'The Christian Doctrine of Salvation.'

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Professor Stevens deals in this new volume of the 'International Theological Library' with a momentous subject, and he does so with a vigour and ability which must arrest attention. His subject is the Christian Doctrine of Salvation. His treatment includes the biblical, ecclesiastical, and positive aspects of that doctrine. For the task he has undertaken Professor Stevens has an excellent equipment. He is an accomplished and conscientious scholar. He has already published important works on The Pauline Theology, The Johanneine Theology, and The Theology of the New Testament. To the last-named work especially we would desire to express our indebtedness. We have often consulted it, and always with instruction and profit. The present volume necessarily goes over much of the same ground in different form, and we should have liked to be able to say in quite as satisfactory a manner. The present book falls in no way behind its predecessor in scholarship, in liveliness, in interest. The standpoint, however, unless we greatly mistake, has in certain respects very considerably changed. We may perhaps concisely express our criticism of the book by saying that when we differ from Professor Stevens in this new work, it is chiefly in points where he differs from himself in his earlier volume.

It is one of the criticisms which Dr. Stevens passes on Professor Denney that, in his Atonement and the Modern Mind, he shifts his ground from what Dr. Stevens had understood him to mean in his previous books on the atonement. Dr. Denney most likely will contest the charge; but we do not think that Dr. Stevens will dispute that since the publication of his former work in 1899, his own views on many things have, as he would probably say, grown and advanced—in any case have become considerably modified. We trace this change in subtler or more pronounced forms in his discussions and conclusions on nearly all the greater topics, as on sin, the person of Christ, the teaching of Jesus on His own death, the meaning of the atonement, the person and work of the Spirit, the harmony of certain aspects of apostolic teaching, etc.; though it is to be acknowledged that in certain points, as in the tendency to an identification of righteousness with love, and the avoidance of the word 'penal' in connexion with the sufferings of Christ, there is a preparation in the earlier for the fully developed type of theology in the later work. So considerable a divergence as we thus assume points to some more deeply lying change in the author's general attitude to the problems of Christian faith, and Dr. Stevens would perhaps allow that we are not unwarranted in finding in that the real explanation. It is not difficult to trace in the general trend of the new work a decided movement of mind towards the school of thought best represented, perhaps, by Sabatier. It rests on the ideas of the immanence of God, of Jesus as 'the incarnation of the immanent God in our humanity,' of the repudiation of 'the philosophical dualism which is implied in the contrast commonly made between the natural and the supernatural' (pp. 487, 490). Its application may be seen in the section on Christian Character (pp. 487 ff.), and in remarks on the Personality of the Saviour (pp. 268 ff.). We do not at present criticise, but only state. The presuppositions, in any case, are different from those of the previous volume, and necessarily affect the whole exposition. We do not think Professor Stevens would now allow himself, e.g., to say, as he did six years ago, of the Holy Spirit, 'The conclusion which these facts justify is that our sources, with the utmost possible unanimity, refer to the Spirit in terms implying personality' (Theol. of N.T. p. 215); or to use the language he formerly did on the person of Christ (ibid. pp. 64, 212, 401, etc.); or to speak as he then did about Paul's 'miraculous' conversion ('no explanation tallies with all the facts which are known to us except that which Paul himself gives,' p. 339), or of the consistency of this apostle's doctrine ('I accordingly hold that Paul's teaching regarding the way of Salvation is not two, but one,' p. 128); or to make the strong statements he did about the sacrificial, atoning

death of Christ, and the harmony of Christ's teaching with that of the apostles (pp. 132-134). There is undoubtedly development, and of a surprisingly rapid kind, in the new volume: the only question is—Is it in the right direction?

