

THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY.

1916

VOL. XX.

JANUARY, 1916.

No. 1.

DID GOD HAVE TO BE RECONCILED BY THE DEATH OF CHRIST?

Paul speaks of "the offense of the cross." (Gal. 5, 11.) He was conscious of the scandalizing effect which his preaching of Christ crucified was continually producing in the world of secular culture and in the world of mechanical religiousness. (1 Cor. 1, 22. 23.) There was a spiritual heroism connected with his ministry, of which many glimpses are afforded the reader of Paul's writings; but it is doubtful whether the quality and extent of this heroism is generally and fully appreciated. Paul had been a devout devotee of the most sanctimonious type of Pharisaism. He was not unacquainted with Greek learning and art. He embraced the cause of the condemned criminal on Calvary with the distinct feeling that he was making a sacrifice. His "knowledge of Jesus Christ" cost him "the loss of all things." (Phil. 3, 7. 8.) His sensitive heart felt the sneer and haughty scorn that greeted the bearer of the tidings of reconciliation which the death of the Nazarene prophet was supposed to have effected between the angry God and rebel man. (Rom. 1, 16.) He was aware that the miseries attending his apostolate reflected the sufferings of the Redeemer (Gal. 6, 17); yea, that no herald of the atoning sacrifice by which God was appeased once for all time could look for a more favorable reception of his evangelical message from the self-wise and self-righteous world than that which had been accorded him. (2 Tim. 1, 8.) The offense of the cross must be perpetual.

The contemptuous remark which Lucian hurled at the Christians about "this master of theirs who was crucified" has been echoed in later ages. The ass's head, which replaced the "bleeding head and wounded" in the rude caricatures of the formative period of Christianity, finds a counterpart in the loathing with which many an enlightened mind in later ages has looked upon the "Man of Sorrows." Wherever the Talmud holds sway, the vision of Jeshu (= Jesus) in hell, sentenced to be forever in boiling filth, is conjured up before the eyes of the faithful. The offense of the cross is expressed in ever-varying forms, but it remains the same essentially, even as the intellectual and the moral pride of the corrupt heart of man are perpetuated from generation to generation.

In the doctrinal theology of the Church the offense of the cross has been recognized as an ever present one. Her creedal declarations and the interpretations which her theologians have put on the cause and purpose of the death of Christ have, in particular, wrestled with the denial that the death of Christ was demanded by God as a satisfaction due His offended justice and for a conciliatory end.¹ The struggle, besides affecting the redemptive work of Christ, has always involved one or more of the other fundamental teachings of Christianity; first, the essential attributes of the Deity: whether it is proper to conceive of a passionless Being like God as being angry, harboring thoughts of revenge, and calling for a bloody sacrifice to appease His wrath, when Scripture makes redemption to appear as a manifestation of His love to man; secondly, the supreme need of fallen man: whether it was not the cure of his moral corruptness rather than the canceling of his guilt; thirdly, the ethics of the economy of grace: whether the imputation of foreign guilt to the confessedly innocent Christ is compatible with the law of equity, and whether the imputation of a foreign righteousness to confessedly wicked man can be regarded as a moral act on the part of God and as an ethical blessing to man. /

/ The mind of the Greek Fathers on the scope of the death

of our Lord may be summed up in the words of Irenaeus: "He became what we are, that He might make us what He is."¹) To them the central soteriological fact is, not the crucifixion and resurrection, but the incarnation of the Son of God. This they view as the beginning of the moral rehabilitation of the race. While retaining the Scriptural terms of "ransom," "atonement," "expiation," etc., they are interested more in exhibiting the effects of the expiatory sacrifice of Christ on man than on God.

In the Latin Church the rise of Pelagianism brought about a profounder study of the inherited guilt of man and of the relation of the death of Christ to the divine Lawgiver and Judge of mankind. Augustine emphasized the satisfaction that had to be rendered the justice of God. So did Anselm. But in Anselm's view "that which gives value to the death of Christ is not its penal quality as suffering, but its moral quality as obedience." This creates, for Anselm's view, "close points of contact with the later ethical satisfaction theories." "Christ is not punished for our sins, as in the later Penal Theory; His death is rather a precious gift brought to God, having its value in the spirit of self-sacrifice by which it is inspired."²) The 'modification' which is thought to have been put on the view of Anselm by later theologians of the Latin Church, such as Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, and by the so-called Acceptilation Theory, is really very slight. By that theory it is held that the value of Christ's death rests not on that death or on any quality inherent in Christ's suffering, but merely on the good pleasure of God. In other words, the death of Christ has as much value as God is pleased to put on it. If the penal quality in Christ's death is suppressed, — and that was done also by Anselm, — whom did His "satisfaction" really satisfy?

