

ATONEMENT

# INSIGHTS

*The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary*



SPRING 2000

RIGBY • KESHGEGIAN • GUNTON • PAUW  
CARL • HALL • MUCK • GREENWAY

# INSIGHTS

*The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary*

Spring 2000

Volume 115      Number 2

*Editor:* Terry Muck

*Editorial Board:* Michael Jinkins, Kathryn Roberts,  
Jerry Shetler, and Randal Whittington

*Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary* is published each spring and fall by Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 100 East 27th Street, Austin, TX 78705

e-mail: [tmuck@austinseminary.edu](mailto:tmuck@austinseminary.edu)      <http://www.austinseminary.edu/>

Entered as non-profit class bulk mail at Austin, Texas, under Permit No. 2473. POSTMASTER: Address service requested. Send to *Insights*, 100 East 27th Street, Austin, TX 78705-5797.

Printing runs are limited. When available, additional copies may be obtained for \$1 per copy. Permission to copy articles from *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary* for educational purposes will be given by the editor upon receipt of a written request.

Some previous issues of *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary*, are available on microfilm through University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 (16 mm microfilm, 105 mm microfiche, and article copies are available). This periodical is indexed in *Religion Index One: Periodicals*, *Index to Book Reviews in Religion*, *Religion Indexes: RIO/RIT/IBRR 1975- on CD-ROM* and the *ATLA Religion Database on CD-ROM*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 820 Church Street, Evanston, IL 60201-5613, e-mail: [atla@atla.com](mailto:atla@atla.com); <http://www.atla.library.vanderbilt.edu/atla/home.html>/ ISSN 1056-0548.

---

COVER: "Agnus Dei," Francisco de Zurbarán, oil on canvas, ca. 1636-40. Reprinted with permission of the San Diego Museum of Art (gift of Anne R. and Amy Putnam).

*There is an undercurrent of angst in the Agnus Dei—an unresolved chord that binds and strains our most dearly held concepts of the justice and mercy of God and of the meaning of the crucifixion and atonement of Jesus Christ. How did, or does, the Lamb of God take away the sins of the world? The church is on the horns of that dilemma, caught in a thicket of historical images of faith and contemporary theories and concerns. Our cover illustration depicts a lamb prepared for the slaughter, perhaps a distant descendant of Abraham's ram. The faintest hint of a halo may serve to illuminate our meditations on the issue of the atonement—central to the Christian faith.*

# CONTENTS

2

## INTRODUCTION

*Robert M. Shelton*

## ATONEMENT

- 3 ARE YOU SAVED?  
*Cynthia L. Rigby*
- 19 CYNTHIA RIGBY: THE NOT-SO-SIMPLE TRUTH  
*An Interview*
- 24 RESPONSES  
*Flora A. Keshgegian, Colin Gunton, Amy Plantinga Pauw*
- 33 DOING DOCTRINE IN THE PULPIT  
*William J. Carl III*

39

## BOOK REVIEWS

PRESBYTERIAN WORSHIP PLANNER (SOFTWARE EDITION)  
AND LABORA WORSHIP 3.0, *reviewed by Stanley Hall*;  
THE STAMP OF GLORY, Tim Stafford, *reviewed by Terry Muck*

42

## SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF A CREATION CRISIS

*William Greenway*

I have often stated that I can think of no subject more exciting than theology. Why? Because it deals with the ultimate questions concerning human life and our lives: Who are we as human beings? What is the purpose of our existence? What is our destiny? What am I created to do and to be? What is the future of the created order? What do I believe? What can I believe?

Moreover, I am convinced that the task of “doing theology” is a task which every generation of Christians must take very seriously. The eminent theologian Karl Barth, in his renowned work *Church Dogmatics*, described that task by declaring that in every time and in every context Christians are required to examine critically their talk about God, i.e., what the church means when it speaks about grace, judgment, love, salvation, redemption, reconciliation, et al. It is never enough, Barth averred, “simply to combine, repeat, and transcribe a number of truths of revelation which are already at hand, which have been expressed once and for all, and the wording and meaning of which are authentically defined.”<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the understandings and conclusions of those who have preceded us in the faith are there to guide us, but they are not adequate substitutes for our own efforts and inquiry. It is not even sufficient, he opined, “to combine, repeat, and define the teaching of the Bible.”<sup>2</sup> No, those who make up the church today, as in every day, are called to determine what the church’s utterances can and should be in the present. To do that is to do theology.

This issue of *Insights* is an impressive example of doing theology. In the lead article, Professor Cindy Rigby, who is completing her fifth year on our faculty, explores three well-known theories of the atonement in the Christian tradition. She then proceeds to make creative use of their insights to suggest how we can build on them to state what we as Christians today want to proclaim about the nature and work of Jesus Christ in bringing salvation to the lives of all people. Responding to Dr. Rigby’s thoughtful and substantive article, three guest writers—Professors Flora Keshgegian, Colin Gunton, and Amy Plantinga Pauw—become active participants in this example of doing theology by adding their thoughts about how the church should and can speak of salvation.

Other authors enrich and expand this recorded exercise in doing theology. Dr. William J. Carl III, senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Dallas, and a visiting lecturer on our campus this spring, sets forth a model for doing theology through preaching, in his practical article, “Doing Doctrine in the Pulpit.” Likewise, Professor William Greenway of our faculty illustrates in a useful way the importance and significance of engaging the created order as an approach to theology which focuses not on conceptual thinking about God but on an awareness of God which leads to wonder and praise.

These fellow Christians present creative examples for the church’s task of doing theology. Still, they are no substitute for our own participation in that task as individuals, as congregations, as clergy and as laity.

Robert M. Shelton  
President

<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I/I, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



## ARE YOU SAVED? RECEIVING THE FULL BENEFITS OF GRACE CYNTHIA L. RIGBY

---



Does Barth believe *everyone* will be saved?” a student asked me, after reading from the last volume of the *Church Dogmatics*. Uh-oh, I thought. *That* question, again. “It depends on what you mean by salvation,” I answered. “If you mean: did Barth think that everyone would, in the end, share eternal life with God, well . . . Barth certainly hoped for that. But Barth didn’t think salvation was just about making it to heaven. According to Barth, it *matters* that we know God is with us and for us. To be ‘saved’ is to live in conscious awareness of who God is, and who we are in relation to God.” “So,” the student asked, “does that mean that, if we don’t know God, we won’t be saved?”

“Salvation” is one of those theological terms we might think we understand, until we attempt to explain it. In this essay I explore the doctrine of salvation by presenting an integrated understanding of three common approaches to Jesus Christ’s mediating work: Anselmian atonement, Abélardian atonement, and the Christus Victor theory of atonement.<sup>1</sup> I argue that to uphold one, rejecting the other two, is to embrace a hollow soteriology—to turn our backs on the full benefits<sup>2</sup> of God’s grace-full gift in the event of Jesus Christ. This is because, as I will explain in the end, each of these approaches tells us something of *who God is for us* as well as *what God does for us*. To consider the three approaches in relation to each other, in the context of the incarnation, is to: (1) lay claim to the richness of our biblical and ecclesiological inheritance; (2) to make sense of what it means to say that we “live out” our salvation as well as “receive” it; and (3) to embrace an understanding of salvation that includes human agency as well as divine agency, bodies and souls, the now and the not yet, the ordinary and the extra-

---

*Cynthia Rigby is assistant professor of theology at Austin Seminary. She received the M.Div. and the Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary, and joined the faculty of Austin Seminary in 1995. Her special area of interest is setting Reformed theologies in conversation with theologies of liberation, particularly feminist, womanist, and mujerista theologies.*

ordinary. In short, by resisting simple definitions of “salvation,” and instead indwelling the lavish, multifaceted event of Jesus Christ, we can progress in working out our salvation<sup>3</sup> in this life, even as we hope for it in the next.

#### SALVATION: BROADENING OUR UNDERSTANDING



I remember, back in my less Reformed days, when my Christian friends and I would practice explaining how it is that Jesus saves us. We prepared to deliver this information as clearly, compellingly, and efficiently as possible, for the deepest desire of our hearts was to do our part in “saving the unsaved.” While our tactics erred on the side of overemphasizing human agency at the expense of the divine sovereignty, we certainly believed that it was God, and not us, who did the saving. But we also believed that God worked in and through us to accomplish salvation.

I imagine that many readers of this article will remember a time when they were passionate in the work of “saving souls.” With me, they might recognize that spiritual growth has brought with it a more complex understanding of salvation, an understanding that is not apt to think of the kingdom of God as a place one can ignorantly remain outside of or readily step into; an understanding that stands in awe before the mystery of election.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps now we are less likely than we once were to sloganize the gospel or sugar-coat the life of Christian discipleship. We’ve read enough of Jesus’ parables to know that we cannot readily discern between “insiders” and “outsiders” with respect to the kingdom. Our energies have shifted from formulating answers to life’s problems to seeking an understanding of what it means to be people of faith.<sup>5</sup>

And yet we still care deeply about salvation. As ministers, lay leaders, and seminary professors, we strive to explain how it is that Jesus Christ saves us, what this salvation is all about, and how we are called to participate in it. But how do we engage in such discussions in ways that take into account the varied approaches of Scripture and the Christian tradition? How do we, in our preaching, witnessing, and teaching, honor the varieties of social and religious experiences people have had with symbols such as the cross?<sup>6</sup> How do we remain honest about the complexities inherent to this subject while still speaking a word of conviction to the spiritual need that surrounds us?

#### THE CHALLENGES OF OUR CONTEXT



Various pressures beset us as we attempt to articulate what salvation is all about and how it is that Jesus saves us. First, we might feel frustrated when we attempt to explain salvation, believing we *should* be able to explain it better than we actually can. We know that salvation is not just about going to heaven after we die, and we know that it somehow presumes that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. But, because we North Americans associate “sacrifice” not with life and freedom, but with abuse and incapacitation, it is difficult to articulate how, exactly, Jesus’ death accomplishes salvation for us. Given the pressure in our cultural context to brandish immediate results, we are challenged to explain how salvation matters in our lives *right now*. And given our obsession with human agency, how do we allay fears that we have lost our place, if Jesus “took our place” on the cross?

A second impasse in discussing “salvation” is that there is significant pressure on

Christian leaders to “package” salvation well. As church leaders, we are often encouraged to speak with simplicity and conviction about what we believe so that we can appeal to a culture of people who are said to have short attention spans, way too many things to do, and plenty of other options for spending the little extra time they do have. The growing “megachurch” movement, we are told, appeals to this demographic in ways that should be emulated.<sup>7</sup> We might feel pressure, for example, to follow the lead of a growing megachurch in Austin, Texas, that deals with the ambiguity of the cross by declining to display it on church property. In the place of the usual cross, the pulpit harbors a globe, a silhouette of the city of Austin, and more “positive” Christian symbols, including a dove. Worshipers “see,” then, that their salvation is about life and agency, not about death and incapacitation. While those of us in mainline churches are unlikely to remove the crosses from our sanctuaries, we do work to reconstrue Christ’s death on the cross in ways that are more palatable. In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), for example, we have removed certain atonement hymns emphasizing Christ’s blood and suffering.<sup>8</sup>

Third, there are innumerable pastoral concerns that emerge in relation both to our increasing diversity and our growing awareness of the varieties of human suffering. A survivor of domestic violence might have difficulty seeing the cross as a liberating symbol, for example, because a pastor once pointed to it and told her that her suffering was Christ-like.<sup>9</sup> An African American member of the congregation may find it painful to think about Christ’s dying on the cross because the Klan once burned a cross on the front lawn of his grandfather’s home. (Or, to complicate matters further, this same person might find reassurance in the cross because it reminds him that Christ, too, was victimized, and therefore understands the situation of the grandfather.) An elderly parishioner might feel anxious in discussing the ambiguity of salvation symbols such as the cross, precisely because these symbols have been so important and he or she does not wish to feel unsettled. And a half-dozen influential people in the church might be campaigning to discontinue the food pantry, arguing that the annual budget is tight and, after all, feeding poor people who don’t attend the church is taking too much time away from the church’s more important work: preaching the message of salvation. How do you, as a pastor or lay leader, discuss salvation and atonement with such a diverse group of people?

Faced with these ambiguities and pressures, what tack do we take in exploring what it means to be saved, and how Jesus saves us? At our best, I believe, we defy the pressure to be “slick,” looking to get beyond articulating the truth of our faith with the same old catchphrases. Believing that Christian doctrine has something relevant to say to our real, day-to-day lives, we embrace opportunities to consider difficult issues such as the violence of the cross; we try to go beyond the catchy aphorisms that speak neither to the complexities and pains of life nor to the diversity of human experiences.

Because life is varied and complex, and we believe salvation is relevant to life, we must not fear complexity in struggling to embrace the benefits of our salvation. But our commitment to engaging in the theological task, as people of faith seeking understanding, does not mean that we sacrifice conviction for the sake of complexity. On the contrary, we reject the common associations between simplicity and conviction,

between complexity and indeterminacy. Neither simplicity nor ambivalence will help those who seek to know, in all its possibility, the hope of their salvation.

The gospel boldly testifies to the breadth and power of our salvation, insisting that the atoning life and work of Christ are not confined to *either* his preparing the way for us *or* doing the work for us *or* sustaining us as we go; *either* the manger *or* the cross *or* the resurrection; *either* his example *or* his substitution *or* his ongoing battle with the forces of Satan. The benefits of our salvation include all of these; all of these help us understand what it means not only to “be saved,” but to live out our salvation.

### ATONEMENT THEORIES EXPLORED



In the course of Christian history, the great cloud of witnesses has articulated what it is to be saved, and how Jesus saves us, in innumerable ways. Three of these approaches have emerged, over the centuries, as pivotal to our understanding of atonement. The church has consistently recognized that each has something relevant to say about the character of our salvation. In brief, it has acknowledged that the biblical witness<sup>10</sup> speaks of Christ as the One who goes ahead of us (e.g., Matt. 28:7; Heb. 12:1-2), the One who died so that we can be free to live and serve (e.g., Rom. 8:3-4; Rev. 1:5-6), and the One who empowers us on the journey itself (e.g., Phil. 4:13; II Cor. 12:9). Never has a council determined that one approach is orthodox, and another is not. And theologians such as John Calvin, John Wesley, and Karl Barth insisted that we think of Christ’s atoning work not in a monolithic fashion, but as three-fold: Prophet, Priest, and King.<sup>11</sup>

And yet recently in our churches, strong emphasis has been placed on Anselmian—or substitutionary—atonement,<sup>12</sup> at the expense of the other approaches. In some cases, there have been movements to deny the value of Abélardian atonement and Christus Victor altogether. Why is this? What do we miss, in terms of appropriating the full benefits of grace in our spiritual lives, when we confine our understanding of Christ’s work in this way?

