Reclaiming the Cross this Side of Paradise: Atonement in the Postmodern Church

by

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Date: 11/25/19

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry at Duke University's Divinity

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Abstract

Penal substitutionary atonement is a wide-spread, wildly acknowledged, and often-repeated understanding of Jesus’s death on the cross in white, western Christianity. Found in inside the church in hymnody, Sunday school lessons, church pulpits, as well as in influences in the wider culture, it is considered by many to be the orthodox understanding of Jesus’s death on the cross. What is little known is that not only did this theory of atonement take significant time to develop within the history of Western theology, it includes some troubling theological implications.

It also remains true that many Christians, particularly in mainline Protestant denominations, are stumped when it comes to articulating in any coherent way the meaning of Jesus’s death on the cross for their faith and practice. In part, this deficit is due to the fact that while substitutionary atonement swims in the waters of popular white western culture, many mainline congregations do not necessarily hold to a penal view of atonement. Yet, they also do not have a compelling alternative. Additionally, for many Christian traditions, outside of fundamentalist and evangelical traditions, the atonement is not a defining point of doctrine. The cross might be thought about briefly on the way to Easter Sunday, or with a casually mentioned, but marginally understood phrase such as, “Jesus died for my sins.”

In the absence of a theologically rich account of the cross, Christian communities are at risk for being unable to articulate in any meaningful way how exactly this fundamental theology makes any difference for what it means to be Christian, and ultimately to the reality of people’s lives and the salvation of the world.

This paper proposes that the postmodern church must reclaim a robust theology of the cross in three ways: embracing multiplicity and variety, reconnecting the cross to Jesus’s ministry and therefore the first-century Greco-Roman context in which he lived, and articulating a nonviolent atonement. It offers practical resources to assist local congregations in teaching the topic.
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Introduction

And so, he was raised on the cross, and a title was fixed, indicating who it was who was being executed. Painful it is to say, but more terrible not to say . . . He who suspended the earth is suspended, he who fixed the heavens is fixed, he who fastened all things is fastened to the wood; the Master is outraged; God is murdered.

Melito of Sardis (d. c. A. D. 180)

I am sitting in rush hour traffic on a Texas interstate. I stare out the window at a billboard advertising a sermon series for a local Protestant congregation. A giant picture of a white gentleman with salt and pepper hair and perfectly pressed suit smiles comfortingly at me in front of a background of blue skies and fluffy clouds. The billboard reads, “A Place Called Heaven: 10 Surprising Truths about Your Eternal Home,” apparently the title of the upcoming sermon series. As my car crawls forward beyond the billboard and beneath the glare of the setting sun, I think, “Is the only hope the church can offer the world an escape from it?”

For many, Christian faith is God’s Plan for what happens to us when we die. It is a faith that believes something now and waits for the reward coming in the afterlife. This configuration of faith tells us that, if we profess belief in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we will be saved from hell and welcomed into heaven at the end of our life. Often included with that belief is a particular understanding of how Jesus’s death on the cross secures this salvation for us. Articulated in what is broadly known as the theory of penal substitutionary atonement, the whole purpose of Jesus's death on the cross was that he "paid the price" for our sins, so that we can go to heaven when we die.

“Penal substitutionary atonement” is a term used for a way of thinking about soteriology (or the logic of salvation) that says Jesus died on the cross in our place and satisfied the unpayable debt of sin we owe God. Because Jesus died in our place,
suffering the punishment we deserve, God regards us as not guilty, and we can go to heaven. As Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green point out, “One does not need to go to a theological library to encounter a substitution model of atonement. Most Christians in the west have encountered it in a Sunday school class, heard it proclaimed by pastors and evangelists, sung in a hymn, or read it in tracts or books of basic doctrines.”¹ It is a widespread, widely acknowledged, and oft-repeated view within popular American Christianity.²

Substitutionary atonement has what some would call scriptural warrant. Matthew and Mark describe Jesus’s death as a “ransom for many” (Mark 10:45; Matt 20:28); the Apostle Paul uses the expression, “sacrifice of atonement” (Rom 3:25); and 1 John says God sent the son “to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10). The writer of Hebrews says that Jesus died, “once and for all” (Hebrews 9:26) to restore our blemished relationship with God.³

Over time, these obscure phrases in scripture have evolved into wholesale theories of salvation and the cross that include troubling implications. For one, penal substitutionary atonement follows that merely believing in Jesus secures one an eternal destiny unrelated to life in this world. This way of thinking reduces the Christian faith to an evacuation plan, and Jesus’s crucifixion to a theological “fire insurance policy.” Or as Danielle Shroyer describes it, “following Jesus is the sin version of tax evasion.”⁴

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² Sally A. Brown, Cross Talk: Preaching Redemption Here and Now (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2008), 11.
⁴ Danielle Shroyer, Original Blessing (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), x.
the theory of substitutionary atonement is an understanding of the cross and resurrection as a means of hope and a pattern of discipleship in this life.

Substitutionary atonement also places violence at the heart of God’s saving activity. Jesus’s violent death on the cross, enacted by a punishing God, is the answer to how God saves us, bringing about the fullness of life for God’s creation. Mel Gibson’s cinematic portrayal of Jesus’ death in the Passion of the Christ is a clear example.⁵ The film focuses on the barbaric torture that Jesus endures at the hand of the Roman Empire, revealed in setting before the audience the vividness and sheer bloodiness of The Passion of the Christ. Reflecting on the movie, Mark Baker and Joel B. Green write, “It drips, it plops, it splatters, it flows, it trickles, it pours, it dribbles, it wells, it streams, and in never-ending supply; does one human body possess so much blood?”⁶ When asked to explain the purpose of the film’s grotesque violence, Gibson said that it was meant to make understandable “the full horror of what Jesus suffered for our redemption.”⁷ This criticism is not to say that Jesus’ death was not violent. I wish to point out the troubling notion that, from the vantage point of substitutionary atonement, violence is the way that God sets things right in the divine-human relationship rather than a problem that Jesus’s death on the cross exposes and redeems.

Additionally, substitutionary atonement implies that violence, when the cause is just, can save us. If violence is salvific, one is left to wonder how a violent God can offer a life-saving word to a world groaning under the weight of that very same violence.

⁶ Baker and Green, Rediscovering the Scandal of the Cross, 27.
Further, if violence becomes the locus of the gospel, this obscures the dangers of violence and our ability to see and name those dangers. In recent years, feminist and womanist, liberation, and post-colonial scholars have raised the criticism that the retributive suffering of the cross reinforces victim passivity and violent oppression. As Marit A. Trelstad writes, “Many critiques of the cross assert that it supports systems of oppression by demanding self-sacrifice and suffering from the weak while at the same time justifying, or worse, sanctifying oppression and abuse by the powerful. In these ways, they posit that it could be used to support racial and domestic violence or nationalistic, imperialistic uses of the cross.”\(^8\) From encouraging women to suffer in places of abuse, to the Crusades to the Ku Klux Klan and lynching, the cross enacts violence and oppression in God’s name.

Despite these theological roadblocks, the truth is that the cross remains a critical part of Christian theology. As Sally Brown writes, “At the heart of the Christian faith lies the scandalous claim that God’s promise to renew all things in accord with the divine will is inseparable from the long-ago death of a man named Jesus on a Roman Cross.”\(^9\) Similarly, Jurgen Moltmann argues, “the inner criterion of whether or not Christian theology is Christian lies in the crucified Christ … we come back to Luther’s lapidary statement, the cross is the test of everything: *Crux probat omnia.*”\(^10\) The cross is essential to Christian theology. After all, Jesus did not die of cancer, in a car accident, as a result of a natural disaster, or from fatal human error. Jesus died on a Roman cross, a tool of state-

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sanctioned violence used to subjugate an occupied people, to maintain the order and security of the empire. It was a disgraceful way to die, reserved only for non-Roman citizens, insurrectionists, and criminals. However, this ignominious death is, as the Apostle Paul writes, “foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved.”¹¹ In part, this is because what is also significant about Jesus’s death is not just that he died. Throughout human history, there are many examples of individuals who have stood up for what they believed in, facing the full force of evil systems of power, ultimately giving their life. What is remarkable about Jesus’s death is that it shows the way to life—for those first-century disciples who followed him and for Christian believers today. For Christians, Jesus’s death on a Roman cross is the decisive turning point in history, the event in which the earth’s axis shifts toward God’s new world order, as salvation is revealed in the cross of a condemned criminal. There is something about the very nature of God and God’s redemptive engagement with destructive forces in the world around us, that one can learn only from discerning Jesus’ death as an event of divine redemption. For a world groaning under the weight of sin and death, the cross discloses something indispensable about the character of God and is necessary for understanding how God enters redemptively into our varied human experience.

If this is true, then it is also the case that the church must claim a robust theology of the cross as central to its life, witness, and worship. This is particularly true in the postmodern, post-Christendom culture in which white, western mainstream Christianity exists. The world has changed dramatically. The church can no longer count on the

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 1:18, NRSV.
support and assumptions of Christendom that allowed for an easy triumphalism with life at the center. As Douglas John Hall writes, “As the Christian movement emerges out of its Constantinian cocoon and tries to enter again, after fifteen centuries of religious establishment, the big, wide, many-cultured world, we Christians need all the help we can get if we are to find our way into the future.”

Finding a way into the future includes not falling silent on the subject of the cross, leaving the historically harmful uses unexamined, and the saving significance relegated only to the afterlife. The church in the postmodern, post-Christendom world must reclaim the cross as an indisputable revelation of the full presence of God, and not merely, “an interruption in the career of the God Incarnate—a regrettable but necessary transaction to deal with the obstacle of sin.”

The time is ripe for rethinking the power of the cross and its saving significance for Christian faith, worship, and witness.

It also remains true that many Christians, particularly in mainline Protestant denominations, are stumped when it comes to articulating in any coherent way the meaning of Jesus’s death on the cross for their faith and practice. In part, this deficit is due to the fact that while substitutionary atonement swims in the waters of popular white western culture, many mainline congregations do not necessarily hold to a penal view of atonement. Yet, they also do not have a compelling alternative. Additionally, for many Christian traditions, outside of fundamentalist and evangelical traditions, the atonement is not a defining point of doctrine. The cross might be thought about briefly on the way to Easter Sunday, or with a casually mentioned, but marginally understood phrase such as,

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13 Ibid, 3.
“Jesus died for my sins.” In the absence of a theologically rich account of the cross, Christian communities are at risk for being unable to articulate in any meaningful way how exactly this fundamental theology makes any difference for what it means to be Christian, and ultimately to the reality of people’s lives and the salvation of the world. If Christians believe that Jesus’s death on the cross is an indispensable part of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and that the message of the cross brings a word of life in the midst of death and despair that often seems numbingly familiar, it must be made accessible in ways that fundamentally shapes Christian faith and practice.

My central question, then, is this. How might the western church talk about the saving significance of the cross beyond substitutionary atonement? How might the saving significance of the cross be claimed in new ways? The writing that follows is not meant to develop a new systematic theology of the cross, or to name once and for all, the authoritative meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection. Instead, it seeks to make thinking about the atonement accessible, identifying present challenges with an understanding of the cross and resurrection in western Christianity, and lift up different understandings the saving significance of the cross for Christian disciples seeking to lead and follow faithfully in today's postmodern, post-Christendom context.

In my thesis, I will outline the theological and historical origins of substitutionary atonement within the broader context of western Christian atonement theories referenced in popular, white, western mainstream evangelical sources in the U.S. I will identify some of the particular theological problems that arise from this way of thinking about the cross, and then will then examine how each of these challenges might be shifted and seen
from a different perspective. I will conclude with learning and liturgy resources for teaching about the saving significance of the cross in the local congregation.
Defining the Problem

Throughout the history of the Christian movement, believers have searched for meaningful explanations of Jesus’s death on the cross. In recent centuries, penal substitutionary atonement developed into the most familiar, most widely accepted understanding of Jesus’s death within many western mainline Protestant communities. This popular conception describes Jesus’ death on the cross in reasonably simple terms, which is part of the appeal: The atonement “problem” is that: (1) the original sin of Adam infects the entire human race, therefore permanently severing the relationship between God and humanity.  

14 Humankind in its finite, sinful nature is incapable of paying the sin debt owed to God. However, God’s “justice” demands that sin is punished (hence, penal). (2) To rectify our sin problem, God the Father sends his Son to earth to suffer the just punishment that we deserve by dying on the cross (hence, substitution). Only Jesus, who was not only fully human but also fully divine, spotless and without blemish, can fill that role. Through Jesus’s death on the cross, God forgives sinful humanity. If believers subscribe to the idea that they are sinners deserving of hell, but that Jesus died in their place, then they go to heaven when they die.

14 Saint Augustine, Confessions, translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9. The Doctrine of Original Sin says that sin is passed down from the first human being, Adam. Original sin argues two things: one, that when Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the Garden, something negatively and permanently shifted in their nature, and two, this nature has been passed on to every human being since. The doctrine of Original Sin does not appear in the Western Church for the first four centuries until it is developed and explained in greatest depth by St. Augustine. In book one of the Confessions, Augustine points to his argument that no human can escape their sin nature in writing, “Who can recall to me the sins I committed as a baby? For in your sight no man is free from sin, not even a child who has lived only one day on earth.” Therefore, Jesus was not familiar with the notion of original sin, and his disciples would not have been either, nor the Apostle Paul. When the writers of scripture talk about sin, they do not speak from a western, developed, or assumed understanding of sin nature. The Doctrine of Original Sin is also absent from Eastern Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, and Armenian traditions, as well as Judaism.
One does not need to go to a theological library to encounter the penal substitutionary model of atonement. Expressions of substitutionary atonement are found in traditional western Christian hymnody, Sunday school curriculum, church pulpits, evangelism teaching resources, and broader popular culture. Western Christians might have learned the basics of substitutionary atonement as young people in a Sunday school class. Bible lessons sometimes teach children that because of sin human beings are stuck and so Jesus stepped in and took humanity’s place, dying for all the sins of the world, and taking on the punishment humans deserve—just like when one does not do his or her homework, or one gets sent to his or her room, or when one is grounded. It is like Jesus stepped in and said, “I will do that. I will take the punishment you deserve.” Why? Because God loves people so much. Or, sometimes children learn that God is like a judge sitting in a courtroom looking at a big list of sins for which he must punish people. If, however, Christians believe that Jesus died in one’s place, suffering the punishment humanity deserves, God forgives humankind and blots one’s sin from the page, promising heaven when one dies.

Adults in western Christianity know about Jesus’s substitutionary death on the cross through Good Friday services infused with hymns such as, “O Sacred Head Now Wounded,” “Beneath the Cross of Jesus,” and “Nothing but the Blood of Jesus.” As Danielle Shroyer writes, “We’ve been told over and over again that we need Jesus solely because of our sin problem. We do not even question whether this is the best or most genuine description of the gospel anymore. We have heard it so many times, we accept it without thinking.”

Similarly, Darby Ray argues that a form of penal substitutionary

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15 Danielle Shroyer, *Original Blessing*, ix.
atonement, with elements of sacrifice and Anselmian satisfaction motif thrown in, comprises what amounts to nearly unassailable atonement orthodoxy in the west.\textsuperscript{16}

Examples of penal substitutionary atonement, however, are not limited to the western church. Penal substitution is present in broader western Christian culture in evangelism resources, sporting events, and on highway billboards. For instance, while studying at Princeton Theological Seminary, a seminary classmate received an “Evangecube” from a man handing out tracts on one of the street corners in downtown Princeton. The wooden cube is intended to be a visual representation of the gospel that unfolds to show the story of God sending Jesus to die in our place on the cross, rescuing us from hell and promising us heaven at the end of our lives. Evangecubes are not an obscure item found only in a small section of religious circles, but are frequently found in conservative Protestant groups as teaching and evangelism tools.\textsuperscript{17}

What is more, a drive down interstates, particularly in the southern part of the United States, reveals billboards with the admonition, “Jesus Died in Your Place” alongside pictures of the cross. Catchphrases and slogans vouching for a substitutionary view of Jesus’ death abound on the North American landscape.

Therefore, it is not surprising that most western Christians believe that this is the reason for Jesus’ death, the orthodox and “official” understanding. What is little known is that not only is penal substitutionary atonement not the only Christian understandings of Jesus’ death on the cross, it took more than a thousand years for that theory to appear


\textsuperscript{17} For example, a quick internet search for “Evangecube” provides a variety for sale everywhere from western Christian resource sites to online shopping retailer, Amazon.
in theological thought, let alone dominate in western Christian theology.\(^\text{18}\) So, where did this particular influential conception of the saving significance of Jesus’ death on the cross come from? This section will trace the historical evolution of penal substitutionary atonement in white western Christianity, identifying those critical touchpoints beginning with the early church through the present day.

Tracing the History of Penal Substitutionary Atonement

For most of Christian history, no single theoretical consensus prevailed on what it means for Christians to say, “Jesus died for my sins.” Beginning with the witness of scripture, through the early church, images, metaphors, and motifs along with variety and multiplicity dominate the theological landscape. Gradually, over time, penal substitutionary atonement overtakes the prior multiplicity of conceptualizations that influenced western thought and imagination.

Those who uphold penal substitutionary atonement point to scriptural warrant as the origin of this understanding of the cross. They identify scriptures such as those in Matthew and Mark which describe Jesus’ death as a “ransom for many” (Mark 10:45; Matt 20:28). Or, where the Apostle Paul uses the expression, “sacrifice of atonement” (Rom 3:25), and 1 John says God sent the son “to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10), or where the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus died, “once and for all”

\(^{18}\) See Douglas Campbell, “An Apocalyptic Rereading of ‘Justification’ in Paul: Or, an overview of the argument of Douglas Campbell’s *The Deliverance of God.*” The Expository Times, 123, no. 8(2012), 382-393. Campbell challenges problematic readings of Paul’s soteriology in Romans 1-3 and 3-4 and their influence on western atonement theories. It is also important to note that there is an essential distinction between the doctrine of atonement and a theory of atonement. The doctrine of atonement is the claim that through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we are saved from sin and reconciled to God. A theory on atonement, however, is an explanation of both how and why Christ’s life, death, and resurrection were in some sense necessary to save us from sin and reconcile us to God.
(Hebrews 9:26) to restore our blemished relationship with God.\textsuperscript{19} While these passages in and of themselves do not communicate a coherent account of penal substitutionary atonement, and in fact, suggest multiple different images and conceptualizations of what is accomplished on the cross, proponents of penal substitutionary atonement interpret them as upholding a penal framework.

