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LUTHER AND THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY
IN RELIGION

PART II*

Having in Part I of this article given some account of the development, in Luther's religious experience and his career as a Reformer, of the principle of the supreme normative authority of the sacred Scriptures, we shall now try to indicate the main features of his teaching in regard to the nature of this authority.

It is well to recall—indeed, the significance of the fact cannot be overestimated—that it was by a singularly deep and rich experience of the grace of God in Christ Jesus that Luther had come to the double conviction that he was himself a saved man, and that the subject matter of the Bible, culminating in the assurance of the free gift of eternal life through faith in the Son of God, is true and trustworthy. In this experience lay the germ of his power to refashion the religious life of his age.¹ Inheriting the medieval ideas concerning the relative functions of the Scriptures and the Church, he presently found himself constrained, by the logic of his spiritual necessities, to oppose one after another of the traditional authorities that kept thwarting his advances toward full evangelical freedom. One of the greatest conservatives that ever lived,

* For Part I, see this REVIEW, October, 1917, pp. 553-603.

¹ Preuss, *Die Entwicklung des Schriftprinzips bei Luther bis zur Leipziger Disputation*, p. 6, aptly remarks: 'Es ist der Ausgangspunkt und mit ihm das ganze weitere Werden des Reformators ein religiöser, kein humanistischer, ein positiver, kein negativer, ein erlebter, kein erdachter, ein errungener, kein übernommener.' On the importance of interpreting "the whole Luther" in the light of his formative evangelical experience, cf. Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, iii⁴ p. 835.

DR. DENNEY AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

The death of Dr. Denney removed one of Scotland's ablest theologians, and that one whose name is probably more associated with the doctrine of the Atonement than is that of any English-speaking theologian since M'Leod Campbell.

Dr. Denney always contended most earnestly for an objective Atonement. He always recognized the essential place which the death of Christ occupies in New Testament Christianity, and from this position from first to last he never receded.

In his earliest book, *Studies in Theology*, published in 1894, he put the whole matter in a nutshell when he wrote: "The Gospel is the revelation of God's redeeming love, made in view of a certain situation as existing between God and man. Now what is the serious element in that situation, as Scripture unfolds it? In other words, what is the serious element in sin, as sin stands before us in Revelation? Is it man's distrust of God? Man's dislike, suspicion, alienation? Is it the special direction of vice in human nature, or its debilitating corrupting effects? It is none of these things, nor is it all of them together. What makes the situation serious, what necessitates a Gospel, is that the world, in virtue of its sin, lies under the condemnation of God. His wrath abides upon it" (pp. 102, 103). These words ring true to the Christianity of the New Testament. Indeed one rises from reading what Dr. Denney has to say concerning the Atonement in this early volume, with the impression that it is the Satisfaction doctrine which he is setting forth and to which he is giving unqualified allegiance. For after stating the situation clearly in the words just quoted, he goes on to show that Christ bore our sins, and that this means that He bore our condemnation in the place of us sinners, and that thus God's justice is satisfied and manifested. The ideas of substitution, imputation and

penalty, all seem to have full recognition. Moreover Dr. Denney shows us that this is not only the view of all the Apostles, but that it has its origin in the teaching of Christ Himself. And what is more, Dr. Denney himself accepts it apparently without reserve.

Then in the year 1902 came his book, *The Death of Christ*. This is an admirable exegetical study of the New Testament doctrine of the Atonement; admirable on the whole, yet showing in its exegesis, especially in some passages from the Epistle to the Romans, a hesitancy to let Paul speak out, and not so good or so objective an interpretation of the Apostle's thought as is to be found, for example, in Pfeiderer's *Paulinism*, a circumstance doubtless due to the fact that Pfeiderer sits much more loosely to the authority of Paul than does Dr. Denney.

