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Anselm of Canterbury and John McLeod Campbell: Where Opposites Meet?

Dr. Hart, who is Lecturer in Systematic Theology in the University of Aberdeen, here takes a fresh look at John McLeod Campbell and asks whether his theology is as unevangelical as it is commonly supposed to be.

The purpose of this essay¹ is to juxtapose elements from the soteriological understanding of two otherwise disparate figures within the history of western Christian thought in such a way as to throw into sharp relief points of similarity and difference between them.

Whilst we are not aware of any very careful or detailed comparison of their respective theologies,² Anselm's *Cur Deus homo?* and Campbell's *The Nature of the Atonement* have often been selected as representative of certain strands within the history of the doctrine of the work of Christ. This is not altogether surprising since both are works of remarkable erudition and, in their respective historical contexts, broke new theological ground. If the latter remains less widely known than the former they are both, nonetheless, classics of the western tradition of atonement theology.

What is altogether more surprising is the fact that these two great thinkers on the atonement should, without further qualification, have been almost universally viewed as representing opposite ends of the soteriological spectrum (not least in recent evangelical studies of the area³), and their writings frequently

¹ A paper read to the Aberdeenshire Theological Club on 16 January 1989.

² Moberly's *Atonement and Personality* (London, 1901, 367-412) is representative of the sort of treatment so often given, citing both writers, yet never really setting their ideas directly alongside one another. It is also typical insofar as the treatment of Campbell concentrates exclusively on *The Nature of the Atonement*, and makes no reference to his many published sermons on the theme of the atonement.

³ See, e.g. J. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester, 1986) and G. Carey, *The Gate of Glory* (London, 1986).

cited in defence of mutually antagonistic points of view.⁴ For one approaching their writings independently of these secondary interpretations, what initially impress are the apparent points of remarkable similarity and convergence in certain aspects of what they each have to say. It is with these alleged parallels that we will be concerned in this essay.

This having been said, however, let it be qualified at once. It would be quite ridiculous to suggest that these two men, issuing forth as they do from very different historical and ecclesiastical circumstances, are saying *essentially the same thing* in their respective attempts to understand and elucidate the necessity for and nature of salvation. They are indeed, in certain fundamental respects, at opposite ends of the theological spectrum. Yet in the same way that two points on the circumference of a circle may be as far apart as possible viewed from one perspective, and yet closer than ever viewed from another, so, notwithstanding the very clear and real differences between Anselm and McLeod Campbell, there are, it will be argued, points at which in the midst of their opposition they come tantalizingly close to convergence and agreement.

How is it, then, that when the two men have been compared at all, it has almost invariably been as representatives of mutually exclusive traditions of thought? Here, it seems, it must simply be admitted that many treatments of the two, and especially of McLeod Campbell, have suffered from a lack of careful scholarly consideration of the whole text.⁵ Too often a reliance by scholars upon other secondary texts or a partial attention to the primary sources would seem to be evident. In Campbell's case the reason for this is adequately testified to by R. C. Moberly who writes: 'It must be owned that Dr. McLeod Campbell is not an attractive writer. He is constantly prolix and difficult in style. Too often, . . . this is simply a literary defect. But it is also connected with the largeness of a thought which is apt to be too many-sided for its

⁴ Cf. the respective comments of B. B. Warfield (*The Person and Work of Christ*, Philadelphia 1950) and R. S. Franks (*The Work of Christ*, Edinburgh 1962) for two similar assessments of Anselm and Campbell, but reflecting diverse sympathies.

⁵ Having purchased a second hand copy of Campbell's *The Nature of the Atonement*, I discovered that the book's previous owner had been a well known former Professor of Divinity in one of the Scottish universities. My excitement in knowing that such a great thinker had fingered these same pages and pencilled these same margins before me was soon matched by disappointment in discovering that in some of the most significant portions of the book the pages remained uncut! My suspicion is that this is all too commonplace.

language'.⁶ It is hardly surprising, then, that those with insufficient interest to invest large amounts of time and effort should rest content with a somewhat superficial perusal of *The Nature of the Atonement*. Yet McLeod Campbell's complicated style and profundity of thought make such an exercise highly likely to result in a distorted and imbalanced interpretation, and too often the secondary material proves an unreliable guide.

This essay is not offered as an apology for either Anselm or McLeod Campbell. Rather it intends as far as possible to allow both men to speak for themselves in such a way as to demonstrate both divergence and convergence in their thinking about the Atonement. Of the many literary witnesses and advocates upon whose services one might call in such an undertaking, only a small handful have been selected. Partly because limitations of space would not allow otherwise: but also because views expressed on the matters in hand are so diverse as to muddy the waters, rather than enabling a clear view of our subject.

The essay will be divided into four parts: firstly, some brief comments on the popular interpretation of Anselm's and McLeod Campbell's writings in their relation to one another; secondly, an exposition of the interpretation of the atonement by Anselm in terms of the satisfaction made by the God-man; thirdly, a consideration of McLeod Campbell's understanding of salvation as having been wrought in the 'vicarious penitence' of the incarnate Son and, lastly, some brief concluding comments. Within the scope of a short essay it is not possible to attempt any comprehensive survey of either Anselm or Campbell, and our focus will be on those specific areas of their theology which are relevant to the particular task in hand.

I. Anselm and McLeod Campbell: the popular interpretation

According to the Scots theologian James Denney, the *Cur Deus homo?* of St. Anselm is 'the truest and greatest book on the Atonement that has ever been written'.⁷ His reason for bestowing this accolade is, he himself tells us, that in this book Anselm takes absolutely seriously the gravity of human sin in relation to divine justice, and the necessity for an atonement to take place between God and man, a satisfaction of the divine wrath apart from which there can be no forgiveness for man. This same note is echoed

⁶ *Atonement and Personality*, 396.

