Dr. John D. Hannah
ed., Dr. Robert Dean, Jr.

THE PERSON OF CHRIST
Part IV: The Modern Church

Summary:

I. INTRODUCTION.

As has been previously described concerning the doctrine of Trinitarianism, so also the doctrine of the Person of Christ was formulated in the Ancient Church period. Medieval and Reformation thinkers did not advance Christology, although in the fringes of the Reformation Period a harbinger of change became evident in the teachings of Servetus and resultant movements such as Socinianism and Unitarianism. It seems correct to say that if one has a misconception of the preincarnate Christ, the error will proceed to the incarnate Christ!

The focus of this lesson shall be to gain an understanding of how the Modern Era understands the incarnate Person of Christ.

N.B. The setting for this study, that is the nature of the Enlightenment, has already been delineated (Lesson 4) and reiterated (Lesson 9). The student should review this important issue! The point to be seen is that the philosophic shift (as postulated by Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and Kant) forged a reorientation of theology. The mind was set free from the necessity of dependency, sin, and revelation for an inward quest for truth, either on the mind or intuition.

N.N.B.B. To orient to what occurs, a section from Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, citing Dutch Reformed theologian, G. C. Berkouwer is enlightening.

> G. C. Berkouwer introduces his discussion on the person of Christ by a long chapter on the subject "The Crisis in the Doctrine of the Two Natures." He finds a serious defection from the early church doctrine of the person of Christ in the

nineteenth century at the hands of Schleiermacher and Ritschl. [Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ, 21-25*.] This arose out of a background of Socinianism. The defection was furthered by Harnack, Nietzsche, Hegel, Straus, and the kenosis theory of Thomasius.

This decline from orthodoxy ultimately led to the theories of Bultmann who is evaluated by Berkouwer in these words:

> What in the dogma of the church are regarded as God's acts in history are devaluated by Bultmann to the status of a religious fancy. Theology can sink no farther. The witness of the Scriptures and the dogma found on them are pushed aside and the cross is made into the irrational fact of a decision in which man comes to know himself.

Berkouwer concludes with a challenge about the personal relevance of the question:

> To testify that the crisis of the doctrine of the two natures is not merely a theoretical matter but a religious crisis.

II. THE PERSON OF CHRIST AND THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN THEOLOGIANS.

A. Fredrick Schleiermacher (1768–1834).

1. **Schleiermacher and Religion**. As stated previously, Schleiermacher was influenced by Kant and anticipates the turning to subjective experience as the beginning point of theology; by this, he thought he was preserving Christianity from its two primary obstacles: Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment. He affirmed faith as deduced from inward feeling (faith not from the Bible, but in the Bible as it derives authority from faith). Thus, religion to Schleiermacher is "the feeling of absolute dependence" on God—the stress is not upon God but upon human consciousness, a god-consciousness most perfectly displayed by Christ.

2. **Schleiermacher and the Person of Christ.** In brief, Schleiermacher asserted the "divinity of Christ" and stressed that he was the "ideal of humanity" in that He possessed true god-consciousness. Mackintosh wrote (*Thoughts*. II, 385): "The Redeemer, then, is like all men in virtue of the identity of human nature, but distinguished from them all by the constant potency of His God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in Him."

N.B. The degree to which one is god-conscious is the degree to which he/she is sinless since sin is a lack of god-consciousness. In this non-constitutional sense Christ was sinless!

Schleiermacher wrote (*Christian Faith*. II, 388-89): "So that from the beginning He must have been free from every influence from earlier generations which disseminated sin and disturbed the inner God-consciousness, and He can only be understood as an original act of human nature, i.e., as an act of human nature as not affected by sin. The beginning of His life was also a new implanting of the God-consciousness which creates receptivity in human nature; hence this content and that manner of origin are in such a close relation that they mutually condition and explain each other. That new implanting came to be through the beginning of His life, and therefore that beginning must have transcended every detrimental influence of His immediate circle; and because it was such an original and sin-free act of nature, a filling of His nature with God-consciousness became possible as its result."

N.B. Christ's god-consciousness came upon Him from natural birth, a sort of dynamic monarchianism if you understand his "feeling" for or of God to be His only godness!

Schleiermacher speaks of the divine and human nature in Christ as historically set forth in the creeds with distain, the product of "heathen" influence though possibly of unconscious origin. He said (*Christian Faith*. II, 393): "For in polytheism, which represents the Godhead as no less split up and divided than finite existence appears to us, the word 'nature' has certainly the same meaning in the expression divine nature as it has elsewhere. The fact ought to have a warning, that the heathen sages themselves had already risen above this imperfect representation of God, and said of Him that He was to be thought of as beyond all existence and being."

The union of the "two" natures, god-consciousness and humanity, is resultantly but one human Jesus with an elevated consciousness of God (*Christian Faith*. II, 392): "For how can divine and human be thus brought together under any single conception, as if they could both be more exact determinations, coordinated to each other, of one and the same universal? Indeed, even divine spirit and human spirit could not without confusion be brought together in this way. But the word 'nature' is particularly ill-adapted for such a common use, even if we leave Latin and Greek etymology completely out of account and simply take our stand on our own use of the word. For in one sense we actually oppose God and nature to one another, and hence in this sense cannot attribute a nature to God. Nature in this sense is for us the summary of all finite existence, or, as in

the opposition of nature and history, the summary of all that is corporeal, and that goes back to what is elementary, in its various and discrete phenomena, in which all that we do describe is mutually conditioned. Over against this divided and conditioned we set God as the unconditioned and the absolutely simple."

N.B. Schleiermacher rejects the concept of two natures for a human Jesus who has become overpowered and dominated by "a feeling of godness." This "feeling" for God makes the person of Christ "supernatural." It is what is meant by the "virgin birth." The birth was natural, but supernatural in that it was sinless (i.e., not lacking in god-feeling). He wrote (*Christian Faith*. II, 405): "Since, therefore, there is no doctrine or tradition of a continuous series of mothers who were conceived, and who remained, without sin, the absence of the male share in the begetting of the Redeemer is in both connexions inadequate; and consequently the assumption of a Virgin Birth is superfluous. Consequently everything rests upon the higher influence which, as a creative divine activity, could alter both the paternal and the maternal influence in such a way that all ground for sinfulness was removed, and this although procreation was perfectly natural—as indeed only this creative divine activity could avail to give completeness to the natural imperfection of the child who was begotten. The general idea of a supernatural conception remains, therefore, essential and necessary, if the specific pre-eminence of the Redeemer is to remain undiminished. But the more precise definition of this supernatural conception as one in which there was no male activity has no connexion of any kind with the essential elements in the peculiar dignity of the Redeemer; and hence, in and by itself, is no constituent part of Christian doctrine. Whoever accepts this definition, therefore, accepts it only on the ground of the narratives involving it contained in the New Testament writings; hence belief in it, like belief in many matters of fact which have just as little necessary connexion with the dignity and the work of the Redeemer, belongs solely to the doctrine of Scripture; and everyone has to reach a decision about it by the proper application of those principles of criticism and interpretation which approve themselves to Him. But anyone who accepts a supernatural conception in our sense of the term can hardly, at least, find any reason in the supernatural element which they contain for denying the historical character of these narratives, or for departing from the literal interpretation of them. Similarly anyone who cannot accept them as literally and historically true is still quite free to hold to the doctrine proper of the supernatural conception. But if it is superfluous to set up a doctrine of the Virgin Birth proper, it is also inadvisable to do so,

for this involves one all too easily in investigations of a purely scientific character which lie quite outside our sphere."

