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The rationale of the atonement

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The Rationale of the Atonement.

① "If God wishes to lie, we must not conclude that it is right to lie, but rather that he is not God." This quaint sentence of Anselm implies the true statement of God's relation to truth and righteousness. The Moral Law is not as ^② Socinus taught, a product of the divine will; nor is it a necessary and eternal law outside of God, which he may or may not obey in the freedom of his own volition; nor is the truth best expressed in ^③ Mr. Dale's doctrine of identity, - that in God the abstract law is alive; - the Law is not subject to God, nor sovereign over God, nor is there an abstract law which comes to life in God, but has no source in him: - the Moral Law is the law by which God expresses himself, the outward manifestation of what God really is, the outcome of the totality of

the Godhead. As stated in a recent study of Trinitism: — ⁽⁴⁾ "The living God is supreme reason and righteousness in eternal act of self-realization."

Such being God's relation to his Law, he must forever demand the supremacy of that Law. He can no more allow the overthrow of his Law than he can allow the ^[Disruption] splintering of the Trinity. No creature — no possible thing or person — no race or world which the Absolute Personality can will out of nothing into being can be as precious and necessary to God as is his own majestic Law. Max-⁽⁵⁾tensson is not extravagant when he says: —
 "Sooner must He leave the world to sink in ruin than violate the eternal laws of his holiness and rectitude."

Against this Moral Law man had sinned. What will God do? What must

God do? HE must demand such a satisfaction as will, to his own thought, uphold the supremacy of the Law. This Demand springs out of the necessities of the Divine life. It is not that without such a satisfaction God could not govern, but that without such a satisfaction God could not be God at all. Here, then, is the philosophical ground of the absolute necessity of satisfaction.

At this point, however many details of the work we may reject, the value of the "Cure Deus-Homo" appears. Gregory Nazianzen had asked the question: ^(b) "Is it not plain that the Father received the ransom, not because he himself required or needed it, but for the sake of the Divine government of the universe?"^s So, replies the archbishop of Canterbury by his famous metaphysique of the atonement,

it is neither plain nor possible; the Father did require and need it, both: there is an inward necessity of the atonement grounded in the essence of Duty itself.

It is in being content with a relative necessity of satisfaction that all purely governmental theories fail. The atonement must reach up into God's life absolutely, or, in the end, some ^{clumsy and miserable fiction} [miserable sham] like the "acceptatio" of Duns Scotus is logically ^{our own latest writer on the subject} inevitable. Even ^{the} [Professor Alley], ^⑧ when he says that God needed an atonement "only in the requirements of his restoral obligations", comes short of the truth. God demands the supremacy of his Law, not, first of all, to benefit his creatures, not because he is under restoral obligations, but because he cannot be undefined.

It is only when we pass from the

necessity to the nature of the atonement, and enquire: - How does the vicarious sacrifice of Christ propitiate God and render forgiveness possible? - that we find the value of the governmental theory. The necessity of an atonement is grounded in God as God; but the nature of the atonement which is a fact in history, becomes apparent when, with Grotius, we consider God as ruler. God as God demands the supremacy of his Law; God as ruler demands the supremacy of his Law in governmental relations - i.e. - when God has once limited himself by a vesture of office, the demands of duty appear in that office, and the Law must be established in the moral government of the universe. The atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ is just this satisfaction to God as Moral Ruler. That faultless life of toil and teaching crowned

with that mysterious sorrow of Gethsemane and that awful agony of Golgotha declared the righteousness of the King and established the supremacy of the Law in the Kingdom. Not only this, but the love of God is manifest in the atonement, and the interests of the Law are conserved by this revelation of divine compassion. It must be admitted that Orthodoxy has often slighted the moral theory of the atonement; yet this theory contains features which we cannot dare not spare. To establish the supremacy of the Law in the government of the world, it was as necessary to reveal the love of God as to reveal his righteousness. Either revelation alone would be incomplete, the one leading to presumption, the other to despair; but both together inclining all hearts to a hopeful reverence and a grateful obedience. To us, then, no less than to Abelard, Maurice, Leampool & John Young: - "Christ

is the Heart of God laid open that man might almost hear the beat of its unutterable throbbings, might almost feel the rush of its mighty pulsations." Once holding firmly that God as God must demand the supremacy of his Law, and that God as ruler must demand the supremacy of that Law in governmental relations, - and no man - not even a Berkeley in his mildest passion of sympathy can overemphasize the love of God in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To obtain a more complete rationale of the atonement we must consider, not only its divine, but also its human side. Here a field opens out before us which has been too much neglected by students of Soteriology. Man has been created in the image of God; and, as created, must demand the supremacy of that Law which is an

expression of the divine nature. Man, now, is out of harmony with God, and the divine image shatters; yet in just the degree man is brought back to original purity, in just that degree he makes the original demand. ⁽¹¹⁾ Vincent and Mousell have both caught this truth that the

"most imperious and profound of man's wants is the satisfaction of Moral Law."

This is the secret of our feeling that there is ⁽¹²⁾ "a real difficulty in the way of forgiveness" - a feeling which James Freeman Clarke would have us think is due to our ignorance of God, but which is due really to our deep inner knowledge of him. If (to use a forcible expression of Horace Bushnell) God could, against the requirements of righteousness, 'spill a mother-pardon' out of his warm pity upon a reprobate, there yet would need to be paid a satisfaction to every holy

life in the universe! - if God could, without an atonement, by the mere exercise of "na-
ked and horrid almightiness", force man
into harmony with the divine life, as long
as man remained man, that very harmony
would either plunge him into furious an-
tagonisms, or compel him, out of the very
depths of God, to demand an atonement
for sin!

Man can be at rest only under the
Moral Law supreme: saved by the God-Man, man
is satisfied. Am Chn Rd

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