

Who Is Jesus Christ for Us Today?

Part II
The Work of Christ

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Liberating Sacrifice

Solidarity and Substitution
in the Atoning Work of Christ

Paul R. Hinlicky

On the face of it, even the most cursory reading of the Lutheran Confessions would stipulate that the penal suffering of Jesus Christ, the righteous for the unrighteous, constitutes the Christological backbone of the article on which the Church stands and falls: justification by faith. Justification means passing, already now, through the final judgement of God to newness of life. Justification is *propter Christum*, on account of Christ in just this way, passing through judgment in union, that is, in *solidarity* with His cross and resurrection *because* there our sin and its wages, death, were made His, that is, as our *substitute*, so that His righteousness and life be made ours. His is a liberating sacrifice: if not in deepest solidarity with us whom He thus represents before God, we would not be sought as we truly are and found there in our helpless need; if not from God, and so alone in our place, the righteous exchanging Himself for the unrighteous, He would only die with us and we all, Jesus too, would still be dead in our sins. By His humanity He unites with us. By His deity He substitutes for us. By His personal obedience even to death on a cross He sets us free.

Already the Augsburg Confession, Article III, prepares the way for the central contention of justification by faith in Article IV with these sharply accentuated words: "He is true

God and true human being, who truly 'was born, suffered, was crucified, died and was buried' in order both to be a sacrifice not only for original sin but also for other sins and to conciliate God's wrath."¹ The accent specifies that Christ bore all actual sins, not only original sin. This amplification is not trivial; it is logically integral to the reformatory argument of the Augsburg Confession as a whole, particularly as it comes to expression in Article XXIV, where the critique is made of the sordid trade in masses performed for the living and the dead. This ecclesiastical merchandizing of the Eucharist was rationalized on the basis of a supposed distinction between Christ's own sacrifice on Golgotha for original sin applied in baptism and the priestly offering of the sacrificed body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist for the actual, post-baptismal sins of those paying for the Mass or their designated beneficiaries. To be sure, contemporary Catholics officially repudiate "the sacrifice of the mass" understood in this way, while continuing to affirm eucharistic sacrifice in the sense that by union with Christ communicants are incorporated into His self-offering as they arise in Him to newness of life.²

The reformatory critique, also for us today, of the *religion business* cannot be sustained, however, nor can in turn the doctrine be maintained that justification comes by faith alone in Christ alone *if we cannot understand theologically and so effectively communicate* His sacrificial work as sufficing for divine justification of the sinner who repents precisely in believing in the validity of this sacrifice as liberating *pro me*, that is, personally for me, the sinner—echoing the Apostle's language about Christ who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:21). The language of the Augsburg Confession is inescapable. Christ is, in Latin, called *hostia*, that is, sacrificial victim, and in German,

1. *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb & Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 38.
2. *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV: Eucharist and Ministry* (USA National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, 1970).

Opfer. Therefore, as Luther characteristically spelled out justification by faith Christologically: "all our sins are Christ's, if only they displease us, and His righteousness is ours in turn."³ The only controversial question might be whether Christ suffered for our sins as our representative in an act of loving solidarity which enables our participation so that we too die with Christ, or whether Christ suffered for our sins as our substitute, in our place enduring something so that we would not. In his essay, *Defending Substitution*, the British New Testament scholar, Simon Gathercole, however, rightly contends that both are true and he cites extensively from Luther's celebrated 2nd Galatians commentary in support.⁴ Indeed, Christ's substitution for us—*literally* alone and apart from us whom He represents facing God's eternal No upon the sin of the world—is the good reason why already now we can *spiritually* die in solidarity with Christ by surrendering to Him our sin and in faith rising to newness of life. This is the position that I will defend in this essay.

Ecumenical Considerations

As is well known, the 16th century dispute between the Confessors and their Papist opponents came to be delineated in another way, as the stark alternative: *either* the Lord's Supper in which the risen Lord comes to offer himself in his body and blood for struggling sinners purely as gift to sustain embattled faith in the joyful exchange, giving us what we do not deserve; *or* the Eucharistic offering by the priesthood expiating sins by offering anew the body and blood of Christ to an offended God to satisfy His just wrath at the sins of the baptized. In the process of arguing my thesis, I will also be pointing the way beyond this stand-off, at least insofar as contemporary Catholics actually do

3. *Luther: Lecture on Romans*, trans. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 121.
4. Simon Gathercole, *Defending Substitution: An Essay on Atonement in Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 15-17.

disown the view attributed to them in the 16th century polemic.

