

**THE ATONEMENT.  
[NEW YORK]**

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The Atonement. [New York] by Borden P. Bowne

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## Preface

*This study of the atonement, while dealing with theory, has mainly a practical aim. It is due to the conviction that the gracious truth in the doctrine has often been hidden from us by theological theories which, while well-meant, are really confusing or misleading. Further, while many of these theories are antiquated or greatly modified in most theological circles, their echoes remain in popular religious thought, and trouble many minds which have not learned to distinguish between the Christian fact and the theological theory. Thus the doctrine of Divine*

*Grace itself becomes a stumbling-block and offense unto many. To help such minds, not to instruct theologians, is the aim of this study. It is not offered as a treatise on the subject, but rather as a series of thoughts on the atonement.*

BORDEN P. BOWNE.

*February, 1900.*

## The Atonement

THE Christian Church has always held that a great work of Divine grace has been wrought for the salvation of men. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." "Ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich." "He loved us and gave himself for us." Such passages set forth the work of love; and because of this work the forgiveness of sins is promised unto



all those who turn to God in repentance and faith. Apart from metaphor and theory, the sum of the matter is a work of supreme and infinite love on the part of God for the blessing of men.

But assuming the reality of such a work, the question arises, How shall it be expressed and made accessible to our minds? A little reflection convinces us that there must always be something transcendental in the divine life and activity to which our earth-born thought, and especially our "matter-molded" forms of speech can only approximate. Thought itself has its parallax with reality when dealing with these high themes; and even when we are sure we have the right conception, we see it vanishing into mystery on the farther side. Such conceptions are of the nature of limits to which we must

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approximate, but can not fully attain. Approached from the side of experience we see their necessity; but when we take them abstractly and absolutely, and reflect upon them in their metaphysical possibility, we soon find ourselves wandering in "endless mazes lost." Conceptions of this type are clear only from the side of the facts; if we attempt to approach them from the farther side, or by the way of deductive speculation, we only delude and confuse ourselves.

We may illustrate our meaning by our conception of the divine life and consciousness. When we attempt to construe our experience of the inner and outer world, we are shut up to the affirmation of an absolute and intelligent cause as their only adequate source. But as soon as we seek to construe this cause in its inner life, we find mysteries thronging upon us. We

have to affirm an unbegun life of tideless fullness, of unchanging self-possession, a life transcending time, and subject to no spatial limitations. How mysterious this is! Our own life of spatial and temporal limitation furnishes a very inadequate key; and we have to be constantly on our guard against transferring to that life conceptions born of our own limitations.

This illustrates what is meant by saying that thought itself has a parallax with reality which we must never forget. A further parallax is found in language, which is only an imperfect instrument for the expression of an already imperfect thought. All language for expressing spiritual things is necessarily based on metaphor. However spiritual the conception itself may be, it can find linguistic expression only through some