

Christ Our Penal Substitute

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Chapter 10 The Testimony of Christendom

The consensus of the Christian churches in their doctrinal standards does not amount to true inspiration; and we hold no rule of faith to be infallible and of divine authority except God's own word. But this general concert of beliefs among the various denominations of God's children carries great probable weight for those points of doctrine whereon the agreement exists: "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." The standards of a church are usually the mental work of its most learned and revered members, who have made most careful study of the Scriptures. Where so many good and competent men concur, notwithstanding the different points of view from which, and habits of thought with which, they inspect and construe God's word, there is the highest probability that their harmonious construction is the correct one. Our assailants should remember that when they talk of their "advanced thought," their "intellectual progress," their "sloughing off of the old dogma," as superstitious and antiquated rubbish, they are disdainful of the combined scholarship of the greatest and best men and of the most profound learning of all the centuries since Athanasius, and of all the nations and churches of Christendom. Such arrogance is the surest sign of heedlessness and superficiality.

The two ancient communions of the "Roman Catholics" and "Orthodox Greek" Christians are great and imposing for their antiquity, their learning, and their numbers. We believe that their creeds involve numerous great and fatal errors, chiefly the accretions of human traditions and priestcraft before and during the Dark Ages; but the Articles in which they still declare Christ's vicarious substitution for human guilt are the most respectable and least corrupted parts of their Confessions of Faith which come down to them from the creeds of earlier and purer ages. The force of their testimony is in this: that even these corrupt churches agree exactly with all the Protestant creeds concerning this ancient and vital doctrine. Hear, then, the Roman Church, in the "Dogmatic Degrees of the Council of Trent," Session sixth, Degree of Justification, Chapter II.: "Him God proposed as a propitiation through faith in his blood for our sins," etc. And Chapter VII.: "Our Lord Jesus Christ.... merited justification for us by his most holy passion on the wood of the cross, and made satisfaction for us unto God the Father."

Hear also the witness of the Russo-Greek church, which now contains the vast majority of the so-called "Orthodox Greek Christians." The Larger Catechism of the Oriental Grecian and Russian Church, Article IV., Question 208; "His voluntary suffering and death on the cross for us, being of infinite value and merit, as the death of one sinless, God and man in one person, is both a perfect satisfaction to the justice of God, which had condemned us for sin to death, and a fund of infinite merit, which has obtained him the right, without prejudice to justice, to give us sinners pardon of our sins, and grace to have victory over sin and death."

We now pass to the great Protestant confessions, citing, first, the Lutheran Augsburg Confession, Article III.: Christ "truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, that he might reconcile the Father unto us, and might be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men." Again, Article IV.: "Their sins forgiven for Christ's sake, who by his death hath satisfied for our sins."

The Formula Concordia, the latest and most conclusive confession of the Lutheran body, speaks thus, Article III., Section 1: Christ, "in his sole merit, most absolute obedience which he rendered unto the Father even unto death, as God and man, merited for us the remission of all our sins and eternal life."

The same is the witness of the great group of the Reformed Protestant churches. The Heidelberg Catechism, Second Part, Question 12, Answer: "God wills that his justice be satisfied; therefore must we make full satisfaction to the same, either by ourselves or by another." And Question 16: "Why must 'Christ' be a true and sinless man?" Answer: "Because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which has sinned should make satisfaction for sin; but no man, being himself a sinner, could satisfy for others." The Confession of the French Reformed Church, Article XVIII.: "We, therefore, reject all other means of

justification before God, and without claiming any virtue or merit, we rest simply on the obedience of Jesus Christ, which is imputed to us as much to bear all our sins as to make us find grace and favor in the sight of God."

The Belgic Confession (Dort, 1561), Article XX.: "We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and also perfectly just, sent his Son to assume that nature in which the disobedience was committed, to make satisfaction in the same, and to bear the punishment of sin by his most bitter passion and death."

First Scotch Presbyterian Confession (1566), Article IX.: Christ "offered himself a voluntary sacrifice unto his Father for us;... he being the innocent Lamb of God was damned in the presence of an earthly judge, that we should be absolved before the tribunal seat of our God."

The Thirty-nine Articles, the doctrinal confession of all Episcopalians throughout the world in the empires of Britain and the United States. Article II.: Christ "truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men."

The Confessions of the Waldenses, A. D. 1655, Section XIV.: God "gave his own Son to save us by his most perfect obedience (especially that obedience which he manifested in suffering the cursed death of the cross), and also by his victory over the devil, sin, and death." Section XV.:... Christ "made a full expiation for our sins by his most perfect sacrifice."

The Westminster Confession (1647) gives us the present creed of all the Presbyterian churches in the English speaking world, Scotch and Scotch-Irish, colonial, Canadian, and American. It is also the doctrinal creed of these great bodies, the Evangelical Baptist, and orthodox Congregationalists in Britain and America, being expressly adopted by some of them and closely copied by others, as the "Saybrook Platform" of New England. In this great creed, Chapter VIII., Section V., is this witness: "The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father, and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him."

"Methodist Articles of Religion" (1784) are the responsible creed of the vast Wesleyan bodies of Britain and America. Many of these propositions are adopted verbatim from the "Thirty-nine Articles." This is true of Article II. which contains an identical assertion, in the same words, of the doctrine of Christ's penal substitution.

The Catechism of the "Evangelical Union" teaches these doctrinal views, in which all the churches concur which are represented in the "Evangelical

Alliance." This document omits the peculiar, distinctive doctrines in which these churches differ from each other. It was the work of Dr. Philip Schaff, D.D., LL. D., 1862, Lesson XXVIII., Question 4: "What did he (Christ) suffer there? " "He suffered unutterable pains in body and soul, and bore the guilt of the whole world."

Such is the tremendous array of the most responsible and deliberate testimonies of all the churches of Christendom, save one little exception, the Socinian, in support of our doctrine concerning the penal substitution of Christ. This testimony was not formulated in the gloom of the ninth or tenth century: but between the sixteenth and nineteenth, after the great renaissance, after the splendid tide of Greek and Hebrew scholarship had reached its flood in large part, after the full development of the scholastic and modern philosophies, synchronously with or after the Augustan age of theological science and exegetical learning, just during the epoch of the grandest and most beneficial development of human culture which the world has hitherto witnessed, concurrently with the splendid birth and growth of those physical sciences which have created anew our civilization. In this our boast we have not claimed the guidance of that Holy Spirit which Christ promised to bestow continuously upon his visible church, and which its pastors sought in prayer and supposed they were enjoying in these their most solemn witnessings for their Master. As our opponents usually repudiate this spiritual guidance for themselves, and prefer that of human philosophy, they will, of course, pay no respect to this higher claim. We only ask our readers to judge betwixt us, what is the modesty of that pretension which affects to thrust aside all these conclusions of the best ages as silly, antiquated, and self-evident rubbish. Is the irony of Job too caustic for this case? "Surely ye are the people, and wisdom will die with you."

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