

"JUSTIFICATION & JUSTICE," IV: PERSPECTIVES ON THE ATONEMENT

2377 16 Dec 87

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One aim of Craigville Theological Colloquy VII on "J&J" is to correct our tendency in the United Church of Christ to (1) impatience with the first "J" & (2) uncritical enthusiasm for action toward the second "J." This Thinksheet is on the first "J" in its technical Christian sense, viz God's action in Jesus Christ's life-suffering-death-resurrection to "justi-fy" (Latin, "make just") the unjust, "us sinners," who--being unable to redeem ourselves--are utterly dependent on God's mercy-grace, which alone can restore our sin-broken relation with God, effecting reconciliation, "at-one-ment" (OED: "used by theologians in the sense of 'reconciliation, propitiation, expiation'"; "propitiation of God by expiation of sin 1611"; "reconciliation or restoration of friendly relations between God and sinners 1526")....Reff. are to Thos. C. Oden, THE WORD OF LIFE (SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY: Volume Two; Harper&Row/89). This work's charts (herewith) simply and comprehensively present, on the atonement, the possible perspectives or options; &, on evil, the rival paradigms.

1. I think it's partly from our human experience of roots, the roots of plants & trees, that we concern ourselves about "root causes," "the source of human good" (to use Wierman's booktitle), "the prime evil" (as on this p.416 Oden chart, where I've added "*" to the biblical answer). Please use the chart to think through your personal knowledge of the competition. What experiences of our rivals have you had? What ideas/feelings of theirs do you personally share? Why?

THE PRIME EVIL	ITS SPHERE	PROTOTYPE	SALVATION FOUND IN
Tyranny of passions	The cosmos	Stoicism	Reason
Inability to enjoy	The passions	Epicureanism	Hedonic enjoyment
Death	Vulnerability of life	Hellenism	Immortality
Pain	The feelings	Buddhism	Nirvana
Ignorance	The intellect	Platonism	Philosophy
Property	Class alienation	Marxism	Revolution
Repression	Neurosis	Freudianism	Psychoanalysis
Sin *	The will	Judeo-Christian tradition	Forgiveness

2. COMMENTS on the chart: (1) "Judeo-Christian" is like a combined Hanukkah/Christmas card: offensive to both religions. Read "Bible." (2) Oden wants us to see the biblical view among its competitors, but (as he would admit) the situation is more complex & the biblical view richer than this useful visual can reveal. Eg, as supplement, see Gabriel Fackre's chart of "the four models of the Work of Christ" (135, THE CHRISTIAN STORY, vol.1, Eerdmans/84 rev.). (3) For "Hellenism," read "Hellenisticism." We need the latter word for post-Alexander syncretism, as the dictionary already distinguishes (pre-Alex.) "Hellenic" from (post-Alex.) "Hellenistic." Note then that our competitors include four Greek streams; one Eastern; & two deracinated-Jewish Western. (4) Think your way down the first column while holding this question in mind: what movements/institutions have I personally experienced that premised themselves on this identification of "the prime evil"? I'll name a few for myself: "Ignorance," public schools (eg, control sex & drugs by, yes, education); "Property," a communist cell, 1931; "Repression," Esalen Institute; "Sin," churches (though the definition of "sin" varies along the theological spectrum: how would you define it existentially in your present congregation?).

3. Here's some Oden on "J&J": Jesus is a theandric union, "the body language of God." (Sexist, cry some radical feminists: the incarnation should have been not theandric but theanthropomorphic. Is there a justice issue here? [My comment on Oden's use of "theandric."])....We need (against liberal theology, but also against Bultmann & even Pannenberg) "a recovery of classic Christological exegesis on its own terms, unadulterated by modernity" (533)....496: "The declaration of his sonship occurred through an event: resurrection. This event constitutes our justification" (Ro.4²⁵)....380: The atonement comes to us as "transactional metaphors"--the Good Shepherd "lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn.10¹¹); "the innocent Messiah dies for guilty sinners, their just punishment is remitted, his sacrificial death making satisfaction for them" (Ro.3²⁴: "We are justified through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus"; Eph.1⁷: "In him we have redemption through his blood")....1Peter shows how "the metaphors of substitution and sacrifice became interfused in early Christian preaching" ([3,18-21 2²²⁻²⁴ [cf.Is.53⁹] 3¹⁸)]....The basis of "penal theories of the atonement": Ro.3²¹⁻²⁶ Gal.3¹³ 2Cor.5²¹....Substitution: Mt.20²⁸ 2Cor.5²¹ Gal.2²⁰ 1P.3