There is one other distinction between the earlier and the newer volume which must here be signalized. The earlier volume is predominatingly and dispassionately expository; it is not unfair to say that the newer volume is governed throughout by a strong polemical motive. Dr. Stevens's mind has become, one might say, 'obsessed' by the idea of the contrast between a 'penal' and a 'moral' view of the atonement, and he throws the whole force of his book into the effort to discredit the former as unchristian and 'morally intolerable' (pp. 245, 425-426), and to establish and commend the latter as the necessary alternative. He mercilessly hunts the representatives of the 'penal' view, as he conceives of it, through their supposed ambiguities, inconsistencies, self-contradictions, moral absurdities, and labours to make them out wrong on every ground, exegetical, historical, and rational. He comes back to this contrast at every turn, and leaves the unhappy victims of the supposed false theory no loophole of escape. As the result, 'I trust,' he says, 'it will be apparent that I repudiate the ideas of a propitiation or placation of God's wrath in the sufferings of Christ, the removal of hindrances to forgiveness by his sufferings, the substitution of a sacrifice- that is a summary statement of my conclusion' (p. 426).

Professor Stevens speaks of his view half ironically as 'so daring an aberration from dogmatic tradition' (p. 426). His truer conviction, as he often indicates, is that the view he combats is already to all intents and purposes dead—'adolescent' (pp. 245, 251, 260, 375). It has, in fact, never been anything else but 'a provincialism in Christian theology' (p. 252). Reputable theological thought has left it behind. Was it then really necessary to spend so much energy and thought in its refutation? Or is there underlying the polemic an uneasy suspicion that its vitality is not yet after all...
altogether gone? The present writer, after the manifold slaying of the slain in the 536 pages of this volume, feels that it requires some courage to confess that he belongs to the belated company that still thinks there is an essential element of truth in the so-called ‘penal’ theory which the theory of Professor Stevens misses. He even goes so far as to believe that there can be no adequate Christian doctrine of salvation which leaves this element out.

It need not be said that no fault at all is found with Professor Stevens’ strenuous and capable attempt to show that his view of Christ’s atonement—if the word does not become a superfluity—is the only and all-embracing Christian one. It is refreshing in these times to find a writer who thinks that one view of the Christian salvation rather than another is worth fighting for so earnestly. The author’s intensity of conviction, and the strong ethical motive underlying it, are not to be mistaken. As against hard, mechanical, and purely legal ways of representing Christ’s redemption, his polemic has its positive uses. As little need his desire to be perfectly fair in his representations be questioned, though his success here, perhaps, is not always quite in proportion to his intentions. As with everybody involved in controversy, his bias unconsciously leads him occasionally into mistakes, and partially warps his views of the positions he is combating. As a very minor example, he represents the present writer as characterizing Dr. M’Leod Campbell’s theory as ‘artificial and indefensible,’ ‘because he repudiates the idea of a vicarious endurance of the penalties of transgression’ (p. 191). That is ungrounded. What is really so characterized is not Dr. Campbell’s repudiation of the idea of vicarious endurance of penalty, but the theory he substitutes for this—a vicarious repentance. Of more consequence is it to remark that Dr. Stevens mistakes in suggesting—as his words must do to a reader (pp. 270, 271)—that Professor Skinner and Dr. Dillmann are in agreement with him in his one-sided representation of righteousness and grace or love as ‘synonyms.’ This, as any one will see who reads Dr. Skinner’s admirably balanced article in the Dictionary of the Bible, or Dillmann’s sections in his Alttest. Theologie, is by no means the case. It is one thing to say that righteousness and love are not opposed or conflicting attributes, and another to say that the two ideas can be everywhere and completely interchanged. Neither Dr. Skinner nor Dr. Dillmann falls into such error; on the contrary, each carefully guards against it. To the former righteousness is still ‘pre-eminently the judicial attribute of God’; the parallelisms ‘are not to be pressed so far as to identify righteousness with grace or faithfulness’; ‘that the divine righteousness was conceived by them mainly as a judicial attribute is beyond dispute,’ etc. Even in the continual use of the term ‘penal theory’ there is a misleading ambiguity, as if every one professing such a view must, in consistency, be held down to the particular phrases and modes of thought of, e.g., Drs. Shedd, or Strong, or Hodge, or of Jonathan Edwards—the former assumed to be the pure types of this theory,—or as if the theory was equivalent to saying that Christ’s death ‘appeased God’s appetite for punishment’ (p. 416). We respectfully decline to be driven into any such dilemma, or to accept such representations. We can appeal to Dr. Stevens’ own list of testimonies that all down the long line of Christian witnesses—Paul, Augustine, Anselm, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, etc.—Christ’s satisfaction to divine law was never viewed as the cause or motive of God’s love, but always as the fruit of that love (cf. pp. 74, 139, 153, 154, 275-276, 429, etc.).

