

in whom Satan was being subjugated? The wise and powerful of this world? No—they were just “babes,” vessels without honor, in this world.] [Hence, v. 21]: I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father; for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight. [He rejoiced that God the Father was using the weak things of this world to confound the mighty. And what was the nature of His joy?] [It was spiritual—in the Spirit and of the Spirit. *How truly is a man's character revealed in the things that cause him to rejoice!*] [Again said Jesus, on another occasion]: The Father abiding in me doeth his works [John 14:10]. [But God abides in men only by His Spirit]: hereby we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit [1 John 4:13]. [Thus Jesus, in this statement, acknowledged the Spirit's leading and power in all the acts of His ministry on earth. Hence said the Spirit through Peter, in the latter's sermon to the house of Cornelius], . . . Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him [Acts 10:38]. [It must be kept in mind, of course, that in Jesus Spirit-power was essentially His own power by nature; He was the Incarnate Logos Himself. “The miracles were the signs of the Presence of God with Jesus, of the Spirit that dwelt in Him, which was stronger than the power of evil, and could set its victims free.”<sup>1</sup>]

## 6. The Spirit and the Atonement

If I remember correctly, it was Epicurus who first posed the celebrated antimony of the *Goodness* of God versus the *power* of God. There is evil in the world, said he: then why does God permit it to be so? If God *can not* eradicate evil, certainly He is not all-powerful; if He *can*, but *does not* eradicate it, on the other hand, then certainly He is not all-good. It must be admitted that this problem still persists in our human thinking, which after all, it must be remembered, is *human*, or, as Spinoza would put it, *sub specie temporis*. The problem is approximately solved, however, by the Christian doctrine of the Atonement. This doctrine also solves the problem of the relation between the mercy and justice of God. As W. Robertson-Smith puts it: “To reconcile the forgiving goodness of God with His absolute justice is one of the highest problems of spiritual religion, which in Christianity is solved by the doctrine of the atonement.”<sup>2</sup>

1. H. B. Swete, *op. cit.*, 59.

2. W. Robertson-Smith, *The Religion of the Semites: Fundamental Institutions*, 62.

It is interesting to note that Aeschylus, perhaps the greatest dramatic poet that ever lived, dealt with these problems. In his great *Prometheus* trilogy (*Prometheus Bound*, *The Unbinding of Prometheus*, and *Prometheus the Fire-bearer*), the story of the moral struggle between Zeus, originally a tyrant and in a sense the personification of the blind force of Nature, and Prometheus, the lover of humanity, is developed in a manner which permits us to see into one of the deepest recesses of the poet's soul. As the story is unfolded by Aeschylus, it is Zeus himself who, in the course of the struggle, acquires a new and extraordinary Divine faculty—a faculty to which the Greeks gave the suggestive name, Understanding—the power to learn *through suffering* to think in terms of man's needs and frailties. "First," writes Professor Gilbert Murray, "Zeus has the power of Thought, the power of Learning by experience, which differentiates him and his rule from all that has gone before. He has also led man along the road of Thought. He learns and does better. *This gives us the interesting theory—not, like Shelley's, of the perfectibility of Man—but of the perfectibility of God.* The doctrine recurs in a slightly different form, if I remember rightly, in the famous pessimist philosopher, Von Hartmann, who urges his disciples 'to work with God to redeem God.' Translated from metaphor into a statement of fact, Aeschylus' theory would mean that this brutal non-moral external world which still dominates Man and shocks his conscience has itself a possibility of evolving towards something more spiritual and more concordant with our higher ideals; a view which would not, I think, be rejected by [the philosopher] Bergson."<sup>1</sup> But there is a second element in this interesting Aeschylean theory, namely, that mortal men must remember that they are mortal, and therefore not in a position to sit in judgment on the ways of God. Perhaps after all, the acts of God are part of an infinitely long-range plan, inscrutable to our human minds and therefore unjudgeable by us. Hence, as Murray puts it, "one can only pray that his desire may be for what we, so far as we understand it, should call good or godlike."<sup>1</sup> Indeed this is the "conclusion" of the Old Testament epic of Job. "Then Jehovah answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: Who is this that

