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The "God of War" and his "Prince of Peace"[1].

ABSTRACT

We are confronted with the fact that religion (including the Christian religion) and violence are apparently closely connected. At the same time religion (including the Christian religion) is historically intimately associated with peace. In the so-called "Song of the Sea" (Exodus 15) the God of Israel is celebrated as the "Lord of War" (vs 3), but on the other hand the Bible promises a Kingdom of everlasting peace brought about "not by might nor by power" but by the "Prince of Peace"? The pressing question put in this paper is whether the aggression of the God of war is compatible with the compassion of the Prince of peace, especially since the latter is claimed to be the revelation of the former.

CAUSE OR CURE?

In January 2000 De Wet Kritzinger took a gun and 26 bullets, boarded a bus in Pretoria transporting black people, and in cold blood murdered three passengers. During his trial he testified that it had been his intention to kill more.[2] This violent act was the result of a solemn vow he had taken eight years previously. He frequently quoted from Scripture and according to his testimony, prayed for power that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would speak through him.

Mark Juergensmeyer[3] claims that "religion seems to be connected with violence virtually everywhere" and that this phenomenon is not the monopoly of any single religion.[4] In his personal participation in social activism however, he has also experienced the positive transforming potential of religion. Consequently he is well aware "that many will find in it a cure for violence instead of a cause". That coincides with the conviction of Shri Jagadguru that all great religions are also pervaded with non-violence and compassion. He believes "there is no religion without peace, no peace without religion."[5]

It would seem that this ambiguous relation between religion and violence also holds good for the Christian religion. In the "Song of Moses and Miriam" (Exodus 15), the so-called "Song of the Sea", God is celebrated as "the Lord of war"[6] (vs 3) and many "wars of the Lord" are recorded in

1 Paper read at the 5th Conference of the International Reformed Theological Institute, Indonesia 2003 on *Faith and Violence*.
2 *Die Burger*, 3 May 2003**,** Front page.
3 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the mind of God. The global rise of religious violence*, London 2000 (updated edition with a new preface written September 18, 2001), xi, xii.
4 See also David Martin, *Does Christianity cause war?* Oxford 1997, 3f. "On the other hand, much of what we hear suggests that religion can be rather dangerous. It seems believers not only die for it but kill for it…A letter to the Independent put the point succinctly: why teach our children Christian values when their effects are so visible across the Irish Sea?"
5 Quoted by Henry O. Thompson, *World religions in war and peace*, Jefferson, North Carolina, and London 1988, 71. On the ambiguity of religion with regard to war and peace cf. also the conclusion of John Ferguson, *War and peace in the world's religions*, London 1977, 156f.
6 P. D. Miller, *The divine warrior in early Israel*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 171 declares that "the language and understanding of God as a warrior dominated Israel's faith throughout its course…It

the Old Testament. At the same time the Bible promises a Kingdom of everlasting peace (Isaiah 11) not brought about "by might nor by power" (Zech 4:6) but by God's Spirit through the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). *Is the aggression of the God of war compatible with the compassion of the Prince of Peace?* This is an exceptionally pressing problem bearing in mind that according to the New Testament, the latter is professed to be the revelation of the former.

At a time like the present when violence is rife, this apparent paradox creates a serious predicament for the Christian faith in general and the Reformed faith with its well-known predilection for the Old Testament, in particular. Many find it extremely difficult to reconcile belief in the "God of violence"[7] of the Old Testament with the universal cry for a non-violent society. Although the focal point of our paper is not ethics but dogmatics, not the doctrine of man but the doctrine of God, not the "*wars* of the Lord", but the "*Lord* of war", we are reminded by Calvin of the indissoluble link between knowledge of God and of ourselves. For that reason the doctrine of God has serious implications for anthropology, ethics and culture. On the strife-torn African continent where the movement away from violence towards peace has been called a challenge for African Christianity,[8] the relation between faith and violence is of pre-eminent importance.

