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THE ATONEMENT AND THE MODERN MIND.

III.

WHAT has now been said about the relations subsisting between God and man, about the manner in which these relations are affected by sin, and particularly about the Scripture doctrine of the connexion between sin and death, must determine, to a great extent, our attitude to the Atonement. The Atonement, as the New Testament presents it, assumes the connexion of sin and death. Apart from some sense and recognition of such connexion, the mediation of forgiveness through the death of Christ can only appear an arbitrary, irrational, unacceptable idea. But leaving the Atonement meanwhile out of sight, and looking only at the situation created by sin, the question inevitably arises, What can be done with it? Is it possible to remedy or to reverse it? It is an abnormal and unnatural condition; can it be annulled, and the relations of God and man put upon an ideal footing? Can God forgive sin and restore the soul? Can we claim that He shall? And if it is possible for Him to do so, can we tell how or on what conditions it is possible?

When the human mind is left to itself, there are only two answers which it can give to these questions. Perhaps they are not specially characteristic of the modern mind, but the modern mind in various moods has given passionate expression to both of them. The first says roundly that forgiveness is impossible. Sin is, and it abides. The sinner can never escape from the past. His future is mortgaged

to it, and it cannot be redeemed. He can never get back the years which the locust has eaten. His leprous flesh can never come again like the flesh of a little child. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap, and reap for ever and ever. It is not eternal punishment which is incredible; nothing else has credibility. Let there be no illusion about this: forgiveness is a violation, a reversal, of law, and no such thing is conceivable in a world in which law reigns.

The answer to this is, that sin and its consequences are here conceived as though they belonged to a purely physical world, whereas, if there were only a physical world, there could be no such thing as sin. As soon as we realize that sin belongs to a world in which freedom is real—a world in which reality means the personal relations subsisting between man and God, and the experiences realized in these relations—the question assumes a different aspect. It is not one of logic or of physical law, but of personality, of character, of freedom. There is at least a possibility that the sinner's relation to his sin and God's relation to the sinner should change, and that out of these changed relations a regenerative power should spring, making the sinner, after all, a new creature. The question, of course, is not decided in this sense, but it is not foreclosed.

At the opposite extreme from those who pronounce forgiveness impossible stand those who give the second answer to the great question, and calmly assure us that forgiveness may be taken for granted. They emphasize what the others overlooked—the personal character of the relations of God and man. God is a loving Father; man is His weak and unhappy child; and of course God forgives. As Heine put it, *c'est son métier*, it is what He is for. But the conscience which is really burdened by sin does not easily find satisfaction in this cheap pardon. There is something in conscience which will not allow it to believe that God can simply condone sin: to take forgiveness for granted, when you realize what

you are doing, seems to a live conscience impious and profane. In reality, the tendency to take forgiveness for granted is the tendency of those who, while they properly emphasize the personal character of the relations of God and man, overlook their universal character—that is, exclude from them that element of law without which personal relations cease to be ethical. But a forgiveness which ignores this stands in no relation to the needs of the soul or the character of God.

What the Christian religion holds to be the truth about forgiveness—a truth embodied in the Atonement—is something quite distinct from both the propositions which have just been considered. The New Testament does not teach, with the naturalistic or the legal mind, that forgiveness is impossible; neither does it teach, with the sentimental or lawless mind, that it may be taken for granted. It teaches that forgiveness is mediated to sinners through Christ, and specifically through His death: in other words, that it is possible for God to forgive, but possible to God only through a supreme revelation of His love, made at infinite cost, and doing justice to the uttermost to those inviolable relations in which alone, as I have already said, man can participate in eternal life, the life of God Himself—doing justice to them as relations in which there is an inexorable divine reaction against sin, finally expressing itself in death. It is possible on these terms, and it becomes actual as sinful men open their hearts in penitence and faith to this marvellous revelation, and abandon their sinful life unreservedly to the love of God in Christ who died for them.

From this point of view it seems to me possible to present in a convincing and persuasive light some of the truths involved in the Atonement to which the modern mind is supposed to be specially averse.

