

worship of the Church; *should lift up undefiled hands, without wrath or disputatious distrust.* Paul describes the attitude of prayer,<sup>1</sup> and a condition of acceptable prayer. We cannot draw near to God with rebellious spirit, with angry passion, with "hands full of blood" or "bribes," *i.e.*, with defiled conscience and unrepented sin. It is in the desire for purity, in the spirit of forgiveness, and in the intensity of faith, that, because Christ is our Mediator and our Ransom, and the Eternal God loves us, and has testified the fact to us, we must draw near to Him. Thus the apostle justifies his main request, and reveals the intensity and reasonableness of his conviction, that "men ought always to pray and not to faint." The mightiest and the thoughtfulest of the teachers of the nations calls the world to prayer. The young evangelist, "first of all," is to pray for all; while all men everywhere are to lift up holy hands.

H. R. REYNOLDS.

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### THE ATONEMENT.

IF, as we believe, Christ is both God and the Son of God; if, moreover, He is Man as well as God; and if this Son of God and Man has made a sacrifice in virtue of which the sin of the whole world is taken away,—then, surely, the Atonement effected by this mysterious Person must itself be a mystery the full import of which we cannot hope to fathom. No man, however wise, or learned, or devout, should affect to comprehend it; no man, whatever his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Clem. Rom. : Ep. Cor. c. xxix; 1 Kings viii. 22 : Psa. cxi. 2 ; Lam. ii. 19 ; iii. 41.

attainments, should venture to speak of it save with modesty and reverence, and with a profound conviction that he knows it "but in part," that he sees it but as "through a glass, darkly."

If any man object, "But why speak at all of so incomprehensible a mystery?" or, "How can you expect me to believe what I cannot understand?" the reply is obvious. Faith begins where knowledge ends; and knowledge soon ends, so soon that no man ever did live, no man can live, without faith. What we see and understand, that we know. Faith is that quality, or power, by which we apprehend and receive the things which are not seen, by which we venture out into the invisible and incomprehensible, assured that even there we shall find a solid path beneath our feet and a friendly Heaven above our heads. "Mysteries" are the proper objects of faith. We walk by faith only where we cannot walk by sight.

And, at the best, our knowledge is but a little island floating on, and amid, an infinite sea of mystery. Every natural phenomenon, every fact of experience, runs up, as we pursue it, into those great laws of Nature and Life whose modes of action we may be able to formulate, but of the essence of which we are wholly and hopelessly ignorant. Every rock, flower, tree, star, and much more every man, is but a manifestation in time, to sense, of those natural and vital laws which, in themselves, are an unsolved and insoluble mystery even to the wisest of our race. Were we to speak only of that which, in the full sense, we *know*, we should never open our lips; for we know nothing fully: all our knowledge

is but in part. We cannot follow any track of inquiry more than a few steps without reaching the farthest shore of our knowledge and launching out on that great deep of mystery which belts it round.

We know all things phenomenally, not really ; not as they are in themselves, but as they are manifested to us under the conditions of time and sense : and, always, our knowledge is bounded by mysteries at which we speedily arrive, and in which we are lost, unless indeed we are prepared to believe what we cannot see and define and formulate.

Now we may speak of the Atonement on precisely the same terms on which we may speak of any other topic which engages our thoughts. That is to say, we may take this great spiritual fact, or transaction, to have been proved by appropriate evidence ; we may say that this or that aspect of it has been manifested, or revealed, to us : and we must confess that, beyond and beneath all the aspects of it which we are able to grasp, there stretches an illimitable sea of mystery in which our thoughts are drowned, unless, indeed, they be inspired and upheld by faith ; for even on *this* sea of mystery, as of old on the darkened and wind-vexed sea of Galilee, He walks who can give us grace to walk with Him, if only we are not doubtful but believing.

And just now, when a single aspect of the Atonement is being earnestly pressed home on the thoughts of men as though it were a complete and satisfactory account of that great mystery of godliness, when the doctrine of the Cross is being robbed of much of its truth by being stripped of all its mystery, it is very necessary that we should speak about it, and frame

for ourselves the widest conceptions of it that we can. Any man who will speak frankly and modestly of what he himself has learned of it, and of the shape it has taken in his thoughts, may help to clear and enlarge the thoughts of his neighbours, whatever the point of view from which he approaches it.