The bloody world of the Bible

The world we encounter in the Bible is a bloody world and consequently the Bible is a bloodstained book. From the first book of Genesis where the blood of Abel[9] slain by his brother, cries to high heaven (Gen. 4:11), to the last book of Revelations where the souls of those slain for maintaining their testimony call out in a loud voice: "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (Rev. 6:9), "bloodshed follows bloodshed" (Hosea 4:2). Raymund Schwager[10] maintains that no other human activity is as ubiquitous in the Hebrew Bible as bloody war, brutal murder, devastation and destruction. But one can safely say that bloodshed and violence is a persistent theme throughout the entire Scripture. In the New Testament everything is centred on the crucified Christ the inaugurator of a new covenant in his blood (1 Cor 11:25). In trying to explain the meaning of the sacrifice of God's Son, the author of Hebrews uses no fewer than 17 times the word "blood" within 5 chapters (9-13).[11] Soaking into the earth, which had opened its mouth to receive the blood of Abel (Gen 4:11), is the blood of the Lamb dripping from the accursed Cross (Gal 3:13).

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would not be amiss to say that the most elaborate conceptions of the divine warrior come at the end of the Old Testament period. So wherever one turns one encounters this theme."

7 Cf. W. Dietrich & C. Link, *Die dunklen Seiten Gottes. Willkür und Gewalt*, Neukirchener 1997, part B: "Der Gewalttätige Gott".

8 May N. Getui, Peter Kanyandago (ed), *From violence to peace. A challenge for African Christianity*, Nairobi 1999. Cf. also N Lohfink, "Der gewalttätige Gott des Alten Testaments und die Suche nach einer gewaltfreien Gesellschaft", in: *Der eine Gott der beiden Testamente*, Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie Band 2 (1987), 106-136, who declares that many Christians who sympathise with the peace movement are embarrassed by the violence of God in the Old Testament (p.107f).

9 Vide Mark McEntire, *The blood of Abel. The violent plot in the Hebrew Bible*, Georgia 1999, chapter 1: "Violence enters the human community".

10 Raymond Schwager, *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock? Gewalt und Erlösung in den biblischen Schriften*, München 1978, 58.

11 R. Schwager, *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock?*, 206.

The aggression of God

What is of prime importance for the purpose of this paper, is the fact that violence is not only a human phenomenon, but according to Schwager, "approximately one thousand passages (of the Old Testament, PFT) speak of Yahweh's blazing anger, of his punishment by death and destruction, and how like a consuming fire he passes judgement, takes revenge, and threatens annihilation. He manifests his might and glory through warfare and holds court like a wrathful avenger. No other topic is more often mentioned as God's bloody works."[12]

The pronouncement found on several occasions in the early church, namely that there is no violence in God, seems to be in stark contrast with the Bible itself.[13] "God as a warrior" (Exodus 15:3)[14] is not an isolated theme in the Old Testament, but is connected intimately with other metaphors like "God as King" and "God as Judge".[15] Related issues are God's wrath and retribution, vengeance and violence, jealousy and justice.

Since the Psalms played a major role in fashioning Reformed spirituality, it is especially disturbing to realise that the dimension of vengeance and retribution is very much in evidence in the Psalter.[16] Ps. 94:1 refers twice to Jahwe as "God of vengeance". As Zenger puts it: "The psalms, and the 'psalm songs' inspired by them, became the programmatic and aggressive poetic texts of the great Reformers and their reforming churches."[17] He describes Ps 1 and 2 as "double motto" for the entire Psalter, whose music is not played in a "sweet major key" but promises that the wicked will perish. That is confirmed at the end of the Psalter. According to M A Vincent "the vengeance promised is at last being performed."[18]Just before the repeated praising of the Lord in the *grand finale* namely Ps 150, we encounter the "double-edged sword" of God's praise which inflicts vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples (Ps 149:7). Even Ps 23, which comforted Immanuel Kant more than any other book he read, makes mention of the fear-inspiring rod that threatens his foes whilst God prepares a table for the psalmist in the presence of his enemies.[19] Not to mention Ps 58:10 where the righteous are glad "when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked", or the beautiful "By the rivers of Babylon" (Ps 137) which according to Zenger[20] is at the same time regarded as the "psalm of violence" *par excellence*. Extremely revolting to modern sensibilities are the closing verses (8,9): "O Daughter

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12 Quoted by McEntire, *The blood of Abel*, 4, from (the English translation of *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock?) Must there be scapegoats: violence and redemption in the Bible*, New York 1987, 55.

