

# Atonement and Violence

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## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the significance of the Christian doctrine of the atonement in relation to violence. That violence is very much a part of human beings is self-evident. From the murder of Abel to the present, human history is soaked in blood—so much so that we can say with Sigmund Freud that we are *homo homini lupus*, “Man is a wolf to man.” i[1] Karl Barth said, “There exists in every man a very deep-seated and almost original evil and lust to kill. The common murderer or homicide is simply the one in whom the wolf slips the chain.” ii[2] We shall explore the origins of our violence later. These references are enough to describe what has been happening in our history, and in recent current events from the killings in our schools, to the terrorist attacks not only in the United States but around the world.

As I ponder our human propensity for violence, I wonder what our faith has to say about it. The Bible itself is filled with stories of violence. Sometimes these are graphically told, as we encounter in the Book of Judges. The centerpiece of our faith, the act of Atonement, was an act of violence. Whatever meaning and interpretation we give to the Atoning death of Jesus for us, we cannot ignore the “terrifying refrain of the first apostolic preaching: ‘Ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain...ye killed the Prince of life...Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree...’” iii[3] The Bible and our faith certainly is not blind to our violent propensities. Therefore, I have wondered why more has not been said in Christian theology, liberal or conservative, about how our doctrine of the Atonement relates to and enables us to cope with our violence.

I want to make such an attempt in this paper. I shall begin by looking at the prominent theories of the Atonement. Then, I want to try to define violence (it is a word with a much broader meaning than one might first suspect); and, how biblical anthropology might help us understand our violence within. Finally, I want to make some pastoral suggestions that may help us harness our violence constructively. iv[4]

## Theories of the Atonement in the History of the Church

If we say that at the heart of the Christian faith is Jesus as the Messiah, we must also say that He stands as a crucified Messiah. It is as the crucified Messiah that He is wisdom and power of God. v[5] As an Evangelical theologian, I would contend with Bloesch “that there is a consistent biblical witness to the atonement of Jesus Christ, though no one theological position is completely dominant.” He continues, “Through the ages various theories of the atonement have developed, some of which reflect and others obscure biblical themes. No theory in and of itself exhausts the truth in the mystery of the atonement...”. vi[6] We shall look at three of the more prominent theories.

**THE CLASSICAL THEORY.** This is also known as “The Ransom Theory,” and more recently as “The Christus Victor” vii[7] model. “The central theme of this view is the idea of the work of Christ as a scene in the divine cosmic drama of conflict and victory.” viii[8] As many writers have noted, this was the view of the atonement that predominated among western church leaders from the second to the sixth centuries as an image for understanding the incarnation and especially the death and resurrection of Christ. ix[9]

The strength of this theory is that it “interrelates Jesus’ life, death and resurrection more coherently than do... (other models). The conflicts of Jesus’ earthly ministry can be understood as early phases of that struggle which climaxed at his death and resurrection. ... (It) emphasizes the role of Jesus’ teachings and

example in preparing the way for a new humanity, yet a humanity decisively brought to life only at the resurrection.”x[10]

In this classical view, sin is seen “Primarily as submission to evil powers and the resulting enslavement at their hands;” and, it “is corporate as well as personal.”xi[11] Biblical anthropology sees us human beings as individuals in community. Therefore, sin is not just an individual matter; it has social ramifications that are not just secondary characteristics. The strength of the classical theory of atonement is that it keeps together the personal and social aspects of our sin. As humanity turned away from God, we turned “towards death and the Devil. As a result humanity is now under their power.”xii[12] The wrath of God at sin is exercised by turning humans over to the dominion of these powers.xiii[13] While Gudem says there is little Scriptural basis for this view,xiv[14] Finger and Driver give excellent summaries of the Biblical passages that relate to this theory.xv[15]

The primary weakness of this view relates to the idea of ransom. In its early teaching, the church fathers spoke of Christ’s death as being a ransom paid to the Devil to free humanity from their bondage. Further, they implied a deception on the part of what God did in the atoning death of Jesus, hiding his divine nature in his humanity. This understanding fell into disrepute because of idea that the Devil has certain rights that even God must respect, and the element of fraud on God’s part that is implied. Further in our contemporary setting, “It is difficult to know what meaning, if any, its proponents might ascribe to ‘the Devil’ and other powers in the modern world. Does this ‘mythological terminology’ mean, as theological tradition has long held, that the Christus Victor motif holds no real cognitive value? Finally, this model has social implications, though their character is not immediately obvious for only some of its proponents emphasized the powers’ socio-political activity.”xvi[16] However earlier work by H. Berkhof and more recently by Walter Wink on the Biblical use of the “principalities and powers” show that this language is very relevant to our modern/postmodern situation.xvii[17]

**MORAL INFLUENCE THEORY.** Peter Abelard (1079-1142) first enunciated what we call the “Moral Influence Theory.” For Abelard the cross of Christ is a demonstration to humanity of God’s matchless love. He “rejected the (classical)... view (one interpretation of which said) that Christ had come to pay a debt to the devil as well as Anselm’s theory that Christ had come to offer a satisfaction to God.... Through the power of Jesus’ example, people are moved to love God, whose forgiveness is based on limitless love and is given in response to the intercession of the risen Christ.”xviii[18] In this view, Christ did not die to appease the offended dignity of the Father, but to demonstrate to humanity the full extent of God’s love. “The advocates of the moral-influence theory hold that God’s nature is essentially love.”xix[19]

Sin in this view is more in our evil intentions than actions. “It consists in agreeing to the evil inclinations of the mind.”xx[20] As Erickson expounds on humanity’s sin in this view, “It was humans’ fear and ignorance of God that needed to be rectified.”xxi[21] Christ’s suffering overcame our alienation by the exhibition of God’s love on the cross. Thus in this view, the work of the cross affects a change in us, rather than in God. Horace Bushnell revived this view of the atonement in the nineteenth century. He regarded sin as a type of sickness from which we must be healed. Erickson summarizes his view in three points:xxii[22] 1) “Humanity needs openness to God, an inclination to respond to his call to repentance. 2) Humanity needs “a genuine and deep conviction of personal sin and resultant repentance. 3) “Humanity needs inspiration. While we have abstract descriptions of the holiness we are to embody, it is when we see it in practical and personal exposition that it becomes real for us.”

The weakness in this view is that it does not adequately come to grips with the Biblical view of the enslaving power of evil and bondage to sin that redemption requires. “It does not do justice to the Biblical vision of God’s covenant love and righteousness which redeem and create a covenant people who will reflect God’s character.”xxiii[23] Liberal theological versions of this theory describe God’s love and people’s response in a “universalism of the parenthood of God and the familyhood of all humanity.”xxiv[24] That we are to follow Christ is clear from His own command in the Gospels. The Moral-Influence theory does attempt to link ethical and moral concerns with the atonement. However without taking into account the creation of the new messianic community, it makes such concerns just another socio-political philosophy to be accepted or rejected according to a person’s proclivities.

**SUBSTITUTIONARY THEORY.** This is the most influential view of the atonement in Western Churches and Orthodox Protestantism. Indeed John Driver, calling this the “Satisfaction theory,” notes, “Protestantism has not only tended to reaffirm the satisfaction view but has made it more dominant and more nearly a test of faith.... This has been true for both established and free Church Protestants, for Lutherans, Calvinists and Arminians alike.”xxv[25] Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) first gave it systematic form.xxvi[26]

According to this view “humanity is in a desperate situation from which Christ alone can rescue it.... Especially for early Reformed and Protestant Orthodoxy, humanity’s situation was desperate because each person was considered a sinner thus under the penalty of God’s wrath.”xxvii[27] Erickson gives a good summary of this theory: “Humans were made for God and were intended to choose, love and serve the highest good, God. This, however, they did not do; consequently, death came upon them. God, however, necessarily had to save at least some of fallen humanity. Satisfaction had to be made, if this was to be accomplished. To be effective, the satisfaction rendered had to be greater than what all created beings are capable of doing, since they can do only what is already required of them. This being the case, only God could make satisfaction. However if it was to avail for humanity in relationship to God, it had to be made by a human. Therefore, the satisfaction had to be rendered by someone who is both God and a human being. Consequently, the incarnation is a logical necessity. Without it there could be no satisfaction and, therefore, no remission of punishment.”xxviii[28] The substitutionary aspect of this theory is that Jesus did this for us, in our place. The Penal aspect is that He bore our sins and took our punishment, thus turned away the wrath of the Father at our sin. Further, as Grudem explains, he fulfilled all righteousness in his life, as the Second Adam. Thus his righteous avails for us.xxix[29]

I believe this theory is basic to the others, however there are a number of weaknesses that we should keep in mind.xxx[30] First, this theory emphasizes Christ’s death as a sacrifice of propitiation that turns away God’s wrath, almost to neglect of any immediate consequence of Christ’s death for the daily life of the believer. It makes the atonement mainly a transaction between the Father and the Son. Note the following quote from Grudem: “...the atonement is viewed as objective; that is, something that has primary influence directly on God himself. Only secondarily does it have application to us, and this is only because there was a definite event in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son that secured our salvation.”xxxi[31] If some of the other theories are weak in not showing why Jesus had to die, this theory, as it is sometimes expounded, fails to adequately show why Jesus spent so much time teaching and calling people to follow him.

