

LIFTING OF THE CURSE: ATHANASIUS ON MAKING SENSE OF THE DIVINE “WRATH” AND “PROPTITIATION” IN THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

Robert C. Doyle, Ph.D.

Visiting Lecturer, Moore Theological College

Sydney and George Whitefield College, Cape Town

rcdoyle@me.com

Abstract: *The purpose of this article is to identify how Athanasius in On the Incarnation (c. 337) understands the relationship of God to the elements of judgment and redemption often indicated in the biblical story by the terms “wrath” and “propitiation”. Five other treatments are referred to by way of comparison and extension of Athanasius approach: Anselm, Why God Became Man (c. 1090); John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion 2.12-17 (1559); John Owen, The Death of Death in the Death of Christ (1647); John McLeod Campbell, The Nature of the Atonement (1856); and T. F. Torrance, Atonement: the person and work of Christ (2009). James Torrance’s ministry of reconciliation, and scholarly comment on Athanasius, Calvin, and Campbell also elucidates Athanasius. In that way, we may identify biblically and conceptually robust resolutions of some, if not all, of the problems that continue to trouble Christian doctrinal construction and proclamation of the atonement.*

Contemporary Difficulties

Several contemporary authors and song writers in the Evangelical tradition reflect the difficulties the Christian tradition has faced in giving an appropriate and lucid account of two recurring themes in the Bible’s presentation of atonement — the wrath of God, and propitiation. On the one hand, we are invited to sing “He chose to send his precious only Son, to punish him for sins we’ve done,”¹ and on the other, to believe that “for Paul, wrath is not a divine property

1 “At the Cross”, words by Bryson Smith, music by Philip Percival. 1996 Plainsong



or essential attribute of God . . . [1 Thess. 1:9-10] Even in this context, divine anger or retributive justice are alien concepts, since these assume . . . that God's sense of holiness must be required."² "Christ's work . . . is primarily directed toward human sin and not God's wrath."³ Now, all these authors nuance their understandings in ways that both reflect the biblical material and moderate the seeming starkness of the statements cited above. Further, it is quite proper to note that, unlike love and holiness that eternally mark the relations between the persons of the Trinity, wrath is a response of that love and holiness to the depths of human wickedness. But that is not the same as making wrath in some sense distant from who God is in himself and his saving acts in the world.

These contemporary formulations are, of course, far from the radical solution offered by C. H. Dodd, in which the wrath of God is a somewhat impersonal "inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe."⁴ Indeed, wide-ranging biblical studies, while appreciative of the depth of C. H. Dodd's work, will affirm that in the Old and New Testaments "the *orgē* word-group serves to illustrate the character of God", and that John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul stress the reality of the future wrathful judgment of God whom Israel and the rest of Adam's race have deeply and personally offended.⁵ With respect to "propitiation", the *kipper* group in the Hebrew Bible and *hilaskomai* group in the Greek Testaments are not reducible to just expiation or removal of sin. Colin Brown concludes that C. K. Barrett's comments on Paul's use in Romans can be applied to Old Testament passages too: "It would be wrong to neglect the fact that expiation has, as it were, the effect of propitiation; the sin that might have excited God's wrath is expiated (at God's will) and therefore no longer does so."⁶ After canvassing

Version, © Words: 1996 Emu Music Australia, Inc. URL: <http://www.harptabs.com/song.php?ID=10130>.

2 Joel B Green & Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: atonement in the New Testament & contemporary contexts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000). 54.

3 Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 347.

4 *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder, 1932), 23.

5 H. C. Hahn, "Anger" in *The New International Dictionary of Evangelical Theology, volume 1: A-F*, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1975), 111, and passim 105-13.

6 *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Adams and Charles Black, 1957), 78. Cited from C. Brown "ἵλασκειν", *The New International Dictionary of Evangelical Theology, volume 3: Pri-Z*, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978) 157, and passim 148-66. See also N. T. Wright comments on Romans 3:25-26, with reference to the debate concerning propitiation versus expiation, in *Interpreter's Bible Commentary* volume 10, ed. P. J. Sampley et al.

the options for understanding *hilastērion* in Romans 3:25, C. E. B. Cranfield follows Chrysostom in affirming:

On the whole it seems best to accept (iv)[“a propitiatory sacrifice”]. . . . We take it that what Paul’s statement that God purposed Christ as a propitiatory victim means is that God, because in his mercy he willed to forgive sinful men and, being truly merciful, willed to forgive them righteously, that is, without in any way condoning their sin, purposed to direct against his own very Self in the person of his Son the full weight of that righteous wrath which they deserved.⁷

But there is a current pushback on viewing the propitiatory elements of atonement in this way. In a Mennonite tradition of affirming a “nonviolent God”, drawing on contemporary scholarship that further develops C. H. Dodd’s views,⁸ J. Denny Weaver has argued for an acceptance of a divine wrath that is interpreted in his narrative Christus Victor model of atonement as representing one of the two stances from which we, the human race, view the salvation drama, love being the other. “Wrath” signifies “an act of judgment as long as we continue in bondage to the powers of evil that enslave us.”⁹ The Son carries out the Father’s will not by in any sense being a propitiation of a personal divine wrath, but by making the nonviolent reign of God visible in the world. This is the Jesus we meet in the scriptural narrative. In him, as the “mercy seat”, we have both stances from which to view the atonement. As the “mercy seat” (*hilastērion*), the crucified Christ is the “the throne of God’s presence — where atonement is made.”¹⁰ Although nonviolent, Jesus’ confrontation of the evil powers was an active resistance, not passive, and it cost him his life. The resurrection vindicates Jesus’ revelation of the Father’s nonviolent and liberating will for his creation, and is the defeat of the evil powers. It now enables a discipleship that itself resists evil and “upholds a message of liberation for both oppressed and oppressors.”¹¹

In this way, through our involvement in the divine drama, Weaver draws together atonement and discipleship into an indissoluble whole, unlike more

(Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), pp. 519-20.

7 *The Epistle to the Romans, volume 1* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 216-7, and footnote 1.

8 E.g. Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul’s Gospel and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 54, 57. Cited by Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 67-8.

9 *Nonviolent Atonement*, 98.

