
Sin and Sacrifice

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probably not deter that particular offender, and it will certainly not deter other offenders, from repeating the offence. The lash is, in fact, a mere fictitious makeshift for genuine correction; it attempts by the hasty, slipshod method of bodily pain-giving what can only be effected by mature reason and thought.

To conclude, then : Corporal punishment, as the very antithesis of moral suasion and the compact embodiment of brute force, is an outrage on what should, above all things, be held sacred—the supremacy of the human mind and the dignity of the human body. It would be quixotic to hope that all use of physical violence, odious though it is, could be at present dispensed with, in a society which is but half emerged from barbarism; but *this* form of it, at least, the most barbarous, because the grossest and most sensual, must be uprooted and abandoned, before any true measure of civilization can be attained.

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SIN AND SACRIFICE.

The most striking fact about the Old Testament conception of sin is the absence of reference to the suggestive myth in the third chapter of Genesis. The nearest approach to the idea of the race as involved in Adam's transgression is in the passages where sin is represented as universal; but such passages nowhere teach that man's sinfulness is derived from Adam. Hence the story of the Fall may be disregarded until we consider the apostle Paul's doctrine of sin.

The true starting point for our enquiry is to be sought in those records of early Israel, where custom is the controlling force in morals. The stories of the patriarchs give the truest reflection of the manners and morals of that period. The patriarchs are represented as being arbitrarily elected to Jahweh's favor and a covenant is established between them. The great crime is revolt against Jahweh's choice—the selling

of the birthright. Even lying, lust, and violence are not denounced as sinful. Under the Mosaic covenant custom remained the dominant social factor. Sin was neglect of ceremonial regulations rather than moral transgression. Such ceremonial transgression was punishable with death because the nation was felt to be involved in the individual's guilt. "What Holiness required was not to do good, but to avoid sin." The prophetic reformation was of the utmost importance because it raised Israel above mere customary morality. A great conception of Jahweh as righteous, and therefore impartial, and even universal in His relations, dawns in Amos, and is developed by his successors. To the prophets sin was the denial or disregard of Jahweh's righteous character; it took the form of idolatrous worship and was frequently associated with foul rites. Powerful and persistent attempts were made to combine the worship of Jahweh with that of other gods in heathen fashion. Against such practices and tendencies the Hebrew prophets hurled indignant protests, moved not by mere jealousy for the honor of Jahweh, but by a profound conception of His moral character.

How far the prophets had departed from customary morality is seen in their insistence upon the need and possibility of repentance. Repentance was a new aspect of sin. Hitherto the whole nation had felt itself involved in the individual's sin. The standard was external, conformity to it was possible to all and obligatory upon all. The prophets discriminated between ritual and righteousness, and declared the former to be vain apart from the latter. Their deeper insight discerned in the new class consciousness the real peril of the nation. The exploiting of the poor by the rich, the defrauding of the widow and the orphan, the buying and selling of justice impressed the prophets as graver wrongs than breaches of ritual observance. And as these wrongs were perpetrated by one section of the community against the other the ancient solidarity was felt to have been finally dissolved. Thus the attack upon the ruling and commercial classes in Amos and Hosea gradually developed into the doctrine of Jeremiah and Ezekiel that every man was responsible for his own sin. A correlative of

this movement was the deepening of the sense of alienation between the Israelite and Jahweh. The sinfulness and littleness of man were placed in striking contrast to the holiness and greatness of his Maker.

The sense of personal responsibility and the conception of Jahweh's holiness, combined with the terrible suffering of the captivity and exile, deeply influenced Israel's view of sin. Suffering had long been regarded as due to sin, but when even the righteous were overwhelmed in ruin and grief the mind of the people was confused with doubt. The conjectures of the book of Job reflect the new mood. Its anxious questionings turn restlessly from one point of view to another, with the result that the view of sin it presents is closely related to the inwardness of the New Testament; *e. g.*, the thirty-first chapter dwells upon the sinfulness of evil thoughts and desires. But with respect to the relation between sin and suffering the book of Job does little more than challenge the traditional view that the latter is the inevitable consequence of the former. It remained for Deutero-Isaiah to boldly present a positive view by his noble conception of Israel as the suffering servant of Jahweh.

The pressure of suffering produced in Israel not only a period of doubt, but also one of deep conviction of sin and assurance of forgiveness. The voice of psalmists was heard in plaintive, poignant confession of sin. The conceptions of God and man in psalmists and prophets are similar, but the attitude is very different. The prophets spoke as representing Jahweh and their demands were high and stern. Deep was calling unto deep. The heart of Israel was pierced and the psalmists uttered its cry. They represented Israel as loving Jahweh because of His wonderful love shown in the great acts of the nation's history. Unhappily sin broke the happy relationship, and they gave this new, deep sense of sin undying expression. It is the sinner's view of sin. Its profoundest utterance is in the fifty-first psalm. There is nothing mean or ignoble in the confession, nothing but a burning hatred of sin for its own sake, accompanied by a wistful hope of forgiveness and renewal.

