

The Doctrine of the Atonement in the Writings

of James Denney

by

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A Thesis

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Thesis Outline

James Denney's Doctrine of the Atonement

I Introduction:

Chapter 1 His life - from his letters

Chapter 2 His Times

- i. Higher Criticism - emphasis on history
back to the historical Jesus
Harnack "Son has no place in
the Gospel
- ii. Impact of Science - Science wants to reduce every-
thing to its own level
- iii. German Idealism - unity of God and man
Christ not unique
- iv. Everything must be tested by experience
- everything must have ethical meaning

Denney did not reject the modern viewpoint but he said let us go back to the Bible.

II The Atonement:

Chapter 3 The Need for Atonement

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- ii. Sin an outrage - attempts to explain away sin
- sin a reality to God and man
- iii. What is to be done - sin must be dealt with
- God cannot condone sin
- man cannot condone sin, reality
of guilt

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- i. does the Christian religion as exhibited in the
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- the Synoptics
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a self-consistent New Testament

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- ii. is the Christian Religion as exhibited in the New Testament justified by an appeal to the mind of Christ?
 - the disciples believed Jesus was alive
 - existence of church and New Testament without explanation if Christ was not raised

- iii. the Self-revelation of Jesus
 - the Baptism
 - the Temptation
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Jesus is the object of faith

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- confirmed by appeal to mind of Christ
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 - the fact of divine wrath
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 - the propitiation, key to understanding of Paul's doctrine
 - sin is only forgiven as it is borne
 - (c) the relation of Christ's death to the Christian life
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- ii. John:
 - (a) centrality of passion story
 - (b) the relation of Christ's death to Divine Love
 - (c) the relation of Christ's death to a perishing world
 - propitiation

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Propitiation as the Supreme Proof of Love
 - the ultimate reality in the universe is
 a love which bears our sins

Chapter 7 Summary of the New Testament Doctrine of the Atonement

- i. a propitiation - it deals with sin
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 - assurance, joy springing from assurance
 - morality follows a true grasp of the meaning of the atonement
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 - Denney denies this
 - illustrated in his criticism of Anselm

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- ii. Denney sees that to say God forgives freely without any Atonement does not do justice to the facts of the New Testament
 - it does not do justice to the facts of experience
 - the sense of debt to Christ is central for Denney
- iii. for Denney religion is more than morality
 - yet the Atonement has deep ethical and practical implications
 - the Atonement is the secret of Christian living
 - provides the only motive for true Christian living
 - provides the assurance which gives joy

The following abbreviations will be used in this thesis in referring to the writings of James Denney:

- II Corinthians - "The Second Epistle to the Corinthians" in
The Expositor's Bible
- DC - "The Death of Christ" (edited by R.V.G.
Tasker)
- DR - "The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation"
- JG - "Jesus and the Gospel"
- Letters I - "Letters of Principal James Denney"
To W. Robertson Nicoll 1893-1917
- Letters II - "Letters of Principal James Denney to his
Family and Friends."
- MM - "The Atonement and the Modern Mind"
- Romans - "Expositor's Greek Testament", The Book
of Romans
- ST - "Studies in Theology"
- WE - "The Way Everlasting" Sermons

Editions used will be those mentioned in the bibliography.
All references to "The Death of Christ" are to Tasker's
edition unless otherwise noted.

Chapter 1

The Life of Dr. James Denney

James Denney was born at Paisely, Scotland on February 5th, 1856. We know very little of his childhood except for the fact that he attended the Highlanders' Academy at Greenock for his early education.

In 1874 Denney began his studies at the University of Glasgow and five years later, in 1879, he graduated with the M.A. degree and first class Honours in both Classics and Philosophy. Four years later he graduated from the United Free Church College in Glasgow.

In the spring of 1886 he was ordained to the ministry of the East Free Church at Broughty Ferry, and that summer he was married to Miss Mary Carmichael Brown of Glasgow.

During his ministry at Broughty Ferry, he wrote his first books, his commentaries on I and II Thessalonians and the one on II Corinthians. By November 1, 1893 he had completed his commentary on II Corinthians except for the introduction. (1)

In 1894 he went to Chicago to deliver a series of lectures which were published the following year, under the title "Studies in Theology". This book deals with the chief doctrines of the Christian faith, namely God, Christ, Man, Redemption, the Church, the Holy Scriptures, and Eschatology. Already in this book it is obvious where Denney's centre of interest lies. A large section

(1) Letters I, p. 3.

of this book is devoted to the Doctrine of the Atonement and even here Denney goes to great pains to refute unscriptural theories of the Atonement. W. Robertson Nicoll is high in his praise of this book and he writes: "In fact, his 'Studies in Theology' are perhaps the freshest and brightest of his writings"(1). There followed shortly after this his work on the Epistle to the Romans in the "Expositor's Greek Testament" which Nicoll describes as "perhaps the very best piece of work he ever accomplished"(2).

On May 25th, 1897 the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland elected Denney Professor of Systematic and Pastoral Theology in the Glasgow Free Church College. He remained in this position until 1899 when A.B. Bruce died and Denney succeeded him as Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Theology.

In the summer of 1902 Denney completed his book "The Death of Christ" and sent the manuscript to Nicoll for publication. This book is a study of the Doctrine of the Atonement in the New Testament and Denney deals in turn with the doctrine as taught in the Synoptic Gospels, Early Christian preaching, the Epistles of St. Paul, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Johannine Writings. The book closes with a chapter on the importance of the death of Christ in Preaching and Theology. In this book it is

(1) Letters I, p. xx.

(2) *ibid.*, p. xvii.

quite clear where Denney's heart lies. It is not only in the Atonement but supremely in what the New Testament has to say about the Atonement.

In November 1903, Denney's book "The Atonement and the Modern Mind" was published. In the preface of this book he states that the three chapters of this book have already appeared in "The Expositor" and are intended as a supplement to the "Death of Christ". In this book Denney attempts to deal with objections which the mind of his day presented against the New Testament doctrine of the Atonement. He states that the purpose of the book "is to commend the Atonement to the human mind as that mind has been determined by the influences and experiences of modern times and to win the mind for the truth of the Atonement"(1).

In the summer of 1905 Denney travelled to America with Mrs. Denney. During this visit he lectured at Hartford and Northfield. A little over two years later in December 1907 Mrs. Denney died.

In 1908, perhaps the greatest of Denney's books was published. This was "Jesus and the Gospel". As we shall see in Chapter 2 of this thesis, there was a widespread tendency in Denney's day to look upon Jesus as merely the greatest of all human beings. There was no unbridgeable gap between the human and the divine. To Denney such a view denied the very essence of Christianity. In a letter to W. Robertson Nicoll, he says:

(1) MM, pp. 6f.

"The Christian religion is what it is, and what it has been all through its history, in virtue of the place which Jesus holds in it."(1). Denney knew that to deny the uniqueness of Jesus was to deny the whole of Christianity. He wrote "Jesus and the Gospel" to demonstrate that Jesus is a unique and incomparable Person. Denney points out that this fact is proved not only by an appeal to the writers of the various New Testament books but also by an appeal to the mind of Jesus Himself. This book presents us with a case which it would be most difficult to deny.

In his preaching as we see it illustrated in his book "The Way Everlasting" Denney was constantly stressing the great truths which he wrote about in his books. In one of his sermons in this book he tells us that "the one heart-breaking and hopeless mystery of life is sin; the one thing in presence of which it vanishes is redeeming love, the love revealed in the crucified Son of God"(2). He speaks of "the heart of the revelation on which our religion rests: Christ crucified"(3). In his preaching, as in his books, the Atonement is central. In another sermon, he tells us that to evade 'propitiation', or to let it fall into the background "is to pluck the heart out of the Christian religion"(4).

In 1914 Denney became Principal of the United Free Church College in Glasgow, a position he held until his death

(1) Letters I, p. 95.

(2) WE, p. 17.

(3) WE, p. 18.

(4) WE, p. 304.

in 1917. In March 1917, in a letter to W. Robertson Nicoll he is bemoaning the fact he is unable to help with the Temperance Cause and the Central Fund and he indicates his astonishment at those who condoled with him for having to postpone the Cunningham Lectures. Denney died in June of that year and the Cunningham Lectures were published posthumously. Before his death he had prepared the lectures for publication and so we have them without alteration as the preface to "The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation" indicates.

In this last book, Denney relates the New Testament doctrine of the Atonement as presented in "The Death of Christ", to the daily life and experience of men. He, of course, deals with the Atonement from a different point of view in the sense that he not only deals with the New Testament doctrine but also the interpretations of the Atonement offered by the great Christian theologians of the past, and taking these together he applies the whole truth of the Atonement to life. "The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation" is a great book but it has one obvious weakness. Chapter 2 is certainly a weak spot in the book. Denney was not especially interested in the different theories of the Atonement as taught by the great thinkers of the Church. His chief interest lay in the New Testament and in what the New Testament had to say about the Atonement. As a result of this, this chapter in "The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation" is not at all satisfying. It is obvious from a study of this chapter that Denney was not really interested in the theological

theories of the Atonement. Denney himself did not try to hide this fact. Writing to J.P. Struthers in 1897, he says: "It seems odd that I should lecture to a church society on two such blackguards as Gibbon and Cellini, but they are more interesting than the Fathers, Reformation, theologians or modern divines"(1).

Even a casual reading of Denney's books reveals the fact that his supreme interest was in what the New Testament has to say about the person and work of Christ. This is most obvious in his book "Jesus and the Gospel" where he deals with the New Testament doctrine of the Person of Christ, and in "The Death of Christ" where he deals with the New Testament Doctrine of the work of Christ. In these two books, he has little interest in what any other writer has to say on the subject. He only deals with other writers to the extent that they contradict the New Testament account of Jesus and His work. And Denney only mentions them in order to contradict their anti-scriptural views.

The fact that Denney is supremely interested in the New Testament doctrine of the Person and work of Christ is made doubly clear in his last book "The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation". He does deal in this book with the various theories of the Atonement put forward by the great Christian thinkers of the past. But he only devotes one chapter in the whole book to it. He also had one chapter in "Studies in Theology" on the

(1) Letters II, p. 73.

subject. But these are the only two places in all his writings, where he deals extensively with the subject. It was not that Denney was not capable of dealing with this subject. The truth is he was not really interested. His interest lay almost entirely in the New Testament doctrine of the Person and work of Christ and their relationship to human life.

And so we turn to Denney's Doctrine of the Atonement which is first of all a New Testament Doctrine of the Atonement.

The Age of Dr. James Denney

Dr. James Denney wrote in an age when German Historical Criticism had made a tremendous impact on theological thinking. Denney was very much aware of this fact and he never tried to ignore it. In fact he wrote as one keenly aware of contemporary thinking in the field of theology. He never tried to ignore the facts of historical criticism. On the other hand he took up the very weapons the opponents of orthodox Christianity had used and used them for his own ends. In our description of contemporary thinking in the age in which Denney wrote, we shall deal with it under Historical Thought of the Period, Scientific Thought of the Period, and Philosophical Thought of the Period.

i. Historical Thought of the Period

In Denney's day, the Historical School of Higher Criticism had exerted a great influence on theological thinking. The crucial test of any truth or doctrine was whether it was true to historical facts. Everything was tested by history.

Albert Schweitzer in his book "The Quest of the Historical Jesus", published in 1911, gives a detailed account of the history of criticism regarding the Person of Jesus. He begins with Reimarus who was the first to attempt a historical account of the life of Jesus (1). And he goes on to deal with such writers as Paulus, Strauss, Bauer, Renan, and Wrede. The aim of Historical Criticism was to get back to the Jesus of History.

(1) Albert Schweitzer, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus", London, 1911, p. 13.

F.C. Burkitt, in his introduction to Schweitzer's book, tells us that all writers of this school were one "in their unflinching desire to attain historical truth" (1). According to these writers, the Church had transformed the Jesus of History into the Christ of Christian dogma. The ~~task~~ task of Historical Criticism was to bring together the supra-mundane Christ and the historical Jesus of Nazareth "into a single personality at once historical and raised above time" (2). It was not so much a hatred of Jesus that was the animating spirit of this school of thought, but a desire "to strip from Him the robes of splendour with which He had been apparelled and to clothe Him once more with the coarse garments in which He had walked in Galilee" (3). Schweitzer sums up the central problem of Higher Criticism in these words: "Does the difficulty of explaining the historical personality of Jesus lie in the history itself, or only in the way in which it is represented in the sources?" (4). In other words the problem was to determine to what extent the personality of Jesus, as it is portrayed in the Gospel records, was a true picture of Jesus.

In 1901, T.B. Saunders' translation of Adolph Harnack's "What is Christianity?" was published in London. This book is typical of the school of historical criticism. In the early pages of this book, Harnack points out that "in history absolute judgements

(1) Ibid., p. v.
(2) Ibid., p. 3
(3) Ibid., pp. 4ff.
(4) Ibid., p. 11.

are impossible. Such judgements are the creation only of feeling and of will; they are a subjective act" (1). Every fact must be tested by history. If we cannot prove the historicity of certain facts, we cannot accept them. Harnack rejected in part the historicity of the Gospels, and as a consequence of this his conception was very different from that of orthodox Christianity. For Harnack, no historical fact had any absolute value. Historical facts were always relative (2). Jesus was an historical Person. He lived and died in Palestine in the first century. But this does not mean He is unique. As a historical Person He cannot possess any absolute value. He was a great religious teacher but He was not unique in the sense that orthodox Christianity thinks of Him as unique. He possesses no absolute value for us in the realm of religion. To say He is unique and incomparable is to say something which, according to historical criticism, cannot be substantiated. Therefore we find ourselves in the position where, if we follow historical criticism, Jesus is no more than a great religious teacher. He may be the greatest religious teacher but He is not unique and incomparable. By unique we do not mean the highest in the scale of human values but having a place which no other can share. For the full meaning of the word as applied to Jesus we must turn to chapter 4 of this thesis which presents Denney's interpretation of the uniqueness of Jesus.

(1) Harnack, Adolph, "What is Christianity?", London, 1901, p. 19.

(2) Ibid., p. 19.

The Catholic Church has always given to Jesus a place which no man can share. Historical Criticism feels that the Church, in doing this, has committed a grave error. It has turned the simple Jesus of the Gospel into the Christ of Christian dogma. According to Harnack (1), the Church considered the formation of a correct theory about the Person of Christ, a matter of prime importance. But for Harnack the important thing was not to think rightly about Jesus but to follow the example of his life (2).

Undue emphasis on the person of Jesus led to a false conception of Christianity. It put the Person of Jesus at the heart of the Gospel and Harnack believed this was a grave error. In fact He went so far as to say: "The Gospel, as Jesus proclaimed it, has to do with the Father only, and not with the Son"(3). Denney tells us that Harnack said that in the Gospel as preached by Jesus, the Son has no place but only the Father (4). For this statement, Denney does not give the specific reference to Harnack. But the above quoted statement from Harnack says almost the same thing as Denney does and we get the basic idea of Harnack. It is this that the centre of Christianity is not the Son but the Father. A further statement from Harnack confirms this basic idea. "The whole of Jesus' message may be reduced to these two heads - God as the Father and the human soul so ennobled that it can and does unite with him"(5).

(1) Op. cit., p. 198.

(2) Ibid., p. 198

(3) Ibid., p. 154.

(4) DR, p. 126

(5) Harnack, op. cit., p. 68.

According to Higher Criticism, the important thing in Christianity is not so much to hold right opinions about Jesus but to follow Him as an example in His loving obedience to the Father. Harnack tells us that Jesus "desired no other belief in His person and no other attachment to it than is contained in the keeping of his commandments"(1). To call Jesus the Son of God, according to Harnack, means nothing more than to say He knew God in a unique way(2).

Higher Criticism refused to see in Jesus anything more than a human being. Denney could not accept this point of view. He agreed that we must get back to the Jesus of History, but he went to great pains to point out that when we do get back to the historical facts, we find a unique and incomparable Person. This is the position he supported in such a magnificent way in his book "Jesus and the Gospel!"

ii. Scientific Thought of the Period

In Denney's day there had been a tremendous development in the field of the physical sciences. Part of this development was in the field of biology. One of the aims of the physical sciences is to reduce everything to its simplest components. And so there arose the idea that everything to do with man could be reduced to biological terms. Self-consciousness, freedom, morality, and religion were all given biological explanations(3). If man is merely a biological creature, it is absurd to speak of morality and sin. Sin is merely the growing pains of the human race. It

(1) Harnack, op. cit., p. 135.

(2) Ibid., p. 138.

(3) MM, p. 41.

is something he has inherited and we cannot hold him responsible for it. And if man is not responsible for his sin, there is no need to talk of such things as forgiveness and atonement.

But when man reduces himself to merely a part of the physical phenomena of the universe, he forgets that in doing this he shows the utter absurdity of such a thought. If he were merely a biological creature, he would not even be able to form such a concept. To reduce man to a biological phenomenon does not deal with all the facts as we know them.

iii. Philosophical Thought of the Period

The predominant philosophy of the age in which Denney wrote was that of German idealism. The University of Glasgow was a stronghold of German idealism. As we shall see in the course of this thesis, Denney was not interested to any great extent in philosophical speculation. We have already seen that he graduated with Honours in Philosophy and he was certainly aware of the philosophical thinking of his day. We have seen that he definitely was interested in the intellectual atmosphere of the age in which he wrote. Denney wrote in an age when German idealism had exerted a powerful influence on thinking. One of the basic tenets of Idealism was that God and man were essentially one. There is no great gulf between God and man. Man is essentially divine. This attempt to blend the human and the divine did two things to religion.

In the first place it tended to turn God into a glorified human being. If there is no essential gap between God and man, God is not in essence different from man. This idea is of great

importance for Denney's thinking, not because Denney, in any way, accepted this point of view, but because it made Jesus only a very good man. Idealism was willing to admit that Jesus was the best man who ever lived, but beyond that it could not go. It believed only in a human Jesus. Jesus was not sinless nor was he in any sense unique or exceptional(1).

If Jesus were not a unique Person, there is only one conclusion we can come to as we weigh the evidence of the Gospels, and that is that He was a deluded person. It is quite clear from a careful consideration of the self-consciousness of Jesus as displayed in the Gospels that Jesus did consider Himself a unique Person. In the light of this fact there are only two possible conclusions to which we can come; either Jesus was what He claimed to be or He was a deluded Person. Concerning the second of these views, Denney says: "that He was deluded is a hypothesis I do not feel called to discuss"(2). To answer more fully the first view, Denney wrote his book "Jesus and the Gospel", in which he gives us a most satisfying answer which we may give to those who dispute the uniqueness of Jesus.

In the second place, Idealism tended to make man divine and if man is divine it is absurd to talk about sin. Man is divine and therefore he does not really sin. Sin is just a passing phase in his development into the divine. Thus there is no need for atonement. Each new generation bears the sin of the

(1) MM, p. 50.

(2) MM, p. 50.

previous generation and so sin is annulled. Sin, in the final analysis, was explained away and made atonement or reconciliation unnecessary.

If there is no such thing as sin, it is absurd to speak of an atonement. And this is exactly the situation that arose in Denney's day. In 1904 there was published in London a book called "The Doctrine of the Atonement" by Auguste Sabatier. Sabatier makes the Atonement, in the New Testament sense of the word, unnecessary. His theory was not new, as we shall see in chapter 8 of this thesis, but it represents a point of view that was widespread in Denney's day. The thesis of Sabatier's book is that God forgives freely, that is without Atonement. He repudiates the whole idea of atonement and propitiation. "As to the notion" Sabatier says, "of penal substitution, of the exchange of the life and suffering of the victim for the life and suffering of the guilty, it never once appears" (1). To Sabatier this was the whole truth about the Atonement, namely that God forgives freely. Referring to the parables of "The Prodigal Son" and "The Pharisee and the Publican" Sabatier says, "Nothing is historically more certain than that these parables contain all that Jesus meant by "His Gospel" (2). Then again he refers to the Last Supper and says, "in this order of ideas there is not the smallest room for the notion of judicial atonement" (3).

Sabatier is quite clear. He tells us that the parables of "The Prodigal Son" and "The Pharisee and the Publican" represent

(1) Sabatier, Auguste, "The Doctrine of the Atonement", p. 25.

(2) Ibid., p. 36.

(3) Ibid., p. 42.

the whole Gospel. God freely forgives men when they turn to Him in repentance. There is nothing else that God asks but our repentance. This is part of the Gospel. We do not deny this. But it is definitely not the whole Gospel. That it is the whole Gospel is a truth that Denney goes to great lengths to deny. Denney points out clearly and emphatically all through his books that God only forgives on the basis of the Atonement. When Sabatier says that the truth that God forgives freely is the whole of the Gospel, he is really denying the need for atonement. Denney goes to great pains to point out again and again that the truth that God forgives freely is not the whole of the Gospel.

Another characteristic of a great deal of the thinking in Denney's day was the insistence on the test of experience. Nothing was considered true that could not be verified by experience. This point of view made a real impact on the study of theology, because no longer was a truth accepted on the basis of Scripture. Scripture was not a sufficient authority for the modern mind. The truth of any theological doctrine was measured by its ethical value. And any theological belief which violates the ethical standard of the modern mind must be rejected (1).

When we make human standards the test of religious truth we are on very dangerous ground. After all God is God and not

(1) MM, p. 61.

man. To make man's ideas the test of theological truth is to turn the truths of revelation into merely subjective ideas which have no absolute value. On the other hand, to say that the Atonement, or any other doctrine for that matter, has value in itself apart from its effect on man is to misunderstand the whole meaning of the Atonement. The Atonement has no meaning unless it brings man into a new relationship with God which leads on to a life of ethical goodness. Denney was careful to make this quite clear and writing about this matter he said: "The modern mind assumes what Dr. Chalmers painfully discovered. An Atonement that does not regenerate, it truly holds, is not an Atonement in which men can be asked to believe" (1).

Denney was keenly aware of the intellectual outlook of the age in which he wrote. We can see this all through his books and especially in the letters that he wrote to W. Robertson Nicoll.

(1) MM, p. 63.

As we study the different works of James Denney, beginning with his earliest books, his expositions of I and II Thessalonians and going on to his latest book "The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation" we find one theme permeating all his books. The Doctrine of the Atonement was Denney's first love and his last love. It was the Atonement which was always the focus of attention in the mind and heart of James Denney. If we were to remove all references to the Atonement from his writings, we should have very little left. It is the theme of all his writings and on every page he wrote thoughts of the Atonement are in his mind.

Denney believed that all man's knowledge was capable of being arranged into one coherent whole. "All that man knows - of God and of the world - must be capable of being constructed into one coherent intellectual whole" (1). He was convinced that each part fitted into an over-all pattern and in this pattern theology had a place. In fact, Denney would say that in this pattern theology has a place of central importance and for him, of course, the heart of all theology is the doctrine of the Atonement. And the over-all pattern has no meaning if the doctrine of the Atonement is removed.

We have seen that Denney was definitely not interested in spinning theories, and that he graduated from the University of Glasgow with First Class Honours both in Classics and Philosophy

(1) ST, p. 4.

but Philosophy was not his first love. It was not in the world of philosophy that his heart lay but in the pages of the New Testament. No matter how interested he was in speculation when he studied philosophy, he had no interest in speculative theories when he came to theology. In the realm of theology he was a supremely practical man. By practical we mean he was not interested in any truth which could not be related to life. This is illustrated in one of the most profound statements he ever made: "I haven't the faintest interest in any theology which doesn't help us to evangelise" (1). Writing one day to W. Robertson Nicoll, he speaks of his dislike of the antithesis of objective and subjective theories of the Atonement (2).

