

Lenten Study:

“Questioning Our Grip on the Cross”



Study 4

The “Solution” to the Problem of the Cross: Fall-Salvation Theology

Lenten Study: Questioning Our Grip on the Cross

PRELIMINARY NOTES

This Lenten Study has been prepared for use in study groups at Blackwood Uniting Church and other interested groups. It is hoped that engaging with this study series will, in some small way, lead to a deepening of understanding and an enlivening of personal faith.

It has been my observation that there are some people for whom reflection on their beliefs and understanding of the Christian faith seems not to be so terribly important, so focussed are they on compassionately *living* their faith, through acts of service and love. If you are in that category, all I ask is that I continue to be permitted to sit at your feet and to learn from, and be inspired by, the ways of your heart.

It is my view that Christian practices, including engaging in studies such as this, are valuable insofar as they contribute to our change and growth as human beings, better enabling us to engage positively with the world, and lovingly and compassionately with those around us. Whether this study contributes in such a way remains to be seen, but...*one lives in hope!*

A word about the reflection questions that accompany each study. Please consider these as suggestive, rather than prescriptive. They are not questions which I'm expecting you to answer like it's some sort of exam! Some of the questions I have raised may be questions that also come to *your* mind. Some questions may not have occurred to you, and you may deem them worthy of exploration. Other questions may have no interest or relevance to you at all.

To the extent that the questions are helpful in facilitating discussion in your group, or sparking your own thoughts, use them. Otherwise consider them of no account.

TWO WAYS OF ENGAGING WITH THE STUDY SERIES:

Study documents and YouTube video clips

Study participants have two ways in which they can engage with the study materials. Firstly, there are the printed studies, which are also available as downloadable PDF documents that can be viewed on your computer, tablet or smartphone. Secondly, there are YouTube videos for each of the seven studies. It is hoped that these two study media will complement each other, but either can be used separately too.

How each group approaches the study is, of course, up to them. I would anticipate, however, that it may be helpful for a study group to first watch together the YouTube video for the particular week's study, and then discuss the study, using the printed/PDF study notes as a reference. The links to the downloadable PDF files and to the YouTube videos can be found at:

<http://blackwooduc.org.au/downloads/studies/lentenstudy2022>

I hope that you appreciate this study series *Questioning Our Grip on the Cross*.

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Lenten Study: *Questioning Our Grip on the Cross*

A recap of what we've covered in the Lenten study so far

So far, we have reflected on the central place of the cross in our Christian life and worship. We have explored the concept of religion as a “model” for understanding the world that we experience. We have considered the possibility that our own Christian understanding might reasonably be seen as an incomplete model of God’s truth; a model that we might subject to scrutiny and, if need be, update. We have explored the notion of *theodicy*: the need to explain the observation that the world is “a bit of a mess” and how this can be reconciled with its creation by a perfect, all-powerful and all-loving God. We have pondered a strange hypothetical in which Jesus was never crucified, and how we feel about such an odd hypothetical, and how our faith might change in such hypothetical circumstances. We have explored the thorny question of how those first century observers made sense, in their writings, of the concept of a crucified Messiah.

Most recently, in study 3:-

- We focussed mainly on scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament.
- We looked at sacrificial *images* in scripture, but nothing resembling a detailed, systematic *theology of the cross*.

Study 3 looked at some fancy footwork by the New Testament writers to explain how exactly a “Messiah” gets crucified! They did so:



1. **By re-affirming that Jesus is indeed Messiah.**
2. **By asserting that, despite all expectations to the contrary, it was *necessary* for the Messiah to *suffer*.**
3. **By asserting that the necessity for the Messiah to suffer was *foretold* by the Jewish scriptures.**

It's time now to move beyond mere images to a systematic theology

Now, we begin to unpack the details of a theology and a theodicy of the *cross*. We move beyond the isolated sacrificial images of the New Testament to a particular theology arising from the combined deliberations of a number of theologians:- Augustine of Hippo, in the 4th century; Anselm in the 11th century; and the 16th century Protestant reformers. The theology of which we speak is *Fall-Salvation theology*. In the imaginative dialogue that follows, even though later theologians contributed to the development of Fall-Salvation theology, Augustine is employed as the spokesperson since his doctrines of “Fall” and “Original Sin” are foundational on everything that follows him.

Anticipating objections, I apologise in advance to theologians and biblical historians for my scandalous disregard for the theological complexities involved. I apologize in advance for combining into a single dialogue theological concepts that were developed over hundreds of years.