Finally, and in summary, Schleiermacher wrote (*Christian Faith*. II, 423-24): "Now if this is in general the sufficiently clear result of an examination of Scripture, our Dogmatic can not only easily dispense with the whole arsenal of particular statements which have been set forth under various rubrics as proving the being of God in Christ, but put them aside all the more readily that they give no help in presenting the subject in the best way, but rather hide what is important and certain under what is untrustworthy. For what is the use of ascribing divine titles to Christ, if He Himself calls attention to an improper use of the word 'God' [John 10:34-36]? but appellations which express the unity of the divine and the human in so definite and unambiguous a way as the later 'God-man' do not occur in Scripture; all the predicates which can be cited in this connexion are more or less uncertain in meaning. So, too, as far as the divine attributes are concerned, it is natural that, since Christ is always spoken of as a man, only such attributes are ascribed to Christ in such a way that it must remain doubtful whether they do not mean that He is active cause only in so far as He is final cause. Finally, in the Resurrection and the Last Judgment, Christ is everywhere distinguished from God, for He appears only as a deputy with full powers, and hence His power is represented as resting in the Father, just as the appointment proceeds from the Father originally. Exactly the same is true of the sending of the Spirit, which Christ ascribes, now to Himself, now to the Father, who sends it all at His request. So that without those great supreme testimonies all these details would have little effect."

N.B. Thus, Schleiermacher has a two-natured Christ which in reality is one. His humanness is swallowed in godness. Godness is not actual but implanted at his "supernatural" birth. In reality, his Christ is a god-intoxicated man; an example for men to follow!

B. Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72).

A passing comment will likely be sufficient to grasp this "anti-theologian's" concept of Christ. As Feuerbach projected himself into infinity, he objectified the reality of God. The extension of his thought was the idealized Christ; that is, in our idea of Christ we encounter this projection of ourselves as God. Of Christ he wrote (*The Essence of Christianity*): "The consciousness of the species. We are all supposed to be one in Christ. Christ is the consciousness of our unity. Therefore, whoever loves man for the sake of man, whoever rises to the love of the species, to the universal love adequate to the nature of the species, is a Christian; he is Christ himself."

N.B. Hence, the incarnation is the mystery of the love of God to man, which really is the love of man for himself. The resurrection of Christ is "the fulfilled longing of man for an immediate certainty of his continued personal existence after death."

PARENTHESIS: Theodore Christlieb has caught the theological mind of his age when he wrote (*Modern Doubt*, 341): "The spirit of our age, weary—and that not without good reason—of mere speculation, is in every department asking for realities and facts. The study of dogma has had to yield to that of history. Men no longer look to authoritative statements of Church doctrines . . . but to his historical investigations of the Gospel narratives and of primeval Christianity for an answer to the question, Who was and is Jesus Christ."

C. Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89).

The nineteenth century had a Christ who was human, but one who witnessed to the power of God in his life. Christ, as a man, was our "window into the ways of God." His claim to deity, however expressed, was not native or eternal but extrinsic. Ritschl, and the entire Ritschlian School, follows in the same views. Christ is Christ because He most perfectly cooperated with God in bringing forth God's purpose, the kingdom of God on earth.

1. Christ is a unique person from an internal viewpoint to Ritschl; that is, He most consistently aligned with God's purpose, His vocation. Christ, as a man, had marvelous insight into the ways of God; thus, He became the elevated one. He wrote (*Reconciliation*, 436): "His estimate of Himself betrays, it is true, a sort of sliding scale in the way he describes His own relation to God, not only in John, but also in the other Gospels; yet amid this variety of presentation, describing Himself at one time as a mere ambassador who has seen and heard God and executes His commands, and at another time as the son of God Who pursues God's work and in His own person exercises God's lordship over men for the ends of the Kingdom of God, Jesus attributes to His life as a whole, in the unity which for His own consciousness it possesses, the worth of being the instrument of the complete self-revelation of God. This is the purely religious type of self-judgment. But the unique feature of the case is, that there is not a trace of evidence to show that Jesus exempts any one relation of His own spiritual life and activity from the standard in question. For even when He expresses Himself in terms of independent human purpose, that purpose is at least adjusted to the ultimate Divine end for men which He is seeking to promote. The difference, namely, does not present itself to his consciousness in the form of a contrast, as in the case of Paul, who says on the one hand that Christ lives in him, and on the other that he lives a natural life, but in the faith of Christ (Gal. 2:20). And thus John, in seeking to realize the impression made on his own mind of the worth of Christ's

life as a whole, was in a position to construct a new formula, which implies more than that Christ was an instrument of Divine revelation. His faith in the Divine worth of Christ expresses itself in this judgment with regard to Him—that the Divine revelation is a human person."

Christ's relationship to godness is functional or economic, to use the century's term for it, not ontological! He then said: "Since, now, as the founder of the kingdom of God in the world, or as the bearer of God's moral authority over men, He is the unique one in comparison with all those who have received from Him a similar purpose, thus is He that power in the world in whose self-end God primordially makes His own eternal self-end effective and evident—whose entire work in His calling thus forms the material of the complete revelation of God present in Him, or in whom the Word of God is a human person."

Swing analyzes Ritschl as follows (*Theology of Albrecht Ritschl*, 98): "In other words, the Ritschlian argument is this—and it is not often surpassed in apologetic literature: There is one kingdom of God for which God has made the world. Jesus Christ, as the conscious founder of this kingdom in the world, is the one person to whom God looks, and to whom the members of this community look as head of this kingdom. Thrown upon the cosmic background of physical forces, He becomes the revealer of the purpose and character of the supramundane spiritual God, for the one divine purpose of making men free and independent of the world. Between God's self-end and Christ's self-end, there is a solidaric unity, by which men are to discover their own true self-end, and be won into its accomplishment through fellowship."

2. The origin of the Christ-man, which Ritschl conceives as a unity of purpose, not being, is uncertain and unknowable. He wrote (*Reconciliation*, 451-52): "The origin of the Person of Christ—how His Person attained the form in which it presents itself to our ethical and religious apprehension—is not a subject for theological inquiry, because the problem transcends all inquiry. What ecclesiastical tradition offers us in this connection is obscure in itself, and therefore is not fitted to make anything clear. As Bearer of the perfect revelation, Christ is given us that we may believe on Him. When we do believe on Him, we find Him to be the Revealer of God. But the correlation of Christ with God His Father is not a scientific explanation. And as a theologian one ought to know that the fruitless clutching after such explanations only serves to obscure the recognition of Christ as the perfect revelation of God."

3. Christ is the Christ because we trust what He is doing, not who He is. Swing wrote (*Theology of Albrecht Ritschl*, 99): "We worship Jesus, not

because we see in Him a control over cosmic forces, but because in Him we see all the same ethical and moral self-end which belongs to God."

4. Of Christ's eternal relationship to the Father, Ritschl asserts that something is "real," but "our scientific explanations are limited in all such problems." The eternal Godhead of Christ is only in the mind of God and only "apparent" or "seemingly" so to us. He wrote (*Reconciliation*, 471): "Under this condition, the view expounded above—that the eternally-beloved Son of God, on the ground of the like content of His personal will, and of the uniqueness of the relation He holds to the community of the Kingdom of God and to the world, is to be conceived under the attribute of Godhead—accords with the traditional theology. Of course our time-conditioned view of things cannot get rid of the antithesis between God's eternal decree and the realization of the same in the empirical phenomena of time, just as our conception of the community of the Kingdom of God is bound up with the antithesis between the calling in time and the choosing before the foundation of the world. At the same time we must premise that this relation does not mean for God that there is in Him any want or need; rather is His self-sufficiency everlastingly satisfied in what to us, in the long series of preparatory stages, looks like the expression of want. For this reason the eternal Godhead of the son, in the sense here described, is perfectly intelligible only as object of the Divine mind and will, that is, only for God Himself. But if at the same time we discount, in the case of God, the interval between purpose and accomplishment, then we get the formula that Christ exists for God eternally as that which He appears to us under the limitations of time, but only for God, since for us, as preexistent, Christ is hidden."

