

## VI. Redemption.

We believe that in the greatness of His love for man God has in Christ opened up a way of deliverance from the guilt and power of sin.

We believe that Christ, by living our life without sin, by dying at the hands of sinful men with faith unshaken and unfaltering love, has done for man what man could not do for himself. On the Cross He bore the burden of sin, and He broke its power; and what He did there moves men to repentance, conveys forgiveness, undoes the estrangement, and binds them to Himself in a new loyalty.

We believe that by His resurrection and exaltation Christ stands victorious over death and all evil, and that He fills those who commit themselves to Him with such grace and strength that in Him they, too, are conquerors. His redemption of man is at once an awful mystery and a glorious fact; it is the Lord's doing and marvellous in our eyes.

So we acknowledge the unmerited love and the mercy of our God in giving His only-begotten Son that we might not perish, but have everlasting life.

## CHAPTER VI. REDEMPTION

*What Man Could Not Do.* Gal. 3: 19-24; Rom. 11: 32-36.

"There is nothing that man can desire from the gods, nothing that the gods can grant to a man, nothing that wish can conceive or good fortune bring to pass which Augustus . . . did not bestow upon the republic, the Roman people, and the world." So run the fulsome words of the courtly historian Velleius Paterculus. But a brother historian lets the light in on that same Augustus: there were things he could not achieve in his own household. He had to acknowledge vexation of soul over his grandsons, Gaius and Lucius, because he could not instil into them the virtues befitting members of the imperial house: they were given to luxury and to insolence. It was the story over again of Eli, the aged priest of Israel. Neither priests nor kings can control the waywardness of the human heart. Augustus introduced Gaius to the Senate as the Führer of youth, *princeps inventutis*, but the real leader of youth was already introduced to a most inconspicuous company of folk at Nazareth in a corner of his empire. How little right Augustus had to the extravagant claims of Velleius Paterculus appears in the picture we have of him in his old age, trembling fearfully before thunder and lightning, carrying a sealskin for protection, and at any hint of violent storm diving for shelter into an underground vaulted room. Kings cannot control their own fears, far less protect their subjects from the manifold evils that beset the realm of the spirit.<sup>1</sup>

Reconstruction is the blessed word upon our lips these days. After great upheavals men look with eager expectation to the new order. It was so in the days of Augustus. National barriers were broken down. Greek thought and literature with all their power to stimulate had overflowed the world and given to mankind a vision of the larger, more generous interests of the mind. Over the far-flung battlefields of East and West peace had fallen at last, fratricidal strife had ceased to pour her blood-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by J. Y. Simpson, *The Garment of the Living God*, p. 255.

offerings upon earth. Under such a beatific respite were induced in a war-weary world hopes that mounted to high heaven.

But architects of great empires are not physicians of the spirit. There are tears in things, as Vergil has it. "I have been made to learn," writes R.L.S., "that the doom and burthen of our life is bound for ever on man's shoulders, and when the attempt is made to cast it off, it but returns upon us with more unfamiliar and more awful pressure."<sup>2</sup> So Aeschylus long ago:

Taunt follows taunt and things are hard to read.  
The spoiler's spoiled: murders to murder lead:  
And long as Zeus abides upon his throne  
Sure the ill-doer must suffer and atone.  
God set the law. Who out of bounds may throw  
The brood of curses? The race is glued to woe.<sup>3</sup>

Evidently man—modern as Stevenson, ancient as Aeschylus—is persuaded that there are some things he cannot do. There is a sequence that is hard to break, a bondage that demands a divine intervention.

*The Lord's Doing.* Rom. 5: 1-11; 1 Cor. 1: 18—2: 5.

There is a paradoxical quality in the Gospel story that betrays the handiwork of God. Wishful thinking could not have lit on Jesus as the bearer of the liberating word for mankind. There was so much of the surprising and the unexpected in the manner of His coming and the method of His action that we can only ascribe the initiative to the divine wisdom. To step out of a carpenter's shop for this superhuman task seems fantastic. No good thing could come out of Nazareth, and no exponent of peaceful policies was looked for by revolutionary Galilee, the seat of recurring outbreaks against Rome. A little company of fishermen and tax-gatherers was no formidable invasion army for the setting up of a new order. To combat the sophistries of a subtle world there was no scholar among them. To think that out of that arid period of legalism new life should spring up, that after centuries of spiritual exhaustion in which no prophetic voice was raised new wine should suddenly burst the old wineskins! Who

<sup>2</sup> *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.*

<sup>3</sup> *Agamemnon.*

could have anticipated that out of a nation proudly conscious of its own religious uniqueness, a nation that turned deliberately away from other people as contaminating Gentiles, there should issue a movement that gathered mean slaves and abandoned sinners to its fold and welcomed with open arms all sorts and conditions of men?

Was it not strange too that at the very moment when the strong right arm of Rome had gotten her the victory over all nations, when the approval of heaven seemed to be stamped on the efficiency of ruthless forces and masters of the art of war, there should appear that startling notion that by suffering love and a patient humility a Kingdom could be established on the earth, and that a Kingdom without end? And the chosen point of appeal to mankind was a humiliating criminal's cross, the least spectacular of platforms, the most repulsive of all standards. Then to go on to assert that to men who had thus foully done Him to death this man had only forgiveness to offer, that the burden of sin was taken away for faith alone! How could it be suggested that a righteous God could overlook the accumulated sins of that war-crazed and lust-driven world of men? Man could not have the face to imagine so free a gift. The wonder of it stamps it as divine. Only God can deal in such stupendous generosity. The divine initiative shines out from every feature of this moving story.

*Marvellous In Our Eyes.* Acts 2: 22-23; Mark 8: 31-32; Mark 10: 35-45; Gal. 4: 1-5.

"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2: 23).