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However, if theological offence is indeed taken, I would ask the offence-takers this question: in my scandalous over-simplification of complex theological nuance, in my zealous merging of theologies from various centuries, how have I misrepresented the *essence* of Fall-Salvation theology as commonly espoused today?

What Study 4 will cover in this imagined dialogue:

An imagined dialogue that will explore “Fall-Salvation” theology which ambitiously aims to:

- Provide a systematic theological explanation for WHY Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross

AND...

- Solve the THEODICY problem

“Please explain!”



First some reading before we commence the dialogue...

1. Take the time to read Genesis 2-3 as a story in its own right, without importing into the story any presuppositions. *I invite you to read these two chapters now as a group.*
2. Pay attention, as you read the chapters, to the various details in the story.
3. What is the significance of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?
4. What differences, if any, can you detect in the two humans *before* and *after* taking the fruit?
5. Who would the offspring of the first humans have married?
(Hint: Genesis 4:17 describes Cain marrying and building a city; marrying whom and building a city for whom?!)
6. What message, if any, do you come away with from the story?

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As you follow the dialogue, I invite you to truly engage with the logical flow of thought and argument. Pay attention to where you agree or disagree with the points raised on each side.

Person	Dialogue	
Augustine	You understand, of course, that Jesus needed to die on the cross to redeem the world.	1
Inquirer	But, why, specifically, did <i>Jesus</i> need to die?	2
Augustine	Because Jesus was the perfect God-Man, the one and only Son of God.	3
Inquirer	And why was that important?	4
Augustine	Because Jesus was perfect, and therefore without sin, so he could offer the perfect human sacrifice to God.	5
Inquirer	But why did God require a human sacrifice, perfect or otherwise? That seems awfully violent.	6
Augustine	Because there is “no forgiveness without the shedding of blood.” (Hebrews 9:22)	7
Inquirer	So, God couldn’t simply have forgiven the world, and its people, <i>even if he wanted to</i> ?	8
Augustine	That’s right. God’s <i>mercy</i> might have wanted to forgive us, but God’s <i>justice</i> insisted on the necessity of a penalty for sin.	9
Inquirer	What sort of penalty?	10
Augustine	If Jesus hadn’t died on the cross to redeem the world, the penalty would have been eternal damnation for every human that has ever lived, including those who lived and died as infants.	11
Inquirer	Seems like rather an excessive punishment! I mean eternal punishment is <i>infinite</i> punishment. How could <i>finite</i> beings, such as us humans, have sinned <i>infinitely</i> against their Creator?	12
Augustine	Don’t you understand? To sin against God is to offend against an <i>infinite</i> God. Hence the offence against God’s honour is <i>infinite</i> in its scope.	13
Inquirer	Why would God be bothered about his honour being offended?	14
Augustine	That’s outrageous! To offend against God’s honour is a terrible crime, because God’s honour is infinite in magnitude!	15
Inquirer	That’s exactly my point. If we consider two beings worthy of some level of honour: one a tinpot dictator, and the other Almighty God. The tinpot dictator’s honour is a very small pool indeed, but the honour of Almighty God is, by comparison, an infinitely large ocean. If we were to “contaminate” the honour of these beings by committing some finite offence against them, the “contaminant” of the offence would have a significant effect	16

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Person	Dialogue	
	upon the honour of the tinpot dictator, because the pool of the tinpot dictator's honour is so relatively small. In contrast, a finite offence committed against Almighty God would have no effect whatsoever, diluted as it is in the infinite majesty of God's honour. It would be, quite literally, a drop in the ocean of God's infinite and majestic honour. Tinpot dictators are worried about their honour being offended. I suspect Almighty God wouldn't be.	
Augustine	You play games with ponds and oceans! No! God's honour has been offended!	17
Inquirer	Jesus didn't seem too fussed about defending God's honour.	18
Augustine	What do you mean?	19
Inquirer	In his famous parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), Jesus portrays a father who disavows all "honour," when he throws all dignity to the wind, running with joy to the younger son, and forgiving this son who has so dishonoured him. If the father in the story is meant to be synonymous with Our Heavenly Father, then it would seem that God the Father isn't too bothered about defending his honour.	20

Reflection break # 1

1. If Jesus is a "sacrifice" and if Jesus is *both* human *and* divine, it is presumably only the human aspect of Jesus that dies on the cross. That would make Jesus' sacrifice a **human sacrifice**. How well does the alleged demand by God for a perfect human sacrifice sit with the notion of an all-loving God?
2. If God is *both* merciful *and* just, what about when these aspects conflict? If God's merciful nature is willing to forgive "the offence" but God's demand for justice insists on a perfect human sacrifice on the cross, which wins out? Which aspect of God's nature is more fundamental?
3. The 11th century theologian Anselm of Canterbury developed the "satisfaction theory" of the atonement (which centuries later morphed into the penal substitutionary theory), which argued that an offence against God's honour demanded satisfaction. What do you see of God's demand for honour in the Bible and in the life of Jesus?

