A Participatory Model of the Atonement

Tim Bayne

tim.bayne@gmail.com

St. Catherine's College, University of Oxford

Greg Restall

restall@unimelb.edu.au

School of Philosophy, The University of Melbourne

Abstract

In this paper we develop a participatory model of the Christian doctrine of the atonement, according to which the atonement involves participating in the death and resurrection of Christ. In part one we argue that current models of the atonement—exemplary, penal, substitutionary and merit models—are unsatisfactory. The central problem with these models is that they assume a purely deontic conception of sin and, as a result, they fail to address sin as a relational and ontological problem. In part two we argue that a participatory model of the atonement is both exegetically and philosophically plausible, and should be taken seriously within philosophical theology.[i]

> What? Humanity sins but it's God's Son who pays the price? I tried to imagine Father saying to me, "Piscine, a lion slipped into the llama pen today and killed two llamas. Yesterday another one killed a black buck. Last week two of them ate the camel. The week before it was painted storks and grey herons. And who's to say for sure who snacked on our golden agouti? The situation has become intolerable. Something must be done. I have decided that the only way the lions can atone for their sins is if I feed you to them."
>
> "Yes, Father, that would be the right and logical thing to do. Give me a moment to wash up."
>
> … What a downright weird story. What peculiar psychology.
>
> — *Life of Pi*, Yann Martel

The atonement is at the heart of Christian theology. However, the atonement has not been at the heart of 20th Century Christian philosophy of religion: at least, you would not get the impression that it was from the volume of literature on the topic. Nonetheless, in recent years there has been a noticeable change in the intellectual climate, with a number of philosophers articulating models of the atonement. Although much of this work contains valuable insights, it

also suffers from a notable lack of engagement with work in theology and New Testament scholarship. Contributors to the philosophical discussion of the atonement have been almost exclusively concerned with what we might call *Abelard's constraint*: their goal has been to develop a model of the atonement that is "neither unintelligible, arbitrary, illogical nor immoral." While Abelard's constraint is perfectly acceptable (who would not prefer a theory which was intelligible, non-arbitrary, consistent and morally acceptable over one which was not?), accounts of the atonement should also be informed and constrained by the reflection on the atonement and salvation through the New Testament and in later church history.[ii] Any account that is not informed either by Scripture or by tradition forfeits its right to be thought of as a *Christian* account of the atonement, and the more an account *is* so informed, the better candidate it can be for being properly Christian In this chapter we argue that philosophical accounts of the atonement have much to learn from recent work in New Testament scholarship, in particular, Pauline scholarship.

1. Current models of the atonement

A model of the atonement is a model of God's way of dealing with sin. In light of this, it is useful to taxonomize models of the atonement in terms of their conception of sin. Roughly speaking, one might conceptualise sin in three ways: *ontologically*; *deontically*; and *relationally*. An *ontological* conception of sin conceives of it as a feature or element of human nature; it is something from which we suffer. One might also call it a "pathological" conception of sin, for it conceives of sin as a sickness. A *deontic* conception of sin conceives of sin in terms of a failure to fulfil our moral obligations. Sin, on this view, is immoral behaviour, and it results in a moral debt; it involves a debit in our moral ledger. A *relational* conception of sin conceives of it in terms of broken or alienated relationships; sin, on this view, consists in the fact that our relationship with God and each other is not what it ought to be. These three models of sin are not necessarily mutually exclusive—perhaps a pluralist account of the atonement could view sin through the lens of all three models—but they are substantively different, and treatments of the

atonement tend to privilege one conception at the expense of the others by foregrounding some considerations and backgrounding others, or by *explaining* features playing an explanatory role in one model in terms of features central to another.

Deontic Models

By far the dominant approach to the atonement in philosophical theology is deontic. Penal, satisfaction, merit and sacrificial models of the atonement are all deontic models in that they conceive of the atonement as dealing with a problem of moral debt. These models present different accounts of *how* God deals with this debt, but they are united in their conception of sin as first and foremost a deontic problem – it is a problem of moral *debt*.

According to Anselm's *satisfaction* model in *Cur Deus Homo*, the debt is paid when Christ gives God the honour that the human race owes him (see Aspenson 1990 for a contemporary discussion). The debt is dealt with by payment: the death of Christ qualifies as payment for the sin of humanity. According to the *penal* model (Morris 1966; Packer 1974; Porter 2002), the debt is dealt with by punishment: Christ is punished in place of our non-payment of the debt. On Swinburne's (1989) *sacrificial* model, Christ's death constitutes reparation and penance for non-payment of the debt. And on the *merit* model the debt of sin is forgiven rather than repaid: Christ's life and death is a meritorious act that persuades God to forgive the debt (Quinn 1994; Cross 2001; Putrill 1991).

