

The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross

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CHAPTER III

THE BLOOD

THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'blood' in Scripture, especially with reference to the blood of the sacrifices in the Old Testament and to the blood of Christ in the New, has been the subject of some discussion, and the writings of W. Milligan, B. F. Westcott, N. Hicks, and Vincent Taylor, to name but a few, have urged the opinion that by 'the blood' life is meant rather than death, so that the essential thing in sacrifice is the offering up of life. This view has been opposed by such scholars as J. Denney, J. Moffatt, J. Armitage Robinson, and more recently, J. Behm¹ and F. Taylor.²

I. BLOOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

a. Classification of passages

The word *dam* is used in the Hebrew Bible 362 times with various shades of meaning. The occurrences may be grouped as follows:

- (i) *Death with violence of some kind: 203 examples.*
- (i) Generally: 165 examples. Here I class passages like 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed' (Gn. 9:6); 'the avenger of blood' (Nu. 35: 19, *etc.*); 'he that maketh inquisition for blood remembereth them' (Ps. 9: 12).
- (2) In the phrase 'innocent blood': 21 examples. 'Thou shalt put away the innocent blood from Israel' (Dt. 19: 13).
- (3) One's blood being on oneself: 12 examples. 'For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall surely be put to death . . . his blood shall be upon him' (Lv. 20:9).
- (4) Death of animals: 5 examples. 'What man soever there be of the house of Israel, that killeth an ox, or lamb, or goat. . . and hath not brought it unto the door of the tent of meeting, to offer

1 Art. *αἷμα* in *TWNT*.

2 'Art. 'Blood' in *TWBB*. See additional note on pp. 126ff. for some important statements.

it as an oblation unto the Lord... blood shall be imputed unto that man; he hath shed blood' (Lv. 17: 3f.).

(ii) *Connecting life with blood: 7 examples.*

'For as to the life of all flesh, the blood thereof is all one with the life thereof' (Lv. 17: 14).

(iii) *Eating meat with blood: 17 examples.*

(1) The practice prohibited: 12 examples. 'Ye shall eat neither fat nor blood' (Lv. 3: 17).

(2) The practice occurring: 5 examples. 'The people did eat them with the blood' (1 Sa. 14: 32). This group is closely connected with the previous one as Leviticus 17: 11, 14 shows.

(iv) *Sacrificial blood: 103 examples.*¹

(1) Generally: 94 examples. 'Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread' (Ex. 23: 18).

(2) The institution of the Passover: 6 examples.

(3) Heathen sacrifices: 3 examples.

(v) *Other uses: 32 examples.*

(1) Turning the Nile into blood: 8 examples.

(2) Processes of birth, etc.: 12 examples.

(3) Bleeding: 3 examples.

(4) Colour: 3 examples.

(5) Of grapes: 2 examples.

(6) 'A bridegroom of blood': 2 examples.

(7) Metaphorical: 2 examples. 'Shall I drink the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?' (2 Sa. 23:17).

From these figures it is clear that the commonest use of *dam* is to denote death by violence, and, in particular, that this use is found about twice as often as that to denote the blood of sacrifice. There is a difference also in distribution, for the blood of the sacrifices is often mentioned in Leviticus and Exodus (the actual figures are fifty-nine for Leviticus and nineteen for Exodus), but rarely elsewhere,

¹ It may well be that after examination it will appear that the meaning of sacrificial blood is essentially that of one of the other groups, but for the present it seems best to leave it as a separate group.

there being no more than twenty-five references to sacrificial blood in all the rest of the Old Testament. By contrast the use of blood to denote violent death is not specially located in any part of the Old Testament, and is found almost throughout. As far as it goes, the statistical evidence indicates that the association most likely to be conjured up when the Hebrews heard the word 'blood' was that of violent death.

b. The connection between blood and life

Those who think that 'the blood' means essentially 'the life' pay a good deal of attention to Leviticus 17: 11, 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life'. Also important is the statement, 'the blood is the life' (Gn. 9: 4; Dt. 12: 23). They also draw attention to the prohibition of eating flesh with the blood yet in it (Lv. 3: 17; 7: 26f; 17: 10, 12, 14, *etc.*), the refusal of David to 'drink the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives' (2 Sa. 23: 17), the parallel statements that Yahweh will require 'your blood, the blood of your lives' and 'the life of man' (Gn. 9: 5), and the psalmist's parallel use of 'soul' and 'blood' (Ps. 72: 14). This represents a formidable body of evidence and indicates that among the Hebrews a close connection between life and blood was recognized.