In building an argument for how holding all three approaches to atonement deepens our understanding of salvation, I first present each of the three theories. After highlighting each one’s strengths and weaknesses, I offer an integrated understanding of what it means to be saved.

#### *Anselmian atonement*

In *Cur Deus Homo*<sup>13</sup> (1098), Anselm of Canterbury explains why it is that God became a human being in Jesus Christ. According to Anselm, our sinfulness dishonored God. The God who is perfectly righteous and holy cannot look upon sin because to do so would be inconsistent with God’s righteous character. But the holy God is also a God of order who desires to restore the damage done by sin. Because of who God is, then, God can only turn away from sinners, and God will find a way to be reconciled to them. In order for God to enter back into relationship with us, Anselm explains, the debt to God’s honor has to be satisfied. Since we, as sinners, are not capable of satisfying God’s honor, and since a human being has to pay the debt accrued as a consequence of human sin, God becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ. Because Jesus takes the penalty

of dishonor upon himself, as the fully human, sinless one, God’s honor is restored. Jesus is offered a reward for his sacrifice, a sacrifice he was not compelled to make, being sinless. But because Jesus is also fully divine, he does not need the reward. He offers the reward to us. The reward is our salvation.

*Strengths of the Anselmian view.* Notice that Anselm’s understanding of salvation did not emerge until the end of the eleventh century! Early in the church’s history, it was clearer to believers that, if God entered into human existence (e.g., John 1:14), humanity was redeemed. For example, in the fourth century, in the course of arguing that the Word had to suffer or we were without hope, Gregory of Nazianzus made the famous theological claim: “That which is not assumed is not saved.” The corollary of this is: “That which is assumed is saved.” If the Word became flesh, it was clear to early Christians that humanity was saved.

Not so in our day, and not so in Anselm’s. Today, we tend to look at the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ at Christmastime as a kind of “means to an end.” After all, Jesus had to get down here somehow, so he could grow up, die on the cross, and save us! I remember, as a child, sitting in the back of the church and hearing the preacher say that “Jesus died for me.” I remember wondering: How did Jesus’ death on the cross, so long ago, “get” from him to me? How did his dying help matters any? The strength of substitutionary atonement, developed by Anselm, is that it helps address questions like this. Anselm clearly explains how it is that Christ’s death translates into life for us.

Anselm’s theory also does a fine job of upholding the divine sovereignty. According to Anselm, God does not demand that the Son die because there is any external metaphysical necessity imposed on the being of God. The need for satisfaction stems from the divine aseity, the divine freedom. God becomes flesh because God’s very being demands it in order to be in relationship with us, not because God is following “rules” that compel God to do this. As Bentley Hart explains it, Anselmian atonement does not represent Christ’s sacrifice as an “economic gesture,” required by the “laws of the universe.” Rather, the sacrifice of Christ “belongs . . . to the infinite motion of God’s love, in which justice and mercy are one and can never be divided one from the other. . . . Christ’s act [is] an infinite motion towards the Father.”<sup>14</sup> The ransom for our sins, then, is not paid to the devil (as in the Christus Victor proposal), which would imply that the devil had some power in the workings of the universe. Satisfaction is made to the one true God, for whom there is no rival.

Another strength of Anselmian atonement, not often noticed, is that it takes very seriously God’s relationship to the created order, particularly to human beings. The closeness of God to us is seen not only in God’s decision to enter into our reality in Jesus Christ, making amends for our sinfulness. It is also seen in the fact that God is affected by us—profoundly affected by us—so affected by us that God has to turn away—so affected by us that something has to be done to preserve God’s righteousness, God’s honor, God’s character.<sup>15</sup>

*Weaknesses of the Anselmian view.* While substitutionary atonement is the theory most consistently upheld in our North American, twenty-first-century context, it is probably the most strongly criticized. Today, it is criticized by feminist theologians, liberation theologians, and others who are concerned that this model glorifies human suf-

fering, even “divine child abuse.” If the Father-God sends the Son to die a violent death in order to satisfy the Father-God’s honor, they ask, how can we *not* see this as abusive?<sup>16</sup> Connected with this is frustration regarding Anselm’s insistence that God’s honor had been violated. “Why couldn’t God just *forgive* human beings, without demanding that a sacrifice be made?” feminist theologians want to know.

But feminist theologians were far from the first to come up with such a critique of Anselm. Peter Abélard (ca. 1130), following on the heels of Anselm, wrote that he did not even recognize Anselm’s God as the God he loved and worshiped. He, like the feminist thinkers who would follow, thought that God certainly had the capacity to “just forgive,” and that forgiving us is consistent with the divine character. Abélard thought Anselm also engaged in faulty logic, asking:

If the sin of Adam was so great that it could be expiated only by the death of Christ, what expiation will avail for the act of murder committed against Christ, and for the many great crimes committed against him or his followers? How did the death of his innocent Son so please God the Father that through it he should be reconciled to us?<sup>17</sup>

While Calvin emphasized Anselmian atonement (the priestly office of Christ) more than the other two approaches, he, too, worked at explaining why the emphasis on God’s “wrath”<sup>18</sup> was necessary:

Since our hearts cannot, in God’s mercy, either seize upon life ardently enough or accept it with the gratefulness we owe, unless our minds are first struck and overwhelmed by fear of God’s wrath and by dread of eternal death, we are taught by Scripture to perceive that apart from Christ, God is, so to speak, hostile to us, and his hand is armed for our destruction; to embrace his benevolence and fatherly love in Christ alone.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, one can see abusive themes in this particular citation from Calvin. But one notes, also, his desire to convince us that the “wrath” of God is not really part of the divine character, but a pedagogical tactic for the sake of our salvation.

One further, and important, critique of Anselm is that he tends to reduce Jesus Christ’s atoning work to the substitutionary work on the cross. According to feminist theologian Dorothee Sölle, this raises certain questions: If Christ is only our Substitute, what happens to us? Was the only purpose of Christ’s “becoming human” to die, as the penalty for our sin? Did the incarnation, the teachings, the life of Jesus Christ contribute nothing to our salvation? If Christ is only the One who substitutes for us, and not One who lives for us and enters into partnership with us, Sölle holds, the atoning work of Christ is not accomplished *for* our benefit, but only in order to replace us. And replacement, she thinks, is not salvation, but annihilation.<sup>20</sup>

#### ***Abélardian atonement***

Having critiqued Anselm’s understanding of atonement, Abélard was fair enough to present his own view.<sup>21</sup> According to Abélard, we are not saved primarily through Christ’s death on the cross, but through the example of Christ’s life, which includes his suffering and death on the cross. Abélard thought the gospel testimony presented such a compelling portrait of Jesus Christ—his love for God, his submission to the Father’s

will, his concern for those to whom he ministered, his desire to live a righteous life—that we who ponder these stories will be compelled to respond in kind. In contrast to what he believed was a skewed representation of God by Anselm, Abélard founded his understanding of atonement on his belief that God is a God of love, and that the example of this love is Jesus Christ. The cross, too, is primarily a manifestation of the divine love, the perfect realization of the divine friendship with us:

By the faith which we hold concerning Christ, love is increased in us, by virtue of the conviction that God in Christ has united our human nature to himself and, by suffering the same nature, has demonstrated to us that perfection of love of which he himself says: “Greater love than this no man hath . . . .”<sup>22</sup>

For Abélard, Jesus Christ is not just a nice example, a leader in a game of Simon Says that we are called to emulate. For Abélard, Christ is the one who constrains us to love: the best friend, the parent, the mentor—the person who will not let us go, the advocate who is always working to make a place for us to be who we are. The desire to emulate Christ above all else is a mark of spiritual maturity.

*Strengths of the Abélardian view.* Abélard’s understanding is helpful insofar as it does not reduce the person and work of Jesus Christ to the event of the cross, but understands the atoning work of the cross to be efficacious only in the context of Jesus Christ’s entire life and ministry. In this regard, Abélard’s understanding of the atonement returns to the early church’s emphasis on the soteriological value of the incarnation. God in Jesus Christ has entered into existence with us, and in so doing has redeemed us. We are not replaced, as in the case of a solely substitutionary view. Instead, our place is held by Christ.<sup>23</sup>

Abélard opens the door, then, for us to consider what Jesus’ teachings and interactions with others in his ministry communicate to us about our salvation. Given Christ’s prophetic example, how shall we then live in relationship to God and one another?

Following Abélard, looking to Christ as our representative might lead us away from seeking to locate the cross in the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) or that of the prodigal son (Luke 15). Instead, we note that Jesus’ concern for the woman compels her to respond to him and to reach out to others; the father’s overwhelming love urges the elder son to give up thinking only about what is “fair” and participate in the realm of grace. When seen through an Abélardian lens, salvation in both of these stories is holistic—revealing to us what it is to live in the Kingdom of God in the here and now.

Similarly, an Abélardian reading would not attempt to make sense of Jesus’ cry of dereliction (Matt. 27:46) by understanding it as a necessary means to the end of paying the penalty for our sin. Instead, a representational reading helps us to hear the cry as an affirmation that God really suffers with us, and so understands our suffering.<sup>24</sup> God loves us enough to enter into the most heinous dimensions of human existence with us, and this identification with us is indeed endemic to our salvation. Salvation is not just about what God does or doesn’t do for us, it is about God entering into existence with us.

The idea that we need to consider Christ’s atoning work on the cross in relation to the incarnation, the rest of his life, and the resurrection/ascension was emphasized in

the Reformation period and is still a strong theme in Reformed theology today. Calvin asks: How has Christ abolished sin, banished the separation between us and God, and acquired righteousness to render God favorable and kindly toward us? He doesn't answer this question with "by dying on the cross," but "by the whole course of his obedience."<sup>25</sup>

In a context in which we are suspicious of those who claim to be our representatives (consider, for example, our attitude toward our political and legal representatives), it might be difficult to resonate with Abélard's depiction of Christ as our Representative. Abélard's greatest contribution to us might then be that he communicates so clearly what it is to be represented and to represent. Surely, because Christ our Representative *is* for us, living our salvation must entail that we *be for* one another as well as *do for* one another.

*Weaknesses of Abélard's understanding.* The critique frequently made of Abélard is two-fold: First, those who have learned from Anselm's view are concerned that Abélard does not take into adequate account the character of God. To argue that God may simply forgive if God wants to is to ignore God's self-revelation as the perfectly holy One. God does not do whatever God wants to, but only that which is consistent with God's own character. The divine freedom does not imply that God has unlimited options, but that God's existence is always consistent with God's essence, and God's act with God's being. For Anselm, God could not "just forgive" (existence-act) because God is holy (essence-being).

Second, some critics wonder if Abélard has given much thought to the depraved character of human beings. How can he be so sure that we are equipped to respond to the love demonstrated for us by Jesus Christ? Someone who is a "good example" cannot redeem us, it is argued, for our salvation then ultimately rests on our shoulders, and we are not good enough to redeem ourselves. Finally, Abélard's atonement theory can begin to look more like works righteousness than like grace, for it is up to us to follow after Christ, who leads the way but doesn't rescue.

One further critique made of Abélardian atonement is that it, like Anselmian atonement, can perpetuate violence and abuse. Feminist and liberation theologians argue that the model of conformity to Christ for marginalized persons can no longer be one of self-sacrifice. The marginalized need, rather, to learn that they are God's precious children and to stand up for themselves. They need to look, perhaps, not to emulate Christ's work on the cross, but to respond to the command of the risen Christ to follow him to Galilee (cf. Matt. 28).<sup>26</sup>

**Christus Victor**

The Christus Victor<sup>27</sup> ("Christ is Victor") theory cannot be ascribed to any single thinker as readily as the Anselmian and Abélardian views. Usually Irenaeus (second century) is credited with its earliest articulation, and the theory is later reflected in theologians including Luther (sixteenth century) and Wesley (nineteenth century). It has been promoted most recently by twentieth-century theologians Gustaf Aulén<sup>28</sup> and C. S. Lewis.<sup>29</sup>

According to the Christus Victor theory, God and the forces of Satan are in battle

The Mediating, Atoning Work of Jesus Christ			
	(a) Anselm/substitution/satisfaction theory	(b) Abélard/moral exemplar theory/representation	(c) Christus Victor
(1) Theory of atonement	Priest	Prophet	King
(2) Office of Christ	Cross	Incarnation	Resurrection
(3) Emphasized event in the life of Christ	The fully divine One who is fully human	The fully human, fully divine One	The fully human One who is fully divine
(4) Person of Jesus Christ	Substitute	Pioneer, Representative, Witness, Intercessor, Friend who lays down life	Shepherd, Coach, Partner, Friend who works by our side
(5) Jesus Christ in relation to us	Pays the debt we have accrued so we can be free to run the path	Clears a path for us, running ahead	Empowers us to run along the way
(6) How Jesus Christ saves us	We are replaced to have a place	Our place is held for us	Our place is reclaimed by us
(7) The place of human agency	Justification	Sanctification	Glorification
(8) The one work of grace, manifest in	Lent	Advent	Ordinary Time
(9) Liturgical season	<p><i>This chart is heavily influenced both by Barth's christology (cf. "The Doctrine of Reconciliation," "The Church Dogmatics) and Dorothee Sölle's argument (especially her critique of Barth) in Christ the Representative.</i></p>		

with one another. There is no question of who will ultimately win, Christus Victor proponents argue, and in this sense the battle is therefore not a “real” battle. There is no God above God, Iraneus insists, which is why Christ was able to “overthrow Satan by means of [God’s] words and commandments.”<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, Christus Victor clearly acknowledges that, while never tenable rivals to God, Satan and Satan’s demons have real power along the way to the coming of the Kingdom. “Jesus opposes [the forces of evil] during his life, is apparently conquered by them in his death, but triumphs over them through his resurrection.”<sup>31</sup>

God and Satan are at war because human beings sinned. In sinning, we succumbed to the power of Satan (the “fallen one”). Christ came to release us from the bonds of Satan, and to bind Satan to sin. As Iraneus explains:

For as in the beginning Satan enticed human beings to transgress their Maker’s law, and thereby got them into his power; yet Satan’s power consists in transgression and apostasy, and with these Satan bound humanity . . . so it was necessary that through a human being Satan himself should, when conquered, be bound with the same chains with which he had bound humanity . . .<sup>32</sup>

According to Iraneus, Christ “carried off a glorious and perfect victory” by paying the ransom that was owed to Satan for our salvation.<sup>33</sup>

The Christus Victor theory presumes that we continue to struggle against demonic forces even though victory has been achieved in Christ. Luther believed that Satan has no real power over us, in the sense that we could ever be “kidnapped” from the grace of God. But he thought it was spiritually beneficial that we be continuously reminded of this. Luther thought, for example, that “remembering our baptisms” would help guard us against the wiles of Satan, enabling us to live in conscious awareness of God’s grace. Consider, for example, the third verse of “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”:

And though this world with devils filled,  
Should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph through us.  
The prince of darkness grim, We tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure, For lo! his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.<sup>34</sup>

Clearly, Iraneus and Luther found it to be spiritually valuable to name their experience of the principalities and powers in their midst, testifying always to the superior power of God.