It was only when the volume entitled *The Atonement and the Modern Mind* appeared in 1903, that it became apparent that Dr. Denney had departed from the doctrine of the Satisfaction of Christ. He still contends earnestly for an objective Atonement. He still recognizes that sin has made a difference to God. He still insists that the atoning work of Christ is made necessary, in some sense, by what God is. But it seems after all that it is the Rectoral theory of the Atonement that Dr. Denney is expounding and defending. There is a marked absence of unequivocal statements about the justice of God and the guilt of sin. Instead of speaking of God's condemnation and punishment of sin, he uses constantly the phrase "God's reaction against sin" which was manifested in Christ's death. It looks as if the ideas of substitution, imputation and penalty, were not in Dr. Denney's thought at all.

His positive statements in this book, moreover, disclose the same thing. Thus he says that the New Testament teaches "that forgiveness is mediated to sinners through Christ, and specifically through His death: in other words, that it is possible for God to forgive, but possible for God only through a supreme revelation of His love, made at in-

finite cost, and doing justice to the uttermost to those inviolable relations in which alone, as I have already said, man can participate in eternal life, the life of God Himself—doing justice to them as relations in which there is an inexorable divine reaction against sin, finally expressing itself in death” (pp. 112, 113). (Also in forgiving sin, God, he says, “must demonstrate Himself to be what He is in relation to sin, a God with whom evil cannot dwell, a God who maintains inviolate the moral constitution of the world, taking sin as all that it is in the very process through which He mediates forgiveness to men” (p. 114). That is to say that God must forgive in a way which shows how opposed He is to sin.

This language is no doubt somewhat vague. But, judged by the general impression of the book and the explanations which the author makes, it seems evident that it is not so much retributive as it is rectoral justice which demands the Atonement; that God might perhaps pardon sin without the sacrifice of Christ, were it not for the danger thus involved to the moral order of the world, or at most, to His holy abhorrence of evil. The idea of substitution, moreover, is denied in any strict sense of the term, and the somewhat contemptuous remarks about “forensic” and “legal” words strengthen the conclusion that the ideas of satisfaction, retribution, substitution, and imputation no longer underlie Dr. Denney’s thought on the subject.

No doubt this is due in large measure to the fact that Dr. Denney’s avowed purpose in this book was to “mediate” between the Christian doctrine of the Atonement and that abstraction which he terms the “modern mind,” and to the fact that he has adopted an apologetical method of expounding Christian truth which is absolutely fatal to its correct understanding and statement. We may take Christianity or leave it; we will never understand it if, in our attempt to do so, we keep one eye constantly upon how it will be regarded by some supposed standard of values foreign to Christianity. The science of Christian Apologetics has its

place, and that a fundamental one, in the defense of Christianity, but an apologetic method is entirely unscientific and wholly out of place in the exegetical determination of Christian truth and its doctrinal formulation.

We were prepared, therefore, when we took up Dr. Denney's latest book, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*,* to find him consciously and intentionally departing from the Satisfaction doctrine of the Atonement. He cannot allow that Christ's death was in any real sense penal; nor that Christ's work fully satisfied Divine justice; nor that our guilt is imputed to Christ; nor His righteousness to us. All these ideas Dr. Denney explicitly rejects. This being so, he cannot allow that Christ acted as the sinner's substitute in the full sense of that term. And rejecting thus the ideas of imputation, substitution, and penalty, while still contending earnestly for an objective Atonement, *i.e.*, one that has reference to God as well as man, Dr. Denney must needs modify the doctrine which the Christian Church has always found in the Scripture. He must needs, also, set forth a view according to which the atoning work of Christ does not actually save sinners, but only renders salvation possible.

Dr. Denney would seem in this last volume to be seeking a combination of the Rectoral view and that of M'Leod Campbell, that Christ offered to God a vicarious repentance. In this respect he reminds us of a German theologian, Professor Haering. There is, however, a marked difference between them which in our opinion renders Professor Haering's views clearer than those of Dr. Denney. It is this, that while Professor Haering in his first *brochure*, *Zu Ritschl's Versöhnungslehre*, set forth a view very nearly resembling the Rectoral theory, and in his later one, *Zur Versöhnungslehre*, a view resembling that of M'Leod Campbell, Dr. Denney appears to be seeking a combination of these views. This fact, as was said, renders his thought on the subject less clear than that of Professor Haering.

