

THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST

By ALAN M. STIBBS, M. A.
Vice-Principal, Oak Hill Theological College, London

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ΤΕΤΕΛΕΣΤΑΙ

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up his spirit. Jn. xix. 30.

'Reconciliation was finished in Christ's death. Paul did not preach a gradual reconciliation. He preached what the old divines used to call the finished work.... He preached something done once for all, - a reconciliation which is the base of every soul's reconciliation.... What the Church has to do is to appropriate the thing that has been finally and universally done.'
- P. T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ* (p. 86).

THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

The idea that Christ's atoning work is 'finished' is Scriptural in origin; it is indeed based on a word uttered by our Lord Himself before His death on the cross. We read that Jesus said, 'τετέλεσται - It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up his spirit.'¹ Clearly, therefore, when Jesus at last reached the point of departure from this present earthly life, the work to which this word τετέλεσται referred was already fully accomplished. Similarly the doctrine to which such plain Scriptural witness gave rise, that Christ by His death has done all that was necessary to reconcile sinful men to God, was equally clearly a precious conviction of many of our Christian forebears. They gloried in '*the finished work of Christ*.' It was to them the heart of their gospel, the foundation of all their hope. Nor, as we shall see, has its unqualified reassertion been completely lacking in recent times. But views which are fundamentally different are widely prevalent, and are more far-reaching in their influence on Christian faith and worship than many are aware. It is our purpose in this study first to indicate briefly the distinctive features of these different views, and then to show why they are to be rejected as unscriptural, and why we ought with renewed determination to embrace and to affirm the conviction of our forefathers concerning 'the finished work of Christ.'

In contrast to this view that Christ's atoning work was 'finished' at the cross, it is suggested by some that Christ's earthly passion was but an expression in time or history of something which happens only fully in eternity; and that the eternal Son of God is, therefore, to be thought of as continually offering Himself to God in order to secure our acceptance in God's presence. For instance, Bishop A. M. Ramsey writes: 'Christ's priesthood belongs, as does His sonship, to the eternal world: for ever Son, He is also for ever priest. Priesthood means offering, and in

the Son there is for ever that spirit of self-offering which the sacrifice of Calvary uniquely disclosed in our world of sin and death.¹²

¹ Jn. xix. 30.

² *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ*. (1948). p. 94.

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Similarly, Prof. D. M. Baillie, while he asserts that the idea of 'a divine sin-bearing', 'a costly atonement in the heart of God,' arose out of the historical event of the death of Jesus Christ; and while he insists that, 'To reduce the importance of the historical event would be contrary to every instinct of Christian faith'; nevertheless goes on to write: 'and yet it seems impossible to say that the divine sin-bearing was confined to that moment of time, or is anything less than eternal.'¹ He also writes: 'As God was incarnate in Jesus, so we may say that the divine atonement was incarnate in the passion of Jesus. And if we then go on to speak of an eternal atonement in the very being and life of God, it is not by way of reducing the significance of the historical moment of the incarnation, but by way of realizing the relation of the living God to every other historical moment. God's reconciling work cannot be confined to any one moment in history.... It is not that the historical episode is a mere symbol of something "timeless": it is actually a part (the incarnate part) of the eternal divine sin-bearing.'²

It is suggested by others that Christ's 'blood' or 'life', shed or rather 'released' through His death on the cross, is now being offered to God as a continual oblation; and thus that the decisive offering made once for all on the cross is in some way continued or 're-presented' before God, both by Christ in heaven, and by the Church on earth. Surveying the views and teaching of others; D. M. Baillie begins, indeed, by making the very questionable assertion that, 'As regards the idea that the divine sin-bearing, the atoning work, which appeared in history once for all on Calvary, goes on *ever since* in the heavenly sphere, there are hints of this in the Christian tradition from the beginning.'³

Certainly not a few modern writers have given expression to the view that the heavenly and the eucharistic offering complete and consummate the sacrifice of the cross. For instance, R. C. Moberly writes: 'Though Calvary be the indispensable preliminary, yet it is not Calvary taken apart, not Calvary quite so directly as the eternal self-presentation in heaven of the risen and ascended Lord, which is the true consummation of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But of course in that eternal presentation

¹ *God was in Christ*. (1947). p. 190.

² *Ibid.*, p. 191.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

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Calvary is eternally implied. ¹ Similarly E. J. Bicknell writes: 'So our Lord, by His presence within the veil, is now making atonement for us. As the high priest uttered no spoken prayer but by his presentation of the blood made reconciliation for Israel, our Lord as our representative, clothed in our nature, having become all that He now is through His cross and passion, eternally presents Himself to the Father. ² Also, F. C. N. Hicks writes of Christ: 'He has entered into the holy place - once for all, it is true. He does not need to re-enter every year

like the Jewish priest; and there His work is to sanctify, by bringing His outpoured life before the face of God, as the blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat.¹³

This idea of the continued offering to God of Christ's one sacrifice is also said to find expression on earth through Christ's mystical body, the Church, in the sacrament of Holy Communion. For instance, O. C. Quick writes: "The Eucharist then is truly a sacrifice. For it is the perpetual externalization in human ritual of the self-offering of Christ, which was once for all in fact externalized on Calvary, but is ever real in the inward and heavenly sphere."¹⁴ "In the Eucharist... we make before God an offering which is one with Christ's present and eternal offering of Himself."¹⁵

Similarly in a chapter entitled 'The Eucharist as Sacrifice' W. Norman Pittenger of the General Theological Seminary, New York, writes: "The Church is enabled to make its sacrificial action identical with the once-for-all event on Calvary, because it is the same Christ who offered Himself on Calvary and who gives Himself in His body the Church."¹⁶ "The Eucharist is a sacrifice because it is that "offering of Christ once made," herein pleaded and offered to the Father, set between "our sins and their reward."¹⁷ Pittenger thus asserts not only that the Church in the Eucharist continues Christ's atoning work, but also that only as she does so is Christ's one oblation made effective for

¹ *Ministerial Priesthood*, p. 246.

² *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles*. (Second Edition, 1925). p. 144.

³ *The Fullness of Sacrifice*. (1930). p. 238.

⁴ *The Christian Sacraments*. (1927). p. 198.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 199, 200.

⁶ *The Christian Sacrifice*. (1951). p. 109.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 110.

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men's present benefit.

Over against all such views it is the conviction of this present writer that Christ's work of offering Himself for men's salvation is unmistakably represented in Scripture as exclusively earthly and historical, the purpose of the incarnation, wrought out in flesh and blood, in time and space, under Pontius Pilate; that by this once-for-all finished happening the necessary and intended atoning work was completely accomplished; that, because of it, Christ has been eternally rewarded, and His people enjoy the benefits which unceasingly stream from it, without any necessity, indeed without any possible place, for its continuance and completion by Christ in His glorified or mystical body in heavenly or eucharistic offering. It is, therefore, the main purpose of this study to expound the grounds of this conviction, and by implication to show the unscriptural and misleading character of the different views already illustrated.

IMPORTANT PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

I. THE RELATION OF CHRIST'S WORK TO SIN

There is great need for a clear recognition of the definite and distinctive purpose of Christ's redeeming and reconciling work. Activity which may be eternally true of the divine Son in His

relation to the Father, or activity which ought to be characteristic of sinless and perfect man in his relation to God, namely continuous devotion of self as a living sacrifice to glorify God and serve His pleasure, ought not to be confused with the special activity in which the eternal Son had to engage in order to redeem a lost race, and reconcile sinful men to God. It is this latter activity that we are here to consider.

Since this special activity was called forth by man's fall into sin, it is impossible to appreciate its necessary character except in that connection. We need to appreciate that sin exposes those who commit it to immediate bondage and inevitable condemnation; such creatures rightly become objects of the divine wrath, deserving to be dealt with in judgment. Also, such sin makes those involved in it totally unfit to approach God; they are inevitably excluded from God's presence and from the enjoyment of His company. They have deprived themselves of the true

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satisfaction and fulfilment of their God-given human nature - that is, to know God.

The special activity of Christ must, therefore, deal in particular with these two consequences of sin, - exposure to the divine wrath and exclusion from the divine presence. Such consequences demand for their remedy a single decisive action rather than a continuous and eternal activity. Something needs to be done, and completely done - in other words 'a finished work' needs to be accomplished - to secure men's deliverance from the divine wrath, and men's free access to the divine presence. Such a 'finished work' Christ did when He died for our sins; and we propose to consider its 'finished' character in these two connections - first, as 'The τελείωσις of Redemption', delivering us from God's wrath, and, second, as 'The τελείωσις of Reconciliation', securing our unhindered access to God's presence.