Yet notice: even in this 16th century dispute, as Robert Bertram once pointed out,⁵ there is no dispute about the necessity of Christ's sacrifice and indeed of its penal nature. It is needed for the liberation of sinful humanity from the wage of sin, which is death, from the tyranny of the Devil over otherwise indebted and so guilt-bound sinners, and, indeed, from the holy wrath of God on the sin that ruins the good earth and continues to afflict the baptized. Nor should there be any Lutheran dodging of this shared conviction of faith regarding the need of a sacrificed Christ for our atonement with God by dismissing it as a relic of medieval Catholicism; I have already pointed out how it is the very hinge on which the reformatory critique of trafficking in the mass turns. Or in another dodge, perhaps the language I have quoted from the Augsburg Confession might be attributed solely to its author, Philip Melancthon, in distinction from Luther, who supposedly held a different view. Historical scholarship has sometimes urged that Melancthon, under the influence of Anselm's so-called "satisfaction theory" of the atonement, introduced these thoughts of atoning sacrifice satisfying

5. "Quite a different danger that neither Melancthon nor Luther seems to have reckoned with, nor yet needed to, is the sort of reductionist Christology in which the saints are not so much promoted to christological responsibilities as Christ is demoted to theirs. In this alternative all Christ does is what the saints admittedly do, too: transmit, communicate, reveal us-ward—in that sense, mediate—a pre-assured divine grace that would have obtained anyway, with or without Christ, except that we might not have known about it. On such a view, from the outset there never was any real alternative to divine mercy like divine judgment or wrath, which only in Christ—that is, in God as a human being—is historically overcome for all other human beings. Against such tepid christological background the danger of the saints competing with Christ is probably a non-problem because by contrast with more classical Christologies this revelationist Christ has little to do that is all that unique and might not just as well be shared or delegated among his members." *The One Mediator, The Saints, and Mary: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*, ed. H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992), 261.

God's wrath,⁶ while Luther held to a more dramatic picture of routing the devil by the bait and switch of the crucifixion and resurrection (Aulen) or to an existentially immediate notion of actual atonement executed in the event of proclamation (Forde). But this is quite confused.

Some Contemporary Lutheran Confusions

First, the notion of a penal substitution is not to be found in Anselm, who thinks of Christ's sacrifice as a hyper-meritorious deed yielding an infinite surplus of credit available to sinners for satisfaction of their debt to divine justice. While the rhetoric of Christ's merit in His active obedience is surely present, it is the notion of Christ as the Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world in passive obedience that veritably saturates Luther's theologizing as well as his preaching—as Marc Lienhard has demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt, quoting Luther: "He does not give grace freely to the point of requiring no satisfaction, but for us he gave Christ who satisfied [his righteousness] in order to give freely, nonetheless, grace to those who satisfy [divine righteousness] through another."⁷ Thus for Luther, as for Melancthon, as for Anselm and Augustine, as we shall see: Christ by His filial obedience to death on the cross for us and before God as our representative is the mediator of redeeming grace. His gracious deed for us is not immediate but mediated, through the Spirit's Word and sacrament, to be sure, but not because of some linguistic abracadabra of performative utterance, a mere *translatio verborum*, as Luther put it against Laotomus; but the words of the joyful exchange are powerful grace to redeem

6. See Timothy Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philipp Melancthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), especially 183-90.

7. Lienhard cites WA 56, 37, 26; also WA 56, 37, 14: "It is Jesus Christ alone who has redeemed our sins by satisfying [his righteousness] and by paying for us." See Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ – Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 76.

where and when the Spirit wills because they communicate in reality the unheard of exchange that took place on Golgotha, the *translatio rerum*.⁸ His sinless bearing of the sin of others in fulfillment of the double love commandment is the surpassing act of righteousness in both active and passive senses. Bearing sins of others not His own out of surpassing love, He becomes death of their death and hell's destruction in a liberating sacrifice. He is the sinner's substitute, then, whose innocent moment of God-forsaken dereliction annuls for guilty others a foreboding eternity of God-forsakenness. Yet this substitution is not complete in the sense that a blanket amnesty, a universal fiat of reconciliation, so to speak, is pronounced apart from its further mediation or exchange personally to each and every believer by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Atonement or reconciliation thus actually transpires when by Spirit-born faith the sinner surrenders sin to the Lamb of God and appropriates His righteousness in turn as her own spiritual death and resurrection!

Second, while it is certainly true that Luther does not *only* or *exclusively* designate Christ's atoning sacrifice as saving satisfaction of God's wrath on our behalf, he does place it in the center of the other atonement motifs of victory over the demonic powers and example of love for disciples to follow, as is evident in his well-known explanation of the Second Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism. In any event, by the time of the second Antinomian controversy, Anselm's probe into the *necessity* of Christ's atoning sacrifice as just laid out, taken, however as a penal substitution, the righteous for the unrighteous in which a salutary present exchange is grounded, has become central, indeed, in Luther's maturing theology. Luther: "When Isaiah 53 [:8] declares that God has 'stricken him for the transgression of my people,' tell me, dear fellow, does this proclamation of Christ's suffering and of his being stricken for our sin imply that the law is cast away? What does this expression, 'for the transgression of my people,' mean? Does it not mean 'because

