

Redemption - Proof Of The Doctrine

What is Christianity? Part 5

By Very Rev William M. Moran, D.D.
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Before I discuss the arguments for the doctrine expounded in the preceding booklet of this series, it may be useful to refer to some erroneous views about the Redemption wrought by Christ. It will help the reader to understand more fully the Catholic doctrine already explained; and it will prepare him for the religious atmosphere, in which he may have to live, if his lot is cast in non-Catholic surroundings.

The leaders of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century did not deny the vicarious character of the Redemption wrought by Christ; but their errors in other directions compelled them to take a distorted view of its effects. Luther held that man's nature was substantially corrupted by the fall; so that, even after the Redemption, a man is never restored to the state of sanctity originally enjoyed by our first parents. According to Lutheran theology, Christ's mediation did not procure for us real justification, that is. real remission of sin, and true inward sanctification of the soul by the infusion of sanctifying grace. We thus remain permanently sinful and displeasing to God. Yet, for the sake of Christ's merits, God is willing to "turn the blind eye" to our state of spiritual corruption – He is willing to refrain from punishing us, as our real condition deserves. Christ's merits are like a cloak wrapped around us, to hide our sinfulness from the eyes of God. Consequently, it does not matter what sins a man commits, or what moral condition his soul is in, provided only he has faith in Christ. For faith will secure that God will look, not at the real condition of a man's soul, but at the merits of Christ which cover it. Calvin agreed with Luther about the corruption of human nature by the fall. But he took a different view of the effect of Christ's mediation. Briefly, his opinion amounted to this: that in view of Christ's passion and death God elects some souls for eternal life, while He consigns the rest to eternal damnation.

These errors can be traced to the failure of Luther and Calvin to distinguish clearly between what is supernatural, and what is merely natural. They regarded Adam's original state as a natural state – that is, they regarded all his gifts as gifts due to human nature. Consequently, when they came to frame their doctrine about the effects of Adam's fall, they were logically compelled to choose one of two possible alternatives. The first alternative was to say that Adam's fall did no real harm to his posterity. This alternative would have involved the denial of the doctrine of original sin. The second alternative was to admit that Adam's fall injured his posterity and to explain this injury as a corruption of human nature. They chose this second alternative.

The harshness of the errors just mentioned, and the immorality to which they inevitably led, soon began to arouse dissatisfaction within the Protestant ranks. A new sect (the Socinians or Unitarians) went back to the first of the two alternatives already mentioned – that is, they held that Adam's fall

did no real harm to his posterity (except by the bad example it gave them). But this view had serious implications. If there be no original sin, the principal reason for a vicarious redemption disappears. There remained, of course, the problem of satisfaction for our own personal sins. But this problem was soon solved, by denying the necessity of satisfaction at all. The parable of the prodigal son shows, it was argued, that God does not require any satisfaction for sin; but that He is prepared to give a free pardon to all who repent. (Footnote: You will have noticed (from the exposition of Catholic doctrine already given in Booklet 4 of the series, Redemption - the Doctrine that Catholics, no less than Unitarians, hold that God is always prepared to pardon the penitent sinner, and restore him to the state of grace, and heir-ship to heaven. The sinner receives a free pardon, which he himself has not merited. But that is because Christ has already made satisfaction for the sins, and merited the sinner's restoration to grace. The Socinians thus read more into the parable of the prodigal son, than it was intended to convey.)

While the Socinians rejected the doctrine of vicarious redemption, they continued to emphasise the subjective value of Christ's mission. He was the supreme model of virtue, as well as the greatest teacher of the human race. Christ might thus be regarded as the Saviour of the world, by reason of His many-sided influence for good. His noble example and sublime teaching are incentives to virtue. He has provided further motives for a virtuous life; in the rewards He has promised, and the punishments He has threatened. We may even suppose that it is His prayers to the Father, on behalf of mankind, which bring us some spiritual help and benefit. But vicarious satisfaction – that must be excluded! So they say.

The gradual weakening of the authority of the Bible among the Protestant sects during the past century and more, and the growing tendency to deny the divinity of Christ have greatly helped to popularise the Socinian view of Christ's mission. The introduction of a purely subjective standard of truth, by the movement known as Modernism, has served to speed up the disintegration of what was left of traditional Christianity among the sects. According to this new standard, a doctrine is true if it satisfies the religious needs of the period.

That is the modernist test of religious truth. It appears that the doctrine of vicarious redemption does not come up to this test: it is deemed too "legal", too "forensic", for the religious sense of the twentieth century. And so we are offered from time to time a new "presentation of Christianity" – one that is more in keeping with the ideas of the age in which we live. According to these new "presentations", Christ's mission was substantially the same as that of the Jewish prophets, who went before Him. His work for mankind was merely a work of moral influence. By teaching and example, He has shown us how to be better men. His death did not satisfy for our sins, nor merit for us justification. At most, it taught us a useful lesson: it revealed to us God's love for men, and God's hatred of sin. (Footnote: By the way, if the vicariousness of Christ's passion and death is denied, it is not very clear how Christ's death reveals either God's love for men, or His hatred of sin.)

Let us now see what revelation tells us about Christ's mission, and about the Redemption wrought by Christ for the human race.

THE OLD TESTAMENT EVIDENCE.

Among the people of antiquity, the Jews stand out, not only as remarkable, but as quite unique for their sense of the guilt of sin, and the necessity of atoning for it. Their sacred books and religious services gave the most forcible expression to these ideas. While the literature of other peoples lauded the feats of the leaders and heroes of the past, and painted rosy pictures of the golden age

enjoyed by their ancestors, the Old Testament (the literature of the Jews) unfolded a very different theme. Starting with a great moral catastrophe at the beginning of human history, it continued the story of sin down the ages, till the great mass of humanity was shown to be sunk in a state of moral corruption and stupid idolatry. Then out of that mass of human degradation, God called Abraham, the father of the Israelite (Jewish) people, and promised to bless the earth once more through his seed.

But the great vocation to which they were called, did not prevent the Israelites themselves from frequent lapses into sin and idolatry. God raised up prophets in their midst to denounce their crimes, and to bring them back to a sense of their duty. These prophets taught them to see, in their national calamities, the punishment of their sins. The Mosaic Law at the same time forbade the eating of blood; and for this reason: "Because the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you, that you may make atonement with it on the altar for your souls" (Leviticus 17:2). The purpose of the law was easily understood by a people who believed that "death is the wages of sin." And so, the idea of expiation by blood became familiar to every Jew. The religious services prescribed by the Mosaic Law brought home to the people in graphic form the lessons taught in their sacred books. The ceremonies of the Day of Atonement – the greatest day of the Jewish year – were particularly impressive; and were calculated to produce in all who witnessed them a deep sense of the guilt and horror of sin.

The Jewish prophets did not merely denounce the sins of their people: they also promised deliverance from evil in a great spiritual kingdom yet to come. If national adversity was associated in the popular mind with defection from God, it was only to be expected that national prosperity would be associated with the promised era of righteousness. Hence, the Messianic Kingdom is often described in terms of peace and plenty for Israel at home, and triumph over her enemies abroad. But this figurative language is often supplemented, or entirely replaced, by a more spiritual description of the kingdom, in which the victory is depicted as deliverance from sin, not only for Israel herself, but also for the Gentile nations through the instrumentality of Israel.

The Messiah, like his kingdom, is depicted under different images. He is a great king, of the seed of David; he is God's Holy One, God's Shepherd, God's Servant.

He is also referred to anonymously, and described in terms of an innocent sufferer. His character and work are very different from those of a dictator, bent on world domination (in the sense understood by European politicians). His work will be a work of peace and deliverance – deliverance of Jew and Gentile alike, by bringing them all back to God. His arms will not be those of the world's warriors, but the light and comfort of his teaching; And his own suffering. The blood he will shed will not be that of his enemies, but his own.

The prophet's vision of the Messianic Kingdom and its King is often closely associated with events in the national life of the Israelite people. In such cases, the prophet does not see the Messianic age directly in itself, but only as typified by some change in the condition of the Israelite people. In this way, important events, such as the exile of the Jews in Babylon, and their subsequent return to Jerusalem, become, for the prophet, types of the suffering and triumph of the Messiah. Events in the prophet's own life sometimes serve the same purpose. On the other hand, there are Messianic passages, in which the prophet's vision appears to reach directly to the Messianic age, without any reference to secular events. A few examples of Messianic prophecies will throw light on the teaching of the Old Testament, concerning the mission of Christ.

The following prophecy is referred by Our Lord to Himself (Luke 4:21): – (Jahveh – ‘He Who Is’ – is the ‘name’ of God in Hebrew.)

"The spirit of Lord Jahveh (that is, God) is upon me.
For Jahveh made me His Anointed (His Messias or Messiah);
He sent me to bring the good news to the lowly,
To heal the broken-hearted,
To proclaim deliverance to the captives
And to those in chains their freedom;
To announce a year of grace for Jahveh,
A day of vengeance for our God;
To comfort all the mourners, to give them
Instead of ashes a diadem,
Instead of garments of mourning the oil of gladness:
Instead of despair, rejoicing." (Isaiah 61:1-3).

The next passage is referred to Our Lord by Saint Matthew: (Matthew 21: 4): –

“Rejoice you, daughter of Sion, (Zion)
Shout for joy, you Jerusalem!
Behold your King is coming to you,
He is just and a Saviour;
Yet He is lowly and riding an ass,
A colt, the foal of an ass!
He does away with chariots from Ephraim,
And away with steeds from Jerusalem,
Done away with is the warrior's bow!
For He speaks peace to the Gentiles,
From sea unto sea is His sway,
From the river to the ends of the earth.

(To the King).

Yea, You in the blood of Your covenant
Releases the prisoners belonging to You,
From the pit, which holds no water!
The prisoners of hope are returning to safety."
(Zachary or Zechariah, 9:9-12).

In another passage, referred to Our Lord by Saint John (John 19:37), the same prophet gives us a hint of how the spiritual deliverer, to whom he has referred, will actually achieve His victory.

(God is represented as speaking) "And I will pour out upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and prayers, and they shall look towards Me. Him Whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for Him as one mourns for an only son, and they shall grieve over Him, as the manner is to grieve for the death of the first-born."

And a few verses later, in a text referred by Our Lord to Himself (Matthew 26:31), the prophet adds: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd and against the man that cleaves to Me, says the Lord of Hosts: strike the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn My hand to the little ones." (Zachary or Zechariah, 12:10; and 13:7).

The idea of a suffering Messiah appears still more clearly in other passages of the Old Testament. Here is an example from the Book of Psalms (Psalm 21 in the Vulgate or Psalm 22 in the Hebrew). The first verse was actually quoted by Our Lord, as He hung upon the Cross: –

"O God, My God, look You upon Me,
Why have You abandoned Me?
Remote make my rescue, the sins which have been laid on me.
My God, I pray in the day-time, and You pay no heed;
And in the night-time – but not for my own sin.

But as for Me, I am a worm and not a man,
The scorn of men and the outcast of the people.
All those who see Me, laugh Me to scorn.
With their lips they mock Me, and they wag their heads (as they say):
He hoped in the Lord; let Him set Him free,
Since He finds His pleasure in Him.

My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And My tongue cleaves to My palate:
And You have brought Me down to the dust of the earth.

A multitude of dogs surrounds Me:
A band of evildoers encompasses:
They dig through My hands and feet.

They count all My bones;
They gaze on Me and examine Me.
They divide among them My garments,
And they cast lots for my tunic."

In the earlier part of this psalm, we can almost imagine that we hear Our Lord complaining of the agony and utter desolation He is suffering on the Cross. Towards the end of the psalm the theme changes; and the writer ends on a note of triumph, because he beholds all nations brought back to the service of God. The abrupt change of theme gives us a clue to the purpose of the suffering previously described. Here are the concluding stanzas of the psalm: –

"All the ends of the earth will be mindful of the Lord
And will turn to Him:
And all the heathen nations shall worship before Him.

For the Lord's is the Kingdom,
And He will rule over the nations.
Before Him shall bow all who go down to the dust.

But my soul shall live for Him;
And my children shall serve Him.
Tidings of the Lord will be given to a race that is to come.

The heavens will tell of His justice
To a people which shall arise, which the Lord has fashioned."
(Psalm 21 in the Vulgate, or Psalm 22 in the Hebrew.)

{Footnote: The above quotations have not been made from our Douay Version, but from Father Lattey's translation, as given in The Atonement (Cambridge: Heifer, 1928).}

There is also recommended a Translation from The Psalms by Canon Boylan (Dublin: Gill, 1920).}

I shall quote one other prophecy – a poem from the Book of Isaiah (chapters 52-53). The prophecy is referred to Our Lord in several passages of the New Testament; and expresses very clearly the purpose of His suffering. In the first stanza of the poem God speaks:

"Behold my servant shall achieve success;
He shall be lifted up, high, and exalted exceedingly.
Even as many were appalled at him –
For his aspect was marred from that of man,
And his form from the sons of men –
So shall many nations stand in awe of him;
Kings shall shut their mouths;
For that, which had not been told them, they shall see:
And that, which they heard not of, they shall perceive.

(Then the nations speak.)

Who would have believed that which we hear?
And the arm of Jahveh ('He Who Is'), to whom was it revealed?

And he grew up before Him as a young shoot,
And as a root from arid land.

No beauty had he, nor grace, that we should regard him;
And no comeliness, that we should delight in him,
Despised and forsaken by men,
A man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

But it was our sufferings that he endured.
It was our sorrows that he bore,
While we accounted him stricken,
Smitten by God and afflicted.

For our iniquities was he wounded;
For our sins was he bruised;
Upon him fell the chastisement, that made us whole,
And by his stripes we were healed.

The mighty ones of earth will eat and do homage;
We all like sheep had gone astray;
We had turned, each his own way;
And had laid upon him
The iniquities of us all.

He oppressed him, and he was submissive;
Like a lamb, that is led to the slaughter,
And like a sheep, that before its shearers is dumb.

He opened not his mouth." Et cetera.

(In the last stanza of the poem, God speaks again.)

My servant shall justify many,
And their iniquities he shall bear;
Therefore will I give him many as his portion;
I will give him multitudes as his spoil.

Because he exposed his soul to death,
And was numbered with transgressors,
So has he borne the sins of many,
And makes intercession for transgressors."

{Footnote: The above is a literal translation of the Hebrew.}

I have dealt with the Old Testament literature at some length for two reasons. In the first place, it is impossible to appreciate at their full value the Gospel texts that deal with the Messiah and his mission, unless we know something about the Old Testament ideas, which they presuppose.

Secondly, the Old Testament writers, who depict a suffering Messiah, imply more or less clearly the doctrine of vicarious redemption. In the last prophecy quoted, the idea of vicarious satisfaction is quite manifest. All the conditions necessary for vicarious satisfaction, are clearly brought out by the prophet. The "Servant of God," to whom he refers,

- (a) voluntarily undergoes the sufferings and death inflicted on him;
- (b) he suffers as our representative;
- (c) he suffers in satisfaction for our sins;
- (d) God accepts the satisfaction so offered.

A glance at the text itself will show that all these conditions are verified. The first three of these conditions are clearly implied in those stanzas in which the nations are represented as speaking. The fourth condition (that is, God's acceptance) is implied in the final stanza, in which God is represented as speaking. In this stanza two ideas stand out – the success achieved by the "Servant of God" on behalf of sinners; and the reward and glorification of the "Servant" Himself. Both imply God's acceptance of the vicarious satisfaction offered by him.

