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the well, and drawing it up again. It is at once understood that the pitcher is not the same thing as the muscular action, by which it is let down and drawn up. Both must contribute to the result; for without either pitcher or muscular action no water could be obtained, but the pitcher is external to the person, the muscular action a movement of the person. It is also clearly seen that neither pitcher nor muscular action is water—that the arm might put itself forth for ever, and the pitcher be let down continually, but that if it were a dry pit into which the vessel were lowered, no refreshment could be had thereby. The figure is easy of application. Christ is the Well of the Water of Life, from Whom alone can be drawn those streams of grace which refresh and quicken, and fertilize the soul. It is by faith that the soul reaches out after this living water; faith is the soul's muscular action, by which the water is drawn up and brought into use. But faith needs as an implement those means which Christ has appointed, and particularly the mean of means, which He instituted for the conveyance of Himself to faithful souls. These means are the pitcher in which the water is conveyed. Faith is not a Christ; neither are sacraments a Christ; but faith (under all circumstances) and sacraments, where they may be had, are necessary to the appropriation and enjoyment of Christ.—E. M. GOULBURN.

WE know of certain church members who are so completely under the cold shade of the world that the half-dozen sour dwarfish apples they yield are not worth any man's gathering. We know, too, of others so laden that you cannot touch the outermost limb without shaking down a golden pippin or a jargonelle. Such trees make a church or a land beautiful. They are a joy to the pastor who walks through them. Every stooping bough, and every purple cluster, that hangs along the walls, bespeaks the goodness of

the soil; the moisture of the Spirit's dews, and the abundance of God's sunshine. In glorious seasons of revival we realize old Andrew Marvell's description of his garden—

Ripe apples drop about our head;  
The nectarine and curious peach  
Into my hands themselves do reach;  
The luscious clusters of the vine  
Upon my mouth do crush their wine.

—T. L. CUYLER.

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## The Atonement: Limitations of Theology.

BY THE REV. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., D.D., PRINCIPAL OF KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.

IT is a trite and often repeated story that Bede tells of the conversion of Edwin, King of Northumbria. As he debated with his chiefs whether to receive the new teaching of Paulinus, one of them compared the life of man to the swift flight of a sparrow, flying through the warm, bright banquet-hall in winter, when rain and storms prevail abroad. He flies in at one door and immediately out at another into the dark winter from which he has emerged. 'So this life of man appears for a short space: but of what went before, or what is to follow, we are utterly ignorant. If, therefore, this new doctrine contains something more certain,

it seems justly to deserve to be followed.' This new doctrine has been ours for twelve centuries since then, but the words are as true and touching, and the challenge they offer to the Christian faith as frank and fair, as when they were first spoken. And if our faith has accepted and satisfied the challenge, if it has lightened for uncounted thousands of Christians the darkness which surrounds our brief life on earth, it has been, I think, first and foremost, not so much by direct and explicit information as to what lies beyond, as by inspiring a joyous and tranquil trustfulness, grounded on the certitude that the destiny of our

soul is in the hand of an almighty and all-loving Father, who has accepted us as dear children.

If our faith is to be victorious amidst the clouds and storms of modern difficulties, it must be so, above all, by maintaining an unclouded perception of its true centre. 'If God be for us, who shall be against us?' Belief in God is indissolubly bound up with the conviction that we are at peace with God. Remove the latter, and the Christian faith has lost its sure foothold, its expansive power.

At every age of the Church's life, then, it has been a vital matter for her to apprehend with all possible vividness and energy the work of her Redeemer; and the intellectual side of this task, the theology of Redemption as formulated from age to age, has been as significant of her general condition as a man's convictions on matters of pressing personal interest are significant of his character and life.

In our age this is equally or especially true, and, amidst the many influences which tend to obscure the clearness and vigour of Christian conviction in modern life, it is of the first importance to endeavour to bring the clear light of the Cross in its original significance to bear on our working creed, and to study how best to express its message so as to carry conviction to the modern man.

More than this, perhaps, we cannot hope; the history of Christian thought does not encourage us to hope that we can ever penetrate the central mystery, or clear away every difficulty that surrounds the Atonement. But at least we may see where the previous attempts have failed, and what conceptions have been most helpful towards clearing the Church's mind.

