The Atonement

By
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Abstract

While there are no explicit divisions of the article, there are three relatively distinct subjects of consideration.

The first part is a critical discussion of the three major classical theories of the Atonement: the governmental theory, the moral influence theory, and the satisfaction theory.

The middle portion of the article considers certain scriptural passages that employ the three major families of terms used to set forth the nature of the atonement.

The final portion of the article is a philosophical excursus, centering around Rom. 3:25-26. There is a consideration of the nature of life and death, as it pertains to humans and, particularly, to Jesus Christ. The discussion concerns the question of the significance of Jesus' death as having atoning efficacy.

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Matthew, chapter sixteen, records Peter's great confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." From this time forward in His life, Jesus disclosed to His followers that "he must go . . . and suffer . . . and be killed . . . ."[1] The expression, "he must," reads literally, "it was necessary for him." Thus there is a necessity for his death. In terms of the subject of this work, there is a necessity for the atonement.

But just what is this necessity? Why was it necessary that Jesus die? To answer this question, the great classical theories of the atonement have been developed, reworked and reconsidered, over the centuries. Various and differing answers are given to the question. In the main, the answers turn on the conception of necessity that is espoused, i.e., to the definition of the necessity requiring the atonement. There are here only two orders of necessity: necessity as *relative* and necessity as *absolute*. On the one hand, it may be said that the atonement is a relative expedient, either to protect

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[1]Matt. 16:21.

moral government or to create a moral influence sufficient to enable the sinner to repent. The two proposals constitute, respectively, the governmental theory of the atonement and the moral influence theory of the atonement. On the other hand, those who find an absolute necessity for the atonement have traditionally placed that necessity in the justice of the divine nature. Divine justice requires satisfaction for human transgression. This satisfaction may be obtained either through punishment or through the vicarious death of a substitute sufficiently virtuous to satisfy the demands of justice. In modern theology, this view became the satisfaction theory of the atonement.

The governmental theory of the atonement was introduced by the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). He insisted upon the intrinsic evil of sin and its deserving of punishment. There is, however, no necessity arising from the nature of God to inflict such punishment. The ground of punishment, should it be inflicted, lies in the interests of the moral government, of which God is the ruler. Those interests require that sin should not be lightly regarded. God has the right to exact a penalty, but He also has the right to lift the penalty. But he cannot do this at the expense of governmental interests. It is therefore necessary, purely for governmental reasons, to offer an atonement——some vicarious provision——that, on the remission of penalty, will conserve the ends of moral government. Such a provision is, he holds, the death of Jesus Christ.

The essential of the Grotian theory is held by theologians of the Arminian and Wesleyan persuasion. The early Methodist theologians, Richard Watson (1781-1832) and William Burton Pope (1822-1903), espouse the essential and positive element in the governmental theory, but insist that the governmental emphasis must be combined with consideration of the ethical character of God. The atonement is a satisfaction to the ethical nature of God, as well as an expedient for sustaining the interests of the divine government. In more recent times the theory has been further developed by John Miley (1813-1895), A. M. Hills (1848-1935), and H. Orton Wiley (1877-1961). Wiley, for example, following Pope, combines what he terms the acceptable elements of the three classical theories. Miley sets forth the governmental theory as follows:

> The sufferings of Christ are an atonement for sin by substitution, in the sense that they were intentionally endured for sinners under judicial condemnation, and for the sake of their forgiveness. They render forgiveness consistent with divine justice, in that justice none the less fulfills its rectoral office in the interest of moral government. The honor and authority of the divine Ruler, together with the rights and interests of his subjects, are as fully maintained as they could be by the infliction of merited punishment upon sin.[2]

As the term indicates, the moral influence theory finds the significance of the death of Christ in its power to reform the individual. The virtue of the atonement consists in the power of love to subdue the enmity of the human heart and empower the individual to repent and become transformed in spirit and life.

Perhaps the earliest statement of the theory is that found in Abelard's (1079-1142) *Epistle to the Romans*:

> Now it seems to us that we have been justified by the blood of Christ and reconciled to God in this way: through this unique act of grace

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[2]John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1893), II, 155-56.

> manifested to us. . . he has more fully bound us to himself by love; with the result that our hearts should be enkindled by such a gift of divine grace, and true charity should not now shrink from enduring anything for him.[3]

Historically, the theory became identified with the 16th century Italian monk Laelius Socinus (1525-1562) and his nephew Faustus Socinus (1539-1604). Consistently with their denial of the doctrine of the deity of Christ, they denied any objective atonement. The death of Christ is but an incentive to moral improvement. The theory is held by rationalistic views of Christianity, as Unitarianism and Universalism.

In modern times, perhaps the most influential exponent of the theory was Horace Bushnell (1802-1876). In his book, *Vicarious Sacrifice*, he speaks of Christ:

> His work terminates, not in the release of penalties by due compensation, but in the transformation of character, and the rescue, in that manner, of guilty men from the retributive causations provoked by their sins.[4]

The noted Scottish theologian, Hugh Ross Mackintosh (1870-1960), writes that, so far as he can tell, it was Bushnell who first "regarded the atonement as the doctrine of the cost of forgiveness to God." He quotes two statements found in Bushnell's *Vicarious Sacrifice*. "Our human instinct puts us always on making cost when we undertake to forgive" (p. 48). Pointing out that forgiveness requires two things antecedently, Bushnell states: "first, such a sympathy with the wrong-doing party as virtually takes his nature; and secondly, a making cost in that nature by suffering, or expense, a painstaking sacrifice and labour" (p. 40).[5]

This form of the moral theory of the atonement places the emphasis on Christ's self-sacrificing love. It is this, finally, that saves; not merely and only Christ's teaching or His sealing of them with His blood.

Charles Hodge (1797-1878), the 19th century Presbyterian theologian, admirably summarizes this form of the moral theory:

> This exerts a greater power over the hearts of men than all else besides. . . . As such love as that of Christ was never before exhibited to men; as no such instance of self-sacrifice had ever before occurred, or can ever occur again, He is the saviour by way of eminence. Other men, who through love submit to self-denial for the good of men, are within their sphere and in their measure, saviours too; the work of salvation by the exhibition of self-sacrificing love, is going on around us continually, and from eternity to eternity, so long as evil exists, in the presence of beings endued with love. Still Christ in His work occupies a place peculiar and preëminent, and therefore we are Christians; we recognize Christ as the greatest of Saviours.[6]

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[3]L. Morris, *The Cross of Jesus* (Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press), p. 19.

[4]Horace Bushnell, *Vicarious Sacrifice* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1866), p. 449.

[5]Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1927), pp. 185-86.

[6]Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scriber & Co., 1871), II, 569.

The penal satisfaction theory emphasizes the absolute necessity of the atonement. The atonement is not a relative expedient either to protect moral government or create a moral influence sufficient to move the sinner. It locates this absolute necessity in the nature of God, specifically and exclusively in the attribute of divine justice. The sole purpose of the atonement, its absolute necessity, is to satisfy the claims of an offended divine justice.

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) propounded an early version of the theory. He applied judicial categories to ethical and religious relations. The guilt of sinners against the infinite God is infinitely great, and must, according to the principles of divine justice, be atoned for by a punishment of infinite severity. Were this punishment to fall upon the human race, all men would suffer eternal damnation. But this would conflict with the divine goodness. On the other hand, forgiveness without atonement would conflict with the divine justice. The only alternative, by which the claims of goodness and justice could be reconciled, was to resort to the expedience of representative satisfaction. In view of the infinite nature of human guilt, this could be rendered only by God, since he is the only infinite being. But he could not represent the human race without assuming the character of a man descended from Adam. This was accomplished by the second Person of the Godhead, who, by the virgin birth, became man. Christ thus stands in the place of humanity, and in his death renders to God the satisfaction due him, and thereby conducts the believing portion of humanity to salvation.

> No man except this one ever gave to God what he was not obliged to lose, or paid a debt he did not owe. But he freely offered to the Father what there was no need of his ever losing, and paid for sinners what he owed not for himself.[7]

The Anselmic theory, with considerable modification and development, was adopted by the Latin, Lutheran and Reformed churches. This developed view was, in modern times, advocated by Charles Hodge at Princeton, and, later in the 19th century, by W. T. Shedd (1820-1894) at Union Theological Seminary. Both men were Presbyterians, and both became the outstanding American advocates of high Calvinism.

