

NOTES AND STUDIES

HEBREW CONCEPTIONS OF ATONEMENT, AND THEIR INFLUENCE UPON EARLY CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

HOWEVER differently men have conceived the nature of sin, they have always regarded it as something which separated them from God. In every age, therefore, and under every form of religious belief, they have felt impelled to seek the means of atonement. To the primitive races only one means was known. All over the world, from the dawn of history to the present hour, the simpler peoples have sought reconciliation through sacrifice. Other means of atonement begin to be recognized only when the nation has made a considerable advance in ethical thought; and, however earnestly the new means are advocated, ages often pass before they can challenge the supremacy of the old. While all civilized nations exhibit some phases of the conflict between different conceptions of atonement, the people of Israel, the type and epitome of religious mankind, are unique in the completeness with which they develop the sacrificial and the ethical principles in an age-long rivalry. That is why the Christian Church, the heir of the Jewish, has found that her acceptance of an *universitas hereditatis* brings her not only wealth but embarrassment.

The object of this paper is to shew how some of the problems which the Christian Church has not yet solved arise naturally out of that inheritance. I propose to sketch the principal Hebrew doctrines of Atonement, and then to trace their influence in the various parts of the New Testament.

(i) The Law recognizes two kinds of sacrifice, which may be described respectively as sacramental and piacular. In sacrifices of the first class, which includes the Passover, the peace-offering, and the covenant sacrifice, only some portions of the victim are burned, while the greater part is eaten by the worshippers. In the second class, which includes the sin-offering, the trespass-offering, the burnt-offering, and part of the offerings on the day of Atonement, either the whole of the victim is burned, or else part is burned and the rest is given to the priests. Without entering into disputed questions of origin, we can see plainly what is the main distinction between the two classes in historical times. In the expiatory sacrifice the whole of the victim is 'given to

God'. In the other case the worshippers are conceived (to use St Paul's image¹) as sitting at the table of the God, sharing a meal with him, and thereby renewing the bond of kinship which unites them to him. It is thus a sacrifice of communion, whose effect is conceived not as reconciliation but as reunion. This sacrifice was specially appropriate where a covenant was to be solemnized. For the God who was conceived as invisibly present, and sharing in the feast given at his table, was at once a witness and a party to the compact. Accordingly wherever we read an account of the ceremonies attending a covenant, from Jacob and Laban onwards, the sacrificial feast upon the peace-offering forms an essential part.²

(ii) The other class of offerings, which the Law frequently contrasts with the peace-offering, were piacular. Some of these sacrifices were made on behalf of the whole nation, others for families or individuals: but in all cases their operation was understood to be the same. Yet in different ages both the mode and the scope of their operation were differently conceived.

(a) In what cases are piacular sacrifices held to be efficacious? Passing over the few survivals of prehistoric thought, which regarded the wrath of Jehovah as an inexplicable volcanic fury, and blindly strove to propitiate it—as at Perez Uzzah—we come to historical times, when piacular sacrifices were offered either to atone for offences against God or for wrongs done to men.

The former class included the worship of foreign gods and the deliberate or accidental breach of the ceremonial law. As public opinion grew stricter, the worship of foreign gods tended to disappear, and men questioned whether presumptuous sins—i. e. deliberate violations of the ceremonial law—could be atoned for by sacrifice. After the age of Nehemiah, therefore, the offences against God for which offerings could be made were only such violations of ceremonial law as were unconscious or accidental.

With regard to wrongs done to men—breaches of the moral law—there were curious changes of opinion. In primitive times no sacrifices were offered to atone for murder and theft and adultery, because these were regarded as simply offences against man, for which the injured person could exact reparation. During the monarchy they were treated as offences against God, and sacrifices were offered as atonement. The protests of the prophets, who affirmed that God required not sacrifice but repentance and amendment, bore little fruit till the exile: but the post-exilic law denied sacrificial atonement to the thief and the murderer on the ground that moral offences were too serious for such remedies. Yet, even when that was established as the official doctrine, many of

¹ 1 Cor. x 21.

² See additional note on p. 126.

the people clung to the belief that some sacrifices—at any rate those of the Day of Atonement—could cleanse all their sins.

(β) What gives efficacy to piacular sacrifice? What is the mode of its operation? The records of Israel give three answers to this question, which roughly correspond to three periods in the people's history.

(1) Sacrifice is a gift, which Jehovah, like human sovereigns, expects and receives with pleasure. The crude form of this theory, which implied that the gods actually tasted the flesh of the victims, was gradually refined. But in no shape could it satisfy a people who had once begun to reflect: and after the seventh century it survived only as a poetical convention. (2) When herds and flocks became the property of individuals instead of clans, the Hebrews began to attribute the efficacy of sacrifice to the effort or self-denial which it involved. That view finds its most vivid expression in Micah's phrase: 'Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' This theory of sacrifice also, though nobler than the former, lent itself to grave abuses, against which the prophets protested. But it survived the exile: and the sacrifices of the second temple provoked renewed protests from the psalmists and the Son of Sirach.¹ (3) Convinced at last that cost was not the measure of value in God's sight, men began to look for some element more personal than renunciation which might explain the efficacy of their oblations. They found such an element in the idea of substitution. 'My life', a man would say, 'is forfeit for my sin. What can I do to meet the claim of the Law? I will offer another life in place of mine. The blood of an innocent creature, perfect in its kind, shall be shed instead of my own, and will surely be accepted.'