   Again, he wrote in summary (*Reconciliation*, 469-70): "On the contrary, it is implied that, as Founder and Lord of the Kingdom of God, Christ is as much the object of God's eternal knowledge and will as is the moral unification of mankind, which is made possible through Him, and whose prototype He is; or rather, that, not only in time but in the eternity of the Divine knowledge and will, Christ precedes His community. Of course, to this statement a certain qualification must be added. For whatever belonged to the natural and generic limitations of Christ, more especially His individual natural endowments and His Jewish nationality, cannot be taken as the object of the eternal will of God, since these things are by their very nature bound up with the world, consequently can be fore-ordered, even by God, only through a volition in time. But Christ, we know, reduced the significance of these limitations to mere means toward His own spiritual life, in particular toward the apprehension of His own religious fellowship with God, and the carrying out of the vocation He had embraced. Sharing the religious and moral customs of the Jews, he yet knows Himself, as the son of God, exalted above them; in discharging the

duties of His vocation toward His countrymen, He knows His work destined to be fruitful, at the same time that He distinctly foresees its fruitlessness among the Jews; in His own life-conduct, that universal human morality of which the Kingdom of God shall be the perfect realization so markedly preponderates, that we fail to notice in Him those traces of individual temperament which are wont to count for something even in the most perfect of men. Yet Christ's life was not a mere abstract presentation of universal human morality; for He gave the whole world wealth of personal devotion to the universal content of His vocation. Rather is He Himself the prototype of that life of love and elevation above worldly motive, which forms the distinguishing characteristic of the Kingdom of God; and this as the deliberate result of His vocation to be the Founder of that Kingdom, not in any mere application of the principle of the Kingdom to the separate details of human life, which is the source from which other men derive their ethical vocations. If, therefore, the Kingdom of God as the correlate of the divine self-end is the eternal object of the love of God, this is so because Christ as the prototype and inspiring force of that union of the many in one, in other words, as the Head and Lord of that Kingdom, is the eternal object of the love of God, so that in this special form the Kingdom of God is present eternally to the Divine knowledge and will, while its individual members are objects of the knowledge of God in time."

N.B. Thus, the Christ of Ritschl, the Ritschlians, and the nineteenth century, was human, yet once elevated by virtue of his personal piety and vocation to receive the title "Son of God", a title signifying unity in vocation, not essence!

PARENTHESIS: An outgrowth of Ritschl's teachings on the kingdom was that of Adolph von Harnack and Wilhelm Hermann. This extension of Ritschl sought to find revelation history (man gaining insight into himself!) and developed the "Kernel," the essence of Christianity (i.e., the truth of the Bible covered over with Hellenism and Mythology). To Harnack, Christ was not unique as to His person, but in that He exemplified the principles of the Kingdom (Son of God = knowledge of God, divinity = filial vocation). He stressed the religion of Jesus (what He lived and taught) not the religion about Jesus. The religion of Jesus and His "disciples of progress" was an ethical, moral kingdom.

N.B. This same line of thought (i.e., existentialism, the Kerygma) is clearly evident in Rudolph Bultmann (1884–1976), who attempted to demythologize the Bible.

N.B. The "History of Religions School" was led by Wilhelm Bousett (1865–1920), who wrote the influential *Kyrios Christos* in 1913. The school, more radical than the Ritschlian, taught that the New Testament was the product of syncretism. The historical Jesus is perceived as a "creative miracle" in the midst of His ancient

environment. The essence of Christianity is that which is the unifying kernel or commonality of all religions; it is not unique.

III. THE PERSON OF CHRIST AND KARL BARTH.

The positive influence of Barth has been alluded to previously relative to the doctrine of the Scriptures and Theology Proper. In both areas, and to varying degrees, Barth caused German theology to swing back toward the conservative spectrum. The question before us is how did Barth conceive of Christ on earth? Quite obviously with his view of the preincarnate Christ, his view of the Christ-man will be radically different from his immediate predecessors. In brief Barth wrote (*Dogmatics*. 1.2, 132): "We understand this statement as the answer to the question: Who is Jesus Christ; and we understand it as a description of the central New Testament statement, John 1:14: 'The Word was made flesh.' Therefore this New Testament verse must guide us in our discussion of the dogmatic statement that Jesus Christ is very God and very man."

A. Barth and the Human Christ

Barth is abundantly clear that Christ, the eternal one, became flesh and dwelt among men. He wrote (*Dogmatics*. 1.2, 147): "That the Word was made 'flesh' means first and generally that He became man, true and real man, participating in the same human essence and existence, the same human nature and form, the same historicity that we have. God's revelation to us takes place in such a way that everything ascribable to man, his creaturely existence as an individually unique unity of body and soul in the time between birth and death, can now be predicated of God's eternal Son as well. According to the witness of the Evangelists and apostles everything miraculous about His being as a man derives its meaning and force from the fact that it concerns the true man Jesus Christ as a man like ourselves. This is true especially in the Easter story, the *evangelium quadraginta dierum*, as the supreme event of revelation. It is true of the sign of His birth of the Virgin at the beginning, and the sign of the empty tomb at the end of His historical existence. It is true of the signs and wonders already manifested between this beginning and end, which proclaim the Kingdom of God in its relation to the event of Easter. What in fact makes revelation, revelation, and miracle, miracle, is that the Word of God did actually become a real man and that therefore the life of this real man was the object and theater of the acts of God, the light of revelation entering the world."

And again (1.2, 149): "The Word became flesh means primarily and of itself, then, that the Word became participant in human nature and existence. Human essence and existence became Him. Now since this cannot be real except in the concrete reality of one man, it must at once be said that He became a man. But precisely this concrete reality of a man, this man, is itself the work of the Word, not His presupposition. It is not (in the adoptionist sense) as if first of all there had

been a man there, and then the Son of God, and as the presupposition of His work, was simply the potentiality of being in the flesh, being as a man. This is the possibility of every man. And here—for the individuality and uniqueness of human existence belong to the concept of human essence and existence—it is the one specific possibility of the first son of Mary. The Word appropriated this possibility to Himself as His own, and He realized it as such when He became Jesus. In so doing He did not cease to be what He was before, but He became what He was not before, a man, this man."

B. Barth and the God-man

Barth conceives of Christ in the Orthodox form of the Chalcedonian creed. Christ is at once God and man in unity of a single person. He wrote (*Dogmatics*. 1.2, 160-61): "If we paraphrase the statement 'the Word became flesh' by 'the Word assumed flesh,' we guard against the misinterpretation already mentioned, that in the incarnation the Word ceases to be entirely Himself and equal to Himself, i.e., in the full sense of Word of God. God cannot cease to be God. The incarnation is inconceivable, but it is not absurd, and it must not be explained as an absurdity. The inconceivable fact in it is that without ceasing to be God the Word of God is among us in such a way that He takes over human being, which is His creature, into His own being and to that extent makes it His own being. As His own predicate along with His original predicate of divinity, He takes over human being into unity with Himself. And it is by the paraphrase, 'the Word assumed flesh' that in the incarnation, by means of a union of divine and human being and nature, a third is supposed to arise. Jesus Christ as the Mediator between God and man is not a third, midway between the two. In that case God has at once ceased to be God and likewise, He is not a man like us. But Jesus is the Mediator, the God-Man, in such a way that He is God and Man. This 'and' is the inconceivable act of the 'becoming' in the incarnation. It is not the act of the human being and nature. How can it be capable of such an act? Nor it is the act either of the divine being and nature as such. It is not the divine nature that acts where God acts, but it is the triune God in His divine nature, One in the three modes of existence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, too, in this assumption of human being by the eternal Word. He, the eternal Word, in virtue of His own will and power as well as in virtue of the will and power of Father and Holy Spirit, becomes flesh. The unity into which the human nature is assumed is thus unity with the Word, and only to that extent—because this Word is the eternal Word—the union of the human with the divine nature. But the eternal Word is with the Father and the Holy Spirit the unchangeable God Himself and so incapable of any change or admixture. Unity with Him, the 'becoming' of the Word, cannot therefore mean the origination of a third between Word and flesh, but only the assumption of the flesh by the Word."

PARENTHESIS:

1. **Barth and Impeccability**. He wrote (*Dogmatics*. I.2, 156): "That God sent His own son *en homoiomati sarkos hamartas* is at once explained in Romans 8:3 by *peri hamartias*, i.e., for sin, in matters of sin and so not in order to do sin Himself; and then the main clause unambiguously declares that *katekrinen* (*ho theos*) *ten hamartian en ti sarki*. That is, in the likeness of flesh (unholy flesh, marked by sin), there happens the unlike, the new and helpful thing, that sin is condemned by not being committed, by being omitted, by full obedience now being found in the very place where otherwise sin necessarily and irresistibly takes place. The meaning of the incarnation is that now in the flesh that is not done which all flesh does. 'He hath made him to be sin for us' (2 Cor. 5:21) does not mean that He made Him a man who also sins again—what could that signify 'for us'?—but that He put Him in the position of a sinner by way of exchange (*katallasson*), in the sense of the Old Testament sin-offering). But whom did He put in that position? *ton my hunonta hamartian*. Because this man who knew no sin is 'made to be sin.' This 'making' signifies the act of a divine offering *peri hamartias, huper hymon*, judgment upon sin, its removal."

