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ARTICLE III.

THE DEFINITION AND DOCTRINE OF GOD IN
THE PRAYER-BOOK.

BY THE REVEREND BURNETT THEO. STAFFORD.

"We are not . . . masters over our beliefs, but draw our conclusions from obvious premises with unerring certainty, not gilded by the volitions, which here count for but little, and play an arbitrary part, if any. Belief is responsible from the standpoint of accepted premises, and not on the ground of conclusions drawn. The reasoning faculty is true to itself."

DOCTOR AUGUST DRÄHMES.

THE truth set forth in this statement has abundant confirmatory evidence in life and philosophy. That which unites or divides men is found to be, in the last analysis, a matter of definition. The fundamental assumptions at the source of Chinese civilization are quite other than those out of which come the culture and strength of Anglo-Saxon life. The direct influence of definitions in men's minds upon their work is beyond dispute. In the writings of Quintilian, one may constantly detect the social and political flavor always coming from the soil of despotism. His idea of society was despotic, and of any other he had not the first notion. The pure Calvinistic idea of God permeated Puritan society from center to circumference. It touched and colored every thought and institution, whether secular or religious, and accordingly gave to everything a sandstone grit and granite hardness. The Hildebrandine development of the papacy came out of an entirely false definition of the church, and what should be its normal progress through the world. The definition of the

state to which both Greeks and Romans tenaciously held to the very last compelled, the one to either execute or banish its greatest men, and the other to vent persecuting fury on Christian congregations all over the Empire. The idea of government held by Charles I. was expressed by "kingly prerogative." It was one of the baleful political maxims of the Cæsars bestowed to the modern world. The definition on which rested the Petition of Rights and the Grand Remonstrance was the old Teutonic one of freedom as it had been enriched and made wonderfully strong by Hebrew thought and the Christian doctrine of man. Definitions made real in the life of a people produce after their kind. They give an enduring solidity, chiefly seen in its capacity for unlimited growth, or they cause arrested development and decay. The natural resources of South America are in every way equal, if not in some marked particulars superior, to those of North. That which has produced the vast superiority of the civilization of the latter over the former, has been the social, political, and religious definitions which have entered into the character of her people. These have produced intelligence, self-reliance, courage, and energy—the personal furnishings of men—such as cause them to rejoice in the opportunity to tame the forest, make the desert very fruitful, and enrich the world with the gold and silver of the mountains.

Definitions out of which has come attempted reform, have counted for much. In the end they have proved to be the accurate gage of success or failures. Beyond a doubt, no man ever appealed to Italians with such persuasive and powerful eloquence as Savonarola. All that he said was true: it was recognized as such. He sought social and religious reform along the lines of the papacy. The old definitions he allowed to live on in the individual and the social body. This

was the source of his failure. After his execution, the old definitions asserted their presence and power, and the old abuses and sins speedily reappeared. Luther rejected and smashed the definitions on which the papacy rested. In the minds and hearts of his countrymen, he planted a new set of social and religious ones. He caught somewhat the profound but simple meaning of the Apostle's words, "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." With this truth anchored in the souls of Germans, a new faith and life came to have enduring form and lines. For the maintenance of both, the *fatherland* gave of its treasure and blood for thirty long, terrible years.

At the bottom of every theology, whether pagan or Christian, is a definition of God. This serves as the source of its being, and at the same time furnishes the fixed lines of its unfolding. Attempts to fasten on conclusions not germane in the definition have never been satisfactory. It has been the repetition of the unsuccessful experiment of putting new wine into old bottles. The criticism that theology should be reconstructed, so as to be made distinctly Christian, is only another way of saying that the definition of God, out of which has come this defective system, has elements in it not in any way Christian. It is not at all to the point to say that, since a definition of God is in the Bible, it is therefore Christian. The Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments alone give to men the true and glorious knowledge of the ever-living and merciful God; but during the entire period of their marvelous evolution the Canaanite, with his accursed notions, "was in the land." That affirmed by Balak, and out of which his action came, when he sent for Balaam to come and curse Israel, is heathenish to the core. So was the notion of King Saul, when, in opposition to the express command of Samuel,

he reserved for sacrifice the best of the Amalekite cattle. Of the same sort was the theological position of the priests in Isaiah's time who conducted the temple service on the supposition that God would hear, bestow mercy and protection, because of their many sacrifices and much incense.