10 Weaver citing Hultgren. *Ibid.*, 67-8.

11 *Ibid.*, 319.

abstract satisfaction theories which separate the believer from the cross event. In the context of Weaver's argument for a narrative Christus Victor model, "wrath", then, is reconfigured away from a personal outpouring of righteous anger by the holy and merciful God of Israel to a standpoint from which we can appropriately view our all-too-human bondage to evil. We see "wrath" not from God's perspective, for he is essentially nonviolent, but that of the narrative and our involvement in it as sinners in willing bondage to the evil powers.¹²

In these serious engagements with the scriptural salients of atonement the authors are deploying conceptual strategies drawn from Christian thought more widely. The purpose of this article is to identify how Athanasius in *On the Incarnation* (c. 337)¹³, understands the relationship of God to the elements of judgment and redemption often indicated in the biblical story by the terms "wrath" and "propitiation", with special attention to the wider strategies within which his treatment sits. Five other classical treatments will then be referred to by way of comparison and extension of Athanasius' approach: Anselm, *Why God Became Man* (c. 1090); John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.12-17 (1559); John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647); John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (1856); and T. F. Torrance, *Atonement: the person and work of Christ* (2009).¹⁴ James Torrance's ministry of reconciliation, and scholarly comment on Athanasius, Calvin, and Campbell also elucidates Athanasius. In that way, we may hopefully identify biblically and conceptually robust resolutions of some, if not all, of the problems that continue to trouble Christian doctrinal construction and proclamation.

12 "The wrath of God and the love of God represent the two stances from which we view the salvation drama, the two perspectives from which we view the act of God in Christ - as an act of judgment as long as we continue in bondage to the powers of evil that enslave us, and as an act of love that frees us from the powers of evil. These are not consecutive stages in God's attitude toward humankind but differing stages in humankind's perception of God." Ibid., 97-8.

13 Following the dating of Robert W. Thomson, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) [RWT *On Inc.*], xxi-xxii.

14 This last choice may be proleptic with respect to formative influence on systematic reflection, but its profundity, and the earlier appearance in 1992 of its leading ontological thoughts, suggest that giving it the status of "classical" is more than idiosyncratic. Refer T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992 rev. ed.) 109-26 and *The Trinitarian Faith: the evangelical theology of the early catholic church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 154-90.

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (c. 337)¹⁵

Although Athanasius not infrequently quotes St Anthony's warnings about the wrath of God active against sinners and the coming judgment, in his own voice, direct references to the divine wrath are rare.¹⁶ There are none at all in *On the Incarnation*. Neither is there any direct use of the *hilastērion* (propitiation) language to speak of the Son's self-offering to the Father, although he does so in *Against the Arians*.¹⁷ Since Athanasius does not in this work directly draw on the concepts denoted by the terms "wrath" and "propitiation," how does he express God's attitude to sin and the relation to him of its remedy?

Athanasius signals a broad strategy that has two intertwining elements — the scriptural narrative and theological reflection on it against the being and acts of God. The incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ is placed in an atoning movement from creation and Fall to new creation, and treated in terms of who this God is and how he acts:

But to treat this subject it is necessary to recall what has been previously said; in order that you may neither fail to know the cause of the bodily appearing of the Word of the Father, so high and so great, nor think it a consequence of his own nature that the Saviour has worn a body; but that being incorporeal by

15 The references here are to the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [NPNF] second series volume 2 edition of Athanasius works, cited by the name of the work and the appropriate section or chapter number, and where applicable, subsection number. Capitalisation has been modernised. Unless otherwise stated, the Greek is mainly that of the critical sources used by the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae [TLG]. The critical Greek text and English translation by Thompson of *De Incarnatione* has also been consulted — Thomson, *Athanasius*, 134-277. Lexicographic input is from Liddell and Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) and E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910).

16 In his *Apology to the Emperor* 34, it is merely a rhetorical device. But in *De Synodis* 2, in the context of the spiritual devastation caused by the party of Ursacius, Athanasius refers his readers to Romans 2:15 and 24, Isaiah 52:5 and Matthew 18:6, and speaks of the wrath to come as a very real and impending reality.

17 "For when 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' and came to minister and to grant salvation to all, then he became to us salvation, and became life, and became propitiation [ἐγένετο ἱλασμός]; then his economy in our behalf became much better than the Angels, and he became the Way and became the Resurrection." *Against the Arians*, 1.64.

"Now when became he 'Apostle,' but when he put on our flesh? and when became he 'High Priest of our profession,' but when, after offering himself for us, he raised his Body from the dead, and, as now, himself brings near and offers to the Father those who in faith approach him, redeeming all, and for all propitiating God [ὑπὲρ πάντων ἱλασκόμενος τὰ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν]?" *Against the Arians*, 2.7. Also 2.8, referring to Heb. 2:10-17.

nature, and Word from the beginning, he has yet of the loving-kindness and goodness of his own Father been manifested to us in a human body for our salvation. It is, then, proper for us to begin the treatment of this subject by speaking of the creation of the universe, and of God its Artificer, that so it may be duly perceived that the renewal of creation has been the work of the self-same Word that made it at the beginning. For it will appear not inconsonant for the Father to have wrought its salvation in him by whose means he made it. (*On Inc.*, 1.3-4)

Thus two brackets or outer markers are evident as Athanasius develops the atoning appearance and work of the Word of the Father. Within the first bracket, creation and Fall, the curse of God falls on a rebellious humanity that brings with it the related entities of death and corruption. Death is the legally mandated consequence, and corruption the ontological dissolution congruent with having separated ourselves from the source of life, the Word of the Father. Here, Athanasius articulates the divine attitude towards and action against sin using two particular interrelated strategies - the story that unfolds in Genesis chapters 1 to 3, and the nature or character of the God who is the primary actor in the drama of creation and redemption.

Before examining this first bracket more closely, we note that the second bracket concerns the final advent of the Saviour. Although only briefly stated toward the end of his work, this advent is marked by the fulfilment of "the fruit of his own cross, that is, the resurrection and incorruption," and along with it, the final judgment which brings the kingdom of heaven for the faithful and "everlasting fire and outer darkness" for "them that have done evil."¹⁸

The Curse and its Removal — the nature and deployment of penal elements

In chapter 25 we find a summary of why atonement through a cross. Athanasius is answering objections concerning the propriety of Jesus public death:

it was well that the Lord suffered this for our sakes. For if he came himself to bear the curse laid upon us, how else could he have "become a curse," unless he received the death set for a curse? and that is the cross. For this is exactly what is written: "Cursed is he that hangeth on a tree." [*On Inc.*, 25.1-2]

Having moved in his explanation from the curse of Genesis 2:16 and 3:1-17 to the lifting of that curse in Galatians 3:13, Athanasius summarises the effects of

¹⁸ *On Inc.*, 56.3.

this death, which is a “ransom for all,” by reminding us that on a cross “a man dies with his hands spread out.” Two major consequences are identified: with one outspread hand he might “draw the ancient people, and with the other those from the gentiles, and unite both in himself.” And fittingly, also, by those hands outspread into the air, “he cleared the air of the malignity both of the devil and of demons of all kinds.” So by suffering death in this way the Prince of the Air is defeated, and the human race, described in biblical terms of the Nation and the Nations, is reconciled in the person and work of the Father’s Word. More on the nature of this reconciliation at the end.

