

## **THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT: RESPONSE TO MICHAEL REA, TRENT DOUGHERTY, AND BRANDON WARMKE**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The doctrine of the atonement of Christ is the distinctive doctrine of Christianity. Over the course of many centuries of reflection, highly diverse interpretations of the doctrine have been proposed. In the context of this history of interpretation, in my book *Atonement* (OUP, 2018), I considered the doctrine afresh with philosophical care. Whatever exactly the atonement is supposed to be, in Christian theology it is understood as including a solution to the problems of the human condition, especially its guilt and shame. In *Atonement*, I canvassed the major interpretations of the doctrine that attempt to propound and defend a particular solution, and I argued that all of them have serious shortcomings. In their place, I explained and defended an interpretation that is both novel and yet traditional and that has significant advantages over other interpretations, including Anselm's well-known account of the doctrine. In the process, I also discussed many concepts in ethics and moral psychology, including love, union, guilt, shame, and forgiveness, among others.

At an author-meets-critics session at the American Philosophical Association Central Division, 2018, organized by Craig Warmke, three critics presented papers raising questions about one or another strand in the book. I am grateful to these critics, Michael Rea, Trent Dougherty, and Brandon Warmke, for their stimulating comments on this book. (I should add that I owe both Trent Dougherty and Michael Rea a special debt for their extensive help with the manuscript while it was in progress. Each of them worked through it carefully then and gave me extensive comments — Rea in writing and Dougherty in the course of a reading group and workshop that he organized. The book is undoubtedly better for having had the benefit of their comments while it was being completed.) The comments and questions of all three of these presenters at the APA session are helpful, and I am glad of the chance to clarify one or another element in the book further in consequence. I am only sorry that in the short space available to me here, I am able to comment on only some of the interesting issues they raise.

### **II. RESPONSE TO MICHAEL REA**

Michael Rea's paper focuses on what, using Aquinas's terminology, I called 'the stain on the soul'. I argued that the stain could be removed by Christ's atonement and that God could forget the stain (in an analogous sense of 'forgetting') and thereby alleviate it. In his paper, Rea wants to call our attention to cases in which the stain on the soul stems not from a person's guilt, but from something else, such as a person's victimization at the hands of others or a person's suffering something, including something for which God might be blamed. Rea makes two claims about such cases, first that

- (a) Christ's atoning work cannot remove the stain in such cases,
- and second that

(b) God's forgetting about the stain does not necessarily alleviate every kind of stain on the soul.

In these cases, Rea argues, something more is needed to remove the stain. And, in Rea's view, that something cannot be Christ's atonement alone, because atonement is a matter of giving something to God; but something needs to be given to human beings in such cases.

As far as I can see, Rea is here using the word 'atonement' in its common usage, to mean something like morally appropriate appeasement or pacification. But in *Atonement* I hoped to rescue the word from this more constrained usage and return it to its original meaning of *at-one-ment*, that is, a unifying of separated and distant persons, making them at one with each other. So whatever rescues human beings from the problems of the post-Fall human condition, that counts as atonement in my use of the term. Whatever Christ does to remove any of the stain on the soul of a person guilty of grave wrongdoing is therefore also part of Christ's atonement, understood as *at-one-ment*.

And here I need to make one more terminological adjustment, this time about the phrase 'the stain on the soul'. I introduced this phrase as the English equivalent to a Latin phrase Aquinas uses, and I explained the notion of a stain on the soul as I first learned that notion from Aquinas, although I also broadened it for my purposes. As I developed the notion, the stain on the soul is the residue of grave wrongdoing that is not removed by a wrongdoer's repentance, even with the victim's forgiveness. There are sad effects on the memory, empathic capacities, and relationships of such a wrongdoer that do not vanish as soon as he has repented and been forgiven.

So Rea is right that the remedies for the stain on the soul that I explored cannot cure problems that have nothing to do with guilt. But that is because I introduced these remedies as remedies only for the psychic leftovers of a person's guilt for serious wrongdoing.

As Rea is thinking about the stain, however, it does not have to be a result of a person's own wrong acts. There can also be an undesirable residue left on a person's psyche by being the victim of someone else's wrongdoing, for example. A stain of that sort, Rea argues, cannot be remedied just by Christ's satisfaction for human evil and God's willingness to forget such evil in consequence (however such forgetting has to be understood for an omniscient God.)

On this score, I agree. It is right to think that there are stain-like defects on a person's psyche that stem from someone else's serious human wrongdoing, for example, and so have nothing to do with that person's own guilt. In *Atonement*, I discussed defects such as these (and others as well) and grouped them together under the heading of *shame*. As I explained shame there, it is a matter of diminished relative standing by comparison with other human beings on some scale of values that the shamed person accepts and expects others around him also to accept. Lessened relative standing can arise from being victimized by others; but it can arise as well from other sources, such as defects of nature. On my account, shame is also part of the post-Fall human condition, and I argued that it also needs to be remedied by Christ's atonement if Christ's atonement is to be a full and complete solution for the post-Fall human condition.

So, insofar as there seem to be disagreements between my position and Rea's on these issues, the disagreements are largely terminological, in my view. Like Rea, I also think that there are diminishment for human beings that arise from sources other than guilt, and that these diminishment need rectifying for a solution to be complete.

