NONVIOLENT ATONEMENT: A THEORY-PRAXIS APPRAISAL OF THE VIEWS OF J DENNY WEAVER AND S MARK HEIM

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

MASTER IN THEOLOGY

in the subject

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: DR. D. F. OLIVIER

NOVEMBER 2014
Title of thesis: 
Nonviolent atonement: A theory-praxis appraisal of the views of J Denny Weaver and S Mark Heim

Abstract:
Violence in traditional “satisfaction” atonement theologies is addressed here. An alternative non-violent view follows in discussion with Weaver / Heim.

Weaver outlines a nonviolent Jesus narrative focussing on God’s rule made visible in history. Jesus’ saving death stems not from God but Jesus’ opposing evil powers. For viability violent biblical texts are disregarded. Church history interpretation is nonconventional. Early church is nonviolent. The subsequent Constantinian “fall” births the violent satisfaction model. Weaver’s problematical violence definition receives attention.

Girard’s scapegoating philosophy and Jesus’ rescuing humankind from this evil undergirds Heim’s approach. Scapegoating establishes communal peace preventing violence. The bible is antisacrificial giving victims a voice. Jesus becomes a scapegoating victim, yet simultaneously exposes and reverses scapegoating, his death stemming from evil powers not God.

Nonviolent atonement influences numerous theological concepts with Incarnational theology demonstrating Jesus’ humanness impacting upon atonement. Four ways to live out transformation established by Jesus’ saving work follow.

Key terms:
Nonviolent atonement; Christus Victor; Narrative Christus Victor; J. Denny Weaver, S. Mark Heim, H. Boersma; Feminism; Cross, Crucifixion and Resurrection; Salvation; Punishment; Oppression; Suffering; Reconciliation; Scapegoat; Appeasement; Justice; Revelation
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Appendix A: IMAGES OF ATONEMENT-
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

The central claim of the Christian faith, according to Waldron Scott, in his book *What about the Cross?* is that in the Christ-event\(^1\), the world was being reconciled to God— for example as stated in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19\(^2\) (Scott, 2007:3). In the NIV Bible the wording of this verse is as follows: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ not counting men’s sins against them” (Barker, 1995:1770).

This statement reflects a core truth of the atonement\(^3\) (this core truth being that which revolves around God’s gracious desire to reconcile with estranged sinful humankind). And which according to Scottish scholar James Denney, “determines more than anything else our conceptions of God, humankind, history and nature; it determines them, for we must bring them all in some way into accord with it” (Scott, 2007:3).

Most religions that believe in God/gods have an atonement notion. The atonement notion in Judaism, Christianity and Islam— the Abrahamic religions— implies that God and humanity are in some way alienated and require some form of appeasement.\(^4\) The estrangement is usually held to be the result of sin, and the fundamental requirement is for sin to be forgiven or annulled (Scott, 2007:3). John Suggit, in his article titled, *Redemption: Freedom Gained*, which appears in the book, *Doing Theology in Context*, confirms Scott’s

\(^1\) According to Ferdinand Deist in his “*A Concise Dictionary of Theological and Related Terms,*” the Christ-Event can be defined in general as the fact that Christ once lived as a human person. In particular, the modern interpretation of the significance of Christ’s life is a symbol of redemption (Deist, 1992:43). Alister McGrath in his *Christian Theology. An Introduction* helps to further clarify the meaning of the word “Christ-event” as a symbol of redemption when he says in this regard: “A central theme of mainstream Christian thought is that redemption is manifested in and through and constituted on the basis of, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ” (McGrath, 2001:349).

\(^2\) Other biblical texts also reflecting the same kind of thought can be found in Ephesians 2:11-22 and Colossians 1:15-23 (Barker, 1995:1795,1815)

\(^3\) Most theological terminology stems from Greek or Latin according to Scott. Yet he notes the word atonement (at-one-ment) is the one significant Christian term originating in English, having been coined by William Tyndale for his 1525 translation of the New Testament and traditionally having three distinct meanings: to propitiate, or appease; to make amends; to be reconciled (Scott, 2007:3).

\(^4\) In confirming this observation in his article on Atonement in *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, edited by Richardson and Bowden, we find F.W. Dillistone stating, “The English word ‘atonement’ originally signified the condition of being ‘at-one’ after two parties had been estranged from one another. Soon a secondary meaning emerged: ‘atonement’ denoted the means, an act or payment, through which harmony was restored” (Richardson & Bowden, 1994:50).
observation that the atonement notion in Christianity (which is part of the Abrahamic religions) requires some form of appeasement. Suggit does this specifically by drawing attention to Jesus as the one who effects deliverance of sinful humanity. Furthermore, says Suggit, Pauline literature is especially exemplary in its reference to the inestimable cost involved in effecting redemption since the price paid was the death of Christ God’s son—Romans 3:24; 8:23 (de Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio, 1994: 114-115).

In also confirming Scott’s understanding that the view of atonement in Abrahamic religions (of which Christianity is a part) involves some sort of appeasement, Hendrikus Berkhof in his book *Christian Faith* asserts the following. Israel needed a saviour Jesus Christ to reconcile the estranged people with God. Furthermore this act of redemption is only effective when coming through death, suffering, cross, dying blood—that is, surrender of life (Berkhof, 1990: 307,308).

The ancient Hebrews, like their pagan neighbours, possessed an intricate sacrificial system for atonement. Modern Jews continue to celebrate an Atonement Day (Yom Kippur) annually though no longer with a ritual of sacrifice. Rather, in place of a ritual of sacrifice, Ariela Pelaia, in her online article, *What is Yom Kippur?* tells us that Jews celebrate Yom Kippur by way of observing the following three essential components: *Teshuvah /repentance* which occurs on the ten days leading up to Yom Kippur; *prayer* which is repeatedly engaged in during the Yom Kippur synagogue service which lasts from dawn to dusk; *fasting* which is for a twenty five hour period beginning one hour before Yom Kippur begins, and ending after night fall on the day of Yom Kippur (Pelaia, A 2001: http://judaism.about.com/od/holidays/a/yomkippur.htm. For Muslims atonement is by “good works which annul evil deeds” (*Al Qur’an*, Surah 11:114).

When we consider that the most popular view behind the general modern Christian understanding of atonement today is founded upon a violent and abusive mechanism. And more specifically that this mechanism revolves around a vengeful God’s requirement of the death of God’s innocent son as an appeasement for human sin. How can we possibly be

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5 Dillistone in the same article mentioned above from the *A New Dictionary for Christian Theology*, further comments here that in the OT the phrase, ‘to make atonement’ often occurs in a ceremonial context. It pointed to an action or succession of actions by means of which guilt could be taken away. In this regard the annual Day of Atonement became a day wherein elaborate ceremonies were carried out which were designed to expiate the sins of the entire nation (Richardson & Bowden, 1994: 50).
reconciled to, and lasting friends with our creator God, each other, and creation? Because if our creator sets out to redeem his/her creation via a violent abusive means, surely this is a means that by implication condones violence, abuse, oppression and ongoing schism in God’s creation? Just how is our reconciliation with God effected? What is the mechanism? These are the key questions asked by Scott, which I hope to address in my dissertation, and that much of theology, in my opinion, has failed to answer (Scott, 2007:4).

The focal point of my dissertation revolves around my moving away from the theology of the traditional atonement models and the general popular understanding of revelation today (which limits revelation to a narrow understanding of cruciform faith and implicates God in violence). I move instead to an understanding of revelation that shows the person of God to be loving and nonviolent in the sense that God is not responsible for his/her own son’s death but instead has an atoning/saving plan for us in Christ that embraces God’s creation of everything– Jesus’ incarnation, life, death, resurrection and pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

1.1 Why the Questions?

I have stated in my dissertation that I wish to question, challenge and oppose the violent satisfaction/penal notion of Christian atonement. I now go on to discuss in more detail my reasons for wanting to do so which include the following.

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6 I use both the words “his” and “her” to refer to God because as a feminist I join various other theologians and feminists such as Sallie McFague in her, Models of God, in recognising the following. That God in God’s ineffable greatness, although beyond being either male or female in a purely sexual sense, nevertheless in God’s creative love exhibits both male and female attributes of love. This notion in my view thus renders the concept of God as expressed purely in masculine terms inadequate (McFague, 1987:122,123).

7 The reason as to why I also wish to address the issue of revelation in my dissertation which focuses on the atonement, and why it will not be possible for me here to just stick to analysing the various models, is very well explained by the scholar James Denny in his book, The Death of Christ, from which I quoted earlier. Here in the seventh chapter titled, The Atonement and the Modern Mind, Denny explains that the atonement is in fact the focus/central point/nucleus of revelation itself. This is so because it is the point at which we see most profoundly into the truth of God and come most entirely under its power. It is the summation of the meaning of our faith in a nutshell because it reveals to humankind all that the power, wisdom and love of God means in relation to its sinfulness (Denny, 1902:chapter 7). Our understanding of it reveals to us the nature/character of our God and the nature of the rescue plan God embarks upon to redeem us from our sinful death-dealing alienation from God, and the richness of God’s grace in granting us reconciliation and eternal life through Christ.
I see satisfaction atonement as an erroneous later development. Evidence of apostolic and early church understanding of atonement that I present shows Christ’s work as revolving around challenging the powers of evil rather than appeasement. My desire is thus to see the basic principles of the earlier Christus Victor view somehow reinstated in a notion that shows God to be nonviolent. Also the satisfaction model’s scandalous assertion that the suffering of Christ on the cross was God’s choice, and the resulting violent character-type that God is imbued with here and the permission that this notion gives to oppressors is unacceptable to me. This is especially so, since, as a result of my feminist context, I feel I have an acute awareness of the world’s suffering. Another reason that I want to argue against satisfaction atonement is that it, (in conjunction with the Reformers and Karl Barth), supports/hinges upon a Christocentric reductionist view of revelation. This in my opinion is an erroneous toxic view wherein the death is focussed upon at the expense of all the other aspects of God’s revelation in Christ– especially the resurrection. As long as this reductionist view of revelation is in place (which has also been responsible for the lack of other models being formulated), a violent notion of atonement will remain at the forefront of Christian atonement belief.

Thus I challenge satisfaction/penal derived atonement notions with the intention of promoting the Christus Victor based notions of Weaver and Heim. This is because both these scholars in my opinion offer notions that in being based on a fuller understanding of revelation– Christ’s birth, ministry, death, resurrection and Pentecostal outpouring- begin to make sense to a postmodern imagination by rejecting a notion that embraces strange and tortuous explanations of how the cross can be positive and salvific.

1.1.1 Early Christian Literature

According to Scott (and a number of other scholars, some of whom I’ll mention shortly), neither the first century apostles nor the church leaders in the immediately following centuries attained a strictly unanimous conclusion on how to comprehend atonement. For example as Scott notes, the Apostle Peter himself had no well-worked-out notion. However with regard to Peter we can begin to trace the crystallization of his thinking via his early sermons recorded by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts chapter two for example, although he is not yet thinking specifically or exclusively in terms of atonement, the first
aspects of Peter’s atonement understanding emerge. They revolve around his awareness of the prophets foretelling that the Christ would suffer for forgiveness of sins which results in atonement and the gift of the Spirit which is associated with the larger theme of salvation—Acts 3:18-20 (Scott, 2007:10).

Furthermore in Peter’s first epistle we find the notion of ‘redemption by the precious blood of the perfect lamb’—a concept that according to Scott contributes towards forming the “seed” of what will ultimately become the Ransom model—e.g. 1 Peter 1:18-19 (Scott, 2007:10-14).

Paul’s writings which are dated earlier than Peter’s, give us insights of the atonement as grappled with by some of the earliest Christians. In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, asserts Scott, Paul suggests various purposes for the atonement, all of which involve liberation and freedom. Galatians 1:3b-4 speaks of deliverance from this evil age; Galatians 3:13-14 speaks of liberation from the curse attached to the Mosaic law and the fact that, in Christ, liberation belongs to all people—God’s blessing that stems from Abraham being meant for Jew and Gentile alike; Galatians 4:4-5 and Galatians 5:1 speak of liberation from sin via humanity being adopted to sonship—Christ’s ransom buying our liberation which consequently sets us free from our slavery (Scott, 2007:16-18).

According to Scott, Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians features a core text on the aspect of reconciliation within the concept of the atonement—e.g. 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (Scott, 2007:20-22). Evangelical Geoffrey Grogan writing in Tidball, Hilborn and Thacker’s *The Atonement Debate*, agrees with Scott that this text is about reconciliation. Yet more specifically he (Grogan) claims that 2 Corinthians 5:21 is not merely about human sin. But about the vengefulness and resulting judgment of God on that sin—judgment and vengefulness which falls upon Christ who goes on to become the propitiation for our sin and thus the foundation of our justification by God. Herein of course lie the seeds of the penal substitution model (Tidball, Hilborn & Thacker 2008:89)

According to Scott, the primary motivation behind Paul’s letter to the Romans is his desire to demonstrate that Gentiles and Jews alike are justified before God by virtue of their active faith in God, quite apart from scrupulous observance of the Mosaic Law. In the early part of the letter Paul’s key focus is on the power of sin—e.g. Romans 3:9b, and the inability
of the Mosaic law to prevail over sin, and that justification for Paul in the context of atonement revolves around the act of being made right with God– Romans chapters 6-8 (Scott, 2007:27-28).

Thus for Scott, Romans chapters 6-8 are key chapters indicating towards a Participatory/Incarnational atonement comprehension, Romans 8:2-4 being one of the few passages wherein Paul makes positive reference to the humanity of Jesus. God liberates humankind from the natural law of sin and death (which the Mosaic law in incapable of doing) by sending God’s Son to be human- a state through which the Son imparts new life to all human life in this age already– Romans 8:3. For Paul here, ‘new life’ is a core part of his atonement understanding and the seed out of which a participatory/incarnational model eventually grows. As we shall see, it also becomes a key feature in some of the early Church Fathers’ notions of atonement (Scott, 2007:29).

The aspect of atonement Paul is referring to in this instance is not so much a stress on atonement in the strict sense of being reconciled to God, says Scott. But rather Paul is stressing what is needed to maintain our relationship with God once the estrangement has been triumphed over. What is required is the new governing law of the Spirit in our lives made possible by the Messiah’s work. This work consists in Jesus’ uniting of human nature with God’s nature, and as the resurrected Christ, making intercession for humankind at God’s right hand. The atonement for Paul in this particular sense is a continuous process in which the Holy Spirit is crucial (Scott, 2007:29).

Coming from a somewhat different angle, to evangelical scholar Geoffrey Grogan’s mind, Paul in a nutshell saw Christ’s death to be propitiatory, substitutionary and justifying. An example here is Romans 3:25 which is a verse according to Grogan that “avoids any thought of humanly initiated appeasement, God sending forth Christ as a hilasterion (propitiation)” (Tidball, Hilborn & Thacker, 2008:89).

Regarding the Gospel writers views on atonement, we find N.T Wright in his book Evil and the Justice of God, echoing Scott’s sentiments that neither the first century apostles nor the church leaders in the immediately following centuries attained a strictly unanimous conclusion on how to comprehend atonement. Wright asserts “little is said in any of the four gospels that directly mirrors early Christian thinking about the atonement as cosmic conflict,
satisfaction, penal, substitutionary etc.” Yet, says Wright, the Gospel’s unclouded focus on Jesus’ entire incarnation lends itself to modifications of what in Wright’s opinion would become the Moral Exemplar theory (Wright, 2006:78).

Evangelical Geoffrey Grogan claims to have found evidence to validate a substitutionary model in John 10:17-18 wherein according to Jesus, the Father orders him to lay down his life for others. Similarly, points out Grogan, in Mark 14:21, even though Jesus sees the participants in the crucifixion drama to be responsible for their own actions- Jesus also recognises a divine purpose in it, the Father having willed it– Mark 14:21 (Tidball, Hilborn & Thacker, 2008:85).

In his book, *The Letters of John*, scholar Colin Kruse concludes as do Scott and Wright that early Christianity was anything but a homogeneous organism. It grew rather in varying ways, in varying locations, under the steering and influence of varying personalities (Kruse, 2000: 4). More specifically Kruse confirms that early atonement theology presented itself in the early church mainly within a number of divergent streams of thinking- two of which I’ve already discussed- the Petrine stream and the Pauline stream. A third main stream that I now go on to analyse is according to Kruse, the Johannine stream (Kruse, 2000:4).

The Johannine worldview according to Scott, is in line with a certain aspect of Pauline thinking insofar as the author of 1 John sees the present world as part of the Old Order that is in opposition to the New Age (which is associated with the Kingdom of God), and wherein Christ has victory over the devil and the world– e.g. 1 John 2:8b- 2:15-16. This is of course a primary element in what would later become the classical theory of atonement (Scott, 2007: 51).

In his *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Alister McGrath is of the opinion that the classical theory based upon the triumph gained by Christ over sin, death and the devil is one upon which the NT and early church laid enormous stress. Often as a theme of victory, it was associated liturgically with Easter celebrations, says McGrath (McGrath, 2001:415). This notion as we shall see, forms the underlying argument for Weaver’s narrative Christus Victor (Weaver, 2001:20). It is also the underlying theme of Heim’s theory (Heim, 2006:161).
A second Johannine atonement interpretation, Scott points out, is found in the manner in which the Johannine writer interprets the OT concepts of sin and sacrifice, e.g. 1 John 2:2-4:10. Scott points out that the notions of sin and sacrifice are integral aspects in the Satisfaction and Penal Substitutionary models developed later on (Scott, 2007:51).

A third prominent Johannine interpretation, says Scott, revolves around the fact that the writer believes that the atonement effects the believers’ current experience of life in the Spirit. In other words the writer is concerned with the atonement’s bearing on the contemporary relationship of the believer to God and to his/her fellow believers. Hence the writer of 1 John stresses light verses darkness and the need of the believer to ‘go forth in the light’– Jesus’ life as well as death contributing to this possibility– 1 John 1:7. This notion has relevance for the Moral Exemplar model (Scott, 2007:52).

Finally, the book of Revelation which may or may not have been written by the same John of the fourth gospel and the three Epistles that bear his name, points to the following. An atonement notion that reflects the cosmic spiritual battle between the powers of good and evil– thinking that of course is behind the Classic theory of atonement (Weaver, 2001:20).

As time passed for these above mentioned earliest Christians (who had no need to develop a formal atonement theory because its dramatic effects had been enough for them, says Scott). And Jesus did not return as anticipated, the world did not end and persecution persisted, the Church Fathers began to explore the meaning of atonement and salvation in more depth. Later Christian scholars then followed on from here by weaving these diversified notions into various theories or models- some of which hold more truth than others for me, and all of which reflect the context of their times (Scott, 2007:4).

Examples of some of the prominent Eastern Church Fathers responsible for exploring the atonement in more depth are: Irenaeus of Lyon (130-200 CE) who himself was influenced by the earlier atonement thinking firstly of the apostle John, then Ignatius, then Polycarp, and whose atonement thinking became the ‘seeds’ of the Incarnational Classical and Ransom models (Irenaeus, Book 3, Chapter 18, paragraph 6); Origen (185-254 CE) who developed a variation on Irenaeus’ Ransom theme claiming God deliberately tricked Satan by coming to earth as a mere man, Jesus being the “bait” on the fishhook; Athanasius (296–373); Gregory of Nyssa (330–395 CE); Gregory of Nazianzus (329–89 CE) (McGrath, 2001:415).
Three Western Fathers who also explored the Classical and Ransom models of understanding atonement in their own thought were: Ambrose of Milan (339–397 CE); Leo the Great (440-461); Gregory the Great (540-604); Augustine (345–430 CE) who formulated a variation of Irenaeus’ ransom theme by using the image of a mousetrap to illustrate God’s tricking of Satan by coming to earth as a mere man (McGrath, 2001:415).

As a way of ending off this section on “Early Christian Literature,” and before we come to look at the traditional/prevailing models of atonement, I feel it would be beneficial for me at this point to explore the results of some significant historical work published quite recently. This focusses on a Christological consciousness among the first Christians.

In this regard I will be looking at views from Mark Heim, John Koenig and Larry Hurtado who, to my mind, add theological weight to both Weaver’s, and Heim’s and the Incarnational approaches. These writers do this in the sense that all three critique the Anselmian notion that Jesus’ one specific task in the world involved being sent by the Father to die for humankind’s salvation.

Mark Heim in his journal article, Christ Crucified, states the following. The early Christians “were completely captivated by the reality of their salvation which they attributed not just solely to Christ’s death but to the whole of his life, actions and teaching, which for them ran in a seamless unity” (Heim, 2001). They were aware that they were forgiven and in addition they also knew they were new creations living a new transformed and reconciled life in the Spirit, and they rejoiced and gloried in their experience. The early Christians, confirms Scott, really took to heart the sentiments that St Paul writes about in 2 Corinthians 5:17 (Scott, 2007:4). According to the NIV Study Bible, 2 Corinthians 5:17 reads as follows: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! (Barker, 1995:1778).

According to John Koenig in his book “The Feast of the World’s Redemption,” Jesus is not seen in terms of being God or God’s son who comes to die at the request of the Father in order to appease the Father’s wrath on behalf of sinful humankind. In the interpretation of Jesus’ meaning, according to Koenig, a good deal depends on the interpreter’s attitude to the
historical accuracy of the gospels– in other words when did a Christological consciousness which saw Christ as the full revelation of God develop? (Koenig, 2000:40).

Working from a fairly conservative position Koenig argues that Jesus lived in the full knowledge of his mission, which knowledge is captured– to give one specific detail–accurately by the use of the word “covenant” in Mark’s account of the Last Supper which was, therefore, “not so much a farewell meal…as a salvation event…” born of a conviction that in Jesus the Messiah had appeared (which is not to say, as the church later did, that this Messiah was God) (Koenig, 2000:41).

In being a salvation event the last supper was thus an event in which God’s gracious plan for Israel was freshly and definitively revealed and into which the disciples were enlisted more profoundly than ever before via their ritual eating and drinking (Koenig, 2000:41).

Surely we must deduce here that the historical Jesus himself believed his messianic last supper presidency to be transhistorical?– that is, the covenant and the kingdom disclosed in Jesus’ words at table connected him uniquely with Israel’s past and future. Jesus’ presence at the last supper is a presence of “a messiah on the move”— he goes from the meal to his arrest and death, but more significantly, he strives toward the Kingdom in terms of the entire cosmos (Koenig, 2000:41).

The strength of Koenig’s view is that it takes seriously that something drove the extraordinarily powerful mission of the first Christians and that the Last Supper played a critical role in this powerful dynamic. Its weakness is that it assumes a kind of inner certainty in Jesus which may be doctrinal rather than historical, though to be fair to Koenig he presents Jesus quite convincingly as playing a prophetic role of which he was utterly convinced rather than as God (Koenig, 2000:50).

In any event according to Koenig the first Christians worshipped a Jesus who was fully conscious throughout his human existence of his messianic mission, focussed on the task of re-assembling the Twelve Tribes and leading them into the kingdom (Koenig, 2000:40). Fulfilment, Koenig argues correctly, reflects a later development rather than Jesus’ own perception, though Jesus believed in his eschatological leadership of a re-united Israel at the End. This early Christology may be called “Messianic,” rooted in the messianic feast
Jesus had inaugurated, and characterized by celebration and thanksgiving but not by a God-Jesus as developed in later thought (Koenig, 2000:28-29).

In similar vein Larry Hurtado in his book, “Lord Jesus Christ” argues that when the earliest Christians attributed divine sonship to Jesus they did so within biblical and Jewish traditions in which divine sonship didn’t mean divinity but denoted a special favour and relationship with God. Worship of Jesus among the first Christians developed in respect of Jewish monotheism which meant that Jesus was worshipped as the one who in his humanity revealed fully a unique relationship with God who alone was the object of worship. If you like, worship of Jesus was contained within worship of God. Hurtado argues that it was a natural step for later Christians to attribute a pre-existence with God to one who exhibited Jesus’ unique calling (Hurtado, 2003:52).

