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A Study of the Historic Theories of the Atonement

William F. Bromley

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A STUDY OF THE HISTORIC THEORIES
OF THE ATONEMENT

-by-

William F. Bromley

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts
Department of Christian Doctrine

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CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	ii
Chapter	
I. THE ATONEMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT	1
Christ's Death in His Own Teaching	
The Witness of the Book of Acts	
The Atonement in the Writings of Paul	
The Death of Christ in First Peter	
Christ's Work in the Epistle to the Hebrews	
The Atonement in the Johannine Writings	
II. THE CLASSIC THEORY OF THE ATONEMENT	25
III. THE SATISFACTION THEORY OF THE ATONEMENT	43
IV. THE SUBJECTIVE OR EXEMPLARY THEORY	62
The Theory of Abelard	
The Example Theory of Socinus	
The Moral Influence Theory of Bushnell	
V. SOME MODERN THEORIES	81
The Vicarious Penitence Theory	
The Irvingian Theory	
The Eternal Atonement Theory	
More Objective Views	
VI. SOME CONCLUSIONS	100
BIBLIOGRAPHY	118

A STUDY OF THE HISTORIC THEORIES
OF THE ATONEMENT

INTRODUCTION

In one of his letters to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul sets forth as one of the basic facts of the primitive Gospel that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."¹ In the same passage, he asserts that it is by this Gospel that men are saved - that is, that there is a definite relationship between the death of Christ and the salvation of men. To define this relationship has been a task that has occupied the thinking of some of the greatest minds of the ages since the day that Jesus of Nazareth hung on the cross on Golgotha's hill. The writers of the New Testament deal with the question from a variety of viewpoints. Consequently, practically every theory of Atonement that has been developed during the centuries since the close of the apostolic age can find some Scriptural support.

In dealing with the various theories of Atonement, one need not feel obligated to embrace any one of them as containing the full statement of the truth, while rejecting all the others as being completely false. If, as the New Testament writers and the Christian church through the ages have believed, Jesus Christ was more than a mere Man - if the One who walked by the shores of Galilee bore

¹I Cor. 15:3

a unique relationship to the Eternal that can be claimed by no other - then His atoning death has an infinite significance, beyond the power of finite minds to fully fathom or exhaust. Therefore, one should approach the study of the Atonement, on the one hand, expecting to find truth in all the theories that have been developed in an effort to explain it, and on the other hand, with a conviction that after all that men have said upon the subject, much more remains that could be said, and doubtless shall be as future generations discover new light.

Concerning the question of the importance of this subject, J. K. Mozley writes:

Now the problem of atonement is of fundamental importance in religion. For if religion involves the idea of relationship between man and God,... then the problem of atonement is the problem of the way in which that relationship may still be regarded as existing, despite certain facts which appear to affect it adversely. There is a certain true relationship between man and God; something happens which destroys or appears to destroy that relationship; how can that relationship be restored? That is the problem.¹

This being so, it is not surprising that the idea of Atonement is found in some form in nearly every religion, ancient and modern. And it makes clear why the death of Christ, viewed as an act vitally connected with the relationship between God and man, holds the place of prominence which has been accorded to it in the Christian faith.

¹J.K. Mozley, The Doctrine of the Atonement, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 5

In the consideration of this subject, we shall begin with a consideration of the subject-matter which, at least in theory, lies at the foundation of all the views of Atonement that have been developed: the New Testament teaching. We shall then devote a chapter to each of the three main types of theories of the Atonement. These we may define as the classic or patristic theory, the satisfaction or Anselmic theory, and the subjective or exemplary theory. A fifth chapter will deal with some of the modern views that have been expounded by modern scholars. We shall endeavor in the concluding chapter to draw from our study some pertinent conclusions regarding the significance and the understanding of that bedrock truth of the Christian Gospel - that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

CHAPTER I

THE ATONEMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the consideration of the relative value of the life and the death of Jesus Christ in its relation to human salvation, one modern scholar concludes that "if either can be passed over in a brief statement of Christian facts, the death cannot be omitted and the life may."¹ In leading up to this statement, the author of it makes one pertinent point clear. Although it is by the sufferings and death of Christ that we are saved, it is not possible rightly to separate that death from the antecedent life. He had been prepared for the crowning act of redemption amidst the temptations and sufferings of His life. Theologians have distinguished between the "active obedience" and the "passive obedience" of our Lord, meaning by the former expression His life of perfect filial obedience to the Father, and by the latter His willingness to suffer the death of the cross. But this distinction is impossible to maintain. Both the active and passive elements of His obedience enter into His life at all of its various stages, and, therefore, like His robe, His ministry, even to its crowning act of dying, is "without seam, woven from

¹Robert Mackintosh, Historic Theories of Atonement, (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1920), p. 3

the top throughout."¹

It will be our task in this opening chapter to examine the New Testament Scriptures with a view to determining insofar as possible whether the importance that historic Christianity attaches to the death of Jesus Christ has a solid basis in the recorded sayings of our Lord Himself, and in the writings of those who interpreted Him to the first generation of Christians. This investigation will disclose several important facts. In the first place, the New Testament writers represent the Atonement of Christ under various forms. They also employ a number of figures of speech, no one of which, taken by itself, gives an adequate idea of the Atonement. In the second place, it will be found that there are ideas set forth that cannot be made to fit into any one of the various theories of Atonement that have arisen through the centuries. This is not to say dogmatically that the New Testament contains contradictory views of the significance and meaning of the death of Christ. These views may be complementary and supplementary rather than contradictory; for the Atonement is a truth which, like a great diamond, has many facets.

The inability to make New Testament statements fit into a well-ordered "systematic theology" of Atonement is due largely to two causes. One of these is the vitality of the New Testament message. The experience of first

¹John 19:23

century Christians of the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus, as well as the experience of men in every century, was not a stereotyped form which came alike to every heart and every mind. Not everyone has come to know Jesus Christ in the same way as Saul of Tarsus came to know Him. Therefore, as the way in which the New Testament writers interpreted their Lord and His saving work was dependent upon their individual experiences of His salvation, and as there was a great variety in those experiences, there was inevitably a variety in the expressions employed. Even so, these varying expressions may be properly regarded as differing in emphasis only. And amidst all the wealth of ideas and figures employed, there is a bond of unity that unites all the New Testament utterances concerning the death of Christ into at least one luminous truth: namely, that it is connected in some vital way with the salvation of men.

The other reason why all existing theories of Atonement fail to fit all the New Testament statements into their scheme is that most of these theories emphasize an element of truth and are defective in what they omit rather than in what they assert. In other words, to employ a familiar courtroom expression, they tell "the truth" but not "the whole truth." In a very real sense, the most brilliant of men are very much like a high school student who by dipping a teaspoonful of water out of the ocean and examining it under a microscope seeks to

set forth a statement describing the entire vast expanse of the sea with its depths and its eddies. And so, doubtless, it will always be as reverent minds seek to apprehend ever more fully all the depths to be found in Him who said, "I am the...Truth."¹

The study of New Testament statements concerning the death of Christ will also reveal the profound influence of the Old Testament Scriptures in the thinking of both our Lord and His early followers. Marcion may appear in his time with his theory of the Demiurge and his antithesis regarding the God of creation and the God of redemption; but to Christ and Paul and Peter and John, as well as to the writer of Hebrews, the God who in the last times spoke to men by His Son is the same God who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past unto the fathers by the prophets.² Although the Christian faith, like new wine poured into the old wineskins, by its very nature must burst asunder the narrow bonds of Judaism and flow forth to all mankind, it is nevertheless eternally in debt to the Hebrew tradition of which it was regarded as not the destruction but the fulfillment.

Finally, the careful analysis of New Testament passages bearing on the Atonement will reveal how contrary to the facts is the oft-heard assertion that we today, like the apostles, ought to preach the "fact" rather than the

¹John 14:6

²Hebrews 1:1

"theory" of Atonement: that is, that salvation through the blood of Christ is a fact to be believed, not understood. Even apart from the teaching of the New Testament, to attempt to exclude all meaning from the death of Christ is absurd. Dr. Mullins illuminates this point in the following words:

No moral or spiritual fact can be a fact for an intelligent being without a meaning. The fact does not become a fact for intelligence apart from its meaning. A dose of medicine given to relieve physical pain might do its work without a grasp of its meaning to the patient. But in the higher realm of spirit fact and meaning are inseparable. Apart from their meaning religious facts become mere magical agencies.¹

But that Jesus Christ and those who loved and followed Him should be content to accept His shameful death as a mere fact and make no attempt to explain or understand it is utterly unthinkable. The first generation of Christians wrestled with the "why" and the "how" of the Atonement; and succeeding generations have rightfully followed in its wake.

Christ's Death in His Own Teaching

We shall begin with the consideration of our Lord's own thought concerning His death as revealed in sayings ascribed to Him in the Gospel narratives. At the very outset of this investigation, we come face to face with the fascinating question as to whether or not Christ at the beginning of His public ministry, or prior thereto, anticipated His rejection and death as the culmination of

¹E.Y. Mullins, The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression, (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1948), p. 305

His work and the means by which His mission was to be brought to a successful conclusion. Men of broad and reverent scholarship are arrayed on each side in the controversy over this problem. Those who hold that the Lord began His ministry with no expectation of His rejection can point to strong lines of evidence for their contention. Dr. Mackintosh sees our supreme reason for believing that Christ began His ministry without any certainty of the cross in the fact that He offered the Gospel of divine mercy to His own people. He raises the question, to which a negative answer is regarded as highly probable, whether the opportunity to embrace the goodness and grace of God could have been genuinely presented to the Jews had Christ foreseen from the first His rejection. He sees in much of our Lord's early teaching a tone of joyful confidence which is inconsistent with any a priori assumption that His ministry would produce the reaction which it did. He concludes that "Jesus began His work desiring and expecting to be welcomed by His own people whom He so dearly loved."¹

Further evidence to strengthen the argument of those holding to the above position may be found in the fact that it was at a somewhat late point in the Gospel story, viz., after the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi, that Jesus began to teach His disciples about His approaching death. The exception to this is found in

¹Historic Theories of Atonement, (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1920), p. 46

our Lord's words about the sons of the bride-chamber, placed early in the tradition of our Gospels by both Matthew and Luke, and undoubtedly predicting a tragic death.¹ In reply to the question by some of the disciples of John the Baptist, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but Thy disciples fast not?" Jesus replies that the children of the bride-chamber cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, but that the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. Dr. Mackintosh has four possible solutions to the problem that this saying presents: that it is either displaced, or an allegorizing gloss, or the passing apprehension of a possible sorrowful interruption of bridal joy, or conditional and not absolute.² Any of these solutions makes the saying compatible with the idea that Jesus began His work expecting to be welcomed and accepted.

The opposing viewpoint, which is ably defended by Dr. Denney, holds that from at least the beginning of His public ministry our Lord knew that His mission was to be accomplished through rejection, suffering, and death. Denney sees in the record of the baptism, with the pronouncement of the voice from heaven, proof that the Messianic consciousness in Jesus from the very beginning was one with the consciousness of the Servant of the Lord. A voice

¹Matthew 9:14-15

²Historic Theories of Atonement, (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1920), p. 46

from heaven means not a voice from the clouds, but a voice from God, speaking in familiar Old Testament words, mediated through psalm and prophecy.

It is through the absorption of Old Testament Scripture that Jesus comes to the consciousness of what He is; and the Scriptures which He uses to convey His experience to the disciples are the second Psalm, and the forty-second chapter of Isaiah.¹

Thus, according to this view, in the mind of Jesus the King and Son of the Psalmist is at the same time the Servant of Jehovah of the Prophet. The evidence indicates that Jesus combined beforehand two lines of anticipation which seem at first glance so inconsistent with each other, and that therefore from the very beginning of His public work the sense of something tragic in His destiny, which might become definite in form only with time, but in substance was sure, was present to the mind of Jesus. The record of the temptation, in which the Christ, seeing the two paths that lie before Him, chooses that which He knows will set Him in irreconcilable antagonism to the hopes and expectations of those to whom He is to appeal, is regarded as further evidence that our Lord began His ministry with the assurance that the Suffering Servant was to be an element in His Messianic calling.²

One statement ascribed to Christ prior to Peter's great confession indicates that He saw in the experience of Jonah a prophecy of His coming death and resurrection.

¹James Denney, The Death of Christ, (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), p. 10

²Ibid., pp. 12-13

In response to the Pharisees' request that He give them a sign, Jesus replies that to an evil and adulterous generation no sign should be given save the sign of the prophet Jonah: that as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so should the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.¹ This allusion of our Lord to His death does nothing toward carrying us into the understanding of it. It suggests that the victory of Christ lies beyond His death. Some scholars believe that Jonah represents the nation of Israel emerging as though by a miracle from the Exile in order to carry out its mission to the world, and that it is therefore highly fitting that the allegory of the death and resurrection of the nation should be also the allegory of the death and resurrection of the nation's true Representative.²

The beginning of our Lord's explicit teaching concerning His coming death is placed at the same point by all the synoptics: following immediately upon Peter's great confession of Him as the Christ.³ "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."⁴ The Gospel records indicate that in a real sense a new epoch in our Lord's

¹Matthew 12:38-40

²James Denney, The Death of Christ, (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), p. 18

³Matthew 16:13-21

⁴Matthew 16:21

ministry had begun. His discourses are not now so much to the multitudes as to the twelve. His method is no longer so much the preaching of the Kingdom as teaching concerning Himself, particularly His death. The synoptics are unanimous in emphasizing the imperative note in His words: He must go up to Jerusalem and die. What is the meaning of this "must?" In what way did Christ regard His death as such an urgent necessity? Two answers are given, which are not mutually exclusive, and both of which probably set forth truth.

In the first place, the "must" may be one of outward constraint: His death was inevitable. One with the spiritual insight of Jesus could scarcely have failed to read the signs of the times. Doubtless in the martyrdom of John the Baptist He perceived a sure indication of what lay in store for Himself. He must have seen in the mounting opposition and hostility of the forces arrayed against Him that they were only waiting their time, which was sure to come sooner or later. Some have said that Jesus came thus to see that His death was inevitable, and that He reconciled Himself to it by interpreting it as something which properly entered into His work and contributed to its success. Such an assertion, however, would not seem to be justified in the light of the facts presented in the Gospels.

The second answer finds in the "must" an inward constraint: His death was indispensable. As Dr. Denney

so aptly points out,

The inward necessity which Jesus recognized for His death was not simply the moral solution which He had discovered for the fatal situation in which He found Himself. An inward necessity is identical with the will of God, and the will of God for Jesus is expressed, not primarily in outward conditions, but in that Scripture which is for Him the word of God.¹

If it be true that our Lord found Himself foreshadowed in the forty-second chapter of Isaiah and other Servant passages, it is incredible that He should fail to apply to Himself Isaiah liii and Psalm xxii. This being the case, while it may be admitted that circumstances made Christ's death inevitable, the divine necessity for a career of suffering and death is deduced not from the malignant necessities by which He is encompassed, but from an inward compulsion: "All things must be fulfilled, which were written...concerning Me."²

Perhaps the first of the two outstanding statements of our Lord which give the clearest insight into His own thought of His approaching death is found in the context which records the ambitious request of James and John, and Jesus' response to that request. In this passage, after referring to His coming death as a cup which He shall drink of and a baptism that He is baptized with, He tells the ten disciples, angry with their two ambitious brethren, that the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a

¹James Denney, The Death of Christ, (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), p. 22

²Luke 24:44

ransom for many.¹ Is it possible to grasp our Lord's meaning - to know what was in His mind when He spoke of His life being given as a ransom?

Here once again, we may doubtless find the most satisfying explanation of His thought by using as the key Jesus' thorough acquaintance with the Old Testament Scriptures. The phrase "and give His life a ransom for many" may include an echo of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, where the Suffering Servant is said to bear the sins of many;² but it is more likely indebted chiefly to the teaching of the forty-ninth Psalm regarding ransom from death.³ The thirty-third chapter of Job may also furnish a real clue to the mind of Christ.⁴ If this be true, we may regard our Lord's saying in the passage under consideration as showing that He regards the lives of the many as being somehow under forfeit, and that His own life was the ransom price by which those to whom these forfeited lives belonged might obtain them again.

There is to be found in the ransom saying no certain clue as to whom the ransom price was to be paid. There is not the slightest suggestion that it was paid to the devil. If the idea that Jesus' saying is shaped by the forty-ninth Psalm may be pressed to such an extent, the ransom spoken of must be conceived as given to God. In a suggestion provocative of serious consideration,

¹Matthew 20:20-28

²Isaiah 53:12

³Psalm 49:7

⁴Job 33:23-24

Dr. Mackintosh writes:

It is not easy to say what are the implications of Christ's words. If we are pressed to define these more sharply, we might say that the moral order of the universe receives the price, and therefore ultimately God Himself receives it, since by Him the moral order is shaped and upheld.¹

As its author readily acknowledges, these are characteristically modern expressions, and it would be hard to know how the early Christian mind would have stated such a thought.