This is the first recorded pronouncement of the early Church concerning the mystery of the Cross. This is their primary conviction. "It is the Lord's doing and marvellous in our eyes." The Church proclaimed the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. That death upon the Cross was no human mischance, no accidental miscarriage of justice on the part of a Roman governor. It was a grand design of God in which the human actors were but players fitted into a larger drama than their minds perceived. The God who made man, and sent him into the universe with the perilous gift of freedom, had foreseen the

tragic failure, and had made gracious provision for a grand act of redemption. There was One who was to bear the sins of the world according to the divine plan. Wickedness was to guide men's hands, but that deed was to be a mirror in which they would see themselves in their true nature as never before. God was to deliver up, to surrender, that which was infinitely precious, to achieve His hidden purpose. That purpose was to redeem mankind. All through history He had been stirring, provoking, cherishing movements to that end. In the evolving story of Israel His seers had come to trace the working of His hand. Had He not set His seal on Israel and yet delivered her up to torturing spoliation, oppression, and exile? Was it not by her defeats and sufferings that He had striven to woo her from the affections of earth? Did she not learn more from her humiliation than from her victories? Was it not from out of slavery under Pharaoh, from wilderness experiences, that she came first to discern the righteous God of Sinai? Did not the favoured King David and the inspired Elijah and the suffering Jeremiah all learn by buffetings and humiliation? Was this not the divine way, the sorrowful way of the Suffering Servant of God? So the culminating act, the Cross of Christ, was His deliberate purpose, the choice He had made in the beginning of time.

*God Has Done.* Heb. 2: 17-18; Heb. 4: 14—5: 10; Heb. 7: 26-28; Heb. 10: 24-28; Phil. 2: 6-11; Eph. 2: 4-10.

The way of deliverance for men came in a single decisive act of God. The New Testament rings from end to end with the sense of a "once-for-all-ness" in this deed of God. This is emphasized consistently by the tense of the verb the writers use to describe the coming of Christ Jesus: it is the tense (aorist) that marks an action as taking place at a point of time. It is a fact of history, the Fourth Gospel assures us, that God let His love light on the world: *He made a gift*, the gift of His only-begotten son; and the end in view was that every individual soul setting its faith in Him should not fade out into futility, but should touch life on a new plane of being (John 3: 16). Paul is equally insistent about the historic character of that invasion. When there came the crisis point of time, he says in Gal. 4: 4, 5, *out He sent* His own son, born of a woman, born under the slavery of law, that He might buy out the enslaved of the law to

the end that we might get back the status of sons. Again in Phil. 2: 7, He took a slave's rôle and thus in one act of will poured Himself out. Further, in Col. 1: 13 he exalts the Father as the one who made it possible for us to share the lot of the saints in light, who *actually effected our rescue* from the power of darkness and translated us into the Kingdom, the realm of His beloved Son: deliverance has been achieved in one stroke. So in Rom. 3 after describing the human situation—that all men committed sin and so fell short of God's high purpose for their destiny—he declares that God set out in the forefront the Christ as a means of achieving our reconciliation. Striking the same note of affirmation, Peter (1 Pet. 1: 3) blesses the God and Father of our Lord because He really has *brought us to birth* into a new life of hope; and the author of the Apocalypse (1: 5) breaks into praise to "him who *loves us and has loosed us* from our sins with the shedding of his blood," the change into the tense of finished action being significant. In all this testimony the Epistles are but under-scoring the words ascribed to Jesus Himself in Mark 10: 45: "The Son of Man came not to get service, but to give it, and to make the gift of his life as a ransom for many." The author of Hebrews has as his theme the *finality* of the work of Jesus: the occasional voices of the past have given place to the one complete utterance in the Son. The continually repeated sacrifices of the ancient Hebrew ritual were ineffective; now has come by contrast a sacrifice distinguished by its singleness and finality. It was but *one* sacrifice that He made for sin: by a single offering He has for all time perfected those who are under sanctification (10: 12-14). Once and for all at the culmination of the ages Christ has appeared to abolish sin by the sacrifice of Himself. It is appointed to men to die but once and then to undergo judgment. So Christ, after being once and for all sacrificed to bear the sin of many, will appear again—but without any relation to sin—to save those who are on the lookout for Him (Heb. 9: 26-29). Protestantism certainly has here sure and abundant evidence for the faith that there was one complete and adequate self-giving; an event so unique that there can be no repetition.

In this one decisive intervention of God we are confronted by two elements that cannot be taken separately: (a) a life lived without sin with faith unshaken, and unflinching love, (b) a

death suffered at the hands of sinful men. Too often the death has been considered in isolation as if by one blood-offering a transaction was carried through that mollified an angry God and enabled Him to score off the piled-up debt that stood over against human kind. We must see Christ in His wholeness, in the total witness of His life and death. The death is meaningless unless we see it as the crown and culmination of a spirit and virtue that were poured out without stint upon the earth.

*By Living Our Life.*

Consider that sinless life. His work and words engendered such bitter hate that, if His contemporaries could have found any shred of evidence against Him, they would have seized upon it and magnified it with the will to slander. The fact that they tried to cast aspersions on His birth, on Mary rather than on the son, indicates how futile was their search for taunts against Him. And the word "sinless" is a weak negative term that should be displaced in our mind by the thought rather of His positive moral power, an elevation of mind and soul and heart that gave to human personality a new glory. It was a phenomenon that had never been known before even in a nation that excels in the greatness of its heroes. A Hosea and a Jeremiah were outstanding men, set on a pinnacle in the national religious tradition, and yet those closest to Jesus were not content to put Him on that high level. Those who were so close to Him as to see magnified any flaw yet counted Him the Chosen One of God, the One fit and ready to open the gates of a new order upon humanity. Men had to stand back and ask questions about such a life. That within a mortal body such as we have life could be sustained without spot or stain; that the evil forces of this world, the principalities and powers that struck terror into other men, should play vainly upon this soul, presenting temptations and Gethsemanes, rejection and a criminal's cross, without breaking a serene confidence in an overruling Providence; that amid misunderstanding and scoffing and deliberate hostility the outpouring of His love and ministry should have been persisted in to the end—that was a new emergence in the human story. Here was one who from the time He stepped out into the open surprised and startled men so that He was a spectacle, the centre of crowds, the focus of popular bewilderment. "Never man spake like

this man," and it was about God that He always spoke. Here was a magnitude that human personality had never touched before, and the feature of it all was an undimmed mind in every situation, an unstained purity before God, and an inexhaustible love towards man.