1.1.2 The ‘Scandal’ of the Cross

I have already touched upon the importance of the atonement in Christian faith. And once again I would like to draw upon the thoughts of James Denny who writes the following in this regard:

It will be admitted by most Christians that if the Atonement, quite apart from precise definitions of it, is anything to the mind, it is everything. It is the most profound of all truths, and the most recreative. It determines more than anything else our conceptions of God, of man, of history, and even of nature; it determines them, for we must bring them all in some way into accord with it. It is the inspiration of all thought, the impulse and the law of all action, the key, in the last resort to all suffering. Whether we call it a fact or a truth, a power or a doctrine, it is that in which the differentia of Christianity, its peculiar and exclusive character, is specifically shown; it is the focus of revelation, the point at which we see deepest into the truth of God, and come most completely under its power. For those who recognize it at all it is Christianity in brief; it concentrates in itself, as in a germ of infinite potency, all that the wisdom, power and love of God mean in relation to sinful men (Denny, 1902: chapter 7) (no page numbers).

Furthermore, in the light of the above, when one considers that today’s general view of atonement holds that the suffering of Christ on the cross is God’s choice, (Alister McGrath confirming for us here that the satisfaction model revolves around “God’s will to execute God’s judgement on us in the person of his Son”) (McGrath, 2001:42) - for me, some very problematical questions are raised. A couple of examples here are questions that revolve
around the character-type that this atonement notion imbues God with, and the permission that this atonement notion gives to oppressors to carry on oppressing.

There are many senses in which interpreters have described the cross as being “scandalous.” According to Thomas Schreiner writing in Beilby and Eddy’s *The Nature of the Atonement*, an example of a more commonly known sense revolves around the extent of humankind’s sinfulness. This, according to Schreiner, is of such great magnitude that it required God’s sending of God’s own son into the world as the only possible appeasement offering capable of satisfying God’s justice and consequently bringing humankind salvation (Beilby & Eddy, 2006:67).

A further example of a more commonly known sense in which the cross is seen to be scandalous revolves around the observation by Steve Chalke that a commitment to penal substitutionary theology immediately moves the sinner from the wrong side of God’s legal ledger to the right side. By way of the innocent Christ paying the price for an extent of human sin, the depth of which humankind in its own strength simply cannot make amends for, instant forgiveness is ours. Our eternal destiny being guaranteed here without our moral behaviour being in any way challenged (Tidball, Hillborn & Thacker 2008: 231).

There is however, one usage of this term- ‘scandalous’ which is not so commonly known. This is the question posed to the very character of God- to God’s use of a cruel instrument of torture, which is what the cross was, as God’s instrument of salvation. This question is posed especially by the intense and unremitting suffering of the great majority of human beings, especially in contexts of poverty, civil war, state oppression, starvation, rampant disease, sexism, racism, ageism and so forth.

Many feminist, womanist, black and contextual theologians, who due to their specific contexts are particularly sensitized to the issues of abuse and oppression, have been led to question the “scandal” of the cross” in this sense. In their essay, “For God so loved the World?” Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole Bohn mention feminist Carter Heyward as rejecting this characterization of God as it makes a loving God, in her view, “into a sadist” the implications of which cannot thus bring about true reconciliation (Carlson Brown & Bohn, 1990:26). Feminist Rita Nakashima Brock, in her essay titled, “And a little Child will lead us,” also rejects this notion of a God who saves via cruelty and torture. She claims here
that this false notion of God reflects God as being abusive, sanctioning of child-abuse/abuse in general on a cosmic scale, and supportive of the evils of patriarchy- God thus being unable to bring about true reconciliation (Carlson Brown & Bohn, 1990:42,43).

In my view the questioning of the cross as God’s cruel instrument of salvation, stems mostly from those coming from a place of suffering/oppression/poverty/racism etc. because their specific contexts here, maybe more so than others, compel them to seek to discern the character of God differently. God to them, in being the loving merciful redeemer that they seek comfort and rescue and liberation in, being surely not one who perpetuates/condones oppression/suffering via the murder/torture of God’s own Son for the purpose of our salvation. But who rather achieves our salvation through God’s loving reconciling desire to bring us into God’s redeeming liberating realm of Kingdom in the here and now and in all eternity through Christ our Saviour.

1.1.3 Different Interpretations of the Cross

Clearly there is more than just one interpretation of the cross and thus more than one way of understanding the work of Christ.

As we read the great interpreters of the cross from the Patristics such as Origen, Jerome, and Augustine, through medieval theologians like Peter Abelard and Thomas Aquinas, to the Reformers like Luther and Calvin. And then through into the beginning of the modern era with someone like Schleiermacher and those closer to us like Bonhoeffer, Bultmann, Pannenberg, Moltmann, plus theologians from contexts of struggle like Sobrino, Marc Ela in Africa, and Radford Ruether and other feminist interpreters. We find that most of their interpretations fit into one or other of the four controlling images of the cross or into a rereading thereof.

According to Alister McGrath in his book, *Christian Theology*, discussions of the meaning of the cross and resurrection of Christ are best grouped around these four central controlling themes or images which are not mutually exclusive. Many theologies embrace overlapping elements from within the various themes, or in a more contemporary setting formulate a new view based on a re-reading of an already established theme such as J Denny
Weaver’s re-reading of the Christus Victor theme (Weaver, 2001:7). The four central images are: Classic Christus Victor; Satisfaction (substitutionary); Satisfaction (penal); Moral exemplary⁸ (McGrath, 2001:411-429).

As far as I can see, few people have as yet articulated a theory much different from one of the four controlling images. Each theory though, may itself contain a huge range of different interpretations. One has to think very hard before one realizes, for example, that the contemporary El Salvadorian liberation theologian, Jon Sobrino, is in fact also interpreting the cross under the rubric of a reworked version of the classic Christos Victor motif. This motif of course has a working assumption that rejects violence. And thus it rejects the killing of Jesus as an act required to satisfy divine justice, or as proclaiming the “rightness of submission to abusive authority” in this world, or as being as a result of the Father’s need to redeem humankind (Sobrino, 2006:221-226)

Another example of a contemporary rereading of one of the four controlling images of the cross would be that of Latin American liberation theologian Jose Bonino’s interpretation of the cross. His is also a reworked version of the classic Christus Victor model- one that has a working assumption that spurns violence- in other words it rejects the killing of Jesus as being the result of the Father’s requirement to rescue humanity. For Bonino in his Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation the historical significance of Jesus’ death lies in the fact that Jesus was a subversive. And in this particular role he took the side of the poor and oppressed against the constituted religious and political authorities, and died for his cause at their hands (Bonino, 1986:122-123).

A further and closer to home contemporary example of a rereading of one of the four controlling images of the cross is that of South African black theologian Buti Tlhagale. In his essay, On Violence: A Township Perspective Tlhagale gives us clues that his atonement motif is also that of a reworked Christus Victor model. It is one that has a working assumption that exonerates God the Father from violence, in that Tlhagale views Christ as dying as a result of his opposition to injustice in the world (Mosala & Tlhagale, 1985:148-149).

⁸ Please refer to Appendix A at the end of this dissertation for a more detailed background exposition of these traditional/classical models
However, in having made this point Tlhagale further suggests that Christ’s usually accepted to be, nonviolent stance in opposing oppression/violence, may in some cases (such as in the ongoing entrenched oppression of the past apartheid era in South Africa), require to be reassessed. Violence here, says Tlhagale requires ultimately to be seen to be justified in the name of Christ. An interesting viewpoint and issue here that I will deal with more fully in the course of my dissertation (Mosala & Tlhagale, 1985:148-149).

1.1.4 Reasons for Lack of other Views

In my opinion the main reason for a lack of other views on the atonement was fear of placing too much emphasis on the resurrection- Luther and Barth according to McGrath, being so frightened of the salvific concentration on the resurrection that they entitled such a theology a theologia gloria. A theologia gloria according to McGrath is that which adheres to an understanding of revelation/knowledge of God in creation and history. This is in contrast to a theologia crucis. This is a theology that embraces a Christocentric view of revelation/knowledge of God through his sufferings and cross. And this theology was of course to Luther and Barth the only biblically-based and thus acceptable type of theology. The Reformers’ slogan sola scriptura confirming here, the Reformers’ fundamental belief that Scripture (and their interpretation of it) was the sole necessary and sufficient source of Christian theology (McGrath, 2001:69)

It is within the Heidelberg Disputation\textsuperscript{10} that we find Luther contrasting these two rival ways of thinking about God, his rejected theologia gloria perceiving God’s glory power and wisdom in creation, his accepted theologia crucis discerning God hidden in the suffering and humiliation of the cross (McGrath, 2001:275).

\textsuperscript{9} Van Niekerk, in confirming McGrath’s point here indicates that one of the biggest problems as to why so few have articulated a theory much different from one of the four classic theories is: “the substantive lack of the resurrection as God’s main liberative and salvific tool as the overarching definition of salvation and thus of the cross” (Van Niekerk, 2007).

\textsuperscript{10} Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 captures the heart of his theology wherein he displays a dramatically restrictive view of revelation. God revealed Godself in the incarnation and supremely on the cross— the cross being the point at which God appeared to be the very contradiction of all that one might reasonably have anticipated God to be. The theologians of glory therefore are those who construct their theology in the light of what they expect God to be like, and not in terms of God’s own revelation of Godself— which is God hanging on a cross (Trueeman, 2011).
In his book *The Crucified God* Jurgen Moltmann argues that Reformist Martin Luther’s “theology of the cross” is not so much an attack on medieval Catholic theology per se (as some defenders of Anselm wrongly assume). But what he (Luther) recognised in it—humankind’s concern for self-deification via knowledge and works.

Just as Paul contrasted the wisdom of this world and the folly of the cross, and in parallel with this, also contrasted righteousness by the works of the law and the scandal of the cross. So Luther, according to Moltmann brought together the notion of a religious way to knowledge through the contemplation of the works of God and the notion of a moral way of self-affirmation via one’s own works, and directed the theologia crucis against both (Moltmann, 2008:67-68).

However, according to Moltmann’s interpretation of Paul’s salvation theology, the ‘word of the cross’ is based in the event of the resurrection of the crucified Christ; but it is a message about the cross of Christ. Nevertheless, Paul, according to Moltmann, did not comprehend the resurrection of Christ as an episode that merely followed Christ’s demise, but as an eschatological event that characterized the earthly crucified Jesus as the *Kyrios*. On the basis of the resurrection of Christ as an event of the crucified Christ, he spoke in his gospel of the ‘cross of the risen Christ’ and worked out its importance for the godless, albeit Jews or Gentiles (Moltmann, 2008:70).

According to Moltmann, Paul’s gospel, which Paul expresses in his theology of the cross claims to be the one revelation of the crucified Christ in the light of his resurrection from the dead. A deceased man cannot forgive sins. The gospel, as the present forgiveness of sins, says Moltmann, assumes the new, divine, eschatological life of the crucified Christ, and is itself the ‘spirit’ and the present power of the resurrection (Moltmann, 2008:70).

Thus according to the Moltmann understanding of both Paul and revelation here (which is also an understanding that I resonate with and intend to pursue in this dissertation), in the ‘word of the cross’ the crucified Christ himself speaks. Resultantly the occurrence of revelation consists not only of the event of the cross of Christ, but also in the events of resurrection, Pentecostal outpouring, and the preaching of the gospel (Moltmann, 2008:71).
1.1.5 A Greater Awareness of Acute Suffering

We live in the shadow of a greater awareness of acute suffering caused by two world wars, the atom bomb, the holocaust, and the increasingly obvious effects of global structural poverty, environmental degradation and the oppressive and pervasive evils of abuse. We know these sufferings through the media, and through human rights legislation we know they shouldn’t be. When one combines this knowledge with the knowledge that Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God– and the knowledge that the kingdom of God was what Jesus preached is only about a century old (Sobrino, 2006:105). Then we know that the human suffering and abuse we see all around is certainly not God’s kingdom.

In the light of this pervasive suffering and abuse in our world, the question is posed: how could God demand the death of an innocent man to save the world? This question intensifies when one considers that this innocent man was God’s own Son: how could the divine Father demand his own Son’s death as the way to save the world? These questions are pertinent because they lead us to address the issue/problem within the popular/general view of revelation today. A view that points to Christ’s suffering on the cross as being God the Father’s own atoning choice for us- a view that in depicting the person of God as being violent and abusive, therefore condones violence/abuse/oppression in the world.

1.1.6 A Reductionist Viewpoint of God’s Revelation

In a secondary sense for me these questions are also pertinent because as Christ-followers, we want to grow Christians who understand their faith. And can find real concrete relevance and purpose in it, can explain and argue for it in the marketplace and can prophetically challenge the world based on a real belief in, and passion for, their faith.

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11 In suggesting that our knowledge that Jesus preached the kingdom of God is only about a century old, I am drawing on the views of liberation theologian Jon Sobrino in his book Jesus as Liberator-views which Roger Haight combines with his own similar views in his book Jesus Symbol of God (Haight, 2005:76). This is a more modernistic view that reflects an understanding of God’s kingdom that goes beyond the simple comprehension of God’s kingdom as being that which reflects religious virtues. Rather, in the genre of liberation theology, this more recent understanding of Kingdom consists more in a social political situation in which humankind whose essence is freedom, thrives. Thus kingdom is a historical reality that is sought- a transformed social condition that stands opposed to the anti-kingdom of injustice.
McGrath confirms that such questions indeed point to the fact that when we as modern people usually talk about the cross we are interpreting it’s meaning in terms of a faith which is based on a reductionist viewpoint of God’s revelation. This reduces God’s revelation to being that which is interpreted exclusively to revolve around Jesus Christ as the reconciliatory agent of God (in the sense here that God’s revelation is reduced to the person of Christ whom God sends to die on the cross to save humankind) (McGrath, 2001:204).

In summing up, this reductionist understanding of revelation is problematical for me in two ways: firstly it is one widely accepted in modernity, the reductionist viewpoint of the Christ-centeredness of God’s revelation being a 20th century notion which has Karl Barth as its main protagonist. Barth, according to Hugh Kerr in his Readings in Christian Thought, states emphatically here that “revelation in fact does not differ from the Person of Jesus Christ and again does not differ from the reconciliation that took place in him– to say revelation is to say Jesus Christ!” (Kerr, 1985:296).

Secondly, if there is talk of revelation, my model of choice (which can be used in such a way as to exonerate God from violence) can be labelled a non-reductionist doctrinal model (as opposed to Barth’s reductionist model). According to Alister McGrath in his book Christian Theology, this non-reductionist doctrinal model consists of biblically-based- (OT and NT) and church tradition-based “referential information about the nature of God,” pointing to the fact that “God has not abandoned God’s purpose to have us as God’s friends. Instead, God has resolved in God’s love to rescue us from sin and restore us to Godself. God’s plan for doing this being to make Godself known to us as our Redeemer and re-Creator through all of the following: the incarnation, death, resurrection and reign of God’s Son” (McGrath, 2001:203).

This means that God’s saving plan for us does not simply revolve around a cruel child-abusing God sending God’s Son to die as an appeasement offering for our sins. But rather God’s plan revolves around the Son saving us by way of the following. The Son becoming flesh- and thus divinely consecrating all of creation itself; and hereby showing us
by his own gracious life, death and resurrection how to live as restored Kingdom beings in
the power of his Holy Spirit in a world that is God’s sacrosanct gift to us all.\(^{12}\)

According to Beilby and Eddy in their book, \textit{“The Nature of the Atonement,”} among
those recently and significantly fuelling the debate regarding the person and work of Christ
are the following: the voices of women; adherents of the work of literary critic Rene Girard
and his scapegoat theory of ritual violence; those who are endeavouring to identify the most
suitable atonement image out of so many biblical possibilities, the New Testament alone–
according to Beilby and Eddy offering no less than 10 motifs– i.e.–
conflict/victory/liberation;/ vicarious suffering; archetypal (i.e. representative man, pioneer,
forerunner, firstborn); martyr; sacrifice; expiation/wrath of God; redemption; reconciliation;
justification and adoption-family (Beilby & Eddy, 2006:10).

According to J. Denny Weaver in his \textit{The Nonviolent Atonement} the preoccupation
with modern atonement theology with its past Anselmian connection has mainly engaged
Protestants above Catholics. This is because Catholics are accorded saving grace via the
sacraments and therefore have not sensed the same need to guarantee access to God’s grace
via a correct atonement doctrine (Weaver, 2001:2). As confirmation of Protestant
preoccupation with atonement theology we have John Wesley himself saying, “Nothing in
the Christian system is of greater consequence than the atonement doctrine” (Beilby & Eddy,
2006:9).

The general observation that a modern preoccupation with atonement theology has
mainly engaged Protestants, is further supported by David Hilborn in his article from the
book entitled, \textit{“The Atonement Debate– (Papers from the London symposium on the theology
of atonement).} Here Hilborn confirms that there is little doubt that the evangelical tradition is
distinguished by a large emphasis on the cross of Christ and on the atonement accomplished
via his death. Others like Alister McGrath and Derek Tidball agree that “where others place
the doctrines of creation or of incarnation, evangelical place the atonement, it being quite
simply, the heart of evangelicalism” (Tidball, Hilborn & Thacker, 2008:15-16).

\(^{12}\) In light of what I’ve just said here, I agree with Van Niekerk when he says “revelation can only be interpreted
through God’s glorious acts of \textit{creation of everything- incarnation, reconciliation (cross and resurrection),
renewal} (Pentecost’s ongoing affirmation of the salvific newness of the resurrective elements in our lives in this
era already) and \textit{consummation and fulfilment} towards the end- (this in very late theology being called the
Eschaton and Eschatology, dealing with things of the end)”– these realities having meaning for us as Christians
only as they derive their meaning from Christ. (Van Niekerk, 2007).
Irrespective of a person’s persuasion however, the prevailing choice for much of the past millennium has been for Anselm with Abelard as the minority alternative. However Weaver says the classic theory has gained prominence in the latter part of the 20th century through Gustav Aulen’s renewal and popularisation of this motif in his Christus Victor, thus making it a viable alternative to both Anselm and Abelard (Weaver, 2001:2).

Recently when popular evangelical leader Steve Chalke in his book “The Lost Message of Jesus” appeared to denounce the notion that God was punishing Christ in our place on the cross as a “twisted version of events,” “morally dubious,” and a “huge barrier to faith.” And thus suggested the notion should be jettisoned in favour of proclaiming only that God is love– enormous controversy was fanned into flame. Many had thought the notion of penal substitution was at least at the core of the evangelical comprehension of the cross, if not the only legitimate interpretation of the death of Christ. As a result of Chalke’s claims a heated public debate ensued amongst evangelicals, the result of which ended in a series of papers being written by various leading scholars to act as some form of reconciliation and to air a variation of evangelical views on a highly complex issue.

Yet in my estimation the overall outcome/conclusion here, published in the book called “The Atonement debate” (edited by Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker), is still mainly to defend and affirm the satisfaction atonement notion and its variants. These being notions of atonement that to my mind and others, portray God as most directly and wrathfully being involved in divine violence. Chalke however does take it upon himself to challenge the extreme harshness and violence of penal language. He prefers rather to couch God’s need for violence in more gentle language by appealing to the necessity of Christ’s death as being an act of love of the Father and Son for their creation as is in the Christus Victor model. In the Christus Victor model of course, Christ’s life, death and resurrection are seen as his victory over evil and sin (Tidball & Hilborn & Thacker, 2008:44).

Evangelical scholar Tom Wright in embracing a similar view to Chalke (and Hans Boersma in Boersma’s Violence Hospitality and the Cross, of which I will say more later), say in defence of Chalke “the angry violent imagery of the word “penal” puts many people off” (Tidball & Hilborn & Thacker, 2008:44).
In an article in the theological journal, *Christian Century*, entitled Christ Crucified, as well as in his book, “*Saved from Sacrifice*” Mark Heim relays an incident underlining current uneasiness with the cross which took place at a recent theological “re-imagining” conference. Here womanist theologian Delores Williams commented on the topic of atonement by saying: “I don’t think we need a theory of atonement at all. I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff”........... (Heim, 2006:20).

Heim claims that comment resulted in a knee-jerk expression of outrage which revealed a nerve had been struck in many regarding this painful topic. “Yet for others,” says Heim, “the statement carried with it a sigh of relief: So I’m not the only one who never got it or bought it.”(Heim, 2001).

For Heim and for many other contemporary Christians, the above is indicative of much current apprehension and incoherence around the issue of the cross, *an absolute key image of the Christian faith*. “For example,” says Heim, “it seems that when in a liturgical setting and the Lord’s Supper is focused upon. And thus when there’s also focus on sacrifice—(because many understand the meaning of sacrifice in a narrow and distorted sense as is reflected in the substitutionary atonement motif), much unease and discomfort results.” Consequently in many Protestant congregations the Lord’s Supper has become a ritual affirmation of the spiritual equality of the participants, their mutual commitment to each other, and their shared hope for a future society with a just distribution of resources. Heim goes on to assert that even the Eucharist of the Roman Catholics, once soaked in sacrificial emphasis, can now be encountered in forms that focus mainly on *celebration of community*—with as it were “a few moments silence spent on the untimely death of our late brother.” (Heim, 2001).

Heim concludes these changes in ritual practice are often indicative of attempts made to regain a liturgical fullness that a narrow highlighting on sacrifice had distorted. Within early Christian faith Jesus’ life actions and teaching ran as a seamless unity alongside his passion and death. In following centuries however, Heim confirms observations that the church has erred by way of subsequently placing too much emphasis only on his death giving the impression that this is the only truly important thing about Jesus’ life (Heim, 2001).
Yet simultaneously Heim asserts, the attempts by some to build a notion of Jesus that leaves out any stress on the death, emphasising rather his message and teaching without reference to his own fate are without distinctive Christian character, and are implausible as history. John Crossan’s reconstruction of the historical Jesus is a case in point here, Crossan’s work fitting in well with a widespread disinclination to dwell on Jesus’ death factually or theoretically (Heim, 2001).

Many today find Christ’s death as a fact represented by tradition, art and in a literary sense, highly morbid– a recent example here, according to Heim, being of an Australian state education department banning a passion play due to the department’s complete ban on violence in schools. Ironic as it may seem when one considers the TV, movies and video games the world is exposed to, Christians (the majority of whom whether they are aware of it or not, are familiar mainly with the substitution notion of atonement), can find the crucifixion an embarrassing primitive barbarism, with the theory and doctrine most closely linked with the cross also evoking an uneasy tension (Heim, 2001).

1.2 Why J. Denny Weaver and S. Mark Heim?

As a woman, a proponent of feminist theology, someone with a burden for injustice of any sort and especially Third World suffering and the abuse of the environment on my heart, and having myself experienced suffering, ostracism and persecution in terms of my gender and calling as a priest in the Anglican church, I naturally feel a great deal of resonance with my sister theologians and others in their questioning of the assumption of violence which lies behind all classical atonement models.

An example of a further scholar questioning the assumption of such violence is Roger Haight in his *Jesus Symbol of God*, who when considering what Jesus did for our salvation according to these models, makes the following comment: “One of the most serious problems for understanding today what Jesus did for human salvation is the traditional focus that Christians place on the suffering and death of Jesus. Even more troubling is the positive valuation they place on Jesus’ death on a cross. How can the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus be anything but evil? How can the strange and tortuous explanations of how the cross
could have been positive and salvific even begin to make sense to a postmodern imagination?” (Haight, 2005:345).

The notion that any one of the traditional atonement notions can be salvific is, as I’ve said, an assumption that I intend to critique and challenge within the course of this dissertation. This will happen specifically as I place my support behind alternate motifs wherein their proponents grapple with the issue of exonerating God from divine violence– in particular those of J. Denny Weaver and his narrative Christus Victor Motif in his “The Nonviolent Atonement,” and S. Mark Heim’s Girardian views in his “Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross.” I have particularly chosen to engage with the work of Weaver and Heim because their approaches both strive for nonviolence in atonement and yet their thinking and methodologies are very diverse- a factor that I hope stretches and deepens the scope of my own research and conclusions in this dissertation.

Heim’s book draws on the work of the French philosopher and biblical scholar Rene Girard and asserts along with Girard that the cross must be understood against the whole history of human scapegoating violence. Yet Heim goes beyond Girard by way of developing a more comprehensive and more substantial theology of the atonement and the cross via his fresh readings of well-known biblical passages and his exploration of the place of the victim. Although lending support to Weaver’s motif in terms of its opposition to the notion of violence in atonement, Heim’s approach which embraces a totally differing methodology disagrees with Weaver’s on a number of issues. This is especially so with regard to Weaver’s embrace of total nonviolence as an underpinning working assumption for his entire theology and thus his choice to simply bypass large tracts of scripture containing sacrificial images (Heim, 2006:7).