Athanasius had set this up in chapter 3 where he moved from creation to Fall. We have been created, in the sheer goodness of God, by the Word of God out of nothing. Considered from the viewpoint of the rest of (irrational) creation, we are as such innately liable to mortality, to “corruption,” which is understood, minimally at least, as dissolution into death and non-being.¹⁹ However, as a gift, an added grace, God makes us, “after his own image.” In that way, as “a kind of reflection of the Word,” we have a portion of the power of God’s own Word, are thus, in contrast to non-human creation, “rational,” and are not destined for our native estate of “non-being” but “might be able to abide ever in blessedness.” Chapters 4 and 5 elaborate further. By this grace of participation in the Word of the Father, that is, bearing and abiding in the very image of God, we are intended for “a life in correspondence with God.” Bound in that fellowship to our creator, we may live a life that is a present abiding in “incorruption” instead of dissolution into non-being (4.4), with an eschatological (heavenly) promise of an eternal “incorruption” (3.4). Here then in outline is Athanasius’ theological anthropology. We are created for unmarred fellowship with the Father through the Son, his own Word and Image, a reality that is described with a concept we can identify as both Neoplatonic and Pauline, “incorruption.” Neoplatonic in that “incorruption” is the flipside of our natural destiny as creatures out-of-nothing towards non-being, and Pauline in terms of the reversal of physical and spiritual death that the incarnation, death, and especially the resurrection of the Son brings (1 Cor. 15:1-11; 16:20-28, 42-49 ARV).²⁰

Alongside and related to this notion of “the promise of incorruption” Athanasius now identifies from the narrative another foundational element supporting this trajectory, the placing of the human race into God’s own garden, and giving them a law, the transgression of which would bring death, “that corruption in death which was theirs by nature [3.4].”

19 Ibid., 4.4-6.

20 American Revised Version.

But knowing once more how the will of man could sway to either side, in anticipation he secured the grace given them by a law and by the spot where he placed them. For he brought them into his own garden, and gave them a law: so that, if they kept the grace and remained good, they might still keep the life in paradise without sorrow or pain or care besides having the promise of incorruption in heaven; but that if they transgressed and turned back, and became evil, they might know that they were incurring that corruption in death which was theirs by nature: no longer to live in paradise, but cast out of it from that time forth to die and to abide in death and in corruption. [*On Inc.*, 3.4]

It is evident here from Athanasius' use of the creation narrative, that he views this death, this slide into "corruption," as penal, that is, the penalty (*hupeuthunon*) following transgression of the law.²¹ This impression is strengthened in that he further describes this death as the "debt" we owe God and as a "necessary condition" to be met by the death of Christ:

For the Word, perceiving that no otherwise could the corruption of men be undone save by death as a necessary condition, . . . to this end he takes to himself a body capable of death, that it, by partaking of the Word who is above all, might be worthy to die in the stead of all, . . . Whence, by offering unto death the body he himself had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from any stain, straightway he put away death from all his peers by the offering of an equivalent. For being over all, the Word of God naturally by offering his own temple and corporeal instrument for the life of all satisfied the debt by his death [*On Inc.*, 9.1-2].²²

With this identification of law, death, debt, and its satisfaction by the death of Christ "instead of all" (*anti pantōn*)²³, and "on behalf of all" (*hyper pantōn*)²⁴ we

21 "[S]eeing, further, the exceeding wickedness of men, and how by little and little they had increased it to an intolerable pitch against themselves: and seeing, lastly, how all men were under penalty of death (ὁρῶν δὲ καὶ τὸ ὑπεύθυνον [liable to, guilty of] πάντων ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τὸν θάνατον): he took pity on our race." "And thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death (διὰ τὸ πάντας ὑπευθύνους εἶναι τῇ τοῦ θανάτου φθορᾷ) he gave it over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father — doing this, moreover, of his loving-kindness." *On Inc.*, 8.2,4.

22 "But since it was necessary also that the debt owing from all should be paid again: for, as I have already said, it was owing that all should die, for which especial cause, indeed, he came among us: to this intent, after the proofs of his Godhead from his works, he next offered up his sacrifice also on behalf of all, yielding his Temple to death in the stead of all, in order firstly to make men quit and free of their old trespass, and further to shew himself more powerful even than death, displaying his own body incorruptible, as first-fruits of the resurrection of all." *Ibid.*, 20.2.

23 *Ibid.*, 8.4; 9.1; 20.2,6; 21.3.

24 *Ibid.*, 7.5; 16.4; 20.2,5,6; 21.5; 25.6; 31.4; 37.2.

have here what nowadays may be termed a “penal substitutionary” view of the atonement.²⁵ But, in the face of not unwarranted criticism that some contemporary presentations of penal substitutionary satisfaction are “abstract” from the ethical life of the believer,²⁶ several things bear noting in Athanasius’ presentation.

1. No split between the being of the believer and the person and work of the incarnate Word

First, there is no split between the being of the believer and the person and work of the incarnate Word. The ontologically inclusivity of all humankind in the incarnation and work of Christ is foundational for Athanasius. Before turning specifically to the incarnation in chapter 8, Athanasius has stressed our racial solidarity from creation through to the Fall. We are “the race of man,” “the rational man made in God’s Image” (*On Inc.*, 6.1). It is a racial solidarity grounded not in itself, but in God and the original acts of God that express his being.²⁷ The race is the creation of the One Word of the Father, who has gifted it with “his own image,” “a portion even of the power of his own Word” (*On Inc* 3.3). It is this human race that now suffers dissolution, the disappearance (but not effacement), the staining of God’s image.²⁸ So, when Athanasius in chapter 8 states that in the incarnation the Word took “a body of our kind” (but “clean” and “pure”), “one of like nature” to us, “a body of no different sort from ours,” he is indicating the Word’s ontological solidarity with us, sin excepted. His affirmation of the inclusivity of the whole race in the further work of the incarnate Word

25 A. J. Doval understands “penal substitution” as Christ dying *for* us, but not *with* us (emphasis his). On that ground, he quite rightly rejects the presence of the idea of penal substitution in *De Incarnatione*. Alexis James Doval, “Multiple Models of Atonement in Athanasius’ *De Incarnatione*,” *Studia patristica* vol. 41, *Orientalia; Clement, Origen, Athanasius; the Cappadocians; Chrysostom* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006) 153. But there are many who affirm penal substitution in terms of both *for* and *with*, an ontologically grounded substitution and representation. E.g. Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 75-79, 84-8. Garry Williams has shown that in two early Fathers, at least, Eusebius of Caesarea and Cyril of Jerusalem, there is a concern to show that a representational Christology is necessary to make the idea of substitution coherent. Garry J. Williams, *A Critical Exposition of Hugo Grotius’s doctrine of the atonement in De satisfactione Christi* (unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1999) 79-81. As we will see, this is where Athanasius sits.

