Touchstone

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RANSOM FOR MANY? THE ATONEMENT TODAY

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Editorial

The expressions "knock on wood" and "touch wood," often accompanied by the corresponding action, have pre-Christian roots. Across many ancient cultures, people would touch wood to ward off evil influence or bad luck. At a later point in evangelized societies, the expressions came to refer to the wood of the cross and the saving death of Christ. *Touchstone* does not aim to promote superstition, but in this number we are "touching wood," for the atonement is our theme.

It may come as a shock to some Christians that there is a sustained critique of traditional teaching about the atonement in the theological world. They know key Bible verses that have sustained their trust in Christ's saving work. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "This is my body given for you . . . This cup is the new covenant in my blood . . ." Isn't it clear that the cross is about love that gives itself to the uttermost? Isn't the cross the unmistakable signature of love divine?

They are not only in the Bible—such assertions of divine love flowing from the cross—but also in some of the church's well known hymns: "My song is love unknown," "Beneath the cross of Jesus," "There is a green hill far away," "Here, O my Lord, I see thee face to face." Not to mention the sublime and intimate communion expressed in "O sacred Head, sore wounded" and "When I survey the wondrous cross." Indeed, "What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest Friend?" How is it possible not to resonate with these portrayals of the cross as expressive of almost inexpressible love? To those who have felt it, the emotion of awed gratitude evoked by the story of the cross and the symbols of bread and wine is indisputably at the core of Christian faith.

And yet . . . there are questions. The response of the heart is one thing. But what if one tries to explain how it is that the death of Christ alters the relationship between God and humanity, bringing about reconciliation? Was God's angry judgment hanging over the head of sinful humanity, a wrath that only the sacrifice of the beloved Son could

placate? Was a blood sacrifice required on the part of a perfect representative of humanity necessary to restore broken relationship?

Faith does seek understanding. So we try to trace in the mystery of an apparently avoidable and cruel death the design of a sovereign Hand. Anselm of Canterbury surmised that the disobedience of sin in Adam constituted an insult to divine justice and the very honour of God. Only an offering of obedience equivalent to, or greater than, the insult could restore God's honour by satisfying divine justice. This obedience was offered by Christ on Golgotha. Calvin followed Anselm's "satisfaction" interpretation, but also made more explicit that Christ actually suffered on the cross, in our place, the divine punishment for sin (the *penal substitution* theory).

In the twentieth century Gustav Aulen lifted up the almost forgotten understanding of the atonement as a victory over forces of evil first proposed by Ignatius of Antioch, and then developed by Gregory of Nyssa as the deception of the devil. Through its sin, humanity had bound itself to the devil in an inescapable way. In taking the cross, Christ became the ransom for humanity, and suffered death in our stead, his divinity hidden like a hook in the humanity of his flesh. In dying, he drew the sting of death and overcame the evil one when his divinity broke forth in the resurrection. The children's fantasy, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* by C.S. Lewis, is a compelling artistic expression of the *Christus victor* theory.

These theories assert that the atonement works an objective change in the relationship between God and humanity. Where, beforehand, enmity existed between God's righteous will (expressed in the law) and sinful human behaviour, now "we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). Does this mean that before the event of Christ's death God was our enemy, bearing wrath toward us? Certainly there are verses of Scripture that make this seem so (e.g., in Rom. 1). However, as Calvin observes, such language is a concession to human weakness, an accommodation to humanity's limited capacity, rousing us to confront our ruinous condition apart from Christ. He quotes Augustine's conviction that the only enmity between God and humanity came from humanity's side, for God "has loved us from before the creation." Thus,

"the work of atonement derives from God's love." God is the subject, not the object, of reconciling sacrifice.

There remains another theory of the atonement, offered by Peter Abelard, writing in the generation after Anselm, and usually called the *moral influence*, or *subjective*, theory. Abelard agreed that an objective change occurs through Christ's death on the cross: there Christ bore the punishment due original sin and this sin was thus remitted. But he then turned attention to the problem of actual, ongoing sin in the human heart and the relationship of humans to a loving God when their proneness to sin is born of contempt for God. Rooting out this sin requires a "subjective" aspect of the atonement, i.e., a change worked in the heart of individuals. Abelard believed that this happens when humans, beholding the costly love of God offered through Christ, are moved to faith and to a moral re-orientation of their lives. Believers respond in love not simply because they recognize how deeply they are loved by God—or because of anything else they might receive from God—but rather because they are enraptured by the vision of the God who is pure Love.

The historic theories of atonement, especially the "objective" ones, continue to present challenges to contemporary Christians. Yet each of them can provoke insight into the mystery of mercy in Jesus Christ. It is helpful to remember that they are just that—*theories*, attempted explanations offered in the face of the believer's experience of reconciliation and liberation. No rational account can ever do justice to the depth of divine engagement with the human condition implied in the event of Jesus Christ.

Challenges remain, of course. Even when it is recognized that the biblical testimony to God's wrath is a concession or accommodation to human frailty, one is still left with the vocabulary of "wrath." One has to be on guard lest this vocabulary obscure the truth that the self-giving culminating in the cross was only possible because of God's initiative of steadfast love (*hesedh*).

Another challenge is that the theories leave the impression that reconciliation is achieved solely through the event of the cross. However, Calvin, for instance, observes that the divine pardon for sin

and the renewal of relationship stems not simply from the crucial event of the cross, but from "the whole life of Christ," "the whole of his obedience." Ultimately, Christian thinking about the atonement rests on the Incarnation, the overall "downward mobility" of Christ.

One of the besetting difficulties of all the theories is that they rely on a definition of sin as hereditarily transmitted from an original ancestor. Today, we may understand "original sin" as an assertion of the universality of sin in human nature, thus accepting the reality, but not the mythic cause, of sin's ubiquity. Thus, one can still recognize "the gravity of sin" (Anselm) and the need for a remedy, but the theories require significant adjustment in their understanding that Christ's death discharges an *inherited* burden of sin.

Another continuing challenge is that the theories seem to regard Christ's willingness to undergo physical suffering as the essential component of his obedience. Does this lead to an inevitable glorification of violent suffering? Does it lead also to the embrace of avoidable suffering as an aspect of the life of discipleship? These questions certainly are before us and need to be addressed. However, the grotesque violence of Roman crucifixion cannot be ignored. These serious questions, then, are pastoral, rather than theological, in nature.

In this number we are privileged to have major articles on the atonement from two theologians—Doug Hall, who once held the McDougald Chair in systematic theology at St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon, and Don Schweitzer, who currently holds it. Biblical scholar Christian Eberhart offers an overview of reconciliation in the New Testament. United Church Moderator Gary Paterson has contributed a Good Friday sermon, and former moderator Lois Wilson speaks from the heart about "Four Funerals and a Question." In our profile, Alan Davies recalls the magisterial influence of New Testament scholar G.B. Caird, whom he first encountered in his divinity studies at McGill. The usual five book reviews round out this number. May you find stimulus in it for your thinking, teaching and preaching.

Peter Wyatt

UNDERSTANDING SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT IN SPATIAL TERMS

by Don Schweitzer

Substitutionary theories of atonement describe Jesus as dying in the place of others. Jesus' death is interpreted as payment of the debt for sin, or suffering the punishment of sinners. This averts God's wrath, effects reconciliation between God and sinners, and so brings salvation to those who believe in Jesus. These theories have been prevalent in many Western churches for centuries. Over the past forty years they have been sharply criticized in the following ways.

First, it is alleged that they portray God as inherently violent and immoral, demanding the suffering and death of an innocent victim in order to obtain God's forgiveness of humanity's sins. Second, if Jesus is understood as the Son of God, and God the Father as the first "person" of the Trinity, the latter appears as a divine child abuser whose actions seem to justify abuse and violent punishment of spouses and children. Moreover, Jesus' complicity in his death models acceptance of abuse that should be resisted. Third, much of the New Testament does not understand Jesus' death to have saving significance by satisfying God's wrath in this way. Fourth, this model misconstrues God as needing to be reconciled to sinners, when a central message of Scripture is that God never ceases to love us regardless of our sin. Jesus died to reconcile us to God, not God to us. Fifth, this model posits a conflict in the Godhead between God's love represented by Jesus, and God's justice associated with the first person of the Trinity. This seems to contradict the Trinity's essential unity. Sixth, the concept of vicarious substitution, that Jesus' death atones for humanity's sin, is said no longer to be convincing or coherent, since it is not evident to reason that the virtuous action of one can atone for the sin of another.

While some have made these criticisms, others have argued that certain aspects of substitutionary theories of atonement remain efficacious in important ways.[1] They can be pastorally very powerful.

[1] Lisa Sowle Cahill, "*Quaestio Disputata*—The Atonement Paradigm: Does It Still Have

They explain how a person's sin is forgiven and one is reconciled to God in a way that takes seriously the burden of guilt or the reality of social stigma. This model speaks not only to guilt, but also to many forms of spoiled identity, enabling people who cannot accept themselves, who suffer violence or misfortune, denigration or lack of recognition, to find in God a source of acceptance, dignity and self-worth. Finally, this kind of atonement theory can provide a powerful moral source for the reconciliation of individuals, communities and peoples who have been in conflict with one another. As God through Jesus has accepted us, despite our sin, so we should forgive and accept others who have sinned against us, and be open to examining our complicity in sin.

What follows is an examination of some basic considerations of substitutionary atonement, including the crucial interpretation of Romans 3:25. We will then examine how substitutionary atonement has been re-thought in spatial terms, thereby avoiding some of the critiqued dangers while retaining its powerful meanings, and showing how it addresses more than guilt. Finally we will examine aspects of its public relevance in Canada today.

Some Basic Considerations of Substitutionary Atonement

A first basic consideration of substitutionary atonement is that sin complicates our moral identities. As sinners we are both loved and judged by God. God's love judges and condemns sin. If it didn't, it wouldn't be love, which passionately desires what is good. God's forgiveness presupposes God's judgment. This judgment is an expression of God's love designed to bring us back to God and closer to who we should be. God does not turn away from sinners, but judges and seeks to save us.

Second, sin spoils our identity regardless of the good we do and in ways we cannot undo. Guilt is a stain or defilement that the guilty cannot remove themselves. William Shakespeare depicted this in the guilt-ridden figure of Lady MacBeth vainly trying to wash the imagined

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Explanatory Value?" *Theological Studies* 68 (2007), 418-432; JoAnne Marie Terrell, "Our Mothers' Gardens: Rethinking Sacrifice," in *Cross Examinations*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 33-49.

blood of murdered King Duncan from her hands.[2] Key to reconciliation with God, others and ourselves is forgiveness from those we have wronged. But peoples' identities are damaged by more than their own sin. Suffering can produce a sense of godforsakenness. Social marginalization or denigration can leave deep and lasting wounds. Substitutionary theories of atonement address this serious psychological damage. Evil "as 'the power of sin' crosses moral bounds, spanning the guilt of the perpetrators who have become the slaves of evil, and the suffering of those who have become evil's victims."[3] The cross of the risen Christ liberates sinners and victims from this malign power.

Third, substitutionary atonement theories offer second-order readings of Jesus' cross. Primary-order readings, such as those found in Acts 2:23-24, interpret Jesus' death as the killing of a prophet faithful to God. Second-order readings arise from reflection on Jesus' death in light of his resurrection. These view Jesus' crucifixion not only as something done to him, but also as an event in which God in Jesus underwent something for humanity's salvation. Here the cross images the cost of discipleship, but also something saving in its own right, ultimately empowering discipleship. It symbolizes human sin and violence that must be opposed, and also God's forgiveness of the guilty and presence with the suffering.[4] Reflection on what Jesus' resurrection meant for his person triggered a process of doctrinal development that led eventually to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity and the understanding of Jesus framed in the Chalcedonian Definition as fully human and fully divine, the two natures united without confusion in his person. These doctrines are presuppositions of substitutionary theories of atonement like Anselm's, or recent revised versions like those of Marilyn McCord Adams or Kathryn Tanner.[5]

A danger of second-order readings of the cross is that they can

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[2] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of MacBeth*, Act V, Scene 1.
[3] Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 61.
[4] Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006), 97.
[5] Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 108, 274-275; Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 252. Tanner describes hers as an "incarnational model of the atonement." Ibid., 258.

exercise a distorting influence on the first-order events of Jesus' public ministry and resurrection. Christian theology must always remember the contradiction between the two and how Jesus' resurrection brings hope for the final overcoming of all the suffering, evil and sin that the cross represents. But because Jesus' resurrection vindicated and exalted his person, it also revealed his divine identity.[6] The one who died is the incarnate Word. As Jesus' death resulted from his faithfulness, it expressed his decisive "yes" to God, and, together with his resurrection, God's irrevocable "yes" to humanity and all creation.

Some Christians discard or ignore the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, preferring instead to speak of Jesus as he can be known through historical inquiry, understanding him as a prophetic figure. But this understanding alone does not do justice to the claim implicit in Jesus' ministry that he was playing a unique and decisive role in salvation history. Nor can it account for the experience of salvation received through faith in him. It is also questionable whether it can sustain a self-critical commitment to Jesus' teaching, example and practices. The doctrine of the Trinity and the Chalcedonian Definition, while conceptually challenging, express "hard won insights"[7] of the Christian faith tradition. The quest for the historical Jesus can give this kind of christology historical concreteness, but cannot replace it.

There is no doubt that Jesus was human. Yet the grace Christians experience in Jesus is such that it must have come from beyond history, through a unique initiative of God.[8] So Christians also have described him as fully divine. This does not mean that Jesus was superhuman, possessing omniscience, etc., as some medieval theologians claimed. What the Chalcedonian Definition says is that in Jesus both the mystery of what it means to be fully human and the nature of God's divinity have been decisively revealed. Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God created the basis of a new future for humanity and creation.

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[6] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 170-171.

[7] Elizabeth Johnson, "Jesus, Wisdom of God," *Ephemerides Theologiae Louvaniensis* 61 (1985), 263.

[8] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith,* eds. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 365.

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God's being is dynamic, able to enter history in a new way in the Incarnation, to create a new reality and new possibilities within history. The Chalcedonian Definition describes this new reality as the unity of God and creation that occurred in the person of Jesus Christ. Here creation's alienation from God was overcome in principle. The uniting of divine and human natures in the one person of Jesus Christ is the essence of the atonement.[9] Jesus is the reign of God in person. His resurrection promises a future in which all of creation will be one with God.

A final consideration is the need to understand how atonement has been effected in relation to guilt, and how God's love speaks to spoiled identities. Substitutionary theories of atonement try to explain how this happened through Jesus' death. Other theories of atonement express different aspects of Jesus' saving significance. Each type expresses a different way by which Jesus saves people from different kinds of sin, suffering and evil. The one essence of the atonement, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, works in various ways. The being and actions of Jesus that effect atonement are an expression of the divine life. What God does in Jesus Christ is a repetition in time and space of God's eternal being. The ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are a further communication in history of God's self-diffusive love. This self-diffusive love created the dynamic, lived reality of the unity of God and humanity in Jesus' person. Substitutionary theories of atonement express one meaning of the multi-faceted lived reality of Jesus' person by focusing on the one aspect of his death on the cross.

Romans 3:25

Romans 3:25 is a key passage for substitutionary theories of atonement. Here Paul uses a Greek term "*hilasterion*," sometimes translated as "expiation" or "place of atonement,"[10] to articulate what for him is a

[9] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 34-36.