The Bible, however, speaks not of one atonement theory, or even atonement theories, but the saving significance of the cross through a variety of different images, metaphors, and motifs. In other words, there is no single correct image or metaphor for understanding the saving significance of the cross in the witness of scripture. There are plenty of places throughout the New Testament that allude to the cross. However, full theories on atonement logic are not what we discover in the pages of scripture. As Sally Brown writes, “Cross talk in the New Testament is almost bafflingly \textit{uns}ystematic and richly diverse. Biblical metaphors are evocative, yet unapologetically modest. No single metaphor provides a comprehensive, all-purpose explanation of the saving efficacy of Jesus’s death or parses the fine ‘logic’ or ‘mechanics of salvation.’”\textsuperscript{20} This lack of systematic speech about the cross does not mean that New Testament writers, particularly the Apostle Paul, did not think coherently about the meaning of the cross. The writers of the New Testament were not so much concerned with developing a comprehensive system or theory about the cross but instead wanted to address the good news of God’s redemptive activity for particular people in particular times and places using metaphorical language that was contextually relevant. Images from the marketplace, the public square, the courtroom, corporate worship, and the family household, were drawn

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{19} Suzanne Henderson and Mitri Raheb, \textit{The Cross in Contexts}, 1.  
\textsuperscript{20} Brown, \textit{Cross Talk}, 6.}
into relationship with Jesus’s death. An example of this is found in the second chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, where Paul reflects on the corporate impact of Jesus’s death and resurrection through the metaphor of reconciliation of God’s household. Paul writes, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.” The New Testament writers also do not hesitate to combine multiple metaphors to achieve desired rhetorical effects. Colossians 2:6-9 demonstrates this well. Woven together in this passage are metaphors of circumcision, the erasing of a legal record, a canceled debt statement, disarmed warriors, and captives led in a victory procession. No image dominates, and each qualifies all the others. Whatever the scriptures are doing in relationship to the cross, it is not developing atonement theory based on the singular metaphor of substitution.

Additionally, no early church council declared one theory of Christ’s death on the cross more authoritative than another, as was the case with the Doctrine of the Trinity or the divine-human nature of Christ, decided at the Councils of Nicaea or Chalcedon. As Cynthia Rigby explains,

When we think of the relevance of the “Word made flesh,” we consider it in relation to the Nicene idea that Jesus Christ is homoousios with the Father and the Chalcedonian (‘fully human; fully divine’). When we think of the triunity we bear in mind the statement that God is, simultaneously, the one who is three and the three who is one (‘one ousia; three hypostases’). But when we consider

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21 Ephesians 2:19, NRSV.
22 Seven councils in the early church established significant theological orthodoxies. Those councils include: The First Council of Nicaea in 325, the First Council of Constantinople in 381, the Council of Ephesus in 431, the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, the Third Council of Constantinople from 680–681 and finally, the Second Council of Nicaea in 787.
atonement, as it relates to redemption, there is no council that made any
determination, no statement that serves as a reference point. The reference point is
the cross itself, and the life, death, and resurrection of Christ in which it is
situated.23

Despite the fact that there was never an attempt by the early church to settle on a single
normative theory of the saving significance of Jesus’s death, thinking about the meaning
of the cross did shift from considering multiple images and metaphors present in scripture
to also include, specific theories of how and why Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection were
in some sense necessary to save us from sin and reconcile us to God.24

In 1930, Swedish theologian Gustav Aulen reviewed centuries of theology and
concluded that historically atonement theories fall into three overarching categories
which he identified as Christus Victor (“Christ the Victor”), substitution, and moral
influence. It would be misleading to argue that Aulen’s categorization covers every single
variation of thought on the atonement, or that the history of atonement theory developed
in neat linear sections. It is the case, however, that Aulen’s distinctions help to classify
and to trace the general arc of atonement theory. Therefore, his framework is the basis for
most conversations on the history of western atonement.

The dominant theories for the first several hundred years (the second through the
fourth centuries) mainly understood Jesus’s death as a part of a cosmic battle between the
forces of good and evil. Early Christians believed there was a "price" or a ransom for
Jesus's death. The price, however, was exacted by God but paid to Satan. In other words,

23 Cynthia L. Rigby, Holding Faith: A Practical Introduction to Christian Doctrine (Nashville: Abington
Press, 2018), 187.
24 While this section highlights trends and important touchpoints, it would be wrong to suggest that
developments in the understanding of Jesus’ death happened in a neat, linear fashion.
the human race, because of its sin, belonged to the Devil, and Jesus died to pay him the ransom. Later identified by Aulen as the *Christus Victor* (Christ the Victor) theory of the atonement, this explanation of the atoning death of Christ took on several different iterations.

One of the earliest articulations of the *Christus Victor* theory came from Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons (130-202 CE). In part, Irenaeus’ thinking on the atonement reflects a concern about the rising popularity of Gnostic ideas, insisting that evil had its source in matter and that human beings could achieve salvation by escape from the body through special knowledge.²⁵ Irenaeus countered this understanding by attesting that while God had given mortal humanity the gift of immortality, the problem was not finding an escape from physical matter, but the willful disobedience of the first humans Adam and Eve. According to Irenaeus, Adam and Eve’s sin corrupted all of humanity so that they lost God’s gift of immortality, and there was nothing that human beings could do to restore themselves to life and achieve the gift of salvation. Salvation was through Christ alone. Jesus’s incarnation, death, and resurrection freed and restored captive humanity from the powers of sin, death, and the devil.

In the latter part of the second century, Origen of Alexandria (185-254 CE) built on the ideas of thinkers like Irenaeus, developing the first full theory of how Jesus’s death was a ransom payment to the devil. Responding to Matthew 20:28 “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” Origen wrote, “To whom was it [the ransom] paid? Certainly not to God; can it then be to the evil one? For he had power over us until the ransom given to him on our behalf, namely

²⁵ Gnosticism (after *gnosis*, the Greek word for "knowledge" or "insight") is the name given to a loosely organized religious and philosophical movement that flourished in the first and second centuries CE.
the life of Jesus; and he was deceived in thinking he could keep his power.”26 According to Origen, the devil accepted the ransom payment, but the goodness of Christ was too much. It was torture to have Jesus in his possession, so he was forced to let him go. In the process, the devil lost both humanity and Christ, and humanity was set free.

Gregory of Nyssa (330-395 CE) also articulated a variation of the same idea by asserting that Jesus’s death was a ransom to the devil for the release of captive and sinful humanity, but that the payment was an intentional trap set by God. Jesus’s divinity tricked the devil because he only saw Jesus's humanity. Jesus’s divinity made it impossible for Jesus to remain in his grasp. As a result, the devil traded captive humanity for Jesus. Through Jesus’s death and resurrection, God triumphed over the devil and the power of death.

Contemporary western sensibilities might struggle to think about the devil as a part of the explanation of Jesus's death. However, that way of thinking made sense for the early church as followers of Jesus were a minority sect. For Christians in the first three centuries, the declaration that “Jesus was Lord,” stood in contrast to the dominant social structure which declared that Caesar was Lord. Both the church and the Empire required absolute loyalty. As a result, Christians often experienced empire-wide persecution. The cosmology of the time also led people to understand conflicts on earth as being intertwined with heavenly conflicts. Therefore, it is not surprising that theories of atonement were thought of in their earliest forms as a cosmic fight between God and the forces that opposed the will of God.

When Emperor Constantine (306-337 CE) made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christians were no longer a persecuted minority. Given this shift, the conflict-victory model no longer connected as profoundly to the reality of people’s lives and therefore became less relevant. As Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green write, “The tension between the empire and the church had, in the early days of the church, founded atonement theology grounded in the image of Christ conquering even in death. When the church became linked with worldly powers, then a conflict-victory model was less connected to people’s daily lives.” The Christus Victor understanding of the atonement was less popular and gradually fell out of favor.

Then, in the eleventh century, Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) wrote a paper titled Cur Deus Homo? or, “Why did God become human?” Anselm’s work is one of the seminal pieces of western atonement theory, laying the foundation for later iterations of substitutionary atonement. Rejecting any notion that Jesus’s death was a ransom payment to the devil, or part of a cosmic battle between good and evil, Anselm shifted the conversation around atonement to the context of the medieval code of honor and shame where social obligations were based on rank, with the honor due to those of the highest social standing. The stability of the system depended on maintaining the privilege of the “lord” at the top of the hierarchy. The landowner or lord lived in peace with his vassals or serfs at the intersection of a carefully managed series of reciprocal obligations. The lord provided capital and protection, and the vassal provided honor, loyalty, slavish fidelity,

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27 According to legend, Emperor Constantine had a vision of the cross and the motto in hoc signo vinces—“In this sign I conquer.” He adopted the cross as his military standard. Under Constantine, Christianity ceased to be a persecuted minority and instead became “established.” There have been challenges to the legitimacy of Constantine’s conversion. While no definitive conclusion exists, Constantine likely didn’t understand the meaning of the death of Christ as he adopted the cross for use on his battle flag.

28 Baker and Green, Recovering the Scandal of the Cross, 150.
and tribute. Any offense against the lord’s honor incurred a debt, that unless repaid, threatened his authority and thus the stability of the system. The necessary reparations depended on the severity of the crime and the rank of the offended person.

Applying the logic of this feudal system to atonement, Anselm understood the essential problem with salvation not as a debt "due" to the devil but as an offense committed against God. Human beings, he argued, traded their vocation of faithfulness and service to God for lives of sin, upsetting the divine order in the universe, and offending God’s honor. Reparations were necessary, but that was impossible for human beings since the depth and reach of sin, combined with God’s immeasurable status, undercut any human efforts to restore the relationship. As a result, Anselm argued that God became human because only someone fully human and fully divine could restore God’s honor and repair the breach between God and humanity. Therefore, Anselm gives singular importance to a substitutionary motif in which Christ’s sacrificial death provides satisfaction to God for the debt of honor owed to God by sinful humanity.

Anselm’s rejection of the idea that Jesus’ death was in any way a ransom payment to the devil, fundamentally changed the conversation around atonement. Primarily, Anselm opened the door for the party responsible for Jesus’s death to shift from the devil to God. As J. Denny Weaver writes, “Here is where we see Anselm’s deletion of the devil from the three-cornered relationship involving the devil, sinners, and God. With Satan deleted, remaining in the equation are God and the sinners who have offended God.” 29 The shift in thinking from the three-part equation of God, sinners, and the devil

to the two-part equation of God and sinners leads many scholars to see Anselm as the real beginning point for later theories of penal substitutionary atonement.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that the presence of the "motif of substitution began entirely with Anselm. In her book, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus*, Fleming Rutledge points to the presence of the theme of substitution (or exchange) in the Old, and New Testament scriptures, as well as some of the early church fathers. She writes, “The notion of substitution lies behind not only scattered individual passages but also large sections of scripture.” Rutledge wants to avoid any later charges brought on penal substitutionary theory from eliminating substitution as a legitimate, and in her view indispensable, theme in the saving significance of the cross. She also wants to counter any suggestion that the concept of substitution was non-existent for the first one thousand years of Christianity, suddenly appearing out of thin air with the atonement theology of Anselm at the turn of the first millennium. In this capacity, Rutledge offers a fair critique. The New Testament does contain scattered metaphorical references to the concept of substitution. For example, often sighted is 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.” Similarly, Galatians 3:13 says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’” Romans 5:8 reads, “God proves his

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30 Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 468. Discussion about the meaning of Christ’s death in the scriptures always involves the Greek prepositions *hyper* and *peri*, translated “for.” In her book, Rutledge evidences biblical scholar Charles B. Cousar who discusses the challenge of assigning exact meaning to the preposition “for” (*huper*), while also arguing that in specific passages such as Galatians 3:13, the word “for” (*huper*) clearly denotes, “in place of.”
love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” These passages do not use the word "substitute" or "substitution" directly. Nevertheless, some argue that the metaphorical image is present.

However, it is essential to note that there is a significant difference between any image of substitution present in the scriptures and the wholesale theories that later became attached to it. Rutledge also acknowledges this as a crucial distinction writing, “The simple biblical statement that Christ died not only on our behalf but also in our place should not be mistaken for the various elaborations that have been attached to it.”

Therefore, when describing the first true origins of the theory of penal substitutionary atonement, most scholars do not point back to the New Testament, but to Anselm, permanently changing the conversation. As Gustav Aulen writes, “Needless to say, it is not implied that Anselm’s teaching is wholly original. The stones lay ready to hand, but it was he who erected them into a monumental building.” Anselm is a significant turning point in the historical development of substitutionary atonement.

The Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century and their successors elaborated on Anselm’s ideas, making them relevant for their day and time. In particular, John Calvin (1509-1564) emphasized the image of substitution in the atoning death of Christ. Calvin, a lawyer, recast the cross within the legal context in which he was familiar. According to Calvin, divine law required the punishment of sin. Jesus’s death on the cross satisfied this requirement. In his death on the cross, Jesus submitted to and endured the justice of God on behalf of sinful humanity. In *Institutes of the Christian Religion,*

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Calvin writes, “God in his capacity as judge is angry toward us. Hence, an expiation must intervene in order that Christ as priest may obtain God’s favor for us and appease his wrath.” Elsewhere Calvin writes, “The priestly office belongs to Christ alone because by the sacrifice of his death, he blotted out our guilt and made satisfaction for our sins.”

The shift from the medieval system of feudal obligations understood by Anslem, to criminal law context articulated by Calvin marks another critical moment in the evolution of penal substitutionary atonement. Unlike Calvin, Anselm did not present the justice of God punishing Christ in our place. Anselm was focused on Jesus becoming human to pay the debt we owe in offending God’s honor. Calvin moved from Anselm’s feudal system to a judicial one. In the criminal justice system, “satisfaction” for the wrong that one has done has to do with capturing and punishing the guilty. Thus, in Calvin’s understanding, Christ does not pay a debt owed to God but bears the punishment of God against human sin.

One aspect of Calvin’s thinking that distinguishes him from other theories of penal substitutionary atonement is that his vocation as a pastor frames his theology. Therefore, his atonement approach, however problematic, lacks the overly wooden or forensic lens of theologians who both preceded and followed him. Calvin desired Christian believers to be free of anxiety about their standing before God. He demonstrates his pastoral sensibility when he writes that Christ was appointed to “care for the consciences of his people” so that we might live in “untroubled expectation of judgment.”

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34 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.16.5.
Fleming Rutledge goes a step further in describing how Calvin’s use of substitution in his theology of atonement is unique from others who develop the motif of substitution in relationship to the cross. Rutledge argues that scholars who study substitutionary atonement, particularly those seeking to criticize it, sometimes engage in a rough or undisciplined reading of Calvin’s texts, unfairly lumping him in with other theologians, not only missing his pastoral frame, but also the nuances of his more complicated language. In particular, Rutledge points to Calvin’s use of the word, “wrath,” arguing that, “We must try to understand that Calvin is not referring to an enraged, vindictive old man in the sky (or earth for that matter, as though Zeus or Odin were striding the globe). It is essential to read the ‘wrath of God’ as symbolic language. It is a figurative way of expressing the eternal opposition of God to all that would hate and destroy his good creation.”

According to Rutledge, Calvin sought to emphasize how fatally serious the breach is between humanity and God. God’s wrath is kindled, not against helpless individuals, let alone his Son, but against the sin that dwells within us, our unredeemed selves. She writes, “It is worth the extra work to understand Calvin’s language about the breach between sinful humanity and righteous God as a corrective to our narcissism.”

Writer and scholar Marilyn Robinson supports Rutledge’s assessment that one must invest in a more careful reading of Calvin’s theology—especially his notion of sin and total depravity as it is related to humanity’s salvation. She argues that Calvin’s understanding of God’s wrath and humanity’s total depravity is nothing new in the history of the Christian tradition which has always held that people are all sinners in need of grace, that “no one is or is likely to be perfected” in this life. Robinson offers a
reminder that for Calvin it was imperative theology communicate that people, “are all absolutely, equally, unworthy of, and dependent upon the free intervention of grace.” Another theologian, Cynthia Rigby, also affirms the importance of parsing Calvin’s seemingly harsh atonement language for the modern ear writing, “Significant is [Calvin’s] desire to convince us that the wrath of God is not really part of the divine character, but a pedagogical tactic for the sake of our salvation.” For Calvin, the language of God’s wrath emphasizes his belief that humanity has nothing to contribute to the redemptive process, that there is no hope for the redemption of humankind apart from Christ.

Rutledge and others are right that Calvin’s vocabulary of God’s “wrath and vengeance,” and his descriptions of a human beings as, “an heir of wrath, subject to the curse of eternal death . . . the slave of Satan, captive under the yoke of sin, destined finally for a dreadful destruction,” are difficult for the modern reader. They also make a convincing point that there is room for a more careful and therefore more generous reading of Calvin’s use of substitution, even as he built on Anselm’s thinking. However, regardless of how Calvin’s theology is nuanced, what is clear is that the shift from Anselm’s feudal model to Calvin’s legal one marks another essential change in the development of the concept of substitution in atonement thinking.

Protestant scholarship after Calvin and the Protestant Reformation evolved in a much more methodical, systematic direction. The language of substitutionary atonement lost any possible pastoral edge. Taking on a systematic, forensic emphasis, it most closely

resembles the understanding of penal substitutionary atonement articulated at the popular level today.

Charles Hodge (1797-1878) was the theologian best known for expanding on and solidifying these ideas during his fifty-year tenure at Princeton Theological Seminary. Some argue that Hodge was the leading theologian of the nineteenth century. His three-volume systematic theology, first published in 1871-1872 was republished again as recently as 1981, and his articulation of substitutionary atonement is still considered orthodox in many contemporary conservative-evangelical circles.

