

Reconciliation: Philosophic and Christian

by P.T. Forsyth

Christian reconciliation is a mutual act between God and humanity, initiated by God and requiring human response, and is necessary due to guilt and necessitates the work of Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 51:16, Jeremiah 31:34, Romans 5:10, Romans 11:15, 2 Corinthians 3:6, 2 Corinthians 5:19, Hebrews 9:14

Topics: "Atonement", "Reconciliation"

Description

P.T. Forsyth preaches on the vital aspects of Christ's reconciling work: it is a personal reconciliation affecting both sides, resting on atonement, reconciling the world as one whole, and final in nature. He cautions against obscuring the idea of reconciliation with atonement and emptying it of atonement. Forsyth highlights the importance of understanding reconciliation as communion with God, not just alignment with a rational process, emphasizing the divine initiative and the need for a reciprocal relationship. He delves into the philosophical views of Hegel and Ritschl, stressing the significance of God's holiness in atonement and the objective act of God in reconciliation.

Transcript

I place on the board before you five points as to Christ's reconciling work which I think vital:

1. It is between person and person. 2. Therefore it affects both sides. 3. It rest on atonement. 4. It is a reconciliation of the world as one whole. 5. It is final in its nature and effect.

I was saying yesterday that two cautions ought to be observed in connection with this matter of reconciliation. First, we should not hide up the idea of reconciliation by the idea of atonement; we should not obscure the end, or the effect, by the great and indispensable means to it. Second, at the other extreme we are to beware of emptying reconciliation of atonement altogether. Two very great thinkers arose last century in Germany - where most of the thinking on this subject has for the last hundred years been done.

Much of our work has been to steal. That does not matter if it is done wisely and gratefully. When a man gives out a great thought, get it, work it; it is common property. It belongs to the whole world, to be claimed and assimilated by whoever shall find. Well, there were two very powerful men in Germany much opposed to each other, yet at a certain point at one - Hegel and Ritschl. While they preached the doctrine of reconciliation in different senses, they both united to obscure the idea of atonement or expiation.

Now we are to beware of emptying the reconciliation idea of the idea of atonement, whether we do it philosophically with Hegel or theologically with Ritschl. I mention these men because their thought has very profoundly affected English thinking, whether philosophical or theological. I protested yesterday against the practice, so common, of taking New Testament words, and words consecrated to Christian experience, emptying them of their essential content, and keeping them in a vapid use.

That is done for various reasons. It is sometimes done because the words are too valuable to be parted with; sometimes because a philosophic interpretation seems to rescue them from the narrowness of an outworn theology; and it is sometimes done for lower motives in order to produce a fictitious impression upon people that they are still substantially hearing the substance of the old truths when really they are not. Especially I began yesterday to call attention to the view which is associated with the philosophical position of Hegel.

Being a philosopher he was great upon the idea. The whole world, he said, was a movement or process of the grand, divine idea; but it was a process. Now please to put down and make much use of this fundamental distinction between a process and an act. A process had nothing moral in it. We are simply carried along on the crest of a wave. An act, on the other hand, can only be done by a moral personality. The act involves the notion of will and responsibility, and, indeed, the whole existence of a moral world.

The process destroys that notion. Now the general tendency of philosophy is to devote itself to the idea and to the process. Science, for example, which is the ground floor, not to say the basement, of philosophy - science knows nothing about acts, it only knows about processes. The chemist knows only about processes. The biologist knows only about processes. The psychologist treats even acts as processes. But the theologian, and, indeed, religion altogether, stands or falls with the idea of an act.

For him an infinite process is at bottom an eternal act. The philosophical thinker says the world is the process of an evolving idea, which may be treated as personal or may not. But for Christianity the world is the action of the eternal, divine act, a moral act, an act of will and of conscience. Let us see how this applies to our thoughts about reconciliation. I have already indicated to you that the grand goal of the divine reconciliation is communion with God, not simply that we should be in tune with the Infinite, as an attractive but thin book has it.

The object of the divine atonement is something much more than bringing us into time with God. It is more than raising our pitch and defining our note. It means that we are brought into actual, reciprocal communion with God out of guilt. We have personal intercourse with the Holy, we exchange thoughts and feelings. But this Christian idea of reconciliation, the idea of communion with the living and holy God, is replaced in philosophic theology by another idea, that, namely, of adjustment to rational Godhead, our adjustment to that mighty idea, that mighty rational process, which is moving on throughout the world.