Further insight into the mind of Christ regarding His death is to be found in the passages which contain the sayings at the Last Supper, especially the words concerning the Cup. The evidence is very strong at this point that Jesus regarded His death as sacrificial, and connected in some way with the remission of sins. Three Old Testament references are suggested by the words "My blood of the covenant:" the record of the covenant-sacrifice in Exodus xxiv; the New Covenant passage of Jeremiah xxxi., where forgiveness is emphasized as the new covenant's central glory; and Zechariah ix. 11. The latter passage is most likely the starting-point of Christ's thought. If this be correct, it would seem that here at least Jesus is thinking of deliverance from bondage. By His death He is to rescue those who are in slavery to the Evil One, although it should be observed that there is no thought of a "transaction" for the benefit of that evil power.

Much more could be said upon the subject of our Lord's

¹Robert Mackintosh, Historic Theories of Atonement, (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1920), p. 52

own thought of His death. The agony in Gethsemane and the cry of desertion on the cross doubtless throw more light upon this sacred matter. But the material we have examined would seem to justify the following conclusions: (1) that Jesus, at whatever point in His ministry the consciousness came, regarded His calling as Messianic, and realized that He was to fulfill that calling through a program of suffering as set forth in the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the Servant; (2) that His death was therefore not only inevitable because of outward circumstances, but indispensable because of an inward compulsion, identical with the will of God, to fulfill His divinely-appointed ministry; and (3) that His death was to be the crowning act of His service to mankind, by which many forfeited lives were to be ransomed and the sins of many to be remitted.

The Witness of the Book of Acts

The importance of the book of Acts as a witness to the earliest apostolic preaching with reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus is widely recognized. Although it is a relatively late writing, it shows strong evidence of being based on early sources. It must be acknowledged that it contains no theory of Atonement. There are numerous isolated texts that might be examined for the light they give on the understanding of Christ's death in the primitive Christian community; but most of

the ideas set forth in these texts may be found in three important passages: Peter's Sermons in the second and third chapters, and Paul's sermon in the thirteenth chapter.

In Peter's Pentecostal sermon, Christ's death is set forth as the fulfillment of a divine purpose. He was "delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."¹ Why Jesus was "delivered up" is not explained. Rather, as is the case so uniformly in the earliest apostolic preaching, the resurrection and exaltation of our Lord are emphasized. The humiliation accomplished in death is regarded as a stage in a wider purpose. Dr. Vincent Taylor summarizes the thought of this passage as follows:

Whatever the work wrought in death may be, it is associated with the present activity of Jesus "at the right hand of God", and especially with the outpouring of the Spirit. Through death He has passed to a position of superhuman dignity: "God hath made Him both Lord and Christ." Already in this discourse it is clear that the dominating conception is that of the Servant, humiliated in death and exalted by God in the fulfillment of His supreme service for men. This claim is valid even though the Servant has not yet been mentioned.²

In Peter's second sermon, the reference to the Servant is explicit. Jesus is said to have fulfilled "the things which God foreshadowed by the mouth of all the prophets." The facts of who He is and what He does are made the basis for the exhortation to repentance found in this discourse. This implies a close connection between

¹Acts 2:23

²Vincent Taylor, The Atonement in New Testament Teaching, (London: The Epworth Press, n.d.), p. 18

the suffering and service of Jesus and the facts of human sin. A hint of the idea upon which later subjective theories of the Atonement have been built may be found in the saying that God sent His Son to bless His people in turning them away from their iniquities.¹ This would seem to indicate that a "moral influence" is regarded as at least a part of the divine purpose in the death of Christ.

In Paul's sermon in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia, Christ is presented as "Saviour." He is identified with the Messianic Son of the second Psalm. It is through Him that remission of sins is proclaimed. Through belief in Him everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. The latter idea is probably "Forgiveness for everything - which the Law never offered."² The basis of the proffered blessing is once again seen to be the Lord's death, and particularly His resurrection.

One other important witness to primitive thought and belief may be found in Paul's address to the Ephesian elders, in his reference to "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."³ Although this thought is decidedly Pauline, it is not exclusively so. It is probably an element in the common Christian belief which Paul shared with others in the primitive community. It clearly bears a sacrificial meaning. It decidedly points

¹Acts 3:26

²Vincent Taylor, The Atonement in New Testament Teaching, (London: The Epworth Press, n.d.), p. 20

³Acts 20:28

to an objective element in the Atonement. It plainly implies that the death of Christ must be regarded as more than an act calculated to move men to repentance. It reveals that there is involved in human redemption a cost to God; and the death of Christ is the price paid.

In summary, the book of Acts makes it clear that the earliest preaching is closely related to the teaching of Jesus. The emphasis in both is upon the fact that the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord were parts of a divine plan. Jesus referred to Himself as the Stone which the builders rejected;¹ and the apostles added to this that the Stone was made Head of the corner, in whose name alone salvation was to be found.² Jesus speaks of His blood as being shed for the remission of sins; the apostles offer the remission thus procured to all who believe on Him. It is true that the early preaching recorded in the Acts emphasizes the resurrection and exaltation of Christ rather than His death. It does not follow from this that the crucifixion is regarded as of but minor importance. Rather, it is the resurrection and exaltation of our Lord that give abiding value to His life and death, and emphasize the dignity of His Person, upon the basis of which men are called to repentance and faith in Him.

The Atonement in the Writings of Paul

To state that in the letters of Paul the death of Christ occupies the central place is merely to express

¹Matthew 21:42

²Acts 4:11-12

that which must be obvious to the one who reads these letters with an unprejudiced mind. To identify the thinking of Paul with any one theory of Atonement is an utter impossibility. As Mozley expresses it,

When we turn from the primitive Community to the doctrine of St. Paul, we find ourselves in the presence of conceptions of such variety and richness attached to the death of Christ that we are in constant danger either of paying too much attention to dialectical minutiae or of overlooking some point which may appear trivial to us, but which, for the Apostle, was of the highest consideration.¹

Yet, in spite of the profundity of his thought, there is a certain simplicity about Paul, and the secret of that simplicity lies in the fact that his thought never moves far from its center, which is the Cross. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"² is the vivid expression of what the Atonement meant in the life of this man who found in that cross the transforming power that made him one of the greatest Christians of all times.

To deal in a brief survey with all of Paul's thought concerning the significance of Christ's death is not possible, but we shall note some of its most significant features. In the great doctrinal epistle to the Romans, he devotes the greater portion of the first three chapters to showing the necessity for redemption in the sinfulness of men, both Jew and Gentile. Conscience and law have both failed to make man righteous before God. All the

¹J.K. Mozley, The Doctrine of the Atonement, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), pp. 65-66

²Gal. 6:14

world is guilty before Him.¹ Man's plight, resulting in his desperate need for salvation, is approached from another angle in the fifth chapter of the Roman letter, where Paul speaks of the entrance of sin into the world, and death by sin, through the disobedience of Adam.² All of this results in an enmity between God and man, giving rise to the need for one of the great blessings secured through the cross - reconciliation. It cannot be maintained by any fair method of exegesis that man alone needs to be reconciled in the thinking of Paul. The expression, "the wrath of God" is by no means uncommon in his writings.³ Therefore, the problem that is met in the death of Christ is that of man's sin, and the inevitable reaction of a holy God toward that sin.

How the death of Christ brings about reconciliation and salvation for the sinner is approached from a great variety of angles in the Pauline letters. It is regarded as a propitiation.⁴ Christ is said to have been made sin for us;⁵ and again, to have been made a curse for us.⁶ His blood - one of Paul's most widely-used expressions - is said to have obtained redemption and forgiveness,⁷ peace,⁸ and justification.⁹ It scarcely need be said that Paul has left unanswered many questions that arise in the mind concerning the exact way in which the death of

¹Rom. 3:19

²Rom. 5:12

³Rom. 1:18

⁴Rom. 3:25

⁵II Cor. 5:21

⁶Gal. 3:13

⁷Eph. 1:7

⁸Col. 1:20

⁹Rom. 5:9

Christ is to be related to the blessings which flow from it. There is for St. Paul a penal element in the cross - a sense in which Christ bore somehow in His suffering the penalty of human sin. The idea of substitution, as Mozley says, is "embedded in St. Paul's writings."¹ The death of Christ is regarded by Paul as the great revelation of God's love for sinners;² but to make such an idea the sum and substance of his doctrine of Atonement is to deal with his thought in a decidedly partial manner. Another conclusion that a careful reading of the Pauline letters necessitates is that the Atonement has both its objective and subjective elements. It is a work of God for man, and it must, to be effective, produce a response in man.

The preceding considerations will serve adequately our purpose in the present chapter, which is not to fit the teachings of Paul or any other New Testament writer into a concise theory of Atonement, but to show that in the thinking of the Apostle to the Gentiles, the death of the Son of God on the cross was the heart of the Gospel which he preached with such power, as well as the dynamic of his unparalleled life of service, and the means by which the Infinite blessings of God were made available by faith to all who would believe. To Paul, every stream of blessing has its rise at Calvary. All of the radiant hope that shines forth in his writings has its sole ground in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹J.K. Mozley, The Doctrine of the Atonement, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 73

²Rom. 5:8

The Death of Christ in First Peter

The First Epistle of Peter contains four great passages dealing with the significance of the death of Christ. In the second verse of the opening chapter, he speaks of Christians as elect through the foreknowledge of the Father and sanctification of the Spirit "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."¹ In the eighteenth verse of the same chapter, the redemption of believers from their former vain manner of life is ascribed to the precious blood of Christ, the spotless Lamb.² In the twenty-fourth verse of the second chapter, it is said that Christ "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, might live unto righteousness."³ And in the eighteenth verse of the third chapter, we are told that Christ suffered once for our sins - the just for the unjust - that He might bring us to God.⁴ These passages, taken together in their obvious sense, indicate that to Peter, as to Paul, Christ stood in our place, and endured in our interest something which must be done and endured in order that we might enjoy the blessings of salvation. These passages also indicate the strong influence of the Old Testament sacrificial system, and the prophecy in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

Christ's Work in the Epistle to the Hebrews

The Epistle to the Hebrews is devoted more fully to

¹I Peter 1:2

²I Peter 1:18-19

³I Peter 2:24

⁴I Peter 3:18

the discussion of the work of Christ than is any other New Testament book. It is unique among the New Testament writings in setting forth the idea that the work of Christ is the substance of which the Old Testament priesthood and ritual were the shadow. It emphasizes in a striking manner the finality of the one sacrifice. It is said that Christ "by Himself purged our sins;¹ that He by the grace of God tasted death for every man;² that He offered one sacrifice for sins forever;³ and that by that one offering "He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.⁴ The writer of Hebrews adds an element that is not found in the writings of Paul, but is alluded to in the First Epistle of John⁵, when he speaks of the present ministry of intercession on our behalf of our great High Priest who has brought His own blood into the true holy of holies.⁶

The Atonement in the Johannine Writings

The last source from which we may derive a conception of the New Testament understanding of the death of Christ is the Johannine writings. In the Revelation, Christ is spoken of as the Lamb no fewer than twenty-nine times. This title, going back as it does to the suffering Servant of Isaiah fifty-three and possibly to the Passover Lamb as well, is constituted by the thought of suffering and death. In the Gospel of John and his First Epistle, there is to be

¹Heb. 1:3

²Heb. 2:9

³Heb. 10:14

⁴Heb. 10:14

⁵I John 2:1

⁶Heb. 7:25

found no real contradiction to Paul's doctrine of the death of Christ, but only a difference in emphasis.

There is a significance in the self-revelation of the incarnate Son of God through His life and words as well as through His death that is not stressed by Paul. Yet for all of that, in John's gospel Christ is the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world;"¹ and He must be lifted up even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, that men may have eternal life.² It is expedient that one man should die for the people;³ and the corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die in order to bring forth fruit.⁴ And in the epistle, it is the blood of Jesus Christ His Son that cleanseth us from all sin,⁵ and He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.⁶ Although in the latter passage the reference is to Christ Himself, it is most natural to regard the propitiation as flowing from Christ in His death.

The brief survey we have completed of the thought of Christ and His earliest followers regarding His death would seem to clearly justify the great significance that has been attached to it by each succeeding generation of Christians. Strikingly absent from the New Testament writings is the slightest hint that the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth were unforeseen tragedies unrelated to the purpose of God. It is true that apologetic

¹John 1:29

²John 3:14-15

³John 11:50

⁴John 12:24

⁵I John 1:7

⁶I John 2:2

needs impelled the Apostles to find in the death of their Master the eternal purpose, and to connect it with the forgiveness of sins. But this is no adequate explanation of something so living and dynamic as the Christian Gospel. It must be connected with the inner experience of peace and joy and the assurance of forgiveness which were so characteristic of the members of the early Church. And the words of our Lord Himself, as well as the writings of those who experienced the power of His saving grace, show that the death of Jesus Christ for our sins is one of the great pillars of the faith once delivered.

It would be difficult to find in so few words a finer statement than that with which Dr. Mozley concludes his discussion of the New Testament interpretation of the death of Christ. He writes:

Through the New Testament runs one mighty thought: Christ died for our sins; He bore what we should have borne; He did for us what we could not have done for ourselves; He did for God that which was God's good pleasure. Apart from this there is no New Testament doctrine of salvation.¹

¹J.K. Mozley, The Doctrine of the Atonement, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 93

CHAPTER II

THE CLASSIC THEORY OF THE ATONEMENT

Until recent years, it has been the traditional view of the history of the idea of the Atonement that the early church had no developed doctrine, and that the contributions of the patristic period to theology lie in another direction. The interest during the latter period was more concerned with the question of the Person of Christ and the nature of the Trinity than with the interpretation of His death. The real beginnings of a thought-out doctrine of the Atonement, according to the traditional view, are not to be found until Anselm of Canterbury. Anselm's doctrine, regarded as the objective view of the Atonement, and the view associated with Abelard, which may be called the subjective theory, have been considered the two types, each with several modified forms, which have struggled to dominate the thinking of Christendom during the last several centuries.

Some of today's outstanding scholars in this field have come to regard this traditional account as being unsatisfactory. One such scholar is Dr. Gustaf Aulén, Professor of Systematic Theology in the University of Lund, Sweden. In his historical study of the doctrine of the Atonement, this distinguished professor, who is regarded

as the foremost dogmatic theologian of the Swedish Church, writes of the generally accepted view:

My work on the history of Christian doctrine has led me to an ever-deepening conviction that the traditional account of the history of the idea of the Atonement is in need of thorough revision. The subject has, indeed, received a large share of attention at the hands of theologians; yet it has been in many important respects seriously misinterpreted. It is in the hope of making some contribution to this earnestly needed revision that this work has been undertaken.¹

The important and original contribution of this work is its strong delineation of that view of the Atonement which is summed up in such phrases as "Christus Victor" and "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." This view, in Dr. Aulén's thinking, sets the Incarnation in direct connection with the Atonement, and proclaims that it is God Himself who in Christ has delivered mankind from the power of evil. Concerning it, he writes:

This type of view may be described provisionally as the "dramatic." Its central theme is the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ - Christus Victor - fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the "tyrants" under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself.²

Although Dr. Aulén exercises a scholarly restraint, it is clearly apparent that he regards the views of the Greek fathers concerning the nature of the Atonement as not only a well-defined system rather than the raw materials out of which later theories were developed, but also

¹Gustaf Aulén, Christus Victor, trans. by A. G. Herbert, (London: Society of the Sacred Mission, 1950), p. 17

²Ibid., p. 20

as the viewpoint of the New Testament and the early church. He attempts to see behind the sometimes crude and - to the modern mind - often revolting figures employed to set forth the ransom theory the underlying truth: that the powers of evil, whether regarded impersonally as mortality or death, or personified in the devil, have a rightful claim upon man, and that God is therefore bound to effect man's rescue not by sheer power, but by actually paying a ransom price to the hostile forces. He regards both the Anselmic and subjective theories as departures from the characteristic New Testament viewpoint, and sees in Luther's doctrine of Atonement the revival of the Biblical-patristic position, which was unfortunately not followed by Lutheran theologians. It may be genuinely hoped that his pioneering work may lead to a re-study and re-evaluation of the patristic theologians, resulting in a deepened appreciation of their contribution to the understanding of the work of our Lord.

To examine the writings of a considerable number of the Greek fathers would involve a procedure that would lead astray from our main purpose of seeking to grasp the leading views of Atonement as set forth in the writings of a few whose ideas may be regarded in a general sense as characteristic. We therefore pass by several writers of recognized high quality to devote our study to two men who were outstanding in the formulation of the classic idea of the Atonement - Irenaeus and Athanasius. In so doing, it

is fitting that, before proceeding to this task, it should be acknowledged that the idea of the death of Christ as a ransom paid to the devil in exchange for the souls of men, forfeited by sin, was first clearly taught by Origen. To him belongs the credit for this widely-held explanation of the question "to whom was the ransom paid?"