Thus it becomes credible—we say so not *à priori*, but after experience—that there is a *divine necessity* for it; in other words, there is no forgiveness possible to God with-

out it ; if He forgives at all, it must be in this way and in no other. To say so beforehand would be inconceivably presumptuous, but it is quite another thing to say so after the event. What it really means is that in the very act of forgiving sin—or, to use the daring word of St. Paul, in the very act of justifying the ungodly—God must act in consistency with His whole character. He must demonstrate Himself to be what He is in relation to sin, a God with whom evil cannot dwell, a God who maintains inviolate the moral constitution of the world, taking sin as all that it is in the very process through which He mediates His forgiveness to men. It is the recognition of this divine necessity—not to forgive, but to forgive in a way which shows that God is irreconcilable to evil, and can never treat it as other or less than it is—it is the recognition of this divine necessity, or the failure to recognize it, which ultimately divides interpreters of Christianity into evangelical and non-evangelical, those who are true to the New Testament and those who cannot digest it. No doubt the forms in which this truth is expressed are not always adequate to the idea they are meant to convey, and if we are only acquainted with them at second hand they will probably appear even less adequate than they are. When Athanasius, e.g., speaks of God's *truth* in this connexion, and then reduces God's truth to the idea that God must keep His word—the word which made death the penalty of sin—we may feel that the form only too easily loses contact with the substance. Yet Athanasius is dealing with the essential fact of the case, that God must be true to Himself, and to the moral order in which men live, in all His dealings with sin for man's deliverance from it; and that He has been thus true to Himself in sending His Son to live our life and to die our death for our salvation. Or again, when Anselm in the *Cur Deus Homo* speaks of the satisfaction which is rendered to God for the infringement of His honour by sin

—a satisfaction apart from which there can be no forgiveness—we may feel again, and even more strongly, that the form of the thought is inadequate to the substance. But what Anselm means is that sin makes a real difference to God, and that even in forgiving God treats that difference *as* real, and cannot do otherwise. He cannot ignore it, or regard it as other or less than it is; if He did so, He would not be more gracious than He is in the Atonement, He would cease to be God. It is Anselm's profound grasp of this truth which, in spite of all its inadequacy in form, and of all the criticism to which its inadequacy has exposed it, makes the *Cur Deus Homo* the truest and greatest book on the Atonement that has ever been written. It is the same truth of a divine necessity for the Atonement which is emphasized by St. Paul in the third chapter of Romans, where he speaks of Christ's death as a demonstration of God's righteousness. Christ's death, we may paraphrase his meaning, is an act in which (so far as it is ordered in God's providence) God does justice to Himself. He does justice to His character as a gracious God, undoubtedly, who is moved with compassion for sinners: if He did not act in a way which displayed His compassion for sinners, He would *not* do justice to Himself; there would be no *ἔνδειξις* of His *δικαιοσύνη*: it would be in abeyance: He would do Himself an injustice, or be untrue to Himself. It is with this in view that we can appreciate the arguments of writers like Diestel and Ritschl, that God's righteousness is synonymous with His grace. Such arguments are true to this extent, that God's righteousness includes His grace. He could not demonstrate it, He could not be true to Himself, if His grace remained hidden. We must not, however, conceive of this as if it constituted on our side a claim upon grace or upon forgiveness, which would be a contradiction in terms. All that God does in Christ He does in free love, moved with compassion for the misery and doom of men.

But though God's righteousness as demonstrated in Christ's death—in other words, His action in consistency with His character—includes, and, if we choose to interpret the term properly, even necessitates, the revelation of His love, it is not this only—I do not believe it is this primarily—which St. Paul has in mind. God, no doubt, would not do justice to Himself if He did not show His compassion for sinners; but, on the other hand—and here is what the apostle is emphasizing—He would not do justice to Himself if He displayed His compassion for sinners in a way which made light of sin, which ignored its tragic reality, or took it for less than it is. In this case He would again be doing Himself injustice; there would be no demonstration that He was true to Himself as the author and guardian of the moral constitution under which men live; as Anselm put it, He would have ceased to be God. The apostle combines the two sides. In Christ set forth a propitiation in His blood—in other words, in the Atonement in which the sinless Son of God enters into the bitter realization of all that sin means for man, yet loves man under and through it all with an everlasting love—there is an *ἔνδειξις* of God's righteousness, a demonstration of His self-consistency, in virtue of which we can see how He is at the same time just Himself and the justifier of him who believes on Jesus, a God who is irreconcilable to sin yet devises means that His banished be not expelled from Him. We may say reverently that this was the only way in which God could forgive. He cannot deny Himself, means at the same time He cannot deny His grace to the sinful, and He cannot deny the moral order in which alone He can live in fellowship with men; and we see the inviolableness of both asserted in the death of Jesus. Nothing else in the world demonstrates how real is God's love to the sinful, and how real the sin of the world is to God. And the love which comes to us through such an expression, bearing sin in all its reality, yet loving

us through and beyond it, is the only love which at once forgives and regenerates the soul.