Different expressions in the Old Testament define the nature and character of God. To Abraham, he is *El-Elohim*—The Strong One. Moses told the Hebrews that *I Am That I Am*—The Eternal One—had sent him. He is *Jehovah*—The God of Righteousness. In times of military conquest he is *The Lord of Hosts*. When social and moral issues were being worked out he is called *The Holy One of Israel*. These names are brilliant points of dazzling light, marking the progress of revelation and the growth of human ability to understand it. In one exceptional case the nature and property of God were made distinctly clear before *the fullness of time had come*. To his faithful servant, Moses, He spoke *face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend*. On the top of cloud-obscured Sinai *the Lord descended in the cloud and stood before him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed: The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin and that will by no means clear the guilty*. This early and complete revelation of the divine nature and character is the formative truth in the words and work of Hebrew legislator, judge, king, psalmist, and prophet. The teaching of all was given full and final expression by the Divine Man of Galilee. He said, "God is love." That is his name; that defines him. Love universal and imperial is the *I Am That I Am*, the *First and the Last*, originating cause of all things "visible and invisible." There

was nothing before it; there is nothing beyond it by which it may be limited or changed. Love is on the throne, and beneath the reach of its constraining power there is nothing at all. There is no place or person too great or too small to escape its touch. Love is *all, and in all*. This is the Christian definition of God.

That this is the unvarying definition of the Prayer-book and out of which its teaching comes, its own words will best show. The beginning of the last prayer for Ash Wednesday (p. 51) is this: "O God, whose nature and property is ever to have mercy and forgive, receive our humble petitions." This tells the whole blessed story. In himself God is love, and therefore the necessary manifestation of himself is first of all in mercy and forgiveness to a world of sinners. The collect for the eleventh Sunday after Trinity (p. 166) begins thus: "O God, who declarest thy almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity. . . ." In the communion office the spiritual teaching of the church is gathered up to make it the supreme part of Christian worship. In it is found the heart and vitalizing truth of the Prayer-book. For the present, one extract sufficiently serves. Those are wonderful words of sincere humility and confident trust in the prayer of humble access (p. 236): "We do not presume to come to this Thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our righteousness, but in Thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Thy table, but Thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy." Further citations are not needful. The nature of God is manifested in his property; that is his character. Its first and essential quality is mercy and forgiveness. These are ever the products of love. From this definition, that God is love, comes all Christian doctrine.

The nature of love is to cherish those belonging to it and their interests. They are never absent from its thoughts. They may forget love and its privileges, but it never forgets them. *Love seeketh not her own* apart from the object of her desire. Her full joy of satisfaction is had when those loved appreciatingly receive that freely bestowed, and so become partakers of her enthusiasm. If her gifts are valued, love rejoices, since thus has the way been opened for a larger giving. If they are neglected or spurned, love in patience works and waits for the manifestation of a better mind and spirit. And not only so, all of her persuasive kindness and discipline are brought to bear so as to brood the birth of personal appreciation. *Love suffers long and is kind* for the sake of reclaiming the wayward one. Moreover, in so doing she is true to herself. It were impossible that it should be otherwise. She must give of her gracious strength. Love must rescue her children from self-will and sin. And so it is that the fundamental doctrine of Holy Scripture and the Prayer-book is that of the Incarnation. St. Paul's statement is definite and conclusive: *God was in Christ* (God in Incarnation) *reconciling the world unto himself*. A stronger presentation of the same fact could hardly have been made than that of St. John: *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*, that all men might receive of his redeeming grace. In a most realistic way he testifies: *That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life— . . . declare we unto you.*

The God of love taking upon himself the form of a servant, and using human nature to make himself personally known and understood; manifesting himself along the lines of human power to exalt and purify it; willingly subjecting himself to the common and every-day experiences of men,

so as to know their meaning; tasting to the full human suffering, in order to make clear the way of victory over it; and touched at every point by human ambition, for the sake of transforming and glorifying it,—this, the doctrine of the Incarnation, is the first and formative one of the Prayer-book. Its history is that of revelation. It is the germinating source of all sound moral reasoning and spiritual growth. It constitutes the constructive and explanatory principle of all Christian theology.