Hodge’s theology built on Anselm and Calvin, strengthening judicial imagery by drawing the criminal justice system of the nineteenth century into his atonement theory. Hodge understood the fundamental relationship between God and the world primarily in terms of the moral law and used judicial notions of the secular courtroom. He writes, “Christ’s work was of the nature of a satisfaction, because it met and answered all the demands of God’s law and justice against the sinner. The law no longer condemns the sinner who believes in Christ. . . It is here as in the case of state criminals. If such an offender suffers the penalty which the law prescribes as the punishment of his offense he is no longer liable to condemnation.” Hodge saw the nature of divine justice as a primary factor in understanding how and why Jesus’s death on the cross was necessary. Hodge writes that, “God cannot simply pardon sin without a satisfaction to justice, and that He cannot have fellowship with the unholy.” For Hodge, Christ’s death on the cross is significant because it, “met and answered all the demands of God’s law and justice

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42 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 492.
Hodge acknowledges that while it might be true that God can do whatever God wants, God cannot stop being just. Moreover, God’s justice, God’s moral excellence, as demonstrated in the witness of scripture, demands the punishment of sin. He writes, “If sin be pardoned it can be pardoned in consistency with the divine justice only on the ground of forensic penal satisfaction,” and continues by arguing that God’s justice, “renders it necessary that the righteous be rewarded and the wicked be punished.” The wages of sin is death, and therefore, Hodge explains that “every sin subjects the sinner to the wrath of God.” Through Christ’s death on the cross, God acts to save sinners from their alienation from God. Hodge acknowledges that the suffering of Christ may “illustrate and enforce truth, and exert a moral influence on others,” but these are all “subordinate and collateral ends.”

Hodge also argues that Jesus’s death on the cross was not a natural consequence of “subjecting himself to the common lot of humanity.” Instead, Hodge believes that God planned and choreographed Jesus’ suffering and death. Exegeting Galatians 13 he writes,

Exegeting Galatians 13 he writes,

These were divine inflictions. It pleased the Lord to bruise Him . . . These sufferings were declared to be on account of sin, not his own, but ours. He bore our sins. The chastisement of our peace was on Him. And they were designed as an expiation, or for the satisfaction of justice. They had, therefore, all the elements of punishment, and consequently it was in a strict and proper sense that he was made a cure for us.

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43 Ibid, 482
44 Ibid, 488-490
45 Ibid, 516
46 Ibid, 517
47 Ibid, 517
In addition to the passage from Galatians cited above, Hodge uses a significant number of Scriptural references as evidence for supporting his argument. In particular, he focuses heavily on the biblical image of blood sacrifice. Quoting Hebrew 13 and 14 he writes, “The Apostle clearly teaches in Hebrews 13, 14: ‘For if the blood of bulls and of goats . . . sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through (or with) an eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God.’”\(^{48}\) Although

Hodge cites a large amount of scripture, his language is logical, rationalistic and therefore remarkably unlike anything in the New Testament. For example, he uses phrases such as, “forensic penal substitution,” a phrase unfamiliar to the New Testament.

Hodge's use of Scripture gives the appearance of being biblical. However, his argument makes sense only if the reader approaches scripture with the same nineteenth-century presuppositions about justice, God's wrath, and judgment. As Baker and Green write, “Hodge explains the penal substitutionary model in a way that makes it appear self-evident that God must behave according to late-nineteenth-century American notions of justice. This understanding, however, leads him to depict God as having no other option but to act in ways that do not match up with the God revealed to us in Scripture and ultimately in Christ.”\(^{49}\) The consequences of which are that Hodge presents a God who wants to be in relationship with creation but is forced to deal with a sin problem akin to legal book-keeping that blocks that relationship. The solution is, as Baker and Green point out, “having God the Father punish God the Son. Rather than presenting a Father and Son who are one, Hodge has one member of the Trinity punishing another member of

\(^{48}\) Ibid, 483-484

\(^{49}\) Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 173.
the Trinity.”50 Certainly, Hodge and others who are proponents of the theory of penal substitutionary atonement are quick to point out that God the Father sent God the Son to die on the cross in our place out of love. However, Hodge’s understanding makes it too easy to conceive of God who punishes with retributive justice.

Over time, white western theologians developed new approaches to the penal substitution model. There is also a growing consensus in some conservative Protestant circles in America that penal substitutionary atonement needs to be rethought and revised. Some who articulate different approaches to penal substitutionary atonement argue that Charles Hodge is an unfair choice to represent all contemporary articulations of penal substitutionary atonement or substitutionary atonement. They point out that his scholarship is a gross caricature too easy to critique in comparison to other expressions of the substitution model. While there are indeed scholarly variations of substitutionary atonement that avoid some of the theological pitfalls of Hodge’s theology, Hodge’s version of penal substitutionary atonement closely resembles that which is still articulated at the popular level today. As Baker and Green write, “For many American Christians ‘penal satisfaction’ interprets the significance of Jesus’ death fully, completely, without remainder.”51 Therefore, Hodge’s penal substitutionary atonement remains most relevant to interpreting the meaning of Jesus’ death on the cross in contemporary contexts, is a solidifying touchpoint in the development of western atonement theory.

Throughout the history of the Christian movement, believers have searched for meaningful explanations of Jesus’ death on the cross. In recent centuries, penal substitutionary atonement developed into the theory most familiar, widely accepted

50 Ibid, 174
51 Ibid, 32
understanding of Jesus’s death. It is articulated inside and outside of the church, and is considered the orthodox understanding. However, a broad overview of white, western atonement theories reveals that penal substitutionary atonement is not the only understanding of atonement and that it was absent from the life of the theology of the white western church for more than a thousand years. Penal substitutionary atonement evolved gradually over time through critical touchpoints, primarily beginning with Anselm and culminating in the theology of Charles Hodge in the nineteenth century.
Presenting the Problem

Beginning with Anselm and culminating with Charles Hodge, penal substitutionary atonement evolved into an often-repeated, widely reflected view in the mainstream North American landscape. Despite its absence from the first thousand years of the early church and its gradual appearance in the development of western theology, it is repeated and absorbed today almost without question. Accompanying this widely accepted theory of Jesus’ death on the cross, are some troubling theological implications. Many scholars have identified and analyzed these challenges that issue from the theory’s logical and biblical disconnections to the more disturbing charges of violence and encouraging passive suffering and abuse. This section will not name every single problem related to penal substitutionary atonement. Instead, it will focus on those theologically problematic conclusions most critical for discipleship in the context of white, western post-modern Christianity.

Questioning Penal Substitutionary Atonement: Scripture

For Christians, the texts of the Old and New Testaments are considered the unique and authoritative witness to God’s saving activity in the history of the people Israel and supremely in Jesus Christ. Given the Scriptures’ central importance to the Christian faith, subscribers of penal substitutionary atonement naturally turn to specific biblical passages in support of the model. There are, however, several problems with penal substitutionary atonement’s use of and connection (or lack of) to the Scriptural witness.

First, it is reductionistic. Substitutionary atonement develops one image, one metaphor present in scattered scripture passages into an all-encompassing theory viewed as the only correct and needed explanation of Jesus’s death on the cross. In contrast, both
the Bible and the early church offer a number of ways to speak of the saving significance of the cross. For example, in *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church*, Peter Schmiechen identifies no fewer than ten “theories” in the western Christian tradition of the way Jesus’s death saves us, puts us right with God and the world. Unfortunately, penal substitutionary atonement disregards this diverse witness, reducing the conversation—as Kevin Vanhoozer notes—“from many metaphors to one, and from one metaphor to a single theory, preferring the clarity of unifying concepts to the messiness of multiple metaphors.” Thus, a complex and abundant collection of images on which to draw in order to speak about God’s redemptive activity within the context of people’s varied life experiences is lost.

In addition to underrepresenting the abundance of metaphors in the New Testament witness, penal substitutionary atonement is guilty of over-representing the image of punishment. As Sally Brown writes, “Not only is it extremely difficult to reconcile the full spectrum of New Testament metaphors with a penal view of Jesus’s death, but also where the metaphors of substitution occur, the notion of bearing punishment is largely absent.” Scripture texts such as those that describe Jesus’s death as a “ransom for many,” are plucked out and pointed to as evidence in support of substitutionary atonement as the definitive understanding of the cross.

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54 Sally Brown, *Cross Talk*, 58.
Many readers of the Bible assume that there is far more support for the penal view of Jesus’s death than is found there.

Penal substitutionary atonement also disconnects the cross from the grand narrative of scripture and the full context of Jesus’s life, ministry, and resurrection as witnessed to in the Gospels, giving the impression that God sends Jesus to earth as an isolated solution to humanity’s sin problem. For example, in his book *Hanging by a Thread*, Sam Wells recounts the larger store of God’s redemption in which the cross is placed,

The Gospels present Jesus as the embodiment of the Covenant, utterly Israel and utterly God. Jesus reenacts the great events of Israel’s history; being baptized in the Jordan to reflect Joshua’s entering the Promised Land across the Jordan, spending forty days in the wilderness to mirror Israel’s forty years, calling the twelve disciples to echo Israel’s twelve tribes, delivering a sermon on Mt Sinai to imitate Moses’ time with God on Mt Sinai, right up until his body is destroyed on the cross like Israel’s temple was destroyed by the Chaldeans. At the same time, the rejection of Jesus by the Pharisees and Sanhedrin is presented as the final among Israel’s long list of failures to honor the covenant. And yet, just as Israel was close to God in exile than ever elsewhere, so we are closest to God at the moment of Jesus’s crucifixion, his ultimate exile from God and from us, at any other moment.56

Removing the cross from this overall story not only diminishes the Biblical narrative and the full scope of God’s redemptive activity, but it also opens the Gospel to a dangerous

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form of Biblical myopia, attempting to tell the story of God while airbrushing out the narrative of the Hebrew Bible. We cannot make sense of Jesus and his saving activity apart from God’s activity and covenant with Israel, or without the cosmos as a whole.

Additionally, substitutionary atonement’s singular focus on the necessity of Jesus’s death to pay the debt of human sin reduces the indispensability of the incarnation to the last three days or three hours of Jesus’s life, thereby rendering Jesus’s life, ministry, and resurrection entirely unnecessary. It leaves one to wonder that if the whole point of Jesus’s life was to take the place of sinners and satisfy the demands of God’s justice by dying on the cross, why bother with the Gospel accounts of Jesus’s healing the sick, welcoming the stranger, and rising again from the grave? As Sam Wells again writes, “If Jesus were simply a component in a mathematical equation or legal formula, then why would the Gospels tell us so much about the disciples who deserted him, the women who followed him, the mother who loved him, the sinners he forgave, the sick he healed, the poor he accompanies, the blind he led?”57 Likewise, Sally Brown offers, “This [penal substitution] model makes the redemptive efficacy of Jesus’s death seem oddly disconnected from the substance of his life and ministry.”58 Furthermore, no account of Jesus’s death on the cross is complete without the sure and certain hope of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. As Fleming Rutledge writes, “It cannot be said too often: If Christ was not raised from the dead, we would never have heard of him. Tens of thousands were crucified in the Roman era; of all of these, the name of Jesus of Nazareth is the only one known to us.”59

57 Wells, Hanging by a Thread, 7.
58 Brown, Cross Talk, 58.
The disconnect between Jesus’s death and his ministry and resurrection ultimately obscures the essential fact that Jesus’s death was the consequence of his fidelity to God’s reign and his unswerving commitment to truth-telling and acts of healing that witness to that reign. Any atonement theory, including substitution, should be interpreted in the context of the entire incarnate life of Christ, a life that from the beginning was set on a path to the cross and includes the resurrection.

Furthermore, penal substitution discounts the critical first-century context of the biblical witness. In Jesus’s world, the cross was a tool of state-sanctioned violence, for the Roman Empire used the cross as a form of control and capital punishment for slaves, foreigners without rights, members of the lower class, or those who were perceived as enemies the government’s power and interest in the status quo. Any discussion on the meaning of Jesus’s death on the cross must consider both the cross’ historical reality and the range of its symbolic first-century meaning. As Donald Senior argues, “The historical background of crucifixion as an extreme and horrifying form of capital punishment provides an essential context for understanding the meaning of the cross in the New Testament.”\(^60\) The consequences of removing the cross from its first-century context deny the historical particularity of Jesus’s life, which should not be reduced to an abstraction. It also diminishes the scandalous idea that a Jew who was crucified by the Roman authority through a form of capital punishment was also the Son of God, the Savior of the world. It is his ignominious death that is saving. Moreover, removing the cross from its first-century context anesthetizes the Gospel from any association of Jesus’ death on the cross with the poor, outcasts, and persecuted of the world.

Questioning Penal Substitutionary Atonement: Christian Discipleship and Ethics

Essential to the Christian faith is the ongoing transformation of human life to mirror the divine life. Christians are called not only to believe things about God but are called to be in an ongoing transformative relationship with God. The theological tradition of the church calls this justification—the grace of God that pursues and redeem humanity—and sanctification—the work of the Holy Spirit in people’s lives after they have committed their lives to God, enabling them to grow in holiness and strengthened for service. The second set of problems with penal substitutionary atonement is that it distances the cross from any meaningful process of sanctification, including the practice of Christian discipleship and ethics, as well as, any authentic expression of Christian hope and Christian community.

In penal substitutionary atonement, merely believing in Jesus’s substitutionary death is efficacious for salvation. In this capacity, Jesus’s death on the cross functions more as a “fire insurance policy” saving sinners from punishment and hell and promising heaven at the end of life. Therefore, it places primary emphases on thanking God for God’s saving activity and believing in what God did through Jesus on the cross, rather than something God does for us that we are also called to participate in.

At best, penal substitutionary atonement’s integration between the cross and Christian discipleship comes as an afterthought, where Christian living is expressed (paradoxically) as a kind of grateful indebtedness, although the specific consequences of this indebtedness remain unclear. Because of this, salvation becomes, as Richard Rohr articulates, “a onetime transactional affair between Jesus and the Father, instead of an
ongoing transformational lesson for the human soul and all of history.”61 Or, as Baker and Green write, “According to the logic of the model, an individual could be saved through penal substitution without experiencing a fundamental reorientation of his or her life.”62 In other words, if Jesus’s death on the cross is necessary only to satisfy a legal requirement demanded by God’s justice, and that requirement is once and for all satisfied, it is hard to see what bearing Jesus’s death has in terms of patterning a Christian life and witness in any meaningful way.

The result is an ahistorical, amoral atonement separated from participation in the divine life as well as from how Christians relate to others in and outside the church or in broader, social-ethical issues. Christ’s birth, ministry, death, and resurrection are connected to the call to love God and love neighbor, to participate in the reconciliation of all peoples, and to care for the least and the lost—all of which led Jesus to the cross in the first place. Through his birth, teaching, death, and resurrection, Jesus pursues utter fidelity to the ways and will of God.

Also stemming from disengagement with persons and struggles in this life is the absence of an authentic expression of Christian hope. In penal substitutionary atonement the focus is on heaven as the great and glorious goal of existence, leaving no space for interpreting and engaging meaningfully with human suffering in the here and now. While the good news of the gospel proclaims that God’s victory over sin, evil, and death has been accomplished in Christ, it does not interpret the resurrection victory as eliminating all the creational and human suffering for which the cross stands, as a thing of the past.

62 Baker and Green, Rediscovering the Scandal of the Cross, 175.
Christian hope is a catalyst for action and participation that does not deny the suffering of the world, but engages followers in the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead, and therefore, that resurrection promise is alive and at work in the world. As Douglas John Hall writes,

Hope, as it is conceived under the sign of the cross, is not based on the capacity of humans (some of them!) to think positively, cheerfully, ‘hopefully;’ it is based on faith in the grace and providence of God. God, who brought Jesus again from the dead, is at work in the world to fulfill the promises of creation, appearances to the contrary. Such hope does not have to turn away from all hopeless things in order to sustain its hope. It can be honest about the way that developed nations are despoiling nature and oppressing the materially deprived; it can face the reality of ongoing wars, of devastating pandemics like AIDS, of the worldwide marginalization of women, of racial tension, and so forth. Hope that is fashioned ‘beneath the cross of Jesus,’ will even, despite itself, be driven to great and greater honesty at the data of despair, the realities that make for earthly hopelessness.63

Authentic Christian hope propels Christian believers toward engaging the world—a world that contains both the fragile nature of human life and the ongoing work of peace and justice. This fragile unfulfilled creation holds the resurrection promises of God, that there is more to life than cold hard facts that end in death.

A further consequence of penal substitution’s departure from Christian discipleship and ethics is an emphasis on individualism in favor of a communal

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accounting of human nature and redemption. In the substitutionary model, the atonement is only about a person and his or her relationship with God. Or more specifically, the salvation of an individual sinner from God’s impending wrath. This creates a soteriology that, as Rita Nakashima Brock writes, “falls short of what is necessary to restore right relationships and frame meaning in ways for life to flourish.”64 Essential to Christian faith is the understanding that the Spirit calls into being a new community, a people, who live corporately within the world as the body of Christ, and not individuals one by one. The result is a disconnect between Christian theology and Christian community and its vocation.

Some critics, like theologian Fleming Rutledge, point out that it is insufficient to argue that penal substitution does not adequately develop Christian character and practice. She insists that there has been an increased emphasis on resistance of evil and engagement with social justice in many churches where substitutionary atonement is a dominant concern. She also asserts that the criticisms made by these particular community’s discipleship and ethics are sometimes just a snub at another’s brand of Christianity—churches that resist evil just not the evils that their critics had in mind! In particular, she references the evangelical church’s causes of human trafficking, famine, Ebola, and persecuted Christians around the world. Rutledge is correct that many churches—evangelical, mainline, conservative, and progressive—are engaging in responsive practices of Christian discipleship and social justice, albeit different expressions. However, her argument that this engagement results from an understanding

of the saving significance of the cross remains unconvincing. The disconnection between Jesus’s death on the cross and meaningful practices of discipleship and ethics with and for self and others remains fundamentally separated at the popular level in the Western church and culture. Throughout American church pulpits, Sunday school classes, Christian camps, hymns, and praise songs both conservative and progressive, the cross is discussed in positive terms, with an emphasis on its “cash value” for our salvation.