8. LW 32: 200.

my people sinned against my law and did not keep my law'? ... according to Romans 5 [:13], where there is no law there is no sin. And if there is no sin, then Christ is nothing. Why should he die if there were no sin or law for which he must die? It is apparent from this that the devil's purpose in this fanaticism is not to remove the law *but to remove Christ, the fulfiller of the law.*"⁹

If justification were through our works, Luther thinks, following Paul, then Christ died to no purpose. But Christ's death was purposeful. His work of obedience provides our righteousness. It is His righteousness that satisfies God. He died for our sins—indeed, He who knew no sin was made to be sin, to liberate us from this present evil age. What is thus *made* free to us was costly to Him, so that what transpired at His cross can and does come to us personally as the *event* of the *victory* of astonishing love, the righteous for the unrighteous, and so the liberating source of new life for those who believe.¹⁰

Yet for the last several hundred years, Lutheran theology has been deeply troubled by what is polemically mocked as a "theory" of "penal substitution." There are a number of objections here which are not all of the same order. One objection is to any "theorizing" at all about the mystery of Christ's work on

9. "Against the Antinomians" (1539), LW 40:274ff., emphasis added. How does this Luther differ from the Anselm, who argues against the cheap grace of mere pardon, even if on account of Christ and mercy: "then God is relaxing the penalty and making a man happy on account of his son... But divine 'mercy' of this sort is quite opposed to God's justice which allows nothing but punishment to be the return for sin. Therefore, just as it is impossible for God to contradict Himself, so it is impossible for Him to be merciful in this way" Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, and, *The Virgin Conception and Original Sin*, translation, introduction and notes by Joseph M. Colleran (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1969), 115.

10. We see this centrality of atoning sacrifice also in the contemporaneous Smalcald Articles, where Luther equated the doctrine of justification by faith as the chief article with the Christologically articulated doctrine of Christ's atoning sacrifice and in the motif of the marvelous duel of in the 2nd Galatians commentary. Indeed, citations to this effect could be piled up beyond measure.

the cross which, it is said, should be regarded with great reserve, proclaimed only as an accomplished fact and not inquired into lest, in our theorizing, we blunt the sheer divine force that in the event of proclamation crucifies us as Christ's cross is proclaimed.¹¹ Steve Paulson has argued this case with characteristic force,¹² but, in my view, he has great difficulty in reconciling it with Luther's joyful exchange, which he also wishes to affirm and which, as I am maintaining, is the event in which atonement becomes actual. But the joyful exchange cannot merely be asserted; for an actual exchange to occur through its proclamation, it must be grounded in Christ's obedience even to death on the cross and so understood, if it is to be believed at all, when believing consists, as Luther put it, in "making satisfaction through Another," namely through Christ the Lamb.

Another weightier objection, perhaps most influential since Immanuel Kant articulated it at the apex of the European Enlightenment (and very much on the soil of German Lutheranism!) is the Socinian one that substitution is not merely a morally suspicious notion, but a profoundly immoral one.¹³ *Suum cuique* – to each his own: that is the essence of justice. Substitution of one for another violates this fundamental dignity and moral equality of all human persons. I alone deserve the praise for my good works and I alone deserve the blame for my evil ones. Neither righteousness nor guilt is morally transferable. The very idea infantilizes believers and dooms them, as Kant put it elsewhere, to a self-caused immaturity. To give anyone what is not their just desert is both irrational and immoral! While

11. Gerhard O. Forde, "The Work of Christ," Seventh Locus, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. Two, ed. C.E. Braaten & R. W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

12. Steven D. Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* (London & NY: T & T Clarke International, 2011); See my review in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16/4 (October 2014): 489-92.

13. *Religion and Rational Theology*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, trans. A.W. Wood and G. Di Giovanni (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Kant's critique hits the target of a cheap grace view of substitution—"Jesus took the rap for me, so I get by scot-free"—, it is, as Sibylle Rolf has shown,¹⁴ deeply incompatible with Luther's view that divine, creative, surpassing love assumes the burdens of others, including the moral burdens of guilt and shame, by taking its consequences to oneself to spare another and provide renewal. This is divine and creative justice of which the philosophers know nothing.

A final important objection that has gained traction in feminist theological critiques was with characteristic flash and caustic precision articulated by Nietzsche: redemption by the Crucified is gruesome, indeed sadistic, for it imagines God as an offended narcissist whose fragile sense of honor must be restored by the bloody spectacle of a hapless victim.

