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Atonement in Hosea and the Prodigal Son: Relationality as Personhood and the Being of God

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GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

ATONEMENT IN HOSEA AND THE PRODIGAL SON:
RELATIONALITY AS PERSONHOOD AND THE BEING OF GOD

A WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
STEPHEN SHERWOOD

NEWBERG, OREGON

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DISSERTATION ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

STEPHEN SHERWOOD

DATE: OCTOBER 28, 2008

TITLE:

**PROSTITUTES, PRODIGALS
AND THE STORY OF GOD'S EMBRACE**

**WE THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ
THIS PROJECT AND APPROVE IT AS ADEQUATE IN
SCOPE AND QUALITY TO COMPLETE THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN
LEADERSHIP IN THE EMERGING CULTURE DEGREE**



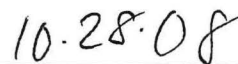
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To Elizabeth
and our daughters, Bailey and Rachel,
living examples of steadfast love.

In that day, declares the Lord, you will call me “my husband”;
you will no longer call me “my master.”

Hosea

My song is love.

Chris Martin

| Section One: The Problem

My project will provide a survey of traditional atonement metaphors, with a particular emphasis upon contrasting penal substitution with a covenantal relational understanding of the atonement, and will then posit that a covenantal relational approach is ideal for resonance with a postmodern audience.

I will seek to determine whether any single biblical metaphor or cluster of metaphors provides an interpretive matrix for all discussion of the atonement in a way that is both biblically faithful and conceptually accessible to a postmodern world. I contend that atonement discussions in typical evangelical contexts may be both biblically insufficient and culturally inadequate and that alternatives exist which address both issues. I believe it possible to engage with atonement theology in a metaphoric landscape that resonates with the postmodern experience of life and scripture as the reader encounters it. This engagement will enable the reader to be better able to access the transformative power of the atonement in his or her life.

In beginning to unpack the problem, one begins by asking whether or not the Bible presents a unified metaphoric or thematic front in terms of making sense of the atonement. Is it appropriate to ask for one unifying metaphor? Or, as Scot McKnight, along with others, suggests, are we better off comparing the Bible to a bag of golf clubs with various metaphors constituting different *clubs* to be used as the ministry situation demands?¹ Some would suggest that their metaphor is the only way to discuss the atone-

¹ Scot McKnight, *A Community of Atonement* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007) xiii.

ment and that any discussion that fails to center itself on their framework is no discussion of the atonement at all.² Is this so? Why do some believe it to be the case?

Some, like Stephan Finlan, have come to see the atonement as an outdated concept altogether, an archaic relic of Christianity's violent, superstitious past that we can now evolve beyond.³ To them, language and imagery of blood, sacrifice, wrath, propitiation/expiation, or substitution are anathema to postmodern views of the world and God and must be jettisoned.

My interest in this problem has a pragmatic grounding as well as a theological one. Having spent over 20 years on the staff of Young Life, an evangelical outreach ministry to adolescents that has grounded itself primarily in propositional presentations of penal substitutionary atonement, I have developed concerns about the efficacy of this approach. While we have demonstrated an ability to communicate this approach winsomely and have brought literally thousands of adolescents to response, I have seen two disturbing trends developing with young people.

The first is that, whereas in past years it was mostly a matter of getting kids to recognize their need for Jesus within the framework of penal substitution, increasingly the fundamental logic of penal substitution seems not only no longer self evident to young people but often offensive. Second, I have also seen an increasing tendency for this method to "wear off." While initial responses might suggest the value of this ap-

² Christianity Today's May 2006 issue dedicated to the atonement had "Nothing but the Blood" as its cover byline and the articles and editorials throughout serve as an example of the widespread move within some circles of evangelicalism to view Penal Substitution as the only appropriate and biblically faithful way to speak of the atonement.

³ Stephen Finlan, *Problems with Atonement* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005)

proach, a significant tendency for young people to later walk away from Christian faith all together raises questions.

My anecdotal conversations with young people I have worked with suggests that they often come to see the God of penal substitution as cold and capricious (choosing to love a few but damning most and being willing to save the guilty at the expense of the life of the innocent) and strangely irrelevant to their actual lives (salvation as so configured seems like a fictional or abstract construct that doesn't really change much of how they experience their lives in the world). This is not a new sentiment, however. In 1949, Dorothy Sayers put it pithily in a sardonic theology quiz:

Q: What is meant by the atonement?

A: God wanted to damn everybody, but his vindictive sadism was sated by the crucifixion of His own Son, who was quite innocent, and, therefore, a particularly attractive victim. He now only damns people who don't follow Christ or who never heard of Him.⁴

I am sure that no proponents of penal substitution would welcome this characterization as accurate. At the same time, this does seem to be how the penal orientation is often perceived. My project, therefore, seeks to determine why this is so. Is the problem with this generation of young people or that they have "closed their hearts" to the Gospel? Does it arise from a failure of evangelical evangelists to adequately understand they way postmoderns experience the world and to adjust their presentations of the Gospel accordingly? To borrow from Leonard Sweet's imagery, are we failing to present an old message in a new medium or with a new method?⁵ Perhaps the problem lies in our pres-

⁴ Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), 33.

⁵ Leonard Sweet, ed. *The Church in the Emerging Culture*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003). I have encountered this idea of Dr. Sweet's from Sweet himself and

entations. Could it be that penal substitution is *not* the most accurate or helpful way to describe the work of the cross after all? Perhaps various factors are at play. That is what this project will seek to explore.

This exploration will go in three directions. I will look at the biblical texts with an eye toward determining how the Bible actually describes the work and ministry of Jesus. How does Jesus save? I will also consider the postmodern landscape on two fronts. The first involves modern and postmodern understandings of *the self*. Who does Jesus save and from what? Finally, I will explore how to communicate effectively to a world that increasingly distrusts or is disinterested in linear propositional presentations. How do we talk in a way that can be understood and received? Is it valid to speak of truth in non-propositional ways?

numerous others. I cannot recall, however, where I first interacted with the idea. This is where he first published it.

Section Two: Other Proposed Solutions

There is no want for suggestions as to how to engage 21st century culture in the West with the atonement. What is more difficult is finding any sort of agreement amongst the proliferation of options. The range extends from those who essentially seem to propose that we just need to say what we've been saying for several hundred years, only *more loudly*,⁶ to those like Stephen Finlan, for whom the atonement has become an out-dated relic of an earlier, less ethically and theologically evolved time. In between are those who suggest that the atonement remains crucial but should be understood in terms other than those of penal substitution, from Aulen's *Christus Victor*, Abelard's theory of Christ as Moral Exemplar, or Girard's theory of Mimetic Violence, to name a few.⁷ This section will explore some of those options and probe their adequacy for the dual tasks of remaining faithful to scripture's understanding of the cross while engaging meaningfully with postmodern culture and providing adequate foundation for spiritual formation.

Penal Substitution

In beginning with penal substitution, and spending substantially more time critiquing it than critiquing other models, I do not intend to set it up as the great bane of atonement theology. It is but one approach among many and has had significant positive

⁶ For a growing number of Evangelicals in the West, penal substitutionary atonement has become a position to be defended with crusade-like fervor. The speaking ministry of Seattle based Pastor Mark Driscoll and the writing of theologians like John Piper, *Pierced for our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007) or the controversy in England surrounding Steve Chalke and his book written along with Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), serve as examples.

⁷ Peter Schmiechen, in his book, *Saving Power* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005) identifies ten distinct atonement theories. While there is some overlap between them, this speaks to the multi-faceted nature of atonement theology.

effect in some ways over the last few centuries. I do so because, for many, particularly in the evangelical West, penal substitution has virtually become synonymous with the atonement itself. This can be seen in the vehemence of its defense by theologians and preachers, but also in its prevalence in street-level ministry. If one were to ask the vast majority of evangelicals, “What is the heart of the Gospel?” I suspect that most would posit some form of penal substitution. For many, it seems there is never a thought that the meaning of the cross *could* be found in any other construct, so closely has penal substitution become synonymous with Gospel for many evangelicals.

Others, like John Stott, for example, who do grant that varied metaphors round out our understanding of the atonement, still insist that penal substitution be the anchor or chief metaphor.⁸ In this case, penal substitution is not one metaphor among many or one metaphor that helps inform some other, larger metaphoric construct. Rather, it is *the* lens through which all other biblical metaphors are seen. This makes substitution a transactional issue rather than seeing it within the covenantal framework found in scripture. A relationship is what was lost in the Fall, not, primarily, right standing in a legal sense.

Penal substitution is defined by one of its champions, Thomas Schreiner, in this way:

The Father, because of his love for human beings, sent his Son (who offered himself willingly and gladly) to satisfy God’s justice, so that Christ took the place of

⁸ I. Howard Marshall’s, *Aspects of the Atonement* (Tyrone, GA: Paternoster, 2007), John Stott’s classic, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1986), and Leon Morris’, *The Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1983) would serve as examples. All three insist that while other metaphors have biblical merit, they all seek to inform penal substitution and penal substitution is the lens through which all other metaphors draw their meaning.

sinners. The punishment and penalty we deserved was laid on Jesus Christ instead of us, so that in the cross both God's holiness and love are manifested.⁹

Recognizing strengths. While this point can be overplayed by its adherents, it must be recognized that penal substitution faces headlong the *scandalous* elements of the atonement. It does not make light of sin; it powerfully argues against any sense that humanity is adequate to deal with sin on its own. There is no Pelagianism to be found here. This is highly admirable.

It also does not shy away from biblical passages and ideas that modern sensibilities might find offensive—passages with ideas like *wrath*, *sacrifice*, *substitution* or *judgment*. Where some Christian theology seeks to explain these ideas away or eviscerate them of any real meaning and, therefore, any real offense, penal substitution makes them the centerpieces of the doctrine that encapsulates the saving work of God through Christ and for humanity. Whether it does so in an accurate way will be discussed later, but its insistence in fidelity to scripture and to the God of scripture is a sure strength.

In now turning to what I see as weaknesses in penal substitution, I want to emphasize I am not trying to dismiss either the sincerity of its proponents or the multitudes of Christians who have come to faith through presentations of the Gospel centered on penal substitution. Penal substitution is vivid, has proven to illicit significant response, takes issues of God's righteousness and humanity's sin seriously and certainly, on the face, has roots in biblical language, particularly Paul's.

Mistaking the word for the thing. Much of our current view of penal substitution arose in an age dominated by the logical empiricism of Immanuel Kant and others: that

⁹Thomas R. Schreiner, "Penal Substitution" in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: 2006) 67.

which “cannot be translated from metaphorical into ‘literal’ language cannot be held to be true.”¹⁰ Colin Gunton helpfully illustrates this when he points out that whereas Descartes stated “I have described the Earth and the whole visible universe *as if it were* a machine,”¹¹ it is but a short step to then believe that “the world *is* a machine.” Basically, we take the metaphor meant to describe the thing and it becomes the thing itself in our minds. When we do this in theology, Peter Rollins argues that we are taking what was intended to be an *icon*, using “words, images or experiences as *aids* [emphasis mine] in contemplation of that which cannot be reduced to words, images or experiences,”¹² and turned it into an *idol*, an *exact* representation of the thing itself. A semiotician would say that we are confusing the signifier (the metaphor) for the signified (atonement).¹³ It is difficult to determine whether this results from epistemological confusion or arrogance, but the result is the same.

While the danger of doing this lurks constantly at the door of all of our theological and ideological pronouncements and is by no means unique to proponents of penal substitution, I would argue that they often fall prey to it. They too often succumb to the danger of taking language and metaphors that are intended to point toward, point beyond, or partially illumine and take them to be the thing itself, to be what literally happens or transpires on the cross. For example, Joel Green, who writes strongly in support of the

¹⁰ Colin Gunton, *The Actuality of the Atonement* (London, UK: T&T Clark, 1988), 30.

¹¹ Ibid. 30.

¹² Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (London, UK: Paraclete Press, 2006), 38.

¹³ Arthur Asa Berger, *Signs in Contemporary Culture* (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing, 1999), 11.

atonement, but in opposition to penal substitution as it is generally presented, relates, “My own experience is that, without exception, questions raised against the theory of penal substitution invite the response, ‘So, you don’t believe in the atonement?’”¹⁴

Less universal than often presumed. It is often posited by its proponents and perceived by lay Christians that penal substitution’s roots lie in Paul and that it has grown unquestioned through the history of the church. In reality, penal substitution has not, until recently, held such a hegemonic sway over Christian theology. As Colin Gunton (among others) helpfully points out, while elements of penal categories are clearly present in Paul, he hardly sees this as his only available option. David J. Williams has isolated no fewer than 85 distinct metaphors in Paul’s writing, many of which are applied to Christ.¹⁵ As Scot McKnight points out, often the determining factor in Paul’s selection of a metaphor seems to be less an overarching idea than the particular metaphor’s functionality in the moment.¹⁶

Paul did not limit himself to penal imagery when discussing the atonement. Likewise, penal substitution as presently held is a relative latecomer to church history. While penal language was present in the earliest church atonement formulations, it did not dominate. With roots in Anselm’s theory of the atonement as “satisfaction” of God dating back to the 11th century, penal substitution as we know it did not come to flower until, depending upon one’s perspective, either the early Protestant Reformers, including Cal-

¹⁴ Joel B. Green, “Kaleidoscope Approach” in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, 115.

¹⁵ David J. Williams, *Paul’s Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003).

¹⁶ Scot McKnight, 52.

vin, or 19th century American theologians, of whom Princeton's Charles Hodge would be the chief representative. The uncertainty of its origin in its present form arises because, while Calvin and the early reformers used some of the same language of penal substitution, it is debatable that they used these terms in the same way as the more recent theologians.¹⁷ Regardless of its origins, penal substitution became the dominant theory in Western Protestantism in the 19th and 20th centuries.¹⁸ In the Eastern church, while penal language appears occasionally, the emphasis is much more on identification vis-à-vis Irenaeus with the incarnation understood to be the key to atonement as the cross.¹⁹

Mark Baker and Joel Green, among others, argue that it is not surprising that penal substitution came to the fore in the late Enlightenment period. They state, "Hodge explains the penal substitutionary model in a way that makes it appear self-evident that God must act according to late-nineteenth-century American notions of justice."²⁰ This, coupled with the Enlightenment's emphasis upon the autonomous self, makes penal substitution a seemingly perfectly appropriate theory for a Western Enlightenment context. That *self-evident* nature, however, has caused its adherents then to read penal substitution back

¹⁷ Peter Schmeichen, 37-45. Schmeichen stresses that, for Calvin, Christ's death is *not* an act of retributive justice and that salvation is achieved through the obedience of Christ, both in life and death. This is in contrast to saying that salvation is being achieved through blood required retributively in penal substitution.

