

The immanence of the incarnate lord in the believer in its bearing on the doctrines of the incarnation and the atonement

Autor(en): **Lias, J.J.**

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THE IMMANENCE
OF THE
INCARNATE LORD IN THE BELIEVER
IN ITS
BEARING ON THE DOCTRINES OF THE INCARNATION
AND THE ATONEMENT ¹).

I can well remember the time when the doctrine of substitution, as it was called—that is to say the doctrine that Christ died on the Cross as our substitute—was universally held by men of all schools of thought in our church, except the so-called very “Broad” school and in those days that school taught a purely naturalistic view of Christianity. The Evangelical party pushed the doctrine of “substitution” a little farther and made it the foundation of their doctrine of Justification by faith. As popularly taught, their view of the Atonement and of Justification amounted to this, that man had utterly fallen from righteousness and was thus exposed to the full fierceness of the Wrath of God; and that this Wrath would inevitably have been poured out upon mankind, and we should all have been plunged into the most unimaginable and unceasing torments, had not Another Being come forward, as full of Mercy and Love as God the Father was of fierceness and wrath, and had He not undertaken to bear the burden of Infinite Wrath for our sakes. Upon him, instead of us, the burden of Wrath was laid. His Infinite sufferings sufficed instead of ours; His death was accepted in the place of ours; the Father’s Justice was satisfied; we were relieved from all suffering whatsoever—from all the consequences of our sins; the Righteousness of the Son was transferred to us, as our guilt had been transferred to Him; and every one who felt that these great truths were true for

¹) A paper read before the Cambridgeshire Association for the Promotion of Sacred Study, May 10, 1904.

him was translated from death to life, from a condition of reprobation to one of acceptance, and, as one of the elect, was sure of salvation, and need not trouble himself about good works. Some of the more extreme Calvinists believed that good works were altogether unnecessary and useless, and that the Divine decree, and nothing else, was the source of man's salvation. Others thought that sanctification would come of itself, in virtue of the union between the Saviour and the soul set up by what was called "saving faith". This is no caricature of the doctrine taught from thousands of pulpits in the early part of the last century, I have heard it repeatedly in my childhood. Some of the more responsible theologians of that time qualified it *more or less*. The great Puritan authorities, John Owen and Jonathan Edwards, will be found to have qualified it a good deal. But either in a unmodified or modified form this theology was for many of our forefathers was the *articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiæ*, and its acceptance was the first condition of a Christian's salvation.

We have become so entirely strangers to teaching of this kind of late years, that it will not be surprising to me to find my statements questioned. I have given the evidence for them in my Hulsean Lectures. This doctrine drove a great many persons into Unitarianism. They could not believe that the Justice of God required the infliction of pains and torments upon an innocent person. In our own days it has become the source of a good deal of scepticism.

First of all the sceptic insisted that the doctrines which I have described were of the essence of Christianity—and perhaps, in consideration of the way in which thousands of christian divines had represented them as absolutely necessary to salvation, he was not altogether to blame. And then he rejected these doctrines with scorn on account of their "moral iniquity and obliquity". He could not understand—I am quoting the actual words of two of them—how "the Divine Justice could be *impugned* by pardoning the guilty, and *vindicated* by punishing the innocent". Now of course if this doctrine had actually been formulated in Holy Scripture as the scheme of salvation—if it had been taught by Jesus Christ and promulgated by His Apostles—it would doubtless have been binding on every Christian believer. But if it be at best but a possible or even

probable inference from Scripture language; if, as is unquestionably the fact, it was never heard of in the Church for many centuries; Christianity must not be made responsible for it, whether we individually choose to accept it or not. And as the human mind cannot be restrained from speculating on the how and the why of things Divine, we may endeavour to find other explanations of the language of the first preachers of Christianity, and may even hope that, as time goes on, a reverent and prayerful, as well as honest and free inquiry into the truth in this matter may issue in the solution of many mysteries which at present are hidden from us. I believe that during the last fifty years free and fair discussion has done a vast deal to elucidate the truth of God enshrined in the Holy Scriptures. I believe that the mysteries involved in the great fact of Christ's death for the sins of the whole world are opening out and will continue to open out to those who scrutinize them in the proper spirit. And thus difficulties will disappear; the claims of reason and faith will alike be satisfied; and we shall see clearly how God can at once be "just", and "the justifier of those who believe in Him".