Irenaeus asks the question, "For what purpose did Christ come down from heaven?" and answers, "That He might destroy sin, overcome death, and give life to man."¹ He elaborates on this in the following passage:

Man had been created by God that he might have life. If now, having lost life, and having been harmed by the serpent, he were not to return to life, but were to be wholly abandoned to death, then God would have been defeated, and the malice of the serpent would have overcome God's will. But since God is both invincible and magnanimous, He showed His magnanimity in correcting man, and in proving all men, as we have said; but through the Second Man He bound the strong one, and spoiled his goods, and annihilated death, bringing life to man who had become subject to death. For Adam had become the devil's possession, and the devil held him under his power, by having wrongfully practised deceit upon him, and by the offer of immortality made him subject to death. For by promising that they should be as gods, which did not lie in his power, he worked death in them. Wherefore he who had taken man captive was himself taken captive by God, and man who had been taken captive was set free from the bondage of condemnation.²

The main idea set forth in this passage is clear. The work of Christ is regarded first and foremost as a victory over the powers which hold mankind in bondage:

¹Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses, III., 18. 7, quoted in Gustaf Aulén, Christus Victor, trans. by A. G. Herbert, (London: Society of the Sacred Mission, 1950), p. 35

²Adversus Haereses, III., 23. 1, quoted in Ibid., pp. 35-36

sin, death, and the devil. These are objective powers, whose rule is brought to an end, and from whose dominion men are set free, through the victory of Christ. It is apparent from the study of Irenaeus that the Incarnation is emphasized in his theology rather than the Atonement; but, as Dr. Aulén points out,

It is no more true to say that all depends on the Incarnation apart from the redemptive work than it would be to make all depend on the work apart from the Incarnation. To make an opposition between the two is altogether to miss the point. In Irenaeus' thought, the Incarnation is the necessary preliminary to the atoning work, because only God is able to overcome the powers which hold man in bondage, and man is helpless... Thus the answer which Irenaeus gives to the question "Cur Deus homo?" is simple and transparently clear; there is no trace of the cleavage between Incarnation and Atonement which appears in Anselm.¹

The most comprehensive theological idea of Irenaeus is the "recapitulatio" - the restoring and the perfecting of the creation. The central element in this conception is the Divine victory accomplished in Christ. This recapitulation does not end with Christ's triumph over the hostile powers which had held mankind in bondage, but continues in the work of the Spirit in the Church. This point shows that Irenaeus' doctrine of salvation is not so naturalistic as some have supposed. He writes:

They that fear God, and believe in the advent of His Son, and by faith establish in their hearts the Spirit of God, such are justly called men, and spiritual, and alive unto God, who have the Spirit of the Father, who cleanses man and exalts him to the life of God.²

¹Christus Victor, trans. by A.G. Herbert, (London: Society of the Sacred Mission, 1950), pp. 36-37

²Adversus Haereses, V., 9. 2, quoted in Ibid., p. 38

It has been widely asserted that Irenaeus, in common with other Eastern theologians, places little emphasis upon sin, for the reason that salvation is regarded as a bestowal of life rather than of forgiveness, and as a victory over mortality rather than over sin. In the opinion of Dr. Aulén, this assertion is quite misleading. He quotes from another writer a discussion, written primarily with reference to the Eastern Church in general, which may be applied equally to Irenaeus:

Salvation from what? From sin or from death? Western theologians like to put this contrast, and claim that the Orthodox put death in the foreground instead of sin. But this is scarcely true. Orthodoxy is quite inclined, it is true, to conceive of original sin as the result of the first sin, and death as the reward of sins; yet, as has been said, empirically one is not separated from the other; where sin is, there is death also, and vice versa... To the Orthodox the question "Why salvation?" is very clear: in order to be free from sin and death, in order to break down the wall of partition between God and men, to enter into inner and complete communion with God, to be at one with Him.¹

This close association of sin and death is characteristic of Irenaeus, and therefore there can be in his teaching no essential opposition between the two.

Though the idea of the triumph of Christ over the devil is found frequently in his works, it is not emphasized by Irenaeus as it is with some of the later Greek fathers. Hints of the idea of the deception of the devil may be found. But more prominent is the element of justice in Christ's victory over the devil. In a characteristic passage, he writes:

¹Stephen Zankow, Das orthodoxe Christentum des Ostens, trans. by Donald A. Lowrie, (London: 1929), pp. 49-50, quoted in Ibid., p. 39

He who is the almighty Word, and true man, in redeeming us reasonably, by His blood, gave Himself as the ransom for those who had been carried into captivity. And though the apostasy had gained its dominion over us unjustly, and, when we belonged by nature to almighty God, had snatched us away contrary to nature and made us its own disciples, the Word of God, who is mighty in all things, and in nowise lacking in the justice which is His, behaved with justice even towards the apostasy itself; and He redeemed that which was His own, not by violence (as the apostasy had by violence gained dominion over us at the first, insatiably snatching that which was not its own), but by persuasion, as it was fitting for God to gain His purpose by persuasion and not by use of violence; that so the ancient creation of God might be saved from perishing, without any infringement of justice.¹

This statement expresses the righteousness of God's act of redemption from two different angles. In the first place, the devil is a usurper, whose claim upon mankind was obtained by fraud and violence, and should therefore justly be defeated and driven out. But, in the second place, the apostasy of mankind involves guilt, and man deserves to lie under the devil's power. Therefore God deals according to justice even with the devil, and Christ gives Himself as a ransom paid to the devil for man's deliverance.

The second of the Greek fathers to whom we shall give some attention as making an outstanding contribution to the classic idea of the Atonement, particularly through his work "De Incarnatione Verbi Dei," is Athanasius. The central ideas found in Irenaeus reoccur in his teaching, but he has his own distinctive approach to the problems discussed.

¹Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses, IV., 41. 2, quoted in Ibid., p. 43

Basically, we may say that the answer to the question as to why the Word of God became incarnate is to be found as the solution to a dilemma, in the thinking of Athanasius. In other words, the Incarnation was made necessary by the fall. Man, created in the image of his Creator, had transgressed the commandment of God, thus permitting the entrance of sin and death into the world. Mankind was sinking further and further into the bondage and corruption that resulted from his fall. What, then, was to be done? Apart from the work of redemption through the Incarnation, only two equally unthinkable courses were open. God might let men live as though the fall had never taken place. But this would involve His being untrue to His own word, for He had declared that for sin man must die. Or, He might permit that which had once shared in the being of the Word to sink again into non-existence through corruption.

All things were becoming corrupt: what was God's goodness to do? Suffer corruption to reign over them? Why then was man created? For weakness would be attributed to God if His work failed under His very eyes...Therefore man could not be left in corruption.¹

Athanasius then proceeds to a problem which has been occupying the thinking of many theologians in every age. The question, briefly stated, is why God cannot restore mankind to life by simply requiring repentance. Athanasius gives the following answer: The consistency of God's essential attributes must not be sacrificed for man's profit. To demand repentance for the transgression would merely cause

¹Athanasius, De Incarnatione Verbi Dei, trans. by T. H. Bindley, (London: Religious Tract Society, n.d.), p. 23

cessation from sin; it would neither satisfy the law that demanded death, nor amend a fallen nature. This answer, it may be noted in passing, indicates the absence of any such doctrine of total depravity as that which later became so prominent in the theology of Augustine and Calvin. The possibility of repentance or cessation from sin does not exist in fallen nature, according to the later doctrine. But such does not seem to be the case in the thinking of Athanasius.

Now, if corruption had not followed from sin, repentance might have availed. But since death and corruption had been incurred, men had lost the grace of God's image, and stood in need of re-creation by their Creator, the Word Himself. No one but the Creator could re-create. He alone could worthily guard the consistency of God's essential attributes. He alone could re-create everything. He alone could satisfy the demands of the law by suffering for all. So the eternal Word took a body similar to ours, prepared in the womb of a pure and spotless virgin, and offered this body as a sacrifice on behalf of all. By this offering we are restored to incorruption, and death is abolished forever by His resurrection.

Athanasius then goes on to show how we are freed from death by the Incarnation. And the terminology that he employs cuts away any ground for the idea that the Incarnation itself, apart from the Atonement, is the significant feature of his theory. His argument runs thus: The

Word perceived that death could be abolished only by the death of all. Being incapable of death Himself, He took a body capable of death, and in it made a sufficient death for all. He, by His death, satisfied all that was required by virtue of the fact that all are united with Him; and because of our solidarity with Him and with one another we are all clothed with His immortality, and death no longer has any power over us. As the presence of an emperor in a city preserves it from attack, so the presence of the Word in human nature has put an end to the plots of our enemies and the corruption of death. Two characteristic thoughts stand out in this argument: the idea of the Atonement as consisting primarily in the victory of Christ over the hostile powers which held mankind in bondage, and the conception of Christ's unity with the race as being the outstanding feature of His saving work. While it would be going too far to say that the Saviour's death is only an incidental part of Athanasius' theory of Atonement, it is true that to him the death of Christ is not the sole reason for the Incarnation, but rather its value lies chiefly in the fact that it completes the identification of the Word with the race.

Another problem with which Athanasius deals at some length is the question as to why Christ must die. He asks first why He did not choose to die privately and in a more honorable way, and answers that He, being the Life and Strength, could not die from sickness or weakness. As to

why He must die at all, it is because it was for that very reason that He came, and by His death comes our resurrection. Further, Athanasius asks why Christ died at the hands of others, and tells us that as He came to die for mankind, His death ought to come from others, and not from Himself. In Athanasius' view, although the body of Christ was mortal, by its union with the Word it was rendered incapable of natural death; therefore, His death must be either self-inflicted or brought about by others. His death must be a public death before witnesses because this was necessary for the assurance of the doctrine of the resurrection. He did not choose the manner of His death, because it might have been said, had He done so, that He had power only over the particular form of death which He should have chosen.

The three reasons given for the appropriateness of the cross as the means of Christ's death afford an insight into Athanasius' use of the Scriptures. He gives as his first reason that in order to remove the curse from us, He must die the death to which the curse was attached. This has reference to the words of Paul¹ quoted from Deuteronomy.² In the second place, only on the cross could He stretch forth His hands to summon and to unite together Jew and Gentile. As a proof-text for this idea, he refers us to the words of our Lord, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."³

¹Gal. 3:13

²Deut. 21:23

³John 12:32

Finally, only on the cross could He die in mid-air, thus overcoming the devil, the prince of the air, in his own region, thereby purifying the air, and making a new way for us up into heaven.

The reason why Christ rose from the dead the third day is also answered very carefully. He did not raise His body on the same day as His death lest His real death should be denied; nor on the second day, lest His incorruption should not be clearly manifested; nor later than the third day, lest there should be a question as to the identity of His body, and lest He should keep His disciples in suspense too long, and the witnesses of His death should be dispersed, and the memory of it faded.

The terror of death is removed for the Christian through the victory won by Christ. It has been abolished by the Saviour, and the resurrection is the proof of this fact. And the evidence for the resurrection is seen in the miracles of grace, the withdrawal of the Gentiles from idolatry, and the moral reformation of men. These things are the work of One who lives; for activity belongs only to the living.

The question once again presents itself, as was the case in the consideration of the doctrine of Irenaeus, as to whether it may be truly said that Athanasius and his successors emphasize the thought of deliverance from death at the expense of that of deliverance from sin. The answer would seem to be that Athanasius regards sin

not only as the cause of the corruption from which men need to be saved, but as being identical with it. Christ came in order that He might break the power of sin over human life. He came "that He might set all free from sin and the curse of sin, and that all might evermore live in truth, free from death, and be clothed in incorruption and immortality."¹ So, while admittedly the forgiveness of sin is not proclaimed with the power which was evidenced in the message of the Reformers, it had its rightful place in the theology of the Greek fathers, in which the thought of the triumph of life and the overcoming of mortality is intimately connected with the breaking of sin's power.

Before coming to the summary of the essential features of the classic theory of Atonement, it will be well to deal briefly with that aspect of the teaching of the fathers which has provoked the most widespread criticism, namely, their treatment of the dealings of Christ with the devil. Dr. Aulén seeks to relieve this problem of some of its darker aspects by attempting to penetrate through the imagery used to describe these dealings to the underlying thought that it is intended to express. Thus, the whole group of ideas - the semi-legal transaction with the devil, the payment of the ransom price, and the idea of the deception of the devil, are endeavors

to show that God does not stand, as it were, outside the drama that is being played out, but Himself takes part in it, and attains His purpose by internal, not by external, means; He overcomes evil, not by an almighty fiat, but by putting in something of His own,

¹ Athanasius, Against the Arians, quoted in Gustaf Aulén, Christus Victor, trans. by A.G. Herbert, (London: Society of the Sacred Mission, 1950), p. 60

through a Divine self-oblation.¹

The legal imagery used to describe the transaction with the devil is intended to express the idea that God's dealings even with the powers of evil have the character of fair play. With regard to the devil's rights, the underlying idea is the responsibility of man for his sin, and that the judgment which rests on mankind is a righteous judgment. And as for the deception of the devil, the thought that lies behind the seemingly fantastic speculations is that the power of evil over-reaches itself when it comes in conflict with the power of God. "It loses the battle at the moment when it seems to be victorious,"² These rationalizations may do for a modern thinker who regards the classic theory as the true Christian view of Atonement; but whether they fairly represent the actual viewpoints of the Greek fathers is a highly questionable matter, which can never be either proven or disproven.

In conclusion, it will be useful to sum up briefly the essential features of the classic theory of Atonement. In the first place, the work of Atonement is regarded as carried through by God Himself. This is true not only in the sense that God initiates the plan of salvation, but also that He is the effective Agent in the redemptive work from beginning to end. This marks a sharp distinction

¹Gustaf Aulén, Christus Victor, trans. by A. G. Herbert, (London: Society of the Sacred Mission, 1950), p. 70

²Ibid., p. 71

between the classic and the Anselmic views. In the former, the work of Atonement or reconciliation is a continuous Divine work; in the latter, although the act of Atonement has its origin in God's will, it is in its carrying-out an offering made to God by Christ as man and on man's behalf. Therefore, it may be called a discontinuous Divine work. It is the Word of God incarnate who overcomes the tyrants that hold man in bondage. This involves no antithesis between Incarnation and Atonement, but rather regards them as belonging inseparably together. God's love removes the sentence that rested upon mankind, and creates a new relation between the human race and Himself, far different from any idea of justification by legal righteousness. The whole dispensation is the work of grace.

Mankind, that had fallen into captivity, is now by God's mercy delivered out of the power of them that held them in bondage. God had mercy upon His creation, and bestowed upon them a new salvation through His Word, that is, Christ, so that men might learn by experience that they cannot attain to incorruption of themselves, but by God's grace only.¹

In the second place, this view of the Atonement has a dualistic background. The forces of evil, which are hostile to the Divine will, are real. These forces - sin, death, and the devil - so far as their sphere of influence extends, bring about enmity between God and the world. The work of Atonement is depicted in dramatic terms, as a conflict with the powers of evil issuing in a triumph over

¹Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses, V., 21.3, quoted in Ibid., p. 51

them. It is interesting to note in this connection that Paul counts the Law among the powers which hold mankind in bondage. The reason for this is not to be found chiefly in the fact that the Law condemns sin, but rather that the way of legal righteousness which it demands can never lead to salvation and life. Like the way of human merit, it leads, not to, but away from, God. Through Christ the Law, as an enemy, is also overcome.

Thirdly, because of the dualistic background of the classic theory of Atonement, there is a double-sidedness which makes God not only the Reconciler but also the Reconciled. Not only does the world now stand in a new relation to God, but God stands in a new relation to the world. In the very act in which He reconciles the world unto Himself, His enmity is taken away.

Finally, although the Atonement is regarded by the fathers as being God's own saving work, they do not lose sight of the fact that it is carried out in and through man. The Incarnation involved the entrance of Deity into human flesh, and the fulfillment of God's saving work was accomplished under the conditions of human nature. "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead."¹ In holding fast to the true manhood of Christ, the Greek fathers expressed the truth which later humanistic doctrine expressed by speaking of Christ as "Representative Man."

¹I Cor. 15:22

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judgment on the correctness of this opinion. Suffice it to say now that some of the ideas contained in this view undoubtedly form one facet in this great gem of truth.

CHAPTER III

THE SATISFACTION THEORY OF THE ATONEMENT

The beginnings of that theory of the Atonement which reached its fullest development in Anselm of Canterbury, although intimations of it may be found in earlier writings, may be traced to the views of Tertullian and Cyprian. "Tertullian prepares the building materials; Cyprian begins to construct out of them a doctrine of the Atonement."¹ In Tertullian may be found the fundamental conceptions of satisfaction and merit, both of which apply to penance. Satisfaction is regarded as the compensation which a man makes for his fault.

How absurd it is to leave the penance unperformed, and yet expect forgiveness of sins! What is it but to fail to pay the price, and, nevertheless, to stretch out the hand for the benefit? The Lord has ordained that forgiveness is to be granted for this price: He wills that the remission of the penalty is to be purchased for the payment which penance makes.²

Thus penance may be described as satisfaction; it is the acceptance of a temporal penalty to escape eternal loss.

