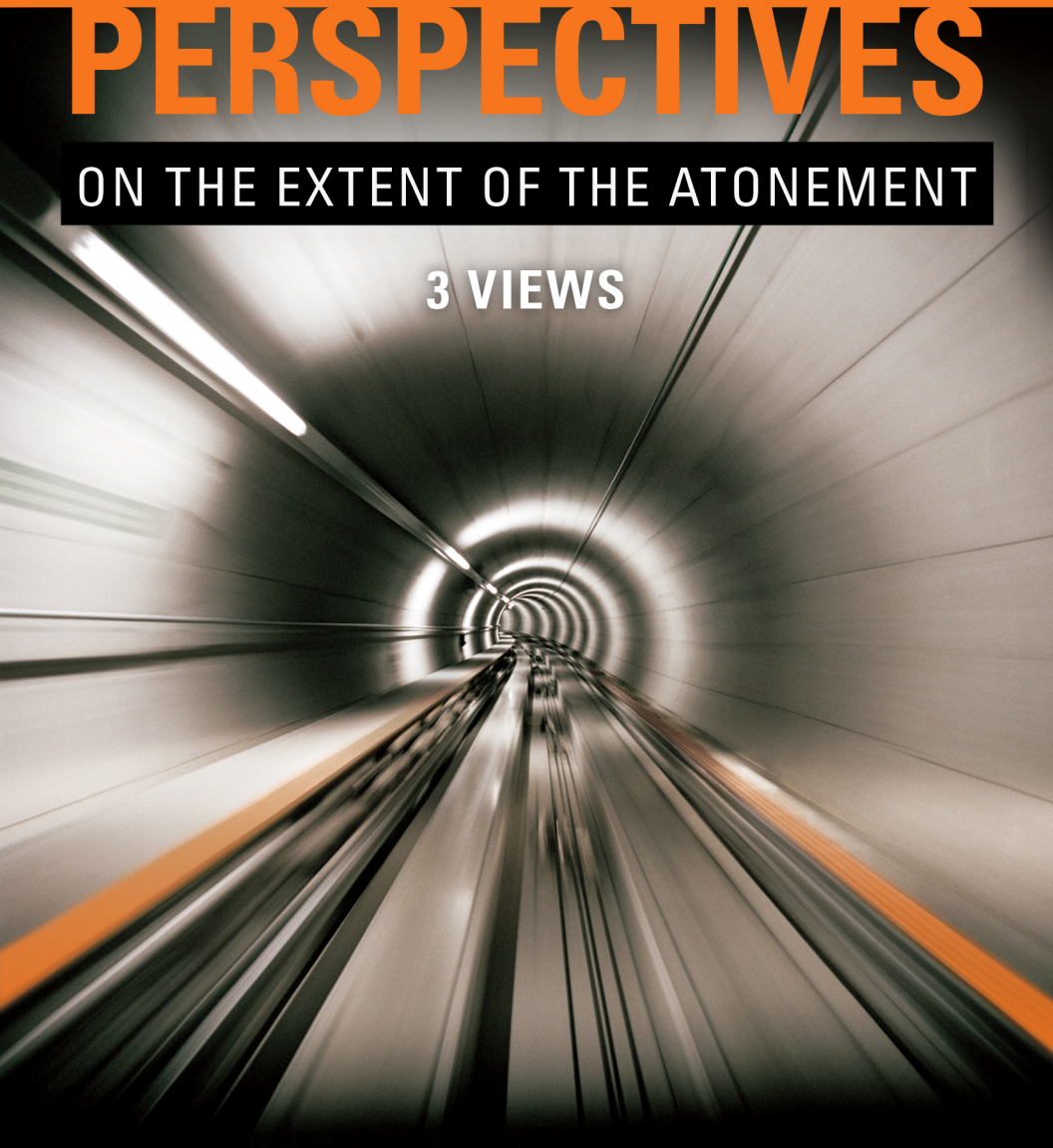
CARL R. TRUEMAN GRANT R. OSBORNE
JOHN S. HAMMETT

EDITED BY ANDREW DAVID NASELLI AND MARK A. SNOEBERGER

PERSPECTIVES

ON THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT

3 VIEWS



"At one theological institution where I studied, we spoke of a certain style of debate: thesis, followed by antithesis, followed by personal abuse. This book does not adopt that style. The first obligation in serious theological polemics must be understanding both your own position and your opponents' positions as thoroughly as possible, the more so if the topic is sensitive. That is the first strength of this book. The second is that it shows how, in debates over the extent (or intent!) of the atonement, the principal options are not two, but three, and how this third position, often connected with Amyraut, turns on the difficult notion of God having more than one will. In one sense this book breaks no new ground; it does not intend to. But I know no book that handles this subject with more scrupulous attention to fairness and accuracy in debate."

—D. A. Carson, research professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; president, The Gospel Coalition

"The extent of the atonement has been debated by Christian theologians from the early Reformation through contemporary evangelical theology. This volume offers compelling presentations by outstanding representatives of three leading views—definite atonement, general atonement, and multi-intentions views of the atonement. The multiviews format of this book allows readers to come to a more well-informed understanding of their own perspective."

—Steve W. Lemke, provost, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

"Here is a first-order discussion of a second-order doctrine. The contributors to this volume agree that the question of the extent of the atonement falls short of being placed in the top tier of doctrines central and non-negotiable to the Christian faith, yet they also rightly see the importance of this doctrine for faith and practice. Hence, the discussion here is spirited yet charitable, firm yet gracious. The quality of the discussion throughout is simply superb, as exegetical, historical, and theological considerations

are put forth with clarity and scholarly acuteness. I strongly recommend a careful reading of this book, in light of the continued controversy surrounding this doctrine, and for the sake of our souls, as we seek to understand better the glory of Christ's atonement for sinners."

—Bruce A. Ware, T. Rupert and Lucille Coleman Professor of Christian Theology, Chairman of the Department of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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B&H ACADEMIC
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

B&H Publishing Group
Nashville, Tennessee

ISBN: 978–1–4336–6971–2

Dewey Decimal Classification: 232.3
Subject Heading: ATONEMENT—CHRISTIANITY \ SACRIFICE \
JESUS CHRIST—CRUCIFIXION

Printed in the United States of America
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 • 20 19 18 17 16 15
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Contents

Perspectives Series Abbreviations List

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992
AJT	*Asia Journal of Theology*
ANF	*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*
ARG	*Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*
AUSS	*Andrews University Seminary Studies*
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed.
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BSac	*Bibliotheca sacra*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CHR	*Catholic Historical Review*
CTM	*Concordia Theological Monthly*
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
HALOT	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*

ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick et al. New York: Abingdon, 1962
Int	*Interpretation*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JE	*Jewish Encyclopedia*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LCC	Library of Christian Classics. Philadelphia, 1953–
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LQ	*The Lutheran Quarterly*
LXX	Septuagint
NAC	New American Commentary
NIB	*The New Interpreter's Bible*
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NPNF1	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Series 1*
NPNF2	A Select Library of the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Series 2*
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OTL	Old Testament Library

PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
ResQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
Str-B	Strack, H. L., and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 6 vols. Munich, 1922–61
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–74
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TrinJ	*Trinity Journal*
TynB	*Tyndale Bulletin*
VC	*Vigiliae christianae*
VE	*Vox evangelica*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WLC	Westminster Larger Catechism
WSC	Westminster Shorter Catechism
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*

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Foreword

One can scarcely think of a question that Christians debate more passionately than the one our little book addresses. Some of our readers can even now reflect on some acerbic quarrel about the extent of Christ's atonement that lacked Christian love. So when we proposed a project that deliberately convened participants with conflicting perspectives on this topic, we wondered fleetingly whether the project might be a dreadful one. Our fears proved unwarranted as grace prevailed. The project proved a delightful one.