1. Gilbert Murray, *Aeschylus*, 108-109.

1. Gilbert Murray, *op. cit.*, 109.

darkeneth counsel, By words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; For I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding. Who determined the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who stretched the line upon it. Whereupon were the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the cornerstone thereof, When the morning stars sang together, And all the son of God shouted for joy?" etc. (Job 38:1-7). "Then Job answered Jehovah, and said: I know that thou canst do all things, And that no purpose of thine can be restrained. Who is this that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not, Things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak; I will demand of thee and declare thou unto me. I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; But now mine eye seeth thee: Wherefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:1-6). Cf. Isa. 55:8, 9—"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." "Thus" continues Murray, "we see that Aeschylus has in his mind two speculative answers to the Question of Job each effective singly but the two still more effective in combination. The world power that he calls Zeus learns and grows. The *élan vital*, as M. Bergson calls it at first almost blind in its striving, acquires clearer and more definite aims; the striving becomes more intelligent, and at last more spiritual. At the same time, even in its present state amid all its horrors, the world power is something beyond our comprehension and power of judgment. Though doubtless terribly imperfect even by its own standards, it is not to be fully understood or measured by standards which have been built up to suit the finite and narrow experience of man."<sup>1</sup>

The Aeschylean thesis is perhaps the noblest ever devised by uninspired human intelligence, and indeed parallels, in some of its features Biblical revelation. Christianity, however, offers as solutions of these basic problems the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Atonement. Christianity proposes the solution of the human struggle not by a driving force within the

1. Gilbert Murray, *op. cit.*, 109-110.

universe itself, but by a pulling force exerted upon man from without. That force is the Love of God, as manifested in the Incarnation, Sacrifice, Resurrection, and Exaltation of His Only Begotten Son whom He gave freely for us all, and who "through the Eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God" (Heb. 9:14) for the redemption of mankind. The fundamental truth of the Old Testament is that God created man in His own image; that of the New Testament is that God, in the Person of the Logos, took upon Himself the image and nature of Man.

From two points of view, at least, the Incarnation or Divine Begetting of Jesus was an absolutely necessary prerequisite of the Atonement. *It was necessary, in the first place, for the Messiah-Redeemer to take upon Himself our human nature in order to qualify Himself to act as our just and merciful High Priest.* Heb. 2:14-18: "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the name: that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily not to angels doth he give help, but he giveth help to the seed of Abraham. Wherefore it behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." In a word, the Humiliation of the Logos was necessary (1) to enable Him to conquer death and thus to deliver mankind from bondage to the fear of death, and (2) to qualify Him to act as merciful and faithful High Priest of His people in all things pertaining to God. It was necessary for Him, in order to fulfill the duties of His office as High Priest, to understand through His own *human* experience the needs, temptations, frailties, and sufferings of mortal men. So the Scriptures teach, and at this point we see a striking parallelism between the Aeschylean theory and Divine revelation. Heb. 2:9, 10—"But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all

things, and through whom are all things, *in bringing many sons into glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*" Heb. 12:1, 2—"let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, *who for the joy that was set before him* (was this not the joy of redeeming lost souls?) endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Heb. 4:15—"For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Having been tempted as we are, having experienced his Gethsemane and Calvary as we experience them, He thereby understands our frailties and makes proper intercession for us at the Throne of Grace. I thank God for these Scriptures. I thank God that I have a High Priest who is acquainted with my infirmities, who acts as my Intercessor with all justice tempered with mercy in consequence of His personal knowledge of my weaknesses and my needs. Without such a High Priest, I should be utterly without hope either in this world or in the world to come.