13Another scholar who grapples with the issue of exonerating God from divine violence is for example Theodore Jennings in his Transforming Atonement: A Political Theology of the Cross, in which he specifically grounds the cross in the concrete political confrontation within which it occurred. Furthermore his understanding here relates the message about the cross to the practice of Jesus (thus keeping together the Gospels and the theology of Paul). Jennings comments on the, according to him, erroneous thinking behind the satisfaction model in the following way: “The use of patently unjust means to achieve allegedly just aims is enshrined here as the very action of God in Christ, thereby legitimating the manifold ways in which this perspective has played a decisive role in the history of human injustice. Most recently we have been reminded by feminist scholars of the ways in which this view has served as a template for domestic abuse– not only of women, but most particularly of children” (Jennings, 2009:219).
My aim in this dissertation is to move away from the approach of traditional theology and the manner in which it builds a salvific quality into the cross—my intention being not to look at the cross from the narrow perspective of cruciform faith but more from a resurrection perspective. Yet this is not to say that I disregard the importance of the incarnation which is a doctrine that I hope to use as a way of complementing my approach here.14

God is the ‘beyond’ in the midst of our lives, to quote the words of Bonhoeffer from the book *The Wisdom and Witness of Dietriech Bonhoeffer* (Floyd, 2000:69), precisely because of the following. The Spirit of God raised Jesus from the dead and Pentecost is the affirmation and vindication of the resurrection. This is so in the sense that the Spirit remains the tangible living proof of the resurrection’s victory in ushering in a new and transformed era that offers us the choice of Kingdom living, both spiritual and concrete, even now. We are saved— at-one-with God— not on the basis of the cross alone but primarily because of Jesus’ resurrection.

Van Niekerk claims that theologians from Paul to Augustine to Luther to Karl Barth had a total under-emphasis on the resurrection as God’s liberative and salvific tool. How much emphasis one places on the cross as opposed to the resurrection or on the resurrection as opposed to the cross is all a question of focus— and what steers one’s focus will depend upon which model of atonement one formulates or buys into when formulating one’s faith15

As a feminist who is a proponent of the nonviolent character of God in the sense that God is merciful rather than vengeful apropos God’s requiring of quid pro quo justice for human sin. And of the consequent striving to formulate an understanding of the passion that portrays God in this light. I have found the views of Weaver and Heim, and various liberation

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14 As Van Niekerk rightly says— “precisely the lone cross on the hill viewed as the space of suffering and passion of Christ and sometimes even the place of God’s suffering and death without the resurrection twinning up with the crucifixion as together they form God’s main salvific tools is traditional butchery theology with blood and suffering all over the hillside without the salvation, liberation and empowerment of the resurrection which is the actual salvific goal of the cross” (Van Niekerk, 2007)

15 Thus, inquires Van Niekerk, does one place one’s emphasis on the cross, and as an appendix the resurrection is treated with a focus of its own— or is the focus for one in one’s faith experience, on the process or movement (as Van Niekerk describes it) “from cross to resurrection as centre of the message of reconciliation and salvation as one grand act of God in the meandering of the Kingdom of God through, in and with God’s grand acts of creation, reconciliation (cross and resurrection), renewal (Pentecost) and consummation (eschaton) which are all four revelatory acts of God— God’s revelation thus not being just in Jesus Christ alone (Van Niekerk, 2007).
theologians, namely black, feminist, womanists resonating a lot with my own views. Yet although they go a long way, none of these views in my opinion, as we shall see, are able in the broadest scheme of things, to totally absolve God of all violence.

In accordance with my above introduction, my main intentions within this dissertation are to:

- Conduct a helpful prescript probe into the development of a Christological consciousness among the early Christians which I have already done in my introduction and the implications of which will become more evident;
- Conduct a background analysis of the major classical/traditional atonement models which I offer as an appendix at the end of this dissertation;
- Describe the work of Weaver and Heim along with various other theologians, such as contextual theologians/Hans Boersma whose work is helpful and or pertinent to my argument;
- Consider and critique the views of some modern-day proponents of Anselm along the way;
- Analyse Weaver and Heim’s differing understandings as to how and why Anselm went off course;
- State which approach out of Weaver’s and Heim’s resonates most feasibly for me, in terms of its attempt to portray a nonviolent atonement;
- Consider some serious critiques of the work of Weaver and Heim;
- Consider the role the incarnation should play in one’s understanding of atonement;
- Finally explore the implications of nonviolent atonement in terms of orthopraxis within my own experience.

1.3 The Way Forward

At this point in my dissertation before getting into the main meat of my work, I proceed to describe for my readers in a complete overview, what they can expect to find in my dissertation.

So far in my Chapter One (of which my above introduction is a part), I have amongst other things, included an important presentation of a sketch of some recent work that explores
A Christological consciousness among the first Christians. I see this as being necessary as it shows that early Christians understood Jesus’ mission (rescue of humankind) much more along the lines of understanding contained within a nonviolent model of atonement as opposed to a substitutionary understanding. I will argue that this substitutionary understanding is a much later understanding based on erroneous thinking on the part of Anselm and then other later reformer theologians such as Luther and Barth whose aim was to avoid a theologia gloria. The Christological consciousness of the early Christians adds weight to an argument for a nonviolent notion of atonement and is thus a necessary addition to my dissertation.

Hereafter as a background to my work, I offer in an appendix at the end of my dissertation, a brief exposition of the thinking behind the traditional atonement motifs comprising the Substitutionary Abelardian and Christus Victor motifs. I also point out here that with some changes to its thinking the traditional Christus Victor model, as we shall see, can become a basis for the thinking behind nonviolent atonement motifs.

Next, my dissertation proceeds into its second chapter wherein I explore the nonviolent atonement views of J Denny Weaver. In an introduction section to Weaver’s work I show that he structures his approach in the following way. Firstly he proposes his complete suggestion for atonement from a nonviolent perspective. This for him entails his utilization of post-modern thinking wherein it is assumed that there can never be just one universal truth but rather that one’s perception of truth hinges on one’s context. Thus as a Mennonite Weaver takes the liberty in his approach to review Christian sources such as scripture and church history in a new light. As a consequence his atonement notion comes to pivot on an entire theology that has a working assumption wherein the rejection of violence is key. This biblical image recounts the narrative of Jesus within the history in which we live and it is a model that attributes cosmic meaning to events in the realm of history. Jesus is a nonviolent saviour who confronts the reign of Satan with the reign of God nonviolently.

My second section on Weaver’s work entitled Narrative Christus Victor in Six Biblical Milieus shows him selecting and unpacking six key biblical milieus for the purpose of showing that the rejection of violence is actually an integral part of the reign of God in history. These are Revelation; the Gospels; the work of philosopher Rene Girard; Paul; OT sacrifices; Hebrews; Israel’s history.
My third section on Weaver entitled *Narrative Christus Victor: some Comparisons and its Expiration* features him comparing in more detail how Narrative Christus Victor differs from the traditional atonement motifs. Establishing that unlike in the traditional motifs, God in narrative Christus Victor is not responsible for Jesus’ death, he shows that this understanding also puts an entirely different spin on our understanding of grace and forgiveness; free will and predestination; justice and mercy of God; ethics; atonement in history.

Also in my third section, Weaver then considers narrative Christus Victor in terms of the history of doctrine and gives an explanation for its expiration. He argues here that this biblical motif is also an image of ecclesiology. In a version of church history that is unconventional, Weaver claims that Narrative Christus Victor was an image fully understood and embraced by the early Church. The Constantinian shift in 325AD however in his view obliterated the early Church’s view of a nonviolent saviour who confronts and ultimately defeats the reign of Satan, nonviolently for the sake of our salvation.

Here I relay Weaver’s argument that with the church’s support of the state, and with the social order no longer requiring challenging and confrontation, this situation subsequently gave Anselm a platform to seek out how individuals are saved. And furthermore that by way of being influenced by his feudalistic context Anselm came by the notion that God’s honour which has been affronted by our sin requires appeasement. The erroneous switch in atonement understanding from a nonviolent God confronting and defeating the reign of Satan in the world for our salvation, to a violent God requiring the Son’s death as an appeasement was born in this way according to Weaver. In this my third section on Weaver’s work I also mention Weaver’s observation that although the abstract Nicean/Chalcedonian Christological creeds of 325 and 451 do not negate the notion of a nonviolent atonement, they nevertheless do nothing to further it. This is because they are based within the context of the Greek philosophical thinking of the time.

In moving on to section four of Weaver’s work I feature his *dialoguing with black, feminist and womanist theologies*. I show that the reason Weaver embarks on this exercise is because in also opposing the abusive traditional atonement notions, the insights of these various theologies broaden and add weight to his own approach. They show that violence has many forms apart from the violence of the sword, such as racism, sexism etc. Weaver does
however show in the end that many of the feminist and womanist approaches are mere variations of Abelard and thus do not in his opinion steer clear of the violence of God in atonement that they set out to do.

My fifth and final section dealing with Weaver’s work is entitled, *Conversing with Anselm and his Defenders*. This revolves around concluding conversations Weaver has with both Anselm and his defenders. In his rejection of Anselm’s motif Weaver claims that Anselm fails to focus on the fading (and unpopular at the time) traditional Christus Victor image. And rather, from his feudal setting perspective sees humankind’s sinfulness as revolving around a withholding of obedience to God. In this understanding, in order to rescue us from this alienation Jesus the perfect obedient son goes to his death so as to pay the debt we sinners owe to God’s honour. Although God does not directly coerce the son into dying in this scenario Weaver still regards Anselm’s version as being violent. Weaver also has an answer for those who defend Anselm’s notion from accusations that it portrays and fosters violence. He accuses those who attempt to redefine punishment in a positive light such as William Placher; or attempt to rehabilitate images of blood and sacrifice for the modern world such as David Wheeler; or who attempt to reemphasize images of suffering in a nonviolent light by using the Trinity, of still ultimately being unable to break free from portraying God as violent.

Lastly in this fifth section I examine Weaver’s concluding definition of his motif, Narrative Christus Victor: the nonviolent Christ. Here Weaver points out that in the end Anselm’s mistake when describing how Christ rescues humankind revolves around Anselm leaving the devil out of the equation. By putting the devil back into the equation Weaver points out that this move exonerates God from violence. And it reveals the son’s death to have come about from his conflict with Satan who in Weaver’s thinking is not a personified entity but is manifest rather in the evil political, social and structural powers in the world.

In my Chapter Three, I move on to examine the work of S. Mark Heim beginning with an introduction wherein I explain the meaning of his Girardian context. And also the fact that he sees the reconciliatory act between God and humankind as a question and a problem— a groping in the dark for answers. I convey his view that the variation within tradition when it comes to understanding the cross adds confusion to its interpretation. And then I point out the specific anthropological perspective Heim gives to the cross as regards its
specific saving purpose within the entire saving work of Christ. I relay that he views the Bible as an antisacrificial text. And point out his approach is to limit his scope to that of examining what the distinctive saving significance of the cross is within the whole saving work of Christ. As an act of love why was that particular kind of death important? And furthermore can we make sense of the categories of sacrifice and substitution in a way that does not require their jettisoning or render the Father a vengeful child-abuser (which is of course an atonement notion abhorrent to Heim and to many).

Heim’s goal is to show that this is possible. And I consequently show him setting out to demonstrate the following. Jesus dies for our sins in order to save us not due to any need on the Father’s part for appeasement. But rather in the sense that Jesus’ death exemplifies a specific kind of sin we are all implicated in and we all need saving from, and it acts to overcome it. Only the divine power of resurrection and revelation could do that. In Jesus’ death God uses our sin of scapegoating violence as an occasion to save us from that sin. The result is that victims become harder to hide and another basis for peace (love and reconciliation) needs to be found other than unity in violence. I show that for Heim this is the eschatological saving act of God in Christ. With regard specifically to the cross, it is how God in Christ rescues us.

In my introduction to Heim’s work I also touch on Heim’s thinking as regards Anselm’s mistake. And that according to Heim this revolves around the fact that because there is a saving act of God in the cross and a sinful human act, and the two are so close together they are easily mixed up in our understanding and our theology. Thus Anselm’s mistake regarding the cross is to place God on the side of humankind who according to Girard’s research on mimetic violence require sacrifice of an innocent victim in order to rescue itself from evil and chaos and restore societal peace and reconciliation.

At this point at the end of my introduction I also sketch a layout of the rest of Heim’s book. I describe it as being separated off into three sections that attempt to reflect how we may construe the death of Jesus theologically today by inter-relating three dimensions of meaning with regard to the cross. These three dimensions can be taken in a number of ways: as layers of meaning in the scriptural texts; as three cumulative stages in historical development; as three aspects of revelation. We cannot view all sides of a three dimensional
object at once says Heim, but all three have to be kept in mind if we desire to understand the whole.

After my introduction and before I launch into Heim’s three main sections mentioned above I move on to briefly draw attention to five serious accusations Heim makes against substitution atonement. The accusations are the following: it deals with the unintelligible language of sacrifice; being anti-Semitic; being just another tale among many of a dying and rising God; being spiritually immature in its embrace of unsophisticated symbolism; producing toxic psychological and social conditions.

Next, I move on to the first of Heim’s three main sections. In Section One: Things Concealed from the Foundation of the World I discuss Heim’s first dimension of meaning-the mythological side of the cross. He shows here how the narrative of Jesus fits into a pre-existing pattern and revolves around that plot in a way that it exposes it for the myth that it is. Even with their violence and bloodshed, the passion narratives and the scriptures on the whole are able to expose the pre-existing pattern for the myth that it is. This first section of Heim’s thus shows that within the ant sacrificical text of the Bible we come to hear the grievances of the sacrificed. The bible reveals that sacrifice is not the source of creation but a strategy to deal with a fallen creation. Thus the voice of the scapegoat such as that which is heard in many of the Psalms, the story of Abel, Joseph, Job, the voice of the prophets, clearly comes through.

Discussing the next part of Heim’s work- Section Two: Visible Victim- The Cross we cannot Fail to Recall brings us specifically to the passion narratives and to their reinterpretation of Jesus’ death. I show Heim identifying the focus here as being the paradox deeply rooted in the Gospels: Jesus’ death saves the world and it ought not to happen. Heim desires to show that this puzzle is the key to the drama in the passion accounts and to the interpretation of the subsequent differing types of atonement theories. The narrative is comprised of two stories superimposed one on top of the other. One portrays Jesus’ slaying as a type of sacrificial business as usual says Heim. The other is of God’s saving purpose played out in the script of the first story, but to different effect. Thus Heim moves to show that we interpret the crucifixion through the lens of the treatment of sacrifice in the Hebrew Scriptures. The exposing of violence and murder of an innocent victim is revealed. And I show that this, for Heim, is the first truly supernatural event of the cross. Redemptive
violence is revealed as a sinful human construct. Throughout the New Testament we see God is not its originator but the one crushed by it.

Specifically in the book of Acts Heim shows the early Christians perceiving sacrificial violence as a major focus of Jesus’ saving work. Paul, in Romans confirms that Christ becomes a sacrifice in the sense that God enters into the position of the victim in sacrificial atonement and occupies it so as to reverse sacrifice and redeem humankind from it. Satan in the New Testament is perceived as a supernatural transpersonal evil power and the driving force behind Jesus’ demise, and not God. The Paraclete on the otherhand in being the opposite of Satan is the power that continues to convict the world of the wrongness of scapegoating. The writer of the Book of Hebrews points to Jesus as the mediator of a new covenant that in his blood, unlike Abel’s does not spark revenge.

Heim finally in his acknowledgement of the New Testament’s recognition of Jesus in antisacrificial terms, points to the Christus Victor image drawn on by the early church as being a worthy basis upon which to build an explanation as to how Jesus reconciles us. And although the traditional ransom versions of this model have their problems Heim acknowledges that it is an apt image for showing that the worldly evil powers were responsible for Jesus’ death and not God.

From the beginning however Heim notes there was a strong tendency to assimilate this new vision regarding the crucifixion of Jesus into the mythical pattern it was breaking, the elements of Gnosticism and anti-Semitism being two examples here which round off Heim’s section two.

Hereafter I move on to Heim’s Section Three: In Memory of Me- The Cross that Faith keeps Unoccupied and show it as being that which follows the story from the New Testament into the early church and later history. Christ’s resurrection undoes the “good” of sacrifice which is an undoing that brings not only hope of eternal life but also an apocalyptic challenge: How can human societies live without sacrifice? Heim lets us know that we can learn here that the primary impact of Jesus’ death is not mere revelation but requires an additional transformation on humankind’s part. Heim points out further that personal conversion via an empowerment of the Holy Spirit and a new form of social reconciliation is required. The resurrection of Jesus brought with it not vengeance but a new community that
used varying elements (such as baptism and Eucharist) as aids towards their identification with the crucified one and those placed in a similar situation.

In his third section I show Heim also addressing a number of related issues. The first is suffering which he claims is only godly if it is in place not for the sake of suffering alone (as can be wrongly deduced via a satisfaction understanding) but for the sake of opposing the powers and structures of evil in the world and furthering the reign of the kingdom. Heim also addresses the issue of violence wherein unlike Weaver, he claims his notion of atonement cannot speak against all aspects of violence for Christians but only those aspects which appear in the ambit of sacrificial violence. Heim also converses with liberation theologies in this section showing that the issue of scapegoating sacrifice around which he builds his approach provides a clear link- the element of social, structural, and political violence- that connects all liberation theologies. In dealing with apocalyptic literature, Heim in addition shows here that in his opinion it is not indicative of a violent wrathful God but rather it confronts us with judgement. It shows us what will happen when the old reconciling power of sacred violence shrivels and a new way of peace fails, leaving two distinct paths wherein for each the cross has a catalytic role. Society either tears itself apart or it learns to live without scapegoating.

I discuss also the way in which Heim sees both the Abelardian and Anselmian atonement versions veering off track so as to end up as being those erroneously based upon violence. As a start Heim points out that because there are some biblical texts in existence that indeed endorse the necessity of scapegoating the danger exists that atonement theology will interpret the antisacrificial elements in terms of the more mythical ones. I show that in Heim’s opinion the mistake the influential penal substitution notion of atonement makes hinges upon exactly this. It makes Jesus our principal scapegoat rather than our saviour from sacrifice.

I point out further that for Heim a jettisoning of that notion now often entails a jettisoning of any consideration of Jesus’ death as a sacrifice- which is what Weaver does- as he expunges from his notion all elements of violence that have fed “sacrificial” doctrines of atonement. Or alternatively says Heim a jettisoning of that notion can entail as in the Abelardian notion a rendering of Jesus’ death as being a moral inspiration for us to love God.
as Christ did, yet without this having any objective effect. This situation, in Heim’s view, is also unacceptable when it comes to the formulation of a correct notion of atonement.

I at this point mention Heim’s argument in which he declares that the elements of violence in the Gospels, far from requiring expunging require to be reassembled as building blocks that contribute toward the recovery of the antisacrificial dynamic of Christ’s work. This practice will also then simultaneously cohere with and reinforce all other strands Christ’s ministry. Heim believes a renewal of understanding around the work of the cross is called for wherein the traditional concrete phrases and notions of the cross which have been interpreted in a purely penal sacrificial manner require reintegrating into the biblical vision of God’s work to overcome scapegoating violence.

I also show in greater detail in this section how Heim explains Anselm’s error as revolving around Anselm making the cross a celebration of the sacrifice it is meant to overcome.

Furthermore I discuss Heim’s suggestion that the early Christians were able to more easily read into Jesus’ sacrificial death the fact that there was something wrong with this practice. And in addition that Jesus’ death revolved around a concrete rescue wherein Jesus steps into the path of an evil power bearing down on us so as to take its blow in our place and rescue us from it. This negates our popular modern concept of Jesus’ dying based on the satisfaction notion which portrays Jesus as dying to satisfy a cosmic debt and thus not for anyone’s sake. On the contrary, says Heim, Jesus dies for Barabbas and us and in so doing overturns the mechanism of victimage and objectively changes the balance of power in the universe.

I go on to show how in Heim’s view once we understand this, we also understand the following: it was the sacrificial mechanism that killed Jesus and not God’s justice; the Father and son do not take up opposing positions in the work of salvation; the global extent of human sin is not an adequate launching pad from which to understand the specific importance of the cross; sin must be seen not only as a sin against God as Anselm viewed it but sin against others too; justification and sanctification which from a traditional point of view are contrasted, are shown to fit together rather than oppose each other; an understanding of the meaning of the cross founded on the unmasking and overthrowing of scapegoating is
concrete, anthropological and pertaining to nature. Whereas an understanding of its meaning founded upon a cosmic transaction taking place between Father and Son lacks this concrete dimension and grounding.

I conclude my Section Three on Heim’s work by examining his three facets of the cross. Herein he reveals how his attempt to trace a renewal of the theology of the cross revolves around transforming our view on the language of sacrifice.

In the **fourth chapter** of my dissertation which is also my concluding chapter, *I compare and evaluate the approaches of Heim and Weaver and conclude who out of the two in my opinion presents with the most convincing argument for a nonviolent atonement.* In order to assist me in my task here I draw on the helpful work of Hans Boersma who has developed his own atonement approach in his book *Violence Hospitality and the Cross.* Although I do not support Boersma’s notion which links atonement with divine violence I nevertheless find his observations and views, especially on the topic of violence, insightful and helpful.

In commenting on violence as harm or injury Boersma claims that in our imperfect world there can be no such thing as total nonviolence either on the part of God or humankind. I note that Boersma critiques scholars such as Weaver who see the problem of God and violence as being analogous to the problem of God and evil. Weaver with regard to violence unreasonably according to Boersma and I, wants to retain the possibility of active resistance on his list of nonviolent activities without describing such activity as violent.

I note that Boersma proposes instead that we admit that there is such a thing as redemptive violence used by faithful people and a loving God. I do however end up rejecting both Weaver’s and Boersma’s proposals on how to understand violence in atonement in favour of Heim’s view. Heim proposes nonviolence on the part of God in terms of God’s redeeming activity, yet at the same time concedes that the scapegoating profile does not include every type of violence. And thus that those forms violence falling outside of the scapegoating profile provided they are not morally reprehensible may as a last resort be viewed as inevitable and acceptable.
Following on from this discussion I move on to describe the problem I have with Weaver’s model which has a working assumption that revolves around total nonviolence. I accept Heim’s notions on violence as being more feasible.

I then compare similarities between Weaver and Heim noting along with Boersma that they both could be labelled as variants of Abelard. Yet simultaneously they both also make use of a Christus Victor theme. I also address the criticism which claims that both approaches have not been able to fully expunge the idea that Jesus had to die.

Furthermore I comment on: the strong connection that both of these motifs share regarding the crucifixion and the resurrection; the revised demonology that both approaches embrace wherein it is understood that Christ’s nonviolence on the cross is responsible for the defeat of the powers of evil. In addition I show both motifs as being very compatible with the atonement motifs of liberation theology. This is because unlike Anselm’s motif that dehistoricizes Christ’s work separating it from God’s liberating act in history, both Weaver and Heim embrace Christus Victor imagery which historicizes the work of Christ rooting it in a concrete battle against the social, political and structural powers of evil in the world.

I extrapolate upon both Weaver and Heim’s common agreement that Anselm’s motif erroneously bifurcates (divides into two branches) the God of justice and the God of forgiveness/mercy. In both Heim and Weaver’s views both God and Jesus submit themselves to human violence. Both suffer its results and reveal and overcome it.

Thus not surprisingly and leading on from here, I go on to suggest that both Heim and Weaver have similar notions on the nature of sacrifice, sin and guilt. For Heim sin is no longer a moral ontological blemish that calls for sacrifice, but the practice of sacrifice itself. Thus here in Heim’s thinking Christ no longer saves us from the moral and legal aspects of sin but rather from the evil of scapegoating. No longer is justification about a traditional covenantal state of righteousness for humankind, but rather about being brought into right relationship with God as our eyes are opened to the practice of scapegoating.

Anselm on the other hand puts enormous primary focus on the forensic (legal) dimensions of the passion narratives because of his conviction that a legal exchange is the core of the objective meaning of the cross. Thus for both Heim and Weaver the treatment of
guilt and sin by Anselm as a single undifferentiated quantitative value was one of Anselm’s errors.