13 P van Dijk, A Houtepen, H Zeldenrust, *Geloof en geweld. De vrede van God en de oorlogen der mensen*, Kampen 1988, 82.

14 "The LORD (Jahwe) is a warrior; the LORD (Jahwe) is his name." Cf. T Longman III & D G Reid, *God is a warrior*, Grand Rapids 1995.

15 H G L Peels, *The vengeance of God. The meaning of the root nqm & the function of the nqm-texts in the context of divine revelation in the Old Testament*, Leiden, New York, Köln 1995, 276 – 283. Also P D Miller, *The divine warrior*, 173 f. makes mention of the close relation between Jahwe as warrior and the concepts of salvation, judgment and kingship.

16 E Zenger, A God of Vengeance? Understanding the psalms of divine wrath, Louisville (Kentucky) 1996, 16. (Translated from *Ein Gott der Rache: Feindpsalmen Verstehen*, Freiburg 1994). Also H G L Peels, *The vengeance of God*, 234 - 246. Peels (234) shows that it is misleading to speak of *imprecatory* or *vengeance psalms*. He prefers to speak of *imprecatory prayers* or *prayers for vengeance*. These prayers are not restricted to psalms and no single psalm is "purely" a psalm of imprecation.

17 E Zenger, *A God of* vengeance?, 2.

18 M A Vincent, "The shape of the Psalter: an eschatological dimension?", in P J Harland & R Hayward (ed.), *New Heaven and New Earth. Prophecy & the millennium*. Essays in honour of Anthony Gelston, Leiden, Boston, Köln 1999, 69.

19 Vide E Zenger, *A God of vengeance?*, 9 – 13.

20 E Zenger, *A God of vengeance*?, 47

of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us – who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks." It comes as no surprise that many Christians feel ill at ease with the "aggressive God" we encounter in the Old Testament in general, and the book of Psalms in particular. It is noticeable that the Roman Catholic Church has excluded some psalms and some segments of psalms, which call for vengeance and retribution from the missal and Liturgy of the Hours.

Victimhood is in vogue

Whatever scruples and reservations one may have regarding the bloody world of the Bible, the fact remains that the world of war and destruction we come across in Scripture is the real world and not an idealistic fabrication of our imagination. At least one can say that the world we stumble upon in the Bible, rings true. It is the same blood-drenched earth we encounter in our daily papers. It is miles removed from the romanticised "topsy-turvy world of victimology" as Gil Bailie terms it.[21]

With that he refers to a significant phenomenon in American society which was described by the journalist Robert Hughes as "the all-pervasive claim to victimhood" in which you either claim to be a victim yourself, or profess that you are speaking on the victim's behalf. That resulted in a serious shortage of victimizers. For some time the only available non-victim was "that Blond Beast of the sentimental imagination, the heterosexual, middle-class, white male", but lately the latter has started "bawling for victim status too." Bailie adds laconically that "a claimant denied can easily be mistaken for a victim scorned, the result being that denying someone's claim to victim status can have the same effect as granting it."[22]

Another symptom of this trend of political correctness, is the so-called "homeless chic" i.e. the new fad to buy patched clothes as an indication of social status and style. Bailie remarks: "This is all very funny and very expensive and more than a little pathetic. If money can't buy happiness, maybe it can buy poverty, or at least catch clumsily at the moral distinction that adheres to social marginality in a world exposed for centuries to the Sermon on the Mount".[23]

This self-serving, sickly trivialising of victimhood is by no means merely a First World phenomenon. It may take a different form, but "victimology" is not foreign to Sub-Saharan Africa. Sometimes the more vociferous advocates of "affirmative action", which very often takes place to the detriment of the poorest of the poor, are frequently the "fat cats" who are clamouring for victim status. Those who are willing to protest, must also be ready and prepared to pick up flak.

