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## **Atonement Theory 2:**

+Ian, OSJ (UK)

As promised, further work on ‘atonement theory’, something which has infiltrated many aspects of the way we express our Christian faith and we have come to take for granted. It however forms only part of the Gospel message.

Atonement theory likes to think of itself as being the cornerstone of the Christian faith but it focuses only on the death of Christ. The life, teachings and ministry of Jesus are equally as important as his death.

The seeds of atonement theory do not appear in Jesus’ own words or in his teachings but first appear in Paul’s writings and developed thereafter.

Atonement theory as a concept is not really fully established in mainstream theological thinking until the writings of St Anselm a century after the death of Christ. However well-intended this writing was, there is no evidence that atonement theory was ever proposed by Christ himself.

As a concept, it remains a theoretical construct which even its proponents find [great variance](#) of disagreement. However, the language of atonement theory has become embedded in much of our Christian language and it is often used unwisely, even in error, and it has clouded the Gospel we preach and teach.

My concern is we have moved from the Full Gospel of Jesus Christ to a subtly different gospel promoted by Paul and more lately by others.

To get some idea about the kind of objections that exist regarding atonement theory, I draw your attention to [Confronting Atonement Theology - United Methodist Insight](#), and I have extracted key sections and references to the writings of other authors. It makes for interesting reading.

(Imported or quoted text is shown in italics. Clicking on the links will take you directly to the original source material.)

*The Gospels do not explicitly rebut atonement theology. [However, there are some scholars who argue that the Gospels present a different view of Jesus' death than the one presented by atonement theology](#)<sup>1</sup>.*

*Atonement theology posits that Jesus' death was necessary in some tangible, cosmic way, as a "sacrifice" for the sins of humanity.*

*[Further, it suggests that this sacrifice, and this sacrifice alone, is the "salvific" work of Jesus; the moment that Jesus' earthly ministry is complete](#)<sup>1</sup>.*

*[In contrast, some scholars argue that the Gospels present Jesus' death as a result of his teachings and actions, rather than as a necessary sacrifice for the sins of humanity](#)<sup>2</sup>. [They argue that Jesus' death was a consequence of his radical message and his challenge to the political and religious authorities of his time](#)<sup>2</sup>.*

It is important to note that there is no one doctrine of atonement, and that different Christian traditions have different interpretations of the meaning and significance of Jesus' death <sup>3</sup>. (Editor - see later articles in this newsletter.)

Some scholars argue that the Gospels present a narrative atonement theology, which emphasizes the story of Jesus' life and death as a way of understanding the meaning of his death <sup>2</sup>.

Others argue that the Gospels present a Christus Victor theology, which emphasizes Jesus' victory over sin and death through his resurrection <sup>4</sup>.

*In conclusion, while the Gospels do not explicitly rebut atonement theology, there are scholars who argue that the Gospels present a different view of Jesus' death than the one presented by atonement theology.*

It is important to recognize that there are different interpretations of the meaning and significance of Jesus' death, and that these interpretations have evolved over time <sup>3</sup>.

*The Gospels do not explicitly rebut atonement theology, but there are different interpretations of the atonement in the Gospels.*

Atonement theology posits that Jesus' death was necessary as a "sacrifice" for the sins of humanity, and that this sacrifice alone is the "salvific" work of Jesus <sup>1</sup>.

However, some scholars argue that the Gospels present a more nuanced view of the atonement, with Jesus' life and teachings being just as important as his death<sup>2</sup>.

For instance, the Gospel of Mark presents Jesus' death as a ransom for many, but also emphasizes the importance of following Jesus' example of service and humility<sup>2</sup>.

Similarly, the Gospel of Luke emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and compassion, and presents Jesus' death as an act of love rather than a necessary sacrifice<sup>2</sup>.

*In summary, while the Gospels do not explicitly reject atonement theology, they present a more complex and multifaceted view of the atonement that goes beyond the idea of a necessary sacrifice.*

<sup>1</sup>: *United Methodist Insight*<sup>2</sup>: *BYU Studies Quarterly*

The term "atonement" developed in the English language in the 16th century by the combination of "at onement," meaning to "set at one" or "to reconcile"<sup>1</sup>.

The concept of atonement is a recurring theme in the history of religion and theology, and is often attached to sacrifice, both of which often connect ritual cleanness with moral purity and religious acceptability<sup>1</sup>.

Various theories of the meaning of the Atonement of Christ have arisen, including satisfaction for the sins of the world, redemption from the Devil or from the wrath of God, a saving example of true, suffering love, the prime illustration of divine mercy, and a divine victory over the forces of evil<sup>1</sup>. In Christian orthodoxy, there is no remission of sin without “the shedding of [Christ’s] blood” (Hebrews 9:26)<sup>1</sup>.

St Anselm of Canterbury (1033/34–1109) formulated the most trenchant theory of the Atonement of Christ, which is also referred to as the “satisfaction theory of redemption”<sup>1</sup>. Anselm held that Jesus’ death on the cross was absolutely necessary because there was no other rationally intelligible way in which sinful humankind could have been reconciled with God<sup>1</sup>.

*If God in his mercy had simply forgiven humans for their sin, God’s moral order would have been repudiated.*

God’s righteousness, offended by human sin, demanded satisfaction: that satisfaction could be rendered only by someone who was both God—because God could overcome sin by sinlessness—and human—because humans were those who were guilty of sin<sup>1</sup>.

*In summary, the concept of atonement has been present in religious and theological thought for centuries, and has been interpreted in various ways throughout history. The “satisfaction theory of redemption” formulated by St. Anselm of Canterbury is one of the most influential theories of the Atonement of Christ*<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

The first problem is that the beginnings of atonement theory are a later construct which attempt to answer questions about the nature of God in Christ and how the matter of sin is resolved. Atonement theory is not found in Jesus' own words and teachings.

Part of this is created by Paul in suggesting that Christ came as the sacrificial lamb to redeem mankind from sin and then enable mankind to enjoy a relationship with God. (See Hebrews.)

Under the Jewish sacrificial system, this notion makes perfect sense but it neither fits in with Jesus own teaching about his ministry of fits in with the fact that Jesus was able to forgive sins before his death. Atonement theory is very much 'Old Testament' thinking.

Even the letter of James, the earliest and least adulterated text in the New Testament, makes no mention or suggestion of atonement theory, and neither does Mark's gospel although there are some suggested hints which may be inferred by those who support atonement theory.