*Strengths of Christus Victor.* According to Aulén, one of the strengths of the Christus Victor model is that it is the earliest view of atonement theory, therefore getting closest to the New Testament church’s understanding of Christ’s atoning work on our behalf.

A more frequently noted strength is that Christus Victor is honest about naming the presence of evil in the world for what it is, being clear that it is not something that will simply “go away” without intervention. For this reason, liberation theologians often resonate with Christus Victor, arguing that atonement is “ongoing work.”<sup>35</sup> The Christus Victor theory is reflected, for example, in Gutiérrez’s comment that:

Redemption implies a direct relation to sin, and sin—the breach of friendship with God and others—is a human, social, and historical reality which originates in a socially and historically situated freedom . . . Sin demands a radical liberation, which in turn necessarily implies a political liberation.<sup>36</sup>

A strength of Christus Victor is that, in unabashedly naming sin, it can support dynamics of change. Transformation can only occur if sin and/or oppression is identified; once we identify it, we can repent of it, disarm it, and work to put in place personal and institutional structures that are consistent with the salvation we claim.

*Weaknesses of Christus Victor.* In many mainline Christian denominations in North America, there is not much emphasis on Christus Victor. There are at least three reasons for this. First, Christus Victor is often thought to compromise, however unintentionally, the sovereignty of God: If Satan has power that needs to be undermined, and God must act in order to thwart the will of Satan, then God is not all-powerful, but only mostly powerful. Reformed believers, in particular, are committed to the belief that there are no gaps in the divine sovereignty, even for isolated moments. To hold that Satan must be attended to is, finally, to reveal that one believes in more than one god, even if Satan is only a “lesser” power.

Second, as Aulén explains, the benefits of Christus Victor have not been seriously considered in the modern period because we understand this theory of atonement to be too “dramatic” for conservative theological thinkers, who thought it did not reflect a “clearly worked-out theological scheme” and was therefore unhelpful.<sup>37</sup> For liberal theologians, Aulén argues, Christus Victor was too “mythological,” “grotesque,” and “lurid,” unable to address, concretely, the realities of life.<sup>38</sup>

Third, there is the concern that Christus Victor is too triumphalistic.<sup>39</sup> To insist that Christ conquers sin and evil can be to deny the reality of sin and pain. The victory of Christ and his followers has too often in history come at the expense of others, as in the case of the Crusades. The victory of Christ and his followers is meaningless and oppressive in the face of heinous crimes such as occurred at Auschwitz and in Bosnia. To sing “Onward Christian Soldiers” is not, according to this concern, to live our salvation in Christ. It is to use our identification with Christ as a weapon against others.

While liberation theologians often understand Christus Victor to open up the possibility for speaking and acting prophetically against injustice in the hands of the *oppressed*, they are concerned that it supports imperialism in the hands of the *oppressor*. For those who are looking for a way out of working to bring God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, Christus Victor can serve as a justification for passivity. This is because, though the threat of Satan is real, the victory of God is still a foregone conclusion. If it is inevitable that God wins in the end, one might reason, why even fight?

#### WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SAVED



How does consideration of these various approaches help us better articulate what it means to be “saved”? I have tried to show that each approach has something unique and profound to say about how we are related to God in Jesus Christ. We might be tempted, at this point, to choose our favorite of the three, arguing for why, all things considered, it is the “best” approach. But I have suggested

that we resist the urge to reduce our understanding of atonement to any one theory, believing, as Leanne Van Dyk puts it, that a “range of theories attempts to focus our attention, illuminate the truth, and point beyond themselves to God.”<sup>40</sup> As the portrayals of Jesus vary in the four Gospels, each shedding fresh insight on the figure of Jesus Christ, so the various approaches to understanding the atonement challenge us not to become overly confident in our ability to “summarize” what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Instead, keeping the three in play can open us to marveling ever-anew at the working of grace, drawing us into deeper participation in the mystery of our salvation.

Thinking of these approaches to atonement in an integrated fashion, then, should not be done in the spirit of trying to “harmonize” them into a master narrative. Rather, setting them side by side enables us to see what each contributes, and what they all together contribute, to our understanding of our relationship to God.

What all these theories have in common is, of course, that they attempt to elucidate how our lives are affected by the life and work of the fully human, fully divine One, Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup> To be saved is, for all of these theories, to exist in relationship with God through Jesus Christ. But how is this relationship accomplished, given that we disobeyed God in the Garden, alienating ourselves from God, from one another, and from the created order?

The starting point of each theory’s response to this question is, “The Word became flesh.” Anselm, Abélard, and Iraneus might disagree with how, exactly, the coming of the God-Human saves us, but their agreement that *God entered into existence with us in Jesus Christ* undergirds their common pursuit of *how* this is the case. Attention to the incarnation, then, provides a necessary and helpful backdrop to presenting an integrated portrait of the three approaches. In such an envisioning, considering *what God did for us* in the work of atonement must also involve a remembering and recognizing of *who God is for us* in Jesus Christ. As George Hunsinger notes, citing Thomas Torrance, “It is all one indivisible act . . . in one indivisible Person . . . . The atonement is identical with Christ himself . . . . It lives forever in the person of the Mediator. He is the Atonement.”<sup>42</sup> When we understand this, we can begin to look at these approaches to the atonement not only as explanations of what God did, but who God is; not only as clues to what we receive, but who we are in relationship to God. The “full benefits of grace” that are ours in and through the atoning work of Christ are not handed over to us, extraneously, *from* the depths of the divine being. Rather, through the work of the One who is with us and for us as the Word made flesh, our salvation is our being drawn *into* the depths of the divine being. Atonement theory, understood as grounded in the person of Jesus Christ, enables us to glimpse the “how” of the reality that we abide in Christ, and he in us (John 15). Our lives are, indeed, “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3) precisely because in Christ, God has acted. These atoning acts of Christ, utterly consistent with the being of the One who loves in freedom,<sup>43</sup> reveal to us that we, through Christ, participate in the very life of God.

“I no longer call you servants, I call you friends,” Jesus says, “because you know the mystery of the Father’s will” (John 15:15). The mystery of God’s will is revealed to us in the atonement; in the person of Jesus Christ who encounters us by revealing who

God is in his actions on our behalf. In him, the Word made flesh, we as flesh live and move and have our being. Because he is one with the Father, we are one with God. Salvation is living in this synchronicity, in this mutual abiding. It is not in claiming the gift that God is handing us—via Christ’s death on our behalf—apart from living with Christ, who has entered into death and life with us. It is not in claiming that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and thinking that we know what this means apart from knowing him. And knowing him, again, is knowing his atoning work; the work that reveals who he is because he—as the God who is one of us—always acts in a way consistent with the divine being, bringing us along.

This abiding in Christ and he in us is known in our baptisms—in *him* we die to sin, are buried, and rise to new life. Apart from our union with Jesus Christ, apart from his entry into human reality with us, atonement theory is meaningless. To understand Jesus Christ as “doing something for us” in the work of atonement is to overlook our salvation; to thank God for coming and dying for us without recognizing that God drew all creaturely existence—in its dismal as well as lively colors—into God’s life is to miss that the abundant life *is* our salvation.

The three approaches to atonement theory, in short, reveal to us who God is in relation to us, and who we are in relation to God. In Jesus Christ, we learn that God is for us through what God does for us in the free exercise of God’s love. When understood in the context of the incarnational event, both the concern that human beings are *replaced* by Jesus Christ (critique of Anselm) and the concern that *we* replace *Christ* (critique of Abélard) is appeased. Our salvation, realized in and through the incarnate One, is not made manifest *either* in our replacement by Christ, *or* in our representation by Christ, *or* in our empowerment by Christ.<sup>44</sup> As a parent’s love for a child—a parent’s *being for a child*—is manifest in various different acts, so God in Jesus Christ enters into our reality and exalts us to the very life of the triune God, saving us in a multiplicity of ways.

In his substitutionary role, Christ reveals that God is *for* us by taking on the burdens that we cannot handle. He does this precisely in order to save us, to free us to engage in “other more important and more happy and more fruitful activities” than being caught up in our own guiltiness.<sup>45</sup> Christ’s representative work communicates that we do not live out our salvation as lone rangers, but as members of Christ’s body (I Cor. 12) who look to the Author and Perfecter of our faith, the One who has gone ahead of us and prepared a way. Practically speaking, to be saved is to pray constantly in the name of the One who has gone before, the One who understands, the One who is never without us, for he has gone into all places, even into Hell. And Christus Victor reminds us that to be saved means that God has promised to give us strength for the journey. While Christus Victor has been used to support imperialism, in the life of the saved it must function as a constant critique. As we work our way along the path cleared for us by the Pioneer, Christus Victor reminds us that we are not the victors, for *Christ* is.

Understanding Christ to “be for us” in the event of the cross cannot remove from it the pain and the violence. The concern of Abélard, feminist theologians, and others that atonement theories promote violence can, however, be more adequately addressed when the three approaches to atonement are held in play. Substitutionary atonement, when seen in relationship to the representational view, argues that we are *replaced* on

the cross precisely so we can have a place in running the race that is before us (Heb. 12:1). When seen in relation to Christus Victor, substitutionary atonement becomes a prophetic claim that God died on that cross *in our place* so that we do not have to die for our sins or the sins of others. Christ is the victor who dies, we are not. To direct a victim to suffer as Christ suffered is to deny our salvation by extrapolating Christ's work (as priest) from Christ's person (as, in the case of king as well as priest). It is to separate the cross from the incarnation and the resurrection, to see the crucifixion as "something God did" that must be done over and over again because it takes place only in time. On the contrary, the cross is once and for all because it is eternally realized (in the priestly role of Christ) and conquered (in the kingly role of Christ) in the life of the triune God.

To be saved, then, means this: in relation to our sinfulness, we are replaced; in relation to the course we are called to follow, we are represented; and in relation to the nitty gritty details of the journey itself, we are sustained. Salvation is neither something that is completed (*only* justification), something to be waited for (*only* glorification), or something that is "in progress" (*only* sanctification). Salvation is not even all of these three, though all three are included. Rather, salvation is living in and with the One who accomplishes it for us, the One who is eternally incarnated, crucified, and resurrected. Considering all three atonement theories, then, enables us to receive the full benefits of our salvation not because they serve as a kind of "table of contents" to the gift we have been given. Rather, exploring and cherishing the breadth of our tradition can help us to live our salvation by reminding us that God is with us and for us in relation to all of life, and that we are therefore able to be with and for God in our living. ☩

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> These approaches to atonement theory will be briefly discussed below. In the course of reading this article, it may be helpful to consult with the table "The Mediating, Atoning Work of Jesus Christ" (see p. 11).

<sup>2</sup> "Benefits" is a word used by John Calvin to refer to the gifts that God "freely bestows on God's beloved." In addition to eternal life, the benefits of grace include: the sacraments, prayer, friendship, and enjoyment of the natural world. The Reformed tradition understands all of these benefits to be our inheritance as children of God. "Salvation," then, is broader than "going to heaven after we die." Similarly, Christ's atoning work accomplishes a great deal more than providing a way for us to go to heaven.

<sup>3</sup> Scripture teaches us that we are to "work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling" in response to God's self-emptying (kenosis) in Jesus Christ, remembering that it is "God who is at work in [us]" (see Philippians 2:12-13).

<sup>4</sup> We become aware of this mystery, for example, when we ponder why we believe that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine while others—others who are just as open, just as knowledgeable of Scripture, just as apt to attend worship services—do not.

<sup>5</sup> My phrasing here is developed in relation to a saying of Anselm (1033-1109). Anselm believed that faith involves both the heart and the mind. As Christians, he thought, our posture should be that of "faith seeking understanding."

<sup>6</sup> For example, we wear crosses around our necks to remind us of our relationship to God in Jesus Christ, and yet crosses are also burned on the lawns of people who are African American, by the

Ku Klux Klan, to communicate to them that they are not wanted. What do we make of the ambiguity of this symbol?

<sup>7</sup> For a helpful overview of this movement, see Donald Miller's *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Lyle Shaller's popular works, including *Twenty-One Bridges to the Twenty-First Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), also takes such issues into consideration.

<sup>8</sup> A question: Why is it that some denominations sing "There's Power in the Blood" and "The Old Rugged Cross" with great conviction, while others don't include it in their hymnals? Does reflecting on the shedding of Christ's blood enable us more fully to participate in our salvation, or does it inevitably lead to the perpetuation of violence?

<sup>9</sup> For resources addressing issues of sexual abuse and violence in the context of the parish community, see the works of Marie Fortune (e.g., *Sexual Violence and Is Nothing Sacred?*).

<sup>10</sup> For additional supporting passages, see row (10) of table.

<sup>11</sup> See row (2) on table.

<sup>12</sup> For guidance in distinguishing among the three types of atonement theory discussed in this article, see the included table (p.11).

<sup>13</sup> This text may be found in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, ed. Eugene R. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 100-183. The title, literally translated, means, "Why a God-Man?"

<sup>14</sup> Bentley Hart, "A Gift Exceeding Every Debt: An Eastern Orthodox Appreciation of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*," *Pro Ecclesia* 7: 333-349 (Summer 1998), 347.

<sup>15</sup> In a fascinating response to John Hick's argument that all transactional approaches to the doctrine of atonement are a mistake, Robert Merrihew Adams argues that, though he agrees with Hick that God can just forgive without recompense, "ransom" theories (i.e., substitutionary atonement and Christus Victor) should not go unappreciated. Transactional theories are personal theories that seek to describe not only how God has acted on us, but the "interaction that happens between us and God" (100). "Christ acts on (or acts in such a way as to reconstitute) the relationship between God and us" (101). See Adams, "Atoning Transactions," response to Hick's "Is the Doctrine of Atonement a Mistake?" *Philosophy and Theological Discourse*, ed. S. Davis (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 98-101.