It becomes credible also that there is a *human necessity* for the Atonement: in other words, that apart from it the conditions of being forgiven could no more be fulfilled by man than forgiveness could be bestowed by God. There are different tendencies in the modern mind with regard to this point. On the one hand, there are those who frankly admit the truth here asserted. Yes, they say, the Atonement is necessary for us. If we are to be saved from our sins, if our hearts are to be touched and won by the love of God, if we are to be emancipated from distrust and reconciled to the Father whose love we have injured, there must be a demonstration of that love so wonderful and overpowering that all pride, alienation and fear shall be overcome by it; and this is what we have in the death of Christ. It is a demonstration of love powerful enough to evoke penitence and faith in man, and it is through penitence and faith alone that man is separated from his sins and reconciled to God. A demonstration of love, too, must be given in act: it is not enough to be told that God loves: the reality of love lies in another region than that of words. In Christ on His cross the very thing itself is present, beyond all hope of telling wonderful, and without its irresistible appeal our hearts could never have been melted to penitence, and won for God. On the other hand, there are those who reject the Atonement on the very ground that for pardon and reconciliation nothing is required but repentance, the assumption being that repentance is something which man can and must produce out of his own resources. On these divergent tendencies in the modern mind I should wish to make the following remarks. First, the idea that man can repent as he ought, and whenever he will, without coming under any obligation to God for his repentance, but rather (it might almost be imagined) putting God under

obligation by it, is one to which experience lends no support. Repentance is an adequate sense not of our folly, nor of our misery, but of our sin : as the New Testament puts it, it is repentance *toward God*. It is the consciousness of what our sin is to Him : of the wrong it does to His holiness, of the wound which it inflicts on His love. Now such a consciousness it is not in the power of the sinner to produce at will. The more deeply he has sinned, the more (so to speak) repentance is needed, the less is it in his power. It is the very nature of sin to darken the mind and harden the heart, to take away the knowledge of God alike in His holiness and in His love. Hence it is only through a revelation of God, and especially of what God is in relation to sin, that repentance can be evoked in the soul. Of all terms in the vocabulary of religion, repentance is probably the one which is most frequently misused. It is habitually applied to experiences which are not even remotely akin to true penitence. The self-centred regret which a man feels when his sin has found him out—the wish, compounded of pride, shame, and anger at his own inconceivable folly, that he had not done it : these are spoken of as repentance. But they are not repentance at all. They have no relation to God. They constitute no fitness for a new relation to Him. They are no opening of the heart in the direction of His reconciling love. It is the simple truth that that sorrow of heart, that healing and sanctifying pain in which sin is really put away, is not ours in independence of God : it is a saving grace which is begotten in the soul under that impression of sin which it owes to the revelation of God in Christ. A man can no more repent than he can do anything else without a motive, and the motive which makes repentance possible does not enter into his world till he sees God as God makes Himself known in the death of Christ. All true penitents are children of the cross. Their penitence is not their own creation : it is the reaction

toward God produced in their souls by this demonstration of what sin is to Him, and of what His love does to reach and win the sinful.

The other remark I wish to make refers to those who admit the death of Christ to be necessary *for us*—necessary, in the way I have just described, to evoke penitence and trust in God—but who on this very ground deny it to be *divinely* necessary. It had to be, because the hard hearts of men could not be touched by anything less moving; but that is all. This, I feel sure, is another instance of those false abstractions to which reference has already been made. There is no incompatibility between a *divine* necessity and a necessity *for us*. It may very well be the case that nothing less than the death of Christ could win the trust of sinful men for God, and at the same time that nothing else than the death of Christ could fully reveal the character of God in relation at once to sinners and to sin. For my own part I am persuaded, not only that there is no incompatibility between the two things, but that they are essentially related, and that only the acknowledgment of the divine necessity in Christ's death enables us to conceive in any rational way the power which it exercises over sinners in inducing repentance and faith. It would not evoke a reaction God-ward unless God were really present in it, that is, unless it were a real revelation of His being and will; but in a real revelation of God's being and will there can be nothing arbitrary, nothing which is determined only from without, nothing, in other words, that is not divinely necessary. The demonstration of what God is, which is made in the death of Christ, is no doubt a demonstration singularly suited to call forth penitence and faith in man, but the necessity of it does not lie simply in the desire to call forth penitence and faith. It lies in the divine nature itself. God could not do justice to Himself, in relation to man and sin, in any way less awful than this; and it is the

fact that He does not shrink even from this—that in the Person of His Son He enters, if we may say so, into the whole responsibility of the situation created by sin—it is this which constitutes the death of Jesus a demonstration of divine love, compelling penitence and faith. Nothing less would have been sufficient to touch sinful hearts to their depths—in that sense the Atonement is humanly necessary; but neither would anything else be a sufficient revelation of what God is in relation to sin and to sinful men—in that sense it is divinely necessary. And the divine necessity is the fundamental one. The power exercised over us by the revelation of God at the Cross is dependent on the fact that the revelation is true—in other words, that it exhibits the real relation of God to sinners and to sin. It is not by calculating what will win us, but by acting in consistency with Himself, that God irresistibly appeals to men. We dare not say that He must be gracious, as though grace could cease to be free; but we may say that He must be Himself, and that it is because He is what we see Him to be in the death of Christ, understood as the New Testament understands it, that sinners are moved to repentance and to trust in Him. That which the eternal being of God made necessary to Him in the presence of sin is the very thing which is necessary also to win the hearts of sinners. Nothing but what is divinely necessary could have met the necessities of sinful men.

