

B. B. Warfield on the False View of the Love of God Underlying the Modern Theories of Christ's Atonement

“To such a pass have we been brought by the prevailing gospel of the indiscriminate love of God. For it is here that we place our finger on the root of the whole modern assault upon the doctrine of an expiatory atonement. In the attempt to give effect to the conception of indiscriminate and undiscriminating love as the basal fact of religion, the entire Biblical teaching as to atonement has been ruthlessly torn up. If God is love and nothing but love, what possible need can there be of an atonement? Certainly such a God cannot need propitiating. Is not He the All-Father? Is He not yearning for His children with an unconditioned and unconditioning eagerness which excludes all thought of ‘obstacles to forgiveness’? What does He want but—just His children? Our modern theorists are never weary of ringing the changes on this single fundamental idea ... God is continually reaching longing arms out of heaven toward men: oh, if men would only let themselves be gathered unto the Father’s eager heart! ... And the indiscriminate benevolencism which has taken captive so much of the religious thinking of our time is a conception not native to Christianity, but of distinctly heathen quality. As one reads the pages of popular religious literature, teeming as it is with ill-considered assertions of the general Fatherhood of God, he has an odd feeling of transportation back into the atmosphere of, say, the decadent heathenism of the fourth and fifth centuries, when the gods were dying, and there was left to those who would fain cling to the old ways little beyond a somewhat saddened sense of the *benignitas numinis* [kind or benevolent divinity]. The *benignitas numinis*! How studded the pages of those genial old heathen are with the expression; how suffused their repressed life is with the conviction that the kind Deity that dwells above will surely not be hard on men toiling here below! How shocked they are at the stern righteousness of the Christian’s God, who loomed before their startled eyes as He looms before those of the modern poet in no other light than as ‘the hard God that dwelt in Jerusalem’! Surely the Great Divinity is too broadly good to mark the peccadillos of poor puny man; surely they are the objects of His compassionate amusement rather than of His fierce reprobation. Like Omar Khayyam’s pot, they were convinced, before all things, of their Maker that ‘He’s a good fellow and ’twill all be well.’ The query cannot help rising to the surface of our minds whether our modern indiscriminate benevolencism goes much deeper than this. Does all this one-sided proclamation of the universal Fatherhood of God import much more than the heathen *benignitas numinis*?” (*Works*, vol. 9, pp. 293-295).