Furthermore, this qualification of Jesus as a just and merciful High Priest was necessary *prior to* His performance of His first official act in that capacity, namely, that of making propitiation for the sins of His people (Heb. 2:17). This He did when through the Eternal Spirit He offered Himself up to God and thus provided an all-sufficient Atonement for sin. John 1:29—"Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." 1 Cor. 5:7—"For our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ." 1 Pet. 1:18-20: "Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold; from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ: who was fore-known indeed before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of the times for your sake."

*In the second place, the Divine Conception of Jesus was a necessary prerequisite of the Atonement in the fact that only a body thus specially begotten and therefore unaffected by the inherited consequences of sin could have constituted a perfect Sacrifice for the purpose of Atonement. Christ was the Lamb "without blemish and without spot," the great Antitype of the*

Paschal Lamb. It was human nature in its perfection that He, through the Eternal Spirit, offered up to God on the Cross.

[Heb. 5:7-10]: Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and ears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, though he was a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation; named of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. [1 Cor. 11:23, 24]: The Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, This is my body, which is [broken]for you: this do in remembrance of me [cf. Luke 22:19]. [1 Pet. 2:21-24]: Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that ye should follow in his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: *who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree*, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed. [cf. Isa. 53:4-6]. [Heb. 7:26]: For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.

One of the irreparable deficiencies of all other systems which have appeared in the world in the past, or which are in vogue today, in the name of "religion," is their lack of a sufficient Atonement, indeed, in most cases, of any Atonement at all. It is at this very point that the theory of Aeschylus, too, is deficient, and utterly futile. For without an adequate Atonement, reconciliation of sinful man and Infinite Holiness is both juridicially and naturally impossible. Ordinary common sense should convince any unbiased person that there is no way by which man can acquit himself of the guilt of sin by simply tugging at his own bootstraps. Atonement is necessarily a Divine Act; it belongs in the universal juridicial order, although it has ethical significance also. *And Christianity alone provides the adequate Atonement for the sins of the world.*

The Will of God is the constitution of the moral, as well as of the physical, universe; and in the moral universe it is expressed in the Eternal Moral Law. Violation of the Divine Will, transgression of the Moral Law, rebellion against Divine Love—*this is sin*. 1 John 3:4—"Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." All sin is essentially rebellion, and the essential principle of sin is selfishness; there never was a sin committed that was not, at its root, the choice of one's own will and way of doing things above God's Will and way of doing things. Now law would not be law without

its appropriate penalty (sanction), and the penalty for the violation of the Divine Moral Law is—quite naturally—separation from God; and if such separation remains unhealed, the ultimate penalty will be *eternal* separation from the fact of the Lord and from the glory of His might (2 Thess. 1:9),—the eternal loss of all Good. This was the penalty which man faced when he rebelled against the Divine Government.

When man was created, naturally he became subject to the Divine Moral Law. That law was stated at first in a single all-comprehensive prohibition, very plain and simple: He was not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 2:16-17); that is, he was not to permit the experience of sin to enter his life. But man disobeyed God; he allowed sin to enter his life; and at that moment rebellion entered his heart. It seems to be a law of human nature that when a man wrongs his neighbor, he instinctively becomes an enemy to the one whom he has wronged. So it was with man and God. When man sinned, rebellion came into his heart against the Creator whom he had wronged; he found himself separated from God by his own act. At the same time, conscience was born; when God came down to commune with him, he tried to hide "from the presence of Jehovah amongst the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:6-8: the experience of our first parents, as described here, has been reproduced in the life of every accountable member of the human race).

Thus it will be seen that the problem before the Divine Government was twofold: (1) that of sustaining the majesty of the Divine Law which had been violated, and (2) that of overcoming the rebellion in man's heart and winning him back into fellowship with his Creator. Great as the problem was, however, the solution had already been worked out in the counsels of the Godhead. That solution was the Atonement.

