

REDEMPTION

Accomplished and Applied

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JOHN MURRAY

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Foreword to the 2024 Edition

The republication of this book is most welcome. John Murray (1898–1975) taught systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary from 1930 until his retirement in 1965. Among his published works, invariably marked by his characteristic clarity and precision of expression, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* has proven to be the most widely read. With good reason. For in it he addresses a broad audience in a most helpful and edifying manner regarding matters that, as the title indicates, are of paramount doctrinal concern, especially within the tradition of biblical and confessional Reformed orthodoxy in which he stands. The following observations about this perennial concern aim to provide some perspective on the distinctive contribution Murray has made.¹

¹ For a bibliography of Murray's published writings, see *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 361–75. A notable omission there is his important article, "Structural Strands in New Testament Eschatology," presented as a paper to the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in December 1954. The paper was published posthumously in the journal *Kerux: A Journal of Biblical-Theological Preaching* 6/3 (Dec 1991) 19–26. It is available online at <https://kerux.com/doc/0603A2.asp>.

The Gospel

What is the gospel, the good news it communicates? This is a question for which the church must always have a clear and robust answer because nothing less than its existence is staked in the answer. This demand is all the more pressing in times like the present when gospel continues to have a currency so broad and varied or vague that too often even among Christians its use is misinformed and misleading.

Scripture is replete with the requisite answer. Expressed most succinctly, the gospel is “the gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13). The content of the gospel message is, in a word, salvation. So, the question about the gospel becomes the question about salvation or, used interchangeably, redemption (cf., e.g., Luke 1:68–69).

The distinction, then, between the accomplishment and application of redemption—made and kept clear—is crucial for a biblically sound understanding of the gospel. It does not overstate to say that the truth of the gospel stands or falls with this distinction. Much error and confusion about the gospel stems from the failure to grasp or maintain this distinction properly. Several observations in this regard, some perhaps obvious to many readers, are still worth highlighting.

An Essential and Irreversible Distinction

The distinction, as essential as it is, is irreversible. Clearly enough simply from the terms employed, “accomplishment” has priority in the sense that it is the precondition and basis for any “application.” Without accomplishment there can be no application; the latter presupposes and depends upon the existence of the former. Application does not somehow constitute accomplishment. Nor is the truth of redemption (the

gospel) to be defined in terms of its application, as important as the latter is.

The concrete sense of the distinction and its validity depend on a proper understanding of redemption, in what the gospel message of salvation consists. Again, Scripture must provide the answer. A particularly instructive summary, for one, is 1 Corinthians 15:3–4. In the immediate context (vv. 1–11), Paul, fairly seen as reflecting on his apostolic ministry as a whole in Corinth (and no doubt everywhere else by implication), reminds his readers that central to that ministry is preaching the gospel “by which you are being saved” (vv. 1–2); note, again, the explicit connection between the gospel and salvation.

Then follows directly: “of first importance” in the gospel proclamation central to his ministry—the center of that saving gospel-center we may say—is “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures....” At the heart of the gospel of salvation that the apostle preached are the core events of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Plainly, these events are not in view as brute facts, isolated and uninterpreted. There are two important stipulations. One, made twice, is that the occurrence of these events is “according to the Scriptures.” They are meaningful because they are the fulfillment of the long, unfolding Old Testament history of God’s redemptive revelation. Note also Paul’s similar Scripture-based summary in Romans 1:1–4 (“the gospel of God, ...promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures”) as well as the description of Jesus’s post-resurrection instruction to the apostles in Luke 24:44–47, with a similar focus on his death and resurrection as the fulfillment of Scripture (vv. 46–47). Christ’s death and resurrection have their meaning as they are the unique culminating

realization, at last, in “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4; cf. Eph. 1:10; an expression that should be taken in an eschatological sense), of God’s old covenant promises of salvation. In their saving gospel significance, Scripture makes clear, the death and resurrection of Christ are nothing less than eschatologically definitive. They are neither in need nor capable of being supplemented or superseded; in their all-sufficient gospel finality they are once-for-all events.