Secondly, this theory fails to explain the existence of the church. Jesus not only said he came to give his life as a ransom for many; he also said, “I will build my church.”xxxii[32] Since Paul is often quoted to prove the substitutionary theory of the atonement, we should not forget his other statements:

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup> by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup> and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.xxxiii[33]

This theme can be found elsewhere in the New Testament:

<sup>4</sup> As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—<sup>5</sup> you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.xxxiv[34]

These words show that the same atoning death of Christ not only reconciled and made us alive to God, his death also reconciled us to each other, making us “one new man,” and “the people of God.” By the atonement, we are made a new race, now alive to God. The church, both universal and in each congregation, is the earthly, contemporary expression of that new race. Too often, I am afraid, this is neglected in our preaching about the atonement and what it means for us.

Thirdly, does not the thinking that anything relating directly to us in the atonement is “secondary”<sup>xxxv</sup>[35] create an unbiblical separation between our justification and sanctification? Is being made the righteousness of Christ only a matter of our objective standing with God? I do not believe there can be any justification if there is no on going sanctification. We must be led in the “paths of righteousness”<sup>xxxvi</sup>[36] now if that is to have any meaning for our standing before the Father. Consider Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 3:18, **And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.** I do not believe such transformation is only secondary. As I have read and debated these points, it seems for many conservative Protestants, the real test of orthodoxy has become what you believe ABOUT Christ and his death FOR us; and not our transformation IN Christ. As I understand the atonement, something has indeed happened to us that is as significant for us on earth as it is and will be in heaven.

In Summation, I believe we need insight from all theories to understand the significance of the atonement for us. Erickson has noted that the meaning and impact of the atonement is rich and complex. As he began his review of the various theories of the Atonement, he said, “These truths are all evident in the atonement, and should be included in the explanation of the atonement.”<sup>xxxvii</sup>[37] Leon Morris said, “no theory (of the atonement) is adequate. We need the contributions of quite a few theories to express something of what the Cross meant to the men of the New Testament”<sup>xxxviii</sup>[38]

While we have noted weaknesses in each of the theories surveyed, each of them highlights a truth about the atonement. The New Testament uses many images to testify to the atoning work of Christ. “Rather than simply offering formal dogmatic assertion the New Testament writers employed a series of images (pictures) to depict the saving work of Christ and to interpret its meaning.”<sup>xxxix</sup>[39] Of the three we have reviewed in this study:

THE RANSOM (CHRISTUS VICTOR) THEORY shows the death of Christ as a triumph over the forces of sin and death, liberating us from their power. **“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” (Colossians 2:15).**

THE MORAL-INFLUENCE THEORY demonstrated the great extent of God’s love and shows us what holy living is. **“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” (1 Peter 2:24-25)**

THE SUBSTITUTIONARY THEORY shows how the death of Chrstit rendered satisfaction to the Father for our sins. **Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we ve peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...” (Romans 5:1)**

I have said that each of these theories will be necessary to understand the meaning of Chrstit’s death as an atonement for us. We will need each of them to understand its meaning for us in our life here as well as when we stand before our God. We will need each of them to come to terms with our violence. But is either one of them basic to the others and enable the others? John Driver, following Gustaf Aulen, favors the “Ransom Theory” over the others. Thomas Finger seeks to keep them together without emphasizing one over the other. The other theologians I have consulted favor the “Substitutionary Theory.”

Erickson gives a good exposition of how the substitutionary theory undergirds each of the other.<sup>xl</sup>[40] Regarding the Ransom Theory, he says, “The Penal-substitutionary theory ...affirms that victory over evil was won by Christ’s giving of himself as a ransom—but to the requirements of God’s, not to Satan.” And later, “By bearing the penalty of our sin and thus satisfying once for all the just requirements of the law, Christ nullified Satan’s control over us at its root—the power to bring us under the curse and condemnation

of the law.” The “valid insight of the (Moral-Influence)...theory is dependent on the fact that he (Jesus) died *for us*.” Erickson concludes, “...it is effective as a demonstration of love precisely because we were lost and God cared enough about our condition to offer his Son as a sacrifice.”

It now remains for us to look at our violence within and relate that to our understanding of the atonement. To prepare for that, I want to conclude this section by reviewing the implications that Erickson draws from the Substitutionary theory of the atonement.xli[41] These implications relate to a number of other doctrines regarding God, Christ, human beings and our salvation that can illuminate our understanding of our violence within.

“1. The penal-substitution theory confirms the biblical teaching of the total depravity of all humans. God would not have gone so far as to put his precious Son to death had it not been absolutely necessary. Humans are totally unable to meet their own need.

“2. God’s nature is not one-sided, nor is there any tension between its different aspects. He is not merely righteous and demanding, nor merely loving and giving. He is righteous, so much so that sacrifice for sin had to be provided. He is loving, so much so that he provided that sacrifice himself.

“3. There is no other way of salvation but by grace, and specifically, the death of Christ. It has an infinite value and thus covers the sins of all humankind for all time. A finite sacrifice, by contrast, cannot even fully cover the sins of the individual offering it.

“4. There is security for the believer in his or her relationship to God. For the basis of the relationship, Christ’s sacrificial death is complete and permanent. Although our feelings might change, the ground of our relationship to God remains unshaken.

“5. We must never take lightly the salvation we have. Although it is free, it is also costly, for it cost God the ultimate sacrifice. We must therefore always be grateful for what he has done; we must love him in return and emulate his giving character.”

### **Theories of Violence**

**Paul Tournier.** I begin this section by reviewing one of the most profound books on violence I have ever read. It is Paul Tournier’s, *The Violence Within*.xlii[42] This is a small book of only 200 pages. Yet it gives profound insight into our human propensity toward violence. What was most significant for me was the idea that we are all violent, and that is not necessarily a fault. I had to wrestle with that latter concept. Growing up in the Mennonite Church, one of the historic peace churches,xliii[43] I had come to believe violence was bad, and all violent emotions were to be suppressed.

What Tournier does is to identify violence as a powerful emotion, a life force, and explore how that same powerful emotion can be a force for good rather than evil. The book is divided into two parts. The first part explores what violence is and tries to identify the boundary between beneficial and harmful forms of violence. The second explores the relationship between violence and “power.” “It seems to me,” Tournier says, “that the key to the problem of violence is to be found in that of power.”xliv[44]

In the opening sentence of this book, I believe Tournier accurately describes our dilemma with violence. “We are all against violence; but we are all to some degree in favour of it. We all condemn it, and we all have a certain respect for it.”xlv[45] He illustrates: “Against violence... The people you meet are more likely to be honest peaceful folk, who nevertheless get worked up at the thought of violence, who are properly indignant, and condemn violence in severe—sometimes even violent terms. They want it put down ruthlessly—violently.” Yet these same people are, “In favour of violence. Those honest peaceful folk, without exception, honour their country’s heroes; they admire their courage, their struggles and their victories. Our national holidays are, as often as not, celebrations of violence, homage quite properly paid to the violence of our ancestors as they founded our nation.”xlvi[46]

The rest of the first part of Tournier's book looks at various attempts to differentiate between malignant destructive violence and benign beneficial violence. Might we not distinguish between the two kinds of violence by using different names: *aggression* when it seems legitimate, and *violence* when it is not? After reviewing this possibility, he concludes, "...the real problem is how to decide whether an act of violence is justified nor not; and the trouble is that we have no objective criteria by which we can judge." That is a startling statement. Isn't it obvious where to draw the line? Many point to the level or intensity as a criterion. However, the same would argue that the level of violence unleashed by the allied forces against Hitler, or our own use of the atomic bomb against Japan was legitimate to stop a greater evil. The search is further complicated by the fact that there are various subtle forms of manipulation, not as blatantly violent as war, that reek much violent devastation in people's lives.