But does it indicate more? Many think it does; for example, Vincent Taylor says: 'The victim is slain in order that its life, in the form of blood, may be released. . . the aim is to make it possible for life to be presented as an offering to the Deity. More and more students of comparative religion, and of Old Testament worship in particular, are insisting that the bestowal of life is the fundamental idea in sacrificial worship'.¹ On this view the slaughter of the animal is necessary, but only because there is no other way of obtaining the blood, the life. The death plays no real part in the sacrifice.

It is difficult to see how such a view can be substantiated. It goes

¹ *Jesus and His Sacrifice* (London, 1939), pp. 54f. Cf also E. L. Mascall (summarizing Hicks). 'The slaying was merely an indispensable preliminary by which the life was set free to be offered' (*Corpus Christi*, London, 1955, p.89).

beyond the words of the passages cited, for there is none which speaks of the blood as indicating life in distinction from death. -Some of the passages adduced lend no real support to the idea when we look into them. Thus, while it is true that 'your blood, the blood of your lives' is used in the same fashion as 'the life of man' (Gn. 9: 5), yet its support of the theory is no more than superficial. 'Blood' here means death rather than life. When Yahweh says He will require the life or the blood of man, He is not asking men to produce life or hand it back to Him: He is saying that men will be held responsible for destroying life. It is not otherwise with the parallelism of 'soul' and 'blood' in Psalm 72: 14. What is meant by 'precious shall their blood be in his sight' is made clear by the very similar statement of Psalm 116: 15, 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death, of his saints', so that redeeming the soul in the first half of the verse is an expression meaning 'to deliver from death' (*cf.* Ps. 116: 8).

Similarly, David's refusal to 'drink the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives' is a metaphorical statement and must be understood so. David certainly did not mean that he would literally be partaking of either the blood or the lives of the men, and the statement must not be tortured into giving an unreal meaning. It is a defect of the view we are considering that it insists on taking very literally certain statements about blood, when there is abundant evidence that the word was used continually in a variety of metaphorical senses. Thus we read of 'innocent blood', and there are many expressions like 'his blood be on his own head' which make nonsense if we try to take them in a literal sense. This is the case with 'Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person (lit. the blood of the innocent)' (Dt. 27: 25), for it is manifestly impossible to limit the application of the words to murders where blood literally flows, whilst exempting those brought about without actual spilling of blood. Again, A. M. Stibbs draws attention to another figurative use of 'vivid word pictures involving "blood" . . . especially to indicate people's connection with someone's death',¹ and he cites Judah's saying concerning Joseph! 'What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?' (Gn. 37:26), the description of Joab as one who 'shed the

1. *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' in Scripture* (London, 1954), p.10.

blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle . . . and in his shoes' (1 Ki. 2:5), and the psalmist's idea of the vengeance of the righteous when 'he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked' (Ps. 58:10). Such examples could be multiplied, and in the face of them it is difficult to insist that passages like Leviticus 17:11 mean that life is literally in the blood.

Further, it may not be without significance that *nephesh*, which is translated 'life' in Leviticus 17:11, is not coterminous with the English 'life'. It can mean something very like 'life yielded up in death'. It occurs in passages which refer to 'taking away', 'losing', 'destroying', 'giving up' or 'devouring' life, to 'putting one's life in one's hand' and to the life 'departing'. A not uncommon way of referring to slaying is to speak of 'smiting the *nephesh*' (Gn. 37:21; Nu. 35:11; Je. 40:14, *etc.*), while those who desire to murder someone are usually said to 'seek his *nephesh*', an expression which occurs thirty times (*e.g.* Ex. 4:19; Ps. 35:4) and which is reinforced by others which speak of 'lying in wait for the *nephesh*', 'laying a snare for the *nephesh*', *etc.* (1 Sa. 28:9; Pr. 1:18). Some passages speak of 'slaying the *nephesh*' or the *nephesh* 'dying' (Nu. 31:19; Ezk. 13:19; 18:4).

