

The Doctrine of the Atonement as set forth in the Prayer-Book.

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THE term "Prayer-Book" is used here in what is, strictly speaking, an inaccurate sense. The Articles do not properly belong to the Prayer-Book, as may be seen in the omission of any reference to them both in the title-page and in the table of contents as authorized by the Act of Uniformity of 1662. But the subsequent addition of the Articles to that table, though unauthorized, represents the sanction of general consent to the wider use of the term. And when any attempt is made to expound the doctrinal teaching of the Prayer-Book, it is in that inclusive sense that the term must be used. For any treatment of the Church's teaching which omits reference to her authorized dogmatic utterances would (apart from all questions as to the quality of the attempt) be unworthy of the name. Moreover, in such treatment the Articles must be regarded, not as an appendix which has to be included for the purpose of completeness, but as providing the more important part of the material that is at our disposal. For in matters of doctrine that which is the ultimate authority for the expression of the Church's position is not the language of the Services, but the dogmatic statements of the Articles. Liturgical statements often assume the fulfilment of certain conditions, and, having been drawn up on the principle of charitable presumption, they may depend for their literal meaning upon the fulfilment of such conditions; whereas the dogmatic statements of the Articles assume nothing of the kind. The two classes of statements must be carefully distinguished. The difference between them is such that in the final issue liturgical statements must be interpreted by the dogmatic, and not the dogmatic by the liturgical. The observance of this principle is of most importance in relation to certain questions of sacramental doctrine; and it was in connection with

the doctrine of Holy Baptism that, in the middle of last century, it received the careful attention of Professor Mozley in his work on the Baptismal Controversy.¹

Although it does not so vitally affect our present study, yet it is, in itself, a principle of such importance that we shall do well to observe it, if only as a reminder that the study of the Church's doctrine must at all points be determined by her dogmatic statements in conjunction with the language of the liturgy, and not by the language of the liturgy alone as being in itself final and decisive.

Turning first, then, to the dogmatic language of the Articles, let us try to gather up the statements which bear on the subject before us.

In the definition of the properties of the Godhead, as given in Article I., we find the words, "of infinite goodness." The equivalent word in the Latin draft of the Article is *bonitas*. We shall be helped in our understanding of the significance of the phrase if we refer to the Vulgate and English translations of Rom. v. 7, where St. Paul introduces a contrast between the man who is "righteous" (*justus*) and the man who is "good" (*bonus*). "Goodness" is a more comprehensive term than "righteousness," because it includes the conception of kindness (*benignitas*). But it means more than kindness, because it excludes the conception of an unholy, unrighteous kindness. It embraces the two ideas of righteousness and kindness.

When, then, the Article states that God is "of infinite goodness," it sets before us one of the cardinal lines of approach to a true conception of the doctrine of the Atonement. No theory can be regarded as representing the teaching of our Church which contradicts the fundamental truth that God is infinitely holy and kind. No idea, on the one hand, of mercy wrung from a revengeful God, no theory of a forced forgiveness, finds any sanction in our Church's interpretation of Atonement. And, on the other hand, there is no place for any conception which ignores the requirements of perfect holiness in dealing with the fact of sin.

¹ See Mozley, "The Baptismal Controversy," pp. 284 *et seq.* (Ed. 1895.)

Article II. deals with the subject of the Incarnation. It clearly states that the Godhead and manhood were joined together in the one Person of the Son. This adds a further limitation. No conception of God having His *will* towards us changed through the intervention of *another being* finds any place in the teaching of our Church. The Lord Jesus was very God as well as very man. And therefore, when the Article proceeds to state the facts of His sufferings and death, and their purpose—"to reconcile His Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men"—we are bidden to remember that it was not merely as man, but also as God, that He effected this. In Him God was reconciling Himself to us, was offering Himself as the sacrifice for the sins of men.