This same point of view is seen in his impatience with speculation regarding Adam's origin and nature. He points out that we do not know anything about the beginning of man's life. We do not know anything about how sin came into the world but we do know it is here, and that is the fact with which we have to deal. Speculation as to how sin came to be is of no practical significance for us (3).

In his expositions of II Corinthians, Denney, in referring to some rather abstruse interpretation of a certain passage, makes this rather significant comment: "Surely it is safe to say that nobody in Corinth could ever have guessed this from the words" (4). Denney's interest was definitely not in metaphysical explanations

(1) Letters II, pp. xii ff.

(2) Letters I, p. 59.

(3) ST, pp. 78 ff.

(4) II Corinthians, p. 95.

of theological problems. He was interested supremely in the great spiritual truths of the New Testament and their relation to the life of the ordinary man.

We have seen where James Denney's centre of interest lies, namely in the great spiritual truths of the New Testament and in the relationship of these truths to the life of mankind.

Among all the problems and difficulties with which mankind is confronted, there is one problem which stands far above all others. That is the problem of sin. Denney, with deep insight into the spiritual problems of mankind places his finger on the pulse of the world and declares: "There is in truth only one religious problem in the world - the existence of sin" (1). If sin is a problem and a problem of supreme importance, why is this so? What is sin and why does it create a problem? To answer this question we must go back to a brief consideration of certain aspects of God's essential nature. Sin creates a problem because of the personal nature of God.

i. God is Personal

At the centre of the Christian Revelation is a declaration regarding the character of God. The matter which is of supreme interest to us at this point is the fact that God is personal. For us this means that God is able to enter into personal relations with man. Denney tells us that "religion is an experience of the personality of God" (2). Personal relationships range all the way from that of a casual friendship to the intimate relationship

(1) DC, p. 180.

(2) MM, p. 66.

existing between father and son. But the most intimate relationship is that existing between the soul and God. Man's supreme glory as a man consists in the fact that he is capable of fellowship with his Creator. Man is "a being, in nature akin to God, capable of fellowship with Him, and designed for it" (1). Man was made for fellowship with God; he was created for fellowship with God and was intended to live in communion with God. In itself this creates no problem for us; for if God is our Father and we are His children why should we not live in happy fellowship with Him. This is the ideal, of course, but it is not the actual. If it were the actual the word 'Atonement' would have no meaning for us. But, of course, it is not the actual and so there arises the need for Atonement.

ii. Sin

Atonement is necessary because of the presence of sin in the world. Sin has interrupted the relationship of harmony that ought to exist between God and His children. Sin has come between God and man and broken the relationship between them. This is the situation as Denney sees it in the light of the Bible and for him the New Testament was a very realistic book.

The word 'law' when used in the New Testament often refers to the law of Moses but it often points to something deeper than this law of Moses. It refers to something underlying it. It refers to the moral constitution of the world (2). Because of this, sin, which is a breaking of law, is a serious matter. It is not only

(1) ST, pp. 74ff.

(2) MM, pp. 74ff.

a breaking of certain moral codes, it is a violation of the moral constitution of the Universe. "Sin, as a disturbance of the personal relations between God and man is a violence done to the constitution under which God and man form one moral community" (1). Sin is a personal rebellion against a personal God. And as such it is a matter for serious concern. "The serious thing which makes the Gospel necessary, and the putting away of which constitutes the Gospel, is God's condemnation of the world and its sin; it is God's wrath¹ revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (2).

There are those who refuse to take sin seriously and various attempts have been made to explain it away. The biologist tells us that sin is just a carryover from the animal world and that it will disappear in the ordinary course of man's evolution(3). It is an inheritance which man will outgrow and for which we cannot hold him responsible (4).

It is hardly necessary to point out that these attempts to explain away sin really do not get to the heart of the matter. After we have done all our explaining away, sin is still a grim reality in human life.

First of all, sin is a reality to God. No matter how we try to explain it away it is still very real to God. If this were not so, there would be no need of Atonement. As we shall see more clearly later on, God cannot just overlook sin. "Sin is a real thing; a real violation of the will of God which ought to be our

(1) MM, p. 80.

(2) II Corinthians, p. 212.

(3) MM, p. 41.

(4) MM, p. 43.

will and it brings real responsibility along with it. I say real responsibility; for it is no illusion that we have to answer to God for what we have done" (1). Sin is a reality to God. This truth lies at the very heart of the New Testament. "In the Cross", says Denney (2), "we see how seriously God deals with the sins which for the time He seemed to pass by. It is a demonstration of His righteousness - that is, in the widest sense, of His consistency with his own character, - which would have been violated by indifference to sin".

Is it really necessary to prove that sin is a reality to man? All men know that sin is a reality. It is a very obvious fact of human experience that sin is a terrible reality. "The sin which weighs upon us, which disables us, which defeats us, which makes us cry 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?' is more than isolated acts, it is deeper than the deliberate volition of this or that moment, it is as deep as our very being. It is we who need to be saved and reconciled, and we have never known ourselves but as subjects of this need. It is our very nature which needs to be redeemed and renewed"(3).

Sin is a serious matter, first because it is an outrage against God and secondly because it leads to condemnation. The sinner who defies God stands under God's condemnation and judgement. "What makes the situation serious, what necessitates a Gospel, is that the world, in virtue of its sin, lies under the condemnation of God" (4).

Because of the situation with which sin confronts us, man's great need is to get right with God. He is not right with God and because of this there is need for atonement. Here lies the fundamental

(1) ST, p. 93.

(2) Romans, p. 609.

(3) DR, p. 196.

(4) ST, pp. 102ff.

reason why atonement is necessary. Man needs to get into a right relationship with God.

iii. What is to be done?

Here is the central problem of the New Testament, the problem of sin, the problem of the broken relationship between God and man. What is to be done? We cannot ignore the problem for it cries loudly for a solution. Sin must be dealt with. The seriousness of this problem and the fact it cannot be passed by is seen in the New Testament statement that Christ came into the world to save sinners, or to use His own words "to give His life a ransom for many" (1).

There have been other theories put forward to explain why Christ came into the world but Denney has no sympathy with them. He believes very definitely that Christ came primarily to make atonement, to deal with the problem of sin. The New Testament teaches that Christ came into the world to save sinners, that "man's desperate need drew Him from heaven to earth; and it never suggests, even in the remotest way, that He would have come anyhow" (2).

Christ came to deal with sin, in the first place because God cannot condone sin. The picture of God as a kindly grandfather who overlooks the sins of His children is not the New Testament picture of God. In the New Testament, God condemns sin and pronounces judgement. There is none righteous(3); the whole world stands guilty before God(4); it is impossible to believe that God either ignores or condones sin, when we speak of forgiveness (5). God cannot overlook sin and still be God. In the very act of forgiving

(1) Matt. 20:28

(2) ST, p. 101

(3) Ro. 3:10.

(4) Ro. 3:19.

(5) DR, p. 21.

God must act in consistency with His own character (1). Sin is a serious matter in the sight of God. This is not because there is anything of an arbitrary nature in God, it is because it is part of the very nature of God to take sin seriously. Sin is an outrage against the holiness of God and something must be done about it. God cannot freely forgive sin and still be God. For God to overlook sin would be to deny His own nature. This truth permeates all Denney's thinking about the Atonement. It is because sin is a serious matter in the sight of God that Atonement is necessary. The Gospel as St. Paul understood it tells men "that God has dealt seriously with these serious things for their removal, that awful as they are He has put them away by an awful demonstration of His love" (2). The very heart of the Epistle to the Romans is this insistence that sin is a serious matter and it must be dealt with. God cannot condone it; He cannot overlook it. "We see in it (the Cross) how seriously God deals with the sins which for the time He seemed to pass by. It is a demonstration of His righteousness - that is, in the widest sense, of His consistency with His own character, - which would have been violated by indifference to sin" (3).

It is impossible for God to condone sin, but man would like to explain it away. Various attempts have been made in this direction but none of these satisfy the human conscience. Man has a sense of guilt which has its roots in a wrong relationship with God. Denney speaks of the bad conscience, the sense of guilt,

(1) MM, p. 114.

(2) II Corinthians, p. 213.

(3) "Romans", p. 609.

being answerable to God(1). And "this sense of being wrong with God, under His displeasure, excluded from His fellowship, afraid to meet Him, yet bound to meet Him, is the sense of guilt"(2). Man knows he is answerable to God for his sins and nothing will ever convince him otherwise. "There is something in the conscience" says Denney "which will not allow it to believe that God can simply condone sin" (3).

What is man to do in the face of these two serious and inescapable facts, the fact that God condemns sin and the fact that man knows this in his inmost heart? These two facts, in themselves, apart from the Christian Doctrine of the Atonement lead man to utter and complete despair. God must deal seriously with the fact of sin but if He should give to man his just desserts, He would have to destroy man and that He cannot do for He loves man. He made man for communion with Himself and to destroy him would be to frustrate His divine purpose. This presents us with a dilemma; it confronts us with a seemingly insoluble difficulty.

This difficulty leads us to a question, the answer to which may lead to a solution of the problem. The question is this: "Is Forgiveness possible?" The New Testament teaches that forgiveness is possible. But it does not only tell us that forgiveness is possible; it goes on to explain how forgiveness is possible. It is not an easy solution to the problem. No easy solution would meet the requirements of a righteous God or the needs of the guilty conscience. It is a central conviction of the New Testament that

(1) MM, p. 83.

(2) MM, p. 84.

(3) MM, p. 111.

forgiveness is possible only through the Atonement. This is the heart of the New Testament. It knows nothing of forgiveness apart from atonement. It is possible for God to forgive, but only at infinite cost (1).

The soul of man stands in desperate need of an assurance of forgiveness; otherwise it will be led to despair which is the feeling that life has no ultimate meaning. Denney with his profound insight into the needs of the human heart saw this very clearly. What the soul alienated from God by sin needs most of all is "the manifestation of a love which can assure it that neither the sin itself nor the soul's condemnation of it, nor even the divine reaction against it culminating in death, is the last reality in the universe; the last reality is rather love itself making our sin its own in all its reality, submitting as one with us to all the divine reaction against it, and loving us to the end through it and in spite of it" (2). An assurance of God's forgiveness is essential for Christian living for only in this assurance does there come that contagious spirit of joy which makes a Christian a witnessing Christian (3).

We have dealt with the fact that atonement is necessary because of sin and we have reached the place where we have seen that forgiveness is possible. Because of the serious nature of sin only God can make forgiveness possible and this He does through His Son. The New Testament knows nothing of forgiveness apart from Christ and this leads to an enquiry about the Person of Christ.

(1) MM, pp. 112ff.

(2) DR, p. 218.

(3) DC, p. 160.

Chapter 4

The Saviour - The One Who Makes Atonement

The New Testament is quite clear about the fact that only God can forgive sins. It is not something man can do. It is true we can forgive those who have wronged us but ultimate forgiveness, the sense of being right with God, comes only as a Divine gift. Forgiveness in the ultimate sense is a Divine act. Only God can forgive sins and only a Divine Saviour can make atonement. This leads to a consideration of the Person who makes the Atonement. "The doctrine of the Atonement", says Denney, "secures for Christ His place in the Gospel, and makes it inevitable that we should have a Christology or a doctrine of His Person" (1).

It is the Saviour who makes the Atonement and this Saviour is a divine person. Now we ask the question: "On what grounds do we consider Christ divine?". This question can only be answered by a consideration of the New Testament as a whole. We can go nowhere else for a consideration of this question, for the New Testament is our earliest source for the life of Christ, We must go back to the historical Jesus as He is portrayed in the New Testament. Denney insists that "it is the historical Christ to whom we have to go back as the true fountain of our theology" (2).

What does the New Testament say about the Person of Christ? This is the question Denney considers in his Book, "Jesus and the

(1) DC, p. 176.

(2) ST, p. 44.

Gospel". And he begins with this question: "Is it the case that the Christian religion, ~~as life, as the New Testament, exhibits it,~~ really puts Jesus into the place indicated, and that everything in this life and everything especially in the relations of God and man is determined by Him?" (1). In other words: "Does the Christian religion as exhibited in the New Testament put Christ at the very centre of its faith, make Him not only a pattern of Faith but an object of faith?".

To answer this question Denney turned to the New Testament. To answer great theological questions he always went back to the New Testament. First and foremost he was interested in what the New Testament had to say on the subject. The cry of his day was: "Back to the Jesus of history", and to support his position Denney always went back to the Jesus of history. He was impatient with those who distinguished between the historical and dogmatic view of Christ's person. He believed the two were one and he wrote his book "Jesus and the Gospel" to prove his point. Briefly stated, his position is this: Christ has the same unique place in the earliest documents of the New Testament as He has in the Church's faith.

- i. Does the Christian Religion as exhibited in the New Testament put Christ at the very centre of its faith?

What place is given to Christ in the New Testament? Is Christ merely the pattern of faith or is He the object of faith?

(1) JG, p. 2.

These are the questions we must try to answer. What was the mind of the early Christians about Christ? And is their conception borne out by an appeal to the New Testament as a whole? (1)

The central thesis Denney seeks to support is this: Christ holds a unique place in the minds of the first Christians and in the minds of the authors of the various books of the New Testament. We shall now consider Denney's views regarding the various interpretations of the Person of Christ as exhibited in the various books of the New Testament.

The Person of Christ in primitive Christian Preaching

The earliest examples of Christian preaching that we have are in the sermons of Peter in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Speaking to the Jews on the day of Pentecost Peter says: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works"(2). It is obvious from a careful consideration of Peter's sermon in this chapter that Christ held a unique place in his mind. "The criticism which would have us believe that from the resurrection onward the Jesus of history was practically **displaced by an ideal** Christ of faith is beside the mark. The Christ of faith was the Jesus of history" (3).

In Peter's address in the home of Cornelius as recorded

(1) JG, p. 5.

(2) Acts, 2:22 RV.

(3) JG, p. 15.

in Acts chapter 10 we get the same emphasis on the uniqueness of Christ. Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one, and an anointed one refers to a king. Peter speaks of "good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)" (1). Jesus is the King through whom the kingdom comes; He is the King through whom all prophets are fulfilled (2) and as such He holds an exclusive place in the minds of the early apostles. Denney says: "It is clear that Jesus had in the earliest preaching and the earliest faith of Christians that solitary and incommunicable place which the Church assigns Him still" (3). Jesus held a unique place in primitive Christianity. The earliest Christians were not men who shared the faith of Jesus; He was the object of their faith (4).

The Person of Christ in the mind of Paul

Next Denney discusses the place Christ held in the mind of Paul. Once again it is seen to be a unique place, a place shared by no other.

In the period before the turn of the century there was a strong tendency to differentiate between what has come to be known as the religion of Jesus and the faith of Paul. It is a decidedly false antithesis in the light of the facts recorded in the New Testament. After Paul became a Christian he did not live in a vacuum; he lived in the midst of the early Christian community. He must have known what the early Christians thought of Christ. ^{he lived} It is impossible to believe in the midst of these early Christians

(1) Acts 10:36 R.V.

(2) Acts 10:43

(3) JG, p. 17.

(4) JG, p. 20.

and yet was ignorant of the place Christ held in their minds (1). Mark and Luke were intimate friends and fellowworkers of Paul; is it reasonable to believe that he did not know their position in regard to the person of Christ? The facts are that Paul's conception of the uniqueness of Jesus for Christian faith is the same as that of Mark and Luke.

Peter and Paul were of one mind on this matter. Peter declares: "there is no salvation in any other" (2). Paul writes: "other foundation can no man lay" (3). For both, the foundation stone of Christianity was a unique person.

Two great controversies rocked the apostolic Church to its very foundations. One was the controversy which lies behind the situation in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. The Jews maintained that to be right with God it was necessary not only to have faith in Christ but also to be circumcised. Paul vehemently denied this and maintained that trust in Christ's atoning death and it alone put a man right with God. "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (4). For Paul, Christ crucified and risen, was the whole of Christianity. "Anything that compromises this simple and absolute truth, anything that proposes to supplement Christ on the one side or faith on the other is treason to the Gospel" (5).

The idea which lies at the root of the trouble in Colosse is that Christ is not unique; He has a place in religion but only

(1) JG, p. 21.

(2) Acts, 4:12.

(3) I Cor. 3:11.

(4) Gal. 2:16 RV.

(5) JG, p. 28.

a place with other beings. The heresy whatever specific form it took failed to give to Christ a unique place. Paul denies this error; for to him, Christ is unique. "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (1). We have here to do with "a person who can only be characterised as eternal and divine" (2). Then Denney adds these significant words: "It is not possible to do justice to Jesus until we realise that in Him we are in contact with the eternal truth and being of God" (3). The Colossian heresy brought out clearly the fact that for Paul, Christ had a place no other could share.

A third fact which throws light on Paul's conception of Christ is the place Christ has in Paul's interpretation of the Atonement. In fact Denney maintains that this is the signal proof of the unique place Christ had in the faith of Paul (4). Paul tells us that redemption is through Christ (5), that Christ is a propitiation for sin (6), and that He was made a curse for us (7). There is no other person of whom Paul could say such things.

As we look at the place Christ had in the faith of Paul we see clearly that it was a unique place, a place that no man can share. "All nature, all history, all revelation and redemption, all that is human, all that is divine, can be understood

(1) Col. 2:9 RV.

(2) JG, p. 34.

(3) JG, pp. 34ff.

(4) JG, p. 41.

(5) Eph. 1:7.

(6) Ro. 3:25.

(7) Gal. 3:13.

only through Him" (1).

In his consideration of the person of Christ Denney turns from the writings of Paul to the four Gospels. First he deals with the Synoptic Gospels and later with the fourth Gospel and other Johannine writings.

The Person of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels

The historical school of Higher Criticism as we have seen maintained that the place given to Jesus in the Gospels is not rightly His in the light of the historical facts. Before we take issue on this matter we must first find the true place Jesus had in the minds of the three evangelists. What kind of person was He in their eyes? Was He a unique person or was He just another human being greater than the ordinary man undoubtedly but still only a human being? Denney's thesis is that Jesus, in the minds of the evangelists, was a unique person. Whether the evangelists were mistaken in their estimate of Jesus is another question which we shall consider in the latter half of this chapter. Of course, Denney, never for a moment suggests they were mistaken. In fact he goes to great lengths to deny this.

But the question before us now is: "How did the three Evangelists think of Jesus?"

Mark opens his Gospel with these words: "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (2). Jesus not only is the subject of the Gospel, He is the Gospel. The Gospel is not merely the story of Jesus (3). All through the Gospel Mark gives

(1) JG, p. 42.

(2) Mk. 1:1 rv.

(3) JG, p. 58.

to Jesus a unique, and incomparable place (1). The Jesus whom Mark describes is not, in the eyes of Mark, a mere Galilean carpenter.

When we turn to Matthew, we find that in his mind Jesus holds this same unique and incomparable place. Jesus, in the mind of Matthew, is the great religious teacher. He is not just another prophet following in the footsteps of the great Old Testament prophets. He is the One of whom they spoke. Old Testament prophecy finds its fulfilment in Him. It was He of whom the great prophets spoke. "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet" runs like a refrain through the whole book (2).

For Matthew Jesus was not only the great teacher, He is the Messianic King. He is Emmanuel, 'God with us'. And this divine Sonship "connects Him immediately with God, and makes His presence with us the guarantee and the equivalent of the presence of God Himself" (3).

Matthew's conception of Jesus is illustrated in his account of our Lord's last commission. He sees Jesus in that final scene as the One to whom all authority in heaven and earth is given and as the One who is ever present with His disciples. He is the exalted Lord who shares the throne with God. "That He was truly human it could never have occurred to

(1) JG, p. 61.

(2) JG, pp. 61ff.

(3) JG, p. 64.

the evangelist to doubt; but just as little could it have occurred to him to think that He was merely human" (1). In the mind of Matthew as in the mind of Mark Jesus had a unique place.

When we turn to Luke we find the same story. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and Luke leaves us in no doubt as to what he means by these epithets (2). "He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David" (3).

In the story of Christ's visit to Nazareth in Luke 4 we see Him as the One in whom God's gracious promises are fulfilled. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears" (4). Then again in the story of the walk to Emmaus, Luke pictures Jesus as the One who is the subject of all the prophecies in the Old Testament. A careful study of the place Jesus has in the mind of Luke leads again to a confirmation of the important truth that Jesus holds a unique place in the minds of the New Testament writers.

The thought is sometimes put forward that the view of Christ's person presented to us by the Synoptic writers are the peculiar views of these three men, or of the three men who wrote these Gospels, if we wish to dispute the traditional authorship.

(1) JG, p. 66.

(2) JG, p. 67.

(3) Lu. 1:32ff

(4) Lu. 4:18 ff. RV.

The major difficulty in such a theory is, as Denney points out (1), that these Gospels were produced in the church, for the Church, and by men who were members of the Church. They do not represent Jesus as He was apprehended by peculiar individuals but as He was apprehended by the early Church. Jesus lived "not as another good man, however distinguished His goodness might be, but as one who confronted men in the saving power and therefore in the truth and reality of God" (2).

The Person of Christ in the Johannine writings

Denney accepts the common authorship of the Apocalypse, the Epistles of John, and the Fourth Gospel. And so for our present purpose we follow Denney in this regard.

The central thing about the Apocalypse in regard to the Person of Christ is the fact that in this book Christ is the One who is worshipped. We read in 1:5 "Unto Him that loveth us and loosed us from our sins by His blood". Denney describes this worship: "Nothing could be conceived in worship more intense, more passionate and unreserved than this: it gives to Jesus Christ, with irrepressible abandonment, the utmost that the soul can ever give to God" (3). The vision of Christ in chapter 1:12ff. ascribes numerous divine attributes to Him. He speaks of Himself as "the first and the last", the One who has "the keys of death and Hades". It is certainly clear from this

(1) JG, p. 71.

(2) JG, p. 71.

(3) JG, p. 75.

passage that John intended to give to Jesus a unique and incomparable place.

The cause of the fierce persecution behind the book of Revelation was the fact that the Christians refused to give to the Emperor the worship they could give to God alone. In the light of this fact it is inconceivable that they thought of Christ as anything less than a unique person.

In the opening verses of John's first epistle, the writer tells his readers that their fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (1). He places the Father and the Son side by side. Jesus is given a unique place with the Father. The central emphasis of this epistle is that to deny that Jesus is the Christ is to deny the Father. "The one fatal lie is that which declares Jesus is not the Christ" (2). Jesus is given a unique place with the Father all through the Epistle. For the writer of this epistle, Jesus has a universal and absolute significance which no other being can have (3).

John, in this epistle, lays great emphasis on the significant fact that in Jesus Christ the historical and the eternal are united. The fact that the eternal and the Divine became historical is ~~a fact to which Denney is constantly returning.~~ **a fact to which Denney is constantly returning. (4)**

Once again, from evidence found ~~in the First Epistle~~ **in the First Epistle**, of John, Denney drives home the fact of the uniqueness of Jesus. He speaks of "the universal and absolute significance of Jesus in the faith

(1) I John 1:3.

(2) JG, p. 84.

(3) JG, p. 82.

(4) JG, p. 86.

of the writer" (1).