II. THE PERFORMANCE OF CHRIST'S WORK IN TIME AS AN EVENT IN HISTORY

Ideas that Christ's work is supremely achieved continuously or eternally in heaven sound philosophically attractive and spiritually good. Actually such ideas are unscriptural and irrelevant to man's need of redemption and reconciliation. For God has been pleased to deal with the situation which man's sin has created on the field of earthly history, in time and space, in flesh and blood, and particularly through suffering and death.

Valuable reassertion of this essential Christian truth has been made by Oscar Cullmann in his significant work published in an English translation under the title *Christ and Time*. One can scarcely do better than quote some of his statements, which are, it is to be noted, not his own theorizing, but his scholarly evaluation of primitive Christian thought, as it can be learnt from the witness of the documents of the New Testament. He insists that in order properly to determine 'the essential Christian kernel' it is necessary 'to renounce all standards derived from any other source than the most ancient Christian writings themselves.'¹ He warns us of the need deliberately to recognize the unique character of the Christian standard, namely, 'that the

¹ *Christ and Time*. (1951). p. 12.

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Christian norm is itself also history and is not, as is the philosophical norm, a transcendent datum that lies beyond all history. ¹ 'Here,' he says, 'in the final analysis lies the "offense" of the primitive Christian view of time and history, not only for the historian, but for all "modern" thinking, including theological thinking: the offense is that God reveals Himself in a special way, and effects "salvation" in a final way, within a narrowly limited but continuing process.'² Also: '... all points of this redemptive line are related to the *one historical fact* at the midpoint, a fact which precisely in its unrepeatable character, which marks all historical events, is decisive for salvation. This fact is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.'³

Again, this idea of a '*kairos*', or definite point of time especially favourable for an undertaking, and central in the divine plan of salvation, is found connected with the work which the incarnate Christ performed not only in the subsequent faith of the Church. 'Rather,' says Cullman, 'Jesus Himself, according to the Synoptic witness, characterizes His passion as His "*kairos*".'⁴ Similarly, 'in the numerous Johannine passages in which Jesus speaks of His "hour"... in every case the hour of His death is meant.'⁵

So Oscar Cullmann would have us realize on the one hand, that Jesus really 'regarded His own death as the decisive point in the divine plan of salvation,'⁶ and, on the other hand, that what he calls the one great Christological heresy both of ancient and modern times is that wider Docetism, which has at its root 'the failure to respect the historically unique character of the redemptive deed of Christ.'⁷ Before we proceed further, therefore, we shall do well to take seriously to heart both this positive witness and this complementary warning.

THE ΤΕΛΕΙΩΣΙΣ OF REMISSION OF SIN AND OF REDEMPTION FROM SIN

Much might be said under this heading. We wish to concentrate thought upon this one point that Christ secured the remission

¹ Ibid. p. 21.

⁵ Ibid. pp. 43, 44.

² Ibid. p. 23.

⁶ Ibid. pp. 148, 149.

³ Ibid. pp. 32, 33.

⁷ Ibid p. 127.

⁴ Ibid. See pp. 39-41.

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of our sins, and our redemption from its bondage and its penalty, by His death, as a decisive act once-for-all accomplished, whose benefits endure for ever, and are available to be enjoyed by all for whom He died. In other words, the atoning and redemptive efficacy of His saving work, the necessary propitiation and ransom price, are to be found in His death; and it will be our object to show that this is explicitly indicated by significant utterances of our Lord, and abundantly confirmed as the faith of the early Church by the pointed testimony and dogmatic statements of the New Testament.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEATH

As an aid to fuller appreciation of what we understand the evidence to imply it may be helpful at this stage briefly to indicate what is, as we see it, the significance attached in the Bible both to death itself, and to the voluntary submission to such death of the sinless God-man Christ

Jesus. For in the thought-world of Scriptural truth, death is directly connected with sin as its consequence and penalty. To quote a recent writer: 'For man to die is unnatural. It is a punishment for sin (Rom. i. 32, etc.); and it is no arbitrary punishment, being bound up with it by an inner necessity. ¹ Over against this truth the unique, remarkable and indeed paradoxical truth about Christ's death is that, while, on the one hand, He suffered the death due to men as sinners in all the grimness of its curse and shame, on the other hand, He did this not as Himself a sinner inevitably bound so to die, but in complete voluntary submission, as one who freely chose thus to lay down His life² to secure remission and redemption for sinners, whose condition as under condemnation and judgment He thus completely made His own.

Christ's suffering was, therefore, penal - the kind of suffering due only to sin and to sinners. It was substitutionary because due actually not to the sinless Christ, but to us sinners, in whose place He suffered as, so to speak, our 'proxy '. It was redemptive, because, by thus exhausting upon Himself the claims of sin and death against us sinners, without Himself becoming subject to their power as a sinner, He secured the possibility of our

¹ J. A. T. Robinson. *The Body*. (1952). p. 34.

² See Jn. x 18

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release, once we acknowledge Him as our Lord, who did it in our stead. For once He was dead the ransom price was paid and the remission effected; in other words, the necessary atoning and redemptive work was finished.

No wonder it has appeared to some, particularly in the early centuries of the Christian era. as if the powers of evil were deceived. For the death due to us as sinners, which He thus took upon Himself, secured no proper hold upon Him. the sinless One. For Him death had no sting. Indeed, He died not 'in sin' or 'under sin' but 'unto sin'.¹ 'It was,' as Peter preached, 'impossible that He should be holden of death ²; and He is now able to give release to sinners, who would otherwise be holden, because He thus died on their behalf. So sin and death are robbed of their prey. The stronger than the devil has taken possession of the devil's stronghold and is able to spoil his goods or free his captives; and all because the necessary work to make such results possible is already finished. The resurrection of our 'proxy' from the dead is the decisive proof that the sin He bore is remitted, and that we are justified in God's sight. ³

OUR LORD'S ATTITUDE TO HIS OWN DEATH

The Gospel records themselves provide ample evidence that this is how Christ Himself during His life-time saw the death which He set Himself to face to be both absolutely necessary and abundantly worthwhile. Let us consider three significant illustrations.

a. Christ's submission to baptism by John

John gave baptism to the repentant as a solemn pledge and promise of remission of sins and of the baptism of the Spirit, a seal of that necessary cleansing and quickening which would give them entrance into the kingdom of God. Jesus came to be baptized, not because He needed remission and regeneration, but, as we believe, in order to consecrate Himself to the necessary work that would make such remission and regeneration possible for sinful men. His own

explicit words later confirmed that it was His death which He saw plainly to be the true baptism with

¹ See Jn. viii. 24; Rom. vi. 10. ³ See 1 Cor. xv. 17; Rom. iv. 25.

² Acts ii. 24.

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which he must be baptized. ¹ In submitting, therefore, to ceremonial baptism with water He was consecrating Himself to die to put away sin and make possible the gift of the Spirit.

This consecration was followed by three remarkable testimonies. First, the testimony of the Father's voice from heaven, indicating His delight in the Messiah, who thus chose to fulfil the role of the Suffering Servant and bear the sin of many. ² Second, the testimony of the rent heaven and the descending Spirit, not only indicating that God Himself would empower Him for this very task, but also suggesting that, when it was accomplished and He emerged from His baptism of death, the Spirit would be given to men. ³ Third, the testimony of the Baptist's preaching. For John declared his awareness that through his water baptism 'the coming one' would be fully made manifest to Israel; and in the light of Jesus' consecration of Himself by baptism to the 'fulfilment of all righteousness' John proclaimed Him to be 'the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,' and 'He that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit.'⁴

Yet further significant comment on John's baptism may be found in our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus.⁵ To him Jesus made plain that the outward ceremony of water baptism alone would not suffice to give entrance to God's kingdom. There must be an accompanying inner renewal, a birth of the Spirit. And when Nicodemus asked how such a miracle could happen, Christ indicated plainly the decisive work that would make it possible for men, who must otherwise perish as sinners, to become possessors of new God-given life. 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life.' Nor is it without complementary significance that, as soon as Jesus' baptism of death was accomplished and He was risen from the dead, He at once made plain to His disciples that remission of sins and the gift of the Spirit can now be authoritatively offered to men⁶; indeed, these are the great fundamental gifts of the gospel of which at Pentecost baptism in the name of Jesus Christ was declared to be the seal.⁷

¹ Lk. xii. 50.

