

An unlikely alliance:

Augustine and feminist-inspired reappraisals of the atonement

Jonathan D. Teubner

Draft for Analytic Theology SMU Meeting

11-15 August 2014

Feminist theologies of the atonement have characteristically taken for granted the modern (post-Ritschlian) disjunction between atonement ‘models’ and then often rejected the sacrificial and penal as somehow mandating human violence by having God implicated in it.¹ But this leaves an important *aporia*: what significance does the death of Christ hold? Is it simply an unfortunate accident wrought by sinners rather than intended by God in the first place? Kathryn Tanner is no exception to this feminist trend.² Tanner goes so far to say, ‘Calling Jesus’ death a sacrifice might be indeed a way of drawing attention to something taking place on the cross other than death’.³ There is, in fact, some strange equivocation in her position regarding sacrifice, for earlier in the same article Tanner suggests that one of the virtues of feminist accounts is that they contextualise Christ’s death.⁴ A repression of the issue of death thus runs through her account. Returning to Augustine may be particularly revealing in relation to some feminist concerns, because he himself abhors violence and wishes to purify the pagan notion of sacrifice from any mandated public violence and horror. At the same time, however, he provides a wonderfully rich argument for why the death of Christ is a crucial passage through to the atoning effects of his incarnation, namely, because it is *purifying* and enables the unifying of our wills with Christ’s. En route to life, the contemplative and participatory life does indeed involve death. This particular argument has been surprisingly neglected, perhaps because – like virtually all great biblical and patristic accounts of the atonement it mixes many ‘models’ – and therein lies some of its power. It is, however, peculiarly important for a feminist-conscious atonement theology, as Augustine’s account is resistance to violence and focusing on justice.

In this paper I shall take up the question of the significance of the death of Jesus in Augustine’s *De trinitate* (*trin.*) 4 and 13 in response to a challenge that I perceive Tanner laying down for atonement theories, namely, why is the *death* of Christ significant? In particular, I think Augustine’s emphasis on the unity of will within his discussion of sacrifice has been

¹ Erin Lothes Biviano, *The Paradox of Christian Sacrifice: The Loss of Self, the Gift of Self* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2007), pp. 81-97. For an overview of feminist critiques, see Maryane Stevens, *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993). For the relevant background in Tanner, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘The Execution of Jesus and the Theology of the Cross’ in *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1997), pp. 97-128 (cited in Kathryn Tanner, ‘Incarnation, Cross, and Sacrifice: A Feminist-Inspired Reappraisal’, *Anglican Theological Review* 86:1 (2004), pp. 35-56, 35). For the now classic statement on ‘ideal types’ of atonement, see Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995).

² Tanner (2004); reprinted as ch. 6 in Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp. 247-73.

³ Tanner (2004), p. 51.

⁴ ‘Feminist and womanist theologians keep the fact of human sin, and with it the whole religious and political sides of the human situation that brought about Jesus’ death, from being eclipsed, as they tend to be in accounts of the atonement where the focus is on God bringing Jesus to his death, or on Jesus’ death as necessary to satisfy divine requirements’ (Tanner (2004), p. ?). It is important to remember that only the *fact* of Christ’s death has been authoritatively pronounced by an Ecumenical Creed (or Pope), but not *how* Christ’s death atones for sins (see Richard Swinburne, ‘Christ’s Atoning Sacrifice’, *Archivio di filosofia* LXXVI: 1-2 (2008), pp. 81-7).

underappreciated, and drawing out this response will highlight an account of the atonement that takes seriously the death of Christ without glorifying violence. A central issue at stake between Augustine and Tanner is how they conceive of ‘union’ or ‘participation’, and whether the death of Jesus is an intrinsic or extrinsic part of this process. For Augustine sacrifice is an intrinsic part of participation.⁵ But for Tanner, sacrifice is extrinsic to the central theme of unity or participation such that it can be excised from an account of redemption. I shall thus highlight the relationship between participation and atonement.

Tanner’s incarnational model

In the article quoted at the top of this essay, Tanner presents an ‘incarnational model’ of the atonement that purportedly seeks to address some concerns of feminist and womanist theologians with classical atonement theories (e.g. validates execution, black surrogacy, and patriarchy):

I propose an incarnational model of atonement that would supplement feminist and womanist theologies on this score, thereby deflecting criticism of them while resurrecting, so to speak, a nearly forgotten form of classical atonement theory. Following Thomas Torrance, one must say: “Union with God in and through Jesus Christ who is one and the same being with God belongs to the inner heart of the atonement.” Incarnation becomes the primary mechanism of atonement, replacing, I will suggest, the vicarious satisfaction or penal substitution models with the obvious problems from both feminist and non-feminist points of view. Incarnation is, moreover, the basic mechanism of atonement underlying the *Christus Victor* and happy exchange models.⁶

While there is much scope in which to investigate what Tanner thinks is lacking in vicarious satisfaction and penal substitution models, I shall take as my starting point the issue of participation. In her discussion of atonement, Tanner’s preferred locution for participation is ‘union with God’. But earlier in *Christ the Key* she distinguishes between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ participation: weak participation ‘means nothing more than being a creature of God’; and strong participation occurs when creatures ‘receive from God what is beyond themselves – the divine image itself – and be considered the image of God themselves primarily for that reason’.⁸ Tanner’s ‘union with God’ thus seems to be a variety – albeit a perfected one – of ‘strong participation’ in God.