It was reserved to the Reformation to behold with apostolic clearness the forensic meaning which the life and death

1) *Adv. Haeres.*, V, Preface. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, IX, 55.

2) W. Adams Brown in Hastings. *ERE*, V, 650.

of Christ have in the entire scheme of redeeming grace. In the evangelical assertion of the Protestant theologians that justification is a judicial act of God which affects, not the moral, but the legal status of a sinner, giving him a standing in the court of eternal justice, not on the strength of any reformation that he has undergone, but on the strength of the merits of his Proxy, there lay concealed as a necessary premise the belief that the suffering and death of Christ were penal. For no one will deny that these sufferings and death, when borne by the sinner, would be penal, justly decreed to the sinner by the retributive justice of the Lawgiver who has declared Himself a jealous God, and resolved to visit his iniquity upon the trespasser of His holy Law. The penal character of the retribution is in no wise changed by the penalty being shifted from the original malefactor to his voluntary Substitute.

The penal conception of the death of Christ is the Scriptural one. It is set forth in both Testaments. To cite only one instance from the Old Testament, two terms which are employed in the prophetic portrayal of the "Servant of Jehovah," the vicarious Sufferer, in Is. 53, are decisive for this view: מוֹסֵר in v. 5 and מִשְׁפָּט in v. 8. The former term, which has been rendered "chastisement" in both our English versions, is, as Delitzsch has rightly urged, the proper and only word in Hebrew to express "punishment." Gesenius, though he fails to refer to Is. 53, 5 in his references under מוֹסֵר, shows that the idea of authority is connoted by the term, the authority of parents over their refractory children, or of kings over their unruly subjects, or of God over rebellious man. As to the forensic meaning of מִשְׁפָּט, there is no doubt. Gesenius gives as its primary meaning "judgment," and groups under this head the following subordinate meanings: act of judging, place of judgment, cause, or suit before a judge, sentence of a judge, charge, guilt, crime, for which one is judged. This last term is taken over into the New Testament. John informs us that the Lord announced the beginning of His Great Passion with the words: "Now is the judgment (*κρισις*) of this world."

(John 12, 31.) The agony in the garden, the great dereliction which Christ felt on the cross, are glimpses of the unsparing trial to which the righteous Judge subjected the Representative of our race. God was angry with Christ; the curse that had fallen on Adam in Eden was transferred to Christ, who was "made a curse for us." (Gal. 3, 13.) The "wrath of God" is a current Scriptural phrase, and is not by any means to be taken as a figurative expression. It is a very real element in the life of every one who is born of a woman (Eph. 2, 3); and it determines the state of every one who rejects the grace that would save him (John 3, 36). The prospect of this wrath which he must face as a culprit made Jesus quail at the awful ordeal before Him. He felt in His own conscience the justice of that vindictive righteousness which He had come to deflect from the sinners' head to His own. In terms of penal import Paul, too, speaks of the suffering and death of Christ in that remarkable parallel which he draws between the two Adams in Rom. 5. *Κρῖμα, κατάκριμα, δικαίωμα, δικαίωσις, ἁμαρτωλὸν κατασταθῆναι, δίκαιον κατασταθῆναι*, — what else than a trial and a verdict can be read out of these words?

