THE PHRASE "IN CHRIST."

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THE Revised Version of the New Testament has now been in use for forty-five years. It has not superseded the Authorized Version; but it is probable that an increasing number of persons are becoming familiar with it through private study. It is generally understood that, though it has not the literary excellence and charm of the older version, it has a value of its own in that it renders the original more accurately, giving us more nearly the precise meaning of the words of our Lord and of His Apostles. It thus tends to correct, in some passages, erroneous impressions of doctrine.

To take an outstanding illustration. The careful student of the Revised Version cannot have failed to notice how often the phrase "in Christ" is substituted for other phrases in the Authorized Version, such as "through Christ" or "for Christ's sake." Here are some instances: "The wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life *in* Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. vi. 23). "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, even as God also *in* Christ forgave you" (Eph. iv. 32). "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts *in* Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 7). "We seek to be justified *in* Christ" (Gal. ii. 17). "I can do all things *in* Him that strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 13). Bishop Westcott said that he would gladly have given the ten years of his life spent on the Revision to bring only these two phrases "in Christ" and "into the Name" to the heart of Englishmen, adding, "he who has mastered these two propositions has found the central truth of Christianity."

In trying to estimate the significance of this change of rendering we may bring to mind what was till recently the common view of the Atonement. It was supposed that in order to get into a right relation with God, the all-important thing was to plead the sacrifice of Christ and to pray to be forgiven for His sake. It was a half-truth only: one of those half-truths which, when stated by themselves, pervert the truth as a whole. The doctrine of the vicarious sacrifice, as thus conceived, seemed, indeed, to many to present no difficulty: they found it very comforting. To others, however, it was disturbing and dissatisfying. To them it seemed an immoral transaction to lay the sins of the guilty on the innocent and to allow the guilty to go scot-free for the sake of the innocent.

Another objection to this view of the Atonement was that it misrepresented the character of God the Father. It made Him appear to be stern, unapproachable, and inexorable, while it invested Jesus by contrast with the peculiarly attractive divine attributes

of mercy and compassionateness. The extreme result of such a conception is illustrated in the frank acknowledgment of the little child, "I love Jesus, but I hate God."

It was easy in the earlier days of the Church to fall into this way of thinking and feeling, because the common notion of the Supreme Being was derived in part from pagan sources. God was conceived very much as having the characteristics of an earthly monarch—"a jealous Potentate needing and liking to be placated by ostentatious grovelling." This idea has come to be described as that of the Sultan-God in distinction from that of the Father-God Whom Christ revealed. We clearly see now that there was nothing more original or more significant in Christ's teaching than His mode of speaking about God. He never applied to the Supreme Being even such titles as are given to Him in the Old Testament. He never spoke of Him as the Eternal or the Almighty: only once did He call Him the "Most High," and that was in reference to His love (St. Luke vi. 35). Always it was "the Father," "your Father," "My Father." He would have all men think of God at all times as "the Father" simply. And He bade men learn to think of the Father as they would think of Himself. "No one cometh unto the Father, but by Me." "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." "I and My Father are one." Was the Son loving and compassionate, not willing that any should perish? So was the Father. Was the Son meek and lowly in heart? So was the Father.

The teaching of the Apostles was similar to this. They always spoke of the sacrifice of the Cross as illustrating the pitifulness of the Father, and they associated the Father and the Son together in the work of atonement. "God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8). "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. v. 19). "My God shall fulfil every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 19). "God in Christ"—God in His holiness, justice, love, pity, and self-sacrifice fully revealed and incarnate in Christ—that is the first note of the Gospel.

The second is, "We in Christ." We responding to the love of God as manifested in the sacrifice of Christ; we incorporated into Christ, partaking of His Spirit, renouncing ourselves, dying to sin and rising again with Christ unto righteousness; we living our whole lives "in faith, the faith which is *in* the Son of God, Who loved us, and gave Himself for us" (Gal. ii. 20).

That is the correct way in which the work of atonement and redemption is to be thought of, man's part being associated with God's part, as both being necessary to the full effectiveness of the work, so that there can be no thought of God being placated merely by Christ's death and of our accepting passively the benefits of that death. As Bishop Knox has put it, referring to "speculations upon the Atonement which emphasized one aspect of truth at the expense of another": "The justice and wrath of God are emphasized at the

expense of the Love of God. The two attributes were regarded as antagonistic, whereas in the realm of infinite holiness, wrath is love reacting against sin. The revelation of the Cross was that of love triumphing over sin, not by vengeance, but by supreme self-sacrifice, and holding out the same triumph to sinners, who submitted themselves to accept that love, and to lose themselves in Him, Who loved them and gave Himself for them." [1]

Here we have an entirely satisfying view of the Atonement, one which magnifies the holiness and love of God, attributing all the merit of our salvation to Him, and at the same time commends itself to our moral sense by insisting on "the surrender of the whole man to Christ in joyful faith," so that our spiritual fellowship with Christ in the full meaning of that great idea is essential to our reconciliation to God.