(iii). This doctrine of substitution depends ultimately upon the belief, which was common to a large part of humanity, that pain and death are in some mysterious way demanded by a rule of justice, by which God himself is bound. This belief underlies a number of passages in the Old Testament where suffering is described as a set-off to sin; and the suffering of the innocent may be substituted for that of the guilty. A few typical quotations will make this clear.

'Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo! this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.' Isaiah vi 7.

'Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; that she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.' Isaiah xl 2.

'He that hath died is justified from sin.' Rom. vi 7.

¹ Ecclus. vii 4.

The casual way in which St Paul introduces this remark shews that he is appealing to a principle which his readers would not question.

These three sentences are examples of suffering endured by the sinner. I will now give three instances in which the suffering is vicarious.

After numbering the people, David's heart smote him, and he prayed, 'Put away, I beseech thee, the iniquity of thy servant.' The answer to the prayer was a pestilence which destroyed thousands of David's people. 2 Sam. xxiv 10-17.

In the song of Moses we find these words :
 'He will avenge the blood of his servants,
 And will render vengeance to his adversaries,
 And will make expiation for his land and for his people.' Deut. xxxii 43.
 The martyr Eleazer, according to the fourth book of the Maccabees, prayed thus amid his tortures : 'Be merciful unto thy people, and let our punishment be a satisfaction on their behalf. Make my blood their purification, and take my soul to ransom their souls.' 4 Macc. vi 28.

Commenting on the words of Ecclesiasticus xviii 20, 'In the hour of visitation thou shalt find forgiveness', Canon Charles writes thus : 'According to Jewish teaching, suffering and sickness, as well as death itself, are in themselves means of atonement, and therefore of reconciliation with God'. That is plainly true of the whole period from the exile to the Christian era. How far the same view prevailed in earlier ages we can only guess : but certainly a belief in the atoning power of pain or death is one of the elements of pre-exilic religion. The passages quoted above, half of them pre-exilic and half post-exilic, have one thing in common. In each case God is the actual or virtual agent. He inflicts punishment ; and when the punishment is sufficient to balance the offence, atonement is complete, without repentance being required of the sinner. Most remarkable is the quotation from Isaiah xl 2 ; for it is a summary of Deutero-Isaiah's whole message. In the whole of his prophecy (apart from the four sections on the Servant of Jehovah) there is no demand for repentance, but Israel is treated as being fully cleansed by suffering.¹

(iv) In broad contrast with these two conceptions of atonement, as effected by sacrifice or by suffering, stands the teaching of the great prophets of the monarchy, and of their followers among the post-exilic prophets and psalmists. Their demand was consistently made for penitence, that is, for repentance and reform. Under the monarchy it is to sacrifice that they oppose penitence. Micah spoke for all when he said to one who proposed to offer the most costly of all sacrifices, 'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy,

¹ I resist the temptation to discuss fasting and other self-inflicted pain, regarded as a means of Atonement, for it would lead me too far.

and to walk humbly with thy God?' After the exile it was not so much sacrifice as mortification with which the prophets contrasted penitence. A notable example is the 58th chapter of Isaiah, of which only a few words need be quoted: 'Is not this the fast that I have chosen?—to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free?'

How far did the preachers of repentance affect the faith and the life of the multitude? It is hard to estimate, for the evidence is incomplete: but a partial answer may be attempted.

Sacrifice was less important after the exile than before. It was not the protests of the prophets so much as the change of habits and the break in tradition, which the exile caused, that displaced sacrifice. Still it was in a measure displaced. When we read in the 51st psalm 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit', we are tempted to say it has dissolved into a metaphor. But we are corrected by an editor of the psalm, who has added two verses at the end, 'Build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the burnt-offerings and oblations.' And we remember that long after the Return the Day of Atonement was instituted. Probably it is true that while the higher minds, such as the Son of Sirach¹ and some of the psalmists, could say from their hearts 'Burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required', yet in the lower levels of religious thought the old ideas of expiation remained current.²

Still less did the doctrine of penitence do away with the practice of mortification. Penitence did, indeed, gain a formal victory, but the fruits of victory were filched from her with a *distinguo*. What is repentance? How may it be discerned? 'Rend your hearts and not your garments', cries Joel. 'Create in me a clean heart' prays the psalmist. 'Return unto the Lord and forsake sins' advises the Son of Sirach. Excellent. But only God can read the heart, and the priest, before pronouncing absolution, demands some evidence which he can read. For his satisfaction we see growing up a system very like that of the mediaeval church, requiring confession, restitution, and the wearing of sackcloth. As time goes on the emphasis on such externals increases. Thus in the latter part of the second century before Christ a historian could write that 'the women, girt with sackcloth under their breasts, thronged the streets. Then it would have pitied a man to see the multitude prostrating themselves, all mingled together'.³

So the demand for proofs of right feeling restored the trust in externals which the prophets had denounced. Penitence as generally

¹ Eccus. xxxv 1; Psalm xl 6.

