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## Abstract

This dissertation questions the modern and contemporary promotion of objective and Crucifixion-centred models of the Atonement at the expense of the apparently 'subjective' and 'moral'. I suggest that the idea of revelation as salvific is more fundamental to many of the 'exemplarist' models of salvation than the idea of Jesus as a moral example, and that the criticisms fired at example-based soteriology are inapplicable to soteriology rooted in revelation. I argue that the grounds for its exclusion from the status of first-order model should be re-evaluated, and defend it against five primary criticisms. First, I argue against the accusation that a revelatory model has no foundation in Scripture or Christian tradition, and in so doing I explore the relationship between salvation and revelation in The Gospel of John, and in the works of Origen, Abailard, GWH Lampe, and Dumitru Staniloae. Second, I dispute the assertion that a revelatory model is subjective and entails a Pelagian attitude towards divine grace, suggesting that the objective/subjective distinction is a false dichotomy, and, taken to extremes, is damaging to soteriology. Third, I contest the perennial criticism that a revelatory model would render Christ's death superfluous, suggesting rather that such a soteriology might unite history and theology in biblically and theologically responsible way. Fourth, I question the claim that a revelatory model necessarily excludes the non-Christian from salvation in Christ. Finally, I argue against the idea that a revelatory model would have a weak and naïve view of sin, suggesting a view of sin connected to a revelatory model rooted in (but not identical with) that of Augustine of Hippo.

While much of the dissertation is therefore apologetic, there is also a constructive element to the work. In the final chapter I sketch a possible revelatory model, connecting ideas such as the identification of God as love, sin as privation and *apatheia*, and the equation of inspiration and infusion. In addition, I point to many of the insights inherent in a revelatory model from which, I suggest, soteriology as a whole would benefit. The aim of the dissertation, therefore, is to propose a re-evaluation of revelatory soteriology as a first-order model, questioning many of the preconceptions that currently obstruct it, and indicating reasons for its theological value.

**Transforming Revelation: Towards a Revelatory Model of Salvation**

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M.A. Thesis

Department of Theology

University of Durham

2002

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30 MAY 2003

*For Tom Hick*

*3<sup>rd</sup> January 1914 - 25<sup>th</sup> December 1992*

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## Introduction

The assertion that Jesus of Nazareth is the Saviour of the world has, throughout Christian history, naturally led to exploration of the way in which Jesus effected salvation. Early Christians drew upon themes and images within their cultural context in order to explain both what the world needed saving from, and how this salvation was accomplished. In particular, imagery from the contexts of the law-courts, the battlefield, religious and cultic life and the market-place were applied to the salvific work of Christ, although in the early church these remained metaphorical and were never developed as comprehensive explanations of how salvation took place. In the Middle Ages, Anselm of Bec took the unprecedented step of developing a juridical metaphor into a soteriological *theory*, interpreting God's relationship with humanity and the œconomy of salvation in the light of the legal norms of his own day. The development of salvific imagery into soteriological models and even comprehensive theories soon became the norm, and models such as satisfaction, *Christus Victor*, sacrifice and ransom are often given the status of first-order models. A further model is recognised as a secondary and inferior model, generally regarded as dependent upon the primary models of salvation, since its apparently subjective and moral nature renders it inadequate in and of itself as an expression of God's redeeming work in Christ. This model, and imagery concerning the work of Christ as Teacher or Revealer, is called exemplarism.

In this essay I question the association of Christ's revelation of God with Christ's moral example. I look at the presuppositions underlying condemnation of exemplarist and revelatory soteriology, suggesting that what is true of the former does not apply to the latter. In the first chapter, I am concerned with the portrayal of both exemplarist and revelatory approaches in recent work on soteriology, suggesting that the two are erroneously associated, and that there are good reasons for the reconsideration of revelation as a first-order model. In Chapters Two and Three, I

discuss the theme of revelation in particular parts of Scripture and Christian tradition, attesting against the assertion that a revelatory model has no foundation either in the Bible or in tradition. In so doing, I aim to demonstrate that much that has been regarded as exemplarism is in fact essentially revelatory, and does not fall into the same traps as a model based on example. In addition, I explore many of the premises and themes surrounding a revelatory model – particularly concerning the nature of sin, the love of God and the relation between the revelation of God in Christ and the salvation of the individual. In Chapter Four, I sketch a revelatory model of salvation, re-appropriating and developing the insights of Augustine of Hippo into the nature of sin and God as love. In the Conclusion I return to the problems set out in Chapter One, reviewing the kind of revelatory model sketched in Chapter Four in the light of the criticisms of those who believe it to be unsatisfactory as a first-order model.

Unfortunately, there is much that must lie beyond the scope of the current essay. In the first place, I do not discuss the nature of models and their relation to metaphors and to theories, but instead take the term in a fairly general sense to signify aspects of both. Secondly, I deal only with the salvation of the individual, and, while I recognise that salvation also takes place within the community and is in an important sense also a community phenomenon, I feel that discussing the process of the salvation of the individual is sufficient for a dissertation of this size. Thirdly, my concern is with the process of salvation in this life, although it is assumed that salvation is an ongoing process that continues beyond the current world, and that salvation in its fullest sense is experienced only in the afterlife. Fourthly and finally, the accomplishment of salvation discussed here has a christological focus rather than a pneumatological one, although it is recognised that the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual (and the community) is an important and connected subject within soteriology. The limitations



and presuppositions of this essay are necessitated by the enormity and complexity of the subject matter, and I can only recognise the partiality of the idea I suggest.

## Chapter One

### *Exemplarism, Exemplarists and Subjective Soteriology: Conclusive Condemnation?*

Among the diverse theories, models, and metaphors of the Atonement is that inspired by the writings of Peter Abailard and developed by Hastings Rashdall. This model is generally called exemplarism, based upon the perception that its primary tenet is that Christ's salvific efficacy lies in the moral example that Christ gave humanity to imitate. The model is also known as the 'moral' theory of the Atonement, since it is thought that the model entails that good ethical practice is the key to salvation, and sometimes the 'subjective' theory of the Atonement, since it is thought that, according to the model, Christ effects not an objective change in the relationship between God and humanity, but a subjective change in demonstrating to humanity how it is that they should live.

Such a model has undergone a critical response, often in terms that constitute an accusation of Pelagianism. This is perhaps most unambiguously and vehemently encapsulated by Alister McGrath's critique at the end of his article, 'The Moral Theory of the Atonement'. Rashdall is taken as the primary representative of exemplarism, and thus the chief focus of McGrath's attack. The main thrust of the attack is upon Rashdall's competence as an historian, particularly with respect to his interpretation of Abailard, and his awareness of the Aufklärung and of Kant. Criticisms of his theology are also fired at the end of the article, and are as follows.

#### 1.1 McGrath on Rashdall

First, other models of the Atonement emphasise the primacy of God's grace in our salvation, that is, what God achieves, through Christ, for us and even despite us. In contrast, Rashdall's model seems to suggest that humans earn their own salvation through moral works. According to McGrath, Rashdall's theory 'amounts to nothing

less than a doctrine of salvation by merit.’<sup>1</sup> Secondly, and consequent upon the first criticism, Rashdall’s theory has too high an expectation with respect to what human beings can achieve morally. McGrath writes, ‘It does not take account of the weakness and frailty of human nature.’<sup>2</sup> As a result, Rashdall’s model demands that humans must be morally perfect if they are to be saved, since, as Kant has argued, freedom to behave morally implies an obligation to do so. According to McGrath, ‘if man *can* advance to moral perfection, it necessarily follows that he *must* do so.’<sup>3</sup>

Thirdly, the horrific human activity of the twentieth century, particularly during the first and second world wars, demonstrates that Rashdall’s optimistic view of human nature is inaccurate. McGrath regards the atrocities that humans have inflicted upon one another as conclusive evidence for the existence of sin in the human race as a whole. He writes, ‘If ever there was a period in which it was clear that man was a sinner, it is the twentieth century.’<sup>4</sup> The fourth criticism concerns the question of whether humanity is ‘in captivity’ to sin, or whether the notion of being captive to sin is a crippling illusion. While the revelation of God’s love for humanity, and humanity’s responsive love for God, are both necessary parts of any soteriology, ‘man needs more than education about God – he needs liberation from the forces which imprison him.’<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Rashdall’s idea that once man is made aware of his own situation he can ‘effect his salvation’ is incorrect if, as McGrath holds, the situation is one of captivity and not freedom, from which a person needs to be saved by another being. McGrath illustrates this difference between his and Rashdall’s view of humanity’s situation using the metaphor of freedom from and incarceration in a prison. McGrath’s theory of humanity’s situation is illustrated by ‘a man in prison: upon being told that he is in

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<sup>1</sup> Alister McGrath, ‘The Moral Theory of the Atonement’, in *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 (1985), p.219

<sup>2</sup> McGrath, ‘Moral Theory’, p.219

<sup>3</sup> McGrath, ‘Moral Theory’, p.219

<sup>4</sup> McGrath, ‘Moral Theory’, p.219

<sup>5</sup> McGrath, ‘Moral Theory’, p.219

prison, he is not thereby in a significantly better position – he still requires liberation.’<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Rashdall’s model implies that man believes himself to be in prison, whereas actually he is free: ‘upon being informed of the true situation, he is thus freed from false estimations of his position, and is able to act accordingly.’<sup>7</sup> If, as McGrath asserts, humanity is in some sense ‘captive’ to sin, then the theory that Rashdall propounds is ineffective since it assumes that humanity is free and offers no objective liberation from captivity.

Fifthly, Rashdall’s high estimation of human free will is naïve concerning those who suffer from psychological disorders that prevent them exercising their free will fully. Furthermore, Rashdall’s view implies that, since salvation must be brought about through moral perfection, those who suffer from psychological disorders preventing them from acting morally cannot be saved. McGrath points out that Rashdall’s view ‘offers no hope of salvation to those who are slave to habits’.<sup>8</sup> Increased awareness of psychological disorders such as kleptomania, dipsomania, and psychosis means that theologians after Rashdall are more open to the ‘idea of enslavement to alien forces.’<sup>9</sup> Rashdall’s soteriology, by contrast, ‘denies salvation to those who are simply not capable of doing the will of God.’<sup>10</sup>

This summary of McGrath’s criticisms of Rashdall’s model demonstrates the inadequacy of a soteriology based solely on Christ’s example. A purely exemplarist model fails to take account of the saving grace of God and the depth and complexity of human sin. If McGrath is accurate in his interpretation of Rashdall’s work, then Rashdall’s model may rightly be condemned as naïve Pelagianism. Before consigning Rashdall’s work to the flames, however, it may be helpful to reconsider his work and to question whether this understanding of Rashdall is entirely accurate and therefore

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<sup>6</sup> McGrath, ‘Moral Theory’, p.219

<sup>7</sup> McGrath, ‘Moral Theory’, p.219

<sup>8</sup> McGrath, ‘Moral Theory’, p.219

<sup>9</sup> McGrath, ‘Moral Theory’, p.219

<sup>10</sup> McGrath, ‘Moral Theory’, p.219

whether McGrath's criticisms are undoubtedly justified. Is the model Rashdall suggests really based upon the idea of Christ as an example for humanity to follow? Does it actually imply that humans effect their own salvation by moral living, and so belittle the role of God's grace in the work of Atonement?

### 1.2 Rashdall Revisited

Rashdall's soteriological model is sketched in his 1892 and 1894 sermons, 'Revelation by Character' and 'The Abailardian Doctrine of Atonement', published in 1898 in *Doctrine and Development: University Sermons*. His theory was developed at greater length in the Bampton lectures of 1915, published in 1919 as *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*. In the earlier work, Rashdall describes himself as 'translating'<sup>11</sup> traditional Christian ideas into the language of modern thought, while in the later work Rashdall seems more aware of the distinctiveness of his own thought with respect to contemporary theology.

While it is the element of Christ's *moral example* that is drawn out by the term 'exemplarism', it seems to me that the elements of Christ as revealing God's nature and inspiring human love are at least as important to Rashdall himself. In *The Idea of the Atonement in Christian Theology*, Rashdall discloses three aspects of how salvation takes place when he writes that the object of Christ's entire Incarnation - life, death, and Resurrection - is to '...make known God's nature and His will, to instruct men in the way of salvation, and to excite in them that love which would inspire sorrow for past sin and give the power to avoid sin in the future.'<sup>12</sup> The second of these three aspects is frequently taken to be constitutive of exemplarism, and yet it can be seen that Rashdall's theory involves a three-fold soteriology. This comprises, first, the revelation

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<sup>11</sup> Hastings Rashdall, *Doctrine and Development: University Sermons* (London: Methuen and Co., 1898), p.vii

<sup>12</sup> Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1919), p. 443

of God as loving and compassionate, secondly, ethical teaching and example, and, thirdly, inspiration to love God because of the love shown by God. The revelatory aspect of soteriology is also evident in 'Revelation by Character',<sup>13</sup> where Rashdall writes that the Christian revelation is two-fold, revealing both the nature of God, and what humanity was originally intended to be. However, he writes, the two are integrally linked. This is because, while Rashdall does not identify God and humanity, he believes there to be a union between the divine and the human natures based on humanity's creation in the image of God. Consequently, in revealing what God is like, Christ reveals what humanity was eternally meant to be. Conversely, in setting forth the ideal of human life, Christ reveals the eternal nature of God. Again, in 'The Abailardian Doctrine of the Atonement', Rashdall emphasises the revelatory and inspiring aspects of Christ's work alongside the exemplarist. He displays his own soteriology when he writes that according to Abailard 'The whole life of Christ, the whole *revelation* of God which is constituted by that life, *excites* the love of man, *moves* his gratitude, shows him what God would have him be, enables him to be in his imperfect way what Christ alone was perfectly, and so makes at-one-ment, restores between God and man the union which sin alone has destroyed.'<sup>14</sup> This demonstrates that Rashdall's theory concerns only partially the notion of Christ as Example, also suggesting the themes of Christ the Illuminator or Revealer, and Christ as Inspirer or Infuser<sup>15</sup> of love. While McGrath focuses solely on Rashdall's exemplarist aspects, a subtler soteriology is evident, and may be worthy of soteriological consideration. With this in mind, I shall consider the place of Christ's revelation and pedagogy<sup>16</sup> involved in allegedly 'exemplarist'

<sup>13</sup> Rashdall, 'Revelation by Character', in *Doctrine and Development*, p.110 – 111

<sup>14</sup> Rashdall, 'The Abailardian Doctrine of the Atonement', in *Doctrine and Development*, p. 137

<sup>15</sup> While Rashdall speaks of 'inspiration', implying a natural psychological response, Abailard speaks of 'infusion', suggesting a stronger sense of divine intervention. The two are complementary, and it is suggested in Chapter Four that, because God *is* love, the natural response of being inspired is indistinguishable from the divine gift of infusion. The two are therefore be used synonymously.

<sup>16</sup> I assume Lessing's association of pedagogy and revelation, according to which pedagogy is pertinent to the individual, while revelation is pertinent to humanity as a whole: 'What education is to the individual man, revelation is to the whole human race.' (Lessing's Theological Writings, trans. and ed. Henry

soteriologies, and shall speak, where appropriate, of revelatory or pedagogical models. I shall now look at Rashdall's soteriology as a whole, since this will shed light on the partially revelatory soteriology he propounds, and will offer a larger context to facilitate later discussion and critical development.

While Rashdall asserts the need for theological reconstruction where elements of Christianity have become incomprehensible or morally abhorrent, he insists upon the need to base contemporary theology upon the Christian tradition as it has developed since the time of Christ. In consequence, Rashdall begins in his later work by establishing the roots of his own theory of the Atonement within Christian tradition. While Rashdall is rightly criticised for his historical inaccuracy, particularly with respect to Abailard<sup>17</sup>, Rashdall's treatment of salvation in Christian history is significant because it highlights what he regards the primary elements of the Atonement to be. The model Rashdall derives from his historical survey is important as theology in and of itself and regardless of the fact that Rashdall interpreted history in accordance with his own soteriological theory, as historians generally now agree.

According to Rashdall's historical appraisal, the Atonement was not a part of Jesus' teaching and (with the exception of Paul) the Biblical writers, Apostolic Fathers and early fathers up until the time of Irenaeus expounded no 'definite theory' of substitution or expiation, that is, those metaphors that have been developed into theories of Christ's death such as ransom to the devil, or as sacrifice to or satisfaction of God. Furthermore, in much of the early church as in Rashdall's own theology, the salvific work of Christ is related to the entire Incarnation of Christ - life, death, and Resurrection - rather than to Jesus' death exclusively.

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Chadwick, London, 1956, quoted in Timothy Gorrige, *Redeeming Time: Atonement through Education* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986), p.1

<sup>17</sup> Rashdall sees Abailard's emphasis upon Christ's salvific revelation as a theory, and erroneously believes him to hold it exclusively of other models of Atonement.

Christ's death is primarily revelatory, 'completing that revelation of the nature and character of God which it was the object of Christ's whole mission to set forth.'<sup>18</sup> However, far from reducing the significance of Jesus' death, Rashdall sees Jesus' death as the supreme instantiation of God's love for humanity: the revelation of God's nature as loving is found pre-eminently in the self-sacrificing death of Christ because, as Jesus himself articulated, laying down one's life for one's friends is the ultimate expression of love. Rashdall appeals to the words of Peter the Lombard, conveying the Abailardian idea that God's love saves humanity by initiating a loving response: 'So great a pledge of love having been given us, we are both moved and kindled to love God who did such great things for us; and by this we are justified, that is, being loosed from our sins we are made just. The death of Christ therefore justifies us, inasmuch as through it charity is stirred up in our hearts.'<sup>19</sup>

One oft-raised criticism of this theory is that a 'subjective' interpretation of Jesus' death as the revelation of God's love makes the crucifixion meaningless: being executed for someone does not express one's love for them unless one is accomplishing something for them in dying. Therefore, many have argued, Jesus' death must have an 'objective' purpose, such as removing sin by way of a sacrifice or freeing humanity by means of a ransom, in order for the 'subjective' element to be meaningful. In the words of Rashdall's rival, James Denney, '...(I do not know of) any interpretation of Christ's death which enables us to regard it (Jesus' death) as a demonstration of love to sinners, if this vicarious or substitutionary character is denied.'<sup>20</sup> Among the several replies Rashdall makes to Denney, of importance to revelatory soteriology is the idea that Christ's death was the necessary outcome and culmination of the way in which Jesus led his life. Jesus was executed because he never ceased to live in accordance with God's

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<sup>18</sup> Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement*, p.437

<sup>19</sup> *Sent iii Dist. xix.i*, cited in Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement*, p.371, my emphases.

<sup>20</sup> James Denney, *The Death of Christ: Its Place and Interpretation in the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), p.172



will and to serve humanity, even to the extent of challenging the leaders of the society and the established framework of presuppositions and rules in which they lived. Rashdall argues that Jesus had no thought of offering a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Rather, he regarded himself as persisting in his task of preparing and inaugurating the Kingdom in obedience to God - a task he persisted in even to the point of death.

Several instances of revelatory soteriology developed in the light of Rashdall's thesis have used the notion of the revelation of God suffering with his creation to demonstrate further the necessity of the Crucifixion on a solely 'subjective' view of the Atonement. Interestingly, Rashdall makes less of this idea than later theologians, primarily because of his view of the relation between God and the human Jesus.<sup>21</sup> Like 'Suffering God' theologians, however, Rashdall does reject the idea of divine impassibility, which, he argues, is not essentially Christian but Aristotelian. Furthermore, he argues, suffering is necessarily concomitant with love where the object of that love is in a state of moral or spiritual deterioration, or is suffering and in pain: '...if God loves mankind, He must needs suffer over human sin and human pain.... A God who could contemplate such a world as ours without suffering would not be a loving God, nor would He be in the least like Christ.'<sup>22</sup> The model Rashdall suggests emphasises the love of God for creation, and the costliness of this love for God because of the suffering it entails.

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<sup>21</sup> Despite denying divine impassibility, Rashdall argues that we cannot hold that God's sufferings are identical with a particular person's pain or even with Jesus' Passion. To do so would either be pantheistic in identifying God and humanity absolutely, or would fall into the traps of Modalism, equating the Persons of God the Father and God the Son entirely and without qualification, and distinguishing between them only in their manifestations. It is even more certain in Rashdall's mind that we cannot think of God as actually dying in the person of Jesus, for this would be to posit an oxymoron and a logical impossibility because of the nature of God as eternal. In the attempt to balance the suffering nature of God with the fear of making God 'too human', Rashdall argues that we may say that the suffering Christ *reveals* the suffering God, but not that the suffering Christ *is* the suffering God. God did not suffer in the human Jesus, but God's love was revealed in Christ's self-sacrificing love because of God's presence in the human Jesus: 'The sufferings of Christ reveal to us the love of Christ, and the love of Christ reveals the love of God.' (*The Idea of Atonement*, p.451)

<sup>22</sup> Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement*, p. 452 - 453

Contrary to McGrath, Rashdall does view humanity as captive to sin, and in need of liberation or salvation. However, departing from conventional understandings of sin, Rashdall views sin as a lack of love<sup>23</sup>, and asserts that Christ overcame and overcomes human sin by revealing the love of God, teaching God's will, and initiating a response of love from humanity. But it is not simply the removal of or liberation from sin that constitutes salvation according to Rashdall's view; rather, life in the Kingdom of Heaven is the fullest manifestation of salvation. For this reason Rashdall, incorporating the element of the ransom metaphor that affirms humanity's liberation from sin into his own model, writes that: 'The prominent thought (of salvation according to the Gospels) is not what Christ delivered men *from*, but what He bought them *for*. He bought them for His kingdom, He made them subjects of His spiritual empire, at the cost of His own death. That is the ultimate purpose of all Christ's work, of which even the deliverance from the slavery of sin is but a negative and a subordinate aspect.'<sup>24</sup>

Rashdall's theory of Atonement is, in one respect, seemingly paradoxical. Unlike other, more 'objective' soteriological metaphors and theories, Jesus does not instigate a different state of affairs with respect to humanity's status before God, but merely reveals an eternally present situation – God's love for humanity, and the union between the divine and human natures.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Rashdall's theory suggests a greater change in the situation, in that salvation has a real and observable effect on those who experience it, while according to some other metaphors and theories justification or satisfaction are not really part of the individual's experience, but are merely regarded as such in the sight of God. On this point, Rashdall writes that '...the justifying effect of Christ's work is a real effect, not a mere legal fiction. Christ's work really does make men better, instead of merely supplying the ground why they should

<sup>23</sup> Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement*, p. 450

<sup>24</sup> 'The Abailardian Doctrine of the Atonement' in *Doctrine and Development*, p.130, my emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> 'Revelation by Character' in *Doctrine and Development*, p.110- 111

be considered good or be excused the punishment of sin, without really being made any better than they were before.'<sup>26</sup>

This brief overview of Rashdall's thought suggests that, contrary to McGrath, Rashdall's soteriology is not based merely on the idea of Christ as a moral example to be followed in order to earn salvation. Rather, it is also rooted in the revelation in Christ of God's love for the world, and the inspiration or infusion of love in humanity because of Christ. Furthermore, Rashdall's theory exhibits positive elements valuable to our understanding of the Atonement. For instance, a revelatory model differs from most western soteriology because it implies that the entirety of Jesus' Incarnation is salvific, and does not regard salvation as taking place solely on the Cross (a tendency I shall henceforth refer to as *cruciocentric*). Again, Rashdall and his successors move away from the idea of divine impassibility, and suggest that God actually suffers for his creation, insisting that God's love is more than a principled duty or concern devoid of actual compassion, or comparable with a moral but emotionally indifferent ruler. Furthermore, a revelatory model suggests that salvation is not just something being removed, but also something being given, that is, a new kind of life lived in the knowledge and presence of God's love. Rashdall also shows the way in which salvation may have an actual rather than just a theoretical effect upon the individual, so that salvation is conceived of as pertaining (at least partially) in the present world, and is not seen solely as a future promise of immortality (though it is seen as this also).

Such positive aspects are indispensable to our understanding of salvation, the nature of God, and person and work of Christ. While Rashdall is in some ways more of a product of his age than some other soteriologies, there appears to be much of lasting value to theology inherent in his work. As such, it might be expected that aspects of Rashdall's thought would be found, alongside other models, in soteriological

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<sup>26</sup> Rashdall, 'The Abailardian Doctrine of the Atonement', in *Doctrine and Development*, p.137

scholarship written since 1919. With this in mind, I shall turn to more recent work on the Atonement, in order to ascertain the place of Rashdall's model and the insights it offers in later twentieth-century thought.

### 1.3 Rashdall: The Consensus

In *The Actuality of Atonement*, Gunton argues that use of metaphor is crucial to the advance of human knowledge and understanding in all disciplines, and that Enlightenment rationalism, represented by Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher, has deprived theology by its reductionist approach. Gunton recognises three metaphors of the Atonement: victory over the dæmons, the satisfaction of justice, and sacrifice. These metaphors have differing aspects appealed to in Gunton's hypothesis, and each seems to supplement the others' defects in some respect. In stressing that these are indeed metaphors, and should not be regarded as theories to be pushed to their logical conclusions, Gunton relieves the traditional imagery of the Atonement of many of the challenges by liberal theologians in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries: metaphor may not be regarded as 'wrong' as such, and it is with respect to the positive elements of the victory, justice and sacrifice themes rather than, for instance, any negative connotation these metaphors may have on the nature of God, that Gunton believes the metaphors to be pertinent. While the metaphors are primarily focused on Jesus' death on the Cross, Gunton also regards them as expressions of Jesus' Resurrection, and imaginatively extends them to God's activity in creation and the eschaton.

As the title, *The Actuality of Atonement*, might suggest, Gunton's concern is to establish 'objective' approaches to the Atonement over and against 'subjective' approaches. These latter, Gunton argues, result in the belittlement of grace and the belief that humans can achieve their own salvation. He comments pointedly that 'The

Christian church still stands or falls by whether it proclaims and lives by the Gospel of the liberating grace of God, or whether its life degenerates into some form of self-salvation.<sup>27</sup> In Gunton's view, exemplarist and subjective views are 'different aspects of a single approach to a topic'.<sup>28</sup> In reference to Schleiermacher's subjective view, Gunton suggests that it is new-fangled because it 'differs from tradition', precisely in not being a satisfaction or sacrificial model and in not teaching 'that on the cross Jesus in some way or other underwent the divine judgement on human sin'.<sup>29</sup> Gunton does not include the idea of Christ as Pedagogue, Example or Teacher among his primary metaphors, and, while recognising that Christendom would be bereft were it not to recognise Jesus' moral example as important, his discussion of the theme consists in large part of the four following criticisms of it.

First, a 'largely exemplarist' approach is mistaken because it only takes into account certain parts of the Bible. Exemplarism, argues Gunton, tends to concentrate on one specific text and to isolate it from the rest of Scripture, thus removing its proper context and framework of interpretation. He writes, '...it takes passages from the Bible out of context and makes what is a part, and a part consequent on the priority of divine initiative, into almost the whole'.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, an exemplarist model does not take full account of the qualitatively unique nature of Jesus: 'Jesus is an example because he and he alone is the incarnate Son who by the enabling of the Holy Spirit remained unfallen where we universally fall'.<sup>31</sup> According to Gunton's interpretation of 'exemplarism', all humans have the ability to achieve the moral perfection of Christ. This is not only problematic because it seems implausible, but, additionally, it does not take into account Jesus' divine nature. Thirdly, Jesus' Passion dominates the entire Gospel narratives and

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<sup>27</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) p.101

<sup>28</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, p.156

<sup>29</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, p.13

<sup>30</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, p.158

<sup>31</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, p.158

the Epistles, and so any soteriology must be *crucioentric*. If an 'exemplarist' soteriology is taken to be *crucioentric*, however, it renders Jesus' death no more significant than that of a martyr such as Socrates. While there is the element of martyrdom in Christ's death, it is also clear from Scripture that the Crucifixion is to be regarded as something qualitatively different and as decreed by God. Gunton writes, '...the death of Jesus is first of all to be understood as part of the divine purpose of redemption. In the language of sacrifice, God 'gives up' or hands over his Son to death.'<sup>32</sup> An 'exemplarist' view, argues Gunton, fails to take account of the Scriptural view that Jesus' death is a divinely ordained event as well as an act of self-sacrifice on the part of a human being. Fourthly, Gunton, like McGrath, objects to a merely 'exemplarist' soteriology because it does not take human sin seriously, and because it overrates the ability of humans to save themselves: '...the human condition is too enmeshed in evil to be restored by its own agency.'<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, such a model seems to imply that sin is solely moral, whereas in fact the problem is 'encompassing all dimensions of human existence and its context.'<sup>34</sup> Even supposing it were possible for humans to be as morally perfect as Christ, sin in *all* its aspects would not be conquered. There must, he argues, be a redemptive act in which God takes the initiative to correct the disordered human condition.

