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The Anastatic Theory of Atonement

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Abstract: I propose and defend a model of the atonement, called "anastatic" because of the central role played by Christ's resurrection. According to this model, union with Christ is achieved by means of expanding the divine act of resurrection to incorporate sinners, thereby granting them access to a new life free from sin. I provide a biblical defense and a Thomistic explication of the model, and close by considering how it might relate to other atonement models within a broader theory of the atonement.

Keywords: Atonement, Resurrection, Act Expansion, Union with Christ

Introduction

From early on in Christian thought, theologians and philosophers have proposed various models of the atonement, and new ones continue to be developed even today. Understandably, many of these models have taken as their starting point Christ's death on the cross, while noticeably less attention has been given to his resurrection. The overarching argument of this paper is that assigning a primary causal role to Christ's resurrection provides a fruitful path forward for understanding the atonement.

In order to show this, this paper develops an "anastatic" model of the atonement (*anastasis* being the Greek word for resurrection). As with any successful model, the aim is to give an account of the nature and mechanism of atonement, which in turn requires an account of the problem of sin to which atonement is the solution. At its core, the anastatic model is a participatory model explicated in terms of a phenomenon I call "act expansion," which enables us to understand the mysterious work of union with Christ in terms of something for which we can provide everyday examples.

In outline, the model holds (1) that our sin alienates us from God, not only morally *but also ontologically and relationally*, because of the fundamental incompatibility between holiness and sin. In order to overcome this, (2) Christ became incarnate as a human being and willingly died for us, thereby taking on the ultimate result of such alienation before rising from the dead. Christ's resurrection consisted in him being raised into a new glorified life, rather than

his original earthly life, by having his divine nature "poured into" his humanity through his person. (3) Since this new glorified life obtains in Christ's human nature, it can be extended to incorporate other humans as well, achieved partially by means of the Holy Spirit indwelling us in the present, and completely by means of him resurrecting us like Christ in the future.

As I unpack the exegetical and philosophical details of this proposal, I hope to show that the resulting model is one which allows for a natural reading of the variety of biblical motifs used for atonement, as well as connect it organically to other central Christian doctrines such as the incarnation and the Trinity. After discussing the three tenets of the model just enumerated, I offer clarifications in order to allay some concerns, before proposing how this model might work together with others within a broader theory of the atonement.

1. The Problem of Sin

At bottom, "a model of the atonement is a model of God's way of dealing with sin." (Bayne and Restall 2009) Before we can understand God's solution, then, we must first understand the problem of sin. Bayne and Restall proceed to offer a taxonomy of models of sin. According to *deontic* models, sin is a failure to fulfill our moral obligations, resulting in a moral debt before God for which he requires some sort of recompense. For example, God's justice requires that he punish our guilt (penal substitutionary theory), or his honor requires that we make satisfaction in response to defrauding him of it (Anselm's satisfaction theory). According to *relational* models, sin is the brokenness or alienation in our relationship with God, akin to the estrangement of a child from a parent or animosity between friends. In this case, atonement requires restoring us to the relationship offered by God, perhaps through a great act of divine love which draws us to God (moral influence or exemplarist theory). And according to *ontological* models, sin is a sickness or weakness of our nature which prevents us from living with God or makes death inevitable. For example, that there is an intrinsic inability in humanity to attain the divine life by its own power, that Adam's first sin was a rejection of the divine offer of it, and that Christ was needed to redeem us from this error (Irenaeus's recapitulation theory); or that original sin infects human nature and will lead to death without divine aid (participation theories).

Even if it is not exhaustive, Bayne and Restall's taxonomy is helpful in two important respects. First, it highlights the influence our conception of sin has over the final shape of our theory of atonement. It is, therefore, crucial that we spend sufficient time developing such a conception before proceeding to the mechanics and effects of atonement. Second, it throws into sharp relief an issue that besets any such attempt: the biblical account does not limit itself to any one of these

conceptions of sin, but freely makes use of all of them.[1] Indeed, we find all three in some form at the very outset, in the fall account: deontologically, Adam and Eve are guilty of disobeying God's command (Gen 3:17); relationally, their relationships with God and each other are damaged (3:16); and ontologically, they are consigned to inevitable physical death (3:19, 22). How, then, should we conceive of sin if it includes aspects from all three models? One option is to start with one of these conceptions as primary, and work to expand it to include or explain away the others. Another option, which we shall pursue in this section, is to look for a more holistic account of sin which undergirds the biblical account, of which each of these conceptions captures an important but incomplete part. In particular, I propose that *holiness* is the key to this holistic and biblical conception of sin.

Holiness has not featured prominently (or at all) in atonement theories. This is perhaps due to the tendency to reduce it to a personal or ethical notion, or perhaps because it seems too foreign a notion to serve as an intuitive ground for a theory of atonement. Whatever the reason, the noticeable absence of holiness in such theories puts them at odds with the biblical account's own articulation of atonement as a solution to sin. The notion of atonement finds its first detailed treatment in the laws of Leviticus, most noticeably in the sacrificial laws (Lev 1–7) and the regulations on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). And yet Leviticus not only describes this solution, but also articulates more fully the problem it is intended to solve. Let us briefly situate Leviticus within the context of the preceding biblical narrative, starting with the opening chapters of Genesis. Morales eloquently summarizes their primary import:

> The story of the Bible begins with a creation account that sets forth humanity's fellowship with God on earth as the goal of creation. Created in the image and likeness of God, humanity's highest purpose… was to be found in the awe-inspiring prospect of engagement with the uncreated Being who transcends all creation . . . More than this, [God] sanctifies the Sabbath day as time set apart to enjoy fellowship and communion with humanity. (2020, 7)