⁵ The theme of participation in Augustine’s thought has received much attention of late. See Bonner, ‘Augustine’s Concept of Deification’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986), pp. 369-86, and his later, ‘Deification, Divinization’ in Fitzgerald (2000), pp. 265-6. Bonner (1986) was a groundbreaking paper (see Robert Puchniak, ‘Augustine’s Conception of Deification, Revisited’ in Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds. *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), pp. 122-33) but has a few notable deficiencies that my account seeks to remedy. While Bonner correctly (in my opinion) locates Augustine’s doctrine of deification in his Christology, Bonner further argues that deification is a matter for ‘dogmatic’ theology *over and against* ‘contemplative’ theology. Bonner sustains this while also recognizing that Augustine equates justification and deification in *en. Ps.* 49. The specific deficiency that I hope to redress is the implicit claim that Christology is a matter of ‘dogmatic’ theology rather than ‘contemplative’ theology. Christology is, rather, the point at which the ‘dogmatic’ and ‘contemplative’ intersect, as Williams (2008) has persuasively argued. For a bibliography of deification in 20th century Augustine scholarship, see David Vincent Meconi, *The One Christ: St. Augustine’s Theology of Deification* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), p.xvi-xvii, n. 13.

⁶ Tanner (2004), pp. 39-40.

⁷ Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), p. 8.

⁸ Tanner (2010), p. 12.

What is not explicit in the early chapters of *Christ the Key* but is drawn out in clearer terms in chapter six is the centrality of the Incarnation. The Incarnation is not only the very grounds of possibility for ‘strong participation’ (and ‘weak participation’ as well), but also is a necessary condition for the saving acts of God to be for us, *pro nobis*:

Those saving acts flow to the humanity of Christ in virtue of an already present community with that humanity – the strongest possible community in which what is the Word’s becomes humanity’s own – a community that holds prior to the meeting of any conditions and which in its intimacy obviates the need to meet them.⁹

The ‘mechanism’ (Tanner’s word) of the atonement is thus not some legal or contractual transaction that occurred in the death of Jesus, but rather that which was already present within the life of Jesus, from his birth to his ascension (and possibly, under some doctrines of the Incarnation, extending even from creation to the parousia).

As one can see, this account pushes to the side many of the major concerns of atonement theories (e.g. what is the devil’s role? did God forsake his Son?, what is Christ’s death for – was it just an unfortunate accident? etc.). While there are certainly a few things a defender of, say, penal substitution, might want to say in response,¹⁰ I want to conclude this brief excursus on Tanner’s work by highlighting two elements, which are common to the a pre-modern account of redemption, but suggest a question we might pose to Augustine’s account in *trin*.

First, Tanner emphasises the diachronic dimension of atonement. This is particularly striking vis-à-vis her ‘incarnational model’, as she emphasises that the Incarnation does not refer strictly to the *birth* of Christ, a point from which Christ’s healing powers extend to all of creation. Rather, following Athanasius’ use of the term in his *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, the Incarnation refers to all of Christ’s ministry, from his birth to his ascension. This opens up the possibility for Tanner that the human appropriation of Christ’s atoning work occurs over the course of a life.¹¹ And second, Tanner holds that *what* is being sacrificed is the same as *who* is doing the sacrificing. ‘If the man who dies on the cross is not just a man but God as well, then in a sense God is both the one sacrificing and the one sacrificed. The whole act is God’s’.¹² This, too, is in keeping with a pre-modern tradition, particularly one that emphasises that Christ *willingly* sacrificed himself on the cross, as Augustine suggests in *trin*.¹³ These two elements, which comprise the broad contours of Tanner’s account, suggest a surprisingly traditional account of the atonement.

However, when Tanner integrates this relatively non-contentious account into here ‘communion-rite’ frame, we can see that what she means by ‘sacrifice’ is disconnected from the

⁹ Tanner (2004), p. 43.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Steven L. Porter, ‘Swinburnian Atonement and the Doctrine of Penal Substitution’ in Michael Rea, ed. *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology, Volume 1: Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), pp. 314-27, p. 315.

¹¹ See Tanner (2004), p. 46: ‘One must not understand the saving consequences of the incarnation to be immediate... Instead, one must say that humanity suffering from the effects of sin is being reworked for its salvation over time, from Jesus’ birth up to and through his death. The incarnation remains a constant but its effects are not. Salvation, what the incarnation brings about, takes time, in short; it is a process of temporal, historical proportions, involving struggle with the forces of sin and death, and the sort of changes that any human life, sinful or not face’.

¹² Tanner (2004), p. 53.

¹³ *trin*. 4.18-19.

death of Jesus. Tanner's 'communion-rite' frame is drawn largely from ethnographic studies of religious sacrifice, in which 'sacrifices are viewed as establishing and maintaining community between God and human beings'.¹⁴ These sacrifices must, however, be seen 'in the light of the communion and thanksgiving meals that they reinstate and sustain'.¹⁵ Tanner's concerns are as follows:

Those atonement theories that make the death of Christ saving have the tendency in this connection to overemphasize the importance of death to sacrificial rites. Certainly, the cross is associated with sacrifice because Jesus dies there for our sins, but that does not mean that death is the center of the rites with which the cross is being associated. Calling Jesus' death a sacrifice might be indeed a way of drawing attention to something taking place on the cross other than death.¹⁶

If it is not death that materially matters in the sacrifice, what then does Tanner think is the important element? Tanner ultimately argues that God did not kill God's self, but humans did,¹⁷ and that it is the blood that 'purifies and reconnects across separation because of its life-giving powers'.¹⁸ Death is therefore significant because 'death is what is *being* sanctified, transformed, in the passage from life to death, and not because death is what is doing the sanctifying'.¹⁹ The question I want to pose to Augustine from Tanner's proposal is: how can the *death* of Christ be a meaningful aspect of union with God? Citing Augustine's *City of God* 10.3-6, Tanner posits that 'Sacrifices are acts done in order that we may cleave in human union with God'.²⁰ But where does this leave the death of Christ? Is it simply an unfortunate accident of redemption?