¹⁸ It should be noted that this not the case in *all* Protestant streams. Anabaptists, for example, have typically not been adherents of penal substitution have tended more toward Christus Victor or Moral Exemplar theories of the atonement.

¹⁹ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985). This book has served as my introduction to Eastern theology and Stanley Grenz considered it to be a definitive Eastern response to Barth and Rahner in the last half of the 20th Century.

²⁰ Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 147.

into, as it were, all of Church history and into the biblical texts themselves. We shall later discuss the appropriateness of this reading.

Reading out of focus, from two directions. One of the touchstones of penal substitution is that God's justice is immutable. This is so much the case that while it maintains that God perfectly holds love and justice in tension,²¹ penal substitution "eliminates the tension by affirming justice as the only significant and functional divine attribute."²² It has been argued that, for Hodge, love was accidental to the nature of God; justice was not.²³ In other words, "God can save sinners by sending his Son; but he doesn't have to do so,"²⁴ since this might imply some limitation on God's sovereignty. This fits nicely with the British/American conception of *blind justice*, a justice almost apart from God that seems to make requirements upon God in a binding way. Yet why should God's nature of justice be any more binding than God's nature of love? This reading of biblical texts with a modern Enlightenment sense of abstract and absolute justice affects how penal substitution reads virtually all of the biblical texts related to the atonement.

Just as, I believe, penal substitution reads back into the texts, particularly those of Paul, a modern conception of justice that is not necessarily present in the texts, it makes a

²¹ This is a problematic assertion in its own right. Can anything in God's nature be "in tension" with another part of God's nature? Would it be more appropriate to say that justice flows from God's loving nature (as I will assert in my thesis) or that in God's transcendence love and justice are not at odds or in need of being held in tension but only appear to be so due to our finite minds?

²² Schmeichen, 110.

²³ Gary Deddo, "Issues in Contemporary Evangelical Theology" Lecture (Colorado Springs, CO: Fuller Theological Seminary, Colorado Extension, October 19, 2007). Deddo was contrasting the theology of Hodge with that of T.F. Torrance.

²⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981), 115.

similar error in reading forward to Paul from the Old Testament. The key issue here is the nature of sacrifice in the life of Israel and its relationship with God.

Defenders of penal substitution generally stress that sacrifice in the Old Testament did not have the capricious *feed the angry god* nature of other ancient pagan religions. They are correct. That said, it is hard to see how their presentation of sacrifice and the nature of God in the Old Testament supports their point. I will here quote Thomas Schreiner at some length:

Those who sin face the retributive judgment of God.... The theme of judgment permeates the Old Testament.... Scripture regularly teaches that God is personally angry at sinners....²⁵ [And later] Reflect on the violence of the activity (OT sacrifice): the blood, the entrails, and the goriness of it all. The death of the animals shows that the penalty for sin is death. When we are told that the sacrifices are a soothing aroma, this image indicates that they satisfy God's wrath, that they appease his anger.²⁶

At the root of these quotations, and the sentiments that they reflect, is the conviction that, for Israel, it was the death of the sacrifice that turned away wrath, God's wrath. This is a God "who is angry and alienated by human sin, (and) requires something to appease divine anger before showing favor to the sinner."²⁷ The sacrificed animal becomes the object of God's wrath and only the shedding of blood can turn away anger. The violence of the sacrifice is seen as retributive: a just punishment for the wrong committed.

²⁵ Schreiner, 78, 79.

²⁶ Schreiner, 83.

²⁷ Bernhard Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 120.

A few issues with this position immediately present themselves. Ironically, a prominent proponent of penal substitution, Leon Morris, pithily illustrates one of the chief. In speaking of the Old Testament Law, and with it the sacrificial system, he states:

Law and Grace are mutually exclusive as ways of salvation. The conclusion is plain. The Law had its place in the purposes of God, but that place was not the bringing of salvation. God has made that abundantly clear in his dealings with Abraham that the only way is the way of Grace. Nothing can alter that, certainly not the Law. *The Law was 430 years too late [emphasis mine].*²⁸

Statements like this, coupled with both statements in scripture of God's desire for mercy and acknowledgement of God over sacrifice²⁹ and the numerous instances in both the Old and New Testaments where forgiveness is granted to individuals in the absence of sacrifice, call in question the "non-negotiable" nature of "blood for life"³⁰ required in penal substitution. It is striking in Morris' case that this profoundly astute observation, that Abraham and his descendents were put in and remained in relationship with God for 430 years *before* the sacrificial system came into being, does not then show itself more significantly in his presentation of penal substitution.

Additionally, Leviticus 5:11 indicates that, in the case of the poorest of the poor, a blood sacrifice is not required at all; a grain sacrifice will suffice since that is all that can be afforded. Colin Gunton, citing J.S. Whale, helpfully (and ironically) notes, "(This) is

²⁸ Leon Morris, *The Atonement*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1983), 36.

²⁹ Hosea 6:6 and Micah 6:8 serve as examples.

³⁰ The statement, "the life is in the blood" refers to blood being adequate payment for guilt (retributive justice) or if it is an offering or oblation. Larry Shelton provides an extensive argument for the latter understanding in Chapter 5 of *Cross and Covenant*. This will be taken up in the next section.

very important in demonstrating that sacrifice does not carry with it any connotations of vengeance or punishment: ‘You cannot punish a cupful of barley.’”³¹

How then is retributive violence at play here? And, is retributive justice even possible? Schmiechen argues that retributive violence is illusory.

In what sense can imprisonment or even capital punishment restore health or lost life? If this then, is the case in human justice, in what sense can retribution be applied to the issue of atonement? If the punishment cannot equal the offense that leaves us with the idea that the punishment *per se* is somehow satisfying to God.³²

This is consistent with Bernhard Anderson’s assertion that, in Leviticus, the sacrificial system serves to:

Express God’s readiness to establish good relations. They are ritual ways of expressing belief in God’s power to overcome the sin that distances people from God so that they may live in communion or fellowship with God. Accordingly, in the Priestly (Levitical) view the sacrificial system is a means of grace that God has provided.³³

This question, “Is the sacrificial primarily a means to ‘appease’ or ‘propitiate’ the angry God, or is it a graceful provision of a God who has already put Israel into relationship from Abraham onward?” seems of utmost importance for the validity or lack of validity of penal substitution. While most penal adherents might well say “both/and” it seems as if they fundamentally support more of the former and not the latter. Starting with an assumption that sacrifice is primarily about appeasing God’s wrath, it is therefore easy to see how the death of Jesus and the New Testament writers’ discussion of it is clearly seen in similar terms.

³¹ Gunton, 120.

³² Schmiechen, 39.

³³ Anderson, 118.

In this document, I will demonstrate how others propose means in which covenantal relationality is the driving interpretation of the Old Testament while still taking sin and God's justice seriously. I will also argue that a potentially paradigmatic metaphor for the atonement is in fact embedded in the Old Testament: the story of Hosea and his wife Gomer.

God constrained. In an attempt to refute the accusation that penal substitution presents a vengeful, angry God, it is often argued that God's *justice* or God's *holiness* constrain or require God to demand death or punishment. While careful attention is given to declaring that this justice and holiness is *God's* and that they are part of who God is, positing that God is controlled by justice seems to create a sense in which *justice* takes on a character that is either separate from God. It seems to make claims upon God or at least functions as a characteristic of God that controls or rules over other attributes of God. Proponents are quick to argue that this is not the case. John Stott states, "We must certainly remain dissatisfied whenever the atonement is presented as a necessary satisfaction either of God's 'law' or of God's 'honour' in so far as these are objectified as existing in some way apart from him."³⁴

Trouble in the person of God. Larry Shelton, referencing Henry Spaulding, states:

the satisfaction and penal theories of the atonement, which are virtually ubiquitous in evangelical circles, have reflected a deficient Trinitarianism in assuming that that the 'real problem in the atonement is with God.... Inevitably this pits Jesus against the Father.'³⁵

³⁴ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 120.

³⁵ Larry Shelton, *Cross and Covenant* (Tyrone, GA: Paternoster Press, 2006), 22.

This succinctly articulates what I believe is the single most insurmountable deficiency of penal substitution. It seems, unavoidably, to put the action of one member of the Trinity against the other. As was expressed in the initial summary of the theory, adherents are anxious to say this is not so: “The Father, because of his love for human beings, sent his Son (who offered himself willingly and gladly) to satisfy God’s justice, so that Christ took the place of sinners.”³⁶ Or John Stott replies to the charge by stating:

Such crude interpretations of the cross still emerge in some of our evangelical illustrations, as when we describe Christ as coming to rescue us from the judgment of God, or when we portray him as the whipping boy³⁷ who is punished instead of the real culprit. The whole notion of a compassionate Christ inducing a reluctant God to take action on our behalf founders on the fact of God’s love.³⁸

Others reply to the charge by cataloging at length all of the examples of how, in scripture, God the Father displays himself to be loving.³⁹ I believe this clouds the issue. To say, “Look at all the ways God is loving,” does not take away the fact that your model primarily describes God as wrathful. To illustrate, it is as if I were confronted with the accusation, “You beat your wife,” and I respond by saying, “That’s ridiculous. Let me tell you all of the loving things I have said to her over the last year.” It very well may be true that I have said all those things, but that in no way addresses the truth or falsity of the charge that I have been abusive to my wife. Likewise, to answer that penal substitution

³⁶ Schreiner, 67.

³⁷ Is it possible to read this sentence without Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* coming to mind? I don’t ask that to attack Gibson. I sincerely believe his desire was to produce a devotional homage to Christ. Still, the idea that “the more blood the more beautiful is our salvation” abounds.

³⁸ Stott, 150.

³⁹ I. Howard Marshall, 52-65.

posits a fundamentally angry God whose hand must be stayed by Jesus by listing verses elsewhere that argue for God's love, if anything, serves to make the point of the opposition: that penal substitution, in this regard, is not consistent to the nature of God.

While Stott and others admit that "crude representations" of penal substitution do suggest a God-Son dynamic that is at least sub-Trinitarian, I believe the questions must be asked, "If a significant number, and perhaps a majority of a model's proponents, present it in an inappropriate, if not dangerous, way, might there be some intrinsic flaw in the model? If only professional theologians (and I'm not sure I'd be willing to concede this point) can get it right, is this truly the best model available?"

A Trinitarian alternative in view of the cross is offered by Miroslav Volf and Jürgen Moltmann. I will deal with their positions more later, but quote them here at length as a counterpoint to penal substitution's view of the Trinity.

For the very nature of the triune God is reflected in the cross of Christ. Inversely, the cross of Christ is etched in the heart of the triune God; Christ's passion is God's passion.... When the Trinity turns toward the world, the Son and the Spirit become, in Irenaeus's beautiful image, the two arms of God by which humanity was made and taken into God's embrace.... When God sets out to embrace the enemy, the result is the cross.⁴⁰

Echoing the Christ Hymn of Phil. 2, Moltmann says:

When the crucified Jesus is called the 'image of the invisible God', the meaning is that *this* is God, and God is like *this*. God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness.... The nucleus of everything that Christianity says about 'God' is to be found in this Christ event. The Christ event on the cross is a God event.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 127, 128-9.

⁴¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*. (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1974), 205.

I will later argue that this view, with its view of all of the Trinity participating in the event of the cross, deals with the Trinitarian difficulties intrinsic in penal substitution.

Getting the cart before the horse. All of these issues cumulatively point to what I believe is the fundamental problem with penal substitution. It takes that which is primarily a relational issue—humanity’s broken relationship with God, with one another, and with creation, and the cost required to restore relationship—and shifts it all into the world of legal abstraction, particularly retributive justice. “It structures the relationship between God and humankind in terms of an ahistorical, abstract legal formula.”⁴² Without a doubt, legal terms and concepts are at play in scripture, particularly in Paul. I would assert, however, that these metaphors serve to illumine or inform the larger, dominant metaphor at play, covenant relationships.⁴³

I. Howard Marshall feels that it is most appropriate to think of God’s wrath and the atonement in terms of retributive justice:

...If a person causes somebody to suffer, then they should be made to *suffer proportionately* to cancel out the original evil deed In some sense, the crime has not been ‘paid for’ until the criminal has suffered something comparable to the suffering they have caused. This is most clearly so in the case of murder where murderers are subjected to loss of their own life or deprived of liberty for a so-called life sentence; the thought is that a life must be paid for a life. Until the penalty has been paid, the guilty party remains guilty.⁴⁴

Marshall admits that this kind of retributive justice “does not do any good to the victim or others affected by the crime. The victim’s relatives may cry out for vengeance,

⁴² Dennis Weaver, *Atonement and Violence*, ed. John Sanders (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 6.

⁴³ This argument here follows closely that of Shelton’s *Cross and Covenant*, Colin Gunton’s *The Actuality of Atonement* and T.F. Torrance’s *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992).

⁴⁴ Marshall, 27.

but it is hard to see how making the offender suffer actually does any good to the persons who have suffered.”⁴⁵ However, he still feels retributive justice is warranted as a motivation for God in the atonement.⁴⁶ Personally, I am at a loss as to how to explain, both either in a human legal sense or in a cosmic spiritual sense, how “until the penalty has been paid, the guilty party remains guilty” can have applicability in taking the life of the offender. How is it that the now executed murderer is actually free from guilt? If the murderer is now free from guilt, in the eyes of the law, of what good is it? They are now dead!

Retributive justice is built around the idea that somehow a proportional penalty can be paid for wrong done. “Punishment should equal the crime.” While this may be possible in petty crimes, is it possible in larger offenses? “In serious acts of violence, punishment does not compensate or make actual restitution. In what sense can imprisonment or even capital punishment restore health or lost life?”⁴⁷ One thinks of the angry surviving families crying for *justice* in the execution of the murderer of a loved one. And yet, if the execution takes place, do they feel relief? Do they feel restored? Is their loss removed?

One is left to wonder if retributive justice is merely a tragic myth. In essence, “you have inflicted pain on me and it will ‘satisfy’ me to inflict pain in return.” Echoes of this can be seen in Mel Gibson’s popular “Passion of the Christ” and its relentless focus

⁴⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁶ In referring to Romans 13:4 he asserts that the “magistrate is God’s agent to carry out vengeance/punishment or retribution on wrongdoers” on p. 14. This argument is furthered elsewhere as well.