⁷ *The Atonement and the Modern Mind* (London, 1903) 84.

more recently by J. S. Whale who writes: 'Forgiveness is neither intelligible nor credible unless justice is vindicated and guilt confirmed. The sentimental interpretation of the divine love is a lie. The consciousness of guilt cannot be overcome by the facile formula that because God is love man is forgiven'.⁸ 'Critics of Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*,' he adds, 'have always to meet the scrutiny of its most famous sentence: thou hast not yet considered how great is the weight of sin'.⁹

The characteristic predominance in western soteriology of moral and relational categories has meant that the idea of an *atonement* between God and man has figured very largely in its attempts to interpret the biblical language and imagery of redemption. A source of constant debate and disagreement over the centuries, however, has been the question of how we are to understand this atonement as having been effected, and by whom. The framework for discussion has tended to be the traditional distinction drawn between objective and subjective views. According to the former, the atonement is something which has been worked out 'objectively' for us by our Saviour Jesus Christ, and is focussed in the event of his death upon the Cross of Calvary where somehow the divine wrath or offended divine honour consequent upon human sin was satisfied and dealt with. On the other hand are those views which see atonement as being worked out *subjectively*, within our own human existence as men and women, moved by the example of Christ in his life of obedience, and supremely in his self-sacrificing love on the Cross, repent, and live lives of holiness before God, thereby atoning for their former ways. Doubtless these are caricatures; but they serve to throw into sharp relief some of the broad tendencies in western soteriology, and the background against which Anselm and McLeod Campbell have been understood.

Briefly stated, it would seem that whilst Anselm has been acclaimed as the father of all objective models of atonement, McLeod Campbell has been located within the opposite camp, being seen as a successor to the views of Abelard, Socinus and Schleiermacher. We may take John Stott's recent book *The Cross of Christ* as typical in this respect.¹⁰ 'Anselm' Stott tell us, 'taught

⁸ *Victor and Victim*, 75.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See also the more significant treatment given to Campbell by R. S. Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacraments*, (London, 1961, 140 ff.), which may, perhaps, have influenced Stott's own interpretation.

that the death of Christ was an objective satisfaction for sin'.¹¹ And whilst Stott himself has some penetrating criticisms of *Cur Deus homo*, he is clearly content with it insofar as 'the ground on which God forgives our sin was to Anselm the propitiatory death of Christ'.¹² For Abelard, on the other hand, the ground upon which God forgives our sin, the atoning factor, was not the death of Christ, but rather 'our own love, penitence and obedience which are aroused *in us* as we contemplate the death of Christ'.¹³ God, according to this tradition, does not require any objective satisfaction; he is able to forgive us without it. Rather he leads sinners to repentance, and so makes them *forgivable*. And it is within this general tradition, Stott argues, that John McLeod Campbell's *The Nature of the Atonement* is to be located. In the views espoused within the book, he insists, 'sin-bearing' has dissolved into sympathy, 'satisfaction' into sorrow for sin, and 'substitution' into vicarious penitence, instead of vicarious punishment'.¹⁴ All such attempts to retain the language of substitution and sin-bearing, while subtly changing its meaning, Stott concludes, must be pronounced a failure. They create only confusion, concealing the fundamental difference between 'penitent substitution' (in which the Saviour offers what we could not offer) and 'penal substitution' (in which he bears what we could not bear). His plea, then is for intellectual honesty at this point, and a recognition of the clear difference between objective and subjective notions of atonement. Similar criticisms are to be found in writings as theologically varied as those of B. B. Warfield, Vincent Taylor, R. S. Paul and George Carey. The idea of a vicarious penitence, Carey insists, has absolutely no cash value; it evacuates the atonement of any objective content, and is ultimately a variation of the moral influence theory taught by Abelard.¹⁵

Anselm, then, is to be acclaimed or criticized (according to one's own perspective) as one who saw clearly the necessity for an atoning satisfaction of the divine honour or wrath in order to secure forgiveness for the human race, and who located this atoning factor in the propitiatory death of Jesus Christ upon the Cross. McLeod Campbell, on the other hand, we are to see as carrying forward the banner of Anselm's opponent in the Middle

¹¹ *The Cross of Christ*, 218.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.* 219.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 142-3.

¹⁵ *The Gate of Glory*, 130.

Ages, Peter Abelard, and as calling into question the idea that the justice and holiness of God made an objective atonement necessary,¹⁶ setting forth instead a view in which the focal point shifts from the Cross to the human obedience of Christ as a whole, which is viewed as a vicarious sympathy with our human feelings of penitence, such that we are ourselves moved to the same penitent state. The Cross, insofar as it remains of particular significance, is seen not as a measure of what God can inflict upon sinners, but rather as a revelation of God's 'feelings' over human sin, which is again designed to prompt repentance for that sin on our part.

II. Anselm—the satisfaction made by the God-man

The question which Anselm sets himself to attempt to answer in *Cur Deus homo?* is 'for what reason or by what necessity did God become man, and by his death, as we believe and acknowledge, restore life to the world, although he could have accomplished this by means of another person, whether angelic or human, or simply by an act of his will?'¹⁷ It is to the *ratio* and the *necessitas* of the incarnation and the Cross, therefore, that he directs our thought.

The short answer to this question, of course, is that it is human sin that has necessitated these drastic measures on God's part. Yet much more must be said if we are to grasp why and how the divine economy is related to our human plight. Sin, Anselm, tells us, is best understood as a failure to render to God that which is due to him from every creature. The Creator-creature relationship, he suggests, is not unlike that between ruler and subject, and everybody knows that subjects owe certain dues to their human overlords. If these are not properly rendered, then a situation occurs in which the honour of the Lord is at stake, and his justice compromised. In such a circumstance it is expected that some reparation proportionate to the damage done will be made, plus something extra to compensate for the offence caused, or else the Lord is likely to exact some form of punitive measure instead.

In the case of God and his creatures, Anselm explains, 'The will of every creature must be subject to the will of God. . . . This is the debt which angel and man owe to God, so that no one sins if he pays it and anyone who does not pay it, sins. This is the only

¹⁶ See L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Edinburgh, 1958) 391.

