

THE MINISTRY AND RECONCILIATION.

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IN the earliest days of the Church the Doctrine of the Cross was hardly a matter of controversy like the Doctrine of the Incarnation, or the Blessed Trinity of Persons in the Godhead. Our three Creeds just state in general terms that Christ suffered for us and rose again. The Cross was recognised as so central and fundamental that it could not be questioned. In these latter days the Spirit speaketh expressly that some shall depart from the faith, and that a mark of the perilous times will be that some shall be "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." And so, to-day, the Doctrine of the Cross which is the foundation truth is the centre round which controversy rages, sometimes in the Sacrament of His Crucified Body and Precious Blood, sometimes in the manner in which the efficacy of the Cross is to be received, whether by preaching or by the Confessor's absolution or by Group methods, and sometimes in the philosophical reasonings of the intellectually unsettled who strangely seem to neglect the pure theology of the first exponents of the Doctrine of the Atonement, St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John.

But all controversy dies when by the Holy Spirit's power we get nearer and nearer to the Cross for ourselves. We shall never get beyond the MYSTERY of the Cross. How the Atonement of Christ on Calvary affected the mind of God will always remain a profound mystery. But we recall that in the ritual of the great Day of Atonement, Jehovah took the initiative, and Himself devised the means whereby the barrier might be removed which prevented the exercise of Divine mercy. The multiplication of the details in that ritual reminded the seeker that the covering of sin by Shed Blood only was a mystery that lay hidden in the heart of God. But the profundity of the mystery does not alter the fact. Aristotle taught that in regard to the moral training of the child we must teach him what is right and what is wrong, but we need not at once teach him why. He will grow up to discover that for himself. We are all growing up, and none of us know all the WHY of the Atonement. One day we may. "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I fully know as I am fully known." (I Cor. xiii. 12.)

And as we can never get beyond the Mystery, let us see to it that we never lose the Melody of the Cross!

"How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear."

"Tell me the story of Jesus,
Write on my heart every word;
Tell me the story most precious,
Sweetest that ever was heard."

“ Sweetest note on seraph song,
Sweetest name on mortal tongue ;
Sweetest carol ever sung,
Jesus, Blessed Jesus.”

And when the Gospel bells are ringing clear and true, the music of the Gospel leads the wanderer Home.

But in addition to this there will always be the Mastery of the Cross.

Do some still say, “ Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with ? ” Ah ! “ I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.” We, the ministers of Reconciliation, have the unspeakable privilege of lifting up the Uplifted One, of portraying or *painting-up* in living words Jesus Christ Who-is-the-Crucified. (Gal. iii. 1.)

To do this, we ourselves must be drawn, and then ever more be drawn nearer and nearer. It is the enraptured man who enraptures others with the Uplifted Christ.

“ All glory to the Risen Lamb,
I now believe in Jesus ;
I love the Blessed Saviour’s Name,
I love the Name of Jesus.”

Now if we are to be successful heralds of the Glad Tidings, we must be clear in our minds as to the meaning of the Ministry of Reconciliation.

GOD IS RECONCILED TO THE SINNER

In the A.V. the word “ Atonement ” only occurs in Rom. v. 11 : “ If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, we shall be saved by His life, and not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we have now received the Atonement.” So Atonement means Reconciliation, this is its meaning in the New Testament. But though the word occurs once only in our A.V. and that in the writing of St. Paul, the teaching of Reconciliation, like Justification, is not confined to him alone. For instance, what greater text on Justification is there than, “ God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life ” ? (John iii. 16.) And so with Reconciliation. What clearer teaching can we have on the Atonement than St. John’s words, “ Perfect love casteth out fear,” and “ Unto Him that loveth us and loosed us from our sins in His Own Blood, to Him be glory for ever and ever ” ? (Rev. i. 5.)

Or what could be clearer than the Petrine teaching in 1 Peter ii. 24, 25 : “ His Own Self bare our sins in His Own Body on the Tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by Whose stripes ye were healed,” and, “ Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls ” ?

Now the Old Testament word for Atonement is כִּפֶּר ; the root is recognised as meaning to *cover*.

Where there has been ground for offence there a cover or barrier is set between the sinner and the Holy God. This is the Old Testament conception. In the New Testament Atonement removes the barrier, and God and the sinner are reconciled.