2. **Barth and the Virgin Birth**. Barth affirms the virgin birth in a chapter called "The miracle of Christmas." He inseparably links as historic events the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection (*Dogmatics*. 1. 2, 182): "Now it is no accident that for us the Virgin Birth is paralleled by the miracle of which the Easter witness speaks, the miracle of the empty tomb. These two miracles belong together. They constitute, as it were, a single sign, the special function of which, compared with other signs and wonders of the New Testament witness, is to describe and mark out the existence of Jesus Christ, amid the many other existences in human history, as that human historical existence in which God is Himself, God is alone, God is directly the Subject, the temporal reality of which is not only called forth, created, conditioned and supported by the eternal reality of God, but is identical with it. The Virgin Birth at the opening and the empty tomb at the close of Jesus' life bear witness that this life is a fact marked off in the first instance, not by our understanding or our interpretation, but by itself. Marked off in regard to its origin: it is free of the arbitrariness which underlies all our existences. And marked off in regard to its goal: it is victorious over the death to which we are all liable. Only within these limits is it what it is and is it correctly understood, as the mystery of the revelation of God. It is to that mystery that these limits point—he who ignores them or wishes them away must see to it that he is not thinking of something quite different from this."

   After a lengthy defense of the phrase "conceived by the Holy Spirit" he concluded (*Dogmatics*. 1.2, 202): "Here, as so often, it is not true that such statements by early dogmaticians are the products of an idle and irrelevant scholastic cleverness. Rather is it the case that in these statements an attempt is made at a spiritual understanding of the spiritual; and no one who at this particular point takes the

trouble seriously to think himself into the task set him will deny that in the decisive issue this was the right line to take. In conclusion, let us remember that it is particularly this positive factor in the miracle, expressed in the *conceptus de Spiritu sancto*, that belongs to the sign of the miracle of Christmas which the dogma aims at stressing. Noetically, i.e., for us to whom this sign is given, who have to recognize it in and by this sign, the fact that Jesus Christ is the son of God come in the flesh stands or falls with the truth of the *conceptio de Spiritu sancto*. But it could not be said that ontically, in itself, the mystery of Christmas stands or falls with this dogma. The man Jesus of Nazareth is not the true son of God because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. On the contrary, because He is the true Son of God and because this is an inconceivable mystery intended to be acknowledged as such, therefore He is conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. And because He is thus conceived and born, He has to be recognized and acknowledged as the One He is and in the mystery in which He is the One He is."

N.B. Again, Barth reveals himself to be remarkably orthodox concerning our Lord; indeed, his chapters on Christ are particularly devotion—cf. God with Us (*Dogmatics*. 4.1, 13). Christ is not the "man" with "feeling" for God and God's kingdom plans; He is the incarnate God, the God-man. We leave Barth (with hesitation) by quoting a remarkable paragraph (*Dogmatics*. 1. 2, 158): "This is the revelation of God in Christ. For where man admits his lost state and lives entirely by God's mercy—which no man did, but only the God-Man Jesus Christ has done—God Himself is manifest. And by that God reconciled the world to Himself. For where man claims no right for himself, but concedes all rights to God alone—which no man did, but only the God-Man Jesus Christ has done—the world is drawn out of its enmity toward God and reconciled to God."

IV. THE PERSON OF CHRIST AND THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN THEOLOGIANS.

The German theology of the nineteenth century has been reproduced in the United States in Classic Liberalism (1890–1930) and Neo-Liberalism (1930–60) with little, if any, change in Christology. This section will therefore focus on the Person of Christ in the "Radical Theologies" of the 1960s, which are a product of post-Bultmannianism. Bultmann's thought was not popular in the U.S. until after his death, then only in radical forms.

A. Tillich and "The Theology of Being"

Paul Tillich (1886–1965) referred to "Jesus as the Christ," but rejected the term "Jesus Christ"; he prefers to think of the "anointed one," who became Christ. He rejects the term "divine nature" when applied to Christ; for Christ, unlike God, is

not beyond essence and existence. He simply redefines theological terms to create a god-adopted man. McKelway wrote (*Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich*, 165-66): "In the place of asserting the unity of divine and human natures in Christ, Tillich prefers the assertion that in him 'the eternal unity of god and man has become historical reality.' He is the 're-established unity between God and man.' The concept 'the divine nature' in him is replaced by the concept of 'eternal God-man-unity.' This way of expressing the matter, Tillich argues, replaces a static essence with a dynamic relationship. And instead of 'human nature,' we must speak of the Christ as 'essential man.' 'It is essential man who represents not only man to man but God to man; for essential man . . . represents the original image of God embodied in man.' "

Tillich believes that "abstract definitions of the nature of this unity are . . . impossible." However, he understands that two concepts are given in the New Testament which point toward a correct interpretation of it. The first is "adoption," which is already evident in his phrase "Jesus as the Christ," and the second is "incarnation." The concept of adoption is necessary, Tillich maintains, because if the eternal unity of God and man is actualized in existence, it can be so only through an act of finite freedom. God chooses to "adopt" the man Jesus as the Christ, and Jesus chooses to accept His adoption through obedience. However, this free choice is not contingent—it is destined; and this unity actualized in Jesus as the Christ is the finite—it is eternal. Therefore, it is also necessary to speak of the incarnation. But if this word is used (and Tillich is doubtful about its usefulness), it must be kept clear that it is an expression of the eternal character of the relationship found in this man. It seeks to "express the paradox that he who transcends the universe appears in it and under its conditions."

The assertion is that the term "God-man" is a nonsensical statement because it cannot mean what it says ("a mythology of metamorphosis"). McKelway wrote (*Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich*, 168): "Tillich has not said, nor will he say with the 'incarnational' Christologies of Nicaea and Chalcedon, that Jesus was 'truly God and truly Man.' No, it is the adoptionist position to which he holds with greater consistency. God chose Jesus, Jesus became the Christ."

B. Whitehead and "Process Theology"

Process Theology, which finds its philosophic roots in Alfred N. Whitehead's belief that reality is creativity, becoming. This wave was carried into the theological realm by Charles Hartshorne. Process Theology places stress on Jesus' uniqueness, but in such a way to reject historic Orthodoxy. Christ has a unique relationship to God. According to Norman Pittenger ("*The Last Things"*, 12): [It is] not [a] mechanical union in which the godhead and manhood, or God and that man, are stuck together in some less than personal manner. It is to be conceived after the analogy of personal union such as we know in, say, human marriage . . . . I realize that this analogy is Antiochene . . . in its tendency as well

as in its suggestion of the mode of relationship. Nonetheless it does express admirably the reality in view: that the union of God and man in Jesus is more like what we know of personal relationship . . . than it is like anything else."

Christ is a mere man who was given a "subjective aim," that is to realize Himself. Christ has union with men by virtue of the accomplishment of the "aim." Pittenger notes (*"The Last Things"*, 119): "Let us not ask whether or not Jesus was sinless. Let us ask if we have sufficient material in the gospels to assure us that in them was remembered and reported by the primitive Christian Church there was an outgoing active, and creative goodness."

Using Ritschlian terms, Pittenger wrote ("*The Last Things",* 124): "The greatest single factor in determining that specialty is the way in which, with a high degree of awareness of what was going on, the man Jesus as the center of the event accepted his vocation, made his decision and his subsequent decision, and set about fulfilling the aim which was his own."

N.B. Again, this is a return to the Jesus of the nineteenth century!

V. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to delineate the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century concept of the Person of our Christ. The Germans of the previous century retreated into an "adoptionistic" posture as had the "Radical Theologians" of America. Christ is merely a god-intoxicated, and hence elevated, ideal of the temporal and eschatological hopes ("feelings") of the theologian and philosopher. He is a man who has achieved and the example of the hopes of a struggling humanity. Karl Barth is a gasp of rarified theological air in the interim betwixt the centuries defending Chalcedon, a sinless God-man, and an objective Virgin Birth. Modern theologians have lost the Christ of the Bible by misappropriating and misapplying the rationalistic hermeneutic of the post-Kantian world.

Dr. John D. Hannah
ed., Dr. Robert Dean, Jr.

THE WORK OF CHRIST
Part I: The Ancient Church

Summary:

I. INTRODUCTION.

After theologians discuss the preincarnate nature of Christ and the relationship of the two natures in His incarnate person, it is both customary and logical to turn to the accomplishments of Christ (from person to work). It is for this reason that our topical study now shifts to the doctrine of the atonement. The most fertile period in the delineation of this subject did not commence until the eleventh century with Anselm of Canterbury and proceeded through the Reformation Era. Orr wrote (*Progress*, 210): "We may affirm, therefore, that from Anselm to the Reformation is the classical period for the formation of our doctrine as it appears in our creeds." The purpose of this initial lesson shall focus upon the major explanations of the atonement prior to Anselm. By the "atonement" this writer means to focus upon the accomplishments of the death of Christ, meaning the nature, object, and purpose of His death.

II. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH FATHERS.

The Fathers generally maintain a vagueness, an unspeculative approach to the meaning of Christ's death. Shedd states (*History of Christian Doctrine*, 2, 207): "Examining them, we find chiefly the repetition of Scripture phraseology, without further attempt at an explanatory doctrinal statement." Orr said (*Progress*, 212): "The Apostolic Fathers are profuse in their allusions to redemption through the blood of Christ, though it cannot be said that they do much to aid us in the theological apprehension of this language." A few brief examples will be cited.

A. Clement of Rome (*ca*. A.D. 95)

In four passages Clement, in his letter to the Corinthians, connects the blood of Christ with redemption. In 7:4 he stated, "Let us fix our eyes on the blood of Christ and understand how precious it is unto His Father, because being shed for our salvation is won for the whole world the grace of repentance" (cf. also 12:7 and 49:6). The blood of Christ appears as the means of redemption; it is procured by Christ; it is directed to the Father; and it has won the possibility of human repentance.

N.B. Clement has no doctrine of the atonement, simply scattered undefined, unrelated facts.

B. Ignatius of Antioch (*ca*. A.D. 110)

To the Trallians, he wrote (2.2): Christ "died for us that believing on His death ye might escape death". The Philadelphia church "rejoices in the passion of our Lord 'and is saluted' in the blood of Jesus Christ (*Intro*.)." *To the Smyrnians*, he wrote (6.1): "Even the heavenly beings, if they believe not in the blood of Christ, judgment awaiteth them also." Ignatius' devotion to Christ's cross is as notable as his love for His person (Ephesians 18:1), "My spirit is devoted to the Cross." However, like Clement, he gives no theory of the accomplishments of the atonement.

C. Other Fathers

The Didaché (*ca*. A.D. 140) and Hermas (*ca*. A.D. 130) never connect redemption with the death of Christ. In *The Didaché*, Christ is a revealer of knowledge; in Hermas He is a laborer that reveals a new law. The Epistle of Barnabas connects forgiveness with blood (5:1—"For to this end the Lord endured to deliver His flesh unto corruption that by the remission of sins we might be cleansed which cleansing is through the blood of His sprinkling" and then quotes Isaiah 53. He then said (7, 2), "If then the Son of God suffered that His wound might give us life, let us believe that the Son of God could not suffer except for our sakes." Elsewhere he speaks (14, 5) of Christ redeeming us out "of the darkness of our hearts."

The *Epistle to Diognetus*, (*ca*. A.D. 180) which is collected in the corpus of the writings of the Fathers though it is actually late second century, has a lovely passage (1.2, 9): "And when our iniquity had been fully accomplished, and it had been made perfectly manifest that punishment and death were expected as its recompense, and the season came which God had ordained, when henceforth He should manifest His goodness and power (O to the exceeding great kindness and love of God), He hated us not, neither rejected us, nor bore us malice, but was long-suffering and patient, and in pity for us took upon Himself our sins, and

Himself parted with His Son as a ransom for us, the holy for the lawless, the guileless for the evil, the just for the unjust, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal. For what else but His righteousness would have covered our sins? In whom was it possible for us lawless and ungodly men to have been justified, save only in the Son of God? O the sweet exchange, O the inscrutable creation, O the unexpected benefits; that the iniquity of many should be concealed in One Righteous Man, and the righteousness of One should justify many that iniquitous! Having then in the former time demonstrated the inability of our nature to obtain life, and having now revealed a Saviour able to save even creatures which have no ability, He willed that for both reasons we should believe in His goodness and should regard Him as nurse, father, teacher, counselor, physician, mind, light, honour, glory, strength and life."

N.B. Shedd exclaimed (*History*. 2, 219): "Is not the whole doctrine of vicarious substitution contained in these words?"

III. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE APOLOGISTS.

A. The Western Apologists.

1. Tertullian (*ca*. A.D. 155–240/60) of Carthage's view of the atonement is summarized by Mozley, who wrote (*The Doctrine of the Atonement*, 118): "... Tertullian were destined to have a far-reaching influence. Especially does this apply to the term satisfaction. His legal outlook naturally led him to emphasize the necessity of reparation when an offence had been committed, and he transferred the idea from law to theology. Only he applies it not to the work of Christ, but to repentance and good deeds. In this he is followed by Cyprian. Nevertheless, Tertullian lays great stress on Christ's death, more indeed than his contemporary Irenaeus: denial of the reality of Christ's body means denial of 'the whole weight and fruit of the Christian faith (*nomen*)—the death of Christ.' Christ was 'sent to die,' and this death is sacrificial, springing from Christ's love and the Father's will. Only by His death could our death be destroyed. While, therefore, we are debarred from ascribing to Tertullian later juridical theories, and it is even going too far to speak of his conception as that of 'an expiation provided by Jesus Christ dying for us,' we cannot rule out entirely from his meaning the idea of substitution, and of Christ's death as determined by moral necessities, whether real or imagined, and therefore not to be described as simply object-lesson or self-sacrifice." Tertullian, however, did not attempt to develop a synthesis of his diverse statements! A somewhat classic summary of his Christology/Soteriology is given in *Prescription Against Heretics*, 13: "We believe that there is but one God, who is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced everything from nothing through his Word, sent forth before all things; that this Word

is called the Son, and in the Name of God was seen in divers ways by the patriarchs, was ever heard in the prophets and finally was brought down by the spirit and Power of God the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb, was born of her and lived as Jesus Christ; who thereafter proclaimed a new law and a new promise of the kingdom of heaven, worked miracles, was crucified, on the third day rose again, was caught up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father; that he sent in his place the power of the Holy Spirit to guide believers; that he will come with glory to take the saints up into the fruition of the life eternal and the heavenly promises and to judge the wicked to everlasting fire, after the resurrection of both good and evil with the restoration of their flesh."

N.B. Tertullian did not attempt to delineate the meaning of the Atonement. However, he is the first to use the term "satisfaction" in reference to the death of Christ.