¹⁷ *Cur Deus homo?*, (ET, Collieran, New York, 1969) I.1, 64; *Migne Patrologia Latina* (PL) Paris, 1863, 158.361C.

and the total honour which we owe to God and which God exacts of us. . . . A person who does not render God this honour due him, takes from God what is his and dishonours God, and this is to commit sin'.¹⁸ In fact, however, no man renders this due to God, and thus all *are* in a state of sin, a state of being severely in God's debt with all the final demand for payment due. 'As long as (man) does not repay what he has plundered' Anselm continues 'he remains at fault. Neither is it enough merely to return what was taken away, but on account of the insult committed, he must give back *more* than he took away . . . Thus, therefore, everyone who sins must pay to God the honor he has taken away, and this is satisfaction, which every sinner must make to God'.¹⁹

To make matters even worse it becomes clear that man can do absolutely nothing to even begin to repay the debt which he owes, let alone make extra compensation. Owing God all that we are and have already, even if we cease from our sinful ways, our obedient lives cannot be considered as repayment of our outstanding debt, let alone as a compensatory satisfaction for the offence caused to God.²⁰ Yet even if we did not owe all this to God, and supposing that we did have something to offer which was not his already by right, whatever we had could never be enough to repair the enormous damage done by our sins. For reparation is to be made over and above the corresponding offence; and offence is to be measured in accordance with its object, in this case, God himself. 'Therefore' Anselm reasons, 'you do not make satisfaction if you do not return something greater than that for whose sake you were bound not to commit the sin'.²¹ 'This', remarks Boso, Anselm's hypothetical interlocutor, 'is a very crushing thought.'

Now, given that all this is the case, what is God to do? Man is trapped by his own sins into a terrible plight, the only way out of which is for some payment to be made. God cannot forgive man without such a payment, his honor having been compromised. 'To remit sin in such a way would be the same as not to punish it. And since to deal justly with sin (without satisfaction) is the same as to punish it, then, if it is not punished, something inordinate is allowed to pass'.²² So, then, God must either punish the sinner, or else receive full satisfaction from the sinner, in which case forgiveness and restoration may follow. Yet we have

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 1.11 (Colleran 84; PL 158.376BC).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 1.11 (Colleran 84-5; PL 158.376D-377A).

²⁰ *Ibid.* 1.20 (Colleran 106; PL 158.392B).

²¹ *Ibid.* 1.21 (Colleran 110; PL 158.394C).

²² *Ibid.* 1.12 (Colleran 85; PL 158.377AB).

seen that what is owed by the sinner is too great. It seems that punishment, and not forgiveness must be the plight of mankind.

Here it is that Anselm finally arrives at the all-important answer to his opening question. For satisfaction to be made, and punishment avoided, he insists, what is required is 'someone to render to God, for the sins of man, something greater than everything that exists outside for God . . . (for this to be possible) it is also necessary for (this person) to be greater than everything that is not God. . . . But there is nothing that surpasses all that is not God but God himself . . . Therefore no one but God can make this satisfaction . . . But none ought to make it but man. Otherwise it would not be man making the satisfaction'.²³ 'It is necessary that one and the same person be perfect God and perfect man to make this satisfaction. For no one can make the satisfaction unless he is truly God, and no one has the obligation unless he is truly man.'²⁴ Hence the necessity and reason behind the incarnation.

What, then, is the payment, the *satisfactio* which Christ makes, and which atones for human sin? Anselm tells us: 'None other than Christ ever gave to God by dying anything he was not at some time necessarily to lose, or paid what he did not owe. He, however, freely offered to the Father what he would never have necessarily lost, and he paid for sinners a debt he never owed himself.'²⁵ Thus, having lived a life in which he made perfect payment of his dues to God, living always in perfect accordance with the divine will, Christ freely offered his life up, not as we do, as something owed due to sin, but as a freely given gift. Thus he acquired merit, and put God in his debt. But what could God give to him that did not already belong to him? Anselm asks. Nothing. Yet it would be improper for this great deed to go unrewarded, so God agreed to transfer the infinite merit accrued by Christ to those for whom he came and died. Thus the satisfaction owed by men to the divine honour is made, and man is forgiven his sins.

Several things require to be noted at this juncture.

1. It is true enough that Anselm's presentation of the atonement is one in which the focus is ever upon the *death* of Christ. Yet the way in which he sets things out forces us to concede that taken in isolation the death is utterly empty of saving significance. It is precisely because it follows on from a life of perfect human obedience that this death possesses its supererogatory character,

²³ *Ibid.* II.6 (Colleran 124; PL 158.404A).

²⁴ *Ibid.* II.7 (Colleran 124-6; PL 158.404D-405A).

²⁵ *Ibid.* II.18 (Colleran 156; PL 426B).

and thus its significance for others. The categories which Anselm applies to the atonement here are unmistakably those of the earlier western penitential theology, reaching back to Tertullian and Cyprian. Christ satisfies and makes reparation for others by a transfer of merit; yet this merit is *not secured by his death alone*; but rather by that death viewed within the context of his whole life, in which all that was owed to God was rendered to him. If Anselm's theology is staurocentric, therefore, it certainly is not so to the exclusion of an emphasis upon the whole life of the incarnate Son of God as an obedient rendering of that which was due to God.

2. Christ satisfies, both in his life and his death, therefore, not by 'bearing that which others could not bear', but precisely by 'offering that which others could not offer'.²⁶ The cross is not viewed here as a penal measure, but rather as a meritorious giving up of that which was not demanded of the giver. We must be careful here; for whilst Anselm does indeed present punishment and satisfaction as alternative outcomes of sin,²⁷ it is not clear whether there is a difference of substance to be borne in mind, or simply a difference of perspective and attitude. 'Either the sinner freely pays what he owes,' says Anselm, 'or God takes it from him against his will. It may be that a person by free choice shows due subjection to God—either by not sinning or by making reparation for sin—or it may be that God subjects him to himself, against the person's will . . . And in this matter, we must observe that just as man, by sinning, plunders what belongs to God, so God, by punishing, takes away what belongs to man.'²⁸ Here it would seem to be suggested that the *same thing* is rendered to God in both *satisfactio* and *poena*, the all important difference being in the attitude of the one who either gives it freely, or else has it wrenched from his grasp. The distinction remains, nonetheless, and we must stress again that for Anselm it is quite clear that the cross is no punishment: how could it be, when Christ's whole life is one long self-offering to God?

