

## Atonement and Salvation.

SIR OLIVER LODGE coined a famous phrase when he said a few years ago that men to-day are not worrying about their sins. Unfortunately his remark has a good deal of justification in common life, for there is not the slightest doubt that the sense of sin is, broadly speaking, weak. The man in the street is very apt to be hurt if you suggest that he is not all he might be, and he usually retorts by pointing to his possession of some very commonplace virtues, or, more frequently still, to his freedom from certain vices. A necessary result of this is that he does not see any particular reason why he should seek the services of a Saviour, or avail himself of the Saviour you make known to him. Nevertheless Sir Oliver Lodge's dictum does not cover all, nor even the larger part of the facts of human life all the world over. As the late Dr. Orr pointed out in his book on *Sin as a Problem To-day*, while there is a great deal of moral indifference in private life, there is set over against it a much keener moral sense in certain social matters. There never was a time when more stir was made about alleged injustices in the relations of capital and labour, and about the conditions of life among the poorer sections of the population. Moreover if we let our thoughts wander from West to East, we are at once arrested by the phenomena in such a country as India. Continuously, pathetically, with untold labour and pain her people have gone about seeking salvation from sins which pursue them relentlessly through successive incarnations.

Assuming, then, the reality and tragedy of human sin, it becomes of primary importance that the right remedy should be found and recommended. Now among Christians it is agreed, and among followers of other faiths it is coming more and more to be recognized, that there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved except the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a pure question of facts and of experience. When, however, it comes to a question of explaining the facts and of presenting a reasoned account of the way of salvation, the utmost variety of opinion is at once manifested. The history of the Church is as full of theories of the Atonement as it is of theories of the Person of Christ, and both problems have received a large number

of suggested solutions in the last hundred years. From one point of view the variety is not a cause of wonder. Both the Person and work of Christ are much too big to be embraced in their completeness by any created brain, and all explanation must reach a point where it becomes baffled. There is, too, an obvious parallel between these subjects and a great mountain. Men may see different sides and describe them with equal truth and equal inadequacy of truth. What is best is to try to appreciate fairly all the points of view, or, in other words, to gather up the most helpful thoughts in the various writers and to hold them together, even though there may be some difficulty about making them exactly fit.

It is not the purpose of this paper to attempt any historical account of the theories of the Atonement, but it may be helpful to our constructive object just to notice the general principles of classification, and thus to bring out the salient points to be kept in mind. We may set aside at once as totally inadequate that type of theory which makes Christ's death an insignificant episode in his life, and regards it as having no greater value for us than as a splendid example of a noble death. Ritschl may be taken as a representative of this view. He will not admit any deeper meaning in the Cross than that "the death of Christ has the value of the covenant offering and the universal sin offering, not because of the fact that His enemies put Him to death, but because of the fact that He yielded Himself to this fate as in the providence of God a certain result of His special mission." Apart from this view, which clearly is not true to the New Testament any more than it is satisfactory to human need, atonement theories which recognize the unique place and importance of the Death of Christ fall into two classes, commonly called objective and subjective, terms which may be roughly taken to mean that stress is laid on the Godward and manward aspects of the Atonement respectively.

To find a thorough going and unrelieved objective theory we probably have to go back as far as Anselm's famous *Cur Deus Homo?* completed in 1098. The essence of his theory can be sufficiently stated in a couple of quotations. In Book I, chapter II, he says :—

"This is the righteousness or rectitude of will which makes men righteous, or right in heart : that is, in will. This is the sole and entire honour which we owe to God, and which God requires from us. . . . The man who does

not render to God this honour, which is His due, takes away from God what is His own, and dishonours God, and this is to sin. Moreover, as long as he does not repay what he has stolen, he remains in fault; and it is not sufficient only to restore what has been taken away, but in return for the injury inflicted he ought to restore more than he took away. For just as when one injures the health of another, it is not sufficient to restore his health, unless he give some recompense for the injury inflicted by causing him suffering: so when one wrongs any person's honour, it does not suffice to restore his honour, unless he gives back to the man whom he has dishonoured something which may be pleasing to him, according to the extent of the injury caused by his dishonour. . . . In like manner, therefore, every one who sins ought to render back to God the honour he has taken away, and this is the satisfaction which every sinner ought to make to God."

This is the statement of the necessity for an atonement. The way in which the necessity was met is stated in Book II, chapter 17.