<sup>16</sup> For an example of feminist theologians writing about the violence of the Anselmian view, see Joanne Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?," pp. 1-30 of *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, eds. Brown and Bohn (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1989). Note that, while many feminist thinkers uphold the Abélardian view, and many liberationist thinkers find solace in Christus Victor theory, Brown and Parker find all three approaches to the atonement to be irredeemably violent and therefore not salvific.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Abélard, "Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans (An Excerpt from the Second Book), *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, ed. Eugene R. Fairweather, 276-287, 282-283.

<sup>18</sup> Anselm did not emphasize God's "wrath," but God's "honor." In the history of doctrine, however, his theory was redacted to be saying that God turned away from us "in righteous anger," demanding that recompense be made by the Son. When feminist theologians and others are resistant to Anselmian atonement, they are often reacting negatively to the "wrath" of God that Anselm never actually emphasized, but that even careful readers like Calvin perpetuated. One way of making a case for the value of substitutionary atonement might be to get away from the "wrath" language and back to the language of "honor."

<sup>19</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II.16.2.

<sup>20</sup> See Dorothee Sölle, *Christ the Representative* (London: SCM Press, 1967).

<sup>21</sup> Abélardian atonement is also known as the "moral exemplar theory," "representation," or the

“subjective view.”

<sup>22</sup> Abélard, 278.

<sup>23</sup> Sölle, *Christ the Representative*, passim.

<sup>24</sup> Contemporary theologian Jürgen Moltmann is well-known for developing these representational readings of the passion. See, especially, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, II.16.5.

<sup>26</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza discusses this point at some length in *Jesus: Miriam's Son, Sophia's Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Also called “the classic view.”

<sup>28</sup> See Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor* (New York: Collier Books, 1969). In this book, Aulén surveys the three major atonement theories, showing the weaknesses of the Anselmian and Abélardian approaches in favor of Christus Victor, which he argues is the “classic view,” i.e., the view that is most consistent with the belief of the early church.

<sup>29</sup> See C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, 7 vols. (New York: Collier Books, 1950). In these mythological children's books, Aslan (the Christ figure) wages war with the White Witch (who represents Satan, the forces of darkness). While there is no question who will win in the end (and how: through Aslan's voluntary death), there are battles and setbacks. The White Witch in the long run has no power, but in the short run is a rival not to be taken lightly.

<sup>30</sup> Iraneus, “Against Heresies,” chapter XXI. *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 548-550.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Finger, “Christus Victor and the Creeds: Some Historical Considerations,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 72: 31-51, January 1998), 43.

<sup>32</sup> Iraneus, XXI.3.

<sup>33</sup> Iraneus, *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Martin Luther, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” Hymn #260 of *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990).

<sup>35</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), p. 172.

<sup>36</sup> Gutiérrez, pp. 172, 176.

<sup>37</sup> Aulén, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Aulén, 8.

<sup>39</sup> I thank “The Community,” a group of pastors who discussed this subject with me, for this insight.

<sup>40</sup> Leanne Van Dyk, “Do Theories of Atonement Foster Abuse?” *Perspectives* 12:11-13 (1997), 13.

<sup>41</sup> That Jesus Christ is “fully human, fully divine, one person in two natures, without confusion and without change, without separation and without division,” was decided at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. For more details about the Chalcedonian statement, see J.N.D. Kelly's *Early Christian Doctrines*.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Torrance, “the Priesthood of Christ,” unpublished manuscript cited by George Hunsinger in “The Politics of the Nonviolent God: Reflections on René Girard and Karl Barth,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 no 1:61-85 (1998), 75.

<sup>43</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, passim.

<sup>44</sup> See row (6) on table.

<sup>45</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 234.

CYNTHIA RIGBY:

THE NOT-SO-SIMPLE TRUTH



**In your article you advocate combining the three classic views of atonement. Is that a cop-out—an unwillingness to choose among the three?**

Choosing one over the other two is a cop-out. The Reformed tradition has always held the three in tension. The easy way out is to go with one.

**What Reformed thinker holds them in tension?**

You might have heard of John Calvin. Back in the sixteenth century he talked about Christ in the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. He did emphasize the priestly role or the Anselmian view more than he did the kingly or the prophetic view, but he thought that seeing all three as a whole would help us have a better understanding of who Christ is as our “Mediator.”

**An atonement trinity.**

Nothing limits the views to just the three. The whole point is to not think of Jesus Christ and what he did for us in a monolithic way. Our relationship with God in Christ is multifaceted. There are many, many ways in which Christ exalts us into the life of God.

**Okay. But what about Barth?**

Picking up on Calvin's three—Prophet, Priest, and King—Barth structured one whole volume of the *Church Dogmatics*—vol. IV, the Doctrine of Reconciliation—along the same

lines: Christ in the priestly office, Christ in the kingly office, and Christ in the prophetic office. He does change the traditional ordering; he goes with Priest, King, Prophet.

**So why do we feel so much pressure to choose one of the three?**

Because of the pressure to market our faith. In a quick-fix, fast-food, megachurch world, we look for catchy slogans or a simple formula. The Reformed tradition tells us that our faith is more complex than that.

**The more complex, the more true?**

Theology is words about God. We believe that God is relevant to our lives. Real lives are complex. Christian doctrine and Christian theology must speak to the complexity of real lives, because we believe God is relevant to real lives.

**What about “Keep it simple, stupid”?**

Common cultural wisdom says that conviction and simplicity go together; what is true is simple. The gospel message is simple, but it takes a lifetime, maybe all of eternity, to begin to understand it. I fight the idea that we have to choose between simplicity/conviction and complexity/wishy-washiness. I argue for complexity/conviction. I teach students to not fear the complexity of life.

**And when they say, “All I need to know is Jesus”?**

I say that’s exactly right—that all we need to know is Jesus. To really know Jesus, however, isn’t just to *say* that, but to enter into relationship with Jesus. The question then is: How do you do that? To build a relationship you spend time together, you learn about the history of the other person, you learn about what they do, you learn about what they care about and stand for. In coming to know Jesus we study Scripture, we think about what Christ has done on our behalf. Part of studying who Jesus is and coming to know Jesus is to look at atonement theory.

**You write about the importance of the atonement but when I look at Christian bookstores, there are a lot more books on the Trinity than on the atonement. Why?**

The number one show on television is “Friends.” Why? Families are in trouble, kids don’t know what it is to have close relationships. Kids are turning to “Friends” to fill that void. In that cultural ethos, the Trinity is a very appealing doctrine. The Trinity teaches us how God relates to us in specific ways—as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Theologians these days are writing about how the doctrine of the Trinity suggests possibilities of God as our friend and, since we are made in the image of the triune God, as of our friendship with one another.

**Why so few books on atonement theory?**

Actually, there are quite a few. Most, though, see the cross (the symbol of atonement) as an ambiguous symbol. We haven’t quite figured out what to do with it yet.

**What do you mean, “ambiguous symbol”?**

We have become more aware of domestic violence and sexual harassment, aware that in the history of Christendom it has not been uncommon for pastors and other Christian leaders to direct a person who is suffering to the cross and say, “You are Christ-like in your suffering.” The cross is a symbol of execution—you can’t get away from the blood, the violent dimension of the cross. Part of what I am trying to do in this article, and what many of us as theologians are doing, is to think in new ways—or reclaim old ways—about how the cross is a symbol of redemption. How the cross does not have to perpetuate violence but actually can bring life and support life.

**If I wanted to know more about the atonement then, what are the three or four key resources to look at?**

Begin with *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, which has excerpts from Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Human) and Abélard who was a critic of Anselm and said, “Are you crazy? My God would not send his son to die. That is divine

child abuse.” He didn’t say it quite that way, but some have drawn that conclusion from his argument. Gustaf Aulén’s book, *Christus Victor*, would also be a good choice. Jürgen Moltmann’s book, *The Crucified God*, is an important book that incorporates both the Trinity and atonement—he explains why the atonement is not divine child abuse. The Father sent the Son to die, but in the death of the Son, the Father and the Spirit, as well as the Son, were present. The cross is part of the triune life of God, not external to it. Gustavo Gutiérrez, in *A Theology of Liberation*, writes about atonement as salvation history. A book not as well known but very good is Paul Fiddé’s *Past Event and Present Salvation*. And of course, you must look at my favorite, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV. A book critical of atonement theory, edited by feminist theologians Joanne C. Brown and Carole R. Bohn, is *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*.

**Let’s say I’m preaching next Sunday on the atonement and need to quickly review the basic issues.**

Get the *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*. It costs about \$45 hardback. I keep it on my desk and refer to the short articles on all the major Christian doctrines.

**Which of the three views of the atonement is held by the majority of the students in your theology class at Austin Seminary?**

Substitutionary atonement. The few who reject substitutionary atonement usually do so because they have a negative reaction to its violent aspects. Usually they don’t have any idea what to substitute for substitution.

**How do you help them?**

I begin by discussing salvation. I try to broaden their understanding of what salvation is. Typically, students won’t raise their hands and say, “I believe in substitutionary atonement,” but they will say, “I believe Jesus died for me so that I will be saved.” Then I will say, “What is salvation about?” “Well, it means we are saved from the penalty of sin and death.” “Well, what’s that about?” “Well, it means that after we die, we’ll go to heaven and not hell.” And I’ll say, “This is just about fire insurance then?”

**You’re very sinister, you know.**

Thanks. Then I usually pose the question, “Are we saved only *from* things or are we saved *for* things, as well?” We try to think about how the cross saves us for something. What does it save us for? Life in Christ, participating in the ministry of reconciliation, loving one another. All of a sudden we are already beginning to think in new ways about the cross as a Christian symbol. Another thing we do is sing hymns together, blood hymns from different hymnals.

**Such as?**

We sing “There’s Power in the Blood” and all the Baptist students will be singing raucously and they are usually sitting in the front row anyway because they are Baptists and the Presbyterians don’t know the words. When the song is over I point out that Presbyterians don’t often sing that song and we have a great discussion about why. It’s not about me changing their understanding of substitutionary atonement, but thinking about the atonement from different angles. I challenge those who embrace substi-

tutionary atonement to think about the ways in which the cross has been misused to perpetuate violence, and I challenge students who won't sing "There's Power in the Blood" to think about what they are missing in their spirituality by not being able to say boldly, "Christ shed his blood for me."

**To what extent do your students think theology matters?**

On which week of the introductory theology class? The first week they figure whatever they know about theology is all they need to know. By the second or third week they are worried that what they believe will be taken away from them. By the fifth week, things begin to come together. Most students do come in wanting to see how theology matters, otherwise they wouldn't be in seminary. Once students recognize that their teachers are working with them, they join us in trying to figure out how theology matters in real life.

**What are the seminary students' greatest strengths and weaknesses?**

The greatest strength is that they are looking for relevance; their greatest weakness is that they are looking for relevance.

**What?**

If I walk in and start talking about the Trinity, and if in two minutes I don't tell them why it matters, they glaze over. This is a reaction against the esoteric, ivory-tower approach to theology. They want to go out there and make a difference and they want to get to that as quickly as possible. I wish students could be a little better at hanging in there in terms of the theory and trust that we are going to get to the practice. Karl Barth agreed that in one sense theology is an esoteric, theoretical thing that means nothing in the life of the church in and of itself. But then he goes on to say: Just try to act without thinking first, try to do without any theory, and pretty soon you will find out that your actions are not making a difference.

**What are the best ways to preach the atonement?**

Boldly. Carefully. Sensitive. We believe that what Christ has done for us on the cross has liberated us from sin. We've got to preach the cross in a way that communicates how it has done away with what I call both sides of sin.

**Sin has two sides?**

Yes. The typical definition of sin is that we are people who are prideful and self-centered. So we must preach the cross as a way of saying to those who are guilty of the sin of pride that they need to deny themselves. But we also need to preach the other side of sin, the sin of self-deprecation or thinking of ourselves less highly than we ought. The cross critiques our pride, reminding us that we are not God, and at the same time lifts us up as human creatures created in God's image. Karl Barth said that Christ died so we would be free to occupy our time with better and happier things than self-judgment.

**Have your views of atonement changed over the years?**

I can remember as a little kid sitting in the back of the church, hearing the preacher

point to the cross and say, "You should have died on that cross. You are a sinner, and you deserve to die. But God took on human flesh in Jesus Christ and died in your place." I can remember concentrating as hard as I could, trying to figure out how Christ's death 2000 years ago on the cross got transferred to me. Atonement theory helps us understand how this works. It helps to know that, yes, Christ paid the penalty for us. But salvation is about even more than this. Atonement is not about exchanging commodities as much as it is about relationship to God. What's important about the cross is not only that Christ paid the penalty for my sins but that Christ has entered into the human condition with us. God is with us and for us in Jesus Christ. Christ has entered into my humanity and in entering into my humanity has exalted my humanity into the very life of the triune God.

*Flora Keshgegian* is assistant professor of systematic theology at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest. She holds a Ph.D. from Boston College and is an ordained priest in the Episcopal Church. Her book, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (forthcoming from Abingdon Press) reexamines Christian understandings of redemption in relation to processes of remembering and witnessing to traumatic suffering.

FLORA A. KESHGEGIAN

Cynthia Rigby has offered us a thoughtful and lively consideration of the value of pluralistic thinking, particularly in relation to theories of the atonement. Her respectful questioning of the hegemony of what is deemed the Anselmian approach in western and Reformed thinking opens the door to incorporate other approaches, especially the Abélardian and Christus Victor models. She also argues powerfully that the atonement is best understood in relation to the incarnation. As has happened too often, splitting them leaves us a distorted theological perspective that seems either to undercut God's love or to condone violence or both.