As we approach the Gospel of John we are struck by an atmosphere quite different to that found in the Synoptic Gospels, in this respect that the Jesus who fills the mind of the writer is not only the Christ of the Galilean hills and the thoroughfares of Jerusalem. He is this; let us never forget this. John knows nothing of the contrast which higher criticism draws between the Jesus of history and the Christ of the Church's faith. The Christ who speaks in the pages of the Fourth Gospel is the historical Christ and the eternal Christ. Denney tells us that the Christ whom John portrays for us "is not only the Jesus who taught in the synagogues and fields of Galilee, or in the temple courts and streets of Jerusalem but also the exalted Lord whose spirit vivifies and interprets the memories of Jesus in the heart of an intimate, devoted, and experienced disciple" (2). John is thinking of the Jesus who taught in Jerusalem; he is thinking even more of the exalted and glorified Jesus who sits at God's right hand. For the writer of the Fourth Gospel, Jesus has a unique and universal significance. No mere words are sufficient to express the exalted place Jesus has in the mind of John. But in the opening verses of the Gospel, the author does endeavour to express in the highest terms of which he knows, the universal significance of Jesus. "To set everything into relation to Christ, under this profound sense of His universal significance, is the purpose of the writer in the

(1) JG, p. 82.

(2) JG, pp. 87f.

opening verses of his Gospel" (1). The purpose of the prologue is to set before us, John's sense of the divine and eternal significance of Jesus. In order to do this, John chose the most significant term of which he was aware, the term 'Logos'. "He borrowed the Logos because it lent itself to the convenient and intelligible expression of this independent Christian conviction" (2), that is Christ's divine and eternal significance.

But it is not only in the prologue that Jesus is given a unique and incomparable place. Twice in the Gospel, he is referred to as "the only begotten in the bosom of the Father" (3). A person described in this unique way is no ordinary human being. "He is not conceived as the author of the Gospel conceived Him, He has not the place in our faith which He had in His life, if He can be classified with even the greatest and most spiritual men" (4).

The unique place given to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is seen very clearly in the great "I am" passages. Jesus is "the bread of life" (5), "the light of the world" (6), "the door" (7) "the good Shepherd" (8), "The resurrection and the life" (9), and "the way, the truth, and the life" (10). These are words even the simplest can understand. They point to the fact that there is no human need that Jesus cannot meet (11).

Repeatedly in the Fourth Gospel, the death of Christ is

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| (1) JG, p. 91. | (2) JG, p. 91. | (3) Jo. 1:18 and 3:16 |
| (4) JG, p. 93. | (5) Jo. 6:35 | (6) Jo. 8:12 |
| (7) Jo. 10:9 | (8) Jo. 10:14 | (9) Jo. 11:25 |
| (10) Jo. 14:6 | (11) JG, p. 95. | |

closely linked with the forgiveness of sins (1). It is no merely human person who brings forgiveness through His death. We shall deal with this thought later but it is significant for our present purpose that forgiveness can only come through the death of Christ if He is a unique person.

This treatment of John's conception brings to a close the conception of the person of Christ as it is illustrated in the various authors of the New Testament books. We have omitted the treatment of the subject in the Epistle to the Hebrews and other minor books of the New Testament, in order to keep this chapter from becoming too extended. We now come to a brief consideration of the New Testament evidence as a whole on this subject. The most significant fact that arises out of this survey is that the various writers of the New Testament present us with a self-consistent New Testament doctrine of the Person of Christ. Denney points this out in a significant paragraph:

"There is really such a thing as a self-consistent New Testament and a self-consistent Christian religion. There is a unity in all these early Christian books which is powerful enough to absorb and subdue their differences and that unity is to be found in a common religious relation to Christ, a common debt to Him, a common sense that everything in the relations of God and man must be and is determined by Him" (2).

(1) Jo. 1:29; 11:50; 12:33

(2) JG, pp. 100ff.

This leads us to ask the question: "Why did this unique Person come into the world?" All the New Testament writers are again united in their testimony to the purpose of Christ's coming. The relations between God and man have been profoundly affected by sin, and in the minds of the New Testament writers ^{the} purpose of Christ's coming was to deal with the situation which sin has created (1). This thought links us with the problem of sin we discussed in Chapter 3 and leads us on to our discussion of the way God dealt with sin in the Atonement.

When we go back to the individual writers of the New Testament we find nothing to support the idea that Jesus was a child of God like ourselves (2). But when we are asked whether this conception of Jesus as a unique and incomparable Person is true to the historical facts, there are two answers to this question. First, "it is not easy to admit ... that Christianity itself, in the only form in which it has ever existed and functioned as a religion among men, has been a mistake and a misconception from the first" (3). And secondly, as we shall see in the next section, the place given to Jesus by the writers of the New Testament is the place He gives to Himself.

Thus we are compelled to accept the truth that the writers of the New Testament gave to Jesus a unique and incomparable place. If our only evidence is the minds of the writers of the New Testament as exhibited in their writings, we are forced to

(1) JG, p. 101.

(2) JG, pp. 102f.

(3) JG, pp. 103f.

admit they all gave to Jesus a place no human being can share. For them Jesus was not just the pattern of faith but the object of faith.

We have considered Denney's views regarding the place which was given to Jesus in the minds of those who wrote the books of the New Testament, and we have found that he believes their testimony to the uniqueness of Jesus is unanimous. It is possible to put forward the argument that all these writers had a wrong view of the Person of Christ. It is possible but most improbable. But the probability of this being true is shattered by an appeal to two major historical facts which corroborate the views expressed by those who wrote the New Testament. These facts are the Resurrection of Christ and the self-consciousness of Christ. We shall now pass to a consideration of these.

ii. The witness of the Resurrection to the Uniqueness of Christ

There is one fact about the resurrection of Christ which no man is able to dispute and that is the fact that the early disciples believed Christ rose from the dead. There is a dogmatic conception of history which tells us beforehand that no such event as the Resurrection is possible (1). But such a view holds little weight in the light of the historical facts. Early Christianity is inexplicable apart from the Resurrection. It can be argued that the resurrection stories are the product of the fertile minds of the writers of the New Testament. But this leaves out of consideration

(1) JG, p. 108.

one very important fact. "The real historical evidence for the resurrection is the fact that it was believed, preached, propagated and produced its fruit and effect in the new phenomenon of the Christian Church long before any of our gospels was written" (1). The existence of the Church and the New Testament are without explanation if there was no Resurrection. It is easier to believe Jesus actually rose from the dead than to believe the early Church had its origin in an event which never occurred.

According to Denney our oldest written evidence for the Resurrection is I Corinthians 15. He cites Sanday who dates I Corinthians in the year 55 A.D. (2). What Paul taught was the common Christian tradition. He became a Christian not long after the death of Christ. Denney tells us that according to Harnack it was one year after, according to Ramsay three or four years after, according to Lightfoot six or seven years after (3). At a date so close to the alleged events, we find that the fundamental facts of Christianity were these: Christ died, was buried, rose, and appeared to certain people. It is hardly possible to believe that Paul was unaware of the true facts. To question the fact of the resurrection creates more problems than it solves. "It is not easy to discredit offhand, as mere illusion, what has meant so much in the life of the human race" (4). It is impossible to explain the moral power of the Resurrection in the lives of the early Christians unless the Resurrection is a fact. No one can

(1) JG, p. 111.

(2) JG, p. 112.

(3) JG, p. 113.

(4) JG, p. 120.

dispute the moral change in the lives of the early Christians. This change could not have had its basis in a story which had no historical basis.

As we consider the different facts regarding the Resurrection of Christ, we are forced to the conclusion that Jesus actually rose. This places Jesus in a unique and incomparable position and confirms the position taken by the various writers of the New Testament in relation to the Person of Christ.

iii. The Self-Revelation of Jesus

In the last analysis our final court of appeal as we consider the uniqueness of Jesus is the mind of Jesus Himself. No one will dispute the fact that the final authority for any Christian doctrine is the mind of Jesus Himself. If Jesus actually considered himself a unique and incomparable person there is nothing more to say on the question. If the early disciples came to believe in the uniqueness of Jesus, it must be primarily because He thought of Himself as unique. At first they thought of Him as one of themselves, just an ordinary person, but something led them to change their minds on the subject. We naturally ask what it was that caused them to change their minds (1). Along with this change of mind in the disciples, there came an astonishing outburst of intellectual and spiritual energy which we see in the religious life of the early Church (2). Of course, we can say that the Christian religion from the beginning was a mistake but the great difficulty here is that "it leaves the Christian religion,

(1) JG, p. 160.

(2) JG, p. 166.

in the only form in which it is known to history, without any historical explanation" (1).

To say that the Christian religion, from the beginning, was based on an error does not satisfy any thoughtful person. We must seek for a more satisfying explanation than this, and so we turn to the self-revelation of Jesus.

A few preliminary considerations are necessary before we turn to the Gospel of Mark which is our fundamental source for this self-revelation.

"It is agreed that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are based on Mark" (2). Matthew and Luke frequently diverge from Mark but they never agree against Mark in these divergences (3). Furthermore, Denney gives in detail the argument to support the position that Mark is based on the testimony of the man who stood closer to Jesus than any other (4) that is on Peter. If Peter did not know the mind of Christ, no one ever did know His mind. We are forced to this conclusion that in the Gospel of Mark along with Matthew and Luke we have a true self-revelation of Christ.

A detailed consideration of Denney's account of the self-revelation of Christ is impossible within the limits of this thesis, which is primarily a study of the doctrine of the Atonement. We are only able to deal with a few of the most significant facts. First there is the account of our Lord's Baptism, as recorded in

(1) JG, p. 173.

(2) JG, p. 174.

(3) JG, pp. 174~~ff.~~.

(4) JG, pp. 175~~ff.~~.

all three of the Synoptic Gospels (1). The words "Thou art my Son" come from Psalm 2; there they are addressed by God to the ideal King of Israel. The words "the beloved in whom I am well-pleased" are from Isaiah 42 and they refer to the "Servant of the Lord". Names may indicate certain characteristics of a person, but "Jesus was greater than any name, and we must interpret the names He uses through the Person and His experiences and powers, and not the Person through a formal definition of the names" (2). A detailed consideration of the story of the Baptism reveals to us that Jesus thought of Himself as related to God in a unique way. The place given to Jesus in this story gives to Jesus the unique place He holds throughout the Gospels.

Next there is the story of Christ's temptation in the wilderness (3). Here again we see Jesus conscious of the fact He is the Son of God and the ideal King, in and through whom God's sovereignty is established. "Conscious of His calling, conscious of the Divine power which has come upon Him" He looks out on the world and upon the ways ascendancy over it may be won (4). The story of Christ's temptation shows unmistakably, in the mind of Jesus, how the Kingdom of God is wound up with Himself. The coming of the kingdom is involved in His victory.

We turn now to the account of the calling of the Twelve (5). Denney, after establishing the historical nature of this story (6) goes on to ask what significance the story has for us in our present discussion. Jesus told His disciples that man's final destiny

(1) Mk. 1:9-11; Matt. 3:13-17; Lu. 3:21ff. (2) JG, p. 206.

(3) Mk. 1:12ff; Matt. 4:1-11; Lu. 4:1-13. (4) JG, p. 210.

(5) Mk. 3:13-19; Matt. 10; Lu. 6:12-19. (6) JG, p. 218.

is dependent on fidelity to Him (1). The mind which could think in this way must be conscious of a unique relationship to God. Once again we see the unique place given to Jesus in the New Testament has its basis in His own teaching. In the above mentioned passage Jesus identifies loyalty to Himself with loyalty to God. It is impossible in the light of this fact for Him to be anything but a unique person.

When Jesus said to His disciples: "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (2)., He was claiming as the context shows, a devotion above the love of one's dearest. There is only one ground on which Jesus has any right to claim such devotion and that is on the ground that he stands alone, apart from other mortals.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares: "Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake" (3). He tells men that the supreme blessedness comes to those who suffer for Him. Why should supreme blessedness be linked with suffering shame for a Galilean teacher? There really is only one explanation. The Galilean teacher is much more than appears on the surface.

A further consideration of other passages in the Sermon on the Mount reveals a Person who claims a legislative authority beyond that of the great Lawgiver of the Old Testament. "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill;

(1) Mt. 10:32

(2) Mt. 10:39 RV

(3) Lu. 6:22 RV

..... but I say unto you" (1). The sovereign legislative authority of Jesus stands absolutely alone in Scripture (2). And this along with Jesus' consciousness that all that God had initiated in the earlier dispensation was to be consummated in Him, gives to Him a solitary and incomparable place (3). In the words: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven" (4), and in the following verses, especially in the parable of the two houses, we see Jesus making claims to be the final Judge of men. "It is the consciousness that the Speaker is nothing less than the final Judge of all which makes the parable of the builders on the rock and the sand, with which the Sermon closes, the most solemn and over-powering of all the words of Jesus" (5).

Denney goes on to draw evidence from the story of the healing of the Centurion's Servant, the relations between Jesus and John the Baptist, and certain isolated sayings of Jesus, to substantiate the argument that Jesus thought of Himself as a unique and incomparable Person. Denney goes on to consider these passages (6) and there is no need to go into further details at this point of the argument.

Denney turns next to a consideration of Mark's history of the Son of God. Here again the evidence is clear and unmistakable. There is first of all, the story of the healing of the man let down

(1) Mt. 5:21ff. RV

(2) JG, p. 245.

(3) JG, p. 248.

(4) Mt. 7:21ff. RV

(5) JG, p.251.

(6) JG, pp. 255-284.

through the roof. In this story, Jesus claims the power to forgive sins (1). It is easy to say to a paralysed man: "arise take up thy bed and walk", but it is hazardous because if nothing happens the healer is exposed (2). The scribes question the spiritual authority of Jesus to forgive sins but what they were unable to question was that God's power to help was present in Jesus in a unique way. If the power of God to help is present in Jesus in a unique way, it is fresh evidence for our position that Jesus is a unique person.

In Mark 2:18-20, Jesus refers to Himself as the Bridegroom, and this implies a consciousness on the part of Jesus of Himself and of His place in God's work which men are resolved not to recognize (3).

From a study of the story of Peter's Confession at Caesarea (4) we learn that the matter which was of supreme importance to Jesus was what the disciples thought of Him. To Him it was vital that His disciples should receive a true impression of who He truly was. "To His mind, evidently, there can be nothing so important as that **men should have received a true impression of Him, should think of Him as He thinks of Himself, and in their attitude to Him respond to what He knows Himself to be**" (5). Why was Jesus concerned about this matter? It was because He wanted them to grasp the truth that He was a unique Person.

Finally, in no story in Mark does Jesus give to Himself a more

(1) Mk. 2:10

(2) JG, p. 306.

(3) JG, p. 318.

(4) Mk. 8:27ff.

(5) JG, p. 323.

unique place than in the story of the Last Supper. The central fact here is that His death is linked with the forgiveness of sins. One who brings forgiveness through His death must of necessity be a unique person.

As Denney brings his consideration of the Person of Christ to a close he arrives at some very definite conclusions which are of supreme importance for the doctrine of the Atonement.

It would be absurd to entertain the idea that Jesus, by His death, could atone for the sins of the world unless He was a unique person. No mere human being can make atonement for the sins of the world, And unless Jesus is a unique person, unless He is God in human flesh, there can be no atonement.

But Denney's arguments for the uniqueness of Jesus stand on firm foundations. In summing up the arguments, he asks two important questions: "Has Christianity existed from the beginning only in the form of a faith which has Jesus as its object and not at all in the form of a faith which has had Jesus simply as its living pattern?" (1). "Can Christianity, as even the New Testament exhibits it, justify itself by appeal to Christ?" (2).

As we have studied the evidence as given in the mind of Christ, and as it is given in the various writers of the New Testament, we have been certain of the answer very early in our studies. And as we have progressed, the evidence has gathered weight with each consideration of a fresh incident in the life of Christ and with each consideration of a different New Testament writer. Denney gives a

(1) JG, p. 373.

(2) JG, p. 373.

very definite answer in these words: "To both questions the answer must be in the affirmative. The most careful scrutiny of the New Testament discloses no trace of a Christianity in which Jesus has any other place than that which is assigned to Him in the faith of the historical Church" (1). All the writers of the New Testament "set Him in the same incomparable place. They all acknowledge Him the same immeasurable debt. He determines as no other does or can, all their relations to God and each other" (2).

From the evidence brought before us in the second half of this chapter, we have found that this unique and incomparable place given to Jesus in the New Testament is confirmed by an appeal to the mind of our Lord Himself.

In Denney's mind, there is not the shadow of a doubt that Jesus was a unique Person. Every writer of the New Testament believed Him to be unique. Those who knew Him most intimately believed Him to be unique. But most important of all Jesus considered Himself unique and incomparable.

We have seen above that no one but a unique person could make atonement for the sins of the world. And so we have before us that unique and incomparable Person, the world's only Saviour. In the light of this unique fact, we turn now to a consideration first within the pages of the New Testament and later to a consideration of the Atonement, as it has been understood by the great theologians of the past.

(1) JG, p. 373.

(2) JG, p. 373.

Chapter 5

The Atonement in the New Testament - Part I

Before passing on to a consideration of the different interpretations of the Atonement in the New Testament, we shall consider very briefly, the place of the doctrine of the Atonement in the New Testament as a whole.

Once again we are concerned only with what Denney had to say on the subject. We have seen that Denney was never particularly interested in speculative theories of the Atonement. His real interest lay in what the New Testament had to say about the Atonement. He was not uninterested in what the great theologians of the past had to say about the Atonement but his chief interest was not in the different theories of the Atonement. For Denney in any consideration of the doctrine of the Atonement, the New Testament is the centre of focus.

In our attempt to understand the doctrine of the Atonement, it is quite obvious that the key to the situation is the teaching of the New Testament, and especially the teaching of our Lord Himself. We have seen, in our study, of the Person of Christ that the New Testament is a unity on the subject. For all the writers of the New Testament, Jesus was a unique and incomparable Person. From another point of view the New Testament is also a unity. When we come to a consideration of the doctrine of the Atonement in the New Testament, we find that the New Testament

is a unity in its testimony to the death of Christ, as an atoning death. The unity of the New Testament, says Denney, is its testimony "to a love in God which we do not earn, which we can never repay, but which comes to ^{meet} us with mercy, dealing, nevertheless in all earnest with our sins" (1). The Atonement is absolutely central in the minds of all the New Testament writers. The Gospel where Jesus is regarded as the object of faith, the Redeemer of men from their sin and their reconciler to God through His death on the Cross is the one which is characteristic of the New Testament from beginning to end (2). Some would make the Incarnation the focus of attention but in doing so they are disloyal to the New Testament. The New Testament knows nothing of an Incarnation that can be defined apart from Atonement (3). Christ became incarnate to put away sin. "Not Bethlehem but Calvary, is the focus of revelation and any construction of Christianity which ignores ^{or denies} this distorts Christianity by putting it out of focus" (4).

The death of Christ is central in the New Testament because it provides the only satisfying solution to the world's supreme religious problem, namely the problem of sin. "There is in truth", says Denney, "only one religious problem in the world - the existence of sin. Similarly there is only one religious solution of it - the

(1) DC, p. 174.

(2) DR, p. 128.

(3) ~~DC, p. 172~~

(4) DC, p. 179.

Atonement, in which the love of God bears the sin, taking it, in all its terrible reality for us, upon itself. And nothing can be central or fundamental either in Christian preaching or in Christian thinking which is not in direct and immediate relation to this problem and its solution" (1).

Denney was one of those who was not interested in the Atonement as a philosophical system. He believed it was the task of the mind to understand and interpret what is and not to wander off into speculative theories about what might have been (2). He points out that our concern can never be with a world we have never known and never can know (3). This is the true spirit of the New Testament. The writers of the New Testament were never interested in purely speculative theories. They dealt with facts and supremely with the facts of the Atonement.

But we cannot stop here. The tragedy is that many do stop here. They believed that Christ lived and died but that is all they do believe. But facts have no meaning for us apart from some theory that explains them. Denney says there is no such thing as a fact without a theory (4). And in another passage he enlarges on this statement. "A certain theory," he says, "is seen to be essential to the fact, a certain theology to be the constitutive force in the religion. The death of Christ was what it was

(1) DC, p. 180.

(2) DR, p. 182.

(3) DR, p. 182 and p. 269.

(4) ST, p. 106.

to him (Paul) because it was capable of a certain interpretation; his theory of it, if we choose to put it so, gave it its power over him. If these interpretations and constructions are rejected, it must not be in the name of 'fact' as opposed to 'theory', but in the name of other interpretations more adequate and constraining. A fact of which there is absolutely no theory is a fact which is without relation to anything, in the universe" (1).

The importance of the death of Christ is not in the mere fact that He died, though His actual death is absolutely necessary, but in the fact that He died for our sins. The death of Christ was no ordinary death. In the first place, it was the death of a unique Person, and in the second place it was a death which had a unique purpose. And the purpose was to make atonement for sin. It is the purpose of the New Testament to explain how Christ made atonement. The New Testament, to use its very simplest terminology says, "Christ died for our sins".

Denney turns now to four different treatments of the New Testament doctrine of the Atonement.

i. Christ's Own Teaching

We have seen in the previous chapter that there is no ground for regarding Jesus merely as the pattern of faith. This truth is substantiated both by an appeal to the writers of the

(1) "II Corinthians", pp. 226ff.

New Testament books and by an appeal to the mind of Christ. The Gospel where Jesus is regarded as the object of faith, the Redeemer of men, from sin, and their Reconciler to God through His death on the Cross is the one which is characteristic of the New Testament from beginning to end (1).

Jesus as the object of faith is primarily a Saviour, a Redeemer, the one who reconciles men to God through His death. There are those who would minimise the importance of the Atonement in the mind of Christ and put the stress on His Incarnation. By an appeal to the mind of Christ as exhibited in the Synoptic Gospels we are led to see that this position is untenable. In fact Christ is very definite about the purpose of His coming for He says that "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (2). This is enough, for at least for a starting point. Further appeal to the mind of Christ as exhibited in the Synoptic Gospels will produce abundant evidence to confirm this central statement of Christ.

Christ stated that the purpose of His coming was to make atonement and He linked this Atonement very closely with His death. In other words to make atonement for sin is a costly business. Jesus did stress the freeness of forgiveness and appeal

(1) DR, p. 128.

(2) Mt. 20:28 RV,

to such passages as the parable of the Prodigal Son and that of the Two Debtors confirms this. But when Jesus emphasized the freeness of forgiveness, He did not deny that forgiveness has other characteristics (1). To say that the Parable of the Prodigal Son teaches the whole truth about forgiveness is obviously not in line with the rest of our Lord's teaching. Even from a human point of view, forgiveness is a costly thing. We may forgive freely but the cost to us is great. Anyone who knows what it is to forgive or be forgiven "knows also that it is the most costly and tragic of all experiences" (2). If human forgiveness is a costly thing, is it logical to believe that God is less than human in this respect and that the forgiveness He grants is easier and cheaper than human forgiveness? It is not logical and no one can believe anything so inconsistent. When God forgives the sins of mankind, the cost to Him is staggering (3). In contrast to human forgiveness, says Denney, "how dearly bought must be that great forgiveness which is the highest achievement of the love which bears the sin of the world" (4).

To forgive sins is a costly business; in fact forgiveness is not possible except through Christ's atoning death. Our Lord made this quite clear when He said: "the Son of man came to give His life a ransom for many" (5). If this verse

(1) DR, p. 132.

(2) DR, p. 135.

(3) Jo. 3:16.

(4) DR, p. 136.

(5) Matt. 20:28 RV.

means anything, it means that forgiveness is only possible through Christ's atoning death, and if the primary purpose of His coming was to make atonement, then we must expect to find that our Lord's death had a central place in His thoughts from the very beginning of His ministry. And this is just what we find.