Our original band of three essayists morphed a bit over the course of time and ended finally as a band of four. *Carl Trueman*, Paul Woolley Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, brings his sprightly voice to the debate as champion of a definite atonement. *Grant Osborne*, long-time professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, contributes an initial essay in defense of a general atonement, and because of some serious health difficulties, he handed the baton to his colleague at TEDS, *Tom McCall*, associate professor of biblical and systematic theology, who capably responds to the other two positions. *John Hammett*, professor of

systematic theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, rounds out the group with an apology for the multiple-intentions view of Christ's atonement.

And so we offer to you a lively and robust yet irenic exchange of ideas on this important issue: for whom did Jesus make atonement, and how does God apply Jesus' atonement?

Andy Naselli and Mark Snoeberger
May 22, 2014

Introduction

MARK A. SNOEBERGER

College and seminary instructors regularly caution their students against exaggerating the importance of their research topics. Undoubtedly "most important" and "most controversial" topics of theology must exist somewhere, but few studies that make such claims about their subject matter live up to their billing. With that reality in view, let me begin this study rather anticlimactically by affirming that the question of the extent of the atonement is not the most important question of systematic theology. In fact, the authors of this volume agree that the importance of the question is frequently overstated. Still, the topic continues to be—if judged by the vitriol with which some members of the theological community defend and promote their respective views—quite controversial.

The reasons for this state of affairs are manifold, but a few basic concerns come to the fore. On the one hand are those who worry that the authority of Scripture and the mission of the church might be compromised by a limited atonement. After all, the Bible clearly states that Jesus loved the *whole world*, died for *all*, and commissioned the church to evangelize *everyone*. On the other hand are those who fear the theological implications of a universal atonement: intra-Trinitarian conflict,

universalism, injustice, and errant views of the nature of atonement. Practically, one side is concerned about a sort of evangelism that underperforms, the other about a sort of evangelism that overpromises.

Happily the dire predictions of what lies at the bottom of the slippery slopes situated on either side of this debate are rarely realized. Still the question of the extent of the atonement offers a wonderful laboratory for learning how to navigate the rough terrain that often exists at the intersection of exegesis and systematic theology—or as Cornelius Van Til put it in his *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, the harmonization of *correspondence* and *coherence*.[1]

Van Til argues that truth must be characterized first of all by correspondence with reality—and not just any reality but God's reality. In the quest for truth, one is always constrained by the reality God has created. Truth-seekers are not free to fabricate their own alternate realities. Truth, in its simplest definition, is what God *would* say about a given issue; it is known best through what God *has* said about that issue. Because of this, the Christian Scriptures are the *norma normans non normata* in theological debate: not merely a weighty contributor but the final arbiter in all that they address.[2] While one might build a coherent reality different from God's reality, in the final analysis it matters little if this is really possible: no alternative reality can ever be called true if it conflicts with the reality God created.

Van Til cautions, however, that correspondence, while critically important in the discovery of truth, does not exclude logical coherence from theological debate. In discerning God's truth system there must also be an absolute commitment to coherence. Theologians may never use biblical correspondence as an excuse for illogic or internal contradiction in their theological systems. They must continuously refine and harmonize each detail with the whole so that the system is self-consistent. This means, at times, that Christian truth-seekers must seriously consider the

[1] Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, vol. 2 of *In Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, n.d.), 1–3.

[2] Lit., the "norming norm that cannot be normed." The Scriptures cannot be subjected to a higher authority because they are the words of God.

possibility that their best efforts to construct theological systems that correspond exegetically to biblical truth may be stymied not only by logical errors but also by interpretive errors. To address this concern (by turning a phrase popularized by one of the contributors to this book), they must invoke a "hermeneutical spiral" in which they not only check their theology (coherence) with exegesis (correspondence) but also the reverse.[3]

The debate on the extent of the atonement of Jesus Christ has long been expressed as a debate between correspondence (exegesis) and coherence (theology). On the one hand, many texts suggest a general atonement, announcing, apparently, that Christ has borne in common the sins of the whole human population (Isa 53:6; John 1:29; 3:16; 12:32; 2 Cor 5:14–15, 19; 1 Tim 2:4–6; 4:10; Titus 2:11; Heb 2:9; 10:29; 2 Pet 2:1; 3:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:14; etc.). Too often those who hold to particular redemption dismiss such texts or respond with exegesis that smacks of special pleading.[4] On the other hand, those promoting universal theories of atonement sometimes dismiss the theological tensions that their positions raise: the nature of substitution, the problem of double jeopardy, and the specter of universalism. All too often justification for this dismissal comes in the form of the trump card of biblical correspondence: the Bible says Christ died for all people, so whether or not this makes sense, it must be true—absolutely clear statements are not threatened by the theologian's inability to coherently harmonize them with the systematic whole. Rather, such theological antinomies stand as monuments to the mysterious character of the Creator, whose thoughts and ways far exceed those of his creatures.

This does not mean that those adhering to a definite atonement have no supporting texts or that those adhering to a general atonement have no theological concerns. They do.[5] However,

[3] Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

[4] For instance, the *world* is sometimes qualified as the *world of the elect*, often without any exegetical defense of this narrower reading. Or the seemingly arbitrary decision is made to qualify *all* into something less than *all*, even when there is no exegetical reason forthcoming for making this qualification.

[5] Those who hold to a definite atonement appeal to such texts as John 6:37–40; 10:11 (cf. vv. 15, 26); 17:6–10; Mark 10:45; Acts 20:28; Rom 8:29–32; Eph 5:25; and to some of the same texts referenced by general atonement advocates (e.g., Isa 53:11–12;

as a rule, adherents of a general atonement seem to vigorously wave the flag of correspondence (exegesis), while adherents of a definite atonement wave the flag of coherence (theology). As a result, the two groups regrettably tend to talk past each other, dismissing any disparate objections raised.