The phrase "to reconcile His Father to us," interpreted in the light of the following phrase, "and to be a sacrifice," clearly implies that there is need of reconciliation on the part of the Father towards man. But the need must be so explained as not to contradict the teaching of Article I. In other words, it is the need of reconciliation on the part of Him who, while being infinitely holy, is also infinitely kind. The meaning, therefore, can only be that sin had imposed a barrier between God and man; not in the sense that God's will toward man needed to be changed, but that His love could not act independently of His holiness. All that God is He is essentially, and not accidentally.¹ There is no such thing in the Godhead as any property lying dormant. Divine love and Divine righteousness are not accidents of the Divine will, but expressions of the Divine nature. Hence it is that, while Divine love cannot leave the sinner without the offer of pardon, Divine righteousness cannot leave sin uncondemned; but both find their satisfaction in Divine self-sacrifice, in the sacrifice for sin offered by God Himself in the Person of the Incarnate Son. The barrier erected by the guilt of sin had to be removed in order that righteousness

¹ See Litton's "Introduction to Dogmatic Theology," pp. 68 *et seq.* (Second edition.)

might be satisfied. Justice required the removal and love effected it. The nature of the satisfaction, the content of the sacrifice, these are not dealt with in the Article; but the fact is stated, and stated in the words of Scripture, which speaks of the need of the reconciliation of the Father, and of the meeting of that need through the sacrifice of the Incarnate Son.

We notice, in passing, that the culminating point in the atoning sacrifice of Christ is stated to be His death.

In Article IV., which treats principally of the Resurrection of our Lord, there is a reference to His session in Heaven. The significance is not explained, and the study of it belongs rather to the examination of Scriptural teaching than to that of the teaching of the Church. But its bearing on the doctrine of the Atonement is of such importance that a passing reference to its interpretation may perhaps be permitted.

The conceptions that are most usually associated with the session of Christ are those of His mediatorial kingdom, and His coequal power and majesty with the Father. But these ideas do not exhaust the associations of the metaphor. It signifies also the completeness of Christ's propitiatory offering and the mode of His perpetual intercession. This relation of the Lord's session to His propitiatory work is clearly defined in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In one passage we read that Christ, "when He had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."¹ In another passage the language is still more emphatic: "Every priest, indeed, standeth day by day ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, the which can never take away sins: but He, when He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God. . . . for by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."²

Moreover, the dogmatic statements of the session of Christ

¹ Heb. i. 3.

² Heb. x. 11 *et seq.* The contrast between standing, as the position for continual offering, and session, as the evidence of completed offering, should be carefully noted. The Vulgate translation of ἕστηκεν (*præsto est*) misses the point, and has affected Western interpretation of the passage.

determine the mode of His perpetual intercession. It is as seated that Christ intercedes: it is as King that He is also Priest. In the words of Bishop Westcott: "The modern conception of Christ pleading in heaven His Passion, 'offering His blood,' on behalf of men, has no foundation in the Epistle. His Glorified Humanity is the eternal pledge of the absolute efficacy of His accomplished work. He pleads, as older writers truly expressed the thought, by His presence on the Father's throne."¹

The metaphor of the session, then, denotes, on the one hand, the completeness of Christ's propitiatory offering, and, on the other hand, the perpetuity of its efficacy, through the presence of Christ in our nature on the throne of God. Christ took His seat because there is no more offering for sin; Christ sits and we are accepted in Him, the beloved.

Passing now from those Articles which deal with the fundamental doctrines of the Godhead and the Incarnation, we turn to those which deal with the doctrine of salvation. They start, as all effective teaching about salvation must start, with the statement of man's needs.

Article IX. affirms that original sin, involving as it does a corrupt nature and a rebellious will, deserves in every person born into the world the wrath and condemnation of God. Here, then, we are introduced to the interpretation of the language of the earlier Article which speaks of the Father being reconciled and of Christ being a sacrifice for sin. Article IX. also alludes to the removal of the condemnation, but not on the Divine side, for that was dealt with before: it is on the human side that the removal is now contemplated. Atonement requires the co-operation of man with God, and on man's side the conditions are faith and baptism; in the words of the Article, "there is no condemnation to them that believe and are baptized."

Article X., of "Free-Will," lays additional emphasis on the truth that Atonement is the gift of God. It was stated in

¹ Westcott, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," p. 230.

Article II. from the point of view of the satisfaction of Divine righteousness; now it is stated from the point of view of the conversion of the human will. It is only through the grace of God that man can turn and prepare himself to faith and calling upon God."¹ Realized atonement is the manifestation of Divine love and mercy, whether it be regarded from the standpoint of Divine reconciliation or from that of human conversion.