A number of specific objections can be levelled against particular deontic models of the atonement but rather than pursue these objections we want to explore generic objections to deontic accounts of the atonement.[iii]

The grounds of our obligation

Somewhat curiously, proponents of the deontic conception of sin have said little about the nature of the moral obligations that we are assumed to have. There are three issues to be

addressed here: (a) To whom are these obligations owed? (b) What is the content of these obligations? and (c) On what basis are these obligations owed?

There is general agreement that the primary obligations are owed to God. Some or most sin might involve flouting one's obligation to oneself, or to other human beings, but on this picture, all sin is first and foremost an offence against God. But what are these obligations? According to Anselm, the obligation in question is our oubligation to *honour* God. There seems something morally problematic about this claim. To conceive of this as the *centre* of our obligations is morally dangerous. If the obligation to *honour* God is the ground of our obligations, then God's relation to us is morally no different to a petty bureaucrat, whose relations with his inferiors are controlled by whether or not those inferiors show respect. This is not to deny that respect may be appropriate in a right relationship, but to analyse the rightness of the relationship in terms of respect is to conceive of God's desires for his creatures in terms of their *compliance* and *deference*. This does grave injustice to the Gospel imperatives for the believer to *love* God and *love* neigbour.

According to Swinburne, the obligation in question is to God, and it is an obligation to live good lives. We sin when we live second-rate lives, despite having been given the opportunities by our creator to do otherwise (1989: 157). There is much that we find mysterious in this account. Perhaps we have obligations to live good lives, but do we have such obligations *to God?* Swinburne seems to think that we have this obligation to God because God created us, but this cannot be an adequate justification. Does Frankenstein's automaton have obligations to Frankenstein on the grounds of its origin? This could well be contested. Of course, Christians believe that we owe our being to God in a more thorough-going way than the automaton owes its being to Frankenstein; even so, ontological dependence alone is a tenuous basis on which to ground a deontological conception of sin. In the presence of other considerations, our ontological dependence upon God may well form a *part* of the ground of our obligations, but

any link between our dependence on God and our obligations to God cannot be the only explanation.

A second worry with Swinburne's conception of sin is that it sits uneasily with the biblical claim that *all* are subject to sin. Do we *all* live second-rate lives? It is not at all clear that we do. Obviously a life can be more or less virtuous, but surely some lives are very virtuous — yet all have sinned. (It could well be granted that we should call *all* lives of sinners "second-rate", but this is to evacuate the term of explanatory power. We then understand being second-rate in terms of sin rather than *vice versa,* which was the aim.) Finally, we note that if we have an obligation to God to live first-rate lives, then God has an obligation to us to give us the opportunity to live first-rate lives. Given the prevalence of evil and suffering, one might think that God has failed in this respect. Someone brought up in a violent and abusive household has little opportunity to live a first-rate life. At the very least, we do not think that this is a helpful explanatory notion, and again, it cannot be the point from which we *explain* the atonement.

Another ground for obligation might be the obligation we have to *love God* and *love neighbour*.[iv]

There is much to be said in favour of this notion, of course, and any properly Christian account of the imperatives of the Christian life will focus on the these commandments. However, it seems to us that thinking of love for God and love for neigbour as the grounds of an *obligation* is to undercut the explanatory force of the deontological vocabulary. To conceive of sin in these terms instead of than in compliance to some measurable code, is to recast the discussion in relational terms, which we shall consider below.

Of course, none of these points is conclusive; there is surely much that could be said in reply to them. Nonetheless, they do suggest to us that the deontic conception of sin is not unproblematic.

So, a ground for dissatisfaction with deontic models of the atonement concerns their exclusive focus on the deontic conception of sin.[v] Deontic models give very little attention to sin as either an ontological or relational problem. The standard view seems to proceed as follows. Sin involves a failure on our part to fulfil our moral obligations. This, *in turn*, leads to a breach in the relationship between God and humanity, a breach which God repairs by means of the atonement. This repair job—so the story goes—involves solving the deontological problem: the restoration (and continued health) of the relationship is conditional on and grounded in the good standing of humanity vis-à-vis our moral obligations to God. Since we are unable to secure that good standing by our own merits alone, God must take the appropriate actions to secure it for us (or with our help). As we have seen, models of the atonement differ on exactly how this good standing is achieved (and maintained)—some models give a role to restitution, others to punishment, others to forgiveness – but there is a broad consensus that reconciliation in the relationship between humanity and God is conditional on a solution to the deontological problem, the breach of obligations and duties.