² Mk. i. 11; Is. xlii. 1, liii. 10-12.

³ Mk. i. 10.

⁴ Mt. iii. 13-17; Jn. i. 29-34.

⁵ See Jn. iii. 1-14.

⁶ Jn. xx. 19-23; Lk. xxiv. 44-49.

⁷ Acts ii. 38.

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b. Christ's breaking of the bread to feed the hungry

In the familiar stories of the feeding first of the five thousand, and then of the four thousand, the point at which the miracle happened is unmistakably clear: indeed, Jesus later rebuked His disciples for not remembering. It was when He broke the loaves that on each occasion there were enough broken fragments for all to be satisfied and enough over to fill several baskets.¹ The multitude was fed, first, because Jesus was there, second, because He condescended to take the loaves, third, - and this was the decisive event, - because He broke the loaves. Once that work was finished, there was plenty to give to all. Similarly the spiritual need of men has been met, first, because the eternal Son of God arrived on the human scene, He came down

from above; second, because He condescended to take our nature, flesh and blood, to become man; third, and this is the decisive event, because He gave His flesh to be broken so that His blood was shed in death. Once that work was finished Christ could be offered to, and received by, men as the bread of life, that is, as the Saviour who died for them. For those who would have eternal life must, He said, 'eat my flesh and drink my blood'; and it is clear enough from the Old Testament that such phraseology as 'eating a man's flesh' and 'drinking a man's blood' meant to the Hebrew mind appropriating and enjoying as one's own benefits only procured at the cost of someone else's life.² In other words, eternal life is to be received solely and exclusively as a benefit of Christ's passion, as made available for us to enjoy by that one decisive event, the rending of His human body in death. This truth our Lord Himself indicated and enforced in the most dogmatic and conclusive fashion when He said, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves.'³ Nor is it without complementary significance that the bread, which we break according to Christ's ordinance in the Holy Communion, on the one hand unmistakably points to the decisive event of His death, and, on the other hand, by what Christ commanded

¹ See Mk. vi. 34-44, viii. 1-9, 14-21.

² See Ps. xiv. 4, xxvii. 2; 2 Sa. xxiii. 15-17. See also *The Theological Word Dictionary* (1950), Article 'Blood'; and A. M. Stibbs, *The Meaning of the Word 'Blood' in Scripture* (1947, Tyndale Press). [Now on-line at http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/blood_stibbs.pdf]

³ See Jn. vi. 32-35, 47-58.

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to be done with it (i.e. 'Take, eat'), dramatically speaks of consequent benefits thereby made available to be received by men. 1 His finished work is thus visibly shown to make possible an unceasing feeding; it provides enough and more than enough to satisfy all the needs of all the people of God; or, as St. Paul put it, in appropriate Passover language, 'For our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ: wherefore let us keep the feast.'²

c. Christ's declaration that He came to give His life a ransom for many³

In Biblical usage the word 'ransom' (Greek, λύτρον, Hebrew, *kôpher*) is clearly a price paid to deliver anyone from threatened or merited punishment, and particularly to secure release and rescue from death of a life otherwise forfeit.⁴ Ps. xlix. 6-8 declares of those who 'trust in their wealth' that 'none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: for the redemption of their soul is costly, and must be let alone for ever.' Our Lord Himself emphasized the hopelessness of the human situation by two unanswerable rhetorical questions: 'For what doth it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? For what should a man give in exchange for his life?'⁵ These words imply that, once a man's life is forfeited, man has no means of redeeming it from loss. In relation to this situation Christ asserted that, if He laid down His one life, it would be sufficient to secure the release not only of one other, but of all the people of God - 'the many' - whose lives otherwise, so Christ implies, are all forfeited. Also, 'the giving of the λύτρον is certainly here the laying down of life in death.'⁶ It is a reference to a work of redemption finished at and on the cross. 'It is not the presentation in heaven of blood shed on earth, nor the sprinkling in any sort of the Saviour's blood on earth or in heaven; but it is the blood-shedding, the dying, the death, which is here set before faith's view as the great work which the Son of man came into the world to do; and the doing of which is the paying of the ransom price for man's redemption, for his spiritual liberty and restoration.'⁷

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 23, 24, 26.

² 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

³ Mk. x. 45; Mt. xx. 28.

⁴ See Ex. xiii. 13; Nu. xxxv. 31.

⁵ Mk. viii. 36, 37.

⁶ Nathaniel Dimock. *The Doctrine of the Death of Christ*. (1903. 2nd Edition, Revised). p. 48.

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 48, 49.

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The very idea of paying a ransom demands, if it is to be successful, a decisive result, a complete consequent change in the condition of those for whose benefit it is paid. It is, therefore, completely out of place to think of Christ's redeeming work still being completed in heaven. For the reiterated testimony of the apostolic writers is that 'we have our redemption through his blood, ' i.e. through His death, or, to quote our Lord's own phraseology, through His human life given as a ransom. Also, His bodily resurrection as man was the proof that the redemption was already completely effected through His death.

The one finished work of Christ's voluntary submission to death is, therefore, to be viewed as a sufficient sin-offering or '*kôpher*'. It is intolerable to think of this necessary payment of ransom as going on continuously or eternally.² Christ's own words indicate that He came into this world, and became man, in order to finish the necessary redemptive work here and now, by giving His earthly human life as the ransom. And in general the Scriptural witness emphasizes that the necessary 'transaction' was all limited to, and settled in, one critical 'hour' or 'day' in which God thus allowed Him to be handed over to suffer in His person as man the inevitable outworking of the power and penalty of sin.

THE DECISIVE EVENT ITSELF

When we consider the New Testament records of the decisive event itself, together with the apostolic interpretation of its significance, there are noteworthy evidences that, once this act of sin-bearing up to the death on the cross was finished, the situation was completely changed and Jesus immediately began to enjoy the fruits of victory. For, by Himself thus dying, He did not become, like others, a victim and prisoner of death; rather, by dying voluntarily, and not as one who must, He, so to speak,

¹ Eph. i. 7; cf. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

² 'For it is one thing to believe that the moral government of God required an historic manifestation of the condemnation of sin through the earthly life and death of the Lord Jesus; but it is quite another thing to believe that God requires for man's forgiveness a continual process of propitiation through the ceaseless re-presenting to Him by our Lord of His sacrifice.' A. J. Tait. *The Nature and Function of the Sacraments*. (1917). p. 89.

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stormed the stronghold of death and captured it. His purpose was by a human death in flesh and blood to 'bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.'¹ 'God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.'² Jesus 'realized' the eschatology of God's eternal judgment against sinful man by bringing it decisively to an immediate consummation and finish in the one completed act of earthly and temporal history - His death, - which by its very nature as a freely chosen act of sacrifice took Him beyond the scene of sin and death not as their victim but as their victor, the one who had thus broken their otherwise invincible hold on men and inevitable doom for men.

Thus Jesus became the Lord of death and of the dead. Thus He was able freely Himself to open the gate back into life, and came forth to proclaim: 'I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.'³ Thus, through such suffering, He was made perfect - a finished work - as the pioneer of salvation. For by this way of the cross He not only entered His own glory, but also opened up the road by which to bring the many as sons into glory, - the destined glory of humanity of which men have come short through sin.⁴ For, when His flesh was rent in death, He not only opened a way out for sinners from death and doom, He also consecrated a way in for believers into man's true home in God's presence.⁵ As the redeemer He brings men out of sin and death, not back into physical, sinful, earthly life, but beyond it into spiritual, sanctified, eternal life, and all because of the finished work of His own death and its endless consequences.

The hour, therefore, when the prince of this world was cast out, was the hour of Christ's death. The place where Christ was triumphantly lifted up as the king whose right it is to reign was on the tree.⁶ There at the cross, to those who have the faith to see, He openly triumphed over the powers of evil. He cancelled out the legal charge sheet written against us as transgressors.⁷ He broke the hold that sin and the law, death and the devil, had upon us as guilty sinners.⁸ As soon as He was

¹ Heb. ii. 14.

² Rom. viii. 3.

³ Rev. i. 18.

⁴ See Heb. ii. 10; Rom. iii. 23.

⁵ Rom. iv. 25-v. 2, 9; Heb. x. 19, 20.

⁶ Jn. xii. 27, 31-33.

⁷ Col. ii. 14, 15.