Articles XI. and XII., "Of the Justification of Man" and "Of Good Works," eliminate from the Church's teaching any idea of human merit. It is only on account of the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and not on account of our own works or deservings, that we are accounted righteous in God's sight; and the blessing of Justification is appropriated by faith alone. The good works of man have no place at all in the removal of condemnation; they are the fruit and result of such removal, and not the cause of it. Justification—which is only another term for atonement realized and enjoyed—is a state which is entered upon at the commencement of the Christian life.² While it covers the whole life of the believer, and lasts into eternity, it is also the first thing in Christian experience. In this connection we notice also the incidental reference to Justification in the article on Predestination. Not only are men justified "freely" (Latin *gratis*), *i.e.*, without any merit of their own to offer, but also Justification comes at the beginning of their Christian experience, and follows immediately on their obedience to the call of God through His Spirit.

Article XV., "Of Christ alone without Sin," reiterates the truth of Christ's sacrifice for sin, and renews the emphasis on the death, as the culminating feature of that sacrifice. In Article II. the word for sacrifice is *hostia*; here it is *immolatio*: the one referring to the personal victim, the other to the actual sacrifice, both involving the conception of sacrifice through death.

¹ See also Article XVII., "they through grace obey the calling."

² See Simpson, "Fact and Faith," pp. 85 *et seq.*, 141 *et seq.*

But in this Article an additional feature is introduced in the words : "By the sacrifice of Himself *once made*." It is an anticipation of the fuller statement of the completeness of Christ's offering, which is found in Article XXXI., and we can leave the consideration of it until we come to that Article.

We pass on to the Sacramental Articles, and the question of the relation of the Sacraments to the Atonement. Article XXV., which deals with the doctrine of the Sacraments from the point of view of that which is common to them both, speaks of them as "sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace and God's goodwill towards us." What Sacraments are in themselves is independent of the worthiness of their reception ; what Sacraments effect in the recipient depends on their worthy use. Sacraments are "sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace and God's goodwill towards us," whether we receive them worthily or not.¹ Unworthy reception cannot rob them of their signification, because their signification belongs to their essence ; but unworthy reception does debar them from being means by which God works invisibly in us, because their wholesome effect and operation is conditional. Such invisible working is an end that may accompany their use, but is not a property inherent in them. It is as "witnesses" that they are "sure," and it is as "signs" that they are "effectual." In other words, the epithets "sure" and "effectual" relate to the Divine donation, but not to the human reception ; they are concerned with the gift, and not with its appropriation. They distinguish Sacraments as the seals of the covenant, by which God puts into visibility the covenant gifts, exhibits the covenant grace, bestows the covenant blessings ; but the gifts, the grace, the blessings can only be appropriated by faith. The relation, then, of the Sacraments to the Divine side of the Atonement may be described in two ways : (1) They are witnesses and signs, the seals of donation, and as such they are sure and effectual ; (2) they are means by which God works invisibly in us, and as such their efficacy is conditioned by worthy use.

¹ See Dimock, "The Doctrine of the Sacraments," pp. 19 *et seq.*

But there is the other, the human side of Atonement, and Sacraments are related to that too, as being badges or tokens of Christian men's profession. Through Sacraments there is put into visibility, not only God's grace and goodwill, but also man's repentance, faith, and obedience. They are the instruments of human, as well as of Divine donation, the means by which men put on Christ, identify themselves with His obedience, and give themselves to God. We must be on our guard against allowing time relationship to enter too fully into the conception. It is not that the actual entrance into the enjoyment of the Atonement awaits the actual moment of sacramental administration, any more than the actual entrance into the condition of repentance, faith, and consecration, awaits such a moment; but Sacraments being the visible embodiment of invisible conditions, these invisible conditions have to be conceived of as being effected in, at, and by the reception of the Sacrament.

We pass now to the last of the Articles which bear upon the subject, Article XXXI., which asserts the completeness of Christ's offering as the "perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world." The title of the Article is decisive as to the meaning of the phrase "once made," which appears in the text both here and in Article XV. The title runs, "Of the one oblation of Christ finished upon the Cross."

This Article has had a special interest attached to it by the attempt which has been made to explain the condemnation of "the sacrifices of Masses," as not including condemnation of the official doctrine of the sacrifice of the Mass. But (let it be noted) the Article relates to doctrinal error, and not to mere matters of practical abuse; and it is focussed upon a specific conception of propitiation, and not upon a distinction between official and popular interpretation. It positively states that the offering of Christ is finished and perfect, and it condemns all teaching which alleges that Christ is still offered "for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt" as blasphemous

fables and dangerous deceits. The question as to whether the official doctrine of the Mass is included in that condemnation depends not on the interpretation of the phrase "the sacrifices of Masses," but on the further question as to whether the official doctrine involves the condemned position. And of that there can be no doubt whatever.