There is surely significance in the fact that the word is used in such a variety of ways with regard to death. But even more important for our present purpose are certain passages where *nephesh* plainly points to death. Thus the sailors, about to cast Jonah into the sea, pray 'let us not perish for this man's *nephesh*' (Jon. 1:14). Clearly it is his death and not his life they have in mind. It is not otherwise with a number of passages which speak of 'life for life' as the punishment for murder, for example, 'Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him for the *nephesh* of his brother whom he slew' (2 Sa. 14:7).¹ Then there are passages wherein *nephesh* is translated by 'dead' or a similar term, as 'Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead (*lanephesh*)' (Lv. 19:28; cf Lv. 21:1; 22:4; Nu. 5:2; 6:11; 9:6,7, 10; Hg. 2:13, and, with the addition of *meth*, Lv. 21:11; Nu. 6:6; 19:11, 13). The expression 'blood of the life (lives)' is found twice (Pr. 28:17; Je. 2:34) and both times it signifies violent death.

1. Cf Ex. 21:23; Lv. 24:18; Dt. 19:21, and passages where the letting go of a prisoner is to be punished by the execution of the guard responsible, 1 Ki. 20:39, 42; 2 Ki. 10:24.

From all this it is clear that the association of *nephesh* with *dam* in Leviticus 17: 11, *etc.*, cannot be held to prove that life is thought of as still existent after the blood has been poured forth. This use of both *nephesh* and *dam* in other contexts makes it more probable that the meaning here is that of life given up in death.¹ This is supported by the fact that it is 'the life of the flesh' that is said to be in the blood, and it is precisely this life which ceases to exist when the blood is poured out. For the understanding of sacrifice there is an important use of *nephesh* in Isaiah 53: 10ff, where the offering of the *nephesh* is spoken of in sacrificial terms (it is an '*asham*, a guilt offering). But in verse 12 we have this offering of *nephesh* described as 'he poured out his *nephesh* unto death'.

Again, to speak of the life as in some way existent in the blood subsequent to the slaughter of the animal is to ignore the Hebrew stress on the connection of life with the body. So far were the Hebrews from thinking of an immaterial principle of life that they associated life in the age to come not with the immortality of the soul, but with the resurrection of the body. If they found difficulty in thinking of human life as persisting after the death of the body, it is most unlikely that they would think of the life of an animal as persisting after slaughter. Indeed, in the case of most of the sacrifices there is explicit mention of the animal being killed before the blood is referred to. To take an example at random: it is very difficult to believe that the writer had life in mind when he said, with reference to the cleansing of a leprous house, the priest 'shall . . . dip (certain things) in the blood of the slain bird' (Lv. 14: 51), for the bird is expressly said to be 'slain'. We seem far from the extremely practical Hebrew turn of mind when we read of 'soul-substance' (with W.O.E. Oesterley and E.O.James), or of the term blood suggesting 'the thought of life, dedicated, offered, transformed, and open to our spiritual appropriation'.² It is much more likely that A. M. Stibbs is correct when he sums it up as follows:

1. Cf. Lods' explanation of the verse: 'There is a ransom, a redemption, a death by proxy' (*The Prophets and the Rise of Judaism*, London, 1937, p.294).

2. Vincent Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching* (London, 1946), p. 198. It is largely his view of the meaning of blood which leads him to say 'those scholars are justified who insist that the most significant conception in sacrifice is that of life offered to God' (*Jesus and His Sacrifice*, London, 1939, p. 59). But he frankly admits 'It would be folly to pretend that this conception of sacrifice is taught in the Old Testament or was a theme of Rabbinical teaching' (*ibid.*).

'Blood shed stands, therefore, not for the release of life from the burden of the flesh, but for the bringing to an end of life in the flesh. It is a witness to physical death, not an evidence of spiritual survival.'¹

C. The problem of atonement

Examination of the passages treating of atonement is relevant, for if they show that atonement is generally linked with life, then, in view of Leviticus 17: 11, they will support the idea that life and blood are much the same thing. This will strengthen the hands of those who feel that the essential thing in sacrifice is the offering of life. But if, on the other hand, we find that atonement is linked with death this will form evidence against both these conclusions.

