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THE AGÁPĒIC THEORY

JOSHUA R. SIJUWADE

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Keywords: Atonement; Agápē; Flourishment; Election; Crucifixion;
Resurrection

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According to the doctrine of the Atonement, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, became incarnate in a particular man: Jesus of Nazareth (hereafter, Christ), who lived a life that provided a means of atonement for all human beings. The doctrine of the atonement (hereafter, Atonement) was declared and defined authoritatively at the Council of Constantinople (381 CE) through the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, where it states that it was the Son who “for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.” And whilst, as a human, it was “for our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day, he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.” On the basis of this authoritative teaching, one can understand that the historical events concerning the life, death and resurrection of Christ play a fundamental role in the Atonement. However, a further theological precisification of these events can now be provided, which can be stated succinctly as follows:

- (1) (Atonement) The life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (i.e., Christ) provide a means for humanity to be saved from sin and reconciled to God.

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The Atonement as expressed by (1) is the authoritative and definitive teaching of Christianity. On this basis, some positions concerning the nature and work of Christ that deny the veracity of this teaching—that is, that deny the fact *that* Christ’s life, death and resurrection saves humans from sin and reconciles them to God—are to be ruled out as unorthodox. Yet, as there is no authoritative and definitive stance on *how* to best interpret this teaching, it is possible for there to be several different interpretations that can each be classed as “orthodox” interpretations of the doctrine. More specifically, in the field of systematic theology and contemporary analytic theology, certain individuals have sought to propose particular theories of the Atonement that provide an explanation of *how* Christ’s life, death and resurrection saves humans from sin and reconciles them to God. Though a prominent contemporary pursuit, this task of providing theories of Atonement has its roots deep in church history, with a number of distinct theories having been proposed in the past. The most influential of these theories are as follows: first, the Ransom Theory, which was dominant in the early Church up to the first millennium.² This model perceives humanity as held captive by sin and Satan, with Christ’s death as a ransom for their liberation. The exact nature of this ransom, however, has been a subject of considerable debate. Gustaf Aulén’s seminal work *Christus Victor* revitalised interest in this theory, critiquing the legalistic interpretations of Atonement that had dominated in the previous centuries.³ However, critics point out that the Ransom Theory leaves open the question of why a ransom was necessary in the first place.⁴ Second, the Satisfaction Theory proposed by Anselm of Canterbury in his work *Cur Deus Homo* shifted the focus from the devil to God’s honour. That is, Anselm argued that humanity had offended God’s honour through sin and that satisfaction was needed. However, only a perfect sacrifice, such as Christ, could make amends. This model is lauded for its emphasis on God’s sovereignty and honour, but is also critiqued for its feudal context, which may not resonate with modern understandings of justice.⁵ Third, the Penal Substitution Theory,

² J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001).

³ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor*, (London: SPCK, 1931).

⁴ John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, (London: SCM Press, 2008).

⁵ Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

strongly associated with the Reformation—particularly with John Calvin—posits that humanity deserves punishment for sin, and Christ substitutes himself to bear the wrath of God.⁶ Now, whilst this model provides a direct answer to the problem of sin and emphasises God’s justice and love, it has been criticised for portraying a violent and vengeful image of God.⁷ Fourth, the Moral Influence Theory, associated with thinkers such as Peter Abelard and, more recently, Hastings Rashdall,⁸ posits that Christ’s death is a demonstration of God’s love which inspires believers to live morally. This theory has been celebrated for its emphasis on God’s love and the moral example of Jesus. However, critics argue it downplays the seriousness of sin and the necessity of Christ’s death.⁹ Fifth, the Christus Exemplar Theory views Jesus as a model for behaviour and faith. In this theory, Jesus’ death and resurrection symbolise overcoming worldly challenges and remaining faithful to God. That is, it encourages individual spiritual development and moral living, though critics claim it does not adequately address the issue of human sin.¹⁰ Finally, the Governmental Theory, developed originally by Hugo Grotius,¹¹ argues that Christ’s death was a demonstration of God’s displeasure toward sin, thereby upholding divine law. This theory promotes the idea of God as a divine ruler whose laws must be respected. Critics, however, suggest that it fails to satisfactorily explain why Christ’s death was necessary.¹² There is thus a rich selection of theories of the Atonement available—each with its own strengths and weaknesses—that can be possibly affirmed by a Christian. The central focus of this article will thus be to continue this enterprise by putting forward a novel and robust theory of the Atonement termed the “*Agápēic Theory*,” which will combine

⁶ Alister McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

⁷ Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006).

⁸ Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1919).

⁹ Gary Shultz, *A Multifaceted Gospel: Reexamining the Theories of Atonement*, (Hamilton, ON: McMaster Divinity College, 2010).

¹⁰ Francesca Aran Murphy, *Christus Exemplar: A Theology of Atonement*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012).

¹¹ Hugo Grotius, *A Defence of the Catholic Faith concerning the Satisfaction of Christ against Faustus Socinus*, (London: John Bill, 1625).

¹² Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology*, (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009).

various elements of these historically rooted positions in light of important concepts and developments found within contemporary systematic and analytic theological thought. More precisely, the Agápēic Theory seeks to show how Christ's life, death and resurrection saves humans from sin and reconciles them to God, within a specific theoretical framework that takes God to desire the maximization of human flourishing through an everlasting relationship of love (*agápní*) with him. Yet, given the human condition, all humans face a problem that stops them from entering this relationship with God. Hence, the atoning work of Christ provides the necessary means for dealing with this problem and enabling all (pre- and post-mortem) humans to enter into an Agápēic relationship with God, and thus truly flourish to the maximum level. Conceptually, at a foundational level, the Agápēic Theory centres on five structural components:

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|----------------------|--|
| (2) (Agápēic Theory) | (i) Framework: Flourishment & Agápē |
| | (ii) Problem: The Human Condition |
| | (iii) Solution: The Action of the Atonement |
| | (iv) Appropriation of Solution (i): Pre-Mortem Reception of Atonement |
| | (v) Appropriation of Solution (ii): Post-Mortem Reception of the Atonement |

The Agápēic Theory, on the basis of these five structural components, will be formulated by using a specific concept of love—*agápní*—which was introduced by Alexander Pruss into the field of applied ethics—and various elements from other existing theories of the Atonement within the fields of analytic theology, in the work of Richard Swinburne, Eleonore Stump and Robin Collins,¹³ and systematic/biblical theology, in the work of Karl Barth and N.T. Wright—which will help to ground the Agápēic Theory on firm philosophical and theological grounds, and ultimately provide a robust theory of the Atonement.

Thus, the plan of action is as follows: In section two (Stage One: Framework and Problem), I detail the first two components of the Agápēic Theory, which set the theoretical framework for formulating the theory and detail the problem that the Atonement focuses on addressing. In section three (Stage Two: The Action of the Atonement),

¹³ With the post-mortem reception of the atonement—which can be taken to be an extension of the theory—drawing on the work of Thomas Talbot, John Kronen, and Eric Reitan.

I detail the third component of the Agápēic Theory, which explains the specific way in which the Atonement solves the problem from section two. Then, in section four (Stage Three: Pre-mortem Reception of the Atonement), I explicate the fourth component of the Agápēic Theory by explaining how a pre-mortem individual can appropriate the means of atonement that has been provided by Christ and thereby flourishing to the maximal level. After this, in section five (Stage Four: Post-mortem Reception of the Atonement), I explicate the fifth component of the Agápēic Theory by explaining how a post-mortem individual can also appropriate the means of atonement that has been provided by Christ and thereby flourishing to the maximal level as well. Section six (Conclusion) will summarize the above results.

I. STAGE ONE: FRAMEWORK & PROBLEM

I.1 FRAMEWORK BACKGROUND: FLOURISHMENT AIM

The first stage of our task details the background and aim of the framework understudy, the problem that plagues humans according to this framework, and God deals with this problem. This framework assumes that God is an omnipotent entity that can actualise any state of affairs that is logically possible for him to actualise.¹⁴ Hence, as nothing external to God can impede his action, he will always achieve his actualisation goals so long as he has formed an intention to do so. That is, whether God does, in fact, actualise a given state of affairs that is logically possible for him to actualise will depend on whether he chooses to do so. As an omnipotent entity, God also knows the nature of the alternative actions that he can choose from, which results in his being omniscient. And he is free from any nonrational influence determining the choices that he makes, and thus is be perfectly free. Being omniscient and perfectly free, God is also be perfectly good in the sense that he will always perform the best action (or kind of action)—if there is one—many good actions, and no bad actions.¹⁵ More specifically, given the exemplification of omniscience, God knows the nature of each available action that he can choose from and thus pos-

¹⁴ Specifically, God is an omnipotence-trope. For an explanation of this, see Sijuwade, Joshua R. Sijuwade, “Divine Simplicity: The Aspectival Account,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 14 (2021): 143–179.

¹⁵ Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism: Second Edition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

sesses knowledge of whether each action is good or bad, or is better than some incompatible action. Moreover, in recognising an action as good, God has some motivation to perform that action. In recognising an action as being better than another action, God has an even greater motivation to perform it.¹⁶ Hence, given the exemplification of perfect freedom, if God is situated in a scenario in which there is a unique best action (or best kind of action) for him to perform, then God will inevitably perform that action (or kind of action) as an *act of essence* (i.e., a necessary act of his nature).

Now, one can acquire knowledge about God's intentions by assessing whether the purported intended act is a morally good act. That is, given our understanding of God's perfect goodness, we can ascertain the type of aims and actions that God would fulfill and perform. An action that seems to be a unique best action (i.e., a sensible, appropriate, reasonable/rational action) is one that we can judge that God would inevitably perform. One such action is God's creating entities other than himself. That is, as an omnipotent and perfectly good being, God is the sole creator and source of all created reality. As the creator of human beings, God has certain aims that he would seek to fulfill. Plausibly, a central aim that God would seek to fulfill concerning humans is what we can term his "flourishment aim,"¹⁷ which can be stated precisely as follows:

- (3) (Flourishment Aim) God aims for humans to flourish to the maximum level through their participation in an everlasting relationship of love with him.

Based on the inherent goodness of the aim for humans to flourish to the fullest extent possible, God would inevitably seek to bring it about—that is, it would be a unique best action for God to bring this type of human flourishing about, and thus God would inevitably seek to provide the opportunity for humans to live flourishing lives by being in an everlasting loving relationship with him. More specifically, one can take it to be the case that, as the final end of all human beings is union with God, the *intrinsic upper limit* on human flourishing is to be in a loving relationship with God that includes this union as an in-

¹⁶ Swinburne, *Coherence*.

¹⁷ Where, at a general level, to "flourish" is to "develop successfully," "to the fullest," or to "thrive."

tegral part. That is, a given human's permanent relationship with God in this life, and ultimately in Heaven, is, at a general level, the best thing for human beings—as it fulfils their nature. In contrast, the worst thing for human beings is the absence of that relationship with God and others. Now, the best thing for humans comes in degrees. That is, based on the fact that it is possible for one to have a greater degree of a loving relationship with another person, it is possible for one to have a greater degree of a loving relationship in union with God as well—which, as Eleonore Stump (2012a, 404) notes, is based on “the willingness and the capacity to receive God's love even on the part of those human beings who are in union with God.” Hence, the most excellent state for humans is the degreed state of being in an everlasting relationship with God that is not had equally by individuals who are in that state. And, as humans possess libertarian free will, it is possible for a human being to choose to be in a loving relationship with God—and thus, this choice is the necessary and sufficient condition for one going to Heaven and warding off Hell.¹⁸ Providing all humans with the opportunity to be in an everlasting relationship with God would thus be a means of enabling these individuals to flourish to the maximal level—as an enduring intimate and appreciative personal relationship with God is an immeasurable good for created individuals, given the infinite and incommensurable good that God is himself.¹⁹ Yet, despite the inherent goodness of all humans entering an everlasting relationship of love with God, God faces a problem in actualising this state of affairs. Before we further detail the nature of this problem, it will be important to now further precisify the flourishing aim expressed by (3), by utilising a specific theory found within the field of applied ethics that centres on the notion of *Agápē*, which will provide a theoretical basis for further understanding the problem that stops humans from flourishing.

1.2 FRAMEWORK PRECISIFICATION: AGÁPĒIC RELATIONSHIP

According to Alexander Pruss,²⁰ the notion of *Agápē* is at the heart of

¹⁸ More on the nature of Hell in the final section of this article.

¹⁹ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999).

²⁰ Alexander Pruss, *One Body: Reflections on Christian Sexual Ethics*. Available online: <http://alexanderpruss.com/papers/OneBody-talk.html> (Accessed June 2022); *One Body: An Essay In Christian Ethics*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press,

a loving (Agápēic) relationship between two individuals: the lover and the beloved. Given the importance of this notion within this context, we can understand its nature more specifically as follows:

- (4) (Agápē)
- (i) Determination: A determination of the will of an individual in favour of the beloved.
 - (ii) Forms: A multi-formed concept with three interrelated aspects: a complacent aspect, a benevolence aspect, and a unitive aspect.

In conceptualising the nature of *Agápē* more fully, one can understand that within a theological context that is based on the teaching of the Christian Scriptures, all individuals are presented with a duty to show *Agápē* toward all individuals. More specifically, as Pruss notes, “the ethics of the New Testament centres around a specific duty to love.”²¹ That is, according to the Christian Scriptures—specifically the New Testament—every individual has a specific duty: The duty to love everyone and to act in that love in such a way that all of morality is included within this act.²² In other words, all individuals are obliged to love, and do so in an appropriate manner—to love the beloved as they are and not as what they are not. This understanding of one’s moral duty to love—to show *Agápē*—is thus one that is focused on particular actions that are for the betterment of the beloved in the loving relationship. Additionally, this specific duty provided by *Agápē* implies three reasons why love is not to be conceived as or reduced to a static feeling or emotion. The first reason is that loving feelings or emotions are not under volitional control, whereas one is always obliged to love.²³ The second reason is that feelings are often transitory and can be lacking in certain times of distress, whereas the New Testament sees love as being best exhibited in situations of great distress—such as during the suffering of Christ.²⁴ The third reason is that feelings are not closely connected to action—they do not always need to be acted on,

2014). Pruss, “Ethics,” introduces this specific theory/conceptualisation of love within the applied sexual ethics context. However, this specific theory is not wholly wedded to this context, and thus we are able to extract it from that context and apply it to the task at hand. The Agápēic framework, which is developed with the aim of maximal human flourishing, though based on Pruss’ theory, is itself original to this article.

²¹ Pruss, *Essay*, 9.

²² John 13: 34–35; Romans 13:8–13.

²³ Pruss, *Essay*.

