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The comprehensive framework is also important relative to the type of individualistic, personal salvation espoused by some strands of Protestant evangelical theology. In this approach, usually associated with evangelism aimed at producing a conversion experience for large numbers of people, salvation tends to become attenuated to a punctiliar experience, readily recognized among those who emphasize the importance (and even the necessity) of a conversion which can be fixed to an 'hour of decision', or even to a minute of change. The experience is frequently formulaic (following a 'plan of salvation' with various defined stages) and related to a theology of almost totally passive receptivity on the part of the convert. Repentance may be avowed, but it usually has a secondary role, as does baptism. Salvation becomes an individual affair: personal punctiliar salvation. Even the whole rich field of conversion in terms of its history and nature receives little attention.³⁷ 'Saving souls' usurps making disciples of Christ, and the comprehensive nature of God's saving work is lost.

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The Radical Modernizing of the Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation

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INTRODUCTION

With a trembling hand and tears young Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, who had just turned eighteen, wrote the following in a letter to his father, a Prussian army chaplain, on January 21, 1787:

³⁷ 37. A selection from the extensive literature could include: William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (see note 8 above), 157–206; A.D. Nock, *Conversion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933, 1961); Marilyn J. Harran, *Luther on Conversion: The Early Years* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983); Hugh T. Kerr and John M. Mulder, *Conversions: The Christian Experience* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983); H. Newton Malony and Samuel Southard, *Handbook of Religious Conversions* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1992); Karl F. Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992); *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia press, 1992); and the work of A.F. Segal cited in note 18 above.

Faith is a regale (i.e., a sovereign right) of the divinity, you wrote me. Oh, dear Father, if you believe that without this faith, there is no salvation, at least not in the life hereafter, and no peace in this life as there is in the other, and that is indeed what you believe, oh, then ask God that He grant this faith to me, because right now I have lost it. I cannot believe that it was the eternal, true God who merely called himself 'Son of Man'. I cannot believe that his death was a substitutionary atoning one because he himself never expressly said so, and because I cannot believe that it was necessary, for it is impossible, therefore, for God to want to eternally punish people whom He apparently created not for perfection, but, rather, only for striving after the same, just because they did not become perfect.¹

The far-reaching break with tradition, the revolution in the theological thinking of modern times, can hardly be summarized more briefly than in this confession of young Schleiermacher, who quickly rose to become one of the leading Protestant theologians of the nineteenth century. What occurred with respect to the history of ideas which allowed a young man who sincerely believed, who was completely influenced by his father in the piety of older Pietism of the Herrnhuter sort, and who orientated himself as a young theologian to the Bible and the basic principle of the Reformation of the justification of the sinner by faith alone, to fall into such serious doubt and temptation?

One thing must be made clear here: Schleiermacher was certainly familiar with the basic principles of the classical biblical doctrine of atonement, which can be summarized as follows: man, who was created by God as 'good', rebelled against his Creator because of his original freedom, and fell away from God. He came thereby under the enslavement of sin and death. God redeemed man from temporal and eternal damnation in that he himself became a man in Jesus Christ and suffered the curse of death in a substitutionary way. By this redemptive act of God man is liberated from the power of sin and death. He is placed into new fellowship with God the Father when he accepts in faith the forgiveness of sin given by Christ. As a pardoned sinner, the Christian is empowered to become obedient to God's command. In a world of suffering and death he may hope for the fulfilment of the promise of God in eternal life. The goal of the reconciliation of God in Christ is 'the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells' (see [2 Peter 3:13](#)). The salvific work of substitutionary atonement is completed in the Kingdom of Heaven, in which all believers have a part.

Why then does the message of the Christian faith just summarized, which is centred on the gift of reconciliation of the holy God with sinful man, no longer seem believable to Schleiermacher? After all, theology had throughout sixteen centuries of church history developed this very gospel. Certainly different aspects of the event of reconciliation move into view in differing epochs of the church, but the biblical doctrine of salvation was held unchallenged as the foundation of the faith. The revelation of the work of divine redemption was confessed as unalterable truth.

In this article we will try to clarify how radical changes of thought came about and how these influenced important theologians of the Modern Age; we will use as examples some important philosophical positions of the European Enlightenment and of German Idealism. This can, of course, be shown within the bounds of a short essay only in some especially representative source texts. In this essay, it is important for us to confront, example for example, the basic biblical ideas with the convictions of modern thought in order to show how philosophical presuppositions and evaluations have become definitive for the theological understanding of reconciliation even up to the present.

¹ 1. *Aus Schleiermachers Leben. In Briefen*. Erster Band (Vol. 1): Von Schleiermachers Kindheit bis zu seiner Anstellung in Halle October 1804. Berlin, 1858, p. 45.