* *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*. By the late PRINCIPAL JAMES DENNEY, D.D. The Cunningham Lectures for 1917. New York. Geo. H. Doran & Co. 1918. Pp. 339.

It is not our purpose to give an account of the contents of Dr. Denney's recent Cunningham Lectures, but rather to examine the final form which the doctrine of the Atonement assumed in his mind. The volume consists of six chapters, in the first three of which he deals respectively with the "Experimental Basis of the Doctrine," "Reconciliation in the Christian Thought of the Past," "The New Testament Doctrine of Reconciliation"; and then in the last three chapters gives his own view, taking up "The Need of Reconciliation," "Reconciliation as Achieved by Christ," and "Reconciliation as Realized in Human Life."

When we come to enquire more closely into Dr. Denney's view of the Atonement, we notice that the reconciling work of Christ has a reference both to men as sinners and to God. In speaking of its influence on men, it appears to be a view closely resembling the Rectoral theory which Dr. Denney is giving his readers. He says: "The work of Christ is not designed to impress men *simpliciter*. It is designed to impress them to a certain intent, to a certain issue: it is designed to produce in them through penitence, God's mind about sin. It cannot do this simply as an exhibition of unconditioned love. It can only do it as the exhibition or demonstration of a love which is itself ethical in character and looks to moral issues. But the only love of this description is love which owns the reality of sin by submitting humbly and without rebellion to the divine reaction against it; it is love doing homage to the divine ethical necessities which pervade the nature of things and the whole order in which men live" (p. 234). These words seem to imply, not merely that the work of Christ has reference to men, but that this is its primary and fundamental reference. If it were an "unconditioned love" which He manifested, a love demanding no atonement for sin, the chief difficulty, according to Dr. Denney, would seem to be that it would not and could not then have the desired effect on sinners. In order to have this effect, as he tells us, "homage must be paid by Christ to the moral order of the

world" (p. 235). It is a homage, he hastens to add, which has "value in God's sight, and therefore constitutes an objective Atonement," nevertheless the satisfaction of the "divine ethical necessities" seems after all only of secondary importance, and in order that men may be impressed aright. It is clear from this, we think, that Dr. Denney's thought is moving under the general rubrics of the old Rectoral theory. If God should pardon sin unconditionally, it would be dangerous to the moral order of the world; it would leave men unimpressed with the sinfulness of sin.

But the atoning work of Christ has reference also to God. It terminates on God as well as on man. It is, in every passage in which Dr. Denney speaks of reconciliation, an objective atonement for which he is contending. In order to ascertain what the atoning work of Christ meant for God, it is necessary to determine what was the relation of Christ to sin. And in order to answer both of these questions Dr. Denney asks what it is that Christ has done in this work of reconciliation between God and the sinner. Christ, he tells us, was born into the world and the race in which sin and the divine reaction against it were the universal experience. Furthermore "He took all the burdens of the race upon Himself in passionate sympathy" (p. 251). He submitted to death at the hands of sinners, and thereby experienced to the utmost limit the divine reaction against sin.

This leads us, then, to ask what was Christ's relation to sin? Did He take *all* the burdens of the race upon Himself? If He did not take our guilt and condemnation upon Himself, He did not bear our heaviest burden and the very one which mattered in respect to the need of atonement. And, according to Dr. Denney, Christ did not bear our guilt, for he cannot admit the idea of imputation. The idea of sympathetic identification has replaced those of imputation and of substitution. The idea is that Christ so identified Himself with men that He could in some way experience God's attitude toward sin, and what a burden sin is to man.

