who pays the price

Well, let's get started. This evening I have a little bit of theology and some history and a lot of lecturing and some discussion. So really there's something here for everyone to hate. But the topic at least is one of the most important things we can talk about, and I hope that with some grace I can stimulate your thoughts and enquiries in new directions.

PROSPECT

As I advertised on the website, I'd like to consider three questions and several theses tonight and in the next four weeks. What is a theory of atonement and why do we use it? How does a given model filter and shape our experience with God and the church? How does our dominant model influence the way we repent, we forgive, we work, and we serve?

Where do we begin in tackling such a monumental topic? Well, let's start in two places: first, what actually happened (we'll come back here again at the end); and second, where our thinking about atonement typically has its roots.

WHAT HAPPENED

Our language is often imprecise, and we use "atonement" to denote "sacrifice" or "recompense", perhaps in token of our sorrow for an action. What we are discussing tonight and ahead is the specific action taken by Jesus Christ in the epitome of his Godly agency which allowed the reversal and overcoming of death and decay. Oddly enough, we do not see it happening—at least, we do not seem to understand its effects in more than a general way, and we do not understand what he did in more than a general way as well. (This is not said by way of condemnation, except as we may rest on our laurels rather than seek more.) The reason I will speak of these things is that I have learnt there is a broad range of models, and each of these has consequences to what we see as efficacious from Jesus' life and passion and death and resurrexion.

Any one of you would tell the story differently—different bits would stand out to you, other graces than those I will now recount. You could start at a lot of places—that piece of fruit with a single bite taken, or an angel explaining sacrifice to a lost and lonely Adam, or a pair of stone tables carried at great cost back to a wayward and idolatrous folk. But we begin our consideration with most, in an upstairs room, around a table. You've all imagined this scene before. *In media res.* Thirteen men gathered to eat, and to talk under tense and fraught circumstances. The foreign powers of Rome were wary, the religious authorities of the Jews were crafty and hostile. And a tiny and desperate band, about to become a little more tiny and a lot more desperate, gathered to celebrate the holiday which created their fractious and oppressed nation.

Jesus took a loaf of dark and grainy bread, and he brake it, and he blessed it. He took the wine, which must have been a little bitter, perhaps more so than usual that evening, and shared it among his friends. And of all the things he could have been doing on that night, he spent it in a quiet dinner conversation with his friends. I suppose that if you knew tonight was the last night you had, at least before everything changed, you couldn't really do much better than that. So Jesus talked with his friends. He told them of oneness, the *at-one-ment* he was about to realize, and he spoke of the true vine and the comforter, and he told them that seeds and love are greater than self-love and death. And he knelt down on the ground and washed their feet.

Then they sang a hymn, and they went out. McConkie suggests that they sang Pss. 113–118, which I will leave for your future perusal (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*?). So they sang this hymn, and they went out to the Mount of Olives. It must have been a cool night in Jerusalem in the spring, and it must have taken a few minutes. I wonder what they could have said to each other, unknowing what that evening held.

They stopped in the grove of olive trees, and as the three friends kept a sleepy watch, Jesus went out and took upon himself the horrible weight of sin, of pain, of insanity and cruelty and everything that is broken. And after the last drops of that bitter cup wrung the blood from his veins, he returned again to those friends in the dark of the evening.

Then another friend came along, and kissed him on the cheek, and handed him over to the soldiers so they could tear his cloak and crown him with thorns and nail him to a tree. Peter, who would so soon deny his Lord, felt strongly enough that he drew his sword and assaulted a man. Whom Jesus promptly healed. I can't picture it without Jesus dropping to his knees with this man to help him

And then a trial followed. A very wise man, one of the best I ever had the privilege to meet, told me under unusual circumstances that we can learn very much about the character of Christ by observing how he behaved during his trial. I still don't know all he meant. But there was a trial, and a travesty of law, and political expediency and favors and manipulation and the whole sorry mess that we know too well today. Right down to a certain elitist cynicism about truth. And again Jesus stood in for the worst man, for the lowest murderer, when those legions of angels could presently have carried him triumphant up to heaven. But it would have been the wrong triumph.

So instead a wooden beam was thrown across Jesus' bloodied back, and he carried until his fading and stressed mortal frame could do absolutely no more. The soldiers took him to the hill Calvary, and they took the nails, and they hung him up to die. Hours and hours later to die.