Furthermore there is in the most loving, nurturing relationship, some level of competition and assertion that must take place for life to happen. "...We must acknowledge that there is in nature a force—whether we call it aggression or violence—which is normal and healthy, which introduces a relationship of rivalry between individuals, a dynamic equilibrium which can be observed in all vital phenomena. It is more than an effect of life; it is the very essence of life. And we must also acknowledge that there can be a sudden brutal amplification of this force—whether we call it aggression or violence—which no longer serves life, but acts against it, sowing the seeds of death."xlvi[47]

Just what might be the normal, healthy aspect that Tournier alludes to?xlviii[48] He notes what to us is the benign singing of the male robin to mark his territory. That is an act of aggression, a threat to all other male robins to keep out. This act is so well respected that seldom does it escalate to physical fighting between them. I think of the elk and other animal species that have ritual fights to protect territory or establish dominance as the breeding male. In each case we have an act of violent behavior. But as researchers note, there is an instinct that stops the violence before the combatants kill each other. Animals that do kill, kill only other species, and that only for food. Seldom do they kill their own kind. If they do, it is aberrant behavior brought on by disease or some outside factor.

There is another feature from zoology that is instructive in our search to understand violence. Tournier refers to a study that shows, "...so long as animals live in flocks, in undifferentiated bands, there is no aggressiveness among them, but also there are only anonymous relationships. It is among the territorial animals that there appears the personal differentiation which is the necessary condition for the development of personal feelings—attachment, friendship, loyalty, love—features of a superior social organization." To make matters even more complicated, he quotes another researcher who concludes, "It is only when intense aggressiveness exists between two individuals that love can arise."xlix[49] Aggression then is seen as an expression of life. "...A force of nature present in every living thing, a gift of life which can have both beneficial and unfortunate results depending on the use that is made of it. In the animals this use is regulated by instinct, whereas man must assume responsibility for it through free ethical choices."l[50]

This brings us to the idea that reason takes the place of instinct in humans as a restraint on violence. But reason, Tournier notes, does not have the same constraining force, though it is capable of making sound judgments. For example, "While it may not be able to stop a man from drinking too much, at least it tells him that it is a mistake to do so."li[51] This is not the case with aggression. "If reason is to take over in default of instinct in this field, obviously it will need to be possible to establish a rational criterion for violence, and that means declaring with the logical, clear, and universal authority of reason where the precise boundary between useful aggression and harmful violence is to be found."lii[52] Unfortunately the search for the criteria that would describe such boundary cannot be found. Human nature is such that, too often, our passions and emotions govern us and we bring in reason only afterwards to justify our actions and opinions. Thus reason ends up justifying our behavior rather than governing it. Tournier concludes that rationality is powerless in the face of our passions, reason is powerless to direct men.

Tournier says that we have to finally acknowledge that violence is in all of us as a reality of nature. We are all guilty of violence. "When (we bemoan)... the escalation of violence, it is always other people's violence (we are)... thinking of. Freud revealed the subterranean sexual urges that fester in the dark layers of the mind, and we must recognize that our urges towards violence are just as real. We need to see that violence is already present in the child, just as Freud proved that sexuality is."liii[53]

The second part of Tournier's book looks at the role of power in understanding violence. Tournier discusses them as "Two Closely Related Problems."liv[54] The problem of power is accessible to reflection. "One can give oneself over," he observes, "to dreams of power without limits. But on the other hand, enlightened by thought and by revelation, one can weigh its dangers and voluntarily set limits, renounce certain courses of action, and set one's face against any abuse of power."lv[55]

The problem of violence is intrinsically linked with our desire for and use of power. It is often the power of the powerful that provokes others to violence. This may happen whether or not the powerful has abused their power or not. "Oversimplifying a little, one might say that it is through violence that one passes from weakness to power, but that it is through power that one passes from proper to improper violence. What is especially important when we are considering our own period and the connection between the two problems of violence and power, is to realize that power confers impunity upon violence. If you are powerful, your violence may escape all retribution. Power is secured by violence, and violence is justified by power!"lvi[56]

We can see this being played out in our current national situation. We have taken some pride in being the only Superpower on the world scene. We gloated over the fall of the Soviets as a Superpower. They were, after all, an "evil empire." Some of us even see our position as the blessing of God, justifying our position. If Tournier is right in his analysis of the relationship of power and violence, it is our very position that makes us a target. Our power is the ability to impose our will on others. I make this statement as a matter of fact. As we see in personal experience and in the history of our race, no one likes to be imposed upon. We will react to those we perceive as imposing their will upon us. There are many complex factors of history and politics at work in the terrorists' attack upon us. But we cannot and dare not overlook the fact that they see themselves as weak and powerless. They perceive that we have been imposing our will, and standard upon them. Through the use of violence against us, they seek to regain power. We see ourselves as justified in our violence against them as an act of retribution. We were attacked. Our citizens were killed. We stand for liberty and justice for all. We will protect those rights and ourselves at all costs. Through the use of violence we will protect what is ours. And so the age-old cycle continues, bloody after bloody year, age after age.

**Rene Girard.** Recently, the work of the French literary critic, Rene Girard, has become prominent in understanding violence. Of particular interest is the way he connects violence to the sacred practices of all cultures and races. In his book, *Violence And The Sacred*,lvii[57] Girard defends his belief that destructive violence is at the heart of the sacred. He sees violence as belonging to all peoples. He traces the threads of his thesis through anthropological studies of sacrifice (both human and animal), through mythology and ritual. The tapestry he weaves covers the primal tribal ritual sacrifices, the mythologies from the European past, and the religious festivals of both. He is convinced that we are not so much rational as driven by impulse. Tournier, reviewing Girard's argument, says that it is impossible to read Rene Girard's book without noticing that he describes violence in way Freud describes the libido. Girard's violence, like Freud's libido, appears as an indestructible force, a natural life-force, which can be repressed but never destroyed, and which is turned upon another object when its way is barred by psychological censorship. It is a force that will always seek and find an object."lviii[58]

Girard finds the roots of violence in mimetic desire and the rivalry such desire raises. "The rival desires the same object as the subject, and to assert the primacy of the rival can lead to only one conclusion. Rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of the two desires on a single object; rather, *the subject desires the object because the rival desire it.*"lix[59] When two people, or by extension two groups, desire the same thing, there is bound to be a clash—violence. "Girard notes that these impulses work according to certain predictable pattern...it is not only human nature to desire an object, but to desire what another wants *because* the other wants it. This understandably makes life in society difficult."lx[60] As desire escalates, it can lead to violence that can overwhelm the community and destroy it. If one kills another, vengeance is sought, escalating until all is destroyed. Violence, once aroused, "will not be denied, but it can be diverted to another object, something it can sink its teeth into."lxi[61]

The "other object" that is turned too, according to Girard, is the sacrificial victim, the "scapegoat." This is an innocent third party, who becomes the focus of the community's violence. The victim is not a substitute

for just one individual, but “it is a substitute for all the members of the community, offered up by the members themselves. The sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its own violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside itself.” lxii[62] Every society has its customs, taboos and practices that are designed to regulate human mimetic desire. When these breakdown, Girard says a “sacrificial crisis” develops. All the dissensions, rivalries, jealousies and quarrels within the community breakout in the open and threaten to consume the community in the heat of unleashed violent passions. By the mechanism of the surrogate victim, the scapegoat, who through sacrifice on behalf of the community, the violence unleashed is diverted and the community is saved. Girard concludes, “The purpose of the sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric.”lxiii[63]

The rest of Girard’s book explores his thesis in depth. Later books by him explore his idea even further, and he looks at the Judeo-Christian texts as well.lxiv[64] In Girard’s later work reflecting on the Judeo-Christian faith, he sees the Old Testament unveiling the way the scapegoat mechanism works. The ultimate exposure comes in the Gospels, where the death of Jesus robs the scapegoating mechanism of its power. “Girard believes the Gospels picture a reconciling community which is an alternative to societies structured either directly or indirectly on violence and the scapegoating mechanism.”lxv[65]

I would agree with those who see Girard’s work as helpful in understanding the atoning death of Jesus.lxvi[66] I believe that a biblical anthropology sees us as individuals in community. Girard’s theories help us see human nature in that way. He also helps us understand the alienation that sin has brought into human life, exposing a “rivalry both with God and in the human community.”lxvii[67] But, there are questions regarding Girard’s views and those of Girardian scholars that need to be explored. The essays in Swartley’s book do that very well. For example, Girard himself does not claim to provide an adequate alternative theological model of the atonement. Also Miller notes that a social sciences approach cannot fully perceive and articulate the particular truth of revelation.lxviii[68] The pastoral implications are not clear, either. This paper will be one attempt that explores that area.