The doctrine of the immanence of the Incarnate Lord in the believer has been lost sight of in the most extraordinary way by Western theology. The very *palladium* of the Faith among the early Greek Fathers, it has been obscured for us Westerns by the shortcomings of the Latin tongue, by the misconceptions and mistranslations of the Vulgate, and by the general trend of Latin theology since Augustine. In my little book on the Nicene Creed I have quoted a few specimens from modern writers of the amazing explanations which have been given of our Lord's plain and unmistakeable words; of the extraordinary incapacity to understand their drift; of the desperate attempts to evacuate them of their true force and meaning. Rarely in any modern Divine, save in the works of Maurice and his disciple Kingsley, and in that most remarkable and original work, Wilberforce on the Incarnation, as well as in later days still in the works of Bishop Westcott, do I find a clear apprehension of this most important truth. Constantly will you find it evaded, or come short of, or neglected in some way, whether in theological treatises, in sermons, or in books of devotion. And yet its right understanding is, unless

I am grievously mistaken, absolutely necessary to a *rationale* of the scheme of salvation. John Bunyan once said: "Here Mr Prejudice fell down and broke his leg. I heartily wish he had broken his neck." I suppose that only those who have studied the history of theology with an independent mind have the least idea of how vast a part prejudices and prepossessions have played in retarding the advance of theological science. I once heard an Archbishop of Canterbury say at a Church congress, that he "did not like the word immanence". I remarked to a friend that if the Archbishop did not like it, St. John appeared to do so very much. I wonder whether it had ever occurred to the Archbishop that St. John, in his Gospel and First Epistle, employs it some thirty-five times and implies it many times more, that though our version of the New Testament often obscures his meaning, this fact of Christ's indwelling in the believer through His Spirit—of the impartation of Christ's Divine Humanity to the believer as the source of his relation to God—is the very first principle of St. Paul's theology, and that his view of Justification and Sanctification, of the imputation of righteousness to the individual, of the ground of our acceptance with God, all depend on the fact that, as Christ Himself has told us, we live in Christ and Christ in us—that there is a communication to us through the Spirit of the Life which the Son derived from the Father, a gradual inflow into us of the Humanity which Christ took for our sakes, as it has been sanctified, perfected, and glorified by His Sacrifice on the Cross—and that what is called sanctification is nothing but the increasing closeness of the union in which each one of us stands to that sanctified, perfected, glorified Humanity in consequence of the continuous work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of every one who believes in Christ as the source of his redeemed and regenerated life.

It seems probable that the reason of all this is to be found in a supposed necessary conflict between the idea of Immanence and that of transcendence. We have been accustomed to regard God as *outside* phenomena, shaping and controlling them according to the counsel of His Will. Even in our scientific conceptions Christians have until lately failed to apprehend Him as the Breath which dwells in the universe, carrying on His work in and through the things that He has made. And our conception

of salvation has been equally external. We have failed to recognize God as the life of our life, the soul of our soul, the spirit of our spirit. But we need not have been afraid to accept immanence because we believed in transcendence. The fact that God dwells in us, witnessed to by Scripture in a thousand ways, does not exclude the doctrine that He also exists outside and beyond us. Infinite as space is, infinite as are the forms of life which we must believe to be found in it, yet beyond and around it all is the Infinite Being Himself, inhabiting, no doubt, every individual and every particle; yet infinitely greater than all put together. No, immanence does not *exclude* transcendence, either in nature or in grace. God is immanent in nature and in ourselves *because* He transcends us. Of the Divine Nature it is as true as of the Personal Word, that “He is before all things and in Him all things consist”, or are held together.

Another reason for the incapacity of many to conceive of the true scheme of redemption is the idea that the main object of Christ’s coming was to provide a means whereby God might be enabled to forgive mankind. This idea was almost universal a century ago—it has far from disappeared even now. It lurks still in the minds of many who would decline to formulate it. But if we read the great Greek theologians of early times, we shall see that, in their view, the main object of the Incarnation was not forgiveness, but restoration and perfection. I will not detain you by proving this. I have, I believe, proved it elsewhere. And Mr Allen’s able work on the Continuity of Christian thought is well known, though, in consequence of the diversion of the attention of English theologians in another direction, it has hardly received from us the attention it deserves. Eastern theology, I may venture to say, regarded the Incarnation as the last step in the evolution of conscious and sentient being. Jesus Christ, the Lord Incarnate, by His Life, Death and Resurrection, perfected Humanity once for all as the real and ideal Man. He perfects the individual by dwelling in him by His Spirit or Breath. This process will go steadily on until the “times of the restitution of all things”. Then sin and death will be destroyed, and all things will have been made new in Jesus Christ.