3. For Anselm we cannot say that the death of Christ on the cross is something which God wills or demands. We must distinguish, he insists, between Christ having done something under the requirement of obedience on the one hand, and his enduring what happened to him *without obedience requiring it*

²⁶ So Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 142–3.

²⁷ *Necesse est ergo ut aut ablati honor solvatur, aut poena sequatur: Cur Deus homo?* I.13 (Colleran 88–89; PL 158.379A).

²⁸ *Ibid.* I.14 (Colleran 89; PL 158.379B).

because he persevered with that obedience on the other.²⁹ Christ freely endured death, therefore, not by giving up his life out of obedience, but by obeying a command to preserve justice, in which he persevered so unwaveringly that he incurred death as a result. The cross, then, is not something which Christ submitted to in direct obedience to God, but rather something to which he was submitted as a direct result of his obedience to God.

III. John McLeod Campbell: salvation as wrought in the vicarious penitence of the incarnate Son

Had spatial considerations allowed it, it might have been helpful to rehearse here some of the historical background to the circumstances of McLeod Campbell's ministry and writings.³⁰ As it is, however, we must be content to remind ourselves that Campbell attained a certain notoriety (both in his own day and still in our own) by having been deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland in 1831 for allegedly preaching in a manner 'contrary to the Holy Scripture and to the Confession of Faith Approved by the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland'.³¹ This episode has inevitably affected the interpretation of Campbell's writings, disposing many evangelicals in particular against a balanced or objective hearing of what he has to say.³² Yet in fact the homiletic proclamations for which he was deposed (and the doctrines contained therein, namely the universality of the atoning work of Christ and the doctrine that assurance is of the essence of Christian faith³³) are today virtually forgotten, attention being focussed rather upon the content of his *magnum opus* written much later in life, *The Nature of the Atonement*. In this his more developed work Campbell does not make any radically new departures, but develops his earlier thoughts, and elucidates them with particular polemical intent, setting himself over

²⁹ *Ibid.* 1.9 (Colleran 76f.; PL 158.370Cf.).

³⁰ For details see G. Tuttle, *So Rich a Soil* (Edinburgh, 1986) and J. B. Torrance's article 'The Contribution of McLeod Campbell to Scottish Theology' in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 296ff.

³¹ *The Whole Proceedings in the Case of the Rev. John McLeod Campbell* (Greenock, 1831), p.1.

³² See, for example, the disappointingly shallow account of Campbell's theology provided by I. Hamilton in the recent *New Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Ferguson and Wright, Leicester, 1988). Surely, even if Campbell were to be proven guilty of all the charges laid at his door and more besides, the largeness of his intellectual achievement demands more careful, respectful and sensitive exegesis from evangelical scholars than this?

³³ *Proceedings*, p.8.

against the extreme calvinism of the New England theologian, Jonathan Edwards. Thus his key themes are once again the universality of the atonement (although he was certainly no universalist), its unconditional nature (although he was certainly no antinomian), and a criticism of the presentation of it in terms of a *penal substitution* in which Christ, on the cross, is punished for the sins of the world.

In the following paragraphs our objective is not to present a comprehensive sketch of Campbell's theology, but simply to demonstrate points at which what he actually says seems to challenge the standard interpretations, and to show him to be moving along parallel lines to models of atonement more readily acceptable within the evangelical wing of the Church. In particular we will suggest that whilst in certain respects his soteriology is distant from that of Anselm, there are nonetheless some surprising similarities which hitherto have been overlooked by the commentators. We shall briefly consider four points of Campbell's theology, drawing both on the early published sermons (the 'heretical' material for which he was deposed) and *The Nature of the Atonement*, seeking to draw out his distinctive emphasis.

(1). Notwithstanding the concerted testimony of many recent writers on the history of the doctrine of the work of Christ, there can be no question that McLeod Campbell both sees and affirms the need for an atonement in which the divine wrath (his term) is dealt with, and that he sees this atonement as something that has been wrought by Christ for us. In short, he does not adhere in any way to an Abelardian or Socinian subjective model of atonement, or 'moral influence theory' in which 'the real atonement takes place when, with the same attitude and response of Christ's perfection, obedience is seen in us.'³⁴

Campbell is utterly opposed to any suggestion that God might forgive human sin by some arbitrary edict of his will. Indeed mere clemency or mercy in God would not be sufficient to calm the troubled hearts of those awakened to the reality of their sin, but only that clemency and mercy which is 'presented to them in connexion with the sacrifice of Himself by which Christ put away sin, becoming the propitiation for the sins of the whole world'.³⁵ Thus 'when it is argued,' he writes, 'that the justice and righteousness of God and his holiness, and also his truth and faithfulness, presented difficulties in the way of our salvation, which rendered for their removal an atonement necessary, I fully

³⁴ Carey, *op. cit.*, 130. See also Stott, *op. cit.*, 141–2; Paul, *op. cit.*, 140ff.

³⁵ *The Nature of the Atonement*, (6th edition, London, 1915), 20.

assent to this.³⁶ There is, due to man's sin, a gulf between God and man which must be bridged if man is to be reconciled with his maker and forgiven by him. How, then, are we to think of this as having been achieved? 'The Gospel declares', says Campbell, 'that the love of God has not only *desired* to bridge over this gulf, but *has actually bridged it over*, and the atonement is presented to us as that in which this is accomplished.'³⁷

Thus the atonement is something that God does, and not something that we do. It is the product of his prevenient love for sinful man, and not something which man brings to placate an angry and otherwise unforgiving deity. Indeed, 'if we could ourselves make an atonement for our sins, as by sacrifice the heathen attempted to do, and as, in their self-righteous endeavours to make their peace with God, men are, in fact, daily attempting, then such an atonement might be thought of as preceding forgiveness, and the cause of it. But if God provides the atonement, then forgiveness must precede atonement; and the atonement must be the form of the manifestation of the forgiving love of God, not its cause.'³⁸ This key theme of Campbell's theology disintegrates the very moment that it is conceded that that which atones for man's sins springs from man himself (albeit in response to a prior manifestation of divine love) and not wholly from God. The fact that, as John proclaims, 'we love because he loved us first'³⁹ is thus not a description of the dynamics of atonement for Campbell, but rather of our response to the prevenient, unconditional atoning and forgiving grace of God. It is God, then, who provides the atonement.