I propose to consider, first, the Atonement in its broadest aspect, as preached from the beginning of the gospel; then the main theological explanations which have been attempted of the doctrine; and, lastly, going back to the New Testament, I shall attempt to trace some features of the teaching of St. Paul which affect our estimate of the theological problem.

### I.

First, then, what do we mean by the Atonement? The word is frequently used in the Old Testament, but only once in the New Testament in our English Bible. Its Old Testament use we may set aside as corresponding to a Hebrew root reproduced in the New Testament by *ἵλαστήριον*

(Ro 3<sup>25</sup>), which our Bible rightly renders 'propitiation,' the idea being in the original that of God 'covering' sin, consenting not to look upon it, and so, as the Greek renders the idea, becoming '*propitious*' to the sinner. This is more definite than the idea underlying our English word 'atone,' or the Greek *καταλλαγή*, which it translates in Ro 5<sup>11</sup>. *Καταλλαγή* means—as the Revised Version here renders it—'reconciliation,' without implying anything as to which of the hostile parties needed to be reconciled, and 'atonement,' 'atone,' etymologically convey precisely the same idea.

Well, then, we find from the first the idea of atonement or reconciliation involved in the apostolic preaching of Christ. The central doctrine of that preaching was that Jesus was the promised Messiah, who was to stand between God and man, and to deliver and save His people. This salvation was threefold in its character, corresponding with the triple character which the religious education of Israel had prepared them to recognize in the Messiah. As Prophet He was to restore them by teaching; as King by rule and guidance; as Priest by reconciling them to God. And it is unquestionably this latter aspect of the Messianic office of Christ that stands out most conspicuously in the apostolic preaching. From the first, the appeal of Christ had been to the heart conscious of sin: 'Repent ye'; and now the apostles carry His summons 'to all men everywhere, to repent'; and what gives the summons to repentance its persuasive power is the assurance that belief in Jesus as Christ and Lord will bring with it *forgiveness*,—the past life with all its guilt will be in God's sight washed away. 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins.' Observe, belief in Christ and baptism in His name, not belief in a certain specific effect of His death, is here and elsewhere demanded as the condition of forgiveness. But when we look in detail at the grounds of the appeal, as revealed in the language of the apostolic writers, we find that they one and all derive the forgiveness of sin, accorded to all believers, from the fact that Christ has died for their sins. The subjective ground, so to call it, of forgiveness is belief in Christ as Lord; the objective ground is that Christ has died for our sins (*e.g.* in 1 Co 15<sup>8</sup>).

I take no account here of the shades of difference between Gospel and Gospel or Epistle and Epistle. Important as they are, our concern is with something more important still, the consent of all the apostles—'whether it were I or they, so we preach and so ye believed'—that belief in Christ brought forgiveness of sins, and that forgiveness was, in whatever way, the result of Christ's death.

So far I have stated the doctrine of reconciliation, of which the fundamental factor is the forgiveness of sins, in its broadest outline, as tendered by the apostles in answer to the question, 'What shall I do to be saved?' A childlike faith, a faith which has had no occasion to reflect and reason about itself, may be content with that. But as soon as the Church began to discharge her functions, whether of convincing those without, or of meeting difficulties which inevitably arose from within, we find the instinct of faith endeavouring to translate itself into reason, the confession of belief beginning to be coloured by theology. This is to some extent true in the New Testament itself. But it is far more conspicuous in the subsequent thought of the Church.

## II.

We put aside, so far as possible, the various ways in which the Church has endeavoured to understand the office of Christ as Prophet and King. Our concern is with His *Soteriology*, and with the *Christology* only so far as it affects the other. And on the whole, the Church has, in her attempts at a theology of Redemption, held fast by what is clearly the mind of the New Testament, namely, that the redeeming office of Christ consists, not primarily in what He *was*, but in what He *did*—depends on His Will rather than on His Nature. This is clearly brought out by St. Peter and by St. Paul (Ph 2), by the Synoptics, and by St. John, and it may be taken as one clear result of the speculative debates of eighteen Christian centuries. The idea of a God-Man may, doubtless in itself, as has been implicitly held from the very earliest times, be necessary to satisfy the Divine purpose of Creation, so that the *Incarnate* is, as such, *πρωτορόκος πάσης κτίσεως*; but given human sin, and *guilt* as the correlative of sin, it was by His Death that the Christ purchased forgiveness for man, and simply in order to die for our sins that He came in the flesh.