Suffice it here to refer to Hodge's succinct definition of the satisfaction theory:

> This is the doctrine which the writer has endeavoured to exhibit and vindicate in the preceding pages. According to this doctrine the work of Christ is a real satisfaction, of infinite inherent merit, to the vindicatory justice of God; so that He saves His people by doing for them, and in their stead, what they were unable to do for themselves, satisfying the demands of the law in their behalf, and bearing its penalty in their stead; whereby they are reconciled to God, receive the Holy Ghost, and are made partakers of the life of Christ in their present sanctification and eternal salvation.[8]

The theory is virtually a theory of mathematical values. In his death, Jesus suffered an equivalent penalty——of equivalent value for the satisfaction of justice. Now, if Christ suffered punishment due to all, and all penalty has been met, and the justice of God is entirely satisfied, then it follows that salvation is universal: the entire human race is saved. To escape this

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[7]Anselm *Cur Deus Homo*, in Sidney Norton Deane, *St. Anselm* (La Salle, IL: (The Open Court Publishing Co., 1951) p. 280.

[8]Hodge, *loc. cit.*, pp. 563-64.

result, which Calvinists themselves realize is contrary to scripture, resort is made to the idea of *limited atonement*. Christ endures the punishment only of the elect. And, further, this elect is foreordained and predestined by the sovereign will of God. To refer here to Shedd:

> If the word [atonement] means value, then the atonement is unlimited; if it means extending, that is, applying, then the atonement is limited....
>
> Atonement must be distinguished from *redemption*. The latter term indicates the *application* of the atonement. It is the term "redemption," not "atonement," which is found in those statements that speak of the work of Christ as limited by the decree of election. . . .
>
> Since redemption implies the application of Christ's atonement, *universal* or *unlimited* redemption cannot logically be affirmed by any who hold that faith is wholly the gift of God, and that saving grace is bestowed solely by election.[9]

The governmental theory of the atonement, at least in its pure form, takes human government and applies it analogously to the divine government. This renders the theory problematical, unless it is assumed that the analogy is without question properly fitted to express the metaphysical nature of God and His relations to His creation.

Now, it may very well be that we must resort to analogy when we address questions relating to the supernatural. But if so, the analogy should be concrete, not abstract, i.e., taken, not from objective and formal conceptual patterns, but from the lived intensions of actual and subjective experience. But this the governmental theory does not do.

There is a further difficulty of the theory, which it is appropriate to notice at this point in our discussion. We have previously noted that the theory finds only a relative necessity for the atonement. The atonement is a relative expediency to protect the interests of moral government. Atonement, then, is not grounded in any absolute necessity, rising from the nature of God.

We have previously noted that certain governmental theorists admitted this difficulty. Watson, for example, insisted that the governmental emphasis must be combined with consideration of the ethical character of God. The atonement is a satisfaction to the ethical nature of God, as well as an expedient for sustaining the interests of the divine government. Thus, this form of the governmental theory does assert the absolute necessity of the atonement, albeit in association with the relative expediency of governmental interests. But there is no disagreement between laws and the nature of God. The satisfaction of the laws and the nature of God coalesce in an inseparable unity.

> The death of Christ, then, is the satisfaction accepted; and this being a satisfaction to *justice*, that is, a consideration which satisfied God, as a being essentially righteous, and as having strict an inflexible respect to the justice of his government; pardon through, or for the sake of that death, became, in consequence, "a declaration of the righteousness of God," as the only appointed method of remitting the punishment of the guilty; and if so, satisfaction respects not . . . the *honour* of the law of God, but its *authority*, and the upholding of that righteous and holy character of the Lawgiver, and of his administration, of which that law is the visible and public expression. Nor is this to be regarded as a merely *wise* and *fit expedient* of

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[9]W. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), II, 466-70.

> government, a point to which even Grotius leans too much, as well as many other divines . . . and that it is to be concluded, that no alternative existed but that of exchanging a righteous government for one careless and relaxed, to the dishonour of the Divine attributes, and the sanctioning of moral disorder; or the upholding of such a government by the personal and extreme punishment of every offender; or else the acceptance of the vicarious death of an infinitely dignified and glorious being, through whom pardon be offered, and in whose hands a process for the moral restoration of the lapsed should be placed.[10]

The moral influence theory, too, defines the atonement in terms of a relative expediency. The atonement is a provision to enable the sinner to repent. It is true, to be sure, that the recorded facts of the life and death of Jesus exert a moral influence conducive to repentance. But this does not imply that the atonement consists wholly in this influence. It is not a constituent fact of the atonement as such. In sum, the moral influence theory in effect denies an *objective* atonement.

It may we well, at this point, to refer to Horace Bushnell, who may be taken as the most eloquent advocate of the moral influence position. He argues that God and humans have similar moral sentiments and that therefore God forgives as do people. He saves, not by any propitiation, but only by suffering in and with the sins of humanity. He writes:

> They come to the same point where they require exactly the same preparations and conditions. So God must propitiate the cost and suffering for our good. This He did in sacrifice on the cross, that sublime act of cost, in which God has bent himself downward in loss and sorrow, over the hard face of sin, to say, and in saying to make good, "Thy sins be forgiven thee."[11]

However he came to feel that there was something lacking in the view that redemption consists wholly in moral influence. There is, he wrote, a need for an objective atonement.

> In the facts, outwardly regarded, there is no sacrifice, or oblation, or atonement, or propitiation, but simply a living and dying thus and thus. The facts are impressive; the agony is eloquent of love; and the cross a very shocking murder triumphantly met. And if then the question arises, how are we to use such a history so as to be reconciled by it, we hardly know in what way to begin. How shall we come to God by help of this martyrdom? How shall we turn it, or turn ourselves under it, so as to be justified and set at peace with God? Plainly there is a want here, and this want is met by giving a thought-form to the facts which is not in the facts themselves. They are put directly into moulds of the alter, and we are called to accept the crucified God-man as our sacrifice, an offering or oblation for us, our propitiation; so as to be sprinkled from our evil conscience, washed, purged, purified, cleansed from our sin.[12]

The satisfaction theory of the atonement has the merit of regarding the atonement as having an *absolute* necessity. But its primary defect here is that this necessity concerns, in the final analysis, the *justice* of God as the essential character of God effective in the atonement. Therefore, the theory

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[10]Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes*, 2 vols. (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1850), II, 139.

[11]Horace Bushnell, *Forgiveness and Law* (New York: Scribner, 1874), p. 35.

[12]Horace Bushnell, *Vicarious Sacrifice* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1866), pp. 534-35.

fails to relate the justice of God to other features of His nature, and, as a result, fails properly to define justice itself. Other difficulties with the theory really follow from this one crucial defect.

If the divine justice must have absolute penal satisfaction, if justice *requires* punishment, then mercy and forgiveness are impossible. The sinner deserves punishment, and therefore he must be punished. God must be just, and He could not be just were he to fail to exact punishment. That is the theory. Then the punishment, if it be commensurate with guilt and the guilty, must fall upon those who are guilty. To say that justice can be satisfied, even, by a *substitute* will not satisfy the demand that punishment must fall upon the guilty, the *criminal himself*. To punish someone who is *holy* cannot answer to the abstract, absolute requirement of justice.

There is here a fatal flaw in the concept of justice. It should be evident that justice involves more than retribution. Justice involves, essentially, fidelity to *all* interests. And the New Testament indicates that this fidelity is the wellspring of the divine interest in saving those who, although deserving of retributive justice, are nevertheless embraced in the offer of salvation.

> The debt is not paid by the death of Christ, but a provision is made whereby, without injustice, it may be forgiven. The death of Christ affects not man's deserts; all sinners deserve to die, just the same as if Christ had never died. The death of Christ is not a substituted penalty, but a substitute for penalty. The necessity of the atonement is not found in the fact that the justice of God requires an invariable execution of deserved penalty, but in the fact that the honour and glory of God and the welfare of his creatures require that his essential and rectoral righteousness be adequately declared. The death of Christ is exponential of divine justice, and is a satisfaction in that sense, and not in the sense that it is, as of a debt, the full and complete payment of all its demands [13]

Romans 3:25 is St. Paul's nearest approach to a philosophical statement of the atonement. The passage points out that, because of God's forbearance towards sinners in past times, it was necessary to address that forbearance with something new, namely, justification by faith in harmony with God's being just. To the question, why does God desire the justification of the sinner, the answer, in Paul and elsewhere in the New Testament, is clear: because God loves the sinner. But how is this harmony of justice with love to be achieved? Paul's answer is, by the manifestation of His righteousness in the death of Christ: "for the showing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier."