Take away the rest—how about that? Hours hanging on the cross. You're in excruciating pain. What do I do when I'm in the same spot for hours? Do you get bored? Do you have to pee? Your body starts to shut down as the slow-twitch muscle fibers exhaust themselves and collapse. Your lungs start to close and fill with fluid. I don't mean to take anything away from what passed in Gethsemane. But that is not a pain I can understand—blood from pores. This second pain, maybe, I can glimpse. So he cries for water and gets vinegar. *Vinegar*? I can barely smell the stuff. He passes responsibility for his widowed mother to John, and then he calls out in the moment of ultimate withdrawal, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And he knew the answer, and he still had to call—you don't waste words in that sort of situation. Then, after some hours more, Jesus "cried again with a loud voice and yielded up the ghost." And the veil rent in the temple and the power of the law to bind down was broken for ever. And suddenly blood—blood that washed down through the centuries of horror and soaked the ground of Jerusalem and the whole world—red blood could wash clothing bright and white. And Jesus became the Christ, and gained the power to make us his co-heirs to exaltation.

And that's the story, and in all wisdom if we never said anything more this story should suffice. But men kept talking, and tangling, and so we've gathered together tonight to try to tease out the threads of true knowing again. We've gathered tonight and will gather in the future to explain the garden and the cross, to ask and try to find out *why* that had to happen, why only that path could have built a bridge over the chasm that divided us forever from our Father.

We invoke accounts and essays: what the atonement *is*, some quantifier or adjective that we can apply to it. This is the encyclopedic urge, which leads to works like Tad Callister's *The Infinite Atonement*, which is almost a catalogue of scriptural claims about atonement and the effects that flow from it. And we all have experiences with Jesus Christ, else why are we here? There are sacred stories handed down in our families of ancestors who came to know Jesus, sometimes in quite personal ways.

So what we talk about today when we talk about atonement is a mishmash of interpretations of statements melded with personal and familial history. This isn't a dig at it, because we have received a lot of value from that, but if we're interested in going deeper then we need a framework to analyze and discuss the roots of our thought more precisely.

ROOTS OF THOUGHT

To understand this, men in all ages have invoked the dominant social structures of their time to describe the work of Christ. We see various economic and governmental metaphors suggested or imposed as models of what Jesus accomplished and how it works. And yet, each of these is just that—a model. The atonement is the work of Jesus Christ and the nail in the sure place—the nail on which the rest of our religion hangs, so it must be struck deep and true.

When we take up a model or a symbol, if we are not careful about its origins then we tend to overextend the analogy. You see this sometimes in the way we use parables, chaining them along until they've more than exhausted their utility. The models of atonement we have received generally have their roots in particular socioeconomic or cultural practices which men and women have used as a lens to understand God's action. By failing to understand the sources and frames that our thought has makes us a slave to tradition, and tradition is never highly spoken of in the Book of Mormon. If we are to effectively become at-one with God, we must come to understand how the at-one-ment truly works. That will take more than this life but you can't start too early.

Now I do not propose to tell you how the atonement works, in the final analysis. I don't know—I have some thoughts, as do each of you, and I hope we can pool those and learn. But I do hope that we can come to some understanding of what Christ did, how it relates to us, and how we can see it overflows all of the channels men have carved to irrigate only certain fields. This discussion will be somewhat academic, although I hope not dry. We will review the major models proposed of atonement as well as their motivations and consequences. And in so doing, I hope that we come to a greater appreciation of what the Book of Mormon and the revealed gospel offers us, "[a] good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over" (Luke 6:38). We worship a Divine Being who wants us to come up and dwell with him and be like him. He wants that more than you or I have ever wanted anything. He wants that more than we want sin. He established the means of fall, redemption, and quickening with roots deeper and branches broader than anything we have ever imagined. In the end, that's the only thing I want to say, the only truth I want to witness. And all I have to offer in this setting is an unchaining of tradition (I hope) that will permit us to peer more deeply into the tapestry of salvation. Theology is an indulgence I often permit myself, but I know that it is not the way to God.

MODELS OF ATONEMENT

One of my theses is that men summon the models of everyday society to try to catch the bird of atonement in a net of words. Primitive societies often have a notion of *weregild*. Does anyone want to show off their Beowulf or Tolkien and tell us what that means? A *weregild* is a "man-price", the restitution owed to a slain or injured person's family in lieu of retributive justice. And so that feeds into the earliest way that Christ's work is described, as a ransom. Later, normalized economies permitted scholars to pass off first finance and then government regulation as theology. (Humans are very perceptive that the *modern* way is the *best* way.)

The dominant model of atonement you hold governs the way you repent, the way your worship, and the way you think about God and his work. That is why it is imperative to have—not necessarily a complete and correct model—but first a living connexion to Jesus Christ through the experience of his atonement, and second an understanding of the inadequacy of the models themselves. The frame of

course privileges certain features of the world by what it includes and what it cuts out.

