A Review and Critique of the Doctrine of the Atonement in the Writings of British Theologians Since 1900.

Submitted as a Thesis for the Degree of Bachelor of Divinity in the Faculty of Theology, United College, Winnipeg, April, 1952, by Donald E. Pratt, B.A.

Contents

Introduction

That the doctrine of the Atonement is still a subject of the greatest interest and importance to theologians is evidenced by the large number of books and articles published since the turn of the century dealing with the topic. While all the writers are dependent in some degree upon theologians of earlier generations, it can be claimed that they have made some significant contributions to our thought upon the subject.

It is the purpose of this paper to discuss the major trends in the thinking of British theologians of the past fifty years upon the doctrine of the Atonement. It may seem arbitrary to limit the paper to British writers, since other European and American theologians have given us valuable interpretations. To discuss all of these, however, would require a book of considerable proportions. As it is, British writers have written a very large number of books, and it is not intended that every one of these should be considered, but rather those that seem outstanding.

It will be maintained that in this fifty-year period, there has been some movement of thought with reference to the doctrine of the Atonement and that this movement has been based to a very large degree upon a deeper understanding of the New Testament conception of the love of God.

CHAPTER 5

Dr. Vincent Taylor, the Principal of Wesley College, at Headingly, Leeds, has contributed three valuable volumes to the literature on the subject of the Atonement: Jesus and His Sacrifice, a detailed examination of the Passion-sayings of our Lord, The Atonement in New Testament Teaching, a fuller exposition of the conclusions reached in the first book, and lastly, Forgiveness and Reconciliation, in which the Atonement is discussed from the standpoint of the Christian experience itself. All three books bear witness to Dr. Taylor's excellent scholarship.

In his first book, the Passion-sayings were studied in themselves and in relation to the Old Testament teaching upon the subjects of the Kingdom of God, the Messianic Hope, the Son of Man, the Son, the Suffering Servant, and the idea of Sacrifice. Dr. Taylor's view is that an understanding of Old Testament ideas is essential to any real comprehension of the New Testament, and, in particular, to an understanding of Jesus and His teachings. Jesus used these ideas, but gave to them an interpretation which made them new. The idea of a Kingdom of God, for example, is to be found in the Old Testament. Jehovah was King. Jesus' interpretation of the Kingdom however went beyond that of the Old Testament, and was distinctive. The same may be said of his interpretation of other ideas. The conception of the Servant is present in both the Old Testament and Jesus' words, but Jesus defined His own sufferings and death in terms of the Suffering Servant, although in His time, and prior to it, there was no thought of a suffering Messiah.

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CHAPTER 1

A classic exposition of what is referred to as the moral theory of the Atonement was made in 1901 by R. C. Moberly in his book Atonement and Personality. Moberly was himself indebted to an earlier writer, J. McLeod Campbell. Inasmuch as the latter was writing in 1856, his book The Nature of the Atonement falls outside the scope of this paper. It may be of some help in our appreciation of Moberly, however, to note in outline only, some of Campbell's basic ideas. The older penal ideas Campbell saw as a denial of the truth that the love of God must be prior to the Atonement and not its consequence. We must believe, first of all, that there is forgiveness with God. "The Atonement must be the form of the manifestation of the forgiving love of God, not its cause."[1] The sufferings of Christ were not a punishment of sin, but were due to His perfect, divine sympathy. On the manward side, the Atonement consists in the manifestation, through Christ, of the attitude of God towards sin and sinner---His hatred of sin, His unfailing love for the sinner. The Atonement also consists as the offering of a perfect penitence for human sin, the perfect acceptance of God's hatred of sin and wrath against sin as just. In this acceptance of God's sentence upon sin was involved the acceptance of death as the wages appointed in God's law for sin.

As stated above, the main formative influence upon Moberly's thought was that of Campbell. The former's view in the main is that of moral satisfaction. He rejects, as does Campbell, the older penal and retributive ideas held by such writers as R. W. Dale.

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1. J. McLeod Campbell. The Nature of the Atonement, p. 18.

Moberly feels that the moral theory of the Atonement has failed to do justice to the central fact of the Cross, because its exponents have not given full value to certain terms which they use, such terms as punishment, penitence and forgiveness. He begins his book, therefore, with a consideration of these terms.

Punishment, says Moberly, is not simply, or primarily retributive in character. It has meaning only as applied to personalities in whom there is a consciousness of guilt. Moreover, while punishment is pain, it is the pain of righteousness, "the assertion of righteousness in the form of the chastisement of unrighteousness".[1] Punishment is a moral means to a moral end. Moberly admits that in human justice there is a retributive aspect, but claims that this is so only because this is human justice, and therefore imperfect. Divine or perfect punishment, on the other hand, would be perfectly just and wholly reformatory in principle. It is here that Moberly seems to become inconsistent, for he goes on to say that punishment, to be wholly reformatory <u>in fact</u>, would demand perfect acceptance of it by the offender. Punishment, that is to say, begins as discipline, but if the offender refuses to accept it as such, then it <u>remains</u> retribution or vengeance. It has then "a latent retributive character". "There always was this aspect, or possibility about punishment."[2] Perhaps so, but the impression one receives is that the writer having pushed retribution out the front door is now ushering it in the back.

Perfect punishment, that is, God's punishment, would be not only just but wholly reformatory; but, in fact, it would be wholly reformatory

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1. Moberly, R.C. <u>Atonement and Personality</u>, P. 5. 2. p. 14

only as it is accepted by the sinner, only as it induces penitence. Penitence is the transformation of moral character in the self-identification of the sinner with righteousness in its loathing for sin. When punishment induces such a transformation, then it has atoning capacity.

Moberly acknowledges that penitence is a very real thing in human life. He describes it as a characteristic of the Christian consciousness; it is "a condition of a personality which has affinity with, and is capable of, righteousness; a personality which at the same time has self-consciousness of sin."[1] Many degrees of penitence are possible to men, but none is wholly perfect, because sin blunts the edge of penitence. "The consummation of penitential holiness---itself, by inherent character, the one conceivable atonement for sin,---would be possible only to the absolutely sinless."[2]

This latter point raises serious questions which Moberly does not answer very satisfactorily. How can someone who is without sin be penitent? For what is he to repent? We know from our own experience that it is possible to suffer for---more correctly, with---another person. A mother suffers because her child has committed a wrong, not because the wrong has been done directly to her, but because she understands the nature of his deed and its consequences. Her suffering may be so acute as to cause her almost to be penitent for him. Yet it is not her penitence that is desired, since she did not commit the wrong. That Christ suffers because of our sin has never been in

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1 p. 26. 2 p. 43.

question, but is His suffering penitence? Penitence is generally considered to have a relation to the sin of the penitent. Yet Christ was sinless. Stevens rightly comments: "Of course it is true that all human penitence is imperfect...But is it not the very nature of the grace of God to accept us in our imperfect desires and intentions?... Is not this, indeed, the very meaning of the divine grace?"[1]

In his chapter on forgiveness, Moberly makes it plain that forgiveness is not simply the remission of a penalty, though this may be a part of it. What is necessary to forgiveness is that a person be forgivable, that is, penitent. "God's forgiveness is never simply unconditional."[2] Moberly thus does not offer a theory which makes forgiveness a light and easy thing, an ignoring of the gravity of sin. Yet "forgiveness is love, in its relation to a personality which, having sinned, is learning...what the sin-consciousness of penitence means". Man himself has a primary duty to forgive his fellow-men; he finds his inspiration in his experience of God's forgiveness.

We cannot deny the force of much of what Moberly says, yet the implication would seem to be that we are pardoned by instalments in proportion as we are forgivable. "Forgiveness is not consummated perfectly until the culprit is righteous."[3] But the Parable of the Prodigal Son shows the father running out to meet the wrongdoer. The son had had a change of heart, of course, he was penitent, but it is not suggested that he had suddenly become a completely good and righteous man. Nor are we told that the father waited to find out whether he

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1 Stevens, G. B., The Christian Doctrine of Salvation, p. 351.
2 p. 56. 3 p. 61.

was before he forgave him. Moberly's view of forgiveness does not seem consistent with the teaching of Christ here; indeed it is tinged with legalism.[1]

Moberly now discusses the person, obedience and death of Christ. How is atonement accomplished, that is, how are persons who are in fact, unholy, made holy? Through a mediator, Moberly answers. He points out that in human experience the hope of a bad man lies in someone who is very close to him and who by exerting a good influence upon him becomes in a sense a mediator. Christ was able to make atonement between God and man precisely because he was both God and Man. Christ was not only a man, but "inclusively man"[2]; His humanity included and consummated the humanity of all other men. His humanity was also the humanity of the infinite God. If it were not, "it could not stand in the wide, inclusive, consummating relation, in which it stands in fact, to the humanity of all other men. But, as it is, the very essence of the Christian religion is the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ".[3]

In Christ, therefore, as God and Man, and in Him alone is there the possibility of perfect penitence. "He took, in His own Person, the whole responsibility and burthen of its (sin's) penance; He stood, that is, in the place not of a judge simply, nor of a mere victim, but of

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1 H. R. Mackintosh comments: "God's love in Christ, in its full measure, is offered not to those merely who are believing enough, or penitent enough, or reformed enough in their lives. It is offered to all who will cast themselves on God, though it be with 'faith as a grain of mustard seed'. The earthly love that shows likest God's is never apt to put its penitent loved ones on probation, but rather accepts them just as they are. And our thoughts of God's mercy must be not less wide." The Christian Experience of Forgiveness, p. 243.

2 p. 86. 3 p. 90.

a voluntary penitent---wholly one with the righteousness of God in the sacrifice of Himself."[1] This doctrine of vicarious penitence we have discussed to some extent above. Moberly devotes several paragraphs in support of it, but the same questions must be raised. Of the reality of vicarious suffering, we are probably all convinced; we would also grant that such suffering may influence a person to become penitent. But are we entitled to identify this suffering with vicarious penitence?[2]

On the Cross, Christ offered, as man to God, the sacrifice of utter obedience as well as the sacrifice of supreme penitence, doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

The remainder of the book is an attempt to show how this view does justice both to the objective and to the subjective aspects of the Atonement. If they have appeared to be opposed, it is because of a false view of personality. If the personality of man is defined by limitation, by separation from God and from humanity, no theory of Atonement can avoid the charge of externality, that is, of ultimate injustice.

In his discussion of the two aspects of the Atonement, Moberly insists that the heart of the matter lies in the exposition and realization of Pentecost. "Calvary without Pentecost would not be an atonement <u>to us</u>...Calvary is the possibility of Pentecost: and Pentecost is

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1 p. 110.

2 Moberly does not claim that Christ's penitence was a substitute for that of men. "He consummated penitence...that they might learn, in Him, their own true possibility of penitence." (p. 284.) This does not resolve the paradox inherent in the idea of the repentence of one who was sinless.

the realization in human spirits, of Calvary."[1] Furthermore, when we think of God as Holy Spirit, and in relation to man, we are thinking of what is a result of the incarnation. "The significance and work of Incarnation and of Atonement would be after all, without the presence of the Holy Ghost...incomplete."[2] It was this realization of the incarnation in the Holy Spirit which gave life and meaning to the church at Pentecost.

Moberly then finds that it is only through Pentecost that the meaning of human personality is ever actually realized. Man does not possess either free will, reason, or love by himself; he has these only through the indwelling presence of the Spirit of the incarnate Christ. The Spirit does not overrule the self, but rather consummates it. Human personality, then, is not a separate thing, but dependent and relative. "Personality is the possibility of mirroring God; the faculty of being a living reflection of the very attributes and character of the Most High."[3] "I, yet not I, but Christ" is the only formula of real, personal existence.

The last chapters in which Moberly discusses the relation of the Holy Spirit to God and human personality are valuable, in some respects perhaps the most valuable in the book. But the book as a whole raises some real questions in our minds. We have to question, for example, Moberly's insistence that the incarnation is the dominant fact in the New Testament. Where does Moberly find his authority for his notion that punishment goes on after all hope of the sinner's amendment is abandoned? And where is his authority for the idea of

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1 p. 152. 2 p. 181. 3 p. 254.