Olin Curtis (1815-1918) of Drew University shows clearly that the expression, *righteousness of God*, does not mean *bare justice*.

> First, a philosophical reason. God's purpose is to harmonize justice with the demand of love, and this harmony could not be achieved by expressing justice alone. Second, a biblical reason, a reason in the consistency of Pauline theology. Saint Paul's own usage is contrary to the view that the righteousness of God means bare justice. Turn, for a case, to 2 Cor. 5.21: "That we might become the righteousness of God in him." We find here the same expression, δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ: and it cannot

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[13]Miner Raymond (1811-1897), *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Cincinnati: Curt & Jennings, 1877), II, 257-58.

mean justice——that we might become the justice of God in him.[14]

By the atonement we may become the righteousness of God, so Paul affirms. But in no sense can this be construed that we become the justice of God. To assert this is to assert nonsense. What is fundamental in the atonement, then, is the *righteousness* of God, and not the justice of God. In short, there is an absolute necessity for the atonement, and that necessity lies in the nature of God. But the necessity is not His justice, alone and absolute. It is *righteousness*.

Other than the passage in Romans, there are no indications in the New Testament of a philosophical consideration of the atonement. There are no purely rational and *a priori* grounds upon which we can determine the nature of the atonement, that is, how we can determine how God must help us, if, indeed, help should come to us. For this, we must rely on our own experience of forgiveness. To quote Mackintosh:

> The truth about atonement, like all truth in Christianity, is discoverable and verifiable only through submission to Jesus' power to set us right with God. And in formulating what we call doctrine, we simply interpret what comes home to us as we let the living and dying Redeemer bring us to the Father.[15]

The New Testament does not contain any final theory of the atonement. But it does contain statements and truths that bear upon the thought of atonement. If we are, then, to come to some degree of understanding, we must take the New Testament as our inspiration and source. But we must not use the Bible in a cavalier fashion, employing scripture to support any abstractly conceived system. Always we must use the scripture in the light of its own deepest principles. If we move in the spirit of the Bible, we may move towards apprehension of what God has done in Jesus to bring us to His pardoning love.

In the New Testament there are three families of terms associated with the subject of redemption. They are: (1) λύτρον (*lutron*), **redemption;** (2) ἱλασμός (*hilasmos*), **propitiation;** and (3) καταλλαγή (*katallagē*), **reconciliation.**

(1) λύτρον (*lutron*), **Redemption.**

Some short time following Peter's great confession, Jesus again referred to His soon-coming death. He and His disciples were now on their way to Jerusalem, and Jesus spoke of the impending ordeal of Calvary and the triumph of Resurrection. Replying to the importunate mother's concern for a position of prestige for her sons, Jesus defined the true elevation in terms of service. And, again calling to mind His own mission, He said:

> Even as the Son of man
> came not to be ministered unto,
> but to minister, and to give his
> life a ransom for many.[16]

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[14]Olin Alfred Curtis, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1905), p. 305.

[15]Mackintosh, *loc. cit.*, p. 193.

[16]Matt. 20:28. See also Mark 10:45.

The term *ransom* is λύτρον (*lutron*). Something of the meaning of the term may be gleaned from its most prevalent, but not only, Hebrew equivalent, which is כֹּפֶר (*kôpher*). It means *cover*. It always denotes a vicarious gift, the value of which covers a fault. And this covering does *more* than merely cancel the debt; it provides a remedy at a *cost*. Further, when the term is employed in the strict meaning of *ransom*, i.e., as an equivalent for *lutron*, the covering is always for a human life. It is clear that Jesus has used the term in this Hebraic sense. He is giving His own life as a covering for other lives.[17]

The Greek term *lutron* is derived from the verb λύω, which means to *loosen*. The key idea, then, is to *release* or to *make free*. From the noun *lutron* the verb λυτρόω (*lutroō*) is derived, meaning *to release on receipt of ransom*. In classical Greek the verb is used in the active voice.[18] But in the New Testament it has a passive sense, *release*, or *redemption*. In the papyri, the word translated "ransom" is commonly used as the price paid for a slave who is then set free by the one who purchased him. It is the purchase money for manumitting slaves. This is the sense in which Jesus used the term. He asserts here that He is giving His own life as the price of freedom for the slaves of sin. There is in the passage no reference to whom the ransom price is paid, either God or the Devil. The thought is only that there is great cost involved in the rescue of people from the enslavement of sin. In sum, the passage, employing the term *lutron,* evinces Jesus' full consciousness of the significance of His death for humankind.[19]

From the verb *lutroō* the noun λύτρωσις (*lutrōsis*) is formed. It literally means *a ransoming*, although it is translated as *redemption*. It is found in Luke 2:38, which recounts Anna's rejoicing in the "looked for redemption in Jerusalem." It is also found in Heb. 9:12, 15, where it is written that the New Testament High Priest, contrasted with the Old Testament age, "entered in once unto the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

The term translated throughout the New Testament as **redemption** is ἀπολύτρωσις (*apolutrōsis*), derived from the preposition ἀπό (*off*, i.e., *away*) and λύτρον *(lutron*), and conveys the idea of ransom in full, complete redemption. It is found once in the Gospels and several places in the Pauline Epistles.[20]

(2) ἱλασμός (*hilasmos*), **propitiation.**

The term ἱλασμός (*hilasmos*) means an *appeasing*, *propitiating*. It is derived from the middle verb ἱλάσκομαι (*hilaskomai*), which itself is derived from ἵλιως (*hileōs*, gracious, gentle), and means to *conciliate*. In the Bible

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[17]See Exod. 21:30, 30:12; Num. 32, 32 (where the term is translated as *satisfaction*); Prov. 6:35, 13:8.

[18]See *Theaetetus* 165a, where Plato speaks of an opponent in an argument, "after subduing snd binding you he would at once proceed to bargain with you for such ransom as might be agreed upon between you."

[19]The other, and third, use of *lutron* is found in 1 Tim. 2:6, where the preposition ἀντὶ (*anti*), *instead of*, is prefixed. This strengthens the idea of the exchange of Christ's life for the life of others.

[20]See Luke 21:28; Rom. 3:24, 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; Eph. 4:30; Col. 1:14.

the verb is used passively, *to become propitious*, *be placated* or *appeased*.

There are but two places in the New Testament where the term ἱλασμός (*hilasmos*), translated as *propitiation*, is used: 1 John 2:2 and 4:10.

> And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

> Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

In the *Septuagint*, the term *propitiation*, often occurs. It is the translation of אָשָׁם (*'âshâm*), meaning an *oblation for sin*. The proper meaning of *propitiation*, ἱλασμός, is *atoning sacrifice*. Hence *hilasmos* designates the purpose that God has fulfilled in sending His Son. It rests on the fact that God is gracious.

Another word translated as *propitiation*, derived from the same root of ἱλασμός (*hilasmos*), is ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*). *Hilasmos* refers to the *one who effects* the propitiation, while *hilastērion* refers to the *factuality* of the propitiation. Strong, for example, sets forth the distinction in the contrasting terms, *an expiator* and *an expiatory*.

The term is found in Heb. 9:5, where, in reference to the Old Testament ritual of atonement, it is translated as *mercy-seat*. There is here a throwback to Old Testament days. Exod. 25:17-22 describes the mercy-seat. The Hebrew term is כַּפֹּרֶת (*kappôreth*). It means *covering*. On the great Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the holy of holies and there sprinkled the sacrificial blood upon the mercy-seat as an atonement, or covering, for the sins of the people. The writer of Hebrews designates the mercy-seat as τὸ ἱλαστήριον (the *hilastērion*). Here the term is governed by the definite article and is therefore a substantive. It is, therefore, the place, not the gift, or propitiation, as in Rom. 3:25.

