

SPECTRUM MULTIVIEW BOOKS

THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT

FOUR VIEWS

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ONE

Christus Victor View

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*"The Son of God was revealed for this purpose,
to destroy the works of the devil."*

1 JOHN 3:8

One mark of great intelligence is that a person can solve a number of problems with a single stroke. I believe this is why Paul speaks of the "rich variety" of God's secret and hidden wisdom in having his Son become incarnate and die on Calvary (Eph 3:10; cf. 1 Cor 1:30; 2:7). Through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the infinitely wise God solved a number of problems. Among other things, through Christ God defeated the devil and his cohorts (Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8); revealed the definitive truth about himself (Rom 5:8, cf. Jn 14:7-10); reconciled all things, including humans, to himself (2 Cor 5:18-19; Col 1:20-22); forgave us our sins (Acts 13:38; Eph 1:7); healed us from our sin-diseased nature (1 Pet 2:24); poured his Spirit on us and empowered us to live in relation to himself (Rom 8:2-16); and gave us an example to follow (Eph 5:1-2; 1 Pet 2:21). God's wisdom is displayed in a "rich variety" indeed!

Given the multifaceted design of Christ's life, death and resurrection, it is not at all surprising that over time the church created a diversity of conceptual models of the atonement. Hence we have various Christus Victor models, substitutionary models, healing models, exemplary models, apotheosis models, recapitulation models and moral government models of the atonement. Each model legitimately expresses a facet of what the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Christ accomplished.

Some in our postmodern context argue that we should simply leave it at that. While various cultural and personal contexts may call for one model to

be at times emphasized over others, these people argue that we should not attempt to defend any one view as more fundamental than others or attempt to fashion the various models into a single coherent framework. I'm deeply sympathetic to the sentiment. Yet it seems to me perfectly natural and, if carried out with an irenic spirit, potentially beneficial to strive for an encompassing conceptual model that might reveal an "inner logic" to all aspects of Christ's work. Consider that every advance we have ever made in human understanding has been the result of sticking to the conviction that *reality is unified* while striving to comprehend it as such. We strive to integrate apparently disparate facts into a unified framework. If we believe in the *reality* of the atonement, therefore, I do not see why we should avoid trying to integrate the various facets of the "rich variety" of God's wisdom into a coherent whole.

This is not a merely theoretical interest. As has been the case with every advance in science, matters of practical consequence may be at stake. How we understand the "rich variety" of God's wisdom behind the atonement may affect how we apply the atonement to areas of our life (a point I will return to at the end of this chapter).

I obviously cannot try to accomplish this unifying task in the limited space of this present essay. Yet I want to at least propose a framework within which such a project might be carried out. More specifically, I'm suggesting that a unifying framework may be found in the view of Christ's work that dominated the thinking of the church for the first thousand years of its history: namely the Christus Victor model. This model centers on the truth that through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Christ, God defeated the devil. In this essay I will argue that this aspect of Christ's work can plausibly be construed as more fundamental than other aspects of Christ's work and that other aspects of the "rich variety" of the wisdom behind Christ's work can be best understood within this context.¹

¹While the Christus Victor model has for the most part taken the back seat to Anselm's "satisfaction theory" (and later to the Reformers' "penal substitution theory") for the last nine centuries, the Christus Victor model has in the last century been experiencing something of a Renaissance, especially since the publication of Gustaf Aulén's now classic work, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, [1931]). For a sampling of other recent advocates see references in Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), pp. 238-68, as well as Thomas Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological* (Herald Press, 1985). Interestingly, a growing number

I start by providing the scriptural background for the Christus Victor model. I follow this with a brief examination of those New Testament passages that are most central to this understanding of Christ's life and work. I then discuss five clues we find in the New Testament that suggest something about *how* Christ defeated the devil while also revealing that the atonement concerns every aspect of Christ's life and teaching, not just his death and resurrection. This is followed by a brief sketch of how other facets of Christ's work might be understood in the context of the Christus Victor model. I conclude by summarizing eight points that I believe support my thesis that the Christus Victor model of the atonement is more fundamental and more encompassing than other atonement models.

Background: The Warfare Motif in Scripture

The Christus Victor view of the atonement cannot be appropriately understood without an appreciation for the broader spiritual warfare motif that runs throughout Scripture. Though the motif of spiritual warfare is rarely given its full due, the biblical narrative could in fact be accurately described as a story of God's ongoing conflict with and ultimate victory over cosmic and human agents who oppose him and who threaten his creation.²

Hostile waters, monsters and gods. In the Old Testament this warfare is most commonly depicted in terms of God's battle with hostile waters and vicious sea monsters that were believed to surround and threaten the earth. Whereas non-Israelites looked to various deities (e.g., Marduk and Baal) to resist these sinister cosmic forces, the Hebrews declared that it was Yahweh alone who warred against, rebuked, guarded and trampled on the malevolent waters, and who vanquished the cosmic monsters (e.g., Ps 29:3-4, 10; 74:10-14; 77:16, 19; 89:9-10; 104:2-9; Prov 8:27-29; Job 7:12; 9:8, 17; 26:12-13; 38:6-11; 40:15-34; Ezek 29:3; 32:2; Jer 51:34; Hab 3:8-15; Nahum 1:4).

We also read a great deal about rebel gods in the Old Testament, created

of nonevangelical theologians have embraced various more-or-less "demythologized" versions of the Christus Victor motif, often with helpful insights. See e.g., Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Darby Kathleen Bay, *Decoding the Devil: Atonement, Abuse and Ransom* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrims Press, 1990); John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1977), pp. 318-21; cf. also John Macquarrie, "Demonology and the Classic Idea of Atonement," *Expository Times* 68 (1956): 3-6, 60-63.

For a full exposition of the spiritual warfare motif throughout Scripture, see Boyd, *God at War*.

spirit beings with whom God and his heavenly host do battle. As is the case with the hostile waters and cosmic monsters, ancient Israelites never separated battles that took place on earth from battles that took place among the gods (e.g., 2 Sam 5:23-24; 1 Chron 12:22; Judg 11:21-24).³ What went on in (what we today would call) the "spiritual realm" affects what transpires in history, and vice versa. So in the ancient Israelite worldview, part of the explanation for why a prayer is not answered quickly, why people suffer injustice and are in poverty and why "natural" disasters fall on someone may have something to do with the contingent activity of these rebel gods (e.g., Dan 10; Ps 82; Job 1—2).⁴

These depictions of evil in terms of hostile waters, cosmic monsters and rebel gods are in varying degrees clearly influenced by standard ancient Near Eastern mythological imagery. Yet they nevertheless powerfully communicate the understanding that the earth and its inhabitants exist in a *cosmic war zone*. Order in the cosmos and the preservation of Israel depend on God's continually fighting against these evil cosmic forces. In contrast to their pagan neighbors, Old Testament authors of course express unprecedented confidence that Yahweh is capable of keeping these cosmic forces of chaos at bay and ultimately overthrowing them. At the same time, however, it's clear they understand Yahweh's victory over these forces to be praiseworthy precisely because they believe these opposing cosmic forces are *formidable* and that the battles in the spiritual realm are *real*.⁵

Satan in the New Testament. Owing to a number of historical factors, the understanding that the earth is a war zone between good and evil cosmic forces intensified significantly among Jews in the two centuries leading

³For discussions, see Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988); Carola Kloos, *YHWH's Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986); Mary K. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973); John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); E. Theodor Mullen Jr., *The Assembly of the Gods* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980). See other references in Boyd, *God at War*, pp. 73-142.

