

**DISCOURSES AND
DISSERTATIONS ON THE
SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINES OF
ATONEMENT AND SACRIFICE**

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Discourses and dissertations on the scriptural doctrines of atonement and sacrifice by William Magee

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WILLIAM MAGEE

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DISSERTATIONS ON THE
SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINES OF
ATONEMENT AND SACRIFICE**

C. K. OGDEN

DISCOURSES AND DISSERTATIONS

ON THE SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINES OF

ATONEMENT AND SACRIFICE;

AND OF

THE PRINCIPAL ARGUMENTS ADVANCED, AND THE MODE
OF REASONING EMPLOYED, BY THE OPPONENTS OF THOSE DOCTRINES
AS HELD BY THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH :

WITH

AN APPENDIX,

CONTAINING SOME STRUCTURES OF

MR BELSHAM'S ACCOUNT OF THE UNITARIAN SCHEME,

IN HIS REVIEW OF MR WILBERFORCE'S TREATISE.

BY THE LATE

MOST REV. WILLIAM MAGEE, D.D.

ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN.

LONDON:

HENRY G. BOHN, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

WILLIAM CONYNGHAM PLUNKET.

In placing at the head of these sheets a name, to which the respect and the admiration of the public have attached so much celebrity, and in avowing, at the same time, that I have selected the name of a friend, with whom I have been united, almost from childhood, in the closest habits of intimacy, I am aware that I subject myself to the imputation of acting as much from a motive of pride as from a sentiment of affection. I admit the imputation to be well founded. To enjoy the happiness of having such a friend, and not to exult in the possession, would be not to deserve it. It is a pride which, I trust, may be indulged in without blame; and the distinction of having been associated with a character so transcendently eminent for private worth, for public virtue, and for intellectual endowments, I shall always regard as one of the most honourable circumstances of my life.

But, independently of these considerations, the very nature of my subject supplies a reason for the choice which I have made. For I know not, in truth, to whom I could, with greater propriety, inscribe a work whose chief end is to expose false reasoning and to maintain true religion, than to one in whom the powers of just reasoning are so conspicuously displayed, and by whom the great principles of religion are so sincerely revered.

With these views, I trust that I shall stand excused by you, my dear sir, in having, without your knowledge, thus availed myself of the credit of your name. The following treatise, in which so many additions have been made to a former publication, as in some measure to entitle it to the appellation of a new work, I submit to your judgment; well satisfied, that if it meet your approbation, it will not find an unfavourable reception from the public.

I am, my dear Sir,

With the truest attachment,

Your affectionate friend and servant,

THE AUTHOR.

TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN,
8th 21. 1820.

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PREFATORY ADDRESS.

TO THE STUDENTS IN DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN.

THE following Discourses, originally composed with a view to your instruction, are now with the same design submitted to your more deliberate examination.

In these latter days Christianity seems destined to undergo a fiercer trial than it has for many centuries experienced. Its defenders are called upon, not merely to resist the avowed invader, who assails the citadel from without, but the concealed and treacherous foe, who undermines the works, or tampers with the garrison within. The temporising Christian, who, under the mask of liberality, surrenders the fundamental doctrines of his creed; and the imposing Rationalist, who, by the illusions of a factitious resemblance, endeavours to substitute Philosophy for the Gospel; are enemies even more to be dreaded than the declared and systematic Deist. The open attacks of the one, directed against the *Evidences* of Christianity, have but served to strengthen the great outworks of our faith, by calling to its aid the united powers of its adherents; whilst the machinations of the others, secretly employed against the *Doctrines* of our religion, threaten, by eluding the vigilance, and lulling the suspicions, of its friends, to subvert through fraud what had been found impregnable by force. To aid these machinations, a modern and depraved philosophy hath sent abroad its pernicious sophistries, infecting the sources of morality, and enervating the powers of manly thought; and, the better to effect these purposes, clad in those engaging colours which are peculiarly adapted to captivate the imaginations of young and ardent minds. Against arts and enemies such as these, the most strenuous exertions of all who value the religion of Christ are at this moment imperiously demanded.

