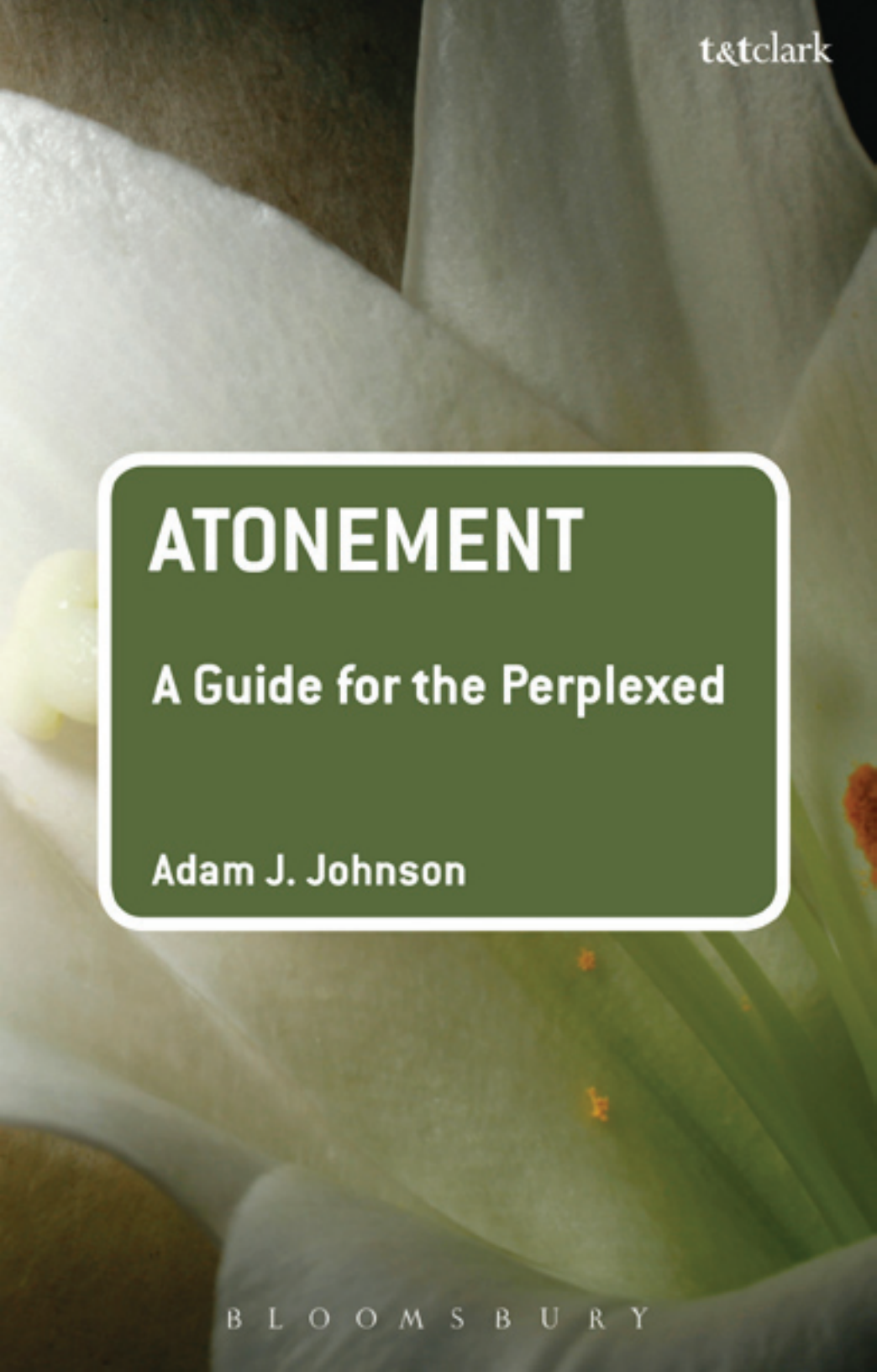
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ATONEMENT
A Guide for the Perplexed
Adam J. Johnson
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Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed

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I dedicate this book to my parents, Glen and Susie Johnson. They are in large part responsible for cultivating in me the joy, curiosity, creativity and love which I hope exude from this book.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AH	*Against Heresies*, Irenaeus of Lyons
CD	*Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth
CDH	*Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm
DCF	*Defence of the Catholic Faith*, Hugo Grotius
De inc	*On the Incarnation*, Athanasius
Inst	*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin
LW	*Luther's Works*, Martin Luther
MP	*Mysterium Paschale*, Hans Urs von Balthasar
ST	*Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas
TD	*Theo-Drama IV: Action*, Hans Urs von Balthasar

1

Mining the Riches

As I told my veteran pastor of my plans to do graduate studies in the doctrine of the atonement, a wry smile creased his face as he asked: 'So . . . which theory of the atonement do you believe in?' I responded: 'All of them!' The purpose of this book is to offer a more expansive answer to this question, sharing a vision for a fuller understanding of the atonement which is eager to explore, embrace and apply new aspects of God's work in Christ to reconcile all things to himself.

But by way of preparation, it behoves us to inquire: Why did my pastor ask this particular question? The questions we ask, and the order in which we ask them, are of great importance. They influence which premises we draw upon and which ones we neglect, direct the ensuing line of thought in terms of what will and will not be considered, and determine to a great extent which (re)sources we might turn to for support. 'Where we begin shapes where we will end up.'[1] Through the centuries, theologians, schools and branches of the Church began their accounts of the atonement with certain key questions, which were themselves built upon certain assumptions and premises. This led to well-worn paths of theological discussion and privileged passages of Scripture.[2]

My pastor asked this question because, until recently, it was a commonplace assumption in theological education, largely due to

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[1]Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 15.

[2]Note, for instance, the way that John McLeod Campbell follows the trajectory of questions asked by the Reformed theologians. John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement and Its Relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life* (London: Macmillan, 1869), 35.

the influential work of Gustaf Aulén, that throughout the history of the Church there have been roughly three main theories of the atonement.[3] This thesis suggests that the early Church held to *Christus victor*, the medieval Church to satisfaction and the modern Church to exemplarist accounts of the doctrine. *Christus victor*, a theory affirmed by such theologians as Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Thomas and Calvin, holds that the purpose of Christ's death and resurrection was to overcome the power of Satan – a work prophesied in Genesis 3:15, and expounded in more depth in Ephesians and Colossians. Satisfaction theories, developed by the likes of Athanasius, Anselm, Thomas and Calvin, diversely explore ways in which the work of Christ satisfies the goodness (Athanasius), honour (Anselm) or justice/righteousness (Calvin) of God in face of our sin, drawing upon such passages as Romans 3:21-26, 2 Corinthians 5:21 and 1 Peter 3:18 for support. Exemplarist theories – affirmed by Athanasius, Peter Abelard, Thomas, Luther and Calvin, and touted by modern theologians such as Ritschl and Harnack – hold that Christ lived, died and rose again in order to be an absolutely unique example for us, that through this example we might be reformed and restored to fellowship with the Father.

Familiar with this debate, my pastor asked his question because such categorization of atonement theories into three main types is the precursor for questions that seek to establish which of the

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[3]Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1951). Towards the end of the previous century, the tide began to turn against Aulén, in favour of holding to multiple accounts of the atonement simultaneously. Cf. John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992); Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality, and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989). My work contributes to this movement, providing a distinctly theological emphasis (that is, an emphasis building upon the key features of the doctrine of the Trinity and the divine attributes) as the basis for both the unity and diversity of the work of Christ.