In this response, I will build on Rigby's efforts by drawing attention to several issues which seem to underlie her consideration: namely, theological language as metaphoric, the meanings of representation and solidarity, and the dynamics of power. The "interest" that directs my remarks, and which I take to be at issue in any treatment of salvation, is the effectiveness of our theology: What difference does it make and does it make the difference it intends to make? This interest is reflected in the kinds of criticisms being put forward by feminist theologians who accuse traditional theories of condoning violence against women or by political and liberation theologians who point out how the cross has been used to subjugate whole peoples. How can Christianity claim salvific power for a religion that seems to do harm? Meanwhile, when womanist theologians such as Jacquelyn Grant and JoAnne Marie Terrell describe the solace and support black women find in the cross, arguing that it helps these women endure and even resist the objective conditions of oppression in which they live.<sup>1</sup>

**Metaphor.** Beginning with the earliest followers of Jesus, those who experienced transformation and new life spoke of it using metaphoric language. What was this new life like? How might it be attributed to the encounter with Jesus Christ—incarnate, crucified, and resurrected? A host of metaphors was used, such as redemption out of slavery, deliverance from bondage, adoption into a family or household, expiation through sacrifice, and more. Over time, the metaphors were dislodged from the original "housing" and became concepts. Their language was no longer considered poetic and metaphoric, but analytical and propositional. This is true not only of the earliest formulations of Jesus Christ's salvific work, but of later developments as well. It is difficult to imagine

the language of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* as metaphoric, but there is a way in which that is precisely what it is. In the style of theological argument, he is developing an image, a picture, of how to understand the atonement. In order to make that picture as concrete and accessible as possible, he draws on images and ideas that those in his culture knew and experienced. They understood the idea of a lord's honor and the payment of a debt to honor in a way they might not have understood the ancient system of sacrifice or our contemporary idea of mutuality. The problem is not with the original metaphors so much as the forgetting that we are dealing with metaphors. Consequently, the problem is not so much with Anselm himself as with those who took his theology too literally and applied it in their own contexts. In doing so, they added twists and turns from their own preferred metaphors. For example, the idea of penal substitution is not in Anselm himself, but comes from those, such as Calvin, who adopted and adapted Anselm's theology in their own ways.

If we understand theological language as metaphoric, we can explore both the continuing usefulness of certain metaphors and the uses to which they have been put. The question then becomes when does a particular metaphor cease to be effective for redemption: Is it when it no longer makes sense in a particular cultural context and/or when that context distorts its life-giving potential?<sup>2</sup>

**Representation.** Professor Rigby seems to reserve the idea of Christ as Representative for the Abélardian approach to redemption. I would suggest that it has a broader application and that a criterion for assessing the effectiveness and, therefore, validity of a given theology of redemption is whether Christ functions as representative. As Rigby points out, this is a complicated matter, especially in our own day when the concept of representation is itself riddled with problems. The possibility of representation presupposes trust. We "entrust" our elected "representatives" with the ability to speak for us and for our interests. Yet we often find our trust betrayed. These representatives seem either to speak for the interests of those with powerful lobbies or for those who will most help their reelection. We also expect to see ourselves imaged in and through those who are meant to represent us, whether they be elected officials or any person that is in some way a spokesperson or icon. We think only those who look and act like us can represent us. As a result, multiculturalism is imaged as a rainbow of persons and perspectives and the inclusion of many voices.

These social concerns impact theology. Those who challenge traditional approaches to the atonement are in some sense arguing that they do not trust God and Jesus Christ as God's representative. That mistrust is rooted in the perception that God's interests seem to favor those in power rather than those most in need of God's care. These challengers also argue that Jesus Christ can only represent them if Jesus, in some way, is like them. Thus, black theologians argue for a black Christ, and Jacquelyn Grant specifies that argument even more by suggesting that Jesus is a black woman.

What is at issue in these challenges and suggestions is whether and how Jesus Christ can be representative. The desire is for valid and effective representation. I would suggest that one measure of an adequate theology of redemption is whether Christ functions as representative. If we are to find truth in any of the traditional approaches

—Anselmian, Abélardian, Christus Victor, et al.—then we must be able to understand the Christ in them as representative. I think that was the intent of the theologians who authored these approaches.

**Solidarity.** The effectiveness of the incarnation presupposes an idea of solidarity. The human race is so connected that the person of one God-Human affects all. For early theologians such as Athanasius, such connection was ontological. We all shared in one human nature so when the Word became flesh, all of human nature was impacted. Such an understanding of ontological solidarity is difficult to maintain in our post-modern world in which the very notion of humanity is deconstructed. More modern ideas of solidarity see it as a moral act, a standing with other people. This shift affects the way we understand Jesus' solidarity as well and turns the focus from the incarnation to his death, when he stood with us even to the point of giving up his life. Such sacrificial solidarity becomes then the model for Jesus' redemptive work and, therefore, for what it means to follow Jesus.

I would suggest a third meaning of solidarity that might bring us back toward the incarnation, but does not assume an ontological connection. This understanding of solidarity is grounded not in the structure of human nature, but in the practice of personhood and an understanding of personhood as profoundly inter-relational. What I term participatory solidarity is a practice of mutual connection and respect, of coming to be and existing in relation. As we practice participatory solidarity, the meaning and saving power of the incarnation will be revealed in new and different ways.

**Power.** Finally, a word or two about power. God's work of redemption in and through Jesus Christ is an affirmation not only of God's love, but of God's power. Perhaps this assertion is manifested most in the Christus Victor model, but God's power is evidenced in all the approaches to redemption. The question I would pose is how do we understand the nature of God's power. "Mighty to save" is the obvious response. However, given that God's might has been used too often in the service of those who seek to dominate others, we cannot rest with such a facile response.

I would suggest that we need to understand power as an energy that is assessed by its effects. In this world, there is no innocent power or knowledge that is somehow exempt from critical evaluation. If God's power is claimed to be mighty for salvation, then we might ask whether it effects salvation. Does it empower for transformation and new life? Does it enable life even in the midst of death? The central proclamation of Christianity—that we are saved through Jesus Christ—must be ever renewed in ways that make it real in the lives of those who yearn for deliverance and life. 📖

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1989) and *Power in the Blood? The Cross in African American Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> See Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) for a fuller expo-

*Continued on page 41*

**Colin Gunton** is professor of Christian doctrine at King's College, University of London. He received the M.A. and the D.Phil. from Oxford University and the D.D. from King's College, London. His most recent books include *The Triune Creator* (Edinburgh University Press, 1998) and *Yesterday and Today: A Study of Continuities in Christology* (SPCK, 1997)

COLIN GUNTON

There are polar dangers in treating the doctrine of the atonement in terms of theories or images. On the one hand, as Aulén notoriously tended to suppose, it may be seen as a matter of rival theories, one or more of which must be defended against the others. Not only does this involve the underplaying or neglect of biblical ways of speaking which are too pervasive to write out of the picture, but also, in Aulén's case at any rate, involves a good deal of distorted scholarship, in which, for example, Luther's plainly Anselmian heritage is underplayed, as is the extent to which such patristic writers as Irenaeus and Athanasius anticipate Anselm's categories. On the other hand, it is equally problematic to hold that the theologian's task is simply or even mainly to attempt to correlate these matters. Both approaches seek the wrong kind of unity, attempting as they do to unify what must remain to a degree open-ended, and for two reasons: because in all theology we can at best anticipate the knowledge of things that we shall one day—or, better, on *that* day—be granted; and because in this locus above all we are concerned with that most difficult of relationships, the one between holy God and fallen creation at the very place where the breach is brought into view and healed.

It is at this place that the distinctive place of the doctrine of the atonement in the history of dogmatics comes into view. It is often commented that unlike the christological and trinitarian dogmas, this has never in the same way been the subject of definition by church council. One reason is that salvation theology—as distinct from the theology of the appropriation of salvation which divided Rome and Reformation—has not yet been seen to be church-dividing, although whether in view of the rampant subjectivism of much of modern church life it ought to be, and perhaps one day will be, is cause for thought. The second reason lies in the breadth of biblical imagery and conceptuality to describe the many facets of the fallen human condition and the many-layered divine action which meets and heals it.

Here we reach another feature of the situation which must be held in view. It is increasingly being borne in upon the conscience and thinking of the church that neglect of the Old Testament base for its theology has proved one of the most serious of all theological sins over two millennia. It is especially the case here. What rarely receives detailed attention is the origin of the language in which New Testament writ-

ers articulate their praises of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. All is derived in large measure from here, with the partial exception of the language of the demonic, clearly inflated in the New Testament, no doubt for good reasons. (Military imagery is pervasive in the Old Testament, often rather embarrassingly for those for whom violence is the primary problem.) The Father to whom Jesus prayed, and into which relation he incorporates the Christian, is the one whose relation to Israel provides the language which Christian theology uses, because what happens in Jesus is the concentration of that relation in the one who was born, lived, and died as he did, was raised from the dead, and rules from the right hand of the Father.

This brings us to another reason for the difficulty of our topic. Christology and Trinity are in large measure concerned with characterizing the *being* of God and Christ, and particularly to distinguish the former from the gods of the world outside the church. In our topic, however, we are engaged in something much more slippery and complex: in attempting to articulate something of God's saving *action* and its re-establishing—rather than displacing or overriding—human action. That this action is action in and over time—embracing a center in a death, but an integral prelude in a life and a provisional closure in a resurrection and ascension—is what makes it uniquely difficult. To take account of the variety and richness of the narrative is the great strength of Dr. Rigby's paper, as is its concluding celebration of the work of the one Christ, in whom all our theology of atonement must center.

I must note two omissions in Rigby's work, though I must begin by conceding that one cannot—indeed should not try to—do everything in a single paper, and that therefore I might be asking too much. Yet if constitutive considerations are omitted, the whole may be lost—as is, after all the contention of the paper. The first omission is this: the atonement, as Dr. Rigby shows so clearly, is a matter of human integrity—of God's establishing, by an appropriate form of action in the world, the conditions for and the reality of right or redeemed human action. She is, I believe, right to take with absolute seriousness the objections of feminists, liberationists, and others to the fact that the shape of the doctrine and consequent church practice have often distorted rather than healed human beings. And yet the chief clue to what can be called hermeneutical healing of God's historical saving action and its present relevance is the person of the Holy Spirit. It is not just that the Spirit in some way makes relevant the action, by revealing or bringing it home to our minds. It is also that his work is instrumental in constituting the incarnation and shaping the life and work of the Son of God. And the one who shaped his life by maintaining it in true relation to his Father's will, through that same Christ, reconciles us to God. Can an account of the atonement be adequate which does not devote major attention to this?

The second point is far more contentious, but also more urgent, and shows the danger that our theology may be over-determined by the proper desire to speak responsibly to objections in the form in which the gospel has sometimes been articulated. (Here I should say, perhaps rather defensively, but also perhaps necessarily in view of recent history, that Ellen Charry made much the same point at a recent conference of the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.]) We cannot and must not evade reference to the first person of the Trinity if the biblical gospel is to be heard and maintained. It is the uni-

form teaching of New Testament Scripture that the one to whom Christ and the Spirit through Christ bring us—that is to say, that the whole point of the salvation with which we are concerned—is God the Father. That is made clear in some of the things Dr. Rigby writes, particularly in her crucial concluding pages. Yet the point still needs to be made that avoidance of this name and the personal pronoun it ineluctably involves cannot be compensated for by repeated uses of the term “God,” which is irredeemably modalistic in both appearance and content. That is where the Old Testament again assists us, because although references to God as Father are rare before he is explicitly so named by Jesus, it is made clear from the beginning<sup>1</sup> that God is characterized not by his “gender” but by his sovereignty, holiness, patience, mercy, and, indeed, what is sometimes called “feminine” tenderness. Attempts to hold onto Jesus' God without the name by which he called him, and without the relationship into which, by the Spirit he incorporates us, will create a vacuum into which other gods will rush, and they will not re-constitute our humanity through that of Jesus, but swallow us into a pantheistic slavery. In other words—and this is the final irony of over-determination by liberationist ideology—we shall return to thralldom to the very gods who were overthrown by Christus Victor. ☛

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Note, for example, the way in which Genesis 1 evacuates the mythical language on which it draws of any reference to the sex and violence which universally accompanied other cultures' accounts of creation.

*Amy Plantinga Pauw is the Henry P. Mobley Jr. Professor of Doctrinal Theology at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. She earned the M.Div. from Fuller Seminary and the Ph.D. from Yale University. She is a contributing writer to several volumes, including Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions (Eerdmans, 1999) and Many Voices, One God: Being Faithful in a Pluralistic World (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998).*

AMY PLANTINGA PAUW

I am frankly a little suspicious of theological typologies. They abstract from the historical context of real theology and force its nuances and ambiguities to conform to a very small array of unyielding categories. Moreover, the very structure of a typology seems to beg its readers to choose among its limited options. For example, despite H. Richard Niebuhr's insistence that his five types of relation between *Christ and Culture* were all viable Christian approaches, readers continue to feel obligated to align themselves with one type or another. In the case of atonement typologies, it does not help matters that Anselm repudiated versions of the Christus Victor model, and Abélard later repudiated Anselm's approach. The theologians themselves give the impression that there are competing accounts of Christ's atonement among which Christians must choose. Is it any wonder that so many Christians equate "the atonement" with a single, inflexible theological model, even if they cannot agree on which model is the "right" one?

Given these negative preconceptions, I found Cynthia Rigby's use of a typology to *complexify* our understanding of the atonement and to increase our appreciation of a *variety* of theological models to be a welcome change, even if the constrictions of a typological framework are still evident. Rigby's title, "Are You Saved?" is the first indication that her theological horizon is much broader than any particular "theory" of Christ's death. She is interested in human salvation and atonement understood in its wide etymological sense of at-one-ment—and this requires attention to Christ's incarnation, life, and resurrection, as well as to his death.<sup>1</sup> As she puts it, "our salvation is our being drawn into the depths of the divine being." This formulation would even suggest the title, "Are You Being Saved?" indicating that God's saving work in Christ through the Spirit is a present reality, not only a past event.<sup>2</sup> Receiving the full benefits of divine grace is a lifelong process.

Rigby acknowledges that images of the atonement can be misused in pastoral and liturgical settings. For African American women, the slave legacy of forced sexual and domestic surrogacy can drain the good news out of the claim that Christ took our place. Victims of domestic violence can find it hard to hear the message of Christ's obedient suffering as gospel. Unfortunately, there is no insurance available against the misuse of theological images; only the most vapid or irrelevant images could possibly claim

immunity. Keeping several images of salvation in play, so that a range of them is available in any particular context and none of them is simply equated with "the atonement," is good theological protection. While Rigby has lifted up three images of atonement that have undergone significant "journeys of intensification,"<sup>3</sup> Scripture and Christian tradition yield many more besides. Some others worth pursuing include the political image of liberation and the medical image of healing.

While no atonement image is immune from misuse, it may also be the case that some images simply are more problematic in our context than others. I would put Anselm's satisfaction theory in this category, despite its continuing influence in western Christianity. It is not enough for Rigby to defend Anselm's model by claiming that it takes the relationship between God and human beings seriously. The key issue is the *kind* of relationship this image renders, and many Christians no longer find Anselm's portrait of the allegiance and honor owed by underlings to their superiors in a feudal hierarchy a theologically compelling model for the human-divine relationship. Moreover, even if one avoids metaphors of the Father's wrath, it is difficult in Anselm's model to avoid moral rifts in the trinitarian relationship between the Father and Son.