At the root of Gunton's suspicion of 'exemplarism' seems to be a sharp divide between objective and subjective approaches, and the related question of whether Christ accomplishes for us a new ontological reality, or whether he 'merely' reveals to us something of significance. This might be re-expressed in the language of M. Kähler, who asks whether Christ initiated a new situation, or whether it is rather that he revealed certain insights concerning an eternal and unchanging situation.<sup>35</sup> In Gunton's view, an

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<sup>32</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, p.159

<sup>33</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, p.159

<sup>34</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, p.160

<sup>35</sup> *Zur Lehre von der Versöhnung. Dogmatische Zeitfragen II* (1898), cited in McGrath, MTA, p.211

'exemplarist' model would suggest the latter, while a substitutionary view of the work of Christ asserts the former, and it is this view that Gunton supports. He writes, 'The real evil of the world is faced and healed *ontologically* in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.'<sup>36</sup> Gunton describes what a sound view of sin and of salvation would involve, and defines this in contrast to what 'exemplarism' is perceived by him to be. The problem with which Atonement deals is objective and theological, 'it does not consist primarily in morally wrong acts whose effect is on human life alone and can therefore be rectified by merely human remedial action, but in a disrupted relationship with the creator'.<sup>37</sup> In the light of what we have seen of Rashdall's soteriology, we may question how accurate Gunton's view of 'exemplarism' is. For instance, the idea that 'the problem' with which the Atonement deals is 'morally wrong acts' is contrary to Rashdall's view of sin as a lack of love. Again, the suggestion that sin 'can be rectified by merely human remedial action' is contrary to the central place attributed to Christ by Rashdall, and to the idea that Christ was able to reveal God and so save humanity precisely because he was not just another human being but was also God himself.

Gunton's work proved to be indicative of what was to come in later soteriology. In 1992 a further review of contemporary soteriology emerged, once again treating Rashdallian approaches with short shrift. McIntyre's *The Shape of Soteriology* is a scholarly treatment of the relation between the different models<sup>38</sup> that have been used in connection with the Atonement. McIntyre argues against the view that interpretation and data form two separate halves of a fact, contesting instead that data include interpretation. Arguing that the different models may all co-exist and enrich one another like stars within a constellation, McIntyre emphasises the role of the different models as *interpretations* of Christ's death designed to speak of the Crucifixion at different

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<sup>36</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, p. 159. cf. 5. 1 below

<sup>37</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, p.160

<sup>38</sup> Models differ from the metaphors dealt with by Gunton in that the model constitutes the basic analogy for the theory, whereas the metaphor is the means by which the theory develops.

dimensions or levels. In offering an interpretive description of a phenomenon or event (such as the Crucifixion), a model propounds a provisional 'ontological claim', that is, it puts forward a particular theory concerning Jesus' death. However, these theories are oblique and analogy is employed in forming the models, since a model suggests only one facet of Jesus' death, and is normally understood through knowledge of a comparable phenomenon, such as sacrifice or ransom. In other words, the different models are 'realistic', but 'indirectly' so; because of the nature of the Atonement 'we do not know and we cannot describe these subjects other than in terms of the models and metaphors.'<sup>39</sup>

Example is treated as the penultimate model of thirteen, and is the only interpretation to be designated a 'second order model'. Immediately upon it being mentioned, McIntyre outlines three criticisms that would prevent 'exemplarism' taking its place alongside other models as a first-order model. First, McIntyre echoes Denney's objection concerning the need for another model in order to explain of what Christ's death is an example: 'the death of Christ is only an example if we first define what its nature in itself is, so that what is to be imitated then becomes clear.' Secondly, McIntyre shares McGrath's anxiety about the depths of human sinfulness. Humanity is unable to live up to Christ's example, and a person cannot save him or herself but needs to be redeemed by another. He writes, 'The second difficulty... is that it presupposes that mankind has the moral and spiritual ability to imitate the example of Jesus Christ. But the absence of such ability in mankind is the very circumstance which made atonement a necessity in the first place.' Thirdly, he suggests, an example is an inadequate way of redeeming humanity. He writes, 'an example as such is not necessarily redemptive. In fact, quite the reverse, for the perfect obedience of one man to the will of God, in spite

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<sup>39</sup> John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1992), p.75



of the sufferings entailed by such obedience, might show up human disobedience in an even worse light than it would be without such an example.<sup>40</sup>

Eruditely foreseeing the possibility of a revelatory model which would be regarded as a development of an 'exemplarist' model, McIntyre points out the defects of such a theory as if to eliminate it while it is still in embryonic form. A revelatory model could only be considered a second-order model, for the same reasons that 'exemplarism' could, and, in addition, it lacks biblical and historical foundation. McIntyre argues, 'There is virtually no biblical evidence for regarding 'revelation' as a soteriological model, worthy to be ranked along with the others we have examined, nor has it established itself in the history of doctrine.'<sup>41</sup>

Further criticism of 'non-objective' approaches to the Atonement is to be found in White's 1991 book *Atonement and Incarnation*, which distinguishes not between the 'objective' and the 'subjective' views, but, rather more insightfully, between 'constitutive' and 'revelatory' models. The purpose of the book is to insist upon the necessity of constitutive models, and to highlight the shortcomings of revelatory approaches. White provides a definition of constitutive approaches, as follows. A constitutive model is, first, one that entails that salvation is dependent upon the Christ event; secondly, one that sees the occurrence of the Christ-event and of Atonement as a divine achievement, necessarily going beyond revelation, and, thirdly, one that sees this achievement as significant for humanity as a whole.<sup>42</sup> It is noteworthy that White includes in his definition of a constitutive model that it necessarily goes beyond revelation, and so excludes a revelatory approach from being constitutive from the outset. This mirrors the way in which objective and subjective approaches are often assumed to be polar opposites in the other works we have considered.

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<sup>40</sup> McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, p.49

<sup>41</sup> McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, p.50

<sup>42</sup> Vernon White, *Atonement and Incarnation: An Essay in Universalism and Particularity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.30

The significance of White's work for the current essay lies in his recognition of the problem, for a revelatory model, of claiming that Christ is of universal salvific significance for the entire world, rather than just for those who explicitly follow him. While so-called 'constitutive' models of the Atonement claim that Christ accomplished a metaphysical reality effective regardless of whether people know about it or not, the salvific efficacy of a revelatory model depends upon the perception of the individual of the revelation, and the transformation consequent upon this. If Jesus' life and death are salvific because of what they reveal about God, does this not imply that the Christ-event saves only those who have heard of Christ, and who are transformed by the revelation of God's love? Is the Christ-event salvific only for those who know of it, and is it devoid of universal significance?

To deny that Christ's life and death has any significance for people who have not heard of him is indeed, according to White, the logical conclusion of the work of Maurice Wiles, whose view of the Christ-event as an effective cause within history to transform people's lives has led him to assert that to look for some universal metaphysical accomplishment is to chase a 'will o' the wisp'.<sup>43</sup> For Wiles, the Christ-event involves the revelation of God and the consequential transformation of the individual, or, in Wiles' terminology, 'historical effectiveness'.<sup>44</sup> There is no 'elusive something more',<sup>45</sup> and, as a result, claims White, Christ can be of no significance for those who have not heard of him. While beginning from the opposite starting-point, John Hick reaches a similar conclusion about the significance of Jesus for those who have not heard of him. In arguing for the revelation of God in faiths other than Christianity, Hick is concerned to show that the Christ-event is of significance only to those who know of it, and that non-Christian individuals may be transformed by the

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<sup>43</sup> Maurice Wiles, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine: The Hulsean Lectures* (London: SCM Press, 1974), p.82

<sup>44</sup> Wiles, *Christian Doctrine*, p.81

<sup>45</sup> Wiles, *Christian Doctrine*, p.81

divine disclosure of their own faiths and traditions. As such, the Christ-event is not seen as the unique revelation of God's love, but is reduced to 'one of the points at which God has been and still is creatively at work within human life', whose meaning and significance lies not in any unique content or 'additional truth' but in the dynamism of the revelation as a 'visible story'.<sup>46</sup> Carl E. Braaten expresses the dilemma confronting a revelatory soteriology to which Wiles and Hick are possible responses when he writes that 'If the special status of Jesus Christ must be explicated by the term "revelation" then we are driven either to deny that God reveals Himself elsewhere... or to reduce Jesus Christ to the level of other revelations.'<sup>47</sup> While it is entirely valid to claim that other religions experience genuine revelation of the divine and yet that Christ is the supreme and qualitatively unique revelation, the crux of the problem that Braaten highlights is that, if revelation is to be identified with salvation, *all* the revelations of the divine in other religions and in human history must be regarded as saviours. Even supposing that Christ were to be regarded as the supreme Saviour and all others regarded as 'smaller' saviours, this would still be contrary to the Christian insistence that Christ alone is Saviour, and that all salvation is 'in Christ'. How can a revelatory soteriology that affirms the revelation of God in other faiths and experiences be considered a first-order model given its apparent incapacity to view the whole of salvation as taking place in Christ? Alternatively, how can the salvation of non-Christians be seen to be 'in Christ' if it consists in the revelation of God through entirely different people or experiences than the Christ-event?

#### 1.4 Conclusive Condemnation?

In spite of the criticisms and difficulties facing a revelatory soteriology, there are possible reasons why some forms of the model which would be or have been called

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<sup>46</sup> Hick, 'Evil and Incarnation', in Michael Goulder (ed.), *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued* (London: SCM Press, 1979), p.82

<sup>47</sup> Carl E. Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics*, p.14, cited White, *Incarnation and Atonement*, p.23

'exemplarism' deserve reconsideration as a first-order model alongside the other 'objective' or 'traditional' models. In the first place, this kind of model would hold together Jesus' Incarnation, death and Resurrection. This tendency may help to counterbalance the predominantly western *cruciocentric* tendencies of other models. In addition, a pedagogical approach, necessarily attentive to the earthly life and teaching of Christ as well as to his death and Resurrection, may prevent the distinction between 'the Jesus of history' and 'the Christ of faith' from becoming an actual separation in the mind of theologians and laypersons alike. Secondly, a pedagogical model may prove to be one of the models most intelligible to a contemporary individual. It is, as Rashdall insightfully observed, the model most often preached in the community of faith.

Rashdall writes:

But when he [the theologian] leaves the cave of theological formulæ and comes down into the world to speak to the hearts and consciences of men, then we find it is usually of the character of God revealed in Christ that he speaks, of the love of Christ for man in life and in death, of the demand which that revelation makes for answering love, of the example of Christ, of the hope inspired by His Resurrection, of the assurance which all this work of Christ brings with it of forgiveness, renewal, and spiritual life for all mankind.<sup>48</sup>

Thirdly, revelatory soteriology is worthy of reconsideration because it recognises that the continuing process of salvation has a real effect on the believer. A pedagogical model perceives the on-going work of God in the world through those who have experienced God's love and who, in turn, may reveal God's love through their example and teaching. In this way, a revelatory approach would be open, for instance, to the idea of the presence of God in the saints or in individuals endowed with a particular degree or a certain kind of *charism*. Furthermore, this sort of approach would highlight the idea that it is not *merely* the removal of sin that constitutes salvation, but a life lived in fellowship with God, and with awareness of his love and purpose for creation. Fourthly, while other models emphasise the 'objective' aspect of salvation, that is, the

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<sup>48</sup> Rashdall, 'The Abailardian Doctrine of the Atonement', in *Doctrine and Development*, p.142

saving grace of God, a revelatory model has the potential to balance the stress on 'what God did for us' with a recognition of human free will. While maintaining the insistence upon God's salvific work in the person of Christ, revelatory soteriology may also have the ability to recognise humanity's *free* response to God's offer of salvation, and the constant striving of the individual to become, through grace, that for which God created them. On a revelatory model, this would not suggest that humans achieve moral perfection in order to effect their salvation, but rather that to attempt to be that which God intended humans to be is an expression of faith in God and love for him. In this case, revelatory soteriology could not only avoid the pitfalls of a 'salvation by works' hypothesis, but also balance the 'objective' models that, taken by themselves, would reign supreme at the expense of necessitating a doctrine of predestination. In relation to this fourth point, it is possible that a revelatory model would encourage contemplation of the human as well as the divine nature of Jesus, thus avoiding a one-sided Christology. This may stimulate a more general understanding of what it is to be human, in its original intended, and, because of the contrasting disparity, in its fallen, state. Fifthly, a pedagogical approach, emphasising the *revelation* of God as love, may redress the mistaken interpretation sometimes attached to the models of satisfaction and of sacrifice that the eternal God could or would 'change his mind' or alter his attitude towards humanity by means of a sacrifice or satisfaction.

In the light of this, I suggest that there are persuasive grounds why a revelatory model may be an asset to Christian theology. This suggestion implies that a soteriological model associated but not equated with the model of Rashdall is worthy of reconsideration as a first-order model. Such a model would have to be focused on the *revelation* of God and of human nature as it was intended to be, and on the idea of Christ as inspiring or infusing love, rather than on the notion of Christ as a supreme moral example *per se*. Such an approach would aspire to include the positive elements

suggested above, while also taking into account and avoiding the pitfalls into which critics believe a Rashdallian approach to have fallen.

The purpose of this essay is to suggest that a revelatory or pedagogical soteriology should indeed be reconsidered and revived as a first-order model. In so doing, this paper shall seek to take into account the criticisms of Gunton, McIntyre, McGrath and White. While it is not within the scope of this essay to develop an independent revelatory or pedagogical model or to defend a revelatory approach from all the objections raised against it, I shall examine several of the more serious criticisms and possible answers to them. In particular, I shall discuss whether a revelatory soteriology is 'untraditional' and has no basis in Christian Scripture or history, whether it has a weak view of sin, whether it is 'subjective' and underrates the role of grace, whether it belittles Christ's significance, whether it necessarily excludes non-Christians from salvation 'in Christ', and whether it depends upon an alternative, recognised 'first-order model' in order to show why Christ's death was necessary.

In the following chapter, I shall note the biblical precedent of salvation as revelation in the Gospel of John and, in passing, some Old Testamental themes of salvific revelation on which John draws. In the third chapter I shall look at historical traditions of revelatory soteriology represented by Origen and Abailard, and modern expressions of the idea such as that of GWH Lampe in western thought and Dumitri Stanilaoe in eastern thought. In exploring the history of the idea, I hope to highlight the theology associated with it, to show the different forms it has taken and different ideas connected to it, to open up possibilities of alternative ways of thinking of revelatory soteriology, and perhaps also to observe what mistakes have been made in the past and should not be repeated. The Scriptural and historical study will testify against McIntyre's objection that there is no biblical or historical foundation for a revelatory soteriology, and that it has not established itself as doctrine in the Christian tradition,

but I also hope that it will facilitate later discussion of the theology surrounding the idea and facilitate more knowledgeable development of the idea.

In Chapter Four, I shall sketch what a revelatory model might look like. I shall begin discussion of salvation with discussion of the Augustinian view of sin as privation, since a sound conception of salvation is ultimately rooted in a sound understanding of that which salvation seeks to redress. I shall then turn to the nature of salvation, developing in particular some of Augustine's insights into revelation and into the nature of God as love. Despite its basis in Augustine, Chapter Four is intended to be primarily theological rather than historical in nature, for the focus will be on re-appropriating and developing some of Augustine's ideas in new ways, and applying them to revelatory soteriology in a way that has not, to my knowledge, previously been done. I shall also provide some brief discussion of whether divine ineffability is an insurmountable obstacle to a revelatory soteriology, arguing that some of Christ's attributes may be projected onto God in eternity by means of the analogy of intrinsic attribution. Chapter Four is not intended to be prescriptive or normative of a revelatory soteriology in any way, but to provide some sort of outline of what a revelatory model might look like so as to have a basis for discussion and criticism in the Conclusion. In sketching a model in this manner, I hope to separate a revelatory model from its traditional 'exemplarist' associations, and in discussing issues surrounding divine ineffability I hope to indicate how such a model might be epistemologically as well as theologically defensible.

The Conclusion is intended to be a critical and analytical review of the sort of revelatory model of salvation sketched in Chapter Four. I hope to discuss the most perennial and most weighty criticisms of McGrath, McIntyre, Gunton and White, in order to suggest that the difficulties are not insurmountable. In particular, I shall discuss the criticisms pertaining to sin, to grace, to the significance of Jesus' death, and to the

question of the salvation of non-Christians in and through Christ. The aim in so doing is to suggest that a revelatory model may still be regarded as a first-order model in its own right, and that it may be considered as significant and theologically illuminating as the 'objective' or constitutive models supported and developed by contemporary theology. It is outside the scope of the current essay to develop a revelatory soteriology that is as three-dimensional and as substantial as, for instance, the metaphors that Gunton draws upon and elaborates, but it is hoped that this paper will raise serious doubts concerning the conviction that a revelatory model is inadequate as a first-order model, and that it will indicate and suggest directions in which such a model might be developed in the future.



## Chapter Two

### *The Gospel of John: Salvation, Revelation and Incarnation*

Textual evidence for the theme of revelation in the Fourth Gospel is not difficult to find. John Ashton remarks that, 'Every major motif in the Gospel is directly linked to the concept of revelation', and that 'revelation is unquestionably the dominant theme of the Gospel.'<sup>49</sup> It is precisely because revelatory motifs permeate the Gospel so entirely that they are particularly hard to pin down: all of the key terms used in the Gospel (Word, words, glory, truth, signs, knowledge, and witness, for example) are linked directly to the concept of revelation in a way that would make any exhaustive study of the theme in the Fourth Gospel a life-time work.

In addition, it has become increasingly clear that revelation is not only a major theme in the Fourth Gospel, but also that it is regarded as the primary if not sole<sup>50</sup> means of salvation. The fact that revelation is regarded as salvific in the Fourth Gospel is now generally accepted by biblical scholars. This is indicated by the treatment of Johannine soteriology by Robert Kysar writing in the Anchor Bible Dictionary, who states: 'Soteriology is hardly separable from christology in the Fourth Gospel, since it is the view of Christ as revealer of the Father which constitutes the salvific opportunity for humanity. Revelation comprises the central soteriological theme. The revelation in itself is saving.'<sup>51</sup> Thus it is, for instance, that at the beginning of the Gospel we are introduced to the idea of the need for a revelation of God: 'No man has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of The Father, he has *declared* him'<sup>52</sup>, and

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<sup>49</sup> John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) p.515

<sup>50</sup> F. Terence Forestell, for instance, has argued for revelation as the sole means of salvation in the Gospel of John (*The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* [Analecta Biblica, 1974]), while Bruce Grigsby has argued that the sacrificial theme plays a complementary salvific role alongside revelation ('The Cross as an Expiatory Sacrifice in the Fourth Gospel', in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 15 [1982]).

<sup>51</sup> Robert Kysar, 'John', in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1983) III. 925

<sup>52</sup> John 1.18

towards the end it becomes clear that revelation is the means of salvation and knowledge of God the substance of salvation itself: 'And this is life eternal, that they may *know* you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent.'<sup>53</sup> It is not within the scope of this chapter to give a thorough discussion of the evidence for revelatory soteriology in the Fourth Gospel, but to draw out some of the incontrovertibly revelatory themes and to point to their soteriological significance, and to consider questions pertaining to Johannine revelatory soteriology that are significant to the present theological debate. The theme of revelation as salvific is also to be found in abundance in the Old Testament, but to trace such a theme is also outside the reach of the current work. However, in discussing revelatory soteriology in John, Old Testament revelatory-salvific themes will be alluded to, and I hope that this is sufficient to give a sense of their existence in the Hebrew Scriptures.

### 2.1 Divine Identity and Disclosure

One way in which the theme of revelation is expressed is through the sayings of Jesus involving the significant linguistic formula 'I am', either on its own or followed by a predicate. The absolute "I am" sayings, those which do not precede a predicate, are revelatory because they identify Jesus with God. The most promising<sup>54</sup> source for the Johannine Jesus' use of "I Am" is that of Deutero-Isaiah, where "I Am" is the divine self-reference and is used absolutely. Here "I Am" is associated with God's uniqueness and the maintenance of monotheism: 'I am I Am and apart from me there is no other.'<sup>55</sup> This implies that John uses the phrase to assert that Jesus was not a deity alongside his Father, but that he and the Father are one. Moreover, in Isaiah "I Am" has become a

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<sup>53</sup> John 17.3

<sup>54</sup> The most promising, since in Exodus 3. 14, God refers to himself as "I Am that I Am", significantly at the point in Israel's history at which he becomes known as Saviour and Liberator. However, the Septuagint translation of "I Am that I Am" is literally "I Am the (One) just like" and thus that it is "The One just like", rather than "I Am", that is the divine name. While Ex. 3 therefore cannot be considered a primary midrashic text alongside Deutero-Isaiah, it may have been in the background of John's use of the term in relation to Jesus.

<sup>55</sup> Isaiah 45.21,22

personal name: 'I am I Am that comforts you.'<sup>56</sup> In referring to himself as "I Am", the Johannine Jesus reveals himself in a unique way as the very person of YHWH.

There is a climactic development of the "I Am" sayings in John, so that the revelation of Jesus' identity is heightened as the Gospel proceeds. The first two are to be understood as common parlance, whereas the middle three, those in ch. 8, necessitate a divine interpretation. Thus when Jesus says, 'Before Abraham was, I Am', his audience attempt to stone him.<sup>57</sup> The final four instances of "I Am" have a *double* meaning, the everyday meaning being understood by the characters of the Gospel, and the theological meaning by its readers. The one exception to this is ch. 18, where those who have come to arrest Jesus fall down before him as though experiencing a theophany. This evidence suggests that the absolute "I Am" sayings of the Fourth Gospel are intended as part of the revelation that Jesus is to be identified with the divine being. The form of the Gospel implies a revelatory process beginning with the Incarnation, for the extent of Jesus' propinquity with God is not merely stated and restated; the revelation of Jesus' identity is initially hinted at, becomes increasingly evident, and reaches a crescendo toward the end of the Gospel narrative with the admission that Jesus is God himself.

The "I Am" sayings that are followed by a predicate likewise imply divine identity, and also reveal further truths about Jesus' identity and nature. For instance, Jesus' dialogue concerning the Water of Life to the Samaritan woman appears on a superficial level to be a simple messianic affirmation. However, the reply "I Am, the one speaking to you" implies not only divine identity in the way in which the absolute "I Am" sayings do, but is particularly reminiscent of Is. 52.6, which emphasises the idea that salvation of God's people takes place through the *revelation* of God's presence.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Isaiah 51.12

<sup>57</sup> The punishment of stoning was used for blasphemy, and as claiming to be older than Abraham is not in itself blasphemous, the hostile response was probably provoked by the phrase "I Am".

<sup>58</sup> Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, p.28

Allusions such as these suggest that the revelation of the Father in the person of Jesus is salvific in the Fourth Gospel, in that those who respond to the revelation with perception and faith experience the spiritual transformation that is concomitant with knowledge of and personal encounter with God.

The allusion to water in the dialogue with the Samaritan woman also has overtones of God's saving revelation to his people. In late Judaism, the water received from God was primarily equated with wisdom,<sup>59</sup> which has a revelatory role. Wisdom was identified by Ben Sirach with the Law<sup>60</sup>, and so water is linked to the idea of the revelation of God's will.<sup>61</sup> The dialogue reveals that the revelation of God in Jesus surpasses all Israelite and Jewish expectation: Wisdom states that those who drink of her will thirst for more<sup>62</sup>, while those who drink the water Jesus gives are never thirsty again. The theme of Jesus as the Water of Life re-emerges in ch. 7, where Jesus invites the thirsty to come to him to drink.<sup>63</sup> The notion of God and, accordingly in John, Jesus, as the source of living water, is probably based on the Exodus miracle of water from the rock.<sup>64</sup> The theme finds expression in Jeremiah where God is the fountain of the water of life,<sup>65</sup> in Psalm 36 where he is the 'fountain' of life, and in Isaiah where YHWH offers the hungry and thirsty nourishment in the form of word and teaching, the source of life: 'Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money; come, buy, and eat.... Incline your ear, and come to me: hear, and your soul shall live....'<sup>66</sup> Thus the identification of Jesus with the Water of Life not only reveals Jesus as God,

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<sup>59</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) p.137

<sup>60</sup> Sirach 24. 23

<sup>61</sup> Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, p. 28, cf. Num. 21. 16 – 18; Sir. 15. 3; 24. 23

<sup>62</sup> Sirach 24. 21

<sup>63</sup> John 7.37

<sup>64</sup> Exodus 17. 6

<sup>65</sup> Jeremiah 2. 13

<sup>66</sup> Isaiah 55. 1 –3

but also reiterates the Johannine view that salvation is to be found, as in Isaiah 55, in the knowledge imparted through divine pedagogy.<sup>67</sup>

A further way in which the theme of revelation is cashed out in the Fourth Gospel is through the designation of Jesus as *Logos*. The term *Logos* in and of itself implies the significance of Jesus as Divine Revealer, since, among its several meanings, it refers to 'word', a primary means of communication. Yet the revelatory implications of *Logos* go far further than this. The description of the *Logos* propounded in the Prologue could not fail to remind a Jewish reader of Wisdom. Of Wisdom, Sirach writes that, 'Among all these I sought a resting place; I sought in whose territory I might lodge'. However, Wisdom does not find a dwelling place until she is sent to dwell among the Israelites: 'Then, the one who created me assigned a place for my tabernacle. And he said, Make your dwelling place in Jacob and in Israel receive you inheritance.'<sup>68</sup> In John, the *Logos* seeks but fails to find a home in Israel, and so eventually 'is tabernacled among us', presumably the Johannine community. The same word is used in Sirach and in John to refer to tabernacle or dwelling.

In the Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom is outside time and is seated by the throne of God.<sup>69</sup> In the Fourth Gospel, the *Logos* is present in the beginning with God, and helps God in the act of creation. In the Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom enters history as the Law, but, like the *Logos* in John, is responded to with incomprehension and rejection. As we have already seen, the figure of Wisdom was seen as a primary instrument of divine revelation, and so the association of the *Logos* with Wisdom suggests that John's primary theological theme is that of revelation. In the light of this, Ashton writes that the Prologue should be seen not simply as a hymn about creation culminating in Incarnation, but revelation culminating in Incarnation. The work of the

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Gail O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986)

<sup>68</sup> Sirach 24.8

<sup>69</sup> Wisdom of Solomon, 9.4

revealing *Logos* has two aspects, life and light (united in the phrase, 'The life was the light of men'<sup>70</sup>), and these two aspects correspond to the two facets of God's work, creation and revelation (salvation).<sup>71</sup>

In anticipation of potential criticism, it is noteworthy that the Johannine view of salvation as revelation is not a façade collapsing on to an alternative conceptual framework, such as that of sacrifice or ransom to the devil. Rather, the soteriological emphasis on revelation is a self-sufficient and independent model, consistent with and integral to a distinctive theology, view of sin, and understanding of salvation. John's entire theology makes sense as a coherent whole when read in the light of his revelatory soteriology, and is not eventually reduced to 'objective' models of salvation on closer inspection. This fact is demonstrated through several characteristics with which the next part of this chapter is concerned. First, the irreducibility of this revelatory model is indicated by the superficiality and half-heartedness of the inclusion of sacrifice and *Christus Victor* themes. Secondly, the integrity of John's revelatory soteriology within the Gospel is shown by John's focus on Incarnation as well as crucifixion. Thirdly, the self-sufficiency of John's revelatory soteriology is indicated by John's own distinctive understanding of sin which corresponds to and elucidates an understanding of salvation based upon divine revelation. Thirdly, the integrity and independence of the idea of the means of salvation as revelation is demonstrated by the subtlety and complexity of the view of what the revelation is, and the way it points to what salvation itself consists in and what kind of existence it is. I shall briefly discuss these four aspects of Johannine theology that are crucial if revelatory soteriology is to be considered a three-dimensional and comprehensive model.