Atonement seems to be connected with the blood in the manner of Leviticus 17: 11 eleven times outside that verse. Some of the passages are so specific as to leave us in no doubt as to the atoning efficacy of blood, as, for example, when we read of the bullock and goat 'whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place' (Lv. 16: 27), or the direction that 'with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once in the year shall he make atonement for it' (Ex. 30: 10). But before we conclude that such passages mean that atonement is made by offering of life we must set beside them another verse in which blood is said to atone, namely, 'for blood, it polluteth the land: and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it' (Nu. 35: 33). Here we have explicit mention of atonement by blood, but it is certainly the execution of the murderer that is spoken of and not any presentation of his life before God. The importance of this verse as a commentary on Leviticus 17: 11 is not always realized. The Leviticus passage is ambiguous, for the reference to blood could be understood as signifying the presentation of life, or, equally, as indicating the infliction of death. This ambiguity is present in nearly all the other passages which connect blood and atonement. This enhances the importance of Numbers 35:33, for in this verse there is no ambiguity - the blood which atones is that which flows when the death penalty is inflicted on the criminal. It is true that this is not a sacrifice in the

¹ *op cit.*, p.11.

strict meaning of the term, and therefore some will doubt the validity of its application to the sacrificial scene. But consider that in both cases it is expiation of sin that is in question, in both cases the means is blood, in both cases the action is directed towards God, and in both cases atonement is said to be secured. It is difficult to deny the relevance of the passage.

There are twenty-two other passages where atonement is effected by means other than the cultus, and these show that atonement and the offering of life were not inseparably connected in Hebrew thought. Four of them are particularly significant. In the first, Moses says he will try to make atonement for the sin of the people and makes his attempt by asking God to blot him out of the book which He has written (Ex. 32: 30-32). In the second, Phinehas is said to have made atonement by killing Zimri and Cozbi (Nu. 25: 13). The third is that in which David makes atonement by delivering up seven descendants of Saul to be hanged by the Gibeonites (2 Sa. 21: 3f.), while in the fourth the heifer is slain to avert punishment when murder has been committed by a person unknown (Dt. 21: 1-9). In each of these passages there is atonement made or contemplated, and in none of them can it fairly be argued that what is meant is the presentation of life to God. In each case it is the termination of life, the infliction of death that atones. So far from any symbol of life being presented to God, the descendants of Saul were hanged, and the heifer killed by having its neck broken. This last passage is remarkable in that in verses 7-9 blood is mentioned four times and the verb *kipper* occurs twice, yet atonement is not connected with blood at all.

Turning now to those passages where atonement is connected with the cultus, the usual way is to speak quite generally of the whole sacrifice, for example, 'he shall prepare the sin offering, and the meal offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel' (Ezk. 45: 17). Thirty-eight times in all atonement is referred to in this way, and the general impression from them all is that it is the whole offering, rather than the presentation of the blood, that is thought of as effecting atonement. This impression is strengthened by the fact that sometimes the mention of atonement is attached to a point in the ritual other than the manipulation of the blood. Thus it is mentioned in connection with the laying of hands on the head of

the beast (Lv. 1: 4),¹ or with the burning of the fat (Lv. 4: 26).² These turns of expression are natural enough if it is the whole offering which atones, but they represent a strange way of speaking if the essence of it all is the offering of life contained in the blood.

Then there are passages in which atonement is mentioned in connection with rites prescribed by the cultus, but where the blood seems definitely to be excluded. Thus Aaron and his sons are instructed that 'they shall eat those things wherewith atonement was made' (Ex. 29: 33). Since the reference is to a carcass from which the blood has been drained, neither blood nor life can possibly be meant. Similar is the passage in which Moses rebukes the sons of Aaron, asking: 'Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary, seeing it is most holy, and he hath given it you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord?' (Lv. 10: 17). In neither of these examples does it seem possible to maintain that the essence of atonement is through offering of life. On the contrary, in both cases the death of the animal seems to be regarded as a necessity in the making of atonement.