Dialogue continues...

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Person	Dialogue	
Augustine	Whether God' honour was offended or not is beside the point. God's justice demanded that a penalty be paid for the offence against God!	21
Inquirer	Let me see if I've got it straight so far. The world is eternally damned by God for having offended against God (<i>I'm sure you'll get around to telling me what the offence was, sooner or later!</i>), and hence we are obliged to offer a perfect sacrifice in order to redeem it. Jesus, as the Son of God, offered himself as that perfect human sacrifice, and died on the cross in order to redeem the world.	22
Augustine	Correct. It's taking a very long time for you to get the point.	23
Inquirer	Wasn't there some other way for the world to redeem itself? Why did it require the sacrifice of a perfectly innocent person?	24
Augustine	There was no other way! The human beings that comprise the world, including you and I, are <i>sinful at our core</i> , and couldn't possibly have offered a perfect sacrifice to God.	25
Inquirer	Why did God make human beings sinful at their core?	26
Augustine	Don't be blasphemous! God made human beings wholly righteous and good!	27
Inquirer	I thought you just said we were sinful at our core?	28
Augustine	<i>We are</i> , now. We are <i>fallen</i> from our state of Original Righteousness.	29
Inquirer	I don't remember falling.	30
Augustine	You and I, and everyone else, fell "in Adam."	31
Inquirer	Who?	32
Augustine	Adam. The first human.	33
Inquirer	So, what happened with this first human?	34
Augustine	God placed the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden, and Adam, tempted by the wicked serpent, took and ate the forbidden fruit from The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.	35
Inquirer	Why did God put a wicked serpent and a forbidden tree in the middle of the garden?	36
Augustine	I am not privy to the inscrutable will of God. He just did.	37
Inquirer	And Adam took fruit from the forbidden tree?	38
Augustine	Yes, that was his great folly; that was his terrible sin.	39
Inquirer	I'm not sure I follow why taking the forbidden fruit was a sin.	40

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Person	Dialogue	
Augustine	Hmmfff! The clue is in the word <i>forbidden!</i>	41
Inquirer	Yeah, I get that. But you said it was forbidden fruit from The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, right?	42
Augustine	That is correct.	43
Inquirer	In that case, prior to taking from this tree, Adam had, by definition, no “knowledge of good and evil,” right?	44
Augustine	I’m not sure where you’re going with this.	45
Inquirer	Okay, it’s like this. If, before taking the “forbidden” fruit, Adam had no knowledge of good and evil, it means he had no moral framework to interpret God’s prohibition on taking the fruit as “good,” nor to interpret the serpent’s advice as “evil.” Prior to taking the fruit, Adam was a moral infant and hence wasn’t morally culpable for his actions.	46
Augustine	Well, that’s not what <i>God</i> thought, because he kicked Adam out of the garden!	47
Inquirer	Whatever. So, you’re saying that Adam sinned in the garden. Couldn’t God just have forgiven him?	48
Augustine	We’ve been through this already. <i>There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood</i> , hence the continuing need so many years after Adam’s transgression, of Jesus’ death on the cross. God’s justice demanded it.	49
Inquirer	But the Bible seems to depict God as endlessly forgiving: <i>he does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us</i> (psalm 103).	50
Augustine	Forgiveness is all very well, I suppose, but God’s demand for justice needed to be satisfied. God couldn’t just forgive Adam!	51
Inquirer	But hang on a minute! Jesus tells Peter, when Peter asks whether he should forgive his brother seven times: “Not seven times, but seventy times seven!” (Matthew 18). Now, Jesus is meant to have embodied God’s love and forgiveness, and he is urging <i>us</i> to forgive without counting how often we forgive. Are you seriously suggesting that Jesus <i>is holding us to a higher standard than God</i> , who, the first time Adam drops the ball, refuses to forgive him?!	52
Augustine	You simply do not understand the imperative of the divine justice.	53
Inquirer	So, Adam sinned, and it couldn’t be forgiven	54
Augustine	Yes. That was our unforgiveable Original Sin.	55
Inquirer	What do you mean “our” Original Sin? I wasn’t there.	56