[10] Christian Eberhart, in Christian Eberhart and Don Schweitzer, "Did Paul See the Saving Significance of Jesus' Death as Resulting from Divine Violence? Dialogical Reflections on Romans 3:25," *Consensus* 34/1 (2012), 3, http://www.consensusjournal.ca/stud-obsv34-1.html.

central understanding of the saving significance of Jesus' death. "*Hilasterion*" also may be understood as "mercy seat" or "atonement cover," a concept taken from Jewish "cultic atonement tradition,"[11] and used in an early Christian tradition to interpret Jesus' death. Paul employs this early tradition to describe how the death of Jesus has created a new possibility for people whose sin has spoiled their identities.

For Anselm, Jesus' death pays the infinite debt owed by sinners to God's honour. For Calvin, in dying on the cross, Jesus suffers the punishment for our sins. Romans 3:25 does not support such theories.[12] Instead the term "mercy seat" is used here to describe the crucified Christ "as the place of the presence of God."[13] The cross symbolizes the experience of God's absence that results from sin. In dying on the cross Christ brings the presence of God into this place symbolic of God's absence. As the new mercy seat or place of atonement, Christ publicly displays the presence of God, making it manifest precisely where God is experienced as absent. Through undergoing death on the cross Jesus brings God's presence into the place of those guilty, suffering, condemned, denigrated, despised and rejected. Christ's death is an expiation in that it overcomes human estrangement from God. However, its goal is not to satisfy God's wrath, for it is the love of God that bridges the distance between God and sinners, embracing the guilty despite their undeserving. Here the love of God reaches out to embrace the suffering and socially rejected.

The cross is the culmination of one trajectory of the Incarnation, that of Jesus standing "in solidarity with sinful humanity," that begins with his baptism.[14] In Jesus God comes to dwell amongst people, establishing a decisive solidarity with humanity, not in humanity's greatness and glory, but in human suffering, despair, guilt and alienation.

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[11] Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 467n48.
[12] Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 97.
[13] Joseph Fitzmeyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 350.
[14] M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 44.

God was in Christ, and on the cross became broken, that humanity and creation might become whole. From this perspective the death of Jesus is an assertion of God's love in the face of sin, evil, suffering and death. Here God's love refuses to be turned away from God's people and creation. On the cross the nature and extent of God's love become publicly displayed.

Romans 3:25 is not the only biblical passage on which theories of substitutionary atonement draw. But traditional versions of this theory are only half-correct as interpretations of this central Pauline passage. They correctly see that Paul understood God to have acted unilaterally in a new way through Jesus' death to reconcile humanity. But they incorrectly interpret this death as required to pay a debt or suffer a punishment. There is not space here to explore other biblical passages that have been used as a basis for substitutionary theories of atonement.[15] Instead, we move on to how the meaning Paul sees here in Jesus' death can be understood in spatial terms.

A spatial mechanism

Every atonement theory uses an explanatory "mechanism"[16] to articulate how Jesus' death reconciles sinners to God. In Romans 3:25, Paul uses a Jewish cultic concept to do this. In recent years, in light of criticisms of substitutionary theories of atonement noted earlier, some theologians have used spatial terms to explain how Jesus' death overcomes people's alienation from God. For instance, William Placher describes guilt as "a spiritual, psychological space of pain and anguish and sense of separation from God."[17] In dying on the cross, Jesus symbolically enters this "space." He does not die as a substitute for sinners, but rather in solidarity with them. His suffering does not pay a penalty or discharge a debt. There is nothing saving about Jesus' suffering and death in

[15] Some biblical passages may interpret Jesus' death as his acceptance of divinely willed punishment as a substitute for sinners. For a study arguing against this, see Darrin Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice and Peace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 112-327.

[16] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 250.

[17] William Placher, *Jesus the Savior* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 141.

themselves.[18] What is saving is that by dying on the cross, Jesus brings God's presence into the places it represents. Human institutions and sinful humanity, not God, required Jesus' death. Jesus died because he was faithful to his proclamation of God's love. But in light of Jesus' resurrection, one can say that, paradoxically, precisely through his death, Jesus put that love into effect in a decisive way. In Jesus' death, God took upon God's self the suffering, rejection and guilt that humanity endures. Through Jesus' cross God came to be with the guilty, despite their sin. If God's love is "to reach humanity suffering under the forces of sin and death, the Word must assume, become one with, a life of that sort,"[19] as Jesus did on the cross. This "is a price that God, in love, is willing to pay"[20] to overcome the separation sin creates between humanity and God.

The cross also symbolizes suffering and denigration, the experience of godforsakenness, and the violence and humiliation suffered by the marginalized and oppressed. In light of Jesus' resurrection, his cross "is the most empowering symbol of God's loving solidarity with the 'least of these,' the unwanted in society, who suffer daily from great injustices."[21] It reveals that God "participates in our pain";[22] that God is present with those who experience godforsakenness.

The use of spatial terms to articulate how Jesus' death brings God's forgiveness to sinners, and God's presence to the suffering and rejected, changes the meaning of the cross. It no longer means that Jesus died in substitution for us or others. It now means that Jesus died in solidarity with all who are alienated from God or who suffer. Regardless of how one's identity is spoiled, why one finds one's self unacceptable or how one suffers a lack of acceptance, one can look at the crucified Christ and know that Jesus shared one's condition and is with one. This can mediate a sense of joy in life and the courage to love oneself and

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[18] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 251-252.
[19] Ibid., 257.
[20] Placher, *Jesus the Savior*, 141.
[21] James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 156.
[22] Moltmann, *In the End—The Beginning*, 70.

others, despite all that spoils one's identity.[23] It can bring peace in the midst of suffering and in spite of guilt.

Broader and Deeper

What is the public relevance in Canada today of this saving significance of Jesus' cross? From roughly 1965 to 1975 a wave of liberalization swept across Canada, transforming government policies[24] and church teachings from assimilationist goals to liberal ideals of freedom and equality. Church and state began to promote a broad range of human rights. This led to significant gains, in principle, for First Nations peoples in terms of self-government, for increased autonomy for Quebec and recognition of its distinctiveness, for the promotion of multiculturalism,[25] for women's rights, and, in subsequent decades, for the rights of gays, lesbians and transgendered people. However, though theoretically committed to extending freedoms and enhancing the well-being of all, in practice, the liberal state has provided such rights, protection and freedoms to some while not extending them to others, particularly non-whites and the poor.[26]

A horrific example of this limited scope in Canada is presented in *Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry*.[27] This report examines the disappearances and murders of women from Vancouver's downtown east side and police responses to them. It concludes that a "systematic bias against the women who went missing . . . contributed to the critical police failures"[28] in investigating their

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[23] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1974), 335.

[24] Will Kymlicka, "Ethnocultural Diversity in a Liberal State: Making Sense of the Canadian Model(s)," in *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada: The Art of the State,* Vol. III, ed. Keith Banting, Thomas Courchene and Leslie Seidle (Montreal: The Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2007), 53-54.

[25] Ibid., 43-52.

[26] Mark Lewis Taylor, *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 74-76.

[27] Wally Oppal, Commissioner, *Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry*, *Executive Summary* (British Columbia: Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, 2012), http://www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Forsaken-ES-web-RGB.pdf (accessed Feb. 24, 2012).

[28] Ibid., 94.

disappearances. This bias was not simply a failing of the police, but reflects "broader patterns of systemic discrimination within Canadian society . . . reinforced by the political and public indifference to the plight of the marginalized female victims."[29] Such public indifference made these women vulnerable to victimization and shaped the inadequacy of police responses to their disappearances.[30] It was no accident that Aboriginal women were over-represented amongst the missing and murdered. The rights and freedoms fostered by the liberal state often fail to benefit them.

Jesus' cross relates to this in two ways. First, by placing human action within a transcendent dimension, Christian faith creates the possibility of people moving through forgiveness to a moral space which makes possible a renewed community with those who wronged them.[31] It can also enable people who have wronged others to make a corresponding move through repentance, as in the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt from the German Protestant Church Council after World War II.[32] In the notion of atonement discussed above, human actions are framed by God's action in Christ. Through Christ, one's identity is located in God and no longer needs to be asserted over against the claims of others. It no longer depends upon one's own performance. The identities of others are also located through Christ in God. As God has accepted them in Christ, we should too. This creates a moral space of reconciliation towards which one can move, through forgiveness or repentance.

Initially, many Canadians blamed the disappearances of the missing and murdered women on their choice of high-risk lifestyles. The saving significance of Jesus' cross, outlined above, enables Christians indicted by this report to respond differently. Instead of blaming these women for their fate, it can empower us to admit our guilt in relation to their disappearance. It can empower us to recognize and protest our

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 16.
[31] Charles Taylor, "Perils of Moralism," in *Theology and Public Philosophy*, ed. Kenneth Grasso and Cecilia Castillo (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 4.
[32] Alan Davies, *The Crucified Nation* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 60.

society's failure to extend concerns for rights, freedom and protection to those of low income, social status and Aboriginal ancestry, particularly to women like those who went missing in Vancouver.

The fate of these women points to another meaning of the cross. On the cross Jesus enters not only into the place of the guilty, but also into places of suffering and abandonment, bringing God to the godforsaken.[33] James Cone writes that when "we see the crucifixion as a first-century lynching, we are confronted by the re-enactment of Christ's sufferings"[34] in the lynching of African Americans. Similarly, the fate of these women interprets the meaning of the cross for Christians in Canada today. Their fate and that of others like them represents the cross in the present. Linking their fate to Jesus' death illumines the concrete historical reality of Jesus' cross as a place of exclusion, vulnerability and expendability, and requires Christians to see these women in a new light. Christ was with them in their suffering. Jesus' cross directs Christians to see them as those he came to free, as those with whom he stands, and to whom he calls Christians in solidarity. In this way the cross can broaden and deepen liberal notions of freedom and well-being so that they include the marginalized, oppressed and abandoned.[35] By enabling people to renounce a claim to be right without abandoning concern for justice, and by extending our horizons of concern, Jesus' cross empowers us to acknowledge our society's failings and prophetically critique its exclusions.

Conclusion

Rethinking substitutionary atonement in spatial terms meets many criticisms while still expressing its pastoral truths. Jesus' cross was not a punishment willed by God, but a decisive expression of God's love. This re-conceptualization takes seriously the pain of exclusion, suffering and guilt. It shows how Jesus' death brings God's presence, and thus peace and hope, into its midst.

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[33] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 46.
[34] Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 161.
[35] Taylor, *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right*, 97-102.

"WE ARE NOT ALONE": REFLECTIONS ON "ATONEMENT"

by Douglas John Hall

> *. . . We proclaim Christ crucified,*
> *a stumbling block to the proudly religious,*
> *foolishness to the proudly rational . . .* [1]

The Argument

Christian faith, which is not to be equated with the Christian religion, is what it is because it finds in the person and work of Jesus Christ a core of meaning that gives it purpose, courage for life here and now, and hope for the future. To the chagrin of both "high" religion and "high" philosophy, faith discerns this meaning, not *despite* but *because of* the crucifixion of Jesus, illumined by the testimony of the Spirit of the risen Christ.

The "Atonement," as the discernment of this meaning has usually been called in the English-speaking world since the sixteenth century,[2] depends for its apologetic appeal on the church's imaginative grasp, and engagement, of the dominant *problematique* of humankind in specific historical contexts. Soteriology is thus the most *contextually determined* dimension of christological doctrine. At the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon the early Christian church "defined" (so far as it could!) the person of the Christ (christology in the more explicit sense); but—wisely, perhaps even providentially—no such official attempt at definition has been undertaken concerning the character of Christ's salvific work *pro nobis*. Soteriological understandings *evolved*, and they evolved quite naturally in relation to the perceived spiritual instabilities of the socio-historical contexts that their authors sought to address; for they were, after all, "answers" that Christians tried to give to the human "question," "How can we be saved from the predicament in which we find ourselves?" And that "predicament," though universal in scope, varies from age to age, and from place to place, as to its particulars.

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[1] 1 Corinthians 1: 23 (revised by D. J. Hall in light of the Holocaust).

[2] It was introduced by Matthew Tyndale, between 1525-35, in his translation of Romans 5:11 (see KJV); later English versions use "reconciliation."

During the classical period of Western civilization, and again during the Middle Ages and early Reformation, theologians produced credible accounts of the meaning of the crucifixion—credible insofar as they could and did speak to the two quite different spiritual crises of these ages. In the modern period, while the centrality of Jesus has been tenuously sustained through the recitation and recall of Jesus' life and teaching, the church has rarely succeeded in offering an existentially arresting soteriology. I shall argue that the main reason for this failure, beyond the entrenched nature of the "Latin" theory of atonement in Western Christendom, lies in the failure of the established churches to contemplate the depths of the anxiety-type which predominates in the modern and contemporary period. There can be no "gospel," however, unless that existential darkness is entered, chartered and confronted. Thus, lacking an effective soteriology, Christianity in the modern period tended gradually (though with exceptions) to devolve into traditionalism, pious sentimentality ("spirituality"?) and moralistic activism.

The challenge to Christian thought today, therefore, is whether as communities of faith we can acquire both the spiritual courage and the theological imagination that is needed to open ourselves to the deepest plight of contemporary humankind, and to rethink the gospel of the cross in response to that socio-psychic *impasse*. In our reduced, dis-established and often dispirited[3] state as communities of faith, are we perhaps in a better position to comprehend humanity's real and present spiritual crisis than in the past, when our established status allowed us to avoid intellectual struggle and simply present yesterday's religious "answers" as if they were adequate responses to today's human questions?

This, in brief, is the direction I shall take in this short essay.[4] I shall begin by explicating what I mean by the "imaginative engagement" of the human condition on the part of Christian theologians at work in

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[3] See my *Waiting for Gospel: An Appeal to the Dispirited Remnants of Protestant "Establishment"* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).

[4] Those who wish to pursue my thought on the subject at greater length are invited to consult *Professing the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context,* Part III (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 363-548.

the classical and medieval periods; then I shall explore reasons why it has been so difficult for Christians to achieve contact with those most caught up in the anxieties of modernity. Finally I shall suggest some ways in which we might move towards a constructive understanding of the meaning of the cross of Christ for today.

Imaginative Engagement

In his most popular book, Paul Tillich delineates three *types* of human anxiety.[5] It is important to emphasize that these are to be considered "types": there are many variations on each of the three themes. All three types, Tillich insisted, are present *throughout* human history, and in all our lives.

Yet one type of anxiety tends to dominate an age; in fact, when we speak of an age or epoch we do so, in part, because the period in question manifests a certain preoccupation with one type of anxiety. Tillich is not attempting a sociology or psychology of history, and he has no interest at all in statistics. It would be ridiculous to think that everyone in an historical epoch suffers from the same psychic uncertainty; nevertheless, thinkers are able, through historical and other modes of research and reflection, not least of all the arts, to perceive or intuit the most salient forebodings of an epoch, and to trace, to some extent, both the causes of these often deeply repressed neuroses, and the attempts of individuals and societies to assuage them.

The first anxiety-type Tillich names is *the anxiety of fate and death.* Fate—destiny—is not a common theme in contemporary Western discourse, where our every other word is freedom. As for death, youth-obsessed "AmeriCana" has acquired great expertise at repressing it, postponing it and camouflaging it. The sick and dying are sequestered in hospitals and "homes." But the classical period of Western civilization was frankly and unrelievedly preoccupied with fate and death. Why wouldn't it be? This anxiety coloured the lives of most, both rich and

[5] *The Courage to Be* (Yale University Press, 1952). There are, of course, other ways of designating the core dilemmas of the human spirit, but Tillich's analysis has rightly, I think, captured the imagination of many, both Christian and secular, who attempt today to comprehend the evolution of Western civilization.

poor. Were you born into a patrician family? Lucky for you!—maybe. Were you born a slave? Don't depend on "upward mobility"! Have you learned any trade, or received any education at all? If not, you could always become a galley slave or a beggar. And how long, in any case, could you count on being healthy?—how many years were ahead of you? Perhaps seventeen? Or thirty-five, if you're fortunate?