Accordingly I venture to offer, as my contribution to the general stock of thought on this theme, a brief summary of the leading aspects of the Atonement revealed in the New Testament Scriptures, although I can only speak as a student and expositor of the Word, not as a scientific theologian. All I can do, all I wish and shall attempt to do in this paper, is to state in a simple and popular way those views of it to which I have been led by a careful study of Holy Writ, and which, as they have been helpful to my own faith, may, I trust, prove helpful to that of others.

But though I must needs speak as an expositor rather than as a theologian, I am not about to cite and discuss texts: for it is this habit of relying on scattered and isolated passages of Scripture, and on the letter of them rather than on the animating spirit, which has given rise to most of the errors and divisions of the Church. The letter killeth; it is the spirit of Scripture which gives life to thought, as well as to souls. And it is to the animating and pervading spirit of the New Testament that I shall appeal. I am not thus evading a difficulty; I am, rather, creating one for myself. Proof passages might easily be quoted in abundance for every position I am about to maintain; but I do not intend

to rely on these, but on certain large and general trains of thought which I feel sure no reader of the New Testament, whatever his theological prepossessions, can have failed to discover in it.

In the New Testament, then, I find three leading aspects of the Atonement wrought by Christ set forth,—not simply favoured by this passage or that, but interwoven with the very substance and whole extent of the Revelation it contains. These three aspects I may call, for want of simpler and happier terms, (1) the Metaphysical, (2) the Apocalyptical, and (3) the Ethical.

I. The *Metaphysical* View, or Aspect, of the Atonement. Beyond all question there is a large number of passages in the New Testament which speak of the Sacrifice of Christ as a ransom which He paid to deliver us from the captivities of Evil ; as a propitiation which He offered to a justly-offended God for the sin, or the sins, of the world : as a satisfaction which He rendered to the law of God, in virtue of which God can remain just while yet He justifies the ungodly. I don't cite these passages. There is no need. I affirm, without any fear of contradiction, that no man who has read the New Testament carefully and candidly has failed to find this view of the Atonement in it. It takes many forms ; it at once hides and discloses itself under many figures of speech ; it gives shape and substance to many passages and arguments, especially in the writings of St. Paul : but, above and beside all this, there is a *spirit* pervading the whole Christian Revelation which points stedfastly in this direc-

tion, and which no reader of spiritual discernment can possibly miss.

So far from having been missed, it is *this* aspect of the Atonement which the popular theology is apt to insist on as the only aspect, as containing in itself the whole doctrine of the Cross. Men are constantly invited and urged to trust in the propitiation offered to God once for all by Christ; and assured that, if they do unfeignedly and heartily trust in it, their sins will be forgiven them, and they will be reconciled or atoned to God.

Now I am very far from denying, or even questioning, this aspect of the Atonement. On the contrary, I heartily affirm it. I acknowledge that it is taught in the Scriptures of the New Testament, taught more frequently even and in more varied forms than any other, and that it is therefore to be believed by all who accept Christ for their Teacher and Lord, even although they do not comprehend it. But I submit that it is not the only aspect of the doctrine, nor an aspect of it which, if it stand alone, can be urged on the faith and consciences of men without peril. It is the heavenward, not the earthward, aspect of the Atonement; the side it turns to God, not the side it turns to man. It is a question of Divine metaphysics. It affects the inter-relations of the Father and the Son. It asserts that the Father, in or by the Son, did that in virtue of which He may justly forgive our offences against Him and his law. It implies — and the implication perplexes and baffles human reason — that, apart from the Sacrifice of the Cross, even the Love of God could not have gained access to us, that

our sins could not have been forgiven. In short, it is a great mystery; or, rather, it is a series of great mysteries which we cannot hope to fathom.

