

# Concordia Theological Quarterly

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**Flights from the Atonement**

David P. Scaer

**The Son of God and the Father's Wrath:  
Atonement and Salvation in Matthew's Gospel**

Jeffrey A. Gibbs

**The Atonement in Mark's Sacramental Theology**

Peter J. Scaer

**The Death of Jesus in the Gospel of John:  
Atonement for Sin?**

Charles A. Gieschen

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

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## The Death of Jesus as Atonement for Sin

The teaching of Jesus' death as atonement for sin has received renewed attention recently in biblical and theological studies. Some of this attention has been in reaction to the omnipresent mantra of critical scholarship that such teaching was a later creation of the church in order to provide a more suitable interpretation of the death of Jesus. Both the Symposium on Exegetical Theology and the Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions at Fort Wayne, held in January 2008, took up the challenge of engaging this debate. The four articles in this issue were first delivered as papers during these symposia.

David Scaer addresses the tendency of Lutherans to see atonement as a doctrine easily separated from—and less important than—justification. He demonstrates the intimate interrelationship and interdependence of these doctrines as well as the current challenges being issued against a proclamation of the atonement that is faithful to the teaching of the Scriptures, especially of Jesus in the Gospels. The remaining three articles each focus on the atonement as proclaimed in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John respectively. Jeffrey Gibbs, author of the recently published Concordia Commentary on Matthew 1–10, explores the variety of texts in which Matthew proclaims the atonement. In addition to his emphasis on Jesus' substitutionary role as the New Israel, Gibbs gives significant attention to showing how Matthew proclaims the death of Jesus as the eschatological visitation of the Father's divine wrath over all sin. The article by Peter Scaer introduces us to some of the modern debate and then focuses on the teaching of atonement in Mark. Not only does he review the traditional texts proclaiming atonement (especially Mark 10:45), but he also probes how Jesus (and subsequently Mark) use the Lord's Supper and Baptism in order to proclaim Jesus' death as atonement. My article addresses the challenge that the fourth evangelist does not understand Jesus' death as atonement for sin by demonstrating ways in which this Gospel proclaims atonement that are in concert with the more explicit atonement teaching in 1 John.

Debate about the atonement in our circles used to center around the legitimacy of proclaiming the atonement also according to the *Christus Victor* model rather than strictly using the more familiar Anselmic model. Much more is at stake in the current debate. We hope these articles will help readers to ground their teaching of the death of Jesus as atonement for sin in the very Gospels that narrate our Lord's exemplary life lived and laid down in our stead to pay for the world's sin and conquer our foes, death and Satan.

Charles A. Gieschen  
Associate Editor

## Flights from the Atonement

David P. Scaer

Self-reflection generally produces predictably favorable results. To create an image of ourselves with which we can live, we sift out unpleasant evidences and preserve positive ones. If we are successful, we can propel ourselves to greater excellence in our own eyes. Socrates said “know thyself,” but we can know ourselves as little as we can know the ways of God. You get the idea. Should we ever reach that point where we get close to discovering our true selves, our memories self-ignite and become the kidneys of our minds to eliminate the uncomplimentary residue that clogs the arteries of our self-esteem. James did not go far enough when he spoke of a man who observes his natural face in a mirror and then forgets how he looked (Jas 1:23-24). It is more likely that he was looking in a glass darkly and did not see his appearance in the first place.

This inability for self-critique also applies to communities of faith, whether it be the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), or the Roman Catholic Church. Even the most sophisticated public relations attempts to polish the mirror does little more than reinforce what we already think of ourselves. Self-image rarely corresponds to the way others see us. The prayer “Lord, cleanse thou me from secret faults” asks for their removal and not that they should be known to us. A side benefit of the symposium series of Concordia Theological Seminary, now happily and unexpectedly in its thirty-first year, is that guest speakers give us an opportunity to see ourselves in ways we could never discover by ourselves. Put in another way, “Oh that we would see our theological selves the way others do.” If critique does not match our self-image, we cast the tie breaking vote. At the 2007 symposium, one lecturer uncovered aspects of our corporate life at odds with our self-image and a brouhaha rose from the back benches whose echoes bounced into the pages of *Forum Letter*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Benne, “Missouri Synod Paradox—Churchly and Sectarian at the Same Time,” *Forum Letter* 36, no. 3 (March 2007): 1-3.

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### I. Primary and Secondary Fundamental Doctrines?

For Lutherans the doctrine of justification by grace through faith on account of Christ is so central to our self-image that we claim that by it the church stands or falls. A glitch in this doctrine threatens to ripple through the entire system with disastrous results. Get this doctrine right and the others will fall in line, or at least there is a good chance that they will.<sup>2</sup> We might, however, want to take a second look at this.<sup>3</sup> A correct articulation of justification has not prevented errors in other doctrines. To complicate matters, Lutherans have disagreed, and still do, on the definition of justification.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, before the Lutheran articulation of this doctrine, the church flourished and produced still binding trinitarian and christological formulations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "As Dr. Luther wrote, 'If this one teaching stands in purity, then Christendom will also remain pure and good, undivided and unseparated; but . . . where it does not remain pure, it is impossible to ward off any error sectarian spirit' (SD III, 6). Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 563. Speaking for many others, Matthew Harrison says: "My friends, the doctrine of justification is the answer to life's persistent questions. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake has something to say about being human. The doctrine of justification is the heart and soul, the *sine non qua*, of Lutheranism and not only of Lutheranism but the *sine non qua* of Christianity." See "Crossing Old-Line Boundaries: The Works of Lutheran Charity," *CTQ* 71 (2007): 260.

<sup>3</sup> There is no suggestion in the Corinthian correspondence that this church had the difficulties with justification that the Galatians had, but this did not prevent them from having women preachers and charismatic practices, denying the resurrection of the dead, and baptizing surrogates for the dead.

<sup>4</sup> Lutheran pietism shifted the weight from justification to sanctification, as did rationalism by seeing salvation as a result of an ethical life. In the 1960s and 1970s some LCMS pastors took justification's place as the chief doctrine to mean that it was the only one that mattered. This infection passed into the ELCA where it eliminated barriers to allow fellowship with the Reformed, Episcopalians, and Methodists, and allowed the ordination of women pastors and closed the eye to the ordination of homosexuals. For differences among Lutherans, see Robert D. Preus, "Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," in *Doctrine is Life: Essays on Justification and the Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Klemet I. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 97-117.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Root makes this assessment: "We may decide that the theology of Gregory of Nyssa passes the test of being compatible with a true doctrine of justification. It would be odd, however, to say that the doctrine of justification was hermeneutically important to Gregory, and an interpretation of Gregory that used justification as a central concept may be appropriate for certain purposes, but it would be using categories foreign to Gregory's own theology." See "Continuing the Conversation: Deeper Agreement on Justification as Criterion and on the Christian as

Giving pride of place to justification as the chief doctrine assumes that some doctrines are more necessary than others. While the categories of primary and secondary fundamental doctrines may seem a bit old fashioned,<sup>6</sup> erstwhile LCMS pastor Richard John Neuhaus claims a similar model in Roman Catholic theology: "There is, to be sure, hierarchy in the sense that some truths are more foundational than others."<sup>7</sup> Axiomatic for any theology, so it seems, is that one core doctrine opens the door to the entire system and reappears throughout it, as justification does in the Augsburg Confession. In the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, Roman Catholics saw justification as a doctrine of the first rank without it being given exclusive honor.<sup>8</sup> The dust has not settled on this document.<sup>9</sup>

Like Roman Catholics, the Reformed do not see justification as the one chief doctrine.<sup>10</sup> Evangelicals who stand in the Reformed tradition may share with Lutherans a verbally identical definition, but in understanding faith as a conscious rational decision of which only the intellectually mature are capable, their definition is compromised. Since infants and young children cannot believe, their birth within a Christian family—and not faith—gives them a place within the covenant. Prime facie justification by faith is denied. The Evangelical or Reformed definition of faith which does not allow the *fides infantium* compromises their understanding of justification of faith and calls into question other aspects of their theology. Only that faith which is pure receptivity responding in trust to Christ

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*simul iustus et peccator*," in *The Gospel of Justification*, ed. Wayne C. Stumme (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 48–49.

<sup>6</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–1953), 1:80–93.

<sup>7</sup> Richard John Neuhaus, "True Devotion to Mary," *First Things* 178 (December 2007): 42.

<sup>8</sup> The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles says of the *Joint Declaration*, "Although not all would agree, I think the much vaunted Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith, signed in 1999, exaggerated the agreements"; see "Saving Ecumenism from Itself," *First Things* 178 (December 2007): 25.

<sup>10</sup> Roman Catholic theologian H. Ashley Hall makes this observation: "For Lutherans, the doctrine of justification is properly called a dogma, since it is equated with the clearest summation of the gospel, its 'living voice.' . . . While Lutherans are unique in seeing the doctrine of justification as the chief article, Roman Catholics and Protestants esteem the doctrine as a chief article." See "The Development of Doctrine: A Lutheran Examination," *Pro Ecclesia* 16, no. 3 (2007): 270. Alistair McGrath notes that the early Swiss reformers saw their reformation in terms of morals not of justification. In the eighteenth century, John Wesley saw his work in the same way. See Alistair McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 248–249.

qualifies as the *sola fide* by which sinners are justified. Self-reflection does not belong to the faith which justifies. For Calvin it does.<sup>11</sup> In Lutheran theology transformation of sinners (sanctification), which is more prominent in Roman Catholic and Reformed theologies, follows simultaneously with the creation of faith but does not belong to the believer's justification. Differences in defining faith render Lutheran agreements with mainline and Evangelical Protestants on justification more apparent than real. Describing justification does not accomplish justification. Another problem is raised when it is asked whether faith or the sacraments are more important for salvation. The inevitable answer is faith, but the comparison turns faith into a substance or "thing" alongside of the sacraments. Sacraments are really "divine things," the *communio sanctorum*, by and through which faith is created and hence possess the prior and greater position.<sup>12</sup>

Side by side with justification by faith at the heart of Lutheran theology is *sola scriptura*, though in practice some Lutheran theologians rely more on and cite non-biblical sources like Luther, the Lutheran Confessions, Lutheran Orthodoxy, the fathers cited by them, and favored theologians.<sup>13</sup> In theological discussion, officially accepted documents often stand on a par with the Scriptures. So much for *sola scriptura*. Since the LCMS's controversies erupted in the 1960s and 1970s, Evangelical definitions of the Bible, like those on justification, have been regarded as the same as Lutheran ones because of identical wording, but they lack the christological component. Lutheran adherence to the inspiration and authority of Scripture includes their being thoroughly christological and not that they merely contain christological components. In the case of the Old Testament, these components are often limited by Evangelicals to messianic prophecies and types authorized by New Testament reference. Christ, however, is both the woof and the weave of the testaments and not only a golden thread lost in the tweed. If Christ is the golden thread, then all the Scriptures are pure gold. The Spirit who inspires is no more and no less than the Spirit of Christ, and so the Spirit's language is totally christological. Christ through the Spirit is both author and content of the

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<sup>11</sup> Phillip Cary argues that for Calvin being saved by faith means knowing that one is saved by faith; see "*Sola Fide: Luther and Calvin*," *CTQ* 71 (2007): 265-281.

<sup>12</sup> This is implied when faith is compared with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, with the former designated as a primary fundamental doctrine and the latter a secondary one. If God is present in Baptism, this sacrament has a prior value in creating and confirming faith.

<sup>13</sup> H. Ashley Hall notes that "the majority of Catholic doctrines and ecclesial practices are accepted by Lutherans"; see "The Development of Doctrine," 267.

Bible (John 16:14–15). Not only is the christological character of the Scriptures proven by citation (Luke 24:27), but it is required from the perspective of the doctrine of justification, which according to Lutherans is the chief doctrine. Any Scripture alleged to be non-christological would be incapable of effecting faith and justifying the sinner. A non-christological interpretation of a biblical pericope points to a deficit in trinitarian theology, since the Spirit would then be inspiring “truths” which did not have to do with Christ.

If Lutherans cannot recognize that shared doctrinal definitions with the Reformed mask bottomless crevices, it might surface that Lutherans are not agreed among themselves. Meeting in Helsinki in 1963, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) could not come to agreement among its member churches. Hence one can sympathize with the Vatican’s hesitancy in signing the *Joint Declaration* and then adding an appendix to the document. Unclear to the Roman Catholic representatives was who spoke for Lutherans. Since then both Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians have distanced themselves from the document.<sup>14</sup> Matters are further complicated by disagreement among Luther scholars on what his doctrine of justification really was. The Finnish School led by Tuomo Mannermaa holds that Luther understood justification as *theosis*, the indwelling of God in the believer.<sup>15</sup> For R. Scott Clark, *theosis* seems close to the view of Osiander that justification takes place in the believer and not in Christ. Robert Jenson challenges this, since *theosis* has to do with the flesh and blood of Jesus and not a mystic indwelling.<sup>16</sup> Clark correctly points out that this does not have to be an either-or situation,<sup>17</sup> but it does show

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<sup>14</sup> Avery Dulles provides a brief survey of Lutheran and Roman Catholic dissent to the *Joint Declaration* (JD); see “Justification and the Unity of the Church” in *The Gospel of Justification*, ed. Wayne C. Stumme (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 126–127. Dulles has a low view of the *Joint Declaration*, as evident in his brief survey: “But if I were in a position to do so, I would prohibit these Lutheran positions from being preached in Catholic pulpits or taught in Catholic seminaries and catechisms. And conversely, I suppose that many Lutherans who subscribe to JD consider the Catholic positions described in that document misleading and even false.” That says it all!

<sup>15</sup> For example, Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther’s View of Justification*, ed. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *The Works of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 297.

<sup>17</sup> R. Scott Clark, “*Iustitia Imputata Christi*: Alien or Proper to Luther’s Doctrine of Justification,” *CTQ* 70 (2006): 269–310. This should not be an either-or, as Clark notes: “I see no compelling reason to treat Luther’s doctrine of union and his doctrine of justification as if they were mutually exclusive. Both doctrines were important to Luther’s Protestant development, but they were logically distinct and Luther ordered

confusion in the Lutheran ranks. Objective justification means it happens first *extra nos* in Christ and then *in nobis*.

Confusion among Lutheran laity is of a different kind. Surveys show that a majority were more likely to see works as a factor in justification. From an eschatological perspective this response has a lot going for it. So the Athanasian Creed states, "Those who have done good things will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil things into eternal fire," a phrase approximating Jesus' words at the final judgment (Matt 25:46).

## II. Justification as the Chief Doctrine?

Francis Pieper, the LCMS's premier theologian, held that justification was the chief doctrine and only Lutherans got it right. Rome and the Arminians did not. Calvinists had the right wording but their doctrine of a limited atonement nullified their definition. Pieper may have realized this claim could be (mis)understood to mean that those not holding to the Lutheran definition were lost. Caught between two poles, neither of which he was willing to give up, he held that justification could take place where it was improperly defined. Rather than consigning this vast majority of Christendom to condemnation, he gave them a pass if they believed in Christ. So the phrase "felicitous inconsistency" came into lingua franca of the LCMS,<sup>18</sup> but this made the chief doctrine less chief. Rather than focusing on one doctrine as the one of honor, the theological environment of a particular period determines the one on which the church stands or falls.

Pieper further hedges his position on justification as the chief doctrine by making the atonement the presupposition for justification, and so the *propter Christum* carries the greater weight.<sup>19</sup> In this hierarchy of what is more or less fundamental, Jesus' death and resurrection occupies the position between justification and atonement. Of "first importance" for Paul was the message he received from the apostles and which he preached: "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that

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them quite differently than Ritschl, Holl, and the New Finnish school would have us think"; see "*Iustitia Imputata Christi*," 309.

<sup>18</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:21-34.

<sup>19</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:514. The following translation of the German may not be adequate: "Thus Christology serves merely as the substructure of justification." It would better be rendered: "Thus Christology alone [*lediglich*] is the foundation for justification." See the German text in Francis Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 3 vol. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917-1924), 2:619. Root notes that Barth makes the confession of Christ the article by which the church stands or falls; see "Continuing the Conversation," 50.

he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:4-5).<sup>20</sup> Because Christ's death was "for our sins," this proclamation justified the believer, but a fuller articulation of justification was reserved for Galatians and Romans, which may mean that the Corinthians were at least straight on justification; however, without correction and amendment, this felicitous inconsistency was doomed to collapse. Paul framed his doctrine of justification in response to those who placed adherence to Old Testament laws alongside of faith in Christ.

Similarly, Luther developed his doctrine of justification by faith in reaction to medieval church teaching that indulgences, pilgrimages, and masses assuaged divine displeasure over sin. This does not mean that non-Pauline books did not have messages that justified sinners by forgiving them, or that those who believed the teachings of the fathers and theologians before Luther were not accepted by God on account of Christ or they did not know it. They did, but the Old Testament prophets, the evangelists, and even Jesus did not articulate the doctrine of justification as Paul did, or take the matter further as Luther did. Absence of an articulated doctrine of justification does not mean that there was ever a time when believers were not justified by faith. Even James knew faith was the key to Abraham's being justified. A prophet's call to Israel to cease their devotion to pagan gods and to turn to the patriarchal God was a call to faith and forgiveness. Since the entire biblical message is about God graciously forgiving sinners by faith, justification permeates the entire Scriptures.

Another fly that spoils the ointment is when the articulation of the doctrine is passed off as essential to the proclamation. This conflation between justification, which is effected by the gospel, and its definition may have resulted from the Reformation controversy. Since Paul articulated the doctrine as no other biblical writer had, his definition becomes the additive to get greater interpretative (homiletical) mileage out of the biblical texts, including the words of Jesus. Recite the Pauline doctrine and justification takes place.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The Greek text reads: παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις, ὃ καὶ παρέλαβον, ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς.

<sup>21</sup> Some Reformed theologians put so much weight on the definition of justification that those seen to deny it are declared apostate. A panel of Evangelical theologians assembled in 1995 at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, expressed their displeasure with "The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," prepared by Evangelicals and Catholics Together; see "Irreconcilable Differences:

### III. Atonement and Justification

In this scenario Paul becomes a midrash for the rest of the Bible, and so he often comes across as the preacher of the gospel in the place of Jesus, who is consigned to the role of a preacher of the law, as in the Sermon on the Mount. This is a common view of Christian and non-Christian alike. To this we respond that all of the Spirit's words create faith by which Christians are justified, but among his inspired words those spoken by Jesus in his humiliation take precedence in honor and effect.<sup>22</sup> Foundational and intrinsic to the Lord's Prayer are atonement and justification in our asking God to forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors, though those who pray these words may be unaware that they are only fully understood in the Eucharistic words: "for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28). Christians forgive those whom God has already forgiven and not

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Catholics, Evangelicals, and the New Quest for Unity," *Bible Bulletin Board Web site* (Columbus, NJ: Bible Bulletin Board), <http://www.biblebb.com/files/ECTDOC.HTM> (accessed November 2, 2007). The group was displeased at the absence of "by faith alone [*sola fide*]" in paragraph 12: "We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ." This led John MacArthur and R. C. Sproul to state that the Roman Catholic Church was "an apostate form of Christianity," "a false religion," and "another religion." The other two panelists took exception but disapproved of the definition. MacArthur said some of his own church members "know about Christ, they know about the Bible, they believe all that, what they don't know about is how to become a Christian—how to be genuinely converted and saved—they don't know that." Sproul saw faith as accepting Christ as Lord and Savior. In regard to babies, Sproul agreed with the Roman Church that regeneration preceded faith but rejected their belief in baptismal regeneration. For Sproul and other Evangelicals, faith is a conscious decision and not, as Lutherans hold, merely trust. Sproul's claim that "'Justification by faith alone' is an essential doctrine" requires the believer to understand imputation.

<sup>22</sup> One notes the christological interpretation of the Beatitudes in the homily by Pope Benedict XVI on All Saints' Day 2006: "Thus, we have come to the Gospel of this feast, the proclamation of the Beatitudes which we have just heard resound in this Basilica. Jesus says: Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed those who mourn, the meek; blessed those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful; blessed the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted for the sake of justice [righteousness] (cf. Mt 5: 3-10). In truth, the blessed *par excellence* is only Jesus. He is, in fact, the true poor in spirit, the one afflicted, the meek one, the one hungering and thirsting for justice, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemaker. He is the one persecuted for the sake of justice. The Beatitudes show us the spiritual features of Jesus and thus express his mystery, the mystery of his death and Resurrection, of his passion and of the joy of his Resurrection. This mystery, which is the mystery of true blessedness, invites us to follow Jesus and thus to walk toward it." See "Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Vatican Basilica, Wednesday, 1 November 2006," [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/homilies/2006/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20061101\\_all-saints\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20061101_all-saints_en.html).

those whom God is about to forgive. God does the unconscionable thing in showing no greater favoritism to his own people than he does to his enemies, whom he showers with the same astounding generosity (Matt 5:45).

His non-discriminatory beneficence is evidence of objective justification; if this phrase is too scholastic, try universal justification. Narrow justification down to the one person of Jesus whom God finds and declares as righteous (Acts 3:14-15) and in this declaration he incorporates all of humanity. In raising Jesus from the dead, God found him righteous, and in that one act God found all of humanity righteous in him (1 Cor 15:22). Jesus, as the second, greater, and true Adam, possessed all of humanity in himself. So if all sinned in the first Adam and were condemned to death, how much more shall life and resurrection be given to all in the greater Adam, in and from whom God constituted a new humanity. Apart from how the Reformed understand faith, their doctrine of a limited atonement has christological consequences in that the first Adam remains more effective in bringing sin, death, and condemnation on all than Christ who brings justification, resurrection, and salvation only to the elect. Justification, like atonement, is as cosmic in its dimensions as Adam's sin. God does not justify individuals separately at the moment of faith, but justification happens once and for all in Christ<sup>23</sup> and by faith we share in what already exists as a reality in Christ. Preaching creates faith in Christ in whom sins are forgiven.

While in the divine hierarchy a greater honor belongs to the gospel of proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection than to faith which is effected by such proclamation, an even greater honor belongs to the events which form the content of the proclamation. Without Christ's death and resurrection as historical events, the proclamation would be empty words with no salvific value. This is at the heart of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians, though these Christians were unaware of it. They believed the gospel that Christ died and rose, but they did not realize that their denial of the general resurrection logically meant that Christ was still dead and they could no longer count themselves as forgiven (justified). Without the historical foundation of Christ's resurrection, their justification or being forgiven was null and void. They were still in their sins. Within the Corinthian context, the doctrine by which that congregation was going to stand or fall was Christ's resurrection, without which justification by faith would not have a leg to stand on. Justification would have been the second

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<sup>23</sup> "He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30).

shoe to fall, or was it the third? First was the general resurrection, the second was Christ's resurrection, and finally their justification. Matthew's argument is similar but perhaps not as obvious. His aggressive—and one might add polemical—defense of the empty tomb (Matt 28:11-15) is the foundation for Christ's entrusting his words and ministry to the apostles (Matt 28:16-20). The empty tomb reinforces his resurrection appearance to the women (Matt 28:9-10) that he had actually been raised from dead. Without a historically verifiable resurrection, as far as that is possible, Christ's establishing his church in the apostolic ministry would be vacuous. God's participation in history provided the foundation for the gospel, and the gospel creates and confirms faith by which believers are justified before God.

To recap our argument, at the external level sinners hear and believe the gospel and are forgiven (justified). Then we pass through the proclamation which justifies to the historical moments of crucifixion and resurrection which provide the proclamation with its content. Finally—or almost finally—we arrive at the atonement which for several reasons is the *fundamentum* of the Christian faith. From our perspective its importance rests in providing a foundation for our being forgiven (justified). As side benefits, death and Satan lose their threatening power. From God's perspective things are different. By the atonement, affronts from his rational creatures challenging his deity have been removed, and Satan is dethroned as the anti-god. God can be recognized as the sole creator, and so his creation awaits restoration. Atonement is all about his being creator *coeli et terrae*. Designating the atonement as the *fundamentum* does not detract from the necessity of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection as historical events, since they provide the housing, the external forms in which atonement and justification occur, and thus provide the gospel with its content. Remove the historical garments of the crucifixion and resurrection and not only is the king without clothing but there is no king. By the proclamation of the gospel, faith is created, and we are right smack back in the First Article of the Creed. Creation is not only restored but perfected.