It is not accidental therefore that the first soteriological musings to gain popular appeal were doctrinal reflections, analogies and metaphors emphasizing the work of the Christ as liberator from the "powers and principalities" (Col. 1:16) by which human beings are enthralled: despair, the demonic and death. It is true, fantastic ideas were put forward: the Christ as a ransom to the devil, his humanity a foil concealing the steely hook of his divinity, and so forth. St George and the dragon, depicted on nearly every European fountain, is an artistic representation of this soteriology. But make no mistake: what all these images were saying, and in the only way that many people could understand them, was that, because of God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ, human beings need no longer languish under the dehumanizing constraints of negating powers, whether mundane or supra-mundane. The spiritualization of these redemptive ideas, which of course occurred, could not forever hide their political—indeed their revolutionary—connotations. Contemporary liberation theology in its several forms is the natural inheritor of these thoughts; and wherever today there are people who suffer great oppression, the gospel of freedom from "the anxiety of fate and death" speaks to them.

That anxiety is not, however, the prevailing *Angst* of most who will read these words, nor of the classes and races that they/we represent. To be sure, there are persons and whole categories of persons who feel, and who are, trapped in circumstances over which they have little or no control. In some ways we are *all* victims, or will become such: we are all going to die, for one thing! But when affluent Western people play the victim's role, they are singularly unconvincing. And it always has seemed to me the most contrived and convoluted soteriology is one that, borrowing as usual from the struggles of others, tries to figure out ways of applying liberation theology also to us, the relatively

rich and powerful. Anything to avoid delving into the anxiety by which our "First World" societies actually are plagued!

Gustav Aulen, in his seminal study, *Christus Victor*,[6] called this most ancient (rescue or ransom) soteriology the *classical* theory of the Atonement, and he insisted that it is not only the most biblically-based of the three types, but also the characteristic soteriology of Luther's Reformation.[7] Aulen's little book has a strongly polemical aura, for he was writing over against the soteriology that had for centuries captured the Christian West (though not the Orthodox East)—namely the "Latin" or "Substitutionary" theory of the atonement.

This theory, the ascendancy of which parallels in many ways the establishment of Christianity from the fourth century onwards, was given definitive expression[8] by the brilliant medieval scholar and monk, Anselm, who, in the wake of the Norman Conquest, became archbishop of Canterbury. As such, his theory was addressed quite obviously to the *second* of Tillich's anxiety-types: *the anxiety of guilt and condemnation.* God, Anselm argued, is both holy and just; humanity is infinitely guilty because it is neither; human sin and guilt must be *atoned* for; but guilty humankind cannot make satisfaction; God therefore must become human and make, on humanity's behalf, an offering through death greater than the sin of humanity, thus saving believers from eternal condemnation.

So profoundly ingrained in the theology and piety of Western Christendom is this view of the meaning of the cross that, for the vast majority of Western Christians *that* is what "the Atonement" means. Period. In its crassest forms, it colours especially the most conservative expressions of the Christian religion in North America. Belief in the atonement as "substitutionary satisfaction" was one of the five so-called "fundamentals" of the late nineteenth century Niagara Conferences of

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[6] *Christus Victor*: *An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (London: S.P.C.K., 1953).

[7] Not Calvin's. Calvin's "penal" theory of the atonement, developed in his *Institutes* (II.xvi) is a refinement of the Anselmic satisfaction concept.

[8] *Cur Deus Homo* (*Why* [*did*] *God* [*become*] *Man*?) was written 1097-98 in direct opposition to the ransom (*Christus Victor*) theory.

what came to be "the Christian Right." But Anselm's soteriology, in Calvinistic, Pietistic and other modifications on the theme, informs the spirituality, liturgy, hymnody and biblical interpretation of many Christians, including liberal and moderate Protestants who would certainly deny any fundamentalist leanings. Indeed, so ubiquitous is this "Latin" theory that the very word "atonement," which came into use after Anselm's influential theory had been almost official dogma for four centuries, functions as a code-word for the Latin theory.

There are some very practical—indeed, frankly ecclesio-political—reasons why this satisfaction soteriology has persisted in the West. For if eternal damnation is the destiny of sinful, fallen humankind, and the only means of averting it is membership in the church and regular participation in its sacraments, then the *power* of the church is assured. Such a scenario is in fact a veritable invitation to religious monopolism, and Christendom—whether in Catholic or Protestant forms—has not been slow in availing itself of this advantage. Today one has to ask in all seriousness how permanently the biblical idea of "sin" has been ruined by the church's self-serving need to keep alive human consciousness of guilt (e.g., sexual guilt) and the fear of its temporal and eternal consequences—earthly and/or heavenly condemnation.

It would be naïve to discount the reality of "the anxiety of guilt and condemnation," however, just because it has been so egregiously misused. This anxiety too belongs to the human condition. Who among the "good" middle class church-goers of today can stand before the poor and marginalized of the earth and not feel at least some twinge of guilt? I write as a pensioner, emeritus professor of a great university, owner of a (modest but stable) house, a survivor (thanks to Canadian Medicare) of two kinds of cancer, etc.—in short, I belong to the possessing peoples of the planet; therefore I cannot write, or speak, or think as one guiltless! Moreover, as Franz Kafka and Sigmund Freud have made graphic for my generation,[9] guilt and condemnation, however "unreasonable," belong mysteriously to the subconscious of "the rational animal." A man or woman wholly unconscious of the gnawing guilt of "the survivor"

[9] Read again Kafka's *The Trial.*

must be judged naïve, or even possibly a fool.

Failing to Connect

But, while neither of these two anxiety types, nor the soteriologies that address them, can be ignored—even in the economically successful societies of the planet—it is clearly Tillich's third type that dominates in our affluent context. Perhaps ironically, the social alleviation of the first two anxiety-types has brought about a situation in which the third type is allowed full sway! Medicine and psychology have greatly lessened the impact of the anxiety of fate and death; guilt and condemnation have been relativized by the ascendancy of a more sympathetic and liberal (including liberal Christian) assessment of the human condition. The secularized West, having swept away the vindictive gods and tormenting demons of myth and religion (cf. Matt. 12:45), has unwittingly left the human psyche open to the most insidious anxiety of all: *the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness.* An empty soul is much more menacing than a guilty or an entrapped one.

This anxiety is, of course, no stranger to human history. It is present in all ancient cultures, including the tradition of Jerusalem. Indeed, biblical thought is surprisingly aware of this anxiety, and not only in the so-called "pessimistic" wisdom literature, where we can read, for example, such lines as these:

> All things are wearisome,
> More than one can express;
> The eye is not satisfied with seeing,
> Or the ear with hearing . . .
> There is nothing new under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 1:8-9)

Not many sermons have been preached on *that* text—or countless others like it, including Jesus' reverberating cry of abandonment from the cross.

But this age-old anxiety, the articulation of which in the past has usually been left to poets (Shakespeare), philosophers (Schopenhauer) and musicians (Tchaikovsky), is in our time the daily diet of millions.

One in every four Canadians, we are told, is clinically depressed. Recent concern has been engendered throughout our society by the frequency of profound despondency in adolescents, too often leading to suicide. Many high school students are found "crying" over the futureless-ness they darkly sense. Everyone is scandalized by the American gun-culture, but few ask why, in Barack Obama's yes-we-can America, life can appear so valueless as to promulgate laws protecting the right quickly to obliterate life. In our post-everything culture, the sensitive young fear that the future is impossible, while the weary old suspect that the past didn't matter.

Christianity has manifested a conspicuous reluctance to engage this anxiety-type soteriologically. There is, of course, no shortage of peace-of-mind religion, but this rarely achieves any psychological or theological depth; it remains chiefly in the mode of pastoral encouragement and exhortation—based, often enough, on Jesus' "Be not anxious . . ." But exhortation is not gospel. Even when it is well done, exhortation remains in the mood of the imperative. The anxious one, caught in the throes of what Luther called *Anfechtung*—a sense of utter abandonment, hopelessness, *acedia*—hears every admonition to tranquility of spirit as a taunt, even when it comes from Jesus! The experience of profound anxiety, as distinct from bourgeois "concern," begs for a new possibility in which life beyond anxiety may be contemplated as possibility. In both the classical and Latin atonement theologies, such a new situation is offered: the powers and principalities have been beaten, the dragon slain (classical); the infinite weight of guilt[10] has been lifted, and forgiveness granted (Latin). An anxiety that despairs of the very purpose of existence, and finds "nothing new under the sun," can only be comforted by the prospect of there being, after all, something new!

Among the many reasons why Christians have failed to address the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness soteriologically, the most

[10]One of the most evocative sentences in Christian writings on the atonement is Anselm's rejoinder to his rhetorical dialogue partner, Boso, who thinks that God might simply *declare* forgiveness. "*Nondum considerasti quanti ponderis sit peccatum,*" says Anselm: "You have not considered the sheer weight of sin."

salient, I suspect, is this: it is very hard for those living within a framework of *meaning* (or professing to do so) to entertain the prospect of meaninglessness, or for those who are (or wish to seem) hopeful sympathetically to comprehend the experience of despair (*de* +*spes*=negation of hope). Religious belief insulates most Christians from asking, openly and seriously, whether history might indeed be "a tale told by an idiot . . . signifying *nothing.*" For the majority of church-folk, the church, with its affirmation of belief in a providential God, its spiritual placidity, and its warm communality, exists precisely as a bulwark *against* temptations to fall prey to such negations. The anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness is the stealthiest of human anxiety-types, surely, just *because* it seems so inevitably nihilistic, so blatantly a-theistic![11] No doubt it was just for this reason that the book of Ecclesiastes barely made it into the canon of the Old Testament. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and a striving after wind!" Can faith condone the entertainment of such bleak thoughts*?* Is it not precisely that kind of "temptation" from which we ask God to "deliver us"?

What an honest theology must ask, however, is whether a faith that fears *this* temptation is really more credulity than faith. Far from being certitude about the goodness and purposefulness of life, biblical faith is a continuous dialogue with its antithesis. Faith without doubt (said Unamuno) "is dead faith."[12] True faith in biblical terms is always some variation on this theme: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24, KJV). If this is so, then a Christianity that insulates believers from the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness must be regarded with more than a little skepticism. With Dietrich Bonhoeffer we should affirm that it is precisely in being thrown back again and again on the possibility of our being "without God in the world" that faith in the God who *is* can become real and strong.[13]

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[11] In fact contemporary Oxbridge atheism is quite obviously an extension of the anxiety of the meaninglessness of life itself, though its advocates seldom admit it.

[12] Miguel de Unamuno, *La Agonia del Christianismo* (1885).

[13] *Letters and Papers from Prison,* trans. Reginald Fuller (London: S.C.M. Press, 1953), 161 ff.

Toward a More Constructive Meaning

How, then, might we move towards an understanding of the cross of the Christ that could actually speak to the anxiety that is most insidiously operative in our own modern/post-modern culture? One cannot hope to develop a profound response to this challenge in the space available; I shall just indicate three steps that might lead in that direction.

First, and as a necessary aspect of the *critical* function of doctrine,[14] preachers and teachers should make deliberate efforts to prevent the Latin "satisfaction" theory from openly or subtly monopolizing Christian thought and worship. (Watch those hymns and prayers!) Perhaps the word "atonement" itself should be retired from active service, for it inevitably conjures up conceptions of both humankind and God that are biblically questionable or one-sided: humankind in the Latin theory is unacceptable until it aligns itself with the perfect human who "paid the price for sin"; and the primary quality of God in this theory is the kind of righteousness that seems constitutionally incapable of forgiveness. At the very least, biblical thought about both human and divine natures is more complex and more nuanced than that! The hegemony of the substitutionary-satisfaction idea must be broken—for the sake of the gospel!

Second, the cross of Jesus Christ should be understood quite consistently within the framework of the *agape* of God: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . ." (John 3:16). Peter Abelard (1079-1142) had at least the right *perspective*. Because he knew both love and suffering (his autobiography is entitled *Historica Calamitatum—The History of My Calamities*), he hated the atonement theology of his older contemporary, Anselm. It seemed to him a highly convoluted argument in which the holy, righteous Deity was busy, in the Christ-event, resolving a personal problem: how to reconcile his love with his wrath. While Abelard did not write extensively on the meaning of the cross, in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans he insisted that Christ's death, like his life, was exemplary: that is, the cross

[14] See my *What Christianity is* Not*: An Exercise in "Negative" Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013). It also is to be published by the World Council of Churches, Geneva.

illumines the expansiveness of God's love. In contemplating the sacrifice of Jesus we should ourselves be moved, inwardly, to act more lovingly towards others.[15]

The strength of Abelard's incipient interpretation is twofold. (1) It introduces a neglected "subjective" dimension into Christian soteriological reflection. Both older theories depicted the meaning of the cross of Christ in objective terms that almost overlooked humankind in their concentration on the interaction between "the Father" and "the Son"—and, in the case of the ransom theory, the devil. For Abelard, what mattered (perhaps too much!) is *our* response. (2) Abelard's "moral influence" theory, as nineteenth and twentieth century liberalism named it, rightly maintains over against the many lurid concepts of an angry, vengeful or merely power-hungry God, that it is love that motivates the God of Golgotha—nothing less than self-sacrificing love.

But *third*—precisely in the name of that love—let us try to rescue Good Friday and Easter from the allure of religious sentimentalism and simplism, which today, one suspects, represents the ecclesiastical norm in North America. Abelard is right: love is the answer. But the trouble with Abelard's exemplarist theory of the atonement—especially as it was taken up by the less brilliant liberal and modernist Christian theorists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—is that it does not explore *the question* deeply enough. How does anyone—even God—convey love to the unloved, the unlovely, the perhaps-unlovable? Or still more complex: How can the exemplification of love address human beings who harbor the suspicion, not only that they are unloved and unlovable, but that they are . . . without purpose?

"Love" is perhaps the most abused word in our language. To the secular majority, it is a synonym for sex—"making love."[16] In more refined, including religious, circles, love is often so thoroughly sentimentalized that it conveys nothing of the term *agape*, which the

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[15] See "Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans," in *A Scholastic Miscellany*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 10, ed. Eugene Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 276-287.

[16] Until about 1950, this term was used (e.g. in novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth century) to mean courtship—mostly talk. Today it is universally understood to imply "having sex."

early Christians used to describe the *rationale* of the cross—a term that they wrested from oblivion, almost; a term quite distinct from the more common *eros* (erotic love) and *philos* (filial love); a term with which they tried to capture the fundamental character of the biblical God as conceived by the great prophets. What characterized the faith of Israel's prophets, as the Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel insisted, is their overwhelming consciousness of the *pathos* of God.[17] The early Christians had to grope for a word to describe *that* kind of God because none of the prominent Greek terms for love—*or for God*—could bear the idea of a "crucified God" (Luther), namely a God whose *pathos* would go *that* far.