The great text of Rom. 3:25 is particularly significant with respect to the subject of propitiation:

> Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

In this passage ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) does not have the definite article. The term is not, therefore, a substantive. The New Testament ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) cannot be regarded as a place. Rather, it must be viewed as a *means*, or *agency*, of propitiation. Now, there are examples of ancient inscriptions where the term is used as an adjective, meaning "a votary offering" or "propitiatory gift." This is the respect in which Christ is the ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*). He is the votive gift of Divine Love for the salvation of humanity.

Some attention should here be given to the opening clause of the verse: "Whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." The verb *set forth* is προέθετο (*proetheto*), an old verb meaning *to place*, *to*

propose to oneself. The preposition πρό (*pro*) adds the thought that the action signified by the verb-component is exhibited to view. Of this verb, which is found in only two other places in the New Testament (Rom. 1:13; Eph. 1:9), Robertson says: "God set before himself (purposed) and did it publicly before (*pro*) the whole world."[21]

What is it that God has purposed to Himself and set forth openly? We have already found the answer to the question: it is the propitiation in the form of Christ Jesus. But now the text of Rom. 3:25 adds an element that serves to define clearly the nature of that propitiation. The translation of the remaining portion of the clause under consideration asserts that Jesus Christ is "a propitiation through faith in his blood." The Bible does, indeed, teach that the saving benefit of the propitiatory offering is dependent, on our part, on faith. But it cannot be that the propitiation itself is conditioned, or dependent, on faith. So it does appear that ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι (*en tō autou haimati*), *in his blood*, should not be taken in connection with διὰ τῆς πίστεως (*through faith*). Rather, ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι (*en tō autou haimati*), *in his blood*, should be thought as connected with ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*), with *propitiation*. This interpretation is reinforced by the emphatic position of the pronoun αὐτοῦ (*his*, genitive), signifying, apparently, *in his own blood*. In Heb. 9:25 the writer distinguishes the offering of Christ from those of the Hebraic law, in that Christ's offering is διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος (*dia tou idiou haimatos*), *by his own blood*, not ἐν αἵματι ἀλλοτρίῳ (*en haimati allotriō*), *in blood of another*. The literal reading of the text is this: "Whom God set forth a propitiation in his own blood through faith." The text means, then, that Christ was set forth, or purposed, as an ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*), or *propitiation,* consisting in his own blood, i.e., in the offering of Himself, and available by faith. Curtis expresses the thought in these words:

> St. Paul's surface meaning in this passage may be fairly rendered thus: Christ was set forth, openly, in his blood, to be a propitiation available by faith. The crucial word is ἱλαστήριον). . . . a propitiation is *the means by which one is rendered propitious*, or favorable, or open to plea. Inasmuch, therefore, as Saint Paul says that Christ was set forth, openly, in his blood, to be a propitiation, available by faith, the apostle's full thought is the sacrificial means by which God is rendered propitious to one having faith.[22]

(3). καταλλαγή (*katallagē*), **reconciliation.**

The third major term dealing with redemption is one that only Paul uses in the New Testament. It is καταλλαγή (*katallagē*). It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to find the basic meaning of the term. Nevertheless, the thought of change is predominant. It does derive from the verb καταλλάσσω (*katallassō*). This verb is a compound of the verb ἀλλάσσω *(allassō*), *to make different*, *to change*, and the preposition κατά (*kata*), *down*. Prefixing the preposition to the verb adds an intensive or perfective force to the verb.[23] Thayer, for example, defines the verb καταλλάσσω (*katallassō*) as *to change*, and the noun καταλλαγή (*katallagē*)as, first, *exchange*, and, second, *adjustment*

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[21]A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), IV, 347.

[22]Curtis, *op. cit.*, pp. 301-02.

[23]See A. T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), pp. 605-06.

of a difference, restoration to favor. As thus employed figuratively, it means to *compound* a difference. In the New Testament it is translated as *reconciliation*.

There is some, but little, use of the term outside the New Testament. It does not play an essential role in the pagan expiatory rites. Plato employs the term in a non-religious sense, where he speaks in *Phaedo* 69a of exchanging (καταλλάττεσθαι, *katallattesthai*) fear for fear. Sophocles uses it in a religious sense in *Ajax* 444, where he says of Teucer, "he wants to be relieved (καταλλσχθῇ, *katallaxthē*) of the god's anger." Its absence in classical antiquity results from the impersonal relation between divinity and humanity.

The word is employed, however, in classical Greek records as a technical term for the reconciliation of married couples. Paul uses it in that sense in 1 Cor. 7:11 as an action on the part of a wife separated from her husband.

With respect to the relation between God and man, only Paul uses the term in the New Testament. There are two texts that are of particular note. In 2 Cor. 5:18, 19, Paul speaks of "the ministry of reconciliation" and "the word of reconciliation." Used in this context, the term is a noun. The term is also found here as a participle.

> And all things are of God,
> who hath reconciled us to him-
> self by Jesus Christ, and hath
> given to us the ministry of
> reconciliation;
> To wit, that God was in
> Christ, reconciling the world
> unto himself, not imputing their
> trespasses unto them; and hath
> committed unto us the word of
> reconciliation.

It is clear from the text that reconciliation is more than a change of relationship in a judicial sense. It involves a total renewal of one's life. It produces the most comprehensive renewal possible for the individual. He becomes a new creature; old things have passed away and all things have become new. We are made, Paul says, "the righteousness of God in Him."

Further, the text suggests that our reconciliation is not merely passive, but that it involves action on our part. It is not, as it were, a blow thrust upon us. On the contrary, we are *made active* by the reconciliation. We have received "the word of reconciliation." This word enlightens us as to the possibility of our reconciliation. It not only enlightens; it also empowers us to respond to the offer of our restoration to the divine favor. We thus have an active part in the reconciling process. "Be ye," Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:20, "reconciled to God."

The second text that we must consider is Rom. 5:10, 11. Here Paul states emphatically that reconciliation comes about by the death of Jesus.

> For if, when we were ene-
> mies, we were reconciled to
> God by the death of his Son,
> much more, being reconciled,
> we shall be saved by his life.
> And not only so, but we also
> joy in God through our Lord
> Jesus Christ, by whom we

have received the atonement.

The term ἱλασμός (*hilasmos*), *propitiation*, refers to one party, the party being propitiated. It is quite clear that this one party is God. But the term καταλλαγή (*katallagē*), *reconciliation*, refers to, or involves, two parties. Thus the question arises as to whether the change in attitude, which reconciliation requires, is a change in God or a change in man, or a change in both God and man. This is a difficult question, and biblical scholars hold differing views. It is doubtful if this question can be given a satisfactory definitive answer, and it is not our intent here to attempt to propose one. But some attention must be given to this subject.

There are scriptural texts that suggest that the subject of reconciliation is the individual. 2 Cor. 5:18, 19 states that God has "reconciled us to himself," and, indeed, "the world unto himself." Col. 1:20 makes the same assertion: "And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself." But cannot this mean, not only that we are reconciled to God, but that we are so reconciled because He has reconciled us to Himself? We know that the scriptures speak of propitiation as a means of reconciliation. In this relation it is God, not man, that is propitiated. There is here implied a change in the divine attitude, and such change implies reconciliation on God's side. In sum, the reconciliation may be mutual, which is a view many expositors adopt.

Rom. 5:10, 11 speaks of enmity. So also Col. 1:21: "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled." If the term ἐχθροί (*exthroi*), *enemies*, be taken, in both texts, as *active*, the sinner is reconciled to God, not God to the sinner. The expression in Colossians is ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ (*exthrous tē dianoia*), *enemies in mind* (the Greek does not have the possessive pronoun *your*). The dative τῇ διανοίᾳ is a causal dative, which carries an active sense, i.e., that the enmity is effected in and by the mind. If the mind in question is the human mind, then, the enmity is on the part of man rather than on the part of God. Similarly, if the ἐχθροί (*exthroi*) of Rom. 5:20 is regarded as active, then the enmity is on the side of the individual. But there is no reason, grammatically, to take it as active; it can very well be passive, in which case the enmity is, although not necessarily exclusively so, on the part of God. The fact that in the Colossians passage the causal dative lacks any possessive pronoun, i.e., does not specify either the human mind or the divine mind, reinforces this possibility of mutual hostility. On this interpretation, reconciliation would then be mutual.