⁴⁷ Schmiechen, 39.

upon the physical suffering of Jesus in his scourging and crucifixion. Here, the inference seems to be that it is great suffering that achieves atonement, and that somehow, it is profound pain that God requires. This view neglects other key roles suffering can play. Shelton states that this, “Western tendency to view suffering as synonymous with punishment distorts the priestly understanding of identification and participation (by Jesus, the great high priest) in the human experience.”⁴⁸ Finally, as Joel Green points out:

Does the transfer of guilt satisfy the demands of justice? Given the antipathy at work in attributing this sort of anger to Yahweh, can we so easily escape the reality that redirecting anger at an innocent party does not (or at least need not) return the guilty party to good graces?⁴⁹

Fixing a phantom and a limited vision. My final concern with penal substitution is that it addresses what is wrong in the self-contained individual. “*I have a sin problem. Christ died for my sins. I owe a debt I cannot pay.*” The penal model seems virtually obsessed with dealing with the sin of the individual before God, in a legal sense.

I struggle with this on two fronts. The first is that it seems to lack the all-encompassing nature of the atonement expressed in verses like II Corinthians 5:19, “God was in Christ reconciling *the world* to himself” or Colossians 1: 19,20, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him *to reconcile all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*” This universal or cosmic dimension to the saving work of Christ seems wholly missing from penal substitution as it is often articulated. This is where models like Christus Victor and a covenantal understanding of the atonement offer a helpful corrective.

⁴⁸ Shelton, 77.

⁴⁹ Green, 112.

My second concern is with how penal substitution and, in reality, most all of the modern world, conceives of the *self*. In my thesis, I will argue at some length that the Modern Enlightenment has created a *bounded, interior* sense of selfhood, a *self* “in isolation and abstracted from communal imbeddedness.”⁵⁰ This *self* that Martin Buber says, because it is incapable of relating communally to others, is the “detached I” which “is transformed from substantial fullness (true personhood) to the functional one-dimensionality of a subject that experiences and uses objects (things AND others as things).”⁵¹ In doing so, two things occur; all *others* become *its* to be used and manipulated and the self becomes a “golem, an animated clod without a soul.”⁵² The *self* has become “masterful, bounded and empty.”⁵³

This bounded, interior self is the self addressed in penal substitution. What is wrong is a problem *interior to the individual*. The cross fixes that problem. The stain of guilt is removed.

In viewing the atonement in this manner, penal substitution returns to the problem of replacing a fundamentally relational issue with an interior abstract one, only this time from the other direction. How fortunate that God’s primary concern in the atonement is addressing an interior defect, individual sinfulness, and its interior consequences, standing guilty and judged before Justice, because that is exactly how the bounded, interior

⁵⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 4.

⁵¹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*. (New York, NY: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1971), 80.

⁵² Ibid., 114.

⁵³ Philip Cushman, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America*. (New York, NY: DeCapo Press, 2002), 79.

self sees itself. Atonement allows the self to have corrected that which is interiorly wrong with the self. God now enables the self to be truly whole, interiorly so.

I would argue that as God is more concerned with the reconciliation of broken relationship than with the satisfaction of abstract justice, the self is, in actuality, not bounded and interior. As Buber famously suggests, selfhood is attained in relationship, in I and Thou. If this is correct, and I will argue more on this later, then penal substitution does not truly address what is wrong with me, that sin has destroyed my basic personhood rendering me incapable of the right relationships (with God, others, creation) needed to constitute a self.

Christus Victor

First articulated as a formal theory of atonement by Gustav Aulén⁵⁴ and tracing its roots to Irenaeus in early church history,⁵⁵ Christus Victor often stands as the primary alternative to penal substitution. Like penal substitution, it clearly posits that God, through Christ, performed a saving act that humanity is incapable of performing on its own. However, whereas penal substitution focuses upon Christ providing a substitute to receive the just punishment from God that human sin deserves, the emphasis in Christus Victor is upon Christ *rescuing* humanity from oppressive powers (configured variously as sin, the law, powers and dominions, demonic powers, Satan, or death)⁵⁶ or, similarly *defeating* these same powers. Whereas penal substitution focuses upon addressing issues

⁵⁴ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor*, trans. A.G. Hebert (London, UK: S.P.C.K., 1931).

⁵⁵ Schmiechen, 125.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 124.

interior to the self, Christus Victor is concerned with addressing issues exterior to the self that hold individuals and all of humanity in thrall.

Reading the life and work of Jesus through the lens of Israel's Exodus story provides a conceptual paradigm for Christus Victor.⁵⁷ N.T. Wright, for example, says that a failure to see Jesus in light of the biblical account of deliverance, beginning in Egypt and weaving through all of scripture, renders the work of Jesus unintelligible. God's statement to Moses, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them..."⁵⁸ provides a synopsis of the motivation and suggests the coming action of God. The Exodus story here prefigures and frames all of God's salvation work in history and Jesus' work in particular.

How is this rescue brought about? Various views exist. The recapitulation of fallen humanity, ransom paid, Satan deceived, and Evil (Satan) defeated were primary theories in the early Church.⁵⁹ In recapitulation, Christ *participates* with us in our suffering and we *participate* in his death, resurrection and ascension, hence being *re-formed*, free from the destructive effects of sin. The incarnation of Jesus plays a much larger role in recapitulation than in penal substitution. The concepts of participation and identifica-

⁵⁷ N. T. Wright, *The Problem of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999).

⁵⁸ Exodus, 3:7, 8a.

⁵⁹ Shelton, 160.

tion are fundamental. In Irenaeus' words, "He became like us that we might become like him."⁶⁰

Another approach to rescue is that Christ served as a ransom payment to secure our salvation: "You were bought with a price."⁶¹ But to whom is this price paid? Shelton sees Origen as the classic early commentator on this point and summarizes his view in this way:

Origen suggested that the ransom cannot be paid to God but to Satan, since he has humanity in his power. The ransom payment Satan seeks is the life of Christ. Christ gives himself in exchange for the life of humanity; but Satan then finds that Christ cannot be contained by death—he breaks free from Satan's control, thus vanquishing death and rendering it no longer the master of humanity.⁶²

A vivid and popular example of this theory would be Aslan's death and resurrection in C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. There the sinful deeds of a human (the traitor Edmond) have made his life forfeit to the White Witch (Satan). The great lion Aslan (Jesus) offers to die in his stead, recognizing that the Witch's claim to a life is legitimate but knowing of a "deeper magic" than the Witch's which allows a life freely offered to triumph over death.

In this story can be seen a central and, for many, troubling feature of ransom theories of the atonement, deception. It is similar to Gregory of Nyssa's famous metaphor of Jesus' humanity serving as the fish that Satan swallows whole only to discover that the hook, Jesus' divinity, has trapped him. While modern sensibilities find such illustrations

⁶⁰ Ibid., quoting Irenaeus 162.

⁶¹ I Corinthians 6:20

⁶² Shelton, 166.

problematic or even “grotesque,”⁶³ Shelton states that Christus Victor and its variations “provide rich resources for creative communication of the atonement to a postmodern audience sensitized to the reality of spiritual forces.”⁶⁴

Indeed, in modern/postmodern contexts, Christus Victor has proven to be a very attractive paradigm for people who have experienced oppression, whether political, economic, racial, or gender related. Beginning with Moltmann, liberation theologians, feminist theologians, and spokespersons for the Civil Rights Movement have found rich soil in the categories of Christus Victor.⁶⁵ “The appeal of liberation theology [Christus Victor] is to those who live in danger of losing hope because of oppressive forces.... Sins need to be forgiven, but people in bondage need to be liberated.”⁶⁶ While these groups are often criticized, with justification, for tending to minimize, if not eliminate, individual responsibility for sin, surely they are correct in emphasizing the need for liberation. Speaking personally from my experience in youth ministry, when talking with a young person whose life has been a relentless cycle of abuse and emotional abandonment, the language of personal responsibility for sin and guilt deserving death in penal substitution seems at least inadequate if not bordering on abusive in its own right. As psychologists and sociologists increasingly paint a picture of the woundedness and emotional abandonment that most young people experience, it is not surprising that Christus Victor lan-

⁶³ Shelton, 161. Shelton here is summarizing others, not expressing his own opinion. While he grants the concern that deception is a characteristic untenable with the nature of God, he is sympathetic to that which these images describe.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 172.

⁶⁵ Schmiechen, Ch. 4., Shelton. Ch. 9.

⁶⁶ Schmiechen, 164.

guage might be increasingly popular with those ministering to youth in the affluent suburbs as well as blighted cities.⁶⁷

I suspect that a middle way regarding personal responsibility for sin and cosmic or structural powers of evil is warranted. If penal substitution is “reduced to the removal of (personal) guilt,”⁶⁸ it is also likely true that Christus Victor can tend to make the opposite mistake:

If the great strength of liberation theologies is the critique of injustice and a vision of freedom, all based on God’s preferential option for the oppressed, herein lies its vulnerability.... They require more precision in speaking of areas of responsibility and guilt.⁶⁹

Schmiechen here is correct, both in his noting above that “people need to be liberated,” not just forgiven, but, conversely, that it is also a mistake to swing the pendulum so far toward liberation that personal repentance and forgiveness are obscured. Shelton suggests, as we will discuss further, that the possibility exists to fold these two together in a helpful synthesis.⁷⁰

Moral Influence

Generally attributed initially to late 11th-early 12th century theologian Peter Abelard, the moral-influence model finds the significance of the cross less in achieving the forgiveness of sins and more in providing the motivation, impetus, and model for hu-

⁶⁷ Chap Clark, a veteran of youth ministry and a child psychologist and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary has written a profoundly influential book regarding the emotional abandonment of virtually all youth in modern culture, *Hurt* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

⁶⁸ Shelton, 169.

⁶⁹ Schmiechen, 165.

⁷⁰ Shelton, 172.

manity to live a God-centered life. He suggests that the cross can not be “necessary” to bring the forgiveness of sins because “if Jesus pronounced forgiveness of people’s sins before he went to the cross, then if by the same grace God wanted to forgive others, would that not be possible?”⁷¹ Rather, Jesus’ life and death are “a demonstration of God’s love that moves sinners to repent and love God.”⁷² Shelton argues, “The spirit of obedience and love in Christ’s sufferings, rather than their penalizing nature, form their atoning value. His perfect expression of repentance on behalf of humanity serves to demonstrate God’s love and forgiveness.”⁷³

If one of the concerns with penal substitution is that it “implies little or nothing about ethics,” positing an “a-ethical atonement image,”⁷⁴ the moral-influence model suffers from the opposite concern. Here, the primary purpose and result of the death of Jesus is to lead us into a virtuous, Christ-imitating life. Like *Christus Victor*, moral-influence theory addresses a weakness in penal substitution, but in many ways, replaces that weakness with a new one. Moral-influence fails to take sin seriously enough. Stott states that, “it offers a superficial remedy because it has made a superficial diagnosis.”⁷⁵ It tends to suggest that if properly motivated and guided, the human heart has the capability to leave a life of sin. This seems clearly to run against both the description of the human heart in scripture and the personal experience of any of who have tried on our own effort to ask,

⁷¹ Green and Baker, 137.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 137.

⁷³ Shelton, 207.

⁷⁴ Weaver, 9.

⁷⁵ Stott, 220.

“What would Jesus do?” and to do likewise. As Philippians 2 clearly suggests, we are encouraged to take great guidance and inspiration from the life and death of Jesus and the moral-influence theory does bring this out in ways that penal substitution does not. Still, at the end of the day, it does seem accurate to declare that, on its own, it is both an inadequate accounting of scripture and an inadequate description of how we actually are.

Girard and Mimetic Violence

Literary critic and cultural anthropologist Rene` Girard has, over the last decades of the 20th century, had a profound impact upon understandings of the cross.⁷⁶ According to Girard, human desires are driven by a sort of jealousy and imitation of that which another has. Cain relative to Abel would be an example of this *mimetic rivalry* and just as it leads Cain to murder Abel, *mimetic rivalry* leads humanity to ever increasing spirals of violence. As James says, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.”⁷⁷

As this violence spirals out of control, society seeks to assuage the violence.

Boersma summarizes Girard:

The group subconsciously looks for a way out and finds this in a scapegoat. Girard views the ‘scapegoat mechanism’ as the identification of a particular individual as the source of unrest, disorder, sickness or other societal ills.... The group is transferred into a mob and lets off steam against the victim, who becomes a substitute for the mimetic rivals.... Ironically, the scapegoat mechanism works. Once the crowd has vented its frustrations, its violent impulses subside, resulting in peace and harmony.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004),133.

⁷⁷ James 4:1-2a.

⁷⁸ Boersma, 137.

On many levels, Girard has correctly identified a powerful force in society. From Cain and Abel to Jewish pogroms to hatred of “gypsies” or racial strife to even the xenophobic behaviors of countries today, this mimetic violence can be seen at play.

For Girard, this also explains the death of Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate scapegoat. In this case he is not just the scapegoat of the Jews of 1st century Palestine, but also the scapegoat for all of the mimetic violence of humanity. This is possible because, for Girard, God himself allows himself to be the victim of human violence, in so doing “revealing the futility of accomplishing reconciliation through the unjust scapegoating.”⁷⁹ William Placher similarly argues, “what is different about the biblical narratives (as opposed to other mimetic histories), and above all, the story of Jesus, is that they expose the workings of the device and, therefore, disarm it.”⁸⁰

This ability to disarm is at least partially true. The centurion of Mark 15, viewing Jesus’ death on the cross and proclaiming, “Surely this was the Son of God,” seems to suggest it. Additionally, the success of passive- resistance movements led by Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. seem to have in at least some part been due to the exposure of the violence and scapegoating of the dominant culture. One thinks of the scenes of the bridge at Selma or white adults yelling obscenities at black elementary-school children flashed across the country on TV. In fact, these examples speak to one of the great strengths of this view of the atonement. Shelton states that it, “assumes that the atonement calls the Christian to recapitulate the sacrificial attitude of Christ through participation in living

⁷⁹ Shelton, 212.

⁸⁰ William Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 119.

out the consequences of the atoning work of Christ in the world.”⁸¹ It is a view of the atonement that really does call Christians to “take up their own crosses.”

As helpful as this mimetic insight is, it is not without significant problems. Stephen Finlan, who is in many ways sympathetic to Girard’s reading of scripture, states:

As an anthropological theory, the fatal flaw in Girard’s proposal is the reductionist insistence that all culture and religion are founded on one thing, the scapegoating mechanism. Even if it can be shown that there is such a mechanism in societies around the world, that would only prove its existence, not its primacy in social formation.⁸²

As is often the case, it seems inappropriate to reduce things as vast as all human societies or all religions to any one idea or principle.⁸³

Additionally, central to the effectiveness of Girard’s treatment of the atonement is the belief that to thoroughly expose the futility of human violence through scapegoating is enough to end it. Girard sees “salvation as knowledge.”⁸⁴ Is this true? Is it adequate? Does knowledge of what I’ve done, or am doing, truly give me the strength to stop? Human history since the cross would seem to suggest otherwise.