The other stipulation is that Christ’s death is “for our sins.” The momentous import of this brief encapsulating phrase is difficult to overstate. Understood within the context of Paul’s overall teaching and of Scripture as a whole, it signals both the absolute necessity and the defining goal of Christ’s death and resurrection as the gospel-center of his person and work. Christ’s death, together with his resurrection, as the fulfillment of Scripture, has its significance—both primary and comprehensive—in relation to human (“our”) sin, for the remediation and removal of sin and all its consequences.

The distinction between redemption accomplished and applied, while not explicit in this focused summary of the gospel Paul preached, is unmistakable. On the one hand, redemption is solely Christ’s accomplishment; salvation is his work, and his alone. Redemption accomplished is his triumph over sin and death in all their dimensions achieved by his earthly ministry culminating in his death and resurrection. Elsewhere, 1 Peter 1:10–11, the “salvation” prophesied consists of “the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (NKJV). Expressed more broadly, redemption is accomplished by Christ’s passing from his past state of humiliation into his present and abiding state of exaltation (Phil. 2:8–9). This accomplishment is Christ’s and his alone. It is complete. It does not need to be supplemented in any way or augmented by anyone else.

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It should be clear, then, that the essence of redemption accomplished, what is primary, “of first importance” in redemption, is not the experience had by others than Christ; it is not other than Christ’s experience culminating in his death and resurrection. The experience of those redeemed, however factored, rather than that of the Redeemer does not constitute redemption. Nor is recounting of this or that individual experience of salvation, no matter how memorable that experience, the content of the gospel. To make experience other than Christ’s integral or the focus in understanding and defining salvation will invariably obscure and diminish the Savior and the salvation he has accomplished. The effect, too often evident where that happens, will be to eclipse or distort the truth of the gospel.

An Inseparable Connection

Still, with this caution about undue preoccupation with experience noted, the multiple benefits of the redemption accomplished by Christ are not “for Christ’s own private use” (Calvin’s arresting phrase²). Rather, those benefits are saving benefits that have been acquired and are secured by him in order to be shared with others. Specifically, as Christ’s death is “for our sins,” these saving benefits are for sinners, to be shared with needy sinners. In other words, for the accomplished redemption to be effective it must be applied. And that application must take place in the life, the actual life history, of the sinner.

This necessity is memorably expressed, for one, by Calvin. A fair characterization of his *Institutes*, globally consid-

² *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. J. McNeill; trans. F. Battles; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:537 (3.1.1).

ered, is that Book Two deals with Christ's accomplishment of redemption and Book Three with its application ("The Way In Which We Receive The Grace Of Christ: What Benefits Come To Us From It, And What Effects Follow"). At the outset of Book Three, in the second sentence, we read: "First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us."³

I am inclined to say that no more important words have been written about the nature as well as the necessity of the application of redemption, the necessity that has been captured later by the succinct aphorism: "Without application, redemption is not redemption."⁴

As Calvin immediately continues on the same page just beyond the quote above, the Holy Spirit by creating faith unites the sinner with Christ. This Spirit-worked union by faith between Christ and the believer is such that it effectively bonds the once-for-all accomplishment of salvation in the fullness of time and its ongoing application, individual and corporate, regardless of time and place in history. Union with Christ bridges the two—accomplishment and application—so that they are neither confused on the one hand nor separated on the other.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Dempta applicatione, redemptio non est redemptio; quoted, without attribution, in H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Kampen: Kok, 1976), 3:520; the English translation, *Reformed Dogmatics* ed. J. Bolt; trans. J. Vriend; (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 3:523–24, varies slightly in being less literal.