That hope of forgiveness found its happiest fulfillment in the

teaching of Jesus. There was a long interval between the great psalmists and Jesus during which scribism received its full development. The scribes added little to the Old Testament doctrine of sin save in the direction of legalism and casuistry. Their teaching was attacked by Jesus as tending to hypocrisy. It reestablished externalism in religion and was a departure from the great teachers of Israel. But Jesus did not stop at criticism, what is striking and important is His new attitude toward sin. As denunciation and confession of sin had been the respective notes of prophets and psalmists, so forgiveness of sin was the insistent note of Jesus. He declared that this is God's attitude towards sin and He gave point to the declaration by His wonderful gentleness when dealing with individual sinners. Christ's gospel of forgiveness gave a new character to sin. It became opposition to the kingdom of God—a persistent and willful denial of goodness, even when the goodness is recognized and understood.

Of special importance in the New Testament is the apostle Paul's conception of sin. St. Paul combined a wonderfully vivid religious experience with profound interest in theological speculation. He felt what he taught in a degree given to few. He believed that humanity was tainted, disordered, disunited from God by sin. The story of the Fall had hitherto been strangely disregarded. St. Paul found it helpful because of its representative character; it enabled him to think of humanity as a whole in its relations to sin and redemption. He taught that through Adam's transgression sin entered into the race, enslaving and paralyzing man's higher nature. The flesh became the seat of sin. Physical death was a result of it. How are we to be emancipated from the body of this death? How are we to be justified before a righteous God? Is death to sin possible? It is with these problems that the apostle grapples.

It would be difficult to overestimate the influence of St. Paul's philosophy of sin upon subsequent religious thought and experience. It became allied with philosophic and ascetic ideas of the body as sinful, the spirit being a divine element imprisoned in alien matter. The cruelties to the body, self-in-

flicted in the name of religion ; the morbid longing for death as a release from the disease of earthly existence ; the injury to human society which has followed the train of monastic ideals ; the neglect of higher duties and indifference to grave wrongs : these things and more make a dark and depressing chapter in the history of Christianity. Yet while protesting against false and morbid views of sin it would be a shallow conception that ignored its reality and importance as a stage in human history and individual experience.

Estranged from God by sin how can man become reconciled to the Highest? This question involves some consideration of the biblical conception of sacrifice. The Scriptures seem to point to a childlike time when, in festive spirit, worshipers entertained God at their feasts or under the gloom of threatened calamity sought to propitiate Him by gifts of burnt offering and the like. The fragrant essence distilled from food by fire seems to have been the divine share. These rudimentary conceptions were refined by a progressive civilization, and eventually were subjected to searching criticism by the eighth century prophets. The standard of criticism was the nobler conception of Jahweh they gave to Israel. The gift theory was ridiculed : were not the cattle upon a thousand hills already His? Did they regard their religious ordinances as the grand means of pleasing Him? He was weary of them : away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. Count by count the great indictment developed culminating in the demand : "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with thy God?"

Some of the prophets were impatient of the dumb show of sacrifice. The value of sacrifice lay in its aspiration, and such aspiration could find a nobler expression in language. "Take with you words," urges Hosea, "and turn to the Lord, say unto Him, Forgive all iniquity, and receive us graciously : so will we render the fruit of our lips." When tracing the development of the Old Testament conception of sin we saw that the stern teaching of the prophets about the holiness of Jahweh and the heinousness of sin against Him, followed by the national calamities which ended in ruin and exile, gave rise to

psalms in which the pent-up emotions of Israel found expression in contrition and confession. But this literary movement was too spiritual to satisfy the age. During the gloom of Exile the consciousness of sin weighed heavily upon the heart of Israel. Jahweh seemed so far away and so high in His holiness that the people lost confidence in mere confession and repentance. There was a revival of the ancient spirit which sought to appease Jahweh by material oblation. To approach Him without some costly offering seemed useless. Jahweh had been provoked by their sins, and the penalty of sin was death. Their traditional cultus was pervaded with ideas of sacrificial offering. The slain victim suffered the penalty of sin for others. They had been driven from the land which Jahweh's might had conquered for them. Their enemies were mere instruments, the rod of His anger.

