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ON THE ATONEMENT

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Reflection: Meeting Christ in the Shadow of Death

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PROLEGOMENA

D. W. Congdon

As many people have observed, there is no *dogma* of the atonement—that is, no council, pope, or ecumenical authority has ever established how the death of Jesus accomplishes our reconciliation with God. Consequently, Robert Jenson observes, “If you deny that Christ is ‘of one being with the Father,’ or that the Son and Jesus are but one hypostasis, you are formally a heretic. But you can deny any explanation of how the atonement works, or all of them together, or even deny that any explanation is possible, and be a perfectly orthodox believer.”¹ The result of having no ecumenical consensus on the atonement has been a proliferation, especially in recent years, of theological engagements with this important doctrine. In particular, the crucicentrism of modern evangelicalism has led many contemporary Protestant theologians to devote their attention to this doctrine above all others.

It is in the light of this complex theological history that we present this fall issue of the *Princeton Theological Review* on the doctrine of the atonement. While our journal seeks to represent the broad spectrum of views within the ecumenical church, we also recognize the impossibility of truly doing justice to a doctrine as theologically and historically rich as the doctrine of the atonement. This issue seeks to contribute to the larger ecumenical conversation through original articles that address the atonement from exegetical, theological, and historical standpoints.

In the first article, Nathan Hieb, a Princeton Theological Seminary Ph.D. student, examines the interconnection between incarnation and atonement in the theologies of Cyril of Alexandria, Nestorius, and Schleiermacher. Hieb presents Cyril as a model for contemporary constructive theology, in that Cyril recognizes the important dogmatic relation—what Hieb calls the “inner logic”—between these two central doctrines of the faith. Sharon Baker, Assistant Professor of Theology and Religion at Messiah College, argues for a radical rethinking of atonement as forgiveness rather than satisfaction in her article, “Justice, Mercy, and Forgiveness: Jesus’ Cross to Bare.” Baker looks to medieval theology and postmodern philosophy—including Thomas Aquinas and John Caputo, among others—in an attempt to articulate a nonviolent doctrine of the atonement.

Matthew Forrest Lowe evaluates the *Christus Victor* conception of the atonement as advanced by Gustaf Aulen in relation to the Roman imperial context. Lowe places theology in dialogue with the biblical text and the social sciences in order to reappropriate and recontextualize the *Christus Victor* view as a more clearly counter-imperial theology of *Christus Coronatum*. Darren Sumner looks at the metaphors used by John Calvin in his attempt to describe the work

1 Robert Jenson, “On the Doctrine of the Atonement,” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 27:2 (2006), 100.

of Christ in a way that is faithful to the myriad images found in the biblical text. Sumner demonstrates how Calvin's variegated approach to the atonement allows him to encompass recapitulation, ransom, penal substitution, blood sacrifice, and *Christus Victor* in his theology of Christ's saving work. Sumner argues that Calvin's theology is held together by a consistent emphasis on the themes of mediation and substitution.

The final three articles look at the atonement from a more exegetical standpoint. Melanie Bair, a student at Messiah College, examines the understanding of atonement found in Leviticus, particularly in relation to the Day of Atonement. She argues that Leviticus conceives of atonement "as a process of reconciliation whereby the *nephesh* of God is reconciled to the *nephesh* of humans through an intermediary *nephesh*." She then applies this conception to the death of Jesus. In his article on penal substitution in Romans 3, Jarvis Williams briefly exegetes the text of Paul's epistle in order to show how Paul views the death of Jesus as a means of satisfying the wrath of God. And, finally, Amy Julia Becker queries the common practice of interpreting 2 Corinthians 5:21—"For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"—metaphorically rather than literally. Becker argues that, in this verse, Paul presents a radical doctrine of atonement where God enters into the ontological reality of sin in Jesus Christ—what she calls the "un-creation of Christ," in that Christ enters into the "nothingness" of sin.

Finally, we are also publishing a reflection by Princeton Seminary student, Cambria Kaltwasser. In her reflection, "Meeting Christ in the Shadow of Death," Kaltwasser frames the atoning death of Christ in the context of her own mother's death. She reflects on the fact that Christ not only died in our place but also lived among us in a world of brokenness in order to redeem humanity from within. This reflection was the winner of our inaugural theological reflection contest, which the *PTR* began in order to encourage students to write short, insightful essays on the theme of that particular issue.

Surely, in an age of such prodigious scholarship on the atonement, an issue on the doctrine of the atonement requires justification. Such justification will not come, however, in the form of statements about where current scholarship is lacking or where the tradition has gone awry. No, our age has plenty of such scholarship already, and the church has much to gain from such rigorous theological thinking. The only true justification is, however, doxological: we must learn again and again what it means to worship and confess that Jesus Christ is Savior, that "he is our peace" (Eph. 2:14), that we "have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:19), and that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). In this Advent season, let us remember the words of Simeon, who held Jesus and praised God, saying, "for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Lk. 2:30-32).

CYRIL, NESTORIUS, AND SCHLEIERMACHER ON THE RELATION BETWEEN THE INCARNATION AND THE ATONEMENT

Nathan Hieb

Historians often portray the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E. as the bitter nadir of the quarrel between Cyril and Nestorius remembered for its pervasive hostility, harsh tactical maneuvers, and incessant political intrigue that led eventually to the exile of the former Patriarch of Constantinople to a life of nomadic obscurity in 433.¹ Yet, in spite of this council's negative tenor, important theological insights emerged regarding the relation between Christ's divinity and humanity that influenced the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and that continue to be relevant to constructive theology today. In particular this debate holds significance for the doctrine of atonement, which Cyril acknowledges in the final two of twelve anathemas he composed against Nestorius one year before the Council of Ephesus:

11. If anyone does not confess that the flesh of the Lord is life-giving ... because it became the own [flesh] of the Word who is able to give life to all things, let him be anathema.

12. If anyone does not confess that the Word of God suffered in the flesh and was crucified in the flesh and tasted death in the flesh, and became the first-born of the dead, although he is as God Life and life-giving, let him be anathema.²

For Cyril, Christ's flesh is life-giving because it is united to Christ's divinity and this union is essential to our redemption from the corruption of sin. Within anathemas eleven and twelve exists the implicit thesis that our interpretation of the incarnation determines the conceptual structure of our view of the atonement. For this reason, Cyril believes that his dispute with Nestorius does not simply concern Christological technicalities regarding how we think about

1 For a vivid description of the unsavory nature of the Third Ecumenical Council, see Dean Milman's comments quoted in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Vol. 3: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 723, footnote 1. For more on the historical background of the debate between Nestorius and Cyril, see Schaff, 714-729; Edward R. Hardy, "The Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius," *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1954), 349; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Vol. 1* (San Francisco: Harper, 1975), 164-169.

2 Cyril of Alexandria, "The Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius," *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1954), 354.

the relation between Christ's divinity and humanity but that it cuts to the heart of how we understand Christ's work of redemption.³ This paper explores Cyril's thesis concerning the close connection between the incarnation and the atonement by setting forth Nestorius' argument against, and Cyril's argument for, the use of *theotokos* as a title for Mary. The modern relevance of Cyril's thesis is then tested with reference to Friedrich Schleiermacher.

NESTORIUS

In what was surely a memorable sermon in its day, Nestorius pointedly asks, "Does God have a mother?"⁴ The widespread use at that time of *theotokos* ("Mother of God") as a title for Mary clearly answers this question in the affirmative.⁵ Nestorius suggests, however, that if *theotokos* is a correct description of Mary, then Hebrews 7 must be incorrect when it states that Christ is "without father or mother" like Melchizedek. For Nestorius, the affirmation of the Nicene declaration concerning the Son's divinity and eternal existence logically entails the rejection of the title "mother of God," because Mary did not in any way contribute to the origin of the Son's existence in eternity: "A creature did not produce him who is uncreateable."⁶ Rather, she should be called the "Mother of Christ," for she gave birth to his humanity alone.⁷ Closely related to his avoidance of attributing the Logos' origination to Mary, Nestorius emphasizes the separation and distinction between Christ's divinity and humanity in a way that Cyril will consider too extreme. According to Nestorius, Christ exists in a "twofold"⁸ state in which his divinity and humanity relate by "conjunction"⁹ rather than union. The external character of this conjunction ensures that Christ's experiences of human limitation, especially his birth, suffering, and death, do not in any way subtract from his full divinity.¹⁰ Since Christ's humanity alone experienced birth, suffering, and death, any attribution of these experiences to Christ's divinity, such as

3 George Hunsinger also argues that one's view of the incarnation is inseparable from one's understanding of the atonement. He writes, "[T]he person (*p*) and the work (*w*) of Christ mutually imply each other: If *w*, then *p*; and if *p*, then *w* . . ." See George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character," *Disruptive Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 131, fn 2. See also Schaff, 720.

4 Nestorius, "First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*," *The Christological Controversy*, ed. Richard A. Norris (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 124-125.

5 On the centrality of *theotokos* to the debate between Cyril and Nestorius, see Schaff, 718.

6 Nestorius, "First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*," 124-125.

7 Nestorius, "Second Letter to Cyril," in *The Christological Controversy*, ed. Richard A. Norris (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 137.

8 Nestorius, "First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*," 129.

9 Nestorius, "Second Letter to Cyril," 137-138.

10 Cyril notes the externality of Nestorius' view in *On the Unity of Christ*, trans. John Anthony McGuckin (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1995), 81. Schaff also interprets Nestorius as claiming that the two natures of Christ "hold an outward, mechanical relation to each other, in which each retains its peculiar attributes, forbidding any sort of *communicatio idiomatum*" (719).

using *theotokos* as a title for Mary, is deeply mistaken.

In sermons and letters, Nestorius employs vivid metaphors that forcefully depict the separation and division he sees between Christ's divinity and humanity. In one sermon he calls Christ's humanity an "instrument of the Godhead"¹¹ and claims that Christ put on our nature "like a garment."¹² Elsewhere he argues that Christ's body is a "temple of the Son's deity."¹³ In particularly striking imagery, which emphasizes both the externality of conjunction and the duality of personhood latent in his understanding of Christ, Nestorius describes Christ's divinity as taking up his human nature in much the same way that one person will pick up someone else who has fallen to the ground.¹⁴ These two people are now connected to the degree that one is carrying the other, and yet they remain two separate and distinct individuals. Nestorius further emphasizes this separation in passing references to Christ's humanity as "the assumed man," in his statement that "God is within the one who was assumed," and in his claim that Christ's burial belongs to "this man, not to the deity."¹⁵

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Unlike Nestorius, Cyril affirms the use of "*theotokos*" as a title for Mary because of his insistence upon the indivisible union "without confusion or change" of Christ's divine and human natures.¹⁶ Central to Cyril's argument is John 1:14, "The Word became flesh," which he interprets to mean that the Logos "appropriat[ed] a human body to himself in such an indissoluble union that it has to be considered as his very own body."¹⁷ The entrance of the Logos into the human condition is so radical, according to Cyril, that the Logos inseparably and permanently becomes human while remaining divine. Though the human nature of Christ is the same as that of every other human, the ontological status of the

11 Nestorius, "First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*," 124-125, 129.

12 Nestorius, "First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*," 128.

13 Nestorius, "Second Letter to Cyril," 138.

14 Nestorius, "First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*," 125.

15 Nestorius, "First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*," 128-130. It seems that Cyril is correct when he argues that Nestorius' embrace of conjunction instead of union leads to "the assertion of two Sons." Cyril of Alexandria, "Second Letter to Nestorius," *The Christological Controversy*, ed. Richard A. Norris (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 134. Schaff argues that the position of Nestorius "pressed the distinction of the two natures to double personality" (718). Schaff goes on to write, "The Antiochian and Nestorian theory amounts therefore, at bottom, to a duality of person in Christ, though without clearly avowing it. It cannot conceive the reality of the two natures without a personal independence for each" (720).

16 Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 73-77. Cyril rejects Nestorius' notion of conjunction because it implies, in his view, that Christ's divinity and humanity could be disjoined in the future, *On the Unity of Christ*, 81. For more on Cyril's rejection of Nestorius' view of "conjunction," see *On the Unity of Christ*, 60-61, 63, 73-74, 88, and Cyril's "Second Letter to Nestorius," 132-134.

17 Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 63, 77. See also Cyril of Alexandria, "Second Letter to Nestorius," 134-135.

person of Christ is thoroughly unique because he is the only one to possess both a divine and a human nature.¹⁸ In contrast to Nestorius, who externalizes the relation of Christ's divinity and humanity to the degree that it is difficult to see how he may avoid affirming the existence of two persons in Christ, Cyril posits an internal relation between Christ's divinity and humanity in which they mutually indwell each other in perichoretic union as two inseparable, yet unconfused, aspects of the one person of Jesus Christ.

For Cyril, the union of Christ's divinity and humanity occurred in the womb of Mary, therefore the eternal Logos experienced a human birth and Mary is the *theotokos*.¹⁹ Cyril argues that this assertion is not equivalent to the claim that the Logos began to exist in Mary's womb. Rather, the Logos experienced a human birth because the Logos was united to human flesh in Mary's womb in such a way that the birth experienced by the flesh of Jesus Christ is also attributed to the Logos. Through union with human flesh, the divine Logos is also united to the human experiences associated with this flesh. There is no contradiction, then, in the claim that the Logos truly experienced human birth while also eternally pre-existing this birth as God. To claim that the Logos did not experience human birth, and that therefore Mary is not the *theotokos*, is to deny that the humanity of Jesus is also "God and Son."²⁰

According to Cyril, as the eternal Logos experienced human birth, the impassible divinity of Christ experienced human suffering. One should not lightly dismiss Cyril at this point due to the apparent contradiction of terms; his careful argumentation contains a precision capable of clearing away a great deal of post-modern confusion concerning God's experience of the human condition in Christ. In *On the Unity of Christ* and in his "Second Letter to Nestorius," Cyril argues that Christ's divinity is impassible due to its incorporeality,²¹ suggesting that he is only speaking of physical suffering and not of the psychological and emotional agony that looms so large in most contemporary discussions of divine passibility.²²

18 Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 77-79; "Second Letter to Nestorius," 132-133.

19 Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 55, 64; "Second Letter to Nestorius," 133.

20 Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 64.

21 In *On the Unity of Christ*, Cyril writes, "... as God [Christ] is bodiless and lies entirely outside suffering" (121). In his "Second Letter to Nestorius," Cyril also states, "... the divine, since it is incorporeal, is impassible. Since, however, the body that had become his own underwent suffering, he is ... said to have suffered these things for our sakes, for the impassible One was within the suffering body" (133).

22 Jürgen Moltmann, following Karl Barth, believes that God is able to experience the suffering of love. Moltmann claims that the Father experienced the "infinite grief of love" at the death of the Son on the cross and for this reason explicitly rejects the affirmations of divine impassibility made by Cyril, Thomas, and others. Moltmann does not recognize, though, that Cyril is using a definition of suffering limited to physical corporeality which entails a very different definition of divine impassibility. In my view, Moltmann is unjustly dismissive of Cyril and thereby loses an important resource that could have benefited his own project. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*

In *On the Unity of Christ*, Cyril carefully explains how Christ suffered impassibly.²³ He points to I Peter 3:18 as evidence that Christ suffered “in the flesh”; the flesh, therefore, is the place “where the suffering occurs.”²⁴ Cyril believes that Christ’s flesh is vulnerable to the physical experience of suffering in a way that incorporeal divinity is not. By this move he continues to affirm the impassibility of Christ’s divine nature, even in the experience of the cross, while also claiming that Christ’s divine and human natures are so profoundly united that the human experiences attributed to Christ’s flesh also belong to Christ’s divinity by virtue of this union. Christ’s divinity, because it is incorporeal, does not have the biophysical components necessary to receive and to process experiences of physical suffering. Yet Christ’s divinity experiences human suffering through the biophysical components of the flesh to which it is united. Simply put, Christ’s flesh mediates biophysical experiences to Christ’s divinity.²⁵ Christ’s divinity remains impassible for Cyril, and yet the indissoluble union of Christ’s divine/human person experiences suffering “in the flesh.” Cyril in this way demonstrates that the experiences of Christ’s humanity, such as birth, suffering, and death, become the experiences of Christ’s divinity without compromising divine impassibility.²⁶

(Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 228-229. Barth writes, “[T]he personal God has a heart. He can feel, and be affected. He is not impassible.” See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (New York: T&T Clark, 1957), 370. Barth later speaks of “the empty loveless gods which are incapable of condescension and self-humiliation” and which are exposed as false by the loving humiliation of Jesus Christ. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (New York: T&T Clark, 1956), 132.

23 Cyril of Alexandria, “On the Unity of Christ,” 115-118.

24 Cyril of Alexandria, “On the Unity of Christ,” 117.

25 Cyril argues that Christ, “though being by his own nature impassible, suffered in the flesh for us, according to the Scriptures, and he was in the crucified flesh impassibly making his own the sufferings of his own flesh.” See Cyril of Alexandria, “The Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius,” 351. Elsewhere Cyril states that by becoming human the Logos reveals human flesh to be “his very own, so that even the suffering might be said to be his because it was his own body which suffered and no one else’s.” Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 118. Cyril further claims that to regard experiences of suffering and death as something that is experienced directly by Christ’s divinity without the mediation of flesh “would be insanity.” Cyril of Alexandria, “Second Letter to Nestorius,” 134.

26 Cyril is clearly following Athanasius regarding the impassible suffering of God in Jesus Christ. In “On the Incarnation of the Word,” Athanasius argues that physical experiences such as eating, being born, and suffering are attributed to God by virtue of the union of Christ’s divinity and humanity while he also affirms divine impassibility. Athanasius, “On the Incarnation of the Word,” *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy, trans. Archibald Robertson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1954), 72, 108. In Book III of his “Orations Against the Arians,” Athanasius again asserts that affliction, death, and the human weaknesses of the body are predicated of God “for our sakes in the flesh” while divine impassibility is preserved. Athanasius, “Orations Against the Arians,” *The Christological Controversy*, ed. Richard A. Norris (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 90-93.

Cyril identifies additional problems that may arise from Nestorius' use of "conjunction" rather than "union" to describe the relation between Christ's divinity and humanity. As mentioned earlier, Nestorius' use of "conjunction" risks introducing division into the "integral whole" of Christ's person which leads to the assertion that there are actually two Sons in Christ, one human and one divine.²⁷ Cyril also believes that "conjunction" does not adequately describe Christ's uniqueness because every Christian is conjoined to God: "the Word also dwells in us."²⁸ For Cyril, the union of divinity and humanity in the one person of Jesus Christ is unique and essentially different than the Christian's spiritual encounter with God because Christians, even the greatest saints among us, are not divine.²⁹ Finally, Cyril finds Nestorius' use of conjunction unstable for that which is "added on from outside"³⁰ may potentially be lost, leaving us uncertain if Christ's humanity will always remain conjoined to his divinity.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of Nestorius' Christology for Cyril, though, is the implication it carries for the doctrine of atonement. Divinization, or *theosis*, is the theory of atonement primarily operative in Cyril's thinking. This view claims that Christ in the incarnation takes upon himself our corrupted humanity in order to reconstitute and renew it in such a way that we may receive by grace the benefits that belong to Christ's divine nature.³¹ In this redemptive movement, Christ as the eternal Son of the Father empties himself for our sake, taking upon himself our lowly condition and fallen flesh, in order that we might be exalted with him as the adopted children of God: "he took what was ours to be his very own so that we might have all that was his."³² For Cyril, the implication of Nestorian Christology for redemption is clear:

When they say that the Word of God did not become flesh, or rather did not undergo birth from a woman according to the flesh, they bankrupt the economy of salvation, for if he who was rich did not impoverish himself, abasing himself to our condition out of tender love, then we have not

27 Cyril of Alexandria, "Second Letter to Nestorius," 134.

28 Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 74, 80.

29 Cyril of Alexandria, "The Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius," 350-351.

30 Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 81.

31 Cyril writes, "[T]he Son came, or rather was made man, in order to reconstitute our condition within himself; first of all in his own holy, wonderful, and truly amazing birth and life. This was why he himself became the first one to be born of the Holy Spirit ... so that he could trace a path for grace to come to us. He wanted us to have this intellectual regeneration and spiritual assimilation to himself, who is the true and natural Son, so that we too might be able to call God our Father." Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 62; see also 35, 81, 82, 88, 95. Elements of an *Irenaeus* theory of recapitulation may also be seen in Cyril's thought. See *On the Unity of Christ*, 59-60, 105-106, 121.

32 Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 59. For more on our adoption as children of God see *On the Unity of Christ*, 63. The famous statement by Athanasius provides a concise summary of *theosis*: "[Christ] was humanized that we might be deified." See Athanasius, "On the Incarnation of the Word," 107.

gained his riches but are still in our poverty, still enslaved by sin and death, because the Word becoming flesh is the undoing and the abolition of all that fell upon human nature as our curse and punishment.³³

If the Word did not become flesh, which is what Cyril believes any denial of *theotokos* entails, nothing less than salvation is cast into doubt.³⁴ In Cyril's eleventh anathema against Nestorius he argues that the flesh of Christ is life-giving because it is the flesh of God. In the twelfth anathema Cyril argues that the Logos "suffered in the flesh and was crucified in the flesh and tasted death in the flesh" when he offered himself, according to anathema ten, as an atoning sacrifice for our sin.³⁵ In these anathemas we may discern Cyril's implicit thesis that the incarnation determines the conceptual structure of the doctrine of atonement. No subtraction from the complete union of Christ's divinity and humanity may occur without there being a corresponding reduction in the effectiveness of Christ's work, and any revision of the incarnation entails a significant revision of the meaning of redemption. Conversely, if one desires to make certain assertions regarding the atonement, then one must affirm a view of the incarnation that supports these assertions.³⁶ Yet, to what extent does Cyril's thesis hold when one is dealing with a vastly different theological system? Friedrich Schleiermacher's reinterpretation of the incarnation provides an opportunity to test the relevance of this thesis for modern theology.

FRIEDRICH SCHLEIERMACHER

Schleiermacher's view of the incarnation is neither Nestorian nor Cyrillian since he affirms the union of divinity and humanity in Christ and yet uniquely redefines Christ's "divinity." Schleiermacher regards the language of "two natures" in Jesus Christ as nonsensical because any actual combination of divinity and humanity would lead either to a third mixture that is "neither divine nor human," to a Nestorian separation of divinity and humanity at the expense of union, or to the unbalanced dominance of one nature over the other.³⁷ For this and other reasons, Schleiermacher rejects the traditional Chalcedonian pattern regarding Christ's divine and human natures and argues instead that the divinity of Christ,

33 Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 59-60.

34 Within Cyril's theology, the efficacy of *theosis* is dependant upon the eternal Son's complete union with human flesh, and for this reason he calls the incarnation "the root of our salvation" and "the cornerstone of our hope." See Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 60.

35 Cyril of Alexandria, "The Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius," 354.

36 Hunsinger, 131.

37 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (New York: T&T Clark, 1999), 394. Following Schleiermacher, Paul Tillich argues that "the assertion that 'God has become man' is not a paradoxical but a nonsensical statement." Rather, Tillich prefers to speak of Christ as "divine" or as one in whom "God is manifest." See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), 94-95. It is advisable that current Christological discussions clearly designate how words such as "divine" are being used with reference to Christ in order to lessen the confusion that arises from the subtle redefinition of terms.

his “peculiar dignity,”³⁸ is his powerful and continuous experience of the God-consciousness. He writes, “The Redeemer, then, is like all men in virtue of the identity of human nature, but distinguished from them all by the constant potency of His God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in Him.”³⁹ Combined with this move is Schleiermacher’s attempt to naturalize the appearance of the constantly potent God-consciousness in such a way that the pre-conditions for it exist within every person.⁴⁰ Perhaps Schleiermacher’s redefinition of the meaning of incarnation is most clearly seen in his interpretation of the verse that is so central to Cyril’s arguments: “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). Of this verse Schleiermacher writes, “‘Word’ is the activity of God expressed in the form of consciousness”; in short, the Word becoming flesh is equivalent to a human experiencing a constant and powerful God-consciousness.⁴¹

In the foregoing we have seen that Schleiermacher does indeed reconceptualize the incarnation in a unique way. If Cyril’s thesis that the incarnation determines the conceptual structure of the doctrine of atonement is correct, then the innovation introduced by Schleiermacher to the doctrine of incarnation should lead to a corollary innovation in his view of redemption. There are two ways that Schleiermacher’s view of redemption confirms Cyril’s thesis. First, he reinterprets the meaning of redemption using terms that correlate to his prior redefinition of Christ’s divinity as God-consciousness. While Schleiermacher affirms the importance of Christ’s suffering and death, he limits this importance to their display of Christ’s “imperturbable blessedness” and their demonstration of his sympathy and love for humanity.⁴² Schleiermacher does not view redemption as entailing the transformation of corrupt humanity in the sense proposed by Cyril’s model of *theosis*, nor does he advance a forensic model drawn from Pauline texts concerning our legal justification before God.⁴³ Rather, Schleiermacher believes

38 Schleiermacher, 386.

39 Schleiermacher, 385. Later, he restates his position as follows: “[T]o ascribe to Christ an absolutely powerful God-consciousness, and to attribute to Him an existence of God in Him, are exactly the same thing. The expression, ‘the existence of God in anyone,’ can only express the relation of the omnipresence of God to this one” (387); also 386, 397.

40 Schleiermacher, 64. The divine activity in Christ which enables the manifestation of his unique God-consciousness is the single and continuous divine act of creation/preservation which is operative within each of us. Schleiermacher argues, “And we know no divine activity except that of creation, which includes that of preservation, or, conversely, that of preservation, which includes that of creation” (426). Later he writes, “we do not admit the reality of any individual and temporal divine acts” (569).

41 Schleiermacher, 397. In spite of these statements, Schleiermacher disparages the Ebionitic view of the person of Christ which “leave[s] no room for any essential distinction between Christ and an exceptional man” (396). Yet, he seems to display Ebionitic tendencies in that the extent of the “essential distinction” between Christ and any other person is Christ’s uniquely constant and powerful experience of the God-consciousness.

42 Schleiermacher, 436, 457-458.

43 For Schleiermacher, Christ’s suffering and death illustrate that the connection

that redemption consists of humanity's reception of Christ's constant and powerful God-consciousness.⁴⁴ For this reason he opposes any "wounds theology" that perceives atoning significance in Christ's suffering and death because, in Schleiermacher's view, these elements in Christ's experience do not contribute to the reconciliation of humanity with God.⁴⁵ Second, Schleiermacher speaks of our reception of redemption in naturalized terms that avoid any appeal to a supernatural encounter between God and the Christian. For Schleiermacher, Christ's powerful God-consciousness is transmitted to us through the natural human interactions within the Church, the historical sphere of Christ's influence.⁴⁶ Schleiermacher's naturalization of our reception of redemption is the logical corollary of his prior decision to naturalize Christ's divinity as an experience of God-consciousness whose natural pre-conditions are possessed by every person as part of our common humanity.

Finally, Schleiermacher's theories of incarnation and redemption, when viewed together, leave him vulnerable to one of Cyril's critiques of Nestorius. Schleiermacher is by no means Nestorian, and yet Cyril's concern that Nestorius is positing a relation between Christ's divinity and humanity that is the same as the relation between God and any other believer carries a degree of applicability to Schleiermacher's proposal. Cyril points out that Nestorius' notion of conjunction is "something that any other man could have with God, being bonded to him as it were in terms of virtue and holiness."⁴⁷ While Schleiermacher views Christ's experience of the God-consciousness as actually unique, this uniqueness is quantitative rather than qualitative or ontological to the degree that Christ has achieved an experience of God the pre-conditions for which are located within our common humanity and shared among us. We may emulate Christ's God-consciousness, i.e., his uniqueness, to greater or lesser degrees because this God-consciousness is a natural, latent potentiality, even if unrealized, within us all. Cyril, on the other hand, claims that Christ is qualitatively and ontologically unique as both God and human in a manner of existence that not even the most devout saint among us

between sin and punishment has been dissolved but do not actually effect this dissolution. This is a naturalized model which views suffering as an effect caused by sinful acts rather than a forensic model which sees punishment as a legal consequence of sin. He believes that Christ did not experience the punishment associated with the sins of the whole world but only experienced the suffering caused by the sins of the specific Jews and Gentiles who beat and crucified him. See Schleiermacher, 436, 457-458.

44 Schleiermacher, 425-432.

45 Schleiermacher, 436-437, 457-462.

46 Schleiermacher, 426-427. In reference to the common spirit and pure will of the Church, Schleiermacher writes, "If therefore we ask how our particular aims arise out of that pure will, the answer is that it happens only in the common life. They no longer come to anyone directly from Christ; no one is given a special command by Christ, as was the case with the disciples," 568.

47 Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 74. In this passage Cyril also claims that Nestorian conjunction is not limited to the relationship between God and humans but that it is a bond common to many human relationships.

may experience.⁴⁸ For Cyril, there is a fundamental and untraversable difference between the faithful Christian's relationship with God and the union of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ.

This brief sketch of Schleiermacher's theology confirms the modern relevance of Cyril's belief that the incarnation and the atonement are deeply linked at the conceptual level. Schleiermacher's redefinition of Christ's incarnate divinity in terms of God-consciousness occurs in tandem with the revision of the doctrine of redemption in terms of our reception of this God-consciousness thereby demonstrating that in his theology the incarnation does indeed determine the conceptual structure of the doctrine of atonement.

CONCLUSION

In his attempt to safeguard Christ's divinity from human weakness, Nestorius posits a sharp separation between Christ's divinity and humanity which removes Christ's divinity from the human experiences of birth, suffering, and death. As a practical implication, this position leads to the rejection of *theotokos* as a title for Mary. Cyril, on the other hand, fervently opposes Nestorius by defending the use of *theotokos*, by arguing that the divinity of Christ experienced human weakness without compromising the divine nature, and by claiming that Nestorian Christology negatively affects Christ's ability to redeem. By doing so, Cyril uncovers what may be considered an element of the inner logic of our faith, the thesis that the incarnation determines the conceptual structure of the doctrine of atonement. Friedrich Schleiermacher demonstrates the modern relevance of Cyril's thesis by incorporating it within his thought even though he significantly redefines both the incarnation and the atonement.

If engaging in the task of constructive theology is like learning how to paint, then it may be that Cyril is demonstrating certain basic techniques of brushwork that have proven indispensable to the production of the very finest portraits of Jesus Christ in the Christian tradition. Of course, we live in an era in which some believe that any artistic technique, and any theological method, may be dispensed with or radically revised, though always at the risk of causing many small children to ask, "Is that really art?" Undoubtedly, Cyril's thesis concerning the relation between the incarnation and the atonement will continue to prove useful to contemporary constructive theology as it attempts to rearticulate the inner logic of the Christian faith in fresh and living ways today.

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48 Cyril of Alexandria, "The Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius," 350-351. Cyril writes, "If, as they say, one is truly the Son by nature, but the other has the sonship by grace and came to such dignity because of the Word dwelling within him, then what more does he have than us? For the Word also dwells in us. . . . And so, if we have been granted the same dignity by God the Father, our position is in no way inferior to his. For we too are sons and gods by grace." Cf. *On the Unity of Christ*, 80.