First of all, it is clear in this that the great thinkers of the Enlightenment and of Idealism were completely aware of the foundational upheaval brought about by their approach compared to the classical doctrine of reconciliation. We have, therefore, started from Schleiermacher's crisis which most certainly was not merely an intellectual problem but was also a deeply existential one as well. The renunciation of the traditional Christian doctrine of reconciliation in all essential arguments, which is representative of the Modern Age, can be demonstrated in an exemplary fashion in the writings of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). They established the 'ideal type' of the Christian understanding of reconciliation which Count Aulen of Lund presents in a well-informed manner in his essay on 'The Three Main Types of the Christian Idea of Reconciliation'.²

Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) and Wilhelm Herrmann (1846–1922) took up the idealistic type of the doctrine of reconciliation in the nineteenth century and thereby completely reshaped Christian dogmatics in an effort to convey the gospel to modern culture. In the twentieth century, Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) and Paul Tillich (1886–1965) advanced these ideas further. Further development of these ideas, somewhat trivialized, appears in the currently fashionable theologies of feminism and psychological exegesis. We will examine here aspects of the work of these theologians and philosophers which have contributed in a definitive way to the reshaping of the biblical doctrine of atonement, quoting relevant source texts in detail and contrasting them with the statements of Scripture.

1. ATONEMENT AS THE CALL OF THE 'LOVING GOD' A THEOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

1.1. The Rejection of the Divine Attribute, 'the Wrath of God'

Central to the development of the Christian doctrine of God is the reflection on the essence and the characteristics of God, his so-called attributes. The attributes of God in theology are not, of course, deduced from the speculative thought of man about what God could or must be like theoretically, but they go back to the historical revelation of God given in the Holy Scriptures. Religious and philosophical speculation very quickly and for good reasons becomes a slave to the criticism of religions, which argues from a psychological standpoint. Man works out his concept of a god from his open or hidden illusions. If this is so then God is in fact only a projection of Man in the sense meant by the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872).

In modern theology, which starts with a very human conception of Man, the idea of the wrath of God is an intolerable thought which cannot be harmonized with the modern concept of love. This position is represented especially by Albrecht Ritschl, one of the most important liberal theologians of the 19th century. According to Ritschl, wrath is not an attribute of God and atonement cannot be completed properly in legal statutes and structures because the realm of morality is, theologically, not that of law, but of love. The idea of the God of love is, thereby, derived less from the biblical history of redemption, and more from a purely idealistic conception which Ritschl determines with a philosophical definition:

First, it is necessary that the objects which are loved should be of like nature to the subject which loves, namely, persons. ... *Secondly*, love implies a will which is constant in its aim. If the objects change, we may have fancies, but we cannot love. *Thirdly*, love aims at the

² 2. *Die drei Haupttypen des christlichen Versöhnungsgedankens* (ZsTh 8, 1930).

promotion of the other's personal end, whether known or conjectured. ... *Fourthly*, if love is to be a constant attitude of the will, and if the appropriation and the promotion of the other's personal end are not alternately to diverge, but to coincide in each act, then the will of the lover must take up the other's personal end and make it part of his own.³

In short, love is '... that will which accepts, as belonging to one's own end, the task of advancing permanently the end of other personal beings of like nature with oneself'.⁴

The biblical understanding of the wrath of God stands opposed to this: 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth'. ([Rom. 1:18](#)) 'But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed'. ([Rom. 2:5](#)). It is noteworthy that these witnesses are from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, the basic document in the New Testament dealing with the doctrine of atonement, from which Luther gained his crucial Reformation understanding of justification. Corresponding to this is Jesus' own testimony: 'He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him' ([John 3:36](#); see also [John 3:16](#)).

Misunderstanding God's actions in love, Ritschl believes he can demonstrate that

the asserted necessity of a penal satisfaction to God as a condition of the exercise of this grace has no foundation in the Biblical conception of God; on the contrary, it is an intellectual inference from the principles of Hellenic religion that the gods practise a twofold retribution.⁵

In looking at the matter more carefully, exactly the opposite is shown to be correct: the idea of satisfaction for a penalty to God is offensive to the human mind (see [1 Cor. 1:23](#): '... foolishness to the Greeks'.) whereas the Scriptures see the basis for our salvation therein: 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us' ([Gal. 3:13](#); see also [Deut. 21](#); [23](#); [1 Peter 3:18](#)).

1.2 A Rejection of God, the Judge of the World

The rejection of God's function as Judge is directly connected with calling into question the wrath of God as an inappropriate and thereby unworthy idea of God. If God's love excludes his holy wrath toward sin and the unrepentant sinner, then forgiveness remains as the only business of the 'loving God', which is completely in accordance with Voltaire's (1694–1778) polemic statement: *pardonner c'est son métier* ('forgiveness is his business').

For Schleiermacher,

... the separation contemplated at the Last Judgment remains ... both inadequate and superfluous. All that might be said is that it takes place for the sake not of the blessed but of the others ... But either this would mean attributing jealousy to the Supreme Being, an idea against which even the higher paganism protested; or it must rest solely on that familiar and widespread idea of the divine righteousness which in its one sidedness looks so like caprice that before we could feel ourselves entitled, not to say obliged, to regard the idea as in harmony with the mind of Christ, it would have to be much less equivocal in

³ 3. Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (3rd ed.) English translation by H.R. Mackintosh and A.B. Macauley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1900), p. 277f.