Finlan also argues that Girard’s analysis focuses so much attention on the role of violence in society that it misses all other realities.

If there is no other basis to human religion than violence and dissembling, then humanity is doomed.... If human beings around the world and in their nonbiblical religions had not learned anything about justice, honesty, compassion, reciprocity,

⁸¹ Shelton, 212.

⁸² Stephen Finlan, *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 106.

⁸³ Although, as we shall soon see, Finlan makes much the same mistake only substituting “spiritual evolution” for the scapegoating mechanism.

⁸⁴ Boersma, 142.

compromise, repentance, repair, afterlife, spirituality or perfection of motivation, how could the Gentiles ever be attracted to the Gospel?⁸⁵

These concerns illustrate that, while it is a provocative theory that may in fact explain much of how humans function in societies and likely has much to say to atonement theology, Girard's analysis cannot be seen as adequate in itself. Mark Heim, who builds most of his extensive work, *Saved from Sacrifice*, around Girard's ideas, admits as much.

I agree that if taken as an exclusive account of Christian theology or even as an exhaustive account of the cross, Girard's writing can be faulted for tending toward the impression that all that is needed in Christ's work is a particularly dramatic demonstration of a truth we need to learn, as opposed to a divine act by whose power we are transformed.⁸⁶

Stephen Finlan and Incarnation INSTEAD OF atonement.

I would like to conclude this section with a look at the work of Stephen Finlan as an example of someone trying to do theology that takes the divinity of Jesus seriously and takes, at least on many levels, the authority of scripture seriously, while rejecting the atonement as an essential Christian doctrine. Other examples could be given of persons who wish to be called Christians but who reject the atonement altogether,⁸⁷ but Finlan strikes me as different in that he doesn't arrive at his position by dismissing the biblical texts out of hand; rather, he radically reinterprets them.

Two ideas are foundational to Finlan's approach: a familial view of God and God's interactions with humanity and a "growth hermeneutic" applied to all of scripture. Finlan asks, "If we drop atonement, do we lose all these [divinity of Christ, saving pur-

⁸⁵ Finlan, 107.

⁸⁶ Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 13.

⁸⁷ Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer or radical feminist theologians would be examples.

pose of the incarnation, God's concern for humanity] essential ideas? If we drop the concept of the violence of God, will we cease to believe in God at all?"⁸⁸

He answers, no—if we replace the violent God with the loving father God. Finlan's answer to the violence of the atonement is, "We must return to the response of Jesus, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.'" ⁸⁹ This, for him, is not just a part of the message of Jesus, it "is the heart of the simple and stunning message of Jesus."⁹⁰ In an extended quotation that speaks to this priority of a loving parent as well as his evolutionary emphasis, Finlan states, "A good Father is not a slave owner, a stern judge, or even a king, but 'the Father himself loves you' (John 16:27). God planted us here to *grow* us. There is a fundamental contradiction between the atonement metaphor and the family metaphor."⁹¹

As mentioned earlier, Finlan does not want to throw out scripture, or even dismiss the validity of church history. How does he hope to avoid this while taking such a dismissive stance toward the atonement? He does this by positing a "hermeneutic of growth, a way of understanding progress and regression in religious ideation."⁹² In a statement not lacking a fair bit of condescension, he states, "Perhaps the best option with outmoded atonement concepts, is to see them as a phase of childish construction that Jesus endures

⁸⁸ Finlan, 127.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 128.

⁹² Ibid., 126.

as he patiently waits for his children to grow up.”⁹³ In a way that mirrors the work of Michael Polanyi,⁹⁴ Finlan does not see “new theological insight” as invalidating past ideas, but, rather, moving *through* and building *upon* them. For example, while Einstein’s insights regarding physics run counter to Newton’s, they would not have been possible without climbing upon Newton’s philosophical shoulders. Finlan’s picture of God is a God who has slowly been doling out revelation in ever evolving insights as humanity is ready for them. “Who says we are forced to either deify or vilify the past? There is another choice between fundamentalism or Marcionism. We may begin to allow our knowledge of God to grow, ‘first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain of the head’ (Mark 4:28).”⁹⁵

For Finlan, Christianity should replace its focus upon the atonement with a focus upon the doctrine of the Incarnation. Repeatedly returning to the “Hosea Principle,”⁹⁶ that God “desires steadfast love and not sacrifice,”⁹⁷ he posits the Incarnation as the key concept of Christianity. He reads Ireneaus’ famous dictum, “Jesus Christ became what we are in order that we might become what he himself is,” to be a statement solely about the Incarnation. “Not atonement, but *restoration* and *re-enabled participation in divinity* are

⁹³ Ibid., 125.

⁹⁴ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

⁹⁵ Finlan, 125.

⁹⁶ Stephen Finlan, *Problems with Atonement* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 112.

⁹⁷ Hosea 6:6.

the pillars of reconciliation.”⁹⁸ In this sense, Finlan is proposing a position quite similar to moral-exemplar views of the atonement, except that here the exemplar lies in God’s incarnating love, not in Jesus going to the cross. For Finlan, the cross is an accident that has mistakenly been infused with meaning through church history. “There are quite a few parables and remarks of Jesus that indicate that he did *not* think it was God’s will that he should be murdered...He (Jesus) simply did not preach a sacrificial theology.”⁹⁹

While one appreciates Finlan’s attempts to remain biblically oriented in spite of his profound dis-ease with atonement, and while he is correct in stating that the Incarnation has been an underdeveloped doctrine, dwelling in the shadows of atonement theology¹⁰⁰ it seems he vastly overstates his case. To argue that the atonement is in no way a “necessary” doctrine to Christian orthodoxy¹⁰¹ seems to require an enormous amount of either dismissing or radically reinterpreting both scripture and 2000 years of Church teaching. Finlan’s atonement theology is intrinsically tied up with a belief that *all* atonement theology posits a barbaric God who demands appeasement.¹⁰² I believe this unfairly conflates some views of the atonement with all views of the atonement.

⁹⁸ Finlan, *Problems with Atonement* 121.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 109.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 4. Finlan makes much of this case upon the fact that the early Church councils went to great lengths to define the divinity/humanity of Christ, an issue of the Incarnation, while giving little attention to ideas of atonement. He feels that the Church quickly lost this incarnational emphasis and needs to return to it.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 3.

Conclusion

Each of the approaches to the atonement discussed thus far has recommending characteristics. Each, in its own ways, draws attention to important ideas about God, the human condition, and how the two relate in the person of Jesus. At the same time, each has deficiencies that make it untenable as *the* definitive approach to the atonement. Given that, one is faced with two options—either, a “kaleidoscope approach”¹⁰³ that draws elements from each, or, perhaps, another more fundamental paradigm that could draw from the strengths of each while avoiding their weaknesses. In the following section, I will posit that a familial/covenantal/relational orientation to the atonement provides just such a framework.

¹⁰³ Joel B. Green, “Kaleidoscopic View” in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*.

Section 3: My Thesis

Situational Framing of the Thesis

During a week at a Young Life camp, the first three nights of the week will often feature talks that center upon our hunger for meaning, our sense of being fundamentally alone and our awareness of emptiness, and how Jesus interacts in the Gospels with individuals experiencing issues. These talks often *profoundly* resonate with students. They will express sentiments like, “That’s *exactly* how my life feels all the time.”

The fourth and fifth nights present a significant change in approach and tone. Leaving the largely Gospel narrative based orientation of the first three days, the fourth night is a propositionally driven exposition of the doctrines of the fall, sin, and humanity’s inability to address the issues of sin by our own efforts, often with little or no mention in this talk of Jesus at all. The conversations on this night reflect a *vastly* different response from students. The range here can be profound, from apathy to confusion to rage. The apathetic and confused responses seem to come from the same root, “So what? This doesn’t feel real to me. It doesn’t fit how I see the world or live my life.” The rage is different. These folks get it and are angry—at God and at the adults who brought them. “What the hell?! You brought us here and get us excited about how much God loves us and how Jesus cares for us and then all that is thrown out the window tonight with a God that is angry and is sending us to hell and there’s nothing we can do about it. I hate this place!”

The fifth night is the story of the cross of Jesus. “Hey, I know we left you in a really hard place last night, but now here’s the rest of the story!” This night typically is a combination of a narrative telling of the crucifixion and continued propositional theologi-

cal presentations trying to describe atonement. Responses to this evening are mixed. Some kids are profoundly moved and respond significantly. Others are moved but ask, “I still don’t get it. How does something Jesus did fix all the stuff we talked about last night? Why would God ask Jesus to do that? Do I want to be reconciled to a God that would do that to Jesus?”

The sixth night is a further explication of “What does all this mean?” More often than not, the story of the Prodigal Son is told, with a pronounced emphasis upon the supposed repentance of the son and some emphasis upon the loving movement of the father. *This* is the night that things typically come together for students. Often kids will say, “Now I get it.”

In Young Life, we tend to view nights four and five as The Gospel Presentation and deem everything else to be ancillary and of secondary importance. This seems only natural, given the evangelical propensity to see the propositions of penal substitution as the heart of the Gospel and to view abstract presentations of these propositions to be the most appropriate means to communicate them. After 20+ years of taking kids to camp, I have come to wonder why nights four and five, if they are the real crux of things, are so confusing and troubling to kids? Why do students respond so powerfully to the issues of the first three nights and again to the story of the Prodigal Son, in contrast? Could it be that on nights one to three and again on night six we are more accurately and effectively communicating the Gospel? Could it be that nights four and five, particularly in the way we describe sin and our emphasis here on propositional theology, are almost obstacles to effectively sharing the Gospel? Is there a way to maintain the centrality of the cross while

being less confusing and troubling to students? I believe a relationally centered view of the self and the atonement is that way.

A plot in context

In many evangelical circles, a popular evangelistic phrase is, “If you were the only person to ever live, Jesus would still have come to die for you.” This is obviously a powerful statement. My fear, however, is that too often we treat the saving work of Jesus as if, functionally, this statement were actually the case. We talk and think about him *only* in terms of his coming and dying for *me* or for *you*, but always and only for individuals. We also think of him only in terms of his *death*. In the famous phrase, Jesus truly was the man born to die, but we have so focused upon his death that it is as if his life and who he was in his person is of little or no consequence. Finally, in framing our evangelism in this fashion, we rip Jesus out of any historical context and really do treat him as if his birth, life, death, and resurrection 2000 years ago could have happened anywhere and at any time as long as it happened for you and for me. In this first sub-point to my thesis, I would like to do a bit of re-contextualizing the saving work of Jesus.

While this re-contextualizing project is not new, perhaps no one has championed it more passionately or skillfully in recent years than N. T. Wright. Wright argues that Jesus’ self-understanding was intrinsically wrapped up in the history of Israel, in his Jewishness. I quote him here at length:

Jesus believed and acted upon two vital points, without which we will not even begin to understand what he was all about. These two points are foundational to everything I shall say from now on. First, he believed that the creator God had purposed from the beginning to address and deal with the problems within his creation *through Israel*. Israel was not just an ‘example’ of a nation under God; Israel was to be the means through which the world would be saved.

Second, Jesus believed...that this vocation would be accomplished through Israel's history reaching a great moment of climax, in which Israel herself would be saved from her enemies and through which the creator God, the covenant God, would at last bring his love and justice, his mercy and truth, to bear upon the whole world, bring renewal and healing to all creation.¹⁰⁴

The argument of Wright's work, *The Challenge of Jesus*, is that Jesus literally embodies Israel's role in history relative to God and the world *and* simultaneously embodies God's movement toward Israel and the world. Larry Shelton echoes this point in his discussion of *hilasterion* in Romans 3:25 when he argues that rather than "sacrifice of atonement," *hilasterion* is better rendered *mercy seat*, or the "location where God is present and may be safely approached."¹⁰⁵ Jesus is at once the God who dwells in the Holy of Holies, the Priest who enters on behalf of the people, the sacrifice that signifies covenant relationship and reconciliation, and the people themselves, in need of and desiring reconciliation.¹⁰⁶

In his brief, but profoundly significant work, *The Mediation of Christ*,¹⁰⁷ T. F. Torrance makes a similar point. "They [the Apostolic Fathers] found themselves coming to grips with the essential message of the Gospel embodied in Jesus in its relation

¹⁰⁴ N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 35.

¹⁰⁵ Shelton, 137.

¹⁰⁶ Colin Gunton argues similarly in *The Actuality of Atonement*.

¹⁰⁷ I vividly remember the plane flight from Orlando to Chicago in 1999 during which I read this book. I remember thinking, "Nothing will ever be the same now."

to the age-old message of God that had been worked out in his covenant partnership with Israel.”¹⁰⁸

How do the Apostolic Fathers reach this understanding? “What are the tools we need in order to grasp the content of divine revelation?”¹⁰⁹ In a way reminiscent of Leslie Newbegin’s appropriation of the scientific philosophy of Michael Polanyi, Torrance draws an example from the field of physics. He recounts a conversation he had with the maker of highly sensitive, complex instruments for use in a high-energy physics lab. In order to make the highly specific instruments called for, the maker had to understand not just his field but had to also study and develop personal expertise in the field of high-energy physics. This was to facilitate “the construction of appropriate tools with which to shape knowledge and understanding of what is being investigated.”¹¹⁰ This leads him to consider the need for “conceptual tools” whose function:

is particularly pressing when we have to do with something radically new which we cannot understand by assimilating it into the framework of what we already know, and for which old patterns of thought and speech are not only inadequate but can prove quite false.¹¹¹

For Torrance, Israel serves this exact purpose.

Let us consider God’s relation to Israel in just this light. In his desire to reveal himself and make himself knowable to mankind, he selected one small race out of the whole mass of humanity, and subjected it to intensive interaction and dialogue

¹⁰⁸ T.F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers and Howard, 1992), 5.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

with himself in such a way that he might mould and shape this people in the service of his self-revelation.¹¹²

God's continued interaction with Israel gives them and us a conceptual framework, a paradigm to comprehend Jesus. To use Newbigin's illustration, Israel becomes the glasses lens through which we can properly "see" Jesus.¹¹³

For Torrance, this self-revelation is characterized by God's intense desire for reconciliation. The point of Israel's election was never that they were an intrinsically holy or worthy people, "but precisely the reverse."¹¹⁴ God's covenant with Israel was "pure grace between God and Israel in its rebellious and estranged existence. Hence, no matter how rebellious or sinful Israel was, it could not escape the covenant love and faithfulness of God."¹¹⁵ He points to the book of Hosea to stress that even in the face of profound rejection and infidelity, "the bonds of God's steadfast love [*hesed*] retain their hold on Israel and lock into a relationship with God which will finally triumph over all estrangement and bring about reconciliation and peace."¹¹⁶

This is not a love that glosses over sin and rebellion. In fact, the covenant God forms with Israel has the effect of:

intensifying the conflict of Israel with God...The more fully God gave himself to his people, the more he forced it to be what it actually was, what we all are, in the

¹¹² Ibid., 7.

