

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

I

IF a new philosophy entails a novel nomenclature, much more a new dispensation. A body of fresh truth necessarily drapes itself in a fresh terminology. Its new wine cannot be pent in the old wine skins. Language however, unless in incompetent hands, is a cautious novelizer. It draws on pre-existing materials whenever possible. Its canonical rules prescribe a minimum of innovation, even under the pressure of conceptions the most unique.

This principle is illustrated by the Pauline vocable *καταλλαγή*, *reconciliation*; for that is by no means a neologism. In common with its twin-birth *διαλλαγή*, its pedigree can be retraced to the golden age of Attic Greek. Originally a mercantile term, signifying an exchange of money or goods, both the nouns and their cognate verbs came to be employed to denote a reconciliation of parties at variance. They are virtually synonyms, though possibly *καταλλαγή* lays more stress on the medium of reconciliation than the other substantive, which suggests rather a cessation of hostilities. Only the figurative import just noted finds place in New Testament hermeneutics.

Obviously, in this sense, reconciliation implies an antecedent breach of harmony. A resolution of discords postulates prior dissonances of some sort. Terms of peace presume a foregoing state of war. In using such a word to set forth one aspect of Christ's Mediatorial work Paul plainly predicates a substitution of friendly for unfriendly relations.¹ He furthermore teaches, as we shall see, that we are brought nigh by the Saviour's bloodshedding (Eph. ii. 13); and we thus learn that man has been in a state of alienation from his Maker. Both sacred and profane annals drive home that lesson in a thousand forms. Nor will anybody duly prize restoration to Divine favour till he is brought to own that he has forfeited it. Perversions of evangelical doctrine at present rife render the consideration of this subject peculiarly seasonable. For the revealed basis of acceptance with the Most High must always bide a matter of vital moment to true believers.

¹ Cf. Rom. v. 10; 1 Cor. vii. 11; 2 Cor. v. 18-20.

Augustine's well-known proposition that "God loves what He has made in us, but hates what we have made of ourselves" points out very aptly the ground of that acute disaccord between heaven and earth which reconciliation so triumphantly surmounts. No sober investigator of the world's condition can deny that a hydra-headed pest despoils it. Of course there are those who try to persuade themselves that the groans of creation and its manifest vassalage to vanity are symptoms of comparatively slight importance, that instead of being laid waste by the ravages of an organic disease, humanity only suffers from the fretting discomfort of a kind of moral eczema, or shall we say from certain shooting pains incident to an immature stage of growth. But, in order to rest in that hallucination they have to ignore some of the most salient factors of the case. Is Bishop Butler's too austere a verdict when he declares "that most men make life a *discipline in vice*"? Indeed, ere a man can acquiesce complacently in the conclusion that sin is a bagatelle, he must bolster it up by an evolutionary philosophy to suit. The poet Schiller was far from being biased in favour of the theological tenet of total depravity; yet, merely as a moralist surveying the drift of man's history chronicled by himself, he penned the stern indictment: *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*.

But if so frivolous an estimate of humanity's epidemical plague clashes with an overwhelming mass of evidence of its viperous corrosion dispersed through the entire circuit of history, ancient and modern, it becomes absolutely untenable as soon as we raise our eyes to the perpetual snow-line of Divine purity. Brought into juxtaposition with immaculate holiness, set in the searching rays of God's countenance, the black stain on the face of creation lours in livid contrast with its lustrous ethical antipole. In that august hemisphere the flimsiest of optimists can no longer hug his illusion that the blackamoor's skin is only white of a peculiar tinge. Yet even then our eyes are, for the most part, "holden", as respects the gravity of the situation confronting us. Familiarity with sin's workings, not to say participation in its narcotic effects, dulls our sensibilities as moral agents to its unrelieved turpitude and rank pollution. Slum-dwellers may breathe a fetid atmosphere till they become quite unconscious of its infection. From an opium-sot we do not expect an impartial appraisal of the evils attendant on opium-eating. At least we cease to do so when we recognize the witching spell

that opium casts over its victims. But sin is a far subtler sorcerer than opium. "It is a malady", wrote John Caird, "which impairs the very organ by which it is detected." That is why the Spirit of God Himself must unscale our vision, to beget conviction of sin. And Arnold of Rugby was surely right when he averred that "in a deep sense of sin more perhaps than anything else abides a saving knowledge of God". Not to feel ourselves defaulters is to inhabit a fool's paradise; not to confess frankly that we have gone fatally astray is to shut the gates of mercy on ourselves.