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<sup>70</sup> John 1.4

<sup>71</sup> Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, p.528

## 2.2 Imagery, Incarnation, and Sin

While the Fourth Gospel includes imagery indicating to some that the evangelist suggests a view of salvation based on Christ's death as a sacrifice or a victory over the devil, scholars since Bultmann have recognised increasingly that such imagery only goes skin-deep. Nicholson expresses this when he says that to interpret John sacrificially because of the *huper* ('on behalf of') sayings, and because of the prominence of sacrificial thought in much of the rest of the New Testament, is an approach often followed by earlier scholars. However, Nicholson writes, '... we would now have to say that this judges the Fourth Gospel by non-johannine standards. For while there is an outcropping of such language in the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel itself is not determined by categories of sacrifice and atonement. This language occurs in places but the Fourth Evangelist does not make anything of it; he does not "buy into" the associated mindset in understanding Jesus' death.'<sup>72</sup>

Development of the sacrificial theme is conspicuously absent in the Gospel, almost as if John inherited the imagery from the Christian tradition, and, while including it in the Gospel narrative, did not expound upon it or allow it to permeate his theology. Kysar says in this respect that 'While Jesus' death is clearly viewed as an act of sacrifice (e.g., 15:13), the effort to explicate this theme in terms of analogies drawn from sacrificial cultic worship are notably absent.'<sup>73</sup> It appears that, rather than scrap a significant portion of traditional Christian imagery altogether, the evangelist chose to re-interpret the old imagery in the light of the revelation of God in Christ. For instance, as F. Terence Forestell argues, the Passion in John is seen as a victory over the prince of this world, not because it makes possible the forgiveness of sin by God or because through it the devil is 'tricked' as in later thought, but because Jesus' death is a

<sup>72</sup> G. C. Nicholson, *Death as Departure: The Johannine Descent-Ascent Schema*, (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983) p.2

<sup>73</sup> Kysar, 'John', in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 926.III

revelation of love, that will 'draw all men to Jesus' and lead them to faith in him. This is a persuasive view of the Passion as a victory over the devil because in responding with faith, people reject the evil one and are freed from sin and death, being granted instead the opposite mode of existence, eternal life.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, sacrificial imagery is used in the context of Jesus' death, and yet this does not appear to be cultic in nature. Rather, the sacrificial imagery points to Jesus' death as an act of *self-sacrifice*, hinted at, for instance, in the foot washing that appears in the context of the Last Supper. Similarly, Kysar observes that the evangelist most probably 'understood Jesus as the Passover lamb who removed sin *by virtue of the revelation that frees humans from sin.*'<sup>75</sup>

From this it may be concluded that salvation as revelation is not to be viewed as a flimsy or superficial soteriological model that may be reduced to 'objective' models; on the contrary, it appears that the 'objective' models are quickly reduced to a revelatory model on further examination. The self-sufficiency of the revelatory model is further indicated by the fact that the Fourth Gospel is not *cruciocentric*, but focuses upon the Incarnation and crucifixion and Resurrection as one saving revelatory event. This is significant because it is improbable that a crucifixion in itself could reveal much about God, unless we knew from elsewhere something of the person, significance, and motivation of the one condemned to death. While earlier scholars took the Fourth Gospel to be alike to the Synoptics in focusing upon Jesus' death, Rudolf Bultmann<sup>76</sup> and Ernst Käsemann<sup>77</sup> in their groundbreaking studies of John argued that the Incarnation is the decisive salvific event. Bultmann argues that the Cross is not salvific in itself, and is subordinate to the Incarnation. The Cross is the *completion* of Jesus' work as revealer, his 'release' from his mission, and his return to the Father:

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<sup>74</sup> F. Terence Forestell, *The Word of the Cross*, p.149

<sup>75</sup> Anchor Bible Dictionary, 926.III, my emphases

<sup>76</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, (2 vol.s) trans. K. Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1955), 2:52 – 53

<sup>77</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study in the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*, trans. Gerhard Krodel (London: SCM Press, 1968), p.7



While for Paul the Incarnation is secondary to his death in importance, one might say that the reverse is true for John.... In John, Jesus' death has no pre-eminent importance for salvation, but is the accomplishment of the work which began with the incarnation. Thus Jesus' death takes on a double aspect in John: it is the completion of his obedience, but it is also Jesus' release from his commission, and he can return to the glory he had in pre-existence.<sup>78</sup>

On this view, Jesus' Incarnation and the entirety of Jesus' life is seen as a sacrifice in the non-cultic sense,<sup>79</sup> and this is not limited to his death alone.<sup>80</sup> Käsemann observes that the Passion narrative in John comes across as 'a mere postscript'.<sup>81</sup> The Gospel narrative would make sense if it ended with Jesus 'reporting back' to God.<sup>82</sup> It appears at this moment that the Gospel could end with Jesus' Ascension, without the necessity for the Cross. Clearly such an option would pose a difficulty for an evangelist, aware as he was of the historical fact of Jesus' death, and the important place of the Cross and Resurrection in Christian tradition. Introducing a 'third way' between the two polar opposites of solely incarnational and *cruciocentric*, Forestell argues that the Cross as well as the Incarnation is salvific. However, while typically those arguing for the salvific efficacy of the crucifixion in John generally propound a soteriology involving cultic sacrifice or ransom, Forestell argues that in the Fourth Gospel the Cross is salvific solely because of what it reveals about God. He writes that 'The theology of the Cross is not a theology of sacrifice or expiation but a theology of revelation.... The death of Jesus upon the cross is given a peculiar Johannine treatment; it is presented as the culmination of the revelatory work of Jesus and neither as a vicarious work of satisfaction nor as an expiatory sacrifice for the sins of men.'<sup>83</sup>

Forestell points out that the Prologue is generally thought to be a theological summary of the Gospel,<sup>84</sup> and that the Prologue is concerned primarily with the Incarnation and with revelation and faith, and not with the sacrifice and cleansing blood

<sup>78</sup> Bultmann, *Theology*, 2:52 – 53

<sup>79</sup> John 10.36

<sup>80</sup> John 17.19

<sup>81</sup> Käsemann, *Testament of Jesus*, p.7

<sup>82</sup> i.e. ending with Chapter 17

<sup>83</sup> Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, pp.113, 120

<sup>84</sup> Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, p.198

themes found in soteriology focused solely on Jesus' death. Yet the Incarnation is considered incomplete without the Cross and Resurrection; the Cross is the point at which the truth is most clearly revealed, and thus the fulfilment of the Incarnation. Forestell asserts that the Incarnation is neither the mere necessary precondition for the Crucifixion, nor is it the sole salvific event to which the Crucifixion is subordinate. Rather, the Incarnation is 'the beginning of a revelatory process which culminates in the supreme revelation'.<sup>85</sup> In this way, the Incarnation and Crucifixion should not be seen as two competing or even complementary events, but as two stages in one salvific revelatory event. Kysar concurs with Forestell's understanding of the salvific significance of the Cross, stating: 'Jesus interprets his death as the supreme act of love (15; 13) – an act which transforms the relationship of the believers to him from that of servants to "friends". The cross, therefore, emerges as the model of divine love.... As it reveals the love of God for humans, it saves them from life in alienated lovelessness.'<sup>86</sup>

From this it can be concluded that the Fourth Gospel does not centre primarily on the Cross, in contrast, for instance, with Paul. Rather, the Fourth Evangelist holds the Incarnation and the Cross in balance, seeing the latter as the perfection of the former. This is significant, since a soteriology based on Jesus' Incarnation and life as much as his death is not conducive to a salvific model such as sacrifice which would be focused primarily on Jesus' death, but to a model such as revelation which would necessarily also consider significant the identity and character of the revealer during his life. The fact that John's soteriology is revelatory and that this is a well-thought-out and deep-rooted idea rather than a superficial theme is further indicated by the fact that the Johannine view of sin is one not consistent with a soteriology based on sacrifice or ransom, for example, but one that corresponds to a view of salvation as revelation.

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<sup>85</sup> Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, p.19

<sup>86</sup> The Anchor Bible Dictionary, 926. III

As a soteriology, the theme of revelation in John affirms, like all soteriology, that God *saves*, and offers an indication of what it is that God's revelation saves humanity *from*. The opposite of revealed knowledge is ignorance, and in John it is unbelief and misunderstanding that appear to incur criticism from Jesus. We are told in the Prologue that that the world did not recognise Jesus, and that his own did not receive him,<sup>87</sup> and Nicodemus is negatively portrayed for his continual misunderstanding of Jesus' words. The notorious 'Jews' of ch. 8 do not understand the point Jesus makes, and so conclude by attempting to destroy him, and even the disciples do not fully understand what Jesus has said until after his Resurrection. The judgmental treatment of misunderstanding and rejection has led scholars to assert that unbelief equates to sin. Carson writes, 'Unbelief is morally culpable',<sup>88</sup> and Schneider asserts that 'The rejection of Jesus is sin'.<sup>89</sup>

Forestell suggests a more subtle version of this view, suggesting that sin is not conceived of as wicked actions, but as a mode of existence that is the opposite of spiritual life, and as an attitude characterised by (but not consisting in) rejection of God. I would add that since sin is not wicked action but rejection of God, it is faith, and not moral works, that is the opposite of sin and means of overcoming the sinful life. Forestell asserts that it is not the case that sin is identified with unbelief, but that unbelief is the *outward sign* of a sinful existence: 'unbelief manifests a state of sin in which man lives.'<sup>90</sup> The sin of the 'Jews' is *exposed* by their antagonism towards Christ and in their refusal to see who he is and what he reveals, and yet this is an indication that they are sinful and not the substance or extent of their sinfulness. Those who do not believe reject God, and this state leads them to behave immorally, and, above all, to reject the one whom God has sent to save them.

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<sup>87</sup> John 1.10,11

<sup>88</sup> D. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, (Edinburgh: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991) p.99

<sup>89</sup> H. Schneider, 'The Word Was Made Flesh: An Analysis of Revelation in the Fourth Gospel' in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31, 1969, p. 350

<sup>90</sup> Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, p. 144

Forestell argues that forgiveness is not a key theme in John, and that this is because forgiveness supposes a more legal view of sin, a 'juridical notion of sin as a debt which God in his mercy remits.'<sup>91</sup> Sin is a complex reality that cannot be dealt with by forgiveness, as though it were a debt to be remitted or paid, or dirt to be cleansed. Sin is not destroyed by a legal absolution from guilt, but when Jesus heals a person and gives them eternal life. As we have seen, Jesus' death is viewed as a victory over the world<sup>92</sup> and the prince of the world,<sup>93</sup> because it is a revelation of God's love that will draw all men to Jesus, and will therefore save them from sin and procure for them eternal life.

The idea of salvation as revelation in John possesses an apparent similarity to gnosticism, in which a revealer descends to earth in order to communicate some esoteric knowledge to an exclusive and elect group, which will result in their liberation from the (evil) world and the flesh and their ascent to the realm of spirit. However, while Johannine theology may have influenced later gnostic groups, Johannine theology is not itself gnostic. As Schneider argues, the use of the terms 'flesh' and 'world' do not convey anything inherently evil or sinful, and the Fourth Evangelist maintains that God loves the world,<sup>94</sup> and that it is his creation. In addition, Forestell has argued that John's revelatory soteriology does not concern mere doctrine about God as gnostic revelation does, but is incarnational – God himself becomes the frail and mortal indicated by the term 'flesh'. Johannine revelation does insist upon the giving of true knowledge of God, but this knowledge is incarnational, and is not propositional or ecstatic.<sup>95</sup> The death of Christ, writes Forestell, is an integral part of this revelation and thus of salvation, and there is no hint as in some forms of Docetism that a phantom took the place of Jesus on the Cross.

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<sup>91</sup> Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, p.149

<sup>92</sup> John 16.33

<sup>93</sup> John 12.31; 14.30; 16.11

<sup>94</sup> John 3.16

<sup>95</sup> Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, p.197

From this it can be seen that the Fourth Gospel offers a view of sin that only makes sense on a revelatory soteriological model. Once again, this suggests that revelatory soteriology is not dependent upon other soteriological models, but stands up on its own, offering a subtle and complex portrayal of what it is about Jesus' revelation that is salvific and how it is that revelation can save the individual. While a view of sin as ignorance would imply a gnostic view of divine revelation, John's view of sin and of salvation is far more rooted in the world and cannot be reduced to the mystical or the academic. The proceeding section aims to give some idea of what it is that Jesus reveals and how it is that this is salvific.

Due to the subtlety of the evangelist's treatment of revelation, scholars, while agreeing that revelation is salvific, do not concur on what is the *essence* of the revelation, that is, what it reveals and why this has a salvific effect on humanity. As we shall see, there is continuing debate on this subject matter, but all hypotheses might fairly be regarded as drawing out some important aspects and yet succeeding only to give a partial account of the theology of revelation in John. As has become increasingly clear, this failure to give a full explanation of revelation in John is partly the result of the non-propositional nature of Johannine revelation: the substance of the revelation cannot be reduced to words but to an understanding of the person of Christ as a whole, and this understanding is not purely intellectual but is also experiential so that while the essence may be grasped it can never be subject to linguistic formulation or analysis.

### 2.3 Revelation: Delivered Doctrine or Existential Event?

Reacting against nineteenth and early twentieth century emphases upon the Johannine revelation as having a specific 'message' or *content*, Rudolf Bultmann argued that to express the revelation-content in propositions is to misunderstand the existential nature of the revelation. To attempt objectified knowledge of God, that is, to

speak of the content of the revelation, is equivalent to a view of salvation by works, since both are an attempt to guarantee the self over against God. The revelation of Jesus according to John must not be seen to endorse a view of salvation that requires mere assent to doctrinal propositions describing objective truths, but requires faith, that is, accepting Jesus as revealer without evidence, and an encounter with God through the uncertainty of the present situation, the existential event. The Gospel demands that the individual respond either with faith or with offence, and salvation occurs through responding to Jesus with the former. Therefore, the essence of the revelation is not related to any *content*, but to the very fact that Jesus claims to be revealer. Bultmann writes:

Thus it turns out in the end that Jesus as the revealer of God *reveals nothing but that he is the Revealer*. And that amounts to saying that it is he for whom the world is waiting, he who brings in his own person that for which all the longing of man yearns: life and truth as the reality out of which man can exist.... But how is he that and how does he bring it? In no other way than that he is it and says that he brings it – he, a man with his human word, which, without legitimation, demands faith.<sup>96</sup>

Jesus' revelation is a *challenge*, intensified by the fact that there is no evidence for his claims other than his own presence. Responding to Jesus with faith rather than taking offence saves the individual, since responding to Jesus in faith authenticates human life. Since there is no content to Jesus' revelation, God is not made known through Jesus' words – or even through his person and work – but in the act of decision to take the leap of faith in the absence of anything that can guarantee that the object of belief is true.

It is uncertain whether, for Bultmann, the revelation of God remains empty, or whether the individual encounters God in the moment of faith, and in this sense God is made known to the individual<sup>97</sup> (though faith is never made certain, since, if it were, it would cease to be faith). However, Gail O'Day rightly criticises Bultmann's portrayal

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<sup>96</sup> Bultmann, *Theology*, 66

<sup>97</sup> It might be argued that should the former be the case, then the individual never truly 'encounters' God because he never knows him, and cannot be transformed (which is at the root of Haenchen's objection), while if the latter is the case, Bultmann is retaining the idea of the revelation having content, while simply shifting the *locus* of the revelation. This latter seems to be O'Day's interpretation of Bultmann.

of Jesus' revelation because, even if God is revealed in the existential event, it makes the personal decision, rather than Jesus himself, the centre of the revelation.<sup>98</sup> This means that the salvific revelation is not christocentric, and, while it is recognised that Bultmann was not a subjectivist<sup>99</sup>, focuses on the subjective as the *locus* of salvation. I would add that such a view might be thought to replace the idea of 'salvation by works' with one of 'salvation by faith', still requiring that salvation is earned but disguising it by propounding alternative means. However, Bultmann's view of the essence of revelation is important as a corrective to many of the earlier attempts to describe Johannine revelation which spoke as though Jesus revealed propositions about God, and failed to recognise the actual experience of God imparted through Jesus.

In reaction to Bultmann's existential understanding of revelation in the Fourth Gospel, Ernst Haenchen revived the emphasis upon *content*, arguing that the Gospel of John depicts the entire life of Jesus as the revelation and actualisation of God's love.<sup>100</sup> In his Commentary on the Fourth Gospel, Haenchen continually sees instances of the revelation of divine love in Jesus. Of the passage in which Jesus washes his disciples' feet, Haenchen writes, 'Jesus' act in washing feet – denoting his self-abnegation to the extent of death – is his salvific act of revelation.... John views the whole of Jesus' earthly life as the revelation and realization of this divine love.'<sup>101</sup> Every instance of self-sacrificial love during the life of Jesus is viewed as pointing to Jesus' ultimate expression of love on the Cross, and every instance is salvific, since it is the revelation of God's love. However, this revelation only becomes clear in the light of the Resurrection and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and thus it is the case that the

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<sup>98</sup> O'Day, *Revelation*, p.41

<sup>99</sup> Bultmann is wary of speaking objectively because he does not wish to objectify what is rightly subjective, but he does affirm objective aspects. He writes that 'The fact that God cannot be seen or apprehended apart from faith does not mean that he does not exist apart from faith.' (*Jesus Christ and Mythology*, cited by J. B. Webster, 'Bultmann', in the *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson *et al* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p.115 - 117

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Ernst Haenchen *Der Vater 72*, cited in Ulrich Busse, 'Ernst Haenchen and his Commentary on John: Biographical Notes and Sketches of His Johannine Theology', in Haenchen, *John*, vol.2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p.248

<sup>101</sup> Haenchen, *John*, vol. 2, p. 114

evangelist presents Jesus' revelation with lucidity, while the characters in the Gospel often struggle to see the significance of Jesus' person and work. Haenchen writes, '...the earthly Jesus does indeed reveal the name of God in word and miracle, but the *risen* Christ makes possible saving faith in the Father and him whom the Father has sent, Jesus Christ.... The spirit of truth alone can lead to the whole truth.'<sup>102</sup>

Haenchen was critical of Bultmann's theory on the basis that an existential view of revelation is anachronistic to the Fourth Gospel: '...the theme of authenticity...is Heidegger speaking, not the Evangelist.'<sup>103</sup> Moreover, he argues, Bultmann's idea that Jesus' revelation consists in the fact of revelation alone which demands faith in Jesus as revealer is problematic, since this would not lead to faith but to Nihilism.<sup>104</sup> For humanity to be saved it is necessary that they are made aware of God's grace, which makes possible the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life. The revelation must have content, argues Haenchen, since, as there is no knowledge of God prior to Jesus, God must be revealed in order for humans to know him and to experience salvation.<sup>105</sup> As has been noted above, it is possible that in Bultmann the revelation of God does occur, though in the subjective moment of faith rather than in the person of Jesus, and, were this the case, Haenchen's criticism would be invalid because of a failure to understand Bultmann's idea of the encounter with God in the existential event. However, Haenchen's observation that demand of belief in something without any understanding of the substance or content of the something may be more conducive to Nihilism (in the sense of belief that the truth is that there is no truth) than to faith may be insightful.

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<sup>102</sup> Haenchen, *John*, vol. 2 p. 20, my emphases

<sup>103</sup> Haenchen, *John*, vol. 2, p.114

<sup>104</sup> Busse, 'Ernst Haenchen', in Haenchen, *John*, p.248

<sup>105</sup> *cf.* Haenchen, 'Das Johannesevangelium und sein Kommentor', 121 n. 37, cited, Busse, 'Ernst Haenchen', in Haenchen, *John*, vol.2, p.248



The approach to revelation that emphasises the content of the revelation is generally associated with exemplarism. Gail O' Day manifests the tendency to connect this approach with exemplarism when she writes:

When the focus is on the content of Jesus' revelation of God, revelation is primarily understood as something that communicates *about*, and Jesus' revelation can therefore be understood and appropriated as a series of propositions and concepts. When this content is examined for what it reveals about God's nature, Jesus' revelation is translated into conceptual language that speaks of God's exemplary righteousness and love. God's love is made known both through God's sending of Jesus and through the love of Jesus himself. The importance of this revelation of God's love lies in the moral example that it sets for the believer's life.<sup>106</sup>

It is not within the scope of this dissertation to discuss whether every exponent of the 'content' approach to Johannine revelation has an exemplarist view of salvation. Haenchen masterfully draws attention to the fact that in first century thought the polar opposites of morality *versus* faith would have been considered a false dichotomy, and pushed to their logical conclusion his words may indeed suggest that the individual's attitude towards other humans is an important aspect of faith, a view that may be forced into the mould of a doctrine of salvation by moral works. Haenchen writes that fellowship with Jesus and the Father necessitates readiness for the same act of self-abnegation shown by Jesus, and that it is 'this kind of existence' (though not this action *per se*) that 'makes unity with the Father and the Son possible.' However, to think that the moral replaces faith in God is anachronistic. Haenchen writes, 'To say that this is only something ethical, yet lying below the level of the religious, throws Johannine theology as a whole into confusion. Behaviour toward fellow Christians (or fellow human beings) is not to be separated from behaviour toward God and Jesus. In this sense, there is no such thing as "pure religion" that permits us to pass the neighbour by and come directly to God.'<sup>107</sup>

It seems to me that in this passage Haenchen falls into the same trap as Bultmann in thinking that an emphasis on faith necessarily implies a view that salvation

<sup>106</sup>O'Day, *Revelation*, p.35

<sup>107</sup>Haenchen, *John*, vol. 2, p.114

is achieved by the grace of God rather than that it is earned, and is erroneous because salvation might be thought to be earned by faith as much as by moral works. Haenchen's portrayal of John's soteriology is one that seems to imply that salvation is earned, but this is not merely through moral works: as in some other instances of typically Protestant thought, the individual's faith is regarded as the means of salvation. An exponent of such a view may rightly respond that it is God that grants the individual capacity for faith, and thus it is still God's grace that grants salvation to the individual. However, the same is also true of the exemplarist, who may argue that it is God's grace that grants the individual the capacity to behave morally well, or to love fellow human beings and to act accordingly.<sup>108</sup> In noting this point, I am not intending to defend 'real' exemplarism, but simply to point out that where it fails many 'non-moral', faith-centred accounts of salvation fail also.

It is important for the purpose of this dissertation that the idea that Jesus reveals God's love and that this is salvific does not necessarily imply 'real' exemplarism, despite O'Day's assertion to the contrary. The idea that God's love is only revealed as an example to follow misses the point that, in the thought of the Fourth Evangelist, knowledge of God (which may be viewed in the broad sense of implying experience of and fellowship with God) is that in which salvation consists. On a revelatory soteriological model, revelation is seen as the *means* of salvation. Salvation itself is generally viewed as a fellowship with God that has its basis in the revelation of God, and that spiritually transforms the individual. Moral works or the individual's attitude of love are not seen as accomplishing salvation, but might best be regarded as the (necessary) consequence of salvation: the spiritual transformation of the individual brought about through fellowship with God involves an infusion of love which manifests itself in an attitude of love or moral works towards other human beings.

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<sup>108</sup> Most 'real' exemplarists regard love of humanity rather than moral works as the key to salvation, though the two are usually equated by critics of exemplarism.

Therefore, an approach asserting that the revelation of God as love is salvific should not be associated too closely with an exemplarist soteriology, even though it seems that biblical scholars (such as Haenchen) who assert the former have often been unintentionally guilty of the latter also.

From this, it may be concluded that the extent to which the 'content' approach to revelation has been made unpopular by its erroneous identification with exemplarism is unjust, for there is nothing that necessarily unites the two. Further, while the existential approach was an important corrective to the emphasis on affirmations of particular propositions that often accompanied the 'content' approach, Haenchen's work is a necessary counterbalance to Bultmann's hypothesis that (either) the *locus* of the revelation is the subjective experience of the individual and not the person of Jesus, or else that there is no revelation of God and that even the believer can have no knowledge of God. If Johannine theology is indeed incarnational and if salvation does consist in knowledge (including fellowship) of God, then it would seem that the purpose of Jesus' life and work according to the Gospel must be to reveal God to humanity, and to make him known. This debate led to a third understanding of the essence of revelation in the Fourth Gospel, one which stemmed from dialogue with both Bultmann's and Haenchen's antithetical approaches to the subject.

Ernst Käsemann's primary argument was that the *fact* of revelation cannot be distinguished from that which is revealed, and that the emphases of Bultmann and of Haenchen are only properly understood when they are unified. Käsemann criticised Bultmann for having *reduced* the language of the Gospel to mere event.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, knowledge of God cannot be understood on the basis of subjective experience and faith, but through revelation concerning the unity between Jesus and the Father, and for this reason one 'should not play off the kerygma against the dogma'.<sup>110</sup> The revelation of the

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<sup>109</sup> O'Day, *Revelation*, p.42

<sup>110</sup> Käsemann, *Testament*, p.25

'metaphysical' nature of God, that the Father and Son are one, is central for Käsemann, partly because it is precisely because of such unity that the 'moral' nature of the Father can be revealed. In other words, if the love of God is revealed through the love of Jesus, then it is a necessary precondition that Jesus is one with the Father, since otherwise it might not be deduced that what is characteristic of Jesus is in the nature of the Father also.

Käsemann's emphasis on the revelation of Jesus and the Father as one is important, since it highlights the idea that it is through the revelation of Jesus as the *Logos* Incarnate that it is revealed that God is love. However, Käsemann's emphasis on the dogmatic may fail to speak of the individual's experience of God and spiritual transformation. Rashdall's criticism that some soteriological models do not view salvation as affecting the individual in any real way might be applied to Käsemann here, as might the criticism of the 'content' approach that the revelation is reduced to mere affirmations of dogmatic propositions. Furthermore, in contrast to the 'content' approach, Käsemann seems to share with Bultmann the conviction that God is revealed exclusively through the person of Jesus, and, presumably, that there is no salvation for the non-Christian.

From this it can be seen that, while each has some insight, these approaches focusing on one exclusive aspect of Johannine revelation, such as the fact of the revelation itself, the content of the revelation as dogma, or the content of the revelation speaking of the 'moral' nature of God, fail to give a coherent and comprehensive account of Johannine revelation. This fact is recognised by O'Day, who attempts to approach Johannine revelation considering not just the theological claims made through direct propositions, but also theological claims made through the narrative mode which communicate the revelation experience. O'Day writes: 'In order to arrive at a more integrated understanding of revelation in the Fourth Gospel, we need to approach the

question of revelation with categories that reflect the gospel's interplay of *narrative mode and theological claim*.<sup>111</sup> We cannot, she argues, answer how it is that God is revealed in the Fourth Gospel, unless we comprehend the literary techniques of the evangelist through whom the 'message' is revealed.

O'Day's particular contribution to this textual approach to Johannine revelation is through discussion of the evangelist's use of irony. For instance, as demonstrated through careful exegesis of John 4, the text sets up a dialogue between Jesus and an individual (in this case the Samaritan woman) who continually ironically affirms what Jesus says but misunderstands the way in which he means it. In this way the reader is drawn into the text, and is confronted with the decision of either understanding Jesus as Jesus suggests (faith), or else accepting the partial understanding of Jesus pertaining to the Samaritan woman with whom Jesus is in dialogue. This is significant for understanding Johannine revelation, since it is through this technique that the reader experiences the essence of the revelation for him or herself.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, irony is used when one word is used with two distinct meanings, as, for example, when *ύψωθήναι* is used of the crucifixion to mean both 'lifted up' and 'exalted'. It becomes increasingly clear in the text that both meanings of the word are appropriate, and so the reader comes to recognise that the Cross is to be seen as the enthronement of Jesus. Use of such technique means that revelation is not understood by the reader as empty, revealing only itself. Rather, the reader is teased into reflection of the meaning of the revelation of Christ and encounters through the text and through contemplation of the text the essence of the revelation, an encounter with God.

Supporting O'Day's move away from the antitheses of fact *versus* content, Ashton combines O'Day's appreciation of the text with a consideration of the nature of a gospel. The Fourth Evangelist, he argues, deliberately chose to write a gospel, as

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<sup>111</sup> O'Day, *Revelation*, p.46

<sup>112</sup> O'Day, *Revelation*, p.10

opposed to a revelatory discourse, homily, or collection of sayings put in the mouth of the glorified Christ. While the Fourth Gospel is not considered an *historical* document, the fact that it is a Gospel indicates that the evangelist had an interest in the earthly life of Jesus. Therefore, the Johannine revelation is not pronounced simply through the *words* Jesus speaks (as in a revelatory discourse or collection of sayings), but also through Jesus' deeds and character. The attempt to isolate the revelatory message from Jesus' life and character necessarily results in an unrevealing revelation. Ashton concludes that the revelation 'is indeed God's plan for the world, but in so far as the plan is transcribed in terms of a human life it is not to be understood from words but from deeds.... What the divine agent 'heard' from God is disclosed not in his words but in his life; the 'what' is displayed in the 'how'. The matter of the Gospel, its true content, is indistinguishable from its form: the medium is the message.'<sup>113</sup>

The revelation presented in the Fourth Gospel does have substance, yet this is not limited simply to those things which Christ says of himself or of the Father in propositional form. The essence of the revelation is to be found in the person of Christ, and in his entire salvific work begun at the Incarnation. Indeed, the Incarnation itself is essential to the revelation, for it is the unique instance of God becoming known not *through* the flesh, but *in* the flesh. Saeed Hamid-Khani writes 'When God in the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, the eternal became mortal, the timeless became locked in time and space. The event of the Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection is the quintessence of revelation and the exposition of the meaning of it is theology *par excellence*.'<sup>114</sup>

The ministry and teaching of Jesus are also revelatory, since it is through Jesus' teaching that it is revealed that Jesus and the Father are one, and thus the nature of the Father is disclosed in the person of Jesus. In other words, it is because the reader is

<sup>113</sup> Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, p.553

<sup>114</sup> Saeed Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ: A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), p.352

aware that Jesus' words and deeds reflect finitely what God is like infinitely, that they know that the character of Jesus and his attitude towards people encountered must also be – in a finite and human form - the character of God and his attitude towards humanity. If the Fourth Gospel portrays Jesus' life as one of compassion and love, as when Jesus gives up his life for his friends or weeps at the death of Lazarus or heals through compassion, it discloses the love and compassion of God also. Jesus' death is considered to be the ultimate expression of his love, and reveals also the extent of God's love for the world, for 'it is through the death of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, that the Father's love and forgiveness are made known.'<sup>115</sup>

From this brief study of the nature of sin and of the substance of revelation in the Fourth Gospel it can be seen that the idea of revelation as salvation in John is not a flimsy and semi-transparent disguise which, on closer inspection, is seen to be hiding an alternative soteriological model, such as sacrifice or ransom. Rather, revelation permeates every moment of the Fourth Gospel, and the understanding of revelation is so subtle and comprehensive that it must be concluded that the evangelist understood the saving person and work of Jesus primarily (if not solely) in terms of revelation. Revelatory soteriology is to be regarded as an independent model involving its own distinctive imagery and conceptual apparatus, and, as we have seen, there is no moment in the Gospel in which the revelatory model falls back upon other models because it is incomplete or superficial taken on its own.

