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GENERAL COUNCIL
HELD IN
PHILADELPHIA
1880
UNITED STATES



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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE,

CONVENED AT PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER, 1880.

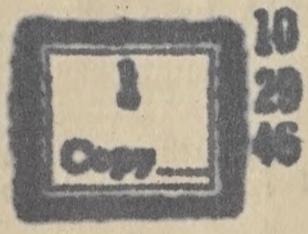
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EDITED BY

JOHN B. DALES, D.D., AND R. M. PATTERSON, D.D.

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ature only, may be cited: "Just as I am, without one plea;" "I lay my sins on Jesus;" "Free from the law, O happy condition!" In all great gatherings of Christians, whether as at the Evangelical Alliance meetings in Bâle, or as in this great assembly, no utterances thrill like these; and it cannot be supposed there is any change of doctrine while the old strains reach every heart. I am, therefore, not so much moved as some by the alarms of theological defection. I dread much more the stifling influence of worldliness and religious torpor than the blasts of earnest theological debate; and I would, therefore, have the churches represented in this Alliance, while watching over orthodoxy by every right means and discountenancing all visible error, still to hold on their path in the confidence that their best work is to continue to preach Christ crucified, whether amidst calm or amidst the sounds of controversy, assured that this alone makes way, healing the wounded conscience, and cleansing the saint from all remaining sin; and that the victory is to that Church in the old world and in the new, in the homes of our ripest Christianity and in the darkest outfields of our missions, which shall most earnestly, unswervingly, devoutly renew that ancient confession: "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," and shall turn it most gratefully and jubilantly into song,—the song alike of earth and heaven: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

The PRESIDENT [Taking Prof. Hodge by the hand as he came forward]: Brethren, may I for a moment be allowed to depart from the reticence usually observed by the presiding officer? A Scotchman, by your favor, occupies the chair to-day; and I think I speak in the name of all my co-delegates from the other side of the ocean, when I express the reverence, the admiration, the gratitude with which we receive, to enshrine in our heart of hearts, the honored name borne by the distinguished Professor whose hand I hold.

PROF. A. A. HODGE, D. D., of Princeton, N. J., then read the following paper:

THE VICARIOUS SACRIFICE OF CHRIST, AS UNDERSTOOD BY THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES REPRESENTED IN THIS COUNCIL.

It would be impossible to set forth in the space allotted to this essay all the evidence upon which the faith of the Church in this great corner-stone of human redemption rests. I propose, therefore, to treat it only in its character as a common principal article in the

faith of those historical bodies known as the Presbyterian Churches represented in this Council.

1st. The "Vicarious Sacrifice of Christ" is a phrase having a definite meaning. It is not co-extensive with the word "redemption," nor does it include the whole of "soteriology," nor embrace those provinces marked off by the great terms "justification," "sanctification," or "adoption." It specifically designates the sufferings and death of Christ in their relation to the remission of sins, and to the satisfaction of the justice of God. This "vicarious sacrifice" unquestionably has other aspects, but the question which is central to all others, and to which the only serious debate relates, is what relation do the sufferings and death of Christ sustain to the forgiveness of human sins, and hence to the salvation of sinners?

The doctrine of the Reformed or Presbyterian family of Churches is that the "vicarious sacrifice" of Christ was an endurance of the penal consequences of sin by the offended Lawgiver in the place of the offending subject; that it was the absolutely essential pre-condition of the forgiveness of human sins; and that this absolute necessity has its ground in the immutable moral perfections of the divine nature.

2d. That this has been from the beginning the one unchanged, publicly declared and covenanted faith of the Reformed Churches there cannot be a shadow of doubt. As to this point the consensus of all the Reformed symbols has always been uniform and conspicuously clear. The First Helvetic Confession, the earliest and most simple of the Reformed symbols; the Second Helvetic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, the most generally received and symbolically authoritative among the Continental and American Churches, teach precisely the same doctrine as to the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, with precisely the same tone and shading as that taught at a later date in Confessions as highly developed and marked by as specific characteristics as the Confession of the Westminster Assembly and the Formula Consensus Helvetica of Heidegger.* There have been wide diversities exhibited in the religious life, in the modes of worship, and in the theological speculations of the various branches of the Reformed Churches and of their conspicuous teachers and writers. Infra- and Supra-lapsarian views as to predestination are alike represented by high authorities. Differences as to the design of the atonement, as to our relation to Adam, and the extent to which and the manner in which his apostacy has affected us, have divided our schools of theology, and all claim to be embraced within the limits of our recognized orthodoxy. But with strictly provincial and temporary exceptions, which have secured the adherence of not a single one of our historical Presbyterian bodies, the substitutionary and penal character of the vicarious