In what manner to prepare for this conflict we are informed on high authority. We are to "take unto us the whole armour of God—having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace: above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked: and taking the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." These are the arms which are to ensure us victory in the contest; and without these arms we neither can nor ought to stand. A conspiracy the most deep and deadly has been formed against Christianity. The "powers of darkness" have combined their mightiest efforts. If, then, the sentinels of the Gospel sleep upon their posts, if they do not instantly rouse to its defence, they are guilty of the blackest treason to their heavenly Master. There is no room for truce or accommodation. The "Captain of our salvation" has declared, that "he that is not with him is against him." The force of this declaration is at this day peculiarly manifest. It is now become necessary, that a broad and distinct line should be drawn between those who truly acknowledge the authority of revelation, and those who, whilst they wear the semblance of Christians, but lend the more effectual support to the enemies of Christianity.

These reflections, though befitting all who profess the religion of Christ, press peculiarly on those who are destined to teach and to enforce his word. To you, my young friends, who look forward to the clerical office, they are important beyond description; and, if allowed their due weight upon your minds, they cannot fail to stimulate to the most zealous and effectual exertions in your pursuit of sacred knowledge. Already, indeed, has a more enlightened spirit of religious inquiry been manifested amongst you. To promote that spirit, and to supply some additional security against the prevailing delusions of the day, these Discourses on the *Doctrines of Atonement and Sacrifice*,—doctrines against which, above all others, the Deist and the rationalizing Christian direct their attacks,—were originally delivered, and are now published.

The desire expressed for their publication by the existing divinity classes would have been long since complied with, but for the addition of certain arduous academic duties to the ordinary engagements of the author's collegiate situation. To those who are so well acquainted with the laborious employment which those duties and engagements necessarily impose, no apology can be requisite on the ground of delay. More than twelve months have elapsed since the greater part of these sheets were committed to the press; and the prosecution of the subject has been unavoidably suspended during a considerable portion of the intervening period.

The form in which the work is now presented seems more to require explanation. The first design extended only to the publication of the two Discourses, with a few occasional and supplementary remarks:

and on this plan the sermons were sent to press. But on farther consideration, it appeared advisable to enter into a more accurate and extensive examination of the subject, even though a short text should thereby be contrasted with a disproportionate body of notes. The great vice of the present day is a presumptuous precipitancy of judgment; and there is nothing from which the cause of Christianity, as well as of general knowledge, has suffered more severely than from that impatience of investigation, and that confidence of decision upon hasty and partial views, which mark the literary character of an age undeservedly extolled for its improvements in reasoning and philosophy. A false taste in morals is naturally connected with a false taste in literature; and the period of vicious dissipation is not likely to prove the era of dispassionate and careful inquiry. There is, however, no short way to truth. The nature of things will not accommodate itself to the laziness, the interests, or the vices of men. The paths which lead to knowledge are unalterably fixed, and can be traced only by slow and cautious steps.

From these considerations, it was judged expedient to submit the subject of these discourses, and the crude and superficial reasonings which have of late been exercised upon it, to a stricter and more minute test of inquiry. For this purpose, the present plan has been adopted as best suited to that exactness of critical investigation which is due to the importance of the subject, and as the most fitly calculated to direct the thoughts of the student to the most useful topics of inquiry, and the most profitable sources of information. Such a plan, I have little doubt, will be favourably received by those whose minds, trained in the habits of close deduction, and exercised in the researches of accurate science, cannot but be readily disposed to accept, in the place of general assertion and plausible declamation, a careful review of facts, and a cautious examination of Scripture.

One circumstance, which is of no mean value in the method here pursued, is, that it enables us, without interrupting the thread of inquiry, to canvass and appreciate the pretensions of certain modern writers, whose high tone of self-admiration, and loud vauntings of superior knowledge, have been but too successful in obtaining for them a partial and temporary ascendancy in public opinion; and who have employed the influence derived from that ascendancy to weaken the truths of Christianity, and to subvert the dearest interests of man. I trust that you, my young readers, will see enough in the Illustrations and Explanatory Dissertations accompanying these Discourses, to convince you of the emptiness of their claims to that superiority, which, did they possess it, would be applied to purposes so injurious. You will probably see sufficient reason to pronounce, that their pretensions to philosophic distinction, and their claims to critical pre-eminence, stand on no better grounds than their assumption of the exclusive profession of a pure Christianity. The confident and overbearing language of such men you will then regard as you ought: and, from the review of their reasonings, and the detail of their religious opinions, you will naturally be led to feel the full value of the duly regulated discipline of the youthful understanding, in those severer exercises of scientific study, which give vigour to the intellect, and steadiness to the judgment; and the still greater value of that early reverence for the mysterious sublimities of religion, which teaches the humility becoming man's highest powers when directed to the yet higher things of God. The half learning of modern times has been the fruitful parent of multiplied evils: and it is not without good cause, that the innovating theorist of the present day makes it his first object to abridge the work of education, and, under the pretence of introducing a system of more immediate practical utility, to exclude that wholesome discipline, and regular institution, which are essential to conduct the faculties of the young mind to sound and manly strength.