#### 2.4 Revelation, Salvation, and Ethical Exhortation

Applying existentialist language to Johannine thought, Schneider suggests how it is that knowledge revealed concerning God might be considered salvific by the Fourth Evangelist, and what comprises this salvific revelation. According to Schneider, the

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<sup>115</sup>Hamid-Khani, *Revelation*, p. 352

Johannine term 'flesh' is to be understood as frail and mortal humanity, distinct and ignorant of God, but not necessarily sinful.<sup>116</sup> Flesh becomes sinful when man attempts to become independent of God and self-sufficient, that is, when he builds upon his frailty and mortality rather than upon God: 'Centering his life and attention on himself man turns from God and from the light.'<sup>117</sup> When this happens, the realm of flesh becomes 'co-extensive' with the realm of darkness.<sup>118</sup> Sin is the self-confidence of the world, a radical turning away from God. Men walk in death and darkness because they reject God's love,<sup>119</sup> believing that they do not need God. To depend upon the frail and mortal is to point to 'the prince of this world', the incarnation of the purely fleshly mode of existence.<sup>120</sup>

In contrast are those who are of the realm of spirit. Such people put their faith in God and do not depend upon the frail and mortal. Those of the spirit point beyond themselves to God, and 'are defined by their radical turning toward God.'<sup>121</sup> In order for individuals to turn away from the realm of the flesh to the realm of spirit God must be revealed to them, since otherwise those belonging to the flesh will not know God in order to put their faith in him. Schneider expresses this, writing that 'The former [mode of existence, that of flesh] absolutizes the world of contingency to which man belongs and the second [the realm of spirit] makes man accept himself for what he really is. He turns toward life, toward God and hopes for salvation. If it is true that the realm of flesh has of itself no knowledge of God (John 15. 22 – 24; 3. 6), then God had to *reveal* himself, otherwise man could never know and live according to the spirit.'<sup>122</sup>

The revelation of God to humans that saves humans from their attempts at self-sufficiency is the *Logos* incarnate, and this is epitomised in the declaration of the

<sup>116</sup> cf. John 3.6; 3.15, 22 – 24

<sup>117</sup> H. Schneider, 'The Word Made Flesh', p. 345

<sup>118</sup> John 1.5; 8.12; 12.35; 11.10

<sup>119</sup> Note that it is not the case that God rejects humanity, but *vice versa*.

<sup>120</sup> John 8.44

<sup>121</sup> Schneider, 'The Word Made Flesh', p.345

<sup>122</sup> Schneider, 'The Word Made Flesh', p.345, my emphasis



Prologue, 'The *Logos* became Flesh'.<sup>123</sup> The Incarnation of the *Logos* means that 'God reveals himself not in and through the flesh: God is the weak, the contingent, the mortal human being Jesus.'<sup>124</sup> The revelation consists in the relation between the Father and Jesus, and - perhaps more essentially - the love and self-giving of the Father for and to the world. Schneider writes:

The Son is totally obedient to the Father and thus perfectly reveals the Father (14. 9). How does he do that? He does it by being what he is - by being Son. Thus who God is, namely a loving Father, and who Jesus is, can only be revealed by a total self-giving, which is, on the one hand, perfect obedience to the Father's will and, on the other, a self-sacrificing love for men. Thus in the Fourth Gospel the Cross becomes the place of the full revelation of the Son and the Father and the Father's love for the world.<sup>125</sup>

One final question concerning the revelatory soteriology of John is whether such a view of salvation based on revelation necessitates 'real' exemplarism. Interestingly, there is very little emphasis on morality in John in comparison to the Synoptic Gospels. Obvious examples of morality in the Fourth Gospel include the woman caught in adultery who is told to sin no more, the foot washing as an example to be followed, and the command to 'Love one another'. However, the story of the woman caught in adultery is generally agreed to be a later addition, and cannot be taken as representative of the Evangelist's thought. The foot washing is an example of self-sacrifice to be followed by Jesus' disciples, but this is only secondary, since the primary point of the foot washing seems to be that it points to Jesus' death as an act of self-sacrifice. Jesus' command to 'love one another' seems to refer to the disciples' attitude toward the other disciples, and, by extension, the Johannine community's outlook within itself. There is no mention of loving neighbours or enemies, as in the Synoptics. Throughout the Gospel, there is absolutely no indication that good moral behaviour leads to salvation, and no significant emphasis on Jesus as a moral example to follow. This fact demonstrates that while the Fourth Gospel suggests a revelatory soteriology, it is in no

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<sup>123</sup> John 1.14

<sup>124</sup> Schneider, 'The Word Made Flesh', p.346

<sup>125</sup> Schneider, 'The Word Made Flesh', p.353

way exemplarist. That is not to say that the Fourth Gospel has no place for morality whatsoever: an implicit reference to good moral behaviour as *consistent* with belief in Jesus is made through Jesus' pronouncements that he is the Light and the Way.

With the exception of that found in the Prologue, the imagery of Jesus as the light of the world has moral overtones. Forestell observes that in the Old Testament and in late Judaism the Law, the revealed *Logos* of God, is sometimes regarded as a light which leads men to life.<sup>126</sup> Jesus' words, 'I am the Light of the World, the one following me will not walk in the darkness',<sup>127</sup> imply further moral connotation, since 'to walk' is a Semitic metaphor for moral conduct. Likewise, the imagery of Jesus as 'the Way',<sup>128</sup> is morally connotative, having the implication of being the way marked out by the Law of God.<sup>129</sup> In the context of the Farewell discourses, Jesus is probably suggesting that it is his mission to show the world the way of faith which people must follow to the Father's house. From this it appears that Jesus does not only reveal his own identity and the nature of the Father, but also the mystery of God's plan for humanity.<sup>130</sup> A part of God's plan for humanity appears to involve that humans adopt an attitude of love towards God and toward one another, and this may be regarded a moral exhortation. However, it is not the case that humans are saved by good moral behaviour; rather, eternal life, involving love, appears to be the mode of existence individuals are saved *for* through the revelation of God in Jesus, and so 'moral' behaviour is a corollary, and not a cause, of salvation.

### Synopsis

From this discussion of salvation in the Fourth Gospel, it is apparent that revelation is viewed as the means of salvation, and knowledge (in the sense of

<sup>126</sup> Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, p.32

<sup>127</sup> John 8.12

<sup>128</sup> John 14.6

<sup>129</sup> Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, p.34

<sup>130</sup> Forestell, *Word of the Cross*, p.35

fellowship rather than purely intellectual knowledge) of God is viewed as salvation itself. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that revelatory soteriology is not superficial or insubstantial, but that it is deeply-rooted and complex, accompanied by its own understanding of sin, of the essence of the revelation, and of the person and significance of Jesus. This shows that there is an exception to McIntyre's statement that 'There is virtually no biblical evidence for regarding 'revelation' as a soteriological model, worthy to be ranked along with the others we have examined',<sup>131</sup> and suggests that perhaps revelation ought to be reconsidered as a first-order model in the light of the biblical scholarship we have reviewed. Important in this respect is that fact that, as we have seen, a revelatory soteriology is not exemplarism under another name, since the Fourth Gospel is far from implying 'real' exemplarism at any point. For this reason it may be worthwhile sketching a revelatory model and then exploring further whether revelatory soteriology falls into the same traps as exemplarism, as McIntyre anticipates that it would. First, however, it may be valuable to look at some representations of revelatory soteriology in the Christian tradition outside the Scriptures, and to observe and learn from some of the different ways and forms in which the theme has developed.

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<sup>131</sup>McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, p.50. Cf. above, 1.3

## Chapter Three

### Christian Tradition and a Forgotten Legacy

#### 3.1 Abailard and the Revelation of Love

Peter Abailard's thoughts on salvation, expressed most fully in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, are often referred to as the 'moral' or 'exemplarist theory' of the Atonement. This epithet is misleading in two respects. In the first place, it is erroneous to view Abailard as propounding a particular *theory* of the Atonement. There are certainly distinctive and original ideas Abailard explores and consistently expounds throughout his work, as, for instance, his perception of the divine essence and divine grace as love, his emphasis upon the individual and upon free will, and the internalisation of both sin and salvation. However, it is mistaken to suppose that Abailard develops an entire and comprehensive *theory* of the Atonement, or to assert (with Rashdall<sup>132</sup> and others) that he rejects unqualifiedly models such as *Christus Victor* and metaphors alluding to Christ's blood as buying back sinners.<sup>133</sup> The term 'moral' or 'exemplarist theory' is also deceptive because, as I shall suggest, Abailard does not propound an understanding of Atonement which makes moral works the means of salvation, nor does he view Christ's importance as consisting primarily in a moral example for Christians to follow. As this brief study of Abailard's soteriology aims to demonstrate, the consideration of the means by which salvation is attained is focused on the *revelation* of God's love in the person and work of Christ, and the infusion of love in the individual that liberates from sin and unites the recipient in love with God and with neighbour.

Discussion of Abailard's soteriology begins with the following passage from his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.

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<sup>132</sup> Rashdall, 'The Abelardian Doctrine of Atonement', in *Doctrine and Development*, pp.128 - 145

<sup>133</sup> *Theol. 'Summi Boni' III. I*, cited R.E. Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love: A Critical Analysis of the Soteriology of Peter Abailard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.128 - 129

*Now it seems to us that we have been justified by the blood of Christ and reconciled to God in this way: through this unique act of grace manifested to us – in that his Son has taken upon himself our nature and persevered therein in teaching us by word and by example even unto death – he has more fully bound us to himself by love; with the result that our hearts are enkindled by such a gift of divine grace, and true love might not shrink from enduring anything for him.*<sup>134</sup>

In reaction against this key passage and others expressing similar ideas, contemporary and later scholars alike have charged Abailard with Pelagianism or exemplarism.<sup>135</sup> Passages such as these appear to imply a superficial understanding of sin, an understatement of the role of grace, and a belittlement of Christ's earthly life and death. Bernard of Clairvaux writes that, according to Abailard's teaching, Christ lived and died 'for no other purpose than that he might teach how to live by his words and example, and point out to them by his passion and death to what limits their love should go!'<sup>136</sup> Most recently, even sympathetic Abailardian scholars such as John Marenbon continue to emphasise the element of Christ's *example* as the purpose of the Incarnation and crucifixion. Marenbon writes that, concerning the reason for the Incarnation, 'this involved especially emphasizing the Passion as an example of supreme, self-sacrificing love, by following which we are enabled to love God properly.'<sup>137</sup> The impression of Abailard given here is that an individual's love of God follows on as a *consequence* or reward of their good ethical conduct, that is, of following the moral example of Christ's

<sup>134</sup> Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans, III. This translation is based on those of both Weingart, and E.R. Fairweather in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham* (The Library of Christian Classics Vol. X, London, 1956)

<sup>135</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *De erroribus Abaelardi*, ix. 23, and Thomas of Morigny, *Disputatio catholicorum patrum adversus dogmata Petri Abaelardi III*, cited Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.125

<sup>136</sup> *Tractatus contra quadam capitula errorum Petri Abaelardi, ad Innocentium II Pontificem* vii. 17, cited Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.202

<sup>137</sup> John Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.64

self-sacrificing behaviour. The ethical tendency of Abailard as perceived by Marenbon is affirmed when Marenbon writes that Abailard's is a 'morally based view of why God became incarnate and suffered death on the Cross'.<sup>138</sup> Clearly such a view would have only a minor role for God's grace, believing Christ's work to be not one of transforming the individual but merely of showing the individual the means by which they might transform themselves. Bernard asks, 'Did he [Jesus] then teach righteousness and not bestow it; reveal love and not infuse it?'<sup>139</sup>

If we take a second look at the representative passage taken from Abailard's Commentary on Romans, we may find that Abailard's answer to Bernard would have been a firm denial. It might be suggested that the ideas propounded in the passage may be re-expressed without any addition or shift of emphasis as follows. Salvation takes place through the revelation ('manifestation') of God's love (grace) in Jesus' Incarnation, life, and death. This revelation *binds* individuals to God in Christ by love. This has two results. First, the individual is inspired and infused ('our hearts are enkindled') by the love of God. Secondly, because of the love for God with which the individual has been inspired and infused, the individual lives according to God's will. It is significant that the ethical element is said to be the *result* of the revelation and inspiration of love, and not, as Marenbon suggests, a *cause* of being able to love God properly.

A few other points might usefully be made in connection with the passage. First, Abailard writes as though God were active in salvation, while the individual is relatively passive. God *manifests* his grace to the individual and *binds* the individual to himself by love. In contrast, the individual is passive; their heart is *enkindled*, and they are *bound* to God in love. In addition, while it seems at times in Abailard that the individual earns salvation, not through moral works but through the ability to love God,

<sup>138</sup> Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abailard*, p.64

<sup>139</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Epistle 190 7 - 9', cited and trans. L.W.Grensted, in *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (Manchester, 1962), p.106

it is clear on a closer reading that it is God's grace, and not individual free will, that enables the individual to love, and actually infuses the individual with love. It appears from this that the role of God's grace in the salvation of the individual is not undervalued, and that Christ's life and work is in no way reduced to that of moral example.

The work of the revisionist Abailardian scholar R.E. Weingart argues persuasively that Abailard is neither exemplarist nor Pelagian. Abailard, he contends, maintains the divine initiative, since 'Man is saved by grace, a free, unmerited gift that first transforms his heart before any moral efforts bear the imprint of love.'<sup>140</sup> The means of salvation in Abailard's thought is the revelation of God's love in Christ, and 'Abailard's primary attention focuses on Jesus Christ's work of revealing divine love.'<sup>141</sup> However, as with John, the knowledge imparted in this revelation is not primarily propositional, but experiential. Just as it is only through knowing that God is love that the individual can experience God's love, so it is only through experiencing God's love that the individual knows that God is love. Weingart writes that 'The knowledge of God revealed in Christ makes a vital difference to the existence of the knower.... The disclosure of divine love is tantamount to salvation for those who receive God's revelation in faith, hope and love.'<sup>142</sup>

Weingart emphasises the fact that the revelation of God in Christ is not thought by Abailard to be a mere exhibition of what God is like or (as is more commonly thought) of what humanity ought to be. Rather, the self-disclosure of God in Jesus has a real effect on the individual, since it inspires and infuses divine love into the heart of the individual, and it is this which overcomes sin, for God's love reconstructs and reorients 'the diseased and disordered spiritual life of the sinner.'<sup>143</sup> The revelation of God's love

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<sup>140</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.126

<sup>141</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.121

<sup>142</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, pp.122 – 123, 124, 126

<sup>143</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.124

does not exhibit love to the individual and leave them to replicate it, but spiritually transforms the individual, binding them to God and to the rest of humanity by love: 'All the possibility of human love for God and other men is created in the revelation of divine love.'<sup>144</sup> Weingart argues that the divine love revealed in Jesus is 'creative, transforming love.'<sup>145</sup> It first restores the spiritual life of the individual, renewing the individual's relationship with God and with the rest of creation. This love is called 'grace', since the individual does and is nothing which merits it, and 'because it is substantive, a new quality of life that is infused in the heart of man by God.'<sup>146</sup> As illustrated by the Romans passage discussed above, it is only after the individual has received the gift of transforming love that they participate in the true love of God, including ethical behaviour. To do this is not a way of earning salvation, but a fruit of salvation. God's love transforms the individual so that they are enabled to 'do all things out of love rather than fear – love to him who has shown us such grace that no greater can be found.'<sup>147</sup>

From Weingart's groundbreaking review of Abailard's soteriology it can be seen<sup>148</sup> that Abailard is in no way Pelagian or exemplarist. It is not the case that the life and death of Jesus are purely exemplary (though they are this *secondarily*) but that the revelation of divine love transforms the individual and infuses them with love. In answer to Bernard, Christ did not teach righteousness but not bestow it; nor did he reveal love and not infuse it. Paul Fiddes' work on soteriological models recognises this in moving away from the use of the term 'subjective theory' in relation to the Abailardian soteriology. He observes that Abailard's reflections on the work of Christ are focused on the objective work of God as well as on the complementary subjective element of humans being prompted by the love of Christ to love God. Abailard speaks

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<sup>144</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.125

<sup>145</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.125

<sup>146</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.125

<sup>147</sup> 'Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans', II. iii, in Fairweather, *A Scholastic Miscellany*

<sup>148</sup> cf. Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*



of the power of God's love to create as well as to encourage love within the individual. It is not the case that Abailard suggests that Christ's life is a mere demonstration or exhibition of love which humans follow in order to accomplish salvation. Rather, Christ's demonstration of love is at the same time an objective transformation of humanity. Thus Fiddes explains that Abailard believed that '...the revelation in Christ, when received by the human mind, is at the same time an actual infusion of love. The exhibition is a restoration. The manifestation is a transformation.'<sup>149</sup> In Abailard's thought salvation is an objective reality given directly by God, and not a subjective process earned by merit, or even given *indirectly* by God. Abailard's theory, then, it seems, is not guilty of reducing the significance of Jesus' Incarnation and death, nor of belittling the role of grace or suggesting that individuals are capable of extricating themselves from sin and death. Given this, it would seem strange that Bernard and his contemporaries took offence at Abailard's works, and repeatedly had them condemned by ecclesiastical authority.

In the light of this, I suggest that, while not Pelagian or exemplarist in any sense, recognition is needed of the distinctiveness of Abailard's views of grace, sin, and salvation. Such recognition is important, because some of the distinctive elements of Abailard's thought might be integral to a revelatory soteriology. For this reason, I shall now turn to distinctive Abailardian ideas such as the interplay between free will and grace, and the individualisation and internalisation of both sin and salvation.

While it is untrue that Abailard plays down the role of grace, it is true that his view of grace is unconventional in comparison with that proposed by Augustine and accepted by Anselm, Bernard, and mediaeval theologians in general. Abailard begins by questioning how it is that individuals may be damned if God has chosen to withhold from them divine grace, since, he argues, they cannot be guilty unless they are given a

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<sup>149</sup> Paul Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1989), p.154

choice in the matter.<sup>150</sup> In the light of the Augustinian assertion that *prevenient* grace is needed in order for an individual to accept God's offer of grace, Abailard pushes the question further, using the analogy of a sick man and a doctor:<sup>151</sup> a doctor brings to a sick man medicine that can cure him, but the sick man is too feeble to reach for and take the medicine, and the doctor does not pass it to him. Is the sick man at fault, and can the doctor be commended? Abailard's unprecedented suggestion is that, while humans certainly need grace, a new 'dose' of grace is not needed at each moment of a Christian's life.<sup>152</sup> There is a single gift of grace, offered to the entirety of humanity, and each person is free to accept or reject the grace they are offered. Abailard solves the problem by arguing that every person has the innate ability to accept the grace that God offers. Following the doctor analogy, Abailard says, 'I do not see how I could solve this problem, unless I said that the sick man had something from himself which enabled him to get up [and reach the medicine]. And we say that, in the same way all men have from themselves that which enables them to get up [and accept the grace they are offered].'<sup>153</sup> Avoiding a doctrine of predestination, Abailard appears to some to over-emphasise the role of free will in the salvation of the individual. However, the innate ability to accept God's grace is a gift thought by Abailard to be given to humans by God, and it is God who first offers his unconditional gift of *prevenient* grace to which people are free to respond. Abailard portrays a subtle interplay between grace and free will so that they cannot be divided into polar opposites and played off against one another, but must be accepted as mutually component and inseparable in the field of salvation.

God is compassionate, revealing to humanity his love, and transforming and liberating them from sin. God is also just, and for this reason he rewards with eternal

<sup>150</sup> *Comm. Rom.* 240:78 – 242:363, cited in Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, p.325 - 326

<sup>151</sup> *Sententie Parisienses* 60:18 – 21, cited in Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, p.326

<sup>152</sup> Though this is contrary to Abailard's statement that 'Grace certainly anticipates us that we may will, then follows us so that we are able, and finally joins with us so that we may persevere.' (*Apologia seu Fidei Confessio* 107, cited Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence, and the Rhetoric of Salvation* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], p.111 – 112)

<sup>153</sup> *Sententie Parisienses* 60:18 – 21, cited in Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, p.326 - 327

life those who are liberated from sin, and who are justified in his sight, and punishes those who have neglected to do his will. Once again Abailard appears to verge on Pelagianism, but again he is innocent of this charge because of his emphasis on divine grace. Those who accept God try to follow his example, living in love in accordance with God's will. However, it is inevitably the case that even the saints do not reach moral perfection or sinlessness, and that they remain imperfect and deficient in this respect.<sup>154</sup> Abailard writes that these deficiencies are supplemented by Christ's *meritoriousness*,<sup>155</sup> so that God makes humanity justified in his sight. In so doing, Abailard is distinctive in the context of Augustinian theology, reintroducing the apostolic idea of the perpetual intercession of Christ for humanity.<sup>156</sup>

The question of what is to be understood by Christ's meritoriousness, and how this may supplement humanity's deficiencies, is one which has aroused a degree of scholarly controversy. Weingart underlines the fact that the idea is unrelated to the notion of satisfaction propounded by Anselm, and argues that meritoriousness does not refer particularly to Christ's death.<sup>157</sup> Weingart suggests that, in a broad sense, Christ's meritoriousness alludes to Christ's work, that is, the undoing of the harm done by Adam, and thus the forgiveness of sin, justification, and the elimination of the penalty of sin.<sup>158</sup> In a narrower sense, Weingart suggests, Christ's meritoriousness is that which comes forth from Christ's absolute obedience to the will of the Father, even to the extent of giving up his life, and this meritoriousness supplements that which is lacking in the recipient of salvation. Because Abailard internalises sin, the notion is probably to be seen as the supplementation of an *imperfect or incomplete attitude* towards God and not the supplementation of particular *moral works*. Abailard never regards Christ's

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<sup>154</sup> *Exp. In Epist. Ad Rom.* II. v, cited in Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.142

<sup>155</sup> *Exp. In Epist. Ad Rom.* II. v, cited in Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.142

<sup>156</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Vol. VI, trans. William M'Gilchrist (London: Williams and Norgate, 1899), p.80

<sup>157</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.142 - 143

<sup>158</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.144

meritoriousness as 'a sum of distinct actions; the fullness of love to God dwelling in Christ is His merit.'<sup>159</sup> Christ's meritoriousness lies in his self-giving attitude and his perfect relationship with God, since 'it is in will, not in works, which are common to the good and evil, that all merit consists.'<sup>160</sup> Here as elsewhere, it is untenable that there is any suggestion that the believer earns salvation. Rather, salvation involves an attitude of love towards God and neighbour which, in order to be complete, requires not only God's grace in the form of the infusion of love but also God's grace in the form of supplementation of Christ's meritoriousness arising from his life and person. Once again, grace and free will are seen to be involved in a complementary and interrelated role in the salvation of the individual. It is in Jesus' free human response to the Father that meritoriousness is able to supplement the love of the individual, and yet it is also through God's grace that the perpetual intercession of Christ is made and is able to be made.

In addition to a distinctive view of grace, Abailard offers a distinctive and original angle on sin and salvation, in that, while his understanding is essentially that of a late Augustinian theologian, Abailard individualises and internalises sin and salvation in an unprecedented way. While both Augustine and Abailard internalise sin and agree that it is neither actions nor carnal appetites that in themselves constitute sin, Abailard replaces the Augustinian assertion that it is the *will* to sin that constitutes guilt with the idea that it is *consent* to sin that is the source of guilt.<sup>161</sup> Sin is defined not as a particular action, but as the contempt for God's will that harms our relationship with God. While it is often observed that an 'exemplarist' view necessitates moral severity, Abailard leniently asserts that even if our desires, that is, will to sin, are not wholly quenched, there is no sin so long as we have not consented to sin. Intention is the

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<sup>159</sup> Peter Abailard, cited in von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, p.79. Harnack does not offer references for these quotations.

<sup>160</sup> Peter Abailard, cited in von Harnack, *History of Dogma* p.79

<sup>161</sup> J.G. Sikes, *Peter Abailard* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1932), pp.185 - 190

criterion by which our guilt and merit are judged, so that if we intend to do evil but are prevented we are guilty, while if we intend to do good but cannot we are viewed as meritorious in God's sight. If morality is based on consent and intention, then God's will must be known before it can be either taken up or rejected, and so actions contrary to God's will committed in ignorance do not confer guilt. Therefore, while Bernard and Anselm believe that those who crucified Christ were guilty only of venial sin because of their ignorance, Abailard goes a step further and argues that, because they believed they were doing God's will, those who killed Jesus were not guilty. This claim, he writes, is supported by Christ's prayer to forgive them, 'for they know not what they do'.<sup>162</sup>

The internalisation of sin in Abailard leads to the individualisation of sin, perhaps his most radical contribution to theology. F.W. Dillistone observes that the truly distinctive aspect of Abailard's thought lies not in any perceived 'subjectivity', but, rather, in the emphasis upon the individual: 'Abelard marks the transition from an outlook which saw God dealing with humanity *as a whole*, either through a legal transaction or through a mystical transfusion, to one in which the ethical and psychological qualities of *the individual within the community* began to receive fuller recognition.'<sup>163</sup> One interesting aspect of internalisation and individualisation is that it means that sin and guilt necessitate reason and therefore free will, thus leading to the rejection of the Augustinian notions that humans could not help but sin because of their disposition towards evil, and that unbaptised infants are guilty of sin through inheritance.<sup>164</sup> Placing a heavy emphasis on the necessity of reason and free will for sin,

<sup>162</sup> *Scito Teipsum*, 13ff, coll. 653ff, cited Sikes, *Peter Abailard*, p.187

<sup>163</sup> F.W. Dillistone, *The Christian Understanding of Atonement* (Welwyn: Nisbet, 1968), p.325

<sup>164</sup> In opposition to this stand statements in which Abailard claims that unbaptised babies are damned in the sense of being deprived from the beatific vision, and says that God mercifully allows to die unbaptised only those babies whom he has foreseen would have grown up to be very wicked and incurred greater punishments still if they did not die in infancy (*Comm. Rom.* 164: 536 – 170: 554, cited Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, p.325). Further, Abailard writes, it is not extraordinary that the unbaptised that die in infancy should be punished while their parents are pardoned, since the sin is transferred to them in the wicked concupiscence involved in their conception (*Comm. Rom.* 250: 72 – 7, cited Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, p.330). These more traditionally Augustinian ideas have less prominence in Abailard than those which he suggests to supersede them. It is possible that

Abailard defines venial sin as that done in forgetfulness, or because a person is provoked or particularly prone to a certain failure. Mortal sin is reserved for that which is premeditated or done for pleasure. Therefore, in contrast to McGrath's portrayal of Rashdall, Abailard would be more temperate towards those who suffer from a psychological disorder that prevents them from doing God's will, than were contemporaries of Abailard such as Bernard.<sup>165</sup>

The way in which salvation takes place according to Abailard is similarly internalised and individualised, and it is this that has led scholars to regard Abailard's model as 'subjective'. However, it is not the case that Abailard's view of Atonement is a 'subjective' one. Rather, Abailard demonstrates psychological insight into how the 'objective' revelation given by God in Jesus affects and transforms the individual so as to bring about their salvation. However, the 'objective' revelation of God's love as the means of salvation remains central to Abailard, in the same way that Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross or the satisfaction of the Father were central to Augustine and Anselm before him.

The primary content of Jesus' salvific revelation is that God is, in his essence and in his attitude toward humanity, the God of love. Abailard expresses this repeatedly in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, as when he writes of the Pauline phrase, "To the showing of his justice", 'that is, his love – which as has been said, justifies us in his sight.'<sup>166</sup> The nature of God as unconditionally loving and compassionate is disclosed throughout Jesus' life, person, and work, but is revealed most especially in his sufferings and death. The rejection, agony and torture Jesus

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Abailard is employing irony in these passages, to ridicule the opinions he opposes. However, it is equally possible that Abailard reverts to traditional Augustinian thought at times since, while he represents the marriage of rationality and faith, it may be anachronistic to suppose that he had done away with these ideas all together.