26 Green and Baker, *Scandal of the Cross*, 30-1, 33, 91, 132-3. Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 182-3.

27 *On Inc.*, 54.1.

28 *Ibid.*, 14.1.

follows naturally: "And thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death he gave it over to death in the stead of all (*anti pantōn*), and offered it to the Father (*On Inc.*, 8.4)."²⁹

This foundation works in Athanasius' deployment of the concept of "death". Death not only signifies the debt fallen humanity owes due to our transgression of the law in Adam,³⁰ but it also signifies "corruption." "Incorruption" signifies our ontological status, our state of rationality in a life lived in fellowship with the Father through participation in the power of his Word, with the promise of its heavenly fulfilment. Against this original state, Athanasius uses the opposite term, "corruption," to analyse the meaning of both "penalty" and "dissolution," and to relate them.

"Corruption" signifies an ontological state of dissolution. Athanasius mainly deploys the concept of corruption in the context of describing the inveterate "ignorance," "idolatry," "immorality" and the like that mark our flight from God, the good source of all being, and thus into evil, the privation of being.³¹

As indicated in the previous section, "corruption" also describes the outworking of the curse of God against our transgression of his law. That is, although, as Athanasius stresses, it is innate to our flight from God and the Word of the Father who keeps us "rational," it is also a penalty. Further, even if only lightly portrayed by Athanasius, God is not distant from this corruption that overtakes us,³² for in it we are receiving the condemnation he has threatened.³³ Further, on the question of the closeness of God to our condemnation, at the last advent in his "glorious and divine appearing to us," the Incarnate Word, the God-man, acts directly both to consummate salvation and render judgment upon those who persist in evil.³⁴ We will return to the question of the relation of God to the evil that has overcome us at the end of the section.

29 "The Son, we might say, seizes humanity in the incarnation and in the cross entices it toward the heavenly sanctuary to worship the Father." Peter J. Leithart, *Athanasius* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 155.

30 Athanasius only refers to Adam by name in 10.5, where he quotes 1 Corinthians 15:21-22.

31 Ibid., 4.4-6 cited above.

32 Ibid., 4.4-5. 3.4: "καὶ μηκέτι μὲν ἐν παραδείσῳ ζῆν, ἔξω δὲ τούτου λοιπὸν ἀποθνήσκοντας μένειν ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ καὶ ἐν τῇ φθορᾷ." Thompson's translation is preferable (RWT *On Inc.*, 141-2): "and would no longer live in paradise, but in future dying outside it would remain in death and corruption." The *NPNF* translation by Robertson more directly makes God the actor: "but cast out of it from that time forth to die." This may be justifiable from the surrounding sections, but it is not justified by the Greek text itself.

33 Ibid., 4.4.

34 Ibid., 56.3.

So, when the cross removes “death” it means not only that a debt has been paid, but also, above all, that corruption is undone. This pattern can be seen in 9.1-2, cited above. Although stated in apologetic mode against the scorn of Greek paganism, chapters 41–55 form a robust statement of realised eschatology, the actual sanctification or deification now of Christian men and women by the appearing and work of the Father’s Word. In the Christian community we see that ignorance of God is dispelled, the power of idols vitiated, sexual immorality replaced by the new virtue of continence, courage shown in the face of death, and wars lulled.³⁵

As expected from the logic of his exposition in terms of Creator–creation, creation–recreation, Word of the Father–incarnate Word, there is in Athanasius no possible split between the acts and effects of atonement, that is, between the acts of God and the being of the believer.

2. The legal is not in antithesis to actual standing

Second, we may also note from the same ontological inclusivity, Athanasius exposition undercuts the criticism that the deployment of “penal” notions in the form of “substituted punishment” must inevitably only confer a legal standing and not an actual or ontological condition. Amongst others, John McLeod Campbell makes this case against certain penal substitutionary notions of atonement developed in Reformed Orthodoxy that affirmed a limited atonement, and then universalises it to all penal views of substitution. Campbell argues that a legal standing only gives us a title to eternal sonship, at best, not that sonship itself.³⁶

In contrast to the Reformed Orthodoxy criticised by Campbell, Athanasius stresses the universal character and scope of the incarnation and the work of the Word of the Father. Everything is made, from nothing, through him (*On Inc.*, 3.1-3), the gift of being in the image of God is given to the whole human race by him (*On Inc.*, 3.4). We are to understand the person and work of the incarnate

35 See also Gerald Hiestand, “Not ‘just forgiven:’ how Athanasius overcomes the under-realised eschatology of evangelicalism” *Evangelical Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (2012): 47-66.

36 “[T]he penal infliction is complete in itself as a substituted punishment; the righteousness wrought out is complete in itself as conferring a title to eternal blessedness, *irrespective of results* to be accomplished in those in the covenant of grace. [emphasis mine]” John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1997), 127-8. . Capitalisation has been modernised. More recently, the lack of ontological or real and good effect is expressed in terms of little or no direct impact on daily discipleship, or even an adverse influence. E.g., Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal*, 25-7. Also Weaver, *Nonviolent*, 16-18 and 236-8: it “models submission to abusive authority as a virtue” and “is irrelevant for ethical reflection.”

Word in the context of our origin and our racial transgression (*On Inc.*, 4.2-6; 10.5-6 where he quotes 1 Cor. 15:21-22). In keeping with this, Athanasius stresses that the work of Christ was fully representative and substitutionary, both in payment of the debt and in the restoration to the life of incorruption. "On behalf of all" and "instead of all" are constant refrains:³⁷

thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death he gave it over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father — doing this, moreover, of his loving-kindness, to the end that, firstly, all being held to have died in him, the law involving the ruin of men might be undone (inasmuch as its power was fully spent in the Lord's body, and had no longer holding-ground against men, his peers), and that, secondly, whereas men had turned toward corruption, he might turn them again toward incorruption, and quicken them from death. [*On Inc.*, 8.4]

He is to come, no more to suffer, but thenceforth to render to all the fruit of his own cross, that is, the resurrection and incorruption. [*On Inc.*, 56.3]

Of course, both payment of debt and the renewal of incorruption are also to be understood eschatologically and relationally (*On Inc.*, 56), but the relation of belief and the eschatological denouement in consummation and judgment rest on this fully representative and substitutionary view. The one who "renders to all the fruit of his cross" and judges all with a view to "everlasting fire and outer darkness" is the one who has died "instead of all" and "on behalf of all."