Again, they had little hope of a restored monarchy. Israel had been a mere "buffer" state between powerful kingdoms, and there seemed little prospect of restoration of former conditions. By the destruction of the outer order of the monarchy there had disappeared all that symbolized the nation's strength and beauty. Hence the Jewish exiles were led to dream of restoring the ancient worship in a second temple at Jerusalem. Jahweh should be their king. The temple services should rival in magnificence the splendors of a court.

Amidst such influences no religious forms could rival the claims of sacrifice. Its imposing ceremonial, its costly gifts, its immemorial antiquity were irresistible in that strange historical situation. At the Restoration, under Ezra, 444 B. C., the elaborate system of sacrifice embodied in the priestly code became the authoritative feature of the Jewish religion.

When we come to the New Testament we find that the hold of sacrifice upon the Jewish mind had again been loosened. The attitude of Jesus towards sacrifice was very similar to that of the prophets. He quotes with approval the saying, I will have mercy and not sacrifice. But it would also appear that he conformed to the contemporary ritual. His ultimate attitude to Jewish ritual is seen in His founding of a new covenant with the implied abolition of the ancient system of worship and its sacrifices. In establishing the new covenant Jesus is repre-

sented as speaking of His blood being shed for many for the remission of sins. He elsewhere declared that the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.

Whilst it is clear that Jesus intended His followers to abandon the traditional sacrifices, it is far from clear what was meant by His own sacrifice. It is also impossible to tell what was the precise significance of sacrifice to contemporary thought. Neither Christ's teaching nor practice would lead us to conclude that the salvation of the sinner depended upon His sufferings and death. As we have seen, His attitude towards the sinner was one of gentleness, His message one of forgiveness. He called upon men to repent and have confidence in God, and nowhere taught that the temple sacrifices had a temporary efficacy until His own efficacious offering had been made.

It is in the writings of the apostles that we must look for the fullest statements of Christ's death as a literal objective sacrifice. Forever estranged from the ecclesiastical authorities at Jerusalem by the crucifixion of their Master the apostles were confronted by the task of proclaiming and explaining a new religion to the world. They had been trained to observe the ritual of the priestly code. But the time was ripe for a change in religious conceptions. Sacrificial worship was being slowly undermined by many influences. The shambles and the sanctuary must have been felt to be incongruous as æsthetic feeling developed. The noble conceptions of God, taught by the greatest Jewish teachers as well as those contained in Greek philosophy, must have made burnt offerings seem incongruous when presented to a spiritual deity. On the other hand, idolatry and sacrificial worship prevailed in every contemporary religion. A religion with no external ground of approach to God would have been inconceivable. Certainly a missionary religion, such as Christianity, which sought to win men of every nation and clime, of every rank and condition, must have objective elements or be doomed to failure. The necessities of the time determined the form of Christian doctrine. The necessity was not only in their contemporaries, it was shared by the apostles themselves. Objective elements were necessary to

their faith, and yet they were sufficiently possessed by the spirit of Jesus as to rise above the crude, coarse objectivity in which prevailing worship found expression. Their doctrine of the cross, interpreted as a literal, objective sacrifice, may have seemed to some Greeks foolishness, but it would come as a welcome intellectual relief to many who were weary of obsolescent ritual but were not ready for an entirely spiritual religion. That the doctrine of the cross was a great advance towards a spiritual religion finds striking confirmation throughout Christian history since apostolic times.

"In Christian as in pre-Christian temples, clouds of incense rise as of old. Above all, though the ceremony of sacrifice did not form an original part of Christian worship, its prominent place in the ritual was obtained in early centuries. In that Christianity was recruited among nations to whom the conception of sacrifice was among the deepest of religious ideas, and the ceremony of sacrifice among the sincerest efforts of worship, there arose an observance suited to supply the vacant place. This result was obtained not by new introduction but by transmutation. The solemn eucharistic meal of the primitive Christians in time assumed the name of the sacrifice of the mass, and was adapted to a ceremonial in which an offering of food and drink is set out by a priest on an altar in a temple, and consumed by priest and worshipers. The natural conclusion of an ethnographic survey of sacrifice, is to point to the controversy between Protestants and Catholics, for centuries past one of the keenest which have divided the Christian world, on this express question whether sacrifice is or is not a Christian rite." ¹

To return to the New Testament. It would be a mistake to suppose that the writers were unanimous in their teaching on the atonement. St. Paul taught that sin is punishable with death, but that Christ, representing the race, exchanged parts with man and by his death satisfied Divine justice. Therefore, the old order under which sin in the flesh held our nobler life in bondage would gradually pass away and a new Humanity would appear.