In this connection, Rea seems to me right to look to the work of Marilyn Adams for help, but I do not think that her account is sufficient to handle the issue Rea is focused on. One way to understand Adams's account of Christ is to interpret her as trying to find in Christ's life, passion, and death a solution to the problem of shame. For Adams, Christ's joining the human species in becoming incarnate by itself is a remedy for human shame. But, although there is merit in Adams's thought on this score, it cannot do the whole job of explicating Christ's life, passion, and death as a solution to the problem of shame. That is because, on Christian theology, construed as a solution to shame Christ's life, passion, and death affect all post-Fall human beings equally. But shame is a matter of relative standing among human beings. What affects all equally cannot then be a solution for those who feel particularly disadvantaged through shame by comparison with others.

In *Atonement*, I argued that the general remedy for shame is honor. As I showed, on Christian doctrine, there is real honor in being so greatly desired by God that God would become incarnate to endure passion and death in order to bring human persons to himself. By this standard of value, the standard that measures desirability to God, all shame has to fall away. What greater honor could there be than being desirable in the eyes of God? Furthermore, honor comes in degrees, as shame does also; and there is a way of understanding the doctrine of the atonement that implies shame and honor can be in direct proportion to one another. (But I am here abbreviating drastically what is a long account in the book.) And so, on my interpretation of the doctrine of Christ's atonement, there is a full solution to the problem of shame, as Rea thinks (and I also think) there needs to be.

Finally, I also agree with Rea that a person who is angry at God or is alienated from God is not helped by having it explained to her that in the incarnate Christ God has also suffered as she has. If, on Christian doctrine, all that there is in Christ's incarnation and passion is an additional suffering in the world, then what Christ endures simply makes more suffering. It does not alleviate or defeat the suffering or the shame of others.

The one place where in my view Rea in fact highlights an incompleteness in my account has to do with cases in which people suffer in virtue of being angry at God or alienated from God because they take God to be responsible for their suffering.

As witness the unpublished passage from a work by Jesse Hobbs that Rea cites, some philosophers suppose that God owes such people an apology or needs to make reparation to them. But I would say that in this connection everything depends on whether we suppose that God has done such people an injustice. On orthodox Christian theology (which Rea himself accepts), God is not capable of doing an injustice; and so it is not possible for God to do anything for which it would be appropriate for God to make an apology. But if, contrary to orthodox Christian theology, God does sometimes have something to apologize for, then I would agree that there is a problem to solve in cases where people are angry at God or alienated from God.

Rea's own point is that people can be right to be angry at God or right to be alienated from God even if God in fact is not guilty of any injustice against them. And on this score my own previous work aligns with Rea's point, though it is not the subject of explicit examination in that work.

For example, on my interpretation of the book of Job, Job is someone who is right to be angry at God even though God has done no injustice to Job. That is because on the evidence available to Job in advance of his being faced with God during God's speeches to him, the suffering Job undergoes cannot be understood as punishment for any wrongdoing on his part, and he is unable to conceive that there is any other explanation for God's allowing that suffering. Given that the evidence looks this way to Job, then, it would in fact be bad of Job *not* to be angry. And, as I read the story of Job, at the end of the story God himself validates Job's anger.<sup>1</sup>

Or, to take another example, on my interpretation of the story of the raising of Lazarus, Mary of Bethany is right to be alienated from Christ when he does not come to help while Lazarus is sick, even though in fact, contrary to what she supposes, Christ is guilty of no injustice against her.<sup>2</sup> Being angry or being alienated from a person can be a right response to that person on the basis of information that appears rock solid; but appearances can be misleading, and human beings can easily be mistaken in their evaluation of others. Given her understanding of her situation, Mary of Bethany is right to be alienated from Christ; but, in the story as I read it, it remains the case that her understanding is mistaken and that Christ has done nothing unloving to her. Nonetheless, it is her own understanding of her situation that she has to rely on, and so she does well to be hurt and alienated.

So my previous work aligns with Rea's view of cases in which a person is angry at God or alienated from God. But I also agree with Rea that such cases need some explicit treatment in connection with the problem of shame, as I would put it, or the stain on the soul, on Rea's broader use of that phrase. In

1 See my *Wandering in Darkness. Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (OUP, 2010), Chapter 9.

2 Ibid, Chapter 12.

this sort of case, it might well be true, as Rea argues, that a perfectly loving God would need and want to do something to remedy the human sufferer's anger or alienation, even though God is not guilty of any injustice towards the sufferer. This kind of case is one that I did not deal with explicitly in my account of atonement, and so I welcome Rea's interest in it and his suggestions for approaches to it. In my view, he develops these suggestions in promising ways in his own treatment of the book of Job and analogous cases in his *The Hiddenness of God*.<sup>3</sup>

### III. RESPONSE TO TRENT DOUGHERTY

Trent Dougherty begins with a brief summary of the goal of the atonement on the interpretation of the doctrine that I defended; and while his summary is generally right, it is not entirely accurate or complete. As Dougherty describes my interpretation, the goal of the atonement, as of human life in general, is peace; and God's love is a means to that peace. But if I were to rephrase Dougherty's summary, I would do it this way.

On the doctrine of the atonement as I interpreted it, the heart of all human excellence is second-personal; and nothing that can be described solely in terms of individual intrinsic characteristics, as it seems that peace can be, properly captures either the goal of the atonement or human flourishing.