Let me briefly—all *too* briefly—review the teaching of Holy Scripture on this point. It is most distinctly formulated in St. John’s account of the esoteric teaching of His Master. But, as I have shown elsewhere, and can but indicate generally here,

it is the foundation of St. Paul's whole system of redemption. I have said that the Incarnation was the last step in the evolution of conscious being. Now, I have observed that even well-instructed and intelligent Christians are sometimes inclined to shrink from the word "evolution", as though they scented danger in it. Let me explain therefore, that by evolution I do not mean the theories of Mr Darwin on that point. Those theories were once—it is an unfortunate habit, which I regret to say, still exists among us—thrust down our throats at the point of the bayonet as the final conclusions of scientific discovery. But they are widely questioned now. The doctrine of evolution by Natural Selection, that is to say the natural tendency in the individual of a species to modify its functions in accordance with its environment, is no longer, I am given to understand, regarded as the sole or complete explanation of all the phenomena observers have recorded. But evolution, that is to say the building up of an individual or a species by forces acting from within rather than without, is a fact which cannot be denied. All animal and vegetable nature is thus evolved from a germ, not produced as a workman builds and decorates a house. But the latest phase of scientific thought does not, I believe, exclude external influence. In other words, it believes in transcendence as well as immanence. It is ready to recognise the Creator of the world as introducing at His Will modifications of the type on which He has modelled animated nature. And if this be so, theology is only proceeding on scientific lines when it regards the Incarnation of the Eternal Word as the last step in the sequence of evolution—the keystone of the arch which has been so long in construction—the true explanation of the Mystery of Creation. The work of Creation had culminated in the Divine evolution of Man. But it was not the final step. The first man was psychic or animal man. One further and final step had to be taken in the course of the development. The second man—the Lord from heaven—was pneumatic or spiritual man. Animal man had fallen and retrograded. Spiritual man was destined to progress till he reached perfection. The Incarnation was to be the first step in the road of the mental and moral improvement of the race, and under its influence man was to traverse that road until his ultimate perfection was reached. How completely this view of salvation, that, let us not forget, of early Greek theology in its interpretation of the

Bible, has been fulfilled by the history of the last nineteen centuries it is unnecessary to point out. Neither does it seem necessary to enlarge on the brilliant prospects which it anticipates for humanity in the future.

Let us now glance at the teaching of Holy Writ on this point of the results of the Incarnation.

St. John—who alone among the Evangelists reproduces the esoteric teaching of the Saviour—starts in his Gospel from the Eternity and Incarnation of the Word. The germ of Life was implanted in man. He was to be born (or rather *begotten*) not by natural descent, or through any power of transformation residing either in himself or any other finite being, but of God alone. His “fulness”—the exact sense of *pleroma* is a little difficult to define—became the heritage of each believer, and favour upon favour¹⁾ was heaped upon him through his possession of the Divine gift²⁾. This possession of a new life is the chief characteristic of the Christian Church. That Church is the aggregate of those in whom the new life dwells. The life Christ came to bring pervades each individual and the Church at large just as the life of a vine pervades its branches, twigs, and leaves. But this new life has its laws³⁾. It is not a direct inflow of the Divine into the human soul. It is a communication of the Divinity through the Humanity of Him in Whom both dwelt. Christ’s disciples are to feed on, that is to assimilate, His Flesh and Blood, that is to say His Human Nature. And if they thus derived their restored humanity from the Word made flesh, the Eternal Life was their assured possession⁴⁾. And by the inhabitation of the Spirit⁵⁾ they were united to the Son, and through him to the Father. And “in” (or rather “into”) the One⁶⁾, the individual and the race gradually reached their perfection. This, too, was the doctrine of all the other

¹⁾ *Χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος*, literally, “one favour in the place of another”. But the meaning is that given above.

²⁾ John I, 13, 16.

³⁾ John XV, 1—10.

⁴⁾ John VI, 53—58. The precise meaning of *τρῶγω* has exercised the critics a good deal. But we shall not, I hope, be far wrong if we interpret it of the *results* rather than of the *act* of eating.

⁵⁾ John VI, 63.

⁶⁾ John XVII, 22, 23. *Ἔν* (neuter) seems to imply the unity of an organism consisting of many parts.

Apostles. St. James tells us how man was “begotten”, that is received a new and higher humanity by the Word of truth according to the sovereign Will of God¹). St. Peter (I enter into no critical questions of authorship) tells us that we are delivered from corruption by partaking of the Divine Nature²). And St. Paul tells us how Christ is “our Life”, that this “life is hid with Him in God”³); that the special Gift⁴) of God is eternal life in Him; that Jesus Christ is in us, unless we become separated from Him⁵); and that He dwells in our hearts by faith so that, rooted and grounded in the love which is Himself we are filled with all the Divine pleroma or fulness⁶). If Christ did not teach what St. John reports Him as doing, it is difficult to understand the remarkable unanimity with which His Apostles set forth the first principles of His Gospel.