Historia Salutis and Ordo Salutis

The application of salvation, as many readers will recognize, is largely concerned with what is termed the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation); the two—application and the *ordo*—are often and fairly viewed as virtually equivalent and used interchangeably. This *ordo*, as Murray shows convincingly in Part II, has in view (1) that the application of the salvation accomplished by Christ has a fullness marked by multiple elements or aspects, and (2) that these aspects are not received in an arbitrary or confused fashion but in an ordered pattern with fixed connections among them. The failure to recognize the existence of this ordering with its interrelationships runs the risk of ignoring or misrepresenting individual aspects or acts and so distorting the work of Christ applied as a whole.⁵

Recently, in his important work on the theology of Paul, Herman Ridderbos has coined *historia salutis* (history of salvation) to contrast with *ordo salutis*.⁶ This distinction is equivalent to the conventional distinction between redemption accomplished and applied. There is value in this proposal. The expression *historia salutis* is useful for at least two reasons—because it serves to accent: (1) that salvation accomplished is not a suprahistorical or supratemporal event, somehow occurring outside of history or above and beyond calendar time, and (2) that Christ's work in history, the accomplishment of redemption, is not to be considered by itself, more or

⁵ Assuming secondary sources are correct, the first occurrence of *ordo salutis* in this sense is in the eighteenth century within emerging pietism, from where it is taken over and becomes widely current in both Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy.

⁶ The distinction first appears in his essay, "The Redemptive-Historical Character of Paul's Preaching," in *When the Time Had Fully Come: Studies in New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 48–49; it occurs repeatedly in his *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. J. de Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), e.g., 14, 45, 63, 91, *passim*.

less in isolation. Rather, his work in all its uniqueness is the culmination of the long redemptive history that began already at the fall (Gen. 3:15) and continues, incorporating in its unfolding the history of Israel, God's covenant people, until Christ's coming in "the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4). The salvation revealed in Christ is nothing less than the "last days" climax of that long redemptive or covenant history (Heb. 1:1–2a). Without being able to explore further here, suffice it to say that keeping in view the culminating redemptive-historical, eschatological nature of Christ's accomplishment and what it entails is paramount, as I have already noted earlier, for a sound understanding of its ongoing application.

*The Distinction Denied*⁷

The distinction between salvation accomplished and applied has not been without its detractors. This challenge needs to be addressed because, as we have seen, nothing less than the integrity of the gospel itself stands or falls with maintaining this distinction. What is at stake here can be seen by considering briefly Karl Barth's rejection of both the distinction as well as the idea of an *ordo salutis* as found, for instance, in Protestant orthodoxy.⁸ His dismissal, probably the most influential to date, turns on his idea of *Geschichte* ("historicity" or "historicness") that involves the undivided contemporaneity of salvation as a single event, the radical simultaneity of all its aspects (in this sense often termed "the Christ-event").

⁷ This section adapts material from Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. "The Work of Christ Applied," in *Word and Spirit: Selected Writings in Biblical and Systematic Theology*, eds. David B. Garner and Guy Prentiss Waters (Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2023), 549–551.

⁸ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 502–3; IV/3 (1962), 505–6.

This notion excludes the distinction between accomplishment and application. It has no place for a finished salvation achieved in history two thousand years ago and, as such, having its own integrity, yet distinct from its ongoing appropriation. Accordingly, Barth rejects the concept of an *ordo salutis*, maintaining that it leads inevitably to psychologizing and individualizing distortions of Christian existence.

Furthermore, as Barth's idea of *Geschichte* leaves no room for the accomplishment–application distinction, it involves a radical recasting of the work of Christ. Significantly, it excludes that a temporal sequence between the two states of Christ is determinative for salvation. Barth denies that their saving efficacy resides in their historical before and after, that in history Christ's exaltation followed his humiliation.⁹ He sees, quite rightly, that the distinction between accomplishment and application is given with the historical sequence of humiliation followed by exaltation. To affirm or deny the latter sequence is to affirm or deny the former distinction; they stand or fall together.