Locating my argument within the trajectory of the last 150 years, one could say that mine is an emphasis on 'the cross as an event in God's being', employed towards a '"unified" atonement', combining the fifth and seventh trajectories noted in: Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Atonement', in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 191–6, 199–201.

theories one adheres to, why, and whether this theory incorporates aspects of the others or simply stands over and against them. Adherents of *Christus victor*, for example, might say that Christ offered satisfaction to God (or Satan) in order to rescue us from Satan. This loving work of rescue provides us with a governing paradigm or example for the Christian life (exemplarism), thus accounting for each of the main theories of the atonement within a single overarching theory.[4] However, one might emphasize a satisfaction theory, in which Christ's primary work was to satisfy God's righteousness. This also resulted in both our release from captivity to Satan and our debt of obedience to live out lives of righteousness within our communities on the basis of Christ's example.

More telling than the question itself, however, was my pastor's wry smile – for he knew that his question was a trap. Jesus' death and resurrection accomplished all three of these things: he defeated Satan, satisfied the goodness, honour and justice of God, and taught us to love God and neighbour by means of his absolutely unique and unprecedented example. Choosing any one of the traditional theories as an answer to his question would have received an immediate rejoinder in favour of the other two theories, accompanied by a list of great theologians touting the theory, and Bible verses supporting it. Not only is each of these theories biblical, it is also quite difficult (if not impossible) to discern which among them is pre-eminent. Did Jesus offer satisfaction in order to free us from Satan (emphasizing *Christus victor*), or was freeing us from Satan a mere accident of offering satisfaction to God (emphasizing satisfaction)? And was his example a by-product of these, or was it the focus (emphasizing exemplarism), as Christ sought to restore in us the divine image?

While there may be in fact answers to these and other common questions, there are better ways to engage the doctrine, better questions to ask at the beginning of our exploration of the nature and benefits of Christ's death and resurrection, which encourage us to have a balanced and proportioned interaction with the doctrine as a whole. To do otherwise is to risk delving into culturally significant but ultimately short-sighted questions of less ultimate consequence,

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[4]Graham A. Cole, *God the Peacemaker* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 233–43.

dooming such efforts to unnecessary inadequacy and shallowness. Different questions will lead us to new or less-trodden paths at dogmatic, historical and biblical levels, ultimately offering the possibility of significant new insights into and appreciation of the work of Christ. And they will entail significant changes for works building their inquiry upon supposedly competing or antithetical theories – a premise which sidesteps many of the fundamental issues within the doctrine, resulting in highly distorted and parochial accounts of Christ's work.

Before considering how else we might begin our approach to the doctrine of the atonement, we will take a moment to explore some of the reasons that the above approach is inadequate. I listed Athanasius, Thomas and Calvin as supporting each of the aforementioned theories. What makes this so interesting is that if this is true, we have theologians from the early, medieval and Reformation periods of the Church, each holding to a range of explanations, undermining both the theological and historical plausibility of Aulén's thesis. In a sample passage, Thomas writes that many things besides deliverance from sin concurred for man's salvation through Christ's passion:

> In the first place, man knows thereby how much God loves him, and is thereby stirred to love him in return. . . . Secondly, because thereby He set us an example of obedience, humility, constancy, justice, and the other virtues displayed in the Passion, which are requisite for man's salvation. . . . Thirdly, because Christ by His Passion not only delivered man from sin, but also merited justifying grace for him and the glory of bliss, as shall be shown later. . . . Fourthly, because by this man is all the more bound to refrain from sin. . . . Fifthly, because it redounded to man's greater dignity, that as man was overcome and deceived by the devil, so also it should be a man that should overthrow the devil; and as man deserved death, so a man by dying should vanquish death. (*ST*, 3.46.3)

The first, second and fourth points refer to exemplarism, the third to Thomas' development of Anselm's satisfaction theory, and the fifth to *Christus victor*. But if Thomas, perhaps the paradigmatic systematizer of the Church, holds these elements of Christ's passion in harmony with each other, something must be amiss with assuming

from the outset that these views are somehow in competition with each other. Perhaps atonement theories, rather than being seen as competing to offer a comprehensive and sufficient account of the work of Christ, are best understood as mutually complementary accounts of different aspects of the work of Christ, which together work to fill out the substance of the doctrine (more of this in Chapter 2).