The idea of merit is associated with the performance of that which is commanded. In its special sense the term

¹Gustaf Aulén, Christus Victor, trans. by A. G. Herbert, (London: Society of the Sacred Mission, 1950), p. 97

²Tertullian, De Paenitentia, 6, quoted in Ibid.

is applied to acts which are "supererogatoria" - going beyond what is strictly of obligation. In Tertullian's view, such acts include fasting, voluntary celibacy, and martyrdom. It is thus possible for men to earn a surplus of merit. Dr. Mackintosh sets forth the basic premises of this idea in the following words:

Merit creates a Plus; satisfaction obliterates a Minus...The whole system presupposes that man can put God into his debt. If man has previously incurred debt to God by acts of sin, his newly achieved good works or meritorious sufferings liquidate the Minus. If he has a clean slate at the time, his new merit stands as a Plus. If he has a credit balance, the balance is swelled.¹

Tertullian's legal outlook naturally led him to emphasize the necessity of reparation when an offence has been committed; and he readily transferred the idea from law to theology. In both Tertullian and Cyprian, satisfaction and merit are applied to the repentance and good deeds of men rather than to the work of Christ. It is important to observe the evolution of the penitential theory in Catholic theology. It arose largely as a result of the problem of forgiveness for sins of the Christian. The original forgiveness had come to be regarded as being bestowed at the time of baptism. But what about post-baptismal sins? Tertullian gave an immense impulse to the disciplinary regulation of such sins. And the Catholic system slowly developed toward a sacrament of penance, with three finally recognized ingredients: contrition,

¹Historic Theories of Atonement, (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1920), p. 102

auricular confession, and satisfaction. Thus, as Dr. Mackintosh points out,

Out of these disciplinary conceptions, in course of time, interpretations of the Atonement were to be drawn. Not the first and greatest forgiveness, but the secondary forgiveness of average sin-stained Christian lives, came to afford what passed as a clue to the work of Christ, the supreme manifestation of the grace of God.¹

It is clearly apparent from this that the Anselmic theory of the Atonement grew up on the basis of the penitential system. "The Latin idea of penance provides the sufficient explanation of the Latin doctrine of the Atonement."² The root idea is that man must make a payment or an offering to satisfy God's justice; and this idea comes in the doctrine of Anselm to be the explanation of the work of Christ. From this we observe two distinguishing facts regarding the satisfaction theory: it is essentially legalistic, and it emphasizes as basic in the work of Christ that which He does as man in relation to God. In this we may see quite clearly the difference between this theory and that which we considered in the preceding chapter. In the latter theory, the Atonement is regarded largely from the standpoint of God Himself entering into conflict with the powers of evil and subduing them by paying, through His Son, the ransom price. In the satisfaction theory, we see Christ paying to God the debt which man by his sin had incurred, thereby satisfying the Divine justice. The death of Christ becomes His

¹Ibid., pp. 98-99

²Gustaf Aulén, Christus Victor, trans. by A. G. Herbert, (London: Society of the Sacred Mission, 1950), p. 98

satisfaction on behalf of man; or rather, on behalf of the elect portion of humanity. And through His obedience a surplus of merit is available to men. Thus the ideas of satisfaction and merit serve to explain the sacrifice of Christ from the Anselmic viewpoint.

Anselm's theory of Atonement is set forth in his great work, Cur Deus Homo? - "Why was God made Man?" The varying viewpoints of modern thinkers regarding this book and its argument may be seen from the statements at which we shall briefly look. J. K. Mozley writes:

If any one Christian work, outside the canon of the New Testament, may be described as "epoch-making," it is the Cur Deus Homo? of Anselm. It has affected, though in different degrees, and by way now of attraction, now of repulsion, all soteriological thought since his time...¹

Professor Denney pays tribute to it as "the truest and greatest book on the Atonement that has ever been written."² In Harnack's judgment, "no theory so bad had ever before his day been given out as ecclesiastical."³ And to Dr. Stevens, "it would be difficult to name any prominent treatise on Atonement, whose conception of sin is so essentially unethical and superficial."⁴ These statements indicate the high quality of St. Anselm's work by showing in a

¹The Doctrine of the Atonement, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 125

²Ibid., p. 126, quoting James Denney, The Atonement and the Modern Mind.

³Ibid., quoting A. Harnack, History of Dogma.

⁴Ibid., quoting G. B. Stevens, The Christian Doctrine of Salvation.

striking manner how difficult a task it seems to be for modern scholarship to take an objective, neutral attitude toward it. It richly deserves to be regarded as the typical expression of the theory which it sets forth.

The treatise is written in dialogue form, in which Boso, the pupil representing people with difficulties, or even unbelievers, asks questions, which Anselm answers. It is divided into two books.

The first of these contains certain objections of unbelievers who reject the Christian faith because they think it contrary to reason, with the answers of the faithful; and finally, setting Christ aside, (as though He had never been) proves by logical arguments that it is impossible for any man to be saved without Him.

In a like manner, in the second book, (as though nothing were known of Christ), it is shown no less plainly by reason and in truth, that human nature was made to this end, that at some time man in his completeness, i.e., in body and soul, should enjoy a blessed immortality; and that it is necessary that, what man was made for, to that he should come; but that only by one who is man and God, and by necessity by all which we believe of Christ, could this be done.¹

The question from which Anselm's treatise takes its title, stated a bit more fully, is "By what necessity and for what reason hath God, being omnipotent, assumed, in order to its restoration, the humiliations and weakness of human nature?"² One of the most winsome features of the book is the attitude of reverent humility with which its author undertakes the exposition of the sacred subject with which he deals. He is reluctant to attempt to answer the question which his pupil propounds. He fears lest the

¹St. Anselm, Cur Deus Homo? (London: Griffith Farran Okeden & Welsh, n.d.), pp. xxvii-xxviii

²Ibid., p. 2

inquirer, failing to find satisfaction in his answer, should conclude that the actual truth did not exist, rather than that his intellect was unable to grasp it. Furthermore, to discuss the subject adequately, some clear conception of power, necessity, will, and other things connected with it, are essential. Therefore, he approaches the task not so much to show to seekers that which they seek, as to seek it with them.

There is a striking similarity in the manner in which Anselm answers his first great question to the way in which Athanasius explains it. The question as to why God should become man and suffer for human sin, in the thinking of both of these venerable theologians, is answered by the fact that otherwise the human race would have utterly perished, and it was not fitting that the intentions of God for man should be frustrated. Anselm adds to this assertion the idea that God's design could not have been carried out unless the human race had been delivered by the Creator Himself. The reason for this is that man would rightly belong to whatever other person should save him from eternal death, and in such a case, he could not possibly be restored to that place of dignity which he would have filled had he not sinned, since he who was created to be the servant of God only would be the slave of one who was not God.

A second weighty question with which Anselm wrestles is why an omnipotent God could not have redeemed man by a word, as He created him, especially in view of the fact

that the devil had no just right against man, and therefore no ransom need be paid to the devil. It is at this point that the cleavage between this and the older theory becomes apparent. Anselm clearly holds that the devil has no just right against man. He writes:

And I think that those who deem that the devil has some right to dominion over men are drawn to this opinion because they see men justly subjected to annoyance by the devil, and God permitting this with justice; and thence they infer that the devil inflicts it justly... So the devil is in this way said to harass man with justice, since God justly permits it, and man suffers it justly; but man is not said to suffer it justly because of the justice of the infliction; only on account of his being punished by the just judgment of God.¹

Therefore, if the idea of a ransom to the devil must be discarded, why should God will to redeem mankind by the shameful suffering of His Son? And was it right that Christ should die?

Anselm begins his answer to this problem by re-treating into the Divine sovereignty. God's will ought to be a sufficient reason for us when He does anything, even if we do not see why He so wills; for His will is never unreasonable. If it seems unreasonable that the Highest should stoop to such indignities, or the Omnipotent do aught by so great effort, we must understand that while the Divine nature is impassible, and incapable of being brought down from its exaltation, and needs not to use effort to accomplish that which it wills, the Lord Jesus Christ is true God as well as true Man. So the humility and infirmity which we say that God endured had reference to the

¹Ibid., pp. 10-11

human rather than to the Divine nature. If it be further objected that it is unjust to condemn the innocent in order to let the guilty go free, the reply is that God the Father neither compelled Christ to die, nor permitted Him to be slain, unwilling; but rather He bore His death by His own free will that He might save mankind. And to the further question as to whether it was right that the innocent die for the guilty, even though willingly, Anselm says that since if man had not sinned, it would not have behoved God to require him to die, God did not compel Christ, in whom was no sin, to die, but rather He of His own will, bore death not from any obligation to give up His life, but because of the obligation He was under to fulfill righteousness. So death was inflicted on Him because He stood firm in His obedience.

Having dealt with these objections, Anselm goes on to answer his second question by stating the principle that man was made for blessedness, but cannot attain to it unless his sins are forgiven. Then what is sin? Anselm regards it as the failure to pay to God what is owed to Him.

If angelic beings, or men, always repaid to God what they owe, they would never sin... Thus to sin, is nothing else but not to repay to God one's debt.¹

As to the nature of the debt we owe to God, it is that our whole will, as rational creatures, ought to be subject to the will of God. When this is paid, none sins, and everyone who does not pay it does sin. Whoever does not render

¹Ibid., p. 23

unto God this due honor takes away from God that which is His, and does God dishonor; and this is sin. Therefore each sinner ought to repay the honor of which he has robbed God; and this is the satisfaction which every sinner ought to make to God.

Now is it fitting that God should forgive sins by mercy alone, no Atonement being made to His honor? This Anselm answers in the negative. To remit means simply not to punish sin; and since the just treatment of unatoned sin is to punish it, if it be not punished, it is unjustly forgiven. And if it is unseemly for God to forgive anything in His realm illegally, it is unseemly that He should forgive unpunished sin. It is therefore necessary that either the honor of which man has robbed God by sin shall be restored, or punishment follow. Otherwise, God would be unjust to Himself. But how can the sinner's punishment be any honor to God? It is impossible that God should lose the honor due to Him. The sinner pays what he owes, whether freely or unwillingly. For either man spontaneously of his own free will yields due submission to God (whether it be by not sinning or by satisfying for his sin), or God subjects him unwillingly by compulsion. Since man was so created as to be able to attain to bliss if he had not sinned, when God because of his sin deprives him of bliss and of all good, man repays that which he took, however unwillingly. Thus is God's honor maintained in the punishment of the sinner.

It being therefore absolutely essential that God's honor be upheld either by receiving satisfaction from the sinner or inflicting punishment upon him, what can the sinner offer to God in satisfaction for his sins? If he reply, "Penitence, a contrite and humbled heart, fastings, and many bodily labors, and mercy in giving and forgiving, and obedience,"¹ he must be reminded that when we render to God something which we owe to Him, even had we not sinned, we should not set it against the debt which we owe on account of our sin; and that we owe to God all these things mentioned. Then we have nothing which we can give in amends for sin. And God cannot raise to blessedness anyone who is to any extent a debtor for sin. How then shall man be saved, if he neither pays what he owes, nor ought to be saved unless he pays?

The answer to the above question is that the satisfaction whereby man can be saved can be affected only by one who is God and man. Anselm tells us that there can be no salvation

...unless there be someone who can repay to God for the sin of man somewhat which is greater than all which is not God. Also, he who of his own should be able to give to God anything which might surpass all that is below God, must needs be greater than all which is not God. But nothing exists which is above all that is not God, save God. None therefore but God can make this reparation. Yet, none should make it save a man, otherwise man does not make amends. If, then, it be necessary...that the celestial citizenship is to be completed from among men, and that this cannot be unless there be made that before-mentioned satisfaction, which God only can, and man only should, make, it is needful that it should be made by one who is both God and man.²

¹Ibid., p. 47

²Ibid., pp. 66-67

And so God was made man in order that because of the greatness of His Deity He might make satisfaction for man's debt, and because of the reality of His humanity He might make that satisfaction as man. And how is this satisfaction to be made? Man could of free will, being under no necessity, suffer nothing harder for the glory of God than death. In no way could man give himself more fully to God than be yielding himself to death for God's honor. Therefore, he who would atone for the sins of man must be such that he can die if he wills it. And, as already noted, Christ being under no compulsion of death because He had no sin, and being capable of death by virtue of His partaking of our humanity, is fully qualified to make that satisfaction whereby the sinner may be restored to blessedness.

In his answer to the question as to how the death of Christ could exceed in value the many and great sins of mankind, Anselm lacks the clarity that is characteristic of most of his arguments. It would seem that the sharp distinction which he draws between the Divine and human natures in our Lord prevents him from finding the solution to this problem in the infinite character of the sacrifice of God made man. That is, since only the human nature was capable of humiliation and death, and the Atonement was offered to God by Christ as man, it is not so clear in Anselm as it is in later theologians who followed his view in the main that the Atonement has an infinite value

because it is God who died. But he does come very close to this position in a different way. He reasons that a sin committed against the person of Christ is incomparably greater than all those which could be imagined without His person. If then the murder of Christ is so great an evil, it follows that

If His existence be as great a good as His destruction is an evil, incomparably greater a good is it than is the evil of those sins which are exceeded beyond all comparison by His murder...Sins are hateful in proportion as they are evil; and this His life is deserving of love in proportion to its goodness. Whence it follows that this His life is more deserving of love than are sins hateful.¹

This being true, it follows that so great and lovable good can suffice to atone for the sins of the whole world. This life can conquer all sins, if yielded up for them. As to yield up the life is the same as to accept death, then as the yielding up of the life outweighs all the sins of men, so also does the acceptance of death.

But this answer gives rise to another problem. If the sin of slaying Him is as evil as His life is good, how can His death overcome and blot out the sins of those who killed Him? Anselm finds the solution to this difficulty in the words of Paul that "if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."² In other words, the sin of those who slew Christ, because they acted in ignorance, is not incapable of being forgiven.

The final great question with which Anselm deals is that of how the death of Christ results in the salvation of

¹ Ibid., p. 84

² 1 Cor. 2:8

men. He reasons that one who freely gives to God so great a gift as did Christ ought not to be without any recompense. It is needful that the Father should recompense the Son, lest He appear to be either unjust if He would not, or powerless, if He could not. There are two ways in which one may recompense another: by giving what that other has not, or remitting what from that other might be required. But, before the Son gave that great gift to God, all which the Father had was His also; nor did the Son ever owe anything which to Him might be remitted. Then what recompense could be made to Him who had need of naught, and to whom naught could be either given or remitted? It must be repaid to someone else. If the Son should will to give to another that which is due to Himself, the Father could not rightly forbid Him, nor refuse it to any to whom the Son might give it. There is no one to whom He might more fitly assign the fruit of His death than to those for whose salvation He made Himself man, and to whom He in dying gave the example of dying for righteousness' sake. So

whom could He more justly make heirs of a debt due to Him of which He Himself had no need, and of the overflowings of His fulness, than His kindred and brethren, whom He sees burdened with so many and so great debts and wasting away in the depths of misery; that what they owe for their sins may be remitted to them, and what on account of their sins they are in need of may be given them?¹

And how one ought to enter into participation in so great grace, and to live under it, we are taught everywhere in

¹St. Anselm, Cur Deus Homo? (London: Griffith Farran Okeden & Welsh, n.d.), p. 106

Holy Scripture.

The reflections of later centuries upon this theory of Atonement set forth in Anselm have discovered therein much that is still regarded as good and valuable, as well as what today are regarded as weaknesses. As to the merits of this theory, it is practically impossible to make any generalizations with which all scholars would agree. For instance, Dr. Mozley writes:

The outstanding merit of the theory is its sense of the seriousness of sin and its issue in guilt. This is true, however inadequate the actual concept of sin may be...Further, the insistence upon guilt and upon the need of forgiveness is an ethical advance as compared with the Patristic stress upon death, and upon the necessity for the almost physical antidote of deification.¹

And yet, to those who regard a sense of guilt as having no true objective basis, that which gives to it a strong sense of reality is contrary to the facts as they see them. Again, while one school of theologians regards Anselm's view as being commendable in respect to its connecting the Atonement with a requirement of God, that type of thought which sees only in man, and not in God, the necessity for an Atonement, considers this feature of the theory a serious defect. So the basic positions of Anselm's view, as well as of every other view, are regarded as strong or weak depending upon the theological inclinations of those who pass the judgment.

Unfortunately, it is nearly always easier to see faults than it is to see virtues. Some of the defects in

¹The Doctrine of the Atonement, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 129

the Anselmic theory may be noted in bringing this discussion to a close. In the first place, it is defective in making the Divine honor or majesty the principle of the Divine nature that is most prominent rather than the Divine character in which God's honor and majesty are grounded. The theory had its origin in a time when exaggerated ideas prevailed respecting the authority of popes and emperors, and when dishonor done to their majesty was the highest offence known to law. In those days of feudalism, men thought of heaven as organized on a feudal basis. But in making God's honor and majesty central, Anselm falls into the error that in all other features of his theory remains its outstanding defect - it deals in externals.

It is wrought out in abstract terms of honor, justice, satisfaction, and merit, apart from regard to the personal relations between God and man.¹

The terms "commercial" and "mathematical" have often been applied to it - and justly so.

Perhaps an even more serious defect than that of regarding sin chiefly as an offence against God's honor and majesty is that it seems to hold to a merely external transfer of the merit of Christ's work, while not clearly stating the internal ground of that transfer in the union of the believer with Christ. This makes salvation appear to be largely a matter of book-keeping. Christ in His death obtains merit of which He personally has no need. This merit is placed to the account of His "kindred and

¹E. Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression*, (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1948), pp. 306-307

brethren." This appears to involve what has in recent times been described as a legal fiction: a reckoning of merit to those in whom no merit exists. And while the reckoning of righteousness to men apart from any merit in them is a clear teaching of the New Testament Scriptures, it is quite plain that the basis for this is a vital inner relationship by faith between Christ and the believer. Anselm's view leaves no moral dynamic in the cross.