There are a number of reasons to question this picture of things. For one thing, there is more than a little tension between deontological and relational language. Even where is it justified, the language of rights and duties is ill-suited to the most intimate of human relationships.[vi] The surest sign that a marriage or friendship is in trouble is when the participants start invoking their rights, or calling attention to their partner's obligations. Friends do indeed have obligations to each other, but it is not in the nature of friendship for friends to call attention to such obligations. Outsiders seeking to understand the relationship would not be advised to conceive of the relationship in terms of obligations, and it is unlikely that deontic language will play a central role in the restoration of the relationship when it breaks down. We grant that as a relationship is repaired, this may mean (and it may require) the meeting of obligations that were

broken before. However, deontic features are neither the ground of the repair of the relationship, nor the way to understand either the break of the relationship or its repair.

Consider also another intimate relationship, that between children and parents. Although there may be *some* room for a deontological approach to the parent-child relationship, this is surely not how this relationship ought to be understood in the first instance. Children may have an obligation to care for their parents in old age simply because they are their parents, but their primary motivation and ground for such activity ought surely to be that of love. Similarly, parents may have obligations to care for their children simply because they are their children, but their primary motivation here should be based in the love they have for them. At the very least, if the obligation has to play an important motivational or explanatory role, there is something deeply wrong with the relationship. Invoking deontological language in a last-ditch effort to fix what is broken is unlikely to mend an intimate relationship, and may well sour it further.

So too, it seems to us, to conceive of restoring a broken relationship between a person and God in terms of compliance with obligations is to do grave injustice to scripture and to Christian tradition. According to the prophets, God desires *mercy*, not compliance with ritual commands. Compliance with obligations is a *consequence* of atonement an not its ground (Isaiah 1:11ff, Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13, Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16).

Although this point has been extensively discussed in recent theological literature, it has been only dimly appreciated in the literature in the philosophy of religion. Richard Swinburne rejects penal models of the Atonement on the grounds that "talk of law courts and punishment makes the whole process too 'mechanical' for a means of reconciliation that ought to be intimate and personal" (1989: 152). This is surely true, but Swinburne himself describes sin as a debt that we have incurred as a result of failing to fulfil our obligations to God (1989: 149). Porter's (2002) version of the penal model suffers from precisely the same shortcoming. Porter claims that "fundamental to sin is a prideful usurpation of God's rightful place in one's life and thereby a

rejection of God's offer of intimate friendship. Hence, sin is a form of rebellion that cannot be repaired by positive efforts, and thus, reparation and penance can be better captured by punishment" (Porter 2002: 603). Is punishment really an appropriate response to a rejection of intimate *friendship?* One wouldn't have thought so, especially if the parties involved were attempting to restore the relationship.

The deontological model of sin is also in tension with an ontological understanding of sin. If sin is something under which we (together with the rest of creation) labour, then it is not clear that we are morally responsible for it. An inability to do something is normally thought of as excusatory. As the slogan has it, 'ought implies can'. The sick need a doctor not a judge or jailor. Even if deontic models of the atonement are able to deal with sin as a deontological problem, they fail to deal with it as a problem of human nature.[vii] None of this is to say that talk of obligations and duties can play *no* role for someone who takes sin to be a primarily ontological problem. It is merely to say that such talk does not get to the heart of the problem. The signs that the sick need a doctor are the symptoms of the illness. In the case of sin as diagnosed in the New Testament, our failures of duties and obligations are at most a sign and symptom of the illness and not the disease itself. Curing the disease by merely correcting the symptoms in no more likely to be successful in treating the problem in this case than it is in everyday medical practice.

Atonement and the role of the incarnation

A satisfactory model of the atonement should explain how Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection play an essential role in the atonement. Arguably, an account of the atonement need not show that the incarnation was the *only* way that the atonement could be brought about if only because we tread on difficult ground, and judgements of *necessity* and what is possible for God to achieve in atonement are, at best, extremely difficult to justify. Nonetheless, an account of the atonement should at the very least draw a meaningful connection between the atonement and the incarnation. It is a powerful objection to any Christian theory of the atonement that it

fails to explain how the atonement is related to the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and it is damning objection that it renders the saving acts of Christ unintelligible or unnecessary.