Attention should be drawn also to certain passages in which the slaughter of nations is likened to sacrifice. Thus Jeremiah speaks of the destruction of the mighty men of Egypt and her allies and proceeds: 'And the sword shall devour and be satiate, and shall drink its fill of their blood: for the Lord, the Lord of hosts, hath a sacrifice in the north country' (Je. 46: 10). Similarly Zephaniah says, 'for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath sanctified his guests' (Zp. 1: 7). If the essence of sacrifice is the presentation of life before God such passages are completely inexplicable. They

1 Similarly in the Mishnah we find mention of atonement in the confession while hands are laid on the head of the animal (Yom. 3:8; 4:2; 6:2).

2 In view of this association of atonement with the fat it is worth noticing that a very important place is assigned to the fat throughout the sacrifices, so that this association with atonement is not surprising. Thus it is explicitly said that 'all the fat is the Lord's' (Lv. 3: 16), and there is a prohibition of eating the fat in exactly the same terms as that of partaking of the blood (Lv. 3: 17). Similarly the fat and the blood are closely associated with one another in Isaiah's denunciation (Is. 1: 11 and *cf.* Is. 34: 6). If the manipulation of blood and the final pouring of it at the base of the altar are essentials of sacrifice, no less so is the burning of the fat on the altar. Again, in David's lamentation over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sa. 1: 22) fat is clearly just as much a symbol of life (or death) as is blood.

receive adequate explanation only when we hold that sacrifice is inherently the destruction of the victims.

In other places atonement is connected with such ceremonies as the pouring of oil on the head of the cleansed leper (Lv. 14: 18,29), the offering of incense (Nu. 16: 46), the scapegoat (Lv. 16: 10), and there are others. But these do not seem to forward our inquiry so we pass over them, merely noting that in each case the removal of the particular thing sacrificed from the possession of the offerer seems indicated.¹ In the case of the animal offerings this is almost invariably by death.

Attention should also be drawn to the Passover ritual. In the original Passover, although there is no mention of atonement, there is mention of the blood as a means of averting destruction. 'And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there shall no plague be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt' (Ex. 12: 13). It is impossible to understand from the splashing of blood on the lintel and doorposts that a life is being presented to anyone. The obvious symbolism is that a death has taken place, and this death substitutes for the death of the firstborn.

We conclude, then, that the evidence afforded by the use of the term *dam* in the Old Testament indicates that it signifies life violently taken rather than the continued presence of life available for some new function, in short, death rather than life, and that this is supported by the references to atonement.

II. 'BLOOD' IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The word αἷμα is found in all **ninety-eight times in the New Testament**, sometimes simply of blood without any implication of life or death or the like. Thus five times we meet the expression 'flesh and blood', there are four references to the woman with the issue of blood, and there is the unusual expression 'born not of bloods'

1. H. Hubert and M. Mauss in their important examination of the concept of sacrifice concluded that the essential thing is the destruction of the victims, at least as regards possession by the worshipper (*L'Annee Sociologique*, II, 1897-8, pp.71, 75f., 133. etc.). Eugene Masure finds the essence of sacrifice in 'a religious transfer of property' (*The Christian Sacrifice*, London, 1944, p.34).

(Jn. I: 13). Altogether such passages account for **twenty-four occurrences** of the word.

Twenty-five times the word indicates violent death, this being the largest group, as we have already seen to be the case in the Old Testament. A good example is the statement of St. Paul, 'when the blood of Stephen thy witness was shed, I also was standing by' (Acts 22: 20). As that death was by stoning there is no emphasis on the literal outpouring of blood. The expression stands simply for violent death. So is it with **the query of the martyrs in the Apocalypse, 'How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?'** (Rev. 6: 10). It makes nonsense of this passage to insist that there is any emphasis on a literal shedding of blood. The people in question are those 'that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held' (Rev. 6: 9) quite irrespective of how they met their death. Very important in this group are the references to 'the blood of Abel' and the 'blood of Zachariah' (Lk. 11:51), for they form parallels to 'the blood of Christ', and both of them plainly signify death and not any offering of life.