The task of the Church, I suggest, is not to determine which is *the* theory of the atonement, or which theory of the atonement has pride of place among others. Rather, following Thomas (who stands clearly in line with the majority position of the history of theology), we ought to witness to the fittingness of the atonement: to demonstrate how the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ brings together a wide array of benefits for the sake of the reconciliation of all things to God, that we might have as full an understanding as possible of the work God accomplished in Christ.[5] Accordingly, one of the governing images behind this book is one of exceeding riches, of a treasure trove.[6] That is to say, it attempts 'to articulate a theory that explains the saving significance of Jesus' death without betraying the rich testimonies to the event of his death'.[7] We reject the pursuit of the one theory of the atonement that is at the heart of the biblical witness and allows us to account for

[5]Adam Johnson, 'A Fuller Account: The Role of "Fittingness" in Thomas Aquinas' Development of the Doctrine of the Atonement', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 3 (2010): 304–7. In support of my use of reconciliation as the broadest term for exploring the work of Christ, cf. I. Howard Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement: Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2007), 98ff. Note, however, Baker and Green's caution regarding biblical vocabulary and biblical concepts, pertaining to the atonement. Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 36.

[6]This is opposed to the image of heart, foundation or centre that one often finds in the literature. My thesis works well with other similar arguments, though as we will see I have a distinctive approach rooted in theology proper. For a project working along similar lines, see: McKnight, *Community*, 114. The danger with the images of treasure is that it is static, whereas a more perfect image would be living, moving towards life in Christ. The image of treasure is merely to communicate the riches, abundance and variety of blessings we have in Christ through his saving work.

[7]Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Atonement in Postmodernity: Guilt, Goats and Gifts', in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 369.

and systematize the others, and the ensuing temptation to fight skirmishes with other competing theories.[8] Rather, the goal of this book is to explore, understand, cherish and employ the abundant riches we have in Christ – the host of necessary, fitting and mutually complementary theories of Christ's saving work which are founded in Scripture and developed throughout the history of the Church. For 'it is impossible to designate this dramatic climax in the relations between God and man with a single, isolated concept. . . . There can only be a dénouement when all the dimensions of the mystery are before us' (*TD*, 229).

In keeping with the complexity inherent in the doctrine of the atonement, this book aims to delight in and employ the exceedingly abundant riches with which we have been 'overwhelmed [by the] divine largess' in Christ.[9] For in Christ, the ever-rich God took upon himself a human nature, fully entering our fallen condition and its circumstances, sharing those riches with us in the form of a multidimensional work of atonement, yielding a manifold salvation and reconciliation of all things. As Barth says:

> Although theology is certainly confronted with the one God, he is One in the fullness of his existence, action, and revelation. In the school of the witness theology can in no way become monolithic, monomanic, monotonous, and infallibly boring. In no way can it bind or limit itself to one special subject or another. . . . The eternally rich God is the content of the knowledge of evangelical theology. His unique mystery is known only in the overflowing fullness of his counsels, ways and judgments.[10]

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[8]That is to say, I resist 'the search for a controlling category', for these run 'the risk of restricting the other categories'. Charles B. Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 54. Jeremy Treat offers a helpful list of terms denoting controlling categories, as used by defendants of penal substitution: Jeremy R. Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 222.

[9]Ivor J. Davidson, 'Introduction: God of Salvation', in *God of Salvation*, ed. Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 4. This work, we might say, is a 'saturated phenomenon': one 'so overflowing in meaning as to be in excess of any intention'. Vanhoozer, 'Atonement in Postmodernity', 394.

[10]Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Grover Foley (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 33–4.