Fortuitously, as I sat down to write this lecture, Pastor Kevin Haug published a critique in the CORE Newsletter of a contemporary ELCA theologian, Dr. David Lose, who, according to Haug, managed to voice all such objections to the traditional Lutheran confessional understanding of Christ's sacrifice on the cross as the good reason for the sinner's free and effective justification—and gave one further. As Pr. Haug quoted him: "In addition to these questions, the major problem with this understanding of God and the cross is that it enjoys relatively little support from the biblical witness. In particular, note that Jesus doesn't wait until after his sacrifice on the cross to offer God's forgiveness; in fact, it's the very fact that Jesus goes all over the place announcing God's forgiveness that riles up his opponents in the first place. Again and again, people take exception to Jesus' declaration that 'your sins are forgiven,' at various points questioning his authority or accusing him of blasphemy (Mark 2:1-12)."¹⁵ The force of this supposedly "biblical" counter-ar-

14. Sibylle Rolf, "Atonement," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther*, eds. Paul R. Hinlicky and Derek R. Nelson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), I: 62-3.

15. CORE Voice 4 (Summer 2017).

gument—as if the Gospel of Mark ended in chapter two! —is that we, not God, sent Jesus to the cross, because we couldn't tolerate a tolerant God of unconditional tolerance, as figured in Jesus. Truth be told, however, Dr. Lose is hardly pioneering such criticism of the traditional Lutheran confessional understanding of Christ's atonement as the divinely good reason why the free forgiveness Jesus proclaimed is valid and thus trustworthy. Indeed, already in 1984, Gerhard Forde anticipated Lose with a broadside of rhetorical questions: "Why should a God who is by nature merciful demand satisfaction? Is a God who consigns his Son to an excruciating death just to provide an example of what everyone already knew really a 'loving Father'? If God is God, could not the defeat of the demonic powers have been accomplished without the painful death? In other words, was the trip really necessary?"¹⁶

Dalferth's Trinitarian Correction of Modern Lutheran Confusions

These objections, then, from a variety of significant contemporary voices, require us to dig more deeply, if with Pastor Haug we wish in a more precisely qualified way to continue to proclaim the sacrificial obedience of the man Christ to death, even death on a cross, as the astoundingly good reason for the sinner's justification and transit to newness of life. The most impressive attempt in contemporary Lutheran theology to meet this challenge comes from the pen of Ingolf Dalferth, who, in his *Crucified and Resurrected*, undertakes a retrieval and reconstruction of the doctrine of Christ's atoning sacrifice, which advances understanding of the atoning sacrifice considerably by

16. Gerhard Forde, "Caught in the Act: Reflections on the Work of Christ," *Word and World* (III:1): 25. See further Burnell F. Eckhardt Jr., *Anselm and Luther on the Atonement: Was It 'Necessary'?* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992) and my fulsome critique of Forde's mature statement in *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom*, with a Foreword by Mickey L. Mattox (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 66-104.

reasserting the Trinitarian grammar of persons over an abstract dialectic of natures.¹⁷ There is still, in the end, the continuing irresolution of the 16th century tension, previously mentioned, namely, whether Christ's atoning sacrifice is to be re-presented as the Lord's testament and supper by which He gives Himself to faith for forgiveness, life and salvation in a movement *ad populum*, to the people; or whether Christ's atoning sacrifice is to be re-presented as the Eucharistic movement of the people of God in union with the self-donating Christ *ad patrem*, to the Father. Substitute or Representative? I am contending that it can be *both* when the properly Trinitarian distinction and relation of the distinct persons of the self-donating Son and the self-communicating Spirit is recognized. In Dalferth's work, regrettably, this old polemic takes the form of, in my view, misguided criticisms of Anselm and Augustine. I will not belabor here Dalferth's criticisms.¹⁸ I will be more interested in lifting up the contributions of these Latin fathers to our considerations of the saving work of Christ.

I am also presently more interested in lifting up Dalferth's own highly significant contribution to articulating the crucial role of Trinitarian "grammar," as he puts it, in rightly understanding atoning sacrifice as an event from God, in God, through God for us; thus as a *liberating* sacrifice. God the Father originates reconciliation in the person of His incarnate Son, crucified and raised, and communicates this reconciliation through God the Holy Spirit, who summons into existence a reconciled humanity by faith in this very divine event. God speaks, God is spoken, God is heard. The Father sends, the Son goes, the Spirit is given to receive the Son in whom we are restored to the Father's grace and favor. The Father in mercy surpassing wrath is the subject of reconciliation, the sin-bearing Son is the object of

17. Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected: Restructuring the Grammar of Christology*, trans. Jo Bennett from the German original, *Der auferweckte Gekreuzigte* [1994] (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).

18. *Ibid.*, 297-305. See my review essay in *Modern Theology* 33: 4 (October, 2017): 678-80.

reconciliation, the Spirit makes the world the audience of this reconciliation, incorporating into the earthly body of the risen Lord. Atonement is actual, then, when the Spirit unites us by faith to the crucified and risen Son: "God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father!"