JUSTICE, MERCY, AND FORGIVENESS: JESUS' CROSS TO BARE

Sharon L. Baker

Violence infects our world and poisons our global relationships. We need no scientific evidence for proof; just pick up any newspaper and read. Although I was taught as a child to forgo pointing my finger in blame, finger-pointing may be just what the doctor ordered. It may raise awareness of the causes of violence long enough to act as an antibiotic that hinders its infectious spread. Consequently, in an effort to reveal one of the prevalent causes of violence, I point my finger at religion. Religious violence wreaks havoc on our world and has done so for millennia. From the systemic violence of racism, sexism, and poverty to the overt violence of the civil justice system, capital punishment, and war, all may trace their roots back to religion—in this case, the Christian religion.¹ We may wonder why a religion based upon the love of God and others, instead produces acts of hatred and violence in the name of God and upon others.

Images of a violent God in the Old Testament incite its readers to emulation. A brief mental review of our Christian history brings to mind the violence inflicted upon innocent people in the crusades and in the various attempts at genocide. Just yesterday, in an undergraduate theology class, students justified human acts of war by citing various biblical passages in which God incited God's people to fight. Pointing our finger at the Old Testament alone, however, overlooks a major instance of violence in the New Testament—violence traditionally interpreted as a divine requirement. Atonement theory, articulated especially as satisfaction and penal substitution, begins with violence. Jesus is murdered. Moreover, the murder of this innocent man is orchestrated by none other than God. In other words, the cataclysmic event of the Christian religion and of its doctrine of redemption and reconciliation is born from divine violence. The doctrine of atonement, as traditionally interpreted, therefore, accommodates violence and provides a divine model for us to imitate. As a result, religious violence is the child (however illegitimate) of divine violence.²

This essay emerges out of a desire to think differently about the workings of God in what we traditionally refer to as the atonement. I write self-consciously as

1 Cf. J. Denny Weaver, "Violence in Christian Theology," in *Cross Currents* 51 (Summer 2001): 161; J. Denny Weaver, *The Non-Violent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 1-11.

2 Not only do traditionally interpreted theories of atonement give birth to violence, they also act as a repellent. For example, one woman rejects Christianity, saying that "the main reason I had to reject Christianity was because god killing his son went too far. I could never worship a god that evil." See Julie Shoshana Pfau and David R. Blumenthal, "The Violence of God: Dialogic Fragments," in *Cross Currents* 51 (Summer 2001): 183.

a Christian, stymied and disturbed by the escalation of religious violence. My goal is to help other Christians re-think an issue that historically has caused massive pain and suffering. In order to promulgate peace and productive relationships with others, we must look anew at our theological traditions that in the past have been used to support human violence. A re-interpretation of atonement motifs which normally portray God as a violent, angry deity, finger cocked in readiness to blast the disobedient with lightening bolts of destruction, is extremely important in light of the spread of religious violence infecting contemporary societies and cultures. I am not suggesting we throw away millennia of Christian tradition in favor of the newest trend in theological studies; I am suggesting that, as believers have done for centuries, we re-interpret our tradition in order for it to remain relevant for our changing world.

By incorporating the insights of theologians who have significantly influenced Christian theology in thought and practice (e.g., Thomas Aquinas and Peter Abelard), I hope to maintain a connection to relevant aspects of the Christian tradition. I specifically focus on images of God as peace-loving rather than as violent in hopes of counterbalancing those atonement theories that depend upon ideas of satisfying God's wrath through vicarious substitution or a penal exchange. Naturally, when addressing the issue of satisfaction, St. Thomas Aquinas, who re-interpreted St. Anselm, comes to mind. Although Thomas Aquinas admits that the one "who waives satisfaction and forgives an offence done to himself acts mercifully, not unjustly,"³ he still maintains that God willed to forgive humanity through satisfaction. Aquinas scholar Jean-Pierre Torrell tries to soften the satisfaction components in Aquinas' thought, claiming that rather than retaining the idea of a payment of a debt, Aquinas holds to the idea of the rupture and the reconciliation of a friendship with God. What we find in Aquinas' thought "is not the sole reestablishment of the equalizing of justice as in vindictive justice, but rather a reconciliation of the friendship, which is realized when the offender provides a compensation corresponding to the desire of the one whom he has offended."⁴ Even though Aquinas clearly suggests that, rather than the death itself, the love of Jesus in dying for us effected the satisfaction, the economic structure of Jesus's satisfaction in Aquinas' thought remains.⁵ While I agree with Aquinas that the love

3 ST III, q. 46, a. 2, ad 3. In his earlier thought Aquinas claimed that it was more glorious for humanity to be pardoned and redeemed through satisfaction than to be forgiven without it. In later writings, such as those in the *ST*, Aquinas provides other reasons for Christ's satisfaction that do not include greater glory to humanity. See *Sent. III*, d. 20, a. 1, sol. 2: "[*Hominis*] non enim tantae gloriae esset post peccatum, quantae erat in statu innocentiae, si non plenary satisfecisset; quia magis est homini gloriosum ut peccatum commissum satisfaciendo plenary expurget, quam si sine satisfactione dimitteretur." Cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Le Christ en Ses Mystères: La Vie et l'oeuvre di Jesus selon Saint Thomas d'Aquinas*, Tome 2 (Paris: Desclée, 1999), 322, 403.

4 ST III, q. 90, a. 2: "[*Quia* hic non quaeritur sola redintegratio aequalitatis iustitiae, sicut in iustitia vindicativa; sed magis reconciliatio amicitiae, quod fit dum offendens recompensat secundum voluntatem ejus quem offendit." Cf. Torrell, *Le Christ en ses Mystères*, 405.

5 ST III, q. 14, a. 1, ad 1; q. 48, a. 2, ad 2. See Torrell, *Le Christ en ses Mys-*

of Jesus remains one of the most significant aspects of Jesus's life and passion, I take issue with the idea that love in any manner constitutes a violence engendered economy of exchange. Not only do such theories negate the value of forgiveness, they also portray an image of God as a cruel and perverse tyrant who demands suffering in order to compensate for an offense, who neither forgets nor forgives without making someone pay. This notion of God harkens back to the old God of vengeance and sacrifice so prevalent in the religious myths already deconstructed by Renè Girard and others.⁶

Peace theologians work to expose the theological inconsistencies within satisfaction theories of atonement. According to Timothy Gorringer, although one person might pay another's debts, a person cannot suffer and, by doing so, cancel the penalties of another person's debt that would in other circumstances result in death. For him, vicarious punishment is both unjust and unscriptural.⁷ William Placher argues that notions of the Son appeasing the Father would result in a misunderstanding of the Trinity, "whose Persons do not work in opposition, or have to win one another over, but operate in perfect unity. Therefore, any sense of conflict, of one Person paying a price to appease another Person, has the story wrong."⁸ The Trinity, rather, is a unity of persons in harmony with one another, working together to reconcile humanity.

There are those, however, who suggest that satisfaction theories of atonement do not compromise the nature of divine forgiveness due to the fact that the economic transaction occurs within the Godhead. Robert Culpepper notes that St. Anselm devotes much of the *Cur Deus Homo* to demonstrating that the ransom

terés, 406.

6 Cf. André Dumas, "La Mort du Christ n'est-elle pas Sacrificielle?: Discussion d'objections contemporaines" in *Etudes Théologiques et Religieuses* 56 (1981): 581-582. Dumas argues, along with Girard, that "this perverse God is suspect of only being the product of human imagination who institutes the magic of substitution. . . We conceal ethical homicide through a dogmatic theory where it becomes necessary that another one die in our place. . ." ("[c]e Dieu pervers est soupçonnable de n'être que le produit de l'imaginaire humain qui instaure la magie de la substitution. . . Nous dissimulons ici l'homicide éthique par une théorie dogmatique, où il devienne nécessaire que quelqu'un meure à notre place. . ."). See also Renè Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972).

7 Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence, and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 145. Gorringer states that "Christ cannot both suffer in our place and fulfill the law as our substitute. If he did one, there was no need for the other." Interpretations that claim an unscriptural basis for retributive theories of atonement may appear to disregard the Pauline texts of the New Testament. Lack of space in this short essay prohibits any treatment of Paul. I will deal more fully with Paul and the varying ways to interpret his atonement metaphors in another work still in progress. For a more complete treatment of interpreting Paul's atonement theories, see Stephen Finlan, *Problems with Atonement: The Origins of, and Controversy about, the Atonement Doctrine* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005).

8 William Placher, *Jesus the Savior: The Meaning of Jesus Christ for Christian Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 2001), 139.

required by God was paid to God by God. He contends that if the debt was paid by God, then the debt was not in fact paid, but forgiven.⁹ Aquinas carries this thought into his own theory of satisfaction. He states that “the ransom price did not have to be paid to the devil, but to God. Jesus, therefore, is not said to have offered his blood, the price of our redemption to the devil, but to God” and “the payment and the price both pertain immediately to Christ in his capacity as man, but to the whole trinity as to the first and remote cause, since Christ’s very life belongs to the trinity as to its first author.”¹⁰

Although Aquinas does attempt to lay the act of paying the price of sin at the feet of “Christ the man” in order to maintain his alignment with the orthodoxy of his time, he certainly would not be disposed to separate the human and the divine actions of Jesus to the point that one acted in a manner that the other did not. As a result, “God in Christ” pays the price of human liberation to “God in the Father,” or in other words, God pays God. This notion is inconsistent with the very nature of God as love. If God remunerates God for the forgiveness of sin, sin was forgiven without payment of the debt. The imagery of God forcing Jesus to undergo immense injustice and suffering for the sake of an illustration contradicts our conceptions of a loving, just God. Does God set the stage and act out a horrendous travesty of human justice and excessive violence through the murder of an innocent man in order to reveal the extent of divine love and forgiveness? If so, we are left with the imagery of divine forgiveness through violence and injustice that not only permeates our perceptions of God, but that also invades and influences our own behavior. Dissatisfaction with such inadequate and disturbing conceptions of God leads to the search for more consistent models of divine forgiveness that are not founded on retaliation or retribution, but on the basis of creating a new relationship that forgives without the violent economics of exchange.

The parable of the forgiving father in Luke 15 gives us a relational motif that casts doubt on the idea of exchange. The father in the story is satisfied merely with his son’s return to him. He does not first demand the son repay the money frittered away on careless living. In fact, he refuses to admit to any debt on the son’s part at all. He covers him in a loving, forgiving embrace and receives him into the fold.¹¹ John Caputo helpfully articulates the liberality of the father’s forgiveness: “In the story of the prodigal son, the father does not sit down and calculate just how much

9 Robert H. Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 82-83.

10 *ST*, III, q. 48, a. 4, ad 3: “[N]on erat pretium solvendum diabolo, sed Deo. Et ideo Christus sanguinem suum, qui est pretium nostrae redemptionis, non dicitur obtulisse diabolo, sed Deo”; q. 48, a. 5, r: “Unde utrumque istorum ad Christum pertinet immediate, in quantum est homo, sed ad totam Trinitatem sicut ad causam primam et remotam, cujus erat et ipsa vita Christi, sicut primi auctoris. . .” Cf., Torrell, *Le Christ en ses Mystères*, 87-91; Edward J. Miller, “Inclusivist and Exclusivist Issues in Soteriology: To Whom Does Jesus’ Saving Power Extend?” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 12 (Summer 1985): 128.

11 Luke 25:30; Paul Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 101.

suffering he should inflict upon his errant son for his prodigality but is prodigal with forgiveness; indeed, the idea that seeing the son suffer would in some way constitute a pay-back to the father would clearly be abhorrent to the sort of father portrayed in this story.”¹² In accordance with just such a view, Gorringer theorizes that our sin is forgiven “prior to the passion,” and is forgiven “in the name of the God who seeks life for all his creatures. Guilt is shriven, not expiated.”¹³

Two possibly problematic issues in constructing a theory of atonement founded upon this non-economic model of forgiveness are the conceptions of divine justice and mercy. Those holding to satisfaction or penal substitution theories often inconsistently object to such freely given forgiveness while insisting on the unconditionality of divine mercy.¹⁴ Traditional atonement theories focus on both the necessity for God’s justice and for the extravagance of God’s mercy in effecting our salvation, often creating an unnecessary tension between the two. I believe that human interpretations of justice and mercy, based upon quantitative notions of retribution and payment of a debt to society, as exemplified in our judicial system, for instance, differ considerably from the divine execution of justice and mercy. Where human justice is often retributive, and quantitative, destroying relationships, God’s justice is reconciling, qualitative, and creates new relationships.¹⁵

Conceptions of divine justice as reconciling and relational rather than as quantitative and retributive carry significant implications for theories of atonement. Retributive justice sticks to the letter of the law, requiring its pound of flesh, demanding re-payment, compensation, an eye for an eye, in order to be forgiven. Conversely, divine reconciling justice seeks neither payment nor retribution. Divine justice finds fulfillment in reconciliation, peace, the fore-giving¹⁶ of pardon

12 John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 2005), 232.

13 Gorringer, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 66. Cf. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 43, 47.

14 Billy Graham observes this attitude. During an appearance on the *Today* show he mentioned that he forgives Bill Clinton. His forgiveness created an uproar in the evangelical community. Graham remarked: “I said one word—‘forgiveness.’ I got all kinds of ugly letters about that.” See John Mark Eberhart, “Book Chronicles Graham’s Influence,” in the Harrisburg, PA *Sunday Patriot News* (Sunday, September 9, 2007): G7.

15 For a study on biblical justice and its implications for atonement see Sharon Baker, “Repetition of Reconciliation” in *Stricken by God?* ed, Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2007), 220-239. I use the word “reconcile” throughout this essay, defined as follows: to win over to friendliness; to cause to become amicable; to compose or settle a quarrel or dispute; to bring into agreement or harmony. The “re” in “reconcile” is not intended to indicate a re-harmonization of a once harmonious relationship. In reconciling us to God, Jesus brings about a new relationship; he enables God to re-create our relationship from one of hostility to one of harmony.

16 Fore-giving expresses the notion of “giving before hand” or giving something before a person repents or pays back a debt.

so that harmony and qualitatively new relations can take place between offended parties. In other words, divine justice is that which reconciles through the mercy of forgiveness. It is justice satisfied by mercy. Rather than holding mercy and justice in polarity, justice and mercy work together, one in polyphony with the other.¹⁷

Charles Moule, who works in the field of criminal and civil justice, contends that divine justice, which he considers the deepest level of justice, is restorative rather than retributive. Whereas retributive justice seeks to fit the punishment to the crime and attempts to control wrongdoing through punishment, restorative justice forgives the crime and seeks to redeem wrongdoing through the repair of the relationship. He states that “the first great step towards justice at the deepest level is, paradoxically, when the victim [in this case, God] abandons quantitative justice [such as penal and satisfaction requirements], waives the demand for ‘just’ retribution, and begins to become ready to forgive—that is, to meet the damage by repair.”¹⁸ Divine justice relinquishes retribution or satisfaction for sin in order to create in us a *new* relationship with God, and simultaneously creates a new and harmonious relationship with humanity through the act of forgiveness.¹⁹ Consequently, in God’s terms, forgiveness satisfies justice—to be just is to forgive.

We see in the New Testament evidence of a movement away from the pursuit of retribution, vengeance, and retaliation towards a pursuit of forgiveness, conciliation, and new life. Through the actions of Jesus, we gain an understanding of the divine response to retributive violence and conceptions of human justice. Rather than shouting threats of retaliation in the name of God, Jesus set in motion the ultimate expression of divine justice and its reconciling character by asking God to forgive us. The process of forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration without retaliation demonstrates the most profound level of justice.²⁰

Even Thomas Aquinas recognizes that divine justice includes notions of divine mercy. He offers an illustration of a man who is owed a certain amount and who receives double the payment from his debtor. The one paying double does not

17 Richard Rohr, *Job and the Mystery of Suffering: Spiritual Reflections* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), 57. The Hebrew word *hesed*, often translated “mercy,” expresses the biblical concept of justice.

18 C.F.D. Moule, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: And Other New Testament Themes* (London: SPCK, 1998), 41-42 [bracketed additions are mine].

19 Stephen Travis notes that the retributive doctrine of justice insists that forgiveness cannot take place without a cost or a remuneration of some sort. In contrast, forgiveness without retribution, in other words, restorative justice, forgives another, accepting the pain caused by the offense and forgiving it rather than throwing the hurt and pain back on the offender in retaliation. See Stephen Travis, “Christ as Bearer,” in *Atonement Today*, ed. John Goldingay (London: SPCK, 1995), 38.

20 Moule, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 44-46. Moule states the notion of divine justice well: “The life of Jesus and his death—the inevitable consequence of total dedication to the way of God—and his total aliveness through and beyond (not in spite of) death, all point in this direction, and exhibit the justice of God at its deepest level: ‘God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself’ (2 Cor. 5:19). No hangover of retributive systems still showing itself in the New Testament can negate this . . .”

work against justice but is, instead, exhibiting liberality and goodwill. Aquinas brings the analogy home by saying, “so it is when you forgive an offense against yourself. For a pardon is a sort of present; St. Paul calls forgiving a giving, *forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you*. Clearly mercy does not take justice away, but is like it in fullness; as St. James says, *mercy triumphs over judgment*.”²¹ Mercy triumphs in satisfying the demands of justice.

In the same vein, Aquinas adds that “if God had wanted to free man from sin without any satisfaction at all, he would not have been acting against justice [. . .] If then he forgives sins, which is a crime in that it is committed against him, he violates no one’s rights. The man who waives satisfaction and forgives an offence done to himself acts mercifully, not unjustly.”²² If forgiveness without satisfaction falls under the rubric of justice, then not to forgive or to forgive while yet demanding satisfaction may be considered unjust. On the one hand, ideas of satisfaction that include ingredients of a violent economic contract, retribution, or payment are unjust at the least and, at most, absurd. Aristotle articulates the absurdity well when he indicates that “the gods seem absurd if they make contracts and return deposits.”²³ On the other hand, non-economic forgiveness or pardon is a gift, not an absurdity.

The medieval theologian Abelard also speaks of justice in harmony with mercy and with love. He says that “justified [forgiven] for free means that you are justified not because of your outstanding achievements or gains but thanks to God’s mercy who was the first to love us” and “in the time of mercy it is God’s justice that he gives us and through which we are justified and the name for it is love.”²⁴ Abelard makes clear that through love and in mercy, the forgiveness of sin without condition or compensation fulfills divine justice. Our justification, through loving forgiveness, is just—it serves to satisfy justice and is a gift from God.

A gift is something freely presented to another. I do not give a gift and expect payment for it. Similarly, if we truly forgive another, we do not ask for ret-

21 *ST Ia*, q. 21, a. 4, ad 2: “*Qui enim aliquid remittit quodammodo donat illud; unde Apostolus remissionem donationem vocat, Ephes., Donate invicem, sicut et Christus vobis donavit. Ex quo patet quod misericordia non tollit justitiam, sed est quaedam justitiae plenitudo. Unde dicitur Jac. quod misericordia superexaltat iudicium*”. Cf. *ST Ia*, q. 21, a. 4, r; q. 21, a. 3, ad 2; Torrell, *Le Christ en Ses Mystères*, 403-404.

22 *ST III*, q. 46, a. 2, ad 3. “*Nam si voluisset absque omni satisfactione hominem a peccato liberare, contra justitiam non fecisset. . . Et ideo si dimittat peccatum, quod habet rationem culpae, ex eo quod contra ipsum committitur, nulli facit injuriam: sicut quicumque homo remittit offensam in se commissam absque satisfactione, misericorditer et non injuste agit.*” Aquinas continues on to say that King David cried out to God asking for forgiveness as if to say that God can forgive without being unjust.

23 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10.8.11-12; *ST Ia*, q. 21, a. 1, note f.

24 Abelard, *Epistle to the Romans*, 3:22, 24 in Eugene R. Fairweather, ed., *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 275-277. Abelard equates divine justice with divine love. Divine love forgives human sin. See Richard E. Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love: A Critical Analysis of the Soteriology of Peter Abelard* (London: Clarendon, 1970), 121, 275-277.

tribution at the same time. Continental philosophers and theologians, like Jacques Derrida and John Caputo, assert, however, that as imperfect human beings we are never free from the mechanisms of economies of exchange.²⁵ A perfect gift does not exist in the human realm. Our human notions of justice are similarly infected with conceptions of revenge, retribution, and economies of exchange that demand the balancing of books. Aquinas comments on the character of gift giving, which includes fore-giving, saying that “a gift is literally a giving that can have no return, i.e., it is not given with the intention that one be repaid and it thus connotes a gratuitous donation.”²⁶ He continues by telling us that the basis for such giving is love—the very love that effects our atonement in the passion of Jesus.

The forgiveness of God “reproduces perfectly the paradox of the gift.” God unconditionally gives up payment for our debt, releases us from debt, and dismisses our debt. God, however, can and does give the perfect gift (could a gift from God be anything else?), free from economic restraints and expectations of *quid pro quo*. Divine forgiveness is a perfect gift, a gift of justice that mirrors mercy, that triumphs over retribution and human notions of balanced books. Divine forgiveness is justice that triumphs in mercy. Only unconditional, aneconomic forgiveness can be a true gift. For God to require that we earn our forgiveness or that Jesus earns God’s forgiveness for us through death or merit or satisfaction does not meet the standards for a pure gift of forgiveness. If Jesus earns our forgiveness then forgiveness is our due in return for Jesus’s death on our behalf. In that case, by forgiving us God gives us what Jesus has earned for us. That which has been earned cannot be considered a gift according to Aquinas’ definition.

Caputo affirms this thesis in his own words:

So if the other is to be forgiven only after measuring up to certain conditions, if the other must earn or deserve forgiveness, then to forgive him is to give him just what he has earned, to give him his just wages. But that would not be to give a gift, but to give the other his due, to repay the labor of his repentance with the wages of forgiveness; it would be not a gift but the economy of retributive justice.²⁷

25 For an interesting study on divine forgiveness see Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, chapter 10; John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 178-181, 226-229; John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 4-5, 13.

26 *ST* Ia, q. 38, a. 2, c. Aquinas, however, applies this notion of forgiveness to humans, but not to God. For him, God forgives only after the sinner repents (*ST*, III, q. 86, a. 2) See also Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 211; Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 178. Caputo aptly expresses the notion of forgiveness as a gift: “The question of the gift of giving is inseparable from that of forgiving, that is, of giving ‘away’ or ‘forth’ (as in the German *fort*), giving away what is due to come back to us, whether that be a debt or an obligation, real or symbolic. That gift is a give-away. *Le don* is inseparable from *le par-don*. As the gift must not be a secret calculation of a way to get a return for oneself, so it must not encumber the other with a debt. Whatever debts, whatever guilt, the other incurs must be forgiven.”

27 Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 210-211; see also 211-214. Caputo criticizes

Caputo asks the question: “How does God—as opposed to bankers—forgive his debtors?”²⁸ He takes us to Luke 18:9-14 and interprets the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector as an illustration that serves to demonstrate an act of divine forgiveness and divine gift-giving. In an older version of the story²⁹ the Pharisee is a good man, paying his dues to God, and the tax collector is a sinner, who does not pay his dues to God. Both men are the same before God who forgives them on equal ground, “the sun of whose love and forgiveness rises upon both the good and the bad.”³⁰ The emphasis, rather than remaining on the two men, falls upon God who forgives unconditionally, radically “leveling the difference between the Pharisee, who does well, and the tax collector who does not.”³¹

God is not concerned with settling accounts in order to forgive. God does not get caught up in the endless cycle of economic exchange, a tit for tat, and *quid pro quo*. Instead, God forgives all human beings unconditionally, with boundless, radical, incomprehensible love. God’s forgiveness is a pure gift, a pure fore-giving that gives even before we repent.³² The definition of the word itself leads us to the conclusion that God’s forgiveness is unconditional, a letting go of an offense without re-payment of any sort. The Greek word *aphesis* means a letting go or dismissal, to set free or to acquit or remit, so that the concept and act of forgiving is the foreswearing of a legitimate reason for complaint, a letting go of an offense and right to demand retribution.³³

Forgiveness does not imply a state of amnesia in which the offense is treated as if it never happened. Instead, forgiveness seeks to establish a relationship in spite of an offense. Although forgiveness does not entail a violent economic transaction of any sort between Father and Son, the gift of forgiveness is nonethe-

the church for requiring conditions to forgiveness, believing that, “in actual practice, forgiveness is reserved for *non*-sinners, while the sinners can go to the devil unless and until they shape up and stop sinning. We forgive non-sinners, who have earned it . . . but not sinners, who really need it.”

28 Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 214.

29 Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 210-214. See also A.N. Wilson, *Jesus: A Life* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), 30-31. Wilson argues that Lk. 18:9, 14, verses framing the story, are later Lukan redactions, reducing the element of pharisaical pride so that the Pharisee and the tax collector are both on equal ground before God. Of course, recreating an older form of the text that makes the desired point is always a rather dubious endeavor.

30 Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 215; Matthew 6:43-48.

31 Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 215; see also Wilson, *Jesus*, 30-31.

32 Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 215-218; see also E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 174, 204, 300.

33 See John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 44. Although I disagree with Milbank’s conclusions concerning divine forgiveness, I find his research on forgiveness helpful. See also Walter Wink, *When the Powers Fall: Reconciliation in the Healing of Nations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 16. Wink stresses that repentance does not come before forgiveness; God freely forgives whether or not we repent. Wink believes, as do I, however, that repentance on the part of the offending party must occur.

less costly.³⁴ The New Testament story of the forgiving father in Luke 15 hints at the costly nature of forgiveness. The father is willing to suffer the pain from the wrong done to him by his son and still offer forgiveness. He does not demand that his son return his inheritance, nor that the son beg the family's pardon. Instead he prepares a banquet for his son. Forgiveness, as this father knows, is not merely a matter of words spoken, "I forgive you," or of an embrace given. "It is a creative act, costly and achieved only by the output of energy. It means thinking nothing about one's rights or about abstract justice, but surrendering one's self concern altogether. It means absorbing the wrong instead of retaliating; giving, and not demanding any *quid pro quo*."³⁵ In other words, the father's acceptance of the son is an internal sacrifice of self-giving that manifests its extravagance through forgiveness.

Human beings tend to have difficulty accepting the possibility that God forgives sin unconditionally, since from a human viewpoint forgiveness of such magnitude is impossible. The thought of divine forgiveness, extravagant, freely bestowed forgiveness, puts our teeth on edge for some reason. We seem to feel the need to see others suffer for their wrongdoing, although we ourselves hope to escape just such suffering. As Caputo points out, "unaccountable" forgiveness "disturbs our sense of law and order, disrupts our sense of economic equilibrium, undermines our desire to 'settle the score' or 'get even', blocks our instinct to see to it that the offenders are made to 'pay for' what they did."³⁶ Divine justice as reconciling and redemptive does not keep accounts with records of retributive actions or satisfactions. It is un-accountable. God gives just this kind of forgiveness.

Those who have suffered grave injustices at the hands of abusive religious leaders, spouses, or governments have reason to begrudge such liberal forgiveness. Keeping faith in unredeemable situations sometimes remains possible only when victims of injustice can hang onto the hope that God will vindicate them at some point either in time or in eternity. Yet such non-retaliatory forgiveness may

34 Moule, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 23-24. Moule suggests that forgiveness includes a type of death to self in that the self gives up or sacrifices the selfish desire for revenge or retribution. See also Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 16; Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); B. Keith Putt, "Prayers of Confession and Tears of Contrition: John Caputo and a Radically 'Baptist' Hermeneutic of Repentance" in *Religion With/Out Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo*, ed. James H. Olthuis (New York: Routledge, 2002), 62-79; B. Keith Putt, "Faith, Hope, and Love: Radical Hermeneutics as a Pauline Philosophy of Religion" in *A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in Focus*, ed. Mark Dooley (New York: SUNY Press, 2003), 237-250; John D. Caputo, "Holding by Our Teeth: A Response to Putt" in *A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in Focus*, ed. Mark Dooley (New York: SUNY Press, 2003), 251-254.

35 Moule, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 22. Cf. P.T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, 2nd ed. (London: Independent Press, 1948), 29. Forsyth proclaims that a feeble gospel preaches that God is ready to forgive. A strong and impelling gospel announces the good news that God has already forgiven.

36 John D. Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 208.

have profound consequences for the one forgiven with such sacrificial abandon. In fact, the expenditure of forgiveness often results in a response of repentance that proves just as sacrificial. Aquinas comments that “an equal gift of grace means more to the penitent who deserves punishment than to the innocent who has never incurred it.”³⁷ When a person is brought face to face with his or her sins, and experiences the unexpected grace of forgiveness rather than the expected retributive punishment, real repentance may occur. As articulated by Gil Bailie, “Jesus seems to have understood that the only real and lasting contrition occurs, not when one is confronted with one’s sin, but when one experiences the gust of grace that makes a loving and forgiving God plausible.”³⁸

For Abelard, forgiveness wins a person over through the love inherent in the act and by eliciting the good that resides in one who expects (and deserves) retribution but receives mercy instead. Forgiveness calls to the offender with love, summoning him or her to take responsibility for the offense, to give up the self-involvement, and to repent of the offense. Moule states that in such a case, “forgiveness is ruthless in the severity of its judgment, although judgment in its deepest sense is never a destructive condemnation, but is essentially reconciling.”³⁹ Repentance produced by forgiveness harmonizes estranged parties in the bond of divine love.

Human sin incurred an unimaginable debt to God, a horrific and unfathomable chasm between God and creation so that we have no relationship with God. Nonetheless, as God forgives, God reaches out and embraces all of us, even the worst of us. Such boundless love and unexpected forgiveness in the face of our own sin and guilt reveals, as in a mirror, the deformity of our own guilt. Becoming our own judge, expecting retribution and receiving love in its place, enables us to realize the extent of our sin. Consequently, we repent so that reconciliation and the creation of a new relationship can take place between God and those who repent.⁴⁰

If God forgives, fore-gives, before we repent, before we admit our offense, why did Jesus suffer and die on the cross? If the passion did not take place in order to satisfy God in a violent economy of exchange necessary for forgiveness, why the cross? What relevance does the passion of Jesus hold for us today?

Timothy Gorrige offers this explanation concerning the passion event: “[T]he necessity of the death [of Jesus], may have less to do with providence than with the fate of anyone who critiques the ruling powers. John the Baptist, with whom Jesus was compared, had been executed, and Jesus must have seen the writing on the wall.”⁴¹

37 *ST IIaIIae*, q. 106, a. 2, ad 3; Ia, q. 20, a. 4, ad 4.

38 Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 208-209.

39 Moule, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 23, 26, 31-32. Cf. Bailie, *Violence Unveiled*, 209.

40 Peter Abelard, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. by D.E. Luscombe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 91.