The salvation we claim in Christ is a gift of the whole Trinity, and any account of salvation that neglects one or more members of the Trinity or, even worse, sets them in opposition to each other, fails to give full witness to "the lavish, multifaceted" reality of God's gift. The Trinity deserves more attention in Rigby's analysis of the atonement—no account of "God's grace-full gift" of salvation can afford to ignore its trinitarian dimensions. The Holy Spirit in particular is strikingly absent. Given her conviction that salvation is about abundant life in union with God, I would have expected considerable attention to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. This theological gap shows up especially in Rigby's treatment of Abélard's representational view, where she includes in its weaknesses the concern that he leaves it "up to us to follow after Christ" and to respond to the love he demonstrates. In a fully trinitarian account of the atonement, this is precisely where the role of the Holy Spirit would be emphasized. Abélard's basic argument is that God's love has transformative power, and the work of the Holy Spirit is to actualize the power of this love in us and among us. Robert J. Sherman has recently suggested a typology for recognizing the correspondences among "the three persons of the Trinity, the three offices of Christ, and the three commonly recognized models of his atoning work."<sup>4</sup> In particular, his model argues the importance of the Holy Spirit in the exemplarist approach. The theological goal is not to suggest a rigid "appropriation" of one member of the Trinity to a specific view of the atonement, but to enhance our appreciation of the fundamental unity of our salvation as the gracious act of the triune God.

In one of Jonathan Edwards's most famous sermons, "God Glorified in Man's Dependence," he gives an explanation of "our dependence on each person in the Trinity for all our good":

We are dependent on Christ the Son of God, as he is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We are dependent on the Father, who has given us Christ, and made him to be these things to us. We are dependent on the Holy Ghost, for 'tis of him that we are in Christ Jesus; 'tis the Spirit of God that gives us faith in him, whereby we receive him, and close with him.<sup>5</sup>

To build on what Rigby affirms, our salvation is our being drawn into the depths of the trinitarian life of God. Given the inexhaustibility of this life, Jonathan Edwards thought that our knowledge and love of God would never stop increasing, even in heaven. With Edwards and Rigby, we can rejoice in “the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom. 11:33) 

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In her *Scottish Journal of Theology* Lectures for 1999, Kathryn Tanner has emphasized the perfected and glorified humanity of Jesus Christ as the means of our salvation. This would imply that Christ’s obedience, ransom, substitution, etc. are “the effects of his saving us and not the very means or mechanism by which Jesus saves.” This approach to the atonement bears serious consideration.

<sup>2</sup> This alternative title would echo I Cor. 1:18: the power of the cross is visible in “those who are being saved.” See Paul S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> David Ford borrows this phrase from David Tracy to describe the development of different images of salvation in Christian theology. See *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 119.

<sup>4</sup> Robert J. Sherman, “Toward a Trinitarian Theology of the Atonement” *Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol. 52, No. 3 (1999), 346-374. Here, p. 347.

<sup>5</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 17, *Sermons and Discourses 1730-1733*, ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 201.

## DOING DOCTRINE IN THE PULPIT

WILLIAM J. CARL III

Two problems dog the church these days. One is biblical illiteracy, which makes it harder and harder to “be church in the world” when people don’t understand the quarry from which kingdom work is dug. The other is a theological identity crisis, in which believers aren’t sure what they believe anymore or who they are as Christians.

The prescription for the illiteracy problem is to get people into the Book: reading it, studying it, analyzing it, talking about it. Preachers also need to engage the congregation in their own exegetical wrestling with texts. Some passages, like Jacob’s stranger at the Jabbok, do not yield easily to our hermeneutical intrusions. Why give the impression that they do? Some of them take us to the mat and leave us limping, in part because humility always precedes wisdom, and grace always comes with a set of crutches. If we or our people are ever going to receive the blessings and the new names that accompany rich exegetical probing, we have to share the authentic struggles we sometimes encounter in the toughest texts.

The prescription for the identity crisis is to offer more theological substance when we preach. I’m always surprised at how much congregants want to know as long as the scholarship we share illumines the larger journey of faith. People want to know what they believe and why, and they don’t want it handed to them piecemeal. I have a friend, an internationally known medical school professor, who has edited large volumes and lectured all over the world. He lives in Virginia. One day he said to me, “Bill, you preachers learn all that exegesis and theology in seminary. Then you do one of two things: you either hold it back from us or you spoon-feed it to us. You know, some of us are pretty bright! We can handle more than you dish out.” He’s right. Laity these days are smart, well-read, and ready to learn. They can assimilate large amounts of data quickly. They do it every day in their jobs. Most of them are hungry to learn and grow in the faith. They see the pulpit as a place for *didache* as well as *kerygma*.

But, if we’re going to teach from the pulpit, how do we do it in a responsible and effective manner? We do so by plumbing the depths of exegesis and theology, then tak-

---

*William J. Carl III is senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Dallas. He has also served as associate professor of homiletics and worship and instructor of New Testament Greek at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. He has authored five books, including Preaching Christian Doctrine (Fortress, 1984).*

ing our congregations with us. We shine the light of scholarship into the inmost cave of biblical and doctrinal thought in such a way that our fellow travelers want to travel with us. In expositional preaching, we remember to allow the text to emerge in the sermon. In doctrinal preaching, we remember that there are three starting points: (1) Scripture; (2) sacrament, season, and creed; and (3) culture.

### SCRIPTURE

Beginning with the Bible is like going home for many people, a home some left long ago. It looks different to them when they return. Perhaps there were things about it they never noticed before—this window, that door—wonder what’s behind it? A story that resonates and disturbs at the same time? A biblical character who seems all too familiar? A saying they heard as children that’s stuck with them all these years? A doctrine they’ve lived but never understood?

Our job as preachers is to help people see themselves in the stories and the characters as they unpack the meaning of the sayings and the doctrines. Yes, there are doctrines nestled inside these ancient texts. They’re not just old rocks we hold up as if we were homiletical archaeologists knee-deep in ecclesial dust. Doctrines are the theological life-blood of the faith that infuse the church which is trying desperately to do God’s will in the world. They are summary statements that have emerged from living communities struggling with what it means to be Christian in their time. In a way, we preachers are *reverse theologians*, trying to help people get in touch with the shared experiences, emotions, and joys that inform the doctrines of the faith.

The best place to start is with the Scripture itself. Some of us do so with *lectionary preaching*, where we hop and skip systematically through the Bible. Ernie Campbell once said, “Two cheers for the lectionary, but not three.” We know its limitations: a canon within a canon; whole sections of Scripture are never preached if we follow it slavishly. But there are strengths as well: it forces us to deal with texts we might overlook; it nudges us off our pet subjects. (Someone said, “Most preachers have only one sermon; they just change the texts and illustrations every week!”) We grow with the lectionary, especially when we approach each text with fear and trembling and the possibility that we might learn something new, then share our discoveries with the congregation with the enthusiasm of a child.

Others start with the Scripture by preaching *lectio continua*, that is, straight through a book of the Bible. John Calvin particularly enjoyed this approach. If there is a theological argument being presented throughout the book, as in Romans for example, the *lectio continua* approach works quite well. It also gives the preacher time to allow Paul’s argument to build over weeks and months of preaching.

Another approach to doctrinal preaching that starts with the Bible is *Puritan plain style preaching* that occurred primarily in the early periods of American history. Jonathan Edwards was one of the chief proponents and practitioners of this homiletical style. Philosophically, Edwards followed Locke with an emphasis on sensation and experience. Theologically, he looked to Calvin with his stress on the sovereignty of God. Edwards’s own thought led him to a religion of the heart which anticipated Kierkegaard. But rhetorically, Edwards followed Peter Ramus and William Perkins, the

author of *The Art of Prophesying*, whose writings practically turned sermons into lawyers’ briefs with a very strict pattern of exposition–doctrine–application. The sermons often lasted three hours, so the preacher spent an hour on each section. The first was mostly exegesis; the second was a series of reasons and proofs on the doctrines in the text; and the third dealt with the use, the “so what?” of the text.

Last summer I tried a *Puritan plain style* sermon on Psalm 119 and found that people really enjoyed it. At the beginning, after explaining the style briefly, I launched into it. In the exposition section I discussed the Hebrew alphabet as the acrostic for this psalm and the mathematical and poetic precision with which the psalmist presented his message. Each bulletin had a page from Psalm 119 in Hebrew, so that everyone could see how each section began with a different letter of the alphabet and how there were twenty-two sections for each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Then I shared the emphasis on the law presented here in its historical context. In the doctrine section, we examined the fact that Torah is not a rigid code, that revelation is trustworthy and reliable, that God’s law comes from the Holy Spirit and quickens us with God’s covenant blessing. The proof of the psalmist’s response to God is that he doesn’t follow the law out of fear, but out of hope. It was important to illustrate this section with humor and inspiration to keep it from getting too heavy. The application section pushed us into how, specifically, we live upright and holy lives in response to God’s law and what that means for us who claim to follow Christ. Here practical advice emerged naturally from the passage. Again, well-chosen illustrative material is a must for this section to connect. Some might say there’s too much here for one sermon, which would be a fair critique if the congregation hadn’t been told about the *Puritan plain style* approach. That way they were ready to listen for the doctrines in the context of exposition and practical application.

Starting with Scripture to preach doctrine is a way of answering the first of three important questions believers are asking today: (1) Who am I as a Christian? (the personal identity question); (2) What do I believe? (the theological/spiritual question); and (3) What ought I to think, say, and do? (the ethical and evangelical questions). Preaching on doctrine found in Scripture gets us in touch with our true selves as believers. In many ways, it’s also the easiest kind of doctrinal preaching to do because it involves the least amount of homework. Good resources for this kind of preaching are Raymond Brown’s *Biblical Exegesis and Church Doctrine* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1985) as well as Walter Burghardt’s and Barbara Brown Taylor’s many books of sermons.

### SACRAMENT, SEASON, AND CREED

The second starting point for doctrinal preaching is found in the sacraments, the seasons, and the creeds of the faith. Here preaching becomes, of necessity, more topical, less expository, but no less biblical since true doctrine is rooted in the revelation of the Word of God. We know that not all doctrines are found explicitly in Scripture. But they are present implicitly. Doctrinal preaching that begins with sacrament, season, and creed still turns to Scripture for what it has to say on specific doctrines. It asks the question: What word from the Bible is behind these doctrines and what does it say about them?

Sacraments make a wonderful starting point for doctrinal preaching. Baptism, the sacrament of belonging and initiation into a life of discipleship, occurs frequently enough in the life of the church that a sermon on the meaning of baptism could be very instructive. Think how many heretical ideas lurk about what it means to be baptized. Likewise, the Eucharist suffers from numerous theological misunderstandings. There are many in the pews who long for a better grasp of the doctrinal meaning of the Lord's Supper. Preachers can use this as an opportunity to offer a teaching sermon. The biblical resources for the sacraments are numerous and easily found.

Church seasons also open themselves to theological interpretation in the pulpit. Think how many in worship on Sundays still wonder why we celebrate a season of Epiphany. There are still countless numbers who think that Easter is just one day, like the minister who rose one Easter morning and said, "I'd like to interrupt my Lenten series this week for a word about the Resurrection." Why several Sundays for Easter? What's Pentecost? Of course, Trinity Sunday naturally offers itself up for a doctrinal sermon. Often the lectionary will provide excellent texts for these theological themes.

Finally, creeds push preacher and congregation into opportunities for a deeper exploration of the Christian faith. I once heard Al Winn give an excellent series of doctrinal sermons on the Apostles' Creed that lasted several weeks. The Dutch Reformed Church has a tradition of preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism periodically. Here, the series lasts a year since there are fifty-two questions—one for each Sunday—which form a kind of theological lectionary for the preacher.

A few years ago I preached a series on the Brief Statement of Faith in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). I re-organized it to fit the Christian year and took one phrase (sometimes two) a week. In every case, I found Scripture that stood behind each doctrinal phrase. It was amazing how it worked, with phrases that even helped interpret the theological meaning of stewardship! As we added phrases we said more of the Brief Statement at the time of Affirmation of Faith each week until the last Sunday when we said the whole thing. The series lasted a little over a year. When we reached the last Sunday, the people were really excited—I'm sure in part because it was finally over!

Doctrinal preaching that begins with sacrament, season, and creed leads to either catechetical or polemical preaching. The former is for our instruction. The latter is to distinguish between what is correct Christian doctrine and what borders on heresy within the family. If preaching that starts with Scripture answers the question, Who am I as a Christian?, preaching that starts with sacrament, season, and creed answers the question: What do I believe? A good resource for this kind of preaching is Mark Ellingsen's *Doctrine and Word: Theology in the Pulpit* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983).

## CULTURE

Preaching that starts with the culture answers the question: What ought I to think, say, and do? This kind of doctrinal preaching is the most fun and, at the same time, the hardest and the most frustrating. It takes us from exegesis, catechesis, and polemics to apologetics, pastoral care, ethics, and evangelism. Doctrinal preaching that begins with the culture is a kind of *anthropocentric homiletics* which starts with the human condition.

Fosdick rightly believed that most people do not come to church on Sundays with a burning desire to know what happened to the Jebusites. They come with their own theological, personal, and moral questions. And they are looking to the church for answers—not pat answers that wrap everything up into a tidy package, but answers that wrestle seriously with the ambiguities of human existence. Tillich believed that often the church is answering questions nobody is asking. So it seems that the most responsible doctrinal preaching that begins with culture would be that which asks the right questions. And that starts with responsible homiletical listening. As John Buchanan once noted, "Part of what the preacher is about is knowing what the issues are—the questions being asked, themes which define a culture in a given time and place. The preacher must read and listen and see and participate in the world in which the congregation lives." The ear then supercedes the mouth and precedes it in preparation. No wonder one of David H. C. Read's books of sermons was titled *Overheard* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).

Human questions and human dilemmas provide wonderful starting points for this third type of doctrinal preaching. They divide into four different arenas of conversation: (1) theological questions of both a spiritual and intellectual nature; (2) pastoral questions that relate to the pain of human experience in human relationships; (3) moral/ethical questions that deal with both personal and global dilemmas; and (4) questions of evangelistic witness in the world as they relate to the place of the Christian faith in an increasingly secular and religiously multicultural world.