⁴I have argued elsewhere that the activity of rebel gods is one of several missing aspects of traditional theodicy. See Gregory A. Boyd, *Is God to Blame?* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

⁵See Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, pp. 14-27.

up to Christ, commonly referred to as the apocalyptic period.⁶ While there is significant theological diversity among apocalyptic writers, all attribute far more influence to gods, angels and demons than Old Testament canonical writings do.⁷ What is more, all share an acute awareness that the earth is held hostage by evil forces to such a degree that it can only be freed by a radical in-breaking of God, something they believed was going to happen in the very near future.

It was into this world that Jesus came, and all indications are that he and his earliest followers shared and in some respects intensified still further this apocalyptic worldview. For example, the role given to Satan by Jesus and his followers is without precedent in previous apocalyptic writings. According to John, Jesus believed that Satan was "the ruler of this world" (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).⁸ The word translated "ruler" (*archōn*) customarily referred to "the highest official in a city or a region in the Greco-Roman world."⁹ While Jesus and his followers of course believed that God was the *ultimate* Lord over all creation, they clearly viewed Satan as the *functional* lord of earth at the present time.

Along the same lines, Satan is depicted as possessing "all the kingdoms of the world"—to the point where *he* gives authority to rule these kingdoms to anyone he pleases (Lk 4:5-6). In fact, the various kingdoms of the world can be described as *a single kingdom* under Satan's rule (Rev 11:15, cf. Rev 13). John goes so far as to claim that the *entire world* is "under the power of the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19), and Paul does not shy away from labeling Satan "the god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4) and "the ruler of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2). Because of this pervasive and oppressive diabolic influence, Paul, in typical apocalyptic fashion, depicts this present world system as fundamentally evil (Gal 1:4).

Everything Jesus was about was centered on vanquishing this empire, taking back the world that Satan had seized and restoring its rightful vice-roys—humans—to their position of guardians of the earth (Gen 1:26-28; cf. 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 5:10). Each one of Jesus' many healings and deliverances diminished Satan's hold on the world and liberated people, to whatever de-

⁶See Boyd, *God at War*, pp. 172-76.

⁷With the possible exception of Daniel, though most scholars argue this is because Daniel was composed in the second century B.C., during the apocalyptic period.

⁸Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

⁹Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 81.

gree, from his stronghold.¹⁰ Peter succinctly summarized Jesus' ministry to Cornelius when he said that Jesus "went about doing good and healing *all who were oppressed by the devil*." (Acts 10:38, emphasis added). Gustaf Wingren captures this central motif well:

When Jesus heals the sick and drives out evil spirits, Satan's dominion is departing and God's kingdom is coming (Mt 12:22-29). All Christ's activity is therefore a conflict with the Devil (Acts 10:38). God's Son took flesh and became man that he might overthrow the power of the Devil, and bring his works to nought (Heb 2.14f.; 1 John 3.8).¹¹

The battle against the powers. Intensifying the apocalyptic view of the time, Jesus and the New Testament authors saw demonic influences not only in demonized and diseased people but directly or indirectly in everything that was not consistent with God's reign. For example, swearing oaths, temptation, lying, legalism, false teachings, anger, spiritual blindness and persecution were all seen as being satanically inspired.¹² This ought not surprise us since, again, Jesus and his followers all believed the devil had significant control of the entire world (1 Jn 5:19). The kingdom of the roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8) was an ever-present reality to Jesus and his earliest disciples. For this reason Paul taught that whatever earthly struggles disciples found themselves involved in, they must understand that their *real* struggle was against "the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12; cf. 2 Cor 10:3-5).

This last Pauline passage brings up a final and very important aspect of the New Testament's apocalyptic worldview. Beyond the frequent references to Satan and demons throughout the New Testament, we find Paul (and others, e.g., 1 Pet 3:21-22) making reference to other spiritual powers, most of which have their counterpart in the apocalyptic literature of the time. Thus we read about "rulers," "principalities," "powers" and "authorities" (Rom 8:38; 13:1; 1 Cor 2:6, 8; 15:24; Eph 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16;

¹⁰On the centrality of healings and exorcisms in Jesus' ministry, see Boyd, *God at War*, pp. 171-214.

¹¹Gustaf Wingren, *The Living Word*, trans. T. V. Pague (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960), p. 53. I have elsewhere argued that even Jesus' "nature miracles" (e.g., calming the raging sea, cursing the barren tree) are manifestations of the kingdom of God over and against the kingdom of Satan (see *God at War*, pp. 205-14).

¹²See e.g., Mt 5:37; 6:13; 13:19, 38; Acts 5:3; 1 Cor 7:5; 10:20; 2 Cor 2:7, 10-11; 4:4; 11:3, 13; Gal 1:8; 4:8-10; Eph 4:26-27; Col 2:8; 1 Thess 3:5; 1 Tim 4:1-5; 1 Jn 4:1-4; 2 Jn 7.

2:10, 15), along with "dominions" (Eph 1:21; Col 1:16), "cosmic powers" (Eph 6:12), "thrones" (Col 1:16), "spiritual forces" (Eph 6:12), "elemental spirits" (Col 2:8, 20; Gal 4:3, 8-9) and other spiritual entities.¹³ For the sake of brevity I will follow the precedent set by Walter Wink and simply refer to this vast array of cosmic powers as "the powers."

There has been a good deal of discussion surrounding what precisely Paul and others were referring to with these various titles, and while certain matters continue to be debated, there is widespread consensus that these powers are at the very least closely related to (and, some argue, identical with) the destructive spiritual force of various social structures and people groups—nations, governments, religions, classes, races, tribes and other social groups, for example.¹⁴

It is arguably for this reason that Paul does not see "sin" first and foremost as a matter of *individual* behavior, as most modern Westerners do. He rather conceives of "sin" (and related concepts such as the "law" and the "flesh") as a quasi-autonomous power that holds people groups as well as individuals in bondage (e.g., Rom 3:9; 6:6-12; 7:7-20, 23, 25). This is why people can never hope to break the power of sin and fulfill the law by their own effort. As in much apocalyptic thought, Paul believed what was needed was nothing less than God breaking into human history to destroy the power of sin and rescuing us from the cosmic powers that keep us in bondage to sin. This is precisely what Paul and all early Christians believed happened with the advent of Jesus Christ. And this is the essence of the Christus Victor view of the atonement.