Christian believers, through the work of the Spirit, recast their lives in light of Jesus’s continual call to “follow me.”65 Communities of faith might not agree on the causes or the means of engagement. However, Christian discipleship and ethics link theology with behavior, eternal matters with earthly ones, individually and communally.

**Questioning Penal Substitutionary Atonement: Violence**

The world in which we live is rife with violence—from the bedroom to the battlefield. Paradoxically, amid this violent world, Christianity proclaims the saving significance of Jesus, who died a violent death on a Roman cross. Over time, the centrality of Jesus’s violent death has come to dominate the western theological imagination, placing violence at the center of God’s saving activity.66

To begin with, penal substitutionary atonement portrays God’s nature as vindictive, finding it much more comfortable, even necessary, to punish rather than to forgive. The model argues that original sin creates a separation, an imbalance, for which God’s justice demands punishment. It also assumes that this imbalance of human sin is

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65 Matthew 4:19; Matthew 9:9 NRSV
66 Here I am speaking broadly of the term *violence* and *nonviolence*. Violence means to hurt, or to harm, including physical force, intented to damage or kill, but also contains systemic violence such as poverty, racism, and sexism. Nonviolence is identified with a broad system of attitudes and practices that are reflected in action, confrontation and alternatives that do not cause bodily or systemic harm.
corrected by death, with an innocent Jesus bearing the punishment that human beings
deserve. In other words, God the Father necessitates the death of God the Son in order to
satisfy the demands of God’s justice. In its crassest forms, penal substitutionary
atonement teaches: God punishes Jesus instead of me. In penal substitutionary atonement,
one is forced to conclude that the demands of God’s justice require that God is
uncompromising in God’s punishment of sin and that punishment exacts death. In a
playful but disturbing way, theologian Robin Collins demonstrates this emphasis on the
vindictive, violent character of God by placing penal substitutionary atonement within the
well-known New Testament story of the prodigal son.67 In Collins’s retelling, the
wayward prodigal son recognizes the error of his ways and returns home. However,
instead of welcoming his son with extravagant forgiveness, the father responds,

I cannot simply forgive you for what you have done, not even so much as to make
you one of my hired men. You have insulted my honor by your wild living.
Simply to forgive you would be to trivialize sin; it would be against the moral
order of the entire universe. Such is the severity of my justice that reconciliation
will not be made unless the penalty is utterly paid. My wrath—my avenging
justice—must be placated.

Collins also provides an alternative ending to the parable in which the elder brother
agrees to pay the debt of sin on his brother’s behalf by working extra in the fields. After
decades of work, the elder brother dies of exhaustion, satisfying the father’s demands of
justice, and the father and prodigal son live happily-ever-after.68

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67 Luke 15:11-32, NRSV
68 Robin Collins, “Understanding Atonement: A New Orthodox Theory,”
http://home.messiah.edu/~rcollins/Philosophical%20Theology/Atonement/AT7.HTM, (Accessed June 20,
2019).
This unforgiving violence placed at the center of the penal substitutionary atonement might ultimately lead one to conclude that Jesus came to save us from the wrath of God. Some protest that despite these gross caricatures, it is out of love that God sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. They affirm that God is a God of love, not of vengeance. However, affirming God’s love as the motivation for enacting the sacrificial death of Jesus, still leaves unaddressed the idea that God demands victims, sacrifice, and death—whether to satisfy the demands of justice or as an outpouring of love. Both options are equally distressing.

Moreover, the emphasis on God’s unforgiving violent character violates critical theological orthodoxies including the Doctrine of the Trinity and the Doctrine of the Incarnation, by splitting the Godhead with one member of the Trinity punishing another member of the Trinity, as well as, setting the will of God against God’s self, and destroying the sacredness of the body. The outcome of God’s unrelentingly punishing character is an image of God that does not match up with the character of God revealed in scripture and ultimately in Christ.

These observations about penal substitution’s emphasis on the implacable nature of God lead to the presence of additional violent elements. Not only is God’s character violent, but God uses violence to accomplish salvation. The consequences of this are two-fold. On the one hand, penal substitution relies on retributive justice, which means meting out punishment. On the other hand, God’s use of violence as a part of the divine plan upholds the myth of redemptive violence, which argues that violence has the potential to save if the cause is just.
In the case of retributive justice, penal substitution assumes that original sin creates an imbalance and the punishment of death corrects that imbalance. The assumption of retributive justice is virtually universal in North American culture and around the world, including the criminal justice system of the United States where crime demands punishment, and the larger the crime, the more severe the punishment with the most serious crimes deserving the ultimate punishment of death. This confluence of western notions of justice with the atoning death of Christ causes some scholars to argue that substitutionary atonement presents justice as a cultural product of the west steeped in an individualistic legal framework, rather than the understandings of justice in Scripture which is covenantal and relational and almost always synonymous with faithfulness and restoration.

Additionally, in retributive justice, God participates in an economy of retaliatory exchange where in the management of resources presupposes a divine ‘economy’ in which God distributes a particular resource (forgiveness) only after an appropriate payment (Jesus’ substitutionary death). It is an economy based on an “eye for an eye,” suggesting that God needs to be placated with death before God can love and forgive God’s creation.

Concerning redemptive violence, penal substitution implies that violence is a means of salvation. In penal substitutionary atonement, God wills the violent death of Jesus to achieve a higher cause—forgiveness and the possibility of salvation for humanity. Similarly, the myth of redemptive violence argues that violence, when the

69 The “Myth of Redemptive Violence” is attributed to the late theologian Walter Wink, professor at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York. Wink examined creation stories of the Ancient Near East and how the story of violence solving problems and creating peace is used over and over again throughout history, and very much in the present day.
cause is noble, has the power to bring peace, security, safety, and salvation—when the
good guys beat the bad guys. The myth of redemptive violence is the idea that a good
person with a gun is our only hope to beat a bad person with a gun.

The myth of redemptive violence is a powerful idea in western American psyche. It is present in children’s cartoons, adult television shows, and blockbuster movies. For example, most American superhero movies such as Batman and Superman, or children’s cartoons like Popeye rely on the myth of redemptive violence. These superheroes and good guys redeem and save the world through their guns and fists and explosives, defeating the villains and archenemies.

The myth of redemptive violence is also particularly compelling concerning western military power. War and military sacrifice are glorified in American culture as salvific, almost to the point of being beyond reproach. So powerful is the myth of redemptive violence concerning military power, worshipping communities go as far as to align the good news of the gospel with the freedom secured through war and military power. A disturbing example of this is Dallas First Baptist Church’s celebration of “Freedom Sunday.” The church describes the purpose of Freedom Sunday worship as “celebrating our freedom as Americans and our freedom in Christ with patriotic worship.”70 In this case, violence used by the military to maintain “peace” connects with the freedom believers receive as followers of Jesus Christ. As J. Denny Weaver writes, “Does it then surprise us that Christians envisioning a God who orchestrates violence as a part of the divine plan might justify violence, under a variety of divinely anchored claims

and images?” Penal substitutionary atonement reinforces the idea that state-sanctioned power mediated through a violent death is the solution that God intends rather than the problem that Jesus’s death exposes and redeems. Jesus’s death on the cross and his resurrection must lay bare the myth of redemptive violence for what it is: a myth. Violence never saves. At best, it has the power to destroy or prevent something worse, but it cannot create life or restore broken relationships.

It is only a small step from God-directed, and God-induced violence to the legitimization of human suffering or the idealization of the victim, glorifying sacrificial suffering.

Substitutionary atonement presents Jesus as a model of voluntary submission to innocent suffering and death, willingly agreeing to bear the punishment deserved by sinful humanity and required by divine law. In doing so, Jesus’s self-sacrifice becomes a model for suffering love. As Rebecca Ann Parker writes, “When theology presents Jesus’ death as God’s sacrifice of his beloved child for the sake of the world, it teaches that that highest love is sacrifice. To make sacrifice or to be sacrificed is virtuous and redemptive.” God’s character and love are drawn into question if God is imagined as demanding death or suffering, either as a satisfaction for sin or as a moral example. This is also true if Jesus’s self-sacrifice was undertaken willingly. A relationship that requires the self-destruction of one member, for the sake of another person or persons, is a highly questionable form of love.

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71 Weaver, “Violence in Christian Theology,” 229.
Beginning in the latter half of the twentieth century, located critiques—coming primarily from feminist, liberation, and post-colonial theologians—began to question the role this idealized suffering and submission plays in traditional western atonement theories. In particular, feminist, womanist, and Asian feminist writers point out that glorifying passive suffering through the cross inadvertently justifies abuse and conveys the impression that one is to suffer silently in one’s place, or sacrificially endure out of love. As Merit Trelstad writes, “Thirty percent of women can expect to be beaten or abused within their lifetime. And ‘This is my cross to bear’ is one of the most common justifications that women give as to why they deserve to be beaten or why they cannot leave an abusive situation.”

The rise of the “Me Too” movement in recent years continues to solidify the physical and emotional violence and sexual harassment that women experience and the pressure they often feel to suffer silently, or to love and endure in relationships that are toxic, harmful, or abusive. A provocative article in the Christian Century Magazine entitled “Why I Stayed” lifts up the voices of women sharing dangerous cultural and theological pressures that encourages them to remain in abusive relationships. One woman in particular speaks to the church’s role in offering Jesus as an exemplary model of self-sacrifice. She writes, “Youth pastors had us dramatize The Giving Tree, by Shel

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74 The Me Too movement (or #MeToo movement), with a large variety of local and international alternative names, is a movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault. The movement began to spread virally in October 2017 as a hashtag on social media in an attempt to demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace. Tarana Burk, an American social activist and community organizer, began using the phrase "Me Too" as early as 2006, and the phrase was later popularized by American actress Alyssa Milano on Twitter in 2017.
Silverstein. A girl always played the tree. The tree was Jesus. We were like Jesus.”

What is more, women and girls are typically culturally conditioned into submissive roles, or taught to abnegate their selfhood. They are nurtured into offering love to others without ever claiming the right to love, comfort, understanding, or self-development for themselves. It is through the western church’s traditional teachings on the cross, people in general, and women in particular, internalize the harmful spirituality of self-sacrifice and the willingness of love to suffer.

Similarly, there is a connection between gender oppression and racial oppression. The vicarious suffering of Jesus feeds systems of white supremacy and specifically reinforces the violence experienced by African Americans in the history of racism in the United States.

One expression of the connection between Jesus substitutionary suffering and racial oppression comes from womanist theologians who identify Christ’s surrogacy, demanded by God or voluntarily offered by Jesus, as legitimizing black women’s experiences of coerced and voluntary surrogacy in roles ordinarily filled by white women or white men. For example, Delores Williams points out how “black female slaves were forced to substitute for the slave owner’s wife in nurturing roles involving white children.”

She then makes the connection that to glorify the idea of Jesus as the helpless surrogate for sinners on the cross is to “glorify suffering” and unacceptably render this exploitation of black women as ‘sacred.’”

JoAnne Marie Terrell also points to examples

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of black women’s continued surrogacy in postmodernity, “The targeting, censuring, and scapegoating of young, black men through the criminal justice system, black women continue in surrogate roles as providers for their families, as ‘mothers and fathers’ for their children.” In substitutionary atonement, Jesus represents the ultimate surrogate standing in the place of someone else: sinful humanity. Black women rightly question the dangers and relevance of this Christian sacrificial tradition present in substitutionary atonement.

Additional concerns related to the voluntary suffering and sacrifice of Christ and the history of race and racism in the United States, include the use of substitutionary atonement to encourage slaves to suffer in place, accepting slavery as their cross to bear.

Further, in her book, What’s Faith Got to Do With it? Black Bodies/Christian Souls, Kelly Brown Douglas makes the connection between traditional atonement theories such as substitutionary atonement and the violence of lynching. She writes, “If one follows the theological logic of Christianity’s classical atonement tradition, the Christian God is one who some way accepts human sacrifice. A crowd that lynches, therefore, would not repulse such a God. A God that sanctions human sacrifice as brutal as the crucifixion can serve as a divine ally for those who make such a sacrifice—even a sacrifice as brutal as lynching.” The violence present in substitutionary atonement functions far too often as a warrant for relationships—political, institutional, domestic—of domination. It mystifies violence in the language of sacrificial love, therefore obscuring violence and the ability to name the dangerous theology that emerges from that

same violence. Christians must see Jesus not as a warrant for sacrificial suffering, but as the incarnation of God empowering the Christian community to work against death and oppression.

Penal substitutionary atonement developed gradually in white western evangelical Christianity and now maintains almost universal orthodoxy. Despite its almost total acceptance, it is a problematic way of thinking about and understanding the saving significance of Jesus’s death and resurrection. In addition to numerous other challenges, it presents an atonement theory profoundly disconnected from the witness of scripture, as well as Christian discipleship and ethics. Additionally, it places retributive, redemptive, and oppressive violence at the heart of God’s saving activity. The collective impact of these theological challenges is an impoverished and potentially dangerous way of understanding the cross and the resurrection.

Rethinking the Saving Significance of the Cross
In recent years, scholars have not only identified the problems with substitutionary atonement but also offered alternative methods for thinking about Jesus’ death and resurrection. Therefore, this section will examine three possibilities for thinking about the redemptive work of the cross in the postmodern context that counter the problems offered in the previous chapter.

Rethinking the Cross: Embracing Variety and Multiplicity
In 1930, Swedish theologian Gustav Aulen reviewed centuries of theology and concluded that all atonement theories fall into three overarching categories: Christus Victor (“Christ the Victor”), satisfaction, and moral influence models of atonement. Aulen’s distinctions help to classify and to trace the general arc of atonement theory and serve as the basis for most western conversations on the history of atonement. Unfortunately, Aulen’s classification provides an overly narrow menu of atonement theory, assuming that there is only one right way to think about the cross. In contrast, recent scholarship embraces multiplicity and diversity, returning to the witness of the New Testament and the early church, wondering as Sally Brown does, “What if the local, apparently ad hoc, and sapiential character of New Testament cross talk, in all its metaphorical diversity, is not an obstacle to be avoided, but a path to be followed?” In her book, Cross Talk, Brown points to the Apostle Paul as one example in scripture and the early church who embraced an assortment of metaphors to speak about Jesus’ death. She writes that Paul

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80 Change theorist Ronald Heifetz identifies two types of challenges in change: adaptive and technical. Technical change is defined as those problems that can be solved by the knowledge of experts, whereas adaptive change requires new learning.
talks about the cross in ways that are always, “context-specific, vivid, and varied,” avoiding a single metaphor in service to a single theory.\textsuperscript{81}

Embracing diversity in atonement theory is also relevant to rethinking the cross with regards to the nature and function of metaphorical speech. Atonement theory is meant to systematize the mechanics of salvation, the how and why of Jesus’s death. In contrast, metaphors seek to illuminate, pointing beyond the thing we wish to talk about to some other thing. As Sally McFague writes, “Metaphor is seeing one thing as something else, pretending ‘this’ is ‘that’ because we do not know how to think or talk about ‘this’ so we use ‘that’ as a way of saying something about it.”\textsuperscript{82} Or, G. B. Cardi describes it, “metaphor is a lens.”\textsuperscript{83} Therefore, one can say that atonement metaphors are lenses through which we understand the atonement as like something else, gaining a clearer insight into its redemptive significance. French philosopher Paul Ricoeur pushes the semantic (meaning-generating) power of metaphor even further. He argues that metaphor is not just a series of images that we substitute for other things, but something that grabs our imagination and challenges our categories. Or, as Anthony Thiselton claims in \textit{New Horizon Hermeneutics}, “Metaphor produces new possibility of imagination and vision; narrative creates new configuration which structures individual and corporate experience.”\textsuperscript{84} This is also to say, speech about the atonement is always metaphorical. That is, Jesus was not an actual sacrifice—slain by a priest on an altar. Likewise, Jesus’s death was not a literal victory, or debt payment, or ransom. What actual battle did he win or ransom payment did he offer? Instead, Jesus's death is described through metaphors

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 30-32.  
\textsuperscript{84} Anthony Thiselton, \textit{New Horizons in Hermeneutics} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 351.
addressing the concrete reality of what God has done through Jesus Christ, and illuminating new possibilities for seeing God’s divine action hidden within the cross. The atonement is too much for human language to speak of adequately. One uses metaphors and models to get a grasp on what exactly God has done. As Kevin Vanhoozer points out, “The operative concept in postmodern theological understandings of the atonement is excess, not exchange. The death of Jesus exceeds our attempts to explain it.”

Metaphors are also used with regard to the cross because claiming that a shameful execution by a Roman cross is the redemptive action of God is in of itself enigmatic. Christians need multiple metaphors to assist in making sense of the confluence between this historical event and its redemptive claims, offering fresh, imaginative possibilities of the dynamic relationship between human beings with God in the atonement.

Additionally, embracing multiple metaphors recognizes the contextual nature of all theology which is shaped by our sociopolitical and cultural locations. In his book, *A Community Called Atonement*, Scot McKnight illustrates how context is especially relevant in atonement conversations when talking about what one means by “human” and what one means by “sin,” arguing that to say Jesus’s death on the cross saves “human-beings” from “sin” is not so simple.

When defining “human,” it is possible to say that we are all human beings made in the image of God. It is also true that humans are male and female, transgender, Western, Eastern, Southern, Northern, Africa, African American, Asian, Asian American,

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Middle Eastern, white, suburban, rural, and urban—to name a few! As McKnight wonders, “Does atonement mean the same thing for an empowered suburban male as it does an unempowered inner-city female or a rural middle-aged female? For an aristocrat as it does an immigrant? What does atonement mean for a young woman reared by loving parents who provided everything, including a good example and set boundaries?”

One could surely ask similar questions about what it means to be human within all sociopragmatic contexts.

Similarly, how one defines sin is complex. There is a diversity of metaphors for sin present in Scripture, as well as, the notion that sin is both personal and systemic; it is individual and communal. Just as with what one means by “human,” what one means by “sin” is also shaped by social location, culture, and gender concerns. For example, is sin the same for a male as it is a female? Feminist theologians argue that traditional definitions of sin almost always identify sin as selfishness or pride, failing to consider that sin can also be a lack of a sense of self.