The gospels of Luke and Matthew and the later gospel of John have a possible basis for elements of atonement theory but one cannot discount later revisions of the text being amended to include and or promote elements of Paul's own teaching, and the teaching of others.

Unfortunately we have to accept the possibility that later revisions of the gospels and epistles may have been adapted to suit the politics of the times.

Just to confirm, my concern is that we get as close to the truth and fullness of the original gospel taught by Jesus without being influenced by other later and perhaps unproven or unnecessary teachings.

As Christians we need to focus on what is 'of Christ' as our primary source rather than the words and understandings of others.

Paul we can add to our arsenal of general Christian teaching providing it takes no more than third place in general hierarchical teachings - first Jesus, then the apostles, and then and only then Paul.

And as to so called 'historical discernment' and the developments of atonement theory, they are only of value so long as they support the words of Christ or God rather than supersede, over-ride or contradict them.

The real ground shift in atonement theory came in the teaching of St Anselm (1033-1109 AD). He did a good job in trying to make sense of who Christ was and His purpose, and many consider Anselm to be the source of a developed doctrinal foundation of atonement theory as we have come to understand it.

The following is a summary from Britannica:-

*When Anselm left [England](#), he had taken with him an incomplete manuscript of his work [Cur Deus homo?](#) ("Why Did God Become Man?"). After the Council of Bari, he withdrew to the village of Liberi, near Capua, and completed the manuscript in 1099.*

*This work became the classic treatment of the satisfaction theory of redemption.*

*According to this theory, which is based upon the feudal structure of society, finite humanity has committed a crime (sin) against [infinite](#) God. In feudal society, an offender was required to make recompense, or satisfaction, to the one offended according to that person's status. Thus, a crime against a king would require more satisfaction than a crime against a baron or a serf.*

*According to this way of thinking, finite humanity, which could never make satisfaction to the infinite God, could expect only eternal death.*

*The instrument for bringing humans back into a right relationship with God, therefore, could be rendered only by someone who was both God—because God could overcome [sin](#) by sinlessness—and human—because humans were those who were guilty of sin.*

*Anselm held that the death of the God-human ([Christ](#)) on the cross was the only rationally intelligible way in which sinful humankind could have been [reconciled](#) with God.*

*[Atonement](#) is made possible through Christ, by whose infinite merits humanity is purified in an act of cooperative re-creation. Anselm rejected the view that humanity, through its sin, owes a debt to the Devil and placed the essence of redemption in individual union with Christ in the [Eucharist](#) (Lord's Supper), to which the sacrament of [baptism](#) (by which a person is incorporated into the church) opens the way.*



*Anselm's theory was significant for presenting a comprehensive system that focused on the interrelationship between God, Jesus, and humankind.*

*With some relatively minor alterations, Anselm's doctrine of Atonement eventually passed over into the [theology](#) of the Latin church, forming the basis of both [Roman Catholic](#) and orthodox [Protestant](#) ideas of the work of Christ.*

The first problem with this view is that atonement theory is a series of theological contrivances which try to explain something that in reality is beyond the confines of the human intellect and grasp. These things are more 'matters of faith and trust' for which no satisfactory explanations can be formed because of our limited humanity. They remain Holy mysteries, and there is nothing wrong with either stating or accepting this.

In simple terms, we can experience the truth but not necessarily be able to explain or rationalise it. How can we, mere humankind, understand or express the mind and love of God as He understands it?

The fact it works should be sufficient, and we must accept that our best attempts at explanations will always fall short.

In our vain attempt, all we may end up doing is muddying the water for others, or worse still, create foundations for building great edifices on our misunderstandings that end up leading others astray.

And where it comes to matters of faith and trust, then we have to be realistic in our expectations for no amount of explanation will ever be sufficient to convince and convict or provide undeniable and irrefutable fact to someone who does not have the faith to believe or take on trust.

And because of our own weak natures, 'the truth' is often based on little more than what we find convenient to believe regardless of the evidence.

There is a point at which all theology has to hold its hands up and state it doesn't have all the answers. There is such a thing as 'the mystery of faith'. And the danger is of course that when theology has all the answers it becomes self-defeating and faith becomes redundant because it has no purpose.

(This is where, in my opinion, the Eastern Orthodox churches outshine the Western Orthodox church because they accept and rejoice in the mystery of God and His relationship with us.)

The other problem is the idea that now atonement theory has gained some acceptability, it potentially has become an add-on/replacement for the Gospel Jesus preached in both action and word.

The language of atonement theory has certainly become pervasive. For example, how many times have you heard 'Jesus had to die on the cross so our sins could be forgiven'? So often perhaps that it doesn't even raise a second thought, but is it factually true?

Jesus did not have to die on the cross so sins could be forgiven.

The Gospels clearly record that during his ministry and prior to his crucifixion there were many Gospel examples of sins being forgiven.

That he had to die there is no doubt, but Jesus prophesied this and only this when he told the parable of the vineyard. No mention of so 'sins could be forgiven'. I think we can safely infer that this was definitely not in Jesus' mind when he spoke these words.

### **Mark 12**

***12** He began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a pit for the winepress, and built a tower, and rented it to vinedressers, and went to a far country. <sup>2</sup> At harvest time he sent a servant to the vinedressers to receive from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. <sup>3</sup> But they seized him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>4</sup> Then he sent another servant to them. They threw stones at him, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. <sup>5</sup> Still he sent another, and they killed him. And there were many others. Some they beat, and some they killed.*

*<sup>6</sup> "Having yet his one well-beloved son, he sent him last to them, saying, 'They will revere my son.'*

*<sup>7</sup> "But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' <sup>8</sup> So they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.*

*<sup>9</sup> "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill the vinedressers and give the vineyard to others. <sup>10</sup> Have you not read this Scripture:*

(The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD by the Romans could be seen as verse 9(b) as the fulfilment of these words.)

It's not just about making atonement theory fit the Gospels. There is also a problem about the complexity of atonement theory. Jesus did his very best to make his teaching simple to understand and it was full of humanity and use of the common daily experience of life.

Not so atonement theory. It is both contrived and complex.

Ask yourself, which is easier to grasp?

(1) God loves me, or,

(2) finite humanity, which could never make satisfaction to the infinite God, could expect only eternal death. The instrument for bringing humans back into a right relationship with God, therefore, could be rendered only by someone who was both God—because God could overcome [sin](#) by sinlessness—and human—because humans were those who were guilty of sin.