But no sooner do we assent to that graver valuation of human guilt which both experience and testimony countersign and revelation avouches, than the query arises whether reconciliation with spotless Sanctity be possible or no. Can the gaping chasm sin has riven between the Holy One and the unholy be bridged? In a word, *does God forgive sin?* To that interrogation three conceivable hypotheses suggest themselves in reply. An American divine has thus classified them. We might surmise that God never pardons lawbreakers; or pardons arbitrarily, by royal prerogative; or pardons on valid grounds. Let us briefly reconnoitre these three suppositions.

II

In the absence of authentic information anent the method of the Divine government, we might adopt the view that the Supreme Ruler was inexorably just, and then draw the corollary that no pardon of transgressors could be looked for from the Judge of all; that such a hideous anomaly as disobedience in God's loyal universe, once committed by accountable beings, was uniformly left to work out its issues without remedial interference. The demands of law may be regarded as enforced to the bitter end, as exacting from every delinquent *in propria persona* the uttermost farthing of recompense. Few care to espouse this sombre creed, as can well be imagined; yet it has not been altogether without advocates. The Greek notion of Nemesis, and those grim sleuth-hounds of Justice, deprecatingly styled the *Eumenides*, so familiar to the student of Greek tragedy, look that way; and so does the belief in fatal curses cleaving inseparably to certain royal dynasties of Hellas. How profoundly Aeschylus was imbued with a sense of the inviolability of retribution his Agamemnonic trilogy yields ample evidence. The same

sentiment is embodied in the oft-quoted couplet ("The mills of God grind slowly"), translated professedly from the German of von Logan by Longfellow, but in sooth a plagiarism from the old Greek hexameter cited by Sextus Empiricus: ὄψε θεῶν ἀλέουσι μύλαι, ἀλέουσι δὲ λεπτά. Some modern scientific minds, in like manner, impressed with the reign of law (a very equivocal phrase, by the way), in the physical sphere, and observant of the swift penalty that dogs the heels of its infringers, have leant to this opinion. Kant would have endorsed it, and probably also Carlyle.

Now we are free to admit that this philosophy of ethics has its lofty aspect. It pays homage to the grandeur of moral law by upholding its sanctions at all costs. Better justice should be done than we should be saved by connivance with injustice! More sacred interests hinge on the maintenance of the supreme rule of right than on our destiny.

But, if that be all its content, what a forbidding and melancholy creed! Moreover how imperfect a display of the Divine attributes it affords! True, rectitude obtains full recognition; and that is well; but tender-mercy veils her sweet countenance. No scope is furnished for her gracious forthgoings. Yet the full-orbed Deity revealed in His word is Love as well as Light. He declares Himself to have no pleasure in the death of the sinner, to delight in mercy as He does not in severity. The God of all glory is withal the God of all Grace. Yet a modicum of truth undoubtedly lurks in this Rhadamanthian theory. For the thrice-holy Jehovah will by no means "deny Himself" in order to "clear the guilty". If moral administration is to discharge its majestic function aright, *somewhen, somewhere*, every transgression must eventually receive its due recompense of reward (Rom. ii. 6). For "*lawful* mercy is nothing kin to *foul* redemption", if we may adapt a line of Shakespeare to the subject in hand.

III

Far more numerous are the advocates of the second hypothesis, that *God pardons without just cause*. Of course, that is not how they would state the case, but that is what their easy-going scheme involves. They exalt benevolence at the expense of holiness and construe sin in softer terms than the Book. They insist that the Final Judge is not strict to mark iniquity, that