Additionally, some scholars, such as British theologian Alan Mann, contend that in the postmodern context, we live in a “sinless society.” Meaning, that postmodern people tend to be pre-moral rather than amoral, and are generally disconnected from others. Therefore, defining sin simply as offense against God or others does not resonate.

For all of these reasons, many scholars like Scot McKnight argue that western scholarship should think of atonement metaphors more like golf clubs: Whatever situation one is addressing one ought to select the most appropriate metaphor (e.g.,

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ransom, sacrifice, victory, reconciliation, etc.) to communicate how it is that Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection address particular circumstances.\(^90\) He writes, “We need each of them. We need justification and sacrifice and substitution and satisfaction and ransom and recapitulation and incorporation and imputation because each, in its own language game of metaphorical exploration and imagination, leads us to the core of it all: reconciliation (which is a metaphor) with God, self, others, the world.”\(^91\) Some do not believe that there is room for the metaphor of substitution or sacrifice in the golf bag, while others argue that substitution and sacrifice are essential and indispensable metaphors, among many others, for talking about the saving significance of the cross.

Ultimately, embracing multiplicity and variety serves as an exercise in postmodern theological humility. As Cynthia Rigby argues, “As the portrayals of Jesus vary in the four Gospels, each shedding fresh insight on the figure of Jesus Christ, so the various approaches to atonement challenge us not to become overly confident in our ability to summarize what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.”\(^92\) Additionally, resisting the urge to identify a master theory also creates space for minority views, communities with significant legacies of oppression and victimization, and those whose voices are covered up by the theological bias toward singularity and “objectivity.” Brian Blount lifts up a helpful example in his book, *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh*. He writes, “The status of recognition belongs to the congregations of Euro-American scholars, ministers, and lay folks who have, over the centuries, used their economic, academic, religious, and political dominance to create the illusion that the Bible, read through their experience, is

\(^90\) Ibid, xiii
\(^91\) Ibid, 38
\(^92\) Cynthia Rigby, *Holding Faith*, 197.
the Bible read correctly. The whisper [of God’s voice] took on white flesh.”93 Western atonement theory often attempts to speak orthodoxy for the whole of the Christian experience. Appreciating and utilizing the multiplicity of approaches found in Scripture and the tradition makes contemporary atonement theology richer and more robust, and therefore more faithful. Embracing multiplicity and variety allows the western church to speak fully to the particularity of context, embracing new imaginative possibilities through which God the Spirit enacts the ongoing work of redemption in the lives of all people here and now.

Rethinking the Cross:
The Cross and the First-Century Greco-Roman and Jewish World

In white western atonement theory, Jesus bearing our sin and its penalty is the primary way to comprehend the cross. As Timothy Gorringe writes, “For many Christians, the ‘meaning of the cross’ is simply self-evident. They do not reflect that they have been taught to understand it through hymns and paintings, and through the way it is described in liturgy—‘a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction.’”94 Regrettably, this conventional interpretation places the cross outside of human history. Jesus comes to earth as the answer to the problem of human sin, articulating the relationship between God and humankind in terms of an ahistorical, abstract legal formula, disconnected from Jesus’s birth, life, and teaching. Therefore, often missing are the numerous political and religious facets of Jesus’s first-century context and how those details connect with the saving significance of the cross, as well as faithful discipleship

within contemporary life. As J. Denny Weaver acknowledges, penal substitutionary atonement “is a theology that is ‘not relevant’ for social ethics.”95 Any proper consideration the cross in the postmodern context must place it in the first-century historical, religious, and political context operating within the biblical narrative.

Religious and historical scholars grant that the cross was a political symbol long before it was a religious one, a tool of state-sanctioned violence and punishment. As Timothy Gorringe writes, “Exegetes of every school are agreed that a judicial execution, using torture reserved for slaves and guerrillas, stands at the center of the entire New Testament.”96 This fact posed a considerable problem for the first Christians. In particular, Jesus’s death on a Roman cross was a challenge for Jews taught in the Torah that anyone who died in such a manner was cursed.97 It was also complicated for Jesus to die in this manner as it defied widespread expectations that the coming Messiah would rescue God’s people from the clutches of Rome—a warrior king like King David. The Apostle Paul demonstrates this disconnect in writing, “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God,”98 Paul establishes that worshiping a “lord” who was crucified by imperial officials as a criminal and an insurrectionist defies conventional views of power and strength, let alone claims to Messiahship.

Crucifixion in the first-century Greco-Roman context was a feared and heinous form of public execution. “The very word cross in ancient times,” Thelma Megill-Cobbler writes, “evoked strong emotions because it was symbolic of the ultimate penalty

95 Weaver, “Violence in the Atonement,” 231.
96 Gorringe, God’s Just Violence, 59.
97 Deuteronomy 21:23, NRSV
98 1 Corinthians 1:18, NRSV
and most excruciating form of death.”99 The Romans of Jesus’s day were far from the first people to use crucifixion,100 but under the Roman law, it became a more formal mode of capital punishment reserved almost exclusively for non-citizens, particularly slaves and members of the lower class, or aliens who had no claim to civic rights. A Roman citizen, however guilty, was never subjected to the shame and horror of such a punishment. For example, in a famous quotation from 63 BCE, Cicero defends his client, a Roman citizen against the punishment of crucifixion: “The very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but his thoughts, his eyes and ears. For it is not only the actual occurrence of these things, but the very mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man.”101 Crucifixion was too horrifying for a Roman citizen to talk about, let alone, experience. Or, as Suzanne Henderson writes, “Only those already considered expendable could be crucified. The sentence was off limits for Roman citizens, as well as for subjects of any repute in their own context.”102

Part of the effectiveness of crucifixion is that it also took place in a public setting, functioning as a deterrent, and as a way to discredit the cause of the one crucified. This was especially true when applied to crimes of treason and other actions that disrupted the carefully managed and stratified “public order.” New Testament scholar Paula Frederickson notes, “Crucifixion was a Roman form of public service announcement: Do not engage in sedition as this person has, or your fate will be similar. The point of the

100 On the historical context of crucifixion, see Senior, Why the Cross? Reframing New Testament Theology; see also Henderson and Raheb, The Cross in Contexts: Suffering and Redemption in Palestine; see also Hengel, Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Cross.
exercise was not the death of the offender as such, but getting the attention of those watching. Crucifixion first and foremost is addressed to an audience.\textsuperscript{103}

It is also the case, that Roman use of crucifixion took place against the backdrop of what historians refer to as the Pax Romana, or the Roman Peace, the time between 27 BCE to 180 CE, in which Rome maintained internal stability and minimal unrest. This “peace,” however, came at considerable cost for those who lived under the empire’s control. Crucifixion was a tool of the powerful reminding those at the margins of their inferiority and powerlessness, and thus maintaining order and tamping down on any who would question or challenge the status quo.

In part, placing the cross within this first-century political context reveals that Jesus’s death on a Roman cross was not unique. He was hardly the first or only person to be crucified. Jesus died as one of countless victims of state-sanctioned violence in a world where violence in a number of forms—social, political, and economic—was the order of the day.

But for Christians, Jesus death on a Roman cross does stand apart as decisive in the history of the world, a tipping point when the axis of the universe fundamentally shifted toward God’s new world order. So, the question is, how and why did Jesus become a target for such an extreme form of capital punishment? And why is Jesus’ ministry and saving death against the backdrop of a violent imperialist and nationalist Roman agenda significant for those who follow him?

First, Jesus’s ministry announced the coming to earth of a new kingdom directly challenging the current power structures and proclaiming a different world order. In Luke

chapter four, a passage that scholars often refer to as Jesus, “inaugural address,” Jesus, drawing on Jewish scripture,\(^{104}\) proclaims what this ministry, the arrival of God’s reign on earth, looks like:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me to bring good news \textit{to the poor}

He has sent me to proclaim release \textit{to the captives}

and recovery of sight \textit{to the blind}

to let the \textit{oppressed} go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.\(^ {105}\)

In the context of state-sanctioned violence and imperial power, Jesus makes clear that God’s inbreaking kingdom is a liberating force that pursues human dignity and flourishing for all, and that God’s power is especially found wherever Jesus the Christ works on behalf of society’s most vulnerable members. Thus, as Timothy Gorringe writes, “Jesus comes preaching the kingdom, and his teaching is directed to a new way of conceiving and practicing human relationships.”\(^ {106}\) Though he appears as a spiritual figure, Jesus’s life and ministry pledges allegiance to a different kind of “empire.” This is not just a spiritual kingdom but, as Suzanne Henderson writes, “signaled that God’s sovereign rule in heaven would soon occupy and renew the whole earth,” and “to declare God’s coming kingdom was to pledge allegiance to an alternative and more enduring kind of empire.”\(^ {107}\)

\(^{104}\) In preaching a robust hope for a different world order, Jesus drew from the resources of Jewish tradition that had formed and shaped him. God’s people had been subjects of a foreign power before and the prophets often served as a mouthpiece for God’s alternative reality, challenging evidence of political and economic oppression with a “word from the Lord.”


\(^{106}\) Gorringe, \textit{God’s Just Vengeance}, 60.

Jesus’s preaching of God’s inbreaking kingdom was also coupled with active resistance to the existing world order that was both profoundly spiritual and firmly political. For example, the writer of Mark’s gospel illustrates Jesus’s resistance to the current world order with a side-by-side accounting of two first-century banquets.\textsuperscript{108} In the first story, Herod Antipas, the Roman governor of Galilee, holds a lavish feast for privileged guests at his palace, during which he murders John the Baptist in a display of power, greed, and lust. Immediately following that narrative, Jesus feeds five thousand people at a different kind of lavish banquet that, “takes place not in a palace but in the wilderness; it has a guest list in the thousands, rather than an elite few; it nourishes rather than kills; and it transforms limited resources into abundance, rather than supplementing opulent wealth with human flesh.”\textsuperscript{109} Within the pericope Jesus echoes the promise from Luke chapter four through the words of the prophet Isaiah, “Lo, to everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”\textsuperscript{110}

It was Jesus’s commitment to and enacting of a different kind of imperial kingdom that pushed him to the political and religious cauldron of Jerusalem during the Passover, and ultimately to his death on the cross. As Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan write, “The first passion of Jesus was the kingdom of God, namely, to incarnate the justice of God by demanding for all a fair share of a world belonging to and ruled by the Covenantal God of Israel. It was the first passion for God’s distributive justice that

\textsuperscript{108} Mark 6: 14-44, NRSV \\
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, 31 \\
\textsuperscript{110} Isaiah 55:1-2
led inevitably to the second passion by Pilate’s punitive justice.”  

Jesus made the kingdom of God, the rule of God, visible. As J. Denny Weaver argues, “defending poor people, raising the status of women, raising the status of Samaritans, performing healings and exorcisms, preaching the reign of God, and more. His mission was to make the reign of God present in the world in his person and his teaching, and to invite people to experience the liberation it presented.” Jesus’s mission to make the reign of God visible was so threatening to the current world order, that they killed him.

Somehow, though, Jesus’s vision and proclamation of God’s new world order did not expire with his last breath. Instead, God raises Jesus from the dead and his shameful death on a Roman cross is transformed to a scandalous symbol of liberation, redemption, and new life.

Reflecting on the terrible historical reality of crucifixion as a cruel instrument of capital punishment alongside Jesus’s alternative kingdom message present in Scripture, the cross is not only God’s decisive rebuke of violence and human understandings of power, but it is also synonymous with a way of discipleship through vulnerable solidarity.

First, the cross exposes the brutality of state-sanctioned violence for what it is—contrary to all appearances—powerless. Paradoxically, the cross inverts the world’s value system with the news that hope comes by way of defeat. The Apostle Paul writes about it this way, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world,

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things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are.”\textsuperscript{113} Paul understood that through the cross, God’s power was “made perfect in weakness.”\textsuperscript{114} The cross of Christ is a reminder of the presence of God in places of vulnerability, and the empty cross is a reminder that the powers of suffering and violence, sin and death do not have the last world. This inversion of God’s power, among other things, saves us, as Suzanne Henderson writes, “from the delusion that strength lies in political powers exerted coercively over other human beings,” and from the stranglehold of sinful systems and their ability to save us.

Secondly, for those suffering under the weight of violence and oppressive systems, the cross also places God decisively in the midst of crucified people. As was noted earlier, crucifixion—whatever its justification in particular individual cases—communicated the social status of the crucified. It was a punishment reserved only for those who were outcast in society or a threat to the social order. Given this, it was an appropriate fate for Jesus. His proclamation of the kingdom of God placed him in proximity to and in relationship with people that were on the margins of society, challenging the social and political order of the day. As Kelly Brown Douglas writes, “Jesus was crucified because he identified with the ‘crucified’ class of people and because he jeopardized social and political stability. The crucifixion of Jesus thereby reaffirms both whom Jesus was for and what Jesus was against. He was for those rendered of no value by dominant power and he was against such power.”\textsuperscript{115} That Jesus

\textsuperscript{113} 1 Corinthians 1:27-28, NRSV
\textsuperscript{114} 2 Corinthians 2:9
\textsuperscript{115} Kelly Brown Douglas, \textit{What’s Faith Got to Do With It? Black Bodies/Christian Souls}, 86.
was crucified on a Roman cross underscore his solidarity with those victimized and
demonized by exploitative, dehumanizing power.

In his book, *The Cross and the Lynching tree*, theologian James Cone draws this
connection between the presence of God in Christ crucified and the “crucified peoples”
of history. He writes,

Unfortunately, during the course of 2,000 years of Christian history, this symbol
of salvation has been detached from any reference to the ongoing suffering and
oppression of human beings—those whom Ignacio Ellacuria, the Salvadorian
martyr, called the ‘crucified peoples of history.’ The cross has been transformed
into a harmless, non-offensive ornament that Christians wear around their necks.
Rather than reminding us of the ‘cost of discipleship,’ it has become a form of
‘cheap grace,’ and easy way to salvation that does not force us to confront the
power of Christ’s message and mission.  

Throughout his theological work, Cone argues persuasively for the connection
between the crucified Christ and the African American experience of lynching in the
history of the United States, and the redemptive power of Jesus’s solidarity with the
vulnerable and hurting even unto death. He writes, “the cross places God in the midst of
crucified people, in the midst of people who are hung, shot, burned, and tortured. . . just
knowing that Jesus went through an experience of suffering in a manner similar to theirs
gave them faith that God was with them, even in suffering on lynching trees, just as God
was present with Jesus in suffering on the cross.”  

Mitri Raheb writes similarly about

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the experience of the people living today in twenty-first century occupied Palestine,

“Jesus shares our story, our history, our destiny. Christ is very human. Christ is in
solidarity with us. This is the power of the cross. In the Crucified we see ourselves; in his
pain we see our pain. In his wounds we recognize our wounds.”  

God’s presence found among the crucified people of the world, in the midst of
human suffering, does not romanticize or trivialize suffering, nor does it endorse its
perpetrators. Instead, it is God’s liberating presence with and for those who are despised,
devalued, or dismissed, exposing true power, and for those who “have eyes to see,”
revealing the very face of Christ.

Finally, the cross also means that for those who benefit from the privilege and
prosperity of power—I count myself among that group—the way of discipleship is clear
and challenging. Christians are called not only to join Jesus in proclaiming the good news
of the kingdom of God that all people are loved and valued, but to actively join in
resisting all political forces that subjugate, separate, and kill. This means not only
recognizing and confessing our participation in those forces, including “their present
manifestations in such powers as militarism, nationalism, racism, sexism, heterosexism,
and poverty that still bind and oppress,” but joining in the life-giving rule of God.

Through his ministry, Jesus’s got proximate to the weak, demonstrating vulnerable
solidarity with those on the margins, offering the life-giving power of God. Jesus’s
proximity did more than endorse the concerns of the vulnerable, his vulnerable solidarity
with them made him vulnerable too, even to the point of death on a Roman cross.

Jesus’s saving death does not shy away from the political implications of pledging allegiance to God’s kingdom—either for Jesus or for his followers. His death on a Roman cross is a reminder that those in power deemed him a threat to the systems and status quo of the current world order. Moving too quickly to personalize or spiritualize the cross overlooks historical and biblical evidence that his death was more than an isolated event to deal with humanity’s sin problem. Appropriately located, Jesus’s death and resurrection points followers toward a cruciform pattern of faithful obedience to the kingdom of God. Therefore, the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ is an invitation to pledge allegiance to a different kind of life-giving kingdom, even as obedience to this crucified savior makes us vulnerable to a culture of death.

Rethinking the Cross: Non-Violent Atonement
The cross is nothing but violent. As was mentioned in the previous section, the cross was a torturous form of state-sanctioned violence. Traditional atonement scholarship like penal substitutionary atonement places this violence, either as the consequence of divine judgement or as a result of self-sacrificial love, at the heart of the cross’s redemptive power. In other words, central to western Christian theology is the belief that God saves humankind through suffering in our place on the cross. This fixation on the violence Jesus endured on the cross permeates western Christian thought. As Rita Nakashima Brock writes, “Once [Jesus] dies, that is all that he seems to do. The crucifixion is one of the most recognizable images in all of western art. His death becomes the screen onto which is projected every imaginable human suffering—an image so characteristic of western Christianity that it is nearly impossible to imagine a time when his crucifixion
did not claim the center of Christian art and piety.” Additionally, in more recent times, the saving violence of the cross features centrally in such cultural events as Mel Gibson’s widely viewed film, *The Passion of the Christ*. Those watching Gibson’s film are subjected to, if nothing else, overwhelming and unrelenting violence, and are left with the suggestion that Jesus’s death was salvific simply because of the sheer amount of violence that he endured “on our behalf.” This suggestion is, of course, not true. Jesus was one of many people subjected to the horrendous torture of crucifixion in his day. Not to mention the unspeakable violence and abuse currently experienced by countless prisoners, immigrants, men, women, and children around the globe.