Glimpses into this mystery may be permitted us, nevertheless, and glimpses which reach, for aught that I can tell, to its very centre and heart. We may say, for example, that only as a satisfaction was rendered to the Divine Law which we had broken could that Law be vindicated and established in the respect of men. Or we may say that, in and through Christ, we are taught that obedience to that Law, even though it leads through suffering and death, is the only path to peace and blessedness, and that thus the law of God is not only vindicated, but glorified. Or we may say that since He who might justly have inflicted on us the penalties due to sin Himself endured them on our behalf, the revelation of the eternal righteousness of God was even more emphatic than it would have been had these penalties been exacted of those who had incurred them. Or, again, we may say that, as all men had sinned, it was necessary that He in whom all men are and live—the archetypal, all-comprehending Man—should obey for them all, that so, by the obedience of the One, the many disobedient might be made righteous. In many ways we may try to lessen the burden and pressure of this great mystery. But the more we brood over it, and the wiser we grow, and the clearer the light that falls on it, the more humbly do we confess that it is dark with excess of light, that it is so high we cannot attain to it, so wide that we cannot grasp it. All our endeavours do but land us in the conclusion, that we cannot hope to com-

prehend the relations which obtain among the Sacred Persons of the Blessed Trinity, or how those relations were modified, if indeed they were modified, by the incarnation and death of Christ. We can only say, "The New Testament, which teaches us all that we know of the Saviour, affirms that it is in virtue of his death that God can forgive and justify the ungodly; and therefore we believe it, and urge our neighbours to believe it."

That, in this aspect of it, the Atonement is a great mystery, an "unsearchable operation," must be admitted, if for no other reason, yet for this,—that during the last eighteen centuries at least three radically different theories of it have successively prevailed in the Church. But it would be none the less a mystery—rather, our reason as well as our faith would be still more severely tried, were this aspect of it not revealed. For there is a sense of justice in us which demands that the violated law of God should be vindicated, that his rectitude should be displayed as well as his love, that forgiveness should not be a mere act of grace wholly dissociated from the claims of righteousness. And in the Scriptures of the New Testament we are made to feel that this sense of justice is met and satisfied, though we cannot tell exactly how, by the fact that He died for our sins in whom we all died (2 Cor. v. 14), and rose again from the dead that we all might live in Him. Were it not in any way met, the mystery of the Atonement would only be a still more inscrutable mystery.

Nor, on the other hand, because we cannot solve the mystery which underlies the Atonement, are we



at all warranted in refusing to believe in that great Act. We cannot understand how two natures, the physical and the spiritual, can inhere in one person, or how the one is affected by the activity of the other; but we do not therefore refuse to believe that man has both a spiritual and a physical nature, and that each of these is affected in many subtle and intimate ways by its associate. Still less do we understand how there should be "three persons" in one God, and how the manifestation of God to the world in one of these Persons should affect their relations to each other and to men: but if there be an infinite God above us, how should we who are finite, and who touch unfathomable mysteries at every step, expect to comprehend Him and his ways? A God whom we *could* comprehend would be no God to us: He would be altogether such an one as ourselves.

2. But even faith must have something—something intelligible—to grasp. The great mysterious laws of Nature manifest themselves in phenomena which we can study and apprehend; it is as we study natural phenomena that we become aware of the laws and mysteries—mechanical, chemical, vital—which lie behind them. And, in like manner, the laws and mysteries of the spiritual world must have their phenomena, their intelligible outlines and aspects, on which our thoughts may fasten. Can we not find in the New Testament, then, other, and more intelligible, and more practical aspects of the Atonement than that at which we have just glanced? Assuredly we may. For in these Scriptures we find

what, for want of a simpler word, I have called the *Apocalyptical* view of it.

Now an "apocalypse" is an uncovering, an unveiling, of that which was before hidden and unseen. The Apocalypse of St. John is an uncovering, or unveiling, of the secrets of the heavenly, or spiritual, world. And the death of the Cross is an apocalypse, an unveiling, an uncovering, of the eternal love of God for men. Men, as we may see from the religions which preceded that of Christ, had come to doubt and distrust, if not to deny, that God loved them. They conceived of Him as an offended and austere Being, who needed to be placated or atoned by gifts and sacrifices before He would be gracious to them.<sup>1</sup> Christ came to convince them that they had misconceived the Father; to teach them that God would *make* the Atonement they had supposed Him to demand: to assure them that He had never ceased to love them, and that his love was of a quality which would bear wrong, distrust, enmity, death, and yet not loosen its hold. In short, He unveiled the hidden love of God; He shewed how far it would go, how much it would do and bear, in order that men might be redeemed from the miserable captivity of Sin, that they might be reconciled and restored to Him.