“ . . . the acknowledgment of God in Christ,
Accepted by the reason, solves for thee
All questions of the earth and out of it.”¹

In no sense at all is it the projection of speculative thought; neither is it dependent upon it. In the sacred writings there is no attempt to explain it. It is simply stated as fact. All the doctrinal conclusions concerning this matter deducible from the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds have the same characteristic. One of the most singularly interesting facts of the church's last intellectual struggle with a determined paganism is that the Nicene fathers simply stated, in a slightly extended way, the basis of sound doctrine embodied in its predecessor, the Apostolic symbol. Time has shattered the arguments of this “exalted paganism,” while the fact of the Incarnation is now, as ever before, the unfailing source of victorious hope and strength to those accepting it. In the Prayer-book there is not a collect or prayer which in some way does not recognize and emphasize this fact. In all of its various offices it is suggested and set forth in some clear way. In that superbly beautiful and inspiring Christian hymn, the “Te Deum,” always said or sung at *morning prayer*, it is thus stated:—

“When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man,
Thou didst humble thyself to be born of a Virgin.”

¹ Browning, *A Death in the Desert*.

The statement that the Incarnation was the normal and logical manifestation of love, needs further comment. "*God so loved the world*" is the explanation of St. John. With St. Paul the same truth is expressed in the most intense, because personal, way; *I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* The motive and propelling cause was love itself. It was neither an after-thought nor an expedient. It was the final and fullest expression of love in Personality, which Moses and the prophets had foreseen and had felt its power. The manifestation was in time and place, so as to form an essential part of human history and moral experience. With its beginning and completion, sin was overcome; but had there been no sin, the God of love would have come to his children, as they toiled in obedience to law and the urgings of conscience, to show them the blessedness of heavenly fellowship, the constant privilege of verified and nourishing grace, and the certain goal of their striving in beatific victory. Again, that which originated and sustained all this was the love which had been before the foundations of the world were laid.

"Velled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the Incarnate Deity,
Pleased as Man with men to dwell:
Jesus, our Emanuel."

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness. The unchanging ordinance of creation, whether of matter or of spirit, is that life comes from the light. Into the midst of men's uncertainty of the meaning and the end of life, the Divine Definition has come; for the depressing sense of orphanage in the universe, the Almighty Father's tender compassion and solicitude have been made fully known; for realized inability of one's self to contend

successfully against the deceptive and tireless attack of evil, has come the privilege of heavenly comradeship, which shall be the unfailing source of overcoming power *even unto the end of the world*. Love has been enthroned in the midst of men as they trade and recreate and hope and toil, and so has the world been redeemed.

But more still. By the light shining in the darkness, sin has been dispelled. The power of sin and death were shattered and broken. Death was met in its own realm and conquered. The Christ says of his work: *I have overcome the world*. St. John declares: *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil*. Such is the direct and positive teaching of the collect for the sixth Sunday after the Epiphany: "O God, whose blessed Son was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil, and make us sons of God and heirs of eternal life . . ." (p. 79). The forces of evil which had enslaved and tortured and divided and destroyed humanity were conquered and banished. At the beginning of the final act in the redemption of the world, and with the terrible shadow of the cross distinct and bending over him, the Christ thus defines the struggle and its issue: *Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out*. With this overthrow of the power of evil, the law of the divine righteousness henceforth marks the one line of action every one must accept and follow to become and remain citizens of the Kingdom of God. So it is that the words, *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*, have been verified over and again in the lives of both believer and scoffer. With the one they have come in the judgment of salvation; with the other, the judgment has been unto condemnation.¹

¹ In all shades of Calvinistic theology, much is said of some

The sacrifice of the Christ was perfect. He gave himself. More than one's life may not be given. It is the all, so that he "made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world" (p. 235). The ends of justice were entirely met, since justice is love contending with sin for its overthrow and the deliverance of its victim. All the demands of moral government were sustained, since he touched and stirred to the deepest depths the pure emotions of humanity. There may be a no more moving appeal. It is indefinable in the symbols of thought and the theological definitions of the schools. St. John attempts to measure it by an exclamation: *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.* With St. Paul its strongest presentation is its statement: *While we were yet sinners Christ died for us.* This atoning love is the one and only ground of hope