¹¹³ Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 35.

¹¹⁴ Torrance, 27.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

self-willed isolation of fallen humanity from God. Thus the movement of God's reconciling love toward Israel not only revealed Israel's sin but intensified it.¹¹⁷

Why would this be? For Torrance, the more Israel rebels, the deeper is God's self-identification with Israel in their resulting suffering. This self-identification with Israel is key to the development of the *conceptual tools* needed to receive Christ. The Incarnation is not a new thought to the mind of God. As Bernhard Anderson says, God is the "tabernacling presence,"¹¹⁸ God dwelling with Israel in their wanderings. In Hosea 11:9, while stating that he will not come in wrath but in mercy, God affirms, "I am the Holy One among you," God in your midst.

All of this leads Torrance student and Fuller Seminary professor Ray Anderson to assert that one of the key elements of the Old Testament's *inner logic* is that "grace presupposes barrenness." Echoing Torrance, he sees the narrative flow of the life of Israel as told in the Old Testament to be a "building into the reflexive muscle memory" of Israel, and by extension humanity, an awareness that we are barren and that God responds to our barrenness by extending grace and mercy. In this way, Israel's *muscle memory* or *conceptual framework* is prepared to receive the culmination of grace, Jesus Christ.¹¹⁹

Space does not allow full exploration of the Old Testament once one turns to the text looking for examples of "grace presupposes barrenness." Examples are too numerous to discuss all of them. Two pivotal scenes in the self-understanding of Israel will have to suffice.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 28.

¹¹⁸ Anderson, 106.

¹¹⁹ Ray Anderson, "Reconciliation and the Healing of Persons" Lectures, (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, Spring, 1999).

In Genesis 15, Abram and YHWH participate in a covenant-forming ceremony; they “cut a covenant.” While all the elements seem consistent with similar ancient customs, there is one striking difference. Whereas typically it is the dominant party that dictated the terms of the covenant and attached attending punishments if the covenant were broken,¹²⁰ this does not happen here. Rather than God’s requiring Abram to pass between the slaughtered animals, stating, in McKenzie’s words, “As it has been done to these animals so it will be done to you if you break this covenant.”¹²¹ It is the burning pot, symbolizing God, that passes through. Bernhard Anderson says:

Notice, however, that in this eerie covenant making rite, during which God made a pledge under solemn oath, the patriarch was in a passive state, asleep. The covenant was made unilaterally by God; Abram was a passive recipient.... This covenant is characterized by the giving of promises (by God to Abram), not the imposition of obligations.”¹²²

430 years later, God gets around to giving his covenant partners the Law. Now, at last is the Old Testament God we so fully expect, stern, legalistic, and wrathful. Right? No. Taking just one of the Deuteronomic commandments, the injunction to keep the Sabbath, makes the point. Why is it that God commands that Israel abstain from work one day a week? “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.”¹²³ According to

¹²⁰ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Louisville, KY: Abingdon, 1996), 154-5.

¹²¹ Steven L McKenzie, *Covenant* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000) 17.

¹²² Bernhard Anderson, 99.

¹²³ Deuteronomy 5:15

Bernhard Anderson, “behind the commandment, then, is the demonstration of the prior love and grace of God.”¹²⁴ Essentially the Torah is not a matter of, “Here are my rules. If you keep them, I will love you,” but, rather, “I have put you in relationship with me, because I love you. Here is what that relationship looks like.”

Sacrifice, a sign of God’s love or God’s wrath?

That sacrifice in the Old Testament is associated with punishment and the assuaging of God’s anger is often assumed and needs no rehearsal. But is that valid? The shedding of blood is assumed to lend sacrifice a retributive quality. It is helpful again to reference Gunton’s observation of the provision of a cup of grain as a substitute for the poor. “The (provision) is important for demonstrating, as Whale points out, that sacrifice does not here carry any connotations of vengeance or punishment: ‘You cannot punish a cup of barley.’”¹²⁵ Echoing the contextualization of the law within the gracious act of the Exodus, Gunton goes on to say, “Ultimately, all sacrifices in the Old Testament depend for their context upon the story of God’s deliverance of his people from Egypt at the Exodus. If there is a centre, it is to be found at the place where Israel began to understand the roots of her life in its relation to God.”¹²⁶

Anderson frames the issue in the difference between *propitiation* and *expiation* and the debate over which concept dominates OT sacrifices. In propitiation, God is angry and alienated from humanity and “requires something to appease divine anger before showing favor to the sinner. The hindrance to reconciliation *lies with God* [emphasis

¹²⁴ Bernhard Anderson, 146.

¹²⁵ Gunton, 120.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 121.

mine]. By contrast, in the case of expiation the hindrance to right relationship lies in human sin and the obstacle is overcome by the God-provided means of grace.”¹²⁷

For Anderson, sacrifice in the Old Testament comes down clearly on the side of expiation over propitiation. Shelton sees both terms having validity. “Ultimately, atonement is achieved, both in the Old and New Testaments, by expiation that leads to propitiation.”¹²⁸ Still, his emphasis clearly is upon expiation as the dominating theme. “God is no longer wrathful because his intention was to maintain the covenant fellowship in the first place.”¹²⁹ And again, “Indeed, God initiated the procedure for atonement and reconciliation. The action of God is always to restore the covenant.”¹³⁰

Much of evangelical theology has maintained that the Deuteronomic sacrificial system called for, “life for life, or blood for blood. No forgiveness without blood meant no atonement without substitution,”¹³¹ in Stott’s words. And that the God “who is angry and alienated by human sin, requires something to appease divine anger before showing favor to the sinner.”¹³² Shelton strenuously argues against these positions. While I am unable to give the full range of argument here, his emphasis upon our reading of “the laying on hands” in the sacrificial cultus is of utmost importance. Shelton argues that the

¹²⁷ Anderson., 120.

¹²⁸ Shelton, 69.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 69.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 70.

¹³¹ Stott, 138.

¹³² Anderson, 120.

“blood for blood” or economy of “a life demanded for sin” has its theological roots¹³³ in an inattentive reading of the sacrificial ceremonies themselves.

While offerings in the pagan cultures surrounding Israel often did serve to “propitiate, appease or bribe to counteract a god’s vengeance”¹³⁴ this was not so in the life of Israel. Here, sacrifices “function as gifts to God, a means of expiation, and a means of communion with God.”¹³⁵ It can also be argued, I would maintain, that these rituals in that they were provided by the stronger of the covenant partners were a gift from God to Israel rather than a burden as we in Christianity have tended to view them. Even if God did demand equal payment for sin, substitution, life for life, is there any real way in which a goat could be viewed as an equal and adequate stand-in for the nation?

Similarly misplaced is our belief that the sacrificial goat had the sins of the people placed upon it, in that way foreshadowing the sins of all humanity’s being placed upon Christ. Shelton argues that failure to understand the difference in laying on one hand and laying on two hands has caused this misconception. In the ceremony surrounding the Day of Atonement there were *two* goats, each of which experienced a laying on of hands. Transference, the passing of one’s essence or being to another, occurs in the laying on of *both* hands. This is *not* what happens to the slain goat; it happens to the *scapegoat* or the goat that is driven into the wilderness, away from the people.¹³⁶ The goat that *is* slaughtered and whose blood is splattered around the Holy of Holies receives *one* hand upon it.

¹³³ It has cultural roots as well in the European understanding of judicial justice and punishment, particularly from Anselm forward.

¹³⁴ Shelton, 63.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 54. The referent scripture is Leviticus 16.

This symbolizes *identification with* more than *transferal to*. In language almost identical to Torrance, Shelton states that, “the ceremony of sprinkling the blood on the altar and on the people consecrates them both and renews the covenant *binding-together of God and Israel* [emphasis mine].”¹³⁷

Finally, and on a related point, Shelton stresses the importance of ritual cleansing and purity in regard to the priest and the Holy of Holies. In light of this, he argues that it seems inconceivable that blood that is not only not purified, but has been ultra-defiled by bearing all of the people’s sins, would be splattered upon the most Holy physical space in the world. With this in mind, viewing the blood as a cleansing agent is more appropriate. The blood represents our being cleansed by God.

Paul Fiddes roots the concept of justification, which has traditionally been rooted in the appeasement, propitiation view of sacrifice, in covenantal tones; “this Hebrew setting means that ‘justification’ while a legal term is at root a matter of relationships. Hebrew law was concerned with the health of the covenant community.”¹³⁸ While this may be a minority view within many evangelical circles, it warrants more attention, particularly in light of the previously argued covenant/relational narrative arc of the Old Testament.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 56.

¹³⁸ Paul S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 87.

Narrative Precedes Theology.

Stanley Grenz and John Franke said, “The reading of the biblical text must always take precedence over our theological constructions.”¹³⁹ Here they directly follow the thinking of Stanley Hauerwas when he asserts, “they [doctrines] are not the meaning at the heart of the stories. Rather they are tools...meant to help us tell the story better.”¹⁴⁰ He contrasts this with the “standard picture” that “...assumes that if scripture is to be meaningful it must be translated into a more general theological medium.”¹⁴¹

Hauerwas and William Willimon are standing on the shoulders of Alasdair MacIntyre, as many do, when they say:

How does God deal with human fear, confusion, and paralysis? God tells a story: I am none other than the God who ‘brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.’ Knowing that story makes sense out of the following command that Israel ‘shall have no other gods before me...Idolatry is condemned only on the basis of a story we know about God.’¹⁴²

In his profoundly influential book, *After Virtue*, MacIntyre stresses that to be human is to be ‘embedded’ in a story. “I can only answer the question, ‘What am I to do?’ if I can

¹³⁹ Stanley J. Grenz, and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 83.

¹⁴⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 26.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴² Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 54.

answer the prior question, ‘Of what story do I find myself a part?’”¹⁴³ Newbigin helpfully adds, “What is the *whole story* of which my story is a part?”¹⁴⁴

Arriving at the same place from a different tack is Catherine Mowry LaCugna, who states, “Theological statements are possible not because we have some independent insight into God...but because God has revealed and communicated God’s self, God’s personal existence, God’s infinite mystery.”¹⁴⁵ And how has God revealed and communicated God’s self? LaCugna, building upon Barth and Rahner, would argue that revelation is in action in history rather than in proposition. There is no difference between God-in-Revelation (God in history) and God-in-Eternity (God in theological construct).¹⁴⁶ Jesus is the story of God.¹⁴⁷

All this is to say that our understanding of the atonement needs to begin in the biblical narrative before working its way to the theology of Paul or the theology of the Church Fathers. Both Paul and the creeds are of immense worth but, as Hauerwas points out, as tools to tell the story better, not as the starting point themselves. Stories are not just for children, to be later sloughed aside in favor of theological formulations. If Jesus is the revelation of God, then God is revealed in Jesus’ actions, in his story. Likewise, the

¹⁴³ Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1981) 219.

¹⁴⁴ Newbigin, 99.

¹⁴⁵ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1991), 3.

¹⁴⁶ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*. 35-37.

¹⁴⁷ Hauerwas, *Community of Character*. 50.

revelation of God in the Old Testament is in God's interactions with a people, the family of Abraham and later the people of Israel.

Not only a storied-God, but a story-telling God. If Barth, MacIntyre, Newbiggin, Hauerwas, and others are correct that approaching scripture as first story and later theology is correct and God is primarily revealed to human understanding through God's actions in history, then it follows that particular attention should be given to the stories God tells. Obviously, all of scripture, from this perspective is a *story God is telling*, but I have in mind the specific stories of God. I would argue that two of these, the story of Hosea and his relationship with his wife Gomer and Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son are stories God tells that have profound atonement implications.

Hosea

As is often the case with the Old Testament prophets, their actions have prophetic weight along with their words.¹⁴⁸ Certainly this is the case with Hosea and, further, God explicitly spells out those implications. "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife, this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord."¹⁴⁹ And again, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulterous. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods..."¹⁵⁰ In the actions of Hosea toward Gomer, we are seeing a living parallel to God's interactions, first with Israel, and in a larger sense with all of humanity through Christ. Torrance says:

¹⁴⁸ See Jeremiah or Jonah as further examples.

¹⁴⁹ Hosea 1:2.

¹⁵⁰ Hosea 3:1.

The covenant between God and Israel was not a covenant between God and a holy people, but precisely the reverse.... Not matter how rebellious or sinful Israel was, it could not escape from the covenant love and faithfulness of God. That is the aspect of the covenant that is brought out so poignantly in the book of Hosea. Even if Israel persists in adulterating its relationship with God, he will not divorce Israel, for the bonds of God's steadfast love retain their hold upon Israel and lock into a relationship with God which will finally triumph over all estrangement and bring about reconciliation and peace.¹⁵¹

He is directly tying the story of Hosea/Gomer to Israel's covenant relationship with God and, in saying that God's steadfast love "will finally triumph over all estrangement and bring about reconciliation and peace," he is clearly pushing forward to Christ. Hosea "tastes in his own being Yahweh's bitterness over the people's apostasy,"¹⁵² according to Pentiuć. This is not just Israel's apostasy, for, "we are not overhearing a conversation between God and ancient Israel, but finding ourselves involved directly,"¹⁵³ states Kidner.

To demonstrate how Hosea's story provides metaphoric resonance with atonement theology, I will now highlight key points in the story and how they address issues and concerns of atonement theologians:

Is movement God-initiated as opposed to humanity-initiated?

Clearly. Hosea, standing in the role of God, marries Gomer. Once the infidelity on Gomer's part has begun he sends their children to plead with her,¹⁵⁴ he woos her by

¹⁵¹ Torrance, 27.

¹⁵² Eugen J. Pentiuć, *Long-Suffering Love: A Commentary on Hosea* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2002), 25.

¹⁵³ Derek Kidner, *The Message of Hosea* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981), 39.

¹⁵⁴ Hosea 2:2.

speaking tenderly in the wilderness to her [a picnic with love poems?],¹⁵⁵ he gives her gifts,¹⁵⁶ and finally he buys her back from slavery, not to be his slave but again to be his wife.¹⁵⁷ She makes no move of reconciliation at all. All action is on Hosea's part.

Does it take sin seriously?

In describing the book of Hosea's treatment of Israel's sin, Derek Kidner states, "This approach [setting sin in a marital framework] is far from sentimental. *It sharpens guilt immeasurably* [my emphasis] by making it the betrayal of love."¹⁵⁸ Similarly, Ray Anderson argues, "unless we are involved in a history of trust and commitment, we feel no strong sense of betrayal when such a breach occurs...betrayal rends the fabric of an intimate relationship, there is no safe distance from it."¹⁵⁹ While steadfast love, *hesed*, is the abundant theme of the story, judgment, pain, and even wrath at the sin of unfaithfulness are clearly present. They just do not dominate or prevail. Love does.