⁴ 4. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 381.

⁵ 5. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 478.

its origins, the expression given to it much more decisive, and the Apostles' use of it much more comprehensive.⁶

It can be clearly seen in this statement by Schleiermacher how very detestable the idea of God's wrath is to the man of the Romantic period who considered himself to be modern. He is no longer able to combine the wrath and judgment of God with the holiness and righteousness or justice of God, but only still with the blind capriciousness and the vengeful malice of pagan gods.

According to Ritschl, the penal justice of a judging God is also not compatible with divine freedom and love; he writes:

But since Divine justice, in relation to human sin, operates merely in a one-sided way, namely in its character as penal power, the juridical complexion of this theory comes out still further in the notion that the primitive justice of God manifests itself in the same positive impartiality as befits a judge when hearing each particular case of accusation. Just as a judge, when forming his opinion of a punishable act, must disregard everything of the nature of moral disadvantage which the punishment of the criminal will entail upon his relatives and himself, so God, it is maintained, is bound so strictly by His punitive justice that He is entirely in different to the form which the fate of the human race may take as a result of punishment. The proverb which is used to illustrate the impartiality which ought to characterise any particular sentence—*Fiat iustitia, pereat mundus* —[Let justice be done, even if the world is destroyed!] is literally applied to the alleged Divine dispensation.⁷

While Schleiermacher turns the judging God almost into an idol with religious historical arguments, Ritschl approaches the problem with the idea of a trial within the rule of law. God must at least satisfy the elementary requirements of procedural law. Here, though, a particular weakness of modern humanism results in a criticism of the judgment of God which leads ultimately to utter absurdity. A God who is not oriented to the rules of the game defined by man cannot be good and just. What is overlooked is that God's being is holy in itself and, therefore, his present and eschatological judgment on Judgment Day is and will be just. What righteousness is cannot be derived theologically from Man's awareness or sense of justice, but must be taken in a normative theological sense from God's being, and from the way in which he has revealed himself in the biblical history of salvation.

The modern illusion of the 'loving God' which the nineteenth century especially nurtured with considerable intensity broke down in the horror of the First World War as a traumatic culture shock. After the catastrophe of the Third Reich, Wolfgang Borchert, in his theatre production *Draussen vor der Tuer* (Standing Outside the Door) rebelled against the '... loving God bloody with ink'. In the catastrophes of the twentieth century the naive cultured Protestant talk of the love of God, which does not include his anger and his judgment, could no longer be defended. In the argument over the loving God, who could not be reconciled with the realities of the world, God was denied by many completely and finally. The teachings of Ritschl and Schleiermacher about the nature of God fail because of the realities of life. (see [Isa. 13:9](#); [James 5:8f](#); [Acts 10:42](#))

⁶ 6. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (2nd German edition) edited and translated by H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928) p. 716 § 162.

⁷ 7. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 255.

2. THE PROUD EGO NEEDS NO ATONEMENT AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

2.1 Tthe Moral Protest of Autonomous Man

Among the philosophers of the Modern Age, none was as influential for Protestantism as Immanuel Kant. His understanding of the autonomous moral man had an especially profound influence on the Protestant criticism of the Reformation understanding of the doctrines of justification and atonement. According to Kant, the Law enables man to recognize the Law and to obey it:

So far as morality is based upon the conception of man as a free agent who, just because he is free, binds himself through his reason to unconditioned laws, it stands in need neither of the idea of another Being over him, for him to apprehend his duty, nor of an incentive other than the law itself, for him to do his duty.⁸

This is essentially saying that man, who is completely dependent upon his own freedom and morality, is autonomous in and of himself. He needs God neither for knowledge nor for the foundation of moral norms because these result from the reasonableness of the moral imperative itself. The inner motivation to live up to the obligation recognized as reasonable also needs no God. For man who is so emancipated from God, there is nothing more to be said on the questions of forgiveness and atonement. To demand these would be unreasonable and would therefore injure the pride of man.

In contrast to this, in [Romans 7:15–19](#) Paul writes in his analysis of human existence how every human being is confronted with his own entanglement in guilt before God and his fellow human beings. Every attempt at self-justification leads to despair and hopelessness.

According to Kant, one's own responsibility is first of all based on his freedom of action. Paul knows about the depravity of man under the power of sin. Man is warped and cannot liberate himself from the bondage to his own ego with all the blackest depths of his soul. In contrast to this basic insight, Kant points man back to himself. Man is an absolutely free personality, who is defined and determined entirely by his own individual action. So the philosopher from Königsberg, Germany declares that there is therefore 'nothing morally evil in that which is our own deed'.⁹

In contrast to this, throughout the entire Bible it is taught and recognized that man is in enmity to God from birth onwards due to original sin, and is responsible although he cannot decide for himself 'on the basis of his own reason or power' for or against God: 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow' ([Ps. 51:7](#)). 'Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned'. ([Rom. 5:12](#); see also [Rom. 5:15–19](#), [Eph. 2:3](#), [John 3:6](#)).