He treats mankind slackly, because the race is heavily handicapped by circumstances, and rather in the stage of pupillage than responsibility. Even when men indulge in swinish lusts, their aims are mostly good, though their instincts may be misguided. In fine, they are "more sinned against than sinning". Poor unfortunates, much too highly-strung for their welfare! It is only meet that many a point should be strained in their behalf. To these enthusiasts for humanity, all whose sympathies are engrossed by the criminal, what befalls the Lord's glory is of slender consequence compared with their favourites' interests and happiness. They are ready to set aside the moral constitution of the universe for the offender's sake. *Their* paradise regained consists of a garden city for wastrels who have never had a fair chance, scamps who forsooth have been very scurvily treated, and not unnaturally embittered against heaven by trials much too arduous for their strength; but who are promptly reclaimed from their quarrel with their Maker by the present of a sheaf of tickets for a cosy hostel adorning an idyllic site in the environs of the New Jerusalem! But, as Campbell Morgan has forcibly remarked, "the Gospel of salvation by environment was tried once for all in the garden of Eden, where it failed conspicuously". Assuredly sinners in grain cannot be coaxed into sainthood by a process of molly-coddling. Was it not Carlyle who observed with his usual causticity that "sentimentalism is the twin-sister of cant"? There is truth in that sarcasm, whoever broached it. Nor can anybody who takes the Bible seriously long nurse the fond delusion that the staple principle of the Divine government consists in setting a premium on zeal in the devil's service by pampering those who pursue that besotted course. Such a topsy-turvy theory of moral administration amounts to constructive blasphemy. It jauntily confers on evil the freedom of the city of God. And what is its elastic, emasculated Deity, but a *false* god "impregnated with earth", framed in the image of that corrupt heart which even Horace's worldly wisdom brands as *acclinis falsis animus meliora recusans*?

There remains the true answer to the momentous question, Is God a pardoning God? the answer worthy of all acceptance, seeing that it is His own. It may be summed up in a sentence. We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son (Rom. v. 10). Christ is the Staircase which communicates between heaven and earth. Not in the spangled vault overhead, nor in the deep that

coucheth beneath, but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ shines the supreme apocalypse of Divine wisdom and power.

Some of God's attributes may be exercised or no, as pleaseth Him. Omnipotence, for example, may be dormant or operant, held in check or put forth; for that omnipotence obeys the dictates of His sovereign will, a will actuated by unerring wisdom. But holiness pertains to what, in our frail vehicle of language, we may be suffered to designate the innermost circle of the Divine perfections. It lies at the very foundation of the eternal Name. Absolute perfection attaches to the very idea of Deity. An unholy God would be self-dethroned. His glory would be tarnished irreparably by the slightest countenance shown to wrong-doing. Hence we may infer how deadly are the shafts launched by sin against the majesty on high. "Sin designs deicide," says Rabbi Duncan in one of his pregnant laconicisms. To the extent of its ascendancy it renders the Lord's statute-book null and void; nay worse, erects a standard diametrically the reverse of His. It affronts His effulgent light with its own insolent darkness. Were it left at large to prosecute its infernal policy, the principle of evil would rise up in insatiable enmity against the God of heaven, to cast Him down from the throne of His excellency, and stablish itself in His room, the tyrannical autocrat of an unhinged and devilized universe. In its blind and brutish fashion, Soviet Russia gropes after the actualization of such an atheistic *bouleversement de l'univers* before our eyes.

IV

It is with a heartfelt sigh of relief that we reflect that no such riot of anarchy can carry the day, that it is foredoomed to frustration. The throne of the One and Only Potentate can never be scaled by creaturely Titans, be their crests ever so towering. The Lord's sway is paramount, perpetual, universal. No combination of events, no confederacy of darkness, no recrudescence of "Chaos and old Night", can surprise His wisdom nor foil His counsel nor imperil His sovereignty. Because He reigns, yea in the midst of His enemies—for "blindly the wicked work the righteous will of heaven"—and because righteousness and judgment are the perennial habitation of His throne, holiness shall triumph and dust shall be the serpent's meat. "As the Lord liveth," O blessed assurance! iniquity, blatant anarchy though it be, shall stop its mouth and the travailing creation

yet be redeemed from its bondage to corruption. For strong is the Lord God Who judgeth His adversaries and repays them to their face. Who shall veto His decrees or say Him nay when *He* riseth up to the prey ?