Christ's vicarious and perfect penitence? Do we have to believe that Christ could know the horror of sin only by holding an attitude of perfect penitence? If He and His Father were one, surely this was not necessary. Again, as we have seen, Moberly speaks of Christ's inclusive humanity. "Christ is Man, not generically but inclusively." What does this mean?

We are forced to conclude that impressive as this book still is, it creates almost as many problems as it solves.

CHAPTER 2

The view of the Atonement held by Dr. P. T. Forsyth is set forth in two books, The Work of Christ and The Cruciality of the Cross.

The title of the second book suggests where Forsyth places the emphasis. The Cross is central in his thinking because he regards it as central in Christianity. The death of Christ is crucial; and so, therefore, is the Atonement. In the Cross God is revealed as He is not revealed in anything else. It is there too that the question of Christ's person is determined; His full divinity was shown forth in His death. "That Cross was deep embedded in the very structure of Christ's Person...He was born for the Cross."[1] Forsyth's insistence upon the supreme value of Christ's death is the strong note which sounds throughout both of these books.

It is not easy to summarize briefly the author's theory of the Atonement. The nearest we can come to doing so is by quoting him when he says: "By the Atonement, therefore, is meant that action of Christ's death which has a prime regard to God's holiness, has it for its first charge, and finds man's reconciliation impossible except as that holiness is satisfied once for all on the Cross...We must take that view of Christ which does most justice to the holiness of God...Christ's concern and revelation was not simply the forgiving love of God, but the holiness of such love."[2]

Why may we not be content simply with the forgiving love of God? The answer lies in the fact that Christ had to create the capacity for

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1 The Work of Christ, p. 108. 2 The Cruciality of the Cross, pp. 5-6.

response; He had to affect us far beyond what any display of heroism or courage could do in this respect. It is not our admiration or gratitude, but ourselves with our shame Christ wants. His death had to do, not with the lack of these but with something much deeper, our sin, our enmity against God who makes demands upon us. Nothing short of His holy love can cope effectively with this sin. Of course, the grace of God is real, and it must be preached, but that which alone will bring sin and grace home to us is the sense of the holy. This can only be done by replacing the Cross at the centre of Christian faith and life. One of the greatest needs is the ethicising of religion itself, and this rests not upon a sentimental piety but upon the judgment of a holy God. "Ours is an eternal faith, and it can only be moralised by the eternal righteousness, i.e. by its source in a holy God."[1] The moral order of our world has its ground in such a God. The Cross, which is a decisive act, stands in relation to this world with the moral order of God's holiness as its central issue. Hence the forgiveness which it brings is a holy forgiveness which involves judgment. This judgment is borne by God Himself in man.

We must remember that the Atonement was the act of God. In this lies its objectivity. "It was not human nature offering its very best to God. It was God offering His very best to man."[2] His judgment, then, did not fall on man alone, but on Himself. Because God is holy, He must either punish or expiate sin. In being "made sin" Christ not only felt about sin as God does, but, as man, He experienced its effects.

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1 The Cruciality of the Cross, p. 48. 2 The Work of Christ, p. 24.

That is, He entered into the judgment of God upon sin. God did not punish Christ, yet Christ bore God's penalty upon sin. Christ's sacrifice upon the Cross may be described as penal, just because, of His own free will, He bore God's judgment.

In doing so, Christ was also confessing something. He confessed human sin, but beyond that, He confessed God's holiness in reacting against human sin. "What a holy God requires is the due confession of His holiness before even the confession of sin."[1] Christ's death was in fact caused more by God's holiness in Him than by the perversity of men.

In His act of atoning, Christ was being obedient. His suffering was "suffering accepted and transfigured by holy obedience...The atoning thing was not the amount or acuteness (of His suffering), but its obedience, its sanctity."[2]

The reconciliation which is effected in the Cross is that of the world. Forsyth reminds us that we are in a society, members one of another. There is no such thing as an absolute individual. The race is not a mass of individuals to God, but an organic moral unity. God's action was for that race. The reconciliation was that "of the world as a cosmic whole.."[3]. What Christ presented to God for His complete joy and satisfaction was a perfect racial obedience...It was a racial holiness."[4] If the moral order is broken, it cannot be healed by patching up, for the moral law makes a universal demand upon us for ever. This

1 The Cruciality of the Cross, p. 206-7. 2 The Work of Christ, p. 157
3 op. cit. p. 177. 4 ibid. p. 129

demand can be met only by "personality of acknowledgment,"[1] that is, by the adequate acknowledgment of holiness by a man who is perfectly holy. Christ who has united us to Himself has done this.

What is the result, we may ask, of Christ's atoning act? By His holiness, He presents to God the repentance in us which it creates. He represents not a natural humanity, but a new penitent humanity. It raises us in newness of life to a fellowship of His resurrection.

Although Forsyth's books were written over forty years ago, they are as timely for the present day as they were then. They may seem to some to be one-sided in their emphasis, but obviously Forsyth felt that there was a great need for that emphasis. The Cross was crucial and central; there could be no skirting around this fact. That crucial-ity is just as inescapable now. There is a note of urgency in Forsyth's writing, and we shall do well to give heed to it.

The conception of God which Forsyth held was high and lofty. His stress upon God's holiness however, does seem to be overdone. It is true that this is an aspect, or a quality, of God's love. Moreover, Forsyth will not have God's love watered down into something cheap and trivial. We can appreciate his desire to safeguard that love from such a process. But it is impossible not to feel that sometimes Forsyth considers God's love to be expressed only in His holiness whereas there are other aspects fully as significant, aspects which are to be noted in the New Testament conception. Of course, we must guard against anthro-

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1 ibid. p. 124.

pomorphism in our thought of God, against any suggestion that the attributes of God are simply those of men carried to an infinite degree. Nevertheless, the sternness of God in Forsyth's conception is not entirely consistent with that of the New Testament.[1]

We have noted too that Forsyth also retains something of the penal idea in relation to that of judgment. He was not punished by God, but bore His penalty upon sin. Christ's suffering was penal in that it was due to the moral order of sin. Forsyth tells us that "God by Christ's own consent identified Him with sin in treatment though not in feeling Him. God did not judge Him, but judged sin upon His head."[2] In the end we are not too certain just what is meant by this distinction between penalty and punishment.

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1 God's love and holiness are discussed much more effectively by Dr. H. H. Farmer in his book, God and Men: "If, then, we ask what is the quite distinctive Christian doctrine of God's nature and purpose, as disclosed in Jesus Christ, the answer will be found in the doctrine that He is love...(But) we must keep the truth of the love of God and the truth of the holiness of God, the nearness and the distance of God, in quite inseparable connection with one another." (pp. 143,145.)

2 op. cit. p. 83.

CHAPTER 3

The principal work of Dr. Hastings Rashdall is contained in his Bampton Lectures published under the title The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology. It was, and is yet, a very influential book. It is no exaggeration to say that Rashdall's theory, usually referred to as the moral influence theory, is accepted, consciously or otherwise, by vast numbers of people today.

Strictly speaking, the author does not give us a systematic treatise on the Atonement; he devotes only some thirty pages out of nearly five hundred to his own theory. In the course of tracing the development of the idea, he comes to the Abelardian view which is basic to his own thought.

While Rashdall recognizes his debt to Abelard, he claims to find the view to which he subscribes much earlier, in Origen, the Eastern Fathers, St. Paul, and the Johannine writings. In fact, he claims that Christ Himself held it! This view was formulated by Peter Lombard: "So great a pledge of love having been given us, we are both moved and kindled to love God who did such great things for us; and by this we are justified, that is, being loosed from our sins we are made just. The death of Christ therefore justifies us, inasmuch as through it charity is stirred up in our hearts."

Rashdall deals first with the teaching of Christ concerning forgiveness. His conclusion is that it reveals only one condition as indispensable to forgiveness, namely repentance. There is nothing in

His teaching to indicate that He thought His death was necessary to forgiveness. The "ransom passage" in Mark and Matthew teaches nothing regarding the traditional doctrine of the Atonement, and does not show that Christ regarded His own death as a vicarious punishment, a substitutionary sacrifice, or even an expiation without which sin could not be forgiven. In any case, Rashdall doubts if the words are genuine.[1] "The only doctrine of the Atonement which can trace itself back to Jesus Himself is the simple doctrine that His death, like His life, was a piece of service or self-sacrifice for His followers, such as they themselves might very well make for one another."[2] The genuineness of the passage is of course open to question. What is disturbing is the cavalier way in which Rashdall dismisses the whole matter. It is an approach he uses frequently.

He reaches the same general conclusion after an examination of the sayings of Jesus at the Last Supper. In anything He says, He is not claiming for His death, any unique expiatory value. "There is nothing in the sayings...which implies any fundamental difference in kind between the service which He was conscious of performing and the service to which He was inviting His disciples."[3]

Rashdall, before proceeding to an examination of later theories, makes two assumptions: the truth that God is a loving Father is basic to any doctrine which claims to be a development of Christ's teaching, and the only atoning influence that can be recognized in the

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1 In this, of course, Rashdall is not alone; Bronscomb in the Moffat Commentary takes the same view, as do others.
2 p. 37. 3 p. 45.

death of Christ is one which operates by helping to produce that repentance upon which forgiveness depends.

The development of the idea of the Atonement was due to the tendency in all early forms of religion to look upon gods as deliverers or saviours, to expectations regarding the Kingdom of God, to the institution of animal sacrifices, to suffering as expiation and a source of regeneration, and to the idea of a mediating Logos. All these ideas influenced the elaboration of a Christian doctrine of the Atonement. The doctrine could not have originated with Paul since he ways, "I delivered unto you...that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures".[1] In fact, the early Christians came to believe that Christ had died that sins might be forgiven because they considered that their Scriptures foretold His dying for this purpose. The Suffering Servant conception was applied to Him after His death, because it fitted so well. Christ certainly did not use it of Himself. Any "vague language" which Jesus may have used about the necessity of His death, or about His dying for His followers, would be remembered and interpreted in the light of earlier prophecies.

That the early Christians were influenced by ideas with which they were familiar will not be denied. But Rashdall has succeeded in exaggerating this influence out of all proportion. Why should it not have occurred to them, as a result of their own reflection and experience, that Christ had died to redeem them from their sins? We are supposed to believe that without Isaiah, the followers of Christ

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1 I Cor. 15:3.

would never have arrived at any such idea.

Then there is the matter of Christ's "vague language". Mention has already been made of the ransom passage in Mark 10. There is nothing very vague about this, as Rashdall realises, so he goes to some lengths to get around it. How vague is the language of Mark 8:31: "And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."? Admittedly, this is not direct speech, but the author does not leave us in doubt as to what Jesus taught. It may also be argued, and no doubt would be by Rashdall, that the words are prophecies after the event and the product of Christian reflection. A good case can be made for such a view, but a good case can also be made on the other side. Much argument has centered around the phrase, "Son of man", but certainly it is open to the interpretation given by several scholars[1] that Jesus applied it to Himself.

Attention has been given to these matters in order to offer some idea of Rashdall's approach. To say the least, he is extremely dogmatic at many points, and has a tendency to arrive at his own position by ruling out all others.

Rashdall considers that Paul was the initiator of the view of Christ's death as an expiatory sacrifice for sins. The death is the ground of justification, and the idea that justice demands punishment is latent in his thought. Rashdall finds that it is impossible to

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1 Vincent Taylor, for example.

get rid of the idea of substitution, or vicarious punishment in any representation of Paul's doctrine. It is there. But it is "an idea which can be reconciled neither with the demands of the moral consciousness as interpreted by the mordern intellect nor with the plain teaching of St. Paul's Master and ours".[1]

There are many difficulties in endeavoring to interpret Paul's thought, but one thing is clear: the Atonement springs from the eternal and unchangeable love of God. The love of Christ is always treated as a revelation of His Father's love.