A third defect in the Anselmic theory - a defect which it shares in common with many other theories - is that its conceptions of sin as debt and Atonement as satisfaction, while they do not necessarily misrepresent Scripture, by no means do it full justice. If the fathers dwelt too much on those passages which describe the death of Christ as a ransom, so also does this outstanding representative of the Latin type of theory give disproportionate weight to those passages of Scripture which represent the Atonement under commercial analogies, to the exclusion of those which describe it as an ethical fact, whose value is to be estimated not quantitatively, but qualitatively. According to E. G. Robinson,

The Anselmic theory was rejected by Abelard for grounding the Atonement in justice instead of benevolence, and for taking insufficient account of the power of Christ's sufferings and death in procuring a subjective change in man.¹

The dogmatic edifice of Anselm, as a matter of fact, is built largely upon rational considerations, involving very

¹A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1946), p. 750, quoting E. G. Robinson, Christian Theology.

little use of Holy Scripture. Therefore, if it be allowed that Biblical thought should have its place in every doctrine of Atonement, any theory which is partial and one-sided in its handling of the Biblical material can only be defective in this respect.

Finally, it is a weakness of Anselm's theory that it represents the Atonement as having reference only to the elect; that is, to that portion of humanity predestinated to salvation in the eternal counsels of God. The baneful effects of a rigid doctrine of election upon both the theology and the mission of the Church has been appalling; and that doctrine, which was given its first clear expression in Augustine of Hippo and its even sterner form in later years by John Calvin and his school of theologians, was one of the influences which moulded Anselm's soteriology. That the New Testament, as well as the Old, contains a doctrine of election, cannot be denied; but that there is anything arbitrary in the dealings of the God revealed in Christ with His creation is unthinkable. In Anselm's view, the number of angels who fell must be replaced from among mankind,¹ although the saints will be more in number than are the lost angels.² God had decreed the exact number that should be a part of His celestial kingdom, that number to be made up of both angels and men. This perfect number, as it was not to be completed without both angels and men, will include more

¹Cur Deus Homo? (London: Griffith Farran Okeden & Welsh, n.d.), p. 32

²Ibid., pp. 34-44

saints than the number of fallen angels, else it must of necessity be that each human being among the elected number would be therein only because others - the lost angels - had fallen to perdition. And the blessings secured by the Atonement were intended only for Christ's "kindred and brethren" - those predestinated by God to eternal glory.

With numerous modifications and changed emphases, the satisfaction theory became the accepted view not only of the Middle Ages but also of the Reformation churches. Pfleiderer acknowledges this, and regards it as being a strange fact. He writes:

The work of Christ, as Anselm construed it, was in fact nothing else than the prototype of the meritorious performances and satisfactions of the ecclesiastical saints, and was therefore, from the point of view of the mediaeval church, thought out quite logically. All the more remarkable is it that the churches of the Reformation could be satisfied with this theory, notwithstanding that it stood in complete contradiction to their deeper moral consciousness. If, according to Protestant principles generally, there are no supererogatory meritorious works, then one would suppose that such cannot be accepted even in the case of Jesus.¹

To trace the development of other principles which came to be expounded as essential features of an objective view of Atonement is no part of the purpose of this study, which is chiefly to mark out the three distinct types of theories, as well as to examine briefly some modern views that have been propounded. Suffice it to say that such ideas as the substitutionary view, or the principle of vicarious punishment, or the governmental theory of Grotius,

¹A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1946), p. 750, quoting R. Pfleiderer, Philosophy of Religion.

²See J.K. Mozley, The Doctrine of the Atonement, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), pp. 151-156

may all be included in the general scheme of the objective conception of the Atonement, as well as the particular emphasis on satisfaction which characterizes Anselm. All alike connect the Atonement with something in God, whether it be His holiness, or His honor and majesty, or His just government of His creatures. All alike regard Christ as having accomplished in His death on behalf of men something which they could not do for themselves, and as by His death delivering men from a penalty which every man must otherwise pay. It is quite true that later objective views also made some provision in their system for the subjective elements in the death of Christ; but this subjective viewpoint finds its clearest expression in the influence or example theories, to which we next turn our attention.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUBJECTIVE OR EXEMPLARY THEORY

The third general type of theory of the Atonement which has held a prominent place in theological thought, especially in the closing years of the Reformation period and the centuries following, sees in the death of Jesus Christ neither a ransom paid to deliver men from sin, death, and the devil, nor a satisfaction made to God to remove an obstacle to the Divine forgiveness. It sees rather an exhibition of Divine love, or devotion to truth (depending on whether the theory represents the idea of moral influence or an example), intended to move men to repentance and a better life. Generally speaking, the subjective view connects the Atonement to no necessity in God, unless it be the necessity to make a spectacular exhibition of His great love for mankind. The Atonement is intended, in this theory, to melt the heart, to break down the stubborn will, and to inspire men to a nobler way of life. It is to cause men to echo those sublime words of John, "We love Him, because He first loved us."¹

The Theory of Abelard

The first clear example of the subjective view is

¹I John 4:19

found in Anselm's younger contemporary, Abelard. His theory, which is developed in his commentary on Romans, holds that the death of Christ should be regarded as a supreme exhibition of love which might kindle a corresponding love in the hearts of men. Two texts of Scripture were apparently quite influential in giving form to Abelard's theology of Atonement, both of which contain sayings attributed to Jesus. These are: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends;"¹ and "Her sins, which were many, are forgiven; for she loved much."² Concerning the latter of these two great utterances, as Dr. Mackintosh observes, it is

distorted for him, as for Roman Catholic theology in general, from being a statement of the consequences of receiving Divine grace into passing for a statement of the conditions upon which the grace of forgiveness is imparted.³

This love awakened in men is regarded by Abelard as meritorious. This makes it plain that he does not escape entirely from the traditional Latin scheme of merit. And although his teaching has a subjective character, emphasizing that which is done by men, it does not leave the merit of Christ completely out of the reckoning. It is regarded as being reckoned to man on account of His continuous intercession for them.

A fair evaluation of Abelard may be found in Dr. Aulén's summary. He writes:

¹John 15:13

²Luke 7:47

³Historic Theories of Atonement, (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1920), p. 141

Apart from a few isolated points, it cannot be said that Abelard's thought exercised any great influence in the Middle Ages. He was, indeed, so far in accord with the mind of the period that all his thought lay on the moralistic level; but, on the whole, he was far too radically opposed to the common view to gain a hearing. In particular, the fact that he attached no special significance to the death of Christ was sufficient of itself to make his teaching unacceptable to an age which was laying ever greater stress on the death, both in theology and in devotional practice.¹

The Example Theory of Socinus

In the post-reformation era, Faustus Socinus became an advocate of the subjective type of Atonement theory. His view may be briefly summarized as follows: There is nothing in God that demands an Atonement. The sole barrier between man and God is man's sinfulness. Not God, but only man, needs to be reconciled. The bettering of man's moral condition is the only method of reconciliation. Man's own will is capable of this by means of repentance and reformation. The death of Christ is viewed primarily as that of a noble martyr, and its redeeming power is to be found in His human example of faithfulness to truth and duty, which has a powerful influence upon our moral improvement. This fact is set forth by the writers of the New Testament in the language of the Greek and Jewish sacrifices. In the thinking of Socinus,

Jesus Christ is our Saviour because He proclaimed to us the way of eternal life, confirmed it and clearly showed it forth, both by the example of His life and by rising

¹Gustaf Aulén, Christus Victor, trans. by A.G. Herbert, (London: Society of the Sacred Mission, 1950), p. 113

again from the dead, and because He will give eternal life to us who have faith in Him.¹

The particular character of His death is regarded as necessary in order that the example of His life may have its full effect, since what His followers may suffer as a result of trying to live like Him, He suffered first. It was also necessary so that He, by virtue of knowing in His own experience the worst of human ills, might be made the more anxious to help others.

We shall examine the views of Socinus somewhat more in detail, noting in particular the similarities and the differences between his theory and that of Anselm. In the view of both men, sin is an offence against God's majesty. In the Anselmic view, as we have seen, it is necessary that satisfaction be made by man in order for God to justly forgive and restore to blessedness the ones who had robbed Him of His honor and majesty. This Socinus denies; he argues that God is perfectly free to forgive the offence without requiring satisfaction, else He has less power than man. Therefore, whether or not satisfaction is to be demanded depends upon no inherent principle of right and wrong, but only upon the arbitrary will of God, who may waive the punishment of man's offence if He chooses. Also, justice and mercy are not regarded by Socinus as opposite qualities in God, nor does he identify God's righteousness with punitive justice. Both justice and mercy are only effects of His will; mercy does not prevent Him from punishing, nor justice

¹J. K. Mozley, The Doctrine of the Atonement, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 150, quoting Faustus Socinus, De Jesu Christo Servatore.

from forgiving.

Socinus appeals to the Old Testament Scriptures to show that in His dealing with His ancient people God forgave sin upon the one condition of repentance, without either demanding satisfaction or making reference to any future satisfaction. This last somewhat obscure point is to be understood in the light of the idea, once widely prevalent, that God forgave the sins of Old Testament saints upon the basis of the sacrifice that was to be made by the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, and that believers in that dispensation consciously looked forward to the satisfaction that was to be made. This Socinus denies. He also finds nothing said of God demanding satisfaction in the New Testament.

The thesis of Socinus concerning satisfaction and forgiveness is that "to forgive sins and to receive satisfaction for sins are plainly contradictory and cannot exist together."¹ If satisfaction has been made by a third party, it is useless to reply that the sinner is forgiven, since where no debt exists there is nothing to forgive, and where full satisfaction has been made no debt exists. Not only therefore is satisfaction unnecessary, but it could not possibly have been made through Christ's endurance of the punishment due to us, or through the imputation to us of His righteousness. The reason for this lies in two facts. In the first place, vicarious punishment

¹Ibid., p. 148

of the innocent is both unjust and unscriptural. And secondly, even were this not so, Christ's death could not have been equal in value to the punishment required for the sins of mankind, since He did not die eternal death. Even had He died eternal death, the death of one could not have been equal to that of the entire number of guilty sinners. Further, no doctrine of satisfaction can be deduced from the Person of Christ. Socinus is in agreement with Anselm that Christ did not suffer in His Divine nature, but only in the human. This being the case, His sufferings could not possibly possess infinite value. And as for His obedience, since it was owed to God, it could not be imputed to even one man, let alone the entire number of Christ's "kindred and brethren." Thus, in the Socinian theory, satisfaction is regarded as unnecessary, unethical, unscriptural, and, from the standpoint of the Anselmic view, impossible.

Now, if the sentence pronounced by God against sin can be changed, and men be delivered from the doom of eternal death to the realm of eternal bliss, only by sin being dealt with in some way, and the way of compensation or satisfaction being rejected, there remains the way of forgiveness. This God is free to bestow upon the sole condition of repentance and a changed life. Christ helps men to achieve this by setting before them in His life and death an example of faithfulness to truth and duty. "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example,

that ye should follow His steps."¹ By this example, men are encouraged and inspired to live that kind of life that enables God to forgive. But the help of Christ does not end with the example which He has given. Because He arose from the dead, He has an eternal priesthood, and is ever available to aid men in the living of the good life.

It is interesting to note that in his doctrine of the saving work of Christ, Socinus does not once mention the forgiveness of sins. This points to one of the uniform characteristics of most of the subjective theories; the minimizing of the seriousness of sin. Guilt is regarded in these views as being without any objective reality. Modern advocates of the influence and example theories have recognized this weakness and attempted to correct it. For example, Bushnell and Harnack have recognized the fact of our guilt-consciousness and the need of Atonement with its "altar forms" of substitution and propitiation while denying the objective need of these forms.²

The Moral Influence Theory of Bushnell³

The moral influence theory, as one of the most popular of present-day views has come to be called, embraces an almost endless variety of ideas as expressed by its leading advocates, and to speak of any one writer's

¹I Peter 2:21

²Horace Bushnell, Vicarious Sacrifice, (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866), p. 460ff

³1802-1876

view as being typical is extremely hazardous. For a general definition of the theory as a whole, Dr. Strong's may be regarded as essentially accurate. He writes:

This holds, like the Socinian, that there is no principle of the divine nature which is propitiated by Christ's death; but that this death is a manifestation of the love of God, suffering in and with the sins of his creatures. Christ's atonement, therefore, is the merely natural consequence of his taking human nature upon him; and is a suffering, not of penalty in man's stead, but of the combined woes and griefs which the living of a human life involves. This atonement has effect, not to satisfy divine justice, but so to reveal divine love as to soften human hearts and to lead them to repentance.¹

One of the most attractive, and at the same time representative, works written from the viewpoint of the moral influence theory is Bushnell's Vicarious Sacrifice. In this book, the author begins with the setting forth of his view of the meaning of vicarious sacrifice. Negatively it does not mean only that Christ puts Himself into the case of man as a helper, or undertakes for man in a way of influence, or comes under common liabilities with us. Neither does it mean that it is to be regarded as a literal substitution by which Christ becomes a sinner for sinners, or penally subject to our deserved penalties. These are moral impossibilities. The true conception is

that Christ, in what is called His vicarious sacrifice, simply engages, at the expense of great suffering and even of death itself, to bring us out of our sins themselves and so out of their penalties; being Himself profoundly identified with us in our fallen state, and burdened in feeling with our evils. Nor is there anything so remote, or difficult, or violent, in this vicarious relation assumed by Christ as many appear to suppose...It is the nature

¹ A.H. Strong, Systematic Theology, (Philadelphia: 1946), p. 733

of love, universally, to insert itself into the miseries and take upon its feeling the burdens of others... Love is a principle essentially vicarious in its own nature, identifying the subject with others, so as to suffer their adversities and pains, and taking on itself the burden of their evils. It does not come in officiously and abruptly, and propose to be substituted in some formal and literal way that overturns all the moral relations of law and desert, but it clings to the evil and lost man as in feeling, afflicted for him, burdened by his ill deserts, incapacities, and pains, encountering gladly any loss or suffering for his sake. Approving nothing wrong in him, but faithfully reproving and condemning him in all sin, it is yet made sin - plunged, so to speak, into all the fortunes of sin, by its friendly sympathy. In this manner it is entered vicariously into sacrifice on his account. So naturally and easily does the vicarious sacrifice commend itself to our intelligence, by the ¹stock ideas and feelings out of which it grows.

Bushnell sees an illustration of how Christ bore our sins in the passage in Matthew's Gospel where He is conceived of as entering into men's diseases.² What are we to understand by the expression "Christ bare our sicknesses?" This does not mean that Christ literally had our sicknesses transferred to Him, and so taken off from us. It does not mean that He became blind for the blind, lame for the lame, or a leper for the lepers. It does not mean that He suffered in Himself all the fevers and pains He took away from others.

How then did He bear our sicknesses, or in what sense? In the sense that He took them on His feeling, had His heart burdened by the sense of them, bore the disgusts of their loathsome decays, felt their pains over again, in the tenderness of His more than human sensibility. Thus manifestly it was that He bare our sicknesses - His very love to us put Him so far, in a

¹Horace Bushnell, *Vicarious Sacrifice*, (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866), pp. 7-8

²Matthew 8:17

vicarious relation to them, and made Him, so far, a partaker in them.¹

Now this principle of vicarious love exists not only in Christ, but in the eternal Father, and the Holy Spirit, and the good angels, and in all the glorified and good minds of the heavenly kingdom. Christ, as a "power on character and life,"² renews us in this love. So there is nothing that is superlative in vicarious sacrifice, or above the universal principles of right and duty. This conception conducts us into the heart of the moral influence theory of Atonement. What the life and death of Christ reveal is the vicarious love that suffers for and with mankind; a love that is eternal in God. Awakening to a realization of that love, men are enabled to "love His love and suffer with Him in His suffering."³ This is true salvation.

In the second part of his book, Bushnell brings out the idea that Christ's life and sacrifice are the means by which He becomes a renovating and saving power. That is, the sacrifice is not in itself the purpose for which Christ came, but merely the means to an end - the recovery and reconciliation of men. The healing of bodies which occupied such a prominent place in Christ's ministry is an outward type of the more radical and sublime cure which He undertakes, by His sacrifice, to work in fallen character. The one, all-inclusive aim for which He came

¹Horace Bushnell, Vicarious Sacrifice, (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866), p. 9

³Ibid. p. 83

into the world was to be the causal agent in a change in the spiritual habit and future wellbeing of souls. Not to pay a satisfaction to offended honor, nor to endure a penal infliction on behalf of guilty men, but to exert a healing power upon human souls, was Christ's purpose in coming into the world.

Our author breaks with that type of subjective view which sees in Jesus only an example. If an example be conceived as a model that we copy, and set ourselves, by our own will, to reproduce in ourselves, the conception is inadequate. We want something better than a model to be copied: something that will beget in us the disposition to copy an example. Again, it is not enough to say that the example includes the demonstration of Divine love in Christ's life. No very intense power is to be found in love if we think of it as being only a mood of natural softness, or merely instinctive sympathy. The real moral power of Christ, by virtue of which salvation is effected, lies in His greatness of character. His moral influence stems not from His love alone, but from the conviction that when Jesus in His sacrifice takes our lot upon His feeling and goes to the cross for us, He does this for the right, and because the everlasting word of righteousness commands Him. We may see in this a genuine sense of necessity for the Atonement in the thinking of Bushnell.

Where does the moral power of Christ get its

principal weight of impression? From the revelation, in His vicarious sacrifice, that God suffers on account of evil, or with and for created beings under evil. It is this moral suffering of God that Christ unfolds and works into a character and a power in His human life. Therefore, what is called the agony is pure moral suffering, the suffering of a burdened love and of a holy and pure sensibility. It is this aspect of His suffering, rather than its physical aspect, that is of significance in the Atonement. The importance to us of the physical sufferings lies in the fact that they are the symbol of God's moral suffering.

