



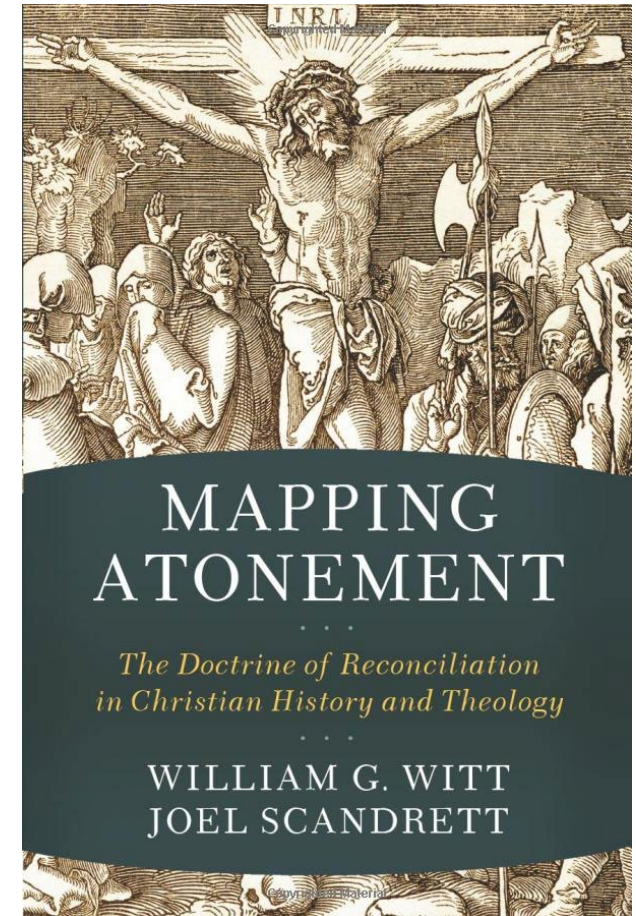
The “A” Word

THE VAST AND RICH THEOLOGY OF ATONEMENT

SUNDAYS IN LENT

Atonement & Incarnation

- Irenaeus (130-202)
 - Arguing against gnostic dualism
 - Recapitulation
- Athanasius (184-253)
 - Arguing against Arianism
 - Re-creation
- Why did God become human?





B

enedictus



Ireneaus

- First theologian to develop a comprehensive theology of creation, fall and reconciliation
- Redemption is essentially an at-one-ment
- There is one God, the Creator of heaven and earth and especially humanity...
- This one God is a triune, the Son and the Holy Spirit are God's Word and Wisdom, the "two hands" through who God Makes all things and in whose image he has created human beings.



Irenaeus and Incarnation

- Why did God become human in Jesus Christ?
 - We, humanity, needed salvation but that we are unable to save ourselves. Only God can save us, and he does this personally by the Son of God becoming incarnate as Jesus Christ.
- It is because the incarnate Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human that he is able to act as mediator between God and humanity, joining together God and humanity in himself, creating a new friendship and harmony between them, presenting humanity to God and revealing God to humanity.
- The name “Jesus Christ” points to the triune unity: it is the Father who anoints, the Son who is anointed and the Holy Spirit who is the divine unction with which the Son is anointed.
- The incarnate Jesus Christ did more than provide an example of others to follow. His reconciling work is not merely pedagogical; it accomplishes something ontologically. Jesus’s incarnate life, death, and resurrection are constitutive, not merely illustrative, of atonement.

Irenaeus and Recapitulation

- The purpose of the incarnation is not merely ontological in the sense that the incarnation alone might save human beings. The incarnation is also reparative, restorative and redemptive.
- Irenaeus uses the word “recapitulation” to describe Christ’s atoning work. This means to re-gather or sum up.
- The main idea is that in the incarnation, Jesus Christ has “regathered” or brought into unity that which has become separated, restoring humanity to its intended unity.
- Christ was not formed from the dust of the earth but was born of a human mother because he was not a completely new being; rather, he recapitulated the same humanity that Adam had possessed.

What to make of the language that Christ died...

- Did Irenaeus understand Jesus's death in ways comparable to later models of the atonement; as a substitution, a judicial or penal satisfaction, a sacrifice?
- It is Jesus Christ's entire personal mission — incarnation, life, death, resurrection and second coming that constitutes atonement and salvation
- The Son of God restores humanity by acting as a human.

Athanasius

- The Question:
 - On what side of the divide does the son stand? Is the Son Creator and eternal or a creature and created from nothing? Arius endorsed the later. Athanasius endorsed the former: the Son is Creator, fully God, and thus always Son.
- Like Irenaeus, Athanasius closely connects creation and atonement.
- Athanasius reads God's salvation of sinful humanity back into the original creation, thus emphasizing the continuity between creation and salvation.



Athanasius: Incarnation and Salvation

- If sin is a “de-creation,” then salvation requires a “re-creation.” Atonement is a restoration of that lost union with a consequent restoration to incorruption and life.
- The Son of God, who is by nature one with God, has become one with humanity in the incarnation so that the humanity of Christ, which is not proper to the Word by nature, has graciously become the “proper” humanity of the Word for our salvation.
- He was made man that we might be made God.

Athanasius and Atonement

- Athanasius is concerned about who Jesus is because of what it means for our salvation. Everything that the Word does, he does “for us.” In the incarnation, God humbles himself so that we might be elevated. This parallels the incarnation model seen in Irenaeus.
- God did not bring about salvation through mere external command but rather through an intrinsic transformation from “within” the human being.
- Four ways in which humanity could be taught about God.
 1. through being created in the image of God, human beings are made to know and love God
 2. after humanity had fallen, God could still be perceived through creation.
 3. God sent the law and the prophets of the Old Testament so that humanity could have instruction “near at hand”
 4. when even this proved insufficient, the Word became incarnate, coming down to our own level and meeting us “half-way”.

Concluding thoughts on Athanasius

- Atonement is so closely integrated with his theology of the Trinity, creation and fall, and the incarnation and grace that it is only possible to discuss it in the context of the whole.
- Atonement is restoration of a fallen creation and union with the incarnate Word through whom humanity was created in his image.
- This communication of life and holiness (deification) is crucial to Athanasius's soteriology. Because the Word who is the image of God has become flesh, he is able to restore the image of God to fallen human beings, to overcome their corruption and death by his own death and resurrection, and by baptizing with the Spirit those who have faith in him, to tie them to his own raised humanity and bring them into communion with the triune God.



Importance of Incarnation

- Truly understanding why God sent his Son is key to understanding atonement.
- Atonement is a process rather than an event
- Unity of the triun God with man and man with God

COMING UP

ATONEMENT AS...

3/12: CHRISTUS VICTOR

3/19: DIVINE LOVE

3/26: RECONCILIATION