⁸ Rom. vi. 6, 7, 14, vii. 4, 6.

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dead, all hell as well as all heaven knew that the decisive victory had been won. He went and proclaimed it to the rebellious spirits in prison, who await the judgment of the coming great day of God.¹

CHRIST'S BURIAL AND RESURRECTION

The completely changed situation immediately following the death of Jesus may also be discerned in what happened to His dead body. For God providentially took over its proper care. Though Jesus suffered to the point of dying as though He were a sinner, as one numbered with transgressors, and publicly bearing the curse due to sin, yet once He was dead, His body was not roughly handled and thrown out like those of the other two malefactors. Not a bone of Him was broken; and by a sudden surprising intervention of two members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, His body was lavishly bound in linen cloths with spices and buried in a new rock-hewn tomb.² Neither did God suffer His holy one to see corruption.³ On the third day His body was glorified. Nor was His bodily resurrection just the condition of His going to heaven to complete the work which will avail to save sinful men. It was the proof of the success, and the beginning of the reward, of His finished work of propitiation and redemption. 'If Christ hath not been raised,' wrote St. Paul, 'your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.'⁴ This means surely that, because He has been raised, we know that the hold of sin has been broken, that full propitiation has been made, and that we are justified before God.⁵

Similarly the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that 'the God of peace... brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with' ('by' R.V. mg., Gk. ἐν) 'the blood of the

eternal covenant.¹⁶ "The force of ἐν here requires us to understand that it was in virtue of the blood of the covenant, because of its availing efficacy, because, having been shed for many for the remission of sins it had accomplished its work, that the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead... (There is) evidence here that the blood of sacrifice... (was) effectual,

¹ 1 Pet. iii. 18, 19; 2 Pet. ii. 4; Jude 6.

² See Jn. xix. 31-37.

³ See Acts ii. 27-32, xiii. 34-37.

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 17.

⁵ See Acts xiii. 37-39; Rom. iv. 25.

⁶ Heb. xiii. 20.

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and... accepted as effectual, before the resurrection of Christ, ... also, an assurance that the New Covenant in that blood was, before the resurrection, already established and confirmed and in full force.¹ Also, 'if the resurrection is the result of the Saviour's sacrifice offered in blood, it is impossible that the ascension of the Saviour can be in order to the offering of that blood of sacrifice in heaven.² In other words, the necessary work of propitiation and redemption was finished at the cross where, in contrast to the hidden mercy seat of the holy of holies, Christ Jesus was openly set forth to be a propitiation by His death.³

CHRIST'S HEAVENLY ENTHRONEMENT

The same writer to the Hebrews also says that the eternal Son of God 'when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high.⁴ If these two phrases are interpreted in their context, their grammatical form and their syntactical sequence emphasize two things: first, that the outstanding achievement of the incarnation was the purification of sins and, second, that the act of taking His seat in heaven at the right hand of God followed, and was indeed a consequence of, its completion. From repeated statements of a similar kind throughout this Epistle it is abundantly clear that this writer regarded Christ's heavenly enthronement as itself the God-given proof and reward of a propitiatory work already successfully accomplished.⁵ Also, 'the force of Heb. ix. 22 lies especially in the fact that it does not say "without sprinkling of blood is no remission" but it says, "χωρὶς αἵματεκχυσίας οὐ γίνεται ἄφεσις" thereby showing the true subordination of the sprinkling as a means merely of applying the efficacy, which is to be viewed as resulting only from the blood-shedding.⁶

To return to the evidence of the Gospel according to St. Luke, the conversation at the Transfiguration between Moses and Elijah and our Lord made plain that the decisive 'exodus', for the redemption of God's Israel from the bondage of sin, would

¹ N. Dimock. *The Doctrine of the Death of Christ*. (1903). p. 58.

² N. Dimock. *The Sacerdotium of Christ*. (1910). p. 113.

³ See Rom. iii. 24-26: note the Greek.

⁴ Heb. i. 3.

⁵ See Heb. i. 13, ii. 9, x. 12, 13, xii. 2.

⁶ N. Dimock. *The Doctrine of the Death of Christ*. (1903). p. 62.

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be accomplished not in heaven after the ascension, but on earth at Jerusalem.¹ That is where the necessary work of redemption was finished. That is where, as Peter wrote later, 'his own self carried up our sins in his body to the tree.²

THE WITNESS OF THE TWO SACRAMENTS OF THE GOSPEL

That this is the truth on which all Christian faith and hope should rest is confirmed by that ordinance which the Lord ordained as the Christian Passover, an ordinance in which we remember the redemption once for all accomplished by His death, from which innumerable benefits unceasingly flow. For the sacrament of the Holy Communion is not a means to repeat or re-present His sacrifice before God, but a visible and dramatic movement, directed by the Lord Himself towards His people, to make them aware that His one sacrifice already finished has so availed that unceasing benefits of it are continually available, and may herewith be by faith appropriated and enjoyed.

Similarly in the other sacrament of the gospel all who are baptized into Christ are baptized into His death 'that the body of sin might be done away.'¹ They are thereby authoritatively made aware that the one sufficient ground and cause of redemption and release from sin, of acceptance in God's sight and freedom to live unto Him, is a finished act of the past, - the death of Christ, - into whose far-reaching consequences they are thus solemnly initiated and challenged actively to enter. It is here noteworthy that believers in Christ are not baptized into Christ's heavenly or eternal offering of Himself to God. For that would make salvation something only in the process of being won; that would deprive believers of the true evangelical assurance of sin forgiven; that would suggest that the Church on earth must unite with the Christ in heaven to procure salvation by a continuing work of propitiatory offering. This is clearly not the gospel of the apostolic preaching in which the exalted Lord was proclaimed as one already put by God into that place of Lordship from which, without further atoning work, He can give repentance and remission of sins to all who call upon His name.⁴ 'The message of the gospel starts from the finished work of

¹ Lk. ix. 30, 31.

² 1 Pet. ii. 24, R. v. mg.

³ Rom. vi. 3-7.

⁴ See Lk. xxiv. 46, 47; Acts ii. 38, v. 30, 31, x. 43, xiii. 38, 39.

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sacrifice.¹ 'What ministers of the gospel have to offer of propitiation for acceptance is for acceptance not in heaven, but on earth; is offered not to the Holy God but to rebel hearts of sinful men.'²

In other words, only if we recognize and believe that Christ's atoning work is decisively finished, and He Himself exalted to give gifts to the sinful for whom He suffered, can we enjoy and proclaim the wonder of present full justification by faith only. Many of us lack assurance of sin forgiven, many of us have ceased to glory in the truth of justification by faith, because we have become weak in our conviction and certainty concerning the τελείωσις of redemption or the finished character of Christ's redeeming work. 'For the death that he died, he died unto sin once for all.'³ That is the point where sin, and its doing, and its doom, are all left behind - at His cross; that henceforth in Him and with Him we may live eternally unto God.

THE ΤΕΛΕΙΩΣΙΣ OF PRIESTHOOD AND OF RECONCILIATION

As we have reminded ourselves in the introduction many hold the view that Christ is continually making propitiation in heaven by offering Himself to God as the Lamb that once was slain. What is more, this view is said to be unquestionably Scriptural because, according to the ritual of the Day of Atonement, propitiation was made not by the killing of the animal but by the subsequent sprinkling of its blood in the most holy place.⁴ Also, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is emphatically asserted that Christ functions as a priest not on earth, like the Levitical priests, but in heaven; and as a priest He must of necessity have something to offer.⁵ Therefore, it is right to think of Him in heaven making priestly and propitiatory offering for sin by offering Himself or His blood to God.⁶

¹ N. Dimock. *The Sacerdotium of Christ*. (1910). p. 85.

² Ibid. p. 80. ³ Rom. vi. 10, R.V. mg.

⁴ Lv. xvi. 15-17. ⁵ Heb. viii. 1-4.

⁶ 'In every ordinary sin-offering... not the slaying of the victim but the presentation of blood was the essentially priestly act; and if, therefore, our Lord ever performed what was the priestly function in its deepest meaning, it must have been when He presented Himself with His offering in the heavenly sanctuary.' W. Milligan. *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of our Lord*. (1891). p. 7. 'The thought of "offering" on the part of our Lord is not to be confined to His sacrificial death: it is so to be extended as to include in it a present and eternal offering to God of Himself in heaven.' Ibid. p. 133.