Now, before we delve into atonement theology more, I'd like to ask a general question of you.

- What metaphors for atonement have you heard used? (Can someone write for me?)

It only makes sense to begin with the earliest and most straightforward models of atonement—which aren't necessarily the same thing. So tonight we will begin with the post-apostolic age, then step back into prechristian Hebrew thought, and finally finish in the High Middle Ages.

So what did the earliest Church fathers propose? Or first—why did they propose anything at all?

It turns out that what we have written in the Bible, however trustworthy a record you may consider it, seems to treat atonement several different ways. And the bare text without a cultural frame doesn't take a stand of course: it isn't a work of formal philosophy or theology, and so we can't expect it to present either of those subjects. (It does present formal theology in the case of Paul, at least, but after more than a thousand pages that almost feels out of place.)

At the beginning, only the bare facts are stated: Jesus was incarnated as a man, he suffered a passion and died on the cross, and was resurrected on the third day. That finds its way into the great creeds of later centuries as a statement of fact. But particularly when controversies arise—the Gnostics in particular are responsible for a lot of trouble—it became necessary as they saw it to clarify what exactly was meant by "atonement". And thus Christian theology was born.

Although many variations on their themes can be identified, most models of atonement fall broadly into one of three categories. We'll step in and out of this framework as we proceed, but will keep it always in view.

MORAL

> *The meaning of Christ's death was to demonstrate God's love towards His children and thus to soften our hearts, causing us to repent.*

TRANSACTIONAL

> *Humanity's spiritual condition as a result of the Fall is slavery to Satan. Jesus paid a ransom to Satan and thus freed us.*

SUBSTITIONARY

> *Jesus Christ is punished instead of us. Only divine forgiveness can satisfy divine justice. (God is not willing to pardon a sin without satisfaction.)*

As Christians, we accept the premise that Jesus came to save us from sin—else why did he come at all? The gospel record is clear and unambiguous on this point. And the horrible burden he bore to render us capable of joint-heirship with him in the kingdom of God surely would not have been borne if there were any other way. This is the naked fact which we must engage, whether mystically or theologically.

RANSOM/TRANSACTIONAL

The earliest proposal (although they wouldn't have thought of it that way) was the ransom theory of atonement. This developed early by the Church Fathers and was really elaborated by later theologians like Augustine. It arose from their understanding of several scriptures, such as:

> *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Matt. 10:45[KJV])*

> *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; ·who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. (1 Tim. 2:5–6[KJV])*

Building off of the idea that a *ransom* was paid, they inferred that a ransom must be paid *to* someone. As a result of the fall, men and women were under the power of the devil. So to free us, Jesus Christ paid a price to him.

> *At that moment they heard from behind them a loud noise—a great cracking, deafening noise as if a giant had broken a giant's plate … . The Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end; and there was no Aslan.*
>
> *"Who's done it?" cried Susan. "What does it mean? Is it more magic?"*
>
> *"Yes!" said a great voice from behind their backs. "It is more magic." They looked round. There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself.*
>
> *"But what does it all mean?" asked Susan … .*
>
> *"It means," said Aslan, "that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward." (C. S. Lewis,* The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe)

As a result of the fall, men and women were under the power of the devil. Jesus Christ paid a price and ransomed us from the devil's power. Ah, but it was a trick, for the devil could not hold the greater prize when it was placed within his grasp!

Historically, this line of thought was first pursued by Irenæus and his successors the Church Fathers, considered the developers of proto-orthodoxy into orthodoxy.

Most of the very early controversies do not center around what Christ did—frankly, the earliest major conflicts are almost exclusively about the nature of God and the Trinity (see Pellikan for more details). Rather interestingly—and this may tell us something about the shackles the Book of Mormon hints are laid upon us by tradition—the philosopher's god, "a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute" is never challenged: "one would expect that the Christian definition of the deity of God would be regulated by the content of the divine as revealed in Christ. In fact however, the early Christian picture of God was controlled by the self-evident axiom, accepted by all, of the absoluteness and impassibility of the divine nature" (Pelikan, 229). That creed I just quoted was written in 1646, but it accurately reflected a consensus across 1500 years at that point (Westminster Confession of Faith). Besides reaching into nature and the trinity, this doctrine ultimately intersected with infant baptism to give rise to the doctrine of original sin in Augustine (Pelikan, 292). (Incidentally, this blew my mind when I first read it last year: the doctrine of *original sin* arose from the established practice of *infant baptism* rather than the other way around.) "That one sin was itself so great that by it, in one man, the whole human race was originally and, so to say, radically condemned. It cannot be pardoned and washed away except through the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who alone could be borne in such as way as not to need to be reborn" (Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 14:48). (Again incidentally, this denial of the necessity of Jesus' baptism was a symptom of Augustine's support of a moral influence theory, up next.)