In similar vein to Heim, I show Weaver also acknowledging that Anselm went badly wrong when in adopting a forensic view of the cross he took human guilt as the reason for the cross. Specifically in Weaver’s narrative Christus Victor motif Jesus’ mission is not about dying but about testifying to God’s reign. In this thinking Jesus thus becomes a sacrifice for us in the sense that his life and death exposed the full character of the forces that imprison sinful humanity and oppose God’s rule. Both Weaver and Heim acknowledge that Jesus was already forgiving sins as part of his mission to make visible the reign of God. Thus for Weaver and Heim sin is no longer defined as a moral and ontological blemish crying out for quid pro quo justice. Our forgiveness does not revolve around a debt payment but around our repentance and confession of our sin as regards our collusion with the powers of evil.

Hereafter I move on to discuss the differences between Weaver and Heim. I begin with their differing understandings of Christian thought and I acknowledge that in my own eyes (as well as in the eyes of Boersma and Heim), Weaver’s search for a nonviolent atonement is one that creates an imbalance in his approach to the church’s tradition. Weaver embraces the “fall” model of church history wherein he claims the biblical narrative structure of salvation as embraced by the early church was replaced by a “Constantinianizing” of the church. In this scenario the church’s utilization of violence has now become a norm. And furthermore according to Weaver this Constantinian arrangement also provided the foundation for the construction of Anselm’s violent theory which has allowed violence to go unchecked.

I discuss Heim’s suggestion that Weaver’s reconstruction is erroneous in several ways. The early Christians according to Heim never grasped and implemented the meaning of the cross in all its dimensions. Because its vision is carried in tandem with the sacrificial dimensions it is meant to reverse there was no originating point of perfection. Furthermore according to Heim and Boersma, Constantine’s theology of the cross was focused on the Christus Victor theme. Thus Weaver’s claim that the Christus Victor theme depended upon a situation of confrontation between church and state appears unfactual. The danger regarding the cross being used as a symbol of violence for both Heim and I revolves far more around the struggle that has to do with how its meaning is translated through time and practice. Thus
across the centuries the church would often fall back into a sacrificial understanding of the cross.

Heim also critiques Weaver who in his quest for a nonviolent atonement motif jettisons sacrificial images and replaces them with narrative Christus Victor. In place of simply dismissing those parts of scripture that point toward sacrifice and atonement which is integral to biblical witness a far more feasible approach according to Heim would revolve around the following. The embrace of a pathway through the problematical texts so as to provide a most convincing account of their true significance- for most of these texts that would be the unmasking of the human mechanism of scapegoating.

I then move on to discuss the agreements between Heim and Weaver with regard to Anselm’s mistake. Firstly I show here that both agree that Anselm’s mistake revolves around human guilt and God’s justice. In Weaver’s and Heim’s view however what killed Jesus were the powers of evil and specifically in Heim’s case, sacrificial scapegoating. To be reconciled to God in the view of both Weaver and Heim is thus not about having our guilt atoned for but converting from the rule of evil powers (scapegoating).

However despite their common agreement as to why Anselm’s theology is erroneous, out of both Weaver and Heim, it is Heim that for me provides the most feasible explanation for Anselm’s mistake. This is because unlike Weaver who grounds the reasons for Anselm’s error in an inaccurate reading of church history and tradition Heim claims the following. Within the generic idea of salvation it is hard to see how Jesus’ death is saving in any concrete way, and thus this invites the theorizing of a hidden transaction to imbue it with meaning.

I conclude here that although I commend Weaver for his attempts to render God free of divine violence I nevertheless reject his work in favour of Heim’s for the following reasons. His problematic definition of violence; his bypassing of large tracts of scripture; his radical exclusion of any divine purpose for the cross; his less feasible account of the history of doctrine.

I then move on at this point to list some of the current criticisms being levelled at both Weaver and Heim by Anselm’s defenders. Specifically I mention Heim being critiqued
in the following areas: his radical misreading of scripture; his ignoring of the high priesthood theme in Hebrews; his lack of interaction with standard commentaries; his avoidance of the theme of divine violence in the traditional atonement motifs regarding them as weak; his abandonment of the traditional notions of sin and justification; by way of radically redefining Christ’s sacrifice his version is nothing but a weak version of Abelard; because he reduces the core of salvation to revelation (true knowledge of scapegoating) his approach is more Gnostic than Christian.

Weaver also comes under criticism in the following way: his accusation that the Anselmian motif has no bearing on a transformed life; his denial of all divine violence is less than convincing; his jettisoning of violence forces him to ignore critical Old Testament and New Testament themes; his ignoring of God’s judgement of the guilty; his engagement in a jarring selectivity of scripture; blaming ongoing theological power of retributive justice on Constantinianism and the western justice system; his unworkable notion that atonement can be discussed in nonviolent terms.

At this point just before I go into my final chapter in which I discuss the dimension of orthopraxis I do the following: I examine some recent work done on *the development of an incarnational model of atonement* as this dovetails very well with my own approach. This is because an incarnational or participatory approach focusses on the humanness of Jesus. And therefore it has the ability to show that it should take more than just a focusing on Jesus’ divinity in order to understand what it means to be redeemed in Christ.

This incarnational approach among other things agrees with the approaches of Weaver and Heim in its claim that sin should be understood (as it is explained by Paul) as an ontic relational concept rather than as a deontic concept revolving around immoral behaviour.

In moving on to my fourth and final section of my chapter four which focusses on *orthopraxis* I go on to express in concrete form my understanding of the fact that through Christ’s death on the cross, a new foundation for reconciliation has been established in the power of the spirit on a social political and structural level. And furthermore that the risen Christ invites us all to participate in this new dispensation and to be part of its ongoing transformation in his name.
I thus go on to extrapolate upon four practical examples within my own life that reflect my attempt to live out and practice the antisacrificial incarnational rule of God in our world. These areas include my involvement with the following: our Diocesan Interracial Reconciliation Initiative; my engaging with anti-woman abuse material from the Ujamaa Centre in Kwazulu Natal; our church’s outreach project to the nearby Zandspruit Squatter camp; our church’s Diocesan based Eco Portfolio.

I end off this last section with a final conclusion. Here I endorse the work of S. Mark Heim above that of Weaver as being the most feasible approach out of the two in terms of my quest to explore atonement in nonviolent terms. However I add here that I feel Heim’s approach could definitely broaden itself and benefit from the complementary views of incarnational atonement theology.

1.4 Conclusion to Chapter One

This first chapter of my dissertation has been intentioned to function as an introduction to my reader regarding my topic. Herein I have endeavoured to spell out my problem with classical and especially satisfaction/penal atonement notions. I have specifically mentioned my opposition to the violence that accompanies these notions and the far reaching emotional and practical implications that this violence has on especially the poor and vulnerable. I also state that my reason for wanting to address this issue as a feminist with a burden for the suffering of this world is to offer an alternative understanding of atonement along the lines of the thinking of James Denny Weaver and S. Mark Heim. This is because these scholars along with various others that I mention seek to exclude violence and it’s far reaching implications from the atonement equation. They view Jesus’ rescuing work as not revolving solely around the appeasement of a vengeful God. But as revolving around Jesus’ opposition to the evil powers in the world and through his consequent death and resurrection, his triumphing over them. In this view I hope to show that Jesus’ death and resurrection bring about an eschatological objective change in the power of the universe whereby evil is defeated and humankind is invited to/required to help bring about the fullness of this defeat made possible in Christ into our world.

In this my first chapter, I have thus also plotted a methodology of how I wish to
proceed with my argument. This includes listing my reasons for opposing classical atonement. And then via the study of the work of Weaver and Heim and various other scholars, who help me to shape and suggest alternative nonviolent views, to also finally list the practical implications of living out such views in my own life.
Chapter 2
J. DENNY WEAVER’S ATONEMENT MOTIF

2.1 Introduction

J. Denny Weaver’s views and arguments are all targeted at addressing and supporting a view of God and Christ’s death that is nonviolent. As I have already indicated, this is a way of thinking that goes contrary to the more popular thinking contained within the general view of atonement, namely the traditional theories, especially satisfaction and penal theories which portray God as a violent God due to God’s demanding of the Son’s death.

Consequently, in this my second chapter, as I go on to note and discuss the content of Weaver’s work in his book, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, I will do this by way of the formulation of my own sub-headings. Under these headings I will focus on the basis of core issues, as seen by Weaver, when dealing with the issue of a nonviolent understanding of atonement in Christ.

2.1.1 Narrative Christus Victor- Plotting a New and Nonviolent Course Through Old and Violent Territory

Pointed debates about the death of Jesus have churned throughout the 20th century and have become the current cutting edge of discussions about Christology and atonement, notes Weaver. The century ended as it began with searches for the historical Jesus interspersed with frequently sharp debates on atonement carried on under a variety of nomenclatures, and between adherents and theological descendants of medieval theologians Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109) and Abelard (1079-1142) (Weaver, 2001:1).

Some examples of late 20th century scholarly works I have read corroborating Weaver’s claims in the category of the search for the historical Jesus are: *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (1993) by Geza Vermes; *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (1995) by E.P. Sanders; *The Historical Jesus: Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (1992) by John Dominic Crossan. Examples of late 20th century works I have read in the category of

Weaver goes on to note that, in fact, the 20th century may well have experienced the most significant sustained conversation about the person and work of Christ since the 5th century Nicean Chalcedonian creeds which became the yardstick of Christological thought since that time.16

Yet, in spite of the new slant that female voices have brought to the discussion, Weaver discerns that his book on atonement is not about a new debate. Rather, it joins an old and long conversation. Simultaneously however it makes an audacious claim as it joins the conversation- namely that it brings some new arguments to the long discussion and plots a new course through much surveyed territory. Expressly, it plots a path of nonviolent atonement through territory scattered with images and assumptions of violence (Weaver, 2001: xii, 1).

For much of the past millennium, confirms Weaver, for those who thought about atonement and who made a choice of a particular model, the prevailing choice was for Anselm or for another version of satisfaction atonement with Abelard’s moral theory as the minority alternative (Weaver, 2001:2).

Yet in the latter half of the 20th century, the so-called classic motif, having been afforded renewed visibility in the modern era by Gustaf Aulen’s Christus Victor, has achieved renewed visibility as an alternative to both Anselm and Abelard (Weaver, 2001:2).

As an Anabaptist, Weaver is particularly sensitized to the fact that atonement starts with violence, namely the killing of Jesus. The commonplace assumption is that something

16 An example of such a current edge christological debate is mentioned in the introduction to Tiball, Hilborn & Thacker’s book, The Atonement Debate. This was a symposium hosted by the London School of Theology in London as recently as October 2004. In a nutshell the debate focused on the meaning of atonement in Christ and whether or not among other things, this event should be understood to portray God and Christ’s death as violent (Tidball, Hilborn & Thacker, 2008:13).
good happened, namely the redemption of sinners, when or because Jesus was killed. It follows that the doctrine of atonement then explains how and why Christians believe that the demise of Jesus— the killing of Jesus— resulted in the salvation of sinful humanity17 (Weaver, 2001:2).

2.1.2 The Western World’s Justice System and Satisfaction Atonement

In the Western world generally, notes Weaver, the current assumption behind the criminal justice system is that “to do justice” means to punish offenders appropriately. “Appropriately” entails that the more severe the offence, the greater the penalty/punishment to be administered with death as the most radical penalty for most serious crimes. There is thus a very suffuse use of violence in the criminal justice system when it functions around the belief that justice is achieved by meting out punishment. Termed retributive justice, this structure presupposes that doing justice consists of administering quid pro quo violence—a malevolent act entailing some measure of violence on the one side, balanced via an equivalent violence of punishment on the other. The degree of violence in the punishment correlates with the degree of violence in the criminal act (Weaver, 2001:3).

It becomes apparent to Weaver how the satisfaction notion of atonement which assumes that God’s justice requires compensatory punishment for malevolent acts committed can seem self-evident in the context of contemporary understandings of retributive justice in the western system of criminal justice. The connection between satisfaction atonement and systems of retributive justice, for Weaver, cannot be denied (Weaver, 2001:3).

In recent years all theories of atonement, and yet especially that of Anselm, have come under critique from various quarters. One group of challenges comes specifically from

17 Garry Williams, Joel Green and Mark Baker, John Stott and John Owen are just some examples of the many contemporary scholars whom I have come across (outside of Weaver’s work) who remain supportive of an atonement view that starts with violence— the Father requiring the killing of the Son— and that good happened as a result. Garry Williams (2008), in his essay, Penal Substitution which appears in Tidball, Hilborn and Thacker’s book The Atonement Debate, confirms that he himself as well as the above mentioned scholars remain supportive of this view. In spite of the harshness of this view, and its promotion of the notion of retributive justice, which one would think would lead to its abandonment, these scholars attempt to soften it. They do this by way of arguing that, from a Trinitarian perspective, Jesus would have been aware of his fate— and Jesus willingly accepted it. Thus according to them the Father alone does not will the Son to suffer and furthermore the Father has also granted the Son to have life in Himself (Tidball, Hilborn & Thacker, 2008:178,179).
writers influenced by Mennonite and peace church notions. In being a Mennonite (Anabaptist) himself, Weaver builds on these peace church initiatives which strive to formulate an atonement doctrine that steers clear of the compensatory violence of satisfaction atonement. Fellow Mennonites Gordon D. Kaufman and John Howard Yoder have given Weaver a base to work from, which comprises a revisioning of the classic motif, a differing methodology, and a differing approach to the history of doctrine (Weaver, 2001:3, 4).

2.1.3 Other Challenges to Satisfaction Atonement

Weaver’s work includes taking note of other challenges to satisfaction atonement such as for example the challenge from French philosopher and biblical scholar Rene Girard. Girard developed his theory on mimetic violence in the 1970’s in his books, *Violence and the Sacred* (2013) and *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (1996). Specifically in his *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* Girard argues against the satisfaction notion of a violent God and asserts rather that the cross must be comprehended against the whole history of human scapegoating violence (Girard, 1996: 3-43).

Other challenges to satisfaction atonement that Weaver notes come from various contextual theologians (black, feminists, womanists such as James Cone, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, and Jo-Anne Marie Terrell). Within the work of these writers Weaver notes that the critique of violence in atonement (especially in Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109) plays similar musical notes to his own and thus he engages these theologies in discussion with the intention of endorsing and broadening his own thinking and motif. For example, his own pacifist understanding of Anselm as an abstract legal transaction permitting violence of the sword is broadened and supported by the other contextual viewpoints so as to make it that which also accommodates racism/sexism/surrogacy (Weaver, 2001: 4, 5).

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19 S. Mark Heim bases much of his own approach on that of Girard, but at the time of Weaver’s writing, had not yet written his *Saved from Sacrifice*. Had Heim’s book been in existence, Weaver would no doubt have found much of Heim’s thinking resonating with his own.
As Weaver has noted, these contextual theologies, in extending the conversation beyond just his pacifist context also bring to the fore a new perspective on traditional theology, especially the classic doctrines of Christology and atonement. By being in tune with and in expressing their own contexts. And by being in touch with a postmodernist understanding of truth, black and feminist and womanist theologies are able to highlight the fact that the received theology of Christendom in general and in particular Anselmian atonement also have a context (Weaver, 2001:6).

Thus it becomes plain, says Weaver, that the debate on atonement is then not about truth (like Anselm’s) on the one hand and defectors from the truth (the Anselmian critics) on the other hand. The conversation here is rather about how the various theologies, whether Anselmian or pacifist or black for example, mirror Christian sources like the Bible and the Jesus narrative. And whether some of these contextual theologies mirror and restate more of the meaning of those sources better than others (Weaver, 2001:6).

In the introduction to his book, Anabaptist Theology: In Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium (2000), Weaver extrapolates further on the reason he is able to make the claim in his book, The Nonviolent Atonement (Weaver, 2001:6-7), that all theologies have their own context. The possibility of making this claim, says Weaver, flows from the unsuccessful Modernist/Enlightenment quest which both shifted from a religious to a philosophical foundation for truth, and sought in vain to establish the idea that there is a universal philosophical foundation for truth (Weaver, 2000:19-21).

As a consequence of Modernism’s failure, says Weaver, a change of thinking ensued and postmodernism was born. This is a notion that deduces that it is simply impossible to identify one universal truth (on both a religious and philosophical level) because truth is relative to differing contexts and cultures. With this understanding of truth now entrenched, says Weaver, wherein no particular theology is accorded a universally recognised status, the Mennonite Church is now offered an opportunity virtually unprecedented since the early church. This revolves around the chance to articulate and perceive a hearing for a theology shaped particularly by the nonviolence of Jesus. In basing the entire thrust of their theology on the nonviolence of Jesus, the Mennonites can now do the following. From a postmodernist stance, they can use this core notion as a key measuring stick to determine which from their
specific perspective, are the biblical and gospel texts that restate the meaning of the core notion of their theological thinking better than others (Weaver, 2000:19-21).

2.1.4 Narrative Christus Victor- a Biblically-based Comprehensive Theology

It is with this understanding in mind, that Weaver makes the claim that his own work on atonement presents with a comprehension of atonement that is strongly rooted in biblical material but does not venture through the previously presumed-to-be-general atonement theology of Anselm (Weaver, 2001:7).

Finding himself challenged from a postmodern perspective as to whether his work on atonement could understand Jesus’ death as an event with universal significance whilst simultaneously respecting the particularity of these other contexts, Weaver thus sets out to do the following. He aims to reflect in his book, his endeavour to develop a comprehension of atonement that makes sense in its own right as a statement about the universal importance of Jesus Christ but that also answers questions raised by the contextual theologies (Weaver, 2001:7).

2.1.5 Violence and Nonviolence in Weaver’s Thinking

Whilst narrative Christus Victor, (which is what Weaver has named his image) exhibits continuity with classic Christus Victor, it differs significantly. Its working assumption is that the rejection of violence, whether direct or systemic should be conspicuous in expressions of Christology and atonement. Developing a comprehension moulded by nonviolence, it then exposes the degree to which Anselmian atonement is grounded in assumptions of violence. Proposing narrative Christus Victor as a nonviolent atonement

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20 With regard to the naming of his motif “narrative Christus Victor,” Weaver says “it is first of all, a biblical motif to which a name has been attributed for ease of reference” (Weaver, 2001:81). Being strongly rooted in specific biblical material, it focusses on the nonviolent victory of Christ over sin and death. Classic Christus Victor on the other hand, is the name coined by Gustav Aulen in his book, Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement. Aulen gave this name to the atonement model favoured by a number of early Church Fathers such as Irenaeus and Augustine (Aulen, 1961:7-12). This traditional motif makes use of the image of violent battle between good and evil wherein Jesus’ resurrection turns the battle into a victory for the risen Christ (McGrath, 2001: 415).
motif consequently poses a basic challenge to, and ultimately a jettisoning of, Anselmian atonement (Weaver, 2001:7).

Due to the fact that violence embraces an enormous amount of sins and issues, Weaver recognises that the scrutiny of biblical and historical material from a “nonviolent viewpoint” is an exercise that requires definitions for both violence and nonviolence. He thus makes it clear that he is using violence to mean harm or damage. This definition is of course inclusive of killing— in war, murder, and capital punishment. Violence as harm or damage includes physical harm or injury to bodily integrity. However notes Weaver it also embodies a series of acts and conditions that include injury to a person’s dignity/self-esteem. Weaver thus recognises that abuse also comes in psychological and sociological and non-physical forms. Although extreme in form, killing is thus by far not the only instance of violence, other examples here being the systemic violence of slavery, current racist practices, social discrimination against women, socially oppressive structures (Weaver, 2001:8).

Weaver goes on to stress that one significant aspect of violence is the way it is assumed and made use of in the criminal justice system. As he has already noted, the prevailing assumption behind the criminal justice system is that to do justice means to mete out punishment with the severity of that punishment determined by the severity of the misdemeanour. Theoretically speaking then, the death penalty differs quantitatively but not qualitatively from more minor punishments. Recognizing the assumption that justice means punishment reveals that a very widespread use of violence envelopes us in the criminal justice system, a use of violence whose pervasiveness makes it practically undetectable. The assumed violence of justice as punishment appears at several points in Weaver’s discussion on atonement especially in the context of feminist and womanist arguments and in the arguments of the defenders of Anselm (Weaver, 2001:8).

This notion that justice is attained via the violence of punishment is especially queried by feminists and womanists such as for example Brown and Bohn in their book Patriarchy and Abuse (1990), and those opposing Anselm, due to the following. Their common observation that women / the oppressed are expected to bear the oppression of patriarchy (and
surrogacy on the part of womanists), because our saviour Jesus Christ willingly underwent divinely sanctioned innocent suffering on humankind’s behalf (Brown & Bohn, 1990:3).

Weaver furthermore points out that if a multiplicity of issues are covered by violence, then so also does “nonviolence” cover a wide range of stances and actions varying from passive non-resistance at one end of the scale to active nonviolent resistance at the other. In this instance it is significant to differentiate violence defined as harm or damage from nonviolence as a force or social coercion that respects bodily integrity. In lieu of the fact that we have no term that conveys the particular meaning of coercion used positively Weaver goes on in his work to describe this as a range of acts stretching from persuasion to physical coercion (Weaver, 2001:9).

Persuasion endeavours to affect and direct the action of others without denying their liberty or damaging their person. At a low level of intensity this would include actions like social ostracism, public marches and protests, strikes/economic boycotts. Examples of physical force used positively range according to Weaver from various types of punishment for children, physical restraint of children, pushing a person out of a path of a vehicle, restraining a potential suicide victim from following through with his/her attempt (Weaver, 2001:9).

One particular stance to clarify in terms of nonviolence as far as Weaver is concerned is that it does resist violence in any of its forms. Thus the question is not whether nonviolent Christians should resist. It is rather how Christians should resist. And the answer is to resist non-violently. In his reading of the story of Jesus, Weaver discerns that Jesus is engaged in nonviolent resistance. He shattered the protocols of the order of the day and posed alternatives to them by way of healing on the Sabbath; journeying through Samaria; his interactions with women. As Weaver uses the term in his book, these actions of Jesus comprise nonviolent resistance (Weaver, 2001:9).

2.1.6 Methodology

Having surveyed the meanings of violence and nonviolence, Weaver deduces that the study of violence and atonement needs to address two affiliated areas of focus. The first focus of
his discussion is to come to terms with the assumed violence in the traditional images of atonement such as: accommodation of the violence of the sword and of various forms of systemic violence by the abstract formulas of satisfaction atonement; modelling of submission to abusive authorities; modelling the assumption that doing justice or making right depends on punishment or sanctioned violence. The second focus of Weaver’s argument is to demonstrate how narrative Christus Victor gives a reading of Jesus’ life and work that evades all the dimensions of violence in traditional atonement imagery (Weaver, 2001:10).

Acknowledging that a discussion of atonement and violence is a convoluted argument embracing a number of elements, Weaver chooses to open his discussion by posing his suggestion for atonement from a nonviolent perspective, and then to go on to explain the troublesome issues this answer solves. This method provides a tangible biblical model to hold on to through the twists and turns of the discussion. It also makes it easier to comprehend the specific arguments of other theologies encountered along the journey (Weaver, 2001:10).

Thus against a backdrop sketch of the traditional atonement motifs, Weaver proceeds in Chapter 2 of his book to lay out his proposal for a nonviolent understanding of atonement which he names narrative Christus Victor by developing it within, and by weighing it up against 6 biblical milieus.

However chapter 2 develops only part of Weaver’s argument. Thus in chapter 3 he does two things. He firstly develops additional nonviolent dimensions by way of exploring answers to some systematic questions. And then secondly he correlates the expiration of narrative Christus Victor and the eventual rise of satisfaction atonement imagery with what he sees as being “changes in ecclesiology that followed the church’s eventual identification with the social order” (Weaver, 2001:10).

In chapters 4, 5 and 6, in putting narrative Christus Victor in conversation with black, feminist and womanist theologies Weaver shifts the focus to issues related to the systemic violence of racism and sexism (Weaver, 2001:10). Finally in Chapter 7, Weaver brings the critique of all these theologies into conversation with modern defenders of Anselm, concluding that Anselm’s motif cannot break free of its foundation in the concept of retributive violence (Weaver, 2001:10).
2.1.7 The Nonviolent Jesus: Questioning his “Irrelevance” for Social Ethics

In chapter 2 of his book, Weaver begins his proposal for narrative Christus Victor by way of drawing to our attention the almost universally accepted notion that Jesus of Nazareth lived and taught nonviolence. Yet, says Weaver, despite this general acceptance, what is doubted here is that Jesus’ actions and teaching apply to the contemporary church, to the church through the ages and now having entered a new millennium. An example here would be that of the enduring notion of a justifiable war, which has been articulated in some form or another since Augustine’s version of it in the 4th century. And which although assuming that Jesus’ jettisoning of the sword is the norm for Christians, proceeds to set out the circumstances in which that norm need not or cannot be applied (Weaver, 2001:12).

