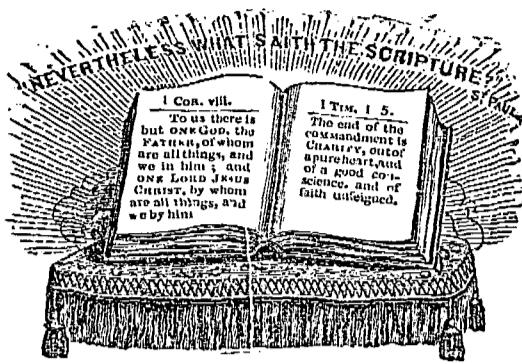


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A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT.

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In surveying the course of this doctrine we are struck by three periods distinctly marked, which present themselves immediately to our observation. The first, which may be called the Mythic period, extends from an early point of Christian antiquity to the eleventh century, during a period of nearly a thousand years. During the whole of this time, the prevailing idea was of a *controversy* between Christ and the devil for the souls of men, and the work of Christ was mainly to redeem men from the power of the devil, by paying the ransom due to him on account of their sins. The second is the Scholastic period, extending from the eleventh century to the Reformation, and during this period the leading notion was *legal*, and the work of Christ was to satisfy the justice of God by paying the debt legally incurred by the sinner. The third is the period from the Reformation to the present time, and the leading thought has relation to the *government of God*, the work of Christ being mainly to produce an impression on the human mind, by manifesting God's hatred of sin, his respect for his law, or his forgiving love.

Throughout the whole of this time we see that the doctrine is in progress. It passes from the most theoretical to the most practical form. The work of Christ is at first something wholly outward, out of men, out of the world; it is at last wholly inward, a work taking place in the interior soul. It is at first objective, it is finally subjective. Atonement is at first a transaction between God and Satan, in the supernatural world; then it becomes a transaction between God and man, in which God is to be satisfied; and then an influence exercised upon the human mind, by which man is to be redeemed. But after reaching this extreme point of subjectivity, a reaction takes place, and in the systems which have followed from the philosophy of Kant, Schelling, and Hegel, there has been an attempt to combine the objective and subjective forms; in other words, to represent the atonement as a transaction in which God is reconciled to man, as well as man reconciled to God.

Returning therefore to the first period, which we have called the *mythic period* of the doctrine, we shall see that the writers of the early church, taking a partial view of the New Testament statements concerning the work of Christ, and seizing on a particular class of Scripture expressions, constructed a theory in accordance with the habits of thought peculiar to that age.

The New Testament ascribes a great variety of influences to the death of Christ, and uses a multitude of expressions in relation to it. Many of these are highly figurative, as where Christians are said to "wash their robes white in the blood of the Lamb," and many are naturally borrowed from the Jewish ritual and sacrifices. But there are two principal influences, relating to the two-fold consequences of sin, as separating us from God and as depraving our nature. The work of Christ, in relation to the first, is called in the New Testament *reconciliation*, in relation to the second, *redemption*. The first removes the guilt of sin; the second, its power. By the first, we are forgiven; by the second, we are cleansed from all unrighteousness. Now the first of these effects was of too inward, subjective, and spiritual a character, to suit the tone of thought in the early church. They passed by, therefore, the fact of Reconciliation; and took hold of the fact of Redemption, as comprising the chief part of the work of Christ. And seizing a single expression of Scripture in relation to this, they built their whole theory on its literal application. The word thus taken as the foundation of their system was the word "Ransom," a word used by Christ* of himself, and applied

also to his work by the Apostles. "A ransom," they argued, "is paid to deliver captives from the hands of their enemies. But if Christ gave his life as a ransom for us, to whom did he give it? It must have been to an enemy who held us captive. And who could this be except the devil?" Thus argued, for example, Irenæus, contending against the Gnostics,* who endeavoured to take a more spiritual view of the death of Christ. Irenæus was the first who attempted anything like a doctrinal development of the notion of Redemption. His theory was this. Men, through sin, became the prisoners of the devil. Christ, being perfectly just, the devil has no just power over him. By causing him to be put to death, the devil therefore made himself liable in turn to a penalty, and Christ accepts the freedom of his prisoners as his due. He, by his death, pays their ransom, and sets them free. This theory was supported by those texts which speak of a victory over the devil.†

Origen supplied the defects in the system of Irenæus, and developed the doctrine further. He is more mythic in his view than Irenæus, for he explains the motives which led the devil to cause the crucifixion of Jesus, a point which Irenæus had left in obscurity. Origen regarded good and evil as in constant conflict, and considered every good action of a good man as a victory gained over evil and the demoniac world. Every martyr-death is a victory. The demons are well aware of this, but blinded by their hatred, forget it, and cause the death of the good. But in doing so they destroy their own power.‡ Thus was the devil deceived, when through hatred to the goodness of Jesus, he caused him to be murdered. He was then obliged to accept his soul as a ransom for sinners. The death of Christ differs from that of others only in this, that his death brought good to all men.