And nowhere is this more the case than in the doctrine of the atonement – for here we have the fullness of God reconciling all things to himself in the fullness of time, in the face of the fullness of our sinful opposition to him and its consequences.[11] Our theme is superabundant fullness of riches grounded in the eternally rich God and employed in the saving work of Christ.[12] For 'salvation comes from God, is wrought by God, and is for God', and it is by dwelling on the riches of this God wrought upon and for us that we properly understand his saving work.[13]

How does this approach differ from other standard approaches? In the way that it works with the given data of different images and theories throughout the Bible and the history of theology. Rather than focusing on these theories and their relationships as the primary task of the doctrine, our approach is to explore the underlying reason for the complexity of Christ's saving work – by rooting this diversity in the underlying diversity proper to the eternal life of the triune God, thereby following Barth in allowing 'the eternally rich God' to be 'the content of the knowledge of [an] evangelical' doctrine of the atonement.[14] By means of this approach, we will sample the breadth of answers we should give to the question of why Christ died and rose again. For while the answer is not simple, there is an answer nonetheless – an exceptionally rich, varied and multifaceted answer, rooted in the diversity proper to the God whose act this is, which sheds light upon every area of Christian doctrine and practice.

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[11]Throughout the book, I define atonement in a comprehensive manner to encompass the meaning and significance of Christ's saving work. As such, it builds on the origins of the word, 'at-one-ment', including both that which we are saved from, and that which we are saved for. In contrast, some works limit atonement to that which Christ saved us from by means of his death alone. The flexibility has to do with the fact that 'atonement' is a word unique to the English language, and as such is not constrained by the meaning of any particular term in Scripture.

[12]In fact, one could develop a riches theory of the atonement, in which the ever-rich God, in the face of our sin, became poor in Jesus Christ, that in him we might be made rich once more. As a subtext, one could weave in the themes of debt and repayment, recontextualizing what are typically interpreted as judicial themes within a framework of God's riches and abundance, rather than God's justice. This would make for interesting dialogue with the work of liberation theologians, as well as those who proclaim a prosperity gospel.

[13]Davidson, 'Introduction: God of Salvation', 14.

[14]Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 33–4.

A glimpse of the 'Riches'

My talk of dazzling riches may suggest a beautiful and inspiring picture, but I would not be the first theologian accused of overzealously painting on clouds, failing to deliver on the substance of the matter (cf. *CDH*, I.4), were I to fail in my task. A brief overview of certain key figures in the history of the doctrine will offer a down payment on this promise of riches, to be followed by further disbursements in the ensuing chapters.

Why did Christ die and rise again? Athanasius, as one part of a manifold answer to this question, writes:

> For what profit would there be for those who were made, if they did not know their own Maker? Or how would they be rational, not knowing the Word of the Father, in whom they came to be? . . . And why would God have made those by whom he did not wish to be known? (*De inc*, §11)

The dilemma, for Athanasius, is that it is monstrously unfitting for the Creator that his creature fail to attain its end. Specifically, it is abhorrent to consider that humankind fail to fulfil its purpose as a reasonable creature – to know, love and worship its Creator. We were helpless in our self-inflicted condition of collapse into culpable deceit and irrationality, so what was God to do? Athanasius' answer: 'What should be done, except to renew again the "in the image," so that through it human beings would be able once again to know him? But how could this have occurred except by the coming of the very image of God, our Savior Jesus Christ?' (*De inc*, §13). Through his death, Christ did away with our corruption (particularly that of our minds), and through both his life and resurrection, renewed us after his own image by revealing himself to us 'as the Word of the Father, the ruler and king of the universe' (*De inc*, §16). The atonement, in other words, is the re-establishment and culmination of God's creative purpose of self-communicating, that we might know and worship him thereby. It is a matter of changing the creature's condition, focused primarily on knowledge and worship of the Creator through our restoration as rational creatures.[15]

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[15]As Ivor Davidson puts it, God wills 'that contingent creation should know its creator still, should yet find its intended *telos* of peace and fulfillment in communion