Campbell's criticism also needs to be viewed against the wider historical development in the doctrine of atonement. The problem of a distance or disjunction between the actual end (restoration to sonship, incorruption, theosis) and means that have gained that end — which are understood in forensic terms (payment of debt, satisfaction, penal substitution) — are more acute when the legal is viewed as the first of two movements. This can imply a preliminary state before a final state — removal of the guilt of sin now by baptism and confession before completion of sanctification in heaven. The distance is further accentuated when debt is quantified and God's actions to deal with it are thought of in Aristotelian terms of perfect agent and perfect means that must limit the scope of the divine acts because not all are saved. This John Owen did.³⁸ But the problem is avoided in Athanasius, not just because the later Augustinian

³⁷ *Huper pantōn* — Ibid. 7.5; 16.4; 20.2,5,6; 21.5; 25.6; 31.4; 37.2; and *anti pantōn* — Ibid., 8.4; 9.1; 20.2,6; 21.3.

³⁸ In his *Death of Death in the Death of Christ* as he sets up his analysis of the nature and extent of the atonement, book 1, chapters 1–2. Refer *The Works of John Owen*, ed. W. H. Goold (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), vol. 10. pp. 157–63.

categories of original sin and guilt are absent,³⁹ nor just because Athanasius does not employ philosophical categories in the way Owen does, but because payment of debt and restoration of life are held together, and universal, in the person and work of the incarnate Word.

3. His emphasis on “corruption”/“incorruption” does not exclude the idea of punishment from the concept of legal

Third, despite objections to the contrary, “corruption” and “debt-paying death” are not two competing themes in Athanasius, nor does his subordination of the legal to his overarching move from corruption to incorruption (from idolatry to *theopoiesis*) exclude the idea of punishment from the conceptual content of the legal.⁴⁰ Rather, they are both conceived of theologically, and are indissolubly interrelated. This can be seen in the way he uses the concept of “death.”

“Mortality” or “death” is viewed in two ways. When by our sin we reject the life-giving participation we have with God, we lose the gracious restraint on our innate propensity to mortality. This, of course, is presented by Athanasius in Christian terms of the Father-Son relation and his work in the world, not in the terms of a logico-causal ontology that was available to him through Aristotle,⁴¹ let alone the “inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe.”⁴² As already noted, this death or mortality is marked by dissolution, a flight into non-being, into a deepening corruption and irrationality.⁴³ In chapters 41-55, his defence against Greek derision of the incarnation is as much an unmasking of

39 Cf. Rodolph Yanney, “Salvation in St Athanasius’ On the incarnation of the Word,” *Coptic Church Review* 11, no. 2 (1990) 46, 48 regarding western views.

40 L. W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980) 79-80, cf. 72; Derek Flood, “Substitutionary Atonement and the Church Fathers: a reply to the authors of *Pierced for our Transgressions*,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (2010) 142-4, 147-50. For an accurate criticism of Flood, refer Garry J. Williams, “Penal Substitutionary Atonement in the Church Fathers,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (2011) 195-6, 203-10. This combination of the penal and the ontological is also identified by Doval, “Multiple Models of Atonement,” 151-54. Moving backward from four widely accepted “models of the atonement” (solidarity, satisfaction, enlightenment, conflict), Doval finds all four groups in Athanasius, and points of integration.

41 In *Metaphysics* Book XII, part 7, Aristotle postulates that behind all substances that move and are moved must be “something which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance, and actuality.” Refer *Metaphysics By Aristotle*, trans. by W. D. Ross, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.html>.

42 C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder, 1932), 23.

43 *On Inc.*, 11.5-7.

the stupidity of idolatry as it is an exposition of the theosis that Christ is bringing about amongst believers. We have been created by the Word of the Father to live in a life- and meaning-giving structure of relationship to him. Athanasius' later writings flesh out the sketch he gives in *On the Incarnation* chapter 3. We are rational (*genomenoi logikoi*), or truly human, because the Father has made us in the image of the One in whom he images and knows himself, his own Son, his own Word (*tou idou Logou*).⁴⁴ Thus, as those who image the Image, and have "a portion even of the power of his own Word," we participate in God's own rationality, and thus, originally at least, live in paradise, "abiding ever in blessedness," and with the promise of heavenly incorruption to come. But having rejected God's law that was given to secure wills otherwise prone to "sway to either side" — a metaphorical description of the temptation to live independently of God, we have departed from the grace of the image of God, and plunged ourselves into irrationality, into corruption. As psycho-somatic entities, we are headlong into death.

"Death" is also the penalty (*to upeuthunon*) for transgressing the law, which was God's kind provision to keep us through the Word in knowledge of him and thus stay us from irrationality. It is Christ who pays the debt of penalty that came from transgressing that law, so that, free from its demands, our ruin may be undone, and we may then be turned towards incorruption. The logic in chapter 8 is inherently Pauline, although there is no direct reference to his writings. Death is both spoken of forensically and hypostasised: our wilful turning from God moves us into corruption, the state of death; the threat of the penalty of death that comes now with breaking God's law gives this corruption even a greater hold, greater mastery; out of pity the Word becomes incarnate, "takes a body of our kind" and gives it over to the penalty of death, our debt, offering it to the Father, "in the stead of all;" thus undoing the law and its hold over us; and that he may turn us toward incorruption.⁴⁵

It is retributive justice that is on view here. The point is not uncontroverted,⁴⁶ but Athanasius makes it clear that Christ dissolves the law by meeting the liability

44 *Against the Arians*, 1.21: "We understand in like manner that the Son is begotten not from without but from the Father, and while the Father remains whole, the Expression of his subsistence is ever, and preserves the Father's likeness and unvarying Image, so that he who sees him, sees in him the subsistence too, of which he is the Expression. And from the operation of the Expression we understand the true Godhead of the subsistence". Also, *Against the Arians* 3.6.

45 *On Inc.*, 8.2,4.

46 E.g. Grensted, *A Short History*, 7; and Flood, "Substitutionary Atonement and the Church Fathers," 142-4, 147-50.

(*to upeuthunon*) by meeting its demands, which in this case is death. The law is “concluded” because it was fulfilled. Further, this fulfilment of the penal debt by substitution leads to the bestowal of incorruption. Not only are the notions of death as corruption and penalty interrelated, but also in one passage Athanasius states that fulfilment of the debt brings incorruption as a consequence:

to this end he takes to himself a body capable of death, that it, by partaking of the Word who is above all, might be worthy to die in the stead of all, and might, because of the Word which was come to dwell in it, remain incorruptible, and that *thenceforth* corruption might be stayed from all by the grace of the resurrection. [*On Inc.*, 9.1 — emphasis mine]

However, although the consequent relationship between the two is clear as the forensic is made to serve the leading idea, restoration of incorruption, Athanasius does not conceptualise them sequentially in time but together, simultaneously, as they are but 2 aspects of the one who himself is our propitiation (Heb. 2:17, I Jn. 2:2, 4:10):

And so it was that two marvels came to pass at once [*amphotera*, simultaneously], that the death of all was accomplished in the Lord’s body, and that death and corruption were wholly done away by reason of the Word that was united with it. For there was need of death, and death must needs be suffered on behalf of all, that the debt owing from all might be paid [*On Inc.*, 20.5]

To reiterate, without removing the idea of penalty, Athanasius treats the legal in such a way that it serves the major theme, the restoration of incorruption, knowing and living in participation with God.

