

## How the Cross Saves

*Mark D. Baker*

Like many Christians, I once assumed that the penal satisfaction theory of the atonement was the one and complete explanation of how the cross provides salvation. Jesus' death on the cross paid the penalty we deserved, satisfied God's demand for punishment, and enabled God to justly forgive us of our sins. Reading Gustaf Aulén's book, *Christus Victor*, in a seminary class opened up the reality that there was more than one explanation of the atonement, or the saving significance of the cross and resurrection.<sup>1</sup> That created space to do what I had not done before—take a critical look at penal satisfaction.

---

*To argue that Paul interpreted words related to "justification" from a Hebraic perspective does not mean that the classical Protestant understanding—that justification addresses a person's burden of guilt—is wrong; rather it is too limited.*

---

My critique was not exhaustive, but I did become passionately engaged by what I observed. Penal satisfaction theory, especially as popularly communicated, could easily contribute to someone viewing God as an angry figure eager to punish and reluctant to forgive. After encountering people who in fact attributed their fear of God to this explanation of the cross, I concluded that this must change. I began looking for alternatives.

### **ATONEMENT THEOLOGIES: EVANGELICAL VS. ANABAPTIST?**

For me this was not an evangelical vs. Anabaptist issue. Aulén was

---

*Mark D. Baker is Associate Professor of Mission and Theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, California*

Lutheran, the professor who assigned the book was Reformed and evangelical, and I was not yet a Mennonite. Therefore it would be wrong to portray the conversation about the atonement in this article as contrasting an Anabaptist position and an evangelical position. Critique of penal satisfaction is not limited to Anabaptists and not all Anabaptists would reject penal satisfaction.

At the same time there are grounds to consider the atonement as an area of conversation between Mennonites and evangelicals because the majority of evangelicals do affirm a penal satisfaction explanation of the atonement, and Mennonites have been prominent in critiquing that position in contemporary discussion. Why? Clearly a biblical theology approach, in contrast to a systematic theology approach, facilitates taking seriously the various facets of meaning in the diversity of biblical images of atonement, rather than forcing all the imagery into one uniform meaning. John Driver's work is an excellent example.<sup>2</sup> The way that penal satisfaction supports the myth of redemptive violence and portrays God as using violence has motivated Mennonites to offer alternative explanations. J. Denny Weaver's work has that focus, as do recent essays by Mennonite Brethren pastors David Eagle and Chris Friesen.<sup>3</sup>

The Anabaptist missionary impulse and seeing mission as birthing theology have also led to alternative explanations of the atonement arising in the context of cross-cultural mission, as is evident in the work of C. Norman Kraus, David Shenk, and myself.<sup>4</sup> It is not, however, just the contextualization and articulation aspects of mission that have led Mennonites to seek alternative presentations of the atonement, but also concern for how atonement theology affects the lived out mission of the church. This concern is evident in the title of Driver's book, *Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church*.

Perhaps most fundamental, and something found in the work of all the writers listed above, is the centrality of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, both as a focal lens for theology and as a model to follow in discipleship. Therefore, Mennonites have sought to articulate alternative explanations that make Jesus' life, the way he lived, and his resurrection integral to atonement theology. In contrast, penal satisfaction simply requires a life lived without sin and focuses on Jesus' death not the resurrection. And, in a corollary fashion, the above thinkers have sought to proclaim the saving significance of the cross and resurrection in a way that emphasizes not just what we are saved from, but what we are saved for.<sup>5</sup>

Interacting with these Mennonite theologians, and scholars from other traditions as well, broadened my original critique of penal satis-

faction. I came to believe it was imperative to offer alternatives to penal satisfaction for the following reasons:

- to correct misconceptions about God,
- to give Jesus' life and resurrection a more central place in our atonement theology,
- to help people see, and experience, the integral relationship between ethics and atonement,
- to help people in other contexts more easily understand the saving significance of the cross and resurrection, and
- to counter the myth of redemptive violence.