<sup>165</sup> Sikes, *Peter Abailard*, p.187 - 188

<sup>166</sup> 'Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans', III. xxiv, in Fairweather, *A Scholastic Miscellany*, p.279

underwent during the last days of his earthly life are a certain indication of the value of sinners in God's eyes.<sup>167</sup>

One facet of the disclosure of God's love is that, as the crucifixion reveals, forgiveness of sin is costly to God and involves self-sacrifice. Sin frustrates God's plan for creation, disordering the unity and wholeness of creation and alienating creatures from God and from one another.<sup>168</sup> While Abailard continues to maintain divine impassibility, he asserts that the decision to forgive humanity is not one God can make indifferently or apathetically, since to forgive necessitates self-sacrifice of God. Weingart asserts this when he writes, 'Even though God is eternally forgiving, his mercy would too easily be counted as indulgence if he had not revealed its cost to him in the Incarnation and death of his own Son.'<sup>169</sup> Perhaps the inclination to express this verity is part of the reason for Abailard's return to the language of the preciousness of Christ's redemptive blood,<sup>170</sup> which emphasises the cost to God of humanity's Atonement. At any rate, this emphasis demonstrates that, contrary to critics, Abailard does not take sin lightly or see humans as capable of disentangling themselves from something that affects the very fabric of creation.

Additionally, from this it can be seen that, in Abailard's thought, the revelation of God in Christ takes place primarily on the Cross, demonstrating God's love for his creation, and, in relation to this, the cost to God of forgiveness and the value of humanity to him. The *cruciocentric* nature of Abailard's thought transpires to be problematic for a revelatory soteriology, since, taken on its own, it may not reveal anything unless it falls back upon an alternative 'traditional' model. This is shown by Fiddes' criticism that the Abailardian model does not explain why Jesus' death was necessary to reveal God's love. Echoing Denney, Fiddes asks why it is that Jesus' death

<sup>167</sup> *Exp. In Epist. Ad Rom. II. iii*, cited Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.122

<sup>168</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.129

<sup>169</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.128

<sup>170</sup> *Ep. V*, cited Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.128 - 129

is salvific since, on an Abailardian model, it fails to explain why it is on the Cross that God's love is demonstrated. A less *crucio-centric* approach may have rescued Abailard from this problem. In addition, as Fiddes points out, the notion of the revelation of God as suffering would salvage Abailard's arguments had Abailard been able to surmount the insistence upon divine impassibility in the theology of his day. This appears ironic, since Abailard is often thought to propound the absolute freedom of God, yet here he reverts to other soteriological models for support because he cannot contemplate that God is free to suffer. The tendencies to emphasise the Cross exclusively and to deny divine passibility may be a weakness in Abailard's thought, but is something that is not inherent to a revelatory soteriology. A discussion of the reason for Jesus' death on a revelatory model will be undertaken in the Conclusion.

A further but subordinate revelation takes place through Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension. Abailard taught that the Resurrection is a revelation of Jesus' divine status, because God has raised Jesus from the dead and his body is now glorious and incorruptible.<sup>171</sup> Moreover, in the Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,<sup>172</sup> Abailard, following Paul, emphasises the idea that Jesus' Resurrection is the guarantee of the future resurrection of the dead, in which the bodies raised will, like Christ's, be spiritual, glorified, and immortal.<sup>173</sup> Thus Weingart writes of the Abailardian view of Christ's work, 'In his incarnation and death he revealed the divine love; in his resurrection and exaltation he reveals the future glory of elect mankind.'<sup>174</sup>

The revelation of divine love in Christ is the means by which God secures humanity's salvation, and this is concomitant with the salvific re-binding of the individual to God by love and the infusion of love. In those who accept the revelation of God in Christ, God *infuses* the divine grace, which in Abailard is love, which spiritually

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<sup>171</sup> *In die Paschae*, cited in Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.416

<sup>172</sup> *Exp. In Epist. Ad Rom. I. i*, cited in Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.147

<sup>173</sup> *Exp. In Epist. Ad Rom. I. ii*, cited in Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.147

<sup>174</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.149



transforms the recipient, 'joining him to God and his neighbour in an indissoluble bond of affection.'<sup>175</sup> Weingart speaks of how divine love effects a spiritual transformation in the individual, writing that:

It [divine love] works a radical transformation of man's spiritual centre and reorientation of his rational, volitional, and emotional faculties. Whereas the old man of sin wrongly loves the shadow of the truth, in Christ he is instructed in the truth by the Truth himself; whereas he consented to evil and despised his Creator, in Christ he is freed from sin that he may love God in perfect obedience; whereas he was emotionally warped by servile fear, in Christ he is re-created in the affection of love, by which he loves God only for his own sake and the neighbour for God's sake.... Man is justified and sanctified by God in love, he is recreated by the infusion of love, he lives a life of love in the community of the faithful.<sup>176</sup>

Because of the internalisation of sin, the infusion of divine love is salvation because it liberates the individual from obeying God through fear, which is a sinful attitude, to obeying God through love, which is a person's proper attitude towards God. Once again, salvation is perceived as being given by God rather than being earned by humans: while humans respond freely to God's initial revelation, it is God that infuses in those who accept his revelation the gift of love that liberates from sin and fear.

Scholars have emphasised Abailard's inclusion of the importance of Christ's life and teachings as an example and pattern to follow, and it is true that Abailard gives a significant place to Christ's example in his theology. Jesus' earthly life provides the Christian with a pattern to follow, and, according to Abailard, it is the divine plan that humanity surpass its pre-Fall state.<sup>177</sup> The infusion of love frees the individual from sin, so that they may strive for moral perfection, having been given by God the ability to love God and neighbour, from which they were formally prevented by their estranged state. Jesus demonstrated by actions and words the way in which humans should live, taught his disciples how to pray, and, in particular, through his passion and death, showed Christians the extremes of suffering which they may have to undergo, and the attitude with which suffering should be faced. Abailard writes, 'So that we might persist

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<sup>175</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.124

<sup>176</sup> Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.204 - 205

<sup>177</sup> *Ep. XIII*, cited in Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.128

strongly in the agony of suffering for Christ's sake, he is always to be before our eyes and his passion ought always to be an example for us lest we fail.'<sup>178</sup>

Those who are saved in Christ have an example to follow, a moral paradigm after which to strive. However, contrary to those who see Pelagianism in Abailardian theology, moral goodness is always regarded a consequence and not a cause of salvation: moral perfection is not what liberates humanity, but is part of what humanity is liberated to. While Abailard seems to deny the idea that grace is given perpetually and at every moment, he does insist that individuals are saved by grace and that grace alone makes human value and good works possible. He writes that 'The grace of God is necessary for everyone, and... without it neither a natural faculty nor free will is sufficient for salvation.'<sup>179</sup>

Abailard is significant for this study, primarily because he is accused of exemplarism but actually suggests a revelatory soteriology. In addition, Abailard is important because his psychological insight into how the revelation and infusion of love affects the individual may highlight a potential valuable characteristic of revelatory soteriology. The related individualisation and internalisation of both sin and salvation, and the refusal to separate the complementary roles of grace and free will, are, as we shall see, perennial issues to the discussion. The remainder of this chapter, however, will be comprised of a consideration of whether Abailard's revelatory soteriology is an exception without foundation or reiteration in the rest of Church tradition, or whether the Abailardian model represents one strand of Christian tradition that has been overlooked and neglected by exponents of so-called 'objective' models. While Abailard represents something of a test-case for the discussion of whether a revelatory model has established itself in Christian tradition, I shall turn now more briefly to Origen, to GWH Lampe, and to the Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae, in order to show

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<sup>178</sup> *Sermo XIV*, cited in Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, p.126 - 127

<sup>179</sup> *Apologia seu Fidei Confessio 107*, cited Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance*, p. 111

that Abailard is by no means unique in suggesting a revelatory model. It should be emphasised that the scholars I now intend to discuss are few and far between, not because representatives of a revelatory model are sparse and difficult to find, but because I hope to represent, however briefly, Christianity as a whole, in its ancient and its contemporary, and in its eastern and western forms.

### 3.2 Origen and Redemptive Pedagogy

The theme of salvation as divine revelation was prominent in the patristic era, and therefore it would be equally plausible to discuss the idea as it developed in theologians such as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Irenaeus of Lyons. However, I have chosen to highlight the pedagogical soteriology of Origen, since, while the theme is crucial to the other fathers, it finds its culmination as a distinctive soteriology in Origen.<sup>180</sup> As with Abailard, the theme does not become a theory in Origen, but remains an idea developed alongside other soteriological themes, particularly in Origen's case that of Christ as a ransom to the devil. However, contrary to Origen's critics,<sup>181</sup> it is not the case that ransom and revelatory soteriology are incompatible. The former concerns the initial liberation of humanity from evil forces, while the latter speaks of the pedagogical process individuals then undergo in order that they may turn freely to God.<sup>182</sup> Significantly, Origen develops a soteriology that is both revelatory and pedagogical, rooting the salvific work of Christ in the context of God's saving work in Israel, and the salvific work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the life of the individual. While it is only within the scope of the current dissertation to discuss christocentric soteriology alone, Origen's sense of the interconnectedness of Christ's work to that of God throughout history adds insight into the pedagogical

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Karen Jo Torjesen, 'Pedagogical Soteriology from Clement to Origen', in *Origeniana Quarta: Die Referate des 4. Internationalen Origeneskongresses (Innsbruck, 2. – 6. September 1985)*, p.370 - 379

<sup>181</sup> Especially De Faye, *Origen*, iii, p.210, and Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis*, p.19, cited in Jean Danielou, *Origen*, trans. by Walter Mitchell (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p.269

<sup>182</sup> This observation was made by Danielou, *Origen*, p.269

experience of the individual that can only be hinted at here. While the work of Christ as Revealer takes precedence here, I hope to touch upon the idea of divine pedagogy in order to give an impression of the theological framework in which a christological revelatory soteriology is best understood.

The idea of Christ as Revealer permeates Origen's writings. In speaking of the relationship between Father and Son, for instance, Origen cannot help but speak of the revelation of the Father in the Son. Origen characteristically uses analogy to express the relationship between the Father and the Son, and the analogy used expresses well the idea of the revelation of God in Christ. Suppose, he writes, that there were a statue so large that it fills the whole world, and could therefore be seen by no one, and that another statue were made identical, yet far smaller, 'altogether resembling it in the shape of the limbs, and in the features of the countenance, and in form and material, but without the same immensity of size'. Such a statue would make known the first statue to those who were formally unable to see it, by virtue of the fact that the second is made so entirely in the image of the first. In a similar way, 'the Son of God, divesting Himself of His equality with the Father, and showing to us the way to the knowledge of Him, is made the express image of His person: so that we, who were unable to look upon the glory of that marvellous light when placed in the greatness of His Godhead, may, by His being made to us brightness, obtain the means of beholding the divine light by looking upon the brightness.'<sup>183</sup> Here, as throughout Origen's thought, the purpose of Christ's Incarnation, life and death lies in the revelation of the divine nature to creation.

Again, the idea of Christ as Divine Pedagogue is crucial to Origen's thought. Meditating on Paul's words that Christ is the 'brightness of the glory of God', Origen speaks of God as the light from whom brightness proceeds inseparably, illuminating all of creation. It is by the splendour of brightness that humans understand and know what

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<sup>183</sup> *De Principiis* 1.2.8, trans. Frederick Crombie, *The Early Church Fathers and Other Works* (Edinburgh: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1867)

light is, and, in like manner, Christ is the brightness and splendour through whom humanity can ultimately know the Light. Origen speaks of Christ's pedagogy as a tender introduction to light that will eventually enable humans to enjoy the divine vision unrestricted and without limit:

And this splendour, presenting itself gently and softly to the frail and weak eyes of mortals, and gradually training, as it were, and accustoming them to bear the brightness of the light, when it has put away from them every hindrance and obstruction to vision, according to the Lord's own precept, "Cast forth the beam out of thine eye," it renders them capable of enduring the splendour of the light, being made in this respect also a sort of mediator between men and the light.<sup>184</sup>

Origen's emphasis on the work of Christ as Revealer and the soteriology arising from this is rooted in a *Logos* christology. In this way, the pedagogical work of Christ is not restricted to that of the earthly Christ in first-century Palestine, but to the work of the *Logos* in eternity. The *Logos* reveals the divine nature to humanity, both through creation and through Scripture. Revelation takes place through Scripture, though not primarily through the history or words literally understood. Rather, salvation is imparted through the 'inner rationality of Scripture'.<sup>185</sup> The literal aspect of Scripture holds the image of the *Logos* veiled, while the 'rationality of Scripture' (its spiritual sense) discloses the *Logos* unveiled. Origen expresses this by speaking of the literal sense being seen, while the spiritual sense is perceived. Characteristically, this is related by Origen to Christ's human and divine natures, the former of which is seen and which veils the latter, potentially perceived nature inherent in the spiritual sense of Scripture.<sup>186</sup> The many layers of meaning to be found in Scripture and the diversity of genre and content make Scripture the perfect instrument for the revelation of the *Logos*, both in terms of the fact that differing individuals have differing needs of salvation,<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> *De Principiis* 1.1.7, trans. Crombie, *Early Church Fathers*

<sup>185</sup> Torjesen, 'Soteriology', p. 374

<sup>186</sup> Origen, *Homily on Leviticus*, 11, cited Torjesen, 'Soteriology', p.374

<sup>187</sup> Origen, *Commentary on John*, 1.20, cited Torjesen, 'Soteriology', p.376

and, consequent upon this, in terms of the multiplicity the *Logos* took upon himself in order to make God (unknowable in his simplicity) known to creation.<sup>188</sup>

Revelation also takes place through creation because the world was made through the *Logos*, and, therefore, all of creation bears the image of the *Logos*. This image is thought by Origen to be an inner rationality (or *logos*), the reason for existence, and purpose. For this reason, Origen (in contrast to Clement and others) views knowledge of the *cosmos* as an inherent part of knowledge of the *Logos*, for 'to know the *Logos* of a thing is already to possess partial knowledge of the *Logos* himself whose image they reflect'.<sup>189</sup> Origen presupposes a particular affinity between God and the human mind, and this presupposition lends itself to a pedagogical soteriology.<sup>190</sup>

The revelation and pedagogy of the *Logos* is not regarded simply as a sort of *super donum* given over and above the gift of salvation. Rather, revelation and pedagogy are the essence of the means of salvation, and salvation is, accordingly, 'face to face knowledge of God'.<sup>191</sup> The revelation of God in the *Logos* takes place throughout the history of creation, as is recognised by Jean Danielou when he writes that Origen 'regards the world as the scene of an educative process carried on by the *Logos*, who as Master and Healer was gradually inducing all free creatures to return to the good' and that Origen holds 'the idea of the Redemption as something pedagogical'.<sup>192</sup> Despite the universalising of Christ's revelation, the Incarnation is still regarded as the focal point of this revelation, 'a veritable revelation of God'<sup>193</sup>, and in some sense the crux of God's saving activity, so that 'Even at the very highest climax of contemplation we do not for a moment forget the incarnation.'<sup>194</sup>

<sup>188</sup> Origen, *Homily on Numbers*, XXVII.1, cited Torjesen, 'Soteriology', p.376

<sup>189</sup> Torjesen, 'Soteriology', p.373

<sup>190</sup> *De Principiis*, 1.1.7; 4.4.10, cited Gorringer, *Redeeming Time*, p.3

<sup>191</sup> Torjesen, 'Soteriology', p.375

<sup>192</sup> Danielou, *Origen*, p.269

<sup>193</sup> Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.92

<sup>194</sup> Origen, *Commentary on John*, 2.8, cited Chadwick, *Christian Thought*, p.92.

Salvation takes place through the revelation of the divine nature and through the pedagogy of Christ the eternal *Logos*. However, this not to imply that in order to be saved it is necessary to be intellectual or to possess particular spiritual insight. As with the other revelatory soteriologists considered, the revelation is not primarily propositional or intellectual, but experiential, involving relationship with God.<sup>195</sup> In addition, pedagogy is a progressive affair, and, accordingly, Origen outlines a schema for the development and salvation of the Christian. Danielou writes that 'Revelation was ... at once a single entity and a gradual unfolding. It is important to realize that if, in Origen's view, revelation implied an advance in knowledge, it also meant an advance in the out-working of salvation.'<sup>196</sup> The *Logos* does not reveal to or teach in the same way to every individual, and the content and the medium of the revelation is dependent upon the capacity of the recipient. Of the different senses of Scripture Origen writes that 'For pedagogical reasons, it is so constructed that the simple will think it simple; but people who want to go deeper will find, if they have the ability, that wisdom really worthy of God's word is hidden in it.'<sup>197</sup> This idea corresponds to a view that sees salvation as corresponding to individual potential, so that the divine vision is revealed in proportion to the degree to which a particular person can grasp it. The experiential and capacity-relative nature of Origen's view of divine revelation and pedagogy is summarised by the fact that the 'education soteriology' of Clement and Origen moves away from what scholars have called '*Christos Didascalos*' soteriology<sup>198</sup> to a '*Christos Paedagogos*' soteriology. The significance of this lies in the fact that '*didascalos*', emerging from the context of philosophical schools, expresses the idea of teaching in the sense of demonstration and explanation.<sup>199</sup> In contrast to this, '*paedagogos*', arising from the context of bringing up children, includes the idea of instruction of a novice, and

<sup>195</sup> Gorringer, *Redeeming Time*, p. 4

<sup>196</sup> Danielou, *Origen*, p.126

<sup>197</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.6, trans. Crombie, *Early Church Fathers*

<sup>198</sup> Represented by Justin and Irenaeus (cf. Torjesen, 'Soteriology', p. 370)

<sup>199</sup> Torjesen, 'Soteriology', p.370

discipline and correction. The idea of Christ as Pedagogue, therefore, involves not primarily intellectual or propositional teaching, but the kind of gentle progressive encouragement and education suggested by an ideal model of child nurture.

In the light of Origen's revelatory and pedagogical soteriology, one may be justified in asking whether Origen should be categorised as suggesting an 'exemplarist-type' soteriology. Unlike Clement, Origen sees Christ's salvific work not primarily as offering an example and teaching to live a perfect life, but as revealing the divine nature and guiding the individual to God. Torjesen writes that 'the *Logos Paedagogos* of Clement is first a trainer and disciplinarian in the life of virtue and then a guide and model for the ethical perfection of the Gnostic. In contrast, the *Logos Paedagogos* of Origen is a revealer, mediating a knowledge of God through his own self-disclosures in the Scriptures and in the *cosmos*.'<sup>200</sup> This would suggest that Origen's soteriology, while focusing on a soteriology which would be regarded by critics as 'subjective' and 'moral', does not suggest a view of salvation that is based on example.

This view is further confirmed by the fact that Origen concurs with Celsus' criticism that Christianity has nothing new to offer in terms of morality and ethical teaching. The Greek philosophers have already said all that is important on the matter, and, furthermore, every individual has an inborn and instinctive awareness of what is right and what is wrong, so that 'it is not therefore matter of surprise that the same God should have sown in the hearts of all men those truths which He taught by the prophets and the Saviour'.<sup>201</sup> Christianity does not teach an original and unprecedented ethical system, but reveals God's love, thus providing a theological basis for existing moral principles. Chadwick expresses this when he writes that 'It [the Gospel] does not bring a new morality, but a recognition of the divine righteousness and love as the underlying

<sup>200</sup> Torjesen, 'Soteriology', p.376

<sup>201</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.4, trans. Crombie, *Early Church Fathers*. Cf. also 2.5



ground of the highest ethical aspiration.'<sup>202</sup> While an exemplarist view tends to see Christ as inaugurating a completely new moral system, Origen believes that the importance of the Incarnation lies not in ethical teaching and example, but in the revelation of God. Of course, the life of the believer becomes rooted in this understanding of God, and this results in a corresponding love of neighbour that produces moral behaviour. However, it is not the case that Christ's significance is reduced to this alone, or that individuals can earn salvation and forgo God's grace. Chadwick writes that Origen did not suggest 'that the believer, following Christ as example, can find his ... way to God independently of Christ.'<sup>203</sup>

To conclude, it can be said that Origen, alongside other scholars we have discussed, represents one significant and neglected strand of Christian thought. Here as elsewhere, the idea of salvation as revelation emerges as distinct and independent of exemplarism. In contrast to Abailard, Origen represents it in its eastern and early form, emphasising the significance of the Incarnation and not yet focusing primarily on Jesus' death. Origen is significant for this dissertation, because, while it is not within the scope of the dissertation to develop the idea, Origen gives a sense of the way that the revelation of God in Christ is to be seen in the context of God's pedagogical work throughout history, and not as an isolated occurrence of the first-century.

### 3.3 Lampe: Revelation and Faith

G.W.H. Lampe's essay "The Atonement: Law and Love"<sup>204</sup> attacks 'legalistic' interpretations of Jesus' death, suggesting in their place what Alister McGrath calls 'an

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<sup>202</sup> Chadwick, *Christian Thought*, p.105

<sup>203</sup> Chadwick, *Christian Thought*, p.92. Chadwick is speaking in the context of Origen's view of deification, but the same may also be said of salvation more generally.

<sup>204</sup> G.W.H. Lampe, *Soundings: Essays Concerning Christian Understanding*, ed. A.R. Vidler, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p.173 - 192

exemplarist approach based on “the paradox and miracle of love.”<sup>205</sup> As has been seen, an exemplarist approach may be defined as the soteriological model that holds that Jesus’ significance lies in providing an example through his life and teachings of a good moral life, which is to be followed by those seeking salvation. Such a view characteristically involves a belittlement of grace in favour of the idea that humans *earn* their own salvation, and an inadequate and superficial view of sin as *ignorance*. I shall turn now to Lampe’s work, suggesting that Lampe is erroneously labelled ‘exemplarist’ by McGrath, since he is a further representative of that strand of Christianity which propounds a non-exemplarist *revelatory* model of the Atonement. I shall focus in particular on the role of grace and the nature of sin according to Lampe, because these highlight the vast difference between exemplarism and a model based on revelation, and because of their insight and their significance for a revelatory soteriology. I shall include some of Lampe’s criticisms of ‘legalistic’ models such as that of satisfaction, for it is primarily in his negation of and in contrast to these that Lampe’s own model comes to light.

In reviewing the work of Lampe, I hope to demonstrate that the following is true of his soteriological model. In essence, the salvific work of Christ for humanity is that Christ reveals to humanity the unconditional love of God for them. Such a revelation is thought to be salvific for it transforms the individual’s relationship with God from one of various attempts at self-justification, to one of faith that God accepts them despite their sinfulness. One result of this faith is that the individual freely chooses to behave more ethically, responding positively to God’s unqualified love for them. Moral behaviour is not viewed as a requisite of salvation, for, Lampe insists, God accepts them before any ethical transformation, that is, while they are still sinful. Grace plays the central part for Lampe, and it is pivotal for him that God reconciled humanity to

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<sup>205</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1994), p.359

himself, rather than that humanity reconciled God to itself, as in some of the post-biblical, "objective" models. Sin is viewed, not as ignorance, but as individuals' attempts at self-justification which lead to self-righteousness or to self-hatred and away from faith in God.

According to Lampe, the belief that God is love has its root ultimately in Christ's death and Resurrection, since it is on the Cross that God is 'revealed as life-giving love'.<sup>206</sup> Jesus' death is the supreme act of divine love, which reconciles us to God, because it reveals his love for us. As in much post-Reformation theology, the opposite of sin is viewed, not as virtue, but as faith. In the revelation of divine love in Christ, God has overcome sin by establishing the possibility of faith, that is, he has 'broken through the barrier of man's estrangement from his Maker and brought him into the relation of a son to a father'.<sup>207</sup> The essence of the Christian Gospel is radical and world-shattering, demonstrating that God reconciles humanity to himself. This is a reversal of all ordinary values, especially those of religion, which generally involves humans attempting to reconcile God to themselves, either by obeying his laws or else by offering satisfaction or sacrifices to him. Because of the newness of this idea, it cannot easily be expressed in the existing categories of religious thought. The ancient conception of a covenant between God and humanity has not only been fulfilled in Christ – it has been given a new meaning. What is entirely new about the covenant is that it is not the case that God's love and compassion towards people is the result of the people's observance of God's law or of any recompense they make for having disobeyed it. The right relationship to God (which is righteousness) cannot be attained by humanity's own will or ethical behaviour. Rather, sinners do not need to attempt

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<sup>206</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.175

<sup>207</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.175

self-justification, for God accepts them as they are: 'The new covenant rests simply on God's acceptance of sinners.'<sup>208</sup>

Biblical motifs such as sacrifice, deliverance, and Adam-Christ parallels arose as a result of the need to express this new covenant in the conceptual framework of the older religious ideas. They all contain some aspect which gives them some affinity with Christ's reconciliation of humanity to God, yet, even taken together, they only express the truth partially, for 'they belonged to a realm of religious belief which had been radically transformed.'<sup>209</sup> Paul recognised that Christ effected a transformation in which the principle of law was superseded by that of unconditional divine love. God is no longer seen primarily as a divine judge, punishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous. Rather, 'His gracious approach encountered man, not in the state in which he would like to be, but where he actually is, in a condition of alienation and enmity.'<sup>210</sup>

Legalistic religion is fundamentally self-centred, because it concerns humans' efforts to justify themselves, both to themselves, and to God. The attempt at self-justification prevents the individual from accepting God's unconditional love, that is, the acceptance of the sinner as they are. The attempt to become acceptable produces internal discord, involving the refusal on the part of the individual to come to terms with themselves. It is the attempt of the individual to make themselves acceptable (and not ignorance) that is the essence of sin, for this is the 'impassible barrier which interposes itself'<sup>211</sup> between God and the individual.

Legalism (epitomised for Paul in the Pharisee's reliance upon the Torah) serves sin, because it advocates either self-righteousness or else self-hatred. It 'expresses and generates that attitude to God which consists either in confidence in one's own achievement and the belief that one can become acceptable to God by virtue of one's

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<sup>208</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.176

<sup>209</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.177

<sup>210</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.178

<sup>211</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.178

own merits, or else in the overwhelming sense of guilt which indicates hatred of oneself and either despair and hatred of God or the fear of God which seeks for some means to propitiate his wrath and satisfy his justice.<sup>212</sup> The Gospel supersedes the law because, according to the Gospel, 'justification comes from the free and unmerited grace of God and has only to be accepted'.<sup>213</sup> God is the Father and not the judge of humanity, and he becomes their judge only if they insist upon regarding him as such.

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England assert that Christ 'truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men'.<sup>214</sup> This assertion is a reversal of the Gospel advocated in the New Testament, for in the Thirty-Nine Articles humans reconcile God to themselves, while in the Gospel God reconciles humanity to himself. The estrangement now appears to be on the part of God rather than on the part of humanity: 'God was at enmity with us, rather than we with him'.<sup>215</sup> God is reconciled to humanity through Christ's death, which annuls human's sin and makes them acceptable to God: 'The work of Christ is now seen, not as effected from the side of God towards men, reconciling them to God, but from the side of man towards God, reconciling him and causing him to acquit the guilty'.<sup>216</sup> The Gospel is forced back into the sphere that it replaced, that of legalistic justice and transgression. God's grace is still required, since other humans could not do what Christ did for them, but this does not alter the fact that God is no longer seen to express *unconditional* love for and acceptance of his creation. In addition to this problem, Lampe criticises this legalistic attitude, for it interprets sin 'as a transgression of commandments instead of as a deep violation of personal relationship'.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.179

<sup>213</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.179

<sup>214</sup> Cited Lampe, 'Atonement', p.180

<sup>215</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.180

<sup>216</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.180

<sup>217</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.181

To interpret Jesus' death in this way, as represented by an interpretation of the Cross as satisfaction or as sacrifice, neglects the fact that Christ's teachings and works speak of God's love and unconditional acceptance of humanity, as, for instance, Jesus' declarations of divine forgiveness of sinners and reception of them into fellowship with himself. This acceptance comes before Christ' death, and before any ethical behaviour, though ethical behaviour may be the *result* of the revelation of unconditional love: 'Zacchaeus was not called upon to make restitution before Christ entered his home; he repented and made amends because Christ had already accepted him as a sinner.'<sup>218</sup>

Lampe particularly criticises Tertullian's view of 'satisfaction' being made by the penance of sinners,<sup>219</sup> which is especially representative of a legalistic approach. Such a portrayal of both God and sin, if applied to Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, would make for an entirely alternative ending, since it 'would make the Father exact compensation from the prodigal son before killing the fatted calf for him.'<sup>220</sup> Where this view of satisfaction is applied to Jesus' death, it is not the case that the expression of God's love disappears entirely. Rather, God expresses his love by finding a way to satisfy his demands of justice and so overcome the punishment due to humans, given that fallen humanity is unable to accomplish it for itself. However, on this model love is secondary to justice. Lampe observes that 'love has to serve the ends of justice, and justice remains the higher principle, inhibiting the free acceptance of sinful men until full satisfaction has been made on their behalf.'<sup>221</sup> Lampe notes that it is no wonder that models which make God's justice the highest principle and speak of God's love only secondarily are often accompanied by an *hierarchical* view of the Trinity, in which Christ, representing love, is subordinated to the Father, who is seen as justice.

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<sup>218</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.190

<sup>219</sup> The idea of satisfaction had not yet been applied to Christ's death, but only to the penance of sinners.

<sup>220</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.181

<sup>221</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.182. The other alternative is that if God is, above all, the God of Love, then he is subject to some higher power or principle, insisting that the rules of justice be adhered to.