Weaver’s predecessor, the Mennonite John Yoder in his book Politics of Jesus (1993), also makes the pertinent point here that in every age in the history of Christian thought about society, Jesus’ irrelevance for social ethics has been proclaimed (Weaver, 2001:13).

Weaver follows in the footsteps of Yoder with his own The Nonviolent Atonement. Where Yoder articulated ethics that assumed the nonviolence of the narrative of Jesus, Weaver’s book endeavours to build theology from that perspective showing that nonviolence is far from being a category restricted to ethics. Beyond ethics, Jesus’ jettisoning of the sword has the potential to shape our comprehensions of all other aspects of theology, and especially what theology has said about Jesus and how the contemporary church should comprehend the work of Christ (Weaver, 2001:13).

2.2 Narrative Christus Victor in Six Biblical Milieus

After drawing attention to his observation that the nonviolence of Jesus has become lost to the contemporary church and the serious implications this has in terms of formulating an understanding of atonement, Weaver launches into the first large component of his multidimensional argument. This revolves around a biblical discussion wherein biblical material from the Gospels, Paul and Hebrews, the Book of Revelation, Rene Girard, the OT sacrificial system, and Israel’s history is surveyed and two primary points are made here. The first point is that this is a discussion that strives to show that narrative Christus Victor clearly
fits and gives meaning to the story of Jesus. Secondly it makes clear that this notion presumes (supposes to be true) nonviolence, and is in fact meaningless apart from that presumption (Weaver, 2001:10, 13).

2.2.1 The Book of Revelation

Because the elements of cosmic battle and victory (between the forces of God and the forces of Satan) appear throughout Revelation, this book according to Weaver can be viewed as a multifaceted statement of the Christus Victor image (Weaver, 2001:20).

For example the lion and the lamb in Revelation 5 symbolize one instance of the conqueror motif. In both referring to Jesus the lion symbolizes victory, the lamb the nonviolent manner of the victory. The victory song of the heavenly creatures in Revelation 5:9-10 celebrates the subsequent joining of people of all nationalities into a united heavenly kingdom that serves God, thus celebrating here the triumph of Gods reign over the reign of evil that killed Christ the lamb (Weaver, 2001:20).

In Revelation 6 and 7 it is the nonviolent conqueror-- the slaughtered lamb-- who has earned the right to open the seals. And it is the lamb’s triumph over the forces that oppose the rule of God that is celebrated by the two enormous crowds of the second scene of seal 6. Although seals 1 through 4 and 6 progress through numerous types of oppression and evil that threaten the entire cosmos, we nevertheless find seal 7 features a victory celebration. Here the people of God (the old and the new Israel) are united and rejoice at the lamb’s ultimate triumph which via his resurrection is the ultimate and definitive cosmic victory of the rule of God over the rule of the devil (Weaver, 2001:21).

While the imagery of Revelation 5-7 plainly depicts the ultimate significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus for God’s cosmic reign says Weaver, the symbols definitely had antecedents in first century Christian church history that the original readers would have easily comprehended. Analysis of these symbols and their antecedents in the book of Revelation shows the correlation between the historical first century church and Christus Victor (Weaver, 2001:21).
The result is Christus Victor portrayed in terms of first century history, a *historicized* or *earthly* Christus Victor. However says Weaver, each of these terms risks being miscomprehended as limiting the scope of Christ’s triumph to earth or to human history. Thus for this reason Weaver chooses to designate his motif as *narrative Christus Victor* which incorporates victory in both human historical and cosmic spheres, as well as stressing Jesus’ life and ministry (Weaver, 2001:22).

Attention to possible historical antecedents makes it apparent that the battle and triumph happened in the world in which we dwell and yet also that the cosmic imagery portrays the author’s interpretation of the universal and cosmic significance of events in our historical world, says Weaver (Weaver, 2001:22).

Weaver suggests that specifically speaking, the possible historical context, referred to here, most probably corresponded to the reigns of the six tyrannical first century Roman Emperors. These ranged from Tiberius 14-37 CE to Domitian 81-96 CE who persecuted both Christ and Christians as the forces of evil, and yet who were ultimately defeated by Christ’s resurrection (Weaver, 2001:22-27).

Revelation 12, notes Weaver, uses a different group of images to depict the battle between the reigns of God and Satan. Here the ultimate image of the resurrection is depicted by the victory won by Archangel Michael and his angels in a cosmic war against Satan (as represented as the Dragon). In being conquered by the demise and resurrection of Jesus and the witness of the martyrs, Satan is expelled from heaven– this image thus constituting another portrayal of the universal and eschatological dimension of the historical confrontation of Jesus and the Christian church with the Roman Empire (Weaver, 2001:22-28).

We learn through the symbolism in chapter 12 that in its historical confrontation with the might of the Roman Empire the numerically small church is tempted to lose heart. However, and comfortingly so, for those who perceive the resurrection of Jesus, the victory celebration has already happened– Revelation 12:10-12, the reign of God already has the victory. Thus although the empire has the potential to hurt the church the damage comes from an already beaten dragon and an already beaten worldly and institutional power source, whose power is thus limited (Weaver, 2001:27-31).
Throughout Revelation, asserts Weaver, Jesus’ resurrection is featured as having defeated evil in all its various guises. As a culmination to the book which Weaver suggests occurs in chapter 21, we are presented with the restoration of all things— an ultimate defeat of evil emphasizing the restoration of what was destroyed. And emphasizing also that the New Jerusalem already exists in part in the alternative praxis of those loyal to the slaughtered lamb— Revelation 21:22-27 (Weaver, 2001:31-32).

What comes out of this survey of historical antecedents for the symbols of Revelation says Weaver is the portrayal of a church as a social structure that poses an alternative to the social structure of the Greco Roman Empire. Each of these social entities seeks ultimate loyalty. The empire confronts and challenges Christians because they are loyal to something other than empire. It is precisely because Christians are marked by loyalty to the risen Christ rather than to the demands of the emperor and the needs of the empire that they pose a contrast to the empire (Weaver, 2001:31-32).

In rounding off his particular interpretation of Revelation for a nonviolent understanding of atonement, Weaver stresses the following points:

- In light of his initial assertion that jettisoning of violence belongs to the essence of Jesus’ life and work, it is important to see that the battle depicted symbolically between church and empire throughout Revelation, is a nonviolent one.

- We note that the triumph of the rule of God over the empire that represents the forces of Satan is won by the demise and rising again of Christ. The slaughtered lamb symbolizes the means of victory— namely death and resurrection (Weaver, 2001:31-32).

- Christians contribute to the triumph of the slaughtered lamb by their witness— Revelation 12:11. Triumph via witness is plainly a nonviolent means of victory— through death and testimony (Weaver, 2001:32-33).

- The supposed warring scenes are not really warring scenes at all, the language of battle between the forces of God and those of Satan being really a portrayal of the universal significance of Jesus’ resurrection. Very significantly in this regard, in chapter 19 in the scene depicting the rider on a white horse killing the king’s armies on earth, we find the following. The rider is the risen victorious Christ who “kills” via a sword of truth that protrudes from his mouth— the word of God 19:13 (Weaver, 2001:33).
Weaver describes his above interpretation of Revelation as being one that has sought to portray the universal and cosmic story of the confrontation of reign of God and rule of Satan (Weaver, 2001:32-33).

2.2.2 Gospels

Weaver’s approach here is to demonstrate that the narrative of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels fits within the universal and cosmic story of the confrontation of reign of God and rule of Satan as depicted above in Revelation. However whilst the imagery of Revelation portrays the *cosmic* importance of that confrontation the Gospels feature the same confrontation from the earthbound perspective of Jesus of Nazareth and his associates in Palestine (Weaver, 2001:34).

Weaver’s methodology for his Gospel analysis revolves around the use of representative kinds of texts with predominant use of the Gospel of Luke (Weaver, 2001:34).

Weaver begins here by pointing out that Mary’s response to the annunciation- Luke 1:52-53 includes reference to acts of God delivering the poor in the face of the rich. And that in connecting those acts to the promise to Abraham, Luke in effect extends the confrontation to the starting point of Israel’s history- Luke 1:55. Furthermore, points out Weaver we also have Luke’s genealogy- Luke 3:23-38, denoting the continuity of Jesus with previous acts of God in history in a different way. Here Luke plots Jesus’ lineage through Joseph to Adam and to God. It thus follows that the triumph of God’s rule that reaches its decisive moment in Jesus’ resurrection is the restoration of the falleness of humanity symbolized by the primeval story of the Fall- Genesis 3 (Weaver, 2001:34).

As we return to the Jesus story, the temptation narrative (Jesus facing Satan in the desert) Luke 4:1-13, also brings to light the confrontation of reigns in the following way. It reveals through Jesus’ rejection of the evil means to power offered him by Satan (such as pandering to public opinion and seizing power by military might), that the reign of God has a totally different basis of allegiance, authority and power than does Satan (Weaver, 2001:34).
In another representative Lukan text, says Weaver, Jesus claims at the beginning of his public ministry- Luke 4:14-30- that he is the personification of Isaiah’s prophecy that a saviour would come bringing good news to the poor- Isaiah 61:1-2. And thus when this proclamation is made by Jesus, Jesus becomes one who represents and makes present a movement in history, namely the reign of God that confronts threatening and oppressive political, economic and social forces with a new reality (Weaver, 2001:35).

Other acts of Jesus recorded in Luke that display the power of the reign of God over physical spiritual and natural oppressive forces are for example: the Capernaum exorcism-Luke 4:31-37; the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law– Luke 4:38-41; the miraculous catch of fish– Luke 5:1-11; the calming of the storm– Luke 8. By way of these acts says Weaver it is revealed that the presence of redemption in God’s reign is already occurring as individuals are liberated from the forces that threaten or imprison them (Weaver, 2001:35).

Jesus’ teaching and preaching as that which represents the confrontation of the reign of evil with the reign of God announces the nearness of God’s reign by illustrating human relationships when governed by it- Luke 4:43. For example Jesus indicates that the presence of his reign exists in the poor, and in those who hunger for spiritual blessing- Luke 6:20-21. And also as the beatitudes make clear, in those who love, do good to their enemies, refrain from retaliation, witness to the good news, and exorcise the forces of the world in the name of the reign of God- Luke 6: 27-36; 9:2; 10:17 (Weaver, 2001:36).

Furthermore, says Weaver, the teaching and the life of Jesus reveal that the objectives of the reign of God are not achieved by violence. Yet on the other hand by way of Jesus’ statements of: turning the other cheek– Matthew 5:39; giving the cloak– Matthew 5:40; going the second mile– Matthew 4:41, the jettisoning of violence here ought not to be construed as passive non-resistance (Weaver, 2001:37).

In his endeavour to understand Jesus’ turning the other cheek statement, Weaver draws on the work of Walter Wink. In his book, Engaging the Powers (1992) Wink states that this act of turning the other cheek is from a Jewish cultural point of view far from a passive gesture. Rather, in being aimed at a supposed superior person, it is an assertive gesture from a supposed inferior who refuses to be humiliated (Wink, 1992:176-184).
Likewise, according to Wink the giving of the cloak is also construed from a Jewish cultural point of view as being an assertive act that gives a supposed inferior great power to challenge oppression and thus embarrass a supposed superior (Weaver, 2001:37).

Thus, deduces Weaver, the resisting of oppression non-violently means for Jesus that oppressed people take the initiative to affirm their humanity and expose and neutralize exploitative circumstances. In practicing these means of confrontation Christ-followers share in the witness of the reign of God against the reign of Satan as personified in Revelation by imperial Rome– a theme that Weaver names narrative Christus Victor (Weaver, 2001:37).

Other ways in which Jesus as the reign of God confronts the reign of Satan are the following:

- By healing on the Sabbath- Luke 6:6-11; Luke 13 10-17- Jesus’ acts here are intentionally confrontational and have the purpose of demonstrating that the regulations drawn up by the religious leadership are subverting and distorting the purpose of the Sabbath under the reign of God (Weaver, 2001:37).

- In his encounter with the Samaritan woman- John 4:1-38, Jesus confronts the oppressive prevailing standards of a patriarchal society with the aim of making the reign of God visible over against the rule of evil in the social order (Weaver, 2001:38).

- In his dressing down of Peter due to Peter’s unpreparedness for a Messiah who would redeem via suffering and death– Matthew 17:21- Jesus shows the following. That the reign of God as enacted through himself plainly poses an alternative to normal expectations, especially when it concerned the refusal to use violence as a means of struggle (Weaver, 2001:39).

- In his act of cleansing the desecrated temple Jesus confronts the established (worldly) social order with the reign of God- Luke 19:45-48. His action here is one that not only witnesses to a reality different than the one governing the social order but is also one that provokes his death (Weaver, 2001:39).

2.2.2.1 The Role of Resurrection

The role that Jesus’ resurrection plays in an understanding of the gospel story as perceived as
revolving around the confrontation of reign of God and rule of Satan can be understood in the following way.

In being tried and put to death by crucifixion in Jerusalem, Jesus’ submission to the powers was consistent with living out the way that the reign of God confronts evil—namely non-violently and from a position of seeming weakness. The resurrection of Jesus however which is God’s act in history to overcome the ultimate enemy—death—and thus the worst that evil could do, places God’s stamp of approval on the living Jesus who has displayed the power of the reign of God over evil. Thus resurrection here is God’s testimony that in Jesus the reign of God has entered the world and will become visible in its fullness at the Second Coming (Weaver, 2001:40).

In the face of active evil Jesus’ refusal to respond in kind is not mere passive submission but a powerful chosen act. In refusing to return evil for evil, he unmasks the violence of the evil acts and demonstrates that the evil which annihilated him originates with humanity and not with God (Weaver, 2001:41).

At first glance, says Weaver, Jesus’ words at the last supper referring to his blood being poured out for the forgiveness of sins—(Matt 26:28), may appear as a statement of the compensatory death referred to in satisfaction atonement. However since Jesus’ message of the reign of God was inseparable from his person, says Weaver, his deeds including his nonviolent submission to death must be seen to have theological significance. Thus understanding Jesus’ new covenant sayings of the last supper must involve comprehending them in light of the mission of Jesus and the nature of his proclamation of grace and judgement under the reign of God (Weaver, 2001:41).

2.2.2.2 Perceiving God’s Forgiveness

Jesus’ mission was to make God’s reign present and visible. That mission entailed testifying to and presenting God’s undeserved forgiveness and the reconciliation of sinners to God. Jesus did not teach that goodness and justice of God were two successive stages as though at a point in time the goodness and mercy of God cease, and then the judgement of God commences. Rather, Jesus clarified that statements about the retribution of God were really an assertion of what those who jettison the rule of God bring on themselves. In having their
sins turn upon them, they in effect judge themselves. Assertions of judgement make plain the consequences of jettisoning God. Yet God remains loving and gracious with an offer of forgiveness that always remains open (Weaver, 2001:41).

When Jesus through the bread and the wine gave his disciples his body and his blood he was gifting them with, making them one with, and identifying them with, the reign of God. Jesus’ giving himself for them was an execution of his mission to present the reign of God on their behalf. In giving of himself for God’s reign, the nonviolent confrontation of enemies has great theological importance. It displays the great love of God for sinners- a making visible of the reign of God that is even willing to suffer and die at the hands of its enemies for the sake of making this reign visible whilst they were still sinners (Weaver, 2001:42).

Although Jesus was ready and willing to die in the execution of his mission his death was not however one required as compensation for the sins of others. It was rather a consequence of Jesus fulfilling his mission about the reign of God (Weaver, 2001:42).

This story of Jesus says Weaver became the orienting account for those who accepted Jesus as Messiah. After the ascension when asked in whose authority they were acting the apostles and Christ followers related this story– Acts 2:14-39; 5:30-32; 13:17-41. The story ended with an invitation to readers to find salvation in the story and participate in the reign of God. Those who responded shared in the triumph, becoming part of the witness to the reign of God (Weaver, 2001:43).

For Weaver this narrative becomes an atonement narrative not in the sense that it is a story depicting Jesus’ demise as a divinely orchestrated plan. And not in the sense that this plan revolves around the satisfaction of an offended God who requires the punishment of Jesus on sinful humankind’s behalf so as to restore justice to the equation (Weaver, 2001:43-46).

Rather, it becomes an atonement narrative in the following sense: it becomes a reconciliation of sinful humanity to God on the basis of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; it becomes that wherein the power of the reign of God over the forces of evil is made manifest in the resurrection which reveals the true balance of power in the universe whether sinners perceive it or not; it becomes that wherein sin is understood as bondage to the forces
of evil as represented by imperial Rome, the structures of the law, the crowd and disciples, all participants in society including you and I; it becomes that wherein salvation equates to a process of liberation from those evil forces and transformation by the reign of God so as to take on a life shaped by Jesus whose mission was to make visible the reign of God in our history (Weaver, 2001:43-46).

2.2.3 Rene Girard

In a nutshell and broadly speaking, both Weaver (Weaver, 2001:46) and Heim (Heim, 2006:11) include Girard’s work in their arguments for a nonviolent atonement because out of Girard’s biblical reading of both the Old and New Testaments comes a challenge to Anselmian atonement. This is because the bible stories when examined through the lens of the Girardian theory of mimetic violence reveal a God who rejects violence (although the exact definition of the scope of violence rejected differs between Weaver Girard and Heim as will become apparent).

Weaver’s narrative Christus Victor interpretation of the story of Jesus has been developed independently of Rene Girard. Nevertheless, notes Weaver, for the above reasons it remains compatible with much of Girard’s theory about mimetic violence, and its implications for comprehending the demise of Jesus and the development of atonement theology (Weaver, 2001:46).

At this stage, in order to further understand the relevance of Girard’s work for a nonviolent atonement as pertaining to the arguments of both Weaver and later Heim, and my own argument it is necessary to begin with a short overview understanding of Girard’s theory of mimetic violence.

Rene Girard in his book, Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World (1996), asserts that human beings develop via the imitation of each other—(mimesis). This results in rivalry and an aspiring towards the same things. If unchecked, this mimetic rivalry culminates inescapably in violence— the killing of one of the antagonists (Girard, 1996:18)
In developing from endeavours to control mimetic violence, human civilization in the beginning at a time when mimesis went unchecked was, according to Girard’s theory, wholly violent. At some point, a single individual earmarked by some form of weakness became the sole target of violence. When this particular individual took the blame for all the violence and was removed or murdered, peace and order was restored. This first murder then became the basis upon which that human society was formed. Culture and religion developed as a result of ensuing endeavours to contain violence and maintain the order in the society that emerged from the founding murder (Girard, 1996:3-47).

Attempts to contain violence thus hinge around three points. The first revolves around prohibitions of inflammatory actions. The second revolves around rituals like games and animal sacrifices- yet although both of these restrict violence for a time they eventually cannot. It is thus at this time that we have the functioning of the 3rd point- the murder of a marginalised vulnerable scapegoat blamed for the crisis and incapable of retaliation. The murder brings a time of temporary peace wherein sacred rituals again begin to feature that re-enact that formative event. Eventually however new victims for the original victim are sought in order to maintain the “miracle” of the ensuing peace that follows (Girard, 1996: 103).

Weaver asserts that according to Girard the story of the scapegoat is an almost worldwide societal tale of originating violence. The murders upon which societies are founded are recorded in myths that contain enough historical information to plot their origins in history. Simultaneously, notes Weaver, the task of the myth is to mask the founding murder so that it does not appear a murder. The story of origins is always told from the majority/ruling party’s perspective which permits the majority to conceal the scapegoat’s innocence and attach blame to it for ills in society. Elimination of the scapegoat is thus able to become not a murderous act but a redemptive one. The murder’s efficacy as a saving event would be lessened if the victim’s innocence were allowed to unmask the deed as murder (Weaver, 2001:48).

Thus the role of religion/ritual in this scenario is the following: to limit the violence to a single victim or group; to cover up the reality that it is a ritual murder; to imbue the process with transcendency and validation- the entire thrust of successful scapegoat violence residing in its disguise. Underneath this concealed secrecy however lies the potential only for more and more violence notes Weaver (Weaver, 2001:48).
Girard’s theory about the role of violence in the foundation of human culture and religion has, as I stated earlier, implications for reading the Bible—both the Old Testament and the narrative of Jesus. Beginning with the story of Cain and his founding of a city, the accounts in the early chapters of Genesis mirror the development of culture and religion on the rationale of a founding murder. But the uniqueness of the Bible’s stories, according to Girard, is that they undeviatingly relate the story from the viewpoint of the innocent victim, whether this be Abel or Joseph or the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. The Bible, by focusing on the victim’s innocence, unmask the sacred justification of violence against the victim, and as a consequence subverts the power of the scapegoat mechanism. The awareness of the function of the scapegoat ritual and of the fact that Israel’s God rejects violence gains an ever increasing momentum beginning in the Old Testament and moving into the New Testament (Girard, 1996: 141-158).

In Girard’s thinking, according to Weaver, the crucifixion of Jesus depicts the final revelation of human violence and of the nonviolence of Yahweh and the reign of God. Jesus, as the representative of God’s reign is totally committed to nonviolence. As the innocent victim he unmask the violence of those who oppose God’s reign. His demise unveils the powers of evil and causes their claim that peace and order are founded on violence to be utterly without substance (Weaver, 2001:48).

Girard, according to Weaver, locates no evidence for a sacrificial/expiation/substitution interpretation of the crucifixion of Jesus in the Gospels. To understand Jesus’ demise in that fashion, asserts Girard, is the perpetuation of a Christian religion in the tradition of scapegoat violence. In place of perpetuating it, Jesus’ demise exposes and consequently terminates religion founded on sacrifice or retributive violence (Weaver, 2001:48).

Very evidently based on the above, narrative Christus Victor, according to Weaver, is able to find a great deal of support in Girard’s theory of the origin of violence and human culture and in his reading of the narrative of Jesus in the Gospels. Of especial significance for Weaver’s argument is Girard’s insistence on the nonviolence of Jesus and the nonviolent character of God and the reign of God and his (Girard’s) consequent argument that the crucifixion of Jesus cannot be interpreted as a divinely sanctioned/willed sacrifice. Of further
major importance here is Girard’s view that violence originates with humankind and not with God (Weaver, 2001:49).

However where Girard would have it that Jesus totally renunciates on retaliation, Weaver in claiming that his own work has a more widely developed comprehension of Jesus’ life and teaching, suggests the following. That Jesus was indeed nonviolent, but he (Jesus) does not completely renounce on retaliation as Girard suggests but rather poses activist ways to turn the situation against the attacker (Weaver, 2001:48). We see this demonstrated for example in his turning the other cheek– Matthew 5:39, and the surrender of his cloak– Matthew 5:40 (Weaver, 2001:36, 37).

2.2.4 Paul

Although it is commonly assumed that Paul’s language about the cross, sacrifice and fulfilment is the basis of satisfaction atonement, some recent work by scholars Christiaan Beker in his, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (1980) and Raymund Schwager in his *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation* (1999) challenge this assumption says Weaver. In basing his own approach to Paul on the work of these two writers Weaver joins them in arguing for an understanding of Paul that is rooted in an apocalyptic setting (Weaver 2001:49)

This setting in a nutshell enables one to make the very different claim that Jesus’ mission is to save– not by having to appease the wrath of a violent Father– but by making present the reign of God. And furthermore in this setting it is not a violent God who orchestrates Jesus’ demise but rather the reign of evil as embodied in sinful humanity (Weaver, 2001:49).

Paul, according to Beker, views himself as an eschatological apostle, namely, one who bridges the times between Christ’s resurrection and the final resurrection of the dead. Thus accordingly Paul’s notion of hope is rooted in an apocalyptic specificity, namely, the resurrection of Christ which is both triumph over evil and death in the old order. And also the beginning of the transformation of fallen creation in the new order. Jesus’ resurrection did not merely mark the end of history. It is rather that the end (goal/eschaton) of history is breaking
into the present and initiating the process of transforming all of creation. The resurrection of Jesus cannot be simply a spiritualized or individualized event as is suggested in Abelardian atonement because as Beker says “it appeals to the Christians solidarity with the stuff of creation that God has destined for resurrection glory” (Beker, 1980: 149).