In the very earliest pages of the Gospel, excluding the accounts of His birth and childhood, we have references to our Lord's coming death. At His baptism there comes a voice from heaven which says: "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased" (1). There is a double reference here, first to the words of Psalm 2, "thou art my Son", and secondly to Isa. 42, "my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth". This second reference is from one of the Servant passages in Deutero-Isaiah, which lead up to a climax in the Suffering Servant of Isa. 53. Jesus was conscious from the very beginning of His ministry of Himself as the Servant of the Lord. And from the beginning He had a sense of something tragic in His destiny (2). From the very beginning Jesus saw two paths before Him and He chose the pathway which would eventually lead Him to the Cross. He could not have thought of Himself as the Servant of the Lord and not been aware of the tragic end of the Servant of Isa. 53(3).

After Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus made three deliberate and earnest efforts to make clear to His

(1) Mk. 1:11 RV.

(2) DC, p. 19.

(3) DC, p. 22.

disciples the fact that He must suffer and be killed (1). The fact that these three are not three different accounts of the same incident is seen in the facts, that in the first we have the protest of Peter, in the second the disciples are silent and in the third Jesus takes the lead in going up to Jerusalem (2).

All three narratives agree that Jesus taught that "He must go to Jerusalem and die". The question is what does this word 'Σε', signify? There are two possible explanations, one that the hostile forces arrayed against Him were so great He could not escape them. The other explanation is that some inner compulsion told Him that He could not avoid going to Jerusalem to die and still be true to His Father. The second of course, is the more satisfying explanation. He must go to Jerusalem to die for that is the very purpose for which He came into the world.

And so we return to the verse which sums up better than any other the purpose for which Jesus came into the world. It was to give His life a ransom for many. Some writers assert that this statement throws the influence of Paul. Denney believes this is impossible. To his mind the words are perfectly in place (3). Others explain the passage by saying that Christ's death was the consummation of His life of service. By His death, we are told,

(1) Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:32.

(2) DC, p. 25.

(3) DC, p. 31.

He wins men to repentance. This is undoubtedly true. Jesus does win men to repentance by dying for them but it is certainly not the whole truth. This explanation does not do justice to the word 'anti' nor to the word 'lutron'. According to Denney, (1) the words take us back first to Mk. 8:34ff., "what should a man give in exchange for his life" (2). According to Denney (3), this verse takes us back to Isa. 53:12, *παρεδόθη εἰς θάνατον*

ἡ ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ There is a correspondence in meaning between

'lutron' as that by which a forfeited life is redeemed and the giving of the life or soul as a guilt offering by which legal satisfaction was rendered for an injury or wrong (Isa. 53:10) (4).

These considerations make impossible any superficial explanation of the words "to give His life a ransom for many".

There is only one satisfying explanation of these words namely that Christ came to make atonement for the sins of men by giving of His life.

Next we turn to the passage containing the account of the institution of the Lord's Supper. This passage is of very great importance in any discussion of Christ's own teaching about the Atonement.

First of all there is the extreme view which says there is no reference here to the death of Christ, but only an anticipation of the Messianic banquet in the world to come. It is hardly necessary to refute such an absurd view. Any view of the

(1) DC, p. 34.

(2) v.37 RV.

(3) DC, p. 34.

(4) DC, p. 34.

Supper which sets aside the whole testimony of the New Testament as to what it meant, which ignores its association with the Passover and which ignores in every account the references to the shedding of Christ's blood, is hardly worthy of our serious consideration.

The first important consideration in any discussion of the different narratives of the Institution is that they all contain the word 'Covenant'. Mark has: "this is my blood of the covenant" (1). Matthew has: "this is my blood of the covenant" (2). Luke has: "this cup is the new covenant in my blood" (3).

Denney tells us (4) that three objections have been made to the expression "το αἷμα μου τῆς διαθήκης". The first is that it is awkward Greek; secondly it is impossible to translate the expression into Hebrew or Aramaic; thirdly the conception of the word 'covenant' owes its place in Christianity to Paul. The third objection begs the question; because Paul used the word 'covenant' does not mean that he originated it. The idea of 'covenant' and 'covenant blood' are Old Testament ideas. As for the first objection, the fact that it is awkward Greek does not mean it is impossible Greek, and this applies to the second objection too (5).

We have then a solid foundation for the expression 'covenant' or 'covenant blood'. Covenant blood is primarily sacrificial blood, and sacrificial blood is recognized universally as having propitiatory power. Denney confirms this interpretation by referring

(1) Mk. 14:24 RV.

(2) Matt. 26:28 RV.

(3) Luke 22:20 RV.

(4) DC, p. 35.

(5) DC, p. 36.

to Robertson Smith's book, "The Religion of the Semites" (1).

It is clear then from a consideration of our Lord's teaching at the Last Supper, that His death had a propitiatory power. When Jesus said to the disciples in the Upper Room: "this is my blood of the covenant", He was "establishing at the cost of His life, the new Covenant, the new religious relation between God and man, which has ^{the} forgiveness of sins as its fundamental blessing" (2).

A strong protest is registered on the part of some to associating forgiveness with the death of Christ. They say that God forgives freely and there is no need to make forgiveness depend on Christ's propitiatory death. But this is a very weak argument. No one disputes the fact that God forgives freely, but if that is the whole explanation of forgiveness, it is most difficult to give any reasonable explanation of Christ's presence in the world at all. Denney points this out in very definite and clear terms. "To say that it is inconsistent with God's free love to make the forgiveness of sins dependent on the death of Jesus is the same as to say with reference to the Christian revelation as a whole, that it is inconsistent with God's free love that entrance into His kingdom and participation in its blessings should be possible only through the presence of Jesus in the world, His work in it, and the attitude which

(1) DC, p. 37.

(2) DC, p. 38.

men assume towards HimIf we give any place at all to the idea of mediation, there is no reason why we should reject the idea of propitiation" (1).

It is very easy to say that God's love is a tremendous thing, that it is so great that it can freely forgive the worst of sinners. Our point here is not to dispute the greatness of God's love nor the freeness of His forgiveness but the important question here is: "Can we possibly know the true greatness of God's love apart from the Atonement?" The fact is that we cannot. The greatness of God's love can only be grasped as we realize the tremendous cost of forgiveness to God. Forgiveness is not something God hands out freely as they hand out free samples at a fair. The comparison is too ridiculous even to consider. Forgiveness may be free to us but God only grants it at tremendous cost to Himself, and that cost is the life of His only begotten Son. The cost to Christ is that of His own life, offered in atonement for our sins. "The love of God by which we are redeemed from sin is a love which we do not know except as it comes in this way and at this cost. Consequently whatever we owe as sinners to the love of God, we owe to the death of Jesus" (2).

ii. The Atonement in Early Christian Preaching

From our Lord's own teaching about His death, Denney turns now to the various interpretations of His death given in the New Testament. We begin this study with the Atonement as it is

(1) DC, p. 39.

(2) DC, p. 40.

interpreted in early Christian preaching and then we shall go on to consider in chapter 6, what Paul and John taught.

When our Lord said farewell to His disciples just before He ascended to Heaven, He gave to them His last commission. We have this commission in four forms. "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (1). In Mark we have: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (2). In Luke we have the words: "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name" (3). And the corresponding words in John are: "whose soever sins ye forgive they are forgiven" (4). In all its forms this last commission deals with baptism or forgiveness of sins, and in the New Testament baptism is always linked with forgiveness, and forgiveness is always linked with the death of Christ. And so we see the Risen Saviour unmistakably puts the forgiveness of sins at the heart of the Gospel which the disciples are to preach. By doing this He puts at its very heart His sin-annulling death (5). Slowly but inevitably the argument is becoming firmly established,

(1) Matt. 28:18ff. RV.

(2) Mark 16:15f. RV.

(3) Lu. 24:47 RV.

(4) John 20:23

(5) DC, p. 46.

that at the very heart of the New Testament is the atoning death of Christ. It was central in our Lord's own teaching; it was central in the commission He gave to His disciples. And now we shall trace out the argument which shows it was central in the preaching of the early Church.

From a survey of the contents of early Christian preaching as illustrated in the Acts of the Apostles, we find that the heart of this preaching was the death and resurrection of Christ (1). Why was it that the early disciples did this? It has been said by some that it was to get over the scandal of a crucified Messiah, but this point of view has no support either in the New Testament or Christian experience. To explain the death of Christ merely as the answer to a conundrum fails to do justice to the fact that the death of Christ became the centre of gravity in the Christian world (2). After all, a world shaking force like early Christianity cannot be explained by saying it has as its foundation the answer to a riddle.

The only answer to the fact that the early disciples put the death of Christ at the heart of their message is this, that in so doing they believed themselves to be doing what Christ commanded them to do. A close examination of this early Christian preaching reveals the following facts. The early disciples saw the death of Christ in the light of a Divine

(1) Acts 2:23ff; 2:32ff.; 5:30ff.

(2) DC, p. 49.

necessity. It was no chance happening. It was something planned by God. Peter tells us that Christ "was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (1). In another passage Peter and John speak of the Jews being gathered together "to do whatsoever the hand and thy counsel foreordained to come to pass" (2).

Then in another passage in Acts, as in our Lord's own teaching, the Suffering Messiah is identified with Isaiah's 'Servant of the Lord'. "The God of our fathers hath glorified his Servant Jesus" (3). In the story of the man of Ethiopia, Christ is identified with the "Suffering Servant of Isaiah". And finally as in our Lord's own teaching, the great blessing offered to men in the early Church is the forgiveness of sins. At the heart of the Gospel as our Lord commanded His disciples to proclaim it and as they did proclaim it, is this offer of forgiveness of sins. "Repent ye, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins" (4).

An appeal to early Christian preaching in Acts confirms once more Denney's thesis that in the New Testament, the forgiveness of sins is central and is always linked with the death of Jesus.

Denney turns next to a consideration of what Peter teaches about the death of Christ in his first Epistle. And here for the first time we meet a theory of the Atonement. When we use the word theory let us not think of it as something remote from the real facts but as an interpretation of the facts,

(1) Acts 2:23

(2) Acts 4:28.

(3) Acts 3:13 RV.

(4) Acts 2:38 RV and cf. 3:19.

something which brings out the true meaning of the facts (1).

Peter draws our attention to the moral qualities of Christ's sufferings: "ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings".

(2) But he goes further than this. There is another side to his epistle. In chapter 1:1f. he writes: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ". God's goodwill has in view obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. The reference here is to Exodus 24 where after a vow of obedience, the people were sprinkled with Covenant blood. We have already seen how, when Christ spoke of Covenant blood in the Upper Room He was referring to sacrificial blood which is atoning blood. Obedience, then, in the eyes of Peter follows atonement. Christ is only our pattern as He is first our Saviour or the One who makes atonement for us.

As we have pointed out, Peter speaks of the sufferings of Christ as an example for us to follow but he knows the facts too well ever to suggest we can seriously follow Christ until we have first of all appropriated His atoning death. In the words "who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree" (3) we first meet the phrase which is Denney's favourite phrase to interpret the death of Christ. The key to all Denney's thinking about the death of Christ is found here. Again and again he goes back to the words "He bore our sins". And so we turn to the words of I Peter "who his own self bare our sins". The

(1) "II Corinthians", p. 226.

(2) I Peter, 4:13.

(3) I Peter, 2:24 RV.

question is: how are we to interpret these words. Denney believes the meaning of the words is quite clear. "The words of the Apostle must be interpreted as the common sense of Christians always has interpreted them: that Christ bore our sins in His body as He ascended the Cross or ascended to it" (1). He refers to the words in Numbers 14:34 "shall ye bear your iniquities" and he says the meaning of these words is quite clear. They clearly mean "bear the consequences of" (2). At the Cross, Peter tells us, Christ took upon Him the responsibilities of our sins (3).

In Denney's mind the words "He bore our sins" means substitution. He is aware of the dangers involved in the use of this word; he knows it can be misunderstood but yet he uses it. Denney believes in a substitutionary Atonement, although T.H. Hughes (4) calls Denney's theory a penal theory, and this is the word he uses to describe the Atonement. Denney is careful never to say: "Christ was punished for our sins" which is obviously an unscriptural statement. Perhaps we are on thin ice but in the present writer's mind there is a world of difference between saying, "Christ was punished for our sins" and, "Christ died for our sins". We shall deal more fully with this idea in chapter 8 when we deal with Anselm's interpretation of the Atonement. Denney's insists on the use of the word substitutionary and in a closing statement on the "Death of Christ in

(1) DC, p. 58.

(2) DC, p. 59

(3) DC, p. 60.

(4) Hughes, Thomas H, "The Atonement - Modern Theories of the Doctrine" pp. 66ff.

Early Christian Preaching" he writes: "If Christ died the death in which sin had involved us, if in His death He took the responsibility of our sins upon Himself, no word is equal to this which falls short of what is meant by calling Him our substitute" (1). Denney's interpretation of the death of Christ as substitutionary is not the crude almost abstract matter it becomes in some minds, for he tells us that to say substitution "is to say something which involves an immeasurable obligation to Christ, and has therefore in it an incalculable motive power" (2).

It is essential to see this clearly; substitution is no abstract theory; it is not a problem in mathematics but it is something closely connected with life. It means primarily that we owe to Christ a tremendous debt, a debt we can never repay. Here is the supreme motive power for Christian living. With this thought in our minds, we turn to the writings of one who perhaps more than any other was conscious of the infinite debt he owed to the Saviour who had made atonement for his sins.

(1) DC, p. 62.

(2) DC, p. 60.

Chapter 6

The Atonement in the New Testament - Part II

i. The Atonement in the Writings of Paul

Denney tells us attempts have been made to discredit the teaching of Paul on the Atonement on several different grounds (1). According to Denney some explain Paul's doctrine of the Atonement as a purely individual interpretation. In other words, it is just Paul's own ideas about the Atonement, rather than a true interpretation of it. Denney tells us that others maintain that his doctrine of the Atonement is speculative theology and not apostolic testimony. They claim that Paul took the simple Gospel of the apostolic Church and turned it into an elaborate and speculative theological system. Then others say that it is only a stage in the development of Paul's thought. After outlining these different approaches to Paul's teaching about the death of Christ, Denney declares that "abstract discussion of such statements apart from their application to given cases never leads to any conclusive results" (2).

To Denney these are merely abstract questions and they are not raised in relation to any concrete situation. Denney was never interested in questions which had no relation to reality. He was primarily interested in what was and not in what might have been.

(1) DC, p. 65.

(2) DC, p. 65.

The first question, that is that Paul's doctrine of the Atonement is a purely individual interpretation, is answered by the fact that Paul wrote I Corinthians in A.D. 55 in the midst of the Christian community of that day. It is difficult to believe, in the light of these facts, that he proclaimed a message contrary to the accepted Gospel of the Christian community. In regard to the second question which says that Paul's message is speculative theology and not apostolic testimony, we must remember that Paul after speaking of Christ as one who gave Himself for our sins (1) goes on to stress the fact that there is only one Gospel. "Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema" (2). The facts are that the doctrine of the death of Christ was not Paul's theology but his gospel (3).

The answer to the question, that his doctrine of the Atonement is merely a stage in the development of Paul's thinking, is that one message on Christ's death permeates all his epistles (4). It is true that in some epistles the Atonement is more central than in others but this is because Paul wrote with the specific needs of the community in his mind but in all his epistles, except perhaps Philemon, there is some reference to the Atonement. The fact that it is central in his epistle to

(1) Gal. 1:4.

(2) Gal. 1:8 RV.

(3) DC, p. 66.

(4) DC, p. 70.

the Romans, his most systematic epistle, is most significant. When Paul wrote a systematic outline of the Christian religion he put the death of Christ at the centre of it.

Paul's sense of debt to Christ is central in all his epistles. If we wanted a verse which is the key to all Paul's thinking, we should probably choose the words: "the love of Christ constraineth us" (1). Why has the love of Christ gripped Paul? It has gripped him because Christ out of love for him made atonement for his sins.

"We obtained mercy", says Paul, and Denney says of these words: "There ^{was} ~~is~~ nothing so deep down in Paul's soul, nothing so constantly present to his thoughts as this great experience" (2). In another passage which is central for any consideration of his doctrine of the Atonement, Paul speaks of "the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me" (3). In this passage Denney sees the key to the whole of the Christian life, which is a response to the love exhibited in the death of the Son of God for men (4). Paul knew by experience that all he was, or could ever become as a Christian, was because of the Cross (5) and because of this he wrote: "Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6).

The Atonement was a very real fact to Paul and because he was a man with a very keen intellect he longed to understand more fully the meaning of this tremendous fact.

(1) II Cor. 5:14.

(3) Gal. 2:20.

(5) DC, p. 89.

(2) "II Corinthians" p. 145.

(4) DC, p. 89.

(6) Gal. 6:14 RV.

The Gospel of the atoning death of Christ, as Paul preached it, "is an independent, eternal, divine truth, the profoundest truth of Revelation, which for that reason contains in it the answer to all religious questions, whether of ancient or of modern times" (1). Paul believed the truth of the Atonement was a truth the mind could understand. It is true that the human mind can never grasp the full meaning of the Atonement but that does not mean we cannot grasp its essential meaning and enter ever more deeply into that meaning. If we could not grasp its meaning, the death of Christ would be just another irrelevant fact in our lives. But it was in no way an irrelevant fact in the mind of Paul.

The writings of Paul are a unity in regard to their interpretation of the death of Christ (2). They are not a theoretical discussion of an abstract problem. Paul was interested in realities and not in abstract speculation. Paul's theory of the Atonement (we use theory as a synonym for the word meaning (3)), discusses the question of how God dealt with human sin in order that man might be restored to fellowship with Himself. We first of all think of Christ's death in relation to the love of God.

a. Christ's death in relation to the love of God

In any interpretation of Paul's doctrine of the Atonement (or any interpretation of the Atonement for that matter) the

(1) DC, p. 70.

(2) DC, p. 70.

(3) DC, p. 71.

love of God must always be central. Any interpretation of the Atonement which fails to make the love of God central is not a truly Christian interpretation. John declares: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth ~~on~~ him should not perish, but have eternal life" (1). And in words with a similar meaning Paul declares: "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (2). The Atonement is the supreme demonstration of God's love. And we must always keep this in mind when we approach the doctrine of the Atonement. Denney is very emphatic about this and writes: "The Interpretation of Christ's death through the love of God is fundamental in Paul. In whatever other relations he may define it, we must assume unless the contrary can be proved, that they are consistent with this" (3).

Forgiveness is the free gift of God's love to us. But forgiveness for God is a costly thing. It cost God the death of His only Son. It is difficult to discuss Christ's death in relation to the love of God without anticipating what we have to say in the next section under the heading "The Atonement in the Writings of John". The fact is, as Denney points out, we cannot know the real meaning of the love of God except in the light of the Atonement. "Redemption, it may be said, springs from love, yet love is a word of which we do not know the meaning until it is interpreted for us by redemption" (4).

(1) John 3:16 RV.

(2) Roms. 5:8 RV.

(3) DC, p. 74.

(4) DC, p. 135.

This is of great importance and Denney goes to great pains to stress this truth. The Atonement has its roots in the love of God. Unless God were a loving God, there would be no Atonement. Because God loved the world, He sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. Because God loved us He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. But true love is not manifested by the giving of a gift we do not need. The death of Christ as a bare fact is not a demonstration of love. It is only a demonstration of love because of the fact it is a certain kind of death. It is a death for sin. It is a death which makes atonement for sin. It is a death in which Christ bears our sins.

Denney points out that there is something irrational in saying the death of Christ is a proof of love unless there is "a rational connection between that death and the responsibilities which sin involves, and from which that death delivers" (1). He uses the illustration (2) of a man sitting on a pier on a summer day. And another man jumps into water and gets drowned to prove His love for the man on the pier. The whole idea is absurd. There was no need for the man to jump into the water and get drowned to show his love. The situation is different where a child falls into the water and the mother loses her life in an attempt to save the child. In the first case the man sitting on the pier was not in danger. In the second case the child was in danger. The mother died to save

(1) DC, p. 103.

(2) DC, p. 103.

the child. In a much more profound way Christ died to save us. He died to save us from our sins. It was sin that made Christ's death necessary. Because of sin, man is in extreme peril. Christ died to save Him. This leads us on to an examination of the relation of Christ's death to sin.

b, Christ's death in relation to sin

We saw in chapter 3 that so far as Denney is concerned sin is regarded seriously by God. Sin makes a difference ~~to~~ ^{to God}. Paul felt that sin had made a difference to God (1). This is what makes the Atonement necessary. God cannot overlook sin. It must be dealt with. "The question of religion, for Paul, is: How shall a man, a sinful man, be righteous with God?" (2).

This is a most important truth in view of the fact that God cannot deal lightly with sin and still be God. There is such a thing as the wrath of God. It is the divine reaction against sin. God demands that sin be punished and punished severely. Attempts have been made to explain away the wrath of God. The wrath of God is not a reality, we are told; it is only a figure of speech. It is unreal, we are told, because it is inconsistent with the Christian conception of God as a loving Father. But to speak of the Christian conception of God as a loving Father in this sense seems to imply that the words "loving Father" give to us an exhaustive description of the nature of God. This is obviously not the case. The love of God is the greatest reality in the New Testament, as Denney stressed

(1) DC, p. 99.

(2) DC, p. 96.

and continued to stress but this did not mean there was no such thing as the wrath of God. Paul speaks of the wrath of God. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (1). For Paul, the wrath of God is something very real. Denney maintains that "Nothing that treats it (the wrath of God) as unreal can have any relevance as gospel to the situation of sinners" (2). We must treat the wrath of God as a reality otherwise there is no need for the Atonement. If man is not separated from God and under His wrath, there is no necessity for the Atonement. All men are sinners lying under God's condemnation, therefore there is need for atonement (3).

The wrath of God in Scripture is mainly if not exclusively eschatological. Jesus is our Deliverer from the wrath to come (4). There is a Divine reaction against sin in this present world but there is a coming wrath which awaits the final impenitent in the world to come. Denney speaks of "the second death, the death involved in the wrath of God, the death which has no life on its horizon" (5). Denney does not discuss the nature of this second death, except to say "it has no life on its horizon". Perhaps we have a key to its meaning in II Thessalonians 1:9 where we read of those "who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (RV). Denney helps us to understand

(1) Roms. 1:18 RV.

(2) DR, p. 147.

(3) ST, p. 117.

(4) DR, p. 227.

(5) DR, p. 229.

this a little more clearly when in his latest book he says: From what did He save us? From dying in our sins. But for His death, "we should have passed into the blackness of darkness with the condemnation of God abiding on us" (1).

Closely linked with the concept of "the wrath of God" is the concept of "the righteousness of God", in its one sense of God's consistency with Himself. This, of course, opens up a discussion as to what Paul means by "the righteousness of God". We are, of course, only interested in Denney's interpretation of Paul at this point.

There are those who explain "the righteousness of God" in the sense it is used in the Psalms and the later chapters of Isaiah. Here it is equivalent to "salvation". We read in the Psalms: "The Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the nations" (2). We have passages in the Gospels where God shows Himself righteous by acting in accordance with His Covenant obligations, receiving his people graciously and loving them freely. But the situation is different in the Epistle to the Romans. Here it is not God's people that are wronged but God Himself (3). This interpretation does nothing to explain the sense of "the righteousness of God" as it is used in the early chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. There it is closely linked with the word "propitiation" and Denney goes so far as to say that "for

(1) DR, p. 283.