Sometimes the Godhead is conceived as personal, sometimes as impersonal; but in any case reconciliation would be rather a resigned adjustment to this great and overwhelming idea, which, having issued everything, is perpetually recalling, or exalting, everything into fusion with itself. But fusion, however organic and concrete, is one thing, communion is another thing. An individual might be lost in the great sum of being as a drop of water is lost in the ocean. That is fusion.

Or it might be taken up as a cell in the body's organic process. That is a certain kind of reconciliation or absorption. But moral, spiritual reconciliation, where we have personal beings to deal with, is much more than fusion; more than absorption; it is communion. It is more than placing us in our niche. When we think

in the philosophic way it practically means that reconciliation is understood almost entirely from man's side, without realizing the divine initiative as an act.

But such divine initiative is everything. It is in the mercy of our God that all our hopes begin. Nothing that confuses that gets at the root of our Christian reconciliation. Or, sometimes, those philosophic ideas are carried so far that God's concern for the individual is ignored. These great processes work according to general laws; and general laws, like Acts of Parliament, are bound to do some injustice to individuals. You cannot possibly get complete justice by Act of Parliament.

It is bound to hit somebody very hard. And it has often been doubted by exponents of philosophical theology such as I describe whether the individual as an individual was really present to God's mind and affection at all. And they think prayer is unreasonable except for its reflex effect on us. Thus the whole stress comes to be put upon our attitude to God, and not upon a reciprocal relationship. That is to say, religion becomes, as I described yesterday, a subjectivity, a resignation.

In others it becomes a sense of dependence. People are invited to become preoccupied with their own attitude, their own relation, their own feelings toward the unchangeable, but absorbing, and even unfeeling God. Attention is directed upon the human side instead of insight cultivated into the divine side. The result of that practically is that religion comes to consist far too much in working up a certain frame of feeling instead of dwelling upon the objective reality of the act of God.

Resignation is, then, my act; but it is not resignation to a sympathetic act of approach in God, but only to His onward movement. But, as I have said before, if we are to produce the real Christian faith we must dwell upon, we must preach and press, that objective act and gift of God which in itself produces that faith. We cannot produce it. Many try. There are some people who actually work at holiness. It is a dangerous thing to do, to work at your own holiness. The way to cultivate the holiness of the New Testament is to cultivate the New Testament Christ, the interpretation of Christ in His Cross, by His Spirit, which cannot but produce holiness, and holiness of a far profounder order than anything we may make by taking ourselves to pieces and putting ourselves together in the best way we can, or by adjusting ourselves with huge effort to a universal process.

Religious subjectivity is truly a most valuable phase; and at some periods in the Church's history it is urgently called for. In the seventeenth century it was so called for because Protestantism had degenerated into a mere theological orthodoxy, a very hard-shell kind of Christianity. It was necessary that the great Pietistic movement should arise and correct it. But this is itself a danger in turn; and we have to rise up in the name of the gospel, of the New Testament, and demand a more objective religion; and we have to declare that if ever divine holiness is to be produced in man it can only be produced by God's act through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

The philosophic kind of theology (which is rather theosophy) often ends, you perceive, in turning real reconciliation into something quite different. It becomes turned into the mere forced adjustment of man to his fate; and naturally this often ends in a resentful pessimism. Supposing the whole universe to be a vast rational process unfolding itself like an infinite cosmic flower, you cannot have communion or any hearty understanding between a living, loving soul and that evolutionary process.

All you can do is to adjust yourself to that process, settle down to it and make the best of it, square yourself to it in the way that seems best for you, and that will cause you and others least discomfort. But reconciliation becomes debased indeed when it turns to mere resignation. Of course, we have to practice

resignation. But Christianity is not the practice of resignation. At least, that is not the meaning of reconciliation. When two friends fall out and are reconciled, it does not simply mean that one adjusts himself to the other.

That is a very one-sided arrangement. There must be a mutuality. Theology of the kind I have been describing has a great deal to say about men changing their way of looking at things or feeling about them. If I were preaching a theology like that I should say: "This mighty process, of which you are all parts, is unfolding itself to a grand closing result. It is going to be a grand thing for everybody in the long run (provided, that is, that they continue to exist as individuals and are capable of feeling anything, whether grand or mean).