"You have shown by many and necessary arguments that the restoration of human nature ought not to remain unaccomplished, but yet could not be effected unless man paid to God what he owed for sin, and which debt was so great that though no one ought to pay for it who was not man, no one could pay for it who was not God, so that the same person must be both man and God. . . . Moreover you have most clearly proved that the life of this Man (Jesus Christ) was so exalted and so precious that it may suffice to pay what is due for the sins of the whole world, and infinitely more. . . . This Man freely offered to the Father what it would never have been necessary for Him to lose, and paid for sinners what He did not owe for Himself."

It is probable that Anselm failed to express completely all that was in his own mind, and that his heart was truer than his head on the subject. But his theory as it stands is purely external, rigidly quantitative and redolent of feudalism. It is an attempt to express one side of New Testament teaching, but an attempt so one-sided as to be hopelessly unsatisfactory. It makes shipwreck on the rock of our perfectly correct feeling that no account of the Atonement is satisfactory which does not in a real and vital way bring our sinful personalities into connection with it. The effects of the Atonement must be seen there.

This feeling has been at the bottom, accordingly, of that whole group of theories which are subjective, which, by way of distinction from such a theory as Anselm's, take to themselves the epithet "moral." For a good illustration of an extreme subjective theory we may turn to J. M. Wilson's *How Christ Saves Us*. He will not give any countenance to the idea that the Atonement has an effect upon God, and hence he has to minimize to the point of explaining away a great deal of the language both of the Old and New Testaments. He writes that it is

"not only<sup>1</sup> permissible, but obligatory, for us gradually to eliminate from our thought of the reconciling work of Christ every trace of expiation, or penalty, except as illustrations such as might be given in parables and metaphors. . . . We must regard these as the temporary presentations and mutable garb of truth" (p. 68); and again (p. 73), the Cross "is to me a proof that suffering is no sign of God's anger: it is a proof that God loves man infinitely, even to death; it is an evidence that nothing, not even torture and humiliation, are outside God and His will. It inspires confidence in Him and reconciles us to the discipline of life and death: a confidence without which the human heart can never be courageous, as each man faces for himself his own life, and the untried, unimaginable experience of death. The death of Christ has therefore in a special sense the power of reconciling us to God. It inspires love to Him, drawn out by that infinite love and patience, and can enable us to bear the failures and inadequacies of life, not with Stoic resignation, but with something of the Pauline spirit of joy." "It is through His suffering and death alone that we are assured that, through the agonies of the world, God is still our Father" (p. 75).

There is no need to deny the helpfulness of such a view, nor that it contains elements of Truth. We are bound, however, to be suspicious of its adequacy when we notice how much Biblical language it has to explain away, and, moreover, that the very language which it rejects is precisely the basis upon which the objective type of theories rests. There is a further difficulty. It is a grave question whether the subjective theory taken strictly by itself is not like a house without a foundation. In this matter, as in some others, a man who goes about looking for effects is the least likely to find them. Dr. Bushnell, in his *Vicarious Sacrifice*, is a doughty champion of the "moral influence" idea, but he is constrained to hanker after what he calls the "altar terms" of the objective theory, and his statement of the reason for his longing is significant enough.

"When I conceive that Christ is my offering before God, my own choice Lamb and God's, brought to the slaying, and that for my sin, my thought moves wholly outward and upward, bathing itself in the goodness and grace of the sacrifice. Doubtless there will be a power in it, all the greater power that I am not looking after power, and that nothing puts me thinking of effects upon myself."

The upshot, of course, is that the attempt to set objective and subjective theories over against each other was a great mistake. The two sides cannot be separated, and each is necessary to the other. Most modern writers on the Atonement have realized this, and combine them, but the old error still crops up from time to time and therefore there is still need to refute it. We hope we are

<sup>1</sup> The page references are to Macmillan's sixpenny edition.

not unjust to the Rev. C. E. Raven's recently published book (1916) on *What Think ye of Christ?* in saying that an otherwise very beautiful statement of the way of our salvation by Jesus Christ seems to suffer by its lack of an "objective" foundation. The two-sidedness of the Atonement was laid down in Scripture when St. Paul used the word Reconciliation (*καταλλαγή*) to denote it. Reconciliation is emphatically something which is effected between two persons. It denotes the removal of a condition of estrangement which has existed between them. Both persons must be affected by this removal. There is a change of some sort in the offended person as well as in the offender. No doubt the Bible speaks most of the change in man's attitude towards God, and not a few writers try to restrict the meaning of the word to the human side. It is good therefore to find the double aspect realized in the note on Reconciliation in Sanday and Headlam's *Romans*, and to note a confirmation from the literature of fiction<sup>1</sup> in Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Marriage of William Ashe*.