Does it demonstrate some sense of sin bearing, shame bearing, or cost paying by the innocent party on behalf of the guilty?

This is likely the point where penal substitutionary proponents say, "Nice story, but there's no substitution here." In a forensic sense, that is true, but I would argue that courtrooms are not the only place where one might take on the guilt or shame of another

¹⁵⁵ v. 14.

¹⁵⁶ v. 15.

¹⁵⁷ Hosea 2:1-3 and 2:16.

¹⁵⁸ Kidner, 45.

¹⁵⁹ Ray S. Anderson, *The Gospel According to Judas* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1991), 15.

to bear it away. Colin Gunton was cited earlier arguing that covenant should be understood more relationally than legally and I believe the same principle applies here. Ray Anderson is most helpful here. He defines sin as “a transgression of a relationship with God and with others,”¹⁶⁰ and then goes on to discuss what is needed for relational reconciliation to occur: “The sin of betrayal is already contextualized by the greater fact of the relationship.”¹⁶¹ For one party to betray, the other party must be faithful. “The positive evidence of the relation continues to exist as an actuality bound up in the personhood of the one betrayed.”¹⁶² The *only* possibility for reconciliation, then, is in the hands of the betrayed. “The possibility of healing broken relationships *always issues from the power of love to embrace the wrong done to it* [my emphasis] for the sake of restoring fellowship and love.”¹⁶³ Embracing the wrong is a deeply painful and yet essential process for real reconciliation to occur. Miroslav Volf’s recent work, *The End of Memory*, deals precisely with the pain and potential great good of the wounded to truly remember and own the pain done to them in order to truly forgive and forget.¹⁶⁴

The names of Hosea’s children are a reminder of his experience of betrayal and a daily source of shame. He purchases her back, at great cost both to his wealth and to his

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 76.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 78.

¹⁶⁴ Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006). The framing narrative of the book is Volf’s personal struggle to forgive a Serbian military officer who engineered Volf’s surveillance and repeated interrogation and accusation in 1984.

public standing. His paying of the reclamation price in a mixture of coins and grain indicates that he has had to “scrape together”¹⁶⁵ the needed amount. In publicly buying her back, “old wounds would have to be reopened and [the possibility faced] that what had happened once might happen yet again.”¹⁶⁶ It is possible for Hosea to avoid taking on the pain caused by Gomer’s sin. It is possible for him to not bear the shame of all that has happened. He could either disavow her, write the relationship off forever, or he could punish her, buy her back to make her pay. He does neither; he buys her in order to love her. Of course, he does, because he is loving as God loves.

Does it effect actual reconciliation as opposed to merely brushing over difference?

Anyone who has had a spouse say, “We are just going to pretend like you didn’t just say that,” knows that, in fact, the opposite is about to transpire. Brushing over an offense in no way brings reconciliation. It just avoids dealing with the rupture to relationship. This is not the path Hosea takes. Rather, he faces “the poignant personal demands that are involved in mending any close relationship. This was no arm’s length settling of a legal battle or extracting of apologies. A marriage asks, because it offers, nothing facile or transitory.”¹⁶⁷

Real forgiveness, in fact, *requires* naming the wrong. It does not turn its back on justice.

¹⁶⁵ Kidner, 42. and Penttuc, 85.

¹⁶⁶ Kidner, 40.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Forgiveness is no mere discharge of a victim's angry resentment or mere assuaging of a perpetrator's remorseful anguish.... On the contrary, every act of forgiveness enthrones justice, it draws attention to its violation precisely by offering to forego its claims.... Much more than the absence of hostility...peace is communion between former enemies...[when] the victim refuses to be defined by the perpetrator, forgives and makes space in himself for the enemy.¹⁶⁸

Forgiveness is not the weak substitute for justice. Forgiveness achieves what retribution cannot. It does so not by the victim being either so afraid or so lacking in self-esteem to name the wrong done to them. Rather, forgiveness is the victim of wrong knowing what could be demanded (revenge or rejection) and offering instead reconciliation.

Is there a need for a response?

A response is needed, though the order of events is of paramount importance. No amount of recalcitrance can trigger forgiveness. It must be offered by the one wronged. But it must also be received. Arms can be extended in the offer of embrace (to use Volf's beautiful image), but the other may turn away, recoil, or stiffen in rejection. For embrace to happen, the recipient, in this case, the perpetrator, must open as well to receive embrace.

The Prodigal Son

William Barclay echoes the observation of R.C. Trench that for centuries the parable of the prodigal son has been called "the Gospel within the Gospels" and "the very essence of the faith."¹⁶⁹ David Wenham states, "There is no more powerful a picture of the forgiving love of God or of the motivation behind Jesus' ministry within the Bi-

¹⁶⁸ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*. 123-126.

¹⁶⁹ William Barclay, *The Parables of Jesus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1970), 182.

ble.”¹⁷⁰ In describing the gospel Schmiechen states, “though humanity is justifiably guilty, God unilaterally reveals a love that draws humanity back to God. *The parable of the prodigal son stands as the great witness to such love.*”¹⁷¹ John Stott sees the parable “implicitly expressing” the doctrine that Jesus “showed his love in bearing our penalty and therefore our pain, in order to be able to forgive and restore us.”¹⁷² N. T. Wright sees Jesus using the parable as paradigmatic of his role in bringing about the final return of Israel from Exile.¹⁷³

And yet, I have been flatly told by staunch defenders of penal substitution, “It’s a beautiful story of God’s love, but there is no atonement there.”¹⁷⁴ Opponents of penal substitution at times make the same claim. John Stott, in *The Cross of Christ*, cites Hastings Rashdall and Douglas White as arguing that the prodigal son preaches a gospel of “forgiveness without atonement.”¹⁷⁵ Kenneth Bailey points out that Muslims see the parable as Jesus’ own refutation of the Christian doctrine of the atonement. According to Bailey, Muslims see no incarnation or atonement in the parable, only repentance and

¹⁷⁰ David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1989), 105.

¹⁷¹ Schmiechen, 291.

¹⁷² Stott, 224.

¹⁷³ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 127.

¹⁷⁴ In conversation with Young Life national leadership in the fall of 2007 regarding the nature of YL’s presentation of the Gospel.

¹⁷⁵ Stott, 222.

mercy. “Jesus in this parable is a good Muslim who affirms Muslim theology.”¹⁷⁶ How can Stott and those who find atonement theology deeply embedded in the parable make this claim? Is the parable of the prodigal son the heart of the Gospel or the refutation of the Gospel that Muslims are said by Bailey to make it out to be?

Kenneth Bailey’s groundbreaking¹⁷⁷ treatment of the parable in the light of over 40 years of ministry in the Middle East beautifully resolves these questions. The key, he argues, is reading this familial story with eyes open to the family dynamics of Middle Eastern patriarchal, honor/shame based cultures. While a number of these observations are backed by commentators such as Jeremias,¹⁷⁸ who sees the parable as Jesus’ “apologetic,”¹⁷⁹ I have not encountered anyone who pulls them together so cohesively and convincingly and I will therefore draw from him at some length.

Disowning, “Two sons have I not.” The son, in asking for his share of the inheritance is not just asking for money, he is insulting his father. “Such a request in a village society means only one thing. *The younger son is impatient for his father’s death...* the son chose deliberately to wound his father’s heart and break all his relationships with the family.”¹⁸⁰ Bailey’s comment that this is transpiring in a “village society” is crucial. The

¹⁷⁶ According to Bailey, Muslims see no incarnation or atonement in the parable only repentance and mercy. “Jesus in this parable is a good Muslim who affirms Muslim theology.” *The Cross and the Prodigal*, 2nd Ed., (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 15.

¹⁷⁷ It is referenced repeatedly by more recent commentaries on Luke 15.

¹⁷⁸ Jachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1954), 128-132.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 132.

¹⁸⁰ Bailey, 40, 44.

wound has not just transpired in the home; it has ramifications in the village. The result of this public insult and humiliation would typically be to “disown the son.”¹⁸¹ Bailey entitles the first act of a short play he has written about the parable, “Two sons have I not” in a reflection of the expected cultural response to the son’s act. The son should be “dead to him.”

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. The son’s claim to *sonship* has been forfeited. He is not asking, as he heads for home, to return into the home. He just hopes for a more favorable employment situation. He understands that there is nothing he can do to reconstitute his relationship to his father. “Father, I have no claim on you whatsoever.”¹⁸²

Kezazah. Bailey describes the communal nature of rejection that would have awaited the son:

Village society is vicious to the man who is down. Wandering beggars endure unspeakable taunting...verbal cruelty...and derisive choruses. The prodigal will have to face this band [of youths]. He will be verbally attacked by it, only in his case the adults will join the mockery rather than protect him from it.¹⁸³

It is possible for the father to maintain his honor in all of this. In fact, the *Kezazah* is largely a communal preservation of his honor. He will not be the one verbally attacked. He is removed.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁸² Helmut Thielecke, *The Waiting Father* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1959), 27.

¹⁸³ Bailey, 55.

After Kezazah. Following the communal ceremony, the son would “then be obligated to sit for some time outside the family gate of the family home before being allowed to even see his father. Finally he would be summoned.”¹⁸⁴ And not summoned for a reunion: he would be summoned to grovel, to beg for mercy. It now goes without saying; nowhere in sight is relational reconciliation. Everything in play here is about preserving honor for the father and heaping shame upon the son.

A father who violates all the rules. “No one in the village thinks or acts as a separate person but as a part of the tightly knit village society. The individual’s solidarity with that community is unshakable,”¹⁸⁵ Bailey notes. One is reminded of Tevye’s response to his daughter Chava in “Fiddler on the Roof.” Though he loves her desperately, he cannot bring himself to even acknowledge her existence after she marries a Gentile. Communal tradition, solidarity, and honor are stronger than love. But this father “breaks all the rules.”¹⁸⁶ He does not sit aloof in his house; he *runs through town* to his son. “In the Middle East a man his age and position *always* walks in a slow, dignified fashion. It is safe to assume that he has not run anywhere for any purpose for forty years. No villager over the age of twenty-five ever runs.”¹⁸⁷

And where is he running? Through the town, in front of the mob who awaits the son’s return to heap scorn and derision upon him. Certainly, his running serves two func-

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 66.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 67.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

tions. First, he shields his son from the mocking of the mob. Second, he runs the risk of it now being turned upon him.

Outpouring emotion. Miroslav Volf states, “It was the profound and singularly fecund story of the prodigal son that originally triggered the idea for a ‘theology of embrace.’”¹⁸⁸ It is clearly not possible to quote the entirety of Volf’s book here, but his conception of the power of embrace, literally and metaphorically, is profound. It is a move that is both a reach out and an opening to. Boldness and vulnerability. The father, in his honor, dignity, and purity embraces the dishonored, shamed, dung covered son.

Giving gifts, reconstituting personhood. The father’s robe, a ring, shoes, the fattened calf and a feast—all bestowed upon the son by the father. Bailey maintains “the father very carefully reestablishes the boy’s broken relationships with each group (in the family and the village) in turn.”¹⁸⁹ Miroslav Volf believes, “With a command to the slaves, the father *reconstructed* [my emphasis] the prodigal’s identity.”¹⁹⁰ The father, in Volf’s reading, allows himself to be “un-fathered” (viewed as dead by his son) so that in suffering this “death” he can keep the son in his heart, eventually restoring him to life and right relationship.¹⁹¹ “[The father] throws a party that has been called a ‘re-investiture,’ treating

¹⁸⁸ Volf, 156.

¹⁸⁹ Bailey, 71.

¹⁹⁰ Volf, 160.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 165.

him as one would treat an honored guest, killing the fatted calf, celebrating in grand style.”¹⁹²

Incarnation and atonement in this parable? As noted previously, Bailey’s project was initially motivated by the fact that Muslims use the parable to undercut the Christian doctrines of incarnation and atonement. Is that warranted? I quote here him here at length as he makes his point.

The father in his house clearly represents God. The best understanding of the text is to see that when the father leaves the house and takes upon himself a humiliating posture on the road, he becomes a symbol of God incarnate. He does not wait for the prodigal to come to him but rather at great cost to himself goes down and out to find and resurrect the one who is lost and dead.... This parable depicts a father who leaves the comfort and security of his home and humiliates himself before the village. *The coming down and going out to the son is a parable of the incarnation. The costly demonstration of unexpected love in the village street demonstrates a part of the meaning of the cross.*¹⁹³ [my emphasis]

Summary of the parables. In both the living parable of Hosea’s marriage to Gomer and in Jesus’ telling of the parable of the prodigal son (better named the parable of the loving father¹⁹⁴) we have *God narrating* stories meant to describe his *telos* or project in the world. In both cases, we have actions taken by the innocent to restore relationship with the guilty. Actions are taken at great cost—financially, in terms of setting aside justifiable wrath or resentments, and in the incurring of great shame to bring about relational restoration and reconciliation. There is a clear substitutionary element to both stories, if not in a forensic sense, certainly in a relational one. In doing so, I follow Bailey’s

¹⁹² Craig L. Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 39.

¹⁹³ Bailey, 67.

¹⁹⁴ Theilecke, 27.

orienting of the parable of the prodigal son in a cultural context whose locus is shame avoidance and honor preservation, as opposed to legal standing. Coming from his mission experience in Japan, also a honor/shame centered culture, C. Norman Kraus similarly rejects a primarily legal orientation to the atonement.¹⁹⁵ This rejection also follows those who see covenantal relationship as the unifying theme of scripture. Given the framework laid out regarding God's covenantal thrust throughout scripture, these two parables seem to contain the DNA of God's atoning work.

I now turn to two last points that further highlight God's relational orientation in the atonement. Both points deal with the nature of personhood, God's and ours.

Persons in relation: God and humans.

Why have I so adamantly pushed for a relational conception of God's work throughout all of scripture and specifically in the atonement? The answer lies in a conviction that God is primarily understood as "God-in-relation" and that we as humans, as bearers of the *imago dei*, are relationally constructed selves.

The Nought. 20th Century Catholic novelist Walker Percy, in his novels and in his essays, writes of a *noughted* self in the postmodern west. A *noughted* self is always devouring and never full, always seeking substance and ever insubstantial. "If I can have that car, my life will be different, for my nothingness will be informed by the having of it.

¹⁹⁵ I have included a most helpful graph comparing the atonement from a shame vs. guilt orientation from Kraus' book, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, appendix A. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987), 256.