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Person	Dialogue	
Augustine	You and I, and indeed everyone who has ever lived, sinned “in Adam” and <i>share equally in his guilt</i> , because we are Adam’s offspring.	57
Inquirer	It doesn’t seem fair that we all share in the guilt of Adam. I mean, I didn’t think God punished the innocent in place of the guilty? I seem to remember one of the prophets making a point of this: “The one who sins is the one who will die. <i>The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child.</i> ” (Ezekiel 18:19-20)	58

Reflection break # 2

1. A key doctrine in the Reformed Protestant tradition that is part of the Uniting Church heritage asserts that we are all “depraved” and “sinful” at our core as a result of the “fall” of Adam, whose guilt they assert we share. What evidence in the Genesis 2-3 text do you see for this doctrine?
2. *If* the Genesis 2-3 text depicts an actual historical event involving the first human couple, and *if* the taking of the forbidden fruit was an actual sin, why could not God simply have *forgiven* this sin?
3. *If* the Genesis 2-3 text depicts an actual historical event involving the first human couple, how reasonable or unreasonable (how just or unjust) is punishing all subsequent generations for the sin of the parents?

Dialogue continues...

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Person	Dialogue	
Augustine	You don't understand! It wasn't just human moral behaviour that went so terribly wrong after the fall. Adam's fall had literally <i>cosmic</i> implications! "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)	59
	All the natural evils in the world, all the natural disasters, are a result of the fall of Adam! It was the entry into the world of death itself! If it hadn't been for Adam's taking of the fruit, no living creature, including human beings, would ever have died!	
Inquirer	Wouldn't that have made the place a bit <i>crowded</i> ?	60
Augustine	Nonsense! God could've have worked around the crowding problem! He would've just kept making the world bigger and bigger to keep pace with the ever-growing population.	61
Inquirer	Hmmm. What about the dinosaurs?	62
Augustine	The <i>what</i> ?	63
Inquirer	Dinosaurs. Gigantic creatures that lived on the Earth millions of years before human beings ever existed. Evidence indicates they were wiped out, likely by an asteroid hitting the Earth, 65 million years before humans came on the scene. Are you <i>really</i> saying that, because of Adam taking the forbidden fruit, God retrospectively hurled a big rock at the Earth 65 million years earlier?!	64
Augustine	I know nothing of these creatures of which you speak, nor of the big rock, but are you saying that God <i>couldn't</i> have wiped them out retrospectively? Are you saying that God is bound, as we are, by notions of past, present and future?	65
Inquirer	No. It just seems a bit rough on the dinosaurs.	66
Augustine	You are making light of the situation! Every natural disaster, every earthquake, every volcanic eruption, every calamitous storm there has ever been, have occurred as a direct result of the fall of Adam! What a terrible price we have paid for his folly!	67
Inquirer	But some of those natural disasters, like earthquakes and volcanoes, are caused by the same seismic activity at the centre of the Earth that generates the magnetosphere, which protects our atmosphere from solar winds. Without the magnetosphere, our atmosphere would be shredded by the solar wind and we'd all be dead!	68

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Person	Dialogue	
Augustine	Again, I know nothing of this magnetosphere, nor of this solar wind which you say is so bad. What I do know, is that had Adam not taken the forbidden fruit, there would be no need for magnetospheres, because our world would still be perfect, and not afflicted by harmful things such as these solar winds.	69
	Yes, everything changed at the fall. Not just human nature, but the entire cosmos was corrupted by the fall of Adam.	
Inquirer	Are you saying that human nature changed at the fall of Adam?	70
Augustine	Yes! Absolutely! <i>Prior</i> to the fall, Adam existed in a state of Original Righteousness. He had complete and total freedom to choose the good. <i>After</i> the fall, the stain of Original Sin on Adam and all his descendants meant the total corruption of all humanity. There was no aspect of human nature untainted by this corruption and, as a result, we have no ability, in our own strength, to freely choose the good, hence the need for our redemption.	71
Inquirer	Just out of interest, where in the book of Genesis does it describe the difference between the <i>pre</i> -fall and <i>post</i> -fall human condition?	72
Augustine	It doesn't. But this difference is very real nonetheless.	73

Reflection break # 3

What do you think of the Fall-Salvation beliefs that:-

- We humans would still exist in a state of sinless “original righteousness” had it not been for the “fall” of Adam and Eve.
- There would have been no death (including the death of the dinosaurs) if it hadn't been for the “fall” of Adam and Eve.
- The world, indeed the entire universe, would have been a perfect place, free from all natural disasters, had it not been for the “fall” of Adam and Eve.

