

The Vindication of God

1. Introduction

(i) The Word 'Vindication'

To vindicate means to justify. It means to assert the cause of a person or movement, and be successful in doing so. In what sense, then, can we speak of vindicating or justifying God? Obviously He needs no such vindication from a human being. It is axiomatic that God, especially the God of the Bible is right in all He does. Hence Abraham says, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' (Genesis 18:25).

P.T. Forsyth in his brilliant book '*The justification of God*' (p. 14, Independent Press, London, 1957) says, 'To justify God is the best and deepest way to fortify men.' He means, of course, that when a man sees God to be trustworthy, then he will be secure in himself. This is the thought of Isaiah 28:16 where God is said to lay a tested stone in Jerusalem and 'he who believes (in this stone) shall not make haste', i.e. he will not panic. Hence, also, Luther's great hymn lines,

'A mighty fortress is our God,

A bulwark never failing.'

To vindicate God, then, is to show that God is truly God, and as such is trustworthy, and that in no sense has He failed.

(ii) Is Vindication Presumptuous?

In fact, has a man the right to justify God? Does this not rather put him in the place of patronising God? If all the glory in the universe belongs to God then surely all men should simply fall before that glory and acknowledge the greatness of God. Why should anyone seek to vindicate God?

The facts are that most, if not all men have at some time or another reproached God for certain things, as though in some sense God had failed. The psalms give evidence of this. Also others have reproached men who believe in God. 'Where is now your God?' they have asked, with a sneer. 'Can your God save you?' they demand. Even the deepest of God-lovers have cried out in bewilderment or protest at what is unintelligible or hurtful. Jesus himself asked why he had been forsaken, and on one occasion at least seemed bewildered by the will of God. He asked at that time, 'If it be possible remove this cup (of death) from me.'

The truth seems to be - at least from the Scripture - that God does not get angry with such misunderstandings and reproaches, and is not against questions as such. In fact God often suggests something

like a conference. In Isaiah 1:18 He gives an invitation, ‘Come now, and let us reason together...’ In 41:1 (of the same book) He says, ‘Let the people renew their strength; let them approach, then let them speak; let us together draw near for judgement.’ In 41:21 God says, ‘Set forth your case, bring forth your proofs’. In 43:26 He says, ‘Put me in remembrance, let us argue together; set forth your case, that you may be proved right.’ In other words, God is not so far removed from man that He will not converse with him, and explain certain things to him.

Without doubt it is the thrust of a question or a criticism which determines the kind of answer that can be possible. If there is bitterness, resentment, prejudice or bias, then even a question asked may be improper. On the other hand, since God's thoughts are not ours (Isaiah 55:9), then it may be ignorance or lack of wisdom that causes us to make deficient or wrong judgements. This is seen when God confronts Job and his debating friends. ‘Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?’ He adds, ‘Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.’ His dialogue with Job clears the mind of that man and gives him a new and wonderful view of God. Had God simply neglected him, then Job would have remained in ignorance of His true nature.

We conclude then that to be able to talk with God is not to be irreverent if we seek to see that He is right. Many have to do this since much of the evidence of life and circumstances about them seems to indicate a God who does not tally in every respect with the revelations given of Him in the Bible.

2. The Need For Vindication

(i) The Questions Asked: Attempts to Answer

We will need to distinguish between the simple, sincere and genuine questions of troubled people, and the kind of question asked by the cynical and embittered which is not so much a question as it is an accusation. The presupposition of the questioner is already that God has failed, is deficient or inadequate. The questioner in this case seems unconscious of his presumption in judging God. There is no possible way in which his question can be answered. This is particularly so because his ears are not open to an answer. Were a brilliant answer to be given, and were it to appear undeniably correct, this would only increase the animosity of the questioner.

We may conclude then that the same questions may be asked by people with varying attitudes. Let us list some of the questions which are asked.

How can God be a God of love (as He claims Himself to be) and yet in the world there is so much suffering, pain and shame?

How come there are such things as wars, plagues, famines, disastrous floods, volcanoes and earthquakes when God is supposed to be both Creator and Provider?

How can deformed children be born into the world when God is said to be omnipotent?

Other questions are asked which concern the teachings of the Bible.

- How can God be love and send people to hell?

- What of the folk who have never heard the Gospel? Why should they perish?
- What of visitation of the sins of parents to the fourth generation of their descendants?

Once these questions are asked they open the flood-gates of further questions.

Are there, then, answers to such questions? The particular attempt by scholars and theologians to give answers to these questions is called *apologia* (cf. Phil. 1:7). It is the reasoned defence of the Gospel. It is not an apology for the truth of God, but the use of reason to show the truth of God is not wrong or irrational. A number of such *apologia* is available. Apologists have been in operation from the day of Pentecost, commencing with Peter. Paul was an outstanding apologist. In the post-apostolic period *apologia* was prevalent as Christianity came under heavy fire. So it has been down through the ages. And today it is no less. We have already spoken of P. T. Forsyth's book. C. S. Lewis in almost every book he writes is in the spirit of *apologia*, especially in his volume 'The Problem of Pain' (Geoffrey Bles, London 1945). C. S. Lewis has the knack of introducing us to another dimension (or, dimensions) than we usually understand or encounter.

Recently the publication of '*The Goodness of God*' by J. W. Wenham (IVF. London, 1974) has not only tackled the actual problems of the questions asked above, but a whole score of particular questions in relation to the God of the Bible who seems so inconsistent with the claims made for Him in the same Bible.

On a much wider basis almost all theology has an element of *apologia* since it is an attempt to make intelligible the nature of God. No matter what school of theology the writers of *apologia* are endeavouring to correct misconceptions, or to supply study material which will make for a rational understanding of God. In passing it may be observed that some theologians have moved a long way from their original doctrinal stand because, in an attempt to make their propositions acceptable, they have had to accommodate the many and varying approaches of their readers. In some cases this has resulted in the negation of much, if not all of their original theology. This is understandable if there is an attempt to make theology acceptable to modern views and ways of thinking and acting.

(ii) Why Certain Questions are Asked

(a) The Kinds of Questions Asked.

We have suggested that certain questions are asked because genuine problems arise in the minds of the questioners. For example, when the discoveries of science seem to conflict with what Scripture says, there must be a conflict within the mind. Is there a reconciliation between the creation claim and the evolutionary theory? Could Adam and Eve have been 'the original couple'? Was it possible that man lived before the account of creation in Genesis? Was there, indeed, a universal Flood? How much of Scripture is in fact myth and legend, and how much reliable historical account? And so on.

The text of Scripture itself appears to present certain problems. Are there not actual errors in transcription? Were certain tenets and concepts held by Israel in fact simply the result of environmental conditioning? Are such world views as they held impossible for any other times but their own? What of the supernatural? Did God really intervene in the natural order in supernatural ways, or are these impressions of intervention the rationalisations and accommodations of those days? And so on.

For many people answers are required so that they are not required to be intellectually dishonest in their attempts to believe Scripture and what it contains. On the other hand, is it possible that certain rationalisations which are given as answers to the questions asked are themselves not true? Could it be that revelation has within it a quality which reaches beyond the hard demands of rationalism? Has rationalism - with its presuppositions - made it impossible for genuine (revelational) answers to be given? It is because of such elements that we know apologia to be a difficult discipline.

When we desire to know why certain questions are asked we have to understand why the questioner himself asks the questions. For example, Jesus often gave no direct answer to the problems people posed to him. He, in his turn, asked other questions of them, and whilst not being obstinately evasive, helped them to see why they asked the kind of question they had posed. Without leading them into this dimension of understanding they could not have had satisfaction in a direct answer to their direct question.

(b) The Situations Which Demand Answers.