²⁴ Mark 15:34.

but instead can willfully be ignored.²⁵ However, as Pruss notes, within the New Testament, *Agápē* is seen as being the fulfilment of the moral law, and thus “it is taken for granted that love expresses itself and is sufficient, in and of itself.”²⁶ *Agápē* is therefore not a feeling, but neither is it a disposition or tendency to feel an emotion—as dispositions are even less under direct volitional control than feelings and therefore cannot serve as a guarantor for right action. From this non-reducibility of *Agápē* to a feeling or disposition, we can see that action is a central component of *agape*. As actions are an expression of an individual’s will, *Agápē* is to be conceived of as a determination of the will of an individual in favour of the beloved.²⁷

Now, within this Agapéic framework, the various forms of love—filial, romantic, or fraternal love, etc.—are all forms of *Agápē*. That is, in Pruss’ thought, *Agápē* is not a distinct type of love alongside the other forms of love; rather, it simply *is* love, a multi-formed love.²⁸ More specifically, this multi-formedness of *Agápē* is grounded upon two factors: linguistic and theological. Linguistically, within the New Testament, all types of love are forms of *Agápē* in the sense that the word has a very wide range of meanings, such that spousal love, sexualised love, and even love for certain possessions—such as the love for the best seats in the synagogue—are all referred to as *Agápē*.²⁹ In short, the New Testament usage of *Agápē* appears to have a semantic range that corresponds to that of the English word “love.”³⁰ Moreover, at a theological level within the New Testament, all types of love are forms of *Agápē* in the sense that the love that humanity is to have for God and for their neighbour, and the love that God has for humanity, is regularly referred to as *Agápē*—and is expressed as a selfless generosity that is directed toward the other and desires reciprocation for the good of the other.³¹ Given this wide range of linguistic and theological usage, the scriptural understanding of *Agápē* does not distinguish it from other forms of love; rather, it presents the forms of love as unified forms of *Agápē*—every love *is* *Agápē*, a multi-formed love. Hence, at a conceptual level, *Agápē* is best conceived of as a multi-formed love that

²⁵ Pruss, *Essay*.

²⁶ Pruss, *Essay*, 9

²⁷ Pruss, *Essay*.

²⁸ Pruss, “Ethics.”

²⁹ Ephesians 5:25; Song of Songs 2:5; Luke 11:43.

³⁰ Pruss, *Essay*

³¹ Matthew 5:44; John 3:16.

is a determination of the will of an individual in favour of the beloved. That is, *Agápē* is thus a concept that is connected to action—it guarantees right action—and thus, individuals are responsible for love, rather than being passive receivers of it.

To fulfill this responsibility, one must love by willing the good for the beloved—for their sake, rather than one’s own—but also one must appreciate the beloved and seek union with them. More specifically, there are three aspects of all forms of *Agápē*: a complacent aspect, a benevolence aspect and a unitive aspect.³² Unpacking this in more detail: First, Agápēic love has a complacent aspect—and thus is a complacent love—in the sense that it is a love that respects, appreciates, and honors the intrinsic worth or value of the beloved.³³ Second, Agápēic love has a benevolent aspect—and thus is a benevolent love—in the sense that it seeks to bestow what is good upon another individual and prevent/alleviate what is bad for another individual—not, however, because the beloved has earned it or deserves it but simply because the beloved’s welfare is valued for its own sake.³⁴ Third, Agápēic love has a unitive aspect—and thus is a “unitive love”—in the sense that it is a love that seeks union. That is, the lover seeks, mentally and/or physically, to become one with the beloved, as further explained below. Now, these three aspects of *Agápē* are interconnected as follows: A complacent love for the beloved would result in a recognition that it is right to bestow goods on them through acts of will. Moreover, exemplifying a complacent love for the beloved would lead to one’s seeking union with the beloved in such a way that the beloved’s good becomes the lover’s good as well. By one’s being benevolent toward the beloved, and thus willing the good for the beloved for their sake, one would value the beloved as an individual upon whom it is appropriate to bestow goods. One would also be united with the beloved in will, given that the beloved would also will the good for themselves. Additionally, by one’s aiming for an intimate form of union in which one treats the good and bad experiences of the beloved as befalling themselves, it

³² Pruss, *Essay* conceives of the first aspect of *Agápē* as being that of appreciation rather than that of a complacent aspect. However, as I see the former as being included in the latter, I will proceed forward with this specific conception of the first aspect of *Agápē*. It is also important to note that the term “complacent” used here refers to its old, theological definition rather than its contemporary dictionary definition.

³³ John Kronen and Eric Reitan, *God’s Final Victory: A Comparative Philosophical Case for Universalism*, (London: Continuum, 2011).

³⁴ Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*.

would be natural for the lover to have complacent love for the beloved, expressed by both their appreciating the beloved as one who is worthwhile of experiencing the good and their willing the good for the beloved. These three aspects of *Agápē* provide a basis for a selfless and generative love between the lover and the beloved. Moreover, all the various forms Agápēic relationships will include these three aspects, though they will manifest in different ways. That is, each form of love—self, romantic, filial, and fraternal love—will exhibit, in distinct ways, a complacent love for the beloved, a benevolent love for the beloved, and a striving for some form of union with the beloved. Precisely, the differentiation between the forms of *Agápē* will be distinguishable by the *type of union* into which one is impelled to enter: *formal union* and/or *real union*. The appropriate type of union between the lover and the beloved will depend, in part, on the characteristics of the individuals.³⁵

Focusing now on these unitive aspects of *Agápē*: The formal union between a lover and their beloved is a *union of mind and will*.³⁶ This union of mind and will consists of a mutual indwelling of the lover and beloved—even in the cases of unreciprocated love. In this mutual indwelling, the lover has the beloved living within their mind and strives to understand the nature and goals of the beloved from their perspective—understanding the beloved from the inside—which leads to a willing of the other’s particular good and the performance of actions for the sake of the lover *as if the beloved were the lover themselves*.³⁷ In a certain way, love is *ek-static*,³⁸ in the sense that through their union, the lover comes to live outside of themselves and in the lover. Hence, in a loving relationship, the lover dwells in the beloved intellectually and in will, and, in turn, the beloved dwells in the lover intellectually and in will as well. There is thus a formal union that can be increased as one gains a better knowledge of the beloved, enabling the lover to understand what is good and bad for this particular beloved and understand them better from their own point of view. Moreover, one’s will is united with the beloved by willing the good for them. Thus, this formal union is derivable from the complacent and benevolent aspects of

³⁵ Pruss, “Ethics.”

³⁶ As, the first two aspects of love will not vary drastically between the different forms of love—one can appreciate the same good of an individual in a romantic, filial, and fraternal context, and the very same goods can also be willed within these contexts.

³⁷ Pruss, “Ethics.”

³⁸ More on this notion below.

love and is, therefore, always present in every case of love. Formal union is present simply in virtue of one loving another, and can therefore exist without reciprocation, as Pruss writes, “formal union is already achieved at any time love is there . . . formal union can exist without any reciprocation.”³⁹ However, the love that is present in a relationship nevertheless impels one toward *real* union. Real union is thus the *external* expression of the formal union between the lover and the beloved. That is, real union is the way that the lover and the beloved, who are each united in mind and will, are together in a particular manner that is determined by the nature of the form of love that is present.⁴⁰ Real union is the reciprocation of love that achieves an additional union between the lover and their beloved through a *shared activity*. *Agápē* thus makes an individual seek real union with another, with the specific form of real union that is sought being the primary distinguishing factor between the different forms of *Agápē*. For example, filial love might require physical touch—such as hugging a child—whilst the friendly love between two colleagues might not call for this expression of their union—where an intellectual conversation might be more appropriate for this type of relationship.⁴¹

The love between people must thus take on a form that is *appropriate* to the lover, the beloved and their relationship, with some type of real union being paradigmatic of the form of love between them. Love, construed as *Agápē*, must be *dynamic* and *responsive* to the reality of the beloved, with the achievement of a real union between the lover and their beloved being the central goal that has an external expression—a consummation of the form of love that is present. Paradigmatically, the consummation of a real union would thus be a *shared activity* that expresses the *distinctiveness* of the type of relationship that is present and enables the love to be *fulfilled* with respect to the particular form that it takes. The unitive aspect of love is thus fulfilled by this consummation, which includes—in all forms of love—a psychological union, and for a specific form of love—romantic love—a physical union as well. In summary, a relationship of love centres around the expression of *Agápē* between the lover and the beloved. *Agápē* is a multi-formed love that is a determination of the lover’s will in favour of the beloved and is expressed through their complacent and benevo-

³⁹ Pruss, *Essay*, 32.

⁴⁰ Pruss, *Essay*.

⁴¹ Pruss, “Ethics.”

lent love toward the beloved, their formal union with them, and the seeking of real union with them as well. Considering this further conceptualisation of the nature of love, we can now restate our flourishing aim as follows:

- (5) (Flourishment Aim*) God aims for humans to flourish to the maximum level by their participation in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with him.

For all humans to flourish to the maximum level possible (and fulfill their natural/final end) they need to stand in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God. In this relationship, God and humans have the determination of their will in favour of one another, and thus exemplify complacent and benevolent love for one another, are formally united, and are striving for real union with one another. It will be shown now, however, that given the human condition, humans cannot actually stand in an Agápēic relationship with God, and thus all humans cannot, in fact, flourish to the fullest extent possible. Yet, all is not lost as, given God's perfect goodness, he would seek to provide a solution to this problem, which will be briefly introduced below and further explicated throughout the rest of this article.

1.3 PROBLEM AND SOLUTION: SIN & ELECTION

The human condition is such that, by possessing libertarian free will, humans (genetically and socially) inherit an inclination toward wrongdoing, which results in their acquiring guilt being spiritually darkened, and ultimately lying in bondage to sin. We can state the human condition more fully as follows:

- (6) (Human Condition) The condition of humanity is such that each individual human, with libertarian free will, has a genetically and socially inherited a proneness to wrongdoing that results in their acquiring objective and subjective guilt, becoming spiritually darkened, and being in bondage to sin.

In understanding the nature of the human condition more fully, one first needs to draw, as Richard Swinburne emphasises, a distinction be-

tween two different types of good actions: obligations—which are good actions that one has a duty to perform (or a duty not to perform)—and supererogatory actions—which are good actions that are non-obligatory.⁴² When an individual performs a supererogatory action (such as falling on a grenade to save a comrade), praise is due to the person. However, if one fails to perform a supererogatory action, that person is not blameworthy as no wrongdoing has been done.⁴³ Whereas if an individual fails to perform an obligatory action (or performs an action which they are obligated not to perform), then they wrong that person and are blameworthy for not performing that action (or for performing it)—that is, they are blameworthy for wrongdoing. The notion of wrongdoing, according to Swinburne, can itself be divided into two ways: First, objective wrongdoing—which is a failure in one fulfilling their obligations (whether one knows of this or not).⁴⁴ Thus, for example, an individual has performed an objectively wrong act if they fail to educate their children properly, even if they do not believe that they have a duty to educate their children, or if they believe that sending them to a certain school is educating their child properly but the school is, in fact, totally incompetent in achieving this aim.⁴⁵ Second, subjective wrongdoing is the failure to try to fulfill one's obligations. Thus, for example, if an individual believes that they have a duty to educate their children and neglect to fulfill that end, then they have performed a subjectively wrong action—even if in some way they end up acquiring a good education through the agency of someone else.⁴⁶ Hence, humans thus have a *proneness* to perform not only a general bad action but also a proneness to (objective and subjective) wrongdoing (i.e., the proneness to performing an action

⁴² Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). In explicating the following position concerning the human condition, there will be a utilisation of a number of theses put forward by Swinburne, *Atonement*, concerning the notions of free will and sin. However, in this explication, there is also an original extension that will be provided to the latter notion of sin, through an application of N.T. Wright's view on spiritual darkness and the bondage of sin, and the manner in which this notion of sin leads to the production of these two further issues, which was detailed in N.T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion*, (London: SPCK, 2016).

⁴³ Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁴⁴ Swinburne, *Atonement*.

⁴⁵ Swinburne, *Atonement*.

⁴⁶ Swinburne, *Atonement*.

that is morally blameworthy). One can ask, however, why God would create humans with this specific proneness to wrongdoing. The primary reason for this is in order to bestow upon humans the good of possessing libertarian free will. Libertarian free will is, at a basic level, the ability for an individual to have done otherwise at a specific time, without causal determination. More precisely, libertarian free will can be best conceptualised, as noted by Swinburne, as the “freedom to choose whether or not to bring about some effect (such as *e*), where the totality of causes that influence him (making it harder or easier for him to make a particular choice) do not totally determine how he will choose.”⁴⁷ In making free choices, humans are influenced in forming their purposes by their desires, which are in-built inclinations to perform one action over another.⁴⁸ Human desires are such that they are formed partly due to one’s physiology (e.g., the desires for food, drink, sleep, and sex etc.) and also partly due to one’s societal context (e.g., the desires for fame and fortune).⁴⁹ Alongside the desires had by a human person in forming their purposes to make a free choice, one is also presented with reasons for choosing one action over the other. However, as Swinburne notes, for one to “recognise a reason for doing A is only to have an inclination to do A, other things being equal. But other things may not be equal. There may be other and better reasons for not doing the action.”⁵⁰ In someone believing that there is an overall reason for them to perform one action over another is for them to believe that this action is, as noted previously, the most sensible, appropriate, reasonable/rational action to perform. However, despite the weight of reason being in favour of one’s performing that specific action, one might still not perform that action because they yield to non-rational forces (i.e., desires) that influence one in forming their purpose. Yet, if one believes that there is a balance of reason in support of performing an action, and thus they are inclined to perform that action, then they would do it if they are left unimpeded by their desires. It thus follows from this, as Swinburne notes, “that if an agent is to have the option of doing what he regards as less good or bad actions—and so, on the assumption that he has true moral beliefs, doing less

⁴⁷ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 113.

⁴⁸ Richard Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁹ Swinburne, *Jesus*.

⁵⁰ Swinburne, *Atonement*, 46.

good or bad actions—he must be subject to a stronger desire to do an alternative action. (The alternative may, of course, simply be the action of ‘doing nothing’).”⁵¹

Hence, only by an individual’s having such desires can the individual then have the free choice whether to pursue the best. Thus, a free choice can only arise in two situations: One in which an individual has a choice between two equally best actions that he also desires equally, and a second in which an individual has a choice between two actions, one of which the individual desires to perform more than the other, and the other one about which he believes it is better to perform (i.e., there is more reason to perform it in the sense of it being the more sensible, reasonable/rational action). This situation, as Swinburne terms it, is a situation of temptation.⁵² Temptation itself can also come in three forms—where the desire to perform an action other than one that the individual believes to be best, and which is of a strength that is greater than the latter, is a desire to do—first, a less good action, second, a bad but not wrong action and, third, a wrong action. In these three forms, individuals would have different degrees of free will in performing an action—where the desire to perform a less-than-the-best action, bad-but-not-wrong action, or wrong action, may be only marginally stronger than their desire to perform the best or good action. In this situation an individual would not require a great amount of effort to conform to the good. However, when the desire to perform the less-than-the-best action, bad-but-not-wrong action, or wrong action, is almost irresistible, a great amount of effort would be required for one to conform to the good. Thus, given all of this, for a human person to have libertarian freedom to choose between what is believed to be good and what is believed to be bad would require that the individual have a strong desire for the latter.

Without this temptation—a strong desire to do what is bad—one would not have a free choice between what is good and what is bad. In short, free moral choice requires that one has both an awareness of the good and the bad and a desire to perform the latter.⁵³ Thus, reality is such that free human choices are made in light of certain moral beliefs (i.e., beliefs about what is morally good to do). Under the influence of desires that incline individuals to perform actions that have strengths

⁵¹ Swinburne, *Providence*, 92.

⁵² Swinburne, *Providence*.