In fact, as I presented the Thomistic ethics that underlies the interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement that I argued for, all human excellence is relational. On Aquinas's ethics, a true virtue is one or another kind of mutual relationship of love between a human person and God; it is not an intrinsic characteristic of an individual human being. And the best state for a human person is union of love, which is of course also relational. Insofar as peace is a goal of the atonement or of human life, it is as an accompaniment to the goal more properly described as union with God.

Furthermore, although Dougherty recognizes that, on my interpretation as on Christian doctrine generally, union with God is a mutual indwelling between God and a person in grace, nonetheless in his discussion of my interpretation Dougherty concentrates on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a human person. But when union with God is at issue, the relationship in question is something metaphysically greater or metaphysically more unified than union between ordinary human beings can be. On the interpretation of the doctrine that I argued for, not only does the Holy Spirit indwell a human person in grace, but also the psyche of a human person indwells in Christ as well. And in my examination of the story of the cry of dereliction and other stories of Christ's life, I explored in detail what it might mean for a human psyche to indwell Christ.

Consequently, on the doctrine of the atonement that I argued for, the goal of the atonement is mutual indwelling between God and a human person in grace, and Christ's passion and death are meant to be a means to that goal. Love, joy, and peace — the first of the fruits of the Holy Spirit — are only a byproduct of that goal.

The emphasis on the mutuality of indwelling and on the second-personal character of human flourishing makes a difference to some of Dougherty's main worries about my interpretation.

Dougherty notes that there are varying ways of specifying the character of Christ's life, passion, and death<sup>4</sup> as a means to the goal of union with God. And in this connection Dougherty rightly focuses on the problem of exclusivism and on my attempt at sailing between Scylla and Charybdis with regard to that problem. Scylla is the exclusivism which seems to imply the highly unpalatable claim that only those human beings who explicitly and sincerely espouse orthodox Christian doctrines are saved, so that the vast multitude of human beings are not saved. And Charybdis is the problematic theological relativism which holds that every worldview is efficacious for salvation and that none is ultimately more privileged than another. Dougherty interprets me as having "no truck with exclusivism" and as supposing that exclusivism is incom-

3 Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God*, (OUP, 2018).

4 Dougherty sees Christ's passion as central in the interpretation of the atonement I argue for, and he is right in this regard. But I also argued that Christ's life and death, and the mode of his death, all have a role to play as well.



patible with the love of God, but this characterization is not entirely accurate. For the purposes of developing an interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement, I accepted Christian exclusivism; what I rejected as incompatible with the love of God are the hateful implications that seem to follow from exclusivism.

In my view, it is the character of union as mutual indwelling that has the potential for solving the problem of exclusivism. As I explained the relation between mutual indwelling and Christ's life, passion, and death, on Christian theology Christ's atoning work has two different roles. First, in his passion Christ provides unilaterally one part of the mutual indwelling, namely, the indwelling of human psyches in God. No human being comes to union with God without Christ's having received in his own human mind the psyche of that person. For this part of the goal, then, on the doctrine as I interpreted it, Christ's passion is a necessary means to union with God— not metaphysically necessary, but conditionally necessary, that is, necessary given the way in which God has chosen to remedy the problem of the post-Fall human condition. With regard to this part of mutual indwelling, on the doctrine of the atonement I argued for, it is true that no one comes to God except through Christ. For this part of mutual indwelling, Christ's passion and death are the best way *simpliciter* to the end of the mutual indwelling that is union between God and human beings.

But on the interpretation of the atonement I defended, in his life, passion, and death<sup>5</sup> Christ also provides means for the other part of the mutual indwelling, namely, the surrender to God by a human being alienated from herself and from God. It is this surrender that enables the indwelling in her of the Holy Spirit. On the interpretation I argued for, which in my view is broadly Thomistic but non-Anselmian (and non-Abelardian too), Christ's passion and death are the best means or a most promising means for God to help a human person to this surrender.

Dougherty rightly points out that the ways in which I describe the status of the means with regard to this part of mutual indwelling—the best means, a most promising means, and so on—are varying, and he wishes for clarification on this score. He also worries that the needed clarification might imply that some people do not have access to the best means of salvation. I agree that my formulations are varying, but I use these varying claims to try to convey a point about exclusivism.

To see this point, it may help to consider analogous claims in medicine. Consider, for example, the claim that morphine is the best means to alleviate severe and otherwise intractable pain. This claim seems to be true; but clearly it is true only relative to a context. For those people who live in times or cultures where morphine is not readily available or is not available at all, it is not true that the best remedy for severe pain is morphine. And even in those contemporary communities where morphine for medical purposes is readily available, the claim that morphine is the best means for the alleviation of severe, otherwise intractable pain is true only in general. There are some patients who respond better to alternative treatments for pain, such as hypnosis and meditation; and there are some patients who cannot so much as tolerate morphine because for them it depresses oxygen in the body to dangerous levels. Obviously, for them, morphine is not the best means of alleviating pain.

So, if we are thinking in the abstract about biological pain in general and the means to relieve it, it is true to say that morphine is the best means to alleviate severe pain. But clearly if we are thinking not in the abstract but rather of the general run of people, more nuance is needed in the claim. We will need to say that morphine is a most promising means to treat severe pain, but that there are also other means that might be better for some people. The attitudes of the people or the circumstances in which they live may make it impractical or inefficacious to treat the severe pain of some people with morphine. And yet, even with these considerations about particular people in particular circumstances, it remains true that, generally speaking, considering pain and human beings in the abstract, morphine is the best means to alleviate severe pain.