Sacrifice and the unity of will in Augustine's *trin.* 4 and 13

For Augustine, 'sacrifice' is at the heart of his thoughts on unity - both the unity of will between the Father and Son, and the unity of will within the body of Christ. The unity of the will or concord of the body of Christ is, in fact, made possible by the unity of will between the Father and the Son. By reading Christ's sacrifice in the context of this complex unity found within the harmony of wills one can discern the theological relevance of Augustine's distinction between bad ('pagan') sacrifice and good ('Christian') sacrifice. Augustine famously suggested that four things must be considered in any sacrifice: *to whom* it is offered, *by whom* it is offered, *what* it is that is offered, and *for whom* it is offered.²¹ What is less explicit in the account of sacrifice in *trin.* 4 and 13 is that a true sacrifice not only has an answer to all of these questions but also fulfills them with one and the same person - namely, Christ as God to whom it is offered, Christ as man by whom it is offered, Christ as man what is offered, and man as

¹⁴ Tanner (2004), p. 51; for a summary account of the ethnographic approach to sacrifice and its findings, see Marcel Hénaff, 'Repenser le sacrifice. Nouvelles approches anthropologiques' *Archivo di filosofia* LXXVI:1-2 (2008), pp. 261-72.

¹⁵ Tanner (2004), p. 52.

¹⁶ Tanner (2004), p. 51.

¹⁷ Tanner (2004), pp. 52-3.

¹⁸ Tanner (2004), p. 52. Tanner's argument is similar to one proposed by Kevin Hart, 'The Unbloody Sacrifice', *Archivo di filosofia* LXXVI.1-2 (2008), pp. 189-98: 'For both bloody and unbloody sacrifices, the *eidos* of sacrifice turns not on death but on gift' (p. 195).

¹⁹ Tanner (2004), p. 53 (emphasis in original).

²⁰ Tanner (2004), p. 54.

²¹ See *trin.* 4.14.19: 'Vt quoniam quatuor considerantur in omni sacrificio: cui offeratur, a quo offeratur, quid offeratur, pro quibus offeratur'.

unified with Christ as what it is offered for. The unity of Christ with the Father and with humanity is thus the central doctrinal feature of Augustine's account of sacrifice.

This question of unity draws us into an analysis of participation in Augustine, a theme that Augustine explores in conjunction with the atoning work of Christ. Augustine's account of participation or 'union with God' is thus Christological, and has *both* human-divine ('vertical') *and* human-human ('horizontal') aspects.²² In his discussion of *participatio* in *trin.* 4.4, Augustine directly connects *participatio* with *inluminatio*:

To cure these and make them well *the Word, through which all things exist, became flesh and dwelt among us.* Our enlightenment (*inluminatio*) is, of course, participation (*participatio*) in the Word, which is, one may know, the life that is the *light of humans.* Yet we were absolutely incapable of such participation (*participatio*) and quite unfit for it, so unclean were we through sin, so we had to be cleansed.²³

The connection between *participatio* and *inluminatio* is important for many reasons, not least of which is that we can see the tight connection between participation and contemplation. But I want to highlight two features of participation found in this passage. First, humanity's uncleanness is blocking this participation, and second, Augustine seems to think of participation as something that partly occurs within time, that is, a part of the diachronically distended act of faith. Here are, then, the conditions of participation – (1) it comes after one is purified, a process that (2) takes place over the course of a life.

Let us look closer at the first. In this same passage, Augustine writes, 'The only thing to cleanse the wicked and the proud man is the blood of the just man and the humility of God',²⁴ which is necessary in order that humans can 'contemplate God, which by nature we are not, and we would have to be cleansed by him who became what by nature we are and what by sin we are not'.²⁵ Here, one can see a further expansion of the notion of *participatio*: Augustine connects the human capacity for participation with human contemplation of God, but explicitly highlights the role of blood of the 'just man' to purify the sinner. Again, we can see the relation between participation and contemplation; however, there is an intermediary between them, that is, the purification brought by Christ. Augustine goes on to account for this cleansing in a style more reminiscent of his homiletic material—namely, Christ's homeopathic cure:

²² Lewis Ayres' has recently asserted a strong connection between participation and contemplation, which thereby turns this into an epistemological puzzle (See Lewis Ayres (2004), pp. ??; *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp. ??; and 'Augustine on Redemption' in Mark Vessey, ed. *Blackwell Companion to Augustine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 416-27). While I think Ayres' connection between (and near identification of) participation and contemplation is correct, it overlooks the important place of sacrifice that makes this identification possible as a purification of the sinner. It is this middle step that is too quickly passed over (often with pious references to love and the Holy Spirit) in Ayres' epistemic rendering of participation and contemplation. Gioia (2008), too, seems to lapse back into this epistemic rendering, despite protestations: 'Christ does not become an epistemological 'function' destined to solve a Platonic aporia between time and eternity, the realm of sense and the realm of ideas, faith and science' (p. 69). This is, however, exactly the line of argumentation Gioia draws in pp. 68-105. More positively, 'Augustine is never tired of repeating that the problem lies in our will, in our love' (p. 68). In Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), participation and contemplation are thus held tightly together in such a way that the importance of will/love seems to be yet another head-nod to the widely accepted Augustinian piety.