### THEORIES AND IMAGES

Whereas in the New Testament we encounter various images that writers use to *proclaim* the saving significance of the cross, theologians have generally sought to develop a single model or theory to *explain* how Jesus' death and resurrection provide salvation. Although after reading Gustaf Aulén I sought a theory to replace the penal satisfaction theory of the atonement later, through the influence of biblical scholars, I became convinced that using multiple images offered a better approach than trying to capture the fullness of the atonement in one theory. Yet I still see value in working at the question an atonement theory addresses: How does the cross provide salvation? How does this work? What follows then is, in one sense, a mix of my training in systematic theology and my training in biblical studies. It is not one theory to replace penal satisfaction, nor is it a listing of biblical images of atonement (something others have already done quite well<sup>6</sup>). Rather it is a list of various explanations and images, some of the images being biblical and some my own. The list does not fit neatly into the approach of either discipline. The reality is that this article, like most of my theological writing, grew out of a specific experience in ministry and therefore perhaps I should most accurately say I am writing it as a missiologist theologian.

Someone recently said to me, "You have written a book on the atonement;<sup>7</sup> it was very helpful, but if Jesus' death on the cross does not provide for our salvation by satisfying God's demand for punishment, how does the cross save? Could you give me a brief answer?" Rather than giving a single answer, I sought to give the person a sense of the depth and breadth of the saving significance of the cross by listing a number of explanations and images. I have added an item or two to the list, but basically what follows is the list I gave to that person "off the

top of my head.” In this article, in contrast to the original answer, I have provided a brief explanation of each point.

What follows is not exhaustive in two senses. First, the list could be lengthened, especially through adding images both biblical and contemporary. Second, the explanations of each point are sketches—hopefully enough to help readers understand my points, but certainly not enough to answer all the questions a person may have. I mention the penal satisfaction theory only once. I recognize that some readers will question a critique of that theory which neglects to engage it directly in the process. However, I have explained my position on penal satisfaction at length in a book and several essays, and refer the reader to those writings.<sup>8</sup>

### **HOW IS SALVATION ACCOMPLISHED?**

Sin is the great disorder that has disrupted the work of God, and salvation is the overcoming of that alienation and disruption. Jesus’ death and resurrection are at the center of God’s saving work. To offer one single explanation of how the cross and resurrection provide salvation would fail to capture the depth and breadth of meaning communicated through the variety of images used by biblical authors. One reason the biblical authors use multiple images to proclaim the saving significance of the cross and resurrection is because they seek metaphors that their audience will best understand. So, for instance, the writer to the Hebrews uses imagery of priesthood and sacrifice, whereas Paul, writing to a more Gentile audience, utilizes metaphors from their world.

To use only the metaphor or explanation that people in a given context most easily understand would be wrong for two reasons. First, the New Testament metaphors are not simply interchangeable. They are not various ways of communicating the same thing. Rather the biblical writers use multiple images to help communicate the multifaceted nature of God’s saving activity.

Secondly, the biblical evangelists sought not only to connect with but also to challenge their audiences. The explanation of how the cross and resurrection save that connects best with the felt needs of a particular context may fail to communicate aspects of the gospel message that confront that cultural setting in saving and liberating ways. It is imperative that we seek to use the full range of biblical imagery, and also seek to interact with Christians from other contexts who will add to our understandings of those biblical images. Therefore, I will offer a number of explanations and metaphors of how salvation is accomplished through the cross and resurrection.<sup>9</sup>

**Jesus suffered, in our place, the ultimate consequences of our sin.** How did God act to save us? Perhaps the simplest answer is the biblical statement that Jesus died for us; he died for our sins (Rom. 5:6; 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Thess. 5:10). One way of understanding the meaning of these phrases is to recognize that those who killed Jesus acted out a tragedy in which we all are involved. Jesus proclaimed a message of radical graciousness, acceptance, and abundant life that contrasted with a culture of exclusion, oppression, and death. Jesus lived out the message he proclaimed. Many, however, resisted and rejected the kingdom of God as lived and proclaimed by Jesus. In response Jesus spoke words and parables of judgment.

In doing so, however, he did not retract his message of unconditional love or his invitation to all to join him at the table with others sharing food and fellowship. Rather out of loving concern he warned people of the consequences to themselves, and others, of rejecting God's graciousness and rooting themselves ever more firmly in a society of tit-for-tat reciprocity, in a religiosity of status seeking and drawing lines of exclusion and, fundamentally, in a paradigm that mistakenly imagined a God of conditional love. Jesus warned them they would suffer, as well as cause others to suffer, the very real punishments of that religiosity and society and live in fear of the "God" they believed in.

