

a suggestion was made, it was invariably met by what was considered the unanswerable objection that there were Catholics in his household and that he had a son who was studying for the priesthood. In 1888, when the Republican field was full of candidates and General Sheridan was brought out as a possibly promising dark horse, some one discovered that he was of Catholic stock and affiliations, and immediately the boom for "Little Phil" vanished like a pricked bubble.

## A MUCH-DISCUSSED BOOK

### DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

#### STATEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC POSITION

(By the Rev. James M. Liston, Holy Cross College, Mosgiel.)

During the past few weeks a book, written by a Presbyterian clergyman (the Rev. J. Gibson Smith, of Wellington), appeared criticising some aspects of the doctrine of the Atonement or Satisfying for sin by the death of Christ. Though the criticisms are mainly directed against the views of Protestant theologians, and only indirectly against those of Catholic theologians—indeed, the writer does not seem to be acquainted with the latter's works,—yet it may be useful to give a summary of Catholic teaching and to make some reply to his remarks.

#### I.—THE CATHOLIC DOCTRINE.

Catholics hold as matters of faith that man was originally endowed with a supernatural destiny and with corresponding graces; that man lost both the one and the other by the Fall; that God, in mercy, sent His promised Saviour, who, Son of God as He was, died on the Cross for our sins, and thus, repairing fallen man, recovered for him his title to divine adoption and restored him to his primitive supernatural destiny. To this series of divine acts, which, beginning and ending in love, tends to the restoration of fallen human nature, we give the general name of Redemption.

But Catholic Theology, resting on Scripture and Tradition, seeks to penetrate still further into the mystery, tries to explain the manner in which this Redemption was accomplished. The sum of its conclusions is known as the doctrine of 'Redemption by the Satisfaction of Jesus Christ.' This conclusion, though never formally defined, yet forms an essential part of the universal doctrine of the Church. The Council of Trent supposes its truth: 'Jesus Christ, . . . by His most holy Passion on the wood of the Cross, merited justification for us and satisfied for us to God the Father' (Sess. vi., c. vii.). The following decree was presented to the Fathers of the Vatican Council (1870), and, though it was not actually incorporated into the definitions of that Council, it yet shows the mind of Catholic Theologians: 'If anyone does not confess that the very Word of God, suffering and dying in the flesh which He assumed, could not satisfy or did not truly and properly satisfy, let him be anathema' (*Collectio Lacensis*, vii., 566).

#### FULLER EXPLANATION OF THE DOCTRINE.

God, as the Creator, has a perfect right to expect from His creatures absolute submission, perfect obedience to His will; as Justice and Holiness, He must necessarily have all things subordinate to Himself, must keep to the 'order of things'—in a word, must preserve what we call His honor.

Now, rational creatures, alone among God's creatures, have the power of refusing this obedience and thus of introducing disorder into the world. They exercise this power when they sin. Sin is therefore a rebellion against God's honor, because it is an inordinate act, a disorder, a violation of the moral law of which God is the author and guardian.

Then it may be asked: When man sins, can he not by his own powers restore the disorder his sin has introduced, and thus make reparation to the wounded Honor of God? Plainly, the answer must be in the negative, for at best the act of repentance has only a human and therefore a finite value, whereas sin committed against God has about it a certain infinitude (St. Thomas, *Summa*, 3a, q. i., 2, ad. 2um). To strike against universal order in its least manifestation is a wrong; to strike against those greater ordinances on which the universe is hinged is a greater wrong; and to strike against the Absolute, the Eternal, the First and Last, without Whom is nothing, from Whom are all things, Whose claims are utter worship, unrestricted homage, unreserved love—this is surely a wrong which, if it fall short of infinitude, only does so by the impotence of the arm that strikes, not by the moderation of the consummation

aimed at. (Hedley, *Our Divine Saviour*, p. 50). 'It is infinite, because its tendency, aim and object is the destruction of the Infinite' (ibid., p. 50). On the one hand, we measure the reparation by the dignity of the person who offers it; on the other we

#### Measure the Offence

by the dignity, the position, the greatness of the person who is offended. If the dignity of the one is on a level with the dignity of the other, the satisfaction offered is said to be adequate or perfect; if the dignity of the offender falls below that of the offended, the satisfaction offered is imperfect; while if there is an infinite distance separating the two, there can be no question of satisfaction. This is precisely the case between man and God. As a man may, if he please, throw himself over a precipice, but cannot climb its scarped face back again, so man can turn from his God, and place the span of unmeasurable wrong between God and himself: but build as he may, and climb as he may, he cannot touch again the serene heights from which he fell (Hedley, ibid., p. 51). Thus man can introduce disorder into the world by sin, but cannot repair it by his own powers.

In that state, therefore, man would remain, were it not for the mercy and love of God. God is:

#### In No Way Bound to Redeem Man.

If He does so, it is out of pure love. Some of the Fathers, especially St. Athanasius, do speak as if God were obliged in some way or other to restore man to a divine life of immortality and incorruptibility; but their expressions need not be urged, and they also frequently speak of God's mercy in this connection. Saint Anselm, among the Schoolmen, went further, and spoke of an absolute necessity under which God lay of seeing that mankind, as a whole, attained the end for which it was created; but his opinion has remained peculiar. The consensus of Fathers and later Catholic theologians has been all the other way; while the express testimony of St. Paul makes the matter certain: 'God, Who is rich in mercy, for His exceeding charity wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ' (*Ephes.*, ii., 4).

Nor, even on the supposition that God wished to redeem the human race, fallen by sin of its head, was He bound to bring it about by a redeeming act on the part of His Son. That, indeed, would mean a perfect reparation, an adequate satisfaction; but God, like any other offended person, is not obliged to demand a perfect satisfaction from the offender; He could be satisfied with the imperfect satisfaction which a repentant sinner might offer—nay, He could grant His pardon without demanding any satisfaction.

As a matter of fact, however, God has exacted the perfect satisfaction to which He has a right; and here we have another proof of His love. The acceptance of an imperfect reparation would have been a great act of love: the granting of a free pardon, still greater; but the determination to exact full satisfaction was a supreme act of love; for while it showed forth His justice and His mercy, it was also the most perfect means of inspiring us with a hatred of sin and of exciting in us a love of God.

#### Here, then, is the Position:

Man cannot make a full reparation of the disorder his sin has brought into God's world, cannot offer a perfect satisfaction to the wounded honor of God. Yet God demands that full reparation, complete satisfaction shall be made, and made, too, not by an angel, but by man himself. Seeming contradiction, which results in the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Redemption on the Cross! Then said He (Christ): Behold, I am come to do Thy will, O God' (*Heb.* x., 9). Jesus-Saviour! Saviour He could not be if He were not God; Saviour of men He could not be, were He not a man satisfying for man. No other shall redeem: (yet) a man shall redeem' (*Ps.* xlviii., 8). 'God,' indeed, 'so loved the world that He sent His Son,' that, taking human flesh, He might become the victim of expiation for our sins. Christ was innocent and did not need to make satisfaction for Himself; but He was also man, the real head of the human race, and thus, joined with every member, He could stand in our place and suffice for us even to death. Men, writes St. Chrysostom, 'ought to be punished: God has not punished them. They ought to perish: He has given His Son in their place' (1 *Tim. Hom.*, vii., 3). A little later, St. Cyril of Alexandria writes in the same strain: 'It is not for His own sins, it is for ours that He has been struck. We had disobeyed God: it is we who should be punished. But this punishment, which was due to sinners, is fallen upon Him. God has struck Him by reason of our sins, in order to absolve

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