The true relations of the objective and subjective aspects have never been expressed better than by the late Dr. Moberly, in *Atonement<sup>2</sup> and Personality*. He writes that the Atonement is

"objective first, that it may become subjective. It was real to Godward in Christ, that it might become the reality, in Christ, of men. It is real in others that it may be real in us. It is first an historical, that it may come to be a personal, fact. Calvary and the Ascension precede any thought or apprehension of ours. But Calvary and the Ascension are none the less to become an integral part of the experience and reality of our personal consciousness. If Calvary and the Ascension were anything less than the most real of historical realities, there would be in fact no possibility of their translation into our personal characters. But if even Calvary and the Ascension were past history merely, they would not after all have saved, or have touched us."

Acting on this statement, which obviously sums up the lessons to be drawn from the history of the doctrine of the Atonement, let us make a brief and simple attempt to set forth a more rounded exposition of the way of salvation in Christ—remembering always, however, those limitations of human intelligence which even a St. Paul was constrained to recognize in his phrase, "I speak as a man."

I. *The Basis of Salvation.* The first thing to be done is to appreciate the truth involved in the phrase that Christ is our Substitute.

<sup>1</sup> See the *Expository Times*, xxvi, p. 344.

<sup>2</sup> P. 143.

No doubt the phrase has been much misused, and the misuse largely accounts for the discredit into which it has fallen. It has been represented in certain popular statements that as God wanted to punish somebody, and did not want to punish man, He punished Christ instead. Such a statement at once invites the criticism that the Atonement is immoral, for it is unjust and indeed impossible to punish anybody except the person who is guilty. It also suggests a perfectly untrue distinction between an angry Father Who punishes and a loving Christ Who wards off the punishment, and thereby goes against the elementary facts stated in the two texts, "God so loved the world that He gave" and "God was in Christ reconciling the world." However much we hold that Christ was a Substitute, we must not forget that there is a Christian doctrine of the Trinity, and that the first beginnings of salvation lie in the love of God.

We may find the necessity for a Substitute in the classical statement of St. Paul in Romans iii. 25, 26: "Christ Jesus Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by His blood, to show His righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God, for the showing, I say, of His righteousness at this present season, that He might Himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." Let us put into simpler words the thought of that passage. All through the days of the Old Testament men had been falling into sin, men had been repenting, had been coming to God with a prayer for forgiveness, and had in the mercy of God been receiving it. Men had been repenting. The statement is true and yet untrue. They had been repenting up to their lights. But just because sin has a deadening effect upon the conscience, and sinful men do not realize the gravity of their own sins, the repentance of Old Testament days was all imperfect. Men did not realize the depth of the contrast between their sin and God's holiness. In other words there was a certain obscuring of God's holiness and God's attitude of utter abhorrence of sin. It was absolutely necessary to safeguard the truth of God's holiness from being overlooked or despised while men freely availed themselves of His mercy in forgiveness. This safeguard could only be found in some great historical demonstration of God's righteous abhorrence of sin. If this demonstration were once made and set openly before men's eyes, God might at

one and the same time be "just" and the "justifier" of sinful men. Now St. Paul says that in the person of Christ the historical demonstration was made on the Cross.

Let us look at this point further. It is required that men shall be truly and utterly penitent. But that is precisely what their sin prevents them from being. Hence they can never by themselves satisfy God's conditions of forgiveness, and they must throw themselves upon assistance in the matter.

Now one of the leading points in Dr. Moberly's exposition is that Christ came to our assistance by acting in our stead as a perfect penitent, and that amid the awful scenes of the Crucifixion, God's judgment upon sin, He perfectly confessed our sin. It has been widely felt that while Moberly is on the track of a right idea, he spoils everything by an unhappy phrase. In the common meaning of the word penitent—and Moberly almost helps himself to go astray by his very ingenuity in following up the significance of words until he makes them mean what in common speech they do not mean—the sinful man himself only can be penitent; and therefore Christ could not be the perfect Penitent, Christ could not confess human sin, just because His conscience was from first to last stainless.