1 Even the ancient sacrificial system is allowed to have grace behind it.
lates no principle of natural reason! (Introd. to Vicarious Sacrifice).

TO come nearer the essence of the matter, we would take entire exception, first, to Professor Stevens' way of contrasting the so-called 'penal' and 'moral' views of Christ's atoning work as necessarily opposed and mutually exclusive conceptions. The antithesis so strongly pressed here seems to us wholly fallacious and misleading. This is seen most clearly in the fact that there is hardly anything in Professor Stevens' expression of the ethical side of Christ's work to which the advocate of the other view would not also most heartily say Amen. What, one would like to know, is the opponent supposed to deny of all that is said of Christ's holy love and sympathy, of His voluntary giving of Himself up for men, of the burden of sorrow which human sin laid upon His soul, of His revelation of the evil and hatefulness ('the black enormity') of sin, and of the willingness of the Father, in holy love, to save men from sin? But if the whole of the second—or 'moral'—view is gladly accepted, how can it be represented as a necessary antithesis of the first—except in the sense that one party says, This is all there is in Christ's saving work, and the other party says, No, there is still something more; a vital element of Christ's redeeming activity is still left out. On the other hand, the advocate of the so-called 'penal' view will deny that his view, rightly understood, is not also 'ethical.' It is, he will say, an ethical law which connects sin with penalty, and an ethical act which, in Christ's sacrifice, does honour to this divinely established connexion. Professor Stevens himself says of the theology of the Reformers: 'The Reformers deepened and ethicised the conception of God which underlies Anselm's reasoning. For them the work of Christ was grounded in the ethical nature of God, and was required by the supreme and absolute law of his being ... The whole subject was brought into the field of ethics' (p. 244). Only he denies that 'the ethics which was applied to it was sound and tenable' (we should conclude, therefore, was not really ethics at all). Here we come to the kernel of the subject.

What, in effect, those who are dissatisfied with Professor Stevens' so-called purely 'moral' view of Christ's redeeming work—discarding details of theories—would say, would, we suppose, be something like this. It pertains to the conception of the divine holiness that it cannot but eternally declare itself against sin—a breach of the moral order of the universe—in condemnation and punishment. There is, to use a phrase of Dr. Stevens about God (p. 248), an 'obligation' arising from holiness so to react against sin (cf. p. 267). Among the other relations which sin sustains to God is this relation to His condemning and punishing will. Christ, therefore, in His union with us, and in His reconciling work as Mediator between God and man—our holy and perfect Representative—cannot be conceived of as having had nothing to say to this tremendous reality of God's holy condemnation of the sin of the world. His work, like sin itself, must, among its other relations, embrace a relation to God's condemning and punishing will. Honour must be done to this as to other aspects of the divine holiness. That this element did enter into Christ's bearing of human sin in its relation to God—this, not in mental recognition only, but under actual experience of the penal evils which sin, in the ordinance of God, had brought upon our race, and supremely in holy submission to the last evil of all, death—they believe to be the implication of the whole apostolic gospel (Paul, Peter, John, Hebrews, Revelation), and to be in harmony alike with the preludings of Old Testament law and prophecy, and with the words and acts of Jesus Himself, as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels and in John. All this, on the other hand, Professor Stevens energetically rejects as resting on an unbiblical view of the divine righteousness and false idea of the relation of sin and punishment, and as contradicted by the real tenor of Christ's teaching and work.

The point of righteousness has already been alluded to. Enough for our present purpose to have it recognized 'that God is inviolably holy and must for ever repudiate and condemn all moral evil' (p. 267), while, as we are elsewhere told, 'his favour is free and undeserved' (p. 30): repentance establishes no claim on it. For Dr. Stevens also, therefore, it would appear, there is for God a 'must' in the condemnation of sin, and a 'may' in the exercise of mercy (cf. p. 178 ff.). The question of sin and its punishment requires more attention. Professor Stevens contends stoutly that punishment cannot be at once 'retributive' and 'disciplinary'; the latter conception at least is primary, the former subordinate (p. 338). Here
again, we cannot but think, he is the victim of a
table antithesis. If, as he also allows, 'sin is
blameworthy and deserves punishment' (p. 337),
and if God in His inviolable holiness 'must'
eternally condemn all moral evil, how can it be
denied that there is a retributive aspect in God's
treatment of sin? How, indeed, can the disci-
plinary benefit be reaped, unless the sinner is
brought to see that what he receives at the hand
of God is his due (cf. Lk 23:41)?