² Ben Sira retained sacrifice without being able to give any reason except that it is commanded (Eccus. xxxv 7).

³ 2 Macc. iii 19.

understood by the Judaism of the Christian era was not the deep sorrow and altered life of the 51st psalm, but compliance with the Levitical ordinances which, like the Catholic Church of the sixth century, degraded penitence into penance.

(v) A fourth conception of atonement is presented in four short passages of Deutero-Isaiah.¹ Whether that great poet was the author of the so-called 'Servant' prophecies, or some later poet who inherited his spirit: whether the 'Servant' is the people of Israel (as I believe) or an individual martyr; the main conception is the same. The sufferings and death of the 'Servant' are unquestionably represented as making atonement for the sins of those who slew him, and slew him not as a sacrifice but as a malefactor. They themselves looking back upon their own deed, repentant yet rejoicing, state it clearly:—

'All we like sheep had gone astray,
We had turned every one to his own way;
While Jehovah laid upon him
The iniquity of us all.'

The moving beauty and the apparent simplicity of this most vivid of dramatic lyrics are apt to conceal from the reader the truth that the underlying conception is by no means simple. In the first place, though the poet evidently thinks of the Servant's death in terms of sacrifice, that death really lacks the primary conditions of sacrifice: for there is no one who offers the victim, and according to Hebrew conceptions the benefit of a sacrifice accrues only to the person who offers it, or to some one in whose interest it is consciously offered. The poet's interpretation of the Servant's death really rests upon the undeveloped notion described above, that pain as such can balance sin, and the pain need not be borne by the sinner. 'Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all' recalls the verse of Deuteronomy, already quoted, which tells how Jehovah himself makes atonement for a guilty land by slaying the offenders whose sin polluted it.

But the Servant's death is only a part of the atonement. The emphasis lies rather upon the pain and indignity which make his life a long martyrdom. Here again there is a 'mixed mode of thought'. For whereas Deutero-Isaiah consistently teaches that punishment wipes out the sin of him that endures it, in this case the punishment is not only vicarious, but is inflicted by the hands of the very sinners of whose forgiveness it is the price.

The poet, whatever his date, is in a very different stage of thought from the authors of Samuel and Deuteronomy. He seems to stand at a point of vision where sacrifice, suffering, and martyrdom melt into

¹ Isa. xlii 1-4, xlix 1-6, l 4-9, lii 13-14, liii 12.

one another in the dawn of a new conception. Like other new thoughts of the first order, it was but dimly defined at first. Perhaps it may be interpreted thus: All redemptive service done for mankind has its root in sympathy: and sympathy in the full sense means not only feeling for another, but feeling with him—sharing his pain, his weakness, his sorrow, even his degradation. Look where we may, we find the same law, that he who would uplift a fellow man must stoop to his level; he who would relieve suffering must in a very real sense share it. What is the reason of that law? we long to ask. There is no answer, except that the law is part of that mystery of pain which baffles our intelligence.

The dramatic form in which the poet presented his message has caused many misunderstandings. But it has preserved and enshrined the key which he found to the mystery of Israel's long martyrdom, to aid a grateful Church in unlocking a greater mystery still.

(vi) Turning over the pages of the New Testament we can hardly fail to recognize that the 'Servant' prophecies had a predominant influence in shaping early Christian conceptions of Atonement. From St Matthew to Ephesians there is not a single book which does not contain both quotations from them and allusions to them: and the writers of 1 Peter and Hebrews make a large use of them. And yet the careful reader is left in doubt as to some important questions. How far, in the minds of the early disciples, was the idea of sacrifice associated with that of martyrdom? When a New Testament writer quotes a phrase from these prophecies, ought we to assume that he implies a definite theory as to the whole complex of conceptions which (as we have seen) the prophecies combine? And if that be the case, how can we explain the fact that no single writer quotes Isa. liii 10, 11 as a prophecy of the resurrection?

Materials for answers to these questions may be most conveniently found by examining the references in something like chronological order. Let us consider first the sayings attributed to our Lord Himself, next the speeches in the Acts, then St Paul's teaching, and that of other epistles, and last the statements which the evangelists make in their own persons.

If Jesus applied to Himself the words 'He was numbered with the transgressors',¹ must we understand that He claimed to fulfil the whole chapter from which the words are taken? In another case it was not so: for when He read Isa. lxi in the synagogue, He pointedly omitted the words 'and the day of vengeance of our God'.² A similar question arises about the dramatic scene of Peter's confession at Caesarea

¹ Luke xxii 37.

² *Ibid.* iv 16-21.

Philippi.¹ Though the words of the Synoptic narrative shew no trace of Isaiah's language, the underlying thought is certainly an identification of the Son of Man with the Servant of Jehovah. But how far was the identification carried? If we may judge by the context, it was not carried beyond the life of suffering and the death of shame: for no reference is made to 'The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all', and such reference seems to be excluded by the emphasis with which Jesus insists that His disciples must be ready to follow in their Master's steps.