A usage which is **probably derived** from this is that in which 'blood' signifies spiritual, rather than physical, death, as when St. Paul says to the Jews opposing him: 'Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles' (Acts 18: 6; and see Acts 20: 26).

Twelve times we come across references to the blood of animal sacrifices, all of them in Hebrews; but with one exception they tell us little about the way sacrifice was regarded, being allusions to what was actually done without any attempt to explain why it was done. The only possible exception is Hebrews 9: 13 where 'the blood of goats and bulls' is linked with 'the ashes of a heifer', and since the latter undoubtedly points to death it may be held that the former does also, or at the very least that it is congruous with it.

The **remaining passages** all refer in one way or another to the blood of Christ, and on a number of occasions the reference seems plainly to His death, without any necessary implication of sacrifice. Thus in Romans 5: 9 we are said to be 'justified by his blood' and 'saved from the wrath through him'. This is parallel to 'reconciled ... through the death of his Son' and 'saved by his life' in the next verse, while it follows references to dying in each of the three

preceding verses. It does not seem possible to resist the conclusion that 'his blood' here refers to the death of the Lord. It is not otherwise with 'the blood of his cross' (Col. 1: 20), for a cross has no place in the sacrificial system, and stands only for a particularly unpleasant death. There seems no reason for interpreting Ephesians 2: 13 in any other way, especially since here 'made nigh in the blood of Christ' seems to give much the same thought as 'might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross' (verse 16). Very clear is the word of the high priest to the apostles, 'ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us' (Acts 5: 28), where the reference is plainly to the death of Christ, this time with the added thought of responsibility for that death. The death is meant also in 1 John 5: 6, where Jesus is said to have come 'by water and blood'; of which passage even Westcott, who holds strongly to the thought that blood signifies release of life, can say: 'There can be no doubt that the Death upon the Cross satisfies the conception of "coming by blood."¹ Probably we should include in this group also two passages in the Apocalypse, viz. those which refer to Him 'that loosed us from our sins by his blood' (Rev. 1: 5), and to His vesture, 'a garment sprinkled with (or dipped in) blood' (Rev. 19: 13), though perhaps some would prefer to include them among passages referring to sacrifice.

There is an interesting passage where the blood cannot be interpreted as a reference to sacrifice, namely that referring to the drinking of Christ's blood (Jn. 6: 53ff.), for there is no place in the Hebrew sacrificial system for drinking blood. To understand this passage as signifying a participation in the life of Christ is to assume the point at issue, for it certainly does not prove it. Indeed, the indications are the other way, for the mention of blood and flesh in separation points to death rather than life,² and, moreover, we cannot overlook the fact that drinking the blood is coupled with eating the flesh. There is no reason for thinking that the two expressions give essentially dissimilar ideas, and it is very difficult

1 *In loc.*

2 Bernard says that the use of the expression *πινειν το αιμα* in Jn. 6:53 'as distinct from *φαγειν την σαρχα*, indicates that the Flesh and Blood have been separated, and thus it suggests death, even more definitely than *φαγειν την σαρχα* does' (*ICC, in loc.*). Westcott also sees in the separation indication of violent death (*in loc.*).

to understand the latter expression of participation in the life. And if we do we have destroyed the case for thinking that the life is in the blood; it would then be also in the flesh. Plainly the passage points to the death of Christ.¹ Perhaps we should also notice 1 Corinthians 10: 16; 11: 27 here, for although neither of them speaks explicitly of drinking the blood, they are passages of the same type. All things considered, it would seem that the passages noticed in this paragraph are satisfactorily interpreted only if the blood of Christ be taken as pointing us to His death.

A further group refers to the blood of Christ as the price of our redemption (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7, *etc.*). This group seems to point to the blood as meaning death, but no stress is laid upon the passages which comprise it, because it would be possible to interpret them of the offering of life, if that could be substantiated from elsewhere.