This summary captures two key features required to understand the problem of sin. First, holiness is in the picture from the beginning, seen in (1) God sanctifying (making holy) the Sabbath day for community with humanity as well

[1] Among others, the deontic conception of sin is operative in passages which portray God as judge (e.g. Gen 18:25; Mic 6:1–2; Is 3:13; Eccl 12:13–14; 2 Cor 5:10; Heb 13:4; 1 Pet 4:5) and lawgiver (e.g. Deut 5:31–33; Lev 18:4–5; Ezk 20:19; Jas 4:11–12), the relational conception is operative in passages which describe God as jealous (e.g. Ex 34:14; Deut 4:24; Zech 8:2) or frame sin as adultery (e.g. Lev 17:7; Ezk 16; Hos 1:2–3), and the ontological conception is operative in passages framing sin as sickness, inability, or weakness (e.g. Deut 29:4,; 30:6; Ezk 36:26; Mark 2:17; Rom 5:6).

as, as we shall see shortly, (2) his transcendence as the creator over everything. The second feature is the creation ideal of God dwelling with humanity, which will be frustrated by sin when, in the fall, humanity is exiled from the divine presence. The specter of exile and desire to return to God's presence undergirds the rest of the Genesis narrative and continues into Exodus, the latter part of which (Ex 25–40) is concerned with the tabernacle as the new place at which God will be accessed (Morales 2015, 49–107). However, in the closing verses of Exodus, what should be a moment of celebration is a cause for concern, since "Moses was *not* able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." (40:35, emphasis added) This crisis, in which even Moses is not able to approach God in the tabernacle, is the motivating context for the book of Leviticus. The regulations contained therein explicate the means by which sin is overcome and humanity lives with the holy God once more, so that after Leviticus Moses is addressed by God *within* the tent of meeting (Nu 1:1).

This literary pattern, of introducing a crisis before explicating and resolving it, appears again within Leviticus itself. The book opens with regulations for offerings (Lev 1–7), which bring atonement (burnt, sin, and guilt offerings) or provide the means of fellowship with God (peace offerings), followed by the institution of the priesthood, who will officiate these offerings for the people (Lev 8–9). At this point, in the face of an apparent solution to the crisis at the closing of Exodus, we are presented with a new crisis: two of the priests, Nadab and Abihu, die while approaching God improperly (Lev 10:1–3). In the wake of this event, God explains that he must be sanctified (upheld as holy) by those who are near him (10:3), and that they "are to distinguish between the holy and the common, the unclean and the clean" (10:10). Now that God has made himself accessible to the people of Israel, they must do everything in their power to avoid bringing uncleanness into contact with his holiness, "lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst" (15:31). This concern for keeping separate the unclean and the holy underlies the entire theology of Leviticus, and provides us with the biblical analysis of the problem of sin which has beset humanity since the fall. Sin makes us unclean, but God's holiness cannot co-exist with uncleanness. Therefore, in order to avoid our own destruction, we must be excluded from his presence. But this is at odds with the purpose of creation, for humanity to live in that holy presence. This impasse is the problem of sin, and atonement is God's solution.

Milgrom (2004, 95) proposes that we understand the fourfold distinction of Lev 10:10 in such a way that a person always belongs to two of the categories simultaneously: either holy or common, and either clean or unclean. In this scheme, commonness is compatible with both cleanness and uncleanness, while holiness is compatible with cleanness but incompatible with uncleanness. The

basic meaning of the Hebrew word for holiness is to be "set apart." God, as the transcendent creator, is set apart from his creation in all its limitations, and is therefore the pinnacle and center of holiness.[2] Within creation, things are made holy by being set apart to God and apart from uncleanness. Thus, the opposition between holiness and uncleanness in some sense brings the fourfold distinction into existence.[3]

Cleanness describes the *condition* of a thing, whereas holiness describes its *status* in relation to God (Morales 2015, 155). Things become unclean in a variety of ways, and it is tempting for modern readers to distinguish between forms of uncleanness which are *moral* in nature from those which are simply *cultic* in nature. However, such a distinction does not seem to inform the laws of Leviticus. Cothey (2005, 143) explains:

> Leviticus does not present a set of cultic requirements, on the one hand, and a set of ethical ones, on the other: rather it recognizes no distinction between these two sorts of command but presents them jointly while ignoring many ethical categories that we usually regard as essential.

One and the same condition of uncleanness applies to people, animals, houses, the tabernacle and altar, and the land. Even when applied to people, it includes obviously non-moral issues such as bodily discharges, leprosy, disfigurement, and touching dead bodies. Furthermore, it is *all* the uncleannesses of the people that require atonement (e.g. 15:31; 16:16), not merely their sins. When we attend to the full expression of uncleanness in Leviticus rather than using a moral-ritual distinction in order to focus on parts of it, we find that the unifying theme is an association with death and disorder. Conversely, then, cleanness is associated with life and order.[4] As with holiness, these notions find their ultimate basis in

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[2] God's being the paradigm of holiness is often expressed in Scripture by reference to his supreme power and goodness, both of which I take to be grounded in his unique role as creator over everything. Sklar (2014, 39–40) provides a brief discussion of holiness in terms of these two attributes, and Feinberg (2006, 339–45) provides a lengthier one.

[3] The holy is also set apart from the common, but in a different sense from the unclean. It is set apart *in opposition* from, or contrary to, the unclean, so that the holy is antithetical to the unclean. On the other hand, it is merely set apart *out* from, or in contradistinction to, the common, so that the holy is merely other than the common. This distinction is necessary for understanding the sense in which the holy is set apart when cleanness and uncleanness are inapplicable, such as the Sabbath and other holy days of Israel (Lev 23). The Sabbath is selected out of the days of the week as special, but not because the other days are in any sense unclean or opposed to God.