The world is rife with violence. Each night, the news features murder, torture, neglect, abuse, environmental devastation, and war. And these days, it seems as if mass shootings are numbingly familiar, happening weekly, if not almost daily. It is a world, as the Apostle Paul wrote, “groaning in labor pains.” What’s more, in the context of Jesus’s violent death in the context of a violent world, many followers of also Jesus stake alternative claims about the will and ways of God that utterly oppose violence in all its forms. Therefore, recent atonement scholarship, primarily put forth by women, advocates for understandings of the cross that move away from violence and the redemptive power of suffering, claiming that in a world pushed almost to the breaking point under the weight of death and despair, the cross might yet bring a word of life.

One of the primary problems with violence in penal substitutionary atonement is that it is locked into a set of assumptions where sin is breaking God’s law and the only solution is the divine execution of the death penalty, substituting Jesus for the punishment

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121 Romans 8:22, NRSV
that we deserve. Therefore, one of the first ways theologians attempt to reframe the saving significance of the cross is by attempting to free the metaphor of substation from clutches of this limiting and distorted understanding. For example, theologian Kathryn Tanner suggests that the metaphor of substitution is best re-envisioned “within a radical understanding of the incarnation.”122 In this case, she argues that through his ministry, death, and resurrection God functions as our “substitute” not by suffering the punishment we deserve, but by assuming our full humanity in all its frailty, including our estrangement from God. Taking and bearing our human brokenness within God’s self, Jesus assumes the deadly consequences of this substitution on the cross. Locating the saving significance of the cross within the incarnation, Jesus is also our “substitute” in the completeness of his humanity, including his perfect obedience to the divine will. In other words, Jesus unites with humankind completely in sin, that humanity might be joined with him in the fullness of the Triune life. In this capacity, Jesus functions more as a representative than a substitute, one who stands with us and for us, and through dying and rising calls us to repentance and participation in the divine life.

In many cases, however, reconsidering of the image of substitution within the incarnation does not go far enough in addressing violence present in the atonement. A significance challenge with regard to violence in traditional atonement theory is the idea that God in some way willed the death of Jesus, that Jesus’s death on the cross happened because God wanted, needed, or allowed it to happen—either to satisfy the demands of God’s justice or as an act of love for our sake. For many theologians, feminist, and otherwise, the idea that God committed divine violence of any kind is reprehensible.

122 Sally Brown, Cross Talk, 60.
Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel makes this case, recounting the story of Abraham and Isaac, maintaining that the difference between Christianity and Judaism is that on Mount Mariah, Abraham did not kill his son, and on Golgotha, he did. And for that reason, Wiesel says, he is grateful God made him a Jew.\footnote{Elie Wiesel, \textit{Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends} (New York: Random House, 1976), 67.}

Therefore, a second way of rethinking the violence present within theologies of the cross, is by acknowledging that there are other powers at work in the world—powers that oppose the will of God. As preacher Barbara Brown Taylor writes in a sermon, “The Will of God,” “Maybe that is why we call it the will of God—simply because it happened. If God had not willed it, it would not have happened. Only that assumes a universe where there are no other powers operating beside the power of God, and I am not so sure about that.”\footnote{Barbara Brown Taylor, \textit{God in Pain: The Mystery of Suffering} (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2018), 116.} Taylor argues that from the beginning, humans are co-creators with God, and as such have the freedom to resist God’s will, and “what happens, happens in a world of clashing wills.”\footnote{Taylor, \textit{God in Pain}, 117.} Taylor suggests that God did not will Jesus to die, but rather that Jesus pursued utter fidelity to the ways of God, and human beings resisted and frustrated that will. Therefore, it was the utter fidelity of Jesus’s \textit{life} that led to his death, his refusal to stop being who he was as the incarnate presence of God. In this case, Taylor argues, the cross is in some sense, “divine defeat” while also being the perfection, “of one beloved human being who chose to bear the consequences of being who he was and died with the same integrity that he lived,” and “insofar as it was the will of God that he lived like that, then God’s will included the possibility of his death—not as something that God
desired but something God suffered” at the hands of sinful humanity. In raising Jesus from the dead, God conquered the powers of sin, death, and violence such that they do not have the last word.

Likewise making the case for the sinful will of humanity in opposition to the will of God, theologian Marilyn McCord Adams writes, “The cross of Christ is an outward and visible sign of caricatured, crippled, bound, and distorted humanity, the work of all those forces that keep us from being who we are meant to be.” The point, Adams raises, is that the violence exposed at the cross not the will of God, but is our violence, human violence. The cross reveals the effortlessness at which humanity is both a victim and a perpetrator of violence. Adams also tackles head on the critique, aimed specifically at atonement models such as penal substitutionary atonement, of the cross as divine child abuse. She again shifts the responsibility from the will of God to humanity arguing that the cross, “does not represent and extra-punitive God taking out his rage on a handy target, or even God making the innocent take the rap for the guilty because justice demands that someone must pay,” but the “ease at which we become abusers.” The cross, she says, reveals a suffering of God who identifies with us in our pain, and defeat. Or, as Douglas John Hall writes, “the cross of Jesus Christ is the end-consequence of the divine determination to be “with us” (Emmanuel) unreservedly.” In each case, Jesus’s violent death is not something that God wills or chooses quid pro quo, but instead is a

126 Ibid, 118
128 Adams, Wrestling for Blessing, 51.
consequence of the human propensity toward willful disobedience, coupled with the faithfulness of Jesus’s life to the ways and will of God.

In another theologically powerful and illuminating sermon, preacher Laurie Ferguson challenges distorted notions of violence present in Jesus’s crucifixion for those who experience suffering and abuse. Ferguson argues that the emphases on Jesus’s willingness to sacrifice himself “for our sake” results in dangerous forms of imitative discipleship. That, “if it was not only okay but right that Jesus should be a victim, then so should we.” She points to traditional hymnody and popular understandings of the cross especially present in the celebration of Palm Sunday, all of which unfortunately center on self-sacrifice, writing that on Palm Sunday Jesus is, “moving to be sacrificed, and the joy is interpreted in rejoicing in the salvation that comes through Jesus’s death.” This interpretation, she argues, “of palms and sacrifice takes us in a dangerous direction,” justifying the belief that, “when we face injustice at the hands of a person or a system or an institution, we should bow our heads, meekly expose our necks to the blade, and submit, and endure.” Ferguson asserts that bowing meekly as a passive victim, seeking death, and glorifying suffering are not what God was doing through Jesus’s death on the cross, nor is that what God desires for humans. Instead, Ferguson points out that when Jesus went into Jerusalem, he went, “of his own choice,” and that he was not a “passive victim of God or of fate” but instead “surrendered himself with full understanding.” In other words, once again God did not will Jesus’s death nor did Jesus seek death out.

131 Ibid
132 Ibid
133 Ibid, 103-104
Instead, Jesus’s death was a consequence of living a faithful life, “he could not compromise what he knew to be true.”

Ferguson’s desire to move the violence of the cross away from interpretations of sacrificial suffering, is also emphasized by a variety of feminist and womanist theologians. In particular, feminist scholar Rita Nakashima Brock and her colleague Rebecca Ann Parker point to their personal experiences, as well as those ministering to other women, where the penal and substitutionary understandings of the cross, the “willingness of love to suffer,” lead to devastating consequences. Parker recalls her experience of being sexually abused by a family member as a child and writes, “I recognized that Christianity had taught me that sacrifice is the way of life. I forgot the neighbor who raped me, but I could see that when theology presents Jesus’s death as God’s sacrifice of his beloved child for the sake of the world, it teaches that the highest love is sacrifice. To make sacrifice or to be sacrificed is virtuous and redemptive.”

In recalling another story about a woman in her community who was repeatedly assaulted and ultimately murdered by her husband, Rebecca writes, “Anola believed a good woman would be willing to accept her personal pain, and think only of the good of the family. You know, ‘your life is only valuable if you give it away’ and ‘this is your cross to bear.’ She had heard, just like you and I have, that Jesus did not turn away from the cup of suffering when God asked him to drink. She was trying to be a good Christian, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.”

Given the deadly consequences of Jesus’s self-sacrifice on the cross for so many women, both Brock and Parker wonder about the legitimate place

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of redemptive suffering in any expression of the atonement in particular and Christian theology in general. They ask “What if the consequence of sacrifice is simply pain, the diminishment of life, fragmentation of the soul, abasement, shame? What if the severing of life is merely destructive of life and is not the path to love, courage, trust, and faith? What if the performance of sacrifice is a ritual in which some human beings bear loss and others are protected from accountability or moral expectations?” In this case, crucifixion is a reminder of the human legacy of violence, not of salvation, and self-sacrifice is not love but the “mystical confusions and fusions of violence,” mistaking “the trauma of violence with healthy, life-affirming love that resists violence and works for justice.”

Seeking a way forward, Brock and Parker reorient the saving significance of the cross by moving away from atonement theology that focuses in any way on the belief that Jesus saved the world by dying. Parker writes, “Jesus could not have incarnated God by dying. Christians claim that God is a God of love; if this is true Jesus would have had to receive and give love through living, not dying. . . Jesus’s vision of basileia, the community of God, committed him to the struggle for justice and right relationship; living in such a community saves us.” For Brock, Christian communities who receive Christ’s blessings through the power of the Holy Spirit are centered not on crucifixion, but on baptism. In this understanding paradise is not a place people go to after they die but a gift that people receive through sanctified life in this world. Repenting, baptized in Christ and given the power of the Holy Spirit, Christian life is shaped by, “the joy and

136 Ibid, 25
138 Ibid, 4
confidence granted by the Spirit, the moral obligations of community life, and an affirmation of the spiritually renewing capacities of ordinary life and its ritual activities.” In fact, Brock argues that communities of resurrection centered on the ritual of baptism was exactly the way of the earliest church, pointing to a time prior to the tenth century when “crucifixion did not claim the center of Christian art and piety,” but when Christians “believed in Jesus’s resurrection and the promise of paradise delivered by baptism.” Additionally, she points out that during this time paradise was not about getting to heaven but had a this-worldly address and was most often depicted as a renewed garden of Eden or any earthly garden with a risen Jesus presiding over creation as the Good Shepherd. She also points out that while the cross was present in the church as a central symbol of the Christian community, Jesus’s body is absent from it. Therefore, the cross is never a crucifix. “Jesus,” she writes, “on the cross is neither in agony or dying.” Instead, if Jesus is present, he is standing next to the cross alive, “standing as an ‘orant,’ the position of prayer in paradise.” What is more, Brock explains that it was through baptism that believers in the early church understood access to the eucharistic meal, enacting the community’s communion with the presence of the risen Christ and the departed community of saints. Jesus’s death was remembered as a part of the holy meal, but was not the central focus of the celebration.

Some might worry that Brock’s attempt to harken back to the early church, reorienting the church from communities of atonement to communities of resurrection, too easily removes the cross from the center of Christian life and faith, that her

139 Brock, 244
142 Ibid
interpretation does not take sin seriously enough, or that it opens the church to triumphalism lacking a realistic concern for violence and God’s solidarity and compassion with those who suffer. However, Brock does not discount the importance sin or of the cross in Christian faith and life, but instead sees it as effective not only because Jesus died a bloody death on the cross for our sake, but because he lived, died, and rose again, conquering the powers of sin and death. As such, Christians live as if they need not fear those forces, but instead participate in the redeeming activity of baptism and ongoing sanctified life beneath the sign of the empty cross while also actively resisting the principalities and powers of the world. Brock writes, “The images of the cross bears witness to paradise, recovered in the ordinary tasks and sustaining relationships of life, sanctified and embodied in ritual. They remind the faithful that worship occurs in the presence of resurrection. The promise of paradise is the restoration of a world devastated by war—a community engaged in common activities where love is tenacious, generous, and fierce.”

Additionally, Brock acknowledges that in the earliest church, the cross was understood as a sign of divine solidarity with human pain and suffering. The violence of the cross was not to be glorified or imitated, but instead seen as cause for grief, and violence of any kind was a sin. Therefore, the church faithfully laments the violence of Christ’s crucifixion on a Roman cross and sees it as a reminder of ongoing human suffering. Simultaneously, the church invests in the sacred tasks of providing presence, compassion, and care in places where any of God’s creation suffers. She writes, “The church heals wounded souls, knits broken relationships, calls the repentant to new life, and offers company and dignity to the dying.”

What is more, underneath the sign

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143 Ibid, 250
144 Ibid, 251
of the cross the church is called not only to see and respond to human suffering, but to
shelter the truth and raise prophetic voices to speak out against actions and systems of
injustice, organizing communities to resist violence and the powers and principalities of
this world that seek to subjugate and destroy life. As Sally Brown writes, “a church that
lives under the cross will willingly recognize that it is to the margins, the place of risk,
vulnerability, and ‘outsider’ status, that Jesus leads.”

Salvation comes from communal practices that affirm the incarnation, the presence of the Spirit in life, and its ongoing promise of resurrection and paradise here and now.

Jesus did not save the world by dying. Instead, the cross and the salvation it brings centers around the whole person and story of Jesus Christ and his utter fidelity to the ways and will of God. Contrary to penal and substitutionary understandings of the atonement, Jesus’s violent death on a Roman cross was not a triumph but a reminder of the human propensity toward violence and resistance to the life-giving, life-saving ways of God. Therefore, the cross points us away from violence and its power to save, including the willingness of love to suffer. As Cynthia Rigby writes, “to direct a victim to suffer as Christ suffered is to deny our salvation and separate the cross from the incarnation and the resurrection, to see the crucifixion as ‘something God did’ that must be done over and over again because it takes place only in time. On the contrary, the cross is once and for all because it is eternally realized (in the priestly role of Christ) and conquered (in the kingly role of Christ) in the life of the triune God.”

Living, dying on the cross, and rising from the grave, Jesus conquered the very real powers of sin and

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death and calls the church, empowered by the power of Spirit to live as embodied communities of resurrection, continually transformed through life in Christ.

Teaching the Cross in Contemporary Contexts
Teaching and preaching about the saving significance of Jesus’s death within the context of western parish ministry is a tricky endeavor. The overwhelming cultural influence of penal substitutionary atonement in the west means that pastors are often reluctant to take on the subject matter for fear of upsetting what is for many the core of the Christian message. This apprehension is particularly real in places like the one I serve in Dallas, Texas, where evangelical and fundamentalist expressions of Christianity are dominant. It is also the case that unthoughtful challenges to this prominent understanding of the cross are damaging to those for whom substitutionary atonement provides confidence in their worth and the grace of God. Additionally, without appropriate considerations, careless teaching about the cross prevents lay people from being open to alternative and fresh possibilities. Therefore, church leaders must tread lightly and with pastoral sensitivity to the importance of substitutionary understandings of the cross in the minds and hearts of those that they lead, introducing new learning in ways that are culturally and contextually sensitive.

It is also true that even when pastors want to introduce more expansive thinking about Jesus’s crucifixion with their congregations, they are uncertain of both what to say and how to say it when preaching and teaching. After all, attempting to explain the atonement theories learned in the seminary classroom within the congregation often
means as one preacher confessed, “almost everyone in the pews glazes over.””\textsuperscript{147}

Additionally, because atonement theory is very different from the narrative and metaphor-driven text found in the Bible, it can be hard to reconcile those two approaches to the cross. Therefore, atonement theories alone feel like a barrier to teaching and preaching about the cross. Further, many church leaders are keenly aware of how harmful understandings of sacrifice and suffering play out in traditional beliefs about the cross and fear accidentally saying the wrong thing will only further that harm, particularly for those who suffer at the hands of abuse and unjust systems. Therefore, as Sally Brown points out, Jesus’s death on the cross is a subject that, “theologians are discussing more and more, while preachers seem to speak of it less and less.”\textsuperscript{148}

However, as was addressed previously, the cross is a central part of Christian faith and practice, and church communities must not remain silent in the face of challenges. This section will offer two unique possibilities for introducing renewed conversation around the saving significance of the cross in the context of the church through pilgrimage travel experiences. Both travel-learning experiences provide opportunities to engage current problems with models like penal substitutionary atonement and offer alternatives within the context of contemporary discipleship. Where appropriate, each trip will include a pedagogical rationale, commissioning liturgy, a syllabus for teaching, travel itinerary, and questions for classroom discussion.

\textsuperscript{147} Sally Brown, \textit{Cross Talk}, 12.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 1
Living Classroom Experiences

During my time at Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church, I formed “Living Classroom” experiences, two annual pilgrimage trips providing opportunities for lay people to learn and engage theologically through travel. The first trip is a Racial Justice and Equity Pilgrimage, and the second is a “Sacred Sites and Living Stones” trip to the Holy Land. Both trips intentionally engage the saving significance of the cross in ways that move beyond penal substitutionary atonement, helping persons make connections between a renewed theology of the cross and the practice discipleship in the postmodern context.

One of the main reasons for curating travel experiences as a part of teaching about the cross, is that travel is a pedagogically powerful tool. At its most basic level, traveling is one of the best ways to learn. It is one thing to read about something in a book or talk about it as a part of a small group or a Sunday school class. It is another to travel somewhere and see and experience that which one has read. It adds a whole different dimension to learning when people can experience the sights, sounds, smells, landscape, and relationships that come from visiting places and engaging with local people.

I also believe that sometimes to learn, to see what God would have us see, it is necessary to leave the people and places that we are most familiar with and journey outside of our comfort zone. It is in the moments of displacement, disorientation, and in the journey from one place to the next that God helps us to see in new ways. There are many places in scripture that point to the value of learning by leaving. For example, in Genesis chapter twelve, the LORD tells Abraham, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you."149 For

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149 Genesis 12:1, NRSV
Abraham to grow in faith, he must leave. Jesus also often taught this way. When he called the disciples, he said, “Come, follow me.” In the Gospel of John, Jesus responds to two disciples of John the Baptist who are seeking answers and direction (literal and figurative) by saying, “Come and See” (John 1:39-41). Sometimes people learn best by leaving.

Additionally, there is a magic that happens on trips. People detach from the schedules of daily life and find a new rhythm with a group of people they may not have known before they boarded the bus or the airplane. If intentional, the presence of the Holy Spirit feels particularly close, opening people’s hearts and minds to new ideas and new relationships. For example, in a recent article in the Atlantic, Kim Sajet writes, “Anthropologists have suggested that such a journey involves people leaving the familiarity of home and undergoing a liminal experience, a disorienting voyage that brings them to the threshold of spiritual change. In their heightened psychological awareness, pilgrims develop a sense of communitas, in which strangers on the same journey feel a sense of kinship with one another, allowing cultures to cross paths both real and symbolic. They return home with a renewed sense of hope.”