* *Confessio Helvetica Prior*, XI. *Confessio Helvetica Posterior*, Cap. XV. § 3. The Heidelberg Catechism, Ques. 11-40. *Formula Consensus Helvetica*, cans XIII-XVI. The Westminster Confession of Faith, Caps. VIII. and XI.

sacrifice of Christ remains the professed and covenanted faith of all our Churches.

This determines the sense in which this doctrine is professed by this Council, the fundamental principle of its constitution being that the members of such Churches only are admitted, "whose creed is in harmony with the consensus of the Reformed Confessions."

3d. This uniform consensus of the Churches represented in this Council extends not only to the doctrine itself, but also to its relative position in that whole system of truths which is most surely believed among us. This doctrine of vicarious sacrifice is not only essential in itself, but it is fundamental to the whole system; it is an architectonic principle which will always configure the entire fabric of rational belief to its own law. All experience proves that a true doctrine of the incarnation carries with it a corresponding view of the vicarious suffering of Christ. The Humanitarian, Arian and low Arminian Subordination views as to the trinity and person of Christ have always been connected as cause or effect with correspondingly modified views as to the significance of his suffering and death. As is a man's theory of virtue, so will be his theory of the atonement. Systems of morals, whether spiritual or utilitarian, assimilate corresponding views as to the vicarious sacrifice of our Lord. The broad Biblical teaching as to the union of the Christian with Christ, as to the nature of faith and its office in the plan of salvation, and as to the relation of the work of Christ to the justification, sanctification, adoption, perseverance and glorification of his people, all demand the view maintained by our Churches as to vicarious sacrifice. Scriptural experience of sin, of its turpitude, of its guilt, and of its power as an indwelling principle in our nature, has never found moral equilibrium with any other view of the sacrificial work of Christ. With every revival of religion, and in constant proportion to the depth and power of the prevalent religious experience, this doctrine of a blood-bought salvation has always been the more sharply emphasized in the prayers, the hymns and the expressed thoughts of God's people. The cross as the meeting-place of infinite justice and love, as the fountain of inexhaustible streams of life and righteousness effected by sacrificial blood, has been the inspiration of all the heroic living and doing of the distinctively Christian type which has appeared in the course of human history.

This doctrine of the vicarious sacrifice of our Lord, as the Presbyterian Churches have always held it, carries with it our whole gospel and our entire religious and ecclesiastical life. Any attempt to modify this is, in effect, an attempt to discard the whole system of religion we have inherited from our fathers, and to substitute a different one in its place.

4th. In the fourth place we affirm that the doctrine common to the Presbyterian Churches is in the broadest sense catholic. The conscious grasp of the Church on this, as upon every other point of Christian doctrine, has passed through a protracted process of development

from the beginning, and has become clearer and more consistent with the advance of the ages. But this growth has been always uniformly in one direction. Different side views and complimentary aspects of the truth have been more or less prominently emphasized at different times. But still the central principle of a vicarious suffering of the penal consequences of sin has always been presupposed and more or less prominently set forth. It is undeniable that the ancient Jewish Rabbins and the early Christian Fathers interpreted the sin-offerings of the Mosaic ritual just as we do. In spite of all the fluctuation of point of view, and crudeness of statement which prevailed among the early Christians, the objective reference of the sacrifice of Christ to the justice of God never failed of a witness in the prayers, hymns, and religious writings of the Church. From the time of Anselm it has been more clearly discriminated and sharply defined and prominently emphasized, and with the related doctrines of the Incarnation and the supernatural work of the Holy Ghost has taken its permanent place at the heart of the Christian system, the common principle of all creeds. At the Reformation, while the divergencies between the Catholic and Protestant views of justification or the personal application of redemption were so great as to preclude comparison, all recognized the fact that as to the underlying doctrine of the vicarious sacrifice of Christ the parties were perfectly agreed. Since that date to the present moment all the various speculative and partial theories, as to the nature and significance of that sacrifice, which have had currency among the various Protestant schools of religious thought, have also had their day in the Catholic coteries. Yet all the while the juridical view remains with the Catholics as with the Protestants, the only one which has general prevalence or permanence or symbolical authority.* The same perfect agreement holds between the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches, and between the several symbolical books of each confession.