**Theological questions** are on the minds of believers and nonbelievers alike. Look at all the books out on angels these days. The millennium and its meaning for our time springs up in all sorts of non-church settings. People talk about heaven and hell. They think about sin and salvation. Their questions echo all around us. Any one of these topics of conversation can become a starting point for a doctrinal sermon. Augustine's and David Read's sermons are excellent examples here. Also check Fleming Routhledge's *The Bible and The New York Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

**Pastoral questions** that emerge from the daily struggles with human existence—death, divorce, depression, disappointment, grief, guilt, anger, suffering, fear, worry, separation—all offer jumping off points for doctrinal preaching. Fosdick, Peale, Schuller, and many others have been doing this kind of doctrinal preaching throughout the twentieth century. The danger to avoid here is turning our sermons into giant group therapy sessions where Pelagian self-help is the answer to our problems and not the Christian faith. For a good model for this kind of preaching, check out Joanna Adams's sermon "The Only Question," in response to a murder and suicide, published in *A Chorus of Witnesses*, ed. by Tom Long and Cornelius Plantinga Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

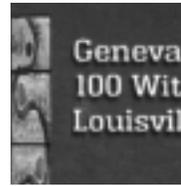
**Moral/ethical questions** are probably the hardest to confront. Here the preacher wades out into the deep waters of such topics as abortion, AIDS, homosexuality, hunger, poverty, war and peace, racism, sexism, the forgiving of third world country debts, environmental issues, and many others. Preachers in the twentieth century who have addressed these issues unflinchingly include Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Luther King Jr., and William Sloane Coffin Jr. See especially Coffin's *A Passion For The Possi-*

ble: *A Message to U.S. Churches* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).

*Witness and evangelism questions in a multicultural world* push the preacher into apologetics and mission. This kind of doctrinal preaching is probably the most challenging, especially in a time when there are more Muslims than Presbyterians in the United States. Interfaith relations are no problem for the church when we're working side by side with non-Christians to feed the hungry or build a Habitat for Humanity house, but they challenge the pulpit when questions of salvation, and the particularity of the gospel arise. What does it mean to love your neighbor and share the gospel when those around you think so differently than you do about God? Questions like these become good starting points for doctrinal sermons.

Sermons that begin with the culture's questions are the hardest to do because of the sheer volume of homework required to prepare. Often church members know much more than preachers about these various topics and, in fact, provide wonderful resources. Before starting make sure to ask: Is the pulpit the most appropriate place for this subject or would a dialogue in a different setting be better, where people have an opportunity for give-and-take? If it passes the pulpit test, then ask what doctrines speak to it, then what Scripture informs those doctrines? A journal called *The Living Pulpit* is by far the best resource for answering those questions and preparing doctrinal sermons that begin with either sacrament, season, or creed or with questions that arise from the culture.

Finally, our whole purpose in doctrinal preaching is not to make our congregations smarter theologically, but to help them encounter the living God and to be able to think and act in responsible ways in the world as a result of that encounter. ☛



**PRESBYTERIAN WORSHIP PLANNER, software edition** Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999. \$99; system requirements (Windows) Intel 486 or Pentium, Windows 95 or 98, 16 MB RAM, CD-ROM; (Macintosh) Apple Power Macintosh, Version 7.5.3 or later, 32 MB RAM, CD-ROM.

**LABORA WORSHIP 3.0** Louisville: Witherspoon Press, 1999. \$350 (with 25% discount to seminary students); system requirements (PC only) Intel 486 or higher, Win 3.1, 95 or 98, 8 MB RAM, 10 MG available hard drive, VGA recommended. *Reviewed by Stanley R. Hall, associate professor of liturgics, Austin Seminary*

I like my books ready to hand, available to deal out across my desk as I prepare a liturgy. I like to riffle through the pages, seeking the best match of texts, music, and ceremonial directions for a particular service. I just like books, for that matter. The feel, the idea.

The *Presbyterian Worship Planner, software edition (PWP)* is a set of electronic books, a library for worship preparation. It contains a variety of resources that can be searched and from which text can be copied and pasted into a separate word processor. The contents include the *Book of Common Worship* (1993); *The Book of Confessions of the PC(USA)*; The NRSV Bible; *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV, Years A,B,C*; and *The Handbook for the Revised Common Lectionary* (by Peter Bower). The PWP also contains *The Presbyterian Hymnal, software edition* (with its full indexes and features)—which you can open five times, and then choose to purchase separately for \$199. The *Folio Views* software used by Presbyterian Publishing provides the framework and search capacity for this package. The look of the screen is much improved since the first appearance of the *Book of Common Worship, software edition*, built on the *Folio Views* program. Search functions are smooth, with the liturgical calendar and Sunday lectionary text cross-references easily located in the various data bases. Text units may be blocked

and transferred into the user's word processor to construct an order for a worship service, or any document that would use the books of this library. PWP does not contain its own word processor, but it is compatible with Corel and MS Word. The price is within the usual retail range, although the additional purchase of *The Presbyterian Hymnal* will significantly boost the total.

*LabOra Worship 3.0* is a more sophisticated and fundamentally different package. While it includes a great many texts, this is not an electronic library shelf. *Worship 3.0* is worship planning and preparation software. The difference is significant. A series of templates (detailed orders of the services in the *Book of Common Worship*) provide the default framework for planning. A template may be modified from head to toe, and any version the user constructs (including full *Book of Common Worship* order) may become the planning default. All the elements of the order of worship—whether for Lord's Day, daily, or occasional liturgies—may be searched and drawn into a specific order. *The Common Calendar*, the *Revised Common Lectionary*, *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (with the melody line audio for the musically challenged planner), and an expanding list of other resources are available, or in the prospectus for the product. Desktop publishing-quality service orders can be produced, and an archive of orders—including a record of the use of hymns—may be developed. Several different services, or services for different churches, can be prepared, produced, and recorded. The program starts you at a blank monthly calendar where you select the date (Sunday or any day) and service (or a specific church) for which the liturgy will be prepared. When an order of worship is standard, with just the specific texts, music, etc. changing week to week or occasion to occasion, the template for the service can be called up in full for any date with a click: i.e., the *ordinary* of worship can be customized and made the program default for service preparation, and then the *propers* for the day are located, systematically delivered to their place in the order to be modified as desired. This service becomes part of the record or archive, and an order can be printed out with any degree of detail, and even with integrated graphics. A great number of such

regular orders or templates can be stored and used weekly or on any regular schedule. Secretaries, musicians, and volunteers will rejoice, rise up, and call you blessed.

Both the *Presbyterian Worship Planner* and *LabOra Worship 3.0* include a variety of texts for reference, books that are not for use in liturgy but for help in preparation. The list contained in the LabOra product prospectus is a good deal longer: it includes the *Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study* with annual upgrades, the *Directory for Worship*, *Book of Confessions*, the catechism *Belonging to God*, and the new study catechisms of the PC(USA), plus the annual music lectionary aids published in *Reformed Liturgy & Music*. The idea of updated resources related to the calendar and lectionary is particularly promising, but it is primarily a (very good) idea right now.

*LabOra Worship 3.0* has some additional liturgical resources, including the new metrical *Psalter for Christian Worship* (by Michael Morgan). A late 2000 upgrade will supply the popular *The Psalter—Psalms & Canticles for Singing* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993). This version 3.0 contains the King James Version of the Bible (it's free, after all), but upgrades this year will offer the choice of NIV or NRSV translations.

LabOra is a trademark of Duplo Data AS (Forsand, Norway), which is a group of Lutheran pastors with a very good program and entrepreneurial savvy. *LabOra Worship 3.0* is being refined in collaboration with some equally entrepreneurial American Presbyterians, so that it will be both customized for our liturgical needs (including our diversity) and expandable through upgrades and online access. As a liturgist, I am very intrigued. Here is a *Book of Common Worship* default-based program that is integrated planning and preparation software, and which those who do worship and praise services in contemporary idiom can also put to good practical use.

On the other hand, Geneva Press has a fine product, a set of electronic books that don't slide off your desk or get lost among your papers. The *Presbyterian Worship Planner* has a search capability that is efficient, with calendar and lectionary coordination. That

may be what you want. In either case, the software offers ways to employ liturgical knowledge, experience, and attention to the practice of the worshiping community. It is no smarter than the user. And none of it replaces in worship the way that only a finely bound and covered book caresses the hand and gives gladness to the eye.

**THE STAMP OF GLORY.** Tim Stafford. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000. 383 pages; \$15. *Reviewed by Terry C. Muck, professor of religion, Austin Seminary.*

Tim Stafford's *Stamp of Glory* is a historical novel about the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement in America. It is historical insofar as it faithfully tells the story of abolition, making

reference to and use of the personalities, words, and deeds of abolitionists like William Garrison, Louis Tappan, Theodore Weld, Frederick Douglass, John Brown, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and others. It accurately depicts Nat Turner's Rebellion and Harper's Ferry.

It is a novel, though, in that the main characters, Thomas Nichols and his kin, are fictional. Stafford creates a believable story around a former slaveholder who moves from Alabama to New York, repents of his complicity in slavery, and becomes an integral part of the religious anti-slavery movement.

*The Stamp of Glory* is told from the point of view of religious abolitionists, that is those who considered slavery a moral problem to be first addressed by repentance and conversion (and/or recommitment) to Christianity on the part of slave-holders and non-slave-holders alike. Not that those were the only abolitionists. One of the novel's strengths is its accurate portrayal of the abolitionist movement as a complex movement which included, in addition to the religious viewpoint, the practical abolitionists, some of whom advocated repurchasing slaves and

returning them to Africa, and political abolitionists who considered the primary solution to the problem to be a matter of making slave-owning illegal. One of the significant questions asked by scholars studying the abolitionists is how these different groups did and did not work together and their relative roles in the final result, the Emancipation Proclamation.

The story begins in the South (Alabama) in 1824 with the death of Thomas Nichols's father, Martin, who as part of his will frees his slaves. This move is disastrous for the economic well-being of his cotton plantation and his children's inheritance. With their inheritance made worthless, the children scatter. One son, Thomas, moves to New York, and the story follows his success in business, his conversion to Christianity and then anti-slavery, and ends with the beginning of the Civil War and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

It is a book worth reading for a number of reasons. First, it is a darn good story. Stafford has real skill at character development, plot construction, and description. He weaves together his scrupulously researched historical data with his fictional superstructure to make a believable, informative, and entertaining story. The danger of moralizing caricature in this kind of story is especially acute. It would be easy to make a moralistic hero out of Thomas Nichols. Stafford avoids this, painting a picture of an abolitionist who does indeed act out of religious conviction, but not without exposing his personal flaws and weaknesses.

Second, this is a period of both American and Christian history we need to know more about. In order to effectively address the issues surrounding the ongoing racism in our country, we all must know our lamentable history of slavery. The events of the book only happened 150 years ago, a short period in historical time, at least. Yet how many of us know the history of the abolitionist movement, particularly the role churches played (or didn't play)? Again, in order to effectively address the issues surrounding the ongoing racism in our country, Christians need to know our historical mistakes in this area so as not to repeat them and to know our

historical successes and contributions so that we can emulate them—and have hope.

Third, this book forces one to not only think about slavery but to feel its evil. There is real emotive power in this story, owing largely to its format as a novel. Music, art, literature, and poetry are able to capture dimensions of events that intellectual studies of necessity must avoid. By personifying slavery in his characters, Stafford makes us recoil in horror at its evil. By telling abolition's story we can see how slavery's tentacles reached into every political, economic, cultural, and religious corner of our society, sucking the integrity out of even well-intentioned deeds. By forcing us to identify with the experiences of individual slave-owners and lukewarm activists, we confront our own guilt.

Stafford has done us a service and plans on doing more. "*The Stamp of Glory* is the first of four books in my River of Freedom series," he says. "Subsequent books will cover woman suffrage, prohibition, and civil rights. Put together these books are meant to chronicle the ways in which faith interacts with social justice."

It is an interaction the church must continue to step up to if it is to faithfully address the problems of the day. 🙏

## RESPONSES

*Continued from page 26*

sition of the metaphorical nature of Christian theology.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) and Albert Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1969)—arguments for a black Christ. See also Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, as well as Grant, "Subjectification as a Requirement for Christological Construction" in *Lift Every Voice*, eds. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) and Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994).



SEEKING A NEW  
ENLIGHTENMENT  
AN ADVENTURE IN WILDERNESS  
AND SPIRITUALITY

WILLIAM GREENWAY

---

I. OF BUTTERFLIES

Scott and I squint as we step out of the dark shade of the pine forest and into the bright, cool mountain sun. Ahead of us, the trail cuts through a sloped mountain meadow for two hundred yards before disappearing again into the forest shade. Leonard is a few steps ahead and the other nine members of our party, some still

---

*William Greenway is assistant professor of Christian studies at Austin Seminary. Greenway developed the wilderness and spirituality course for the Seminary through his own interest in eco-theology and the psychology of religion.*

bouncing and cinching their backpacks into better position for the day's hike, are scattered out over the first fifty yards of the clearing.

To our right, the meadow extends a quarter-mile east and down some three hundred feet to a rushing mountain river. Across the river, the far slope of the drainage is heavily wooded. To our left, the slope runs up two hundred feet and ends at the uneven baseline of one-hundred-and-fifty-foot granite cliffs, which stretch the length of the clearing. A thin stream pours over a worn groove at the top of one cliff, splashes down its rocky face, disappears into the tall grasses, and emerges—a tiny stream flowing down the center of the meadow. Ahead, Tina and Seung Jin halt, help each other balance thirty-five-pound packs as they kneel, and quietly begin to fill each of our plastic canteens. It is impossible to see what lies above the cliffs. As the canteens are slowly filled, the group again begins to scatter ahead along the trail.

Tight clusters of white, purple, and yellow flowers bloom amid waist-high green and bronze meadow grasses. The buzz and whirr of insects punctuate the distant roar of the river, and innumerable yellow and blue butterflies flutter above and among the flowers and grasses.

We are silenced by the beauty. It is a silence of attention and wonder and thanks; it permeates this living meadow and sustains among us an invisible intimacy. In the midst of the intensity, Scott and I suddenly stop short, having felt as much as heard the soft, shocked gasp. At the front, now on the far side of the clearing, Mary, Diana, and Greg stand still and staring. We catch up and then, too, stand stunned.

The web, strung between two tall, thick stems, is intricate, delicate, perfect. It still glistens from lingering drops of morning dew. The spider, dead center, pivots and then quivers in place at absolute attention. The brilliant blue butterfly, vibrant and struggling, is hopelessly glued near the upper right edge.

Now we are silenced by simultaneity. Spider and butterfly. Gratification and terror. Focus and panic. Struggle against struggle. And momentarily, the bite, the numbing, the silky wrap, the slow death . . . and food for life. We stare silent. Horror, delight, awe, finality distance intimacy power helplessness understanding wonder incredulity . . .