Marcion's modern admirers

The debate about the relation between the Christian faith and violence is of course nothing new.[24] Behind it lurks the name of Marcion who was excommunicated by the church but whose doctrine of the dissimilarity between the God of the Old Testament and the Father of Jesus Christ has haunted the church ever since. Bijlsma[25] refers to Von Harnack as an exponent of "modern Marcionism" that opened the floodgates to 20th century theological anti-Semitism. The violence

21 Gill Bailie, *Violence unveiled. Humanity at the Crossroads*, New York 2002, 23.
22 Gill Bailie, *Violence unveiled*, 23.
23 Gill Bailie, *Violence unveiled*, 22.
24 On the debate on the subject during the first three centuries of the early church, see Jean-Michel Hornus, *It is not lawful for me to fight. Early Christian attitudes toward war, violence and the state*, Scottdale (Pennsylvania), Kithchener (Ontario), 1980.
25 R Bijlsma, *Schriftgezag en Schrifgebruik. Een hermeneutiek van de Bijbel*, Nijkerk 1964, 191.

that resulted gives one pause to ponder whether the "violence" of God is not kinder than the "kindness" of man.

Whereas the strongly anti-Marcionite Reformed spirituality has a predilection for the Psalms, Reformed theology shares with Marcion a proclivity to Paul. At the same time it is highly ironic that whilst Marcion opted predominantly for Paul in his rejection of the aggressive God of the Old Testament, in "modern Marcionism" it is precisely Paul who is regarded as the villain of the piece. According to Western liberal theology the "intolerant" Paul is looked upon as the founder of the Christian religion and (says S C Barton) "a wedge is driven between Paul and Jesus in a way that preserves Jesus as the model teacher of universal love and demonises Paul as the source of corruption of the original ideal."[26]

Most certainly Paul is not a paragon of tolerance as it is often understood in liberal theology. In his confrontation with Peter recorded in Galatians 2, he is not mincing his words, and his uncompromising attitude towards opponents of the Gospel, is not intended to "win friends and influence people". Barton rightly contends that Paul's conversion does not entail that "Saul the intolerant Pharisee is transformed into Paul the tolerant apostle."[27] One is reminded, rather, of Moses[28] coming down the mountain after his meeting with God, approaching the camp and seeing the golden calf and the dancing people, burning with anger, hurling the tablets to pieces (Exodus 31:19). The intolerant Moses that killed the Egyptian is not transformed into the tolerant mediator of his people; on the contrary, Noordmans reckons that his anger has rather assumed a volume and proportion that is more than merely human. It is, as it were, a spark of the wrath of the God Moses has met on the mountain, which as mediator of Israel he averts from destroying his people.

Prince of Peace or reprisal?

When one starts rejecting parts of the Bible it becomes exceedingly difficult to stop short of rejecting it all. *Sola Scriptura* implies *tota Scriptura*. You cannot reject the Old Testament and retain Paul the apostle; you cannot snub the "intolerant" Paul and hold on to Jesus the Jew. The language Jesus occasionally uses against the teachers of the law and the Pharisees (Mt 23 for instance) disqualifies Him as the epitome of tolerance in the modern sense of the word. Not to mention the way He clears out and cleans up the temple when his Father's house is turned into a market (Mt 21, John 2).[29] John the "apostle of love" who employs the Christological title "Lamb of God" which is peculiar to him, also records this episode.