The religious and political systems of the day punished and killed Jesus, and Jesus took on himself the judgment that he had warned others about. Jesus had not sinned, but he bore the ultimate consequences of our sin, of our lack of trust in God. The alienation described above leads to death. It is the wages sin pays (Rom. 6:23). Jesus' death was the consequence of an alienation that was not his but ours. His death had a substitutionary character. He suffered in our place to save us from experiencing the ultimate consequence of our sin.

**God raised Jesus from the dead and triumphed over death.** Jesus died, but death did not have the final word. The most common explanation of the means of salvation in the early centuries of the church portrayed God defeating death and forces of evil through the cross and resurrection (Heb. 2:14-15).<sup>10</sup> Similarly to the substitutionary nature of Jesus' death, we are united with him in his triumph over sin and death (Rom. 5 and 6; 1 Cor. 5:21-22). It is true that one expression of God's wrath, similar to what is described in the previous subsection, is turning people over to suffer the consequences of their sin (Rom. 1). In this victory, however, we see God's wrath expressed as an active and holy opposition to sin and death.

**God offers forgiveness.** At the cross God experienced the worst that humans could do. Jesus suffered a humiliating and painful death, and God the Father suffered the loss of his son. Yet on the cross Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34 NRSV). When Jesus forgave those who crucified him, he forgave them not just for the specific act of crucifixion, but also for the attitudes and behaviors that had led to the cross. Of course, God had forgiven before, and Jesus had previously demonstrated a forgiving stance to his disciples and others; but the depth of the offense at the cross means that God’s forgiveness of that offense also penetrates to the very depth of human sin. God has and will forgive the worst we can do. We are freed from the burden of guilt.

God, however, does much more than decree forgiveness and place a human in a different column in a legal ledger in heaven. Forgiveness is a precursor to reconciliation. God responded to the cross with restorative forgiveness bringing people back into right relationship. We observe this concretely when the resurrected Jesus returned to the disciples as a forgiving presence—intent, not on scolding, or seeking revenge for their betrayal and desertion, but on reaching out in love and restoring relationships. The powerful waves of that forgiveness extend to us today as the living Jesus Christ continues to respond to human betrayal and rejection with forgiveness.

**Jesus frees us from shame.** Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection God liberates not only from guilt, but also from shame. Whereas we feel guilt for an act that transgresses a boundary, we feel shame in relation to others for being inferior and not meeting expectations. We feel guilt for *making* a mistake, we feel shame for *being* a mistake. The objective consequences of an act of disobedience are accusation and punishment or retaliation; the objective consequences of failing to meet expectations and being inferior are disapproval, ridicule, rejection, and often exclusion. Forgiveness or pardon frees us from guilt. The remedy for shame includes removing disgrace, offering a new identity, restoring honor, and overcoming exclusion through reincorporation.

Societies, distorted by sin and influenced by powers of evil, often shame people inappropriately. In the gospels we repeatedly observe Jesus liberating people from the shame of being labeled unworthy, unclean, or inferior. He embraced and included the excluded; he freed them from shame by honoring them and giving them a new identity. These actions by Jesus threatened the status quo and those who had done the shaming. They sought to stop him through the ultimate act of

exclusion: death, and not just any death, but the extremely dishonorable and shameful death of public crucifixion.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection add to the liberating work already seen in his life. First, they add weight and significance to the new identity he had offered to the shamed. He was so committed to their inclusion he was willing to die rather than accept the norms and practices of those who shamed them. Second, through the resurrection God validates Jesus and thus also his actions of loving acceptance. Third, through Jesus' death on the cross God has fully identified with humans in our experience of shame and has experienced the shameful exclusion we fear.

The cross, however, offers more than a promise of God's solidarity and God's knowing what it means to experience shame. The cross exposes false shame and breaks its power to instill fear. On the cross Jesus was inappropriately shamed, and the cross and resurrection exposed the powers and the lies they used to falsely shame Jesus (Col. 2:15). Jesus' death and resurrection invite and enable us to live in freedom from this dehumanizing shame that he disregarded on the cross (Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 2:6).