When we admit this twofold necessity for the Atonement we can tell ourselves more clearly how we are to conceive Christ in it, in relation to God on the one hand and to man on the other. The Atonement is God's work. It is God who makes the Atonement in Christ. It is God who mediates His forgiveness of sins to us in this way. This is one aspect of the matter, and probably the one about which there is least dispute among Christians. But

there is another aspect of it. The Mediator between God and man is Himself man, Christ Jesus. What is the relation of the man Christ Jesus to those for whom the Atonement is made? What is the proper term to designate, in this atoning work, what He is in relation to them? The doctrine of atonement current in the Church in the generation preceding our own answered frankly that in His atoning work Christ is our substitute. He comes in our nature, and He comes into our place. He enters into all the responsibilities that sin has created for us, and He does justice to them in His death. He does not deny any of them; He does not take sin as anything less or else than it is to God; in perfect sinlessness He consents even to die, to submit to that awful experience in which the final reaction of God's holiness against sin is expressed. Death was not *His* due; it was something alien to One who had done nothing amiss; but it was our due, and because it was ours He made it His. It was thus that He made Atonement. *He bore our sins.* He took to Himself all that they meant, all in which they had involved the world. He died for them, and in so doing acknowledged the sanctity of that order in which sin and death are indissolubly united. In other words, He did what the human race could not do for itself, yet what had to be done if sinners were to be saved: for how could men be saved if there were not made in humanity an acknowledgment of all that sin is to God, and of the justice of all that is entailed by sin under God's constitution of the world? Such an acknowledgment, as we have just seen, is divinely necessary, and necessary, too, for man, if sin is to be forgiven.

This was the basis of fact on which the substitutionary character of Christ's sufferings and death in the Atonement was asserted. It may be admitted at once that when the term substitute is interpreted without reference to this

basis of fact it lends itself very easily to misconstruction. It falls in with, if it does not suggest the idea of, a transference of merit and demerit, the sin of the world being carried over to Christ's account, and the merit of Christ to the world's account, as if the reconciliation of God and man, or the forgiveness of sins and the regeneration of souls, could be explained without the use of higher categories than are employed in book-keeping. It is surely not necessary at this time of day to disclaim an interpretation of personal relations which makes use only of sub-personal categories. Merit and demerit cannot be mechanically transferred like sums in an account. The credit, so to speak, of one person in the moral sphere cannot become that of another, apart from moral conditions. It is the same truth, in other words, if we say that the figure of paying a debt is not in every respect adequate to describe what Christ does in making the Atonement. The figure, I believe, covers the truth; if it did not, we should not have the kind of language which frequently occurs in Scripture; but it is misread into falsehood and immorality whenever it is pressed as if it were exactly equivalent to the truth. But granting these drawbacks which attach to the word, is there not something in the work of Christ, as mediating the forgiveness of sins, which no other word can express? No matter on what subsequent conditions its virtue for us depends, what Christ did had to be done, or we should never have had forgiveness: we should never have known God, and His nature and will in relation to sin; we should never have had the motive which alone could beget real repentance; we should never have had the spirit which welcomes pardon and is capable of receiving it. We could not procure these things for ourselves, we could not produce them out of our own resources: but He by entering into our nature and lot, by taking on Him our responsibilities and dying our death, has

so revealed God to us as to put them within our reach. We owe them to Him; in particular, and in the last resort, we owe them to the fact that He bore our sins in His own body to the tree. If we are not to say that the Atonement, as a work carried through in the sufferings and death of Christ, sufferings and death determined by our sin, is vicarious or substitutionary, what are we to call it?

The only answer which has been given to this question, by those who continue to speak of atonement at all, is that we must conceive Christ not as the substitute but as the representative of sinners. I venture to think that, with some advantages, the drawbacks of this word are quite as serious as those which attach to substitute. It makes it less easy, indeed, to think of the work of Christ as a finished work which benefits the sinner *ipso facto*, and apart from any relation between him and the Saviour: but what kind of relation does it suggest? It suggests that the sinners who are to be saved by Christ put Christ forward in their name: they are not in the utterly hopeless case that has hitherto been supposed; they can present themselves to God in the person and work of One on whom God cannot but look with approval. The boldest expression of this I have ever seen occurs in some remarks by a writer in the *Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review* on the doctrine of St. Paul. He is far from saying that a writer who finds a substitutionary doctrine throughout the New Testament is altogether wrong. He goes so far as to say that "if we look at the matter from what may be called an external point of view, no doubt we may speak of the death of Christ as in a certain sense substitutionary." But no one, he tells us, can do justice to Paul who fails to recognize that the death of Christ was a racial act; and "if we place ourselves at Paul's point of view, we shall see that to the eye of God the death of Christ presents itself less as an act which Christ does for the race than as an act which the