I cannot conclude this prefatory address without indulging in the gratifying reflection, that, whilst the deceptions of wit and the fascinations of eloquence, combined with a wily sophistry and an imposing confidence, have but too frequently produced their pernicious effects, to the detriment of a true Christian faith, on the minds of the inexperienced and unreflecting; these audacious attempts have seldom found, in this place, any other reception than that of contempt and aversion. And with true pleasure I feel myself justified in pronouncing with confidence, that, so long as the students of this seminary, intended for the office of the ministry, continue to evince the same serious attention to religious subjects which has of late years so honourably distinguished numbers of your body, and so profitably rewarded the zealous labours of your instructors in sacred literature, Christianity will have little to fear in this land from such attempts.

That you may gloriously persevere in these laudable efforts to attain the most useful of all learning, and in the conscientious endeavour to qualify yourselves for the due discharge of the most momentous of all duties; that so the work of God may not suffer in your hands; and that, being judged fit dispensers of that "wisdom which is from above," you may hereafter be enabled to "turn many to righteousness," and finally to obtain the recompense of the "good and faithful servants" of Christ, is the ardent wish and prayer of your very sincere friend,

THE AUTHOR.

TWO DISCOURSES

ON THE SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINES OF

ATONEMENT AND SACRIFICE ;

DELIVERED IN THE CHAPEL OF TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN, ON
GOOD FRIDAY, IN THE YEARS 1798 AND 1799.

DISCOURSE I.

"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called—Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." 1 Cor. I. 23, 24.

THAT the sublime mystery of the Redemption should have escaped the comprehension both of the Jew and of the Greek; that a crucified Saviour should have given offence to the worldly expectant of a triumphant Messiah, whilst the proud philosopher of the schools turned with disdain from the humiliating doctrine which proclaimed the insufficiency of human reason, and threatened to bend its aspiring head before the foot of the Cross,—were events which the matured growth of national prejudice, on the one hand, and the habits of contentious discussion, aided by a depraved moral system, on the other, might, in the natural course of things, have been expected to produce. That the Son of God had descended from heaven; that he had disrobed himself (No. I.) of the glory which he had with the Father before the world began; that he had assumed the form of the humblest and most degraded of men; that, submitting to a life of reproach, and want, and sorrow, he had closed the scene with a death of ignominy and torture; and that, through this voluntary degradation and suffering, a way of reconciliation with the Supreme Being had been opened to the whole human race, and an atonement made for those transgressions, from the punishment of which unassisted reason could have devised no means of escape,—these are truths which prejudice and pride could not fail, at all times, to have

rejected; and these are truths to which the irreligion and self-sufficiency of the present day oppose obstacles not less insurmountable than those which the prejudice of the Jew, and the philosophy of the Greek, presented in the age of the apostle. For at this day, when we boast a wider diffusion of learning, and more extensive acquirements of moral knowledge, do we not find these fundamental truths of revelation questioned? Do we not see the haughtiness of lettered scepticism presuming to reject the proffered terms of salvation, because it cannot trace, with the finger of human science, the connection between the cross of Christ and the redemption of man? But to these vain and presumptuous aspirings after knowledge placed beyond human reach, we are commanded to preach Christ crucified: which, however it may, to the self-fancied wise ones of this world, appear as foolishness, is yet, to those who will humble their understanding to the dispensations of the Almighty, the grandest display of the divine perfections—"Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

To us also, my brethren, who profess a conviction of this truth, and who are called on by the return of this day, (No. II.) more particularly to recollect the great work of salvation, wrought out for us by the memorable event which it records, it may not be unprofitable to take a short view of the objections that have been urged against this fundamental doctrine (No. III.) of our religion; that so we may the better discern those snares which beset the Christian path, and that, being guarded against the obstructions which are insidiously raised against that true and gospel faith, whereby alone we can hope for accep-

tance and happiness, we may be able to place the great pillar of our hopes upon a basis which no force can shake, and no art can undermine.