Dialogue continues...

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Persona	Dialogue	
Inquirer	And this “Adam” was a real, historical human being?	74
Augustine	Yes, absolutely. Adam was the parent of all humans who have ever lived.	75
Inquirer	I’m curious about a few details. I’m wondering when this Adam lived, and who his children married since there were no other people around at the time?	76
Augustine	I’m afraid I don’t have all the details. I just know that he was the ancestor of everyone who has ever lived, and we all share in the guilt and the ramifications of his terrible crime.	77
Inquirer	Okay. Just to clarify my understanding, <i>if</i> this Adam <i>hadn’t</i> taken the fruit from the forbidden tree, you’re saying that human beings <i>wouldn’t</i> have fallen, <i>wouldn’t</i> be tainted by Original Sin but <i>would</i> still be in a state of Original Righteousness, and hence <i>wouldn’t</i> be eternally damned and in need of salvation and redemption?	78
Augustine	That’s absolutely correct. It would have been how God intended.	79
Inquirer	And Jesus wouldn’t have needed to die on the cross?	80
Augustine	Yes, that’s right. Our Saviour wouldn’t have needed to die on the cross.	81
Inquirer	Hmmm...okay, indulge me in a hypothetical. Let’s imagine, hypothetically, that Adam <i>wasn’t</i> an actual historical figure, but instead only an <i>imaginary</i> or mythological figure. The taking of the fruit and the fall would only be <i>imaginary</i> or mythological. Am I correct in thinking that, in such a hypothetical, there would be no need for Jesus to redeem the <i>real</i> world by dying on the cross, because the <i>real</i> world <i>wouldn’t</i> be <i>really</i> fallen?	82
Augustine	Well, that’s a ridiculous hypothetical, but, I suppose, given that hypothetical, no, it <i>wouldn’t</i> be necessary for Jesus to die on the cross.	83
	Why do you ask?	
Inquirer	No reason.	84

Dialogue ends...

Enough of imagined dialogues with *ancient* theologians...
What about some words from a *modern* theologian?

The implications of there being no historical Adam and no historical fall:

"Everything turns on what kind of credit we give to the historical narrative and whether we are willing to speak, as not only Genesis 3 but subsequent Scripture does, of the human condition *before* and *after* the fall. Whatever one's conclusions concerning the process of human origins, Christian theology stands or falls with an historical Adam and an historical fall. On this point, Roman Catholic and Reformation theologies are at one."

"...if one does not take Adam (i.e. the human as *human*) seriously, two problems ensue: first, sin must be attributed to creation itself (and therefore ultimately to the Creator); second, there is no longer any historical basis for Christ's work as the Last Adam, undoing the curse and fulfilling the terms of the covenant of creation."

Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, pp. 424-425

Final reflection questions

1. Which parts of the imagined dialogue with Augustine do you find noteworthy?
2. Does the critique of the theology implicit in the dialogue mirror your own critique, or does your critique differ?
3. What is your view of the last seven lines of dialogue together with the insert box quoting Michael Horton's book? Were you aware that Fall-Salvation theology is dependent on a real, historical "Adam" and a real, historical taking of a "forbidden fruit"?
4. Reflect on the idea of Jesus as "Saviour" and "Redeemer." *If there wasn't a historical Adam, and if there wasn't a historical "fall," what has Jesus saved or redeemed us from, or for?*
5. For those of you who simply can't get enough theology, and who think my focus upon Fall-Salvation theology ignores other "atonement" ideas, see APPENDIX!

APPENDIX: An Abundance of Atonement Theories

It may surprise some people to learn that there is not one theory of the atonement, but *many*.

Sometimes, the word atonement is subject to a play on words: **At-one-ment**

According to this play on words, atonement relates to the process by which a person, or a world, is made “at-one” with God. This is something quite appealing about this play on words as it speaks of reconciliation, a key theme in the writings of the apostle Paul, as well as being a theme with much resonance in Australia, as we seek to further the process of reconciliation with First Peoples.

However, the *typical* meaning of the word **atonement** relates to *atoning* for one’s sins or failures. Built into the very word “atonement” is, therefore, the premise that one has indeed sinned or failed in a way that requires you to atone for this sin or failure. *Every* atonement “theory” therefore carries with it something of this notion of the requirement to atone for sin.