In our attempts to distinguish *agape* ("suffering love") from all the "cheap love" by which we are surrounded today, we should reflect on a related term that can help us to recapture the New Testament understanding of divine love: *compassion*, which Karen Armstrong claims is the common bond in "all the world faiths."[18] Unfortunately, English, which was overly influenced by Latin, hides for most people the "picture" that the word "compassion" actually depicts: *com* = with + *passio* = suffering; literally *with-suffering*. The compassion of God means the same thing as the *pathos* of God: it means God's full participation in creaturely suffering.[19] The biblical God is a God who *suffers with* the creation: the "groaning" of the creation is God's groaning (Romans 8:18 f.), and the longing, frustration and sorrow of the articulate creature, the so-called *homo sapiens,* is God's longing, frustration and sorrow. The cry of dereliction on Golgotha is not just Jesus' cry; it is the cry of the Creator for the creation. God *loves!*—and to the point of unqualified solidarity with the beloved—who, God knows, may in the first place be not only unworthy but absurd, impossible: creatures who know that they are creatures, but cannot find

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[17] *The Prophets* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), especially 223-224.

[18] Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God* (New York and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), xvii.

[19] German, which is far freer from Latin than English, translates our "compassion" as *Mitleid,* literally, with-suffering, or suffering-with.

out what they are "for."[20] In short, the cross is more about God's suffering *with* us than it is about God's suffering *for* us.[21]

I know of no single modern statement that conveys the pathos of the with-suffering God more poignantly than a rabbinic legend evoked by Elie Wiesel. (It should be read alongside Jesus' Gethsemane prayer.)

> Legend tells us that one day man spoke to God in this wise:
> "Let us change about. You be man, and I will be God. For only one second."
> God smiled gently and asked him, "Aren't you afraid?"
> "No. And you?"
> "Yes, I am," God said.[22]

The gospel of the cross tells of the *Mitleid* of One who, fearfully and at great cost, assumes our human destiny fully, following it through to the bitter end, and seeking to alter it day after day, not *from above* but *from within* the seething crucible of creaturely life and history. To be loved is to know our purpose even when concrete teleological evidence is lacking. No argument, rhetoric or logic of ours can persuade our religiously estranged contemporaries that they are greatly loved and that their lives, therefore, have purpose. We ourselves can believe that only with great difficulty, wrestling with a Spirit that is sometimes (*Deo gratia*) stronger than our own (Romans 8:15). The "word of the cross" is still foolishness and a scandal (1 Cor. 1:18), as every serious preacher knows. But in a society that lives and breathes the repressed anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness, this is the only message that has contextual weight, and that may therefore—now and then, here and there—be heard as *gospel.* Even on this lonely blue planet wandering in infinite space; even in the empty spaces of our own personal wanderings . . . "we are not alone."

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[20] See Wendell Berry's essay, "What Are People For?" in *What Are People For* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 123ff.

[21] Diana Butler Bass makes this point strongly in a recent article, "Being with God; A Different Holy Week," www.huffingtonpost.com/diana-butler-bass/being-with-god-holy.

[22] Elie Wiesel, *The Town Beyond the Wall* (New York: Holt, Renfrew and Winston, 1964), 179.

"THE LAMB OF GOD THAT TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD": REFLECTIONS ON ATONEMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT[1]

by Christian A. Eberhart

As I write this essay, Christians from different denominations around the globe celebrate Easter. Pastors preaching on proposed lectionary texts will most likely struggle somewhat when preparing their sermons for Good Friday and look forward to Easter Sunday when they proclaim the victory of the resurrection. Congregations will join in hymns remembering the passion and painful death of Jesus Christ on the cross, commemorating his obedience and willingness to "give himself for us," and praising the redemption "by the blood of the Lamb" or human salvation through the "sacrifice of Jesus." And while most likely the word "atonement" does not occur in such hymns, it is generally understood that all of these images and concepts have to do with atonement. This means Christians believe that the basis and epitome of their salvation is the death of Jesus Christ; without this event, the reconciliation between God and humanity would have been impossible.

Needless to say, atonement is a central topic for many Christians.[2] Moreover, several of these concepts and images of atonement appear in, or are based on, biblical texts. For example, Jesus is famously saluted as "the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" in the Gospel according to John (1:29; see also v. 36). In his Letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul describes God as putting Jesus forward "as a place of atonement by his blood" (3:25), while in his Corinthian correspondence he states that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor. 5:19). Yet for a variety of reasons,

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[1] Dedicated to Sandra Beardsall and William Richards, with deep gratitude for their friendship and support.

[2] Stephen Finlan specifies that, today, atonement is more central a doctrine in Western Christianity than it is in Eastern Christianity, which has a strong emphasis on the concept of *theōsis* instead. Cf. Stephen Finlan, *Problems with Atonement: The Origins of, and Controversy about, the Atonement Doctrine* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2005), 3-4, 120-24.

atonement is no preferred topic in church and academy. The problems that many Christians today perceive with this topic are multifaceted. The notion of sacrifice is usually associated with violence and death; therefore it is troublesome and embarrassing that it appears right at the centre of the Christian faith. There might also be objections that atonement and sacrifice are conceptually grounded in the Hebrew Bible and that they perpetuate a dark, ritualistic, or vengeful image of God. How could the Christian God demand a bloody victim in order to show grace?[3] Finally, while many Christians today have been taught to believe that "Christ died for our sins," they wonder how substitution "functions" and can be understood in our modern world. These are tough questions. Considering that they affect core constituents of our religious identity, it is certainly warranted to say that we are dealing with issues that amount to a Christian identity crisis.[4]

In this essay, I want to address some of these urgent questions while exploring the meaning and purpose of atonement in the New Testament. I will argue that atonement is misperceived if understood in terms of vicarious violence or images of retaliation. Instead, atonement in Judaism and Christianity is a broad and multifaceted category that requires familiarity with ancient Jewish practices and Hebrew Bible texts in order to be comprehended more fully. Indeed, some of the misconceptions about sacrifice and atonement are the result of a lack of understanding of ancient Judaism. In this article, therefore, I will try to describe and explain the worship practices and traditions of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem.[5]

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[3] Cf. Finlan, *Problems*, 1–3; Ruben Zimmermann, "Die neutestamentliche Deutung des Todes Jesu als Opfer: Zur christologischen Koinzidenz von Opfertheologie und Opferkritik," in *KuD* 51 (2005, 72–99), 73–75.

[4] Cf. Christian A. Eberhart, *The Sacrifice of Jesus: Understanding Atonement Biblically* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 7–8.

[5] Due to the limited scope of the present study, the exploration of both atonement in the New Testament and of its Jewish background will remain only an overview. For more in-depth information, please consult, e.g., Eberhart, *Sacrifice*; "Atonement. I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception,* 3 (Berlin: Walter DeGruyter, 2011), 24–32; "Atonement. II. New Testament," 32–42; and *Kultmetaphorik und Christologie: Opfer- und Sühneterminologie im Neuen Testament,*WUNT 306 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

The "Sacrifice of Jesus": What Does This Mean?

The quintessence of modern atonement concepts seems to be the notion of the "sacrifice of Jesus." It conveys, as do few other images, that Jesus died on behalf of others for the forgiveness of sins. This notion is particularly prominent in the Letter to the Hebrews which presents Jesus as a high priest who sacrificed himself "once for all" (7:27; 10:10, 12, 14). Introductory matters in commentaries on Hebrews are notorious for scholarly disputes, and one such dispute is the date of composition. The tabernacle imagery prompts some to posit an early date before the destruction of the Second Temple. Other scholars assume that it points in the opposite direction; the cultic christology of Hebrews could have been developed in relation to the temple space and appurtenances as if they still existed. The reference to the tabernacle would then suggest that Hebrews was indeed written after 70 C.E. Pamela M. Eisenbaum, for example, dates Hebrews to the late first or early second century C.E.[6] Considering the unique christological and soteriological approach of Hebrews as well as its critique of Judaism, I consider this opinion plausible and think that it is particularly important to recognize its conceptual difference from other New Testament writings. For our purposes, this means that the christological and soteriological approach of Hebrews will be considered in its own right and will not be interwoven with other New Testament concepts.

In which New Testament writings—outside of Hebrews—is Jesus called a "sacrifice"? This metaphor is unexpectedly rare; for instance, it does not occur anywhere in the canonical gospels. Of course, Jesus is called "the lamb of God" in John 1:29, 36, but this is not necessarily a

[6] Cf. Pamela M. Eisenbaum, "Locating Hebrews within the Literary Landscape of Christian Origins," in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods, New Insights,* BibInt.S 75, ed. Gabriella Gelardini (Leiden: Brill, 2005, 213–37), 226–31. On the ongoing debate of dating Hebrews, see also Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* Anchor Bible 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 50–54; Georg Gäbel, *Die Kulttheologie des Hebräerbriefes: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Studie,* WUNT 2 Reihe 212 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 484–88; Martin Karrer, "Der Hebräerbrief," in *Einleitung in das Neue Testament,* Kohlhammer Studienbücher 6, eds. Martin Ebner and Stefan Schreiber (Stuttgart 2008, 474–95), 484–86.

reference to a sacrificial animal. Even if this predication were intended to evoke the Passover tradition, it needs to be maintained that the Passover was no sacrificial ritual (see below). In fact, the only New Testament passage outside of Hebrews in which Jesus is explicitly called a "sacrifice" is Ephesians 5:1–2: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, just as Christ loved us, too, and gave himself for us as an *offering and sacrifice for God as a pleasing odor*."[7] Other New Testament passages mention the blood of Jesus and can thus be construed to refer to sacrificial rituals (e.g., Mark 14:24; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 John 1:7), but, besides Hebrews, Jesus is explicitly called a "sacrifice" only in this passage from Ephesians.

What does this statement convey? Many today interpret a passage like Ephesians 5:1–2 as a reference to the death of Jesus on the cross and think that it evokes violence and bloodshed. To assess such an interpretation, it is important to become acquainted with sacrificial rituals that are described in the Torah and belonged to daily worship routines in ancient Israel and Second Temple Judah. Modern Christian readers of such a passage are confronted with a twofold dilemma: on the one hand, they lack the experience of having participated in rituals that are no longer part of their religious practice. On the other hand, Christianity has relegated biblical texts describing sacrificial rituals, especially the book of Leviticus, but also the second half of the book of Exodus and the first half of Numbers, to less than canonical status. While these texts were, and still are, considered of key importance in Judaism, they are of little interest to modern Christians. This lack of interest, however, is the reason why Christians today struggle to understand key soteriological concepts like the "sacrifice of Jesus" and think that they are about violence, vengeance, and death.

Yet a cursory reading of the book of Leviticus points in a different direction. Chapters 1–7 of this book provide detailed instructions on how to offer five different types of sacrifice. The attentive reader will recognize that sacrifice emerges as a complex and multivalent

[7] The translation of Ephesians 5:1–2 is my own. NRSV and NIV render this passage in a way that obscures its direct reference to ritual texts in the priestly source. I have, therefore, italicized those words in my translation.

phenomenon that defies reduction to one ritual activity such as the act of slaughter. Not all types of sacrifice require slaughter in the first place. Leviticus 2 contains instructions for the cereal offering, prepared from vegetal materials, oil, and frankincense. Some of these substances were burnt on the main altar in front of the sanctuary while most were intended for the officiating priest. It is, therefore, significant to realize that a sacrifice in the priestly cult system could "function" without killing and did not necessitate a victim. Killing, therefore, cannot be the key to interpreting the sacrificial rituals of the Hebrew Bible.

Instead, the ritual component of burning sacrificial materials seems to be prominent. It is, in fact, the only ritual element that is common to all five types of sacrifice featured in Leviticus 1–7 and is usually emphasized through interpretive formulas which point toward its meaning according to the ancient Israelite and Jewish cult theology. Hence, the cereal offering, when burnt on the main altar, becomes "an offering by fire, a pleasing odor for YHWH" (Leviticus 2:2, 9, 12, 16). Similar formulas also occur in rituals of animal sacrifice (e.g., 1:9; 3:5; 4:31). What do they convey? The term "offering by fire" implies that the altar fire does not destroy the sacrificial substance; instead, it suggests a process of metamorphosis into an ethereal quality. The second interpretive comment is the phrase "a pleasing odor for YHWH," encapsulating how the transformed sacrificial substance rises upward in the form of smoke and is thus perceived by God.[8]

According to the instructions in Leviticus 1–7, therefore, sacrifices are given to the God of Israel by means of altar fire. This aspect is also conveyed by the Hebrew term for sacrifice, *qorbān* (e.g., 1:2–3, 10, 14; 2:1, 4; 3:1; 4:23, 28, 32; 7:38), which means "offering" (for YHWH) or, literally, "that which is brought" (to YHWH).[9] Considering that the sacrificial material typically comes from the home of the person offering it and needs to be transported to the sanctuary, a sacrificial ritual entails

[8] Cf. Alfred Marx, *Les systèmes sacrificiels de l'Ancien Testament: Formes et fonctions du culte sacrificiel à Yhwh,* VT.S 105 (Leiden: Brill 2005), 139; Eberhart, *Sacrifice*, 67–68.

[9] Cf. Christian A. Eberhart, "Sacrifice? Holy Smokes! Reflections on Cult Terminology for Understanding Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible," in *Ritual and Metaphor: Sacrifice in the Bible,* Resources for Biblical Study 68, ed. Eberhart (Atlanta: SBL, 2011, 17–32), 22–24.

a movement from a profane to a sacred space. More specifically, it serves as a preparation for the Israelite who wishes to encounter God there.

What, however, do these insights about sacrificial rituals in ancient Judaism contribute toward the understanding of the christological passage in Ephesians 5:1–2? First, it is significant that the author of this letter, when writing that ". . . Christ loved us, too, and gave himself for us as an *offering and sacrifice for God as a pleasing odor*," quoted exactly those formulas that epitomized the offering of sacrifices to the God of Israel. This means that Jesus gave himself to God in a genuine act of worship. Does such sacrificial terminology point to the death of Jesus? This is altogether questionable. Note that our passage from Ephesians 5 is located at the core of a larger paragraph that comprises 4:1–6:9, featuring detailed advice on proper behaviour. How could the death of Jesus on the cross be an example of proper behaviour? In fact, it is not. Since sacrificial rituals in the Hebrew Bible do not all deal with violence and death, metaphors derived from these rituals likewise may not convey a meaning of violence or death either. Instead, this terminology communicates that Jesus' "entire mission and life were of a special quality and, as a genuine expression of worship, accepted by God . . . With this meaning, the term *sacrifice* has surprisingly positive connotations—at least compared to its modern understanding that is bent on loss, misfortune, and destruction."[10]

Sacrificial Blood: Substitution or Cultic Purification?

What, then, about other New Testament images and phrases that also are derived from the sacrificial cult? How does my proposal that sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible does not always include violence and death square with the observation that other phrases single out the "blood" of Jesus, like Romans 3:25, "atonement by his [Jesus'] blood," or the well-known words of institution in 1 Corinthians 11:25 spoken over the eucharistic cup: "this cup is the new covenant in my blood"? Are these not references to his death, interpreting it as a vicarious event for sinful

[10] Eberhart, *Sacrifice*, 106.

humans?

