

- **Cross of Christ 4**
- **Satisfaction for Sin Romans 3:25-26**
- **La satisfaction pour le péché (Romains 3.25-26)**
- **Sühne (Römer 3, 25-26)**

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## RÉSUMÉ

«Dieu l'a présenté comme un sacrifice expiatoire par la foi en son sang. Il l'a fait pour démontrer sa justice . . . en sorte d'être juste tout en justifiant ceux qui ont la foi en Jésus». Voilà une affirmation qui suscite bien des problèmes! En outre, l'idée d'un sacrifice humain est choquante pour l'homme moderne.

### 1. «Dieu l'a présenté»

Le verbe grec utilisé ici a deux sens, celui de projeter ou faire des plans, et celui de présenter. Les avis des exégètes sont partagés. La croix apparaît comme une déclaration divine. Pourtant, combien peu nombreux sont les prédicateurs qui semblent consumés par la passion de présenter Jésus-Christ crucifié et ressuscité.

### 2. «Comme un sacrifice expiatoire»

Le terme grec employé ici signifie «propitiation». John Owen dégage quatre éléments essentiels à ce propos: une offense doit être effacée, une personne offensée doit être apaisée, celui qui a commis l'offense doit être pardonné, un moyen d'expiation doit être trouvé. Le deuxième élément pose problème à beaucoup. On a parfois présenté le sens du mot propitiation de manière malheureuse, mais le fond du problème réside dans le refus de l'enseignement biblique au sujet de la colère divine, et cela est dû à l'absence d'une vision du monde biblique.

Avec H. Blocher et C. S. Lewis, il faut insister sur le caractère mauvais du péché. Dans les Églises aujourd'hui, on rationalise le péché et on l'excuse. Si le

péché ne met pas Dieu en colère, on n'a pas besoin de propitiation. De nombreuses traductions modernes évitent le terme pour la raison que les gens ne le comprennent plus. Mais nous devons plutôt enseigner le sens de ce terme.

La colère dirigée contre le mal n'exclut pas l'amour pour celui qui l'a commis. Ceux qui prêchent l'enfer devraient le faire dans les larmes.

### 3. «Par la foi en son sang»

La propitiation renvoie au jour de l'expiation. Les auteurs du Nouveau Testament utilisent le mot «sang» pour parler de la mort de Christ. Pourquoi? À cause de l'unité intrinsèque de la Bible, entre l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament. Une solide connaissance de l'enseignement de l'Ancien Testament sur les sacrifices peut enrichir le culte du peuple de Dieu.

La notion de justification répond au problème de la transgression de la loi divine, la notion de rédemption répond à celui de notre esclavage du péché et de Satan. Mais la notion de sacrifice répond au besoin que nos péchés soient effacés.

### 4. «Il l'a fait pour démontrer sa justice . . . en sorte d'être juste tout en justifiant ceux qui ont la foi en Jésus».

On connaît la réponse d'Anselme à la question: «Pourquoi Dieu s'est-il fait homme?» Calvin avait la même conception de la satisfaction pour le péché. John Stott a répondu à des objections modernes soulevées contre cette doctrine.

Il faut souligner le sens relationnel du terme «justice».



*Qu'est-ce que cela signifie pour notre vie aujourd'hui, dans notre Europe postmoderne? Prenons l'exemple des attentes de ceux qui entrent aujourd'hui dans le mariage. La vision du monde biblique a disparu. Le Dieu qui, tout en*

*étant juste, justifie ceux qui ont foi en Jésus a été oublié.*

*En Romains 3, Paul conclut que le Dieu juste, en apportant par son Fils une justice de Dieu, accomplit et entérine la loi qu'il a lui-même donnée.*

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

*Römer 3,25f.: 'Den hat Gott für den Glauben hingestellt als Sühne in seinem Blut zum Erweis seiner Gerechtigkeit . . . daß er selbst gerecht ist und gerecht macht den, der da ist aus dem Glauben an Jesus'. Diese Aussage enthält eine Reihe von Problemen, auf die wir im vorliegenden Artikel eingehen wollen. Außerdem werden wir uns mit Einwänden beschäftigen, die gegen die Darbringung eines menschlichen Opfers vorgebracht worden sind.*