The Old Testament reveals the absolute necessity of a cover between the guilty sinner and the Holy God if the sinner is not to die. The word occurs most frequently in the Pentateuch, and the fact was taught over and over again that without some cover the sinner in his attempt to draw near to a Holy God would die in his sins. The prohibition to the people not to draw near to the Mount at Sinai lest they die, and the Table of the Law inclosed in the ark to shield Israel from the danger of its presence amongst them, and then the ark itself covered with gold and on the lid of the ark the Kapporeth, the mercy seat, which had to be sprinkled with Blood, and then placed in the farthest recess of the Tabernacle, all taught the same thing, that without a cover, Israel, in their approach to God, would die in their sins. But in the Prophets and Psalms there emerges a more spiritual apprehension of the work of Atonement. The sin of Isaiah is purged or covered when the live coal from off the altar touches his lips. And the Psalmist exclaims upon the great Blessedness of the man whose sin is covered.

All this made the way clear for the apprehension of the meaning of Christ's Atoning and completed work which was finished upon the Cross of Calvary. If we ask what was the meaning of the Death upon the Cross, we go to Christ's Own words, "The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep"; "the Son of Man came to give His life a Ransom (λύτρον) for many." And at the last Supper He said, "This is My Blood which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins." St. Paul affirms that He died for all (2 Cor. v. 14), that is, in their stead, as the whole context and argument prove, and that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and by "reconciling" is meant removing the impediment or barrier that existed. And this was done by making Him Who knew no sin . . . not a sinner, but a partaker of the very element of sin itself *in its penalty* (Litton, p. 221).

So St. Peter teaches that we are "redeemed with the precious Blood of Christ," and that "Christ bare our sins in His Own Body on the Tree." And St. John follows on by saying that "the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us" (καθαρίζει; a legal term for cleansing) "from all sin," and, "Jesus Christ the Righteous is Himself the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world" (1 John ii. 2). Then *Some One* is propitiated! Who can this be but God? Sin had alienated the Holy Love of God, and true as it is that God loves the sinner, yet He hates sin. But the Propitiation has caused God's anger against sin to cease and there is therefore now a change on the part of God towards sinners on account of the "katallage."

Imperfect as our language is to express this truth, it is the truth nevertheless that God is reconciled to man. As Litton says:

"The whole tenour of Scripture is to the effect that through the vicarious

sacrifice of Christ a change was wrought in God of this nature, that whereas previously He could not, consistently with the perfection of His attributes, grant forgiveness on repentance, now He can."

Or as Dr. Griffith Thomas said :

" There is practical unanimity among Scholars that reconciliation in St. Paul means a change of relation on God's part towards man, something done by God to man which has modified what would otherwise have been His attitude to the sinner. Thus, reconciliation is much more than a change of feeling on man's part towards God, and must imply first of all a change of relation in God towards man."

THE SINNER CAN BE RECONCILED TO GOD

" God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. v. 8.) To believe that Christ died for us is apprehended by the heart rather than by the mind for love travels faster than the intellect, and when the heart is touched there is really no need to labour the point with the mind. Nevertheless there are some minds that are disturbed at the apparent injustice of the doctrine of Substitution. However reasonably it may be explained it will ever remain outside the range of perfect human understanding. Who understands the law of our creation? Who then can fully understand the mystery of our redemption, which is after all a fresh creation? Dr. Charles Henry Waller used to teach that the three words, Representation, Substitution, and Identification, help to remove the moral difficulty. Our Lord became our Substitute because He is our lawful Representative, lawful because God had appointed Him, and His Substitution becomes effectual in consequence of our subsequent Identification or living union with Him. He illustrated it thus :

" If a man forges my name to a cheque, and receives the money as my substitute he is a robber. But if I make him my representative by giving him a power of attorney, his signature on my behalf is no longer forgery, because he and I are practically one person. He applies the money which he receives as my representative, for my benefit, under my instructions. The substitution becomes lawful in the case of my representative because of our Union.