2. **Irenaeus (*ca*. A.D. 140–202)** of Lyons attempted to present a more synthetic interpretation of the death of Christ which has come to us under the title, the Recapitulation Theory. In other words, some progress in the scientific statement of the atonement is being made.

a) Up to this point in the early churchmen the need for the atonement arises from the justice of God, that is also true of Irenaeus. Shedd quoted Dorner (*History*. 2.224-25): "Justice, in the scheme of Irenaeus, stands between the physical attributes of infinity, omnipotence, etc., and the ethical attributes of compassion and love, as a protector and watch. For this reason, God will and can accomplish no work that is spiritual in a merely physical manner; he must win over man by the manifestation of that which is spiritual,—that is, by the highest and fullest possible exhibition of his love. But love is of two kinds, active and passive; the former manifests itself by doing something to its object, the latter by suffering something for it. The highest and fullest manifestation of love would consequently include the passive form of the affection, as well as the active form,—an endurance namely, of suffering in behalf of the object of benevolence, if suffering is necessary from the nature of the case. But suffering is absolutely necessary, because now that sin and guilt have come into the world divine justice cannot be satisfied except by penal infliction. Consequently the manifestation of the love of God takes on a passive as well as active form, and vicariously bears the penalty of guilt in the place of the criminal."

b) Spokesmen in the early church delineated the atonement in relation to the doctrine of Satan; that is, the death of Christ is often represented as ransoming man from the power and slavery of the devil (i.e., Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14). At this point Irenaeus rejects Ransom-to-Satan. Mozley wrote (*Atonement*, 100): "Irenaeus, like the Apologists, thought of men as enslaved by the powers of darkness, and of redemption as freedom from these powers: he goes beyond the Apologists by introducing the idea of the death of Christ as the Act (NOT SATAN'S) and power (NOT SATAN'S) which liberates." In the classic passage on the atonement, there is no mention of Satan (*Against Heresies*. 5.1, 1): "Redeeming us by His own blood in a manner consonant to reason, [He] gave Himself as a redemption for those who had been led into captivity. And since their apostasy tyrannized over us unjustly, and, though we were by nature the property of the omnipotent God, alienated us contrary to nature, rendering us its own disciples, the Word of God, powerful in all things, and not defective with regard to His own justice, did righteously turn against that apostasy, and redeem from it His own property, not by violent means, as the [apostasy] had obtained dominion over us at the beginning, when it insatiably snatched away what was not its own, but by means of persuasion, as became a God of counsel, who does not use violent means to obtain what He desires; so that neither should justice be infringed upon, nor the ancient handiwork of God go to destruction. Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, attaching man to God by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at His coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God,—all the doctrines of the heretics fall to ruin."

N.B. The stress is upon a sacrifice that was both penal and substitutionary.

c) This is not to say that Satan is entirely removed from the soteriological framework because Irenaeus is clear that in what Christ did he overthrew, destroyed the power of Satan; the focus, however, is Godward not satanward.

Christ's death as the second Adam broke Satan's grip over the descendants of the first Adam. Irenaeus is clear at this point (*Prescription*, 16.3): "And not by the aforesaid things alone has the Lord manifested Himself, but [He has done this] also by means of

His passion. For doing away with [the effects of] that disobedience of man which had taken place at the beginning by the occasion of a tree, 'He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;' rectifying that disobedience which had occurred by reason of a tree, through that obedience which was [wrought out] upon the tree [of the cross]."

Again (17): "And therefore in the last times the Lord has restored us into friendship through His incarnation, having become 'the Mediator between God and men:' propitiating indeed for us the Father against whom we had sinned, and canceling (*consolatus*) our disobedience by His own obedience; conferring also upon us the gift of communion with, and subjection to, our Maker."

Again (18, 3): "Therefore, by remitting sins, He did indeed heal man, while He also manifested Himself who He was. For if no one can forgive sins but God alone, while the Lord remitted them and healed men, it is plain that He was Himself the Word of God made the Son of man, receiving from the Father the power of remission of sins; since He was man, and since He was God, in order that since as man He suffered for us, so as God He might have compassion on us, and forgive us our debts, in which we were made debtors to God our Creator. And therefore David said beforehand, 'Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord has not imputed sin;' pointing out thus that remission of sins which follows upon His advent, by which 'He has destroyed the handwriting' of our debt, and 'fastened it to the cross;' so that as by means of a tree we were made debtors to God [so also] by means of a tree we may obtain the remission of our debt."

d) The means through which Christ broke the power of Satan, whereby men are expiated by God, is commonly called the Recapitulation Theory. Men are delivered; justice is satisfied by Christ's life. Irenaeus' principal thought is that to which the word *auakezalaiosis* gives expression; when Christ was incarnate (*Against Heresies*. 3, 18.1): "He summed up in Himself the long roll of the human race, bringing to us a compendious salvation, that what we lost in Adam, namely, being in the image and likeness of God, we might regain in Christ Jesus." He also thinks of Christ as "reconciling us to God by His passion" (5, 16.3). Orr wrote (*Progress*, 213-14): "Irenaeus, the earliest of these Fathers, furnishes us, in the doctrine of the recapitulation, formerly adverted to, with a singularly interesting point of view from which to regard the atonement. Under this idea he brings the thought that

Christ recapitulates in Himself all the stages of human life, and all the experiences of these stages, including those which belong to our state as sinners. He applies the idea first to a redeeming obedience of Christ on our behalf—our redeeming Head passing through the whole curriculum of our experience, and in every part of it rendering a perfect obedience to God. Thus he retracted the disobedience of the fall, our salvation being achieved, as Dorner expresses it, by a recapitulation of the history of mankind *per oppositum*."

N.B. In summary, Irenaeus makes a remarkable advance on the development of the atonement, the first such synthetic delineation. He stresses the need of atonement (i.e., justice of God), the focus of the atonement (i.e., God, not Satan), the means of the atonement (i.e., the life and death of Christ and the results of the atonement) (i.e., Satan defeated, Adam's life restored) [though he errs in that man is not restored to Adam's pre-fall state nor to the image of God]. He does stress satisfaction and forgiveness in Christ!

B. The Eastern Apologists.

Mozley wrote (*Atonement*, 98): "There is little to detain us in the Greek Apologists of the second century. Christ for them is pre-eminently the Teacher of divine truth, and the Savior from the power of demons." A passing exception is Justin Martyr.

1. Justin Martyr's (*ca*. A.D. 100–165) thought is but little developed and the idea of expiation is not prominent. He seems to have little regard for a ransom-to-Satan concept, but his ideas are too infrequently presented to know for sure. He wrote (*Apology*. 1, 32): "After this He was crucified in order that the rest of the prophecy be verified . . . He was to endure, purifying with His own blood those who believe in Him." To Trypho he said (74): "All who know this mystery of salvation (the Passion of Christ) through which He saved them (are) to sing out." And yet to Trypho he connects the Cross and water baptism as cleansing from sin (86): "Christ, by being crucified on the wood of the cross and by sanctifying us by water raises us up who had been immersed in the mire of our mortal sins."

2. Clement of Alexandria (*ca*. A.D. 150–211/16) is perhaps representative of an attempted bridge between Greek philosophy and Christian belief. Mozley wrote (*Atonement*, 102): "In his more important works Clement's soteriology, when judged by any standard that tries to do justice to the New Testament, is seriously defective, and has more in common, now with Stoic, now with Gnostic, than with distinctly Christian conceptions.

Christ is for him Saviour by being the Teacher who endows men with true knowledge, and leads them on to a love which has no desires, and a righteousness whose best fruit is contemplation."

In his work, *Who is the rich man that shall be saved*?, he speaks of a debt paid, Christ a ransom, and death for every man. He wrote (23): "But on the other side hear the Saviour: 'I regenerated thee, who were ill born by the world to death. I emancipated, healed, ransomed thee. I will show thee the face of the good Father God. Call no man thy father on earth. For thee I contended with Death, and paid thy death, which thou owedst for thy former sins and thy unbelief towards God.' "

In Chapter 37 he said, "And about to be offered up and giving Himself a ransom . . . for each of us he gave his life."

C. **Origen (*ca*. A.D. 185–253/4)** of Alexandria's view of the atonement has been roundly debated; most conservative scholars finally saying that he championed a fully-developed Ransom-to-Satan Theory. Mozley wrote (*Atonement*, 104): "No one conclusion can be pronounced exclusively right." Therefore, it appears best to summarize his confused ideas without a label. Harnack understands four concepts in Origen's view (*History*. 2, 367): "Accordingly he propounded views as to the value of salvation and as to the significance of Christ's death on the cross, with a variety and detail rivaled by no theologian before him. He was, as Bigg (209ff.) has rightly noticed, the first Church theologian after Paul's time that gave a detailed theology of sacrifices. We may mention here the most important of his views. (1) The death on the cross along with the resurrection is to be considered as a real, recognizable victory over the demons, inasmuch as Christ (Colossians 2:14) exposed the weakness of his enemies (a very frequent aspect of the matter). (2) The death on the cross is to be considered as an expiation offered to God. Here Origen argued that all sins require expiation, and, conversely, that all innocent blood has a greater or less importance according to the value of him who gives up his life. (3) In accordance with this death of Christ has also a vicarious signification. (4) The death of Christ is to be considered as a ransom paid to the devil."