Although the previously mentioned Sybille Rolf, in her state-of-the-art analysis of Luther's atonement theology, does not make the Trinitarian correlation explicit, her unveiling of this emphatically triadic, not binary logical structure of reconciliation in Luther easily could. It is not the abstract binary—deity and humanity—that poses the problem of reconciliation in Luther; rather, as Lienhard puts it: "...the Father sends the Son who obeys the Father and whose work is made effective, in the present, as salvation by the Holy Spirit. It is not simply 'God' who acts, but it is God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in the framework of a drama within God himself, with which human beings find themselves associated."¹⁹ Dalferth can accordingly take God the Father as the active subject of reconciliation and His obedient Son cooperator precisely as the passive object of reconciliation in that the Son had actively taken upon Himself responsibility for the sinners whose sins He forgave. Now from the beginning this event between the Father and the Son is communicatively aimed at humanity, where and when the intra-divine reconciliation that occurred on Easter morn when the Spirit exalted the Crucified to the Father's right hand becomes actual on the earth as the same Spirit, as Rolf puts it, raises to "*faith* holding on to Christ." That is her point. Coming to faith at the Spirit's call through the joyful exchange is "the means and reality of reconciliation" in that faith is "not only the subjective adherence to the event of salvation but also, for its part, designates an impartation of God and man as a communicative process."²⁰

19. He speaks also of the immanent Trinity... "the saving act of God in history only translates what God is from all eternity..." Lienhard, *Martin Luther: Witness*, 319.

20. Rolf, "Atonement," 63-64.

But typically in the western tradition we do not think of God in the dramatic and interactive way of these Trinitarian relations. Instead, we typically think in terms of natures, of divine and human natures, what the Divinity does and what the humanity does. But natures cannot do anything; they are just concepts of possibilities, by which we classify things and agents. Accordingly, this habit of thought cannot but obscure atonement as an act from God, in God, through God, for us, as parsed by the Gospel narrative of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Consequently, when thinking in terms of natures as if they were agents, if we want to emphasize objectively what God has done for us we speak of an infinite satisfaction of the justice of God by the voluntary suffering of the innocent God-man as something only divine nature provides. Or, if we want to speak of the moral transformation of the believer, we speak of the perfect God-consciousness of the perfect human being, Jesus, who died committing Himself to the heavenly Father—something only humanity can do. These are the well-known objective and subjective "theories" of the atonement in the Western tradition. They represent the well-known *alternatives* of conservative and liberal theologies today, which can hardly be reconciled. We get into this bind, however, from the root error in thinking of natures as if agents.

When Gustav Aulén famously identified the predominance in Luther by contrast of the Eastern patristic *Christus Victor* motif, he was not only calling attention to the apocalyptic framework of Luther's atonement theology, but also implicitly referencing Luther's vital Trinitarianism. Dalferth, following Eberhard Jüngel, is excavating and retrieving Luther's consistent Trinitarianism. In this way of thinking, the question of reconciliation is not the metaphysical riddle of synthesizing or compatibilizing divine and human natures, but how the reconciliation of the Father and the Son through cross and resurrection becomes ours by the ministry of their Spirit. The biblical answer, of course, is by faith, indeed by faith alone, which personally appropriates this reconciliation by dying in Christ to sin to rise

in Him to newness of life. But here the work of the Holy Spirit must be accented; faith here must be divine faith, work and gift of the Spirit. Not surprisingly, just here is the juncture at which Lutheran and Catholic antagonists have so often talked past each other, as we shall see in our considerations now of Anselm and Augustine.

Anselm and Augustine on Sacrifice

Consider the following synopsis of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Man):

Human beings were created by God to live and be happy. But man (human beings), through Adam, sinned. For that sin man must adequately be punished: Only man could render satisfaction for the offense against God of deliberate disobedience. But only God could possibly render satisfaction for all humanity. Hence, only a God-man could by his death render appropriate and sufficient satisfaction to save humanity. Therefore, God freely took on human nature and died on the cross.²¹

Much as with contemporary objections stemming from Kant, Nietzsche and Lose, in Anselm's time Jews, Muslims and the Greek philosophy to which they appealed questioned why God chose to die as a man in such a degrading way and what kind of alleged salvation this could provide. If God is all-powerful and able to restore the world by other means, why would He chose such a method? Why the incarnation? Why the cross of the incarnate One? Why the divine passive in Jesus' passion predictions, "it is necessary"? Why the "cup" He consents to drink in Gethsemane? The "ransom" of His life?