For holiness is no latent potentiality of Godhead, but an energetic property, incapable of biding in a state of abeyance. If then the Lord be holy in *all* His ways, if the title "King of Righteousness" necessarily takes precedence of that other, "King of Peace", the old enquiry mooted by the patriarch of Uz looms inevitably in sight. "How shall man be just with God?" For our own consciences, once roused from torpor, pronounce us shortcomers. Pagan religions, with all their dismal infatuations, proceed on the general assumption that all is not well between the worshipper and his fictile Pantheon; else why do they constantly interpose rites of lustration or deprecation betwixt themselves and their objects of devotion? Even when sacrifices have dwindled to the plane of talismans, they still suggest the need of a medium of conciliation. Nevertheless they fail to provide what they desiderate. Herein lies the glory of Christianity, a glory that renders it the antipodes of all cults of human elaboration, that it furnishes a complete solution to the problem of a sinner's acceptance with the Holy One and the Just, who is of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity; an answer conclusive and final to that otherwise insoluble problem which for ever haunts with its wistful dream of reaccord the aching, dissatisfied, world-weary soul of man. Not in the outwitting of justice by mercy, but in their harmonious conjunction, lies the crux and clue of its unravelment. Hence the point of the proposition, enunciated, if we are not mistaken, by Theodore Monod: "First save the Law, then save me!"

V

In seeking to summarize New Testament teaching on this theme we cannot overlook one most prominent feature in its presentment. *Reconciliation is the Lord's own handiwork.* That feature at once serves to differentiate Christianity from other religious systems, which are all of them autosoteric. It announces salvation as consisting in an advance on God's side towards man, not the reverse. The sublime spectacle it bids us scan is that of human redemption suspended on an almighty arm, outstretched

to uplift the sinner from the slough in which he is found wallowing to the Rock that is higher than he. Nowadays, to be sure, when bogus gospels swarm, we may hear a chorus of parasites of the hour repeating the cuckoo-note they have caught, that, in order to gain our Maker's good graces, all we need do is to lay aside our weapons of offence and cry *pax* to a Being of "infinite placability", incapable of wrath, the very embodiment of bland good-nature. But this travesty of fatherhood, too nerveless and void of righteous indignation to correct, this waxen Deity, tame under the grossest provocations, can gull no one who is not himself a moral mollusc. An authoritative element inheres even in the institute of human parentship. Its lawful tract of sway cannot be scouted with impunity in any self-respecting grade of society. Caressing indulgence lavished on flippant scapegraces incurs general reprobation; for, where gush swamps governance, the common weal is menaced. How much less can silken ductility prevail in the exalted sphere of Divine rule, with its august inviolabilities, that paramount domain in which the sceptre of righteousness must ever lead the van, and the postulates of sovereignty can never yield place to arts of effusive blandishment. Even Dr. Forsyth has let fall the remark that a Being of positively boundless pity would not "rise to the height of the Christian God", nor be enough in "moral earnest" for a Supreme Governor. "God loves sinners," he adds significantly, "but He loves the law of His own nature better still." The revealed Deity is not the stucco Godhead of these "daubers with untempered mortar", nor His universe such a happy-go-lucky "Liberty Hall" as they dream, but a *cosmos* in earnest, looking forward to a thorough and decisive adjustment. Béranger's *je ne crois qu' à des dieux indulgents* offends every genuine theist.

Reconciliation then must be His doing; otherwise we are undone. For all self-devised schemes of peace-making prove wretchedly futile. Not one of them can heal the gaping breach. "Our work arm is broken," says Boston, and can never eke out an amends-making commensurate with the exigencies of the case. A fashion, as we have hinted, has sprung up latterly of alleging that repentance *per se* lays a sufficient basis for reconciliation, and the parable of the Prodigal Son is often adduced in its support. But that exquisitely beautiful picture of the gracious welcome extended to the least deserving penitent, itself one of a parabolic

triad meant to be viewed consecutively, does not touch on the point in question, unless it be in the oblique allusion, "I have sinned *against heaven*." There is a judicial as well as a parental forum ; and in that forum contrition, however genuine, has no power to purge away guilt. That holds even in mundane jurisprudence. Certain it is that in the supreme realm of moral government a wide interval parts penitence from pardon ; for repentance only lessens *future* guilt. Even granting then what is not to be granted, that they could be made good, how can vows of reformation for the future exert any transmuting influence on the charge-sheet of a man's sinful past, with its indelible record sealed up against the day of reckoning ? By what legerdemain can pledges to do better wipe out misdeeds once and for ever done ? *Stant rata non ulla fila renenda manu*. Such a mock-settlement can settle nothing save the culprit's condemnation at the Final Assize.