This view, it should be clear, involves a radical departure from biblical revelation, one that strikes at the very heart of the gospel of salvation. Christ's state of exaltation is distinct from his state of humiliation in the sense that the former is subsequent to the latter; his being "highly exalted" and "given the name above every name" follows, temporally, his "obedience unto death" (Phil. 2:8–9). Christ, having become incarnate in history, for a definite time in the past endured and satisfied God's just wrath on the sins of his people, but now,

⁹ *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 502. Correlatively, he denies as well the historicity of the fall, in the sense of the historical sequence of creation (a time of original beatitude at the beginning of human history where sin was not yet present) and the fall; e.g., "There never was a golden age. There is no point in looking back to one. The first man was immediately the first sinner" (*Church Dogmatics* IV/1 [1956], 508).

subsequently and permanently, for all eternity future, he is no longer under God's wrath but has been restored to God's favor under conditions of eschatological life.

If that is not the case, then, as Murray's faculty colleague Cornelius Van Til, for one, has pointed out in critiquing Barth's theology, "there is no transition from wrath to grace in history."¹⁰ But if that transition has not taken place for Christ, if salvation does not depend on his resurrection following his death after three days in history, then his people are still in their sins (cf. I Cor. 15:17). The gospel, the salvation of sinners, stands or falls with the historical before and after of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. In fact, this transition is the gospel at its core (what is "of first importance"), as we have seen I Corinthians 15:3-4, for one, makes clear.

Accordingly, with that before and after, with the historical sequence from the one state to the other, is given the irreducible distinction between redemption accomplished and applied, between the *historia salutis* and the *ordo salutis*, where neither one may be allowed to diminish or eclipse the other. The question of application, of the *ordo salutis* and what constitutes it, may not be dismissed: How does the then-and-there of Christ's transition from wrath to favor relate to the here-and-now of the sinner's transition from wrath to grace? How do Christ's death and subsequent resurrection and ascension, then and there, benefit sinners, here and now? What are those benefits and what is the pattern (*ordo*) in which they are communicated to sinners? This is a controlling question in considering the application of redemption, and union with Christ is the key to the answer.

10 C. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), vii); the same observation is made by G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 257, 380; cf. also 234-36, 370.

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Here then are some further observations about this book and just some of its notable strengths. In the Preface (Eerdmans, p. 6) Murray calls attention to the “difference...in the mode of treatment between Part I and Part II.” This disparity exists because, unlike the former, the material in the latter (on application) originated as a series of articles written for the readers of *The Presbyterian Guardian*, the monthly periodical of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in which Murray was an ordained minister. Also, this may explain in part why Part II is nearly twice as long as Part I. Nothing is said about the source of Part I with its slightly more academic tone, but as a former student I recognize the content as that offered in his treatment of the atonement in a required course on soteriology taught multiple times annually at Westminster Seminary.

For Part I, its fourfold topical structure—Necessity, Nature, Perfection, and Extent—facilitates an effective and instructive overall treatment of the atonement. Among other strengths is his framing of the treatment of the *necessity* of the atonement. With an eye to the *Cur Deus Homo* question (the reason for the incarnation), he focuses the issue in terms of the distinction between “hypothetical necessity” (held, for instance, he notes, by Augustine and Aquinas) and “consequent absolute necessity” (“the more classic Protestant position”). [Ben: Eerdmans, p. 15]

Arguing emphatically for the latter enables him to make clear a crucially important reality that is not to be missed for a sound understanding of the atonement. On the one hand, given the fall God was not compelled by an antecedent absolute necessity, however understood, to provide atonement for sin. However, consequent upon his entirely uncoerced and sovereignly free and loving determination to atone for

sin, the incarnation of the Son culminating in his death on the cross is not a theoretical option but an absolute necessity. Given the immutable demands inherent in his person, only God can save sinners, but God *only as God* cannot save sinners. “He...did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all,...by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:32, 3), because, given his free determination to redeem his “elect” (v. 33), he *could* not spare his Son. In the words of one hymn writer concerning the *incarnate* Son, “There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin; he only could unlock the gate of heav’n, and let us in.”¹¹