From Genesis 3 and Romans 1:20ff we are faced with man's rebellion against God. In his rejection of God man refused the normal functional explanation of creation. He also rejected the functional modes, as such, of creation. This meant he rejected his own functional modes, as such. Yet, at the same time, certain functional operations could not be rejected, because they were self-obvious. Nevertheless, to the degree that man re-rationalises God, man, and creation, to that degree he builds up puzzlement for himself. This is primarily because he has perverted the truth. He is bound to suffer in every situation where he is mal-functional, and because he is a rational creature is sure to be disturbed by the seeming irrationality of much about him. He finds things, often to be 'absurd', and this means he posits, somewhere in his mind, an image of that which is not absurd. This further adds to his confusion. He must then rationalise the absurdities as arising from one of three sources, namely God, man, and creation. He must say that one or all of these three have deficient elements. Hence his dismay (and often fear) at humanity, or God, or creation, or all three. As a result he has to be a wary existent in his world, never really sure of God, man, and the creation. He may become cynical or bitter as a result, or he may come to uneasy terms with the elements he seems to have discovered.

Yet again, man may devise brilliant rationalisations of sickness, suffering and evil which he then calls religion or philosophy. These will proceed from his mind and will relate to the knowledge he has obtained along with his experience of life and his universe. In this case he has formulated certain answers to certain questions, and the probability exists for him of having other answers to other questions. This makes living tolerable to some degree, if not totally. Some of these rationalisations may contain the thought that the only true mode for living is the existential one, or the anarchic one. And so on.

(c) Some Situations Prevent Answers.

Certain attitudes and approaches make it so that answers cannot be given to various questions. Answers are not always desired, or a person's world views are such that only answers congruent with those views will be heard. This makes the propositions of a Christian apologia quite unacceptable. Hence to speak of vindicating God in such circumstances is hopeless. Jesus kept crying, 'He who has an ear to hear, let him hear.' He meant that explanations, far from helping, may in fact harden those to whom statements are addressed. There had to be a will to hear or explanation was impossible. Far from the common idea that parables were simple modes of communication, the fact is that they were used to conceal the truth

from those antagonistic to it (Luke 8:10, cf. Isaiah 6:9-10). Of course the parables as such may have been simple for the true hearers.

An example of difficulty in hearing is the book of Job. All Job's comforters saw his predicament from their point of view. Even though, in the main, Job was right, they rejected his explanations. Job himself could not give the answers fully because he needed to be placed in a wider dimension, a larger frame of perspective and thinking. He is certainly placed in this by the questions God asked him concerning creation (chs. 38-42).

There must also be a recognition of human creatureliness in reasoning with God. In Isaiah 64:8 the prophet says, 'Yet, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay and thou art the potter'. Paul takes this up in Romans 9:20, '... who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder, 'Why have you made me thus?'' Paul sees a certain kind of question, perhaps even a certain attitude of questioning to be inevitably fruitless.

Added to all this is the fact that certain elements of understanding are beyond either the right to understand, or the ability to understand. Sin certainly affects the ability to understand because the desire to understand is necessarily absent. When, however, certain propositions are beyond man's reasoning, then man is limited in understanding the required answer. Isaiah 55:9 shows God's wisdom to be of a higher order than man's. In Romans 11:33 Paul explains, 'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, and how inscrutable his ways!' He adds, 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who is his counsellor?' He gives the explanation, 'For from him, and through him, and to him are all things.'

This situation of limitation is again described in Eccles. 3:11, 'He has made everything beautiful (appropriate, functional) in its time; also he has put eternity (or, the world) into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.' Man will never know all things, for it is not intended that he should. He is, after all, not the Creator but a creature.

Another limitation is nominated in Deut. 29:29, 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.' The revealed knowledge is not for the mind alone, but for action - 'to do them'. Hence questions about the secret things can have no answer. Even knowledge of the occult is forbidden (cf. Deut. 18:9-14). 'Occult' means 'secret or esoteric knowledge'. Even so there is a knowledge or wisdom which will be revealed, and which normally is beyond 'what eye has seen, ear heard, or mind conceived' (I Cor. 2:6-10). This is not occult, nor is it the secret knowledge which belongs to God, but it is revelation. Since the natural man cannot understand (I Cor. 2:14, cf. John 3:3-6) then his questions cannot receive answers which are unintelligible to him, although in fact there are answers which are true and correct.

If we go back to what Jesus said about having an ear to hear we deduce the principle that understanding is a matter of the will. Jesus took it a step further. He said, 'If any man wills to do His will he shall know of the teaching, whether it is from God...' (John 7:17). He meant there must be a willingness to obey as well as to know with the mind. The person whose will is gripped by, and subject to, Him will most easily know the answers to his questions. Already he will have settled the fact in his mind that 'God is, and a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him' (Hebrews 11:6).

3. The General Problem of God Confronting The Universe

(i) The Problem of Good and Evil

When Abraham said, 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' his own answer is implied in the positive; 'Yes, He will do right.' Abraham seemed to come to a place where he trusted God for what He commanded, even to the demand that Abraham sacrifice his own son which itself was against all Semitic morality. Not everyone would see eye to eye with Abraham. The list of questions we nominated above all seem to point to an innate dualism in the universe. That is, they envisage two forces of good and evil. Further to this they envisage these forces as being of the very nature of the universe. Monism, as against dualism, insists that there is only one form of being, and that there is nothing innately dualistic in the universe. Monism has then either to say that the dualism which exists is not of the true order of the universe, or that evil is part of the 'one-being' of the universe. In that case evil is not wholly other than good and vice-versa. The monism which denies that evil is any part of the universe but is foreign to it, i.e. an innovation within it, and an imposition upon it, is close to the Biblical view. In the Bible there is an apparent but not an essential dualism.

The problem of good and evil has two aspects. The first is the origin of both, and the second the final outcome of both.

(a) **The Scriptures do not really describe the origin of evil.** Some scholars suggest it does not have true being, that is because it is of a negative nature it does not have real being, and therefore cannot have real origin. One problem is that in discussing its 'origin' we use those terms which should apply only to true origination. Indeed it is difficult to talk at all without using such terms. The closest the Bible comes to speaking of evil's origin is in Ezekiel 28:15, 'You were blameless in all your ways from the day you were created, until evil was found in you'. This evil is designated as pride (verse 17). Revelation 12 describes the rebellion of evil against God in that some angelic powers followed Satan whose ambition was (and is) to be like God and thus to rule over celestial powers.¹

(b) **The Scriptures certainly describe the outcome of good and evil.** Evil is judged and punished: the good triumphs. Evil is Satan and his hosts and the rebellious humanity enslaved to him. Good is the loyal celestial powers and the humanity redeemed by God. Evil forces are ultimately defeated and destroyed. The powers and people of God find eternal life and bliss at the end of the age. The question that is asked is, 'Does not God fail in that part of His creation perishes, or goes into eternal punishment, whilst only a portion of it is redeemed and glorified?' This question infers that every created element ought to be glorified. The best we can say at this point is that the Scriptures do not seem to see the final impenitence and judgement of certain created elements as the defeat of God, but rather as the defeat of evil.

(ii) The Question of Theodicy

Theodicy is really the vindication of God in view of the presence and

¹ For a wider treatment of this subject see NS. 22 'The Dominion of Darkness and the Victory of God' (NCPI 1975). Also refer to the N.C.P.I. book under the same title (NCPI 1977).

operation of evil. Given that He does not create evil, how can evil exist within His universe? How can He be called God and vindicated when evil can do so much harm within His creation? All the other problems of pain, degradation and suffering are subsumed under this great question of theodicy. Is not the question of a viable theodicy ruled out by the very presence of evil?