It is my pleasure to be working with a team of contributors who do not fall prey to the stereotypes just described. Each one is committed to the twin concerns of (1) fidelity to the Word of God as the *norma normans non normata* and also (2) theological consistency. Each grapples carefully with the objections of the others without dismissive sniping or flippancy. Naturally, they cannot all be right, and readers of this book will likely side with one essayist over the others (or dismiss all of them). This is to be expected. But we hope each author's biblical commitments, sincere desire to understand other views, and cordial spirit will prove helpful.[6]

Survey of the Three Views

In a sense the debate about the extent of the atonement is binary: one either believes Christ died for all or Christ died only for the elect; therefore, a reader might reasonably conclude that Carl Trueman is pitted unfairly against two opponents. Others have crafted this debate according to John Owen's "treble option": Christ died for either (1) "all the sins of all men" (universalism), (2) "all the sins of some men" (particularism), or (3) "some sins of all men" (Romanism/Arminianism).[7] But why stop with three? Protestantism is littered with variations of (and arguably exceptions to) Owen's taxonomy. About a century ago B. B. Warfield

2 Cor 5:14–15; 1 Tim 4:10). Those who hold to a general atonement suggest that a definite atonement (1) renders the free offer of the gospel both illogical and unjust; (2) places limits on the infinite love of God; and (3) discounts human freedom by denying the believer any faith-participation in his own salvation.

[6] In the interest of perpetuating this irenic exchange, I commend Andrew David Naselli's "ten practical suggestions to believers for avoiding unhealthy schism over the extent of the atonement," in "John Owen's Argument for Definite Atonement in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*: A Summary and Evaluation," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14.4 (2010): 74–76, 81–82.

[7] John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 10:173–74.

acknowledged eleven variations,[8] and we could probably double that number today.

As editors, we considered whether this book should include more than three views:

- On the particularist pole we could have added at least two views: (1) the so-called "commercial view," a minority variation of particularism that denies the atonement's infinite value and excludes common grace from the atonement,[9] and (2) the "eternal application" model that sees the accomplishment and application of atonement as simultaneous—either in eternity past or on the cross.[10]
- On the opposite pole we could have included at least four distinct views associated with a general atonement position: (1) that Christ's death secures the expiation of all sins and with it prevenient grace so that all may either accept or reject that expiation;[11] (2) that Christ's death simply provides for the expiation of all sins except unbelief, which is a separate category;[12] (3) that Christ's death merely satisfies God's wrath without properly substituting for each sinner;[13] and (4) that Christ's death expiates

[8] Warfield sees three variations of the "particularistic" model, three variations of the "universalistic" model, three variations of the "sacerdotal" model, and two variations of the "naturalistic" model (*The Plan of Salvation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1935], 23).

[9] Thomas J. Nettles argues for this less common particularist understanding (though without using the commercial label) over and against Andrew Fuller's more widely held historical expression of particularism (*By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life*, rev. and exp. 20th anniversary ed. [Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006], 335–59).

[10] Once a rare view even among hyper-Calvinists (see, e.g., John Brine, *A Defence of the Doctrine of Eternal Justification from Some Exceptions Made to It by Mr. Bragge, and Others* [London: A. Ward and H. Whitridge, 1732]), this view has few if any modern proponents.

[11] This view is common among professing Arminians who reject the governmental view of atonement. Grant Osborne ably defends this view in this book.

[12] Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died: A Biblical Case for Unlimited Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 101; David L. Allen, "The Atonement: Limited or Universal," in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 88.

[13] Anselm's satisfaction view, which still dominates in Roman Catholic circles, arguably fits this description.

all sins so that all humans will ultimately be saved (i.e., universalism).[14]

- In the middle we could have isolated models such as Amyraldism, English hypothetical universalism,[15] and the recently defended "classical position"[16] as alternatives to the "multiple intentions" view we ultimately selected.[17]

And besides all of these, there remain, of course, broad swaths of scholarship that advocate nonsubstitutionary views of atonement.[18]

In the interests of a manageable project, however, we decided to narrow the discussion to three basic options (which are not, to the relief of some readers, John Owen's three options). We began by narrowing our focus to Protestant views and, further, to those views that affirm penal substitutionary atonement. The primary question, thus, that this book addresses is not, For whose benefit did Christ die? but more specifically, For whom was Christ a substitute?[19] Finally, we agreed that too much noise between similar but only mildly divergent views would create more confusion than clarity. In the end we narrowed our focus

[14] *Universalism* means all people without exception will be finally saved. *Universal atonement* means Christ provided the means of salvation for all people without exception. All universalists hold to universal atonement, but most who hold to universal atonement are not universalists.

[15] Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

[16] E.g., P. L. Rouwendal, "Calvin's Forgotten Classical Position on the Extent of the Atonement: About Sufficiency, Efficiency, and Anachronism," *WTJ* 70, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 317–35.

[17] E.g., Bruce A. Ware, "The Extent of the Atonement: Select Support for and Benefits of a 'Multiple Intentions' Understanding," outline presented at the 62nd Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (November 18, 2010). See also a thesis prepared by Gary Shultz under Ware's tutelage: "A Biblical and Theological Defense of a Multi-Intentioned View of the Atonement" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008).

[18] Cf. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

[19] John Hammett requested and was granted permission to exceed this question to deal with other intentions of the atonement, but the narrower question of substitution remains his central concern.

to three representative views that are sufficiently distinct for the point-counterpoint format:[20]

1. A Definite Atonement
2. A Universally Sufficient Atonement
3. A Multiple-Intention View of the Atonement

The contributors to this volume are conscious of the various nuanced alternatives to the positions being argued, but in the end each is not defending a cluster of positions but one—his own. So with apologies to readers who have their own twist on this issue (as most of us do), the following summarizes the three views.

Definite Atonement

Carl Trueman champions *definite atonement* (also known as *limited atonement* or *particular redemption*), which argues that Christ's atonement is particular in intention and efficacious in character.[21] By his atoning work, Christ intended to effectively secure the salvation of only the elect. The "limitation" on Christ's atonement reflects neither a deficiency for God in himself nor any external restraint;[22] rather the limitation is God's own, prior elective decree.[23] Enormous debate surrounds the question of the modern origins of definite atonement. The long-standing

[20] We considered using historical labels for these (e.g., Calvinist, Arminian, and Amyraldian, respectively), but in light of vigorous debates about the precise positions of Arminius, Amyraut, and Calvin, we decided the theological labels would be more useful.

[21] The label "limited atonement" is used more by opponents than by proponents of this view, and opponents often use it pejoratively. This label, further, is not especially accurate because all three views in this book "limit" the atonement, whether in intention, sufficiency, or application.

[22] That is, limiting the expression of God's practical love (his love *ad extra*) does not limit his intrinsic love (his love *in se*), nor does any force external to him limit his ability to save more than he does.

