THE OXFORD CONFERENCE OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHMEN.

GENERAL SUBJECT: THE WAY OF REVIVAL: RUIN, REDEMPTION, REGENERATION.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS.

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THE summons to the "Way of Renewal" was first sounded by the Archbishops' Pastoral of July, 1929, and again in the following summer by the Encyclical Letter of the Lambeth Report.

In the "Way of Renewal" the two means whereby the growing forces of materialism are to be checked and "our vision of God's glory" renewed are intellectual study and also corporate worship in which adoration should be the chief note. But although the Lambeth Encyclical acknowledged "that the root of our failure to behold God, and to manifest Him to the world, is sin," yet the "Way of Renewal" contained no call for the conversion of the sinful will—whereby alone we may know God in order to know about Him, and enter into what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes as a worshipping relationship with God. It is to include this primary necessity of a change of heart preceding an appeal to reason or the senses, that we have altered the title of the subject of this Conference to the "Way of *Revival.*" We believe that the real issue to-day is a moral and practical one of pardon and power, and can only be met by the eternal Gospel of our Lord and Saviour. We hold that there is no way either of Revival or Renewal which does not run past the foot of the Cross, and so includes in its progress the stages of Ruin and Redemption as well as that of Regeneration.

The "Way of Renewal," with its important objects, might indeed have produced great effect in more quiet and stable times, but in these days of raw reality and ethical upheaval it has fallen upon deaf ears, and at this Conference we shall examine instead other movements which challenge us by the stir they have provoked.

All such movements, whether of Renewal or Revival—if they are to be healthy and enduring—must rest upon a well-thought-out theology. The revival of the Reformation was based upon the New Learning; and the great Evangelical Revival was preceded by the Holy Club in Lincoln College, Oxford. The Lambeth Way of Renewal likewise emerges from the greatest Report of that great Conference—"The Christian Doctrine of God." It is hard to exaggerate the excellence of this treatise with its depth of thought and wide scholarship. Suffice it to say that it has been termed

the most important document produced by the Church of England since the Reformation. But the vital omission of a Gospel message for sinners in the Way of Renewal is immediately explained by the equally unaccountable omission of the Atonement from "The Christian Doctrine of God." In the eighteen closely reasoned pages of that Report, with its 8,000 words, the Cross of our Saviour is dismissed in twenty-three words and as merely symbolic of the eternal struggle of Love with evil.[1] It may be that the Atonement is taken for granted, and so finds no specific mention in this Report. On the other hand, the doctrine of the Cross has for so long been a matter of controversy, and its morality as a transaction so much questioned even by Evangelicals, that it is more probable that Lambeth dared not commit itself upon the subject—even if its caution against our thought of God being inconsistent with all that we may learn of His character in Christ,[2] does not include a caveat against a substitutionary view of His Passion. It is the Incarnation, not the death of Christ, which is central in the theology of Lambeth; with the Church as its next most important theme. Hence it is that intellectual study—to relate all things to Christ the immanent Word (Logos) of God—and the worship of the Christian Society, form the two features of the Lambeth Way of Renewal. And, to adopt a thought of Dr. Kirk's in *Essays Critical and Catholic*, after reading the Report on "The Christian Doctrine of God" we should rise and sing an amended version of Mrs. Alexander's hymn:

> He *lived* that we might be forgiven;
> He *lived* to make us good.
> That we might go at last to heaven,
> Saved by His precious *love*.

But such Christian doctrine is not Christ's doctrine either of God or of His own Mission to this world. I turn to St. Peter, who describes himself as "a witness of the sufferings of Christ,"[3] and who, as St. Luke tells us,[4] had been taught by the Master Himself, both before and after the Resurrection, the meaning of those sufferings and how remission of sins should be preached in His Name unto all nations.

In the five chapters of the first Epistle of St. Peter—styled the "Catholic Epistle" because its authenticity has been universally acknowledged—there are no less than eight passages in which reference is made to the Blood, or the Death, or the Sufferings of our Lord. And in them the Cross is set forth as central to the whole purpose of history, and as standing at the very heart of the Universe itself. Christ as the Lamb of God was foreknown before the foundation of the world.[5] Prophecy, with its developing theme of a Suffering Servant, prepared for His great redemption.[6] The event of His Death marked the end of one age and the beginning of another;[7] and the Resurrection floods that Death with glory.[8] That

[1] Lambeth Report, p. 69.
[2] Lambeth Report, pp. 20 & 39.
[3] 1 Peter v. 1.
[4] Luke xxiv. 44 ff.
[5] 1 Peter i. 19, 20.
[6] 1 Peter i. 10 ff.
[7] 1 Peter i. 20.
[8] 1 Peter i. 3, 21.