So much on the connection of the Incarnation with the salvation of Man. We proceed to consider its connection with the doctrine of Propitiation, of Imputation and of Justification. There seems to have been considerable misconception here. And it may all be traced to the neglect of many ages of the doctrine which underlies the whole New Testament, the doctrine, that is, of the Divine Life of the Incarnate Lord, immanent in the believer. The doctrine of salvation through Christ’s merits, as distinguished from our salvation through, or rather *in*, Christ’s Self, seems to have little, if any, support in Holy Scripture. The notion of a transference of *merits* grew up in mediæval times, and finds expression in the Collects of our Prayer Book. But I cannot find the expression in Scripture. Nor do I think it will be found in the earlier Fathers, either of East or West. The whole modern system of theology, up to a very recent date, appears to me to rest upon a misconception of the true scheme of salvation. It is perfectly true that Christ’s Righteousness is said to have been imputed to us, that our sins are said to have been laid on Him, that we are declared to be saved by His Righteousness and not by any righteousness of our own. But the whole ground on which

¹) James I, 18.

²) 2 Pet. I, 4.

³) Col. III, 3, 4.

⁴) *χάρισμα*. Rom. VI, 23.

⁵) *ἀδόκιμοι*. 2 Cor. XIII, 5. Cf. John XV.

⁶) Eph. III, 17—19. Cf. id. 13. John I, 16.

these statements rest seems for many centuries to have been misapprehended. We have figured to ourselves a Saviour outside of ourselves, instead of within us. The process of salvation has been regarded as an external one, not the inward work of the Holy Spirit. It has been construction, rather than evolution. God has been in heaven and we upon earth. He has elaborated a “transaction”, as it has been called, not a process, and our acceptance with Him has been supposed to rest on a legal fiction, not on an external, necessary, incontrovertible principle. Christ’s Righteousness has been substituted for ours, not implanted in us by His Spirit. It is accepted *instead* of ours, not by *becoming* ours. He takes away God’s Wrath by bearing the punishment which was our due, not by identifying Himself with sinful, suffering Humanity, and working out from that point of view the victory over sin and the deliverance of the sinner from its yoke. Thus the whole scheme of salvation has become capricious, unnatural. It has appeared to many to rest on a subterfuge, unworthy of man, and therefore *a fortiori* derogatory to the Honour of God—to be contrary to the first principles of justice and truth implanted by Him in the human heart. Why should we not interpret the language of Scripture in a way which avoids the difficulties which have been fatal to the faith of so many? Why insist that God’s Wrath, or Justice, could only be satisfied by the exaction of a certain amount of punishment from some one, whether it were the actual offender or some one else, instead of as the vindication of God’s Justice and Love by the Sufferer, and the proclamation of the truth that only when each of us is content to bear other people’s burdens can the curse of sin be removed? Why not regard our acceptance with God as due to an actual God-given righteousness dwelling in our hearts? Why not explain the condemnation of our attempt to substitute our own righteousness for God’s as meaning that we must not attempt to substitute a righteousness worked out for ourselves, independent of God, and claiming recognition from Him as a right, for the Life of the Eternal Word, Incarnate in the flesh, communicated to us by the inflow into our hearts of His Eternal Spirit? The great theologian Godet has regarded the work of justification as the recognition by God of the fact that the process of redemption is going on in a soul, and its acceptance by God *because* that process is

going on. "The ultimate object of Christ's coming", he says, "is the re-establishment of sanctity in the individual soul; the forgiveness of sins is simply a means to that end." But he fails to recognize the truth which, as I have shown, is the very essence of all Scripture teaching, namely the impartation to us, through the Spirit, of the Life of the Incarnate Christ. Christ is still with him the heavenly Being working outside of us, not the very Life of our life. It is because God sees in us at least the rudimentary signs of the all-holy Presence of His Son; because He assumes that the work thus begun will be carried on, that he imputes Christ's Righteousness to us. It is because it is there, not in spite of its *not* being there; because it is the first step in the process of the reconciliation, not because it is a "transaction", in which God, for the maintenance of His own character and dignity, and to find the way out of an amazing difficulty, affects to see what is not to be seen, and pardons the guilty because a Divine scapegoat has been found. This is a very human way indeed of interpreting the secrets of the Most High. At least the way of treating the matter which I have indicated removes a difficulty which puzzled me for many long years;—namely, how St. Paul could tell us that we were not saved by our own works, that we must not lay claim to any righteousness of our own, and yet continually point to his own conduct as being an example to others, and as a witness to the truth of what he said. It was just because he had no separate righteousness of his own, just because his conduct was not due to any merit on his part, but was due to the Presence within him of the implanted Lord¹⁾, that he could dare to hold himself up as a model for other people to imitate. In himself he was "the chief of sinners". In his Lord he was what that Lord had made him. So he urges us to "work out our own salvation", on the ground that "it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure"²⁾.