It is possible, however, to put Moberly's real thought in language less open to objection. What are the two main features in the sufferings of Christ? There were the physical sufferings and there was the sense of desertion by God expressed in that unfathomable phrase, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" These might be called the indirect and direct results of God's hatred of sin. The physical sufferings were the indirect result, because they were inflicted by sinful men. They were a manifestation in action of that condition of moral chaos into which the world gets when sin has free play to work itself out, and when evil goes so far as to persecute good even unto death; and that moral chaos is rendered possible by the freedom of action which God gives to man whereby he reaps the harvest of his own sowing and, as it were, punishes himself. On the other hand, the sense of desertion by God seems to betoken some severance in the unbroken communion with God which Christ had enjoyed through all His earthly life. Its precise nature is a profound mystery into which we cannot enter. But it is clearly connected with God's reaction against sin. Now if these

two things, the physical suffering and the sense of desertion had been endured by sinful man, they would have been punishment for sin, and what is required for the vindication of God's holiness is that man, from the midst of such sufferings, should recognize them as the inevitable reaction of God's Holiness against sin, and should identify himself with God's attitude in thus condemning sin. But this is precisely what man as sinful can never do for himself. It is also, however, what Christ could and did do for him, and in this sense was his Substitute. Christ of His own will and choice, and out of His great love, submitted Himself to just those sufferings of mind and body which to us—but not to Him—are punishment for sin, and out of the depth of those sufferings—more intense to Him just because of the fineness and purity of His nature—He recognized God's Holiness and identified Himself with God's condemnation of sin. Calvary thus fulfilled the condition of being a great demonstration of God's righteousness, and on the Cross Christ offered to God what Anselm would have called a satisfaction to His honour.

This line of thought has been best brought out in the various writings of Dr. Forsyth. Here are some sentences from his book on *The Work of Christ*, pp. 148-150—

“ Christ confessed not merely human sin, which in a certain sense, indeed He could not do, but He confessed God's holiness in reacting mortally against human sin, in cursing human sin, in judging it to its very death. He stood in the midst of human sin full of love to man, such love as enabled Him to identify Himself in the most profound, sympathetic way with the human race ; fuller still of love to the God whose name He was hallowing ; and as with one mouth, as if the whole race confessed through Him, as with one soul, as though the whole race at last did justice to God through His soul, He lifted up His face unto God and said, ‘ Thou art holy in all Thy judgments, even in this judgment which turns not aside even from Me, but strikes the sinful spot if even I stand on it.’ The dereliction upon the Cross, the sense of love's desertion by love, was Christ's practical confession of the Holy God's repulsion of sin.”

It will be perceived that the quotation dwells on a certain summarizing quality—the word representative is for the present deliberately avoided—in Christ's work. This cannot be elaborated here. But it is connected with the fact that Christ was Man, embracing within Himself the generic qualities of manhood, and therefore having the capacity to become representative of all particular men

Thus far, then, we have seen how Christ's work affects God His Holiness is vindicated. God is reconciled. We have also seen



that Christ laid the foundations of human salvation by taking up the right human attitude towards God. Before we go on to study the correlation of Christ's experience with our own, it may be well to make passing reference to one difficulty which sometimes finds voice when the contention is pressed that Christ's work affects God, and by vindicating His Holiness reconciles Him to man. It is said, "How can God be reconciled when He is changeless?" The question really arises out of a misunderstanding of what is meant by the changelessness of God. God is changeless. But God is Love. And He who by nature is changeless Love must by reason of that very fact change His attitude towards and His dealings with men according to their sin and their penitence. "I am the Lord, I change not." "The Lord repented." Both statements are true, and are complementary. They are made contradictory only when the truth of God's changelessness in ethical nature is twisted into a falsehood of God's impassibility.

II. *The Achievement of Salvation.* "It is finished." "This man having offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting until His enemies be made His footstool." There is no question that Christ's work on Calvary is represented in the New Testament as complete and final. In what sense was it so? As a means of reconciling God, in every sense. Nothing more remains to be done. As a means of reconciling man, it was complete in principle, but not in detail. Christ as man's Substitute had taken up the right attitude towards God and sin. It remained for Christ to become man's Representative instead of his Substitute. In other words, it remains for individual men to identify themselves with Christ in all that He did and said on Calvary. Calvary must not remain an historical fact outside human experience. The spiritual experience of Christ on Calvary must become the spiritual experience of individual men. Only when men have come to share in the great confession made by Christ, and thereby have been freed from sin, will Christ's work of Atonement have been finished in detail as well as in principle, and will man's salvation have been achieved.

The word salvation is here used in its full sense. It is not regarded as a mere equivalent of the Pauline justification. Salvation is rather the completed process of which justification is only the first step. It is in this sense, surely, that St. Paul used the

word when he wrote, "Much more, then, being now justified by his blood . . . shall we be saved by his life." It is not, of course, for a moment intended to disparage justification, or to deny the reality of the forgiveness which comes to the sinful soul at its first uniting of itself with Christ by faith. But it is to be remembered—and the warning is not unneeded—that salvation is much more than this. There are those who so desire to make the way of salvation plain that they seem to cheapen it and make it easy—a thing which can be safely left to a death-bed repentance. Such a view not only leaves out of sight the grand full meaning of salvation, but it also misunderstands the implication of what Paul meant by faith. We need to insist that salvation is nothing less than the achievement of identification with the mind of Christ manifested on the Cross.