2.2 Moral Protest in the Name of Human Freedom of the Will

⁸ 8. Based on the translation of the Preface to the First Edition (1793) of *Religion with the Limits of Reason Alone*, by T.M. Greene and H.H. Hudson, (LaSalle, Illinois: 1934), taken from a Kant website created by Steve Palmquist.

⁹ 9. I. Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*, (hg. V.K. Vorlaender (PhB 45), 6 Aufl. (ed.) 1956, III.) p. 25f. (translation, J.L. Kautt).

The moral optimism of Kant is rooted in his basic anthropological conviction of the unlimited freedom of the will of the individual. He writes:

Every thing in nature works according to laws. Only a rational being has the capacity of acting according to the *conception* of laws, (i.e., according to principles). This capacity is the will. Since reason is required for the derivation of actions from laws, will is nothing less than practical reason. If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions which such a being recognizes as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary. That is, the will is a faculty of choosing only that which reason, independent of inclination, recognizes as practically necessary (i.e., as good).¹⁰

According to the testimony of the Scriptures and the confessions of the Reformers, man has lost this free will by reason of sin and is subjected to his own affection (tendencies) and lustful desires: ‘... everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin’ ([John 8:34](#)).

For the Protestant Reformers, the teaching of the basic lostness of natural man under the power of sin is a non-negotiable biblical truth which must be maintained against the philosophical dogma of freedom of the will. Luther writes: ‘*Liberum arbitrium post peccatum res est de solo titulo, et dum facit quod in se est, peccat mortaliter*’. (Once sin enters, there is only free will in name. If man does that which is in him according to his will, he commits mortal sins.)¹¹

3. SIN, THE DEFICIENT CLOUDING OF THE AWARENESS OF GOD HAMARTIOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

What does the power of sin actually consist of? According to Ritschl, sin is simply that which is inappropriate, that which contradicts the Christian ideal of life.¹² The only ‘existence’ which sin has is its ‘being made to disappear’. This innocuous idea of the power of evil is completely consistent with idealistic philosophy. Evil has no power of its own, or existence in and of itself, but, rather, is only a ‘*privatio boni*’, that is, a deficit of good. For this liberal theology of Ritschl, the Pauline connection of sin and evil is untenable. Sickness, suffering, and death are not results of the sinful Fall of man. For, according to the biblical understanding, evil things as such are the outwardly visible power and consequence of the effective enslavement under sin of the heart of man (‘The wages of sin is death’, [Rom. 6:23](#)).

In contrast to this, for Ritschl, external evil serves merely as a means of instruction for moral betterment. The serious consequence of playing down sin in modern Protestant theology is visible here. If sin has nothing to do with complete reality, from whose sphere

¹⁰ 10. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?* (2nd ed. Rev.) translated, with an introduction by Lewis White Beck (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1985, 1990) p. 29.

¹¹ 11. Heidelberg Disputation, (These 13, WA 1,359) and see also Luther’s lyrics to the hymn, ‘Nun freut euch, Lieben Christen g’mein’, (*Evangelisches Gesangbuch* (Ausgabe fuer die Evangelische Landeskirche in Wuertemberg, 1996, Gesangbuchverlag Stuttgart GmbH, Stuttgart, Germany. First edition.) No 341, St 3 ‘Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice’ from 1523, translated by Richard Massie, text transcribed from: *The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1942), pp. 277–8. The third stanza: ‘My own works availed me naught, No merit they attaining. Free will against God’s judgment fought, Dead to all good remaining. My fears increased till sheer despair Left naught but death to be my share. The pains of hell I suffered’.

¹² 12. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 334f.

of influence or control we must be redeemed and freed by God's saving action, then there is also no longer any complete redemption and deliverance from the bad/ evil things of our personal lives and of the fallen world as a whole. The defeat of sickness, suffering, and death along with sin becomes ineffective and powerless as well. Sin is, then, finally, only about the acceptance of and a new Christian understanding of evil, but has nothing to do with its ultimate elimination by a new heaven and a new earth, which Christ will bring about as the Judge of the world at his return.

The relationship between the status of sin and the status of salvation must not be considered as an immediate contrast, but, rather, 'the earlier and the later states are combined in a single self-consciousness'. Punishment in this view is the awareness of guilt and, corresponding to this, atonement is the 'removal of the consciousness of guilt'.¹³

Ritschl continues:

Guilt, in the moral sense, expresses the disturbance of the proper reciprocal relation between the moral law and freedom, which follows from the law-transgressing abuse of freedom, and as such is marked by the accompanying pain of the feeling of guilt. Guilt is thus that permanent contradiction between the objective and the subjective factor of the moral will which is produced by the abuse of freedom in non-fulfilment of the law, and the unworthiness of which is expressed for the moral subject in his consciousness of guilt.¹⁴

Understood in this way, guilt as such is not eliminated in the process of atonement, but what is removed is the distrust resultant from guilt, in the sense of alienation between God and man. Ritschl writes:

