
A table of contents for *Grace Journal* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_grace-journal.php

THE ATONEMENT AND HUMAN SACRIFICE

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Many trusting hearts have paused to ponder the weighty words of Genesis 22:2, "Take now thy son...and offer him for a burnt-offering." This text prompted Søren Kierkegaard to ask, "Is there such a thing as a teleological suspension of the ethical?" Most serious readers of Genesis 22 have doubtless shared the concern which promoted Kierkegaard's enquiry.

The problem with which we are here concerned regards the interpretation of the phrase, "And offer him there for a burnt-offering." Did this mean that Abraham was actually to kill and cremate his own son? If so, how can Yahweh (Jehovah) be justified for making such a command? Are not such sacrifices prohibited? Is not the very idea abhorrent, and does not the very suggestion offend our moral sensitivity? Or was Abraham merely commanded to wholly dedicate his son to Yahweh? In this case, why is the expression 'olah used, and how can God be vindicated for allowing Abraham so grossly to misinterpret His will? In either case there is a theodicy--the problem of reconciling the divine command with the otherwise known divine nature and purpose.

There is, to be sure, an awesome aspect to the stern, succinct narrative regarding the sacrifice of Isaac. Unfortunately, many readers have been overawed. The present study is not slanted to the liberal theologian, but to the otherwise conservative interpreter who through his awe at the sacrifice of Isaac has prepared himself for major hermeneutical and Christological concessions.

The severity of Abraham's test and hence the significance of the problem of this study was greatly multiplied by the soteriological implications of his action. The promise of salvation and blessing was to come through Isaac. This was clear enough to Abraham. But if to him, how much more is that clear to us who have the full revelation concerning that seed through whom all nations will be blessed, even Jesus. The Divine Providence seems to delight in manifesting the glory and power of God in such incidents where the hope for the fulfillment of the Messianic promise hangs by the finest thread--and that about to be cut off. As in the day that Cain killed Abel; as in the day that Athaliah destroyed all the seed royal save Joash; as in the day that Haman devised his wicked plot against the kin of Mordecai; and as in the day that Herod sought the life of Messiah Himself; so it seemed on this occasion, Abraham was commanded not only to sacrifice his beloved son, "but to cut in pieces, or cast into the fire, the charter of his salvation, and to have nothing left for himself, but death and hell."[1]

Two problems bearing on the sacrifice of Isaac demand attention before the nature of that sacrifice can rightly be evaluated. These are the relation of Abraham to the rite of human sacrifice and the attitude of Yahweh toward the same.

THE PRACTICE OF HUMAN SACRIFICE

The sacrifice of Isaac has traditionally been related in one way or another to the practice of human sacrifice. It is supposed that such sacrifices were prevalent in Abraham's day. It

is urged on the one hand that Abraham's offering was qualitatively identical to that of his pagan ancestors and neighbors. Others maintain that the experience of Abraham is unique, and should be compared only with the sacrificial death of Christ, to which it bears a typical relationship.

In the early stages of modern archaeological discovery, generalizations regarding practices such as human sacrifice were sometimes made with too great haste. Time has tempered the judgment of authorities, but the evidence that such sacrifices were actually carried out remains intact. In Mesopotamia, for example, we have the positive evidence of a published Babylonian cylinder seal which unmistakably portrays the actual execution of a human sacrifice.[2] A.H. Sayce, British Assyriologist of a generation ago, has called attention to an Akkadian poem of pre-Semitic times with its later Assyrian translation concerning the sacrifice of a firstborn son. It says distinctly, "His offspring for his life he gave."[3] Biblical evidence that human sacrifice was known in Mesopotamia in later times is found in II Ki. 17:31, "...And the Sepharvites burnt their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim." Among the Canaanites, the silence of the Ugaritic texts with respect to human sacrifice[4] has confirmed the opinion of Prof. Albright that human sacrifice, though well known, "does not seem to have been practiced quite so frequently as used to be thought."[5] Among the Hebrews, it must be conceded that human sacrifice was never an established or recognized part of the Jewish religion. The sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter, for example, will admit of interpretation other than that of a true human sacrifice. Although rejecting the idea that human sacrifice was ever a legitimate or recognized element of the religion of Israel, it cannot be denied that the cult did exist as an idolatrous abomination in times of religious declension and national apostasy. Biblical references to such sacrifices uniformly relate them to the worship of the deity Molech.

We conclude therefore that Abraham probably had some knowledge and experience with human sacrifice. It appears, though, that such knowledge was more limited than was supposed in previous generations. On the other hand, we deny on the basis of Levitical legislation that Yahweh ever demanded human sacrifice as a general practice for the nation of Israel. Therefore, whatever else is said of God's demand upon Abraham, it must be acknowledged that his experience is unique in Old Testament history.[6]

YAHWEH AND HUMAN SACRIFICE

It is generally assumed that the Old Testament categorically prohibits the rite of human sacrifice. To be sure, the Mosaic Law contains certain prohibitions in this regard.[7] However, a thorough examination of these prohibitions sheds significant light on the problem of the sacrifice of Isaac. For example, (1) The legal prohibitions, as well as the prophetic polemics,[8] are uniformly related to heathen deities. In the passages cited, human sacrifice occurs almost incidentally amid lists of abominations rendered in connection with idolatrous worship. (2) The greater offense is not the sacrifice, but the idolatry involved in offering such a sacrifice to a god other than Yahweh. The first commandment is not, "Thou shalt not offer human sacrifices," but, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."[9] (3) The Bible contains no prohibitions of human sacrifice to Yahweh. The only possible exception to this principle is the legislation regarding the redemption of the first-born sons in Ex. 13:1-16. This passage, however, does not condemn human sacrifice. On the contrary, it proves that Yahweh had a very definite claim on all the first-born of Israel, whether man or beast.