Pilgrimage travel is one of the oldest and most effective forms of spiritual growth. Further, travel experiences also have the potential to overcome the barriers and sensitivities surrounding the overwhelming cultural influence of penal substitutionary atonement by moving conversation around the saving significance of the cross solely from the arguments and opinions of the classroom, however appropriate and helpful, to

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the realm of study, experience, and relationship. Lay people are invited to consider new ideas and experience transformation through engaging key texts in combination with strategically cultivated experiences and relationships of travel. Ultimately, pilgrimage travel honors the belief that, as Suzanne Henderson writes, “the cross is a divine mystery, not a puzzle to be solved; amazing grace, not a concept to be mastered.”151 Thus, engaging the saving significance of the cross through travel study provides an opportunity for pastors and church leaders to invite their congregations into new imaginative possibilities for connecting theology and discipleship.

Racial Justice and Equity Pilgrimage

The Racial Justice and Equity Pilgrimage is a collaboration between Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church and Joy Tabernacle African Methodist Episcopal Church, a mostly African American congregation with whom Preston Hollow is in a relationship. I share leadership of the trip with Rev. Dr. Michael Waters, the Senior Pastor at Joy Tabernacle. Michael started leading racial justice and equity pilgrimages as an undergraduate student at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and continues to lead pilgrimages for various religious and educational groups. A chance meeting between us opened the door for deepening relationship and collaboration on a pilgrimage experience between our congregations. The shared leadership and participation from members of Joy, a historically African American church, and Preston Hollow, a mostly white congregation, is an essential dimension of this kind of pilgrimage experience. It ensures that voices of the African American community are authentically present and privileged in the conversation, while

also opening space for building genuine relationships within which to listen and speak painful truths.

The five-night, six-day Pilgrimage travels from Dallas, Texas to various cities at heart of the America Civil Rights Movement including Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia. Some of the sites visited are Glendora Mississippi, the birthplace of the American Civil Rights movement and the place where fourteen-year-old Emmett Till was brutally lynched and murdered, Medgar Evers’ home in Jackson, the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, and the lynching museum and memorial in Montgomery. Additionally, along the journey pilgrimage travelers engage with participants in the Civil Rights Movement who share their first-person testimonies and eyewitness accounts of this essential American history.

In preparation for the trip, travelers read several of Martin Luther King Jr.’s original works, such as *Stride Toward Freedom*, *Why We Cannot Wait*, and *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, as well as, portions of James Cone’s *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Discussion on these various readings occurs in two pre-meetings leading up to the trip. In particular, James Cone’s work provides deep insights into the cross as a primary symbol of the Christian community means and how the paradox of the cross informs our faith and contemporary experience.

Additionally, while on the road, participants view the PBS Documentary, *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Movement*, and have the opportunity to reflect individually and as a group through daily devotionals that place the various sites and themes of the trip in conversation with passages from scripture.\(^{152}\) The overall result of the

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\(^{152}\) This landmark series, which first premiered in 1987, documents the history of the civil rights movement in America. Produced by Blackside, segments include the Montgomery bus boycott of 1954, school
combined study and the travel experience opens participants to new ways of thinking about Jesus’s death on the cross in combination with contemporary Christian ethics and discipleship. As one participant wrote,

The Pilgrimage was a once in a lifetime experience. Learning the history of racial injustice in Glendora, Mississippi, and Selma, Montgomery, and Birmingham, Alabama were [sic] heartbreaking. Talking to people directly involved in the American Civil Rights Movement and learning about the deaths of people like Emmett Till, Medgar Evers, and others was so meaningful. I was especially impacted by meeting Joanne Bland and hearing about her experiences in Selma walking across the Edmund Pettus Bridge and encountering so much violence as a young girl. I know that racial injustice still occurs and I am discerning where and how God is calling me to participate as a person of faith.

The trip is also structured to share the transformative journey with the congregation, through the commissioning of travel participants in Sunday worship as well as in daily travel updates and theological reflections offered in blog posts. Upon returning, group members provide their thoughts and trip photographs through an art installation in the church’s atrium.

In my experience, congregations, mainline and otherwise, seek to invest in the necessary and messy work of racial reconciliation. However, often missing is the theological connection to why specifically Christians need to engage in this ministry as a

[desegregation in 1957 Arkansas, the right-to-vote battle within Mississippi, the march from Selma to Montgomery, Ala., and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The series has been honored with a George Foster Peabody Award, an International Documentary Award, Television Critics Association Award and numerous Emmy Awards.]
part of ongoing life in the Spirit. Connecting the saving significance of the cross with racial justice and equity study and pilgrimage is a powerful way to bridge the gap.

Holy Land Pilgrimage: Sacred Sites and Living Stones

Millions of pilgrims visit the Holy Land each year. Tourism in the Holy Land is increasing with an estimated two million tourists visiting Israel-Palestine annually, seventy-five percent of whom are Christian pilgrims.153 Most pilgrims travel to the Holy Land, sometimes called the fifth Gospel, to better understand the first four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is true that a pilgrimage to the places where Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead is a transforming experience that makes one read and understand the Bible in new ways. The stories of the Bible come alive when people experience places such as the Pools of Bethesda, or the Shepherds Field where angels announced the birth of Jesus, or walk the path on which Jesus carried the cross. However, many travelers to the Holy Land only interact with the sacred sites, the historical landmarks connected to biblical and religious history, neglecting the contemporary people and politics of the region. Additionally, many Christian and Jewish groups focus heavily on Jewish history, rarely visiting the West Bank or interacting with Palestinians. As a result, Holy Land travel functions as something of a Christian Disney World, a place that is politically and theologically uncomplicated, sanitized and disconnected from the saving significance of Jesus’s life, death, resurrection both in the past and in the present.

Therefore, I created a “Sacred Sites and Living Stones” pilgrimage to the Holy Land that

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provides travelers with the opportunity to explore the history and visit the sacred places where Jesus walked, while also including opportunities to share in relationship with Jewish, Muslim, and Christian peoples. Additionally, the planned travel experience includes curriculum exploring the saving significance of the cross might illuminate and bridge these two contexts past and present.

The itinerary for the ten-day travel experience begins on the coast exploring Jesus’s ministry in the Galilee area, before spending several days in and around Bethlehem and concluding in Jerusalem. In addition to sacred sites, participants will visit an Israeli settlement in the Golan Heights and share time with residents there, while also doing the same in the Deheishe Refugee Camp where Palestinians have lived since 1948. We will spend time at the separation wall, and attend an Arabic worship service and enjoy fellowship with the congregation at Christmas Lutheran Church. We will also meet students from Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture in Bethlehem, joining them for a cooking class that is a part of their culinary arts degree program.

Before the trip, travelers will engage books related to the people and the politics of the Holy Land, such as Elias Chacour’s book *Blood Brothers*. They will also read John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg’s book *The Last Week*, as well as, Suzanne Henderson and Mitri Raheb’s, *The Cross in Contexts: Suffering and Redemption in Palestine*, exploring some of the vital history related to Jesus’s first-century context, and

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154 Founded in 2006, Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture offers advanced training in visual and preforming arts as well as Palestinian Cultural heritage, design and tourism related studies. The school is committed to building a culture of democracy, critical thinking and free expression, thus contributing to the strengthening of the civil society in Palestine.
thinking about the saving significance of the cross in biblical times and present-day circumstances. Discussion on these various readings also occurs in two pre-meetings leading up to the trip.

Similar to the Racial Justice and Equity Pilgrimage, the congregation participates by joining in commissioning during a Sunday worship service and receive theological reflections through the church’s social media platforms. Upon returning, group members provide their observations and photographs during a talk-back session. The congregation's participation broadens the reach of teaching on the cross and inspires others to participate in future trips.
Conclusion

Historical Christianity—Christendom—has steadfastly avoided the *theologica crucis* because such a theology calls into question the whole imperialistic bent of Christendom. But with the demise of Christendom in the modern and postmodern periods, it has become possible for serious Christians to reconsider the meaning and role of this submerged theology. . . The *possibility* of such a reconsideration has become a grave *necessity*, for there is no place in the world on the brink of self-destruction for a religion that is driven by the quest for power and glory, or even for survival. Such a religion can only be ‘part of the problem, not its solution.”

Douglas John Hall

Penal substitutionary atonement is a widespread, widely acknowledged, and oft-repeated understanding of the saving significance of Jesus’s death on the cross within popular American Christianity. In some cases, such as fundamentalist and evangelical church traditions, a penal view of the cross is actively taught as the orthodox way of understanding the cross and a defining point of doctrine. In other instances, substitutionary atonement is passively absorbed through the influence of broader culture or the absence of a compelling alternative. Accompanying this interpretation of the cross are some troubling theological implications that in many cases in the local church context persist unexamined. As a result, the cross exists either as a point of harm, as peripherally important, or as missing entirely from the witness of the church.

Despite these challenges with popular expressions of the cross such as penal substitutionary atonement, I have argued that the cross remains a critical part of Christian theology, and therefore the church in the postmodern world must claim it as central to its life, witness, and worship in a manner that is accessible to laypersons. To do so, I began by defining the problem of substitutionary atonement, examining the historical and

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theological roots of the theory, drawing awareness to its absence from the early church and its gradual development in western theology. I then pointed out in greater detail the theological challenges with this interpretation of the cross, grouping those hurdles into three broad categories of scripture, ethics, and violence. Finally, I offered a series of alternatives perspectives for how these groupings of challenges can be understood differently.

To aid the local church leader, I provided two possibilities for teaching about the saving significance of the cross through travel-learning experiences accompanied with intentional study tools. The appendices offer two complete sets of planning materials for executing those experiences from start to finish and are ready to use. I provide these resources because I believe that the church in the postmodern context is uniquely suited to engage the challenge of claiming a theology of the cross beyond penal substitutionary atonement.

First, the decline of Christendom provides the church an opportunity to re-examine its beliefs and find new redemptive ways of living. In the current cultural context participation in a faith community is not assumed. There are culture-wide shifts in institutional trust, religious participation, knowledge and practice. A recent Gallup poll finds the percentage of Americans who report belonging to a church, synagogue or mosque at an all-time low, with an increasing proportion of Americans identifying no religious preference. The shifting religious landscape offers fertile ground for reexamination and renewed theological expressions.

Second, the Presbyterian Church, rooted in Judaism and an outgrowing of the Reformed tradition, is a reminder that the church is “reformed and always reforming” according to the Word of God. The church is a living organism, made up of fallible human beings who at times err in judgement. The church is also the body of Christ and is an agent of God’s ongoing reforming work. God has ushered the church to renewed life in the Spirit in the past and can do so again. Presbyterians are challenged to listen and discover where the Holy Spirit is calling in a new time.

Third, there is an abundance of social and ethical issues pressing in on our world: care for creation, racism, immigration, nationalism, sexism, violence. The church is called through Spirit to be “with and for the world” and yet this call is also answered out of theological affirmations and commitments. Therefore, it matters not that Christians are “nice people” who on the whole act generously and give themselves toward moral endeavors of love and justice. For the church, the work of justice, love and peace are uniquely Christian in character, emerging from a robust theology of the cross.

A theology of cross is crucial for authentic and faithful expression of the church’s ministry. Rooted in the witness of scripture, the cross shapes and guides the church’s faith, worship and witness.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Commissioning Liturgy for Racial Justice and Equity Pilgrimage

Introduction

On Wednesday, a group of thirty people from this congregation and Joy Tabernacle A.M.E will be leaving on a racial justice and equity pilgrimage to Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia. As a team, we will experience the history of the civil rights in the United States movement through historical locations and touchpoints. We will also hear the stories of those closest to the civil rights movement and many who participated in it.

In part, the trip is an expression of Preston Hollow’s commitment that learning and faithful transformation happen not just inside church sanctuaries and classrooms, but also in relationships and along the journey from one place to the next. Led by Rev. Dr. Michael Waters at Joy Tabernacle A.M.E here in Dallas and Rev. Sarah Johnson from Preston Hollow, this five-day, four-night travel-learning experience is an opportunity to learn by leaving, traveling outside out of our comfort zone and well-known communities.

The trip is also an expression of our commitment that God is calling us to do the messy and holy work of racial reconciliation as an authentic expression of our theological commitments as followers of Jesus Christ. We know we will not always get things right or have all the answers. But we know we have to risk and stumble forward together.

We travel to listen and learn, to bear witness to the history and the stories of others. The experience is intended to transform our hearts and minds so that we might be catalysts for the ongoing work of racial justice, equity, and transformation at Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church and in the city of Dallas.
The team covets your prayers and invites you to follow our journey online through the PHPC blog, Facebook, and Instagram accounts. As one body with many parts, we commission these members to go on our behalf to be present to our partners in Christ.

*Now let us join together in our congregational covenant and commissioning:*

**Commissioning**

**One:** In his letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul reminded God’s people of their call, “God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So, we are ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, Paul challenges the church to be with and for the world by participating in God’s ministry of reconciliation. Courageous women and men have taken this risk of faith standing up and speaking out for those whose voices are long silenced, risking God's love in a world of hate, moving beyond ourselves to listen, and standing in solidarity with the crucified people in our midst.

*Please join with me:*

**Team:** With God’s help, we go to participate in what God is already doing in the world.

**Congregation:** God calls us to love God and love our neighbor.

**Team:** With God’s help, we go to bear witness to the good news of reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

**Congregation:** Jesus frees us to love God and love our neighbor.

**Team:** With God’s help, we will listen and learn, seeking to witness to the stories of others and be transformed the Spirit.

**Congregation:** Together as one body, we can love God and love our neighbor.

**Team:** With God’s help, we go so we can come back, empowered to work for a just world for all.
Congregation: As you go, we go with you: awed by God’s wonder, present with our prayers, changed by your commitment, and empowered to work together upon your return for a just world for all.

Prayer
Holy Spirit,
Go out with this team as they have answered the call to bear witness to the good news of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Surround them with protection, fill their hearts with joy and thanksgiving, pour out your wisdom and grace into their service. We give thanks for those whose stories we will encounter, for their hospitality, generosity, and invitation into their lives and communities. May our partnership be a light in this world, so that all may know your glory. Holy God, bring this team safely home, so that we may all be empowered to continue to work for a just world for all. Amen.
Appendix 2: Syllabus Racial Justice and Equity Pilgrimage

Rev. Sarah Johnson
sjohnson@phpc.org
Rev. Dr. Michael W. Waters
pastormwaters@gmail.com

Dear 2019 Racial Justice and Equity Pilgrims,

We are looking forward to our journey together in February. A great deal of care and planning has gone into shaping what we hope will be a life-changing and transformative experience for us all. More specific details regarding our itinerary will be provided early in the coming year. This initial correspondence provides recommendations of resources to engage leading up to the pilgrimage and a brief overview of what to expect.

**Recommended Book Resources**


King, Martin Luther, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 1964.

Cone, James, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 2011.

**Recommended Online Resources**


**Pilgrimage Overview**

We will leave late afternoon, Sunday February 16th and return February 23rd. A final travel itinerary will be made available before our departure. We will visit cities and sites significant to the American Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia. Among the anticipated sites include Medgar Evers’ home in Jackson, the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Rosa Parks’ bus stop in Montgomery, and many, many more. We will also speak with various participants in the Movement who will share their eyewitness accounts of this essential history.

In combination with our travel, we will spend time reading and reflecting on critical texts related to the Movement, as well as theological writings about the saving significance of the cross. The blending of lived history and theology will help us connect the past and the
present work of racial justice and equity with the Holy Spirit’s call to faithful discipleship.

**Trip Cost**
The total cost of the trip, including transportation, lodging, museum entrances, and 2-3 meals is 1,000 per person. A fifty percent deposit is required to secure your place on the pilgrimage with the balance due one month before the trip’s departure.

**Food**
Each individual is financially responsible for their food. We will stay in hotels that primarily provide free breakfast. Sometimes, we will need to eat while in route to our next city to stay on schedule. However, we will have some sit-down meals as well. We anticipate 2-3 meals to be provided to you as part of our journey.

**Weather, Dress, and Travel**
Weather conditions during our pilgrimage will likely range from being very cold to mild. We would recommend traveling with a heavy jacket and sweater. Dressing in layers may prove helpful. We also recommend that you dress comfortably and wear sturdy walking shoes. We are going to get in a lot of steps each day. There is only one planned experience that you may want to “dress up” for which is Sunday morning for worship at Ebenezer Baptist Church (King’s Home Church) in Atlanta, Georgia. You may also want to bring pillows and a blanket for our time on the charter bus.

**Processing/ Downtime**
It is essential to recognize that some sites present a sanitized version of brutal history. In contrast, we have selected sites during our travel that present history in a very raw form, physical spaces that have been shaped mainly by the persons most impacted by the history and their descendants, emphasizing stories told by the people, not flashy, sanitized spaces. Therefore, you should prepare yourself spiritually and emotionally each day as best as possible as we will bear witness to a lot of trauma and pain, some of which endures even unto the present day.
We will provide space for daily devotionals, journaling, processing, and release during our travels. If at any point you find yourself overwhelmed, please feel free to remove yourself from the experience. Self-care is crucial. Know also that you will be surrounded by persons willing to support you through these painful experiences.

**Surprises**

Co-leader Rev. Dr. Michael Waters has been leading these types of pilgrimage experiences for many years, and have taught him to be open to beautiful surprises. For example, on a previous trip, participants had a chance meeting with the late Dr. Amelia Boyton Robinson, the leader of the Selma Movement responsible for bringing Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King to Selma. The chance meeting at a museum also resulted in travelers being invited to dine in her home, reviewing never-seen artifacts from the Movement. Please be flexible if such wonderful opportunities present themselves again.

**Late Entry/Early Departure from Pilgrimage**

If you must depart early from the pilgrimage, please send a formal update of your plans as soon as possible as this will impact our hotel arrangements and entry fees at various museums. You are personally responsible for any alternative preparations to depart. We are unable to pick up or drop off at airports, bus terminals, etc.