41 Gorrige, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 63.

René Girard gives a viable answer to the question: “Why did the passion of Jesus occur?”⁴² Men killed Jesus because he revealed to them a God other than the retributive, vengeful God dictated by their tradition. André Dumas, in support of Girard, says:

[t]he cross is purely the result of the nastiness of men who do not support the new idea that Jesus brings from God, the new non-violent conduct of men practiced in Jesus, the Christ of non-violence. The non-sacrificial canon refuses a mercantile calculation in God . . . Christianity is repainting in new colors the solidarity with the oppressed poor and of the hope of a coming historical change.⁴³

The fact that Jesus, who rebelled against the strictures of institutional religion and oppressive forms of government, suffered a violent death at the hands of the authorities is no surprise. The Gospels predict just such a death during Jesus’s ministry.⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas supports this interpretation of Jesus’ passion, labeling the act of putting Jesus to death a crime, calling Jesus’s executioners murderers, and pointing to the leaders of the people as the agents responsible for his death.⁴⁵ Abelard, too, denies that the suffering of the cross had any correspondence with violence on God’s part or any mercantile relationship to God’s forgiveness.⁴⁶

The cross, therefore, should not be interpreted as a deflection of God’s anger, as a punishment, as an exchange that transfers the guilt to an innocent person, or as some “ledger amount which could be shifted about by divine finance” so that God could then afford grace. The cross did not “procure grace, it flowed from grace.”⁴⁷ Out of love for humanity trapped in religious structures of violence, Jesus submitted to the religious and secular powers of that time as a prophetic pro-

42 For further study on Girard, see *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001) and *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986).

43 André Dumas, “La Mort du Christ n’est-elle pas Sacrificielle?” in *Etudes Théologiques et Religieuses* 56 (1981): 587. “Le croix est purement la résultante de la méchanceté des homes qui ne supportent pas l’idée nouvelle que Jésus apporte de Dieu, la conduite nouvelle que l’homme pratique en Jésus, le Christ de la non-vioence. . . [L]e christianisme est repeint aux couleurs nouvelles de la solidarité avec les pauvres oprimes et de l’espérance d’un avenir historique changé.”

44 Mark 8:31; 9:31; Matthew 17:22-23; Luke 9:43-45. I will discuss Paul’s metaphors for the atonement and the problems associated with them in another work, which is currently in progress.

45 *ST* III, q. 46, a. 10, ad 1; q. 47, a. 1, r. Aquinas clearly blames the rulers of Jerusalem for the death of Christ, yet, at the same time, he believes that they got away with their wickedness only because Christ submitted to their violence. The point I am making is that human agents, as efficient causes, bear the responsibility for Christ’s violent death rather than God. See also Torrell, *Le Christ ene Ses Mysterés*, 437.

46 Abelard, *Epist. to the Romans*, 3:36, 282. Cf. C. Behan McCullagh, “Theology of Atonement,” *Theology* 91 (September 1988): 397-398.

47 P.T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, 2nd ed. (London: Independent Press, 1948), 89.

test against injustice, oppression, and systemic evil. In so doing, he exposed them and simultaneously condemned the violence and offered forgiveness. According to Dorothee Sölle, Jesus suffered the cross *for us* and *because of us*. She suggests that while Christ's suffering was not a divine imperative, it was not irrelevant. Christ suffered *because* human agents killed him; he suffered *for us* by standing with us in our own suffering.⁴⁸ Caputo agrees with this interpretation. He states that, in many instances, the early Church interpreted Jesus's death as a "*prophetic* death, not a sacrificial one, that is, the death of a just man who took the hit for telling the truth, for speaking the prophetic word, for contradicting the world and interdicting its hardness of heart with his parabolic of the Kingdom. It was the 'world' that made Jesus *pay*—not God—for contradicting the world."⁴⁹

The death of Jesus as a prophetic death, orchestrated not by God but by human beings, does not detract from the sacrificial element of his death. The idea of sacrifice significantly applies in the case of Jesus's life, suffering, and death. Aquinas clearly considers the sacrifice of Jesus a sacrifice of love and obedience rather than as the immolation of a victim. He writes that "on the part of those who put Jesus to death, the passion was a crime; on the part of Jesus, who suffered out of love, it was a sacrifice."⁵⁰ Those who committed the crime, the outward act of torturing and killing Jesus, had no part in the passion as a sacrifice. Aquinas comments further on the notion of sacrifice, stating that "exterior sacrifice is the sign of a spiritual internal sacrifice by which the soul offers itself to God in sacrifice."⁵¹ He claims that "on the part of Christ who has submitted to death for us, it is his infinite love that has rendered the passion acceptable to God, of the sort that it is through it that we are reconciled."⁵²

Gorringe explains that an internal conception of sacrifice is consonant with the Rabbinic tradition. Sacrifice is important because God commands it, not in itself, but as a form of obedience to Torah. Upon Jesus' overturning the tables in the temple court, which can be read as an implicit rejection of the sacrificial system, Rabbi R. Nathan lamented the destruction but said, "Do not grieve, my son, for

48 See Dorothee Sölle, *Christ the Representative: An Essay in Theology After the Death of God*, trans. David Lewis (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 124.

49 Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 233-234.

50 *ST III*, q. 48, a. 3, ad 3: "[p]assio Christi ex parte occidentium ipsum fuit maleficium; sed ex parte ipsius ex charitate patientis fuit sacrificium."

51 *ST IIaIIae*, q. 85, a. 2: "Significat autem sacrificium quod offertur exterius, interius spirituale sacrificium, quo anima seipsam offert Deo. . . ." Torrell comments that the terms "substitution," "vicarious satisfaction," and "expiation," or the anger of God do not make their way into the Thomistic corpus. When the term *ira* is used in connection with Christ's death, it refers to the human actors who put him to death, an external putting to death that has nothing whatever to do with the notion of an acceptable sacrifice. See Torrell, *Le Christ en ses Mystères*, 446-447.

52 *Sent. III*, d. 19, a. 5, sol. 1, ad 3: "sed ex part Christi qui pro nobis mortem sustinuit, fuit immensa caritas quae fecit passionem ex parte patientiae Deo acceptam; et sic per ipsam sumus reconciliati." Cf. *SCG IV*, c. 55.25. Here Aquinas states that the death of Christ had its satisfying power in the love Christ bore, even to the point of death.

we have an atonement which is just as good, namely deeds of mercy, as the Scripture says, “[f]or I desire mercy and not sacrifice.”⁵³ Acts of mercy are motivated by an internal condition of the heart that sacrifices selfish motives out of love for God and others. Notions of internal sacrifice as the true sacrifice echo throughout Amos, where external sacrifice is rejected in favor of the internal sacrifice of acting in justice and righteousness. Hence, sacrifice was considered, above all else, a metaphor for a complete, loving, obedient commitment to God. Gorringer asserts, correctly I believe, that “such an understanding sat uneasily alongside the tradition of expiatory or propitiatory sacrifice, which gained such prominence . . .”⁵⁴

In the New Testament, as well, the notion of internal sacrifice encompasses practically any exercise in the Christian life such as prayer, meditation, and worship.⁵⁵ In fact, for those holding to Girardian conceptions of the events in the New Testament, the passion of Jesus brings external sacrifices to an end by exposing “their hollow and bogus nature,” and focuses instead on the internal sacrifice of the self.⁵⁶ Gorringer notes that the heart of Paul’s atonement theory is not one in which external sacrifice propitiates for sin, but is a sacrifice of participation in which believers participate in Jesus’s sacrifice of self out of love for God and others. Jesus’s internal, willing sacrifice of love is participatory, enabling a person to transfer from “the lordship of sin to the lordship of Christ,” through the internal, sacrificial transformation of the self.⁵⁷

When questioned about the practice of sacrifice in the temple, Jesus responds to the Pharisees with an alternative tradition, quoting Hosea 6:6 in support of the internal sacrifice of the heart and mind: “For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”⁵⁸ The active ingredient, therefore, that made the passion of Jesus a sacrifice was the internal condition of Jesus’ heart and mind, his willing love, not the material elements of death such as the pain, the shed blood, or the nails through his hands and feet.⁵⁹ The violence of the passion did not please or satisfy God and was considered a

53 Gorringer, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 61-62. 1 Samuel 15:22.

54 Gorringer, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 52-53. Cf. Amos 5:22; Micah 6:7-8; Hosea 6:6; Ps. 40: 6-8, 13-14, 16-17.

55 Cf. Torrell, *Le Christ en ses Mystères*, 411-412.

56 Gorringer, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 76. Gorringer continually argues that the New Testament deconstructs sacrificial, retributive forms of violence (58).

57 Gorringer, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 75. Fiddes expresses the same notion of sacrifice, stating that “the saving work of Christ can thus be understood as a sacrifice of homage and obedience to God in which we can join, making his act our own. As he gave himself away in love for God and humankind, so we can give ourselves for God, for our friends and our enemies.” See Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 63.

58 Cf. Micah 6:7-8. Gorringer notes that in the first Johannine letter, the blood of Christ seems to refer to Christ’s total self-giving as an internal sacrifice rather than expiation. Shedding blood is a metaphor for the life of love and obedience carried all the way to the end. Gorringer, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 52-53, 78-80. In addition, references to the blood of a sacrifice in Leviticus 17:11 denote the internal life of sacrifice rather than the external act of killing. See Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 69.

59 *ST* III, q. 14, a. 1, ad 1.

crime. As Abelard understood it, the true sacrifice of Jesus lies not in the outward shedding of blood (which served to symbolize the internal sacrifice) but in his heart of sorrow: “[a] sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit.”⁶⁰ Jesus, therefore, did sacrifice something; his life and death were a sacrifice offered both to God and to humanity. With a heart freely offered to God and to humanity in love, he sacrificed the right to take his pound of flesh; he sacrificed receiving back (as God) what was owed by humanity for the offense of sin. Jesus Christ offered us a sacrifice of cosmic proportion. He sacrificed the balancing of the divine account books and took the loss for the debt we owed and the punishment we deserved for sin.

What Jesus offers, therefore, is the sacrifice of love and obedience by completely identifying with humanity and the consequences of human sin as he suffers in solidarity with the oppressed and abused throughout time. “He plumbs the bitter depths where broken relationships run out into desolation and nothingness. He hangs on the cross at the end-point of human sin, at the focus of all human self-destruction.”⁶¹ Through his loving obedience, sacrificial in both life and death, Jesus integrates us into the kingdom of God, “re-socializes us, that is to say, makes us citizens of his kingdom.”⁶²

Jesus provides a different analogy for living life without violence. As a human being, Jesus’s obedience is our obedience offered to God. His sacrifice is “not a propitiatory sacrifice, but the offering of glad and affirmative obedience,” an obedience that exposed the systemic violence so ingrained in human structures of religion and culture.⁶³ Raymund Schwager proclaims that:

“[b]y sending his Son, [God] even created the possibility for the hidden resentment against him to change to open hatred. He redeemed humankind by permitting its evil deeds to develop to their perverse climax but not to fall back upon the perpetrators. After they had unloaded their innermost desires on Jesus, a love could flow back into their hearts from the murdered and resurrected one, a love totally without coercion. . . The law of revenge became the law of redeeming love. The curse was repaid with blessing. The conspiracy of hatred was answered with an outpouring of love.”⁶⁴

The source of Jesus’s obedience is love, for God and for humanity. Love led Jesus to the cross. “In the revelation of divine love the cross stands as the symbol

60 Abelard, *Ethics*, 97.

61 Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, 91. Dumas calls Christ’s sacrifice “costly communion,” as an act of solidarity through love. See Dumas, “The Death of Christ,” 590.

62 Sölle, *Christ the Representative*, 118-119. Cf. Moule, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 20. The work of Christ results in reconciliation, which demands the sacrifice of obedience that works itself out in community living. See Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 157. Cf. Gorringer, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 77.

63 Moule, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 26.

64 Raymund Schwager, S.J., *Must There Be Scapegoats?*, trans. by Maria L. Assad (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1978), 214.

of the painful cost borne by God to redeem [all humanity].⁶⁵ Both Aquinas and Abelard clearly assert that the passion of Jesus not only reveals divine love, but also stirs or inflames us to love God in return.⁶⁶ Consequently, love redeems us, not by winning a victory over us but by winning us over, filling us from the source with love for God. God's love and the resulting redemption are not given on the basis of merit earned, but are God's gratuitous gifts to humankind. No one is excluded; no one is turned away.⁶⁷ Jesus identifies with all humanity throughout all the events of his life and his death. He saves us "simply by being God with us," God in solidarity with us even in the midst of our worst pain and suffering.⁶⁸ In agreement with this concept of redemption, Dumas asserts that "if there is good news in Jesus, it is because God shows himself there not the fictive substitute for man but effectively in solidarity with him. The passion is not a real life drama in our place but the result of a life on our side. . . [Christ] is a companion of the world who engages in the heart of the barriers of the world in order to become the brother of the excluded and in order to give a permanent example. . ."⁶⁹ Jesus calls to every person, saying "turn away from violence; love your enemies." He reveals to us a different path, "for without violence he has been our redeemer."⁷⁰

In fact, I believe that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection not only reversed the human conception of retributive justice to conceptions of reconciling justice and the creation of a new relationship with God, but in so doing Jesus demonstrated how we are to negotiate our relationships with others: seeking reconciliation, restoration, and peace, rather than retribution through warfare or terrorism. Jesus's sacrificial example culminated in his prayer uttered while he hung on the cross.

Thomas Aquinas, although wrapped up in notions of predestination, believed strongly in the significance of prayer in the life of God and in the divine governance of the world. Aquinas believed that divine providence does not take away secondary causes; in other words, for Aquinas, prayer affects God and the manner in which God takes care of the world. He claims that even the predesti-

65 Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, 131; Michael Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love* (Fribourg, Switzerland: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1988), 305. Jesus's obedience lay in his coming to live a godly life and to teach and reveal the kingdom of God. The result of his life and teachings led to his death.

66 *ST*, III, q. 46, a. 3, c; Abelard, *Epist. to the Romans*, 3:26, sol., 283. Aquinas notes that the love of Christ compels us and that in Christ we have our example of perfect love. See *ST* III, q. 48, a. 1.

67 The Thomistic notion of redemption based upon merit earned by Christ and applied to our account is one of the areas in which I depart from Aquinas. See *ST* III, q. 48, a. 1, r; Miller, "Inclusivist and Exclusivist Issues," 129; Moule, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 38; Quinn, "Abelard on Atonement," 298: Quinn argues that God has made his transformative love available to all humanity, church or un-church, Christian and non-Christian, good and evil.

68 Placher, *Jesus the Savior*, 128.

69 Dumas, "La Mort du Christ," 583.

70 Placher, *Jesus the Savior*, 149.

nation of members of the human race is ameliorated by the prayers of the saints. Aquinas also claimed that reason was superior to and more God-like than emotion. He asserted, therefore, that prayer, as an intellectual act, brought one closer to God, thereby increasing the likelihood that God would look favorably on the desires of the praying person. Aquinas believed, in addition, that because God loves us, “it is appropriate to divine goodness for him to fulfill the desires of a rational creature when they are presented to him through prayer.”⁷¹ Abelard also asserts that the prayers of Jesus offered from a loving heart on behalf of all humanity are prayers that God answers in the affirmative. He writes that “[i]ndeed his supreme righteousness requires that his prayer should not be rejected at any point since the divinity united to him allowed him to will or to do nothing except what was fitting.”⁷²

The point is this: while Jesus hung dying on the cross he prayed and asked God to forgive those who murdered him. This prayer, uttered in a state of utmost suffering, expresses a desire for forgiveness rather than for retaliation from God, pardon rather than a balancing of the books. While the evil of humanity reached a climax in crucifying Jesus, he himself reached out and sought the reverse of revenge. He asked that his father reverse the human conception of justice as retributive. Instead of another chapter in the long human history of eye-for-an-eye justice, the great injustice of the cross culminated in the satisfying of justice by forgiveness, in compassionate restoration and in a loving embrace that brought shame to the human structures of “religion.”⁷³

Jesus revealed to us what satisfies God’s justice. Divine forgiveness through his prayer from the cross provides the objective, cosmically universal element of our at-one-ment. God answered Jesus’ prayer and forgave humanity its sin. Jesus’ prayer is a prayer that God answered in the affirmative. Since 1) the sin against Jesus occurred as the inevitable result of human sin, 2) Jesus, as the “second Adam” represented all of humanity to God, and 3) Jesus overcame death for all humanity, Jesus’ prayer was a prayer for God to forgive all humanity.⁷⁴ Consequently,

71 SCG, III.II, c. 95.6: “*Ad bonitatem igitur divinam pertinet ut impleat desideria rationalis creature sibi per orationem proposita.*”; c. 95.2: “[C]onsequens est ut, secundum suam bonitatem, desideria pia, quae per orationem explicantur, adimpleat.”; 95.4-8; 95.14; ST Ia, q. 23, a. 8, sc and r; *Quodl.* 2, q. 8, a. 1.

72 Abelard, *Exp. in Epist. ad Rom. ii.v.*, qtd. in Weingart, 141.

73 James 5:16; 1 John 5:14-15; Mark 11:24. The scriptural evidence pointing to the divine will to answer the prayer of God’s righteous ones is abundant. The writer of James tells us that “[t]he effective prayer of a righteous [person] can accomplish much.” 1 John expresses a similar promise of answered prayer, stating: “And this is the confidence we have before him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from him.” Jesus exhorts his followers to pray, promising them good results, saying “all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you.” In other words, throughout scripture the people of God call out to God in prayer and God answers.

74 In becoming sin for us, as Aquinas states in reference to 2 Cor. 5:21, Christ’s prayer for forgiveness of that sin can be thought to cover all who have sinned. ST III, q.

when Jesus asked, “Father forgive them”—God did. God forgave humanity its sin. Jesus’ prayer for forgiveness from the cross summoned the compassion of God to transform the violence of human existence into compassion, love, and forgiveness. God’s act of forgiveness reveals to humanity the true nature of at-one-ment as mercy, as reconciling, creative, and transforming. The forgiveness of God discloses to humanity the greatest of sacrifices, a sacrifice that forgives humanity its sin without condition and without keeping accounts. God’s forgiveness gives expression to the anti-violent nature of God who seeks to save those who are trapped in strictures and structures of injustice often justified by mistaken notions of God and the atonement.

Through the work of these medieval and contemporary theologians the Jesus event can be reinterpreted into a theory of at-one-ment that deconstructs notions of a violent God bent on retributive justice. We see that the justice of God *is* love and that love forgives, transforms, and seeks to create new and harmonious relationships. Atonement occurs through the abundant love of God in Jesus who suffers a horrendous death *because of* human evil, sin, and violence. Jesus’ death exposes human injustice and reveals the love of God by asking God to forgive. Through the forgiveness of God, a way is opened up for the transformation of all humanity. Through the cross of Jesus, we are forgiven without condition, accepted as we are. Through repentance we are transformed into those who live in the power of divine love.

Divine justice, therefore, is the act of loving and forgiving, a bottomless, endless, profoundly absurd forgiveness that reaches out in love to all humankind. Our response-ability is repentance—if we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Yahweh is tender and compassionate,
 Slow to anger, most loving;
 His indignation does not last forever,
 His resentment exists a short time only;
 He never treats us, never punishes us,
 As our guilt and our sins deserve.

—Jerusalem Bible, Ps. 103:8-10

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46, a. 4, ad 3. See also *ST* III, q. 46, a. 6, r and ad 2, 3, 4 in which Aquinas writes that Christ was suffering for the sins of all humanity, the very sins that Christ asked God to forgive.

ATONEMENT AND EMPIRE: REWORKING *CHRISTUS VICTOR* FOR ROMAN IMPERIAL CONTEXTS¹

Matthew Forrest Lowe

I. NEW IMPERIAL PARADIGMS, REMAINING PROBLEMS, AND *CHRISTUS VICTOR*

The social setting of the early church has been a major focus of late in biblical studies. The distinctively Jewish roots of Paul, Jesus, and early Christianity have benefited from a generation of scholarly scrutiny, as in the work of Krister Stendahl.² More recently, however, this scholarly tradition has been balanced and complemented (hopefully not supplanted) by growing interest in Christianity's Greco-Roman background. The most specific focus in this vein of research concerns the influence of the Roman Empire on the New Testament and its authors; yet even here we find a multiplicity of approaches. Social-scientific projects have sought to place the writings, events, people, and thought-patterns of the New Testament within the context of a first-century-CE world that was distinctively Roman; Richard Horsley and Philip Esler are among those who have edited and contributed to several such volumes.³ Ben Witherington has noted traces of imperial and counter-imperial discourse in his socio-rhetorical commentaries, in an attempt to learn simultaneously from NT texts and their cultural *milieux*.⁴

1 A previous draft of this paper, "Empire and *Christus Victor* in the Communities of the Early Church," was summarized and discussed in the "Forming Early Christian Communities in the Roman World" panel at the Fifth Annual Research in Religious Studies Conference, held at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, on May 3-4, 2007. I am grateful to those who offered comments on the paper in discussion during and after the panel.

2 Stendahl (*Paul Among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976]) insists that Paul "remains a Jew as he fulfills his role as an Apostle to the Gentiles," but also anticipates discussion of Rome's impact on Paul's life: the apostle's name change (Acts 13:9) "symbolizes the change of focus. From now on, Rome is the 'magnet'" of Pauline narrative (11).

3 See for example Philip F. Esler, "God's Honour and Rome's Triumph: Responses to the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE in Three Jewish Apocalypses," 239-258 in his edited work *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); or Horsley and his contributors, who in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997) locate a "counter-imperial gospel" in the Pauline and "pseudo-Pauline" corpus. Horsley has also drawn parallels between the Roman and American empires in his brief but convincing monograph, *Religion and Empire: People, Power, and the Life of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003).

4 See, for instance, Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhe-*

At a level slightly more abstract, competing ideologies of sovereignty—the Roman Empire versus “God’s empire”—dominate much of the landscape in the work of Warren Carter and Peter Oakes.⁵ Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat have provoked interest in the applications of Paul’s subversive worldview and ethics in their recent book *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire*; the book has spawned panel discussions, a website devoted to further exploration of questions that reveal the pervasive influence of the *current* imperial worldview, and even a night club event.⁶ Peter Schmiechen has brought the problem of competing divine and human claims to the overlaps between ecclesiology and atonement theory in *Christ the Reconciler*.⁷ Other points of contact are too varied to rehearse here, but these works represent a much larger body of literature,⁸ a growing and self-sustaining “cottage industry” of Roman-contextual scholarship, influencing related areas of biblical study while remaining deliberately relevant to contemporary worldview issues.

To date, these conversations—anchored primarily in biblical studies—have been limited largely to individual pericopes of the NT, leading in some cases to studies of whole books. The question then becomes, where will the topic lead next? Only in the past decade has the Roman Empire received such contextual attention, and already the degree of Rome’s sociopolitical and ideological dominance is well documented. The empire’s *theological* influence, however, is territory that Carter and others have broadly surveyed, but not yet fully explored. Limiting conversation to select passages (or at most, specific books) of the NT

tological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

5 Carter, in *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), repeatedly phrases God’s reign as an “empire” in subversive competition with Caesar’s; see especially 60-64 and 87-117, as well as much of his earlier *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (JSNT Sup 204; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000). Indicative samples of Oakes’ views can be found in Oakes, ed., *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church* (Carlisle: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

6 Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004). The book was the focus of a panel with response from the authors at Wycliffe College, April 13, 2006; related discussion has led to the website (<http://www.empireremixed.com/>) and “Wright Remixed,” an evening interview between the authors and N. T. Wright, whose thought influenced the writing of *Colossians Remixed*.

7 Peter Schmiechen, *Christ the Reconciler: A Theology for Opposites, Differences, and Enemies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), especially 97-137.

8 For further examples, see the contributed essays (including those of Esler, Oakes, and Carter) in John Riches and David C. Sim, eds., *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman Imperial Context* (JSNTS 276; New York/London: T & T Clark [Continuum], 2005); the epistolary fiction of Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Lost Letters of Pergamum: A Story from the New Testament World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), in which characters exchange correspondence regarding the “empire of God”; and Mark T. Finney’s article, “Christ Crucified and the Inversion of Roman Imperial Ideology in 1 Corinthians,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 35.1 (Spring 2005), 20-33.

allows little consideration for the empire's larger theological implications for ancient Christian worldviews—even though any imperial influence found in the NT would likely have informed aspects of biblical, historical, and early systematic theology.

I suspect that when we find even one early theological theme that bears the stamp of ancient empire, we can learn more about the thought of the earliest Christian communities: how they interacted with the political powers of the day, and how they incorporated these powers into their developing worldviews. Consider *Christus Victor*, advanced by Gustaf Aulén as an early image of the atonement, which envisions the crucifixion and resurrection as Christ's triumph over sin, death, and Hades. Aulén conceptualized this motif as a spiritual conflict on a cosmic plane.⁹ But the cross itself, so central an image in Christian scripture, history, theology, and liturgy, functioned not just as a humiliating and painful form of execution, but also as a vivid reminder for the Mediterranean world of Rome's power over life and death. Any reconsideration of a theory of the atonement must address both the stark reality and the ideological impact of the cross; an atonement motif that portrays Christ's crucifixion as a victory over "the devil and all evil powers"¹⁰ must also encompass *earthly* powers such as Rome.

This proposal, then, amounts to a reconsideration, perhaps even a partial re-appropriation, of the atonement motif that dominated the early church period and the NT itself.¹¹ Texts from the NT and early church fathers will provide primary sources, with interdisciplinary modern resources drawn from social-scientific models and biblical theology. While Aulén's motif itself will remain largely intact, its components can be reworked somewhat to reflect recent trends in imperial-context research. As we address *Christus Victor* and its relevance for Roman imperial contexts, it may help to keep some questions in mind:

- how does the portrayal of Christ's opponents in this dramatic rendering of the atonement change when we consider the imperial context to which Aulén traces *Christus Victor*?
- in what ways does Christ's triumph function both in a salvific sense and as a subversive response to the military might of Rome?
- how might the Roman Empire have influenced the overall development of a dominant atonement motif among early Christian communities?
- how can insights taken from vastly different theological avenues complement one another, enriching our investigations of the atonement in early Christian theology?

9 Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, A. G. Hebert, trans. (London: SPCK Large Paperback 16, 1970), 5. Unless otherwise indicated, all references are taken from this volume; most subsequent references are made parenthetically within the body of the text.

10 Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 48-50.

11 As Aulén (6) originally asserted, in keeping with his leadership (together with Anders Nygren) of the *Motivforschung* (motif research) school, emphasizing recurrent scriptural themes as aids for theological study.

To articulate a response, we must explore in more detail Aulén's argument, before considering briefly how it has been critiqued, and how it might be re-worked and adapted to account for the realities of Roman imperial power.

II. RECAPITULATING *CHRISTUS VICTOR*

A. Aulén's Argument Summarized

What was it that transpired on the cross? How should we describe the significance of the gruesome act played out there? If the passion narratives of the four canonical Gospels and the references to the same events throughout the NT are to be believed—that is, if the man crucified as an insurrectionist in Jerusalem was God's Messiah and Son—then there are no human words, no pictures, concepts or songs that can fully explain the “work” that was performed on that cross. Those who have tried have often resorted to offering more than one image, in hopes that one “angle” may show what another does not.¹² Yet Aulén's angle is compelling: he describes Christ's crucifixion and resurrection as a *drama*, in which Christ “fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the ‘tyrants’ under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself” (4). Aulén rarely speaks of *Christus Victor* as a complete theory or doctrine, preferring terms like *theme*, *idea*, and *motif* that suggest both coherence and dynamic development; it is not just a source of images and symbols available for piecemeal appropriation (9, 69, 73-74, and 78, repeated 157). He smartly casts his theme as the neglected “classic” view of the cross (9 and elsewhere), placing all other perspectives at a historical disadvantage.

At the heart of the *Christus Victor* motif is a basic cosmic dualism, pitting demonic forces against heavenly ones. Aulén draws from Paul's letters a “great complex of demonic forces,” with sin and death, “almost personified,” as major players; “to be set free from sin through Christ,” Aulén writes, “is to be delivered also from death's dominion,” citing Rom 5:18 and 6:11 (67). A similar view was shared by the rest of the NT authors and (with minor changes) by church leaders in the patristic period: Paul and the early church fathers shared a “dualistic outlook,” the same ideas of “conflict and triumph” and “powers of evil under which mankind is in bondage,” and the hope of victory through Christ from heaven.¹³ While forms of dualism survived in the West at least until the Enlightenment, the *Christus Victor* theme fell into disuse in favor of other atonement models, such as Anselm's objective satisfaction theory (advanced in *Cur Deus Homo?*) and Abelard's subjective view (Aulén, 9; also 2-3). *Christus Victor* was revived

12 A summary of major atonement theories (in dialogue with a new theory, one with startling implications) is Hans Boersma's *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

13 Aulén, 66-67; he also acknowledges key differences between Paul's “powers” and the church fathers' emphasis on the devil as a singular entity. Even for Paul, Satan is implicitly present as chief behind his demonic hosts (69-70). It is possible to see this hierarchy as a dark parody of God as “Lord of Hosts” – or “Yhwh Armies,” to use one of John Goldingay's innovative expressions from *Israel's Faith: Old Testament Theology, Vol. 2* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006) – further accentuating the drawing of cosmic battle lines.

under Luther (14, and chapter 6), only to be subsumed once more by subjective theories since the Reformation (chapter 7). Aulén does not discount the overall value of other atonement models, nor does he intend his work as an apology for the “classic” view; he seeks to restore a motif to its early prominence, emphasizing some of the shortcomings of the other views in the process of vindicating his own (though considerable irony can be seen in the need to vindicate a theme that features Christ as a victor!).¹⁴

Aulén’s case never rests solely on the dualistic worldview. He locates what he calls a “double-sidedness” or “double aspect” to *Christus Victor*’s redemption drama: as God-in-Christ “combats and prevails over the ‘tyrants’ which hold mankind in bondage,” God is at once the reconciler and the reconciled, both the author and the object of reconciliation with the world and people he created (55-56). The dualism here is not absolute; death and the devil are revealed as “executants” (55) with roles circumscribed within God’s redemptive purpose. In overcoming the “tyrants,” Christ enacts reconciliation (56); in defeating enemies, he effectively removes enmity.¹⁵ Once Aulén has invoked the language of drama, we could carry the metaphor further, visualizing the atonement as not merely double-sided but *manifold* in its depth, with multiple levels of staging and “scenery”: victory and deliverance are shown onstage, while reconciliation and redemption are worked out behind the scenes, as it were. Also in the background are other compatible atonement images, such as ransom and recompense.¹⁶ Seen from this perspective, the atonement is not just a doctrine but the evidence of a *work* or *act* of God, one that informs the study of God’s own nature and character (4, 12-13). This thoughtful interpretation of theology and history remains a priority for Aulén: if a theological scheme was valued by the NT and patristic authors, it should be given due consideration in the contemporary church as well. Even if the worldviews of Western modernity are less dualistic in outlook than their ancient counterparts, there is continuing value in the idea of the “conflict of God with the dark, hostile forces of evil, and His victory over them by the Divine self-sacrifice; above all, we shall hear again the note of triumph” (158-59).