There are additional considerations that indicate reconciliation on the part of God. In the authorized version, Rom. 5:11 reads: "by whom we have now received the atonement." The word *atonement* is not correct. The word is the one previously used in the text, καταλλαγὴν (*katallagēn*), *reconciliation*. Thus the passage should read: by whom we have now received the reconciliation." The implication is that reconciliation comes from the side of God. Also, in Rom. 11:28 ἐχθροί (*exthroi*), enemies, and ἀγαπητοί (*agapēptoi*), *beloved*, are paralleled as opposites. *Beloved* must be passive, and therefore, to preserve the parallelism, *enemies* must be passive. The enmity, and thus the reconciliation, must be, in the least, on the side of God.

The denial of reconciliation on the side of God is, in a considerable respect, due to the view that God is *impassive* and therefore insusceptible of any change. In commenting on 2 Cor. 5:18, Alfred Plummer writes:

It is well to be reminded that God is not a man that He should repent

> or change His mind, and that His unchanging love is always waiting for the penitent sinner. But in order to get another side of this vast truth we are obliged to use language which involves us in a seeming contradiction. Scripture speaks of God being angry with impenitent sinners and ceasing to be angry with those who are penitent. Scripture also speaks of 'propitiation' as a means to reconciliation (1 Jn. ii.2, iv.10; cf. Rom. iii.25; Lk. xviii.13), and in this relation it is God and not man who is propitiated. In both cases we have to affirm or imply change in One who was before said to be incapable of change. As so often, in trying to express deep spiritual truths, we have got down to "the bed-rock of contradiction."[24]

William Sandy takes somewhat the same position:

> we infer that the natural explanation of the passages which speak of enmity and reconciliation between God and man is that they are not on one side only, but are mutual.
>
> At the same time we must well be aware that this is only our imperfect way of speaking: κατ ἄνθροπον λέγω must be written large over all such language. We are obliged to use anthropomorphic expressions which apply a change of attitude or relation on the part of God as well as of man; and yet in some way which we cannot wholly fathom we may believe that with Him there is 'no variableness, neither shadow of turning.'[25]

But one does not need to accept this contradiction as a way of preserving the full meaning of reconciliation. Neither will it do to suggest that our language about God's relativity is "anthropomorphic," while that of His absoluteness is free from such anthropomorphism. When it comes to speaking about the transcendent, all our language reflects our limited and finite standpoint. The difficulty here is ruled by the concept of God as absolute in every respect and therefore immune to any and all forms of relativity. This view of God is the result of our clinging to the abstractions of classical philosophy and theology. But there is nothing about those abstractions that requires us to believe in their absolute truth as regards the nature of God and the relations He sustains to the world. Indeed, the Bible itself does not, and cannot, abide by them. In Isaiah 53:3-7, the prophet speaks of the transaction of redemption. Surely it must be said that the Eternal One is affected in the transaction when the great prophet looks forward to the redeeming immanence of God in the Savior. Surely the Father is affected by the salvation that results from the great work of the Savior: "He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied . . . ." And the satisfaction is in heaven:

> And when he cometh home,
> he calleth together his friends
> and neighbors, saying unto
> them, Rejoice with me; for I
> have found my sheep which was lost.
> I say unto you, that likewise
> joy shall be in heaven over one
> sinner that repenteth . . . .[26]

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[24]Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, in *The International Critical Commentary* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 182.

[25]William Sandy, *The Epistle to the Romans*, in *The International Critical Commentary* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), p. 130.

[26]Luke 15:6-7.

The view that God is absolutely impassive and unchanging is also driven by an erroneous conception of the nature of time and the transference of that conception to the nature of eternity. Time has been conceived as an objective timeless instant. Certainly, there are no such mathematical-geometrical points in nature. And our experience of time is not of that abstract order. We never experience a flash of instantaneousness. The time we experience is a duration, a passage in which what we call the past and future shade into that epoch of experience. There are no grounds, either in nature or our experience, that require or justify the concept of God as absolute, an instantaneous present that precludes passage of, and hence change in, His experience of eternity. His eternity is better thought of as His own duration that carries with it the relativity of His love for and salvation of the world and humanity. He thus can, and does, in his absoluteness sustain the relativity that propitiation and reconciliation require.[27]

> Olin Curtis has clearly and summarily stated the matter as follows:
> The word translated "reconciliation" is καταλλαγή; and our first question is, Does it mean reconciliation by means of a change taking place in men? or is there an actual change which takes place in God? From our English usage, it would, at first glance, seem as if the reconciliation were by a change in men, God himself being favorable all the time. But our English usage is altogether misleading. The change is primarily in God. We know this conclusively for two reasons: First, this reconciliation, Saint Paul says, was "through the death of his Son." And, already, in this very epistle, as we have seen, the apostle has taught that the death of Christ was a propitiation, or means of changing God, or making him propitious. That is, Saint Paul is but saying in a new way essentially what he had said before. To say that by the death of Christ God is made favorable to men is essentially the same thing as to say that by the death of Christ God is reconciled to men. And just as the propitiation becomes available by personal faith, so the reconciliation is completed by men becoming reconciled to God. Second——but we do not need to go back to the third chapter, for the decisive point is given in the passage before us. Saint Paul here tells us that "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son"; and then, a bit later, that we have "now received the reconciliation." In the first place, that is, before men did a thing toward it, God became reconciled to men by means of the death of his Son; and now we accept by faith the divine offer of reconciliation.[28]

The discussion of the scriptures shows that they set forth the death of Jesus Christ as the procuring cause of the atonement. His sacrifice of Himself avails as a ransom price, as a propitiation, and as a reconciliation. In His own words, His giving of Himself is a necessity. All this the scriptures claim.

We have previously considered, at the theological and philosophical level, the question of the nature and ground of this necessity. We have argued that theories of relative necessity are inadequate to the strength of this necessity. If the atonement is but a relative necessity, surely another, less costly, way should have been found for the salvation of humanity. Some way, other than a governmental expediency or a moral influence, might very well have been sufficient and adopted by the divine counsel. W. G. Blaikie,

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[27]For a more complete discussion of this issue, see my article "The Age of the Ages," in *The Asbury Theological Journal*. Vol. 57, No. 1 and Vol. 58, No. 2 (Fall 1002, Spring 2003), pp. 105-27.

[28]Curtis, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

writing on Eph. 2:16 aptly says:

> If Christ had *only* to *proclaim* God's friendship to sinners, why should he have suffered on the cross? The cross as a mere pulpit is hideous; as an altar it is glorious. The love of God is ill revealed if, it subjected Jesus to unnecessary agony. The love of both Father and Son is indeed commended, if the agony was voluntarily borne by the Son, and permitted by the Father, as being indispensable for the pardon of the sinner.[29]

It is true, as we have previously seen, that the satisfaction theory of the atonement considers the atonement as an absolute necessity. That absolute necessity is grounded in the justice of God. The sole purpose of the atonement is to satisfy the claims of an offence to the justice of God. In its own terms, however, the theory fails even to address adequately the claims of justice. Justice is more than retribution; it is also fidelity to all interests. Included in those interests is the adjustment of the legitimate claims of justice with God's nature and life as organic. While we must be careful in defining the divine nature in terms drawn from our experience, what we can say, as a strictly formal designation, is that the divine life is marked by internal harmony. And, further, it is precisely this harmony, and the claims arising from that harmony, in which the absolute necessity of atonement is grounded.

Rom. 3:25, 26 clearly distinguishes justice (δίκαιος, *dikaios*) from righteousness (δικαιοσύνη, *dikaiosun*ē). Jesus Christ was set forth, Paul says here, as a propitiation, to declare the Father's righteousness. The primary and absolute necessity of the atonement is the *righteousness* of God, not the quality of judicial justice. Certainly, the propitiation bears upon and is concerned with justice; it is a factor in the propitiation. But it is not the primary or exclusive factor. Instead, it is conditioned by, is dependent on, that which is even more fundamental, namely the *righteousness* of God.