One interesting feature about the classical philosophical view of God that prevailed is that the

assertion of God's nature was taken as the fundamental fact and then all else had to be derived from it. This of course led to Christology, Mariology, the Real Presence of the Mass, the whole bit. (As an aside, Mormonism tends to consider the relationship to God as the fundamental fact, and thus in a sense we derive much of what we know or conjecture about Heavenly Father from our material experience with atonement rather than vice versa.)

The ransom theory grew out of the social reality of early Christians: they were caught in a cosmic battle between the powers that be and extinction, and thus the devil was winning on either hand. But "Jesus told [them] all is well, so all must be well" (Mumford & Sons). This is the first example of understanding the atonement by a social reality and by a convention that was familiar to them: a man-price or slave-price which could be paid in order to redeem them. And, that price being paid, they could rest easy in the knowledge that they were redeemed—another economic word.

Turning back to the ransom theory and Irenæus, one scholar wrote:

> *Irenaeus has two different ways of expressing the righteousness of God's act of redemption. According to the first, the devil cannot be allowed to have any rights over men; he is a robber, a rebel, a tyrant, a usurper, unjustly laying hands on that which does not belong to him. Therefore it is no more than justice that he should be defeated and driven out... But at the same time Irenaeus also exhibits the righteousness of God's redemptive work, by showing that in it He does not use mere external compulsion, mere brute force, but acts altogether according to justice. 'God deals according to justice even with the apostasy itself.' For man after all is guilty; man has sold himself to the devil. (Aulén,* Christus Victor*, pp. 27–28)*

Irenæus again:

> *For [the Son of God] fought and conquered; for He was man contending for the fathers, and through obedience doing away with disobedience completely: for He bound the strong man, and set free the weak, and endowed His own handiwork with salvation, by destroying sin. (III, 18.6)*

One flaw of the ransom theory, perhaps, was its ambiguity in to whom the price came due. A ransom or weregild must, of course, be paid to someone, else it is the wrong notion to apply to the transaction described. So either God pays a ransom to himself, or to the devil.

Some followed this attitude through, such as Gregory of Nyssa:

> *God, without the knowledge of His enemy, got within the lines of him who had man in his power, is in some measure a fraud and a surprise; seeing that it is the peculiar way with those who want to deceive to divert in another direction the expectations of their intended victims, and then to effect something quite different from what these latter expected. . . .*
>
> *So in this instance, by the reasonable rule of justice, he who practised deception receives in return that very treatment, the seeds of which he had himself sown of his own free will. He who first deceived man by the bait of sensual pleasure is himself deceived by the presentment of the human form. But as regards the aim and purpose of what took place, a change in the direction of the nobler is involved; for whereas he, the enemy, effected his deception for the ruin of our nature, He Who is at once the just, and good, and wise one, used His device, in which there was deception, for the salvation of him who had perished, and thus not only conferred benefit on the lost one, but on him, too, who had wrought our ruin. . . . Therefore even the adversary himself will not be likely to dispute that what took place was both just and salutary, that is, if he shall have attained to a perception of the boon. (Schaff & Wace, ch. 23, 26).*

Origen expressed it thus:

> *But to whom did He give His soul as a ransom for many? Surely not to God. Could it, then, be to the Evil One? For he had us in his power, until the ransom for us should be given to him, even the life (or soul) of Jesus, since he (the Evil One) had been deceived, and led to suppose that he was capable of mastering that soul, and he did not see that to hold Him involved a trial of strength greater than he was equal to. Therefore also death, though he thought he had prevailed against Him, no longer lords over Him, He (Christ) having become free among the dead and stronger than the power of death.* (In Matthæum, *xvi. 8)*

But could God legitimately owe a debt to the devil, or could man legitimately contract a debt with the devil which could judicially be paid by God?

A similar account of the transactional model is the *Christus Victor* theory. This is similar to the ransom theory, but tells the story thus: Jesus triumphed over Satan in cosmic battle; the resulting death of Christ sealed God's victory over the devil.