The death of the God-human ([Christ](#)) on the cross was the only rationally intelligible way in which sinful humankind could have been [reconciled](#) with God.

[Atonement](#) is made possible through Christ, by whose infinite merits humanity is purified in an act of cooperative re-creation.

In practical pastoral terms, is atonement theory easily explained and is of immediate personal comfort the person who is dying, or facing traumatic and insurmountable circumstances, or is facing rejection or persecution when all they may be capable of grasping or need to know is they are genuinely loved by God?

My instinct says they get better comfort from knowing God is at their side and actually cares about what happens to them.

The other issue is that atonement theory, whichever version you choose, is inherently legalistic in its very nature. It asks us to choose 'the law' over 'love', and because of its contractual nature, becomes an end in itself rather than the means to an end.

Atonement theory is about condemnation, judgement, retribution and punishment. It remains stranded in the legalistic sacrificial system of the Temple.

In the end, atonement theory demands that someone pays the price and has to die 'because.....', and this does not sit well with the idea of a loving God who says He cares and will fight to His last breath rather than lose a single person.

There is also the problem of the death of Jesus in atonement theory which states that the death of Jesus is the catalyst which allows the magic of salvation (forgiveness of sin) to happen.

But if Jesus is God who is immortal, eternal and all powerful, he is totally incapable of death and therefore the problem of sin still remains unresolved.

If Jesus is merely human then his death achieves nothing in terms of atonement theory as only God can resolve this situation.

The other massive issue of atonement theory is that it begins to suggest that Jesus' life was nothing more than the preparation for his death and that his ultimate death was the only thing that mattered. Anything outside of that consequently has no or little value. Taken literally, that might even be construed to include Jesus' teachings and the Gospels and other texts.

I completely refute this notion. Jesus transformed the lives of others during his time on earth as the Gospels clearly state and brought them forgiveness even before his work on the cross.

The sole purpose of Jesus being bred as the innocent single use sacrificial object of retribution for the sins of others does not suggest a loving or just God, but one who is much more cold and calculating, and one who puts more store in fulfilling the technicalities of the law.

I think I prefer a God who is all about reconciliation and forgiveness and who is more about the practicalities of developing a personal relationship rather than the imposing impersonal corporate theory.

In this respect I think it is time for the church as a whole to consider which and what kind of Gospel it is preaching.

We seem to have forgotten the original and very practical Jesus Gospel which was intended to draw us into the presence of God. Instead we preach something that is overly academic, distant, largely theoretical and technical. I'm sure Jesus would be very disappointed at this. Life offers so much more.

Far more understandable and compassionate is the God who so loves us that He took on human form to fully understand and experience our human condition and walked amongst us, and starts on the premise reconciliation, compassion and forgiveness are better ways forward.

At best, atonement theory is just what it says it is, just theory – the clue is in the title. As interesting as it is, we need to be careful that it does not distract us from presenting the Gospel of Christ in all of its fullness rather than just focussing on one small part of it and pretending it is the whole.

**Additional texts and sources for further consideration and study.**

**Confronting Atonement Theology:** (Extracts)

ERIC FOLKERTH

The basic idea of Atonement Theology posits that Jesus' death was necessary in some tangible, cosmic way, as a "sacrifice" for the sins of humanity. Further, it suggests that this sacrifice, and this sacrifice alone, is the "salvific" work of Jesus; the moment that Jesus' earthly ministry is complete. (The moment that "salvation" happens...)

In its more radical forms, it suggests that without it, there is no point to Jesus' earthly ministry, or to belief in him (and by extension, belief in God...).

## So, How Does God Save?

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus himself answered the question in his first public appearance at his hometown. It wasn't a very popular answer that day, but he was pretty clear about it. Here are Jesus' own words about why he came into the world:

*"He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.""*

Jesus reads from Isaiah in his hometown synagogue. He basically puts forth a "mission statement" for his ministry. A few minutes later, though, the crowd goes from adoring to angry when he suggests that this mission will be to all people, not just the hometown crowd. They get so angry that they want to kill him! But, miraculously, he slips away.

From the very beginning, Jesus is clear that his mission is to bring Good New to people. From the very beginning, it is clear this message might well get him killed. Not killed for some "cosmically necessary" reason, but because it was a threat to many other human beings who didn't like it.



The Gospel of John repeats this powerful truth in a verse that everybody who watches sports knows by heart: John 3: 16

*"For God so loved the world that he **gave** his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."*

God gave God's son.

Gave to the world.

Gave as messenger of this incredible Good News (the same Good News of Luke Chapter 4).

Gave to walk among us, "full of grace and truth."

Gave to minister... to heal... to teach.... to preach... to "reconcile" the world to God.

But, please note what this verse does not say.

It does **not** say: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, **to be crucified and die**, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

**God gave Jesus to live for our sins, not die for them.**

God gave Jesus to "reconcile and make new" the covenant between God and Jesus.

As Marcus Borg notes in the book "The Last Week,"

*"...Jesus's passion for the kingdom of God led to what is often called his passion, namely, his suffering and death. But to restrict Jesus' passion to his suffering and death is to ignore the passion that brought him to Jerusalem. To think of Jesus's passion as simply what happened on Good Friday is to separate his death from the passion that animated his life."*

Jesus' ministry was important. Jesus' life was important.

All those who encountered Jesus during his three-year ministry had the potential of experiencing a life-altering encounter with God's grace and power. It was not prologue. It was a part of the "already-happening" story of God's working in the world, "saving" the world.

So, if not atonement, then what?

In his essay, "God Does Not Demand Blood," Daniel Bell unpacks this beautifully:

*"...Christ's faithfulness even to the point of death on the cross marks not a divine demand for retribution, but a divine refusal to hold our rebellion against us. God offers us life and we reject it."*

*God continues to offer it, in the form of love incarnate, and we crucify him.*

*Yet even now, God will not lash out against us but instead raises Jesus up and sends him back with the same offer of life.*

*Christ is God bearing offense, even the offense of the cross, without holding it against us, without giving up on us, without exacting compensation or inflicting retribution, instead continuing to extend the offer of communion.*

*Christ's work of atonement, including the cross, is nothing less than God refusing our refusal; Christ is God rejecting our rejection and instead continuing to offer us the gift of life and love. Even after we crucified him."*

God was able to turn what human beings intended for evil into something Good. God turned that death into the ultimate symbol of God's triumph over human evil.