The Grace of God in the Redemption of First-Born Sons

Following the judgment on the first-born in Egypt and in connection with the institution of the passover, Yahweh demanded that all the first-born in Israel be sanctified to Him (Ex. 13:1).[10] The clean beasts were to be sacrificed, the unclean were to be redeemed with a lamb or killed, and the first-born of men were to be redeemed. This passage, taken at face value, must mean that Yahweh had a claim on the first-born which would have involved their death, save for His gracious provision for their redemption. Theories of interpretation which refuse to admit this minimize the sovereignty of God and the sinfulness of man. When one rightly appreciates that his very existence and his continuation in existence are dependent upon the grace of God ("It is of Jehovah's lovingkindness that we are not consumed," Lam. 3:22), then the demand of God upon the life of any particular individual will pose no problem. Prof. Sayce, although he insists that, "Abraham, in accordance with the fierce ritual of Syria, believed himself called upon to offer up in sacrifice his only son,"[11] nevertheless, admits that Yahweh had a claim on the first-born sons of Israel. "He could claim them, and it was of His own free-will that he waived the claim."[12] It is not surprising that expositors generally have failed to see this point since they have rejected the more ultimate thesis that human sacrifice per se is an amoral act. We contend, on the other hand, that no act is inherently moral or immoral except as it impinges on the revealed will of God. Therefore, any argument against human sacrifice which begins with the premise that God could not require such a sacrifice errs in beginning from a false premise. Since the sin of Adam, it is only by the grace of God that any man has been permitted to live. Therefore, a fortiori, it is only by the grace of God that any particular individual or group is spared.[13]

Sacrifice or Obedience

The most frequent objection raised against the Biblical presentation of Yahweh and His relationship to sacrifice is that sacrifice, whether of human beings or of beasts, is an element of primitive religion, and that Yahweh really desires not sacrifice at all but obedience. Those who argue this way support their claims with such texts as Genesis 22, urging that the outcome of the Abraham/Isaac incident proves that Yahweh was really interested in the obedience of Abraham and not the sacrifice of Isaac. Another text, frequently used is I Sam. 15:22:

> And Samuel said, Hath Jehovah as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.[14]

The spirit of the objection is evident in the opinion of Marcus Dods with respect to the sacrifice of Isaac:

> God meant Abraham to make the sacrifice in spirit, not in the outward act; he meant to write deeply on the Jewish mind the fundamental lesson regarding sacrifice, that it is in the spirit and will that all true sacrifice is made...The sacrifice God seeks is the devotion of the living soul, not the consumption of a dead body.[15]

This view, carried to its logical conclusion, would eliminate the necessity of the sacrificial death of Christ. This in turn eliminates the atonement and thereby abnegates the whole Christian gospel. A few commentators have seen this and candidly admitted to the consequence. Lange, for example, after drawing the distinction of two kinds of sacrifice, namely, the spiritual consecration of a man as a sacrifice, and the visible slaughter of an animal, argues that the latter is only symbolical and typical of the former. He concludes:

> In the crucifixion, these two sacrifices outwardly come together, while really and spiritually they are separated as widely as heaven and hell. Christ yields himself in perfect obedience to the will of the Father, in the judgment of the world. That is the fulfilling of the Israelitish sacrifice. Caiaphas will suffer the innocent to die for the good of the people (John xi. 50), and even Pilate yields him to the will of men (Luke xxiii. 25); this is the completion of the Moloch-sacrifice.[16]

To assert that the death of Christ was only Pilate's idea is certainly far afield from Pauline theology which says:

> ...While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son... (Rom. 5:10).
>
> ...in whom we have redemption through his blood (Eph. 1:7).
>
> ...Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of sweet smell (Eph. 5:2).

The view that sacrifice is subordinate to obedience stems from two diametrically opposed points of view. Those who take the Bible seriously and regard it as indeed the written revelation of God tend to minimize the importance of Old Testament sacrifices on the basis of New Testament theology. The New Testament regards those sacrifices made under the old dispensation as subordinate and inferior to the sacrifice of Christ--"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second" (Heb. 8:7). They are regarded as typical or symbolic--"For the law having a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things, can never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect them that draw nigh" (Heb. 10:4). On the other hand, those who do not treat the Bible with such "wooden-headed literalism" deny that God ever wanted or demanded sacrifices at all. The institution of sacrifice is a primitive, savage rite that was merely tolerated for a season until more advanced revelation could be received.