To speak of
God's wrath as 'holy love' is to leave much unsaid
(p. 275). It is pointed out that the word 'wrath'
is but once put into the mouth of Jesus (p. 266).

Has Professor Stevens ever noticed that the word
'love' never occurs even once in the Synoptic
Gospels (or Acts) as applied to God? Yet
Jesus, as we are rightly told, was the revelation
of the love of God. If 'love' is not
there, the synonyms are there; and so it is in
relation to 'wrath' (cf. p. 268). What, indeed,
strikes, and even startles, as in Christ's teaching
often is the terrible severity of His language about
punishment (cf. e.g. Mt 18:24 22:7-13 23:38 25:30, 41
etc.). The most terrible of all wrath is 'the
wrath of the Lamb,' when it flames out against
wilful and presumptuous evil-doers. But this is
not to deny, but to assert, its retributive character.

To measure the awfulness of the divine con-
demnation of sin, we must set 'the evil and hate-
fulness of sin,' its 'black enormity,' against 'the
white background of Christ's own conscious holi-
ness, in the perfect light of the divine perfection'
(p. 269). We must see in it that which, in the
will of God, ought never to have been. Speaking
of the view which regards sin as 'a real part of
the world-plan' (which, in one point of view, it no
doubt is), Dr. Stevens says: 'It seems to me
quite evident that the Christian view of God and
the world does not include the opinion that sin
was a part of the original divine plan of the
system' (p. 360). Perhaps, if Dr. Stevens would
think this out a little, it would suggest to him that
the Christian view of sin is not quite indifferent,
as he supposes, to questions of origin. For with

modern views of man's origin, sin is unquestion-
ably an unavoidable incident in man's develop-
ment. But if so real a condemnation is due to
sin in its essential nature, the question recurs—Is
nothing due from Christ, as the world's Redeemer,
in recognition of this attitude of the divine holiness
to sin? When it is replied that no evils can be 'penal' which are not the result of personal
transgression, we take leave to demur. This is
one individualistic point of view which ignores
the patent fact of corporate responsibility. The
penalties of transgression, as well as the rewards of
goodness, are seldom confined to the individual
agent, but overflow for evil or for good on others.

When Jesus says that the righteous blood shed in
all past time will come upon His own doomed
generation (Mt 23:38-39), does He not mean us to
regard the accumulated misery as 'penal'? Even
a Bushnell can speak of Christ being 'incarnated
into our curse,' and M'Leod Campbell can declare
that in Christ's atonement it was not simply sin
that had to be dealt with, but an existing law with
its penalty of death, and that death as already
incurred.' The mystery of Christ's sacrifice is not
that, sinless Himself, He suffered penal evils
brought upon Him by the world's sin, but that,
in the Spirit in which He met them, and the
honour done to God's righteousness in enduring
them, He made them expiating. The 'penal' is
also 'ethical.'

Is it not, however, a conclusive reply to such
statements to say, with Dr. Stevens, that nothing of
all this, or hardly anything, is met with in the
teaching of Jesus Himself? Two passages only
(Mk 10:45, Mt 26:28, with parallels) 'explicitly con-
nect his death with his saving work' (p. 43); and
these, with the cry upon the Cross ('My God,
my God,' etc.), form, in Dr. Stevens' view, the
whole material on which to base the theory of
Christ's substitutionary death for the remission of
sins (p. 52). The phrases, he seeks to show, that
in Matthew being doubtful—do not necessarily, or
naturally, bear the interpretation put upon them.
In His ordinary teaching Christ said nothing of
His death as a sacrifice for sin, or as necessary to
its forgiveness. Nothing comes between the re-
turning Prodigal and his Father's love. To which,
in the first place, it may be replied, that as little
is anything said of any connexion between Christ's
person and His loving sacrifice for men, and the
forgiveness of sins. If there is any sense in which