I personally believe that God and Jesus had something very different in mind for Jesus' earthly ministry. I believe it is wrapped up in the Palm Sunday story. God and Jesus intended that to be a grand entrance of Jesus into the seat of power...bringing that Good News into the very heart of political and religious authority.

But this was a threat to the "Powers That Be." So, they had Jesus killed.

As John Dominic Crossan says in much of his writings, *Jesus was crucified, not stoned. He pushed some sort of limit that made him a threat to Roman political power. Crucifixion was something only the Romans did.*

*This could have been the end of the story. But it was not. God's powerful message of Resurrection is that no matter what evil the world can dish out, God will respond in love.*

Again, hear the Bell describe the beauty and the power of God's Good News:

*"...God will not lash out against us but instead raises Jesus up and send him back with the same offer of life..."*

*"Christ's work of atonement, including the cross, is nothing less than God refusing our refusal; Christ is God rejecting our rejection..."*

### **At-One-Ment**

Previously during Lent here at Northaven, we used this play on this word, "Atonement" to remind ourselves of this truth: that atonement is about the act of being reconciled to God, not necessarily the act of blood sacrifice.

In his blog, "Ponderings on a Faith Journey," Bob Cornwall notes this:

*"The definition of this word in the Westminster Dictionary of Theology (Westminster Press, 1983) begins:*

*The English word "atonement" originally signified the condition of being "at-one" after two parties had been estranged from one another. Soon a secondary meaning emerged: "atonement" denoted the means, an act or a payment, through which harmony was restored." (p. 50).*

*That is God's power at work...God's salvific power."*

Note that the goal is being "at one" with God. It is only secondarily that the idea of an "act" or "payment" emerges, related to the word.

God seeks our "at-one-ment" with God. That is why Jesus came into the world.

It was Jesus' consistent message throughout the Gospels, and from the very beginning of his ministry.

The message of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday do not stand in opposition to this, but in complete and total consistency with all that has come before.

God so loved the world that God sent Jesus into the world with a message of Good News, not so that Jesus would die, but so that all who believed would find life, wholeness, and love.

The events of Holy Week simply mean that God cannot be defeated by human evil. Nothing, not even death, can stop God from saving the world.

The Rev. Eric Folkerth is senior pastor of Northaven United Methodist Church in Dallas, TX.

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Also see: [Articulating the atonement: Methodology and metaphor in atonement theology](#)

## **Church of England 'vanquishes' Satan:**

References to Devil removed from services to make them 'accessible'

The Telegraph, Published Feb 13, 2015

*The Book of Revelation speaks of the Devil being vanquished and cast into a pit of fire and brimstone at the end of the world.*

*Yesterday, however, the Church of England consigned Satan to a decidedly less dramatic fate – being quietly designated as an optional extra.*

*Instead of requiring an apocalyptic battle between the forces of good and evil, the move was approved with a polite show of hands at the General Synod, the Church's decision-making body, which has been meeting in Westminster.*

*Members voted to approve an alternative baptism liturgy with all references to the Devil removed, as part of a drive to make services "accessible" to those unused to attending church.*

*Those who work with young people gave consistent advice that references to the Devil are likely to be misunderstood in today's culture.*

*Following a consultation process, a committee of liturgical experts ruled that the inclusion of Satan as "personified evil" was "unhelpful" as it was likely to be "misunderstood" by young people.*

*The word "fight" has also been removed from the liturgy to give the services a more pacifist tone.*

*An earlier draft abandoned references to sin, but it was reinstated after complaints from churchgoers who said the new wording was “bland,” “dumbed down” and “nothing short of dire.”*

*Those who wish to retain references to violent combat against the Prince of Darkness will still be able to opt for the baptism liturgy in the Church of England’s main service book, Common Worship, in which those being baptized, or in most cases their parents and godparents, are urged to “fight valiantly as a disciple of Christ against sin, the world and the Devil.”*

*Despite the subject matter, there was little fury in the tone of the debate, which approved the new texts without dissent.*

I missed this article and discovered it by accident but it both intrigues me and saddens me.

At what point will the Church of England make a stand for the truth of Holy Scripture rather than trying to be all things to all people, even those who have no commitment or background in matters Christian?

Once the Devil and the concept of evil are removed from liturgy, then how long will it be before all references to God are removed, just in case they too cause offence?

I regret to say that the Devil and evil are a reality and pretending they don't exist is playing straight into their hands. You should read your bible, especially the Gospels, and take note.

Evil and the Devil (often the personification of evil rather than a specific entity) are adversaries of God and are not to be trifled with or ignored or written off as medieval myth\*. They are a reality and not to be underestimated.

**\*Bible Statistics:**

The word "devil" appears **36 times** in the New Testament of the Bible <sup>1</sup>. However, the word "satan" is used more frequently in the Old Testament, occurring **27 times** <sup>2</sup>. It is important to note that the word "satan" simply means "accuser" or "adversary" in Hebrew <sup>2</sup>.

The word "devil" appears **36 times** in the New Testament of the Bible <sup>1</sup>. However, the word "satan" is used more frequently in the Old Testament, occurring **27 times** <sup>2,2</sup>.

Shame on the Church of England yet again. If you were a vegetable you would probably be Celery. Pointless, tasteless and using up more calories than it provides. If you were remotely Christian you would more likely be Chill Pepper. If only you were too hot to handle.....

Read Revelation and weep, then do something about it.

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*\*For more global information on the Devil, see [Devil - Wikipedia](#)*



## Is OSJ really 'a church'?

+Ian, OSJ

Here is an interesting thought for you all.....

### **What is a “church” in English law?**

Posted on **19 January 2016** by **Frank Cranmer**

**Simon Hunter**, of 13 Old Square Chambers, muses on the interesting question of what is a “church” for the purposes of English law?

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#### **Introduction**

In recent weeks and months there has been much soul-searching about the future of the Anglican Communion.

The Primates’ communiqué may well be destined to please no-one – too liberal for the conservatives and too conservative for the liberals – and it may be that holding the Communion together is a Sisyphean task.

However, the discussions got me thinking about the nature of the Communion, and of communion.

The Anglican Communion, quoting the 1930 Lambeth Conference, describes itself on its website as a “fellowship, within the one holy catholic and apostolic church, of those duly constituted dioceses, provinces or regional churches in communion with the see of Canterbury.” This quotation itself raises an interesting question about what in this context and more broadly it means to be or to say “a church”.