²³ *trin.* 4.4; slightly modified trans. Hill (2012), pp. 154-5.

²⁴ *Porro iniquorum et superbiorum una mundatio est sanguis iusti et humilitatis dei* (*trin.* 4.4; CCSL 50: 163-4).

²⁵ *ut ad contemplandum deum quod natura sumus et quod peccato non sumus* (*trin.* 4.4; CCSL 50: 164).

By nature we are not God; by nature we are human; by sin we are not just. So God became a just man to intercede with God for sinful man. The sinner did not match (*congruere*) the just, but man did match (*congruere*) man. So he applied to us the similarity (*similitudinem*) of his humanity to take away the dissimilarity (*dissimilitudinem*) of our iniquity, and becoming a partaker (*particeps*) of our mortality he made us partakers (*participes*) of his divinity.²⁶

It is a ‘match’ or ‘congruence’ between the humanity of Christ and humans’ humanity; the incongruence, that which needed to be healed, is between Christ’s justice and humans’ sinfulness.²⁷ The cleansing is thus not simply a result of the Incarnation as homeopathic (i.e. purification does not happen simply by God becoming human). Rather, the homeopathic presumes the cleansing powers of the heteropathic: only by virtue of Christ’s *dissimilitudinem* can Christ’s *similitudinem* implied in his participation effect human participation in his divinity.

The heteropathic remedy - what Christ brings that is wholly *other* - is, however, grounded in Augustine’s conception of justice and sin, which highlights the ontological difference between God and humanity that is held together in the one ‘person’ of Jesus Christ.²⁸ Far from this simply being an extra layer of difficulty, the ontological difference offers Augustine the opportunity to develop one of his more creative insights. The asymmetry between the single death of Christ and the double death of humanity evokes the principle of harmony:

This match (*congruentia*)—or agreement (*conuenientia*) or harmony (*concinentia*) or consonance (*consonantia*) or whatever the right word is for the proportion of one to two—is of enormous importance in every construction or better said as accurate joining together (*coaptatio*) of creation. What I mean by this *coaptatio*, it has just occurred to me, is what the Greeks call ἁρμονίαν.²⁹

Augustine’s vocabulary here is aesthetical and musical—*concinentia* and *coaptatio*, the root of the latter is *aptus* — all of it is both metaphysical and ethical.³⁰ Indeed, for Augustine, especially in *De musica* 6, aesthetic categories rely on metaphysical notions of the proportion inherent in the creation as well as certain ethical norms deemed appropriate for social beings.³¹ The healing that Christ provides is not a ‘violent’ heteropathic remedy, but one whose difference calls forth the sameness of the homeopathic remedy. In more strictly theological terms, Christ’s humanity is not some third thing added to humans’ body and soul; rather, Christ’s humanity is a ‘new humanity’ that fully harmonizes body and soul.³² Christ’s unity which heals human disunity is a paradigmatic case of 1:2 harmony, the most basic and perfect of all harmonies, according to Augustine.³³ How, then, does this *coaptatio* or harmony function within redemption by the sacrifice of the just man’?

Unum of sacrifice in *trin.* 4.11-19

²⁶ *trin.* 4.4; trans. Hill (1991), p. 155.

²⁷ For discussion of the specific role of Christ’s justice, see Dodaro (2004), pp. 72-114.

²⁸ For an account of Augustine’s development in his use of ‘person’, see Drobner, *Person-Exegese und Christologie bei Augustinus: Zur Herkunft der Formel Una Persona* (Leiden: Brill, 1986) ... **MORE**

²⁹ *trin.* 4.4; trans. Hill (1991), p. 155.

³⁰ See Harrison (1992); this is an revealing glimpse into Augustine’s thinking, one that is confirmed by Harrison (1992)—Augustine often finds recourse to musical categories when in open reflection such as this.

³¹ **Citation...**

³² Williams (2008), p. 180.

³³ For Augustine’s detailed account of this proportion, see *trin.* 4.7-12.

Human participation in the divine thus requires a harmonious purification. When he turns to sacrifice itself, a central concept that is broadly used at the time (in both Christian and non-Christian literatures) to refer to a process that sanctifies or purifies, Augustine emphasises the unity of the Word with the Father and the Word Incarnate with humanity. At *trin.* 4.11 this is strikingly laid out in language common to more philosophical accounts of the fall. Here Augustine deliberately co-opts a play on the many-one problem, common within Platonic (or, more narrowly, ‘Plotinian’) circles, to offer an account of *coaptatio*:

This sacrament, this sacrifice, this high priest, this God, before he was sent and came, *made of woman* (Gal 4:4) – all the sacred and mysterious things that were shown to our fathers by angelic miracles, or that they themselves performed, were likenesses of him, so that all creation might in some fashion utter *the one* who was to come and be the savior of all who needed to be restored from death. By wickedness and ungodliness with a crashing discord we had bounced away, and flowed and faded away from *the one* supreme true God into the many, divided by the many, clinging to the many. And so it was fitting that at the beck and bidding of a compassionate God the many should themselves acclaim together *the one* who was to come, and that acclaimed by the many together *the one* should come, and that the many should testify together that *the one* had come, and that we being disburdened of the many should come to *the one*; and that being dead in soul through many sins and destined to die in the flesh because of sin, we should love *the one* who died in the flesh for us without sin, and that believing in him raised from the dead, and rising ourselves with him in spirit through faith, we should be made *one* in *the just one*; and that we should not despair of ourselves rising in the flesh when we observed that we the many members had been preceded by *the one head*, in whom we have been purified by faith and will then be made completely whole by sight, and that thus fully reconciled to God by him the mediator, we may be able to cling to *the one*, enjoy *the one*, and remain for ever *one*.³⁴

In this passage Augustine refers to Christ as ‘the one’ (*unum*) 11 times, using *unum* two more times to refer to the state that humans might have with Christ (‘being made one’ and ‘remaining one’). While there is still an interest in certain Platonic (or, more narrowly, ‘Plotinian’) concerns running through this passage,³⁵ Augustine’s central concern is not with an ontological unity often ascribed to Platonist positions but rather with a volitional one, an aspect that plays out in 4.12:

[Christ] wants his disciples to be one in him, because they cannot be one in themselves, split as they are from each other *by different wills and desires*, and

³⁴ Hill trans.; *trin.* 4.7.11 (CCSL 50.175-6): ‘Hoc sacramentum, hoc sacrificium, hic sacerdos, hic deus antequam missus ueniret factus ex femina – omnia quae sacrate atque mystice patribus nostris per angelica miracula apparuerunt siue quae per ipsos facta sunt similitudines huius fuerunt ut omnis creatura factis quodam modo loqueretur *unum* futurum in quo esset salus uniuersorum a morte reparandorum. Quia enim ab *uno* deo summo et uero per impietatis iniquitatem resiliences et dissonantes defluxeramus et euanueramus in multa discissi per multa et inhaerentes in multis, oportebat nutu et imperio dei miserantis ut ipsa multa uenturum conclamarent *unum*, et a multis conclamatus ueniret *unus*, et multa contestarentur uenisse *unum*, et a multis exonerati ueniremus ad *unum*, et multis peccatis in anima mortui et propter peccatum in carne morituri amarem sine peccato mortuum in carne pro nobis *unum*, et in resuscitatum credentes et cum illo per fidem spiritu resurgentes iustificaremur in *uno* iusto facti *unum*, nec in ipsa carne nos resurrecturos desperarem cum multa membra intueremur praecessisse nos caput *unum* in quo nunc per fidem mundati et tunc per speciem redintegrati et per mediatorem deo reconciliati haereamus *uni*, fruamur *uno*, permaneamus *unum*’ (my emphasis).

³⁵ **Fill in the list of Platonist readings of 4.11...**

the uncleanness of their sins; so they are cleansed by the mediator that they may be one in him, not only by virtue of the same nature whereby all of them from the ranks of mortal men are made equal to the angels, but even more by virtue of *one and the same wholly harmonious will* reaching out in concert to the same ultimate happiness, and fused somehow into one spirit in the furnace of charity. This is what he means when he says *That they may be one as we are one* (Jn 17:22) – that just as Father and Son are one *not only by equality of substance but also by identity of will*, so these men, for who the Son is the mediator with God, might be one not only by being of the same nature, but also by being bound in the fellowship of the same love.³⁶

Unsurprisingly, the will is given a privileged place in the unity sought in salvation. If beatitude is a matter of rightly loving, then the will ought to be a central concern for a doctrine of redemption. However, the importance of this passage extends beyond the mechanics of beatitude in two ways. First, it offers a glimpse of the trinitarian dynamics behind Augustine’s christocentric soteriology in books 4 and 13. In the quotation of 4.11 above, Augustine begins this discussion of the unity of will as an account of ‘this sacrament, this *sacrifice*, this high priest, this God’ (emphasis added), highlighting that his understanding of sacrifice is embedded within a larger scheme of christocentric redemption, which in turn is embedded within a trinitarian account of Christian existence. Christology and Trinity are tightly held together, but not so much so that one cannot peel away the ‘layers’, so to speak, to identify how Christ’s sacrifice is functioning within a philosophical polemic against certain pagan conceptions sacrifice.

Second, and more directly relevant to the purpose at hand, the volitional rendering of unity indicates how Augustine will distinguish between a ‘true’ and ‘false’ sacrifice.³⁷ The central distinction with which Augustine begins is that between a death that is a punishment and a death that is a sacrifice. Whereas our human death is a punishment, Christ’s death is a sacrifice: ‘We came to death by sin, he came by justice; and so while our death is the punishment of sin, his death became a sacrifice for sin’.³⁸ Theological ascriptions of sin aside, what distinguishes between these two deaths is, according to Augustine, the willingness with which one dies. Under normal circumstances the death of the body is a punishment. ‘Because the spirit willfully forsakes God (*ut quia spiritus uolens deseruit deum*), it has to forsake the body against its will (*deserat corpus inuitus*)’.³⁹ Christ’s death, however, is not punishment ‘because he did not forsake his life against his will (*quia non eam deseruit inuitus*), but because