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It will be our aim in what follows to show that such a view represents a radical misunderstanding of the witness of Scripture through failure to give due consideration to certain new facts in the New Testament fulfilment of the Old Testament figure, which completely alter the situation. Such a view is, indeed, more Jewish than fully Christian, because it fails properly to appreciate the true τελείωσις or perfection, and the consequent surpassing glory, of the priesthood of Christ compared with that of the Levitical system. For with the Levitical priests, although propitiation and the winning of full and free access to God for the people was the goal or τέλος of their service, this τέλος was never reached. 'There was no τελείωσις. The legal covenant knew no τετέλεσται'.¹ Whereas, to quote A. B. Bruce, 'the didactic significance of Hebrews vii. 11-28 is that in Jesus Christ, as the priest after the order or type of Melchizedek, the ideal of priesthood is realized.'² 'It is assumed that a priesthood worthy of, and destined to, perpetuity must make men "perfect" in the sense of bringing them really near to God, establishing between them and God a true unimpeded fellowship by the removal of sin.'³ And it is shown that, because such 'perfection' could not be procured for men by the Levitical priesthood, it had to be superseded. It never became an effective and consequently an enduring priesthood; or, to use the Scriptural way of putting it, it never became a priesthood 'for ever after the order of Melchizedek.'

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RITUAL OF THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

As a figure of the true or a copy of heavenly things,⁴ and as a shadow of good things to come,⁵ the function of the ritual of

¹ N. Dimock. *The Sacerdotium of Christ*. (1910). p. 22. See also Heb. vii. 11.

² A. B. Bruce. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. (1899). p. 262.

³ Ibid. p. 263.

⁴ See Heb. ix. 24, viii. 5.

⁵ Heb. x. 1.

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the Day of Atonement was to suggest a method, and to promise a divine provision, that would do two things - secure access to God's presence for those otherwise shut out by sin, and so to provide for their sins' complete removal that they would be remembered no more. Both blessings were clearly shown by the ritual to lie beyond the decisive death of the sin-offering and to depend upon it.¹ The stress in connection with the high priest sprinkling the blood on the mercy-seat is placed on the unique achievement of his thereby *securing entrance* into the most holy place, and not on his continuing to fulfil a work of offering the blood after entrance had thus been gained.² Indeed, his early reappearance from the sanctuary was eagerly awaited. For his coming out again alive was an explicit indication to the people of his acceptance in the most holy place; and he completed the indication of the benefits procured by the killing of the sin-offering by confessing the sins of the people on (its '*alter ego*'³) the second live goat to be borne away into the wilderness. Thus there was in the figure of the ritual no continued offering in the sanctuary, but the immediate assurance of a completed atonement and of the present possibility of the taking away of sin. Though the writer to the Hebrews adds his significant comments that 'it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins'⁴; and that the very continuance of a tabernacle

¹ See Lv. xvi. 1-22.

² 'A profound emphasis is laid upon both the secluded sanctity of the inner shrine... and the sacrificial process by which alone the rare privilege of entrance into it could be obtained.' H. C. G. Moule. *Messages from the Epistle to the Hebrews*. (1909). p. 44.

³ 'For it must be noted that there was here no second act of atonement. There were not two sin-offerings but one. And the reason that *two* goats were used for the *one* sin-offering lay in the fact that "the ritual of this exceptional sin-offering rendered it necessary that, after the slaughtering and sprinkling of the blood, the animal should either still be living, or be brought to life again. And as this could not possibly be represented by means of one single goat, it was necessary to divide the role which this sin-offering had to play between two goats, the second of which was to be regarded as the *alter ego* of the first as *hircus redivivus*" [Kurtz. *Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament*. Eng. tr. p. 395f.]. The second goat, therefore, carried to completion the work which the first had begun' (Geo. Milligan. *The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*. (1899). pp. 164, 165).

⁴ Heb. x. 4.

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or temple, with the holy place permanently separated from the holy of holies by a divine veil, was itself a Spirit-given witness that the true way into the holiest of all was not yet disclosed.¹ The whole ritual, therefore, represented a reaching-out after benefits never actually attained by it. There was in the figure an indication of the way of bringing to the birth, but there was no strength actually to bring forth. There was no τελείωσις either of priesthood or of reconciliation.

CORRESPONDING FULFILMENT IN CHRIST

All this should prepare our minds the better to appreciate both the character and the wonder of the actual τελείωσις in Christ. He was able to bring forth, to finish the work of propitiation, and thus to win through beyond it to the crowning fulfilment and ministry of priesthood, into which the Levitical priests were never able to enter, and which in the Old Testament could be found only figuratively suggested by the priesthood of Melchizedek.² Henceforth, instead of endlessly striving, like the Levitical priests, to fulfil the essential function of priesthood by the true achievement of reconciliation, Christ became able, as the one perfected priest, to minister to all who come to Him the endless and eternal benefits of His finished work of

reconciliation.³ For, in His offering of Himself by Himself, as the victim as well as the priest, He shed blood whose shedding could avail both to win entrance to God's presence, and to cleanse all sin. Nor did His people have to wait long for His reappearance alive to administer the benefits of His finished work of atonement. For on the third day He appeared to His disciples, risen from the dead, and assured them that they could now become the dwelling place of God's Spirit, and that repentance and remission of sins could now be authoritatively proclaimed in His name to the ends of the earth.⁴ This surely is proof of the τελείωσις of priesthood and reconciliation. The pattern of the figurative ritual also suggests that those, who would now know the peace of sins removed, have only to unburden them on One, who was dead and is alive again, the Lamb once slain, who takes

¹ Heb. ix. 8.

² See Ps. cx. 1, 4.

³ See Heb. v. 7-10, x. 11, 12, iv. 16.

⁴ Jn. xx. 19-23; Lk. xxiv. 45-49.

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away the sin of the world, because He has already 'made an end of atoning.'¹

HOW CHRIST FINISHED THE WORK OF ATONEMENT

Let us now consider in more detail how Christ as high priest finished the work of atonement. To begin with, the Scripture states explicitly that every high priest is 'taken from among men,'² and that 'it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.'³ Even so, because Christ's priesthood is clearly heavenly, some would regard not only His earthly life, but even His death on the cross, not as part of His priestly work but rather as necessary preliminaries. What we need to understand here is that, because Christ's crowning act of priesthood, His offering of Himself, was done in relation to the actual presence of God, and not in relation to the earthly figure sanctuary in Jerusalem, it was, as the writer to the Hebrews saw it⁴, done in the true heavenly tabernacle and not in the shadow earthly one. In other words, though Jesus died outside the city of Jerusalem, His deed as a priestly act was done in heaven, or in the heavenlies, as Paul himself might have said, and not just on earth.

It was as man, in the flesh, that Christ was made sin for us, and that God in Him condemned sin in the flesh.⁵ In this hour of judgment on the cross, His humanity, thus regarded and treated as sinful by God, became, as it were, itself the veil that shut men out of God's presence; and in the mystery of man's greatest darkness temporarily hid from Jesus His Father's face.⁶ But when His flesh was finally rent in death, it gave Christ, not

¹ See Lv. xvi. 20-22.

² Heb. v. 1.

³ Heb. ii. 17.

⁴ 'In his view "true" and "heavenly" are synonyms; whatever is "true" is "heavenly", belongs to the upper world of its realities... If Christ's sacrifice of Himself be a true sacrifice, it belongs to the heavenly world, no matter where or when it takes place.' A. B. Bruce. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. (1899). p. 294. 'Heavenly things (Heb. viii. 5, ix. 23) are in contrast not with the earth as a locality, but with the tabernacle as a material building.' W. Milligan. *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of our Lord*. (1891). p. 24.

⁵ 2 Cor. v. 21; Rom. viii. 3.

⁶ Mk. xv. 33, 34.

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exit into outer darkness to await eternal judgment, but *immediate entrance* into God's presence.¹ Christ's willing submission to such a death did not have to be followed by a separate, subsequent entrance into the heavenly sanctuary to sprinkle the true place of propitiation. For, in the one act of offering Himself in death, He entered God's presence as Himself the now bloodstained propitiation,² having already obtained eternal redemption for us.³ Such entrance was itself evidence that His propitiatory and redeeming work was finished; it was not the preliminary only to its necessary and proper completion in heaven.