Had our Lord, on that solemn occasion, actually spoken of His approaching death as piacular, how could it be that neither the epistle of St James nor the early speeches recorded in the Acts shew any trace of a conception so cardinal? The explanation which has been offered—that the apostles were silent on this topic for fear of offending the Jews—is oddly applied to St Peter, who said *ἄνδρα ἀποδεδειγμένον ἀπὸ θεοῦ . . . διὰ χειρὸς ἀνόμων προσήξαντες ἀνείλετε*; and still more oddly to St Stephen, who said *οὐ νῦν ὑμεῖς προδόνται καὶ φονεῖς ἐγένεσθε*. St Luke, of course, does not give us verbatim reports. But, in summarizing speeches of such importance, the disciple of St Paul would be the last person to omit a piacular explanation of the Lord's death if it had been offered.

The evidence, then, seems to indicate that the Synoptic report of our Lord's words at Caesarea is accurate in its negative as well as its positive features; and that when He applied phrases of Isaiah to Himself, He did not mean to apply their whole context also.

At any rate it is in St Paul's epistles that we find the first attempt to refer such words as 'it was the sins of the world that He bore' to the crucifixion. Of the familiar passages which illustrate this view, it will be enough to quote three, which are typical:

τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν. 2 Cor. v 21.

ὃς παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν. Rom. iv 25.

διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί. Rom. v 19.

In these sentences, and many such, we hear the echoes of 'the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all'. Echoes repeat the sound,

¹ Mark viii 27-ix 1. Some readers, indeed, find the equivalent of this in the later passage (Mark x 45) where, after promising that the sons of Zebedee should drink of His cup, Jesus says *καὶ γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἤλθεν διακονηθῆναι, ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι, καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν*. But (1) the last clause is inapplicable to the sons of Zebedee, and reads like an interpolation. (2) It is doubtful whether the Greek words used can properly bear the sense in which they seem to be here employed. For *δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν* in the one place where it occurs in the LXX means 'devote living energies' (1 Macc. ii 50). [But in John xv 13 *θεῖναι τὴν ψυχὴν* is so used.] And *λυτρόν* in Num. iii 41 (where alone it is applied to a living person) describes the living service of the Levites, not their death, in place of the firstborn of Israel.

but with a difference: and so it is here. The musings of a poet upon the mystery of his nation's martyrdom have been translated into a literal record of a transaction; even as the ballad of Bethhoron was translated into prose by a scribe who made the sun actually stand still. It is a process to which the Hebrew mind was prone; and Paul, with all his genius and inspiration, continued to think like a Jew.

So did the authors of Hebrews and the first epistle of St Peter, who shew clear traces of Pauline influence. The former writes *ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπαξ προσενεχθεὶς εἰς τὸ πολλῶν ἀνεγκεῖν ἁμαρτίας*¹: the latter, *ὃς τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν αὐτὸς ἀνήνεγκεν ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον*.²

Shocked by such crude substitutionism, many writers have tried to explain this language away; and to prove that St Paul did not mean what he said, by shewing that he held a spiritual conception of atonement with which these passages are inconsistent. All that they succeed in proving is that St Paul, like all great prophets, stood with one foot in the past and one in the future. Even more than Isaiah, St Paul was able to fuse inconsistent beliefs in the white flame of his spirit, not observing that they could not really be welded together. That is the hall-mark of his genius, not a proof that he did not hold the lower view as well as the higher.

What, then, is the significance of such sentences as those which have been quoted above? Surely they represent the first stage of an inevitable process of interpretation. Thoughtful men, when confronted with a great new fact, feel bound to bring it into relation with their own philosophy. The crucifixion, with its manifest consequences, was an overwhelming fact: the instinct of the scholarly Jew compelled him to fit it with a frame of Jewish thought: and one such frame (but not the only one) was provided by the individual interpretation of the 'Servant' prophecies. As we shall see presently, there was another which the apostle generally preferred.

The writers of the Synoptic Gospels, when they are not quoting our Lord's words but expressing their own thoughts, shew the influence of the 'Servant' passages very plainly. Not only does St Matthew twice directly quote them as prophecies of Christ: what is more significant is that the whole narrative of the Passion in all three Gospels is studded with reminiscences of the Servant, key-words being so introduced as to suggest inferences of fulfilment. But these suggestions are limited to the pathetic aspect of the 'Servant' prophecies, and always stop short of the piacular.

The Fourth Gospel draws inspiration from the same source, but the form of expression is characteristically different. After quoting the words 'Lord, who hath believed our report?' the author adds 'These

¹ Heb. ix 28.

² 1 Pet. ii 24.

things said Isaiah, because he saw his glory'; and so he gives us the key to his interpretation. Turning to the LXX of Isa. lii 13, we read *ιδού, συνήσει ὁ παῖς μου, καὶ ὑψωθήσεται καὶ δοξασθήσεται*. That verse has supplied two *leitmotifs* which run through the Gospel¹—*ὑψοῦσθαι*, applied to describe both the crucifixion and the ascension, is the note of the earlier chapters, *δοξάζεσθαι* in the later chapters is the phrase for the Passion as a whole. In the twelfth chapter the two words meet, *ὑψοῦσθαι* occurring twice and *δοξάζεσθαι* four times.