#### IV. Atonement and the Trinity

In designating the atonement as the *fundamentum* for the Christian faith, a place must be found for the trinitarian mystery in relation to atonement and justification. Unless this is done, the doctrine of God is detached dogma. Rather than seeing atonement as foreign or even contradictory to who God is, it is the most profound expression of his trinitarian nature. If atonement is *fundamentum*, then Trinity must be "*fundamentissimum*," a mystery surpassing all others and in which all

others are subsumed. Atonement and God's trinitarian existence are distinct, but the former is the most perfect expression of the latter. In the moment of the atonement God is revealed as the Father who offers up the Son and in reciprocal action the Son offers himself up to the Father. In this sacrificing and being sacrificed, the eternal giving and receiving between the first and second persons of the Trinity is seen. Also within the inner-trinitarian life the Father gives of himself in love by eternally begetting the Son, and the Son responds to the Father with eternal love. All this is revealed in the atonement. Within the trinitarian life the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque*) and the Father is the eternal source of the Son and the Spirit, so the Spirit is the goal and conclusion of the trinitarian life.

The atonement, which is characterized by the Father's sacrifice of the Son in which the Son sacrifices himself to the Father, is the source of the Spirit's ability to create faith so that in hearing the gospel of the atonement believers find themselves accepted by the Father and sacrifice themselves for others. In this way the trinitarian life and the act of atonement are seen in the lives of Christians. In our being presented by Christ as sacrifices to God, the effects of the atonement are seen in our lives (Rom 12:1). Before the Son offered himself as atonement to the Father, he was the Spirit of Christ who spoke through the prophets of what God was going to do. Now through an accomplished atonement the one who has always proceeded from the Son has become in the moments of the cross and resurrection the Spirit of Jesus testifying to what God has accomplished in these events. The holiness which characterized the trinitarian life is extended to sinners in the gospel to create faith. So the Spirit shares in the holiness of the Father through the Son and by his presence in the preaching of Christ's death and resurrection appropriates this holiness to believers so that before God they become saints, that is, holy ones. From their eyes the veil is removed and they see God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The one who is the eternal completion of the Trinity and brings the creative chaos to a glorious completion now completes the work of the Father and the Son in justifying sinners. Thus the Matthean formula Father-Son-Holy Spirit is not isolated dogma but a commentary of the cross event by and in which God makes atonement.

### V. Agreement on Justification?

Evaluations have differed on the outcomes of the discussions on justification which resulted in the *Joint Declaration* and "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." In spite of a much needed openness surfacing in the

documents, major differences remain and are unlikely to be resolved to everyone's satisfaction.<sup>24</sup> James A. Nestingen may be the most blunt in calling the *Joint Declaration* "a public relations document."<sup>25</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles asks, "If Lutherans hold that the justified person remains always and inevitably a sinner, sinning in every act, and worthy of condemnation in the sight of God, while Catholics hold that justified persons have been cleansed of all sin and can by their good works truly merit the crown of eternal life, are the two parties not truly opposed to each other?"<sup>26</sup> Then we come to the issue of some Lutherans closely resembling Roman Catholics and Roman Catholics who preach sermons which easily rival those of Lutherans in preaching Christ, the only way justification is accomplished in individuals.<sup>27</sup>

It might be good to evaluate where we are in ecumenical discussion and rely on the observations of Alistair McGrath who sees the World Council of Churches as increasingly inconsequential.<sup>28</sup> To this we add that the National Council of Churches has been on financial life support for some time. McGrath notes that, in the place of one Protestant denomination joining with another, a different type of ecumenism has arisen. An example of this since 1994 is "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" in which their theologians lay their cards on the table taking note of similarities and—for now—insurmountable differences.<sup>29</sup> In the face of the collapse of organizational ecumenism, Christians see a need for trans-denominational alliances for the sake of survival, even if they are not complete in every aspect and more informal. Agreements across

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<sup>24</sup> See essays in *The Gospel of Justification*, ed. Wayne C. Stumme (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> James Arne Nestingen "Anti-JDDJ: Visions and Realities," *dialog* 39 (Spring 2000): 140.

<sup>26</sup> Dulles, "Justification and the Unity of the Church," 127–128.

<sup>27</sup> Root provides a citation from the Act of Oblation to the Merciful Love of St. Therese of Lisieux which sounds much like Luther: "All our justice is blemished in your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in your *justice* and to receive from your love the eternal possession of *yourself*." See "Continuing the Conversation," 54. Also see n. 22 above.

<sup>28</sup> "Yet when the time came to mark the World Council of Churches' golden jubilee in 1998, nobody felt that was all that much to celebrate. . . . However noble its intentions, the organization had become bogged down in internal debates and ceased to play a credible role in bringing Protestants together." See McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, 286.

<sup>29</sup> "Since neither secularism nor Islam seem likely to disappear in the foreseeable future, Protestantism can be expected to shrug off some of its historic debates and differences, in the interest of mutual survival." See McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, 287.

denominational lines have created a checkered board. In other words, "I won't go to Communion with you but we have a common purpose in commitment to certain doctrines."

But what doctrines are these? Women's ordination is one at the periphery, at least in comparison with the atonement which is at the center, but when we look at the feminist agenda we might discover that the ordination issue strikes an ice pick into the trinitarian heart. In the dwindling Lutheran opposition to the practice, we make common cause with Roman Catholic and Orthodox communions. Already for the LWF the ordination of women has replaced justification as the dogma by which the church stands or falls. Oppose this practice, then one is out of the fellowship and—as in its Nordic member churches—denied ordination. At the first meeting of the LCMS's consultation on "The Scriptural Relationship of Man and Woman," the keynote speaker began by saying that the ordination of women could only come up for discussion when Rome and the Orthodox initiated the practice.<sup>30</sup> Some participants were less than fully enthusiastic. In a feminine laden atmosphere where any or all distinctions between the sexes are eliminated, even in the matter of who may marry whom, adherence to biblical mandates and catholic practice of ordaining only qualified men is made increasingly difficult. Already in feminist circles the Father-Son-Holy Spirit formula is found to be offensive and more acceptable replacements for the masculine references have been put in place. Also in need of revision from a feminist perspective is the traditional doctrine of sacrificial atonement. The blood, guts, and sacrifice need removal.

## VI. No Agreement on Atonement?

We should be able to acknowledge agreement on the historical character of Christ's death and resurrection<sup>31</sup> and then proceed to the

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<sup>30</sup> Gilbert Meilaender delivered the keynote presentation on "Men and Women in Christ" at the first consultation on December 4-5, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Hays notes that the current Roman pontiff "regards the separation between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history as a disaster for theology and Christian faith. His book attempts to remedy the situation"; see review of *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, by Benedict XVI, *First Things* 175 (August/September 2007): 49. Hays notes that though the pope attempts to use historical methods, he does not give sufficient attention to how the evangelists made use of the words of Jesus. In this he is closer to hermeneutical methods used in the LCMS up to the last quarter of the twentieth century. John Stephenson, professor of historical theology at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary in St. Catherines, Ontario, Canada, says that the late Robert D. Preus, who embodied confessional theology in himself as no other figure in the LCMS in the second half of the twentieth

atonement. Whatever difficulties Lutherans had with the Roman Catholic interpretation of the Mass, few, if any, existed on the atonement in the Augsburg Confession, the Confutation, and the Apology. Such agreement is no longer the case. Among the so-called deficiencies of the catholic faith is "the notion that Jesus died to appease His Father's wrath." Offering scholarly support for his denial of the atonement is the Roman Catholic theologian Stephan Finlan.<sup>32</sup> Sins are forgiven but without price and sacrifice. Finlan is single-minded in dismantling the Anselmic or Latin theory of the atonement. More than half a century ago Gustaf Aulén did this for Lutherans with his *Christus Victor*,<sup>33</sup> but he did this without Finlan's determination to paint the sacrificial aspects of the atonement in violent and, hence, unacceptable terms. He cites feminist theologians to show that Christianity is a violent religion precisely because of the atonement. In his first book one sentence says everything: "'Redemption' does not mean God actually paid anyone off, or paid Godself off; it just means God *rescued* people."<sup>34</sup> Were this not enough, Finlan followed up with another book two years later. There he states, "The killing of Jesus was very much like the killing of other honest men and women throughout time."<sup>35</sup> He goes even further when he writes, "What was formerly thought to uphold christology—Jesus' death as a

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century, "entertained considerable respect for Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, whom he once labeled 'more Catholic—in the best sense of word—than the pope'"; see "Robert Preus, Historian of Theology," in *Doctrine is Life: The Essays of Robert D. Preus on Justification and the Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Klemet I. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 363. Preus did not live long enough to see Cardinal Ratzinger become Benedict XVI. The atonement has, however, been a doctrine that has divided Western Christianity from the Orthodox. Yet some Lutherans can even set atonement aside. That Christ offered himself up as a sacrifice for sins and still presents himself to God as a sacrifice for sin gave cause for a LCMS pastor to resign and, in his own words, "to embrace the Orthodox Faith." John W. Fenton, "Statement of Resignation" *Conversi ad Dominum* blog (October 29, 2006), <http://conversiaddominum.blogspot.com/2006/10/statement-of-resignation.html> (accessed March 29, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Finlan, *Problems with the Atonement: The Origins of, and Controversy about, the Atonement Doctrine* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), and *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007). At the time his first book was published, Finlan was a research assistant for the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture at Drew University; he is now an instructor in biblical studies at Fordham University and Seton Hall University.

<sup>33</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (1931; repr., London: SPCK, 1953). This book had a wide influence in Anglican and Lutheran churches including the LCMS, especially in the 1950s.

<sup>34</sup> Finlan, *Problems with the Atonement*, 107 (emphasis original).

<sup>35</sup> Finlan, *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought*, 40.

ransom payment or substitution—is no longer convincing and is ethically repugnant.”<sup>36</sup> For him sacrifice and atonement are only horrible metaphors about obtaining forgiveness by faith. So he concludes his book in this way: “But this does not mean that the individual’s faith is all-powerful, independent of Christ or of grace. Faith is faith *in Jesus*.”<sup>37</sup> Justification has entirely replaced atonement at the center of theology.

Coming off the presses shortly thereafter was a gentler critique of the atonement by David A. Brondos, who is calmly persuasive but whose conclusions are the same as Finlan’s.<sup>38</sup> After chapters on Isaiah, Luke, and Paul, he gives a detailed historical survey from Irenaeus<sup>39</sup> to feminist theology (e.g. that of Rosemary Radford Ruether). Christ’s death does not accomplish an objective redemption, but with the resurrection it is only revelation of God’s love for us. Like Finlan, Brondos sees sacrifice and atonement as no more than metaphors or picture language and compares his own method of excising sacrifice out of the Bible to demythologizing.<sup>40</sup> His limiting of the New Testament discussion to Luke and Paul is reminiscent of a late second-century heretic. Conveniently excluded are Matthew, Mark, and Hebrews with their sacrificial understandings of the atonement. For Brondos the patriarchal ideology which was at the heart of the doctrine of the atonement also prevented women from being ministers.<sup>41</sup>

## VII. Conclusion

Agreement on justification seems out of our grasp, perhaps even among Lutherans, but if we are to get things in right order we should acknowledge agreement not only on the first things preached, that is the crucifixion and resurrection, but the atonement and the Trinity, the things behind the things preached which create faith. Without these there is no faith and no church. A Vatican response in 1998 to the *Joint Declaration* seems to be saying something very similar: “the message of justification, according to Scriptures and already from the time of the Fathers, has to be organically integrated into the fundamental criterion of the *regula fidei*, the

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<sup>36</sup> Finlan, *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought*, 127.

<sup>37</sup> Finlan, *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought*, 132 (emphasis original).

<sup>38</sup> David A. Brondos, *Fortress Introduction to Salvation and the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). Brondos is an ELCA theologian at the Theological Community of Mexico.

<sup>39</sup> Aulén began his survey with Irenaeus, who seems to be a launching point for dislodging sacrificial aspects from the atonement; see *Christus Victor*, 32–51.

<sup>40</sup> Brondos, *Salvation and the Cross*, 183.

<sup>41</sup> Brondos, *Salvation and the Cross*, 177.

confession of one God in three persons, christologically centered and rooted in the living church and its sacramental life."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Root, "Continuing the Conversation," 50.

## The Son of God and the Father's Wrath: Atonement and Salvation in Matthew's Gospel

Jeffrey A. Gibbs

In this study on atonement and salvation in Matthew, I want to begin with a completely obvious comment and then return to it at the end. The obvious comment has two parts, and the first part is this: Matthew's Gospel is about Jesus and what he does, as we read in Matthew 1:1: "The book of the origin of Jesus."<sup>1</sup> The second part of the obvious comment follows quickly, also in chapter 1, when the angel declares to Joseph, "You will call his name 'Jesus,' for he himself will save his people from their sin" (Matt 1:21). The Hebrew equivalent for the Greek name "Jesus" is, of course, related to the Hebrew verb "to save."<sup>2</sup> The name signifies the work, and this is what the Gospel of Matthew is about: Jesus who will save. We will return to this promise at the end, but here I want to assert that "salvation" is not *exhausted* by the concept of "atonement" or "forgiveness." I will offer a few comments in this regard at the end of the essay.

The task at hand, however, is to investigate the concept of the atonement in Matthew. Traditionally, "atonement" theology has to do with the doctrine of the vicarious work of Christ, his saving deeds done in the stead and in the place of others. The Gospel of Matthew delights in proclaiming such a substitutionary work, and that in very large strokes. To be sure, there are specific words of the Lord Jesus that declare that his death has atoning significance. These sayings, such as Matthew 20:28 and 26:28, are well-known and have received much attention. This essay, however, will focus on larger strokes in Matthew's narrative, following a straightforward, three-part presentation. The first part will examine Matthew's theology of Jesus as the "replacement" or "substitute" Son of God, the summation and representative of the nation of Israel. The second part will examine the significance of the death of Jesus in Matthew. The

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<sup>1</sup> The translation of the term *γένεσις* in Matthew 1:1 and 1:17 is debated; see Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 71–72.

<sup>2</sup> See the discussion in R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 53.

third part will then briefly examine two key texts (Matt 20:28 and 26:28) in light of these larger themes.

### **I. The Son in Place of the Son: Jesus as the Summation and Substitute for Israel**

Traditional Christians who confess the ecumenical creeds are inclined to invest a particular meaning in the simple sentence, "Jesus is the Son of God." That meaning, of course, is the truth that for Jesus to be "God's Son" means that he is fully "God of God, Light of Light." Without meaning in any way to suggest that Matthew does not proclaim this truth, we would be missing the Matthean mark if we were to limit our understanding of Jesus as God's Son to this creedal teaching. In light of Old Testament (OT) backgrounds and by means of his own remarkable hermeneutic, the first evangelist invests the identity of Jesus as God's Son with a meaning that is vicarious at its very core. Three texts early in the Gospel's story proclaim this truth: the flight into Egypt (Matt 2:14-15), the Baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:13-17), and the temptation in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11). Each presents a vicarious "Son of God" Christology.

#### *The Flight into Egypt (Matt 2:14-15)*

Matthew 2:14-15 reads as follows: "And he (Joseph) got up and took the child and his mother during the night, and he departed into Egypt and he was there until Herod's death in order that the thing that was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled saying, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" As is well known, the citation within this text is from Hosea 11:1, which translates readily from the Hebrew, "For Israel was a youth and I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." The Septuagint (LXX) follows the Masoretic Text (MT) closely, with the noteworthy exception of reading at the end, "out of Egypt I called his children." Matthew has hewn closely to the Hebrew text which, in its context, is referring to the Exodus from Egypt. As is common in OT texts that refer to the Exodus, Hosea 11:1 refers in the singular to the nation as God's "son" (see especially Exod 4:22 and Deut 8:5).<sup>3</sup> In the context of Hosea, however, the prophet refers to God's "son" at the time of the Exodus only to contrast that earlier, constituting event with Israel's later apostasy: "The more they

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<sup>3</sup> Although not widely acknowledged, it is a fact that OT texts refer to the nation of Israel as God's "son" more often than to any other person or entity. Along with Exodus 4:22 and Deuteronomy 8:5, one can refer to Jeremiah 3:4, 19; 38:19-20; cf. also Deuteronomy 1:31; 32:6; Jeremiah 6:26. See also G. Fohrer, "υἱός, υιοθεσία," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 8:340-354, esp. 351.

were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols" (Hos 11:2 ESV).

If the original context of Hosea is referring to the *nation* as God's son, and Matthew 2 claims that *Jesus'* movement to and back from Egypt "fulfills" Hosea 11:1, in what sense can this be true? It is widely acknowledged that Matthew is employing a typological hermeneutic. The first Exodus by the nation, God's "son," was an anticipation of a second, greater "Exodus" by Jesus, God's true and greater Son.<sup>4</sup> This view is a commonplace in Matthean studies, and it results in this conclusion: Matthew is proclaiming that Jesus, God's Son, is the embodiment, the summation, the singular representative of the nation of Israel and of her history. He is, in the familiar phrase, Israel reduced to one.<sup>5</sup> Jesus is the Son of God.

### *The Baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:13-17)*

The second unit that presents a vicarious sonship theology is Matthew's account of Jesus' Baptism in 3:13-17. Recall the verses that lead up to the well-known event. John the Baptizer has begun his ministry, calling Israel to repentance. The response is astounding; Jerusalem and all Judea and all of the region surrounding the Jordan come out. Israel is streaming out to John and being baptized by him as they confess their sins (Matt 3:1-6). In response to the unrepentant religious leaders, however, John proclaims the coming judgment of the Mightier One. On the Last Day he will winnow the grain, separating wheat from chaff (Matt 3:7-12). And John is right about the Mightier One, for John speaks as the voice of Isaiah

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<sup>4</sup> See the important discussion of R. T. France, "The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2 and the Problem of Communication," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 233-251. He comments on the citation of Hosea 11:1 at Matthew 2:15 that "we have both a surface meaning based on the central geographical term and also a variety of christological implications available to those with the scriptural knowledge and perceptiveness to dig deeper into Matthew's purpose"; see "The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2," 244. Ulrich Luz oddly both acknowledges Matthew's typological hermeneutic and also avers that Matthew does not recognize that he has misunderstood Hosea 11:1 as a prediction; see *Matthew 1-7: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 146. It is hard to see how both of Luz's statements about Matthew could be true. In contrast to Luz, W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison reject the view that Matthew was "naively oblivious to the switch in referents when he applied Hosea 11.1 to Jesus, not to the people." They, too, perceive a typological understanding of Jesus "in the place of the nation." See *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 1:263.

<sup>5</sup> On Jesus as Israel, see the marvelous discussion in David E. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 31-58.

40, and he is the promised manifestation of Elijah of old (cf. Matt 11:7–15). John is right about the Mighty Judge. Then that Judge shows up for the purpose of being baptized, and John cannot accept it. He actually tries to hinder Jesus from doing what he wants to do.<sup>6</sup> Jesus, whose very name says what he will do, explains, “Allow it now, for to fulfill righteousness in this way is fitting for us” (Matt 3:15). John, then, allows it, and Jesus is baptized.

What was John’s problem? It was the utter contradiction between what he had proclaimed about Jesus as Mighty Judge and what John had proclaimed about the Baptism that he himself was administering. John’s Baptism was for people who needed to repent and confess their sins. Although there is no explicit statement about the sinlessness of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel (presumably this is John’s problem), he knows and believes that the Mighty Judge does not need to repent. But Jesus’ answer is at least sufficient for John to acquiesce. So we have to inquire, however briefly, as to the meaning of Jesus’ words to John in Matthew 3:15.<sup>7</sup>

“Allow it now.” Acknowledging John’s confusion, Jesus teaches him that *now*, in the present time of the reign of God, this is how it will be. I would argue that Jesus’ words are implicitly acknowledging that *then*, on the final great day of judgment, it will be as John was preaching. The reign of God, however, has come, now, in the present time, in a strange and paradoxical way.<sup>8</sup>

“It is fitting for us.” Together, Jesus and John will do something that is fitting, something that fits. This deed will reveal the course of how God will be a gracious, saving king.<sup>9</sup> The action of Jesus being baptized corresponds in a profound way with the entire shape of Jesus’ ministry.

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<sup>6</sup> The verb *διεκώλυεν* is a classic example of how context can lend a conative force (“he tried to hinder”) to an imperfect indicative. John tried to hinder—but it did not work!

<sup>7</sup> The interpretation of Jesus’ words in 3:15 is greatly debated. See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:325–327, for a summary of seven general positions.

<sup>8</sup> The term “now” (*ἄρτι*) occurs seven times in Matthew. Three times (23:39, 26:29, 26:64) it occurs in the phrase, “from now” (*ἀπ’ ἄρτι*), and refers to a specific moment in time. Twice the term alone refers to a specific moment (9:18, 26:5). Once, the phrase is applied to a key moment in salvation history, “From the days of John the Baptist until now” (11:12). I suggest that a similar salvation-historical significance accompanies Jesus’ words to John in 3:15. For the theme of God’s unexpected ways in Christ’s manifestation of the reign of God, see Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 209.

<sup>9</sup> The plural pronoun “for us” (*ἡμῖν*) underscores the salvation-historical nature of what is happening at Jesus’ Baptism. This is not just something for Jesus to do; John plays his role as well, as the forerunner.

"To fulfill all righteousness." In Matthew's Gospel, "to fulfill" possesses virtually a technical meaning. It means "to enact the scriptural plan of salvation." It means "to do the deeds planned long ago by God." It means "complete the story."<sup>10</sup> If this is the meaning of "fulfill," then "righteousness" in Matthew 3:15 also likely has a salvation-historical sense, as it often does in the Psalms and in Isaiah, and as it also does elsewhere in Matthew.<sup>11</sup> "Righteousness" in the OT is often paralleled with "salvation"; Psalm 71 is a parade example. The sense of Jesus' words to John, then, will be something like this: "Allow this strange thing *now*, John, for this will be a fitting event in how God's plan of salvation is being carried out." So Jesus goes down into the place of sinners. He assumes the posture of sinners. He goes down into the water, into the place where John has summoned Israel to go. He is literally standing in the place of Israel.

Heaven responds in double fashion. Look! The Spirit descends, showing that Jesus is the Servant of Isaiah 42, the one upon whom God puts his Spirit (cf. Matt 12:18–21). And look, a voice comes from heaven and declares the identity of Jesus: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt 3:17). It is common in New Testament (NT) studies to find here an allusion to Psalm 2:7, "You are my son, today I have begotten you." I have elsewhere argued directly against this view and for a more likely allusion to Jeremiah 31 (LXX Jeremiah 38).<sup>12</sup> This is a chapter that Matthew knows well; he has already cited it the "Rachel weeping" passage in 2:18. Matthew probably also alludes in 26:28 to the "new covenant" of Jeremiah 31. Note well: the phrase "beloved son" (ἀγαπητὸς υἱός) occurs in the LXX in only two places. The first is the binding of Isaac in Gen 22, a text which is not in view here in Matthew 3. The second occurrence of "beloved son," however, occurs in Matthew's well-known LXX Jeremiah 38, where the nation of Israel is referred to as God's "beloved son."

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<sup>10</sup> Davies and Allison conclude that the phrase "to fulfill all righteousness" "refers to Jesus fulfilling prophecy. . . . So when Jesus fulfils all righteousness, he is fulfilling Scripture." See *Matthew*, 1:326.

<sup>11</sup> The study of Benno Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press: 1980) has been extremely influential in its conclusion that "righteousness" in Matthew always refers to ethical conduct. However, he neglects the influence of Old Testament backgrounds. Donald A. Hagner rightly takes issue with Przybylski when he says, "No writer is obligated to use a word consistently; the meaning of a word must be determined from its immediate context. . . . [T]here is no reason to exclude the possibility that [Matthew] can understand δικαιοσύνη here not as moral goodness but as the will of God in the sense of God's saving activity." See *Matthew 1–13*, Word Biblical Commentary 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 56.

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey A. Gibbs, "Israel Standing with Israel: The Baptism of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 3:13–17)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002): 511–526.

Matthew has already proclaimed that Jesus is God's Son in that he is the summation and substitute and representative of Israel, God's son (see above on Matt 2:15). That same "Jesus as Israel reduced to one" theology is also at the heart of the Father's words from heaven, and it is central to the meaning of Jesus' Baptism. If this is the case, then Jesus' Baptism is *truly fitting*, for it reveals the shape of his entire ministry as God's Son. He has come as the summation, the representative of the nation, as Israel. In his Baptism, then, he is "Israel standing with Israel," down in the water, down in the place of sinners where only he should not be standing. This is fitting because he has come to be in the place of sinners. The Baptism of Jesus shows the vicarious character of his entire ministry.<sup>13</sup> Jesus is the Son of God.