(2) Ps. 98:2 RV.

(3) DC, p. 100.

Paul there is no such thing as a righteousness of God except through the propitiation" (1).

Another explanation of the words "the righteousness of God" is that righteousness means acting according to one's proper norm, doing what one ought to do (2). This means that in spite of sin, God takes steps to restore fellowship between himself and man. This interpretation fails to deal seriously with the fact of sin and thus is not a satisfying explanation.

In the Expositor's Greek Testament, Denney points out that there are three possible interpretations of the phrase (3). The phrase can mean "a righteousness valid before God" but Denney doubts whether "the righteousness of God" is a natural expression for it. Then there is the interpretation which says it is "a righteousness of which God is the author or source", and finally it is interpreted as "the judicial action of God in which He justifies His people and accomplishes their salvation".

Denney sums up these interpretations and writes: "In substance all these three views are Biblical, Pauline, and true to experience, whichever is to be vindicated on philological grounds. But the same cannot be said of another, according to which righteousness is here an attribute, or even the character of God. ... God's righteousness in this sense is the sinner's condemnation and no one will succeed in making him find in it the ground of

(1) DC, p. 101.

(2) DC, p. 101.

(3) "Romans", p. 590.

his hope" (1).

Paul speaks of "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe" (2). This gift is something which makes a man acceptable in God's sight. It is an act by which a righteous or holy God pronounces a man who is a sinner righteous in His sight. How can God who is righteous pronounce a sinner righteous and be true to Himself?

Here lies the crux of Paul's doctrine of the Atonement. "It is not too much to say that for Paul there is no such thing as a righteousness of God except through the propitiation" (3). Righteousness in this sense of God's gift to sinful men of a right standing in his sight is what man needs most of all. God's righteousness has a double sense: "it is a righteousness which comes from God and is the hope of the sinful and God's own righteousness, or His character in its self-consistency and inviolability. In virtue of the first, God is ~~'the Justifier'~~ 'the Justifier'; in virtue of the second, He is ~~'the Justifier'~~ 'the Justifier', just.Something is done which enables God to justify the ungodly who believe in Jesus, and at the same time to appear signally and conspicuously a righteous God" (4).

We now want to enquire into the meaning of this act whereby God who is righteous is able to forgive the unrighteous and to restore them to fellowship with Himself. This does not come about merely by overlooking sin. This is the assumption and

(1) "Romans", p. 591.

(2) Roms. 3:22 RV.

(3) DC, p. 101.

(4) DC, p. 98.

and argument of this whole thesis. God cannot overlook sin; He has to deal with sin.

The way God deals with sin is summed up in the word "propitiation". This is the very heart of Paul's Gospel; it is the very heart of the Christian Gospel. Apart from propitiation, there is no forgiveness. Denney was a stout defender of this truth, which he believed to be the very heart of the Gospel. Denney, speaking of the two aspects of the righteousness of God, we have considered above, says: "it is the very function of Jesus Christ set forth by God ^{as} propitiation in His blood to exhibit these two senses" (1).

What then is the basic meaning of this important word, "propitiation"? The first thing we need to grasp about this word is that the key to its meaning is not to be found simply by reference to the LXX or to words current in the writings of the day, but only from the connection of Paul's thoughts in Romans 3 (2).

The word "propitiation" is explained by several synonymous terms which Paul uses to interpret the Atonement. Basically, the word "propitiation", the words "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin" (3), and "having become a curse for us" (4), and the words "Christ died for our sins" (5) refer to the same act, the act by which sin is forgiven and man is restored to fellowship with God. Denney tells us that the words "having become a curse for us" mean exactly the same as to say "He died for us" (6). In

(1) DC, p. 97

(2) DR, pp. 155ff.

(3) II Cor. 5:21 RV.

(4) Gal. 3:13 RV.

(5) I Cor. 15:3.

(6) DC, p. 92.

another passage (1) he says the same thing of the words "made to be sin". In The Expositor's Greek Testament, he says: "To say that God set forth Christ as a propitiation in His blood is the same ^{thing} as to say that God made Him to be sin for us. God's righteousness, therefore, is demonstrated at the Cross, because there, in Christ's death, it is made once for all apparent that He does not palter with sin; the doom of sin falls by His appointment on the Redeemer" (2).

The word "propitiation" does not imply that we have to propitiate an angry God. The very fact upon which the Gospel proceeds is that we cannot do any such thing. "But it is not true that no propitiation is needed. As truly as guilt is a real thing, as truly as God's condemnation of sin is a real thing, a propitiation is needed" (3).

Nor does the word "propitiation" imply that Christ by His death wrings from God a forgiveness he is reluctant to bestow (4). God never ceased to love man but He cannot act as if man had never sinned. This would be to act contrary to His essential nature. Sin must be dealt with; this is what propitiation means. But we can go further than this.

Denney cannot agree with Sanday and Headlam when they say: "it is a word we must leave to Him (the Holy Spirit) to interpret. We drop the plummet into the depths, but the line attached to it

(1) DC, p. 87.

(2) "Romans", p. 613.

(3) "II Corinthians", p. 221.

(4) DR, p. 235.

is too short and it does not touch the bottom" (1). In a sense this is profoundly true. No man will ever be able to grasp the full meaning of the Atonement in all its tremendous depth. But that does not mean we should not come to a progressively deeper understanding of the Atonement in relation to sin. It definitely does not mean that the word propitiation is incapable of being understood. No one can accuse Paul of putting meaningless words at the very heart of the Gospel. The whole idea is ridiculous. We admit that it is not an easy word to understand fully, but that does not mean we cannot understand it at all. Why should the very word which lies at the heart of the tremendous fact of our redemption be easy to understand fully? We use the word "fully" advisedly. No one can fully understand the word, but it is not reasonable to believe it was unintelligible to the Christians in Rome to whom Paul wrote.

What then does the word "propitiation" mean? Denney believes the key to the understanding of the word is to be sought "not in any peculiarities of Jewish or of pagan history, but in the human conscience which is common to both" (2). What it means is that God is a sin-forgiving God. "In Christ as ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~latter~~ ^{latter} ~~day~~ ^{day} justice is done not only to the grace of God but to His wrath - to that solemn reaction of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men from which the apostle sets out in the exposition of his gospel" (3). Here is the crux of

(1) "Romans", p. 94, quoted by Denney in DR, p. 153.

(2) DR, pp. 155ff.

(3) DR, p. 157.

Paul's doctrine of the Atonement. In some way that we can never fully fathom, justice is done both to God's love and His wrath. Many cannot agree with him but Denney taught that Christ was our substitute and sin-bearer. He dealt with sin by bearing its penalty for us. This is the meaning of the words "whom God set forth to be a propitiation". Denney writes however: "it is simpler, and there is no valid objection, to making it (hilasterion) masculine, in agreement with ~~for~~^{this}: 'whom God set forth in propitiatory power' (1). Christ's death has a propitiatory power. It deals with sin in a way that is satisfactory to God.

Denney points out that the message of the Gospel as presented by Paul can be summed up in the words: "He bore our sins", ^{this} and then he adds: "mysterious and awful as ~~the~~^{this} thought is, it is the key to the whole of the New Testament" (2). In Denney's mind this means substitution or nothing and he makes no hesitation whatever in stating this. "I do not know any word which conveys the truth of this if 'vicarious' or 'substitutionary' does not. Nor do I know any interpretation of Christ's death which enables us to regard it as a demonstration of love to sinners, if this vicarious or substitutionary character be denied". In these words, Denney makes his mind quite clear to us. But Denney warns us very definitely that though he believed

(1) "Romans", p. 611.

(2) DC, p. 88.

in the substitutionary death of Christ, he does not interpret this substitutionary death in a mechanical or quantitative way. Luther did this but Denney cannot agree with Luther at this point, as we shall see more fully in chapter 8, for he writes: "Quantitative categories are meaningless in the moral world. To say that the sin of the world in all its tragic reality was borne by Christ on His Cross, so that He is a propitiation for that sin is one thing; to say that the penalties due to all men's offences were summed up and inflicted on Him is another and entirely different thing" (1).

We have dealt briefly with the terrible fact of sin in relation to the Atonement. It is a dark, dark picture, and the darkness of the picture in the sense of the tremendous cost to God can only be understood in the light of the word "propitiation", but now we emerge into the light of day once more and the one great reality before us is the love of God. When the sinner stands before the Cross, "what he sees there is the astounding truth that the last reality in the world is not, as he might have feared, sin, condemnation, estrangement, death, but a love which bears sin taking it in all its dreadful reality upon itself" (2).

Propitiation is the heart of the Gospel. It is the heart of any Scriptural doctrine of the Atonement. This is because we do not know the love of God in all its magnitude till

(1) DR, pp. 159f.

(2) DR, p. 163.

we see it in the light of the word "propitiation". But a love so tremendous never leaves us as we are. We cannot grasp the real meaning of that love and ever be the same again. That love grips us and changes us. This is what Paul means when he says: "the love of Christ constraineth us". The whole of the Christian life is summed up in these words. "The propitiatory death of Christ, as an all-transcending demonstration of love, evokes in sinful souls a response which is the whole of Christianity" (1).

This leads to a brief consideration of the relation of Christ's death to the Christian life.

c. Christ's death in relation to the Christian life

What is the relation of Christ's death to the Christian life in the mind of Paul? According to Denney, "the whole of the Christian life is a response to the love exhibited in the death of the Son of God for men" (2). This point of view is confirmed by numerous passages in the writings of Paul. There are two such passages which are especially significant in this regard. They are: "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and 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" (3) and "the love of Christ constraineth us" (4).

The first essential for the living of a good life is a good conscience, and "until sin is expiated the sinner has a

(1) DC, p. 104.

(2) DC, p. 89.

(3) Gal. 2:20 RV.

(4) II Cor. 5:14.

bad conscience, and as long as a man has a bad conscience he cannot

begin to be a good man" (1). Before a man can begin to live a life pleasing in God's sight, he must first of all be in a right relationship with God. And a man can only become right with God through faith in the atoning death of Christ.

When a man grasps the greatness of the love of God in the atoning death of Christ, he is drawn to Christ and Christ's love becomes the great motive power of his life. In view of what Christ has done for him, he goes out to live for Christ. Gratitude for Christ's love becomes the great driving force of his life. When a man sees the greatness of God's love as manifested in the atoning death of Christ, there is only one thing he can do and that is "to trust himself to such love instantly, unre-^{and}servedly, / for ever" (2).

ii. The Atonement in the Writings of John

In our study of the Person of Christ, we saw that Denney assumes that the Fourth Gospel, the Apocalypse, and the Epistles of John were all written by the Apostle John. If we cannot go this far, at least we have to admit that all three come from the same locality and period, the same circle of ideas and sympathies (3). It is on this basis Denney proceeds to a study of the Atonement in the writings of St. John.

When we pass from the writings of St. Paul to those of St. John we pass into a very different religious atmosphere. Paul is the practical thinker; John is the mystic. But we do not mean

(1) DC, p. 109.

(2) DR, p. 163.

(3) "The Death of Christ", p. 241, edition of 1909, published by Hodder and Stoughton in London.

by this that the spiritual point of view of Paul and John is fundamentally different. Rather than this, quite the contrary is true. John does not differ from Paul in his fundamental ideas, much as he may differ on the surface.

We shall first consider the Gospel of John because it represents the heart of John's teaching.

It used to be common to contrast Paul and John and to argue that Paul was concerned with the death of Christ and John with His life (1). But this contrast is only relative. It is certainly not absolute. It is true, that in Paul, redemption is in the forefront and that through His redeeming work, Christ reveals the Father. In John, revelation is in the forefront, and it is through a revelation of what God is that Christ exercises His power to redeem (2).

As we consider this argument, we must emphasize the fact that though Paul emphasizes redemption and John revelation it is not correct to say that Paul only speaks of redemption and John only of revelation. Both concepts have an important place in both writers. It is not in accord with the purpose of this thesis to prove that revelation has an important place in the writings of Paul though this could easily be done. It is in accord with the purpose of this thesis to prove that the Atonement has an important place in the writings of John. And as we study the place the Atonement has in the writings of John, we

(1) DR, p. 174.

(2) DR, p. 174.

shall see that he is at one with Paul in the fundamental points.

It has been said that the important thing in the Christian religion is not redemption but revelation. This is an erroneous point of view which finds no support in Scripture. It is an absolute contrast where we have no right to make an absolute contrast. Denney goes to great pains to counteract this point of view as we shall see in a later chapter (1). We have already noticed that according to Denney, the New Testament knows nothing and says nothing of an Incarnation apart from atonement (2).

a. The centrality of the Passion Story

Throughout the Gospel of John, there are constant references to Christ's atoning death. In the first chapter, there is the significant statement of John the Baptist: "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (3). Some have denied that this is a reference to the atoning death of Christ. But when sin is spoken of in the Bible as taken away by a Lamb it means it is taken away sacrificially. At least this is Denney's point of view and in referring to the words in this verse, he says: "that these words refer to the death of Jesus does not seem to me open to question" (4).

Our next references are in chapter 3. In 3:5 we read: "except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God". This is clearly a reference to Baptism and Baptism is closely linked with forgiveness. But as we have

(1) Chapter 8.

(2) DR, pp. 183ff.

(3) John, 1:29.

(4) DC, p. 140.

already seen, the New Testament knows nothing of forgiveness apart from the atoning death of Christ. Thus there is in this passage a clear reference to the death of Christ.

In verse 14 of the same chapter, there is a reference to the Son of man who must be lifted up. A comparison with the words "when ye have lifted up the Son of man" in 8:28 and those in 12:32 "and I if I be lifted up" makes it clear that 3:14 is a reference to the atoning death of Christ.

That 6:51-53 is a reference to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is quite clear (1). This means that here also we have a clear reference to the atoning death of Christ.

A consideration of later chapters reveals such words as: "the good shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep" (2), "he prophesied that ^{Jesus} ~~it~~ should die" (3), "except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die" (4), and "greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends" (5). These passages show us the central place the atoning death of Christ had in the mind of John.

The detailed account of the story of the Passion and its centrality in the Gospel are indisputable proofs of the facts that for John as for Paul, the atoning death of Christ is of supreme importance.

When we turn to the Apocalypse, there is no doubt as to what John considers central in Christianity. The central figure

(1) DG, p. 142.

(2) John 10:11 RV

(3) John 11:51.

(4) John 12:24

(5) John 15:13.

of the whole book is the Lamb of God. It is true it is the risen and glorified Lamb of God. But still it is the Lamb of God. Among the very earliest verses of the book are the words: "Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood" (1). Here again, in words that are unmistakably clear, is the great central truth of the New Testament, that forgiveness comes through the atoning death of Christ.

In chapter 5 we see the Lamb, once slain, now worshipped by the whole of creation. He is the object of all praise. This can only mean that "redeeming love is the last reality in the universe, which all praise must exalt" (2).

In 7:14 there is the reference to those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. This is a reference to the martyrs of the period who were inspired by Christ's atoning death. The sanctifying power in their lives had its source in that same death.

Turning to chapter 12 we read of those who overcame by the Blood of the Lamb. The great driving force in the lives of the early martyrs was the love which led Christ to die for them. Denney maintains that to say "they overcame by the Blood of the Lamb" is the same as to say "the love of Christ constrained them" (3). With the Cross before their eyes, they dared not betray the cause of Him who had died for them.

(1) Rev. 1:5. RV

(2) DC, p. 136.

(3) DC, p. 137.

We shall deal with the Johannine Epistles in the course of our discussion under the next two headings.

We have seen very clearly that according to Denney the atoning death of Christ is indeed central in the writings of John as it is in the rest of the New Testament. We turn now to a fuller discussion of the meaning of the death of Christ in the writings of John.

b. The Relation of Christ's Death to the Divine Love

Denney finds that a consideration of John's doctrine of the Atonement reveals the fact that the thing which stands out above everything else in John's mind is the love of God. We can never forget the fact of sin when we consider the doctrine of the Atonement. Neither in this world nor in the world to come can the Lamb of God who died be anything but the centre of interest. The Apocalypse makes it unmistakably clear that in the world to come the Lamb who was slain holds the centre of attention. It is the Lamb who died who is the object of all heaven's worship (1). With this in mind we go on to develop the idea that according to Denney for John that which is of central importance is the love of God (2).

Whenever we think of the Gospel of John we think of the great words in chapter 3 verse 16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life". This is the very heart of the Gospel of John. God showed the greatness of His love by

(1) DC, p. 136.

(2) DC, p. 138.

giving His Son for the salvation of the world. In the Atonement and in the Atonement alone we see the greatness of the Father's love. Eventually there will come a day when sin will be no more and God's love will be victorious over all. In the Gospel of John, this point of view is present in John's mind. Although it is not nearly so marked as in the Apocalypse. John wrote his Gospel near the close of the century and although the historical Christ is definitely in the back of his mind, his mind is more on the glorified and ascended Lord than it is on the earthly Jesus. It is not that John distinguishes between the two as two different persons. But John writing as an old man at the close of the century is not now thinking of the suffering Saviour who was but of the ascended and glorified Saviour at God's right hand.

Because of this John is thinking of the day when sin shall be no more. He is thinking of the love of God as the ultimate reality in the universe. But this does not mean that John has forgotten about the reality of sin. "The love of God to the world is never conceived in Scripture abstractly" (1). The love of God in the writings of John is not something that exists in a vacuum. It is something very practical, related in a very definite way to the needs of mankind. This leads up to our next section, the section where Denney deals with the death of Christ

(1) DC, p. 147.

in relation to the needs of men.

c. The relation of Christ's death to a perishing world

John tells us that God gave His Son that the world might not perish. The love of God in the Fourth Gospel has in view the sin of the world, its exposure to the Divine wrath, and its perishing if left to itself (1). Here is the supreme thing about the love of God in John's mind; it deals with sin. According to Denney the way in which the love of God deals with the sin of man is through the propitiation (2). John is quite clear about this, for he writes: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (3). This is an exceedingly important point in John's doctrine of the Atonement. It tells us that we cannot know the true meaning of the Divine love except through the propitiation. God loved us and He showed the meaning of His love by sending His Son as a propitiation.

Once again we have to ask the meaning of this significant term. Denney believes that it is impossible to interpret this word differently here than we do in Paul or in the Epistle to the Hebrews. "The characteristic words of religion cannot be applied in new ways at will" (4).

And so we conclude from the writings of John as we did from the writings of Paul that sin is a fact that must be dealt with and the way God deals with it is through propitiation. It

(1) DC, p. 147.

(2) DC, p. 150.

(3) I John 4:10 RV.

(4) DC, p. 150.

is through propitiation that sin is forgiven. Denney referring to the views of Paul and John regarding propitiation writes: "Neither apostle thinks of arguing - God does not forgive without propitiation and therefore He is not an absolutely loving God. They rather concur in arguing - God in order to forgive in consistency with Himself, provides a propitiation, and in so doing gives the supreme proof of love" (1).

It is here that we see the love of God in all its fullness. It is a love which bears the awful burden and penalty of the world's sin. The greatest reality in the world is God's sin-bearing love. In the propitiation and nowhere else do Paul and John see the truth that God is love (2).

Propitiation explains love in a way that no other word can. Propitiation and love become words which explain each other (3).

It is always difficult to explain what we mean by the word 'love', when used of God. It seems so abstract and yet love in the New Testament sense can never be thought of as something abstract. Always in the writings of John and in the rest of the New Testament, love is very real and practical. We mean practical in the sense that it deals with human need. Forgiveness is man's greatest need and it is through propitiation that forgiveness becomes possible. "It is sin, according to the uniform teaching of the New Testament, which creates the necessity for it. . . .

(1) DR, p. 175 and cf. DC, p. 150.

(2) DR, p. 176.

(3) DC, p. 151.

In other words sin is the problem with which ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~problem~~ ^{problem} deals. John agrees with all New Testament writers in regarding sin as a problem. It cannot be simply ignored or suppressed. Something has to be done with it, and the effective something has been done by Christ the ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~problem~~ ^{problem} (1).

We shall only learn the real depths of the Divine love as we drop our plummet into the depths of the word 'propitiation'. Denney declares that to eliminate the propitiatory death of Christ from the love of God is to rob this love of its depth (2). It is here we find the true meaning of love, in the propitiation where God has dealt with our sin. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (3). The ultimate reality in the universe is the love which bears our sins.

(1) DC, p. 150.

(2) DC, p. 152.

(3) I John 4:10 RV.

Chapter 7

A Summary of the New Testament Doctrine of the Atonement According to Denney

In this chapter we shall endeavour to gather together the different threads of Denney's doctrine of the Atonement we have discussed in the last two chapters and to bind them together into what we might call his New Testament Doctrine of the Atonement. Denney believed there was a unity about these various New Testament teachings in relation to the Atonement, just as we saw that in his eyes they were a unity in relation to the Person of Christ.

There is one point of great importance in this regard. As we have mentioned, the New Testament books are a unity. John does not teach one thing and the early Church another. Paul does not teach something different from John, and our Lord something different still. Fundamentally we get the same teaching in all. We saw in chapter 4 that this was true of the Person of Christ; it is equally true of the New Testament teaching regarding the Atonement. Denney sums up the scriptural teaching about the Atonement in this way: "Another conclusion to which we are led is that the death of Christ is the central thing in the New Testament and in the Christian religion as the New Testament understands it" (1). Denney develops this thought in the same book, a few pages later, where in speaking of the meaning of the inspiration of the Scriptures, he says that the inspiration

(1) DC, p. 156.

of the Scriptures is the fact of their unity, and this unity consists in their testimony to "a love in God which we do not earn, which we can never repay, but which comes to meet us with mercy, dealing, nevertheless, in all earnestness with our sins" (1).

This is the very heart of the Bible, that God in the Atonement deals lovingly yet earnestly with our sins. The death of Christ in the New Testament is first and foremost an atoning death, a death which deals with sin. This is the first thing we must note in any New Testament doctrine of the Atonement. In the death of Christ God deals with our sins.

i. God deals with our sins - the propitiation

All through this thesis we have seen how Denney stresses the fact that sin must be dealt with by God. The New Testament uses a variety of words to explain the process by which God dealt with our sins. The simplest way we can describe the Atonement is this "that God dealt with our sins in the death of Christ" or to use Paul's words "Christ died for our sins". The most profound word which the New Testament uses to explain the Atonement is the word 'propitiation'. Then there are the great New Testament words such as redemption, Reconciliation, and forgiveness. They all throw fresh light on the Atonement but they all refer to the same fundamental fact, that in His death

(1) DC, p. 174.

Christ dealt with human sin.

The central problem in the Atonement is to deal with the relation between God's wrath and God's love. Some dispute the reality of God's wrath but we cannot do this and be true to the New Testament. In the New Testament, God's love is a reality and so is his wrath. To explain away His wrath is to deny the seriousness of sin and to remove the very heart of the Atonement. Denney knows this and he never grows tired of emphasizing it. The world is the object of God's love and it is also the object of His wrath. "The very task of Christian thought is to do justice to both ideas. The world is undoubtedly the object of God's love - the whole world; but it is a love which inexorably judges and repels evil" (1).

As we consider the fact of God's wrath, there are several difficulties with which we must deal. First of all, there is the crude idea that when God dealt with sin, He punished Christ for us. It needs to be stressed and stressed again that this is not a scriptural idea. It is pagan and no Christian can have anything to do with such an idea. Denney repudiates the idea in very strong language: "That the innocent, moved by love, should suffer with the guilty and for them, is in line with all we know of the moral order under which we live; it is the triumph of goodness in its highest form. But that the innocent should be punished for the guilty is not moral at all" (2). This thought

(1) DR, p. 228.