### 1. Gott hat ihn hingestellt

*Das Verb προσέθετο hat zwei Bedeutungen, nämlich 'beabsichtigen, sich vornehmen' und 'bekanntmachen, öffentlich präsentieren' (vgl. Morris, Cranfield und Calvin). Das Kreuz war ein göttliches Statement, doch wie wenig Prediger haben heutzutage noch die Leidenschaft, Christus als den Gekreuzigten und Auferstandenen bekanntzumachen.*

### 2. Als Sühne

*Der Begriff ἱλαστήριον ('Versöhnung') umfaßt, wie John Owen aufgezeigt hat, vier wesentliche Elemente: (1.) die Straftat, die gesühnt werden muß; (2.) die Person, an der die Straftat begangen wurde und mit der man sich aussöhnen muß; (3.) den Straftäter und (4.) das Mittel der Sühne. Die Bedeutung der Versöhnung ist manchmal auf unbedachte Weise vermittelt worden, doch grundsätzlich stehen wir dem Problem gegenüber, daß Leute aus einem mangelnden Verständnis der biblischen Weltanschauung heraus die Lehre vom Zorn Gottes ablehnen. Der Artikel geht in diesem Zusammenhang auf die Sicht von Denney ein und erwähnt Henri Blochers*

*und C. S. Lewis' Gedanken zur Sündhaftigkeit der Sünde.*

*Wir tendieren heutzutage oftmals dazu, unsere Sünden zu verdrängen oder zu entschuldigen, doch ohne den persönlichen Zorn Gottes gegen jegliche Sünde gäbe es keine Notwendigkeit für Versöhnung. Manche modernen Übersetzungen vermeiden den Begriff, da die Leute nicht mehr verstehen, was er bedeutet. Doch gerade deshalb ist es so wichtig, daß wir ihnen die Bedeutung des Begriffes erläutern.*

### 3. Für den Glauben in seinem Blut

*Die neutestamentlichen Autoren verwenden den Ausdruck 'Blut' als Kürzel für den Tod Christi. Wir gehen dem Grund für die Verwendung dieses Wortes nach, der mit der Einheit der Bibel, und zwar des Alten und Neuen Testaments, zu tun hat. Ein solides Verständnis der alttestamentlichen Lehre vom Opfer kann den Gottesdienst des Gottesvolkes vertiefen und bereichern.*

*Die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung zielt auf Vergehen gegen das Gesetz Gottes, während das Konzept der Erlösung unsere Versklavung an die Sünde und den Satan im Blick hat. Die Opferterminologie jedoch macht deutlich, daß wir es nötig haben, daß unsere Sünde gewaschen wird.*

### 4. Zum Erweis seiner Gerechtigkeit . . . daß er selbst gerecht ist und gerecht macht den, der da ist aus dem Glauben an Jesus

*An dieser Stelle beschäftigen wir uns mit den Aussagen Anselms in Cur Deus Homo und gehen auf Calvin ein, der ein ähnliches Verständnis von der Sühne hatte. Außerdem soll John Stott zu Wort kommen, der sich mit modernen Einwänden gegen diese Lehre*



*auseinandergesetzt hat. Es ist darüber hinaus wichtig, die relationale Komponente von Gerechtigkeit zu betonen.*

*Doch was bedeutet dies für unsere Situation in einem postmodernen Europa? Wir wollen dies am Beispiel des modernen Verständnisses von der Ehe veranschaulichen, bei dem ebenfalls die biblische Weltanschauung keine Rolle*

*mehr spielt. Den, der selbst gerecht ist und gerecht macht den, der da ist aus dem Glauben an Jesus, hat man vergessen.*

*Paulus zieht in Römer 3 die Schlußfolgerung, daß der Gott der Gerechtigkeit das Gesetz, das er selbst erlassen hat, erfüllt und bestätigt, indem er durch seinen Sohn eine Gerechtigkeit bereitstellt, die von Gott kommt.*