race does in Christ." In plain English, Paul teaches not that Christ died for the ungodly, but that the ungodly in Christ died for themselves. This is presented to us as something profound, a recognition of the mystical depths in Paul's teaching: I frankly confess that I cannot take it seriously. Nevertheless, it brings out the logic of what representative means when representative is opposed to substitute. The representative is ours, we are in Him, and we are supposed to get over all the moral difficulties raised by the idea of substitution just because He is ours, and because we are one with Him. But the fundamental fact of the situation is that, to begin with, Christ is *not* ours, and that, to begin with, we are *not* one with Him. In the apostle's view, and in point of fact, we are "without Christ" (*χωρὶς Χριστοῦ*). It is not we who have put Him there. It is not to us that His presence and His work in the world are due. If we had produced Him and put Him forward, we might call Him our representative in the sense suggested by the sentences just quoted; we might say it is not so much He who dies for us, as we who die in Him; but a representative not produced by us, but given to us—not chosen by us, but the elect of God—is not a representative at all, but in that place a substitute. He stands in our stead, facing all our responsibilities for us as God would have them faced; and it is what He does for us, and not the effect which this produces in us, still less the fantastic abstraction of a "racial act," which is the Atonement in the sense of the New Testament. To speak of Christ as our representative, in the sense that His death is to God less an act which He does for the race than an act which the race does in Him, is in principle to deny the whole grace of the gospel, and to rob it of every particle of its motive power.

To do justice to the truth here, both on its religious and its ethical side, it is necessary to put in their proper relation

to one another the aspects of reality which the terms substitute and representative respectively suggest. The first is fundamental. Christ is God's gift to humanity. He stands in the midst of us, the pledge of God's love, accepting our responsibilities as God would have them accepted, offering to God, under the pressure of the world's sin and all its consequences, that perfect recognition of God's holiness in so visiting sin which men should have offered but could not; and in so doing He makes Atonement for us. In so doing, also, He is our substitute, not yet our representative. But the Atonement thus made is not a spectacle, it is a motive. It is not a transaction in business, or in book-keeping, which is complete in itself; in view of the relations of God and man, it belongs to its very nature to be a moral appeal. It is a divine challenge to men, which is designed to win their hearts. And when men are won—when that which Christ in His love has done for them comes home to their souls—when they are constrained by His infinite grace to the self-surrender of faith, then we may say He becomes their representative. They begin to feel that what He has done for them must not remain outside of them, but be reproduced somehow in their own life. The mind of Christ in relation to God and sin, as He bore their sins in His own body to the tree, must become their mind; this and nothing else is the Christian salvation. The power to work this change in them is found in the death of Christ itself; the more its meaning is realized as something there, in the world, outside of us, the more completely does it take effect within us. In proportion as we see and feel that out of pure love to us He stands in our place—our substitute—bearing our burden—in that same proportion are we drawn into the relation to Him that makes Him our representative. But we should be careful here not to lose ourselves in soaring words. The New Testament has much to say about union with Christ, but I

could almost be thankful that it has no such expression as mystical union. The only union it knows is a moral one—a union due to the moral power of Christ's death, operating morally as a constraining motive on the human will, and begetting in believers the mind of Christ in relation to sin; but this moral union remains the problem and the task, as well as the reality and the truth, of the Christian life. Even when we think of Christ as our representative, and have the courage to say we died with Him, we have still to *reckon* ourselves to be dead to sin, and to put to death our members which are upon the earth; and to go past this, and speak of a mystical union with Christ in which we are lifted above the region of reflection and motive, of gratitude and moral responsibility, into some kind of metaphysical identity with the Lord, does not promote intelligibility, to say the least. If the Atonement were not, to begin with, outside of us—if it were not in that sense objective, a finished work in which God in Christ makes a final revelation of Himself in relation to sinners and sin—in other words, if Christ could not be conceived in it as our substitute, given by God to do in our place what we could not do for ourselves, there would be no way of recognizing or preaching or receiving it as a motive; while, on the other hand, if it did not operate as a motive, if it did not appeal to sinful men in such a way as to draw them into a moral fellowship with Christ—in other words, if Christ did not under it become representative of us, our surety to God that we should yet be even as He in relation to God and to sin, we could only say that it had all been vain. Union with Christ, in short, is not a presupposition of Christ's work, which enables us to escape all the moral problems raised by the idea of a substitutionary Atonement; it is not a presupposition of Christ's work, it is its fruit. To see that it is its fruit is to have the final answer to the objection that substitution is immoral. If substitution, in the sense in which we must assert it of Christ,

is the greatest moral force in the world—if the truth which it covers, when it enters into the mind of man, enters with divine power to assimilate him to the Saviour, uniting him to the Lord in a death to sin and a life to God—obviously, to call it immoral is an abuse of language. The love which can literally go out of itself and make the burden of others its own is the radical principle of all the genuine and victorious morality in the world. And to say that love cannot do any such thing, that the whole formula of morality is every man shall bear his own burden, is to deny the plainest facts of the moral life.