Analogously, if we are speaking in the abstract of human psychology, then, I argued, Christ's life, passion, and death are the best means to the surrender to God's love that is necessary for the sanctification

5 Or in the story of his life, passion, and death. The connection between the story and the things related in the story is explained in detail in Chapter 9 of *Atonement*.

that is in turn necessary for union with God. But if we are thinking not in the abstract but rather of the general run of people with access to the Christian story of Christ's passion and death, then it is better to say that Christ's passion and death are a most promising means. Finally, for some people, something in their past life experience or their present psychological state may make the Christian story toxic for them; and so, for them, something other than the Christian story will be a better means. And, nonetheless, speaking in the abstract, considering in general human psychology and the post-Fall human condition, it remains true that Christ's passion and death are the best means to elicit the surrender needed for union with God.

So it could be true that Christ's passion and death are the best means to help bring about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a human person, but it might still be true that some other means can serve better for some people. And it would not follow that the means which serves for them is second best. On the contrary, it could be true that the means that helps bring about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for them is the best means for those particular people in their particular circumstances. Consequently, Christ's passion and death could be the best means for bringing a person to surrender to God's love, and yet it could also be true that many people who do not have Christian beliefs are nonetheless brought to the same salvific surrender through means that are the best for them.

For this reason, the apparently hateful implications of exclusivism are warded off, but theological relativism is also avoided because Christ's passion and death enable the union of mutual indwelling in two different ways. As enabling the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a human person, Christ's passion and death are rightly described only as the best means or a most promising means. But as enabling the indwelling of a human psyche in Christ, Christ's passion and death are necessary for every person—conditionally necessary, but still necessary.

And so the exclusivist claim of Christianity can be true: no human being comes to God except through Christ, because mutual indwelling requires that human psyches indwell in Christ in his passion. And yet the apparently lamentable implications do not in fact follow from this exclusivist claim, because for some human beings something other than the story of Christ's passion and death may be the best or at least a most promising means to the needed surrender to God's love. That some people never have access to the story of Christ's passion and death does not imply that they are not offered the means that are best for them to come to God.

Finally, Dougherty questions an inference important for my argument that exclusivism does not entail the distressing claims generally attributed to it, namely, the inference that since Christ is the second person of the Trinity and so God, love of what is really God is also love of Christ. Dougherty says, “‘Christ is God’ is made true by the hypostatic union of the human nature with the divine nature, but the second person of the Trinity is not essentially hypostatically united to a human nature.” And so, he thinks, the inference fails because one can love some things that really are God without loving Christ.

But, as I explained my usage of the term ‘Christ’ in my *Atonement*, I said that by this term I intended to refer to what the Chalcedonian formula mandates as the appropriate referent for the term: one *person* — who is the second person of the Trinity and is thus God — with two *natures*, one fully divine and one fully human.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore the *person* who is referred to as ‘Christ’; and this person is God (and therefore also essentially God) in virtue of being the second person of the Trinity. So while it is true on Christian doctrine that the second-person of the Trinity is not essentially incarnated, it is also true on Christian doctrine that the person who is Christ is the second-person of the Trinity. And insofar as on the Chalcedonian formula ‘Christ’ refers to this person, who is essentially God, the inference that Dougherty worries about is actually good and acceptable, on the relevant Christian theology.

<sup>6</sup> It is also possible to use ‘Christ’ to designate the whole composite of person and natures. For an explanation of the circumstances in which it is appropriate to think of Christ as composite, see, for example, Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III q.2 a.4.

## IV. RESPONSE TO BRANDON WARMKE

Brandon Warmke starts with an attempt to refine what he sees as my basic claim about forgiveness, which he interprets as the claim that love is necessary and sufficient for forgiveness.<sup>7</sup> But in *Atonement* I did not depend on a basic claim about forgiveness; I gave an extended and detailed discussion of it. And I began that extended discussion this way:

Whatever exactly is required for morally appropriate forgiveness, it must involve some species of love for the person in need of forgiveness. A person who refuses to forgive someone who has hurt her or been unjust to her is not loving towards the offender, and a person who does forgive someone who has treated her badly also manifests love of one degree or another towards him. So whatever else forgiveness is, it seems to include a kind of love of someone who has done one an injury or committed an injustice against one. Since love emerges from the interaction of two desires, for the good of the beloved and for union with her, the absence of either desire is sufficient to undermine love. To the extent to which love is implicated in forgiveness, the absence of either desire undermines forgiveness, too. (Stump (2018, 81–82) footnotes in paragraph omitted)

This beginning description of forgiveness clearly includes some of the conditions on forgiveness that Warmke thinks are needed as refinements of what he takes to be my basic claim, including the time-indexing of forgiveness and the standing to forgive. So he is right that I do not disagree with the conditions he highlights at the beginning of his paper.<sup>8</sup> They are included in the description of forgiveness with which I began.

It should also be said here that working out the details of any of these elements of an account of forgiveness would not be simple. Consider, for example, just the issue of standing to forgive. As his example about a person's inability to forgive a neighbor's adultery suggests, in this paper<sup>9</sup> Warmke seems to suppose that only those who have been the direct and immediate targets of moral wrongdoing have the standing to forgive, because only they have been injured by the wrongdoing. But such a view seems evidently mistaken. To the extent to which human beings are social animals, a person can be injured by wrongdoing without being the direct and immediate object of it. The carjacking in a neighborhood saddles all its inhabitants with the need for extra security measures and with extra anxiety as well. The anonymous gossip in an organization diminishes trust among all the people working there. The harm done to the most vulnerable people by those in power over them shames all human beings, who belong to the species that does such things. And so on. To the extent to which the lives of human beings are intertwined in this way, the question of who is harmed by a particular wrongdoing is more complicated than it might originally seem; and consequently so is the question of who has standing to forgive a particular wrongdoing.