[4] Dead bodies make people unclean (Lev 11:24; 21:1; Nu 6:6–12; 19:11–22), while atonement occurs through offerings because their blood is life (Lev 17:11). God's statutes are living-giving (Lev 18:1–5), while disobeying them brings death (Deut 30:15–16) and makes the people and the land unclean by the practices of the other nations (Lev 18:24–30). Leprosy was associated with death, and so was considered unclean (Lev 13–14). Any instances of bleeding, or discharges of

the creation account: creation is framed in terms of God bringing order to the primordial disorder, and bringing life from non-life. This in turn explains the fundamental opposition between holiness and uncleanness: God is holy because he is the transcendent creator who has brought creation into existence with purpose and design, to which uncleanness is the antithesis. God, who is life in himself, gives life and order to his creation, but uncleanness draws his creation away from this, toward death and disorder. Cleanness, by contrast, is the creaturely condition of being aligned with the creator's purpose, and is therefore a precondition for life in his presence.

Looking back at the fall through a Levitical lens, it is not simply that Adam sinned, but that by sinning he introduced uncleanness, a negative force within creation ordered toward death and disorder. Since it is antithetical to life, it is also antithetical to the holy God, thereby damaging our relationship with our creator; since it is antithetical to the created order, it also frustrates our relationships with each other; since it is antithetical to God's purposes for his own creation, it makes us accountable before him; and since it is rooted in a condition we inherit, it is a sickness that needs curing. We see, then, that the Levitical analysis of the problem of sin includes within it all the conceptions of sin discussed above.

This analysis and its categories continue into the New Testament, even if only occasionally in explicit terms (1 Cor 7:14; 2 Cor 7:1; 1 Pet 1:16). Paul notes that Adam brought sin into the world and death through sin (Rom 5:12–21), and later recognizes that this resulted in creation becoming "subjected to futility" and corruption (Rom 8:18–30).[5] Elsewhere he says that death is the final enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor 15:26) and characterizes sin as the *sting* of death (15:56), which is to say the stinger whereby we are infected with death (Campbell 2020, 181–6). In light of the resurrection of Christ, Paul is able to see more clearly how deep

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semen or blood were considered unclean because this involved a loss of life-giving fluids (Lev 15). This same reasoning applies to postpartum lochia (Lev 12), and the "spilling of blood" on the land through murder (Nu 35:33–34). Finally, animals (Lev 11) are considered clean which conform to the "norm" of that animal's realm (sea, air, land, c.f. Gen 1:20–25), at least as understood by the Israelites in their ancient pastoral context. Conversely, "those creatures which in some way transgress the boundaries are unclean" (Wenham 1981), as well as those associated with death in some way, like carrion birds. These boundaries can be transgressed by failing to sufficiently resemble the normative features, as with pigs (11:7), as well as by being mixed or indeterminate in some way, as with swarming things (11:41). For further discussion on this, see Morales (2015, 153–67).

[5] While the negative influence on creation already aligns well with the broader notion of sin outlined thus far, we can further add the suggestion from Kline that the "bondage of corruption" (Rom 8:21) refers to "earth's being subjected to the fate of covering the blood of the innocent and concealing the corpses of the saints." (Kline 1986) If he is correct, then even when Paul takes a wider view of creation he still indexes the problem to death introduced by sin.

this problem goes. Even before sin and death entered the world, our nature must have been open to them in some sense, which he characterizes as our mortality. He explains that as Christ was resurrected so too shall we, and as a result God will give life to our mortal bodies (Rom 8:11) and clothe us with immortality (1 Cor 15:53). So then, Paul not only understands the problem of sin in terms which develop from the Levitical picture, but also conceives of Christ's resurrection as a crucial part of the solution. Having discussed the former, we now turn to the latter.

2. Christ's Death and Resurrection

In order to cleanse us to overcome the problem of sin, Christ bore our sins on the cross by taking on the ultimate consequences of sin.[6] Specifically, Christ bears our sin by being abandoned by God to die on the cross as a (wrongfully) condemned sinner. Christ thereby takes on the culmination of the problem of sin, which is death. According to the anastatic theory, his death alone did not secure atonement for humanity, but was necessary in order that he might rise again from the dead.

In order to appreciate the significance of his resurrection, it would be helpful to compare Christ to others who had risen from the dead before him. Why is it, for instance, that Lazarus is raised from the dead only to die again later, but Paul can say of the risen Christ that death no longer has dominion over him, and that he will never die again (Rom 6:9–10)? A plausible answer is that Lazarus's resurrection consisted in him *returning to the old life* he had before, whereas Christ's resurrection consisted in him being *raised into a new life* unlike the one he had before. Since the life Lazarus had before was subject to sin and death, so too was the life to which he was raised, but not so for Christ's resurrection life. Lazarus's life before and after rising from the dead was mortal, while Christ died with a mortal life and was raised into an immortal one.

Christ has access to this new life owing to his having two natures, so that while dead in his human nature he continues to live in his divine nature. We might describe Christ's resurrection as God "pouring out" the divine life into his dead human nature through his person, resulting in him being raised into a new glorified life rather than a mere revivification of his old earthly life. This glorified life can therefore be thought of as a divine-human hybrid, in the sense that it consists in the participation of human nature in the divine life. The New Testament refers to this life in various ways: immortal (1 Cor 15:53; Rom 8:11),

[6] This need not mean that there was any transferal of sin from us to Christ. The biblical notion of "bearing sin" has a wider meaning than this. It can refer to the taking on of the *consequences* of sin (Lev 20:20), as well as what the priests do in their service at the temple (Lev 10:17).

spiritual (1 Cor 15:45), heavenly (2 Cor 5:2; Eph 2:6), glorious (Phil 3:21), and even divine (2 Pet 1:4). For the sake of clarity in what follows, we choose one of these terms, and refer to it as the *glorified* life in contrast to our current *earthly* life.