The resurrection language of Paul, asserts Beker, cannot function when it is divorced from this temporal and cosmological framework. And furthermore Paul’s apocalyptic notion of the resurrection is also that which impacts on his notion of ecclesiology so that it too mirrors the apocalyptic. Thus the church in this setting is not just a gathering of justified sinners, or a sacramental institute or a means for private sanctification (which in my opinion is how those who understand atonement from a satisfaction perspective can tend to view church). Rather it is the leading edge of a new creation developing new pockets in this world of God’s dawning new kingdom and longing for the day of God’s visible lordship over God’s creation- the general resurrection of the dead (Weaver, 2001:50).

For most of church history, says Beker, there has been an inclination to separate resurrection from its apocalyptic domain and to find a solution to the tension between the yet-not-yet natures of the resurrection in one of two ways. Either by delaying the culmination or by collapsing the culmination into the present. The crescendo of this movement was in the Nicene and Chalcedonian struggles when via logos doctrine the following happened. The interest moved from the resurrection status and imminent return of the Son of God at the right hand side of God to incarnation and the relationship between Father and Son in pre-existence (Weaver, 2001:51).

Paul however lived with the tension of yet-not-yet, founding churches with a long-term missionary strategy while dwelling in expectation of a very near Parousia. He perseveres says Beker, in immanent expectation despite his cognizance of the delay of the Parousia. And the reason that Paul could preserve the tension is because he comprehended that the issue here was first and foremost not one of chronological calculation but one of theological necessity (Weaver, 2001:51).

The framework within which to read and interpret what Paul says about the cross, death and resurrection of Christ is his apocalyptic orientation, confirms Beker. While Paul used language and images of sacrifice, he reinterpreted such language drastically. Beker’s
research shows that Paul’s reinterpretations of this sacrificial language brings him into line with what Weaver terms narrative Christus Victor rather than with Anselm as has often been assumed (Weaver, 2001:51).

Paul shared with all Christians, an apocalyptic interpretation of the resurrection—namely the belief that the Christ event had inaugurated the messianic age and the kingdom of God, says Beker (Beker, 1980:134). However these Christians drew different conclusions than Paul from the Christ-event points out Weaver. Paul reinterpreted the sacrifice of Christ as an apocalyptic event (Weaver, 2001:51).

For Paul, the demise of Christ meant the end of the law in the sense that previous to Christ the law was valid, but in finding its fulfilment in Christ, it had met its end. Paul thus accepted the Antiochian Church’s claim that Christ died a sacrificial death for the forgiveness of sins condemned by the law (Acts 13:38-39). However Paul radicalized this confession so that it did not merely mean forgiveness under law. It meant the termination of the law and due to the resurrection of Jesus the cessation of the previous age and the inauguration of the new eschatological life (Weaver, 2001:52).

It is from within the framework of this radicalized understanding of sacrifice that Paul can accept the confession of the Antioch church in Acts 13:38-39 that Christ died a sacrificial death for the forgiveness of sins condemned by the law, a death that was “for us” or “on our behalf” or “for our sins”- Galatians 3:13; 1 Corinthians 15:3 (Weaver, 2001:52).

Because Christ’s demise marks the triumph over the powers of evil, it is not simply a moral act but an apocalyptic event, says Beker. Death, sin, the law and the flesh (powers that determine the human situation within the created order) are negated by Jesus’ death and will also be judged by Jesus’ death at the last judgement (Weaver, 2001:53).

Paul reinterprets the traditional Christian concepts of the righteousness of God as covenant renewal; of Christ as expiation or as the Paschal Lamb- (Romans 3:24-26/1 Corinthians 5:7) or the sacrificial blood of Christ- Romans 3:24-25/ Romans 5:9) in terms of his understanding of Christ’s death as the judgement of the powers of this age. It is this inseparable connection in Paul between the death and resurrection of Christ so that the death of Christ is drawn into the apocalyptic-cosmic event that inaugurates the cosmic triumph of
God. It is the inextricable connection of these two distinct historical events that renders the demise of Christ its eschatological importance and prevents it from being an individual theology of the cross (Weaver, 2001:54).

Beker indicates that death and resurrection are first of all consecutive events for Paul. While the cross gives prominence to the judgement of the old age, it is resurrection that proclaims the coming of the new age. The language of sacrifice and atonement can express judgement and forgiveness, but is incapable of expressing the new ontological state of life that succeeds the judgement of God in the demise of Christ. Forgiveness means acquittal of punishment but not the destruction of the power of sin or the “new creation” of the Christ-followers involvement in the resurrection way of life (Weaver, 2001:54).

It is when Paul’s thought is viewed through the lens of the apocalyptic that it not only lines up with the apocalyptic slant of narrative Christus Victor as portrayed in Revelation and the Gospels, says Weaver, but it also pronounces Paul incompatible with satisfaction atonement. In having its focus on the appeasing death, satisfaction atonement has no necessary role for the resurrection that occurs in an entirely different locale in the theological framework. Contrastingly, resurrection is the foundation of Paul’s thought and is what gives it the apocalyptic orientation described by Beker (Weaver, 2001:54).

Furthermore resurrection is what gives narrative Christus Victor the apocalyptic orientation commensurate with what Beker says about Paul. It seems a simple matter that since satisfaction atonement lacks a role for resurrection in salvation, it is not apocalyptic in orientation and consequently is incompatible with Paul. Narrative Christus Victor has an apocalyptic orientation and can be shown to fit with Paul’s thinking. Finally it is the proleptic rule of God (God’s future rule breaking into the present) that renders narrative Christus Victor the motif that supports a challenging of the status quo by the church as representative of the rule of God. Here is the foundation of Christian commitment to life in Christ and to carry on Jesus’ quest to witness to the presence of the rule of God in history (Weaver, 2001:54).

Contrastingly, satisfaction atonement, in lacking a proleptic presence of God’s reign in history, features a salvation motif outside of history which in turn lacks any impulse of confrontation with, or testimony to, the social order which turns it toward accommodating
and upholding the status quo. And in this way, only further accommodating oppression against the poor/vulnerable (Weaver, 2001:54).

Weaver also observes that the Girardian influenced work of Schwager goes well with Beker’s portrayal of the apocalyptic slant of Paul. After showing that Jesus’ mission concerned the reign of God Schwager deals with various formulations from Paul such as Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13 that other scholars have claimed for a very different comprehension of Jesus’ mission and death (Weaver, 2001:54).

Luther and Barth for example have seen these texts as revolving around a theology of the cross in which Jesus undergoes punishment meant for sinful humankind as though Jesus’ expiration is a judgement attributed to the Father as a direct act of condemnation of his Son. This notion is of course congruent with satisfaction atonement but does not match the understanding for the Gospels and Revelation in Weaver’s narrative Christus Victor (Weaver, 2001:55).

How one comprehends the judgment of the cross in such texts, Schwager asserts, depends on our comprehension of who acts in obedience to God’s will, and particularly whether one should comprehend the adversaries of Jesus as direct representatives of God’s will (Weaver, 2001:56).

In Jesus’ mission on behalf of the reign of God his human will cooperated in such a manner that, in obedience, he totally followed the divine will which sent him. But, Schwager asserts, if Jesus was made sin and was being punished by the Father as is the case with the punishment (compensatory violence) of satisfaction atonement, then the following happens. Those who annihilated Jesus must also have been acting in harmony with the divine will and acting in a sense as representatives of God. In this scenario Jesus stopped being the revealer of God. And his adversaries were charged with the divine mission of exterminating him as punishment on humankind- which stands in direct contradiction to the claim that in his mission Jesus’ human will cooperated in total obedience with the divine will that sent him (Weaver, 2001:56).

Some may then want to make the possible rationalization that both Jesus and the adversaries of Jesus reveal something of the will of God. That rationalization however would
place the message and surrender of Jesus (his nonviolence) and the action of his adversaries (their violence) up against each other in a contradictory manner that extends into the idea of God (Weaver, 2001:56).

Consequently Schwager deduces here that if the New Testament conviction of God’s revelation is not to be destroyed, the action of God in Jesus must be plainly detached from possible “divine” actions by his opponents. In other words Schwager plainly wants to steer clear of an interpretation of texts such as 2 Corinthians 5:21- “God made Christ to be sin”; Romans 8:3– “God condemned sin in the flesh”; Galatians 3:13– “Christ became a curse for us,” that would make God the divine agent behind the demise of Jesus (Weaver, 2001:56).

Even as far back as in the Old Testament, says Schwager, the Israelites never made God responsible for sin (as an act of God against God), but always only people. Thus God’s anger against sin is expressed by God handing people over to the consequences of their own depraved thinking wherein they punish themselves mutually. Consequently for example, “God made Christ to become sin,” is then a statement that “God was not the direct actor but sent his Son into the world ruled by sin and thus through the excess of sin making use of the law he became sin and a curse (Schwager, 1999:165)

In conclusion here Weaver claims that like Beker who comprehended Paul’s statements about the cross in an apocalyptic context, Schwager also comprehends that Paul views the demise of Jesus not in terms of compensatory violence but as the confrontation between the realm of God and evil forces. Resurrection then becomes the triumph of the reign of God over the power of sin (Weaver, 2001:58).

2.2.5 Old Testament Sacrifices

Another biblical motif often assumed to feed the satisfaction model is ancient Israel’s sacrificial system. Yet according to Weaver the correlation here is more linguistic than substantial (Weaver, 2001:58).

The first 8 chapters of Leviticus, explains Weaver describe the actions behind a number of ritual sacrifices (burnt offerings in the form of animals and grain) performed in
times of celebration thanksgiving and unwitting sin - Leviticus 1:4; 4:20; 5:6; 10; 13; 16. And furthermore an introductory point in comprehending the potential relationship of this ceremonial sacrifice to atonement images is to take note of the circumstances in which the ritual sacrifice takes place. Since the ritual was enacted not only in times of sin but also celebration and thanksgiving, it cannot be a mere matter of a ritual blood payment to satisfy guilt as prescribed by the law (Weaver, 2001:58-59).

A further pointer to comprehending the possible relationship of ritual Old Testament sacrifices to atonement imagery stems from Leviticus 17:11- “For the life of the flesh is in the blood.” Here, when the Hebrew understanding that the life of a creature is in its blood is put together with the worshipers symbolic identification of the animal being sacrificed, the following happens says Weaver. Rather than dying in the place of the worshiper the animal’s blood is understood to go to God as a self-dedication of the worshiper to God (Weaver, 2001:59).

As a rededication however it cannot or should not be appropriated as an image of satisfaction atonement in which the blood/death is deemed to satisfy a legal penalty imposed as the price of sin. It is rather a blood ritual of self-dedication to God, says Weaver (Weaver, 2001:59).

Additionally here notes Weaver is the fact that the sins dealt with in this ritual rededication such as those in (Leviticus 4:2; 13; 22; 27; 5:2; 14; 17), are mainly sins committed inadvertently and unintentionally. For the most serious and comprehensive sins, blood is not involved. This becomes apparent in Leviticus 16:20-22 which describes the ritual of the scapegoat wherein all the serious sins of the Hebrews are loaded on to a scapegoat which then rather than be killed, is made to carry them away into the barren outback (Weaver, 2001:60).

The motif of sacrifice, points out Weaver, can of course be commandeered as an image for the death of Jesus. When it becomes plain, however, that the dimension of satisfying a legal penalty is not an element of the Israelite ritual sacrifice then mere use of sacrificial terminology or imagery should not be interpreted to be evidence for satisfaction atonement. As was previously revealed in the work of both Beker and Schwager, sacrificial
terminology can fit within a context at variance from satisfaction atonement, namely that of narrative Christus Victor (Weaver, 2001:60).

A second aspect of challenge to the Hebrew sacrificial system is the critique of the pre-exilic prophets, who call the entire system into question, says Weaver. Their voices were heard in the context of Israel’s challenges from 721 BCE during the annihilation of the Northern Kingdom through to the annihilation of the Jerusalem temple - 587 BCE. In the face of these challenges the prophets anticipated no godly assistance via the sacrificial cult, but rather identified the cult itself with falsehood and deceitfulness that they claimed was the reason for the crisis in the first place. The prophet Amos for example, informs the people of God’s unhappiness with their burnt offerings, God preferring justice and righteousness in their place- Amos 5:21-22, 24 (Weaver, 2001:61).

2.2.6 Hebrews

With its symbolism of Jesus as the high priest and sacrificial language this book too would seem to support sacrificial and satisfaction motifs of atonement, notes Weaver (Weaver, 2001:61).

Yet, points out Weaver, Girardian scholars such as Michael Hardin in his work, Sacrificial Language in Hebrews (2000), and Loren Johns in his work Better Than Sacrifice? (2000), argue that Girard’s analysis of mimetic violence also fits Hebrews, and that it thus in fact has a nonsacrificial comprehension of Jesus’ demise. While Hebrews obviously makes use of the language of sacrifice the important question for these scholars revolves around whether it is accepting of the victimage mechanism or not. And clearly, for them, Hebrews is not (Weaver, 2001:61).

Hardin argues that the author of Hebrews subverted sacrificial language under the cover of sacrificial language. In sharing human flesh, Jesus is indeed mediator between God and humankind yet in that function is compared not to a sacrificial lamb, but high priest. Jesus is not so much offering as offerer (Hardin, 2000:107).
This is a very important difference, says Hardin. If Jesus were compared to the “passive lamb,” he would be a victim and join the victimage of which Girard spoke. But by comparing Jesus to the high priest, Jesus is neither victim, nor is he conspiring with the crowd in his demise. Instead he is in charge of his destiny and choosing to relinquish/sacrifice his life rather than to kill and keep alive the cycle of violence. It is in this sense that Jesus, in Hebrews, dies once for all….his incarnation and death is not to be repeated- Hebrews 9:26, 28 (Hardin, 2000:107)

Repetition, points out Hardin, is indigenous to the sacrificial mechanism where ritual repetition of sacrifice recalls the originating killing that originally founded the community. It is indubitably the repetitive character of the sacrifices in the Hebrew cultus that is considered one of its major weaknesses– Hebrews 7:27; 9:25 (Hardin, 2000:107).

The Hebrews writer thus comprehends the demise of Jesus as a surrender of life without a desire for vengeance, says Weaver. By not engaging in violence, Jesus shatters the mechanism of violence and clears the way for a new obedience. Retribution is not part of the high priestly work of Christ. This refusal to exact retribution by Jesus is contrasted to Abel, whose demise was the founding murder of the biblical tradition. Where Abel’s blood shouts from the ground for retribution- Genesis 4:10, the author of Hebrews wrote that Jesus’ blood “speaks a better word than the blood of Abel”- Hebrews 12:24. In place of shouting for retribution Jesus’ blood speaks words of mercy and forgiveness (Weaver, 2001:62-3).

Following the discussion of Jesus’ death as a refusal to use violence, Hardin developed the use of Psalm 40 in Hebrews 10:1-18 to place rejection of the system of sacrifice on the tongue of the pre-existent Christ. In this interpretation of the Psalm Jesus rejects sacrifice- the religion founded in violence- and thus enacts the only role open to him in the incarnation process: he becomes the ultimate victim. And in doing the will of the Father here he models Christian life as a self-offering, namely as one who is called to care for victims and even possibly become one (Weaver, 2001:62-3).

In response to Hardin, Loren Johns, in his work Better than Sacrifice? (2000) emphasizes arguments that challenge a sacrificial theology in Hebrews. With Hardin he notes the writer of Hebrews is far keener to depict Jesus as high priest than as sacrifice. In this context, says Johns, when Jesus’ demise is referred to as a sacrifice the stress is on his self-
offering rather than on the solidification of sacrifice theology. This emphasis steers clear of blaming God for a need for appeasement (Weaver, 2001: 62, 63).

In consolidating the thinking of Hardin and Johns, Raymund Schwager in his *Jesus in the Drama* (1999) separates Christ from the wide sacrificial tradition of Aaron and Levi. This is an action that inaugurates a new covenant and places Christ in a new priestly order, as opposed to continuing the day-to-day sacrifices of the old covenant order (Schwager, 1999: 182).

The new sacrifice makes clear that the old ones purified only in an external cultic sense, but did not bring about inner healing, says Schwager. In Hebrews 10:1-18 and its use of Christ quoting Psalm 40 for example there is a rejection of a sacrificial hermeneutic, with Christ quoting words here about God not wanting sacrifice and offering, and not taking delight in burnt and sin offerings. The writer of Hebrews notes that these undesirables were “offered according to the law,” and then puts words in the mouth of Christ that state that he (Christ) has come to abolish the first law (the Law) and replace it with the second (God’s will). In other words Christ has come to abolish the sacrificial system and replace it with obedience to the will of God (Schwager, 1999:123).

2.2.7 Israel’s History

Although narrative Christus Victor does not appeal to the tradition of sacrifice in the Old Testament it is still connected to the Old Testament says Weaver. In being far from limited to New Testament input from Revelation, the Gospels, Paul and Hebrews, it is a continuation of a reading of the story of ancient Israel. Way back in the call of Abraham- Genesis 12:2-3- the mission of God’s people to make God’s reign visible on earth, and history begins (Weaver, 2001:66).

The story of Israel is the history of that mission. That history is the story of those who represent God’s reign in witness against the powers of the world that do not yet recognize the reign of God. In its quest to witness to God’s reign in history Israel experiences both a number of successes and failures along the way. The Egyptian exodus is the exemplar event of God’s reign on behalf of God’s people (Weaver, 2001:66).
The just noted challenge by the prophets to the fruitlessness of the sacrificial system and their consequent requests for love justice and obedience witness to failure in implementing that quest. On the other hand in exile and without a political infrastructure and a national monarchy Israel carried on as testifiers to the presence of the reign of God (Weaver, 2001:66).

Jesus both carries on with this story and represents a new juncture in its development. Jesus not only testifies to the presence of the reign of God in history, but is also of God so that his life and teaching are the presence of the rule of God in history. Consequently Jesus’ challenge of evil and his ultimate triumph via resurrection do not emerge as totally novel events in the history of God’s people. It is rather the continuation and culmination of a mission that initiated with the call of Abraham (Weaver, 2001:66-67).

According to Weaver, John H. Yoder, in his essay, “See How they Go with Their Face to the Sun (1997), makes plain this link between Israel and Jesus and then the early church. The key imagery for this essay, says Yoder, comes from Jeremiah 29:7. Here, the exiles are instructed to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Weaver, 2001:66-67).

In Babylon, as an extension of their witness as the people of God, the exiles dwelt without attempting to change the social order. Whilst maintaining their Jewish identity they nevertheless lived in peace and cooperation with the Babylonians not considering any local state structure to be the principal bearer of the movement in history. And furthermore, claims Weaver, this particular pacifist ethos of Jewry continued on into the first two centuries of Christian history (Weaver, 2001:66-67).

Jesus’ impact in the first century was to add further and more profound authentically Jewish reasons for the already well-established ethos of not being in charge and not considering any local state structure to be the principal bearer of the movement of history. Then hereafter the apostles added another layer of further reasons having to do with the messiahship of Jesus, his lordship and the presence of the Spirit. Until the messianity of Jesus was replaced by that of Constantine says Yoder, it was the only ethos that made sense. At no point along this path from Babylonia to Constantine were the people of God defined by a
national political structure or by whether their culture was accepted by or made sense to the Babylonians (Weaver, 2001:68).

It was this stance and status of the people of God in exile in Babylonia that Jesus as a Jew filled out, that was continued in the church as God’s people by the generation of the apostles, and that was eventually jettisoned in the era of Constantine. And when the church assumed the role of managing the social order in the time after Constantine, it was a return to the policy of David, the rise of whose rule was a disappointment not only to Samuel but to God (Weaver, 2001:68).

What Weaver calls narrative Christus Victor thus finally becomes a reading of the history of God’s people, who make God’s reign visible in the world by the confrontation of injustice and by making visible in their midst the justice, peace, and freedom of the reign of God. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, says Weaver, constitute the culmination of the reign of God, and also the particular point in history when God’s reign is most fully present and revealed (Weaver, 2001:68).

2.3 Narrative Christus Victor: Some Comparisons and its Expiration

In order to assist in the understanding of Weaver’s argument for a nonviolent understanding of atonement, I have so far analysed 6 biblical settings that Weaver chooses for the purposes of laying out his proposal. Here, Weaver ties God’s saving action in Christ to the biblical reading of the entire history of God’s people. The atonement notion narrative Christus Victor becomes for Weaver a reading of the history of God’s people who make God’s reign visible in the world by the nonviolent confrontation of the forces of evil and injustice.

The events of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection together become the culminating revelation of that reign of God, having profound ethical implications in a concrete sense for how we live our lives and also emphasising how totally outside of history satisfaction atonement is. This of course is because the satisfaction motif appears to minimize the life of Jesus to a strategy whose purpose was to manufacture his death, and in the process is also that which permits oppression.
This next section of Weaver’s work is just as important as the previous one for my argument for a nonviolent understanding of atonement, as it goes on to develop further understandings of atonement shaped by nonviolence that may not be so immediately apparent. It does this in the following ways.

- Firstly by way of exploring some answers to some systematic questions Weaver develops further nonviolent dimensions beyond the biblical that are not clear at first glance. In the process he further emphasizes how satisfaction atonement is intrinsically founded upon assumptions of violence and as a result of this is totally devoid of an ethical dimension in the historical realm.

- Secondly in his quest for a nonviolent understanding of atonement, Weaver approaches the history of doctrine differently. Here, by offering a new reading of the development of Christology and atonement in the history of doctrine his discussion shows that the standard accounts of the development of doctrine have presumed the accommodation of violence as the self-evident norm. He provides an alternative reading here that is an extension of the biblical interpretation that presumed nonviolence. For Weaver these biblical and historical insights make quite visible the fact that atonement has ecclesiological implications and that narrative Christus Victor is thus an ecclesiological motif as well as a model of atonement. Together, claims Weaver, these biblical and historical insights bring a critique shaped by nonviolence to the internal logic of atonement motifs themselves. The result is a statement of narrative Christus Victor as a comprehensive theology that responds to a variety of violence issues. Weaver himself admits that his approach here does not use the standard account of the history of doctrine (Weaver, 2001:67). As we shall see, I along with many other scholars cannot agree with this account of the role he claims church history played in the formulation of a violent notion of atonement.

Weaver sums up his multi-dimensional discussion in this section in the following way. It is a theological alternative to the almost “dogmatic” status of the satisfaction notion wherein the work of atonement is deemed to be a forensic act occurring outside of the realm of history and is thus that which can never be equated with ethics (Weaver, 2001:13).
Conversely Weaver’s work is that which seeks to demonstrate that interpretations of biblical material related to atonement, and the history of doctrine, and contemporary reconstructions of atonement are in fact affected when issues of atonement are scrutinized through a lens focussed by the nonviolence of Jesus.

2.3.1 Differentiating Narrative Christus Victor- Some Systematic Questions

2.3.1.1 Who Was Responsible for Jesus’ Demise

Weaver notes that answers to questions about the “object of Jesus’ death,” “who needs Jesus’ death,” and “who killed Jesus,” are instructive for his argument because they bring out important differences between a nonviolent notion of atonement (narrative Christus Victor), and the traditional violent notions (Weaver, 2001:70).

In a nutshell answers that emerge to the above queries when posed to traditional atonement (satisfaction and moral) show God the Father to be the one who requires/is the agent of Jesus’ demise (Weaver, 2001:70-72).

Conversely when these queries are posed to narrative Christus Victor it is the powers of evil that require the death and Jesus’ mission is not about perishing but making visible God’s reign. And furthermore in his countering of the powers of violence, by yielding to them rather than meeting them on their own terms he makes visible the notion that God’s reign does not respond to violence with violence. The resurrection thus becoming proof here of God’s power over death which is the worst that evil can do (Weaver, 2001:70-72).

2.3.1.2 Our Participation in Jesus’ Demise

Additional dimensions to the query “who needs the death” appear when one enquires about the sinner’s role in the drama in which the reign of God in Jesus confronted the powers of evil. Since all humankind is sinful, says Weaver, to enquire about the sinner’s role here is to enquire about our own participation in this story (Weaver, 2001:73).
The good news of salvation is that as a result of Jesus’ saving act sinners are saved. Yet from a narrative Christus Victor perspective before we claim the salvation offered in Christ what is required of us is not simply an abstract confession of sinfulness and guilt revolving around a debt owed to the divine honour. Rather, it is about our identification with the powers that killed Jesus. Via resurrection Christ has triumphed over the evil powers yet it is only as we acknowledge our complicity with them in the killing of Christ that we can be set free from them. Salvation in narrative Christus Victor thinking thus entails humankind’s commitment to cease any oppressive behaviour in the world- the likes of which is able to find accommodation and even acceptance in satisfaction atonement (Weaver, 2001:73-76).