The most concise summary of the theory under consideration may be seen in Bushnell's contrast between Atonement and propitiation. He writes:

Atonement then is a change wrought in us, a change by which we are reconciled to God. Propitiation is an objective conception, by which that change, taking place in us, is spoken of as occurring representatively in God, just as guilty minds, thrown off from God, glass their feeling representatively in God, imagining that God is thrown off from them; or just as we say that the sun rises, instead of saying, what would be so very awkward to us, and yet is the real truth, that we ourselves rise to the sun.¹

So the reality in the Atonement is that change brought about in the believer by the revelation in the sacrifice of Christ that God suffers because of the sins of mankind, and the idea of propitiation is, like other objective ideas in which the Gospel is expressed, merely a

¹Ibid., p. 450

thought-form which has no actual reality. As we noticed earlier, Bushnell sees a use for objective language as furnishing symbols which express the truth, even though the symbols themselves are not true.

The third section of Bushnell's work deals with the matter of the relations of God's law and justice to the saving work of Christ. He deals first with the idea that logically there is a "law before government;" that is, the eternal law of right. God's own nature was in law, or "crystallizing in eternal obligation,"¹ before He became a lawgiver. Therefore, a sacrifice and restoring power such as may be seen in Christ need have nothing to do with justice proper, "being related only to that quasi justice which is the blind effect, in moral natures, of a violation of their necessary law."² This being the case, instituted law is no necessary prerequisite of redemption. All that God will do in the way of redemptive suffering and sacrifice, revolves about this eternal law of right, which exists logically prior to the institution of government. God's righteousness is not to be identified with His justice, and never requires Him to execute judgment under political analogies. Law and justice are to be regarded as co-factors of redemption, serving the same ends of spiritual renovation. Thus, recognizing the distinction between the eternal law of right, which is binding upon men by

¹Ibid., p. 187

²Ibid., p. 198

virtue of their nature as moral beings in the image of God, and the law which is the expression of God's government, the Bushnellian theory can eliminate the necessity for connecting the Atonement with the latter law. It is subjective defilement with which Christ's sacrifice is concerned, rather than the satisfaction of law or of punitive justice. Men are in need of salvation because they have fallen away from that moral state which is the proper expression of the eternal principle of right that is binding upon God, and upon man in His image. This salvation is to be realized in the restoration of humanity to that lost state; and the means by which this restoration is accomplished is the revelation in the cross of the vicarious love of God which suffers with and for His fallen creatures. Law and justice are concerned with nothing in God needing to be propitiated, but only with the all-important matter of renewing human lives.

Bushnell admits that arguments which show the probability of damage to the integrity and authority of God's government from a free remission of sins coupled with no penal satisfaction of justice have an appearance of reason. But that such is not the case, he devotes four chapters to proving. In the first he argues that the law precept is duly sanctified by Christ, and set in a position of great honor and power, by the following

considerations:

- (1.) He proposes...no remission of sins which does not include a full recovery to the law.
- (2.) All that He does and suffers in His sacrifice, He as truly does for the resanctification of the law as for our recovery.
- (3.) In His incarnation, He incarnates the same, and brings it nigh to men's feelings and convictions, by the personal footing He gains for it in humanity.
- (4.) He honors it again by His obedience, which is, in fact, a revelation of God's own everlasting obedience, before the eyes of mankind; the grandest fact of human knowledge.¹

In the unfolding of this argument, the point is made that the law of right is identical with the law of love, and that the vicarious sacrifice of Christ was the result of His obedience to this law that demanded that the good suffer for and with the evil. This point gives an element of strength to the influence theory as represented in Dr. Bushnell that is not so clearly apparent in all theologians of the subjective school. The revelation of vicarious, suffering love is not optional, but based upon a demand of the eternal law of right.

Having defended the proposition that in the work of Christ the law is duly sanctified though the remission of penalty be proclaimed apart from penal enforcement, Bushnell shows that legal enforcements are not diminished by referring to two doctrines of Scripture: the doctrine of endless punishment, and of Christ as the Judge of the world. The solemn warnings contained in these two conceptions, which were first proclaimed by the Saviour Himself, are a sufficient provision for the enforcement of the law apart

¹Ibid., pp. 265-266

from any penal substitution by Christ. Failure to respond to the moral power of God in Christ will result in endless loss to the sinner. And by warning men of the consequences of continuing in sin, our Lord in no way weakens the legal enforcements of the law by bestowing free pardon apart from satisfaction.

The third question dealt with is how God's rectoral honor is effectively maintained under the moral influence theory. Can God be just unless He either executes justice, or somehow has His justice satisfied? Dr. Bushnell admits that his view as to how Christ in His work adheres to law and justice could be put forward in a way of compensation, but he refuses to do so. In his view of vicarious suffering, Christ entered practically into the condition of evil and was made subject to it. By His incarnation He entered that state of corporate evil which the Scriptures call "the curse." He came into the curse and bore it for us.

Not that He endures so much of suffering as having it penally upon Him - He has no such thought - and yet He is in it, as being under all the corporate liabilities of the race. He had never undertaken to bear God's punishments for us, but had come down as in love, to the great river of retributive causes where we were drowning, to pluck us out; and instead of asking the river to stop for Him, He bids it still flow on, descending directly into the elemental rage and tumult, to bring us away.¹

If there must be some compensation made to law and justice for the loss they must suffer in the release of their penalties, it may be found in more than sufficient measure in all that is involved in the Incarnation.

¹ Ibid., p. 327

Finally, there is a chapter dealing with justification by faith according to the moral view. It is only where it wins consent, or faith, that moral power will produce its transforming work. This faith is to be regarded as a footing of grace and Divine liberty rather than as an idol of dogmatic opinion. The true meaning of justification by faith is that

Jesus, coming into the world, with all God's righteousness upon Him, declaring it to guilty souls in all the manifold evidences of His life and passion, wins their faith, and by that faith they are connected again with the life of God, and filled and overspread with His righteousness.¹

Thus, once again, there is no injury done to justice by God's act of free forgiveness, since the faith which justifies believers is "connected again with the life of God," and thus they are enabled to participate in that vicarious love for others which fulfills the eternal law of right.

As one of the most attractive theories of the subjective type, there is much in Bushnell that is appealing. The idea of sin as being a serious thing is stronger in him than in many of the example and influence views. This of necessity magnifies the corresponding conception of the salvation which Christ brings to men, for the need of redemption is fully appreciated only as there is an adequate view of the greatness of that from which man needs to be redeemed. There is also no tendency to make the love of God a certain soft, sentimental attitude of good will in spite of evil deserts, nor yet an assertion that this love freely

¹ Ibid., p. 369

pardons without any reference to the ideas of law and justice. One may rightly question whether or not Dr. Bushnell fully succeeds in his attempt to prove that no violence is done to these principles by the bestowal of free forgiveness without some form of satisfaction. It may also be doubted that the view of propitiation as having neither a necessity nor an objective reality can be made to harmonize fully with a great part of the New Testament teaching. It seems rather strange that Bushnell regards an element of wrath toward evil as a part of the moral perfection of God, while still denying any need for propitiation. The denial of both usually go hand-in-hand with subjective theories. But in this respect, as in others, we see an example of a basically orthodox thinker seeking to reconcile with his orthodoxy a view which often has no concern about utterly rejecting ideas which are both Scriptural and time-honored.

It may be regarded as a flaw in the Bushnellian view that, as Dr. Mackintosh expresses it,

it tends to transfer Atonement from the cross of Calvary to the throne of Heaven. Sin was eternally made good by the sufferings which the loving heart of God endured. But is not this one more way to make the cross of Christ of none effect? Not to age-long pain in heaven, but to one sharp immeasurable sacrifice of sorrow upon earth, we owe our deliverance in the blood of Christ. We were and are redeemed by Him who died for us, to the glory of God the Father.¹

The whole idea of eternal suffering in God is highly questionable. It is speculative in the highest degree. It has

¹Robert Mackintosh, Historic Theories of Atonement, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1920), p. 256

been the well-nigh universal faith of the Church that a part of the significance of the Incarnation may be seen in the idea that through it Divine love now knew suffering as suffering. The idea under consideration makes God's taking our humanity merely the vehicle for revealing an eternal truth concerning the nature of the Almighty. There is real point in Dr. Mackintosh's remark that "in relief at discovering a God who can feel, many minds fail to weigh the danger of losing a Christ who saves."¹

In criticizing any theory, it is usually the part of wisdom to consider the words of its friends as well as those of its foes. We therefore bring the discussion of the subjective theory to a close by looking at this appraisal by Dr. Bushnell himself:

It is one of the most remarkable facts in the history of Christian doctrine, that what the critical historians call the "moral view" of the Atonement, in distinction from the expiatory, has been so persistently attempted, and so uniformly unsuccessful... We are able to see...why the attempts at a moral construction of the sacrifice, such as have heretofore been made, should have failed. They have been partial, they have not contained matter enough to make any complete Gospel, or to maintain any permanent hold, as a power, in men's convictions. They begin to wane as they begin to live, and shortly die for want of any complete apparatus of life. One proposes Christ as an example. Another imagines that His work is exhausted in correcting the superstition, or false opinion, that God will not forgive sin; and so allowing God's paternity to be accepted. Another shows Him to be the teacher of a divine morality that must needs restore the world. Another beholds, in His life and death, the manifested love of God...The inherent weakness of all such versions of the Gospel is, that they look to see it operate by mere benignities - something is either to be shown or done, that is good enough to win the world.²

¹Ibid.

²Vicarious Sacrifice, (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866), pp. 336-337

CHAPTER V

SOME MODERN THEORIES

We have completed the study of the three general types into which the historic theories of Atonement may be divided. We have given some attention to the views of men who may be regarded as representative of these three types. It need scarcely be mentioned that, in view of the countless number of minds that have come to grips with the problem of the meaning of the central fact of the Christian faith, a great variety may be seen within the broad types of theories. Different points of view and different emphases are clearly discernible among the theologians who have given us the fruit of their studies. The marvel of all this grows to tremendous greatness as we consider the facts involved. That a life lived in an obscure corner of the world, and a death suffered in the shameful manner in which the Roman government executed capital punishment, should become the subject of so much thought, and study, and exposition, and controversy, on the part of some of the world's most brilliant minds, is one of the wonders of the ages. It is a strong testimony to the truth for which Christians have always stood: that in Jesus Christ of Nazareth we have not only a very exceptional and remarkable Man, but One who was

more than Man; One whom those who come to the place of faith in Him do not hesitate to address, with Thomas of old, as "My Lord and my God."

We may now bring our study to a close with the briefest glance at some of the theories of recent thinkers which are widely held and enjoy considerable popularity in our day.

The Vicarious Penitence Theory

The first view we shall consider may be defined as the theory of vicarious penitence. This idea, as set forth in its outstanding advocate - Dr. McLeod Campbell - regards Christ as the representative penitent. He, by virtue of His oneness with the human race, in His incarnation shared with men their sin and guilt consciousness, and thus actually repented for mankind while remaining sinless Himself. And it is on the basis of this representative penitence that God forgives sinners.

The theory of vicarious penitence is proposed and ably defended in Campbell's book, The Nature of the Atonement. In dealing with the Atonement, which he recognizes as having a fundamental place in Christianity, he observes that there are three aspects in which it may be contemplated: its reference - for whom was it made; its object - what was it intended to accomplish; and its nature - what has it been in itself?¹

¹J. McLeod Campbell, The Nature of the Atonement, (5th ed.; London: Macmillan and Co., 1878), p. 1

The question between the Reformers and the Church of Rome - the question of justification by faith alone - was most closely connected with the second aspect of the atonement...The discussions which subsequently divided the Reformers among themselves turned on the first; being as to whether the atonement had been made for all men, or for an election only. Much recent advocacy of the atonement has dealt freely with the third point, i.e., what the atonement is in itself, as to which there was no question raised in the earlier discussions, but as to which it has been latterly felt, that the other questions could not be rightly taken up until this one was more closely considered; and as to which the advocates of the universality of the atonement have begun to feel, that the received conceptions of its nature have given to the advocates of an atonement referring to an election only, an advantage in argument which a true apprehension of what the atonement has been would do away with.¹

It is this third aspect with which Dr. Campbell is particularly concerned.

It is worth noting the way in which the circumstances of his ministry affected the development of his doctrine of Atonement. He was appointed minister of the parish of Row,² in which he came to a people who were morally and spiritually asleep. Upon these sleeping souls Campbell urged God's claim for immediate trust. He exhorted them to believe that they were redeemed. But this was made well-nigh impossible because of an iron-clad Calvinism that limited redemption to an elect few. Such a situation forced Campbell to break with the Calvinist-Augustinian dogma which so paralyzed the delivery of the Gospel's message of mercy. He began to preach boldly that Christ had died for all - and was deposed from the ministry. Perceiving that a penal and legal substitution, with counter-imputations between

¹ Ibid., p. 2

² In Scotland

Christ and His people, went naturally with the conception of the limitation of redemption by Divine decree to the precise number actually saved, Campbell felt he must break with penal views of the Atonement. It was unthinkable to him that any doctrine should be true which involved the arbitrary limitation of redeeming love to only some out of the multitude of God's fallen creatures. Therefore, Christian theology must teach a moral and spiritual rather than a legal Atonement. Our faith in the Atonement for sin must be separated from delusive conceptions of the vicarious suffering of our punishment.

Three basic propositions lie at the basis of Campbell's Atonement doctrine. These propositions are an echo of an earlier theologian of the Calvinistic school to whose writings Dr. Campbell frequently refers - President Jonathan Edwards.¹ The first of these foundational ideas is, that Atonement could take place only on the ground either of equivalent punishment or of equivalent repentance. To Edwards only the first of these is logically possible; Campbell finds the truth in the second. The second basic proposition deals with the suffering of Christ as being such as only a perfectly holy and perfectly loving being could experience. To Campbell, the sufferings of Christ may be summed up as repentance for His brethren's sin blending with trust in God's eternal mercy. Edwards regards them as being penal in nature. The third essential idea is that Christ as perfect Man is under obligation to

¹ Princeton University

all men. God's law is the law of love; and Christ in His incarnation came under that law and perfectly fulfilled it. Such a truth is completely destructive of a theory which limits the Atonement to the elect.

Three unifying principles stand out clearly in Campbell's theology. The first of these is his faith in the Divine Fatherhood as the ultimate truth and the deepest ground of our hope in God. He felt that in the view of traditional Protestantism, God must be just but may be loving. But in his own doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood, there is no idea of a genial God, unmoved to wrath by sin. Rather, the wrath of God against sin is regarded as a reality, and the idea that satisfaction was due to Divine justice, no delusion. To trace redemption to its ultimate source in the Divine Fatherhood, and to regard that Fatherhood as implying no need for redemption, are completely opposite apprehensions of the grace of God. And Christ, in dealing with God on man's behalf, must be conceived of as dealing with the righteous wrath of God against sin, which is not inconsistent with His paternal love.

The second of Campbell's unifying principles is that the fact of the Atonement is to be studied in its own light; that is, it is to be seen in the light of the Gospel record of Christ the Sufferer, devotionally studied. Such a study of the Gospels reveals that Christ represents man before God in two ways: retrospectively, by repentance, and prospectively, by intercession. And He represents God to men in

the same two ways: retrospectively, by announcing God's condemnation of sin, and prospectively, by announcing the hope that there is for us in God, and the gift of eternal life.

The third unifying principle in Campbell's theology is his appeal to the conscience. Rectoral or public justice has no real meaning apart from absolute justice. Sin deserves suffering; guilt is real; God's wrath against sin is morally inevitable. Campbell speaks of Christ as enduring and exhausting the Divine anger. He tells us that Christ, in responding to God's judgment on sin,

is necessarily receiving the full apprehension and realization of that wrath, as well as of that sin against which it comes forth, into His soul and spirit, into the bosom of the divine humanity, and, so receiving it, He responds to it with a perfect response - or response from the depths of that divine humanity - and in that perfect response He absorbs it. ¹

We may now summarize Campbell's theory as to how Christ made Atonement. This He does by making a perfect confession of men's sins. The idea of an equivalent sorrow and repentance is made central. That perfect confession which was possible only to perfect holiness and perfect love was offered by Christ to the Father.

That oneness of mind with the Father, which towards man took the form of condemnation of sin, would in the Son's dealing with the Father in relation to our sins, take the form of a perfect confession of our sins. This confession, as to its own nature, must have been a perfect Amen in humanity to the judgment of God on the sin of man. ²

¹ Ibid., p. 117

² Ibid., pp. 116-17

Such confession, commensurate with the evil of sin and God's wrath against it, was made both possible and inevitable by the Incarnation. Christ's intercession, along with His confession, is a part of His sacrifice;

its power as an element of atonement we must see, if we consider that it was the voice of the Divine love coming from humanity, offering for man a pure intercession according to the will of God, offering that prayer for man which was the utterance alike of love to God and love to man.¹

Thus Christ makes in humanity "the due moral and spiritual Atonement for sin."² The direct and foremost blessing of His work is deliverance from sin rather than from the punishment of sin, which is regarded as a secondary result.