**Jantzen: “*Habitus*” Theory of Violence.** Grace Jantzen bases her argument on the theory of Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist who devoted “his efforts to developing a logic of practice, an account of how people in culture develop a ‘practical sense for what is to be done in a given situation.’ He call this shared practical sense *habitus*.”lxix[69]

This is the common-sense world in which we are all born, have grown up, and live. As Jantzen describes it, the *habitus* encompasses a whole range of attitudes, tastes, and values. “It is this complex of tastes and preferences and learned behaviour patters, this *habitus*, that enables us in most situations to know spontaneously what to do” We have a sense of what is needed or appropriate and how to do it. And it feels completely natural or even instinctive...”lxx[70]

This makes social life possible, as we all know what sort of behavior is expected in various social roles and contexts even as we add our own personal distinctives. “Because the *habitus* is largely below the level of consciousness, it is entirely possible for a society to be in the grip of a dominant symbolic system without bringing it to critical scrutiny.... Thus history will be produced on the basis of history, patterns will repeat themselves ever and again.”lxxi[71]

Jantzen’s theory of violence is that it is our *habitus*. Much of our history, including our most recent history, “is an re-enactment of this violence which has been internalized to such an extent that in any situation requiring response, violence seems natural, the only alternative. Violence has so colonized our *habitus* that we have collectively lost the capacity to imagine other sorts of responses. In the global context this is regularly expressed in military terms...”lxxii[72] But she explains that it is not war that we should focus upon. War is only the explosive exportation of the systemic violence in our cultural *habitus*, to use her words. She illustrates by quoting Susanne Kappler in a book, *The Will to Violence*:

War does not suddenly break out in a peaceful society; sexual violence is not the disturbance of otherwise equal gender relations. Racist attacks do not shoot like lightning out of a non-racist sky, and the sexual exploitation of children is no solitary problem in a world otherwise just to children. The violence of our most commonsense everyday thinking and especially our personal will to violence, constitute the

conceptual preparation, the ideological armament and the intellectual mobilization which make the ‘outbreak’ of war, of sexual violence, of racist attacks, of murder and destruction possible at all.lxxiii[73]

Jantzen then explores a number of ways our habitus is shaped by what she calls “Master Discourses” so that we naturalize violence as part of the way of responding to our world. In *Theological Discourse*, violence is taken as a given inseparable from human nature now corrupted by original sin. Therefore, it is necessary to use some violence to restrain the “wolf” (see the quote at the beginning of this paper.) that would devour us. Thus we develop theological justifications for our use of violence to restrain evil and protect the good. From our *political discourse* we conclude that since we are inherently violent, we will subordinate ourselves to a political arrangement that we each recognize to be for our own good. We cede to the State the right of violence to protect us both domestically through the police and courts and internationally through military force when needed. Recently, a *biological discourse* has developed that naturalizes violence. Evolutionary theory assumes that all life is a struggle for existence where only the

strongest and the fittest survive. To carry all this even further there is the *Philosophic discourse*, seen especially in Hegel and Marx, where there is a struggle with the other for freedom of self-consciousness and recognition. In Marxism this is the class struggle. In modern western society this is expressed as individuation at the expense of the other. As *psychoanalytic discourse* tells us, violence and hostility are as natural as eating, sleeping. Freud says that the inclination to violence is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man.”

For Jantzen, this shows that we have a way of seeing, and acting—our *habitus* makes violence our natural response. We just cannot see any other way to respond. It is common sense for us to grab a weapon in response to a perceived threat. Can we find another *habitus*?

## **Relating Atonement to Violence**

### **A. Atonement: On a Hill Too Far Awaylxxiv[74]**

I began this paper by saying that I want to explore the relationship between the Atonement and violence. I stand appalled at the amount of blood shed across human history. I am especially horrified at the amount of blood that Christians have spilled in the name of God, even killing each other. Christians killing Christians under the banner of the cross of the One they confess is the Prince of Peace. Something is terribly wrong. I have wondered if part of the problem might not be in our theology of and preaching about the atonement. How can Christians justify killing and doing violence to other people when they confess that each of us is created in the Image of God? How can we Christians kill and do violence to each other when we confess that Christ shed his own precious blood for us to reconcile us?

Part of the problem has been, and is, that the “view of the cross held by many Christians: it is too far away, a completed transaction, a past event having little to do with our Christian identity and practice. The analysis of Alister McGrath is apt: ‘All too often the cross is treated as something of importance in relation to the initiation or inauguration of the Christian life, but that which exercises no subsequent influence over that life.’”lxxv[75]

Dallas Willard adds to this perspective stating our preaching and theologizing has been about what he calls a “Gospel of sin management.” He says, “The current gospels, left and right, exhibit the very same type of conceptual disconnection from, and practical irrelevance to, the personal integrity of believers—and certainly so, if we put that integrity in terms of biblically specific ‘Christlikeness.’”lxxvi[76] He notes that if we ask the 74 percent of Americans who say they have made a commitment to Jesus Christ what the Christian gospel is, you will probably be told that Jesus died to pay for our sins that if we will only believe he did this, we will go to heaven when we die. This summarizes very well the popular understanding of the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement. Incredibly, this leads many Christians to believe, “that God for some unfathomable reason, just thinks it appropriate to transfer credit from Chrst’s merit account to ours, and to wipe out our sin debt, upon inspecting our mind and finding that we believe a particular theory of the atonement to be true—even if we trust everything but God in all other matters that concern us.”lxxvii[77] Thus how we deal with the violence is left out of this gospel. The cross is indeed, “on a hill

too far away,” irrelevant to what we may be facing now. It’s a matter of personal salvation. It has no meaning to how one lives.

Willard sees the gospel on the left as equally deficient. The gospel for liberal Christians of today is a message of liberation and community. It proclaims that “God himself stood behind liberation, equality, and community; that Jesus died to promote them, or at least for lack of them; and that he ‘lives on’ in all efforts and tendencies favoring them. For the theological left, simply this became the message of Christ.”<sup>lxxviii</sup>[78] This revised view of God and Christ on the theological left “destroys any workable sense in which God and Jesus are *persons*, now alive and accessible, standing in an interactive relationship with those who rely on them.”<sup>lxxix</sup>[79] The cross here is simply an example, of self-sacrifice, or an example of the brutality of oppression. Following the moral-influence theory, the atoning death of Jesus becomes a demonstration of self-sacrifice that so overwhelms us that we will likewise give ourselves to those who are oppressed that we too will die for them; maybe even kill the oppressors for them. Again, the atonement has no relevancy to shaping the inner life of Christians and their Churches. It’s about feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and liberating the oppressed. It gives us no help in dealing with the violence within and so is often frustrated in dealing with the violence out there.

The corrective needed is an understanding of the atonement that links it to our lives as individuals and as churches. Let me adapt a statement from Marshall: atonement as exclusively God’s work, precluding human participation, is an over simplification. Atonement as the gracious act of God, for sin and thereby doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves, must be joined by that which only we can do.<sup>lxxx</sup>[80] Lest such an observation be labeled as Pelagian, let’s recall such Scriptures as “Repent and believe the Gospel” (Cf. Acts 2:38 & Mark 1:15). Or consider these words of Paul to the Philippians: “<sup>12</sup>**Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,** <sup>13</sup>**for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose** (Philippians 2:12-13). These verses highlight that our salvation involves coordinated effort between God and us.

The witness of the New Testament is that the atonement involves us objectively and subjectively. Consider just two examples from many of Paul’s writings:

**GALATIANS 2:20 (NIV) I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

**COLOSSIANS 3:3 (NIV) For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.**

The Colossian quote is based on Paul’s argument at the end of chapter two, verse twenty, that we have “died with Christ to the basic principles of this world,” a concept that will be important for our thesis in this paper.

