

Atonement in Christ.¹

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1. GOD is the Father of mankind. He has called into life a race of beings akin to Himself, yet with distinctness of individuality. Mankind is always conditioned by this essential relationship. Inasmuch as God's thoughts preceded man's being, and as God is the cause of his being, existence for man is meaningless, and belies its origin unless there be an ideal of his own nature to be reached, an ideal which exists in the mind of the originator. God's authority is permanent; His Fatherhood involves dominion. It is the essential Love in God which expresses itself in Fatherhood, but kingship and rule are necessary elements of perfect Fatherhood. Many of the current difficulties concerning the Atonement are due to the emasculation of the idea of Fatherhood, which is the reaction from its induration in earlier centuries of thought. The attainment, then, by man of the ideal of human nature is the permanent kingly will of the Father.

2. The New Testament reveals the second person of the Godhead, spoken of as Christ, as the organic head of the race. This is no mere word-juggling. He is 'the firstborn of all creation, for in Him (*ἐν αὐτῷ*) were all things created . . . through Him and unto Him (*δι' αὐτοῦ, εἰς αὐτόν*) [Col. 1¹⁶].' He speaks of Himself as the Son of man, and He regards Himself as the representative of the race. All creation had its aim, its goal directed *unto Him*. The underlying thought of the whole New Testament is of a vital permanent organic connexion between the Son of God and mankind. Creation is incomplete until consummated in Him. When in the fulness of the time He is born of a woman there is for the first time the full realization of the divine sonship in man; for the first time in an individual, Himself the organic head of the race, the ideal relation of man to God, of son to Father, is reached. In any scheme of a perfect humanity He is essential.

¹ This was one of a series of twenty-minute addresses to the Cambridge Intercollegiate Christian Union. Thus it is the barest outline of a practical man's working-theory of the Atonement, given to a sympathetic but theologically untrained band of students.

3. However it came about, we see that *sin exists*. Sins imply an underlying sinful disposition, just as the fall of apples from a tree is a momentary expression of the deep underlying law of gravitation. The fact of this sinful disposition is an outrage of God's standard for man. And this outrage is certainly voluntarily and deliberately committed. In our heart of hearts we know that we are responsible for sin, and God knows it. He resents this outrage of the very purpose of man's existence, this destruction of His thought for man, of the ideal set before man. The very intensity of His love measures the intensity of His wrath. He loves and is angry at the same time. The Monarch who is Father of His own subjects cannot, by the laws of His being, lay aside either love or anger while His children-subjects voluntarily and deliberately insult His standard and frustrate His plan. For this standard and plan are expressions of absolute righteousness.

4. Nor has this anger any element of selfishness. A righteous Fatherhood is bound to claim righteousness in its children. It is vital to the order of the universe. Sin, the infringement and destruction of that order, necessitates a penalty. If disobedience involved no penal consequence, the world would sink into moral chaos. The punishment of sin, both consequence and penalty, is death. Death is a much larger term than the mere sundering of soul from body. It is true that part of the penalty is the horror of physical death, for the sting of death is sin. But the death which is the penalty of sin is the cutting off from God. Just as the body lives by air and food and, when cut off from these, is said to die, so the man who is spirit, whose atmosphere is God, whose food is God's word, when he sins, cuts himself off from God; that is, he dies. The ideal aim is shattered, the goal is hopelessly missed; man was meant for life, he has instead fallen into death.

5. It is this wreck which has somehow to be remedied. Somehow or other alienated mankind must be brought back to God, must be restored to the air and food of the soul, must be rescued

from death and restored to life. Mere punishment is naught. Let us consider the feeble and broken analogy of a human father with an erring child who has broken the parental law. Love, patient but firm, breathes in every word of the father's unfolding of the sin; punishment must be inflicted, but the aim of every right-minded parent will be to win the love, the assent of the child, and its willing submission. Only thus is the right relation restored. So must it be with the divine treatment of sin and the sinful race. The penalty must be paid, and the race must return to love, to willing submission.

6. Hence the necessity of the Incarnation of the Divine Son. We have already seen that He is in organic relation to mankind; none other than He can be its true representative and head. If the return to God is to come at all, He must head it. Moreover, His Divinity brings to the work of rescue that perfection of power which mankind otherwise hopelessly lacked. There is no unreality in the whole. The Temptation was real, the Agony was woe untold. And all through He offered an obedience perfect, willing, and deliberate. This is an essential, vital principle of the Atonement; that the Great Head of mankind should as its representative come with joy to do God's will. But this obedience was an obedience unto death. The Atonement involved not only the Incarnation but the Cross. The perfect obedience of the Man, we have seen, balances the sin of man; and the willing surrender of life under penal conditions annuls sin. Death is the penalty of sin; He died as the direct consequence of sin, willingly drinking the Cup. Even to Him there came in some mysterious way the utter loneliness in death which showed how sin separates from God. And through it all

there was the perfect filial response as He gave His spirit into His Father's keeping. He was Son to the end.

The Atonement restored the race, as race, to its right position Godward. Man had given a perfect and willing obedience, had drunk to the dregs the bitter cup of death, the consequence of sin. That death could not hold Him was the result of the Godhead which thus set manhood in its ideal place.

7. It remains to point out in two or three words what we must avoid in any statement of the Atonement.

First, we must claim that it be remembered that to-day we are stating only one-half of our truth. Conversion in man remains to be considered.

Men object to the Atonement because they think it a suggestion of a bargain, a compounding for the remission of a penalty. The very phrase 'imputed righteousness' is often blamed as implying legal trickery. Many statements have been fairly open to this blame.

Above all must we avoid that travesty which pictures an angry God, the Father, importuned by a kindly God, the Son, into a reluctant forgiveness. Many a sentimental hymn sings this libel on God.

It is not the place here to enlarge on the mysterious and comforting truth of the Trinity. But the deeper we explore into its luminous depths the more do we feel how God is All and in All. God the Father and the Son it is who in all the Atonement wrought out Salvation, God the Father who is angry with the sin and the wicked because He is Father, God who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

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¹ *Grundzüge der Kirchengeschichte*. Ein Ueberblick von Hans von Schubert, D.D., Prof. der Theologie, Kiel. Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr; London: Williams & Norgate, 1904. 4s. net.

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