In such a picture of the Passion, painted in colours of exaltation and glory, there is no place for the piacular. The words of John the Baptist 'Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world'² are not, as some have thought, an exception: for 'the lamb' is not the lamb of Isaiah, but of the Passover; and the Passover is essentially sacramental, not expiatory. Yet the phrase does form a link between the two conceptions of the Passion, as martyrdom and as sacrifice, and shews how easily men's thoughts overleap the boundary between the two. That makes it the more remarkable that the earliest disciples, as our quotations shew, never made any such confusion. So the answer to our first question is in the negative. As to the second question, it appears from the quotations that in general the New Testament writers and speakers quoted parts of a prophecy without intending to imply the fulfilment of the whole. And that explains, in answer to the third question, how, among the many applications of the 'Servant' prophecies, there is none which draws any inference about the resurrection.

(vii) Seeing how large a place sacrifice held in the religious thought of the ancients, and especially of the Jews, it was inevitable that imagery drawn from sacrifice should be employed to describe the Lord's Passion. It is therefore instructive, and a little surprising, to observe how rarely such images are actually used, and with what limitations. The prominence which Church tradition gives to certain striking phrases disturbs our sense of proportion. When we correct it by counting, we find that the definite images drawn from sacrifice are in the Gospels only three or four, in St Paul's writings about a dozen, in the epistle of St Peter one, in the first epistle of St John four or five, and in the Apocalypse a single phrase several times repeated. Only in the epistle to the Hebrews does the conception of sacrifice occupy a considerable space.

Modern readers, unfamiliar with the Law, are apt to give too wide a meaning to sacrificial language, ignoring the limitations and distinctions which were present to the mind of every educated Jew. As has

¹ Westcott pointed them out in his edition of St John, but apparently did not recognize the source from which they were drawn.

² John i 29.

been indicated in § 1, orthodox Judaism did not regard sacrifice as atoning for sins in our sense of the word, but only for ceremonial or unconscious offences: nor did it confuse, as we often do, the sacramental with the piacular offerings. Both these facts are of vital importance for the interpretation of our Lord's words at the last Supper. For when He gave bread and wine to His disciples as representing His own body and blood, saying *τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ αἷμα μου τῆς διαθήκης*, He was in effect defining the way in which His death was to be regarded. Now according to Hebrew tradition a covenant was sealed, not by a burnt offering, but by a peace offering, which was sacramental. If, then, our Lord's words are correctly reported by St Paul and St Mark—the two earliest authorities—they establish two points. (1) That Jesus did not regard His death as piacular—a sacrifice for sin. For He and His disciples knew that, according to the Levitical law, even piacular sacrifices could not atone for moral offences.¹ (2) That He intended His disciples to celebrate His death as the seal set upon the new covenant, the new relationship between God and man, of which His whole life was the manifestation. What could be more natural, more satisfying than for Him, who had lived to reconcile men to God, to account His death the sacrifice which was needed to give that new covenant validity in the eyes of men? Who can deny, whatever be his creed, that it was the death of Christ which won men to obey the teaching of His life? From the time when St Paul resolved to preach 'nothing but Christ crucified' down to our own day, when missionaries carry the same message into darkest Africa, it has been the Cross which has commended the Gospel of hope and freedom.

As in the case of the scene at Caesarea, the Synoptic report of the Last Supper is confirmed by the silence of the Acts: for the speeches of St Peter and St Stephen give no hint that the crucifixion is to be regarded as a sacrifice for sin. Indeed that view is virtually excluded by the words of Acts iii 26, v 31. So far as the records go, St Paul was the first who presented this view in his teaching. It is not always certain whether he is thinking of martyrdom or sacrifice. The instances in which he certainly means sacrifice, as distinct from martyrdom, are few; but they are decisive. The following examples will probably suffice:

ὃν προέθετο ὁ Θεὸς ἰλαστήριον διὰ πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι. Rom. iii 25.

δικαιωθέντες νῦν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ σωθησόμεθα. Rom. v 9.

¹ St Matthew's Gospel, in the parallel passage, adds an important phrase, *εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*. Many scholars, on critical grounds, regard it as an unwarranted addition to the text. But I have not seen the reason given which appears to me decisive. No orthodox Jew could either regard a peace offering as piacular, or hold that a piacular sacrifice could cleanse from sin, other than ceremonial offences.

ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν πέμψας . . . περὶ ἁμαρτίας . . . ἵνα τὸ δίκαιωμα τοῦ νόμου πληρωθῇ ἐν ἡμῖν. Rom. viii 3, 4.

παρέδωκεν ἑαυτὸν προσφορὰν καὶ θυσίαν τῷ θεῷ. Eph. v 2.

Besides these there are three passages in which αἷμα is used in a definitely sacrificial sense: Eph. i 7, ii 13; Col. i 20.