Some further attention to the two texts will be helpful. Verse 25 states that Jesus Christ is set forth to be a propitiation, "to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." The prepositional phrase διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν (*dia tēn paresin*) is translated in the Authorized Version as "for the remission." It is an erroneous translation. Nowhere else in the New Testament is the term translated *remission*. The word for remission is ἄφεσις (*aphesis*). The term in Rom. 3:24 is πάρεσις (paresis), which means *passing over, disregarding, toleration*. One may see immediately that this interpretation is consistent with the prepositional phrase with which the verse concludes, "through the forbearance of God." While He was not indifferent to the sins of the Old Testament people, God passed them over through His forbearance.

The two texts indicate that there are two purposes of the setting forth of the propitiation, Jesus Christ as ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*). They are both denoted by the word ἔνδειζιν (endeizin), which means *to show forth, to declare*. In verse 25 it is governed by the preposition εἰς (*to* or *into*). In verse 26 the same word is governed by the preposition πρὸς (*towards*). The passage in verse 25 should read: "for showing forth (εἰς ἔνδειζιν, *eis endeizin*) of his righteousness because of the passing over of sins done aforetime in the forbearance of God." The passage in verse 26 reads: "toward the showing forth (πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειζιν, *pros tēn endeizin*) of his righteousness in the present

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[29]H. D. M. Spence & Joseph S. Excell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary*, 23 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), 20:66.

time, so that he may be righteousness and justifying."

Some commentators say that there is no substantial difference of meaning in the change of the prepositions. But this interpretation is, again, incorrect. Paul does not play fast and loose with his prepositions. Verse 25 states the *immediate* purpose of the propitiation, which is the vindication of God's righteousness with respect to the former ages when He passed over, left unvisited, the sins of the people. The death of Christ, as Mediator of the New Covenant, is "for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant" (Heb. 9:15). The preposition πρὸς *(towards*) signifies an *aim* or *direction*, and carries the thought of a further purpose consequent on the first. There is thus a *further grand* purpose signified by the πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειζιν (*pros tēn endeizin*) of verse 26, that of providing a way of present justification for believers now without compromising the Divine righteousness. The major point, however, of this excursus is to show that the *righteousness* of God is primary in regard to the propitiation, while judicial justification is different from righteousness and, accordingly, consequent upon righteousness. Again, the absolute necessity of the atonement is the Righteousness, not the justice, of God.

It may be observed that classical Greek writers also differentiate between righteousness and justice. Thus the distinction is not limited to the Bible. Plato writes: "justice *[*δικαιοσύνη - *dikaiosunē]* and legislation [νομοθετική - *nomothetikē*]——there is some intercommunication, as both deal with the same thing; at the same time they have certain differences."[30] Justice, in the ethical sense, i.e., righteousness, is not the same as legal justice. Aristotle observes the same distinction: Justice *[*δικαιοσύνη - *dikaiosunē]* is the virtue through which everybody enjoys his own possessions in accordance with the law."[31] Elsewhere he speaks of "the class that plays a part in judicial justice *[*δικαιοσύνη *(dikaiosunē)* δικαστική (dikastikē)].[32] The term δικαστική (dikastikē) means forensic judgment, judgment concerning the law. The implication of the passage is that judicial justice is a form, or application, of a wider justice, or righteousness.

It is the righteousness of God, then, in which the atonement finds its absolute anchor. We are now faced with the question: "What is the righteousness of God?" We can say with confidence that it is deeper than the demonstration of His righteousness. Paul's use of the expression δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ (*dikaiosun*ē Theou) in Rom. 3:25 shows clearly that God *is* righteous, that righteousness is proper to Him. It is not a static quality or an abstract attribute as conceived by an older Protestantism. It is always, in Paul, associated with the demonstration of God's judicial action. This judicial action is not retributive action: it is at the same time *the expression of grace*. It is righteousness that conjoins justice and grace and that is thus given concrete form in the atonement. Judaism had never succeeded in combining these two; the duality of justice and grace always remained far apart. But in the New Covenant they are combined at the deepest level and for all time.

There is a remarkable association of righteousness with holiness. Depending on the context, the meaning of righteousness varies. Its various

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[30]Plato *Gorgias 464c.*

[31]Aristotle *Rhetoric* I, 9, p. 1366b, 9ff.

[32]Aristotle *Politics* IV. 4, p. 1291a, 27.

meanings are: moral concern, the sum of all moral excellence, and moral love. Commenting on Romans 3:25, Professor Stevens writes:

> Here δικαιοσύνη must mean the self-respecting attribute of holiness in God, the reaction of his nature against sin which must find expression in its condemnation. Holy love is the best definition of Paul's conception of the ethical nature of God.[33]

The Hebrew term for holiness is קֹדֶשׁ (*qōdesh*). It means a *sacred* place or thing. It is rarely used abstractly as *sanctity*. Its early usage may have been to indicate the bare idea of Deity. It may not have had any distinctly ethical content. The basic thought was that God is unapproachable. The appropriate attitude, then, was one of reverent hesitation. With the coming of the great prophets, however, the term took on a moral significance. The holiness of God thus signifies His absolute moral perfection.

In the New Testament the ethical conception of the holiness of God is brought to completion. To refer again to Professor Stevens:

> The Christian use of the word lifted it into accord with the highest ethical conceptions, and gave it the idea of separateness from the sinful world, harmony with God, the absolutely Good Being, moral perfection. Thus ἅγιος is, above all things, a qualitative and ethical term.[34]

Thus it can be said that the righteousness of God is the Holiness of God. It is, then, the holiness of God that requires with absolute necessity the atonement. Curtis expresses this summarily:

> In the Christian view the holy man is the man whose entire being is organized under moral concern. But when the term is applied to God the full Christian meaning is, I think, something more. It is that God is both absolutely perfect and absolutely moral. In God there is no blemish of any kind whatsoever; but this divine perfection is urged with the most intense ethical emphasis. God is perfect *and* he is righteous. The Christian conception *starts* with God's perfection and *culminates* in his moral life. It is not that God is perfect because he is moral, but rather that he is moral because he is perfect. Thus God's moral life obtains its awful unyieldingness, for it is rooted in the wholeness of the Infinite Being. This point I must insist upon, for it has, when we come to the doctrine of the atonement, the most vital importance. The final Christian idea is that God must be ethically satisfied, not because he bechances to have a moral standard, but because he has a moral standard *and*——AND this moral standard is the necessary expression of his absolute perfection.[35]

The Old Testament always associates the Divine holiness with beauty. 2 Chron. 2:29 records the time when Jehosaphat "appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness." David sings in Ps. 29:2, "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." The reference to the aesthetic of beauty has significance with respect to the question as to the nature of holiness. The organizing principles that are definitive of beauty are those of harmony,

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[33]G. B. Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), p. 378.

[34]In James Hastings, ed., *Dictionary of the Bible*, 5 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898-1904), II, 399.

[35]Curtis, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-63.

balance and centrality. *Harmony*, which achieves unity by recurrence and complex of temporal and spatial items, is especially significant in the temporal arts, as music. *Balance* achieves unity by contrast, by a close and complex juxtaposition of similar and dissimilar items, especially spatial items. It is particularly important in painting. *Centrality* obtains when items are so arranged in a complex that one item, or group of items, dominates the others. In short, beauty is the order and unification of the elements of content.

Beauty in reference to divine holiness means the harmony of the divine life. The experience of God is organic, in the sense that it is an ordered complex of qualities. No single quality can exist in isolation. Curtis describes this holiness of God in the following manner:

> This is the Christian view, as I understand it: can we give it any clarity by philosophical consideration? I think we can in the following manner: the fundamental individuality of God himself is under law, in the sense that it is a complex of initial qualities made organic under an eternal plan of harmony.[36]

In the atonement the divine moral concern, occasioned by the emergency brought by human sin and its inconsonance with holiness, is balanced with the divine concern of love. Here justice and grace are brought harmoniously together. And it is the propitiation, so Rom. 3:25, 26 tell us, that makes this preservation of God's internal harmony a continuing reality.

The absolute necessity of the atonement is the harmony of God's individuality. It is necessary, therefore, that sin be confronted in its absolute severity. But it is also necessary that God's love for His children be given free, unchecked, and continuing expression. For this, the scriptures declare, the death of the Son of God, is essential. The interests resident in the harmony of the living life, and the interests arising from the relations of the moral order, require and justify the Father's sending forth, publically and for all to witness, His son as propitiation in His blood.