> *[This theory's] central theme is the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ—Christus Victor—fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself. (*Christus Victor*, p. 4)*
>
> *The classic idea of salvation is that the victory which Christ gained once for all is continued in the work of the Holy Spirit, and its fruits reaped. . . . The victory of Christ over the powers of evil is an eternal victory, therefore present as well as past. Therefore Justification and Atonement are really one and the same thing; Justification is simply the Atonement brought into the present, so that here and now the Blessing of God prevails over the Curse. (*Christus Victor*, p. 150)*
>
> *The Atonement is set forth as the Divine victory over the powers that hold men in bondage. Yet at the same time these very powers are in a measure executants of His own judgment on sin. This opposition reaches its climax in the tension between the Divine Love and the Divine Wrath. . . . The Divine Love prevails over the Wrath, the Blessing overcomes the Curse, by the way of the Divine self-oblation and sacrifice. The redeeming work of Christ shows how much the Atonement 'costs' God. (*Christus Victor*, p. 153)*

There is a sharp and apocalyptic edge to this account which appeals to my habits of thought, and it fits will with the dramatic and windswept images of Revelation, like the Wild Hunt or Napoleon crossing the Alps. It sends shivers down my spine.

In particular, for the Christus Victor model the *death* of Jesus Christ is the victory, and the resurrection is set as a sort of seal manifesting the result. The death of Jesus Christ, then, becomes almost ironic in this telling, a flaunting of his triumph over the devil unwitting.

If you've been following along with your worksheet, we can pause now and address at least a couple of those questions.

- First, what do you perceive as the strength of the ransom and Christus Victor models? What are their weaknesses?
    - What is the major emphasis?
        - We are *liberated* from hostile powers, rather than *forgiven.* This has led to some caginess about this theory from many Protestants.

- Why can God morally deceive the devil? Better, how can God deceive the devil? Did Satan forget about Jesus?
- This theory also doesn't account for why the *suffering* was necessary, particularly if you conceive of a classical omnipotent God.
  - *When we say to these people, 'It was from . . . the power of the devil that God ransomed us, and he came himself to drive out the devil on our behalf because we were ourselves incapable of this, and he bought back the kingdom of heaven for us, and, through the fact that he did all these things in this way, he showed us how much he loved us', they reply, 'If you say that God could not have done all these things merely by commanding that they should be done—the same God whom you say created all things by issuing commands—you are contradicting yourselves, because you are making him out to be powerless. Alternatively, if you admit that he could have acted, but did not wish to act, other than in this way, how can you show him to be wise, while asserting that he wishes for no reason to suffer such indignities? (Anselm,* Cur Deus Homo)

- Where does this model find its expression in the LDS church today (hymnody)?
- Does it meet Abelard's constraint?

MORAL INFLUENCE

Another way after the apostolic age that people tried to understand atonement was through what became known as the moral influence theory. This pops up again and again through the Middle Ages into modern times—it's particularly a favorite of liberal theologians but not limited to them. Basically, the moral influence theory suggests that the meaning of Christ's death was to demonstrate God's love towards His children and thus to soften our hearts, causing us to repent. "Jesus' death is thus understood as a consequence of his activity, and it gains its significance as part of the larger story of his life, death, and resurrection" (Wikipedia, "Moral influence theory of atonement").

> *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his footsteps. (1 Peter 2:21[KJV])*
>
> *Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. (Luke 7:47[KJV])*

Although there are earlier precedents, the major advocate who developed this view was Peter Abelard, who articulated it in opposition to the enormously influential satisfaction theory of Anselm. He lifted it in large measure from the arguments of Augustine and Clement of Rome.

I really wanted a good quote from Abelard here, but surprisingly his works are nearly impossible to find. The primary one is his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, which was translated into English for the first time only in 2011. The scholastics aren't known for their armchair reading style anyway.

This theory comes in and out of favor over the centuries, but isn't majorly influential except as a bogeyman for a long time. The orthodox are wary of it particularly because of the *Pelagian heresy*. Pelagius was an English monk who taught that the human will is sufficient in and of itself to choose good. The Pelagian heresy thus holds that "man could, by the natural power of free will and without the necessary help of God's grace, lead a morally good life" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 406). This denied original sin, and led to an unacceptably noble conception of humanity, and was thus quashed. You can see how it relates to the moral influence model, though.

The moral theory really comes into its own in the nineteenth century among the German theologians, who taught that Jesus Christ, whether God or man, triumphed over His own sinful nature during His

lifetime, and contemplation of this fact and His actions will awaken within us *das Gottesbewußtsein*, a "god-consciousness". To me it comes off as a little hippy-dippy, particularly for dour German theologians. This feeds into Eugene England's thought in LDS circles as well.