B. Criticism of Christus Victor

The effect of Aulén’s argument can be measured by the amount of theological conversation—and critique—it continues to engender. A number of authors

14 Aulén (149) faults Anselmian doctrine for emphasizing only sin and guilt as “enemies,” while his own classic view encompasses death, devil, sin, law, and curse as representative of a “series” of powers.

15 Aulén, 55; this language suggests Eph 2:14, where Christ is remembered as having “broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (NRSV).

16 Gregory of Nyssa and Chrysostom expound the deliverance of humanity respectively as a payment of ransom for hostages, or the release of tortured prisoners as redress for the unjust death of a ruler or heir (cited in Aulén, 48-51; biblical connections can be drawn to Mk 10:45//Mt 20:28; 1 Tim 2:6; Heb 9:15; Lk 4:18-19 [“He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives...to let the oppressed go free,” cf. Isa 61:1-2]; the “Parable of the Wicked Tenants” of Lk 20:9-19//Mt 21:33-46//Mk 12:1-12; and 2 Tim 2:26).

have taken Aulén to task for his treatment of alternative positions on the atonement, oversimplifying Anselm's case, neglecting Abelard, and offering a one-sided treatment of Luther.¹⁷ Aulén's handling of other (rival?) atonement perspectives is not our primary focus here, but several points of criticism specific to his own view should be acknowledged before we continue. *Christus Victor* has been faulted for its metaphorical, if not mythological, categories; for neglecting issues of theodicy; for unresolved dualisms and self-contradictions; for the difficulty of translating its concepts into systematic theological categories; for under-representing human response to Christ's sacrifice; and for overemphasizing the victory theme that some do not find apparent in the New Testament.¹⁸ Yet Aulén's motif still finds supporters, such as Hans Boersma and Thomas Finger, who are willing to rework and defend the *Christus Victor* motif, despite their own criticisms. Space does not permit us to address all of these points, but a few of the objections will be answered, at least implicitly, as we explore the possibility of applying Aulén's work to imperial contexts.

C. Empire-Relevant Aspects of Aulén's Argument

The specifics of Aulén's argument that are especially relevant to the Roman imperial context can be summarized under three headings: *opponents*, *atonement*, and *enthronement*.

Opponents. As Aulén casts *Christus Victor*, "God is pictured as in Christ carrying through a victorious conflict against powers of evil which are hostile to His will . . . the hostile powers are regarded as in the service of the Will of God the Judge of all, and the executants of His judgment" (5). The dualism Aulén describes here is a conflict born of competing claims: the "powers of evil" are hostile specifically to God's decisions, and thus they represent a challenge to God's sovereignty. But when Aulén speaks of the evil powers "of the world" (4), his language is perhaps deliberately imprecise; in both Greek and English, words like *world* (*kosmos*, as in 1 John 2:15) and *age* (*aiōnos*, as in 1 Cor 2:8 and Eph 1:21) are often ambiguous. Spiritual powers were not the only powers in question in the first-century world, nor had the link between spiritual and political powers been ignored in previous centuries. The OT attested to several traditions of dualistic conflict: the portrayal of God as the divine warrior is among those images that

17 Anselm: Colin E. Gunton, "Christus Victor Revisited: A Study in Metaphor and the Transformation of Meaning," *Journal of Theological Studies* 36.1 (Apr 1985), 130. Abelard: Pamela Dickey Young, "Beyond Moral Influence to an Atoning Life," *Theology Today* 52.3 (Oct 1995), 349-350. Luther: Boersma, 181-189 and esp. 183; and Ted Peters, "Atonement in Anselm and Luther, Second Thoughts About Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor*," *Lutheran Quarterly* 24.3 (Aug 1972), 309-310. This paragraph expands slightly on the summary of *Christus Victor* critique in my entry on Aulén for the *Encyclopedia of Christian Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, forthcoming).

18 In addition to the sources mentioned just previously, see on these counts Thomas Finger, "Biblical and Systematic Theology in Interaction: A Case Study on the Atonement," in *So Wide a Sea: Essays on Biblical and Systematic Theology*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger, 1-17 (Text-Reader Series 4; Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1991); and Peters, 301-314.

Aulén refers to as anticipating his classic atonement motif, citing Isa 59:16ff (79). But the biblical employment of the divine warrior motif is itself partly political. Isaiah depicts bellicose nations as unwittingly serving God’s purposes, usually as instruments of judgment upon Israel or other countries; in the prophetic mindset, even these local superpowers would eventually be forced to acknowledge Israel’s God as the ultimate Superpower.¹⁹

The NT carried on this tradition: Carter notes Matthew’s Deuteronomic expressions (including the idea that “God’s blessings or curses take effect through historical events”), with Rome featured in Matthew’s world as God’s “punitive agent.”²⁰ Rome’s power was omnipresent in the first-century Mediterranean world. Its power pervaded political, socio-economic, ideological and religious contexts to such a degree that Carter has declared the empire to be *the* framework which the NT authors had to negotiate, both in their writings and in their daily lives.²¹ Faced with the need to address Rome’s power, Matthew places it in the context of God’s greater power and comprehensive sovereignty²²—and effectively makes Rome an executant of God’s will, in the same way Aulén describes the “powers” in his work.

We spoke earlier of dramatic language—of the atonement as a drama and as a work being “performed” on the cross—and it may be appropriate to return to that language here, to recast the role of Aulén’s “executants.” Is there a way we can describe the powers that will do justice to the NT’s blurred boundaries between earthly/political forces and spiritual ones? We require a “both-and” definition of powers, and Marva Dawn supplies one: “The powers are not spiritual beings, but a connection of human beings and their fabrications/institutions infused with supernatural powers. The ‘rulers’ that ‘crucified the Lord of glory’ (1 Cor 2:8) included false religious leaders (Caiaphas and various other leaders), unjust politics and government (Herod and Pilate), and Mammon (Judas).”²³ This definition is not without potential problems: what kind of “connection” does she see, and where is it drawn? Given that Aulén earlier referred to personified, ontological enemies such as Death, how much are the “infused powers” here personified (as with Mammon)? Still, the notion of interwoven entities, of “tyrants” that

19 This “superpower” phrasing belongs to Goldingay, who points to Isa 13-14 and 33 as examples in Section 8.3 of *Israel’s Faith*.

20 Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 41.

21 Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 1, 12, and 15. While I have learned much from Carter’s observations on Matthew, I find his terms troubling here. *Framework* implies a frame of reference so comprehensive that even the NT’s appeals to the traditions of the Old/First Testament would have been unable to circumvent it; *negotiate* can too easily suggest an unhealthy degree of compromise or collaboration with the “powers” of the day.

22 Carter (*Matthew and the Margins*, 40-42) employs the term *sovereignty* often here, and in *Matthew and Empire* and *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*; it evidently includes “total authority” (42), but seems to reach beyond this as well.

23 Marva J. Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 148.

exist partly in earthly power structures, acknowledges the indistinct edges of NT speech, without obstructing the flow of Aulén's original argument. If anything, Dawn's definition renders Aulén more relevant for discussion in the twenty-first century world, where mega-corporations make claims of ownership and sovereignty not too dissimilar from those made by Rome.²⁴ In Dawn's definition, we find an alternative "power" source.

Atonement. Terms such as *victory* and *triumph* clearly inform Aulén's title, and he freely employs similar language throughout his book, language already suggestive of a military context, if not an imperial one.²⁵ In articulating his dominant biblical motif, Aulén's decision to foreground Christ's opponents demands a portrayal of the atonement that conveys brutal strife and hard-fought conquest. His allusion to the divine warfare cycle is foundational to his argument and our own. The mythological enemies overcome in the OT, such as Rahab, Leviathan, River, and Sea (Isa 27:1, 12; 51:9-10; Ps 68; 74:13-14; 93:3-4) can be seen as pre-figuring the cosmic opposition in the NT, but they also represented Israel's most implacable, imperial foes; coronation songs, expressing Israel's own hopes of political sovereignty and expansion, grew out of the same contexts (cf. Ps 72:8-11). Early Christian communities, finding their freedom to confess Jesus (not Caesar!) as Lord restricted by Rome, would likely have had little trouble substituting Rome in place of Israel's ancient oppressors and mythological counterparts. Much of Revelation can be read at this level, especially those passages featuring the Dragon and the Monsters from the sea and land (Rev 12-13).²⁶ Many among the first generations of Christians would have had little problem with a perceived victory over Rome.

The imagery of triumph is not merely military; it connotes the celebratory, highly symbolic parade practiced by Rome when its generals won significant battles or wars abroad. Though the Imperial Senate voted the right to a triumph procession only rarely, Larry Kreitzer lists eight such events spanning approximately one century—and several which would have been memorable events for the earliest Christians, as commemorated in architecture, coins, and other forms of propaganda.²⁷ Esler has made a briefer but similar study of Rome's triumph propaganda, finding that Jewish apocalyptic literature carried responses of resistance to the empire's ideology; both 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch refer to the Roman tri-

24 Carter (*The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 28) writes of Rome's claim on earth as one of *ownership*; for a more detailed discussion on this and other related themes, see Walsh and Keesmaat, as well as David J. Hawkin, *The Twenty-First Century Confronts its Gods: Globalization, Technology and War* (Albany: SUNY, 2004).

25 See Aulén, 4, 55, 59, 66, 69, 73-74, 79, 146, and 159.

26 For a recent commentary that highlights these themes, see Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (Black's New Testament Commentary Series; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), esp. 179-86.

27 Larry J. Kreitzer, *Striking New Images: Roman Imperial Coinage and the New Testament World* (JSNTSup 134; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 129 and 135-40.

umph with its symbolic power and inherent transaction of honor and shame, with 2 Bar 40 functioning as a triumph-parody with Rome represented as the victim.²⁸ In the Gospels, even modern paratextual elements hint at a triumph theme, as Jesus' Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem is often titled "The Triumphal Entry."²⁹ Accounts of this event can be read as commemorating the arrival of a Davidic king, even as they join 2 Baruch in subverting and parodying Roman triumph and visitation parades—but in either case, they anticipate the victory of a leader not yet triumphant. Richard Horsley and Neil Silberman suggest that while Jesus is following a Jewish prophetic "script" here, to Roman eyes his entry would have appeared to function in "unabashed imperial mode," a parody mocking the messianic *and* imperial pretensions of Herod and his family.³⁰ Whether Jewish or Greco-Roman in their background, early Christians would have easily identified the idea of victory with the symbols of a triumph.

But victory against the "powers" of the day was not part of everyday first-century Christian life. Quite the opposite: the Lord they proclaimed had been crucified, given the death of a criminal or slave, shortly after his purportedly triumphal entry. Paul embraced a similar knowledge of suffering and made it his own, highlighting both Christ's triumph and his own surprising and humiliating role in the imagined parade. Kreitzer, Scott Hafemann, and Michael Knowles have all devoted considerable space to the theme of triumph as it influenced Paul, as evidenced by both 2 Cor 2:14 and Col 2:13-15.³¹ When Paul writes that God "in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession" and "disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in [the cross]," the verb he uses means "'to display as the spoils of victory,' implying that Christ has conquered and enslaved those who follow him, displays them as evidence of his victory, and leads them to death."³² The metaphor of triumph was double-edged. It could celebrate the victory won by Christ, while admitting that Paul's own path of ministry, following the Crucified, was filled with pain and the potential for execution. This position of extreme weakness "paves the way for the triumph of God through the power of the cross. Death gives way to life."³³

28 See Esler, "God's Honour," 239-258.

29 The TNIV's title for the event, "Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King," is even more explicitly subversive.

30 Richard A. Horsley and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Message and the Kingdom: How Jesus and Paul Ignited a Revolution and Transformed the Ancient World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 70-73.

31 Kreitzer and Knowles each respond to Hafemann's view (from *Suffering and the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of II Cor: 2:14-3:3 within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence* [WUNT 2.19; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1986], 22-35). Kreitzer offers a complementary conceptual modification of Hafemann's description of the triumph; both authors underscore his link between ministry and death (Kreitzer, 128 and 142-44; Michael P. Knowles, *Not Ourselves: Paul and Preaching in the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, forthcoming, no pp.)

32 Knowles, again citing and developing Hafemann.

33 Kreitzer, 128.

Victory could indeed be read as triumph, but in the experience of Paul and other early Christians, the metaphor takes on a more complex character.

Enthronement. Aulén (55) refers to Christ's victory as a point at which he "wins His triumph," alluding to the historical moment of the crucifixion, if the NT passages above that explicitly link triumph and cross are any indication. Again, Aulén's language is readily adaptable. He finds "the theme of Christ's victory" spotlighted in Colossians, with Col 2:15 as a pillar of his argument there (69; noted above). He locates parallel themes in Phil 2:10 ("at the name of Jesus every knee should bend") and 1 Cor 15:24-27 ("he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death"), which attest to common authorship (69-70). These and other related passages affirm that the redemption Christ accomplishes affects the entire cosmos (70). But they also indicate that Christ is at the head of a kingdom, one that is anticipated proleptically in the NT and especially so in the confident expectation of 1 Cor 15. Christ is not just *Christus Victor* but *Christus Coronatum*, Christ crowned and reigning—a truly subversive message in the first-century Mediterranean. Earlier we referred to Ps 68 and Ps 72 as examples of divinely-ordained kingship celebrations; Ps 68 is appropriated in Eph 4:8 ("When he ascended on high he took captivity itself a captive"), while 1 Cor 15:24-27 evokes similar exaltations in Ps 8:6 and 110:1.

But would passages that draw so heavily on OT imagery really have been read as threatening Rome's power? When employed to describe Christ, the threat is clear: the prospect of *every* knee bending before Christ must include *every* form of power, no matter how strong in an earthly/political or spiritual sense. The spatial dimensions of *ascending* and *reigning-over* may also point back to triumph practice: the climax of the triumphal procession in Rome was an ascent of the Capitoline hill, where the victor was lauded and the prisoners executed.³⁴ To speak of Christ as a king or ruler (*basileus*) was to give allegiance to "Jesus, the agent of God's saving presence and empire"³⁵—and to undermine the Roman emperor. Aulén, speaking primarily of the devil, argues that "the power of evil ultimately overreaches itself when it comes in conflict with the power of good, with God Himself. It loses the battle at the moment when it seems to be victorious" (55). If the early Christians had begun to cast the empire as an evil power, placing the "empire" of their reigning Lord over against Rome's, such a move would likely have been encouraging within their own communities—and dangerous without.

III. SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC CRITICISM AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AS COMPLEMENTARY MODELS

We have rapidly explored Aulén's theological scheme and its imperial-con-

34 Kreitzer, 142-44.

35 Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, xvii and again on 1 ("God's salvation or empire"); as much as I admire Carter, to equate the terms *presence* and *salvation* with *empire* seems politically and theologically questionable.

text adaptability, but only on a theological level. Can we discover how the atonement was being formulated in the hearts, minds, and gathering conversations of first-century Christians? I suggest that we can begin this process only when we allow our research to be interdisciplinary. Only when we combine the findings of social-scientific criticism and biblical theology are we likely to discern something of the early Christian worldview regarding the atonement.

A. Sect Formation and Ideology

There has been considerable dispute over the categorization of the first Christian groups. Two examples from Esler's 1995 volume should serve to illustrate the debate: John Elliott tracks the Jesus movement from Jewish messianic faction to discrete Christian sect, while Bruce Malina insists that Christian associations as described in the NT never reached the most productive "performing" stage of small-group development, so "it would be quite anachronistic to describe them as sects."³⁶ One of Elliott's sect-identifying criteria entails "an ideological unit with a specific ideology involving extraordinary legitimation and warrant for its contested structure of values and its contested system of beliefs and codes of behaviour"; he notes that in meeting this criterion, messianic sects "also utilized various theological claims to provide divine warrant" for their values and actions.³⁷ The "also" here implies that the sects *did* maintain a distinctive ideology, but went *further* in developing (and sharing, with travel along Rome's trade routes) *theological* supports to counter the dominant ideology of Rome and the *pax Romana*.³⁸ There is at least room to suggest that early Christian theologies would have grown and spread out of direct opposition, not just in the form of censure from Jewish communities, but also through the empire's own pervasive ideology—though Malina may disagree, based on his reading of the NT.

B. Using Biblical Theology to Address Gaps in Social-Scientific Approaches

This is precisely where social-scientific models begin to break down: perceived lack of evidence, divergent readings of ancient texts, and temptations to ignore information outside one's model, can all lead to reductionism and frustration with the disciplinary boundaries of biblical research. Few theoretical models are equipped to address the involvement of supernatural forces in the world of the NT. Yet without this acknowledgment, even the most optimistic social-scientific approach will falter. What if Malina's groups never arrived at the "performing" stage because the accent in the NT narratives and letters is on what *God* is performing through Christ? What if the obstacles that interrupt a group's devel-

36 John J. Elliott, "The Jewish Messianic Movement: From Faction to Sect," and Bruce J. Malina, "Early Christian Groups: Using Small Group Formation Theory to Explain Christian Organizations," 75-95 and 96-113 respectively in Esler, *Modeling Early Christianity*. Malina (113n8) goes on: "Further, to explain any first-century CE embedded religion in terms of church and sect typology is to explain first-century carts in terms of internal combustion vehicles or automobile typologies." Just what an automobile typology would look like is something he declines to explain.

37 Elliott, 83.

38 Walsh and Keesmaat offer an incisive critique of the *pax Romana* as Rome's guiding, captivating myth early in *Colossians Remixed*.

opment are the institutional, structural, and even personified “powers,” such as Rome and its gods?

While social-scientific criticism struggles with such questions, biblical theology finds its strengths in discerning God’s redemptive activity and the opposition and conflict that often develop in hostile response.³⁹ Perceiving multiple levels of narrational reality and metaphor, biblical theology is also qualified to address the “double-sidedness” and depth of the *Christus Victor* theme’s staging. Aulén insists that the classic theme can be clearly explained but admits that it is not necessarily a “rationally consistent” theory (58) when compared with other models of the atonement. This is hardly a shortcoming. I would suggest that the NT canon is not always rationally consistent either, and any theological motif that exists in close proximity to the NT and its cultural (imperial) context is unlikely to lend itself readily to the structures of modern, Western, systematic thought. Yet few biblical theologians have employed the *Christus Victor* motif,⁴⁰ nor have many attempts been made to address Aulén’s thesis (whether favorably or unfavorably) from any discipline other than systematic theology and ecclesiology. By reorienting this motif toward imperial-context scholarship, I hope to provoke a more cross-disciplinary discussion.

Perhaps a return to Malina’s observations will serve to illustrate the promise of an interdisciplinary approach. Malina’s refusal to see the NT’s Christian groups as distinct sects is based on his chosen model of small-group development: the groups never attained the productive “performing” stage. Here we can take advantage of a linguistic overlap between Malina’s borrowed theory and Aulén’s dramaturgical terms. Perhaps performance as a *metaphor* can encompass both interests, as the corporate human performing process adapts to recognize the acts that God, in Christ, has already performed and continues to work out through the performance—whether in biblical interpretation, ecclesiology, or the ethics of everyday life—of God’s people.⁴¹ The metaphor is imperfect; the integration of diverse approaches is often problematic, and any model designed for social-scientific or dramaturgical analogy remains incomplete without a visual component. Still, performance provides an example of great potential, incorporating contributions from multiple fields of biblical and theological study. The work Christ has performed on the cross is pivotal, but there is more cooperative performing yet to be done, and more of this metaphor to be explored.

IV. REVIEW: *CHRISTUS VICTOR* RECONTEXTUALIZED AS *CHRISTUS CORONATUM*

Even an attempt to answer our initial questions has required not just a re-

39 God’s great redemptive acts within Israel’s sacred history form the structure of Christoph Barth’s *God with Us: A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), in the tradition of von Rad and others; Section 8 of Goldingay’s biblical theology, *Israel’s Faith*, speaks volumes about the opposition.

40 A notable exception is Thomas Finger’s essay in the Mennonite anthology *So Wide a Sea*, noted above.

41 I owe this insight to the essays in *Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian Tradition*, ed. Trevor A. Hart and Steven R. Guthrie, Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination, and the Arts (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007).

construction of the sociopolitical and theological setting of first-century church communities, but a restructuring of the *Christus Victor* theme itself. Aulén was by no means ignorant of the Greco-Roman aspects of early Christian history, but the recent attention to Rome's impact demands more than his original structure can give. In reworking Aulén's thesis with a more synthetic view of the "powers" in mind, we arrive at a more muscular *Christus Victor*. *Christus Coronatum* is only one step in a longer process of discovering the early church's first coherent theological scheme. Perhaps it is better to refer to their first discrete *theologies*, plural: Basil Studer maintains that the "theology of victory" generated by Aulén's motif was fueled by the dualism and demonology that pervaded the ancient Mediterranean world, trends partly indebted to Jewish apocalyptic traditions.⁴² But when Rome's ideological and theological influence is added to the mix, the theology of victory must be politicized, its anticipation of proleptic/apocalyptic judgment carefully redefined. Early kerygmatic and creedal statements like Phil 2:6-11 must be revisited in hopes of learning more from the texts and their communal, imperial contexts. Aulén's work is also worthy of continued reconsideration. When he writes that "the safeguard of the continuity of God's operation is the dualistic outlook, the Divine warfare against the evil that holds mankind in bondage, and the triumph of Christ" (146), there remains much to unpack regarding Christian theology's increasing independence from Jewish and Roman forms of expression.

Already emergent here are the clear beginnings of counter-imperial ideology, theology, and Christology, centered on an early motif of the atonement. My proposal is not without risk. Social-scientific and socio-rhetorical forms of criticism apply modern theoretical models and discourse analysis to situations from the ancient world; my approach entails similarly anachronistic hazards, in using an *atonement* model rather than a more concrete *social-scientific* one, in appropriating an imported model usually associated with systematic theology, and in trying to adapt an atonement motif published nearly eighty years ago to today's biblical and theological scholarship. Then, too, there is the sheer historical distance to consider, from the first century to Aulén's twentieth and our twenty-first. Though we must be careful not to draw facile comparisons between ancient ages and our own, on occasion the gap may be bridged. Spiritually and physically oppressive situations existed in the Roman era; many of these powers and injustices still survive in our time, and as North Americans we bear more than our share of the global responsibility for them. Gordon McConville affirms that "if and when, in our world, systems of oppression are disclosed for what they are and a believing response is made, the mismatch between that world and this, and that particular case and this . . . becomes unimportant beside the forceful impact of the word of God";⁴³ I would argue that contextual differences are never "unimportant,"

42 Studer, 48-50.

43 Gordon McConville, "Old Testament Laws and Canonical Intentionality," 259-81 in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, Scott Hahn, Robin Parry, Christopher Seitz, and Al Wolters (*Scripture & Hermeneutics 7*; Grand Rapids: Zondervan; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006).

but when creatively and thoughtfully addressed, they can open fresh theological viewpoints. The atonement, as the pivotal moment in the cosmic drama, must never be allowed to become too familiar, but must be faithfully reworked and reinterpreted for new audiences.

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THEORY AND METAPHOR IN CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

Darren Sumner

Much work has been done in the area of John Calvin's Christology, and specifically on his view of the extent of the atonement, whether the work wrought was done for the whole world or only for the elect, who are saved by it. This essay is not about Calvin's overall view of the work of Christ, nor its extent, as much as it is about his employment of biblical metaphor in his expression of the doctrine of the atonement. Rather than particularly *what* he teaches, though that will be the realm in which my analysis takes place, it is about *how* he teaches by drawing on the rich tapestry of metaphor present in the Old and New Testaments.

As a linguistic tool metaphor comes with its own set of epistemological issues, even apart from the theological context in which we will use it. A metaphor is figurative language, but this does not mean that the things being said are never objectively true.¹ There must always be points of actual correspondence between the metaphor and the principle it is used to illustrate, as there are between an analogy and its subject, or the metaphor was poorly chosen. In an important way, even if not exhaustively so, Christ's work is not only *like* juridical substitution, it *is* juridical substitution.

On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that as figurative language metaphor rarely, if ever, offers a one-to-one correspondence to reality. "No matter how carefully we try to analyze and unwrap the meaning of the metaphor," Hans Boersma writes, "we can never quite give a literal description that conveys the exact same sense as the metaphor. Just as an explanation of a piece of art can never quite capture the full richness of the artwork, so also every attempt to unpack the metaphor will be only partially successful."² Theology is indeed a form of art, imprecise in its beauty. Furthermore, if truth can be encapsulated in non-figurative language, what purpose do our metaphors serve?

In discussing metaphors employed for very specific theological purposes, there should be no implication that the metaphor can only draw a similar picture,

1 Hans Boersma suggests that "all language is metaphoric in character. Thus, we can never downplay the significance of metaphors as somehow less truthful than what we think of as literal descriptions." See Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 18. This is significant to our study of Calvin, who used what I will refer to here as "metaphors" of the atonement to describe objective reality, sometimes using a word such as "sacrifice" metaphorically and other times quite literally.

2 *Ibid.*, 102. Calvin himself wrote: "No language, indeed, can fully represent the consequences and efficacy of Christ's death." Calvin, *Commentary on Ephesians in The Commentaries of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1843-55), 5:2. Quoted in John Frederick Jansen, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1956), 90. For more on the proper use and limitations of metaphor, particularly in atonement theology, see Boersma, 99-114.

and never speak to the actual state of things. Let us never conclude that because it is a metaphor, it is only an illustration and not “true.”

Calvin had a deep appreciation for metaphor in all areas of theology. This is no more true elsewhere than in his treatment of the atonement, where he drew upon Scripture to invoke many complementary and contrasting metaphors describing the work of Christ; he often mixes several metaphors within the same passage, even the same sentence.³ He had a great love of multiplicity in metaphor. For example, he takes great pleasure in quoting Bernard:

The name of Jesus is not only light but also food; it is also oil, without which all food of the soul is dry; it is salt, without whose seasoning whatever is set before us is insipid; finally, it is honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, rejoicing in the heart, and at the same time medicine. Every discourse in which his name is not spoken is without savor.⁴

Calvin often laid different metaphors side by side, so that the ideas they represent – ransom, victory, blood sacrifice – might play off one another, filling out the whole picture as one that is more than the sum of its parts.⁵ Truth is to be perceived from as many vantage points as possible.

The theory of the atonement commonly associated with the Genevan reformer is penal substitution. The metaphor is that of a judge, God, and the accused criminal, humanity. The verdict is “Guilty;” the punishment is death. But then comes Jesus Christ, who offers the most unimaginable defense: He will stand in our place and take the death sentence so that the judge is left to declare men and women free.⁶

I do not contend that Calvin did not actually advocate this view of Christ’s work (he certainly did), nor that this view of the atonement is by any means tangential in Calvin’s writings. Rather, I hope to demonstrate that it is by no means the only view that he advocated. The atonement metaphors of recapitulation, ransom, victory, sacrifice, and the like should not be made subordinate to the juridical model in a proper explication of Calvin’s thought. Though guided at a fundamental level by the principle of substitution, Calvin did not allow his doctrine of the atonement to be limited to one metaphor or a few metaphors within the

3 One example of Calvin’s use of mixed metaphors is given by Kennedy: In describing Christ’s giving the believer “nourishment” and “life” through his union with the savior, the reformer uses the metaphor of Christ as bread and as a fountain, and as the channel through which God pours his life into us. See Kevin Dixon Kennedy, *Union with Christ and the Extent of the Atonement in Calvin* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 125-6.

4 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II.xvi.1, 503-4.

5 The short commentary on the Messianic fifty-third chapter of Isaiah demonstrates Calvin’s love for variety of metaphor. It includes reconciliation of relationship (v. 5), metaphors of ransom and commerce (v. 5), medical healing (v. 5), penal substitution (v. 8, 9, 10), and sacrifice (v. 10, 12).

6 There are variations on the penal metaphor, and Calvin himself offers a logical explanation as to why Christ is able to accept punishment for a transgression he did not commit. See below.

same vein, but allowed the multiplicity of biblical metaphor to inform a theology that is always consistent and whole in all its parts. His theology is richer for it, as would be ours.

A VARIEGATED APPROACH

In the *Institutes*, Calvin writes: “. . . clothed in our flesh He conquered death with sin, that the *victory of the triumph* might be ours; that He *offered in sacrifice the flesh* which He took from us, that by *expiation wrought* He might *destroy our guilt* and might *appease the Father’s just anger*.”⁷ Here Calvin uses three distinct linguistic categories in reference to the atonement in a single statement: victory over the powers of evil, sacrificial appeasement of divine wrath, and substitutionary expiation of human guilt.

Calvin never formulated a systematic doctrine of atonement. Instead, his view of the work of Christ, which is too multifaceted and too organizationally indistinct to be called a “theory,” is scattered throughout his published works. Rather than existing as a discrete section of the *Institutes*, Calvin’s view on atonement flavors everything he has to say. It is wrapped up in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the subject of the entire Christian theological endeavor.

What, then, is the problem that the atonement must resolve? The starting point is human sin: Sin must be dealt with, which means (in part) that the curse must be lifted, the punishment must be exacted, the human revolt must end, and God and human beings must be reunited. For our part, the wrath of God toward us must be satisfied; for God’s part, our sin must be expiated and we must be brought back into a state of obedience, which we are helpless to do.

Before considering five major categories under which Calvin described the atonement, it should be noted that Calvin’s theology is bound to the complex chorus of Scripture.⁸ It is informed by a careful reading of Scripture (and, derivatively, the Apostles Creed, which forms the structure for Book II, chapter xvi of the *Institutes*), and never done in abstract isolation. This fact is vital in recognizing the source of his variegated approach to atonement, since his source material is equally variegated.⁹ Bruce McCormack suggests that a function of this commitment to the authority of Scripture was Calvin’s anti-speculative tendency, which

7 Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xii.3 (emphasis added). Quoted in L.W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 212.

8 See Trevor Hart, “Humankind in Christ and Christ in Humankind: Salvation as Participation in Our Substitute in the Theology of John Calvin,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42:1 (1989), 70. On the fact that many later Calvinists, including John Owen, broke from Calvin and went beyond the limits of Scripture, see Kennedy, 25.

9 I take it for granted that the biblical authors employ a variety of categories for describing the work of Christ, including but not limited to: ransom (Mark 10:45; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20), victory (Matthew 4:1-11; Revelation 17:14), blood sacrifice (Mark 14:24; 1 Corinthians 5:7), penal substitution (Romans 4:23-25; Isaiah 53:5-6), recapitulation (Romans 5:12-21), exemplar (1 Peter 2:21-25; 1 Timothy 1:15-16), and interpersonal reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Romans 5:10). An author such as Paul, like Calvin, will invoke multiple metaphors even within the same passage. A separate study of the use of the many atonement metaphors throughout Scripture would be helpful.

is why he never set forth a comprehensive Christology or atonement doctrine.¹⁰

In proportion with Scripture, some atonement concepts are more prominent than others in Calvin. The Levitical code outlining the sacrificial system is prominent in the history of Israel, and provides an indispensable model for the New Testament authors' description of who Jesus is and why he died in the way that he did. It is no surprise, then, that for Calvin this is a key atonement model.¹¹ This theme of cultic sacrifice is interlaced with the other of Calvin's two dominant atonement themes, forensic or judicial satisfaction.¹² These two models dominate the landscape of Calvin's atonement theology, and we will consider them along with three others.