In the consideration of this subject, which every Christian must deem most highly deserving the closest examination, our attention should be directed to two different classes of objectors,—those who deny the necessity of any mediation whatever, and those who question the particular nature of that mediation which has been appointed. Whilst the Deist, on the one hand, ridicules the very notion of a Mediator; and the philosophising Christian, on the other, fashions it to his own hypothesis; we are called on to vindicate the word of truth from the injurious attacks of both, and carefully to secure it, not only against the open assaults of its avowed enemies, but against the more dangerous misrepresentations of its false or mistaken friends.

The objections which are peculiar to the former are, upon this subject, of the same description with those which they advance against every other part of revelation; bearing with equal force against the system of Natural Religion, which they support, as against the doctrines of Revealed Religion, which they oppose. And, indeed, this single circumstance, if weighed with candour and reflection—that is, if the Deist were truly the philosopher he pretends to be—might suffice to convince him of his error. For the closeness of the analogy between the works of Nature and the word of the Gospel being found to be such, that every blow which is aimed at the one rebounds with undiminished force against the other, the conviction of their common origin must be the inference of unbiassed understanding.

Thus, when, in the outset of his argument, the Deist tells us, that, as obedience must be the object of God's approbation, and disobedience the ground of his displeasure, it must follow, by natural consequence, that, when men have transgressed the divine commands, repentance and amendment of life will place them in the same situation as if they had never offended; he does not recollect, that actual experience of the course of nature directly contradicts the assertion, and that, in the common occurrences of life, the man who, by intemperance and voluptuousness, has injured his character, his fortune, and his health, does not find himself instantly restored to the full enjoyment of these blessings on repenting of his past misconduct, and determining on future amendment. Now, if the attributes of the Deity demand that the punishment should not outlive the crime, on what ground shall we justify this temporal dispensation? The difference in degree cannot affect the question in the least. It matters not whether the punishment be of long or of

short duration; whether in this world or in the next. If the justice or the goodness of God require that punishment should not be inflicted when repentance has taken place, it must be a violation of those attributes to permit any punishment whatever, the most slight, or the most transient. Nor will it avail to say, that the evils of this life attendant upon vice are the effects of an established constitution, and follow in the way of natural consequence. Is not that established constitution itself the effect of the divine decree? and are not its several operations as much the appointment of its Almighty Framer, as if they had individually flowed from his immediate direction? But, besides, what reason have we to suppose that God's treatment of us in a future state will not be of the same nature as we find it in this—according to established rules, and in the way of natural consequence? Many circumstances might be urged, on the contrary, to evince the likelihood that it will. But this is not necessary to our present purpose. It is sufficient that the Deist cannot prove that it will not. Our experience of the present state of things evinces, that indemnity is not the consequence of repentance here: can he adduce a counter-experience to shew that it will hereafter? The justice and goodness of God are not, then, necessarily concerned, in virtue of the sinner's repentance, to remove all evil consequent upon sin in the next life; or else the arrangement of events in this has not been regulated by the dictates of justice and goodness. If the Deist admits the latter, what becomes of his Natural Religion?

Now let us inquire whether the conclusions of abstract reasoning will coincide with the deductions of experience. If obedience be at all times our duty, in what way can present repentance release us from the punishment of former transgressions? (No. IV.) Can repentance annihilate what is past? Or, can we do more, by present obedience, than acquit ourselves of present obligation? Or, does the contrition we experience, added to the positive duties we discharge, constitute a surplussage of merit, which may be transferred to the reduction of our former demerit? And is the justification of the philosopher, who is too enlightened to be a Christian, to be built, after all, upon the absurdities of supererogation? "We may as well affirm," says a learned divine, "that our former obedience atones for our present sins, as that our present obedience makes amends for antecedent transgressions." And it is surely with a peculiar ill grace, that this sufficiency of repentance is urged by those who deny the possible efficacy of Christ's mediation; since the ground on which they deny the latter, equally serves for the rejection of the former: the necessary connection between the merits of one being, and