This view of the Atonement is an invaluable gain of our modern theology. We have reached it by an exact study of the New Testament doctrine of God in relation to the death of Christ, and as the result, too, of a reflection on the successive currents of thought which have tended in the past to pervert the New Testament doctrine. It has been admirably stated, as the conclusion of an historical survey of the development of the Church's Christology, by one of the most luminous and inspiring theological writers of our time, the late Professor Du Bose. His words are worth quoting in full:

"Of course atonement and redemption are acts of God, but they are real for us as they are acts performed in man and not outside of him. If the essence of the atonement is found where it lies, in the fact that humanity taken into God itself dies to and from the sin that separates it from Him and lives in the holiness in which it is one with Him, we shall see at once that the atonement could not have been an act of God performed for humanity externally because it is essentially an act performed for humanity internally. God's atonement is *our* reconciliation and reunion with Him; His redemption is our freedom from sin and death. The atonement was accomplished when humanity in Jesus Christ was made one with God by the spiritual and moral act of the cross; the redemption was finished when in Him men overcame sin and destroyed death. The whole spiritual science of the New Testament is to show us in Jesus Christ how the divine humanity was realized for us and is to be realized in and by us. Our Lord Himself expressed it in that one word, the cross; the cross which is the eternal symbol of self-sacrificing love; love, in which God lost and found Himself in us and in which we lose and find ourselves in God." [2]

It is of acute interest to note how this great conception of our union with God in Christ is brought out in our present Communion Service. The old view of the Atonement formed the background of the doctrine and ritual of the Mass. The prominent feature of

[1] *The Unscriptural Character of the Alternative Consecration Prayer* (Longmans), page 34.

[2] *The Ecumenical Councils*, by William P. Du Bose (T. & T. Clark), 4th edition, 1926.

that service was the propitiation of the "Sultan-God" by the offering to Him of the Body and Blood of Christ, the worshippers benefiting by "assisting" at the sacrifice, most often without communion.

Most happily for the English Church, we recovered in the sixteenth century the true conception of the Fatherhood of God, and, as a consequence, the service of propitiation was turned into a Communion—a Feast of happy Fellowship. The whole substance and structure of the service was adapted to this corrected view of our approach to God in Christ. We first thankfully commemorate the great sacrifice, acknowledging that we are unworthy to draw near to God except by virtue of what Christ has done for us. Then, receiving the sacred gifts by faith, and being thus strengthened and refreshed and re-united to Christ, we offer "ourselves, our souls and bodies," to God—which offering of ourselves in union with Christ has been regarded from early days as the true eucharistic sacrifice. Plainly this was to lift the whole conception of our relationship to God in Christ and of our re-admission into His favour on to a higher moral level, as everything led up to this complete surrender of the self in response to God's forgiving Love; and the most careful preparation on every occasion of attending the service was obviously necessary.

It was all the more remarkable that this thought of our reconciliation to God in penitent, trustful self-surrender, as distinguished from His reconciliation to us, should have been brought out so emphatically in the service, because our Anglican Reformers had not altogether cleared their minds of the vindictive conception of the work of Atonement. Yet they adhered so strictly to Scriptural language and authority that there is no suggestion in the service of our reminding God of what He does not need to be reminded of, or of our propitiating Him by the presentation or re-presentation to Him of the Sacrifice of Christ. Thus it has come about that our present Communion Office, as compiled and shaped in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is in advance of all other liturgies, and will be regarded, no doubt, in the years to come as a priceless heritage of the English Church, witnessing, as it does, so clearly and fully to our vital union with God in Christ.

It is pitiful to think of the Church being plunged now into a state of turmoil and disunion for the sake of a reactionary alternative, which, if it is authorized, will probably supersede the old office in most of our cathedrals and in many of our parish churches. From one point of view the prospect is tragic. The Gospel that the world needs to-day is just the old Gospel as we have learnt of late to view it in all its wonderful attractiveness. We are looking and longing for a revival of religion in this country. There are signs, indeed, that such a revival is coming, though not as yet through the action of the official Church. From that quarter the movement may be hindered and blocked by a determination to press upon the use of Churchpeople a form of devotion which obscures "the central truth of Christianity."