Warmke then argues for a number of claims, all of which he sees as objections to my account of forgiveness. In the interest of brevity, I will focus largely on one. In my view, the considerations raised by this

<sup>7</sup> Warmke also objects that the source of my account of forgiveness consists in intuitions about forgiveness. It is true that intuition is one main source of my account, but then intuition is one source for any basic ethical claim. In forming ethical theories, we do typically begin with strong intuitions; and if we find an ethical theory that violates them, we tend to reject the theory, so that ethical intuitions retain a kind of primacy in theory formation. But, of course, on the other hand, once we use intuition as a source in ethics, we then go on to test the results of those intuitions against a number of cases, to see if the apparent implications of the intuitions, or even the intuitions themselves, need to be revised. This is the methodology employed in my discussion of forgiveness, where one test case after another is raised to see how the developing account of forgiveness based on basic intuitions fares. As I argued in surveying such cases, the account of forgiveness I develop handles the test cases very well and can in fact explicate some cases that are hard for other accounts of forgiveness to explain.

<sup>8</sup> Warmke correctly lists the implications of the account of forgiveness as I gave them except that he adds one for God, namely, that God's forgiveness is fully automatic. It is not clear to me what it means to say that something is automatic; but usually calling something automatic indicates that it is not voluntary. So understood, there is no such implication of my account of forgiveness. Insofar as God is perfectly good, he not only does not do what is morally wrong but he also has no desire to do what is morally wrong. On the contrary, God necessarily does what is morally right. But to say so is not to say that God's doing what is right bypasses God's will. Rather, God's doing what is right has its source in God's perfectly good will.

<sup>9</sup> I add the qualifier 'in this paper' because Warmke has written a great deal about the topic of forgiveness. The references to his previous work on forgiveness are given in the footnotes to his paper.

one claim of his show the way in which to deal with most of his other objections as well. In the objection I will examine here, Warmke claims that love is compatible with blame ('overt blame', in his terms), but forgiveness is not. And so, in his view, forgiveness and love come apart, contrary to my account.

I think that the assessment of this and the other objections Warmke raises is made difficult by the fact that the crucial terms — 'forgiveness', 'blame', and so on — are common and widely used, and so they tend to have ambiguous meanings.

'Forgiveness', for example, can be taken in a broad sense to include reconciliation, or it can be used in a narrower way, where it does not automatically imply reconciliation. An older brother who has been cruel to a younger sister might repent and ask for forgiveness. Then what he is seeking is forgiveness-plus-reconciliation. But, on the other hand, a spiritual director might encourage a client to try to forgive his father, who has been dead for years.<sup>10</sup> Then what the director is recommending is forgiveness construed in a narrow sense since there can be no question of reconciliation in such a case.

Analogously, 'blame' can be used narrowly to indicate just negative moral appraisal, or it can be used more broadly to indicate negative moral appraisal together with alienation from the wrongdoer and a desire for something bad for him (which is what Warmke calls 'overt blame'). When we say that Peter's denial of Christ is blameworthy, we generally have the narrow sense of 'blame' in mind. But when we blame those responsible for the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, it is the broader sense of 'blame', with its implication of alienation and resentment, that is usually at issue.

Furthermore, whether we understand these terms broadly or narrowly often depends on the context of the case under consideration. For example, when a wrongdoer is begging for forgiveness and thereby demonstrating repentance, we unreflectively suppose that forgiveness includes reconciliation as well. But when we ask whether it is possible to forgive those who are our enemies, we are construing forgiveness in a narrower sense, since there is no question of reconciliation with someone who is actively hostile.

With these things in mind, consider Warmke's claim that love is compatible with blame (with overt blame, on his view) but that forgiveness is not. (I will assume that in this connection he means 'forgiveness' in the narrow sense since that is the sense I specify is at issue in my account.) To have a concrete case with which to evaluate this claim, think about John Newton, who was a slave trader in his younger years but who went on to fight victoriously for the abolition of the slave trade in England. And think about a human person kidnapped and enslaved by Newton — for ease of reference, call this enslaved person 'Sam'.

We can now consider Warmke's claim with respect to two different contexts for this case.

*Context A.* Suppose that Newton has by now repented his slave trading and is trying to make amends. And suppose also, for purposes of the example, that Newton has succeeded in buying Sam out of slavery and that Newton and Sam are working together for the abolition of the slave trade in England.

In this context, could Sam forgive Newton and still blame Newton for Newton's kidnapping and enslaving him?

In one sense, as Warmke argues, the answer to this question is clearly 'NO'. Sam's forgiveness of Newton is not compatible with his blaming Newton if we construe blame in its broad sense as including alienation and a desire for something bad for the wrongdoer.