is to say, all that went before pointed forward to the Cross, and all that comes after points back to it. So is it central in history. Also the Cross stands at the very heart of the Universe. Angels look down upon it with amaze ; [1] it wrought the salvation of men ; [2] and its reverberations were felt even in the underworld of departed spirits.[3]

Moreover, it is worth noticing that while St. Paul—who has been credited with inventing the expiatory theory of the Atonement—can speak of the sufferings of Christ as an example, without a word as to their character, St. Peter seems forced to dilate on what the Death of Christ actually effected, even when it involves a digression. It is when he is holding up the Saviour as an example, only, of patient suffering, that he bursts out with those two supreme sayings : " Who His own self bare our sins in His Body on the tree " ; [4] and " Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God." [5] But this centrality of the Cross in the Evangel of him who was its eye-witness, is only what we find in the Gospel of His Teacher—the Saviour Himself. If we consider (as, indeed, we are bound to do, and as scholarship is doing increasingly) that all four Gospels must be taken together in order to gain a true picture and record of our Lord's life and teaching ; and that the fourth Gospel is not the least important of the four as history as well as philosophy : then we are bound to conclude that in our Saviour's mind the Cross was central to His whole earthly Ministry ; and that at Calvary He believed that He was giving His life a ransom *instead* of (*anti*) many,[6] and for the remission of sins.[7]

It was a death that was foreseen, and that from the first days of His Ministry. The Cup was *accepted*, even as early as in the Wilderness of Temptation ; and that by One Who deemed Himself the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, if we may judge by the Baptist's description of Him, immediately afterwards, as " the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." [8] The death was definitely *proclaimed*, only a few weeks later, on the occasion of our Lord's first visit to Jerusalem ; and that both publicly in the Temple,[9] and also in private to Nicodemus as the fulfilment of what Moses pictured by the brazen serpent.[10] And in his great work *The Atonement* (a book that should still find an honoured place on the shelves of every Minister's study) Dr. Dale has set forth with great force and clarity how the Cross cast an ever-darkening shadow upon the Saviour's path, as with increasing foreboding He journeyed towards its foot. As Bengel has put it, " His life was one constant going to death." It would then be false to the facts not to recognise that —like as His Death occupies one-third of the gospel story—so also, according to the Evangelists, His Atonement occupied a unique

[1] 1 Peter i. 12.
[2] 1 Peter i. 9, 20 & 21.
[3] 1 Peter iii. 19.
[4] 1 Peter ii. 24.
[5] 1 Peter iii. 18.
[6] Mark x. 45.
[7] Matt. xxvi. 28.
[8] John i. 29.
[9] John ii. 19.
[10] John iii. 14.

and central position in our Lord's mind, such as His Incarnation and Resurrection cannot claim. The Incarnation led up to the Atonement. Christ did not die because He was born, but He was born in order that He might die—"*for this cause came I unto this hour.*" [1] and the Resurrection is the glorious consequent upon it—"*behoved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory?*" [2] That is to say our Lord taught that His death was not simply a fitting conclusion to a life of self-sacrifice and obedience to the uttermost, but that (in the words once more of Dr. Kirk) it "effected something vital for our salvation which His earthly Incarnation, had it ended in some other way, could not have secured for us." [3]

It was also a death that was entirely voluntary, and in which the Victim Himself took the initiative—"*No one taketh it (my life) from me, but I lay it down of myself.*"[4] He chose the place—"*It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.*" [5] He fixed the hour—"*His hour was not yet come.*" [6] But when the hour did come that, like the serpent in the wilderness, He should be lifted up and draw all men to Himself,[7] then no longer did the Saviour seek to escape the plots of the Jews, which were fully known to Him, and which He had easily evaded before and might as easily have avoided again. Of set purpose He journeyed to Jerusalem, declaring that He was going to His death, and thus deliberately putting His neck into the noose. He even arranged the halter round His own throat. First He bade Judas at the Last Supper to fetch his confederates. And then He resorted to that Garden whither He knew that His enemies would seek Him ; instead of—when He had passed unchallenged through the city gate—hastening on to the asylum of Bethany. We who are taught, by the Christian ethic, the sanctity of human life must regard such suicidal action as immoral if inspired by any other purpose save by that greater love which lays down its life for its friends. As a demonstration, simply to reveal God's love to the uttermost or the full horror of sin, the Cross would only be excusable on the part of an unbalanced fanatic. Socrates, indeed, refused to lift a finger to escape the condemnation of his judges by evasion, or the infliction of death by bribing his jailor. To do so, he contended, would be to run away in the day of battle, and to break the laws of the State he had agreed to uphold.[8] But it would have been interesting to have heard him on the immorality of deliberately *courting* death in order to show up the iniquity of his accusers.