(2) DR, p. 262.

excludes the idea that the Son whom the Father loved was also the object of His displeasure. But while we are thinking of this idea of the utter seriousness of sin and the way in which atonement was made it is important to note something in Denney's thinking which is truly amazing, namely that in the Atonement God takes part with us against Himself (1). This latter thought will be more fully discussed in Hughes' criticism of Denney in chapter 9.

In the face of all those who would stress the Incarnation rather than the Atonement, Denney makes it unmistakably clear where he stands. Christ became man to put away sin. We have already seen that "Not Bethlehem but Calvary, is the focus of revelation and any construction of Christianity which ignores or denies this distorts Christianity by putting it out of focus" (2). Among all the religious problems in the world, the most important, says Denney, is the problem of sin. In fact he goes so far as to say: "There is in truth only one religious problem in the world - the existence of sin. Similarly there is only one religious solution of it - the Atonement, in which the love of God bears the sin, taking it, in all its terrible reality for us, upon itself. And nothing can be central or fundamental either in Christian preaching or in Christian thinking which is not in

(1) DR, p. 142.

(2) DC, p. 179.

direct and immediate relation to this problem and its solution" (1).

The supreme message of the Atonement is that God loves the world. He loved it enough to give His only Son for its redemption. But finally He loved the world enough to give His Son to make atonement for its sins. Here is the supreme thing about the Divine love; it gives Christ for the redemption of the world and we can never know the depths of the Divine love till we see it in the light of redemption (2).

Forgiveness is a costly gift and we can never consider it as anything but costly as long as we live in the atmosphere of the New Testament. "To preach the forgiveness of sins as the free gift of God's love while the death of Christ has no special significance assigned to it, if the New Testament is the rule and standard of Christianity, is not to preach the Gospel at all" (3). To take forgiveness for granted is to ignore the whole New Testament teaching about the Atonement.

ii. our response - love

There has been a tendency in some circles to stress the Atonement almost to the exclusion of Christian ethics. This is, of course, a travesty of the New Testament. Christianity is "a new moral life" or it is nothing. According to Denney, "no one knew better than Paul that, though Christianity, must be capable

(1) DC, p. 180.

(2) DC, p. 135.

(3) DC, p. 157.

of an intellectual construction, it is not an intellectual system in essence, but a new moral life" (1). "Salvation does not mean we are exempted from living Christ's life" (2). Christian morality is always the outcome of a true grasp of the meaning of the Atonement. A forgiven man is always a man who desires to live a better life. In fact forgiveness is needed to give the sinner his initial start in the Christian life (3). More than once in his writings Denney quotes the magnificent words of Thomas Chalmers: "What could I do if God did not justify the ungodly?" (4).

The offer of forgiveness as the free gift of God's love leads to repentance, not mere remorse, but the hopeful, healing, sanctifying sorrow which leads on to a new life. Only as we grasp what Christ has done for us in the Atonement are we given the desire to live the new life, to live for Him and not for ourselves. "The atonement, or God's justification of the ungodly, which takes effect with the acceptance of the atonement, regenerates, and there is no regeneration besides" (5). Here is the practical significance of the Atonement; when it is grasped by faith, it changes men. In an honest heart, the Cross can never be an excuse for sinning, but only a motive to love, devotion, and gratitude (6). We see this in such words as "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that

(1) "II Corinthians", p. 371.

(2) DR, p. 328.

(3) DC, p. 160.

(4) DC, p. 160.

(5) DC, p. 168.

(6) DR, p. 282.

one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again" (1). John expresses the same truth when he says: "We love, because He first loved us" (2).

The forgiveness which is a result of faith in the Atonement not only leads to newness of life. It leads also to assurance. We not only are forgiven. We know we are forgiven. This fact is of great importance in the Christian life.

Denney tells us there are those who reject this doctrine of assurance on the ground that it is dangerous. They say it leads to presumption. This is the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church (3). We are told that men knowing they are forgiven will go out and live as they like. There is a danger here, we admit. Paul was aware of it (4). But it is a danger only if we forget the truth that our forgiveness is based on Christ's death. The man who keeps in the centre of his mind the cost of our forgiveness to God can never use the assurance based on the Atonement as an excuse for loose living.

The assurance that our sins are forgiven is the deepest source of joy there is. There can be no progress in Christian living, till we first have the assurance that the past has been dealt with, that our past sins are forgiven and forgotten and that God no longer holds them against us. Paul begins his great

(1) II Cor. 5:14, 15 RV.

(2) I John 4:19 RV.

(3) DC, p. 160.

(4) Roms. 6:1ff.

chapter on the Spirit-led life with the words: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (1). With the past cleared we are able to move forward. The assurance that the past has been dealt with once and for all brings a sense of joy and release. This joy becomes one of the great motivating forces behind men's lives. It is the joy of "one who has the assurance of a divine love which has gone deeper than all his sins" (2).

The New Testament assurance which springs from the knowledge that our sins have been forgiven is not meant for our despair but for our inspiration (3). If God did not deal with our sins, we would be led to despair. But he has dealt with our sins. This is our inspiration. This is the great motive for true Christian living. But Christian faith does not stop here. It carries us on into the future and gives us a hope that nothing can destroy.

iii. the ultimate reality - the Divine love

Christ's death gives us the assurance of forgiveness and pardon for all that is past. It deals with our past sins. It gives to us the great motive power for daily Christian living. It also gives us a hope for the future. In the midst of life's perplexities, in the midst of suffering and death, it assures us that God is not indifferent to the tragedy of human life (4). God does not watch the struggles and sufferings of men from afar;

(1) Roms. 8:1 RV.

(2) DC, p. 159.

(3) DC, p. 160.

(4) DC, p. 182.

He does not let man struggle on alone against the terrible reality of sin. But He comes to man in his struggles and his sufferings. He comes to man and enters into his struggles and sufferings and most of all He deals with man's sin. He assures us that the ultimate reality in the universe is not sin, nor law, nor judgement, nor even death but the Divine love which bears the sin of the world (1). This is what man needs most of all. What the soul, alienated from God by sin, needs most of all, says Denney "is the manifestation of a love which can assure it that neither, the sin itself nor the soul's condemnation of it, nor even the divine reaction against it, culminating in death, is the last reality of the universe; the last reality is rather love itself, making our sins its own in all its reality, submitting as one with us to all the divine reaction^s against it, and loving us to the end through it and in spite of it" (2).

The doctrine of the Atonement in the New Testament finally points us to a world beyond this where the work of reconciliation begun at the Cross will have its consummation. Christ, in His death, deals with our past sins; in that same death He deals with the power of sin in our lives to-day; through that same death, He will one day abolish sin forever. Denney tells us that God's reaction against sin through the Redeemer "holds out the prospect of a mode of being in which not only

(1) DR, p. 176.

(2) DR, p. 218.

sin will have disappeared, but in which there will be no more death neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. In the world of reconciliation all things are made new" (1).

No one has ever expressed what this glorious consummation means in a more profound way than St. Paul when he writes: "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (2). The love manifested in Christ's death reaches its climax and consummation here. With the following words used to describe this passage in the Epistle to the Romans Denney closes the greatest book he ever wrote: "The Christian's faith in reconciliation does not find its full expression till it finds it here" (3).

(1) DR, p. 225.

(2) Roms. 8:38ff. RV.

(3) DR, p. 332.

Chapter 8

The Interpretation of the Atonement in History

We pass in this chapter from Denney's interpretation of the Scriptural doctrine of the Atonement to his account of the Atonement as interpreted by the great Christian thinkers of the past. The first thing we notice about Denney when he passed in- to this new field is the fact that from the point of view of space he devotes very little attention to this subject in comparison with what he has to say about the doctrine in the New Testament. In all his books he only has two chapters on the Atonement in the Christian thought of the past. There is one chapter in his "Studies in Theology" and one in "The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation". It is true that the latter is a long chapter but still it is less than one third of the whole book.

Then when Denney does deal with the subject of the Atonement in History, we find his treatment is most disappointing. His treatment is rather sketchy and lacks depth. We feel that Denney never wrestled with the problems with which they wrestled except to the extent they all wrestled with the New Testament Doctrine.

It was not that Denney was incapable of dealing with the subject. The fact is he was not really interested in interpretation^s of the Atonement offered by the great Christian minds of the past. Denney admits this himself. Referring to two authors, Gibbon and Cellini, he says: "they are more interesting than

the Fathers, Reformation theologians, or modern divines" (1). We have already pointed out that Denney's heart was in the New Testament and anything outside it could never be a matter of primary concern to him.

We have seen also that Denney was not interested in speculative theories. This is especially true of his thinking on the subject of the Atonement. He was supremely interested in what the New Testament had to say about a doctrine. Outside the New Testament Denney had little real interest when it came to interpreting the Atonement. This explains, in a large measure, his attitude towards the subject of the Atonement in the Christian thought of the past.

For Denney, the Scriptural Doctrine of the Atonement was always the norm (2). Interpretations of the Atonement which are in accord with the teaching of the New Testament, Denney can accept. Interpretations which are not in accord with the New Testament, he cannot accept. For him the centre of interest was the New Testament and he could not accept any teaching which contradicted or seemed to contradict the New Testament. We begin this chapter with the assumption that for Denney the New Testament is normative for any doctrine of the Atonement.

i. General Ideas Used to Interpret the Atonement

First of all, there is the idea of merit. There are those who use quantitative terms to interpret the Atonement. They

(1) Letters II, p. 73.

(2) DR, pp. 26ff.

speak of the merits of Christ and our demerits. As far as Denney was concerned, when we begin to talk about the transference of merits from one person to another, we are definitely not using Scriptural terminology or Scriptural ideas. The relations between God and man, as we saw in chapter 3 are definitely on a persona level. Some describe relations between God and man in terms of the transfer of merits and demerits, "as if the reconciliation of God and man, or the forgiveness of sins and the regeneration of souls, could be explained without the use of higher categories than are employed in book-keeping" (1). Denney rejects the whole idea and he says: "Merit and demerit cannot be mechanically transferred like sums in an account" (2). Denney is quite definite about the fact that for him, book-keeping terms are inadequate when it comes to interpreting the Atonement.

Sometimes the figure of paying a debt is used to interpret the Atonement. Here again Denney rejects the idea as inadequate (3).

Then there are those who prefer the term 'representative' to the term 'substitute'. Denney believes that this word 'representative' has just as many disadvantages as the word 'substitute'. In fact he tells us that "a representative not produced by us, but given to us - not chosen by us, but the elect of God - is not a representative at all, but in that place a substitute" (4).

(1) MM, p. 130.

(2) MM, p. 130.

(3) MM, p. 131.

(4) MM, p. 135.

Each of these three terms, merit, debt, and representative is to Denney's mind an inadequate term when it comes to interpreting the Atonement.

ii. The Relation of the Incarnation to the Atonement

There are those who say that the Incarnation is the Atonement (1). Christ's life was an atonement, they say, and there is no need to think of an Atonement through His death.

In the first place, Denney points out this is the viewpoint of the Eastern Fathers as opposed to the Western Fathers. He tells us that "Western Christianity has been described as more realistic, more biblical, more practical, more ecclesiastical, less speculative than Eastern" (2). From this point of view, as we have said, the Incarnation is the Atonement, and through the Incarnation man is delivered from death. Denney's objection to this theory of the Atonement is that it makes a metaphysical rather than a moral problem our chief concern. "Scripture has no interest in metaphysics, except as metaphysical questions are approached through and raised by moral ones" (3). For Denney the Atonement was essentially a moral problem, or to be more accurate a religious problem, in that it deals with the fact of sin.

But for Athanasius who is a representative of this school of thought, the great problem is not sin but death. According to Denney, the important thing to Athanasius was not the sin of man,

(1) DR, p. 240.

(2) DR, p. 44.

(3) DC, p. 179.

nor the estrangement between man and God, nor the need of effecting a change in man, but that sin made man liable to death, and the supreme achievement of the Saviour was to abolish death. Corruption is thought of as something physical rather than something moral (1).

As far as Denney was concerned, the taking of human nature into union with the Divine has no reconciling power. He tells us that "it is the self offered as a ransom to God which has value" (2). Through the Atonement, death has lost its old character. This is the heart of Christianity, according to Denney (3). Denney goes on to say it is only the heart of Christianity, if we realize that it is the fact of sin which gives death its terrifying aspect. In Denney's eyes, it is only because Christ has dealt with sin in the Atonement that death has been robbed of its sting. And according to Denney, Athanasius has very little to say about the forgiveness of sins (4). This leads Denney to ask the question: Why did not His very birth accomplish the Atonement? (5).

Denney's criticism of this whole outlook is that it fails to deal with reality. It turns the Doctrine of the Atonement into a metaphysical problem, And it is definitely not this in Denney's mind for he tells us that it "is in the world of ethics not of metaphysics that the real problems are raised" (6). Therefore, on the following grounds, he rejects the theory that the

(1) DR, pp. 38ff.

(2) DR, p. 41.

(3) DR, p. 41.

(4) DR, footnote p. 42.

(5) DR, p. 40.

(6) DR, p. 44.

Incarnation is the Atonement. In the first place "it shifts the centre of gravity in the New Testament" (1). Then Denney tells us that "the New Testament knows nothing of an incarnation that can be defined apart from its relation to the Atonement" (2).

In the second place Denney tells us that such an interpretation makes the Atonement a metaphysical rather than a moral problem. And since as we have already seen, in Denney's eyes, "Scripture has no interest in metaphysics except as metaphysical questions are approached through and raised by moral ones" (3), Denney rejects the idea that the Incarnation is the Atonement.

According to Denney, we must look elsewhere for the key to the doctrine of the Atonement for it is not to be found here (4).

iii. The Atonement in the Western Fathers and the Middle Ages

In the period of the early Fathers of the West, Denney gives considerable thought to two names, Tertullian and Augustine.

First of all, Denney turns to Tertullian. From the great thinkers of the Eastern Church, we now turn to those of the Western Church. As we turn to the West, we notice a distinctly different point of view. According to Denney, Eastern Christian thought deals with the Atonement mainly in terms of death and immortality, while Western Christian thought deals

(1) DC, p. 178ff.

(2) DC, p. 179.

(3) DC, p. 179.

(4) DR, p. 44.

with it mainly in terms of sin and forgiveness (1).

Tertullian was a lawyer and quite naturally he thought in legal terms. When it came to interpreting the Atonement he used legal terminology. Denney tells us that it was due to Tertullian, perhaps more than any other, that relations between God and man came to be regarded as legal relations, and sin came to be regarded as a legal liability (2). Satisfaction is the word Tertullian used to describe the way Christ dealt with sin. Christ made satisfaction for our sins, Denney tells us that for Tertullian the word 'satisfaction' is identical with the word 'punishment' (3). In Tertullian, Denney sees the seeds of Anselm's doctrine of the Atonement. He writes: "If we do not find in Tertullian the Anselmic formula that every sin must be followed by either satisfaction or punishment, we find ideas which remarkably approximate to it" (4).

Augustine

The problem of sin is the central problem for Augustine. But, according to Denney, he thinks in different terms than Tertullian. Tertullian thought of sin in terms of legal liability. Denney tells us that "in Augustine it is not guilt and pardon that are in the foreground but moral impotence and

(1) DR, p. 52.

(2) DR, p. 45.

(3) DR, p. 46.

(4) DR, p. 48.

renewing grace" (1). For Augustine, Denney tells us, grace was not the attitude of God towards the sinner, but "a holy divine power actually lodged in the heart of man and enabling him to overcome his old sins" (2).

Augustine's great word for interpreting Christ and His saving work is, according to Denney, 'Mediator'. Then he goes on to quote a passage from Augustine's 'Enchiridion de Fide, Spe, et Caritate' (Section 10) where Augustine says: "A Mediator was necessary, that is a reconciler (reconciliator) who by the offering of a unique sacrifice, of which all the sacrifices of the law and the prophets were shadows, should appease this wrath" (3). Through His atoning death, Christ has brought God and man together. They are reconciled through the death of Christ. Denney gives us few details as to how in the thought of Augustine, Christ through His atoning death brought man and God together, though he does tell us that according to Augustine, Christ is both priest and victim (4). Denney is careful to point out here as he does elsewhere that Christ was not punished (5). Whether this was Augustine's view or not, Denney does not make clear.

For Denney, the great thing about Augustine, is his emphasis on the love of God. "It is the supreme distinction of Augustine", says Denney, "among the representatives of the ancient church that he conceived Christ fundamentally as the

(1) DR, p. 52

(2) DR, p. 52.

(3) Quoted in DR, pp. 54ff.

(4) DR, pp. 55ff.

(5) DR, p. 58.

mediator of the love of God to sinful men" (1). This love is supremely manifested in the Atonement. Denney tells us that Augustine was conscious of the difficulties involved in the thought that the love which came from God Himself should make a difference in God's attitude to men. Then he tells us that Augustine in an effort to explain the relationship between the wrath of God and the love of God, says that in a wondrous way, even when God hated us, He loved us (2).

The great merit of Augustine in the eyes of Denney is that for him the love of God exhibited in Christ is all-important. "This", says Denney (3), "is what makes him the most living of all the Fathers. For nothing but love wins and reconciles".

According to Denney, the greatest tribute to the profundity of Augustine's thinking is the fact that the ideas on which the Western Church lived for a thousand years may be found latent or patent in him. "It is hardly an exaggeration", says Denney, "to say that in Augustine may be found latent or patent all the ideas on which the Western Church lived for a thousand years" (4).

In the period of the Middle Ages, Denney deals with two men who wrote at considerable length on the Atonement. These are Anselm and Abelard.

Anselm

The basic assumption of Anselm's doctrine of the Atonement

(1) DR, pp. 59ff.

(2) In DR, p. 60.

(3) DR, p. 60.

(4) DR, p. 64.

is, according to Denney, a truth which is a presupposition for any doctrine of the Atonement, namely that man is destined for communion with his Maker (1). Man once lived in communion with his Maker but through sin that communion has been broken. If it is to be restored and if God's purpose is to be fulfilled, the problem of sin must be dealt with in a definite way.

Anselm wrote "Cur Deus Homo?" to answer the question of how God deals with sin for man's salvation and the fulfilment of the Divine purpose. In Anselm's day, people were asking such questions as: "If God had to redeem men why could He not redeem them sola voluntate, by the mere exercise of His will? Why speak of redemption at all? Whose slaves are we from whom God cannot deliver us merely by putting forth His almighty power?" (2). Denney tells us that, because Anselm writes with these objections in his mind, he has made on^e of the really great contributions to the doctrine of the Atonement (3). Man has forfeited the blessedness of communion with God. How then is this communion to be restored? Denney tells us that Anselm sees that God cannot ignore sin or treat it as less real or less awful than it is (4). To forgive sin by the arbitrary exercise of the will would be to ignore the moral order through which God expresses Himself in the world. God would cease to be God if He overlooked sin. For Anselm, Denney tells us, sin is a very real and serious thing. Anselm makes this clear, when he

(1) DR, p. 68.

(2) DR, p. 66.

(3) DR, p. 66.

(4) DR, p. 68.

this clear, when he writes: "Nondum considerasti quanti ponderis sit peccatum" (1).

Denney tells us that there are two aspects of sin which Anselm stresses, namely that it is "the violation of a universal moral order" (2) and "an infringement of the honour due to a very great person" (3). Sin must be dealt with. Denney tells us that in Anselm's mind "sin makes a real difference to God, and that even in forgiving it God treats that difference as real and cannot do otherwise" (4). God deals with sin in the death of Christ. Christ did no sin and because of this He did not have to die, therefore when He did die, His death was an immense gift entitled to a reward from God. But there is nothing Christ needs, therefore His death avails in God's sight as a satisfaction for man's sin. Thus Denney gives us an outline of Anselm's Doctrine of the Atonement.

Having given us a survey of Anselm's doctrine of the Atonement, Denney turns to a consideration of his merits and his demerits.

Denney is high in his praise of Anselm; he calls "Cur Deus Homo?" the truest and greatest book on the Atonement that has ever been written" (5). There are reasons why Denney makes this statement. He tells us that Anselm has a "profound sense of the seriousness of sin" (6). Sin is not something that is to be taken

(1) "Cur Deus Homo?", I, xxi, quoted in DR, p. 66. (2) DR, p. 68.

(3) DR, p. 68.

(4) MM, p. 116.

(5) MM, p. 116.

(6) DR, p. 73.

lightly. It is not only a violation of the moral order of the universe but a personal insult to a holy God.

For Denney another great merit of Anselm's doctrine of the Atonement is his insistence that God must make the satisfaction for sin. Man cannot do it, therefore God must (1).

Then finally Denney tells us that Anselm stresses a fact that is the very heart of the New Testament. It is that the forgiveness of sins comes through Christ's death. According to Denney, the New Testament knows nothing of forgiveness apart from the death of Christ. In this Denney felt that Anselm was true to the New Testament (2). And for Denney this was one of the great things about Anselm's doctrine of the Atonement.

Denney is very much aware of the great merits of Anselm's doctrine but he knows too that Anselm has his weak points. In this regard, F.W. Dillistone's remarks are important: "It is significant, for example, that James Denney, one of the most acute of all modern Reformed theologians, although first giving much weight to the Anselmic argument, came later in life to see its weaknesses and wrote in his Cunningham Lectures one of the most damaging criticisms of the Anselmic theory which have appeared" (3).

Denney tells us that "Anselm gives no prominence to the love of God as the source of the satisfaction for sin, or to the appeal which that love makes to the heart of sinful men" (4).

(1) DR, p. 74

(2) DR, p. 74.

(3) "Theology To-day", Vol. X, No. 2, July, 1953.

(4) DR, p. 75.

Anselm gives little place to the Divine love in his doctrine of the Atonement. This was always a major criticism of Anselm's doctrine, in Denney's eyes. In the New Testament, it is in the love of God that the Atonement has its spring and source. If it were not for the love of God, there would be no Atonement. And Denney feels that Anselm's failure to stress the love of God is a very serious omission.

In the second place, according to Denney, Anselm has another very serious omission in that he tends to think of the death of Christ "as a thing, a quantum of some kind" (1). He tends to think of Christ's death as something apart from His life. In the New Testament, Christ's death only has meaning in connection with His life. His death and His life are inseparably linked together. Denney tells us that "Anselm, by defining Christ's death as merely an alternative to the punishment of sin.....and by refusing to define Christ's death in relation to His life as something He owed to God.....has practically made it meaningless" (2).

Denney's final criticism of Anselm is that he gives no account of the way in which the work of Christ comes to benefit man (3). What is the purpose of Christ's death? Anselm tells us that it is to make satisfaction for sin. But he stops there. He does not tell us that Christ died for man's salvation.

(1) DR, p. 75.

(2) DR, p. 77.

(3) DR, p. 77.

Denney sees strong points in Anselm's doctrine of the Atonement; he also sees weak points. He sums up his criticism of Anselm in these words: "In not tracing 'satisfaction' originally to the love of God, in not exhibiting it as an integral element in the life of the man Christ Jesus and as therefore possessed of moral value, and in not relating it vitally to the new redeemed life in man, Anselm left great blanks in his doctrine of reconciliation" (1).