**Hotel Rooms**

There are a few spouses and partners who will be traveling together who will share a room. Others have the option of staying in a single room or being assigned a roommate. Please note on your rooming requests on your registration form. All hotels will be booked by the church.

**Pre-meeting dates**

**Sunday, January 13th at 5 p.m.** Preston Hollow Presbyterian, Emmanuel Hall

**Sunday, February 9th 6:30 p.m.** Preston Hollow Presbyterian, Conference Room

*Please plan to block off 60-90 minutes for these meetings*
Appendix 3: Racial Justice and Equity Pilgrimage Trip Itinerary

**Thursday: Greenwood, Glendora, and Jackson Mississippi**
We will begin our time in Greenwood, Mississippi where Jimmy Travis was shot by the Ku Klux Klan when registering voters in the delta, and then travel a short distance to Glendora where Emmett Till was lynched and murdered. From Glendora, we will go to Jackson, Mississippi to visit the home of Medgar Evers. We will enjoy dinner in Jackson before driving to Selma, Alabama, for our overnight stay.

**Friday: Selma, Alabama; Montgomery, Alabama**
Friday morning, we will spend time with Joann Bland, one of the youngest persons on the bridge on Bloody Sunday and Turn Around Tuesday. She will share her story and take us on a tour of the neighborhoods, cemeteries, and historical places of Selma. We will have the opportunity to cross the Edmond Pettus Bridge and visit the Voting Rights Museum maintained by the local people of Birmingham. We will then travel to Montgomery, passing by the bus stop where Rosa Parks boarded the bus, visit the Freedom Riders Museum, as well as, the Legacy Museum and Lynching Memorial. Our day will conclude with dinner and conversation with Dr. Velda Montgomery, family friends and neighbors of the King family.

**Saturday: Montgomery and Birmingham, Alabama**
Saturday morning, we will spend time in downtown Montgomery at the King home, the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and Parsonage, as well as, the Southern Poverty Law Center and Memorial. From there we will travel to Birmingham, reading Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s famous Letter from Birmingham Jail in route. Once in Birmingham, we will spend time at the 16th Street Baptist Church, Kelly Ingram Park, the Gaston Hotel, and the Civil Rights Museum.

**Sunday: Atlanta, Georgia**
Sunday morning, we will attend the 9 a.m. service at Ebenezer Baptist Church. There will be an opportunity to see Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s childhood home and the King
Center. We will finish our time with a family-style lunch at Pascals, a famous southern-style restaurant that also doubled as one of the headquarters for the Movement.
Appendix 4: Pre-Meeting Session 1 Racial Justice and Equity Pilgrimage

Preparation: Read Martin Luther King Jr.’s books, Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story and Why We Can’t Wait.

Details: If the group is more than twelve people, divide the group into two smaller groups to enable more depth of discussion. Have smaller teams record some of their conversations to share with the group. This first meeting is focused on helping the group build relationships and discuss some of the historical material related the Civil Rights Movement.

**Discussion Questions:**

What prompted you to participate in this trip? What previous experiences do you have with travel and learning about racial justice? What do you hope to glean from your experience?

How King’s account of what happened in Montgomery similar or different to what you previously might have learned? What parts of the story provided new information for you? What details intrigued you most?

How does Dr. King’s account of the Montgomery Bus Boycott dispel notions of the “hero narrative?” That is the courageous and heroic action of a few on behalf of the many. Share some of the people whose participation was previously unknown to you. Describe an experience from your life where you have been a part of something bigger than yourself. How has that experience shaped you?

King describes the spiritual and earthly commitments of faithful discipleship writing, “Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of men and is not concerned with the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a dry-as-dust religion. Such a religion is the kind that Marxists like to see—an opiate of the people.”\(^{157}\) What do you think of his description?

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In Chapter five of *Why We Cannot Wait*, King writes to the white clergymen in Birmingham. What reason does King give for his presence in Birmingham? In particular, why is King disappointed with the “white moderate” and with the church? What does King believe is the role of people of faith in bringing about change?

In his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” King writes, “If today’s church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century.”\(^{158}\) What do you think of King’s assessment? What do you think he means by, “the sacrificial spirit of the early church?”

Appendix 5: Pre-Meeting Session 2 Racial Justice and Equity Pilgrimage Preparation: Read James Cone’s book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.

Details: If the group is comprised of more than twelve people, divide the larger groups into two smaller groups to enable more depth of discussion. Have groups record some of their conversations to share with the whole group. The first portion of this meeting is devoted to discussion of the readings, and the second portion will review final logistics and travel instructions.

**Discussion Questions:**

In the introduction to the book, Dr. Cone writes, “Unfortunately, during the course of 2,000 years of Christian history, this symbol of salvation [the cross] has been detached from any reference to the ongoing suffering and oppression of human beings. . .?”

What do you think of Cone’s assessment of the cross in Christianity? Describe hymns, sermons, or experiences that have shaped your understanding of the cross.

Cone writes, “Until we can see the cross and the lynching tree together, until we identify Christ with a ‘recrucified’ black body hanging from a lynching tree, there can be no genuine understanding of Christian identity in America, and no deliverance from the brutal legacy of slavery and white supremacy.”

What do you think Cone means by this? Did it ever occur to you to link the cross and lynching in this country? Why or why not?

In chapter one, Cone writes, “White supremacy was and is an American reality.” Do you resonate with Cone’s description? Why or why not? How does he describe white supremacy? What might be some other examples from today?

According to Cone, in what ways did a crucified and risen Christ provide encouragement and comfort for African American Christians?

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159 James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, xiv.
160 Ibid, xv
161 Ibid, 8
At the beginning of chapter two, Cone describes argues that “the crucifixion was clearly a first-century lynching.”162 What are the connections that he makes between the first-century Roman context in which Jesus lived and the practice of crucifixion, and the practice of lynching in American history?

Cone spends a portion of chapter two, analyzing and reflecting on the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr. According to Cone, why did Niebuhr fail to make the connections between the saving significance of the cross, and lynching and the African American experience?

Chapter three begins with a discussion of Emmett Till. Is Emmett Till’s story familiar or unfamiliar to you? Do you think that we, as a society, know enough about Emmett Till? Why or Why not? What strikes you most about Emmett Till’s story and the events that followed?

In chapter three, Cone writes, “It is one thing to teach theology (like Niebuhr, Barth, Tillich, and most theologians) in the safe environs of the classroom and quite another to live one’s theology in a situation that entails the risk to one’s life.”163 What do you think of the idea of “living your theology?” Describe a time when you have “risked” something for your faith.

In chapter four, Cone describes the work and writing of W. E. B. Du Bois. How did Du Bois help re-imagine and define the content of the Christian gospel? How does Du Bois connect the cross to the lived experience of black Christians?

Toward the end of the book, Cone writes, “I find nothing redemptive about suffering in itself. The gospel of Jesus is not a rational concept to be explained in a theory of salvation, but a story about God’s presence in Jesus’s solidarity with the oppressed, which led to his death on the cross. What is redemptive is the faith that God snatches

162 Ibid, 30
163 Ibid, 70
victory out of defeat, life out of death, and hope out of despair, as revealed in the biblical
and black proclamation of Jesus’s resurrection.”164

What do you think of this?

After reading and discussing *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, what part of the book and
collection struck you most? Why did this part stand out to you? What insight will you
carry with you?

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164 Ibid, 150
Appendix 6: Commissioning Liturgy for Holy Land Pilgrimage

Introduction

Tomorrow morning, a group of thirty members and friends of this congregation will travel to the Holy Land for a “Sacred Sites and Living Stones” pilgrimage experience. As a group, we will see the sacred sites and historical roots of our faith in Galilee, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem. Just a few of the places we will visit include the first century “Jesus Boat,” which was salvaged from the muddy bottom of the Galilee, the Shepherds Field where according to the Scripture the angels announced the birth of Jesus, and the path on which Jesus carried the cross. We will also have the unique opportunity to visit with people living, thriving, and struggling in the region.

The trip’s balance between sacred sites and living stones is intentional. Every year, tens of thousands of pilgrims visit the Holy Land to see the sacred sites of scripture and the faith. Indeed, a pilgrimage to the places where Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead is a transforming experience that makes one read and understand the Bible in a new way. However, visiting only the ancient stones and touring only archaeological sites, means we miss out on encountering and being transformed by the people who are dwelling where Jesus is dwelling today. It is a moving experience for travelers to walk the Via Dolorosa, carrying a wooden cross on their backs. Still, it is even more meaningful to hear first-hand stories, genuine testimonies, and personal narratives by local Christians and other peoples of faith.

In part, the trip is an expression of Preston Hollow’s commitment that learning and faithful transformation happen not just inside church sanctuaries and classrooms, but also in relationships and along the journey from one place to the next. It is also a part of our belief that theology and scripture are not only meant to be studied but lived and experienced through people places and relationships.
Commissioning
In the gospel of John, Jesus sees two followers coming after him. He turned and asked them, "What are you looking for?" They said, "Teacher, where do you live?" And Jesus responded, "Come and see." (John 1:36-42). Throughout our journey of faith, Jesus bids us, “Come and see.” Jesus invites us to take the stories of scripture and live them on our walks of faith.

*Please join with me as we commission these fellow pilgrims:*

**Team:** With God’s help, we go to participate what God is already doing in the world.

**Congregation:** God calls us to love God and love our neighbor.

**Team:** With God’s help, we go to bear witness to God’s good news in the world

**Congregation:** Jesus frees us to love God and love our neighbor.

**Team:** With God’s help, we will listen and learn, seeking to witness to the stories of our faith and the stories of others and be transformed the Spirit.

**Congregation:** Together as one body, we can love God and love our neighbor.

**Team:** With God’s help, we go so we can come back, empowered to live as faithful disciples here and now.

**Congregation:** As you go, we go with you: awed by God’s wonder, present with our prayers, changed by your commitment, and empowered to work together to share God’s good news with the world.

**Prayer**
Holy Spirit,
Go out with this team as they have answered the call to “come and see” where you are at work in our world. Surround them with protection, fill their hearts with joy and thanksgiving, pour out your wisdom and grace into their service. We give thanks for those whose stories we will encounter, for their hospitality, generosity, and invitation into their lives and communities. May our partnership be a light in this world, so that all may know your glory. Holy God, bring this team safely home, so that we may all be empowered as faithful pilgrims. Amen.
Appendix 7: Syllabus for Sacred Sites and Living Stones Holy Land Pilgrimage

Rev. Sarah Johnson
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Dear 2020 Holy Land Pilgrims,
I am looking forward to our journey together in May 2020. A great deal of care and planning has gone into shaping what I hope will be a life-changing and transformative experience for us all. By now, you should have a general outline of our itinerary provided in the official brochure from Group Travel Directors. Further travel details and logistics will be provided over the coming year. This initial correspondence is intended to provide a recommendation of resources to engage leading up to the pilgrimage as well as to provide a few thoughts of what to expect on our journey.

**Recommended Book Resources**

**Recommended Online Resources**

Geraldine, Brooks, *Smithsonian Magazine*; “A New Way to See the Holy Land,”
Additional Recommended Reading
For those of you who would like to read and engage further in preparation for the trip, listed below are a few additional resources that are not required but often recommended for those traveling to the Holy Land:


Pilgrimage Overview
We will depart Dallas May 18, 2020, and return May 28, 2020. Several of you are also traveling an additional four days on the trip extension to Jordan. We will begin our time in the Galilee Region focusing on Jesus’s ministry in and around that area, before continuing to Bethlehem. We will spend several days in Bethlehem, including a day trip to Masada, the Dead Sea, and Qumran to see the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. We will conclude our time with several days in Jerusalem.

“It’s Complicated”
There is nothing about the Holy Land that is simple. It is a place where history and architecture mix with present-day politics and the fabric of people’s everyday lives. It is a place of old traditions and modern conveniences, ancient religious history, and contemporary conflict. Most of the time, the answer to questions of all kinds is, “It is complicated.” Many people travel to the Holy Land expecting to hear and gain a clearer understanding of two distinct narratives—Israeli and Palestinian—only to discover that there are multiple narratives and a diversity of stories. It is possible to travel to the Holy Land and see what you want to see, confirming already formed biases and perspectives. I hope that as we approach our time together, that you will allow the readings, experiences,
and the relationships open your minds as well as your hearts to new ways of thinking and being.

Weather, Dress, and Travel
This tour requires a considerable amount of walking. Please be sure that you can comfortably walk five miles a day, equipped with proper and comfortable footwear. The weather in May is relatively pleasant with daily high temperatures from 76°F to 81°F, rarely falling below 69°F or exceeding 88°F. Daily low temperatures are typically in the sixties and rarely fall below 54°F. Dress for the trip is casual. There will be a few opportunities, such worship at Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, where you might want to wear business casual attire.

Pre-Meeting Dates
Sunday, November 3rd Dinner
Fellow travelers Steve and Sandy Watson have graciously opened their home to us so that we can get to know one another and enjoy time together over a meal and fellowship.

Sunday, April 5, 2020
We will discuss several of the pre-readings.

Sunday, May 3, 2020
This meeting will include final logistics and preparations for our travels.

Please plan to block off 60-90 minutes for these meetings.

*I will teach a six-week Lent study on this book.
Appendix 8: Pre-Meeting Session 1, Holy Land Sacred Sites and Living Stones

Preparation: Read *Blood Brothers* by Elias Chacour

Details: The goal of this first gathering is to help travelers get to know one another and begin discussion on the Holy Land through the lens of people and relationship, particularly the story of Elias Chacour, a Palestinian Christian Melkite priest working for peace in the region.

Discussion Questions:
What prompted you to participate in this trip? What previous experiences do you have with travel and learning about the Holy Land? What do you hope to glean from your experience?

In the opening portions of the book, Elias describes his childhood in Biram. What struck you about his experience? What is the significance of the book’s title, *Blood Brothers*?

Elias feels a call to join the priesthood. What key experiences most shaped his call to ministry, to nonviolence, and to peacemaking? How did his parent’s faith and devotion shape those passions? What are key characteristics if Elias’ theology of nonviolence?

Elias is assigned to serve in the village of Ibillin. What challenges does he run into while serving there? What strategies does he employ to overcome these obstacles?

Where does Chacour see signs of hope, in the midst of a land and a people in conflict? What is the call that he issues to people of faith around the world?

What stands out for you having read *Blood Brothers*? Did you learn something new? Or discover something that you perhaps knew before, but that has taken on a new significance? What parts of Elias’ story do you want to carry forward with you in our travels?
Appendix 9: Pre-Meeting Session 2, Holy Land Sacred Sites and Living Stones

Preparation: *The Last Week* by John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg and *The Cross in Contexts: Suffering and Redemption in Palestine* by Suzanne Henderson and Mitri Raheb.

Details: The second pre-travel gathering will have two purposes. One goal will be to discuss some of *The Last Week* and *The Cross in Contexts*. The remainder of the time will be devoted to final logistics and travel information.

Part of our trip will take us to Jerusalem with the opportunity to walk the Via Delarosa, the journey that Jesus took on the way to be crucified. In the preface of their book, Crossan and Borg point out that we tend to think of “The Passion” only as what happened on Good Friday. They also argue that it is more important for us to think about Jesus’s passion as including his life and ministry, what he was passionate about. What do you think of this distinction? Describe some of your experiences with how Jesus’ death on the cross is understood.

In the first chapter, Borg and Crossan describe two different processions that enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. What are the two different parades? How are they described? What significance does each of the processions hold? How do they relate to the Passion of Jesus? What are some of your memories and memories associated with Palm Sunday?

The final part of our travels will take us the various sites in and around Jerusalem. Borg and Crossan paint a vivid picture of Jerusalem during the time of Jesus and argue that it “was not just any city.”

How is Jerusalem described? What is its significance in Jewish history? What is the role that Jerusalem plays in the gospel of Mark?

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165 Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week*, 5.
Borg and Crossan describe Jerusalem as the center of a domination system. What are the characteristics of that system? How is it connected to the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus? What resonances do they suggest persist today?

How does The Last Week add to your picture of Jesus or your understanding of his last week? What’s something from the experience of reading and talking about this book that you want to take with you on our trip?

In the introduction to The Cross in Contexts, Henderson describes her experience with atonement theology (understanding of the saving significance of Jesus’s death) in popular American Christianity. How is your experience similar or different from what she describes?

During our time, we will travel to Bethlehem, Palestine. In chapter one, Raheb describes Palestine as a “land at a crossroads.” What does he mean by that? How is Palestine a “land and a people on the cross?” What connections does he draw between the cross and Palestine’s past and its present?

In chapter one, Henderson describes the political dimensions at work in Jesus’s first-century context. What stands out most for you in her description? What is the relationship between the political environment in first-century Palestine and Jesus’s ministry? How does Suzanne draw the first-century context into today?

Raheb describes some of his life and ministry in Bethlehem. What stands out to you from his experiences? How does he describe the challenges and hopes for the relationship between religion and state in the Arab world?

According to Henderson, how is Jesus’s ministry an expression of covenant faithfulness? How does she suggest we might engage the call to covenant faithfulness today?

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Raheb suggests that empires always raise questions about God: “They behave like God; they are omnipotent; they produce, own, and operate the latest inventions in military sophistication; they can dictate their conditions and no one can object. In a victorious and mocking tone, they pose the question to those that they conquer: ‘Where is your God?’”167 Where does Raheb see evidence of God’s saving presence in the midst of empire, violence, and despair?

How has *The Cross in Contexts* added to your understanding of Jesus’s death on the cross? The context in Israel-Palestine? What will you take with you on our travels?

As we prepare to leave, what stands out for you from these pre-readings? Did you learn something new? Or discover something that you perhaps knew before, but that has taken on a new significance? Is there something from these readings that puzzles you, either because it’s not clear or because you wonder about the implications, that you would like to clarify?

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Bibliography


Collins, Robin. “Understanding Atonement: A New Orthodox Theory.”
http://home.messiah.edu/~rcollins/Philosophical%20Theology/Atonement/AT7.HTM.


First Baptist Church Dallas, Texas, “Freedom Sunday,”
http://www.firstdallas.org/events/freedom-sunday/.