As it happens, this was already in my mind, as the answer to the question “what is a church?” was important to some advice that I recently gave to a client.

His question, “how do I set up a church?”, in fact related to his non-mainstream faith which also happens to use the word, but the answer is much the same whatever faith or denomination one looks at.

## **Definitions**

I would suggest that we use the word “church” with three different meanings:

1. the physical building in which worship takes place; the Parish Church, e.g.;
2. “the quasi-corporate institution which carries on the religious work of the denomination whose name it bears”: the Church of England, e.g.; and
3. “the aggregate of the individual members” of the denomination or faith in question; the congregation, e.g.

The two quotations have appeared in *Halsbury's Laws of England* at least since 1922, when they were quoted by Romer J in *Re Barnes* [1930] 2 Ch 80n.<sup>[1]</sup>

My Pocket<sup>[2]</sup> *Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus* agrees, citing three (admittedly Christiano-centric) meanings corresponding precisely to the three set out above:

“Church: noun.

1. a building for public Christian worship.
2. (Church) a particular Christian organisation.
3. (the Church) Christians as a whole.”

The first of these meanings seems to me to call for little by way of legal comment. A building might with some linguistic justification be called a church if it is used for religious activity of some sort. Then again it might be used for such activity and called something different: a chapel, a mosque, a temple, e.g.

Therefore this is a cornflakes definition<sup>[3]</sup>: all churches must be places of worship, but not all places of worship need to be churches.

I do, however, note in passing at this stage the possibility that such a building might be registered under the Places of Worship Registration Act 1855, bringing consequential effects in both marriage and tax law.

It is probably this first definition that most people mean most of the time when they say ‘church’.

However, there appears to be no legal effect dependant on whether a building is called a church, or a chapel, or anything else. The law in this area, quite rightly, looks to substance and not form.

Norman Doe, in his fascinating book *Christian Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2013) says that:

“what emerges from a comparison of these instruments [i.e. the regulatory instruments of the various denominations explored in the book] is that a church is a community of Christians in a particular geographical area with defined objects and a distinct membership, institutional organisation and autonomous polity; moreover a church may be, or may be a part of, a local, regional, national or international ecclesial community and at the same time claim its place in the church universal” (pp11-12).

This definition encompasses the second and third of my above-mentioned definitions, and expands on them. It also emphasises that they are connected. This is important. The three definitions I have given are not alternatives: the existence of the one implies, in almost every conceivable case, the existence of both of the others.

It may be, in fact, that which of the three definitions is seen to the fore in any given situation may tell us something interesting about the body being studied. For instance, a body which emphasises the corporate nature of the denomination is likely, I would suggest, to be more centralised, perhaps more hierarchical, than one which emphasises the aggregation of members.

One might compare Canon 204§2 of the *Codex Iuris Canonici* (quoted by Doe at p12):

“This Church, established and ordered in this world as a society, subsists in the catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him”

with Article 19 of the Articles of Religion of the Church of England:

“The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same”,

and with the Baptist Union of South Africa’s model definition of a local church (quote by Doe at p19 fn51)

“a community of believers in a particular place where the Word of God is preached and the ordinances of Believers’ Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are observed. It is fully autonomous and remains so notwithstanding responsibilities it may accept by voluntary association.”

### **Churches in English law**

The quasi-corporate institution has been described as “the operative institution which ministers religion and gives spiritual edification to its members”: see *Re Barnes* at 81.

What might such an institution be, in legal terms?

It seems to me that there are four main structures that it might adopt. It might simply have no formal structure at all, a group of friends meeting to share their faith. It might be a formal unincorporated association: a society or club. It might be an incorporated association such as a company.

Finally, it might be a charity. There is an almost infinite number of possible variations, many of which overlap these boundaries.[\[4\]](#)

If the primary *raison d'être* of the association is to own the property (the church...) in which the community worships, a charitable trust might be right. Where the faith in question is not recognised as a religion such that its promotion would not be “for the advancement of religion” (such as was, until recently, the position with Scientology), perhaps a company limited by guarantee or a voluntary association would be better. If the practice of the faith requires some practice which is illegal under English law, such as the taking of prohibited substances, then having no formal structure may well be the only option. There are almost as many answers as there are religious groups.

It is all too easy, particularly for commentators and the media (for whom it can provide a useful paper-selling and often sensationalist narrative), to assume that the quasi-corporate institutions that we call Churches – the CofE, the Roman Catholic Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, etc – are monolithic, single entities.

They need not be, of course, although some are. In the case of the Anglican Communion, it has historically been about as polyolithic as they come.

So does this meaning of the word have any use to lawyers? I would argue that it does, provided we use it precisely. To say 'the Church of England' is to interpose the whole law on the structures and constitution of that body. Ditto 'the Roman Catholic Church'. The label is a convenient shorthand for that body of law and faith, but it is only ever a shorthand.

Third, the aggregation of members.

Here, I think, we can again leave the law (and, more importantly perhaps, the lawyers) behind for a moment.

Maybe it is a peculiarly Christian perspective, I wish someone would tell me, but this seems to me to be the very nub of the answer. Without an aggregation of individuals there is no need for institutions or buildings, certainly no need for lawyers to argue about what it all means.

**Conclusion:** So (legally), what is a church?

I hope that it is now clear that the lawyer's only answer to the question must be: "that all depends on the context."

However, it seems to me that, whatever the faith or denomination concerned, and whomsoever the "thy" concerned might be, the words of the golden-tongued Patriarch of Constantinople St John Chrysostom might not be a bad place to start: *"...when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests..."*

**Simon Hunter**

## **7 Theories of the Atonement Summarized**

Jeff McGregor

The nature of the Atonement has been something I have looked at, studied, thought about a lot. It is something that amazes me; that God would come in the flesh and be a sacrifice on my behalf so that I can be reconciled to God the Father. So I would like to get theological with you if I may, and share with you an article by Stephen D Morrison, who outlines in summary the seven major views on the atonement, and then add a comment or two of my own. I want to encourage you to look into this subject yourself and experience the fascination of God's grace, the joy of what God has done for us, and to be more able to defend your faith when it comes to this central tenant of our faith. Be blessed as you read.