" Or, I am convicted of a capital crime and sentenced to death. My elder brother offers to be my substitute and die in my place. If I consent, he and I may agree that he shall act as my representative on the scaffold. But will justice permit the substitution? Certainly not. I am a murderer. My brother a respectable member of society. Mankind would not be safe if he were allowed to die for me. Society would suffer by the loss of a valuable member, and the continued presence of a dangerous criminal. Substitution cannot be permitted in this case, because Union is impossible, and therefore Representation is unlawful.

" But suppose it were possible, that by my brother's death, I, the murderer should die also. Suppose that the innocent man having died could return to life having slain the murderer in me. Then I am reformed, my brother is not lost, murder is punished. Society is protected and justice is satisfied.

" Either this or nothing is effected by the Atonement of Christ."

Or to put it in another way. The reason why without shedding of Blood is no remission lies in the fact that the old Adam whose

life is in his blood is irrevocably doomed to die. He is so spoiled by sin that there is no way to mend him except to kill him, and unmake him, and make him again. "The vessel that He made of the clay was marred in the hand of the Potter, so He made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the Potter to make it" (Jer. xviii. 4). It is not that He cleaned the old vessel or slightly altered its shape. He actually crushed it all out of shape into the original clay, and re-formed it as He thought best. But the death of the old vessel must precede the reformation that makes it new. When Christ died for us, He laid down the soul of the first Adam, which in us is the vehicle of sin, that He might take it again, not as a living soul in a natural body, but as a quickening Spirit in a Spiritual Body, and so He became the Founder of a new race of sons of God (John x. 17; 1 Cor. xv. 45; Rom. viii. 29). He is our Saviour God.

Or, as Bishop Handley Moule puts it thus :

"I, a believer, am 'in Christ' in covenant union. Between me and Him, my blessed 'Head once wounded,' there passes a real interchange of interests, and liabilities, and possessions, under an Eternal Covenant. He is liable for my debts; I am inducted into His possessions. On both sides is 'imputation,' reckoning, placing to an account. To His account is placed my fall, my transgression, my guilt; to my account is placed His standing, His obedience, His merit, His righteousness, His large and glorious satisfactoriness to His own and His Father's Law. But why? Is all this a cold 'legal fiction'? Is it the arbitrary treatment of *any* guilty person as innocent because *any* other person being innocent was treated as guilty? No. It is indeed a thing profoundly legal; but it is a thing in which holy Law moves within lines and orbits of real and eternal Life. The Sufferer is the HEAD; the Justified are the MEMBERS."

THE MINISTER AS AN AMBASSADOR

The chief office of a Jewish Priest in the Old Testament was not to offer sacrifice only, but to teach the Law, and also to burn incense when it was his turn. The Levites, not the Priests, did most of the work at the Altar of Sacrifice (1 Chron. xxiii. 13, 27, 28, 31). So to connect the words "Priest," "Altar," and "Sacrifice" is not altogether accurate Judaism, and is certainly not Christianity. If the ordained Christian Minister is in any sense a successor to the Jewish Priest, he has nothing to do with offering a sacrifice, but he has a great deal to do with teaching God's Holy Word and with offering the Incense of Prayer and Intercession.

And so there emerges the office of the Ambassador, the privilege which is the envy of Angels and Archangels. Now the Ambassador's work is not to plan terms of peace but to proclaim them, not to discuss them but to declare them. He has no plenipotentiary powers to arrange or adjust, he can only announce the terms already determined and urge their acceptance; he cannot grant peace, he can only give the message of the Gospel of Peace. If the ambassador adopts the rôle of the priest-confessor he is assuming the powers of the King Whom he represents. Rather is it his office to introduce the alienated soul to the King-Priest. His proclamation of the

Glad Tidings, has this in view. This is the object of all his work, and it is for this grand purpose that he uses his ambassadorial office. Let me at this point plead for a simpler and more historic interpretation of the words in John xx. 23: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted to them, and whosoever sins ye retain they are retained." We are so accustomed to think of the common view of these words that we can hardly read them without being conscious of the controversial aspect which they present. As Westcott reminds us, "whatever the words mean, the Commission must be regarded properly as the Commission of the Christian Society and not as that of the Christian ministry." Now our Lord must have had two men in mind that evening. There was Judas whose sin against the Christian Society and against his Lord had not been forgiven because he had never sought forgiveness. And so as regards Judas, our Lord said, "Whosoever sins ye retain they are retained." Here is a public declaration then that Judas was an unforgiven man. The other man in our Lord's mind was Simon Peter, who had also grievously sinned against the Christian Society and against Christ. He had sought and found forgiveness at the hand of Christ and had been forgiven by his fellow-disciples whose fellowship they had allowed him to join again. As regards this disciple then the Master said, "Whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted." It was a public declaration of Peter's forgiveness, ratified before the assembled gathering of believers.