We thus come to our final question: Why is it necessary that Jesus Christ die? Why is it that His death is the only means of achieving that harmony in individuality which yields the balance of justice and love? Could that there have been, consistent with God's being and relations, a far less costly remedy for human sin?

Mackintosh, to whom reference has been previously made, deals with this question. He argues that our own human experience of forgiveness may become a window into divine forgiveness. In several places in his writings, he takes the example of a very critical and serious offense that one person has committed against the other, an offense that is a threat to the very integrity of the one receiving that offense. If the offended person is authentically to forgive the guilty person, he who forgives must take the offense against him seriously. He must see the offense in all its evil and hideousness. And this requires, inescapably, that the one who forgives must undergo profound suffering. He must suffer in his realization of the evil that has been perpetrated on him, and he must suffer in the decision and process of forgiving the offender. While the analogy cannot hold absolutely, it does, Mackintosh says, give us some insight into the divine act of forgiveness and the necessity of suffering in providing forgiveness.

But consider again: is not vicarious suffering for the unworthy the

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[36]Curtis, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

> thing that is recognizably best and noblest in life? . . . And shall we forbid God to do what the best of the human race are doing daily? Who will venture to tell Him that this service of the evil——so gladly rendered by friend for friend, by mother for child——is impossible for Him? Who will put limits to what Fatherhood may be?
>
> No: as ever where a great forgiveness is imparted, there was agony in the Cross; there was an awe-inspiring anguish corresponding the vastness of sin forgiven. Jesus' death is a window into the heart of the Eternal; so that we can say, what Christ was in history God is for ever. Thenceforward His pardon is above the suspicion of indifference to wrong. Pardon is always costly, and here the price was paid not merely to God but *by* God in His dear Son——the price necessary to reveal His nature of perfectly holy love.[37]

There is great significance in this type of analysis. It rejects, and rightly so, the abstractions of *a priori* thinking. It draws the analogy from the concrete realm of lived human experience, the character of which we are aware with certainty. There still remains the question as to why it is necessary that the sufferings of Jesus must terminate in and be fulfilled in His death.

Mackintosh is aware of this difficulty in the analogy of suffering and does address this question:

> The sinfulness of sin varies with the character of those against whom it is done, with the clear-eyed acceptance of hostility to those who, in lesser degree or greater, are good and represent the good. And in Jesus men for the first time were up against pure goodness. Never before had sinners confronted unflinching and perfect love; never before, accordingly, has it been possible for sin's malevolent antagonism to perfect love to declare itself without reserve. Hence, by its treatment of Jesus Christ, man's sinfulness was exposed: its sheer evil was laid bare to the bone, reprobated, doomed, sentenced without appeal. What we are as sinners was lit up by a flash that told the whole and left nothing unsaid.[38]

Thus it is death, and death only, that meets the extremity of sin and discloses the farthest reaches of grace. The suffering that brings forth redemption must be the suffering to the point of death.

Professor Sandy says that the significance of sacrifice, in the case of Jesus, is death:

> In what sense can the Death of Christ be said to demonstrate the righteousness of God? It demonstrates it by showing the impossibility of simply passing over sin. It does so by a great and we may say cosmical act, the nature of which we are not able wholly understand, but which at least presents analogies to the rite of sacrifice, and to that particular form of the rite which had for its object propitiation. The whole Sacrificial system was symbolical; and its wide diffusion showed that it was a mode of religious expression specially appropriate to that particular state in the world's development. Was it to lapse entirely with Christianity? The writers of the New Testament practically answer, No. The necessity for it still existed; the great fact of sin and guilt remained; there was still the same bar to the offering of acceptable worship. To meet this fact and to remove this bar, there had been enacted an Event which possessed the significance of sacrifice. And to that event the N.T. writers appealed as satisfying the conditions which

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[37]Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Highway of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1931), pp. 33-34.

[38]Mackintosh, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, p. 198.

the righteousness of God required.[39]

We are now at the point where we must make some inquiry into the nature and meaning of death. More precisely, what is there about Jesus's death that decisively answers sin and decisively meets the conditions of forgiveness.

We know that death is the antithesis of life. Our understanding of death, therefore, presupposes an understanding of life.

Now, both life and death may become the objects of scientific analysis. A strictly empiricist view of life holds that all phenomena of life may be explained in terms of physics and chemistry. It is true, to be sure, that physical and chemical laws do apply to living organisms. The living organism is a bodied creature and is associated with certain forms of matter. Nevertheless, the laws of physics and chemistry do not give a full account of all manifestations of life.

There is a purposive behavior of the living organism that escapes physico-chemical laws. This is the case with respect to human behavior. It is even found in an anticipated form in the behavior of animals. The maintenance of conditions of life in the internal body of the organism are from purely a physical and chemical standpoint wholly unintelligible. Embyronic development in the formation of special organs for future use reveal a tendance, or predetermination, that far transcends any given state in the development of the embryo. The processes in ontogeny, the development of an individual from first cell to maturity, depend on a real and primary whole determining, in a way that positive science does not address, the harmoniously integrated and functionally adjusted organism.

> The organism . . . is a primary "whole" which controls and guides the epigenetic development of differentiated tissues, structures and organs. Its specific integration is such that it cannot be explained in terms of physics and chemistry alone. It is a "whole" which is not only more than the sum of its parts, but which exists prior to these parts and is the material as well as the efficient cause of the parts.[40]

Curtis has expressed precisely the same concept of the organism, from the viewpoint of a theologian rather than a philosopher.

> An organism is a complex of essential parts, every part making contribution to the common end, and all the parts interdependent. That is the lowest organic condition. In a higher organism every part must be both means and end——by which I mean that every part gets as much as it gives. In the highest conceivable organism, like the personal organism of the Trinity, not only is every part essential to the organism, but also the entire organism is essential to every part; that is, the very existence of every part is possible only in and by means of the entire organism. Now, what I understand by life. It is this: *It is the power of organic action*. Or, it is the power which every organism has to act as an organism.[41]

The death of the organism, for us bodily death, involves more than the

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[39]Sandy, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

[40]W. H. Werkmeister, *A Philosophy of Science* (New York: Harper & Brothers, c1940), p. 362.

[41]Curtis, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-89.

processes that may be described in terms of the laws of chemistry and physics. To some extent they are applicable here, but with limits. The death of the organism is finally the destruction of the primary whole, the determiner of organic structure and function. This conclusion would seem to be a necessary inference, given the fact that life is the function of a predetermining whole.

There is thus, from the standpoint of science, a mystery as to the nature of life and death. In purely human terms, we are confronted with an opaque horizon. There is, however, in the Bible one primal conception of life. It is that God Himself is the source of life. From God derives "the breath of life"; "the breath of the Almighty hath given . . . life"; "for with thee is the fountain of life." But not only does God give life; He *is the life*. "In him," John writes, "was life; and the life was the light of men."[42]

The human organism is completely dependent upon God. The health of the organism is conditioned by correspondence with God. Since the individual is a moral person, correspondence with God must be more than an organismic one; it must also be a moral one. When that moral correspondence is broken, the organism begins to break up, and this because the connection with the primal life-source is being lost. This is the meaning of Paul's statement in Rom.6:23, that "the wages of sin is death." Further, in this connection between the organismic and the moral, physical death is a mark of God's hatred of sin. Death is thus the penalty of sin.

Bodily death is more than can be described in physico-chemical terms. Bodily death concerns also the *self-consciousness* of the individual who is undergoing the death-process. Curtis states that there are several layers of significance regarding bodily death: personal significance, moral significance, and racial significance.

The personal significance of bodily death consists in the fact that for the first time *the individual is absolutely* alone. Even before birth, while developing in the mother's womb, the developing child is aware of an environment. As an independent being in the world, he is aware, *via* his body, of the elements of nature. If he his socially responsive, he is aware of others and sustains relations with them. But in bodily death all this is lost.