In each of these examples note the objective aspect that Christ died for us, and that fact leads to the subjective aspect that affects the way we live now. For Paul, and the other New Testament writers,<sup>lxxxi</sup>[81] Calvary is not “hill too far away.” It is a reality immediate and present. We turn now to show how this applies to our violence within.

A review of our study violence shows that the factors giving rise to it are complex. Tournier sees violence inherent in us as human beings. He describes it as a life force necessary for our continued existence, but which can escalate with horrific consequences. Girard sees the roots of violence in mimetic desire and the rivalry such desire raises. He postulates that behind many religious practices and myths is a primal act of violence that nearly overwhelmed the community. In order to preserve the group, there develops a sacrificial system to redirect the violence and preserve the community. Jantzen following Bourdieu says that violence is a *habitus* a way of seeing and acting that is second nature to us so that we cannot even perceive of any other way to act when we perceive ourselves threatened.

I see these studies as complementary. When I put them together, I conclude that our violence arises from a composite of personal and social factors rooted in our humanity. It is a life force necessary for each of us to survive physically, emotionally and socially. We form relationships and communities in order to facilitate this. In so doing, we find ourselves in competition with one another. Mimetic desire arises. Destructive violence threatens. For our survival, patterns of behavior develop to direct or contain our violent tendencies. These commonly accepted patterns give rise to social structures and practices that are the milieu in which each generation grows. They become our *habitus*.

As I reflect theologically on all of this, I recall that God created humanity in His Image.

**<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth,<sup>b</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”**

**<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.** lxxxii[82]

Whatever else we might say to explain our being created in the image of God,lxxxiii[83] I believe that it means in some small measure we share in the power of the Creator. The power necessary to “rule” according to God’s will in His creation. I agree with Erickson that being human is something we are rather than something we have or do.lxxxiv[84] However inherent in what we are, is the power to do. Being in the Image of God must also “refer to the elements in the human makeup that enable the fulfillment of human destiny. The image is the powers of personality that make humans, like God, beings capable of interacting with other persons, of thinking and reflecting, and of willing freely.”lxxxv[85] To expound further, “The image itself is that set of qualities that are required for these relationships and this function to take place. They are those qualities of God which, reflected in human beings, make worship, personal interaction, and work possible.”lxxxvi[86] If I were to summarize what these qualities mean for us living in this world, I would say that we were created by God *to live in* His righteousness and love in covenant relationship with Him. Then, as a consequence, we are *to live out* His righteousness and love in relation to each other and the rest of creation.lxxxvii[87]

The present reality of our race is, however, we are not living out God’s righteousness and love in this world, and neither are we living thus in covenant relationship with Him. The Scripture’s testimony is we have rebelled against God. Immediately following the account of creation is the account of humanity’s fall into sin. As Genesis chapter three shows three aspects important to our development as human beings were disrupted. First, our relationship with God was broken. Our first parents hide in fear and shame from God in Whose Image they were created. Since we are created to be in His image, and no longer have a relationship with Him, it is impossible for us to know what that means. Ontologically we cannot know who we are. Worst of all, our fear of God turns to hostility. Hostility is concomitant with fear, since fear arises from our feeling threatened. The potential for violence looms.

Secondly, our relationship to each other is broken. This is shown in the story by the fact that our first parents immediately covered their nakedness. Vernard Eller gives a most insightful explanation of what that means:

“...the point of our first parents’ nakedness is that there is *nothing between them*—not so much as a blush of shame. No barriers, no secrets, no regrets, no facades, no intimidations, no status distinctions, no suspicion. The relationship is that of frankness, honesty, trust, openness, ‘here-I-amness,’ *nakedness*. ‘Shame’—which is the condign and involuntary admission that one is in the wrong—is the worst possible thing that could come between, for it is itself the sign of other deep and serious barriers.”lxxxviii[88]

Human history verifies how deep and serious the shame and barriers have become. We have become our own worst enemy, *homo homini lupus*.

Finally, our relationship with our individual selves is broken. As I said, ontologically, we each face a crisis. Cut off from God we do not and cannot know who we are. All of the power and creativity inherent in our

being in the image of God has become malignant. We are “wring.” Dallas Willard observes, “In the hierarchy of abilities, any disruption or malfunctioning of the higher powers deforms and weakens the lower ones, not the other way around. . . . There is a life higher than natural thought and feeling for which the ‘living being’ in human nature was made. It is the spiritual. Disruption of that higher life wrecks our thinking and valuation, thereby corrupting our entire history and being, down to the most physical levels. It is this pervasive distortion and disruption of human existence from the top down that the Bible refers to as sin (not sins)—the general posture of fallen humanity.”lxxxix[89]

Our growth and spiritual formation has taken place in this kind of world described above. As a race, we do not only ignore God, but are antagonistic toward Him. We are not only fearful of each other, but also suspicious and envious of each other. In this environment our formation has been such that our passions have become mimetic, desiring what is not ours and even what ought not to be ours. Also, we are trapped, even blinded by our *habitus*. We claim we see, but too often we are blind. So our sin remains.xc[90] Having reviewed all of this, now wonder Paul cried out in Romans 7:24-25a, “<sup>24</sup>**What a wretched man I am** (we all are)! **Who will rescue me from this body of death?** <sup>25</sup>**Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!**” It is here that our understandings of the atonement come into play.

## **B. Participatory Atonement: Redirecting Our Violence**

The three theories of the atonement that we have looked at speak to our human crisis as described. For example, our ontological crisis is not just a passive condition. The New Testament shows this to be an active choice where we do not honor God as God.xci[91] In political parlance we have committed treason against our Creator. We are enemies of God. Our enmity and estrangement must be removed. They are the breeding ground for violence toward God and each other. It is to this that the Penal Substitutionary Theory Speaks. Having turned against God, we stand guilty under penalty of His wrath. But God not only is righteous in his expectation of us as our Creator, He is also our loving Father. As such **God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us** (Romans 5:8). In so doing, “Christ redeemed us from the curse by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3:10-14). Jesus’ blood is an expiation (Rom. 5:18) for sinners precisely because the one who knew no sin was made sin for us on the cross (II Cor. 5:21).”xcii[92] As we noted above the rest of the 2 Corinthians passage tells the immediate benefit of Christ’s death: **so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** I believe that whatever else we might say “the righteousness of God” means, it includes a restoration of being in the image of God in us. In this restored relationship with God, we now can learn what it means to be in His image, and live as He desires in His righteousness and love in all our relationships.

We are not only individuals in need of personal salvation, we are born into and live in complex web of relationships that shape our being as well. The doctrine of total depravity tells us that every aspect of our being is corrupted by sin. This includes the relational aspects of our personality, and the institutions that have grown out of those relationships. Christian teaching has not always been clear on this point. “Historically, Christians have shown more optimism toward the ‘natural order’ of things than toward the good of an individual. In Western Christendom particularly, discernment in accepting social convention has been lacking. We need to be aware that the structure of things as they are may be in fact quite contrary to God’s will.”xciii[93]

The works by Berkhof and Wink open us to such discernment.xciv[94] Their studies imply that the biblical language of principalities and power, basic principles, etc., describes a spiritual reality behind our social reality. Wink explains, “I will argue that the *principalities and powers* are the inner and outer aspects of any given manifestation of power. As the inner aspect they are the spirituality of institutions, the *within* of corporate structures and systems, the inner essence of outer organizations of power. As the outer aspect they are political systems, appointed officials, the chair of an organization, laws--in short, all the tangible manifestations which power takes. Every Power tends to have a visible pole, an outer form--be it a church, a nation or an economy--and an invisible pole, an inner spirit or driving force that animates, legitimates, and regulates its physical manifestation in the world. Neither pole is the cause of the other. Both come into existence together and cease to exist together.”xcv[95] It would be through the spirituality of our various corporate existences that the “Prince of this world,” and the “spiritual forces of evil” work their influence in our culture and society. Thus our entrapment is complete. Every aspect of our humanity is corrupted by our

sin. We have no escape for nothing about us is unaffected. Further the various principalities and powers often place us in competition with each other. In their name, we will justify the use of violence against one another to preserve the peace and prosperity they afford us. They convince us that there is always someone who will take it all away from us.