The New Testament attests in various ways to the fact that Christ's glorified life—in which we participate for our atonement—is the divine life. Consider three representative examples.

First, the life we have in Christ is not simply a life without sin, but rather a life that derives from a life between the Father and the Son, applied to us by the Holy Spirit. In John's gospel, for instance, Jesus says to his disciples, "Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:19b–20; cf. vv. 23–24; 17:20–23). Here we see that our life is based on Jesus's life with the Father. It is because Jesus is the Son and has this relationship with the Father, that we can be included in it *by being included in him*. Likewise, Paul's understanding of sonship is expressed in terms of us being adopted as children *by virtue of being in Christ*, himself the *unadopted* Son of God. For instance, in Eph 1:3–5 it is through the Son Jesus Christ that we are predestined for adoption as sons ourselves. A fuller exposition of this idea from Paul comes in Rom 6–8. In ch. 6, he explains that we have been united with Christ in his death so that we might also be united with him in his life (6:1–14). Later in chs. 6 and 7, we see that this life is eternal (6:23) and enables us to serve God perfectly (7:4), unlike the life we currently have. We see that we have partial access to this life by the Spirit now while awaiting its completion in our own resurrection (8:9–11), a point which is immediately restated in terms of adoption as children of God (8:12–17) who are awaiting coming glory (8:18–25), at which point we will finally be conformed to the image of God's Son (8:26–30). Looking back at 6:1–14 with this in mind, we may infer that the life into which Jesus was resurrected was the life accessible to him as the true Son of God, and that our adoption as God's children occurs precisely through our union with his new life, poured out into his human nature. In short, we have derivatively what Christ has non-derivatively—we are children of God through *adoption*, while Jesus "is the Son not because of adoption but because of his own ontological relationship with the Father." (Macaskill 2019, 99)

Second, the life to which Jesus gives us access by virtue of his resurrection is not merely a perfected human access to God, but is itself described as divine. Paul says that our life with Jesus is hidden *in God* (Col 3:1). Peter says that he has granted us promises through which we become *partakers of the divine nature* (2 Pet 1:3–4). And it is in the Lord that we all gain access to the Father through the Spirit, whereby we are built into a holy temple, *a dwelling place for God* (Eph 2:18–22). These descriptions go far beyond the earthly conception of humanity, and envisage something very much like the "divine-human hybridization" that we have described above.

Third, as Macaskill (2018, 247) notes, Paul's characterization of the resurrected body as "spiritual" (1 Cor 15:44) indicates its connection to the divine life:

> The fact that glory is linked to the [S/spiritual] character of the resurrection body is noteworthy. In the context of this letter in particular, but quite unsurprisingly in the light of all that we have seen in Paul so far, this adjective has to refer to the relationship of the body to the Holy Spirit. It will be, in the truest sense, a Spiritual body, one fully characterized by the presence of divine life.

Our access to the divine life depends on Christ's access, since we are said to bear his image (1 Cor 15:49). Thus, Christ must have access to the divine life in a non-derivative way, which can only happen through his divine nature.

Having offered biblical warrant for thinking of Christ's resurrection in this way, let us explicate it in Thomistic metaphysical terms. A human being, like all material substances, is a composite of substantial form and prime matter. In general, matter is an indeterminate substratum which serves as the principle of individuation while form makes matter determinate, unifying the resulting substance with others by virtue of their being determinate in the same way. Immaterial substances, such as God and angels, may also be understood in these terms, as forms without matter. The form is that which gives life to living things, in which case we call it the soul. In material things, life is a self-perfective immanent activity, wherein the activity works to perfect (develop, heal, strengthen, etc.) the powers which make it possible as well as the ordering of these powers to the whole (Oderberg 2008). In immaterial beings, the powers and ordering resulting from form are not separated out by matter in the first place, so that their unity—and the life grounded by it—is an intrinsic feature of such beings.

Regarding the incarnation, Aquinas's account can be briefly summarized as follows. Christ assumed a human nature into his person (rational hypostasis), resulting in one suppposit with one subsistence in two natures. Aquinas reasons that in composite beings, and especially those composed of form and matter, the supposit must be really distinct from their nature because the former has various accidental features that the latter does not. In the divine nature, however, no such distinction obtains, so that each divine person is really identical to this nature. Normally, when form and matter are composed so as to constitute a human, a new person thereby comes into existence. In Christ's case, however, the person already exists and simply assumes a human nature, with its form and matter, into himself.[7]

[7] For Aquinas on the nature of the union of the incarnation, as well as how it relates to his account of divine simplicity, see ST III QQ 2–3. For a detailed discussion of how the assumed human nature relates to the divine person, see (Gorman 2017, chapters 3–4).

