

**A PAPER SUBMITTED TO
THE ASIS-PACIFIC NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL
CONFERENCE**

**BY
THE FACULTY OF
MELANESIA NAZARENE BIBLE COLLEGE**

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**Mt. Hagen, Papua New Guinea
July 24, 2006**

2005 Manual of the Church of the Nazarene Article VI

"We believe that Jesus Christ, by His sufferings, by the shedding of His own blood, and by His death on the cross, made a full atonement for all human sin, and that this Atonement is the only ground of salvation, and that it is sufficient for every individual of Adam's race. The Atonement is graciously efficacious for the salvation of the irresponsible and for children in innocency but is efficacious for the salvation of those who reach the age of responsibility only when they repent and believe.¹

Wok Jisas I mekim bilong yumi ken wanbel wantaim God (Atonement)
Yumi bilip Jisas Kraus i bin karim pen na i kapsaitim blut bilong em yet na i dai long diwai kros. Em i bin karim mekim olsem bilong tekewe olgeta sin bilong olgeta manmeri na mekim yumi i kamap wanbel wantaim God. Dispela wok Jisas i mekim bilong bam bek yumi, em tasol i wokim rot bilong God i ken kisim bek yumi long pasin bilong sin o bikhet pasin yumi mekim. Em inap long helpim olgeta manmeri wanwan long lain bilong Adam. Dai bilong Jisas inap mekim yumi kamap wanbel wantaim God. Long marimari bilong God tasol em inap kisim bek ol manmeri i longlong wantaim ol pikinini i no gat save yet. Wok bilong Jisas bilong baim bek yumi em inap kisim bek ol manmeri i gat tingting na save, tasol ol i mas tanim bel na bilip pastaim.²

Isaiah 53:5-6, 11; Mark 10:45; Luke 24:46-48; John 1:29; 3:14-17; Acts 4:10-12; Romans 3:21-26; 4:17-25; 5:6-21; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Galatians 1:3-4; 3:13-14; Colossians 1:19-23; I Timothy 2:3-6; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 2:9; 9:11-14; 1 Peter 1:18-21; 2:19-25; 1 John 2:1-2

The Melanesian approach to understanding and explaining the atonement is tied to cultural expressions of personal relationships and of power. Relationships are extremely important in Papua New Guinea. There is a thoroughly developed system of compensation for renewing relationships between neighboring tribes, which have been damaged by wrongs committed by individual members of a given tribe. This is not a written but rather an understood system. It is a system, which does not really deal with the problem directly or with the offending member of the tribe directly. It also does nothing to deal with the root cause of the problem. It is a way of removing shame from the offended tribe without putting shame directly on the person responsible for the offence. Tribal members contribute to pay the compensation to the offended tribe. Compensation is not an exact equivalent for the loss suffered. It is like the governmental theory of atonement advanced by Hugo Grotius. "...God is

not regarded merely as an offended party, but as a Moral Governor of the Universe. He must therefore uphold the authority of His government in the interests of good. Consequently the sufferings of Christ are to be regarded, not as the exact equivalent of our punishment, but only in the sense that the dignity of the government was thereby upheld and vindicated as effectively as it would have been, if we had received the punishment we deserved."³

Compensation payment in Melanesia is a form of public closure of an issue. It is an atonement for which the offender pays none or very little of the compensation price but it is paid by members of the tribe who are themselves not guilty of offence in this case. The cultural alternative is war and eternally severed relationships. Relationships are extremely important and Melanesians view that as one of the messages of the atonement.

Atonement is also understood in terms of power. It is the power of the Son to preserve the dignity of the Father, Creator. It is the power of Christ to join in and win the battle with sin and Satan. It is the power of God's love to restore a proper relationship between God and man. That brings this discussion back to broken relationships being restored.

Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria 328-373 A.D., presents the argument for the preservation of the dignity of God as a result of the atonement in *The Incarnation of the Word*. "For if a king, having founded a house or a city, if it be beset by bandits from the carelessness of its inmates, does not but any means neglect it, but avenges and reclaims it as his own work, having regard not to the carelessness of the inhabitants, but to what beseems himself; much more did God the Word of the all-good Father not neglect the race of men, His work, going to corruption: but He blotted out the death which had ensued by the offering of His own body, He

corrected their neglect by His own teaching, restoring all that was man's by his own power."⁴

Shame would certainly fall upon a "Papa" who would allow a village on his land to stay in the hands of and under the control of the enemy. The avoidance of shame and the restoration of dignity would require swift and powerful action to see the lost land and property returned. The focus would not be on the carelessness of the village residents who allowed themselves to be so taken over. The discussion and actions to be taken by the council of the elders around the Papa would center on the dignity of the Papa and the punishment of the enemy for this offense. The village of the Papa must be freed and the enemy defeated and shamed.