In the context of the Reformers, who saw God as unable to forgive until compensation had been made, Lampe notes that forgiveness after satisfaction has been fully made is no forgiveness at all, even though in this case it is God, the forgiver, who undertakes to pay the compensation to himself.<sup>222</sup> Advocating the Christ-Adam motif, developed primarily by Irenaeus and later Luther, Lampe underscores the idea that Christ reversed Adam's disobedience, which was attempted independence and self-justification, by showing utter dependence upon and obedience toward God. In so doing, Christ overcame sin, restoring the relationship between God and his creation.

To portray God as punishing humans *retributively* is to make God in the image of sinful humanity. It is arguable that the corporal punishment is necessary in an imperfect society such as ours, but, either way, it indicates the limited and often flawed nature of our society, signifying 'the bankruptcy of justice through the failure of love.'<sup>223</sup> It is, ultimately, an admission of failure on the part of the executioners, because 'It is a short-term way of dealing with an unsolved problem, but it is no solution'.<sup>224</sup> Were God to adopt the same policy and condemn sinners to destruction in hell, he could not be called Almighty, but impotent. This is because 'To hang the criminal is to admit defeat at the level of love, and a God whose dealings with his creatures end in their condemnation to hell is a God whom evil has defeated'.<sup>225</sup> This is the case, whether the view involves sinners being thrown into hell because of their misdeeds, or that Jesus suffers and dies in their place.

To deny the idea that God exercises retributive justice is not to deny the reality of hell, which, Lampe argues, does pertain. Hell is the state of existence of those who refuse God's unconditional love, who persist in attempts at self-justification. Hell is estrangement from God – but this estrangement is not decreed by God, nor does he

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<sup>222</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.185

<sup>223</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.189

<sup>224</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.189

<sup>225</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.189

throw humans into it. Instead, 'Hell is made by man, and only man can consign himself to it'.<sup>226</sup> Similarly, Christ's death was inflicted as a punishment, not by God, but by humans in an attempt to justify themselves and to secure their own righteousness before God. Paradoxically, this was to reject God utterly, 'to kill him with every accompaniment of contempt and hatred'<sup>227</sup>, because it was to reject his unconditional love.

The Cross is both the ultimate sign of humanity's hatred of God, and the ultimate sign of God's love of humanity. It is on the Cross that God accepts humanity at its most depraved and unacceptable: 'in that very focal point of hatred the love of God accepts him despite the worst that he can do, in his most extreme sinfulness and bitter enmity'.<sup>228</sup> Christ takes upon himself humanity's hatred, and shares humanity's estrangement and despair. Jesus' death is an expiation for sin, but only in the sense that through it the sinner is accepted as a child of God. In Christ's death, the old, self-centred Adam is slain, so that Jesus' death is 'a death to sin and self-justification, leading to life as a son of God, reconciled to him through faith responding to love'.<sup>229</sup> Jesus' death reveals God's unconditional love and invites the sinner to accept it, saving him from sinful attempts to become acceptable and justified to God through moral works, sacrifice, or satisfaction.

Lampe, like Abailard and Origen, sees salvation as taking place through Jesus' revelation of the divine nature, and, in particular, in the revelation of God's love for his creation. Far from expressing exemplarist tendencies, Lampe emphasises the role of grace in the redemption of humanity, and sees Christ's significance as surpassing that of exemplar or teacher. Furthermore, Lampe attests against McIntyre's view that a revelatory as well as an exemplarist soteriology would have a superficial view of sin,

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<sup>226</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.189

<sup>227</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.189

<sup>228</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.190

<sup>229</sup> Lampe, 'Atonement', p.191



such as sin as ignorance. Rather, Lampe's view of sin involves the psychologically insightful idea that sin is an individual's attempts at self-justification and independence of God, their pride, and their attempts to over-compensate in the face of self-hatred. Like Abailard and the writer of the Fourth Gospel, Lampe moves away from the idea of sin as immoral action, to the idea of sin as an attitude of rejection towards God.

Certain aspects of Lampe's work seem less essential to a revelatory soteriology, and may even seem to detract from the coherence of a view of salvation as revelation. For instance, at times Lampe appears to assert that Christ not only reveals God's unconditional acceptance of humanity, but actually effects it in inaugurating the new covenant. Such a view, while having much in common with 'objective' models of the Atonement, can seem to imply that God did not love humanity unconditionally before Christ's death, but did indeed demand self-justification from humans in the form of sacrifice, satisfaction, and moral works. It seems to me that this is not Lampe's intention, but is perhaps a danger in speaking of a new covenant in a context which is used to hearing of 'an objective transformation', or of God's undergoing 'a change of heart' toward humanity.

A second problem is that Lampe appears to me to be too *cruciocentric* to do justice to a revelatory soteriology. The revelation of God in Christ is perhaps elucidated more clearly if seen in the perspective of Jesus' entire Incarnation, life, death, and Resurrection. The tendency toward *cruciocentrism* is common to Abailard and some other theologians discussed so far. However, far from a more incarnational approach being a breach of tradition, an exception or an innovation, such an approach is central to the eastern church, in which *cruciocentrism* has never been prominent. I shall turn now to the work of one contemporary representative of the eastern church, hoping to learn from an outlook that views neither a non-*cruciocentric* nor a revelatory approach to salvation as an novelty.

Having looked briefly at the theme of revelation as salvation in the modern western thought of Lampe, I now turn to the work of the Romanian Orthodox scholar Dumitru Staniloae, in order to ascertain that revelatory soteriology is not particular to the western church in general, but that it is universal in Christian thought, and, indeed, has established itself in the east to a greater extent than in the west. Though primarily eastern in culture and theology, Romanian Orthodoxy is in the unique position of being a Latin-based Orthodox Church, and, being surrounded by other churches including Roman Catholic, Uniate, Baptist and Unitarian, is a theological melting pot and place of potential ecumenical dialogue. Staniloae, while remaining an Orthodox priest, was receptive to western ideas, and, having studied western existential philosophy and theology, introduced aspects, such as an emphasis on personal experience, to the Orthodox faith. Such a universal and open-minded approach means that Staniloae may be thought to represent not only Orthodox theology, but may be seen to be of significance to Christian theology more universally.

### 3.4 Staniloae, Revelation and Deification

According to Staniloae's biographer and critic, Emil Bartos,<sup>230</sup> the soteriology of Staniloae is focused on revelation as the means of salvation. Revelation is seen as the divine self-disclosure of God as Trinity *through the medium of creation* as the Creator, Reconciler, and Saviour of all creation. In comparison with other knowledge, revealed knowledge has a unique epistemic status: knowledge of God is independent of and is of a different kind to all other kinds of knowledge. Divine revelation is the result of the intentional action of God, who expresses his will, freedom, and being in disclosing himself. God's actions are necessarily the expressions of his being since God is not

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<sup>230</sup> Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology: An Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae* (Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1999), p.74

restrained by any external factor. The action of God as Trinity is unitary but not uniform, indicating the 'unity of intention and act, will and being in God'.<sup>231</sup>

The content of God's revelation concerns not only doctrines about the metaphysical nature of God, but expresses the 'moral' nature or character of God in a way that in western thought might be characterised as inaugurating a 'personal relationship' with God. Bartos says, 'God does not reveal only propositions about God; God reveals Himself.'<sup>232</sup> However, this does not imply that God's being is fully accessible to the minds of his creatures, or that they know him as he knows himself, but that they grasp who and what he is. The content of God's revelation is his action in creation, reconciliation, and salvation, and this unity of content reflects the identity of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit actualises the universal truth of God's revelation, that is, the Gospel, through his activity in the lives of believers. In this way, the Gospel is 'vindicated'<sup>233</sup> for individuals as the reality of their personal existence and of creation as a whole, that is, as they experience the process of salvation. To speak of this is to speak of the revelation becoming *effective*, since the revelation is the active and salvific instrument of God's grace, and not merely a disclosure that remains for individuals to take in and act upon or reject. In this understanding of revelation Staniloae comes very close to Abailard, and Fiddes words that 'The exhibition is a restoration. The manifestation is a transformation'<sup>234</sup> might be applied to Staniloae also.

While Staniloae recognises other divine revelations, presumably such as those recorded in the Old Testament, the revelation of God in Christ is the supreme and unique divine disclosure. The Christ event is the 'paradigmatic disclosure, God

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<sup>231</sup> Bartos, *Deification*, p.75

<sup>232</sup> Bartos, *Deification*, p.75

<sup>233</sup> Bartos, *Deification*, p.75

<sup>234</sup> Paul Fiddes, *Past Event*, p.154

disclosing Himself in created reality.<sup>235</sup> Christ is the fulfilment and completion of all divine revelation, and is unique in that, rather than being given through words or visions, 'Christian revelation is given in a Person.'<sup>236</sup> The Holy Spirit guides the Church's interpretation of the revelation of God in Christ.

Salvation for Staniloae, as for most of the Orthodox Church, involves the fulfilment of humanity's *telos*, deification. For many western thinkers, deification has appeared an abhorrent concept, implying that humans become less human and are absorbed into the divine being until they lose altogether their distinctive identity. Hans Kung writes, 'But does a reasonable man today want to become God?... Our problem today is not the deification but the humanization of man.'<sup>237</sup> However, the conception of deification does not imply that individuals lose their distinctive identity, but, on the contrary, that their uniqueness and integrity is more fully realised, as they become that for which God originally created them. Humans are not amalgamated into the divine being, but are united in love with God and with the rest of creation. Within the framework of Staniloae's metaphysics, deification is described as 'assimilation to and union with the divine energies, not with the divine essence'.<sup>238</sup>

The concept of deification has been understood diversely, and different models are used to communicate its meaning. Staniloae uses two models of deification, the first of which is the 'realistic' model.<sup>239</sup> Staniloae shows affinity to Abailard in this respect. While for Abailard, salvation involved the *infusion* of love in humanity and *bond* of love between God and humanity, Staniloae sees the whole of creation as being drawn into a *union* of love with God through the Incarnation. Bartos writes that, for Staniloae, Christ's human nature is 'a place of contact between Himself and nature; or, in other

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<sup>235</sup> Bartos, *Deification*, p.76

<sup>236</sup> Dumitru Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, p.111- 112, cited in Bartos, *Deification*, p.76

<sup>237</sup> Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian*, p. 442, cited in Bartos, *Deification*, Footnote 29, p.16

<sup>238</sup> Bartos, *Deification*, p.10

<sup>239</sup> The distinction between the models and attribution of terms is to be found in N. Russell, *The Concept of Deification in the Early Greek Fathers*, p.1 – 2, cited in Bartos, *Deification*, p.9 - 10

words, a centre in space and time which organises existence around itself.<sup>240</sup> As in Abailard, salvation is internalised in that it is seen as the spiritual transformation of humans. Salvation takes place within humanity because it takes place within the personal being of Christ, who is both God and man. Christ is God in hypostatic union with humanity, and, therefore, what Christ is in his attitude towards humanity, God is in his essence. The Incarnation is salvific because it unites God and humanity in love, in a way not dissimilar (though achieved through different means) to the bond of love formed through Christ's work according to Abailard. Bartos expresses this understanding of the Incarnation when he writes, 'The hypostatic union brings God and man together in Christ in an ontological connection of love.'<sup>241</sup>

The second model of deification Staniloae adopts is the 'ethical or philosophical' model, which bears some resemblance to the moral effects of salvation in Abailard and Lampe, which, I suggest, have mistakenly been branded 'exemplarist'. For Staniloae, the believer is deified partly by attaining to the likeness of God, 'reproducing the divine attributes in himself by imitation.'<sup>242</sup> Imitation of the divine attributes is the free moral striving of the individual, though there is no doubt in Staniloae that this is in response to the salvific revelation of God in Christ and the uniting of God and humanity in love through the Incarnation, and it is not the case that humans earn their own salvation or could be saved except for the divine initiative. In Staniloae as in other theologians we have considered, revelation forms a bond or union of love between God and humanity and this is viewed as salvation, while the ethical behaviour of the individual is not seen as salvation itself, but as a consequence or effect of having been saved or spiritually transformed.

Such a soteriology evidently emphasises the redemptive nature of the Incarnation, and yet it is not the case that the Incarnation takes the place that the Cross

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<sup>240</sup> Bartos, *Deification*, p.228

<sup>241</sup> Bartos, *Deification*, p.229

<sup>242</sup> Bartos, *Deification*, p.10

holds on a *cruciocentric* model, or that Christ's life and death are thought to be insignificant to salvation apart from the hypostatic union between divine and human natures. Christ's entire earthly life, culminating in death and resurrection, are perceived as being salvific. His Incarnation united God and humanity, and his life was the revelation of God's nature and of what humanity was originally intended to be, culminating in his death which was offered in complete obedience to the Father. While western theology speaks of the crucified Christ as a 'substitute', Staniloae sees Christ as 'substituting' for humanity throughout his incarnate life.<sup>243</sup> The Cross is not a cultic sacrifice, but another aspect of Christ 'wrestling with humanity's plight',<sup>244</sup> and the 'cost' involved is not bearing the *punishment of sin*, but, rather, the sorrow, pain, and suffering of the world that is caused by sin.<sup>245</sup>

Staniloae's conception of sin and evil differs from a western or Augustinian model, and is important because it sheds some light on the idea of Christ taking upon himself not the penalty of sin but the suffering that is caused by sin. Evil is perceived far more as a metaphysical 'reality' than a moral one, and so sin is seen primarily as an infection causing disorder. Redemption is seen as the re-ordering of the Universe, and, in particular, as overcoming not humanity's revolt from God, but non-moral corruption, that is, mortality. Being vulnerable to corruption and death is a sickness in humanity that is caused by the free act of sin, and mortality and corruption need to be overcome in order for humanity to be perfected or deified. Christ is in a position to save humanity, since he has taken upon himself our post-fall nature and is 'one of us', and yet he also reveals our intended nature, uniting God and humanity in love, and overcoming sin and, consequently, corruption, suffering, and death.

In the theology of Staniloae, the Atonement (Christ's person and work, which is not restricted to the Cross) does not bring about the forgiveness of sin, but is far more

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<sup>243</sup> Bartos, *Deification*, p.228

<sup>244</sup> Bartos, *Deification*, p.234

<sup>245</sup> Bartos, *Deification*, p.234

constructive in what it effects. Staniloae emphasises that the love of God is the source and cause of the Incarnation or Atonement, and that the Atonement is not the prerequisite of forgiveness, since forgiveness precedes the Incarnation. God engages in the act of forgiveness 'before' the Incarnation, and the mission of Christ is, rather, to bring about more perfect divine fellowship through the union of love between God and humanity. With respect to this, Bartos says that Christ's work involves much more than a 'restoration of the relationship between God and man: it is a real sharing in the inner life of God in this earthly life.'<sup>246</sup>

### Synopsis

This brief study demonstrates that western theologians who have emphasised the Incarnation or taken a *non-cruciocentric* stance with respect to their soteriology, while unusual by the standards of the rest of the western church, are not unusual in Christendom as a whole, for they share much in this respect with the eastern church. Furthermore, as Origen, Abailard, and Staniloae have indicated, developing a revelatory soteriology is not a novel introduction to, but is firmly rooted in, the Christian faith, and there is no necessity for this idea to infringe upon that of the divine initiative in salvation. Additionally, Staniloae's alternative interpretation of evil and redemption challenges western assumptions concerning evil as equivalent to immorality or sin, and redemption as Christ taking upon himself the penalty of sin and thus facilitating God's forgiveness. The problem with which Christ deals according to this eastern model is not God's anger, but is humanity's current imperfect and unhappy state of existence. Exploring an alternative view of the nature of sin may help to open possibilities concerning the nature of salvation that have previously been overlooked, and I shall therefore take this as the starting-point of the following chapter.

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<sup>246</sup> Bartos, *Deification*, p.229

## Chapter Four

### 'Jesus, Revealer and Redeemer': Revelation, Infusion and the God of Love

This chapter suggests that, in revealing God as love, Christ inspires and infuses love in the individual, freeing the individual from sin and resulting in the human fulfilment that is salvation. The revelatory model of salvation suggested here is not intended to be complete or perfect, or prescriptive or normative of other revelatory models. Rather, it is intended to be a somewhat skeletal indication of what such a model might look like, thus facilitating some critical review of such a model in the Conclusion by reference to something more concrete and self-conscious as a model than the insights into salvific revelation displayed in the works of the Fourth Evangelist, Abailard, and others. The model suggested here is to be viewed as equivalent and comparable to other christological models of Atonement, and, therefore, while the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of salvific revelation is recognised, it is not within the scope of this dissertation to discuss that work as distinct of that of the Incarnate Word.

A salvific model presupposes a corresponding notion of sin, and to some degree the view of sin determines the view of salvation just as a diagnosis of an illness determines the method or type of cure. For instance, on a satisfaction model of salvation sin is often seen as an offence to God's honour, and on either a ransom or a *Christus Victor* model sin is viewed as enslavement to diabolical forces. On a revelatory model, critics have often said that sin would be seen as ignorance. Such a view of sin seems inadequate, given the tendency in humans not only to sin through ignorance, but also to sin deliberately and maliciously. Clearly the imparting of knowledge to humanity is not sufficient to overcome sin, and something more is needed to effect humanity's salvation and transformation. The following section shall argue that, on a revelatory model, sin need not be viewed as ignorance. Rather, sin may be seen more realistically as a lack of



love, and, resultant upon the lack of love, a lack in the state of human flourishing, a wrong relationship with God and with neighbour, and either false magnification or else hatred of the self. To clarify an understanding of sin is vital for the current essay, for it is only through recognising what sin is that one can anticipate what salvation might be and how it is accomplished by God in Christ.

#### 4.1 An Hamartiological Model

A revelatory model of salvation may, I suggest, correspond most naturally with an understanding of sin as the privation of love. In order to elucidate the idea of sin as the privation of love and so as to provide some sort of substance to such a view I shall turn to some of the insights of Augustine of Hippo. While Augustine's hamartiology is generally associated with controversial ideas such as original sin and human sin as the source of all worldly evils, the concepts that are of interest here are those of evil as non-being and sin as privation, sin and virtue as based on intention or motive rather than action, and the assertion that all sin stems from a lack of love and that all virtue is a form of love. Other aspects of Augustinian hamartiology have no direct bearing on these insights, and may be accepted or rejected with no consequence to the current subject matter.

In the face of evil and sin Augustine offered an alternative to the polar opposites of denying either God's goodness or else God's omnipotence. This alternative was to suggest that evil was non-being, that is, a lack of the goodness in the created order made by God out of nothing. In the context of speaking of the erroneous hamartiology of his Manichean days, Augustine writes that 'I did not know that evil has no existence except as a privation of good, down to that level which is altogether without being.'<sup>247</sup> As Charles Matthews expresses the Augustinian view of evil, 'Ontologically, in terms of

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<sup>247</sup> *Confessions*, III.vii (12), trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

the status of evil in the Universe, it understands evil as nothing more than the *privation* of being and goodness – “evil” is not an existing thing at all, but rather the absence of existence, an ontological shortcoming.<sup>248</sup> All things are created good, so that to be corrupted is to become less good, and thus to become less existent, even to the point of ceasing to exist altogether. All of God’s creation is good, and yet because it is created out of nothing it is vulnerable to corruption. Corruption is essentially deterioration and a return to nothingness, to the nothing out of which things were created. Thus there is no ‘thing’ that is essentially evil, since evil is merely the privation of the good that is God’s creation, and sin a deterioration of the good in a being. In speaking of corruption as a deterioration of the good, Augustine writes that:

It was obvious to me that things which are liable to corruption are good. If they were supreme goods, or if they were not good at all, they could not be corrupted. For if they were supreme goods, they would be incorruptible. If there were no good in them, there would be nothing capable of being corrupted. Corruption does harm and unless it diminishes the good, no harm would be done. Therefore either corruption does not harm, which cannot be the case, or (which is wholly certain) all things that are corrupted suffer privation of some good. If they were to be deprived of all good, they would not exist at all. If they were to exist and to be immune from corruption, they would be superior because they would be permanently incorruptible. What could be more absurd than to say that by losing all good, things are made better? So then, if they are deprived of all good, they will be nothing at all. Therefore as long as they exist, they are good. Accordingly, whatever things exist are good, and the evil into whose origins I was inquiring is not a substance, for if it were a substance, it would be good. Either it would be an incorruptible substance, a great good indeed, or a corruptible substance, which could be corrupted only if it were good. Hence I saw and it was made clear to me that you made all things good, and there are absolutely no substances which you did not make.<sup>249</sup>

To develop Augustine’s view in this respect, we might turn to the phrase *תהו ובהו* in Genesis I, interpreting this as the ‘void and non-being’ out of which is created all that now pertains except for God himself.<sup>250</sup> God imposed positive attributes and qualities which he derived solely from his own nature upon the ‘nothing’ and so what was previously non-existent was given properties of order, form, life, substance, and, in the

<sup>248</sup> Charles Matthewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.6

<sup>249</sup> *Confessions*, VII.xii (18) cf. Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.14

<sup>250</sup> cf. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996)

case of humanity, mind, love, and spirit.<sup>251</sup> Evil and sin, then, are the return or deterioration of creatures to the void out of which they were created, where this return to nothing is not natural, in the sense of intended by God.

In order to clarify the idea of evil as non-being further, we may liken evil as darkness and God's (good) creation as light. Without light there is merely darkness, though strictly speaking darkness does not actually exist: it is merely the lack of light and not an opposing power or force. When light is imposed upon it, the darkness seems to disappear, though in reality it was never 'there'. A lesser degree of light would give the appearance that it is becoming darker, though in reality there is simply a greater lack of light. Similarly, evil does not 'exist', but is merely a lack of goodness. It is neither an opposing power, nor a product of God's creation. It is not. When we imagine goodness, we imagine evil being overcome, and when we imagine evil, we imagine a victory of evil over the powers of good. I would argue that this is erroneous: though the evil seems to be overcome, there is simply goodness imposed upon where it was not previously, and where there appears to be evil, this is simply a decline in the goodness that has been imposed upon the void.

An examination of the criticisms levelled against a metaphysic of evil as non-being will help to clarify and develop the theory further. In the first place, Karl Barth has argued against the Augustinian view of evil as privative, agreeing that evil is 'nothingness' (*das Nichtige*), and yet arguing that this is not 'nothingness' in the sense of a lack, but is the powerful negation of all creation and ultimately of God himself. Augustine's view is problematic because '*das Nichtige* is not simply to be equated with what is *not*.'<sup>252</sup> To illustrate this point, Barth points out that God is God and is not the creature, but this clearly does not imply any element of *das Nichtige* in God. Rather, this 'not' is part of God's perfection: 'The diversities and frontiers of the creaturely

<sup>251</sup> This list is illustrative, not prescriptive, and is not exhaustive.

<sup>252</sup> *Church Dogmatics* III/3, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), p. 349. That it is Augustine's view that Barth is opposing is implied, but not explicitly stated.

world contain many 'nots'. No single creature is all-inclusive. None is or resembles another.<sup>253</sup> While for Augustine, therefore, diversity within creation is comprised of limitation and privation, and different degrees (or none) of a property, for Barth, there are no limitations but simply a diversity of unique attributes, regarded as good.

My criticism of Barth's objection is two-fold. First, Barth misunderstands the Augustinian theory if he believes that it is the case that evil is non-being and that therefore non-being must be evil. Evil is *oukontic* (absolute non-being), but it does not necessarily follow that all that is non-existent or privative is necessarily evil. Secondly, perfection is that which is fulfilled that is *proper* to a particular creature or entity, and an imperfection is an unfulfilled attribute or quality that should be present in that creature in order for it to be how it was intended to be. As Aquinas has pointed out,<sup>254</sup> blindness is an imperfection in a man, because humans were intended to have sight, but no one would claim blindness to be an imperfection in a stone.

A second criticism of the concept of evil as non-being is raised by John Hick,<sup>255</sup> drawing upon Bertrand Russell's theory of descriptions.<sup>256</sup> Russell argues that the 'existence' of non-being is an illusion grounded in the existence of nouns such as 'nothing'. This implies to people that there is a separate realm of 'nothingness' and 'non-existence' in addition to a realm of existence, and is fallacious. Hick concludes from Russell's point that the idea that evil is non-being is philosophically flawed, for it presupposes that 'nothing' is, as it were, a 'something', even in a negative or subsistent way. While I believe Russell to be correct in his claim that there is not a separate realm of non-being or non-existence, I do not believe this to be a problem with respect to evil as non-being in the sense of *oukontic* rather than in the Platonic sense of non-being as

<sup>253</sup> *Church Dogmatics* III/3, ed. Bromiley and Torrance, p.349

<sup>254</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, pt. I, Q. XLVIII, art. ii, trans. and ed. by Timothy McDermott (Texas: Christian Classics, 1989)

<sup>255</sup> Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1968) p.186

<sup>256</sup> cf. Bertrand Russell, 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism', sect. V, in *Logic and Language*, ed. R.C. Marsh, cited in Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p.186

*meontic*<sup>257</sup> (relative non-being, or that which is contrary to 'Authentic Being' and subsists in the 'realm of Non-Being'<sup>258</sup>), since the idea of evil as *oukontic* asserts that non-existence and non-being are, quite literally, non-existence and non-being. There is no separate realm in which they pertain or subsist; they merely are not. There is a related linguistic problem with this theory, however. It is difficult to talk of evil, which is not substance or power but which is void, in terms that attribute to it anything other than activity and substance. For instance, it is difficult to talk of evil instantiated in the world when what is really meant is the failure or lack of instantiated good. Similarly, to include in a clause 'evil is...' would be attributing existence to evil and would therefore contradict the idea of evil as a privation of the good. However, I do not see this as a logical objection to evil as *oukontic*, but rather, a linguistic problem that may be surmounted by some redefinition and some caution concerning terms. Henceforth the term evil will carry the implications of *oukontic* non-being and uncreated void, which is passive, a privation of the good, and ultimately non-existent.

Augustine's hamartiology viewed sin and evil as two aspects of the same problem, and so the idea of sin as privation follows on logically from Augustine's idea of evil as non-being. Sin is essentially privative, passive, and consists in the deinstantiation of God's creation into the non-being out of which it was created. On this model therefore, we may say that sin is a failure of the individual to fulfil their *telos*, that is, a failure to become that for which they were created by God. G.R. Evans explains that for Augustine everything of which God is Creator is something, 'But since to be nothing is to depart from the God who is supreme being, that means that evil takes away into its negativity all good, all joy, all clarity, all reconciliation with God, all hope of heaven for the sinner who is infected with it.'<sup>259</sup> This highlights the important idea

<sup>257</sup> Hick's point is, however, pertinent with respect to Plotinus. Cf. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 40

<sup>258</sup> Cf. *Enneads* i. 8, 3

<sup>259</sup> G.R. Evans, 'Evil', in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), p.340 - 344

that sin is something privative, and that sinfulness is that which detracts from an individual's fulfilment as a person, that is, that for which God created them.

Augustine's contributions to hamartiology on a revelatory model of salvation are further significant in that, as has already been noted,<sup>260</sup> Augustine (and later Aquinas and Abailard) internalised sin. This means that sin is not to be understood as wicked action, but as evil *intention* or motive, as something which makes the very being of the individual other than the individual should be, and leads to their deterioration as a person. Such a view is reminiscent of that of Forestell's interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, according to which sin is not conceived of as wicked action, but as a mode of existence that is the antithesis of spiritual life, and as an attitude expressed in (but not consisting in) rejection of God.<sup>261</sup> Actions are not themselves sinful, but neutral, though they become sinful or virtuous depending upon the motives and mode of existence from which they are derived. This view is related to the Augustinian idea developed by Thomists that moral evil (which is a part of sin but is not identical with sin) is moral evil because of the implications an *intention* has on the *perpetrator*, and not because of the effects of an action upon a separate victim.<sup>262</sup> The perpetrator makes himself a *moral* victim. This can be illustrated by the fact that, if one accidentally dropped a stone and this stone fell on a neighbour's head, there would be no moral evil, or sin, involved, because there would be no morally culpable perpetrator. If, on the other hand, one deliberately threw a stone at someone's head, but missed, while there would be no damaged victim a moral evil would have occurred, because the intention and inclination of the action would make the perpetrator culpable. Sin and moral evil, therefore, are not to be associated with particular actions, but with particular intentions and motives that

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<sup>260</sup> See above, 3.1

<sup>261</sup> Forestell, *The Word of the Cross*. See above, 2.2

<sup>262</sup> See Herbert McCabe, 'Evil', in *New Blackfriars*, vol. 62(1981), p.36 – 45, for a classic and witty expression of the Thomist position on evil.

render the perpetrator guilty and sinful, and make them less than (or detract from) that for which they were created.