Again we ask: Why did Christ die and rise again? Returning to Athanasius, as a reminder of just how wide-ranging so many doctors of the Church are in their account of Christ's work, we find him exploring the poetic fittingness of Christ's crucified position. Prior to canvassing Christ's elevation in the air as appropriate to one who is thereby defeating Satan and clearing the air that we might ascend to heaven (a strong affirmation of *Christus victor*), he considers the outstretched arms of Christ:

> Therefore it was fitting for the Lord to endure this, and to stretch out his hands, that with the one he might draw the ancient people and with the other those from the Gentiles, and join both together in Himself. This he himself said when he indicated by what manner of his death he was going to redeem all, 'When I am lifted up, I shall draw all to myself.' (Jn 12.32; *De inc*, §25)

While the poetic nature of Athansius' argument may seem questionable to the modern reader, the underlying insight is a profound one, echoed throughout the New Testament: that Christ died so as to reconcile all peoples with God and with each other.[16] While this may seem like a mere implication of the Gospel, I would argue, to the contrary, that it is the message of the Gospel itself. God, who lives in an everlasting triune fellowship, shared this reality with his creatures in the form of a twofold fellowship: fellowship between God and the creature, and fellowship between creatures.[17] We, in our sin, pursue distorted and fragmented relationships, which exude animosity and harm towards others, one aspect of which is ethnic conflict. Christ bore this sin and its consequences of violent exclusion, exile and persecution in himself, shunned by Jew and Roman alike, that he might restore all peoples to fellowship by means of their restoration to fellowship with God.

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with him. In the unfathomable love that God is, God does not give up on his world, but moves in mercy to bring it back to himself.' Davidson, 'Introduction: God of Salvation', 1.

[16]For an entry into this discussion, see: Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 573–86. While the biblical focus is on the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, this provides the seeds for ethnic and racial reconciliation generally. Cf. Timothy G. Gombis, 'Racial Reconciiation and the Christian Gospel', *ACT 3 Review* 15, no. 3 (2006): 117–28.

[17]Think here of Jesus' two-part summary of the law.

Why did Christ die? With Athanasius, we affirm that he died to draw the Jews and Gentiles to each other in himself; and with Paul we affirm that Christ's 'purpose was to make the two groups of people become one new people' through his blood (Eph. 2:13-15; cf. Gal. 3:13-14).

A third time, we ask: why did Christ die and rise again? John Calvin, as part of his multifaceted answer to this question,[18] writes:

> But that these things may take root firmly and deeply in our hearts, let us keep sacrifice and cleansing constantly in mind. For we could not believe with assurance that Christ is our redemption, ransom, and propitiation unless he had been a sacrificial victim. Blood is accordingly mentioned wherever Scripture discusses the mode of redemption. Yet Christ's shed blood served, not only as a satisfaction, but also as a laver [cf. Eph 5:26; Titus 3:5; Rev. 1:5] to wash away our corruption. (*Inst*, II.xvi.6)

While in the vicinity of this passage Calvin affirms his well-known doctrine of penal substitution, it is worth stopping to consider the significance of the above claim. God is most certainly loving and just, but he is just as much loving and holy – accordingly, he seeks to deal with our sin comprehensively in both its guilt and uncleanness. Jesus came as our sacrifice, then, not merely to pay a penalty (for sacrifices and penalties are distinct though related realities), but to make us clean, to 'wash away our corruption' that we might once more rejoice in being fit to enter the presence of our holy God. Christ died and rose again to make us clean and holy, that we might be holy as he is holy (Lev. 20:26; 1 Pet. 1:16).

Once more we ask: Why did Christ die and rise again? Jonathan Edwards, in a series of sermons on the wisdom of God, writes:

> So hath the wisdom of God contrived this affair, that the benefit of what he has done therein should be so extensive, as to reach the elect angels. . . . The angels cannot partake in [redemption], having never fallen; yet they have great indirect benefit by it. – God hath

[18]For a helpful treatment of Calvin's view(s) of the atonement, cf. Robert A. Peterson, *Calvin and the Atonement* (Fearne, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2008).