The remaining passages seem to point to sacrificial blood. Six times there is reference to covenant blood, which calls for no comment to show the sacrificial reference: thus God is said to have set forth Christ as *ἱλαστήριον* . . . *ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι* (Rom. 3: 25), where the word *ἱλαστήριον* points us to the sacrifices.² In Hebrews 9 the whole context with its mention of the blood of sacrificial victims shows that verses 12, 14 carry a reference to the sacrificial system when they speak of the blood of Christ, and the same is true of 10: 19. The unusual phrase, 'blood of sprinkling' (Heb. 12: 24), points to a sacrificial action, and the context shows that in Hebrews 13: 12 the sin offering is in mind. The sprinkling of the blood in 1 Peter 1: 2 is a sacrificial action, while the blood 'as of a lamb without blemish and without spot' (1 Pet. 1: 19) is clearly sacrificial blood. The same is probably true of 'the blood of the Lamb' (Rev. 7: 14; 12: 11). Finally, the thought of cleansing associated with the blood in 1 John 1:7 seems to be an allusion to sacrifice.

When we were dealing with sacrifice in the Old Testament we saw reason for thinking that the infliction of death rather than the release of life was the dominant thought, and these passages, which

1 It may be noted that both expressions are found in a metaphorical sense in the Old Testament, namely Ps. 27: 2; 2 Sa. 23: 17.

2 Cf. W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam: 'It is impossible to get rid from this passage of the double idea (1) of a sacrifice; (2) of a sacrifice which is propitiatory' (*ICC, Romans*, p. 91).

view the death of Christ as a sacrifice, do not disturb that conclusion. There is nothing in the context of any of them to show that the writer was thinking of the offering of life when he spoke of Christ's death in sacrificial terms. Contrariwise, each one of them yields a natural interpretation when we think of the blood as signifying death.

One or two of the sacrificial passages strengthen our impression that the blood means death. Thus in Hebrews 9: 14f. we read: 'How much more shall the blood of Christ . . . cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place. . .' It is hard to envisage a reason for interpreting 'the blood' here in a sense other than that given by the words which follow: 'a death having taken place'.

If anything the connection between blood and death is even plainer in Hebrews 12: 24 where we read of coming 'to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than (that of) Abel'. Whether we include the words in parentheses or not, the contrast is between the blood of Abel and the blood of Jesus.¹ There can be no doubt that the blood of Abel is a metaphorical way of referring to the death of that patriarch, and it is unnatural accordingly to interpret the blood of Jesus as signifying anything other than His death. Yet the reference to sprinkling shows that the thought of sacrifice is in the writer's mind, so that for him the blood of sacrifice seems to have pointed to death.

Again, we read in Hebrews 13: 11f.: 'For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered without the gate.' Here the comparison is made between the sin offering and the blood of Jesus, but the point that is singled out for notice in the Levitical sacrifice is not the presentation of the blood (though that, too, is important to this writer as we see from his previous references to it), but the burning of the

¹ I regard the view that 'that of Abel' refers to the blood of Abel's sacrifice as untenable, on the ground that the reference to the blood speaking marks the passage as an allusion to Gn. 4: 10. There is no suggestion in Gn. 4 of the blood of Abel's sacrifice speaking.

carcass outside the camp. This part of the sacrifice can point only to the death of the animal, and certainly not to any presentation of life. Once more we see that the sacrificial allusion indicates the death of Jesus.

Thus it seems tolerably certain that in both the Old and New Testaments the blood signifies essentially the death. It is freely admitted that there are some passages in which it is possible to interpret the blood as signifying life, but even these yield a better sense (and one which is consistent with the wider biblical usage) if understood to mean 'life given up in death'. In particular, there seems no reason for disputing the dictum of J. Behm: ' "Blood of Christ" is like "cross", only another, clearer expression for the death of Christ in its salvation meaning'.¹

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'BLOOD'

A. M. Stibbs, in his monograph *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' in Scripture*,² gathers passages supporting the view that 'blood' means 'life released' rather than 'death inflicted' from the writings of Nathaniel Micklem, C. H. Dodd, O. C. Quick, F. C. N. Hicks, P. T. Forsyth, B. F. Westcott, and W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam. The list could easily be extended. The idea is specially prominent in H. Clay Trumbull's *The Blood Covenant*,³ where statements abound like 'not merely that the blood is *essential* to life, but that, in a peculiar sense, it *is* life'.⁴ Something very like this appears as early as H. Bushnell, who says: 'Not that the life thus offered, the life made sacred and mysterious by such associations gathered to it, carries effect by ceasing to live, that is, by death symbolized in the sprinkling of it. No, it gets its effect as being life, the sacred, mystic, new-creating touch of life.'⁵ 'It is not death, but life, that is in it.'⁶

1 *TWNT*, I, p.173.