To the objection that pursuing such questions licenses illicit theorizing which blunts the brute force of proclamation, Anselm, following Augustine, would reply, *credo ut intelligam*,

21. McGreal, Ian P. *Saint Anselm of Canterbury*. Great Thinkers of the Western World. Annual 1999, 81.

"I believe in order that I understand" – for believing without understanding is blind. Already Paul the Apostle repeatedly chastised willfully blind believers with the rhetorical question, "Do you not know...?" As in our time, anti-intellectual barbarians in a bad defense of poorly understood orthodoxy urge believers to ask no questions but just to submit to the authority claimed by sacred tradition or sacred preaching. But these are sacred cows. Little do such theologians understand that objections are trials of faith permitted by God to purify and deepen faith. For the believer who understands why a crucified Christ is needful for her eternal joy takes the delight in this understanding as befits a rational being made for heaven and knows how on earth to cooperate with it intelligently by presenting the body for service as the living sacrifice of rational worship. An ignorant believer on the other hand merely submits to some authority and is Christian by accident; under duress he can and will believe anything.

If we grant that faithful theological understanding which is orthodox in intention wants to know why for our good the gospel offers us a crucified Christ as the power of salvation for all who believe, I confess that, to my surprise, I have learned in the past year that I am not the only contemporary Lutheran theologian willing to make a qualified defense of Anselm's question, if not entirely to his answer to it. Ted Peters' defense of Christ's priestly work of atonement,²² with an assist²³ but also a correction of René Girard²⁴ really stands out. Because of Peters' strong cognitive claim that God is the future of the world, a qualified defense of Anselm's *Cur deus homo*²⁵ is and can be made. Peters disputes the caricature of Anselm's God as a

22. Ted Peters, *God – The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*, 3rd edition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015). The following discussion is drawn from my "Cross, Contestation, and Consummation: An engagement with Ted Peters' *God – The World's Future*," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*.

23. *Ibid.*, 87.

24. *Ibid.*, 327, 393-94.

25. *Ibid.*, 409.

narcissistic feudal lord whose ego has been offended and whose subjective sense of personal honor must be appeased by a blood offering demonstrating and so re-establishing proper fear. He rightly understands Anselm's inquiry into the justice of God's mercy within a covenantal context;²⁶ the concern is with God's office as Creator, not His ego, in a world that manifestly —Romans 1:18! — merits only punishment for the ruin of sin. How, under these conditions, is redeeming grace possible? Peters sees that as such Anselm's motif of Christ's obedience in voluntary suffering for the sake of others to this extent backs Luther's "joyful exchange" of human sin and Christ's righteousness,²⁷ because it explains Christ's righteousness not as a quiescent quality of His divine nature but as the fruit of His personal act of obedience in fulfillment of the double love commandment. Jesus thus abolished the law as condemnation, not by dictate, even by dictate of "grace," but because out of grace He ethically fulfilled the law of love,²⁸ indeed, over-fulfilled it as the innocent *sin-bearer*²⁹ who for us, in fidelity to God, met and surpassed God's righteous wrath on the ruin of His creation, opening up a redemptive new creation.

Peters' Lutheran reading of atonement differs from Anselm's notion of Christ as innocent *punishment-bearer*, whose surplus merit is made available to the needy sinner for their satisfaction of God's justice through the sacramental system; it differs in that Christ's obedience is seen primarily in his sin-bearing solidarity of love which victoriously explodes to pieces finally every calculating scheme of justice before God on the principle of *suum cuique*. In Christ who righteously bears the burden of unrighteousness, God gives the guilty who believe what is *not* deserved! Yet He does so *justly* because Christ's free obedience to death does in humanity and for humanity what it cannot do

26. Ibid., 412.

27. Ibid., 413, 452.

28. Ibid., 414.

29. Ibid., 416.

for itself. Only so can justification really be *propter Christum*,³⁰ on Christ's *account*. Likewise, only so does Christ's gift of self in sin-bearing substitution for others —especially in Luther's version—undo the scapegoating that goes back to Adam (Genesis 3: 12) once and for all.³¹ His sacrifice turns sacrifice once and for all into His own, unique and all-sufficient substitution for others, no longer self-love seeking to escape the consequences of its own sin by off-loading blame with its punishment on to others. The turning of human subjectivity from doer of scapegoating to recipient of sacrificial gift comes about by union with Christ³² who is thus affirmed as risen, victorious and present in faith.³³ Indeed, He can be present in faith for Peters because His resurrection is an objective event in history,³⁴ a "miracle."³⁵ He comes presently to faith as the very One who he was in history³⁶ so that the joyful exchange with Christ in Word and Sacraments is not an impersonal appropriation of merit but a personally transformative unification with Christ in His cross and resurrection, a Spirit-worked conformation to Christ. And so the Christian is Christian not only in name or by accident but as one now freed to love in deed, becoming a "little Christ" to the neighbor.