⁵³ Swinburne, *Jesus*.

that are independent of the believed moral worth of those actions, these desires as inclinations thus make it easier for an individual to perform a certain action.⁵⁴ Now, each individual can act at a specific time to gradually form their character; however, as Swinburne notes, “nature and nurture, our genes and our upbringing that is, begin to form our character before ever we can ourselves try to mould it; and as it forms it makes it harder or easier for us to act to change it according to the sort of character we acquire.”⁵⁵ Humans are different from one another in many physical and psychological ways, yet there is a shared feature among them all concerning their desires—namely, the strongest desires of humans are had for their believed enjoyment. That is, as Swinburne further writes, “The bodily desires for food, drink, and comfort and the more sophisticated desires for power and admiration, love and company which evolve in us independently of language and culture (as we can see from the fact that the higher animals also have such desires) are self-centred desires, desires centred on oneself receiving bodily satisfaction and certain attitudes of respect and affection and obedience from others.”⁵⁶

Given this, human desires are often in conflict in the sense that if an individual’s desire is fulfilled, another individual’s cannot be. Such conflicting desires are not learned—that is, they are not of nurture (i.e., the environment) but of nature (i.e., genes), as is evidenced by their existence in babies and other animals. This conflict stems from the basic feature of human desire that each individual desires only that which he believes he would enjoy.⁵⁷ And, whilst two individuals might have as the object of their desire the same thing, it is often the case that only one of them would have the right to it. Yet, the selfish desires of humans are of a strength that they often influence individuals to satisfy them, even when it is wrong for them to do this. Hence, humans thus have a *proneness* to perform not only a general bad action, but also a *proneness to (objective and subjective) wrongdoing* (i.e., the proneness to performing an action that is morally blameworthy). As human desires are often selfish and operate in situations where selfishness is objectively wrong, humans are subject to wrong desires that often lead

⁵⁴ Swinburne, *Atonement*.

⁵⁵ Swinburne, *Atonement*, III.

⁵⁶ Swinburne, *Atonement*, III. This is not to say that there are not any altruistic desires; however, these types of desires operate alongside the selfish desires and are often of a weak nature.

⁵⁷ Swinburne, *Atonement*.

them to spontaneously perform an action that is objectively wrong. Moreover, as Swinburne notes, “a desire is combined with the belief that the action desired is wrong, we get an inclination to do what is believed wrong.”⁵⁸ Thus, as it is plausibly the case that humans are subject to weakness of will, the consequence of this is that individuals would not only do wrong actions spontaneously but also will perform many intentionally—subjectively wrong, that is—actions. And this proneness to wrongdoing is further reinforced by individuals’ refusing to acknowledge to themselves their moral beliefs, or their refusing to discover the consequences of their actions and coming to the realisation that they are in this state. Thus, for example, as Swinburne writes, “This is the process which produces the wickedness of the obedient official who organises the Holocaust. He hides from himself the consequences of his actions (he doesn’t know, he says, what happens to the Jews whose transport he has been arranging), and he pretends to himself that he does not have obligations to any wider community, acknowledging only his duty to his superiors.”⁵⁹ The temptation for self-deceit—that is, for one to conceal from himself the moral obligations that he has—is an evident fact of human living and is the specific process that transforms mere moral weakness (such as that of one’s failing to perform an action on the moral obligations that he acknowledges) into what would be deliberate wickedness, if it weren’t for the individual’s being successful in deceiving himself concerning the moral nature of the action. Hence, for the propensity for wrongdoing, it is necessary for there to be moral belief and a self-centred desire, and the transmission of the former (i.e., moral belief) is a cultural phenomenon, whereas the transmission of the latter (i.e., the proneness to wrongdoing) is biological, through genetic, transmission.⁶⁰ For the moral beliefs of individuals, the specific beliefs that are held by individuals are often limited by which ones are transmitted within society—and thus, if society fails (deliberately or through ignorance) to teach the correct moral distinctions (such as what is morally obligatory, wrong, good or bad action)—it may fail to commend courses of conduct that are the natural extrapolations from these distinctions.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Swinburne, *Atonement*, 113.

⁵⁹ Swinburne, *Atonement*, 113.

⁶⁰ Yet, as Swinburne, *Atonement*, notes, the fact of moral belief is good as it “simply serves as the trigger which turns desires of certain sorts into a proneness to wrongdoing” (114).

⁶¹ Swinburne, *Atonement*.

Hence, by society doing this—that is, teaching an inadequate or incorrect morality—society will fail to provide individuals with reasons to pursue the good and will provide them with reasons to pursue the bad. (Swinburne, 1989). So false moral beliefs will then strengthen wrong desires and increase objective wrongdoing. Furthermore, false moral teaching may also lead to individuals' having a general disregard for the moral teaching of society in cases where this teaching conflicts with the individual's moral intuitions. In combination with humans' own doubts about their own moral intuitions, this situation may contribute to the weakening of the will and again increase subjective wrongdoing. The proneness to wrongdoing may have its power strengthened or weakened, not only by false moral teaching but also by bad examples. That is, as Swinburne writes:

Even if the society's moral teaching is correct and so regarded by some man, it may be treated with such casualness and levity that the desire to imitate other men, which would otherwise reinforce the pursuit of the good, now acts in a contrary direction, making it easier to yield to temptation. Conversely, the power of a good example is, of course, enormous.⁶²

So, the central aspect of the proneness to wrongdoing is transmitted genetically; however, the societal environment of an individual can play an important role in determining the strength of its effects. An ideal education system would work to help teach and provide examples that can aid the process of weakening the bad desires of humans and reinforcing good ones. Yet, this type of ideal system of education is indeed rare, and there is a reason for this being so—namely, that of the genetically transmitted proneness to wrongdoing.⁶³ As individuals are prone to yield to bad desires—due to their genetic inheritance—they are also prone to yield to desires which lead to them failing to take on board the ideas that will lead to their being a less selfish morality in society, and thus they are also prone to yield to the desires which lead them to treat morality with unseriousness and so for them to become a bad example for others. In reconceptualising this all now within a theological context, we can take the term “sin” to refer to the wrongdoing that is performed by humans in relation to God and one another—with objective wrongdoing thus being objective sinning and sub-

⁶² Swinburne, *Atonement*, 115.

⁶³ Swinburne, *Atonement*.

jective wrongdoing being subjective sinning. Now, in following Eleonore Stump,⁶⁴ we can take it to be the case that individuals who do not die before the age of reason are not only prone to (a genetically and socially sourced) objective and subjective wrongdoing but also have actually done morally wrong actions of some sort. Hence, every individual past the age of reason is one who has performed an objective and subjective sinful action with regard to at least some of their past actions, as each individual's life history includes their having succumbed to their proneness to wrongdoing and thus having done morally wrong actions of some sort. By an individual's actually sinning, he incurs a certain debt called guilt, with his mind also being subject to spiritual darkness and his will having a bondage to sin. More specifically, in virtue of an individual's inheriting a proneness to wrongdoing—which, following Swinburne, we can now re-term "original sinfulness"⁶⁵—and that individual's having performed a wrong action, he acquires guilt.⁶⁶ By one's performing an action of objective sinning, an individual acquires objective guilt, and by an individual's performing an action of subjective sinning, he acquires subjective guilt, for which he is culpable and blameworthy. Thus, we can also take it to be the case that the human condition is such that all humans—rational individuals who are created and sustained in existence moment to moment by God—have inherited this quasi-genetic and social general original sinfulness and, because of this propensity to sinning, humans have wronged God.

This wronging, or sin, has been performed against God in two specific ways: direct wrongdoing and indirect wrongdoing. Humans have wronged God directly by failing in their obligation to show him the reverence and gratitude which is his due, based on the fact of his being the ultimate source of their existence (i.e., being their greatest benefactor). And humans have wronged God indirectly by abusing their free will and responsibility through wronging others (i.e., hurting God's creation). Thus, by humans' wronging God in this specific way, they have acquired guilt. Moreover, in addition to the (direct and indirect)

⁶⁴ Eleonore Stump, *Atonement*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 18.

⁶⁵ Swinburne, *Atonement*, 137.

⁶⁶ There are indeed various debates that have taken place in church history concerning the nature of original sin and the concept of total depravity that is associated with it. However, in this specific article, we will utilise a relatively weaker conception of original sin (or original sinfulness) that is linked to the corruption of one's nature but not the total depravity of it.

wrongdoing, and the resultant guilt incurred, one can also follow Swinburne in taking it to be the case that humans have also inherited an *analogous* form of guilt which is produced through an indebtedness that descendants have to their ancestors for the life and benefits that has come to them through their ancestors.⁶⁷ As Swinburne writes:

For God, in creating us, has acted through our ancestors, who have not merely brought us into the world, but often lavished much care on our nurture or on the nurture of our parents or their parents etc. from which we have ultimately benefited. Those who have received great benefits from others owe them a smaller benefit in return.⁶⁸

What a descendent of these individuals could do (in theory) is help them make up for their sins, as these ancestors, through their original sinfulness (i.e., their propensity to sin), have failed in their obligations to God and thus are indebted to God for the (direct and indirect) wrongdoing that they have performed. Hence, we can take it to be the case that the descendants of these ancestors thus incur a specific obligation to help their ancestors deal with their sin (i.e., their wrongdoing)—where we can term this specific obligation incurred here “original sin.”⁶⁹ Nonetheless, by individuals’ acting on original sinfulness and thus performing a sinful action, they incur guilt (of an objective and/or subjective nature). In addition to this, as Robin Collins notes, they “create a form of spiritual and moral darkness along with an accompanying bondage to sin that, as with the genetic and social inheritance of a proneness to wrongdoing, is also inherited from one’s ancestor.”⁷⁰ More precisely, in following N.T. Wright, one can understand that sin is not just a state of being but a web of forces that actively works against God’s purposes.⁷¹ And thus, as Wright states, “When we worship and serve forces within the creation (the creation for which we were supposed to be responsible!), we hand over our power to other forces only too happy to usurp our position . . . some of these ‘forces’ are familiar (money, sex, power). Some are less familiar in the popular mind, not least the sense of a dark, accusing ‘power’ standing behind

⁶⁷ Swinburne, *Atonement*.

⁶⁸ Swinburne, *Jesus*, 56.

⁶⁹ Importantly, however, descendants do not incur the guilt of their ancestors but solely the obligation to help their ancestors to atone for their wrongdoing.

⁷⁰ Robin Collins, “Evolution and Original Sin,” in Keith B. Miller ed., *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 472.

⁷¹ Wright, *Revolution*.

all the rest.”⁷² The forces of sin thus exert a kind of negative agency that seeks to enslave humanity and the rest of creation, resulting in a spiritual darkening that pulls it away from the intention of God. Hence, by humans’ abdicating their own purpose and responsibilities, this has led to a surrender of their power and authority to forces that are neither divine nor human.⁷³ This all results in these forces’ running wild, wreaking havoc on human lives and despoiling the beauty of creation, ultimately transforming God’s world into a chaotic and unbearable existence.

Hence, on the basis of all of this, there is thus a spiritual dimension that exists and includes certain entities (namely, forces) in an analogous manner to our cultural dimension that exists and includes certain entities (namely, humans). Operating within the perspective of this dimension, one can thus see that all humans, through acting on their original sinfulness, can become bound to sin and darkened spiritually (by certain forces) such that they become, as Swinburne writes, “a prisoner of bad desires.”⁷⁴ Thus, this spiritual darkness and bondage is inherited in an analogous way to how the proneness to wrongdoing is inherited. And therefore, in addition to the guilt that is incurred by the performance of a sinful action, all human beings are not only prone to sin but are clouded in their minds and bound in their will to it as well. An individual whose mind is darkened in this manner and bound to sin is thus in a state that he does not have a natural desire to do actions ordered toward the good. Therefore, in considering what has been said concerning the human condition, one can thus clearly see the issue that stops all humans from flourishing in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God. In an Agápēic relationship between God and human beings, God, as a perfectly good being, would thus have his will determined in favour of each and every individual by having complacent love for them, being benevolent toward them, and striving for union with them. However, given the human condition of sin that is plaguing all individuals, God and humans *cannot* be in formal union. The reason for this is twofold: First, humans cannot be in formal union with God *from his end*, due to the fact that humans have incurred guilt in actually sinning and inheriting original sin (i.e., an

⁷² Wright, *Revolution*, 77.

⁷³ Wright, *Revolution*.

⁷⁴ Richard Swinburne, “A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell,” in Alfred J. Freddoso ed., *The Existence of God*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 49.

obligation to deal with the sins of their ancestors). At a general level, it is bad to treat an (unrepentant) individual who has wronged you—and thus devalued you—as someone who has not wronged you. Swinburne writes in forwarding this point that it:

is not to take his hostile stance toward you seriously; it is to treat him as a child not responsible for his actions. If someone has killed your much-loved wife and yet for some reason is beyond the reach of the law, it would be bad simply to ignore this and to enjoy his company at a party; it would be insulting to your wife to do so.⁷⁵

Thus, as sin is a disordering of one's values in a manner that does not allow one to appropriately value and honour God as the ultimate source of his being, it would thus be wrong for God to treat each human being as an individual that has not wronged him (and incurred guilt in doing so) by uniting his mind and will with the individual, and thus providing him with the incommensurate good of being one with God. If God were to, in fact, provide this incommensurate good, it would be to reinforce an individual's wrongdoing, which is itself a wrong action that would trivialise sin. Hence, plausibly, God would not seek to formally unite with humans in their current condition. Moreover, we can also further emphasise this problem by understanding the *expressive function* that an act of wrongdoing fulfils between the wrongdoer and the victim of the wrongdoing. A wrongdoing performed by an individual, according to Jean Hampton, is an *expressive act* that denies the moral truth that all individuals are of *equal value*.⁷⁶ That is, when a wrongdoer performs an act so as hurt, brutalise, or damage the interest of another individual in order to further their own purposes, the wrongdoer, according to Hampton, is indirectly "saying to that individual, 'I am up here, and you are down there; so I can use you for my purposes.'" ⁷⁷ The wrong actions of an individual express something that appears to diminish the victim's value—where the wrongdoer acts on the assumption that their victim's inherent value does not preclude them from performing this specific action. Through his wrongdoing, the individual thus treats the victim as one that has a lower value than himself. Hence, the wrongdoer's action is

⁷⁵ Swinburne, *Jesus*, 55.

⁷⁶ Jean Hampton, "Punishment, Feminism, and Political Identity: A Case Study in the Expressive Meaning of the Law," *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence*, 11 (1998): 23–45.

⁷⁷ Hampton, "Punishment," 38.

wrong again not only because it is a failure to fulfill an obligation but because it makes the false claim concerning the value of the victim and denies the moral truth that all individuals are of *equal and immutable value*.⁷⁸ Thus, given this, God, as a perfectly good being who has been (directly and indirectly) wronged, would seek to correct this false claim asserted by each sinner's wrongful actions—as will be further detailed later—will not be able to be achieved by simply ignoring the wrongdoing or using a non-punitive means. Rather, only through the enactment of *retributive punishment*, which can then fulfill an *expressive role* that condemns the wrongdoer and reaffirms the equality of value between that of the victim and wrongdoer, will the solution to our problem be provided.