Once more, I propose to consult ritual texts of the Torah in order to gain deeper insights and critically reflect on our modern assumptions about atonement. Those ritual texts indeed mention blood and describe various blood rituals in detail. For example, for a sin offering, the blood of a slaughtered animal has to be smeared or sprinkled on certain objects of the sanctuary such as the main altar (Leviticus 4:25, 30; 16:18–19). Here, too, it is significant that the pertinent texts are explicit about the "function" or outcome of those rituals according to the ancient Israelite and Jewish cult theology: "He [the priest] shall sprinkle some of the blood on it [the main altar] with his finger seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites" (16:19). During the Day of Atonement, therefore, sacrificial blood purges upon direct physical contact with those objects to which it is being applied. Thus sacrificial blood may be considered an effective cultic cleansing agent providing consecration.[11]

What is crucial for our understanding of New Testament atonement concepts is the fact that, first, blood rituals necessitate the death of a sacrificial animal; yet no Hebrew Bible text suggests that animal slaughter has any constitutive significance for sacrificial rituals. Thus sacrifice does not operate through death, nor is animal slaughter the key to understanding atonement. Rather, to the contrary, Leviticus 17:11 states that atonement is effected through sacrificial blood, but this blood represents the animal's life. And second, sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible does not have a vicarious quality; that is, sacrificial animals do not take the place of humans, let alone die instead of humans. It is noteworthy that even the sin offering or guilt offering can only be offered for unintentional sins, but not for grave ones that would warrant the death penalty. The idea that, in the ancient Israelite and Jewish cult, sacrificial animals would die instead of humans was an older scholarly hypothesis,

[11] Similar blood rituals are also attested in Hittite rituals; in fact, biblical blood rituals might originate in the religion of Hittite Anatolia. This relationship has recently been investigated in Yitzhaq Feder, *Blood Expiation in Hittite and Biblical Ritual: Origins, Context, and Meaning,* Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series 2 (Atlanta: SBL, 2011).

but it has long been refuted.[12] What then is implied by New Testament statements about the "blood" of Jesus? First, they do refer to the death of Jesus, but the point is that this event made his life available for all times. Second, some of these New Testament phrases resemble cultic passages from the Hebrew Bible in that they are explicit about the effect. For example, 1 John 1:7 states: ". . . the blood of Jesus . . . cleanses us from all sin." Hence forgiveness of sins is maintained, yet it happens not through vicarious death but through purification. A comparable statement is found in Revelation 7:14, according to which martyrs at the throne of God "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). Once again, blood appears as a cleansing agent. The net result for humans who are thus freed from sins and consecrated is that they can now approach the holy God.

We have now explored two key features of ancient Jewish sacrifice: first, sacrificial substance is given to God by immolation on the altar; second, sacrificial blood rituals have the function of purification. There are further important aspects of sacrifice: they are to be performed at the sanctuary (Leviticus 17:1–9), and they require the assistance of priests. Finally, all material offered as sacrifice must be of best quality or "without blemish" (1:3; 22:17–25; see also 2:1). These features are important to distinguish sacrificial rituals from other rituals such as the Passover. The Passover lamb was roasted and entirely consumed by the family or community while its blood was applied to the doors of the houses of the Hebrews (Exodus 12). The blood ritual had the function of protecting Israel from disaster and death; it was an apotropaic ritual. It was no cultic sacrifice because it was not carried out at a sanctuary, no priest had to assist, and no part of the Passover lamb was burnt on an altar as an offering for God. Therefore, the Passover is never associated with atonement. This distinction is important in interpreting New Testament passages, as when Jesus is called "our Passover lamb" (1 Cor. 5:7) or appears as "a lamb as if it had been slaughtered" (Rev. 5:6; 12:11; 13:8, etc.). Especially the latter predication must be understood in the context of Revelation's vivid

[12] For a brief overview of scholarly theories of sacrifice, see Eberhart, *Sacrifice*, 14–29.

description of eschatological battles between heavenly and satanic forces. In the midst of these threatening scenarios, the lamb provides protection for its adherents.[13] However, since these images are derived from the Passover tradition, they should not be confused with atonement.

Atonement in the New Testament: Is Christ the "Victim" of God?

At this point, I would finally like to explore the unique christological and soteriological approach of the Letter to the Hebrews which presents Jesus as a high priest who sacrificed himself "once for all" (Greek *ephapax*, 7:27; 10:10, 12, 14). In its deployment of cultic concepts and images, Hebrews follows traditional parameters when stating, "According to the law, almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (9:22). As discussed above, the connection of blood, purification, and forgiveness is familiar from sacrificial rituals. Interestingly enough, however, the approach followed in Hebrews differs from ancient Jewish sacrificial rituals with regard to the quintessence of sacrifice.

While I have demonstrated that the death of the victim had no constitutive significance for the sacrificial ritual as such, in Hebrews the self-sacrifice of Jesus, the high priest, does focus on his death (9:27–28). However, there is no claim that it might be a vicarious death of any sort. Instead, the death of Jesus is the prerequisite for his ascent to heaven. Once liberated from the confines of his earthly existence, Jesus Christ "sat down at the right hand of God" (10:12) to intercede on behalf of humans. Salvation for humans now also occurs through his appeal for mercy. It should be noted that Hebrews sees the second person of the Trinity as separate from the first person. Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann describe this trinitarian separation in Hebrews as follows: "The Father does not show mercy to his children, but the high priest does for his siblings. Only the mediator has sympathy, while God 'himself' is 'a consuming fire' (Heb. 12:29) and it is a horror to fall

[13] Cf. Christine Schlund, "Deutungen des Todes Jesu im Rahmen der Pesach-Tradition," in *Deutungen des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament,* WUNT 181, eds. Jörg Frey and Jens Schröter (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005, 397–411), 404–5.

into his hands."[14]

The christological-soteriological concept found in Hebrews differs significantly from that of Paul. For the Apostle, God provided salvation through the incarnation in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:19). This means that, in the drama of atonement, God did not "sacrifice" the innocent "other." Rather, God freely grants forgiveness to humans by giving the divine Son, who is God-self, for humans. For a correct understanding of atonement according to Paul, it is important to understand the triune God as just that: triune. In Jesus Christ, God was crucified. This observation helps to address objections that atonement concepts depict God as demanding the slaughter of an innocent person in order to appease divine wrath. If Jesus Christ is recognized as the incarnate God, then it is indeed God who agreed to suffer on behalf of humans.[15] Grace obtained in this way is truly costly grace.

Atonement in the New Testament: only through the Death of Jesus?

Contrary to common objections, the previous reflections suggest that atonement in the New Testament is not only about the death of Jesus. The New Testament metaphor of the "sacrifice of Jesus" refers to his entire life which is depicted as acceptable to God. Moreover, references to the "blood of Jesus" communicate forgiveness of human sins through the operative paradigm of purification and consecration; they point to the death of Jesus which, however, made his life available for all times. Thus early Christian concepts of salvation have a broader incarnational dimension and celebrate Jesus as the Saviour. They include the passion and death of Jesus on the cross, but they are by no means limited to these tragic events and rather celebrate his life beyond death.

These important nuances are also manifest in further New Testament metaphors, concepts, and images that convey salvation in Jesus Christ without being derived from sacrificial rituals. Instead they refer to secular motifs that were prominent in the environment of early Christianity. Nevertheless, it is worth exploring them to inquire whether

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[14] Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011), 336.

[15] Cf. Eberhart, *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception,* 3, 36.

they reference the death or life of Jesus.[16] For example, the well-known statement: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16) is often understood as alluding to the crucifixion. The same also applies to the phrase in Ephesians 5:1–2 that ". . . Christ loved us, too, and gave himself for us as an offering and sacrifice for God as a pleasing odor." Is not the expression that Christ "gave himself for us" an unambiguous reference to his death? The Greek verb *paradidomi* employed here occurs also in other contexts. It is illuminating for a closer understanding of this christological passage that, in Acts 15:26, it refers to people who are thoroughly alive, although they are ready to go on a dangerous mission. The example demonstrates that the phrase "to give oneself for . . ." has a broader meaning and does not refer exclusively to somebody's death. It is, therefore, congruent with the import of the sacrificial metaphor that references the entire life of Jesus. In a similar fashion, the statement in John 3:16 points to the Incarnation, which for Jesus marked the beginning of a life of advocacy for, and in the service of, the poor, sick, and outcast.

There are, however, other secular atonement motifs and phrases that do refer specifically to the death of Jesus. When Paul writes that, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8; see also John 11:50–52; 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Thess. 5:10), he articulates this death as "effective" by ascribing meaning to it: it did not happen in vain, but made a crucial difference for humanity. Likewise, Jesus says, according to Mark 10:45: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." The term "ransom" refers to deliverance from the existential bondage under debt, while the ransom price is Christ's life. As the human debt cannot simply be cancelled, someone needs to step up to pay. Therefore, this phrase conveys the vicarious surrender of life for others. Like the term "redemption" or "to redeem" (Romans 3:24; Eph. 1:7), it refers to a payment for the manumission of slaves or captives. "Its imagery must have strongly

[16] A more comprehensive exposition of secular atonement concepts and images is found in Eberhart, *Sacrifice*, 123–30.

resonated with those at the bottom of society. In terms of outcome, it conveys liberation and a critical upgrade of one's status within the social hierarchy."[17]

Conclusion

Expositions of atonement in the modern Western world are still dominated by inappropriate paradigms of vicarious violence or retaliation, while theological scholarship describes ritual sacrifice predominantly in terms of destruction or killing. There is no doubt that such interpretations have popularized a readiness to suffer in Christian piety while fostering a strong interest in the passion of Jesus Christ. But this development, which is as manifest in Christian literature as it is in art and iconography, is relatively recent, as John O'Malley observes:

> Christian writers from the second century through the 12th do not dwell upon the Passion. None of the Fathers of the Church has a treatise on the sufferings of Christ, nor do we have from them any notable homilies on the topic. The same is true for the flowering of Christian literature in the 12th century . . . By this time images of Christ on the cross had begun to appear, but they depicted him as reigning from it, not hanging in agony. With the 13th century came momentous cultural shifts. Among them was a new focus on the humanity of Christ. This was the precondition for a growing focus on the Passion . . . During the next two centuries, however, Christian devotion continued to shift towards the Passion, with ever more attention paid to Christ's physical sufferings. The crucifixion panel of the Isenheim Altarpiece (1515) reflects the gruesome and detailed descriptions of the torments current in literary texts.[18]

I have therefore explored the multifaceted spectrum of atonement images in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament in order to

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[17] Eberhart, *Sacrifice*, 130.

[18] John O'Malley, *A Movie, a Mystic, and a Spiritual Tradition*, http://www.americamagazine.org/articles/omalley-emmerich.cfm (accessed December 21, 2004).

challenge inappropriate reductions of Christian concepts of salvation to suffering, violence, and death. After an investigation of ancient Jewish cult practices in pertinent Hebrew Bible texts, I have argued that sacrifice is better understood as a multivalent phenomenon which comprises both the aspect of "transport" of sacrificial substance to God and the aspects of purification and consecration. When employed in the New Testament, cult metaphors do not centre exclusively on the death of Jesus, but have a broader incarnational dimension that includes his entire mission and life. Finally, in terms of theological ramifications, it is crucial to recognize the agency of God who provides the "place of atonement" (Romans 3:25) to offer free redemption for humans. In Jesus Christ, God encountered humanity and proposed salvation for all. This is the core of atonement in the New Testament.

SERMON

ATONEMENT UPDATED: A GOOD FRIDAY SERMON ON THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

by Gary Paterson

So just imagine we're there . . . at the foot of the cross; well, maybe not quite so bold, maybe a few hundred metres back. Safer that way; wouldn't want to draw attention to ourselves! Never know what might happen at times like these. Because what's clear, if nothing else, is that we can't run afoul of the authorities and expect to get off unscathed. We threaten the powers that be, those with money and the force to protect it, then we'll find ourselves in deep trouble. We've only to look at Jesus there on the cross to know the truth of that. Here is the logical outcome of his preaching, teaching, being a thorn in the side of the religious types who like to run the temple just the way it's always been run, and don't appreciate being shown up by a small town rabbi from Galilee. Here is the predictable result of his always talking about kingdoms and endings, and the first shall be last . . . because, after a while, the Romans couldn't help but hear about him, and they dealt with troublemakers swiftly and ruthlessly. It's always been that way; always will.

So we ask what the cross means. Well this is where we have to begin: they nailed him! The big guys; the powerful guys. But let's be clear: Jesus knew it was coming. In fact, he talked about it, even predicted it. Lots of people told him what would happen if he went to Jerusalem for Passover, just asking for trouble. But he refused to stop preaching; refused to back down; refused to play the game. He spoke his truth, God's truth. So we could say that he was a martyr, a witness; that he chose to give his life, if there were no other way, in order to honour and hold fast to his call, his vision, of what he felt compelled to say and do, what God was asking him to say and do; like all the prophets, who suffer for the truth they speak, who stir things up, who upset people, who challenge the status quo in the name of God's dream of peace and justice.

Now, it's not that hard to make a jump from the historical to the symbolic, which is what early Christians did, to expand the dimensions of this struggle, so that it is not only a story of Jesus nailed to the cross by Roman soldiers operating under Pilate's orders, but it is also an account

of a struggle with Rome itself, the empire; and, once again, by extension, a struggle with every system of domination that benefits a minority at the expense of the majority; call it Egypt, call it Babylon, give it a more modern name; any system that depends on oppression and enslavement, enforced by sophisticated violence administered by a well-funded military. Sound familiar? Jesus on the cross is a challenge to every empire that has ever been.

And then—and this is quite remarkable—those early Christian theologians took a further jump in metaphor, to suggest that what was happening on the cross carried cosmic implications, that the battle had been joined with, well, Paul called them "the powers and principalities"; with the overarching structures of oppression, economic and political systems that seem to take on a life of their own; call it evil, darkness, even death—all those forces that seem hell-bent on destroying the good.

When Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" surely that's the existential cry of every human who feels overwhelmed by the rivers and flames, by pain and abandonment . . . and yes, by the fear of death. There is a strange darkness at the very heart of life itself, where beauty, harmony and complexity are always struggling against entropy, falling apart, the world ending in flame or ice, where individual humans seem caught in great forces and tides that sweep over the world with dark wings of destruction. Good is pitted against evil, light against dark, angels against demons, God against . . . well, the Bible has many names to personify evil: Satan, Beelzebub, the Beast, the Dragon.

The biblical story begins with myth and ends that way; our lives are never just about ourselves but are part of a much vaster unfolding. And, despite the strangeness of the myth, we continue to resonate with such a story, simply because at a deep level it does reflect our reality. The crucifixion of Jesus is an historical event, yes; but it also becomes a symbol of this cosmic struggle between good and evil. The cross is portrayed as a battle scene between God and dark forces, whatever or whoever they are, all that would thwart God's dream of abundant life for humanity, for all creation; Jesus' willingness to die is the moment of engagement with the enemy forces.

Sure, this is myth-making, but that doesn't mean it isn't true. If it all sounds too fanciful, just take a twirl through today's popular

mythologies, where, in Star Wars, the Dark Side is overcome and the Force brings new life; where, in Tolkien's Middle Earth, Sauron of Mordor is overthrown when the Ring of Power is destroyed; where, in the world of Hogwarts School, Lord Voldemort is defeated by Harry Potter. The battle is real; the price is high; the outcome . . . well, although it seems to hang in the balance, and its immediate expression depends on our involvement, the Christian story proclaims that, in the end, the structures of oppression and evil—Egypt, Rome, Satan, give it a new name—all this shall come to an end; indeed, all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well. The victory has been won.