But, then, contrary to Warmke's view, blame so understood is not compatible with Sam's love of Newton either. That is, in *Context A* it is not compatible with Sam's love of Newton that he be alienated from Newton. On the contrary, if Sam loves Newton, then Sam will have a desire for union with Newton, where union is a matter of being at one with him, in whatever kind of oneness is suitable to the nature of their relationship. And something roughly analogous can be said of the desire for something bad for

<sup>10</sup> Someone might suppose that it is not possible to forgive a person who is dead, but in my view this supposition is mistaken. The context for this discussion is the interpretation of the Christian doctrine of the atonement. But Christian doctrine includes claims about the afterlife. So, at the very least, on Christian doctrine a person can forgive someone who is dead by desiring that that person be in heaven and by desiring to be united at some time with that person in heaven. In addition, in my view, there are secular analogues to these Christian claims, so that even on secular worldviews it is possible to forgive the dead; but in the interest of brevity I leave explanation of this view to one side here.



Newton. In *Context A*, insofar as Sam loves Newton, he will want the good for Newton, not something bad.

So if we understand blame in a broad sense to include alienation and a desire for vengeance, then in *Context A* neither love nor forgiveness is compatible with blame. Consequently, it is no objection to the strong connection between love and forgiveness in my account that in such a context forgiveness is not compatible with blame. In such a context, with blame understood in this broad sense, love is not compatible with blame either.

On the other hand, but still with respect to the same context, if we construe blame in the narrow sense as a matter of negative moral appraisal only, then the answer to the question of whether Sam could forgive Newton and still blame him is clearly ‘YES’. Construed narrowly, blame is compatible with love; but in this context, with blame so understood, blame is also compatible with forgiveness. It is compatible with both Sam’s love and Sam’s forgiveness of Newton that Sam continue to have a strong negative appraisal of Newton’s slave-trading. Sam can say to others or even to Newton that Newton’s slave-trading was a moral horror, even while it is nonetheless true that Sam loves and forgives Newton.

In fact, on this understanding of blame Newton continued to blame himself for his slave-trading even after he felt forgiven by God and reconciled with him. Newton expressed his attitude this way: “I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders.”<sup>11</sup> And Newton seems entirely right in this attitude. It would be an appalling moral failure not to blame Newton for slave-trading, on this narrow understanding of blame. But then on this understanding of blame, it is also the case that Sam can forgive Newton even while still blaming Newton for his past slave trading, just as Newton forgave himself but continued to have a strong negative moral appraisal of his past slave-trading.

So in this first context, *Context A*, love and forgiveness do not come apart. They are both compatible with blame narrowly construed and incompatible with blame broadly construed.

Now consider a second context:

*Context B.* Suppose that Newton has not yet repented his slave-trading; suppose that he is in fact still active in the slave trade. And suppose also that one of his victims, Sam, is still in an enslaved condition at this time.

In *Context B*, Sam could desire that Newton stay away from him, and he could desire that something bad happen to Newton; but he could have these desires in two different ways.

- (1) Sam could have these desires and also hope that eventually Newton rot in hell (or some suitable secular analogue).

Or

- (2) Sam could have these desires and hope that Newton undergoes conversion and reform and eventually goes to heaven (or some suitable secular analogue).

In (2), Sam is desiring something bad for Newton only as an aid to Newton’s conversion, and he desires distance from Newton only while Newton is so sunk in evil. Ultimately, Sam wants Newton to become a decent human being, one with whom Sam can be glad to share the human family, one with whom Sam would be glad to be united in heaven. In way (2), then, Sam’s more global desires include both the desires of love for Newton, namely, the desire for the good for Newton and the desire for union with Newton.

So, although in both ways (1) and (2) Sam has the desire that Newton stay away from him and the desire that something bad happen to Newton, these desires of Sam’s are incompatible with love of Newton only in (1). In (2), these desires of Sam’s are actually part of Sam’s love of Newton. To want the ultimate

11 See *The Journal of a Slave Trader (John Newton) 1750–1754*, ed. Bernard Martin and Mark Spurrell (The Epworth Press, 1962), 98.

good for a slave trader and to want union ultimately with him, it may be necessary to want something bad for him and alienation from him while he is still actively engaged in slave trading.

Consequently, in *Context B*, while Newton is active in the slave trade, blaming Newton even in the broad sense that includes alienation and a desire for something bad for the wrongdoer is compatible with love of Newton. But then it is also compatible with forgiveness of Newton. If, in spite of still being enslaved by Newton, Sam hopes for Newton's reform and is willing to be reconciled with Newton ultimately, then Sam does forgive Newton. After Newton's repentance of his slave trading, when Newton looks back on these desires of Sam's while Sam was still enslaved, Newton will be able to see what a gift he was given in that attitude of Sam's towards him. It was a gift Newton most definitely did not deserve then, and that is one of the reasons why it is easy to recognize it as forgiveness.

And so in *Context B*, the context in which the person being blamed is an unrepentant perpetrator of great evil, blame is compatible with both love and forgiveness, even when blame is construed in the broad rather than the narrow sense. And since the broad sense implies the narrow sense, in *Context B* blame construed in the narrow sense is also compatible with both love and forgiveness.

Consequently, in neither of these contexts do love and forgiveness come apart. In each context, blame is compatible with love only in case it is also compatible with forgiveness. So if we disambiguate the different contexts and the different usages of the relevant terms, then considerations of blame actually confirm the strong connection between love and forgiveness defended in my account.