This experience of Christ, Dr. Denney refuses to term repentance, as M'Leod Campbell did, because he says that since Christ was sinless, He could not repent. Nevertheless he says that Christ, through His identification of Himself with men, did fully realize what sin is as a burden to them, and what it is in God's sight.

But, to begin with, it is not easy to see why it was necessary for Christ thus sympathetically to identify Himself with sinners in order to understand the burden of sin upon man and how God regards it. God Himself, we may well suppose, understands both these things better than any man could. Surely it could not have been necessary for the Son of God to become man for such a purpose.

Furthermore, waiving this, the relation of Christ to sin is not cleared up. He did not bear the guilt of our sin, for, as was said, Dr. Denney rejects the idea of imputation, and defines guilt in a way which makes it equivalent to personal ill desert, and which therefore renders the idea of the imputation of guilt impossible and absurd. Christ, he says, bore our sins. But how, we ask? Bearing sin, according to Dr. Denney, means "entering lovingly, sympathetically, and profoundly into the sinner's experience." Now aside from the fact that this is not at all what the Scripture means by "bearing sin," the question remains as to what precisely Dr. Denney means. Suppose that Christ does enter sympathetically into our experience. In one respect He cannot do this. He cannot experience a guilty conscience, for He was sinless. It is just in respect of sin that He does not enter into our experience. He could have no experience of it any more than He could repent. But what then, after all, is His relation to sin? We seem to get no further in attempting to answer this question. Christ did not bear the guilt of sin; He was not incarnated in a flesh of sin in which He might be supposed to have destroyed it; Dr. Denney rejects all these ideas. All that Christ does is to see what sin is to man and God. He seems to have no connection with man's sin, and He could have understood it all without becoming incarnate.

And if this is so, if Christ has no real relation to man's sin, how could He in His death have experienced "the divine reaction against sin"? God, says Dr. Denney, has ordained that death shall follow sin. Hence Christ in dying experienced God's reaction against sin. But since Christ was in no way connected with sin, His death must have been totally different from the death of sinners; indeed upon Dr. Denney's premises the death of Christ must have been just the one death in which the divine reaction against sin was not experienced at all. The most that could be said would be that in submitting to death, Christ experienced something, which in the case of sinners is a "divine reaction against sin." But this does not explain His death or make it clear that Christ had any relation to man's sin at all. His death would seem to have been wholly unrelated to sin, and His sympathy must of course have been for sinners, not for their sin. It is difficult, we repeat, according to Dr. Denney's view, to understand how Christ had any relation to sin at all.

This at once raises the other question as to what value Christ's work can have for God in atoning for sin. According to M'Leod Campbell, God is supposed to require repentance, and Christ is supposed to offer a vicarious repentance to God. Dr. Denney is right in saying that Christ could not repent. But apart from this, the theory is intelligible. But according to Dr. Denney, Christ neither bears the penalty of sin nor repents of sin. All He does is to realize what sin means to God. Is it, then, that this mental attitude of Jesus is well-pleasing to God? And if so, is it vicarious—performed for the sinner? It would seem as if some such thought as this were in Dr. Denney's mind, for he seems to approve of M'Leod Campbell's view as far as it goes, and only to object to it because it does not exhaust the meaning of Christ's work. It would seem, then, as if Dr. Denney would say that Christ's thorough comprehension of the sinfulness of sin, was acceptable to God. But how, we ask, can this atone for sin in God's sight? Can we

suppose that, if we only realized how much God hates sin, we would be accepted and pardoned? In point of fact have not many saints, not to mention the Prophets, realized in large measure the heinousness of sin? And did any one of them suppose that this had the slightest value as an atonement for sin?

After all, Dr. Denney seems to see the inadequacy of this line of thought, for he leaves it hanging in the air, as it were, and uncompleted. For in setting forth finally what he regards as the value of Christ's work for God, he says that we must look beyond M'Leod Campbell's view. It ignores Christ's death, or rather it emphasizes the spirit in which He died rather than His death as an event which happened to Him, and was in a sense inflicted on Him. The secret of the Atonement and its value for God lie in Christ's death after all, and that too in the fact that He died for our sins.