At the same time, however, there are things for which humans should feel shame. What could be more shameful than crucifying God incarnate? Those who sought to shame Jesus were in fact the ones who behaved most shamefully. Jesus' disciples and followers also acted shamefully by betraying, denying, or abandoning Jesus. Yet God did not respond by shaming them, but by taking actions to heal the shame they felt and to restore relationships. Love banishes shame. On the cross and after the resurrection, Jesus responded with relationship-restoring acts of love and acceptance.

Although, through familiarity, many of us may more easily see biblical pronouncements of salvation from guilt, the remedy to shame described above is apparent as well. For instance, John E. Toews points out an example of Paul writing about salvation as liberation from shame:

God "makes peace" (*we have peace with God*, Rom. 5:1), love is extended (*God shows his love for us*, Rom. 5:8), reconciliation occurs (*while we were enemies we were reconciled to God . . . we are reconciled and saved by his life*, Rom. 5:10), a new identity is given (*we are children of God*, Rom. 8:16, who have been adopted as sons and daughters, Rom. 8:23).<sup>12</sup>

In exposing the misplaced shame and lovingly revealing and responding to the true failure of us all, Jesus, the “friend of sinners” (Luke 7:34), removed the stigma and hostility which alienates us from each other and God.

**Saved by Jesus’ blood.** In one sense to say we are saved by the blood of Jesus is a general statement and another way of communicating we are saved by Jesus’ death. The saying does also, however, have a more specific meaning even if it is difficult to fully comprehend if one is not from a society that has practiced blood sacrifice. In the Old Testament blood sacrifice had a variety of uses. The Old Testament gives little explanation of the mechanics of sacrifices. It communicates more what the sacrifices accomplished than how they accomplished it.

One common use of blood sacrifice in the Old Testament, as well as in other cultures, was in making and sealing a covenant. So Jesus’ blood, shed on the cross, is described as “the blood of the covenant” (Mark 14:24; Heb. 10:29). It can be seen as God’s commitment to keep the new covenant established by Jesus Christ (Col. 1:20). This meaning is a central aspect of the Lord’s Supper. To drink the cup of wine is to participate in the covenant offered to us through Jesus’ blood (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25). Through his sacrificial death, Christ identified fully with human reality but transformed it through a once-and-for-all covenant that provided the possibility and promise of eternal life, life in all its fullness.

Another common function of blood sacrifice is to cleanse and purify. Jesus’ shed blood is described as having this cleansing action (Heb. 1:3; 9:12-14, 22; 10:19-22; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 John 1:7). Jesus’ blood wipes away the stain of guilt and shame and thus enables restored relationships.

**Justification through Jesus’ faithful obedience.** “Justification by faith” has been a central doctrine for Protestant theology. It interprets Paul as using a courtroom metaphor to communicate that our guilt has been wiped away, and we are declared innocent. This was Luther’s experience. His striving did not alleviate guilt or bring him peace with God; peace came when the Spirit led him to understand and experience that divine grace through faith brings justification and peace with God.

Without contesting the authenticity of Luther’s experience, we must ask if we err by reading Paul through the lenses of Luther’s personal experience and a Greco-Roman understanding of justice. In Greco-Roman based legal systems an impersonal code of laws provides the means for the judge to weigh the case. Crimes have victims, yet in criminal cases the central issue is how the accused measures up against

the legal code. Restitution to and reconciliation with the victim are not the focus. With this understanding of justice we quite naturally think that for God to justify an individual is to pronounce him or her as “not guilty”—that is, to view the person as if he or she had met the standard of the justice.

In contrast, the Hebraic concept of justice seen in the Old Testament has a relational foundation. The basis of judgment is how faithful one is to agreements, obligations, or covenants with other people and with God. To act justly is to be faithful to the people one is committed to by agreement or covenant. The relationship, not an impersonal law, is central. Old Testament law is relational in the sense that God gave it within a covenant relationship as an expression of God’s intention for life and relationships within Israel. Therefore, a person would be seen as just by God if he or she lived in a way that demonstrated faithfulness to Israel’s covenant with God.