Anselm was appropriating Augustine's seminal reflections on Christ's sacrifice as mediation to humanity in humanity of divine salvation. In Book X of the *Confessions*, Augustine explains, "a mediator between God and man must have something in common with God and something in common with man. For if in both these points he were like men, he would be far from God; and if in both these points he were like God, he would be

30. Ibid., 435.

31. Ibid., 419-20.

32. Ibid., 422.

33. Ibid., 446.

34. Ibid., 375.

35. Ibid., 604.

36. Ibid., 614.

far from men. In neither case could he be a mediator." Happily, "there is a true Mediator... Like men he was mortal: like God, he was just. And because the reward of the just is life and peace, he came so that by his own justness, which is his union with God, he might make null the death of the wicked whom he justified, by choosing to share their death... He who alone was free among the dead, for he was free to lay down his life and free to take it up again, was for us both Victor and Victim in your sight, and it was because he was the Victim that he was also the Victor. In your sight he was for us both Priest and Sacrifice, and it was because he was the Sacrifice that he was also the Priest."³⁷ We see in this passage how Augustine prepares the ground for Anselm by thinking in the characteristic Western way in terms of divine and human nature which must somehow combine forces to mediate reconciliation. Yet Augustine, in distinction from Anselm, sees the atoning power of the Mediator's cross in the free choice to share the death of the wicked (not then in the infinite value of the divine nature as such). The God-man offers His sinless self in the place of sinful others as their substitute.

Later in life, Augustine expanded on the foregoing as follows:

Who then is so righteous and holy a priest as the only Son of God, who had no need of sacrifice to purge his own sins, either original or the sins which are added in the course of human life? And what could he take more fittingly from men to offer on their behalf than human flesh? And what is more suitable for such sacrificial offering than mortal flesh? And what was so pure for purifying the vices of mortals than the flesh born without any infection of fleshly lust within and from the womb of the Virgin? And

37. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin Classics Edition (New York: Penguin, 1961), X: 43. There are two other comments referring to Christ as our mediator in *Confessions* XI.2 and XI.29. Thanks to Sarah Hinlicky Wilson for providing these references.

what could more acceptably be offered and received than the flesh of our Sacrifice, made the Body of our Priest? Since there are four things to be considered in any sacrifice: to whom it is offered, by whom it is offered, what it is that is offered, and for whom it is offered, so the One True Mediator, who reconciles us to God by the sacrifice of peace, remained one with him to whom he offered; made one in himself those for whom he offered; and was himself both the offerer and the thing which was offered.³⁸

Both/and, not either/or! For a priest who offers himself once for all is a new thing in the world, no longer literally either priest alone or sacrificial victim. He is the new thing in the world to which the Hebrew prophets pointed when they informed Israel that God desired mercy, not sacrifice. So Augustine, in the light of Christ, revises sacrifice: "The visible sacrifice is the sacrament, the sacred sign, of the invisible sacrifice... what is generally called sacrifice is really a *sign* of the true sacrifice. Mercy is, in fact, the true sacrifice."³⁹ Or again:

So then, the true sacrifices are acts of compassion, whether towards ourselves or towards our neighbors, when they are directed towards God; and acts of compassion are intended to free us from misery and thus to bring us to happiness... This being so, it immediately follows that the whole redeemed community, that is to say the congregation and fellowship of the saints, is offered to God as a universal sacrifice, through the great Priest who offered himself in his suffering for us—so that we might be the Body of so great a head—under the form of a servant. For it was this form he offered, and in this form he was offered, because it is under

38. Augustine, *On the Trinity* in Schaff, P. & Wace, H. eds. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), IV.14.19.

39. Augustine, *City of God* in Schaff, P. & Wace, H. eds. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), II.10.5. My italics.

this form that he is the Mediator, in this form he is the Priest, in this form he is the Sacrifice.⁴⁰

In the form of a servant moved by boundless compassion, Augustine's Christ fulfills and so surpasses the signs of Torah and Temple, so that His substitution for us might be likewise be fulfilled in us. Both/and, not either/or! "Therefore, the death and resurrection of Christ are mysteries and signs from which we learn to sacrifice ourselves. His resurrection in the flesh is a sign of the resurrection of our souls when they are released from ungodliness to new life; it is also a type, or foreshadowing, of what will happen to our bodies after death."⁴¹ Augustine explains:

Man learns also how far he has gone away from God; and what it is worth to him as a pain to cure him, when he returns through such a Mediator, who both as God assists men by His divinity, and as man agrees with men by His weakness. For what greater example of obedience could be given to us, who had perished through disobedience, than God the Son obedient to God the Father, even to the death of the cross? Nay, wherein could the reward of obedience itself be better shown, than in the flesh of so great a Mediator, which rose again to eternal life? It belonged also to the justice and goodness of the Creator that the devil should be conquered by the same rational creature which he rejoiced to have conquered, and by one that came from that same race which, by the corruption of its origin through one, he held altogether.⁴²

"God the Son obedient to God the Father, even to the death of the cross" – so *justly* the ancient deceiver is "conquered" and his imprisoned set free. Freed, liberated – as Augustine puts it, "We, then, now put faith in things done in time on our account,

40. *City of God*, X: 6.