Few conceptions of the atonement are able to meet these criteria. Consider, for example, Quinn's modified version of the substitution model:

> Christ's life and death persuade God to be lenient rather than severe in his treatment of human sinners. Just because the supererogatory goodness in Christ's life and his voluntary submission to suffering and death are a sacrifice that is enormously pleasing to God, their effect is to forestall the severe but just demand for reparation and not to make the reparation that would be demanded in their absence. They function not to remove a debt of punishment that human sinners owe by paying it, but to persuade God to remit or cancel the debt. (1994: 298)

Quinn fails to explain here *how* Christ's life and death persuades God to be lenient. Why was the sacrifice that Christ paid to God enormously pleasing to him? If it were sacrifice alone that God desired, why must God incarnate make that sacrifice? Why couldn't someone else make the sacrifice? Quinn fails to address any of these questions.

Brümmer's accounts of the atonement raises similar questions. Brümmer summarizes his model as follows: "through sincere penitence and divine forgiveness I can be restored to loving fellowship. Such fellowship bestows ultimate meaning on my very existence and enables me to 'live with myself'" (1992: 451). Why does divine forgiveness require the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection? Brümmer's answer is this:

> … the person who forgives us is the person who has to pay the price for reconciliation. Since in restoring our fellowship with God it is God who forgives, it is also God who has to pay the price and has to absorb into his own suffering the consequences of the wrong that we have done to him. On Calvary God reveals to us the cost of his forgiveness. (1992: 452).

This is clearly unsatisfactory as it stands. What does God's forgiveness cost God? Does God have to struggle to overcome feelings of anger and resentment towards us? That doesn't sound like the God of the New Testament – a God whose very essence is love and whose nature it is to always show mercy. Why can't God simply *decide* to forgive us? What exactly is the price that God must pay, and to whom must it be paid? What are the consequences of the wrong that we have done to God, and how does Christ's death and resurrection reveal them? To leave these questions unanswered is to indicate poins at which an account is radically incomplete.

Perhaps the best that can be made of Brümmer's line is this. The death of Christ is not in any way a *mechanism* or a *means* of forgiveness, but a *manifestation* of God's attitude toward us. We need to know that God has forgiven us for the relationship to be restored, and this is how God shows us. But now one wonders why God would choose to reveal the fact that we are forgiven in this peculiar and costly way, unless that action was more than simply a *revelation* of God's love.

The most sustained attempt to answer these questions that we know of is Purtill's. Purtill suggests that

> in suffering and dying, Christ was giving God a *good reason* to punish us less and reward us more than we deserve on our own merits. His suffering and death for our sake give us a claim on God's mercy and generosity. God became a man; as a man he offered his suffering and death for our sake. God now has *good reason* to show us justice and mercy. (Purtill 1991: 44; italics in original).

What is the "good reason" that Christ's death provides? According to Purtill, God could have forgiven us without Christ's suffering, but to do so would have removed our motivation for gratitude and repentance, for "we do not value what seems easy" (1991: 44). According to Purtill's account, Christ's death is only externally related to the atonement: dealing with sin is costly, but only because it is necessary that it appear to be costly. It is easy for God to obtain salvation, but God doesn't want us to think that it is easy. It is important for us that our

salvation appears to cost God much, for otherwise we will take it for granted. Since God can not or will not deceive, God must then obtain our salvation in a costly manner.

Purtill's suggestion is ingenious, but there is something unsavoury about it. Consider the following analogy. An eight-year-old wants a bicycle. Her parents can *easily* afford it, but they worry that if their daughter realises this then she won't value it. So they pretend that they can barely afford to purchase the bike for her. No doubt there is something honourable about the motives of such parents, but there is something dishonourable about their means. Similarly, one ought to wonder about a God who makes a process that is not intrinsically costly appear to be so.

There is a further problem with Purtill's account.] The costliness of an action can be a motive for gratitude, but the costliness has to be seen to be *internally* related to the offence in order for this to happen. Should the eight-year-old discover that her parents could easily afford the bike, she would be angry, and justifiably so. Her parents take a risk in pretending that their daughter's present cost them more than it did, and their actions might well alienate her from them. Similarly, on Purtill's account, God takes a risk when he makes our atonement appear costly. The motivational force of the atonement is dependent on our failure to realize that the atonement doesn't intrinsically cost God anything.

So, these contemporary analyses do not succeed in showing how the incarnation, crucifiction and resurrection play an essential role in the atonement. We have reason to look elsewhere.