It is in connection with the process of salvation that St. Paul uses his suggestive metaphors of death and life. "The death<sup>1</sup> that He died, He died unto sin once, but the life that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus." "Ye died<sup>2</sup> and your life is hid with Christ in God." It is in the same connection that he uses his still more mystical phrase, "My little<sup>3</sup> children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you." "I live,<sup>4</sup> yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me, and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Christ in us, we in Christ—those far-reaching expressions are indeed the fullness of salvation.

Now the great question is—What is the power which can produce this identification with Christ? The only and the sufficient answer seems to be that it is the power of love. Love has an assimilative tendency which sometimes manifests itself even in curious external points such as the imitation of handwriting. Dr. Moberly beautifully writes—

"Consciously<sup>5</sup> or unconsciously, all love is imitative. What I am really in love with I must in part be endeavouring to grow like, and shall be growing like, if the love is really on fire, even more than I consciously endeavour. What I am really in love with characterizes me. It is that which I, so far, am becoming. In love, then, at least, though perhaps not

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vi. 10, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Col. iii. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. iv. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

*Atonement and Personality*, pp. 146-7.

separably from love, there is much imitation, conscious and unconscious, of the Spirit which revealed itself to the world on Calvary." Or again: "Real, personal, love, uplifted and uplifting, love for the Crucified because of the Cross, love even for the Cross because of the Crucified, this is perhaps the most obvious, and the most indispensable, of practical conditions for the real translation of the scene without into the material of the character within."

Love to Christ, then, ever active, ever deepening, this is our great need for the effecting of our salvation. But when we have said that, a serious practical question arises which had better be dealt with under a separate heading.

III. *The Working Out of Salvation.* Whence arises our love to Christ? Whence arises that contemplation and meditation which is the food of love? Great deeds of heroism are done in the war, and the papers are full of them, and men's hearts go out at once in response to them. Why is there not the same response to the great deed done on Calvary? There is no doubt that for some reason the response is lacking. Many men who are on fire about the war are quite cold to the story of the Crucifixion, and even saints can truly say of themselves—

"Lord, it is my chief complaint  
That my love is weak and faint;  
Yet I love Thee, and adore,  
Oh! for grace to love Thee more."

The great text, "We love Him because He first loved us," has limits of application. What is it which rouses the latent capacity of love in us, and sets it going on its activities of transformation?

The answer seems to lie in an appeal to the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit Who sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts. That means God's love to us. The Holy Spirit plants firmly in our hearts a sense of God's great love. Once we have come really to perceive the love of God, our love does go out in return and we become imitators. There is a real work of new creation to be done in us in making us lovers of God.

Forsyth is worth quoting on this point. He calls attention to the fact that while Tennyson appealed to people at once by his play on the more superficial emotions,

"original poets like Wordsworth and Browning had to create the taste for their work. Now in like manner Christ had to make the soul which should respond to Him and understand Him. He had to create the very capacity for response. And that is where we are compelled to recognize the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as well as the doctrine of the Saviour. We are always

told that faith is the gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. The reason why we are told that lies in the direction I have indicated. The death of Christ had not simply to touch like heroism, but it had to redeem us into the power of feeling its own worth. Christ had to save us from what we were too far gone to feel. Just as the man choked with damp in a mine, or a man going to sleep in Arctic cold, does not realize his danger, and the sense of danger has to be created in him, so the violent action of the Spirit takes men <sup>1</sup> by force." Or again, Christ "creates <sup>2</sup> by His act the Humanity He represents."

It is one of the strong points of Moberly's book that he has drawn such prominent attention to the connection between the Holy Spirit and the redemption of Personality. Not everybody will agree with all that he says, and indeed his pages show a leaning towards a Pantheistic way of writing. But there is no doubt that the place of the Spirit in working out the Atonement needed to be emphasized. Calvary and Pentecost go together, and correspondingly there must be no separation in life (if there may be in thought), between justification and sanctification. Both are essential to salvation. Christ on Calvary is its basis. The love of God in Christ is its instrument. The Spirit of Christ is its Agent. In the light of these truths, it is helpful to go back again to a familiar passage of St. Paul and to note the connection between Christ and love and the Spirit in the words, "That ye may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that ye, being rooted, and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God."

C. H. K. BOUGHTON.

<sup>1</sup> *Work of Christ*, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> P. 182.