The latter position we reject on the grounds of our presupposition that the Holy Scriptures are an inspired and inerrant revelation, and the corollary that the religion of Israel is therefore essentially revealed rather than evolved. However, even apart from this premise, it is quite possible to establish with a relatively high degree of certitude that the origin of sacrifice must be accounted for on the basis of divine revelation. Hobart Freeman has pointed out that:

> The universal prevalence of the practice of vicarious and piacular sacrifice...cannot be reasonably explained apart from the idea that it was derived from a common and authoritative source.[17]

He has also examined the only alternative explanations, namely, that the practice of sacrifice arose from (1) some dictate of reason; (2) some demand of nature; or (3) some principle of interest, and found them wholly inadequate.[18]

The other position, that the Old Testament sacrifices were not so important after all, is quite as serious as the liberal view, for in attempting to exalt the significance of the death of Christ, it actually has the opposite effect of undermining the basis thereof. This view also minimizes the Old Testament teaching that for the individual under the old covenant the Levitical sacrifices were the only possible means of atonement for sin and the only means through which Yahweh chose to be propitiated. Although He expected that the offerer would bring the appointed sacrifice in an attitude of repentance and faith, it by no means follows that a proper "heart-attitude" without the appropriate form would be acceptable to Yahweh.[19]

The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ

Having cleared away certain relatively superficial matters we come now to the crux of the whole issue. The crucial question related to the proposed sacrifice of Isaac is this: In the death of Christ, did God actually demand the sacrifice of an innocent human being as a substitutionary sacrifice for others, thereby atoning for their sins and propitiating the wrath of a holy God against them? The dilemma which this question poses for the interpreter is: If answered affirmatively, then there is no a priori ground for denying that God could have demanded the actual slaying of Isaac as a sacrifice. Indeed, if God could demand the death of his own Son as a substitutionary sacrifice, then there is more ground for expecting Him to demand the sacrifice of other human beings than for denying the same. On the other hand, if one answers negatively, then the whole basis for Christian salvation is destroyed.

Biblical Representation of the Atonement

Scholastic theologians established the proposition that our knowledge of God and spiritual realities is neither univocal nor equivocal but analogical. As such our understanding of great spiritual truths is related to a variety of figures. This is especially true of the death of Christ. Historically, theologians have erred through an unbalanced emphasis of one of the figures, excluding or minimizing the others. It is therefore important to know just what the Bible does teach, and to have a balanced picture of that teaching.

The death of Christ and its significance is the very center of the Biblical message. Texts cited here are only a representative sample of the Biblical teaching. The death of Christ is represented as:

(1) Sacrificial.

> For our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ (I Cor. 5:7).

(2) Expiatory.

> For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:13-14).

(3) Propitiatory.

> Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (I Jn. 4:10).

(4) Redemptive.

> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree (Gal. 3:13).

(5) Representative.

> For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again (II Cor. 5:14-15).

(6) Exemplary.

> For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps (I Pet. 2:21).

(7) Triumphantorial.

> You, I say, did he make alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses; having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross; having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it (Co. 2:15).

(8) Substitutionary.

> But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:5-6).

Historical Interpretations

In the process of analysis and systematization the Church has in various periods emphasized the above aspects of Christ's death in different ways. Apart from an outright denial

of the efficacy of Christ's work none of the historical interpretations are wholly in error. They are deficient from the standpoint of what they omit rather than defective from the standpoint of what they include.

The so-called "theories of the atonement" have been enumerated and discussed voluminously. Theories have been variously grouped and separated, contrasted and compared. The most frequent division is that of (1) subjective theories, (2) objective theories, and (3) all shades of opinion on the "misty flats in between." In our discussion here we have chosen an outstanding representative from each of five distinct positions. It is our intention to show by this study that Christian orthodoxy has developed a doctrine of the atonement which harmonizes with the Biblical picture of Christ's death as a sacrifice, that this sacrifice was in accord with the eternal counsels of God, and that the sacrifice of a theanthropic person was the only possible means of securing a reconciliation between a holy God and sinful men.

Irenaeus (second century, A. D.)--We begin with the Patristic church taking as a representative Irenaeus. The early Fathers obviously believed in salvation through the work of Christ. They adhered closely to the Biblical figures in speaking of Christ's death. However, the early church had no theological formulation on the atonement--as it did, for example, on the trinity or the nature of Christ's person. For this reason it is easy to misinterpret illustrations used by the Fathers as comprising their whole concept of the doctrine. The view of the early church with respect to Christ's death has frequently been designated the "Ransom theory," or the "Devil-ransom theory." This is due to the Patristic emphasis on the redemptive aspect of Christ's work which was crudely spoken of in those days as a ransom price paid by God to Satan. It was deemed necessary, in light of man's bondage to sin, death, and Satan, that the ransom for men's souls be paid to Satan, their captor. It is true that this concept formed a common motif in those early discussions.

> And since the Apostasy [i.e. the rebellious spirit, Satan] unjustly held sway over us, and though we were by nature [the possession] of Almighty God, estranged us against nature, making us his own disciples; therefore the Word of God, mighty in all things and not lacking in his own justice, acted justly even in the encounter with the Apostasy itself, ransoming from it that which was his own, not by force, in the way in which it secured the sway over us in the beginning, snatching insatiably what was not its own; but by persuasion, as it became God to receive what he wished; by persuasion, not by use of force, that the principles of justice might not be infringed, and, at the same time, that God's original creation might not perish.[20]

Irenaeus further spoke of Christ's redeeming and sanctifying every stage of human life by his recapitulation of the same in his own life.