CHRIST OFFERED HIMSELF

Christ offered Himself, we are told, 'through eternal Spirit.'⁴ He was thus able, as undying Deity, still to be active in the moment of the death of His humanity. In consequence He did what no other priest could do, and, as simultaneously both priest and victim, 'offered Himself.' Accordingly He entered God's presence, not 'with blood,'⁵ as was necessary in the entrance of the Levitical high priest to provide evidence of the death of the sin-offering, but 'through his own blood,'⁶ that is, through the very event of His own human death as the true sin-offering.⁷ And where, in entering, the Levitical priest is said to have offered or brought near *blood*,⁸ Christ is explicitly said through His own blood (i.e. His death) to have offered or brought near *Himself* to God.⁹ Similarly later in a context, where the reference is explicitly defined as a reference to His earthly suffering and sacrifice, Christ's action in offering Himself is treated as corres-

¹ Heb. ix. 24, x. 20.

² See 1 Jn. ii. 1, 2.

³ Heb. ix. 12-14.

⁴ Heb. ix. 14.

⁵ Heb. ix. 7, 25.

⁶ Heb. ix. 12.

⁷ The statement that through death Jesus became *ipso facto* author of salvation is not falsified by the fact that the essential point in a sacrifice was its presentation before God in the sanctuary, which in the Levitical system took place subsequently to the slaughtering of the victim... The death of our High Priest is to be conceived of as including all the steps of the sacrificial process within itself. Lapse of time or change of place is not necessary to the accomplishment of His work. The death of the victim, the presentation of the sacrificial blood - all was performed when Christ cried *τετέλεσται*. A. B. Bruce. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. (1899). pp. 190, 191.

⁸ Heb. ix. 7.

⁹ Heb. ix. 12, 14.

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ponding to the action of the Levitical high priest in entering the holy place with blood.¹ Also, the very phraseology of Heb. ix. 12 and 14 indicates that Christ's blood shed in death was the ground of His entrance, and not that its subsequent atoning offering to God was the purpose of His entrance.² In other words, once He had *entered* Christ was no longer making atonement; He had begun to enjoy the benefits of full atonement already made.

THE VEIL RENT

What is more, by this sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and by this entrance into God's presence through death, sin and the veil which shut men out from the sanctuary were not just temporarily and figuratively covered or by-passed; they were actually and eternally removed and done away. This fact is, of course, dramatically indicated in the Gospel records of both Mark and Matthew, who, immediately following the statement that Jesus yielded up His spirit, declare, 'And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.'³ Christ, therefore, could never again find Himself, like the Levitical high priest, outside the

veil, as one needing still to continue, or again to repeat, the work of atoning for sin. For His propitiatory work and His entrance into God's presence were both accomplished once for all for ever; neither activity needs to be, or indeed can be, continued or repeated. Rather it is the blessed consequences of His finished work which continue for ever, and repeatedly operate for the benefits of men.

CHRIST HAILED AND ACCLAIMED BY GOD

The amazing character of Christ's decisive achievement is indicated in Scripture, particularly in the Epistle to the Hebrews,

¹ Heb. ix. 25, 26.

² 'The writer' (of the Epistle to the Hebrews) 'uses language which can only fairly be understood as intimating that Christ enters heaven, not in order to offer His blood in sacrifice, but because of His blood already shed, and in virtue of the efficacy of His atoning death already offered upon the cross.' N. Dimock. *The Doctrine of the Death of Christ*. (1903). p. 56.

³ Mk. xv. 38; Mt. xxvii. 51.

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by the various ways in which we are told that (as soon as by His obedience through suffering unto death He was 'made perfect'¹) He was immediately hailed and acclaimed by God. There are three relevant passages.

***a. 'Sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet'*²**

First, Jesus was hailed as the victor, who had done all that God required, and who was worthy to be rewarded. So, without being given more to do in heaven to complete His work, He was told by God Himself at once to occupy the seat of supreme power in the universe at God's right hand; and God Himself promised to see that all His enemies were brought into subjection to His Lordship. The same truth is as emphatically indicated by St. Paul who says, 'Wherefore,' that is, because of Christ's earthly obedience unto the death of the cross, 'God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'³ Paul also says, when God displayed the strength of His might in raising Christ from the dead, not that He exalted Him to heaven to continue and complete His atoning work, but that He 'made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and he put all things in subjection under his feet.'⁴

***b. 'Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek'*⁵**

Second, in contrast to the ineffective Levitical priests, whose incessant offerings could never take away sin, as soon as Jesus had fulfilled the purpose of the incarnation, and had done the will of God on earth by offering His human body in sacrifice, He was hailed by God as the only true effective priest, who, like Melchizedek, the Scriptural figure of the true, would be able to occupy the throne for ever, and henceforth give gifts

¹ Heb. ii. 9, 10, v. 7-9.

² Heb. i. 13; from Ps. cx. 1.

³ Phil. ii. 9-11.

⁴ Eph. i. 19-22.

⁵ Heb. v. 6, 10; from Ps. cx. 4; cf. Heb. vi. 20, vii. 17, 21.

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of royal bounty to all who sought His priestly aid. He was, says the writer to the Hebrews, so 'named' or addressed by God as 'a high priest after the order of Melchizedek,' as soon as, through His earthly suffering, He had been 'made perfect,' and thus had become able to save men eternally.¹ Or again, the same writer says that it is because Jesus has successfully *entered* the sanctuary that He has clearly become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.² It was, therefore, by the propitiatory work which Jesus finished on the cross that He thus fulfilled His calling as the one true, heavenly and eternal high priest, and entered at once into its royal consummation.

***c. 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee'*³**

Third, Jesus, brought up from the dead, was immediately hailed as the Son to whom in His humanity God had given resurrection glory as the firstborn from the dead,⁴ the firstborn, that is, of the new creation, the redeemed community for whom He died, whose similar resurrection was thereby assured. For it was God's foreordained purpose that the Son should not only Himself as man be begotten again from the dead, but also that He should be the firstborn among many brethren.⁵ His resurrection was the proof and the seal that He could and would raise or build a church, and that the gates of Hades or Death were no longer able to prevail against it or prevent it.⁶ The same prospect of perfection for all the people of the new eternal covenant inaugurated by Christ's death is regarded by the writer to the Hebrews as assured by the fact that God has brought again from the dead 'our Lord Jesus,' as the head of His people, 'the great shepherd of the sheep'.⁷ Here, in one of the closing prayers of this Epistle, there is no place given to any suggestion that further propitiatory work in heaven is necessary to win our full salvation. This exalted Jesus is obviously already and for ever able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him.⁸

The additional wonder is that such coming by us into God's presence is now possible simply and solely on the ground of

¹ Heb. v. 7-10.

² Heb. vi. 20.

³ Heb. i. 5, v. 5; from Ps. ii. 7; cf. Acts xiii. 33.

⁴ See 1 Cor. xv. 20; Col. i. 18; Rev. i. 5.

⁵ Rom. viii. 29; cf. Heb. ii. 12.

⁶ Mt. xvi. 18.

⁷ Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

⁸ Heb. vii. 25.

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Christ's finished work. For, when He *entered* God's presence by the road of suffering, He did so in our interest as our 'file-leader'¹ or 'fore-runner'.² This is the outstanding achievement of His priesthood. His success was of such a kind that we now have, inaugurated for us by His death, a new and living way into the inmost sanctuary.³ Because our great high priest has passed through the heavens, we are invited to come, and to come without misgivings in outspoken confidence, to what we shall now find to be a throne of grace; and when we come we find enthroned there the living and glorified Christ, 'Jesus, the Son of God,' waiting and able to function as our great high priest by ministering directly and sympathetically to our need, or speaking to God on our behalf.⁴

THE PLACE OF OFFERING IN CHRIST'S PRIESTLY MINISTRY

Here some would contend that, if Christ is, as the Scripture makes so plain, still our great high priest in heaven, He must have something to offer.⁵ Since any fresh sacrifice or repetition of Calvary is unthinkable, they imagine that the one sacrifice, begun decisively at a point in time on the cross, goes on without end in eternity; that Christ is always doing without cessation in heaven what He began to do in His earthly body, that is, offering Himself to God to make propitiation for sin. This action some also believe He sustains in His mystical body the Church, especially through the oblation of the eucharistic elements.⁶ But here there are both misunderstanding of, and also major addition to, what Scripture actually says. Admittedly the act of offering was necessary to constitute Christ a priest in fact, and not only in name, just as the act of child-bearing is necessary to constitute a woman a mother. But that truth does not mean in the case of motherhood that henceforth, to those who resort to her as 'mother', such a woman is always giving them birth. Her act

¹ Heb. ii. 10, 'the author', see Gk.