"theory of the atonement." Any theory is the attempt to explain some recognized fact or condition. The theory of the Glacial Period seeks to explain the origin, progress, and conclusion of this chief phenomenon of this period. A theory is needful where mystery is to be removed. In the "redemption of the world by the atonement of sacrifice" there is no mystery at all. The originating cause was the love which had ever been in the bosom of the Almighty Father. So Jesus Christ testifies and teaches. The one having a definition of God which is considered more fundamental than that he is love, is by it prevented from grasping the fact, that love, because of its own self-contained need, must always and everywhere give the very fullest redemptive expression of itself. This fact can find no lodging-place in the intellect in bondage to the old heathen lines of theological definition. The progress of the redemption of the world is recorded in the four Gospels, and he who will may read. The conclusion was the complete conquering of all the powers of death and hell: they were crushed and cast out by the Son of God and the Son of Man. So says the record. Assuredly, there is no mystery here needing a theory to work out an explanation. The explanation of the Christ is the demonstration of accomplished fact.

and confidence for the sons of men that they may meet all their enemies to overthrow them. For *neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.*

Because of the Incarnation, the principle of reconciliation by sacrifice is the operative and constructive one with the individual and nations, as both move through time and opportunity for the accomplishment of allotted work. The great Apostle speaks of *the fellowship of his sufferings* and of the *filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ*. The same by St. Peter: *Ye are called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps*. There is no moral teaching more clearly and often demonstrated in the actual course of history. The growing recognition of the obligations imposed by this law of life makes plain England's advance into social and political greatness. "The white man's burden" she has borne, so as to elevate with the magic spell of her freedom many dusky millions. The rejection of the privileges of serving others explains the decadence and utter humiliation of Spain. Washington suffered with his soldiers and for his country, and so has his glory grown. Napoleon had a marvelous power of moving men to suffer for gaining his selfish ends. At the last, when his personality could no longer be obscured, even the swarthy Mamaluke, who for years had slept across his door, deserted him in silent Oriental disgust.

In modern society the recognition and application of this teaching of the cross is wide and particular. Just one instance. Every year it causes increasing millions of money to be given for the magnificent work of elevating all sorts and conditions of men into a more enjoyable state of existence and

usefulness. It is just as imperial now as when stated by the Galilean, that there shall be no respecting of persons. In the home, it is the source of the most satisfying joys and rewards that may come to any heart. The mother who freely and gladly gives her best years of thought and strength that her children may enter life's work adequately equipped with clean energy and ambition is sure to have them rise up and call her blessed, when the cords of gray appear. Before the Christ ascended on high, he said: *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.* Since in his humiliation and suffering he overcame and cast out selfishness in all forms, the logical and normal conclusion was the resurrection. And so it is that the church, as she comes in the course of the Christian year to her great feast, petitions in the *collect* for the Sunday next before Easter: "Mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of his patience and also be made partakers of his resurrection" (p. 96).

But Divine Love must nourish its own; it must feed them with itself both to keep and advance them in the life of grace. Human souls must be fed with the bread which comes down from heaven. There are minor ways of accomplishing this. The chief and Christ-appointed way is Holy Communion. Its root idea is sacramental, and therefore constitutes the supreme act of Christian worship. The presence and active operation of the sacramental principle in the religious articulations of men has been constant. This is so because of the inborn moral instincts requiring it as the one appropriate means of expression. These inherent spiritual cravings may be neglected; their suppression may be attempted, but, sooner or later, they make their presence known and their demands acknowledged. For example: there are to-day bodies of

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Christians who, not so many years ago, rejected with ardor all thought of the Lord's Supper as sacramental, with whom to-day the word is in common use. The fact is that, between the realm of spirit and human beings, there has to be some copula—some sacrament of connection. The sacrament of friendship is the handshake with its kindly pressure; the sacrament to the soldier on the field of battle is the flag, appealing to his heroism and endurance by suggesting the interests of home and native land. Many fine speculations ever and anon have been set forth concerning the laws of pure spirit, and their acceptance urged. On the hard plain of every-day reality these flights of fancy have shown themselves vain and abortive. Nothing at all is known of this realm of existence, if indeed it exists; and what is more, there are no standards of measurement by which it can be tested. The post-resurrection history of our Lord is the only suggestive piece of evidence. But in this state he had a body. The disciples saw him do strange and inexplicable things. He passed right through bolted doors and thick stone walls; time and space were *nil* to him. They wondered in great amazement, and that is all we can do.