For impunity there can be none, when that ultimate audit of moral values takes place. Figure to yourself any hushing-up of unsettled counts, and you figure lawlessness "holding the crown of the causeway", crying quits with right and snatching her sword and scales from the palsied hand of Justice. Is that conceivable whilst Jehovah reigneth ? Let it be borne in mind that moral evil comprises the fatal incubus and scourge of this fair universe, that it has turned our planet into a lazar-house and stained the very face of nature with foul orgies of wickedness. Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with the thrice-holy One ? Nay verily ! He can and will give sin no quarter. In Milton's phrase, sin is *the eternal outlaw*, which can never pass muster at God's tribunal muffled in the robe of Law, its predestined unmasker and requiter.

Here the matter would end, were inexorable justice the sum of all the Lord's dealings. No place would then be found for reconciliation, and His treatment of our lapsed race would be marked, as in the case of the fallen angels, by severity in disjunction from mercy. But, blessed be His Name ! thoughts of peace to usward dwelt in the heart of the Eternal, a peace to be procured entirely at His own charges. Had He chosen to await overtures on our part, not one of us would have greeted heavenly day. For the carnal mind breeds hostility against the true God as surely as the soil begets weeds. One of its main solitudes is to keep Him at arm's length ; for its rankling lusts

hurry it as far as it can get from the embarrassment of His presence. But, even supposing it to have faced about and to crave terms of truce, how could it either pay off its lifelong arrears of default, or guarantee its future solvency? Help must be laid on a Champion mighty to save, if aught availing is to be accomplished. Accordingly, in the riches of His loving-kindness, we view the Lord taking the initiative; we see the gate of reaccess opening from within, and opening unsought. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us unto Himself *through Christ*" (2 Cor. v. 18).

VI

Here lies the very gist of the transaction. *Reconciliation rests on an all-sufficient objective ground.* "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. v. 10). In a Mediator's hands are lodged the title-deeds of our recovered heritage. No man can lay other foundation than that which is laid. What flimsier platform of pacification would bear the strain of the new creation? A patched-up amnesty could not still for long the throbbings of the disquieted conscience itself. Merely to be let off would not allay its twinges. These immortal spirits of ours, strangely susceptible of bliss or bane, must enjoy an *eirenicon* of sovereign virtue, if those forebodings they harbour are to be lulled to rest, if the ghosts of past offences, those grim spectres that haunt the chambers of memory in the silent watches of introspection, are to be laid for evermore. "When my conscience was aroused to know the evil of sin," said Spurgeon, "I felt that if God did not punish me, He *ought* to do so. I cannot help holding that atonement must precede pardon, because the little court within my own breast refuses to be satisfied unless some retribution be exacted for the dishonour sin has done to God." Forgiveness for adequate reasons possesses intrinsically higher worth than forgiveness by arbitrary grant, and such a hope casts anchor in an immeasurably surer roadstead. For if the impulsive sentimentalism which the modernist ascribes to his Deity were all that stood betwixt us and perdition, we should have continual cause for dread that the same ethical flexibility which had condoned our guilt might one day veer about and with equal fitfulness reverse its award. Trust placed in elastic leniency, or rather supine indolence, shrinking back in self-indulgent recoil from the pain of penal infliction,

will assuredly prove a sorry shelter on that forthcoming day of inquisition, when the hail shall sweep away all refuges of lies, and sin, dismantled of its tinsel finery, be once for all pilloried in its doomsday dress.

The vinculum divinely knit between sin and penalty inheres in the very constitution of things, and no arbitrary fiat can dissolve the bond. As John Howe puts the matter: "God will not redeem the reputation of one of His attributes at the expense of another," inasmuch as they invariably act in concert. In one of their extant plays Beaumont and Fletcher or Massinger has drawn the picture of an appeal for clemency made by a lady charged with heinous misdemeanours. In rejoinder the royal justiciar utters this noble sentiment :

I were no man if I could look on beauty
Distressed without some pity ; but no *king*,
If any superficial gloss of feature
Could move me to decline the course of justice.

And shall not the King of Kings, the final Avenger of sin and Guardian of outraged rectitude, He who is infinitely distant from complicity with evil, uphold the honour of His own perfections, mirrored in the glass of His holy Law ? "God owes it to Himself not to relinquish what we owe to Him." That baseless pardon which either a suave effeminism, or the puffy religiosity of this bombastic but fibreless age, deems so much more plausible than the stern message of the cross would have involved a far lighter outlay on heaven's part than the revealed counsel of peace, in which the travail of our deliverance lacerates the very bosom of the God-head ; but it would have blemished the Name above every name irreparably ; for, as Shedd points out, it would have set up *might* instead of *right* as the ultimate ground of Jehovah's empire. The world of moral intelligences in that case would have witnessed the dreadful anomaly of sovereignty and righteousness clashing in internecine feud. *Cum nocens absolvitur damnatur judex*. By screening the delinquent the Sovereign Arbiter would have passed judgment not on the prisoner at the bar, but on Himself.