But, again, the death of Christ cannot be explained as the death of a martyr. On such an assumption our Lord's shrinking from the Cross is quite unaccountable—not so are martyrs wont to meet even a cruel death. Twelve months before the Cross, away up in

[1] John xii. 27. [2] Luke xxiv. 26.
[3] Dr. K. E. Kirk in *Essays Catholic and Critical.*
[4] John x. 17. [5] Luke xiii. 33.
[6] John vii. 30 & viii. 20. [7] John xii. 23 & 32.
[8] Plato's *Apology*, c. 39 ; & *Crito*, c. 50.

sunny Galilee, He had cried out "There is a flood of sorrow in which I must be plunged, and how I am tortured till it is all over!"[1] Two days before the betrayal, in the Temple, He had cried out again, "Now is my soul troubled, Father, save me from this hour.[2] The Sweat of Blood in Gethsemane is the culmination of an agony of foreboding which had always dogged the Saviour's steps, but which did not even so anticipate to the full the actual experience of Calvary itself. It is a well-known phenomenon that martyrs are exalted above the pains they endure, supported (according to their testimony) by an intense realisation of the Presence of God. So, indeed, had our Lord been upheld to suffer with serenity and even joy all the sorrows and stress of a life of pain and persecution because of His sense of perfect communion with His Father.

But on the Cross a mysterious and dreadful loneliness of spirit oppressed the Saviour's soul, which His great cry of desolation revealed as a sense of utter separation from God, and which broke His heart (literally so, it seems) in six hours. Bodily torture cannot wholly account for this swift collapse upon the Cross. Crucifixion was devised as a lingering torment and its victim usually survived for two or even three days. It is true that after His long trial and cruel scourging our Lord fell beneath His Cross. But strength to support a load is different from the capacity to endure suffering; and Pilate, who was experienced in these matters and had been given ample opportunity of judging the physical endurance of his Prisoner, was so astonished that He was already dead that he required confirmation of the fact. More than this, Christ's actual passing held no mystery, and was what we should have expected for Incarnate God. As regards the world He left it was with a triumphant cry of victory upon His lips—"*It is finished.*" As regards the spirit world He entered, it was a voluntary and quiet breathing out of His Spirit into the hands of His Father with Whom once more He knew Himself in full communion. We speak in general terms of the Atonement being consequent upon the *Cross* and the *Death* of the Crucified; but such language is symbolic and pictures a deeper spiritual reality—namely, that shame for sin and that sense of alienation from God which is the sting of death. As He hung upon the Cross the Sinless Saviour, with His Divine horror of sin, experienced pangs unknown even to the chief of sinners, as he confronts his lonely journey into the unknown and trembles at the conviction of judgment to come. So only can we account for the facts of the Cross, even as St. Paul has summarised them—"Him who knew no sin, God made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."[3]

I have shrunk from thus dwelling upon the central scene of the world's supreme and most sacred drama, upon which nature reverently rang down the curtain of thick darkness; and which, as in great Greek tragedy, took place off the stage, in a spiritual realm whither the eyes of the curious may not and cannot penetrate.

But I have found that those who, actuated by the noblest

[1] Luke xii. 50. [2] John xii. 27. [3] 2 Cor. v. 21.

sentiments, instinctively revolt from a theory of the Atonement which we are bound to term "substitutionary," yet refuse to face the facts either of our Lord's own words or of the circumstances of His Cross and Passion. It is significant, for example, that a few years ago, when I was privileged to attend a little gathering of Oxford scholars who met each week over a long period to study the Atonement in the Bible itself, though the evident desire was to discover therein a doctrine that did not involve Substitution, yet it could not be done.

It is true that the reconciliation between God and man wrought by the Atonement can never be fully understood by the finite mind —"How, in what particular way Christ's death was efficacious there are not wanting persons who have endeavoured to explain; but I do not find that Scripture hath explained it," is Bishop Butler's summing up of the matter. At the same time there is no occasion for a theory of substitution, as held to-day, to be branded as immoral. Loose language and inadequate pictures may, in the past, have suggested both a wrathful Potentate appeased by the sufferings of a pitiful Redeemer; and also a single unrelated transaction nineteen hundred years ago cancelling the guilt of sinners to-day—thus giving colour to Mr. Bernard Shaw's indictment of "an insane vengeance and a trumpery expiation." But the mistake has lain in dividing not only the Godhead, but also the two Natures of the One Christ. The Atonement is the work of the Father, Who so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, and Whose changeless love is always going out towards His sinful children. The New Testament never speaks of God being reconciled to us, but always of ourselves being reconciled to God; and even in defiance of grammatical construction the Saviour is described, not as propitiating the Father, but as making propitiation for sin.