Yet St Paul's language in such passages is neither exact nor explicit. Though his general meaning is plainly to describe the death of Christ as a piacular sacrifice, he speaks only of *θυσία* and *αἷμα*, which are common to all sacrifices, while the characteristic feature of such offerings—the burning of the flesh—is not once mentioned. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews, we may fairly conjecture, feeling how serious was this omission, endeavoured to supply it (Heb. xiii 12). His unsuccessful attempt did but emphasize the difficulty: but at the same time it gives us a clue to St Paul's own thought. For when he assumes¹ that the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement only is in question, he confirms the impression given by the use of the word *ἱλαστήριον* in Rom. iii 25, that St Paul had already chosen that sacrifice, rather than any other, as the type of Christ's atoning death. Two reasons might naturally determine the choice. Though the bodies of the victims were in fact burned,² the striking feature of the day's ceremony was the sprinkling of their blood upon the Mercy Seat. And in the popular mind, in spite of official pronouncements, that sacrifice was regarded as atoning for all sins. Here, we may well suppose, the apostle found the one sacrifice which in essence corresponded with the vicarious death of the Servant of Jehovah; it was recognized by all Jews as the great sacrifice of the year: and therefore he felt that it offered a firm basis for his argument. No doubt he was thus departing from orthodox Jewish teaching. But this interpretation of the Lord's death was undoubtedly a response to the demand of many converts, both Jew and Gentile, whose conversion did not change the feeling about atonement which was ingrained in them by millenniums of tradition. To such men the reproach, which was so often urged against Christians, that they had neither priesthood nor sacrifice, appeared to be a fatal charge, which must be disproved. The epistle to the Hebrews is at once a symptom and a confirmation of this feeling. The author has been made aware of two objections which were naturally brought against St Paul's sacrificial theory of the Atonement, and he endeavours to meet them by a restatement.

Men had asked (so we infer) 'If Jesus was the victim in a sacrifice, who offered that sacrifice?' As we have seen, Isaiah liii supplied no

¹ Heb. ix 7, xiii 11-13.

² Lev. xvi 27; Heb. xiii 12.

answer. St Paul had suggested two answers, (1) that God himself (as in Deut. xxxii 43) made the offering—*ὃν προέθετο ὁ Θεὸς . . . ἰλαστήριον*¹—and (2) that Christ offered Himself as a willing victim—*παρέδωκεν ἑαυτόν*.² But it was easily shewn that neither of these suggestions satisfied the requirements of tradition, which have been described in § v: so the question was repeated. The new answer which is given in the epistle to the Hebrews is formally adequate—‘Christ is our High Priest. As such He has authority to offer sacrifices on behalf of us all. The victim which He offers is Himself.’ But this answer, as was found later, rather shifted the difficulty than removed it.

The other objection went deeper. Seeing that sacrifice, according to the Law, can expiate only ceremonial offences, how can you claim that the death of Christ atones for sins? Logically, no appeal could be made to Isaiah liii, for the expiation there contemplated is wrought not by a victim’s blood but by a martyr’s sufferings. The objection was rather ignored than answered by St Paul’s appeal to the Day of Atonement, which has been described. His more logical disciple recognizes the difficulty and offers a solution. *εἰ γὰρ τὸ αἷμα τράγων καὶ τῶρων . . . ἀγιάζει πρὸς τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς καθαρότητα, πόσω μᾶλλον τὸ αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ . . . καθαρῆι τὴν συνείδησιν ἡμῶν;*³ To a modern mind such analogical reasoning is not quite convincing. But it is exactly parallel to the action of John the Baptist in transforming baptism. The Jews had applied it to wash off the ceremonial uncleanness of the flesh from heathen converts: he applied to the Jews themselves, in order to wash off moral pollution.

Parallel to the line of interpretation which connected the sacrifice of the Cross with that of the Day of Atonement there was another which identified it with the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb. Until the dates of the Apocalypse and of 1 Peter are fixed, it is unsafe to claim priority for either: nor need we suppose that the teaching of one is derived from the other. The Apocalypse makes no statement of doctrine: but the prominent use of such phrases as ‘the Lamb that was slain’, in whose blood ‘the saints washed their robes’, without any explanation, implies that the writer’s circle, at least, was familiar with a theory which identified the crucified Christ with the Paschal lamb.⁴ In the first epistle of St Peter there is a definite statement of doctrine: *ἐλυτρώθητε . . . τιμίῳ αἵματι ὡς ἄμωδῷ ἁμώμων*, which implies the same identification.⁵

¹ Rom. iii 25.

³ Heb. ix 13, 14.

² Eph. v 2.

⁴ 1 Pet. i 18.