> For we have shown that the Son of God did not then begin to exist since he existed with the Father always; but when he was incarnate and made man, he recapitulated [or summed up] in himself the long line of the human race, procuring for us salvation thus summarily, so that what we had lost in Adam, that is, the being in the image and likeness of God, that we should regain in Christ Jesus.[21]

Later writers, particularly Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius, and Augustine, elaborated the theory of Irenaeus into a fantastic scheme whereby God deceived Satan, as with a fish-hook or mouse-trap, and thus gained the victory over Satan and his forces.

These views, though not a technical theological formulation, characterized the thought of the church for about a thousand years, until the writing of Anselm's Cur Deus Homo.

Anselm (1033-1109).--Few writings in the history of Christianity have had an influence comparable to Anselm's Cur Deus Homo. For all its brevity, it marks a turning point in Christological and soteriological thought. Cur Deus Homo is really the first serious attempt to define the nature of the atonement. As such it should be the terminus a quo of all subsequent discussions.[22]

In contrast to Augustine's view that it was good or fitting that God forgive sinners on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, Anselm attempted to prove by logical argument that there was no other way.[23] Only God himself could repay man's infinite debt and only a man could make that payment for men. He attacked the old ransom theory, particularly the idea that Satan had certain "rights" over men. Sin is a violation of God's law, an offense to His honor and majesty. It is therefore the honor of God that must be satisfied rather than the claims of Satan.

The theory of Anselm was largely cast in the terms of feudal society. It was addressed more to the honor or majesty of God than to His holiness. His view, however, was refined by the reformers, especially Calvin, later by John Owen and Jonathan Edwards, and is still held by consistent Calvinists. The view of Anselm, albeit with refinements and variation, is defended by James Denny, George Smeaton, T. J. Crawford, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, W. G. T. Shedd, A. H. Strong, L. S. Chafer, and others of our own era. It is variously referred to as the commercial view, the penal view, the satisfaction view or the substitutionary view.

Abelard (1079-1142).--The objective theories[24] were based on the view of sin as a violation of God's law. Man stands separated from God by reason of his own personal sin as well as by reason of his inherited guilt from Adam's sin. He is helpless to change his status of condemnation apart from a sovereign intervention of grace. It is altogether reasonable that the Pelagian view of sin[25] should generate a theory of the atonement that enables man to help himself. This type of theory, so-called the subjective or moral influence, was given classic expression by Peter Abelard. In his opinion the purpose of the death of Christ was to impress man with the love of God and thereby morally influence him to surrender his life to God.[26] Sin is forgiven gratis on the sole condition of repentance and a desire to do better. In his commentary on Romans, Abelard writes:

> Now it seems to us that we have been justified by the blood of Christ and reconciled to God in this way: through this unique act of grace manifested to us--in that his Son has taken upon himself our nature and persevered therein in teaching us by word and example even unto death--he has more fully bound us to himself by love; with the result that our hearts should be enkindled by such a gift of divine grace, and true charity should not now shrink from enduring anything for him.[27]

A generation ago this theory was defended with various modifications by Albrecht Ritschl and Fredrich Schliermacher of Germany (mystical theory); Edward Irving and McLeod Campbell of Britain (respectively, the theories of gradually extirpated depravity and vicarious repentance); and Horace Bushnell of America (theory of vicarious sacrifice).

This view of Christ's work was one of the outstanding features of modernistic theology and is by no means dead today. William Adams Brown, leading modernist theologian, taught that Christ's saving work consisted of the revelation of the loving character of God which calls forth an answering love in us. This revelation influences us morally by what it shows us to be true.[28] Nels Ferré believes that, "Forgiveness is free and direct to those who are willing henceforth to live responsibly on the Father's terms for the family."[29] Unitarians subscribe to the example variation of Abelard's theory.

Grotius (1583-1645).--In the seventeenth century, Hugo Grotius of Leyden, Holland, propounded a theory which Warfield calls a half-way-house between the objective and subjective views.[30] His view is called the governmental or rectoral theory and is expressed in legal terminology--Grotius himself being a brilliant lawyer. Sin is regarded as rebellion against the government of God. God in his love will forgive sin but he must demonstrate publicly that He will not condone sin and thus make forgiveness possible.[31]

This theory has been adopted and defended by Arminian theologians from the reformation onward. It is really the highest form of atonement doctrine logically conformable to Arminian theology which rejects the doctrine of imputation, either of sin or of righteousness. Defenders of the governmental view include Charles Finney, F. Godet, R. W. Dale, Alfred Cave, John Miley, and Marcus Dods.

Aulén (Prof. of Systematic Theology, University of Lund).--The ransom theory of the early church, though it erred in the matter of God's deceiving and bribing Satan, had the value of emphasizing man's bondage to Satan and the necessity of his being freed from that bondage by the work of Christ. It supported the objectivity of Christ's work. Luther also emphasized Christ's death as a victory over Satan and man's deliverance from sin, death, and the law. The old view--which was not, as we have noted, a systematic formulation at all--has been revived in our day by a group of Swedish theologians, notably, Gustaf Aulén, and primarily in his book, Christus Victor.[32] He refers to his view as the "Classic" or "Triumphantorial" view.