The Irvingian Theory

Another view of the Atonement which may be considered very briefly is that which may be called "Redemption by Sample." In this view,

Christ redeemed not us but His own humanity by the power of the Spirit gaining a victory over the flesh, which was sinful in Him as in us, and by dying on the cross not for our sin, but in condemnation of the sinfulness of His own human nature.³

According to the more recent versions of this theory, human flesh is regarded as inherently sinful, and the fall of Adam as the first manifestation rather than the origin of the evil principle in humanity. This would mean that Christ took upon Him not a fallen nature, but one doomed to sin by its creaturely weakness. This nature, whether conceived as

¹Ibid., pp. 127-128

²Ibid., p. 270

³Robert Mackintosh, Historic Theories of Atonement, (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1920), p. 232

fallen or as inevitably sinful, Christ, through the power of Holy Spirit or of His Divine nature, keeps from manifesting itself in any actual sin, and gradually purifies it, through struggle and suffering, until in His death He completely extirpates its original depravity, and reunites it to God. Thus He reconciles human nature to God, and makes humanity sinless - personally in Himself, potentially in all.

This theory is often connected with the name of Edward Irving,¹ who was one of its most representative advocates. Irving contended that the idea of a sinful nature in Christ is the uniform doctrine of both Catholic and Reformed orthodoxy. He reasoned that true, full humanity in our fallen race included original sin. Now as orthodoxy stands for Christ's full humanity, it stands for impersonal, potential, though unreal, sinfulness. The subjective purification of human nature in His person constitutes His Atonement, or at-one-ment, by which He unifies, in a sample personality, God and man. Through faith men become partakers of Christ's new humanity. This is a moral theory of Atonement. That He could and did stoop so low makes Christ's suffering a great exhibition of love, sacred before God and man.

This theory has some fatal weaknesses which have prevented it from obtaining as great a popularity as other modern views. The mind of the Christian instinctively shrinks from connecting sin with the nature of Christ. In the idea that "Christ became what we are" is no thought that, in order to redeem us from sin, He became sinful. Further-

¹1792-1834

more, the idea of a nature which never once results in act is a figment of the imagination which is utterly contrary to the facts. And finally, the idea that human nature is henceforth redeemed, independently of the redemption of the persons clothed in the common human nature, is a flat contradiction of the ethical terms, such as repentance, faith, and love, in which real redemption must be stated.

That we are saved, independently of faith, by a change in the substance of human nature - a change perhaps operating mainly through material sacraments - the assertion will not long be possible for any sincere modern mind.¹

The Eternal Atonement Theory

Reference should be made to an idea which we saw in Dr. Horace Bushnell, and which was made prominent in the view of theologians such as Dr. William N. Clarke and the preaching of popular preachers such as Leslie D. Weatherhead, that the greatest value to be seen in the cross of Christ is that it reveals a suffering love which in God is eternal. Thus is our salvation to be linked not to a historical sacrifice at Calvary, but to the "eternal Atonement" of which it is the proper expression. This theory may be classified as the "eternal Suffering" theory. The late Dr. Hitchcock of Union Seminary sees Scriptural support for this doctrine in those passages which speak of Christ as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world or as fore-ordained before the foundation of the world.²

¹ Ibid., p. 249

² R.D. Hitchcock, Eternal Atonement, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), pp. 3-4

And Leslie Weatherhead sets it forth in his most glowing language.

The world will only be redeemed by a love which suffers and waits till man at last, satiated with sin, shall turn to see what sin is costing God; who, through the long eternal years, treads His own self-chosen via dolorosa, and is nailed by sin to His eternal cross. We believe that the greatest truth about the Cross is that it is the translation into terms of history of an eternal fact. Calvary is its historical setting, but eternity is its compass; A.D. 29 was the time, but in a truer sense the Cross is timeless. For three terrible hours a curtain is drawn back from the eternal heart of God... Here is a love revealed to our wondering eyes which, long before Christ came, was loving and suffering for men in a manner which only Christ could reveal, and which will go on loving and suffering until the last soul is voluntarily brought into harmony with Himself in the final perfection of the ultimate heaven.¹

This theory, largely by virtue of the beautiful language in which it is stated, has a strong sentimental appeal. But, as we noted in the discussion of this idea as it appeared in Bushnell, it is based far more on speculative imagination than upon any clear teaching of Scripture. And, insofar as it pictures an unhappy Deity, it is decidedly undesirable. As Dr. Mackintosh so well expresses it,

We believe...that the assertion of God's happiness is a true part of our faith. Knowing the end from the beginning - seeing and feeling the whole as a whole - being in His inmost and deepest self the God of redemption - God possesses without effort or struggle the assurance that grace shall reign and that love must conquer. Therefore, in His calm vision of the unfolding ages, He must be happy indeed. An unhappy God would mean a bankrupt universe, a demonstrated pessimism, a doomed faith.²

Of course the advocates of God's eternal vicarious suffering

¹Leslie D. Weatherhead, The Transforming Friendship, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n.d.), pp. 156, 158

²Historic Theories of Atonement, (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1920), p. 254

do not regard Him as being unhappy; rather, they find therein the highest joy of vicarious love. That this is a paradox they freely admit. And the idea that our salvation is due to God's eternal suffering and not to the historic sacrifice of His beloved Son on the cross of Calvary is something that will not occur to the student of the New Testament Scriptures who is seeking to obtain from them their intended meaning, rather than to find in them that which will support a previously conceived view. The truth that may unhesitatingly be conceded in the theory is that the offering of Christ was an eternal Atonement in the sense that it was the expression of an eternal impulse of God's love, an eternal desire to give Himself for the good of His creatures. It was the expression of God's nature. To assert more is to go beyond the New Testament and the bulk of reverent thought through the Christian centuries.

More Objective Views

By no means all of today's theologians are so fully departed in their views of Atonement from the older orthodoxy as those whose theories we have scanned thus far. Such names as those of Hodge, Shedd, and Strong in America, and Dale, Denney, and Forsyth in Britain, are linked with views that recognize and are built upon many of the ideas that found their first expression in Anselm. We shall bring our study to a close by a brief consideration of one

theologian from each of these two groups - Dr. Strong and Dr. Forsyth. The former in many respects echoes Calvin, although there are elements of originality in his view as well. Strong describes his view as the ethical theory. It is a rigidly substitutionary view, holding to a two-fold element in Christ's substitution; namely, a vicarious obedience for righteousness, and vicarious punishment for sin.

This theory recognizes two kinds of substitution: unconditional, which grants full and absolute deliverance to those for whom substitution is made; and conditional, which grants deliverance only on the terms agreed upon between the one who makes the substitution and the one who accepts it. Christ's substitution was conditional, dependent upon repentance and faith, with reference to personal sins, and unconditional with reference to the guilt of the Adamic sin attached to the race.

There are three kinds of vicariously penal satisfaction: identical, equal, and equivalent. Christ's death was not identical because the death of one could not be the same as the death of many; it was not equal, because the death of the entire race of finite beings would not be equal to the death of the Infinite Being; it was equivalent, because one infinite factor, Jesus Christ, is inconceivably greater than all the finite factors making up the race of Adam.

Two questions are considered which are regarded as leading into the heart of the Atonement. The first is, what

¹1836-1921

²1848-1921

did the Atonement accomplish? The answer is three-fold: it satisfied the outraged holiness of God, avenged the violated law of God, and by its exhibition of God's love, furnished man a motive for repentance from sin and faith towards Christ. The second question deals with the problem of how Christ could justly die, and again, the three-fold answer is: He took our flesh; He inherited our guilt; He bore our penalty. The consequences of Adam's sin to his race are depravity, or corruption of human nature; guilt, or obligation to make satisfaction for sin through the holiness and law of God; and penalty, or actual endurance of loss or suffering as punishment for sin. Now Christ had no depravity; such passages as the one which speaks of His being made sin for us who knew no sin¹ must be understood to refer to the fact that by taking our humanity He inherited its guilt, in the sense defined. As a consequence of His thus inheriting our guilt, He justly bore our penalty.

Strong differs from the majority of the older satisfaction theories in asserting a universal Atonement. Provision is made in Christ's death for all mankind. But only those are actually saved by it who accept God's gracious offer of salvation through Christ. This involves the convicting and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Hence, it is not the Atonement that is limited, but the application of the Atonement by the Holy Spirit to the hearts of men.

¹ II Cor. 5:21

This theory, while well-reasoned in its presentation, and making a real effort to resolve some of the difficulties inherent in it, does not seem to be able to fully avoid the problems of the older satisfaction views. One such question regards the justice of God's punishing the sinner for whom the penalty of his sins has already been paid by the suffering of Christ. A limited Atonement is more consistent with this theory as a whole than the idea of a universal Atonement. Of course many other objections may be raised to this theory from the viewpoint of the subjective school. The idea that satisfaction and forgiveness are mutually exclusive, or that not God but man only is in need of reconciliation, invalidates Dr. Strong's view. And even from the viewpoint of others who believe in an objective Atonement, the question as to how God could justly punish the innocent for the guilty is not fully resolved by the idea that Christ inherited our guilt.

Dr. Forsyth is perhaps the outstanding theologian of modern times from the standpoint of maintaining an orthodox position while excluding from his theory many of the features which are regarded by modern thinkers as the most objectionable. The great need of the day, in his view, is expressed in the words "back to the Cross."¹ This means not only back to the moral principle of sacrifice, but to the religious principle of expiation as well. The faith of the Church must experience a new and practical grasp

¹ Thomas Whittaker (ed.), The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought, (New York: Bible House, 1902), p. 61

of the revelation which deals with the central human situation - the situation of sin and guilt. This revelation is concentrated in an Atonement. The need of Atonement rests not on a historic fall, but on the reality of present and corporate guilt.

From a negative viewpoint, Dr. Forsyth sets forth those ideas which must be regarded as outgrown in the construction of a sound doctrine of Atonement. The first such idea is that God has to be reconciled. The satisfaction made by Christ flowed from the grace of God, and did not go to procure it. Secondly, the idea that Redemption cost the Father nothing must give place to a realization that the Son could not suffer without the Father suffering, and that a forgiveness which cost the forgiver nothing would be too lacking in moral value or dignity to be worthy of holy love or rich in spiritual effect. Thirdly, the idea that Christ's suffering was an equivalent punishment, or that there can be an imputation as transfer of quantitative merit, must be replaced by our agreeing to see that what fell upon Christ was the due judgment of sin, its condemnation. We cannot renounce the idea of penalty, but must be cautious in using the word, and must abandon any thought that on the Cross Christ "was punished by the God who was ever well pleased with His beloved Son."¹ Fourthly, we need to escape from the sentimental idea of love which found no difficulty placed by the holy law of

¹ P.T. Forsyth, The Cruciality of the Cross, (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., n.d.), pp. 78-79

God's nature in His way of forgiveness, and must outgrow the other extreme - that forgiveness cost so much that it was impossible to God till justice was appeased and mercy set free by the blood of Christ.

Fifthly, the idea must be left behind that the satisfaction of Christ was made either to God's wounded honor or primitive justice, and we must see that it was made by obedience rather than by suffering. In the sixth place, we can no longer separate Christ's life of obedience from His expiatory death. And finally, the idea must be abandoned that expiation and forgiveness are mutually exclusive.

If we say that God, who had a right to destroy each sinner, offers pardon to those who really own in the Cross the kind (not the amount) of penalty which their sin deserved, then the contradiction vanishes.¹

The positive ideas by which Dr. Forsyth's doctrine of Atonement is set forth may be expressed in four points. First of all, Redemption is a part of Revelation. Revelation is not revelation until it comes home as such. The first Revelation involved the creation of man to receive it; thus Revelation and creation were one act. The second and greater revelation was not mere illumination or impression, but Redemption. Revealing was remaking. Revelation is properly regarded as something done, not something shown.

Secondly, Atonement is a constituent of Redemption.

¹ Thomas Whittaker (ed.), The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought, (New York: Bible House, 1902), p. 72

The thing from which we are to be redeemed is guilt. The love of God can only be revealed to sinful men as atoning love in some form of judgment. Salvation must be not from judgment, but by judgment.

Christ did not simply pronounce judgment, but effected it. And He gave it effect in His own person and experience. He bore the infinite judgment He pronounced. ...As Judge of all the earth, as the Conscience of the conscience, Christ is absolute in His judgment, unsparing and final in His condemnation. But as the second Adam and Man of men He attracts, accepts, and absorbs in Himself His own holy judgment; and He bears, in man and for man, the double crisis and agony of His own two-edged vision of purity and guilt. He whose purity has the sole right to judge has by the same purity the only power to feel and realize such judgment. And His love made that power for Him a duty. And so He was their Saviour.¹

In the third place, Atonement is as impossible for us as it is necessary to holiness. It is substitutionary in character; Christ not only represents God to man but man to God. Representation apart from substitution implies a foregone consent and election by the represented, which is not Christ's relation to humanity at all. The principle of a vicarious Atonement is bound up with the very idea of revelation, of love emerging into guilt. There is an atoning substitution and a penal, but no penitential.

Finally, the suffering of Christ is to be regarded as penal in the proper sense of the word. Sin is punished by suffering. Christ suffered because of the world's sin. The punishment of sin fell on Him. Christ loved holiness as much as He loved man, and the willing penalty of the Holy One was the only form

¹Ibid., p. 82

in which wounded holiness could be honored, and love be revealed as in earnest with sin. It was, moreover, the only way in which penalty or law could produce its fruit of repentance, and so of reconciliation. Expiation is the condition of reconciliation...The suffering was penal in that it was due in the moral order to sin.¹

As to what it was in the death of Christ which gave it saving value in the sight of God, the answer is twofold: it was a Divine satisfaction by virtue of its being the practical and adequate recognition of a broken law in a holy and universal life; and its effect on men must bring them to a repentance and reconciliation which was the one thing God required for restored communion and complete forgiveness.

The doctrine of Dr. Forsyth concerning the meaning and necessity of Atonement is well summed up in his following great sentence:

Every remission imperils the sanctity of law unless he who remits suffers something in the penalty foregone; and such atoning suffering is essential to the revelation of love which is to remain great, high, and holy.²

The preceding treatment of Dr. Forsyth's theory of Atonement points to the conclusion that in his view we have still such time-honored principles as satisfaction, substitution, and vicarious suffering which is penal in nature, but construed in a way that makes them more compatible with moral and spiritual realities than the older representations of these ideas which are rejected. Whatever may be felt as to its strength or weaknesses, it is a striking illustration of the truth that basic ideas are capable of

¹Ibid., pp. 84-85

²Ibid., p. 88

being dressed in new clothes, and that what is needed is not for these ideas to be discarded, but restated in the thought-forms of a new generation.

Thus we bring to a close this brief survey of what men have thought concerning the death of Jesus Christ. And by no means the least of the benefits from such a study is the profound sense of gratitude that the last word on this sublime subject has not yet been said. All the theories leave an impression of inadequacy; not one of them seems to fully satisfy. It is still open to all who have been brought by the Spirit of God into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and a participation in the benefits of His Atonement to discover new truths and furnish further insights into this grand theme into which the angels would fain inquire.

CHAPTER VI

SOME CONCLUSIONS

We have considered in the preceding pages some of the outstanding thought of the ages upon the great theme of the death of Jesus Christ. We have seen how a few of the great Christian thinkers have understood the significance of that death and its relationship to the salvation of men. We have endeavored, not by any means to cover the entire field of thought upon the Atonement - for the volumes that have been written thereon are legion. It has rather been our purpose to consider some of the theories that may be regarded as typical, with many variations and modifications, of three main types of views - the classic or patristic view; the objective view, of which Anselm's theory of satisfaction is the first great type; and the subjective view, which, in Socinus, regards Christ's death chiefly as an example, and in Bushnell, emphasizes the moral influence of the Atonement. We have given very brief consideration to a few modern theories which combine both objective and subjective elements. It will not be out of order to attempt to draw a few conclusions from our studies, which appear to our own mind to be justified by the things which we have considered. These conclusions are, and should

be, subject to change; for to become static in thinking is intellectual suicide. Nevertheless, to be without firm convictions is no evidence of mental power. It is not the inability to have, but the inability to change one's strong beliefs, that is detrimental to growth.

One fact, which was stated in the introduction, is borne out by the study of the theories of Atonement. That fact is, that no one theory has ever been propounded that has either contained all of the truth or has failed to contain an element of truth. It is undoubtedly one of the most precious doctrines of the Christian Gospel that Jesus Christ has in His death triumphed over man's greatest enemies. He has taken the sting out of death for all who trust in Him. Therefore, the view that sees in the Atonement primarily a victory of God over the powers of evil is based on a very vital element of truth. The Satisfaction theory, on the other hand, finds a necessity for the death of Christ by connecting it with a requirement of God. Many Christian theologians of course reject this idea; but, as we shall attempt to show later in this discussion, to fail to recognize this element in the Atonement is a definite defect in the subjective theories. And who can question the tremendous effect of the cross in melting hardened hearts and breaking down stubborn wills, in awakening a responsive love deep in the soul of the one who sees in the sacrifice on Calvary the greatest expression of the self-sacrificing love of God? It scarcely need be said that love to Jesus

Christ has been the underlying, the great impelling motive behind countless deeds of valor and examples of unflinching devotion to truth. The subjective element of the Atonement can be seen in its outworking in the lives of men, and therein lies the reason for its strong appeal to those who seek to set forth the ultimate meaning in the death of Christ in terms of its observable results. Therefore, we have in the historic theories of Atonement not a conflict of truth with falsehood, but truth viewed from different aspects and points of view. We might compare the various views to stones with which men are attempting to erect a great structure: the structure of the truth concerning the death of Jesus Christ. Each stone needs the hammer and the chisel; its rough edges must be made smooth by the cutting process in order that it may fit perfectly into the finished structure. And that this great temple of truth will ever be completed within the present historic order is highly improbable.