For the ends of salvation, believers must be connected with the source of all grace and hope and forgiveness. The realization of the thought and desire of the Christ is that men have the more abundant life, and so he said: *Except ye eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.* This feeding on him reaches its largest fulfillment in a constant indwelling and fellowship. *He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him.* He explained to his disciples that in the ordinary sense human flesh and blood could do them no good. There is to be an inflowing of his glorified manhood into believing

souls. As understood and distinctly taught by St. Paul, this supreme privilege is presented and only realized in its largeness in the Lord's Supper. It is the communion—the sacrificial partaking of the ascended Christ. For, says the Apostle: *The cup of blessing which we bless (consecrate) is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?* The Apostle's thought is just as clear and definite as language can make it. On the night of the betrayal our Lord took bread and said: *This is my body*, and the cup, *This is my blood*. The expressions are used purely in the sacramental sense. He was alive and stood before them, and yet they were to partake of him: they were to eat his spiritual body and drink his spiritual life, which in Incarnation were sacrificed for them and the sins of the whole world. The immolation and death on the Cross in no sense are to be considered as the origin and sole measure of this sacrifice. It is found in every hour of the earthly history of Almighty God. And according to the appointment of our Divine Lord, the consecrated Bread and Wine serve as the channels through which the glorified Lord now comes to believing souls. They constitute the ever-living and perpetual Eucharistic Sacrifice. But more than this; the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper absolutely forbid the Romish exaggeration of *transubstantiation*. His literal flesh and blood were not given them to eat. The thought in its mildest form is both shocking and degrading. The fact they set forth is the ever-living and glorious one of Divine Love stooping to redeem, by its suffering, from the power of evil and sin. It is the presentation and perpetuation of the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. In the Incarnation the human flesh and blood of the Christ were the sacrament through which the *Word* was manifested. The di-

vinely chosen and appointed bread and wine are the sacrament of the body and blood of the glorified One, through which now he comes in the supreme way to the souls of all believers. This doctrine is clearly expressed by Irenæus, who was the pupil of Polycarp, who in turn was the pupil of St. John. He says: "It is no longer common bread, but Eucharistic (Thanksgiving), composed of two things, both an earthly and an heavenly."

"Most patient Saviour, who canst love us still!
And by this food, so awful and so sweet,
Deliver us from every touch of ill."

This was the Catholic and Apostolic teaching of the English Reformers, as distinguished from that of the Romanists, and also from the Genevan theologians. Citations regarding the latter are not needful. The following, from Archdeacon Hammond (1659), makes clear their teaching as regards the former: "The Protestants of the Church of England believe and reverence, as much as any, the sacrifice of the Eucharist as the most substantial and essential act of our religion . . . and herein abhor or condemn nothing, but the corruptions and mutilations which the Church of Rome, without care of conforming themselves to the Universal Church, have admitted in the celebration." And to-day such is the Holy Communion in the Book of Common Prayer.

The office itself abundantly and with marked clearness sets forth the teaching of the church in the days of the apostles and the Catholic period. The invitation (p. 230) breathes forth the searching kindness of grace and forgiveness. "Ye who do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways; Draw near with faith, and

take this holy Sacrament to your comfort." The partaking is reminiscent, but for the express end "that we, receiving them [the bread and wine] according to thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed Body and Blood" (p. 236). The intensest form of profound but clear statement of these spiritual experiences and gains of any soul is in the "prayer of humble access." Beneath the living truths there uncovered there are no streams of everlasting life. "Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us" (p. 234).

The same truth, though in such form as to make clear the sacrifice of the people, as they come to receive anew remission of sins, "and all other benefits of his passion," is stated in words of unsurpassed spiritual beauty in the last part of the invocation: "And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee that we and all others who shall be partakers of this Holy Communion, may worthily receive the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son Jesus Christ, be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction, and made one body with him, that he may dwell in us, and we in him" (p. 237).

For centuries, Churchmen at every communion have been instructed out of the Prayer-book to consecrate themselves anew to the Lord and his service, while the spiritual fact of "the indwelling Christ" has been ever conspicuous in its teaching. Its definition and doctrine of God has for generations entered into the make-up of Anglo-Saxon character to

give it solidity and self-reliance and enthusiasm. Storms of criticism have come upon this Book of Common Prayer; they have passed, leaving it more deeply imbedded in the religious affections of the great mass of English-speaking peoples. Against its distinctly Christian teaching, opposing and antagonistic creeds have been placed. It has been anathematized by Calvinist, and its use for private and public worship made a crime. But this book of Apostolic and Catholic theology has witnessed them pass into the state of apology, and then of rejection and death. Among all sorts and conditions of men, it has ever given strength and faith to the living, and hope and peace to the dying. Its living and constant voice of testimony has been, "Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good-will towards men. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for thy great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty."