

The Vicarious Atonement

THE CONCEPT of the Vicarious Atonement has generated both controversy and confusion from the time of its first enunciation to the present day. The doctrine of Vicarious Atonement, that is, atonement by substitution, has raised many questions and prompted many objections, some of which we will consider.

This doctrine states that Christ, the only begotten Son of God, came to earth, was incarnate in a human body, was crucified, died, and then rose from the grave. His sacrifice was accepted by God as a propitiation for the sins of men. His pure passionless blood was imbued with the power to cleanse men from their sins. To avail one's self of the cleansing blood that remits sins and gain eternal life one must believe the doctrine as stated, one must have faith in Christ's power to save, and then obey his commandments and do his works.

Questions and objections which this doctrine has evoked include: Just what does the Vicarious Atonement do for the individual and in what way? How can the death of one man, even though he be divine, have any bearing upon the eternal salvation of another? How can we reconcile our ideas of a God of Love with one who requires the death of any man in order to satisfy what would appear to be revenge for transgression of His law? How can blood have any cleansing properties?

Rosicrucian Philosophy provides an answer to these questions somewhat as follows. The spread of religion in all ages has been accomplished primarily through two agencies—the school of knowledge, and the school of faith. The former uses the mind as its most active instrument, and

through the aid of those advanced Beings who are guiding our evolution, come into possession at various times of a certain degree of supersensible or occult knowledge pertaining to the cosmic scheme of evolution and man's part in it. This school is represented in the current era by various exoteric societies such as the Rosicrucian Fellowship, behind which are corresponding esoteric Orders.

The school of faith uses the heart as its most active instrument. It accepts the doctrine of life and the creedal system purveyed by its priests and ministers. The doctrine of Vicarious Atonement is the principal dogma of the school of faith.

Upon investigation, we find that “living of the life” is the essential feature of both schools and that it matters comparatively little which agent induces us to so live. We also come to realize that salvation is simply the opportunity to progress in our evolution and does not mean we obtain a ticket of admission to some region of perpetual joy.

The school of knowledge asserts that the object of the present phase of evolution is to “build the Christ within.” That is, we are to weave the vehicle that scripture calls the “Wedding Garment,” which humanity must begin to fashion if we are to continue evolving in the 6th and 7th culture periods of this 5th Epoch. *Building the Christ within* means developing the Intellectual Soul so it can be assimilated by and nourish the Life Spirit. The Intellectual Soul is the concentrated wisdom extracted from the feelings, emotions, thoughts, and ideas generated by self-conscious living. It is built primarily through the agency of altruism and unselfishness, undergirded by a purification of the desire nature. These three attributes have largely

been made possible through the advent of Christ, who purified the psychic atmosphere of the earth by permeating it with his own highly evolved desire body. The desire body of man can now be composed of purer desire stuff than in the days prior to Christ's Incarnation in Jesus, thereby facilitating right action and the avoidance of evil. Fortifying the Life Spirit, the Christ within, enables us to perceive "the fundamental unity of each with all," since the Life Spirit is the spirit of unification. Understanding this fact makes altruism both logical and mandatory.

After a conversion to the belief in the doctrine of Vicarious Atonement, the sincere convert immediately begins to transform his life by practicing personal virtue, resisting temptation, and by daily engaging in charitable works and unselfish service.

As a result of self-discipline and the performance of good works, he achieves the same objective as does a member of the school of knowledge; that is, he purifies his desire nature, he develops unselfishness, and, proportional to his fidelity and zeal, he begins to live from the promptings of the Christ within, and thereby attains a corresponding degree of soul power.

Thus we see that the statements contained in the doctrine of Vicarious Atonement are literally true: Christ *did* come to earth to save sinners; His death *was* necessary to take away the sin of the world, and in time the sins of men; belief in Christ *does* lead to salvation, because it leads to living the Christ-centered life.

The fervor and spiritual exhilaration shown by some orthodox Christians, insofar as they are not transient emotionalism, are the bi-products of a commitment to righteousness. The Christ within imparts a joy and consolation to the convert who has an intuition of the presence of the Savior in his heart, Who is bestowing upon him a personal benediction for service well done. This is but a personal response to an impersonal fact.

The doctrine of Vicarious Atonement is an incomplete exposition of the truth, simplified so that it can be understood, generate faith, and inspire the spiritual novice to begin to live according to God's law and will. The doctrine contains all the vital elements needed for initial spiritual

growth. However, at some point in his evolution, the devotee of the school of faith will of his own volition want to begin to cultivate the mental side of his nature so he may love creation and its Creator with his mind as well as with his heart.

The doctrine of Vicarious Atonement gives courage to the faint of heart, since it conveys the idea that each has a Helper and Protector who is ever present to lighten his burdens. And again, this is literally true, for Christ now lives within the earth through the medium of his desire body and does lighten the burdens of his followers by making it easier for them to do right and avoid evil, than would be the case through their own unaided efforts. He does not do this personally; the help is a global, ever-present, impersonal force, available to him who seeks it. Subjectively or objective, it exists and provides the needed salvific power.

The error in the popular understanding of the doctrine of Vicarious Atonement is the idea that belief or faith saves; whereas, in reality, it is the living of a righteous life that achieves results—not faith alone, or the truth of the doctrine which this faith embraces. In a word, faith without works is dead. In and of itself, belief is of comparatively little importance. The person who leads an altruistic and unselfish life, performing helpful deeds, doing for others out of love, builds the Christ within, regardless of whether or not he knows of, or believes in, the existence of Christ. To be sure, there are disadvantages connected with agnosticism, chief among which, perhaps, is the appearance of illusion upon entering the spiritual world after death, and the relative difficulty of obtaining one's poise in that world. But eventually the constructive work done in a good life will remove this handicap. Thus we see that persecution for heresy, in this instance regarding an occult view of Vicarious Atonement, is founded upon a misunderstanding. Sadly, such dogmatism in the past has generated tremendous conflict and bloodshed.

Eventually, the two schools of spiritual development—the school of occult knowledge and the school of mystic faith—will eventually coalesce. And, comparatively speaking, this convergence will take place in the not too distant future. □

—A Student