We are more inclined to speak of the "silence of the Lamb" (Is 53:7) than the "violence of the Lamb"[30], and we feel more comfortable with the love of the Lamb than the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 17:14), but also the latter is not lacking in the New Testament. In the last book of the Bible the Lamb is also called a Lion. The title "Lamb of God" has nothing to do with the "gentle Jesus

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26 S C Barton 1998: "Paul and the limits of tolerance" in G. N. Stanton & G. G. Stroumsa, *Tolerance and intolerance in early Judaism and Christianity*, United Kingdom, New York, Australia 1998, 121. Barton adds: "And, except within the Lutheran and Reformed traditions of the Christian church, Paul's reputation has suffered ever since."

27 S C Barton, "Paul and the limits of tolerance", 124

28 For Paul as in a sense a 'second Moses', see Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the history of Israel. The letter/Spirit contrast and the argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, Massachusetts 1995.

29 It can therefore be misleading to say, like Philip Berrigan, that "Christ is God disarmed". Quoted as motto by John Dear, *Our God is nonviolent. Witnesses in the struggle for peace and justice*, New York 1990.

30 George Aichele wrote an article on "Jesus' violence" in: George Aichele & Tina Pippin (ed.), *Violence, Utopia and the Kingdom of God. Fantasy and Ideology in the Bible*, London, New York 1998, 72-91.

meek and mild" that is a figment of modern imagination. C H Dodd warns that "the sentimental explanation which makes it refer to the innocence and gentleness of the character of Jesus cannot be taken seriously."[31] The title is used by John the Baptist (Jn 1:29) who is not renowned for his meekness and mildness. Dodd argues that the word "*amnos*", like its equivalent "*arnion*" in Revelation, is used as a synonym for "Messiah". In the Apocalypse this "Lamb" has seven horns (5:6),[32] shares the throne of God (22:1, 3), is the Lord of lords and King of kings who overcomes his enemies (17:14) whilst they call to the mountains and the rocks to hide them "from the wrath of the Lamb" (6:16). At the same time the Lamb is the sacrificial Lamb "that was slain from the creation of the world" (13:8), who with his blood, purchased men for God (5:9).

This apparent paradox is also noticeable in the word *sjalom*, which is usually translated as "peace". It is however a moot point whether the expression *sar-sjalom* (Is 9:5) should be translated as "prince of peace" or "prince of reprisal". The debate on the basic meaning of the root *slm* is still undecided. Gerleman is convinced that the meaning of the verb (*slm* pi = *sjillem*) i e to repay, requite, retaliate, take reprisal for, should be taken as point of departure.[33] He argues that "requital" in both the positive (compensation, reward) and negative (penalty, vengeance) meaning, underlies all uses of the root *slm*. Like the English word "repay", *sjillem* can have the positive meaning to "satisfy" or "reward",[34] but also to "perform restitution", or to "exercise vengeance". Therefore it can be used synonymous with the verb *naqam*[35] (to avenge) in the "Song of Moses" (Deut 32:35): "It is mine to avenge (*naqam*); I will repay (*sjillem*)" which is repeated in vs 41[36] and quoted in Romans 12:19.

Usually however, when the substantive *sjalom* is taken as point of departure, the basic meaning of *slm* is believed to be wholeness, entirety, well-being, to be inviolate (German: *Unversehrtheit*) and undivided (Judg 4:17), in short: to have peace.[37] According to 1 Chr 12:38f all the fighting men came to Hebron "fully determined" (*lebab sjalem = whole-heartedly*) to make David king and "all the rest of the Israelites were also of one mind (*lebab sjalem*) to make David king". When a heart, a body, a people, a nation etc is not divided, there is peace. Since there will be no end to his *sjalom* (Is 9:7) there can be little doubt that the phrase *sar-sjalom* (Is 9:5) has the meaning: "Prince of peace".[38] This eschatological peace is brought about by the Suffering Servant, whom the author of 1 Peter 1:18f has in mind[39] when he refers to "the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." In order to make us whole, the Servant was pierced, in order to

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31 C H Dodd, *The interpretation of the fourth Gospel*, Cambridge 1968, 230.