Christ's Victory over the Powers

For Luther and other Reformers the central theological issue that needed addressing was how individual sinners could be made righteous before an all-holy God who cannot leave sin unpunished. But as numerous scholars in the last several decades have confirmed, this was not the main problem

¹³For example, it's likely Paul is referring to demonic entities in Rom 8:39. See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary 38A (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1988), p. 513.

¹⁴For an overview of the discussion, see Peter O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 16 (1992): 353-84. No one has explored and developed this thesis more thoroughly and insightfully than Walter Wink in his acclaimed "Powers" trilogy. See especially Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). Unfortunately, in my estimation, Wink denies the "powers" are personal, transcendent agents. See my critique of his view in Boyd, *God at War*, pp. 273-76.

most first century Jews struggled with.¹⁵ As was the case with Paul, the central concern of most first-century Jews was over how people could get free from the oppressive and destructive force of the cosmic powers that had seized the world. Most fundamentally it was in *these categories* that the followers of Jesus came to understand the significance of his life, death and resurrection.

Christ's victory over enemies. According to the New Testament, the central thing Jesus did was drive out the "ruler of this world" (Jn 12:31). He came to "destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn 3:8). He came to "destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil" in order to "free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death" (Heb 2:14-15). Jesus lived, died and rose again to establish a new reign that would ultimately "put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor 15:25). Though "the strong man" was "fully armed," one who was "stronger than he" had finally arrived who could attack and overpower him (Lk 11:21-22). While the cosmic "thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy," Jesus came into the world to vanquish the thief so that all "may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). Jesus "disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them" (Col 2:15). In a word, Jesus came to end the cosmic war that had been raging from time immemorial and to set Satan's captives free (Lk 4:18; Eph 4:8).

The first messianic prophecy given in Scripture—indeed the first prophecy *period*—announced just this: a descendent of Eve would crush the head of the serpent who originally deceived humanity into joining in his rebellion (Gen 3:15).¹⁶ It is therefore not surprising that the original disciples expressed what the Messiah accomplished in terms of *a victory over the ancient serpent*.

The very first Christian sermon, according to Luke, centered on Christ's

¹⁵The now classic work on this theme is E. P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). We do not have to embrace all of the particulars of Sanders's proposal in order to appreciate this and other aspects of his "new view" of Paul. From my perspective, a balanced approach to Paul in our post-Sanders world is represented in the work of N. T. Wright. See e.g., Wright's *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); and "A Fresh Perspective on Paul?" *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 83 (2001): 21-39.

¹⁶On the messianic interpretation of Gen 3:15, see Ralph A. Martin, "The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 84 (1965): 425-27. This reading seems to lie behind several New Testament texts (e.g., Rom 16:19-20; 2 Cor 11:3; Rev 12).

cosmic victory. After the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and preached:

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

"The Lord said to my Lord,
'Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.'"

Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:32-36).

The central thing Jesus did, according to Peter, was *fulfill* Psalms 110:1. Jesus had been raised to a position of divine power (the Lord's "right hand") over his defeated and humiliated enemies (who are now his "footstool"). In an apocalyptic Jewish context, to say the kingdom of God has come was to say the *kingdom of Satan has been defeated*.

This theme of victory over cosmic foes pervades the entire New Testament. Indeed Psalm 110 is the most frequently cited passage in the New Testament, and it always, in a variety of ways, is used to express the truth that Christ is Lord *because he has defeated God's enemies*.¹⁷ The significance of this is difficult to overstate. In the words of Oscar Cullman:

Nothing shows more clearly how the concept of the present Lordship of Christ and also of his consequent victory over the angel powers stands at the very center of early Christian thought than the frequent citation of Ps. 110:1, not only in isolated books, but in the entire NT.¹⁸

Through his incarnation, life, teachings, death and resurrection, Jesus manifested the power of God over Satan, demons and the entire spectrum of rebellious principalities and powers. The one who created "thrones . . . dominions . . . rulers . . . [and] powers" (Col 1:16) became incarnate, died and was resurrected in order for God "to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his

¹⁷See, e.g., Mt 22:41-45; Mk 12:35-37; Lk 20:41-44; 1 Cor 15:22-25; Heb 1:13; 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 15, 17, 21; 10:12-13, cf. Mt 26:64; Mk 14:62; Lk 22:69; Acts 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12-13; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev 3:21.

¹⁸Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time*, trans. F. V. Wilson, rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1962), p.193. For a thorough exposition of the importance of Psalms 110 in the New Testament, see David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973).

cross" (Col 1:20). *This* is what Christ accomplished. In the words of Karl Heim, the cross is "God's final settlement of the Satanic opposing power which has arisen against God."¹⁹

Salvation as deliverance from the devil. Because the main thing Christ accomplished was that he defeated the devil, we are not surprised to find that salvation in the New Testament is frequently depicted as freedom from the devil's oppression. For example, the message Paul received when he first encountered Christ was that he was being sent to the Gentiles "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Christ]" (Acts 26:17-18).

Through Paul, God was going to free Gentiles from "the god of this world" who had "blinded the minds of the unbelievers" (2 Cor 4:4) and thereby set them free from the power of Satan and bring them into the power of God. Because of this—and *note closely the logical order*—they would be in a position to "receive forgiveness of sins" as well as a place among the community that is set apart ("sanctified") by God. Salvation clearly involves forgiveness of sins, but this forgiveness is itself rooted in a person getting freed from Satan's grip, and therefore freed from the controlling power of sin.

A multitude of other passages captures the same dynamic. Salvation is most fundamentally about escaping "from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (2 Tim 2:26). It's about being "set free from the present evil age" (Gal 1:4) and liberated from our "enslavelment] to the elemental spirits of the world" (Gal 4:3; cf. Rom 6:18; 8:2; Gal 5:1; Heb 2:14-15). It's about being "enabled . . . to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light" by being "rescued . . . from the power of darkness and transferred . . . into the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col 1:12-13). This inheritance involves receiving "redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:14), but we have this inheritance only because we've been "transferred" out of Satan's dominion and brought under the reign of God through his Son.

Similarly, Peter notes that baptism saves believers "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him" (1 Pet 3:21-22). The ordinance of baptism has meaning, Peter says, not because it is a

¹⁹Karl Heim, *Jesus the World's Perfecter*, trans. D. H. Van Daalen (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959), p. 70.

literal washing (v. 21) but because it connects the believer with the death and resurrection of Christ. And the foremost thing that the death and resurrection of Christ accomplished, we see once again, was the subjugation of all cosmic powers under him. In baptism, therefore, believers express and participate in Christ's cosmic victory. Indeed, Peter seems to suggest (however cryptically and controversially) that because of the cosmic significance of what Christ has accomplished, even some who "in former times did not obey" can now be set free (1 Pet 3:19-20).