As Paul makes clear we have all sinned or failed to be just in our relationships with God and others (Rom. 3:23). Jesus, however, was obedient, faithful and just at every point and in every way that we have failed—faithful even to the point of death. Paul proclaims that we are justified not by our actions, but by God’s grace through the faithful actions of Jesus (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:24-26). Therefore, in contrast to our failing to be just, God proves to be just by being faithful to God’s covenant commitment to bless and save Israel, and through them to save others.

Both Romans and Galatians address the issue of salvation within a broader discussion of the relationship between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. In Galatians Paul specifically addresses questions about the role of Jewish laws and traditions in defining one’s inclusion within the people of God. In this broader context of Galatians and Romans, and through the lens of a Hebraic relational understanding of justice, it is clear that to be justified is not simply to be declared innocent of having broken laws and thus to be placed in proper relationship with standards recorded in an impersonal code. Rather, to be justified is to be placed in proper relationship to God—to be made a full participant in the community of God’s people. (Justification is only one of the metaphors that Paul can use to describe this act of inclusion by grace; for example he uses “adoption,” in Gal. 4:5 and Rom. 8:15).

Understood from the relational Hebraic perspective, the verb “to justify” (*dikaion*) includes a sense of making straight or straightening out or restoring relationships that have been twisted or broken. In the Old Testament God provided a system of sacrifices to restore and

straighten relations between God and the people of God. In Galatians Paul affirms that he, Peter, and the other Jewish Christians agree that this straightening out of relationship comes through Jesus. Therefore, as a metaphor of salvation, to say that someone is justified communicates a sense of inclusion within the community of faith and a straightening or rectifying of relations with God and others in the community of faith.

To argue that Paul interpreted words related to “justification” from a Hebraic perspective does not mean that the classical Protestant understanding—that justification addresses a person’s burden of guilt—is wrong; rather it is too limited. A clear example of justification dealing with guilt, but not only guilt, is found in Leviticus 6. Clear directions are given on using an offering to deal with the guilt one feels for stealing something from a neighbor. The offender was instructed, however, not just to go to the priest and make an offering, but also to make actions of restitution to the neighbor with the aim of restoring the relationship. A more Hebraic perspective of justification adds breadth, depth, and actuality to our understanding of justification.

Returning to the issue of penal satisfaction, we can affirm that Paul does use a legal metaphor for atonement, but not necessarily one that pictures God demanding punishment as a condition for salvation. A key question to ask is what courtroom we imagine as we read, in Romans 3, that through Christ Jesus’ sacrifice of atonement God proves to be just. Those who read this through the lens of a Greco-Roman courtroom understand Paul to be saying that God has met the standard of justice by demanding punishment. Through the lens of a Hebraic courtroom we understand Paul to be saying that God is considered just because God was being faithful to a covenant, to the divine promise to provide salvation.

**The cross stops the cycle of violence.** Humans have often sought to increase their status and security through violence, oppression, and labeling others as inferior. This has led to whirling cycles of violence and tit-for-tat actions. Jesus challenged this way of life, and his refusal to spin along in the same direction as others created tension and hostility. This came to a head at the cross when alienated people, caught up by the principalities and powers, attempted to put a stop to Jesus once and for all through bribery, falsehood, humiliation, and a violent and shameful death. Jesus did not react violently against those forces, but instead acted like a rock in a river that absorbs the energy of the whirlpool and stops it.

In a definitive way the cross broke the cycle of increasing alienation and violence because it absorbed the worst act of violence in the

world—the killing of God incarnate. God did not respond to this by lashing out with a vengeful counter blow, but with forgiving love, thus responding to the root causes of a violent society. The ultimate act of hatred was answered with the ultimate act of forgiving love. Jesus' life and his death on the cross break the cycle and extend the liberating, healing, and humanizing love of God in a way that made newness of life and transformation of all reality a real possibility and promise for all creation. Christians know that whirlpools of sin are not ultimately the most powerful force, and that, enabled by the Spirit of Jesus, they can resist their drag, and stand together as a rock that stops whirlpools.<sup>13</sup>