The theory thus developed by Irenæus and Origen, held its place for many centuries with little alteration. The *right* of the devil over men was fully admitted. Augustine regarded it as the *right* of property. According to him, Adam was conquered by the devil in a fair fight, and made his slave by the laws of war, and according to the same laws all his descendants were slaves also.¶ Leo the Great considered the devil to have a tyrannical right. Others thought man to be only in the power of the devil. Some, as Theodoret and Hilary of Poitiers, spoke of redemption as a battle, in which Christ has conquered the devil, and set free his prisoners. The notion

* The Gnostic views of the death of Christ were quite different from each other. Thus Basilides admitted a real death of Jesus, but only of the *man* Jesus, and denied the power of his death to redeem others. Marcion taught that the sufferings of Jesus were to be regarded as those of the Divine Being, but were not to be considered as real, but only symbolic, representing the truth that man must die to this world and to all material things. Valentinus said that the *Pneumatic* Christ, not the *Pneumatic*, (the soul, not the spirit, the humanity, not the divinity,) suffered on the cross. This, according to him, typified the truth that in the Absolute becoming one with itself, all finite existence is reconciled with it.—Baur, *Christ. Gnosis*, p. 140.

† The early Fathers were occupied almost entirely in opposing the Gnostic Docetic tendencies, and in proving the *reality* of the death of Jesus. Ignatius, Tertullian, &c., say a great deal of the reconciling power of the death of Jesus, but not definitely enough to give any distinct doctrinal idea.—Baur, *von der Versöhnung*, p. 26.

‡ Coloss. ii. 15. Heb. ii. 14. 1 John iii. 8.
§ Origen taught that good works magically, by a secret wonderful power, upon evil. He refers those who doubt, to the Heathens, who believed that nations and cities had been saved by the voluntary devotion of some heroic characters. Origen also regards the death of Christ as a sacrifice offered to God, and contends that a sin can never be forgiven without a sacrifice. Yet this necessity is not deduced from the notion of divine justice, consequently it contains no idea of *substituted suffering*. The purity of the sacrifice takes away the sin, and in its beauty the evils of men vanish away. The purity of the sacrifice would lead God to forgive, but the devil's claim remains, and that is satisfied by the soul of Jesus as a ransom. We must not look for perfect consistency in these early fathers.

¶ Augustin wavers in this view, and in some places seems to take an opposite one.

of a *contract*, however, was more usual, and it was accurately explained how the devil was deceived into accepting the life of Christ as a ransom. Gregory of Nyssa tells us that he was attracted by the sublimity of Christ's works, and did not perceive the divinity under the veil of the flesh. "Under the bait of the flesh," he says, "the hook of the divinity was concealed." The figure of the hook and bait runs through many of the Fathers down to Peter Lombard.

Objections are made to this view, from time to time, by one and another, and even those who held it seem often inconsistent with themselves in their statements. It was opposed by Gregory Nazianzen, John Damascene, and others. But it had taken such strong hold of the mind of that age, that it contained the prevailing view. And even after it had been rejected by Anselm and Abelard, and its inconsistencies fully pointed out, the famous Orthodox teacher, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, defended it with extreme bitterness against its opposers. Peter Lombard, Bishop of Paris, A.D. 1164, whose "Four Books of Sentences" was the text-book of every student, and commented upon by every great theologian, holds to a certain right in the devil over the souls of men. In fact, so long as they clung to the literal idea of redemption, they were compelled to return to the view of an atonement offered to the devil.

The second period is that of *Scholasticism*. But what was scholasticism? Bauingenius Crusius says, "The school separating itself from the Church, and endeavouring to gain an independent existence." Hegel, going deeper, says, "First come the Church Fathers, then the Church Doctors." First come those who give light to the Church, then, life needing light, there arise those who shall teach it.

In the first period of the Church, the direction of its activity was to produce the contents or substance of Doctrine; in the second, or scholastic, to give arrangement and form. To systematize and reconcile the various doctrines which had come to be regarded as Orthodox; to harmonize the whole into a complete system of theology; by innumerable distinctions, and the most subtle definitions, to unfold and penetrate every theological question with the sharpest thought; such was the work of the dialectic scholasticism of the middle ages. But at the very beginning of this period appears a book, which was destined, by the power of its author's genius, to make an epoch in theology, and especially in the history of this doctrine.

Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, born 1034, scholar and successor of Lanfranc, the opponent of Berengar, in his celebrated book, "Cur Deus homo?" lays the foundation of the Church doctrine of substituted punishment. A realist in philosophy, proving the existence of God by assuming the reality of general ideas, in an argument which has been commended by Leibnitz and Hegel; he carries into theology the same strong confidence in necessary truths, and endeavours to found the doctrine of the Atonement on a basis of absolute necessity. He sweeps away, with the boldness of an independent thinker, the whole doctrine of the rights of the devil, declaring that the devil has a right to nothing but to be punished.

Anselm begins this treatise by asking, Why was it necessary that God should become man in order to redeem mankind? His answer is, Because only so could the guilt of sin be atoned for. He defines sin to be, *not giving to God his due*. But man owes God all that comes within the sphere of his free will. Whenever he omits to pay this debt, he dishonours God, and commits sin. How can satisfaction be made to God for his dishonour? It cannot be made by us, since at any moment we already owe God all that can we can do. All that we do, therefore, only fulfils our present duty, and prevents us from falling into new sin, but cannot satisfy for past sin. Since the gift of a universe ought not to tempt us to omit a single duty, it is evident that each duty outweighs the universe, and for each omission of duty we owe God more than a universe. Evidently, therefore, we cannot ourselves satisfy God for our past sin. But satisfaction must be made, or pun-

ishment inflicted; for only by punishing sin, or receiving satisfaction for sin, can God's honour be maintained. That it ought to be maintained, is evident; since as there is nothing in the universe greater or better than God, to maintain God's honour is most just, and the best thing for the whole universe. If God were to forgive sin without satisfaction being made for it, it would be a disorder in his kingdom. Sin, in that case, being subject to no law, would enjoy greater freedom than goodness. Now, as God's honor can be preserved in two ways, either by punishing sin, or receiving satisfaction for it, why does God choose satisfaction instead of punishment? Anselm gives two reasons: first, because so sublime a work as man's rational nature should not be created in vain, or suffered to perish; second, because the number of the redeemed being absolutely fixed, and some of the angels having fallen, their number must be supplied from among men. Man must, therefore, be enabled to satisfy God for his sin, in order that he may be saved. But to satisfy God, we have seen that he must give God more than the universe, that is, more than all that is not God. But only God himself in this, therefore God must make the satisfaction. But it is man who owes the debt, therefore God must be man to make satisfaction. Hence the necessity of the Incarnation of the Son of God, or of the God-man. To make satisfaction, this God-man must pay something which he does not himself owe on his own account. As a man, he owes perfect obedience to himself; this, then, cannot be the satisfaction. But being a sinless man, he is not bound to die; his death, therefore, as the death of a God-man, is the adequate and proper satisfaction. In return for so great a gift, the Father bestows what the Son desires, namely, human redemption. These are the essential steps of the famous argument of Anselm.*

Many serious objections may be urged against this theory, and the same scholastic acuteness which Anselm showed in building it up was manifested by other scholastic Doctors in criticising it. Their minds were too penetrating not to discover its main defect, namely, that the idea on which it is based—of the absolute preponderance of the Divine Justice over the Divine Love—is a mere supposition. Peter Abelard, born 1079, the great Rationalist of the middle ages, criticises and opposes it in his Commentary on Romans. He places the reconciling power of the death of Jesus in its awakening in us an answering love, which conquers our sinfulness. Those who foresaw this revelation of the goodness of God were influenced by it also.† Robert Pullen, teacher at Oxford, 1130, agrees with Abelard. So also, on the whole, do Peter Lombard and Hugo St. Victor.

With Peter Lombard begins the period of Summists, or system-making Doctors. Their object was totality. They attempted to give a solution to every theological question that could be asked. Their usual course is to state the question, then adduce the arguments from Scripture and the Fathers on each side, then the conclusion, in which they endeavour to find a way of reconciling the opposite views. On these great theologians, overrated once, underrated now, we would gladly dwell, did our limits permit. Bonaventure, the Seraphic Doctor (born 1221), handles this subject with great clearness and simplicity. He almost adopts Anselm's theory, and then lets it fall by denying the absolute necessity of satisfaction.

* It will be seen that, according to Anselm, Christ's death was not vicarious punishment. He did not endure punishment in the place of sinners. On the contrary, the idea of *satisfaction* excludes that of *punishment*. God is satisfied either by satisfaction or punishment. "Necessitate ut omne peccatum satisfactio aut pena sequatur." The death of Christ satisfies God's holiness, because it was a free act of goodness which was equal to all the good acts which men had omitted to perform. The notion of vicarious punishment was introduced afterwards by the Lutheran Reformers, when they distinguished between the active and passive obedience of Christ.

† In proof of which he quotes the text, "The multitudes which went before, and followed, cried, saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David'!"

* Matt. xx. 28. Mark x. 45. Titus ii. 14. 1 Peter i. 18, &c.