It is all going to work out to a grand consummation. You do not see that, but you must make an effort and accept it as the genius and drift of things; and that is faith. You must accept the idea that the whole world is working out, through much suffering and by many round-about ways, to a grand final consummation which will be a blessing for everybody, even though it might mean their individual extinction. What you have to do in these circumstances is, by a great act of faith, to believe that this is so and to immolate yourself, if need be, for the benefit of this grand whole; at any rate, accommodate yourself to its evolving movement."

The gospel of Christ speaks otherwise. It speaks of a God to whom we are to be reconciled in a mutual act which He begins; and not of an order or process with which we are to be adjusted by our lonely act, or to which we are to be resigned. If we have an idea of such a Godhead as I have been describing, how does it affect our thought of Christ? Christ then becomes but one of its grandest prophets, or one of the greatest instances and illustrations of that adjustment to the mighty order.

He first realized, and He first declared, this great change in the way of reading the situation. What you have to do if you accept Him is to change your way of reading the situation, to accept His interpretation of life, and accept it as rationally, spiritually, and resignedly as you best can. Accept His principle. Die to live. But what a poor use of Christ - to accept His interpretation of life, as if He were a mere spiritual Goethe! That is a very attenuated Christ compared with the Christ that is offered to us in the New Testament.

That is not the eternal Son of God in whom God was reconciling the world unto Himself. That is another Christ - from some hasty points of view indeed a larger Christ; for the philosophers have a larger Christ, apparently, one more cosmic. But it is a diluted Christ, and one that cannot penetrate to the center and depth of our human need or our human personality, cannot reach our guilt and hell, and therefore cannot be the final Christ of God. Whether from the side of the philosophers, as I have been showing, or from the side of certain theologians like Ritschl, who was so much opposed to Hegel, you will often hear this said: that only man needed to be reconciled, that God did not need any reconciliation.

Now, I have been asking you to observe that we are dealing with persons. That is the first point I put upon the board. Our reconciliation is between person and person. It is not between an order or a process on the one hand and a person on the other. Therefore a real and deep change of the relation between the two means a change on both sides. That is surely clear if we are dealing with living persons. God is an eternal person; I am a finite person; yet we are persons both. There is that parity.

Any reconciliation which only means change on one side is not a real reconciliation at all. A real, deep change of relation affects both sides when we are dealing with persons. That is not the case when we are dealing on the one side with ideas, or one vast idea or process, and on the other side a person only. When

Christianity is being watered down in the way I have described, we have to concentrate our attention upon the core of it. All round us Christianity is being diluted either by thought or by blague; we must press to the core of the matter.

It is true the theology of the Christian Church on this head needs a certain amount of modification and correction at the present day. That will appear presently. But I want to make it clear that the view of the Church upon the whole, especially the great view associated with the Reformation, preserves the core of the matter, which we are in danger of losing either on one side or the other. Let me call your attention, then, to these five points, which you will find immanent in what I have subsequently to say.

First, you will note that the reconciliation is between two persons who have fallen out, and not between a failing person on the one hand and a perfect, imperturbable process on the other. The second thing is a corollary from the first, and is that the reconciliation affects and alters both parties and not only one party. There was reconciliation on both sides. Thirdly, it is a reconciliation which rests upon atonement and redemption. Fourthly, it is a reconciliation of the world as a cosmic whole.

The world as one whole; not a person here and another there, snatched as brands from the burning; not a group here and a group there; but the reconciliation of the whole world. Fifthly, it is a reconciliation final in Jesus Christ and His Cross, done once for all; really effected in the spiritual world in such a way that in history the great victory is not still to be won; it has been won in reality, and has only to be followed up and secured in actuality. In the spiritual place, in Christ Jesus, in the divine nature, the victory has been won.

That is what I mean by using the word "Final" at the close of the list. I will expound these heads as I go along. Let me begin almost at the foundation and say this. Reconciliation has no moral meaning as between finite and infinite - none apart from the sense of guilt. The finished reconciliation, the setting up of the New Covenant by Christ, meant that human guilt was once for all robbed of its power to prevent the consummation of the Kingdom of God. It is the sense of guilt that we have to get back today for the soul's sake and the kingdom's; not simply the sense of sin.