41. *On the Trinity*, IV: 3.6.

42. *Ibid.*, XIII: 17.22.

and by that faith itself we are cleansed."⁴³ Thus Christ's once for all substitution not only delivers from the guilt of sin, but this costly grace begins the eschatological work of delivering from the powers of sin and death by drawing us to Him to become living sacrifices, members of the body of which Christ is the head. Christ's sacrificial substitution for us becomes actual reconciliation in us when we learn by faith to sacrifice ourselves in lives of compassion for others, little Christs to neighbors in need. We learn this in life and in death as the Spirit joins us to the communion in Christ's body and blood. Kant's argument, then, is not truly with the Christian who believes herself recipient of unmerited grace, but with Christ the donor of it. In this Christological way, Augustinian teaching outbids Kant's moralistic objection by a magnitude. In giving Himself, the righteous for the unrighteous, in humble obedience to His Abba – Father, Christ fulfills the double-love commandment and so justly gives to sinners what they do not deserve: peace with God. Furthermore, He gives His own Spirit that reconciled sinners may receive this gift precisely by surrendering sin to the Lamb in exchange for His righteousness, giving God His due glory for seeking us in His Son and finding us in His Spirit. What greater moral accountability can be imagined than the Christian's daily dying to sin just because Christ has died for their sins? What greater justice than Christ's self-offering, harbinger from God of a new humanity?

Can you credit that, Nietzsche asked? Precisely that astonishing justice of grace in Christ's liberating sacrifice is what Nietzsche found incredible. "Suddenly," he wrote, "we stand before the paradoxical and horrifying expedient that afforded temporary relief for tormented humanity, that stroke of genius on the part of Christianity: God himself sacrifices himself for the guilt of mankind, God himself makes payment to himself, God as the only being who can redeem man from what has become unredeemable for man himself—the creditor sacrifices

43. *Ibid.*, IV: 18.24.

himself for his debtor, out of love (can one credit that?), out of love for his debtor!"⁴⁴ Can you credit that? Because he could not, Nietzsche also could not think in the Trinitarian way of atonement as an event from God, in God, through God for us. Unable to think this way, he produced in place of the genuinely Christian knowledge of God the caricature of the heavenly big bully whose bruised ego is assuaged by a blood offering. As you believe God, so you have God. We have here a fork in the road: the Christ crucified, a folly to Greeks and a stone of stumbling to Jews. But for us who are being saved the critique misses its target by a magnitude.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with mandates for preaching and teaching.

1. *Justification* by faith *not* warranted by Christ's gift of His sinless self in place of sinners before God is, well, unwarranted and hence cheap grace which annuls the law by fiat rather than fulfills the law by an obedience that overcomes its condemnation for those who repent and believe, precisely in the new thing in the world, the righteousness of Christ "who gave himself for our sins *to set us free* from the present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). Justification by faith is warranted by Christ's *liberating* sacrifice.

2. Justification *by faith* that is not the sovereign work and gift of the same *Holying* Spirit who drove Jesus into battle with the unclean spirits is an ideology of substitution for the religion business, not the apocalyptic reality which incorporates into itself so that, with the apostle, believers can and do say: "I am crucified to the world and the world to me!" This is the *holy* "freedom for which Christ has set us free!"

44. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967) # 92.

3. Justification by faith *propter Christum* means that Christ's sacrifice for us precedes and grounds Christ sacrifice in us, but reconciliation or atonement is not actual in the event of its mere proclamation but rather in its Holy Spirit reception by repentant faith which actually surrenders, i.e. sacrifices sin to Christ and receives His particular righteousness in its place as divine gift. This union with Christ happens as the Spirit incorporates us into the earthly body of the crucified and risen Lord.

4. We get tangled into knots when we think that the problem of reconciliation in Christ is how to conciliate finite and infinite natures. What separates us from God is not finitude but sinful dis-ease with finitude, the serpent's false promise, *sicut deus eritis*. Our need of the mediation of a crucified Christ is to overcome sin and so be at peace with our finitude before God's gracious majesty.

5. We think Christ's work of atonement well when we think of an historical event for us from God the Father, in God the Son, through God the Spirit. The atoning sacrifice of Christ for us is indeed first of all represented as His testament and gift grounded in what He alone did in our place. But just because this gift unifies us with Christ, we too in the power of His Spirit given to us too present our bodies as living sacrifices in the sacrifice of compassion for others to the glory of God. This loving sacrifice of praise in union with Christ and so by the grace and power of His Spirit is represented in the Eucharist in which Christ's work of reconciliation becomes actual in the world. These are not alternatives, not an either/or. They are the Christological and Pneumatological dimensions of the Father's reconciliation of the world—both/and!