RECAPITULATION: CHRIST THE SECOND ADAM

Following the thought of second century theologian Irenaeus, Calvin believed that an important component of what Christ did was to live a life of perfect obedience to the Father, the life that human kind had failed to live. "Christ has redeemed us through his obedience, which he practiced throughout his life."¹³ By living a human life from birth to adulthood to death, Christ redeemed each moment of the human condition. The key here is not exclusively the cross, which is why the model of recapitulation is secondary or even tertiary in Calvin's thought, but rather obedience. For Calvin, the redemptive nature of obedience is *primarily* at the cross.

Christ's perfect life and obedient, self-sacrificial death restores righteousness to believers, and demonstrates the immortality which they are to inherit. Calvin writes: "Whence comes the hope of immortality, except from this, that we have already a pattern of it in the person of Christ? For as righteousness is restored to us on this ground, that Christ, by fulfilling the law in our nature, has abolished Adam's disobedience, so also life has been restored to us by this means, that he has opened up for our nature the kingdom of God, from which it had been banished, and has given it a place in the heavenly dwelling."¹⁴ There are echoes of a more subjective, exemplarist model here. By "fulfilling the law in our nature," that nature is redeemed – not that sin no longer exists in us, but that the possibility

10 Bruce McCormack, "For Us and Our Salvation: Incarnation and Atonement in the Reformed Tradition," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 43:1-4 (1998), 284-5. Cf. Robert A. Peterson, Sr., *Calvin and the Atonement* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 1999), 125-6.

11 See Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 260: "There can be little doubt that Calvin's Reformed theory of the atonement has biblical underpinnings in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament and in especially the apostle Paul's strong emphasis on Christ turning aside the wrath of God for us."

12 Henri Blocher notes that Calvin utilizes two main language-sets: "the religious, cultic language of *sacrifice*, with such terms as expiation (*expiatio*, *piaculum*), curse, propitiation, uncleanness and purification by means of shed blood; and the forensic or judicial language of *condemnation*, with guilt, imputation, judgment, penalty, remission and so forth. Other elements may be added or included in one of these, such as the metaphor of debts and repayments." See Henri Blocher, "The Atonement in John Calvin's Theology" in *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 283.

13 *Institutes*, II.xvi.5, 507.

14 Calvin, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians*, 5:16.

of living toward the kingdom of God has been opened up.

The reformer's doctrine of recapitulation is not fully-formed, but it does bear some important similarities to the atonement model put forth by Irenaeus. What is important to Calvin is obedience to God's law and that Christ took our place to do something that we could not - overturning the Adamic curse and restoring to men and women the life of righteousness in obedience to God.

RANSOM: CHRIST OUR REDEEMER

"Redeemer" and "redemption" are terms used by Calvin to refer to the ransom theory of atonement, where Christ purchases back humanity from the devil, evil, or death, usually by the "payment" of his death. Terms such as "price" and "payment" are also common when Calvin describes the death of Jesus. "How Christ Has Fulfilled the Function of Redeemer to Acquire Salvation for Us" is Calvin's chapter heading for the central passage of the *Institutes* in which he discusses matters of the atonement (II.xvi). Note not only the use of "redeemer," but also the notion that salvation is a commodity acquired through transaction.

This language set is used in a more general way to refer to the work of Christ, often leading Calvin to mix his metaphors: Christ may be said to have "redeemed" us through, for example, penal substitution. But generally speaking, for the reformer "redemption" is not synonymous with "salvation." Thus he writes that "the office of Redeemer was laid upon him that he might be our Savior. Still, our redemption would be imperfect if he did not lead us ever onward to the final goal of salvation."¹⁵

Though ransom language is at times used to complement judicial punishment (the punishment effects *redemption*), Calvin elsewhere offers the ransom metaphor as an *alternative* to punishment. In his interpretation of Romans 3:24-25, Calvin counterbalances the ransom and penal metaphors:

The apostles clearly state that he paid the price to redeem us from the penalty of death, 'being justified . . . by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ . . . whom God put forward as a propitiation through faith which is in his blood'. Paul commends God's grace in this respect: for God has given the price of redemption in the death of Christ; then he bids us take refuge in Christ's blood, that having acquired righteousness we may stand secure before God's judgment.¹⁶

The implication here is that Christ's blood is a payment made so that men and women would no longer be subject to the penalty of death. Ransom, in this case, is not paid to set us free from a captor, but in his death Christ *nullifies* the penalty rather than suffering it on our behalf. The payment, to whomever it is made (Calvin does not say), "absolves us of guilt."¹⁷

Calvin also appropriates ransom terminology to illustrate the substitutionary nature of Christ's work. Though substitution is traditionally associated with

15 *Institutes*, II.xvi.1, 503.

16 *Institutes*, II.xvii.5, 532.

17 *Ibid*, 533.

the legal and sacrifice models, Calvin's incorporation of multiple metaphors into a single concept allows him to spin the ransom theory in another way. In his Galatians commentary he compares Christ's accommodation to the law to a man who buys the freedom of a slave by becoming a slave himself, turning himself over to the slave owner and taking up the other man's chains. In this case there is not merely a debt paid, such as with the "currency" of blood or merit, but a substitution of one prisoner for another.

PENAL SUBSTITUTION: CHRIST THE CONDEMNED

It is difficult to explore Calvin's use of the model of penal substitution, which was one of his two preferred categories for discussing the atonement, without the historical and theological baggage that came to the theory in subsequent generations when it became a central pillar of Reformed soteriology.¹⁸ At its most simple, this model considers the work of Christ within the allegorical scope of a court of law. Human beings stand "arraigned at the bar of God,"¹⁹ accused and clearly guilty. The sentence has been issued, and it is death. But Christ, our advocate, steps forward and takes that guilt and punishment upon himself, leaving us with a "Not Guilty" verdict.

Calvin's use of this category, including justice, guilt, condemnation, punishment, is prolific. But one must be careful not to press his writings too firmly into the mold of the law court illustration (let alone into the mold of the penal substitution theory expounded by the later Evangelical tradition). When he employs this category, it is derived more from the biblical precedent than from sixteenth century jurisprudence, and he rarely uses terms such as "punishment" in a strictly legal sense.

There is also an important difference between Calvin's understanding of "law" and the more juridical sense that would come to characterize the penal substitution theory. Robert Peterson observes: "In *Institutes* II.vii, Calvin maintains that the law as the expression of God's character is 'a perfect pattern of righteousness'. Later in that chapter he notes that the law contains the 'knowledge of the divine will'. Hence Calvin does not understand the law in an impersonal sense as an abstract code; it is 'the best instrument . . . to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will'."²⁰ The law that condemns men and women and requires punishment for transgression is, in Calvin's view, not an abstraction one might associate with a government or ruling body. Instead, this "law" contains the very will of God.

Men and women stand before the judge helpless and justly condemned, and that provides the inciting incident in the penal model's account of the atonement narrative. As Calvin will go on to say, only Jesus Christ is capable of making the

18 Cf. Robert H. Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1966), 103: "Many of the criticisms commonly leveled at the view of penal substitution are really not so much criticisms of Calvin's view as distortions of his view in later Calvinism. . . . In later Calvinism there is a tendency to emphasize the retributive justice of God, making the punishment of sin the primary requirement of God's nature."

19 *Commentary on 2 Corinthians*, 5:21.

20 Peterson, 79.

necessary satisfaction. But Jesus does not burst into the courtroom at the eleventh hour to volunteer to suffer our punishment as an eager innocent – something that would never be in accordance with the justice of God. Instead, Jesus stands before the judgment seat and, contrary to all his goodness and divine perfection, is condemned. In substitution, Christ not only receives our punishment, but takes on our guilt, according to Calvin, since our sins were reckoned to him. Thus Calvin says: ‘having assumed our person and taken upon Him our guilt, He had of necessity to stand before the tribunal of God as a sinner’.²¹

The suffering that Christ underwent in history was wholly appropriate to the punishment for which he was acting as substitute and, argues Calvin, no other kind of death could have sufficed. “To take away our condemnation, it was not enough for him to suffer any kind of death: to make satisfaction for our redemption a form of death had to be chosen in which he might free us both by transferring our condemnation to himself and by taking our guilt upon himself.”²² Here substitution is juridical - Christ takes our condemnation and guilt - but it is not simply a matter of suffering the punishment due to transgression.

Instead, the substitution of the Mediator provides for just that sort of death that would make *satisfaction* and so *redeem*. In a robust theology of penal substitution, it should be acknowledged that on the cross Christ did not act merely passively in absorbing wrath and punishment, but actively by satisfying the divine requirement. Jesus did not simply *endure* the wrath of God against all sin but seized the cup of wrath and drank it to the dregs. Jesus is the acting Subject of atonement, and this trumps all accusations of “cosmic child abuse.”

BLOOD SACRIFICE: CHRIST OUR PROPITIATION

The second of John Calvin’s two preferred categories for discussing the atonement is the idea that the death of Christ was a sacrifice, offered to propitiate the wrath of God the Father and to make an offering for the sins of the people through the shedding of blood. The biblical precedent is clear, from the Levitical sacrifices to statements that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,”²³ to the explicit equation of Jesus with the Old Testament sacrifice in the epistles, particularly the letter to the Hebrews.²⁴

Although penal substitution is a dominant atonement model in Calvin, it is often presented in the service of sacrifice;²⁵ our *guilt* is *expiated*, or Christ takes

21 *Commentary on Psalms*, 22:2. “To be a sinner means that one must face the judgment of God,” says Paul Van Buren. “This was the inevitable consequence of Christ’s taking our place, if it were true substitution and efficacious for our deliverance from the judgment which was due to us.” See Paul Van Buren, *Christ In Our Place: The Substitutionary Character of Calvin’s Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), 42.

22 *Institutes*, II.xvi.5, 509.

23 John 1:29.

24 See especially Hebrews 9-10; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7.

25 Robert S. Paul suggests that the priestly office of Christ is therefore the interpretive key to Calvin’s doctrine of atonement, even when that doctrine bears penal characteristics. “Plenty of passages can be taken from the *Institutes* where the theory of penal substitution provides all the metaphors, but that emphasis and its imagery have to be put within the context of what Calvin says about the Bible’s plan for salvation, which is the sacrificial context.” See Robert S Paul, *The*

our *punishment* by offering himself on the *altar*:

As a pure and stainless Mediator he is by his holiness to reconcile us to God. But God's righteous curse bars our access to him, and God in his capacity as judge is angry toward us. Hence, an expiation must intervene in order that Christ as priest may obtain God's favor for us and appease his wrath. Thus Christ to perform this office had to come forward with a sacrifice. For under the law, also, the priest was forbidden to enter the sanctuary without blood [Heb. 9:7], that believers might know, even though the priest as their advocate stood between them and God, that they could not propitiate God unless their sins were expiated [Lev. 16:2-3].²⁶

The sacrifice of the atonement is the fulfillment of the Old Testament's sacrificial code, of which Christ is the archetype. Human sin is cast upon him, that when he is slain we might live. The functions of the sacrifice are to atone for sin and to propitiate God's wrath, turning away God's anger and making future relationship possible once again. Calvin says, "What was figuratively represented in the Mosaic sacrifices is manifested in Christ, the archetype of the figures, Christ was offered to the Father in death as an expiatory sacrifice that when he discharged all satisfaction through his sacrifice, we might cease to be afraid of God's wrath."²⁷

It is clear that the blood sacrifice model is also substitutionary. The high priest represents the people before God; the divine wrath is too terrible for them to approach him alone. And the sacrifice itself is representative, with the sins of the people cast upon it and killed in it. Christ's priestly activity is *for us* and, as Van Buren suggests, draws us into participation with our representative. Because Christ's act is a priestly act, it becomes our own; "we stand before God in the person of our priest."²⁸

CHRIST THE VICTOR

If Calvin's more dominant language of blood sacrifice, penal substitution, and ransom are tied to the event of the cross, the resurrection of Christ bears the aspect of the victory of Christ over evil and death. Here it is important to consider not only that Christ is our conquering king, but that he challenges and defeats our enemies throughout his entire life. For Calvin, the temptation of Jesus and his ministry, his death and resurrection, his ascension and session at the right hand of the Father, and even the incarnation itself are battles in which Jesus scores victo-

Atonement and the Sacraments (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 102.

26 *Institutes*, II.xv.6, 501-2. Another example of Calvin's focus on the *reconciled relationship* wrought by atonement (a model I have chosen not to explore in detail here) is in *Commentary on 2 Corinthians*, 5:18-9, where Calvin calls the ministry of reconciliation "an illustrious designation of the gospel, as being an embassy for reconciling men to God."

27 *Institutes*, II.xvi.6, 510.

28 Van Buren, 68.

ries for his oppressed people.²⁹

But the event in the life of Jesus that is most significant to the *Christus victor* model is the resurrection, for here Christ conquers humankind's greatest enemy: death. "For as he, in rising again, came forth victor over death, so the victory of our faith over death lies in his resurrection alone."³⁰ The resurrection also confirms Christ's identity not only as the Mediator and Messiah, but as the Son of God: "Therefore, Paul states that 'Christ was declared the Son of God . . . in the resurrection itself' [Rom. 1:4 p.], because then at last he displayed his heavenly power, which is both the clear mirror of his divinity and the firm support of our faith."³¹

Calvin draws the victory metaphor from the figurative picture of the king on a battlefield, in Book II, chapter xvi of the *Institutes*:

Therefore, by his wrestling hand to hand with the devil's power, with the dread of death, with the pains of hell, he was victorious and triumphed over them, that in death we may not now fear those things which our Prince has swallowed up.³²

For Calvin, the *Christus victor* model is the great and unexpected payoff of the gospel narrative. Who would consider that God's Messiah, defeated and destroyed by the powers of humankind and of the devil, would make such a triumphant comeback after his humiliating execution? Likewise, Calvin sees the victory of Christ in the resurrection as the payoff of the other metaphors he has employed. Christ has suffered, been sacrificed, appeased God's wrath and propitiated our sins, been judged and taken our punishment, paid our ransom with his own blood, and reconciled us to God. Now, on Easter Sunday, Christ's resurrection seals and completes all of these.

UNIFYING PRINCIPLES: MEDIATION AND SUBSTITUTION

Such a varied use of metaphor may make Calvin's atonement theology appear haphazard, even schizophrenic. He finds no problem in quickly switching from one metaphor to another or combining many metaphors into the same statement. But beyond being biblically informed, Calvin's approach to atonement has an inner consistency. In his use of each picture of the atonement, Calvin is inexhaustibly consistent in his affirmation that the work of Christ is *vicarious*; it is substitutionary, in our stead.

Calvin begins his section of the *Institutes* on the work of Christ with a chapter on his identity as Mediator (II.xii), a topic that was of significant interest to him in framing soteriology. He first establishes the need of a mediator, one who stands between God and humankind in a reconciliatory office, before identifying that person as the God-Man, Jesus Christ:

So great was the disagreement between our uncleanness and God's per-

29 See Peterson, 77-8.

30 *Institutes*, II.xvi.13, 520. See Kennedy, 152-3; Paul, 104.

31 *Ibid*, 521.

32 *Ibid*, II.xvi.11, 517.

fect purity! Even if man had remained free from all stain, his condition would have been too lowly for him to reach God without a Mediator.³³

Without such a mediator, our sin leaves us helplessly subject to divine wrath: “When we contemplate God without a mediator, we cannot conceive of Him otherwise than as angry with us: a Mediator interposed between us, makes us feel that He is pacified towards us.”³⁴

For Calvin, it is Christ’s mediatory work that brings about salvation, and this is quite independent of any metaphor one might choose to illustrate the atonement. Whether Jesus is portrayed as paying our ransom, suffering our punishment, offering himself as a blood sacrifice, fighting our enemies, or even living the exemplarist life of obedience, he is in some sense standing between God and humankind to bring about resolution between the two separated parties.

From Christ’s role as Mediator (deriving primarily from his priestly office) springs the notion of substitution, of Christ being or doing something in our place that we could not. This is one of Calvin’s most important themes, which peppers nearly everything he has to say about redemption. Regardless of the atonement metaphor he chooses at any given point, the common thread is undoubtedly *substitution* – Christ in our place, taking our punishment, dying our death, paying our debt, offering our sacrifice. The theme of the gospel is “divine vicariousness”-*Christus pro nobis*, the surety of glory!

This unifying principle is to be differentiated from the metaphorical model of *penal* substitution. Here we consider the more general notion of Christ in our place, which need not be juridical in its make-up. In fact, contrary to the suggestion that penal substitution underlies all valid atonement theories,³⁵ for Calvin this unifying principle is *not* specifically juridical, and substitution is a more appropriate undertaking outside of the juridical setting.

There is a logical leap in penal substitution. In a normal court of law the advocate would never be permitted to take a punishment so that the criminal may go unpunished. The legal requirement is not that *some punishment* must be meted out for the crime, but that *the wrong-doer* must be punished.

Christ’s identification with us and the taking of our place in the penal model as it is traditionally expressed requires this leap. This may explain some occasions in which Calvin mixes metaphors, temporarily abandoning the penal model for another. He begins by equating sin with crime and God with a judge and stating that punishment is required. In the case of the example above from Romans 3:24-25, Calvin only allows penal language to enter after Christ has already been established as our substitute through ransom language: “God has given the price of redemption in the death of Christ; then he bids us take refuge in Christ’s blood, that having acquired righteousness we may stand secure before God’s judgment.”³⁶

33 *Institutes*, II.xii.1, 465. The necessity of the God-Man is one of Calvin’s clearest points of agreement with Anselm and the medieval tradition.

34 *Commentary on 2 Corinthians*, 5:19.

35 I. Howard Marshall is one who advocates this position (see note 41 below).

36 *Institutes*, II.xvii.5, 532.

In describing Christ's move to take that punishment in our stead, Calvin also at times shifts from penal substitution to another model – such as ransom, where the metaphor clearly allows for one's debt to be paid by another. In the models of ransom and blood sacrifice, the grounds for substitution of the innocent for the guilty are well established.

The principle of substitution is clear in the penal model. In the blood sacrifice model, Calvin is equally clear in stating that the expiation of sins is done only because sins are transferred from the people to the sacrificial offering.³⁷ What the Mediator takes from us is *sin and its stain*, in contrast to the penal model's *legal guilt*. In the one model substitution is the properly appointed *mechanism* for expiation, for God would not slay his own people but requires a sacrifice instead; and in the other, substitution is a *work-around*, an escape from what justice demands the guilty party must suffer by transferring that guilt to an innocent advocate.

Likewise, when Calvin describes the work of Christ using the metaphor of healing from Isaiah 53, he makes it substitutionary: "The reason, therefore, of the weakness, pains, and shame of Christ is, that 'he carried our sicknesses.'"³⁸

CONCLUSIONS

Calvin's perspective on the atonement is understandable only in the multiplicity of metaphors that he chose to express it, drawing upon the rich tapestry of figurative language within the pages of Scripture. Calvin's approach demonstrates that while satisfaction and penal substitution are at the center of Protestant thinking about the atonement, they are neither the full nor the final word. The Bible goes far beyond these when it speaks of the manifold work of Jesus Christ on and beyond the cross.

Models of the atonement are limited not just by cultural familiarity and values, but by the reach of metaphorical language itself. In this sense, it should be clear that there is no singular model of the atonement that can ever contain the entire biblical witness, let alone the entire truth of divine action. As Roger Olson has put it: "While there is nothing wrong with reverent speculation and construction of modest models to explain and communicate transcendent mysteries, Christian thinkers must be careful not to baptize any theological speculative construction (theory, model) as the one and only true Christian belief to the exclusion of all other possible perspectives."³⁹

Calvin's variegated understanding of the work of Christ is sewn up by the common threads of mediation and substitution, both performed because Christ is *pro nobis*. We should not be surprised to find no explicitly stated doctrine of the atonement in the *Institutes*, for beyond the loose frameworks provided by the *munus triplex* and the biblical metaphors, Calvin has no single "theory" for this doctrine, drawing instead upon the theologically diverse and often complementary statements of Scripture.

Could each of the various attempts at a "theory of the atonement" offer

37 See *Institutes*, II.xvi.6, 510.

38 *Commentary on Isaiah*, 53:4.

39 Olson, 263.

Christian theology an indispensable element? Gustaf Aulén, for example, suggests that while his own *Christus victor* model is not itself a complete doctrine (but rather should stand in parallel with other views), the core theme of the atonement is drama. That drama, “where the love of God in Christ fights and conquers the hostile powers, is a central and decisive perspective which can never be omitted and which indeed must stamp every really Christian doctrine of the Atonement.”⁴⁰ Clearly many Reformed theologians have made this same argument regarding penal substitution – that while other models may be permitted to operate in compliment to it, the model itself is central to the gospel and therefore the one model that is indispensable.⁴¹

Calvin’s own appreciation for atonement language in Scripture leads us finally to an appreciation for variety and paradox, for scandal, replacing our need for a discrete model. The complete picture of Christ’s work is revealed piecemeal in one model or another; it is whole only in the full testimony of Scripture.

At the end of the day, Calvin’s motivation for describing the atonement in such a manner remains pastoral. His concern is not necessarily with theological precision, but with the impact that one image or another might have on the hearer:

If we seek redemption, it lies in his passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if remission of the curse, in his cross; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification, in his blood; if reconciliation, in his descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb; if newness of life, in his resurrection; if immortality, in the same; if inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom, in his entrance into heaven; if protection, if security, if abundant supply of all blessings, in his Kingdom; if untroubled expectation of judgment, in the power given to him to judge. In short, since rich store of every kind of goods abounds in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other.⁴²

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40 Gustaf Aulén, “Chaos and Cosmos: The Drama of the Atonement,” *Interpretation* 4:2 (1950), 156.

41 See I Howard Marshall, “The Theology of the Atonement.” Unpublished paper given at the Evangelical Alliance/London School of Theology Symposium on the Atonement, July 6-8, 2005, <<http://www.eauk.org/theology/atonement/>>.

42 *Institutes* II.xvi.19, 527-8.

LIFE IS IN THE BLOOD: ENVISIONING ATONEMENT WITH REGARDS TO LEVITICAL THEOLOGY

Melanie Bair

The doctrine of atonement, central to the Christian faith since the days of Augustine, has focused much attention on the atoning work of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Despite this Christocentric approach, the theme of atonement predates Christ's work and is pervasive through much of the Old Testament text, with especial concentration in the book of Leviticus. While appeals are not often made to the Levitical text when constructing a doctrine of the atonement, I argue that Leviticus serves as a vital resource for exploring the broad meaning of the atonement.¹ The theme of reconciliation between people and their God which is found in Levitical accounts of atonement offers a fresh theological perspective that can be applied when constructing a post-resurrection atonement theory.

Many Christian atonement theories are constructed to revolve around New Testament formulations of the meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and while it is necessary for contemporary Christians to make Jesus central in any formulation of atonement theology, it is also vital to recognize the role that atonement played in the lives of religious practitioners prior to Jesus. In fact, the process of atonement discussed in Leviticus exposes a vision of atonement that is often absent from purely Christocentric formulations. Thus, an examination of Levitical conceptions of atonement proves to be enlightening when formulating an atonement theory that is able to account for the inconceivable work of grace that occurs when humans, in all of their sin and depravity, are reconciled to a just and perfect God.

This reconciling work of atonement is a pivotal point in the law of the Torah. As John Hartley recognizes, the procedures concerning the Day of Atonement found in Leviticus 16 are located centrally in the book of Leviticus even as the book itself is located in the center of the Pentateuch. Hartley suggests that the literary placement of these procedures "highlights the importance of this solemn day for the Israelite community."² Thus, the position of the specifications regarding the Day of Atonement in the text suggests to Hartley that the theological concept of the atonement was of great significance to the people for whom this atonement was made.³ Deborah Rooke also recognizes the importance of the

1 I look forward to continuing conversations with Dr. Sharon Baker whose forthcoming book entitled *B(u)y Grace?* explores many of the ways in which Leviticus 17:11 can inform atonement theology.

2 John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, vol. 4, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 217.

3 It is both fascinating and disappointing that the importance of the atonement

ritual and the theology of atonement for the Israelite community. Rooke observes that “[the laws of the Day of the Atonement] are clearly the jewel in the crown of the Priestly torah.”⁴ Thus the Day of Atonement has a special status among the rituals and ceremonies described in Leviticus.

The Day of Atonement was especially significant for the community because of the universal accessibility to the ceremony. Unlike many of the more individualized sacrificial rituals, the Day of Atonement was intended to serve the entire community. R. K. Harrison notes that “high priests and laymen alike had offended against God’s holiness, and therefore atonement was needed by everybody.”⁵ As Leviticus 16:34 affirms, the Day of Atonement was meant to provide atonement for *all* of the sins of Israel.

Even in addition to the Day of Atonement itself, other sacrificial rituals were established by the Levitical laws that aimed to provide atonement for sins. Leviticus 5 specifies the procedures for making atonement for certain sins. The procedures described there are significant because of the flexibility that they demonstrate in providing atonement for all members of the community. The text describes a sliding scale of sacrificial payment whereby a lamb is the preferred sacrificial animal, but in the case that a lamb is unaffordable, the penitent one is permitted to sacrifice two turtle-doves or two pigeons (Lev. 5:7). In the case that even this is too burdensome a price, the text makes a provision for a tenth of an ephah of flour to serve as an offering that will make atonement for sins that have been committed (Lev. 5:11,13). Thus, as Terry Briley observes, “no one is to be excluded economically from the process of atonement.”⁶ The Torah’s emphasis on atonement is so profound that it appears that the actual offering used to make the atonement is not as important as the penitent one’s step to seek atonement through an offering. Ultimately, the significance of the act lies in the individual’s *desire* for atonement.

The individual seeking atonement must also collaborate with the priestly leadership. In the sacrificial rituals and the Day of Atonement, the high priest plays a significant role in mediating the ceremonies of atonement. Rooke suggests that the Day of Atonement specifically served as a yearly ritual for the high priest

has been largely lost in lay Christianity today. Even where this significance has not been abandoned, however, it seems that ideas of the atonement are limited to New Testament conceptions of the meaning of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. While the Christian must certainly place primacy on these events, New Testament texts cannot be viewed in a vacuum. Rather, a reading of Jesus’ atoning work in the context of the atonement in Leviticus will lead to a deeper understanding of the concept of the atonement.

4 Deborah Rooke, “The Day of Atonement as a Ritual of Validation for the High Priest,” in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, ed. John Day (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 342.

5 R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 176.

6 Terry Briley, “The Old Testament ‘Sin Offering’ and Christ’s Atonement,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 3 no. 1 (2000): 96.

in which his status as high priest was affirmed.⁷ Thus, this ceremony served functions for both the people as recipients of atonement, and the high priest as a religious leader. The high priest's role in officiating the ceremony was a major aspect of the drama associated with the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 16:2 clearly states that if Aaron, the high priest, enters the sanctuary "just at any time... he will die."⁸ On the Day of Atonement, however, the high priest is given instructions to enter this holy sanctuary. As Jacob Milgrom recognizes, this action implies that the high priest is literally *risking his life* in order to perform the ceremony.⁹ Ultimately, the Day of Atonement presents a drama in which it becomes clear to the people that atonement can be dangerous.

The high priest's permission to enter the sanctuary is explicit, but in the description of both the sacrifices and the ceremonial rituals of the Day of Atonement, the manner in which the offerings are atoning for the sin of the one providing them is not specified. Harrison suggests that "Leviticus teaches that atonement for sin must be by substitution."¹⁰ Harrison's idea is plausible insofar as it seems to correspond with the scapegoat ritual in which Aaron, the high priest, is to place both of his hands upon the scapegoat's head and confess all of the iniquities of the people over it (Lev. 16:21). After being thus imbued with the sins of the people, the goat is taken and released into the wilderness (Lev. 16:22). This procedure would seem to indicate that the goat is acting as a substitute for the people and accepting the punishment (i.e., exclusion from community) that was intended for the people because of their sin.

John Goldingay differs from Harrison in his approach to how the sacrificial offerings function as a means of atoning for the sins of the people. He recognizes that "there is indeed a sense in which the offering substitutes for the offerer, though it is not that the offering is vicariously punished."¹¹ Thus, for Goldingay, there is a sense in which the sacrifice is substituting for the human person, but he draws a distinction between this sense of substitution and the idea that the animal is, in fact, being punished in lieu of the person. While this understanding of atonement is helpful in that it does not require that God be imagined in violent terms, the element of substitution that remains could be problematic. If justice is imagined as the transfer of status from animal to human, imagining that a single animal could be an adequate substitute for the great sins of humanity is incompatible with the idea that in order to establish "justice," restitution must be made for every iniquity.

In response to the problems of this substitutionary theory of atonement, J. S. Whale proposes that the idea that the sacrifice was actually made in substitution for the sinner is inadequate and incorrect. Whale observes that a penal substitution

7 Rooke, "Atonement as Ritual," 345.

8 All Bible quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

9 Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 162.

10 Harrison, *Leviticus*, 31.

11 John Goldingay, "Old Testament Sacrifice and the Death of Christ," in *Atonement Today* (London: SPCK, 1995), 10.

theory of atonement whereby atonement is effected through the vicarious punishment of a sacrifice “is quite foreign to the Bible.”¹² Whale points to the flexibility of the procedures for a sin offering suggested in Leviticus 5 to support his claim that the sacrifices did not serve as a substitution for the one who was offering them. He notes that in the case of the impoverished person who is only able to make an offering of a tenth of an ephah of flour, “you cannot punish a cupful of barley.”¹³ Likewise, Whale suggests that the prophetic critiques¹⁴ of the sacrificial system suggest that the idea of punishment was not the primary purpose of the sacrifices, and one should not imagine that atonement is achieved through vicarious punishment.

While there is scholarly disagreement on this issue, following Whale I suggest that especially when considering the prophetic critiques of the sacrificial system, the atonement that penitent worshippers receive is not a result of the punishment that is endured by the sacrifice that they bring. In fact, in the case of the needy person who is only able to bring some flour as a sacrifice, it does not follow that this person does not receive atonement simply because no punishment has been enacted or blood has been spilled.