However, for answering our question: Did God have to be *reconciled* by the death of Christ? the term *καταλλάσσειν*, with its intensive form *ἀποκαταλλάσσειν*, will appear most to the point. These terms occur in Rom. 5, 10; 2 Cor. 5, 18, 19; Eph. 2, 16; Col. 1, 20, 21. True, in all these passages sinners are said to be reconciled to God. However, it is a shallow understanding of these texts that reads out of them the meaning that by the death of Christ the sinners' enmity to God has been abolished, and that a change has been effected in their hearts by the agony of the Lord. The term *ἐχθροί* is, with Hodge, best understood in the passive sense, "those who are the objects of God's just displeasure"; and the term *κατηλλάγημεν* is necessarily passive, and, with Meyer, to be rendered "ausgesocht mit Gott." In all these passages the reconciling agent is Christ, and the reconciling medium, His death. Unto this death the Redeemer was appointed by God; that death was

included in the "will of Him that sent Him," and that He came to execute. The death of Christ having taken place, a sufficient expiation has been offered God for men's guilt. He declares Himself satisfied with the sacrifice; He is reconciled, whether the sinners individually continue or cease their enmity to Him. He sets up in their midst the "Word of Reconciliation," that is, the announcement that He prefers no charges against them, all His claims having been met by the propitiatory offering of Jesus' death; and He pleads with them through His ambassadors to accept the reconciliation which He has announced to them as a fact, and thus to be reconciled themselves.

It is not doing justice to Luther when Dr. Brown³⁾ says: "To Luther, as to Athanasius and to St. John, the death of Christ is only the culmination of that self-identification with humanity through which we are freed from our bondage into the glorious liberty of the children of God. In Christ we see the revelation of the gracious Father, and are conscious of our own adoption as sons. In Christ we see our present Deliverer, the One who has fought the battle against sin and death and come off Victor, and with whom we even now may live and reign in heavenly places. Important as are the sufferings of Christ on our behalf,—and no one knew how to paint more vividly than Luther the pain and tears of the Redeemer,—they are only a part of the work of redemption which is as varied and many-sided as humanity's needs." Certainly, Luther knew of other effects of the sacrificial death of Christ than of that of appeasing the righteous anger of God. The question, however, is: Did he view the death of Christ primarily as a penal phenomenon? In the Easter sermon in his *Epistle Postil* he explains the words, "Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us," thus: "The meaning of the phrase 'sacrificed for us' has been explained in the sermon on the Passion of Christ. Two thoughts are there presented: First, necessity of considering the great-

3) *l. c.*, p. 645.

ness and terror of the wrath of God against sin in that it could be appeased and a ransom effected in no other way than through the one sacrifice of the Son of God. Only His death and the shedding of His blood could make satisfaction. And we must consider also that we by our sinfulness had incurred that wrath of God, and therefore were responsible for the offering of the Son of God upon the cross and the shedding of His blood. Well may we be terrified because of our sins, for God's wrath cannot be trivial when we are told no sacrifice save alone the Son of God can brave such wrath and avail for sin. Do you imagine yourself able to endure that wrath of God, or to withstand it if you will not consider this and accept it? The second thought presented in the sermon mentioned is, the necessity of recognizing the inexpressible love and grace of God toward us. . . ."4) In Luther's larger commentary on Galatians we find the following remarks on chap. 3, 13:

"Here again, Jerome, and the popish sophisters who follow him, are much troubled, and miserably rack this most comfortable place, seeking, as they would seem, with a godly zeal to turn away this reproach from Christ that He should be called a curse or execration. They shift off this sentence after this manner: that Paul spake not here in good earnest; and therefore they most wickedly affirm that the Scripture in Paul agreeth not with itself. And this they prove after this manner: The sentence (say they) of Moses which Paul here allegeth speaketh not of Christ. Moreover, this general clause, 'whosoever,' which Paul allegeth, is not added in Moses. Again, Paul omitteth these words, 'of God,' which are in Moses. To conclude, it is evident enough that Moses speaketh of a thief or a malefactor, who by his evil deeds had deserved the gallows, as the Scripture plainly witnesseth in the twenty-first chapter of Deuteronomy; therefore they ask this question, how this sentence may be applied to Christ, that He is accursed of God and hanged upon a tree, seeing that He is no malefactor or thief, but righteous and holy. This may, peradventure, move the simple and ignorant, thinking that the sophisters do speak it, not only wittily, but also very godly, and therefore do defend the honor and glory of Christ, and give warning to all Christians to beware that they think not so wickedly of Christ, that He should be made a curse, etc. Let us see, therefore, what the meaning and purpose of Paul is.