(2). Not only does Campbell insist upon the objectivity of the atonement as something wrought by God in Christ on behalf of sinners, he also insists upon the gravity and weight of human sin. Thus, whilst his characteristic stress ever falls upon the nature of God as love, and the relationship between God and man having been revealed to us as essentially filial rather than essentially legal, he is nonetheless also quite emphatic concerning the fact that the God who reveals himself in the incarnate Christ is one who punishes human sin and cannot tolerate it. The love of God in Christ is not a benign tolerance, but rather a 'holy love'. Most important still, of course, it is a forgiving love; yet this forgiveness is a costly thing indeed for the one who secures it.

Thus, he writes, 'the sufferings of Christ teach you these things

³⁶ *Ibid.* 25.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 22, my italics.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 16.

³⁹ 1 John 4:19; ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν, ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς.

concerning God, that God loves sinners, his enemies—that God’s holiness rejects and his righteousness punishes sin, *though* he loves and *while* he loves those whom he punishes.⁴⁰ God’s heart is revealed by the Son to be that of a Father who loves and forgives his children; yet this love does not override the justice which makes atonement necessary. ‘Christ’, Campbell insists, ‘when made a curse for us, showed us, that however much God loved us, and however much his pronouncing this curse was consistent with actually loving us, this curse, unless exhausted in Christ, would have continued upon man for ever’.⁴¹ It is the measure of God’s Fatherly love that he has done all that needed to be done for us to be freed from the curse in sending his only-begotten Son to Calvary for our sakes. Yet even now that Christ has exhausted the curse, Campbell is quite frank about the real danger involved in man either ignoring or presuming upon divine grace. ‘While I see that love, immeasurably great, stretching forth its arms to pluck men as brands from the burning’, he writes, ‘I can see nothing for the rejectors of it but the terrors of the coming wrath; and the more I am made to see the great things that God has done to make men return to him, the more awful do I see the state of those who will not return.’⁴² Whilst, therefore, he certainly sees the love of God as universal in scope and as having wrought an atonement for all, Campbell is unequivocal concerning the need for men and women to discover the great truth of this forgiving love for themselves, and to respond to it in joy and gratitude, embracing willingly the adopted sonship conferred upon them in Christ. ‘If Christ were to appear at this moment to judge you’, he asks, in a manner reminiscent of the most urgent evangelistic appeals, ‘where would your place be? . . . You certainly cannot think it an uninteresting question. . . . If you have repented, you are saved; if not, you are perishing.’⁴³

⁴⁰ *Sermons and Lectures*, 3rd edn., (Greenock, 1832), 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 22. Cf. 326: ‘Do not think it inconsistent with God’s tender love to cast the wicked into hell. There is a strange contradiction in your natural hearts. You will not believe that God loves you, so as to have comfort and peace in the thought of his love; and yet you will not believe that God can deal so hardly with you as to cast you into hell’.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 133–4. See also 298: ‘It is no cause of peace, in thinking of your prospects, to know that the inheritance has been purchased for you, unless we know that you are trusting Christ for the inheritance; and therefore, with the fullest and most entire belief that God loves all of you—that Christ died for every one of you—I can still have no peace, no comfort, concerning any individual among you, until that person is seen holding the confidence and rejoicing of hope’.

Faith in Christ, then, is for Campbell a necessary part of what it means to be saved from the wrath of God which must ultimately destroy human sin. Campbell is clear that this does not turn faith into a condition of salvation;⁴⁴ but nor does he ever suggest that salvation may be had without faith. If there is no absolute distinction to be drawn between believer and unbeliever insofar as both are under judgment deserving only punishment and both embraced within the scope of the unconditional acceptance and forgiving love of the Father, there is nonetheless a real distinction. To be forgiven and loved in Christ, and yet to embrace darkness and separation and hell instead are, for Campbell, wholly (and sadly) compatible states.

(3). If, then, the atonement is something wrought for us by God in Christ, and if this same God is a God who cannot tolerate sin, but must deal with it justly, how are we to understand the nature of this atonement? What comes to pass in order to secure it? There are many elements in Campbell's answer to this question, but here our purpose is simply to note that in all that he says on the matter, he speaks clearly (and, in relation to the points outlined above, consistently) of Christ's death as a bearing of men's sins, and as a bearing or dealing with the righteous wrath of God.

'The wrath of God against sin', Campbell argues 'is a reality, however men have erred in their thoughts as to how that wrath was to be appeased. Nor is the idea that satisfaction is due to divine justice a delusion, however far men have wandered from the true conception of what would meet its righteous demand'.⁴⁵ Thus, he continues, 'Christ, in dealing with God on behalf of men, must be conceived of as dealing with the righteous wrath of God against sin, and *as according to it that which was due*'.⁴⁶ For Campbell there is certainly more to be said than that Christ, in dying upon the Cross, met the demands of divine justice and thus fulfilled the sentence of God upon human sin. Yet he does not deny that this is so. Indeed he sees it as an integral part of the retrospective aspect of Christ's atoning activity, the dealing with God on behalf of man in relation to man's sinful past. In saving

⁴⁴ See, e.g. *Ibid.* 291: 'I beseech you to understand, that I would say to any here who have never known what it is to rejoice in God, that in speaking of repentance—a change of heart—I am not speaking of something that is to come before joy in God, but of coming to have joy in God; and that to call on a man to repent, is not to call on him to comply with some condition on which God will receive him, but just a call on him to return to God.'