Paul attributes to the death of Christ an actual, objective efficacy, but he offers no clearly formulated theory as to why the death of Christ was necessary. All we can say is that the efficacy of Christ's death for Paul rests on the authority of the Old Testament.

In primitive Christianity, Rashdall claims, anything which suggests substitution or expiation can be traced back to the words of the prophets, particularly to Isaiah 53. The efficacy attributed to Christ's death is subjective and moral in all the New Testament writings, although Paul comes close to a theory of substitution. Paul's theories about atonement and justification exercised almost no influence.

What is Rashdall's own theory of the Atonement? Some indications have already been given, but we must now consider the theory in detail.

Rashdall makes it very clear that he cannot accept any substitutionary or expiatory ideas regarding Christ's death, since these imply a

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1 p. 98.

retributive theory of punishment. This he considers to be a survival of primitive modes of thought. Retribution, in Rashdall's thought, means vengeance, which he takes to be inconsistent with the love of God. Whether retribution can be anything else he does not consider.

It is impossible to defend the punishment of the innocent in place of the guilty.

"No theory of justification can possibly be reconciled with that teaching of our Master which does not fully recognize that faith has no value except, and in so far as, it actually tends to real change of heart, and the amendment of life which necessarily...results from real change of heart."[1]

It is Rashdall's claim that down to the time of Irenaeus and even later, no ways of thinking about the Atonement involved a definite theory of substitution or expiation. The death of Christ was considered to have completed the revelation of the nature and character of God. "His death was an incident in a real human life...And the particular mode of death was the outcome and culmination of the mode of life which He had chosen."[2] Christ showed His love to mankind by becoming incarnate and in submitting to a death which others brought about. "Death came to Him as the direct and necessary consequence of His faithfulness to His Messianic calling."[3] Rashdall thus places the central emphasis upon the incarnation[4], of which the death of Christ was more or

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1 pp. 429-30. 2 p. 441. 3 p. 441.
4 He quotes Dr. Illingworth: "The incarnation is the atonement", and adds, "That is a healthy tendency with which we shall do well to identify ourselves explicitly and emphatically." p. 454.

less the outcome. The possibility that Jesus' interpretation of His Messianic calling might have included suffering, and even death is not considered by the author.

His conclusion is that the love shown by Christ will awaken our own love for God and man.

Rashdall attaches great significance to Christ's teaching regarding the moral ideal in which God is revealed. He admits that character may be more than the words, but feels that after all it is in the words that the character is chiefly expressed. In the end, one is left wondering whether it is Christ's teaching itself or the love of God which saves. "The fullest, most efficacious, most contagious living of Christ's life will be reserved for those who are not only influenced by Christ and His teaching, but are consciously and supremely influenced by it."[1]

It is difficult to feel that Rashdall in his own theory of the doctrine of the Atonement has given a very adequate account of the nature of sin. The emphasis given to Christ's words and teachings would seem to suggest that reconciliation is effected through a knowledge of these, so that sin is largely intellectual. This is not the Christian view of sin. Sin may be partly ignorance, but is much more deeply rooted in the will. If it is to be mastered, something more than knowledge is required. And the Christian conviction is that sin is not overcome by any power that resides in man himself. It is something with which in the end only God Himself can deal.

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1 p. 464.

Rashdall's theory is substantially a subjective one. He denies the need for an objective theory. Of course there must be an element of subjectivity in the Atonement in the sense that every man's experience of it must be his own. It is a man's own sin that is the cause of his estrangement from God; the need for forgiveness and reconciliation is his need. But in this theory, "subjective" implies something different, namely, that all God meant to achieve in Christ, His sufferings and His death was the subjective experience of penitence in the soul. In the Cross, God disclosed His love in such a fashion as to make men forgiveable, and once they are so, His forgiveness flows freely to them. Beyond this, there are no conditions attached to forgiveness. This does not do justice either to God's attitude to sin or to His love. God's love is not a sentimental feeling; it has an element of austerity to it. It is a love which both condemns and forgives.

We must also note that though Rashdall stresses the revelation of God's love in Christ, he has very little to say about man's response through faith. Yet the whole object of this revelation is that man shall respond to it. To say that God's love awakens our gratitude is true, but is this the whole truth about man's response? Are we to equate faith with gratitude?

Again, in what sense does the Atonement, on Rashdall's theory, have meaning in relation to those who lived before Christ, and to those who, coming after Him, have not known Him? If Christ died for all men, then He died for these too. But Rashdall would seem to limit the mean-

ing of the death of Christ to those who know of it and can respond to it. There are after all many millions who cannot say, "Christ died for me"; they do not know His name or anything about His work, nor can they make the response of faith. It is nonetheless true that He did indeed die for them.

To his last work, Dr. James Denney gave the title, The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation, and fittingly enough, since to the author, "the experience of reconcilation is the central and fundamental experience of the Christian life, (and) the doctrine of reconciliation is not so much one doctrine as the inspiration and focus of all."[1] Further, there is no such experience apart from Christ; it is dependent on Him and mediated through Him. His reconciling power lies in His attitude to sinners, since it is sin which constitutes the barrier between them and God. That attitude reaches its supreme manifestation in Jesus' death on the Cross. We dare not ignore this but we must not fall into the error of thinking of His death as something quite apart from His life; it would be proper to speak of "Jesus in His death (rather) than of the death of Jesus".[2] Nor, on the other hand, must we think of Christ simply with reference to His Cross and Passion.

Denney considers that reconciliation involves effort or tension on the part of God. In forgiving sins, "God takes sides with us against Himself".[3] This does not mean, however, that there is a conflict between His justice and mercy: the opposite of justice is not mercy but injustice.

Reconciliation takes place in a realm of personal relations. Man is somehow wrong with God, and must be put right with Him again. This realm is both moral and spiritual. To do wrong gives us a bad conscience, and this in turn paralyzes the moral nature. Man overcomes the power of sin through having its guilt annulled and his bad conscience stilled.

Denney is not satisfied with the claim that a bad conscience is the only divine reaction against sin. It is the conviction of conscience that the natural and the moral world are one and are against the sinner.

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1 p. 6. 2 p. 17. 3 p. 21.

What he must learn is that under God, there is an inevitable reaction against his sin, and that it is retributive. This does not rule out its also being reformatory; in fact, punishment depends for its reformatory power upon retribution.

There is no doubt that Denney considers the divine reaction against sin to be a terrible thing. "Sin is essentially a thing against which an annihilating sentence of God lies. The end...of the doings of the sinful life is death."[1] Such a death is not merely physical, it is moral and spiritual. Moreover, any sin is death, until it is repented of and forgiven. The reaction of God, as evidenced in the consequences of sin, is penal.

We may feel that Denney is inclined to be extreme in his description of the attitude of God to sin. It is hard to escape the notion that in Denney's view God comes very close to being vindictive. Later writers use a more moderate terminology. We may take issue too with the idea that the punishment of sin is penal. Yet all this stems from Denney's profound awareness of the seriousness of sin and its consequences, and his conviction that man's need of reconciliation is so great just because sin is what it is.

The source of reconciliation is the love of God, though Denney denies that "the work of Christ has reference to men only, and that its meaning and virtue are exhausted in the effect it is designed to produce upon sinners".[2] The object of Christ's reconciling work is to produce in men through penitence God's mind about sin, but it can do

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1 p. 210. 2 p. 234.

this, not simply as an exhibition of unconditioned love, but only as the demonstration of a love which is ethical. "The only love of this description is love which owns the reality of sin by submitting humbly and without rebellion to the divine reaction against it."[1] In His work, Christ paid homage to the divine ethical necessities, which are independent of men. Hence, the Atonement is truly objective, for the homage paid by Christ has value for God, whether it impresses men or not. Because this is so, the way is open for sinners to return to God through Christ.

Denney admits that the New Testament never speaks of God as the object of reconciliation, but he denies that it is wrong to speak of Him as being reconciled, since this would impute immutability to Him in a sense which would practically deny that He is the living God. Forgiveness makes a difference to God. Of course, "He is not reconciled in the sense that something is won from Him for us against His will, but in the sense that His will to bless us is realised, as it was not before, on the basis of what Christ has done, and of our appropriation of it."[2]

What is the content of the reconciling work of Christ? Denney's conclusion is that it is the substitution of Christ for all that appertains to sin and its punishment. He has a sympathetic appreciation of the incarnation. Christ accomplished His task of reconcilation as a member of our race, sharing our nature and our lot, but we are not entitled to argue from this that the incarnation contains the Atonement. Reconciliation is not the nature but the task of the reconciler.

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1 p. 234. 2 p. 238.

That Christ entered into the sinner's experience sympathetically and lovingly, Denney acknowledges, but what he emphasizes is that Christ bore men's sins. He did so because of His love for men. Without love, there could be no reconciliation.

Denney holds the view that Christ's sufferings were penal, "not in the sense of coming upon Jesus through a bad conscience, or making Him the personal object of divine wrath, (but)...in the sense that in that dark hour He had to realise to the full the divine reaction against sin in the race in which He was incorporated."[1] There is no getting around the fact that His suffering had to do with sin. While His suffering demonstrated His moral heroism triumphing over sin, it also made plain God's judgment reacting against it.

It is true, says Denney, that Jesus bore our sins "on His heart", but at the very same time He bore them by dying. "If He had not <u>died</u> for us, He would have done nothing at all; for of what use to sinful mortal men would be a Saviour who did not know what sin and death mean when they combine, as they do, to crush poor human nature?"[2] Hence, Denney returns to one of his major points, namely, that the divine reaction against sin is not limited to conscience, or to the purely spiritual world,...but pervades the world of reality in all its dimensions. Death is not just the debt of nature but is also the wages of sin.

Denney protests against the idea that Christ, as our substitute, died in order that our punishment might be transferred to Him and that

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1 p. 273. 2 p. 274.

we might escape the penal consequences of our sin. On the contrary, He died in order that we might be saved from dying in our sins.

The work of Christ is not the only factor in the experience of reconciliation. Reconciliation becomes effective through faith, which is "the correlative of Christ where Christ really touches the life of men".[1] It is not arbitrary, nor is it a condition on which forgiveness is granted, but the natural and inevitable way in which salvation is accepted by men. "Every Christian experience whatsoever---call it justification, adoption, or sanctification---call it love, or repentance, or regeneration, or the spirit---lies within faith and is dependent upon it."[2]

How does the life of reconciliation manifest itself in men? First, as reconciliation to the mind of God about sin. To be reconciled is to submit to His reaction to sin without resentment or bitterness. Second, the reconciled man accepts love as the law of life. Third, the life of reconciliation is a life which itself exercises a reconciling power, where men, in Christ, transcend the differences and barriers which separate them from one another.

In his presentation of the subject of the Atonement Denney has offered much with which we can agree, although not as much as some later writers. But there are a number of points about which it is difficult to feel satisfied.

In what sense does the Atonement make a difference <u>to</u> God? God's

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1 p. 288. 2 p. 291.

love is affirmed to have been the source of all that was done in Christ, but the death of Christ on the Cross had an effect not only on man but on God. But what was that effect? We would not rule out the Godward aspect of the Atonement, but we may question whether it is to be defined in this way.

Again, what are we to make of the conception of the necessity of Christ's death as an atonement for sin before God could forgive? The teaching of Jesus, and, indeed of the prophets, concerning God's forgiving love does not point to any such necessity at all. Jesus in His earthly life, forgave many people. Was there no reality in Hiw forgiveness? Did they have to wait until He was crucified before they experienced forgiveness in its fullness? That God was forgiving sin was implied in the very mission of Christ; it was the presupposition of the Cross. But Denney says that "God would not <u>be</u> to us what He is"[1] if Christ had not died. Did Jesus ever suggest that God would change in His attitude and feeling towards us as a result of His death? Surely the change was to be <u>in man.</u>

The basis for Denney's view would seem to be in his insistence on the reality of the Law in God, and on the need for its moral necessities and reaction against sin being met. It is a conception which does not match that which Jesus had of God as a loving Father.