“But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Rom. 5:20 NKJV). This truth is shown with admirable clarity in treating the *nature* of the atonement. The obedience, active and passive, of Christ is “generic...the unifying and integrating principle” (p. 25). In light of the compounding and complicating exigencies created by sin, four “specific categories” delineate the substitutionary obedience that removes these diverse liabilities: sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption. “Just as sacrifice is directed to the need created by our guilt, propitiation to the need that arises from the *wrath* of God, and reconciliation to the need arising from out *alienation* from God, so redemption is directed to the *bondage* to which our sin has consigned us” (p. 49, emphasis added).

In discussing the *extent* of the atonement Murray’s careful and compelling exegesis brings him to this conclusion: “The inference is inevitable that those for whom Christ died are those and those only who die to sin and live to righteousness.” And, “The conclusion is apparent—the death of Christ in its specific character as atonement was for those and those only who are in due time the partakers of the new life of which Christ’s resurrection is the pledge and pattern.” (p. 80)

¹¹ Cecil Frances Alexander, “There Is a Green Hill Far Away” (1848).

“This,” he then adds, “is another reminder that the death and resurrection of Christ are inseparable.” (pp. 80–81) This observation prompts the further reminder—too often insufficiently appreciated—that Christ’s resurrection is as integral and necessary for the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption as is his obedience unto death. The precious and undeniable “it-is-finished” efficacy of the cross in removing death as the just wages of sin is only realized and revealed in the resurrection and not until then. Minus his resurrection, the accomplishment of redemption remains not only incomplete but in fact unachieved. “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17; cf. Rom. 4:25: “raised for our justification”).

Of all that is of considerable and distinctive value in Part II, especially noteworthy is the chapter on “Union with Christ.” Though occurring in this Part dealing with the application of redemption, Murray shows that in its scope this union is not limited to application. Rather, from beginning to end, from its pretemporal plan to its eternal consummation, “Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation” (p. 210). With edifying clarity he demonstrates conclusively from Scripture that “All to which the people of God have been predestined in the eternal election of God, all that has been secured and procured for them in the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption, and all that by God’s grace they will become in the state of consummated bliss is embraced within the compass of union and communion with Christ” (p. 210).

Accordingly, concerning its place and function within the application of redemption specifically, union is plainly not subsumable within the *ordo salutis* as one coordinate element in series with others. Rather, it is the central and radiating benefit from which all the others—like regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, and

glorification—flow. Murray’s understanding of the role of union with Christ in the application of redemption is clearly akin to that of Calvin expressed at the beginning of Book Three of the *Institutes* noted above: the essence of the *ordo salutis* is union with Christ, sharing with him by faith created by the Spirit in all the benefits of salvation he has secured (cf. the Westminster Larger Catechism, 69).

It is of interest to note that Murray’s thinking about union with Christ apparently underwent some development or clarification subsequent to the publication of *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. For instance, several years later in treating the *ordo salutis* in the course he taught on soteriology mentioned earlier, union was dealt with immediately following effectual calling and before the other elements in the *ordo*. This contrasts with the book, where the chapter on union is next to last. This repositioning in the course, with union presented as the initial result of effectual calling (“called into the fellowship of his Son,” 1 Cor. 1:9), enables a clearer and more effective focus on the centrality of union and how it is antecedent in the sense that justification, adoption, sanctification, and other benefits of application flow from it.

A further observation may be made about union with Christ in relation to sanctification. The chapter in the book provides a treatment of sanctification largely as ongoing, as a never complete life-long process. However, while the rudiments, the initial indications, are certainly present, missing is a clear and explicit presentation of the definitive, as distinct from the progressive, aspect of sanctification, a definitive reality which he cogently delineated in articles published about a decade later.¹² In these articles he shows, with

¹² “Definitive Sanctification” and “The Agency in Definitive Sanctification,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:277–93.

a focus on Romans 6 and related passages, that having been irrevocably united with Christ as crucified and resurrected entails a definitive, once-for-all breach with the dominion of sin. As a consequence of that union, believers are no longer in bondage to sin but, freed from its controlling power, are permanently enslaved to righteousness and Christ as Lord.