In the light of the Augustinian idea that sin is the privation of good, an occurrence of sin may be said to be one in which an agent intends to do something through motives and intentions which are not good, that is, which are lacking in or deprived of goodness. This 'sin' may be regarded as bringing about a state of sinfulness, that is, the deinstantiation of the good in an individual and the failure to be that for which God created them. A further insight into the nature of sin of pertinence to a revelatory soteriology lies in the fact that Augustine views *all* sin as stemming from the sinner's lack of love. The lack of love is 'the cause and ratification of all sin'<sup>263</sup>. Thus Augustine writes, 'What is sin? To do contrary to the commandment. What is the commandment? "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." Mark well! This commandment of Christ is called, "love." By this love sins are loosed. If this love be not kept, the not holding it is at once a grievous sin, and the root of *all* sins.'<sup>264</sup>

An illuminating connection may be made between the Augustinian view of sin and evil as privation and non-being and the idea of sin as a lack of love if we consider the idea that the opposite of love is not hate but indifference or *apatheia*. Such a view would involve the perception that hatred is often close to or connected with love (as for instance in the case of jealousy or the extreme hatred a person may feel if they are hurt by someone they love, rather than the more moderate anger they may feel towards someone with whom they were previously not emotionally involved) and thus that hatred may best be seen as the flip-side or shadow-side of love rather than its absolute opposite. Kierkegaard expresses the idea that hate is essentially love burning as its opposite, rather than the equal and absolute antithesis of love. He writes that 'Hatred is

<sup>263</sup> Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, 'Love', in *Augustine: An Encyclopaedia*, p.510

<sup>264</sup> Augustine, 'Homily on the First Epistle of John', 5.2, in *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. John, and his first Epistle*, trans. H. Browne (Oxford: John Henry Parker; F. and J. Rivington, London, 1849), my emphasis



a love that has become its opposite, a love that has perished [*gaae til Grunde*]. Down into the ground [*i Grunde*] the love is continually aflame, but it is the flame of hate; not until the love has burned out is the flame of hate also put out. Just as it is said of the tongue that "it is that same tongue with which we bless and curse,"<sup>265</sup> so it may also be said that it is the same love that loves and hates.<sup>266</sup>

Several reflections on the relationship between other, yet related, concepts may elucidate this relationship between love as the relative opposite of hatred, and apathy as the absolute antithesis of love. For instance, Barth's distinction between *Schaffenseite* (the 'shadow side' or relative converse of goodness and creation) and *das Nichtige* (the ultimate antithesis of goodness and creation) may be considered a paradigm for and also interconnected with the idea that indifference is the absolute antithesis of love while hatred is only the flip-side of love or love that has been warped and redirected into a negative rather than a positive force. Again, William Blake's words that 'Joy and Woe are woven fine'<sup>267</sup> expresses the connected idea that sadness is often the flip-side of happiness and often gives happiness its meaning, and it may be said that it is depression or emotional 'flatness', the absence of any emotion and so emotional nothingness, is the true opposite of happiness.

This conception of the relationship between love, hatred and apathy is supported by the non-equivalence of the concepts of love and hate. While love is an absolute good, hatred may not be an absolute evil, since it may be regarded as a good thing to hate evils such as injustice, malice or dishonesty, and so hate cannot be the absolute antithesis of love.<sup>268</sup> Furthermore, it might be observed that both love and hatred are proactive, love

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<sup>265</sup> Cf. James 3:10

<sup>266</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. and ed. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) p.34

<sup>267</sup> Peter Porter (ed.), *William Blake* (London: Aurum Press, 1986), p. 50, from the poem, *Auguries of Innocence*.

<sup>268</sup> On the other hand, it might be argued, love is not an absolute good since love evil is itself evil, and is not redeemed by the fact that it involves love. Against such an objection, it might be maintained that the word 'love' describes a multitude of different concepts. For instance, the love of God or the self-giving love of one person for another is quite different from love of good wine or love of money. The



being proactively creative and hate proactively destructive, while indifference is passive and latent. Therefore, we might conclude, that, while hatred is clearly a 'relative opposite' warping of love, it is *apatheia* that is love's absolute antithesis. Thus whereas love is essentially creative (and God as love the Creator), apathy is fundamentally privative, a deinstantiation of all love, all joy, and all hope.

The revelatory model I am suggesting concurs with Augustine in saying that sin is the *privation of love*, adding that this privation of love is itself a spiritual, mental and emotional nothingness, an apathy that detracts from joy and love and the process of human becoming, and leads ultimately to the deterioration of a person and to their spiritual death. On this model, therefore, sin is that which detracts from an individual's goal of becoming that for which God created them, that is, the goal of deification in the Staniloan sense, or of human flourishing. Sin is essentially privative, and leads to the deterioration of an individual's humanity, away from liberation and transformation and toward spiritual, emotional, and mental non-being.

The view of sin as something which detracts from the aim of human fulfilment or salvation may be associated with Lampe's view of sin according to which sin is viewed as individuals' attempts at self-justification which lead to self-righteousness or to self-hatred and away from faith in God. On this model, the revelation in Christ of God's unconditional love for humanity initiates a response of faith in the individual, so that they no longer hate themselves or attempt to justify themselves in God's sight. While Lampe's focus is upon Christ's revelation of God's love as initiating a response of faith, on an Augustinian view the revelation of God in Christ primarily involves initiating a response of love, in which, as we shall see, faith and all other 'virtues' or aspects of salvation are encompassed. With this in mind it is now to a revelatory model

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suggestion being made in this essay is not that every use of the word love in the English language refers to the ultimate good, but that the sort of love shown by God for humanity and expressed in some extraordinary human actions is to be identified with the very being of God and transforms the individual and effects their salvation.

of salvation that I wish to turn, once again beginning from and developing the insights of Augustine into how the revelation of God's love for humanity might be salvific.

#### 4.2 Salvation, Revelation, and God as Love

While Augustine undoubtedly employs 'objective' and 'traditional' metaphors of the Atonement, and while literature on Augustine's soteriology is generally concerned with sacrifice, *recapitulatio* and *Christus Victor*,<sup>269</sup> Augustine insists that the reason for and purpose of the Incarnation is the revelation of God's love for humanity, so that it is arguable that it is the disclosure of divine love that is in fact at the centre of Augustine's soteriology. Van Bavel writes that Augustine taught that 'The reason for the incarnation of the Son of God is the revelation of God's love for the human being'<sup>270</sup>, and in his Sermons on I John, Augustine says that if the only words in Scripture were "God is love" (I John 4. 8), this would be enough for our redemption.<sup>271</sup> Augustine teaches that it is not the case that God has turned away from humanity because of sin, but rather that humanity has turned away from God so that they can no longer 'see' or 'know' God without grace. Like Lampe, Augustine insists that God does not need reconciling to humanity, but that humanity needs reconciling to God, even though post-lapsarian human 'sight' of God erroneously perceives that God is angry with humanity and that God must be reconciled to them. Salvation, therefore, involves a revelation of God's true attitude towards humanity, so that humanity's attitude to God may be changed and therefore that the relationship may be made right. As Lewis Ayres writes of Augustine's view, 'Christ has come in the flesh, in a way that we can now see,

<sup>269</sup> Cf. Finbarr J. Clancy, 'Redemption', in *Augustine: An Encyclopaedia*

<sup>270</sup> Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, 'Love', in *Augustine: An Encyclopaedia*, p.510

<sup>271</sup> Augustine, 'Homily on I John', 7.4; 20.31, in *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. John, and his first Epistle*, cited Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, 'Love', in *Augustine: An Encyclopaedia*, p.510

to enable us to offer testimony to that which has always been present.<sup>272</sup> Far from belittling Christ's work by suggesting that Christ merely reveals an already present situation rather than effecting a new situation, Christ would, on this model, be seen to effect an entirely new relationship between God and humanity precisely in revealing God's true nature and attitude and initiating a response in the human person that would be deemed, on this model, as salvation itself.

The revelation of God's love for us is salvific because it initiates in us a response of love for God, and, consequently, for our neighbours, our selves,<sup>273</sup> and our bodies.<sup>274</sup> The important question of how the initiation of God's love into the individual takes place is related to Abailard's central insight that what makes humans love is that they are loved first, with a love that is unmerited and which gives of itself without expectation or limit. The love initiated in an individual is a gift from God, and the first aspect of this gift is that God loved us first, since humans only love God because of God's love for them. Yet the gift of love is not only inspired but is also infused: because Augustine radically equates God and love absolutely<sup>275</sup>, the indwelling of God in the Christian means that they are instilled with love. Augustine writes that in order that we may love God, we must allow God to live in us, and so 'let him love himself through us, that is, let him move us, enkindle us, and arouse us to love him.'<sup>276</sup> In this way, the dichotomy between inspiration – implying a natural psychological response – and

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<sup>272</sup> Lewis Ayres, 'Augustine, Christology, and God as Love: An Introduction to the Homilies on 1 John', in *Nothing Greater Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), p.73. cf. Augustine's First Homily on 1 John, especially regarding 1 John 1. 1 –2, in *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. John, and his first Epistle*

<sup>273</sup> Augustine sometimes speaks of love of God as being concomitant with contempt of the self (e.g. *City of God*, XIV. 28), implying to some that Augustine thinks that hatred of the self is a good idea. However, the point seems rather to be that in renouncing the 'I', the individual is loving themselves because they are going from egocentricity to theocentricity, thus finding their salvation and ultimate happiness, and so Augustine advises that one should 'Learn to love yourself by not loving yourself.' (s. 96.2.2, cited in Van Bavel, 'Love', in *Augustine: An Encyclopaedia*, p. 512)

<sup>274</sup> *doc. Chr.* 1.23.22 – 1.24.24, cited in Van Bavel, 'Love', in *Augustine: An Encyclopaedia*, p.514

<sup>275</sup> Augustine is radical in saying not only that 'God is love' but also that 'Love is God' – an assertion that later theologians have been hesitant in making. Cf. Lewis Ayres, *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better*, p.86

<sup>276</sup> s. 128.2.4, cited in Van Bavel, 'Love', in *Augustine: An Encyclopaedia*, p.115

infusion – suggesting special divine grace – is resolved, since a free and ‘natural’ psychological response is itself the particular divine grace, because love is God himself.

One of the things that emerges from this is that according to this model there is no thought that this salvation takes place through some sort of moral exemplarism, that it is purely ‘subjective’ or that it involves the Pelagian view that humans save themselves and are not saved through God’s grace. Rather, it is through the revelation and initiation of love (revelation and inspiration/infusion being two inseparable aspects of the one divine activity of salvation) into a person that God effects their salvation, since love not only makes humans good but also unites the lover with the object of that love. Consequently, it is only in loving God that we are in fellowship with him, and that our likeness to God develops. Furthermore, because God himself is love, through love of God we come to know God, and through coming to know God we come to love God more. The love of God shown in Christ might therefore be seen to initiate a pedagogical process that involves both coming to know God and coming to love God, for the two are inseparable. Thus a revelatory model may see salvation not as an instant event, but as an ongoing process transforming the life of the individual, since, as Gorringe perceives, *‘The process itself is an essential part of the liberation.’*<sup>277</sup> While ‘knowledge’ of God is in some sense that in which salvation consists on a revelatory model, there is nothing intellectualist about such a view; the more we come to know God and to love God the more we perceive his ineffability and our own inability to ‘know about’ God.<sup>278</sup> As in the Fourth Gospel,<sup>279</sup> the knowledge imparted in the revelation of God in Christ is primarily experiential, and any theoretical content that it has is merely a means to this experiential knowledge of God. Thus a revelatory model may say with Brümmer that ‘Love is not the *source* of this kind of knowledge, it *is* this kind of knowledge. To know

<sup>277</sup> Gorringe, *Redeeming Time*, p.66

<sup>278</sup> *En. Ps.* 99.5 – 6, cited in Van Bavel, ‘Love’, in *Augustine: An Encyclopaedia*, p.510 - 511

<sup>279</sup> *cf.* above, 2.3

someone in this sense *is* to have fellowship with or to love that person. The antithesis of this kind of knowledge is not ignorance but estrangement.<sup>280</sup>

Love is salvific because (to employ Hick's terminology) it leads individuals away from egocentricity to theocentricity and, as a part of this, to other-centredness.<sup>281</sup> Theocentricity and fellowship with God is salvation, since, as Augustine says to God, 'you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.'<sup>282</sup> Love is the only thing that can make a person good, that is, in fellowship with God and, consequently, virtuous.<sup>283</sup> In fact, every virtue is a manifestation of love, including the faith that is so central in Lampe's soteriology. Van Bavel expresses the Augustinian idea that love is not one virtue among others but is the source of all virtues, writing that:

Temperance is love which knows how to protect its integrity and is dedicated wholly to what is loved. Fortitude is love that is capable of enduring much for the sake of the beloved. Justice is love which does not desire to retain for itself the good things of life but knows how to share them equally. Prudence is love that knows how to discern what will benefit love and what will harm it (*mor.* 1.15.25)... Love is a dynamic reality; it possesses beginning and perfection: perfect love is perfect righteousness (*justitia*) (*nat. et gr.* 70 .84)<sup>284</sup>

Love is made manifest in the fruits of salvation, so that kindness and fidelity (for instance) are not ways of 'earning' salvation, but are outward signs of an individual's love of God and of creation. Augustine is so far from a 'moral' view of salvation that he has even been accused of teaching that 'all things are lawful' and that a person may do anything so long as they love God and their neighbour. This accusation is misplaced, for it is rather that Augustine teaches that if an individual loves then they will always act virtuously and so, for instance, the Ten Commandments are not displaced by the law of love, but subsumed by it. Therefore, Augustine writes, 'Love, and do what you will. If

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<sup>280</sup> Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.180

<sup>281</sup> For Augustine, the self and other humans are to be loved primarily because they are God's creation and because of God's presence in them; and only God is to be loved absolutely in and of himself.

<sup>282</sup> *Confessions* 1.1, trans. Henry Chadwick

<sup>283</sup> Being virtuous is a consequence of being saved and in fellowship with God, and is not a cause of salvation, as in exemplarism or Pelagianism.

<sup>284</sup> Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, 'Love', in *Augustine: An Encyclopaedia*, p.509, 510

you keep silence, keep silence in love; if you correct, correct in love.... Let love's root be within you, for from that root nothing but good will spring.<sup>285</sup>

The aim of this chapter thus far has been to sketch what a model of salvation based on revelation might look like, drawing upon and developing many of the insights of Augustine into the nature of sin and the salvific power of love. Such a view has at its core the idea that sin is the privation of love and consists in *apatheia*, and that this results in the deinstantiation of good in the individual and in their ultimate non-being. Accordingly, salvation is seen as the revelation and 'infusion' (these two being one activity) of God's love, and brings about in the individual a transition from egocentricity to theocentricity and other-centredness, and thus human fulfilment that is characterised by love of God, self, and creation. Gorringer demonstrates this understanding of salvation (conceived as education) as human fulfilment characterised by love, and expresses the liberating and transformative effects such a life has upon the individual. He writes:

Underlying all notions of completeness... is the notion of *human* fullness, the realisation of personhood, of authentic subjectivity, of the human capacity for freedom and for love....The only purpose of any education [in this case, that of the salvific process] is that human beings should have life and have it more abundantly, that through the educational [salvific] process persons may be more fulfilled, and therefore more creative, more free and therefore more loving, more loving and therefore more free. The ultimate aim of education is the becoming of human being.<sup>286</sup>

This brief sketch of the idea of salvation based on the revelation of God's love in Christ seems to me to go some way towards combining an understanding of the 'objective' nature of salvation as wrought in Christ with an appreciation of the 'subjective' salvation worked out in the life of the individual. Yet as it stands it is inadequate and even naïve, for the concept of revelation needs clarification and reinforcement if the ideas suggested here are to be put forward as a soteriological model

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<sup>285</sup> Augustine, 'Homily on 1 John', 7.8, in *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. John, and his first Epistle*, trans. H. Browne (Oxford: John Henry Parker; F. and J. Rivington, London, 1849)

<sup>286</sup> Gorringer, *Redeeming Time*, p. 7. Gorringer propounds a pedagogical view of salvation, and what is true of education is true also of salvation at this point.

of the first order. In particular, how can the finite human Jesus be said to reveal the eternal God who is beyond all human thought and comprehension? Even supposing that Jesus does display the divine nature, how can humans receive or understand this as a revelation if God is, by his very nature, beyond human thought? Again, how can we know which of Jesus' attributes are to be attributed to God the Father also, and which are simply characteristics of Jesus' human nature? Even supposing that we knew which of Jesus' attributes were to be predicated of God in his essential nature, it seems as though attributes such as love when predicated of the divine nature would never have anything in common with human instantiations of love - and this fact would render the Johannine insight that 'God is love' (and thus our salvific opportunity) entirely meaningless and redundant.

#### 4.3 Divine Ineffability: An Obstacle for Revelation?

The questions I have posed all centre around the problem of how humans can speak of God's ultimate nature given the divine ineffability that orthodoxy maintains. God, it is argued, is outside the world and is therefore not an object of human knowledge, being beyond comprehension, classification, and description. God transcends the world and so cannot be described by words, which fail to refer to God's attributes in the way that they refer to the world, or to objects within the world such as human beings. Aquinas expresses the problem more fully, writing:

'...nouns are either abstract or concrete. Neither are appropriate to God: concrete nouns because he is simple, abstract nouns because they don't express complete subsistent things. So no nouns apply to God. Moreover, nouns express sorts of things, verbs and participles are tensed, pronouns are either demonstrative or relative. None of this is appropriate to God, who is without qualities or incidental properties, exists out of time, can't be ostensively demonstrated to our senses, nor referred to by any pronoun referring back to a noun or participle or demonstrative pronoun. So no sort of word can apply to him.'<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Aquinas, in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans., selected & ed. Timothy McDermott, cited Brian Davies, *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.156

Barth perceives there to be a problem not only in speaking of the divine reality but also in knowing the divine reality whatsoever. God, Barth argues, is absolutely and radically other to the created order, and therefore humans have no capacity to know God or to see God whatsoever. Barth borders on agnosticism (in the literal sense), asserting that 'we have no organ or capacity for God... we are in enmity against Him and powerless to be obedient to Him'<sup>288</sup> and 'he [man] does not possess the possibility of communion with God'.<sup>289</sup> In addition to these two perspectives on ineffability<sup>290</sup>, some have wanted to say, with Augustine, that God is ineffable as a result of human sin, because of which human minds and emotions have been clouded by sinfulness, so that people cannot experience God who is holy and entirely removed from sin. Given the problems which face humans in speaking of or in experiencing God, how can we speak of salvation as taking place through the revelation of God's love in Christ?

One possibility of how humans can speak of and know God is rooted in the Scholastic principle that all effects reflect their cause. This led Aquinas to assert that knowledge of God could be acquired through natural theology, since it follows that there is an intrinsic relation between God and humanity. This intrinsic connection makes possible an *analogy of intrinsic attribution*, that is, 'an analogy where the denominating form exists intrinsically in both (or all) the terms, in one absolutely and in the other or others relatively, through intrinsic relation to the former'.<sup>291</sup> Therefore, the intrinsic relation between God and creation allows humans to speak of God's love through analogy, asserting that love exists in God's nature absolutely, while it exists in humanity in a relative way and dependent upon the derivative relation of humanity to God. As Alan Torrance points out, this basis for speaking of and knowing God has

<sup>288</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, p.168

<sup>289</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, p.257

<sup>290</sup> To say that God is ineffable is not to say that ineffability is an essential attribute of the divine nature, but, rather, to say something about humans – namely, that there are limitations on their capacity for knowledge and understanding of God.

<sup>291</sup> Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology*, p.40, cited in Alan Torrance, 'Is Love the Essence of God?' in *Nothing Greater Nothing Better*, p.118



several theological insights. First, the understanding of analogy based on intrinsic attribution has more potential for speaking of the divine nature than some other models of analogy.<sup>292</sup> Secondly, Aquinas' view asserts that any attribution of the divine nature must always be 'of one to another', and therefore insists upon the absolute 'ultimacy' and supremacy of the divine nature, since God and creation can never be subsumed under a third party such as the platonic form of love. Furthermore, this model of how we can speak of God recognises the priority of God over the created order, so that 'perfection is primarily affirmed of God and only secondarily and in a derivative sense of the creature.'<sup>293</sup> However, Torrance argues, such a model is erroneous, since it applies the Scholastic rule of an ontological likeness between cause and effect to God, who is not subject to the same laws as the created order and to whom the rule of causes being like effects may not apply. Therefore, while Aquinas' argument contains some important insights, it cannot be maintained as a model of how humans can know and speak of the divine reality.

One possible way in which Aquinas' insights might be maintained without falling into the trap of subsuming God under human norms might be to assert that humans are intrinsically connected to God and may thus speak of and know God not because they are created by God *per se* but because they are created in God's image. Because of this, it might be argued that (*contra* Barth) humanity has an inherent capacity for fellowship with God, and, furthermore, humanity may reflect imperfectly what may be said of God absolutely. This view would imply that salvation and communion with God is 'natural' to humanity and the fulfilment of that for which God created humanity, and would also explain the phenomenon of shared insights into the divine nature in both natural theology and revelation. However, there is a problem in taking our creation in *imago Dei* as our basis for God-talk and knowledge of God:

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<sup>292</sup> cf. Alan Torrance, *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better*, p.116 - 123

<sup>293</sup> Alan Torrance, *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better*, p.120

because of the 'existence' of sin, humans no longer reflect only the divine nature but also reflect the non-being from which they were created, so that it can no longer be said that humans finitely and imperfectly express what God is perfectly and infinitely. Furthermore, it might be claimed, humans can no longer even perceive God clearly, for sin has warped the minds and perceptions of human beings so that they no longer perceive reality as it is. Therefore, while it might be affirmed that humanity has the inherent capacity to know and speak of God because of the creation of humanity in God's image, something else is needed to give humans the conceptual apparatus for speaking of God and the basis of knowing what God is like and having fellowship with him.

A further possible solution to the problem of God-talk lies in the Barthian idea that the revelation of God in Jesus' Incarnation and earthly life comprise not only humanity's salvific opportunity, but also (as a precondition to this) the possibility of knowing and of speaking of God at all. As a consequence of the Incarnation, that is, the revelation of the divine reality in the person and works of a finite human, there is a starting-point for speaking of divine love. The revelation of God in Christ provides a basis for God-talk, rooted in the idea of analogy as the projection of ordinary concepts (such as love) onto the divine reality. However, the use of these ordinary concepts in relation to God requires that the concepts themselves and even our thinking undergo a transformation in the light of what Christ reveals about God. Torrance writes that there is a 'semantic shifting of our concepts in parallel with the "reschematization" of our minds (Rom. 2. 20) so that they might truly and appropriately refer to the divine.'<sup>294</sup> Thus there is a reciprocal relationship between our ordinary concepts and language and revealed theology. Christ reveals God's love in the finite form of human self-giving, and yet this transforms the human understanding of love so that the ideal type of human

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<sup>294</sup> Torrance, *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better*, p.123

love becomes that which God reveals of himself in Christ, and so that humans better understand the nature of God's love as revealed in Christ. For Barth this poses a further problem: because of the radical otherness of the divine nature, the revelation of God in Christ is also a veiling and the divine nature can still never be comprehended by humanity which has no capacity for it. Therefore, on a Barthian model, the problem remains that, while humans can see the human Jesus, they will still fail to perceive the divine nature of Jesus and therefore will still not be able to know or to speak of God.<sup>295</sup> However, this poses less of a problem if one presupposes that humanity is made in God's image since it allows for some capacity for and awareness of God through natural theology and for a greater perception of God in the incarnate Christ.

Given the basis of God-talk I have outlined, I suggest that Christ reveals divine love in two ways. First, because humans are created in God's image and Jesus is the 'true and normal' or 'proper' human being, Christ's human love reflects and so reveals the love of God. Secondly, because of Christ's Incarnation through which human and divine natures are co-joined without contradiction, we can say that Jesus reveals in a finite way the divine love that is the love of God the Father in eternity. Therefore, I suggest that the revelation of the divine being is a possibility through the person of Christ, and that this revelation provides not only our salvific opportunity but, in addition, our very possibility of speaking of God. Divine ineffability is therefore not an insurmountable obstacle to the idea of the revelation of God in Christ, for it is the Christ-event itself that overcomes the problems of speaking of or knowing God. Crucially, properties (such as love, in its highest form as revealed by Christ) may be attributed to God as well as to humanity through Christ, though with the qualification that what is characteristic of human love is true of divine love in an infinite, perfect and absolute way. In speaking of Christ's revelation, therefore, it is to be maintained that

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<sup>295</sup> Barth overcomes this idea with recourse to the idea of the gift of faith being able to perceive which attributes of Jesus should be attributed to Christ and which are particular to Christ's human nature.

what humans see of Jesus' love is divine love in a finite and human form, that analogy is needed in order to attribute this love to the divine being in eternity, and that it cannot simply be said that 'what is true of Christ is true of God in eternity also'. Such a view is reminiscent of the statue analogy of Origen, according to which God is known through Christ, who is the perfect image of God and yet is comprehensible to humanity because of the 'smallness of his size' - that is, his finitude and humanity.

### Synopsis

To conclude, it has been suggested that salvation – as liberation and as the fulfilment of the human being as that for which they were created – takes place through the revelation of God's love in Christ, which inspires and infuses liberating and transforming love in the individual. Central to this idea is the Johannine assertion that 'God is love', so that the love infused in the individual constitutes the indwelling of God in the individual. This, it has been suggested, is the essential nature of a revelatory (and not an exemplarist) soteriology. In discussing questions concerning revelation, it has been suggested that because humans were created in God's image, people have the capacity to perceive and have fellowship with God, and that the revelation of God in Christ makes this possible in the face of sin. Furthermore, humans may gain insight into the nature of God's salvific love through Christ, first, because they are created in God's image so that Christ as the 'true and normal' human being reflects and so reveals God's love, and, secondly, because Christ as the Word Incarnate makes God's infinite love known in a finite and therefore comprehensible form. It is emphasised, however, that this insight in the divine nature is by means of analogy, so that it is recognised that what is true of the finite and human Jesus is not identical to the divine being in eternity. This brief and limited sketch of salvation through revelation will, I hope, serve as a basis for discussion in the conclusion of whether (as McIntyre suggests) a revelatory soteriology

is essentially reducible to exemplarism, and whether it suffers from some or all of the failings that McGrath, McIntyre, White and Gunton recognise in exemplarist soteriology.

## Conclusion

### *Reviewing Salvation as Revelation: Towards a Revelatory Soteriology?*

Having sketched a possible revelatory soteriology in Chapter Four, I now propose to review such a model of salvation in order to go some way to exploring its theological implications and testing its worth as a first-order model. In particular, I shall question whether, as McIntyre suggests,<sup>296</sup> a model of salvation based on revelation really does fall into the same traps as exemplarism, and whether it should therefore remain a taboo in or, at most, inconsequential to, theology. With this in mind, I shall consider four main criticisms that have been levelled against exemplarism or against a potential revelatory soteriology, exploring how they might relate to the revelatory soteriology sketched in the previous chapter and how a proponent of this model might respond to them. The four questions to be considered are as follows. First, would such a model be 'subjective' rather than 'objective', and would it therefore underestimate God's grace? Secondly, does such a model have an inadequate understanding of Jesus' person and work? Furthermore, is Jesus' death unnecessary? Thirdly, does a revelatory model have an intellectualist and knowledge-based view of salvation? In particular, does the emphasis on *knowledge* of God through Christ's revelation rule out the salvation of those who do not know of Christ, and what is the status of alleged revelation in other faiths and human experiences? Fourthly, does a revelatory model have a naïve view of sin and of human nature? While it is not possible to provide a comprehensive discussion of these perennial issues, it is hoped that, in the light of Chapter Four, suggestions may be given that might cast doubt on the conclusive condemnation of a revelatory soteriology as a first-order model.

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<sup>296</sup> *cf.* above, 1.3

### 5.1 Subjective and Objective Salvation: A False Dichotomy?

In reviewing the revelatory model of salvation sketched in the previous chapter in the light of the criticisms outlined in Chapter One, I shall begin by looking at the accusation that a revelatory model is subjective and, consequential upon this, that it belittles God's grace and in some sense implies that humans accomplish their own salvation. In order to do this, I shall begin by looking at what is meant by 'subjective' rather than 'objective' views of salvation, for I believe that these terms have erroneously-applied overtones that confuse the issues and misrepresent the nature of a revelatory model.

The term 'objective' refers most properly to the property of existing regardless of whether or not the object is thought to exist. 'Subjective', by contrast, refers to the property of existing only in the sense and to the degree that the entity is thought to exist by the human mind, and which is, furthermore, 'merely a convenient human posit for practical purposes.'<sup>297</sup> In theological and philosophical thought 'subjective' has come to refer to human thoughts, feelings and emotions, so that, far from being mutually exclusive, the subjective may helpfully be seen as the human experience or response to an objective 'external' truth. Applied to soteriology, the terms have become associated not only with the 'outward' and 'inward', but also with the past accomplishment of salvation in Christ in contradistinction to the present realisation of salvation in the human individual. For this reason, Fiddes defines subjective soteriology as a view of 'salvation as a present human experience', while objective is seen as a view which 'locates salvation in a past event, outside our experience and feelings.'<sup>298</sup>

Theologians such as Fiddes view objective and subjective models of the Atonement as complementary aspects of the same reality. For this reason, Fiddes writes

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<sup>297</sup> T.L.S. Sprigge, 'Ethical Objectivism', in the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.284

<sup>298</sup> Fiddes, *Past Event*, p.26

that 'The question is not whether a view of atonement is objective *or* subjective, although much fruitless argument has been spent on this by Christian thinkers in the past; the question to be asked is how well it *integrates* the two elements.'<sup>299</sup> Outward and inward, past and present, are all necessary aspects of a first-order model of Atonement. A revelatory model, I would suggest, integrates these elements, since it balances an emphasis on the 'objective' revelation and infusion of God in Christ to the individual, with 'subjective' insight into the transformation this effects in the life of the individual. So, we might ask, why is it that a revelatory model is branded subjective, and in what ways might it diminish the role of God's grace?