Because we are so caught up in our cultural and social systems, our salvation can only come by the gracious act of God, Who transcends all our human systems. The Classical Theory of the Atonement teaches us that in His death on the cross, Christ overcame the principalities and powers thus breaking our bondage to them. Paul describes it this way:

<sup>13</sup> When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup> having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15)

Yoder notes in verse 15 that Paul “uses three complementary verbs to describe what Christ and his death did to the Powers,” and quotes an extensive section from Berkhof to elaborate.<sup>xvii</sup>[96] An explanation of these verbs helps us understand the classical theory for our day. The three verbs are “disarmed,” “made a public spectacle of them,” “triumphing over them.” Regarding *made a public spectacle* of the powers, “It is precisely in the crucifixion that the true nature of the Powers has come to light.” Religious and political authorities believing they were operating for the common good in the name of piety, justice and law crucified Him who came in the name of the Lord and who was Truth Himself. By his death on their cross, Christ unmasked their presumption and exposed them. He *triumphed* over them when God raised Christ from the grave. “The resurrection manifests what was already accomplished at the cross: that in Christ God has challenged the Powers, has penetrated into their territory, and has displayed that He is stronger than they.” In so doing, God *disarms* the powers. “The weapon from which they heretofore derived their strength is struck out of their hands. This weapon was the power of illusion, their ability to convince men that they were the divine regents of the world...” with ultimate authority and worthy of absolute allegiance. Interestingly, these powers are not destroyed, just disarmed. For they were also created by Christ (see Colossians 1:16), enabling us to live and work in this world. It is in their fallen state that they tend to exert their influence over us as masters rather than our servants, and often usurp the place of Christ as Lord.

Having experienced personal forgiveness and cleansing from sin, and our redemption from the cultural and social Powers that enslave us, we have only now to explore what the atonement means for us in our daily lives. Given the kind of world we are born into and in which we grow, we develop various outlooks, attitudes and feelings about how things ought to be. We develop a *habitus* as Jantzen calls it. Often our *habitus* is that we must look out for me, and mine—even if it is at the expense of others. We will need as the Moral Influence theory says the powerful demonstration of God’s love at the cross to overcome our evil inclinations. That love is so compelling that it can overcome our *habitus*. Compelling is precisely the word Paul uses in 2 Corinthians as he speaks of how God’s love compels him to preach. I believe the same would also compel one to repentance and to seek holiness of life too.

Our discussion in this section thus far demonstrates that “the work of the cross is not completed until we participate in it” to pick up Marshall’s idea. She continues, “We not only find God at the cross, but we find ourselves. In his life and death Christ participates in all of the exigencies of human life and, concomitantly, in Christ, humans not only find suffering and death transformed from within, but are also conformed to Christ’s death and included in his resurrection and newness of life, by the vivifying Spirit.”<sup>xviii</sup>[97] She calls this a cruciformed life. This is a way of life that enters into and shares in Christ’s suffering on the cross. His suffering is our suffering, and our suffering on behalf of the Gospel is his suffering. As Paul says, “<sup>24</sup> **Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.**” These are words that have very little meaning apart from an understanding of the atonement that is relevant for living now as well as for the life to come.

Consider also the following Scriptures

**Mark 8:34-35,** <sup>34</sup> Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. (Cf. Parallels in Matthew 16:24-25, Luke 9:23-24)

**Romans 6:11-14,** <sup>11</sup> In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup> Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

**Romans 12:1-2,** <sup>12</sup> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

**Colossians 3:3-10,** <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

<sup>5</sup> Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup> But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

These texts suggest the cross is not only the way to life, it is the Christian’s way of life. As Yoder suggests, “Here at the cross is the man (Jesus) who loves his enemies, the man whose righteousness is greater than that of the Pharisees, who being rich became poor, who gives his robe to those who took his cloak, who prays for those who spiteful use him. The cross is not a detour or a hurdle on the way to the kingdom, nor is it even the way to the kingdom; it is the kingdom come.”xcviii[98] As a matter of practical application to the Christian’s way of life he continues, “That the concept of imitation is *not* applied by the New Testament at some of those points where Franciscan and romantic devotion has tried most piously to apply it, is all the more demonstration of how fundamental the thought of participation in the suffering of Christ is where the New Testament church sees it as guiding and explaining her attitude to the powers of the world. Only at one point, only on one subject—but there consistently, universally--is Jesus our example: in his cross.”xcix[99]

All these citations are affirmed by many to be true. Yet for many Christians, daily life is no different from that of non-Christians. We know that we are born again by the blood of Christ. Yet for many people that is only a statement, not a reality. Having accepted Christ as their Savior, they find they are still captive to their old *habitus*. They discover they are still prisoners of the old order of things controlled by the principalities and powers. C. S. Lewis noted this reality for many Christians in his *Screwtape Letters*, “...hundreds of these adult converts have been reclaimed after a brief sojourn in the Enemy’s camp and are now with us. All the habits of the patient, both mental and bodily, are still in our favour.”c[100]

In an insightful chapter called “St. Paul’s Psychology of Redemption,”ci[101] Dallas Willard shows us how the cross that saves, becomes our participation in the very life of Christ as well. He describes these “three stages of personal redemption as a real psychological process,” based on an exposition of Romans 6.

The **first stage** is expressed as our baptism into Christ. “We were baptized *into* Christ and brought to ‘experiential union’ with him. What he experienced *then* we *now* also experience through our *communion* with him. And this also means that we share his death to the sin powers that run the world. As they were not what moved him, so they are also not what move us. We participate in the new form of life, the one in Jesus and the one so powerful it could overcome physical death. Remember, this is a matter of what we find in our conscious experience. This new form of life provides not only new powers for our human self.

But also as we grow, a new center of organization and orientation for all of the natural impulses of our bodily self.”cii[102] This provides us with a new psychological reality from which, even if we waver and turn back to the old *habitus*, our “old person” we still are enabled to do otherwise.

I find it interesting how Paul uses the phrase of being dead to sin to describe the meaning Christian baptism in this chapter. The death of Jesus, an historical even at a specific place and time, theologically understood as an atoning death made once for all, is not simply a past event. It is has a conscious immediacy for him, a psychological reality. Jesus’ cross is a life experience. It is a way of life. This speaks to our ontological crisis. We now experience a new perception gained from our communion with Christ that enables us to finally know who we are and what we were created to be. How this becomes practical for us, we will see in the next two stages.

**Stage two** involves a new attitude. This stage “is a specific act on our part that develops into an enduring attitude. In our new freedom we are to ‘reckon’—that is, consciously and purposefully regard ourselves as ‘dead to sin and alive to God in union with Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 6:11, NEB). Note carefully the *psychological realism*. Whatever may have come before this point, this is something we *do*.” With his understanding of “‘reckoning,’ Paul has capitalized upon the first effect of ‘the light of the glorious gospel of Christ’ upon our personalities. This effect is that we now vividly see and are gripped by an alternative to sin. With the life imparted by this vision we love what we see and are drawn to it. In this vision and the power it provides lies our freedom to determine who we shall be.”ciii[103]

The thrust is that old habits, ways of doing things, our bondage to cultural patterns, social customs, and (dare we believe it?) even genetic predispositions no longer need bind us. This has, I believe, profound implications for our tendencies toward violence. I can learn to channel my power in constructive ways in relation to the world and to others. We need not be slaves to rage. We can learn a new *habitus*. How we learn to walk in a new way, that is the new life in and of Christ, is the third stage.

This **last stage** is submitting our members to righteousness. “...in the third stage of personal redemption as a real, psychological process, we consciously direct our bodies in a manner that will ensure that it eventually will come ‘automatically’ to serve righteousness as it served sin automatically.” Willard then refers to Oswald Chambers who states that if we’ve experienced regeneration, we must not only talk about it, but exercise it, working out what God has worked in us.civ[104] Now it is important to make clear here, we are not talking about works in order to be saved, but “working out our salvation,” as Paul says in Philippians 2:12.

For Willard, a human being is a single person composed of various capacities and dimensions. These include our natural capacities and their interactions. For example, “our capacities to represent or think, to feel (sense and emotional), and to choose and will. In addition, there are the bodily and social dimensions of the human self. These latter are of fundamental importance to incarnate personal being such as we. Human life, human capacities are inseparable from them.”cv[105] He goes on to describe the soul as the source of unity of our life, as such it is sometimes used as equivalent with the person. In the hierarchy of our human capacities, the corruption of the higher functions affects everything below it. The result is:

The condition of normal human life is one where the inner resources of the person are weakened or dead, and where the factors of human life do not interrelate as they were intended by their nature and function to do. This is sin in the singular: not an act but a condition. It is not that we are wrong, but that our inner components are not “hooked up” correctly any longer. The wires are crossed, as it were. We are wrung, twisted. Our thinking, our feeling, our very bodily dispositions are defective and connected wrongly with reference to life as a whole.