What value, then, in Dr. Denney's view did Christ's *death* have for God as an atonement for sin? This is the question to which we are at last brought. It should be observed, also, that in attempting to answer this question, we are at once thrown back upon our former question as to the relation of Christ's death to sin, because it is this precisely which gives it value for God. Some repetition, therefore, of ideas of Dr. Denney already touched on is unavoidable.

Christ's death, then, according to Dr. Denney, was not a penal one in which He bore the penalty of our sins in satisfaction of God's justice. And yet in a certain sense Dr. Denney seems to admit that it was a penal death. This point he writes about with considerable confusion. We had better let him speak for himself. He says "while the agony or passion were not penal in the sense of coming on Jesus through a bad conscience, or making Him the personal object of divine wrath, they were penal in the sense that in that hour He had to realize to the full the divine reaction against sin in the race in which He was incorporated, and that without doing so to the uttermost, He could not have

been the Redeemer of that race from sin, or the reconciler of sinful men to God" (p. 273).

What does this mean? Of course Jesus could have had no bad conscience, for He was sinless. Neither could He have been the personal object of God's wrath in the sense of being "personally" a sinner, for He was not. It is not, says Dr. Denney, as if He were "a really guilty man." If by "really guilty" he means personal demerit, again we agree. But if our guilt was imputed to Christ, was He not "really" guilty? The imputation of our guilt to Christ, however, Dr. Denney will not admit. What, then, was the "divine reaction against sin," which Dr. Denney says that Christ experienced in His death, if it were not the bearing of the penalty of our sin? And what intelligible sense can it have when he calls Christ's sufferings "penal"? Christ's sufferings, we are told were penal because expressing God's reaction against sin. And if we ask how they did this, we are told that God ordained that death should follow sin. But we have seen how, according to Dr. Denney, Christ was free from any kind of sin, whether of nature, of act, or through imputation. And we have seen how, therefore, His death was just the one death which had no relation at all to God's reaction against sin. And if all this be so, it is difficult to see how it could have any value for God at all, or any direct relation to God. Its sole value for God must be mediated through its effect on men.

All this amounts simply to saying that if we reject the Scriptural ideas of substitution and imputation, and if we still wish to believe in an objective Atonement we must resort to some such ideas as those of the Governmental theory or that of M'Leod Campbell. When Dr. Denney seeks to transcend these views without accepting the Satisfaction doctrine, he is scarcely intelligible to us.

This leads us to note that the fundamental difficulty with Dr. Denney's view is that it is based on inadequate views of God and of sin. He has laid no adequate foundation for a doctrine of the Atonement. It is true that he devotes one

chapter to the doctrine of sin, but while it contains much that is true, it has no discussion, much less any adequate presentation of, the nature of guilt and of condemnation.

So far as the topic of the attributes of God is concerned, there is no discussion of this subject at all, and no exposition of the nature of the Divine justice, which is the one topic absolutely fundamental in any discussion of the doctrine of the Atonement. But from all that is said throughout the book, it is evident that Dr. Denney has no adequate conception of the justice of God as a divine attribute. He speaks of Christ as doing homage to the "divine ethical necessities" and to "the moral order of the world." And from all that is said it would seem that the former is exhausted in preserving the latter. In this respect he scarcely rises above the older types of the Governmental theory and seems to fall below what might be called "ontologised" Governmentalism which has appeared in some of the newer forms of the theory and which seeks the ground for the necessity of the Atonement in the Divine nature rather than in the moral order of the world.

One question of fundamental importance remains to be answered. How did Dr. Denney reach this doctrine of Reconciliation? Is his doctrine supposed to be based mainly on the New Testament, modifying it where it does not suit him, or is it supposed to be an interpretation of the experience of reconciliation? He says that it is the latter. What, then, is the value for him of the New Testament doctrine on this subject? Is the New Testament supposed only to produce the experience out of which the doctrine is supposed to arise, or can it be used to check one's interpretation?