As to the first phase of this problem, obviously in view of the fact that it was Divine Moral Law which man had flouted and not a mere human statute, there was nothing he himself could do, no offering which he himself could bring, that could satisfy the claims of Absolute Justice by sustaining the majesty of the Divine Law which had been transgressed. The cattle on a thousand hills, all the landed patrimony of the earth, all the material wealth of sky and earth and sea—all these things together would not have sufficed; besides, all these

things belonged to God already, and, moreover, no one man could ever have been in a position to offer them. Man had absolutely nothing to offer; even his human nature and life had become contaminated by sin and its consequences, and hence unfitted to serve such a holy purpose. Divine Holiness, on the one hand, forbade God's receiving man back *in his sins!* man, on the other hand, was already under the curse of sin, as a consequence of his own act, and powerless to lift himself out of the guilt of sin. But at the same time Divine Love counseled the extension of mercy to the erring creature. The only solution was the Atonement. Now Atonement means simply that God did for man what man was utterly helpless to do for himself; God provided the necessary Offering for him (thus nullifying the hypothetical antimony between the Divine Goodness and the Divine Power, and that between Divine Justice and Love as well). In a word, God looked down and saw man in danger of perishing utterly, of becoming lost for ever. Therefore, out of His infinite Love for the creature whom He had made in His own image, God Himself provided the Offering sufficient to uphold the majesty of the Divine Moral Law, and by so doing put Himself in a position to be just and at the same time "a justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26); that is, of him who comes to God by faith in the Atonement (the body and blood—or perfect human nature—of Christ) which God has provided for him. Divine Justice demanded a perfect Offering; Divine Love provided that Offering. *Atonement* means, literally, "covering" (from the Hebrew *kaphar*). Thus the Atonement which God provided is the "covering" for the sins of all who come to Him by faith in Christ Jesus. We may rest assured that whatever the human race lost through the disobedience of the first Adam, it regained through the obedience of the second (Rom. 5:18-19); regained *unconditionally*, in so far as the innocent and irresponsible (including infants) are concerned, but *conditionally* for all human beings of accountable age, the condition being union with Christ and the life of the Spirit.

It should be noted here again, for the sake of emphasis, that the place divinely appointed for the believing penitent to come under the efficacy of the blood of Christ (1 John 1:6-7, the Covering of Divine Grace, Eph. 2:8), is the grave of water (baptism, Matt. 28:16-20, John 19:34, Acts 2:38,



8:12-13, 9:18-19, 10:47-48, 16:32-34, 18:8; John 3:5). This does not mean, of course, that there is some magical power in water. Nor does it mean that the pardon (remission) takes place in the obedient believer. It means that when human faith wills to meet God's grace at the place divinely appointed, *the pardon takes place in the mind of God*, the Source of primary authority. Because remission of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit are divinely promised on the conditions of repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38), it follows that spiritual circumcision is the cutting of the body of the guilt of sin and hence occurs at the same point in conversion (Rom. 6:1-11, Col. 2:8-15). *It must be understood that Christian baptism follows faith and repentance* ("change of heart"), on the part of the one baptized. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

As the second phase of the problem before the Divine Government, that of overcoming the rebellion in man's heart, it is evident that physical or temporal punishment would never have accomplished that end; indeed punishment would but have alienated him the more, driven him farther away from Divine Love. Therefore, there was but one thing to be done, namely, for God Himself to make His Offering of such a character that it would not only be adequate to satisfy the demands of Absolute Justice, but would be, at one and the same time, such an overwhelming demonstration of God's Love as to overcome the rebellion in man's heart and win him back into fellowship with his Creator; or, failing to do that, would by its very costliness leave all men without excuse, in the sight of all intelligent creatures, who might refuse, or even neglect, to accept the Offering provided for them. Hence God selected the most precious jewel in all His immeasurable domains and offered Him freely for us all. John 3:16—"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." V. 17—"For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world." Why not? Because the world was already under Divine judgment, and had been from the time of the entrance of sin into it. Hence, "God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him." He came the first time as the Suffering Savior, the Lamb of God; the next time He comes He will come as