Consider now the unity that obtains between the divine and human natures in Christ. The divine nature, which is really identical to the divine person, is unified to the human nature as supposit to nature. In his incarnation this unity allows Christ's human and divine natures to remain unmixed and unconfused, but in the resurrection it is what allows the new glorified life to be realized in his human nature. How does this happen? It cannot be that Christ's human soul is changed into something else or that some new essential feature is added to it, lest he cease being human. Nor can it be that the prime matter is in some sense "pre-actualized" before the human soul is composed with it, lest the soul be turned into a quasi-accidental form. The only option available, so far as I can see, is that when raising him from the dead by recomposing his human soul with matter, the former is (1) perfected so as to be in no way open to imperfection and (2) its hold over matter is fastened beyond what it would be naturally. The first effect would have a more noticeable effect on sinners than on the sinless Christ: in us, it would exclude any imperfect habit or desire we have, so that we are always and unchangeably ordered to God and our good; in Christ, the most that we could say is that even the possibility of temptation to sin would be removed. The second effect is concerned not with the way in which the soul is ordered, but with the strength this ordering has over matter. To illustrate the notion of the "fastening" of a form, compare a shape made out of wood and the same shape made out of glass. The former is less brittle and fragile than the latter, even though the same form (shape) is present in both. Likewise, the soul's hold over matter is so fastened that the resulting human nature is no longer open to death or any other limitation that might contravene its full realization. These two effects together provide us with a metaphysical gloss of Paul's statement that, "Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God." (Rom 6:9–10)

Now, we may wonder whether the hypostatic union was *necessary* for this glorified life to obtain. Could God have raised Lazarus into such a life before Christ? It seems to me that such a feat would be impossible in much the same way as creating a human soul without a body is impossible. Even though the soul separates from the body upon death, this does not imply that the soul could have always existed without a body. On the contrary, it is the matter of the body which individuates the common human form to this or that particular soul. Likewise, even though the glorified life may be extended to other humans (as we shall see in the next section), it does not follow that it could have first been instantiated in any human. After all, it is a kind of *life*, and life requires a certain tight-knit unity within itself. In order for God to create this glorified life within Lazarus, the divine power would somehow need to become interconnected with Lazurus's human powers, both perfecting and being perfected by those powers. Such a

theologically problematic conclusion is avoided with Christ, however, because the hypostatic union provides a strong unity within Christ without needing any such interconnection. In Christ, the divine power does not need to become connected with the human powers because it is already united to them via the hypostatic union.

3. Expansion of Christ's Glorified Life

Thus far I have argued that the biblical account of the problem of sin is best understood in terms of succumbing to our fundamental susceptibility to death, resulting in a life apart from the holy God and therefore at odds with the purpose of creation. In Christ's resurrection we see a new kind of life arise, made possible by the hypostatic union and consisting in his human nature participating in his divine life. Unlike our current earthly life, this glorified life is impervious to death, and thereby secures a life with God previously made impossible by the specter of sin. What remains to be explained is how Christ's new life could be applied to others, and thereby achieve atonement for them.

The idea of "applying" an innocent life for the atonement of another is operative in Leviticus itself: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life" (Lev 17:11). Morales (2015) notes important implications this has for our understanding of atonement:

> While the idea of death is certainly present in the ritual immolation of animals, yet the pervasive emphasis throughout the first half of Leviticus upon the blood of animals is to be understood rather as an emphasis upon life. This is especially the case as that life is brought into the divine Presence in the holy of holies in Leviticus 16. (30)
>
> Life ransoms from death, and life wipes away the stain of death. When Israel's uncleanness defiles the tabernacle and its furnishings, therefore, sprinkling, placing or smearing 'life' (blood) upon the horns of the altar of ascension offering, for example, serves to wipe away and obliterate the pollution of death. (131)

Since Christ achieves the fulfillment of this atonement, it is reasonable to suppose that his life should play a similar, albeit elevated, role in his atonement of us.

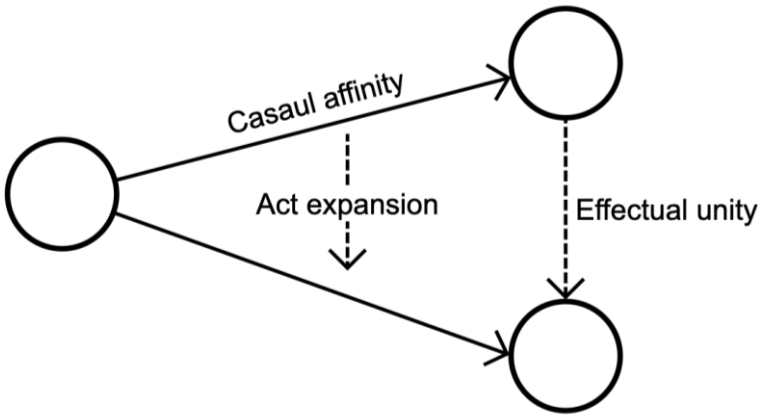
I propose that we understand the application of Christ's life to us in terms of what we might call "act expansion," wherein the causal efficacy of an act is expanded to incorporate secondary patients by virtue of their relation to its primary patient. This notion can be illustrated with a variety of mundane and intuitive examples. First, suppose that Alice's rope breaks while she is climbing, causing her to fall to the bottom of the quarry and injure herself. Bob and Charlie

see this and, with a reinforced rope, Charlie lowers Bob to where Alice is. Charlie begins to pull Bob back up, and this action becomes expanded to incorporate Alice by virtue of Bob holding on to her. Second, consider the scenario where a bouncer cannot let underage children into a local bar (or any event with an age restriction), but can let them in so long as they are accompanied by an adult. In doing so, the bouncer expands the permission from the adult to incorporate the child. And third, suppose that there are two items, A and B, and a light that always points towards A. If we move A near to B, then the illumination of the light is expanded to include B within the total effect.

These examples suggest the following necessary and sufficient conditions of act expansion:

> **Causal Affinity.** The primary patient is uniquely related to the cause such that it alone can be directly caused by it.
> **Effectual Unity.** The secondary patients are unified with the primary patient in such a way that the former can share in the cause's act on the former.