Yet to such a one as this ungrateful humanity dealt out the foulest of deaths, cruel in its brutal torture, shameful in its pitiless publicity, humiliating in that it was plotted by His own people. Such a dark death against the background of such a pure life compels the bystander to ask questions of God and man. God must have had a meaning in this or else His Providence is impugned.

*With Unfaltering Love.*

Evidently then this deliverance of man from sin was no easy affair. We do not believe like the dying Heine that it is God's business to forgive. Rather we acknowledge, as Paul says twice over, that we are "bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6: 20; 7: 23). Jesus Himself was much preoccupied with the cost of the new order. The Kingdom of God, He said, was like treasure hid in a field, treasure that demanded the sacrifice of all else that it might be obtained, a pearl so lustrous that other values must be cheerfully surrendered that one supreme joy might be possessed. The rich young ruler had to learn to sell all and give to the poor to find eternal life. The poor widow who threw into the treasury her whole wealth of two mites fascinated Jesus because His mind was turning on that great law of sacrifice. So Mary with the alabaster box drew His praise for the magnificence and meaningfulness of her self-giving, as did the sister of Martha who cut out all lesser concerns for the one thing needful. What girded the disciples to Him with hoops of steel was that they left *all* and followed Him. So in His own life there was that completeness of self-giving of mind and heart and soul: the whole goblet was drained. With a true appreciation of where He laid the emphasis the Evangelists have given us Gospels that gather half their narrative about the Cross, and the Church from the beginning saw the emblem of her life in the broken bread. Jesus spent months in Galilee for days He spent in Jerusalem; but the Christian tradition has centred, not on the lake shore where He taught, but in

the city where He died: the point of the supreme sacrifice focusses the attention of men.

But this supreme sacrifice only climaxed an expending of virtue that had been going on all the way. Action might appear only in a healing here and there or an agony in Gethsemane, but the burden was for ever on His heart. Beside the sightless and the crippled whom He healed there were the light-headed and the soul-deadened who would not respond. For one rich young ruler who answered his love there were twenty who turned aside with disdain; for one disturbed Nicodemus who came by night there were a score of unmoved hypocrites who flaunted their haughty pride by day. There was an open home in Jericho, and there were warm hearts in Bethany; but synagogues like Nazareth cast Him out, and Bethsaldas and Chorazins threw up ramparts of unbelief. The solid mass of Pharisaism and the entrenched class of Sadduceism held on stubbornly to their positions in the key points of the nation; and if Israel's elect remained obdurate, how could the waiting world be saved? The world seemed bent on clinging to its sin and to its indifference to sorrow, and the weight and frustration fell upon the one super-sensitive soul and the few vaguely sympathetic about Him. Our hearts are wrung by the tortures and sadnesses of occupied lands of Europe, but we grow jaded and callous under the daily repetition of the horrors. Not so the Son of Man: His Gethsemane was everywhere and His soul exceeding sorrowful unto death. Virtue went out of Him daily and the heart bled. There was no sorrow like His sorrow.

*God In Christ.* 2 Cor. 5: 11-21; Col. 1: 19-20; Col. 2: 9-10; John 14: 20, etc.

Now all this continuous self-giving of Jesus is the self-utterance of God. It is the Graciousness that is behind all things breaking out into the arena of human history. Here in these memorable months of ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem we are permitted to hear more than a whisper of Him, to see more than the edges of His ways. In the clarion call to the Kingdom we are listening to the declared purpose of God Almighty that from out of the welter of society and the tangle of conflicting nationalisms He is bringing about a new creation, building a spiritual temple of the souls of men, in which He will make His Presence feared

and loved. In the Beatitudes and the parables we gain glimpses of His standards and His ways, His estimates and His judgments. The hands of the Good Physician laid on sick folks, the opening of the eyes of the blind, the casting out of demons, the forgiveness spoken to the paralytic and the Magdalene, the raising from the dead—these are practical affirmations that our God is a living God and a redeeming God, a God of righteousness and *therefore* a Saviour. He is the Good Shepherd who goes out after His lost sheep, one whose love seeks after men in their forsaken condition and carries them in His pity to the place of health and healing. What was the history of His people but a long, long shepherding full of sad tenderness? But through all this tenderness there is the strong will that, though it forgives seventy times seven times, yet descends with terrible condemnation on the wicked servant who had no mercy on his fellow (Matt. 18: 21-35). It is a will for righteousness that cannot dally for ever with a Jerusalem that slays its prophets and refuses to discern the day of its visitation. This is a love that finally breaks into judgment on hypocritical Pharisee and calculating Sadducee. The lightnings are to flash and the thunders roar on those who know the good and yet choose the evil: there is an unforgivable sin, a passion for righteousness that is a consuming fire. There is the place of unrepentant privilege over which even redemptive love can but utter a sad "Woe unto you" and break into bitter weeping (Luke 19: 41ff.). Here is a judge who makes no final compromise with sin, and He is minded to declare it unforgettably. But how?

*On the Cross.* Mark 14: 35-41; Luke 22: 35-37; Gal. 3: 1-5; John 12: 20-33.