We come this morning to Romans 3:25f: 'God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice . . . so as to be just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus'. Here is a statement which bristles with problems and has engendered perhaps as much discussion and controversy as any in the NT. J. S. Whale wrote in 1960, 'In our modern world, sacrifice has become a mere figure of speech. Parents sacrifice themselves for their children; a politician may sacrifice a career for a principle . . . But modern man finds the very idea [of human sacrifice] revolting'. However, I am not at all sure that is an accurate statement. There is something deeply innate in human nature which recognises in certain kinds of sacrifice something noble, almost godlike. Even though the word is predominantly used metaphorically in the 20th century, sacrifice, especially when it is motivated by the love of a man for his friends, strikes a deep cord within the human breast. We need not, therefore, be apologetic for, far less ashamed of, the kind of Gospel statement such as that in our text for today.

## 1. God presented him

The first verb of our text poses a small problem. The verb, translated by NIV as 'presented' ('put forward', RSV), προσέθετο, has two meanings: (i) to purpose, to set before the mind, and it is used in this sense in both of its other two occurrences in the NT (1:13; Eph. 1:9); (ii) to set forth, to present. Leon Morris prefers the second meaning, as translated by NIV and RSV, along with Barrett, Bruce, Michel, Nygren and others. Cranfield opts for the

first meaning, as translated by NEB ('God designed him'). Calvin states that for those who prefer the first meaning it harmonises well with John 3:16. But he continues, 'If we embrace this meaning, it will still remain true, that God has set him forth in due time, whom he had appointed as a Mediator'. Following Calvin therefore that, even if one prefers the sense of 'to purpose', the meaning of 'to set forth' or 'to present' cannot be far away, I want to comment briefly on the 'setting forth' of Christ as a sacrifice of atonement.

In the death of Christ, God was demonstrating his righteousness. On the Cross he was making a public statement, a public declaration. And what a public declaration it was and still is! Little did the soldiers and bypassers think that Jesus of Nazareth, hanging there in shame and agony, was a divine declaration that would sound down the centuries, echoing across continents and round the entire world for time and for eternity.

In my work as Warden of Rutherford House in Edinburgh, I conduct preaching workshops with ministers when maybe ten or a dozen men come together for a couple of days and in turn each preaches a sermon. We then together evaluate the sermon and try to make helpful comments on its exegesis, application and presentation of the message of the text. These men who bravely subject themselves to this painful experience of being chopped to pieces by their colleagues are all evangelicals. But yet again and again I have to ask, 'Where, my brother, was Christ in all of that? Where was the ray of sunlight streaming from the face of the Son of Righteousness? Where was the smile of God as his Son was set forth, presented to us?'



I don't mean that I am always looking for a statement on the love of God. My concern is how few preachers today seem to be consumed by love for the Lord, by a passion to set him forth crucified and risen, to present him as the sacrifice of atonement! They say many true things, and expound many sound biblical principles. But far too many congregations seldom have Christ crucified placarded before them. It is actually easier to reduce the Gospel to mere moralising than to preach the cross. We can avoid the cross and its demands and opt for good behaviour! Paul wrote to the Galatians, 'Before your very eyes Christ was portrayed as crucified' (Gal. 3:1). May all of us, in our studies, our praying and our pastoring of those we teach, strive and work to see preachers being sent out who will set forth Christ as crucified. Why? Because Almighty God himself has set forth his Son. And ours is now the unspeakable privilege of proclaiming the crucified and risen Lord!

## 2. As a sacrifice of atonement

I don't propose to rehearse the arguments surrounding the noun ἱλαστήριον. You will be aware of the literature on this subject and excellent summaries of it can be found in the commentaries on Romans by Cranfield and Morris. Following both of these, along with many of the older commentators, I am taking it that ἱλαστήριον means propitiation. The English Puritan, John Owen, has set out for us the four essential elements in any propitiation: 1st, there is an offence to be taken away; 2nd, there is a person offended who needs to be pacified; 3rd, there is an offending person, guilty of the offence; and 4th, there is some means of making atonement for the offence.