We should be unduly optimistic, if we were to expect the rationalistic scholars of the present day to see in a poem, written many hundreds of years before Christ, a prophecy of Christ's passion, comparable in its detail to the record of an eye-witness. That the prophet should represent the Messiah as redeeming us vicariously by his passion and death is no less unthinkable to these same scholars. As neither the genuineness of the text, nor the fact of its striking fulfilment in Christ can be denied, there remains only one way of evading the force of the argument; and that is to deny the Messianic character of it altogether. The prophet was not talking about the Messiah at all; and it was only a coincidence that his words happened to fit the circumstances of Christ's death! This coincidence theory could be extended, of course, to other awkward passages.

But we are entitled to ask: of whom was the prophet speaking? In answering this question the scholars, as we might expect, cannot agree among themselves. The fact is significant. Fortunately, the Messianic character of the prophecy has been placed beyond doubt in several passages of the New Testament.

In the Acts of the Apostles (chapter 8), for instance, we are told of a certain Ethiopian official, who was returning from Jerusalem in his carriage, reading this prophecy of Isaiah, and wondering to whom it could refer. And the Holy Spirit said to the deacon, Philip; "Go near and join this carriage." The Ethiopian asked Philip: "Of whom doth the prophet speak this? Of himself or some other man?" "Then Philip opening his mouth, and beginning at this scripture, preached unto him Jesus." The result was the conversion and baptism of the Ethiopian. "And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord took away Philip, and the eunuch (the Ethiopian) saw him no more. But he went on his way rejoicing." After such a dramatic interpretation of the text, under the special direction of the Holy Ghost, we may regard the question of the Messianic character of the prophecy as settled.

[Footnote: The Messianic character of this prophecy is also implied by Saint John (12:35), by Saint Peter (1 Peter 2:22-25). and by Our Lord Himself (Luke 22:37).]

One of the fancy theories of our time is that Christ Himself knew nothing about the doctrine of vicarious Redemption. That the doctrine was taught by the Apostles, and especially by Saint Paul, is admitted; but that they learned it from their Master is denied. In other words, the doctrine was invented by the Apostles – probably by Saint Paul. In view of this theory of two doctrines – one of Christ, the other of the Apostles – it is necessary to consider in the first place the evidence to be found in the Gospels – that is, the evidence for the doctrine of vicarious Redemption. If you look through the Gospels, in an edition that has quotations in special type, you will probably be surprised at the number of references to the Messianic passages of the Old Testament.

Yet, even then, you will miss many implicit quotations and mere echoes. We find these references, explicit, and implicit, in the words and actions of Christ Himself, and in the words of persons who came in contact with Him. Now there are very few of these references, which do not imply more or less clearly the doctrine of vicarious Redemption. We shall just glance at a few of these references, and then pass on to the teaching of Our Lord Himself.

At the Annunciation, the message of the angel is couched in Messianic language: "Behold you shall conceive and bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus (that is, Saviour). He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give him the throne of David his father; and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke chapter 1.)

A little later, the angel tells Saint Joseph: "Fear not to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." (Matthew chapter 1).

The angel leaves no doubt in the minds of Mary and Joseph that the Messiah is about to be born, and that the chief work of His life is to save the people from their sins.

We next come to the baptism of Our Lord. When John the Baptist saw Him coming, he said: "Behold the Lamb of God; behold Him Who takes away the sins of the world." (John chapter 1). The title "lamb of God," in connection with the taking away of sin, is borrowed from the 53rd chapter of Isaiah already quoted; so that the Baptist implies that Christ will take away the sin of the world in the manner described by the prophet, Isaiah, that is, vicariously, by His own sufferings and death.

True to this description of Him by the Baptist, Christ Himself claims to be, not merely a preacher of penance, but the actual deliverer from sin. On several occasions, He exercised the power of directly forgiving sin. On one such occasion, his power was challenged by the Jewish scribes, and He worked a miracle to vindicate it; "But that you may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins, then said He to the man sick of the palsy: arise, take up your bed and go into your house. And he arose and went into his house." (Matthew chapter 9).

On his first return to Nazareth after the beginning of His public life, Jesus preached in the synagogue, taking as His text one of the passages I have already quoted from Isaiah:

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, For God made me His anointed (that is, Messiah or Messiah)", et cetera.

"And He began to say to them: this day is fulfilled this scripture in your ears." (Luke chapter 4.)

The particular passage quoted, though it is descriptive of the Messiah and His work, does not deal with the question of deliverance from sin. Nevertheless, the fact that Christ claims to be the Servant of God, referred to by Isaiah in chapter 61, strongly suggests that He is likewise conscious of His mission to carry out the vicarious redemption, associated with the suffering Servant of God in chapter 53.

On this point, however, He has not left us to mere conjecture.

"The Son of Man," He says, "has not come to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give His life as a redemption (ransom) for many" (Matthew chapter 20.)

The vicarious character of a redemption, wrought at the price of His life, is so obvious, that unbelieving scholars are compelled to deny that Christ ever said these words at all. He could not have given utterance to such an idea they say; it is too Pauline! As if the idea was not substantially contained in Isaiah hundreds of years before Saint Paul was born! Another interesting fact is that the language in which the evangelists Matthew and Mark record this saying of Christ, is as unlike the language of Saint Paul as it could well be – a rather strange fact, if the utterance was invented by Saint Paul. In any case, there is not the slightest manuscript evidence for doubting the genuineness of the passage. It has been questioned solely on the ground that it does not square with a preconceived notion of Christ's mission and work.

As the time of His death draws near, Christ's references to His passion and death become more frequent. He tells His disciples that He "must suffer many things, and be rejected by his generation" (Luke chapter 17). On His way up to Jerusalem for the last time, He says: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed to the chief priests and scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death; and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to be mocked, and scourged, and crucified; and the third day He shall rise again.'" (Matthew chapter 20.) Sitting down to the Last Supper, He says to them: "With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer" (Luke chapter 22).

In the garden of Gethsemani He says to them: "All you will be scandalized in me this night, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be dispersed" (Matthew chapter 26). Our Lord is here quoting a prophecy of Zachary or Zechariah, which has been already referred to above. Our Lord has already told the Apostles: "Therefore does the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No man takes it away from me; but I lay it down of myself. And I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again" (John chapter 10). When the

soldiers came to arrest Him in the garden of Gethsemani, He demonstrated His power over them, before He freely accompanied them to the city (John 18:7).

Why then was this suffering and death freely endured? It is the role assigned to Him by the prophets of the Old Law. It is the role referred to by Christ Himself, when He said that He had come "to give His life as a ransom for many." But on the last night of His mortal life – amid the solemn celebrations of the Pasch, which was a figure of Himself – He wished to manifest to His Apostles in word and action the meaning and purpose of His mission. As He sat at table with His Apostles, "He took bread, and blessed and broke, saying: This is my body, which shall be given for you." And after He had blessed the chalice, He gave it to them saying; "This is my blood of the new covenant, which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sins" (Matthew chapter 26).

For Jews accustomed to the idea of blood sacrifices for sin, these words could have only one meaning – Christ was about to offer His life as a sacrifice of propitiation for the sins of mankind. The mention of the new covenant suggested at once the passage in Exodus chapter 24, which describes the establishment of the old covenant between the Jewish people and God. The old covenant was sealed with the blood of sacrifice – the sacrifice of brute beasts. Christ's blood is to be the sacrificial blood, that will seal the new covenant for the remission of human sins – a covenant between God on the one side, and Christ, representing the human race, on the other. We can now see more clearly how Christ was to give His life as a "ransom for many".