The second issue to be faced given the human condition is that humans cannot be in formal union with God *from their end*, due to the fact that the minds of humans are spiritually darkened, and humans' wills are bound to sin through having inherited (genetically and socially) original sinfulness, which consists of bad desires, weakness of will and false moral beliefs. This original sinfulness causes a lack of harmony between a human's mind and will and God's, as each person, through acquiring a spiritually darkened mind, thus has a mind that is self-centred and inappropriately values things that are not to be valued. And through having their will bound to sin, humans are focused on performing actions that solely benefit the self and are of a nature that is contrary to the will of a perfectly good God. Thus, the original sinfulness of humans influences humankind to *not* will what God wills and come to acquire a mind in correspondence with God's mind (i.e., his beliefs and desires). Hence, given their condition, humans thus cannot unite their mind and will with God (and would probably not desire to do so as well). Thus, on the basis of these two issues, there is a distance between God and a human person that results in their not being formally united with him. Yet, if there is no formal union between God and humans, then there also cannot be a real union between them, as the real union between lover and beloved is simply the expression of the formal union of their minds and wills. However, as an essential component of an *Agápēic* relationship is the formation of a formal union and a striving for real union between lover and beloved, God cannot be in an *Agápēic* relationship with humans (or be in one

⁷⁸ Heather J. Gert, Linda Radzik, and Michael Hand, "Hampton on the Expressive Power of Punishment," *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 35 (2004): 79–90.

of any worth), if this formal union (and real union) is not present. Hence, God cannot achieve his aim of providing humans with the primary means of their flourishing.

In summary, the human condition is thus one in which libertarian free creatures, such as human beings, have an inherent proneness to wrongdoing (original sinfulness) that centres on a badness of desire, weakness of will, and false moral beliefs, with this genetically transmitted proneness to wrongdoing producing and encouraging a socially transmitted proneness to wrongdoing as well. The inheritance of this proneness results in all humans' actually performing wrong actions. In a theological context, the result of this performance of a wrong action (a sinful action) incurs objective and/or subjective guilt. Moreover, in addition to inheriting an obligation to deal with the sin of their ancestors (the inheritance of original sin), humans are in a state of spiritual darkness in regard to their minds and are bound to sin in regard to their will. God can thus not be in a formal union with an individual in this condition, as either it would be wrong for him to unite his mind and will with them (and thus treat them in a manner as if they did not wrong him and thereby reinforce their wrongdoing) or humans would not themselves be able to unite their mind and will with God, given the lack of correspondence between God's mind and will and the mind and will of each human. Hence, in their current condition, humans are not able to be to flourish by being in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God.

The question that thus now stands before is: how would God respond to the human condition that forestalls all individuals from entering into an Agápēic relationship with him? One way in which God could respond to this situation is by requiring all humans to deal with this problem themselves by overcoming their original sinfulness—and thus acquiring a mind and will that is similar to God's—and paying off (in some manner) their original sin and the guilt produced by their actual sin. However, this would be too great a task, given the fact that humans are plagued with a proneness to wrongdoing, and most humans are within a societal context that provides opportunities and motivation for wrongdoing, and thus there would always be a high probability that each human will decide to continue to sin. However, if this is indeed the case, then this would, firstly, further increase the size of the debt that they owe for their actual sin and the inheritance of original sin from their ancestors and, secondly, further darken their

minds and bind their will to sin. It is, therefore, plausible that humans are not able to deal with this problem themselves. Hence, given this inability and the importance of one dealing with sin before entering into a relationship with the incommensurate good that is God, one could indeed take the position that God would decide to let go of his plan and desire for humans to flourish in an Agápēic relationship with him. In short, God could decide to simply reject humans (and the relational goal that he set for them). However, it is quite clear that God would not seek to do this based on the duty, as noted previously, for all individuals to express *Agápē* toward to one another—and thus, in fulfillment of this duty, God would *necessarily* have his will directed toward the good of all humans. Hence, if humans cannot acquire this good without further help, God would thus seek to provide the needed help. That is, God himself could provide the means that will enable humans to enter into an everlasting Agápēic relationship with him.⁷⁹ And, given God’s omniscience and perfect goodness, he would see that this is the best action and inevitably seek to perform this action of providing this means. Now, the form that this specific means could take can be construed in a number of ways; however, one way found within the Christian tradition is that of this means being provided by the “election of Christ.” Following Karl Barth (CDII/2),⁸⁰ we can take it to be the case that in pre-temporal eternity God made the decision to be *God for us* through designating Christ, the Son of God Incarnate, as the Elect (i.e., chosen) One *and* the Rejected One—such that he is the only human who is chosen to stand *directly* in an Agápēic relationship with God, take sin upon himself, and be judged and re-

⁷⁹ Another way that God could respond to this situation is by God himself aiding humans in dealing with the issue of sin that plagues them and has stopped them from flourishing in a relationship with him. How God could provide this aid could itself come in different forms. One form is that of God aiding humans by directly removing their inclination to wrongdoing and resolving them of all of their guilt—without there being any response from humans. However, if God were to do this, this would trivialise the human condition and result in humans not taking their situation seriously. In other words, the sin and guilt incurred by humans need to be taken seriously. Hence, God would seek to provide this aid in a different form—namely, one that, first, comes from the action of God—and thus there is no burden on humans to deal with this problem themselves—and, second, that takes the problem of sin seriously and the rejection that it warrants.

⁸⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics Volume II/2: The Doctrine of God*, edited by G. W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957).

jected in the place of all of humanity.⁸¹ That is, as Barth writes:

In this one man Jesus, God puts at the head and in the place of all other men the One who has the same power as Himself. The rejection which all men incurred, the wrath of God under which all men lie, the death which all men must die, God in His love for men transfers from all eternity to Him in whom He loves and elects them, and whom He elects at their head and in their place . . . Indeed, the very obedience which was exacted of Him and attained by Him was His willingness to take upon Himself the divine rejection of all others and to suffer that which they ought to have suffered . . . He, the Elect, is appointed to check and defeat Satan on behalf of all those that are elected ‘in Him,’ on behalf of the descendants and confederates of Adam now beloved of God.⁸²

Thus, instead of God deciding to reject all of humanity who are not able to enter into an everlasting Agápēic relationship with him, or choosing (electing) some of humanity to enter into this relationship with him—and then rejecting the remainder—God decided to focus the election of humans and the rejection of humans that have sinned, on the person of Christ alone. More specifically, based on their sin, human beings cannot enter into an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God. However, through Christ’s being God (i.e., sharing in the same nature as the Father), he, and he alone, can stand directly in this relationship with God, on the basis of his being free from sin (and thus having no guilt, spiritual darkness or being bound to sin). Thus, what is being posited here is that, for God to deal with the human condition, he elects Christ in fulfillment of this role and thus, as Oliver

⁸¹ For clarity, I prefer to utilise the term “rejected” rather than “reprobated” as was used by Barth.

⁸² Barth, *CDII/2*, 123. I do not aim in this article to delve into the deep waters of Barthian interpretation—especially, concerning his view on election, which is a heavily debated topic. Rather I will proceed forward with a surface reading of Barth on this point, and seek to re-situate the view extracted from this reading within the Agápēic framework that has been put forward. However, for an influential interpretation of Barth on his doctrine of election, see Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology,” in John Webster ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92–110, and for pushback on this interpretation (and other “revisionist” interpretations of Barth), see George Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity: A Hermeneutical Proposal*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).

Crisp notes, all other human beings are “only derivatively elect.”⁸³ That is, as Christ is the Elect One, the set of the elect includes Christ as its only member. And as Christ is the Rejected One, the set of the rejected includes Christ as its only member.⁸⁴ Now, the manner in which this is applied to humans is asymmetrical in the sense that all humans are elect (i.e., can stand in an Agápēic relationship with God) *only in a derivative sense* by having a saving relation to the set of the elect and its single member: Christ.⁸⁵ Moreover, the sin of all humans is dealt with by Christ, the Rejected One, who, as the sole member of the set “the rejected,” is thus rejected and judged in the place of all. Thus, as Barth writes, “This foreordination of elected man is God’s eternal election of grace, the content of all the blessings which from all eternity and before the work of creation was ever begun God intended and determined in Himself for man, for humanity. for each individual, and for all creation . . . It remains to the individual only to grasp the promise which is given in the one Elect, and to seek and find his salvation, not as a private end, but as a participation in the victory and blessedness of this other, the Elect of God.”⁸⁶ Thus, within our specific context, we can conceive of this state of affairs as being that of human beings as a whole being derivatively elect, and thus being able to *indirectly* stand in an Agápēic relationship with God on the basis of *Christ being the Elect One*—who can, and indeed does, stand *directly* in this relationship with God. Moreover, *no* human being is rejected by God, on the basis of Christ *being the Rejected One* who can, and indeed does, stand in the place of all sinful humans—so that no human has to be rejected but can truly be in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God. The election of Christ by God is thus the solution to the human condition. Yet, at the basis of this pre-temporal act of election is the temporal atoning work of Christ that enables all individuals, once appropriated by them, to participate in this election and thus relationally flourish in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God. It will be important now to detail the nature of this atoning work and then, in the subsequent section, the manner in which one can appropriate it.

⁸³ Oliver Crisp, “On Barth’s Denial of Universalism,” *Themelios*, 29 (2003): 18–29.

⁸⁴ Crisp, “Universalism.”

⁸⁵ Crisp, “Universalism.”

⁸⁶ Barth, *CDII/2*, 142.

2. STAGE TWO: THE ACTION OF ATONEMENT

The second stage of our constructive task focuses on detailing the action of Christ that provided a means of atonement for human sin.⁸⁷ This specific action—or, more specifically, set of actions—focuses on three specific events that can be stated succinctly as follows:

- (7) (Atoning Action)
 - (i) The Perfect Life of Christ
 - (ii) The Participatory Death of Christ
 - (iii) The Revitalising Resurrection of Christ

For the atoning action of Christ, God has provided a means of dealing with the problem of sin (i.e., original sinfulness, original sin, the guilt produced by actual sin, the spiritual darkness of the mind, and the bondage of the will to sin) that plagues all of the human race. The means provided by God has as its foundation the pre-temporal election and rejection of Christ. This election and rejection are historically expressed through the perfect life that Christ lived (that dealt with the incurred guilt of humans), the death that Christ endured (that cleared the spiritual darkness and broke the hold of sin in the lives of all humans), and the resurrection that Christ experienced (that provided a means for all humans to possess a renewed mind and will)—which ultimately allows all humans to be able to enter into an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God in an indirect manner through the person of Christ. It will be important to now break down the central elements of (7) in more detail.

2.1 THE PERFECT LIFE OF CHRIST

The first aspect of the atoning action of Christ is his living a perfect human life—a life which showed other individuals how they should live and one which could be offered by other humans as reparation for sin. The perfect life lived by Christ is one in which he performed no

⁸⁷ In developing this component of the Agápēic Theory, there will be a utilisation of elements of the atonement theories of Swinburne, *Atonement*, Stump, *Atonement*, Wright, *Revolution* and Robin Collins, “An Incarnational Theory of Atonement,” (2011), Available online: <https://home.messiah.edu/~rcollins/Philosophical%20Theology/Atonement/Incarnational%20Theory%20of%20Atonement%2010-2-09%20version.doc> (Accessed June 2022). However, there are significant original developments that have been made to each of these elements individually and when brought together.

bad actions, many good actions, and always performed the best or equal best action/kind of action, when there was one.⁸⁸ A perfect life would thus include performing the good (best or equal best action/kind of action) of helping others improve the human condition that has been plagued by disease, death, and sin.⁸⁹ Hence, in living a perfect life, Christ sought to directly improve the human condition through his teaching—namely, by teaching moral truths that can correct the false moral beliefs promulgated. That is, as noted by Swinburne, he could teach other humans “how we are to worship and otherwise interact with God; and teaching about the afterlife, that there is Heaven for the good and (if that is how it is) the possibility of Hell for the bad . . . teaching (e.g., about Heaven) whose truth we could not discover for ourselves.”⁹⁰ Additionally, he would also seek to better the human condition beyond the capacity of ordinary humans by, for example, healing psychological and physical illnesses and dealing with some of the other evils of society. And, as Swinburne further notes, the performance of some miracles with “many non-miraculous healings would be the best combination.”⁹¹ In living this type of life, as a divine person, the life lived by Christ would be one in which he could not be tempted to do wrong, based on the fact that Christ *could not* inherit the proneness to wrongdoing that inflicts all other human persons. More precisely, as Christ is divine, he would, first, not inherit original sinfulness given to humans by society—namely, false moral beliefs—as he would be omniscient and would know the truth value of all moral propositions and would have *no* false moral beliefs. Thus, even if the society that he is placed within is furthering an erroneous moral system, he would not believe the teaching of this system. Hence, his moral beliefs would be true, and one can have certainty that the teaching that comes from him is also true. Second, he would also not inherit the original sinfulness given to humans genetically from our ancestors—namely, bad desires and weakness of will (in the sense of a desire to do wrong and the will to perform a wrong action)—as it is plausibly wrong for an individual to put themselves in a position where they are liable to perform a wrong action—such as that of internationally al-

⁸⁸ Swinburne, *Atonement*.

⁸⁹ Richard Swinburne. *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*, (Oxford: Oxford University: 2003).

⁹⁰ Swinburne, *Resurrection*, 57.

⁹¹ Swinburne, *Resurrection*, 56.

lowing oneself to forget their duties, take drugs that would lead to the individual being tempted to do wrong, or driving a car when you have consumed alcohol, and thus the individual's putting himself in a position where he is likely to harm someone else.⁹² Hence, as a divine person is perfectly good—and thus cannot perform any wrong action—he would not put himself in a position where he could have chosen to do wrong. Thus, as Christ is divine, he would not place himself in a situation where he could have performed any wrong action and open himself up to the possibility of doing objective or subjective wrong, and thus he would, as Swinburne notes, “have ensured that in his human actions, he had access to such true moral beliefs as would allow him to be aware of his duties, and he must have ensured that he would never be subject to too strong a desire to do any action which was wrong.”⁹³ Christ would thus not have false moral beliefs, not inherit desires that could influence him to do wrong, and not have the weakness of will that would lead to him succumbing to this. Yet, even though Christ would not be able to perform a wrong action, his psychological state might be as such as to lead him to feel as though he could. And though he would not have any proneness to wrongdoing, he indeed would be able to have a *proneness to not perform any supererogatory actions or the best action (or equal best action)*, and would indeed face certain temptations not to as well.⁹⁴ Hence, Christ could have been subject to temptation not to live such a perfect life in this specific sense. And in living a perfect life, Christ overcame this temptation when ordinary humans often yielded to it. In overcoming these temptations, and thus living a life of perfection, it is not required that this life end in a *death by execution*. Yet, in many societies, this might, in fact, happen, as it is a frequent response to those who perform the supererogatory action of protesting strongly against injustice, and promoting a correct moral system—in a society that promotes an incorrect one—that they are often executed for doing this. Hence, Christ, in living a perfect life as a reparational sacrifice⁹⁵ and for the purpose of exemplifying and showing how one should respond to the worst that life throws at one, could plausibly decide to live his life in a

⁹² Swinburne, *Jesus*.

⁹³ Swinburne, *Jesus*, 57

⁹⁴ Swinburne, *Jesus*.

⁹⁵ More on this in the next section.

society where his life would end in death by execution.⁹⁶ That is, in Christ's performing the action of becoming incarnate, living a perfect life that could function as a reparational sacrifice for the sins of humanity, and showing others how to live in a society (like many other human societies) that rejects a life orientated toward the good, it is indeed plausible that Christ's life would end in a death by execution. This leads us to the second aspect of atoning action of Christ.