The first element causes us no problem—all will readily agree there is an offence to be taken away. The third and fourth elements cause no problem either for most—we are guilty of offences and there is therefore need for some means of making atonement. It is Owen's second element, the person offended who needs to

be pacified, which has been a problem for so many.

We have to admit that there have been many unfortunate statements which have in turn led to many even more unfortunate caricatures of the meaning of 'propitiation' so that some theologians have been less than fair in their denunciation of the concept. It seems to me that the nub of the problem is an unwillingness to accept the Bible's teaching on the wrath of God. And it is at this point we come so near to the heart of the problem we all face today in communicating the truth of the Gospel. It is the lack of a biblical world-view in the mind of the postmodern society in which we live.

What today's postmodern person fails to realise is that each one of us is the personal property of God. He has created us for himself. He placed us in this world with all its resources and delights. He has given us his commands: 'You may . . . You may not . . .' But we are in revolt against him. Our rebellion and sin have put *us* in the wrong—we are the offenders. For his part, God is justly angry with us because of our rebellion—he is the offended one.

Let me quote a Scottish theologian, James Denney:

In Paul's thought, and in the thought of the New Testament generally, sin introduces an alienation, an estrangement, between man and God, which is indubitably two-sided. There is something in God as well as something in man which has to be dealt with before there can be peace. Nay, the something on God's side is so incomparably more serious that in comparison with it, the something on man's side simply passes out of view . . . The serious thing which makes the gospel necessary, and the putting away of which constitutes the gospel, is God's condemnation of the world and its sin, it is God's wrath 'revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men' (Rom. 1:16, 18).'<sup>8</sup>

While Denney writes that sin introduces an alienation which is two-sided and that the 'something on God's side is so incomparably more serious' than the something on our side, he would certainly



not want us to pass over lightly the heinousness of sin. We are driven back in the final analysis to the problem of evil. Those who deny the wrath of God are also by implication treating sin lightly as something God will overlook. Henri Blocher comments that the rational schemes which try to explain the *whence and why* 'bring evil back into harmony with the creation, and thus they open the road to the excusing, or justification, of what should excite unmitigated horror and indignation. They plead overtly for *theodicy*; they work covertly for *kakodicy*'.<sup>9</sup> It is this failure to recognise the exceeding sinfulness of sin which arises from the denial of the divine wrath against sin. Not so Scripture. In an essay on the imprecatory Psalms, C. S. Lewis points out that to the best of his (I would say, exceptionally wide) knowledge of literature, Scripture is unique in its abhorrence of evil and outright hatred of wickedness.<sup>10</sup>

Is it not true that so many of us try to rationalise and excuse our particular darling sins? We give them other names: if we lose our tempers we say we were provoked, if we covet we say we are just day-dreaming, if we lust we say it was our body chemistry at work. How many of us do a deal with our secret sins! We have a locked cellar hidden away in the depths of our souls and we guard the key so carefully. All unknown to our nearest and dearest, we unlock that cellar door and privately descend those unlit stairs to visit the sins with which we have done a deal. We guard jealously our darkest secret!

Why then is there so little conviction of sin in our churches? Why do so many of our young people behave behind their parents' backs (and sometimes, alas, quite openly and without any apparent shame, before their parents' faces), as if there were no Ten Commandments, no restraints, no moral parameters at all? Why at the open graveside do the friends and relatives who gather to offer comfort to those bereaved tell them that 'he was a good man and is now at rest', when the truth is he was a thoroughly godless man who now faces the Judge of all the earth? Why is pluralism so rampant, and why do

so many believe that all religions lead to God? Why is the prevailing philosophy—the modern pseudo-Christian creed—that 'somehow or other everything must work out well for everybody... God will never condemn anybody'?<sup>11</sup> Surely it is that we have set the love of God against his holiness, and we have set the mercy of God against his judgement. We have presented a false impression of the revelation of God entrusted to us in the Scriptures. And where this thoroughly biblical teaching of 'the wrath of God is ignored, there will also be no understanding of the central conception of the gospel'.<sup>12</sup>