We can see how these two together give us act expansion by representing them in the following diagram:



The act relevant to atonement includes both the initial raising of Christ from death into glorified life as well as the continued sustenance of that life. We can understand how the expansion of this act achieves atonement as follows. In the Levitical system, if we ever brought our uncleanness into God's presence, the consequences of sin would be fully realized in our death. Atonement was a way of becoming clean so that we could have fellowship with God, but this arrangement was severely deficient, since it could only achieve the fellowship at arm's length, with the presence of God veiled behind the curtain in the tabernacle. This is because, strictly speaking, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins," (Heb 10:4) so that a fuller form of atonement

was needed. By means of his incarnation and death, Christ added a missing step to the Levitical picture: before humanity could truly move from death to life with God, God needed to move from life to death with humanity. Having fully crossed the holiness-death divide, then, the act of raising him from the dead is also the act of utterly undoing death and bringing the human into contact with God in the fullest possible way. Christ was, as it were, lowered down into death so that his being raised back up to God might be expanded to include others, who otherwise would be caught up in death without hope.

Effectual unity is achieved first and foremost by Christ's being dead, since it is precisely us being caught up in death through sin which excludes us from life with God. With the relevant "contact" established between the divine life and human death, the resurrection can now be expanded to include other humans caught up in death, thereby bringing them from death to life with God and overcoming the problem of sin. Arguably, however, death alone is not sufficient to establish effectual unity, since death is a privation whereas unity plausibly requires some positive ontological ground. What this ground could be will depend on the ontological status of the human in death. On the Thomistic account, only the rational faculties of intellect and will persist apart from the body in death. Unity with Christ must therefore consist in the knowledge and desire of God through Christ, which is plausibly what Paul describes as "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6).[8] Such unity of intellect and will with Christ would also be necessary in light of how we have characterized the glorified life, in terms of perfecting and fastening. We said that the first of these involves perfectly ordering the person raised to God, which would do great violence to their will if it were not sufficiently ordered to God already. Indeed, if the person was not even imperfectly ordered toward God as the ultimate good, then how could the perfection involved in the glorified life do anything but destroy them? Thus, we can safely assume that effectual unity with Christ is achieved by (1) his sharing in human death and (2) our being ordered toward God so that the perfection of glorified life is recognizable as a perfection of what remains of us in death, our intellect and will.

Causal affinity, we have said, is made possible by Christ's person, or hypostasis. Does this imply, then, that just as the resurrection act is expanded to include others so too Christ's *person* is somehow expanded to include them? I doubt that it is possible to articulate an orthodox account of two persons in each atoned human, let alone one which has any historical precedent in Christian theology. If such an account could be given then it would be consistent with what

[8] For Aquinas on the role of intellect and will in the act of faith, see ST II-II Q2. For a detailed discussion of this, including in relation to questions about epistemological and theological justification, see (Stump 2003, chapter 12).

I have said, but not required by it. Arguably, the New Testament teaches that Christ is passive in the resurrection, and that it is the Father through the Holy Spirit who raised him (Gaffin 1987, 62–74). We need not assume, then, that Christ himself is the agent of resurrection and that by so acting he becomes hypostatically united to each patient's human nature. Rather, both Christ and the believer are raised into glorified life by someone other than themselves—first Christ because of his causal affinity to the Father and Spirit through their shared divine nature, and then believers because of our effectual unity with him in death.

4. Some Clarifications

Thus far I have discussed the central theses of the anastatic model of the atonement. With this in hand, we are now in a position to clarify some of the details and address some concerns that the proposal might engender.

It is noteworthy that unlike many other models, the anastatic model does not see Christ's death, but his resurrection, as causally efficacious in the atonement. How do we reconcile this fact with the New Testament emphasis on Christ's death as our atoning sacrifice?[9] There are two things to be said in response.

First, although Christ's death does not cause the atonement, it is nevertheless the act which makes the resurrection efficacious to do so. Had Christ been incarnated into his glorified life from the start, its expansion would simply be a new way of God making himself present to humans, bringing the divine life into contact with our own. But this would no more *atone* us than any previous instance of God making his holiness present to humanity—on the contrary, the problem of sin implies that it would destroy us. Such destruction is inevitable whenever the divine life comes into contact with sinful human life, since the former is infinite life in itself while the latter is finite and subject to death and disorder. What is needed is for our life to be brought to nothing, so that a new one might be put in its place. And if it is the divine life which is to be put in its place, then effectual unity requires that Christ die so that it could be expanded to us. It is precisely because Christ is raised *from the dead* that incorporation into this act results in our atonement, and it goes without saying that Christ could not be raised from the dead without first dying.

Second, his death remains central to Christ's atoning work because it is the point of greatest sacrifice and obedience (e.g. Phil 2:5–8), and therefore that in virtue of which he is most prominently praised as well as that which most clearly

[9] On the biblical data concerning Christ's death (and death more generally) in relation to atonement, see the discussions by Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach (2007, 33–148), as well as by Craig (2020, 13–88).

characterizes his atoning work. Consider the case of a wife praising her husband for giving up his career to take care of their children. Here it is his sacrifice that is in focus, despite the fact that it is not the cause of his taking care of their children but a necessary step towards it. Similarly, we praise Christ because he died for our atonement, not because his death secures atonement in itself, but because it was the great sacrifice necessary in order to fully achieve it.