This brings us to the actual battle with the enemy. That battle was a manifestation of the Power of Jesus Christ. By that power Jesus Christ wins the battle with sin and Satan. This was the dominant view expressed during the Patristic Period of Church History. "The popular view, which seems to have been first advanced by Irenaeus (c. 200 A.D.), was that the atonement was a victory over Satan."⁵(Wiley 225)

Rationalistic theologians often dismiss this decidedly spiritual interpretation of the atonement out of hand. Western bias is an insufficient reason for the rejection of the spiritual explanation of atonement. Ignatius in his *Epistle To The Philippians* discusses the defeat of the Devil at the hands of Christ. "Thou, O Belial, dragon, apostate, crooked serpent, rebel against God, outcast from Christ, alien from the Holy Spirit...Oh what audacity! Oh what madness! Thou runaway slave, thou incorrigible slave, Dost thou say to so great a Lord, the God of all that either the mind or senses can perceive, "If thou wilt fall down and worship me?"..."Begone Satan," to

the course which thou hast chosen."⁶ This is a spiritual battle and a victory for our Lord Jesus Christ over sin and Satan.

This is a dualism here but not of the absolute sort. It is "the opposition between God and that which in His own created world resists His will; between the Divine Love and the rebellion of created wills against Him."⁷ In his defense of what might be termed the "Classic" idea of the atonement Gustaf Aule faces the prejudice that had developed against the "classic Theory" in the intervening years between the first millennia and his time. "There is a form of the idea of the Atonement which this account of the matter either ignores altogether or treats with very much less than justice, but whose suppression falsifies the whole perspective, and produces a version of the history which is seriously misleading. ...Its central theme is the atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ-Christus Victor-fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself."⁸

The Melanesian worldview allows for spirits. Why did the apostles think Jesus was a spirit walking on the water if they did not so believe? Why did the early believers think Peter's ghost was knocking at the gate if they did not believe in ghosts? The Melanesian worldview allows for angels. Angels may choose and some have rebelled against God. Being a part of the spirit world mankind is involved in the cosmic struggle between God and *that which in His own created world resists His will*. The atonement is the victory of Christ over sin and Satan.

The atonement is also the power of God's love to restore a proper relationship between God and man. 1 Peter 1:13-21 "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the

revelation of Jesus Christ;¹⁴ as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;¹⁵ but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,¹⁶ because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

¹⁷ And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.²⁰ He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you ²¹ who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."⁹ This love restores the relationship by taking on the penalty for sin. This is not a satisfaction of Divine justice but it is Divine Love, as Aule says, that makes the redemption. It is not an offering made from man's side but it is from God's side the reconciliation comes. 2 Cor 5:18-19 "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

Dr. H. Orton Wiley has presented the issue in a form that may open discussion. "One may by faith be a partaken of the benefits of the atonement, and yet not hold a proper theory of its explanation; and on the other hand, it is possible to hold a correct theory of the atonement and still be a stranger to its saving grace."¹⁰ Melanesians are more interested in the story of atonement or what Wiley calls the fact of atonement, than in the theories advanced to explain the atonement. Atonement is the accomplished work of God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. The dignity

of the Father is upheld, Jesus defeated Satan, and Love has restored the relationship between God and man.

The Manual statement focuses more on the fact of the atonement than on the particular theory used to explain it. That creates the unity in the essentials and liberty in the nonessentials that is the way of the Church of the Nazarene. There is room under the Manual statement on atonement for the Melanesian view of atonement and for some other views with which Melanesians might not agree.

This paper is a cooperative effort of the Staff of Melanesia Nazarene Bible College. In the Melanesian culture problems are worked on by members of the "haus Man" (extended family) or "Lain" (tribe). This paper is offered as an expression of the ideas of that staff.

ENDNOTES

1. Dean G. Blevins, Curtis Lewis Jr., Frank M. Moore, R. Douglas Samples, and Jack Stone, eds., Manual Church of the Nazarene: Article VI (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 2006), 32-33.
2. Marvin Thrasher, David Gham, Bai Kovi, Norbert Hota, Brian Bett, eds., Manual Bilong Nasarin Sios: Article VI (Mt. Hagen, PNG: Nazarene Publications, 2003), 24.
3. H. Orton Wiley, Introduction To Christian Theology (Kansas City, MO, Beacon Hill Press, 1946), 230.
3. Athanasius, De Incarnatione Verbi Dei, 10.1.
5. Wiley, Introduction To Christian Theology, 225.
6. Ignatius, Epistle of Ignatius To The Philippians, XI.4,5.
7. Gustaf Aule<n, Christus Victor, (London: Macmillan Co. 1934), 21.
8. Aule<n, Christus Victor, 21
9. The Bible, 1 Peter 1:13-21, NKJV.
10. Wiley, Introduction To Christian Theology, 225.

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