The relationship between the blood of death and life that is found in the Levitical rendering of the atonement is also intimately related to the means by which atonement is effected. In exploring this issue, Whale suggests that it is vital that a distinction be made between the death of the animal which is sacrificed and the death of the human. The animal, Whale notes, “is never contaminated with the sin of him who offers it,” while humans are “sinful, unholy, and the bearer[s] of sin’s penalty in the doom of death...On the annual Day of Atonement [this categorical difference] is solemnly and dramatically emphasized.”¹⁵ Thus, during the ceremony of sacrificing one goat and sending the other goat out into the wilderness to Azazel, the Israelites would be prime spectators of a physical drama that illustrated the spiritual nature of the atonement which they were receiving. As J. D. G. Dunn recognizes, the use of the two goats creates a more comprehensive picture of the spiritual reality of the ceremony. Dunn asks,

Is it not more likely that the two goats were seen as part of the one ritual, representing more fully and pictorially what one goat could not? Perhaps, indeed, part of the significance of the Day of Atonement ritual was that the physical removal of the sins of the people out of the camp by the second goat demonstrated what the sin-offering normally did with their sins anyway – sin-offering and scapegoat being taken as two pictures of the one reality.¹⁶

12 J. S. Whale, *Victor and Victim* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 52.

13 Ibid., 53.

14 Isaiah 1:11; Hosea 6:6, 9:4; Jeremiah 6:20; Amos 5:21-24; cf. Psalm 40:6, 51:16; Proverbs 21:3

15 Whale, *Victor and Victim*, 73-74.

16 J. D. G. Dunn, “Paul’s Understanding of the Death of Jesus as Sacrifice,” in

The Israelites would have been very aware that their lives were spared. The goat that is sacrificed is said to make atonement only for the sanctuary and the uncleanness that it has supposedly incurred as a result of being among sinful people (Lev. 16:16). This action likely raised a question in the Israelites' minds: how many animals must die to purify a person if an innocent animal must die just to purify a *building*? It is here that one witnesses the absurd and irrational grace of the atonement: the sins of the people are laid upon the scapegoat, and it is *simply set free* (Lev. 16:22)! Emile Nicole recognizes that it is highly significant that the scapegoat "represented the removal of sin, the sins being symbolically placed on the animal that took them away *into* the desert."¹⁷ Though the sanctuary required blood to be cleansed, the scapegoat released on the Day of Atonement proclaims that a violent ceremony of death is not required for the people to experience atonement. Rather, merely an acknowledgement and confession of sin is required for atonement to be made (Lev. 16:10, 21).

Although this vision of atonement as the releasing of sins seems helpful in light of the problems of the substitutionary model of atonement discussed above, not all scholars agree on this point. Harrison believes that "only as atonement is linked with death, represented by shed blood, and not life set free, would it appear to become efficacious in the covering of human sin."¹⁸ While the shedding of blood that permeates many of the Levitical atonement procedures seems to suggest that blood was a necessary component of atonement, Harrison fails to adequately address how the scapegoat would be able to provide atonement for the people even though it sheds no blood.¹⁹

Likewise, Harrison does not address the problems that the prophetic critiques of the sacrificial system²⁰ present to his theory that only blood is capable of atoning for human sin. By Harrison's reading, it would seem that the prophetic word, which suggests that the Lord is unsatisfied with sacrifices that are brought in the midst of the people doing injustice, carries the implication that the Lord will no longer provide atonement to the people. If, as Harrison argues, atonement is only effective insofar as it is linked to death and the prophets are correct that the Lord is not pleased with sacrifices, then atonement can no longer occur. Followed

Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology, ed. S. W. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 45.

17 Emile Nicole, "Atonement in the Pentateuch," in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological, and Practical Perspectives*, eds. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 45. The emphasis here emphasizes the goat's *entrance* rather than *exit*.

18 Harrison, *Leviticus*, 182.

19 Lev. 16:10 makes it clear that the scapegoat is presented "*alive* before the Lord to make atonement over it" (*italics mine*).

20 In many cases, the prophetic critique of the sacrificial system is coupled with the criticism that a lack of justice within the society voids the meaning behind the sacrifice such that it becomes an empty ritual. Thus, this twofold condemnation suggests not only a prophetic concern for justice, but also an acknowledgement of the potential inefficacy of the sacrifice as such.

to its logical end, Harrison's argument would indicate that in the times when the Lord is displeased with sacrifice, atonement is not even possible. However, this message seems incompatible with the portrait of God found elsewhere in the Bible. The prophetic message of Jeremiah 31:31-34 demonstrates the Lord's willingness to accommodate to his people. The Lord recognizes that the people have broken the Sinai covenant, but rather than abandoning them, the Lord promises a new covenant in which the law will be written in the hearts of the people (Jer. 31:33).

In light of the Lord's flexibility in working with an obstinate, stubborn, and sinful people, I suggest that Harrison's notion that atonement can be achieved only through the shedding of blood is incorrect. Rather than following the implication of Harrison's suggestion that with the prophetic critique the Lord revokes the gift of atonement because of the claim that the Lord is displeased with the sacrifices that the people bring, I suggest that the Lord's great flexibility with people suggests that atonement is still possible, even in the midst of the despised sacrifices.

The most notable exception to Harrison's idea that atonement is mediated through sacrifice is the scapegoat ritual which is central to the atonement drama. The idea of ridding the community of evil was not uncommon in the ancient world, and numerous scholars have recognized similar ceremonies in other ancient near-eastern cultures. Milgrom suggests that the releasing of the scapegoat into the wilderness mirrors Mesopotamian elimination rites in which "an object that is selected to draw the evil from the affected person is consequently disposed of."²¹ Likewise, Hartley notes that in Ugarit and among the Hittites there were "riddance rites" that had parallels with the scapegoat ritual of the Day of Atonement.²² Gordon Wenham emphasizes that the removal of the scapegoat from the Israelite camp would have been a vivid illustration of the fact that the ceremony was removing the sins of the people.²³

21 Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 166. Milgrom notes, however, that the correspondence between these Mesopotamian rites and the scapegoat ritual of the Day of Atonement disintegrates insofar as there is no evidence of transfers of evil or impurity from an entire group of people in other Mesopotamian practices.

22 Hartley, *Leviticus*, 218.

23 Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 233. Wenham also stresses that the sins are left in the desert because the desert is an unclean place. I suggest that the conclusion that the desert is an unclean place is mistaken. The biblical narrative records numerous heroes of faith (including Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, Jesus, etc.) who received their training and preparation for their ministry within the desert. Thus, unless Wenham is prepared to dismiss these great men as "unclean," he would do well not to make the assertion that simply because the unclean sins of the people that have been laid upon the scapegoat are carried to the desert, that the desert itself is necessarily an unclean place. By Wenham's logic, he would also have to make the assumption that the *sanctuary itself* would be unclean because it receives the blood of the slaughtered bull that serves to make atonement for the high priest and his household (Lev. 16:11). I would suggest that in light of the portrait of the desert that is painted elsewhere in the biblical narrative, it may be helpful to imagine that the sins themselves are being sent to the desert for "training" in

In order to further explore the meaning of atonement in this text, a brief examination of the Hebrew verb *kipper*, which is often translated using the English word “atone,” is helpful for understanding how the Day of Atonement as described in Leviticus 16 may have been understood. Fred Needham recognizes that *kipper* seems to carry a wide range of meanings that include ideas of cleansing, sanctifying, and purifying.²⁴ Likewise, Budd recognizes that *kipper* describes the process and purpose of cleansing, and its use in Leviticus 16:30 implies a cleansing of not only the sanctuary but also of Israel herself.²⁵ Taking a slightly different approach, John Kleinig suggests that *kipper*, at least as it is used in Leviticus 17:11 which describes the role of blood in making atonement for people, is used as “a technical term for the application of blood on the altar for burnt offering.”²⁶ The connection that Kleinig draws between the ideas of atonement and blood in Leviticus 17:11 are worthy of attention, especially in light of the idea that the scapegoat was able to provide atonement without the shedding of blood.

Leviticus 17:11 proclaims, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement.” This verse seems to suggest that atonement is possible only through the shedding of blood. However, this verse provides significant difficulties for both translating and interpreting. Nicole notes that one of the most problematic features of the verse is the preposition בְּ . It is not clear if this is a “ בְּ of price,” “ בְּ of instrument,” or “ בְּ of essence.”²⁷ Thus, the precise meaning of this preposition is unclear and leads to the related problem of how to imagine the relationship between the blood and the life that is said to be present within the blood.

Several scholars have attempted to uncover the relationship between the blood and the life to which this verse alludes. Hartley suggests the cleansing power of the blood is not from the blood itself, but from the life within the blood. The blood simply “serves as the tangible center of an animal’s life force.”²⁸ Budd also recognizes that blood serves as an effective “purifying or ransoming agent” because of its “life-embodiment power.”²⁹ Thus, the blood appears to be able to effect atonement because of the life that it contains.

This explanation of why blood is necessary for atonement provides a helpful perspective on the role of blood in offering atonement. Many formulations of

becoming righteousness. The failure of the scapegoat/sin to return to the Israelite camp may suggest, then, that these sins and iniquitous patterns of behavior have failed by the standards of faith that the desert requires in order to survive its harsh conditions. Thus, the Israelites may be asked to see in this event the truth that their sinful actions cannot survive the standard of faith that desert life requires.

24 Fred Needham, “Atonement in the Ritual Covenants,” in *Stimulus* 8 no. 2 (May 2000): 38.

25 Budd, *Leviticus*, 236.

26 John W. Kleinig, “The Blood for Sprinkling – Atoning Blood in Leviticus and Hebrews,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 33 no 3 (1999): 129.

27 Nicole, “Atonement in the Pentateuch,” 36.

28 Hartley, *Leviticus*, 276.

29 Budd, *Leviticus*, 249.

atonement theories include the idea that somehow atonement requires the shedding of blood *for its own sake*. Leviticus 17:11, however, seems to suggest that blood is necessary for atonement (at least in the Levitical context) because it alone holds the life, the *nephesh*, that is the *real* ingredient necessary for atonement. Thus, a sacrificial ceremony that can appear to be focusing on the death of a creature may be far more focused on the life that the creature gives in order to bring about atonement.³⁰ Briley agrees that “God designated blood as the means of atonement because of its inherent connection with life.”³¹

The idea that atonement is realized through the presence of life, or *nephesh*, leads to the notion that atonement might be viewed as a process of reconciliation whereby the *nephesh* of God is reconciled to the *nephesh* of humans through an intermediary *nephesh*. John Hayes takes up the idea of the restorative and reconciling power of atonement, and he suggests that the theology and atonement rituals of Leviticus are “rituals of restoration and reintegration which participate in and mirror the return to established order and normalcy.”³² Taking a different approach to the idea of atonement as being a form of reconciliation, Needham recognizes that the semantic history of the word “atonement” has moved from a meaning of “at one-ment” to the idea of “reconciliation, meaning the making of unity and harmony.”³³ Thus, it is likely that atonement can refer to a process of reconciliation. More specifically, however, I argue that atonement describes reconciliation both in the human/God relationship *and* in human/human relationships.

The idea that atonement is related to the relationship between humans and God is pervasive in most formulations of an atonement theory. The notion that atonement is intimately connected with the process of reconciliation in human relationships has been less commonly explored in the history of Christian theology. The previous examination of Leviticus, however, points decisively in the direction of the importance of reconciliation to atonement. As Colin Gunton recognizes, the primary problem that atonement must correct is the problem of separation between the human and the divine through human sin. “To talk of sin is to talk of a way in which the world is affected by a breach in relationships between hu-

30 At this point, it may be helpful to recall that according to the previous exploration of Leviticus 5 in which atonement could be made through an offering of fine flour, atonement may not always require blood and the *nephesh* that it contains. In this case, one might imagine a more intimate role for God in the process of atonement as the provider of the necessary *nephesh*. In the creation account found in the second chapter of Genesis, the Lord God is said to breathe into the first man the “breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). After receiving this divine in-breathing, the man becomes a *nephesh*-filled being. Thus, it is clear that God is the ultimate author of the very *nephesh* that is necessary to achieve atonement, and in the case of the impoverished person making an offering of flour, the Lord could easily provide the necessary divine *nephesh* necessary for atonement.

31 Briley, “Old Testament,” 97.

32 John H. Hayes, “Atonement in the Book of Leviticus,” *Interpretation* 52 no. 1 (Jan. 1998): 6.

33 Needham, “Atonement,” 37.

mankind and our creator.”³⁴ In other words, sin is devastating insofar as it causes separation between the human *nephesh* and the divine *nephesh*. Briley diagnoses a similar problem related to human sins. He writes, “the sins of Christians have a devastating effect on both a personal and corporate relationship with God.”³⁵ In other words, the separation caused by sin is the primary human dilemma.

Porter suggests that this problem of separation is one of the underlying human problems that the Levitical priestly theology attempts to correct. In fact, he notes that one of the emphases of this priestly theology is its “insistence on the keeping of the commandments of the law as ensuring a right relationship with God.”³⁶ It is fascinating to observe, however, that these very commandments that were intended to keep humans in a state of reconciliation with God were authored *by God*. Kevin Seasoltz rightly recognizes that the process of atonement is an action of God directed toward creatures rather than a human action directed toward God.³⁷ Thus, the reconciliation of the human *nephesh* to the divine *nephesh* is initiated by the author of *nephesh*.

Just as atonement implies reconciliation between humans and God, it also encompasses the necessary reconciliation in interpersonal human relationships. Levine suggests that the process of atonement between humans and God is related to the process of atonement and reconciliation within human relationships. Of the procedures for the Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16, Levine writes, “we observe a dynamic interaction between the priesthood/community, on the one hand, and the omnipresence of God, on the other.”³⁸ In other words, the process of atonement seems to have implications for both human/God relationships and human/human relationships. Likewise, Hayes recognizes, “through restitution a proper and normal relationship (*shalom*) is restored between the two parties, the victim and the perpetrator of the misconduct.”³⁹ In the same way that a victim/offender relationship can exist between God and humans, it can also exist within human relationships, and thus, it requires the same act of atonement through reconciliation that is required in the relationship between the human and the divine. The importance of atonement for achieving reconciliation in the context of human relationships is of inestimable value. In fact, Rooke believes that “the continuing well-being of the community is dependent on the successful performance of the [atonement] ceremony.”⁴⁰

The centrality of atonement rituals to the Levitical text is evident. As one moves to the New Testament, the idea of atonement remains a prominent theme, and it serves the reader well to draw from knowledge of the role of atonement in

34 Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 139.

35 Briley, “Old Testament,” 101.

36 J.R. Porter, *Leviticus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 9.

37 Kevin R. Seasoltz, “Another Look at Sacrifice,” *Worship* 74 no. 5 (2000): 397.

38 Levine, *Leviticus*, 99-100.

39 Hayes, “Atonement,” 11.

40 Rooke, “Day of Atonement,” 353.

the Levitical texts when examining the role of atonement in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Nicole observes, “a proper understanding of the relationship between the two testaments implies that one should not try to find the New Testament in the Old, but to read the signs in the Old Testament that point in the direction of the New.”⁴¹ Thus, I seek to draw parallels between the theology of atonement as it is explored in Leviticus and the ultimate atonement achieved in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The ceremony of the Day of Atonement, in particular, is helpful in constructing a theory that is able to bridge both Old and New Testament understandings. Seasoltz has recognized that there is no doubt that New Testament writers draw upon Old Testament conceptions of the atonement, specifically the theological ideas connected to the Day of Atonement.⁴² Hartley takes this idea even further in suggesting that Jesus “fulfilled the entire intent of the high Day of Atonement. In fact, because Jesus was both the perfect high priest and an offering free from blemish, his death consummated the entire OT sacrificial system.”⁴³ Ultimately, then, Jesus performed the decisive ceremony of atonement such that it no longer required the constant repetition of Levitical procedures.

The idea from Leviticus that the power of the atonement is in the *nephesh* that is present in the blood, rather than simply the blood itself, has profound implications for a post-resurrection theory of atonement. As McHugh notes, “the slaughtering of an animal was not of the essence of sacrifice even in the Old Testament (for example, the bird in Lev. 14:52-3 and the scapegoat in 16:6-10, 20-22) only the offering of it to God.”⁴⁴ This serves to emphasize the idea that blood was only a requirement for the atonement insofar as it contained the *nephesh*, the *real* requirement for atonement. Thus, the focus of God’s atoning work is on the God-breathed *nephesh*, not on death or the idea that God demands the blood of punishment as payment for grievous human sin.

The implications of the atonement theology found in Leviticus for post-resurrection thinking about the atonement is that Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection are found to serve the purpose of the intermediary *nephesh* that is able to create reconciliation between the human *nephesh* and the divine *nephesh*. Hartley explains that since Jesus fulfills the role of “the boundary between the holy and the sinful, here humans may find forgiveness of all their sins and reconciliation with God.”⁴⁵ Likewise, Gunton recognizes that the *nephesh* that serves as the vehicle of atonement is from God. “The life that is given is the life of God himself, the incarnate Son dying for the life of the world.”⁴⁶

Ultimately, Jesus fulfills all of the roles required by the Day of the Atonement.

41 Nicole, “Atonement,” 49.

42 Seasoltz, “Sacrifice,” 399.

43 Hartley, *Leviticus*, 244.

44 J. F. McHugh, “The Sacrifice of the Mass at the Council of Trent,” in *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology*, ed. S. W. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 164.

45 Hartley, *Leviticus*, 245.

46 Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, 138.

ment as it is specified in Leviticus 16. He serves as the high priest who must risk his life in order to bring about atonement and reconciliation. Jesus also serves as the sacrificial goat whose blood, and the *nephesh* therein, reunites the separated human *nephesh* to the divine *nephesh*. In fact, Matthew 20:28 records Jesus' own statement that "the Son of Man came...to give his life a ransom for many." Jesus affirms that his atoning power is in his *life*, his *nephesh*. Through Jesus' *nephesh*, Jesus is able to enact the atonement that is intimately related to reconciliation among humans and between humans and God. This idea allows contemporary atonement theories to rid themselves of the notion of a violent, blood-thirsty God. The atonement need not, and *should* not, be built upon the idea that God must exact vengeance for the sins of humanity. Rather, in spite of the separation from God that humanity itself has caused, out of an immeasurable self-giving love, God provides God's self in the form of Jesus Christ to serve as the intermediary *nephesh* that can reunite and reconcile the separated human *nephesh* to the divine.

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PENAL SUBSTITUTION IN ROMANS 3:25-26 ?¹

Jarvis J. Williams

INTRODUCTION

Some scholars question whether the New Testament presents Jesus' death as a penal substitute for sin.² This article offers a focused study in which I argue that Paul presents Jesus' death as a penal substitute for sin in Romans 3:25-26. I defend the proposed thesis with a concise analysis of Romans 3:25-26. I offer two primary arguments throughout the article to defend the proposed thesis: (1) God offered Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement. (2) Jesus' death satisfied God's wrath. After I defend the proposed thesis, I offer five concluding observations that suggest whether one affirms or denies penal substitution in Romans 3:25-26 affects not only how one views the argument of Romans 3:21-26, but also the argument of Romans 1:18-11:32. I begin by discussing Romans 3:25-26 in context of Paul's argument in Romans 3:21-26.³

1 I offer thanks to Timothy Gray (a student at Southern Seminary) for proofing the article.

2 Penal substitution suggests that God judged sin in Jesus' death by accrediting to him the penalty of the transgressors. Some scholars affirm that Paul presents Jesus as a substitute, but they reject that he presents him as a penal substitute. For example, see Morna D. Hooker, "Interchange in Christ," *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971): 349-61; idem, "Interchange and Atonement," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 60 (1978): 462-81. For some of the more notable rejections of penal substitution, see John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1856); Horace Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866); Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A.G. Herbert (London: SPK, 1945). For recent rejections of penal substitution, see Stephen Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God: Divine Retribution in the New Testament* (Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1986), 44; Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Rediscovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament & Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000). For recent defenses of penal substitution, see John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986); Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (eds.), *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Penal Substitution View," in *The Nature of the Atonement*, eds. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 67-98; Steve Jefferey, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007).

3 My thesis in this article pertains *only* to Paul's presentation of Jesus' death in Romans 3:25-26. The goal in this article is not to provide an exhaustive investiga-

ROMANS 3:25-26 IN CONTEXT

According to many scholars, Romans 3:21-26⁴ is likely the central section of the letter.⁵ Paul begins this section by contrasting what he has argued in 1:18-3:20.⁶ The latter section argues that all (both Jews and Gentiles) have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Both groups stand condemned before God since neither group is capable of being justified by perfectly obeying the law.⁷ The reason

tion of atonement in Paul. I neither argue that Paul *only* understood Jesus' death as a penal substitute. Rather, the proposed thesis is that Paul presents Jesus' death as a penal substitute in Romans 3:25-26.

4 Henceforth I only refer to the verses in Romans 3:21-26 (e.g., 3:21-26) unless otherwise indicated.

5 For example, C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 199. In the history of interpretation of this text, scholars have also noted that a variety of textual problems exist in 3:21-26. For discussions of the various textual problems in 3:21-26, see Ernst Käsemann, "Zum Verständnis von Römer 3,24-26," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 43 (1950-1951): 150-54; Stanislas Lyonnet, "Le sens de πάρεσι" en Rom 3,25," *Biblica* 38 (1957): 40-61; U. Wilckens, "Zu Römer 3,21-25," *Evangelische Theologie* 24 (1964): 584-610; G. Klein, "Exegetisch Probleme in Röm 3, 21-25," *EvT* 24 (1964): 676-83; Charles H. Talbert, "A Non-Pauline Fragment at Romans 3:24-26?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966): 287-96; Sam K. Williams, *Jesus' Death as Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept*, HDR 2 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975); idem, "The Righteousness of God in Romans," *JBL* 99 (1980): 107-15; B.F. Meyer, "The Pre-Pauline Formula in Rom 3:25-26a," *New Testament Studies* 29 (1983): 198-208. For text-critical issues in 3:25-26, see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 449.

6 Most scholars agree that the words "but now" introduce some kind of shift in Paul's argument. Scholars do not, however, unanimously agree on whether this shift is temporal (i.e., eschatological/salvation-historical) or whether it is simply an argumentative shift. For example, see Douglas A. Campbell, *The Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3:21-26*, *JSNTSup* 65 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 22-23.

7 This reading is against the New Perspective readings offered by E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977); James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Galatians and Mark* (London: SPK, 1990); N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); idem, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Saul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). For responses to the New Perspective, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Frank S. Thielman, *From Plight to Solution: A Jewish Framework for Understanding Paul's View of the Law in Romans and Galatians* (Leiden: Brill, 1989); idem, *Paul & the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994); D.A. Carson, Peter O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (eds.), *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001); Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Simon J. Gathercole, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

no one receives justification through the law is stated in 3:20: “because by means of the works of the law no flesh will be justified in his [God’s] presence, for the knowledge of sin comes through the law.”⁸

Paul provides the antithesis to 1:18-3:20 in 3:21-26: viz., justification by faith in Jesus (3:21-22).⁹ Justification by faith in Jesus is the necessary solution to humanity’s spiritual plight, “for all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God” (3:23). As a result, God takes the initiative and graciously “justifies all freely by his grace” (3:24a). God accomplishes this justification “through the redemption which is by means of Christ Jesus” (3:24b).¹⁰

Paul explicates the redemption that God has accomplished by the death of Jesus in 3:25-26, stating that God offered him as a sacrifice of atonement for those who place faith in him. God made this provision, says Paul, in order to demonstrate his righteousness, having previously passed over sins committed during the Mosaic Covenant.¹¹ By judging sin in the death of Jesus, God vindicated the

8 All translations are mine.

9 I understand δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in 3:21-22 and δικαιούμενοι in 3:24 in a forensic sense: God changes the status of those who trust in Jesus by faith by declaring them to be in the right. Δικαίω (“to justify”) occurs in both legal/forensic contexts and in ethical contexts in the LXX and in the New Testament. For examples, see the LXX of Gen 38:26 (ethical); 44:16 (forensic); Isa 1:17; 5:23; 43:9, 26; 45:25; 50:8; 53:11 (forensic); Isa 42:21 (ethical); Sir 1:22; 7:3; 9:12 (forensic); 18:2 (ethical). In the gospels and Acts, when salvation is in view, δικαίω is only forensic (Matt 12:37; Luke 10:29; Acts 13:38). In Paul, the majority of the occurrences of δικαίω are forensic (Rom 2:13; 3:3, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30; 4:2, 5; 5:1, 9; 6:7; 8:30, 33, 34; 1 Cor 4:4; 6:11; Gal 2:16-17; 3:8, 11, 24; 5:4). To say that justification, however, is forensic does not imply that justification is a legal fiction. Against Wright, *Saint Paul*, 119, 122, 124-26, 29; Robert H. Gundry, “The Non-Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, eds. Mark Husband and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 17-45. In addition, I understand the genitives Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ in διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ as objective genitives, and they emphasize faith in Jesus as opposed to the faithfulness of Jesus. Against George Howard, “On the Faith of Christ,” *Harvard Theological Review* 60 (1967): 459-65; idem, “The Faith of Christ,” *Expository Times* 85 (1974): 212-15; Markus Barth, “The Faith of the Messiah,” *Heythrop Journal* 10 (1969): 363-70; Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Christ*, SBLDS 56 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 170-76; Charles B. Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 39-40 n. 28. For a recent dissertation on the objective versus the subjective genitive that interacts with the most important literature prior to 2003, see Kukwah Philemon Yong, “The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Analysis of Paul’s Use of Pistis Christou (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

10 For an analysis of redemption terminology in the New Testament, see B.B. Warfield, “The New Testament Terminology of Redemption,” in vol. 2 of *Bible Doctrines: The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 327-98; Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

11 Rightly the NIV; Simon J. Gathercole, “Romans 3:25-26: An Exegetical Study” (lecture presented at the Annual Atonement Conference of the London School of Theology, London, July 2005), 1-6.

integrity of his character in this new age of salvation-history, and he proved himself to be the just justifier of those who place faith in Jesus. Having set 3:25-26 in the context of Paul's argument in 3:21-26, I spend the remainder of the article defending the proposed thesis: Paul presents Jesus as a penal substitute for sin in 3:25-26.

GOD OFFERED JESUS AS A SACRIFICE OF ATONEMENT

Paul begins 3:25 with a relative pronoun ("whom"). The relative pronoun modifies "Christ Jesus" in 3:24. The relative pronoun also functions as the object of the verb "to set forth" in 3:25, of which God is the grammatical subject. Ἰλαστήριον functions as the predicate accusative to the relative pronoun "whom" (ὄν). Thus, God set forth Jesus (i.e., presented him) as a ἰλαστήριον.¹² The only occurrence of ἰλαστήριον in Paul is here in 3:25. The only other occurrence of the term in the New Testament is in Hebrews 9:5.¹³ However, 3:25 and 4 Maccabees 17:22 are the only two places in extant literature where ἰλαστήριον is applied to the death of a human for the soteriological benefits of others.¹⁴ In Hebrews 9:5, ἰλαστήριον clearly alludes to the Yom Kippur ritual and refers to the mercy seat.

Since ἰλαστήριον occurs only twice in the New Testament, scholars debate how Paul uses the term in 3:25. Some argue that it refers to the mercy seat (cf. Heb 9:5).¹⁵ Others argue that it simply alludes to the Yom Kippur ritual but does not actually refer to the mercy seat (cf. Lev 16).¹⁶ Others suggest that it refers to

12 Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, 208-09; Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Gospel and Mission: The Outlook from His Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 56-57; Stephen Finlan, *The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement Metaphors* (Atlanta: SBL, 2004), 140.

13 A nominal cognate (ἰλασμοζ) occurs in both the LXX and in the New Testament. For examples, see the LXX of Lev 25:9; Num 5:8; Ps 129:4; Ezek 44:27; 2 Macc 3:33. See also 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 in the New Testament.

14 J.W. van Henten ("The Tradition-Historical Background of Romans 3:25: A Search for Pagan and Jewish Parallels," in *From Jesus to John: Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology in Honour of Marinus de Jonge*, ed. Martinus C. de Doer, JSNTSup 84 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 107) rightly observes that 3:25 and 4 Macc 17:22 are the only two places where ἰλαστήριον refers to humans providing expiation for sin by their deaths. For a more detailed discussion of ἰλαστήριον in 4 Maccabees and its influence on Paul in 3:25, see chapters 2 and 4 in my forthcoming dissertation "Maccabean Martyr Traditions in Paul's Theology of Atonement" (Ph. D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, forthcoming 2007).

15 Daniel P. Bailey, "Jesus as the Mercy Seat: The Semantics and Theology of Paul's Use of Hilastērion in Romans 3:25" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1999).

16 Adolf Deissmann, "ἰλαστήριον und ἰλαστήριον: Eine lexikalische Studie," *ZNW* 4 (1903): 193-211. Cf. Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: A Study of the Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1981), 45; Thomas Knöppler, *Sühne im Neuen Testament* (Neukirchener-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001), 112-17; Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity*, WUNT 163 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 189-202. See also John Reumann ("The Gospel of the Righteousness of God: Pauline Reinterpretation in Romans

a means of propitiation,¹⁷ while others see a martyrological influence on Paul's usage in 3:25 (cf. 4 Macc 17:22).¹⁸ Scholars also question the meaning/translation of ἱλαστήριον. They ask whether the term should be translated as expiation (cleansing/purgation of sin) or whether it should be translated as propitiation (placating/appeasing of God's wrath).¹⁹

An element of truth exists in each of the above solutions for the meaning/translation of ἱλαστήριον. However, Paul's point in 3:25 is not to emphasize one cultic metaphor over and against another or to call Jesus a piece of temple furniture.²⁰ On the contrary, Paul's point is that God justifies Jews and Gentiles the same way, by faith by means of Jesus' death.²¹ That is, Paul's emphasis in 3:25 is that God has provided forgiveness of sins, and he has satisfied his wrath against sin, because he has accomplished redemption through Jesus' death (3:24). God has accomplished this salvation by offering Jesus as a ἱλαστήριον. It seems

3:21-26," *Interpretation* 20 [1966]: 436), who suggests that ἱλαστήριον meant mercy seat in the pre-Pauline traditional formula but means expiation in Paul.

17 Leon Morris, "The Meaning of ΗΙΛΑΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ in Romans 3:25," *NTS* 18 (1971-72): 3-43.

18 Van Henten, "The Tradition-Historical Background of Romans 3:25," 101-28. Against Stanislas Lyonnet and Léopold Sabourin (*Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice* [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970], 157), who state that "all notions are taken directly and immediately from the Old Testament" in Paul's atonement theology. Tom Holland, on the other hand, argues obstreperously against a martyrological background to Paul's use of ἱλαστήριον in 3:25, contending that to affirm a martyrological background for Paul's atonement theology is to undermine substitutionary atonement. See Tom Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul's Biblical Writings* (Scotland: Mentor, 2004), 157-82. Holland instead argues for a New-Exodus model as Paul's background.

19 C.H. Dodd (*The Bible and the Greeks*, 2nd ed. [Hodder & Stoughton, 1954]) initiated this debate in the 1930s by arguing for expiation as the appropriate way to translate ἱλαστήριον. See also Morna D. Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel: New Testament Interpretations of the Death of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 24. Opponents to Dodd's view offered sharp responses to his arguments. Roger Nicole ("C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 17 [1954-55]: 117-57) exposed the weaknesses of Dodd's arguments by analyzing each one in light of the evidence that Dodd either overlooked or simply ignored. Nicole argued for propitiation. Morris likewise ("ΗΙΛΑΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ," 3-43) argued that ἱλαστήριον should be translated "as a means of propitiation." David Hill (*Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, SNTS 5, ed. Matthew Black [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967], 23-48) also critiqued Dodd's thesis.