² Heb. vi. 20.

³ Heb. x. 18-22.

⁴ Heb. iv. 14-16, vii. 25.

⁵ See Heb. viii. 1-3.

⁶ 'It (the Lord's Supper) is the Christian Sacrifice, for it is the continuation and the implementation, in the mystical Body of Christ which is the Church, of the "one oblation of himself once offered" in his physical body on the cross.' W. N. Pittenger. *The Christian Sacrifice*. (New York 1951). p. 108.

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of child-bearing is for them not only an indispensable but also a finished work. What they now enjoy are other complementary ministries of motherhood, which lie beyond the child-bearing. Similarly with Christ's priesthood His propitiatory offering is not only an indispensable but also a finished work. The appropriate sense to be given to Heb. viii. 3 is that it was necessary that He should perform an act of offering.¹ Indeed, it was because He was the only so-called 'priest' who has ever successfully offered, that He was hailed by God as the true abiding royal priest. For, as with motherhood, beyond such successful discharge of the fundamental function of priesthood there lie other complementary throne ministries of grace, which the priest fulfils for the benefit of His already reconciled people.

This, says the writer to the Hebrews, is his 'chief point' that our Christian high priest is a priest of this sort, who has finished the indispensable offering to God, and henceforth sits to dispense royal bounty to us.² The bread and wine in Melchizedek's hands when he met Abraham³, like those in the hands of our Lord in the upper room, were offered not to God in propitiatory or eucharistic sacrifice but to men for their enjoyment and vital renewal. Also, in the case of the Christian sacrament of the Lord's Supper these very gifts evidence and seal the ratification of the new covenant by Christ's death. This covenant makes

¹ 'The only passage in the Epistle which could possibly lend itself to the idea of continual offering is Heb. viii. 3, *it is necessary that this high priest have somewhat also to offer*. But the English translation does not and cannot exactly express the original. For in the Greek there is no equivalent of *it is*, and it would be equally possible and legitimate to use the rendering *it was necessary*. Again, the word for *to offer* is προσενέγκη, which can only mean *do an act of offering*. When the writer wishes to speak of continual offering he uses the tense which expresses it, προσφέρη (ix. 25). Finally, the context of this statement is one in which the writer emphatically denies continual offering (vii. 27, ix. 25ff., x. 11ff.), on the ground that the completed act accomplished all that such offering was intended to accomplish (ix. 12, x. 10, 12, 14, 18).' A. J. Tait. *The Nature and Function of the Sacraments*. (1917). p. 92, footnote 4.

² Heb. viii. 1: cf. i. 3.

³ See Gn. xiv. 18. The writer to the Hebrews 'purposely presents Melchizedek as priest, not in sacrificing but in blessing, that is, in communicating the fruits of an efficacious sacrifice already made.' B. F. Westcott. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. (Third edition. 1903). p. 203.

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remission of sins ours: and once this blessing is being enjoyed, there is no longer any need or place for sin-offering activity.¹

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST'S HEAVENLY INTERCESSION

There is still one further point that may need explanatory comment. It concerns the character of Christ's heavenly intercession. For clearly, according to Scripture, the ascended Lord still intercedes for us.² Does He not then still offer? In this connection William Milligan identifies the two activities. He writes: 'The intercession and the offering cannot be separated from each other. The offering is itself a continuous intercession, the continuous intercession implies the offering as a present thing.'³ To this A. J. Tait answers: 'But it is just this separation that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews insists on. He identifies the offering not with the intercession but with the death, and, because the death is accomplished and over, he speaks of the offering as a completed thing in the past.'⁴ One has only to compare Heb. vii. 25 and vii. 27 to see that this is so.

What then is meant by Christ 'making intercession for us'? 'The first thing to notice is that neither the word used by St. Paul (ἐντυγχάνειν), nor the English equivalent, "to intercede," necessarily means "to offer petition." It has the much wider and more general significance of undertaking a person's affairs, looking after a person's interest, intervening in a person's favour.'⁵ In the two places in the New Testament, where the word is used to describe Christ's present activity, the contexts make plain that it is an activity which concerns our coming to God, and our acceptance in His sight. In Heb. vii. 25 the writer declares, 'Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near (τοὺς προσερχομένους) unto God through him.'

¹ Heb. x. 18. comp. ix. 12, x. 14; "no more" (οὐκέτι) expresses not class but time relation. It is the repudiation not merely of any other kind of offering or way of forgiveness, but also, and more particularly, of any continuance in time of the ministry whereby forgiveness is provided.' A. J. Tait. *The Nature and Function of the Sacraments*. (1917). p. 92. footnote 4.

² Heb. vii. 25; Rom. viii. 34.

³ *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of our Lord*. p. 160.

⁴ *The Heavenly Session of our Lord*. p. 145.

⁵ A. J. Tait. *The Nature and Function of the Sacraments*, pp. 90, 91.

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'Those who draw near' are in the Greek described by a present participle. The word indicates those who are continually or habitually coming. The reason then given for His ability completely to save them is 'seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them'. The Greek word translated 'ever' is πάντοτε not ἄει. It means 'on every such occasion'; that is, in this context, 'every time someone draws near unto God through Him'. His intercession, therefore, is not something He is doing unceasingly. It is rather something which He does every time anyone comes. He then, so to speak, intervenes to speak to God on their behalf, to secure their

acceptance with God, to see that they get all that they need. The same idea is expressed in 1 Jn. ii. 1 by saying 'we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.'

Similarly in Rom. viii. 33, 34, when the question is raised whether anyone can condemn the believer, the answer is given that in the very presence of God Himself, indeed at His right hand, we have Christ Jesus, who died and was raised from the dead, to support our case, and to intervene on our behalf to ensure our justification, and effectively to gainsay all who would accuse us as unfit for God's approval, and deserving to be condemned. Clearly, too, Christ is able to do this on the ground of His finished work, because He is the one who did die and has been raised from the dead, because He has thus become the sufficient 'propitiation for our sins'.¹ No further offering or propitiatory work is necessary.² Also, He will never cease thus to be able to function, for He will never again die. Those who would draw near unto God through Him will never find Him no longer there at God's right hand to welcome and introduce them. Because He thus abides for ever His priesthood is unchangeable or inviolable. It can never be brought to an end or pass to another. He is, as the Lord swears, 'a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.'³

¹ 1 Jn. ii. 2.

² 'The modern conception of Christ pleading in heaven His passion, "offering His blood" on behalf of men, has no foundation in this Epistle (to the Hebrews). His glorified humanity is the eternal pledge of the absolute efficacy of His accomplished work.' B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 232.

³ See Heb. vii. 23, 24, and R.V. mg.

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OUR LORD'S OWN STATEMENTS ABOUT HIS FATHER'S HOUSE

For yet more fundamental confirmation of the truth concerning the τελείωσις of priesthood and of reconciliation to God in the death of Christ it is possible to appeal to the significant implications of some of our Lord's own words with reference to His Father's house, particularly as they are recorded in the fourth Gospel. One may find here unmistakable indication that the barrier that both prevents men from entering God's presence and prevents God from abiding in men's midst, is completely and permanently removed by Christ's finished sacrifice of Himself.

The Greeks who asked to see Jesus were, we are told, 'among those that went up to worship at the feast.'¹ They had as Gentiles probably been impressed by Christ's cleansing of the court of the Gentiles. For here was a Jewish teacher, who seemed concerned to give them a place to pray. They were, therefore, eager to see more of Him. It is certainly possible, if not probable, that they found it necessary to speak to one of the disciples, and not directly to Jesus Himself, because Jesus had gone in further to the inner court of the temple, into which none but Jews could enter. We may imagine, therefore, that Andrew and Philip came from the outer court into the inner court and told Jesus that there were Greeks outside asking to see Him.

To this request Jesus made a surprising and significant response. He said - and, as the fourth evangelist pointedly indicates, it was in answer to their request that He said - 'The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit.' A little later He added, 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself'; and in comment the evangelist adds, 'But this he said signifying by what manner of death he should die.' In the probable setting of the temple courts all this suggests that Jesus implied that

the way to answer the Greeks' request was not to go out to the outer court, but through His own blood shed in sacrifice to go in into the holy of holies, and by such entrance rend the veil and break down the middle wall of partition, and so, through His 'lifting up' present Himself

¹ See Jn. xii. 20-33.

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to the eyes of all as the Saviour of the world, to whom the ends of the earth may henceforth look and be saved.