Atonement theories can be sub-divided into two categories:-

- So-called **Subjective** theories of the atonement: a *subjective* change occurs in *us*.
- So-called **Objective** theories of the atonement: an *objective* change occurs in *God*.

Below I have summarised some of the more common atonement theories, as well as grouping them by category. The list is far from exhaustive.

ATONEMENT THEORIES NOT BASED ON FALL-SALVATION THEOLOGY:

Moral Influence Theory of the Atonement

This was developed and popularised by Abelard in the 12th century. It is a “subjective” atonement theory because, according to it, Jesus’ life, death and resurrection was meant to subjectively inspire us to good works and a commitment to positively developing our character.

In essence, this theory argues that the purpose of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection was to turn humanity back to God by positively influencing our moral behaviour. As a theory of the atonement, it is one of very few that does *not* fall under the general heading of Fall-Salvation theology.

Scapegoating Theory of the Atonement

This atonement theory is associated with the philosopher Rene Girard who argues that the scapegoating mechanism operates in all human societies. According to this theory, a tension will over time develop between various groups in a society and that tension can be dissipated if a scapegoat can be found, allowing the conflicted parties to focus their animosity upon the scapegoat, thereby releasing the tension and resolving the crisis. The killing of the scapegoat frees, at least temporarily, the warring parties from their mutual animosity. Girard formed the hypothesis that societies unify their imitative desires around the destruction of a collectively agreed-upon scapegoat. Jesus is seen by this theory as the innocent scapegoat.

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A possible inclusion as a non-Fall-Salvation theory: Daniel Harlow's theory (see later)

This is an interesting restatement of the Fall-Salvation atonement in a way that *almost* qualifies it as a non-Fall-Salvation theory. I have, however, placed it in the Fall-Salvation category (below).

ATONEMENT THEORIES BASED ON FALL-SALVATION THEOLOGY:

The Ransom Theory of the Atonement

In this model, championed in the early centuries of the common era by such theologians as Gregory of Nyssa, Origen and Augustine, the death of Jesus is seen as a *ransom* paid to Satan, in order to effect the salvation of humanity. This theory posits that, as a result of the Fall, Satan had some form of legitimate or other claim upon the human race. In order to free humanity from this bondage to Satan, a price needed to be paid and, to this end, Christ was prepared to pay the ransom price, in the form of his suffering and death.

There have been a number of variations on the theme of a ransom being paid to Satan, one of which states that a legitimate ransom price was paid, another that Satan was tricked (by God) into thinking that he could claim the God-Man (Christ) as his ransom, and yet another (especially unpleasant variant) that Jesus-the-man was the human 'bait' which was deliberately used by God to bait and cover the divine 'hook' (Christ-the-divine) which caught Satan as one might catch a fish.

Thankfully, the ransom theory has largely disappeared from view, having collapsed under the weight of its own silliness.

The Satisfaction Theory of The Atonement

The so-called *satisfaction theory* of the atonement was developed by Anselm in the twelfth century, a contemporary of Abelard, and indeed his teacher for a time. According to this theory, the sin of humanity has damaged the right and proper relationship with God and offended the proper order of things. As a result, the righteousness and majesty of God has been offended and it is fit and proper that 'satisfaction' is due God. This theory arose out of a feudal culture where one's "liege lord" was owed honour and any slight to his honour demanded satisfaction.

The Penal Substitutionary Theory of The Atonement

The *satisfaction theory* of the atonement received a makeover in the sixteen century by the Protestant reformers. The satisfaction theory, which arose in a feudal context, needed to be updated to suit the new cultural context of 16th century Europe. Like the satisfaction theory, it falls under the general heading of fall-salvation theology, in which humanity is seen as "fallen" and requiring "salvation," a salvation provided by Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. Now however, instead of Jesus' death on the cross being seen as providing "satisfaction" to God's offended "honour," Jesus' death on the cross is seen as payment of a legal penalty, in which Jesus is the penal substitute, punished in our stead. According to the Penal Substitutionary view of atonement, there is a two-way transfer:

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- Our guilt and our punishment is transferred to Jesus, who suffers and dies on the cross.
- Jesus' righteousness is transferred (or “imputed”) to us through our faith in him.

The *Christus Victor* (“Christ the Victor”) Theory of the Atonement

The 20th century theologian Gustaf Aulen is associated with the re-popularisation of this ancient theory of the atonement, which argues that Christ’s atoning work on the cross liberates us from the power of Satan, sin and death. In other words, on the cross Jesus’ defeated sin and death.