the reigning King and Judge of all mankind. And the Logos who by Divine begetting became the Son of God, thus "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). Thus it will be seen that God Himself, through the Spirit's begetting, provided the sinless offering which Christ, also through the Eternal Spirit, offered up on Calvary. He alone—His perfect human nature, His body and blood, His life—is the adequate Atonement for the sins of the world. *There is on other Atonement. (Man can be redeemed only by his original Owner.)* Hence, He had a perfect right to say: "No one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). This, it seems to me, is in broad outline the teaching of the Scriptures regarding the Atonement.

We are told that Christ "*through the eternal Spirit [literally, Spirit absolute, Divine Spirit] offered himself without blemish unto God*" (Heb. 9:14). This Offering was made, of course, by the originating Will of the Father: "the Father hath sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). That it was made also through the agency of the Spirit is evident from the fact (1) that it was through the Spirit that the Word was made flesh, that the Son was begotten in the Virgin's womb (Luke 1:35); that Christ preached, taught, and worked miracles by the power of the Spirit; and that indeed He possessed the Spirit without measure (John 3:34); indeed it may rightly be said that it was in the power of the Spirit that He went to the Cross, rose from the dead, ascended to Heaven, and there presented His Offering for the sins of the world. Commenting on Heb. 9:14, Milligan says: "It was the sacrifice of his perfect humanity, sustained and supported by his own Divinity, that gave to his offering its infinite value. . . . The animals which were offered had no will, no spirit (*pneuma*) of their own which could concur with the act of sacrifice. Theirs was a transitory life, of no potency or value. They were offered through law (*dia nomou*) rather than through any consent or agency or counteragency of their own. But Christ offered himself, with his own consent assisting and empowering the sacrifice. And what was that consent? The consent of what? Of the spirit of a man, such as yours or mine, given in and through our finite spirit, whose acts are

bounded by its own allotted space and time, and its own responsibilities? No: but the consenting act of his Divine personality—his eternal Spirit (*pneuma aiōnion*), his Godhead which from before time acquiesced in, and wrought with the purpose of the Father’.”<sup>1</sup> Note Heb. 12:2, “for the joy that was set before him.” Was not this the sheer joy of redeeming lost souls?) “The Sacrifice of the Cross,” writes Swete, “was consummated by the act of our Lord’s own human spirit, which was so penetrated and elevated by the Spirit of God that it lived in the eternal and invisible, and was able to ‘endure the cross, despising shame.’”<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, the human spirit of Jesus was so possessed at all times by the Holy Spirit that it becomes an act of presumption to attempt theoretically to draw a line of separation between them.

### 7. The Spirit and the Resurrection of Jesus

Christ, as we have seen, was begotten by the agency of the Spirit in the womb of the Virgin; He was anointed at His baptism with the Holy Spirit and with power; His preaching was in the power of the Spirit; throughout His incarnate life He was impelled and guided by the Spirit in all His acts; by the Spirit of God He wrought mighty wonders and works and signs; and finally through the Eternal Spirit He offered Himself without blemish unto God. As a crowning act of Divine attestation, therefore, His Person and Work were gloriously vindicated by the power of that same Spirit: the Spirit of Holiness who have possessed Him throughout His entire life, now triumphed—in Him—over death itself. Rom. 1:1-4: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, which he promised afore through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning *his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: even Jesus Christ our Lord.*” Here, again, why should Biblical exegetes try to draw a theoretical line of separation between the “holy Spiritual nature” of Christ and the Holy Spirit?

1. R. Milligan, *New Testament Commentary: Hebrews*, pp. 255-256. The quotation is from Alford.
2. H. B. Swete, *op. cit.*, p. 61.