2.2 THE PARTICIPATORY DEATH OF CHRIST

The second aspect of the atoning action of Christ is his death which provides a means for the false claim made by each individual's action of wrongdoing to be corrected and for all the bondage to sin and spiritual darkness inflicting humans to be dealt with. More specifically, in the case of a wrongful act, as noted previously, a wrongdoer expresses the view that his victim is of a lesser value to them by not only making an assertion, but also by presenting *evidence* that they are inferior to him by the victim's having been subjugated. This type of evidence that is provided by the action of a wrongdoer, as Heather J. Gert *et al.* write, "has the potential to make others draw false conclusions about the victim's and the offender's relative worth."⁹⁷ Hence, for God to truly deal with the wrongdoing performed by each individual, he must *eliminate* this misleading evidence—and it is the specific use of (retributive) punishment, according to Hampton,⁹⁸ that corrects this type of false claim asserted by a wrongful action. That is, as noted previously, punishment fulfills an *expressive role* that condemns the wrongdoer and reaffirms the equality of value between that of the victim and wrongdoer. Now, even though punishment cannot literally negate the wrong performed by a wrongdoer, as nothing will undo the action that has been performed, it can still attempt to say something about the wrongdoing and thus express something about it in a way that can nullify its effects and thus re-establish the status quo. By one's employing the means of punishment, an individual is able to reassert the moral equality of the victim and wrongdoer, as Hampton writes:

The retributive punisher uses the infliction of suffering to symbolise the subjugation of the subjugator, the domination of the one

⁹⁶ Swinburne, *Jesus*.

⁹⁷ Gert et al, "Expressive," 82.

⁹⁸ Jean Hampton, "An Expressive Theory of Retribution," in Wesley Cragg ed., *Retributivism and Its Critics*, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992), 1–25.

who dominated the victim. And the message carried in this subjugation is ‘What you did to her, she can do to you.’ So you’re equal.⁹⁹

Punishment possesses the power to annul the evidence provided by a wrongdoer’s wrongful action by undercutting the probative force of the evidence of their superiority over their victims.¹⁰⁰ The wrongdoer’s action *cannot* be taken to have established the superiority of them over a victim *if* the latter type of individual—through the punitive action of God—is able to do to the wrongdoer what they did to them. That is, the fulfillment of a retributive role for punishment does not only simply communicate the fact that the victim and wrongdoer are of equal value, but it also creates, according to Hampton, a “state of affairs (a real state, not a hoped-for moral state) in which the victim [is] elevated with respect to the wrongdoer.”¹⁰¹ Thus, God would inflict punishment to say something in return to the assertion made by the wrongdoers against him—by making a counter-assertion that insists on God’s inherent value, ultimately denying the wrongdoer’s claim to elevation. Hence, the use of punishment in cases like this is the *only* means to achieve this end, as Hampton writes, “I contend that punishment is uniquely suited to the vindication of the victim’s relative worth, so that no other method of purporting to achieve vindication could be preferred to it.”¹⁰² Therefore, at a general level, punishment is *the* effective tool to enable the victim to regain his value of equal status with that of the wrongdoer. However, as an act of punishment in normal cases can only reassert that the victim of the wrongdoing is of *equal value* to the perpetrator of the wrongdoing, God’s using punishment as a means to achieve this end would assert the false claim that God and each human individual is of equal inherent value. However, this is not the case, given that God is of incommensurate value and other individual are of great but merely finite value. Hence, as God would, on the one hand, want to correct the false assertion made against God, that he, as a victim of (direct and indirect) wrongdoing, is of lower value than all of the humans that wrong him, he would seek

⁹⁹ Hampton, “Expressive,” 13.

¹⁰⁰ Hampton, “Expressive.”

¹⁰¹ Jean Hampton, “Correcting Harms versus Righting Wrongs: The Goal of Retribution,” *UCLA Law Review*, 39 (1992): 1695.

¹⁰² Jean Hampton, “A New Theory of Retribution,” in R. G. Frey and Christopher W. Morris eds., *Liability and Responsibility: Essays in Law and Morals*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 401.

to utilise the most effective method of doing this, which is that of punishment. However, as, God would also, on the other hand, not want to also express the false claim that he is of the *same* value as humans—which would be made by his punishing them—he would thus seek a means out of this dilemma. Now, as Christ shares the same nature as God—that is, he is *homoousious* with the Father—he would be of equal value to God. And, as Christ also assumed a human nature (took on the same kind of nature as ours) *and* our wrongdoing—without himself becoming a sinner—he would be able to function as a representative for each human wrongdoer, and a substitute for the retributive punishment that would need to be made to counteract the claims made by humans' actions. That is, God's enactment of punishment on Christ would enable him to annul the evidence of the superiority of the humans represented by Christ and, as Christ is of the same value as God, he would be able to ward off expressing a false claim by this action. God would be able to express the correct message that the subject of this punishment—namely, Christ—is, in fact, of equal value to him (as a divine person that is *homoousious* with the Father). Hence, by Christ's taking on the retributive punishment of every human by suffering on the cross, God can counter the false claims of the superiority of each wrongdoer, whilst also not expressing the equally false claim of his being of equal value with those who are being punished—which would, in fact, have been the case if Christ were not the penal substitute for each human. Christ's experience of suffering on the cross would thus serve as the needed retributive punishment to deal with the expressive effects of each sinner's wrongdoing.

In addition to this, however, Christ's suffering on the cross does not fulfill only this *expressive* function but also an *ontological* function as well. That is, through Christ's not only suffering, but also experiencing death on the cross, Christ is also able to overcome sin at an ontological level as well, which can now be understood as follows: All humans are taken, within the Agápēic account, to be present with Christ during his death. This death is the means used by God to overcome the problem that sin has caused for each and every human being. At a general level, and in following Stump,¹⁰³ we can take it to be the case that an individual can be present, firstly, at a *place*, through occupying a certain region of space, secondly, at a *time*, through existing at a certain moment of time, and, thirdly, *personally present*, through having a psy-

¹⁰³ Stump, *Atonement*.

chological connection with another individual.¹⁰⁴ For the third type of presence, personal presence, which is a presence *with* or *to* another individual, one can begin to understand the nature of this presence better through the notion of mind reading. Mind reading, as noted by Stump, is where “one human person can be present with another in a way more powerful than mere presence at a place or in a time.”¹⁰⁵ In contemporary neuropsychology, mind reading is the process in which an individual has within themselves something of the mind of the other individual—where the mind of an individual is the combination of the attitudes, perspectives, commitments, and beliefs of that individual. In short, it includes the individual’s “intentional states.”¹⁰⁶ In mind reading, an individual would have intuitive and direct access to the mind of another person—that is, direct and intuitive access to the intentional states in the mind of another person. An individual can be taken to be present with another individual, as Stump notes, “In the intermingling of minds made possible by the mirror neuron system, one person is present to another in virtue of being in that other, in a way that the neurobiology of the brain makes possible.”¹⁰⁷ More precisely, contemporary neurobiologists conceive of this knowledge of persons as being supported by a neurologically distinct system termed the “mirror neuron system.”¹⁰⁸ Hence, in mind reading, as further noted by Stump, “mirror neurons fire both when a person does a particular kind of action and also when he sees someone else performing such an action. The kind of knowledge given by the mirror neuron system is not a kind of knowledge-that. Rather it is a matter of knowing from one’s own internal state what someone else is doing and feeling.”¹⁰⁹ An individual thus knows a person, and that person is present within the mind of that individual, by their having a “copy” or ‘simulacrum’ of the mental states of that individual that is provided to them by their mirror neuron system. Thus, Christ, in having a human nature, will have the ability, like other humans, to mind-read other individuals. Yet, in Christ’s also having a divine nature, he will have access

¹⁰⁴ Stump, *Atonement*.

¹⁰⁵ Stump, *Atonement*, 131.

¹⁰⁶ Stump, *Atonement*.

¹⁰⁷ Eleonore Stump, “Omnipresence, Indwelling, and the Second-Personal,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 5 (2013): 41.

¹⁰⁸ Stump, “Omnipresence.”

¹⁰⁹ Eleonore Stump, “Atonement and the Cry of Dereliction from the Cross,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 4 (2012): 8.

to divine power and so can have the ability to mind-read other human beings in a way that mere humans cannot do.¹¹⁰ Moreover, as a divine person is eternal (i.e., existing without beginning or end) and omnipresent (i.e., being causally active at, and cognizant of, every point of space) and would be present at every time and space, Christ can use his human mind and the power that is available from his possession of a divine nature to mind read at once the *entire mind of every human beings that exist at every time and space*.¹¹¹ That is, the power of the divine person in the incarnate Christ, as noted by Stump, “can give the human mind of Christ the power of having within himself, in a mind-reading way, the minds of all human persons at one and the same time.”¹¹² The event in which this takes place is Christ’s death by execution on the cross. On the cross, Christ is willing to open himself up simultaneously to every human mind. And thus, when he does so, as Stump further writes, “then at that time all the mental states of all human beings will flood his mind, through the extended powers provided by his divine nature.”¹¹³ Hence, at this time, the mind of Christ is opened to the mind of all human beings—including the times before his birth and after his physical death. And by the mind of Christ’s being connected to the minds of every other human being, Christ would have in his mind a copy or simulacrum of each of the mental states of every individual, such that each and every individual is present within the mind of Christ in the event of his death.¹¹⁴ This would result in two things occurring that are central to our theory: First, in this act, Christ fulfills his pre-temporal rejection by becoming the Rejected One through bearing all the sins and inherent evil of humanity. That is, on the cross, Christ’s mind is connected with the minds of every human being—where at one and the same time, Christ mind-reads the mental states, as noted by Stump, that is “found in all the terribly evil human acts human beings have ever committed. Every vile, shocking, disgusting repulsive evil psychic state accompanying all human evil will also be at once in the psyche [mind] of Christ, only

¹¹⁰ Stump, *Atonement*.

¹¹¹ Eleonore Stump, “Providence and the Problem Evil,” in Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 401–417.

¹¹² Stump, *Atonement*, 164.

¹¹³ Stump, “Omnipresence,” 45.

¹¹⁴ Stump, *Atonement*.

off-line.”¹¹⁵ Christ possessed in his mind a copy or simulacrum of all the stains of all the sinful and evil actions that have ever been thought of, performed (or will ever be performed)—without, however, him having performed any evil acts of his own. Thus, by performing this mind-reading action, Christ takes on all of the sins (and evil) of the world and thus becomes the Rejected One, who stands in the place of all other humans.

The second thing that this mind-reading act would result in is that of all human beings’ being *present with* Christ in his death through all human minds’ being present within the mind of Christ at this time. And, thus, as all of the minds that indwell within the mind of Christ (whilst he is on the cross) are present with him during this event, they are then put to ‘spiritual’ death (in the spiritual dimension) through the physical death of Christ (in the physical dimension).¹¹⁶ In other words, all humans participate in the death of Christ by their being personally present with him. Thus, in participating in the death of Christ, all humans are freed from their bondage to sin, as the death of their minds in Christ puts an end to the proneness to sin and the spiritual darkness of their minds—which are both states that are dependent on the functioning of the human mind. Hence, as all of the minds of each and every human spiritually die at the moment that the mind of Christ physically dies, there is an end that has now been given to the production of sin in the life of every human—as, in short, each of these humans has now died through participating (via personal presence) in the death of Christ. Thus, by Christ’s experiencing death, we are now presented with a means of breaking the bondage to sin that plagues all humans—a means which is provided by Christ’s taking on all the sins of the world (and thus became the Rejected One) and by all human minds’ experiencing death. Thus, the proneness to sin and spiritual bondage that is tied to these minds ceases to exist as well. Following Wright, we can thus take it to be the case here that, in the death of Christ, there is a confronting and defeat of the enslaving powers that brought about humanity’s spiritual darkness and bondage to sin.¹¹⁷ This is due to the fact that Christ willingly goes into the heart of this darkness (by his crucifixion) and takes upon himself the full weight of

¹¹⁵ Stump, “Cross,” 14.

¹¹⁶ The distinction between dimensions was introduced in earlier sections of this article. I leave the metaphysics of this spiritual death open.

¹¹⁷ Wright, *Revolution*.

these powers (through his mind-reading of all humanity on the cross). And, thus, in doing so, Christ exhausts their power and breaks their enslavement (by putting to death the corrupted minds and wills of all of humanity). Yet, the death of Christ is not the end, given that he is resurrected from the dead by God (as affirmed by Christian tradition), which provides grounds for the third, and final, aspect of the atoning action of Christ.

2.3 THE REVITALISING RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The third aspect of the atoning action of Christ is Christ's resurrection which provides a means for all humans to be provided with a renewed mind and will. The mind of an individual, as noted previously, is the combination of the intentional states of that individual. Whereas the first-order will of an individual is a will, in this specific context, that is directed toward the good (or the bad). Based on their genetic inheritance, humans lack a mind and first-order will for the good, and, given their social environment (and the influences of their genes), they cannot bring themselves to acquire it. More precisely, humans cannot reciprocate a formal union with God because—in addition to the guilt that they have incurred— they have a mind and will that are at odds with his. However, humans cannot obtain this mind and will by themselves. Hence, this mind and will must come from God. Yet, as God is a perfect being, he has a mind and will that are *wholly* different from humans—that is, his attitudes, perspectives, commitments, beliefs and will are completely different from that of humans. God's mind is such that it is not something that fits with the "life-situation" of humans, who each have their mind in a manner that is tied, given the human condition, to their vulnerabilities, sufferings, inherent limitations, urges and dependence on the physical, and, ultimately, the reality of death. Hence, humans cannot directly adopt or share God's mind. As noted by Collins, it "would be too alien from ours for this sharing to occur. This is analogous to the fact that a tree branch cannot be grafted into a horse, only another tree; the horse is too alien for it."¹¹⁸ God must use another means to provide the required mind and will.

Now, by all human beings' indwelling within the mind of Christ—by their being personally present through his mind-reading activity—*all humans have been put to death in the death of Christ*. That is, as

¹¹⁸ Collins, "Incarnational," 2.

noted previously, the minds of all humans have participated in the death of Christ and cease to exist spiritually at the time that Christ's mind ceases to exist physically. However, as Christ is not only the Rejected One but is also the Elected One—who has been chosen by God, in pre-temporal eternity, to be in an Agápēic relationship with him—God would seek to bring him back to life so as to be in this relationship with him and enable others to stand in this relationship as well *through* him. The resurrection of Christ thus provides the grounds for the pre-temporal election of Christ and, by each human's being derivatively elect—and therefore their being able to receive the goods made available to them by standing in a (saving) relation to Christ the Elect One—they now have the opportunity to receive a renewed mind and will by being brought back to life *with* Christ in his resurrection. By this event taking place, all humans are thus able to adopt the mind and will that was created during the life of Christ. More specifically, during the period of his incarnation, Christ entered as *deeply* as possible into the human life situation of suffering, limitations, dependence, vulnerability and death—and in this situation, he responded to these issues with love, faith and hope. Thus, by Christ performing this action of identification, a *fully human and divine mind and will* were created in Christ—with this mind *not* being spiritually darkened, and this will not be subject to original sinfulness and being in bondage to sin. In other words, by living a certain type of life, Christ created a *new mind and will* that was wholeheartedly conformed around the good. His intentional states and will were all directed toward the good, and, thus, each derivatively elect individual is provided with the opportunity to replace his previously possessed tainted mind and will by partaking (adopting or sharing) in Christ's.