This is a very superficial view of the problem. A number of the questions relating to good and evil have underlying assumptions or presuppositions which put us in the wrong climate for good argument. We refer to the idea that happiness is the true pursuit of man, that pain is per se wrong, and that suffering is not to be contemplated as an acceptable element of creation. On the same reckoning, love is always beneficent, and indeed the God of love has as His prime object and goal the well-being of man. Nearly all such views are anthropocentric rather than theocentric, and they assume that the love of God is primarily in the service of man. It is implied that this is what God is there for, and what His work is all about.

A true theodicy has none of these presuppositions. It is rightly humble in that it recognises that when the judge of the earth does right He does it not from man's point of view but from His own. Only when man seeks God's point of view does he understand theodicy. It is in regard to this that Forsyth says, 'To justify God is the best and deepest way to fortify man.'

4. The Justification of God

(i) The Nature of God

It is not our intention to give a theology of God, nor to enter into the question of knowing God. Each man must do that for himself and his knowledge must come primarily from the Scriptures if it is to be genuinely Christian, that is if it is to be revelatory and not merely formed from the resources of his own mind. What we need to do here is to be aware that by creation and redemption God is known in His own right, at least as far as a human can know Him, and as a human needs to know Him. We recognise that there is much about God which would be beyond human comprehension, and which is not necessary for human comprehension.

When it comes to the matter of theodicy man needs to know that God is holy. This holiness does not in any sense tolerate evil (Hab. 1:13). The holiness of God is dynamic, setting out positively to destroy all that is evil. Hence the wrath of God and His holiness are closely related. God's wrath is upon all evil, and upon the suppression of the truth (Romans 1:18). The Scriptures make two statements about God which are closely linked. One is that God is light, and the other that God is love. These are both in the first epistle of John (1:5 and 4:8, 16), and in fact to walk in light is to walk in love. See 1:5 - 2:11 (cf. Paul's view in Ephes. 5:1-15 where to walk in love is also to walk in light). Light and love, then, are not opposed one to the other. God in His love does not ignore hatred, and in His light does not ignore darkness. His love does not excuse darkness and evil. His holiness and His love do not fight one another. They are the one. Hence where darkness and hatred exist God will judge and bring His wrath to bear. There can be no love apart from holiness, and no true righteousness which does not judge and condemn evil, and execute the condemnation. False views of love will demand mercy and pity which bypasses justice and judgement, and which de-legalises law. Understanding these things is understanding the nature of God.

(ii) The Nature of Man

Again we need not go into the full anthropology which the Scriptures assert and teach. It is enough to know that man is made in the image of God. When we recognise that created man is intended not only to have moral likeness and affinity with God but also actional likeness, then it will be seen that where man does not fulfil the image in action, especially in his relations with God, man, and the universe, then he merits and receives judgement. In no sense may he be excused from his failures. In no sense may he pass responsibility for failure on to his own (created) weakness, or the elements of heredity, environment, or moral opposition. Whilst he remains in true relationship with God he is capable of truly reflecting the glory of God.

Because he is in the image of God he has the opportunity of making his own choices. In fact he must make these choices. His choices must be right ones. At the same time he is permitted to make wrong choices, and in doing so may not charge God with the evil consequences which obtain from those choices. God for His part never tempts to evil (James 1:13). Man's dilemma is that having committed evil, and being subject to judgement, how then may he escape? He cannot escape merely through the pity of God, or the love of God as an attitude. If he does escape it must be by those means which God Himself plans. Within those means the actions of God's love must not oppose the actions of His holiness.

It may be observed in passing that much of the pain, suffering and sorrow that the world has experienced springs from the rebellion of Satan and his hosts which has resulted in opposition to the creational order of the universe. From the point where man has also rebelled further trouble has been fomented. In fact Satan, evil celestial and demonic powers and their world-system, as also the rebellious 'flesh' of mankind, together with sin and death, all constitute an entire system. This entity is culpable for the anguish, suffering, pain and sorrow of the universe. Such may never be laid upon God directly as though He were responsible for those things. Of course the mystery of His will in the planning and utilising of these things to fulfil His purposes is not easy to comprehend. It is in the true understanding of that mystery that theodicy is intelligible.

(iii) The Justification of Man

We cannot possibly understand God's action to bring harmony to His universe unless we understand His pre-creation purpose to glorify elect man, and His whole creation. This plan is indicated in many passages of Scripture, and its partial outworking is seen in the salvation history which Scripture describes and portrays.

Anthropocentric salvation simply sees God as man's aide, freeing him from the bondage of evil. However it is more than that. God aims primarily to glorify Himself. This self-glorification must not be seen as selfish. That would be to transpose our ideas of self-glorification on God. His self-glorification is not the obtaining of a glory He aspires to, but simply His gracious revelation of Himself as He is, and in fact as He has ever been. Hence in passages such as Isaiah 43:6-7 and Ephes. 1:11-14 His redemption of His children is the glorification of Himself. Likewise in Romans 8:17-25 the ultimate redemption of His children is coincidental with the glorification of His universe, and this work again glorifies Him vindicating Him as true Creator, since true Creator is necessarily true Redeemer where redemption is necessary to bring creation to its preplanned glory.

How does God effect this justification of man and the universe, and so vindicate Himself, at least in this area? The answer is that Christ who is His Son- become-flesh is the means whereby God fully condemns sin in the flesh, thus fulfilling the just demands of the law. This is described in many ways. Christ bears the sins. Christ himself becomes the sin of man. Christ carries the Adamic humanity to the Cross and crucifies it there in himself. Christ crucifies the world. He bears the griefs and sorrows of sinful mankind. He bears the wrath of God upon sin in propitiation. He puts away sin by his death. He pays the penalty the law demands. He dies the death the law requires. He is the propitiating sacrifice. He takes the sting of death which is sin, and strength of sin which is the law, and causes man to be justified by dying the penal death for him. So many Scriptures attest to all this.²

Romans 3:19-31 insists that the death of the Cross was no mere juggling of justice so that love could express itself and effectuate its saving intention. In fact love as shown in I John 4:9-10 demands that wrath be outpoured upon sin. Romans 3:24-31 insists that the law is not only fulfilled but also justified by justification since not one sin, from the beginning of time to its end, is passed over. The judgement of all sins is borne at the Cross. On these grounds alone man may be justified, and only then when he believes in the atoning work, and in the Messiah who completed it.

In passing we may mention the fact that justification breaks the back of the power of sin. This is the message of Romans 6. The power of sin lies in guilt (cf. I Cor. 15:55-56 with Romans 6:12-14), hence when guilt is removed man is liberated to obey (Romans 6:17f). Justification also creates the climate for submission as also motivation for obedience. The work of the Cross, then, does not encourage moral slackness, but motivates to obedience and godliness (cf. Titus 2: 1ff). Justification then justifies God in His redemptive action.

(iv) The Judgement of Evil

The final assurance of a true theodicy is the judgement of evil. Whilst in the end-time, no doubt, evil will have its judgement, evil has already been judged in the Cross. This must be seen clearly. Satan has been judged at the Cross in a number of ways. Primarily his power has been broken by the removal of guilt, which in turn removes the sting of death and the power of sin. Thus the bondage of man spoken of in I John 5:19 and Hebrews 2:14-15 is destroyed. In this sense also Satan has been said to be destroyed. Satan's hosts³ that is principalities and powers who held men in their thrall through the guilt of sin, have now been defeated (Col. 2:14-15, cf. Gal. 1:4). In this way Satan has been further defeated. However, it is the holiness of the suffering Saviour which shows up the evil and uncleanness of the prince of darkness. Pollution of Sin is removed in the purification of the Cross (Heb. 1:3, cf. 9:14, 10:22). Penalty of Sin is also borne in the Cross, and the Power of Sin³ as we have seen, has been broken by the destruction of death (I Cor. 15:55-56, cf. John 8:31-36). Death has been defeated (11 Tim. 1:10, Rom. 6:10, cf. I Cor. 15:55-56) and so Satan's weapon 'the fear of death' has been destroyed. The Flesh has also been defeated (Col. 2:11-15, cf. Romans 8:11-12) as Paul declares in Gal. 5:24. Because the Wrath of God has been poured out to its last 'drop', man is now not under condemnation (Romans 8:1) and has been saved from the wrath to come (I Thess. 1:10, cf. Rom. 5:9). The Adamic

² These Scriptures, amongst many are:- I Peter 2:24, 3:18, II Cor. 5:21, Rom. 6:6, 8:2-3, Gal. 6:14, Isaiah 53:4-12, I John 4:10, Romans 3:24, 6:7, Col. 2:13- 14, I Cor. 15:55-56, cf. Hebrews 9:26, 10:14.