If then, there is no wrath of God, no personal anger of God against sin and the sinner, there is no need for propitiation for there is no 'offended person who needs to be pacified' (Owen's words). Hence so many translations here render ἱλαστηριον as 'sacrifice of atonement' (NIV) or as 'an expiation' (RSV, NEB) or as a 'sacrificial death by means of which people's sins could be forgiven' (GNB). I know translators struggle to make difficult biblical concepts accessible to theologically illiterate readers. But after thirty three years in the pastoral ministry, I am convinced that we have to bite this bullet and educate our people in the meanings of theological terms. Modern young people know a highly technical language needed for computers. They are perfectly capable of learning theological language needed to grasp the central truths of the gospel. We insult them, rather than help them, by simplifying these great truths so much that we evacuate them of their real meaning.

However, by no means all translations are endeavouring to make scripture more accessible. Many have been deliberately seeking to avoid any reference to the wrath of God and for my part I fail to understand why, when divine wrath has been the theme of the early part of this letter to the Romans. I suppose scholars like C. H. Dodd attempted to reach a compromise by explaining the wrath of God as a kind of impersonal reaction.<sup>13</sup> But C. S. Lewis has rightly pointed out the problem with an impersonal wrath: 'You say, "The



live wire does not feel angry with us, but if we blunder against it we get a shock." What do you suppose has been gained by substituting the image of a live wire for that of angered majesty? You have shut us all up in despair, for the angry can forgive, and electricity cannot'.<sup>14</sup>

Those of us who are parents have often been provoked to anger by some of our children's actions. Our anger has been mingled with grief that they could have acted in the way they have. But that does not mean we have ceased to love them. It is a serious fallacy to imagine that love can know no anger. True, there is a wrong kind of anger when our human judgement is distorted by our passion, which is probably why the Scripture exhorts us to be angry without sinning (Ps. 4:4=Eph. 4:26). But there is a righteous anger and there are times when manifestly it would be wrong not to experience anger.

One of our great Scottish saints of the 19th century, Robert Murray McCheyne, was told that a colleague had preached a sermon on hell. His comment was, 'Then did he preach with tears?' Our churches need to hear again of the sinfulness of sin, of the wrath of God against all ungodliness and wickedness, but they need to hear it preached with godly sorrow and even with tears, for the God who so hates sin is nevertheless the God of love.

### 3. Through faith in his blood

We are at once reminded that propitiation is by a sacrifice. While ἱλαστήριον does not here mean 'the mercyseat' in the Holy of Holies, it reminds us of the Day of Atonement when the blood was sprinkled on the mercy-seat as the high priest entered the presence of God with the golden censor.

It is interesting to note how often the NT writers refer to the death of Christ by using the word 'blood'. 'This is my blood of the covenant' (Mk. 14:24), 'he who drinks my blood has eternal life . . . my blood is drink indeed' (Jn. 6:54f), 'the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son' (Acts 20:28), 'we have now been justified by his blood' (Rom. 5:9), 'we have redemption through his blood . . . you

have been brought near through the blood of Christ' (Eph. 1:7; 2:13), 'we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus' (Heb. 10:19), 'the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin' (1 Jn. 1:7), 'freed us from our sins by his blood . . . He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the Word of God' (Rev. 1:9; 19:13), and so on. Why use the word 'blood' rather than speak of his death?

The answer is obvious, is it not? It is the inherent unity of the Bible and the way in which the NT writers have an inspired awareness that what they are setting down is the fulfilment of all that was foreshadowed in the OT. It brings us back to v. 21, 'the righteousness to which the Law and Prophets testify'. Christian congregations today need to be taught the OT scriptures. There is a serious lack of knowledge of the contents of the OT in many churches and as a result there is a shallowness of understanding of the meaning and implications of the Gospel. The inevitable result of a shallow understanding is a shallow commitment to Christ. And so believers in our generation are vulnerable to the lies and fallacies of our postmodern culture.