Again, the crucifixion of Christ is considered to have been a monstrous crime, a crime committed <u>against</u> God. How then does the suffering of Christ become an act of God in which the sin of the world

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1 p. 239.

was laid upon and borne by Him? It was doubtless permitted by God, and its acceptance by Jesus was according to the will of God, but this does not support the idea that in bearing what was inflicted on Him by His enemies Christ was suffering in His person the judgment of God on sin in the way in which men suffer it.

Finally, the prominence given to death as the final penalty of sin seems unjustifiable. The fact that death has a moral significance does not make it any less natural or inevitable. The end of all things is death. Does it follow that death in every instance is a penalty for sin? During the war, thousands of fighting men and civilians died. In laying down their lives, were they paying the supreme penalty of sin?

CHAPTER 5

Dr. Vincent Taylor, the Principal of Wesley College, at Headingly, Leeds, has contributed three valuable volumes to the literature on the subject of the Atonement: Jesus and His Sacrifice, a detailed examination of the Passion-sayings of our Lord, The Atonement in New Testament Teaching, a fuller exposition of the conclusions reached in the first book, and lastly, Forgiveness and Reconciliation, in which the Atonement is discussed from the standpoint of the Christian experience itself. All three books bear witness to Dr. Taylor's excellent scholarship.

In his first book, the Passion-sayings were studied in themselves and in relation to the Old Testament teaching upon the subjects of the Kingdom of God, the Messianic Hope, the Son of Man, the Son, the Suffering Servant, and the idea of Sacrifice. Dr. Taylor's view is that an understanding of Old Testament ideas is essential to any real comprehension of the New Testament, and, in particular, to an understanding of Jesus and His teachings. Jesus used these ideas, but gave to them an interpretation which made them new. The idea of a Kingdom of God, for example, is to be found in the Old Testament. Jehovah was King. Jesus' interpretation of the Kingdom however went beyond that of the Old Testament, and was distinctive. The same may be said of his interpretation of other ideas. The conception of the Servant is present in both the Old Testament and Jesus' words, but Jesus defined His own sufferings and death in terms of the Suffering Servant, although in His time, and prior to it, there was no thought of a suffering Messiah.

"A high ethical and religious conception of Messianic suffering lay waiting to be appropriated."[1]

In the Old Testament, sacrifices were a means whereby men could approach God, the obstacle to that approach having been removed. Their character was that of a tribute and thanksgiving. In the sacrifice, the worshipper identified himself with his offering, which was not so much propitiatory as expiatory. An emphasis was placed too on the ethical aspects of sacrifice. Jesus seems to have thought of His own death in terms of sacrifice, or of the sacrificial principle implicit in the worship of Israel. He identified Himself with men in their sin; that is, He stood in a representative, rather than substitutionary, relationship to men. He did for men what they could not do for themselves. "The true view of Jesus' representative activity is that which recognizes that in His suffering and death He has expressed and effected what no man has the power to achieve, but into which, in virtue of an ever-deepening fellowship with Him, men may progressively enter, so that it becomes their offering to God."[2]

What Christ did was to identify Himself with men. He became the representative not only of individual men but of mankind. In so doing, He exposed Himself to suffering.

In considering Jesus' experience of the consequences of sin, Dr. Taylor asks whether that experience may be described as penal. He considers that the retributive aspect of punishment is fundamental to its nature. Penal suffering is not to be thought of as the expression of

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1 p. 46. 2 p. 283.

a legal principle; it is spiritual and ethical. "It is necessary... to think of penal suffering as the reaction of the holiness and love of God in a world of moral realities."[1] It is not something which can be transferred from one to another, but rather entered into because of love. Sin-bearing is the experience by sympathy and intuition of the penalty of the sin of another. Dr. Taylor admits that the word "penal" is not very satisfactory, but doubts if a better term can be found; "since (it) exactly expresses the required idea, namely, that of a suffering which is caused by the inevitable consequences of sin in a world ruled by God." In point of fact, Dr. Taylor requires a word which will express the idea of a suffering of the consequences of the sin of one person by another. The word "penal" carries no such connotation in the modern mind, unless in the minds of a few theologians. The penal suffering is simply that of the sinner.

If we accept the definition offered, however, it is impossible to deny that Jesus' suffering was penal. He undoubtedly entered into the judgment upon sin.

In the concluding section of the book, in which Dr. Taylor discusses the Atonement, he questions the adequacy of the moral influence theory. It is inadequate to human need. Penitence, which is essential to forgiveness and reconciliation with God is fitful and incomplete. Doubtless the Cross will deepen and quicken it, but this is still not sufficient for human need. Our penitence remains imperfect, and restricted

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1 p. 288.

by sin.

Dr. Taylor also feels that this theory does not give a satisfactory account of the suffering and death of Jesus.

It was Jesus' conviction, says Dr. Taylor, that His Messianic service was the offering of Himself for men, an offering that was made representatively.

What is the nature of Christ's self-offering? Dr. Taylor notes three elements: obedience to God's will, submission to God's judgment upon sin, and the expression of perfect penitence on behalf of men.

The Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, was instituted as a means whereby men should participate in the power of Christ's self-offering, thus making it the vehicle of their penitent and believing approach to God.

Worship has value also in the appropriation of the work of Christ, since it implies a Godward Relationship. The Lord's Supper provides a vehicle by which men, in association with each other, can worship God. The individual worshipper becomes conscious not only of his own sins but of the sin of the world for which Christ offered Himself.

The Atonement in New Testament Teaching, presents a fuller examination of the ideas set forth in the first book. Dr. Taylor investigates these in all the writings of the New Testament, and concludes that the early Christians preserved the beliefs of Jesus, especially His conviction that His death was the fulfilment of the divine purpose, that it was Messianic, vicarious, representative, and sacrificial, and was related

directly to the fact of human sin. The early Church recognized Jesus as the Suffering Servant, and His resurrection as the culmination of His redemptive work. It is pointed out that in primitive Christianity there is no trace of the idea of vicarious punishment, although it was believed that in dying for men, Christ endured the consequences of sin.

In Christ's death, Paul sees the grounds of man's justification and reconciliation with God, who by that death, has revealed His righteousness. God's free gifts of salvation and love are made possible by Christ's obedience and submission to the will of His Father. The bestowal of these gifts are dependent upon a faith-relationship with Christ. "For St. Paul the Atonement is not only a work of God accomplished <u>for man</u> but also and at the same time a work of God wrought <u>in him</u>."[1] This faith of man, as "surrender to Him, reliance upon Him, cleaving to Him in deep love and devotion of spirit",[2] Paul sees also as "the gift of God", even though it arises within man and is the expression of his will. Dr. Taylor makes clear that faith in the Pauline sense goes beyond the thought of the loyalty of a disciple and a recipient of truth; It is "devotion to Christ as the One through whom God has manifested and wrought His redemptive activity. It is the acceptance of that activity, reliance upon it, and participation in it... In the Pauline scheme without faith there is no atonement."[3] On the ground of this faith God can accept men as righteous.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews who emphasizes the power

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1 p. 135. 2 p. 136. 3 p. 138.

of sin as a barrier to fellowship with God, sees that it is removed by Christ's death. This act, which is representative, is also that of a mediator and high priest. It is significant that the author makes no use of the idea of a faith-relationship. "Faith...is not trust in, and self-committal to, Christ in the Pauline sense; it is rather confidence in the reality of the unseen, in the certainty of God's promises, in the truth of Christ's redemptive work...(It is) a confident belief that in the unseen world (Christ) intercedes with the Father on the basis of all that He has accomplished for men."[1]

It is also noteworthy that there is an absence of teaching regarding sacramental communion and mystical suffering with Christ in the Epistle. Dr. Taylor concludes that the author is silent on these matters because he has not felt their relevance to his purpose. While he affirms the necessity of sacrifice, he does not say how it avails for sinners, nor how they can appropriate its blessings.

In the Johannine writings, the death of Christ is seen as the proof of God's love, and also Christ's glorifying and exaltation. The glorifying of the Son is the judgment of the world. The character of Christ's death is sacrificial. Christ is our Advocate with the Father and the Expiation for our sin. Men appropriate Him and what He did by faith. "The faith-union of the believer is mystical fellowship with Christ Himself, in the totality of His Person, rather than with Him as Redeemer and Saviour. What the believer receives is Life in Christ glorified and exalted through death."[2]

In the concluding section of this book, Dr. Taylor turns to a

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1 pp. 152-3. 2 p. 223.

consideration of the doctrine of the Atonement in the light of his examination of the New Testament writings. "(The Atonement) is nothing less than the doctrine of how man, feeble in his purpose and separated from God by his sins, can be brought into a relationship of true and abiding fellowship with Him, and thus can be enabled to fulfil his divine destiny, both as an individual, and as a member of the community to which he belongs."[1] The Atonement is to be thought of on the greatest scale, that is, as involving the world, and even the universe. Essentially the Atonement is a work of reconciliation. On its negative side, it is the salvation of men from sin, since it is sin which prevents men enjoying fellowship with God. The New Testament presents us with such fellowship as being the positive side or result of the Atonement. The Atonement is a work of God directed to the highest moral and spiritual ends, namely, reconciliation, peace, fellowship with God, ethical and religious fruits of every kind. Dr. Taylor rightly points out that "Christ died for our sins" does not mean that His work begins and ends with sin; He died "to bring us to know God". Again, he observes that fellowship with God has an outward expression in the fellowship that men have with each other. Furthermore, they are called to the fellowship of Christ's suffering, to cross-bearing, and to the drinking of the cup.

In discussing the relationship of God to the Atonement, the author notes that "the testimony of the New Testament (is) to the belief that the Atonement is the realization of the purpose of God...He wills the reconciliation of men to Himself, makes it possible and consummates

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1 p. 246.

it in Christ".[1] The death of Christ is the revelation and expression of the love of God.

The work of Christ is regarded as vicarious, representative and sacrificial. It is vicarious inasmuch as it is wrought on behalf of men. "Christ died for us." We cannot stop at this, however, since such words have different meanings for different writers of the New Testament. In using the words, they all give expression to a truth, but not the entire truth.

The work of Christ, therefore, must also be regarded as representative. Christ acts in our name; He becomes one with us, and endures the consequences of our sins. His act, as our representative, is one of obedience, one of submission to the judgment of God. What gives a unique character to Christ's work is that he does it not just as another individual, but as the incarnate Son of God. All that He does, we are unable to do for ourselves.

Christ's ministry is also sacrificial, not as a sin- or guilt-offering, but because He gave His life for men willingly, so that they may freely consent to what He does for them, making Him the means of their penitent approach to God.

It is impossible to isolate the death of Christ from the appropriation of its blessings. This appropriation is consummated through faith-union with Christ, through sacramental communion with Him, and in sacrificial living and suffering.

In conclusion, Dr. Taylor raises a number of "ultimate problems"

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1 p. 251.

in relation to the doctrine of the Atonement. Two of these concern the representative and sacrificial aspects of Christ's work. Then, how is "the Atonement as the purpose of God fulfilled in the work of Christ without accepting an immanental view of His Person, and without dividing the unity of the Godhead by the setting the representative ministry of the Son over against the love, justice and mercy of God?"[1]

It is the author's conclusion that the category of sacrifice embraces most satisfactorily the purpose and love of God, the work of Christ, and man's appropriation of what God has done on his behalf in His Son. The idea of sacrifice must first of all be ethical, and cannot contain any notion of propitiating God. In the New Testament, we find that underlying this idea are others, such as that of the drawing near of the worshipper to God in humility and contrition, the thought of an offering with which he can identify himself, and the conception of sharing in the cleansing power of life which has been released in death, dedicated, and presented to God. While, as stated, Dr. Taylor values highly this sacrificial category, he is forced to conclude that even it will not include all aspects of the doctrine of the Atonement.

In the end, one is forced to say that the Atonement can be compared with nothing else. The best word which can be used to describe its purpose is reconciliation. It is apparent in New Testament teaching that the barrier to this is sin.