### *The Temptation in the Wilderness (Matt 4:1-11)*

We may take a more rapid glance now at the third "Son of God" text that follows immediately on the heels of the second, namely, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11). Key to the unit, of course, is the identity of Jesus as God's Son, and specifically, what "kind" of son Jesus will be. Satan's attacks posit a certain understanding, namely, that God's Son will either have power to use for his own needs or that God's Son will find unfailing protection from the Father regardless of the situation. In the final temptation, although "son" is not mentioned, the essence of "sonship" is surely present. A true son is obedient, subordinating his own will and wishes to that of his father. So perhaps one can summarize the import of the third satanic attack like this: To whom will you subordinate your will and wishes? Whose son are you going to be?

Jesus, of course, holds fast to his identity as God's Son. Most importantly for the present discussion, he does so in the wilderness while quoting from Deuteronomy 8 and 6, in which Moses recounts how Israel's time in the wilderness was a time when the nation failed, refusing to be the "son" that God had called them to be:

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothing did not wear out on

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<sup>13</sup> Craig S. Keener aptly comments, "This baptism hence represents Jesus' ultimate identification with Israel at the climactic stage in her history: confessing her sins to prepare for the kingdom (3:2,6). Jesus' baptism, like his impending death (cf. Mk10:38-39 with Mk 14:23-24, 36), would be vicarious, embraced on behalf of others with whom the Father called him to identify." See *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 132.

you and your foot did not swell these forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you." (Deut 8:3-5 ESV)

In the place where Israel, God's son, failed, however, now Jesus-Israel succeeds. Importantly, this is God's plan for him thus to be attacked by Satan, for Jesus was led up into the desert *by the Spirit*, in order to be tempted *by the devil* (Matt 4:1). Jesus, God's Son, prevails where Israel, God's son, failed. In the desert, Jesus is the champion in the place of the people of God. Jesus is the Son of God.

**Summary: Jesus as Israel**

Early in his Gospel, then, Matthew establishes a representative, vicarious meaning to the declaration, "Jesus is the Son of God." As I indicated briefly before, let me say that this "Israel" meaning does not exhaust the meaning of Son of God Christology in Matthew. As one reads other texts where Jesus is acknowledged as Son of God, for instance, one does not always find this corporate meaning. In the second storm-stilling scene (Matt 14:22-33), for instance, I have not been able to find Jesus portrayed as "Israel" there; rather, he is the Creator who has power to walk on the waves and to still the storm. Accordingly, one should not woodenly read every "son of God" text in Matthew and find exactly the same nuance.

Nevertheless, it seems certain that Matthew expects his hearers and readers to take this remarkable "Israel-Christology" with them as they read his Gospel. We, too, will return to it, content at this point to acknowledge that as the Son of God, Jesus has come to sum up the people of God, to represent them, to stand with them and identify himself with them, and to be their champion.

**II. The Death of Jesus in Matthew: The Father Strikes His Son**

We turn now to the second major part of the presentation, that is, the meaning of Jesus' death in Matthew's Gospel. Four texts will receive brief attention because of their contribution to the atonement theology that is so important in Matthew's story of Jesus: Matthew 16:21-23, 26:31, 26:36-46, and 27:45-54.

***The Divine Necessity of Jesus' Death (Matt 16:21-23)***

As has been argued strongly by Jack Dean Kingsbury and a number of his students (including me), the Gospel of Matthew makes its second major

turn at 16:21.<sup>14</sup> Repeating precisely the Greek wording of 4:17, Matthew writes ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς, “From then, Jesus began” to show to his disciples the necessity of his suffering, death, and resurrection. For the first time in the narrative, the *telos* of Jesus’ own ministry is out in the open. As Peter immediately demonstrates, this is a goal that is impossible to comprehend within the categories of Second Temple Judaism and its eschatological, messianic expectation. Peter’s remonstrance, however, provides a valuable window into the significance of Jesus’ coming suffering and death in Jerusalem.

I would like to focus on a question of translation, and specifically on how to render Peter’s rebuke of Jesus in 16:22, Ἰλεώς σοι κύριε. To set up the discussion, recall the obvious sequence of the unit. Jesus, for the first time, begins to show the *necessity* (δεῖ) —presumably the *divine necessity*—of his rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection in Jerusalem. Peter rejects this divine necessity and seeks to substitute his own plan, his own understanding of what Jesus should do. Jesus’ rejoinder to Peter is direct and savage: “Get behind me, Satan!” (Matt 16:23). Peter’s words reveal a merely human way of thinking, rather than the divine perspective.

What does Peter say? Literally, he says, “Merciful to you, Lord.” The scholarly literature seems to choose between one of two positions on how to understand this cryptic or elliptical statement by Peter. The first position is represented by most, if not all, the English translations: “Far be it from you, Lord” (ESV; cf. KJV), “Never, Lord” (NIV), and “God forbid, Lord” (RSV). This is the preference of Blass-Debrunner-Funk, and other commentators follow their lead.<sup>15</sup> The assumption here is that the two-word phrase “merciful to you” (Ἰλεώς σοι) is the equivalent of the Hebrew interjection “may it never be!” (הֲלֵי־לֵךְ). The Hebrew term occurs twenty-one times in the OT, and in four instances the LXX renders it with “merciful [Ἰλεως] to X.” So, clearly it is possible that Peter’s words are a fervent interjection but nothing more specific.

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<sup>14</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 7–24, and Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 38–47.

<sup>15</sup> F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 128.5 [hereafter BDF]. See also Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, vol. III, in James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 309, and Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:662.

The other way of translating Peter's response to Jesus in 16:22 is represented by BDAG and others.<sup>16</sup> In this understanding, Peter's short phrase assumes an optative verb with God as the subject: "[May God be] merciful to you, Lord. This will surely not happen to you!" Although the two possible understandings are clearly not entirely opposed to one another, the second, more full expression is the much more likely understanding, for the following reasons.

First, the LXX renders the 21 examples of the pertinent Hebrew interjection in four different ways, only four of which exhibit the construction "merciful to X" (2 Sam 20:20, 20; 23:17; 1 Chr 11:19). The most common rendering (nine times) simply offers the adverb *μηδ'αμῶς*, "by no means, certainly not" (Gen 18:25, 25; 1 Sam 2:30; 12:23; 20:2, 9; 22:15; 24:7; 26:11). So it can hardly be claimed that Peter's words are a typical or normal way of rendering the Hebrew interjection.<sup>17</sup>

Second, the adjective *ἔλεως* occurs in the LXX thirty-five times. In only four instances does it render the Hebrew interjection "Far be it" (2 Sam 2:20, 20; 2 Sam 23:17; 1 Chr 11:19; an idiomatic use also occurs in 1 Macc 2:21). The dominant pattern with *ἔλεως*, however, is to pair it with either *γίνομαι* or *εἶμι* in order to say that God will be or has been merciful/gracious to someone; this usage occurs a total of twenty-nine times.<sup>18</sup> This is the normal context for *ἔλεως*; one reference (LXX Isa 54:10) is even a declarative statement that actually elides the verb: "For the Lord said, '[I will be] merciful to you'" (*εἶπεν γὰρ κύριος Ἰλεῶς σοι*).

Third, and perhaps least importantly, the normal way of expressing the Hebrew interjection applies the expression to the speaker(s): "Far be it from me/us." In only four of the twenty-one occurrences is the Hebrew interjection aimed at a third party (Gen 18:25, 25; 1 Sam 20:9; Job 34:10),

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<sup>16</sup> Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), and Henry Alford, *Matthew – Mark*, vol. 1, part 1, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary* (1874; repr., Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976), 175. Ulrich Luz seems to follow BDF, although he does note that other Greek parallels literally mean "May God be gracious"; see *Matthew 8–10*, trans. James E. Crouch, ed. Helmut Koester, *Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 382.

<sup>17</sup> Five times the Hebrew particle is rendered with the optative *μη γένοιτο* (Gen 44:7, 17; Josh 22:29; 24:16; 1 Kgs 20:3), and twice with the optative *μη εἶη* (Job 27:5; 34:10). Once (1 Sam 14:45) the LXX does not translate the particle at all.

<sup>18</sup> Exod 32:12; Num 14:19, 20; Deut 21:8; 1 Kgs 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50; 2 Chr 6:21, 25, 27; 6:39; 7:14; Isa 54:10; Jer 5:1, 7; 27:20; 38:34; 43:3; Amos 7:2; 2 Macc 2:7, 22; 7:37; 10:26; 4 Macc 6:28; 8:14; 9:24; 12:17.

and in none of those four instances does the LXX translate with "mercy to you."

For the reasons given above, it seems clear that we should translate Matthew 16:22 in the direction suggested by BDAG, which also gives other supports from extant Greek literature: "[May God be] merciful to you, Lord. This will certainly not happen to you!"

If this more precise or full rendering is justified, what is the pay-off? Peter does not want Jesus to suffer the things in Jerusalem that Jesus has said he must, by divine necessity, undergo. Presumably Peter agrees with the idea that Jesus would go up to Jerusalem; he is, after all, the Messiah and Son of the living God. Peter's perspective, however, on how things should go with Jesus in Jerusalem is this: in Jerusalem, God should be merciful to Jesus. To think that way, however, is to think the things of men, and not of God. It is out in the open now: Jesus is going up to Jerusalem. He will not go up to receive God's mercy. At this crucial turning point in the Gospel of Matthew, Peter's words express a saving irony that only the reader of Matthew's Gospel can appreciate. Jesus will go up to suffer, and to die, and then, yes, to rise from the dead. What Jesus, however, will experience in his death in Jerusalem will be the opposite of God's mercy.

### *Strike the Shepherd (Matt 26:31)*

A second text helps to nail down this remarkable, saving, atoning truth. Matthew 26:31 records how Jesus and the disciples moved from the upper room out to the Mount of Olives. The verse reads, "Then Jesus said to [the disciples], 'You all will be caused to stumble because of me on this night, for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"" Here the point to be made is a straightforward one, and it pertains to the wording of Zechariah 13:7. In both the MT and the LXX, the strange oracle is addressed to a sword: "O sword, rise up . . . strike the shepherd." One might perhaps be left in doubt as to whose is the hand that wields the sword, though the sword clearly will strike the shepherd in response to Yahweh's command. Jesus' words in Matthew 26:31, however, leave no doubt as to who the striker will be: "I will strike the shepherd." What Jesus now goes to experience is the hand of God, the Father's own hand, smiting him. We might note that, perhaps not surprisingly, Peter speaks out in this context and denies that he will stumble. He asserts, "Even if it is necessary for me to die with you, I will not deny you" (Matt 26:35). Peter thought the things of men in Matthew 16:22; here he shows the same error. Peter does not know that it is not necessary for him to die with Jesus. He will not die with Jesus; rather, he will deny the Master and all the disciples will fall away. Jesus will die

alone, apart from God's mercy (Matt 16:22), struck down by the Father's hand. Although the vocabulary is quite different from the LXX, Raymond Brown wonders whether this change to "I will strike" is an allusion to Isaiah 53:4, 10, where God was pleased to crush his Servant in order to redeem the people.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Cup of Wrath (Matt 26:36-46)*

We move quickly up to the next scene, in Gethsemane. Here commentators are, in my judgment, sometimes oddly reluctant to interpret the significance of Jesus' saying, "Let this cup pass from me" (Matt 26:39). They quickly opt for a mere "cup of suffering" or a "cup of sorrow" or "martyrdom."<sup>20</sup>

There is more here, however, than mere physical suffering. I can mention here a remarkable piece of biblical theology found in the Anchor Bible commentary on Obadiah by Paul Raabe. Obadiah 16 reads, "For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually; they shall drink and swallow, and shall be as though they had never been" (ESV). Raabe's excursus, "Drinking the Cup of Yahweh's Wrath," systematically lays out what is a common prophetic metaphor, namely, that when Yahweh visits his wrath upon his enemies, it is like drinking a cup of foaming wine that makes one stagger and fall into shame, ruin, and death.<sup>21</sup> It is a remarkable and terrible metaphor. It is present here in the garden.<sup>22</sup>

The pieces are in place, and they add up. First, against Peter's wish, there will be no divine mercy in Jerusalem (Matt 16:22). Second, Yahweh himself will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be

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<sup>19</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 130.

<sup>20</sup> A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 287; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 820, 1099; and Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 396.

<sup>21</sup> Paul R. Raabe, *Obadiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 24D (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 206-254.

<sup>22</sup> Scholars who see a likely reference to the "cup of wrath" include D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin et al., vol. 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 543; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 3:4-97*; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1005; Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 533; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33B (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 783; and Keener, *Matthew*, 638.

scattered (Matt 26:31). Now, in the garden, Jesus accepts the cup of wrath. He goes to his suffering and death, knowing what the Father's plan holds for him.

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!  
 What wondrous love is this, O my soul?  
 What wondrous love is this  
 That caused the Lord of bliss  
 To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul  
 To bear the dreadful curse for my soul?<sup>23</sup>

### *The Cry of Dereliction (Matt 27:45-54)*

We come, then, to the cry of dereliction and the confession of the centurion in Matthew 27:45-54. Jesus cites Psalm 22:1. We should not try to soften the text's evident meaning by suggesting that Jesus' citation of the first verse of the psalm thereby invokes the entire psalm, including the triumphant saving conclusion where God delivers the righteous one. I suppose that might be the case, though I have never seen much proof for this assertion. The words remain: "My God, my God, why did you forsake me?" (Matt 27:46).<sup>24</sup> The words are in question form, to be sure, because it is the psalm's own form. Yet here we see, perhaps, the deepest mystery of the faith, that the Father abandons the Son to rejection and wrath. This is the judgment day, as all the apocalyptic signs that break loose demonstrate (Matt 27:51-53). The judgment has come upon Jesus.

As whom does Jesus die? He dies as a number of things, to be sure, not least as the true King of the Jews. The Sanhedrin, however, condemns him for allowing himself to be called the Son of God, and the centurion and his fellows who were standing guard confess Jesus rightly, "Truly, this one was the Son of God" (Matt 27:54).

We may now recall the earlier "Son of God" Christology and especially the Baptism of Jesus. This Son of God embodies, stands for, *is*

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<sup>23</sup> Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 543:1.

<sup>24</sup> France comments, "In the end, [Psalm 22] turns to joyful thanksgiving for deliverance in vv. 22-31, and some interpreters have suggested that it is the latter part of the psalm that Jesus has in mind as well as its traumatic beginning, so that this is in effect a shout of defiant trust in the God whom he fully expects to rescue him. But that is to read a lot between the lines, especially after Gethsemane where Jesus has accepted that he must drink the cup to the full: he did not expect to be rescued. The words Jesus chose to utter are those of unqualified desolation, and Matthew and Mark (who alone record this utterance) give no hint that he did not mean exactly what he said." See *Gospel of Matthew*, 1076.

the people. He went down into the water, to stand in the place of sinners, and the Father was pleased; it was fitting for him to thus stand with sinners, and the Father acknowledged him as the Son of God. Now the Father is pleased to abandon the Son, who hangs in the place of the sinners, stricken by God, apart from divine mercy. His death is divine judgment. Moreover, precisely because he is the Son of God, his death is vicarious, taking wrath and judgment in the place of the people.

### III. Atonement Sayings in Matthew

We may now at last briefly turn our attention to two specific sayings of the Lord. My goal has been to offer the broad strokes of what I believe to be Matthew's atonement theology. If this presentation is coherent, then specific sayings find their place in that wider context. We turn first to the well-known ransom saying of Matthew 20:28.

The context reveals, not surprisingly, complete misunderstanding on the part of Jesus' disciples; James and John come with their mother and ask for greatness in the reign of Jesus. What should be noted, of course, is that this request comes *immediately* on the heels of the third passion prediction (Matt 20:17-19); the death and resurrection of Jesus is not registering at all with the disciples.<sup>25</sup> When the other disciples are indignant, Jesus takes the occasion to teach the strangely inverted realities and standards in the reign of God now present in himself. A great one is a servant. The first one is a slave. The Son of Man himself is the standard and example. He came not to be served but to serve, that is, to give, in the place of the many, his life as a ransom payment.

Here I will simply highlight two points of grammar. First, the prepositional phrase "in the place of many" almost certainly modifies the infinitive "to give." This is the normal Greek pattern, and, although it could modify "ransom payment," there is no need to take it that way. The act of giving is done ἀντὶ πολλῶν. The second point has to do with the normal force of the preposition ἀντί plus the genitive. The sense is "in the place of, instead of." Matthew uses this preposition five times. In Matthew 2:22, Joseph is afraid to go to Judea when he hears that Archelaus is ruling *in the place of, instead of* his father Herod who has died. Herod is not ruling; Archelaus is ruling in his place. In Matthew 5:38, Jesus quotes the *lex talionis* of "an eye in the place of, in exchange for an eye, and a tooth for a

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<sup>25</sup> For a clear and cogent study of the disciples and their incomprehension in Matthew 16:21-20:28, see Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002).

tooth." Replacement or exchange is once again the force of the preposition. Finally, in the wonderful and odd little story of the coin in the fish's mouth, Jesus instructs Peter to pay the temple tax *in exchange for* you and me (Matt 17:27). Given the sacrificial and redemptive overtones of the temple tax, even here it is possible, if not likely, that the sense of exchange and replacement is present.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, when Jesus teaches in Matthew 20:28 that he will give his life in the place of many as a ransom, this is a vicarious payment.<sup>27</sup> In the wider context of the Son of God dying under the wrath of the Father, the traditional interpretation of Matthew 20:28 receives firm support.

The second saying of Jesus is found in the words of institution, Matthew 26:28. Again, only brief attention is needed. Even as he institutes and begins the foretaste of the eschatological feast to come, Jesus offers an interpretation of his own death: "This is my blood of the covenant which is being poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." The prepositional phrase is *περὶ πολλῶν*, and, to be sure, the force of *περὶ* plus the genitive is often a weaker sense of "concerning, about." It is also true, however, that there is a noticeable tendency in Koine Greek to use certain prepositions interchangeably; Blass-Debrunner-Funk suggests that this verse is an example of *περὶ* being used for *ὑπέρ*, "on behalf of."<sup>28</sup> In light of the larger context and the meaning Matthew assigns to Jesus' death, there can be little doubt that the Lord's words here also teach a vicarious, atoning significance to his blood that is being poured out for many.

#### IV. Atonement and Salvation in Matthew: Center and Fullness

I began this study with what might have been a suggestive comment, namely, that salvation is not *exhausted* by the concept of atonement. What I mean to say is this: The great good news is surely the events that proclaim that the Son of God has died a vicarious death and, in so doing, averted the wrath of God away from all who trustingly follow him. This death avails for present joy and confidence now, and it will also avail on the day of judgment.

<sup>26</sup> See Carson, "Matthew," 393–395, and France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 665.

<sup>27</sup> One should note the LXX usage of "to give a ransom" (*διδόναι λύτρον*), all of which occur in contexts of exchange or sacrifice or payment for sins committed: Exod 21:30, 30; 30:12; Lev 19:20; 25:24; Num 3:48, 51. See the still valuable classic study of "Redemption" in Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 11–64.

<sup>28</sup> BDF 229.1.

The Son of God, however, did not just die. He also lived, and his ministry was one not just of preaching good news; he also healed, exorcized, and drove back Satan's power in all of its forms. Remarkably, the one explicit citation of Isaiah 53 in the entire Gospel occurs in Matthew 8:17, where it is given to show why Jesus was healing people and casting out demons: "When it had become late, they brought to him many demon-possessed people and he cast the spirits out with a word, and he healed all who were sick, in order that the thing that was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying 'He himself took our weaknesses, and he carried our infirmities'" (Matt 8:16-17). Physical healing is part of the ministry of the suffering servant. Jesus' miracles were portents of the new creation; they were anticipations of the good things to come. Jesus' signs and wonders were the in-breaking of the reign of God and the temporary reversal of sickness, sin's ally.

The Son of God did not just die. He rose from the dead. Just as Jesus died in our place, we must quickly and joyfully proclaim that he rose in our place. He rose vicariously, as the people of God. Salvation, Matthew would insist, is not just forgiveness, though that is the center. Salvation is not just the averting of divine wrath; it is also the restoration of the creation, and that means the driving back of death itself. Jesus dies as the Son of God. But he also rises as the Son of God. Here the mammoth work by N. T. Wright offers indispensable insight.<sup>29</sup> This is historical apologetics at its best; Wright attacks and undercuts an entire century of destructive biblical criticism. At the heart of his work, however, is this basic point: in the meta-narrative of Second Temple Judaism, "resurrection" is an eschatological, end-time category and event that entails the undoing of death and the restoration of God's creation. So, just as surely as Good Friday is the Judgment Day, suffered in our stead, so also Easter is the victorious Judgment Day, experienced in our stead. The Son of God rose in power. Jesus has come to save his people from their sins—and from all the effects of their sins. Therefore, even to this very day his New Israel lives in hope, baptizing and teaching until the end of days. He has atoned for sin by his vicarious death. He has inaugurated the last days by his vicarious resurrection. On the last day, the eternal life that he fully possesses for us and in our place will be fully ours. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

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<sup>29</sup> N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 3, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).



# The Atonement in Mark's Sacramental Theology

Peter J. Scaer

## I. Atonement: The Lay of the Land

It was much simpler not that long ago. A seminarian taking an essay test on the atonement had only to remember the three A's: Anselm, Abelard, and Aulén. Abelard held to an exemplary view of the atonement, which rang hollow apart from Anselm's assertion that Christ's death actually paid for sin. Aulén's *Christus Victor* shook things up a little, trumpeting Christ's death as victory over sin, death, and the devil.<sup>1</sup> Now, quite frankly, it is a mess. Anselm is judged not simply inadequate, but anathema. As C. J. den Heyer, a professor of New Testament at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches, puts it, "How can the death of someone in a distant past mean salvation and redemption for me, living centuries later? This notion no longer inspires many people today, but rather provokes opposition."<sup>2</sup> While den Heyer is wrong to assume that Anselm's doctrine of the atonement no longer inspires, he is right about the opposition.

Feminist theologians have been in the vanguard of the insurgency. Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker have contended that Anselmic atonement is the source of Christianity's supposed "oppressiveness" and promotes the idea of a "blood-thirsty God."<sup>3</sup> They infamously declared that the atonement amounts to nothing short of divine child abuse. Rosemary Ruether systematized feminist thought, arguing that the traditional understanding of atonement promotes violence, not to mention the evils of patriarchy.<sup>4</sup> Echoing the feminist critique, pacifist J. Denny Weaver expresses disdain for a view of atonement that depends on violence to provide satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> Stephen Finlan notes that proponents of

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<sup>1</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (London: SPCK, 1950).

<sup>2</sup> C. J. den Heyer, *Jesus and the Doctrine of the Atonement*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 132.

<sup>3</sup> Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?" in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 1-30.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

Liberation Theology, Womanist Theology, and Black Theology have all weighed in against the traditional atonement.<sup>6</sup> He proceeds to summarize the objections, noting that the Anselmic atonement is “primitive,” “superstitious,” “destructive of monotheism,” and, for good measure, a “font of anti-Semitism.”<sup>7</sup> The very necessity of Christ’s death is questioned. As Finlan bluntly puts it, Jesus “did *not* think that it was God’s will that he should be murdered.”<sup>8</sup>

It has to be added, however, that the doctrine is attacked not only on the fringes. Consider the promisingly titled book *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, published by the hardy-radical InterVarsity Press. In it Joel Green and Mark Baker proclaim that the cross is “the defining symbol of the Christian faith.”<sup>9</sup> In an ecclesiastical culture of prosperity theology, with both Mormonism and Islam on the rise, such attention to the cross is refreshing. Green and Baker helpfully speak of the manifold ways in which the death of Christ may be articulated. Abelard is credited for championing the exemplary atonement and Aulén for *Christus Victor*. The authors go further and show how developing Christianity in Japan has emphasized the way in which Jesus’ death provides salvation from shame. Other more obscure models of atonement likewise receive positive attention. One view, however, is singled out for extensive criticism: namely, that sin incurs a debt or penalty that must be paid and that Christ pays this debt, on behalf of humanity, to the Father.

What is wrong with the Anselmic view? First, we should know that it is medieval, which is code in modern scholarship for backwards. Second, we should be aware that it is a Western idea, which in scholarship is a synonym for shallow, hierarchical, and possibly imperialistic. Third, substitutionary atonement is based on a judicial model that is supposedly specific to our culture. Christian missionaries, we are told, have discovered “huge populations of our world for whom guilt is a nonissue.”<sup>10</sup> Fourth, Anselmic atonement promotes patriarchy, which, of course, is cruel by nature and a stepping stone to the “legitimation of unjust human suffering or the idealization of the victim.”<sup>11</sup> Finally, as we know, sin is not our fault.