All theories of the Atonement must begin with St. Paul's declaration, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself"; [1] and if we speak in terms of substitution, the whole Godhead is involved in the transaction. The immorality of an "insane vengeance" simply does not exist in such forth-giving forgiveness. Then also incarnate God identifies Himself completely with His brother men; and suffered not only *for* man but *as* man. Seeing, then, that the solidarity of the human race is an axiom of our existence, carrying with it the fact both of vicarious suffering and of vicarious benefit, there is no "trumpery expiation" in the spectacle of the whole mass of the world's suffering and penitence for sin, summed up, interpreted, and consummated in the self-sacrifice of the sinless Son of Man, Who is the Representative Man and the Head of all Creation. On the contrary, as I have already hinted, any theory of the Atonement which does not include some element of a price paid for sin is not only inadequate to explain the facts of the Gospel record, but itself falls into the condemnation of being immoral. If I may so put it, the events of the Passion are so dreadful that they are inexcusable merely as a revelation of Love

[1] 2 Cor. v. 19.

to the uttermost or of the horror of sin; they demand also the necessity of a rescue, whereby the gate of heaven is opened to all believers.

In this connection I would draw your attention to the equally perplexing and kindred problem of punishment as inflicted by human authority. The history of the ethics of punishment has followed very much the same orbit as that of the Atonement, and I believe that the explanation of them both lies in the same region—namely, the moral order of the world as purposed by God.

Retributive Justice has been called "one of the deepest ideas of the world's history." Its authority is based on moral "intuition," and is summed up in the maxim of Spinoza: "It is not good that a guilty man should profit by his guilt." As far back as Aristotle the idea has been held of punishment equating or nullifying this wrongful surplus or profit; and we still employ such phrases as that which our Lord used of "paying the price." Moreover, retributive punishment is considered to be an end itself and inflicted for a past offence, not for any advantages that may accrue from it; though it is recognised that retribution does actually bring with it the useful fruits of the reformation of the punished, and of the deterrence of others from wrong-doing. It is even suggested that punishment is *owed* to the guilty, who is defrauded of his right if he does not receive it. As Professor Leo Polak, of Holland, has expressed it:—by being punished "the culprit . . . is not wronged at all, on the contrary he is honoured as a moral agent susceptible of the claims of justice and righteousness, and as such he gets only his due, only what serves him right."

In modern times—perhaps because we have been moving in a self-indulgent and sentimental age—the principle of retributive punishment has been challenged as immoral: as witness an author on prison reform changing the title of his book from "The Punishment of Crime" to "The Crime of Punishment." And the theory of punishment propounded instead is called the "Utilitarian Theory," because it holds that punishment can only be justified by its good effects—namely, as reformative and a deterrent; and must only look forward to the future good it hopes to achieve. But recently the greatest scholars have returned to a retributive conception of punishment, and agree that "no solution can stand which does not satisfy the essential purpose of this theory."[1] And the reason advanced is that pain is an evil, and its infliction cannot be justified on the grounds of utility alone, whether we have regard to the selfish ends of deterrence or the pious hopes of reform. As Mr. F. H. Bradley, in his *Ethical Studies*, has vigorously summed up the intuitive sentiments of humanity:

"We pay the penalty because we owe it, and for no other reason; and if punishment is inflicted for any other reason whatever than because it is merited by wrong, it is a gross immorality, a crying injustice, an abominable crime, and not what it pretends to be. We may have regard for whatever considerations we please—our own convenience, the good of society, the benefit of the offender—we are fools and worse, if we fail to do so. Having

[1] *The Morality of Punishment*, p. 45, by A. C. Ewing, M.A., D.Phil.

once the right to punish, we may modify the punishment according to the useful and the pleasant, but these are external to the matter; they cannot give us a right to punish, and nothing can do that but criminal desert. . . . Yes, in despite of sophistry, and in the face of sentimentalism . . . our people believe to this day *that punishment is inflicted for the sake of punishment.*"

If we change the word "punishment" to "Atonement" we have here a statement which as truly expresses the intuitive belief of mankind regarding the transaction of the Cross. "*The Atonement was necessary for the sake of Atonement*"; and without that necessity the Cross is immoral, whatever other considerations of good may accrue from it. Indeed, I believe we may even discern in the ethics of retributive punishment some explanation of the Cross—so intimately do the two seem to be related.