A second concern we might have about the anastatic model is that it seems to imply that we only gain access to the atonement at our future resurrection. What are we to make, then, of the New Testament's talk of our *present* reconciliation with God? In fact, by making eschatology primary we are correcting what Richard Gaffin (2002, 27) calls a "tendency in much historical Christian thinking to de-eschatologise the gospel and its implications, especially where the work of the Holy Spirit is concerned." He continues:

> The church ought constantly to make clear in its proclamation and teaching that, in the NT, "eternal life" is eschatological life, specifically resurrection life. It is "eternal", not because it is above or beyond history—"timeless" in some ahistorical sense—but because it has been revealed, in Christ, at the end of history and, by the power of the Spirit, comes to us out of that consummation.[10]

Our present state in Christ is partial and anticipatory of the fulfillment that will be realized in us at the eschaton. According to Paul, believers await adoption as children of God, which occurs at our future resurrection (Rom 8:23), and yet he can say that we have already received the Spirit of adoption (8:15), because if we are led by the Spirit of God then we are children of God (8:14). Adoption, then, occurs through the Spirit's animation of us in accordance with Christ's glorified life, but this is realized to varying degrees now and later. At present, the Spirit animates us in the sense of motivating and guiding the way we live, so that he can be said to lead us (Rom 8:14), to be written on our hearts (2 Cor 3:3; cf. Ezk 36:26–27), to strengthen us in our inner being (Eph 3:16), and so on. In the future, this life will be fully realized in us when the Spirit not only animates us by guiding us but by constituting our very life itself. This already/not-yet schema for thinking about adoption can be applied to many aspects of our relationship with God. Regarding justification, as an example, Macaskill (2018, 242) notes:

> . . . it is valid to closely identify the concepts of adoption and justification in Paul's theology. Both have legal and declarative aspects that in key regards define them as concepts and that describe or delineate those who have been united to Christ. This legal dimension, though, merely gives definition to a relational truth of

[10] Fee (1996, 49–61) offers a related discussion, which further develops the relationship between the eschaton and the present.

> divine presence which is unavoidably transformative and is realized both vertically and horizontally in the communion with God and his people.

Justification is primarily an eschatological reality insofar as it corresponds to a declaration of innocence at the final judgment. Such a declaration is guaranteed to those who are resurrected into the sinless glorified life made possible by Christ, which is to say those adopted as children of God (Rom 8:24, 30). Thus, just as the Spirit's animation of believers signifies their legal standing as adopted children in anticipation of their future resurrection, so too does it signify their present justification in anticipation of their future justification.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that the "already" and the "not yet" are two otherwise disconnected events, connected only by a common name. Such a move would be ad hoc and impossible to justify biblically. Rather, they are organically connected stages of a single process that comes to full realization at the eschaton. In the case of atonement, the Holy Spirit's present work in believers is a taste of the glorified life believers will one day share, as well as preparation for that life, ordering our intellect and will toward God so that we might be in effectual unity with Christ when we die.

A third and final concern has to do with the resurrection of the damned. Following biblical precedent, the anastatic model concerns itself primarily with the resurrection of those in Christ, and has comparatively little to say on the nature or mechanism of the resurrection of the damned. Nevertheless, various biblical passages speak about the future bodily resurrection of the damned (Dan 12:2; John 5:28–29; Acts 24:14–15; Rev 20:13), and so we are right to wonder how this might fit into the anastatic picture. Part of the difficulty in answering this is the limited biblical data on the matter. It is not even clear, for instance, whether the damned have their bodies forever, or only for the final judgment after which point they lose their bodies again as part of a second death (Rev 20:14–15). What does seem clear is that (1) the state of the resurrected damned is repeatedly described as antithetical to that of the saved, with terms such as "contempt" (Dan 12:2) and "ruin" (Matt 10:28) rather than "glory" (1 Cor 15:43) and "redeemed" (Rom 8:23), and (2) that nowhere is it suggested that Christ's work made the resurrection of the damned possible like it did the resurrection of the saved. Thus, it is perfectly acceptable to focus on the latter and leave the former to a separate investigation wherein additional theological points, unrelated to the atonement, may be brought forward.

5. Anastatic Penal Substitution

Recent studies have proposed different ways in which various *models* of the atonement can be combined into an overarching *theory*. William Lane Craig (2020,

4) has suggested, for instance, that the different models can be thought of as different facets of the same jewel, with penal substitution serving as the central facet. Michael Bird (2013, 450, 466–75) suggests that the *Christus Victor* is an "integrative motif" rather than a model distinct from the others, which can help us to understand how they all fit together. And Joshua McNall (2019, 19–21) prefers to construe the relationship between the various models as a "mosaic," wherein none take a primary role but nor do they together form a disconnected plurality.

Now, we noted that any model of the atonement must start with an account of the problem of sin, for we cannot understand a solution if we do not understand the problem it is meant to solve. Furthermore, the conception of sin operative in the anastatic model (which I argued is also the biblical conception) is broad enough so as to include the aspects of sin which are the focus of various other atonement models—deontic, relational, and ontological. This suggests, then, that just as the anastatic conception of sin "contains" these other conceptions, so too does the anastatic model of atonement "contain" these other models. Reflecting on the former, we can see that X "contains" Y and Z, in the relevant sense, if Y and Z can be formulated in terms of X such that they each are seen to focus on a non-exhaustive collection of aspects or implications of X. So, an anastatic *theory* of the atonement would be one in which we formulate a collection of other models in terms of the anastatic model, so that the latter thereby contains the former. Such a formulation would provide a wider perspective on each model, and in doing so perhaps provide new avenues of research, avoid common objections, or overcome weaknesses in conventional formulations. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to develop this line of thought in much detail, in the space that remains let me illustrate how this might work with a model popular in my own tradition, namely penal substitution.