> so wisely ordered, that what has been done in this directly and especially for men, should redound to the exceeding benefit of all intelligent creatures who are in favour with God. The benefit of it is so diffusive as to reach heaven itself.[19]

We will explore how the work of Christ benefited the angels in a later chapter. The point to be made here is that Christ died not only for fallen humankind, not only to defeat Satan and his forces, but also for the sake and benefit of the angels in heaven! Scripture provides strong warrant for this incredibly broad understanding of Christ's work: 'Through [Christ God sought] to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven' (Col. 1:20). Why did Christ die and rise again? To accomplish a cosmic reconciliation – a work that would impact every aspect of God's vast creation, ranging from the earth groaning beneath our feet (Rom. 8:22) to the angels in the highest heavens.

In this brief section we have seen how three theologians from diverse eras of the Church construed the work of Christ in four different ways. To sum up, Christ died that he might (1) restore the image of God in us, (2) accomplish ethnic reconciliation of all peoples in Christ, (3) cleanse us from our filth of sin and (4) effect a cosmic reconciliation, including that of the un-fallen angels to himself. But in touching on these four aspects of the saving work of Christ, we have only begun to develop the many insights that Athanasius, Calvin and Edwards have into the work of Christ – not to mention Irenaeus, Gregory of Nazianzus, John of Damascus, Bernard of Clairvaux and so many other great theologians and pastors in the history of the Church – a treasure trove indeed!

But why, one might ask, am I drawing so heavily from the theologians of the Church, rather than Moses, Isaiah, John and Paul?[20] My answer is that this is a false dichotomy: as the biblical

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[19]Jonathan Edwards, 'The Wisdom of God Displayed in the Way of Salvation', in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Henry Rogers, Sereno Edwards Dwight and Edward Hickman (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 147.

[20]In other words, why not seek to follow in the footsteps of someone like Leon Morris, whose kaleidoscopic approach has strong affinities with my own thesis? Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 395.

references above indicate, I am committed to doing theology on the basis, and after the pattern of Holy Scripture. While the bulk of my argument is theological in nature, theological and biblical studies should be fully integrated: they are (or ought to be) two modes of faith seeking to understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the triune God of which it speaks. Both in theology and biblical interpretation, we fall into ruts and patterns of thought which limit our awareness of the whole of the Gospel in all its riches. These ruts and patterns run the risk of over-prioritizing certain passages, themes or books of the Bible, culturally induced misunderstandings of sources, or theological biases misinforming our reading of Scripture.[21] My theological focus is an attempt to glean from the insight of biblical scholars throughout the history of the Church, so as to equip the Church today with the vision and resources to strive for an ever-greater understanding of the Gospel and its God, and an ever better reading of Scripture.

And this task is vital, for Scripture's witness to Christ's saving work is exceptionally varied. For example, Christ is our ransom (Mk 10:45), propitiation/expiation (Rom. 3:25), Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7) and saviour (Phil. 3:20). He is the lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), who accomplished the defeat of Satan (Jn 12:31, 14:30), sought that which was lost (Lk. 15:3-7) and gives us the victory (1 Cor. 15:56). He accomplished our redemption (Gal. 4:5), made purification for sins (Heb. 1:3), paid our debt (Col. 2:14), abolished death and brought life and immortality (2 Tim. 1:10), brought about the reconciliation of all things (Col. 1:20) and asked God to forgive us (Lk. 23:34). He was delivered over for us (Rom. 8:32), became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13) and summed up all things in himself (Eph. 1:10). And to offer such a list is but to scratch the surface.