5th. In the fifth place, we affirm, the interpretation given by our great historical symbols to the vicarious sacrifice of Christ is central, and comprehensive of all other rational views of the same ever entertained in the Church, and the essential precondition of each of them. These subsidiary views have been exceedingly numerous, and continue to be issued as novelties and improvements up to the present time. They are frequently set forth with the most pretentious assumptions of originality, of spiritual insight, or of elevation and breadth of view. Yet every instance affords new illustrations of the general principle, that the great doctrines which are maintained by the consensus of all the Church creeds are great whole., which embrace and integrate in a common principle all the elements and subordinate relations of the truth revealed. The originators of new and special views have often been men of original genius and of profound religious experience, and the controversies they excite have often been of use in recalling to

* Conc. Trident, sess. 6, chap. vii. Cat. Rom., 2, 5, 63.

the consciousness of the Church some hitherto neglected aspect or relation of the truth she loves. Nevertheless, their pet theories have always been impossible factions of the truth, incapable of independent life, needing the support of the great integrating principle emphasized in the old formulas of the fathers.

The truth and wide-reaching significance of this allegation will appear when we examine in detail the various theories which have been presented as substitutes for the great scriptural and symbolical doctrine of the *pœna vicaria*, the vicarious suffering of the penalty of sin in the stead of sinners. In each case it will be found that the proposed substitute, while it presents an important element of the whole truth, is absurd when represented as an independent whole in itself, and that it derives its entire significance from the underlying principle of the *pœna vicaria* presupposed in it.

For example: (1st.) The theory that Christ came into the world for the purpose of undergoing predetermined and deliberately pre-arranged sufferings and death simply in order to exhibit the love of God to men, or to produce upon the souls of men a subduing, or a hope-inspiring moral impression is self-evidently absurd. Such a gratuitous sacrifice would have been no exhibition of love, and such a studious effort at effect would have defeated its own design by means of its transparent affectation. On the other hand, when the fact that the death of Christ was really a vicarious suffering of the penalty of sin, and as such was absolutely necessary to render the forgiveness of sin consistent with the essential righteousness of God, then it is seen at once and by all to be a transcendent exhibition of divine love, and a most efficient means of subduing the enmity and of reassuring the fearful hearts of sinful men.

(2d.) The doctrine that the sufferings and death of Christ were simply designed "to illustrate the principle of self-sacrifice, as due from all God's intelligent creatures to him who made them, and as constituting their true dignity and excellence as moral beings," is, when taken by itself, no less evidently baseless and irrational. Self-sacrifice, in the sense of the mortification of inherent sin, was impossible for Christ. And self-sacrifice in the sense of the gratuitous rejection and refusal to enjoy, and put to the best possible account all the endowments of God of every kind, and all the means and conditions of blessedness, was never demanded by God, and is not consistent with healthy, rational piety. On the other hand, when once the true character of the vicarious sacrifice of Christ and its absolute necessity in order to reconcile justice and mercy is recognized; then it is at once and by all seen to be indeed a transcendent example of the purest and holiest self-sacrifice for the attainment of a worthy end otherwise unattainable. And as such it has proved, when so understood, to be to men the most inspiring example of self-sacrifice conceivable.

(3d.) The doctrine that the vicarious sacrifice of Christ consists simply in his sentimental identification with human sinners through the combined power of his sympathy with them and his hatred of