The Suffering Servant of God lived out the eternal patience in the ministry of Jesus: bearing men's sins and carrying their sorrows, He cherished high hopes that they would repent, saying that the chastisement of their sin was falling on the innocent. But they did not repent. There is a scorching utterance of Jesus strangely overlooked yet surely full of meaning, menacing meaning. Towards the last hours of the ministry, when Judas has gone out to make his fell betrayal and the darkness is gathering on Gethsemane, the Lord confronts His boldest follower Peter with the weakness behind his bluster, and goes on to look grim

reality in the face. "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end (*i.e.* reach a climax)" (Luke 22: 35-37).

What end? Why this apparent reversal of pacific policy? Had the way of the Suffering Servant failed? With Israel unmoved and unrepentant what next? God had a further appeal to mankind to make. Beside the Love that bears must be set the Judgment that smites. The optimism that believed that human nature would repent gives place to the fact that human sin is too deeply entrenched to be overcome by a merely patient pacifism. Sin must be *judged* and for ever stand *exposed*, and righteousness must be blazoned forth alongside of forgiving love. The patience of the divine love is consummated in the passion to expose and overcome sin. The Cross is the end, God's final word to mankind. Gethsemane and Calvary tell us that there is no gully too deep or too dark, too lined with thorns, for the saving arm of the Good Shepherd.

*He Bore the Burden of Sin.* Mark 15: 34.

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15: 34). This loud and anguished cry directs us into the darkness and mystery of the Cross. Many attempts have been made to soften its harshness or to explain it away altogether. It has been set down as a quotation from a Psalm (22) that Jesus was recalling for the comfort of His soul. But one does not quote in a loud voice to quiet a troubled heart. Nor is it convincing to suggest that the Psalm goes on to end in a triumphant note. If out of the horror of these hours of torture the sound of jubilation had come, bystanders would surely have recorded their amazement at such courage, and Christian tradition would have treasured it. Some critics have attempted to make out that Jesus expected a dramatic intervention by divine forces to rescue Him from the grasp of His enemies, and that this cry records the bitter disillusionment of hopes unfulfilled: the heavens that Jesus expected to become alive with chariots and angelic horsemen

remained dull, brazen, heartless. But how often had Jesus repudiated the popular hunger for a sign from heaven, and surely pain would not make Him turn traitor to His own lifelong convictions. Nor can we think that the cry simply registers His protest and resentment that suffering had filled His cup to the brim and now His courage fainted in the way. Had he not consistently taught from the very hour that the Messianic crown was placed on His head by Peter that for this Son of Man the way of suffering was divinely appointed? Again and again He had acknowledged this as His portion, the cup He must needs drink, the cup that He saw passing likewise even to the lips of His followers (Mark 8: 31, 9: 31, 10: 33-39). He did not regard suffering with Peter's eyes: He had entered into God's thoughts, and so learned that sorrow and travail are greatly used to shake men's souls, deepen their understanding, and so fit them to serve the larger purposes of divine wisdom.

Can it be then that in this saying we see the dark cloud of sin casting its shadow on the Cross and shutting out the gracious face of God, separating the Father from the Son of His love? On such a sombre line as this Christian thought has often travelled out in the hope of probing the mystery, and to this track humanity will return and return to grope again. Yet as we turn over the historic solutions we find much that gives us pause.

(a) Could Jesus in that dense darkness of soul have been suffering Himself the shock of God's righteous *punishment* for sin? Could this be Paul's meaning when he says that Him who knew no sin He made sin for us (2 Cor. 5: 21)? Can we say with John Calvin that here He was enduring within His soul awful tortures, the torments of a man condemned and lost? Did the weight of the world's sinfulness snap the cord that had held Him so far in unbroken fellowship with the Father? Is God so much the prisoner of His own laws of retribution that for human sin a more than human heart must break, for human wrongdoing more than human blood must pay?

To such a line of thought protest rises within us. What righteous principle is left in God if He thrusts out into the horror of the pit of pain His purest and best in order that, His sense of justice vindicated, He may now let the undeserving sinners into His favour? Moreover, if Jesus was paying the penalty of sin for others, was that not the very thing He would have

rejoiced to do—an experience for Him full of light and not of darkness? There would be no desolation in such pain, at least to the soul of one who yearned to release His brethren from their evil plight. He would have cried out: "Let the darkness cover me if thereby they may have light!"

(b) Again, this agony of Jesus has been explained as the anguish required by the *perfect penitent*: as our representative before God, He must know what we in our sad experience know, the emotions of the sinner. Indeed only a pure soul such as His can adequately realize the exceeding hatefulness of sin to God. He alone could plumb the depths of its degradation, enter into its horrid shamefulness, bear its weight upon His conscience for our sakes. With evil thus crushing the soul and crowding out God, He would taste the doom, the estrangement, the "lostness" of the sinner. Only such a deep revulsion as He felt towards sin can create in us the mind that leads to true repentance.

Certainly we count it true that Jesus reached out and took to Himself the burden of our sin. But could one who knew no sin really enter into the consciousness of the sinner? Can anyone but myself repent for my sins? Can any other feel the guilt that is mine alone? Is penitence not too personal a need to be transferable? It was the way of Jesus to identify Himself with His brethren and to enter into their lot. But confronting the sinner did He not rather stand on God's side, rebuking the sin by the presence of His purity and uttering God's word of forgiving? We do not think of Him as entering into Hell with the penitent thief, but rather as receiving him in God's name and leading him into Paradise.

(c) It has been contended under many forms of theory that Jesus had to offer to God "*satisfaction*" for human sin before forgiveness could be granted to men. There had been given a moral law, and for human transgressors there was punishment. On the heavenly books there was a vast score of obligation standing against man, and some equivalent must be offered to an outraged God before justice could be done. And so into the scale against the human mass failure was thrown the weight of the God-man's offering of Himself that the heavenly balance might be adjusted. Old debts must needs be paid before a new order could come in.