Atonement and the Trinity

We end this section with some brief comments on deontic models of the atonement in the light of the doctrine of the Trinity. The general worry here is that such models posit problematic intra-Trinitarian relations. Consider, for instance, the penal model. The idea that God might punish God for a debt owed to God is a strange one. Is God punishing Godself? That seems

pathological. Is God the Father punishing God the Son? That seems sadistic. It also seems to posit a kind of disunity in the being of God that is foreign to Christian thought.

The merit model of the atonement, according to which Christ's life and death persuades God to forgive the debt of sin, also posits the kind of intra-Trinitarian relations that is foreign to Christian doctrine. In his letter to the Romans St. Paul claims that the Father sent the Son for our salvation (Rom. 8: 3), and indeed the entire thrust of Paul's thought sees the atonement as the unified work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. It is difficult to reconcile this with the thought that Christ's death persuades God the Father to cancel the debt of sin.

Finally, consider the Anselmian line, according to which Christ pays God the honour that we owe him. There are two ways to understand this position. On one view, Christ honours God the Father and not God as such. If this is Anselm's view it is a strange one, for surely God as such ought to be honoured, and not solely God the Father. So perhaps Christ honours God. This view too is strange, for Christ as a member of the Trinity *is* God. Is Christ honouring himself? Is that what atonement is all about? That too seems hard to square with what Christian tradition takes the atonement to have achieved.

The Ransom Exemplary Models

Two models of the atonement conceive of sin as an ontological problem: ransom models and exemplary models. Although we applaud the fact that these models see sin as an ontological problem, we find them unsatisfactory as well.

According to the ransom model Christ's death was a ransom paid to the devil to free us from bondage to him. Although the ransom model continues to have adherents (Taliaferro 1988) the criticisms of the model are well known andwe will say little about it here.[viii] More popular are exemplary accounts of the atonement. Such models go back to Abelard, and have been recently defended by McNaughton (1992) and Quinn (1993). According to a purely exemplary model,

Christ's death was nothing but an inspiring example of love and obedience. On this approach, the atonement deals with sin by inspiring us to do better next time.

There is much that is attractive about the exemplary model of the atonement. Unlike many models of the atonement, it offends against neither moral nor metaphysical scruples. There are no dubious moral transactions at work when we take Christ's death as an example to follow: we all understand how it is that someone's life can be inspirational. But for all that the exemplary model has what we regard as fatal weaknesses.

One problem concerns what exactly it is that we are meant to emulate. For the emulation to have any purpose, we need to be able to characterize Christ's death as having an objective, intrinsic point. Campbell captures the problem here well:

> A meaningless or trivial death cannot reveal love: it reveals nothing – except perhaps foolishness. If I drive my car at high speed into a brick wall, loudly proclaiming my love for all humanity, my surviving family would probably wonder how I had left my senses, not how extraordinarily loving my gesture was (Campbell 1994: 239).

The problem, in a nutshell, is that the exemplary model needs to be able to characterize Christ's death as accomplishing something in and of itself, apart from its inspirational value.

Proponents of the exemplary model are not blind to this problem. McNaughton suggests that "Christ's death can be seen as showing the believer, in the most vivid way imaginable, the costs of human sin" (McNaughton 1992: 144). But *how* does Christ's death show the costs of human sin? McNaughton doesn't say. We need an account of how Christ's death is a response t—a cost of – human sin, and this is precisely what exemplary accounts fail to provide. Unless one has some understanding of how Christ's death functions as a response to human sin it's hard to see how it could be taken to show the costs of human sin, far less show them "in the most vivid way imaginable". Perhaps McNaughton is merely suggesting that the atoning value of Christ's death derives from the fact that Christ's death, as the death of an innocent and just man, was a very

vivid example of sin. But surely humanity is not lacking for vivid examples of undeserved suffering.

A second problem with the exemplary model concerns its ability to address sin as an ontological problem. The New Testament does present Christ as a model of self-sacrificial love, but it doesn't suggest that our primary problem is a lack of such models, nor does it suggest that we are ignorant of the costs of sin. Instead, it suggests that our sinful nature puts us at odds with each other and with God. The exemplary model lacks the resources to deal with a problem of this nature.