"But here again we must make a distinction, as the words of Paul do plainly show; for he saith not that Christ was made a curse for Himself, but for us. Therefore all the weight of the matter

4) XII, 487. Lenker's transl. VIII, 190 f.

standeth in these words, 'for us.' For Christ is innocent as concerning His own person, and therefore He ought not to have been hanged on a tree; but because, according to the Law of Moses, every thief and malefactor ought to be hanged, therefore Christ also, according to the Law, ought to be hanged, for He sustained the person of a sinner and of a thief, not of one, but of all sinners and thieves. For we are sinners and thieves, and therefore guilty of death and everlasting damnation. But Christ took all our sins upon Him, and for them died upon the cross; therefore it behooved that He should become a transgressor (as Isaiah, the prophet, saith, chap. 53), 'to be reckoned and accounted among transgressors.'

"Therefore this general sentence of Moses comprehendeth Him also (although in His own person He was innocent), because it found Him amongst sinners and transgressors, like as the magistrate taketh him for a thief, and punisheth him, whom he findeth among other thieves and transgressors, though he never committed anything worthy of death. Now, Christ was not only found amongst sinners, but of His own accord and by the will of His Father He would also be a companion of sinners, taking upon Him the flesh and blood of those who were sinners, thieves, and plunged in all kinds of sin. When the Law, therefore, found Him among thieves, it condemned and killed Him as a thief."

"But some man will say it is very absurd and slanderous to call the Son of God a cursed sinner. I answer, If thou wilt deny Him to be a sinner and to be accursed, deny also that He was crucified and died. For it is no less absurd to say that the Son of God (as our Faith confesseth and believeth) was crucified and suffered the pains of sin and death than to say that He is a sinner and accursed. But if it be not absurd to confess and believe that Christ was crucified between two thieves, then is it not absurd to say, also, that He was accursed and of all sinners the greatest. These words of Paul are not spoken in vain, 'Christ was made a curse for us. For He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' (2 Cor. 5, 21.)"

"Wherefore Christ was not only crucified and died, but sin also (through the love of the divine majesty) was laid upon Him. When sin was laid upon Him, then cometh the Law and saith, Every sinner must die. Therefore, O Christ, if Thou wilt answer, become guilty and suffer punishment for sinners; Thou must also bear sin and malediction. Paul, therefore, doth very well allege this general sentence out of Moses as concerning Christ: 'Every one that hangeth upon a tree is the accursed of God'; but Christ hath hanged upon the tree, therefore Christ is the accursed of God."

"Our most merciful Father, seeing us to be oppressed and overwhelmed with the curse of the Law, and so to be beholden under the same that we could never be delivered from it by our own power, sent His only Son into the world, and laid upon Him all the sins of all men, saying, Be Thou Peter, that denier; Paul, that persecutor, blasphemer, and cruel oppressor; David, that adulterer; that sinner who did eat the apple in paradise; that thief who was hanged upon the cross; and briefly, be Thou the person who hath committed the

sins of all men; see, therefore, that Thou pay and satisfy for them. Here now cometh the Law and saith, I find Him a sinner, and that such a one as hath taken upon Him the sins of all men, and I see no sins else but in Him; therefore let Him die upon the cross. And so He setteth upon Him and killeth Him. By this means the whole world is purged and cleansed from all sins, and so delivered from death and all evils. Now, sin being vanquished and death abolished by this one man, God would see nothing else in the whole world, if it did believe, but a perfect cleansing and righteousness."

"We must not, then, imagine Christ to be innocent, and as a private person (as do the schoolmen, and almost all the Fathers have done), who is holy and righteous for Himself only. True it is, indeed, that Christ is a person most pure and unspotted; but thou must not stay there; for thou hast not yet Christ, although thou know Him to be God and man. But then thou hast Him indeed when thou believest that this most pure and innocent person is freely given unto thee of the Father to be thy High Priest and Savior, yea, rather thy Servant, that He, putting off His innocency and holiness, and taking thy sinful person upon Him, might bear thy sin, thy death, and thy curse, and might be made a sacrifice and a curse for thee, that by this means He might deliver thee from the curse of the Law.