To this there is one answer that immediately springs out. If to God there is some quantitative equivalent rendered, then there

is no such thing as His free forgiveness. He takes His pound of flesh before He lets us go. That is not grace, but legalism. Obviously no such view can hold, and yet here there is a reality concealed under a crude exterior.

(d) Was the sense of dereliction due to man's unresponsiveness? Jesus was wont to see God in this fair world of the birds and the lilies and *especially* to mark His active presence in the daily life of men. Can it be that His supreme hour of dereliction came because He felt that God had faded out of the faces of His fellowmen? He had hoped that in response to His proclamation of the good news there would suddenly yet surge up in Israel a mass repentance, an awakening at last of the nation to their true need and vocation. Did He yearn for the Spirit of God to sweep through the nation as the wind courses through fields of standing grain? But as He looked out from these last days, behold, rather a hardening of hearts, a turning away from Him of the national aspirations, and a settling down on their lees of even the pious and the poor (Luke 22: 35ff.). Did he watch with sadness the long-fingered forces of enmity and reaction clutching at the circle He had aroused, drawing them back into paralysing doubt and eventual desertion? He watched a Judas let the vision fade away and slink back to be an easy prey to silver and smooth words. He saw impetuous Peter break under the light badinage and accusing eyes of a maid and courtyard hangers-on. Caught in a common panic, His chosen ones forsook Him and fled. Roman justice that towered up in the world as the strong and inflexible authority over an evil age crumpled ingloriously before fanatic clamour. The religious leaders of His own people, not content with spurning their heritage of faith and hope, had sinned deliberately against the light, committing the unpardonable sin, and in excess of arrogant pride had come to wag their heads and fling their taunts in petty triumph over the one who had disturbed the sleep of their easy consciences. Surely after all the people He had trusted had turned crazed and bloodthirsty; man on whose redeemability He had built His hopes had become possessed. Where was there foothold for the assurance He had given that the Kingdom had come, that the Gracious God was breaking through into a new intimacy with men? Looking round, He felt humanity crowding close with malice and contumacy, hypocrisy and betrayal, fanatic hate and mob violence,

derision and blasphemy—like wild tongues of flame shooting at Him, searing Him, stifling Him. Surely He was beset with demons and not humans. The devil was gangmaster and men his utter slaves. "God of mine, God of mine, for what end hast Thou deserted me?" For one swift span He had sensed an utter horror and aloneness, confronted by naught but "the enmity of the carnal mind to God." It had been the joy of Jesus to see in the open countenance of men, in the smile of little children, in the love of brothers and the passionate devotion of women, the very guarantee and evidence of the presence of the Living God; and now it was as if—in the nightmare of the trial, the judgment, the sorrowful way and the agony of Calvary—he had been carried leagues away from the light and glory of the Father's face. Who can measure the cost and bitterness of that hour when sin the stranger set his infinite distance between the Son and the Father?

*He Broke Its Power.* Rom. 3: 24-28; Col. 2: 8-15; Eph. 2: 11-18.

Can God finally grant salvation from sin without first exposing it and once for all judging it in such a way that all the universe may see and know and shudder before it? Paul seemed to see in the Cross that crisis point in world history. There the malign influences that bear upon the life of man with all their train of law and lust and death met and lost in an epic encounter with the Son of God. Rom. 3: 24-28 pictures Jesus as set forth deliberately as a means of achieving reconciliation. In His forbearance God had for long appeared to be passing over sin: His patience was mistaken for complaisance. So now at this present epoch He intervened to do a something that would leave no misapprehension about His concern for righteousness. He would vindicate the moral order once and for all; and, once the dread deed was done, the way would be open for salvation on the basis of faith alone. Col. 2: 13ff. fills in some details of this apocalyptic drama. There Paul claims that the law, which with all its injunctions stood over men convicting them of sin, was cancelled at Calvary: it was nailed to the Cross and so taken right out of our area of concern. There too the evil powers that menace human life—having had a free hand to do their fell work in the flesh of the Man of Nazareth and having utterly failed—tasted complete defeat; they came out of that combat broken and no longer formi-

dable, like prisoners of war borne along in the triumphal chariot of their conqueror, the Christ.

What can Paul mean by this dramatic language? Evidently when the mists have cleared away from Calvary men are to recognize that the supreme issue has been decided. That act on Calvary had a cosmic effect; it was to alter the whole conditions of the human struggle. There is a wisdom behind the face of things that has at last been revealed to mortal eyes. In the beauty, purity, and graciousness of the human *life* of the Son of Man the life of heaven has been unrolled: what God had intended to be the glory of human existence in the consummated Kingdom was there realized on earth for a brief span. Now that mystery of His purpose had been further unveiled in the *death* of Jesus. The Cross was another and infinitely dramatic piece of "realized eschatology," *i.e.*, it was the Judgment Day anticipated and foreshadowed. The character and method of God's final dealing with sin stood there plain to see. As Principal D. S. Cairns expressed it, "Paul believes that the Cross of Christ stands in lieu of the Great White Throne. Christ by His atoning death on the Cross has done something which makes that Judgment Day unnecessary for all who believe in Him. He has completely vindicated the moral character of God." In what way does Paul suggest that vindication was made?