⁵ In this reference to the Passover there is some confusion. As it was a family sacrifice of communion, a share would naturally be claimed by the household gods: so that the blood would be sprinkled on the teraphim, whose place was over the door of the house or tent. Naturally the custom survived the

But the full development of the thought is found in the fourth Gospel, which puts into the mouth of John the Baptist the exclamation 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world', ἴδε, ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου.¹ The Dean of St Paul's has told us that 'a careful reader cannot fail to see how the type of the paschal lamb, mentioned at the beginning of the Gospel, underlies the whole narrative of the Passion'. If that be so, it helps to explain the date assigned in that Gospel to the Last Supper, which makes the time of the crucifixion coincide with the usual hour for sacrificing the paschal lamb. And yet, though this be true, the sacrificial suggestion is not a primary but a secondary element in the fourth Gospel. By general consent, the effect of the book as a whole is to present salvation as mediated not by sacrifice but by illumination. In other words, this far-off disciple of St Paul followed his myriad-minded master in two ways, one formal, the other essential. The sacrificial symbolism is accepted as an inheritance from Paul the Jew. It stands like the carved stones from an earlier shrine which we often find built into a church. But the whole plan of his wonderful new building is inspired by Paul the mystic, for whom salvation was a daily experience of union with the indwelling Christ—the wellspring of life and light and love.

While the most creative minds were thus following one or other line of sacrificial interpretation, many—perhaps the majority—held back. The Synoptic Gospels, earlier than St John but later than the epistles, were based upon a tradition which was prior to St Paul's teaching. The authority which they thus possessed combined with their popular style to give them an unrivalled hold upon the minds of men.

Now, apart from the records of the Last Supper, there is no phrase in the Synoptic Gospels which can fairly be said even to imply a sacrificial interpretation of the Lord's death. Even Dr Dale has been unable to find one! That is to say that, when the Synoptic writers speak in their own persons, they uniformly regard the Passion not as sacrifice but as martyrdom. Here we have the explanation of a fact which is noticed by all historians of dogma. When the early Greek Fathers mention the crucifixion in terms of sacrifice, they do so allusively and without any attempt to formulate a doctrine. The reason surely is that they were constant students of the Gospels, where they found no sacrifice except that which was the seal of a covenant.

obsolescence of the teraphim; and then a new explanation grew up to the effect that the blood was to keep off the angel of death (Exod. xii 23). The latter view, though it did not make the Passover an expiatory sacrifice in the proper sense, gave some ground for regarding the blood as a ransom. I believe it is Robertson Smith to whom this explanation is due; but I cannot be sure.

¹ John i 29.

(viii) Micah's epitome of the prophetic teaching, 'Do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God', combines two elements which, though almost inseparable, require to be distinguished. One is repentance in the full sense, which means not only sorrow for sin but active reformation. The other is that 'fear of God' or 'knowledge of God', which is the Old Testament equivalent for faith. The famous catalogue in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews makes that equivalence plain: but we scarcely need its help, for atonement through repentance and faith is written large over the pages of historian and prophet and psalmist. That is the means of atonement which (§ iv) the prophets consistently put forward in opposition to pre-exilic sacrifice and post-exilic legalism. There is no difficulty in tracing the influence of the prophetic teaching in the New Testament. Our problem is rather to define the form which it took, and to enquire how far it harmonizes or conflicts with the other Hebrew influences in the sphere of soteriology.

The call to repentance meets us on the threshold of the Gospel story. The avowed successor of the old prophets, John the Baptist meets every man who comes enquiring 'How shall I escape the wrath to come?' with an answer which recalls the first chapter of Isaiah¹: 'Repent, be baptized, and forsake your besetting sin.' When John was imprisoned, Jesus took his place, and preached 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand'—a call no less to faith than to repentance. And as we follow St Luke's narrative, this offer of atonement in the prophetic sense is repeated again and again.

To the harlot who washed His feet with tears of repentance Jesus said 'Thy faith hath saved thee: thy sins are forgiven.' Luke vii 36-50.

The story of the Prodigal Son is a strain of divine music with but a single theme: 'Repentance and faith make atonement.' Luke xv 11-32.

When Zacchaeus the publican, transformed by the sight of the Master, vowed to give half his goods to the poor, and to restore his unlawful exactions fourfold, the answer came at once: 'To-day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham'. Luke xix 1-10.

Almost the last verse of this Gospel ascribes to the risen Lord a command that the disciples should preach 'repentance and remission of sins'. Luke xxiv 47. Whether the account of that last scene be history or poetry, it accurately represents the spirit which pervades the apostles' preaching in the early days. For instance, we read:

'Repent and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out' (St Peter). Acts iii 19.

'A saviour . . . for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins' (St Peter). Acts v 31.

¹ Isa: i 16, 17.

'In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable unto him' (St Peter). Acts x 35.

'To the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life' (St Peter). Acts xi 18.

When St Paul, speaking to Agrippa, sums up his own preaching in a sentence, he uses these words:

'I declared . . . to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance.' Acts xxvi 20.

The last quotation is all the more notable because in St Paul's writings the words *μετάνοια* and *μετανοεῖν* occur only four times. No doubt when addressing his converts he was able to assume repentance as involved in faith. But for Agrippa the conception of faith required translation: so the Hebrew equivalent is given—repentance and the fear of God.

It is not, of course, suggested that St Paul's conception of faith did not go beyond that of the Old Testament. No one can read his epistles without seeing that it so far excels it as to be almost a new thing. In St Paul's mind the Hebrew elements of repentance, obedience, trust, and reverence are fused into unity by a mystical enthusiasm. But they are still present: they are the elements out of which faith is forged.