And if this still sounds too cosmic and symbolic, well, bring it on home, into our own moments of darkness, where everything is pressing in—be it war, family break-up, illness, despair—to our crucifixion moments when it feels as if the world is falling apart, our lives ending. And it is precisely then, when we are hanging on the cross, that we are invited into a trust that God who in Christ does battle with all that is evil; this God is with us even in our pain and struggle, not rescuing, but transforming; working with even the worst moments of our lives to enable the emergence of the best possibilities of love.

Now this all sounds rather fine, good preacher-talk, but standing at the foot of the cross, keeping a watchful eye on what is happening, well . . . it still seems as if Jesus is dead; it still feels like a defeat. And that's how it felt to those early Christians who scattered like a bevy of quail at the first sign of the wolf; who went into hiding, "behind locked doors," in fear. And they remained that way until Easter—which is to say, crucifixion Friday is only a victory when joined with resurrection Sunday. If I may be mundane in my imagery, it's a bit like eating a clubhouse sandwich: there are a variety of ingredients, layered together, but what we are looking forward to is the first bite, where we taste the combination. Just so here; crucifixion and resurrection are layered events, along with, in fact, Incarnation and Pentecost. Sure, we can separate them out—we are creatures of time—but it's the complete sandwich that will bring a smile to our faces. Because, of course, Easter is the proclamation of victory, that God wins; that darkness is never the final word, but rather light, life and love continue on.

As I write these words, I am spending time with my mother in hospital, in palliative care; she is dying. And every day the verse from Paul's letter to the Romans is one we share: "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is victory talk, and comfort talk; cosmic thinking and pastoral care.

But there's more to this sandwich than just crucifixion and resurrection; there's what came before and after, and that's just as important—Incarnation and Pentecost. I am tempted to say they're the slices of bread that hold it all together, but I thought you'd all roll your eyes, saying "Stop with these metaphors, already."

So let me eschew metaphor for a moment, and talk about Incarnation by returning to the Good Friday story: it has a way of drawing us in, so far in that we begin to sense that we could be one of the characters in the drama; we have a role in what unfolds. Perhaps just one of the crowd, checking out what's happening—"Nothing to do with me, you know!"—crucifixion as distraction, an entertainment perhaps, though also a shudder: this is what could happen if we step out of line. Or maybe we identify with Jesus' disciples, well-meaning followers, folk who have listened to a lot of sermons; they were drawn to his teaching, his example, his vision; but then, when trouble begins, when sacrifice is demanded . . . well, they were quick to escape, step back, duck; disappearing when crosses loomed on the horizon.

Or maybe we might find ourselves identifying with Pilate and the political power behind him, among those who are interested in maintaining the status quo so that the privileged keep their wealth and status, their comfortable life style; or perhaps with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, religious authorities who are willing to dance with the Romans—"Just leave us alone to do our religious thing, and we won't say a thing when prophets get killed . . . They're a bother to us too." Or maybe this whole story comes closer to the bone and we're right there with Judas or Peter, full of betrayal or denial, blood money or guilt; so far down that we can't bear to look at ourselves in the morning mirror.

And then, as we stay with the story, perhaps imagination will take us into the world, where we catch glimpses of a thousand and one present-day crucifixions. Maybe that imagination slides us into our daily lives, with spouse, family, work, and we recognize that crucifixions only happen with our acquiescence, our participation; with our greed, laziness, addiction to whatever . . . with our sin. Perhaps the first thing the cross does is convict us of our bloody-mindedness, our willingness to do whatever it takes to stay on top, keep ourselves comfortable, safe, even though we may not sleep all that well at night—but hey, have another drink, take a pill.

However hard it is to admit that this is our human reality, it just might be the beginning of a new possibility . . . when we begin to recognize our own weakness and brokenness, our capacity to inflict hurt, our willingness to turn away; our complicity in the pain of the world and our neighbour; our sinfulness. Maybe then there is an opportunity to change, to repent, to seek forgiveness, reconciliation. It can feel like bad news, though, this honest recognition and acceptance of what we have done and have not done. This is when we need a word from Jesus, from God. This would be the moment to remember lost sheep and coins, searched for and found; the prodigal son who returns home to his father's embrace; Matthew the tax collector; the woman taken in adultery; the prostitute. A moment to remember that Jesus didn't just talk about God's love, he showed it, did it with healing, feeding, touching, foot-washing; with the words and the welcome of forgiveness. And he did it on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing." Except, we did, didn't we—know what we were doing? Don't we always, once we get under the rationalizations and self-justifications?

And yet, the words of forgiveness still ring; words that are based in love, a love that goes all the way; Jesus laying down his life for his friends. Which is God's love; a "no-matter-what-you-do-I-love-you" kind of love. Maybe Jesus on the cross is saying, "When you wonder how much God loves you, then remember this moment; take a long look. I am an example of that love; I express and make real that love; and, further, if you do trust that I am an embodiment of God in this world, an incarnation, that God and I are one in a mysterious and wonderful way, well then, guess who's hanging on that cross with me, in me. You do your

worst . . . and God is still there, wanting you to come back home, to accept yourself as a beloved child of God."

Still, when we're standing at the foot of the cross, it's really hard to understand how crucifixion is an expression of God's love. However, early Christians, working back from their Easter experience, turned to a whole series of metaphors from their daily lives, linking God's love and the cross. They appropriated metaphors from the legal system: God becomes the Judge of humans guilty of wrong-doing and deserving of condemnation and sentencing; Jesus offers to take our place, pay the fine, do the time: we are redeemed. They also lifted imagery from the religious activity of the day, rooted as it was in rituals of sacrifice, where wrongdoing, law-breaking; impurity; sin—all this could be "washed away," made "clean" by the offering of dove, lamb, goat, calf or bull. Now, with Jesus, the ultimate and final sacrifice has been made: the last scapegoat, the Lamb of God—and all is restored, forever and ever.

Now, these two patterns of imagery are powerful, but remember, their importance is to point beyond themselves to God's love. And if pushed to an extreme literal understanding they backfire and implode. I confess they don't work that well for me, although I get what they are trying to do. Instead, I live with them, gently and contextually, and, at the same time, I find myself exploring different metaphors in an effort to make sense of Good Friday.

For instance, I remember seeing a film some years back—*The Green Mile* (based on a novel by Stephen King)—in which the lead character was able to "absorb" the hurt, sickness and evil in fellow human beings, take it into himself and then release it as a wave of darkness and locusts that could do no further harm. Weird sci-fi kind of thinking, sure, but in a strange way, an apt description of what Jesus was doing on the cross. Or sometimes I have imagined Jesus' body as a container full of light, and when it was broken on the cross, well that holy light went spilling into the world, scattering everywhere. Or perhaps the container was full of the sweet smell of spring, and when broken, the scent of new life was released into the world. Fanciful, of course, but such metaphors remind us of the place of imagination as a help in grasping God's love.

It's because of the Incarnation that we realize that God's love for the world is never done. We might continue to do our worst, turn away,

crucify Jesus, crucify each other, crucify the Earth: Good Friday, over and over. But God keeps entering into these endless events, in suffering love, "working for good in all things," even though these events may not be good in and of themselves. Thus, I find myself more interested in God's dream of restorative justice rather than trying to make sense of God's retributive justice. It doesn't make grace cheap, but it does concentrate on the future, and how we are invited into a whole new way of living, restoring right relations, leading to a new harmony, a new creation. Which once again takes us back to Incarnation, to the Way that Jesus taught and embodied; where asking the question "What Would Jesus Do?" can be helpful. Jesus is our teacher and guide into this new way of being and living, and we are invited to follow; to choose his way of love, of forgiveness, refusing to be violent even when attacked, hurt; knowing there is a cost to this way—just look at the cross—but believing and trusting that this is the only way to bring peace.

So, there we are, still at the foot of the cross . . . we see love hanging there; we recognize our own brokenness; we feel the possibility of forgiveness; we are invited into a new way of living, the way of sacrificial love. But to prevent this from becoming yet another burden, one more example of what we should do, one more excellent teaching about the importance of forgiveness—all of which will soon feel like an impossibility to live out—well, this is when we need to remember that Pentecost is an integral part of the "clubhouse sandwich." Because it is the Spirit that enables us to walk in this new way; it is the Spirit that brings the power to repent, change, be transformed. We don't have to do this ourselves, despite all the popular slogans of "Live Love"; thank God, because we can't do this ourselves! No, the energy of the Spirit is now at work within us, so that "our inner being is strengthened through the power of the Spirit, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, as we are being rooted and grounded in love; as we come to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ, though it is beyond knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Eph. 3:16-19). Now that can give a person hope; that can make for a life worth leading. May it be so.

FROM THE HEART—ABOUT THE HEART OF THE MATTER

FOUR FUNERALS AND A QUESTION

by Lois M. Wilson

I have been attending more funerals than usual in recent months, and the undeniable fact is that people of my generation are dying at a rather terrifying rate. At one of these funerals I was invited to give the "homily," but the others I attended as a mourner. My experience at these four funerals in a row raises an important question for me. What is the purpose of a Christian funeral? How is it different from so many current practices? How is it different from a "Celebration of Life"?

Three funerals were for United Church members, all of whom had opted for immediate cremation so that there was no urn or casket present. The deceased was given visibility and presence by a current photo set up on the communion table. The fourth funeral was for an Anglican friend and there was an urn containing ashes at this one. The United Church services all opened with a warm welcome from the presiding minister as a prelude to the service proper. The Anglican one began quite differently. My reactions to all four were mixed and left me with questions about current funeral practices.

The first one, a do-it-yourself ceremonial, was a "Celebration of Life." Music from sources beloved by the deceased, secular as well as sacred, hymns, and some solos followed. Then came some poetry, and other writings authored by the deceased, and an effusive eulogy. It was all about the wishes of the deceased, his accomplishments and idiosyncrasies. Even the minister barely suggested that life itself had crumbled and had been torn from our grasp. There was scant sense of the ultimate dislocation of life that had overtaken us. The liturgy trivialized the event by minimizing the enormity of what had happened. God had brief mention. Has grieving any part in the celebration of life? Or is it assumed that all of that should have taken place beforehand?

At the following reception almost everyone I talked with exclaimed at what a beautiful service it had been. One friend however said to me *sotto voce*, "I am going to ask the minister what theology informs his homilies at funerals."

The second funeral had some structure given it, since the deceased

had talked things over with his family beforehand. He wanted lots of music and Scripture, and fewer words and less talking than is usual. He wished it tilted to the traditional. Remembrances from family members would have their place. His wishes were carried out faithfully. However, it was the same minister as at the first funeral, and he hadn't developed his theology of a funeral homily any further than the first time round. Again, everyone commented on what a wonderful funeral it had been. Why had I not thought so?

The third one was the one at which I was invited to deliver the homily. There was a beautiful solo by a paid professional and several nineteenth century hymns. Eight friends had been invited to share personal stories and reminiscences—which they did at some length, lifting their arms heavenward to indicate where the friend now apparently resided. Hence I had very little time. Most of what had gone on contradicted everything I said. Some few people recognized the discrepancy and commented on it afterward. The presiding minister confided to me that she had been sidelined in the planning of the liturgy.

The fourth funeral for an Anglican friend was quite different. It too began with a word of welcome from the presiding minister, but was more intentional in its welcome: "to remember before God the life of the deceased; to commend her to God's keeping; to commit her ashes to be buried; to comfort those who mourn with our sympathy and love; in the hope we share through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." The opening statement recognized that the funeral had several purposes and movements, and was to include the understanding of Christians about the resurrection of the body.

The celebrant (presiding minister) then walked to the door of the church, announcing by her action the reception of the ashes of the deceased and a procession of family members and the urn, preceded by the paschal candle. This procession signalled to me immediately that something important was taking place. The intention was to act out the gospel message in a theatrical way. A series of biblical statements rang out in the church, beginning with, "I am the resurrection and the life" and ending with "Come to me all you that are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Then came the first congregational singing, as the procession wound its way to the front of the sanctuary and the urn was placed in a

prominent location. The remembrances were to the point and mercifully short. The service continued with music from secular and sacred sources; readings from the Scriptures and secular sources; the homily; the eucharist; and the commendation. Then everyone was invited to come forward and place a handful of sand on the ashes which had been temporarily removed from the urn and placed on a cloth. It was a symbolic way of doing what mourners do when the casket is lowered into the open grave, throwing a handful of earth on the coffin as it is lowered, and thereby recognizing that "we are dust and return to dust." A final hymn, a blessing and the dismissal followed.

So what is the purpose of a Christian funeral? How can our deepest convictions as Christians be expressed in this ritual?

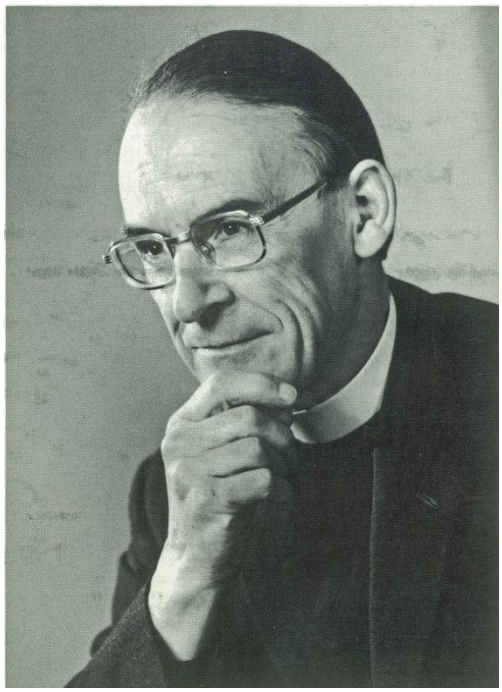
For some, the gathering is not a funeral at all, but a memorial service, as the death is understood as a biological occurrence without much deeper meaning. Many choose the memorial service over a funeral. It becomes a "celebration of life," based on private wishes, and not a celebration of the Creator, the triune God who gives us life. This makes sense if the person is a non-believer. But for Christians, is not the event of death far more than a biological occurrence? Is it *only* about "memories we will cherish?" Is it not also about resurrection and hope? Is the funeral not an opportunity for the Christian community to accompany the deceased on his final lap of his journey to God?

For many, it is understood as a private affair to which others are invited. It is centered on memories and accomplishments of the deceased as identified by the family. With all its limitations, this is still better in my view than funerals where the deceased is never mentioned. But the liturgy has become primarily the result of the personal choices of the deceased as to what music he preferred, or what jokes she most enjoyed, or remembrance of his best bridge hands, and not an articulation of how far the grace of God has been revealed in the life of the deceased. One tires, after thirty minutes, of stories of what a good curler the person was, or what a great quilt-maker she was, or how she loved bees. I think much of this happens because we have abandoned the "wake," when the family and/or community gathered before the funeral and shared remembrances. A vestige of the wake has survived through "visitation" at the funeral home beforehand, but the opportunity to share stories publicly has

disappeared. The funeral then becomes the only time to share these important stories. In our culture there are so few rituals for observing loss. Can we begin to create some? For a start, is it unrealistic to invite everybody to join the family gathering the night before the funeral when stories and grief can be shared communally? Other options?

And what about the body, given that we practise an incarnational faith? What place have the physical remains in the liturgy, given that the body is now not usually present—as though the person were missing in action? I resonated with the Anglican funeral that began with a procession reminding me of the procession at my husband's funeral when his sons and grandsons carried his body in the casket to his final resting place. Here was the acting out of the community walking with the loved one to the place of departure into a new life. I have thought of doing the same, with my daughters and granddaughters doing the honours for me. But increasingly immediate cremation precedes the funeral service, and caskets are unnecessary. What to do? The best practice I have seen is what happened at that Anglican funeral when we were all invited to come forward and place a handful of sand on the ashes of the deceased. It was as though we were at the graveside with what was left of the body, and were invited to participate in the final burial.