"Ye see, then, with what an apostolic spirit Paul handleth this argument of the blessing and of the curse, whilst he not only maketh Christ subject to the curse, but saith also that He is made a curse. So in 2 Cor. 5, 21, he calleth Him sin when he saith, 'He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' And although these sentences may be well expounded after this manner: Christ is made a curse, that is to say, a sacrifice for the curse; and sin, that is, a sacrifice for sin, yet in my judgment it is better to keep the proper signification of the words, because there is a greater force and vehemency therein. For when a sinner cometh to the knowledge of himself indeed, he feelth not only that he is miserable, but misery itself; not only that he is a sinner and is accursed, but even sin and malediction itself. For it is a terrible thing to bear sin, the wrath of God, malediction, and death; wherefore that man who hath a true feeling of these things (as Christ did truly and effectually feel them for all mankind) is made even sin, death, malediction, etc."⁵)

The penal view of the death of Christ was held also by Calvin. However, the practical value of Christ's death was limited to the elect. This limitation brought on a revulsion. Arminianism, justly shocked by the teaching of a divine decree that nullified to a great extent that marvellous act of recon-

5) *Luther's Commentary upon the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*. Published by Salmon S. Miles, 1837 (reprint from the London Folio Edition), pp. 252—263, *passim*.

ciliation in which the justice and the mercy of God are both satisfied, proceeded to declare the sinner's reconciliation an act of his own free choice. Socinianism, attacking this matter from thoroughly rationalistic grounds, argued that punishment and forgiveness mutually exclude one another. Either the one or the other takes place, but not both. Moreover, the distributive justice of God which has to do with individual man, not with the genus man, cannot permit the transfer of guilt from one to another. But, if for any reason sufficient to Himself God did undertake such a transfer, and accepted the penal suffering of one for all, He is unjust if He does not forgive all. Both Arminianism and Socinianism strongly emphasized the suffering and death because of its exemplary effect on the moral nature of men. Against this teaching the governmental theory of the atonement which Hugo Grotius advanced was inwardly too weak to save the day for Scriptural orthodoxy as regards the death of Christ, as Grotius earnestly hoped it would. It is plain that in his treatise on the satisfaction of Christ Grotius starts from Socinian premises. The point where he deviates from his opponent is reached when the argument begins as to the quality and character of that justice in God which necessitated the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ. For the distributive justice of Socinus, Grotius put rectoral justice. He viewed God not as a judge sitting in judgment on the crime of individual man, but as Sovereign and Governor presiding over the affairs of the human race. Public justice, the maintenance of God's equable rule on earth, demanded the sacrifice of the life of Christ. The death of Christ in the governmental theory becomes an overawing spectacle, which impresses the *vulgus humanum* as a deterrent from sin. Virtually this is, in the last analysis, another effort to make the atonement intelligible to man by way of its moral influence on man. That the offended justice of God received a satisfaction due it by the death of Christ is not denied, but it is not the element of primary importance.

4 In modern Protestantism that view of the death of Christ

is become dominant which sees its value chiefly, if not entirely, in the reformatory effects which the martyr's death of Jesus has on the sinner. The moral influence theory of the atonement is a criterion of modern Protestantism. A few striking efforts have still been made in recent times to restate the penal significance of the death of Christ, which was one of the bulwarks of the older Protestant Christology. Such efforts were Dale's *Atonement* and Lidgett's *Spiritual Principle of the Atonement*. But even these efforts defer to the modern view in that they criticize the older Protestant teaching for neglecting the moral and spiritual side which Christ holds to our race as its sublime Head. McLeod Campbell, in his *Nature of the Atonement*, has seen the value of Christ's suffering and death for God in this, that it furnishes to the sinner a sufficiently powerful motive for conquering his sinful disposition, and thus enables God to forgive sin. The suffering Christ is the model penitent because of His perfect submission to the just verdict of God, and His submission is the solemnly impressive way for exhibiting to sinners the condition on which their forgiveness depends. Horace Bushnell, in his *Vicarious Sacrifice*, extols the love of Christ, which was most affectingly manifested in His death, and moves the sinner to seek restoration to the favor of God, who designed the sacrifice of His Son. Moberly, in his *Atonement and Personality*, calls in the aid of the Holy Spirit, by which the atoning Christ enters humanity, and raises sinners to the higher life.