One huge advantage that the moral influence theory has over its rivals is that it has nothing of the bizarre to it: no rough edges to wound our sensibilities. There is no need for a ransom or a substitution—we have simply been shown how to live, and how to face death, and by so doing we can attain to the resurrection as well. Yet for many practicing confessional Christians, the theory has fallen quite short, particularly as the individual responsibility for sin seems to be watered down. With something missing, the moral influence theory is too thin a reed to lean on for most people.

As a twist on this theory, another scholar has suggested that in a sense Christ's atonement gives our repentance traction: "Repentance is a psychological act that is made possible—in other words it is made effective—by the Atonement of Jesus Christ. If it was not for Christ, then repentance would be merely a state of mind, or a change of mind; but because of Christ it is made effectual—because of Christ, repentance saves" (Bruce Charlton, *Miscellany*).

- Take a moment to look at the questions on the handout and share any thoughts you have.
    - "Why is allowing oneself to be crucified unjustly when one has the means to prevent it a morally exemplary thing to do?" (Speaks, "Philosophical Theology Atonement Handout", p. 5).
- Where does this model particularly find its expression in the LDS church today?
    - Hymnody.

HEBREW

So much of Israelite theology is dual: there is a hieratic or priestly strand, focused on the ritual cult at Jerusalem or its predecessor sites; and there is a mantic strand, driven by the wild and unstable oratory of the prophets. (Although the Mosaic law comes first in our bibles and in our received chronology, there are strong reasons to believe that most of text as we now have it is much later, a position not incompatible with the picture of the ancient world we find in the Book of Mormon.) Good Mormons don't like to separate these strands—we prefer our prophecy domesticated. Anyway, in both cases we find involved ritual theories of atonement presented, which are constructed jointly or severally by scholars.

First the priestly view. This is a legalistic reconstruction of the ritual cult at the Tabernacle and later the First Temple of Solomon and the Second Temple of Herod. Obviously practices would have varied significantly over this span of centuries, and so rather than examine specific sacrifices in detail, we will make some overarching comments.

This is also the only time I expect to invoke temple theology—so I'll do so in good Nibleyan fashion. Temple derives from templum, the open field used for Roman augury. The priest would draw the urbs quadratus ⊕, the ritual square, and cordon it off into the four quarters of the earth. He would then sit at the center in the tabernāculum, the tent, to observe the signs in the heavens—in the Roman case, particularly the flight of birds. The temple is the template of the cosmos, and this is a key to understanding ritual ancient and modern.

Atonement is one of several common renditions of כפרת *kaphoreth*, itself derived from כָּפַר kaphar, meaning to cover over, to pacify, to make propitiation (Strong's). However, it has been argued by scholars that the meaning was soon completely specialized, rather like how when we refer to "endowment" as LDS we mean it as a specific ceremony rather than an object given. One scholar of

Hebrew expanded thus on kaphar: "to atone means to cover or recover, cover again, to repair a hole, cure a sickness, mend a rift, make good a torn or broken covering. As a noun, what is translated atonement, expiation or purgation means *[casing or covering layer] made good.* [The opposite, incidentally, is defilement.] Atonement does not mean covering a sin so as to hide it from the sight of God; it means making good an outer layer which has rotted or been pierced" (Douglas, 1993–4, pp. 117–118). In this vein, scholar Margaret Barker argued that, "Atonement rituals repaired the damage to the created order caused by sin through which 'wrath' could have broken in with such disastrous consequences" (Barker, 1996, p. 8). It is the promise, in essence, that broken walls will be mended, that broken hearts will be made whole, that death and pain and loss and violence will be set at harmony and superseded.

The physical ritual expression takes the form of an animal slain and perhaps burnt, followed by the sprinkling of blood about the altar and upon the priest's person. "The life of all flesh is the blood thereof" (Lev. 17:14)—and thus the influence of God's life is set to counteract damage and chaos by spreading his life-force, his blood, through the temple, the symbolic universe[1].

In pagan societies, blood sacrifice was invoked to placate the deity's anger. In contrast to this, in Hebrew ritual we find that the animal seems to represent the high priest, who himself represents God. Thus creation is symbolically, ritually reconciled to God, rather than God being reconciled to creation. (This is a vital point, and is part of the reason that we should not be so quick to write off the intricate discourses on sacrifice and ordinances in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Even if they are suspect from a divine origin standpoint, they still represent Hebrew thought.)

Another fragment of Hebrew thought in this matter is the scapegoat.