All of this comes to a head in the will (the same as the “heart” or the human spirit). The will stands, so to speak, in the shambles of the human system, flailing about in ineffectual and sporadic jerks or driven into complete passivity.cvi[106]

In this reality we cannot save ourselves. We are at the mercy now of emotions and thoughts. Further these spiral outward engulfing others, and feeding off their emotions and reactions. It is no wonder that violence

is so prevalent among us. We are often reacting instead of acting. Reacting is often done for self-preservation against a perceived threat, leading violence.

In the midst of our chaos, comes the Gospel. It proclaims<sup>civii</sup>[107], “a new picture of the world I live in. That world turns out to be made and governed by a person who loved this world and myself so much that he sent his son to save me from total ruin. I am unable to discover this on my own, especially surrounded as I am by layer upon layer of thought, feeling and custom turned against it. And especially since I have through long usage internalized all this and identify it with real life and my life.” This is the work of God’s grace. Doing what I/we cannot do for ourselves—bringing repentance and making us alive unto Him.

Often this is where many Christians stop. Frustrated that we are not more Christlike in character, and often wondering, “Is this all there is?” Also, while proclaiming the Gospel as the universal answer to our universal human need, our churches are filled with the same envy, selfishness and rivalry as the rest of chaotic society. What is not understood is that “the invasion of the personality by life from above does not by itself form the personality in the likeness of Christ. It does not of itself restore the soul into the wholeness intended for it in its creation. It does not alone bring one to the point where “the things I would, that I do, and the things I would not, I do not,” where “sin shall not have dominion over you.” (Rom 6:14) Rather, I must learn and accept the responsibility of moving with God in the transformation of my own personality. Intelligent and steady implementation of plans for change are required if I am to loose the incoherence of the broken soul and take on the easy obedience and fulfillment of the person who lives ever more fully within the kingdom of God and the friendship of Jesus.”<sup>cvi</sup>[108] In this way becoming dead to sin and more and more alive to God, and so being transformed into the likeness of Christ. The members of my body can become instruments of righteousness.

What is needed is an understanding of our continued participation in the cross that I understand to be our sanctification. This participation is called Christian spiritual formation. “Spiritual formation for the Christian basically refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”<sup>cix</sup>[109] It is entirely focused on Jesus with the goal of obedience and conformity to Him that arise out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ. This is accomplished through the Spiritual Disciplines. In his early book on the disciplines, Willard described these as the means whereby God changes lives. Since Protestants have ignored them because we feared falling back into a salvation by works, we are often trapped in the Pauline dilemma of knowing in our mind what we ought to be and do but unable to do it. Too often those who have practiced the disciplines have tried to do them a meritorious works to earn God’s favor. Oh, we are indeed creative sinners, and the Old Serpent is truly crafty! The gifts of God for our salvation are used to further enslave us.

The disciplines that Willard outlines as the means to train our members in righteousness are the classic Christian disciplines. He divides them into two categories:<sup>cx</sup>[110]

The Disciplines of Abstinence.

Solitude  
Silence  
Fasting  
Frugality  
Chastity  
Secrecy  
Sacrifice

The Disciplines of Engagement.

Study  
Worship  
Celebration  
Service  
Prayer  
Fellowship  
Confession

## Submission

Through regular practice of each of these exercises unto godliness, we bring ourselves into more effective cooperation with Christ and His Kingdom. Through them we participate in the process that moves us through objective justification to the subjective process of sanctification. They bring about the total transformation of the state of the soul. This means instead of trying to live a good life and keep the law of God, we are transformed in the functions of the soul so that the deeds of the law are a natural outflow of who you have become.cxi[111] We don't need more trying, but more training especially with regards to violence.

I shall not try to elaborate on each of the disciplines here. But look at two that are basic to all the others. These are solitude and silence. Habits of the mind, feelings, and body are so linked to our social setting, "that being alone and being quiet for lengthy periods of time are, for most people, the only way they can take the body and soul out of the circuits of sin and allow them to find a new habitual orientation in the Kingdom of the Heavens. Choosing to do this and learning how to do it effectively is a basic part of what we can do to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort, even with the assistance of grace."cxii[112] These can be effective in channeling our assertiveness and aggression away from escalating violence. They will enable us to break our *habitus*, and linked to the other disciplines, enable us to see and by God's power break our enslavement to the Principalities and Powers at work within our social contexts.

We could look at fasting as a way of retraining our dependence on immediate gratification which ties into mimetic desire and leads to much violence. We could look at study that focuses our mind upon God's work and word, thus forming the mind and thereby the soul and life so that we begin to think God's thought after him.

I could go on, but I believe I have shown that we will not overcome our violence within and without, if we do not take seriously the fact that the atonement is not just something in our past or something in heaven. It also includes our willingness to deny ourselves (that is die to life considered normal by everyday standards), take up our cross (the disciplines necessary) and follow our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

### **Some Concluding Thoughts**

I have written this paper one-year following the attack on The World Trade Center in New York. As I write, the communities in and around Washington D.C. are reeling from the random killings of a sniper. Congress has given our President the power to make war on Iraq. The Catholic Church is trying to recover from a flood of accusations of sexual scandal and cover-up. Indeed in recent decades there is not a denomination or congregation that has not been touched in some way by the same thing. We are shocked and overwhelmed by it all. But why should we be? What do we expect from peopled enslaved by sin and ruled by feelings and passions that seek only personal and social self-interest?

Is there any hope? There is if we who follow Jesus, his church, do whatever it takes to become the light on the hill and the salt of the earth that he desires us to be. We will need to change some of our thinking about ministry and evangelism to be so. We will need to bring to the forefront the idea that our churches should be about making disciples of Jesus. We will need to redesign our ministries for that purpose. I propose that we take Dallas Willard seriously enough that teaching and training of the Spiritual Disciplines are a regular part of a church's teaching ministry. This will also mean that our church colleges and seminaries train leaders to do this teaching.

There is much material available to help us do this. I have referred to Dallas Willard's works in this paper. Gary Thomas, founder of The Center For Evangelical Spirituality, is another evangelical who can help us. You can find his work listed at the Center's web-sight.cxiii[113] Of special interest relating spiritual formation to the home and marriage is Thomas' book, *Sacred Marriage*.cxiv[114] His thesis in this book is that God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy. With such insight, we can begin to deal with the violence in our marriages, make them avenues for our ongoing spiritual formation. There is also the older work by Tim Stafford, *Knowing The Face of God*,cxv[115] which is a good book to lay the

foundation for Willard or Thomas. In it, Stafford, explores the hiatus between or statements about having a personal relationship with God and our actual experience of such a relationship.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV) <sup>28</sup> “**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.** <sup>29</sup> **Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.** <sup>30</sup> **For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.**” This is the message we have the privilege of taking to a world weary of violence, but unable to do anything about. Here is the answer to our own violence within. All we need do is as our Lord asks: take up His easy yoke—the intelligent, informed, unyielding resolve to live as Jesus lived in all aspects of his life<sup>xvi</sup>[116]—by submitting to the disciplines of His Spirit.

*Vicit agnus noster, eum sequamur.*

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## Endnotes

cxvii[1] Quoted by Grace M. Jantzen, "Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace," *The Conrad Grebel Review* (Spring, 2002),

p. 13.

cxviii[2] Jantzen quoting Barth, p. 9.

cxix[3] Jean Lasserre, *War And The Gospel*, trans. Oliver Coburn (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1962), p. 168. Lasserre quotes

are from the following passages in the book of Acts: 2:23 and 36; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52; 10:39; 13:38.

cxx[4] With this last statement, I am already alluding to my belief about violence being inherent to our natures.

cxxi[5] I Corinthians 3:18ff. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes from the Bible will be from the NIV. International

Bible Society, *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973,

1978, 1984).

cxxii[6] Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 1, *God, Authority, & Salvation* (New York: Harper &

Row, 1978), pp. 148-152.

cxxiii[7] This name is taken from the title of Gustaf Aulen's book *Christus Victor*, trans. A. G. Herbert (New York:

Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1969).

cxxiv[8] John Driver, *Understanding The Atonement For The Mission of The Church* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald

Press, 1986), p. 39.

cxxv[9] Ibid. See also Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983, 1984, 1998,

2001), p. 810. Thomas N. Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Thomas

Nelson Publishers, 1985), p. 317. For a contrary view, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction*

*to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 581. He attributes the view to Origen, "and after him

by some others in the early history of the church." Grudem's statement plays down its significance in the early

church.

cxxvi[10] Finger, p. 321.

cxxvii[11] Driver, p.40.

cxxviii[12] Finger, p. 318.

cxxix[13] Ibid. This fits well with Paul's statement in Romans 1:24 & 26, that God "gave them over...". Specifically Paul

refers to humanity being given over to "sinful desires" and "shameful lusts." We shall see how these relate to our

the principalities and powers a little later in this paper.

cxiii[14]Grudem, p. 581.

cxiii[15] Finger, pp. 322-323. Driver's whole book referred to in note 8 gives an extensive Biblical study of this theory.