Yet this is a point at which difficulty is felt by many in trying to grasp the Atonement. On the one hand, there do seem to be analogies to it, and points of attachment for it, in experience. No sin that has become real to conscience is ever outlived and overcome without expiation. There are consequences involved in it that go far beyond our perception at the moment, but they work themselves inexorably out, and our sin ceases to be a burden on conscience, and a fetter on will, only as we “accept the punishment of our iniquity,” and become conscious of the holy love of God behind it. But the consequences of sin are never limited to the sinner. They spread beyond him in the organism of humanity, and when they strike visibly upon the innocent, the sense of guilt is deepened. We see that we have done we know not what, something deeply and mysteriously bad beyond all our reckoning, something that only a power and goodness transcending our own avail to check. It is one of the startling truths of the moral life that such consequences of sin, striking visibly upon the innocent, have in certain circumstances a peculiar power to redeem the sinful. When they are accepted, as they sometimes are accepted, without repining or complaint—when they are borne, as they sometimes are borne, freely and lovingly by the innocent, because to the innocent the guilty

are dear—then something is appealed to in the guilty which is deeper than guilt, something may be touched which is deeper than sin, a new hope and faith may be born in them to take hold of love so wonderful, and by attaching themselves to it to transcend the evil past. The suffering of such love (they are dimly aware), or rather the power of such love persisting through all the suffering brought on it by sin, opens the gate of righteousness to the sinful in spite of all that has been; sin is outweighed by it, it is annulled, exhausted, transcended in it. The great Atonement of Christ is somehow in line with this, and we do not need to shrink from the analogy. "If there were no witness," as Dr. Robertson Nicoll puts it, "in the world's deeper literature"—if there were no witness, that is, in the universal experience of man—"to the fact of an Atonement, the Atonement would be useless, since the formula expressing it would be unintelligible." It is the analogy of such experiences which makes the Atonement credible, yet it must always in some way transcend them. There is something in it which is ultimately incomparable. When we speak of others as innocent, the term is used only in a relative sense; there is no human conscience pure to God. When we speak of the sin of others coming in its consequences on the innocent, we speak of something in which the innocent are purely passive; or if there is moral response on their part, the situation is not due to moral initiative of theirs. But with Christ it is different. He knew *no* sin, and He entered *freely*, deliberately, and as the very work of His calling, into all that sin meant for God and brought on man. Something that I experience in a particular relation, in which another has borne my sin and loved me through it, may help to open my eyes to the meaning of Christ's love; but when they are opened, what I see is the propitiation for the whole world. There is no guilt of the human race, there is no consequence in which

sin has involved it, to which the holiness and love made manifest in Christ are unequal. He reveals to all sinful men the whole relation of God to them and to their sins—a sanctity which is inexorable to sin, and cannot take it as other than it is in all its consequences, and a love which through all these consequences and under the weight of them all, will not let the sinful go. It is in this revelation of the character of God and of His relation to the sin of the world that the forgiveness of sins is revealed. It is not intimated in the air; it is preached, as St. Paul says, “in this man”; it is mediated to the world through Him and specifically through His death, because it is through Him, and specifically through His death, that we get the knowledge of God’s character which evokes penitence and faith, and brings the assurance of His pardon to the heart.

From this point of view we may see how to answer the question that is sometimes asked about the relation of Christ’s life to His death, or about the relation of both to the Atonement. If we say that what we have in the Atonement is an assurance of God’s character, does it not follow at once that Christ’s teaching and His life contribute to it as directly as His death? Is it not a signal illustration of the false abstractions which we have so often had cause to censure when the death of Christ is taken as if it had an existence or a significance apart from His life, or could be identified with the Atonement in a way in which His life could not? I do not think this is so clear. Of course it is Christ Himself who is the Atonement or propitiation—He Himself, as St. John puts it, and not anything, not even His death, into which He does not enter. But it is He Himself, as making to us the revelation of God in relation to sin and to sinners; and apart from death, as that in which the conscience of the race sees the final reaction of God against evil, this revelation is not fully made. If Christ had done less than die for us, therefore—if He had