The reconciliation effected by the blood of the cross (Col. i. 20) bears no such high-handed aspect. The "Man from heaven", our next-of-kin after the flesh, suffers in that flesh He had assumed ; for satisfaction must be rendered in the nature that sinned ; dying the just for the unjust by His own magnanimous consent and

voluntary election. That expedient accords with the generic law of man's creation, which cements the entire race in bonds of interrelationship and concatenation. The principle of federal headship or representation finds no scope in the unitary, seclusive angelic economy, but is the proper accompaniment of reproduction, of a system with a vicarious base or substructure, whose keyword is multiplicity in unity.

It is the Person of the Sufferer however that confers so divine a quality on the sacrifice and lights up the tremendous portent of Christ crucified with a lustre so unearthly. Human genius has begotten wondrous creations "after its kind"; but, though "exalted to the brightest heaven of invention", it could never have shed on Golgotha the dread magnificence which for evermore invests it as a laying bare of the very heart of the Eternal. Well might the child of God erase all other objects from the tables of memory to fix this scene there in characters not to be effaced. For what do we see spread out before our ravished eyes? An ocean of lovingkindness, but an ocean of crystal limpidity. No flabby compromise of God's attributes in man's behalf meets our vision, no capitulation of law to licence. When the injured party shoulders our liabilities to set us, His injurers, free, His attainted honour secures more jealous redress than our direst punishment would have effected. And what a potent persuasive is at the same time brought to bear on the sinner to disarm all his antagonism at one clap! No wresting of the prey from the mighty by main force, had that been possible, could have displayed a sight so heart-melting as an emancipation of Satan's serfs, not won at the point of the sword and with all the mustered artillery of heaven at its back, but achieved single-handed by the Captain of our Salvation at the cost of "strong crying and tears", by dint of stripes dealt out to the Lord of Glory, made capable of suffering for this very ordeal, by virtue of the meek obedience unto death of the Prince of Life, gibbeted amid felons amidst the midnight Erebus of Divine dereliction, "encountering Darkness as a bride" for the sake of the joy of bringing many sons unto glory foregleaming ahead at the end of the sable vista. All hail to that Climax of Theophanies, when grace personified in peerless self-oblation raised lovingkindness to its highest power in His own Person! All hail to the Ransomer of our souls, who counted no anguish too poignant, no abasement too degrading, no conflict too arduous, to be undergone, in order to win from Justice

herself, vested in all her regal state, an unchallengeable title to cancel our death-warrants, and to flood souls weltering in the miasma of sin's poison-gas with His own tidal-waves of everlasting life and peace!

“Love divine all love excelling” reaches its acme in rescuing offenders from perdition by an expenditure so stupendous. Behold the Holy One satisfying the claims of His own holiness. Behold the Father of mercies charging the sinner's liabilities on His own well-beloved Son, the radiant Nonpareil of heaven; and one superlative wonder, sublime beyond expression, has riveted your gaze, a marvel that reduces all other marvels to commonplace, that beggars the resources of language and outsoars imagination's utmost stretch of wing. What poverty of conception betrays itself in the effort to dwarf the mystery of the cross to a picture-lesson in self-sacrifice! Alas for the vendors of religious frippery who debase Calvary to a tragedy-pageant and cheapen the heavenly secret of justification to the level of an impressive spectacular effect! That amazing scene a histrionical artifice? What a grovelling notion! All who are not spiritually purblind may here discern infinity enlisted in the cause of our salvation, and exult in the master-plea thus put into the lips of the unworthiest to urge with boldness at the throne of the heavenly grace.