Here, again, I quote no texts; for here again there is no need. No one who has read the New Testament with any care will fail to recall many

<sup>1</sup> So far, therefore, is the "metaphysical" conception of the Atonement from being, as is sometimes alleged, alien or opposed to the natural reason of man, that men, when they had no Revelation to guide and instruct their thoughts, universally conceived of God as demanding precisely such an Atonement as this.

passages which speak of the Sacrifice of Christ as a manifestation of the love of God, as a proof that He so loved the world, even when it was at enmity against Him, that, to redeem the world, He spared not his only Son, but freely gave Him up for us all. No such reader but will frankly admit that this thought pervades it from end to end, and is affirmed, not by the letter only, but by the spirit of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Very well, then. Here is an intelligible aspect of the Atonement, one that soon runs up into mystery indeed if we pursue it, but, none the less, one that we can clearly apprehend, and the power of which we feel. We know what love is; we can conceive what the love of God must be like now that it has been revealed in Christ—how pure it must be, how strong, and how enduring. And as this second aspect of the Atonement is more intelligible than the first, so is it also the more practical of the two, the more influential on the hearts and lives of men. Tell them only that Christ has made a sacrifice which, in some mysterious way, justifies God in forgiving their sins, and, you may give them an instant and wonderful sense of relief, since if they believe that He who must otherwise have inflicted the penalties due to their sins Himself endured

<sup>1</sup> Of course it is not only the *love* of God that is revealed in the Death of Christ. That death, as has already been admitted, in a mysterious yet effective way reveals and vindicates the *righteousness* of God. And, no doubt, the completest mode of speaking of it would be to affirm that it reveals the entire nature, or character, of God. All I want to mark here is, that the New Testament does, constantly and with emphasis, affirm the death of Christ to be a manifestation, and the supreme manifestation, of the love of God (as, *e. g.*, if texts *must* be cited, in the familiar passages, St. John iii. 16; Romans v. 8; 1 John iii. 16; and iv. 9, 10).

them on their behalf, they may well believe also that their sins are forgiven them: but however carefully you guard your doctrine, they are well-nigh sure to misconceive and abuse it, as they have done in the past,—assuming that, if they only believed that Christ made such a sacrifice, they needed to do no more; the guilt of their sins would be taken away, although their lives were not lifted out of the slough of sin and made clean and pure. But add this second aspect to the first; when you have told them that, for Christ's sake, God both can and will forgive them, tell them also that God gave his only and beloved Son to die for them in order to shew how much He loved them, how utterly willing He is to forgive and receive and bless them, and so soon as they feel the power and sweetness of this Divine love, their hearts spring up, and must needs spring up, to greet it with a responsive love, a love which, as we shall soon see, cleanses and uplifts their whole nature.

But before we pass on to the ethical aspect of the Atonement, I wish to emphasize a point too often overlooked: viz., that even the Sacrifice of Christ was but a temporal, though it is also the supreme, manifestation to men of a Love that *always* exists, and is always prepared, should need arise, to go as far and to do as much as when the Son of Man poured out his soul unto death. We are often told that in no age, and in no world, will the Sacrifice of Christ be repeated. And, possibly, that is true. It may be that the Sacrifice of Christ is a solitary act, which will never need to be repeated in any form, the effects of which extend, and for ever will extend,

throughout the universe. No similar manifestation of the Divine Love may be requisite at any period or in any sphere of being. But this, we should remember, is only a speculation, or, at best, a doubtful inference from ambiguous words. And the glorious fact is, that the Love which once manifested itself on the Cross still exists, and will for ever exist, and will, we may be sure, be manifested again and again, as the need for its manifestation recurs and varies. Notwithstanding our constant assertion of the eternity of God, we too much forget that He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; that what we see to be in Him at any single moment we may know to be in Him at every moment and for ever. That a Love capable of the utmost self-sacrifice was in Him once we learn from the Cross; and therefore we may be very sure that that very Love—Love as pure, as deep, as self-sacrificing—must always be in God, must in all ways and at all times be seeking to manifest itself to his creatures.