So too Paul writes that our trust in Christ means that we die to the "elemental spirits" in Christ (Col 2:20) and grow into the fullness of Christ who now is "the head of every ruler and authority" (Col 2:10). Through the cross and resurrection, Christ disarmed and defeated these powers, to the point of making them a "public example" (a term used when military leaders would parade defeated soldiers through their city). Consequently, all who trust in Christ are incorporated into him and therefore share in this cosmic victory. This is the essential meaning of "salvation" in the New Testament. Everything Satan and the diabolic powers had on us—all the sin that put us under their oppression—has lost its power and we have therefore been set free from all condemnation (Col 2:14-15).

The cosmic and soteriological significance of the cross. I might summarize what I have been saying by noting that in the Christus Victor view of the atonement—in sharp contrast to all other views—the *cosmic* significance of Christ's work is ontologically more fundamental than its *soteriological* significance. Of course, the soteriological significance of the cross is the meaning that is perhaps most important *to us*, and we should never minimize it. But we only accurately understand and appreciate this significance if we understand it in the context of the cosmic significance of Christ's victory.

It is for this reason that Paul discusses the cosmic significance of Christ's work—how he has in principle brought an end to the war with the principalities and powers (Col 1:15-20)—and only then concludes:

And *you* who [like the rebel powers] were once estranged and hostile [to God] in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him. (Col 1:21-22, emphasis added).

We are reconciled because the cosmos has been reconciled. Because the rebel powers have been put in their place, we can be presented "holy and blameless" before God.

Similarly, in Ephesians 1—2, Paul first glories in Christ's cosmic significance, whereby all God's enemies were placed "under his feet" (Eph 1:20-22) before he celebrates the fact that we who once followed "the course of this world" and "the ruler of the power of the air" have been "made . . . alive together with Christ" (Eph 2:2, 5). This freedom involves forgiveness for the trespasses that placed us under the rulers' authority and thus made us spiritually dead (Eph 2:1). But this soteriological significance is simply an aspect of the broader cosmic significance of Christ's work. Because the "strong man" has been disarmed and tied up—and only because the strong man has been disarmed and tied up—his "property" (the earth) gets "plundered," and the captives get set free (Lk 11:21-22)!

The move from cosmic to soteriological significance is manifested in a number of ways in the New Testament, especially when it speaks of the disciple's life in Christ. For example, it's only because the devil has been defeated, together with sin and the law, which sin used against us, that we can be assured that the accuser can no longer condemn us of sin (Rom 8:1, 31, 33; Col 2:13-15; cf. Rev 12:10). And it's only because the one who once ruled the world has in principle been driven out (Jn 12:31), disarmed (Col 2:15) and destroyed (1 Jn 3:8) that disciples can be assured that no cosmic power can separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:35-39).

Similarly, it's only because we who are disciples know that the same power that positioned Christ "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion" is now at work in us that we can have unwavering confidence that we too shall overcome (Eph 1:18-21). Only because Christ conquered Satan and sin can we be confident that through Christ we can "overcome the evil one" (1 Jn 2:13-14) and overcome the power of sin (1 Jn 5:18). Only because the one who held the keys of death has been destroyed can we who trust in Christ live free from the fear of death (Heb 2:14-15). Only because the cross defeated the devil can we who trust in Christ overcome "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan," for we war against him "by the blood of the lamb and by the word of [our] testimony" (Rev 12:9, 11).

In other words, *our* personal and social victories participate in *Christ's* cosmic victory. Everything the New Testament says about the soteriological significance of Christ's work is predicated on the cosmic significance of his work. Yet only the Christus Victor view captures the centrality of this cosmic, warfare significance and thus properly expresses the soteriological significance of Christ's work.

Salvation as a cosmic and anthropological reality. As alluded to earlier, the New Testament concept of salvation is centered on our participation in Christ's cosmic victory over the powers. It does not first and foremost mean "salvation from God's wrath" or "salvation from hell," as many Western Christians mistakenly assume—often with negative consequences for their mental picture of God or with antinomian consequences for their life. Rather, as James Kallas says:

Since the cosmos itself is in bondage, depressed under evil forces, the essential content of the word "salvation" is that the world itself will be rescued, or renewed, or set free. Salvation is a cosmic event affecting the whole of creation. . . . Salvation is not simply the overcoming of my rebellion and the forgiveness of my guilt, but salvation is the liberation of the whole world process of which I am only a small part.²⁰

Christ has in principle freed the cosmos from its demonic oppression and thus freed all inhabitants of the cosmos who will simply submit to this new loving reign. The cosmos that had been "groaning in labor pains" because it was subjected to "the bondage [of] decay" has now been and is yet being set free (Rom 8:19-22). And we who were the originally intended viceroys of the earth (Gen 1:26-28) have also been and are yet being released from bondage and reestablished to our rightful position as co-rulers of the earth with Christ (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 5:10).²¹ We are saved from the power of God's archenemy, saved from the destruction that would have been the inevitable consequences of our sin, saved from our fallen inability to live in right relatedness with God, saved from the idolatrous, futile striving to find "life" from the things of the world, saved from our meaninglessness and saved to forever participate in the fullness of life, joy, power and peace that is the reign of the triune God.

This is what the New Testament means by "salvation." It is a cosmic reality before it is an anthropological reality, and it is the latter because it is the former. So far as I can see, only the Christus View adequately expresses this truth.

²⁰James Kallas, *The Satanward View: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), p. 74.

²¹Christ has defeated the devil "in principle." Yet we obviously do not see this victory fully manifested. This is the well-known already-not yet tension in the New Testament's eschatology. It's significant to note that Satan is yet identified as the "god of this world," the "principality and power of the air" and in "control of the entire world" *after* the resurrection (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2)!

Overcoming Evil with Good

The ancient Christus Victor theories. That Christ came to defeat the devil and his works is as clear as could be in the New Testament. But how exactly Christ's life, death and resurrection accomplished this feat is not so clear. Early church theologians offered an assortment of speculations about this.

One popular train of thought was that God offered Jesus to Satan in exchange for the humanity Satan held captive, but then God retracted the offer, as it were, when he raised Jesus from the dead. Another even more popular line of thought was that by sending Jesus into Satan's domain as a vulnerable human, God was using Jesus as "bait." God knew Satan and his cohorts would not be able to resist seizing Christ, and yet God also knew that since Jesus was divine and sinless, Satan could not "stomach" him, as it were. Jesus was therefore spewed out on the third day, but when he left hell he took imprisoned humanity with him. For the first millennium of church history, when Christians thought about what Christ accomplished they usually thought along these lines.

If taken too literally and pressed for details, both theories are obviously problematic—which is, in part, why they largely fell out of favor after Anselm proposed his alternative perspective. And yet I wonder if perhaps the church has not tended to throw the biblical baby out with the speculative bathwater. I suggest that there is some profound truth in these ancient ways of thinking about Christ. In the process of fleshing this out, I hope to show how the Christus Victor motif cannot be limited to Christ's death but rather permeates Christ's life and teaching as well.