separated Himself from us, or declined to be one with us, in this solemn experience in which the darkness of sin is sounded and all its bitterness tasted,—there would have been no Atonement. It is impossible to say this of any particular incident in His life, and in so far the unique emphasis laid on His death in the New Testament is justified. But I should go further than this, and say that even Christ's life, taking it as it stands in the Gospels, only enters into the Atonement, and has reconciling power, because it is pervaded from beginning to end by the consciousness of His death. Instead of depriving His death of the peculiar significance Scripture assigns to it, and making it no more than the termination, or at least the consummation, of His life, I should rather argue that the Scriptural emphasis is right, and that His life attains its true interpretation only as we find in it everywhere the power and purpose of His death. There is nothing artificial or unnatural in this. There are plenty of people who never have death out of their minds an hour at a time. They are not cowards, nor mad, nor even sombre ; they may have purposes and hopes and gaieties as well as others ; but they see life steadily and see it whole, and of all their thoughts the one which has most determining and omnipresent power is the thought of the inevitable end. There is death in all their life. It was not, certainly, as the inevitable end, the inevitable "debt of nature," that death was present to the mind of Christ ; but if we can trust the Evangelists at all, from the hour of His baptism it was present to His mind as something involved in His vocation ; and it was a presence so tremendous that it absorbed everything into itself. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." Instead of saying that Christ's life as well as His death contributed to the Atonement—that His active obedience (to use the theological formula) as well as His passive obedience was

essential to His propitiation—we should rather say that His life is part of His death : a deliberate and conscious descent, ever deeper and deeper, into the dark valley where at the last hour the last reality of sin was to be met and borne. If the objection is made that after all this only means that death is the most vital point of life, its intensest focus, I should not wish to make any reply. Our Lord's Passion *is* His sublimest action—an action so potent that all His other actions are sublated in it, and we know everything when we know that He *died* for our sins.

• The desire to bring the life of Christ as well as His death into the Atonement has probably part of its motive in the feeling that when the death is separated from the life it loses moral character : it is reduced to a merely physical incident, which cannot carry such vast significance as the Atonement. Such a feeling certainly exists, and finds expression in many forms. How often, for example, we hear it said that it is not the death which atones, but the spirit in which the Saviour died—not His sufferings which expiate sin, but the innocence, the meekness, the love to man and obedience to God in which they were borne. The Atonement, in short, was a moral achievement, to which physical suffering and death are essentially irrelevant. This is our old enemy, the false abstraction, once more, and that in the most aggressive form. The contrast of physical and moral is made absolute at the very point at which it ceases to exist. As against such absolute distinctions we must hold that if Christ had not really died for us, there would have been no Atonement at all, and on the other hand that what are called His physical sufferings and death have no existence simply as physical : they are essential elements in the moral achievement of the passion. It leads to no truth to say that it is not the death of Christ, but the spirit in which He died, that atones for sin : the spirit in which He died has its being in His death, and in

nothing else in the world. It seems to me that what is really wanted here, both by those who seek to co-ordinate Christ's life with His death in the Atonement, and by those who distinguish between His death and the spirit in which He died, is some means of keeping hold of the Person of Christ in His work, and that this is not effectively done apart from the New Testament belief in the Resurrection. There is no doubt that in speaking of the death of Christ as that through which the forgiveness of sins is mediated to us we are liable to think of it as if it were only an event in the past. We take the representation of it in the Gospel and say, "Such and such is the impression which this event produces upon me; I feel in it how God is opposed to sin, and how I ought to be opposed to it; I feel in it how God's love appeals to me to share His mind about sin; and as I yield to this appeal I am at once set free from sin and assured of pardon; this is the only ethical forgiveness; to know this experimentally is to know the Gospel." No one can have any interest in disputing another's obligation to Christ, but it may fairly be questioned whether this kind of obligation to Christ amounts to Christianity in the sense of the New Testament. There is no living Christ here, no coming of the living Christ to the soul, in the power of the Atonement, to bring it to God. But this is what the New Testament shows us. It is *He* who is the propitiation for our sins—He who died for them and rose again. The New Testament preaches a Christ who was dead and is alive, not a Christ who was alive and is dead. It is a mistake to suppose that the New Testament conception of the Gospel, involving as it does the spiritual presence and action of Christ, in the power of the Atonement, is a matter of indifference to us, and that in all our thinking and preaching we must remain within purely historical limits, if by purely historical limits is meant that our creed must end with the words "crucified, dead, and buried." To

preach the Atonement means not only to preach one who bore our sins in death, but one who by rising again from the dead demonstrated the final defeat of sin, and one who comes in the power of His risen life—which means, in the power of the Atonement accepted by God—to make all who commit themselves to Him in faith partakers in His victory. It is not His death, as an incident in the remote past, however significant it may be; it is the Lord Himself, appealing to us in the virtue of His death, who assures us of pardon and restores our souls.