20 Rightly Deissmann, "ἱλαστήριος und ἱλαστήριον," 193-211, although I do not agree with every argument that Deissmann put forth in order to argue his thesis.

21 The phrase διὰ πίστεως in 3:25 grammatically modifies ἱλαστήριον. This reading is against Luke Timothy Johnson, "Romans 3:21-26 and the Faith of Jesus," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 89; idem, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 60. For examples where the phrase διὰ πίστεως modifies a noun in other New Testament literature, see Phil 3:9 and 2 Tim 3:15.

likely, then, that Paul suggests in 3:25 with ἱλαστήριον that God offered Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement to be a penal substitute for sin (cf. 3:23-25a).²²

JESUS' DEATH SATISFIED GOD'S WRATH AGAINST SIN

That Paul employs the term ἱλαστήριον to refer to both the expiatory and the propitiatory aspects of Jesus' death can be seen in 3:25b-26 with the terms "blood," "righteousness," and "sins."²³ Jesus' blood in 3:25b refers to his death, but it specifically notes the purgative aspect of his death (cf. 4 Macc 6:28-29; 17:21-22). The phrase "his righteousness" in 3:25b refers to the righteousness of God (cf. Rom 1:17; 3:21-22). "Sins" in 3:25b refers to the sins committed during the Mosaic Covenant prior to the cross.

However, God did not offer Jesus to die only for the previously committed sins of the Mosaic Covenant, but he set forth Jesus to die for all sin (cf. 3:23). Because God set forth Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement for all sin, sins committed before the cross and sins committed after the cross can be cleansed and forgiven (cf. Lev 16-17 LXX; esp. 17:11). God forgives the sins of those who place faith in Jesus since he set forth Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement "for the demonstration of his righteousness because of the previously committed sins" (3:25).²⁴

That God offered Jesus as a penal substitute is further elucidated in the rest of Paul's argument in 3:25b-26, especially with his reference to God's righteous-

22 Rightly N.T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in vol. 10 of the New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 393-770; esp. 476. Against Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Jews, Justice, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 198-206; Wolfgang Kraus, *Der Tod Jesu als Heiligtumsweihe: Eine Untersuchung zum Umfeld der Sühnevorstellung im Römer 3:25-26a* (Neukirchener-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991); Stephen H. Travis, "Christ as Bearer of Divine Judgment in Paul's Thought about the Atonement," in *Atonement Today*, ed. John Goldingay (London: SPK, 1995), 21-38; esp. 27-30; Charles H. Talbert, *Romans* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 110-15. Stowers rejects the sacrificial nature of Jesus' death, and he suggests that his death was simply a means by which God delayed his judgment against Jews and Gentiles in order to give them time to repent. For a list of alternative translations for ἱλαστήριον, see Nico S.L. Fryer, "The Meaning and Translation of Hilastērion in Romans 3:25," *Evangelical Quarterly* 59 (1987): 99-116, esp. 99.

23 Against Stowers, *A Rereading*, 211; T.W. Manson, "ἱλαστήριον," *Journal of Theological Studies* 46 (1945): 1-10; A.T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: SPK, 1957), 68-111; G.H.C. Macgregor, "The Concept of the Wrath of God in the NT," *NTS* 7 (1960-1961): 101-09; D.E.H. Whitely, *The Theology of St. Paul*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 61-72; Otfried Hofius, "Erwägungen zur Gestalt und Herkunft des paulinischen Versöhnungsgedakens," in *Paulusstudien I*, WUNT 51 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1981), 186-99. The preceding scholars emphasize expiation more than propitiation. Cf. James D.G. Dunn, "Paul's Understanding of the Death of Jesus," in *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology*, ed. S.W. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35-56.

24 For an alternate translation and interpretation of 3:26, see W.G. Kümmel, "Paresis and Endeixis: A Contribution to the Understanding of the Pauline Doctrine of Justification," *Journal for Theology and the Church* 3 (1967): 1-13.

ness and with his reference to Jesus' blood. Furthermore, Paul's argument in 1:18-3:26 and in 5:9-11 supports the view that he presents Jesus as a penal substitute in 3:25. First, Paul states in 1:18 that God's wrath currently abides upon all who suppress the truth. Second, he declares in 2:1-3:8 that both Jews and Gentiles will be the recipients of God's eschatological wrath. Third, he states in 3:20 that the law does not justify anyone, but exposes sin. Fourth, Paul proclaims in 3:23 that all have sinned and have fallen short of God's glory. Fifth, he states in 3:24-26 that God justifies sinners and satisfies his wrath through the redemption accomplished by Jesus' death. Sixth, he states in 5:9-11 that since believers have been justified by Jesus' blood, they will be saved from God's eschatological wrath. Therefore, the textual evidence suggests that, in 3:25-26, Paul states that God offered Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement in order to demonstrate his (i.e., God's) righteousness by judging sin.

If God would have left unpunished the previously committed sins of the Mosaic Covenant, then his moral rectitude would be in question. Moreover, if God did not punish sin in the cross of Jesus but instead left it unpunished, then whether atonement has been offered for sin in 3:25-26 would also be in question. Hence, God offered Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement for sins committed prior to Jesus' death during the Mosaic Covenant and atonement for sins committed after the cross during the New Covenant (3:25b-26a; cf. 3:23). God, however, proves himself to be just, although he previously passed over the sins of the Mosaic Covenant, because he judged sin in the cross of Jesus. This interpretation is confirmed when Paul explicates the phrase in 3:25b—"for the demonstration of his righteousness because of the passing over of the previously committed sins"—with the phrase in 3:26b: "for the demonstration of his righteousness in the present time, so that he would demonstrate himself to be just as well as the God who justifies the one who has faith in Jesus." God demonstrates that he is just and that he justifies sinners by offering Jesus as a penal substitute. The penal aspect of Jesus' death means that God judged sin in Jesus' death on the cross by judging him as a sinner.

CONCLUSION

Paul presents Jesus as a penal substitute for sin in 3:25-26. I conclude by making five observations as to why the rejection of this thesis negatively affects both Paul's presentation of Jesus' death in 3:25-26 and the argument of 1:18-11:32 as a whole. First, to reject penal substitution in 3:25-26 is to leave unresolved the solution to humanity's spiritual plight. Paul arduously presents humanity's spiritual plight in 1:18-3:20 and in 3:23, but he leaves this problem unresolved until his argument in 3:21-26. To deny that Paul presents Jesus as a penal substitute for sin in 3:25-26 would lessen the weight of Paul's argument in 1:18-3:20. Moreover, if penal substitution is not the emphasis in 3:25-26, Paul's argument in 3:21-26 would be unnecessary at this juncture in his argument, i.e., after he has argued in 1:18-3:20 and in 3:23 that all have sinned, have fallen short of the glory of God, and are subject to God's wrath.

Second, to reject penal substitution in 3:25-26 undermines the teaching in this text that God has finally dealt with sin and that he has accomplished atone-

ment for sin through Jesus' death. If Paul does not present Jesus as a penal substitute for sin in 3:25-26, then one must conclude that he simply presents him as a moral example or as a victim in 3:25-26. However, this reading of the text undermines a soteriological presentation of Jesus' death in 3:25-26.²⁵ On the other hand, to affirm that Paul teaches that Jesus is a penal substitute for sin in 3:25-26 emphasizes that Paul argues in 3:25-26 that Jesus' death was the means by which God accomplished atonement, judged sin, provided the solution to humanity's plight in 1:18-3:20 and in 3:23, and the means by which God extends salvation to Jews and Gentiles.

Third, to reject penal substitution in 3:25-26 would leave unanswered how God deals with the fundamental chasm between God and humanity shown in 1:18-3:26. Such a rejection does not explain how sins can be expiated. All seems hopeless for humanity until 3:21-22 and until 3:24-26, where Paul presents the solution to the problem of sin: viz., justification by faith in Jesus by means of his death for sin. If Paul does not present Jesus as a penal substitute for sin in 3:25-26, then Jesus' death cannot be understood in 3:25-26 as the solution to the sin-problem presented in 1:18-3:20 and in 3:23.

Fourth, Paul specifically connects justification by faith, redemption, and God's judgment of sin with Jesus' blood in 3:21-26. If Jesus' death is not a penal substitute in 3:25-26, then God has not accomplished justification in 3:21-24, which Paul states comes through faith in Jesus through his redemption. Thus, the entirety of humanity would still be subject to the wrath of God. Even followers of Jesus would be subject to God's eschatological wrath from which Jesus' death supposedly delivers them (cf. Rom 5:8-11).

Fifth, Paul argues that everybody is under God's wrath (1:18-3:20, 23). He later argues that those whom God justifies by Jesus' death will be delivered from his wrath (5:8-11). To reject penal substitution in 3:25-26 leaves unanswered why Paul argues that the wrath of God is not reserved for those who have been justified by faith in Jesus.

If Paul does not present Jesus as a penal substitute for sin in 3:25-26, Paul's argument that Jesus' followers will be delivered from God's wrath would be moot. It would also be useless to argue (as he does in 5:1-8:39) that followers of Jesus have hope because of Jesus' death. Moreover, it would be equally wrong for Paul to argue that "all Israel will be saved" in 11:26 if he does not present Jesus as a penal substitute in 3:25-26. If nothing has transpired between 1:18-3:20 and 5:1-11:32 that would provide the solution to humanity's sin-problem, then Paul's argument that God will save from his wrath those whom he has justified by faith in Jesus is wishful thinking at best.

Humanity is only justified and God's wrath is only removed when sins are forgiven (cf. 5:8-11). If 3:25-26 does not present Jesus as a penal substitute for sin, then sin has not been forgiven and, therefore, God's wrath will not be re-

25 The above statement specifically refers to Paul's presentation of Jesus' death in 3:25-26. I do not mean that *only* the penal substitution view represents the New Testament's teaching on the atonement. Moreover, I neither mean that penal substitution is the *only* view of the atonement that is present in Paul's atonement theology.

moved from sin (cf. 5:9-11). Paul's argument in 1:18-11:32 holds together only if he is presenting Jesus as a penal substitute for sin in 3:25-26.

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THE UNCREATION OF JESUS CHRIST: UNDERSTANDING 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

Amy Julia Becker

“For our sake *he made him to be sin* who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”¹ This dramatic statement summarizes Paul’s position on Christ’s atoning work in 2 Corinthians 5. Using similar language in his letter to the Galatians, Paul asserts, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by *becoming a curse* for us...” (Gal. 3:13). Broadly speaking, both verses imply that Christ serves as a representative or substitute on our behalf, “for us.” He somehow takes our sin, our curse, and gives to us righteousness and redemption. Most theologians agree on this general explanation, yet the precise wording of these two verses begs for closer inspection. What exactly does it mean for Christ to *be made sin* or to *become a curse*? A straightforward reading suggests an ontological change in the very being of Christ, the person of the hypostatic union. The vast majority of scholars who remark upon these passages, however, refuse to take Paul’s words literally. They offer explanations for his strong language, but those explanations serve only to explain it away. Although the history of interpretation suggests otherwise, the language of 2 Corinthians 5 and the theological issues at stake in this passage lead to the conclusion that Paul does intend a literal reading. The atoning death of Christ remains, on many levels, a mystery, and problems of comprehension occur using any interpretive lens. In light of the context and syntax of 2 Corinthians 5, however, the most satisfactory reading lies in taking Paul’s words as they appear—*God made Christ to be sin*—as a radical statement about the reconciling new creation of God in and through Christ, for us.

Commentators generally agree on what Paul does *not* mean in 2 Corinthians 5:21. As Jack Lewis summarizes, “It is universally agreed that in no real sense could Christ be spoken of as having done sin.”² There is too much Scriptural and theological evidence to interpret this verse to mean that Christ, the sinless one, did in fact commit acts of sin during his earthly life. Three other exegetical options also are dismissed easily. First, some scholars have suggested that Paul means here that Christ was made a “sin offering.” Victor Furnish concludes that such a reading, “would import an idea foreign to this context,”³ and Frank Matera agrees: “since Paul has just spoken of ‘the one who did not know sin,’ it is more likely that

1 2 Corinthians 5:21, *NRSV*. All other references are to this translation and will be indicated by chapter and verse in parentheses.

2 Jack P. Lewis, “Significant Issues in the Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:14-21,” in *Interpreting 2 Corinthians 5:14-21*, ed. Jack P. Lewis (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 60.

3 Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1984), 340.

hamartian means ‘sin’ rather than ‘an offering for sin.’”⁴ 2 Corinthians 5 does not employ cultic or priestly language at any other point, which makes it highly unlikely that Paul intends the word “sin” to actually mean “sin offering.” Yet another proposal suggests, “Jesus had come into close relationship with sin by doing what no other religious teachers of the day would do, by making friends of sinners . . . [T]hough He remains sinless, He felt the sins of others as though they were His own.”⁵ But the severity of Paul’s language similarly eliminates the idea that this verse merely refers to Christ’s close relationship with sinners. A third option asserts that Paul refers to the fact that “[Christ] had a visible form like human nature which is subject to sin,”⁶ and while this statement may be true in and of itself, it fails to account for the dramatic syntax and context of the passage.

The majority of commentators see Christ here as a representative of sinful humanity, as the one God treats like a sinner although he never actually sinned. John Calvin explains, “[Christ] suffered death not because of innocence but because of sin . . . [W]e shall behold the person of a sinner and evildoer represented in Christ, yet from his shining innocence it will at the same time be obvious that he was burdened with another’s sin rather than his own.”⁷ Christ remains innocent, yet he bears the burden of our sin. Again, Calvin asserts, “Paul writes that sin was condemned in his flesh when he was made sin for us, that is, the force and the curse of sin were slain in his flesh when he was given as a victim.”⁸ Although Calvin places Christ in a closer relationship to sin than those who argue that this verse refers to his association with sinners or his potential to sin, Calvin still qualifies Paul’s statements. It is not that Christ actually becomes sin, but that he appropriates the burden and force of sin through His death.

Modern interpreters agree with Calvin. Furnish explains, “Paul is thinking in a general way of Christ’s identification with sinful humanity.”⁹ Matera writes, “The sense is that God placed Christ in the sinful human condition so that humanity might experience the righteous condition that comes with God’s righteousness,”¹⁰ and, “Christ is regarded and treated by God as a sinner.”¹¹ Hughes also echoes these thoughts: “God made him sin: that is to say that God the Father made His innocent incarnate Son the object of His wrath and judgment, for our sakes, with the result that in Christ on the cross the sin of the world is judged and taken away.”¹² Finally, T.F. Torrance reflects on this verse with the comment, “far from sinning himself or being contaminated by what he appropriated for us, Christ

4 Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 143.

5 Lewis, quoting Tasker, 61.

6 *Ibid.*, 61.

7 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 507.

8 *Ibid.*, 653.

9 Furnish, 340.

10 Matera, 128.

11 *Ibid.*, 143.

12 Lewis, quoting Hughes, 62.

triumphed.”¹³

All of these scholars understand Paul’s words as the language of appropriation. Christ does not actually become a sinner, nor does he actually become sin. Rather, He appropriates the weight, curse, and guilt of sin even as he remains the sinless one. The context and syntax of this passage, however, call this interpretation into question. All of these scholars place greater distance between the person of Christ and the reality of sin than does Paul’s statement. Torrance most clearly demonstrates this desire to protect Christ from sin when he uses the word “contaminated.” Paul, in contrast, writes that Christ was made sin, without qualification or distance between the two words. None of the commentators quoted above explain what warrants treating this verse (and Galatians 3:13 along with it) in a metaphorical sense rather than as a statement of ontological reality. Their readings do not satisfactorily explain Paul’s language. What is more, the traditional understanding of the way in which Christ appropriates sin and imputes righteousness does not fully explain the ontological change that occurs in humanity—from sinfulness to righteousness—because it does not admit any ontological change in Christ—from righteousness to sinfulness. The syntax, context, and theological issues raised by this passage all lead to the question: What if Paul really means that Christ was made sin for us?

The eschatological context of 2 Corinthians 5, combined with the nature of sin, God, and humanity, suggest that Paul deliberately equates Christ with sin. Commentators agree that 2 Corinthians 5 speaks in eschatological and cosmic terms about the effects of Christ’s death and resurrection. Throughout this passage, Paul wants to impress upon his readers the far-reaching scope and eternal significance of Christ’s atoning work. First, he quotes a traditional creedal formula, but he alters it slightly to emphasize the extent of Christ’s work. The traditional creedal formula would be, “Christ died *for us*,” but Paul writes, “we are convinced that one has died *for all*,” and then again, “he (Christ) died *for all*” (2 Cor. 5:14-15). This subtle change of one word—from “us” to “all”—shifts the emphasis from the individual believer to the whole of humanity. As Furnish explains, “the eschatological and therefore universal significance of Christ’s death is being stressed.”¹⁴ In addition to language that suggests the universal scope of Christ’s work, Paul comments on the eschatological effect of that work. He writes, “From now on, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor. 5:16-17). Matera explains, “The phrase ‘from now on’ refers to an event of cosmic proportions that has occurred in Christ.”¹⁵ The universal language of verses 14-15, combined with the emphatic proclamation of a new reality in verses 16-17 have led commentators and theologians to conclude that the only way to conceive of the new reality created in Christ

13 T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: the evangelical theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 161.

14 Furnish, 327.

15 Matera, 136.

is to speak in grandiose terms that still only begin to describe what Paul means by “new creation.”

Commentators further assert that it is more than just humanity that is newly created in Christ. A literal translation of verse 17 reads, “So if anyone in Christ, new creation (*kaine ktisis*).” Furnish explains, “The expression *kaine ktisis* in apocalyptic Judaism suggests that something more inclusive than the new being of an individual believer is in mind.”¹⁶ In fact, “the apocalyptic tradition to which Paul is clearly indebted in this passage conceives of a total replacement of the old by the new.”¹⁷ Again, Paul wants his readers to understand that the death and resurrection of Christ utterly changes the nature of reality for all people and all of creation. In addition to these verses which suggest that Christ’s atoning work has a universal scope with cosmic creative effect, Paul writes, “in Christ God was reconciling the world (*kosmos*) to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). Here again, Paul references what is literally a cosmic event. In the context of asserting this new creation of the entire cosmos through God’s reconciling work in Christ, the final verse of the chapter becomes all the more dramatic: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin.”

Paul’s language suggests that Christ was made equivalent with sin, and this statement comes in the context of a new cosmic reality, the reconciling activity of God for all humanity and all of creation. Is it possible Paul is suggesting that Christ himself was uncreated, that he entered into the ontological reality of sin in order to eradicate fully and finally that reality within us? Commentators agree that the language of new creation is dramatic and far reaching—beyond our comprehension, even—yet they are not willing to give equally dramatic weight to what Christ did to provide the means for this new creation. Paul’s language associates Christ and sin much more closely than any of his commentators dare. And Paul echoes this shocking language in Galatians 3:13 when he writes, “[Christ] became a curse.” In both instances, Paul suggests an ontological change in the being of the God-human.

A theological consideration of the nature of sin, the nature of humanity, and the nature of the God-human clarifies the implications of reading Paul’s words literally. The Biblical witness and Christian theologians assume that sin is an uncreated reality, the antithesis of God’s creative goodness and power. Athanasius describes sin as nothingness: “for what is evil is not, but what is good is.”¹⁸ Calvin defines sin as “the depravation of a nature previously good and pure.”¹⁹ And Barth claims that “sin attains its true form as opposition to the grace of God.”²⁰ Although the language employed differs across the ages, each of these theologians assumes that sin is the antithesis to God’s being. It is ontologically other than God. Sin is

16 Furnish, 314.

17 Ibid., 316.

18 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word in Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), 59.

19 Calvin, 246.

20 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 374; hereafter *CD*.

that which destroys, deprives, and opposes. God is the one who creates, blesses, and redeems.

These same theologians make corresponding statements about sin's effect on humanity. Athanasius sees sin's effect as precipitating humanity's descent into nothingness. He writes, "the race of man was perishing; the rational man made in God's image was disappearing, and the handiwork of God was in a process of dissolution."²¹ Athanasius implies that at one point, before sin began its corrupting work, man was in a position of fullness instead of nothingness, of goodness rather than sin. Calvin similarly remarks upon our "originally upright nature."²² He implies that sin has changed us into something we were not in God's original design. Finally, Barth states, "man . . . can be understood only as the sinner who has covered his own creaturely being with shame and who cannot therefore stand before God even though he is the creature of God. . . . For what we recognize to be human nature is nothing other than the disgrace which covers his nature: his inhumanity."²³ Barth goes so far as to say that humans, because of sin, are actually inhuman. The nature of humanity should be that which is created in the image of God and therefore purely good. Athanasius, Calvin, and Barth all assert that the reality of humanity is sinful humanity, men and women who have turned away from God and toward the nothingness of sin.

Because of sin, therefore, humanity is opposed to God. This reality leads Barth to claim that "the ultimate fact about our human nature is the self-contradiction of man."²⁴ On the one hand, we remain God's creatures. On the other, we are so enraptured by sin that we deny our creaturely reality and contradict ourselves. Barth and Calvin represent the Reformed tradition in their understanding of sin and the effects of sin on human nature. Although Barth and Calvin do not agree on every aspect of Christ's nature, both affirm that Christ is truly human, and both assert that he is human without the taint of sin. Calvin writes, "[Christ] is true man but without fault and corruption."²⁵ Barth echoes this point throughout his theological anthropology. He asserts, "Jesus alone is primarily and properly man";²⁶ "in Him human nature is not concealed but revealed in its original and basic form";²⁷ and "in Him is the human nature created by God without the self-contradiction which afflicts us and without the self-deception by which we seek to escape from this our shame."²⁸ Christ, according to Barth and Calvin, serves as the only example of true humanity. Christ is able to present true humanity to us because, like God, he is sinless, yet, like us, he has the capacity to sin. Christ never chooses to sin, unlike us, and as a result he demonstrates true humanity, that

21 Athanasius, 60.

22 Calvin, 183.

23 Barth, *CD* III/2, 27.

24 *Ibid.*, 47.

25 Calvin, 481.

26 Barth, *CD* III/2, 43.

27 *Ibid.*, 52.

28 *Ibid.*, 48.

for which we were all originally created.

Human beings wrongly align themselves with sin instead of with God, and as a result they exist in a state of dissolution and self-destruction. Christ, the God-human, enters into the world of sin in the form of sinful flesh, yet he does not sin. As the sinless human, he is the true human. But Scripture proclaims that Christ not only demonstrates true humanity through his life; he also accomplishes it for us through his death and resurrection. He does not merely provide an example of what it looks like to live without sin, he eradicates sin in order to make possible a new creation, a new humanity, a humanity truly created in the image of God.

Paul's provocative statement, "[God] made [Christ] to be sin," must be interpreted both within its own context as well as within this broader theological understanding of the nature of sin, humanity, and Christ. Again, most commentators strongly oppose any literal reading of this text. For example, one says, "Paul was being intentionally paradoxical. Paul cannot have meant 'he made him sin' in any literal or ordinary sense of words."²⁹ Another claims, "Christ takes responsibility for the sinner, not for sin. The metaphorical statement is to be taken seriously but not literally."³⁰ Barth comes closest to a literal reading when he writes, "[Christ] has made himself a sinner for us. . . . Our sin is no longer our own. It is His sin, the sin of Jesus Christ."³¹ If Christ were made sin, he would both be utterly opposed to God the Father and no longer the true human. In other words, he would lose his divinity and his humanity at one and the same moment. He would become ontologically nothing. Although this possibility raises problems in terms of the eternal existence of the Triune God, it deserves attention because it takes Paul's assertion seriously while it also upholds the integrity of the hypostatic union.

Yet it is possible to uphold the unity of the divine and human natures in the Person of the Logos by considering the full effect of sin, of nothingness, on the whole Person of Christ. This idea is both radical and nearly impossible to conceive. How could the second person of the Trinity actually die on the cross, actually become sin itself? How could God go without God? The only way such a break in the being of God would be possible is if it were a united break. That is, only if the Father, Son, and Spirit together chose their own disunity could such disunity continue to be an action that occurs in triunity. What is more, such an action could only occur if the Triune God chose that action in order to perfectly fulfill God's own purpose, that of reconciling the world, that of being God "for us." In other words, in the descent of Jesus Christ—in both his human and divine natures—into nothingness, into utter abandonment by God, into sin, the hypostatic union remained united as did the Trinity in the decision to suffer an act of uncreation of all that God is not.

Paul's apocalyptic language is radical and far reaching. It suggests that in

29 Richard T. Mead, "Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:14-21" in *Interpreting 2 Corinthians 5:14-21*, ed. Jack P. Lewis (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 159.

30 Frank Stagg, "Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:14-21" in *Interpreting 2 Corinthians 5:14-21*, ed. Jack P. Lewis (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 176.

31 Karl Barth, *CD IV/1* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 238.

order for God's new creation to take effect, the created order must be uncreated in Christ. The first hint we have at such radical transformation comes in verse 14, when Paul modifies the typical creedal language to say, "all have died." Here Paul employs eschatological language, suggesting that, "when Christ died on the cross, then all men died in him. In some supernatural sense the whole human race died when Christ died."³² At one point Barth calls sin "that which God did not will to create."³³ Sin is the uncreated order, and it is into that sin that Christ descended. In order to eradicate sin, it was necessary to eradicate all of sinful humanity, all of what God's good creation had become. Instead of slaughtering human beings, however, God took that necessary act of destruction into himself in the Person of Christ.

If Christ truly was made sin, then he underwent all the implications of sin; he poured himself into the ontological divide between sinful humanity and the holy goodness of God. As such, Christ underwent an ontological change from the sinless one to sin itself. T.F. Torrance writes that "for our sakes is atonement operating within the ontological depths of human being."³⁴ This ontological change begins with the cross as Christ enters into sin itself. It does not, however, end there. As Barth asserts, "the divine grace is primary and the sin of man secondary and the primary factor is more powerful. . . . We are forbidden to take sin more seriously than grace, or even as seriously as grace."³⁵ Just as God was able to create an entire cosmos, including humanity, out of nothing; once again, and once for all, His grace is powerful enough to create out of nothing. Paul alludes to God's creative activity in 2 Corinthians 5 when he emphasizes God's role in reconciliation: "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself." Through the very uncreation of the Son of God, the new creation of first the Son and then the entire cosmos becomes possible. As Paul writes elsewhere, "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor. 15:21-24). In raising Christ from the dead, God confirms the new creation. God eradicates sin in Christ and then restores Christ in his unity as the God-human.

This resurrected Christ has experienced full incarnational reality, including both sin and death. Not only so, but this Christ also experienced the grace of God. According to Barth, "God is now not only the electing Creator, but the elect creature. He is not only the giver, but also the recipient of grace."³⁶ Christ's experience of sin and grace allows for a new definition of humanity. Instead of humanity being ontologically sinless in and of themselves, writes Barth, "The real man is

32 Lewis, quoting Hanson, 50.

33 Barth, *CD III/2*, 33.

34 Torrance, 190.

35 Barth, *CD III/2*, 41.

36 Barth, *CD IV/1*, 170.

the sinner who participates in the grace of God.”³⁷ This participation in the grace of God gives to them an ontological sinlessness based on the eradication of sin through the death of Christ. Again, Barth writes that “for the reconciliation of man with God nothing more nor less was needed than the death of the Son of God, and for the manifestation of this reconciliation nothing more nor less than the resurrection of the Son of Man.”³⁸ The gospel message is a message of sin and grace, and Barth highlights the depth of human sin and the richness of God’s grace in reminding us that only through death and resurrection—cosmic, world-altering, unique events—can sin truly be overcome and grace truly be victorious.

Paul uses such strong language in 2 Corinthians 5 in order to underline the depths of the reality of human sin, and the even greater reality of God’s new creation through His reconciling work in Christ. As a result, Paul claims, “God has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). Just as God entrusted the care of creation to Adam and Eve in the Garden long ago, so too he entrusts the proclamation of this new creation to those who have received that reconciling word. As Furnish remarks, the ministry of reconciliation is “not regarded merely as responsive to or a consequence of the eschatological event, but as a constitutive part of the event itself.”³⁹ The new creation is not an abstract reality, but a reality in which we participate, one which Paul instructs the Corinthians to announce to the entire world. God’s creation is one of relationship between Creator and creature (again, in parallel to Adam and Eve), whereby the creature plays a significant role in the creative activity of God.

The history of interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5 claims that Paul could not have meant what he wrote. Rather, most commentators and theologians assume Paul meant that God treated Christ as a sinner, and, in exchange, treats us like righteous ones. The problem with this line of interpretation lies in the fact that it does not take the eschatological context of the entire pericope into consideration, nor does it offer any explanation as to why Paul would use such strong language unless he intended to underline the jarring reality of what it cost Christ to take sin upon himself.

In conclusion, commentators who interpret Paul’s words to mean that Christ represents sinners, rather than actually becoming sin, have not adequately defended their position in light of the context and syntax of 2 Corinthians 5:21, or in light of the tendency of that interpretation to divide the human and divine natures of Christ. A metaphorical reading attempts to dissociate Christ from sin, to protect Christ from human sinfulness. Although a literal reading poses problems related to the being of God as Triune, it allows for God’s united choice to dis-unite; it maintains the integrity of the hypostatic union; and it treats Paul’s words with the force and weight they deserve.

A literal reading suggests that for there to be a truly new creation in Christ, there must also be an uncreation. This also implies that the new creation is, like

37 Barth, *CD* III/2, 32.

38 *Ibid.*, 27.

39 Furnish, 336.

the first creation, creation *ex nihilo*. This cycle of creation, destruction, and new creation might seem to repeat endlessly. The difference between the creation in Genesis, however, and the new creation in Christ comes from the unique and eternal significance of Christ's work for us. As Torrance writes, "If the soteriological exchange takes place within the constitution of the incarnate person of the Mediator, then it is as eternal as Jesus Christ himself, the eternal Son."⁴⁰ The new creation is eternally real and effective. Christ's work is once and for all. What is more, this cosmic and dramatic activity on the part of God has a particular purpose in mind.

In both 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Galatians 3:13, Paul provides the same explanation as to why Christ was made sin, why he became a curse. In both, Paul writes, it was "*hyper hemon*," "for us." None of this activity was abstract or for any purpose other than including all of creation in the reality of life with God. Barth states our new reality in simple terms: "Basically and comprehensively, therefore, to be a man is to be with God."⁴¹ Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us, went without God in order that we might become men and women with God. Truly, God made Christ to be sin, for one reason alone: for us.

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40 Torrance, 183-4.

41 Barth, *CD* III/2, 135.

REFLECTION

MEETING CHRIST IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Cambria Janae Kaltwasser

Two weeks before she died, Mom asked me to cut her hair. So I perched on the back of the couch and, leaning over her, combed my fingers through her short gray locks. She wore the lilac cotton nightgown I had bought for her and submitted like a little child to every touch of my hands as, slowly, I snipped away her hair. Slim slips of silver like feathers between my fingers. I did a bad job of it. In the end she looked more like a cancer patient than before. Yet her cousins said they loved the way her color shone, the silver mixed with dark, what to me was an image of her meekness—going gray in her mid-fifties. Mom brushed the slivers of hair from her shoulders. She had brought nothing into this world and was determined to leave with nothing.