We believe that the words in this passage have nothing to do with the secret confession of sin to a priest-confessor. The work of the Ambassador is a supremely happier and holier one.

Bishop Handley Moule, one of the holiest of Anglican Bishops (whom I quote again), from the depths of a consecrated experience has said:

"In the Confession by one sinful being to another, of what we call moral evil, hardly in one case out of a thousand can such detail do other than harm to both minds; such, at least, is my conviction. One of the deepest objections to an organised and systematic confessional system, of which Scripture says absolutely nothing, and really primitive antiquity just as little, is that it tends by its very nature towards an unwholesome treatment of detail in such things. . . .

"Under the fallacious assumption that spiritual diseases regularly require a human physician because physical diseases usually do so, and under the consequent supposed necessity of a minute diagnosis by the supposed physician, it is terribly easy to aggravate by the intended remedy. Experience shows that in certain states of temptation an eager readiness for detailed confession may be an actually bad symptom. Now within certain limits this fact bears upon Confession in secret even to the Lord or professedly to Him. True, we cannot do Him harm, as we could only too easily do to a sinful human confidant, ordained or not. But we may greatly hurt ourselves. Let us confess to Him everything with simplicity, not everything with minuteness."

No, our work is to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. iv. 5). An evangelist is a man with Glad Tidings, as the word means, and the work of evangelism is the preaching of the Glad News of Redemption through the Atoning and Finished work of Christ which

He completed on the Cross of Calvary. It is this Glad News which is our privilege to proclaim.

It is supremely needed.—That is, it is needed above any other kind of message, and first of all. It may not be *wanted*, for the natural man is afraid to look into his own heart for fear of what depths of sin he may find, and nothing finds us out like the Gospel of God's Love. But though it is not *wanted*, it is truly *needed*. In a new and quickly growing area outside one of our large towns, an Archdeacon was seen measuring out a space for a new church. He was observed by one of the new residents, and when it was ascertained that a new church was contemplated, the new resident said, "But we do not want a Church!" No, but he and the thousands of souls settling down in that new parish *needed* what he in his blindness did not realise. "I have need of nothing," said a self-complacent church, at whose door the Saviour with a pierced Hand was knocking because He was kept outside. A sense of need is deadened because men are immersed in cares, absorbed in pleasures, or asleep in sin. The Gospel is needed though men often deceive themselves by saying they do not want it.

It is surely welcomed.—In spite of all the indifference shown, the Music of the Gospel touches a deep chord in the human heart, and it is assuredly welcomed when a sense of need is created. The day of the evangelistic sermon is not over and never will be over, if the right note is struck—the message that has the Cross as its centre. "For years," said a Churchgoer in one of our country parishes, "we were lulled to sleep" until the trumpet call of the Gospel through a new voice with this message filled a hitherto empty church with eager listeners, some coming for miles Sunday after Sunday.

It is spiritually discerned (I Cor. ii. 14).—"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned." There are thousands who hear and yet do not hear. Their hearts have never yet yielded to the Breath of the Spirit, they have never been "born from Above." Evangelism without the Holy Spirit is dead before it is attempted. Before we prophesy to the people, we must prophesy to the Wind of Heaven. We must give ourselves to *The* prayer of all prayers, the Prayer for the shedding forth of the Spirit of God upon men. Back to the Gathering for Prayer must be our determination at all costs. This is the Power House, the Stronghold, the Reservoir whence the Living Streams pour forth. When shall we learn that the birth of souls begins in the prayers of God's believing people?

So the call comes to all who are called to the Ministry, "Do the work of an evangelist." May we not be found standing aside from the Call, nor wanting in this Great Day of opportunity.