[23] The order of the decrees (esp. the priority of God's decree to elect vis-à-vis his decree to send Christ to make atonement) is sometimes invoked as critical to this discussion (e.g., Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. [Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948], 3:178–82). If the decree to make atonement precedes the decree to elect, it is argued, then atonement is unlimited; but if the decree to elect precedes the decree to make atonement, then atonement is limited to the elect. Most particularists find this question irrelevant. What they *do* find relevant, however, is that when Christ actually died in history, the pool of God's elect was, by God's eternal decree, fixed and known to Christ. And with that information in mind, the particularist argues, it would have been illogical for Christ to die (with assured ineffectiveness) for anyone else.

view that John Calvin himself taught the doctrine has been challenged over the last half-century by a substantial group of scholars who sharply distinguish between Calvin and "the Calvinists" (i.e., his Reformed scholastic successors).[24] If this latter theory is correct, then the clear teaching of definite atonement should be relegated to the post-Reformation era. Many, however, deny the substance or, at the very least, the scale of this theory.[25] At first blush the scuffle to identity the rightful heirs of Calvin's mantle appears unworthy of all the fuss. For many particularists, however, more is at stake than mere theological provenance. For these a definite atonement is no less essential a piece of the Reformed system than, say, justification by faith or any of the other four "points" of Calvinism. The question of Calvin's explicit position on the extent of the atonement is a matter of debate that will continue for decades to come, but the answer is not particularly relevant to this discussion. What is relevant, particularists argue, is the necessity of particular redemption as a corollary of Calvin's system. It is no coincidence that "the Calvinists" by and large

[24] This understanding, birthed on the Continent, penetrated the English-speaking world with Basil Hall's "Calvin Against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*, ed. G. E. Duffield (Appleford, England: Sutton Courtenay, 1966). Shortly thereafter it became the subject of Brian Armstrong's dissertation, "The Calvinism of Moïse Amyraut: The Warfare of Protestant Scholasticism and French Humanism" (ThD diss., Princeton University, 1967), available in a more popular format as *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). This view gained considerable popularity in 1979 with the publication of R. T. Kendall's dissertation, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). Among other works sympathetic to this thesis, two stand out as key sequels to these earlier treatments: Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640–1790—An Evaluation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1990); and G. Michael Thomas's *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2002). Most recently, Kevin D. Kennedy has furthered this theory by condensing salient portions of an earlier Peter Lang publication as "Was Calvin a Calvinist? John Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement," in Allen and Lemke, *Whosoever Will*, 191–212.

[25] Among others, see Roger Nicole, "Moyse Amyraut (1596–1664) and the Controversy of Universal Grace" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1966); Paul Helm, "Calvin, English Calvinism, and the Logic of Doctrinal Development" *SJT* 34 (1981): 179–85; idem, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982); Jonathan H. Rainbow, *The Will of God and the Cross: A Historical and Theological Study of John Calvin's Doctrine of Limited Redemption* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1990); and Richard D. Muller, "Calvin and the 'Calvinists': Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and Orthodoxy," 2 parts, *Calvin Theological Journal* 30, no. 2 (1995): 345–75; 31, no. 1 (1996): 125–60. Muller, especially, has made the relationship of Reformation and post-Reformation theology the subject of his life's work.

advocated particularism, these argue, because particularism is a necessary consequence of what Calvin taught—not a contradiction. Denying particular redemption, proponents claim, logically destabilizes the whole Reformation principle. For these, all "five points" rise and fall together in refuting Romanism. As noted above, proponents of definite atonement offer a number of key texts in support of their position. Their most substantive arguments, however, come in the form of theological constructs developed from implications of those texts. While others are included, the following major concerns dominate:[26]

Penal Substitution

First and foremost, particularists argue that anything other than a definite atonement thwarts the idea of penal substitution. Since the days of Anselm, the Roman Catholic Church has taught that Christ satisfactorily provided for sin by amassing a vast quantity of supererogatory grace that was contingently available to all sinners (i.e., based on something they did to earn it). Christ's provision could be accepted or rejected, but it was offered to all. Reformation theology, particularists argue, demands more than *satisfactory provision for sinners' collective benefit*; it demands *penal substitution for sinners' individual culpability*.[27]

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[26] Among recent works see esp. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, eds., *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical Theological, and Pastoral Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013); also Lee Gatiss, *For Us and for Our Salvation: 'Limited Atonement' in the Bible, Doctrine, History, and Ministry* (London: Latimer Trust, 2012) and Jarvis J. Williams, *For Whom Did Christ Die? The Extent of the Atonement in Paul's Theology* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2012). Other leading treatments include John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 59–75; J. I. Packer, "The Love of God: Universal and Particular," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 277–91; Roger Nicole, "The Case for Definite Atonement," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 10, no. 4 (1967): 199–207; idem, "Particular Redemption," in *Our Savior God: Studies on Man, Christ, and the Atonement*, ed. James M. Boice (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 165–78; and most esp. Owen's *Death of Death*.

[27] Many today who hold to a general atonement also teach a substitutionary view of atonement (a marked advance on the governmental and moral influence views that were formerly more common in Arminian circles). Particularists, however, see this claim as inconsistent: while advocates of general atonement may hold to an atonement that involves penal *satisfaction*, it is not accurate to call this a penal *substitution*, except in some potential sense.

Sinners have capital guilt that mere supererogatory grace cannot satisfy; they need a personal substitution of life.

Divine Justice

The foregoing moves naturally to a second concern, namely, divine justice. While it would certainly have been possible for Christ, as infinite God, to satisfy his Father's accumulated wrath against all the sins of each sinner, expiate a person's sins, pay his blood-ransom price, and reconcile him to God, a populated hell proves that Christ did not do this. If he had, then there would no longer be any outstanding sin and, consequently, no possibility of additional divine wrath. To suggest otherwise, many particularists argue, would be unethical and unjust—a kind of "double jeopardy" foreign to the divine order. Logically, then, anyone consigned to the punitive horrors of hell must not have been one of those for whom Christ made penal substitution.[28]

The Language of Efficacy

Closing a possible loophole to the previous argument is the use of the language of efficacy in biblical discussions of the atonement. John Murray identifies the four biblical "categories" of atonement described above—propitiation, expiation, redemption, and reconciliation—categories widely accepted even outside Murray's immediate circle of influence. But unlike those who hold to a general atonement, particularists see these categories as carrying intrinsically efficacious meaning. Nowhere does Scripture say Christ merely made provision to expiate sin, propitiate wrath, or reconcile people to God. Rather, he actually took away sins (John 1:29), bore God's wrath (1 John 2:2; 4:10), redeemed us (Gal 3:13–14), and reconciled us to God (Rom 5:10–11; 2 Cor 5:18–19). For this reason, then, the title of Murray's little book is not *Redemption: Provided and Applied*, but *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*.[29]

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[28] See Owen, *Death of Death*, 246–49, 273.

[29] Drawing a metaphor from a human legal system, we would find it ethically appropriate for a judge to extend punitive wrath against a person who rejected the *offer* of payment for his crimes. But this is not the parallel offered in Scripture, particularists maintain. Rather, Scripture indicates that Christ tendered the payment and the Father received it, thus diffusing his wrath and effecting reconciliation. At this point God is

The Unity of God's Purpose

Finally, proponents argue that a definite atonement is necessary to the unity of the divine purpose in salvation. The Father elected a people before the foundation of the earth, Christ subsequently died for these people, and the Spirit regenerates these people. The proposed suggestion that Christ deliberately (and with self-conscious ineffectiveness) expanded the divine intention when he died, it is argued, wrecks not only God's unity but also his immutability and sovereignty.[30]

General Atonement

Grant Osborne argues the position of *general atonement* (also known as *universal* or *unlimited atonement*), which argues that Christ's atonement is universal in intention and provisional in character. By his cross-work, Christ intended to provide atonement for all people without exception, and he perfectly accomplished what he intended.[31] But Christ did *not* intend to *apply* atonement to all people without exception: application is instead the purview of faith. Culpability for limiting the atonement rests with people who do not embrace the atonement that Christ freely supplied.[32]

The Protestant origins of universal atonement are also debated. Particularists suggest that general atonement does not completely abandon Romanist theories and drinks too heavily from the well of continental humanism. Proponents of a general atonement themselves, however, suggest that their view flows directly from the plain reading of Scripture and that most of the early Reformers embraced it. Thus, they argue, it was not the

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ethically self-obligated to extend all the benefits of salvation to each recipient of atonement. The "golden chain" of soteriology has commenced and cannot be interrupted (Rom 8:32). See also Owen, *Death of Death*, 211–14, 232–36, 259.

[30] Owen, *Death of Death*, 163–79 *et passim*.

[31] This parries the particularist claim that universal atonement reflects an impotent God who does not accomplish what he intended. For advocates of universal atonement, God *did* accomplish all that he intended. But God did not intend to *effectually redeem* anyone; he simply intended to *provide redemption* for everyone. And in this, they claim, God was perfectly successful.

[32] The precise relationship of faith to atonement is a matter of debate among advocates of universal atonement. All agree, however, that faith delimits the application of Christ's atonement.

Remonstrants that departed from early Reformation orthodoxy; instead, it was scholastic particularists that polluted Reformed theology with logic-laced confessions that rivaled Scripture as canons of the faith.[33] The Remonstrants did not object in principle to confessional systems of theology, but they objected to the virtually canonical status these confessions sometimes possessed.

With respect to the extent of the atonement, the Remonstrants argued that the clear statements of Scripture (in this case John 3:16 and 1 John 2:2) disagree with scholastic confessional conclusions so they dismissed the latter:

> Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, died for all and for every individual, so that he has obtained for all, by his death on the cross, reconciliation and remission of sins; yet so that no one is partaker of this remission except the believers, according to the word of the Gospel of John 3.16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." And in the first letter of John, chapter 2, verse 2: "He is the expiation of our sins; and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."[34]

Representative concerns raised by proponents of a general atonement include the following.[35]

Exegetical Concerns

The first concern usually raised by universal atonement advocates is exegetical. While the Scriptures admittedly speak, at times, of Christ's dying for "us," "the many," "the sheep," and "the

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[33] See the sources cited in n. 24, above.

[34] *Remonstrance* (1610), art. 2, in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, *Reformation Era*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 2:549.

[35] See Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Freewill: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002), 103–22; Terry L. Miethe, "The Universal Power of Atonement," in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 71–96; Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998); and David L. Allen, "The Atonement: Limited or Universal?" 78–107. I have borrowed Allen's three categories in the material that follows.

church," such language does not logically exclude everyone else. Instead, exegesis should focus on the plethora of texts that clearly describe Christ's death as for "the world" or for "all." Pride of place belongs especially to passages that speak explicitly of Christ dying "not only" for believers but for everyone (e.g., 1 John 2:2) or that unequivocally state that Christ died for unbelievers (e.g., Heb 10:29; 2 Pet 2:1).[36] Such texts, advocates claim, are sure evidence that the Scripture writers taught a universal atonement.

Theological Concerns

The exegetical concerns agree with three key theological factors. First, since God's love is infinite, its expression cannot possibly be limited. It would be unconscionable for God to send Christ to pay for the sins of only some people (see esp. 1 John 4:8–10).[37] Second, since faith is a necessary catalyst between the historical cross-event and the believer's actual union with Christ, people are ultimately condemned "not just for their sins but also for not putting faith in Christ."[38] It follows that Christ's death does not in itself save anyone; instead, his death makes salvation *possible* for those who actualize it by faith. The reality that not all are saved is not, therefore, due to some deficiency on the part of Christ's cross-work but to the sinner's own failure to exercise faith.[39] Third, since humans are free and since God invites all people to embrace Christ, the availability of Christ's atoning work must be universally available. If Christ did not die to provide atonement for the sins of all people and if God did

[36] See esp. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Freewill*, 123–37; Allen, "The Atonement: Limited or Universal?" 78–83; Lightner, *Death Christ Died*, 55–91.

[37] For a fuller statement of this argument, see Fritz Guy, "The Universality of God's Love," in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 31–49.

[38] Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Freewill*, 118. Lightner further argues that unbelief is no ordinary sin but a decisive sin that derives its true significance only *after* the cross event: "The sin of unbelief is always associated with the completed work of Christ and thus assumes a specific quality and is treated in a particular way in Scripture" (*Death Christ Died*, 101); so also Allen, "Atonement: Limited or Universal," 88.

[39] Details about the source of this faith vary between advocates of general atonement. Some suggest that all people possess the native capacity to believe (Pelagianism), others that faith is made available as a manifestation of prevenient grace (Picirilli and most Arminians), and still others see faith as connected with an efficacious call (Lightner and many "four-point" Calvinists). In any case it is the sinner's failure to believe that limits the application of atonement.

not grant to people the freedom to accept that atonement, then it is illogical and in fact unethical for God to invite all people to believe. Since God *does* issue such a sincere invitation (e.g., Matt 28:18–20; Acts 1:8), it follows that all people can exercise faith and that Christ died for everyone without exception.

Evangelistic Concerns

If the foregoing is true, anything other than a universal atonement stifles evangelism. Unless one can sincerely say, "Christ died for *you*," universal atonement advocates argue, calls to faith become insincere,[40] awkward,[41] and/or rare.[42]

A Multiple-Intention View of the Atonement

John Hammett defends a *multiple-intention view of atonement*, which argues that Christ's atonement has both universal *and* particular purposes and has elements that are alternately provisional *and* efficacious in character. The multiple-intention view is not precisely that of *Amyraldism* or *hypothetical universalism*, but it bears enough resemblance to these models to conflate them all under one heading. With specific regard to Christ's redemptive purpose, these views collectively maintain that Christ intended (1) to pay the penalty for the sins of all humans without exception, thus making possible both the salvation of all and the free offer of the gospel to all, but (2) to secure the salvation of the elect alone.[43] As such, these views attempt to embrace

[40] Particularists, for instance, might evangelize to obey God, but they do so, it is argued, despite their theology, not because of it (e.g., Allen, "Atonement: Limited or Universal?" 96–97).

[41] Because particularists cannot say, for instance, "Jesus died for you," they are obliged to use evasive and sterile statements such as "Jesus died for sinners"—statements unworthy of the warmth of the Christian gospel (ibid., 96–100).

[42] Allen, for instance, notes that the evasiveness and insincerity intrinsic to particularist gospel presentations have not only curtailed the use of altar calls but have even led some to denounce altar calls as unbiblical (ibid., 101).