From the side of man, it is sin which makes it impossible for him to know and love God. How is sin to be annulled?

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1 p. 268.

From the side of God also, sin constitutes a problem, because it prevents Him from entering into fellowship with men, not as a result of a lack of love in Him, but rather because of that love by which in fact He judges and condemns sin, although He does so with mercy.

In view of these problems, how is reconciliation possible? There are two aspects to answer. Dr. Taylor argues that a change in the attitude of God to man is involved, a change, that is, in the different manifestations of his love. "His attitude to saints and sinners cannot be the same. He cannot look upon the evil and the utterly contrite with the same eyes, and think of them alike...It follows therefore that, in reconciling men to Himself, His attitude to sinners is transformed in consequence of a vital change in their relationship to Himself. This change, however, is not a change from hostility to love, but from the love which judges and condemns to a love which welcomes and receives men into fellowship with Himself."[1]

There are two movements of God's grace which are essential to reconciliation. The first is a triumphant disclosure of His redeeming love, so that men may know His willingness to receive repentant sinners into fellowship with Himself. This love is commended to men in the Cross. The second movement is an effective expression of God's love so that men's response will be all that is demanded by His holiness and His love. This expression is given to us in the representative ministry of Christ.

Man, if he is to know reconciliation, has conditions to fulfil;

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1 p. 283.

those of repentance, obedience, and submission to the will of God. He must accept the judgments of God upon his son. His response, moreover, must be his own, for the reconciliation he needs is between God and himself.

Yet, in his own person and power, he is not able to make a truly adequate response. The truth is that the fulfilment of the conditions necessary to reconciliation depends on the work of Christ.

Dr. Taylor takes up again briefly the use of the sacrificial category as an aid to the interpretation of Christ's work. The New Testament, particularly the writing of Paul, comes very close to the idea of substitution, but never quite accepts it. "We need a category of representative action, which describes a work of Christ for men so altogether great and inclusive that they cannot accomplish it for themselves but which far from being external to themselves, and therefore substitutionary, is a vital factor in their approach to God, because in it they can participate both by personal faith and in corporate worship."[1] Such a category exists implicit in the sacrificial ideas of the New Testament. "The work of Christ is vicarious because it is representative; it is representative because it is sacrificial."[2]

Expiation, rather than propitiation, is the character of the sacrificial work of Christ; that is, it involves the covering, cancelling, or annulling of sins. Our repentance and our response to God's love, which result in the joys of forgiveness and reconciliation, are enriched through our response to the self-offering of Christ. Dr. Taylor believes the

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1 p. 290. 2 p. 290.

sacrificial category well-suited to this work of Christ because the word "blood" suggests the thought of life, offered and transformed and open to one spiritual appropriation.

The sacrificial interpretation of Christ's work goes beyond the letter of New Testament teaching, especially in its account of the representative aspect of that work. But this seems justified in view of some gaps in the teaching. Paul, for example, does not speak of Christ as voicing the sorrow and contrition of men in the presence of His Father. Again, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says little about the love of God. It seems necessary, therefore, to describe more fully the representative ministry of Christ by developing its sacrificial implications.

This same interpretation has something to contribute to the meaning of the believer's appropriation of Christ's work. His work evoked the kind of faith-union and communion with Christ in all that He was and did because it was sacrificial in character. "The reason why a sacrificial interpretation...relates faith to all that He does, as well as all that He is...is due to the essential character of a sacrifice. A sacrifice is not simply an offering; it is an offering presented by a worshipper...The greatness of the opportunity of entering into the meaning of all that Christ has done cannot be exaggerated, and there is no temptation to estimate His service as that of a substitute."[1]

It is Dr. Taylor's claim that the different aspects of our relation-

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1 p. 295.

ship to Christ and His work are heightened and enriched owe much to sacrificial ideas. They are apparent in the worship of the early church, in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, in the service of missionaries, and in the very idea of the church, as the community of the redeemed.

Are these sacrificial ideas necessary today? Dr. Taylor's answer is that the values essential to the sacrificial theory should be preserved, even though a restatement in different terms is employed. He does not think that the time is yet ripe for replacing this theory.

Two problems raised by Dr. Taylor remain to be discussed, the purpose of God as fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus, and the significance of the Atonement as it is related to events in history and in time.

We cannot be satisfied, it is claimed, with an immanental view of Christ, the view that God expresses Himself fully in the human personality of Jesus, who is divine only in the sense that in Him the process of revelation reaches its climax. This is not the witness of the New Testament or of the Church. In such a theology, the Atonement becomes mainly manward. That is, man responds to the love which is manifested in Jesus' personality. But this "provides him with nothing in which he can rest, and on which in his frailty he can rely, save an unconfirmed telegram that all is well."[1]

There is no question in the author's mind that God has revealed

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1 p. 307.

His love in Christ and His person. God has done more than reveal. "God not only declares His love; He embodies it; He goes out to seek men, raises them in their despair, and supports them in their journey from the far country. This He does in Christ, but in His Work as well as in the revelation which shines in His Person. Indeed, the revelation in His Person becomes incandescent in His Work."[1]

Such a doctrine of the Atonement does not permit any question of the division of the Godhead. The Father and the Son are one, because through the sacrificial and representative ministry of the latter, God reconciles men to Himself.

Regarding his final question, the significance of the Atonement in relation to history and time, Dr. Taylor observes that the Atonement must be eternal in character. "The Incarnation, culminating in death, is the expression in time of the Eternal Sacrifice within the heart of God."[2] Dr. Taylor believes, however, that we must give a greater place to the exercise of faith in Christ. He also points out that there is no reason why we should not hope that the ministry of Christ avails beyond death, and that it is open to men of ancient times and to those who have not proved its power upon earth.

The third book, Forgiveness and Reconciliation, is less directly concerned with the Atonement. In it, the author considers not only the two terms which form the title, but justification, fellowship, and sanctification. The concluding section deals with the Atonement in relation to the experiences to which these terms refer.

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1 p. 308. 2 p. 313.

While it is certainly true to say that the Cross reveals a pardoning God, Dr. Taylor feels that we must show in what manner it does this.

Remission of sins depends upon repentance. "God cannot forgive the feebly penitent, or those who are not penitent at all."[1] But repentance does not win forgiveness; rather, it makes it possible for us to be forgiven. Yet, it is often very difficult for us to be repentant. How can this need be met? It is not met through our acceptance of a theory of the Atonement, yet we must know how God loves and what His love does for men. That Christ suffered and died for us, that He knew the depths of human sin and evil, stirs us to penitence. We are made aware of the nature of sin and its consequences in our own lives. Furthermore, we are more likely to become penitent if we believe that Christ is the Son of God.

Christ is the bearer of our penitence because of His self-offering for the sin of the world.

In the Cross, too, we find the supreme incentive for the forgiveness of others.

Justification, Dr. Taylor defines as the act of God in accepting men as righteous on the ground of faith in Christ. It is more than the remission of sins, although it includes this. There is a relationship between faith in Christ, by which men are justified, and His work, inasmuch as the righteousness in which they trust must be perfect be-

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1 p. 196.

fore they themselves can be accepted as righteous. How is justifying faith related to the work of God in Christ? Dr. Taylor answers the question by reference to some different theories of the Atonement, and comes out on the side of those which emphasize the representative nature of Christ's ministry; and which are objective as presupposing a Godward as well as a manward direction. "Dependent utterly upon Christ, relying upon all that he has done for men, and committed to Him in complete loyalty, the believer shares in a corporate act of righteousness for which he can claim no merit. His faith is not only response to that which he sees; but is also, and at the same time, participation in that which is done on his behalf."[1] This view provides an ethical and religious basis for justifying faith. "The believer comes to God...with a faith affirmative of, and constituted by, God's righteousness in Christ, embodied in history, and eternally operative in Him."[2]

Dr. Taylor asks next, in what way does reconciliation depend on the work of God in Christ? As justification depends upon the representative and sacrificial ministry of Christ, so also does reconciliation. It is effected when man responds in faith to the love of God and enters into fellowship with Him. What makes the Cross the revelation of supreme love?

It is not enough, says Dr. Taylor, to claim that the Cross is a disclosure of love, for man by himself is unable to respond with a repentance proportionate to his sin. The Cross must reveal God as meeting all the conditions vital to reconciliation. His activity is to be seen in the incarnation in the earthly life of Jesus, and in

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1 p. 206. 2 p. 206.

His death. Furthermore, we see the love of God as Christ willingly bears the sins of men, and as He becomes the means of their penitent approach to God. And this He does as the Son of God.

Taylor can see no objection to the idea of Christ submitting to the judgment upon human sin. Because of our sin, we are not able to fulfil such a ministry ourselves, although we do frequently, if imperfectly, bear the consequences of the judgment that falls on others. Christ who was sinless was perfectly able to do this. "Only saints in the making can bear the sins of another; only Christ can bear the sins of the world."[1]

It is by virtue of what Christ did, in His life and death that we are reconciled to God.

With respect to fellowship with God and the Atonement, Dr. Taylor believes that "we need to think of Christ's work, not only as a deed but also as a doing, a present ministry upon which we can continually rely, in the power of which we can share, and the spirit of which we can reproduce, in our own measure and aided by the Spirit of God, in daily life and practice."[2] Christ's present service is the supreme opportunity for fellowship with God. For the most part, that fellowship is mediated. This does not mean, however, that it is less rich, for it is through Christ Himself that it is mediated.

"(Sanctification) is the climax of regeneration and renewal, of the process of enlightening and strengthening whereby the believer is empowered for every task, and above all, of the outpouring of the love

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1 p. 211. 2 p. 213.

of God in the heart."[1] As such, it is the work of the Spirit, which, however, is not to be thought of as operating apart from the work of Christ. It is in the latter that God is most truly found. In the Cross, man sees love in its perfection, a love which is active as it bears his sins, and makes possible his reconciliation with God. It is only as we behold, and accept this love, that our own love to God and to man becomes cleansed.

In the opinion of the present writer, the work of Dr. Taylor is one of the most valuable contributions to an understanding of the Atonement that has been made in the last fifty years. Underlying it is sound Biblical scholarship. Yet, while Dr. Taylor has leaned very heavily upon the actual writings of the New Testament---especially in Jesus and His Sacrifice--- he has not been entirely dependent upon these, being aware that the sayings of Jesus, for example, do not in themselves alone afford a sufficient base for a doctrine of the meaning of His death. Nevertheless, one occasionally has the feeling that Dr. Taylor's method presupposes a theological precision in the New Testament which does not really exist. It does not always follow that exegesis and theology are as directly connected as the author would suggest.

Dr. Taylor defends Moberly's idea of vicarious penitence, and supports the idea in much the same way. Both writers deplore---and rightly---the habit of thinking of persons as separate entities. "In love we pass beyond the confines of individuality and are united

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1 p. 219.

with (others) in a union which is not the loss of identity but the enrichment of life. But if the sin of others can be felt, it can also be confessed, not indeed as our own, but as that of those who are loved."[1] The question surely remains, whose penitence does God desire?

The present writer is also inclined to feel that the lines which Dr. Taylor draws between forgiveness and reconciliation are too sharp. Forgiveness, he claims, is antecedent to reconciliation; it is that which makes reconciliation possible. At the most, it can only be described as action directed to the removal or annulment of an obstacle to reconciliation. Of course the obstacle must be removed. If I forgive someone a wrong (if, that is, I take away the barrier between us) but imply that reconciliation has yet to follow, am I not in effect saying, "I will forgive but I cannot forget"? There does not seem to be any warrant for the notion that forgiveness is no more than the remission of sins and not at the same time a restoration to fellowship. Such a notion verges on theological hairsplitting.