> But in death, the body is torn away, and the man has no protection whatever. He is naked in the silence. All he has is just his own isolated poverty of person——a single, impotent, self-conscious atom of being——a bare needle-point of quick personality all alone in the long reaches of the Infinite.[43]

The moral significance of bodily death consists in a further isolation. The individual is also alone with conscience. The person becomes sensitive to the awful smiting of moral blow against sin. If he is a sinner, he is abandoned of all companionship with God. But if he is a Christian, he realizes, perhaps intermittently as bodily powers wane, that the spirit yet receives a divine comforting in the solitude of death.

The racial significance of bodily death is the loss of all connection with the human race. He is broken off from all racial connection. He is now utterly alone.

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[42]Gen. 2:7; Job 33:4; Ps. 36:9; John 1:4.

[43]Curtis, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

It is here, in these dimensions of isolation, that the fitness of bodily death as penalty becomes evident. The essential nature of sin is egotism: the individual regards himself as absolute. The isolation of bodily death is, accordingly, the penalty fitting the *willed* isolation, in this life, of the sinner. Death is not an arbitrary judgement; it is the moral consequence of sin. Curtis graphically depicts the final reckoning:

> Bodily death is in consummate fitness with this supreme selfishness of personal sin. Bodily death is the strongest accentuation of egotism. It takes this egotist, this sinner, wrenches him out of the protective physical scene, breaks him off from his race, flings him into absolute isolation, and compels him to inhabit his own selfish fragment of being. Death says to the sinner, "You would not obey God, you would not love your fellow men, you lived for self, you wanted only self——THEN TAKE IT!"[44]

The redemptive significance of Jesus' death is to be explained in terms of the isolation he underwent on the Cross. It was a personal isolation; He was torn away from all earthly relationships, for "he was cut off out of the land of the living."[45] It was a moral isolation; He experienced the shock of God's moral concern, His abhorrence and condemnation of sin. He received the awful blow that is befitting the seriousness of sin. He experienced a racial isolation; He was cut off from the race itself.

Nowhere in the New Testament is the multi-valued isolation of Jesus' death more pathetically expressed than in the final *articulate* cry of the Savior on the Cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What does this mean? It means, Curtis says, that "God the Father was literally absent from the consciousness of his only Son."[46] Throughout his earthly life, the scriptures over and over assert, Jesus felt a strange unity and fellowship with the Father. But now, in the extremity of His death, Jesus is deprived of that which has always, even from the ages before all time, been the right of His divine nativity. *That* is the meaning of His death, which is a meaning that far transcends the fact of the physicality of death. And it is *that* meaning that gives His death atoning and redemptive authority and effectuality.

Arminian and Wesleyan theologians have raised a unanimous voice of criticism of the satisfaction theory, at the point where the theory regards Jesus Christ as assuming the guilt of the sinner and as therefore guilty Himself. Guilt, it is argued, is the result of personal sin. It is therefore incapable of any abstraction away from the sinner and transferred to another. Thus the Savior cannot, in His propitiatory death, actually assumed guilt, or have become personally guilty.

Nevertheless, there is some respect in which Jesus becomes entangled with guilt. Does not Paul state that "he hath made him to be sin, who knew no sin"? The construction in the first clause is, in the Greek, ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν (*hamartian epoisen - made sin*). The words "to be" are not in the Greek. Their insertion in the Authorized Version makes sin a verb. But it is a substantive, not a verb. It is the same word that occurs in the second clause.

Following Augustine, many biblical scholars, including the majority of

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[44]*Ibid.*, p. 297.

[45]Isa. 53:8.

[46]Curtis, *op. Cit.*, p. 322.

Arminian-Wesleyan scholars, interpret the words to mean that God made Him, i.e., Jesus, a *sin offering*. But there are textual difficulties with this view. It is the same word that occurs in the two clauses and it is difficult to see how they could have two different meanings. As contrasted with "righteousness," it means sin in the abstract. Further, this application of the word is not found elsewhere in the New Testament.

Alfred Plummer, writing in *The International Critical Commentary*, accepts the language literally, i.e., that God made Christ sin. But then Plummer retreats in absolute perplexity.

> We must face the plain meaning of the Apostle's strong words. In some sense which we cannot fathom, God is said to have identified Christ with man's sin, in order that man may be identified with God's own righteousness. . . . No explanation of these mysterious words satisfies us. They are a bold attempt to express what cannot even be grasped in human thought, still less expressed in human language . . . . 'St Paul's words here cannot be true, and yet it is possible that they are the best way of stating what is true. We have once more got down to the bed-rock of contradiction' [Newman]."[47]

Curtis recognizes that Christ could not be personally guilty, for He was not a sinner. He could not, therefore, have been personally punished. Nevertheless, Curtis insists on the literal import of the passage that speaks of God making His Son sin. There is some respect in which Christ *was* a sinner and bore the load of guilt. It is here that Curtis' racial theory of the atonement takes effect. The atonement is not, he argues, an end in itself. It has a purpose that lies beyond the event itself. That purpose is to found a new reality, a new race of the redeemed. Redemption is to issue in a great social outcome. It is to secure "a people for his own possession" (Titus 2:14). Christ's atoning work constitutes him "the first born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). He is the Founder of His church, for which he gave of Himself, "that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, of any such thing" (Eph. 5:27). And for this He asked in his last prayer: "that they may be one, even as we are one (John 17:22).

Christ's death must be understood in this context. His death was not the death of an ordinary individual. In His death he stood for the old race, of which, to be sure, He was a part. He died representatively for the race. As its representative, He accepted its burden of sin and guilt, indeed became these representatively, and satisfied the absolute demand of God's holiness, thus opening the way for the saving expression of God's love.

> Jesus Christ was not *personally* a sinner, and was not *personally* punished; that is certain. But, on the other hand, his suffering was not ordinary individual suffering——*it was official, representative suffering*. He suffered, as the Race-Man, for the whole race. *He carried the race in his consciousness*. Thus, Christ's death is a racial event from the double fact that he bears the racial penalty against the old race and that he is the racial center of the new race. And whether we consider the dying Saviour a sinner or not, depends entirely upon our point of view. From the Arminian standpoint of personal sin, he surely was not a sinner. Nor was he a sinner from the standpoint of depravity. But from the racial standpoint he was a sinner, because he stood for the race, and allowed himself to be shut into its category, and actually bore the racial penalty, actually died, and was broken off from the race like any son of Adam. It matters not so much about the words you use,

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[47]Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, in *The International Critical Commentary* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), pp. 187-88.

though, if you only catch and firmly hold the idea that our Lord's death was a racial event through and through.[48]

The new race of the redeemed could not come except the old race be destroyed. It must meet its death, if the new is to come. Yet, merely and only its death would not suffice. That death would but yield an inchoate chasm of negation and nullity. Yes, the old reality must be destroyed, but not in the manner prohibiting its rebirth and renewal. This the atoning Christ accomplished. His death stood representatively for the death of the old race. The way is now open through which a new reality, a new race of the redeemed, may take the place of the old. But the death of the Redeemer must of necessity be one that fully and completely meets the last and full measure of death and of the sin that brought death to the race. That measure is the final estrangement from God. And, as we have argued above, it came in the Savior's loss of consciousness of the Father's presence. The Son was left to pass through the gates of death *alone*. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Now it must be that the alienation of the Son affected the harmony of the Divine individuality. There could be no other consequence of the crisis of the Cross. What happened there in time extends outward into the farthest reaches of eternity. The Father, too, and the Spirit——the bond of harmony——feel the force of the estrangement of the Son. The infinite agony of the Son is thus lifted from this world into the experience of God Himself. God now becomes forever thenceforth forward the "Fellow-Sufferer" with the Son and with His stricken people for whom the Son willingly came to save.

But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord
passed through,
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.[49]

Now, the death of Christ reaches forward into His resurrection. The resurrection is the *teleological* completion of His death. Were His death the last word, the redemptional purpose of His death would be nullified. The darkness covering the earth at the noon-time of His death would never recede. "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."[50] The resurrection brings redemptional feasibility to His death. He becomes truly the dynamic center of the new race, the pioneer of life, only as, having passed through the gates of death, he now passes beyond to the gates opening to "a better country,"[51] to which He brings His people and where "he ever liveth to make intercession for them."[52]

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[48]Curtis, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

[49]Elizabeth C. Clephane, "The Ninety and Nine."

[50]1 Cor. 15:17.

[51]Heb. 11:15.

[52]Heb. 7:25.