How this moral influence theory can be employed to excoriate a striking text that plainly contains the penal conception of the death of Christ, any one can see by comparing Huxtable's expository remarks on Gal. 3, 13 in the *Pulpit Commentary*, and Adeney's homiletic suggestions on the same passage. In Dummelow's one-volume commentary of the Bible there is an excursus on the atonement in which the writer declares that the old penal view of the death of Christ presents "such difficulties to modern religious thoughts as to necessitate an advance to something more satisfactory. We cannot think

either that God would punish the innocent, or that for the sake of punishment inflicted on the innocent He would justly spare the guilty. We cannot think that there can be anything formal and fictitious about our relation to God. These unsatisfying theories have largely come from unduly pressing, in a literal manner, the details of metaphors, which should be interpreted broadly and freely. The metaphors of 'ransom' and 'redemption' are meant to express the greatness of Christ's self-sacrifice, and its purpose and effect in delivering us from sin and its consequences. The metaphors of 'propitiation,' 'reconciliation,' and 'justification' are meant to express, not that God needs to be appeased, but that the effect of the work of Christ, when taken into the heart of sinful man, is to do away with the barrier which sin has built between him and God, and to bring him back to God in penitence and obedience. Christ in His sacrifice was at one with the mind of the Father. God did not hate the world, but 'so loved the world that He gave,' etc." (p. CXXVIII f.) This is the gist of Socinus's teaching. Continuing, the writer tries to come back to the substitutive import of the suffering and death of Christ, and brushes the penal view of the atonement, but concludes by weaving the views of Campbell, Moberly, and Ritschl, who connects the atonement with the Sacraments, into one.

It has been pointed out that the ever multiplying and varying views of the nature of the atonement which the modern age has witnessed stand in some relation to the view which modern men hold of the Bible in general. The Bible is no longer viewed as a unit, through the equally and evenly directed influence of divine inspiration upon the thought and diction of the writers, but as a collection of treatises by various writers, who under the rather undefinable direction and general oversight of God penned their own thought on sacred topics. They did not always express themselves alike on all matters. Accordingly, it is not of such great importance to hold a particular theory of the atonement, if one only believes in a general way that there is an atonement, in whatever way that was, or is,

effected. Henry B. Smith, who a generation ago championed the penal conception of the death of Christ and the *satisfactio vicaria*, meets this thought in the following efficient manner:

"Another mode in which this doctrine is sometimes drawn down from its high elevation, and left in an indefinite vagueness, is by saying: It is enough for any man to believe in the sufferings and death of Christ, to trust to that, and leave all theories about expiation and propitiation to the care of disputants. Christ suffered and died, and for us: so much is plain; here we can all unite. This is plain fact, revealed fact, but theories about the atonement are not so plain.

"The sense of this is, that the position that Christ's death was expiatory is a theory, a philosophical explanation of the fact, and that all we need to believe in is the fact that His death was for us. But if the investigation we have instituted be of any worth, if it have taught us one thing more than another, it is this: that the very nature and essence of the sufferings and death of Christ is that they are an expiation for sin. This is the very idea of a sacrifice. It is its exhaustive definition; it is the thing itself, and not a deduction or inference from it. This is the fact, and not a theory about it. If one does not believe in the expiation, he does not believe in the sacrifice. We have the shell and not the kernel; we have death and sufferings, and not life and peace. The expiation cannot be separated from the death without destroying the life that is in the death. We may form theories about the sacrifice of Jesus, in its relations to the moral government of the world or to the wants of the human soul; but the very essence of the thing about which we are to form our theory is that it was an expiation for sin. And to represent this as a theory, instead of being the fact, is to confound the whole relation between theory and fact. To require us to believe in the necessity of the death of an incarnate God for our redemption, without making that death to be a propitiation for our sins, is to require us to believe in the most startling of facts, and to close our eyes to any reason or availability of it, is not only to demand an historical faith, but a faith for which no sufficient reason can be assigned, — in a fact at once monstrous and enigmatical."6)

The same author, in his *Analysis of the Scriptural Statements as to Christ's Suffering and Death* (chap. IV of Part III of Division II of above work), presents with a clearness and exhaustiveness that is rare in our age the vast Scriptural material that demands as the only teaching which actually restates the thought of God on the death of His Son the penal view of the atonement.

D.

6) *System of Christian Theology*, p. 455 f.