CAN YOU STILL SUBSCRIBE TO FALL-SALVATION THEOLOGY WITHOUT BELIEVING IN ADAM AND EVE AS THE FIRST HUMAN COUPLE?

REJECTION OF THE IDEA OF “Adam and Eve as first humans”

Despite Michael Horton’s claim that Christian theology (specifically Fall-Salvation theology) “stands or falls with an historical Adam and an historical fall” I have outlined three theological views below which reject this assertion.

VIEW # 1: The Homo Divinus or Federal Headship Theory

This theory moves beyond the belief that the “first couple” depicted in Genesis 2-3 were actually the first humans. They were, however, the first “spiritually endowed” humans, selected by God, and given “federal headship” over all the other people living at that time. I quote from the BIOLOGOS website, an organisation founded by Francis Collins, head of the Human Genome Project and former head of the National Institutes of Health:-

“According to this model, God in his grace chose a couple of Neolithic farmers in the Near East, or maybe a community of farmers, to whom he chose to reveal himself in a special way, calling them into fellowship with himself – so that they might know Him as the one true personal God. From now on there would be a community who would know that they were called to a holy enterprise, called to be stewards of God’s creation, called to know God personally. It is for this reason that this first couple, or community, have been termed *Homo divinus*, the divine humans, those who know the one true God, the Adam and Eve of the Genesis account. *Homo divinus* marked the time at which God chose to reveal himself and his purposes for humankind for the first time.

‘The man’ – ‘The Adam’ - is therefore viewed as the federal head of the whole of humanity alive at that time. This was the moment at which God decided to start his new spiritual family on earth, consisting of all those who put their trust in God by faith, expressed in obedience to his will. Adam and Eve, in this view, were real people, living in a particular historical era and geographical location, chosen by God to be the representatives of his new humanity on earth, not by virtue of anything that they had done, but simply by God’s grace. The world population in Neolithic times is estimated to lie in the range 1–10 million, genetically just like Adam and Eve, but in

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this model it was these two farmers out of all those millions to whom God chose to reveal himself.”

“In this model the Fall then becomes the disobedience of Adam and Eve to the expressed revealed will of God, bringing spiritual death in its wake, a broken relationship between humankind and God. In an extension of this model, *just as Adam is the federal head of humankind, so as Adam falls, equally humankind falls with him.*”

<https://biologos.org/articles/genetics-theology-and-adam-as-a-historical-person>

What is puzzling in the above scientifically influenced re-work of Fall-Salvation theology is how exactly the humans, living at the same time as the “first selected couple,” and not genetically related to them, could also “fall” when they did? The answer, according to the Biologos author, appears to be that Adam has “Federal Headship” over the other humans, even if they didn’t know it!

In this scenario, I can only imagine the conversation, immediately after “The Fall” of Adam-as-Federal-Head, when the *fallen* Adam wanders over to his neighbouring village and regretfully informs them that they too are *fallen*, in a scene reminiscent of *Monty Python’s The Holy Grail*, but where “King Arthur” is replaced by “Adam-Federal Head”:

PERSON	DIALOGUE
King Arthur	I am your king
Peasant Woman	Well, I didn't vote for you.
King Arthur	You don't vote for kings.
Peasant Woman	Well, how'd you become king, then?
King Arthur	The Lady of the Lake, her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite, held aloft Excalibur from the bosom of the water, signifying by divine providence that I, Arthur, was to carry Excalibur. That is why I am your king.
Dennis the Peasant	Listen. Strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government. Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony.
King Arthur	Be quiet!
Dennis the Peasant	You can't expect to wield supreme power just 'cause some watery tart threw a sword at you!”
King Arthur	Shut up!
Dennis	I mean, if I went around saying I was an emperor just because some moistened bint had lobbed a scimitar at me, they’d put me away!
King Arthur	[grabs Dennis] Shut up! Will you shut up?!

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PERSON

DIALOGUE

Dennis

Ah, now we see the violence inherent in the system!

King Arthur

[shakes Dennis] Shut up!

Dennis

Oh! Come and see the violence inherent in the system! Help, help, I'm being repressed!

VIEW # 2: Karl Barth on the non-historicity of "Adam"

Karl Barth, one of the great Protestant theologians of the 20th century, did not believe in a literal Adam. The following is a quote from Barth:-

“Through one man all this came about! Who then is this one man? Adam? Yes! Adam is the one through whom death entered the world. For he committed the invisible sin, and fell from God. But the Adam who did this is not Adam in his historical unrelatedness, but Adam in his non-historical relation to Christ....Adam has no existence on the plane of history and of psychological analysis. He exists as the first Adam, as the type of the second Adam who is to come, as the shadow cast by His light. He exists as the ‘Moment’ which forms the background from which Christ advances to victory, the scene where the world and mankind are transformed from fall to righteousness, from death to life, and from old to new. Adam has no separate, positive existence.”