Describing his own view, Aulén writes:

> It was...my intention to emphasize that the outlook of the Atonement as a drama, where the love of God in Christ fights and conquers the hostile powers, is a central and decisive perspective which never can be omitted and which indeed must stamp every really Christian doctrine of the Atonement.[33]

A recent neo-orthodox writer, William Hordern, praises Aulén for rescuing the true view from the unfortunate terminology in which it was expressed. He argues,

> It would be strange indeed if the Bible taught the fundamentalist or Anselmic doctrine and if for the first thousand years of Christianity no one recognized it.[34]

Hordern also notes that Aulén's view has found wide acceptance among neo-orthodox thinkers because it combines the incarnation and the atonement.[35]

The Atonement in Modern Thought

A generation ago, B. B. Warfield said:

> Voices are raised all about us proclaiming a "theory" of the atonement impossible, while many of those that essay a "theory" seem to be feeling their tortuous way very much in the dark. That, if I mistake not, is the real state of affairs in the modern church.[36]

If that darkness shrouded the theological discussion in Warfield's day, and he was presumably a qualified judge, his characterization is certainly no less true of the situation today.

It is sufficient for our present purpose to note several outstanding characteristics of the contemporary (i.e., post-reformation) discussion of the atonement.

First, let it be noted that the noncommittal attitude to which Warfield made reference is still with us. William Hordern, in his popular handbook, A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology, candidly admits this:

> Whereas fundamentalism makes the Atonement central, modern orthodoxy[37] tends to make the Incarnation central. Fundamentalism is committed to one view of atonement--the substitutionary death of Christ for the sins of man. Modern orthodoxy is, in line with historic Christianity, hesitant to make any doctrine of atonement final. The result is that the death of Jesus is of central importance for fundamentalism, while modern orthodoxy, like liberalism, looks to the whole life of Jesus. In particular, modern orthodoxy emphasizes that the Resurrection of Jesus cannot be separated from his atoning work.[38]

An Objective theory: Sine Qua Non.--One of the striking characteristice of this area of thought in our own day is the quest for a satisfactory objective theory. Objective, that is, except for the "morally objectionable" penal and substitutionary elements of traditional orthodox theology.[39] Leon Morris, of Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia, has pointed out this characteristic in a splendid article in His magazine. He writes:

> Marked dissatisfaction with purely moral theories of the atonement has been evident in recent years, and very few (if any) front rank theologians put forth such views nowadays. This does not mean that any unanimity of opinion exists, but it does mean that men are feeling for some theory which will be objective, and yet will not outrage the ideas of our day.[40]

Morris explains that the most popular view is one or another variation of the representative theory. That is, Christ was not our substitute nor was his death a sacrifice as such but he did do something that serves as a basis for reconciliation.

> He was not separate from sinners in His suffering, but dying in their name, dying for their sake, dying in a way which avails for them.[41]

In his important work, God Was in Christ, C. M. Baillie struggles with the problem of defining a theory which is objective and yet avoids the notions of sacrifice, substitution, and propitiation. He denies that Christ's death was a true sacrifice at all--though Old Testament sacrificial terms are used to describe it.[42] The New Testament expression hilasmos has nothing to do with appeasing an angry God, "For the love of God is the starting place."[43] In fact, the Old Testament sacrificial terminology is completely transformed by the usage of the New Testament.[44] Nevertheless, he insists that God did something objective and costly in Christ to make reconciliation possible. The objective element, that which is "Ordained and accepted by God, in 'expiation' of human sin, quite apart from our knowledge of it," is the sacrifice which God is continually making of himself and to himself by suffering on account of sin.

> ...He is infinite Love confronted with human sin. And it is an expiatory sacrifice, because sin is a dreadfully real thing which love cannot tolerate or lightly pass over, and it is only out of the suffering of such inexorable love that true forgiveness, as distinct from an indulgent amnesty, could ever come.[45]

Aulén, too, as we have noted,[46] although he denies the "commercial" view does set forth an objective theory.

> Christ--Christus Victor--fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants'[47] under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to himself.[48]

In short, modern theologians have come to recognize that an objective theory is the conditio sine qua non of any atonement theory that purports to be Biblical.

Christ's death as a sacrifice.--Another significant feature of recent Christological thought is the recognition of Christ's death as a sacrifice. Oliver Quick, C. H. Dodd, Vincent Taylor, and A. M. Hunter have given support to this view. The death of Christ is regarded as the fulfillment of Isaiah 53. Christ died vicariously in the interests of sinful men and forgiveness is mediated through his sacrifice.[49]

Wm. Hordern, in the work cited above, says in reply to Abelard: "Christ's death can only be a revelation of God's love for man if it was a necessary sacrifice. It is meaningless if man could be saved without it."[50] His own view of Christianity is:

> Whereas most religions believe that man has to do something to atone to God, Christianity teaches that God himself performed the atoning work. Other

> religions perform sacrifices in order that God might turn his angry face back toward man and forgive him. Christianity teaches that God has performed a sacrifice, in and through Jesus, which has brought God and man back into fellowship with each other.[51]

By and large, however, the theologians of our own day who use the terminology of Old Testament sacrifice in speaking of the death of Christ do not mean that Christ's death was a sacrifice in that sense. Rather, sacrifice is distinguished as to (1) Sacrifice as a sacrificial gift, a votive offering. Man offers something of his own property as a sacrifice on the altar of his deity. (2) Man's offering of obedience, justice and righteousness, mercy and love. This is the ethical way of sacrifice. This was the essence of the prophetic message in the Old Testament. And (3) the sacrifice of a broken spirit--the offering, that is, of the man himself in humility. This is the religious way of sacrifice.[52]

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ, however, is of wholly different character. "It is God's own sacrifice."[53] The sacrifice of Christ is both God's own act of sacrifice and also a sacrifice offered to God.[54] Aulén insists that the Anselmic view "develops the latter aspect, and eliminates the former."[55]

The immorality of substitution.--Despite any concessions that theologians have made toward a truly Biblical Christology, on one point there is no change. The idea of substitution, of vicarious punishment, is immoral! I call to witness three voices from the past, not because things have changed, but because the attitude was formerly expressed more candidly (or crudely) than now. The most cursory perusal of contemporary literature will reveal that the attitude on this point, though expressed with greater refinement, remains unchanged.