Why else did the Holy Spirit record and preserve for us the elaborate Levitical system of worship but to provide us with a whole theological framework of salvation? I so often hear Christians complaining about the hymns used in their churches. They make comments like this: 'The worship in our church is flat and lifeless. We need some contemporary hymns to pep it up'. Have you ever heard that? But I would submit that the real need is first for their understanding of Christian truth to be enlarged so that their minds can be inspired to praise God, and second for hymns to be used with real theological content. Simplistic ditties with catchy tunes are no antidote to lifeless singing! Let their preachers take them through the awesome ritual of the worship of the Tent of Meeting—the altar, the laver, the golden censor, the Day of Atonement, the mercy-seat, the high priestly office and garments—and relate all that through the



Letter to the Hebrews to the work of Christ, and then give them hymns to sing which adore the Christ of God and his work. I assure you that if the Spirit has been at work opening their minds to divine truth, then he will also work to open their hearts to praise their God and complaints about flat, lifeless worship will melt away.

Through faith in his blood! Justification focuses on our offences against the law of God; redemption focuses on our slavery to sin and Satan; but the language of sacrifice and the blood of Christ focuses on our uncleanness and our need for the washing away of the dark stains that defile us.

I recall a journey I made by motorcycle when I was a student. It was a night ride in winter with snow on the road and a great deal of dirt and slush around. I arrived home at about 2am, frozen to the marrow and absolutely filthy with mud and grit thrown up at me by other traffic. It was in my eyes, my hair, my face, down my neck, into my shoes—the filth had got everywhere! I recall standing for about half an hour under a hot shower and feeling the numbness gradually leaving me and the grime being washed away. I retired to bed at last warm and clean—so clean. ‘Through faith in his blood’: friends, God’s wrath is turned away, our sins are covered, and we are clean, utterly pure, cleansed of all defilement. Nor is it some fictional cleansing which depends on a mind over matter attitude on our part. God has set forth Christ as a propitiation. He hung there for me and for you!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude, In my  
place condemned he stood,  
Sealed my pardon with his  
blood—Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

#### **4. He did this to demonstrate his justice . . . so as to be just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus**

An early classical statement of the case for what has become known as ‘satisfaction for sin’ is given by Anselm in *Cur Deus*

*Homo*. Boso, Anselm’s imaginary interlocutor, asks: ‘What man would not be judged worthy of condemnation if he were to condemn the innocent in order to let the guilty go free? . . . for if he could not save sinners otherwise than by condemning the just, where is his omnipotence? and if he could, but would not, how do we defend his wisdom and justice?’ Anselm answers: ‘God the Father . . . did not compel him to die, nor permit him to be slain, unwilling; but that One himself bore his death by his own free will that he might save mankind’ (1.8). Anselm continues: ‘Each sinner ought to repay the honour of which he has robbed God: and this is the satisfaction which every sinner ought to make to God’ (1.11). Anselm sees the whole universe as having a pre-ordained order and symmetry so that God’s dealing with sin maintains ‘a beauty of order in the same universe’. Unless God exacted due satisfaction ‘when perversity attempts to disturb the regular order of things, there would be caused in that universe, which God should rule, a certain deformity from this violated symmetry of its order, and God would seem to fail in his government’ (1.15). Anselm has already defined sin as ‘not rendering to God what is his due’ (1.11). He now shows that we cannot make satisfaction by obedience or good works since these are required of us anyway. Therefore, ‘man the sinner owes to God, on account of sin, what he cannot repay, and unless he repays it he cannot be saved’ (1.25). He continues: ‘There is no one who can make this satisfaction except God himself . . . But no one ought to make it except man; otherwise man does not make satisfaction’. Therefore, ‘it is necessary that one who is Godman should make it’ (2.6).