32 In the Jewish apocalyptic tradition the leaders are represented as horned rams (bell-wethers) that protect the flock against ravens that want to devour the sheep. See Dodd, *Interpretation*, 231f.

33 G Gerleman, "SLM to have enough", in E Jenni, C. Westermann (ed.), *Theological lexicon of the Old Testament* Volume 3 , Massachusetts 1997, 1337-1348.

34 1 Samuel 24:19 (the words of Saul to David): "May the Lord reward you well for the way you treated me today".

35 Cf H G L Peels, *The vengeance of God*, 132ff. Besides *naqam* the word belongs to the same linguistic field as *paqad, hesib, gamal, zakar, sapat*. Vide N A Schuman, *Gelijk om gelijk. Verslag en balans van een discussie over goddelijke vergelding in het Oude Testament*, Amsterdam 1993, chapter VI: "De discussie (2): Een kwestie van woorden?" This work by Schuman offers an in depth discussion of the whole issue of "divine retribution in the Old Testament".

36 "I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me."

37 P F Theron, *Die ekklesia as kosmies-eskatologiese gawe. Die eenheid van die kerk as 'profesie' van die eskatologiese vrede*, Pretoria 1978, 15-17. For a discussion of the views of Pederson, Koch, Eisenbeis, Scarbert, Gerleman and Stendebach, see N A Schuman, *Gelijk om gelijk*, 175-185.

38 N A Schuman, *Gelijk om gelijk*, 183.

39 Cf Is 53:6-12 and 1 Pet 2: 21-25. C H Dodd, *Interpretation*, 230f.

give us peace, the Servant was punished; by his wounds, we are healed (Is 53:5).[40] In this view the basic meaning[41] of the verb *sjillem*, boils down to "making whole", to "healing". But this "healing" is brought about by means of the wrath and righteousness of God. "For He will avenge the blood of his servants; He will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people." (Deut 32:43). God's vengeance means vindication; his judgement involves justification. By way of *sjillem* God's eternal *sjalom* is established. The flipside of Christ's cross[42] is the resurrection.

Simplicity and peace

The simplicity of God[43] implies that He is of one piece, i e that He is undivided, that there is no clash, no conflict, no duplicity in his being, that He is no composite of light and darkness (1 Jn 1:5)[44], love and hate, compassion and malice and consequently a God of integrity (*integritas* = wholeness) and therefore absolutely trustworthy. Deut 6:4: *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.* Precisely because He is "of one piece"[45], He can be called the "God of peace" (Rom 16:20). Immediately Paul adds that the God of peace "will soon crush Satan under your feet." Quite obviously God's aggression is not in Paul's view in conflict with God's peace but rather its prerequisite.

Kathleen Greider has argued conclusively against a superficial identification of aggression and violence.[46] Because of the ambiguous character of aggression, it can be both destructive and constructive. It has the capacity to harm but also to do good and decrease violence and increase vitality and justice. Therefore there is not only a close relationship between aggression and hate but also between aggression and love.

The "peace of God" is not opposed only to the lack of peace in this world, but also to the peace of this world (Jn 14:27), which is nothing but "organisierte Friedlosigkeit".[47] In the kingdom of God who "promises peace to his people" (Ps 85: 8), "*righteousness* and *peace* kiss each other" (Ps 85:10). Subsequently the "Prince of peace" can even say (Luk 12:51): "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division." The peace (wholeness) God gives, is brought

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40 D G Reid, T Longman III, "When God declares war. The violence of God can only be understood in the shadow of the Cross" in: *Christianity Today* 40 (28 October 1996), 20, remark: "In our haste to see prophecy fulfilled, we easily overlook that Isaiah's familiar Song of the Suffering Servant actually reveals the profile of a warrior" (Is 52:13-53:12).

41 N A Schuman, *Gelijk om gelijk*, 175, rightly warns against too easily accepting a 'root meaning' of a word. After all, *verba valent usu*.