1 The use of such an expression does not relieve from the
apparent (though only apparent) 'conflict of attributes' of
which so much is said. Dr. Stevens would allow that even
'holy love' cannot save except under certain conditions
which are not always fulfilled. Yet love desires not the
death of any sinner, and would willingly save if it could.
The love has its limits set to it by holiness.
Christ's appearance, life, and death, condition or mediate salvation to the world, the Gospels, on His showing, contain no clear mention of it. They say as little about 'eternal atonement,' to which Professor Stevens devotes a chapter, as about 'penal' atonement. If 'the notion of the sacrifice as an atonement or covering of the sins of the offerer supplied an analogue to the work of Jesus in doing for men what they could not do for themselves' (p. 115), this does not appear in the Gospels either. But the whole basis of argument seems to us narrow and fallacious. Christ's sayings and doings must be studied in a wider context than Professor Stevens supplies. Christ's consciousness was rooted in Old Testament revelation, and His mind moved in the circle of Old Testament conceptions, even while, in many ways, transcending them. Numerous examples show how He drew the profoundest principles from words and incidents even in the oldest parts of Scripture (cf. e.g. Mt 12:38, 25:31, 32). He could not but think of the Messianic salvation as connected with His own person as Messiah. We know how deeply His mind was steeped in the prophecies, and especially in the prophecies of the Servant of Jehovah. In accepting the Messianic calling, He could scarcely but foresee from the first the path of suffering and rejection it opened out before Him. If, again, when His death became clear, He could not but read it, as Professor Stevens says, in the light of a divine ordainment for the ends of His mission, we may believe that He would connect it with what is said of the Suffering Servant in Is 53. This, indeed, it is declared He did (Lk 22:37). If the Jews had not the conception of a suffering Messiah (p. 56), it is certain that Jesus and His disciples, taught by Him, had. The idea of vicarious suffering for the redemption of the world, therefore, we may well believe, very deeply in Christ's own thought; and to His own mind, if not always in expressed words, it lay behind His preaching of salvation. This, accordingly, forms the simplest, as it is the most natural, key to His various recorded utterances—and they are not few—in John and the Synoptics, as to the necessity of His sufferings and death, and their connexion with human salvation. It explains the emphasis laid upon His death, the mysterious elements in His sufferings in Gethsemane and on the Cross, the changed relation to His disciples after the resurrection, the commission to preach remission of sins in His name (His death and resurrection being evidently the turning-points), the form of the apostolic gospel.

On this last point, the relation of Christ's teaching to the apostolic gospel, we have but one word to say. We have no faith whatever in the account given of Paul's derivation of his gospel from current Rabbinical notions of the virtue attaching to the vicarious sufferings of the righteous. We doubt whether such notions really had much currency; in any case, Paul knows nothing of such general vicarious suffering of righteous men; and his doctrine of Christ's propitiatory sacrifice had far other and more scriptural roots. We fail to see that his doctrine, while more elaborately wrought out, is essentially different from that of other New Testament writers, and, on the whole subject, may be permitted to fall back once more, in closing, on words of Professor Stevens himself in his earlier work, which express our conviction now. 'His [Christ's] death is a testimony to the heinousness of sin in God's sight and to God's holy displeasure against it. It thus fulfils a condition of sin's forgiveness, namely, the assertion of its desert of penalty and the vindication of the divine righteousness in its condemnation. Was this a product of the "reminiscent phantasies" of his disciples, or had it a place in the mind of Jesus himself? ... Is it credible that the first disciples, after hearing his instruction on the subject, should proceed to build up a subjective theory of his death which had no warrant in his own teaching? Which persons are more likely to have correctly apprehended the significance which Jesus attached to his death, men like John and Peter, and, I may add Paul (who passed two weeks with Peter when this subject was uppermost in his thoughts (Gal 1:18), or an equal number of scholars in our time, however discerning and candid, who undertake to reconstruct the thought of Jesus, and to disentangle it from the supposed subjective reflections of his disciples? Where is the subjectivity likely to be greatest—in the interpretations of the eye and ear witness or in the reconstructions of the moderns? Many adopt the former supposition. I cannot help preferring the latter' (Theol. of New Test. pp. 132–133).