> *And [Aaron] shall take the two goats, and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. ·And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat. ·And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. ·But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness. (Lev. 16:7–10^{KJV})*

In later times, Christians took up this image to represent Jesus bearing away our sins into the wilderness. However, while we can conceive of parallels, we cannot map this concept straight to his atonement. Partially, the scapegoat view fails because we cannot accept fully that it is *right* to punish the innocent for the guilty, and Jesus did much more than simply bear our sins away (Charlton).

Early Hebrews, in contrast, apparently thought of the scapegoat as Satan, being driven away along with the sin he introduced to the nation.

Second, the prophetic view. I believe that as this comes down to us in our bible it is complementary to the priestly models, although perhaps more immediate than the congregational activities discussed previously. For the Hebrew mind, atonement—covering—restores what was broken. That is, it justifies man to God by solemn ritual. And in the prophets in particular there's this wonderful sense of immediacy and urgency to this, a recognition that the nation needed this renewal.

We particularly find the case of Isaiah, who describes an impromptu rite of atonement—for its purpose was certainly to cover his sin:

> *In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. ·Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. ·And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole*

1 Machina, K. (2008). "Supplement to the Alison reading on Jesus' death as sacrifice".

> *earth is full of his glory. ·And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.*
>
> *¶Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. ·Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: ·And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. (Isaiah 6:1–7[KJV])*

Consider this ritual action—for even if it had never been carried out in this way before or since it was certainly ritual. The great Old Testament theologian von Rad wrote:

> *At this direct encounter with supreme holiness and in this atmosphere of sheer adoration, Isaiah became conscious of his own sinfulness and was appalled—indeed, the sin of his whole nation seemed to be made manifest in his own person. At his confession of sin Jahweh made a sign—Isaiah did not, of course, see this—and a rite of atonement, which now made it possible for him to raise his voice in this holy place, was performed upon his lips. (von Rad, II, p. 64)*

We see similar encounters, cryptic and alien to our modes of thought, again and again in the prophets. In order to motivate the nation to repent and be restored to Jehovah's good graces, the prophets take up sackcloth, lamentation, physical illustrations, parables, prison, and death—all in pursuit of an atonement.

Returning to the solemn ritual: scholars (such as von Rad) have long viewed the priest's partaking of the ritual meal as a divine fellowship meal, literally sitting down with Jehovah present to eat with him. (You can see this bleeding over into the empty seat left for Elijah in Rabbinic Judaism.) Of course, the Passover was a meal taken with a god, in those long hours before Gethsemane and Calvary. Perhaps we would get more out of the sacrament if we brought that awareness back into it: Jesus sitting and breaking bread with us. A little bitter wine, the hard crust of a dark coarse bread, and the quiet company of the Savior.

We will skip the questions now in the interest of time and proceed via detour centuries hence into the high middle ages.

MEDIÆVAL/DEVOTIONAL

One of the longest-lasting movements in the history of atonement theology was been the central rôle that the Passion played in high mediæval thought. Much of this devotional aspect was popular and in reaction to the excesses of scholasticism, which we'll discuss about next time we meet.

Thomas à Kempis' *De imitatione Christi* has always been an extremely popular devotional work. *The Imitation of Christ* portrays the ways in which an ascetic and disciplined lifestyle including contemplation of Jesus, Mary, and the saints is the higher way: "The whole life of Christ was a cross and a martyrdom." The book carries a particular emphasis on the rôle of the Real Presence, the transubstantiated body and blood of Christ at the Mass, in cultivating worthiness in the disciple, as well as *meditatio et imitatio*, the contemplation and imitation of Jesus.

> *Thou errest, thou errest, if thou dost seek for aught but to suffer tribulation; for the whole life of mortal man is full of misery, is surrounded with crosses.*
>
> *Not man's virtue, but Christ's grace, it is that can effect so much in the frail flesh as to make it, through the fervour of the spirit, like and seek that which by nature it always*

abhors and avoids.

Set thyself therefore, like a good and faithful servant of Christ, manfully to bear thy Lord's cross; thy Lord for love of thee was crucified for thee.

Set thyself to bear tribulation, and look upon it as the greatest consolation ; for "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," nor would they be so if thou alone couldest bear all.

*If thou settest thyself to what thou oughtest, namely, to suffer and to die, it shall soon be well with thee, and thou shalt find peace. (*De imitatione Christi*, II 12:vii–xii)*

For Kempis and his interpreters (such as Bellarmine), the vicarious death of Christ is not efficacious as atonement so much as his life is a depiction of how we ought to live and his death a depiction of how we ought to die. We thereby come into contact with God and inherit eternal life. Thus even Jesus' death as a theological action is downplayed, and something like Abelard's moral theory pops up—we are to be saved by becoming Christlike. Again, we gain a motivation and lose a means.