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Finlan, *Problems with Atonement: The Origins of, and Controversy about, the Atonement Doctrine* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Finlan, *Problems with Atonement*, 106, 108, 116.

<sup>8</sup> Finlan, *Problems with Atonement*, 109 (emphasis original).

<sup>9</sup> Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Texts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 29. The idea of making guilt an issue by preaching the law does not seem to have occurred to the authors.

<sup>11</sup> Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 30.

Under-represented groups cannot be accused of sin, for they are oppressed. The rest of us can blame our families, genetics, and society at large.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, as if we have not heard this before, we are told that by placing our guilt on Jesus there will be no basis for moral behavior.<sup>13</sup> So, Green and Baker paradoxically tell us that we are not to blame for our sin, while simultaneously encouraging us to take responsibility for our actions.

Now, all of these attacks on the Anselmic view may be lumped together, however inelegantly, as attacks by the left in its desire to mitigate the place of human culpability. I am reminded of a now three-decade old Monty Python skit, in which the arrested thief defends himself, saying, "I'm not to blame. It's society's fault." At which the police respond, "OK then. Arrest society."

### *Light from the East?*

It seems to me that another related challenge to the notion of substitutionary atonement comes not from the liberal West but from the ecclesiastical East. In his work *Light from the Christian East*, James Payton informs us that the Eastern church has not focused on such Western notions as "the justice of God, the question of humankind's guilt, the necessity of satisfaction, payment of debts, being justified, standing before God in his court and the like."<sup>14</sup> As Payton notes, many in the Eastern tradition are wont to say that the real problem facing humanity is not sin, but death, and that the real goal of the Christian life is not forgiveness, but life in God, or some form of divinization. This divinization occurs primarily through the sacraments, where the Christian is healed and brought closer to God. The Eastern Orthodox John 3:16 might very well be 2 Peter 1:4, which speaks of us becoming "participants of the divine nature." This passage has signal appeal for those longing for a fuller sacramental understanding of the Christian life. There is something to learn here. On the other hand, topics such as the justice of God, humankind's guilt, the necessity of satisfaction, payment of debts, being justified, and standing before God in his court are also thoroughly biblical. Some of us might also want to add that while life with God is the ultimate goal, death is not the ultimate problem, but more precisely the fruit of a tree, which has sin as its root. Without the justice of the cross, the devil's accusation stands, as does the unpaid sin which prevents full communion with God.

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<sup>12</sup> Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 31.

<sup>14</sup> James R. Payton, *Light from the Christian East: An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 121.

### *Uneasy Allies*

To their credit, many of the strongest proponents of the Anselmic model of atonement are often traditional Evangelicals and Calvinists. In recent years, works by David Peterson,<sup>15</sup> Robert Letham,<sup>16</sup> Thomas Schreiner,<sup>17</sup> Roger Nicole,<sup>18</sup> J. I. Packer,<sup>19</sup> and others have provided welcome ammunition in the battle to defend the traditional doctrine of the atonement.

Yet, for Lutherans a sense of unease remains. Robert Letham, for instance, has written the largely excellent book *The Work of Christ*. In it, he provides a sturdy biblical defense of penal substitution: namely the doctrine that Christ has paid for the penalty of sin on the cross. What follows though is an appendix on "The Intent of the Atonement"<sup>20</sup> in which he frets that the idea that Christ died for all will lead to universalism. Some idea of limited atonement is necessary, lest we think that God's work is not efficacious. Likewise, J. Ramsey Michaels argues for the idea of a limited, or as he puts it, "definite atonement."<sup>21</sup> Thus, the idea that "Jesus died for everyone indiscriminately" is avoided.<sup>22</sup> Such authors aim to make salvation and atonement co-terminous. The Reformed view that Christ died efficaciously for the elect alone is meant to safeguard monergism and the atonement's efficacy. As Sinclair Ferguson asks, "For if Christ's atonement was made for someone who was never saved by it,

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<sup>15</sup> David Petersen, ed., *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today, Papers from the Fourth Oak Hill College Annual School of Theology* (Carlisle, UK, and Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Penal Substitution View," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 67-116.

<sup>18</sup> Roger R. Nicole, Charles E. Hill, and Frank A. James, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Practical Perspectives, Essays in Honor of Roger Nicole* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> J. I. Packer, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Letham, *The Work of Christ*, 225-247.

<sup>21</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, "Atonement in John's Gospel and Epistles: 'The Lamb of God Who Takes Away the Sin of the World,'" in Nicole, Hill, and James, *The Glory of the Atonement*, 106; see also Raymond A. Blacketer, "Definite Atonement in Historical Perspective," in Nicole, Hill, and James, *The Glory of the Atonement*, 304-323.

<sup>22</sup> Michaels, "Atonement in John's Gospel and Epistles," 117.

how can I look to it with confidence that I will be saved by his precious blood?"<sup>23</sup>

This puts Lutherans in a bit of a quandary. We want, in the strongest way, to proclaim the guilt of sin and necessity of payment. With our Evangelical and Reformed friends, we want to say that Christ's death actually accomplished something. What we do not want is to lose the doctrines of universal atonement and objective justification: the belief that by the death of Christ, God is reconciled to the whole world. The God of limited or "definite" atonement is not a God at peace with humanity, or at least not with all of humanity. In fact, one might argue, he looks not unlike the caricature of the God portrayed by those who rail against the Anselmic atonement. Yes, such a God may be glorious, but is he all-loving? Thus, Lutherans may well lean on Reformed scholarship but are understandably wary of where they may fall.

### *The Sacraments and Atonement?*

The next question is whether there can be any real intersection between sacramental and atonement theology. Does a strong sacramental theology militate against a strong doctrine of the atonement? Or, do the sacraments necessarily lead us to a more therapeutic understanding of salvation at odds with substitutionary atonement? Many of those who promote sacramental theology downplay or disavow Anselm. On the other hand, the most prominent defenders of the doctrine often have little to say about sacramental theology. Or worse, some pit sacramental theology against a true understanding of the gospel.<sup>24</sup>

What I think needs to be established, or at least explored, is the relationship between the atonement and sacramental theology. One place to begin may be the Gospel of Mark.

### *The Gospels within the Debate over the Atonement*

The debate over the doctrine of the atonement is wide-ranging, covering most of the canon of Scripture, from the meaning of the Exodus, the Levitical sacrifices, and the Suffering Servant, to the translation of

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<sup>23</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, "Preaching the Atonement," in Nicole, Hill, and James, *The Glory of the Atonement*, 439.

<sup>24</sup> Such is the case, perhaps, with *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet*, in which Alan Stibbs adds a two-page epilogue on the sacraments, mentioning in passing "the unworthy practice of infant baptism." See "Appendix: Justification by Faith: The Reinstatement of the Doctrine Today," in Petersen, *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet*, 173.

ἱλαστήριον in Romans 3:25 and the role of Christ's priesthood in the Letter to the Hebrews.

Given their centrality to the Christian story, less attention has been paid to the Gospels than one might expect. Most New Testament atonement discussions center first on Paul and then proceed to the Gospels. Martin Hengel, in his marvelous little work *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament*, notes that the kind of atonement formulae found in the Pauline epistles "retreat into the background in the synoptic tradition."<sup>25</sup> In this view, Paul writes the definitive theology which is then given biographical background by the evangelists. There is, however, another way to think about it. That is, the Gospels represent the very heart of the atonement and are Scripture's purest expression of a God who is truly at one with humanity in Christ.

## II. The Meaning of Christ's Death in Mark

Some argue that Mark is not the best Gospel for seeing the fullness of the atonement. The second evangelist lacks much of our Lord's teaching ministry. He omits the Lord's Prayer and, therefore, the petition "Forgive us our debts" (Matt 6:12). Likewise, he does not include the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:21-35). These and other texts would be useful in explaining sin as a debt that must be paid. When it comes to the atonement, one is tempted to agree with C. J. den Heyer who comments that the evangelist Mark "offers relatively few new perspectives on the suffering and death of Jesus."<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, Christ's death is the pivot of Mark's entire Gospel. Strikingly, Mark, excluding the later additions by transmitters of the text, omits resurrection appearances and leaves us only with an empty tomb. Furthermore, no human being declares Jesus to be God's Son until the crucifixion. As Ernest Best aptly puts it, "The death of Jesus broods over the entire Gospel."<sup>27</sup> As such, Jesus' atoning death takes center stage in the Markan drama.

### *Christ's Death is Necessary*

Some strangely argue that Christ's death was not necessary. As Stephen Finlan writes, "Jesus did not come to earth in order to be murdered. He tried to lead his people into a new age of spiritual

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 34.

<sup>26</sup> Den Heyer, *Jesus and the Doctrine of the Atonement*, 80.

<sup>27</sup> Ernest Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 66.

illumination, which would have followed upon acceptance of his revelation."<sup>28</sup> Against such a blatant misreading are numerous Markan passages based on our Lord's own teaching. As Mark writes, "And with boldness he [Jesus] began preaching the word" (Mark 8:32). What word? The word of the cross. Mark writes, "And he began to teach them that the Son of Man *must* suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31). This theme of necessity is repeated in Jesus' passion predictions in Mark 9:31 and 10:33-34, where Jesus again speaks of the inevitability of his death. What is more, the basis for the necessity of Christ's death is found in God's will, as expressed in the Scriptures. In Mark 9:12, Jesus interprets his death in this way: "It is written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt." Again, at the Supper, Jesus says that "The Son of Man goes as it is written of him" (Mark 14:21). Yet again, as he is being arrested, he says, "Let the Scriptures be fulfilled" (Mark 14:49). Thus, Jesus describes his own death as necessitated by the Scriptures and, therefore, by God himself. Though Jesus prays that the cup may pass from him, he nevertheless proceeds to drink the cup of suffering, in accordance with the will of his Father (Mark 14:32-42). Of course, to say that Jesus' death was necessary does not then define the exact nature of that necessity.

### *Christ's Death as Example, Victory, and Ransom*

Abelard could have very well drawn upon Mark in asserting Jesus' death as exemplary. When speaking of his death, Jesus offers himself as a model for the Christian life: "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44). True disciples are called upon to follow the example of our Lord who "came not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45).

Still, the exemplary nature of Christ's death hardly exhausts its meaning. As others have remarked, for his death to be exemplary it must also have purpose. Roger Nicole puts it well when he writes:

Yet for any action to be truly exemplary, it is necessary that it have an appropriate motivation. If I should die in attempting to save a drowning child, my action may be judged heroic and exemplary. But if I thrust

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<sup>28</sup> Finlan, *Problems with Atonement*, 110.

myself in the water to give an example to those present, my act will be seen as insane and far from a paragon of virtue.<sup>29</sup>

Accordingly, after describing his death as exemplary, our Lord then offers the *locus classicus* for the atonement: "The Son of Man has come . . . to give his life as a ransom for the many" (Mark 10:45; cf. Matt 20:28). First, as a matter of housekeeping, we should not think of "many" in such a way that we say that Christ's ransom is for many but not for others. As James Edwards notes, "In Semitic grammar, 'the many' normally stands for totality, all."<sup>30</sup> This Markan and Matthean passage has a close parallel in 1 Timothy 2:6, where Paul writes that Christ "gave himself as a ransom for all." In Romans 5, just as Adam's sin results in the judgment and death for the masses (i.e., all humankind), so also Christ's act of obedience has a positive effect for the masses (i.e., all humankind). Thus, in Mark 10:45, we do well to say that Christ died for the masses, among whom we are all numbered.

In what way is our Lord's death salvific? In Mark 10:45, Jesus describes his death as a λύτρον, which may be translated as "ransom" or "redemption." As many have noted, the term λύτρον is an echo of the Exodus story, where the Lord redeems his people Israel out of the bondage of slavery. For instance, in Exodus 6:6 the Lord says to Moses, "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment." This is the same way the term is used in Luke's Benedictus, where Zechariah sings, "Praise be the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and made a redemption [λύτρωσιν] for his people" (Luke 1:68).

Yet, a number of scholars have cautioned that this supposed metaphor should not be pressed beyond its limits.<sup>31</sup> In Exodus, the Lord redeems with his arm and by his mighty acts. Thus, God redeems not with payment but power. When Christ speaks of his death as a redemption, he evokes memories of deliverance from pharaoh and proclaims his own victory over sin, death, and the devil. Thus, our Lord proclaims himself *Christus Victor*. Score one for Aulén.

Yet, while the *Christus Victor* theme is present, it does not tell the whole story. Even as the death of Jesus broods over the Gospels, so also death broods over the Exodus. The children of Israel were not only

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<sup>29</sup> Roger Nicole, "Postscript on Penal Substitution," in Nicole, Hill, and James, *The Glory of the Atonement*, 447.

<sup>30</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 327.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 317.

redeemed out of Egypt, but they were also saved from the destruction of the firstborn. This came at a price: namely, the blood of the Passover lamb. Those whose doors were not marked by the lamb's blood lost their firstborn to death. It is significant, therefore, that each of the Gospels, Mark included, frames Christ's death within the Passover tradition (Mark 14:1). Mark pictures Jesus' death in terms of the sacrifice of the Passover lamb (Mark 14:12). Christ is the first-born, the spotless lamb whose blood is shed so that we may escape death.

Further, we would do well to consider the work of Simon Gathercole who has shown that the term λύτρον is also found within the legal framework of Exodus (LXX).<sup>32</sup> Particularly, he points to passages such as Exodus 21:29–30 where Moses lays down this law: "But if the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned but has not kept it in, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death." The owner may avoid the death penalty, notes the Lawgiver. "However, if payment is demanded, the owner shall give a ransom [λύτρα] for his life, whatever is demanded." Thus, within the immediate context of Exodus, the term "ransom" cannot be used simply as a metaphor for salvation or liberation because it implies that a definite price must be paid for that freedom. Thus, the term "ransom" carries with it the idea of exchange or bartering.

Many have also noted that Mark 10:45 strongly echoes Isaiah 53.<sup>33</sup> By offering to give his life, Christ identifies himself as the Suffering Servant, the one who will bear the iniquities of others and carry "the sin" of many with the result that "many" will be accounted righteous (Isa 53:11–12). R. T. France aptly concludes, "This accumulation of verbal echoes of Is. 53:10–12 is compelling in itself, and it is the more so when it is recognised that the whole thrust of Is. 53 is to present the servant as one who suffers and dies for the redemption of the people, whose life is offered as substitute for guilt."<sup>34</sup> France astutely observes that it would be hard to offer a better summary of Isaiah 53 than Jesus' own words, "The Son of Man came to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Simon J. Gathercole, "The Cross and Substitutionary Atonement," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 21 (2003): 152–165.

<sup>33</sup> See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2002), 419–421.

<sup>34</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 420.

<sup>35</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 420–421.

In sum, Abelard, Aulén, and Anselm can all be supported by Mark 10:45, not as competing themes of atonement but complementary ones. Without including an Anselmic understanding of Jesus' death in the mix of interpreting Mark, the exemplary nature of the atonement is lost, as is the victory over death.

### III. Jesus Describes the Atonement Sacramentally

What has not been such a prominent part of the atonement discussion is the relationship between the atonement and the sacraments. This, I think, is crucial. Atonement, after all, has to do with reconciliation. What can atonement mean if God does not come in touch and stay in touch with his creation? Without incarnation, atonement is a theory. Without the sacraments, atonement remains history. In the incarnation, and then in the sacraments, atonement is actualized. For in the sacraments, not only do we receive a pledge of forgiveness, we also come into contact with the God who is with us in Christ. God's forgiveness and presence are two sides of the same coin. In this regard, it is interesting to see how closely the Gospel of Mark ties together the death of Jesus to his sacramental ministry. The first instance of this is the relationship between the atonement and the Lord's Supper.

#### *The Atonement and the Lord's Supper*

The setting of the Lord's Supper is the Passover meal, a point Mark repeatedly underlines (Mark 14:1, 12, 14, 16). The reader is thereby reminded that redemption is accomplished and actualized by the sacrifice and eating of the Passover lamb. In what may be the apex of atonement theology, our Lord echoes his previous ransom statement, saying, "This is my blood of the covenant shed on behalf of many" (Mark 14:24). Thus, as he did earlier, our Lord speaks of his death as a sacrificial self-giving for the masses. Yet, now he links that sacrificial giving particularly to the shedding of his blood—to the Supper. Here our Lord's words echo not only Isaiah 53 but also Exodus 24:8 (LXX), in which Moses offered and sprinkled the blood of the covenant (τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης). As in Exodus 24, the shedding of Jesus' blood provides necessary atonement and enables the Lord to eat and be one with his people. The Lord's Supper and atonement are linked further in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus willingly drinks the cup of judgment. Thus, Christ drinks in judgment so that his disciples may drink in forgiveness. The shed blood speaks of sacrifice and the very basis of redemption for "the many." The death of Jesus becomes the basis of a new relationship between God and his people, and this relationship finds its bond in the blood which Jesus sacrifices (atonement) and shares (sacrament). The historical enactment of

atonement (the shedding of blood on the cross) will be actualized as the disciples continue to drink it anew in the kingdom of God (sacrament).

### *The Atonement and Baptism*

That the Lord's Supper should be linked to the atonement is not so surprising. What is remarkable, though, is the way that Mark links Baptism to the atonement and the atonement to Baptism.

Atonement is, at its very heart, the bridging of the gap between God and man and the breaking down of barriers. Perhaps there is no more telling symbol of this than the temple curtain which is the final barrier that separates God's people from his immediate presence. Only the high priest walked beyond this curtain once a year, on the Day of Atonement. In order to enter past this curtain, the high priest was required to offer a sin offering and a burnt offering. In a type of Old Testament Baptism, he would then bathe his body in water and put on holy garments (Leviticus 16). Then he would sprinkle blood upon the mercy seat, thereby making atonement for the uncleanness of the people.

We cannot underestimate, therefore, the significance of the fact that at the death of Jesus the temple curtain is torn in two, from top to bottom (Mark 15:38; see also Matt 27:51 and Luke 23:45).<sup>36</sup> The Holy of Holies, the very presence of God, is made accessible by the death of Jesus on the cross. Adele Yarbro Collins is right to note that it symbolizes "the rending of the barrier between humanity and God," and it may further signify "that the death of Jesus has made possible access to God for all humanity."<sup>37</sup> Mark takes the tearing of the curtain, however, in a surprising new direction. Mark alone among the evangelists explicitly links the tearing of the temple curtain to Baptism. At Jesus' death in Mark 15:38, the temple curtain was torn open (ἐσχίσθη). So also, Mark 1:10 tells us that at Jesus' Baptism the heavens are not simply opened (as in Matthew and Luke), but they are "torn open" (σχιζομένου). Not so long ago scholars attributed such a strange word choice to Mark's primitive, oral character. As R. T. France notes, "Mark's use of σχίζω is vivid and unexpected. He may have chosen it simply for its dramatic impact, which is considerable."<sup>38</sup> Working on the

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<sup>36</sup> There is some debate as to whether the evangelists are referring to the outer or inner curtain. For the writer to the Hebrews, the inner curtain is clearly the significant one (Heb 6:19, 9:3, and 10:19-20). Given that the outer curtain lacks theological significance, Adela Yarbro Collins's judgment that Mark refers here to the inner curtain seems most probable; see *Mark: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 760.

<sup>37</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 760.

<sup>38</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 77.

assumption that Mark was the first Gospel, scholars note how Matthew and Luke smoothed out Mark's rougher narrative. Mark, however, moves beyond Matthew and Luke, and has a distinctly theological point to make. In our Lord's Baptism, the Spirit is able to descend, the Father's voice can be heard, and Jesus is revealed as God's Son (Mark 1:10). In Jesus' Baptism, the wall of separation is violently ripped open. Jesus is baptized unto the death. The tearing open of the heavens is an expression of God's desire to be at one with humanity, as well as a vivid picture of the price that would have to be paid. Mark would have us know our Lord's entire ministry is a passion story, whereby he tears open the curtain of separation between God and man, and ensuring an everlasting *Yom Kippur*, that is, a Day of Atonement.

### *Two Times Three*

Perhaps the most remarkable Markan text linking death and Baptism is Mark 10:38–39. James and John request places of honor at the table of Christ's glory. Jesus asks rhetorically in Mark 10:38, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?" Thus, Mark again underlines the connection between the suffering of Christ on the cross and the Lord's Supper where he offers a cup of blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Then, in what seems a non-sequitur, Jesus switches from the Supper to Baptism, adding, "or [sc. Are you able] to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mark 10:38). Mark may not include the trinitarian baptismal formula, but here we have a three-fold reference to his death as Baptism. This is not incidental or accidental, for our Lord repeats the three-fold baptismal reference, saying, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized" (Mark 10:39). Adele Yarbro Collins, for example, does not see this: "Here 'baptism' is used metaphorically and refers neither to the baptism of John nor to Christian baptism."<sup>39</sup> Why then, one wonders, did Jesus speak with this particular metaphor, especially given the prominence that Baptism held in the early church and within the Gospel of Mark itself? Concerning the double three-fold baptismal references, R. T. France comments that Jesus has "coined a remarkable metaphor, drawing on his disciples' familiarity with the dramatic physical act of John's baptism, but using it (somewhat along the lines of the secular usage mentioned above) to depict the suffering and death into which he was soon to be 'plunged.'"<sup>40</sup> Yet, Baptism is much more than a metaphor in Mark's Gospel. Jesus himself links the cup with Baptism, and both the cup and Baptism with death.

<sup>39</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 497.

<sup>40</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 416.

Moreover, Mark links Jesus' Baptism with his death by connecting the ripping of the heavens with the ripping of the baptismal curtain.

### *The Ministry of Jesus is Baptismal*

Something seems to be missing. For R. T. France, Jesus metaphorically recalls John's baptismal ministry. What France, and many others, miss is that Jesus' own ministry is thoroughly baptismal. Yes, John is introduced as one who baptizes (Mark 1:4). Within the Gospel, he is also the one who introduces the hearer and reader to Jesus. What does he say of him? "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:9). Strangely, within the Gospel of Mark, these are the only words that John the Baptist uses to describe the Lord's ministry. He does not say that Jesus has come to save us from our sins, nor does he call him the Lamb of God (John 1:29). He says only that Jesus has come to baptize. In one small phrase, we are given a summary of Jesus' entire ministry: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8).

What can John the Baptist mean by this? This, I would propose, is a thematic verse, that clues the reader in on how to understand the entire Gospel. If we take John the Baptist's, and the evangelist's, word for it, Jesus' entire ministry is baptismal. What does Baptism accomplish? From elsewhere in the Scriptures we know that in Baptism we receive the Spirit, the devil is driven out, we are able to call upon God as "Abba, Father," we are cleansed from our sin, we are raised up to walk in the newness of life, and we are given the garment of Christ's righteousness that covers us.

These things are happening in Christ's own ministry in the Gospel of Mark. Read against the baptismal template, Christ's ministry is not simply a laundry list of signs and wonders, but it has a distinctly baptismal shape. Note that this is not a matter of eisegesis (reading into the text), but it is a matter of taking John the Baptist's (and Mark's) word seriously. Jesus came to baptize with the Holy Spirit. And so he did. Even as the baptismal service is a trinitarian invocation, so also are the Father and the Spirit present in the Baptism of the Son. Baptism begins with the rite of exorcism; so also in Mark, Jesus' first recorded miracle is the casting out of unclean spirits (Mark 1:26). Baptism washes away sin; so also, Jesus cleanses a leprous man with the words "Be clean" (Mark 1:41). Baptism enables us to walk in the newness of life; so also does Jesus say to the paralytic man, "Rise, take up your bed and walk" (Mark 2:11). In Baptism we share in Christ's resurrection; so also Jesus says to the little girl, "Little girl, I say to you, arise [ἐγείρω]" (Mark 5:41). In Baptism our mouths are opened to call God "Father"; so also does Jesus say to the deaf and mute man, "Ephphatha. Be opened," and the man's ears were opened and his tongue

was released (Mark 7:34–35). Indeed, in Baptism, we receive the garment of Christ's righteousness; strikingly, in Mark, a woman touches Jesus' garment and is saved (Mark 5:29). Jesus' garment is the sole focus of the Markan transfiguration, where Mark comments that Christ's garments were "intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them" (Mark 9:3–4). In short, the whole kaleidoscope of New Testament imagery describing Baptism can be found in Christ's own baptismal ministry. Moreover, this ministry is not simply one of healing, but it is salvific. The woman touches our Lord's garment not simply to be healed but to be "saved" (Mark 5:28). Indeed, as many as touched him were "saved" (Mark 6:56).