There are many who recognize the power of sin, the misfortune of it; what they do not recognize is the thing that makes it most sinful, which makes it what it is before God, namely, guilt; which introduces something noxious and not merely deranged, malignant and not merely hostile; the fact that it is transgression against not simply God, not simply against a loving God, but against a holy God. Everything begins and ends in our Christian theology with the holiness of God. That is the idea we have to get back into our current religious thinking.

We have been living for the last two or three generations, our most progressive side has been living, upon the love of God, God's love to us. And it was very necessary that it should be appreciated. Justice had not been done to it. But we have now to take a step further, and we have to saturate our people in the years that are to come as thoroughly with the idea of God's holiness as they have been saturated with the idea of God's love. I have sometimes thought when preaching that I saw a perceptible change come over my audience when I turned from speaking about the love of God to speak about the holiness of God.

There was a certain indescribable relaxing of interest, as though their faces should say, "What, have we not had enough of these incorrigible and obtrusive theologians who will not let us rest with the love of God but must go on talking about things that are so remote and professional as His holiness!" All that has to be changed. We have to stir the interest of our congregations as much with the holiness of God as the Church was stirred - first with the justice and then latterly with the love of God.

It is the holiness of God which makes sin guilt. It is the holiness of God that necessitates the work of Christ, that calls for it, and that provides it. What is the great problem? The great problem in connection with atonement is not simply to show how it was necessary to the fatherly love, but how it was necessary to a holy love, how a holy love not only must have it but must make it. The problem is how Christ can be a revelation not of God's love simply, but of God's holy love.

Without a holy God there would be not problem of atonement. It is the holiness of God's love that necessitates the atoning Cross. I say, then, that the reconciliation has no meaning apart from guilt which must stir the anger of a holy God and produce separation from Him. That is, the reconciliation rests upon a justification, upon an atonement. Those were the great Pauline ideas which were rediscovered in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and became the backbone of the Reformation.

They were practically rediscovered. Look at the movement in the history of the Church's thought in this respect. You have three great points: you might name them - the first from Augustine, the second from Luther; for the third, our modern time, we have as yet no such outstanding name. The first great movement towards the rediscovery of Paul was by Augustine. Do you know that Paul went under after the first century? He went under for historic reasons I cannot stay to explain.

It is a remarkable thing how he was kept in the canon of Scripture. Paul went under, and for centuries remained under, and he had to be rediscovered. That was done by Augustine. Again he went under, and Luther rediscovered him. And he is being rediscovered again today. Augustine's rediscovery was this, justification by grace alone; Luther's side of the rediscovery was justification by faith alone - faith in the Cross, that is to say, faith in grace. What is our modern point of emphasis?

Justification by holiness and for it alone. That is to say, as I have already pointed out, reconciliation is something that comes from the whole holy God, and it covers the whole of life, and it is not exhausted by the idea of atonement only or redemption only. It is the new-created race being brought to permanent, vital, life-deep communion with the holy God. Only holiness can be in communion with the holy God. We have to be saved - not indeed from morality, because we can only be saved by the moral; that is the grand sheet-anchor of our modern theories.

However we be saved, we can only be saved in a way consistent with God's morality - that is to say, with holiness. The rescue is not from morality; but it is from mere moralism, from a religion three parts conduct. We are saved through the Spirit of a new life, an indiscerptible life in Jesus Christ. That is the grand new thing in Christianity (2 Corinthians 3:6) Reconciliation, then, has no meaning apart from a sense of guilt, that guilt which is involved in our justification.

I am going to try to expound that before I am done. I want to note here that it means not so much that God is reconciled, but that God is the Reconciler. It is the neglect of that truth which has produced so much skepticism in the matter of the atonement. So much of our orthodox religion has come to talk as though God were reconciled by a third party. We lose sight of this great central verse, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." As we are both living persons, that means that there was reconciliation on God's side as well as ours; but wherever it was, it was effected by God Himself in Himself.

In what sense was God reconciled within Himself? We come to that surely as we see that the first charge upon reconciling grace is to put away guilt, reconciling by not imputing trespasses. Return to our cardinal verse, 2 Corinthians 5:19. In reconciliation the ground for God's wrath or God's judgment was put away.

Guilt rests on God's charging up sin; reconciliation rests upon God's non-imputation of sin; God's non-imputation of sin rests upon Christ being made sin for us. You have thus three stages in this magnificent verse.