This being so, we may, for our present purpose,

pass by much that was beautifully and suggestively written by the Greek Fathers on the Incarnation, as, in itself, and prior to any idea of expiation or reconciliation, bringing to human nature the remedy for the disease of sin. So far as this comes under the apostolic doctrine of the work of Christ (rather than the philosophic conception of the *λόγος* as elaborated in the Apologists and the Alexandrian Fathers), it touches the Messianic office of King or Prophet rather than that with which we are now concerned.

Side by side with the theological conception just referred to we find the intellect of the Church all along busied with the arduous task how to interpret to itself the deep-rooted aboriginally Christian instinct, by which the forgiveness of sins, the gospel of reconciliation with God, was carried back specially, and in a unique sense, to the Death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. That this was so, was the fact: He died for our sins according to the Scriptures. But how so? Could not God have forgiven us without so stupendous a means: and how did the means in question bring about its result? In a word, the difficulty which the Church has always felt, was how to explain the *instrumentality* of the Death of Christ in procuring the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of man and God?

We may be permitted to pass over without discussion the idea which, in more or less gross forms, haunted the theology of the patristic Church, that the devil had by man's sin acquired a kind of ownership over the human race, and that by dying on the Cross our Lord in some way satisfied his claim, and thus bought man from his power. So far as this idea represents any real insight into the biblical conception of Redemption, it may be regarded as an attempt to express the substitutionary aspect of the Atonement, namely, that mankind were under the wrath of God, and their punishment was necessary, but that Christ bore the wrath and punishment by being 'made sin,' being 'made a curse,' and thus satisfied an inexorable law which barred the way to man's salvation.

This explanation of the Atonement has, on the whole, held its ground in the mind of the Church more stubbornly and successfully than any other, and the most important sections of Dr. Dale's *Theory of the Atonement* are devoted to the attempt to restate it.

To a great extent, then, the objections which lie

against it are those which make any adequate theory of the Atonement almost hopelessly difficult; and this is the place for stating them once for all.

The forgiveness of sins in virtue of vicarious punishment is not, in itself, an insuperable difficulty. The objections which have often been made on this score largely rest on failure to understand what the Christian doctrine is. The arbitrary infliction of punishment on the guiltless would, indeed, be unworthy of any high conception of God. But the voluntariness of the suffering of Christ is a complete answer to this, or, if any further be required, we must remember that He who bore our sin is Himself the Judge and Lawgiver, and that He asserts the law 'not by inflicting punishment on the sinner, but by bearing it Himself.' The Socinian objection to the Atonement of Christ fails, because it begins by assuming the Socinian view of His Person. It does not reach the Christian and Catholic doctrine at all.

But then we are face to face with the question, *In what sense* did Christ bear the punishment due to sin? Where do we find, in the Death of Christ, that tremendous equivalent, or more than equivalent, which gives it rank high above that infliction of their just penalty on sinful mankind which it supersedes? We may, with Dr. Dale, lay stress on the mysterious desertion of the dying Saviour by the Father: *Eli lama sabachthani*; but even in that we must, I think, fail to find the counterpart of the hopeless irreversible doom due to sin. We apply the conception of sacrifice, but in applying it we must needs resolve the symbolical and composite idea of sacrifice into the moral relations between man and God, to which sacrifice aims at giving concrete expression; and the moment we attempt to do so, the key seems to refuse to unlock the mystery: whence has this unique sacrifice its value? Is it in the equivalence of the Offering, or in the Person of Him who offers it? Is it the Priest or the Offering that has given it its irresistible prevailing power with God? The more closely we consider this, the more strongly, I think, we must needs realize that the redeeming work of Christ derives its power from the Person of the Priest rather than from the strict equivalence of the sacrifice regarded in itself. The infinite merit of the Cross is due to the fact that it was the Son of God who died there. But if so, the whole difficulty remains as far from solution as ever. Christ has

redeemed us, because none other could, and because He could do all this and more. But, then, why was it requisite that He should do and suffer what He did rather than adopt some other means? Here is the question which is really unanswered by all the concentrated thought of Christendom, from the beginning until now. The scholastic appeals to congruity may aid our imagination, but do not even profess to answer the question. The only real reply has been, that God has so appointed it; and that, bearing this in mind, we can see in the Cross a twofold lesson: the Divine love for man, and hatred for sin; and that in it God has given us a unique example, and made a unique appeal to the love of sinful man.