But, once it enters the zone of my nought, the car is emptied out and, instead of informing me, only participates in my nothingness.”¹⁹⁶

This is a self, in this age of seemingly limitless resources and opportunities for self-gratification and self-actualization, that discovers, “how very odd it is, when one stops to think of it, that the very moment he arrives at the threshold of his new city, with all its hard won relief from the sufferings of the past, happens to be the same moment he runs out of meaning!”¹⁹⁷

In the poet T. S. Eliot’s terms, this is the “hollow man.” To build upon Percy’s statements, how is it that in an age where, at least in the industrialized West, there is virtually no limit to the ability to gratify every perceived need and vast amounts of personal and cultural energy is devoted to actualization of the self, we as individuals and a society feel ourselves to be so insubstantial, so “lost in the cosmos?”¹⁹⁸ Why do we feel, along with Percy’s postmodern “he,” the following to be true?

He can never forget who he is: that he is a stranger, a castaway, who despite a lifetime of striving to be at home on the island is as homeless now as the first day he found himself cast up on the beach.... I mean that in his heart of hearts there is not a moment of his life when the castaway does not know that life on the island, being ‘at home’ on the island, is a charade.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle* (New York, NY: Farrar and Straus, 1975), 287.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 112.

¹⁹⁸ Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos* (New York, NY: Farrar and Strauss, 1989).

¹⁹⁹ Percy, *The Message in The Bottle*, 189.

This is the self that Martin Buber called the “severed I”²⁰⁰ and is a member, as Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer passionately argued in the 1970s, of a “cut flower generation.” In Schaeffer’s analogy, a generation that still bears some outward semblance of life, of substantiality, but is cut off from any life-giving source and is already dead. As Philip Cushman says in describing the self in 20th century America, “the self became fragmented, diffuse and somehow ‘unreal.’”²⁰¹ Middleton and Walsh put it this way, “The modern era began with Columbus setting out to sea. He seemed to have at least some idea of where he was going. As that epoch ends and a postmodern era begins, we again find ourselves at sea. But this time we have no navigational assistance and no direction. We are alone and adrift.”²⁰² How did we get here?

The myth of autonomy. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen calls Aristotle the “virtual parent of modern psychology” in that “many of the basic assumptions of these fields trace their heritage back to Aristotle, whose thinking (revived in the sixteenth century) had so much to do with the emergence of modern science generally.”²⁰³ Aristotle posited the “teleological principle” of personhood: that humans progress in development toward an end, a goal, or a *telos*. Van Leeuwen argues that for Aristotle, this *telos* is achieved

²⁰⁰ Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1971), 115.

²⁰¹ Cushman, 66.

²⁰² Richard J. Middleton, and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1995), 62.

²⁰³ Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, “Aristotle, The Biblical Drama and the Meaning of Personhood” in *On Being a Person*, Todd H. Speidell ed. (Eugene, OR, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 15.

through the application of reason to the pursuit of the “Pure Form,”²⁰⁴ the Ideal. While I will later argue that a biblical conception of *telos* as participation in the relationality of the Trinity and participation in God’s relationally restorative work in creation, the emphasis at this point is upon the role of *reason* as a tool to *attain to pure form*. The seat of personhood is being anchored within the self and within contemplation of an abstraction. “The self of the philosopher sought the Universal Good, not the particular, local communal rules laid down by the local gods.”²⁰⁵ I am a self in my interior relation to a Principle, not in my particular, inter-dependent relationships.

In the Enlightenment, this detached autonomy reawakens from its medieval slumber. Philip Cushman states:

The removal of God *out* (emphasis his) of the world, the development of an objective stance toward the world and toward oneself, the universalization of doubt, the extension and elaboration of the concept of interiority, and the valorization of rationality were all begun or advanced by Descartes. . . . (He) found order and truth through the interiorized searching of the individualized, logical thinker.²⁰⁶

Similarly, John Locke posits a self defined by its “power to disengage from and remake itself. It was a self that was pure, independent, disengaged, instrumental consciousness.”²⁰⁷ This is the self of the American Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. This is the self of “individual liberties and rights,” of “self-evident” truths.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 16.

²⁰⁵ Cushman, 360.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 374.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 378.

The Cartesian self, existing because of *cogito*²⁰⁸ is a bounded self. Self emanates *from within* and evaluates, consumes, rejects, or uses the world that it encounters. In *I and Thou*, Martin Buber calls this a self that interacts with the world only in terms of I-It.

I perceive something. I feel something. I imagine something. I want something. I sense something. I think something. The life of a human being does not consist merely of all this and its like. All this and its like is the basis of the realm It. But the realm of You has another basis²⁰⁹.... The basic word I-It is made possible only by this recognition, by the detachment of the I.²¹⁰

Now, however, the detached I is transformed—reduced from substantial fullness to the functional one-dimensionality of a subject that experiences and uses objects.²¹¹

I will later spend a considerable amount of time looking at Buber's idea of I-You, but his contrasting concept of I-It provides an invaluable tool for understanding the implications of Descartes's detached, self-contained (bounded), individualism. To Buber, this conception of the self turns all else into an *It* an object, a thing which I consider from the fortress of autonomy. Obviously, this objectification extends to the self's interactions with other humans and ultimately with God.

Rather than empowering the self, making it master of the universe in a Nietzschean sense, Buber argues that the supposedly autonomous self is an illusion. The "severed I" (severed from I-You relationality) is the I of ego. "The person beholds his self; the ego occupies himself with his MY: my manner, my race, my works, my genius.

²⁰⁸ I think, therefore I am.

²⁰⁹ Buber, 54.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 73.

²¹¹ Ibid., 80.

The ego does not participate in any actuality nor does he gain any.”²¹² He refers to the I that defines itself in *It* relations as a “golem, an animated clod without a soul.”²¹³

In significantly different language but along similar lines, Cushman states that in 20th Century America familial and communal influences upon identity recede and:

The individual self came to be seen as the ultimate locus of salvation; the self was ever evolving, constantly changing, on a never ending search for self-actualization and ‘growth’. Even today personal fulfillment is seen as residing primarily *within* (emphasis his) the individual who is supposed to be self-sufficient and self-satisfied.²¹⁴

Instead of resulting in promised self-sufficiency or self-satisfaction, however, Cushman sees something radically different.

In post-WWII America, the cultural landscape has configured the self...into a particular kind of masterful, bounded self, *the empty self* [emphasis mine]. By this I mean a self that experiences a significant absence of community, tradition, and shared meaning- a self that experiences these social absences and their consequences ‘interiorly’ as a lack of personal conviction and worth; a self that embodies the absences, loneliness, and disappointments of life as a chronic, undifferentiated emotional hunger. It is this undifferentiated hunger that has provided the motivation for the mindless, wasteful consumerism of the late 20th Century.²¹⁵

In this description, we have returned to the self as described by Walker Percy, purchasing a car with the hope that it will “inform my nothingness” only to rather have my nothingness swallow up the car and hunger for something new, something more. What is understood is that this consumerism extends to inter-personal relations. Assuming I should be self-sufficient and self-satisfied and yet experiencing Cushman’s “undif-

²¹² Ibid., 114.

²¹³ Ibid., 93.

²¹⁴ Cushman. 77.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 79.

ferentiated emotional hunger,” I move through encounters with others seeking to satiate my hunger by *taking from* each what I think will fill me and being ever unsatisfied. We here again see Ray Anderson’s conception of sin as fundamentally relationally centered.

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The autonomous self considers God. Before moving to the description of what I believe is a biblical and robust view of personhood drawing upon the work of Buber, Karl Barth, and Miroslav Volf, I would like to briefly consider the implications of the autonomous thinking self as it turns its gaze toward God. If the autonomous thinking self is truly fully constituted interiorly and if, therefore, all encounters are *It* encounters, it follows that encounters with God will be the same. Perhaps God has something to offer to assist in the Lockian project of *remaking* oneself. Perhaps God can contribute to *self*-actualization. Perhaps God can contribute to the alleviation of my “emotional hunger.” If so, then God is *useful to* me. God serves a helpful function in my personal project.

While few would use such straightforward language, it is not difficult to argue that this is the shape that much American Evangelical theology takes on a personal level. Christ’s death on the cross deals with “*my* sin problem.” God fills the “hole in *my* heart.” Even, “I have begun *my* personal relationship with Jesus.” Why did Jesus come? He came to make possible *my* salvation. I am drawn to faith because Jesus meets my emotional needs.

I am not arguing here that there is *no* level of truth in these statements. I am, at this point, just attempting to highlight the marked self and interiorly focused nature of these statements. The point here is to accentuate the way in which biblical concepts and

²¹⁶ Scot McKnight similarly discusses sin in terms of “hyperrelationality,” in *Community of Atonement*.

realities can be shaped so as to be seen through an individualistic, other-objectifying lens without our even noticing. I will return to this point at the conclusion of the paper, but now turn to the positing of an alternative version of personhood.

I-You.

Martin Buber resoundingly rejected any reductionist, materialist orientation in terms of personhood. As discussed earlier, Buber starkly contrasts the I-It dyad with that of I-You. A fair bit has already been said about I-It. I now turn to Buber's alternative, I-You.

In significant ways, Buber strikes me as being akin to deconstructionists like Derrida and Levinas. Buber's extreme rejection of any approach to interactions that turns the other into an It, an object seems comparable to a Derridian rejection of language because it is oppressive and objectifying. Additionally, his insistency on the primacy of the unmediated encounter resonates, particularly with Levinas' idea of visibility.²¹⁷

Buber's entire project is built around the ideas: "Relation is reciprocity"²¹⁸ and "all actual life is encounter,"²¹⁹ or phrased slightly differently, "in the beginning is the

²¹⁷ Where Buber would talk about the I being wholly present and open to the You, Levinas would use the language of being 'visible' to the other and truly "seeing" that other. Where Buber would describe objectifying as It, Levinas would use the language of invisibility; either the I being "invisible" by withholding or masking one's true self or by making the other "invisible" seeing them as a Jew, a Gay, a Black and therefore recusing oneself of obligation to encounter the other as a true other. Corey Beal's book, *Levinas and the Wisdom of Love* (Waco, TX, Baylor University Press, 2007), is a most helpful introduction to Levinas' thought.

²¹⁸ Buber. 58.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 68.

relation.”²²⁰ These phrases appear again and again throughout the book. To Buber, this genuine encounter is not just important; it is imperative to being.

The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter.²²¹ Man becomes an I through a You.²²²

It is as if prior to the genuine encounter, the I is also an It, something diminished or not yet realized. “The I of the basic word I-You *appears* [my emphasis] as a person, becomes conscious of himself as subjectivity. Egos appear as setting themselves apart from other egos. Persons appear by entering into relations with other persons.”²²³ It was earlier mentioned that Aristotle’s teleological principle suggested that persons are in the process of developing or becoming, moving toward an end. Similarly, modern people in the West are no strangers to the idea of striving to *become self-actualized* or to even grow up. I believe Buber is saying something entirely different here. His “becoming an I” bears little resemblance to either Aristotle’s rational progression toward the Ideal or pop psychology’s self-actualization. These all put the locus within the I, Buber places it in the encounter. This is what he means in saying that the I becomes “conscious of himself as subjectivity.” If Descartes argues that, “I Think, therefore I am,” Buber counters with “I relate, therefore I am.”

I am unwilling to grant the power of constituting personhood merely to other humans. What becomes of my I if others refuse to or are unable to interact with me as a

²²⁰ Ibid., 63.

²²¹ Ibid., 58.

²²² Ibid., 82.

²²³ Ibid., 112.

You? Am I contingent upon the magnanimous openness to relation of others? Buber hints strongly at a Thou, which is beyond the human You, to God.

I-We.

Karl Barth uses much of the same ideological landscape and fleshes it out within a Trinitarian perspective.

Even in His divine inner being there is relationship. To be sure, God is One in Himself. But he is not alone. There is in Him a co-existence, co-inherence and reciprocity.... He is in Himself the One who loves eternally, the One who is eternally loved, and eternal love; and in this triunity He is the original and source of every I and Thou...²²⁴

Daniel J. Price notes that Barth refers to this concept as an “analogy of Relations.”²²⁵ In this term Barth is agreeing with Buber in calling relationality that which constitutes personhood, and going further. We fundamentally relate because we are created in the image of a God whose fundamental nature is relation. In relating to God and to others, we are most fully “in God’s image.”

Orthodox theologian John D. Zizioulas, in his widely influential book, *Being as Communion*, argues the same point. Rooting his theology in the Cappadocian Fathers, he believes that the Cappadocians were the first to root personhood to essential being and that this personhood derived its essence from the Triune God. “The mystery of the one God in three persons points to a way of being which precludes individualism and separation (or self-sufficiency and self-existence) as a criterion of Multiplicity... *To be* and *to be*

²²⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/2* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1960), 218.

²²⁵ Daniel Price, “Karl Barth and Object Relations Psychology,” in *On Being a Person*, 163.

in relation become identical.”²²⁶ Stanley Grenz observes that Zizioulas connects this to the postmodern condition as “he points out that the concept of ‘otherness’ stands as perhaps the central existential concern in postmodern society.”²²⁷

Grenz continues, “The fact that from all eternity God pitied and received man...rests on the freedom of God in which there is nothing arbitrary or accidental, but in which God is true to Himself.... God repeats in this relationship *ad extra* a relationship proper to Himself in His inner divine essence.”²²⁸ Phil. 2: 6-11 illustrates this perichoretic relational emphasis, though it is often overlooked. As Jesus “empties himself” and becomes a servant, obedient to the point of death on a cross, he is not acting *accidentally* or in a way unique to himself. This act of self-giving love *is* “proper to Himself [to the Trinitarian nature of God] in His inner divine essence,” as Barth says. This is not just who Jesus is and what Jesus does. This is the inner nature of God. Torrance says, “He [God] is in Himself not other than what he is toward us in his loving and revealing and saving presence in Christ.”²²⁹ As Catherine Mowry LaCugna states it, “God’s way of being in relationship *with us* is in fact God’s personhood,” for “God for us is who God is as God.”²³⁰

²²⁶ Zizioulas, 49 & 88.

²²⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 139.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 218.

²²⁹ T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, on Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1996), 18.

²³⁰ LaCugna, 304-5.

Here Barth, Torrance, and LaCugna offer us something beyond the I-You or even the somewhat oblique I-Thou of Buber. We are given, invited into an I-We encounter. Invited into the perichoretic love of God. Torrance expresses it like this, “Through a relation of mutual indwelling between Christ and us, we are enfolded within the infinite dimensions of the love of God.”²³¹

Reaching out, to give and to receive. Alongside Rublev’s painting of the Trinity at table, Miroslav Volf offers perhaps the most vivid and arresting imagery for understanding perichoretic love in *Exclusion and Embrace*.