### *Jesus' Baptismal Ministry and the Price of Atonement*

Matthew understood that Christ's healing ministry was intimately related to the atonement. Even as he heals, he takes our diseases upon himself. Thus he quotes Isaiah 53:4 in Matthew 8:17, "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases." For Mark also, Jesus' own baptismal ministry of healing and salvation comes at a price. Though his grace is freely given, it is not free. He redeems with his mighty arm, but a heavy toll is exacted along the way.

Consider the way the Mark makes the transition from the Baptism to the temptation. Matthew tells us that after his Baptism, Jesus was "led up into the desert" (Matt 4:1). Luke sweetens the story and tells us that after his Baptism, Jesus was "full of the Spirit" and was "led by the Spirit into the desert" (Luke 4:1). Mark, however, boldly underlines the price of Jesus' baptismal ministry. Even as he makes it possible for us to enter into the presence of God, the Spirit violently casts him out (ἐκβάλλει) into the desert (Mark 1:12). The Markan word choice of ἐκβάλλω is not simply for dramatic effect, or to add, as R. T. France puts it, "the immediacy of the impact."<sup>41</sup> Mark again has theology on his mind. Though sinless and well-pleasing to God, Jesus receives the same treatment as did the first Adam, whom God drove out (ἐξέβαλεν) of paradise (Gen 3:24). Again, even as he drives out (ἐξέβαλεν) unclean spirits, so also is he driven out by the Spirit and left to Satan's devices. Thus, his baptismal ministry begins with the price of atonement.

So also does it continue. He cleanses the leper but with the result that our Lord "could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in the desolate places" (Mark 1:45). Thus, as the leper reenters society, Jesus is pushed to the fringe. The woman who touches Jesus' garment is healed, but our Lord

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<sup>41</sup> France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 84.

feels the power that has left him (Mark 5:30). Again, Jesus' ministry is popular, yet popularity comes at a price. As the crowds gather around Jesus, the disciples make ready the boat lest the crowds "crush" Jesus (Mark 3:9). The Greek word *θλίβω* refers to "tribulation," the type that comes to a culmination in the passion narrative. The crowd that crushes upon Jesus in his ministry will crush him on the cross. This is the pattern throughout the entire Gospel. There is a price to be paid for everything. He frees others but is himself arrested. He brings others to life but himself must be put to death.

### *In Touch with Creation*

Sacramental theology preaches a God who is in touch with his creation. Since Christ atones for the sin of the world, there is no longer a barrier between God and man. Thus, God comes in touch with his creation incarnationally and sacramentally. More than any other Gospel, Mark emphasizes the fact that the miracles of Jesus are accomplished not only by the power of his word but also his touch.

When, for instance, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law, he does so by taking her hand (Mark 1:31). As Jesus cleansed, he "stretched out his hand and touched him" (Mark 1:41). Jairus, whose daughter is at the point of death, requests, "Lay your hands on her so that she might be saved and live" (Mark 5:23). Upon arriving at Jairus' house, Jesus took the girl by the hand and raised her (Mark 3:41). As Jesus healed the blind man at Bethsaida, he places his hands on the blind man's eyes, so that he sees clearly (Mark 8:25).

Even as Jesus heals by touch, others reach out to Jesus and are saved. The man with the withered hand is told, "Extend your hands" (Mark 3:5). He did so and was healed. We are told that Jesus healed many, "so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him" (Mark 3:10). The woman with the flow of blood reached out, "touched his garment," and was saved (Mark 5:27).

Also, we note that within the Gospel of Mark especially, Jesus employs earthly elements in his healing/saving ministry. Some may find such references primitive or embarrassing, but they express the sacramental nature of Christ's ministry. Thus, in the healing of the deaf and dumb man, he heals with saliva: "He spit and touched the man's tongue" (Mark 7:31). This same saliva he uses in healing the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:23). In both cases, Christ comes into a most intimate communion with his creation. The water from his body brings life and salvation to others.

#### IV. Conclusion

So it is that Mark preaches the atonement. Christ has offered his life as a ransom for the masses. Yet, for Mark, there is no divide between this gospel message and the sacramental ministry. The atonement finds its theological culmination in the Lord's Supper. Moreover, Jesus' entire ministry is fully one of baptismal atonement. Through his touch, he heals and brings salvation. Yet this saving touch comes at a price. It is not a case of the cross or the sacraments. It is a baptismal ministry unto death.

Unfortunately, Mark has never garnered the respect he deserves as a theologian of the church. The church fathers neglected him and ran to Matthew's primacy. The scholars' (most probably mistaken) assumption of Markan primacy has proved a mixed blessing. We know much about Mark the storyteller. Yet to this title we may have to add, Mark the preacher of the cross and theologian of Baptism. Whether or not the final ending was written by Mark, the writer captured succinctly the character of the Gospel's message: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation: (namely) 'He who believes and is baptized shall be saved'" (Mark 16:16).

## The Death of Jesus in the Gospel of John: Atonement for Sin?

Charles A. Gieschen

Distaste for the doctrine of atonement for sin through the death of Jesus is not purely a modern phenomenon of critical scholarship; it is as old as the death of Jesus itself. The Apostle Paul tells us that the death of the Son of God by crucifixion was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Cor 1:23). The atonement was one of the teachings that Gnostics opposed already in the second and third centuries, as evidenced again in the newly published gnostic *Gospel of Judas*. April DeConick, a scholar of ancient Gnosticism, makes this relevant observation:

So the barbs in the *Gospel of Judas* are many, all directed at the theology and practices of apostolic Christians . . . . The Sethians who wrote the *Gospel of Judas* especially found the atonement theology unconscionable. Apostolic Christianity has long defended Jesus' death as a necessary sacrifice made to God the Father for the purpose of atonement, vicariously redeeming humanity from its sins. The Sethian Gnostics found this doctrine morally reprehensible—no different from child sacrifice or murder—and thus not an action that could be condoned by God. The *Gospel of Judas* is fascinating in this respect, building a very sophisticated response to skewer the atonement. And one figure that they use to do this is the cursed Judas Iscariot, the demon who was responsible for Jesus' death.<sup>1</sup>

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have witnessed countless attempts by biblical scholars and theologians to argue that later Christians have read atonement theology back into the New Testament texts.<sup>2</sup> Understanding Jesus' death as atonement, as the argument goes, was neither there from the beginning nor even from the time of the writing of New Testament documents. Like the ancient Gnostics, therefore, some theologians have simply concluded that atonement as it has been taught is cruel and unusual punishment that should no longer be used in the

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<sup>1</sup> April D. DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 5.

<sup>2</sup> See Stephan Finlan, *Problems with the Atonement: The Origins of, and Controversy about, the Atonement Doctrine* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005).

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proclamation of Jesus' death. Removing atonement from the historical and theological equation that led to the crucifixion usually means Jesus' death is to be understood primarily as a faithful martyrdom.<sup>3</sup>

Of all the places in the New Testament where the teaching of atonement has been challenged, the Gospel of John is probably where the most doubt has been cast.<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, one of the most influential interpreters of John in the twentieth century, bluntly pronounced the verdict on this Gospel that still holds sway: "the thought of Jesus' death as an atonement for sin has no place in John."<sup>5</sup> Both Bultmann and fellow German Ernst Käsemann argued that the death of Jesus is subordinate to other themes in the Gospel of John. Bultmann asserted that John's major message is the coming of God's Son into the world and his sojourn on earth that led him back to heaven. He viewed atonement as "a foreign element" in this Gospel and dismissed allusions to atonement as being from a non-Johannine source, even a later accretion.<sup>6</sup> Käsemann understood the central theme to be "the unity of the Son with the Father."<sup>7</sup> His claim that John is "naively docetic"<sup>8</sup> is much more well-known than his assessment about the death of Jesus as a "mere postscript" in John: "One is tempted to regard it as mere postscript which had to be included because John could not ignore this tradition nor yet could he fit it

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<sup>3</sup> For example, David Brondos states, "God did not send his Son in order for him to die . . . but to serve as his instrument for establishing the promised reign of *shalom* and justice; his commitment to this task led to his death"; see "Why was Jesus Crucified? Theology, History and the Story of Redemption," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001): 499 (emphasis original). Brondos is an ELCA theologian.

<sup>4</sup> See the history of interpretation by Martinus C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 17 (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1996), 19-42, esp. 20. See also the vast collection of essays in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. G. van Belle, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 200 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951 and 1955), 2:54.

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 54-55; see also de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, 20-30.

<sup>7</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in Light of Chapter 17* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 24; see also de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, 20-30.

<sup>8</sup> Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus*, 26. For an excellent critique of Käsemann's position, see Marie Meyne Thompson, *The Incarnate Word: Perspectives on Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988).

organically into his work."<sup>9</sup> J. T. Forestell, in his book on Johannine soteriology, expresses similar doubts about atonement in John: "The vocabulary of redemption and expiation is completely absent from the gospel [of John]. The remission of sin is mentioned only once (20,23) and the action of Christ against sin only in 1,29."<sup>10</sup> Even Craig Koester, a Johannine scholar who sees the death of Jesus as central to this Gospel, stops short of seeing atonement in John: "The imagery is sacrificial, but it is used in a distinctive way to describe the effects of the death of Jesus as the supreme manifestation of the love of God, as something that transforms people from antipathy into faith, thereby effecting reconciliation."<sup>11</sup>

How, then, does the Gospel of John interpret the death of Jesus? More pointedly: Does this Gospel teach atonement for sin or not? This study will argue that the reason that atonement is often not being read from John is because atonement is taught implicitly through allusion. In many cases, this Gospel communicates on different levels to both the uninformed reader and the informed reader.<sup>12</sup> Even if a reader misses the subtleties of atonement in the narrative of John, therefore, he still can read Jesus' death as a sacrificial act of love that brings life. Because of this "under-the-radar" proclamation of atonement, one may be tempted to skip the testimony of the Gospel and rush ahead to the First Epistle of John in order to find very explicit testimony to Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice (e.g., 1 John 2:2; 4:10).<sup>13</sup> Even though some may be more than satisfied with a few solid proof-texts from First John to answer the question posed here, this study will argue that a careful reading of the Gospel will yield similar theology that is expressed with more subtlety.

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<sup>9</sup> Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> J. T. Forestell, *The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, *Analecta Biblica* 57 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1974), 60–61. See the response by Max Turner, "Atonement and the Death of Jesus in John—Some Questions to Bultmann and Forestell," *Evangelical Quarterly* 62 (1990): 99–122.

<sup>11</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 200.

<sup>12</sup> For example, without knowing much about first-century Judaism, even a modern reader can understand that bread and water are basic elements needed for life; thus, he can understand that Jesus, as the "Bread of Life" and "Living Water" in John, satisfies our spiritual hunger and thirst. The informed reader, however, knows that an important part of the context for these discourses is the first-century Jewish understanding that *Torah* is the "Bread of Life" and "Living Water." For an argument that John was written for a wide audience, see Richard Bauckham, "For Whom Were the Gospels Written?" in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking The Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 9–48.

<sup>13</sup> These two texts will be discussed in Part IV below.

The thesis of this study, therefore, is that the Gospel of John interprets the death of Jesus as the key revelatory event in the life of Jesus, because it is especially in the giving of the flesh of the Son as an atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world that one sees the ultimate revelation of the Son of Man who is the visible glory of YHWH. Rather than seeing the atonement allusions as marginal to the theology of this Gospel, it will be demonstrated in the four sections below that they are central to understanding fully John's presentation of Jesus' death. First, we will examine how Jesus' death is repeatedly interpreted in John as "exaltation" and "glorification." Second, we will look at the theme of Jesus as "lamb of God" in this Gospel. Third, we will probe the Noble Shepherd discourse of John 10 for teaching of vicarious or substitutionary atonement. Finally, we will view the atonement theology found in First John, arguing that the understanding of Jesus' death that is implicit in John's Gospel is stated explicitly in his first epistle.

### I. Jesus' Death as Exaltation and Glorification

Even the casual reader of John will notice that this Gospel speaks of Jesus' death—not his resurrection or ascension—in terms of him "being lifted up" or "being glorified" (e.g., esp. John 3:14; 8:28; 12:23; 12:32–34; 13:31–32; and 17:1).<sup>14</sup> Since these sayings are most often found on the lips of Jesus, one can conclude that this is the primary language used by Jesus as presented in John for interpreting his own death. Before we examine each of these texts, there are two general observations that are crucial for understanding them: one concerning the source for the verbs "being lifted up" and "being glorified," and the other concerning the use of "the Son of Man" title with these verbs.

First, the Greek verbs used in this cluster of texts, *ὑψόω* and *δοξάζω*, are in all probability dependent upon the LXX text of Isaiah 52:13.<sup>15</sup> There the

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<sup>14</sup> This topic has been a considerable focus of recent Johannine scholarship; see M. C. de Boer, "The Death of Jesus as the Exaltation and Glorification of the Son of Man," in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. G. van Belle, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 200 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007), 293–326.

<sup>15</sup> Many scholars have recognized Isaiah 52:13 (LXX) as the source of this language; for example, Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 63–68. It should also be noted that this language of exaltation in 52:13 is drawing on Isaiah's call narrative, where it states that Isaiah saw the Lord "exalted and lifted up" (Isa 6:1; cf. 57:15). For a contrary opinion on Isaiah 52:13 (LXX) as the source of these verbs, see John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 495.

verbs ὑψωθήσεται and δοξασθήσεται introduce the “Suffering Servant song” that continues through Isaiah 53. That text reads:

ἰδοὺ συνήσει ὁ παῖς μου καὶ ὑψωθήσεται καὶ δοξασθήσεται σφόδρὰ ὄν τρόπον ἐκστησονται ἐπὶ σέ πολλοὶ οὕτως ἀδοξήσει ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπων τὸ εἶδος σου καὶ ἡ δόξα σου ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

Behold, my servant shall understand, and *be lifted up*, and *glorified* exceedingly. As many shall be amazed at you, so also shall your form be without glorification from men, namely your glory shall not be from men.<sup>16</sup>

Allusions to the Old Testament, such as these, are seldom meant to link the reader myopically to a few words of text; they are usually used to draw the reader to the wider context. For example, the “In the beginning” (Ἐν ἀρχῇ) of John 1:1 is not only meant to call to mind the first two words of Genesis in the Septuagint, but the entire creation narrative of Genesis 1–2. The use of this exaltation and glorification language from Isaiah 52:13 (LXX), therefore, indicates that the servant song of Isaiah 53 is an important source for the interpretation of Jesus’ death throughout the Gospel of John. The probability of this dependence is strengthened by the repeated use of Isaiah—especially chapters 40–66—in John, including the quotation of Isaiah 53:1 in John 12:40.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, this Isaiah 53:1 quotation is followed by a quotation of Isaiah 6:10, after which John states that Isaiah “saw his [the Son’s] Glory and spoke concerning him [the Son]” (12:41).<sup>18</sup> John not only identifies the servant as the Son, but even understands that the enthroned Lord of the call vision is the Son. Catrin Williams states,

Isaiah occupies a prominent, if not the highest, position among the scriptural texts that have contributed to the shaping of John’s gospel . . . . allusive modes of verbal and thematic scriptural reference attest the deeply embedded and thoroughly absorbed character of John’s use of Isaiah, and reflect the extensive process of christological reflective on scripture from which this gospel emerged.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Italics are used in the translation here and others below to bring attention to key words. All translations of Greek texts are my own.

<sup>17</sup> Catrin H. Williams, “Isaiah in John’s Gospel,” in *Isaiah in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 101–116.

<sup>18</sup> I discuss this in *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums* 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 275, and “The Real Presence of the Son Before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology,” *CTQ* 68 (2004): 120–122.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, “Isaiah in John’s Gospel,” 101.

The use of these verbs indicates that there are numerous allusions to Isaiah 53 in John, calling to mind one of the most powerful prophetic expressions of God's atoning work that has its roots in Israel's atonement rites narrated in Leviticus 16. Jesus' death in John is, therefore, interpreted in light of the Suffering Servant's atoning work, as expressed vividly in these words of Isaiah 53:4-6:

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

What is noteworthy, however, is that the verbs used in Isaiah 52:13 (LXX) speak of the *future* exaltation and glorification of the servant that will *follow* his humiliation and death, whereas the Gospel of John interprets the exaltation and glorification of Jesus happening specifically *in*—not after—his death.<sup>20</sup> The "hour" (ὥρα) of revelation in John is not in the upper room with disciples touching resurrected flesh; the "hour" is the death of Jesus on the cross.<sup>21</sup>

The second general observation is that these texts which refer to Jesus' death as exaltation or glorification also use the title "the Son of Man" (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου).<sup>22</sup> This title is found primarily on the lips of Jesus—except John 12:34—and is frequent in all four Gospels.<sup>23</sup> It is clear "the Son of Man" is not a "confessional title" of the later church since it is not the content of the major confessions in the Gospels, but it is Jesus' *public self-designation* used during his earthly ministry.<sup>24</sup> Absolutely crucial to understanding the significance of this title in John is seeing the influence of

<sup>20</sup> See further Williams, "Isaiah in John's Gospel," 115.

<sup>21</sup> For this theme, see John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; and 17:1 (cf. 7:6, 8; and 16:21).

<sup>22</sup> For a good summary of the philological issues, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The New Testament Title 'Son of Man,'" *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 25 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 143-160. For discussion of the history of scholarship on the subject, see Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation*, Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 107 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> It is found 30 times in Matthew, 14 in Mark, 25 in Luke, and 12 in John; see Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Son of Man Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew*, Proclamation Commentaries, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 33-65.

Daniel 7:13 on the later use of this title among first-century AD Jews, including Jesus.<sup>25</sup>

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came *one like a son of man* [MT: **כְּבָר אֲנִישׁ**; LXX: **ὁὶς ἀνθρώπου**], and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Daniel 7 was not a marginal text in the canon used by first-century Jews and Christians. Both its relationship to the depiction of YHWH as the enthroned likeness of “the man” in Ezekiel 1:26–28 as well as its significant influence upon later apocalyptic texts like *1 Enoch* 37–71, the Book of Revelation (1:13; 14:14), and *4 Ezra* 13 testify to its importance.<sup>26</sup> Many first-century Jews longed for the revelation of the Son of Man.

The Gospel of John evinces this interest in the Son of Man; for example, note the comment of Jesus to Nathaniel: “You will see greater things than this, you will see angels ascending and descending upon [ἐπί] the Son of Man” (John 1:51). In an obvious allusion to the crucifixion by way of Jacob’s comforting vision of God enthroned at the top of a ladder stretching between earth and heaven in Genesis 28:10–17, Jesus promises Nathaniel a theophany in which the Son of Man is seen as the ladder stretching between heaven and earth rather than being enthroned at the top of the ladder where one would expect to see him.<sup>27</sup> John also contains a polemic against those who claimed a heavenly ascent to see the Son of Man who is the visible form of God: “No one has ascended except he who has descended, the Son of Man” (John 3:13).<sup>28</sup> What was puzzling for Jesus’ followers was not that he speaks of himself as the Son of Man, but

<sup>25</sup> Contrary to the assessment of Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 290–306.

<sup>26</sup> *1 Enoch* 37–71 is especially important testimony concerning how the Son of Man of Daniel 7 was being interpreted among first-century Jews as a preexistent person within the mystery of YHWH who would bring deliverance on the last day; see James C. VanderKam, “Righteous One, Messiah, Chosen One, and Son of Man in *1 Enoch* 37–71,” in *The Messiah: Developments in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 169–191. For the identification of the Son of Man with the Ancient of Days in these chapters, see Charles A. Gieschen, “The Name of the Son of Man in *1 Enoch*,” in *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 238–249.

<sup>27</sup> See Jerome H. Neyrey, “The Jacob Allusions in John 1:51,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 586–605, and Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 280–283.

<sup>28</sup> See also Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 282.

specifically *how* he speaks of himself as the Son of Man. John does not focus on seeing the Son of Man enthroned *in heaven* at the *end* of time, but seeing the Son of Man enthroned *on earth* upon the cross *in time* (John 12:23, 32–34; cf. Jesus is “King of the Jews” in the passion narrative).<sup>29</sup>

### *Jesus’ Death as “Being Lifted Up”*

There are three texts in John that speak of Jesus’ death as “being lifted up.” Lest there be any confusion that this language refers to Jesus’ resurrection or ascension and not to the crucifixion, the evangelist clearly explains Jesus’ words in the third text: “He was saying this to indicate *the kind of death by which he was to die*” (John 12:33).<sup>30</sup> As one studies these texts, it is apparent that there is an intentional and profound double meaning to the verb ὑψώω in John: even as Jesus will be literally “lifted up” in the crucifixion, he will also—in this very action of humiliating sacrifice—“be exalted” by the Father in order to show forth his divine identity for all to see and be drawn to him. These texts are the primary passion predictions in the Johannine narrative.

The first of these texts is found near the end of the dialogue with Nicodemus:

[John 3:14; Jesus said] “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, *even so it is necessary that the Son of Man be lifted up* [ὑψωθῆναι] that whoever believes in him has eternal life.”

This text states that the gracious action of the YHWH in Numbers 21, where he instructed Moses to place a bronze serpent on a pole to bring healing to Israel, provides a pattern for the gracious action of the Son of Man being lifted up in the crucifixion (note the καθώς, οὕτως structure). There is great irony in the fact that the last place one would expect to see the Son of Man is lifted up on a cross from earth; Daniel 7 and subsequent Jewish writers have him lifted up on a throne in heaven.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See Richard Bauckham, “The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis, Supplement to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 43–69.

<sup>30</sup> The resurrection/ascension of Jesus in John uses the language of “going away/departing” to the Father; see Martinus C. de Boer, “Jesus’ Departure to the Father in John: Death or Resurrection?” in *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. G. van Belle, J. G. van der Watt, and P. Maritz, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 184 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2005), 1–19.

<sup>31</sup> See Charles A. Gieschen, “The Lamb (Not the Man) on the Divine Throne,” in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity, Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*, ed. David B. Capes,

The second text, spoken amid the escalating conflict with the Jews in John 8, emphasizes that it is precisely in his crucifixion that one will see Jesus to be YHWH:

[John 8:28; Jesus said] “When *you lift up* [ὁψώσητε] *the Son of Man*, then you will know that I AM [ἐγὼ εἰμι], and I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught me.”

Catrin William’s impressive treatment of Old Testament divine disclosure statements, primarily found in Isaiah, confirms much of the past research asserting that the background for the absolute ἐγὼ εἰμι (“I am” or “I am he”) sayings in John—including this saying—is to be found in these statements.<sup>32</sup> John wants the reader to understand that the same YHWH who speaks in Isaiah is the Jesus speaking in John. Richard Bauckham explains how the use of the “lifting up” and the self-disclosure “I am” sayings from Isaiah function together: “When Jesus is lifted up, exalted in his humiliation on the cross, then the unique divine identity (‘I am he’) will be revealed for all to see.”<sup>33</sup>

The third text comes in chapter 12, the pivotal chapter that shifts the narrative from Jesus’ signs to the passion week:

[John 12:32–34; Jesus said] “And I, when *I am lifted up* [ὁψωθῶ] from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” But he was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which he was to die. The crowd then answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Messiah remains forever, and how can

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April D. DeConick, Helen K. Bond, and Troy A. Miller (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 221–243.

<sup>32</sup> Catrin H. Williams, *I am He: The Interpretation of ‘Anî Hû’ in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II.113 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), esp. 255–303. There are nine divine disclosure statements in the MT and seven in the LXX: אֲנִי אֲנִי הוּא (Deut 32:39) אֲנִי הוּא (Isa 41:4; 43:10, 13; 46:4; 48:12; 52:6) הוּא אֲנִי אֲנִי הוּא (Isa 43:25; 51:12) and ἐγὼ εἰμι (Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10; 45:18) ἐγὼ εἰμι ἐγὼ εἰμι (Isa 43:25; 46:4; 51:12). The Gospel of John has seven absolute ἐγὼ εἰμι sayings, but in the last occurrence in Gethsemane it is spoken three times (for a total of nine). Although the ἐγὼ εἰμι formula in John should not be understood as the Divine Name that Jesus is said to have been given (John 17:6), nevertheless these absolute sayings are very closely related to it and function as a way of indicating that Jesus is the possessor of the Divine Name. The message they convey is bold: Jesus’ seven self-declarations are a complete revelation of the same YHWH who made the self-declarations in the Old Testament. See also Charles A. Gieschen, “The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003): 115–157. Because of the obvious relationship between the absolute and predicate nominate ἐγὼ εἰμι sayings in John, it is probable that the latter at least *alludes* to Jesus as possessor of the Divine Name (6:35, 41, 48; 8:12, cf. 9:5; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).