Calvin held a similar view of satisfaction for sin: ‘Suppose this man learns, as Scripture teaches, that he was estranged from God through sin, is an heir of wrath, subject to the curse of eternal death . . . the slave of Satan, captive under the yoke of sin, destined finally for a dreadful destruction . . . and at this point Christ interceded as his advocate, took upon himself and suffered the punishment that, from God’s



righteous judgement, threatened all sinners; that he purged with his blood those evils which had rendered sinners hateful to God; and that by this expiation he had made satisfaction and sacrifice duly to God the Father; that as intercessor he has appeased God's wrath; that on this foundation rests the peace of God with men; that by this bond his benevolence is maintained towards them. Will the man then not be the more even moved by these things...<sup>15</sup> Again, Christ had 'to undergo the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgement'.<sup>16</sup>

We are all aware of the reservations many modern theologians have towards penal substitution and the satisfaction required by God before sin could be expiated.<sup>17</sup> We are grateful to John Stott for his masterly treatment of the subject in his book, *The Cross of Christ*.<sup>18</sup> Stott writes:

The way God chooses to forgive sinners and reconcile them to himself must, first and foremost, be fully consistent with his own character. It is not only that he must overthrow and disarm the devil in order to rescue his captives. It is not even only that he must satisfy his law, his honour, his justice or the moral order: it is that he must satisfy himself.<sup>19</sup>

God's righteousness, then, has been demonstrated in that divine action of setting forth his Son as a propitiation, to turn away his just wrath against us hell-deserving sinners, to expiate our sin and to reconcile us to himself, having satisfied his holy nature that sin has been justly forgiven.

It is at this point that something of the importance of insisting on the relational meaning of 'righteousness' becomes apparent. While we have seen that 'righteousness' is used in this passage in a forensic sense, the relational meaning must be maintained because as it is used in the OT, righteousness is a covenantal word and as such is essentially about relationships.<sup>20</sup> The righteous God is the covenant God. The righteousness he sets

forth is a covenantal righteousness. The covenant is concerned with that relationship he himself has initiated with his people. So that in the Cross of Christ we see the covenant God in action, the righteous God acting righteously, bringing into a right relationship with himself those who have faith in Jesus.

What for us is the meaning of this for life today in postmodern Europe? The objection is sometimes made against the Pauline concept of divine justice that it is inappropriate for the postmodern view of autonomy and freedom. Ever since the Renaissance, we have been focusing increasingly on human individuality and our growing emphasis does not readily co-exist with Paul's teaching as set out in Romans 3. Take one example of the way men and women think today. Our grandparents (and possibly our parents) viewed their marriage vows as a binding obligation and understood their duty to be fidelity to those vows 'for better or worse, richer or poorer, joy or sorrow, in sickness and in health'. Not so the Romeos and Juliets of the closing decade of this century. Their expectation of marriage is to find their own fulfilment, and if they do not, then they consider they should be free to look elsewhere. The whole basis of marriage (more commonly, of co-habitation) has radically changed with our post-modern view of human freedom. We have become more egotistical, more self-centred, more determined to put our personal needs and demands before those of our marriage partners. Anselm's order and symmetry of the divine creation has long since disappeared, and with it a biblical view of sin. In its place, we have legitimised and authorised the tyrannical rule of self!

The Biblical teaching of divine satisfaction, the holy love of God with its tension between his compassion and his 'fierce anger', has been lost. There is little or no conception of 'the compassionate and gracious God' who 'does not leave the guilty unpunished'.<sup>21</sup> Almost unknown is the God in whom 'love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace



kiss each other'.<sup>22</sup> Today's generation knows little or nothing of a God in whom there is both 'kindness and sternness'.<sup>23</sup> The one who is both just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus has been forgotten.