There are some criticisms which can be made of Dr. Taylor's work. Yet it seems to this writer that its strong points far outweigh its weak ones. In the first place, Dr. Taylor is an extremely able New Testament scholar, and his work is based very largely upon his Biblical studies. We may not agree with every one of his interpretations of New Testament passages, but we do not feel that he is being arbitrary and dogmatic. His treatment of the Bible is both painstaking and honest, and it provides

1 Jesus and His Sacrifice. pp. 310-11.

a firm ground for the development of his theory of the Atonement.

Then, too, Dr. Taylor has been successful in holding together so many elements which seem vital to any thoroughgoing doctrine of the Atonement. He sees the Atonement as the act of God in Christ, but sees too that man must respond in faith. If the Atonement is salvation from sin, it is also fellowship with God. Such fellowship finds outward expression in the fellowship of men with each other. The Atonement is both Godward and manward. Again, Christ's ministry was an historical event, yet it avails beyond death; it is supra-historical. In Christ's person, God has revealed His love, but He also actually embodies that love in Christ's work. There are other points along a similar line. The result is that Dr. Taylor has welded all of these together into a strong theory.

His greatest contribution lies in his presentation of the sacrificial idea as a category of interpretation. It is really by means of this that he has been so successful in retaining so many of the elements we have noted.

CHAPTER 6

There are a number of writers whose contributions to the doctrine of the Atonement are not as extensive as those we have discussed, but who nevertheless merit some brief consideration. The first of these is John Oman, whose book, Grace and Personality, was published in 1919.

Oman claims that Christianity offers a particular kind of redemption, a redemption that comes not primarily by way of renunciation but by reconciliation. If we are to understand the latter, we must first determine what is meant by "enmity against God". It is to be in hostility to reality, to feel that everything is against us. Reconciliation to God then is "reconciliation to our lives by seeking in them only His ends. Its immediate significance is reconciliation to the discipline He appoints and the duty He demands".[1] This in turn means fellowship here and now with God, as we live with our fellow-men in this world.

God's rule is one of love. When we understand and accept this, we find that all events are working for the realization of an eternal purpose. Reconciliation is the assurance that nothing is isolated from God. Faith, as trust in God, affirms that the order of the world is of the nature of the wise and holy goodness we name love. "If reconciliation is in a free, a truly personal acceptance of God's gracious relation to us, it can only be by revelation; but on the other hand there can be no revelation to our own personal insight except by reconciliation."[2] The task is not to lay God open to us, but to lay us open to God. Man, being sinful, perverts the witness of truth and wants love to be good-

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1 p. 126; Oman's italics. 2 p. 166

ness without moral demand. The difficulty is that of overcoming man's perversion and hypocrisy which spring from his sin. Just how this is accomplished we are not told.

In dealing with penitence, Oman says that to repent is to see ourselves as we are in the real moral world; it is to be morally sincere. Repentance is not a preliminary to faith. To see a gracious personal relation of God to us is as necessary for true penitence as penitence for seeing that God is gracious. To be reconciled is to be forgiven; we are forgiven when we know that God is waiting to be gracious.

In much of this, Oman verges upon a revelatory idea of reconciliation. If we are not blind, God will be able to reveal Himself to us. We shall see Him, ourselves and others, the whole world as they really are. Having done so, we shall respond in the right way. The fact is however that we do not see as clearly as that, and we cannot do so. That is the present situation in which we find ourselves.

In the same context, Oman refers to Christ who is "the supreme revelation only as He is the supreme reconciliation"[1]. He is this reconciliation because He accepts all life's discipline and "makes peace by obedience to righteousness even to death"[2]. He lays us open to God's whole appeal through the whole of life.

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1 p. 166. 2 p. 153.

The thinking of Oliver Quick on the subject of the Atonement is largely summed up in a chapter in his book, Doctrines of the Creed.

Quick begins by noting that man is a personality that consists in a relatively independent mind and will which can exercise purposive control over what belongs to it, and is capable of loving freely. He is absolutely dependent upon God and yet relatively independent of Him. This is not God's end for man, however; it is rather that He, God, should be all in all when man has freely surrendered himself. His true freedom is that of his self-surrender.

In man's self-consciousness lies his opportunity for freedom and for selfishness which is sin. Man because of his self-consciousness can never be just natural. Quick does not tell us what man would be like if he were natural, other than by noting that the lily and the raven are natural. To be natural presumably means to be un-self-conscious. In any case, he either rises to a supernatural unselfishness or sinks to the artificiality of hypocrisy or self-indulgence.

It may be that Quick has treated the question of sin elsewhere;[1] his treatment of it here does not seem adequate. It is not that we would dispute his theory in so far as it goes. The relationship of sin and self, and even to self-consciousness have long been known. Is there nothing to be said on the subject of sin as disobedience, unbelief, ignorance etc., and is there no relationship between sin and insincerity,

1 In The Gospel of the New World, he expands the above but only slightly.

guilt, and spiritual blindness?

The Atonement consists primarily in a divine act of loving and gracious condescension. Quick insists that we cannot have a doctrine of the Atonement apart from a doctrine of the Incarnation, though he does not agree that the two are identical.

The Atonement recognizes the moral nature of evil while providing a more than moral way of salvation through God's love expressed in free forgiveness. "Forgiveness...is not a moral conception at all. If an offence be not fully purged, morality requires further penalty; if an offence be fully purged, there is nothing left to be forgiven."[1] Quick's use of the word "moral" in this connection is confusing and unsatisfactory. The word "legal" would be closer to his real meaning. It is certainly not possible to claim that either God's love or forgiveness are immoral simply because they are free.

God's forgiveness, extended to the penitent man, does more than restore him to fellowship. "It converts the repented and forgiven sin into an actual stepping-stone by which he has been raised, and can be raised further, into a recognition of God's goodness which could never have been apart from the sin."[2]

The Atonement also has a bearing on pain, inasmuch as it affords us the opportunity to be made like Christ in suffering, and to be partakers in the redemptive activity by which mankind is lifted up to God.

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1 p. 210. 2 p. 210.

The Atonement would not be complete apart from the resurrection, which is the sign that God's love has been victorious over and through death. It is the victory of the self-sacrifice of Christ which makes our own victory possible. Because the full triumph of self-sacrifice can be won only through death, "therefore, and for no other reason, the Christian is obliged to believe in the reality of the world beyond the grave".[1] It is belief in the resurrection, following on the sacrifice completed in death, which enables us to say that the atoning work of Christ is really victorious.

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1 p. 212.

There are two books of Dr. H. H. Farmer which are valuable for our consideration of the Atonement: The World and God, and God and Men. It is proposed to discuss these together.[1]

Dr. Farmer does not minimize the significance of sin. At the heart of man's relationship with God is the element of claim. Man is called to obey and trust God by loving his brethren; and he cannot deeply and truly meet the claim of his brethren to love save in complete obedience and trust toward God. Man's sin consists in his refusal to acknowledge that claim. This is the specifically religious thought of sin. This interpretation of sin takes up into itself other conceptions of sin, as the breaking of an eternal law, self-abuse, and selfishness. "By man's sin," says Dr. Farmer, "we mean a great refusal which man persists in making at the centre of his being".[2]

Through sin men become blind, and unable to discern the truth concerning God, themselves, or their world; they become insincere. They tend to lose their status and integrity as persons.

Such consequences are not confined to the individual sinner since it is impossible for him to live in isolation from his fellows.

How has God responded to man in this situation? The Christian affirms that God has made a saving revelation of Himself in the personality of Jesus Christ. The first thing this revelation does is to show

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1 It may be as well to quote here the opening sentence of the first book mentioned above: "The conviction that God is personal, and deals personally with men and women, lies at the heart of Christian experience and thought." (p. 1.) Dr. Farmer's thought in the field of Christian doctrine has as its basis this central conviction of the personal relations between God and men.

2 God and Men, p. 82.

man the truth and enable him to face and accept it. "It does this because it is a revelation of God as holy love."[1] To apprehend this revelation of love, which both condemns and succours man, and to accept it is to be penitent. It is also to be forgiven and to be reconciled at one and the same time, for "it is not possible to be truly penitent in the presence of the love of God revealed in Christ without experiencing forgiveness and reconciliation".[2]

This revelation is given through a historical personality manifesting that holy love in Himself. It is also given through the Church or the Christian fellowship, through, that is, a living organism of personal relationships.

To be reconciled means to be forgiven in respect of sin, to be reconciled to God's demands, to His appointments, and to one's fellowmen.

While Dr. Farmer observes that God's saving action in Christ is final and unique, he also claims that it is not yet a completed action. "The advent of Jesus Christ marks a new beginning---God's new beginning. God at that point in history took hold of the gone-wrong personal world of men in a new and...once-and-for-all way. But He has still, so to say, got hold of it: He is still at work with the wrongness."[3] Dr. Farmer may seem to have involved himself in a contradiction here, but has he? We are undoubtedly confronted with the finality of a decisive act of God, the coming into history at a particular time of One

1 The World and God, p. 197. 2 Ibid. p. 198. 3 God and Men, p. 97.

who lived and died in order to redeem men from their sins. Must we conclude from this that the divine reconciling activity has ceased? Surely not. It is one of the merits of Dr. Farmer's treatment of the subject that he devotes more attention than almost any other writer to the relationship of eschatology to reconciliation.

The author maintains that there are two problems of human life at the root of eschatological faith: the fact of death, and the fact that life seems to have permanent elements of ugliness and disappointment. With respect to the first, Dr. Farmer says, "It is in the Christian experience of God as personal, of reconciliation to Him, that this certitude of a life beyond death reaches its maximum...In proportion as the succouring and reconciling love of God to the soul is livingly apprehended through Christ, the idea of complete annihilation in death, or after death, becomes unthinkable".[1] Furthermore, as we begin to love others and to see in them beings on whom the love of God rests, the idea of their extinction also becomes unthinkable.

Eschatological faith has a bearing on the significance of the world, with its limitations and frustrations. Within these there is a divine purpose at work which transcends the world. The consummation of that purpose will at one and the same time mark the end of this world and be the fulfilment and justification of it. The present, whatever it is like, has significance for God, yet the soul which is conscious of the divine demand realises how little can be done here and now. We must love others now, yet we can do so only imperfectly; the

1 The World and God, p. 213.

fulfilment of that love must come later, in, as it were, God's own time.

Again, God's acceptance of us as sinners contains within it a repudiation of sin, which will result in its ultimate annihilation. But we cannot believe that annihilation is to take place in the present order, but beyond the order of this world. The whole experience of forgiveness is eschatological, pointing forward to a divine consummation.

The eschatological faith has meaning also in reference to the significance of God. It looks forward to a kingdom of God which is eternal and must therefore transcend this world. We must also say that its inception is fundamentally due to God's sovereign act and not to man's upward striving. This aspect of eschatological faith enters also in our experience of reconciliation, enabling us to have peace notwithstanding the confusions and disasters of this present life.

"Reconciliation thus has at its heart a present possession and an as yet unrealised hope; and each of these requires and strengthens the other...The New Testament writers, on the one hand, are all aware ...(that) their salvation is a present possession...Yet, on the other hand, they are all equally aware that their salvation...is still to come. It is now; nevertheless it is not yet. Yet the 'now' and the 'not yet' are not separate the one from the other."[1]

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1 op. cit. p. 222.

Donald Baillie in his book, God Was in Christ, begins his treatment of the Atonement by considering the need of divine forgiveness. If we are morally earnest, it is inevitable that we shall brood over our sins, whether we ought or not. This does not necessarily mean that modern men have a sense of sin; they may have a moralistic substitute for it. That is, they are dissatisfied with themselves, even though they do not accuse themselves. Behind such dissatisfaction is something real: moral failure, betrayal of ideals, and so forth. What is the solution of this problem?

The solution does not lie at the level of mere morality. The situation must be transformed by an orientation towards God. Sin must be recognized as sin against God. The situation then contains a new possibility because of God's forgiveness. When we become more concerned about Him than about ourselves, we can accept His forgiveness.

What is the relationship between forgiveness and punishment? Punishment seems sometimes to continue after a man has repented. This must be taken simply as his lot, divine discipline but not divine punishment.