Let us now gather up the main points of the teaching which we have traced through the Articles :

1. Atonement is the manifestation of Divine love. It is the gift of the Father, through the sacrifice of the Son, rendered effectual in man through the work of the Spirit.

2. The sacrifice of Christ, which is the meritorious cause of the Atonement, reached its culminating point in the death on Calvary. It was offered in such manner that the offering was finished on Calvary, and that finished offering was the perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world.

3. The Atonement thus provided on God's side is rendered effective in the individual when he puts away his enmity against God, and turns to Him in repentance and faith, this turning being the result of the Spirit's co-operation with man's will, and there for an additional manifestation of Divine love.

4. Justification, or the condition of Atonement realized in the individual, covers the whole life of the man who remains in the state of faith. It is entered upon at the outset of the Christian experience ; good works are the fruit, and not the cause of it.

5. Sacraments are related to the Atonement as the seals of donation, the means of formal bestowal, opportunities of actual appropriation, the tokens of the faith which alone appropriates ; they are not so related in time to the gift, as that the entrance upon its enjoyment must be the moment of the administration, yet they are so related to the gift that the enjoyment of it cannot be recognized by the Church when the Sacraments are not used.

Such are what I conceive to be the chief points in the teaching of the Articles. In that teaching two striking omissions

call for notice, notably the absence of any attempted explanation as to the actual content of the death of Christ which gave to it its atoning efficacy. For this we may be thankful. The fact of Christ's death occupies the central position, as it does in Scripture ; but we are not bound down to any one of the many explanations which the history of the doctrine provides.

The other omission, less happy than the former, is that of any explicit statement of the revealed fact which lies at the root of the doctrine of the Atonement. I refer to the truth of the union of the believer with Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It receives one incidental reference in Article XV., in the phrase "born again in Christ"; but that is an inadequate recognition of a fundamental truth. It is possible, too, to regard it as implied in Article II., which deals with the Incarnation, but it is certainly not dogmatically expressed. And yet the truth of our union with Christ is the foundation of the whole fabric. It is as we are one with Christ that our guilt is covered by His sacrifice ; it is as one with Christ that His righteousness is imputed unto us ; it is as seated with Christ in the heavenly places that we share in the benefits of His session at the right hand of God, that session which is itself the perpetual intercession ; it is as being in the Beloved that we are accepted.

As the Head of the Body He has borne the iniquities of the members ; as members of His Body we share in the merits and glory of the Head. And that union is effected through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit";¹ "By one Spirit were we all baptized into one Body";² "There is one Body and one Spirit."³

A few words will suffice to show that the language of the Services is in entire accord with the dogmatic utterances of the Articles.

The conception of the *need of atonement* on account not only of the enmity, but also of the guilt of sin (*i.e.*, the conception of the need of reconciliation on the part of God as well as of man) finds frequent expression in references to Divine

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 17.

² 1 Cor. xii. 13.

³ Eph. iv. 4.

forgiveness of human transgressions, and in the applications of such terms as "propitiation," "redemption," "satisfaction," "mediation," to the work of Christ for man.

The conception of Atonement as manifesting, alike on the Divine as on the human side, the Father's love, is present in every reference to Divine mercy, as the only ground of hope, and to Divine grace as the essential prerequisite for repentance and faith.

The conception of Atonement as effected on God's side by the sacrifice of Christ is present in every reference to Him and His work both on earth and Heaven as the only means of access to God.

The conception of that sacrifice as culminating on the Cross of Calvary finds expression in the constant reference to the death and blood-shedding. The conception of that sacrifice as complete, sufficient, finished, offered once for all, is present in the general references to the perfection of the forgiveness procured by it, as well as in the particular statements both of the fact and of that which proves it—viz., Christ reigning in glory with the Father.

The conception of Atonement as requiring human co-operation is present in every reference to the need, and every expression of the fact, of repentance and faith.

Space forbids my attempting to pursue the subject further ; I would only add, in conclusion, that the Churchman who has entered into the spirit of the Church's teaching on the subject is one who rejoices in the possession of forgiveness and peace with God ; and in the light and with the inspiration of that blessed gift seeks to live a life which is worthy of such a calling. He prays for forgiveness, just as he prays for the Holy Spirit, not as still waiting to possess it, but as expressing in such prayer his entire dependence upon the goodness of God, prayer in the name of Jesus being a condition, not only of entering into, but also of remaining in that state of grace into which, through the goodness of God, the believer has been brought.