2 2nd edn (London, 1954) pp. 4ff.

3 New York, 1885.

4 *Op cit*, p. 38.

5 *The Victorious Sacrifice* (London, 1866), p.401.

6 *Op cit.*, p. 434.

He has similar statements in *Forgiveness and Law*,¹ but he does not make this view central to his understanding of the atonement.

Advocates of such views scarcely face the fact that, while the blood of Christ is said in the New Testament to bring about a variety of effects, none is specifically connected with life. As A. M. Farrer puts it: 'In the New Testament the Blood of Christ is a ransom-price, a means of purging, the element to ratify a solemn covenant; but the explanation offered for all these ideas - the communication of life - is never stated, but has to be read in.'² The point is important. The idea is never expressed in the New Testament. It must be read into the New Testament by those who have previously decided that this is what 'blood' must mean. When it is added that the sources exterior to the New Testament which are relied on do not yield all the support its advocates claim to the 'life' idea it will be seen that the whole idea is dubious to say the least.

Many reputable scholars strongly oppose the view. Thus James Moffatt can say: 'Semitic scholars warn us against finding in these words (Lv. 17¹¹) either the popular idea of the substitution of the victim for the sinner, or even the theory that the essential thing in sacrifice is the offering of a life to God'.³

James Denney is very forthright in his opposition and speaks of 'the strange caprice which fascinated Westcott' in distinguishing in the blood of Christ '(i) His death, and (ii) His life; or (i) His blood shed, and (ii) His blood offered; or (i) His life laid down, and (ii) His life liberated and made available for men . . . I venture to say that a more groundless fancy never haunted and troubled the interpretation of any part of Scripture than that which is introduced by this distinction into the Epistle to the Hebrews and the first Epistle of John . . . there is no meaning in saying that by His death His life, as something other than His death, is "liberated" and "made available" for men. On the contrary, what makes His risen life significant and a saving power for sinners is neither more nor less than this that His death is in it'.⁴

J. Armitage Robinson's comment is, 'To the Jewish mind "blood" was not merely - nor even chiefly - the life-current flowing

1 London, 1874.

2 *The Parish Communion*, ed. A. G. Herbert (London, 1957), p. 89.

3 *ICC, Hebrews*, p. xlii.

4 *The Death of Christ* (London, 1951), pp. 149f.

in the veins of the living: it was especially the life poured out in death; and yet more particularly in its religious aspect it was the symbol of sacrificial death.¹ Similarly Frederic Platt refuses to endorse Westcott's distinction between 'a life given' and 'a life liberated and made available for men',² while G. F. Moore deprecates the idea that 'the offering of a *life* to God is the essential thing in sacrifice', pointing out that 'No such theory appears in later Jewish thought'.³ More recently F. J. Taylor has written: 'It is hardly likely that blood could signify life released . . . for early Hebrew thought had no adequate conception of a spiritual survival after death',⁴ though C. R. North in the same volume accepts the view that the blood signifies the life.⁵ J. Behm equates the death of Christ with 'the Blood'.⁶ So C. Ryder Smith on Hebrews 10:19 says: 'As elsewhere in the New Testament, the Christian emphasis *under the great symbol* is not on life, but on death.'⁷

1 *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London, 1904), p.29.

2 *HDAC*, I, p.121.

3 *Enc. Bib.*, col. 4221 and note.

4 *TWBB*, p. 33.

5 *TWBB*, Art. 'Sacrifice'.

6 *TWNT*, II, p.136. He reaches a similar conclusion in his treatment of $\alpha\iota\mu\alpha$ (*TWNT*, I, p. 173).

7 *The Bible Doctrine of Salvation* (London, 1946), p.233; and cf J. S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ* (London, 1947), p.237; F. W. Dillistone, *The Significance of the Cross* (London, 1946), p.68; G. O. Griffith, *St. Paul's Gospel to the Romans* (Oxford, 1949), p.17.