Among the relations which go to make up the separation of sinners from God, the rest are overtopped by the consciousness of guilt, partly as a condition of the varied gradations of punishment, partly in so far as it is not an objective attribute, but a subjective function of the sinner. We ought therefore rather to transpose 'the removal of the separation of sinners from God' into *the removal of the consciousness of guilt*.¹⁵

If the real power of sin in the sense implied by Ritschl is thus minimized, then the entire question of sin and atonement becomes a matter which takes place only in the innermost parts of the human person. However, according to the entire biblical record and Christian conviction, sin has its location not just in the consciousness of man, but is a real power which separates him objectively from God, rules him, and brings temporal and eternal death to him if he is not freed by Christ from the power of sin. Although the Christian remains a sinner throughout his life, he is no longer under the dominion of sin: 'You who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart' ([Rom. 6:17](#); see also [Gen. 2:17](#), [Isa. 6:5](#), [Rom. 6:23](#)) The German lyricist and hymn-writer of the first part of this century, Jochen Klepper, knows about the power of sin which separates one from God when he writes in the following hymn 'God dwells in inapproachable light. Sin's ban separates us from his face.'¹⁶

According to Kant, the basis of evil lies in the arbitrary use of human freedom. This misuse of freedom arises when the empirical subject, i.e., the individual human being alone, is strongly influenced by moral as well as by immoral (especially by sensually-driven) impulses. In order to overcome this fateful mixture of morality and immorality, in

¹³ 13. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, pp. 48, 54.

¹⁴ 14. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 57.

¹⁵ 15. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 54.

¹⁶ 16. *Evangelisches Gesangbuch*, No. 379, v. 1.

Kant's view, practical reason is needed. This practical or morally-guided reason produces insight into the morally good which man can then follow also by free will. Because man can know what is good and evil he also gains power by the insight of reason to do what he understands and agrees with and what is good. Although Kant can speak practically about radical evil in other places by accepting what the Bible says about this, he still is bound to his idealistic optimism, which simply maintains the following: one who knows what is good can also do it. Evil, better yet, sin, is only a relative defect which man can overcome himself by virtue of his own autonomous reason.

4. ATONEMENT IS MERELY SUBJECTIVE A SOTERIOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

4.1. It is Just the Awareness of Guilt Which Must be Removed

According to Schleiermacher, sin is first and foremost a matter of the human consciousness. Thus Schleiermacher's doctrine of sin remains trapped completely in the feeling of the pious subject. Sin is the dulling of the awareness of God; sin occurs where sensory self-awareness remains without the influence of the consciousness of God. If sin is something purely subjective, then the ideas of atonement and redemption also lack the objective aspect. Atonement is, then, not understood as Christ's once for all act before God, but rather it consists 'in the rebalancing of the disharmony between the sensory and the human awareness of the divine'.¹⁷

Schleiermacher himself explains:

We have the consciousness of sin whenever the God-consciousness which forms part of an inner state, or is in some way added to it, determines our self-consciousness as pain; and therefore we conceive of sin as a positive antagonism of the flesh against the spirit.¹⁸

Schleiermacher, therefore, defines sin 'as an arrestment of the determinative power of the spirit, due to the independence of the sensuous functions'.¹⁹

The concept of sin as purely subjective cannot be harmonized with the seriousness with which sin is opposed in the Bible. The facts of the wrath of God and the cross of Christ already noted, prevent any minimizing of sin.

The break with tradition is reflected most sharply when one compares the modern positions on the topic of sin with the radicalism of the understanding of sin in, for instance, Anselm of Canterbury (1033/34–1109), who wrote: '*nondum considerasti quanti ponderis sit peccatum*' (You have not yet considered how heavy sin weighs)²⁰ Anselm's approach in the treatise *Cur deus homo* (Why God became a man) is based on a deep horror of the power of sin which can, in no way, be overcome by an act of human consciousness.

4.2. Redemption by a Change of Way of Thinking

¹⁷ 17. C.G. Seibert, Schleiermacher's *Lehre von der Versöhnung in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der Schleiermacher'schen Christologie überhaupt, sowie in ihrem Verhältnis zur rationalistischen, altorthodoxen und rein biblischen Lehre dargestellt und beleuchtet*, (Wiesbaden: 1855), p. 25., translated by J.L. Kautt).

¹⁸ 18. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 271 § 66.

¹⁹ 19. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 273.

²⁰ 20. *Cur deus homo*, besorgt und uebersetzt von F.S. Schmitt, Muenchen 1986, p. 74. (translated from the German by J.L. Kautt).

In his discussion of justification, Anselm started with the basic idea of the offended honour of God. Every sin, even when it appears to man to be minor and insignificant, is rebellion against God. With every sin the dominion of God is fundamentally called into question by man, in fact, even contended. This is what makes up the infinite weight of sin. Kant took up the idea of honour as well but only in the sense of his modern philosophy. Of course it is no longer God's honour which is offended by moral evil but that of man. The 'transcendental subject', that is, the complete reality of the 'ego', is attacked in its dignity by amorality. Man sins not against God, but against himself.