Abelard:

> Indeed, how cruel and wicked it seems that anyone should demand the blood of an innocent person as the price for anything, or that it should in any way please him that an innocent man should be slain--still less that God should consider the death of his Son so agreeable that by it he should be reconciled to the whole world![56]

P. T. Forsyth:

> Does God's judgment mean exacting the utmost farthing or suffering? Does it mean that in the hour of his death Christ suffered, compressed into one brief moment, all the pains of hell that the human race deserved? We cannot think about things in that way. God does not work by such equivalents. Let us get rid of that materialistic idea of equivalents. What Christ gave to God was not an equivalent penalty, but an adequate confession of God's holiness, rising from amid extreme conditions of sin.[57]

Horace Bushnell:

> On the whole this matter of contrived compensation to justice which so many take for a gospel, appears to contain about the worst reflexion upon

> God's justice that could be stated...The justice satisfied is satisfied with an injustice....The penalties threatened, as against wrongdoers are not to be executed on them, because they have been executed on a right-doer! viz., Christ.[58]

Vicarious punishment on our level would, of course, be a serious miscarriage of justice and indeed immoral. The death of Christ, however, is not strictly analogous to the case of a human judge punishing an innocent third party in the stead of a condemned criminal. At least the analogy dare not be pressed. In the case of Christ's sacrifice there is only one party beside the condemned. He is, "Judge, Wronged Party, King (or Law), and Substitute."[59] The case is wholly unique and the same Bible which declares it so to be also declares the impossibility of any other substitutionary atonement apart from this.[60]

The Relevancy of the Atonement for the Interpretation of Genesis 22

As a result of this inquiry into the problem of human sacrifice certain key factors emerge as guidelines for the interpretation of Genesis 22. Nor do we lack for New Testament warrant in drawing such an analogy. Paul certainly alluded to Abraham's experience in Romans 8:32 where he writes of Christ's sacrifice: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all..."[61]

(1) The Biblical record certainly represents Christ's death as a sacrifice and the orthodox Christian community has recognized it as such. Inasmuch as Jesus Christ was indeed the Son of Man, his death is a human sacrifice.

(2) Those who deny that the New Testament use of sacrificial terminology has reference to the Levitical offerings do so on the basis of a distorted concept of the idea of sacrifice. This distorted concept is in turn due to the gratuitous assumption of the evolutionary development of the institutions of Israel's religion.

(3) To speak of the immorality of God's acting in any particular way is an exhibition of pride which elevates the judgment of man above that of God. Such evaluations make man the standard of universal morality and thereby reveal a wholly inadequate concept of ethics. Man is the measure of all things.

(4) To insist that God could not have demanded the sacrifice of Isaac on moral grounds would lend support to the view that God could not have demanded the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the same reason. Contrariwise, if the death of Jesus Christ is a true sacrifice, what ground is left for denying the possibility of God's demanding the sacrifice of Isaac?[62]

(5) The fact that Isaac was not put to death in no way alters the analogy for from the viewpoint of both Abraham and God he was already sacrificed[63] and his coming down from the altar was tantamount to a resurrection from the dead. This was the focal point of Abraham's test: He believed that God would raise the son of promise from the dead.[64]

THE NATURE OF THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

In light of these considerations we proceed to several lines of argument which support the traditional view that Abraham was instructed and expected to offer Isaac as a whole burnt-offering in the usual manner of such sacrifice.

The Divine Origin of the Command

The text of Genesis 22:1 clearly reads: "And Elohim tested Abraham" (translation and underlining are mine). The serious exegete cannot escape the fact that this text teaches the divine origin of the idea for this sacrifice without resorting to a most subjective hermeneutics. By way of contrast, modern interpreters, who do not feel duty bound to protect the reputation of Abraham (or for that matter, of Abraham's God), tend to attribute the idea to Abraham himself. The suggestion that Abraham was only acting in accordance with the custom of his day is quite popular.

> Here in the story of Abraham and Isaac there is embedded the fact that once men not only practiced human sacrifice, but did it at what they thought was divine command.
>
> If men worshipping pagan deities could carry their religion to that terrific cost, how could Abraham show that his religion meant as much to him? Only by being willing to go as far as he did.[65]
>
> In primitive Israelitish religion every first-born male was regarded as the property of Yahweh....The story of the sacrifice of Isaac is almost certainly reminiscent of a progress from barbarism to enlightenment.[66]

We regard as highly improbable the notion that Abraham became aware of this command through the ordinary action of his conscience. Isaac was a miraculous child of divine promise. On him rested the only hope of divine blessing for Abraham and all mankind. He was the sole channel for the ultimate bestowal of eternal salvation. He was therefore to Abraham the charter of his salvation. That Abraham would have himself conceived the idea for Isaac's sacrifice is too great a strain on one's imagination.