God's reconciliation rested upon this, that on His Eternal Son, who knew no sin in His experience, (although He knew more about sin than any man who has ever lived), sin's judgment fell. Him who knew no sin by experience, God made sin. That is to say, God by Christ's own consent identified Him with sin in treatment though not in feeling. God did not judge Him, but judged sin upon His head. He never once counted Him sinful; He was always well pleased with Him; it was part, indeed, of His own holy self-complacency.

Christ was made sin for us, as He could never have been if He had been made a sinner. It was sin that had to be judged, more even than the sinner, in a world-salvation; and God made Christ sin in this sense, that God as it were took Him in the place of sin, rather than of the sinner, and judged the sin upon Him; and in putting Him there He really put Himself there in our place (Christ being what He was); so that the divine judgment of sin was real and effectual. That is, it fell where it was perfectly understood, owned, and praised, and had the sanctifying effect of judgment, the effect of giving holiness at last its own.

God made Him to be sin in treatment though not in feeling, so that holiness might be perfected in judgment, and we might become the righteousness of God in Him; so that we might have in God's sight righteousness by our living union with Christ, righteousness which did not belong to us actually, naturally, and finally. Our righteousness is as little ours individually as the sin on Christ was His. The thief on the cross, for instance - I do not suppose he would have turned what we call a saint if he had survived; though saved, he would not have become sinless all at once.

And the great saint, Paul, had sin working in him long after his conversion. Yet by union with Christ they were made God's righteousness, they were integrated into the New Goodness; God made them partakers of His eternal love to the ever-holy Christ. That is a most wonderful thing. Men like Paul, and far worse men than Paul, by the grace of God, and by a living faith, become partakers of that same eternal love which God from everlasting and to everlasting bestowed upon His only-begotten Son.

It is beyond words. It was not a case of wiping a slate. Sin is graven in. You cannot wipe off sin. It goes into the tissue of the spiritual being. And it alters things for both parties. Guilt affected both God and man. It was not a case of destroying an unfortunate prejudice we had against God. It was not a case of putting right a misunderstanding we had of God. "You are afraid of God," you hear easy people say; "it is a great mistake to be afraid of God. There is nothing to be afraid of.

God is love." But there is everything in the love of God to be afraid of. Love is not holy without judgment. It is the love of holy God that is the consuming fire. It was not simply a case of changing our method, or thought, our prejudices, or the moral direction of our soul. It was not a case of giving us courage when we were cast down, showing us how groundless our depression was. It was not that. If that were all it would be a comparatively light matter. If that were all, Paul could only have spoken about the reconciliation of single souls, not about the reconciliation of the whole world as a unity.

He could not have spoken about a finished reconciliation to which every age of the future was to look back as its glorious and fontal past. In the words of that verse which I am constantly pressing, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." Observe, first, "the world" is the unity which corresponds to the reconciled unity of "Himself"; and second, that He was not trying, not taking steps to provide means of

reconciliation, not opening doors of reconciliation if we would only walk in at them, not laboring toward reconciliation, not (according to the unhappy phrase) waiting to be gracious, but "God was in Christ reconciling," actually reconciling, finishing the work.

It was not a tentative, preliminary affair (Romans 11:15). Reconciliation was finished in Christ's death. Paul did not preach a gradual reconciliation. He preached what the old divines used to call the finished work. He did not preach a gradual reconciliation which was to become the reconciliation to the world only piecemeal, as men were induced to accept it, or were affected by the gospel. He preached something done once for all - reconciliation which is the base of every soul's reconciliation, not an invitation only.

What the Church has to do is to appropriate the thing that has been finally and universally done. We have to enter upon the reconciled position, on the new creation. Individual men have to enter upon that reconciled position, that new covenant, that new relation, which already, in virtue of Christ's Cross, belonged to the race as a whole. I will even use for convenience' sake the word totality. (People turn up their noses at a word like that they say it smells of philosophy.

Well, philosophy has not a bad smell! You cannot have a proper theology unless you have a philosophy. You cannot accurately express the things that theology handles most deeply. The misfortune of our ministry is that it comes to theology without the proper preliminary culture - with a pious or literary culture only.) I am going to use this word totality, and say that the first bearing of Christ's work was upon the race as a totality. The first thing reconciliation does is to change man's corporate relation to God.