This leads at once to the question of the place which the New Testament teaching has in Dr. Denney's discussion and of his view as to its authority.

He devotes an entire chapter in his latest book to the New Testament doctrine of Reconciliation, but his view as to its authority is somewhat vague. In fact he disposes of

this whole question in one paragraph (p. 122). He says that it is scarcely profitable to discuss the kind of questions here involved; that all that we can do is to approach the New Testament with candour and to absorb what of it we can; that there are many things which we cannot absorb, but that it would be a cause for profound misgiving if the thing which is central and vital in the New Testament proved to be something which we could only reject. He concludes by saying that this may not be a "very adequate" statement concerning the authority of the New Testament for Christian doctrine, but that it may serve for practical purposes. But that he regards the New Testament doctrine of Reconciliation as not authoritative is perfectly clear from his statement (p. 121) that we cannot "borrow" it, and that "it is inconsistent with the nature of intelligence simply to borrow anything." Nevertheless he says that the New Testament doctrine is entitled to serious consideration, and that if one's own interpretation of the experience of reconciliation is at variance with the New Testament doctrine, doubts would arise as to whether one's own interpretation could be called Christian.

All this is most unsatisfactory. Is it really inconsistent with the nature of intelligence to borrow anything? Is it not rather true that there are some truths which it must borrow if it would go beyond bare natural religion? And if Dr. Denney should find that his own interpretation of the Atonement was at variance with the New Testament doctrine, which would he regard as *true*?

One thing is clear in spite of his summary dismissal of the subject, and that is that he will allow no real objective authority to the New Testament teaching on the Atonement, and also that he regards his own view as an interpretation of Christian experience, and not as a formulation of the New Testament teaching.

In order to get a fuller and clearer idea of his views concerning the authority of Scripture, we must turn to his earlier writings.

The same subjective conception of authority is expressed in the volume *The Atonement and the Modern Mind* when he says that "truth is the only thing which has authority for the mind." That is to say, we cannot accept any truth because it is told us on authority. It is clear from this that all external authority is rejected.

But these statements are not true. They are true only of certain kinds of truth, *i.e.*, rational *a priori* truth. Such truths do shine in their own light; their authority lies in themselves and in the nature of the mind. We do not "borrow" them. We know at once and independently of all external authority, that things which are equal to the same thing, are equal to one another, or that of two contradictory propositions both cannot be true.

But there is a second kind of truth, *i.e.*, empirical facts. Here we can only rely on external testimony and authority, as Dr. Denney would of course admit. Examples of such truths are, that Washington crossed the Delaware near Trenton; that the Germans were checked at the battle of the Marne; that Jesus was born in Bethlehem; that He rose from the dead.

But there is a third kind of truth, *i.e.*, interpretation of facts; *e.g.*, the meaning of Christ's death. Now this kind of truth does not shine in its own light, nor is it its own authority. The mind must "borrow" it; we must receive it on the authority of Divine revelation. We cannot say how God can save sinners. We could not know, either *a priori* or from the experience of sin and the sense of need, how Christ saves us. Indeed we could not know, apart from the Scripture, that Christ's death has any relation at all to sin or to salvation from sin. It is from revelation only that we know, not only the fact that He died, but that He died for our sin. And if we are dependent upon an external revelation for the truth that Christ died for our sins, we are, of course, equally dependent upon this revelation to tell us how His death atones for sin, and what is its meaning to God. The truth, when once re-

vealed, may under the influence of the Spirit and through Christian experience, appeal to us as God's way of salvation, but we cannot have any knowledge of the nature of the Atonement apart from the Scripture.