2.3.1.3 Unmerited Favour and Pardon

Visualizing our identity with the forces that annihilated Jesus steers us into the concepts of “grace” and “forgiveness” observes Weaver. Here because we are complicit with the evil forces in Jesus’ annihilation, our invitation from the Father to identify with Jesus and to participate in the victory of God’s rule over evil can never rest on any favour we have earned. But rather our acceptance of this loving offer from God despite our sinfulness hinges entirely upon God’s grace. It is impossible to undo or compensate for the sin we have committed. There is no question of humanity earning any kind of status with God. Yet God offers forgiveness and acceptance while we are still under the control of the powers of evil- and that acceptance of us is most certainly grace (Weaver, 2001:76).

However although we definitely cannot earn any status with God and have no power to revoke the evil committed, in the thinking of narrative Christus Victor there is nevertheless a response required from us in order to be a part of the redeeming victory of God’s reign. In an attitude of repentance we are required to commit to living a new and transformed life free of the evil of violence and oppression in the power of the resurrected Christ as we await the full restoration of all things. Thus in nonviolent atonement thinking we do not simply receive forgiveness via an abstract transaction between Father and Son as in satisfaction atonement whereby our gracious redemption is assured despite the requirement of any concrete response on our part in the historical world.
2.3.1.4 Being Part of the Redeeming Reign of God

Upon discussion of grace and forgiveness says Weaver, one can see that a nonviolent notion of atonement such as narrative Christus Victor entails both the responsibility of humankind and God’s predestining grace. Plainly human effort alone cannot impact or resist the forces of evil (Weaver, 2001:77).

In this understanding sinners experience the power of the rule of God both through the power of God’s grace and when they make the choice freely out of their own individual volition to give their lives as a witness to the risen Christ. Participation in the victory of Christ here thus sits astride the paradox of the predestination of individuals and the responsibility of humankind (Weaver, 2001:77).

Conversely participation in the victory of Christ wherein the victory is based upon a forensic act separated from any ethical involvements on our part hinges purely upon the notion of God’s predestining grace, leaving the individual without any responsibility to have to choose to behave ethically in the world. And thus in this scenario being able to assume the freedom to perpetuate and contribute toward oppressive behaviour and sinful living and yet enjoy salvation at the same time (Weaver, 2001:77).

2.3.1.5 Judgement and Compassion of God

Weaver’s contemporary reconstruction of narrative Christus Victor avoids bifurcating (dividing into two branches) the wrath (justice) of God and the love (mercy) of God. In other words whereas satisfaction atonement understands God’s mercy and God’s justice to be sequential events that follow each other, in a nonviolent atonement understanding such as narrative Christus Victor God’s role does not change from mercy to judgement and nor is there a contrast between them (Weaver, 2001:78).

What changes in narrative Christus Victor is where we stand in the saga of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection says Weaver. In terms of our identity with sin and need of confession, we stand with the powers that are in bondage to sin and the law who annihilated Jesus. We stand with the evil that is exposed and condemned by his demise (Weaver, 2001:78).
And God’s judgement, when viewed from this stance can be explained in terms of us (humankind) falling prey to our own wickedness to which we have turned ourselves over and which continues to imprison us. But as Christ-identified people we have been invited by God to change allegiances and stand on the side of Christ and the reign of God that has ultimate victory over sin and death and thus sets us free from them. But while we continue in captivity to sin, God remains merciful and loving holding open the opportunity for a transformed existence (Weaver, 2001:78).

Contrastingly God’s judgement, when understood to revolve around the notion of retributive justice which first requires an innocent atoning death on our behalf, before God can display God’s mercy in the form of the forgiveness of our sins, bifurcates the judgment and mercy of God. And unlike the narrative Christus Victor understanding, accommodates and can even encourage oppression in the world as it offers us a blanket forgiveness of our sins regardless of how we behave in the world. This is because it fails to link the notion of God’s judgment to the notion of humankind falling prey to the consequences of its own wickedness (Weaver, 2001:44, 78).

This understanding of atonement embracing a notion of God’s mercy and justice which revolves around retribution and punishment is that which is accommodating of oppression/violence in the world. On the other hand a nonviolent notion of atonement does not have God’s role changing from mercy to judgement and shows rather that God is perennially merciful and offering of the opportunity for restoration and transformation (Weaver, 2001:78).

2.3.1.6 Ethics

The sinner’s complicity with the powers that oppose the rule of God and the sinner’s repentance, the genuineness of which is identified by active participation in the rule of God, is in contrast with the passive role for humanity in satisfaction atonement, notes Weaver. The paradox of free will and predestination also involves the active participation by the individual in a transformed (redeemed) life, which is again unlike the passive role of humanity in satisfaction atonement. Narrative Christus Victor portrays humanity actively involved in history as sinners against the reign of God, and as actively involved in salvation as the
transformed individual participates in witnessing to the presence of the rule of God in history (Weaver, 2001:78-79).

Contrastingly for satisfaction atonement, the sinner is a passive observer of a divine transaction between Father and Son that takes place outside history. As an outcome of the transaction, the sinner’s legal status before God changes, but outside of that change in status there is no transformation of the life of a sinner in his/her capacity as one living in history. This contrast of active and passive stances of the sinner in nonviolent atonement such as narrative Christus Victor and satisfaction atonement has implications for comprehending ethics as it relates to atonement theology (Weaver, 2001:78-79).

The point about ethics in the satisfaction images that assume a legal framework, notes Weaver, is that they say nothing about ethics. In fact they feature an essential separation of salvation and ethics and thus may even contribute to sinful living since they provide a means to maintain a proper legal status before God without speaking about transformed life under God’s reign (Weaver, 2001:79).

This passive character of salvation and an image of atonement devoid of ethics is striking when compared with the image of narrative Christus Victor in which identifying with Jesus (or being Christian) and the discussion of ethics (how Christians live) are two facets of the same question. Here, in a nonviolent understanding of atonement when the sinner is saved he or she changes allegiances not via a legal status change before God which means nothing in the historical realm, but via a changed life lived according to God’s reign (Weaver, 2001:80).

2.3.1.7 Atonement in History

Atonement defined in terms of a legal paradigm, notes Weaver does not make use of what is learned about Jesus from the story-based portrayal of Jesus’ confrontation of evil. Consequently the satisfaction motif does not make intrinsically necessary any specific knowledge of Jesus’ teaching nor the way he was human or divine. Contrastingly without the narrative portrayal of Jesus in narrative Christus Victor one does not know what the reign of God appears like, nor how those who would be Christian would orient themselves in the world. Shining a spotlight on the ahistorical character of satisfaction atonement is thus
another way to expose the ethical void of satisfaction atonement, points out Weaver (Weaver, 2001:80).

2.3.2 The Expiration of Narrative Christus Victor

Weaver wishes to make clear here that narrative Christus Victor is first of all a biblical motif to which a name has been attributed for ease of reference. This biblical image outlines the narrative of Jesus in a way that focuses on the rule of God made visible by Jesus within the history in which we dwell, and it is a model that attributes cosmic meaning to events in the realm of history (Weaver, 2001:81).

But what happened to this biblical motif? What accounts for its apparent extinction, and its ultimate replacement by Anselm’s satisfaction motif with Abelard’s motif as the minority counterpart to the satisfaction motif?

According to Weaver, a first move towards comprehending the lot of narrative Christus Victor is to recognize that it is also an image of ecclesiology. Identifying likely historical forebears for the symbolism of Revelation positions this telling of the biblical narrative in history and reveals plainly that the narrative is about the 1st century church, says Weaver. According to this biblical construction the church was the earthly mechanism that continued Jesus’ quest of making visible God’s reign. And it did this by way of rejecting the use of the sword and the seizing of authority by violent military means as was the norm in the Empire, and contrastingly taking a pacifist stance in the world (Weaver, 2001:81).

It is the social relationship of early church and Empire that equates to what Weaver has called narrative Christus Victor. This theory assumes that the structure that makes visible the rule of God poses a contrast to or a witness to the social order that does not know or acknowledge the rule of God. That was the case for the church in the time of Revelation and it continued on in the post-New Testament times. Weaver’s reconstructed narrative Christus Victor makes sense of/depends upon this social context (Weaver, 2001:82).
Starting in the mid-second century and going on for more than two centuries, the church was subjected to a number of changes that had long-lasting implications. The Christian religion came into favour with Emperor Constantine who legalized it via the Edict of Milan in 313 CE (Weaver, 2001:82).

In its pre-Constantinian context the early churches feelings about harassment and possible annihilation by the hostile imperial authority were a mirror of its lack of legal standing in the empire. And it was precisely through its uncomfortableness with the structures around it that it represented God’s working in the world (Weaver, 2001:82).

However in moving from a state of persecution into an allegiance with the Empire the church now gained the support of the Empire and assumed that both civil and churchly authorities had roles in ecclesial affairs. It thus came to encompass the social order as a whole- this fusion of church and social order being termed a “Christian society” (Weaver, 2001:84).

With civil leaders assuming authority in churchly affairs the leaders of the social order became presumed agents of God and political structures then became presumed agents of God’s providence. The church as understood as being a small faith-filled minority in a state of confrontation with the world. And also being on the verge of extinction and claiming courageously that God was in control of history and that God’s reign had already found victory in Jesus’ resurrection had reversed itself. In the course of the changes represented by Constantine it now seemed self-evident that God controlled history while it took faith to believe that an invisible but faithful church existed within the preponderance of nominal faith of the supposedly Christian society (Weaver, 2001:84).

Corresponding to the move from church to empire as the constitutional bearer of God’s providence was the move from Jesus to the emperor as the norm by which to gauge the behaviour of Christians. Here Jesus the Lord was no longer held to be the norm of faith and practice and as the decisive aspect of judgement in terms of how one is supposed to live as a Christian. Rather the decisive criterion for ethical behaviour now revolved around the success of the Empire. And thus preservation of the Empire and its social order became the decisive
yardstick against which the rightness of behaviour such as murder or truth telling was to be judged (Weaver, 2001:85).

The Emperor’s behaviour as ruler of the civil order of which church was now a part was gauged not according to Jesus’ example instruction and ethics, but how it furthered the Empire’s cause. Being “Christian” thus meant adhering to nothing more than a minimum standard of Christian behaviour. This included accommodation of the sword which was deemed necessary so as to defend the church which had shifted from a pacifist location outside society and a stance of estrangement and confrontation to a position within society of support for the social order and its governing structures (Weaver, 2001:85,86).

2.3.2.2 The History of Church and Atonement

Weaver does not correlate the slow waning of the Christus Victor image that had begun to occur at this time with the following traditional reasons given for its expiration: objection to God recognizing any rights of the devil; objection to its dualistic worldview; apparent lack of evidence of the triumph of God’s reign in history. Rather, he correlates this with the newly formed Constantinian churches loss of its sense of confrontation with the world, on both a historicized and cosmic level (Weaver, 2001:86).

One dimension of this move from confrontation to accommodation, suggests Weaver, was losing sight of the possible historical predecessors of the symbolism in Revelation. With the church no longer confronting empire, the actual historical social state of affairs that now hinged around co-operation and fusion no longer matched the cosmic confrontation imagery of Revelation- which as a result lost most of its meaning. The pre Constantinian atonement theory that used such imagery could now be denied and jettisoned with place being made over time for the medieval notions of Anselm and Abelard (Weaver, 2001:87).

It wasn’t the case that a new ecclesiology was immediately perceived which in turn led to a new atonement theory being instantly developed to match it, says Weaver. There did however eventually come a time when talking about atonement in a manner that assumed a challenge between church and social order no longer made sense (Weaver, 2001:88).
Other arguments suggesting that Anselm’s theories are more at home in a medieval rather than an early church context are the following. Firstly Anselm’s theory is comfortable in the medieval penitential system that mirrors a background of feudalism and a feudal lord to whom serfs owe honour and service (Weaver, 2001:88-90).

Secondly, this theory has to do only with individuals and individual sin. It thus says virtually nothing about systemic problems due to its assumption that God’s reign was expressed through the social order. The social order was thus not that which was required to be challenged (Weaver, 2001:88-90).

Thirdly, Anselm says nothing about the specifics of Jesus’ life and work that are intrinsic to his atoning work, using instead humanity/deity categories of the Nicean Chalcedonian Christological formulas to portray Jesus (Weaver, 2001:88-90).

### 2.3.3 Christological Formulas

Weaver continues here to track the reasons as to why the Nicean Chalcedonian Christological formulas are problematical for a nonviolent atonement understanding.

As an opening argument Weaver suggests that these formulas are not the universal timeless statements upholding the Christian faith that they have been made out to be. Although they have indeed gained the status of dogma, says Weaver, they do in fact mirror the specific Greek philosophical ontological context from which they come that also embraces a hierarchical worldview. Such categories do not make the Nicean Chalcedonian formulas essentially wrong and nor do they nullify their historic contribution to our comprehension of Jesus. But they do however underline the historical specificity and particular character of these formulas which could only have been officially accepted by a church that was already far along the road in its identification with the social order (Weaver, 2001:93).

A second aspect of these philosophical formulas that fails to express the nonviolent character of the reign of God is that there is nothing inherently in them that can shape the church that would follow Jesus in witnessing to the rule of God in the world. And that can
express the ethical aspect of being Christ related and that would form the church as an extension of Jesus’ presence in the world (Weaver, 2001:93).

It is the church which no longer specifically mirrored Jesus’ teaching about nonviolence that can confess Christological creeds devoid of ethics as the basis of Christian doctrine. The abstract categories in these creeds permitted the church to accommodate the sword and violence while still maintaining a confession about Christ at the core of its theology. Whereas retaining the narrative-oriented portrayal of Jesus from the New Testament as the basis of belief would oppose rather than accommodate the church represented by Constantine (Weaver, 2001:94).

The New Testament narrative that accords with narrative Christus Victor is common to all Christians observes Weaver. Thus could it be that a reluctance to embrace a narrative-oriented identification of Jesus as an ecumenical formula as opposed to the Nicene Creed, derives from the narrative’s jettisoning of the sword, the wielding of which has been so pivotal to Christendom’s experience? (Weaver, 2001:94).

2.4 Dialoguing with Black, Feminist and Womanist Theologies

Whereas from within his own pacifist context Weaver’s discussion of violence and nonviolence relative to atonement motifs, has so far presumed essentially the violence of the sword. Now, in introducing the insights of other contextual theologies to the discussion, the focus broadens and shifts to issues related to the systemic violence of racism and sexism.

2.4.1 Atonement From a Black Perspective

2.4.1.1 Introduction: The Incentive to Challenge “White” Theology

Developing out of the black church in the 1960’s, black theology essentially witnessed to Jesus the Liberator. It challenged the black church that had mostly accepted oppressive white theology. In addition it critiqued white theology which it saw as being the universal theology passed on by Christendom that accommodated and supported slavery racism and white supremacy (Weaver, 2001:99,100).
Important features of black theology for my topic at hand in this dissertation are the following: it brings a new particular perspective to the atonement discussion that revolves around the importance of social location. It makes racism an integral aspect of the discussion.

2.4.1.2 James Cone: Naming his Social Location

In his book *God of the Oppressed* (1999), James H. Cone, the name most often associated with the founding of the black theology movement, describes on one hand the pain of his exclusion from Christianity as practiced by white folks. And yet on the other hand he describes his own black church experience as enabling him to experience a reassurance of God’s love and concern for black wellbeing and a foretaste of Kingdom glory and freedom (Cone, 1999:2-4).

Quite noticeably the experiences of African-Americans in the African-American community differed from experiences of Anglo-Americans who dwelt mainly in white society, notes Cone. Cone’s experience began in the black community and in the black church, so that black theology is formed by the reality of what it means for the black church to dwell in a white dominated society. Thus the context out of which Cone formulates black theology which gives it a specific biblical and theological perspective is very different from the context of those who produced what the predominantly white church terms Christian theology (Cone, 1999:2-4).

Naming the African-American perspective does something to white theology and to the presupposed neutral and universal theology handed down from European Christendom, asserts Cone. Whites begin to perceive their experience as being “white” and the white church as a specific perspective- as opposed to being a universal one- within which to interpret the Bible and theologize (Weaver, 2001:103).

2.4.1.3 A Different Take on the Bible: Critical Analysis of Traditional Theology

The difference between black and traditional white history has led black people and white people to different perceptions when it comes to reading the bible and theologizing claims Cone. From their context of a white dominant ruling class background white theologians developed as a supposedly universally applicable theology, abstract theological issues and
systems such as satisfaction atonement which rests upon the Nicean Chalcedonian Christological creeds. And which hinges salvation onto a legal transaction outside history thus failing to relate Christological issues to the oppressed in society. This absence of ethics plainly laid the foundation for development of a theology that supported the church’s position as the favoured religion of Rome and did not address the conditions of the marginalized and oppressed (Cone, 1999:104,105,107).

In the portrayal of Jesus as a spiritual saviour with salvation from sin and guilt being a spiritual matter and thus divorced from concrete realities, whites saw the social conditions for people of colour as being an unimportant departure point resulting in a theology void/marginalised of ethics (Cone, 1999:42-52). This salvation, notes Cone is compatible with slavery and is maintained in the faith which accommodates assumptions of white superiority. The link between liberation and reconciliation has been severed for much of history says Cone. White theologians could claim Jesus as defined by the abstract Nicean Chalcedonian formulas professing correctly to stand in the orthodox theological tradition yet simultaneously continue to participate in oppression (Cone, 1999:181).

Contrastingly when African-Americans read the Bible and theologize they see an Exodus-based God of justice, siding with the poor and oppressed and involved in liberation. And Jesus, who mirrors God, is a gospel liberator involved in saving people not merely spiritually but in concrete social terms from oppression (Cone, 1999:57-76).

2.4.1.4 Atonement Views of James Cone

In critiquing Anselm and the Nicean Chalcedonian creeds as he does for their lack of ethics and accommodation of the violence of oppression it seems quite natural that Cone’s atonement approach should involve a reformulated Christus Victor-the theory dominant in the pre Constantinian church (Weaver, 2001:106).

Within his reconstruction Cone stresses that reconciliation has an objective reality that is linked to divine liberation, wherein Christ, through his death and resurrection liberates humankind from the powers of this world. Thus God’s reconciliation is a new relationship with humankind, created by God’s concrete involvement in political worldly affairs, and siding with the poor (Cone, 1999:209,210).
Cone’s theory builds on Gustav Aulen’s (1879-1978) renewed classical Christus Victor formulated in the 1930’s that focusses upon the objective reality of reconciliation as defined by God’s triumph over Satan and his forces. Yet whereas the classical motif was nonpolitical Cone’s reconstruction is radically politicized grounding liberation and reconciliation in history and relating it to God’s battle against the forces of enslavement. Thus here, the forces confronted and ultimately beaten by the resurrected Christ include not only the powers of evil mythically expressed in the figure of the devil but earthly realities as well, such as aspects of the American system responsible for black oppression (Cone, 1999:212,213).

2.4.1.5 Postmodern Theological Understanding Challenges Classical Atonement

Weaver noted in the introduction to his book *The Nonviolent Atonement*, the realization that contextual theologians do theology from within a specific context. And that this sheds a different light on the received theology of Christendom which has very often been assumed to comprise the universal basis for all Christian theology (Weaver, 2001:6).

In doing theology from within their own contexts, the contextual theologians possess an awareness that no theology can obtain an objectively verifiable universally recognised uncontestable foundation of common truth. Yet simultaneously what they also recognise is each theologies universal importance in terms of how it attempts to reflect and interpret the Jesus story, and that this reflection may not be readily apparent and thus accepted by anyone of right mind (Weaver, 2001:109).

In coming from the specific stance of his black theological context Cone is specifically able to show up traditional theology as revolving around formulations developed by white churchmen that are: accommodating of dominance and oppression; maintaining the status quo and being based upon an ethic other than Jesus. Contrastingly his own theology, along with feminists and womanists expresses how people of any colour who reflect the story of Jesus the Liberator will challenge domination and oppression and seek to live justly in the world (Weaver, 2001:109).
2.4.1.6 Cone and Weaver: Comparison of Approaches

Cone’s black theology and Weaver’s own Mennonite context both stem from marginalized (suppressed) theological traditions. And included in both their experiences of marginalization comes the questioning of whether their experiences, although very different, might result in a different perspective on the theology of Christendom. And here according to Weaver emerges a parallel perspective regarding mainstream Christendom theological tradition. Both, in making use of the particularity of Jesus in the New Testament critique the categories of the classic formulas demonstrating that when viewed from the margins it becomes all the more clear to discern the abstract categories and lack of ethics of the classic formulations (Weaver, 2001:112).

Both supposedly marginal critiques connect the loss of the NT narrative and the emergence of the abstract categories of classic thought to the changes in the church symbolized by Constantine. And in their reconstruction of an alternative to the classic theology, both root their new comprehensions of atonement in a reconstruction of the Christus Victor atonement theory that was the dominant theory in the Constantinian church (Weaver, 2001:112).

However alongside the multiple parallels and points of agreement between Weaver and Cone, Weaver notes the concept of violent resistance in the contemporary world is one important point of disagreement between the two theologies. In Weaver’s book Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity, he dialogues with, and responds to Cone on the question of violence and resistance (Weaver, 2000:138-140).

Within this book Weaver notes that African Americans and black theology have not been of one voice on this issue any more than have adherents of the peace churches. For example, a difference occurs between black theologians Cone and Fletcher on this point. A particular dimension of Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher’s black Xodus theology (which is spelled without the “E” and which Weaver notes is second generation black theology), is

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21 The Anabaptist reformation of the 16th century posed a threat to the established church and social order by developing an ecclesiology that rejected the intervention of civil authorities in churchly affairs. Many Anabaptists of this time were persecuted for their stance. Although modern Anabaptism is not the radical underside movement it used to be, being a member of this movement has nevertheless spurred Weaver on to ask whether these experiences might result in a different perspective on the theology of Christendom inherited from the churchly tradition that suppressed Anabaptists (Weaver, 2001:111)
Jesus’ rejection of violence, the love of Jesus producing according to Baker-Fletcher a spirit of anti-violence. According to Baker-Fletcher, as Luther King Jnr. developed a programme of nonviolence that combined Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount teachings with Ghandi’s Satyagraha-strategy, so are we as humankind to encourage anti-violence (Baker-Fletcher, 1996:190-191).

However, from a black viewpoint according to Cone, this advocacy of nonviolence was another instance of whites defining black reality. And in that context denying white calls for nonviolence and asserting that blacks should liberate themselves by any means necessary was as much a statement that blacks would define their own reality as it was a comment about violence. In a further point Cone differentiates between nonviolence and self-defence, labelling self-defence as a human right and saying that white people should not tell black people what means they should use to confront racism. Simultaneously Cone asserts that nonviolence equates to “resistance,” and is the only creative way an African/American black minority can fight for freedom and simultaneously avoid genocide during the era of the Civil Rights Movement (Weaver, 2000:138).

Furthermore, says Cone, Jesus’ nonviolence can never be absolutized even if we could be completely sure of biblical testimony (Weaver, 2000:138-139).

2.4.2 Atonement From a Feminist Perspective

2.4.2.1 Introduction

Weaver’s focus on violence and atonement has so far presumed the violence of the sword and racism. Now in order to broaden his critique against traditional atonement and develop nonviolent dimensions even further, he draws attention to feminist theology.

Thereafter in putting narrative Christus Victor in conversation with a number of womanist theologians, yet more additions to the violence problems associated with traditional atonement are added to the mix. In both instances here he takes the opportunity to pose his own challenges from a narrative Christus Victor point of view to these female voices.
Feminist theological analysis in general demonstrates how classical atonement images and Christological terminology have accommodated and supported violence against women. It gives voice to and is informed by experiences of women who reject male dominance and a subservient status in relation to men, notes Weaver. Feminist responses to male dominated theology range across a spectrum from outright rejection of Christianity to those who choose rather to remain Christian and to challenge the male patriarchal and hierarchical attributes ascribed to God and to the general character of western theology. These challenges engage both classic Christology and the accompanying dominant atonement motifs (Weaver, 2001:123).