4. The deeper integration of penal justice and restoration of incorruption

Further, behind this interrelation stands a deeper integration in the nature and acts of God. Both the gifting of humanity with the image of God, which allows participation through the Son with the Father, and the giving of the law to preserve this state of affairs, are acts of the kindness and love, the grace of the triune God who has made us to participate in himself. Again and again Athanasius speaks of our original creation, our being related to the Father through the image of the Son, and the coming of the Son to redeem us as springing from the “loving kindness of the Father,” “the loving kindness of the Word.”⁴⁷ God’s creation of us, bringing us out of nothing to possess being

47 *On Inc.*, 1.3, 4.2, 4.5, 8.1, 8.4, 12.6, 34.2.

in its created fullness in his image, is the very antithesis of a begrudging niggardliness, it is an expression of his very own being:

For God is good, or rather is essentially the source of goodness: nor could one that is good be niggardly of anything: whence, grudging existence to none, he has made all things out of nothing by his own Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. (*On Inc.*, 3.3)

Out of the lavish bounty of his own being,⁴⁸ he who is being in itself gave us being who are without being (*ek ouk ontōn*).

In this way Athanasius paints a picture of God's being as lavishly overflowing generosity, love, kindness and grace. It is against this we are to understand the reference he makes in chapter 6 to the divine rectitude or integrity being at stake in the Fall, and lying behind the incarnation. On the one hand, for God not to fulfil his ordination of a penal death for our sins would "be monstrous and unseemly." "For it were monstrous, firstly, that God, having spoken, should prove false — that, when once he had ordained that man, if he transgressed the commandment, should die the death, after the transgression man should not die, but God's word should be broken." (*On Inc.*, 6.3) On the other, "it were unseemly that creatures once made rational, and having partaken of the Word, should go to ruin, and turn again toward non-existence by the way of corruption. For it were not worthy of God's goodness that the things he had made should waste away, because of the deceit practised on men by the devil (*On Inc.*, 6.4-5)."

The placement of the divine rectitude in the context of the divine overspilling of love means that the former is not anterior to the latter, as it is John Owen's exposition of the atonement, who will insist that God relates himself to all men in justice, but only in love to the elect. Here, justice is the natural attribute of the divine being, whilst love is only an attribute of the divine volition, a movement of the will.⁴⁹ Combination of this with thinking of God's saving acts in terms of an Aristotelian conception of perfect agent and perfect means, means that Owen cannot conceive of God's being and his saving acts as an overflowing generosity that can suffer, without detriment to the divine being, even the rejection of that generosity. This is the pathway to his view of limited atonement. But with Athanasius, although he finds conceptual help from a Platonic ontology in articulating the meaning of creation, nevertheless, his major conception of the divine being comes from God's self-revelation in the economy of salvation. Consequently, he configures the divine love and justice otherwise than Owen, for he configures it evangelically. Thus, Athanasius' doctrine of God evident in

48 To drawn on the *NPNF* editor's perceptive summary of section 3.

49 *Death of Death*, book 4, chapter 2, pp. 319-28.

On the Incarnation — his lavish grace seen in the ontological inclusivity of all the human race in Jesus Christ, so that he dies “instead of all” (*anti pantōn*)⁵⁰ and “on behalf of all” (*hyper pantōn*)⁵¹ — is not made unintelligible by the last judgment, when those, due to their persistent rejection of this generosity, are consigned to “everlasting fire and outer darkness.”⁵² That is, the perdition of some does not overthrow the nature of the divine being and intentions witnessed to by the fact that on that day the God-Man returns “to render to *all* the fruit of his own cross, that is, the resurrection and incorruption (*On Inc.*, 56.3, emphasis mine).” As Calvin helpfully expresses it, persistent evil and perdition is an accidental shadow thrown by the light of the cross,⁵³ by the light of lavish generosity.

5. A trinitarian integration

It is obvious then that the theological structure of Athanasius exposition of atonement, in the movement from creation to new creation, is trinitarian. It is the Father who creates us, through his own eternal Word, the Son, his very own Image, and recreates us in the sending and incarnation of that Son.⁵⁴ This Son of the Father has come to bring us back to the Father. “For he was made man that we might be made God; and he manifested himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father (*On Inc.*, 51.4).”

Although *homoousion* is unarticulated, perhaps surprisingly in a document dated 337,⁵⁵ nevertheless it accounts for the force of Athanasius argument. If salvation is *theosis* then the Saviour must be *Theos*, not just in part but in

50 *On Inc.*, 8.4; 9.1; 20.2,6; 21.3.

51 *Ibid.*, 7.5; 16.4; 20.2,5,6; 21.5; 25.6; 31.4; 37.2

52 *Ibid.*, 56.3.

53 Commentary on 1 Peter 2:8: “This especially deserves to be noticed in case the blame for our fault should be imputed to Christ, for, as he has been given to us as a foundation, it is incidental that he becomes a rock of offence. In short, his proper office is to fit us to be a spiritual temple to God, but it is the fault of men that they stumble at him, because unbelief leads men to contend with God.” Cf. his commentary on 2 Peter 2:4: “God has made known what is useful for us to know, that the devils were originally created to obey God, that they fell from grace through their own fault because they did not submit to God’s rule: and therefore that the wickedness which cleaves to them was accidental and not organic to their nature, so that it cannot be attributed to God.” *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. W. B. Johnston (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1963), 264, 348.

54 *On Inc.*, 3.3, 8.4.

55 Athanasius sparing use of the term in his ongoing confrontation with anti-Nicaeans, probably in order to persuade over the Homoeans who are close in mind to Nicaea, is at least a similar reticence, even if not of great explanatory power for *De Incarnatione*.

himself. Likewise, the Spirit is only directly referred to in the closing benediction. However, it is the assumption throughout of his very person, presence and work as the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son which gives rational coherence, makes possible, the enlightenment and sanctification, the *theopoiesis* the final chapter highlights. For that is the reason and result of the coming of the Son in the purposes of the Father.

But, Athanasius does bring to the fore the lavish, loving kindness of the Father and the Son in terms of the love between the Father and Son. The common Saviour of all is “the beloved Son of the Father (*On Inc.*, 52.1).” The loving kindness of the Word and the Father towards us has a theological anterior. This further consolidates his portrait of the being of God that stands behind and in his saving acts.