Built into the very structure of embrace is a ‘multifinality’ that rests on the systematic underdetermination of outcomes. Though each may open arms toward the other, each has the right to refuse the embrace, to close herself off and stay outside the exchange of mutual giving and receiving. And once the embrace has taken place, nothing can guarantee a particular outcome. Given the structural element of gentleness, we can never know in advance how the reshaping of the self and the other will take place in embrace.²³²

Elsewhere he states, “The embrace is unthinkable without reciprocity; each is both holding and being held by the other, both active and passive.... In an embrace a host is a guest and a guest is a host.”²³³ The images of mutual holding and being held, of reaching out to and receiving embrace, of “reshaping the self” to fit the other are potent and palpable images. In this sense, there is a liminality to personhood, with personhood occurring in the liminal space between I and You. This is the embrace where boundary

²³¹ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 64.

²³² Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 147.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 143.

and differentiation are transcended.²³⁴ They give a picture of what Buber's statement, "there is no I without You, there is no you without I" actually looks like. If identity, selfhood, personhood takes place in the encounter, self is the self in giving/receiving embrace.

Resurrection and participation in the life of God. It is reasonable here to ask, "But, how?! How are we drawn into the perichoretic life of God?" Through the resurrection. Colin Gunton points out that "it must be stressed that redemption is not merely a removal of disorder but a redirection and a liberation: it is a resurrection."²³⁵ N.T. Wright, as has been noted, claims that Jesus ties the parable of the prodigal son and Israel's hope of triumphant return from Exile into his personhood and actions and the culmination of all is resurrection. "He [Jesus] is making a claim, a claim to be the one in and through whom Israel's God is restoring his people.... He believes that [in facing his death], he will be vindicated. And the word for that is 'resurrection.'"²³⁶

According to Moltmann, this vindication has the effect of "taking men and women, with the whole of creation, into the life-stream of the triune God: that is the meaning of creation, reconciliation and glorification."²³⁷ This idea builds upon Irenaeus' view of atonement as serving the function of "recapitulation," reconstituting what it is to

²³⁴ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 56.

²³⁵ Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 150.

²³⁶ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 131.

²³⁷ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 178.

be human through incarnation, death and resurrection.²³⁸ “The resurrected Christ is not only the pattern of the resurrected body that believers will share; he is also the *spiritual vitality who will one day bring about the glorious transformation of the new humanity.*” [emphasis mine]²³⁹

Conclusion. The advantages of stories.

Throughout this project, I have sought to frame everything within the context of story. Scripture is the story of God. Jesus is the lived story of God. Hosea and the parable of the prodigal son are the told stories of God. Our selves, in their relationally constituted natures, are indwelt stories. I believe it to be of the utmost importance that when the people of Israel described their God they did not list off a series of theological concepts. Rather, they said, God was the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”—God known by the stories of what God had done in history, in relationship with people. Leland Ryken argues, “The Bible is in large part a work of imagination. Its most customary way of expressing truth is not the sermon or theological outline but the story, the poem and the vision.”²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Green and Baker, 119-121.

²³⁹ Grenz, 237.

²⁴⁰ Leland Ryken, “Thinking Christianly About Literature” in *The Christian Imagination*, ed. Leland Ryken (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2002), 25.

At the beginning of this section, I asked why Young Life talks at the beginning and end of the week that centered around stories seemed to have a clarity and emotional resonance that is often lacking in the talks that are more theologically driven. As is obvious at this point, I don't think that is accidental, nor would I say that this is just because stories are easy to remember.

I would argue that, in telling stories of Jesus and relating them to our life experiences (our stories), we are speaking in our native tongue. "Tell me a story. These words make up the oldest invitation in the human experience."²⁴¹ We all tell stories. If one were to reduce story to its most basic part, metaphor, we all "live our lives on the basis of inferences we derive via metaphor. Metaphorical thought is unavoidable, ubiquitous and mostly unconscious."²⁴² Sociologist Christian Smith observes, "we are animals that not only make and tell narratives but we are told and made by our narratives."²⁴³ Even our abstract theological statements are, at the root, metaphors. Perhaps the question is not whether or not to tell stories, but whether or not to tell stories well or in ways that come alive.

Earlier I made use of Peter Rollins' differentiation between idols and icons. C. S. Lewis describes the same idea thus, "We demand windows. Literature as Logos is a series of windows, even of doors."²⁴⁴ This is how Frederick Buechner can title his wonder-

²⁴¹ Daniel Taylor, "In Praise of Stories" in *The Christian Imagination*. 407.

²⁴² George Lakoff, and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 273.

²⁴³ Christian Smith, *Moral Believing Animals* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 78.

²⁴⁴ C.S. Lewis, "We Demand Windows" in *The Christian Imagination*. 52.

ful book with both wit and truthfulness, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairytale*.²⁴⁵ This is also how Lewis and Tolkien can argue for the mythopoeic truth of stories, that some truths can *best* be communicated in story, not proposition. What I believe they all are pointing to here is that story enables us to speak truthfully in ways that do not seek to limit truth to our words. “This is a truthful story of the atonement, but it is a door. I could not find words that would pin down the mystery, sum it up for you.” It is why Colin Gunton argues that the biblical metaphors of sacrifice, priest, king, covenant partner, deliverer all converge, overlap and interpenetrate one another in the person and work of Jesus.²⁴⁶

Eighteen years ago, as part of a directed study I did in seminary, I had a phone conversation with pastor and writer Walter Wangerin. In discussing his use of story in “doing theology” he said, “In my years as a Lutheran pastor, I would teach two years of catechism. The first year, I would gather the children every week and do the same thing. I would tell them, ‘Now I am going to tell you the truth,’ and then I would tell them the stories of scripture.” Only after that would he do any “teaching of church doctrine.”

Telos. Earlier, I argued two points. The first was that our presentations of the atonement too often treat it in almost complete isolation from the larger story of which it is a part—God’s revealing and saving story in the life of Israel. It can powerfully tell me that I am saved, forgiven, but it doesn’t tell me much at all about what comes next. “How am I to live? What am I to be about?”

²⁴⁵ Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairytale* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1977).

²⁴⁶ Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*.

I would now argue that this storied and relational approach to the atonement deals with both of these concerns. Not only does it tell me about the past story that Jesus is a part of, but it is a story with a *telos*, an end. While granting the importance of individual experiences of forgiveness (what most of us mean when we say, “to become a Christian”), Hauerwas goes on to say, “such experiences cannot in themselves be substitutes for learning to find the significance of our lives only in God’s ongoing journey with creation.”²⁴⁷ Or, to quote Eugene Peterson, “There is another reason for the appropriateness of story as a major means of bringing us God’s word. Story doesn’t just tell us something and leave us there. *It invites our participation.*”²⁴⁸

In speaking with students in Young Life, over the last several years, I have begun to describe it like this.

Picture this. Imagine yourself flying into Dallas, TX and looking out of the window as you descend. As you look down, you see mile after mile of neighborhoods with beautiful homes and fenced in backyards, most of which have what? A swimming pool.

Most of us picture becoming a Christian, I think, like purchasing our very own “Jesus swimming pool.” It’s ours. We can get in and out when we want. We can invite the neighbors over for a swim, but they’ve got their own pool. We can regulate the temp, the amount of chlorine, how many pool toys we have. Now picture flying into where I live, Portland, OR. As you descend and look out of the right side of the plane, your view is dominated again by water, only this water is very different. It’s the Columbia River.

The Columbia started in the mountains of Canada and pours down through Idaho, Washington, and Oregon and on to the Pacific Ocean. It is massive, powerful, going somewhere.

This is what I believe becoming a Christian really is. Not, building a safe, private Jesus pool in the backyard, but walking over to the river’s edge, taking Jesus’

²⁴⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1983), 33.

²⁴⁸ Eugene Peterson, *The Jesus Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 72.

hand, and jumping in. There's no telling where the river will take you, who you will meet out there, or if it will always be calm and easy.

But you can be sure it is going somewhere. It is joining into the vast story of 'God reconciling the world' that started with the Fall and will continue to the end of time. God is inviting you to join in with His vast story.

Why THIS story? I have attempted to demonstrate that God, through God's revelatory acts and words in scripture, is telling a story of relational reconciliation. While other metaphors help inform that story (there certainly are ways in which legal or victorious combat imagery contribute), I believe I have shown that the story of God, and the story of Jesus' saving work is a particularly relational narrative. This is displayed in the emphasis of covenant relationship throughout scripture. It is evident in the relationality of God's person in the Trinity, his *perichoresis*. Grenz states, "the biblical God longs to reconcile sinful humans, adopting them as children of God, and on the basis of the sexual (relational) character of human existence, to draw reconciled humanity together with all creation into glorious communion with the divine perichoretic life."²⁴⁹

This story of a God desiring and facilitating relational reconciliation also takes sin seriously. It is a sickness unto death, but relational death not legal. To this end, God goes to the ultimate lengths of shame bearing to the point of death to bind God's self with us in our shame and brokenness. In so participating with us in our shame, we are borne with Jesus into the possibility of new relationship through the resurrection.

Finally, it is evidenced in how we experience ourselves in the world. The story that most adequately describes who we are is that we were made for relationships, that we experience the absence of relationships as a kind of death, and that God reconstitutes our personhood through the relationally reconciling work of Jesus on the cross and in the res-

²⁴⁹ Grenz, 312.

urrection. As the autonomous self, in its thinking, mastering, consuming, using personas turns out to be a lie, the relationally contingent self presents itself as the hope of humanity. This is uniquely and ultimately our hope when our contingency is rooted in the One (and Three) that can truly restore and enliven our relational selves, through reconciliation to that One.

To a God who is personal and whose revelation is in history and, therefore, a narrative, nothing better communicates the *inner logic* of the cross better than the narratives of Hosea and the parable of the prodigal son. In them we find sober assessments of our plight, cut off relationally and therefore, de-personed. We also find our inability to respond to this crisis. Most powerfully, however, is the reality that these stories, as is all of scripture, are not ultimately about a cheating spouse, a disrespectful son or a sin ravaged humanity. They are stories about a God who acts, a God who moves in steadfast love, or *hesed*, to accomplish reconciliation. Shame is borne by Hosea and the father, and in doing so, they create an icon, or window, into the guilt/shame bearing of Christ on the cross.

I believe this is a beautiful and exciting time to tell the story of Jesus, of the atonement to people in the postmodern West. Walker Percy ends his discourse on the postmodern self, *Lost in the Cosmos*, with the fictional remnants of human civilization receiving the long awaited “first contact” with alien civilizations. The message asks, in part, “Are you in trouble? If you are in trouble, have you sought help? If you did, did it come? If it did, did you accept it?”²⁵⁰

I believe we have, as we perhaps never have before, reached the end of our rope, the end of our trust in *the self*, and are ready to recognize the help that has come. That

²⁵⁰ Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos*. 262.

help is named, Emmanuel, God with us. I believe we are at last ready to melt into the extended arms of a God who loves like Hosea, like the father. Who cries out to us, “Welcome home, I have missed you so!”

Section 4: Project Description

The project will be a short to medium length book for a popular readership. It will be a narrative-driven presentation of a relational, covenantal approach to atonement theology. The narrative thrust will take the form of short chapters telling stories from scripture that build the case and narratives drawn from my life and ministry, media, and culture at large.

Theological explication, where present, will take a backseat to narrative. The book will be loosely constructed along an arch of Created for Relationality-Loss of Relation-Relations Restored. The reason for this narrative emphasis is both practical and theological. Practically, I believe narrative is an easily accessible mode for all audiences and younger audiences in particular. Theoretically, as has been argued throughout the body of this written statement, I believe narrative to be the primary form through which scripture speaks to us and is, therefore, the primary mode to access revelation. This is because I view God to primarily be revealed *in* history, *in* relationality, therefore, narrative is how we know God.

There will be a certain amount of non-linearity to the project. I intend to interpose quotes, lyrics of songs, and images that contribute to the overall arch of the story, but may or not be specifically tied to the narrative at that point. The goal is to provide multiple “hooks” for the reader to access the ideas discussed in the book without putting too much burden on them the reader to track the argument of the case at every point.

Shane Claiborne's recent book, *Jesus for President*²⁵¹, serves as an illustration of some of what I have in mind conceptually. The book has a linear text driven component. At the same time, the book is interspersed with a multitude of quotes and images, none of which appear in the main text, though they are related themes to the chapters in which they appear. The effect is that it feels as if one is reading two or more books at the same time. One could just read the quotes and look at the images and come away with a pretty clear sense of what the book is about. The layering of text, additional quotes and images have a synergistic effect which is quite striking.

In trying to create something of the same feel, I hope to center this layering effect around two or three cognitive-emotional realities. The pain of relational loss would be one and the joy of reconciliation as another. As mentioned in my main text, Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*, has become a very formative book in my mind. My vision would be to have the image of "embrace" be one that settles into the reader's mind and heart and grows and expands there. In essence, I'd like to boil down the vast storehouse of theology of the atonement to a few basic biblical stories and then boil down these still further to one distilled image-embrace.

²⁵¹ Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus For President: Politics for Ordinary Radicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

Section 5: Project Specifications

Audience: My audience will be two-fold. Older high school and college aged students.

The age group of folks I work with in Young Life and my teaching at George Fox University. The second audience would be those who work with this age demographic.

Goals: This project will jointly serve as a tool to minister the story of God's grace to the reader in a way that is accessible and impacting. Additionally, it will serve as a model to those engaged in ministry of how one could communicate the atonement in non-traditional ways.

Standards of publication: I will need to produce an abstract that I could send to potential publishers. I will need to procure permission to use the various images and quotes, if they are copyrighted. I will need to write at a professional level.

Action plan for completion: I have already written a number of essays that will make up portions of the project. I have also begun gathering quotes and images. I will continue to write and gather in a focused way through July and August of this year, 2008, so as to present a completed product for evaluation on Sept. 1st, 2008.

Appendix A.: Kraus' Comparison of Shame vs. Guilt Approaches to Atonement

Shame (focus upon the self)	Guilt (focus upon the act)
Nature of fault	
Failure to meet self-expectations	Failure to meet legal expectations
Internal Reaction	
Disgrace Fear of abandonment Embarrassment Self-isolation Alienation	Remorse Fear of punishment Condemnation Self-justification Hostility
Social Reaction	
Ridicule and exclusion	Demand for revenge or penalty
Remedy	
Identification and communication with	Propitiation through restitution or penalty
Interpretations of the Cross	
An instrument of shame God's ultimate identification with us in our sinful shame Expresses God's love	An instrument of penalty God's ultimate substitute for our sinful guilt Expresses God's justice ²⁵²

²⁵² Kraus, 204.

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