1. In justification of those who hold that he taught a purely Ransom-to-Satan view, he does speak in places (Matthew 26:8) that Satan through our fall obtained certain rights over us which Christ annuls by ransoming us. Orr wrote (*Progress*, 215): "Too much, however, may be made of these casual utterances, for undoubtedly Origen's prevailing view is that sacrifice was offered to God." Perhaps Mozley gives us the clue to the contradictory Origen when he wrote (104-05): "Whenever Origen dealt with any passage in Scripture, actually or conceivedly bearing on the redemptive Work of Christ, he did it the fullest possible justice on its own lines; but how all these lines were to meet in one centre of unity was a problem that

he never set himself to solve, and which—for his writings at least—may be regarded as unsolvable."

2. A more seriously defective point in his concept of the atonement is that punishment for sin, since that punishment is disciplinary and not judicial, is not endless. Shedd wrote (*History*. 2, 234): "A third opinion of Origen conducing to a defective view of the atonement was, that the punishment of sin is not endless. This opinion flows logically from the preceding one that punishment is not penal, but disciplinary. For an eternal suffering for sin, from the nature of the case, cannot consist with the amendment of the sinner. When, therefore, owing to the exceeding strength of human sinfulness, punishment has so lost its reforming power that even if continued forever no change of character could be wrought by it, God sends the Redeemer who by his death in a mysterious way breaks this power of sin, and thereby restores him to holiness. The death of Christ is thus a manifestation of love alone, and not of love and justice in union."

IV. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE THEOLOGIANS.

It might seem reasonable that since theology proper, Christology, and soteriology (nature of man, free grace) are so fully delineated in this era, that the atonement would be similarly clarified. Such was not the case even in Augustine; the atonement was not a focus of discussion.

A. Athanasius of Alexandria (*ca*. A.D. 295–373)

Athanasius appears to have a two-fold understanding of the atonement: First, he focuses upon a restitutional view of the atonement (i.e., Christ took our humanity to give us what we lost, God's image) and, second, a penal substitution.

1. The human race, being under condemnation, is bound to sin and unable to set itself free. This judgment is judicial and God must be appeased for God's veracity is held in question. He wrote (*On the Incarnation*, 6): "For this cause, then, death having gained upon men, and corruption abiding upon them, the race of man was perishing; the rational man made in God's image was disappearing, and the handiwork of God was in process of dissolution.
2. For death, as I said above, gained from that time forth a legal hold over us, and it was impossible to evade the law, since it had been laid down by God because of the transgression, and the result was in truth at once monstrous and unseemly.
3. For it were monstrous, firstly, that god, having spoken, should prove false—that, when once He had ordained that man, if he transgressed the commandment, should die the death, after the transgression man should

not die, but God's word should be broken. For God would not be true, if when He had said we should die, man died not.
4. Again, it were unseemly that creatures once made rational, and having partaken of the Word, should go to ruin, and turn again toward non-existence by the way of corruption.
5. For it were not worthy of God's goodness that the things He had made should waste away, because of the deceit practiced on men by the devil.
6. Especially it was unseemly to the last degree that God's handicraft among men should be done away, either because of their own carelessness, or because of the deceitfulness of evil spirits.
7. So, as the rational creatures were wasting and such works in course of ruin, what was God in his goodness to do? Suffer corruption to prevail against them and death to hold them fast? And where were the profit of their having been made, to begin with? For better were they not made, than once made, left to neglect and ruin.
8. For neglect reveals weakness, and not goodness on God's part—if, that is, He allows His own work to be ruined when once He had made it—more so than if he had never made man at all.
9. For if He had not made them, none could impute weakness; but once He had made them, and created them out of nothing, it were most monstrous for the work to be ruined, and that before the eyes of the Maker.
10. It was, then, out of the question to leave men to the current of corruption; because this would be unseemly, and unworthy of God's goodness."

N.B. Athanasius' restitutionalism is much like Irenaeus' recapitulation, but the former goes beyond the latter.

2. Athanasius stresses that Christ's death was both penal and substitutionary (he denies a ransom-to-Satan). He stated (*Incarnation*, 8): "For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God comes to our realm, howbeit he was not far from us before. For no part of Creation is left void of him: He has filled all things everywhere, remaining present with His own Father. But He comes in condescension to shew lovingkindness upon us, and to visit us.
2. And seeing the race of rational creatures in the way to perish, and death reigning over them by corruption; seeing, too, that the threat against transgression gave a firm hold to the corruption which was upon us, and that it was monstrous that before the law was fulfilled it should fall through: seeing, once more, the unseemliness of what was come to pass: that the things whereof He Himself was Artificer were passing away: seeing, further, the exceeding wickedness of men, and how by little and little they had increased it to an intolerable pitch against themselves: and seeing, lastly, how all men were under penalty of death: He took pity on our race, and had mercy on our infirmity, and condescended to our

> corruption, and, unable to bear that death should have the mastery—lest the creature should perish, and the Father's handiwork in men be spent for nought—He takes unto Himself a body, and that of no different sort from ours.
> 3. For He did not simply will to become embodied, or will merely to appear. For if He will merely to appear, He was able to effect His divine appearance by some other and higher means as well. But He takes a body of our kind, and not merely so, but from a spotless and stainless virgin, knowing not a man, a body clean and in very truth pure from intercourse of men. For being Himself might, and Artificer of everything, He prepares the body in the Virgin as a temple unto Himself, and makes it His very own as an instrument, in it manifested, and in it dwelling.
> 4. And thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death he gave it over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father—doing this, moreover, of His lovingkindness, to the end that, firstly, all being held to have died in Him, the law involving the ruin of men might be undone (inasmuch as its power was fully spent in the Lord's body, and had no longer holding-ground against men, his peers), and that, secondly, whereas men had turned toward corruption, He might turn them again toward incorruption, and quicken them from death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of the Resurrection, banishing death from them like straw from the fire."
>
> Again (*Incarnation*, 9): "He surrendered it to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father . . . in order that by all dying in Him the law with respect to the corruption of mankind might be abolished . . . . The Logos of God, being above all, by offering His own temple and bodily instrument as a substitution for the life of all, satisfied all that was required by His death."

B. Cyril of Jerusalem (*ca.* A.D. 315–86)

Cyril is quite clear, even opponents do not deny it, that the death of Christ is both expiatory and substitutionary; it satisfies the wrath of God and is endured in the place of sinner. He wrote (*Catecatical Lectures*. 13, 2): "Do not wonder that the whole world was redeemed, for it was no mere man, but the Only-begotten son of God who died for it. The sin of one man, Adam, availed to bring death to the world; if by one man's offense death reigned from the world, why should not life reign all the more 'from the justice of one'? If Adam and Eve were cast out of paradise because of the tree from which they ate, should not believers more easily enter into paradise because of the Tree of Jesus? If the first man, fashioned out of the earth, brought universal death, shall not He who fashioned him, being the Life, bring everlasting life? If Phineas by his zeal in slaying the evildoer appeased

the wrath of God, shall not Jesus, who slew no other, but 'gave himself a ransom for all,' take away God's wrath against man?"

Again (13, 33): "The Savior endured all this, 'making peace through the blood of the cross, for all things whether in the heavens or on the earth.' For we were enemies of God through sin, and God had decreed the death of the sinner. One of two things, therefore, was necessary, either that God, in His truth, should destroy all men, or that in His loving-kindness, He should remit the sentence. But see the wisdom of God; He preserved the truth of His sentence and the exercise of His loving-kindness. Christ took our sins 'in his body upon the tree; that we, having died to sin,' by His death 'might live to justice.' He who died for us was of no small worth; He was no material sheep; He was no mere man; he was more than an angel, He was God made man. The iniquity of sinners was not as great as the justice of Him who died for them; the sins we committed were not as great as the justice He wrought, who laid down His life for us; He laid it down when He willed, and took it up again when He willed. He did not lay down His life perforce, or yield up His spirit against His will, as you may learn from His words to His Father: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' I commend it, to take it up again. 'And having said this, he expired,' not for long, since He quickly rose again from the dead."