3. But even this second aspect of the Atonement is not without its dangers. Those who think of the Sacrifice of the Cross only as a manifestation of the Love of God may only too easily come to rely on that Love without responding to it, or may respond to it only with a weak sentiment which does not purify and ennoble their lives. Indeed, the world has long sneered at the Church, or at certain members of the Church, as holding a creed which either persuades them that they may be relieved from the punishment of sin without being redeemed from sin itself, or which quickens in them a weak

puling sentiment incapable of producing in them the elements of a righteous and manly character. And, therefore, to the Metaphysical and the Apocalyptic, we must be careful to add the *Ethical* aspect of the Atonement.

Now this third aspect springs logically and naturally from the second. For when we once apprehend the love of God for us, a responsive love is kindled in us. And this love, if at least it be a true response, if, that is, it be like the love from which it springs, cannot be a mere sentiment easily divorced from righteousness; for in God love and righteousness are one: nay, according to the New Testament, love includes righteousness both in God and in man. "Love," we are told, "is the end of the Commandment," that to secure which it was given, and in which it rests. And, again, "Love is the fulfilling of the Law." And, again, "To love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourself" is the whole duty, the whole righteousness, of man. So that the love inspired in us by the great revelation of the love of God is a strong and active affection, which cannot fail to draw us into conformity with the righteous will of God.

And that the quickening of this love within us is the proper effect of faith in the Atonement, I need not cite texts to prove. They are to be found in every page of the New Testament, and notably in that large and ill-understood class of passages which speaks of the blood of Christ as of a virtue to cleanse us from all sin. To many it would seem, from the kind of language they employ, that this cleansing virtue shapes itself as a chemical and detergent con-

stituent of the mere blood shed upon the Tree! Others appear to assign this efficacy to the mere pain endured for men by the Son of Man—assuming what surely needs to be proved, that that which is physical is capable of being converted into moral equivalents, that mere bodily pain may become a spiritual power. Others virtually reduce the Sacrifice of Christ to the level of the sacrifices prescribed in the Mosaic economy, and imply that its virtue has an arbitrary source in a Divine ordinance,—forgetting that even the Old Testament pours contempt on all sacrifices save those of the will and the heart, save those which are personal, inward, spiritual. And, indeed, most persons of any refinement have so shrunk from the conventional and traditional uses of the phraseology which connects the redemption from sin with “*the blood of Christ,*” that probably very few of them have paused to consider what the New Testament use of it means and implies.

It must be confessed that the metaphor of the phrase, “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin,” like many other metaphors in the New Testament, is a broken and imperfect one,—the Apostles caring much more for exact expressions or comprehensive summaries of truth than to make a figure run on all fours, or to secure artistic beauty of style. To sprinkle, or wash, or plunge a man in blood is not the way to make him clean, but the way to make him foul. But, in the mind of the Apostles, the “blood” stood for the death, for the sacrifice, of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ was the supreme and consummate expression of the love of God for men. That love, when apprehended by faith, kindled a

corresponding love in them. When once this responsive affection was kindled in them, it drew them away from the sins by which they had offended God, and drew them toward the righteousness by which alone they could please Him. To the Apostles' minds, as any man who will *study* the Epistles of St. Paul and St. John may see for himself, the phrase, "The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin," was a brief summary of this comprehensive series of truths:—the blood stood for the sacrifice of Christ; the sacrifice of Christ was a manifestation of the love of God; that love kindled a love like itself in those who believed in it; and this love, again, broke the power, and healed the wounds, and washed away the stains of sin.<sup>1</sup>

Rightly viewed, therefore, there is nothing in this doctrine to favour the thought of Salvation apart from Righteousness. Rather, the Atonement of Christ