Finally, a word is needed about what Warmke calls his textual objection. Warmke acknowledges that I considered biblical texts such as Matthew 6:15 that seem contrary to my position. But Warmke gives the impression that my response to such texts consisted in little more than pointing to Christ's injunction to love one's enemies. This, however, is a misimpression. Here is my comment about Matthew 6:15:

Christ says that if people do not forgive others, God will not forgive their sins either (see, for example, Matt. 6:15). It is possible to interpret this saying as claiming that God withholds forgiveness from some people. But, so understood, the saying would be at least in serious tension with other texts, such as Christ's telling people to love their enemies so that they will be like God, who sends his good gifts on both the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). Furthermore, in the parable in which this saying about forgiveness occurs, the king (who represents God in the parable) is portrayed as forgiving his servant first, before the episode in which the servant fails to forgive his fellow servant (Matt. 18:23–35). So, in my view, a better way to interpret the saying in the Gospel text about God's forgiveness is to take it as a claim about God's forgiveness-plus-actual-reconciliation, and to understand it as claiming that the hard-hearted cannot be united to God because of their resistance to love, not God's resistance to them. Stump (2018, 440).

It may help to see the point at issue in that passage to look first at the parable in Matthew 18:23–35, which seems to illustrate the general claim in Matthew 6:15. In that parable, in fact the king (who represents God) initially forgives his servant without any conditions on the servant's attitude towards any past wrongdoing of his. That is, the king's forgiveness of the servant is prompted not by the servant's repentance, confession, apology, and penance for a previous sin of accumulating debt.<sup>12</sup> Rather the king's forgiveness is prompted only by the king's compassion for his servant. In the parable, the king only *later* becomes alienated from his servant and sends him away into prison when it turns out that the servant is hard-hearted towards his fellow servant. The parable therefore actually supports my interpretation that God's forgiveness is not conditional on a wrongdoer's repentance of his sins — or his repentance, confession, apology, and penance — but rather is a manifestation of God's love.

<sup>12</sup> It is true that the servant promises to pay his debt in the future, but this promise is not repentance and apology for having acquired the debt in the past or for having failed to pay it up to now. Suppose, by way of analogy, that a divorced person Paula has gotten hold of her former spouse's credit card and has wracked up an enormous debt on it. And suppose that, confronted with his angry reaction, Paula promises to pay the debt herself sometime in the indefinite future. Surely, this promise alone will not strike him (and should not strike us) as Paula's repenting and confessing her wrongdoing, apologizing for it, and offering to make amends for it.

And now consider the general claim in Matthew 6:15: “if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”<sup>13</sup> It is important in this connection to focus on the details of this claim, and for this purpose it may be helpful to have a specific case in mind.

So consider the case of Eleanor Roosevelt. When her husband Franklin Roosevelt died suddenly and unexpectedly, Eleanor discovered that he had been betraying her with another woman, Lucy Mercer.<sup>14</sup> In one dreadful blow, Eleanor learned that her husband had died and that he had died in the presence of his beloved Lucy, with whom he had been unfaithful to Eleanor for a long time. Clearly, Franklin was guilty of a serious betrayal of Eleanor’s trust, which was an injustice to her and inflicted psychological injury on her as well.

For the sake of this example, let it also be the case that Eleanor herself was guilty of some sin. Suppose just for the sake of the example that Eleanor harbored racist biases which led her to many small or large injustices against other human beings. (And if the historical Eleanor had no such sins, then she must have had some others, which could serve just as well in this example). Given her time and background, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that she was entirely unaware of these biases and that she felt no guilt over the treatment of others to which these biases led her. Let her acts based on such racist biases count for the sake of this example as Eleanor’s sins.

Now, on the general claim in Matthew 6:15, here is what we need to say. Unless Eleanor forgives Franklin his sin of betrayal of her, God will not forgive Eleanor her sins of racist bias against others.

The first thing to recognize in this case is that Eleanor’s forgiveness of Franklin has to be unconditional where Franklin’s sin against her is concerned. That is, no repentance (or repentance, confession, apology, and penance) on Franklin’s part is required as a condition on Eleanor’s forgiveness of him; and, of course, nothing of the sort could be given since Franklin was dead at the time that Eleanor discovered his treachery.

And the second thing to recognize is that, on the general claim in Matthew 6:15, God’s forgiveness of Eleanor’s sins of racial injustice is also unconditional as regards those very sins of hers. That is, no repentance of these sins on Eleanor’s part is required as a condition on God’s forgiveness of them. Eleanor does not even need to recognize that she has such sins in order for God to forgive them. Where Eleanor’s sins of racial injustice are concerned, God’s forgiveness of them is unconditional on any psychic state of Eleanor’s as regards those very sins.

On Matthew 6:15, what God’s forgiveness of Eleanor’s sins depends on is not Eleanor’s attitude towards her own sins. It depends only on Eleanor’s attitude towards *Franklin’s* sins against Eleanor. And, with regard to Franklin’s sins, Eleanor’s attitude of forgiveness is also unconditional, in the sense that Eleanor’s forgiveness of Franklin does not depend on Franklin’s attitude towards his sins against her. Therefore, on Matthew 6:15 neither God’s forgiveness of a human person’s sins nor her forgiveness of the sins of others is conditional on the sinner’s repentance of his sins. Rather, in each case, the forgiveness is unconditional as regards the sinner’s attitudes towards his own sins.