In contrast to Fiddes' definition of objective and subjective, highlighting the complementary nature and the integratory role of the two aspects, other scholars have tended to see objective and subjective aspects as mutually exclusive approaches to soteriology, and have attached entirely different nuances to the two terms. In the first place, as Fiddes perceives, objective and subjective have often been mistakenly identified with 'the polarity of act and response.'<sup>300</sup> This, I suggest, has led to a further erroneous identification of objective and subjective with the (often supposedly polar opposites) of God's grace and human merit. However, as Fiddes points out, God works in and through the human response of individuals (the 'subjective' element), and Christ as a human as well as a divine being was the agent of God's grace in freely accomplishing humanity's (objective) salvation. In addition, the perception of God's grace and human merit as opposites may also be an artificial one. It is suggested in this essay that God's grace, the revelation and infusion of love, is responsible for the transformation of the free human person into one who lives in love and who becomes, through love, a virtuous human being. To ask whether it is grace or the human acceptance of God that is responsible for salvation is to miss the point concerning the

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<sup>299</sup> Fiddes, *Past Event*, p.26

<sup>300</sup> Fiddes, *Past Event*, p.26



subtle relationship and interplay between the two. To say this is not to deny the primacy of God's grace, but to recognise that the free human acceptance of God and God's grace are interconnected in the process of salvation, and cannot be separated in the experience of salvation.

A further polarity between objective and subjective models of salvation lies in the idea that objective models assert that, as Kähler put it, Christ initiates an entirely new state of affairs, while subjective models merely speak of the revelation of an 'eternally present situation'.<sup>301</sup> Clearly such a polarity is an error. A so-called subjective model, such as one based on revelation (or, indeed, on moral example) effects an entirely new situation in the individual and, therefore, in the relationship between God and humans, precisely because it reveals an eternally present truth about God. On a closer examination of this particular and peculiar distinction between objective and subjective, it transpires that the underlying distinction is rather between whether salvation effects a change in God's essential nature or in his attitude towards humanity (objective), or whether salvation effects a change 'merely' in the essential nature of humans and in their attitude to God. Again, this distinction seems to me mistaken, for it is precisely in changing humans' attitudes to God that a new *relationship* between God and humanity is initiated, which is as pertinent a transition for God as for humanity. In addition, the change in the divine nature because of the Christ-event as suggested by an 'objective' model becomes, in effect, a revelation and thus 'subjective' in Christ: were Christ to effect a change in the divine nature, this would necessarily be a change in the *eternal* divine nature, so that, paradoxically, the change initiated would be an eternally present situation. In other words, were the Christ-event to effect a change in the divine nature, such as the ability to forgive or, as White<sup>302</sup> more promisingly suggests, the 'new' experience of suffering or temptation to sin, a change could not come into being

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<sup>301</sup> *Zur Lehre von der Versöhnung. Dogmatische Zeitfragen II* (1898), cited in McGrath, 'Moral Theory', p.211

<sup>302</sup> White, *Atonement and Incarnation*

in the divine nature only 'after' the Christ-event (since it is senseless to speak of 'before' or 'after' in eternity), but would have to be an eternally present state of affairs, and thus it would only be the revelation of God as this which would be 'new' at the Christ-event. In terms of what is instituted that is 'an entirely new situation', this may ironically be expressed as the revelation of 'an eternally present situation'! To say this is not to say that there is necessarily no 'objective' ontological change because of Christ in the divine nature, but that such a change is necessarily 'an eternally present situation', and that the only 'new thing' that can be instituted is one that does not involve a change in the divine nature but only in the attitude of humanity and the relationship between God and humanity, the revelation of God in Christ. Leonard Hodgson's insistence that 'Both in theory and in practice, we need to maintain at the heart of the doctrine of the atonement the message of an objective atonement wrought once for all by God in the history of the world, in virtue of which things are not as they were'<sup>303</sup> paradoxically must, in view of the nature of eternity, refer to the revelation and infusion of God's love, rather than to a metaphysical transition in the divine nature.

From this it can be seen that, while often useful for distinguishing two complementary aspects of a single entity, the distinction between objective and subjective as conceived here is an artificial one, and cannot be applied in absolute terms to a soteriological model such as revelation. If it is applied rigorously in this way, it can be turned on its head by reference to God's eternity so that the two terms become applicable only to their supposedly converse models. In the light of this, we can say that a revelatory model such as that sketched in the previous chapter is not merely or solely subjective, and that there is no indication that such a model would belittle God's grace.

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<sup>303</sup> Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Atonement*, Nisbet 1951, p.146

## 5.2 Theology and History Reunited: The Cross of Christ

Given that it has been concluded that a revelatory model need not belittle God's grace, we may, recalling the criticisms fired at 'exemplarist' and more generally 'subjective' models at the beginning of the paper, question whether a revelatory model would have an inadequate understanding of the person and work of Christ. In particular, in view of the great importance placed upon the Passion by 'traditional' soteriological models and in the Christian tradition more generally, would a revelatory model trivialise the theological significance of Christ's death, making it an incidental event and interpreting it as purely historical in nature? While a revelatory model need not claim to be exclusive of other models of the Atonement, if it is to be reconsidered as a first-order model it must offer some insight into the theological significance of Jesus' death, since, as a first-order model, it cannot depend upon the interpretations of other models in order to overcome this difficulty. A revelatory model claims neither that Jesus' death was a sacrifice or satisfaction to God, nor that it was a ransom or victory over diabolical forces. What interpretation or insight can be given, on a revelatory model, to the question, 'Why did Jesus die?'

The interpretation offered on a revelatory model must by nature concern the Cross as a revelation and an infusion of God as love, and, in turn, the institution of a new relationship between God and humanity. Yet such an answer raises further problems and is not, as it stands, sufficient to explain the necessity of Christ's death for humanity's salvation. As Denney has pointed out<sup>304</sup> in relation to an exemplarist model, Jesus' death is not an example of self-sacrificing love unless there was a further purpose for his death, since the mere fact of being crucified is not necessarily or inherently connected to self-sacrificing love. Therefore, Denney argued, a further soteriological model is needed to give meaning to the exemplarist one, and the latter is therefore

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<sup>304</sup> Denney, *The Death of Christ*, p.172

dependent upon and inferior to the former. Does not the same apply to a revelatory model? The suffering and death of Jesus do not reveal anything about the nature of God in and of themselves, since to throw one's life away simply to show the extent of one's love if there is no benefit to be gained from this by the beloved does not express love but is simply futile. Must a revelatory soteriology therefore be relegated to the status of a second-order model, dependent upon rather than mutually complementary with, the first-order models propounded by Gunton and McIntyre and others?

As I suggested earlier,<sup>305</sup> a revelatory model might lend itself to holding together the Christ of theological reflection with the Jesus of history. At this point, therefore, reflection on the theological significance of Christ's death might characteristically turn to the historical reason behind Christ's execution. In particular, it might be suggested, the 'historical'<sup>306</sup> narrative of the Gospels provides an inherent connection between Jesus' death and his self-giving love that might provide the key to understanding the meaning and significance of the crucifixion on a revelatory model. All four Gospels unequivocally connect Jesus' ministry of love and, concomitant with this, his uncompromising criticism of the exaltation of certain elitist groups and their oppression of the poor, with the plot of the authorities to kill Jesus. For instance, in Mark 3.1 – 7 Jesus expresses his compassion in healing a man with a withered hand, despite the fact that this is at obvious risk to himself because it necessitates breaking the Sabbath rules overly-rigorously enforced by the Pharisees. It is, the evangelist tells us, as a direct result of this that the Pharisees conspire to have Jesus executed:

And he [Jesus] entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they [the Pharisees] watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand.

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<sup>305</sup> *cf.* above, 1.4

<sup>306</sup> To call the Gospels 'historical' is not to claim that they are entirely historically accurate, nor to suggest that they are without theological reflection, but to recognise that they speak of the historical Jesus, rather than being in the form of theological treatises or discourses, for instance.

And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.'

Again, in Matthew, Jesus' criticism of the oppression of the poor by the ruling classes of the Temple, as well as the healing he undertook there, tells us both of the idea that his ministry was one of love and compassion and also of the response of enmity leading ultimately to the plot to execute Jesus by the ruling classes themselves:

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and he said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did... they were sore displeased.<sup>307</sup>

Numerous other examples could be cited to illustrate the close connection between Jesus' ministry of love and the plot of the authorities to have him executed. In Luke, Jesus' concern that the Pharisees ostentatiously exalt themselves above the common people and that they 'lay men with burdens grievous to be borne'<sup>308</sup> is met with the desire to 'catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him',<sup>309</sup> and Jesus' friendship with social outcasts is a further source of the Pharisee's and scribe's discontentment with him.<sup>310</sup> Again, in John, Jesus demonstrates self-giving love during the raising of Lazarus, which causes the rulers political insecurity and incites them to conspire against him.<sup>311</sup>

The historical connection between Jesus' death and his self-giving love is also a theological one: Christ's ministry of healing, liberating and even giving life was the direct cause of his death, and the fact that he did not cease his ministry despite the inevitable and foreseeable consequence of his death points to the self-sacrificing nature of his love. If, as orthodox Christianity affirms, Jesus is the Incarnation of the eternal

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<sup>307</sup> Matthew 21.12 - 15

<sup>308</sup> Luke 11.46

<sup>309</sup> Luke 11.54

<sup>310</sup> Luke 15.2

<sup>311</sup> John 11.53

God, then this fact about his life has great significance for our understanding of the divine nature. Jesus' self-giving that necessitates and includes his ultimate self-sacrifice on the Cross is the revelation of God's absolute and costly love for creation. So while the crucifixion is not given a unique nature divorced from the rest of Jesus' life, and while it is not through Jesus' death *alone* that salvation is accomplished, the Cross may still be viewed on a revelatory model as the crowning-point of God's self-giving love and of the Atonement or reconciliation of humanity to God.

For further elucidation of the meaning of Christ's death I wish to turn to Michael Winter's cruciological development of Karl Rahner's work on the sacraments.<sup>312</sup> According to Rahner,<sup>313</sup> the sacraments should not be viewed as the *sole* channels of God's grace, and cannot be separated from God's work of salvation in the world as a whole. Rather, they are the visible *means* of grace, and are, as Winter puts it, 'operations of special intensity, rather like the concentration of light at the focal point of a magnifying glass, so as to produce not just light, but fire.'<sup>314</sup> Winter adds to Rahner's understanding of the sacraments by suggesting that they are channels of 'covenanted grace'. Because God has promised his grace through the sacraments, humans can be sure of the achievement of their effects, though this is always with the qualification that we do not claim to 'possess' them and do not take them for granted, since to do this is incommensurable with a belief in grace as a free gift.

In the light of this understanding of the sacraments, Rahner and Winter (among others) widen the concept of sacrament beyond the traditional Catholic seven, so that 'sacrament' is 'used in other cases where the bestowal of grace takes place with particular intensity, and at the same time is made visible in a symbolic way.'<sup>315</sup> This understanding of sacrament was applied to the Church at the Second Vatican Council.

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<sup>312</sup> Michael Winter, *The Atonement* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995)

<sup>313</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, London, 1963, cited Winter, *The Atonement*, p.129

<sup>314</sup> Winter, *The Atonement*, p.130

<sup>315</sup> Winter, *The Atonement*, p.131

The decree, *Lumen Gentium*, reads, 'By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament, or sign of ultimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity.'<sup>316</sup> As Winter observes, this understanding of Church and of sacrament takes into account not only God's salvific action through the traditional sacraments of the Church, but also God's salvific action throughout the entire world. While sacraments mediated by the Church are seen as operations of special intensity of God's grace, it is recognised that such grace is not limited to people within the visible Church.

The significance of this view of sacraments for the current essay lies in the potential for understanding the Cross as a sacrament in the sense that Winter suggests. On such a model, the crucifixion would be seen as one part (and not the whole) of God's saving work, and yet would be regarded as an operation of greater intensity in mediating – revealing and infusing - God's grace (love) to the world. Winter, propounding a model of Atonement based on intercession, suggests that the crucifixion is the 'sacrament of the intercession'. On a revelatory model, the crucifixion may best be seen as the sacrament of the revelation of God's love for the world and the infusion of love concomitant with this. While the crucifixion is not, on a revelatory model, seen as the total of God's saving activity, nor as a salvific process qualitatively different to that of Jesus' entire Incarnation, it might be suggested that not only becoming human and living a life of love but also (necessitated by this kind of life) giving up one's life, is the greatest expression of love and so the fullest sign of God's self-giving love for creation. As the greatest sign of God's love for the world, it is also the point of greatest intensity in God's salvific work as a whole. As Rahner expresses it, 'The cross is the *signum efficax*, the efficacious sign, of the redeeming love that communicates God himself, because the cross establishes God's love in the world in a definite and

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<sup>316</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, sections 1 and 9, cited Winter, *The Atonement*, p.131

historically irreversible way... Given these presuppositions the cross of Christ can really be seen as the efficacious sign of God's salvific will in the world.<sup>317</sup>

From this it can be seen that a revelatory model would not only not belittle the role of grace, but it would also not fail to give due significance to Jesus' life and, in particular, to his passion. On the contrary, a revelatory model would emphasise the role of God's grace in salvation, and give meaning to our often elusive and hazy understanding of God's grace and the life and death of Christ. A revelatory model would see the Christ-event as a part of God's saving activity throughout creation, and yet would offer a distinctly christological understanding of salvation and suggest a qualitatively unique view of Christ's Incarnation and death that is in no way reductive or devoid of grace.

### 5.3 On the Redemption of Non-Christians and Salvation in Christ

As White points out,<sup>318</sup> a *christological* revelatory model<sup>319</sup> may fall into a further trap precisely because of its emphasis upon the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the revelation of God in Christ. How can a revelatory soteriology that insists upon the revelation of God in other faiths and experiences be considered a first-order model in view of its apparent inability to see the whole of salvation as taking place in Christ? Alternatively, how can the salvation of non-Christians be seen to be 'in Christ' if it comes about through the revelation of the divine *apart from* the Christ-event? The problem can helpfully be re-expressed if we say that the following assertions appear to be inherently contradictory so that it is logically impossible for all three to be true, as a revelatory model such as that suggested in the previous chapter would hope to do.

#### i) Salvation takes place through revelation

<sup>317</sup> Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol.21 (London, 1988), p.250, cited Winter, *The Atonement*, p.132

<sup>318</sup> White, *Atonement and Incarnation*

<sup>319</sup> In contrast to a pluralistic and/or non-incarnational revelatory model.



ii) All salvation takes place in and through the Second Person of the Trinity

iii) Non-Christians, in the sense of those who have not experienced the revelation of God in the Second Person of the Trinity, may be saved

It is not within the scope of this essay to propound an answer to this problem, but, given its great weight as a stumbling-block for seeing revelation as a first-order model, I hope to show that, while there is no adequate theory to deal with this problem on a revelatory model at the present, there is no *logical impossibility* in asserting both that other religions may impart salvific revelations of the divine, and that all salvation takes place through the Second Person of the Trinity. In order to show this I shall utilise some of the thought of Justin Martyr, whose ideas may be a useful springboard for the development of a model that answers this riddle in the future.

For Justin, Christ, or the *Logos*, is not only a designation of the divine nature<sup>320</sup> who is active in creation,<sup>321</sup> but is also the source of the *logos spermatikos* – the seeds of reason in humanity which facilitate knowledge and perception of God, potentially both through natural theology and through revelation. While Origen hints at this idea and so provides some kind of basis for divine revelation to humanity as a whole,<sup>322</sup> Justin's notion of the *logos spermatikos* provides an opportunity for him to take it far further. Such an idea is related to the idea that humanity is created in God's image, and so can perceive and experience the divine being in a finite way. Justin writes that 'In moral philosophy the Stoics have established right principles, and the poets too have expounded such, because the seed of the Word is implanted in the whole human race.'<sup>323</sup> The *Logos* makes the Father known to the whole of humanity through these

<sup>320</sup> The unity of the Godhead is balanced by Justin with the insistence that the Son has a distinct identity of the Father.

<sup>321</sup> II *Apol.* VI, 3, cited Danielou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea, Vol. II: Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, trans. John Austin Baker (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) p.41

<sup>322</sup> See above, 3.2

<sup>323</sup> II *Apol.* VIII, 1, cited Danielou, *Early Christian Doctrine Vol. II*, p.41

seeds of reason, so that, developed on a revelatory soteriology, it might be said that salvation is not restricted only to those who experience the revelation of God in the Incarnate *Logos*, but includes all those who experience the revelation of God through other means, which are ultimately attributed to the divine *Logos* in eternity. According to Justin, the revelation of God in the *Logos* made incarnate in the human Jesus is the supreme and unique revelation of God, and transcends other revelations of God through the *Logos*, since he is not only an agent or prophet of God but is actually God himself. He writes, 'Our doctrine surpasses all human teaching, because we have the Word in his eternity in Christ, who has been manifested for us, body, reason, and soul.'<sup>324</sup> This sort of idea (though not necessarily with the attendant Stoic-based metaphysics) lies behind much theology concerning 'anonymous Christianity'<sup>325</sup> or 'the invisible Church'.<sup>326</sup> The significance for the current essay lies in the fact that a view based on Justin may see salvific revelation as taking place in many different religions and human experience, and yet affirms that all salvation is ultimately 'in Christ'. While as it stands this idea is not conclusive in showing that a revelatory model would hold a consistent and satisfying view concerning the salvation in Christ of all creation through revelation, it is enough here to indicate that such a view is logically possible, and not (as appears at first) inherently contradictory. To my knowledge, no satisfactory model of how this could be has been developed without contradiction or compromise, but it lies beyond the boundaries of this essay to suggest one here.

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<sup>324</sup> *II Apol.* X, 1, cited Danielou, *Early Christian Doctrine Vol. II*, p.41

<sup>325</sup> For instance, in the work of Karl Rahner.

<sup>326</sup> The term is originally Augustine's, and was used to distinguish between the members of the visible Church who were righteous and to be saved from those members of the visible Church who were not. I use it in the more popular and contemporary sense to express the idea that, while there is a clearly defined 'visible Church', the question of who is to be saved (whether inside or outside the Church) is a mystery in the present.

#### 5.4 Concerning Sin and its Weight

Finally, I shall attempt some response to the criticism that revelatory approaches to salvation have an inadequate view of sin,<sup>327</sup> and thus do not offer a satisfactory account of salvation. The questions raised concerning sin are the most perennial criticisms of an allegedly ‘non-constitutive’ soteriology, and can be grouped into four main categories. I shall outline these four main categories and provide some response to them, before moving on to a further critique of the view of sin suggested in Chapter Four.

First, such a model demands that humans ‘save themselves’ by moral perfection, and yet this involves too high an expectation of what humans can achieve morally<sup>328</sup>, and erroneously implies that people can live up to Christ’s example of ethical perfection.<sup>329</sup> Secondly, those who cannot exercise their free will fully – such as those with a psychological disorder such as kleptomania – are excluded from salvation, since they are unable to become completely moral individuals.<sup>330</sup> Thirdly, sin is seen as something that imprisons people, and holds them captive. Revelation is an inadequate response to the problem of sin, since education does not entail liberation.<sup>331</sup> Fourthly, a ‘subjective’ model sees sin as purely moral, whereas in actuality it permeates the totality of human existence.<sup>332</sup> Given the charge that a revelatory model would suffer all the same failings as an exemplarist one,<sup>333</sup> how might a revelatory approach still be reconsidered as a first-order model?

In response to some of these criticisms, it might be observed that the revelatory model suggested in the previous chapter implied neither that humans earned their own

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<sup>327</sup> Cf. McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, p.49

<sup>328</sup> McGrath, ‘Moral Theory’, p.219

<sup>329</sup> McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, p.49

<sup>330</sup> McGrath, ‘Moral Theory’, p.219

<sup>331</sup> McGrath, ‘Moral Theory’, p.219

<sup>332</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, p.160

<sup>333</sup> McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, p.49

salvation, nor that salvation was a primarily moral experience. Rather, it was emphasised that Christ's saving work lay in the revelation of God's love for humanity, in the concomitant infusion of love, and in the consequential transformation and liberation of the individual. This suggests that it is mistaken to charge a revelatory model of believing that sin is purely moral, that it is the key to salvation, and thus that it involves a naïve and inadequate view of sin. While ethical behaviour and moral striving may result from the salvation of the individual, there is no demand inherent in the model upon the individual to become morally perfect. Furthermore, and as a consequence of this, a psychological disorder such as kleptomania would not exclude the individual from salvation, though salvation on a revelatory model *may* involve in the liberation of the individual from their psychological disorder.<sup>334</sup> Incidentally, if, as McGrath (citing Kant) claims, free will necessitates moral responsibility, so that 'if man *can* advance to moral perfection, it necessarily follows that he *must* do so', then the converse must also be true – if an individual suffers from a disorder that prevents them being morally good, then it follows that they are morally innocent to the extent that their free will is restricted - so that McGrath's criticism even of a purely moral and exemplarist model does not apply. Again, it is not at all clear that McGrath's assertion that education does not accomplish liberation is necessarily true. The pedagogy of an individual and the revelation of unconditional love for them may indeed liberate and transform the individual, and so bring about their salvation. From this it can be concluded that the criticisms put forward asserting that 'exemplarist-type' soteriologies have a weak and inadequate view of sin is, contrary to McIntyre, not applicable to the revelatory model suggested in Chapter Four.

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<sup>334</sup> At this point a revelatory model might overlap with a *Christus Victor* model, drawing upon Jesus' healing and exorcisms as an aspect of the divine revelation. The fact that the kleptomaniac is often not healed does not necessarily indicate that they are not experiencing salvation, for, since salvation is eschatological as well as present, it is not to be supposed that individuals experience salvation fully in this life.

A question more pertinent to the view of sin suggested in Chapter Four as a basis for a revelatory soteriology lies in the issue of whether apathy and the privation of love are sufficient accounts of evil, or whether such a view is inadequate so that the revelatory soteriology which rests upon it is rendered untenable. In particular, is sin as apathy and a lack of love insufficient and naïve in view of the proactive existence of evils such as Hitler's deliberate attempt to eliminate the Jews, the enslavement and abuse of Africans by slave-traders, and the mistreatment of prisoners of war in Japan? How can such evils be put down to mere privation and be seen as passive and ultimately non-existent in the light of their clearly proactive and positive-negative nature? In anticipation of this criticism, I hope to suggest an answer that demonstrates how the hamartiology propounded in Chapter Four is an adequate view of sin.

The first distinction to be drawn here is, as Augustine and Abailard have already argued, between sinful intentions, will, desire and motives, and the actions that they instigate. It is suggested that actions are not in themselves good or evil, but are morally neutral. It is the intention or motive behind the action that renders the action morally good or evil, and thus it is in intention and motive that culpability lie. The act of turning on a tap is, in itself, morally neutral. If an agent turns on a tap with the intention of releasing a flow of gas to kill human beings, then the act is rendered morally evil. If, on the other hand, an agent turns on a tap with the intention of instigating a flow of water so as to quench a fire and save lives, then the act is rendered a moral good. An action does not necessarily reflect the intention, since a morally good intention may result in 'evil' consequences, and an evil intention may fortuitously have a positive effect. Actions are, by nature, active, and yet this does not necessarily indicate that that which instigates the action is proactive and 'existent' in and of itself.

A second point to be made, and one that is impeded by the limitations of language, is that intention and will *per se* are always positive, active, existent, and

morally neutral. For instance, the fact that an agent wills to do nothing rather than willing to do something does not imply that the *will* is lacking, but simply that the 'subject' of the will is privative. The agent may wish to do nothing, so that the 'subject' of the will is passive and privative etc., and yet the will is never passive, privative etc., for the agent may will to do nothing very actively and strongly. Thus while intention is the vehicle of sin, and action the expression of it, it does not follow that sin itself takes on the nature of action and intention (i.e. active), but merely appears to take on its form. From this it can be concluded that the proactivity and force of 'evil' actions and intentions do not necessarily imply that sin is similarly proactive and 'existent' in nature, and that the active 'doing' of sin in the world does not invalidate a view of sin based on apathy and indifference.

However, it may well be asked whether, even if proactive intention and action are in themselves morally neutral, can sin be seen as privative given that many 'evil' actions spring from, and many evil intentions consist in, negative forces such as cruelty, hatred, and brutality? While omitting to do good is sin that may spring from apathy, can the same really be said of cruelty and of malice? As I suggested in Chapter Four, hatred and related 'sin' – cruelty, brutality, and gratuitous anger, for instance - are not the absolute antithesis of love, but, as Kierkegaard says, are love – and the derivatives of love – burning as love's opposite. Supposing that all humans have the potential for love, it would follow that all people have also the potential for cruelty, hatred, and brutality. The claim being made about apathy and the privation of love is not that all sin *is* apathy but that, just as all goodness *derives* from love,<sup>335</sup> so all sin *derives* from the privation of love and from apathy. The argument suggests, for instance, that potential cruelty may only be *realised* in an individual through the individual's apathy and indifference, that is, through a lack of love. If love is the 'arch-good' from which all goodness originates,

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<sup>335</sup> Augustine, 'On Nature and Grace', 70.84, in *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings: On Nature and Grace, On the Proceedings of Pelagius, On the Predestination of the Saints, On the Gift of Perseverance*, trans. John A. Mourant and William J. Collinge (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992)

then the apathy is the 'arch-sin' from which all sin is derived. Thus, while certain 'sins' are negative forces, are aspects of love that are warped or corrupted and burn as love's opposite, the root of all sin is essentially privative and is ultimately and leads ultimately to *oukontic* nothingness.

The view of sin put forward in Chapter Four is essential and inherent to the revelatory model of salvation that I have suggested. Were the view to underestimate the force or extent of evil in the world, or to portray an overly optimistic picture of human nature, a revelatory model would offer an inadequate soteriology because the 'remedy' it prescribes would be based on an inadequate diagnosis of the illness. However, from the critique of sin as the privation of love offered above, it may be deduced that, while the force and proactive nature of evil in the world appears to invalidate the idea of sin and evil as essentially privative and passive, it does not in fact do so. Rather, apathy and the privation of love in an individual lead to the corruption of the positive force of love, and that which derives from love, and so produce negative yet proactive intentions, will, and actions. In the light of this, there is no reason why such a view of sin should offer an obstacle to the reconsideration of a revelatory soteriology as a first-order model.

### Synopsis

In this essay I have suggested that much soteriology that has been branded exemplarism actually contains a far more subtle soteriology based not on Christ's moral example but upon the revelation of God in the person of Jesus. I have attempted to demonstrate that this revelatory model has a precedent both in Scripture and in the Christian tradition, and in so doing have explored some of the many forms it has taken. I have sketched a possible revelatory model, re-appropriating several Augustinian themes and yet developing the model beyond its historical forms and foundations. In addition, I have attempted some defence of how revelation of God might take place in

the face of divine ineffability. In the Conclusion, I have reviewed the revelatory soteriology suggested in Chapter Four in the light of the possible difficulties raised by Gunton, McGrath, McIntyre, and White. I have sought to show that none of the difficulties raised are insurmountable, and have suggested that some are based on erroneous premises or are inapplicable to a revelatory rather than an exemplarist model. Unfortunately, the revelatory model itself and many of the responses given in this review – particularly concerning the salvation of non-Christians – have had to be left undeveloped in this paper. However, I suggest that what has been demonstrated is that none of the criticisms raised are conclusive evidence against a revelatory model being considered as a first-order model.

In addition to demonstrating that many of the criticisms of a revelatory model are inconclusive, I hope that this paper has provided some sense of why a revelatory model might provide unique insights into salvation, and thus why there is good reason for it to be re-considered a first-order model. For instance, I have suggested that a revelatory model is insightful because it takes into account the entire incarnate life of Christ, and does not concentrate exclusively on the Cross. Again, a revelatory model unifies the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith in a way lacking in some theology. Likewise, a revelatory model does not appear to offer a merely hypothetical soteriology, but recognises the salvific work of God in the transformation and development of the person in the present. Furthermore, a revelatory model is valuable in unifying objective and subjective approaches to the Atonement, and, in so doing, presents the subtle interplay between grace and human response sometimes absent in other soteriology. A revelatory model, I have suggested, is more intelligible to contemporary people than much other soteriology, views salvation as being more than mere forgiveness of sin, and has a more philosophically defensible view of divine eternity. While it has not been within the scope of the essay to provide a comprehensive account of the benefits of such



a model to soteriology as a whole, or, indeed, to develop a revelatory model fully or to counter the objections against it more completely, I hope that the paper has opened up possibilities for a revelatory model of salvation that may be taken up and developed in the future.

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