But if this is so, it follows that what Dr. Denney says concerning the New Testament doctrine and its authority, is not adequate to the situation. After remarking that this truth is historically mediated and comes to us from the New Testament writers, he adds: "In saying so I do not mean that the Atonement is merely a problem of exegesis, or that we have simply to accept as authoritative the conclusions of scholars as to the meaning of the New Testament texts" (*The Atonement and the Modern Mind*, pp. 19 ff). The authority of exegetical opinions of scholars is of course not the question, but Dr. Denney is really speaking of the authority of the New Testament itself. He continues: "The Modern mind is ready with a radical objection. The writers of the New Testament," it argues, "were men like ourselves; they had personal and historical limitations; their forms of thought were those of a particular age and upbringing; the doctrines they preached may have had a relative validity, but we cannot benumb our minds to accept them without question. . . . It [our intellect] cannot make itself the slave of men, not even though the men are Peter and Paul and John; no, not even though it were the Son of Man Himself."

What attitude, then, does Dr. Denney take to this objection of the modern mind? He gives no uncertain answer. He frankly recognizes the validity of this objection of the modern mind. For, after remarking that this objection often expresses itself in a distinction between a "historical interpretation" of Scripture to which we can sit loosely, and a "dogmatic interpretation" which is authoritative, he says that he prefers to have the antithesis stated in its most radical form as one between the true and the false, and then he adds that he can "find nothing in it [*i.e.*, the position of the modern mind] to which any Christian

however sincere or profound his reverence for the Bible, should hesitate to assent. Once the mind has come to know itself, there can be no such thing for it as blank authority. It cannot believe things—the things by which it has to live—simply on the word of Paul or John. It is not irreverent, it is simply, the recognition of a fact, if we add that it can just as little believe them simply on the word of Jesus.” He adds that truth is its own authority. It is true, he acknowledges, that certain truths, such as the Atonement, can only come to us by some “historical channel,” but if it is a truth of “eternal import,” its authority lies “in itself and in its power to win the mind, not in any witness however trustworthy.”

Now if Dr. Denney means to say that our knowledge of the nature of the Atonement must come to us by some “historical channel,” *i.e.*, in the way of external testimony, but that when once we know it, it validates itself in Christian experience, there can be no objection to his statement. But he means more than this. He means that our *ground of belief* in the doctrine is the fact that it appeals to us. But this is an untenable position. If the nature of any truth is such that the knowledge of it can come to us only by way of external testimony, then ultimately the reliability or trustworthiness of that testimony must be our ground of belief in such truth. It cannot be found in the appeal which the truth makes to the mind. On the other hand, if our ground of belief in any given truth is ultimately the appeal which it makes to our mind, then in case it makes no appeal or is even distasteful to us, we will be bound to reject it or at least to modify it.

To put the matter concretely, if we can know the nature of the Atonement only through the teaching of Jesus and His Apostles, then we must simply accept their doctrine of the Atonement. But if we cannot accept their doctrine of the nature of the Atonement upon their authority alone, we cannot assert that our knowledge of its nature comes to us solely from them. This, however, is what Dr. Denney

seems to do. He acknowledges that it is only by way of historical testimony that we know, not only that Christ died, but that He died for our sins; and he goes on logically to admit that if this is so, we owe to Jesus and the Apostles our knowledge of how Christ's death atones for sin. And yet at the same time, and almost with the same breath, he says flatly that we cannot accept this truth on their authority. This, as has been said, is an untenable position. It is not only in the nature of the case untenable; it must lead us to reject or modify the doctrine of the New Testament in case it does not appeal to us. For what could one do in such a case? The New Testament doctrine of Reconciliation, as he interprets it, seems to appeal to Dr. Denney; to others it does not appeal at all. How can he ask them to accept his doctrine or claim for it final truth? We do not see how he can do so upon his premises. His view on the question of authority is similar to that form of Rationalism known in the history of theology as Dogmatism, only he operates with Christian experience rather than with principles of reason.