The "secret" wisdom of God. Five pieces of biblical data may provide clues (though not detailed explanations) as to how Christ defeated the devil. First, it may be significant that throughout Christ's ministry, demons seem to know who Jesus is but have no idea why he's come into their domain (Mk 1:23-24; 3:11; 5:7; Lk 8:28). Second, the rich variety of God's wisdom that led to the crucifixion was for some reason kept "secret and hidden" until after the crucifixion (Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 3:9-10; Col 1:26). Third, it's pretty clear that Satan and his minions were instrumental in bringing about Christ's crucifixion. It was, after all, Satan who entered into Judas and inspired him to betray Jesus (Jn 13:27). Fourth, Paul tells us that had the "rulers of this age" understood the secret wisdom of God, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor

2:8, cf. vv. 6-7).²² And fifth, it was by means of the cross that the rulers were defeated and humanity, along with the whole of creation, was reconciled to God. Whatever the spirit rulers in their twisted minds thought they were accomplishing by crucifying Jesus, it backfired.

We need not embrace any of the speculative and mythic features of the ancient Christus Victor theories to sketch a plausible story line that makes sense of these five facts. The principalities and powers that presently rule the world recognized who Jesus was but could not fathom why the Son of God had entered their domain, for they could not discern the wisdom of God, as Paul says. The wisdom of God centered on Jesus dying out of love for the race that Satan and the powers had held captive for ages, and these powers, being evil, apparently lack the capacity to imagine action that is motivated by this kind of self-sacrificial love. The only thing the powers could understand was that, for whatever reasons, Jesus had in fact entered their domain, *and this made him fair game*. Working with cooperative human agents, therefore, the powers orchestrated Jesus' crucifixion, only to learn that by doing so they had played into God's secret plan all along (Acts 2:22-23; 4:28). No wonder Paul says Christ not only disarmed the powers; he reduced them to a laughingstock (Col 2:14-15).

As I see it, the truth embodied in the most ancient ways of thinking about the atonement was that God did, in a sense, deceive Satan and the powers, and that Jesus was, in a sense, "bait." But there was nothing duplicitous or unjust in God's behavior. To the contrary, God was simply acting in an outrageously loving way, knowing all the while that his actions could not be understood by the powers whose evil blinds them to love. Like an infinitely wise military strategist, God knew how to get his enemies to use their self-inflicted blindness against themselves and thus use their self-chosen evil to his advantage. He wisely let evil implode in on itself, as it were, and thereby freed creation and humanity from evil's oppression.²³

Paul tells us that one of the jobs of the church is to continually proclaim

²²On issues surrounding the meaning of "rulers" in 1 Cor 2:7, see Boyd, *God at War*, pp. 256-59.

²³Obviously, this account leaves unanswered a number of questions we might like answered. E.g., precisely how did Calvary and the resurrection defeat the powers? In my estimation, the ancient Christus Victor models of the atonement, like some other models, became incredulous precisely because they too vigorously pressed for details. I believe we have enough revealed to understand the broad outlines of the multifaceted wisdom of God in sending Christ to die and defeat the devil. But at the end of the day we must humbly acknowledge that our understanding is severely limited.

God's victorious, loving wisdom to the powers. As Paul writes, he was commissioned

to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph 3:9-11)

Recall that the powers are, among other things, the demonic force of destruction behind fallen social structures. Paul is thus telling all who have pledged their life to Christ that we are to individually and collectively live in such a way that the powers are continually reminded of the victorious wisdom of God's self-sacrificial love—the love that conquered them on Calvary and that will ultimately transform the world. With our lives and our words, in other words, we are to manifest the wisdom of Calvary-like love in response to all forms of evil.

The divine wisdom of self-sacrificial love is of course foolishness to the world, as Paul freely acknowledges (1 Cor 1:18). The way of the world—for it is the way of the powers that dominate the world—is the way of the sword, not the cross. Indeed, nothing seems more absurd in our present age than following Christ's example—loving your enemies, refusing to retaliate when another does you wrong or serving those who persecute you. This perhaps explains why Calvary-like attitudes and behaviors are rarely seen, even among those who profess faith in Christ. Yet, according to Paul, a central part of the church's mission is to proclaim that it is the way of self-sacrificial love, not the way of violent force, that in principle defeated the powers and that will ultimately win the day. As disciples of Jesus mimic Jesus' Calvary-like life (Eph 5:1-2), we remind the powers of their defeat on Calvary and manifest once again the foolish-looking secret wisdom of God that is in the process of freeing the world from the death grip of the violent powers.

Love overcomes all. This brings us to a final aspect of the Christus Victor motif, one that was largely absent in the early church's thinking about Christ's conquest over evil, but that has been justifiably receiving a good deal of attention in recent years by advocates of the Christus Victor view.²⁴

²⁴For the following I am significantly indebted to Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers*; J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*; and John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

When we understand that the powers are destructive systemic forces, and when we view Jesus' life in the light of Calvary, it becomes apparent that every aspect of his life was an act of warfare, for every aspect of his life reflects Calvary-like love.

When Jesus broke religious taboos by fellowshiping with tax collectors, prostitutes and other sinners (e.g., Mt 11:19; Mk 2:15; Lk 5:29-30; 15:1; cf. Lk 7:31-37), and when he forsook religious traditions to lovingly heal and feed people on the sabbath (Mt 12:1, 10; Lk 13:10-18; 14:1-5; Jn 5:9-10), in the light of Calvary we can understand him to be waging war against the powers and exposing the systemic evil that fuels religious legalism and oppression. He was conquering evil with love while giving his followers an example to follow. This is what the reign of God looks like, and therefore this is what confronting the destructive powers looks like.

When Jesus boldly crossed racial lines, fellowshiping and speaking highly of Samaritans and Gentiles (e.g., Mt 8:5-10; 15:22-28; Lk 10:30-37; 17:11-16; Jn 4), and when he crossed other social barriers—fellowshipping with and touching lepers, for example (Mt 8:1-3)—he was exposing and resisting the evil of the powers that fuel racism and social marginalization. He was conquering evil with love while giving his followers the example they are to follow. This is what the reign of God looks like, and therefore this is what resisting the reign of the destructive powers looks like.

So too when in the midst of an extremely patriarchal culture Jesus treated women with remarkable dignity and respect (Mt 26:6-10; Lk 7:37-50; 8:1-32; 10:38-40; 13:11-18; Jn 4:7-29; 8:3-10; 11:5; 12:1-7), in the light of Calvary we must understand him to be battling and exposing the powers that fuel sexism. He was conquering evil with love and giving his followers the model they are to follow. This is what the reign of God looks like, and therefore this is what confronting the reign of the destructive powers looks like.

And when Jesus expressed mercy to people who knew they deserved judgment and whom the culture stipulated should be judged (Mk 2:15; Lk 5:29-30; 7:47-48; 19:1-10; Jn 8:3-10), he was resisting and exposing the powers that fuel social and religious cruelty and judgmentalism. This is what the reign of God looks like, and therefore this is what defying the destructive powers looks like.