Then when it is taken home individually it changes our present attitude. Christ, as it were, put us into the eternal Church; the Holy Spirit teaches us how to behave properly in the Church. I go on to show that reconciliation has its effect not upon man only, but upon God also. That is a difficulty to many people. And, indeed, we require to be somewhat discriminating here. If you say bluntly that Christ reconciled God, it is more false than true. I do not say it is untrue. It is the people who want plain black and white, false or true, that do so much mischief in these matters.

It is the thin, commonsense rationalists, orthodox or heterodox. It is the people who put a pistol to your head and say, "I am a plain man and I want a plain yes or no," that cause so much difficulty. Christ always refused to answer with a pistol to His head. It was the whole manner of His ministry to refuse to give a plain answer when asked a blunt question. We see that in Peter's discovery and confession, "Thou art the Christ," and in Christ's joyful answer, "Blessed Simon."

Peter in his confession had crowned what Christ had labored to live in upon them, but what He had never said plainly in so many words - "I am the Christ." He lived it into them and made them discover it. Repeatedly He was asked, "Give us signs," "Give us yes or no," and He always refused. That would be sight, not faith. A plain yes or no is sight. But faith is insight into Christ. In this region a plain yes or no is somewhat out of place. So, therefore, while it is not false to say that Christ reconciled God, it is more false than true as it is mostly put.

You do not get it in the Bible. It would be a useful exercise to go through the Bible and see what proofs you can get of Christ reconciling God. If we talk about Christ reconciling God in the way some do, we suggest that there was some third party coming between us and God, reconciling God on the one hand and us on the other, like a daysman. That is one great mischief that is done by the popular theories of atonement. God can never be regarded as the object of some third party's intervention in reconciling.

If it were so, what would happen? There would be no grace. It would be a bought thing, a procured thing, the work of a pardon-broker; and the one essential thing about grace is that it is unbought and unpurchasable. It is the freest thing in heaven or earth. It would not be free if procured by some third party. The "daysman" metaphor has been much abused. It is a Scriptural figure, but we get it in the Old Testament, in Job, the idea being that of one who, in the case of a dispute, puts one hand on one head and the other on another and brings two persons together.

That is a crude version of the Christian idea of reconciliation. The grace of God would not then be the prime and moving cause. It would not be spontaneous and creative, it would be negotiated grace; and that is a contradiction in terms. Mediation can never mean that. In paganism the gods were mollified. God, our God, could never be mollified. There is no mollification of God, no placation of God. Atonement was not the placating of God's anger. Even in the old economy we are told, "I have given you the blood to make atonement."

Given! Did you ever see the force of it? "I have given you the blood to make atonement. This is an institution which I set up for you to comply with, set it up for purposes of My own, on principles of My own, but it is My gift." The Lord Himself provided the lamb for the burnt offering. Atonement in the Old Testament was not the placating of God's anger, but the sacrament of God's grace. It was the expression of God's anger on the one hand and the expressing and putting in action of God's grace on the other hand.

The effect of atonement was to cover sin from God's eyes, so that it should no longer make a visible breach between God and His people. The actual ordinance was established, they held, by God Himself. He covered the sin. Sacrifices were not desperate efforts and surrenders made by terrified people in the hope of propitiating an angry deity. The sacrifices were in themselves prime acts of obedience to God's means of grace and His expressed will. If you want to follow that out further, perhaps I may be forgiven if I were to allude to the last chapter in my book, "The Cruciality of the Cross" (1909), in which there is a fuller discussion of the particular point, and especially of what is morally meant by the blood of Christ.

But some one immediately asks, Is there then no objective atonement? It is a question worth deep attention. A great many people say Christianity wrecks chiefly on the idea of objective atonement. How cheap the objection is in many cases, how easy and common it is! If you find somebody who is making it his mission in life to pull to pieces the venerable theology of the Catholic Church, and show how poor a thing it is in the light of the thirty years in which he has lived, you will hear it put likely enough in such terms as these: that objective atonement is sheer paganism.

The Christian idea of atonement is identified offhand with the pagan idea of atonement, as a Hyde Park lecturer might. And when you have done that at the outset, it is the simplest thing to show how false and absurd and pagan such theology is. It is said further, that the whole Church has become paganized in this way, and has spoken as though God could be mollified by something offered to Him. The criticism is sometimes ignorant, sometimes ungenerous, sometimes culpable. If such language has ever been held, it has only been by sections of the Church, sections that have gone wrong in the direction of unqualified extremes.