The Terms of the Command

Abraham was instructed to "offer him there for a burnt-offering." The verb 'alah means to go up, or ascend; in the hiphil, to cause to go up, and therefore, with respect to sacrifices, to offer. The 'olah is the whole burnt-offering. It goes up in the flame of the altar to God expressing the ascent of the soul in worship. The 'olah is a particular type of sacrifice. It was the sacrifice that was completely consumed by the fire on the altar. It is significant that the sacrifice of Isaac is not called a minḥah (a gift, present, or offering), a more general term that would have more suitably described a so-called "spiritual sacrifice" had that been intended. Neither is it called a zeḇaḥ, the general name for sacrifices eaten at the feasts. It is not a ḥaṭa't nor an 'āšām, a sin or trespass offering. The sacrifice of Isaac was not intended as a sacrifice for sin. It was an expression of Abraham's own worship and de-

votion to Yahweh. In light of the universal usage of 'olah for a sacrifice that is wholly consumed by fire, it is only reasonable to expect some qualifying phrase if this were not the actual intent.

New Testament Evidence

> By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a figure receive him back (Heb. 11:17-19).
>
> Was not Abraham our father justified by works in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? (Jas. 2:21)[67]

From these texts as well as from Gen. 22:12, "For now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me," we learn that from the standpoint of both Abraham and God the sacrifice of Isaac was complete. Abraham had gone far enough that there was no question or doubt that he would complete the sacrifice. God was satisfied. Abraham was so sure of Isaac's death that his coming down from the altar was tantamount to a resurrection from the dead. It is therefore a figure or type of Christ's death and resurrection for, auton kai en parabolāi ekomisato. This argument is also sustained by the use of the perfect tense of prospherō in Hebrews 11:17. Pistei prosenānochen Abraam ton Isaak peirazomenos.

Analogy to the Sacrificial Death of Christ

We have endeavored in this study to point out the analogous relationship between the sacrifice of Isaac and the death of Christ as a sacrifice. No interpretation of Genesis 22 can be adequate that fails to consider the Christological and soteriological implications thus involved. An analogy, however, does not bear an exact correspondence to the reality in every detail, else it would cease to be an analogy and become an exact equivalent to the reality.

The sacrifice of Isaac corresponds to that of Christ in the following respects: (1) They are in both cases the sacrifice by a father of his only son. (2) They both symbolize a complete dedication on the part of the offerer. And (3) they are in both cases a human sacrifice.

On the other hand, no single sacrifice in the Old Testament was sufficient in itself to fully typify the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. Only by a composite view of all the different offerings is Christ's death adequately pictured. The sacrifice of Isaac could never have pictured the most essential idea in the sacrifice of Christ, namely, substitution. Isaac was not an adequate substitute. It is doubtless for this reason that the hand of Abraham was stayed and another "parable" introduced, for the substitution of a ram in the stead of Isaac is certainly an adequate type of a substitute ransom. It is perhaps the clearest illustration of substitution in the whole Old Testament. Thus the two sacrifices taken together complement each other in their respective representation of the death of Christ. The sacrifice of Isaac

has the merit of adding that dimension which is lacking in all other Old Testament sacrifices, that God's own sacrifice would be a human sacrifice, and beyond that, the Son of the Offerer Himself.

DOCUMENTATION

1. John Calvin, Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), I, 563.
2. R. A. S. Macalister, "Human Sacrifice: Semitic," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings, VI, 863. This seal is described in detail by Macalister in this article. For another such seal see: The Jewish Encyclopedia, VIII, 653.
3. A. H. Sayce, Patriarchal Palestine (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1895), p. 183.
4. According to Albright, "The extent to which human sacrifice was practiced among the Canaanites has not been clarified by the discoveries at Ugarit, which nowhere appear to mention it at all." W. F. Albright, Archaeology and the Religion of Israel (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1942), p. 93.
5. W. F. Albright, "Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands," Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), p. 34.
6. The burden of this paper is to demonstrate that human sacrifice per se is an amoral act. Its acquired morality is dependent on the command or prohibition of God.
7. The chief texts are: Lev. 18:21; 20:1-5; Deut. 12:31; 18:10.
8. The chief texts are: Jer. 7:31, 19:1-13; 32:35; Isa. 57:5; Ezek. 20:31; 23:37.
9. Exod. 20:3. Paul Tillich has accurately observed that the greater the act of faith or worship offered to an idol, the greater the abomination to the True God. Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), pp. 11ff.
10. The Biblical material is found in: Exod. 13:1-16; 22:29; 34:20. On the redemption of the first-born by the substitution of the Levites and the payment of five shekels, see: Num. 3:40-51; 18:15ff.
11. A. H. Sayce, The Early History of the Hebrews (London: Rivingtons, 1897), p. 51.
12. Ibid., p. 47.
13. In order to avoid the extreme of hyper-Calvinism, the whole matter of divine election must be viewed in this light. It is not that God elects some men to salvation and some to perdition; but that of all men, already doomed, God has graciously chosen to sovereignly elect some to the joys of salvation.
14. Parallel ideas are expressed in the following texts from the Prophets: Amos 5:21-24; Isa. 1:11; Jer. 6:20; and Mic. 6:6-8.
15. Marcus Dods, The Book of Genesis, The Expositor's Bible, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1900), p. 200.
16. John Peter Lange, Genesis, trans. and ed. A. Gosman, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, ed. J. P. Lange, trans. and ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n. d.), p. 80. Italics mine.
17. Hobart E. Freeman, "The Doctrine of Substitution in the Old Testament" (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Ind., 1961), p. 103.
18. Ibid., p. 96.
19. For a thorough treatment of this idea, see "The Problem of the Efficacy of the Old Testament Sacrifices," Hobart Freeman, op. cit., pp. 335-358.