C. Gregory of Nyssa (d. A.D. 395)

This famous Cappadocian retreated back to the remnants of Ransom-to-Satan Theory, as perhaps in Origen.

D. Gregory of Nazianzus (A.D. 329–89)

This Gregory, a friend of his namesake from Nyssa, repudiated with scorn the idea of a ransom paid to Satan. He wrote (*Oration*. 45, 22): "Now we are to examine another act and dogma, neglected by most people, but in my judgment well worth inquiring into. To Whom was that Blood offered that was shed for us, and why was It shed? I mean the precious and famous blood of our God and High priest and Sacrifice. We were detained in bondage by the Evil One, sold under sin, and receiving pleasure in exchange for wickedness. Now, since a ransom belongs only to him who holds in bondage, I ask to whom was this offered, and for what cause? If to the Evil One, fire upon the outrage? If the robber receives ransom, not only from God, but a ransom which consists of God Himself, and has such an illustrious payment for his tyranny, a payment for whose sake it would have been right for him to have left us alone altogether. But if to the Father, I ask first, now? For it was not by Him that we were being oppressed; and next, On what principle did the Blood of His Only begotten son delight the Father, Who would not receive even Isaac, when he was being offered by his Father, but changed the sacrifice, putting a ram in the place of the human victim? Is it not evident that the Father accepts Him, but neither asked for Him nor demanded

Him; but on account of the Incarnation, and because Humanity must be sanctified by the Humanity of God, that He might deliver us Himself, and overcome the tyrant, and draw us to Himself by the mediation of His Son, Who also arranged this to the honour of the Father, Whom it is manifest that He obeys in all things? So much we have said of Christ; the greater part of what we might say shall be reverenced with silence. But that brazen serpent was hung up as a remedy for the biting serpents, not as a type of Him that suffered for us, but as a contrast; and it saved those that looked upon it, not because they believed it to live, but because it was killed, and killed with it the powers that were subject to it, being destroyed as it deserved. And what is the fitting epitaph for it from us? 'O death, where is thy sting? O grace, where is thy victory?' Thou art overthrown by the Cross; thou art slain by Him who is the Giver of life; Thou art without breath, dead, without motion, even though thou keepest the form of a serpent lifted up on high on a pole."

Beyond this he speaks of an expiatory substitution made to God to satisfy His judicial demands. He said (*Oration*. 30, 20): "He sets us free, who were held captive under sin giving Himself a Ransom for us, the Sacrifice to make expiation to the world." In (*Oration*. 30, 5) he said: "For my sake He was called a curse, who destroyed my curse; and sin, who taketh away the sin of the world and became a new Adam to take the place of the old just so he makes my disobedience His own as Head of the whole body."

E. Augustine (A.D. 354–430)

Augustine did not speak to the issue of the atonement except in a tangential manner while discussing the Trinity; thus, it is not fair to press his words. Having said this, however, these concepts emerge.

1. He does speak of mankind as being debtors in the devil's power with references to the devil's rights (this does not to me appear to necessarily embrace a Ransom-to-Satan theory of the atonement).

2. Augustine seems abundantly clear on the penal, substitutionary significance of Christ's death; it is an expiation to satisfy God though he never uses the term "satisfaction". He wrote of a penal sacrifice to God (*Enchiridion*, 33): "And so the human race was lying under a just condemnation, and all men were the children of wrath. Of which wrath it is written: 'All our days are passed away in Thy wrath; we spend our years as a tale that is told. Of which wrath also Job said 'Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.' Of which wrath also the Lord Jesus said: 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth on the son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.; For every man is born with it; wherefore the apostle said: 'We were by nature the children

of wrath, even as others.' Now, as men were lying under this wrath by reason of their original sin, and as this original sin was the more heavy and deadly in proportion to the number and magnitude of the actual sins which were added to it, there was need for a Mediator, that is, for a reconciler, who, by the offering of one sacrifice, of which all the sacrifices of the law and the prophets were types, should take away this wrath. Wherefore the apostle said: 'For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.' Now when God is said to be angry, we do not attribute to Him such a disturbed feeling as exists in the mind of an angry man; but we call his just displeasure against sin by the name 'anger,' a word transferred by analogy from human emotions. But our being reconciled in God through a Mediator, and receiving the Holy Spirit, so that we who were enemies are made sons ('For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God'): this is the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Again (40, 1): "Begotten and conceived, then, without any indulgence of carnal lust, and therefore bringing with Him no original sin, and by the grace of God joined and united in a wonderful and unspeakable way in one person with the Word, the Only-begotten of the Father, a son by nature, not by grace, and therefore having no sin of His own; nevertheless, on account of the likeness of sinful flesh in which He came, He was called sin, that He might be sacrificed to wash away sin. For under the Old Covenant, sacrifices for sin were called sins. And He, of whom all these sacrifices were types and shadows, was Himself truly made sin. Hence the apostle, after saying, 'We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God,' forthwith adds: 'for He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' He does not say, as some incorrect copies read, 'He who knew no sin died sin for us,' as if Christ had Himself sinned for our sakes; but he said, 'Him who knew no sin,' that is, Christ, God, to whom we are to be reconciled, 'hath made to be sin for us,' that is, hath made Him a sacrifice for our sins, by which we might be reconciled to God. He, then, being made sin, just as we are made righteousness (our righteousness being not our own, but God's, not in ourselves, but in Him); He being made sin, not His own, but ours, not in Himself, but in us, showed, by the likeness of sinful flesh in which He was crucified, that though sin was not in Him, yet that in a certain sense He died to sin, by dying in the flesh which was the likeness of sin; and that although He Himself had never lived the old life of sin, yet by His resurrection He typified our new life springing up out of the old death in sin."

In the treatise on the Trinity he said (4, 14): "They do not understand, that not even the proudest of spirits themselves could rejoice in the honor of sacrifices, unless a true sacrifice was due to the one true God, in whose

> stead they desire to be worshipped; and this cannot be rightly offered except by a holy and righteous priest; nor unless that which is offered be received from those for whom it is offered; and unless also it be without fault, so that it may be offered for cleansing the faulty. This is at least all desire who wish sacrifice to be offered for themselves to God. Who then is so righteous and holy a priest as the only Son of God, who had no need to purge His own sins by sacrifice, neither original sins, nor those which are added by human life? And what could be so fitly chosen by men to be offered for them as human flesh? And what so fit for this immolation as mortal flesh? And what so clear for cleansing the faults of mortal men as the flesh born in and from the womb of a virgin, without any infection of carnal concupiscence? And what could be so acceptably offered and taken, as the flesh of our sacrifice, made the body of our priest? In such wise that, whereas four things are to be considered in every sacrifice,—to whom it is offered, by whom it is offered, what is offered, for whom it is offered,—the same One and true Mediator Himself, reconciling us to God by the sacrifice of peace, might remain one with Him to whom he offered, might make those one in Himself for whom He offered, Himself might be in one both the offerer and the offering."

> Mozley wrote a fitting conclusion to Augustine when he stated (*Atonement*, 123): "One feels that had the occasion of great controversy been present, Augustine might have anticipated Anselm, and given to Western Christendom such a synthesis of all the various elements of his thought as would have constituted an authoritative soteriology; but the battle with Pelagianism, though really involving questions of vital moment in connection with the value and effects of the death of Christ, concentrated on other points."

V. CONCLUSION.

The focus of this lesson has been on the development of the doctrine of the work of Christ, particularly the atonement, in the Ancient Church. Indications of a Ransom-to-Satan view are evident in the early theologians with its clearest expositor being Gregory of Nyssa. The Fathers demonstrate strong evidence of a partial, if not total, rejection from this position to a penal satisfaction theory as evident in Irenaeus (through the Recapitulation mode), Origen, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Augustine. However, the most productive period in the delineation of the meaning of the atonement is yet before us from Anselm through the Protestant Reformation.