The relation to God of the curse and its removal

So, to return to the main question in our investigation, seeing that in *On the Incarnation* Athanasius does not use the terms “wrath” nor “propitiation” in his exposition of the atonement, how does he relate God to the curse and its removal? Are we, as Weaver wants to do in order to overcome several pressing problems in “satisfaction” models of atonement, to conceive of God’s relation to curse and removal, especially the penal aspects, only in terms of our stance?⁵⁶

The observation that Athanasius integrates creation, Fall, and restoration all the way down into God is important to our question concerning the attitude of God towards the sin of his human creatures and to the relation of the incarnation and the cross to God in himself. Clearly, in the theological structure and underpinning of Athanasius’ exposition, God is not distant from his acts.

Within this theological integration, Athanasius expresses the closeness of God to the curse and its removal in three ways — threat,⁵⁷ which is also presented as the obverse of the promise of incorruption,⁵⁸ and the problem of the divine rectitude, the divine goodness. Chapter 6 is a sustained exposition on the double dilemma posed to the divine goodness and truthfulness by the necessary exaction of death on the one hand, and on the other, its consequences for God’s purpose for his creation. It begins:

The human race then was wasting, God’s image was being effaced, and his work ruined. Either, then, God must forego his spoken word by which man had

⁵⁶ *Nonviolent Atonement*, 98.

⁵⁷ *On Inc.*, 4.4, 5.2, 8.2.

⁵⁸ *On Inc.*, 3.4.

incurred ruin; or that which had shared in the being of the Word must sink back again into destruction, in which case God's design would be defeated. What then? Was God's goodness to suffer this? But if so, why had man been made? It could have been weakness, not goodness on God's part. (*On Inc.*, 6.1)

That is, the curse and restoration is viewed from the stance of God. Athanasius' wider theological integration of God's acts with his nature will not allow this "stance of God" to be dissolved into a merely human viewpoint or speculation as to the relation of these acts to the mystery of God, for Athanasius insists that the Father sent his very own Image to rescue and restore that image in us. The incarnation means that the curse and its removal are viewed from two stances, sinful humanity seeing itself mirrored in the being and acts of the incarnate Son, and the triune God.

Conclusion: Athanasius' reserve and contribution

But, the action of God is not so directly portrayed by Athanasius as it is in the biblical narratives. In the Garden, God curses directly (Gen. 3:8-19), and through Moses and the prophets he reiterates both curses and blessings for his people (Deut. 28), and in the historical processes of invasion, pillage, and murder pours out wrath on persistent rejection and mockery of his mercy (Ez. 7, 33:21-29; Deut. 28:52-7). Part of the reason for this reserve lies in the nature of theological exegesis at depth. How are we to understand these harsh realities against who God actually is? Early in his exposition, as did Augustine later, Athanasius adapts and deploys with some skill a conceptual structure from Neoplatonism. Evil is conceived of as privation of being. This serves to both highlight the fact that God, in the overflow of his goodness, is the source and upholder of all being and reason, and at the same time avoids dualism. The outworking of evil may be our and the devil's work, but it is not God's. In our flight from God our being is deprived of its divine centre, its "theosis." In that way, it is not possible to give evil and its arbiters the status of divinity, nor make God the author of it. This construct means, then, that the Christian, or even the not-yet-Christian reader of the biblical narrative, is at the outset turned aside from a polytheistic and even animistic and superstitious reading. Here the Christian doctrine of creation, read in the context the Bible itself gives — re-creation, is doing its evangelical work of cultural transformation.

Further, as we have noted, this deployment of a philosophical concept has not hindered Athanasius from giving a robust theological exposition of "corruption." Viewed both protologically, and most especially against the divine movement of

humankind back to incorruption through the incarnate Word, this corruption is never abstractly or moralistically or mechanically conceived. In Athanasius, the relation of God to the world is a real relation, but he does not state it in logico-causal terms, but personal terms, of the triune nature and activity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is that relation that determines both the nature of incorruption as theosis and corruption as deprivation.

Hence, in the giving of the threat and its subsequent unfolding, and by the manner of its remedy in which the Son satisfies the Father by upholding his truthful, good and kind nature and acts, creation and redemption are closely related to who God is in himself. In that way, notions of "moral mechanism" or "stance" are insufficient recognitions of God's working of atonement.

Nor, on the other hand, is this approach patent of the intrusion of foreign or external concepts of retributive justice amongst ourselves, and a piety prone to a merely instrumental view of the work of Christ. With Athanasius, the Father-Son relationship in the economy reflects that of God immanently. Later, building on Athanasius, it is the Christological exposition of James Torrance, and the trinitarian exposition of T. F. Torrance, that brings the consequences of this to clearest expression. God deals with us in the Person of his Son. Christ's humanity is uniquely and inclusively vicarious humanity. There is a two way mediatorial movement in this. The Image of the Father, in whose image we are created as a gift, has assumed the humanity of the whole human race to satisfy *anti pantwn* and *kata pantwn*, the Father's just demands. Further, he has restored us to knowledge of the Father and true rationality, genuine humanity. "Theosis" is how Athanasius expresses our union with Christ, the other side of his union with us, so that we come to participate, in our filial knowledge and worship of God, in the communion of the Son with the Father. This is the Christological underpinning of Athanasius' robust view of the sanctification he observes among believers. On Athanasius' construct, Christ's vicarious work is never reducible to the instrumental cause of faith and the experience of salvation, as in much popular piety nowadays.⁵⁹ The "Great Physician" only operates from within and at the very depths of human personhood.⁶⁰ "Christ's vicarious humanity" was also

59 Refer James Torrance, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ," in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381*, ed. T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1981), 133-35. It was with John McLeod Campbell as conversation partner that James developed this construct. Refer his "The Contribution of John McLeod Campbell to Scottish Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 26, no. 3 (1973): 295-311.

60 *On Inc.* 44.1-6; and refer James' homely exposition, "Vicarious Humanity", p.141.

the well-spring of James' theological reflection and practice of reconciliation.⁶¹ In the apologetic context of these twin treatises, in addressing Jewish unbelief and pagan idolatry and immorality, Athanasius' evangelical portrait of Christian fidelity "reflects God's concern to give to all their humanity in Christ."⁶²

Further, as T. F. Torrance has stressed, the *whole* God is involved in the atonement. Because the incarnation is of the eternal Son of the Father, the incarnation does not at all fall outside of God, but within his very being and life. Consequently, atonement too must also be conceived of as falling within the life and being of God. It is God as God, in the incarnate Son, and thus the Father and the Spirit, who bears our punishment, who became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). We do better to leave-off speaking of the "Father punishing the Son," and with Charles Denney, citing John McLeod Campbell with approbation, speak of our offences and their consequences being absorbed and exhausted in the holy being of Christ.