2. The Participatory Model

In light of the above considerations we would seem to have ample justification for exploring new conceptions of the atonement. In what follows we will do just that, not by introducing a new model, but by rehabilitating an old model that has been undeservedly neglected: the participatory model. There are hints of the participatory model in the recent philosophical discussion of the atonement, but the model has not received the detailed attention that it deserves.[ix]

St. Paul and the Language of Participation

The participatory model of the atonement goes back not to Calvin, Luther, Abelard[,] Aquinas or Anselm, but to Paul. Consider the following excerpt from a summary of Paul's thought by the New Testament scholar Morna Hooker:

> The sin of Adam was reversed and the possibility of restoration opened up when Christ lived and died in obedience and was raised from life to death. Those who are 'baptized' into him are able to share his death to sin (Rom. 6: 4-11) and his status of righteousness before God (2 Cor. 5: 21). Since Adam's sin brought corruption to the world, restoration involved the whole universe

> (Rom. 8: 19-22; Col. 1: 15-20) … [Christ] shared our humanity, and all that means in terms of weakness… in order that we might share in his sonship and righteousness. To do this, however, Christians must share in his death and Resurrection, dying to the realm of flesh and rising to life in the Spirit. Thus Paul speaks of being crucified with Christ in order that Christ may live in him (Gal. 2: 19-20). The process of death and resurrection is symbolized by baptism (Rom. 6: 3-4). By baptism 'into Christ', believers are united 'with him', so that they now live 'in him'. These phrases (in particular 'in Christ') express the close relationship between Christ and believers that is so important for Paul. (Hooker 2000: 522; see also Hooker 1994 and Campbell 1994).

From the perspective of philosophical discussions of the atonement this is a remarkable passage, for it contains no trace of exemplary and deontic language. Christ's death is not presented as something we must emulate, nor is it presented as persuading God to forgive us, as constituting restitution for our debts, as punishment for our misdeeds. Instead, the passage portrays Paul as focused on ontological and relational matters. This focus is encapsulated in Paul's frequent references to Christ as 'the Second Adam', a phrase that is code for Paul's notion that Christ's death brings about a new human nature (a new Adam) (Rom. 8:19-22; Col. 1: 15-20); we are quite literally born again in the sense that we are literally new creatures (Gal. 2:20).[x] This new identity, grounded in the Christian's participation in the death and resurrection of Christ as the Second Adam, is symbolized – and perhaps even constituted—by the rites of Baptism and the Eucharist. Baptism symbolizes death to the old self and rebirth, participating in new life "in Christ"; the Eucharist involves partaking in the blood and body of Christ. These rites are thoroughly participatory. Participatory language also infuses Paul's conception of the Church, which he describes as the body of Christ. Paul describes the Spirit as marrying the Christian to Christ so that "the two become one flesh" (Rom. 7: 1-4; I Cor. 6:15-18).

How does participation deal with sin? According to Paul, our change of identity liberates us from sin: since we are no longer bound by (or under the sway of) sin, we are free to participate in a restored relationship with God. In fact, Paul seems to think that we in some way participate in Christ's relationship with God (cf. Romans 6:8–11: the Christian is "alive to God *in Christ Jesus*"). The central point to note here is that Paul's conception of sin is not, primarily, deontic. Paul doesn't see Christ's death and resurrection as the salve for a troubled conscience—indeed, Paul is adamant that his conscience was clear (Acts 23:1, 2 Cor. 1:12). Instead, he regards Christ's death as dealing with sin as part of the human (indeed: cosmic) condition. The participatory strand in Paul's theology takes sin to be a problem of our *identity*.The atonement does not merely adjust our "moral standing" but instead inaugurates a change in the kind of beings we are.

But one might ask: isn't there some sense in which sin is a deontic problem? How does the participatory model deal with sin as a problem of moral culpability? We are not sure how best to answer this question, but there are a couple of lines of thought one might pursue. One might develop a hybrid model of the atonement, where participation in Christ's death and resurrection deals with sin as a relational and ontological problem, and some form of the deontic model deals with sin as a deontic problem. While there is certainly room for such hybridisation, we are more inclined to adopt the view that the atonement deals with sin as a deontic problem as a by-product of dealing with the sinner: if the sinner is the "old person," and the old person died with Christ on the cross, then there is no one who ought to be regarded *as* guilty for their sin; indeed, there is no longer anyone who ought to *feel* guilty for their sin.[xi] The moral debt we owe to God (if such there be) is not punished or forgiven, nor is satisfaction or reparation made for it. Instead, it is dealt with by changing the identity of the sinner: strictly speaking, the person who is in the wrong before God no longer exists. We think that this is an advantage of the model. God's forgiveness cannot be coerced or merited, even by Godself.