This ongoing resistance to and exposure of the powers, and those who do their bidding, evoked the wrath of the powers and ultimately led to Jesus' crucifixion. So it is that Jesus' life, death and resurrection cannot be sepa-

rated from each other, not even theoretically. Whereas other models of the atonement tend to isolate the meaning of Jesus' death from other aspects of his life, the Christus Victor model (at least as I'm presently fleshing it out) sees every aspect of Christ life—from his incarnation to his resurrection—as being most fundamentally *about one thing*: victoriously manifesting the loving kingdom of God over and against the destructive, oppressive kingdom of Satan.

Every aspect of Christ's life is best understood along these lines. For example, though he by nature enjoyed every divine prerogative, Jesus' love for lost humanity led him to set these prerogatives aside and enter into solidarity with us (Phil 2:6-11). Jesus rightfully owned the entire cosmos, but in loving service to others he put himself in a position where he had no place to lay his head (Mt 8:20). Though he had all power in heaven and earth, John reminds us, he used it to wash the dirty, smelly feet of his disciples—the very ones who would betray, deny and abandon him in a couple of hours (Jn 13:3-5). So too when Peter cut off a guard's ear in self-defense, Jesus lovingly healed the attacker's ear and rebuked Peter (Lk 22:50-51). And when he could have called legions of angels to fight for him, out of love Jesus instead let himself be crucified (Mt 26:53). Everything Jesus was about manifested Calvary-like love and should therefore be seen as acts of war against the destructive powers that seek to keep people from living in God's love.

The central call of every disciple is to imitate *this* life, manifest *this* kingdom, and thereby engage in *this* warfare. We are to purge our lives of every thought, attitude and behavior that is inconsistent with God's character and reign, as defined by Calvary, and we are therefore to manifest, in defiance of the powers, the loving character and reign of God in all we think, feel and do. We are to put off all that is "old" in order to manifest all that is "new." We are to imitate God by living in Calvary-like love (see, e.g., Eph 4:22—5:2). In this way we participate in and further expand the victory Christ accomplished. We become bearers of the kingdom of God and proclaim to the powers the victorious wisdom of the cross.

The Calvary teachings of Jesus. Jesus' incarnation, his countercultural lifestyle as well as his healing and deliverance ministry were about the same thing his death and resurrection were about. So was his teaching ministry. All of it directly or indirectly concerned manifesting the reign of God and vanquishing the reign of the destructive powers.

For example, few things in this demonically oppressed world are as "natural" to humans as resorting to violence to defend or advance our personal, political, religious or national interests. Indeed, this "natural" sentiment is the cornerstone of how things operate in "this present evil age" (Gal 1:4) and the primary reason why human history is largely a history of mindless, diabolical, cyclical carnage. So instinctive is our tendency to resort to violence when we deem it "justified" that most consider it foolish *not* to do so. Yet expressing that "secret wisdom of God" that alone defeats the demonic, violent powers, Jesus expressly forbids his followers to give into this "natural" instinct. Jesus says:

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also. . . . You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. (Mt 5:38-39, 43-45).

We are to love indiscriminately—as the sun shines and the rain falls—without any consideration of the merit of the person we love. This is to be a distinguishing mark of the "children of [the] Father." And it centrally includes expressing Calvary-like love *to our worst enemies*.²⁵

As Wink and others have noted, the word translated "resist" (*anthistēmi*) in Matthew 5:39 does not imply passivity in the face of evil. It rather connotes using a forceful action in response to a similar forceful action.²⁶ Jesus is thus forbidding responding to violent action with similar violent action. Instead followers of Jesus are to respond to their "enemies" in ways that are consistent with loving them and blessing them (cf. Lk 6:28). Feeding our enemy when they're hungry and giving them something to drink when they're thirsty rather than retaliating against them is the only way we can keep from being "overcome by evil" and the only way we can "overcome evil with

²⁵Jesus' harsh words to the Pharisees (e.g., Mt 23) reveal that expressing love is not always flowery, at least not when you're a first-century Jewish prophet trying to protect people from wayward Jewish leaders. Still, Jesus befriended and dined with Pharisees when they permitted (e.g., Lk 7:36), and of course he eventually gave his life for them. I discuss Jesus' loving-yet-confrontational treatment of the Pharisees further in Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

²⁶Wink notes, "Jesus . . . abhors both passivity and violence" (Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* [New York: Doubleday, 1998], p. 111, see also pp. 99-100).

good"—both in ourselves and in our "enemies" (Rom 12:17-21). As Mohandas Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. so wonderfully demonstrated, our Calvary-like response to our enemies exposes the evil of what they are doing, breaks the tit-for-tat cycle of violence that keeps the demonically oppressed world spinning, and lovingly opens up the possibility that our enemy will repent of their ways (cf. 1 Pet 2:23; 3:13-18).²⁷

The point here is that Jesus' countercultural teachings, as much as his countercultural lifestyle and his healing and deliverance ministry, are part and parcel of his work on the cross and his resurrection. Jesus confronted destructive, violent powers with Calvary-like love at every turn. Whereas other models of the atonement tend to isolate the work of the cross from other aspects of Jesus' life, the Christus Victor model highlights a missional unity that interweaves them all. They cannot be separated, even theoretically. Everything Jesus was about centered on manifesting the outrageously loving reign of God over and against the destructive reign of the powers.

What is more, the Christus Victor model weaves together our understanding of what Christ did *for* us with the reality of what Christ is doing *in* us and *through* us. To have faith in Christ inseparably involves living faithful to the kingdom he embodied and manifested in every aspect of his life. It is to trust that the Calvary way of life alone has the power to ultimately conquer the destructive powers that oppress humanity.

The Christus Victor Motif and Other Facets of the Atonement

Though I cannot demonstrate this now, it is my contention that not only can every aspect of Christ's life be understood in the context of the Christus Victor motif, but every aspect of what the New Testament says about Christ's work and about salvation can be best understood in this context as well. Hence I argue that the Christus Victor model is able to encompass the es-

²⁷It is worth noting that the centrality of Christ's teaching on and example of self-sacrificial love, especially toward one's enemies, was largely abandoned, at least at an institutional level, with the advent of "Constantinian Christianity." Once the church acquired worldly power, it revised its task as *conquering* the world in Jesus' name rather than sacrificially serving the world in Jesus' name. I have elsewhere argued that nothing has done—and is yet doing—more harm to the advancement of the kingdom of God than the Constantinian model of Christianity (see Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*). For an insightful discussion of how Constantinian Christianity has undermined the essence of Christian discipleship, see L. Camp, *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003). Some have argued that the Constantinian transformation factored into the eventual demise of the Christus Victor motif. See Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*, pp. 81-92, and J. Denny Weaver, "Atonement for the Non-Constantinian Church," *Modern Theology* 6, no. 4 (1990): 309-11.

sential truth of other atonement models. Indeed it is able to do so while avoiding some of their potential difficulties when they are considered alone.