[43] Some identify more than these two intentions. Ware lists five ("'Multiple Intentions' Understanding," 3–4), as does Robert L. Dabney (*Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia*, 6th ed. [repr.; Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1927], 528–29). Of particular note are God's intentions to supply the ethical basis for providence and common grace (e.g., Col 1:17–18) and to effect the restoration of all things (e.g., Rom 8:19–23; 1 Cor 15:24–28; Col 1:19–20).

the strengths of the definite atonement view while simultaneously addressing the objections of the general atonement view. To borrow the words of William G. T. Shedd, an early precursor to Hammett's view, Christ died to make simultaneously both a "universal atonement" *and* a "limited redemption."[44]

Historically, this centrist view finds its greatest early Protestant endorsement in the school of Saumur and its greatest early champions in John Cameron and especially Moïses Amyraut.[45] Amyraldism, which is properly a minority variation of Calvinism, early on adopted Peter Lombard's understanding that Christ's death was "offered . . . for all with regard to the sufficiency of the price, but only for the elect with regard to its efficacy, because he brought about salvation only for the predestined."[46] The connotative elasticity of the phrase "sufficient for all but efficient for the elect" proved useful as a vehicle of mediation at Dordt, where in 1618–19 a mixed body of both "high" Calvinists and Amyraldians crafted a united response to the threat of the Arminian Remonstrance—the famed Canons of Dordt, from which the well-known "five points" derive. The hypothetical universal position continued through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a persistent minority position in Reformed circles;[47] it probably reached its greatest acceptance in late-nineteenth-century

As an aside it should be noted that particularists, especially those in Dutch Calvinist circles, have sparred over these concerns for years. One side, represented prominently in decades past by Herman Hoeksema and today by John Engelsma, rejects these "intentions" of the atonement because they cannot be understood as *substitutionary* in nature. The benefits of providence, so-called common grace (a term this group rejects), and global restoration are simply spillover benefits of God's particular redemptive impulse—nothing more. The other side, represented in decades past by proponents like John Murray and today by Richard Mouw, sees these benefits as independent and *bona fide* benefits of atonement. It should be noted that this latter group has *not*, however, abandoned their particularist stance.

[44] William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: Scribners, 1889), 2:469. See also the similar wording in one of Shedd's contemporaries, Robert L. Dabney, who advocated "unlimited expiation" and a "limited redemption" (*Systematic and Polemic Theology*, 528).

[45] See Thomas, *Extent of the Atonement*.

[46] Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* 3.20.5 (Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2008), 86.

[47] For a window into the evolution of hypothetical universalism in seventeenth-century England, see esp. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*.

American Presbyterianism.[48] New variations of hypothetical universalism, among which are located the multiple-intention view defended in this volume, are again making advances in the evangelical church.[49]

The theological concerns of the multiple-intention model are extracted from those of the other two positions. Indeed, the great attraction of the multiple-intention position is that it allows proponents to follow Dabney's sage advice, "*In mediis tutissime ibis*" (lit., "the prudent place is in the middle")[50] or to use Ware's more popular axiom, it offers the "best of both sides."[51]

Like their particularist brothers and sisters, advocates of the multiple-intention model (1) adhere firmly to a particular and thus an incontestably substitutionary redemption, (2) affirm the absolute success of an immutable divine decree, and (3) embrace at face value the efficacious language of Scripture respecting the various categories of atonement.

However, like their general atonement brothers and sisters, they (1) connect the universal language of Scripture with the provision for and offer of salvation, (2) categorically affirm the infinite nature of God's provision and the necessity of saving faith, and (3) announce to the whole world, without any nagging twinges of conscience, that "Jesus died for you." The multiple-intention model also boasts the most comprehensive ethical explanation of the theological realities of divine providence, common grace, and the promised cosmic restoration.

Conclusion

We invite you to read carefully, reflect upon, and weigh these three views. Following the Bereans' example in Acts 17, compare the contributors' arguments with the Scriptures to see if these things correspond to the biblical witness and, further, whether

[48] Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:464–89; Dabney, *Systematic and Polemic Theology*, 513–45.

[49] E.g., Ware, "'Multiple Intentions' Understanding"; Rouwendal, "Calvin's Forgotten Classical Position"; Shultz, "Multi-Intentioned View of the Atonement"; Alan C. Clifford, *Calvinus: Authentic Calvinism: A Clarification* (Charenton: Reformed Publishing, 1996).

[50] Dabney, *Systematic and Polemic Theology*, 527.

[51] This is the first of four "key theological arguments" to which Ware appeals for support in his "'Multiple Intentions' Understanding," 3.

these things cohere within the whole testimony of God (the *analogia fidei*). And once you have settled on what you feel is the correct view, please remember that the other views are also held by genuine believers. The question of God's intent in sending Christ to die is an important one to answer, but its importance is not so great that we must deny Christian recognition to those who answer differently.

It is with pleasure that we commend to you the following discussion. May its contents enrich not only you, but also the church for whom Christ died, to the glory of God the Father.

CHAPTER 1

Definite Atonement View

CARL R. TRUEMAN

The doctrine of definite atonement is one of those doctrines that might appear at first glance both counterintuitive and something of an imposition upon Scripture that distorts its plain meaning. Is it not obvious that God loves everybody? Should that not be reflected in the extent of the atonement? It seems basic that, in the words of John 3:16, God loves the world and that therefore a universal aspect to that love should surely lie at the heart of Christ's most significant action as Savior: his death on the cross. To talk of limitation in such context would seem to undercut biblical teaching and to attenuate the love of God.[1]

[1] The classic statement of limited atonement is by John Owen: *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647). This is available in volume 10 of the modern reprint of the nineteenth-century edition of his works (London: Banner of Truth, 1967). It is also published by Banner of Truth as a separate volume with an introduction by J. I. Packer, which (given Packer's lucid prose and Owen's highly convoluted style) has probably proved more influential in modern evangelical circles than the text it introduces. On the history of limited atonement, see Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham: Labyrinth, 1986); Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998); Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). For a recent defense of the doctrine, see Lee Gatiss, *For Us and for Our Salvation: "Limited Atonement" in the Bible, Doctrine, History, and Ministry* (London: Latimer Trust, 2012).

Of course, other, far less controversial church teachings are susceptible to the criticism that, on the surface, Scripture does not at first glance seem to teach them, at least if one focuses on only certain biblical passages. For example, the coequality of the Father and Son would seem to contradict Jesus' statements in the Gospels about the Father being greater than he. Every Christian knows—or should know—that such texts need to be set within the context of the overall teaching of Scripture and also within the history of the church's reflection on the nature of the Father and Son. Only then can one truly understand why Trinitarian theology affirms that the persons in the Godhead are equal. Thus it is with definite atonement: it is important that we do not dismiss the doctrine out of hand because it seems to stand at odds with the "plain meaning" of verses such as John 3:16. In order to do this, we need to understand exactly what questions the church asked that led to the formulation as we have it.