The scholastic formula, endorsed by Calvin and Turretin, which exhibits Christ's propitiatory death as “sufficient for all and efficacious for the elect”, sets forth the illimitability of its intrinsic worth in appropriate terms. Regarded on its Godward side as a Divine blood-shedding and satisfaction to justice, that death was of virtue enough to countervail all human transgression. May we not reverently say of it, *materiem superabat opus*? That the eternal counsel of redemption had in view a particular application we fully believe. The good Shepherd, as He Himself tells us, lays down His life for the fold given Him by His father, and His memorable word, *λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν* (Matt. xx. 28), sets that aspect of the truth distinctly before us. But its liminary radius does not transform an infinite passion into a finite work. Calvinists of Owen's staunch type have not shrunk from allowing that in itself the mighty immolation was adequate to expiate the guilt of every scion of the race.¹ The Heidelberg Catechism employs similar phraseology. And it is quite possible to construe a favourite Arminian text, *ἀντίλυτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων* (1 Tim. ii. 6),

¹ *Death of Death*, iv. 1.

in this sense. Certain it is that Paul's unique *ἀντίλυτρον*, a locution seemingly minted for a special purpose, will bear the Puritan Flavel's exposition of its meaning, *pretium ex adverso respondens*. (Cf. the striking phrase of Athanasius, *Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀντίλυτρος*.) However we construe it, all orthodox exegetes agree that this "King's ransom" eclipses all others. Both the matchless dignity of the Sufferer and the awful burden of the curse He sustained warrant the loftiest estimate of its potential value. It exhausts the law's demands. The "Lord is *well-pleased* for His righteousness sake." Here then, without recourse to the *Marrow Men's* expedient, we may find broad basis laid for general offers of the Gospel. For in the Father's house is bread enough and to spare. Grace abounding has furnished a redundancy of provision for every guest at the King's table; and "yet there is room" at His festal board.

We must in any case admit the existence of an incomputable element in the Saviour's passion, an element of infinitude which the figure of a debt paid, Scriptural as that is, does not wholly cover. The fact is that to weigh a transcendent ethical reparation in quantitative scales does not do it full justice. "All that Christ did and suffered", writes Charles Hodge, "would have been necessary, had only one human soul been the object of redemption, and nothing more would have been required, had every child of Adam been saved through His blood. The secret purpose of God in providing such a substitute has nothing to do with the saving nature of the work or its appropriateness. So far as satisfaction to justice is concerned, Christ did all that was necessary for the salvation of all men. We can all join with the Synod of Dort in saying: 'no man perishes for lack of an atonement.'"¹ (*Syst. Theol.* ii. 545, 555-7.)

Such a declaration supplies all that can be sought or needed. The propitiatory work Godwards discloses to view a Pacific Ocean of merit of limitless extent, a sumless undistributed plenitude of satisfaction. The flawless perfection of the Sacrificer enswathes the sacrifice. Calvary must not be ranked in the category of legal fictions or colourable pretexts. No lame apology to law was there tendered. The chastisement of our peace spent itself on our glorious Proxy. Waters of a full cup were wrung out to Him and no soothing anodyne attempered their inexpressible bitterness. Our puny measuring instruments cannot gauge the

¹ Cf. a similar statement in Cunningham's *Historical Theology* (ii. 331).

fierceness of the maelstrom in whose abysmal vortex Jonah's Lord was plunged, when all wrath's billows rolled over Him. Yet, ineffable as were His pangs and inscrutably forlorn as was the *via dolorosa* He trod, we may perceive how equitable it was that the supereminent rank of Immanuel should modify the incidence and duration of the penalty exacted. There is a higher calculus than that of our mathematics; and by that rule of proportion which omniscience alone can assess, for the sake of the believer's Sponsor, making common cause with him and visited equivalently in his stead, He who is at once a just God and a Saviour can righteously blot out offences multitudinous as the sands on the seashore. For to them that are *in Christ Jesus*, there is and can be, so long as their Redeemer liveth to be their advocate and intercessor, no condemnation. Reconciliation has been made on their behalf, their surety has "met the bond" for them; and they experience release in their own souls by a grateful appropriation of its comprehensive all-sufficiency. In Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* occurs the stately verse, *Infinite riches in a little room*. It is in the uplifted cross of the Lord Jesus that that image finds its noblest sublimation. He has fulfilled every statute and met every sanction of righteousness.