Another fact, which is essential to a full understanding of the various doctrines of the Atonement, is that each theory is profoundly influenced by the social process. That is, Christian doctrines are in part "the projection of existing social institutions and practices..."¹ Shailer Mathews has developed this idea at great length in his book, The Atonement and the Social Process. Although it may be truthfully said that this

¹ Shailer Mathews, The Atonement and the Social Process, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 31

principle seems to be given a decidedly exaggerated importance in this work, it nevertheless contains an element of truth. An example of this may be seen in regard to the Anselmic doctrine. As Dr. Mathews points out,

Feudal practice found expression in the Anselmic doctrine of the Atonement, by which God is conceived of as a feudal lord, having an honor which must be satisfied before He is free to undertake the salvation of men whom He wishes to take the place of the fallen angels.¹

He points out how not only Anselm's view, but every theory of the meaning of the death of Christ is a reflection of the total life - political and economic, as well as religious - of the social groups to which the Gospel came. The greatest weakness in Mathews' thesis is that it places the New Testament revelation on the same plane with later theories. The profound utterances of Paul, and the author of Hebrews, are themselves only expressions of the meaning of the death of Christ in terms of inherited patterns of thought. Of course this idea is commonplace to those who will allow no thought of the New Testament Scriptures as authoritative. But with a certain cautious restraint, the study of the social life of developing civilization can make a valuable contribution to an understanding of some of the conceptions and emphases of the historic theories of Atonement.

A third fact, which has been previously stated but now requires further elaboration, is that Atonement theories

¹Ibid., p. 19

are defective in what they omit rather than in what they assert. They build upon one element of truth, or upon one phase of the New Testament teaching, and leave out of their scheme equally significant facts which are essential to a fully-rounded view. For example, the patristic view illustrates the partial and fragmentary method of dealing with the Scripture passages bearing on the Atonement. It emphasizes out of all due proportion those passages which represent the death of Christ under the figure of a ransom. This ransom must be paid to someone; and that someone comes to be, in the thinking of many of the fathers, the devil, who because of Adam's sin has a rightful claim on men, so that he must be "bought off" in order for life to be restored to them. Similarly, Anselm's view, while it connects the Atonement with a requirement of God, is defective because it fails to emphasize the inward and vital aspects of Christ's atoning work. It is wrought out in abstract terms of honor, justice, satisfaction, and merit. It deals too exclusively in externals. Furthermore, while the subjective theories, as we have observed, contain valuable elements of truth, they provide for only a small fraction of the New Testament teaching on the subject. Oddly enough, they are void of the great elements of power in the Gospel which have been the moving force in Christianity from the beginning. The reason for this is not hard to see. A. H. Strong tells of a deeply convicted sinner who was told that God could cleanse his heart and

make him over anew. He replied with righteous impatience: "That is not what I want; I have a debt to pay first!"¹ It is this sense of guilt that makes the objective view of Atonement so deeply vital in the faith of men. Theologians may deny any validity to that sense of guilt; but this cannot nullify the fact that countless numbers burdened with so heavy a load of guilt that it nearly crushed them have found peace in the assurance that Christ in His death somehow satisfied the claims of justice and put away the sins of those who trust in Him. The failure to make adequate provision for this deep-seated need is the greatest defect of the subjective types of Atonement theories.

We come finally to the consideration of some elements which we believe must be included in any sound view of the Atonement. Such consideration certainly cannot aspire to the dignity of being considered the building of a complete theory; it is merely the setting forth, as we see it, of some of the stones which must be used in erecting a structure that can stand the test.

The first element that must enter into a sound theory is the idea that there is something in God that made the Atonement necessary. This is denied by the subjective theories. According to the various moral influence views, the suffering of Christ is intended primarily to be an exhibition of love intended to touch the human heart. This seems very unreal and dramatic. A father may

¹ A.H. Strong, Systematic Theology, (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1946), p. 732

be badly burned in the effort to rescue his child who had fallen into the fire. Such a deed would win the applause of all. But would we not regard a father as acting in a very irrational manner who should call his child to the fireside and then attempt to prove his love by thrusting his hand into the flame?

There is no real exhibition of love unless the suffering through which love expresses itself was needful...When there is no need for love to express itself in suffering, is that which suffers love, or is it folly?¹

Dr. Mackintosh draws a picture of two friends watching a torrent roaring by in dangerous flood. The younger and weaker man takes a careless step, overbalances himself, and is carried away by the stream; the other instantly plunges in after him and recovers his friend before he has been carried over the waterfall to certain death. But in this heroic deed the rescuer's strength is exhausted, and when he is drawn out of the whirlpool, he is dead or dying. What else can the rescued one say but, "He loved me and gave himself for me?" And if there had been estrangement, how must the survivor's heart be pierced by what has happened! And how must his life be commanded henceforward by gratitude and repentance!

But on the other hand, had there been no necessity for the dear dead friend to incur danger, what a difference it would make! It is hard to imagine anything less sane than for a friend to say to his fellow, "I love you deeply! I must give you proof of it! And therefore for

¹Robert Mackintosh, *Historic Theories of Atonement*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1920), pp. 17-18

your sake I will risk everything by leaping into this dangerous torrent." And he says this while the other is standing safely on the bank! What can the survivor think of so wasted a sacrifice, but "He died for nothing?"

The element in the death of Christ which has truly supplied the "moral influence" that moves men to repentance and a new life has always been the conviction that by the great deed on Calvary they have been delivered from a real and genuine peril. They have believed that the Atonement is connected in a vital way with the forgiveness of their sins and the salvation that is theirs through Christ. They have seen a necessity for Christ's death in the moral constitution of man and in the nature of God. The moral influence theory denies this. It is, like the Anselmic view, too abstract, converting the Atonement into a mere dramatic spectacle and appeal, grounded in no great and fundamental moral and spiritual necessities. It involves a suffering and humiliation of Christ with no inherent and vital connection with the end in view. It does not explain the prayer and agony of Gethsemane, nor the forsaken cry on the cross. As Dr. Mullins observes,

Unless there was more in His death than this theory supposes, Christ was less heroic in His death than some of His followers have been, who have gone singing to the martyr's stake. Early Christianity abounds in such instances.¹

So it is impossible to find any meaning in the death of Christ that can fully satisfy the intellect, or that can

¹
The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression,
 (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1948), p. 309

make its most effective appeal to the heart, apart from the idea that there was a moral necessity involved that made that death necessary. To fully define that necessity may be impossible, and some of the attempts that have been made may be quite unsatisfactory; but it may be boldly asserted that something in the nature of God and the moral constitution of His universe made the death of Jesus Christ necessary.

Another element that must enter into any sound view of the Atonement is the truth that it was God's redemptive love that was the motive behind the life and death of His Son. The older satisfaction theories failed to grasp this truth. Briefly, in the thinking of Anselm and those who follow him, the Divine attributes are at war with each other. One such attribute is conceived of as holiness or righteousness or justice. This attribute demands the death of the sinner, who has violated the Divine majesty. But another attribute, love, pleads for the forgiveness and restoration of God's fallen creation. The death of Christ reconciles these attributes and enables God to be both just and loving in His dealing with mankind. Some forms of the satisfaction theory even go so far as to imply that the Atonement is the cause rather than the result of God's love for the world. This is a serious error. In the first place, it is false to think of the Divine attributes as being detached; they are all qualities of the character and being of God. This being true, it is impossible to intelligently conceive of any

attitude or act of God as being either unjust or unloving. It is probably the truest to the facts in the case to state that it was righteous love that prompted the Atonement. It is certainly a clear teaching of the New Testament that God does not love us because Christ died for us, but that Christ died for us because God loves us.¹ The Son's death did not purchase, but expressed, the Father's love.

A third element in a sound theory of Atonement is a recognition that it is the means by which forgiveness of sins is bestowed. Theologians may insist that it was not necessary for Christ to die in order for men to be forgiven; but their insistence cannot nullify two very obvious facts: namely, that Christ did die, and that the New Testament uniformly connects His death with the remission of sins. In the words of Jesus, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins."² In the writings of Peter, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ."³ According to Paul, in Christ "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace."⁴ The writer of Hebrews tells us that the Son, who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person, "by Himself purged our sins."⁵ And to John, Christ is the Lamb who "has redeemed us to God by (His) blood."⁶ These passages, which could be multiplied

¹Rom. 5:8

²Matt. 26:28

³I Pet. 1:18-19

⁴Eph. 1:7

⁵Heb. 1:3

⁶Rev. 5:9

indefinitely, show conclusively that the idea that Christ's death secured the remission or forgiveness of sins was the universal belief of early Christians.

A fourth indispensable element in a well-rounded theory of Atonement is the insistence upon a vital inward basis for the bestowal of the benefits of Christ's death upon the believer. As we have seen, the Anselmic view failed to give due emphasis to this truth. It presented the idea of the transfer of merit from the Saviour to His "kindred and brethren" in terms that were entirely external. The Scriptures consistently supply a safeguard against this error by representing the faith of the one who trusts in Christ as resulting in an inward change which is no less than revolutionary in its effect. This radical change is described as a "new birth" or a "birth from above."¹ It is said of the one who is "in Christ" that he is a "new creation."² Paul says of his own experience that he has been crucified with Christ, and that the resulting transformation is so complete that it is no longer he who lives, but Christ lives in him.³ There has been a great deal of discussion as to whether this testimony of the Apostle is to be understood as referring to position or experience; considered in the context of his life, it must be regarded as having a reference to both. Now this vital inward aspect of the Christian's faith has been expressed by theology as union with Christ. This union is made real in the

¹John 3:3

²II Cor. 5:17

³Gal. 2:20

experience of regeneration, and its result in a growing Christian life is called sanctification. The agent in both is the Spirit of God. This is the barest possible summary of the way in which the theology expresses the indispensable principle that the Christian salvation includes not only the justification of the sinner who trusts in the Saviour and His finished work, but that vital union with the living Christ through the indwelling Holy Spirit that reproduces the life of Christ in the believer.

Fifthly, a correct view of the Atonement requires a correct view of the Person of the Redeemer. It is one of the most striking facts of history that although there have been many men who laid down their lives for others, there has been only one Man whose death has been regarded as of such extraordinary value that countless thousands have through it received the assurance of the blessing of pardon and a hope of life eternal. What is the explanation of this phenomenon? The answer is obvious. The death of Jesus Christ has unique value because He is in Himself unique, bearing a relationship to the Eternal which can be claimed by no other. The realization that their Master was the prophesied Messiah seems to have dawned rather slowly upon His disciples. Whether Peter made his great confession at Caesarea Philippi as spokesman for the group or as an expression merely of his own personal conviction is not quite clear. But it is the Resurrection which was uniformly regarded by the Apostolic church as furnishing

the conclusive proof of the Messiahship of Jesus. He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."¹ The New Testament reveals a progressive deepening of the understanding of the first generation of Christians concerning who the One in whom their faith was anchored really was. The confession that "Jesus Christ is Lord"² seems to have been the earliest statement of the Christology of the early church. Paul clearly recognizes His pre-existence and His agency in creation.³ And in the Johannine writings He is seen as the eternal Word made flesh - the idea from which our word "Incarnation" is derived.⁴ And so, to the early church, the death of Christ assumed so great a value because they perceived that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."⁵ Later attempts to explain the two natures in Christ, or to define the relationship between the human and the Divine, led to an unfortunate obscuring of that which gave infinite value to the Atonement. This may be seen in Anselm, who taught that Christ suffered only in His human nature,⁶ and was forced by this position to develop a complicated argument to show that Christ's death was of sufficient value to make satisfaction for man's sin. The true and sufficient explanation of the saving

¹Rom. 1:4

²Rom. 10:9

³Col. 1:15-19

⁴John 1:14

⁵II Cor. 5:19

⁶Cur Deus Homo? (London: Griffith Farran Okeden & Welsh, n.d.) p. 13

power of the Atonement is that He who hung on the cross was God manifested in the flesh.¹

A sixth element that is necessary if the Atonement is to be successfully defended against the charge of being unethical is a recognition of the relationship of Christ to the race which He came to redeem. Opponents of an objective Atonement often represent it as holding that the Saviour as an innocent third party bears the sins of the guilty in order that they may be released from punishment. This is a thorough misrepresentation. Christ is not an "innocent third person." He is in reality the Creator of the race. When in Atonement He assumes its responsibility, it is a part of the original responsibility involved in His creative act. At the same time, He is one with the race through the Incarnation. So it is that it is mankind's Creator who on the cross became its Saviour, and who in order to redeem the race became identified with it by partaking of our humanity. This admittedly does not relieve the subject of all of its mystery, but it does answer the charge of immorality that is often brought against it.

A seventh element in an acceptable theory of Atonement is the element of universality. The idea of a limited Atonement, according to which Christ is regarded as having made satisfaction for the sins of only the elect, held sway almost without opposition until the Arminian revolt. Of course it is quite consistent with the view that God has out

¹I Tim. 3:16

of His own good pleasure elected a portion of mankind to everlasting bliss and reprobated the remainder to eternal damnation. It can be made to harmonize quite readily with the God pictured by Augustine and Calvin; but it is impossible to harmonize with the God of the New Testament revealed in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This God's love is inclusive of all mankind. He will have all men to be saved.¹ He is not willing that any should perish.² And He sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.³ All of this involves the proposition that Christ died for all. And it is only upon such a basis that the preacher of the Gospel can make an appeal to all men everywhere to turn from their sins and trust in the Saviour whose blood has been shed for their redemption. If the Atonement was actually made only for an elect group, it follows inevitably that no provision has been made for the rest of mankind. We cannot say to every man with full confidence, "Christ died for you." This clouds the brightness with which the love of God for His world shines forth in the Scriptures. It introduces a note of insincerity into the offer of salvation to all upon the basis of the sacrifice of Calvary. Such an offer can be fully valid only as it presupposes an Atonement made for all men.

A final element essential to a full appreciation of the significance of the Atonement is its nature as a two-fold revelation: a revelation of the exceeding sinfulness

¹I Tim. 2:4

²II Pet. 3:9

³I John 4:14

of sin, and the supreme manifestation of the Divine love that redeems. As to the first of these, it may be said that nowhere is the wickedness of the unregenerate human heart seen in all its ugly blackness so clearly as in that scene on Golgotha's brow. If we may ponder the question as to why those men, many of whom were the religious leaders of their day, who stood around the cross and mocked and jeered at the One who hung there, had in their hearts such a hatred for Him whose death they had at last been able to bring about, the only possible answer must be that His purity condemned their mean, hypocritical lives. He had referred to them as whited sepulchres, outwardly clean but inwardly full of dead men's bones. They saw themselves in the light of what He was; and the comparison aroused the deepest animosity of which the human heart is capable. Calvary reveals human nature at its worst. And dare we say that there has been any change in these days of such marvellous development along some lines? Can we be sure that Christ would receive any different treatment were He to come again to our generation as He did to that one in the long ago?

But the cross reveals not only the sinfulness of human hearts, but it reveals what sin costs God. It is a legitimate paraphrase of the words of Paul that "Christ died for our sins" to say that "our sins nailed Christ to the cross." There is a widespread sentimentality present in our world today that regards forgiveness as something

cheap and easy, and feels that all that a man need do to receive it is to say "I'm sorry." A generation such as ours which seems to have lost a sense of the terribleness of sin needs to look to Calvary. Can the realization that sin made necessary that which took place there fail to reveal to an honest mind something of the horror of this great universal disease of the race?

As we have observed, the cross also is the revelation of the matchless love of God. "Christ loved me and gave Himself for me,"¹ is the glad confession of the persecutor who had become an Apostle. It is at Calvary that "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men."² The love of God had been revealed in what Christ did in His ministry. It had been revealed in His gracious words; in His marvellous deeds as He went about healing the sick; in the compassion with which He was often moved by the sight of the multitudes as sheep having no shepherd. But the fullest possible revelation of redeeming love can be seen only as He willingly went to the cross and freely laid down His life for sinners. It can be seen in His cry, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do."³ It can be seen in His words of pardon to the dying thief.⁴ We have said that sin nailed the Son of God to the cross. This statement is only a half truth. It was for love that the Saviour died. Sin demanded a price; and love willingly

¹Gal. 2:20

²Titus 2:11

³Luke 23:34

⁴Luke 23:43

paid that price. This is the two-fold revelation of the cross.

And so we bring this discussion to a close with a profound sense of how inadequate it has been to fully fathom the depth of the meaning of the death of the Son of God. We have looked at several attempts by reverent minds to set forth the rational explanation of the "why" and the "how" of the Atonement, and have found these attempts only partly successful. We have set forth some conclusions which we believe to be valid; but these leave so much unsaid. And yet, with all its matchless profoundness, the Atonement may in reality be summed up in two brief sentences: "The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me;"¹ and "We love Him, because He first loved us."² On these two marvellously simple statements rests the entire explanation of the Atonement.

¹Gal. 2:20

²I John 4:19

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