Erickson, pp. 818-832, gives a similar though briefer survey in his chapter on "The Central Theme of Atonement."

cxxxii[16] Finger, p. 321.

cxxxiii[17] H. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John H. Yoder (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1962). Walter

Wink, *Naming The Powers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1984); *Unmasking the Powers* (Minneapolis:

Augsburg Fortress Press, 1986); *Engaging The Powers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press 1992).

cxxxiv[18] Driver, p. 44.

cxxxv[19] Erickson, p. 803.

cxxxvi[20] Driver, p. 44.

cxxxvii[21] Erickson, 803.

cxxxviii[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 804-805.

cxxxix[23] Driver, p. 49.

cxl[24] *Ibid.*

cxli[25] *Ibid.*, p. 50. Under his title, "Satisfaction Theory," Driver discusses several variations that others treat as separate

including the Penal view that tends to be the theory of most conservative Protestants and Catholics and, the

Governmental view of Hugo Grotius.

cxlii[26] Cf. Driver pp. 50ff; Erickson, p. 814; Finger, pp. 304ff.

cxliii[27] Finger, p. 304.

cxliv[28] Erickson, p. 816.

cxlv[29] Grudem, p. 570.

cxlvi[30] See Driver, pp. 54-64 for an exegetical, theological, historical and practical critique of this theory.

cxlvii[31] Grudem, p. 570

cxlviii[32] See Matthew 20:28 and Matthew 16:18.

cxlix[33] Ephesians 2:13-16.

cl[34] 1 Peter 2:4-6, 9-10 (NIV)

cli[35] See Grudem reference in note 31.

clii[36] Cf. Psalm 23:3.

cliii[37] Erickson, p. 798.

cliv[38] Quoted by Ronald J. Sider, "A Call for Evangelical Non-violence" (Akron: Pennsylvania: Mennonite Central

Committee, n.d.) p. 2. Reprinted from *The Christian Century* (September 15, 1976).

clv[39] Driver, p. 16.

clvi[40] For the following quotes see Erickson, pp. 836-840. His particular view is the "Penal-substitutionary Theory."

clvii[41] *Ibid.*, p. 840.

clviii[42] Paul Tournier, *The Violence Within*, trans. Edwin Hudson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

clix[43] The others include the Brethren In Christ, Church of Brethren, and Quaker.

clx[44] Tournier, p. 113.

clxi[45] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

clxii[46] *Ibid.*

clxiii[47] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

clxiv[48] The following discussion is a reflection on animal behavior that he uses, pp. 7ff.

clxv[49] *Ibid.*, p. 7

clxvi[50] *Ibid.*

clxvii[51] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

clxviii[52] *Ibid.*

clxix[53] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

clxx[54] See his chapter by this title, pp. 113-118.

clxxi[55] *Ibid.*

clxxii[56] *Ibid.* p. 115.

clxxiii[57] Rene Girard, *Violence And The Sacred*, Trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press,

1977).

clxxiv[58] Tournier, p. 67-68.

clxxv[59] *Ibid.* p.145. Italics Girard's.

clxxvi[60] Marlin Miller, "Girardian Perspectives and Christian Atonement," in *Violence Renounced: Rene Girard, Biblical*

*Studies and Peacemaking*, Willard Swartley, ed. (Telford, Pennsylvania: Pandora Press U.S., 2000), p. 33.

clxxvii[61] Girard, p. 4.

clxxviii[62] Ibid., p. 8.

clxxix[63] Ibid.

clxxx[64] For a listing of these works, see Swartley, pp. 321-322.

clxxxi[65] Miller in Swartley, p.34.

clxxxii[66] Ibid.

clxxxiii[67] Ibid.

clxxxiv[68] Ibid., p. 46.

clxxxv[69] Jantzen, p. 5. See endnote 1 for complete bibliographic information. Italics hers.

clxxxvi[70] Ibid.

clxxxvii[71] Ibid., p. 6.

clxxxviii[72] Ibid.

clxxxix[73] Jantzen quoting Kappeler, p. 7.

cxci[74] With Credit to Molly T. Marshall, "On A Hill Too Far Away? Reclaiming The Cross as The Critical Interpretive Principle of The Christian Life," *Review and Expositor* (Spring, 1994) pp. 247-259. Accessed through OCLC FIRSTSEARCH.

cxci[75] Ibid., p. 248.

cxcii[76] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1998), p. 54.

cxci[77] Ibid., p. 49.

cxci[78] Ibid., p. 51.

cxci[79] Ibid., p. 53. Italics his.

cxci[80] See Marshall, p. 251. Her original statement was about substitutionary atonement: "Substitution as exclusively

God's work, precluding human participation, is an over simplification. Substitution as the gracious act of God,

atonement for sin and thereby doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves, must be joined by that which only we

can do.

cxcvii[81] Cf. these few examples: the benediction in Hebrews 13:20ff; I Peter 1:2, 13; 2:21; 3:15-18; I John 3:11-24.

cxcviii[82] Genesis 1:26-27 (NIV)

cxci[83] Cf. The discussions of the meaning of *Imago Dei* in Erickson, pp.517ff, Finger, vol. 2, pp. 15ff. Grudem, pp.

442-444.

cc[84] See Erickson, p. 532.

cci[85] Ibid.

ccii[86] Ibid. p. 533.

cciii[87] This is an expansion of earlier work I did on this idea in my book, *Women in The Church* (Scottsdale,

Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1978).

cciv[88] Vernard Eller, *War and Peace: from Genesis to Revelation* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), p. 24.

Italics his. Formerly published as *King Jesus' Manual of Arms for the 'Armless* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973).

ccv[89] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperCollins

Publishers, 1988), p. 63.

ccvi[90] Cf. Jesus in John 9:39-41.

ccvii[91] See Romans 1:21-23.

ccviii[92] Sider.

ccix[93] Kuhns, p. 42

ccx[94] See references in note 17 above.

ccxi[95] Wink, Naming The Powers, p. 5.

ccxii[96] John H. Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 149. All quotes in this paragraph are Yoder

quoting Berkhof. The same quotes can be found in Berkhof's book pp. 30f.

ccxiii[97] Marshall, p. 252.

ccxiv[98] Yoder, p. 61. My parenthesis added for clarification.

ccxv[99] Ibid., p. 97. Italics his.

ccxvi[100] C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters and Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 11.

ccxvii[101] In Williard's, *The Spirit of The Disciplines*, pp. 95-129.

ccxviii[102] Ibid., pp. 114-115. Italics his.

ccxix[103] Ibid., pp. 115-116. Italics his.

ccxx[104] Ibid., pp. 117-118

ccxxi[105] Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation and the Restoration of the Soul," *The Journal of*

*Psychology and Theology* (Spring, 1998). Accessed at Dallas Willard's web page at: <http://www.dwillard.org/>.

Willard's newest book, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Chrstit* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002), is a fuller development of this essay.

ccxxii[106] Ibid.

ccxxiii[107] Ibid.

ccxxiv[108] Ibid.

ccxxv[109] Willard, *Renovation of the heart*, p. 22.

ccxxvi[110] Willard, *The Spirit of The Disciplines*, p. 158. Chapter 8 of this book gives a history and meaning of the

disciplines. Chapter 9 describes some of the main disciplines.

ccxxvii[111] Ibid., *Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation...*

ccxxviii[112] Ibid.

ccxxix[113] <http://www.garythomas.com/>

ccxxx[114] (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

ccxxxi[115] (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1996). Previously published as *Knowing The Face of God* (Grand Rapids:

Zondervan, 1986, 1989).

ccxxxii[116] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, p. 10.

ccxxxiii[117] Yoder, p. 250. Translation: "Our Lamb has conquered, Him let us follow."

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