On the other hand, according to Kant, one can detect the inappropriateness of the idea that God holds sins against those committing them. Kant gets out of this conflict by attributing to the process of the changing of the mind (repentance-*metanoia*) the *mortificatio* (mortification) of the old man alongside the *vivificatio* (making alive again) of the new man, and by attaching atoning value to the former. Man who considers himself transcendental achieves atonement for the sins of the old man who is passing away. Atonement occurs in which the penalties are thought to be included in the change of mind, '... which the new right-thinking man can view as those which he is responsible for in another relationship and as such penalties whereby satisfaction occurs for divine justice'.²¹

Atonement, it must be emphasized, is therefore in no way reconciliation between God and man, but the reconciliation of man with himself. All of this occurs within the inner being of the person, his thoughts, and his consciousness.²²

However, as far as the relationship to God can be seen at all in Kant's writings, reconciliation is completed by virtue of the already familiar 'professional obligation to pardon' of an ultimately good-natured grandfather God. The holiness of Christ remains always for us as a distant example; God is not bound by our limitation, but rather the moral act as an already completed whole. The guilt of man can never then be completely removed, now or in the future through a surplus of good works; rather, God refrains from punishment in view of the moral thinking about punishment 'because man is already walking in new life, and, morally, is another person'.²³

It is obvious that according to this view man justifies himself by reason of his changed attitude and no longer needs the service of Christ. Christ is merely the historical example or the philosophical prototype whom one is supposed to imitate. The idea that redemption is something which occurs entirely in the consciousness was also maintained by Schleiermacher. The degree of the consciousness of God corresponds to the degree to which one is redeemed. Redemption and Atonement are, according to this, purely subjective processes:

The Redeemer, then, is like all men in virtue of the identity of human nature, but distinguished from them all by the constant potency of His God-consciousness, which was the veritable existence of God in Him.²⁴

The act of salvation corresponds to this:

²¹ 21. I. Kant, *Die Religion*, p. 97f. (translation, J.L. Kautt).

²² 22. I. Kant, *Die Religion*, p. 98ff.

²³ 23. I. Kant, *Die Religion*, p. 84ff., p. 96.

²⁴ 24. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 385 § 94.

The Redeemer assumes believers into the power of His God-consciousness, and this is His redemptive activity.

The Redeemer assumes the believers into the fellowship of His unclouded blessedness, and this is His reconciling activity

The self-consciousness characterising those assumed into living fellowship with Christ may be set forth under both conceptions, Regeneration and Sanctification.²⁵

According to biblical teaching, by contrast, the fruit of the work of Christ, the atonement which occurred on the cross, is truly independent of the respective conditions of awareness of man. Man experiences redemption neither by reason of his change of mind nor by reason of the degree of his consciousness of God: 'So it depend not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy' ([Rom. 9:16](#), see also [Heb. 9:15](#)).

5. ATONEMENT NEEDS NO MYTH CONCERNING THE SON OF GOD CHRISTOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

5.1. Human Self-Redemption Needs No Son of God

If the idea of a judging God is given up, so also is the necessity of the justification of man before his Creator. Man, as the highest authority of responsibility, knows only his own conscience. This can be satisfied by honest effort. In the case of a possible relative deficit of human ability, man may be content with a 'supernatural' interim bridging of some kind. The whole weight of sin, which only God himself could bear in Christ, is thereby minimized. In this vein, Schleiermacher explains:

Where one's own action for the justification of man is not enough before one's own (strictly judging) conscience, then reason is authorized to accept by faith, if need be, a supernatural complementation to its deficient righteousness (even without being allowed to determine what it consists of).²⁶

Even in Ritschl's writings the moral incentive of the message of the Son of God is done away with:

... the revelation of God through his Son, [extended likewise to His community] however, embraces the community which acknowledges His Son as her Lord, and how it does so, is explained by saying that God manifests Himself to the Son and to the community as *loving Will*.²⁷

In contrast to this, Luther paints the picture of God's will to love not as a demand, but as a gift for us in Christ when he writes: 'Do you see the picture of the Crucified One, then view it as a picture which properly frightens you, so that your heart says: O woe is my sin and God's wrath so great upon me!'²⁸

²⁵ 25. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 425 § 100, p. 431, § 101, p. 476 § 106.

²⁶ 26. *Der Streit der Facultaeten in drey Abschnitten von I. Kant, Königsberg 1798*, in: *ders.(Kant), Werke in zehn Bänden* (hg. v. W. Weischedel, Bd. 9: Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik. Erster Teil, Darmstadt 1975 (4. Nachdruck der Ausgabe von 1964)), p. 60f.

²⁷ 27. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 272f.

²⁸ 28. *Karfreitagspredigt* 1538, WA 46,286. Cf. also: *Sermon von der Betrachtung des Leidens Christi*, 1519, WA 2,137).