Humanity has been crucified, and had its power broken (Rom. 6:6, cf. Gal. 2:20). Hence rebellious man is a defeated foe, along with the system to which he has been allied. This system called the World has also received its death-knell in the Cross (Gal. 1:4, 6:14). The Conscience which once tyrannised man by means of the law, death, and judgement, now no longer may accuse, since it has been purified of dead works (Heb. 1:3, 9:14, 10:22). The Law also may no longer bring the dread of death to man for the law itself has been fulfilled in the Cross (Romans 8:1-3, 6:7, 7:6, cf. II Cor. 3:6). Through the Cross man has died to the law, and so been justified (Rom. 6:7, cf. Gal. 2:19-21).

Because of this powerful work of the Cross the might of all forms of evil has been broken and evil itself has been crippled. It only needs time now for the mopping up operations to be concluded, and for the victory of the Cross to be out-worked to the end (cf. I Cor. 15:24-28, Rev. 11:15). In this victory of the Cross the Resurrection of Christ is also included so that the two acts make the one work.

Rightly seen this redemptive act is the basis of the ultimate cleansing of the polluted creation, and the glorification of the whole. Thus we can call this the justification of God. However, we need to view this work in its widest dimensions and to understand it in its depths before we can refute the accusations of those who would call God to account.

(v) The Indolence and Justice of God

(a) The Seeming Indolence of God.

The claim that God has defeated evil, and that He has released believing man seems an unjustified claim in the light of conditions that prevail in the world. Sin still prevails. Satan and his system of powers and demons are busily at work. Even the writers of the epistles acknowledged that. Indeed they warned their readers against the incursions of evil. It would be scarcely true to say that wars have lessened as the years have passed, and millenniums of Christian teaching do not seem to have diminished human greed, selfishness, and cruelty. Genocides still abound. Can we in any way then, vindicate God because Christ has come into the world? Is He indeed the Lord of all things? Has God indeed triumphed? Would it not be true to say that in fact very little, if anything has seemingly been accomplished by his coming?

That is why some talk about the (seeming) indolence of God. This is highlighted in two pictures given in Scripture. One is written in Revelation 6:9-11. Here are the 'souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God'. They cry out, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' It seems as though they despair of anything ever happening. The second situation is described in Luke 18:1-8. It is the story of the widow who had been cheated of justice. She kept coming to the judge to be vindicated against her adversary. The judge lacked any sense of conscience in the matter, but became wearied by the sheer persistence of the woman. To be finished with her persistence he vindicated her. Jesus said that if a conscienceless judge would do that for a persistent woman, would not God do this for his elect who cried to Him day and night?

The story needs to be understood. Judges expected bribes. Justice cost much time and money. The evil, by means of bribing the judge, could win their case, and where needed be vindicated. Not all the nagging of a person would be able to effect justice. The woman who nagged the judge must have had unusual (and irritating) persistence. Was Jesus then saying we should nag God? No, he was saying that far from being an unjust judge God was just and loved His elect. He is one who speedily avenges His elect. The accusation

against God by His enemies, and sometimes (even) by His elect is that He does not speedily avenge, if in fact He will ever avenge!³ That is, God is indolent. He is not the God of true and active justice. The martyred saints seemed to have waited interminably for justice to be done.

Jesus asked the question in this parable, 'Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?' He really meant, 'When I tell you that God speedily avenges his elect, do you believe me? When I come will I find this kind of faith on the earth, i.e. that God speedily avenges his elect?' As time passes slowly for those who are suffering hardship and persecution for the sake of the Gospel it may well seem God slowly, if ever, avenges His elect. This is how it seemed to the martyrs. This is how it must have seemed innumerable times in the history of man, especially as the people of God were brought under cruelty, torture and atrocities. Even those who profess no living faith in God have been known to protest that God is indolent. They have shaken their fist at heaven and called on the God of indolence to come quickly and do justice! They have asked for the immediate destruction of the Caesars, the Mussolinis and the Idi Amins. Yet God remains indolent, and, seemingly, uncaring and impassive.

(b) The True Justice of God.

In the parable of Luke 18 Jesus is saying that the judge is unjust. He has no heart for justice as such. He has only a heart for bribes. He contrasts God with this judge. God is just. He executes justice and judgement. Jesus said he does it speedily. What then does he mean by 'speedily'? 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' not only refers to mode but also to time. Man's view of time and God's view of time often differ, not simply because God is above time, but because He alone can understand and determine the correct time for the execution of Justice. Take, for example, God's promise of the land to Abraham. In Genesis 15:13-16 God promises the land of Canaan to Abraham but says he is not to possess it in his time, and in fact that it will be some hundreds of years before his descendants possess it as 'the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete'. This must mean that the judgement upon the Amorites for their iniquity will be the possession of their land by Abraham's children (Israel). God will (a) punish the Amorites at the right time. (b) He will vindicate Israel at the right time as the true possessors of the land.

Romans 2:3- outlines the same principle. God is good and suffers long. However, such goodness and longsuffering is intended to lead to repentance, and where there is none of this then there is a storing up of wrath for the day of wrath when God's righteous judgement will be revealed.' The principle surely is that God does nothing before 'the fulness of time'. At the fulness of time He both judges and rewards according to the situation. For example in the passage of Revelation 6:9-11 He tells the martyred saints that they must 'rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow-servants, and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been'. This means that God does nothing before the time. Then He does not hesitate to complete judgement, and to vindicate His people and Himself.

³ Note:- The martyred saints were not seeking revenge! They wanted God vindicated, that is they desired His true justice to be displayed and evil to be rightly punished so that evil did not appear to have triumphed. Romans 12:17-21 is a commentary on the fact that God alone is to be trusted when it comes to avenging.

The term 'speedily' which Jesus used in Luke 18:8 must mean 'at the right time' or 'without delay', that is, 'not one moment later than it ought to be'. Hence it is not true to say that God is indolent. To God a thousand years is but as a day, and yet a day as a thousand years. That, however, does not mean that God is careless about time or haphazard in His regard of it. It simply means that His perspective is the correct one, and ours must be faulty. Hence to accuse God of indolence or not caring about justice or the suffering of His world is a deficient view of God. How then does it come about?

(c) Wrong Judgements of God.

We have seen that rebellious man has had to re-rationalise the nature of God, man, and creation because he rejected the essential nature of all things when he rejected God. This means things are awry in his understanding, and so, in his experience. If we add to that the deceitful elements which are in the universe we can see his mind is affected to see and view things wrongly. The Bible talks of Satan as going out to deceive the whole world, and, in fact, as succeeding. It also talks about the deceitfulness of the human heart. To this it adds the deceit of sin, and the deceitful lusts of the flesh. It is no wonder then that man, separated from God, lives in forms of deceit, some of them very attractive, and some of them quite brilliant in their rationalised cleverness.