### **#1 The Moral Influence Theory**

One of the earliest theories for the atonement is the Moral Influence theory, which simply taught that Jesus Christ came and died in order to bring about a positive change to humanity. This moral change comes through the teachings of Jesus alongside His example and actions. The most notable name here is that of Augustine from the 4th century, whose influence has almost single-handedly had the greatest impact upon Western Christianity. He affirmed the Moral Influence theory as the main theory of the Atonement (alongside the Ransom theory as well).

Within this theory the death of Christ is understood as a catalyst to reform society, inspiring men, and women to follow His example and live good moral lives of love. In this theory the Holy Spirit comes to help Christians produce this moral change. Logically, in this theory the Eschatological development too becomes about morality, where it is taught that after death the human race will be judged by their conduct in life. This in turn creates a strong emphasis on free will as the human response to follow Jesus' example. Although Augustine himself differs here in that he did not teach free will, but instead that human beings are incapable of change themselves and require God to radically alter their lives sovereignly through the Holy Spirit.



This theory focuses on not just the death of Jesus Christ, but on His entire life. This sees the saving work of Jesus not only in the event of the crucifixion, but also in all the words He has spoken, and the example He has set. In this theory the cross is merely a ramification of the moral life of Jesus. He is crucified as a martyr due to the radical nature of His moral example. In this way the Moral Influence theory emphasizes Jesus Christ as our teacher, our example, our founder and leader, and ultimately, as a result, our first martyr.

## #2 The Ransom Theory

The Ransom Theory of the Atonement is one of the first major theories for the Atonement. It is often held alongside the Moral Influence Theory, and usually deals more with the actual death of Jesus Christ, what it actually means and the effect it has upon humanity. This theory finds its roots in the Early Church, particularly in Origen from the 3rd century. This theory essentially teaches that Jesus Christ died as a ransom sacrifice, paid either to Satan (the most dominate view), or to God the Father. Jesus' death then acts as a payment to satisfy the debt on the souls of the human race, the same debt we inherited from Adam's original sin.

The Ransom view could be summarised like this:

“Essentially, this theory claimed that Adam and Eve sold humanity over to the Devil at the time of the Fall’ hence, justice required that God pay the Devil a ransom, for the Devil did not realize that Christ could not be held in the bonds of death. Once the Devil accepted Christ’s death as a ransom, this theory concluded, justice was satisfied, and God was able to free us from Satan’s grip.”

Redemption in this theory means to buy back and purchase the human race from the clutches of the Devil. The main controversy here with this theory is the act of paying off the Devil. Some have written that this is not a fair statement to say that all Ransom Theorists believe that the Devil is paid, but rather in this act of Ransom Christ frees humanity from the bondage of sin and death. In this way Ransom relates the Christus Victor theory. But it's worth differentiating here because in one way these views are similar, but in another way, they are drastically different.

### #3 Christus Victor

Classically, the Christus Victor theory of Atonement is widely considered to be the dominant theory for most of the historical Christian Church. In this theory, Jesus Christ dies in order to defeat the powers of evil (such as sin, death, and the devil) in order to free mankind from their bondage. This is related to the Ransom view with the difference being that there is no payment to the devil or to God. Within the Christus Victor framework, the cross did not pay off anyone, but defeated evil thereby setting the human race free.

Gustaf Aulen argued that this theory of the Atonement is the most consistently held theory for church history, especially in the early church up until the 12th century before Anselm's satisfaction theory came along. He writes that "the work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over the powers which hold mankind in bondage: sin, death, and the devil." <sup>2</sup> He calls this theory the "classic" theory of the Atonement. While some will say that Christus Victor is compatible with other theories of the Atonement, others argue that it is not. However I have found that most theologians believe that Christus Victor is true, even if it is not for them the primary theory of Christ's death.

### #4 The Satisfaction Theory (Anselm)

In the 12th century Anselm of Canterbury proposed a satisfaction theory for the Atonement. In this theory Jesus Christ's death is understood as a death to satisfy the justice of God. Satisfaction here means restitution, the mending of what was broken, and the paying back of a debt. In this theory, Anselm emphasises the justice of God, and claims that sin is an injustice that must be balanced. Anselm's satisfaction theory says essentially that Jesus Christ died in order to pay back the injustice of human sin, and to satisfy the justice of God.

This theory was developed in reaction to the historical dominance of the Ransom theory, that God paid the devil with Christ's death. Anselm saw that this theory was logically flawed because what does God owe Satan? Therefore, in contrast with the Ransom theory, Anselm taught that it is humanity who owes a debt to God, not God to Satan. Our debt, in this theory, is that of injustice. Our injustices have stolen from the justice of God and therefore must be paid back. Satisfaction theory then postulates that Jesus Christ pays pack God in His death on the cross to God. This is the first Atonement theory to bring up the notion that God is acted upon by the Atonement (i.e. that Jesus satisfies God).

## #5 The Penal Substitutionary Theory

Penal Substitutionary Atonement is a development of the Reformation. The Reformers, Specifically Calvin and Luther took Anselm's Satisfaction theory and modified it slightly. They added a more legal (or forensic) framework into this notion of the cross as satisfaction. The result is that within Penal Substitution, Jesus Christ dies to satisfy God's wrath against human sin. Jesus is punished (penal) in the place of sinners (substitution) in order to satisfy the justice of God and the legal demand of God to punish sin. In the light of Jesus' death God can now forgive the sinner because Jesus Christ has been punished in the place of sinner, in this way meeting the retributive requirements of God's justice. This legal balancing of the ledgers is at the heart of this theory, which claims that Jesus died for legal satisfaction. It's also worth mentioning that in this theory the notion of imputed righteousness is postulated.

This theory of the Atonement contrasts with Anselm's Satisfaction Theory in that God is not satisfied with a debt of justice being paid by Jesus, but that God is satisfied with punishing Jesus in the place of mankind. The notion that the cross acts upon God, conditioning Him to forgiveness, originates from Anselm's theory, but here in Penal Substitution the means are different. This theory of the Atonement is perhaps the most dominant today, especially among the Reformed, and the evangelical.

#### #6 The Governmental Theory

The Governmental Theory of the Atonement is a slight variation upon the Penal Substitutionary theory, which is notably held in Methodism. The main difference here is the extent to which Christ suffered. In the Governmental Theory, Jesus Christ suffers the punishment of our sin and propitiates God's wrath. In this way it is similar to Penal Substitution. However, in the Governmental Theory, Jesus Christ does not take the exact punishment we deserve, He takes a punishment. Jesus dies on the cross therefore to demonstrate the displeasure of God towards sin. He died to display God's wrath against sin and the high price which must be paid, but not to specifically satisfy that particular wrath. The Governmental Theory also teaches that Jesus died only for the church, and if you by faith are part of the church, you can take part in God's salvation. The church then acts as the sort of hiding place from God's punishment. This view contrasts both the Penal and Satisfaction models but retains the fundamental belief that God cannot forgive if Jesus does not die a propitiating death.