Yet, this mind and will cannot be imposed upon an individual by God if their libertarian freedom and personhood is to be maintained. Thus, an individual must *freely* partake of it by forming a second-order desire for a mind and will that is directed toward the good—this will be of importance in the next section. Nevertheless, through the death of Christ, humans are able to participate in this death and thus cease to possess their sin-inflicted minds and wills. And now, through the resurrection of Christ, humans can now also participate in his life by the mind and will of Christ now replacing the individual's own mind and will in a manner that the intentional states of Christ are, as noted

by Collins, “creatively individualized and integrated into our own.”¹¹⁹ And, as the new mind and will created in Christ is radically at odds with the original minds and wills of other humans who have inherited original sinfulness, it undercuts it by now providing them with intentional states that are inclined toward the good. Therefore, by Christ’s performing the action of resurrecting from the dead, we now have the final element needed for humans to reciprocate their formal union with God—namely, a renewed mind and will now being made available for all humans. Thus, through the pre-temporal election and rejection of Christ—that is then expressed temporally (and historically) in his life, death and resurrection—humans have been provided with the means to enter into an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God.

Yet, it is again important to note that by employing this means, humans are able to enter into this relationship, in an *indirect manner*, through Christ. That is, humans *cannot* directly remove their guilt, and thus enter into this relationship with God, but they can indirectly remove it through the sacrificial offering of Christ’s perfect life. Moreover, humans *cannot* directly replace their spiritually darkened minds and wills that are in bondage to sin, and thus overcome the second barrier for entering into this relationship with God, but they can remove it, *indirectly*, through the death and resurrection of Christ removing their tainted mind and will and providing them with a mind and will that is in conformity to God’s—namely, Christ’s. In other words, Christ as the Elect and Rejected One is the sole human who can, and does, stand in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God. However, through the actions performed by Christ, humans are now able to indirectly partake of this Agápēic relationship with God, in Christ, by the appropriation of the means of atonement that was provided by him.

This all, however, has cosmic implications as, in building on Wright’s work, it can be stated that humanity’s ability to participate in an Agápēic relationship with God through the actions of Christ *initiates God’s new creation*.¹²⁰ More precisely, this initiation is manifested through Jesus’s death and resurrection, which, by providing humanity with renewed minds and wills, restores God’s initial plan for creation. This original intent was for creation to mirror his glory, and for crea-

¹¹⁹ Robin Collins, “Girard and Atonement: An Incarnational Theory of Mimetic Participation,” in Willard Swartley ed., *Violence Renounced: Rene Girard, Biblical Studies and Peacemaking*, (Telford: Cascadia Publishing House, 2000), 139.

¹²⁰ Wright, *Revolution*.

tures to exist in just, peaceful, and life-affirming relationships.¹²¹ Thus, by Christ's overcoming sin (through Christ's crucifixion) and overcoming death (through Christ's resurrection), a pathway is opened for the comprehensive restoration of all things, thereby marking the commencement of God's new creation.¹²² This new creation, under God's direction, is on a trajectory toward ultimate completion at the end of time. More can indeed be said here; however, it will be important to now turn our attention to detailing the means by which an individual can appropriate this and thus relationally flourish.

3. STAGE THREE: PRE-MORTEM RECEPTION OF ATONEMENT

The third stage of our constructive task focuses on the pre-mortem reception of the means of atonement provided by Christ in the previous stage (hereafter, Pre-Mortem Reception).¹²³ The central elements of the notion of Pre-mortem Reception can now be stated more precisely as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| (8) (Pre-Mortem Reception) | (i) Quiescence |
| | (ii) Guilt Removal |
| | (iii) Transformation |

For Pre-Mortem Reception, God desires for all humans to be reconciled to him—and thus be in an Agápēic relationship with him—which is made possible by a pre-mortem individual's hearing the "Gospel" and ceasing to resist the offer of God's grace that is made available by the Atonement. By an individual's doing this, he is able to freely appropriate Christ's work in his life and thus be brought into an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God. It will be important to now break down the elements of (8) in more detail.

3.1 QUIESCENCE: SURRENDER & THE GOSPEL

In light of the possibility for pre-mortem individuals to flourish maximally in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God and their inher-

¹²¹ Wright, *Revolution*.

¹²² For more on the nature of this New Creation, see Wright, *Revolution*.

¹²³ In developing this component of the Agápēic Theory, there will, again, be a utilisation of elements of the atonement theories of Swinburne, Stump and Collins. However, as before, there are significant original developments/changes that have been made to each of these elements, individually, and when brought together.

ent inability to enter this relationship due to the human condition, it's crucial for God to provide the necessary means for this—Christ's atoning work. This, however, necessitates an appropriation of Christ's work by any pre-mortem individual to stand in this relationship, relying on God's operative grace and their will's orientation toward this grace. More specifically, God's operative grace helps form a second-order desire for good, understood as a desire to will what God desires, given that God only wills the good.¹²⁴ At a general level, the operation of a pre-mortem individual's will can assent to, reject, or remain quiescent toward something, which indicates that there are three possible positions toward God's grace.

Now, God consistently offers grace to all pre-mortem individuals; yet, these individuals, who are each in a state of original sinfulness, typically resist this offer and lack the ability to accept it. God, however, as Stump notes, "cannot unilaterally bring it about that there is such a will."¹²⁵ This limitation is due to the fact that if God acted on a pre-mortem individual's will while he resisted God's grace, the will would become God's will, not the pre-mortem individual's, thereby obstructing, not establishing, the union between God and the pre-mortem individual. Thus, pre-mortem individuals need to cease resisting God's love and surrender to him. This surrender leads to a state of quiescence regarding God's grace, allowing God to infuse his operative grace into that pre-mortem individual, reconfiguring the person's will to assent to the goodness of God. God thus produces faith in pre-mortem individuals who have a quiescent will, and so with the production of this faith also comes the second-order desire for the good (i.e., a desire for a will to will the good). Thus, in providing this grace to an individual, God is providing all that is necessary to produce faith in that individual; yet, in producing this faith, God is responsive to the individuals who are ultimately responsible for their ceasing to resist God's grace, and thus whether or not they have the second-order desire in question.¹²⁶ So, individuals' free will, personhood and individuality are maintained here when they are "infused" with God's grace—as the grace (and faith) that is received is had in *response* to the individuals.

Now, humans can become quiescent to God's grace in several ways; however, what is clearly needed is for there to be, as Stump notes, a

¹²⁴ Stump, *Atonement*.

¹²⁵ Stump, *Atonement*, 343.

¹²⁶ Stump, *Atonement*.

cracking or melting of the pre-mortem individual's heart, which can occur when he hears the Gospel (i.e., the story of Christ's life, death, and resurrection).¹²⁷ Hence, Christ's life (and death and resurrection) serves as a catalyst for the cracking or melting of one's heart needed for a pre-mortem individual to cease to resist God's grace. Why this is the case is based on the fact that pre-mortem individuals often struggle to accept love—and in fact, resist it—due to the vulnerability and loss of autonomy it implies, and the fear of power inequality.¹²⁸ Thus, for this resistance to love to be overcome, God can provide a means that wards off these issues in the form of his revelation: the incarnate Christ, living a life of suffering, vulnerability, selflessness, and powerlessness, which serves to overcome these points of resistance. Hence, hearing the Gospel and reflecting on the life of Christ can thus effectively help pre-mortem individuals to cease resisting God's love, allowing them to surrender to God (i.e., enter into a state of quiescence) and receive operative grace. This grace, in turn, brings about the second-order desire for good, as Stump writes, "This second-order will [desire] is in effect a desire to will what God wills. Its presence in a person...constitutes justification."¹²⁹ Thus, the life of Christ, as conveyed by the Gospel, plays an instrumental role in enabling a pre-mortem individual to be justified, leading to real union with God if they persevere to the end. More precisely, once a pre-mortem individual has ceased resisting God's love, God can then provide him with operative grace that is required for him to come to possess the needed second-order desire for good. And thus, now this individual would have the motivation and ability to proceed to removing his guilt and appropriating the mind and first-order will of Christ that is needed for formal union with God.

3.2 GUILT REMOVAL: PROCESS OF FORGIVENESS

In the state of quiescence and in the reception of God's operative grace an individual now possesses the second-order desire (faith), and, thus, the ability, to undergo the process of removing original sin and the guilt produced by actual sins. At a general level, one can remove guilt, according to Swinburne, by performing four actions: *repentance*, *apology*,

¹²⁷ Stump, *Atonement*, 270.

¹²⁸ Stump, *Atonement*.

¹²⁹ Eleonore Stump. "The Problem of Evil and Atonement," in John A. Keller ed., *Being, Freedom, and Method: Themes from the Philosophy of Peter van Inwagen*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 203.

*reparation and penance.*¹³⁰ Repentance and apology enable a person to (internally and externally) distance themselves from the wrongdoing that has been done, whereas reparation helps to re-establish the status quo by dealing with the effects of the wrongdoing.¹³¹ In some cases of more serious wrongdoing, however, something extra may be required to be done to fully complete the guilt removal process. This would be penance, which is usually a small gift or service which serves as a token of the person's sorrow for failing in their obligation. Once these components are in place, the process of removing one's guilt is then completed when the victim forgives the wrongdoer, which is simply their deciding to treat the wrongdoer as one who has not wronged them.¹³²

Now, as previously noted, ordinary humans are not in the position to remove the guilt that is the result of their sins or provide a reparation for the sins of others. It is plausible that God would respond to this state of affairs by providing humans with the means of reparation. The central aspect of the moral debt owed to God by humans is that of their failure to live good lives. Thus, to successfully deal with this debt (i.e., guilt), what is required is that of a good life being offered to God in the form of a reparation. And it is in, and through, the perfect life of Christ that God provided the act of reparation of which we can avail ourselves. This can be understood as that of the God (i.e., the Father) being the wronged person (i.e., the victim of our wrongdoing), and the Son, as Swinburne writes, "thinking it so important that we should take our wrongdoing seriously, made available the reparation for us to offer back to God the Father."¹³³ This would indeed be a sufficient reparation—that is, the one perfect sacrificial human life lived by Christ—as it is the victim who reserves the right to determine when a sufficient reparation has been made.¹³⁴ And thus, 'by this reparation being made available, humans can deal with their incurred guilt by associating their own repentance and apology with the reparation (and penance) provided by Christ.

At a practical level, one could do this, as Swinburne writes, by saying to God, "Please accept instead of the life which I ought to have led

¹³⁰ Swinburne, *Atonement*.

¹³¹ Swinburne, *Atonement*.

¹³² Swinburne, *Atonement*.

¹³³ Richard Swinburne. "Responsibility, Atonement, and Forgiveness," in J. P. Moreland, Chad Meister and Khaldoun A. Sweis eds., *Debating Christian Theism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 366.

¹³⁴ Swinburne, "Responsibility."

(and the lives which my ancestors ought to have led) this perfect life of Christ as my reparation”¹³⁵—with this association being expressed physically through the act of “baptism” (i.e., the sacramental act of ritual purification through water) and renewed through partaking of the Eucharist (i.e., the sacramental act of consuming the body and blood of Christ). Hence, by performing this action, an individual’s repentance and apology are now associated with the reparation (and penance) that Christ provides through his perfect life, which results in the obligation from original sin, and the (objective and subjective) possessed by humans, being fully removed, and thus forgiveness from God being obtained. Thus, through an individual’s becoming quiescent by hearing the Gospel (i.e., the story of the life of Christ), God can infuse his operative grace into a person (without violating his autonomy). Through this infusion of grace, individuals come to have a second-order desire for the good (faith) that provides them with the ability and desire to seek God’s forgiveness and remove their guilt—which is obtained and achieved by repenting and apologising for their wrongdoing and associating themselves (practically through baptism and the Eucharist) with Christ’s life, which serves as reparation and penance for this wrongdoing. This results in God’s forgiving the individuals for their sin, removing their guilt, and individuals’ having *justification*. Justification is thus the first step toward achieving moral and spiritual regeneration leading to a reciprocated formal union between God and humans, a real union which is completed by the adoption and integration of the mind and first-order will of Christ in a particular individual.

3.3 TRANSFORMATION: UNION ACHIEVED

The adoption and integration of Christ’s mind and will by a particular individual occurs through the process of *sanctification* that is initiated when an individual comes to faith (and thus is justified), by receiving God’s operative grace, and thus now also receiving the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit now comes to indwell in the person and brings with him the mind and virtuous first-order will of Christ that was formed during Christ’s life and in which an individual can now directly partake. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit enables an individual to be directly attentive to the mind of Christ and his character. However, by the Holy Spirit’s coming to dwell within an

¹³⁵ Swinburne, *Jesus*, 59.

individual and infusing the mind and will of Christ into the individual, this does not remove the old dispositions that the individual acquired through their performance of morally bad or wrong actions. However, as Stump writes, it does “introduce virtues over them, and it counteracts the old morally wrong dispositions.”¹³⁶ At this stage, the individual is not *wholly integrated* around the good, as he can still act on some first-order behavioural dispositions that are contrary to the good as he sees it. However, the individual is now in an intimate relationship with God, and together, they can cooperate to make progress in the integration of the individual.

More precisely, there is now a reciprocated formal union between God and humans where, in an “ek-static” manner, each human lives outside himself and in God, and now God, in the person of Christ, lives outside of himself and in a particular individual through his mind’s and will’s being given to that individual by the work of the Holy Spirit. Hence, in and through the person of Christ, all humans can now live in God intellectually by the mind and will of Christ (who shares the same nature as God) being given to them by the Holy Spirit. A justified human being thus can enter into formal union with God, where God now dwells in a particular justified human intellectually and in will. This formal union establishes the ground for a real union between God and humans, as a real union is an external expression of (the now established) reciprocated formal union between God and creation—in the way that God and a human individual, who are each united in mind and will, by the work of Christ, are now together in a particular manner through the *shared activity of sanctification*.

More fully, the integration of the mind and first-order will of Christ, within the psychological structure of a justified individual is at the heart of the process of sanctification (the work of which is called God’s “cooperative grace”) and is a shared activity between God and that human. As long as the individual continues to cooperate with God in allowing his grace (through the work of the Holy Spirit) to progressively impart the mind of Christ—that is, his intentional states—and the first-order will of Christ—a will directed toward the good—into the individual, and this individual does not decide to return to his original resistance to God’s love and the grace that he has infused within them—then the process that has been initiated will continue to work within them to strengthen the individual in willing

¹³⁶ Stump, *Atonement*, 343.

the good. This will ultimately result in an individual's transformation (i.e., a change from an integration around wrongdoing to an integration around the good) and a real union with God.¹³⁷ Hence, an individual's surrender to God's love, in response to the Gospel, is the central act that is met immediately by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit with the mind and will of Christ, which, over time, will ultimately culminate in a complete (i.e., formal and real) union with God.

This all allows God and each individual human who is justified (and is currently undergoing (or has completed) the process of sanctification) to be in an Agápēic relationship. This is a relationship of love where each of the *relata*—God and the human individual—have their will determined in favour of one another, which is expressed by their complacent love for one another, their benevolence for each other, and a formal and real union with one another.