You have extravagances, remember, even in rational heresy. Has the Church on the whole ever really forgotten that it is in the mercy of God that all our hopes begin and end? And even if the Church had gone further wrong than it has done about this, we do not live upon the Church, but upon the gospel and upon the Bible. We live in and through the Church. We cannot do without it. We must get back a great deal

more respect for it. But we do not live on the Church; we live on the word of the gospel which is in the Bible.

What is the real objective element in the Bible's gospel? What is the real objective element in atonement? We are tempted, I say, to declare that it was the offering of a sacrifice to God outside of Him and us, the offering of a sacrifice to God by somebody not God yet more than a single man. That is the natural, the pagan notion of objective atonement. But the real meaning of an objective atonement is that God Himself made the complete sacrifice. The real objectivity of the atonement is not that it was made to God, but by God.

It was atonement made by God, not by man. When I use the word objective, I do not mean objective to you or to me. You are objective to me, and I to you. That is not the idea. Let us learn to think on the scale of the whole race. What is objective to that? The deadly kind of subjectivity is the kind that is engrossed with individuals, or with humanity, and does not allow for God. It is the egotism of the race. And the real objectivity is that which is objective to the whole human race, over against it, and not merely facing you or me within it.

The real objective element in the atonement, therefore, is that God made it and gave it finished to man, not that it was made to God by man. Any atonement made by man would be subjective, however much it might be made for man by his brother, or by a representative of entire Humanity. But we have a certain farther difficulty to face here. If it was God that made the atonement - which it certainly was in Christianity - then was it not made to man? Can God reconcile Himself? And can the atonement mean anything more than the attuning of man to God - that is to say, of individual men in their subjective experience?

God then says to each soul, "Be reconciled. See, I have put My anger away." Can such attuning of Himself by God have for its results anything more than individual conversion? Now, conversion means much, but it does not mean the whole of Christianity. Reconciliation means the life-communion of the race. But, if God made the atonement, it might seem that the result and effect of this atonement could only be reached gradually by the attuning of individual men to God. It would seem to destroy the totality of the race, or (to employ another word even more useful) the solidarity of the race.

That would seem to be the effect; and it is such a serious effect, for this reason: that it affects the universality of Christ's work. Whatever affects the universality of Christ's work cuts the ground from under aggressive Christianity, from under missions, whether at home or abroad. They cannot thrive except upon a faith which means the universality of Christ's work, which means again the solidarity, the organic unity, of the whole human race. And the conversion of a race is a work that exceeds conversion and is redemption.

About that the Old Testament and the New Testament are at one. But, you say, you do not have the solidarity of the human race in the Old Testament. Well, you do, and you do not. What you have to face with God in the Old Testament is a collective nation, Israel. We shall never read the Old Testament with true understanding until we realize that. That is one of the great things modern scholarship has brought home to us - that the vis-a-vis of God in the Old Testament is Israel and not the individual Jew.

Gradually, as the Old Testament develops in spiritual intimacy, you have this changing and becoming intensely individual, as in the later Psalms. In Jeremiah it became so especially. The greatest prefiguration of Christ's individual solitude in the Old Testament is Jeremiah. But both of them were representative or collective individuals. They condensed the people. The object that faced God in the Old

Testament in the main was not primarily the individual soul, it was the soul of the nation of Israel, even though it was sometimes reduced to a remnant.

What took place when Israel made the great refusal of Christ? There was set up another collective unity, the Church, the new Israel, the spiritual Israel, the landless, homeless Israel, whose home was in Him, the universal Israel, the new Humanity of the new covenant. The Church became the prophecy and prefiguration of the unity of Humanity. It is through the Church alone that the unity of Humanity can be consummated, because it is possible only through the gospel. And the preacher of this gospel in the world is the collective Church.

We must, therefore, avoid every idea of atonement which seems to reduce it to God's dealing with a mass of individuals instead of with the race as a whole - instead of a racial, a social, a collective salvation, in which alone each individual has his place and part. Our Protestant theology has been too individualist, too little collectivist. And that has had serious social consequences as well as theological. The basis of a social salvation is the final redemption in one act of the total race. And that act was the Cross of Christ.

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