VII

At this point we encounter *the lesser reconciliation* of 2 Cor. v. 20, consequent upon the greater, which forms the peculiar embassy of the Christian pulpit. On that we need scarcely dwell. Out of Christ naught save a false peace can prevail, a groundless persuasion that God's holy law can be played with, or slighted without penalty, a reproduction of the fallacy which isolates John's designation of God as Love from its counterpart, that He is Light. The believer however has learnt to acknowledge heartily the truth of the indictment preferred against him as a lawbreaker, and to own that the wrath he has incurred is righteous wrath. His cause of rejoicing is that that wrath has been righteously assuaged by the sole *At-one-Maker*, freely taking his "law-place". The Lord's people have no quarrel with *His* way of reconciliation; it is all their boast and all their desire. They are "Grace's men", joined to the Lord in the clasp of mystical union. A cordial Spirit-wrought embrace of the gladdest of glad tidings seals the charter of their blessedness. They can ask no greater boon than the unspeakable gift of their Divine Head brings with it. Thus,

under the escort of their greater Joshua, His convoys journey from out the barren desert of their provocation into the goodly land of promise, replete with richer dainties than well-springs of milk and honey can typify. For their controversy with heaven has not been slurred over or evaded, but sifted to the bottom, and a settlement has been reached that stands foursquare with every requisition of unbending holiness, one in which the Lord Himself finds sweeter complacency than He ever took in the earlier creation aglow with the undimmed lustre of its primeval burnish. To vary the figure, we may say of them that, like trustful Ruth of old, they have come to nestle gratefully under the protection of an almighty wing, sheathed for their safeguarding and spread abroad for their defence.

VIII

Finally, be it noted that the Biblical Reconciliation constitutes *an accomplished fact*. An hour entitled the "fulness of time" struck when the Eternal Priest "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever" (Heb. x. 12). And so we read expressly that "God *was* in Christ", at a determinate time and place, "reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. v. 19). Certain modern interpreters, we are aware, choose to stultify the clause "in Christ" by shifting the traditional comma backwards; but even then the tenor of the passage, though sadly enfeebled, suffers no radical mutilation. Yet the change must be pronounced quite uncalled for. Paul intentionally couches his proposition in the past tense, because he is recalling the specific season of its fulfilment. Already he had declared that the cross was the keystone of the arch of salvation (v. 14), and affirmed that the Saviour's vicarious death was tantamount to the death of all for whom He stood surety; and then founded Christian zeal and devotion on that footing of untold indebtedness. He proceeds to teach that the dispensation of redeeming grace in its entirety descends from above, that "all things are of God" (v. 18), Reconciler and Reconciled in one. Obviously Paul's gospel comprises no factitious or tentative content. Nothing else so earnestly real and certain of completion as this masterpiece of Divine workmanship! Nor is its outcome contingent on the reception given it by "the will of man". That would have been a poor investment of heaven's redemptive funds! Its sovereign virtue resides in its own nature, stamped with the

impress of finality, inasmuch as its fruition rests essentially at its Author's disposal.

Once for all at the completion (or intersection) of the ages Christ has appeared for the cancellation (*ἀθέτησις*) of sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. ix. 26). How conclusive a proof this great atoning act supplies that the Lord delights in mercy, that, in Calvin's noteworthy phrase, *quasi tristis ad puniendum accingitur!* We sold our birthright: He buys it back. We made the fatal breach: He makes it up. Nor is it with perishable rarities that the ransom-price of our enfranchisement is defrayed. No mention shall be found here of corals or of pearls; for the cost of soul-redemption is above rubies. By what material standard shall we rate the preciousness of the blood of Christ, shed for the remission of sins? And where is the crimson-hued transgressor, brought under the sound of this evangel, who may not pluck up heart to cast himself on the mercy of God in Christ? Saving faith may well make bold to take sanctuary in the asylum of that full-orbed reconciliation of Holy Writ, whereby the law is not given up to screen the guilty, nor yet the guilty given up to maintain the law, but the violated moral order is both vindicated and re-established by its Founder, and the inroads of sin upon it are at length curbed by that stabler covenant in which grace reigns through righteousness, thanks to Jesus Christ our Lord. O matchless pacification! not secured by the least obliquity of award, nor by an inconceivable fusion, spelling confusion, of darkness with light. That "sacred high eternal noon" which Zion anticipates reveals her Lord as her everlasting Light, and the panorama it unfolds shows us the Lamb's bride-elect, by virtue of His reconciling work and the refining alchemy of His love, presented before the presence of His glory as faultless and unwrinkled as her Bridegroom Himself. Wondrous consummation! What a jubilant *finale* emerging out of how quavering and tragical an overture!

EDMUND K. SIMPSON.

Edinburgh.