How should we react, after we have repented, to the suffering which we have brought on others? We must make all possible reparation, but we must not go on reproaching ourselves. The evil we have caused is a part of the world's evil, which all must help to bear.

Is atonement necessary? This question is raised because to some

God's forgiveness seems to be all that we need. If God regards our sins lightly, then this may be true. But our own experience teaches us that forgiveness is often a costly thing. How much more costly it must be for God whose love for us is perfect! The cost of reconciliation He bears Himself. Hence "there is an atonement, an expiation, in the heart of God Himself, and out of this comes the forgiveness of our sins".[1]

In the New Testament, the ancient sacrificial system reaches its climax and fulfilment, but its meaning is transformed because God Himself makes the sacrifice. The reconciliation is God's; in the sin-offering, victim and priest are one.

Coupled with this emphasis upon the cost of reconciliation is that which tells of God's readiness to pardon freely.

What is the relation between the Atonement and the Cross? Although Jesus could have saved His life, He chose not to do so. His choice, says Baillie, was determined by His attitude to sinners.

As the early Christians reflected upon Christ's death upon the Cross, they began to see in it the redeeming love of God; that is, they felt that it had been brought about by the purpose of God, especially as that was related to the forgiveness of sinners. Like many other writers, Baillie denies that God's attitude was changed from wrath to love. There is a place for the idea of the wrath of God,

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1 p. 175.

but it is not to be regarded as something which has to be propitiated. In the end, the background of the Cross is God's eternal love for the world.

What is the relation between the historical and the eternal Atonement? We should not minimize the first, "the historical moment of the Incarnation, but (realize) the relation of the living God to every other moment. God's reconciling work cannot be confined to any one moment of history".[1] God was forgiving before Christ died, and the work of reconciliation has continued since the crucifixion.

In his concluding section, Baillie maintains that both the objective and subjective aspects of the Atonement are necessary. The objective aspect is seen in the expiatory sacrifice made by God Himself in Christ; it is a sacrifice God is continually making. Out of this expiation there comes our forgiveness. As we interpret this story, we become willing to bring our sins to God, and to accept His forgiveness. This in turn brings a new beginning.

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1 p. 191.

CHAPTER 7

The Doctrine of the Atonement by Leonard Hodgson, published in 1951, is one of the latest treatments of the subject.

The author begins with a short chapter on the Old Testament preparation. He observes that the Bible comes to us in the form of propositions, which, however, reflect the divine revelation given in acts rather than words. The doctrine of the Atonement is likewise the fruit of reflection upon God's redemptive activities.

Hodgson notes four main points in the doctrine: it is an act of God, restoring fellowship by forgiveness of sins through the death of Christ. His thesis is that "the doctrine of the Atonement is concerned with God's answer to the problem of evil, with the action taken by God in the history of this world in order to rescue His creation from the evil with which it had become infected."[1] In the Old Testament, we see God educating men to see that sin is the hard core of the problem of evil, while in the New Testament, we see Him freeing the world from evil by striking at that core.

This divine education of men was of course a process. The ground of obligation at first was morality rather than religion. But there gradually grew both the consciousness of an obligation of loyalty to Jahweh and the consciousness of moral obligations in human affairs.

In the development of the Old Testament ethic on its material side, there was a three-fold task for the religious leaders: to proclaim the moral demands of Jahweh, to maintain loyalty to Jahweh as the source

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1 p. 17.

of obligation, and to secure for the future the lessons learned. This task was accomplished by the prophets. "Through this insistence on God's will as the source of moral obligation, the prophetic-priestly religion of the Old Testament brought in the central feature of Bible ethics, the recognition of immorality as sin and its need of treatment as such."[1]

It is here that the idea of sacrifice is important. Hodgson admits that sacrifice can degenerate, but feels that at its highest, it had real value. He notes that before Christ, it would not have been possible to say that penitence was all that was needed for forgiveness. Sacrifice in the best Jewish worship was spiritualised by personal devotion and heartfelt penitence.

Two defects in Judaism which required the further revelation of God in Christ were the quest of self-perfection and the quest of a reward.

Hodgson now turns to the wider background of the doctrine of the Atonement. Behind the latter lies the doctrine of creation of which two important features are the existence of contingency and freedom, and the individualising character of the whole process. As man grows in moral self-control, the element of contingency in his behaviour decreases. Not only does he develop the power to make decisions, but he comes to realise that self is not an end in itself, but that its fulfilment lies in giving itself back to its creator. "We are led to the conclusion that what God is aiming at in creation is a community of persons each making

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1 p. 27.

his contribution to the welfare of the whole...The ultimate aim is perfected freedom."[1] Hodgson makes no attempt to say why God's aim is to create such a community.

It is apparent that the divine purpose in creation is not being fulfilled in any straightforward fashion. There is the fact of evil; of its various forms, human sin is the latest and worst. The other forms have always existed, but moral evil was impossible until the existence of creatures endowed with self-consciousness and intelligence.

What is the relation between this kind of evil and the creative purpose? The fact is that creation is a process which admits the existence of irrationalities, such as contingency and freedom. Evil is another irrationality. Its historical origin is a mystery, but "the standing truth of the doctrine of the Fall is that evil has originated within creation through creaturely rebellion permitted by God."[2] We cannot escape saying that God is responsible for the evil consequences which follow upon His creation of persons who are free to rebel against Him.

It is difficult to deny the logic of Hodgson's position here, but there are limitations and dangers to it. Human rebellion explains much evil, no doubt, but it does not explain all of it. Hodgson has said that there are four forms of evil, ignorance, ugliness, suffering, and sin. Does human rebellion always explain the first three? Moreover, how are we to account for the evil of the "natural world.., evil, which

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1 pp. 41-42. 2 p. 48.

at sub-human levels, finds expression in non-moral ways"?[1] If creaturely rebellion is possible only at the human level, then there must be some other explanation for evil at the lower level. The only explanation Hodgson offers is by way of reference to the myth of the fallen angels and the existence of devils.

Again, granting the significance of human rebellion in relation to sin and evil, we are still obliged to ask why man rebels. He is free to choose between good and evil; why is it that he chooses evil and ignores the good? We are still far from a full understanding of evil when we say that it is the rebellion of a free person.

If God permits man to rebel, He may be said to bear a certain responsibility for man's evil. The danger in such a proposition is that it is only a short step then to the notion that God is the direct cause of evil. There are few perhaps who would accept God as being the cause of sin (as one form of evil), but there are still those who come dangerously close to the idea that He is the cause of pain and suffering.

Finally, Hodgson's description of evil is in some ways not so very impressive; that is, we do not feel it to be the terrible thing that it really is. This may simply be an omission on Hodgson's part, but it is not without some significance. However, it is explained, evil is a fact, and one with which God has to deal. This He does through punishment and forgiveness. Hodgson contends that punishment is essentially retributive and vindictive. In explanation of these terms, Hodgson asserts that punishment is "an activity which by its very nature can only

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1 p. 146

exist between a community and a member of itself."[1] The freedom of an individual is balanced by the freedom of the community to disown itself from those of his acts which contradict its standards. Punishment is essentially this disowning by a community. Now the word "retributive" as applied to punishment means that it is action which looks back to something already done; the word "vindictive" means that the action is taken for the purpose of vindicating the standard that has been broken or ignored. They do not mean paying back or taking revenge. The community must punish, but it must also seek to reform. This it does, not without cost and sacrifice, in such a way as to make the punishment an expression of goodwill and love towards the wrongdoer. By so doing, it undertakes to share in the punishment itself.

The essence of forgiveness is the treating the products of sin as raw material for the output of goodness.

That God must first punish sin to mark His reprobation of it before He can forgive it means His descent into human history to make atonement. Not only must He punish sin, but He must absorb its power for evil, and win back the sinner in such a way as to assist his growth in freedom. All this God has accomplished through His Son.

In entering human life, Christ accepted a messiahship of suffering, revealing God's acceptance of the responsibility for the punishment of son. We cannot assume, says Hodgson, that all pain is due to sin, but it is a law of human experience that sin causes pain. Sin produces a

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1 p. 56

rational dislocation of the rational order of existence.

The incarnation makes clear that Christ was not one man punished by God in substitution for other. "He was Himself God...Punisher and Punished are one."[1]

Christ suffered in such a way as to reveal the divine forgiveness. He had no thought of resentment or revenge. "When He was reviled, (He) reviled not again." By this we are assured that our sins cannot corrupt the love and goodness of God.

Finally, God's redemptive work in Christ was at all times one of winning and persuading men to penitence.

Hodgson maintains that God's victory over evil is absolute in the sense that nothing would be gained by its repetition. "Once for all, in the history of this world, God, who is both the source and the object of all the acts of His creatures has won the right to forgive their sins."[2]

As noted above, Hodgson does not say that all pain is due to sin. It is surely necessary, however, to admit that a tremendous amount of suffering has nothing whatsoever to do with sin; the Atonement for sin therefore has no bearing on it.

Hodgson views the Church as the instrument through which the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord carries on His work of rescuing the world from evil. The Church has been redeemed in order that it may give itself

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1 p. 77. 2 p. 83.

to the service of mankind.

In a chapter on creation and redemption, Hodgson notes that those to whom God communicates the fullness of His being, and who have the capacity to receive it become progressively smaller in number. The sons of Abraham are taken to be God's chosen people; they constitute a remnant. Eventually the remnant is narrowed down to one Man, in whom the creation comes to a climax. God's redemptive activity is then broadened out as forgiven men are to bring the world into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Here, Hodgson insists that the Church is able to proclaim the almightiness of God, as well as His other attributes, not as hopes but as matters of fact because in the history of this world God has actually demonstrated these characteristics in the human life of Christ.

What in God's plan is destined to be the end of the world's history? There are good arguments in support of an optimistic view: belief in God's omnipotence suggest that His purpose will not fail; the redemptive process has been at work a relatively short time; there have been some real advances in moral sensitiveness and insight. There is no absolute proof to be found in such arguments, and there is some basis for a lack of optimism.

In the concluding chapter, Hodgson gives consideration to the doctrine of the Atonement itself. He turns first to the New Testament writers and to Christ Himself. "It is not necessary to faith in the godhead of Christ to maintain that during His earthly ministry He was consciously

aware of that godhead."[1] However He knew Himself to be the promised Messiah. "It may be that the passing on from knowledge of His messiahship to that of His essential godhead came after His crucifixion and not before."[2] It is very difficult to see why Hodgson separates the question of the godhead from that of Christ's messiahship. His comment, "we are here moving in a region of mystery," seems fitting.

In Hodgson's view, the doctrine of the Atonement has sprung from the New Testament itself. The first Christians, expressing themselves in the language and thought-forms of their day, said that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself", restoring sinners to fellowship with Himself.

Hodgson maintains that different theologians expound the significance of the same divine redemptive action in accordance with their different general outlooks. It is possible for a stress to be laid on Christ either as God or as Man. Thus theories in which propitiation, expiation or satisfaction are prominent seem to lay the stress on what Christ did as man. The fact is, we are not always obliged to choose between them since they may call our attention to an element of truth which should be in our thinking. Nevertheless, we must hold to the central fact that Christ was both God and Man.

A number of observations have been made on specific points, mainly on the negative side. There are valuable things in this book: the setting of the doctrine of the Atonement in the background of the doctrine of creation, the carrying on of God's redemptive activity by His church.

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1 p. 138. 2 p. 139.

But, as already indicated, there are some omissions, and some statements which leave one less than satisfied. The relationship between sin and pain seems stressed out of its proper proportion. The wrath of God is mentioned several times, but not clearly defined. The notion of self-punishment as applied to Christ is not too convincing. Nevertheless it is a book which merits consideration.