#### #7 The Scapegoat Theory

The Scapegoat Theory is a modern Atonement theory rooted in the philosophical concept of the Scapegoat. Here the key figures Rene Girard and James Allison. Within this theory of the Atonement Jesus Christ dies as the Scapegoat of humanity. This theory moves away from the idea that Jesus died in order to act upon God (as in PSA, Satisfaction, or Governmental), or as payment to the devil (as in Ransom). Scapegoating therefore is considered to

be a form of non-violent atonement, in that Jesus is not a sacrifice but a victim. There are many Philosophical concepts that come up within this model, but in a general sense we can say that Jesus Christ as the Scapegoat means the following. 1) Jesus is killed by a violent crowd. 2) The violent crowd kills Him believing that He is guilty. 3) Jesus is proven innocent, as the true Son of God. 4) The crowd is therefore deemed guilty.

James Allison summarizes the Scapegoating Theory like this, “Christianity is a priestly religion which understands that it is God’s overcoming of our violence by substituting himself for the victim of our typical sacrifices that opens up our being able to enjoy the fullness of creation as if death were not.”

## Conclusions

While it’s fun to think about these theories I don’t think one of the theories conveys the vast fullness of the atonement, especially when the word atonement literally comes from the phrase ‘at onement’. This is a complex issue and it may be that a combination of these theories gives us a better picture of what Christ’s work on the cross did for us. The great thing is that we are saved by Jesus and not by theories. It’s a good and healthy thing to look into theology, to better understand what we believe and why, but we must never let the pursuit of knowledge about Christ overtake the relationship we have with Christ.

What do you think of all these theories? Does a certain one appeal to you more than the rest? Let me know in the comments. Also, if you have a question you would like me to address or an idea for a blog that you would like me to explore, let me know in the comments.

In Christ our redeemer Ps Jeff

[7 Theories of the Atonement Summarized - Living Waters Christian Community Loxton \(livingwatersloxtton.com.au\)](http://livingwatersloxtton.com.au)

## **A Better Atonement: Moral Exemplar**

TONY JONES

In another version of the atonement that was quite popular during the first millennium of Christianity, but virtually snuffed out in the West by penal substitution, Jesus Christ is seen as a moral exemplar, who calls us toward a better life, both individually and corporately.

In this view, the Hebrew scriptures record effort after effort by God to get people on the right track. Through personal interaction, the Law, the prophets, and the sacrificial system, God tried to get the people to live morally upright lives. But each of those attempts failed.

So God sent his son, Jesus, as the perfect example of a moral life. Jesus' teachings and his healing miracles form the core of this message, and his death is as a martyr for this cause: the crucifixion both calls attention to Jesus' life and message, and it is an act of self-sacrifice, one of the highest virtues of the moral life.

We see Jesus' death, and we are inspired to a better life ourselves. But there's more to it than this.

The Moral Exemplar view of the atonement was the first post-biblical view articulated in the very earliest, post-Apostolic church. You can read about it in some of the earliest Christian writings, like the Epistle to Diogenetus, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the letters of Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus of Rome, and the Martyrdom of Polycarp.

Here's Clement:

For [Christ] came down, for this he assumed human nature, for this he willingly endured the sufferings of humanity, that by being reduced to the measure of our weakness he might raise us to the measure of his power. And just before he poured out his offering, when he gave himself as a ransom, he left us a new testament: "I give you my love." What is the nature and extent of this love? For each of us he laid down his life, the life which was worth the whole universe, and he requires in return that we should do the same for each other.

With this quote, one immediately sees that free will is a core component of the moral exemplar theory. Except for one of its major proponents: Augustine!

That's right, Augustine, the proto-Calvinist who wholeheartedly embraced predestination, wrote in support of Jesus as moral exemplar.

But the most articulate defender of this version of the atonement was Peter Abelard (1079-1142), the tragic figure who was castrated by the Church because he fell in love with his young student, Héloïse. He also happened to be a brilliant philosopher and theologian.

Peter Abelard

Abelard rejects the Augustinian notion of Original Sin. While human beings are guilty and sinful, this is not because we've inherited some depravity from Adam. Humans cannot be held liable for another person's sin, Abelard argued. That is not justice. We are inclined toward sin because of Adam, but we are not guilty of his sin. Neither can someone achieve absolution for someone else's guilt. Neither is that justice.

So a human being is not absolved of sin because of Christ's death on the cross. Absolution is achieved only by confession and repentance. Instead, Christ's death serves as an example that beckons us to lives of sacrificial love:

We are joined through his grace to him and our neighbour by an unbreakable bond of love...Our redemption through the suffering of Christ is that deeper love within us which not only frees us from slavery to sin but also secures for us the true liberty of the children of God, in order that we might do all things out of love rather than out of fear—love for him who has shown us such grace that no greater can be found

In the moral exemplar theory, we have an ancient version of the atonement—the most ancient version—without all of the spiritual warfare and demonology required by Christus Victor and Ransom Captive.

The problem for many Protestants, however, is that Moral Exemplar seems to downplay the crucifixion. In fact, it can be asked whether the crucifixion is necessary at all if Jesus is merely an example of a good moral life. How is Jesus any different than, say, Ghandi? This is the very reason why many Protestants consider Moral Exemplar an important secondary understanding of the atonement, a supplement to the dominant Penal Substitution.

But proponents of Moral Exemplar say that's selling their view short. Jesus is not merely an example. He's not merely anything.

God is not coercive. God does not demand. Instead, God invites and beckons. (Here you may rightly hear parallels with process theology.) And the cross is the ultimate invitation to each human being to live the life that God wants us to live.

[A Better Atonement: Moral Exemplar | Tony Jones \(patheos.com\)](https://patheos.com/2015/05/15/a-better-atonement-moral-exemplar-tony-jones/)



### **Editor's comment.**

There is a lot on atonement theory in this newsletter and it is all 'theological' stuff that in the end doesn't really impact on daily life too much. We are perhaps much more focussed in practise on the problems that make our lives difficult, impact on us as individuals and consume out time and efforts.