This definitive aspect of sanctification—the necessary basis for its progressive aspect and without which growth in holiness is impossible—also finds a particularly rich and illuminating expression subsequent to *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* in the chapter, “The Dynamic of the Biblical Ethic,” in his *Principles of Conduct*.¹³

In providing a jacket endorsement for Geerhardus Vos’s *Biblical Theology Old and New Testaments* when it first appeared in 1948, Murray wrote, “Dr. Vos is in my judgment, the most penetrating exegete it has been my privilege to know and, I believe, the most incisive exegete that has appeared in the English-speaking world in this century.” Such high and unalloyed praise reflects Murray’s controlling conviction that, with due attention to the help provided by the history of doctrine, sound exegesis is the life-blood of systematic theology that would be true to Scripture in its doctrinal formulations. One of the notable strengths of this volume, as of Murray’s work as a whole, is that it reflects in such an exemplary fashion the importance of exegesis informed by biblical theology that he learned from Vos, his former Princeton Seminary professor.

In the Preface, particularly with Part I “Redemption Accomplished” in view, Murray writes: “It is with some misgiving that I have ventured to offer for publication the following attempt to deal with an aspect of divine revelation that has

¹³ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 202–28.

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been explored to such an extent. This present study cannot pretend to be in the same class as many of the superb contributions of both the more remote and the more recent past.”¹⁴ How thankful we should be that Murray did not allow these self-effacing misgivings to keep him from venturing as he has in both parts of this volume. For the result, quite contrary to his depreciating assessment, makes an indeed superb contribution, one that will continue to be, as it already has proven to be, for the enduring wellbeing of the church.

R. GAFFIN, JR.
May 2024

¹⁴ Eerdmans edition, p. 5

Preface to the First Edition

The accomplishment of redemption or, as it has frequently been called, the atonement, is central in our Christian faith. It is no wonder therefore that the Christian church should have in its possession a rich repertory of literature on this subject. It is with some misgiving that I have ventured to offer for publication the following attempt to deal with an aspect of the divine revelation that has been explored to such an extent. This present study cannot pretend to be in the same class as many of the superb contributions of both the more remote and the more recent past. I can only claim that I am presenting what has passed through the crucible of my own reflection. I am conscious of the profound debt I owe to numberless theologians and expositors. Acknowledgment in details would be impossible. Other men have labored and we have entered into their labors. However, there are certain facets of this great truth which I have sought to bring into clearer focus. Perhaps some neglected factors have received an emphasis which our present-day theological situation demands.

On so great a theme as Christ's redemptive accomplishment I am profoundly conscious of the limitations that encompass our attempts at exposition. Thought and expression stagger in the presence of the spectacle that confronts us in

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the vicarious sin-bearing of the Lord of glory. Here we must realize that we are dealing with the mystery of godliness, and eternity will not reach the bottom of it nor exhaust its praise. Yet it is ours to proclaim it and continue the attempt to expound and defend its truth.

The material in Part II of this volume, dealing with the application of redemption, was written for *The Presbyterian Guardian* at the request of the editor, the Rev. Leslie W. Sloat, and was published in twenty-two articles from October 1952 to August 1954. I wish to express my indebtedness to *The Presbyterian Guardian* and to Mr. Sloat in particular for the courtesy of publication and for permission to reprint these articles in the present form. Any difference there may be in the mode of treatment between Part I and Part II of this volume is explained by the original purpose of what is comprised in the latter.

I wish to extend my gratitude to Miss Margaret S. Robinson for her services in preparing the typescript and to Miss T. E. N. Ozinga for preparing the indexes. Above all, I must thank the publishers, the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, for undertaking this publication and for the many courtesies bestowed upon me in negotiations to that end.