<sup>1</sup> No doubt, in the mind of *Jewish* writers, this phrase, "the blood of Christ," &c., would contain an allusion to the legal cleansing, or acquittal, effected by the sacrifices offered in the Temple,—which sacrifices, be it remembered however, had no moral worth save as they were accompanied by repentance, faith, and the purpose of amendment and a yearning for the Divine love and help. I admit, too, that this allusion would be very prominent in the minds of the Apostles when they penned this phrase. All I contend for is that there is sufficient evidence in their Writings to shew that, when they endeavoured to get at the moral equivalents of that legal cleansing, to frame a conception of the way in which consciences defiled by sin and characters degraded by it were cleansed and raised, they pursued the line of thought indicated above. But even should this interpretation of the phrase be contested, the general argument in favour of an *ethical* aspect of the Atonement would remain untouched, since no theologian of any mark denies that the objective Atonement only reaches its end as it produces a subjective Atonement in us, we being made "partakers of Christ's death" and of his life,—the death to sins and the life of righteousness (see 2 Cor. v. 15, 17-21; Gal. i. 4; 1 Peter ii. 20-24).



is, according to the Scriptures, a revelation of the love of the righteous God designed to kindle the love and service of Righteousness in sinful men; it only produces its due effect on us when it "delivers us from this present evil world," since He "bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, might live unto righteousness." In fine, to be cleansed from all sin, to be made righteous by love for the loving and righteous will of God,—this, and nothing short of this, is the salvation offered to us in "the glorious gospel of the blessed God."

Now I am very far from saying that these three aspects of the Atonement—metaphysical, apocalyptic, ethical—embrace and exhaust *all* that the New Testament has to teach on this great and mysterious theme; doubtless there are other aspects of it which will yet reward the labour of those who dig in this sacred mine: but I submit that no view of the Atonement can possibly be regarded as complete which does not include at least these three aspects of it, since they are all clearly and obviously revealed in Holy Writ. And, further, I venture to ask all who teach and preach to consider which of these views needs just now to be urged the more earnestly and emphatically on the attention of the Church and the World? That it *is* necessary, now and always, to affirm that Christ offered Himself as a propitiation, in virtue of which God can forgive the sins of men without any departure from justice, without putting any slight on his violated law, I profoundly feel and frankly admit: wherefore else is the truth so clearly

and constantly affirmed in the New Testament? But in affirming and teaching this truth, we should be careful to speak with modesty and reverence, confessing how little we know of the mystery which underlies it. No man, however good or wise or erudite, should affect to comprehend it, to map out with accurate precision the several provinces of it occupied respectively by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; or imply that he has been admitted to the councils of the Sacred Trinity, and can tell exactly what effect the sacrifice of the Son produced on the mind of the Father, and in what way the death of the One gives life, or the prospect of life, to all. There is grave danger, if this aspect of the Atonement be insisted on, solely or even unduly, that men will come to think of the Atonement as a mere legal transaction, which has no necessary or vital bearing on character, as obtaining for them a mere verdict of acquittal at the Divine Bar, instead of thinking of it as redeeming them from the tyranny and usurpation of sin.

On the other hand, if we go to men conscious of sin and longing to be delivered from it, and tell them that God so loved them that He can give Himself no rest till He has delivered them from the grasp of sin and made them righteous even as He Himself is righteous, and that He has given them full proof and assurance of this Divine redeeming Love in that He both gave his Son to suffer with and for them, and is ever seeking by his Spirit to make them like his Son:—are we not likely to address ourselves to the very sense of need of which they are conscious, and win them to meet the Love of God with a love

that shall constrain them to hate the sins which have alienated them from Him, and to practise themselves in the obedience which will bring them near to Him?

In the difficult and perplexing conditions under which we live, longing for gratifications and indulgences not to be procured without sin, and yet hating the misery and degradation which sin involves; shrinking from the effort requisite to doing that which is right, and yet conscious that right-doing is the only way to peace and blessedness, there is surely no Gospel so welcome, none so happily adjusted to our conditions, as that which assures us that the very God against whom we have sinned loves us, and, in his love, will help us to hate sin itself, and not only the misery and degradation it brings with it,—help us also to take and keep that path of righteousness in which alone we can find rest and peace. No thoughtful and noble-minded man can be content with mere exemption from the punishment he has deserved; much less can he be content to transfer that punishment to another who has not deserved it. What he wants, what we all want, even though as yet we know it not, is such a forgiveness of sins as shall really cleanse us from our sins and fix and establish us in the love and service of holiness. And this is the Gospel which, by the grace of God, is preached to us and to all men in the life and death of his Son.

CARPUS.

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