⁴⁵ *The Nature of the Atonement*, p. 116.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 116. My italics.

us from sin the incarnate Son submits to the sentence of the law⁴⁷ and exhausts its requirement, leaving nothing more to be done. Indeed, for faith in the atonement to be engendered, 'it is . . . necessary that the death of Christ, as *filled with divine judgment on sin*, shall commend itself to the conscience'.⁴⁸ 'Christ, making an offering for sin, has taught us God's condemnation of sin—Christ *willingly* submitting to make himself an offering for sin, showed he was of one mind with the Father in that condemnation. And thus we learn from Christ's becoming a willing sacrifice for sin in his love to the Father, that that love was a delighting in that very thing in God's character which led to the curse of the law. It *pleased* Christ to be bruised. This was the mind of Christ. What an awful and glorious testimony to the Father's righteousness in the punishment of sin has the Son thus given! How different from man's testimony in regard to sin is this condemnation of it in his flesh—this putting his seal to the righteousness of the curse, by bearing it himself in his own body.'⁴⁹

It pleased Christ to be bruised, bearing the righteous curse of God in his own body, that we might not have to bear it. To argue, then, as some have done, that in Campbell's theology the death of Christ on the Cross is somehow displaced by a reorientation in which he himself is making, and to misrepresent his thought. The Cross, insofar as it is the submission of the Son of God to the verdict of 'guilty' pronounced by the Father on the human race, and the *submission to the sentence passed* in relation to that verdict, is absolutely necessary to the atonement wrought by him. The atonement certainly entails more than this for Campbell; but it does not entail any less.

(4). Campbell has no complaint, therefore, about the idea that God's nature demands an atonement for the sins of mankind, nor of the clearly biblical suggestion that this atonement was wrought on the cross where the demands of the divine justice and wrath were fully met. Yet at times (and this is particularly true of *The Nature of the Atonement*) he is so vehement in his polemic against contemporary presentations of atonement in terms of a *penal substitution* that he seems to be moving away from these other biblical insights, and embracing a model of atonement

⁴⁷ 'In Christ's honouring of the righteous law of God, the sentence of the law was included, as well as the mind of God which that sentence expressed. In this light are we to see the death of Christ, as connected with his redeeming those that were under the law.' *Ibid.* 260.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 267. My italics.

⁴⁹ *Sermons and Lectures*, 70.

which is somehow less clearly focussed upon the death of Christ, and which thus makes less of the sufferings of Christ as having atoning value. To interpret Campbell in this way, however, would be to misunderstand him altogether, and such an interpretation cannot seriously be advocated if careful attention is given to the whole text. If we are to understand him aright, then we must consider that which for him is the key issue; namely the *nature* of the sufferings which Christ bore and which, Campbell believes, endues them with their atoning worth.

Campbell approaches the atonement with a conviction that the only way to understand it properly is to allow it to be viewed in its own light. In other words his starting point is not some prior definition (biblical or otherwise) of what atonement ought to consist in, but rather the reality itself, namely what God has actually done in his Son to atone for the sins of the human race. Thus whilst he allows his understanding to be informed by the Old Testament categories of guilt, divine wrath, sacrifice and so forth, he also recognizes the fact that these can be just as much a hindrance to our theology as a help if they are not viewed afresh from the New Testament perspective wherein their proper fulfilment and culmination is to be found. In more modern parlance, he employs a Christological rather than a chronological hermeneutic to the text of Scripture. Thus, rather than interpreting the fact of the Cross in terms of the rich inheritance of Jewish ideas about atonement alone, he also takes into consideration the ways in which the reality in fact transcends the expectation, insisting that only when this is done can the full significance and the true nature of the actual atonement of God be grasped.

This hermeneutical procedure leads Campbell to place enormous weight upon the identity of the one who goes to the Cross for us. The significance of the Cross itself is transformed for him by the recognition that it falls within the very life of the triune God, as the Eternal Son offers himself up to death to the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit, that sins might be forgiven. This having been seen, the Cross takes its place as the climax of the self-giving economy of God, the pouring out of the incarnate life of the Son in obedience for our sakes. Were we to consider the phenomenon of the Cross in isolation, abstracting it from its context in this selfless and (properly speaking) *kenotic* movement in God, then we might interpret it in many ways, basing ourselves solely upon the sacrificial and judicial conceptuality familiar enough in the Old Testament material. Once we have perceived the staggering truth about the Cross, however, then the way in which we employ such conceptuality must always be tempered

and informed by this new insight. The old wineskins will not hold the new wine; the identity of the one who atones for our sins forces us to engage in a process of reinterpretation and re-evaluation, if we are to arrive at a truly *Christian* doctrine of atonement.⁵⁰

In particular, Campbell registers surprise at the way in which the Calvinist theologians of his day failed (in his view) to think through some of the radical implications of the central Christian doctrines of incarnation and trinity for their understanding of the atonement. Abstracting the passion of Christ from this larger matrix of his incarnate life and ministry, these theologians transform it altogether, and focus too narrowly on certain empirical aspects of it. 'What I have felt,' Campbell writes, 'and the more I consider it, feel it the more—is, surprise that the atoning element in the sufferings pictured, has been to their minds *sufferings as sufferings*, the pain and agony *as pain and agony*.'⁵¹ 'My surprise is,' he continues, 'that these sufferings being contemplated as an atonement for sin, the holiness and love seen taking the form of suffering should not be recognized as the atoning elements—the very essence and adequacy of the sacrifice for sin presented to our faith'.⁵² In other words, the discontent which Campbell feels with contemporary expressions of the atonement in terms of a penal substitution is not that they should focus on the sufferings of Christ, but rather that they should (focus upon the physical anguish and sufferings of the Saviour as *physical anguish and sufferings alone*, and should interpret them as essentially punitive, a simple wreaking of divine vengeance upon humanity, finding in this the atoning element.

Let us be clear at this point, however, about what Campbell is and is not objecting to. He is not objecting to the idea that the sufferings of Christ are central to an objective atonement wrought on the Cross. 'It is not a question', he writes, 'as to the fact of an atonement for sin. It is not a question as to the amount of the sufferings of Christ in making atonement. It is not a question as to the elements of these sufferings . . . The question . . . is this: The sufferings of Christ in making his soul an offering for sin being what they were, was it the pain as pain, and as penal infliction, or was it the pain *as a condition and form of holiness*

⁵⁰ I.e. in the proper sense of a *messianic* doctrine, informed by the new perspective provided by the reality of the saving activity of God in the fulfilment of the messianic promises made to his people.