For example, the Christus Victor model can strongly affirm the essential truth of substitutionary models of the atonement. Jesus indeed died as our substitute, bore our sin and guilt, was sacrificed for our forgiveness, and was punished by the Father in our place (see e.g., Is 53:4-5, 10; Rom 3:23-25; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 2:17; 9:26; 1 Jn 2:2). From a Christus Victor perspective it was the outrageous act of love in entering into complete solidarity with fallen, cursed, oppressed humanity that broke the back of the cosmic evil that held us in slavery. But because it construes Christ's substitutionary role in organic, warfare terms rather than primarily in legal terms, the Christus Victor model can potentially affirm Christ's substitutionary work without embracing some of the more problematic aspects of the penal substitutionary theory. For example, the Christus Victor model need not hold that our individual sins, guilt and deserved punishment were somehow legally transferred onto Jesus, that Jesus literally experienced the Father's wrath or that the Father *needed* to punish his Son in order to be able to forgive us. The cross reconciles the world to God, not God to the world (2 Cor 5:19).

In the Christus Victor view, we might rather hold that Jesus died as our substitute and bore our sin and guilt by voluntarily experiencing the full force of the rebel kingdom we have allowed to reign on the earth. As the new Adam—our new representative, the originator of a new humanity (Eph 2:14-15)—Jesus stood in our place, bearing the full consequences of our sin. This very act of self-sacrificial love, anticipated in everything Jesus was about, exposed and disempowered the evil of the destructive powers, erased the condemnation of the law that stood against us, and freed us to receive the life-giving Holy Spirit who now draws us into the triune fellowship and empowers us to walk in right relatedness with God and one another.

What is more, in the Christus Victor view, we might hold that Jesus was afflicted by the Father not in the sense that the Father's rage burned directly toward his Son—as though the eternal love between the Father and the Son could be suspended—but in the sense that for a greater good God surrendered his Son over to evil agents to have their way with him (Rom 8:32). This is how God's wrath was usually expressed toward Israel in the Old Testament (e.g., Judg 2:11-19; Is 10:5-6). It's just that with Jesus the greater good was not to teach Jesus obedience, as it usually was with Israel in the Old

Testament. Instead, God the Son bore the Father's wrath, expressed through the destructive powers, for the greater good of demonstrating God's righteousness against the powers and sin (Rom 3:25) while defeating the powers and setting humans free from their oppression.²⁸

So too the Christus Victor model can wholeheartedly affirm that Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many, but without supposing that Jesus literally had to in some sense buy off either God or the devil (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45; cf. 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb 9:15). The word *ransom* simply means "the price of release" and was most commonly used when purchasing slaves from the slave market.²⁹ Hence the Christus Victor model can simply take this to mean that Christ did whatever it took to release us from slavery to the powers, and this he did by becoming incarnate, living an outrageously loving life in defiance of the powers, freeing people from the oppression of the devil through healings and exorcisms, teaching the way of self-sacrificial love, and most definitively by his sacrificial death and victorious resurrection. He "paid the price" needed to bring us and the whole of creation into God's salvation.

Something similar could be said about other facets of Christ's work and thus of other theories about the atonement. For example, the Christus Victor model can completely affirm various versions of the recapitulation model of the atonement. It simply adds that it was as a decisive act of war against the powers and for the sake of the enslaved creation and humanity that Jesus became the new Adam and reversed what the old Adam had done when he succumbed to the devil's temptation. The loving obedience of the new Adam gives humanity a fresh start; by his obedience the violent powers have been vanquished, the Spirit has been released and we are given a new nature.

So too the Christus Victor model can affirm the healing model of the atonement. In manifesting the reign of God and therefore in vanquishing the devil, Jesus heals us of the disease that is our sin and frees us from all its destructive consequences. In love Jesus absorbs within himself all that is part of the "old" creation, and it is this very love that makes all things new (2 Cor 5:17). Moreover, in the process of defeating the devil through his life

²⁸For an insightful discussion of this understanding of how Jesus bore the Father's wrath, see Finger, *Christian Theology*, pp. 327-30.

²⁹John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 176; and Leon Morris, *The Atonement* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983), pp. 106-31.

and on Calvary, Jesus removed the blinders on our spiritual eyes that had kept us from seeing the true nature of God. Jesus is the "truth" precisely because he unveils the true, loving nature of the Father in contrast to all the ugly, untrustworthy and demonically polluted ideas about God's nature we're inclined to have in our state of bondage. This too is part of how God reconciles us to himself and further heals us from our sin bondage. As we behold the beautiful revelation of God in Christ—dying on Calvary for those who crucified him—we are healed from our deception-induced sickness and increasingly transformed into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor 3:12–4:6).

Along the same lines, by having his Son absorb within himself the violent terror of the powers for the sake of our sin, God demonstrates his righteous stance against all sin (Rom 3:25), as the moral government model of the atonement stresses. At the same time, in overcoming evil with good on Calvary, Jesus gives us a beautiful (and difficult) example to follow, and in freeing us from the powers that cut us off from God's life, he empowers us to actually follow this example and participate in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). The Christus Victor model can thus embrace fundamental aspects of exemplar and apotheosis models of the atonement.

Sketchy as this overview has necessarily been, I hope it is enough to at least demonstrate the possibility that the distinctive truth of each model of the atonement can be encompassed in a single, coherent framework. And remember, this framework is the one that dominated the church for the first millennium of its existence. If I am correct, just as all facets of Christ's life are ultimately about one thing, so all models of the atonement can be understood as distinctive aspects of one thing: overcoming evil with good. Christ came to overthrow the powers that hold us in bondage by revealing and establishing in the earth the perfect love of the triune God. In short, he came to manifest and establish the reign of God and therefore to vanquish the reign of the violent, destructive, rebellious powers.

Yes, Jesus died in our place, brought about our forgiveness, heals us, shows us the just consequences of sin, recapitulates our humanity and undoes what Adam did, opens the way for us to become participants in the divine nature, provides an example for us to follow and motivates us to follow it by revealing God's love. But, I submit, all these marvelous aspects of Christ's work can be understood, and are best understood, as distinctive aspects of the "rich variety" of God's "secret and hidden" wisdom by which he overcame evil with good and calls us to do the same.

Conclusion

I conclude this chapter by summarizing eight reasons why I believe the Christus Victor model of the atonement should be considered more foundational to our thinking about Jesus than other atonement models.