CHAPTER 8

In this concluding chapter, it remains, in the light of the survey we have made, to indicate what advance has been made in these past fifty years in the thought of theologians upon the doctrine of the Atonement. To speak of advance in theological thinking raises the question, what constitutes such an advance? By reference to what standard can we claim that an advance has been made? It may be argued that any such claim is purely subjective. Do we hold that progress has been effected when a theory appeals more to the rational nature of man, or to his emotional nature? These questions cannot be ignored. The Atonement, however, was a divine act within history, an act moreover which has been described for us within the writings of the New Testament. A doctrine of the Atonement, then, is not formulated out of nothing; it has to do with an historic event. Our understanding of it is based to a large degree upon the earliest statements concerning what God had done in Christ.

When we speak of advance or progress in the thought upon the doctrine, we mean that it has become more consistent with the thought and spirit of the New Testament. The reason some theories have disappeared is that they have been manifestly out of line with New Testament concepts. On the other hand, there have been others which have been only partially inconsistent. Most of the progress has been made along the lines of modification. There is no theory in these fifty years which is completely original. Indeed, many of the questions which were debated years ago are still being discussed. But there are new emphases, and trends of thought have shifted.

One feature of this progress is a tendency to establish a theory that is more inclusive. It is noticeable that some earlier writers emphasized one or two aspects of the Atonement at the expense of others. This habit has not yet been completely eradicated, and perhaps never will be, but it is not as strong as it once was. In the meantime, some theologians of the present day, aware possibly of the dangers of over-simplification, are taking a broader view. To the present writer, this seems the wise approach.[1]

It must also be said that we have not yet reached any doctrine of the Atonement which we can call final. If there is any one general criticism to be applied to the theories we have considered it is that no one is completely adequate. The "ultimate problems", to use Vincent Taylor's phrase, continue to be problems, although much light has been shed upon them.

We turn briefly now to a consideration of those aspects of the doctrine of the Atonement which have undergone some modification.

Whatever theories have been advanced, they have all been grounded in a concept of the nature of God, and especially, of the love of God. The victory of Christ over evil is the victory of this love. Forgiveness comes from a loving heavenly Father. The sufferings of Christ, and those of men, do not in any sense negate the assertion

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1 The fact that there have been modifications does not justify the view that the theories advanced by theologians at the beginning of the century can therefore be dispensed with. It will be a while yet before students of the subject will be able to feel that the work of Moberly, Forsyth, and Denney is not worth serious consideration.

that God is love. The whole movement of redemption originates in His love. No writer upon the subject of the Atonement has ever completely ignored this basic attribute of God.

Nevertheless, we have noted that the love of God has received various interpretations, some of which do not seem to have a very sound basis in the New Testament. One result is that the theories of the doctrine of the Atonement have been weakened to some extent. Dr. Farmer has said, rightly, that no theory that is derogatory to the love of God can be entertained. Yet some early theories, if not derogatory, fail to pay tribute to the fullness of His love. Denney and Forsyth, for example, do not fail to acknowledge the divine love, and indeed, their work contains some fine passages in praise of it. Forsyth, however, stresses the holiness of God's love so strongly that its other qualities are of secondary importance. Denney does not ignore the love of God any more than any other writer, but his treatment of the wrath of God suggests punitive justice rather than love. He speaks of God's anger working "for the destruction of all who are identified with sin"[1].

Now what these and other theologians were concerned to do was to affirm the strength and power of God, His holiness, in His reaction against human sin. They saw that God could not abide with sin, could not and would not compromise with it. God's nature was moral; therefore His reaction against sin must be thoroughly moral. It was not possible to entertain any idea of forgiveness and reconciliation which

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1 The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation, p. 212. Italics mine.

failed to acknowledge this aspect of God's nature.

Later writers have failed to see this no less clearly. They are quite aware of the terrible nature and effects of sin; in fact, their analysis of these is sometimes more penetrating. They have been just as concerned to ethicize the Atonement. They have not ruled out the wrath or the holiness of God, but have seen these as parts, and only parts, of His love. They have recognized a certain severity in that love. They have not eliminated the principle of judgment from God's dealings with sinful men. The danger which they have been more successful in avoiding is that of equating God's wrath with vindictiveness and something like human anger. It is not something to be set over against the love of God, but is a part or manifestation of it. To use Dr. Farmer's words, "By it we are signifying one aspect of the more inclusive truth that God is agape...Wrath is the burning, fiery heart of utterly pure love"[1]. God must still deal with sin, but He does so through an unchanging love.

This aspect of God's love has been affirmed then by later theologians along with those other aspects which Jesus emphasized in His conception of God as Father. If it has been found impossible and unethical to dismiss the idea of wrath, it has been just as impossible to rule out the aspects which are given such prominence in the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Lost Sheep. And indeed there can be no possible justification for doing so. It is only as we hold all these aspects together in a proper balance that we have any real understanding

1 God and Men, p. 163.

of God's love.

This view of the divine love has influenced the thought of later writers upon other features of the doctrine of the Atonement. In general, some of the harsher elements have either gone or been modified. This is noticeable with respect to the penal theory, although it is still with us, as is the retributive theory of punishment. What is difficult for the modern mind is the acceptance of the idea of penal suffering as the expression of a legal principle. It is equally difficult to accept the idea of someone taking upon himself penal suffering instead of another, and of offering it to God as a means of reconciliation. We recoil from the notion that the suffering of Christ was punishment directly inflicted by God. The older penal theories have been modified to the extent that Taylor speaks of Christ's suffering as penal "only in so far as it is a sharing in the sense of desolation and loss which sin brings in its train when it is seen and felt for what it is"[1].

The danger in the retributive theory of punishment, even as treated by comparatively recent writers is that it so easily becomes tangled up with law, and with the idea that the primary attribute of God is justice. Again, the question has been raised whether the retributive element does not induce penitence - if it does - more by fear of punishment than by anything else?

The same concern lies behind this matter as lies behind ideas

1 Jesus and His Sacrifice, p. 161.

of God's holiness and wrath, namely, the concern for His moral nature. Sin, as rebellion against God, must be dealt with if God is truly moral. Sin deserves punishment. The question to be asked is, what is the purpose of such punishment? If we are to believe that God loves sinners, notwithstanding their sin, must we not believe also that He is concerned with winning them to Himself, and with renewing them?

We may not be completely satisfied with the treatment of the idea of retribution even by present-day writers. The idea which is likely to satisfy most is that in which God is seen as condemning and saving at one and the same time. The final purpose of God's love is to save and to reconcile, and His condemnation, as a part of His love, has therefore that same purpose. The punishment which falls upon us is seen to be the punishment of love.

We may note here two ideas that are related to the penal theory which have largely disappeared: substitution and propitiation. It has been felt increasingly difficult to hold to the idea that guilt (or the consciousness of guilt), and punishment can be borne by another. The sin and its guilt are the sinner's. The reality with which we are faced in the Atonement is the reality of our own wrong-doing, and our alienation from God. Writers today are more inclined to say that Christ did not bear the divine reaction against sin as our substitute but as our representative. That is, He acted in our name, becoming one with us. This He did as the Son of Man and as the Son of God.

With His sacrifice and His obedience, we may identify ourselves. Taylor has put it thus: "In the work of Christ the offering is made representatively, in the name of men, and with the intention that they should participate therein."[1] This is not an easy concept, but it does take us away from the substitutionary idea which does not do justice to the moral nature of man or to the love of God. It has, moreover, the merit of stressing a vital aspect of Christ's work, His complete self-identification with sinful men.

The idea of propitiation has also disappeared almost entirely from modern thought upon the doctrine of the Atonement. Again, it has been the deeper understanding of God's love and wrath which has resulted in our refusal to accept "propitiation" as a term to express what Christ did in relation to man's sin. His sacrifice was not made in order to ward off God's anger or to placate Him. (Nor, of course, can we think of any sacrifice of our own as doing either of these things.) Modern writers tend to stress the expiatory nature of Christ's sacrifice, that is, the covering of sin. Again, this is not easy to grasp. A central thing in it is the felt necessity to acknowledge before God His right to absolute obedience, because in sin there is a refusal to acknowledge this.

Almost all the writers we have discussed emphasize the costliness of forgiveness. The sacrifice was Jesus' offering of His own life to God; but since this is so, we are obliged to recognize that

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1 Jesus and His Sacrifice, p. 305.

this was a sacrifice made by God Himself. Out of this divine suffering, which is the suffering of perfect and inexorable love, comes true forgiveness. How can it be otherwise, if sin is the terrible thing that we conceive it to be, and if God's love is what it is? The Cross reveals in an unmistakable fashion the mind of God concerning sin. As we have noted before, the idea of a cheap forgiveness is not consistent with God's love or the moral nature of it. God cannot pass over our sins lightly as though He were simply indulgent and good-natured. The New Testament gives us no reason for believing such a thing. God is seen as dealing with sin by way of a sacrificial love. "God Commandeth His own love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."[1] "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."[2]

This view of the Atonement by which God deals with sin and reconciles men sees the Atonement as an objective reality. Over against this there is the view, held by Rashdall principally, that it is simply subjective. We are influenced and persuaded by the death of Christ, which however was not really necessary. Both His life and death reveal the love of God which awakens our love in response. The criticism of this offered by those who insist that the Atonement is objective is that it is not adequate. They do not deny the revelatory nature of the Atonement, but feel that it is not sufficient in itself as an account of the meaning of Christ's death. The movement of thought today is towards a theory which does justice to both the subjective and objective views. Certainly we cannot evade

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1 Romans 5:8. 2 2 Cor. 5:19

the fact that it is God's purpose that men should respond to what He has done, in penitence, obedience and faith. But the initiative lies with God. Even faith itself is not a purely human response since its character is determined by Christ Himself; in this sense it is the gift of God.

The subjective view tends to place a greater emphasis upon the incarnation than upon the Atonement. In the end we must have both. As Baillie writes, "more than the Incarnation was needed to awaken in us sinful men and women the sense of (the) paradox of grace. It is because the religion of the Incarnation became also the religion of the Atonement that it has been able to do this"[1]. This is wisely said, and is surely in keeping with the New Testament, which is the story, not of one or the other, but both.

Another feature of the treatment of the doctrine of the Atonement in these fifty years is the stress upon its scope, as bearing upon the whole world. We must again say that this stems from a deeper consideration of God's love. We cannot set any bounds to that love by suggesting that there are some persons for whom God has no concern. We are aware that God has created us as persons, living independently neither of Him nor of each other. There is justification then for believing that the redemption wrought in Christ is the redemption not only of persons but of the community or world of persons, and that it is part of God's purpose to create a new community. It is the Christian belief that the Church is this community. It is only too

1 God Was in Christ, p. 202.

obvious that the Church does not as yet include the entire world of persons, but this does not in any way alter God's purpose that it should, nor lead us to conclude that He will not achieve His purpose, although He may do so beyond this world. The cost of doing so may be infinite, but the Cross is the demonstration and proof of God's willingness to bear that cost.

Still another feature which has received some treatment, although it remains to be developed at greater length, is that of an eternal Atonement which, however, was also within history. The Christ on the Cross of Calvary was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world", and is yet "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world".

We have noted, too, a relationship between the reconciling work of Christ and eschatology, in which it has been affirmed that God's victory will be consummated in a realm beyond the present sinful order of this world. Such a view is not only entirely consistent with that of His love, but actually arises out of it, if we believe, as we do, that His love cannot be defeated. And this also is an affirmation of the New Testament.

To believe at all times and in all circumstances in the love of God is no easy thing. Yet when we rightly and deeply understand it, we can accept it and be at peace. It is not a matter of moral struggle or of intellectual belief. We do not reconcile ourselves to God, to our world, or to ourselves with our sin. God is the Reconciler. It is He who has revealed our sin for what it is, and has made plain His

reaction against it. But is is also God "who so loved the world that He sent His only Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish", and who, by the sacrifice of that Son has made it possible for us to know and to accept His forgiveness. We find ourselves pardoned and received into the fellowship of the Father when by faith we unite ourselves to Christ and are thus in spirit identified with His perfect sacrifice.

The last word about the Atonement has not yet been spoken. There is mystery and paradox here as elsewhere. But in the end, it is not a word that matters, but the experience of fellowship with Him whose love is eternal, and God in Christ has made this experience possible.

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