Much 'theology' is a luxury we can live without and is often overly academic even if interesting. But essentially, as one of my Jesuit friends stated, if it doesn't help us live our lives on a daily basis then it is not important.

So what is theologically important when it comes to our faith?

Your responses may include some or all of the following:-

1. I need to be able to trust the Gospels/God's Word and for it to be consistent both spiritually and historically.
2. I need to know God actually cares about us past, present and future, not just as His creation project but as individuals. I want to know that if God says we all matters to Him then what happens in my life is of interest and concern to Him. If He says He loves us then I want to see how this works in practice.
3. We need to understand that Jesus wasn't just a great teacher and prophet but that there were aspects of his life that took him into a different league.
4. I want to know I have a future with God and that there is a point to my life.

5. I want to know that I can make a difference, that my life has some kind of purpose and meaning, and that what I do with my life matters.
6. I want to know my life has purpose.
7. I want to know that death is not the end and that I will not be abandoned.
8. I want to understand why evil exists in the world and in my own life, and what can be done about it and how to fight it.
9. I want to know that I can be forgiven/the slate wiped clean of my mistakes and errors and learn from them
10. I want to know what 'God's rules' are and what is expected of me.
11. I want to be able to talk to/communicate with God directly and that He will listen to me when I listen to Him.
12. I need to know that good things can come out of bad things, that God can be trusted and knows how these things impact upon us and will deal with them in ways we may not expect
13. As a matter of faith and trust in God, I don't need to know 'all the details', only that 'it' all works.
14. And finally it has to be so simple that even a child could understand it all.

So how do you put all this into words that are simple and relevant?

In my opinion, faith should not be so complicated as that it needs academics to explain and theorise about it (e.g. atonement theory, etc.). It should be straight forward and simple, clear and not dependent on big words, but our faith is a complex business that asks hard questions not easy to answer.

Maybe we should start by determining what 'the Gospel' is since it is supposedly the key expression of our belief.

Firstly it is an invitation. It's not meant to give all the answers but is a mission statement, a summary, a means of engaging further interest and discussion, a foundation to build on. It's a good place to start.

Something like ***'God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes on him shall not perish but have eternal life'*** is a pretty good and worthwhile example (John 3 v 16).

Importantly, it's also fully backed up by Holy Scripture.

Something like 'Jesus died that our sins may be forgiven', something often heard in church, is not a good example because it is not actually supported in the teachings of Jesus or by the Gospels themselves.

Jesus did not die that our sins may be forgiven. Jesus was forgiving sins way before his death. It is an example of atonement theory purporting to be something it is not.

More accurately, 'Jesus came that our sins may be forgiven', is much more acceptable and in line with the teachings of the Gospels.

Such a careful choice of words really does matter when it comes to separating at truth from a half truth or worse, introducing error in our teaching.

The Gospel we preach needs to be accurate from the beginning - the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Anything less is not acceptable.

And we should beware of statements like 'saved by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ' and question whether they are factually/scripturally accurate.

This is another example of an intrusive formula based on atonement theory pervading our common parlance. In fact we are saved by faith, not by blood.

*Luke 7:50*

*<sup>50</sup> Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."*

Secondly we need a basic catechism or creed, a simple summary or brief working outline of the expression and practice of our faith, an agreed short statement of this is what we believe and what we do in response to that belief, just so we all believers and non-believers have a common understanding.

Most catechisms these days have developed into great tomes that are too complex and detailed to be either useful or practical. Historically they didn't start out that way but that's what happens when you leave theologians and committees unattended.

You might look at [Luther's Small Catechism](#) \*\* (written 1529) for example, as an attempt to reduce the existing lengthy and wordy catechisms to something that was actually manageable and would potentially fulfil and answer those basic questions of faith we all have. It places responsibility for teaching the basics of Christian teaching, not with the church but with the family, and in particular with the father as head of the household. The Small Catechism is everything he needs to know and needs to reach.

It's not perfect but it's a good and worthy attempt. We can learn from it.

What I would like to see something that is absolute in its scriptural foundation and doctrinal truth with Christ at the centre. It would need to be something that is free from denominationally biased teaching, practice and language usage, and be short and simple to understand. Something on the lines of good bed time reading might be exactly what is needed.

It's almost like asking that the Christian equivalent of the Tower of Babel the different churches have created with all of their confusions of different languages and interpretations to return back to their point of creation, a point where there was a single common language, understanding and expression of a unified truth. It would be better than the chaos we have presently.

There is one Church with Christ as its head and we need to return back to that position because at the moment Christ and His Church are very much divided and ineffectual. Biblical truths are being abandoned, ignored, falsely re-interpreted and watered down at every level.

It seems that 'the church' is much more intent on following the leadings of a wayward and morally corrupt society than it is to follow Christ, and it is well evidenced.

So my call is to get back to basics and deal only with genuine Christian truth.

Our teaching has to be spot on and uncompromising at every level. There is no room for teaching unsubstantiated scriptural theories when Christian basics are threatened.

Even the language we express ourselves in has to be much more precise and accurate - coming up with fine sounding phrases that have no scriptural foundation is something that we need to be very aware of and keep in check.

And as for atonement theory, it is good to have open discussion and explore aspects of our faith which perhaps lack the biblical clarity we would like, but in the end they should remain just that, discussions and explorations rather than being presented as 'the truth'. To do so is irresponsible and dangerous.

In practice, when things like this become embedded in main stream thinking and speaking without being scripturally proven and tested against Jesus own teaching, it will end in tears.

What has been allowed, whether by default, accident or deliberate action cannot always be undone as quickly as was done, and the damage may take generations to repair.

The responsibility will be ours for not acting appropriately and for allowing lies and half-truths to be presented as the truth.

**\*\*An example of text from the Luther's Small Catechism.**

### **The Apostles Creed: section 2 of 6**

As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his household.

#### **The First Article**

***I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.***

#### **What does this mean?**

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; that He richly and daily provides me with food and clothing, home and family, property and goods, and all that I need to support this body and life; that He protects me from all danger, guards and keeps me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which I am in duty bound to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

#### **The Second Article**

***I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.***

### **What does this mean?**

I believe that Jesus Christ is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary; and that He is my Lord, Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death; in order that I might be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness; even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

### **The Third Article**

***I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen. What does this mean?***

### **What does this mean?**

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; just as He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives me and all believers all our sins; and at the last day He will raise up me and all the dead, and will grant me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.