In photos taken prior to the final diagnosis, Mom is at ease, enjoying a summer surrounded by family. She is happy, yet not whole. Barely noticeable is the fact that she wears one glass eye, the result of a tumor removed 13 months before. Each eye glints differently. One is glassy—light flashing off the surface. The other has depth, like the gray-green stones at the bottom of a river. The shadow thrown across her face is but a picture of her brokenness, her weakness while on this earth.

I remember sitting with my parents in the doctor's office the day we heard the final diagnosis. A year after her eye surgery, the cancer had invaded her liver and silently grown to an inoperable size. "It's not good," was all Dr. Lynch could manage. Dad and I breathed slowly and spoke in measured phrases. I bit the inside of my mouth hard to keep from sobbing, wanting anything but for Mom to recognize my terror. She alone was not ashamed to display fear. Petitioning the doctor, her voice climbed high and thinned. Her legs dangled from the examination table like a little girl's.

Over the following weeks, my mother and father prayed constantly. Dad said she used to sink into his arms while he prayed, as if to say, "Take me to Jesus." I too went to God repeatedly during those weeks. I flailed my arms, buried my head in my hands, bargained my brains out. "God, You don't know how much we need her."

My sister, my father, my husband, and I hovered near her bedside when she died, after a mere six-week battle with the last development of her disease. We took turns saying our goodbyes while she flitted in and out of awareness. Finally, her hectic breathing ceased, replaced by the slow, mechanical wash of air over her vocal chords. Then, only quiet. I felt her absence permeate the room, filling each corner and crevice. I had no attachment to the body—a forgotten garment spread out on her bed. Rather, I felt a kind of awe at Mom's uncanny ability to slip out of her skin, the rest of us unawares. And the first question to rise up out of the darkness was "Where?" Where in the universe or beyond the universe has she escaped

to?

During Lent I made a prayer tree from a fallen branch. I planted this dead branch in a flower pot and strung it with prayers jotted out on tiny slips of paper, tying them to the branches with yarn, one for each troubled family member, each friend facing anxiety, illness, or despair. The tree stood there on my kitchen table for weeks after Easter had passed, crooked in its pot, as if bent under the pain of every human need scribbled over its branches.

A part of me would like nothing better than to take the previous year and drain it down the sink. Life feels hollower than it used to. Since losing my mother, I've walked around a little closer to death, gripped by the certainty, that, this side of heaven, things will never be made right.

With a deeper part of me, I see her death as connected to a thread that runs through the length of my days and bears being traced: this life is not self-subsisting, nor is it an end in itself. Human weakness—our utter dependence upon God for even a single heartbeat—is a truth spoken to us each day as our efforts at living in Christ's footsteps are thwarted from a thousand angles. Death is the last frustration of our efforts to save ourselves, finalizing our failure at living lives of purity. In the wake of death we release ourselves from the pride and rationalizations that keep us from recognizing our basic neediness as humans. We reel; we fall down.

As the dust settles, I consider what it means that Jesus carried our sin, not only in His death, but in His living life down here where there is a little death mixed up in everything. He bore our very neediness—the veins and tendons, sweat stains, tear trails, betrayal and abandonment, the loneliness that makes an aged man become a child through sobbing, the heart-wound that makes a young girl grow old in anger. Jesus bore it all in order that, in taking up our brokenness, He might redeem us from inside the tangled web of the human heart. It was not enough for Christ to look down on us with pity; instead, He followed us into our emptiness, took up our trouble, and “made our conflict with God his own”!¹

In the Gospel of John, Jesus demonstrates His involvement in our human plight as He journeys to the tomb of Lazarus. In witnessing the grief of Mary and those who are with her, Jesus is “deeply moved in spirit and troubled.”² He requests to be taken to the tomb. Then, He weeps.³ He weeps for those sorrowing nearby as well as for Himself, who loved Lazarus deeply. He weeps for human weakness, our frailty, which He Himself knows intimately. He weeps even knowing that in a few moments He will raise Lazarus from the dead. And He weeps knowing that in a few weeks time He will offer Himself as a sacrifice to redeem our very humanity.

It is His commitment to our weakness that impels Him to the cross, His ultimate demonstration of love for us. He determines not only to live our life, but to suffer our death. On the cross Christ bears our very estrangement from the Father. Helmut Thielicke writes,

1 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 31.

2 John 11:33 (Today's New International Version).

3 Ibid., 11:34.

[Christ] implicates Himself so fully in our lostness that He must call out and cry in our place: ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ ... –as though to say: ‘I could bear everything, all the loneliness, all the agony, all the heartache, if only I could snatch one glance from Thee and feel the impress of Thy little finger. But I no longer see Thine eyes, and Thy hand is withdrawn from Me.’”⁴

Christ carries the full burden of our alienation from God. Yet, astonishingly, by making our abandonment His own, Christ reestablishes our relationship with Him. By following us into our darkness, He pours His light upon our human hearts, cleansing them from within, inviting us into a renewed communion with the Triune God. As Torrance writes, in taking up our humanity, “God takes upon himself the very thing that separates us from him and turns it into the instrument of his love in binding us to him.”⁵

Death is not the final word our God speaks to us. Rather, death exposes our poverty as human creatures reliant upon Christ not only to sustain our lives but to redeem them through His own. My mother’s life down here was tinged by brokenness, and her death seemed premature. Yet, I recognize that she is now, as in her life and death, held forevermore in her Savior’s embrace. Death is a mark of our neediness, but, thanks be to Christ, it is not a wedge between ourselves and God, but the twine that binds our hearts to His.

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4 Helmut Thielicke, “The Final Dereliction,” in *The Silence of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 72-73.

5 Torrance, 43.

BOOK REVIEWS

Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of the Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality, and the Christian Tradition*, London: T & T Clark, 2003, pp. 222. \$39.95 (paperback)

Originally released in 1988, reprinted in 2000 and 2003 without revisions, *The Actuality of Atonement* continues to be an influential work worthy of attention. With over twenty reviews shortly after the time of its publication, it seems that another review would be moot. However, nearly two decades since its first publication, the following review attempts to re-introduce Gunton's work to new readers by briefly summarizing the salient points of Gunton's argument and by highlighting several aspects of *Actuality* that are insightful for contemporary discourse, including Gunton's combining of metaphor and narrative and his emphasis on the Christian community as embodying the redemptive work of Jesus Christ by living in creation as gift.

In *Actuality* the recent discourses concerning metaphor, narrative, and community meet the traditional Christian formulations of atonement. With this meeting of theological discourses, Gunton's work speaks to a lacuna in theological scholarship apropos how metaphors function to inform our understanding of salvation. This technical argument serves a broader agenda. First and foremost, Gunton seeks to provide the reader with a glimpse of the multi-faceted, grandeur of salvation and its centrality for Christian faith and practice. The two trajectories, the particular and the general, reinforce one another. By enumerating how the metaphorical language of redemption works Gunton hopes that the beautiful vista of salvation in all its dynamism will come into view. Naturally, then, this is an ambitious work.

Actuality begins by considering "how traditional conceptions of the atonement have been affected by rationalist criticism" (3). Gunton incisively critiques three different forms of rationalism in Kant ("rationalism of the moral agent"), Schleiermacher ("rationalism of experience"), and Hegel ("conceptual rationalism"). Gunton observes how each of these very different thinkers essentially makes the same rationalistic mistake, which produces similar erroneous results. They error by constructing conceptual systems that depend on "a narrowly conceived process of reasoning" (1), which substitutes a highly refined systematic rationale for the open-ended, traditional soteriological metaphors so that the "word(s) is changed so much that the tradition is made to say something entirely different, so that the tradition is not interpreted but broken" (15). For example, Gunton critiques Hegel, using his own categories against him: "the forms for the most part have been filled with a foreign content" (20). In Hegel this means that "the affective dimensions of the content have been all but overwhelmed by the intellectual" (20). But Gunton does not wish to make irreconcilable antinomies between affection and intellect with metaphor serving the former and rationalism the latter. Instead, metaphor presents a rationale that does not succumb to rationalism by allowing words to creatively convey the gambit of human reality.

Previously, it has been mentioned that in *Actuality* Gunton tries to give the reader a glimpse of the grandeur of salvation. It is the purpose of metaphor to provide this panoramic view of salvation. Metaphor accomplishes this by permitting a greater spectrum of knowledge that includes pictures, images, and the imagination. Gunton writes, “We are not disembodied intellects, but require the harmony of sense and reason that only imagination can supply” (31). In contrast to rationalism that narrowly relies on the literal, metaphor includes the entirety of human experience. Although metaphors incorporate the imagination, they do not belong solely to the mind but have their basis objectively in human experience. Precisely because metaphors capture both reality and the imagination, they can simultaneously communicate the status of the human condition as well as create novel ways for understanding how God relates to the human condition. These two aspects are especially important for Gunton’s consideration of the three most common metaphors of the atonement: victory, substitution, and sacrifice.

Most of *Actuality* consists of Gunton explicating how these three atonement metaphors articulate the createdness and fallenness of the world and God’s redemptive action in the world. In the course of being used in the narrative of redemption, words taken from martial, judiciary, and cultic contexts are altered to convey more than their intended original use, without losing their original human context. For Gunton, what is “new” in atonement metaphors is exactly what is revelatory about God. Atonement metaphors bring God to human language and by doing so unveil the universal human condition and its healing. Thus, atonement metaphors focus on God’s concrete, historical acts of redemption, which encompasses the entirety of human experience and has consequences for the whole of creation. Gunton emphasizes the cosmic ramifications of redemption by preferring Eastern accounts of the atonement over some Latin formulations. Western theology has often forgotten that atonement metaphors derive from human experience and have been adapted by the historical act of God in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This omission has resulted in abstract, transactional accounts of atonement that are external to the narrative given in scripture. Following the lead of Edward Irving, Gunton calls this type of transactional theology characteristic of a “stock-exchange divinity” (129). In contrast, Gunton advocates a personal and relational understanding of God’s redemptive activity and wishes to read predominate Western atonement metaphors of substitution and sacrifice in this light. Although it is not always apparent how Gunton’s cosmic emphasis of atonement confirms the relational, personal account he is arguing for, it does clearly underline what Gunton hopes that an appreciation for the function of metaphor will accomplish for our understanding of salvation. Specifically, atonement metaphors combine the narrative of creation with the narrative of redemption by integrating universal human experiences—indeed, the entirety of the created order—with a narrative that begins with Israel, reaches its apex in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and continues by the Holy Spirit in the eschatological acts of the Church.

There are several aspects of *Actuality* including his “social trinitarianism” and corresponding ecclesiology that have been thoroughly debated and do not

need to be explored here. However, there are several aspects of *Actuality* that are pertinent to current theological debates. First, Gunton's combining of metaphor with narrative provides some insight into the contemporary discussion about the differences and similarities between narrative and drama. Is it more than just a coincidence that Gunton's narrative theology relies upon linguistic analysis while Balthasar's *Theo-Drama* relies on metaphysics and especially the *analogia entis*? What bearing do these differing emphases actually have for understanding the relationship between creation and redemption? These questions are even more difficult to answer when one considers the authors' shared emphasis on the role of the imagination for understanding the grandeur of salvation and their use of literary sources to reinforce their point.

Second, one particular argument in the final chapter, "The Community of Reconciliation" is especially instructive for the ongoing discussion about the church as polis. In contrast to idolatry (self-claim for personal or collective power) and a politics of coercion (dehumanization), Gunton offers the worshipping community as a different kind of politics determined by grace instead of power. Far from being another competitor for power, the church acts according to a politics of gift and reception. "The calling of the community of reconciliation," explains Gunton, "is to be those who learn to live in creation as creation, as gift: in the space won for the life of the world by the victory of Jesus" (182). Living in creation as gift means living in service to others. Only in a humble politics of mutual service is justice truly secured, reconciliation actually attained, and transformative, redemptive relationships really formed. Safeguarding against sectarianism, Gunton admits the relative achievement of human political justice but reiterates that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was a "truly human polity" that makes the Church's polity possible in the Holy Spirit. Such an account of the church brings *Actuality* in direct conversation with Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, and Reinhard Hütter.

The breadth of *Actuality* provides the reader with a vision of the splendor and wonder of salvation by means of reflecting on how the metaphorical language of the twin witnesses of scripture and the Church speak of the salvific work of the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ and actualized by the Spirit. However, the trade off is that what *Actuality* gains in scope it sometimes lacks in detail. On numerous points Barth and Balthasar have a significant, if occasionally unspoken, influence on Gunton. It comes as some surprise, then, that these theologians who considered the doctrine of representation at length are not consulted to further explicate Gunton's perceptive conviction that representation and substitution are complimentary. Gunton also does not mention once hell, the cry of dereliction, or the descent into hell, though he discusses the demonic and judgment at length. Nor does he clearly discuss universalism, opting instead for ambiguity and letting the readers assume what they will from his preference for the Eastern cosmological tradition.

Admittedly, *Actuality* would be at least twice the length if all the above was included. Gunton himself observed, "The wonder is that so much can be said" (144). It is to his credit that Gunton provides an account of the atonement describ-

ing the interaction that takes place between the narrative of salvation and our understanding of redemption through the use of atonement metaphors in which language becomes new in Christ. Beholding this, we can appreciate the innumerable and inestimable depth of expressions for redemption and begin to perceive the “grandeur of salvation.”

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Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007, pp. xiii + 159. \$16.95

The theological work of Rowan Williams has generally been devoted to questions of method and discourse, rather than to doctrinal exposition. In this new book, however, Williams reflects directly on the doctrinal content of the Nicene and Apostles' creeds. The book thus offers a kind of dogmatics in miniature, all organized around the central theme that “Christian belief is really about knowing whom and what to trust” (viii). To grasp the message of Jesus is to discover “what lies at the foundation of everything” – namely, that there is an “indestructible energy making for love” (10). On the basis of this conception of God’s love and trustworthiness, Williams offers a series of doctrinal sketches of major themes like Trinity, creation, christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. For the purpose of this review, however, I will focus on the book’s constructive christological account of atonement-theology.

When he comes to consider the significance of Jesus, Williams starts not with abstract christological categories but with the earthly Jesus himself—a man whose human life is “so shot through with the purposes of God, so transparent to the action of God, that people speak of it as God’s life ‘translated’ into another medium” (57). Just as in a performance a musician may become wholly “saturated” by a composer’s work, so Jesus’ life is completely given up to the divine performance (74). There is, in other words, an identity of action between God and Jesus, so that the story of Jesus is precisely “the story of God’s work among us” (69), the story of a life which changes what is possible for *all* human beings.

Since Jesus’ life is thus saturated with God, this human life has a unique expansiveness, an unlimited capacity for giving. This life is uniquely at peace with God, and for that reason it “makes peace in the human world wherever it is at work” (84). In short, Jesus is the “peace dividend.” But when a human being takes responsibility for making peace, that same person also takes on the risk of violent rejection. So Jesus’ rejection by the religious and political powers is the embodiment not only of the peace of God, but also of the violent self-destructiveness of human beings. This is what it means to “pay the price” for sin: not that some external transaction takes place between God and Jesus, but that sin – as revolt from truth and reality – always leads to our destruction, to a violent tearing-loose from reality.

Against the old theory that “a vengeful and inflexible God demands satisfaction,” Williams therefore suggests that the real meaning of atonement is simply that, in a world such as ours, peace with God will inevitably travel this path of love poured out into death. “In the kind of world that you and I inhabit, the kind of world that you and I make or collude with, this is what the price of unrestricted love looks like” (88). Peace with God, we might say, can be activated only when a human being goes against the grain of the sinful structures which constitute our world – and thus the event of Jesus’ violent death is at the same time the arrival of God’s peace. On the cross, Jesus is cut off from reality, abandoned to the violent falsehood of death. And yet through all this, he has “maintained his own peace with the Father” (89).

Further, Williams suggests (following Eastern Orthodox tradition) that Jesus’ resurrection should be understood not simply as a rising from the grave, but as a breaking-down of the doors of humanity’s prison. The theme here is that there is an “open door . . . in every situation because of God’s freedom.” The one man Jesus has “filled all things,” he is there in every human experience, opening the door to peace and freedom (90). Just as the death of Jesus is the activation of God’s peace among us, the resurrection of Jesus is the transformation of every place into a place of peace. Since Jesus is risen from the dead, the act of God in Jesus remains real to human beings in every time and place: “there is a way to peace and praise from any imaginable place, even the prison in which the dead live” (90).

Most importantly, this “peace dividend” which is distributed through Jesus’ death and resurrection is not merely the absence of conflict; it is “an active condition of loving and nurturing, giving and receiving” (102). And this active life of peace is carried out in the *church*. The church is that community whose very “atmosphere” is the life of Jesus. In the church, we are “acclimatized” to the peace of God (139). As we read and re-enact the story of Jesus, we are taken up into that story, into the same frame of reference of Jesus’ own relationship to the Father. The church, therefore, is the space in which the life and peace of the triune God become visible in our world. Or, to return to the motif of trust, the church is the community which assumes responsibility for God’s believability. The church really *becomes* the church when it demonstrates that the God of peace is the one in whom all human beings can place their trust.

This little book is, of course, written for a general audience, and it is not intended as a contribution to the scholarly discussion of atonement theology. Nevertheless, Williams’ meditation on the death and resurrection of Jesus offers rich resources for the ongoing constructive task of envisioning “atonement” as that event in which one man’s violent death becomes the incursion of peace—the event in which a non-violent God shatters our violence and grants us his peace.

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Steven Jeffrey, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced For Our Transgressions: Rediscovering The Glory of Penal Substitution*, Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007, pp. 372. \$34.37 (paperback)

Pierced for Our Transgressions provides a defense of the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement. By penal substitution, the authors mean that “Jesus died in the place of sinners, bearing the punishment of God’s wrath due to them on account of their rebellion” (33). The book’s thesis is argued by offering a particular reading of the Christian tradition in which Jesus’ death as a penal substitute is presented as a leading theme throughout Scripture and the history of theology. In the authors’ words: “In brief, we argue that penal substitution is clearly taught in Scripture, that it has a central place in Christian theology, that a neglect of the doctrine will have serious pastoral consequences, that it has an impeccable pedigree in the history of the Christian church, and that all of the objections raised against it can be comprehensively answered” (31). Each chapter of the book builds upon another in order to defend the proposed thesis.

Chapters 1-5 compose the first section of the book, which argues for the importance of penal substitution for both Christian theology and the Christian gospel. Chapter 1 offers a concise history of research of the debate. The authors present the major works and arguments of those who have rejected and affirmed penal substitution as a central biblical motif (21-32). Chapter 2, in which the authors investigate several texts from both the Old and New Testaments to support their arguments (33-99), presents biblical support for penal substitution.

Chapter 3 examines how penal substitution unites other biblical doctrines in Christian theology (e.g., God’s character, the doctrine of sin, etc.). This chapter emphasizes especially that penal substitution should have a central place in Christian theology and that to reject its central place would do injustice to other theological themes in the Bible (100-48). Chapter 4 considers the pastoral implications of penal substitution, namely, how penal substitution affects one’s assurance of God’s love, confidence in God’s truthfulness, passion for God’s justice, and realism about sin (149-60). Chapter 5 offers an historical survey of penal substitution. This survey focuses on key historical figures throughout church history who have affirmed penal substitution in their writings and/or preaching (161-204).

Chapters 6-12 compose the second section of the book, which critically engages opponents of penal substitution by responding to their objections. Chapter 6 briefly introduces the debate, briefly discussing both the method undertaken in section two and the reason for this method. Chapters 7-12 address the major objections to penal substitution and offer biblical responses to each argument (205-324).

Chapter 13 is the concluding chapter of the book. Here the authors respond to two more objections against penal substitution: the “emotional objection” and the “vague objection” (325-28). The book has one appendix addressed as a personal note to preachers and to those who teach the Bible in some capacity. The appendix makes an appeal to preachers and teachers to explore and address the issue of penal substitution.

Pierced for Our Transgressions is written accessibly to a large readership. The authors' clear style of writing and their simple arguments can be grasped by academicians, pastors, and careful thinking lay people. Perhaps the most unique contribution of this book is the lucidity with which the authors overview the history of the debate and argue their thesis. *Pierced for Our Transgressions* is a must read for those who want to understand the debate regarding penal substitution and for those who are looking for a response to critics of penal substitution.

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John Sanders, ed., *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation*, Nashville: Abingdon, 2006, pp. 170. \$16.50

The number of controversial themes which converge in asking after the relationship between atonement and violence, and the fact that the arguments themselves often work broadly back and forth across the topography of both scripture and centuries of theological reflection, make for a highly delicate but tremendously important debate. The present volume features the work of J. Denny Weaver, Hans Boersma, Thomas Finger, and T. Scott Daniels. These theologians offer not only their own constructive essays, but respond in turn to each of the other contributors. Obvious benefits of this point-counterpoint format for theological debate include: 1) a capacity to present a range of positions in limited space, and 2) an opportunity to track with the back-and-forth of scholarly dialogue. For the most part, the interaction in this particular collection is both direct and irenic, and the accessibility of the prose and the inclusion of a basic bibliography on the subject matter make it a volume particularly suited to newcomers. In what follows, I offer only the briefest summary of each theologian's position and a few critical reflections which are not already covered in the book.

Weaver's essay, the first in the series, is essentially a condensed version of his 2001 monograph.¹ Two features of his project are immediately arresting: its sheer scope and the baffling confidence with which he carries it out. Unconvinced by traditional theories of atonement, Weaver offers his own alternative, which he calls Narrative *Christus Victor*. Read according to NCV, the New Testament centers on the "life-bringing and life-affirming mission" of Jesus which, because of his unswerving faithfulness, leads eventually—though *not necessarily*—to his death (25). It is this *essentially nonviolent* act of God in Christ which Weaver believes constitutes the atonement. Much could be said about the content and method of Weaver's work. We can observe here, however, that his essay is marked by a perplexing impatience with certain highly-nuanced and, at least from an historical perspective, hard-won doctrines. Consider, for example, the fate of divine-human concursus (6) and trinitarian theologies of the cross (16). As an exercise

1 J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

in the *discipline* of theology, it does not seem unreasonable to expect claims as weighty as Weaver's to be supported by more rigorous argumentation than he in fact provides. Whether theological work can proceed this dismissively and yet remain genuinely constructive is doubtful.

The second essay, Boersma's, stands out as the only defense of satisfaction theory. Though he is not uncritical of that tradition—cf. his concern for its juridicizing, individualizing, and dehistoricizing tendencies (48ff)—still, he believes that a modified Reformed view, drawing on “Irenaeus's notion of the recapitulation of Adam and N.T. Wright's understanding of the reconstitution of Israel” (52), is able to incorporate many of the insights from other traditional models.² He considers satisfaction theory strong, in the first place, insofar as it accounts for the *divine intentionality* behind the cross of Christ. Second, it constitutes a cogent argument in the sense that specific kinds of violence are acknowledged as not only permissible but *necessary* to redemption. In his own provocative words: “[R]efusal to use coercion and to inflict harm or damage is really a refusal to enforce boundaries” and therefore “a refusal to engage in truly restorative justice” (61f). It is specifically Boersma's use of “coercion,” we might add, which draws attention to the need in this debate for a common definition of violence. Whereas Boersma includes coercion within the realm of *violence*, Weaver's argument depends substantially on the claim that certain acts of coercion, including “social action, confrontations, and civil disobedience” are essentially *nonviolent* (2).

The Anabaptist scholar Thomas Finger begins with an analysis of sin as bondage to evil. Sin is, he writes, a “quasi-personal power... a force that strives to snatch creatures away from God's order and subject them to its own rule” (92). The end of atonement, then, cannot properly be construed as punishment of sin but rather as sin's destruction. Thus God does not *inflict* punishment, he avers, but rather *abandons* sinners to the consequences of their actions. Much as in the exegetical tradition of C.H. Dodd and Ulrich Wilckens (though Finger doesn't cite them), God judges “indirectly: by handing sinners over to the lords they choose” (98). It is notable that alongside this he acknowledges, first, a place for legal concepts within the Christus Victor theory. On his account, the resurrection is the Father's verdict upon evil, carried out as the Spirit “destroys the operations of evil forces” through “powerful servant-like love” (103). Second, Finger believes that atonement is indeed a matter of substitution insofar as Jesus “does a work *for us*, and also *before us* and *outside of us*, which he gives *to us*” (105). In the end, I am skeptical as to whether an appeal to secondary causality—i.e., *indirect* divine punishment via the Roman authorities—the effects of which God nonetheless uses for God's own purposes, is able cogently (or even coherently) to create the desired moral distance between God and the cross of Christ. One senses here that the one-sided influence of nineteenth-century immanentism is still very much alive.

The final essay, by Daniels, creatively begins with the concern that much of contemporary worship has become “too substitutionary” and thus has distanced

2 For further reading see Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

Christians from the work of reconciliation. From this perspective, human beings are at best, “appreciative observers of Christ’s redemption” (126). Taking his cue from René Girard, Daniels suggests that it is Jesus’ refusal to compromise with violence, and therefore his decision to participate in the scapegoat mechanism, which “detoxifies the violence and sets the model by which mimetic rivalry can and should be cured” (132). What Daniels intends by his use of *model* is crucial. Under the example of Christ, we are called to live our lives “intentionally against the violent patterns and systems of life such that we affect [*sic*] a kind of atonement in our own lifestyle” (136). Daniels follows this line of thought through to its natural conclusion, which is to say that he “understands the atonement as...remaining incomplete apart from the participation in God’s atoning work by the disciple” (136f). This loss of the objective aspect of redemption is similarly manifest in his description of the sacraments as well as in the original, “nonsubstitutionary liturgy” which he offers by way of conclusion.

While, in my judgment, invigorating and detailed discussions come from the pens of Boersma and Finger, as a whole, the collection is a mixed bag. In the first instance, there is simply not enough detailed attention given to questions of historical theology. In the case of Anselm, for example, most of the criticism trades on assumption and caricature. Absent is much of the nuance conveyed by some other recent essays.³ Realistically, it seems debates over atonement and violence will not long continue at this broad level but will sooner rather than later require conceptual deepening and a more measured return to the sources. Related to this is a second observation. The arguments in the book largely operate within the somewhat outmoded and exclusivist division of atonement theories which originated with Gustav Aulén (this is true to a lesser extent of Boersma and Finger). Nowhere in the collection, for example, is the distinction between a motif and a theory considered. An exploration of this would perhaps significantly expand the conversation by including those patristic theories which explain in *ontological* categories *how* Jesus Christ atones for sin.⁴

In the end, this volume may indeed provide a valuable entry point into the ongoing debate over the nature of the relationship between atonement and violence. It is, however, a book best borrowed.

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3 One example is Katherine Sonderegger, “Anselm, *Defensor Fidei*,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9:3 (2007): 342-59

4 Among recent, non-reductionistic work on atonement, see Alan Spence, *The Promise of Peace: A Unified Theory of Atonement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2007), but especially Robert J. Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet: A Trinitarian Theology of Atonement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004).

David H. Kelsey, *Imagining Redemption*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, pp. ix + 108. \$14.95.

I have only been in seminary a year and a half, but even in this short time, I've seen a preposterous amount of senseless tragedies doing their best to devour the earth: wildfires ravaging southern California, hurricanes smacking into Central America, a troubled undergrad going on a shooting spree in Virginia, the continuation of war, poverty, and despair throughout our world. It is not difficult to become one of the despairing, even among the ministry-bound. In fact, it is often in the safe cradle of the seminary that I find myself asking those excruciating questions that accompany this vocation of Christian living and church leadership. How does Jesus really make any difference in this broken and fragile world?

In just a bit over a hundred pages, David Kelsey attempts to answer this question. More precisely, Kelsey carefully phrases the question, "what earthly difference can Jesus make here?" True to his association with post-liberalism, Kelsey demonstrates a commitment to the importance and clarity of *Christian* language, spending an entire chapter explicating nearly every word of his question. As he does this, he explores the various senses of the word "redemption" as it is heard in the concrete particularity of an American Christian context. Based on his conclusions of the possible understandings of "redemption," Kelsey structures the remainder of the book by exploring how those understandings can illuminate and help the reader imagine the answer to his original question.

But this is not the sum total of Kelsey's method. Instead of treating redemption as a subject to be discussed from a purely academic and objective viewpoint, Kelsey explores his understanding of redemption through the lens of a particular situation that he recognizes is in need of redemption. Kelsey provides the reader with the story of a series of tragic events that befell a family he knows, a family whose eight-year-old boy, Sam, was stricken by a horrible illness which forever altered and deeply impacted the family, even contributing to the mother's eventual suicide. It is through this inexplicable story that Kelsey dares to ask his question, "what earthly difference can Jesus make here?"

With this method, Kelsey narrows his exploration of redemption to deal primarily with those situations that continue to confound us, those mysterious catastrophes that happen to the unsuspecting and undeserving, such as those whose houses are now in the ashes of southern California and those who merely attended class on a spring day in Virginia. It is these situations that, according to Kelsey, cry out for redemption, asking "what earthly difference can Jesus make here?" Kelsey's answer is determinedly hopeful. For perhaps the greatest tragedy in the life of Sam and his family (and the many like them) is not the series of events in and of themselves. For Kelsey, the greater tragedy is in the bondage that such situations create for the victims, especially those who are so entrapped by the horror of it all that they define themselves solely on the basis of their circumstances. It is in these places, Kelsey says, that we must look to the cross of Christ. For it is in the cross alone where we see that God comes to us as one who suffers with and for us and who transforms even that most undeserved of all evils into good.

Kelsey takes on a very delicate subject and handles it intellectually, creatively, and pastorally. And yet, if there is one hope I still have remaining for this book, it is that Kelsey and the many pastorally-minded theologians like him would push themselves even further in the “systematic effort to subvert [the] theory-application picture of how systematic and pastoral theology are both distinguished from one another and related to one another” (88). Kelsey makes what, in my view, is a clear departure from the standard systematic treatments of theological issues and moves toward a more comprehensive view of how these theological issues are inextricably intertwined with day-to-day Christian life and ministry. For this effort, I am supremely grateful.

However, I still detect in this book a degree of an attempted separation from the issues it presents, even in Kelsey’s very objective outlining of the events which occurred in the life of Sam and his family. It seems to me that books such as *Imagining Redemption* ought to be the ones filling our abundance of Christian bookstores, directly helping to shape the conscience and self-understanding of the Christian—whether a minister or a layperson. But I fear that Kelsey’s excellent book might not go far enough in bridging the chasm between the “systematic” and the “pastoral” that he hopes to overcome. Thus, the richness contained in its pages may not extend all the way out to a laity desperate for its message of redemption.

Megan DeWald Kline
Princeton Theological Seminary

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