Because Warmke wants to argue that early Christian tradition is contrary to my account on this score, it is worth noting that Augustine reads Matthew 6:15 in this same way, and that he also uses Christ’s teaching about loving enemies to interpret that text. (I omit here to address Warmke’s claims about Aquinas’s views, since my interpretation of Aquinas is defended in detail in *Atonement*.) Commenting on this biblical text, Augustine says,

That [fifth petition in the Lord’s Prayer] may indeed be construed in this way, that when we say, ‘Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive’, then only are we convicted of having acted contrary to this rule, if we do not forgive them who ask pardon, because we also wish to be forgiven by our most gracious Father when we ask His pardon. But, on the other hand, by that precept whereby we are enjoined to pray for our enemies, it is not for those who ask pardon that we are enjoined to pray. For those who are already in such a state

13 The Greek words for forgiveness in Matthew 6:15 and Matthew 18:27 are not the same, but the context makes clear that the same idea is at issue in both places.

14 There are endless other details to this story that make Franklin’s betrayal of Eleanor’s trust worse, but I do not want to complicate the example by including them.

of mind are no longer enemies. By no possibility, however, could one truthfully say that he prays for one whom he has not pardoned. And therefore we must confess that all sins which are committed against us are to be forgiven, if we wish those to be forgiven by our Father which we commit against Him.”<sup>15</sup>

To generalize, then, when the claim in Matthew 6:15 mandates that a human person Paula forgive any person Jerome who has wronged her, that claim puts no conditions on Jerome’s attitude towards his wrongdoing for getting this forgiveness from Paula. There is nothing at all that Jerome must do as regards his wrongdoing against Paula in order to win Paula’s forgiveness. And when the claim in Matthew 6:15 implies that God will forgive the sins of a human person Paula who forgives the sins of others against her, that claim also puts no conditions on Paula as regards her own sins. There is no attitude or action with regard to her own sins that Paula has to adopt in order to gain God’s forgiveness of those sins. The point of the claim in Matthew 6:15 is only that God’s forgiveness is there for all Paula’s sins, which therefore must include even the unrepented ones, provided only that Paula is not hard-hearted towards others with regard to their sins against her.

Consequently, if read carefully, both the general claim about God’s forgiveness in Matthew 6:15 and the parable about forgiveness in Matthew 18 in fact strongly support my point that forgiveness is unconditional on anything on a wrongdoer’s part as regards his own wrongdoing.

As Warmke acknowledges in his paper, my claim that God’s love and forgiveness are unconditional is spelled out clearly in *Atonement* as a claim that God’s forgiveness does not depend on the wrongdoer’s repentance, or repentance plus confession, apology, and penance. But, as I explained in detail in that book, this claim does *not* mean that God fails to be responsive to *anything* in a wrongdoer. To receive the desired *effect* of God’s forgiveness and love, which is union with God in reconciliation, the wrongdoer cannot close out the love of God. For God to have the desires of love and forgiveness for a human person *fulfilled*, the loved person has to surrender to God’s love. And it is not possible for a person to be open to God’s love while also being hard-hearted towards others.

The two commandments on which all the law and the prophets hang (as Matthew 22:40 puts it) are in a sense just one commandment. To love God is to love the goodness that God is and so to love what God loves. Consequently, to be hard-hearted towards another human person *is* in effect to close out the love of God. And that is why reconciliation and union with God, which is what God in love and forgiveness desires, is ruled out for a human wrongdoer when she is unwilling to forgive someone who has wronged her. Even God cannot fulfill his desire for union with a human person if that person is closed to God, as in effect the hard-hearted servant in the parable turns out to be.

So, as I argued in *Atonement* and explained in connection with the discussion of Matthew 6:15, the forgiveness of God which is not conditional even on a wrongdoer’s repentance cannot find the fulfillment of its desires if the wrongdoer resists God’s love. The offered gift of forgiveness cannot succeed in being given if the intended recipient refuses it. So although the *forgiveness* of God is not conditional on the wrongdoer’s attitude towards his sins, the *union* desired in forgiveness is conditional — not on the wrongdoer’s repentance of sins, or on his repentance plus confession, apology, and penance, but rather just on the wrongdoer’s surrender to God’s love.

This explanation of Matthew 6:15 applies also to the other similar text that Warmke cites, namely, Mark 11:25. As for I John 1:9, which Warmke includes in his list of texts that seem to him contrary to my account, that text connects confession of sin with forgiveness-plus-sanctification. But this text is not an objection to my position; rather, it summarizes the very view that I argued for. On Christian doctrine as I interpreted it in *Atonement*, God’s love and forgiveness cannot have their desired effect of reconciliation with God, which requires sanctification, without a sinner’s first having surrendered to God; and that surrender includes hating one’s own sins and yearning for God’s goodness. This surrender begins the process of sanctification, which will continue to its ultimate goal of union with God unless in self-protective refusal to acknowledge her own sins the sinner abandons that initial surrender. So it is not only right on

15 Augustine, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, According to Matthew*, tr. William Findlay, revised and annotated D.S. Schaff, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Eerdmans), 1980), 43.



the interpretation I argued for but it is in fact an explicit part of that interpretation that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

## CONCLUSION

In this brief paper, I have considered only some of the interesting issues and questions raised by the three papers of the APA session presenters; considerations of space prohibit my touching on all of them. But I am grateful to Rea, Dougherty, and Warmke for their generosity in bringing their expertise to bear on *Atonement* and for taking the time to work through the book so thoughtfully. I appreciate their helping me see where I could profitably elucidate in more detail some of the views in that book, and I am glad of this chance to expand more fully on the issues raised by their good questions and concerns.

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