That, in outline, is the participatory model. Of course, there is much more that could (and should) be said here, but we believe that enough has been said to warrant taking this model as a serious and credible alternative to those models that currently dominate the discussion. Its biblical credentials are clear, as are its theological credentials: it doesn't involve any problematic intra-Trinitarian transactions; it does justice to a relational and ontological conception of sin; and —unlike other models of the atonement—it forges a deep connection between the atonement and the death and resurrection of Christ.

Objections and replies

But if the model is so powerful why has it been neglected? Why does one struggle to find references to it within contemporary philosophy of religion?

One reason for the neglect of the participatory model is that Paul's thought has all-too-often been understood in deontic terms: specifically satisfaction and penal terms. Within the Western tradition Paul has often been presented as concerned with the question of how guilty man can be justified—that is, declared morally pure —before God (Torrance 2000). As we pointed out above, recent Pauline scholarship has undermined this conception of Paul's thought, and replaced it with a view on which participatory notions lie at the heart of Paul's understanding of the atonement (see Campbell 1994, 2001; Hooker 1994; Sanders 1977; Ziesler 1990).

But what are we to make of those passages in which Paul does seem to endorse a deontological conception of sin, such as Rom. 1:16–4:25, and Gal. 2:15–4:7? There are a number of options here. One option is to adopt a two-crater view, on which Paul endorsed (perhaps at different times) two models of salvation (see Sanders 1977). Another option, which we prefer, is an argumentative reading of these passages, in which Paul's use of deontic language is largely a dialectical device, forced on him by the rhetorical framework of the theological battles he is waging (see Campbell 2001). Although we find this position attractive, we needn't argue for it here. For our purposes we need claim only that participatory notions play a vital and centrally explanatory role in Paul's conception of the atonement.

We suspect that the central objection to the participatory model is that it is metaphorical at best, and unintelligible at worst. The objection can be phrased in the following way: the Christian doesn't *literally* die on the cross with Christ, and she isn't *literally* reborn with Christ in his resurrection. What sense can we really make of *participating* in the death and life of Christ? There is really no such thing as a participatory *model* of the atonement; instead, all we have are a motley and confusing assortment of metaphors. The participatory model might not be immoral or arbitrary, but it is—the critic claims—both illogical and unintelligible. In short, it flouts Aberlard's constraint.

This is a serious objection, and it deserves a detailed response. We can begin by noting that any religion that is committed to a Trinitarian and Incarnational view of the divine has reason to be cautious about a thoroughgoing application of Abelard's constraint. It would be puzzling, to say the least, to endorse (say) a realist conception of the incarnation or the Trinity only to dismiss the participatory model of the atonement on the grounds that it is difficult to conceive of how we might participate in the Cross. Indeed, it is tempting to suspect that the conceptual difficulties involved in unpacking the participatory model are similar to those involved in the Trinity and incarnation, and that this is a *benefit* of the current approach and not a *cost*. It is more than tempting to think that participatory notions should play a role in our understanding of both the incarnation and the Trinity. We don't have the space to develop this line of thought here; suffice to say that problematic conceptions of identity feature prominently in Christian philosophical theology, and it should be no surprise to find them at the heart of the Christian doctrine of the atonement.

But although not without merit, this point evades the central question for us: is the participatory model really intelligible? There are really two questions here: (1) what can be said by way of explicating what it is to be "in Christ," and (2) what can be said by way of explicating the relationship between the old person and the new person. (These two questions are, of

course, not unrelated.) We cannot hope to answer these in any detail, but we can offer some tentative thoughts.

Consider the difference between what we might call numerical (or thin) personal identity and moral (or thick) personal identity. The standard accounts of personal identity are best understood as accounts of personal identity in the numerical (or thin) sense of the term.[xii] The question these accounts attempt to answer is this: what, fundamentally, are we? What are our identity conditions? In addition to the question of numerical identity, one might also think that there is such a thing as moral identity. One's moral identity is one's identity as a moral agent, as an entity that is responsible for its actions. The need to distinguish between numerical and moral identity is, we think, amply motivated. Think about actions performed while asleep, or under the influence of a drug, or in a fugue state, and so on. Are such actions things one has done? Should one feel guilty for them? In some sense these are things that one has done – and some feeling of [*causal?*] responsibility for them *might* be appropriate. (Think, for instance, of a motorist who runs over and injures a young child who runs out in front of her. The motorist might not be morally responsible for the child's injuries, but she will – and arguably should – feel some sort of responsibility for her actions.) But at the same time we might want to distance ourselves from such actions in a certain way, and such distancing seems defensible. Such actions are not a part of one's *real* self: they are not expressive of one's identity as a moral agent.