5.2. Jesus, the Good Man from Nazareth—The Idea of the Dual Nature of Christ Can be Rejected

According to the New Testament, the atonement is based upon the fact that Jesus is truly God and truly Man. The divine and human natures come together in the person of Jesus completely and inseparably. This Christological fact is the basis for the atoning, salvific activity of Christ. Because God came into this world in the form of sinful man, he defeated sin in the flesh and reconciled God and man in this way. Because modern philosophy and, following it also modern theology, reject the classical doctrine of the dual nature of Christ as an inappropriate and unreasonable metaphysics of being, they have also given up and destroyed the factual basis of the New Testament doctrine of atonement.

In Kant's theory of atonement, the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth is dissolved into the principle of the good. Christ is ultimately identical to the idea of the moral law which confronts man as a demand. In this way Kant can present to the customary formulations of tradition a content which is opposite to it. God does not become flesh, but the idea of the moral law becomes a man. In the end, Christ is only a symbol for a redemption which man works out himself through appropriate actions.²⁹

For the young man Hegel also, Christ is interesting only as the idea of the morally perfect man in which he serves as an example for mankind. In contrast to rationalistic theology, it was important for Schleiermacher to keep together the person and work of Christ, when he wrote: 'The peculiar activity and the exclusive dignity of the Redeemer imply each other, and are inseparably one in the self-consciousness of believers'.³⁰ The uniqueness of Christ is therefore of definite importance to Schleiermacher when he explains: '... as an historical individual He must have been at the same time ideal (i.e., the ideal must have become completely historical in Him), and each historical moment of His experience must at the same time have borne within it the ideal'.³¹ In this unity of idea and historical reality, Schleiermacher sees the unity of God and man in Christ. Schleiermacher's offer to mediate between faith and science in this way met justifiably with disapproval because for him the divinity of Christ exists merely in the 'constant potency of his God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in Him'.³²

Christ is distinguished from Christians, then, only in the strength of his awareness of God; there can be no mention of an identity of being between the earthly figure of Jesus and God, according to Schleiermacher. If Jesus' divinity, however, exists in the 'strength of his awareness of God', then every kind of temptation or suffering of Jesus is thereby ruled out, according to Schleiermacher. A classical example of this idea of Christ is Schleiermacher's exposition of the account of Jesus being forsaken by God ([Mt. 27:46](#)), which argues against the exact words of the text as a foregone conclusion.³³ The lack also of a doctrine of the trinity in Schleiermacher's Glaubenslehre (E.T., *The Christian Faith*) shows that no kind of divinity should be expressed in talking about Jesus' consciousness of God.³⁴

²⁹ 29. I. Kant, *Die Religion*, p. 98ff.

³⁰ 30. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 374 § 92.

³¹ 31. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 377 § 93.

³² 32. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 385 § 94.

³³ 33. Fr. Schleiermacher's *saemmtliche Werke*. (Zweite Abtheilung. Predigten. Zweiter Band. Neue Ausgabe, Berlin 1843), p. 401f.

³⁴ 34. See Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 742ff § 170ff.

According to Ritschl, Christ is an unsurpassable example in the fulfilment of the task of the 'true development of the spiritual personality'. Maintaining his divinity is simply a value judgment which is related to Christ's normative behaviour.

Now this religious vocation of the members of the Christian community is prefigured in the person of its Founder, and rests upon His person as its abiding source of strength for all imitation of Him, because He Himself made God's supreme purpose of the union of men in the Kingdom of God the aim of His own personal life; and thereby realised in His own experience that independence toward the world which through Him has become the experience of the members of His community. This ideal, the true development of the spiritual personality, cannot be rightly or fully conceived apart from contemplation of Him Who is the prototype of man's vocation. Thus what is the historically complete figure of Christ we recognize to be the real worth of his existence, gains for ourselves, through the uniqueness of the phenomenon and its normative bearing upon our own religious and ethical destiny, the worth of an abiding rule, since we at the same time discover that only through the impulse and direction we receive from Him, is it possible for us to enter into His relation to God and to the world.³⁵

The positions presented here show that the different attempts to make the miracle of the incarnation of God plausible to the human mind ultimately end in a dissolution of the historical person of Jesus (prototype Christology), or in the reduction of his divinity to the uniqueness of his consciousness of God or his moral life (exemplary Christology). In any case Christ the Son of God who became flesh as the Bible depicts him has been lost ([John 1:14](#); see also [John 20:28](#); [Tit. 2:13](#); [Heb. 1:8](#); [Rom. 9:5](#)).

5.3. Jesus' Uniquely Strong Awareness of God is Sufficient

Christ's obedience has no representative significance for us, according to Schleiermacher's view. His obedience becomes effective for us only in so far as the consciousness of God which is already inherent in us becomes active through the example of his consciousness of God. For Schleiermacher, it is true that

... the total obedience—*dikaioma*— of Christ avails for our advantage only in so far as through it our assumption into vital fellowship with Him is brought about, and in that fellowship we are moved by Him, that is, His motive principle becomes our also—just as we also share in condemnation for Adam's sin only in so far as we, being in natural life-fellowship with him and moved in the same way, all sin ourselves.³⁶

If this were only about states of awareness in Christ, then the temptation of Jesus and the agony of his temptation in Gethsemane would be types of exhibition fights. Ultimately, Jesus' wrestling with temptation and the satanic opponent of God would not have been the battle for the existence or non-existence of the salvation of the world at all. Basically, nothing would have been at stake, in fact, in Jesus' mission because there was also nothing real at all to be lost or gained. Contrary to this, the Scriptures teach that we have redemption not through Christ's consciousness, but by his act of salvation: 'there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all . . .' ([1 Tim. 2:5f.](#)).