18 (381)....Lev.1¹⁴ Ro.5^{7f} (ὑπέρ *hyper* for, on behalf of, for the benefit of; & ὑπὲρ *hyper* in place of, instead of [price, transaction, exchange--eg, 1Jn.3^{16f}, where v. 17 can be seen as a definition of justice]; on the former Gk. wd., see "body," 1Cor. 11^{23f})....394: more expiation than propitiation. God's wrath: "Forgiveness is made a nonevent if the deep sense of alienation is overlooked."...."In Our Place," 344-425.

IGNORANCE	MISERY	SIN	BOUND WILL
Each is ordinarily called by its key phrase:			
Moral influence	Rectoral governance	Substitution	Christus Victor
Sometimes expressed by the summary term:			
Marturial	Rectoral	Commercial	Dramatic
The prevailing tendency is:			
Experiential, subjectivist	Legal, administrative	Penal, substitutional	Ransom-doxological
Each has a special locus of influence within Protestantism:			
Liberal	Arminian	Calvinist *	Lutheran *
Key advocates of this tradition in the modern period are:			
Schleiermacher	Miley	Hodge	Aulen
Each motif gives resistance to some theme regarded as potentially excessive:			
Resists original sin	Resists imputation	Resists works-righteousness	Resists commercial expressions
The potential problematic issue latent in the theory:			
Pelagian optimism	Legalistic synergism	Predestinarian decrees	Antinomianism
Thematic focus:			
Subject self	Moral reliability	Exchange	Conflict
Primary setting:			
Intrapsychic awareness	Public order	Transactional exchange	Cosmic conflict overcome
Recent inheritors include:			
Unitarianism	Liberation theology	Neoevangelical theology	Neoclassical orthodoxy

As current Lutheran/Reformed dialog will be a resource for the Colloquy, I have asterisked, on this chart, "Calvinist" & "Lutheran."....As Oden's former chart was concerned with the question, what is a position's assumption about "the prime evil"?, this one's question is, what is "the deepest predicament of humanity"? The four are, of course, "complementary tendencies."

SUGGESTION: Read through the chart rapidly, then again slowly, then a third time underlining the words most meaningful to you. Now note what I may call your justification-&-justice pro-file, or location, in relation to others. The project may even grab you enough to nudge you into trying to improve on the chart objectively, or at least subjectively....Anything here you feel moved to study further?

IGNORANCE	MISERY	SIN	BOUND WILL
Then the atonement is likely to be viewed as:			
Moral illumination and influence	Inauguration of a reign of happiness	Salvation by Christ in our place	Redemption from curse of sin
The corresponding social predicament is viewed as:			
Lack of education	Poverty or neurosis	Willful rebellion	Demonic captivity
The predicament of the psychosomatic interface centers more particularly, in each case, upon the:			
Ignorant mind	Sensate experience	Lost soul	Bound will
These theories of atonement have been principally formed in four related, complementary traditions:			
Pelagian-Abelardian	Grotian-Arminian	Augustinian-Anselmian	Irenaeus-Cappadocian
Metaphorical focus becomes variously trained upon:			
Moral example	Executive clemency	Sacrifice	Victory

If evil is no problem, then there is no need of salvation. If there is no prospect of salvation from evil, then there can be no meaningful talk of a Christ of any sort. "The problem of evil only exists in relation to the conceivability of some sort of salvation" (Quick, DC, p. 193). Awareness of evil and suffering arouses a holy discontent that points the discontented, hungering for a saving answer in God, beyond the present sphere of human alienation (cf. Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, pp. 156ff.).