Moral identity is a matter of one's commitments, values and relationships. My identity qua moral agent is bound up with those projects and values with which I identify. I could survive the transition from one set of relations and commitments to another as one and the same person, but not as one and the same moral agent. The notion of moral identity gives us some handle on what it is to be in Christ. To be in Christ is for one's identity as a moral agent—as a moral self—to be centred on Christ and Christ's participation in the life of God.

What about the second problem: how are the old and new persons related? The first thing to note is that Paul regards the transition from the old to new as a work in progress. The process

has been initiated, but it is not yet complete. We are, in some sense, caught between the new and old creation; the process of identification has begun and is continuing (Rom 5:5; 8:1ff). Here too the notion of moral identity is useful. Whether or not numerical identity is always determinate (and reductionists claim that it isn't), moral identity is certainly not always determinate. One and the same person can be caught between two or more moral identities, as they endorse and affirm different sets of relations, values and commitments. Paul's lament of feeling torn between the old humanity and the new humanity is not unfamiliar to us (Romans 7).

3. Conclusion

We have argued that the participatory model should be taken seriously within the contemporary philosophical discussion of the atonement. It has strong Biblical credentials, and it avoids many of the objections that plague other models. But embracing the participatory model doesn't demand that one reject all other accounts of the atonement; there is certainly room for hybrid accounts of the atonement. Indeed, the participatory model can illuminate a number of the other models of the atonement.

The atonement does indeed involve sacrifice on the part of God, but it is not a sacrifice that God makes (to Godself) as restitution for our debt (Swinburne), or in order to convince God to forgive us of our debt to God (Quinn). Instead, the participatory account follows Paul in drawing on Old Testament conceptions of sacrifice and expiation, on which one's transgressions are transferred to the animal, so that they die with the animal (see e.g. Childs 1992). Although the participatory approach does not, as such, see participation as a *mechanism* for the transfer of sin, it does build on the idea of participation and identification that is inherent in the notion of the sacrificial animal.

The participatory model can also make sense of exemplary language, although it will regard such language as highly impoverished if it is left to itself. The Christian is, of course, invited to

emulate Christ's life and death, but this is not where the action is. The New Testament does not merely encourage the Christian to do good works, but reminds them that since they are in Christ they must act in accordance with who they are. That is, they must live up to those commitments, values and relations that now constitute their identity.

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[i] We are very grateful to Oliver Crisp, Jay Garfield, Andrew Howie, Christian Miller, Christine Parker, and Charles Taliaferro for helpful comments on this paper.

[ii] We beg the readers' forgiveness for where we fail our own standards in this paper. While we consider New Testament theologies of the atonement, we pay scant attention to much of Church History. For this we plead constraints of *space*, and of *expertise*.

[iii] One interesting objection we can only *mention* here is charted in the research of Timothy Gorringe (1996), who shows convincingly that penal understandings of the atonement not only influenced penal strategies in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth strategies, but also lent sanction to judicial violence. It stands to reason that a theory of the atonement which enshrines punishment and violence as effective in the realm of the sinner's relationship with God will also find a role for punishment and violence in the realm of the criminal's relationship with the state.

[iv] We thank Christian Miller for pressing this point in comments on an eariler draft of this paper.

[v] This notion is particularly strong in Hare's writing on the atonement (1996). Hare sees the need for atonement as deriving from the *gap* between what morality requires of us and what we *can* achieve.

[vi] Christian Miller points us to the literature on virtue ethics and the ethics of care. Michael Stocker's "Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories" (1976) is particularly apposite.

[vii] Fiddes makes this point powerfully (1989, 70).

[viii] See Lucas (1994) for an interesting discussion of Taliaferro's (1988) ransom model.

[ix] There are hints of it in the final paragraph of Quinn (2000), and also in Hare (1996). Fiddes (1989) makes frequent references to atonement as participation, but he seems to understand the participatory model primarily in the context of penal approaches to the atonement (see especially p. 95), rather than as an independent model in its own right. Of recent accounts of which we are aware Lucas's (1994) is the closest to our own.

[x] Of course, this conception of the new life of the believer is not just Pauline, but also Johannine (John 3:16).

[xi] There are echoes here of Kant's account of the atonement. See Quinn (1986).

[xii] The distinction between numerical and moral identity is complicated by the fact that Lockeans typically take the concept <person> to have moral content.