When we are prejudiced against a person we are also unable to sympathetically understand that one. Man is angry with God, and in his guilt he accuses God of many things. This judgemental and critical spirit is characteristic of persons who have guilt. We could scarcely expect sinful man to understand God's timing of His actions. Man, too, lacks the kindness and long-suffering that is characteristic of God and acts precipitately, and often unadvisedly in his execution of justice and retribution.

In addition to the non-understanding of God, and the refusal to accept His order of things there is also the rebellious endeavour to change the true order, and to make the change permanent. If we can see that man is scarcely likely to take things that happen at their face value, and will always tend to interpret them to God's disadvantage then we are driven back to the point previously made that true knowledge of God is revelational, and that revelation comes from Scripture, especially as it is made understandable to us by the Holy Spirit. If our minds are attuned this way then we can explore the Biblical vindication of God.

(vi) The Plan of God, Love, and True Judgement

(a) GOD.

We are embarking now on the vindication of God. To do so we have to look again at the nature of God as Scripture portrays it. Such descriptions make it impossible for Him to be the author of evil. Deuteronomy 32:4 says, 'The Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he.' In I Peter 4:19 God is called a faithful Creator, which must mean that what He plans for His creation He surely completes and fulfils. We have seen that He is described as Light and Love, and that He is holy, or, even, holiness itself. It is axiomatic that the Judge of all the earth does right, whilst Psalm 76:10 says, 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise you!' meaning that man's sin can only turn out to God's praise and not to His defamation.

We have seen that the holiness of God is vindicated in the Cross as He fulfils the law, and provides redemption for His elect. We have also seen that His seeming indolence is the illusion gripping those who do not have eyes to see and

ears to hear the truth. However, the charge may still seem viable that the coming of the Son of God, his Cross, his Resurrection and Ascension have made little, if any difference to the operations of evil and good within the world. Our greatest need, then, is to see that what has happened is in accordance with the plan of God, and that that plan is perfect in conformity with the perfection of God.

(b) THE PLAN OF GOD.

When God warns man of the consequences of eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil He is telling them of what could happen in their future. When He prophesies to the serpent of what will happen to him He is telling of something planned. This is also the case with His prophecy to Noah of judgement by flood. It is equally true of His prophetic covenant with Noah, and His redemptive covenant with Abraham. It is also true that God does nothing but what He first reveals it to the prophets (Amos 3:7). Abel is the first prophet. Enoch also is a prophet. The N.T. tells us the prophets have been since the world began (Luke 1:70, Acts 3:21, cf. Rev. 10:7), and that means prophecy has always been extant, and much if not all of the plan of God revealed.

Many Scriptures in the O.T. reveal much of the plan of the ages, whilst in the N.T. passages reveal that the plan was devised before creation. Such Scriptures are Ephes. 1:3-14, 3:9, I Cor. 2:6-10, II Tim. 1:9, cf. I Peter 1:19-20, Revelation 13:8, John 17:24, Rev. 10:1-7, and Romans 16:25-26. In Ephesians 1:4-5 what God purposes to do He has planned before creation. At that time He planned it should work out in Christ. He had never intended it should work out in Adam. Likewise in Ephes. 1:5-6 He chose some to be His sons, and this sonship to be to the praise of the glory of His grace. He had planned grace beyond creation!

The facts make us aware that criticism of God as though He were troubled by evil and hindered in working out His plan is a superficial one. Whilst we shrink from making God the author of evil, it was certainly His intention to incorporate it in His plan. This makes evil subject to God rather than God subject to evil.

Prophecy of course is closely linked with, and indispensable to, this plan. Revelation 19:10 tells us that the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy. Christ himself spoke of 'Christ...in all the Scriptures' (Luke 24:25-27, 45f). Hence we expect the working out of the plan of God to be intimately connected with Christ. This is so.

(c) Christ and The Plan of God.

The N.T. makes it clear that Christ is the (true) wisdom of God. This is stated explicitly in I Cor. 1:24, 'Christ the wisdom of God'. In I Cor. 1:30 it is said that God has made Christ unto us to be wisdom. In Col. 1:19 we are told that in Christ the fulness of God dwells, and in 2:9 that the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily in him. In Colossians 2:3 we are told that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In I Cor. 1:24 Christ is not only the wisdom but the power of God. In other words, Christ is the medium by which the whole wisdom (the plan) of God is worked out in time, and for eternity. When that is seen then Christ is also seen as the (practical) vindication of God.

Christ himself makes it clear that he works only according to the plan of God. He represents God as the King of the Kingdom, and the Father of His Son and His people. The willing Son does the will of His Father. That Son reveals the true nature of God as King, as love, and as Father. Moreover he effectuates the will of the Father. Part of the will of the Father is the revelation of Himself through His Son (Matt. 11:27, cf. John 1:18, 14:1-10).

This is not all. The Son has come into the world to defeat the works of Satan (I John 3:8, cf. Luke 11:21ff, and John 12:31). He has come to set man free from sin. Ultimately he will cause the reconciliation of all things (Col. 1:21f) and will himself head up (unite, unify) all things in his person. This is the wisdom of God outworking itself in power. Such wisdom was before time, and is fulfilling itself in time, and, as we said, in the person of the Son. The Son then is the vindication of God. Of course it must be seen that the Son has always worked - with the Father - and goes on working.

Christ anticipated the doubts of men in regard to God's faithfulness. He knew they would see God as tardy. Hence the story of the unjust judge and the importunate widow. However, other stories are told and with them warnings are given. In the story of the vineyard those who work it for their absentee lord kill the prophets and the beloved son. The Lord of the vineyard is coming to take away the kingdom and give it to others, and to destroy the evil men who denied him the rightful fruits of the vineyard. In another story the bridegroom keeps the maidens waiting for many hours, and they sleep, thinking he will never come, and some are unprepared. The point is he does come! In the story of Matt. 24:45-51 the wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed'. He begins to 'beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken'.

Christ's clear teaching was that the end would come suddenly. The action of God, in the fulness of time would be instantaneously precipitated. The idea of a slow advance towards a triumph was not even contemplated. The seeming delay was no delay at all. That was why one had to endure to the end to be saved. The Old Testament had spoken of the Day of the Lord, and Paul said it would come as a thief in the night, whilst Peter said that any seeming delay was only that God held things out to the last moment out of His long-suffering so that men might find time for repentance.

(d) Christ and The Love and Holiness of God.

We have already seen that the redemptive work of Christ is the reconciliation of God's love and holiness. His holiness demanded the defeat and destruction of evil, and this was accomplished upon the Cross. At the same time the Cross is the expression and effectuation of God's love (I John 4:19-10, etc.). To liberate men from evil and give them entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God is surely the love of God. At the same time Christ reveals the holy Father. The Cross is the expression of His holiness as much as it is the expression of His love. When He judges sin, breaks its power, and crushes Satan He liberates the power which will ultimately purge the world. In the present-time it actually washes men of their guilt and pollution (Heb. 1:3, 9:14, Acts 22:16, etc.). Far from saying that the Cross makes no difference in history it actually sets men free in the midst of history and makes the elect 'delight in the law of God after the inner man' and surrender their members as servants of righteousness (Rom. 7:21, 6:15ff). The Cross liberates a power for holiness of life. In this sense God is vindicated by His wisdom which is effectuated in and by His Son.

(e) Christ and The Judgement of God.

We have seen Christ judged all forms of evil upon the Cross. Sin was judged in his flesh (Romans 8:3). The Adamic humanity was also judged (Romans 6:6-7). Likewise the doomed aeon called the world came under judgement (John 12:31, Gal. 1:4, 6:14). Satan was judged (Heb. 2:14-15, John 12:31, 16:11). The principalities and powers were judged (Col. 2:14-15). In this sense Christ proved to be the righteous judgement of God upon all evil.