A penal substitutionary model is one which holds (1) that Christ suffered the punishment for sin (penal), and (2) that Christ suffered this in our place (substitutionary). As has been noted by others, these two conditions are compatible with Christ not actually being punished by God (Craig 2018; 2020, 147–50). Rather, all that is needed is that Christ suffer what *would have* been our punishment had we suffered it. According to the anastatic model, Christ suffers the ultimate consequence of sin, namely alienation from God to death. Since his suffering prevents us from needing to, it follows that such suffering is substitutionary. But is alienation from God to death *punishment*, or simply a *necessary consequence* of the incompatibility between holiness and uncleanness? The worry, here, is that whatever punishment is, it must consist in the willful imposition of something by God, which is *prima facie* at odds with it being a necessary consequence. Nevertheless, necessity need not preclude divine volition: we have seen that God's holiness is tied to his identity as the

transcendent creator who has brought creation into existence with purpose and design, to which sin (uncleanness) is the antithesis. God punishes sin when, by and through his holiness, he removes sin's influence and presence from his creation. He currently forestalls such punishment precisely by excluding us from the fullness of his presence, lest we be destroyed by it. And it is because Christ suffered in our stead that we might avoid such punishment in the future. Thus, his suffering is substitutionary as well as penal.

An anastatic formulation allows us to affirm penal substitution while sidestepping two common objections. The first is that Christ's suffering in our place seems to be morally dubious, since he is innocent and we go unpunished because of it. Penal substitutionary theorists have responded by providing moral or legal justifications, such as the imputation of our sin to Christ, vicarious liability, or the practice of legal fictions (Craig 2020, ch. 10). On an anastatic formulation, however, Christ's suffering is justified independently of his innocence or our guilt: it is a necessary condition for his glorified life to be expanded to us, an expansion which overcomes the corruption wrought by sin, thereby removing the need for punishment. The second objection is that Christ's suffering of a few hours seems insufficient to substitute for what would have been an infinite duration for us. Typically, proponents will respond that Christ's dignity or the intensity of his suffering is infinite whereas for us it would be finite, so that a finite duration of the former can account for an infinite duration of the latter (Craig 2020, 209–11; Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach 2007, 265–7; Turretin 1992–1997, 14.11.xxx). But while the premises of this response are surely true, it is by no means clear whether the accounting practices used to draw the conclusion are legitimate. For one thing, the value of persons is *qualitative* while the duration of punishment is *quantitative*, and so it would seem to be a category error to use the difference in one to account for the difference in the other. On an anastatic formulation, our punishment proceeds as long as we are bound to a life incapable of being in God's presence, which is indefinite for those who do not embrace the glorified life offered through Christ.[11] The *duration* of Christ's suffering is irrelevant—what is important is that he opened up the glorified life as something into which we can be incorporated.

The anastatic formulation of penal substitution also overcomes a weakness of typical formulations, in that it is better able to recognize the role of the resurrection in the atonement. Penal substitutionary theorists have (quite correctly) placed great importance upon Christ's death, but have not been able to give the appropriate weight to the resurrection. Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach (2007,

[11] The infinite duration of punishment, itself not a requirement of the anastatic theory, follows from this together with a supposition either that the reprobate remain constant in their rejection of God, or that the offer of glorified life is rescinded at the eschaton.

212–14), for instance, relegate the resurrection to the epistemological role of vindicating Jesus's innocence. Craig (2020, 206) goes further by construing Christ's resurrection as a necessary consequence of Christ's defeat of death, and yet this at most makes the resurrection a correlated effect of the atonement rather than part of its cause. Yet, a causal understanding is surely what lies behind Paul's statement that Christ "was delivered up for our trespasses and *raised for our justification*" (Rom 4:25, emphasis added).[12]

So, then, focusing on the penal substitutionary aspects of the anastatic model enables us to understand it in terms of how it enables God's justice to be met, as well as where a notion like punishment fits into the picture. An anastatic formulation of penal substitution helps us to affirm the latter while avoiding common objections and shortcomings.

6. Conclusion

An anastatic approach to the atonement is one which assigns a primary causal role to Christ's resurrection. I have argued that a promising model can be developed following such an approach, the central tenets of which can be summarized as follows:

1. Sin draws us away from life and order toward death and disorder, putting us at odds with the holy creator God and frustrating his purposes for creation, deontologically, relationally, and ontologically.
2. Through Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection, God brought into existence a new kind of life, which consists in the divine life being poured into human nature, and which unlike our old life is not susceptible to sin.
3. Through our unity with Christ in death, the act whereby God sustains this new life in Christ can be expanded to include us through the Holy Spirit, thereby removing any influence of sin over us and fully realizing the divine purposes for creation.

The resulting model is one which has a number of benefits: it is well grounded in biblical theology; it connects the atonement naturally to other important Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, incarnation, and union with Christ; and it explains the atonement in terms of the intuitive notion of act expansion rather than any speculative or ad hoc explanatory principle. Furthermore, because it embraces the full scope of the biblical conception of sin, I have suggested that this

[12] As another example, Phil 3:20–21 explains that Christ will raise us "by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." This power was earlier in this same letter framed in terms of Christ's resurrection and ascension (Phil 2:9–11).

model need not be seen as a strict competitor to other popular models, but can be viewed as the connective piece in a broader theory of atonement.

The foregoing suggests a few avenues of future research. First, whether the notion of act expansion could be useful for research projects beyond the atonement, particularly those focused on the union with Christ in the New Testament.[13] Second, whether the anastatic model is tied to the Thomistic metaphysics used above, or whether it can be formulated within other metaphysical frameworks. Third, the construction of anastatic formulations of other atonement models, as I have done with penal substitution. And finally, whether the unification achieved by such an approach extends also to the exegetical arguments made for the respective models, thereby allowing systematic theology to more deeply inform biblical theology.

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[13] Two recent examples of such research, which proved helpful in the research for this paper, are by Macaskill (2018) and Campbell (2012).

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