20. Henry Bettenson (ed.), Documents of the Christian Church (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 43.
21. Ibid., p. 42.
22. This of course has not been the case inasmuch as recent neo-orthodox theologians have returned to the "classic" or early church view.
23. Robert S. Paul, The Atonement and the Sacraments (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 68.
24. Both the ransom theory and the commercial theory are "objective" in that they describe an effect secured apart from man which serves as the basis for his reconciliation. "Subjective" theories emphasize the work of Christ in and for the believer.
25. Pelagius denied that man inherited either guilt or a sin-nature from Adam. Every man is as free as Adam. Some men sin: others never do. As Adam was a bad example to influence men to sin, so Christ is a good example to influence men to holiness.
26. Earle E. Cairns, Christianity Through the Centuries (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), p. 256.
27. Cited by Paul, op. cit., p. 82.
28. Kenneth S. Kantzer, Unpublished notes on the Philosophy of Religion (Wheaton College, 1958).
29. Ibid.
30. B. B. Warfield, The Person and Work of Christ, ed. S. G. Craig (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1950), p. 379.
31. Advocates of this view distinguish retributive justice from public justice. Christ's death satisfies the demands of public justice only. For this reason we judge that the governmental theory really reduces to another variation of the moral influence theory. There is no objective ground for God's forgiving of any particular sin.
32. Gustaf Aulén, Christus Victor (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1961), passim.
33. Gustaf Aulén, "Chaos and Cosmos: The Drama of the Atonement," Interpretation, IV (April, 1950), p. 156. Obviously, we do not deny that this was a part of Christ's work. For a conservative statement of this aspect see: Wendell E. Kent, "The Spoiling of Principalities and Powers," Grace Journal, III (Winter, 1962), p. 8.
34. William Hordern, A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1958), p. 203. In reply it should be noted that before the corruption of the Church began under Constantine, theological discussion was largely concerned with the basic issues of the Scriptures, the nature of the Trinity, and the person of Christ. It is no more surprising that the early church had no technical statement of the Atonement than that it had no precise ecclesiology or eschatology.
35. Ibid. That is, because it differs from the subjective view of liberalism, which neo-orthodoxy regards as bad, and also from the objective view of fundamentalism, which neo-orthodoxy regards as impossible!
36. Warfield, op. cit., pp. 376-77.
37. That is, what we more commonly call "neo-orthodoxy."
38. Hordern, loc. cit. How interesting that the delay of the church in addressing itself to the problem of the atonement is sufficient warrant to declare that no doctrine of the atonement is final. But the same author has no qualms about denying the truth of propositional revelation--a truth on which the church has spoken and spoken clearly. Ibid., p. 188.
39. Samuel J. Mikolaski, "The Atonement and Men Today," Christianity Today, V (March 13, 1961); 3.

40. Leon Morris, "Penal View of the Atonement and Men Today," Christianity Today, V December, 1960), 33.
41. Ibid.
42. D. M. Baillie, God Was in Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 177.
43. Ibid., p. 187.
44. Ibid., p. 175, et passim.
45. Ibid., p. 198.
46. See the discussion of Aulén's atonement theory, above.
47. That is, sin, death, and Satan.
48. Aulén, Christus Victor, p. 4.
49. Mikolaski, op. cit., p. 3.
50. Hordern, op. cit., p. 34.
51. Ibid.
52. Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros, trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 120-21.
53. Ibid., p. 122.
54. Aulén, Christus Victor, p. 77.
55. Ibid.
56. Cited by Paul, op. cit., p. 81.
57. Ibid., p. 236.
58. Ibid., p. 152.
59. H. E. Guillebaud, Why the Cross? (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, reprtd., 1956), p. 147.
60. Ibid., p. 148.
61. The Greek expression ouk epheisato (spared not) is the same as the LXX translation in Gen. 22:16 which reads: ouk epheisō tou huiou sou tou agapātou di' eme. The form is aorist middle (deponent) from pheidomai: third person, singular, in Rom. 8; second person, singular, in Gen. 22.
62. This is not to say that the proposed sacrifice of Isaac was in any sense substitutionary or piacular in nature. In this respect Jesus' death is wholly unique.
63. Cf. Gen. 22:12, 16; Heb. 11:17; and Jas. 2:21.
64. Heb. 11:17
65. Walter Russell Bowie, Genesis, The Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), I. 642, 644.
66. C. R. North, "The Redeemer God," Interpretation, II, (Jan. 1948), p. 5.
67. On the supposed conflict between James and Paul over the justification of Abraham by faith or works, see G. C. Berkouwer, Faith and Justification, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), pp. 134-139.