God willed to pardon man's sin and to save mankind. And Redemption by a direct act was as possible as Creation. But it has been God's pleasure to make use of means, and, moreover, He has dealt with man as a moral agent, by moral influence, rather than by overriding his will. Hence the necessity of the Atonement becomes *moral*, not absolute. Granted that God works by adaptation of means to end, and that the end is the redemption of man without infringing his constitution as a moral being, we may speak of the Death of Christ as the indispensable necessity, the direct instrument, of reconciliation. This at once corroborates the second and third of the main grounds which Dr. Dale finds for the efficacy of our Lord's Death, namely, that in Christ we have a Mediator vitally organically representative of our race, in Whom it has experienced at once the penalty of sin and the restoration of the Filial relation to God, and that accordingly the Cross is the guarantee for the complete victory of Christ in us over the power of sin. Both these grounds correspond to Newman's thought—

That flesh and blood  
Which did in Adam fail,  
Should strive afresh against the foe,  
Should strive, and should prevail.

But with regard to Dr. Dale's first and main ground, that Christ bore the full penalty of sin, we still fail to get rid of the impression that He did so symbolically, and for man's moral enlightenment, rather than literally, and as removing an insuperable obstacle to the will of God for our salvation.

We thus come to an important alternative: Is the atoning work of Christ the *cause* or the *effect* of the redemptive grace of God? Has the merit,

or have the sufferings, of Christ turned the wrath of God into mercy; or is it rather to the Divine mercy that we owe the Cross of Christ and all its unspeakable train of grace and blessings?

### III.

I think if we turn to St. Paul we can have but little doubt as to the true answer. That 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself' is a truth which stands co-ordinate with that of the Divine wrath against sin. The relation between the two may be followed up in the Epistle to the Romans. We there find contrasted the wrath of God, revealed in its supreme intensity (*ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ*) antecedent to the Gospel, and the righteousness of God which is the specific and gracious revelation of the Gospel, constituting the latter the power of God unto salvation to whosoever believeth. The conception has, I think, been often missed, but it will repay the effort to grasp it. St. Paul sees in the new revelation of forgiveness in Christ the final self-realization of God's *righteousness*, *εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον καὶ δικαιοῦντα*. *Καὶ δικαιοῦντα*—the *καὶ* indicates not contrast but close identification; the atoning work of Christ has not overcome or mollified the Divine righteousness, but has carried it into effect. How can we understand this? Never, if we begin from the analysis of the abstract notion of God as perfect justice, rigid sovereign power, and the like. But that is not the way in which God has revealed Himself to man as recorded in Scripture. Tracing the course of revelation in its broadest features, we see God manifesting Himself to His people as their Deliverer, and as exercising a consistently pursued gracious purpose for their highest good. As the experience of Israel lengthens and deepens, the conviction grows that what has been experienced is but the promise of a far greater deliverance in the future, and the conception of their own need

on the part of the people of God gradually becomes purified and spiritualized, passing from the sense of earthly oppression and straits to that of sin and guilt. All this finds utterance in, and is recorded by, the voice of prophecy. The *salvation* of God to which the faithful look forward is closely bound up with His *righteousness*. They know that He will save because they know by experience that He is righteous; and will maintain the character in which He has shown Himself from of old. That St. Paul had caught this profoundest conception of God from the Old Testament is, I think, certain. To him the gospel was the power of God unto salvation, because in it the righteousness of God was revealed—nay, was brought to its maturity, *εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον*. But for the gracious gift of His only Son, the character of God as stamped on the course of Old Testament revelation would have lacked its confirmation; the prophets and psalmists would have seemed to have believed in vain, to have believed in a God whose promises, after all, came to nothing. But in the saving work of Christ, God, who for such long ages has seemed to allow man's sin and ignorance to take its course—*patiens quia aeternus*—has been true and more than true to Himself, and the long night of His long-suffering (*ἀνοχή*) gives way to the warmth and glow of the Sun of Righteousness.

To St. Paul, the original cause of the forgiveness of sin is the righteousness of God, His consistently manifested love for man, which *moved* Him to give His only Son for us. The Death of Christ is God's offer of pardon to the world—an offer the more eloquent and appealing that it is made in visible act rather than in mere words; and for us to rely for grace and reconciliation on anything else, even on the character of God Himself save only as revealed in the Cross of Christ, is surely to pass God's own offer of pardon by, and, by refusing it to forfeit its effect.