(ix) The Hebrew prophets, as we have seen, opposed what we may call faith to sacrifice, and again to obedience or mortification, as a means of atonement. We have to enquire whether a similar opposition is to be found in the New Testament, or whether the Christian Church, which inherited all the Hebrew principles of atonement, effected a reconciliation between them.

(a) As to the opposition between faith and obedience, we have the testimony of St Paul and St James that it disturbed the peace of the early Christians. The conflict was, indeed, somewhat confused by the ambiguity of one of the terms. *πίστις*, may mean either a loving surrender of self to God or an intellectual assent to a historical statement. So the two apostles could use the same terms while they argued victoriously on opposite sides. When St Paul said *πίστις* is better than *ἔργα* he meant 'Trust in God is better than good deeds'. When St James said *ἔργα* are better than *πίστις* he meant 'Good deeds are better than assent to a historical statement. But, as is usual when ambiguous terms are current, there was real confusion in the minds of these writers. St James, when he is not polemical, uses *πίστις* in the higher sense: and St Paul sometimes approaches the point of view at which faith is narrowed into 'the faith'.¹ Their opposition, therefore, is partly formal. But, broadly speaking, it is true that in the New

¹ 1 Cor. xvi 13; Col. i 2?

Testament faith and works (the later Jewish equivalent of obedience) are opposed to one another. St Paul is the champion of the prophetic doctrine, while the Judaizing Christians approach the position of the priests and the scribes.

(β) We do not find a like antagonism between faith and sacrifice. The phrase *ἰλαστήριον διὰ πίστεως*,¹ inconceivable to a Jew, stands as evidence that somehow a reconciliation has been effected between the two former opponents. How was this accomplished? Important as that question appears, it has rarely been asked, and has never (so far as I know) been answered. The following suggestion is made as a small contribution towards an answer, not as either complete or satisfactory. The intellectual sense of *πίστις* never quite disappears: and in the verb *πιστεύω* that sense is generally present. In the fourth Gospel the meaning 'belief' is probably predominant: and, as noticed above, St Paul and St James use the words in both senses. This double use (which like most ambiguities was largely unconscious) probably helped to make a link between faith and sacrifice. A Jew, speaking of the Day of Atonement, might say 'I believe (*πιστεύω*) that the blood of the victims atones, provided that I repent and fear God' (i. e. have faith in God, which is *πιστεύω* in the other sense). There the personal attitude of faith and the external transaction are parallel, but have no point of contact. The Jew could not say, in any sense, 'I believe in the victim', or 'I have faith in the sacrifice'. The Christian, however, could say 'I believe in Jesus Christ', just as he could say 'I believe in God'. He could also say, 'I believe that His death is an atonement for sin', or 'I believe that he came forth from God'. How easily *πιστεύω ὅτι* and *πιστεύω εἰς* coalesce, just as the two senses of *πίστις* run into each other!

Whether this be correct or not, we certainly do find that faith in Jesus means to St Paul not only trust and love for Him, but also belief in the efficacy of His atoning death. The apostle can say, without any feeling of inconsistency, 'Being justified by faith let us have peace with God'² and 'being justified by His blood we shall be saved'.³ So, by a process of association rather than of logic, the objective transaction and the subjective state, contrasted in the Old Testament, are united in the New.

(x) The above considerations, taken all together, may help to explain why the Christian Church has hitherto failed to reach a definitive conception of the Atonement. Theologians have assumed that there must be in the pages of the New Testament one authoritative view, which has only to be made plain in order to be accepted. If, on the

¹ Rom. iii 25.

² Rom. v 1.

³ Rom. v 9.

other hand, the New Testament writers present us with three inconsistent views derived from the Hebrew Scriptures; besides the mystical views of St Paul and St John, the study of their writings is only a stage in the process by which the Church may hope to frame a final formula. The next stage must consist in sifting the spiritual experience of nineteen Christian centuries. And still there may be another stage beyond.

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Additional Note.—In Exod. xxiv 5 a burnt offering is mentioned as well as a peace offering; from which Canon Goudge (*Church Quarterly* for October 1918) infers that the burnt offering was a necessary part of the covenant ceremony. But that is a mistake. A burnt sacrifice was offered as a sort of lustration, to purify the people for taking part in the sacrifice which was to follow; but it was no part of the principal ceremony. The distinction is plain in Lev. i, iv, vii, and viii, where the blood of a burnt offering is ordered to be sprinkled on or near the altar, not on any person: whereas a covenant was ratified by sharing the blood between the altar and the human party. Accordingly in Lev. x a burnt offering is first offered for the sins of Aaron and his sons, and then 'the ram of consecration' is sacrificed, and its blood sprinkled both on the altar and on the priests, who are thus ordained. Similarly on the Day of Atonement there is first a double burnt offering and then the sins of the people are laid on the scapegoat. Now in Exod. xxiv Moses sprinkles 'half the blood' on the altar and half on the people. That is the ceremonial of the peace offering, which alone was the covenant sacrifice.