42 Cf the title of the article of D G Reid & Tremper Longman III, "When God declares war. The violence of God can only be understood in the shadow of the cross".

43 Belgic Confession, Article 1: *We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth that there is one simple and spiritual Being, which we call God*…

44 Against Jim Garrison, *The darkness o f God: Theology after Hiroshima*, London 1982, who tries to assimilate light and darkness, Christ and Antichrist in his concept of God. See also Peel' discussion of the well-known work by P Volz, *Das Dämonische in Jahwe*, Tübingen 1924, in which the latter argues that the "demonic" is "a dark but constitutive element of the Old Testament belief in God." *The vengeance of God*, 298-301.

45 Cf D G Reid, T Longman III, "When God declares war", 14: "What remained for Marcion was a climax with a truncated plot, with the main character split in two: A God of creation and wrath was pitted against a God of salvation and love at the Cross."

46 Kathleen J Greider, Reckoning with aggression. Theology, violence, and vitality, Louisville (Kentucky), 1997.

47 J. Moltmann, *Die Sprache der Befreiung*, München 1972, 100. See also K Wengst, *Pax Romana and the peace of Jesus Christ*, London 1987.

about by the judgement (division; *krinein* = to divide, to separate) of God's word. "Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrew 4: 12).

This judgement (German: *Richten*) implies vengeance (German: *Rache*). In the Old Testament it is not the presence but rather the absence of God's vengeance that casts a shadow on God's righteousness and faithfulness. Sometimes the believers can be extremely impatient with God's patience (Ps 44:24[48]), but when the victims are avenged "then men will say, 'Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth.'" (Ps 58:11). Van Ruler is therefore convinced that there are no more joyful words in the Bible than God's requital, his vengeance and wrath.[49]

At the same time vengeance is God's royal prerogative as stated in Deut 32:35: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay".[50] Contra Marcion Tertullian understands this pronouncement positively as an expression of God's patience.[51] Also the so-called *lex talionis* (Ex 21:23-25; Lev 24:19-20; Deut 19:21; Mt 5:38) that was such a thorn in Marcion's flesh and which many modern readers find morally offensive, is in fact a merciful measure to prevent all human arbitrariness and curtail violence. According to McKeating "it is clearly intended that the law (*lex talionis*, PFT) be applied not by the individual who suffered the wrong but by the judgement of the court."[52] God's vengeance is far removed from human rancour and vindictiveness. This all too human attitude, which is a distortion of the aggression of God, is *expressis verbis* forbidden in Lev 19:18.[53] Confronted with the violation of his will, God's vengeance is not inconsistent with his simplicity but rather its manifestation.

It certainly does create a tension in God's very being. Susan Niditch[54] recalls the Rabbinic tradition which "relates that God's ministering angels sought to chant in jubilation after the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea. Their song however, is stayed by God. 'The work of my hands has drowned in the sea and shall you chant songs?'". Since God is love Peels[55] rightly observes that wrath is not a permanent "attribute" of God, but neither is it "uncharacteristic" of Him. In this regard one is reminded of Ps 30:5: "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime." The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not the apathetic philosophical God of deism, but the "jealous", and therefore zealous, passionate God of the covenant who is a consuming fire of love (Deut 4:24; Heb 12: 29).[56] Miroslav Volf[57] pointedly remarks that "a God of most radical grace must be a God of wrath – not the kind of wrath that burns against evildoers until they prove

48 "Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?"

49 A A van Ruler, *Over de psalmen. 66 meditasies*, Nijkerk 1983, 23. Cf. also B. Jonowski, "JHWH der Richter – ein rettender Gott. Psalm 7 und das Motiv des Gottesgerichts" in: *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie*, Band 9: *Sünde und Gericht*, Neukirchen – Vluyn 1994, 53-85.