I can only hope that the reader will find these studies consonant with the witness of Holy Scripture as the only infallible rule of faith and that by God's grace what is accordant with Scripture will elicit the response of faith and conviction.

Philadelphia
May 24, 1955

JOHN MURRAY

PART I

Redemption Accomplished

CHAPTER I

The Necessity of the Atonement

The accomplishment of redemption is concerned with what has been generally called the atonement. No treatment of the atonement can be properly oriented that does not trace its source to the free and sovereign love of God. It is with this perspective that the best known text in the Bible provides us: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Here we have an ultimate of divine revelation and therefore of human thought. Beyond this we cannot and dare not go.

That it is an ultimate of human thought does not exclude, however, any further characterization of this love of God. The Scripture informs us that this love of God from which the atonement flows and of which it is the expression is a love that is distinguishing. No one gloried in this love of God more than the apostle Paul. "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:31-32). But it is the same apostle who delineates for us the eternal counsel of God which supplies the background of such protestation and which defines

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for us the orbit within which such statements have meaning and validity. He writes: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). And elsewhere he becomes perhaps even more explicit when he says: "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him; in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:4-5). The love of God from which the atonement springs is not a distinctionless love; it is a love that elects and predestinates. God was pleased to set his invincible and everlasting love upon a countless multitude and it is the determinate purpose of this love that the atonement secures.

It is necessary to underline this concept of sovereign love. Truly God is love. Love is not something adventitious; it is not something that God may choose to be or choose not to be. He is love, and that necessarily, inherently, and eternally. As God is spirit, as he is light, so he is love. Yet it belongs to the very essence of electing love to recognize that it is not inherently necessary to that love which God necessarily and eternally is that he should set such love as issues in redemption and adoption upon utterly undesirable and hell-deserving objects. It was of the free and sovereign good pleasure of his will, a good pleasure that emanated from the depths of his own goodness, that he chose a people to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. The reason resides wholly in himself and proceeds from determinations that are peculiarly his as the "I am that I am." The atonement does not win or constrain the love of God. The love of God constrains to the atonement as the means of accomplishing love's determinate purpose.¹

1. Cf. Hugh Martin: *The Atonement: in its Relations to the Covenant, the Priesthood, the Intercession of our Lord* (Edinburgh, 1887), p. 19.

The Necessity of the Atonement

It must be regarded, therefore, as a settled datum that the love of God is the cause or source of the atonement. But this does not answer the question as to the *reason* or *necessity*. What is the *reason* why the love of God should take such a way of realizing its end and fulfilling its purpose? Why, we are compelled to ask, the sacrifice of the Son of God, why the blood of the Lord of glory? “For what necessity and for what reason,” asked Anselm of Canterbury, “did God, since he is omnipotent, take upon himself the humiliation and weakness of human nature in order to its restoration.”² Why did not God realize the purpose of his love for mankind by the word of his power and the fiat of his will? If we say that he could not, do we not impugn his power? If we say that he could but would not, do we not impugn his wisdom? Such questions are not scholastic subtleties or vain curiosities. To evade them is to miss something that is central in the interpretation of the redeeming work of Christ and to miss the vision of some of its essential glory. Why did God become man? Why, having become man, did he die? Why, having died, did he die the accursed death of the cross? This is the question of the *necessity* of the atonement.

Among the answers given to this question, two are most important. They are, first, the view known as that of hypothetical necessity and, second, the view which we may call that of consequent absolute necessity. The former was held by such notable men as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.³ The latter may be regarded as the more classic protestant position.

The view known as that of hypothetical necessity main-

2. *Cur. Deus Homo*, Lib. I, Cap. I: “qua necessitate scilicet et ratione deus, cum sit omnipotens, humilitatem et infirmitatem humanae naturae pro eius restauratione assumpserit.”

3. Cf. Augustine: *On the Trinity*, Bk. XIII, Chap. 10; Aquinas: *Summa Theologica*, Part III, Q. 46, Arts 2 and 3.