**The cross disarms the principalities and powers.** Using principality and power terminology (Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16), Paul writes of Jesus: "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15 TNIV). The earthly leaders and institutions, as well as the spiritual powers that used them, certainly thought they had won the day when Jesus breathed his last breath. Yet, they had not conquered Jesus. Not only had Jesus broken the cycle of violence, but also, until his last breath, he refused to cower, to be shamed and give in to their pressures to live life according to their values and priorities. The cross opens up the possibility that one does not have to obey the powers. The resurrection was not only a defeat of the powers in the sense that Jesus came back to life, but also a validation for Jesus' way of living. Thus the powers are exposed both as failures and liars. Their way is not the way of God, and they can be resisted. Ironic as it may seem, the New Testament proclaims that in the weakness of the cross the power of God is revealed (1 Cor. 1:18-25; 2:6-8). The cross reveals other powers to be pseudo-powers.

Today the whole range of powers and forces of evil—from demons and evil spirits through mammon and enslaving religiosity, to institutions used by the powers—continue to act as if humans have no choice but to follow and obey. But their claim is a false one. Jesus has triumphed over the powers. The lie of the powers has been exposed by the cross. Therefore, humans can be freed from their influence when they come to recognize and to treat the powers as the mere things they are.

**The cross judges.** Some mistakenly view judgment as the opposite of salvation, and view God's punishment as only retributive not corrective. That is, however, too narrow a view of judgment because judgment is essentially speaking the truth about and rectifying a situation. For those who are being oppressed, judgment is good news. Judgment shines a light on and exposes the unjust actions of their oppressors with

the aim of changing the unjust situation. The cross acts as perhaps the brightest light of judgment. It makes starkly clear the error of the ways of the powers who killed Jesus. As we have seen above, they are exposed, and a rectification which began at the cross and resurrection will be consummated when Christ returns.

The cross also, however, speaks truth about us and shines a bright light on our sinful ways. In Jesus the powers and people of his day crucified God incarnate, crucified a fellow human, not just any human, but one who lived authentically as the human we were created to be. We too have turned our backs on God and rejected God. We too have hurt and lashed out at our fellow humans, and we too have hid, covered up, and hence rejected the human God created us to be. Thus we are all crucifers, and we stand exposed by the judging light of the cross.

How can this judgment be saving good news? Having a wrong exposed is painful, but it is also a step toward living in an alternative way. Even so, this judgment would be condemnation if not for the fact that the cross is not just an instrument of judgment, but also a place of forgiveness. Our repentance and salvation are rooted in experiencing both.

**The cross reveals.** Jesus' life and death on the cross reveal to us what it means to live as an authentic human being created in the image of God. The scandal of God-incarnate hanging on the cross in weakness, nakedness, and humiliation is a moment of salvation for us (1 Cor. 1:18-31). It invites us to be the finite and limited humans God created us to be. It invites us to recognize, embrace, and truthfully represent ourselves in all our fleshly physicality, our emotional complexity, and our frightened vulnerability. The resurrection validates the life Jesus led. In a sense through the resurrection God says to us, "this is the life to imitate." It is an invitation to live in freedom from the voices and powers that tell us we must mask our true humanity. God does not promise that, if we will live as the true human we were created to be, we will not suffer; quite the contrary, Christian existence as authentic loving humans in the midst of evil invites reviling, suffering.

But the resurrection is a promise that in an ultimate sense Jesus has died for us, in our place, so that we are no longer enslaved to masking and hiding our humanity as a way to protect ourselves. We can freely live as authentic humans without fear. Life, not death, has the final word. The cross also underscores what Jesus' life reveals: to be authentically human is to be for others. Rather than a self-oriented lifestyle of grasping, lording it over others, and resolving conflicts through force, Jesus models a lifestyle of sharing, service, and nonviolence.

Jesus reveals not only true humanity, but also is the fullest self-revelation we have of God. Jesus clearly reveals God's loving commitment to save. Jesus healed, liberated, confronted oppressing powers, and communicated love and acceptance to those experiencing rejection and marginalization. He was so committed to these saving actions that he did not waver from them even when they led to his death. God's love for us was so great that Jesus was willing to die, and God the Father was willing to let his Son die, to provide salvation. The cross reveals to us a God who is unrelentingly for us (Rom. 8:31-39). This revelation saves us from living with mistaken concepts of an accusing vindictive God that we must appease (John 3:16-17).