Even so, it would seem, by appearances, that this made little difference in world affairs. Apologists might well argue that the Kingdom of God, by the Word, the Spirit and the church has invaded the affairs of man, and this is true. On the surface, however, things do not seem better. It could be argued that things might have seemed worse had the Gospel not been preached, but surely this is not the point. The point is that evil has been revealed for what it is by the coming of Christ, and its ultimate doom has been sealed. He, Christ, has been seated at the right hand of God waiting for his enemies to be made his footstool (Heb. 1:3, 10:12-13). This is the message of both I Cor. 15:24-28 and Phil. 2:9-11. The cataclysmic end will come when evil will be silenced for ever. Until then the debate of theodicy will continue, but then it will be finished. None will have it in himself to oppose the awful victory. Men in history do not anticipate judgement because of the deceit of evil. It is this deception we need to examine before we see the judgements of God working out in current history.

First we see a general sense of deceit and avoidance of judgement.

Psalm 10:11 says of the man who is crushed by evil, 'He thinks in his heart, 'God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it.' That is, the defeated man thinks God is not his present help and comfort in time of need. However, the wicked says, 'Thou (God) wilt not call to account'. Satan of course is the father of lies, and fosters these illusions. In Eccles. 8:10-13 the writer discusses the seeming (present) triumph of the evil man, but then points also to his ultimate fall. He observes, 'Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil.' In this regard we are reminded of the wicked servant in Christ's parable who says his lord is 'a long time coming'.

Secondly there is a failure to remember that God has always judged.

God judged man in the garden and expelled him. He judged Cain for his murder. He judged the world by the flood. He judged Sodom and Gomorrah. There was a judgement of the cruel enemies of Israel. He judged Babylon, and through the prophets uttered oracles of judgement against many nations. We have seen the principle of judgement in the destruction of the Amorites, and in the destruction of the cities of Canaan. Israel itself came under very terrible judgements. The Book of Habakkuk is the classic statement and rationale of judgement. The prophet comes to a rich understanding of God's actions and a beautiful acceptance of them.

Isaiah 30:18 gives us the message that God's judgements are liberating. Once judged a person is free. Thus the greatest judgement in history was that of the Cross. Having judged sin in Christ's flesh God has released those who repent. God then has judged in the very heart of history. This is why Paul says 'The former times of ignorance God has (seemingly) overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent'. Because the Cross is grace it polarises the attitudes of man and demands a decision, one way or the other.

Thirdly there is a failure to believe that God will yet judge the creation.

In Romans 1:32 Paul says that men who do (such) evil things know they are worthy of death, yet they continue in what they do, and approve others who also do them. The point is they know they will be judged. In Romans 2:14-15 Paul says the conscience will do just that at the time of judgement. The Scriptures of the O.T. and the N.T. speak of the ultimate judgement. Paul speaks of God's wrath being currently poured on men (Romans 1:18) and that is of course some form of judgement. He speaks of a terrible consummation of this wrath (Romans 2:4-5, II Thess. 1:7-8, I Thess. 1:10, Rom. 5:10).

Fourthly there is a failure to see that all things are leading to that final judgement.

What is happening now, and which must climax at the end-time is really the heart of our subject. We will seek now to deal with it under the following heading.

(f) Christ and The Vindication of God.

1. Christ the Summation of All Things.

We have seen from Ephes. 1:20-23 and Ephes. 4:10 that Christ will ultimately fill up all things, which means he will give them their essential content, as he did at creation (Col. 1:15-17, John 1:1-3, I Cor. 8:6). In Ephesians 1:9-10 we see that Christ will unify all things, as indeed they were unified at creation. In Colossians 1:19-20 (cf. 3:14) he will harmonise or reconcile all things through the Cross. In I Cor. 15:24-28 he will subdue all enemies, and destroy the enemy death. In Phil. 2:9-11 it is seen that every knee will bow to him. When these things happen there will be no question of vindicating God. The whole creation will be impelled to cry out this truth.

The question is, '**How will this happen?**' The principle is seen in Revelation, chapter five. John the divine sees a scroll with seven seals. Later in the book the opening, of the seals, and the unrolling of the scroll is the very process and happening of history. Who then can do this? The answer is, 'No one in heaven, on earth, or under the earth' is worthy, i.e. capable of doing so. Then one is found. John is told to look at him. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The lion is of course, Christ. When John looks he sees not a Lion but a Lamb, the Lamb of God, Jesus. This surely means the Lamb who took away the sin of the world for he is as a lamb-that-has-been-slain. That is his humiliation of the Cross is his liberating and governing power of history, and for history. It is also his authority to bring judgement to the creation. This he proceeds to do. In other words, the power of the Lion (victorious Lord) is the love of the Cross (crucified Lamb). The one who has borne the judgement of all things within himself, may now work out those judgements in the arena of history.

Karl Heim in his book, '*Jesus the World's Perfecter*' (Oliver and Boyd, London, 1959, p.148) has the following statement, '...the power of Christ's work of atonement, which contains a strength capable of changing the whole world and destroying all God's enemies, is latent as potential energy until the sound of the last trumpet shall loosen the avalanche. ... If the satanic opposing power has lost its claim to the world then thereby it has lost its power over the world.

If the rebellion against God has been cast down then God's creative power can again flow through the world without opposition, then the new creation is there.'

Karl Heim speaks of things being held in tension until the ultimate judgement and this is partly true. According to the Book of the Revelation judgements are now taking place. However, Heim's statement that the power, the potential for executing judgement lies in the Cross is a brilliant insight. This is why the Revelation can speak of 'the wrath of the Lamb' (6:16-17). The facts are that the Lamb opens the seals and the judgements consequently follow.

2. The Seals, Trumpets, Judgements and Plagues.

Before we examine these in detail let us examine the weakness of the argument against God as to the handling by Him of His universe. It is a presupposition of many that if God is just, righteous and loving there will be no pain, sin, sickness and suffering in His universe. More realistic people have seen that if man cannot make genuine choices in his own will-power then he is not really a moral creature. Whilst his greatest freedom may well lie in voluntarily conforming to the will of God he must not be forced to do this, otherwise he is no longer the image of God, the self-choosing One. Hence realistic people have seen that an enormous amount of the sin, hurt, evil, cruelty and impurity in the world has resulted from man's own sin. This would also explain much suffering, sickness, and pain.

We have seen that God by nature is holy and must oppose evil in all forms, and seek to destroy it. This demands judgements. It also incurs much pain and suffering because of the judgements. When evil has been followed to its last lair, routed out and destroyed, then the holiness of God is vindicated. When holy love has pursued man to his last lair and won his will, then love will have triumphed. The deliberate impenitence of any creature is the sealing of his own doom. It does not mean that love has failed, but that love has been rejected.⁴

In Revelation 6:1-17 we see the opening of six seals of the scroll and the consequent suffering which follows. It must be noted that this suffering is under the control of God. The sixth seal is terrifying to all because the day of the wrath of the Lamb has come. In chapter seven we see the seal of God, but this seal is to cover the people of God. The latter half of the chapter portrays the people of God in heaven, and they experience great joy and the tender care of God. In chapter eight the Lamb opens the seventh seal. It is a solemn occasion. As a result seven angels prepare to blow their trumpets. From 8:7 to 11:19 the account of the blowing of the trumpets is given. Again the earth is brought into terrible sufferings by the blowing of these trumpets. In the eleventh chapter the last trumpet is blown and this is the evidence of the triumph of God. In this chapter, also, is a judgement of the world by two witnesses. The earth is visited with three woes and these are linked with the blowing of the trumpets.