Abelard

Denney tells us that it was natural that there should be a reaction to Anselm's doctrine of the Atonement. According to him, Abelard counteracted Anselm's failure to relate the work of Christ to the love of God (2). As we saw in our study of the New Testament doctrine of the Atonement, Denney believes that emphasis must be laid both on the wrath of God and on the love of God. Whenever one side is stressed to the exclusion of the other, there is an inevitable reaction. According to Denney, we see this reaction in Abelard. Anselm stressed the seriousness of sin but he failed to relate the Atonement to the love of God. And Denney sees a swing towards stressing the love of God in Abelard.

Denney sees Abelard as one who interprets the whole work of Christ as a demonstration of love. "Christ's death reconciles us to God because it is a demonstration of love which awakens

(1) DR, p. 77.

(2) DR, p. 78.

in us an answer of love" (1). So, Denney interprets Abelard. It is in the Cross that Abelard sees the supreme demonstration of God's love. This demonstration of love awakens a love in man which is man's response to God's love. And this responsive love on man's part is the reconciliation Christ effects by His death (2).

This is a great truth and it is definitely a very real part of the New Testament Doctrine as Denney understands it. And Denney tells us that Abelard did a great service in emphasizing the love of Christ and in bringing the discussion back from the metaphysical to the moral world (3). Paul stressed the importance of the love of God in the Atonement as Denney has pointed out to us in a previous chapter (4). He has also shown us how John pointed out the importance of the Divine love in the Atonement. But neither Paul nor John said the Atonement could be interpreted solely in terms of love. In fact, as Denney pointed out when speaking of John's doctrine it is true that John stressed the importance of love. "Redemption", says Denney, "...springs from love, yet love is a word of which we do not know the meaning, until it is interpreted for us by redemption" (5). Denney felt we could never lay too great an emphasis on the love of God as manifested in Christ's death. In this he felt Abelard was right. But for Denney, this was not the whole truth. Always for Denney, the Atonement also manifested the righteousness of God, or the fact

(1) DR, p. 79.

(2) DR, p. 79.

(3) DR, p. 82.

(4) Chapt. 6.

(5) DC, p. 135.

that propitiation must be made for sin.

Nevertheless, Denney feels, Abelard did a great service in bringing back God's love into the centre of the doctrine of Atonement and in bringing the discussion back from the meta-physical to the moral world (1).

According to Denney, Abelard and Anselm represent the collective mind of the mediaeval Church on redemption (2). And so Denney passes on to the next major landmark in the History of the Church, the Reformation.

iv. The Reformation

Denney finds that the principle of the Reformation "was to expel things from religion and to exhibit all its realities as persons and the relations of persons" (3). In other words, according to Denney, the Reformation put back at the heart of the doctrine of the Atonement, personal categories. The Atonement ceased to be a problem in mathematics or even in philosophy and it became once more a problem in personal relations, the relation between the individual and God (4).

Denney tells us that in the mediaeval Church, grace had become a thing, a quantum that could be infused into the soul. But at the Reformation, he says, grace "became the attitude of God to sinners" (5) and faith "became the attitude of the sinner who gave himself up unconditionally to the God who was manifested in Christ as a gracious, sin-bearing, sin-forgiving God" (6).

(1) DR, p. 82.

(2) DR, p. 82

(3) DR, p. 91.

(4) DR, p. 91.

(5) DR, p. 91.

(6) DR, p. 91.

According to Denney, Luther taught that forgiveness comes not through our own merits but through the merits of Christ (1). Forgiveness comes not through our own good works but through personal trust in the Saviour.

Denney has shown us that at the Reformation, the personal relationship between God and man came more and more into the centre of focus. This got away from one difficulty; the relations between God and man were no longer thought of in quantitative terms. Attention was concentrated on the personal Saviour (2). But according to Denney, it raised another difficulty. If the relations between God and men were to be explained solely in personal terms, then ideas such as satisfaction for sin and other legal and quantitative terms would become intolerable. And Denney tells us that this is just what did happen (3). If the Atonement was explained solely in personal terms, what place had such terms as satisfaction in this doctrine?

Denney tells us that this is the question which has held the centre of attention in any teaching about the Atonement from that day to this (4). This raised another question which, according to Denney, became the central question in any doctrine of the Atonement. The question was: "Does God forgive freely or does He not?"

(1) DR, p. 96.

(2) DR, p. 94.

(3) DR, p. 94.

(4) DR, p. 97.

v. The History of the Doctrine of the Atonement to
the Present Time

Socinianism

According to Denney, we may say God forgives freely (gratuito) or we may say He forgives for Christ's sake (propter Christum) but we cannot say both (1).

Denney tells us that Socinianism says that God forgives freely. God is kind, therefore He forgives. But Denney knows that such a point of view bristles with difficulties. He tells us that Socinus has no rationale of Christ at all in relation to forgiveness (2). According to Denney Socinus repudiates the whole idea of satisfaction, but he still calls Jesus Saviour. What Socinus does say of Jesus is that "He announced to us the way of eternal life" (3).

Denney could see the reason why Socinus emphasized the freeness of forgiveness. It was a definite reaction against a purely objective interpretation of the Atonement, an interpretation which divorced the Atonement from the life of Christ and the life of the individual. It is true that an Atonement which has no connection with our lives is valueless. Denney is constantly stressing this. For Denney, justification is an illusion unless the life of the reconciled is inevitably and naturally a holy life (4).

(1) DR, p. 97.

(2) DR, p. 98.

(3) F. Socinus, "De Jesu Christo Servatore", quoted in DR, p. 98.

(4) DR, p. 297.

For Denney, to say that God forgives freely does not penetrate to the depths of the problem of sin. In his mind it fails to take account of the utter seriousness of sin in God's sight. Then he tells us that "if Socinianism were true, no one could ever have written, even in a mood of morbid or crazy exaltation: 'I am crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me' (1). Christians, from earliest times, have felt that this explanation is not really satisfying. They have felt that there is a serious element in sin which cannot be overlooked or taken lightly. They have felt, Denney tells us, from the beginning that "in Christ, God somehow takes part with sinners against Himself" (2).

Various attempts have been made to answer the question as to whether God forgives freely. Denney has shown us what he thinks of the different answers.

Another attempt to deal with the problem is found in the statement that God makes satisfaction to Himself. According to Denney, this idea was ridiculous to Socinus. But Denney feels that it is not quite so ridiculous as it appears. It may be difficult to explain, but at least it keeps before us the fact that forgiveness is a costly thing. "It was a sound instinct", says Denney (3), "which made the Church as a whole, cling to the idea of a difficult, costly, and overpowering

(1) DR, p. 99.

(2) DR, p. 100.

(3) DR, p. 102^f.

forgiveness, and reject and even resent a criticism of the idea of satisfaction - and of God as making satisfaction - by which the character of forgiveness was imperilled". If forgiveness is something cheap, Denney tells us, it will fail to inspire (1). We must ever keep before us the costliness of the Atonement. "There is a satisfaction to God at the heart of it (forgiveness) without which, it could not be bestowed" (2).

Denney tells us that there is a third attempt to resolve this difficulty as to whether God forgives freely or whether He does not. This view is that there is an internal contradiction in God Himself. There is a conflict between God's love which urges Him to forgive freely and His justice which demands that satisfaction be made (3). Socinianism rejects this whole idea. Denney agrees with the stand of Socinianism here but he still stands firmly by his rejection of the basic tenets of Socinianism. If God forgives freely, Denney insists, the presence of Christ in the world, to say nothing of His passion, has no vital connection with reconciliation (4).

In Denney's eyes, there is one vital truth which comes out of this discussion of Reformation and Socinian views of the Atonement. It is that we must never consider the Atonement merely as an end in itself. "It is not His death as an incident in the remote past", says Denney (5), "however significant it

(1) DR, p. 103.

(2) DR, p. 103.

(3) DR, p. 104.

(4) DR, p. 104.

(5) MM, pp. 152ff.

may be; it is the Lord Himself appealing to us in the virtue of His death, who assures us of pardon and restores our souls". It is imperative that the Atonement be related to the new life. We cannot think of it as an end itself. We need a doctrine of the Atonement, Denney says, in which "the new life is not an addendum or a casual consequence ^{merely} ~~only~~, but the end which that work has in view from the beginning" (1).

Grotius

To Denney's mind, in the century following the Reformation, there is only one outstanding attempt to interpret the Atonement in terms of satisfaction as opposed to the Socinian view that God forgives freely (2). This is the interpretation of Grotius. Grotius accepted the orthodox doctrine which interpreted the Atonement in terms of penal satisfaction. But the word 'penal' implies that the sinner receives what he deserves according to the law (3). But there is a real difficulty in saying that Christ's sufferings were penal. The word implies that Christ deserved these sufferings. But in the light of the New Testament, this is not true.

Denney felt that Grotius saw the difficulties of interpreting the Atonement in legal terms. Grotius points out that legal categories cannot be applied to God (4). Denney tells us that according to Grotius, God is not a judge on a bench administering criminal law and to apply such terms to Him as pars

(1) DR, pp. 108ff.

(2) DR, p. 110.

(3) DR, p. 111.

(4) DR, p. 111.

offensa, creditor, dominus, is remote from the spirit of the New Testament (1).

In Denney's eyes, while Grotius rejects any description of God which ~~makes~~ use of legal categories, he (Grotius) sees that it is necessary to insist on the seriousness of sin. Sin must be punished ^{but} by the punishment of sin does not exist purely for the sake of God Himself (2). According to Denney's interpretation of Grotius, he (Grotius) sees that the punishment of sin has in mind the common interest and the common interest is that reverence for God and His law should be maintained (3).

Grotius, Denney tells us, explains away the difficulties of the penal theory of the Atonement by saying that Christ does not suffer the penalty of sin, but He suffers something which is equivalent to that penalty. In this way, reverence for God and His law are maintained and in consequence of this the interest of the community is maintained (4).

According to Denney (5), Grotius does not tell us what it is that Christ suffers or what gives these sufferings their virtue. But in spite of all his shortcomings, Grotius exerted a great influence. Denney tells us that Grotius' interpretation of the Atonement "introduced a new conception of God, which, whether or not it was adequate to the Christian truth, created

(1) DR, p. 111.

(2) DR, p. 112.

(3) DR, p. 112.

(4) DR, p. 112.

(5) DR, p. 112.

a powerful stimulus to thought" (1). It directed attention to the effects of Christ's work on men as well as on God. And finally it directed attention away from extreme individualism to the idea of the common good (2).

McLeod Campbell

In his survey of the history of the Doctrine of the Atonement, Denney turns next to McLeod Campbell. In Denney's eyes, no one we have considered in this chapter gets as close to the New Testament doctrine as McLeod Campbell. McLeod Campbell tells us that "it was not only the divine mind that had to be responded to, but also the ^{act} expression of the divine mind which was contained in God's making death the wages of sin" (3). Denney says that this statement of McLeod Campbell's is very much in harmony with the Apostolic Gospel (4). This is the first thing Denney stresses about McLeod Campbell's doctrine of the Atonement; it gets very near to the New Testament doctrine.

In the first place, Denney feels that McLeod Campbell sees that sin is a very serious matter. Because Christ was sinless, He was able to see sin as sinful men cannot see it. And because of this, He felt what sin was to God in all its seriousness (5).

In the eyes of McLeod Campbell, Denney tells us, Christ saw what sin meant to man in terms of misery and suffering. He entered sympathetically into the whole state and responsibility of

(1) DR, p. 113.

(2) DR, p. 113.

(3) "The Nature of the Atonement", p. 261, quoted in DR, p. 268.

(4) DR, p. 268.

(5) DR, p. 259.

His sinful brethren (1). He sees in McLeod Campbell, a great effort to restore the love of God to its rightful place in the doctrine of the Atonement, and to back this up he **interprets McLeod Campbell:** "In a very agony of love He takes this responsibility of man to God upon Himself and makes in the place of sinful men, that deeply felt acknowledgement of human sin which is the repentance due from the race but beyond its power to render" (2).

It seemed strange to Denney to attribute the word "repentance" to One who had never sinned but what McLeod Campbell means, Denney feels, is that Christ saw what sin was to God (3).

The supreme merit of McLeod Campbell, according to Denney, is that he sees the power of suffering love and its power to regenerate man (4). Denney tells us that "of all the books that have ever been written on the Atonement as God's way of reconciling man to Himself, McLeod Campbell's is probably that which is most completely inspired by the spirit of the truth with which it deals. There is a reconciling power of Christ in it, to which no tormented conscience can be insensible" (5).

In the final analysis it is the love of God which changes men. But Denney saw clearly that we only know the deepest meaning of love as we view it in the light of Christ's propitiatory

(1) DR, p. 259.

(2) "DR p. 258 of the Atonement", pp. 117-118, quoted in DR, pp. 258ff.

(3) DR, p. 259.

(4) DR, p. 261.

(5) DR, p. 120.

death. The purpose of the Atonement, in the final analysis, is to change men and Denney tells us that if Christ is not really changing us into His likeness, and enabling us to enter into the experiences in which sin involved Him, He is not reconciling us to God and our sins are not forgiven (1).

Some say that McLeod Campbell only views the Atonement in relation to man. This, Denney feels, is unjust (2). According to Denney, McLeod Campbell would have said that orthodox writers viewed it too exclusively in relation to God. He performed a great service, Denney says, in laying new emphasis on the fact that the purpose of the Atonement is to regenerate man (3).

Bushnell

Closely akin to McLeod Campbell, in Denney's eyes, is Horace Bushnell. Denney thinks of Bushnell's "The Vicarious Sacrifice" as one of the great books on the Atonement (4). Denney felt very definitely that in the earlier theologians, the idea of Christ as man's substitute or representative had lost, to a large extent, its connection with love (5). He sees in Bushnell and McLeod Campbell, a real effort to re-instate this concept of love. As we saw in the earlier chapters of this thesis, Denney feels we must do justice both to God's love and God's righteousness in any doctrine of the Atonement. Denney sees Bushnell as one who writes in reaction against those who stressed

(1) DR, p. 119.

(2) DR, p. 260.

(3) DR, p. 260.

(4) DR, p. 255.

(5) DR, p. 118.

only God's righteousness.

According to Denney, the heart of the Atonement, for Bushnell, is the fact of Christ's sympathetic love. Christ bore the weight of our sins by entering sympathetically into all that sin meant to us. He saw all that sin involved men in, in terms of suffering and misery. And understanding this suffering and misery, He in love bore this burden on his heart (1).

This love is the thing that wins men and brings them back to God. Denney would not have denied for a moment that it is love that wins men. But Denney always saw a danger in this point of view. It was a part of the doctrine of the Atonement, but it was not the whole. Denney contrasts McLeod Campbell and Bushnell and says: "With McLeod Campbell it is otherwise. He thinks not only of man but of God as interested in sin, and as necessarily related to it. Apart from this thought of God, there is a tendency to regard sin as a misfortune, rather than a fault; sympathy with the sinner is apt to lapse into an extenuating or condoning of sin; it becomes emotional or sentimental, and ceases to be, what it always was in Jesus, ethical and austere" (2).

Here is the heart of the matter. Denney talks of "the tendency to think of sin as a misfortune, rather than a fault". Denney realizes the greatness of Bushnell's book, but he sees its limitations. In his stress on Christ's love, Bushnell tended to forget the seriousness of sin in God's sight.

(1) DR, p. 256.

(2) DR, p. 257.

This account of the Atonement in history is brief. This has been done intentionally. For Denney, the interpretation of the various theories of the Atonement was never the centre of interest. His chief interest lay in the New Testament and his main thought in reviewing these various interpretations of the Atonement was to point out to what extent they were, or were not in accord with the New Testament doctrine. In Denney's mind, the merits of any interpretation of the Atonement consisted in the degree to which it was consistent with both Scripture and experience (1).

(1) DR, p. 73.

Chapter 9

Critique - Adverse Criticism of Denney

In this chapter we shall confine ourselves to the adverse criticisms of Denney which have been made by different writers. In the next chapter we shall deal with the other side of the question, favourable criticisms of Denney. In the first place it is difficult to give an adverse criticism of the views of a writer with whom one is in close agreement. And so the writer of this thesis finds it most difficult to give a fair criticism of Denney from an adverse point of view. He must therefore turn to the criticisms of others if he is to deal with this subject in any adequate way. The major difficulty here is that there are very few detailed criticisms of Denney. The writer of this thesis only knows of three such criticisms.

Gustav Aulen in "Christus Victor" makes no reference to Denney. F.W. Dillistone in "The Significance of the Cross" makes only a few passing references to Denney which are all of a favourable nature and thus of no use to us in this chapter. L. Hodgson in "The Doctrine of the Atonement" makes no reference to Denney. R.C. Moberley's book on the Atonement was published in 1901, too early for any criticism of Denney. Vincent Taylor in "Jesus and His Sacrifice" has only two brief references to Denney. In "Forgiveness and Reconciliation", Taylor makes a number of brief references to Denney, but gives no extended criticism.

A quick glance through other books on the Atonement published since Denney wrote his major works, has not revealed any appreciable contribution to the adverse criticism of Denney, except for those we shall deal with in the following pages.

Alexander McCrea writing in 1939 said: "Denney has developed the legal and penal theory so clearly and effectively that nearly all writers since his time have moved either towards the moral influence theory or ~~towards~~ towards a synthesis of the objective and subjective theories in a higher and more ultimate view that will do justice to both" (1).

For our thinking the above statement is intensely interesting and very important. According to McCrea, Denney made writers on the subject of the Atonement take their stand either for or against him. They moved, as McCrea has said, either toward the moral influence theory or towards a synthesis of the objective and subjective theories. This latter is essentially Denney's point of view.

Among those who moved towards the moral influence theory and therefore definitely against Denney was Dr. Hastings Rashdall. Dr. Rashdall's interpretation of the Atonement was not new. In fact he quotes from Peter the Lombard the following words: "The death of Christ therefore justifies us, inasmuch as through it, charity is stirred up in our hearts" (2).

(1) McCrea, Alexander, "The Work of Jesus in Christian Thought", p. 251, London, 1939.

(2) Rashdall, Hastings, "The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology", p. 438, London, 1920.

Rashdall tells us that this is essentially the doctrine of the Atonement to which he subscribes. This is the view of many of the Eastern Fathers which has been summed up in the phrase "Atonement through Incarnation". We have already seen that Denney strenuously rejects the point of view of the Eastern Fathers. It is no wonder then that Rashdall takes issue with Denney and his ideas of substitution and propitiation. Rashdall states (1) that such ideas were not generally accepted in the church up to the time of Irenaeus.

And so Rashdall launches forth on his criticism of Denney. First we shall deal with Rashdall's criticism of the story Denney uses to illustrate a certain aspect of his interpretation of the Atonement.

In brief the story is this: Supposing I am sitting on a pier on a summer day. Someone comes along and says "I am going to jump into the water and get drowned to show that I love you" (2). As Denney points out you do not just jump into the water and get drowned to show you love a person. If a person is drowning and you jump into the water and lose your life in an attempt to save that person, it is a different story. In the one case your death cannot be said to be a demonstration of love by any stretch of the imagination. In the second case it is quite legitimate to say that death is a demonstration of love. One person died in order to save the other and so Denney says that because Christ died to save men from perishing, His death was

(1) Rashdall, op. cit., p. 437.

(2) DC, p. 103.

a demonstration of love. But unless men were perishing, Christ's death was not necessarily a demonstration of love. Denney's point is that Christ's death met a real need in man's life. As the writer of this thesis sees it, according to Rashdall in some abstract and indefinite way that we cannot understand, the death of Christ was a demonstration of God's love.

Rashdall attacks Denney's illustration at several points. Rashdall points out that Christ's death was not Christ's own act but the act of the Jewish priests, the Roman magistrates and the Roman soldiers. He goes on to tell us that Jesus did not of his own free will mount upon the Cross and crucify Himself. Then Rashdall gives us what he considers a more apt illustration of Christ's death. According to him, Christ would say something like this: "To show my love for you, I will allow myself to be thrown into the sea by those who have threatened to do so unless I abandon my work of preaching" (1).

To our mind, Rashdall misconstrues the whole point of Denney's illustration. Denney does not use his story to illustrate either the voluntary or involuntary nature of Christ's death. All such talk is beside the point. Denney uses the story solely to point out that Christ died to meet a definite need in man's life, the need to be right with God. And as we have seen all through this thesis, this takes place through the atoning death of Christ which is a propitiation. The real point of dispute between Rashdall

(1) Rashdall, op. cit., p. 442.

and Denney is the question that was raised in chapter 8 of this thesis, that is: Does God forgive freely or does He not?

Denney maintains that God only forgives on the basis of Christ's atoning death. Rashdall maintains that God forgives freely. After stating his argument to support this point of view, he goes on to say: "There is nothing in the fact that the necessity for the death did not arise from any objective demand for expiation which can diminish the gratitude and the love which such a death, taken in connection with such a life, was calculated to awaken towards the Sufferer" (1). Then he adds on the next page: "It does nothing to diminish the love which the contemplation of such a death is calculated to awaken in the mind of him who believes that the whole life and death of Christ was one of love for His fellows, and that in Him who so lived and died the love of God was uniquely and supremely manifested" (2).

Denney would dispute the idea that to view the death of Christ merely as a demonstration of love does not diminish the love with it awakens. It is one of the points on which Denney is most insistent: He says more than once that we cannot know the depths of Christ's love except in the light of redemption (3).

(1) Rashdall, op. cit., p. 442.

(2) Ibid., p. 443.

(3) DC, p. 135.

H.R. MacIntosh points out the importance of gratitude in the practical application of the truth of the Atonement in human lives. "The impelling reason why people who are conscious of owing everything to God, do one thing and leave another undone, will in countless instances be found in a deep though perhaps quite unobtrusive ⁽¹⁾ ~~thankfulness~~." How gratitude can have much of a place in the life of a sinner if Christ's death is merely a demonstration of love, we cannot see. Real gratitude springs from the fact that Christ did something for us we could never have done for ourselves, something without which we would have perished. He made atonement for our sins. This is what puts gratitude in our hearts. MacIntosh points out this truth when he says: "Psychologically we cannot keep up gratitude except to one who we feel has really benefited us" (2).

Gratitude for an Atonement which meets a deep need in human hearts is the thing which really stirs our hearts to action. Rashdall seems unconscious of this sense of deep need. He seems unaware of the deep seriousness of sin and the fact that it separates men from God. This is the conclusion to which we come as we consider his criticism of Denney. Denney penetrates into the heart of a problem of which Rashdall knew little. Sydney Cave feels this about Rashdall for he writes: "After stating that neither the honest blundering of Dr. Dale nor the passionate scholarship of Dr. Denney nor the superior subtlety of Dr. Forsyth,

(1) MacIntosh, H.R., "The Christian Experience of Forgiveness", p. 265, London, Nisbet Co., 1927.

(2) Ibid., p. 265.

nor the refined elusiveness of Dr. Moberley can any more put reality" into the penal theory, Dr. Oman goes on to say: "Nevertheless one has a feeling that these writers are reaching out after some spiritual need with which Dr. Rashdall is untroubled, not because he has solved the problem but because he has ignored it" (1).

Rashdall goes on to develop the theory that the Incarnation is the Atonement. "It was in becoming incarnate and in submitting to a death which others brought about ... that His love to mankind was shown" (2). This, of course, is the theory that was so central among the Eastern Fathers. It is not necessary to deal in detail with a theory we have considered elsewhere (3). In that chapter we dealt with the reasons why Denney rejects this interpretation of the Atonement. He rejects it primarily because the New Testament knows nothing of an Incarnation that can be defined apart from Atonement (4). Rashdall, following in the footsteps of the Eastern Fathers comes to the place where "he makes of Christianity primarily a teaching and of Christ an example to be followed" (5). Denney does not forget that Christ's death is an example to be followed, for he says: "No one knew better than Paul that, though Christianity must be capable of an intellectual construction, it is not an intellectual system in

(1) Cave, Sydney, "The Doctrine of the Work of Christ", p. 251, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1937.