The spider begins its advance. The intimacy becomes obscene. We turn into the dark shade of the pine forest.

II. MOUNTAIN CHICKENS

The encounter in the meadow of butterflies came on the third day of backpacking in the Rockies as part of a class I teach at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, "An Adventure in Wilderness and Spirituality." The experience contrasts symbolically in my memory with an encounter on our first morning of backpacking.

Our tightly bunched group is startled by a flurry in the brush. Ten feet off the trail, two hen-like birds scurry rapidly through the pines and back into dense brush. Winston, one of my co-leaders, shouts out "ptarmigan," a bird only Tina has ever seen before. But it is "mountain chicken" that sticks. A couple of us pantomime shooting the fleeing birds, and there's joking talk of barbecued chicken for dinner.

We're bunched and jovial and chatty, a bit nervous at the start of the hike. Having endured two days packed tightly into a van and having gone climbing and rappelling,

we've already begun to grow close. But we're not yet intimate and still enough with one another or with the rest of creation to be silent and attentive and respectful and awed when first we encounter these creations in their forest home. Not yet.

### III. RECOVERING SCRIPTURE

"Mary," I say with real feeling, trying unsuccessfully to bring home the depth of my concern, "I care about you so much more than my toaster." I wait expectantly. Mary is not under the misapprehension that I have some sort of fetish for my toaster. "Thanks a lot," she responds sarcastically.

Still sincere, but less stupidly, I try again. "Mary, I care for you so much more than my cats." Mary, knowing how deeply I love my cats, is touched. "Thank you," she replies, "that means a lot to me."

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father . . . So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:29-31). "Suppose any of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:11-12).

There is a clear hierarchy between humans and the other animals in the Scriptures. But animals are not toasters. To the contrary, the power of Jesus' affirmations of God's concern for us turns on recognizing how profoundly God attends to and cares for all the rest of creation.

Scripture assumes we know of God's passion for all God's creatures—for the sparrow, for the flowers of the field, for all the animals in the face of the flood, for the oxen getting their due helping, for an eschatological day in which the lion and the lamb shall lie together, for a day in which "no harm" to any creature shall occur on God's holy mountain.

But, betraying this scriptural assumption, we fail to stay serious when Paul says the whole creation groans for redemption, or when the Scriptures declare that God clothes the flowers in the field, that the trees clap their hands, and that the stars sing forth praise. We neglect to notice that *God delights* in the lives and glories of the flowers and trees and sparrows and stars.

In the beginning God surveys creation step by step and happily declares: It is good. In the first creation account (the "P" account), the picture of creation is explicitly vegetarian—none kill to live. In the "P" strand of the flood, animals *are* explicitly given as food, but that happens after God saves not only Noah but all the animals from the flood and, even more incredibly, as God establishes a covenant not only with Noah but also and explicitly with *all the creatures of the earth*.

This is only a sampling. For those with eyes to see, the Scriptures literally burst with testimony to God's delight and intense concern for all of creation.

### IV. WHITHER "EYES TO SEE"?

Why do we not have eyes to see? Why have we lost the scriptural concern for the rest of creation? Why are we not struck dumb with wonder when first we see ptarmigan

scurrying into the mountain brush? Why are we so shocked to learn that the ideal picture of creation unspoiled is explicitly vegetarian? Why are we surprised to learn that God established a covenant with us *and* the animals?

Why? Because we still live and breathe a scientific picture of the world bequeathed us by the Enlightenment. Before the Enlightenment, westerners thought that the world was alive with a hierarchy of spirits. There were vegetative, animal, human, and incorporeal spirits (e.g., angels and demons), and above them all was God. The creation burst with life and spirits at every level of existence—creatures which in varying degrees were full of emotions, intentions, pleasures, pains, and value.

Enlightenment science killed this picture of a living cosmos. We are familiar with the Enlightenment alternative: the universe is a great machine. The cosmos manifests various levels of organization with which we associate the sciences (e.g., physics, chemistry, biology, psychology). But all of these are understood mechanistically. Atoms and molecules and plants and ants do not have emotions or intentions; they interact in predictable fashion because they invariably respond to causal forces in law-like ways. The cosmos is like a finely calibrated watch.

This mechanistic picture of the cosmos was most obvious in physics, which at its simplest pictured atoms in space interacting causally according to the laws of nature. Today, chaos theory suggests that our knowledge of the universe may in principle face an insurmountable limit (an epistemological qualification). And quantum theory suggests that physical interactions may involve an absolute, if minuscule, degree of indeterminacy (an ontological qualification). But the basic Enlightenment picture of a deterministic system operating according to necessary laws of cause/effect connection still remains fundamental.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, science is an indispensable and incredibly valuable discipline, but it is not sufficient for understanding all aspects of creation. In particular, to try to see and evaluate intentional or evaluative dimensions of creation through the sciences is like trying to taste soup with your eyes—wrong tools for the job!

Enlightenment philosophers and scientists recognized that science presupposed mechanistic causal connections, but they found their first-person experience of free action and emotions too real to deny (e.g., free decision-making, or feelings of anger or pain). So they posited two realms of existence: a mechanistic realm of nature and a free realm of spirit (or "mind"). Humans were thought to participate in both realms, they are both body and spirit. Our bodies obey the laws of nature, but our spirits are free and emotional.

Convinced that science fully captured all other aspects of reality, however, they denied any spiritual dimension to non-human reality. Only hopeless romantics believed that animals had intentions or emotional lives. Descartes argued that animals were spiritless, biological machines. Of course, animals made noises and acted *as if* they made decisions and felt pain or loyalty. But their screams of pain are like the squealing of wheels, and we would be foolish to think that a squealing machine feels pain. Among Cartesians in the 17th century, it became a sign of conceptual sophistication to be able to experiment on animals nailed to boards without anesthetic, and to remain untouched by the screams of pain and terror.

The pre-Enlightenment picture of a creation bursting with spirit at every level, then, is reduced to the picture of a vast cosmic machine dotted with specks of spirit isolated in individual humans. Unsurprisingly, given the amazing advances in science in the 20th century, even this last bastion of spirit eventually came under attack. Most famously, Harvard experimental psychologist B. F. Skinner advanced his psychology of behaviorism. Skinner argued that there was no scientific reason not to extend the methodological assumptions of the natural and animal sciences into the human sciences. At the psychological level, the mechanistic cause/effect vocabulary of physics was captured with the equally deterministic vocabulary of stimulus/response. Most people were none too enthused about this deflating theory, but it is critical to note that ultimately it was rejected not because of any scientific inconsistency, but because it simply conflicted too profoundly with our lived experience.

Skinner was right to say that there is no *scientific* objection to behaviorism because, as I noted above, *modern science is methodologically prohibited from ever seeing intentional dimensions of existence*. To conclude that humans are not free, intentional agents because science cannot see free, intentional activity, however, is like concluding the soup has no flavor because your eyes can't taste any—wrong tools, bad conclusion. And on this ground we rejected behaviorism.

Inconsistently, however, we have continued to accept science's mechanistic conclusions with regard to animals. Of course, animals cannot directly tell us of their first-hand experiences. But, given the incredible biological and genetic similarities, and especially our ability to form relationships with animals and to engage their loyalty, depression, joy, sensitivity, and play (all relationships which presuppose free and emotional response on the part of both parties), it is entirely reasonable to distinguish animals from toasters qualitatively.

A scientist might argue that *in theory* behaviorism can explain all these qualities—that actually animals are impenetrably complex stimulus/response mechanisms. But that point is obviously moot because *in theory*, as Skinner correctly argued, behaviorism can explain all human behavior as well.

A philosopher might argue that emotions and intentionality are language-dependent and note that animals have no language. While one might reply that animals do in a sense “talk” to one another, one would have to admit that animals do not have *concepts* of “love” or “desire” identical to our own. The tie that connects emotions with intentionality and language, however, is less than clear. Tell my goddaughter's parents that thirteen-month-old Isabella, who doesn't yet talk, can't possibly “love” them or have her own intentions and you'll gain a first-hand sense for the less than polite reaction Skinner generated. Certainly, dog “love” is not *identical* to human “love,” but the option is not “either animals have exactly human conceptions or they're toasters.” Overwhelming experience indicates that Kiki and Sadi and Sherlock's feline love for me and for one another is at least *analogous* to the love I have for them or my friends.

In short, ever since the Enlightenment, philosophy and science, in contrast to the Scriptures, have taught us that animals *are* toasters. But today there is no good scientific or philosophical reason to accept this teaching, and our daily experiences with animals provide fair-minded thinkers myriad reasons to reject it.

All this to explain why we no longer share Scripture's clear understanding that God treasures and respects all creatures. All this to explain why we are shocked—and in the last two centuries of highly detailed and sophisticated exegesis have barely noticed—that in the first creation account none kill to live, or that God explicitly makes a covenant with all creatures. All this to explain why we still tend to see other animals as machines, absolutely distinct from humans and without intrinsic value or claim on our respect.

Why is this spiritually significant? Because it means that *in our “enlightened” thinking we have un-created in our understanding and consideration creatures which God created and sees and relates to as living and good and precious*.

In the 1990s “What Would Jesus Do?” was a popular slogan. I'd like to suggest another, “See As God Sees,” and suggest that if God sees a precious, living, sentient, unique, feeling creature, and when we look we see a biological toaster, then we're in severe spiritual trouble (and I've not even attempted to explain how we might discern deeper levels of connection to plants, to the waters of the rivers and the seas, or to the very rhythms and seasons of the land—all of which, too, are quintessential scriptural themes).

## V. DELIGHTING GOD

It's eight a.m., you only got to bed at two-thirty, and you've been up since six. But the gifts are finally opened and you begin to relax and delight in watching your two kids play with their very recently assembled toys. Amidst the rip of paper and flight of ribbons they've opened their two special gifts. Irrepressible smiles and hugs of thanks. They're not fighting yet, and the glee of giving and receiving has given way to the joy of play. Warmed with delight, you sink back into the soft cushions, and as you drift off to sleep you muse happily that, so far, the toys are still beating out the boxes as playthings.

It could be different. What if they'd not been thankful? Even allowing for the trials of early adolescence, giving gifts to thankless brats is no joy. Thanks is essential.

But what if the kids only gave thanks? Toys lie neglected as your kids spend the rest of the day finding ever more creative ways to say “thank you.” The joy here would be severely limited. You'd probably think, “Stop saying ‘thanks’ and play! Let me delight in your delight.” Play is equally essential to giving thanks.

The creation—and we ourselves—are God's gift to us and our gift to one another. God is eager that we—and all the other creatures—delight in creation. Sincere and utter thankfulness is essential. But just and loving play is equally essential (and strife and the abuse of the gift incalculably heart-rending). Like the expectant parent on Christmas morn, the God of love delights in our delight.

In “An Adventure in Wilderness and Spirituality,” we play and love and struggle and sorrow and attend intently and thankfully to all of creation—to ourselves, to one another, and to other creatures, even to the very rocks trod underfoot. Like the Israelites, we mourn all suffering and harm. But with new eyes we delight in God's architecture, God's splashes of color, God's intricate designs. And insofar as our delight

is mediated through absolute *attention* to creation, we find ourselves living out the Christian paradox of *agape*: our delight is mediated through self-forgetfulness, and thankfulness joins with delight and becomes a form of worship.

That silence of absolute attention and wonder and thanks, the silence that permeated that living meadow and sustained among us an invisible intimacy, and that silence which gasped at the butterfly, the silence of simultaneity . . . they were silences of awed joy and humbled delight. On our trip they were joined to wondrous experiences of trust and camaraderie and of discovery and carefree play.

The privilege felt so rare and precious that it was hard not to feel overwhelmed with guilt as we remembered those struggling with suffering. I frequently urged my students not to forget the inescapable simultaneity of creation fallen, but to remember the wilderness retreats of Jesus and Paul, to acknowledge that *they themselves are also worthy* to delight in the present and, in profound thanks, to accept the gift. The sense of undeserved privilege fostered utter thankfulness: the delights were embraced as forms of grace.

As we attended to God's creation, the scales of Enlightenment fell away, and we began to have eyes to see as God sees. In that meadow, we shamelessly rejoiced in God's delighted and delightful clothing of the flowers, we looked across the valley and saw the trees clapping their hands, and we reveled in our love and concern for one another. In our shocked gasp, we knew we joined God in seeing the fall of that butterfly, and with the passion of Paul we felt the whole creation groaning for redemption. Suddenly, the Scriptures seemed literally to burst with testimony to God's delight in and intense concern for all of creation.

Among our number, significant theological, political, and interpersonal differences endured, but they were sustained within a spirit of overwhelming humility and love. By the time we arrived back in Austin, we were all ready in various ways to carry into our ministries a sense for the spiritual dimensions of a creation crisis. Best of all, I believe, God saw our newfound ability to delight in the gifts of creation, God saw our newfound capacity to see as God sees, and, like the contented parent on Christmas morning, God delighted in our delight. ☛

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The "butterfly effect" of chaos theory, for instance, presupposes a highly deterministic causal system. And, at most, quantum theory suggests gaps of indeterminacy *in* the causal nexus. Not even quantum physics introduces a vocabulary for non-random and non-determined thoughts which might change the course of physical events (i.e., a vocabulary of intentional *action* in contrast to mechanistic *event*). Which means—for those convinced that they make free and rational decisions—that science describes only a mechanistic slice of reality. Indeed, insofar as science *presupposes* mechanistic connections, it is not calibrated even to perceive ethical, aesthetic, emotional, or intentional dimensions of creation (i.e., conceptually, the only possibilities remain mechanistic: either determinative causal connection or randomness).

## AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Robert M. Shelton, *President*

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Louis H. Zbinden Jr., Chair

Carolyn W. Beaird	Giles C. McCrary
Jay Dea Brownfield	David G. McKechnie
Diane E. Buchanan	Stephen A. Matthews
James W. Bruce Jr.	James D. Miller
Paul R. Debenport	William C. Poe
Joe B. Donaho	Leila L. Power
Marvin C. Griffin	Cheryl Covey Ramsey
Judye G. Hartman	Max R. Sherman
Bruce G. Herlin	Jerry Jay Smith
George S. Heyer Jr.	Carl V. Williams
James R. Hunt	Elizabeth C. Williams
Betty Wilson Jeffrey	

### *Trustees Emeriti*

Clarence N. Frierson, Weldon H. Smith, Robert B. Trull, Edward D. Vickery

AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
100 East 27th Street  
Austin, TX 78705-5797

<http://www.austinseminary.edu/>

Address Service Requested

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Austin, Texas  
Permit No. 2473

*Spring 2000*