In chapter twelve the basic rebellion of Satan and his angelic powers is described. The defeat of Satan is also outlined. Chapter thirteen describes the various modes and forces of evil as Satan seeks to triumph over God. It is to be noted that the terms 'it was allowed', 'given authority', often appear, meaning that what happens is permitted only under the sovereignty of God, and (presumably) for His purposes. In the fourteenth chapter are the various announcements of judgement, and descriptions of actual judgements, a harvesting of all that is evil ensues. In chapter fifteen the coming of seven plagues is announced. In verse 1 it says, 'for with them the wrath of God is ended'. Chapter sixteen is the description of the seven plagues being poured upon the earth from the seven bowls which contain them. In chapter seventeen one of the seven angels explains to John that Babylon is under judgement, and that the beast from the pit will come under judgement, but prior to this will so relate to the ten kings who are arising that they will identify with him and that Babylon will be made desolate. It is again interesting to see that all that happens is under the sovereign control of God.

Chapter eighteen speaks of the destruction of Babylon and the vindication of the saints who were persecuted and destroyed by her. Chapter nineteen opens with praise to God for His righteousness which executes justice, and then leads on to the glorious event of the Bride and the Bridegroom - Christ and his church - and their marriage. This in turn leads on to the celestial army that proceeds against the beast and the kings allied to him, and the peoples of the earth who bear the mark of the beast. The defeat of these evil forces and their destruction closes that chapter. In the next chapter - twenty - there is a description of Satan being bound for a millennium and that millennium being reigned over by Christ and the martyrs, and following this the release of Satan, a gathering of evil forces for conflict, and the final destruction of the remaining forces of evil. The universal judgement then takes place. Only those written in the book of life escape.

⁴ C. S. Lewis in his book, 'The Great Divorce' (Geoffrey Bless, London) has a fine rationalisation of the lot of those who reject the holy love of God. His main point is that they do not go on living as real persons. They have denied reality and so after death exist in a state which cannot be called life. They are in fact as mere empty ghosts.

The final two chapters - twenty-one and twenty-two - depict the fact, nature and operations of the true people of God and the glorious city of God. Evil has been vanquished, the elect are with God, and He with them, and they see His face. The book closes with an admonition to its readers to realise that Christ is coming quickly, and not to be deceived into thinking otherwise. Probably the greatest message of the last chapters is that there will be a new heavens and a new earth, and that everything will be made new. That is, by some process, evil is banished for ever, and the goodness of God reigns unimpeded - for ever.

3. The Ultimate Vindication of All Things.

We now need to gather our threads together and see how it is that Christ vindicates the Father as history proceeds, as also at its consummation.

We have seen that Christ is seated at the right hand of God waiting for his enemies to be subdued under him. At the same time I Cor. 15:24-28 indicates that a process goes on from the time of his ascension to the consummation of the age. In Matt. 28:20 Christ indicates this, and it is confirmed by the end portion of Mark's Gospel, and the book of Acts where the disciples claim their triumphs through the name and power of Christ. We conclude then that the Son is working in history along with, and by means of, his church, for to it has he given his fulness.

The prophetic sections of the Gospels which themselves concur with the prophecies of the day of the Lord and ultimate judgement in the O.T. are confirmed by the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost as to the significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This outpouring will continue and will lead to unusual signs which will portend the 'great and terrible day of the Lord'. That is the Holy Spirit has come to shape up things towards the end-time. Many passages in the epistles confirm this pattern.

However, it is when we come to the Book of the Revelation that we see the work of God and His Christ in vindicating the God who is both Creator and Redeemer. We see it in two remarkable ways:- (i) The full and exact judgement of all evil, and (ii) the total redemption of all creation in the complete renewal of the heavens and the earth. Let us look at these two elements:-

A. The Full and Exact Judgement of All Evil.

In Romans 3:21-26 Paul points out that the Cross was the total judgement of all sins. He says that God 'in His divine forbearance had passed over former sins'. This of course was not completely so. God had only seemed to pass these over. Paul means He had not immediately and ruthlessly judged. He had a time in hand for that - the time of the Cross. There every sin was judged, for as Romans 8:3 has it, He judged 'sin in the flesh (of Christ)'. Similarly in Acts 17:30 Paul, in speaking of the sin/s of the Gentiles says, 'the times of former ignorance God overlooked but now commands all men everywhere to repent'. He means that something has been done about men's sin, and they must come up to that, in repentance.

Secondly, we have seen in the parable of the unjust judge that God is speedily avenging His elect, i.e. bringing cruel and relentless men to justice. In II Peter the writer insists God is not slow concerning His promise. He is extending time out of mercy and longsuffering. In Revelation 6 God tells the martyrs that nothing must be done before the time. He lets Abraham know that judgement of the Amorites before they are wholly ripe for it would be precipitate and wrong. So then we expect judgement to be right on time, and at that time, total. This is exactly how it is.

For some, the prophetic predictions of Christ, the O.T., the early church and the Book of the Revelation are fascinating, and attractive, as though some code has to be cracked in order to understand them and history. In fact they are given to set the climate for repentance in the sinful, and to encourage the saints. The Book of the Revelation must have encouraged the suffering, the persecuted, the martyrs.

For this reason the Revelation needs to be studied closely.

Briefly we see the following:- Everything that happens in history goes according to God's plan. For His plan He uses His wisdom, namely His Son who out- works that plan. He outworks it in the power of the Cross and Resurrection. Evil never finally triumphs. It may appear to do so, but then the statements 'was permitted' or 'was given authority' are used concerning it. All evil is under the hand of God. Finally no form of evil in angel, creature, or man is allowed to evade judgement. All are brought to boot. Judgements are going on all the time, and the final judgement embraces all.

Take for example Revelation 11:16ff. Here the worshipping elders praise God that He has taken His power and begun to reign. 'The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants the prophets, and saints, and those who fear Thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.' In 12:10 Satan, having rebelled and having been cast down, a loud voice from heaven says, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.' Notice that in every case the action is 'on time'. In chapter 16 when judgements are being poured out, the angel of the water says, 'Just art thou in these thy judgements, thou who art and wast, O Holy One. For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink. It is their due!' (vs.5-6). In verse 7 'And I heard the altar cry, 'Yea, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are thy judgements.'

In chapter 17 the evil of Babylon is shown to John, as also the kings connected with Babylon and the kings connected with the beast. In chapter 18 and 19 the judgement of the evil world system (Babylon) is described in detail. Those connected with the city cry, 'Alas! Alas! thou great city, thou mighty city, Babylon! In one hour has thy judgement come' (v.10). In 18:20 the cry is 'Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgement for you against her!' This is because (v.24) '...in her was found the blood of prophets and the saints, and of all who have been slain on earth.' This is why the great multitude in heaven cries, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power be long to our God, for his judgements are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants.' Thus, as we have seen, every form of evil is judged and God's justice is vindicated. The ultimate truth is that God passes over nothing. This is why in Romans 1:32 Paul says evil men know the things they do are worthy of death, why the writer of Hebrews says for some there is 'a fearful prospect of judgement, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries', and II Thess. 1:5-10 describes the judgements upon those 'who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus'. The martyred saints, saints who cry to God day and night, and in fact all who leave avengement to God see that He is just and true in all His ways. He is vindicated.

B. The Total Redemption of All Creation in the Complete Renewal of the Heavens and the Earth.

II Peter 3:8-18 speaks of the coming crisis when ‘the heavens shall pass away with a loud noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up’. This is judgement. The writer adds, ‘...the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.’ ‘The promise’ to which the writer refers is throughout the O.T., especially as seen in passages such as Hab. 2:14 (cf. Isaiah 11:9, ‘For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.’ Isaiah 11 presents a picture of ultimate perfection upon the earth. In Isaiah 65:17f and 66:22f, literal promises of new heavens and a new earth are spelled out. In the Gospels the glorious Kingdom is promised to the persevering saints, and the same principle is repeated in the epistles. Romans 8:17-30 speaks of the ‘glorious liberty of the children of God’, and says the whole creation will share in this as, and when, all things are glorified.