(a) *God asserted His will to overcome every evil power.* In the world of Paul's time, as we gather from Colossians, men tended to believe that supernatural forces were distributed abroad in the universe in a multiplicity of forms: there were powers and principalities of evil warring against the good power, and that conflict was reflected in our human souls in the struggle of good and evil. Over the stars presided many an evil genius, and woe unto him who, born in an unlucky month, fell under the baleful influence of a demon: for such an one the scales of fate were weighted. It was an immoral universe that held such destiny over men—a universe in which sin was inevitable. But Paul insists that there is no power loose in the world that is beyond the control of God's Son. He existed before any created being, natural or supernatural, and, as originator of all, He is Lord of all (Col. 1: 17). The supernatural energies are not distributed at

\*D. S. Cairns, in *Expository Times*, vol. lii. no. 2, p. 61.



large, but are gathered together in the one Christ: all the potencies of God are in Him (Col. 2: 9). There is no force that can touch us in the realm of experience and destiny that He does not control. That is manifest in His own human life: all the powers of darkness had there the chance to draw Him into evil courses, and they were frustrated: even in the agony and darkness of rejection and the pain of the Cross they had failed to make Him curse God. Indeed the Cross might be likened to a conqueror's chariot in which the Saviour rode victorious with the defeated demons as captive warriors in His train (Col. 2: 15). A life *without sin*, crowned by a cruel martyr's death *without blasphemy*, was a vindication of the character of God and of the worldly conditions He had appointed for human life. When He went on to raise Jesus from the grasp of death, He made clear for ever His will to overcome man's last enemy and every form of evil.

(b) *God discharged man's burden of sin.* What of the law that stood over against man, ordinances that he never could fulfil and that therefore condemned him to dire penalties? Did not the law express the mind of God, and was not the character of God bound up with its fulfilment? Could God abolish the reign of law and its dread consequences? Yes, Paul claims. That law was cancelled and was nailed to the Cross like an old bill, symbol of an obligation that had been redeemed. The law, he maintained, was not a necessary and immutable feature of God's dealing with man: it was but a temporary régime, as temporary as guardianship over a boy in his immaturity (Gal. 4); the boy's father all the time is but waiting to institute a richer mutual relationship of person to person. Jesus in His intercourse with God had risen above the law to that richer relationship. He had lived out His life and expounded His principles on a more intimate basis than law and external penalties, a basis of understanding love, and God had blessed that new relationship inasmuch as He had been able to live a life without sin. Jesus had thus exposed before men another side of God's nature; He had bidden men see beneath the sternness of the Judge the face of the Father. That human father is truly righteous who does not hold up all the family delinquencies for a day of rude reckoning, but in intimate personal bearing with and sharing with the erring sons and daughters lifts them above their errors and evil desires, and woos them into a union deep and spiritual: their resultant common

mind and affection for the best things demonstrates the victory of love over evil. With a graciousness like His Father's, Jesus had been taking up men's sin as an agony and heartbreak to Himself while imparting to the forgiven sinner a new impulse toward good. That was fulfilling the moral order in a way that imposed pains and penalties could never do. The only ultimate objective of law was to educate man in moral truth, to eliminate the disharmony of sin. The pain caused by sin to the one he loves cuts deeper into a man's conscience than any legal penalty. Such a sin-bearing love touches and transmutes the sinner's soul. The moral order is vindicated by being transcended. God is alive in the law as flesh is alive, but His nature is deeper than the moral sense alone. He is alive in His love likewise as warm blood is alive, and His love animates His righteousness. The true antidote to sin is not wounding penalty, but healing grace. The stream of evil that sin spreads through the social network of life is swallowed up in a counter-stream of good that arises from the springs of love and forgiving. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5: 20). "The sin of the world is like the waves of an angry sea breaking on the eternal shore, and transformed from its sullen darkness into the gleaming beauty of the breakers. The divine grace, which is the divine will to forgive and to suffer in forgiving, does not only defeat sin, but makes its consequences contribute to the spiritual beauty of the universe."<sup>5</sup>

God's holiness is offended by sin, as the law is intended to witness. Wherever there is sin, there is registered suffering in God. But God accepts that suffering as the outflow of His gift of freedom to man. Nor does He repudiate the responsibility for all the tragedy of sin that freedom has wrought. He holds it as a personal care upon the eternal heart, a burden that no other can bear. In Christ He shows His willingness to accept that load and finally discharge it. As Dr. James Denney puts it in a letter: "I have often wondered whether we might not say that the Christian doctrine of the Atonement just meant that in Christ God took the responsibility of evil upon Himself and somehow subsumed evil under good; . . . I fancy it was something like this Calvin had in mind when he said that God did not make His noblest creature *ambiguo fine*, without knowing what for; *i.e.*, He

<sup>5</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson, *Suffering Human and Divine*, p. 170.

was quite prepared to take all the consequences, and He took them in Christ." Thus it comes about that "the blot is worked into the finished design of the picture, the discord is resolved into an enriched harmony. The sin-marred world, viewed as a whole, is transformed into a realm of victorious and forgiving love."

(c) *God exposed and finally judged sin.* After that day of blind unreason man must look up and see there on the Cross the hatefulness of sin in its true magnitude. Against the unexampled purity of the Son of Man the blackness of sin stands out in its stark hideousness. The guile that twisted the evidence against Jesus, the hypocrisy that professed to put away this man for the security of the nation, the vaunted justice that sent the innocent to be scourged in the name of good relations between rulers and ruled, the cruel hands that thrust the cross on His bleeding shoulders, the ruthless unconcern that drove the nails into His quivering flesh, the light-headedness that flung clever taunts at Him, the evil leer of satisfaction that distorted the faces of priestly onlookers—these phases and forms of one sinister power of sin must confront and shame men for all time. That exposure pointed directly toward us men that sin might lose its fascination for us. We must see ourselves as the brothers and cousins of the betrayers and murderers; after one convicting gaze into that mirror of awful truth we must acknowledge sin in ourselves and seek to flee from it for ever. God is not changed, but we are changed. Overwhelmed by the fact that the Son of God had voluntarily suffered in Himself the shock and horror of sin's evil consequence, we are broken in heart and ready to be reconciled with the Father of our spirits.

*For Us.* Heb. passim; Gal. 3: 13-29; Rom. 5: 12-21; 1 Pet. 2: 21-25; Rev. 7: 13-14.

There is a representative aspect of the work of Christ on the Cross that is hard for the modern mind to grasp. Ancient society was not so conscious of the rights of the individual. Men were more deeply rooted in family and racial groups and accustomed to the idea that what the father or king or leader did availed for the

\* *Letters of Principal James Denney to his Family and Friends*, p. 187f.