God's flourishing aim is thus able to be fulfilled by the work of Christ, as it is, first, his perfect life which serves as the reparation needed to remove humans' guilt. Second, it is Christ's death that does away with the spiritually darkened minds and wills of humans that are in bondage to sin. Third, it is his mind and will, created during his life, that is appropriated by humans in order to allow them to have a mind and will that correspond to the mind and will of God. Lastly, it is by hearing the Gospel, and reflection on the life of suffering lived by Christ, that one is driven to cease resisting God's love and grace, leading to an infusion of grace, removal of guilt, and an imparting of Christ's mind and will by the Holy Spirit, resulting in the establishment of a formal union with God and a striving for real union together. It is thus the Atonement that enables one to be justified, sanctified, and really unified in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God. This conclusion, however, is not one that can only be reached concerning pre-mortem individuals; rather, as we will now see, it is one that is also extended to individuals in a post-mortem state as well.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Swinburne, *Atonement*.

¹³⁸ It is important to note, however, that the Agápēic Theory is able to be affirmed without also affirming the following development of the model (i.e., post-mortem reception of atonement). Thus, if one has issues with the possibility of post-mortem reception of atonement, the theory so far developed can be affirmed and the following development be taken to be an "extension" of the theory that is dispensable.

4. POST-MORTEM RECEPTION OF ATONEMENT

The fourth stage of our constructive task focuses on the post-mortem reception of the means of atonement provided by Christ in the previous phases (hereafter, Post-Mortem Reception).¹³⁹ The central elements of the notion of Post-Mortem Reception can now be stated more precisely as follows:

- (9) (Post-Mortem Reception) (i) Motivating Universal Salvation
 (ii) Removing Salvation Inhibitors
 (iii) Preserving Free Will & Compatibility with Scripture & Tradition.

For Post-Mortem Reception—as with the pre-mortem state of affairs—God desires for all humans to be reconciled to him—and thus be in an Agápēic relationship with him. However, unlike Pre-Mortem Reception—where this end is reached by one’s hearing the Gospel—post-mortem individuals are able to reach this end through undergoing remedial punishment, which will then free them from the specific things that are inhibiting them from ceasing to resist God’s offer of grace and freely appropriating Christ’s atoning work in their lives. It will be important to now break down the elements of (9) in more detail.

4.1 MOTIVATING UNIVERSAL SALVATION

As previously noted, God is perfectly good in the sense the he inevitably performs the best action, if there is one, many good actions and no bad actions. He would inevitably perform a certain action if there is an overriding reason for doing so—that is, it is a unique best action. It is a unique best action for God to enable *all* individuals to enter an Agápēic relationship with him, and, thus, relationally flourish. That is, given the inherent goodness of an individual flourishing in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God, God has overriding reason or motivation for not limiting the opportunity for humans to utilise the means of atonement provided by Christ to deal with their

¹³⁹ In developing this component of the Agápēic Theory, there will be a utilisation of elements of the theory universalism provided by Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*, and Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God: Second Edition*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2014). However, there will be a significant original development provided to this theory in applying the means of appropriation of Christ’s atonement to this theory of universalism.

sin, but instead enabling *all* humans to eventually come to enjoy an everlasting Agápēic relationship with him. Let's term this state of affairs *universal salvation*. Hence, God would inevitably perform the action of providing salvation to all individuals.

More specifically, according to John Kronen and Eric Reitan,¹⁴⁰ there are three "impelling causes" that provide motivation for God,¹⁴¹ based on his perfect goodness, to will universal salvation, and thus ground being provided for taking this action to be a unique best action. First is God's perfect benevolence, which is an aspect of his Agápēic love. Second is his complacent love for his himself and others, which is also an aspect of his Agápēic love. Third is the election of Christ and the all-sufficient Atonement.

First, God's benevolence, as noted previously, is an aspect of his *Agápē* that bestows worth on all individuals and is not motivated by the particular moral status or worth of humans but is a free gift that is bestowed on them *in virtue of who God is*.¹⁴² There is no specific thing outside of the moral character that inspires God to save humans; therefore, there is no action that humans can perform that would impact God's decision to save them. The decision to save all humans is motivated by the nature of God and his creative and universal benevolence that is directed to them all. God would thus respond to the sinfulness of humans by bestowing good where it is lacking by seeking to *redeem* sinners since, as Kronen and Reitan note, "their wickedness is a vitiation that fundamentally impedes their capacity to enjoy the ultimate human good; namely, union with God."¹⁴³ Thus, the divine benevolence that God has toward all humans, based on his Agápēic love for them, would be committed to the *eradication* of sin, which can only be achieved through salvation.

Second, God's complacent love, as noted previously, is an aspect of his *agape* that responds to the intrinsic worth of an individual. God's complacent love *for himself* is a recognition and respecting of the infinite intrinsic worth of God, and a love that God has for his own essence. As previously mentioned, sin involves a failure to value God in the manner that he ought to be valued—namely, as a being of infi-

¹⁴⁰ Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*.

¹⁴¹ Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*, only focus on the atonement as a motivating factor for God here. However, I also include here that of the election of Christ.

¹⁴² Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*.

¹⁴³ Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*, 40.

nite value—and a failure to appreciate and value God as the ground of all love, benevolence and goodness.¹⁴⁴ Sin is thus an affront to God’s majesty, and to be in the presence of God whilst persisting in sin is for one to fail to respond appropriately to the objective worth of God with whom one is confronted. This is something that God, as a perfectly good being, cannot tolerate. Moreover, God’s complacent love for himself is essentially a love of goodness—given that God is goodness itself—which involves, as noted by Kronen and Reitan, a “love of *whatever* is good and hatred of *whatever* is evil.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, this love includes a love for the love of good and a hatred for the hatred of the good. God’s nature causes him to be angry at wickedness and evil, and his love involves a hatred of sin and anger at sinners insofar as they are sinners.¹⁴⁶ Hence, God’s judgement against sin and wickedness is the ground for his will to *save all*—as it is only when all humans are indeed saved that sin and wickedness can truly be entirely removed from reality. God would thus have good reason to expunge all sin and hatred and replace it with love, which would mean converting every sinner—specifically those who are directed fully toward offending his majesty. However, *if* God does not save all individuals, then the hatred of God is something that will never be completely removed from reality but will be one that persists forever in the souls of the damned individuals.¹⁴⁷ Yet, this indeed would be something that would be an intolerable affront to God’s majesty. Thus, God’s complacent love for himself provides grounds for taking him to have the volition to save all.

Moreover, we can also see that God’s complacent love, not only for himself, but also those of his creatures, provides motivation for him to save all. This is due to the fact that God creates humans as rational creatures who bear God’s image and are ordered toward union with him. Thus, God, as Kronen and Reitan note, “can no more cease to value rational creatures—even if they fall into sin—than he can cease to value Himself, because rational creatures are a reflection of his own essence.”¹⁴⁸ Humans, therefore, have intrinsic worth which demands respect and cannot be lost as long as humans exist. Yet, when humans fail to love God in the manner that they are called to, they fall short of

¹⁴⁴ Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*.

¹⁴⁵ Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*, 40.

¹⁴⁶ Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*.

¹⁴⁷ Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*.

¹⁴⁸ Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*, 38.

their nature as entities that are ordered toward union with him. However, God would thus fail to respect the goodness that stems from his own being if he failed to respect the intrinsic worth of a human by allowing sin to ultimately triumph in their lives by defining and defeating them. That is, humans have, as a part of their nature, a specific teleology, which is a natural ordering of an individual toward the attainment of a certain end—namely, the end of union with God—the realisation of which constitutes that individual’s good. God could not fail to have a motive to save all humans, based on the fact that each human possesses a value that demands respect and has a nature that is completed only in salvation.¹⁴⁹

Thus, God is always faithful to all humans, even when they are themselves unfaithful to him, and so he must seek to destroy sin. That is, as no genuine form of love would seek to further the good of a being by enabling that being to achieve what is contrary to its ultimate end. In God’s being perfectly good and having complacent love toward all humans, he would have a respect for what humans essentially are and would be motivated to seek to overcome their corruption, as Kronen and Reitan write, God’s complacent love would involve “seeking to cure sinners of their wickedness.”¹⁵⁰ In other words, God’s complacent love for humans and for his own essence generates a motive for saving all that can be saved—including even the most recalcitrant sinners—through a wrathful love that seeks to eradicate sin in every human individual.

This eradication of sin leads to our third motivation: the election of Christ and the Atonement. In the person of Christ, all humans are taken, first, to be derivative members of the set “the elect,” through Christ being the sole Elect One. Second, no human is taken to be a member of the set “the rejected,” through Christ’s being the sole Rejected One. Third, the atonement provided for the sin of humans by Christ is *universal in its scope and efficacy*—it works for, and can be appropriated by all people. Hence, in the person of Christ, the means whereby God’s reasons for rejecting sinners have been done away with. The election of Christ and the Atonement, as noted by Kronen and Reitan, serves as “a means of overcoming the conflict, and hence of

¹⁴⁹ John Kronen and Eric Reitan. “Annihilation or salvation? A philosophical case for preferring universalism to annihilationism,” *Religious Studies*, 58 (2022), 139.

¹⁵⁰ Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*, 40.

clearing the way for God's benevolence to operate unimpeded."¹⁵¹ In other words, in God's act of electing Christ (and all of humanity in him) and providing a means of atonement for sin, the divine reason not to save all humans is fully done away with. Christ's life, death, and resurrection provide the means to clear the pathway for God's benevolence and complacent love to prevail. Hence, given the election of Christ and the Atonement, there is nothing impeding God from willing the salvation of all people and allowing this to become a reality in their pre-mortem or post-mortem life.

4.2 REMOVING SALVATION INHIBITORS

On the grounds that God's Agápēic love for humanity and the election of Christ and the Atonement—which would, as a unique best action, provide overriding motivation/reason for God to save all humans—one must now understand the means by which God would achieve this end for those who are in a post-mortem state of existence. Prior to an individual's death, the means by which the individual is able to appropriate the work of Christ is through his hearing the Gospel and reflecting on it, which then serves as a tool to crack or melt his heart, leading him into a state of quiescence. Then, God can begin the process of salvation by infusing operative grace that enables an individual to remove his guilt by repenting, apologizing, and appropriating the reparation and penance provided by Christ, thereby receiving his mind and will.

However, if individuals have not entered into an Agápēic relationship with God prior to their death, they will still need to be brought into a state of quiescence, appropriate Christ's work, and receive God's operative and cooperative grace in order for their sins and guilt to be removed and for them to receive the mind and will of Christ. However, the manner in which individuals are brought into this state of quiescence is not their hearing the Gospel but their undergoing temporary remedial punishment in Hell. This will act as the catalyst to crack, melt, or now even break, their hearts so that they can be led into a state of quiescence.

Thus, the existence and experience of Hell for post-mortem individuals outside of an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God is affirmed within the Agápēic Theory; however, the way in which it is to be conceived is, as Thomas Talbott, notes as a temporary state of

¹⁵¹ Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*, 36.

“forcibly imposed punishment,” which God uses “as a means of correction, or as a means of encouraging repentance.”¹⁵² And, in this punishment, as Talbott further writes, the “good in even the worst of sinners—the indestructible image of God if you will—can itself become a source of ‘unbearable suffering.’”¹⁵³ Post-mortem individuals’ sins, guilt, sorrows, and remorse will become the source of their unbearable suffering, such that the more that they cling to the illusions that have been produced by their sins, the more severe are the means and process whereby God destroys these illusions and frees them from sin.¹⁵⁴ That is, the misery and unhappiness that the sinful actions have brought into the lives of the individuals can be used by God to serve a redemptive purpose of providing evidence for the need for them to change their hearts and motivations to repent.

The experience of Hell by post-mortem individuals is thus a process in which these individuals are gradually educated by their experience of what the true meaning of separation from God is. Hence, in this process, God can change these individuals by making it clear to each of them that their sinful and evil actions are not something which provides any form of good.¹⁵⁵ Rather, by these individuals’ experiencing the full reality of their choices, they will gradually come to an understanding of the dire consequences of these choices. Hell would thus be used as a means of removing each individual’s “salvation inhibitors,”¹⁵⁶ by God’s using this punishment as a means to remove all ignorance, deception, and bondage to sin. The removal of these salvation inhibitors would result in each individual being “fully informed” concerning his choices. The individual would also be aware that his unbearable suffering is a result of his choices and of the unending happiness that can be had in an Agápēic relationship with God.

Thus, given this, each individual, who can be understood to possess rational freedom (i.e., the ability to make a choice based on reasons rather than based on non-rational judgements), would be led to a state of no longer rejecting God.¹⁵⁷ That is, individuals who have their salvation inhibitors removed by their experience of suffering in Hell—and

¹⁵² Thomas Talbott, “Misery and Freedom: Reply to Walls,” *Religious Studies*, 40 (2004): 218.

¹⁵³ Talbott, “Misery,” 218.

¹⁵⁴ Ioanna-Maria Love, *Hell: Against Universalism*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹⁵⁵ Love, *Hell*, 80.

¹⁵⁶ This terminology comes from Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*.

¹⁵⁷ Talbott, “Misery.”

are now fully informed about the reality of their situation and the options available to them—would no longer be able to reject God. As Talbott writes, “the very idea of someone making a free and fully informed decision to reject God forever, or of someone freely embracing an eternal destiny apart from God, is deeply incoherent and therefore logically impossible.”¹⁵⁸ That is, one never freely chooses what they have no motive to choose and every motive for them not to choose. Thus, it is incoherent for one freely choose damnation. Any individual who acquires knowledge about the available options and is free from ignorance, deception, and bondage to sin, would have no specific motive for rejecting God’s offer of reconciliation. In fact, the individual would see all the reasons and motivations for accepting it. Thus, all it takes is for the process of the salvation of post-mortem individuals to be initiated is for God to remove their ignorance, deception, and bondage to sin. More specifically, through post-mortem individuals’ forcibly induced punishment, they would be gradually brought into the needed state of quiescence that enables them to then be open to the working of God’s operative grace, appropriating Christ’s atoning work and having his mind and will be infused within them by the Holy Spirit through God’s cooperative grace.

However, one could now ask the following question: is the individual’s choice in this post-mortem situation, in fact, free? As one of the central components of libertarian freedom, as noted previously, is that of one having the ability to have done otherwise, without causal determination. However, by God causing these individuals to endure a forcibly induced punishment that serves as the means of removing their salvation inhibitors—that is, liberating them from all ignorance, deception, and bondage to sin—these individuals would be in such a state that they would infallibly be brought into a state of quiescence and cease to resist God’s offer of grace. Thus, it is not possible for individuals in this situation to choose otherwise—that is, to continue to resist God’s offer of grace and not be quiescent in regard to it. More precisely, individuals who have been freed from all ignorance, deception, and bondage to sin have a rational freedom which seems to fit best with the more traditional concept of free will termed “compatibilist freedom.” In this model, individuals have the ability to make a choice on the basis of their psychological judgement concerning what

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Talbott, “Freedom, Damnation, and the Power to Sin with Impunity,” *Religious Studies* 37 (2001): 242.

is, in fact, the best option, in the absence of external coercion. Hence, a post-mortem individual would not have libertarian freedom. Rather, the choices made by these individuals would be free in the sense that it is based on their psychological judgement about what is best. Yet, given their condition, they could not have done otherwise than to cease resisting God's offer of grace, and thus their choices are not free in the libertarian sense of the word. Yet, for a number of individuals who affirm the importance of libertarian freedom and the value that it provides for one's choices (such as that in relation to choices conducive to one's salvation), the question that is now to be faced is whether God can indeed guarantee, without violating libertarian free will, that all humans will, in fact, be brought into an everlasting Agápēic relationship with him. It will be important to now focus on finding an answer to this question.