We are clever at avoiding evidences of the subtle and recalcitrant power of evil. The awareness of evil and suffering often seems to be an obstacle to faith. They pose profound questions to which only the cross stands finally as an answer.

Doctrines of Evil Correlated with Teachings of Salvation

Various views of salvation have assumed or offered various explanations of that pivotal form of evil that defines and shapes other evils. Summarily, these may be schematized in this way:

THE PRIME EVIL	ITS SPHERE	PROTOTYPE	SALVATION FOUND IN
Tyranny of passions Inability to enjoy	The cosmos The passions	Stoicism Epicureanism	Reason Hedonic enjoyment Immortality
Death	Vulnerability of life	Hellenism	
Pain	The feelings	Buddhism	Nirvana
Ignorance	The intellect	Platonism	Philosophy
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It cannot be our purpose here to set forth comparative views of evil in various developing historic traditions, however important that subject may be. It is our purpose to show that Christian theodicy exists in the context of the all-too-familiar human problem of suffering—a problem dealt with in many different traditions—and that the cross of Christ stands as the decisive event illuminating Christian theodicy.

Christianity: The Evil of the Bound Will Makes Other Evils Evil

Christianity views the pivotal evil that shapes and penetrates all other evils to be the evil of the will, especially as manifested in transgenera-

tional sin (Quick, DC, pp. 193-95). Christ offers forgiveness of sin as a binding up of the evil that creates and elicits other evils.

If salvation is to attack the deepest root of evil, it must attack and deal with the problem of sin. This is not to say that all evils are unambiguously the direct result of sin, for sin does not directly cause earthquakes and floods (though it may shape our insensitivities and responses to them), but rather that willed sin is the most profound root of the wrong that human beings universally experience in history. Christians believe that if the problem of sin could be rightly dealt with (it is best not to say "solved"), then the most devastating aspects of evil would be constrained.

The good news of God's atoning work on the cross assumes that the radical evil in the world is not finally death, pain, ignorance, class conflict, or libido repression, but sin. The deepest root of evil lies in the distortions of moral self-determination.

Suffering: A Way of Summarizing the Central Human Problem

Suffering and Punishment

It may seem absurd that so much of human history and acculturation have so often been formed around the seemingly odd premise that suffering is a punishment. But the connection seems to appear everywhere in the history of morality and religion. The logic is unsparring: if we receive the due reward of our deeds, and if we suffer, the thought suggests itself that we suffer because of our evil deeds.

The Common Experience of Suffering for Others

The deeper level of the perplexity of suffering, however, is not when people suffer for their own sins (that has a ring of justice), but when they suffer for the sins of others (that seems unjust). Your neighbor may have to suffer innocently for something you have done (even inadvertently). Who does not know how it feels to suffer from something someone else has done? If so, there appears to be universally experienced a profoundly vicarious aspect to human suffering. It is as if all humanity had become mixed in a transgenerational stew where one person's willed evil causes others to suffer. No one comes out unhurt.

Sociality of Suffering

The premise of individualism does not help toward a solution of an enigma that is intrinsically social—the complex relational interfacing of human beings in covenant histories, the histories of families, of associa-

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Aulen's influential account of this view downplays the substitution and satisfaction motifs in Scripture (Gal. 1:4, 1 Cor. 15:3, 2 Cor. 5:21); is selective in his use of sources; "establishes his point only by ignoring other facets of their accounts"; focuses inordinately upon the conflict within God; and "gives little notice to what it [salvation] cost God" (McDonald, ADC, pp. 263-65).

Comparison of the Complementary Tendencies

The differences between these four motifs correspond generally to what is perceived to be the deepest predicament of humanity—ignorance, misery, sin, or the bound will.

If the human predicament is conceived primarily as:

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but to a crucifixion, not to living powerfully but dying powerlessly, not to a crown of majesty but of thorns.

Jesus was conscious of his messianic vocation from the outset of his mission. It is not a consciousness formed only after Jesus' resurrection in the minds of the disciples (as some theories of the "messianic secret" hold, cf. W. Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, accepted as a central fact of "critical orthodoxy"; cf. Ladd, *TNT*, p. 170). He accepted the messianic title, blessed his disciples when they recognized it, and finally under oath on trial accepted it. But prior to his trial, he was cautious about this disclosure because he knew how distortedly it might be perceived.

