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Comments on "'Atonement' in Historical Perspective"

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community of faith." How like Rom 3:31 where Paul writes that faith is not to be used to undermine the law, but to place it on a firmer footing. It is also like Christ's own statement that he did not come to abolish the Law, but to complete it. The Atonement doesn't free us from the Law. It enables us to live under it more fruitfully.

In conclusion, Redemption is a fundamental force in the universe which turns upon the Cross of Calvary and transcends all time. Wherever reconciliation occurs -- between Jacob and Esau, between Joseph and his brothers; or when Gandhi relieves the agony of a Hindu guilty of killing a Muslim infant by telling him the way to salvation is for him to adopt and raise another infant as a devout Muslim; or when Capulet turns to Montague and says, "O brother Montague, give me thy hand," we are witnessing acts of redemption which are all expressions of the Redemptive Act of Christ on the Cross.

To the extent we remain closed to this wondrous love -- this redemptive process open to all -- to that extent we remain in sin and lack wisdom. "What fools they are to measure themselves by themselves, to find in themselves their own standard of comparison...If a man must boast, let him boast of the Lord" (2 Cor 10:12,17 NEB). Christ is the plumbline for measuring the completeness and abundance of the joy of our at-one-ment with God.

NOTES

1. Henri J. M. Nouwen, "Bearing Fruit in the Spirit," *Sojourners*, vol 14 no 7 (July 1985):28.
2. Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964), "The Artificial Nigger," in *The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), pp. 268-270.
3. Heini Arnold, *Christ's Vicarious Atonement: Meetings in Preparation for the Lord's Supper* (Rifton, NY: Hutterian Society of Brothers, Plough Publishing House, 1979), pp. 25-27. Introduced by Ruth Pitman at the QTDG Conference, Barnesville, OH, July 15-18, 1985.

Comments

RON SELLECK

Atonement seems a strange artifact of primitive religious faith to many people today. The blandness of middle-class American life tends to numb them to the significance of the Cross, and eminent virtue and repentance are apt to elude those whom evil has not terrified.

Responsible and respectable mediocrity can provide us with a temporary refuge, and prevent us from reaching the depths of the unutterable sigh.

Or we can decide that we must have outgrown Atonement, since the concept leaves us so cold. After all, many martyrs have died for various causes, how is Jesus anything but a martyr? And why should He be treated any differently?

Since "sin" is a human construction, why can't it be redefined or the consequences modified by a majority (or a consensus)? Isn't what we really need to do simply to persuade people to walk in the right direction? We know that "evil" is only the product of poor environment, and many of us are working diligently to improve that. Really, sin is simply "missing the mark." And many of us try conscientiously to heed the example of Jesus and listen intently to our inner promptings.

Why this arcane puzzle of the Atonement?

Yet we observe that the trodden-down in heart treasure companionship with the dying and risen Lord. The spiritually poor see with clarity that the life they lead apart from God's creative self-sacrifice is a death worse than death. It is never to have lived at all. Remorseful for being so blind and for so long, they cry out with the Publican, "Oh Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

The voice that cannot lie convinces us as well, telling us in the quiet that even our most religious and benevolent activities often take their origin from the machinations of a sin-sick self. From this kind of activism we must be freed that we may learn genuine practice.

Daily, we are incorporated into the Form of the dying and rising Savior. Like the healed paralytic, we find confidence to roll up our cozy bed and embrace the legitimate suffering that attends abundant life. Divine reassurance places doors and windows in the walls of the shabby fortress of our defense. An angel rolls our stone away and calls us forth from a self-hewn tomb.

Jesus' forgiveness bestows the encouragement to be whole. The paralytic was fortunate to know his disease. Illusion's habits prevent us from knowing ours. But, beholding the Form of God in human flesh, we are daily transformed into his Image, until we become as He is. Then our life becomes his Life -- Atonement. May it be soon!