The term *definite atonement* actually covers a variety of views of the atonement. Some of those who hold to definite atonement, for example, are comfortable with the medieval formula that declares Christ's death is sufficient for all but efficient only for the elect; others have little or no use for the phrase. Yet all fit into the range of theories of atonement that can be considered "limited" based on their understandings of its extent. I raise this point because I want to establish at the start that my purpose is to outline the doctrine in terms of the broader confessional consensus and not in any narrow, intra-confessional manner. Thus, issues that might differentiate those within one confessional community, such as the nature and utility of the "sufficient for all, efficient only for the elect" distinction, will not be points of major discussion.[2]

[2] The formula contrasting sufficiency and efficiency received its most influential expression in Peter Lombard's *Four Books of Sentences*, the standard theological textbook in the Middle Ages: see his *IV Libri Sententiarum* 3.5.3; also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3a.2.5. This is essentially the position articulated in the Second Head of Doctrine of the Canons of Dordt. For further discussion of the history of the phrase, see W. Robert Godfrey, "Reformed Thought on the Extent of the Atonement to 1618," *WTJ* 37 (1975): 133–71, esp. 136, 142, 149, 159, 164–69; Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 199–206; Raymond A. Blacketer, "Definite Atonement in Historical Perspective," in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Perspectives: Essays in Honor of*

I should also note at the outset that to pose the question in terms of the atonement's extent is not the most appropriate way to approach the topic. Couched in such a loaded form, it immediately generates obvious questions: How can the atonement be preached other than to those who know (by some mystical experience?) that they are already elect? Does it not thereby kill evangelism? In fact, it is better to think of the question of the atonement's extent as an inference drawn from its nature and efficacy. This, as I will argue, casts the kerygmatic problems in a somewhat different light: does the preacher proclaim a finished, efficacious work of Christ on the cross, or does he preach a work that merely lays the groundwork for salvation?

Historically, treatments of this issue have often carefully discussed the value of Christ's sacrifice relative to classic christological formulations, with debates about whether this means that Christ's death, as God-man, has infinite value.[3] The Anselmic theory of atonement helped establish much of the framework for this type of discussion. Such debates often connected to the medieval distinction between Christ's death as sufficient for all but efficient only for some. In general I will not be adopting this kind of framework for my argument. Most, if not all, Christian theologians would have no problem with the idea that Christ's death could have sufficed for the sins of the whole world if that was in fact God's intention. Arminians and hypothetical universalists agree with five-point Calvinists on that issue.[4] My approach

Roger Nicole, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 311.

[3] This is essentially the argument of the Canons of Dordt II.4.

[4] On terminology, I use the terms "hypothetical universalism," "Arminianism" and "Amyraldianism" (along with their cognates) to describe three nonparticularist approaches to the atonement. Hypothetical universalism refers to those positions which argue for a potentially general, unlimited, or universal atonement. It should be noted, however, that in this essay the term does not imply eschatological universalism or universal salvation. Arminianism refers to those schools of Christian thought that see the atonement as universal and the decisive factor in the atonement's individual efficacy as lying in the individual's noncoerced act of faith. Amyraldianism has become a trendy term for those who regard themselves as Calvinist or Reformed but who reject the traditional notion of limited atonement. In fact, Amyraldianism, technically speaking, is a specific form of covenant theology that places the decree to appoint Christ as mediator logically prior to the decree of election; thus, Christ is appointed mediator for all, even though not all will benefit from it. The contemporary use of Amyraldian is thus in general a rather sloppy and inaccurate appropriation of the term. Most modern "Amyraldians" are more likely hypothetical universalists: they believe simply that Christ died for all, even though God's

will be rather to look at the biblical nature of Christ's mediation, specifically as it relates to the unity of intention that undergirds his priestly work of sacrifice and intercession. The question of the atonement's extent is thus not merely a logical deduction of the kind that simply places the atonement under the umbrella of the decree of election; it is intimately connected to a number of aspects of the atonement. One cannot deal with the question of extent isolated from the doctrinal matrix in which the atonement is to be understood. Thus, the question of the atonement's extent is a part—or perhaps better, a necessary inference—of the atonement's nature.

I need to stress one final preliminary point: the mere presence of universal language in a biblical text does not require that we read it in an unequivocally universal way. Context and intention always determine sense. One obvious example is John 12:19: "So the Pharisees said to one another, 'You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.'"[5] It is obvious from this context that the word "world" does not mean every single human has gone after Jesus but simply that a significant number of them have done so. It is also clear that the speaker is not using "world" in the same way John uses it in John 1:9–10, where it clearly means something different. This really needs no elaborate explanation: we are all familiar with the ordinary use of language that uses such universal terms for a somewhat more limited number. Anyone who has ever stopped their teenage child from doing something or going somewhere will have heard the response, "But everyone else will be there," and know that we are talking here of only a subset of the child's social circle. We might also speak of someone who is well liked as being popular "with everyone" yet automatically understand that "everyone" cannot here mean the whole of the human race. Thus, we must understand verses of Scripture with an apparent

election is restrictive and particular. In other words, they are often more anti-systematic ("just preach and teach the Bible") in their approach, which is ironic given the strongly systematic nature of Amyraldus's own theology. What follows typically distinguishes the three categories but occasionally embraces all three under the general term "hypothetical universalists." The usage should be clear in each context.

[5] Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

universal reference in context—both the immediate context and that of the Bible's teaching as a whole—rather than assume they can simply function as unanswerable proof texts.[6]

The case for particular redemption, like that for the Trinity, does not depend on the understanding of any single text, nor does any single text explicitly teach it. Instead, it is the result of the cumulative force and implications of a series of strands of biblical teaching. We can summarize these as (1) the particularity of intention in Christ's saving mission and (2) the objective efficacy of Christ's work. These two should then be set against the background of general biblical teaching on intention, efficacy, and atonement in the Bible. Once this is done, it is possible to address those texts that seem on the surface to militate against definite atonement.

The Particularity of Intention in Christ's Saving Mission

For anti-Pelagian views of predestination, the focus of Christ's mission as it relates to the decree is inevitably going to be understood in a focused, particular way. However, this particularity

[6] John Murray's comment is apposite: "Universal terms are frequently used in connection with the death of Christ, as also in connection with the categories which define its import (*cf.* 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, 19; I Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; I John 2:2). It is surprising that students of Scripture should with such ease appeal to these texts as if they determined the question in favor of universal atonement. The Scripture frequently uses universal terms when, obviously, they are not to be understood of all men inclusively and distributively or of all things inclusively. When we read in Genesis 6:13, 'The end of all flesh is come before me,' it is plain that this is not to be understood absolutely or inclusively. Not *all* flesh was destroyed. Or when Paul says that the trespass of Israel was the riches of the world (Rom. 11:12), he cannot be using the word 'world' of all men distributively. Israel is not included, and not all Gentiles were partakers of the riches intended. When Paul says, 'all things are lawful for me' (I Cor. 6:12; *cf.* 10:23), he did not mean that he was at liberty to do anything and everything. Examples could be multiplied and every person should readily perceive the implied restriction. An expression must always be interpreted in terms of the universe of discourse. Thus in Hebrew[s] 2:9 the *everyone* on whose behalf Christ tasted death must be understood as referring to every one of whom the writer is speaking, namely, every one of the sons to be brought to glory, of the sanctified, of the children whom God has given to Christ and of whom He is not ashamed (vss. 10, 11, 12, 13). And it must not be overlooked that in II Corinthians 5:14, 15 the 'all' for whom Christ died do not embrace any more than those who died in Him 'one died for all: therefore all died.' In Paul's teaching to die with Christ is to die to sin (*cf.* Rom. 6:2–10)" (*The Atonement* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962], 29–30).

does not rest solely on a theological construct; it finds numerous resonances within the text of Scripture.