<sup>33</sup> Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 65–66.

you say that it is necessary for *the Son of Man to be lifted up* [ὄψωθῆναι]?  
Who is this Son of Man?

This text not only confirms that the lifting up is the crucifixion (“he was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which he was to die”), but it also helps the reader to see that the “hope of Isaiah, that the one true God will demonstrate his deity to the world, such that all the ends of the earth will turn to him and be saved, is fulfilled when the divine identity is revealed in Jesus’ death.”<sup>34</sup> *The important point is this:* All three of these texts understand the lifting up of the Servant depicted in Isaiah 52:13 (LXX) and his subsequent work of atonement as happening in the crucifixion of Jesus. It is in the death of Jesus where the Son of Man, the visible form of God now in flesh, is truly seen for who he is: YHWH, the suffering servant who atones for sin.

### *Jesus’ Death as “Being Glorified”*

With the movement in John 12 to passion week, the dialogue about Jesus’ death moves from the language of “being lifted up” to the language of “being glorified,” the other verb from the pair in Isaiah 53:12 (LXX).<sup>35</sup> John regards these as distinct verbs describing a synonymous reality, because the narrative in John 12 carefully weaves together both “exaltation” (12:32, 34) and “glorification” language (12:23). Listen to the abundant use of the verb δοξάζω (“I glorify”) in these four texts:

[John 12:23–24] And Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come for *the Son of Man to be glorified* [δοξασθῆ]. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

[John 12:27–28; Jesus said] “Now my entire self has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, *glorify* [δόξασον] *your Name*.” There came therefore a voice out of heaven: “I have glorified [ἐδόξασα] him and will glorify [δοξάσω] him again.”

[John 13:31–32] When therefore he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is *the Son of Man glorified* [ἐδοξάσθη], and God is glorified [ἐδοξάσθη] in him; if God is glorified [ἐδοξάσθη] in him, God will also glorify [δοξάσει] him in himself, and will glorify [δοξάσει] him immediately.”

[John 17:1, 5; Jesus prayed] “Father, the hour has come; *glorify* [δόξασον] *your Son* in order that the Son glorify [δοξάσῃ] you . . . And now, Father,

<sup>34</sup> Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 66.

<sup>35</sup> Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 495.

*glorify* [δόξασον] *me* in your own presence with the glory [δόξη] that I had with you before the world existed.”

The primary question in understanding these texts, and also where many interpreters have gone astray, is: What does δόξαζω mean in these texts? Although the basic semantic field of δόξαζω centers on the action of “honoring” someone or something, it is necessary to read this verb as used in *John*, especially in relationship to the noun δόξα. It is widely recognized that John frequently uses the noun δόξα with its profound Old Testament theophanic connotations from the Septuagint where it is used as a designation for YHWH’s visible form.<sup>36</sup> The use of the noun in John is a prominent theme in the Prologue (“we beheld his glory, glory as of the Father’s Only-Begotten” in John 1:14) and the Farewell Prayer (“glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world began” in John 17:5). John sees Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s promise: “The Glory of YHWH will be revealed and all flesh shall see him” (Isa 40:5).

The use of the verb δόξαζω in John seems to take on these theophanic or revelatory connotations of the noun usage. A translation like “honor by tangibly showing forth true identity” is very clumsy, but it gets to the heart of what is being communicated by the verb in these texts. The irony in John is that Jesus is “glorified,” namely honored by his true identity being shown forth, not primarily in his Baptism, miracles, resurrection, or ascension, but in his death. As stated earlier, many first-century Jews longed to see the Son of Man, the mystery of God’s tangible form, revealed; John indicates that this apocalyptic event happened in the crucifixion. Remember, this glorification language is from an interpretation of Isaiah 53 that sees glorification happening in the humiliating suffering and death of the servant that atones for sin. Jesus stressed that even if people reject his words, they should believe his works (John 14:11); this work of atonement, above all, reveals his true identity.<sup>37</sup>

It is worth observing that John 12:27 gives us a unique interpretation of the Gethsemane passion tradition while blatantly acknowledging the true struggle Jesus wrestled with on the way to his death.<sup>38</sup> As in the Synoptic

<sup>36</sup> See Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 78–88.

<sup>37</sup> C. H. Dodd even argues that the death of Jesus is the “final and all-inclusive” sign in this Gospel because it reveals Jesus’ true identity in the ultimate manner; see *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 439.

<sup>38</sup> See the discussion in Scot McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 368.

Gospels, Jesus is very troubled by what lies ahead at the cross (e.g., Matt 26:38–42; cf. Isa 53:11). In John, however, he does not ask to be delivered from this suffering: “Shall I say, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour” (John 12:27). This same attitude is reflected later in John (18:11) during his arrest in Gethsemane where Jesus says to Peter: “Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given to me?” Although these texts present Jesus as more resolute in facing death than the Synoptic Gospel accounts, John affirms with them the passion tradition that Jesus drank the metaphorical cup of the divine wrath over sin in his death. This is an interpretation of Jesus’ death as atonement of sin.

## II. Jesus as the Lamb of God

John’s Gospel combines its depiction of Jesus as the Passover Lamb with atonement lamb imagery and language from Isaiah 53. Shortly after the prologue, John the Baptist announces Jesus to be “the Lamb [ὁ ἄμνος] of God *who takes away* [ὁ ἀῖρων] *the sin of the world*” (John 1:29; cf. 1:36). Richard Bauckham, in his recent collection of essays on John, calls to our attention the noteworthy fact that “Lamb of God” in the Gospel of John is understood to be an interpretation of the name “Jesus” by *gematria* (i.e., the numerical value of a word is calculated and understood to communicate meaning).<sup>39</sup> The name “Jesus” written in Hebrew (יהושע) and the title “Lamb of God” in Hebrew (שה אלהים) have the same numerical value: 391. This title, therefore, is seen in John as a significant way of understanding the person and work of Jesus.

John’s use of ὁ ἄμνος (“the lamb”) is probably dependent on the use of this noun in LXX Isaiah 53:7.<sup>40</sup> Catrin Williams argues this point by stating:

the most probable interpretation is that Passover lamb imagery, which plays a prominent role later in the gospel (cf. 19:14, 29, 36), has been combined with echoes of the descriptions of the Servant of God in Isaiah 53 LXX. The Servant, ‘like a lamb (ὡς ἄμνος) before the shearer’ (53:7), is one who ‘bears our sins’ (53:4) and ‘bore the sins of many’ (53:12).<sup>41</sup>

Unlike Williams’s assertion that John’s language of “taking away sin” (ἀῖρων) may be dependent on Isaiah’s language of “bearing sins,” some

<sup>39</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 276.

<sup>40</sup> It is noteworthy that other Greek nouns are used in the New Testament for Jesus as “the Lamb” (e.g., τὸ ἄρνιον in Revelation).

<sup>41</sup> Williams, “Isaiah in John’s Gospel,” 104–105; see also A. T. Hanson, *The Prophetic Gospel: A Study of John and the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 32–34.

interpreters are quick to point out that in John the Lamb of God neither “carries” (φέρει) sin nor “bore” (ἀνήνεγκεν) sins as the servant does in Isaiah 53:4 and 53:12 respectively, which draw on the scapegoat rite of Leviticus 16.<sup>42</sup> Further support for the intertextual relationship between John 1:29 and Isaiah 53:7 (“lamb”) and 53:11–12 (“to take away the sins”) is found in 1 John 3:4–7.<sup>43</sup> 1 John 3:5 also provides helpful background for understanding that the verbal action of αἴρων (“taking away sins”) is probably linked to the *purity* of Jesus whose death pays for sins of others because he has no sin: “You know that one [Jesus] was manifest in order that he take away sins [ἵνα τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἄρῃ]; in him is no sin.”<sup>44</sup>

The universal—even cosmic—effect of Jesus’ death is emphasized here (“takes away the sin of the world”) and several times elsewhere in John (3:16; 4:45). Sometimes atonement of sins is not seen in John because interpreters do not see much teaching about sin in John. The evangelist at times uses the singular form of ἀμαρτία (“sin”) to signify that sin is a *singular and cosmic condition* rather than merely *multiple individual actions* (see John 1:29; 15:22; 16:8). Both the use of the singular (τὴν ἀμαρτίαν) as well as the inclusive genitive modifier that indicates universal scope (τοῦ κόσμου) in John the Baptist’s announcement signify sin is a condition that enslaves creation, including all people.<sup>45</sup> John, however, also speaks of the multitude of individual sins that result from this condition of bondage. This is expressed with explicit simplicity by Jesus in John 8:34: “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin [πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν δοῦλός ἐστιν τῆς ἀμαρτίας].” Sin’s grip is clear: man is “dead” in sin and commits a multitude of individual sins. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, he tells

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<sup>42</sup> For an overview of scholarship on this subject, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1966), 58–63.

<sup>43</sup> Maarten J. J. Menken shows five elements of 1 John 3:3–7 that are similar to Isaiah 53; see “The Lamb of God’ (John 1,29) in the Light of 1 John 3,4–7,” in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. G. van Belle, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 200 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007), 581–590.

<sup>44</sup> Although he emphasizes Jesus as victor rather than victim, this point is made by J. Ramsey Michaels, “Atonement in John’s Gospel and Epistles,” in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Perspectives, Essays in Honor of Roger Nicole*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 108–109.

<sup>45</sup> For further discussion, see Charles A. Gieschen, “Original Sin in the New Testament,” *Concordia Journal* 31 (2005): 359–375, esp. 363–364. See further Daniel Johansson, “Anthropology in the Gospel of John in the Context of First Century Judaism” (STM thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, 2007).

his disciples: "Whosoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven" (John 20:23). The implication of bestowal of authority to forgive is that his death has done something to free mankind from the consequences of sin. When people believe, they receive forgiveness, which is more often called "life" or "eternal life" in John (e.g., John 3:15, 16, 36).

John the Baptist's announcement of Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" at the beginning of this Gospel is understood as fulfilled in the death of Jesus.<sup>46</sup> John's passion narrative makes this clear by noting that Jesus is crucified on the Day of Preparation when all the lambs are slaughtered for the Passover Feast (John 19:14), by calling attention to Jesus being offered wine on hyssop (John 19:29) and by quoting Exodus 12:46, "Not one of his bones will be broken," at the close of his passion narrative (John 19:36). The blood and water pouring from the side of the Lamb of God is also important. Jesus' Bread of Life discourse in John 6:22-59, presented in the context of Passover (6:4), has already introduced the importance of Jesus' blood in John's Gospel. Jesus is the Passover Lamb whose flesh is not only eaten, but whose blood is drunk because life is in the blood. Here Jesus is also seen as the new temple of Ezekiel (Ezek 47:1; cf. Zech 14:8) from which water, which is the Spirit, flows to give life to the world.<sup>47</sup> In this image of blood and water, John sees the sacramental life of the church instituted at the death of Jesus, the very source of life for the world.<sup>48</sup>

### III. Jesus as the Noble Shepherd

This Gospel contains what can be characterized as Jesus' own funeral sermon in the so-called Good Shepherd discourse of John 10. Jerome Neyrey has shown parallels between this discourse and funeral orations on noble death.<sup>49</sup> Whether it be the death of a Roman soldier in the first century or a United States Marine in the twenty-first century, a death on behalf others can readily be understood as a "noble" death—thus, the translation of *καλός* as "noble" instead of "good" shepherd. Here are the primary texts:

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<sup>46</sup> See the discussion by Bruce G. Schuchard, *Scripture within Scripture: The Interrelationship of Form and Function in the Explicit Old Testament Citations in the Gospel of John*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 133 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 133-140.

<sup>47</sup> Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 280.

<sup>48</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 37-119, esp. 114-116.

<sup>49</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Noble Shepherd in John 10: Cultural and Rhetorical Background," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120 (2001): 267-291.

[John 10:11, 14–15; Jesus said] “I am the Noble Shepherd [Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός]. The Noble Shepherd lays down his entire person [ψυχὴν] in behalf of [ὑπὲρ] the sheep . . . . I am the Noble Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my entire person [ψυχὴν] in behalf of [ὑπὲρ] the sheep.”

[John 10:17–18; Jesus said] “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my entire person [ψυχὴν] that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”

Jesus is not presented here as the *passive* victim of political circumstance; he is the priest who *actively* lays down his entire person as the sacrifice. It is part of Johannine irony that the sacrificial Lamb of God is also the Noble Shepherd who lays down the sacrifice. It is also ironic that Jesus, who is presented as the new temple in John 2:19–21, is not only the new Holy of Holies where YHWH dwells but is also the altar of sacrifice. The Noble Shepherd discourse is given in the context of τὰ ἐγκαίνια (John 10:22). Although usually translated “the Dedication,” the title of this feast may better be translated “the Inauguration.”<sup>50</sup> This festival—commonly known as Hanukkah—celebrates the Maccabean recapturing of the Temple from the Seleucids in 164 BC that led to its purification, the consecration of the new altar, and the *inauguration* of the altar with sacrifice. The end of the Noble Shepherd discourse indicates that Jesus was “consecrated” (ἡγιασεν) by the Father (John 10:36; cf. John 17:19), the kind of language used for consecrating an altar. Richard Bauckham proposes this implication: “If Jesus is treated symbolically as the new temple or the new altar, sacrifice ‘in’ or ‘on’ him could not be a fact of the past, but an event still in the future at this point in John’s narrative. God has already consecrated Jesus to be the place of sacrifice, but the sacrifice has not yet been offered.”<sup>51</sup>

In spite of this kind of sacrificial content, we should not be surprised that some interpreters argue that atonement is not found in John 10.<sup>52</sup> J. T. Forestell, for example, states, “This is clearly an act of self-devotion on the part of the shepherd proceeding from love for his sheep; it has no specifically religious, sacrificial or expiatory value. The shepherd does substitute his life for the life of the sheep, but this action is not performed out of any religious necessity; it is not an act of cult.”<sup>53</sup> Raymond Brown, on the other hand, holds that the language of laying down one’s entire

<sup>50</sup> This argument is made in detail by Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 256–262.

<sup>51</sup> Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 263.

<sup>52</sup> De Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, 233.

<sup>53</sup> Forestell, *The Word of the Cross*, 74.

person stems from the reference in Isaiah 53:10 (LXX) to the servant giving his ψυχή ("entire person") as an offering for sin.<sup>54</sup> Because of the relationship with Isaiah that has already been demonstrated above, this is very possible. It is important, however, also to notice that Jesus does not here call himself the Son of Man or the servant, but shepherd. Those who know Ezekiel 34 would conclude that Jesus is speaking in this narrative as if he were YHWH, for in Ezekiel YHWH promises: "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep" (Ezek 34:15; cf. Zech 10:1-12). The use of the predicate nominative ἐγώ εἰμι construction also supports this conclusion. If Jesus speaks as YHWH and shares his divine name, that makes the "entire person" that he lays down extremely significant and very valuable.

Much theology is taught by prepositions; the use of ὑπέρ ("in behalf of") in John is no exception.<sup>55</sup> This preposition can be used to communicate the theology of substitutionary atonement. A clear example of this is the ironically prophetic words of Caiaphas, "It is better for us that one man die *in behalf of* [ὑπέρ] the nation and that the whole nation not perish" (John 11:50). John immediately clarifies that the benefactors are not only Israel: "and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:52). The benefactor of the sacrificial action spoken of in this text and the Noble Shepherd discourse is not *only* Israel, be they sheep in Jerusalem or scattered abroad. It has been taught earlier in John's narrative, using the same ὑπέρ preposition, that this giving of Jesus' flesh in death benefits "the world" (τοῦ κόσμου): "And the bread that I will give *in behalf of the life of the world* is my flesh [ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς]" (John 6:51). This is an expression of universal substitutionary atonement. This theme is also found in the Farewell Discourse: "Greater love has no person than this: that a person lay down his entire person in behalf of [ὑπέρ] his friends" (John 15:13; cf. John 17:19 and 18:14).

#### IV. The Death of Jesus in Light of 1 John

The atonement theology of John can stand on its own, but its presence is substantially strengthened by the explicit testimony about Jesus' death as the atoning sacrifice in the First Epistle of John.<sup>56</sup> Reading the theology of the Gospel in light of the Johannine Epistles has been tempered by twentieth-century critical scholarship postulating a long development

<sup>54</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, Anchor Bible 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1970), 1071-1072.

<sup>55</sup> Paul, for example, uses this preposition repeatedly in his interpretation of Jesus' death: Rom 5:6, 8; 8:32; 1 Cor 11:24; 15:3; 2 Cor 5:14, 21; Gal 1:4; 2:20; 3:13; Eph 5:2, 25; and 1 Thess 5:10.

<sup>56</sup> Michaels, "Atonement in John's Gospel and Epistles," 112.

process for the writing of the Gospel as well as a different (and later) author for the three Epistles of John.<sup>57</sup> Once the wedge of distinct authorship is placed between the Johannine Gospel and Epistles, the latter becomes of lesser value in interpreting the former. This critical perspective on authorship has been challenged, however, by several in the guild, including both Martin Hengel and Richard Bauckham.<sup>58</sup> Rather than build a case here for using the Johannine Epistles to support our reading of the Gospel, this study will assume a sympathetic readership and proceed.

There are three primary texts where atonement theology is especially explicit. First, already in the first chapter John sets forth the present purification from sin offered through the blood of Jesus: "*The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin* [τὸ αἷμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καθαρίζει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας] . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and *purifies* [καθαρίζει] us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:7-9). Although this text emphasizes the present purification that takes place when sins are confessed, it grounds that purifying activity in the blood that poured forth from Jesus side upon his death (John 19) which is also the blood that gives life in the Eucharist (John 6). This blood both takes away our sin and appeases the Father. In dogmatic terms, this blood both expiates sin and propitiates the Father.

That this is a proper understanding is supported by our second text, which follows a few verses later: "And if someone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins* [αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν], and *not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world* [καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου]" (1 John 2:1b-2). The use of ἱλασμός, both here and in 1 John 4:10, is very explicit and strong testimony to Jesus' death interpreted as atonement. This noun is related to ἱλαστήριον, the term used for the mercy seat in the LXX (Lev 16:13-15; Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5). It has been translated three primary ways: "expiation" ("removal of sin"), "propitiation" ("appeasement of divine wrath over sin"), or the more generic "atoning sacrifice." There has been considerable debate between advocates of the "expiation" and "propitiation" meanings, with the former being favored slightly in the context of 1 John.<sup>59</sup> The generic and more inclusive "atoning

<sup>57</sup> See especially Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

<sup>58</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1989), and Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, 33-72.

<sup>59</sup> Toan Joseph Do, "Jesus' Death as *Hilasmus* According to 1 John," in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. G. van Belle, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum

sacrifice" translation is used here because Jesus' death *both* expiates sin by removing it from us (1 John 1:7) and also propitiates the Father, as the description here of Jesus as our Paraclete (i.e., "Advocate" in 1 John 2:1) shows.<sup>60</sup> It is noteworthy that Reformed exegetes, who confess *limited* atonement, must do gymnastic maneuvers to get around this testimony to *universal* atonement: "not only our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world." J. Ramsey Michaels, for example, gives this explanation: "The point is not that Jesus died for everyone indiscriminately so that everyone in the world is in principle forgiven, but that all those forgiven are forgiven on the basis of Christ's sacrifice and in no other way."<sup>61</sup> This text does not teach *universalism*, but it does teach *universal atonement*.

The third text, 1 John 4:10, also uses the ἱλασμός ("atoning sacrifice") language. It reads: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins [ἀπέστειλεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἱλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν]." This text provides a terse exegesis of John 3:16 that helps interpreters to see that God's "giving" of the Only-Begotten Son spoken of there is nothing other than the "sending of the Son to be an atoning sacrifice for sin" (1 John 4:10). The love discussed in both the Gospel and First Epistle is not a love grounded in a warm-fuzzy feeling of God towards mankind, but in a love revealed through the atoning death of the Son for the sin of the world, which includes our individual sin. It is apparent from these three texts that the implicit atonement theology of the Gospel of John is stated very explicitly in 1 John.

## V. Conclusion

Bultmann was right: John is about revelation. He was wrong, however, in arguing that John's revelation was not about atonement. He was also wrong in concluding that John's revelation *in and of itself* saves apart from atonement. The revelation that John's narrative ticks towards as the reader awaits "the hour" is the death of Jesus because that is where the incarnate Son of Man is shown giving his flesh for the life of the world. The Gospel of John does not sanitize the death of Jesus by using the language of "exaltation" and "glorification" to describe it. As demonstrated above, this language is part of this Gospel's identification of the Son of Man with the atoning work of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. Furthermore, this Gospel presents Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and the Noble Shepherd who lays down his entire person for the sheep,

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Lovaniensium 200 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007), 537-553.

<sup>60</sup> Turner, "Atonement and the Death of Jesus in John," 115.

<sup>61</sup> Michaels, "Atonement in John's Gospel and Epistles," 117.

both of which help readers to see Jesus' death as that which atones for sin. In support of this interpretation, First John speaks very explicitly of Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Each year, on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, much of the church observes the Festival of the Transfiguration of Our Lord. The Synoptic Gospels each have an account of Jesus' transfiguration, where he is glorified upon a mountain (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; and Luke 9:28-36). These are the accounts where—according to the synoptic evangelists—the divine identity of Jesus as the Son of God is revealed, if but briefly. There is no transfiguration, however, in the Gospel of John. It may have been intentionally omitted because in the Gospel of John it is specifically in the death of Jesus where the divine identity of Jesus as YHWH is most clearly revealed: “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [ἐγώ εἰμι]” (John 8:28). Jesus promised Nathaniel that he would see “greater things” (John 1:51). When the Gospel of John is read closely and these atonement allusions are followed, these “greater things” continue to be seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus that John presents.

## Theological Observer

### The Present State of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

*[This is an edited version of the personal assessment by the Rev. Dr. Veiko Vihuri of the Lutheran identity of our sister church in Estonia that was offered during his visit to Fort Wayne in January 2008. The Editors]*

Many Lutherans in the United States do not know the situation of the Baltic Lutheran Churches because we are rather small and quite distant. I will give a general overview of the Lutheran tradition in Estonia and some key elements of our Lutheran identity. Although this is my personal assessment, I attempt to reflect accurately Lutheranism in Estonia, including the current problems we face.

#### *Historical Background*

Estonia has always been a borderland, located in northeastern Europe between the Roman Catholic (and now also Protestant) West and the Orthodox East. In the thirteenth century when German and Danish knights conquered Estonia and baptized Estonians by "sword and fire," it became an outpost of the Roman Catholic Church "at the end of the world," as a local bishop wrote to the Pope. The Russian Orthodox Church has always been our big neighbor. It has played an increasingly important role in the religious life of Estonia, especially since the nineteenth century.

The Lutheran Reformation reached the towns of Old Livonia already in the 1520s. Martin Luther himself wrote several letters to the city councils of Livonia and sent his former students from Wittenberg to introduce the teaching of the pure gospel in this part of Europe. Unfortunately, the history of Estonia that followed became complicated as the country was conquered by different neighboring powers: Sweden, Denmark, Poland, and Russia. Estonian Lutheran spirituality has been influenced by German and Scandinavian Lutheranism. From Germany we received the Lutheran Reformation, Pietism, and a more Protestant understanding of Lutheranism. From Scandinavia we received a more "high" view of the church, ministry, sacraments, and liturgy. Under the Swedish rule, the office of bishop and traditional liturgical vestments were retained until the eighteenth century when Estonia was conquered by Russia.

In the eighteenth century, the Moravian movement emerged in Estonia and was popular among Estonian peasants. As the official church was ruled by the German speaking upper-class (until the second-half of the nineteenth century all pastors were Germans or, in some cases, Swedes), the Estonian-speaking people found their outlet in the simple prayer halls with those of similar social class. For a long period, the official Lutheran Church remained reserved, if not hostile towards the Moravians. Today, it is a very small

movement within the church. Moravian and the low-church piety, however, is now an element of Estonian Lutheran spirituality. In the middle of the nineteenth century, when Estonia was part of the Russian Empire, tens of thousands of Estonians converted to the Russian Orthodox Church. They were unhappy with the social conditions, German barons, and perhaps also the German pastors. The Russian Orthodox Church became the state church. The Eastern Orthodox beliefs and practices, therefore, have influenced the Estonian people as well.