50 That does not exclude the possibility that God uses men in the execution of his vengeance. All autonomous revenge however, is prohibited. "Men ought to refrain from taking vengeance precisely because God will do so." H. McKeating, "Vengeance is mine. A study of the pursuit of vengeance in the Old Testament" in: *Expository Times* 74 (1963), 244.

51 A Schuman, *Gelijk om gelijk*, 11.

52 H McKeating, "Vengeance is mine", 244.

53 Cf the thorough discussion of the root NQM with a human subject by Peels, *The vengeance of God*, chapter four.

54 Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible. A study in the ethics of violence*, New York, Oxford 1993, 150.

55 H J L Peels, *The vengeance of God*, 289.

56 Apropos of Galatians 6:7: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked", Tertullian retorts sarcastically that since Marcion's God knows nothing of wrath and revenge, he can be mocked. N A Schuman, *Gelijk om gelijk*, 11.

57 M. Volf, "Divine violence?", in: *Christian Century* 116 (13 October 1997), 972.

worthy of being loved, but the kind that resists evildoers because they are unconditionally loved." Far from contradicting his simplicity as Lord of the covenant, God's vengeance corresponds with, and is an expression of, his love.

As the Righter of wrongs He brings about justice and peace for the victims who cry out to Him day and night (Lk 18:7). In the cross and resurrection of the "Prince of peace" as the Judge of the world in whom the world is judged (Karl Barth),[58] the Creator and his groaning creation are vindicated and the tension eschatologically (respectively: Christologically) resolved. The only hope for this (not only "fallen" but) falling world, is that as falling world it has no future. The cross of Christ as the manifestation of God's judgement, means the end of this God-forsaken world (Mt 27:45). Mere human vindictiveness and violence, albeit it in the name of God, won't stop it from falling, but merely perpetuate its plunge. The hope for the future does not lie in an extension of the fall but in the opposite direction i e being raised in the resurrection of the crucified Prince of peace. This involves nothing less than a new creation, which is the meaning of the justification of the wicked (Rom 4:5). "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom 4:25). The wholeness (peace) of the "new creation" in Christ corresponds with the simplicity (integrity) of God. Christ's cross and resurrection proclaims that God (as Luther explains) "kills and gives life, He wounds and heals, He destroys and helps, He condemns and saves, He humbles and elevates, He disgraces and honors…"[59] God's *justitia vindicativa* is at the same time a *justitia salutifera*.[60] As Peels[61] puts it: "The Old Testament call for vengeance was in its deepest meaning an urgent prayer for the justification *hic et nunc* of God's honour and justice, in the liberation of his own and the punishment of the enemies. *Post Christum crucifixum et resurrectum* this prayer must necessarily undergo modification because the cross of Christ is the definitive, visible revelation of God's justice (Rom 3:25f)." His cross, with the resurrection as its eschatological reverse, makes clear that the fact that vengeance belongs to God *alone* does not contradict but rather corresponds with the *solus Christus*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *and soli Deo gloria*. "True to the plot reversals of the biblical narrative, it ends with the universal sovereignty of the heavenly king and retired warrior in his new kingdom, overflowing with peace."[62] Then at last, the world will "study war no more" (cf Is 2:4, Mic 4:3) since God's peace and justice will prevail for ever.

58 K Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV, 1, Edinburgh 1961, 211-283.

59 "Answer to the hyperchristian, hyperspiritual, and hyperlearned book by goat Emser in Leipzig – including some thoughts regarding his companion, the fool Murner", in Timothy F Lull (ed), *Martin Luther's basic theological writings*, Minneapolis 1989, 88.

60 Therefore God's judgement is a source of consolation. Cf L Floor, *Het gericht volgens het Nieuwe Testament*, Amsterdam 1979, 147. On the judgement of God in the New Testament see also S H Travis, *Christ and the judgement of God. Divine retribution in the New Testament*, UK 1986.

61 H G L Peels, *The vengeance of God*, 245.

62 D G Reid & Tremper Longman III, "When God declares war", 21.