I Cor. 15 (cf. Phil. 3:21, I John 3:3) speaks of what was sown in corruption rising in incorruption, and what was sown in dishonour (the body of death) rising in glory.

Hence when we come to Revelation chapters 21 and 22 the prophecies are fulfilled beyond man's wildest dreams. The Holy City is now complete, and is glorious in itself.⁵ The old heavens and the old earth have passed away, and there are new heavens and a new earth. God is now amongst His people, dwelling with them, and is their God. As for the true, the faithful, and the loyal amongst men, they are those whom God has redeemed out of every nation and people and kindred and tribe and tongue. With Him, and in the city of God all is light and glory. God wipes away every tear, and there is no more pain, no more sorrowing, no more death! Everything is healed by the leaves of the tree of life. The river of God is full of water. All may drink freely of the fountain of life. Eternity rings with the praises and worship of celestial and terrestrial beings, especially those ‘who have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb’. Losses and rewards are meted out, the details of history are reckoned and tied off. Everything is new.

God has been vindicated! Every knee has bowed to His Son as Lord, and all has been consummated to the glory of the Father. All things have been unified, harmonised, reconciled, filled up with the fulness of the love of God in Christ, and nothing will separate God's creation from Him. Evil has now been judged and been sealed from again doing harm. The whole creation has been won by, and gripped for ever by, the love of God.

God truly is vindicated! No wonder Paul cries,

‘O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgements and how inscrutable His ways!

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
To Him be the glory for ever. Amen.’

...oo0oo....

⁵ Forsyth (op.cit. pp.123-124) has a long and beautiful comment on the new creation and the God who waits and works patiently for it. He observes, ‘To redeem creation is a more creative act than it was to create it.’

-APPENDIX ONE -

The Question of Suffering

We have observed that current human presuppositions include the idea that happiness is man's chief end, hence it is presupposed that pain and suffering are wrong. From this some reason that God has failed. Even if He restores all things at the end He has, nevertheless failed. The Scriptural view of suffering is a wide subject. It needs a treatment of its own. Thoughtful persons of faith have often shown that suffering is indispensable to love, and to the process of character building, and ultimate glorification. Hebrews 11 shows that men counted suffering as nothing over and against their love for God. In Romans 8:17-30 Paul reckons suffering is not even worthy to be compared with the glory which elect man shall see and in fact experience. In II Cor. 3:18 Paul speaks of a current process of glorification in the believer ('from one stage of glory to another'), and in II Cor. 4:16ff says our suffering is light, and but for a flash of time, and is preparing us for a great and eternal weight of glory.

Men, like Job and his so-called comforters, often ponder the mystery of suffering. In Job's case God finally visited him and introduced him into the great and profound dimensions of creation, and in a sense the problem of suffering (so-called) dwindled into insignificance, and almost into irrelevance. In the realised dimensions of creation and redemption, suffering is both light and intelligible. After all, God could not really show us His love apart from suffering. If there is 'no glory without suffering' then it may be that much of the glory of God's love lies in that suffering.

-APPENDIX TWO -

The Question of Universal Redemption

The Scriptures make it evident that not all human beings come to redemption. True redemption is contingent upon repentance and faith and the reception of the gift of life. Because some refuse this gift it is suggested that God has failed. It is obvious that man has failed, but difficult to see how God has failed. In an attempt to rationalise this seeming failure it is claimed from many of the 'all things' passages of the N.T. that even lacking repentance all will be ultimately reconciled - perhaps through some repentance in the future life. It is highly doubtful whether this claim can be sustained from the Scriptures.

The use of Colossians 1:19-20 - 'For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross' - is taken to mean that everything will be reconciled by Christ and his cross. It is equated with Ephesians 1:10 where God's plan is 'to unite all things in him (Christ), things in heaven and things on earth'. In Ephes. 4:10 Paul speaks of Christ 'filling all things'.

It is clear from Rev. chs. 21 and 22 that 'all things' that are evil are thrown into the lake of fire, and come into judgement. Nothing that is unclean enters the city of God. The 'all things' then must mean 'all things that are in

Christ'. Col. 1:15-17 (cf. John 1:1-3, I Cor. 8:6) shows that all things were created in, through, by, and for, Christ. The doctrine of election, whether we like it or not, speaks of 'those whom thou hast given', as against, patently, 'those whom thou hast not given m&! It would be going against much of Scripture to deny that some persons will be lost, and many angelic creatures will be judged and punished.

It is clear that only what is morally viable can possibly be 'in Christ' or 'in God'. Hence, to clear the matter, many have posited annihilation or conditional immortality. They mean what is evil is destroyed completely, and what lives on does so because there has been repentance and faith. Part of our problem lies in the use of words such as 'live', 'eternal life', and so on. It must be seen that whatever is not in Christ does not have true being or true life. It is not morally or spiritually viable. It may well exist, but yet not live. This is what the Bible calls 'death' or 'the second death'. To be 'out of Christ' is to not truly be. Attempts to describe the fire of punishment as eternal, but to say punishment is not itself eternal pose a number of problems. Whilst man of him- self does not have life, let alone eternal life, a great difficulty emerges when we say God eradicates that which He created. It also poses the problem of the holiness of God, and the nature of moral punishment. Universalism or its alternatives of annihilation and conditional immortality do not seem to meet the problem raised by the utter extinguishing of being. Whilst eternal punishment may raise many problems it is doubted whether the alternatives posed reach as deeply as the fact of punishment described by Scripture. Lacking a full perspective of God's holiness, love and righteousness it is to be doubted whether we can solve this real problem merely by debate, since we need that perspective.

-APPENDIX THREE -

The Non-Vindictional Approach: God Is Love

Studies in the vindication of God assume there is much, apparently, in history, which seemingly contradicts the notions that God is love, that He is righteous, and that He is holy. Hence the attempts to show these three elements of His nature in accordance with the Scriptures. Not everyone, however, sees any contradiction. There are those who seem to accept the Scriptures as an integrated whole, and whilst they may profit from apologia do not, themselves, feel any personal need for it.

The reason for this is that they have come to see and know God as love. 'God is love', and, 'God is light' are for them two essential presuppositions to understanding Him and His actions. Such persons assume the goodness of God and are not troubled by His severity, since they see no contradiction between the two. They have a personal experience of the love of God, and they assume that they have no need to question God, much less seek to vindicate Him and His actions as they appear in history. They see this love fully revealed in the Son of the Father, Jesus Christ, and they therefore see the Father fully revealed by the Son. Hence they love both the Father and the Son, especially through the revelation and aid of the Holy Spirit.

Primarily God's love is active in creation and providence, nevertheless, because of man's fall it is primarily seen and experienced in redemption. That leads then to an understanding and appreciation of creation and providence. A person who experiences this love so relates to God that he sees, so to speak, from the

inside, and not merely from the outside. He is at one with God, and senses no need to question God. He may of course ask questions of God, but these are on the basis of his utter trust of God.

Some modern approaches may agree in principle with such an attitude but still insist that we disentangle from the text of Scripture what is God's true action, and what is merely action purported to be from God. This certainly complicates the matter, especially as such 'disentanglement' is often offered on a fairly subjective basis. There are few objective criteria, except to play one section of Scripture against another. Even if folk do such disentangling they must be open, in all honesty, to the kind of apologia presented by people such as Lewis and Wenham. It may well be that the revelational understanding of people who know God as love may transcend even the finest of critical approaches. It may in fact, itself, be the best form of critical understanding. #