¹ "Primitive Culture," Tylor, vol. ii, p. 409.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews another view is presented. It is the idea of a perfect obedience manifested in the whole life and ministry of Jesus; which obedience unto death brought humanity into a new relation to God and constituted an offering with which He was well pleased. "The idea of a chastisement falling by substitution upon Him, the idea of the innocent enduring the sufferings merited by the guilty, is wholly absent from the Epistle to Hebrews, because it is entirely foreign to the Levitical ritual which the Christian writer adopts and scrupulously follows. . . . If the Epistle to Hebrews alludes to the sufferings endured by Christ on earth they are only considered as serving to perfect Him in obedience and holiness, and to make Him feel compassion for our own trials; but they are never taken into account to explain the expiatory virtue of His sacrifice." ²

In the fourth gospel the moral view of the atonement is accentuated. "I have many things to say and to judge of you: but He that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him. They understood not that He spake to them of the Father. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (John viii, 26-28). "Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (ibid., xviii, 37). "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (ibid., xii, 32). It is true that the same gospel contains the Baptist's testimony: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (ibid., i, 29). It is difficult, however, to reconcile such a passage with those in which Jesus is represented as declaring His mission to be that of a witness to the truth whose testimony is sealed by his death.

This divergence of view in the New Testament as to what

² "The Atonement and Modern Culture," Auguste Sabatier, p. 52.

constitutes the atonement is most instructive. It points to the conclusion that the writers felt free to interpret the meaning of Christ's work by institutions and ideas which lay close to their hands, and by the exercise of this freedom were led to results which involve conflicting theories of the atonement. Is not a feeling of the New Testament differences as to what constitutes the atonement reflected in the fact that "no church has made belief in any particular theory of the atonement an article of faith"? Theologians in succeeding ages have formulated different theories which upon examination reveal the influence of contemporary thought and practice. Just as in New Testament times various theories of sacrifice influenced the development of the doctrine, so conceptions derived from Feudalism, Jurisprudence, Chivalry, and Honor have determined its further growth. It cannot be otherwise in our time. The great advances in religious thought have always had their rise in truer conceptions of God. The symbol of the cross represented a great advance to an age that had begun to feel that animal sacrifices were incongruous offerings to a spiritual God. But even in that age when the cross symbolized the sacrifice for sin, there underlay the teaching the ideas of Jewish Deism and Greek Dualism, God was regarded as a Being external to His world; but an idea of the true relation between man and God is shown in the thought that the distance between them was due on the one hand to God's holiness and on the other to man's sinfulness, hence the yearning for reconciliation and the resort to methods of atonement. This sense of alienation has always been the strength of theories of the atonement, and to ignore it is to do injustice to the profoundest element in the religious life of to-day. The failure of the traditional doctrine lies not in its emphasis on the sense of sin and consequent alienation from God, but in its pre-supposition as to the nature of God. Conceiving of God as standing high above human life it is driven to represent the atonement as a transaction between two wills externally related to each other. To this view God is a Judge, a Ruler, a Visitor to the earth at stated times, to certain places. This view also prevents the recognition of sin not only as a break with the natural order

but as a stage in the process by which man attains to self-consciousness and self-realization. Instead of being an act which must be externally atoned for, sin is a sense of condemnation of our lower self. But sin is not negative merely, it has another aspect which may be described as a dying to live: a process by which the will becomes conscious of reconciliation with its own divine and infinite nature as a partaker of the Divine Life. The suffering involved in dying to live is symbolized by the cross of Christ. Freed from all suggestion of externality the cross is seen to be the manifestation of complete surrender to the highest within man. It represents a stage in the process by which man passes from alienation and consequent despair to the divine source of strength in which he lives and moves and has his being. The spiritual struggle that culminated in the cross called forth all the powers of lower ideals and revealed their impotence by the completeness of Christ's self-sacrifice. It revealed the divinity of humanity. It showed how high the spirit within man can rise, and has done more to convince men of sin and lead them to forsake it than any other event in human history. This interpretation is made possible by what may be termed the modern movement. The influence of modern science, philosophy, poetry, has been most marked upon our religious beliefs. It is not that modern conceptions destroy what Christianity gave us, but that the deeper elements in Christianity are made more intelligible. Modern thought is enabling us to apprehend the pure, spiritual conception of God taught by Jesus, a conception containing principles of criticism before which all externals in religion were and are bound to pass. "This idea of the immanence of God underlies the Christian conception; and if we look below the surface we can see that it is an idea involved in all modern philosophy and theology. We may reject religion or we may accept it, but we cannot accept it except in this form; and even where we reject it, the ground of our rejection will generally lie in the difficulties that seem to exist in *this* form of it."³

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³ "Evolution of Religion," E. Caird, vol i, p. 196.