³⁶ Hill trans. (modified), p. 161; *trin.* 4.9.12 (CCSL 50.177-8): ‘Non dixit: ‘Ego et ipsi unum,’ quamuis per id quod ecclesiae caput est et corpus eius ecclesia posset dicere: ‘Ego et ipsi’ non unum sed ‘unus,’ quia caput et corpus unum est Christus. Sed diuinitatem suam consubstantiali patri ostendens (propter quod et alio loco dicit: Ego et pater unum sumus), in suo genere, hoc est in eiusdem naturae consubstantiali parilitate, uult esse suos unum sed in ipso quia in se ipsis non possent dissociati ab inuicem *per diuersas uoluntates et cupiditates* et immunditiam peccatorum; unde mundantur per mediatorem ut sint in illo unum non tantum per eandem naturam qua omnes ex hominibus mortalibus aequales angelis fiunt sed etiam per eandem in eandem beatitudinem conspirantem *concordissimam uoluntatem* in unum spiritum quodam modo caritatis igne conflatam. Ad hoc enim ualet quod ait: Vt sint unum sicut et nos unum sumus, ut quemadmodum pater et filius *non tantum aequalitate substantiae sed etiam uoluntate unum* sunt, ita et hi inter quos et deum mediator est filius non tantum per id quod eiusdem naturae sunt sed etiam per eandem dilectionis societatem unum sint. Deinde idipsum quod mediator est per quem reconciliamur deo sic indicat: Ego, inquit, in eis et tu in me ut sint consummati in unum’ (my emphasis).

³⁷ A third feature, which will not be discussed at length here, is that the volitional approach to redemption highlights the relevance of the lengthy discussion of happiness being the matter of desiring or willing the right objects and permanently obtaining all that one desires or wills. To willing the right object and to obtain it permanently requires, according to Augustine, the reformation of the will achieved in Christ’s sacrifice.

³⁸ *Trin.* 4.12.15 (CCSL 50.181): ‘Nos enim ad mortem per peccatum uenimus, ille per iustitiam; et ideo cum sit mors nostra poena peccati, mors illus facta est hostia pro peccato’.

³⁹ *Trin.* 4.16; Hill trans., p. 164 (modified).

he wanted to and at the time he wanted to and in the way he wanted to (*sed quia uoluit, quando uoluit, quomodo uoluit*).⁴⁰ ‘By his death’, then, Christ offered for us:

the one truest possible sacrifice, and thereby purged, abolished, and destroyed whatever there was of guilt, for which the principalities and powers had a right to hold us bound to payment of the penalty; and by his resurrection he called to new life us who were predestined, justified us who were called, glorified us who were justified... By his just blood unjustly shed destroyed/nullified the bond note of death, and justified and redeemed sinners.⁴¹

The subtlety of this language is often missed. Notice that Christ did not fulfill or *pay* the bond; rather, he nullified it. The phrase Augustine uses is *chirographum delens* – a phrase that refers to the practice of ‘tearing up the bond’ or, more colloquially, ‘destroying the IOU’.⁴² This is often misread because at 4.18 Augustine once more resorts to ‘purchase’ language: ‘And proud men, who treat the great price which Christ bought us with as worthless because he died...’⁴³ But even here the death is disconnected from the payment, for the insinuation is that the payment was worthless *because* Christ died. Christ’s death *nullifies* the contract under which any payment might be sought. At *trin.* 13.16 Augustine appeals to the language of sin, which puts humans in debt to the devil. This would then imply that someone would have to *pay* the debt. But again, Augustine seems to subvert, albeit subtly and without explicit mention of his overturning a soteriological paradigm, this metaphor with the shift from power to justice at 13.17, a point we will discuss in the following section.

True sacrifice then is *not* a kind of purchase or punishment. Rather, according to Augustine, it ‘can only be correctly offered by a holy and just priest, and only if what is offered is received from those for whom it is offered, and only if it is without fault so that it can be offered for the purification of men with many faults’.⁴⁴ The emphasis here is more a matter of the character of the sacrifice itself than that for which the sacrifice is being made. Moreover, the true sacrifice is a *unity* of the four elements of sacrifice account for at the beginning of this section: ‘And this one true mediator, in reconciling us to God by his sacrifice of peace, would remain one with him to whom he offered it, and make one in himself those for whom he offered it, and be himself who offered it one and the same as what he offered’.⁴⁵ Christ’s sacrifice thus not only cleanses – a sense of the term that is broadly acknowledged – but also unifies the human with God.

The devil and the death of Christ in *trin.* 13

But is the *death* of Christ intrinsic to the sacrifice that unifies, and if so in what sense? This is the contention that we saw Tanner question above, and, as the discussion of *trin.* 4

⁴⁰ *Trin.* 4.16; Hill trans., p. 164. The reason Augustine gives for this difference is that Christ is combined as one being with the Word of God (*dei uerbo ad unitatem commixtus*).

⁴¹ *Trin.* 4.13.17 (CCSL 50.183-4): ‘Morte sua quipped uno uerissimo sacrificio pro nobis oblate quidquid culparum erat unde nos principatus et potestates ad luenda supplicia iure detinebant purgauit, aboleuit, exstinxit, et sua resurrectione in nouam uitam nos praedestinos uocauit, uocatos iustificauit, iustificatos glorificauit... suo iusto sanguine iniuste fuso mortis chirographum delens et iustificandos redimens peccatores’.

⁴² Hill’s trans., p. 165.

⁴³ Hill trans., p. 166; *trin.* 4.13.18: ‘Superbi autem homines quibus Christus quia mortuus est uoluit ubi nos tam magno emit’.