(2) Rashdall, op. cit., p. 441.

(3) Chapter 8.

(4) DC, p. 179.

(5) Cave, op. cit., p. 252.

essence, but a new moral life" (1). But he knows that this is not the heart of the Christian Gospel. The heart of the Gospel is that sin has been dealt with in the atoning death of Christ and only the man who is right with God is able, in any sense of the word, to follow Christ's example. But ~~Rash-~~
~~dall's~~ view made justification, not the initial but the final stage of man's upward quest; and that is legalism (2).

J.G. Mozley's Criticism of Denney

We turn next to J.G. Mozley's "Doctrine of the Atonement". From this book we get the impression that the author is very much in agreement with Denney, except on a few minor points. This is quite clear from the following statement found near the end of Mozley's book. "I do not therefore think that we need shrink from saying that Christ bore penal suffering for us and in our stead" (3).

The views of a man who makes such a statement are cer-
~~not~~tainly different from those of Denney in any fundamental way. Mozley thinks of Denney as a writer of great ability, though occasionally guilty of narrowness and harshness towards the supporters of other conceptions.

Next we shall note briefly Mozley's favourable criticisms

(1) "II Corinthians", p. 371.

(2) Cave, op. cit., p. 253.

(3) Mozley, J.G., "The Doctrine of the Atonement", p. 216ff.

of Denney (1). He draws attention to Denney's exposure of the false antithesis between 'historical' and 'dogmatic' interpretations. There is also Denney's very satisfying argument in defense of the word 'substitute' as opposed to the word 'representative'. Then Denney's reply to those who would contrast 'love' and 'propitiation' is most satisfying. These matters have already been dealt with previously and we only stop to mention them at this point.

Mozley mentions the fact that Denney speaks of the Atonement as something "originally outside us" (2). It is a little confusing as to what Mozley means here. He seems to be referring to Christ's death as a finished work. It is impossible to believe that Mozley interpreted Denney as teaching that the Atonement was complete apart from any moral influence on man. If this is how he interprets Denney, Denney's own statements flatly contradict Mozley, for he says: "The modern mind assumes what Dr. Chalmers painfully discovered. An Atonement that does not regenerate, it truly holds, is not an Atonement in which men can be asked to believe" (3).

Mozley criticizes Denney's "comparative depreciation of the Incarnation, except as a necessary presupposition for a true expiatory atonement" (4). Mozley points out that it is wrong to

(1) Mozley, op. cit., pp. 180ff.

(2) Ibid., p. 180.

(3) MM, p. 63.

(4) Mozley, op. cit., footnote, p. 212.

depreciate the Incarnation because of the fact that in itself the Incarnation does mean that God was concerned about us. He came down into our midst to be with us and to sympathize with us. We feel that Mozley has a point here. But we feel it is theoretical rather than real. The Incarnation and the Atonement are two facts; they are not separate facts but two facts; they are not separate facts but two facts indissolubly and eternally linked together in the person of Christ. The fact is that He who was incarnate at Bethlehem made Atonement at Calvary. We cannot have one without the other. This was the whole argument of chapter 4 of this thesis namely that only a Saviour who is God in human flesh can make Atonement.

T.H. Hughes' Criticism of Denney

T.H. Hughes in his book "The Atonement" with the subtitle "Modern Theories of the Doctrine" has a fairly extended criticism of Denney. Hughes' chief criticism of Denney is that Denney thinks of Christ's death as substitutionary. He thinks this is a misinterpretation of the New Testament evidence. He tells us that "Denney ignores the fact that in the New Testament almost all references to Christ's death use the preposition

'huper' meaning on behalf of rather than **'anti'** instead, suggesting that it was vicarious rather than 'substitutionary'"(1). We suppose that Hughes means by the word 'vicarious' that Christ

(1) Hughes, T.H., "The Atonement", pp. 89ff., London, 1949.

died as our representative rather than as our substitute. The Oxford Dictionary (1) says that vicarious means "deputed, acting as substitute, done or suffered by one person on behalf of another". This is not much help to us. We shall assume therefore that by 'vicarious' Hughes means 'representative'. So we may say the crux of the matter is whether the New Testament teaches that Christ died as our representative or as our substitute. For Denney the argument for 'substitute' is well supported. He is not unaware of the difficulties involved in the use of the word but in regard to the use of the word 'representative' as opposed to 'substitute' he writes: "I venture to think that with some advantages, the drawbacks of this word are quite as serious as those which attach to substitute" (2). Then a few pages later he adds: "A representative not produced by us, but given to us - not chosen by us, but the elect of God - is not a representative at all, but in that place a substitute" (3).

Denney is quite clear about the fact that he believes the death of Christ is a substitutionary death. Something very close to Denney's heart was at stake in the use or failure to use this word. He believed the word 'substitute' best explained the New Testament doctrine of the Atonement and he refused to abandon it. "If Christ died the death in which sin had involved us, if in His death He took the responsibility of our sins upon Himself, no word

(1) Pocket Edition, p. 936.

(2) MM, p. 132.

(3) MM, p. 135.

is equal to this which falls short of what is meant by calling Him our substitute" (1).

Hughes tells us that, on the whole Denney leans to the Calvinistic view that Jesus bore all the penalty (2). He sees that at times Denney gets away from this view. Denney makes the statement that "He suffered all the punishment except that of a bad conscience" (3). Hughes feels that Denney leans to the view that Christ bore all the punishment. But is Hughes really fair here? Time and time again Denney repudiates any theory which interprets the Atonement in quantitative terms. He tells us that categories of quantity, which are meaningless where personality is concerned, are inapplicable to the work of Christ (4). Denney goes on to enlarge upon this later in the same book, where he says: "Quantitative categories are meaningless in the moral world. To say that the sin of the world in all its tragic reality was borne by Christ on His Cross, so that he is a propitiation for that sin is one thing; to say that the penalties due to all men's offences were summed up and inflicted on Him, is another and entirely different thing" (5)

Hughes tells us that Mozley says that Denney puts the Atonement "outside us". He feels this may be true of Denney's earlier writings, but that it is definitely not true of his final views

(1) DC, p. 62

(2) Hughes, op. cit., p. 90.

(3) DR, p. 272. **according to Hughes** (4) DR, p. 119.

(5) DR, pp. 159ff.

in his last book "The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation" (1).

In the above named book, Denney makes the astounding statement, speaking of the righteousness of God, that "we can only conceive ~~it as God~~ taking part with us against Himself" (2). Hughes wonders if, in view of this statement, Denney has really abandoned the dualism of the post-reformation divines. He feels that here Denney comes very near to the theory of a cleavage in the Divine nature, a theory which Denney himself claims to repudiate. To the writer of this thesis, Hughes reads into Denney's statement a meaning which Denney never intended to be there. Denney is striving after words which will adequately express the meaning of the Atonement. He is aware of the difficulties involved in saying: "God takes part with us against Himself". Yet he believes that this statement comes very close to what he is trying to say, namely that sin is a very serious thing to God, and at the same time if it is to be atoned for, God must make the Atonement.

A final criticism that Hughes makes is that Denney "makes the place and the power of the Holy Spirit in the experience of forgiveness unnecessary" (3). A consideration of Denney's discussion of the place of the Holy Spirit in the Christian faith reveals that this statement is not exactly accurate. Denney tells us that in the New Testament, the life of the reconciled

(1) Hughes, op. cit., p. 91.

(2) DR, p. 142.

(3) Hughes, op. cit., p. 91.

is also described as life in the Spirit. He sees a danger in stressing too much the place of the Holy Spirit. He speaks of certain groups of Christians whose thinking about the Spirit, to him seemed eccentric and unreal (1). Denney has no desire to depreciate the place of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life. But he sees dangers involved in laying too much emphasis on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. "Unquestionably" he says, "the New Testament justifies the amplest attention to the place of the Spirit in the life of reconciliation, but it is not ~~so~~ easy to do justice to the New Testament facts as some of those who speak most of the Spirit seem to think" (2).

In spite of the Creed, Denney says, there is no such expression in the New Testament as belief in the Spirit. He realizes he may be charged with ignoring the personality of the Holy Spirit and reducing the third Person of the Trinity to an emotional disturbance (3). His answer to this is that even in the Apostolic age, the doctrine of the Spirit led to disturbing phenomena within the Church. Perhaps he is thinking of the situation Paul was dealing with in I Corinthians 12, where we see that emphasis on the Spirit led to strange forms of conduct.

To the writer of this thesis, when Denney says, "in itself Spirit is a vague term" (4), he is getting at an important truth. If the New Testament is to be our guide, it is quite obvious that

(1) DR, p. 307.

(2) DR, pp. 307ff.

(3) DR, p. 310.

(4) DR, p. 310.

the Holy Spirit was never intended to be an end in Himself. Always His function is to point to Christ. Christ said of ^{the} the Spirit: "He shall guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak from himself: He shall glorify me: for He shall take of mine and shall declare it unto you" (1). In the fourteenth chapter of John, Jesus has been talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit and almost immediately he adds: "I will not leave you desolate: I come to you" (2). There is something inconsistent here if what Hughes says is true. Jesus has been speaking of the coming of the Spirit, then he says: "I come to you". In this connection there is a significant passage in Romans 8:9-11 to which Denney draws our attention (3) where the terms 'Spirit of God', 'Spirit of Christ', and 'Christ' are practically indistinguishable. If it is vitally important to distinguish between the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit in reconciliation, why does not Paul do this? There is one answer to this. The supreme work of the Holy Spirit is to make Christ real to men.

If Denney neglects to emphasize the place of the Holy Spirit it is because of this fact. For Denney, as we have seen again and again, Christ is the One of central importance. In this Denney is true to the New Testament. Accordingly, Hughes' statement though outwardly true, fails to bring out the truth that the work of the Spirit is to point to Christ. And this is the one thing that Denney does in a supreme way. He points to Christ.

(1) John 16:13, 14 RV.

(2) John 14:18 RV.

(3) DR, p. 311.

Another student of the Doctrine of the Atonement who refers constantly to James Denney is A.B. Macaulay. In his book "The Death of Jesus", Macaulay acknowledges the great debt he owes to Denney. In the preface of his book, he writes: "Readers will easily perceive who my masters have been: Dr. J. McLeod Campbell and Principal James Denney. The history of Scottish Theology contains no names more distinguished than theirs" (1).

All together Macaulay refers to Denney eighteen times. Nearly all these references are brief ones of one or two sentences. For the most part, they are used to support an argument and are not critical. Macaulay finds himself in hearty agreement with Denney's interpretation of the Atonement, as bearing witness both to God's ~~love~~ and His severity (2).

There is only one passage where Macaulay really takes issue with Denney (3). Macaulay has been saying that the term 'substitute' emphasizes the fact that there is something from which Jesus, in His death, saves sinners. He tells us that Denney's answer is: "He saves us from dying in our sins" (4). Macaulay feels that Denney's answer is unduly narrow and he tells us that "it would be better to say that 'what we are spared or saved from, by the death of Jesus' is from living in our sins and dying in our sins - from the doom of abiding

(1) A.B. Macaulay, "The Death of Jesus", p. vii.

(2) Ibid., pp. 171ff.

(3) Ibid., p. 158.

(4) DR, p. 283.

forever in a wrong relation to God with all its consequences" (1).

Macaulay enlarges on Denney's statement and says that Jesus saves us from living in our sins and dying in our sins, and from abiding in a wrong relationship with God. But the writer of this thesis believes that Denney says each of these three things. Certainly Christ saves men from dying in their sins. The whole argument of chapter three of this thesis is that the purpose of the Atonement is to put man in a right relationship with God. Perhaps the heart of Macaulay's criticism is that Denney does not sufficiently stress the ethical implications of the Atonement. This is only partly true. It is true that Denney does not work out to any extent the ethical implications of the Atonement. But Denney did make such statements as: "Christianity is not an intellectual system in essence, but a new moral life" (2). "This moral union remains the problem and the task, as well as the reality and the truth, of the Christian life" (3). In an honest heart the Cross can never be an excuse for sinning, but only a motive to love, devotion, and gratitude (4). In the light of such statements, it is hardly fair to say Denney ignored the ethical implications of the Atonement.

(1) Macaulay, op. cit., p. 158.

(2) "II Corinthians", p. 371.

(3) LM, p. 138.

(4) DR, p. 282.

Chapter 10

Denney's Lasting Value

One of the things that has particularly struck the author of this thesis is that no writer of which he knows has ever written a shattering criticism of Denney. Except for the few pages in Rashdall's "The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology", there is no strong criticism of Denney's main position. Of course, there will always be those who because of their sympathy with the views of Abelard and his followers, that is the subjective interpretation of the Atonement, will not agree with Denney. But the writings of Dr. James Denney will always stand out as one of the great contributions to thinking on the doctrine of the Atonement. "It could well be claimed" says F.W. Dillistone (1), "that no greater Scottish theologian has arisen in this century than James Denney".

We have already referred to the statement of Alexander McCrea to the effect that Denney forced thinkers since his time to move towards the moral influence theory or towards a synthesis of the objective and subjective views. There is little doubt in any minds that Denney has made one of the really great contributions to thinking in the field of the Atonement. In retrospect, let us draw attention to three truths which make Denney an outstanding writer and thinker in this field.

(1) Dillistone, F.W., "The Significance of the Cross", p. 11.

i. Denney's Rejection of the Forensic Interpretation

One of the outstanding characteristics of Denney's doctrine of the Atonement is his definite rejection of the forensic or legal interpretation of the Atonement. He is quite outspoken about this matter and he writes: "Few things have astonished me more than to be charged with teaching a 'forensic' or 'legal' or 'judicial' doctrine of the Atonement, resting as such a doctrine must do, on a 'forensic', or 'legal', or 'judicial' conception of man's relation to God" (1).

There is no need to go very deeply into this subject here. We have already dealt with it quite thoroughly in chapter 8 of this thesis, when we dealt with Anselm's doctrine of the Atonement. Denney's attitude towards any interpretation of the Atonement in forensic terms is made quite clear in his criticism of Anselm. Because Denney is high in his praise of the merits of Anselm's interpretation, he speaks with real authority when it comes to his demerits.

One of the central truths of the whole Bible is that of the Personality of God. Denney tells us that "religion is an experience of the personality of God" (2). Because of this it will always be inadequate to describe the relations between man and God in anything but personal terms.

When we say that relations between God and man are forensic, we mean they are regulated by statute (3). And in doing

(1) MM, p. 69.

(2) MM, p. 66.

(3) MM, p. 69.

this we put a legal system at the heart of the universe instead of a personal God. It is always difficult to put spiritual truths, especially profound spiritual truths, into words that are easily understood. Of necessity we must always speak of God in parabolic language. There are some parables or metaphors that are more adequate than others but every such parable or metaphor has its limitations and difficulties arise when we press these figures of speech too far. And in no field is this more true than that of legal terms. It is true that God is our Judge and that we are responsible to Him but it is not true that the relations between God and man are those of a magistrate on a bench pronouncing sentence according to the act on the criminal at the bar (1).

This is one of the great things about Denney, he realized the inadequacy of forensic terms in any interpretation of the Atonement. He saw the necessity of interpreting the Atonement in personal terms. The very essence of God's nature is that He is a Person and any attempt to explain man's relationship to Him in anything but personal terms must be rejected.

ii. Denney Taught an Objective Theory of the Atonement

We hesitate to use the term 'objective' to describe a theory of the Atonement for the reason that it only describes the Atonement from one point of view, that is God's point of view or rather from the point of view of its effect on God. We must never forget, as Anselm and his followers in all ages

(1) MM, p. 70.

have forgotten that the Atonement has no meaning apart from its effect on man. There is no point to the Atonement unless it leads man to a new life. We can never say it is complete in itself apart from any effect it has on man. Christ died to atone for sin. This is the very heart of Denney's teaching. But the primary reason why Christ died was to accomplish man's salvation, and through this means of course to bring glory to God. This is seen in the words of John's gospel: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life" (1).

But having said this, let us be clear about the fact that there can be no salvation apart from an objective Atonement. Denney is quite definite here. He writes: "Christ and His work have this absolute value for the Father, whatever this or that individual may think of them; and as it is only on the basis of Christ and His work that reconciliation becomes an accomplished fact, it is strict truth to say that reconciliation - in the sense of man's return to God and acceptance with Him - is based on an objective Atonement" (2). The important point here is that reconciliation is based on an objective Atonement. Man cannot be saved or reconciled to God apart from an objective Atonement. Men are forgiven by a love which does absolute homage to the whole being and self-revelation of God (3).

(1) John 3:16 RV.

(2) DR, p. 235.

(3) DR, p. 235.

The religion which makes man the chief end in the universe and says that the only real reason for God's existence is to care for man is not the religion of the New Testament. Any true interpretation of the religion of the New Testament puts God at the centre and man on the circumference. God and His glory are the prime concern and Denney tells us that the love which seeks man is a love which before everything pays homage to that in God which sin has defied (1). The word used to describe this love which pays homage to that in God which sin has defied is 'propitiation'. Denney makes this quite clear when he says:

"We cannot dispense with the ideas of propitiation, *ἱλασμός*, *ἱλαστήριον* : we cannot dispense with a work of reconciliation which is as objective as Christ Himself and has its independent objective value to God, let our estimate of it be what it will" (2).

Denney describes this as a propitiatory or objective theory of the Atonement. But Denney was not altogether happy about the use of the term 'objective' as applied to the Atonement. We have already pointed out that in one of his letters to W. Robertson Nicoll (3) in speaking of a remark by a certain Dr. Mackennal that he did not care for the antithesis of objective and subjective as applied to theories of the Atonement, Denney says: "No more do I, and in fact what I have written is meant to show that the words in question are not only misleading

(1) DR, p. 236.

(2) DR, p. 236.

(3) Letters I, p. 59.

but meaningless in any discourse about Christ". It was not that Denney objected so much to the use of the two words 'subjective' and 'objective' in themselves but the idea that either word in itself was a complete picture of the Atonement. For Denney the Atonement was both objective and subjective ~~not~~^{not} one or the other. Denney was quite clear about the fact that he believed in an objective atonement for he says: "Reduced to its simplest expression, what an objective atonement means is that but for Christ and His passion, God would not be to us what He is. This seems to the writer the unquestionable Christian truth" (1).

There was one word that Denney clung to with fierce determination. He clung to it because to him it expressed the heart of the New Testament doctrine of the Atonement. It was the word 'substitute' or 'substitutionary'. He would not abandon it because he felt it expressed a truth which a man could not reject and still be true to the New Testament.

For Denney, no New Testament words better expressed the heart of the Atonement than the words: "He bore our sins". Christ's death was a martyr's death but it was more than this. To say His death was a martyr's death does not explain the New Testament truth involved in the statement that "He bore our sins" (2). For Denney, to say that "He bore our sins" was to say Christ died as our substitute. "Whoever says 'He bore our sins' says substitution; and to say substitution is to say

(1) DR, p. 239.

(2) DR, p. 277.

something which involves an immeasurable obligation to Christ, and has therefore in it an incalculable motive power" (1).

Then a few pages later he makes himself quite clear again.

"If Christ died the death in which sin had involved us, if in His death He took the responsibility of our sins upon Himself, no word is equal to this which falls short of what is meant by calling Him our substitute" (2).

We have already dealt with the question as to whether the term 'representative' is as adequate as the word 'substitute' (3). Denney definitely feels that the word 'representative' is not adequate (4).

Denney clings to the word 'substitute' and we naturally ask why he did this. Was it because he was a fanatic about words? Such a position is not supported by an appeal to Denney's writings as a whole. There must be a deeper reason for his action. He used the word because, to him, it expressed one of the deepest, if not the deepest, truths in the whole of the New Testament. It expressed as no other word could the sinner's sense of debt to Christ which Denney describes as "the most intimate, intense, and uniform characteristic of the New Testament" (5).

This sense of debt to Christ pervades the whole of the New Testament (6). This sense of debt is inexplicable except on the

(1) DC, p. 60.

(2) DC, p. 62.

(3) In chapter 9.

(4) MM, p. 135.

(5) DC, p. 61.

(6) DR, p. 283.

basis that the one thing needful for sinners was once for all done and endured at the Cross (1). Here lies the very heart of the New Testament, the very heart of the Atonement. Christ did something for man at the Cross which man can never repay. The only thing that man can do is, not to try to imitate it, but to trust in it, to abandon oneself to this sin-bearing love "unreservedly, unconditionally, and for ever" (2).

We may criticize Denney and say he failed to give love an adequate place in his doctrine of the Atonement, that he was unfair in his criticism of men like Abelard and McLeod Campbell. But this will never be anything but a superficial criticism of Denney. Denney saw as few others have seen that the Atonement teaches us that "God's condemnation of sin" is "a terrifically real and serious thing" (3). And to him the wonder of the Divine love in all its fullness could never be understood except in the light of Christ's death as a propitiation for sin. Sin was terrifically real to Denney. But to him the ultimate **reality** in the world is a Divine love which bears our sins. "It is nothing superficial or imperfectly real about God which is revealed in the work of reconciliation achieved by Christ; on the contrary, it is the ultimate truth of the divine nature; the deepest thing we can ever know about God is that there is a love in Him which bears in all its reality the sin of the world" (4).

(1) DR, p. 284.

(2) DR, p. 290.

(3) Letters I, p. 1.

(4) DR, pp. 290ff.

In the end Denney leads us to the place where love is the supreme reality and he brings his whole argument to a close with the magnificent words of St. Paul, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (1).

iii. The Practical Implications of the Atonement

Morality or ethical conduct is very important, but it can never be the heart of the Christian religion. This is because what man needs most of all is not to be shown what he ought to do but to be given the strength to live such a life. The primary task of religion is to deal first of all with moral failure and then to impart the power to live a new life (2). This is the very essence of what Christ does in His atoning death. Through that death He makes forgiveness possible. Arising from this forgiveness, comes a sense of gratitude which becomes the motive power of the new life.

There is only one thing which brings a man into union with Christ where the new life becomes possible and it is the love of Christ in which He bears our sins in His own body on the tree. New life is only possible through the atoning death of Christ. It is the acceptance of the Atonement which changes men and gives

(1) Romans 8:38, 39 RV.

(2) LR, p. 296.

them new life. There is no other source of the new life.

Denney is quite clear about this, for he writes: "The Atonement, or God's justification of the ungodly, which takes effect with the acceptance of the Atonement, regenerates and there is no regeneration besides" (1). If men are to be changed, it will be through the Atonement alone. It is not sufficient to tell men to be like Christ. They will only want to be like Him as they realize what He has done for them in His death. St. Paul looked at the Cross and said: "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again" (2). St. John looked at the Cross and saw there the deepest love in all the world. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (3). "From this He discovered the secret of all Christ-like living, a secret which is found in the words: "We love, because He first loved us" (4).

Denney stresses the practical implications of the Atonement in a magnificent statement which seems to sum up his whole thinking. He says: "In an honest heart, the Cross can never be an excuse for sinning, but only a motive to love, devotion and gratitude" (5).

(1) DR, p. 168.

(2) II Cor. 5:14, 15 RV

(3) I John 4:10 RV.

(4) I John 4:19 RV.

(5) DR, p. 282.

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