For most, the funeral is not simply a biological or private affair, but recognition of the deep dislocation of life and its meaning, urgently expecting an affirmation of hope. The problem is that the liturgy may not reflect this. Why is the funeral liturgy so seldom a public, dramatic acting out of the deepest convictions of the Christian community about the meaning of life and death? A Catholic sister, who was also an actress, asked me once if there was any part of my ministry I regretted. I replied that I wish I had spent more time in theatre, because good drama always elicited the kind of intense emotion from an engaged audience that I wished to evoke through preaching. Her response was, "What makes you think you *aren't* in theatre?"



PROFILE

GEORGE BRADFORD CAIRD: A TRIBUTE AND A MEMOIR

by Alan Davies

The virtuoso

It was the academic year of 1954-55, and I sat mesmerized in the first-year New Testament course in divinity school at McGill. The lecturer, a tall spare Englishman, lucid, eloquent and obviously brilliant, lifted the veil on an unknown world of high erudition. I had studied under exceptional professors before: H. Noel Fieldhouse in modern history, George Duthie in English literature, Raymond Klibansky in philosophy, but none equalled George Caird as a virtuoso in the classroom. When, twenty years later, I met him again at Mansfield College, Oxford, he welcomed me with great warmth, although I had been by no means the best or most gifted of his students. His sudden death (of a massive heart attack) on Easter eve in 1984 at the peak of his powers robbed the Christian world of an extraordinary exegete, in every way comparable to his illustrious British and German predecessors. He published almost a dozen books and a huge number of shorter writings, but his *magnum opus*, a theology of the New Testament that was to be the consummation of his labours, had to be completed by a former student, lending a measure of ambiguity to the text.

A Londoner by birth (1917), Caird was a graduate of both Cambridge and Oxford, earning first-class honours in classics and theology. As a Congregationalist minister, he served a London pastorate (Highgate) during the final bitter war years (1943-1946) until a sense of adventure drew him to Edmonton, Alberta, to teach Old Testament at St. Stephen's College. In 1950 he accepted the New Testament chair in the Faculty of Divinity at McGill. New Testament was his first love, but it was a mark of his talent that he was able to move easily from the one field to the other—where he swiftly drew student acclaim. In 1955, he became principal of the United Theological College, adding homiletics to his

teaching responsibilities, a sign of his passion for the church and its mission. He believed that the pulpit belonged at the centre of Christian worship, and was himself a superb preacher in the best British expository mode. It was impossible not to listen to him.

Returning to England in 1959, Caird became in succession a senior tutor in biblical studies at Oxford, Grinfield Lecturer in the Septuagint, Principal of Mansfield College, and finally Dean Ireland's Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture in the University, a signal honour. He had published before, notably *The Truth of the Gospel* (1950), *The Apostolic Age* (1955) and his Pauline study, *Principalities and Powers* (1956). However, once restored to his native soil, his scholarly contributions multiplied, including three splendid commentaries: *The Gospel of St. Luke* (1963), *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (1966) and *Paul's Letters from Prison* (1976). His polished masterpiece, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible,* appeared in 1980. Only his unfinished symphony, *New Testament Theology,* might have soared to a greater height.

An ecumenical Protestant, he attended the Second Vatican Council (1964) as an observer, meeting Pope Paul VI and publishing *Our Dialogue with Rome* (1967), a hopeful view of Catholic ecumenism in the spirit of another great Oxonian, John Henry Newman, who saw all dogma as a living process. Caird, ever the loyal churchman, also served for a year (1975-76) as moderator of the United Reformed Church in England and Wales. However, the realm of letters was his real milieu, and he wrote enough to establish his name as one of the best New Testament scholars of the century. No wooden schoolman, he was endowed with exceptional analytical and linguistic powers as well as a literary imagination reminiscent of C.S. Lewis. His facility in languages, both ancient and modern, made him adept in the subtle and difficult art of translation, exemplified by his work on the Apocrypha of the *New English Bible*. Possessed of many cultural interests, notably music, he made his home a centre of hospitality for faculty and students alike, assisted by his effervescent wife Mollie. They had four children.

Caird *contra* Bultmann

A student of the great C.H. Dodd, Caird did not sympathize with biblical literalism in any form, but he often swam against the stream of

contemporary scholarship, especially German scholarship, giving certain of his views a conservative cast. He believed, for example, that Paul himself, not a later Pauline imitator, wrote both Ephesians and Colossians, a hypothesis eloquently defended in *Paul's Letters from Prison*. He also believed, in opposition to Rudolf Bultmann and his school, that much can be inferred about the flesh-and-blood Jesus from the gospels and that it is a serious mistake to disparage their historical value. In particular, the biblical texts contain substantial material linking the ministry of Jesus to the political destiny of ancient Israel, a theme developed in his seminal essay, "Jesus and the Jewish Nation" (1965). Jesus, he declared, like the prophets of old, was wholly committed to his country and sought its spiritual renewal. Hence the twelve disciples as the nucleus of the Israel of the messianic age; hence also the Son of Man imagery: "The coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven was never conceived as a primitive form of space travel, but as a symbol for a mighty reversal of fortunes within history and at the national level."[1] Salvation is collective, not merely individual, and a saved Israel is the holy heart of a saved world. By allowing modern individualistic existentialism to dominate his reading of the gospels, Bultmann missed this corporate dimension.

Caird severely criticized Bultmann's exegesis for its a-historical assumptions, *to wit*, that faith is independent of history and that the Jesus of history does not really matter. The great German scholar, moreover, was afflicted with unwarranted assumptions about the ancients, believing that they lacked sophistication and thus literally regarded the universe as a three-story structure. This "primitive simplicity" on his part induced two grievous errors: "that 'modern man' would be more comfortable among the abstractions of existential philosophy than with the picture language of the Bible, and that biblical man took the picture language as flat statement of fact."[2] Were the people of biblical times really naïve enough to believe that God lived in the sky? Literalism in fact is more modern than ancient, and the pictorial speech of antiquity is far from artless and naïve. "The thought world of myth was not a world of shadow and

[1] *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* (London: Athlone Press, 1965), 20.
[2] *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 193.

fantasy in which the ancient Israelite sat enchained, like the prisoners in Plato's cave, unable to escape into a world of reality."[3] For Caird, the entire demythologizing project designed by Bultmann rested on false premises.

In his appreciation of myth, Caird would have found an ally in another man of genius, literary scholar Northrop Frye, and it is instructive to compare *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* with Frye's two books, *The Great Code* and *Words with Power*. I do not know if they ever met, but both thought that poetry arose before prose and that poetic visions are not to be dismissed as untrue because they do not accord with empirical science. A good example of this modern fallacy is supplied by the witless way in which even scholars often consign apocalyptic literature to a "Jewish backwater," thinking its bizarre symbols and strange metaphors are the fruit of mental and spiritual decline.[4] Instead it represents a profound mythic and artistic "rebirth of images."[5]

Myth, Frye declared, means the opposite of not really true; Caird held the same view, although, unlike Frye, he rejected the notion that this single genre can be employed to cover the manifold contents of the Bible. To Frye, the attempt to demythologize the gospels was simply futile because they contain nothing but myth, so that to demythologize them is to destroy them. To Caird, on the other hand, the many senses of the word "myth" forbade such sweeping judgments; much can be discerned about the past, and especially about Jesus, from a critical examination of the tales and sayings preserved by the apostolic church, despite their mythic frame. Rather than distract Christians from real history, the author-redactor exponents of biblical myth drew on a "fund of powerfully emotive language" to deepen their understanding of current events.[6]

The truth of the gospel

Apart from his posthumous study of the theology of the New Testament, Caird's only patent theological ventures are his early book on the "truth of

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[3] Ibid., 232.

[4] "The modern equivalent of apocalyptic language is the political cartoon with its frequent use of animal symbols." Ibid., 262.

[5] A term borrowed from Austin Farrar.

[6] *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, 232.

the gospel" and his later reflections on Catholic-Protestant relations, but his basic convictions are easily abstracted from his larger corpus. I summarize them as follows: (1) the world is teleological in character; (2) the goal (*telos*) of the cosmos is the creation of a new humanity; (3) the new humanity entails the razing of every wall that divides us from one another; (4) the law of the new humanity is the law of love (*agape*); (5) love is the power of infinite persuasion; (6) the law of love must rule our collective as well as our individual relationships; (7) Christ is the nucleus of the new humanity; (8) because only Christianity proclaims Christ, the Christian religion stands apart from other religions; (9) salvation is threefold: a past fact, a present experience and a future hope; (10) the sacrificial atoning death of Jesus proves that the power of evil can be broken by forgiving love; (11) forgiving love releases a new power in the world: the life of the world-to-come; (12) the life of the world-to-come will be lived on a renewed earth; (13) on a renewed earth our corporate being will be transformed; (14) heaven is the unseen spiritual dimension of earth.

Perhaps the most distinctive of Caird's *dicta* is his emphasis on the three tenses of salvation: past, present and future. "Christians have been saved once for all, but they are also being saved, working out or reaping their salvation, and look forward to a salvation yet to come."[7] It was another of Bultmann's errors to confine the meaning of the cross to the present moment of decision, thereby dismissing its past and future significance. Past and future matter, because a certain point in time was chosen for God's decisive intervention in human affairs and because our mortal existence is social as well as personal. "So far from being peripheral or fantastic, the refashioning of the organized life of man in society . . . is central to God's eternal purpose . . . "[8] In Christ, the second Adam, the many forms of power contrived by the first Adam—political, economic and social—are subject to radical revision according to the law of love, the sphere of God's heavenly domain. Has not God in Christ defeated the "principalities and powers," or the corporate structures of evil "which reach their tentacles into the innermost fabric of our common

[7] *New Testament Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 119.
[8] *Paul's Letters from Prison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 67n11.

life . . . in social custom and law . . . in structures of authority?"[9] Evil is subtle, so subtle that the Son of God ironically was crucified by the "highest religion and best government" the world had hitherto known.[10] "There is no authority among men which is so high or so holy that it cannot become an instrument of Satan."[11] But evil, personified by the biblical Satan, was defeated in the past, is being defeated in the present and will be defeated again in the future: this is the truth of the gospel, the victory of eternal Love.

The law of love, Caird believed, dictates political pacifism. One of the corporate structures to be transformed is the military machinery of the nation-state that, like other British Christian pacifists of the era (Cecil Cadoux, G.H.C. MacGregor), he regarded as utterly incompatible with Christian discipleship. Christ overcame his crucifiers by means of sacrificial and forgiving love; Christians must do the same. "The wildfire course of evil is checked only when someone refuses to be contaminated, refuses to repay hate, or copy the malefactor."[12] As the power of infinite persuasion, love, as an article of faith, cannot be defeated, for its defeat is unimaginable. Total disarmament, even at the risk of national martyrdom, is the true way of the cross and the true path of universal redemption. A utopian element enters Caird's thought at this point, for nation-states are impersonal aggregates of power, not individuals-writ-large, and cannot sacrifice themselves and their citizenry without sinking into immorality on a terrible scale. Love, as Reinhold Niebuhr famously argued, is not the simple possibility imagined by pacifists when transposed from the individual to the collective sphere. It assumes a far more complex character.

This was not Caird's only blind spot. He possessed—dare I say it?—a British bias against German theology. Paul Tillich, like Bultmann, drew his fire as subservient to timeless ideas and thus also a-historical. "Tillich's line," I once heard him say, "is that Christianity would be the same if it never was!" I nodded sagely at the time, but, after reading Tillich myself, realized that this description is at best only a half-truth.

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[9] *Our Dialogue with Rome* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 68.
[10] *Paul's Letters from Prison,* 196.
[11] *Our Dialogue with Rome,* 68.
[12] *The Truth of the Gospel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 44.

Nor did Caird address adequately the Jewish accusation that the roots of antisemitism lie in the New Testament, especially in Paul and the Fourth Gospel. He saw only a false problem.[13] His own small theological book, *The Truth of the Gospel*, with its neat answers and even an instance of faulty logic,[14] has a dated quality and does not read well today. But it is a work of his youth. His failings are overshadowed by the depth and brilliance of his mature scholarship. Those who were fortunate enough to attend his lectures owe him an incalculable debt. In my case, his mark was indelible; I resolved also to become a professor.

[13] In his view, one cannot fairly make Paul the progenitor of modern antisemitism simply because the apostle assailed the pharisaic "ghosts" that haunted his personal memories, or John because he railed against the "synagogue of Satan," nor can modern apologists rewrite the history of the first century in order to correct a later wrong.

[14] See p. 60.

BOOK REVIEWS

Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity
Matthew Thiessen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. 246.

In this clear and tightly argued book, Matthew Thiessen (Saskatoon Theological Union) sets out to challenge not just one, but two positions that have wide currency among scholars of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity. In the process, he makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the relationship between ethnicity and religion, both in the Jewish world itself and in the mixed Jewish and Gentile communities of early Christ believers.

The heart of the book concerns the Jewish practice of circumcision and its role as the defining marker of Jewish identity. Material from the Second Temple period provides substantial evidence of conversion—Gentiles adopting the Jewish way of life and worship, undergoing circumcision (in the case of males) and thus becoming incorporated into the Jewish community. On the basis of such evidence, most scholars believe that such a practice was not only widespread but also generally accepted. It is this belief—that the possibility of conversion was uncontested—that Thiessen wants to contest.

In his first two chapters, he deals with "genealogy and circumcision in the Hebrew Bible." While few scholars would argue that Israel's scriptures contain any full-blown concept of conversion, many assume that the material dealing with "sojourners," together with other examples of Gentile circumcision, provided the essential logic for later developments. To contest this assumption, Thiessen begins with the key text, the institution of circumcision in Genesis 17. He points out the significance of timing: as a sign of covenantal membership, a male infant is to be circumcised "when he is eight days old" (v. 12; variant readings repeat the command in v. 14). In Chapter 2 he surveys the rest of the Hebrew Bible, arguing that "no passage . . . envisages the possibility that circumcision could function as a rite of conversion that enables a foreigner to become an Israelite" (67).

The next two chapters deal with the Second Temple period. In

chapter 3 he presents his strongest piece of evidence, the re-written version of Genesis 17 found in the book of *Jubilees* (second-century B.C.E.) Here, not only is the command to circumcise on the eighth day mentioned four times, but it is given an elevated status ("an eternal ordinance . . . written on the heavenly tablets") and a harder edge (anyone not circumcised on the eighth day belongs *ipso facto* "to the people [meant for] destruction"). Thiessen has little difficulty in arguing that for *Jubilees* "the difference between Gentiles and Israel is genealogical and therefore irrevocable," and thus that a significant strand within Judaism would categorically reject "the possibility that Gentiles can become part of Israel" (83). While he admits that additional evidence for this position is harder to come by, in chapter 4 he adduces evidence suggesting the existence of opposition to conversion in the specific case of the Idumeans (Edomites), Judea's neighbours to the south.