NAMES AND TITLES ASCRIBED TO THE ANOINTED ONE

Metaphors abound in describing who Jesus was and is: the rock of our salvation, the foundation on which the church is built, chief cornerstone, the head of the body, the vine that takes leaf, bridegroom of the end-time banquet, brother of his disciples, and friend of sinners (1 Pet. 2:6; Eph. 1:22; Luke 7:34; Matt. 25:6; John 20:17). He is the physician of souls, the fountain of cleansing, the bread and water of sustenance, the door of access to life with God. The variety of his names and titles is as intriguing as a puzzle asking to be put together.

Jesus is servant, suffering Servant, servant of the Lord, minister, counselor, peacemaker (Isa. 42-43; Rom. 15:8; Acts 3:26). His very name, Jesus (from Jehosua or Joshua), means Savior (Matt. 1:21). He is the Help of the Lord, the Prince of Salvation. As Son of the Father, beloved of the Father, uniquely related to the Father, he is the Word of God, preexistent Logos (John 1:1-18), "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb. 1:2).

As Messiah, Jesus is the Lord's anointed agent of salvation, author of salvation (Heb. 3:2), Redeemer, Mediator (Isa. 59:20; 1 Tim. 2:5), Light of the world, the Desire of the nations, the Expected One of Israel (Isa. 17:3; Hag. 2:7). He was called "Jesus Christ the Righteous" (1 John 2:1), the Righteous One (Acts 3:14), Sanctifier, the Holy One (Heb. 2:11; 1 John 2:20), who presides over our justification in the court (as the "guarantee of a better covenant," Heb. 7:22), and our sanctification in the Temple (as "priest forever," Heb. 7:17). Jesus is the "author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2), "the mediator of a new covenant" (Heb. 12:24), "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6), or, more simply, "the life" (John 11:25).

The Study of Titles and Metaphors Applied to Jesus

The intense study of these ascriptions has been central to class-

Christian teaching of Christ, illuminating to the mind and elevating to the spirit. The study of Christ is diminished when these ascriptions are neglected (Taylor, *N/Y*).

The variability of the ascriptions is due to the determination of Christ to meet each person on his or her own ground. Cyril summarized: "The Savior comes in various forms to each man for his profit. For to those who lack joy, He becomes a Vine; to those who wish to enter in, He is a Door; for those who must offer prayer, He is a mediating High-Priest. Again, to those in sin, He becomes a Sheep to be sacrificed on their behalf. He becomes 'all things to all men' remaining in His own nature what He is. For so remaining, and possessing the truly unchangeable dignity of the Sonship, as the best of physicians and a sympathetic teacher, He *adapts Himself to our infirmity*" (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech. Lect. X, FC 61, p. 198, italics added*).

The titles ascribed to Christ are not used because they adequately designate his reality, but because they point inadequately to him by the only means available—words:

Having no other words to use, we use what we have.

Thou art called the Word, and Thou art above Word;

Thou art above Light, yet art named Light;

Thou art called Fire not as perceptible to sense, but because Thou purgest light and worthless matter;

a Sword, because Thou severest the worse from the better.

a Fan because Thou purgest the threshing-floor, and blowest away all that is

light and windy, and layest up in the garner above all that is weighty and full;

an Axe, because Thou cuttest down the worthless fig-tree, after long patience. . . .

the Door, because thou bringest in;

the Way, because we go straight;

the Sheep, because Thou art the Sacrifice;

the High Priest, because Thou offerest the Body;

the Son, because Thou art of the Father

(Gregory Nazianzen, *Orat. XXXVII.4, NPNF 2 VII, p. 339,*

italics and paragraphing added).

Cyril warned against diminishing the ascriptions by squeezing out of them their metaphorical functions: "He is called a door. But you must not think of a wooden door. You must think of a spiritual door that reasons, and is alive, and knows all about those that enter" (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech. Lect. X.3, LCC IV, pp. 131-32*).