Estonia became an independent state in 1918. The Lutheran Church in Estonia which had been part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, also became independent and was formed as a free people's church. It was the first time in history that Estonians were able to take the church into their own hands. Estonia's independent existence, however, only lasted little more than twenty years. It was occupied by the Red Army in 1940. German occupation followed, but Soviet rule was restored in 1944. In the autumn of 1944, about 70,000 to 80,000 Estonians were forced to flee the country because of the approaching Red Army. There were approximately 60,000 refugee Lutherans. Among them was Bishop Johan Kõpp together with 72 pastors, a few members of consistory, and 12 graduates and undergraduates of theology. In the following years, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad was born.

The Lutheran Church in Estonia stayed under the strict control of the Soviet authorities for almost fifty years. The public activity of the church, including the youth work and catechetical work, was strictly forbidden. The property of the church was nationalized, so congregations had to pay very high rent for their church buildings. During these very dark decades, the church lost most of its members, and the Soviet authorities said publicly that the church would die out soon. Perhaps the only positive side of this was that the Estonian Lutheran Church was cut off from the liberal theological developments in the large western Lutheran churches.

In 1988, Estonia began to move towards independence, which was achieved in 1991. This was accompanied by a remarkable blossoming of church life. But it lasted only a few years; Estonia is now perhaps one of the most secular countries in Europe. According to the census held in 2000, 13.6% of the population over the age of 15 considered themselves as Lutherans, 12.8% said they were Orthodox. The percentage of the other denominations is very small. Approximately two-thirds of Estonia's whole population does not belong to any church or religious movement. It is true that the majority of Estonians would still say they are Lutherans, but it does not necessarily mean they consider themselves believers. As a man said once to his pastor: "I am not a believer, I am a Lutheran."

This also means that we as Christians and Lutherans are living as a minority in a very secular society. We cannot expect that the society and the politicians accept Christian faith as a natural part of our culture. In fact, our

culture has become predominantly secular. In the past, the Lutheran Church was the nation's largest church, but this is now changing. Because the Russian-speaking people who arrived here during the Soviet times tend to be more religious, the membership of the Russian Orthodox Church in Estonia is growing or at least stable, while the number of Lutherans is going down.

### *Some Elements of the Identity of the Estonian Lutheran Church*

**Episcopal-Synodical Church Order.** Estonian Lutheranism has adopted episcopal-synodical church order. Although the office of bishop was introduced immediately after becoming independent, the first Church Constitution (1919) stated that the basic unit of the Lutheran Church in Estonia was the local parish. So the church was actually formed as a free association of local congregations. It was considered as a very Lutheran and truly evangelical understanding of the church order. The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church was defined as a free people's church. The key point was that each parish had the right to leave the church, if the parish council made such a decision. During the theological quarrels between the conservative and the liberal wings in the 1920s, some congregations used that right, and the church was split.

There are still tensions between those who would like to stress the importance of democratic, congregational, and synodical aspects in church order and those who tend to think that the church manifests itself at the diocesan level rather than at the parish level. The problem is that the episcopal level is too far from parish pastors and congregations: there are over 160 congregations in the EELC, and a single bishop cannot visit every parish often. Besides, the archbishop must also be active externally. The functions of the bishop have been given over to the area deans, who are ordinary priests and do not have the authority of a bishop. That is why discussions on the creation of new dioceses have existed since the 1930s. For example, the Church of Latvia now has three bishops.

There are many who think we do not need any changes at all. They say we should remain as a free people's church. They oppose a centralized and hierarchical church organization. I think it is typical Estonian peasant kind of thinking: let us run our farm ourselves; we know better than anyone else how to do it. But it is not very much a democratic people's church kind of thinking, but a very pastor-centered vision of the church. It is up to the local pastor to decide on the matters of doctrine and practice. *Cuius regio, eius religio!*

**The Office of Bishop and the Threefold Ministry.** The office of bishop has become part of the Estonian Lutheran identity. There may be various "high" or "low" views on the office of bishop within our church, but the general understanding is that the bishop is the head of the church and the *pastor pastorum*. In the last decades, the understanding of ministry has been influenced by the more "high" views as well as by the Porvoo Agreement. The office of bishop was reintroduced in 1919 with the new church order. Jakob

Kukk, the first bishop, was consecrated in 1921 by the famous Archbishop of Uppsala (Sweden), Nathan Söderblom, and a Finnish bishop. The low-church conservatives, including the Baltic German clergy, were extremely annoyed over the "high" liturgy of the consecration service and the rumors that Söderblom intended to introduce the apostolic succession in Estonia and Latvia in order to promote his vision of "evangelical catholicity."

We now have had nine bishops and archbishops as the heads of the church (the archbishops of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad, and the suffragan bishop are not included). Seven of them were consecrated by Swedish, Finnish, and later also by Anglican bishops in the historic apostolic succession. The episcopal consecration in historic succession, however, is not an absolute condition. For example, the first archbishop after World War II was only installed rather than consecrated, as it was impossible to ask foreign bishops to come to the Soviet Estonia.

The office of deacon was introduced after World War II. The reason was actually not theological but practical: there was a lack of ministers, and the Soviet authorities had promised to close down every congregation that had no minister. Facing a new Soviet occupation in 1944, more than half of the Estonian clergy had left the country, and the Theological Faculty at Tartu was immediately closed down by the Soviets. In such a desperate situation, the church decided to ordain lay preachers as deacons or assistant pastors. They did not have a full theological education and were subordinated to the pastor-in-charge, but they acted as local ministers and, in the eyes of the parishioners, were like ordinary pastors. Later in the 1970s and 1980s, many young students of theology were ordained as deacons and sent to vacant parishes. The church came to consider them also as part of the ministry.

The three-fold ministry is clearly stated in the Church Constitution of 2004, although the administration of the sacraments is reserved to priests and bishops only. Deacons assist the local parish pastor or their direct *ordinarius*. In practice, many deacons serve parishes where there is no local pastor, and the priest-in-charge is too busy to visit the congregation every Sunday. The problem is that many pastors still serve two, three, or even more parishes because some congregations cannot afford their own minister. The archbishop can give special permission (always for a limited period) to a deacon to celebrate the Lord's Supper, a doubtful practice both theologically and in terms of church tradition. A Swedish bishop asked me once: "Why doesn't the Archbishop of Estonia ordain them as priests?" Thankfully, sixteen deacons were ordained priests last year, but there are other deacons who have not yet completed their theological training. If some of them become permanent deacons, then I think that we should reconsider the role and meaning of the office of deacon in our church. This discussion has already begun.

**Liturgy and Piety.** The Lutheran Church in Estonia has always been a liturgical church. Until the eighteenth century, the traditional liturgical

vestments were used. The Swedish handbook was used in the congregations until the beginning of the nineteenth century. The order of service in the imperial agenda of 1834 and its revised versions was also quite "high." For example, the liturgy had to be sung throughout. The people of Estonia, however, have been influenced by the piety of the Moravian or Herrnhut Brethren. This type of piety is very low church and individualistic, focusing on the Bible, prayer, hymns, and sometimes on mystical visions. For them, the liturgical aspect of church life is not important. There is a trend to consider the "high" liturgy as alien to the true Lutheran tradition. In this view of Lutheranism, preaching is at the center of the service and the Lord's Supper need not be celebrated frequently.

The liturgical renewal movement of the twentieth century, however, has also influenced the work on the new church handbook in Estonia. It is characteristic that the high-church and liturgical movement has been more attractive to the clergy than to the laity, but it is definitely there. Before World War II, it was the more liberal wing that was interested in high liturgy while the low-church conservatives remained reserved. Now it is precisely the high-church wing that is theologically much more conservative, defending the catholic truths and traditional teaching of the church and the Lutheran heritage of the Reformation era. As a consequence, the Lord's Supper is celebrated every Sunday in most parishes, and the number of communicants is increasing.

The first attempts to revise the imperial agenda of 1902 were made as early as the 1920s and 1930s, but World War II stopped the process. In the Soviet period, the question of survival was much more important for the church than liturgical renewal. It was only in 1991 that the liturgical commission started its work. The new handbook was finally completed in 2007. Regarding the service order, it follows the same principles of recent liturgical reforms in other Lutheran Churches (Sweden, Finland, Germany, and the like). The question of the new handbook of liturgy (which has been approved by the Episcopal Council but not the Conference and General Synod) has divided the church into different factions. The high-church wing and many other pastors support the liturgical reform. The revised version of the imperial agenda of 1902, which is still used in some congregations, has its supporters as well, mainly among clergymen with low-church or liberal Protestant views. Many of them believe that behind the liturgical reform is the hidden plan of the high-church advocates to catholicize the Lutheran Church. They also claim that the new liturgy is ineffective in bringing people back to the church. They argue that we are going to lose even more members if we change the traditional—that is, the nineteenth century—liturgy.

**Moderate Theological Position.** The theological position of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church can be described as moderate. What do I mean? There is a trend to avoid "extremes" of both liberal and conservative theology.

We do not have radical feminist theology or a Bible translation with "inclusive language." On the other hand, the terms "Confessional Lutheranism" or "traditional Christian doctrine" alarm many. Being moderate in terms of theology, the Estonian church can be described as a mainline Protestant church. Of course, we are still much more conservative than the churches in Scandinavia or Germany. Yes, we have women pastors, but we have not accepted same-sex partnerships as some Scandinavian churches have. You can find many pastors whose understanding of the Bible is conservative, even fundamentalist. There are, however, some young theologians and pastors who say they represent the middle-way theological position. They consider the Reformation as a transformation from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism, and they adore Martin Luther as the founder of Protestantism. They consider the historical-critical method as a norm. One of them, a young biblical scholar, expressed his wish to make the historical-critical method the only exegetical method in the church. The doctrinal commission did not accept his proposal. We are also an ecumenical church. We are a member of the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches. We have signed both the Leuenberg and the Porvoo agreements. In Soviet times, it was extremely important to have contacts with international ecumenical organizations. It was our only "window" to the free world.

The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church is among those churches that ordain women as priests. It is striking that the Episcopal Council and the Consistory decided in 1938 that the ordination of women is contrary to the Scripture. Only a few years later, in 1945, the Episcopal Council decided that it was possible. As I mentioned before, many pastors had left the country during the war, and the church government faced the problem of vacant congregations. There was a desperate lack of ministers, and the archbishop had to ordain several lay preachers. They did not have a proper theological or pastoral training. There are still divergent views on whether women's ordination is compatible with the Bible. Although the final decision about the ordination of women was made in 1967 by the General Synod with no theological discussion whatsoever, almost all women pastors that are working in the church today have been ordained since 1994 (there are about 40 women pastors and deacons out of 220 ministers in our church).

There are many male priests among high-church as well as low-church conservatives who are unhappy with this decision, but it is only the high-church wing that openly opposes the ordination of women. Yet it seems we cannot change this practice in the foreseeable future. I am not sure whether it is possible to become a bishop if such a candidate would publicly say he is not going to ordain more women pastors. I think many people in our church, especially among the clergy, share a democratic, Protestant, and also low or pietistic understanding of the church and ministry that sees no essential difference between the ordained pastor and the layman. From that point of

view, why should we exclude women from the activity of the church? We are brothers and sisters, all called by the Lord to preach the word!

Regarding theological education in Estonia, the oldest and most famous university in Estonia is the University of Tartu (German name: Dorpat), which was founded as the *Academia Gustaviana* in 1632 by the Swedish Lutheran king Gustavus II Adolph. It was reopened as an imperial university in 1802. For a long time, the theology faculty at Tartu was the only place to study Lutheran theology. The faculty was closed down by the Communists in 1940 as a part of their anti-church policy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it was reopened. At the beginning of the 1990s, a private theological academy was founded in Tartu by a Lutheran pastor who represents a more low-church and pietistic theology. In Tallinn, the Theological Institute of Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church continues its work. It was founded after World War II to train Lutheran pastors, and was the only place in Estonia where theology was taught throughout the Soviet period. The theology that is taught in the University and the Theological Institute is moderately liberal. The historical-critical method is widely used in the study of the Scriptures. The systematic theology is focused on modern Protestant theology. The most influential foreign Protestant theologians for Estonian theological thinking during the past decades include Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Paul Tillich. Most Estonian Lutheran theologians are more open to German theology than Anglo-American or Scandinavian theology.

There are some striking examples of liberal theologians within our church as well. The professor of church history at the Theological Institute has recently written a book in which he states that Jesus began his ministry after the death of his wife and that his real father was a Jewish priest or rabbi, for the name of the angel Gabriel who visited Mary means "the man of God," and that is exactly why twelve-year old Jesus was hoping to find his father in the temple. One may ask how such a man can teach theology at the Theological Institute owned by the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church. The answer is that the Theological Institute desperately needs academically qualified tutors in order to meet the criteria required by the state. Expressing such views then is considered as a matter of academic freedom. The Theological Institute is not deliberately producing liberal pastors, but one could expect that our church would take the question of proper theological training more seriously. The attitude is this: Let the academic theologians do their work and the pastors in the congregations do their work.

What about the Lutheran Confessions? According to the Church Constitution, the sacred Scriptures and the Book of Concord are the basis of doctrine. Each candidate has to take an oath before ordination that he or she will follow the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions. Before World War II, each pastor knew German (and many had learned Latin as well) and was able to read the Book of Concord in its original languages. There was no need to

translate it into Estonian. The younger generation of ministers, however, speak and read English rather than German, and there is an urgent need to have the Lutheran Confessions in Estonian. Thankfully, the translation has already been made, although it is not yet published. The process of editing may take a few more years, but at least we can hope that in the near future our pastors will be able to read what Lutheranism is and teaches in Estonian.

### *The Ongoing Discussion on Lutheran Identity*

Recent years have seen a heated debate on Lutheran identity in the Estonian church. Let me quote an Estonian theologian, Professor Dr. Alar Laats, who sees the Lutheran Church in Estonia as standing between German and Scandinavian Lutheranism. In his article in *Theology for Europe: Perspectives of Protestant Churches* (Frankfurt: Lembeck Verlag, 2006), he states:

Instead of becoming a blessing, this orientation in two different directions has become a misfortune for our church. The church is internally divided. There is a party that is more high-church orientated. Sometimes one can even notice catholic tendencies. The other party is with evangelical inclination and its aim is to follow the Lutheran tradition that has stamped our country historically. This division in the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church is not to Christianity's advantage in Estonia.

In my opinion, it is not only a conflict between the high-church and the low-church parties over the liturgy or church order; it is about the theological understanding of the church and role of doctrine.

Two years ago the *Martin Luther Society* was formed. The founders of this group said in a public declaration that they would stand for the Lutheran teaching, including the ordination of women. They seem to believe that Lutheranism means a very Protestant understanding of Christian faith. This group includes some low-church or pietistic pastors, some rather liberal theologians, and, of course, many women pastors and theologians. Despite their different theological views and piety, they became united in the face of a common enemy: the conservative and the more confessional wing which, in their understanding, seeks to "catholicize" the church's theological position and liturgical practice.

On the other side, the *Society of the Augsburg Confession* (*Societas Confessionis Augustanae*) was founded. It is not a "party" or "wing" in the church, but an organization to promote the traditional and catholic doctrine of the Lutheran Church. I must publicly state that I am a member of this society. The important issues before us are the catholicity of the church, the Lutheran Confessions, and traditional Christian doctrine. This society includes the more high-church and conservative Lutheran pastors, although its membership is small. Now we are establishing contacts with pastors of the Latvian and the Lithuanian churches, as well as the conservative groups in Finland and Sweden. This society runs a conservative website: "Meie Kirik" or "Our

Church" ([www.meiekirik.ee](http://www.meiekirik.ee)). We hope to publish brochures and books on traditional Christian faith in the future.

### *The Lutheran Church in Estonia at the Crossroads*

The Lutheran Church of Estonia is facing rapid changes in a predominantly secular society. Some years ago the General Synod passed a new church constitution. The first paragraph of the constitution states: "The EELC is a free people's church. . . ." This definition goes back to the very beginning of the Estonian Lutheran Church as it was formed in 1917-1919. Our problem today is that after fifty years of Soviet rule we are not a free people's church. It is true that the Lutheran Church still has a nation-wide network of parishes in Estonia. It could function as a good operational basis for missionary activity. On the other hand, local pastors and congregations have to deal with the maintenance of church buildings. Much energy and money is spent on buildings rather than missionary or pastoral work with the people. A local pastor is sometimes expected to be a good manager rather than a man of prayer. The church does not have a reliable economical basis. In Estonia, many people think that the church is financed by the state and that they do not have to support it financially. The truth is that the church was disestablished a long time ago, and the only financial resources are freewill offerings and, in a few cases, income from property. The ability to cope with economic problems differs from parish to parish.

The main reason why the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church cannot remain (or become again) a people's church is that there is an important characteristic missing: there is no operational Christian education system. In the old days, local pastors were responsible for Christian education. Everybody had to pass the confirmation classes as well. Now religion is taught only in 5 or 6% of Estonian public schools. The only chance to get some Christian education is through the Sunday schools and confirmation classes, as well as Bible classes. The Estonian Church has come to recognize in recent years that we need to pay more attention to being a mission-minded church. First, it is obvious that we are living in a secular country. There are many places (e.g., new growing towns) where the Lutheran Church is not present. Second, we should reconsider our working methods. Third, we should reassess our use of resources.

There is also the question of whether our church is going to change or correct its theological position. It seems that the Scandinavian folk churches have chosen their path. They have accepted the dominant ideology of the secular society. The ordination of women and the blessing of same-sex couples belong to their ideology. The three Baltic Lutheran churches are still influenced by continental Protestantism and Scandinavian Lutheranism, which are now rather liberal. Due to the Soviet occupation and the Iron Curtain, our societies in the Baltic countries are not very developed, but this is changing fast. The question is: How long can the churches resist?

There is no doubt that our closest partner is the Church of Finland. The Estonian and Finnish languages are related. There are many relationships between the congregations and people of these two churches. If the Church of Finland decides to accept homosexual relationships (and I think it is just a matter of time), then should we stop all official relations with that church? It seems in this issue that the Lutheran churches of Latvia and Lithuania have made up their mind. On that account, I am glad that the cooperation between the Baltic churches has deepened in the last years. The very fact that the Archbishop of Estonia signed the joint letter of the Baltic primates to the Church of Sweden and the Lutheran World Federation is a remarkable sign of this. On the other hand, the leadership of the Estonian church would like to keep good relations with the German and Scandinavian Lutheran churches, which are our traditional partners, although the official acceptance of the so-called same-sex partnership by some of these churches may cause problems.

The Estonian Lutheran Church is standing at a crossroads right now and must decide whether it wants to become a more confessional and confessing missionary church or remain a people's church with a moderately liberal theological position to please everybody who would like to belong to it. I am not very optimistic about the first option as long as there will be no change in theological training and education. On the other hand, the number of clergy that are unhappy with the developments in Sweden and Finland is growing. We see the possible collapse of traditional Lutheranism in the churches we have loved and admired. There is nothing we can do except to pray and remain faithful to our Lord. It is extremely important that we deepen our contacts with the Latvian and Lithuanian churches and other conservative and traditional Lutherans, to arrange seminars or conferences on Lutheran theology for pastors, students of theology, and laymen, and to publish good Lutheran theological and devotional literature. I would be grateful if The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod can help us a little in these matters. And, of course, please pray for us and for our church.

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### Law and Gospel in Pannenberg, Wingren, and Scaer

[What follows below is the English summary of the doctoral dissertation written in Swedish for the Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo (December 2007) by Tomas Nygren entitled, "Law and Gospel as Talk About God. An Analysis of the View of Law and Gospel in Some Contemporary Lutheran Theologians: Pannenberg, Wingren and Scaer." The Editors]

This dissertation begins with the initial observation that Lutheran theologians today appear to understand the relationship between law and gospel in primarily one of three ways: 1) as elements in salvation history (the era of the law is followed by the new era of the gospel); 2) in terms of a dichotomy (where law and gospel are each other's opposites); and 3) in dialectical terms (where law and gospel function both in opposition to and in cooperation with each other). Representatives for these three understandings are in the present investigation Wolfhart Pannenberg (the salvation-historical view), Gustaf Wingren (the dichotomous view) and David P. Scaer (the dialectical view).

The chief characteristic of a *dichotomous view of law and gospel*, such as Wingren expresses, is that the law is understood as having two uses. The first, "civic" use of the law is to promote good deeds in creation and to maintain good order in society. The second use of the law is to bring people to the realization that they are judged before God and so to prompt them to accept the gospel. Law and gospel are always in opposition to each other, since the law *always* accuses. The law exists in order to limit sin and should not be seen as an original expression of God's will.

A *dialectical relationship between law and gospel*, as found in Scaer's work, is characterized by three uses of the law. This means that law and gospel are opposed to each other only in the first two uses of the law; when it comes to the third use of the law they complement each other. Moreover, the antagonism between law and gospel is not inherent to the law, since that antagonism depends not on the nature of the law itself but on human sin. All human beings, as sinners, need the first and second uses of the law. The Christian, however, also sees the law's original goodness and understands the law as a positive expression of God's will (the third use of the law).

A *salvation-historical perspective to law and gospel*, which Pannenberg represents, typically sees the law as a temporary arrangement in effect only until the gospel comes and replaces it with entirely new conditions. The law's role for people today is, in a salvation-historical view, limited to something equivalent to the first use of the law. It is a contextually formed "natural law" that only obliquely indicates the will of God. The second and third uses of the law are nonexistent according to this perspective. The law cannot be seen as an original expression for the will of God.

The first question asked of the three representatives chosen is how their different understandings of the connection between law and gospel can best be understood in relation to each other. One possibility, for example, is that a decisive relationship exists between a given doctrine of justification and a given view of law and gospel. A theologian's understanding of justification would accordingly have significant consequences for how he or she understands law and gospel. In the present work I have used the term *meta-dogmatic* for this type of correlation. The stronger a meta-dogmatic connection there is between two points of doctrine, the stronger the correlation will be between them. The question to ask then is what point of doctrine has the strongest meta-dogmatic connection to law and gospel? In other words, what point of doctrine casts the most light on how law and gospel are understood? The primary candidates under consideration, based on secondary literature, are the doctrine of justification, the anthropology of the Christian, and redemption. My meta-dogmatic analysis of possible correlations in the theologies of Wingren, Scaer, and Pannenberg reveals, however, that none of these candidates can adequately explain why there are at least three ways of understanding law and gospel.

My own suggestion then follows, namely, that a given view of law and gospel can best be understood in relation to a given view of God's attributes. In order to examine different dimensions of God's attributes, I employ a modified version of Gustaf Aulén's division of God's attributes into three dimensions. These are here termed "the dimension of power," "the dimension of reaction," and "the dimension of relationship." I propose that an analysis of a theologian's "God-talk" can fruitfully illuminate the same theologian's understanding of law and gospel. Attributes belonging to the "dimension of power" are God's omnipotence and omniscience. Attributes belonging to the "dimension of reaction" are God's righteousness and holiness; these find expression in God's wrath when confronted with human disobedience. Qualities belonging to the "dimension of relationship" are God's love and goodness.

My analysis demonstrates that Pannenberg merges the dimensions of power and reaction into the dimension of relationship. Pannenberg's view of God's attributes is shown to be ultimately one-dimensional. Turning to Wingren, we find in the final analysis a two-dimensional view of God's character: a dimension of relationship and a dimension of power. In Scaer's theology, on the other hand, none of the three dimensions overlaps to an extent that a simplification of three dimensions is justified. Accordingly, Scaer gives expression to a three-dimensional view of God's attributes.

The meta-dogmatic analysis of correlation demonstrates that there is a correspondence between different ways of understanding God's attributes and different ways of understanding law and gospel. When law and gospel are only seen from the perspective of salvation history, as in Pannenberg, then

there is a link with a one-dimensional view of God's attributes governed by the dimension of relationship. Likewise, a dichotomous view of law and gospel, as in Wingren, correlates to an understanding of God in which the dimensions of power and relationship are dominant. God's omnipotence is in this case expressed as law when confronted with sin's resistance. Finally, Scaer's dialectical understanding of law and gospel is related to his three-dimensional understanding of God's attributes in terms of power, reaction, and relationship. The third use of the law, found in a dialectic view of law and gospel, has its background in the dimension of reaction, which assumes that God, being holy and righteous, has an inherent eternal norm (an eternal law), and that this eternal norm provides the basis for God's judgmental reaction to sin. The law can accordingly be seen as something essentially good, since its content is inherently good and exists prior to sin's rebellion. In addition to the first two uses of the law, which both presume the presence of sin; the law has in this view a third use that is essentially good. This approach to an understanding of law and gospel, as an expression of "God-talk," is one of my chief contributions to research on law and gospel.