5.4. Jesus, the Model of Faithfulness to One's Calling

³⁵ 35. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 387.

³⁶ 36. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, pp. 456–7 § 104.

Christ's death, according to Schleiermacher, should not be connected to the redemption given by him, but rather his death is a consequence of his faithfulness to his calling. Jesus' exemplary character is expressed in this.

Schleiermacher writes:

Only one misunderstanding still remains to be guarded against at this point; we must not set forth Christ's surrender of Himself to death as a free decision on His part in any other sense than that which is here taken as fundamental, namely, that His self-surrender was identical with His persistence in redemptive activity. For otherwise the suffering of Christ, ... appears arbitrary ... He must therefore have accepted it [his death] as a duty involved in His vocation to appear in the holy city for this feast, in spite of the foreknowledge He possessed; and beyond question it was an element in the development of his great crisis that Christ met His death in His zeal for His vocation relatively to His Father's law ³⁷

Ritschl, who, as we have seen, shares Schleiermacher's reserve concerning the idea of an angry God, also accepts his reduced understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death for salvation when he writes:

It is not the mere fate of dying that determines the value of Christ's death as a sacrifice; what renders this issue of His life significant for others is His willing acceptance of the death inflicted on Him by His adversaries as a dispensation of God, and the highest proof of faithfulness to His vocation. Thus it is impossible to accept an interpretation of Christ's sacrificial death which, under the head of satisfaction, combines in a superficial manner His death and His active life, while at bottom it ascribes to the death of Christ quite a different meaning, namely, that of substitutionary punishment.³⁸

Gratefully recognizing Christ as our example is certainly biblical, but the significance of his substitutionary atoning death must never be thereby diminished. A passage from I Peter makes clear how both aspects have lasting significance: 'For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example ... He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness' ([1 Pet. 2:21-24](#)).

SUMMARY

The criticism of the biblical and Reformation doctrine of the atonement current today is rooted very deeply in the understanding of God, sin, and man defined by the Enlightenment. The rejection of classical Christology and soteriology follows on necessarily from these positions. Although there are individual differences in the detailed philosophical and theological concepts, the radical departure from tradition is constant throughout. In the end, man needs no divine redeemer because he succeeds morally by himself and completes self-redemption in his consciousness, whether this is individual, as it is with Kant, Schleiermacher, and Ritschl, or universal, as with Hegel.

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³⁷ 37. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p. 462 § 104.

³⁸ 38. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 477.

Kreuz?, (Wuppertal: Brockhaus Verlag, 1998) a collection of essays by faculty members of Bengel Haus, edited by Volker Gaeckle. Unless otherwise noted, all translation is by James Louis Kautt of Tübingen.

Salvation from an African Perspective

Henry J. Mugabe

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Keywords: Salvation, culture, sin, healing, deliverance, liberation, ancestors

Not all African theologians share the same views or belong to the same school of thought concerning salvation, notwithstanding the fact it is a key theme in the Christian message. This is not surprising, for in Christian tradition the theme of salvation proliferates in many facets of meaning and colourful interpretations. So it is to be expected that African theologians could not have a unanimous grasp of this key concept. While some Africans have not explored its meaning beyond the theology of the missionaries who introduced them to the Christian faith, others have wrestled with the meaning of salvation within their respective African contexts.

This paper is written from the perspective of an African Baptist Christian who believes that African Christian theologies must be rooted in the cultural, social, political, religious and economic context of African life and thought. Cultural and societal differences are so intrinsic to human nature and inculturated in human existence that theology has to be contextual.¹ The contents of this paper are reflections of one among many African Christians who are wrestling with what it means to be an African Christian.

The discussion of salvation from an African perspective is appropriate and proper, because African voices which are often excluded from theological conversations must be heard and acknowledged as being legitimate. African theology is often viewed as being radical, reactionary, or novel, and not to be taken seriously. A growing number of missiologists, however, are giving credence to the authenticity of Africa's viewpoint of the gospel, its scope, its message and its meaning.²

It does not take much research to show that from the time of the early church to the present, people have always come to Jesus out of their varied experiences, contexts and needs.³ Their reading of the scriptures have been coloured by different traditions and experiences. It is therefore appropriate that the discussion about African perceptions of salvation be taken seriously from African traditional viewpoints of wholeness and well-

¹ 1. Every theology is always someone's theology. All claims to a pure universal biblical theology are illusory and unsustainable.

² 2. A survey of standard texts in systematic theology in the West simply ignore any theological reflection from Africa.

³ 3. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). He presents eighteen 'images' of Jesus that emerged in the history of Christianity.