⁵¹ *The Nature of the Atonement*, 99.

⁵² *Ibid.* 100.

and love under the pressure of our sin and its consequent misery, that is presented to our faith as the essence of the sacrifice and its atoning virtue?⁵³ In other words, when we view the cross within the context of the life of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, and when we consider the dynamics of this man's relationship with God, and when we remember just who this man is, does the category of punishment by physical infliction provide us with an adequate or helpful interpretation of what takes place on the Cross? The answer, to Campbell, is clear enough. 'It was the spiritual essence and nature of the sufferings of Christ, and not that these sufferings were penal, which constituted their value as entering into the atonement made by the Son of God when he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.'⁵⁴

Thus it is not that Christ does not deal with the divine wrath, or that his death is somehow unimportant in doing so, but rather the identity and the *attitude* of Christ himself in making his sacrifice, that forces Campbell to draw a distinction between punishment on the one hand, and that which Christ actually experiences on the other. The oft-misunderstood terminology of 'vicarious penitence' which he uses to describe Christ's atoning work is not of his own devising, but is drawn from his engagement with the theology of Edwards. If sin is to be properly satisfied for, Edwards writes, 'there must needs be either an equivalent punishment, or an equivalent sorrow and repentance.'⁵⁵ When we look to the life and death of Jesus, Campbell argues, what we actually see is a life lived out in absolute oneness of mind with the Father. The incarnate Son enters into our broken and fallen humanity, and views, it *from within* with the same eyes as God. Throughout his ministry he has to struggle with the temptations to which it is subject, and to encounter the darkness which is the consequence of its sinful state. Throughout all this his tacit cry is 'Father, not my will, but yours be done', and his death is a final Amen to the righteous judgment of God upon mankind, sealing the sentence of God, by submitting himself to that which it demands, and so perfecting the atonement which he has to make, not for himself, but precisely for others.

When we see all this, Campbell asks, can we really view this death, in isolation from the rest, simply as a moment in which this man is punished by God, being inflicted with physical pain and death? Is this not to miss the very point of it, namely that it

⁵³ *Ibid.* 102. My italics.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 102.

⁵⁵ *Satisfaction for Sin* Ch. ii.

is the supreme moment of self-offering to God on the part of this man, and has its proper place only within the overall context of this whole life of obedience and sacrifice. This, he insists, is not to lessen the awfulness and darkness of the Cross, but precisely to *heighten* it, seeing its true pain as consisting in the awfulness of divine wrath viewed from the perspective of one whose life has been lived in utter oneness of heart and mind and will with God. Furthermore it is to see that *this* suffering is not restricted to Calvary, but begins from the moment that one who sees things from such a God-perspective enters fully into our human situation. Things which may appear trivial to us might be an unbearable burden and pain to one with eyes to see and ears to hear, and such suffering of the consequences of sin must be recognized as an integral part of the sacrificial self-offering of the Son. But to return to the Cross; what takes place there, Campbell argues, is the perfect confession of human sins by *the only one who could see things in such a way as to make that confession at all*.⁵⁶ And this confession is made not in order to avoid the consequences, but precisely in the act of embracing these consequences in all their awfulness, 'meeting the cry of these sins for judgement, and the wrath due to them, absorbing and exhausting that divine wrath in that adequate confession and perfect response on the part of man',⁵⁷ uttering 'a perfect Amen in humanity to the judgment of God on the sins of man. Such an Amen was due in the truth of things'.⁵⁸

In comparison with this, Campbell argues, the concentration upon physical infliction as physical infliction, upon death as death, seems to have missed so much. 'We may find cases where the physical infliction and the indignities offered have been as great or greater, but how shall we calculate the infinite difference that the mind in which Christ has suffered has made?'⁵⁹ Thus, whilst death in itself, considered purely as human death, could not atone for sin, '*death filled with that moral and spiritual meaning in relation to God and his righteous law* which it had

⁵⁶ The oft made complaint that the notion of a sinless Christ 'repenting' for others is meaningless fails to see that for Campbell Christ's sinlessness, far from disqualifying him from such 'repentance', is actually that which *enables* him to confess the sins of the race, and that this 'repentance' culminates precisely in a oneness of mind with the divine judgment on sin, and a submission to the sentence of death.

⁵⁷ *The Nature of the Atonement*, p. 125.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 117.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 226.

tasted by Christ and *passed through in the spirit of sonship* was the perfecting of the atonement.⁶⁰ In and through it, not only were the demands of divine justice satisfied and the price of human rebellion against God fully paid, but they were satisfied and pain in a voluntary submission to death in which a human mind and will and soul were manifestly and uniquely at-one with the righteous divine verdict upon the human race. 'Seeing it to be impossible,' says Campbell, to regard suffering, of which such is the nature, as penal, I find myself forced to distinguish between an atoning sacrifice for sin, and the enduring as a substitute the punishment due to sin,—being shut up to the conclusion, that while Christ suffered for our sins as an atoning sacrifice, what he suffered was not—because from its nature it could not be—a punishment.⁶¹ It is for this precise reason that, in response to Edwards' formulation of the matter, he suggests that in fact a 'perfect sorrow and repentance', properly understood in the terms outlined above, might well be a more helpful category in interpreting the nature of Christ's atoning work.

The distinction made here, however, does not seem to be one which detracts in any way from the objectivity, or the relatedness to divine justice, or, indeed, of the substitutionary nature of that which Christ endured.⁶² Christ, in embracing the inevitability of Golgotha, makes the response to divine judgment which we were utterly unable to make, and makes it on our behalf. Consequently, it is not just the attitude of the Father towards his only begotten Son as his filial obedience drives him to the Cross. For Campbell, even in the midst of the darkness of the Cross, the Father's verdict upon Christ remains that of the baptismal narrative: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.⁶³ Thus the Cross opens

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 261.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 101.