Moreover, the inherent inconsistency between the acknowledgment that the Atonement is a doctrine the knowledge of which can come to us only by way of historical witness and teaching, and the rejection of the reliability of this teaching as a ground of belief in the doctrine when thus ascertained, reveals itself in the tendency which Dr. Denney shows, unconsciously perhaps, to modify the New Testament teaching where he does not like it. All his exegesis illustrates this, but it is especially manifest in his interpretation of Paul in Romans iii: 20 ff., and notably in his remarks on the meaning of the word *ἰλαστήριον*. He has so much regard for Paul's authority that he cannot allow the full meaning of this passage to come out. Indeed he even goes so far as to make the astonishing remark that after all it is not a historical and exegetical question what *ἰλαστήριον* means, but that we know from our own experience what it means! Surely Dr. Denney will not pretend

that we know from our own experience what Paul means by this term. This simply shows that after all he will not follow Paul when he does not like the Apostle's teaching. And this of course is the logic of his position.

But his rejection of all external authority cuts deeper than this. This will appear at once when we enquire by what method Dr. Denney has obtained his doctrine of Reconciliation. Although he has said that this doctrine comes to us by way of historical teaching and is a truth "historically mediated," he really breaks loose altogether from the New Testament teaching in his method of constructing his doctrine. What he is seeking is really his "own interpretation of what we call the experience of reconciliation." This is perfectly evident because, as we have seen, he speaks of the possibility of a conflict between the New Testament doctrine of the Atonement and our interpretation of our own experience of reconciliation. It is evident from this that, after all, our own experience of reconciliation is the *source*, as well as the norm of truth on this subject. It turns out, then, that the New Testament teaching is not the source of our doctrine of the Atonement. How is this to be reconciled with the statement that this is a doctrine the knowledge of which is "historically mediated"? And, waiving all inconsistencies, may it not happen that what, upon this method, we claim to be the true doctrine, may prove to be one that raises a serious doubt as to whether or not it can be called Christian?

Moreover Dr. Denney overlooks the fact that our experience of reconciliation is determined in its character by the New Testament teaching on this subject. It is just the New Testament doctrine which, under the Spirit's influence, has given form and content to our experience of reconciliation. This fact alone renders it impossible to use this experience as an independent source of truth upon this subject.

In a word, Dr. Denney's whole method of procedure and view of authority is vitiated by regarding the Scripture as

a source of knowledge only mediately and in so far as it is a means of grace.

This comes out still more clearly in his earliest book *Studies in Theology*, in the chapter on Scripture. Here it is quite evident that for Dr. Denney the Scripture is authoritative only in so far as it is a means of grace. He confounds the question of the ground of belief in the divine origin of the Scripture with that of the authority of the Scripture after its divine origin has been established. Since Christian experience is one ground of belief in the divine origin of the Scripture, and for Dr. Denney the most important one, he erects it into a criterion for the determination of the truth-content of Scripture. But this is quite a different matter. It does not follow from the fact that Christian experience is a ground of belief in Scripture, or from the fact that it helps us to understand the Scripture, that it can be used to determine what is true in Scripture. It not only does not follow; it is, as has already been shown, an inherently impossible position because it is the Scripture which has determined the very nature of the Christian experience. It not only does not follow; it not only is an inherently impossible position; it will land us in Mysticism or Rationalism. This position has borne its legitimate fruit in the case of Dr. Denney. That his theology is so Christian is due to his Christian heart; not to his theological principles.

Dr. Denney has gone to his reward. His memory will long be gratefully cherished in the Christian world for his exposition and defense of Christian truth. But in the coming years we venture to predict that it will be those elements of his thought in which he satisfies the Christian heart which will be gratefully remembered; not those in which he sought to please the modern mind. The needs of the sinful heart will be the same long after what he has described as the characteristics of the modern mind have become antiquated. As for ourselves, we shall like to think of Dr. Denney, not as he is when commending Bush-

nell or M'Leod Campbell, but rather as when, in his first book, he is expressing his own thought concerning his Saviour, as well as that of Paul, in the words of the hymn which he there quotes :

“Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood;
Hallelujah.”

Princeton.

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