One of the most singular phenomena in the attitude of many modern minds to the Atonement is the disposition to plead against the Atonement what the New Testament represents as its fruits. It is as though it had done its work so thoroughly that people could not believe that it ever needed to be done at all. The idea of fellowship with Christ, for example, is constantly urged against the idea that Christ died for us, and by His death made all mankind His debtors in a way in which we cannot make debtors of each other. The New Testament itself is pressed into the service. It is pointed out that our Lord called His disciples to drink of His cup and to be baptized with His baptism, where the baptism and the cup are figures of His passion; and it is argued that there cannot be anything unique in His experience or service, anything which He does for men which it is beyond the power of His disciples to do also. Or again, reference is made to St. Paul's words to the Colossians: Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church; and it is argued that St. Paul here represents himself as doing exactly what Christ did, or even as supplementing a work which Christ admittedly left imperfect. The same idea is traced where the Christian is represented as called into the fellowship of the Son of God, or more

specifically as called to know the fellowship of His sufferings by becoming conformed to His death. It is seen pervading the New Testament in the conception of the Christian as a man *in Christ*. And to descend from the apostolic age to our own, it has been put by an American theologian into the epigrammatic form that Christ redeems us by making us redeemers. What, it may be asked, is the truth in all this? and how is it related to what we have already seen cause to assert about the uniqueness of Christ's work in making atonement for sin, or mediating the divine forgiveness to man?

I do not think it is impossible or even difficult to reconcile the two: it is done, indeed, whenever we see that the life to which we are summoned, in the fellowship of Christ, is a life which we owe altogether to Him, and which He does not in the least owe to us. The question really raised is this: Has Jesus Christ a place of His own in the Christian religion? Is it true that there is one Mediator between God and man, Himself man, this man, Christ Jesus? In spite of the paradoxical assertion of Harnack to the contrary, it is not possible to deny, with any plausibility, that this was the mind of Christ Himself, and that it has been the mind of all who call Him Lord. He knew and taught, what they have learned by experience as well as by His word, that all men must owe to Him their knowledge of the Father, their place in the Kingdom of God, and their part in all its blessings. He could not have taught this of any but Himself, nor is it the experience of the Church that such blessings come through any other. Accordingly, when Christ calls on men to drink His cup and to be baptized with His baptism, while He may quite well mean, and does mean, that His life and death are to be the inspiration of theirs, and while He may quite well encourage them to believe that sacrifice on their part, as on His, will contribute to bless the world, He need not mean, and we may be sure

He does not mean, that their blood is like His, the blood of the covenant, or that their sinful lives, even when purged and quickened by His Spirit, could be, like His sinless life, described as the world's ransom. The same considerations apply to the passages quoted from St. Paul, and especially to the words in Colossians i. 24. The very purpose of the Epistle to the Colossians is to assert the exclusive and perfect mediatorship of Christ, alike in creation and redemption; all that we call being, and all that we call reconciliation, has to be defined by relation to Him, and not by relation to any other persons or powers, visible or invisible; and however gladly Paul might reflect that in his enthusiasm for suffering he was continuing Christ's work, and exhausting some of the afflictions—they were Christ's own afflictions—which had yet to be endured ere the Church could be made perfect, it is nothing short of grotesque to suppose that in this connexion he conceived of himself as doing what Christ did, atoning for sin, and reconciling the world to God. All this was done already, perfectly done, done for the whole world; and it was on the basis of it, and under the inspiration of it, that the apostle sustained his enthusiasm for a life of toil and pain in the service of men. Always, where we have Christian experience to deal with, it is the Christ through whom the divine forgiveness comes to us at the Cross—the Christ of the substitutionary Atonement, who bore all our burden alone, and did a work to which we can forever recur, but to which we did not and do not and never can contribute at all—it is this Christ who constrains us to find our representative with God in Himself, and to become ourselves His representatives to man. It is as we truly represent Him that we can expect our testimony to Him to find acceptance, but that testimony far transcends everything that our service enables men to measure. What is anything that a sinful man, saved by grace, can do for his Lord or for his kind, compared with what the sinless

Lord has done for the sinful race? It is true that He calls us to drink of His cup, to learn the fellowship of His sufferings, even to be conformed to His death; but under all the intimate relationship the eternal difference remains which makes Him *Lord*—He knew no sin, and we could make no atonement. It is the goal of our life to be found in Him; but I cannot understand the man who thinks it more profound to identify himself with Christ and share in the work of redeeming the world, than to abandon himself to Christ and share in the world's experience of being redeemed. And I am very sure that in the New Testament the last is first and fundamental.

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