⁶² Stott's objection that 'penitent substitution' is not really substitutionary in the proper sense would seem to rest on a misunderstanding of what Campbell actually means by 'penitence'. Were Stott's objection to be maintained, then presumably the role of the High Priest on the day of Atonement in Old Israel could not properly be described as substitutionary either. In fact there is a profound synchronism between this historical vicarious confession of the sins of the nation and Campbell's understanding of the nature of the atoning work of Christ.

⁶³ It is on this basis that Campbell rejects the interpretation of Matthew 27.46 as evidence of any real Godforsakeness in the Cross, insisting upon a reading of Psalm 22.1 within the larger context of the whole psalm, in which the mood alters considerably to one of assurance and praise. It would certainly seem to be necessary to refute any notion of Godforsakeness which implies a separation of the Son from the Father within the eternal Trinity, or which posits any other attitude than that of love between the Father and the Son.

up no awful division in the Trinity. The Son, in his atoning work, and in embracing the consequences of the divine wrath on human sin, does that which is pleasing to the Father, even though it grieves the Father's heart that it should be necessary in the first place. The death of Calvary has its significance as the culmination and perfection of a life whose moral and spiritual value as a total self-offering to God represents the whole atonement.

IV. Concluding comments

It may be that there will be elements of Campbell's theology which, for one reason or another, remain unacceptable to some evangelicals. Our concern in this essay has been to ensure that if he is to be rejected, then it is for points of view which he in fact advocates, and not (as has more commonly been the case) on the basis of a misinterpretation or caricature of his views. In particular we set out to demonstrate certain points of convergence between the theologies of Anselm and Campbell, thus challenging the usual practice of setting their writings over against one another as belonging to different ends of the soteriological spectrum. The perceptive reader will have noted these alleged similarities already as our exposition of the two men's thought has proceeded. In conclusion, however, it will be helpful briefly to enumerate the main ones.

(1). Both theologians affirm the necessity for and the accomplishment of an *objective atonement* between God and man in which the divine wrath over human sin is dealt with. This atonement is presented as having been wrought by Jesus Christ on behalf of the human race, thus being viewed essentially as the work of God, albeit God as man in the kenotic economy of the incarnation.

(2). In both *Cur Deus homo?* and *The Nature of the Atonement* the death of Christ is presented as the central focus of

To this extent Campbell provides a necessary corrective. Yet it would seem to be possible to distinguish between an *actual* Godforsakenness (which would require either a Nestorian christology or a tritheistic notion of the trinity) and the incarnate Son's human *experience* of that separation from the Father which is the consequence of human sin. Likewise, whilst we must affirm the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father in the midst of the suffering of Calvary, it is not meaningless to speak of the incarnate Son experiencing that darkness which is the manifestation of divine wrath towards sin. What we must hold onto in both cases is the fact that the Cross causes the Father great pain as well as the Son, and that both are of one mind and will concerning the Son's enduring it for the salvation of mankind.

atonement. Yet in both, the life of Christ is the essential context for this particular death, and without that life the death would be bereft of its atoning worth. In Anselm the death possesses its supererogatory merit as *satisfactio* precisely because it is the culmination of a life in which all that was due to the divine honour has been properly rendered, and thus nothing more owed to God. In Campbell the death can only be understood properly as the climax of the incarnate Son's self-emptying sacrifice of himself, the final 'Amen' to the verdict of the Father upon a sinful race, and as such of a piece with that whole life, and not to be isolated from it. In both cases, then, if the death is affirmed as being absolutely necessary to the atoning work of the Saviour, so too is his entire life of obedient sonship. To polarize their theologies, therefore, as 'Cross-centred' and 'incarnation-centered' respectively would be to risk a dangerous misrepresentation of both.

(3). Both Anselm and Campbell make a careful distinction between a penal infliction and the death which Christ in fact died to make atonement for the sins of humanity. For Anselm Christ's death constitutes a satisfaction of the divine honour precisely because it is rendered voluntarily to God and not, as would be the case in a punitive death, extracted from him against his will. Campbell also emphasizes the fact that Christ dies because he chooses to do so in obedience to his Father, and that the true atoning worth of his sacrifice resides not in his physical suffering *per se*, but insofar as that suffering is embraced willingly, as the Son of Man submits to the righteous judgment of God upon the sons of men. Thus both theologians actually present a model of atonement in which, strictly speaking, precisely what Christ does is to 'offer what we could not offer',⁶⁴ although neither would see this as exclusive of the idea of his having drunk to the dregs the cup of divine wrath, thus also bearing what we could not bear. What is vital in the understanding of both theologians is the attitude of the one who makes atonement in embracing the Cross, and the attitude of God towards him in his making of it. It is this factor which forces both to reject a *penal* interpretation of the Cross, while yet seeing it as a satisfaction necessary for a proper atonement between God and man to be effected.

There are, of course, very many points at which our two theologians differ profoundly. In particular, Anselm's entire presentation of God's saving activity is cast in what Campbell would call a 'retrospective' mould, concentrating wholly on that

⁶⁴ See Stott, *op. cit.* 142-3.

which God saves us *from*, whereas Campbell's own treatment is far more broad, insisting that we hold together our understanding of what God saves us *from* with a perception of what he saves us *for*, both aspects having been given to us in Christ, in whom we are now given to share through the bond of the Spirit. It is also notable that whilst Campbell's theology is shot through with the doctrines of incarnation and trinity, so that the very heart of his understanding of atonement lies in the Son's relation to the Father and the Father's relation to the Son, for Anselm, what is necessary for atonement to take place is not the assumption of human nature and existence by the eternal Son of God, and the rooting of the triune Godhead in human history, but simply that the one who satisfies should be 'greater than everything that is not God' on the one hand (and thus able to pay the debt), and fully human (and thus liable to pay the debt) on the other. Here the two theologians are far apart. Yet what we have sought to suggest is that there are nonetheless certain aspects of their thinking about the atonement in which they come very close indeed, and which throw down a cautionary challenge to those who would readily embrace the one as mentor and guide whilst preferring not to be seen associating with the other.