† H. Wheeler Robinson, *Redemption and Revelation*, p. 275.

whole community. In much of Paul's thought revolving round our oneness with Adam, and in the conception of Christ's High Priesthood in Hebrews, this idea is dominant. There is no escaping a social solidarity in which we stand for good or ill. The forced regimentation of the Fascist state and the cultivation of the Führer principle indicate that humanity has lost a unity that it would fain recover. There is a real oneness and interdependence and mutuality in human life, a pervasive unity of spirit that seeks to express itself in community. It is significant that just when ancient faiths were dissolving and national kingdoms were disrupting and a false new unity was being superimposed by force of arms and an emperor, just then the Christ appeared with a power of attractiveness and sensitivity and a universal human appeal. Right into the heart of estranging enmities and paralysing fears and disintegrating despair came this dynamic and vital man of love and faith and confidence.

Now within the social network of our living we cannot isolate sin. It injures the doer and the victim and casts its blight upon those whom they touch. Forgiveness does not cancel the evil result though it restores the sinner. There are consequences that have spread outwards and downwards that no individual human can overtake and nullify. Only the advent of a counter-activity of equal force and pervasiveness can restore the social whole. That needs a creative redemptive urge from above. Scripture is never done assuring us that Jesus went through deep and dark waters *on our behalf*. There was a profound depth of affliction that as Son of God and Son of Man He plumbed for our sake. Making men always strangely God-conscious in His presence, He freely accepted throughout the years the burden-bearing of a sensitive heart that feels for every brother's sin and every sister's sorrow, and on the Cross as our blood-brother and God's Anointed One He felt the shame of what sin brings upon man and the anguish that it lays upon God. As Son of Man, the symbol and promise of a new order of humanity, He ever sought to champion the disinherited outcast and to stand with sinners as conscience awoke within them. Having daily lived in deepening fellowship with the Twelve, He could not leave them without making clear how He loved them to the end, giving them the bread and the wine that declared the completeness of His self-giving. He who

had taken upon Himself our daily load could not in His final agony be less our brother. Thus here was "One who has realised to the uttermost in His own person all that sin meant, One who has drunk the cup our sins had mingled, One who has felt all the waves and billows break over Him in which God's reaction against sin comes home to us sinners." So Jesus by love had achieved an identification of His life with mankind that constituted Him king in a realm closer than an earthly kingdom (Col. 1: 27, 3: 3). That ceaseless knitting of heart to heart and the final gathering of us all into a sin-bearing deed of love form mankind into a new spiritual whole. Our sense of indebtedness and answering devotion are as the nerves and binding muscles of a spiritual body (Eph. 4: 6). The spirit of the living Christ possesses and animates each member. Thus when Jesus breaks the evil entail of sin, we too in that living interlacing are set free; when He has fulfilled the law, we sharers of His hidden life are under its terror no more; when He has proved His supremacy over the demonic forces of the universe, we too, who are linked to Him in the moral bonds of the Kingdom, are redeemed from fear, more than conquerors through Him that loved us. The Cross becomes luminous only when we realize that there hangs upon the tree the Christ appointed before the foundation of the world, who has made Himself one with the sin of man, and it is in intimate union with the victorious Lord of the Resurrection that we are called on to live out our human lives. Calvary is a foretaste and anticipation of the final overthrow of evil in the world.

*He Moves to Repentance.* Acts 2: 22-42; Acts 4: 10-12; 1 John 1: 9-10.

What thoughts well up within us as we look upon this strange man upon the Cross? Could we stand beside the mourning women or the frightened disciples, what would they betray of their emotions? How would Peter feel, the frankest and most human of all His followers? Already Peter had betrayed foreshadowings of the tempest in his soul. When the Lord turned and looked upon him in the Judgment Hall, He was really ascending the steps of the Cross; the furies of human hate and passion had

\* James Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, p. 159.

gathered about His head and already fashioned an unseen crown of thorns for His brow. His coming fate was clear—the forsaken and abandoned leader upon whom the shades of death were closing. The Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter went out and wept bitterly. These eyes so full of understanding love and pity smote to the depths of his soul. It was a Love like that he had denied, a loyalty like that he had failed to emulate. Penitence flooded Peter's heart. Tears alone could utter his emotions, and the tears were not salt enough to express all he felt. And the centurion who stood by was heard to mutter: "Truly a righteous man." As if he were saying: "It is I, a man of blood and violence, who should hang there and not this innocent man." That startling purity rebuked the conscience of the soldier and, pagan though he was, he needed only to have known the Crucified a little better and he would have been mastered by an emotion like Peter's—penitence that he should have a part to play in such a foul deed. Dr. James Hope Moulton has suggested that this was the soldier who heard and later passed into the memoranda of the Church the words, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Was it that forgiving love that amazed the plain blunt soldier? Did that touch him to shame and evoke his testimony—the first stage towards a Christian penitence? And there is the word of the dying thief to his taunting fellow: "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" (Luke 23: 40)—as if upon this rude bandit, hero of many breathtaking encounters, there had fallen an awe such as his soul had not known, an awe that betrays how the reality of God was forcing itself upon him in the presence of this Jesus. He knew he was confronted by a purity that spoke of the Unseen Holiness. And if only one of those women looking on had written an autobiography, how much deeper the note she would have struck! But all would testify to the same effect—the sense of shame and rebuke that by human machination such an one should die like a criminal. Penitence is the primary response in any human who considers this cruel Cross. Bound together in the bundle of life, we are guilty. Like Peter we acknowledge His leadership, profess to follow, and go on to deny. Men of the world like the centurion, we know beside His holiness that we are unrighteous. Caiaphas sent Him to His death; but so do our uncompromising policies. Pilate let Him die to keep the peace: so do we evade our respon-

sibilities and play for security. A city welcomed Him and then forgot to guard Him. Such are our cities—professedly Christian, but crucifying Him nightly in our places of ill fame. The daughters of Jerusalem and of every city are constrained to weep when they consider how readily they adore Him and as easily forget Him.