It seems equally possible to use thoughts of access to the inner shrine of the temple to interpret the meaning of our Lord's subsequent words about going into His Father's house to prepare a place where He could receive His own.¹ May He not have meant that, in contrast to the very limited size of the earthly holy of holies, there was in the true heavenly sanctuary of God's presence room for all; and that the purpose of His entering in through death was to open up a way for all men to come to God and to abide permanently in His presence? For, in the same context, Jesus immediately spoke of Himself as the way, the true and living way, whereby men may come to God, and apart from whom none can come to God. And is it not our Lord's own statement here that underlies the exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which tells us that, having 'boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh,' we should 'draw near'?² Do not such words plainly imply that we can even now enjoy full access to God and abiding communion with God all because Christ's work of priestly reconciliation is already finished?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

A similar consummation is suggested by our Lord's references to the gift of the indwelling Spirit to dwell in the hearts and in midst of His disciples - references which significantly occur in St. John's Gospel in the utterances of Jesus which immediately follow the passages (from Jn. xii and xiv) which we have just considered. For such an incoming of the Spirit of God is the most decisive proof that the place thus occupied by the Spirit has become the sanctuary of God's presence, the dwelling-place of God most high. If such a consummation is already realized, then, without question, the work of priestly reconciliation is already finished.

In these utterances of Jesus recorded in St. John's Gospel³ we find that Jesus said plainly that it was expedient that He should

¹ See Jn. xiv. 1-6.

² Heb. x. 19-22.

³ See Jn. xiv. 12, 16-18, 25, 26, xv. 26, xvi. 7-15.

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go to His Father - obviously by the way of the cross set before Him - because, without such a going to God, the Spirit could not come from God to possess them. Jesus promised that, once this going to God was accomplished, He would send the Spirit. This promise is confirmed later as no empty word, first by the declaration of the risen Christ, and then by the experience at Pentecost of the company of believers. For, on the very day of His resurrection, Jesus

breathed on His disciples and said, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost'¹; and on the day of Pentecost Peter declared of 'this Jesus' that 'being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear.'²

Such a gift is surely final proof that the reconciling work is finished, that full atonement is already made. For the company of believers are no longer mere suppliants for mercy standing outside the sanctuary or drawing near to present and plead Christ's atoning sacrifice. They are already and henceforth for ever the temple of the Holy Ghost. Consequently the primary concern of the early primitive Church was not, as in Old Testament times, to have a proper priesthood to offer propitiatory sacrifice for the people. For they knew by the witness of the God-given Spirit that they already lived in God's day of fulfilment, when the offering of such sacrifice was already finished, and when its innumerable benefits were already to be enjoyed. They were, therefore, concerned rather to test the genuineness of every professed adherent of the believing company by asking, 'Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?'³ For, if the answer to this question is 'Yes', propitiation is clearly already perfectly accomplished. Jesus meant nothing less when, as He was finally about to pass in death through the thereby once-for-all rent veil, He said in triumph 'τετέσται - It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up his spirit.'⁴

SOME OUTSTANDING PAULINE STATEMENTS

Let us now turn to consider briefly some of the outstanding statements of the Epistles of St. Paul. Here there is no mention

¹ Jn. xx. 19-22.

² Acts ii. 32, 33

³ Acts xix. 2.

⁴ Jn. xix. 30.

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whatever of any heavenly offering being still made or continued subsequent to the sacrifice of the cross in order to secure or ensure the completion of our salvation. Here it is stated, as plainly and emphatically as it can be put in words, that sinners are reconciled to God through the one finished work of Christ's human and earthly death.

a. Reconciliation already achieved and enjoyed

We quote Rom. v. 10 and 11: 'For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life; and not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.' Here reconciliation is spoken of as a work achieved decisively by one act already done, namely Christ's death; it is something the realized benefit of which we can and do now receive. It is not something still to be completed by anything which Christ is doing in heaven, or which the Church must do on earth, in order to present or plead the one sacrifice before God.

That this is unquestionably Paul's meaning is made still more obvious by other and more detailed statements in the same context. For instance, he says that, if we acknowledge that Jesus was delivered up to death for our trespasses, and believe in God who raised Him as our Lord from the dead for our justification, then we are justified by such faith alone; we may

without further hindrance or delay enjoy peace with God; we henceforth have before God a standing in grace and a sure hope of participation in the final glory.¹ It is the wealth and wonder of this overwhelming evangelical assurance of which we are robbed, and of which we rob others, once we cease to believe in and to preach the finished work of Christ, and begin instead to suggest that both in heaven and on earth continuation of propitiatory offering is still necessary to secure peace both for the living and the departed.

b. Reconciliation achieved through a finished work of earthly history

We quote Col. i. 19-22: 'For it was the good pleasure of the Father... through him to reconcile all things unto himself,

¹ See Rom. iv. 23-v. 2.

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having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens. And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unreprouvable before him.' Here Paul declares it to be the Father's purpose to reconcile all things to Himself through Christ, including things in heaven as well as things on earth. But, far from asserting that the reconciliation of this world to God depends for its completion upon a continued or eternal offering made in a spiritual realm beyond this one, i.e., heaven, or eternity, he asserts in phrases of grim bluntness that the whole work of reconciliation¹ was wrought out in this physical, material and earthly realm of flesh and blood, through the blood of Jesus as it was shed on the cross, and through the death of His fleshly or natural human body; that is, through a finished work of earthly history.

c. Men exhorted in consequence to get right with God

We quote 2 Cor. v. 18-21: 'But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were intreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God. Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him.' Here the reconciliation of the world to God is declared to be an already accomplished act of God in Christ, on the ground of which God's terms of peace can be offered in Christ's name and stead by God's ambassadors to sin-

¹ 'It is probably wrong to take the words *to present you holy*, etc. (verse 22) as referring to the ultimate issue of the divine purpose, in the final moral perfection of Christ's people. It is "justification by faith" of which Paul is speaking. It is not that the Colossians have attained, or are to attain in some remote future, a moral perfection which will secure their acceptance at the last judgment. It is that here and now, by grace of God, who "justifieth the ungodly" they stand before Him as His consecrated people, to whom He "imputes" no fault.' C. H. Dodd. *The Abingdon Bible Commentary*. p. 1250.

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ful men. Those who thus minister the word of reconciliation are explicitly to proclaim something which God has already done, because of which justification in God's sight can be enjoyed by all those who acknowledge Christ as their proxy or substitute. What God did was to let Christ, sinless though He was, occupy the place of sinners and be treated accordingly in

judgment, in order that in Him we might be treated as His sinlessness deserves, and become justified in God's sight. Not only is this reconciling act of God referred to as already finished; it is quite inconceivable to suppose that God could continuously, still less eternally, be treating Christ as a sinner in heaven. If He were, surely Christ would be excluded and not enthroned?

The unmistakable implications of this passage may be further emphasized by quoting P. T. Forsyth: 'God's reconciliation rested upon this, that on His eternal Son, who knew no sin in His experience, sin's judgment fell... God, by Christ's own consent, identified Him with sin in treatment... God... judged sin upon His head.'¹ 'Reconciliation was finished in Christ's death. Paul did not preach a gradual reconciliation. He preached what the old divines used to call the finished work... He preached something done once for all - a reconciliation which is the base of every soul's reconcilment.... What the Church has to do is to appropriate the thing that has been finally and universally done.'² For Christ 'turned the penalty He endured into sacrifice He offered. And the sacrifice He offered was the judgment He accepted.... The willing acceptance of final judgment was for Jesus the means presented by God for effecting human reconciliation.'³ And this is a work which once-for-all and for ever was finished at the cross. It is not being continued in heaven; nor is it happening eternally within the Godhead.

In conclusion, there is perhaps no better final confirmation of these truths than the emphatic and possibly abrupt witness of the primitive Church as it is reflected and recorded in the Gospel according to St. Mark. For here indication that the death of Jesus once accomplished secured everything needful for full salvation is found in immediate brief factual testimony to two decisive events - the rent veil⁴ and the empty tomb.⁵ For these

¹ *The Work of Christ*. pp. 82, 83.

² *Ibid.* p. 86.

³ *Ibid.* p. 163.

⁴ Mk. xv. 38.

⁵ Mk. xvi. 1-8.

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concrete evidences testify to all who will interpret them that redemption, remission and reconciliation are fully achieved, and all on the sole and sufficient ground of the finished work of Christ's death on the cross.

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