## CONCLUSION

The previous section has sought to point to the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It has not, however, exhausted it. We could add other metaphors and explanations of the saving significance of the cross and resurrection, and we could delve deeper into the meanings of the ones listed above. The cross and resurrection exceed our attempts to explain them.

The conversation within evangelicalism about the atonement will continue. More scholarly books will be written delving deeper into issues raised in this article. We will benefit from that work.

What is, I think, most crucial at this time, however, is to take ideas like those described in this article and develop images and presentations that can be used in sermons, tracts, Sunday school classes, youth meetings and evangelistic conversations. Until we do that the images and presentations of penal satisfaction, which are generally more problematic than the explanations of penal satisfaction in theology books, will reign at the popular level and the problems associated with penal satisfaction will continue.

A recent collection of essays, *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross*, provides a number of alternative images that people have used in ministry settings.<sup>14</sup> I invite you to borrow images from that book and also to join me in seeking to develop other ones. ✨

## NOTES

1. The word *atonement* derives from the Middle English expression "make at one" or "at one-ment" and thus relates specifically to reconciliation. The word has come to be used, however, in a broader sense as a label for theological discussion of the saving significance

of the cross and resurrection.

2. John Driver, *Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1986).
3. J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); David Eagle offers a critique of and alternative to Weaver in, "Anthony Bartlett's Abyssal Compassion and a Truly Nonviolent Atonement," *Conrad Grebel Review* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 66-81; Chris Friesen, "Atonement in the Coffee Shop" in *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of Atonement*, ed. Mark D. Baker (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 34-46.
4. Mark D. Baker, "The Saving Significance of the Cross in a Tegucigalpa Barrio" at [www.mbseminary.edu/baker/atonement](http://www.mbseminary.edu/baker/atonement); C. Norman Kraus, *Jesus Christ Our Lord: Christology from a Disciple's Perspective* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1990), 205-17; David Shenk, *Justice, Reconciliation and Peace in Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima, 1997), esp. ch. 4, 77-115.
5. In addition to the works previously cited, another Mennonite Brethren writer who has displayed these final two characteristics in an excellent short presentation of the atonement is Ryan Schellenberg, "A Father's Advocacy" in *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross*, 118-22.
6. See for instance John Driver, *Understanding the Atonement*.
7. Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000).
8. Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*; Mark D. Baker, "Embracing a Wider Cross: Contextualizing the Atonement" in *Out of the Strange Silence*, ed. Brad Thiessen (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred, 2005), 29-47; and idem, "Contextualizing the Scandal of the Cross" in *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross*, 9-26.
9. Although this article focuses primarily on the saving significance of the cross and resurrection my intention is not to separate the cross and resurrection from the life and teachings of Jesus. In fact my hope is that the explanations offered will, in a way that penal satisfaction does not, make it clearer how Jesus' life and teaching are integrally related to the atonement, the cross, and resurrection.
10. This explanation of the atonement is commonly called Christus Victor. See *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 117-25.
11. Although crucifixion was physically painful, in the Roman era, people dreaded crucifixion first and foremost because of its shameful

character. It was designed to be an instrument of contempt and public ridicule. Romans reserved crucifixion for insurrectionists, foreigners, and slaves. They did not crucify Roman citizens because it was considered too dishonorable (Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 26-27; Kraus, 216; Joel B. Green, "Kaleidoscopic View" in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006], 157-59.).

12. John E. Toews, *Romans* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2004), 147, *emph. original*.
13. The whirlpool metaphor is not a biblical image, but it is based on Jesus' life, and there are Scripture passages that point to the truths communicated by this metaphor. Jesus did not resist or retaliate (John 10:17-18; Matt. 27); there is saving and transforming power in the apparent weakness of Christ being crucified (1 Cor. 1:18-31); the powers are disarmed through the cross (Col. 2:15); and Jesus' death is described as transforming a situation of hostility and enmity to a situation of peace (Eph. 2:13-18). I have borrowed the whirlpool metaphor from Vernard Eller, *War and Peace from Genesis to Revelation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1981), 159-64.
14. Mark D. Baker, ed., *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).