4.3 PRESERVING FREE WILL & COMPATIBILITY WITH SCRIPTURE & TRADITION

The guarantee of a post-mortem individuals' salvation—a guarantee that they will enter into an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God—whilst preserving their freedom to choose to enter into this relationship, can, in following Eric Reitan,¹⁵⁹ can be secured by the working of two theological assumptions. The first assumption is that what is necessary for one to enter into this state is simply a single free choice to not resist God's grace, rather than a series of such choices. This assumption, as Reitan notes, "is in line with the views of those Christians who believe that all we need to do in order to be saved from damnation is to accept—or, even more modestly, choose not to resist—the operation of divine grace."¹⁶⁰ Thus, once we make a choice to cease resisting God's grace, we in effect, as Reitan further writes, "allow God to 'flood' into our lives and proceed to do whatever is necessary to secure our eternal salvation."¹⁶¹

The second assumption is that once a post-mortem individual has entered a state of quiescence, has been infused with God's operative grace/appropriated Christ's atoning work, and thus has undergone the process of guilt removal (by their repenting, apologizing, and ap-

¹⁵⁹ Eric Reitan, "A Guarantee of Universal Salvation?," *Faith and Philosophy*, 24 (2007): 413–432.

¹⁶⁰ Reitan, "Salvation," 414.

¹⁶¹ Reitan, "Salvation," 414.

propriating the reparation for their sins provided by Christ), one is confirmed in this state. That is, once an individual has been saved and brought into an Agápēic relationship with God, one will never return to a state of alienation from God. This assumption, as Reitan writes, is, as he suspects, “nearly universally embraced by Christians. How could the blessed in heaven truly be ‘saved’ from damnation if their status is precarious and they could at any time tumble back into hell?”¹⁶² Thus, once individuals in post-mortem conditions—unlike those in a pre-mortem conditions—freely choose to cease resisting God’s grace, they do not have the freedom to go back on this decision. This would not be problematic for the proponent of libertarian freedom, as one can take it to be the case that once these individuals are united with God in an Agápēic relationship, their libertarian freedom has served its purpose. That is, as Reitan further notes, individuals in this situation have attained their “final end, the end for which we and all our powers—including the power to make libertarian free choices—were created.”¹⁶³ Freedom has thus served its purpose once it has enabled individuals to achieve their ultimate good and can then be suspended without violating the person.

On the basis of these initial assumptions, once individuals accept God’s grace, they are confirmed in that state and cannot fall from it. God can save all individuals while preserving their libertarian freedom. To ensure this universal salvation, God must do certain actions: (a) remove all salvation inhibitors prior to salvation, (b) sustain each post-mortem individual until the individual accepts His grace, and (c) enable the choice of accepting His grace to be an open option for every post-mortem individual. For each post-mortem individual, God has executed action (a) by enabling the individual to endure a punishment that removes all salvation inhibitors. But, due to the preservation of libertarian freedom, as noted by Kronen and Reitan,¹⁶⁴ the removal of these inhibitors does not make choosing God inevitable. God, by performing actions (b) and (c), allows the continuous choice of accepting or resisting Him. This decision is not presented just once but at every moment of the individual’s possibly infinite existence.

Importantly, the salvation of a post-mortem individual becomes a

¹⁶² Reitan, “Salvation,” 414.

¹⁶³ Eric Reitan. “Human Freedom and the Impossibility of Eternal Damnation,” in Robin Perry and Chris Patridge eds., *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, (Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2003), 138.

¹⁶⁴ Kronen and Reitan, *Universal*.

mathematical certainty under these conditions, which can be further explained through possible world semantics, as provided by Kronen and Reitan.¹⁶⁵ A post-mortem individual, let's say David, is in a possible world segment P_1 , where he is the only indeterminacy because he hasn't ceased to resist God's grace at time T_1 . If God removes all of David's salvation inhibitors, at T_1 , there's a 50% chance that David will cease to resist God's grace. At T_2 , there are two possible world segments: $P_{2\text{Saved}}$, where David chooses to cease to resist God's grace, and $P_{2\text{Unsaved}}$, where David rejects God's grace. $P_{2\text{Saved}}$ is devoid of indeterminacy because David has chosen to cease to resist God's grace (and has appropriated Christ's atoning work) and has been confirmed in his relationship with God; that is, he will continue onwards forever being in that relationship with God, making $P_{2\text{Saved}}$ a world where David is saved (i.e., in an Agápēic relationship with God) at every subsequent moment of time. In $P_{2\text{Unsaved}}$, David faces the same decision as he did at T_1 . This process continues indefinitely, and as time progresses, the number of possible worlds where David remains unsaved *decreases*.¹⁶⁶ As the timeline nears infinity, the percentage of possible world segments where David has not yet chosen to cease to resist God's grace tends toward zero. Therefore, given infinite time, it is mathematically certain David will be saved.

This situation, following Kronen and Reitan,¹⁶⁷ is comparable to shaking a box containing a glued penny. Even if there's an equal chance that the penny will stick or not stick at each shake, if shaken indefinitely, it's guaranteed that the penny will eventually stick. Similarly, the universal salvation of all individuals is inevitable, suggesting that universalism is compatible with libertarian free will. God can thus ensure the salvation of all post-mortem individuals by executing actions (a) to (c) while also respecting their free will. Hence, there is no problem when it comes to the compatibility of the inherent possession of libertarian free will by a post-mortem individual and the reality of universalism.¹⁶⁸

However, an additional issue that can be raised, which has played a

¹⁶⁵ The explication of this position within a possible world semantics, the example provided, and the subsequent argument, is wholly that of Kronen and Reitan, *Universal*. The only significant difference in the explanation that is to follow is a substitution of the name "Fred" for "David" and "salvation" for "ceasing to resist God's grace."

¹⁶⁶ Kronen and Reitan, *Universal*.

¹⁶⁷ Kronen and Reitan, *Universal*, 162.

¹⁶⁸ Kronen and Reitan, *Universal*. The assumption that underlay this explanation here is that of salvation being a single choice. However, the conclusion reached here can also

larger role in the rejection of a universalistic conception of the Atonement, is that of the compatibility of conception and the witness of Holy Scripture and Tradition. That is, even though it appears to be a unique best action for God to provide an opportunity (through the experience of suffering in Hell) for individuals to enter into an Agápēic relationship with him, in a post-mortem state, there seems to be a lack of compatibility between this position and the revelation that is found in Scripture and Tradition. For example, it is stated in Matthew 18:8, “And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.” Furthering this point, within the Sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church, we also see the First Council of Lyons (1245) declare the following: “If anyone dies in mortal sin without repentance, beyond any doubt, he will be tortured forever (*perpetuo cruciatur*) by the flames of everlasting hell (*aeternae gehennae*).”¹⁶⁹ It thus seems to be the case that, at least at a *prima facie* level, Scripture and (Catholic) tradition attests to the fact that, within the Agápēic framework that we are working within, if pre-mortem individuals die outside of an Agápēic relationship with God, they will not be able to enter this relationship with God; instead, they will be eternally located in Hell to undergo everlasting punishment that does not fulfill a remedial or reformatory function. In short, post-mortem individuals who are in Hell will eternally remain in it. Thus, the Agápēic Theory does not conform to (this particular reading of) Scripture and (Catholic) tradition—let’s term this the “Compatibility Problem.”

Now, there are indeed plausible, *exegetical strategies* for diffusing this problem by showing that either Scripture and Tradition do not affirm an “eternal Hell,” or, at the least, are undetermined by also including within them universalistic teaching as well.¹⁷⁰ However, one can now ask if there is a particular way to bring this theory in line with Scripture and Tradition by a less contestable *philosophical* approach? I believe that there is by adopting a specific philosophical model pro-

be reached if salvation includes a number of choices. For a detailed explanation of how this could be so, see Reitan, “Salvation,” 424.

¹⁶⁹ Denzinger. *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, Peter Hünermann ed., (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), §839.

¹⁷⁰ For these strategies, see Talbott, *Inescapable*, and Kronen and Reitan, *Universalism*.

posed by Dean Zimmerman.¹⁷¹ This model, termed the “Falling Elevator Model” by Zimmerman, was introduced to demonstrate the cogency of a materialistic model of bodily resurrection. However, we can now employ certain elements of it—specifically, that of the notion of “fission” (or “budding”) to deal with the Compatibility Problem.

In following Zimmermann,¹⁷² one can understand that when some matter constitutes a given organism, there is a special event—termed a “Life”—that occurs so long as that organism exists. As Zimmerman writes, “As bits of the matter are replaced by new material, the things participating in this Life change; but so long as the Life goes on, the organism continues to exist, no matter how much material change there has been.”¹⁷³ An important aspect of the Life of a particular organism is its performing an act of self-maintenance, where the earlier stage of a Life is able to “immanently cause” later stages, with the latter stages being causally dependent upon the earlier stages. Now, within this framework,¹⁷⁴ one can thus understand that, after a post-mortem individual has ceased resisting God’s grace (been brought into a state of quiescence by their remedial suffering) and has been infused with God’s operative grace, this individual would now be freed from Hell and physically enter into an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God in a particular manner. This particular manner is that of “the Life” of the post-mortem individual going one way—namely, to the next world—whilst the present body of the individual going another way—namely, to Hell.¹⁷⁵

More specifically, there are immanent causal connections that jump from the present material body that is in Hell, connecting the Life of the post-mortem individual to some other location where the organic

¹⁷¹ Dean W. Zimmerman, “The Compatibility of Materialism and Survival,” *Faith and Philosophy* 16 (1999): 194–212; “Bodily Resurrection: The Falling Elevator Model Revisited.” In Georg Gasser ed., *Personal Identity and Resurrection: How Do We Survive Our Death?*, (Brookfield: Taylor and Francis, 2010) 33–55.

¹⁷² Zimmerman, “Falling.”

¹⁷³ Zimmerman, “Falling,” 35.

¹⁷⁴ The following is a brief explication and employment (with slight modification) of the model within the present framework proposed by the Agápēic Theory, for a more detailed unpacking of the model that enables it to ward off various challenges that can be raised against the following explication of it, see Zimmerman, “Compatibility.”

¹⁷⁵ The nature of this “next world” is left open, as it could be “Heaven” or the post-resurrection “new Heavens and New Earth” etc.

structure of that individual is preserved.¹⁷⁶ Thus, at the moment of the post-mortem individual's quiescence of God's grace, God allows each atom of this individual's body to continue to immanently cause later stages in the Life of their present body, where it is *eternally located* in Hell; however, God also confers upon each of the atoms that compose this individual's body the miraculous power to immanently cause a *perfect duplicate* of that individual in the next world. This state of affairs is such that a post-mortem individual's body that they had at the moment of their death—and which thus died in a state of sin outside of an Agápēic relationship with God—is eternally located in Hell. And, as Zimmerman writes, the local, normal, immanent causal process linking each atom to an atom in the individual's body "is sufficient to secure their identities; no atom ceases to exist merely because it exercised this miraculous 'budding' power to produce new matter in a distant location. Still, the arrangement of atoms that appears at a distance is directly immanent-causally connected to my body at the time of my death."¹⁷⁷ Hence, the post-mortem individual, in a certain sense, will forever be in a state of absence from God (as Scripture and Tradition require) in that their material body will forever be located in Hell. Yet, as God causes the atoms that make up the body of this individual to fission (or bud) at the moment of their quiescence to his grace, there are at that particular moment two identically structured sets of atoms, one copy located in Hell and one copy located in the next world—with both sets of atoms inheriting the identity-preserving immanent causal relation—where, as Jonathan Loose writes, "the self-sustaining causal process that had previously passed down a single path would now continue down two separate and unrelated paths in two different worlds."¹⁷⁸

However, as the Life of the post-mortem individual goes with the body of this individual that is now located in the next world, it is the body of this individual located in the next world that is now the successful candidate for the continuation of the pre-fission life of the individual.¹⁷⁹ One is thus able to affirm the fact of the post-mortem indi-

¹⁷⁶ Zimmerman, "Compatibility." It is assumed here that the post-mortem existence of an individual is material, and thus this type of individual having a material body—which is plausible given that they are able to suffer within this specific state.

¹⁷⁷ Zimmerman, "Falling," 36.

¹⁷⁸ Jonathan Loose. "Constitution and the Falling Elevator," *Philosophia Christi*, 14 (2012): 861.

¹⁷⁹ One could raise the issue that if the material body located in Hell is conscious and

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 vidual being, in some sense, eternally located in Hell, and thus in “eternal separation” from God (due to the individual’s not entering into an Agápēic relationship with God prior to the individual’s death), as the material body that is located there *is* the individual. However, one is also able to affirm that this post-mortem individual can, in some other sense, be released from his remedial suffering in Hell and provided with the opportunity to enter into an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God in the eternal paradise, which is the world to come, as the material body and that Life that is located there is the individual. Thus, there is no incompatibility between an individual’s eternally being located in Hell, as Scripture and Tradition seem to require, and this individual’s being provided with the opportunity to be released and brought into an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God in the next world—as the goodness of God, as posited by the Agápēic Theory, seems to require. All individuals, pre- and post-mortem, can thus stand in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God—with the initial instigators of this process—namely, the Gospel or Hell—being different, but the means and the path—in Christ, and through his atoning work—being the same for all.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the central focus of this article is to provide a robust theory of the Atonement. The Agápēic Theory is formulated within a theoretical framework that has as its aim maximal human flourishing in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God. Given the human condition, however, humans face a problem, sin, which must be dealt with if they are indeed to flourish by standing in this relationship

is therefore able to experience this location now, the Life of the individual has now been joined together within another body. And if not, then what is the point of God’s keeping this body in Hell rather than simply annihilating it? Working within Zimmerman’s model, it does seem as if the body is to be conceived of as a non-conscious entity, as in the employment of this model within its original context of demonstrating the cogency of a materialist resurrection, the material body is taken to be a non-living corpse. However, in the employment of this model within the present context, I prefer to keep this question open, with the possibility of the material body located in Hell is non-conscious (such as that of a philosophical zombie à la David Chalmers), conscious, or at least having a lower level of consciousness than that of body that now has the Life of the individual within it. I do, however, leave the working out of the metaphysics of this to future work.

with God. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, humans are provided with a means of dealing with their sin, which can be appropriated by pre-mortem individuals' responding to the Gospel and allowing God to infuse his grace with them. Yet, based on God's Agápēic love for all humans, individuals who do not respond to God prior to their death—namely, post-mortem individuals—will still be provided with the opportunity to appropriate Christ's work. However, this appropriation will be through enduring temporary remedial punishment that will remove the inhibitors to their salvation and subsequently enable them to cease resisting God's offer of grace. God will then be allowed to infuse his grace within them. Through the Atonement, the problem raised by the human condition is done away with; therefore, all humans can, and will, be able to flourish to the maximal level in an everlasting Agápēic relationship with God.