Goodness is a state of soul that is other-centred, and is good in proportion as its devotee loves God with his whole heart and his neighbour as himself. Sin is a state of soul that is self-centred, and is sin in proportion as self is enthroned as god, and neither fears not God nor regards man. Goodness brings with it a commensurate amount of happiness, and sin a commensurate amount of unhappiness; and these effects of happiness or unhappiness are twofold —inward and outward. Inwardly, goodness and sin produce a corresponding result on character, either of union with God or of alienation from Him. Outwardly, they bring benefit or suffering to the world, though this is largely vicarious—owing to the solidarity of the human race—and is not always reaped by the well-deserving, or the guilty, individual himself.

Nature, with its inviolable law of cause and effect is parabolic of this Moral Law. And the universal moral intuition which has introduced retributive justice into society, is a God-implanted instinct which has instituted the sacrament of punishment as an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual reality of the consequences of sin, and as a means whereby righteousness is vindicated and the guilty enabled to expiate his offence. We might almost add that at Calvary it was "ordained by Christ Himself."

The Atonement does not touch the natural consequences of sin; neither does retributive punishment. Both are concerned with the character, or the soul, of the offender. And I think it will be conceded that it is not possible for God to unite Himself with sinners without first satisfying this instinct for retributive justice which He has implanted in the very centre of their being. To do so would be to make Himself regarded by sinners as One who winked at sin, and as an accessory to their sin. God is bound by the moral order of the universe which He has created; a truth which explains the otherwise meaningless confession of the prodigal, "Father, I have sinned against *heaven* and before Thee," that is, not only against forgiving Love but against inviolable law. Therefore it is that modern thought, even as it is returning to a retributive theory of punishment, is increasingly re-affirming a substitutionary theory of the Atonement. Professor Streeter, in his book *Reality*,[1]

[1] pp. 230, 231.

could not better reinterpret the old orthodox position when he says that in a moral universe all bills must be paid, and God has paid the bill. And this is only to paraphrase the Saviour's own declaration that He gave His life a ransom instead of many.

So does the Cross stand at the very centre of human existence, and is at once the beginning and the end of any Way of Revival.

If sin is essentially to be self-centred, then Revival is to become Christ-centred, and this the Cross only can truly effect. The Cross is central because it reveals the full *Ruin* which sin occasions. The chief horror of sin is that it blinds to its own sinfulness. But this stupendous crime of man blindly crucifying his God, shocks and startles us out of ourselves—revealing the foulness of our own nature and opening our eyes to the deathless Love of God. Again, the Cross is central because it proclaims a Gospel of *Redemption* that fully assures even the chief of sinners of his complete reconciliation with God. The guilty soul of man, with an intuitive belief in retribution so deeply implanted within him that it has produced the universal phenomenon of sacrifice, is yet satisfied that his offence is done away and remembered no more against him. Even if he should still remember it—and it may be that the memory of our sins will remain with us even in another world—yet the Cross once more will turn his thoughts from himself to sublimate the pang of remorse in adoring love for his Saviour. And, once more, the Cross is central because it is the only true constraining power for our *Regeneration*. It converts us from the death of Self-centredness to the life of Christ-centredness.

I would add one word of caution in conclusion. The whole of this paper has been devoted to an attempt to vindicate the substitutionary theory of the Atonement, in order to establish the centrality of the Cross in the Saviour's ministry, in the world's history, and in any Way of Revival. That does not imply that all to whom we preach the Gospel of salvation must accept any particular theory of the Atonement in order to receive its benefits. Dr. Dale has some very wise words on the point:

> "There is true Christian faith wherever the Lord Jesus Christ is acknowledged as 'Prince and Saviour,' the Founder of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Moral Ruler of mankind, the Author of eternal salvation. That He atoned for sin on the Cross is the explanation of the power which He has received to forgive sin; but a penitent heart may rely on Him for forgiveness, and for restoration to holiness and to God, without apprehending the relation of His Death to human redemption." [1]

But it is for us especially, to whom is committed "the word of reconciliation," who are "ambassadors on behalf of Christ," and beseech others "as though God were intreating by us," [2] to ponder to its depths the meaning of this historic event—that upon this fragment in space a Cross has been planted, and that the God by Whom all worlds were made hung upon it. For there pre-eminently is to be found the heart of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which we are to proclaim to the ends of the earth.

[1] *The Atonement*, p. 112. [2] 2 Cor. v. 20.