Although certainly not the only point of contention, the focus of these works and approach led to the Protestant Reformation: Luther reacted against such works-based merit in favor of sola gratia and the other solæ, as well we know.

(Incidentally, to return to a point I made earlier, this illustrates that the type of model you have influences the part of Jesus' work upon which you focus—although that may be a backwards-reasoning way of thinking about it: for Kempis, the cross, the death of Jesus, is the supreme fact.)

Another form that this mediæval devotion took was the great medieval passion plays. These first arose in the 1100s and have lasted in some cases until the present day. (I wanted to find a good quote or illustration from these, but it turns out that they are very stiff and embroidered and rather boring to a modern ear. It turns out that our notion of drama is more akin to classical antiquity than the Middle Ages.)

Anyway, a very popular festival was to hold a great mystery or passion play, a many-hours-long presentation of a biblical text transposed into then-contemporary circumstances. Closely related to this, although allied with the Roman Catholic Church, was the rise of mediæval devotional sequences, early hymns for Advent, Christmas, Michaelmas, or other liturgical seasons. Among these is the wonderful "Victimæ Paschali Laudes", which you can read complete in the sources or listen to set as a Gregorian chant online.

Incidentally, it is precisely this mystical focus on Jesus that leads us to one of the great innovations in Catholic iconography: the crucifix with a dead Christ upon it. Prior to the High Middle Ages, the cross was conventionally rendered with Christus triumphans, a Christ Pantocrator, Lord of the Universe, a glorious and triumphant god much like what we later see in Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece.

The last point I would like to bring up before our concluding discussion is a point put forward by Julian of Norwich ("Saint Julian of Norwich", New World Encyclopedia). Julian was an anchoress, an English hermit in the fourteenth century. We know very little about her—not even her name, which is not actually Julian, this being the name of the church where she dwelt. At thirty years of age, Julian experienced a severe illness which brought her near death. She experienced a series of visions of God, and she was personally told by Jesus perhaps the simplest and most beautiful expression of the gospel message. (This is in the primary sources online in translation, but I'll give you the original because of the energy it has.)

Synne is behovabil, but al shal be wel and al shal be wel and all manner of thyng shal be

*wele. (*Revelations of Divine Love*, xxvii)*

"Behovabil" would be better rendered into modern English as "behovely", but that doesn't help us much. It means "necessary" and "useful". So for Julian's Jesus, sin is part of the plan—it is in fact necessary and useful precisely "because it brings us to self-knowledge—knowledge of our own fallibility—which in turn moves us to seek God" (Flinders, Enduring Grace, p. 111). And with that attitude, how then will we view our failures and secret shames? And how will it feel to be told some day by Jesus "all shall be well"? That's an experience I am still searching for—I believe it, but I like to hear it again.

Finally, finally, here is an extended discussion of the meaning of atonement, the love of God reaching out to his estranged creation.

> *He shewed me a little thing, the quantity of an hazel-nut, in the palm of my hand; and it was as round as a ball. I looked thereupon with eye of my understanding, and thought: What may this be? And it was answered generally thus: It is all that is made. I marvelled how it might last, for methought it might suddenly have fallen to naught for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasteth, and ever shall [last] for that God loveth it. And so All-thing hath the Being by the love of God.*
>
> *In this Little Thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loveth it, the third, that God keepeth it. But what is to me verily the Maker, the Keeper, and the Lover,—I cannot tell; for till I am Substantially oned to Him, I may never have full rest nor very bliss: that is to say, till I be so fastened to Him, that there is right nought that is made betwixt my God and me.*
>
> *This little thing which is created seemed to me as if it could have fallen into nothing because of its littleness. We need to have knowledge of this, so that we may delight in despising as nothing everything created, so as to love and have uncreated God. For this is the reason why our hearts and souls are not in perfect ease, because here we seek rest in this thing which is so little, in which there is no rest, and we do not know our God who is almighty, all wise and all good, for he is true rest. God wishes to be known, and it pleases him that we should rest in him; for everything which is beneath him is not sufficient for us. And this is the reason why no soul is at rest until it has despised as nothing all things which are created. When it by its will has become nothing for love, to have him who is everything, then is it able to receive spiritual rest. (*Revelations of Divine Love*, v)*

QUESTIONS FOR NEXT TIME

- How do different parables illustrate the atonement? How can different characters in the parable represent an aspect of Jesus Christ?

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