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[21]As Kevin Vanhoozer has made amply clear throughout many of his works, the reading of Scripture is itself a thoroughly theological movement. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2005); *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002); *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998). Cf. John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

I emphasize the theological task on the basis of, in dialogue with and for the sake of the Church's and my own careful reading of Holy Scripture. The present work is an exercise in theological interpretation of Scripture, intended to equip and motivate the Church to further and better study of the Bible by means of a systematic account of the doctrine of the atonement rooted in both the witness of Scripture and its interpretation by theologians over the centuries.[22]

Aren't we rich enough? A revised exemplarism

But is this vision too ambitious? Am I the overzealous neighbour who, when asked for a saw, replies: 'Well . . . do you want a table-saw, jig-saw, band-saw, chop saw, coping saw, radial-arm saw . . . ?' Don't we just need a normal handsaw most of the time – the kind you move up and down against a board to cut it in half? Why can't doctrine be more like that – why can't we just have one theory of the atonement which can be the basis for our preaching, missions work, statements of faith, etc.? This seems rather like the story of the astronomer who, after Barth's sermon, said: 'I'm an astronomer, you know, and as far as I am concerned, the whole of Christianity can be summed up by saying: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."' Barth's retort: 'I am just a humble theologian, and as far as I am concerned the whole of astronomy can be summed up by saying "Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are."'[23] There is something powerful in our longing for simplicity, yet unsatisfying as well, for those who have explored the depth of these realities. 'An account of the gospel which neglected theological metaphysics,' the depth and complexity of the realities

[22]My commitment to biblical studies is evident in my article on the Temple, which I plan to expand into a book-length treatment on the Old Testament foundation for a proper understanding of Christ's saving work. Adam Johnson, 'A Temple Framework of the Atonement', *JETS* 54, no. 2 (2011): 225–37. I intend to follow up this work with similar explorations, continuing to develop the role of the Old Testament in our understanding of the work of Christ.

[23]John D. Godsey, 'Reminiscences of Karl Barth', *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (2002): 321.

at play in the atonement, 'would soon falter in its attempts to speak of the God of the gospel'.[24]

We could answer the question of whether this vision is overwhelming in a number of different ways, but for our purposes two will suffice: (1) the traditional concept of 'faith seeking understanding' and (2) a variation of the exemplarist theory of the atonement. Augustine writes in his *Confessions*: 'You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.' Immediately following this petition, he prays: 'Grant me Lord to know and understand.' The ensuing few pages are filled with an impassioned plea for knowledge of God, culminating in: 'What a wretch I am! In your mercies, Lord God, tell me what you are to me. "Say to my soul, I am your salvation" (Ps. 34:3). . . . Do not hide your face from me (cf. Ps. 26:9). Lest I die, let me die so that I may see it.'[25] Why does Augustine implore the God in whom he already believes that he might know and understand him? What is the role of understanding within faith? According to Augustine, faith is by nature a relationship involving motion towards its object through understanding or 'full vision': 'When a mind is filled with the beginning of that faith which works through love, it progresses by a good life even toward vision, in which holy and perfect hearts know that unspeakable beauty, the full vision of which is the highest happiness.'[26] Faith is the kind of thing that moves towards a goal – in this case, movement towards God, through knowledge and understanding. Faith embraces understanding because that is its end, its goal.

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[24]John Webster, '"It Was the Will of the Lord to Bruise Him": Soteriology and the Doctrine of God', in *God of Salvation*, ed. Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 25. It was commonplace in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to argue for embracing the fact of the atonement, without the need to speculate about its meaning or necessity. Cf. many of the essays in: Frédéric Louis Godet, *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought, a Theological Symposium* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1901). To this, Luther would respond: 'It is not enough to know and accept the fact' – something the papists do all too well. Rather, 'one must also accept the function and power of the fact. If we have this, we stand unconquered on the royal road, and the Holy Spirit is present in the face of all sects and deceptions.' *LW*17, 223.

[25]Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3–5.

[26]*The Augustine Catechism: The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Bruce Harbert (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1999), 34.