Texts

Matthew 1:21; 20:28; 26:28. When the angel visits Joseph, he declares that Christ "will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21), a sentiment Zechariah echoes in Luke 1:68. Later, in Matt 20:28 and 26:28, Christ specifically speaks of his work as intended for the salvation of many, not everyone. Thus, these texts support the notion that the origin of Christ's mission lies in a saving intention that has particular and limited reference.

John 6:37–40. John's Gospel is an even more fruitful place for such references. John 6:37–40 strikingly places the Son's mission under the will of the Father but in such a way that the Son is willing to do what the Father has prescribed and promised. Even though certain people have seen Jesus but have not believed, this does not indicate that his mission has failed or been frustrated in any way (v. 37). He is clear: all whom the Father has given to him will come to him. D. A. Carson persuasively argues that the second half of verse 37 strongly underscores this, to be understood as "I will certainly keep in."[7] The passage then proceeds to indicate the foundation on which this is built: Christ has come to do the will of the Father (v. 38). Christ then defines his Father's will as losing none whom the Father has given him but rather raising them up on the last day (v. 39). The particular and predestinarian thrust of this is clear: Christ has come to do his Father's will, meaning he will bring home to glory those whom the Father has given him.

John 10. John 10 is also important. Presenting himself as fulfilling the Old Testament ideal of the shepherd (cf. Ezekiel 34), Christ speaks about knowing his sheep and them knowing him (v. 14), which he parallels with the knowledge that the Father and the Son have of each other (v. 15). These are the same sheep for whom he has come to lay down his life (vv. 10–11, 15). The reference to other sheep (v. 16) is not to an indiscriminate group but rather to those outside of ethnic Israel. Verses 26–29 confirm

[7] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 290.

this: those who do not hear are not part of the flock for whom Christ has come to lay down his life.

John 17. Most important, of course, given the reality of Christ's death as part of his high priesthood, is what is known as the high priestly prayer of John 17. Christ explicitly restricts his prayer by saying he is not praying for the world but for those whom the Father has given him (v. 9). The intention behind the saving action at this point is limited by the restricted nature of what the Father has given to the Son.

The climactic passage in John's Gospel, which connects both Christ's mission and its particular intention, is the high priestly prayer in John 17. Verses 6–10 are clear in their particularism: Jesus manifests God's name to those the Father has given him out of the world (v. 6); he does not pray for the world but for those the Father has given him (v. 9); and there is shared identity between those who belong to the Father and those who belong to the Son (v. 10). This is the same kind of teaching as in John 6 and 10, where the will of the Father is decisive for those who will come to the Son and for whom the Son prays. Jesus' mission is not an indiscriminate mission to the entire world but to those in the world whom the Father has given to the Son.[8]

The high priestly prayer is central not only to our understanding of Christ's mission but also to our thinking about God as Trinity; thus, these two aspects of Christology are connected in significant ways. The Johannine emphasis on the unity of Father and Son is a foundational part of the church's understanding of Father and Son as sharing in the same substance. This was the purpose of the creedal term *homoousian*. The term, which was so central to the development of Nicene orthodoxy in the years between Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381), is doctrinally important for a number of reasons. Most obviously it protects the notion that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all equally God and that there can therefore be no strictly ontological subordination among the subsistences of the Godhead. This also has important implications for understanding the relationship of the three in their actions relative to creation and redemption, not least in the area of Christ's atoning work.

[8] Carson, *John*, 560–61.

Significantly, the *homoousian* means the interaction between Father and Son cannot be construed in any terms that would imply even the most mildly adversarial relationship. In the work of salvation, the Father's will and the Son's will both have the same intention.[9] Popular presentations of Christ's priestly work, particularly as it relates to penal substitution, can seem to make the case that God the Father is angry with fallen humanity and that the Son has therefore come before him to plead his death as a basis for persuading a reluctant Father to look with mercy upon humanity. Such is clearly counter to the straightforward teaching of Scripture in connection with the Father-Son relationship, and the *homoousian* is the theological safeguard that reinforces this. If Father and Son are of the same substance, are both one God and therefore united in will, then any attempt to make the atonement and intercession of Christ a matter of cajoling the Father into kindness clearly tends toward tritheism. Thus, in John 17, when Christ speaks of praying for those whom the Father has given him, we are pointed back to the heart of the Trinitarian God in terms of his saving intentions: the Father and Son are one in their salvific intention not for all of humanity but for those whom God has appointed to life.

Acts 20:28. This particularity of intention manifests itself elsewhere in the New Testament. The death of Christ and the salvation of the church are directly connected in a number of passages. Paul declares that the church was obtained by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), which has strong commercial implications.[10] A transaction has taken place. The currency of this transaction is Christ's blood. What was purchased is a particular body of people.

Ephesians 5:25–27. Paul draws an important parallel between human marriage and the work of Christ: husbands are to love their wives "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the

[9] Matthew 26:39 is a mysterious verse, where the incarnate Son submits his will to that of the Father; but it does not teach an opposition between the wills of Father and Son. Rather, it underscores the reality of what Christ is undergoing and, if anything, indicates that both wills are ultimately entirely consistent with each other.

[10] David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 570.

church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25–27). This implies that Christ intended to do certain things for his church. If the parallel were set up differently, say, that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the world in general, then the ethical teaching on marriage would itself be fundamentally transformed. The point is that husbands are to have particular, special, effective love for their wives that they do not have for others. Self-sacrifice for that particular person is to be one mark of this relationship. Thus it is also with Christ and the church.

Titus 2:14. Titus 2:14 is also a significant text, speaking as it does about Christ acting to "purify for himself a people for his own possession [Gk. *laon periousion*]." The phrase *laon periousion* occurs also in the Septuagint in Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18, set within the context of God's electing love for ancient Israel. The biblical connotations of the Titus passage, therefore, seem to press the matter of particularity and divine intention. Christ is purifying a special people, not simply making purification generally available to any who will come.

Objections

God's universal desire to save all (Ezekiel 18:23). One response to arguments based on the particular intention of Christ's mission is to point to texts such as Ezek 18:23: "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" This text appears to teach God's universal desire for the salvation of all, and this text in particular has been central to many debates in church history on the issue of predestination, most famously perhaps in the clash between Erasmus and Luther in 1525. On the surface, at least, it seems to contradict any notion of a prior decree of particular election (and thus challenges nonuniversalist anti-Pelagians of all stripes, not simply those who adhere to particular redemption).

Nevertheless, before addressing the kind of issues this text raises, it is useful to remember that such statements in Scripture connect to the general problem of evil that impacts all theologies.