While the argument to this point may be of interest only to specialists, the payoff comes in chapter 5, where Thiessen turns his attention to "early Christianity," specifically the Acts of the Apostles. Here he contests a second widely held belief—that Luke, especially in his accounts of Peter's vision (Acts 10:9-16) and the apostolic council (Acts 15), declares the abrogation of the Jewish law and the end of any role for ethnic distinctions in the church. This assumption, together with Luke's evident interest in the Gentile mission (e.g., Acts 28:23-28), has sometimes led to the conclusion that Luke-Acts is dismissive of Judaism and supersessionist in its theology. Thiessen argues instead that Luke shared the view that only by being circumcised on the eighth day (like Jesus: Luke 2:21) could anyone truly become Jewish. In Luke's view, the Jewish law was not to be imposed on Gentiles—not because it has been abrogated in Christ, but because Jewish identity is genealogically restricted. For Jews, even for those who believed in Christ, the law continued to be significant; but for Gentiles, Christ also served as a means for them to experience salvation as Gentiles.

Thiessen's argument might have benefitted from some engagement with contemporary discussions of ethnicity and identity (e.g., Denise Kimber Buell). Further, he might have given more attention to the variety of ways in which Jews conceived of the possibility of Gentile "salvation": Is there any Jewish analogue to Luke's position as he sees it (conversion,

no; Gentile salvation, yes), or is it a Christian *novum*? Nevertheless, by questioning the common view—that most Jews perceived Jewishness as something that could be chosen (through circumcision) and not only something that was inherited (through birth)—he has advanced the discussion in significant ways.

Terence L. Donaldson,
Wycliffe College, Toronto School of Theology
terry.donaldson@utoronto.ca

The Providence of God
Edited by Francesca Aran Murphy and Philip G. Ziegler.
London & New York: T& T Clark, 2009. Pp. 333.

This volume of essays is dense with the erudition of seventeen authors, several of them internationally known scholars. The co-editors explain that "the scope of this volume indicates the breadth of current interest: from Barthians to leading protagonists of natural theology, from Thomists to correlationists" (1). Here I can comment briefly on only a few of these substantial essays.

Five historical essays explore 1 Samuel, Aquinas, Calvin, Hegel and others. In "Providence and Causality," David Bentley Hart insists on the distinction between primary and secondary causality, attacking the "guileless crudity" of Calvin, who, he thinks, had no authentic doctrine of providence at all. By denying any distinction between divine will and divine permission, he argues Calvin offers only a doctrine of "absolute divine determinism" (36). Hart writes with similar disdain of the "moral idiocy" of the "degenerate" Thomism of Domingo Banez, who asserts that God remains innocent, while being the efficient cause even of human evil actions.

John Webster constructs a theology of providence out of a christological/trinitarian centre, in eschatological perspective. Providence is the work of divine love "whereby God ordains and executes the fulfillment of creatures in fellowship with himself" (158). A general concept of deity is misleading, for "all Christian doctrines are functions of the doctrine of the Trinity." Thus, providence is about "the plan for the

fullness of time, set forth in Christ and made actual by the Holy Spirit" (159). Webster speaks of a "relative independence" of creatures: "God's providential activity is omnicausal, but not solely causal" (171). God's providence is known only by faith, from a movement outside of reason. For persons of faith, the horrors of life evoke "lament but no tragedy" (164). For believers concerned existentially with questions of theodicy, there is little consolation to be found here. A pastorally sensitive article by John Swinton appears later: "Patience and Lament: Living Faithfully in the Presence of Suffering."

Perhaps the most interesting chapter is that of Sarah Coakley: "Providence and the Evolutionary Phenomenon of 'Cooperation.'" Presupposing a development in neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory asserting that cooperation, as well as competition, is an essential element of evolutionary process, we must now recognize that "evolution at significant and crucial junctures *favours* cooperation, costly 'self-sacrifice' and even 'forgiveness'" (191). Coakley sees a tendency against individualism as coherent with trinitarian theism. She assumes a classical Thomism, vigorously eschewing deism. Divine providence is that of an incarnational, trinitarian God of *kenosis,* of "intimate involvement in empathy and suffering." God does not just occasionally stir into action, but intervenes constantly, "pouring God's self into every secret crack and joint of created process" (189). One perceives here a certain proximity to process panentheism and to the kenotic theologies of Polkinghorne and Moltmann.

Philip Ziegler offers a fine article on "The Uses of Providence in Public Theology," raising the question of the Christian discernment of God's intentions within contemporary events and of Christians' responsibilities as agents of God's will. He explores the ways in which providence was used politically during the English Civil War, noting the awareness of complexity in discerning the interface of divine and human action. Puritans often took "secondary agency" seriously, emphasizing the "ordinary means" deriving from the christological centre of faith (313). Further, Ziegler discusses providence and the "German Hour," i.e., the theological support of Naziism by Gogarten, Hirsch, and Althaus, who saw in Hitler "a great turning point in German destiny as coming from the hand of God" (315). Their theology of providence was supposedly

"liberated" from "christological narrowness" and "untethered from the scriptures." Over against this, Barth and the Barmen Declaration repudiated "other events and powers, figures and truths as divine revelation alongside this one Word of God [i.e., Jesus Christ as he is attested in scripture]." Learning from these historical instances, Ziegler cautions against the twin perils of treating providence as "a blank cheque by any and all political programmes," and of collapsing providence into "redemption without remainder" (318). Politics has to do with the penultimate; it may be "salutary, but not salvific . . . in a world understood by faith as 'preserved and maintained by God for the coming of Christ'" (321). He thinks we should deflate Christian expectations in the political sphere. These are surely wise cautions, if they do not encourage quietist passivity, and deflate all passion and enthusiasm for the political engagement of Christians for social and ecological justice and peace.

This is altogether an excellent and important book worthy of wide attention and careful study.

Harold Wells,
Emmanuel College, Toronto
harold.wells@utoronto.ca

Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology
Ed. Kwok Pui-Lan. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010. Pp. 288.

Back in the 1980s, Christian feminism inspired many teachers, thinkers, activists and seekers in United Church pastoral charges, educational centres, and even some Conference and General Council offices. Experience meant women's experience too, and women's experience transformed our view of Scripture, tradition and even reason.

But our experience was only *our* experience. Women in other social and cultural locations needed to tell their own story and do their own theology—and so they did, in books such as the 1989 foundational text, *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology.*

This present collection, an intentional update to *With Passion and Compassion,* aims to "signal newer developments and to include

emerging voices." It still uses the term "Third World" to connote "the tremendous power imbalance between the powerful and the disenfranchised" (1), an imbalance present also within the so-called First World. It includes also the voices of indigenous women.

Why should one read this book?

First, one needs to study Kwok Pui-Lan's essay on the "newer developments." Some of us benefit from globalization and the neo-liberal economy; not so for Third World and indigenous women and families. Also, we have much to learn from her remarks on cultural criticism, as she examines the impact of globalism on local culture and the dialogue between local culture and the doing of theology.

Second, this book illustrates how post-colonial theory can transform our understanding of theology, Bible, and social ethics. This theory "covers the period beginning with the arrival and occupation of an imperial power, the struggle against it, independence, and post-independence—a continuity that remains valid with the persistence of imperial domination" (91). Musa Dube, a Botswanan theologian, asserts that post-colonial discourse is not about "historical accusations," but a "committed search and struggle for decolonization and liberation of the oppressed" (92). Post-colonial theory includes an awareness that "imperialism" is not only about "geographical possession," but persists also in countries that have gained their political independence. In such countries, colonizing may happen "through colonizing texts, that is, texts designed to take possession of the minds and lands of those who are different" (93).

Post-colonial theology is for all of us, so that we do not collude, however innocently, in the disempowerment of others. It is our work to discover and move beyond our biases—especially in our reading of Scripture. Musa Dube's ground-breaking essay explains the theory and then challenges even those of us who profess a feminist, liberation theology. One's perspective on the Book of Ruth will forever be changed when one reads Cherokee scholar Laura Donaldson's interpretation of Ruth as a story of cultural assimilation.

Third, we can learn from the increasing openness of Christian feminist and indigenous theologians to other religions and cultures, anticipated in some of the 1989 Asian theology. This present book

articulates even more strongly the need for feminist inter-faith co-operation. Christian Scripture needs to be placed in dialogue not only with the stories of present-day women but also with stories in other scriptures. Critique of patriarchal scriptures must include critique of patriarchy in all scriptures and religions. Liturgical and spiritual practice can comfortably integrate other spiritualities with devotion to Jesus. In multi-faith Canada, how might we become more open?

Fourth, this book offers voices not available in 1989, including Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon's essay on Dalit women's theology, Lee Miena Skye (Palawa, Tasmania) on Australian Aboriginal christologies, Clara Luz Ajo Làzaro on inter-religious theology in Cuba, a mainland Chinese woman, Meng Yanling, and Palestinian Quaker Jean Zaru (essential reading!). Like Jesus hearing the unheard, we too need to hear those most marginalized in our world.

Who should read this book? Jean Zaru's poignant story of the plight of Palestinian Christians, or Isabel Phiri's African response to HIV-AIDS, would speak to engaged laypeople. The articles by Sharon Bong, Ivone Gebara and Andrea Smith are harder going, even for a very literate reader, because of linguistic and stylistic complexity. However, they are worth the work. The bibliographical references invite one to go much deeper, but I wish there were an index!

This book belongs in seminary libraries and curricula, and on the bookshelves of preachers and Christian educators. These days it is hard for many of us to do sustained reading, much less get outside the North American and Western European perspectives that we readily mistake for universal truth. We need to listen to those on the margins who see what we miss, who open our eyes to the colonialism and other "isms" that shape our lives. We need to persist in the shared task of mending the world.

Jane Doull,
St Andrews, New Brunswick
jvdoull@gmail.com

The Sacrifice of Jesus: Understanding Atonement Biblically
Christian A. Eberhart Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011. Pp. x+170.

In the Introduction, Christian Eberhart writes that this book "deals with sacrifice as it appears in the Hebrew Bible primarily in the form of rituals and in the New Testament primarily in the form of metaphors. Atonement will be discussed to the degree that it is the 'effect' of such sacrifices and belongs to the language of sacrificial metaphors" (11). What follows this ambitious introduction is a lengthy discussion of the meaning of various forms of sacrifice within the life and work of the people of Israel, as well as how each form might also lead to atonement. Eberhart then picks up the trail in the New Testament context, seeking to clarify how Jesus-as-sacrifice and sacrifice-as-atonement came to be understood in the emerging Christian community, with its roots not only within Judaism but also in the Gentile world of experience.

The most enjoyable aspect of this book is the historical overview that Eberhart provides. It is evident from the multitude of references that he has indeed done his homework. The bibliography alone runs to 16 pages; that on the heels of a book that is a slim 132 pages long, with an additional 17 pages of endnotes closing out this work. The reader, then, has the opportunity to review some of these and thus discover if s/he would draw the same conclusions.

This reviewer was challenged by Eberhart's concluding thesis that "the sacrifice of Jesus invites people to accept the salvation that God has prepared for humanity" (134). The difficulty presented in this book is that one must at least believe that Jesus is a sacrifice in order to take the next step to understanding that sacrifice as atonement. Therein rests the dilemma that many Christians, including this reviewer, face head-on. While it is easy to understand how the theology of sacrifice and atonement grew out of pre-Christian experiences, primarily, but not exclusively, within Judaism, and was transformed into Christian orthodoxy, it is not so easy to comprehend how this ought to be the case today, given the wide-ranging contemporary viewpoints of Jesus. Eberhart, to his credit, at least opens the door to the possibility of an

informed discussion of sacrifice and atonement. Whether s/he resolves it in favour of the traditional viewpoint is indeed the question.

Tony Thompson,
Wesley United Church, Prince Albert, SK
tony.t@sasktel.net

Christian Worship: Postcolonial Perspectives.
Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns. Sheffield and Oakville: Equinox Press, 2011. Pp. 169.

This book by Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns emerged from their collaborative teaching experience at the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Birmingham (UK), and their awareness of the absence of insights from postcolonial scholarship in liturgical study. *Christian Worship* embarks on a path that not many scholars and practitioners of liturgy have taken, a path that is, nonetheless, necessary to take in order to properly respond to an era marked by border-crossing and boundary-transgressing.

Postcolonial theory and liturgical theology are rarely connected and thus appear to be unfamiliar partners and "unlikely companions" (p. vii). That is where the strength of this book lies! A comment regarding the cover-art captures their intention: "by evoking border-less-ness . . . oceanic images [in the painting] . . . can provide theologians with some fresh insights to help narrate their exilic experiences, hybrid and mixed identities" (xiii-xiv).

The second strength of this book is found in its interdisciplinary commitment. Not only do the authors undertake liturgical study in conversation with postcolonial study but also they make an effort to work within each other's disciplines. This contributes to the effort to "decolonize the curriculum in theological education" that is still "circumscribed by colonial boundaries" (2). Their commitment comes from a desire to position themselves in such a way as to be able to narrate their own multiple identities.

The book deals with five areas of liturgical study: prayer; song; scripture; space; the sacrament of baptism and ministry. Liturgical prayer

needs postcolonial scrutiny to prevent it from perpetuating or reinforcing forms of oppression while privileging and endorsing Euro-centric white supremacy. In examining the liturgical text of "The Women's World Day of Prayer" (2005), under the theme of "Let Our Light Shine," Jagessar and Burns note the danger of employing the imagery of light and darkness, especially when these are interpreted as good and bad respectively. Liturgical texts, whether they are oral prayers or symbolic gestures, may cultivate a racially prejudiced "mind" that can translate into the "flesh and blood" oppression in real contexts (47).

The authors then examine song, including the hymns of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley. Though their bias may not be explicit, their hymns reflect a colonial mind-set that justifies the submission of the so-called "uncivilized natives" to the rule of British Christians. Such examples lie not only in the past, but also in the contemporary phenomenon that expanding Christian influence in the global south still carries the colonial legacy—as when old hymns continue to be sung without critical scrutiny.

The authors' examination of the dynamic of power that is invested in the development of the lectionary reveals its canonical and christological bias, its ecclesiastical authority, its geographical location and its authorship, all of which privilege Christian groups in the northern hemisphere. Citing Jione Havea's work, they opt for the "Commoner's Lectionary," instead of the "Common Lectionary," as the former attends to concerns of local worshipers sidelined from the dominant position (84).

Last but not least, the authors unpack the rites of baptism and ordination found in *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England,* a resource that is adapted from other churches, including the Anglican Church of Canada and the Uniting Church of Australia (UCA) by asking "how sacramentality might be conceived in relation to postcolonial convictions" (p.108). They note that the baptismal liturgy used in *Common Worship* acknowledges "Christ's authority over human society," changed from the earlier version of "the dignity of every human being" (108). The rite of ordination reflects a similar problematic in the words and gestures as the metaphor of ministry shifts from servant (lay) to shepherd (priest) to Christ's bride (bishop). This poses a postcolonial challenge as these texts seem to underscore a hierarchical ecclesial authority more than identifying the differences in the equality of

threefold ministry. However, their examinations do not fail to point to some positive changes, as in the case of the UCA where "an ecclesial ethos that gives more agency to the participation of laity" (122) is reflected. It is interesting to recognize that the UCA, as an ecclesial product of a former colony of Britain, seems to be able to unlearn a colonial legacy and embrace a postcolonial vision.

While modestly recognizing the limitations of their efforts, Jagessar and Burns successfully interrogate the undercurrents of unexamined liturgical rites, opting for the postcolonial optic. Their engagement, which is a beginning, invites us to join their work rather than be satisfied to "gate-keep" (134) dominant views for the sake of retaining our power.

HyeRan Kim-Cragg,
St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon
hyeran.kimcragg@usask.ca.

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