⁴⁴ Hill trans., p. 166; *trin.* 4.14.19: ‘Neque id posse rite offerri nisi per sacerdotem sanctum et iustum nec nisi ab eis accipiatur quod offertur pro quibus offertur atque id sine uitio sit ut pro uitiosis mundandis possit offerri’.

⁴⁵ *Trin.* 4.14.19 (CCSL 50.186-7): ‘idem ipse unus uerusque mediator per sacrificium pacis reconcilians nos deo unum cum illo maneret cui offerebat, unum in se faceret pro quibus offerabat, unus ipse esset qui offerebat et quod offerebat’ (my emphasis).

made evident, the death of Christ is a largely unquestioned element in Christ's sacrifice for Augustine. What we do not find in *trin.* 13 is any support of the idea that Christ's death on the cross and the shedding of his blood 'benefited God in any way'.⁴⁶ Rather, the discussion of Christ's death is part of a larger polemic regarding the primacy of justice over power. I suggest that when this polemic is positively construed, it is a kind of divine *persuasion* of humanity. In Augustine's view, God is continuously enticing humanity, drawing people to God's self, not with force or power, but with God's love. The primacy of the reformation of the will in the atonement for Augustine is precisely because God uses love to attract humanity and its loves.

Augustine begins his account with a question that is echoed in Tanner's (and others') concerns: 'Was there no other way available to God of setting men free from the unhappiness of this mortality, that he should want his only begotten Son, God coeternal with himself, to become man by putting on a human soul and flesh, and, having become mortal, to suffer death?'⁴⁷ No, Augustine obviously thinks, God was not by necessity forced to redeem humanity in this way. Rather, God chose this way 'as good and appropriate to divine dignity'.⁴⁸ This is, in part, because the problem humanity faced was not only an 'objective' characterisation as 'sinful', but also a 'subjective' despair that needed to be reminded of God's love for humans: 'Nothing was more needed for raising our hopes and delivering the minds of mortals, disheartened by the very condition of mortality, from despairing of immortality, than a demonstration of how much value God put on us and how much he loved us'.⁴⁹ The response to this is, in the first place, the Incarnation,⁵⁰ but more poignantly, the pouring of love of God into humans' hearts through the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ If Christ had not shared our condition right into death (and beyond it) then he would have left the problem of violence on injustice unhealed. In other words Christ had to *redeem* death and injustice in a way that was most fitting with our human condition.

It is this fitting conversion of death and injustice into life and justice that sits at the centre of Augustine's rather confusing account of the devil in *trin.* 13. But in light of the foregoing discussion of sacrifice effecting a unity of will, some clarification on the role of the devil in *trin.* 13 might be possible. While there is a certain 'spiritual realism' in Augustine, as there was for the vast majority of uneducated as well as educated men and women of the later Roman empire, Augustine's discussion is not as 'naïve' as a modern reader might initially think it is. The devil functions as a kind of foil to Christ (just as the pagan philosopher's theurgy does to the Christian's prayer of the *Our Father* in *De ciuitate Dei* 10): where the devil is a creature of power and pride, Christ is the embodiment of justice and humility. The crux of the matter regards the false but all the more alluring *persuasiveness* of the devil:

⁴⁶ Gioia (2008), p. 92-3.

⁴⁷ Hill trans., p. 353; *trin.* 13.10.13: 'Itane defuit deo modus alius quo liberaret homines a miseria mortalitatis huius ut unigenitum filium deum sibi coaeternum hominem fieri uellet induendo humanam animam et carnem mortalemque factum mortem perpeti?'

⁴⁸ *trin.* 13.10.13: 'parum est sic refellere ut istum modum quo nos per mediatorem dei et hominum hominem Christum Iesum deus liberare dignatur asseramus bonum et diuinae congruum dignitati'.

⁴⁹ Hill trans., p. 353; *trin.* 13.10.13: 'Quid enim tam necessarium fuit ad erigendam spem nostram mentesque mortalium conditione ipsius mortalitatis abiectas ab immortalitatis desperatione liberandas quam ut demonstraretur nobis quanti nos penderet deus quantumque diligeret?'

⁵⁰ *Trin.* 13.10.13: 'Quid uero huius rei tanto isto indicio manifestius atque praeclarius quam ut dei filius immutabiliter bonus in se manens quod erat et a nobis pro nobis accipiens quod non erat praeter suae naturae detrimentum nostrae dignatus inire consortium prius sine ullo malo suo merito mala nostra perferret, ac sic iam credentibus quantum nos diligit deus et quod desperabamus iam sperantibus dona in nos sua sine ullis bonis meritis nostris, immo praecedentibus et malis meritis nostris, indebita largitate conferret?'

⁵¹ *Trin.* 13.10.14: 'Vt enim fides per dilectionem operetur, caritas dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis'.

The essential flaw of the devil's persuasion made him a lover of power and a deserter and assailant of justice, which means that men imitate him all the more thoroughly the more they neglect or even detest justice and studiously devote themselves to power, rejoicing at the possession of it or inflamed with the desire for it.⁵²

Against this inflammation of power, Augustine juxtaposes Christ's 'justice game' that ultimately attracted humans to 'imitate Christ by seeking to beat the devil at the justice game, not the power game'.