This confession, as to its own nature, must have been a *perfect Amen in humanity to the judgment of God on the sin of man* . . . Let us consider this Amen from the depths of the humanity of Christ to the divine condemnation of sin. What is it in relation to God's wrath against sin? What place has it in Christ's dealings with that wrath? I answer: He who so responds to the divine wrath against sin, saying, "Thou art righteous, O Lord, who judgest us," is necessarily receiving the full apprehension and realisation of that wrath, as well as of that sin against which it comes forth, into his soul and spirit, into the bosom of the divine humanity, and, so receiving it, he responds to it with a perfect response — a response from the depths of that divine humanity — and *in that perfect response absorbs it*.⁶³

61 From the inexhaustible resources of the person and love of Christ, James Torrance sustained a life-long commitment to the practice of reconciliation. Whether in negotiations with Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland, or at theological conferences in Apartheid South Africa, or giving pastoral advice in parish or elsewhere as God put enquiring and needy people in his way, our dear friend and mentor was a faithful witness to Christ who shaped many, myself included. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." *Soli Deo gloria*.

62 James Torrance, "Listening to its Challenge," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 55 (1986), 42. He is responding to the Kairos Document, a theological statement issued in 1985 by black South African theologians, mainly from Soweto.

63 James Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), 117-18, citing Campbell, *Nature of Atonement*, chpt. 6, p. 118. 22 years earlier Denney had written: "[I]t is God who is presented dealing in an awful way with the awful reality of sin, for its removal; and the way in which he removes it is to lay it on his Son. That is done, not in anything else, but in this alone, that Christ, by God's appointment, dies the sinner's death. The doom falls on him, and is exhausted there." *Studies in Theology*:

And, as Torrance has elucidated, because Christ, so the Father and the Spirit. The whole of God has absorbed and exhausted our transgressions and their dire consequences through and in and with the Beloved Son.

Further, this means that our atonement, understood in the context of the triune relations and the hypostatic union, is of great scope and at great depth.

It may not be possible to find a documentary trail of influence from *On the Incarnation* to Augustine to Anselm to Calvin. All in their own way stress the universal scope of the person and work of Christ that Paul highlights in Colossian 1:15-21. Anselm will uniquely do so by the discussion concerning the question of whether the number of the elect is to make up the number of angels! God has purposed to have a universe that is righteous, that is, is in right order to his majesty and glory. Therefore, to perfectly reflect this, as a heavenly choir so to speak, the number of fallen angels must and will be made up.⁶⁴ But Anselm, along with Augustine and Calvin, also utilises the Athanasian concept of the divine design for creation to account for the nature of the atonement.⁶⁵ The concept helps account for the divine mercy, kindness and love in the face of our intractable opposition, as well as to make sense of the scope of this redemptive outpouring. On this point we may hear Athanasius echoed in Calvin's citation of Augustine:

"God's love," he says, "is incomprehensible and unchangeable. For it was not after we were reconciled to him through the blood of his Son that he began to love us. Rather, he has loved us before the world was created, that we also might be his sons along with his only-begotten Son . . . Therefore, he loved us even when we practiced enmity toward him and committed wickedness. Thus in a marvellous and divine way he loved us even when he hated us. For he hated us for what we were that he had not made; yet because our wickedness had not entirely consumed his handiwork, he knew how, at the same time, to hate in each one of us what we had made, and to love what he had made."⁶⁶

lectures delivered in Chicago Theological Seminary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2nd ed. 1895), 112.

64 *Why God Became Man* [WGBM], in *A Scholastic Miscellany*, ed. E.R. Fairweather (London: SCM, 1956). 1.16-18. "Whence it may be reasoned that God planned to perfect both at the same time, in order that the inferior nature, which knew not God, might not be perfected before the superior nature which ought to enjoy God; and that the inferior, being renewed at the same time with the superior, might, as it were, rejoice in its own way; yes, that every creature having so glorious and excellent a consummation, might delight in its Creator and in itself, in turn, rejoicing always after its own manner . . ." WGBM, 1.18.

65 *Ibid.*, 1.4.

66 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. and ed. F.L. Battles (London: SCM, 1960),

The theologic of Athanasius' treatment also accounts for the depth of the atonement. He expressed this depth in terms of an apologetic stress on the real sanctification evident in the Christian community — their eschewing of idolatry and superstition, their courage, self-control and peaceableness. Both Torrance give the most sustained theological exposition of this. The incarnation means that substitution is at a very great depth. "The whole Christ became a curse for us (Athanasius)."⁶⁷ All of Christ's life is atoning. Since atonement was *in* Christ himself and not in some external way, therefore the whole man, body and soul, is delivered from penalty, debt, ignorance, law, death and devil. In this way then, the image of God is restored, and we come to know God, to enter into his own inner rationality, to share his life. In the self sanctification of the Son of God, we are sanctified (Jn. 17:17-19).⁶⁸ "The benefits of God's free gift of Jesus Christ to mankind are as inexhaustible as his love."⁶⁹

In Athanasius, then, it is the nature of God himself and his actions through the Word of the Father, and thus his personal relation to the world, that are to determine our understanding of the nature of God's aversion to sin and his personal acts to remedy it. Athanasius offers structures of thought that safeguard us, in our engagement with the biblical narrative, from making normative our ordinary and all too human cultural experiences and understandings of "wrath" and "propitiation."⁷⁰

2.16.4, quoting Augustine, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John*, chapter 17:21-23 [Tractate 110.6], *NPNF*, 7.114.

67 T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: the evangelical theology of the early catholic church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 161. *Against the Arians* 2.47: "[W]e do not simply conceive this, that [the] whole Christ has become curse and sin, but that he has taken on him the curse which lay against us (as the Apostle has said, 'Has redeemed us from the curse,' and 'has carried,' as Isaiah has said, 'our sins,' and as Peter has written, 'has borne them in the body on the wood')." In the face of Arian tendencies to use this truth to reduce the full divinity of the Word, Athanasius does not understand the "whole Christ" *simpliciter*. Indeed it is only the unalterableness of the divinity that facilitates both the full depth of the identification with sinners, and also the reversal of sin — *Against the Arians*, 1.43, 51.

68 *Trinitarian Faith*, 154-90; and *The Mediation of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992 rev. ed.), 109-26. Also refer to articles by James Torrance, above.

69 *Trinitarian Faith*, 181.

70 In the end, for all its rich interaction with contemporary Black and Womanist Theologies, insights into Anselm, and posing of important questions about violence, abuse and retributive and substitutionary justice, Weaver's exposition does not allow these starting points and questions to be sovereignly shaped by the biblical narrative. Particularly, Weaver rejects the trinitarian solution offered by W.C. Placher and others to resolve some of these problems — *Nonviolent Atonement*, Kindle version, chapter 7, Conversations: Round One — *Redefinitions, Reemphases, and Rehabilitation* location 2751, 2782 of 5056; and — *Responding to the Defenses of Satisfaction*, 2934-55 of 5056.