1. The Christus Victor model is the only model that does full justice to the centrality of the motif of Christ's victory over Satan in the New Testament.
2. The Christus Victor model was, in various forms, the dominant model for the first millennium of church history.
3. Whereas other models make little or no connection between Christ's life, death and resurrection on the one hand, and the warfare motif that runs throughout Scripture on the other, the Christus Victor model expresses this connection and puts it on center stage.
4. Whereas other models tend to isolate the meaning of Christ's death from his lifestyle, his healing and deliverance ministry, his teachings and even (in some cases) his resurrection, the Christus Victor model reveals the profound interconnectedness of everything Christ was about. All these things are ultimately *about one thing*: establishing the reign of God by vanquishing the reign of Satan and the powers through the power of self-sacrificial love.
5. Only the Christus Victor model does full justice to the apocalyptic context of Jesus' life and the kingdom revolution he started, a consideration that should, in my estimation, carry a good bit of exegetical weight.
6. Other models of the atonement say little or nothing about the cosmic significance of Christ's work—as though the only problem in creation was that humans sin! The Christus Victor model captures the interconnectedness of humans and the broader creation and shows how the cosmic and soteriological aspects of Christ's work are really two aspects of one reality. For this reason the Christus Victor motif best elucidates how Christ's work restores humans to our originally intended place of dominion on the earth, a point that is central to the story line of the Bible (Gen 1:26-28; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 5:10).

Along these same lines, while I cannot make the case presently, I should at least mention that the cosmic focus of the Christus Victor model arguably leads to advantages in working out a plausible theodicy. Because of their more anthropocentric focus, no other model of the atonement as adequately expresses the truth that the problem of evil God con-

fronted on the cross involved the whole of creation (Rom 8:18-23). Hence no other model as effectively articulates how Christ's work on the cross (let alone how every facet of Christ's life) rectified this cosmic problem of evil.³⁰

7. The Christus Victor model is arguably able to encompass within a single coherent framework the elements of truth expressed in other models of the atonement, but so far as I can see, the converse is not true. Not only this but the Christus Victor model is arguably able to embrace these truths while avoiding some of the difficulties that are found in the other models when considered alone.
8. One final consideration deserves more extensive comment. Namely, I believe there are a number of practical advantages to viewing the whole of Christ's life as manifesting the Christus Victor motif, especially for those of us who are considering this model from within the current situation of the church in Western culture.

For example, in the Christus Victor model what Christ does *for* us cannot be separated, even theoretically, from what Christ does *in* us and *through* us. There is, therefore, no temptation to think about Christ's work on the cross as a "legal fiction." Related to this, there is no temptation to even theoretically divorce justification from sanctification.³¹ Rather, in the Christus Victor model we either participate in Christ's cosmic victory over the powers or we don't. Which is to say, we either participate in the ever-expanding reign of God, confronting at every turn the reign of the destructive powers, or we don't. Stated otherwise, what it means to experience "salvation" is that we participate in the cosmic liberation Christ won through his incarnation, life, ministry, death and resurrection. Hence, to have faith in what Christ *did* is to walk faithful to what Christ *is doing*.

Of course, we do so imperfectly. As the kingdom takes hold in our lives, we are gradually being transformed from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:17-18). But with the Christus Victor model there's no temptation for people to mistakenly suppose they are participating in the kingdom when there's no evidence of the kingdom in their life. There is no "legal fiction" version of freedom from the powers and Calvary-like love.

³⁰See Boyd, *God at War*, chap. 8.

³¹On the inseparability of justification and sanctification in the Christus Victor model of the atonement, see William M. Greathouse, "Sanctification and the Christus Victor Motif in Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Spring 1972): 47-58.

Given the multitude of people, especially in Western culture, who seem to buy into some version of the "legal fiction" view of Christ's work and who therefore profess faith in Christ without any significant effect on their life, this advantage of the Christus Victor model strikes me as carrying significant weight.

A related practical advantage of the Christus Victor model for the Western Church is that, in sharp contrast to the hyperindividualistic outlook of most Westerners, the Christus Victor model puts on center stage the easily overlooked demonic dimension of all fallen social structures. By calling on disciples to join Christ's rebellion against and victory over the ever-present powers, the Christus Victor perspective inspires disciples to live countercultural lives that aggressively resist the demonically seductive pull of nationalism, patriotism, culturally endorsed violence, greed, racism and a host of other structural evils that are part of the spiritually polluted air we all breathe.³²

More specifically, the Christus Victor model motivates believers to take seriously the revelation that the devil, though in principle defeated on Calvary, is yet the "god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4) and still has power over the whole world (1 Jn 5:19), including all the nations of the world (Lk 4:5-6). It thereby helps disciples guard against all forms of nationalistic idolatry while motivating them toward radical, nonviolent, Jesus-like social action. Given the tragic extent to which Western Christianity today accepts and often even Christianizes demonic aspects of Western culture, the advantage of a model of the atonement that centralizes the call for disciples to identify and defy the powers is of considerable importance. Most significantly, given the extent to which American Christianity in particular tends to accept and even Christianize nationalistic interests and the use of violence to advance or protect these interests, and given how dangerous this mindset is in our present world situation, and how damaging this nationalistic association is to global Christian missions, the advantage of a model of the atonement that centralizes our call to be ambassadors

³²For an excellent exposition, see L. Camp, *Mere Discipleship*. Because of this emphasis on the Christus Victor model, a number of black, liberation and feminist theologians have been making explicit or implicit use of Christus Victor themes (though often in a demythologized form). See e.g., James H. Cone, *The God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997); Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*; and Thelma Megill-Cobbler, "A Feminist Rethinking of Punishment Imagery in Atonement," *Dialog* 35, no. 1 (1996): 14-20. For a helpful overview and constructive proposal, see Weaver, *Nonviolent Atonement*.

of a kingdom *that is not of this world* (Jn 18:36) and that centralizes our call to resist the powers by imitating Christ's way of nonviolence and self-sacrificial love can hardly be overestimated.³³

As Christ established the kingdom of God by the way his life, ministry, teachings and death contrasted with the power-dominated, violence-oriented kingdom of the world, so his followers are called to advance the kingdom by living lives that sharply contrast with the kingdom of the world. Just as it was with Christ, our witness is centered on this contrast—this persistent defiance of the powers, this refusal to conform to "the pattern of this world" (Rom 12:2 NIV), this obstinate commitment to walk in Calvary-like love, regardless of the practical consequences. Instead of trusting the power of worldly force, followers of Jesus are called to trust the "foolish" power of the cross and thereby proclaim its wisdom to the gods of this age (Eph 3:10). Following the example of our Captain, we are to always overcome evil with good, trusting that, however ineffective it looks in a Good Friday world, when Easter morning for the cosmos comes, it will be goodness that will have won the day—and the entire cosmos.

The Christus Victor motif is the one model of the atonement that makes the call to resist the powers and imitate Christ in these ways the centerpiece of what it means to follow Christ. And given how little the Western church looks like Jesus, and, conversely, given how much the Western church looks like little more than a religious version of Western culture itself, embracing this model of the atonement is perhaps not only advantageous; in the West, at least, it is arguably a kingdom necessity.

³³For a fuller discussion of the harm of nationalistic and patriotic idolatry and the centrality of the kingdom call to confront them, see Boyd, *Myth of a Christian Nation*.