The death of Christ is thus the paradigmatic case of Christ choosing justice over power, for the devil 'found nothing in [Christ] deserving of death and yet killed him'.⁵³ Because the 'perfectly just' died, the debtors the devil held must go free, a logic that relies not so much on a contract fulfilled, but rather a contract nullified, a point that was emphasised at *trin.* 4.13.17. The persuasiveness of Christ's willingness to choose justice over power ultimately relies upon the Incarnation: 'Unless he had been man he could not have been killed; unless he had been God no one would have ... have imagined that he was preferring justice to power, but simply that he lacked power'.⁵⁴ The point of all of this is not so much the 'objective' overcoming of the devil (an aspect that is not completely irrelevant for Augustine), but rather the 'subjective' persuasiveness of the 'justice of humility' that powerless mortals have set before them.⁵⁵ This is, moreover, where the diachronic aspect of Christ's atonement enters, and thus filling in the second aspect of participation highlighted above. By imitating the humility of Christ, often through, for Augustine, the very humdrum Christian practices of prayer and almsgiving, Christ's overcoming of devil in his sacrificial death becomes the condition for rightly willing love for God and for our neighbour. Submitting oneself in prayer and almsgiving serve to bend the will aright toward God, thereby responding to the persuasion of Christ's love over that of the devil's false allurements.

The devil is thus not some thief that needs to be paid off with ransom money, but is rather representative of the false persuasion of power that Christ's true persuasion of justice overturns. Christ's *death*, for Augustine, is that which is necessary for humans to choose justice over power and humility over pride. It is this very inversion of what is so typical of humanity – love of power – that, for Augustine, is the barrier between humans and that which prevents true harmony of concord of will to exist within human community. Christ not only 'objectively' redeems with his death, but offers the persuasion necessary for humans to release themselves from the lust of power, domination, violence that has come to define communities. Justice paradoxically emerges from injustice, not by simple rejection of death, but by Christ's overcoming of death. It is the figure of the devil that represents, for Augustine, the allurements of power, injustice, violence, in a word pride, and Christ's death (and resurrection) the possibility of persuading humans of the way of humility.

⁵² *Trin.* 13.13.17: 'Sed cum diabolus uitio peruersitatis suae factus sit amator potentiae et deseritor oppugnatorque iustitiae (sic enim et homines eum tanto magis imitantur quanto magis neglecta uel etiam perosa iustitia potentiae student eiusque uel ademptione laetantur uel inflammantur cupiditate)'.

⁵³ *Trin.* 13.14.18: 'Quia cum in eo nihil morte dignum inueniret, occidit eum tamen'.

⁵⁴ *Trin.* 13.14.18: 'Nisi enim homo esset, non posset occidi; nisi et deus esset, non crederetur noluisse quod potuit sed non potuisse quod uoluit, nec ab eo potentiae praelatam fuisse iustitiam sed ei defuisse potentiam putaremus'.

⁵⁵ *Trin.* 13.14.18: 'Ideo gratior facta est in humilitate iustitia quia posset si noluisset humilitatem non perpeti tanta in diuinitate potentia, ac sic a moriente tam potente nobis mortalibus impotentibus et commendata est iustitia et promissa potentia'.

Conclusion: 'just blood' or 'unjustly shed'?

Above we saw that Tanner emphasised the purification wrought by the blood of the sacrifice vis-à-vis the death of the sacrifice. Her contention was that it is the life signified by the blood that proves to sanctify.⁵⁶ While his consideration of Christ's sacrifice does not foreground the blood, Augustine references the 'just blood' of Christ as that which nullifies the 'bond note of death'.⁵⁷ Blood is thus an important symbolic feature of Augustine's account, but contrary to some accounts excavated by recent ethnographic studies,⁵⁸ which have been (often uncritically) taken up in recent Christian theology,⁵⁹ blood does not *by itself* hold any magical or life-giving powers. For Augustine, it is most important that Christ's blood was unjustly *shed* and that the blood was that of Christ's, the perfect sacrificial offering. While the shift from death to blood might serve to purify our own consciences, it fails to make the blood of the sacrifice anything other than the blood of an executed man. To maintain that Christ's sacrifice atones for humanity's sin is to maintain, at some level, that the *death* of Christ is significant. Any theory that simply makes the death as an unfortunate accident is far from a socially and politically sanitised theory of the atonement; rather, in failing to account for its centrality one will ultimately need to consider what kind of *perfect* sacrifice might contain an unfortunate accident. Tanner is, however, surely right that death alone does not give life, a point with which Augustine would, no doubt, agree. But death aversion *tout court* eviscerates an Augustinian approach to sacrifice. Christ's death is the death of God Incarnate, the one, true sacrifice, whose objective perfection entices the subjective admiration of humanity, releasing them from the false allure of power for the beauty of justice. It is this justice, wrought by the just blood unjustly shed, when coupled with the power of the resurrection, that effects the unity of will found in loving community - of Father and Son, of Christ and the Church - and through which we might contemplate God as Father, Son, Holy Spirit. To participate in God is thus to have our loves reformed by the redemptive sacrifice of Christ's death. It is the possibility of overcoming injustice and violence that Augustine shares with feminist-inspired atonement theories, and ought to provide some scope for re-thinking the feminist excision of death from Christ's sacrifice.

⁵⁶ See above; Tanner (2004), p. 52.

⁵⁷ *Trin.* 4.13.17 (see above).

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Hénaff (2008) and Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York: Columbia, 2014).

⁵⁹ In addition to the discussion of 'communion-rite' in Tanner (2004), see Eugene Rogers, *The Analogy of Blood* (forthcoming).