At the Last Supper, the sacrifice of Christ's life was only promised and contracted for. The contract was carried out upon the cross. God's acceptance of the sacrifice was manifested by the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. The new covenant was now fully ratified; and the consequences will soon begin to appear. That very evening, Christ said to His Apostles: "These are the words I spoke to you while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets and in the psalms concerning Me. Then He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures. And he said to them: Thus it is written; and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and rise again the third day, and that penance and remission of sins should be preached on the strength of His name to all nations" (Luke chapter 24.) This passage throws a flood of light on Christ's own conception of His mission and redemptive work. Notice how He helps the Apostles to understand the prophecies about a suffering Messiah. And then note the summary: "Thus it behooved Christ to suffer... that remission of sins should be preached on the strength of His name to all nations." There is our title to the remission of our sins – the strength of His name after He had suffered for us.

The explanation given on that occasion to the Apostles was necessary, that they might understand the implications of the great commission He was about to give them: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John chapter 20). He had personally forgiven a few individual sinners, before He actually paid the price of redemption. But only after He had ratified in His blood the new covenant, was it fitting that He should send His Apostles to forgive sinners "on the strength of His name." In exercising this commission, they will be applying to individual souls the merits of His death.

We need not delay to consider at any great length the teaching of the Apostles. The vicariousness of Redemption is so obvious in the letters of the chief Apostles, that few readers will venture to question it. In his first epistle (chapter 1) Saint Peter says; "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as gold or silver... but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb

unspotted and undefiled." The reference to a "lamb unspotted and undefiled" clearly implies sacrifice, in view of its Old Testament associations. But apart from this implication of 'Sacrifice', the text so clearly teaches the doctrine of vicarious Redemption, that comment is superfluous. In the next chapter, he tells us that "(Christ) His own self bore our sins in His body upon the tree (Cross), that we, being dead to sin, should live to justice; by whose stripes you were healed". Words could hardly be plainer.

Saint John, in the first chapter of his gospel, tells us that the Son of God "came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the Sons of God." And, again: "Of His fulness we have all received." In the third chapter, he tells us that "God sent His Son into the world, not to judge the world, but that the world may be saved by Him." If you ask: how exactly did Christ save the world? The answer is given in his first epistle (1 John chapter 2): "He is the propitiation (the sin-sacrifice) for our sins; and not for our sins only, but for those of the whole world."

The epistles of Saint Paul are so full of the doctrine of vicarious Redemption, that we need only consider a few texts, as examples of his teaching. Every aspect of the Redemption can be illustrated from his letters – the special aspects of satisfaction and merit; and the more general concept of ransom, "For I delivered unto you what I also received, namely, that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures... and as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinth chapter 15). And again: "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God has proposed to be a propitiation (sacrifice for sin) through faith in His blood, to the showing of His (God's) justice, for the remission of former sins." And again: "When as yet we were sinners, according to the time, Christ died for us. Much more, therefore, being now justified by His blood, shall we be saved from wrath through Him" (Romans chapter 3).

In the following text, it is the concept of redemptive ransom that is uppermost in his mind. "For there is one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave Himself a redemption (ransom) for all" (1 Timothy chapter 2).

The Epistle to the Hebrews (written most probably by Saint Paul) lays special emphasis on the sacrificial aspect of Christ's death. The author wants to bring home to his Jewish readers the superiority of Christ's priesthood and sacrifice over the priesthood and sacrifices of the Mosaic Law. The latter could only give legal cleanness – cleanness from legal defilement in the eyes of the Law. They had no power to satisfy for sin in the eyes of God. Christ's sacrifice alone had this power; and its influence extended to the sins of the Old Law, as well as to those of the New. "For if the blood of goats and oxen... sanctify such as are defiled unto the cleansing of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, Who by the Holy Ghost offered Himself unspotted to God, cleanse our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God. And therefore He is the mediator of the new covenant, that by means of His death for the redemption of the transgressions under the former covenant, those that are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance." And again: "But now once at the end of ages, He (Christ) has appeared for the destruction of sin by the sacrifice of Himself." And again: "But this man (Christ), offering one sacrifice for sins, forever sits at the right hand of God... for by one oblation (sacrifice) He has perfected for ever those that are sanctified." (Hebrews chapters 9 and 10).

This sacrificial aspect of Christ's death will be discussed more fully in the next booklet of this series. See The Sacrifice of Redemption and the Mass.