<https://theologybraindump.wordpress.com/2017/04/19/barth-on-the-non-historicity-of-adam/>

Even though Barth rejects Adam as an actual historical figure, he still affirms that humanity is “fallen,” and that Jesus paid the price on the cross for our sins. Go figure.

VIEW # 3: No “first couple” but a heavily reworked Fall-Salvation theory

There is overwhelming scientific evidence that the humans currently living on Earth could not possible have descended from a “first couple” but instead are descendent of a “breeding population of many thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of individuals. The genetic evidence for this is highly technical. Anyone sufficiently interested can consult, in the first instance, a relatively non-technical paper by Daniel Harlow, a professor of biblical studies, entitled: *After Adam: Reading Genesis in an Age of Evolutionary Science*.

<https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2010/PSCF9-10Harlow.pdf>

Anyone interested in the more technical, scientific reasoning about the impossibility of a single couple as ancestors of everyone currently living can make contact with me, as I have lots more than I can share.

Christians such as Harlow do *not* believe in a first couple who were the ancestors of everyone currently living, because it is scientifically naïve to do so.

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However, Harlow doesn't so easily give up on Fall-Salvation theology, with its requirement of Original Sin, although his reworking of the theology is extensive and deviates widely from the theology as commonly espoused. His words are interesting enough to quote at length:-

Can and should the Augustinian doctrines of the Fall and original sin be retained with conviction in the age of evolutionary science? I think the answer is yes, as long as we are willing to make some serious modifications to it.

On the one hand, evolutionary biology can be seen to confirm those essential components of original sin that are among Augustine's most enduring theological intuitions: the inevitability of human sin and the inability of human beings to overcome their inherited tendency to sin. If anything, evolutionary biology reinforces Paul and Augustine's sense of how serious the human predicament is. And when assessed from a theological perspective, it substantiates another of their key insights: the absolute necessity of God's supernatural grace in Christ, not only to forgive sin but also to transform sinful human beings into new creatures whose lives conform to the image of Christ. On the other hand, evolutionary biology gives us a better explanation than Augustine did of why all humans are united in sin: not because we bear the guilt and fractured will of a single ancestral couple who fell from a state of original righteousness, but because we share a transtemporal and universal biological and cultural heritage that predisposes us to sin. If the above is true, then we must be willing to detach the doctrine of the Fall from the notion of a single primordial event that brought about a drastic transformation in the human condition. We must also be willing to decouple original sin from the notion that all humans have descended from a single pair.

(Various theologians) have proposed that original sin is a biologically inherited state, a by-product of billions of years of evolution. Intrinsic to the process of evolution is the inclination toward self-preservation at the expense of other creatures. Yet selfish behaviour did not become sin (culpable wrongdoing) in human beings until the evolution of their self-consciousness (and God-consciousness) allowed our remote ancestors to override their innate tendency to self-assertion by the exercise of their free will. The same is true of us today, as, at a certain age, we reach moral awareness. So understood, original sin is not the result of a single fall but of repeated falls in the life of every human being and of their cumulative, systemic effects in society and culture. And humanity's constant falling away is not a descent from some primordial state of integrity but a failure to live up to a divinely posed ideal. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

To put the issue in these terms is not to blame God for human sin. As Karl Giberson puts it:

By these lights, God did not "build" sin into the natural order. Rather, God endowed the natural order with the freedom to "become," and the result was an interesting, morally complex, spiritually rich, but ultimately selfish species we call *Homo sapiens*.

We must trust that God created the kind of world that he did because an evolutionary process involving selfishness, suffering, and death was the only way to bring about such creaturely values as novelty, complexity, and freedom.

FINAL WORDS ON THE ATONEMENT (I promise)

It would appear that I am not the only one bent out of shape by the idea of Jesus' death on the cross being viewed as a perfect human sacrifice to God. The book *Stricken by God: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ* edited by Brad Jersek and Michael Hardin, offers a series of essays seeking to retrieve the cross as an act of divine love, rather than divine violence. The essays take many approaches to this, some of which are interesting. Pretty much all of them, however, seek to retain some sort of efficacy to the cross: they continue to assert that Jesus died on the cross *for a reason*; hence it was *necessary*, rather than simply being an appalling and meaningless tragedy.