Paul is fully aware of this unity and wholeness of all that God has made. His conclusion in Romans 3 is that the God of righteousness in providing through his Son a righteousness from God is fulfilling and upholding the law he himself has made. Nor is the creation neglected; eagerly it is longing for the promised redemption of the children of God.<sup>24</sup>

So we have then the mystery of the cross, the wonder of our salvation, unfolded to us by the Scriptures in a 'kaleidoscope of images which together constitute the NT characterisation of Jesus as sacrifice'.<sup>25</sup> The language of the law court, of the slave market, of the Levitical cultus, is all richly expressed and given to us by the Holy Spirit that we might understand dimly something of the meaning of those hours of darkness when our Saviour languished in bloody agony on the cross. This is the message we are exhorted to study, to incorporate into our thinking, living and loving, which we are to commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.<sup>26</sup> I close with the words of hymn which comes to us from the 6th century:

Sing my tongue, how glorious battle  
glorious victory became;  
And above the Cross, His trophy, tell the  
triumph and the fame:  
Tell how He, the earth's Redeemer, by His  
death for man o'ercame.

Thirty years fulfilled among us—perfect  
life in low estate—  
Born for this, and self-surrendered, to His  
passion dedicate,  
On the Cross the Lamb is lifted, for His  
people immolate.

His the nails, the spear, the spitting, reed  
and vinegar and gall;  
From his patient body piercèd blood and  
water streaming fall:

Earth and sea and stars and mankind by  
that stream are cleansed all.

Faithful Cross, above all other, one and  
only noble Tree,  
None in foliage, none in blossom, none in  
fruit compares with thee:  
Sweet the wood and sweet the iron, and  
thy Load how sweet is He

Unto God be laud and honour: to the  
Father, to the Son,  
To the mighty Spirit, glory—ever Three  
and ever One:  
Power and glory in the highest while  
eternal ages run.

## Notes

- 1 J. S. Whale, *Victor and Victim, Christian Doctrine of Redemption* (CUP, 1960) 42.
- 2 Colin Gunton makes this point in, *The Actuality of Atonement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) 116ff.
- 3 Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 179f.
- 4 C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, (ICC, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975) 208ff.
- 5 Calvin, *Comm. in loc.*
- 6 E.g., Calvin: 'God, without having regard to Christ, is always angry with us . . . God does not indeed hate in us his own workmanship, that is, as we are formed men; but he hates our uncleanness, which has extinguished the light of his image. When the washing of Christ cleanses this away, he then loves and embraces us as his own pure workmanship'. *Comm. in loc.* See also Institutes, 2, 15, 6; 16, 1–3.
- 7 Quoted by D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Atonement and Justification* (Banner of Truth, 1970) 70.
- 8 James Denney, *2 Corinthians, Expositor's Bible* (London: Hodder, 1907) 211f.
- 9 *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel Cameron, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992) ch. 10, Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil, Henri Blocher, 285. See also, Henri Blocher, *Evil and the Cross*, (Leicester: IVP, 1992).
- 10 C. S. Lewis, *Reflections of the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958) ch. 3, The Cursings.
- 11 Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (London: Lutterworth, 1934) 489, footnote.
- 12 *Idem*, 152.



- 13 C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Hodder, 1932), 21ff. See also his discussion of propitiation in, 'ἱλασκεσθαι', its cognates, derivatives and synonymms in the Septuagint, in *JTS* 32 (1931), 352–60 (reprinted in his *Bible and the Greeks*).
- 14 C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, quoted by J. Philip in *The Death of Christ* (Aberdeen: Didasko, 1986) 23f.
- 15 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.2.
- 16 *Op. cit.*, 2.16.10. For a post-Calvin, 17th C. reformed statement on 'Satisfaction', see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ET, Reformed & Presbyterian (1994) Vol. 2, 418ff.
- 17 For a full discussion and critique see Colin Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) ch. 4, 83113.
- 18 John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, (Leicester: IVP, 1986) ch. 5, 111–132.
- 19 *Op. cit.*, 129.
- 20 See Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* (CUP, 1986) Vol. 1, 1–36; and *Justification by Faith* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1988) 24.
- 21 Exodus 34:6f.
- 22 Psalm 85:10.
- 23 Romans 11:22.
- 24 Romans 8:19, 22.
- 25 Colin Gunton's phrase, *Idem*, 126, footnote 2.
- 26 2 Tim. 2:2, 15.

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