their sin, so that in the sufferings growing out of that sympathetic self-identification he has made "a perfect confession of those sins, a confession which must, in its own nature, have been a *perfect amen* to the judgment of God on the sin of man," "which has all the elements of contrition and repentance," belongs to the same class. It has an apparent coherence and verisimilitude simply because it so transparently presupposes the truth of the catholic doctrine which we Presbyterians maintain. Obviously vicarious repentance and vicarious confession imply legal substitution, and legal substitution requires the vicarious sacrifice of the penalty to complete it. No possible amen to the "judgment of God on the sin of man" is so "perfect" as that of the voluntary suffering of the *pœna vicaria*. Besides the Scriptures, and the consciousness of all Christians uniformly ascribe our salvation not to the spiritual experiences, but to the blood and death of Christ, as of a "sin-offering," as of one "made a curse for us." Undoubtedly his vicarious sacrifice presupposes his substitution, and his legal substitution presupposes his moral identification through sympathy and love at once with the offending sinner and with the offended Judge. This moral identification is doubtless the prerequisite of his substitution in the place of sinners and of his sufferings being accepted in the stead of theirs. But the scriptural fact remains that he saves us by his death, and his death avails for that end because he has so identified himself with us that as *he* so regards our sin his own that he "repents of and confesses it," so God regards his sufferings ours to the end of satisfying the penalty.

(4th.) The theory first clearly set forth by Hugo Grotius, that the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, instead of being a real *pœna vicaria*, designed to satisfy the just wrath of God against sin, was merely an exemplary exhibition of God's displeasure against sin as a wise and benevolent ruler, is, like the others, conspicuously absurd, when made to stand by itself, and is isolated from the Church doctrine which is presupposed in it. How can the infliction of suffering be an example of a punishment, or of God's determination to punish sin, except precisely in so far as it is itself a veritable instance of that punishment? Yet when taken in connection with the underlying truth of the Church doctrine it becomes an unquestionable truth, and one of the highest importance. If it does not satisfy the vindicatory justice of God, it cannot act as a sin-detering example of the demands of such justice upon really intelligent subjects of moral law. On the other hand, if it be indeed, as our Church affirms, an instance of the vicarious assumption and endurance of penalty by the Holy Law-giver himself in the stead of sinners, then certainly this sacrifice of Christ is the most conspicuous and perfect example possible even to God of the fact that sin must, by an absolute necessity, be punished without any possible exception. And at the same time and for the same reason it becomes the most powerful sin-detering motive which even God could present to the subjects of his moral government.

(6th.) What are the TENDENCIES at present prevalent among the

Presbyterian Churches controlling the treatment of this doctrine? If what has been said above is true; if the juridical view of Christ's vicarious sacrifice is the catholic doctrine of the historical Christian Churches of all time; if it is the doctrine emphasized in each Reformed Confession without exception; and if it is essential and fundamental to the entire theological system held by those Churches; if these things be true, it is evident that no legitimate development of thought can ever change the fundamental principle. It is still emphasized in our prayers and hymns; it is still preached by all those preachers who remain faithful to their ordination vows; it still sounds the key-note of all revivals, of all the mission work, and really vital action of the Churches. As far as really living, the Churches hold this historical doctrine as of old. To change it would involve the revolution of the Church—not its development into a higher form, but the substitution of a different institution in its place. All tendencies of this sort are illegitimate, and should be corrected by adequate controversy, and prevented by the surgical knife of discipline.

The legitimate tendency at present, therefore, while loyally conserving the old juridical view, as essential and central, is to recognize more fully than before the real truth and importance of all the partial and subsidiary side views and aspects, which heretics have perverted by isolating and exalting out of their due secondary and relative position. The orthodox doctrine is more and more seen not only to be essential and radical, but also catholic and comprehensive, affording the necessary basis for all the side lights and secondary aspects of the great scriptural truth, which individuals have often seen disconnectedly, and have often unduly isolated and emphasized. The statement of this great truth at the hands of orthodox theologians is becoming less mechanical, less logically squared, and more after the manner of the word and works of God, where truth lies in broad surfaces and not in narrow lines, where it has breadth as well as length, and where the glory of the parts melts into the greater glory of the whole.

The REV. T. D. WITHERSPOON, D. D., of Petersburg, Va., next read the following paper on

THE DURATION OF FUTURE PUNISHMENT.

In approaching the subject of future retribution we find ourselves confronted with certain facts which seem worthy of a moment's preliminary consideration.

1st. In favor of what is commonly known as the orthodox doctrine, which postulates the absolute endlessness of the state of the lost, stands the almost unbroken testimony of the Church of God for eighteen centuries—a testimony borne with singular unanimity by this witnessing Church, which is “the pillar and ground of the truth,” through