*Forgiveness.* Eph. 1: 3-14; Eph. 2: 1-18.

Forgiveness is the supreme gift we are given from the Cross. The love that said in the midst of the bitterest agony, "Father, forgive them," is the Love that never faileth. Forgiveness was a gift that the saints of the Old Testament claimed: "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103: 12). And in a very real sense they must have known release. But the forgiveness that the Cross conveys is richer, deeper. It is not a mere overlooking of sin, but the entering into a living union with the God who has stooped and suffered to save us. We are fast held by love of a new degree—the love of a shepherd who goes out after even one lost sheep, the love that pursues and pleads and stretches patience to the uttermost, a love that has not even waited till we in our penitence sought it out, but took the initiative, entered the human scene, lived and suffered with us, and died for us. We see the soldier march past in peace time, and we know he is pledged to defend us, our homes and our fatherland. But in war time he comes back with tattered battle dress and crippling wounds and the face of a man who has looked into the eyes of death, and now we know that he has written his pledge in blood. The Cross is the proof that forgiving is more than forgetting. It speaks of a heart that has been grieved by every act of rebellion and yet has taken to itself and consumed the evil entail of our sin.

Under pressure of so generous a love estrangement must die away. Counting himself fortunate if only he could become a hired servant in his father's house, the prodigal finds himself at a banquet table like a guest of honour and received as a son again. Estrangement lingers only in the jealous heart of a brother where sin still rules. Surely even there the heavy sulky brow must relax under the compelling love that protests: "All that I have is thine."

*A New Loyalty.* Gal. 6: 14-16; 2 Cor. 5: 17-21.

The bond that binds us to the eternal world is a new and finer tie. It is the bond of gratitude, of responsive love. "Who loved me and gave himself for me" is the phrase of Paul, indicating his sense that it was no mere general amnesty that God gave men, not the opening of prison doors that has sometimes symbolized a new monarch's accession to power, but a love that in person turned the key in my own cell. There is in this experience the richness of a personal discovery. In the parables Jesus frequently makes the individual stand out: one prodigal son, one brother who says "No" to his father and repents, one servant who receives ten pounds—as if to emphasize that forgiveness is the opening of a single experience, an encounter with God that is unique to each soul and that leads out into a physician's care for each particular life. But to come to the Father is at the same time to come to His household, the community of His saints. We may enter through a single portal, but the room we enter is large and generous and peopled by a great multitude. The father of the prodigal summoned the whole household to share in the festal return. When one sinner repents it is all heaven that rejoices. The Apocalypse that depicts the heavenly courts resounds to the praise that is a rich deep chorus: the fellowship we enjoy is wide as the multitudes that compose it.

*Victorious Over Death and Evil.* Rom. 6: 3-11; Phil. 3: 8-16.

If the story of Jesus came to a dead halt at the Cross, there would always be honour for Jesus, but misgiving of the gravest about God. On Calvary we would see only another dreamer come to a grim awakening, another idealist fallen from his dizzy height to the cruel rocks of earth. So far from vindicating His righteousness, God would be declaring an Olympian aloofness; so far from manifesting His love for men, God would be pilloried as the one who did not care.

If Calvary had no aftermath  
When Christ had struggled up the path  
Of pain and death and tenfold woe!  
If earth had closed upon the flow

Of matchless ministry and love  
 With naught of answer from above!  
 If God had rested in His wrath  
 And Calvary had no aftermath!

But Calvary had its aftermath—  
 Christ risen walked the garden path,  
 And bade sad Mary lift her eyes  
 And greet her Lord in glad surprise:  
 The time had come to cease from tears  
 And cast aside all mortal fears,  
 For God disdains to speak in wrath  
 And Calvary had its aftermath!

If Calvary had no afterglow  
 When Christ had suffered long to show  
 That Love could tread a darkening road  
 And Patience bear a heavy load  
 Of human hate and bitter days  
 Yet still in faith uplift God's praise,  
 Then human hands would cease to sow  
 If Calvary had no afterglow.

But Calvary had its afterglow  
 When fishermen set forth to row  
 And toiled all night till Jesus spake:  
 "See! Cast on yonder side the lake."  
 Then laden nets and hearts deep thrilled  
 Forecast sea harvests He had willed.  
 Praise God! For all Christ's brethren know  
 That Calvary had its afterglow.

Jesus had never asked for a sign, but God had given a resounding sign unasked. The Resurrection came as a grand affirmation of the life of faith and love sustained deep into the night of gloom. Men had proposed a political murder, but God had transformed it into a heavenly benediction. Caiaphas had played for narrow national stakes, and God had answered with the breaking of an alabaster box that filled the whole world with the odour of the ointment. That act of resurrection was a fore-

taste of the victory of the eternal will to righteousness. Man's deepest evil can be transmuted into the high purpose of God. So must all the forces of darkness fade away before the legions of the light.

*Such Grace and Strength*, Col. 1: 24-27; Eph. 1: 15-23; Eph. 4: 4-16.

Moreover the Cross is charged with a power that passes into human penitents with a renewing energy. A deliverance so great has a momentum that carries a Stephen to a martyr's crown and Paul to a worldwide mission that has not yet ceased to find new frontiers. The breaking of the thralldom of sin releases potentialities in mankind: under the impulse of the Resurrected One men can face the ordeals before which they once quailed, and come out more than conquerors. Faith and love have their victories that only the impetus of the Cross can explain. The weight of the world's sin is heavy; encased in the meshes of our social life we share burdens and carry inherited loads. It is ours to fill up what is lacking of the suffering of Christ.