A second chief line of inquiry investigates which understanding of law and gospel provides the greatest theological potential. I evaluate what theological potential a given perspective has with the help of three criteria. The three criteria are:

- A *Bible criterion*, which assesses a theological system's ability to respond to critical exegetical and theological interpretation of biblical texts that are relevant for the doctrine in question.
- A *criterion of internal coherence*, which assesses the degree to which a systematic theological presentation exhibits inner consistency. A theological system that coheres and succeeds in incorporating different points of doctrine is judged to have better theological potential than a system lacking inner coherence or the ability to integrate a breadth of doctrinal issues.
- A *criterion of relevance*, which assesses a system's ability to address contemporary theological issues.

Pannenberg maintains that the theological potential of Lutheran theology with its opposition between law and gospel is highly limited. His criticism of the traditional Lutheran view of law and gospel is for that reason extensive. Three considerations play into his criticism. According to Pannenberg, a traditional Lutheran understanding of law and gospel lacks exegetical grounding, it fails to exhibit logical consistency and it is unsuccessful in speaking to modern culture.

These three perspectives correspond to my three-pronged criterion of potential. My assessment of Pannenberg's criticism is necessarily at the same

time an assessment of what theological potential Pannenberg's salvation-historical understanding of law and gospel provides in comparison with Wingren and Scaer. My investigation demonstrates for example that Pannenberg's objections to a traditional view of law and gospel are either untenable or at least not binding. Fully acceptable answers to his objections can be found, if only we step outside Pannenberg's own frame of reference, which *a priori* determines for him what arguments carry weight. Wingren's and Scaer's theologies, when complimented with additional material from current theological debate, can offer satisfactory answers. Pannenberg's criticism can thus be refuted. My conclusion is that a theology that contains some form of opposition between law and gospel offers greater theological potential than can a purely salvation-historical perspective of the two concepts.

The question that then follows is what type of opposition between law and gospel – dichotomous or dialectic – offers the greatest theological potential? In other words, does an understanding of law with two uses or an understanding of law with three uses create greater theological potential? Another way to ask the same question is this: What fundamental theological function ascribed to law and gospel provides the greatest theological potential?

The fact that these are different ways of asking the same question can be seen, for example, in the dichotomous perspective's emphasis that the phrase "the law *always* accuses" is an absolute statement. In this case, the opposition between law and gospel becomes the ultimate extremes for theology. Law and gospel assume a comprehensive fundamental theological function. In such a system the possibility of an original, essentially good law is perforce ruled out. A presupposition in the idea of a third use of the law, however, is the idea of an original and good law, and this is therefore also a presupposition in a dialectic view of law and gospel. A dialectical perspective can accordingly never give an opposition between law and gospel the same fundamental theological function as it can in a dichotomous perspective. Thus the answers to the above questions coincide.

I conclude that Scaer's and Wingren's theologies, as well as the American theological debate, which I take into account, reveal that a dialectic understanding of law and gospel offers greater theological potential than a dichotomous view. In other words, a more limited fundamental theological role for law and gospel (as in Scaer) offers greater theological potential than does a comprehensive fundamental theological function for the same pair of concepts (as in Wingren). The results can initially appear paradoxical. Taken together, however, these results illustrate a factor that I maintain exists inherently in any doctrinal system, viz., a point of doctrine provides the greatest theological potential when its roll in theological system is neither underestimated (as law and gospel are in Pannenberg) nor overestimated (as law and gospel are in Wingren).

There are several advantages with a dialectic view of law and gospel. Briefly, I wish to name the following results of my analysis:

- The third use of the law helps to preserve the gospel's character as good news, since the gospel is then not loaded down with the function of giving Christians ethical direction. The risk of practical legalism, in which something a person ought to do is perceived as a condition of salvation, is thereby minimized.
- Allowing for an essentially positive use of the law prevents the law from being defined by current standards in society, and thereby makes it possible for the law to function as a critique of culture. In contrast, according to Wingren, the contents of the law are effectively decided by society's current standards and are accordingly unfixed and changeable. The problem with allowing current standards to dictate the contents of the law is that the law's capacity to criticize culture is reduced considerably.
- A third use of the law, along with its first and second uses, provides a theology of sanctification with a better theological position. I believe that sanctification has increased markedly in importance in the present cultural climate, since a person's life is seen more and more as a project of identity.
- If an essentially positive use of the law is included in a description of the law, then there is a better possibility of taking into account the New Testament's multi-faceted description of the law. Not least the exegetical discussions surrounding the New Perspective on Paul have reminded Lutheran theologians that the New Testament Epistles also contain "good" statements about the law.

These points in a dialectic view of law and gospel can be asserted even while upholding a Lutheran theology's central opposition between law and gospel, where the sinful human person is exposed by the law and driven to the gospel. A person's basic meeting with the law in its first use in the order of creation, as Wingren for example argues, is also preserved. A dialectical perspective means in addition that the law's existential and cognitive dimensions are not put in unnecessary opposition to each other, which can be seen to occur in Wingren's dichotomous view of law and gospel.

Finally, I discuss the connection between understandings of God's attributes and the various theological potentials for different understandings of law and gospel. My analyses suggest that when God's attributes are considered with less than three dimensions, then a theologian loses theological potential to understand fully both law and gospel. Once again, this illustrates the importance of balance for a doctrinal system. When no dimension of God's attributes is reduced to the point of being swallowed up by another dimension,

then a foundation has been laid for a system to provide the greatest theological potential. Theology defined narrowly (as “doctrine of God”) has, in this respect, direct bearings on theology more widely defined.

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### Heaven Is Not Our Home?

Those who still remember the 1950s and 1960s LCMS controversy over the existence of the soul after death may have been taken back by an article by Church of England Bishop N. T. Wright of Durham in *Christianity Today* 52, no. 4 (April 2008): 36–39. Tom Wright, as he is known among his Evangelical friends, is upsetting the historical-critical appletart in his defense of the bodily resurrection of Jesus as an event in real history—not a mean task, especially since he meets his opponents on their own turf. Seeing him in action at the November 2007 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature was a pure delight, but he does not deny the existence of the soul after death as the title “Heaven Is Not Our Home” may have been misunderstood by some. Since many of our readers subscribe to *Christianity Today*, they hardly need an additional commentary on the bishop’s clear and succinct article. Divided into four parts, the first assembles Pauline passages which describe our resurrected bodies like that of Jesus, a fit topic of discussion for Christians in an Easter issue. The second section is entitled “Life After Life After Death.” (Unclear is whether the first ‘After’ is in italics.) The “many places in the Father’s house” are dwelling places (μοναί), temporary halts in a journey leading to another place. (Sounds good to me.) Jesus’ promise of being with him in Paradise refers to “the blissful garden, the parkland of rest and tranquility, where the dead are refreshed as they await the dawn of a new day.” (This sounds better.) No wonder Paul had a desire “to depart and be with Christ,” another reference cited by the bishop. All this taken from Wright’s latest book, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008). In common thought the intermediate state following death is often confused with resurrected life under the general heading of “heaven.” That is why we have preachers to unscramble all this, and Bishop Wright is there to help us. Our only regret is that he is a thorough Calvinist, but we can live with that. We Lutherans do not have a theologian to match his scholarship, proclivity, and wit.

David P. Scaer

## Book Reviews

***Fortress Introduction to Salvation and the Cross.* By David A. Brondos. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. 234 pages. Paperback. \$20.00.**

A history of doctrine can show how it has been interpreted over the years. What Christ's death meant for Irenaeus is not what it meant for Luther or Ritschl. Students new to theology must struggle with the reality that theological terms do not have the same meaning for everyone. Brondos's procedure resembles Gustaf Aulén's in *Christus Victor*, but he is more thorough in engaging his subjects and does not interpret them to fit his own views. To further his view that Christ's death was a victory over sin, Aulén eliminated Luther's understanding that Christ's death was a payment of sin. Brondos does not do this, but where he disagrees with his subjects he takes them to task. Aulén advanced his thesis by beginning with Irenaeus and then taking a U-turn to go back into John and then advancing up to the nineteenth century. Brondos begins with Isaiah, Luke, and Paul before moving on to Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, Anselm, Luther, Calvin, Ritschl, Barth, Bultmann, and culminating with liberation and feminist theologians. For Brondos the purpose of Christ's death is transforming humanity, so he combines Ritschl's exemplar theory, Aulén's *Christus Victor*, and liberation theology. With the fall of the Soviet Union, liberation theology, which sprang from Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Sobrino, has gone comatose (other than in the preaching of some, e.g., Jeremiah Wright), so it is hard to see why Brondos gives it credence. Feminist theology is the new orthodoxy. See chapter 13: "Salvation as Liberation from Patriarchy in the Thought of Rosemary Radford Ruether." As a historian Brondos wants to stay above the fray, but he has a dislike for understanding Christ's death as a sacrifice for sin in the face of divine wrath. He understands Christ's death as transforming creation. He cannot be faulted for choosing biblical books that he believes support his views. Had he included Genesis and Leviticus, he would have had to deal with sacrifice. If Luke and Paul allowed him to soft peddle Christ's death as sacrifice for sin, Matthew, Mark, and Hebrews would not have. Surely Christ's death includes reconciliation with others and peace for ourselves, which for Brondos is the major focus of Christ's death. But "is that all that there is"? Hopefully the thoroughness with which he handles his subjects and his engaging literary style will not prove persuasive enough to win converts.

David P. Scaer

***Jonah.* By R. Reed Lessing. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007. 496 pages. Hardcover. \$42.99.**

The editor's preface in the Concordia Commentary series notes the debt that the authors and editors have to Martin Luther, including his recognition that

exegesis is to follow “the contours of the grammar of the original languages” (xi). Of the many valuable elements within R. Reed Lessing’s commentary on Jonah, his attention to these contours is most noteworthy. His extensive textual notes not only immerse the reader in the subtleties and riches of biblical Hebrew, but his thorough analysis of the Hebrew also sets the stage for the ensuing commentary and exposition of the text. This stands as a ready reminder that sound exegesis flows from the biblical languages. Likewise, this commentary demonstrates that study of the languages finds its fruition in the theological truths mined from the languages. It is also helpful that Lessing discusses the textual notes in a manner that makes the riches accessible to the parish pastor who may have forgotten Hebrew or the student of Scripture who has yet to wade into the language’s bountiful waters.

Lessing’s commentary also has three other valuable aspects. First, he ably grapples with the classic issues of the book (for example, historicity, date, genre, and literary mold), balancing the leading arguments with helpful insights for where a faithful Lutheran exegete can stand on such issues. Second, more cutting-edge issues within the book (for example, his discussions of Jonah and Noah, Jonah and Elijah, and Jonah’s place in the Book of the Twelve) introduce the reader to the latest matters in the scholarship of Jonah. Lessing’s treatment of Jonah’s place in the Book of the Twelve is to be especially commended as he does not fall prey to the current scholarship which loses Jonah within the Book of the Twelve rather than allowing it to stand alone. Third, the excurses of the commentary offer great riches. While they grow out of Jonah, Lessing’s discussion of these topics extends beyond Jonah into the whole corpus of Scripture. Thus, the excurses reveal Jonah’s continuity with the rest of Scripture, while also harvesting the great theological riches of Jonah (the various excurses are trinitarian, christological, sacramental, missional, and theological).

It is the nature of a commentary to leave some stones unturned lest the work would become overwhelming. Among the topics left for the reader to explore are the inter-textual relationships between Jonah (especially the psalm from the belly of the fish in Jonah 2) and the Psalms, as well as the use of Jonah’s confession that YHWH is “gracious and compassionate” at various points in the Old Testament. While these items are addressed, a more thorough study will be of benefit to the student of Jonah. So also, readers may find the work of Ehud ben Zvi to be worth their further study.

The study of a biblical text, however, is never a finished endeavor. There are always more riches to be mined. For those desiring a thorough entrée into those riches, Lessing’s commentary on Jonah stands as a treasure because it offers to the reader this short prophetic book as a bold proclamation of Christ.

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**Ezekiel 1-20.** By Horace D. Hummel. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005. 752 pages. Hardcover. \$42.99.

The Concordia Commentary series has as its goal to provide a commentary with four major convictions: first, the content of the scriptural testimony is Jesus Christ; second, law and gospel are the overarching doctrines of the Bible; third, the Scriptures are God's vehicle for communicating the gospel; and fourth, the Scriptures are incarnational and sacramental (ix-x). While one may find New Testament examples of this approach, Old Testament commentaries with these convictions are rare, and such commentaries on the Book of Ezekiel are almost nonexistent. Horace Hummel does an admirable job not only of providing a strong law and gospel approach focusing on the incarnational and sacramental aspects of the Book of Ezekiel but also with a theological flair not often found in this genre.

Hummel sees Ezekiel playing a prominent role in the *praeparatio evangelica*, the "preparation for the Gospel," and so provides broad messianic applications throughout (14). He states:

The obverse reason for the neglect of the book by the church is its relatively brief overtly messianic material. If we define "messianic" too narrowly and then unconsciously try to reduce the entire OT to the narrow theme of prophecy explicitly predictive of the person and work of Christ, (which I think we have been guilty of doing), then we will have special difficulties with Ezekiel. . . . But if one defines "messianic" broadly of all prophecies of Israel's restoration, the book is full of them, even in the earlier sections. (13)

An example one finds of Hummel doing this is his christological interpretation of *כבוד* (*kabod*), "glory," using New Testament language and thought to interpret "Christ as the divine speaker" (1) throughout Ezekiel and as the one in whose name and by whose authority the prophet gives his messages. This allows him to draw connections to other prophetic literature and to the New Testament, especially the apocalyptic literature (for example, Revelation). Again, Hummel successfully accomplishes his task.

This commentary of Ezekiel 1-20 is quite helpful and will be a useful tool in any pastor's library. The author's preface and introduction alone make the volume worthwhile. Hummel is brilliant in stating his method of interpretation to the exclusion of others, and he lays out the text, style, and historical context in a well thought-out manner.

Criticisms and concerns of Hummel's commentary are few, but one does note that his bibliography is somewhat dated with most of the current resources coming from "in house" writings. With all of the new interest in Old Testament studies, I expected a larger collection of recent works. Also, although Hummel does spend some time with the Septuagint, I would have appreciated more depth, especially in light of Ezekiel's textual variances

between the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text. That stated, it is small criticism for an extensive work.

Jeffrey H. Pulse

*Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church.* By David P. Scaer. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004. 416 pages. Hardcover. \$24.98.

This book develops the approach to the Gospel of Matthew begun by David Scaer in his previous book, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Church's First Statement of the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000). In his new book, Scaer develops the idea that Matthew's Gospel was written as a catechesis of what believers were taught before being admitted by Baptism to Holy Communion.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew uses *didache*, the Greek word for catechesis, or teaching, to describe the words of Jesus (Matt 7:28). Scaer demonstrates how the first Gospel has a liturgical use. It has maintained a prominent position in the church's worship as the Gospel that is read most often. In the early church, Matthew was the most highly honored and respected book of the New Testament. In it the evangelist sets out to compose authoritative Scripture. He anticipates a worldwide audience (Matt 26:13) and a ready acceptance of the contents of his Gospel by believers everywhere. Matthew presents us with a universal Gospel.

Scaer pays special attention to Matthew's five discourses and shows how each new discourse builds on the foundation of previous ones to culminate in the account of Jesus' death and resurrection, and his commission to take his teaching to all nations. He shows how the Eucharist functions as a hermeneutical principle that facilitates a deeper understanding of the whole Gospel (157-164). He argues that a first draft of this Gospel was written before most of Paul's Letters. It was written in catechetical form in order to prepare believers for a deeper reception of Holy Communion. The better communicants know Christ's words and deeds, the richer and more blessed would be their reception of the Sacrament.

Holy Communion gives us access to the meaning of our Lord's life and death. It unites the church by making its members participants in the atonement. The different pericopes all flow into Holy Communion, where the most profound and ultimate interpretation of Jesus' death is found. Scaer argues that participation in Holy Communion is participation in the atonement: "As Christians participate in the Eucharist, differences of time and space between Christ's crucifixion and the sacramental act disappear" (162 n. 5). Here we enter the holy of holies beyond space and time. All that our Lord did and said becomes clearer in the light of the Eucharist. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus goes beyond eating with sinners to relieving them of their sins. The atonement and the Sacrament of the Altar stand in reciprocal relationship with

each other. Christ instituted Holy Communion before his death to demonstrate its significance as atonement. The mystery of the atonement can be best understood eucharistically.

Scaer shows how each of Matthew's discourses builds on earlier ones, just as each pericope informs other pericopes. He shows how righteousness in this Gospel is best understood as God's gift of righteousness in Christ. The righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees is God's gift, and it has everything to do with reconciliation. "On my account" in the last beatitude is synonymous with "for righteousness sake" in the previous beatitude, thus supporting a christological understanding of righteousness. In the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:24-27), "house" and "build" are ecclesiastical terms: the wise build their church on Jesus' words. Scaer argues that Matthew is the New Testament's most satisfying book on the sacraments because it contains the institution of both sacraments and the charge to celebrate both.

Scaer points out that no other Gospel has as many Old Testament citations as Matthew. Jesus is the content of Matthew's catechesis, but this content is expressed in Old Testament terms. "Jesus is himself the catechesis and the catechist" (17). The evangelist's five discourses outline the steps through which catechumens were led, culminating in Holy Communion and Baptism, which are revealed at the end of Matthew's Gospel. Like the other three Gospels, Matthew's writing elicits the devotion of its hearers in a way no other writing can accomplish.

David Scaer's book offers numerous fresh insights into preaching Matthew's Gospel during Year A of the three-year lectionary, especially at eucharistic services. His ability to flesh out allusions to the sacraments that are scattered throughout the Gospel will be welcomed by those who treasure the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. This is a well written and stimulating book that deserves a wide audience.

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***Preaching the Sermon on the Mount: The World It Imagines.* Edited by David Fleer and Dave Bland. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007. 177 pages. Paperback. \$19.99.**

"The abundance of interpretations reveals that no one approach to the Sermon on the Mount can exhaust its meaning or prove satisfactory to all parties. Its majestic expression of Jesus' teaching attracted the attention of the

early church fathers and has continued to challenge the church's theologians throughout the centuries" (David Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church*, 213).

Those who strive to deliver or digest sermons on the basis of historic Lutheran distinctions (for example, law-gospel, justification-sanctification, or the two realms) will find this to be a "challenging" book. Challenges, of course, can be helpful. Few of us have not succumbed to (or suffered through) simplistic homiletical approaches to "strong words" like those found in the Sermon on the Mount that make "distinguishing" scriptural truths-in-tension look and sound more like separating or divorcing. What a coup if we could take a corrective cue from those who tend to err in the opposite direction!

There is, after all, a healthy dose of truth in the fact that far too often "the Sermon on the Mount comes to us preachers handicapped by a convoluted eschatology or shut down by common sense (that can't mean what it appears to say) or reduced to an interior world" (2). For Lutherans, that "interior world" is typically the "realm of justification," too often separated (rather than distinguished) from sanctification, too often individualized in a way that diminishes the doctrine of the church, too often constricted by a view of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as "pure Law" (either as second-use "impossible ideal" or third-use "give it your best shot") rather than as "a lofty expression of Gospel from the mouth of Jesus himself" (Scaer, 213).

The (six) essays and (fourteen) sermons in this book (from a variety of contemporary Christian scholars and traditions) approach the Sermon "as an act of imagination": what would a church that read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested these "foolish" teachings of Jesus actually look like? Proper preaching on it, the authors suggest, necessarily includes "challenging us to follow Christ, calling followers to embrace his alternative lifestyle, encouraging the church to become salt and light in messy relationships even with those who are our enemies, and exhorting disciples to resist the powers that run counter to the ethics of God's kingdom" (5).

To be sure, there is plenty here to critique from a Lutheran perspective. Biblical distinctions do get muddled at times. Differing presuppositions lead to applications and exhortations that will cause even the most charitable Lutheran reader to squirm or wince. But the discerning Lutheran preacher and reader (one primed, perhaps by Scaer's plea for a more holistic christological and ecclesial reading of the Sermon) will also find much to affirm, much to ponder in the way of self-critique, and some excellent resources, insights, and illustrations for enriching one's own preaching and/or hearing of God's word.

To wit, an appetite-whetting snippet from Charles Campbell's sermon "The Folly of the Sermon on the Mount," reminding us that Jesus and Paul were preaching the same message, the "foolish" and full-bodied gospel that we are called to preach:

Although Jesus obviously does not preach “Christ crucified” in the same way as Paul, the content of his Sermon is just as foolish as Paul’s. It is just as subversive of the world’s presuppositions, rationalities and myths. Too often, many of us read the Sermon as a kind of legalistic book of rules for the Christian life. Of course, the Sermon does give directives and delineate practice for the Christian community. Nevertheless, if we read the Sermon on the Mount as a rulebook, we may miss the deep dimensions of its folly. . . . The Sermon seeks to disorient and dislocate the hearers; it shocks us out of our commonsense, take-for-granted assumptions so that we might see the world differently, and possibly glimpse the new creation that has come in Jesus himself. (62)

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***Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospel.* By Craig A. Evans. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006. 290 pages. Hardcover. \$21.00.**

It seems that *Time* and *Newsweek* put out special issues every Christmas in which they purport to offer new evidence about “what really happened” at the birth of Jesus. So also *The History Channel* regularly offers fresh and skeptical investigations of the resurrection, trotting out “objective” scholars such as John Dominic Crossan and Bart Ehrman. The popularity of books debunking the Gospels is also on the rise. The main thrust of these magazines, TV shows, and books is something like this: “You may have learned such and such growing up in church, but now we know from our scholarly investigation that . . .” The virgin birth? A pious legend. The resurrection? A hopeful myth. The canonical Gospels? Well, they are probably less reliable than other traditions, which have been lost through the ages or suppressed by intolerant orthodoxy. So it goes. Drip, drip, drip, the supposedly impartial scholars would dampen our Easter parade.

In the midst of all this, it is good to get out of the rain and read a book such as *Fabricating Jesus*. In it Craig Evans systematically challenges the skeptics’ assumptions. As for the supposed enlightenment brought by the *Gospel of Thomas*, Evans argues that the book is a late second-century document, far removed from the eyewitness accounts that are the canonical Gospels. Likewise, Evans sheds light on such works as the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Gospel of Mary* and, in doing so, shreds them of their mystique. As for those scholars who claim that Jesus was at heart a cynic and a sage, Evans offers a helpful chapter on Jesus the miracle worker, arguing that our Lord’s miraculous deeds were the widely attested reason for his initial popularity. And—surprise, surprise—Evans claims that the canonical Gospels hold the best claim to authenticity.

While Evans' arguments are compelling, systematic, and reasonable, they are not what has created the most controversy. Instead, it is his first chapter, "Misplaced Faith and Misguided Suspicions," that has really touched a nerve. Here, Evans analyzes the scholars themselves. What of the skeptics such as Robert Funk, James Robinson, and Dominic Crossan? Are they truly neutral historians? Is Bart Ehrman really as impartial as he claims? This is the most fascinating part of the book. While skeptics may claim that Christians are biased, Evans shows how the skeptics are often animated by their own personal demons and animus against traditional Christianity. Evans traces the life and career of Ehrman, from a fundamentalist, Bible-believing, young man to a present-day agnostic. He shows how Robinson left his own childhood Calvinism. Some recent reviews of this book have cried foul, noting that we should deal with a scholar's arguments and not his personal background. Fair enough. But, where are those same scholars when Luther is dismissed as a medieval man who, perhaps because of his upbringing, had a problem with an over-active conscience? Is it not helpful to understand a scholar's theological and cultural milieu? Any decent biographer will want to investigate not only what a person thought but also what may have influenced him along the way. Thus, Evans' insights merit our attention. Robert Funk was brought up in the fundamentalist tradition, as it seems were James Robinson and Bart Ehrman. By his own admission, Ehrman began to doubt the Scriptures because of something as simple as a textual problem in Luke 22. Like a widely-swinging pendulum, a number of these scholars have gone from the far right to the far left. One might say they have gone from unthinking belief to unthinking unbelief. Or, as Evans strikingly—but insightfully—writes: "His [Ehrman's] reasoning today, even as a professing agnostic, still has a fundamentalist ring to it" (31). Now, it may be unfair to blame fundamentalism for these scholars' unbelief, as Evans seems to do. Still, it is fair, I think, to note that these scholars seem, for whatever reason, to have as much invested in Christianity being false as we have in its truth.

So, as in all things, let the buyer beware. Those who claim to be impartial judges of the Christian tradition are often animated by as many passions as their Christian counterparts. It would be nice if they would admit that. In the meantime, we can read Evans' book.

Peter J. Scaer

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