I will not pretend to put forth a philosophy of the atone-

¹⁾ ἔμφυτον, James I, 21. Cf. 1 Pet. I, 13. If it is not fair to assume that the word λόγος in these pages is used in the same sense as that in which St. John uses it, it is certainly neither fair nor reasonable to assume the contrary.

²⁾ Phil. II, 12, 13. St. Paul's use of the word ἐνεργέω and its compounds may well be studied in connection with this line of thought.

ment. It may be centuries before we have learned fully to interpret the deep things of God, contained in His Holy Word in regard to that sacred mystery. But it is my belief that each worker in the field of interpretation of Divine things may contribute his mite to the progress of theological research, if he labour candidly, earnestly and humbly at that great and difficult work. What, then, may we venture to regard as having been the main features of Christ's Atoning Work, and in what sense may we understand the Sacrifice of the Cross, and the language of Scripture concerning it? First of all, let us note that the word Atonement has had a remarkable history. The almost universal acceptance of a particular theory of Atonement has led to a complete transformation of the meaning of the word. In the days when the authorized Version was made it meant At-one-ment—simple reconciliation and nothing more. Clarendon, in his History of the Great Rebellion, uses it in that sense. It was not until later times that it came to mean expiation by suffering. Readers, therefore, of the English Bible who interpret the word in its later sense when they find it there, are putting into it a sense which it was not meant to bear. It is used in the Old Testament to translate a word which means to cover or hide, and in the New to express the idea of *reconciliation by interchange*. But that this interchange must necessarily assume the form which later theology has insisted it must assume, may be regarded as "not proven".

How, then, may the language of Scripture concerning the Atoning Sacrifice be explained? Its two main features, as it seems to me are these. In the first place that Sacrifice may be regarded as the "Amen of Humanity" to the doctrine which the believers in revealed religion have ever been taught, that sin is a dangerous and a deadly thing, the one curse and plague which has afflicted humanity, that it is the destruction of all true human life, and that until it is utterly extirpated and destroyed there is no hope for the future of humanity¹). Next it seems to mean that as sin consists in the immediate gratification of selfish desire in contravention of the Divine Law, and the preference of one's own pleasure to the well-being of the race, the Sacrifice of the Cross was the proclamation of the great principle of the duty of the individual to put other men's welfare before

¹) Rom. VIII, 3.

his own, and to extirpate sin in the only way in which such extirpation is possible, by being ready, whenever called upon, to take upon ourselves cheerfully the burden of other men's sufferings, whatever they may be. The subordination of the individual to the race; the readiness to surrender the individual desires and instincts for the welfare of the whole, the utter destruction of fallen man, with his self-seeking aims; in this, and this only, consists the reversal of the Fall; by this and this only is the pathway opened to the Restoration and Perfection of Humanity. Jesus Christ our Master did this for Humanity in the abstract when He died upon the Cross. He sent His Spirit down to complete the work by applying it to the heart and conscience of each individual among us. By the imparting to us of the Divine Humanity the Spirit of Christ teaches each one of us—and He does more than teach us, He *impels* us—to die daily to sin, and to rise again to righteousness; nay, more, He convinces us that it is only by the daily death to sin, that the daily resurrection to righteousness can be achieved. Thus the At-one-ment for the race took place when on the Cross, once for all, the self-seeking human will was destroyed; and the self-sacrificing Will substituted for it. That At-one-ment takes place for the individual when he is finally identified with the Spirit of his Incarnate Lord. I must not stop to discuss the fact that when that identification of the individual man with the Will of God has been secured in all, then the At-one-ment has become an accomplished fact—we are all then One in Christ Jesus. I will only add that *while* this process is going on in us, and *because* it is going on in us, God is willing to “justify” us, that is to say to regard us as what at present we are not, but which we are tending to become, perfectly united to His Son and to each other “in one Mind and in one Judgment”, the Mind and Judgment of the Incarnate Lord. And it is just because He is thus pleased to take the will for the deed that we are, individually and collectively, “growing up into the Perfect Man, unto the measure of the stature of the Fulness of Christ”.

Cambridge.

J. J. LIAS.