2.4.2.2 Critique of Orthodox Imperial Christology and Traditional Atonement by Five Feminists

2.4.2.2.1 Rosemary Radford Ruether

Rosemary Radford Ruether\textsuperscript{22} in her \textit{Sexism and Godtalk} (1983) shows how over the first five centuries, the early marginalized churches understanding of Jesus’ mission focusing on the reign of God and bringing vindication to the marginalized and oppressed was transformed. As a product of this transformation imperial orthodox (Nicean Chalcedonian) Christology and religion was born. This was patriarchal in nature and had attached to it a political and religious hierarchy of being, says Ruether (Ruether, 1983: 123-126).

In this hierarchy, with Christ as head, men governed women. Furthermore women could not represent Christ as the male disclosure of a male God. Only the male as God’s normative representative could represent the fullness of human nature with women being deemed physically, morally and mentally defective. As Ruether notes this is not universal theology as was thought to be for centuries, but reflective of the social order in which it was born (Ruether, 1983:123-126).

\textsuperscript{22}Rosemary Radford Ruether (1936- ) is regarded by many such as Grant D. Miller in his 1999 Internet article for The Boston Collaborative Encyclopaedia for Modern Western Theology as a pioneer of Christian feminist theology. She has been regarded in such a light for over three decades now, says Grant especially in the light of her book \textit{Sexism and Godtalk} which is regarded as a classic in feminist theology (Miller, 1999: people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/)
Ruether’s answer to this problem is to revert to the Jesus of the Gospels who upholds justice, equality, and liberty for all—her depiction here notes Weaver, bearing a strong similarity to the Jesus of narrative Christus Victor (Weaver, 2001:124).

In her *Introducing Redemption* (1998) Ruether sees Jesus’ death in traditional atonement as appearing as a model of passive obedience to the Father’s need to impose a mission of suffering. Yet, in being that which is unjust and innocent, can never be redemptive or salvific. Thus, for Ruether Jesus did not come to suffer and die but to confront the evil powers—not by killing them but by converting them to solidarity with those they formerly despised and victimized. That mission was not focused on Jesus’ death although could result in his death. Thus, redemption happens through resistance to the sway of evil and in the experiences of conversion and healing by which communities of well-being are created (Ruether, 1998:104-105).

2.4.2.2 Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, Julie Hopkins, Rita Nakashima Brock, Carter Heyward

Other more recent feminists discussed by Weaver, namely Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker in their *Christianity Patriarchy and Abuse* (1989); Julie Hopkins in her *Towards a Feminist Christology* (1995); Rita Nakashima Brock in her *Journeys by Heart* (1988); and Carter Heyward in her *Saving Jesus from Those who are Right* (1999) also launch an attack on traditional atonement images which they all identify as being underpinned by the patriarchal and hierarchical elements of the Christian theological tradition and Christology as analysed by Ruether. For them Christianity has as a result been a major shaping force behind women abuse and in conditioning women to accept abuse (Weaver, 2001:126).

The image of Jesus undergoing divine child abuse in traditional atonement imagery (satisfaction, penal and Abelardian) in an accepting manner, has in the thinking of Brown and Parker had the following effect. It has persuaded many women that lives of passive submission, self-sacrifice and obedience are definitive of the Christian faith. The resurrection is that which in this context persuades them to endure pain and humiliation (Brown & Bohn, 1990:2).
Hopkins, who also links traditional atonement with women abuse and the conditioning of women to accept abuse, notes that since Jesus had to die to atone for sin and Eve, a woman, is blamed for original sin, women were blamed for Jesus’ death. Restitution for that guilt was thus expected of women in the form of passive submission that can often also render young women vulnerable to incestuous relationships (Hopkins, 1995:51).

2.4.2.2.3   Dealing with the Problem of Traditional Atonement

Feminists deal with this problem in varying ways notes Weaver. Brown and Parker for example choose not to articulate a comprehensive atonement formula as a platform for Christian faith that avoids the problems of an image of abuse. Rather, they believe that atonement theology must be outrightly rejected. Yet in desiring to remain in the Christian camp they formulate a list of statements that should characterize the Christian faith and challenge abusive imagery. They view Jesus’ demise as an unjust human act done by those who chose to reject his way of life and sought to silence him through death– a death which is “not redeemed by the resurrection.” The resurrection here thus meaning that death is overcome in those instances when people choose life, refusing the threat of death (Brown & Bohn, 1990:27-28).

The other three feminists (Hopkins, Brock and Heyward) whose work Weaver has chosen to analyse, deal with the problem of traditional atonement- not by rejection of atonement outright- but by various suggestions at restructuring.

Hopkins suggests a radical restructuring of understandings of God and of the suffering of Jesus that she names “the scandal of the vulnerable God.” Herein the suffering and death of Jesus reveal that God plainly identifies with and comprehends the plight of oppressed and suffering people. God was present at the death not because suffering was necessary and God wills the death but because God chose to be in solidarity with suffering humankind (Hopkins, 1995: 50-56).

Weaver notes the following with regard to Hopkins’ theory. That the functions of these divine acts of God (that entail being in solidarity with humanity and inspiring disciples to take up a social movement that uplifts the oppressed), in being aimed at sinful humankind,
are in line with moral influence thinking. Thus ultimately here, it is still a violent God who requires the death (Weaver, 2001:137-138).

In this Abelardian understanding that does not escape the notion of a violent God the meaning of the resurrection revolves primarily around a challenge to believing people to make a compassionate commitment to life. Thus unlike the understanding of resurrection in narrative Christus Victor it lacks an objective eschatological dimension that means that Christian life now in history is more than a mere commitment to life. It is the beginning of the actualization of the reign of God, the inbreaking of a new age (Weaver, 2001:137-138).

Like the reformulated atonement notion of Hopkins, Rita Nakashima Brock’s reformulation is also essentially Abelardian in nature in that it lacks an objective character to the work of Christ with no eschatological dimension present for the resurrection notes Weaver (Weaver, 2001:147).

Brock’s reformulation is built on the notion that the community that she names, “Christa/community” emerges when relationships are restored (Brock, 1998:52). Salvation consequently happens when people perceive Jesus and join the interactive relationships of the community. Here however the death and resurrection of Jesus have not fundamentally reordered the forces of the world under the rule of God (Weaver, 2001:147).

Contrastingly in narrative Christus Victor the basic orientation of power in the cosmos has been altered for those who perceive of Jesus’ resurrection. Those who perceive and believe the resurrection comprehend that God’s reign has been made visible in history, thus being established whether or not any of us choose to submit to it (Weaver, 2001:147).

A second point of difference that Weaver would claim between Brock’s atonement notion and narrative Christus Victor concerns Christa/community as the basis of Christian identity. Here within this Christ-identified community that avoids abusive dimensions of received Christology Jesus is one but not the sole representative of the new community of healing and hope. Contrastingly with narrative Christus Victor it is stressed that the fullness of the reign of God is present only in Jesus because were Jesus not the bearer of the fullness of the reign of God, the victory of this reign of God would be incomplete (Weaver, 2001:147,148).
A third point of disagreement with Brock concerns her view of Christa/Community as the basis of godly existence. Brock sees the coming into being of such a community as revolving around the process of the erotic power of Christ moving all of fractured reality (wherein oppressors and oppressed alike in being guilty of the same sin) are being moved in the direction of God (Weaver, 2001:148).

The problem with this approach to an integrated community of healing, notes Weaver is that it assumes all fractured relationships mirror the same kind of basic problem or basic need. This approach however does not adequately acknowledge different kinds of participation and responsibility in fractured relationships. And it does not adequately acknowledge that those differing kinds of responsibility then require different kinds of healing (Weaver, 2001:148).

Conversely narrative Christus Victor treats the different kinds of participation in oppression differently- an issue that I will be dealing with when I analyse womanist theology.

Carter Heyward is another feminist who in her reconstruction does not fully succeed in escaping the image of divine child abuse, claims Weaver. In her Abelardian oriented motif she suggests that all of creation exists in mutuality and non-hierarchical relationship. And it is this understanding of human existence in mutuality as opposed to the evil of authoritarian power that forms the basis of her critique and rejection of satisfaction atonement doctrine (Heyward, 1999:92).

Heyward’s alternative to the God who demonstrates love by using the violence of blood sacrifice is a God who suffers with humanity. The cross here is an image of Jesus’ love and of what it cost him and what it cost all who suffer because they love. In this act of atonement involving two movements, God firstly reaches toward us. And then in a second movement (along the lines of Abelardian understanding) we are moved to reciprocate by way of repentance and commitment to new transformed non-hierarchical life in the Spirit (Heyward, 1999:165,166).

Resurrection in this restructuring of the Jesus story is in terms of Heyward’s own admission almost completely omitted. This of course is in line with an Abelardian
understanding of the Jesus story that is devoid of the objective and eschatological dimensions of narrative Christus Victor (Heyward, 1999:165,166).

A last point of difference between Heyward’s proposed notion of a nonviolent understanding of atonement and Weaver’s understanding in his narrative Christus Victor, grows out of Heyward’s vision of restored mutuality as the basis of godly existence. As was the case for Brock’s Christa/Community based on erotic power, Heyward’s mutuality makes oppressors and oppressed guilty of the same sin, namely betrayal of mutuality. Observing Jesus “with us” and the consequent move to restore mutuality does not address explicitly the varying ways that oppressors and oppressed have participated in the fragmentation of mutuality. And furthermore does not adequately express that very different movements should be expected from oppressors and oppressed in order to achieve reconciliation (Weaver, 2001:155,156).

2.4.3 Atonement from a Womanist Perspective

2.4.3.1 Introduction

Weaver notes that whilst sharing some dimensions with black and feminist theologies, womanist theology is also plainly distinctive from them. It mirrors the specific perspective that black women bring to the theological debate. Focusing on racism sexism and poverty, and other kinds of oppression, womanist theology developed primarily for the following reasons: it confronted white feminists who in presuming to speak for all women disregarded the different experiences of white and black women; it confronted the male dominance of early black theology which all the while made other kinds of domination an integral part of its theological agenda (Weaver, 2001:158).

2.4.3.2 Naming the Specific Womanist Perspective

As was the case for black theology and to a lesser degree for feminist theology, womanists make a particular point of speaking from a perspective that is different from the dominant view that is shown to be both white and male (Weaver, 2001:158).
2.4.3.2.1 Katie Cannon

In her book *Black Womanist Ethics*, Weaver notes that Katie Cannon speaks of the difference between ethics for the dominant class and ethics for the dominated class. And furthermore that she struggles here to reconcile these differences with the Christian teaching that God the universal parent embraces the equal humanity of all people (Cannon, 1988:1).

Cannon notes that the dominant system consisting of white racist male-dominated and classist elements in society and stressing such virtues as positive self-image and upward movement in society withheld economic and political power from the dominated because of the supposed inferiority of those they were suppressing. Consequently in contrast to the dominant ethic, notes Cannon, black faith and liberation ethics discuss defiance of oppressive rules or standards of law and order. In Cannon’s particular case as a womanist writer she specifically draws on the experiences of African-American women to develop a liberation ethic (Weaver, 2001:159,160).

2.4.3.2.2 Emile Townes

Emilie Townes in her *A Troubling in My Soul* is another example of a womanist who asserts the particularity of womanist theology notes Weaver. Describing her writing as “biased,” it specifically reflects the impact of the three-fold oppressions of racism sexism and poverty on African-American women. In working for love and justice in the midst of oppression and falleness, her womanist theology rejects the Eurocentric violence accommodating theology of Christendom and finds resonance with narrative Christus Victor as a theology of atonement (Townes, 1993:2)

2.4.3.2.3 Delores Williams

Weaver observes that Delores Williams in her *Sisters in the Wilderness* (1993) features the most comprehensive formulation of theology from a womanist viewpoint. The biblical figure most identified with black women, says Williams is Hagar servant of Abraham’s wife Sarah. In having Abraham’s sexual advances forced upon her as Sarah’s surrogate, Williams notes Hagar’s exploitation by another woman as well as by a man (Williams, 1993:15-19).
Hagar and her son Ishmael’s subsequent story of survival in the tent of Abraham and Sarah and her eventual unsuccessful escape into the wilderness before returning once again to Abraham’s tent, becomes for Williams the paradigm of the female-centred tradition of African-American biblical appropriation. As such it forms the basis of her critique which is three-fold in nature and which begins with a critique of early black theology such as Cone’s which featured a liberation experience that was essentially male-dominated.

Secondly Williams critiques feminist theology based on Sarah’s exploitation of Hagar wherein black women are forced into being sexual partners for white men and surrogate mothers for white women’s children. And then thirdly Williams critiques the inherited theological tradition of European Christendom which she sees as being conducive to oppression especially in the forms of different types of surrogacy and economic realities related to homelessness (Williams, 1993:217-218).

For Williams African-American females come to learn via the Hagar story in which after running away, God counsels Hagar to return to Abraham’s tent rather than perish in the desert, that rather than setting one free, God sometimes provides the means to survive within the exploitative situation (Weaver 2001:162).

2.4.3.3 Womanist View of Atonement

Not surprisingly womanists also bring to the table a fundamental critique of satisfaction atonement. According to Delores Williams in her *Sisters in the Wilderness* (1993), womanists tend to view Jesus in his role of dying on the cross as a substitute for humans, as being the ultimate surrogate figure- the issue of surrogacy and surrogate suffering being of primary importance for womanists (Williams, 1993:162). It is thus out of the historical experience of being placed under multiple injustices in which they were forced to bear suffering and oppression from white men and women and from black men that womanists do the following. They jettison any comprehension of the demise of Jesus that would found salvation on innocent suffering on behalf of another, and thus in the process glorify innocent suffering (Weaver, 2001:174).
2.4.3.3.1 Delores Williams

Scrutiny of Hagar’s role as surrogate gives Williams a basic critique of Anselmian atonement says Weaver. In dying on the cross as a substitute for the sin and punishment of humankind, Jesus becomes the ultimate surrogate and imbues surrogacy with an aura of the sacred. It follows here that accepting this notion of redemption means passively accepting the exploitation that surrogacy brings, says Williams (Williams, 1993:162).

As an alternative image Williams proposes a comprehension of Jesus’ work in which his demise is not willed by God but occurs as a result of Jesus’ resistance to human representatives of evil. Because God did not intend the death of Jesus, says Williams this then also shows black women that God did not intend the surrogacy roles they have been forced to perform. Rather, says Williams, in Jesus God has provided a vision of how to live rather than how to die. More specifically Williams calls this a “ministerial vision” which she says comes to one through Jesus’ ministry of ethical values, healing, confronting evil forces, the power of prayer, compassion, faith and love (Williams, 1993:167).

Weaver, however, has problems with this “ministerial” view of Williams that redeems via life rather than via death, as he says the same emphasis on the resurrection which is present in narrative Christus Victor making it an objective reality, is missing (Weaver, 2001:166).

2.4.3.3.2 Karen Baker-Fletcher

Womanist Karen Baker-Fletcher is however able to address that gap in Williams’ argument, says Weaver. In her book My Sister, my Brother (1997) Baker-Fletcher appropriates Williams’ challenge to satisfaction atonement, but adds the important reminder that while this atonement notion is indeed problematic we are nevertheless left with the historical reality of the cross. And thus rather than bypassing the reality of the cross Baker-Fletcher suggests, much along the lines of narrative Christus Victor, that placing a stress on the resurrected Jesus will have the desired effect of refocussing the interpretation of Jesus’ death as well (Baker-Fletcher & Baker-Fletcher, 1997:77-80).
Glorifying the cross as though Jesus came to die glorifies the human capacity for oppression, says Baker-Fletcher. Contrasting (much in line with narrative Christus Victor thinking) stressing the resurrection moves the focus to the power of God to overcome oppression. And it then becomes plain that persecution and violence endured by those who stand up to evil/injustice is not salvific suffering nor a cross to carry like Jesus carried the cross. Rather this suffering is the consequence of an “ethic of risk” which emanates from active struggle for social justice. This “ethic of risk” is an alternative to the ethic of sacrifice that has glorified suffering (Baker-Fletcher & Baker-Fletcher, 1997:79-80).

A very important implication of this “ethic of risk,” notes Weaver, is that it makes it plain that Jesus’ expiration is not a divinely willed sacrifice but the upshot of human evil (Weaver 2001:166).

2.4.3.4 Womanists on Theodicy

The womanist discussion on theodicy is important for my argument for a nonviolent understanding of atonement for the following reasons. It shows that the violent atonement notion leading to a hierarchical and oppressive understanding of the social order has done the following. It has led those very people who identify with the ruling forces of the social order to in turn presume that God reflects their dominance and controls all. And thus, in this situation, when it comes to the question of how evil can exist when there is an omnipotent God who controls all, doubts are raised about the existence of God and the omnipotence of God. And this in turn has caused people to reject the notion of an omnipotent God or even to outrightly reject God’s very existence (Weaver, 2001:168,169).

Conversely, womanists in coming from a totally opposite social location (that of being oppressed and exploited) as opposed to those of the dominant class, take a totally different direction when it comes to the problem that theodicy presents. For those being oppressed such as womanists, the fact that they felt God’s presence in the midst of their oppression and survived was itself a demonstration of the existence of God. In their context slaves knew that evil and suffering did not originate with God but with human beings - and it was Jesus who in standing against their oppressors shed his blood for them in his rescue of them (Weaver, 2001:169,170).
Thus Cannon, according to Weaver deduces that a womanist approach when dealing with the problem of theodicy does not ask whether God exists and how to justify God’s goodness in the face of evil. Rather womanist protagonists contend that God’s sustaining presence is known in the resistance to evil. This understanding of theodicy unlike that which stems from satisfaction atonement, does not have the spin-off of leaving one with problematical issues concerning God’s omnipotence or even very existence (Weaver, 2001:170).

2.4.3.5 Womanist View of Christology

Womanists also critique traditional Christological understanding. For example, Kelly Brown Douglas in her Black Christ (1994) describes Nicean Chalcedonian notions and thinking as focusing on Jesus’ metaphysical make up and not upon what Jesus did on earth. And thus in being devoid of ethics, permitting white Christians to be oppressors without guilt or fear about the state of their souls. The Christological formulas thus become for Douglas that which does not have any normative significance for womanists in their attempt to articulate Christ’s significance for the black community. Rather than permitting these formulas to float in an authoritative and normative status that transcends particularity, the womanist critique here makes them one conversation partner among several (Weaver, 2001:172).

2.4.3.6 Narrative Christus Victor in Conversation with Womanists

This concluding conversation is important for my argument for nonviolent atonement because as the many points of affinity between narrative Christus Victor and womanist theology are exposed, so also is the discussion about images of abuse even further developed. And as a consequence, the argument for their jettisoning is made stronger. As is obvious from my above discussion a variety of elements give narrative Christus Victor great affinity with womanist views on atonement, Christology and theodicy notes Weaver. Corresponding points include: the intent to build theology that is not constrained by the inherited European tradition; the critique of atonement founded on divinely modelled violence; an active mission for Jesus in opposing oppressors, and the notion that God is not the author of evil and that God did not arrange the demise of the Son. Also clear for womanist thought and for narrative Christus Victor is that questions about atonement have their counterparts in analysis of
Nicean Chalcedonian Christology so that the focus on Jesus’ life presents a narrative-based alternative to traditional Christology (Weaver, 2001:174).

The element of surrogacy and surrogate suffering is of major importance for womanists. In having, from a historical perspective, been subjected to a threefold oppression from white men and women and black men, womanists consequently jettison any comprehension of Jesus’ demise (such as satisfaction atonement) that would base salvation on innocent suffering on behalf of another. Atonement reformulations for womanists thus focus on Jesus’ life rather than his demise. And, as in line with narrative Christus Victor thinking, they see salvation occurring as Jesus actively and responsibly confronts evil, makes God’s reign manifest in the midst of evil and oppression, and is prepared to risk suffering and even death in the process (Weaver, 2001:174,175).

Womanist thoughts supply the insight that enables narrative Christus Victor to respond well to different kinds of participation in sins involving oppression and unequal power relationships. It is obvious notes Weaver that those in dominant categories—men over women and so on—have shared in oppression. While oppressed persons are also sinful and sinners their involvement in those oppressive and sinful systems differs from that of their oppressors. They become sinful when they acquiesce in their oppression in place of taking up resistance to it, says Williams (Weaver, 2001:175).

The important point here is that Williams points towards a model for dealing with the different ways that oppressed and oppressors are implicated as sinners. The image of “changing sides” in narrative Christus Victor embodies these two ways of participating in sin. Although they were in opposition to God’s reign in very different ways, both oppressed and oppressors swop sides and submit to God’s rule. The oppressed stop acquiescing to oppression and join God’s rule. Oppressors stop their oppression and submit to God’s rule (Weaver, 2001:175).

Williams’ “ministerial vision” model of how Jesus saves thus points to the meaning of salvation as being about the righting of relationships between oppressors and oppressed wherein both join the reign of God by way of oppressors resisting oppressive behaviour and the oppressed resisting their oppressors (Weaver, 2001:164).
Coming from different directions, both oppressed and oppressors have their existence transformed by the rule of God, and together they amalgamate in making visible the opposition to oppression by the reign of God says Weaver. Narrative Christus Victor is thus a model that, unlike feminist theology, is able to account for different kinds of participation in the sinful social order and in contexts of oppression and for a subsequent working together of Christians against oppression (Weaver, 2001:175,176).

A final point of convergence between womanist thought and narrative Christus Victor is the notion that it is not God but the forces of evil in the world that are responsible for the demise of Jesus. This discussion involves theodicy, and contributes directly to the discussion of atonement. When one calls to mind the answer to the question about who was responsible for the demise of Jesus, or who needed the demise, in narrative Christus Victor it is the human representatives of evil in the world who plot to annihilate Jesus. While in Anselmian and moral influence models God is the agency behind the expiration of Jesus (Weaver, 2001:176).

When those are the two options, notes Weaver, it is obvious that the womanist discussion of theodicy is also an answer to the question about the agency of Jesus’ demise. The God who liberates Israelite slaves is a God who opposes oppression not the God who orchestrates the demise of the Son. In their worship and in their resistance to oppression the African-American slaves felt liberation in the risen Christ and dwelt in hope of future physical liberation as well (Weaver, 2001:176).

Weaver points out that like Walter Wink in his book, Engaging the Powers (1992), womanists in their understanding of theodicy do not have a problem with the apparent lack of omnipotence on the part of God when it comes to dealing with the very real presence of evil in the world. Wink’s understanding of the death of Jesus is in line with the thinking of narrative Christus Victor and that of womanists. Thus Wink’s understanding of theodicy is also one that views suffering as not originating with God but with human beings. And yet Wink also importantly notes here that while the forces of evil have been defeated by the resurrection of Jesus, the powers nonetheless still rule in the interval before the culmination (Parousia). And these powers can and do come between humankind and God (Weaver, 2001:176,177).
Yet, asserts Wink, we must remember that while the powers of evil can hinder God in the intervening time, in eschatological perspective the rule of God has already gained victory in the resurrection of Jesus (Wink, 1992:313). In the intervening time until that fall- the consummation of the rule of God- God is with us in the midst of evil. Thus on a praxis level evil is to be dealt with via prayer and social action in a daily attempt to bend evil back toward the purposes of God.

To my way of thinking the above understanding theodicy makes far more sense than one that a satisfaction understanding of atonement gives rise to wherein doubt is cast upon both the omnipotence and very existence of God. This problem with theodicy consequently forms another reason as to why a satisfaction notion of atonement is to be jettisoned.

2.5 Conversing with Anselm and His Defenders

Weaver notes that although extensive critique is brought to satisfaction atonement especially by the contextual theologians, a number of writers still nevertheless try to defend the Anselmian atonement notion. It is important to include this section in my dissertation because of the following. It presents with arguments that endeavour to show that although attempts have indeed been made to defend and refurbish Anselm and to eliminate the offending violence in this image. These attempts according to Weaver and myself, are successful only in serving to blunten the edges of violence and not eliminate it.

This observation of course adds even more weight to the argument that the satisfaction atonement image must be abandoned. Responses to the challenges against Anselm are to be found in three broadly related approaches, says Weaver (Weaver, 2001:179).

The first revolves around the rehabilitation of the notions of punishment and vicarious suffering. The second revolves around moving the emphasis away from punishment by recovering additional themes within satisfaction atonement that have been buried by the stress on punishment. The third approach, as a variant of the second acknowledges the validity of the critique of punishment by blaming the excesses on Protestant reformers such
as John Calvin and appeals to an earlier different emphasis in Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo*\(^{23}\) (Weaver, 2001:179).

### 2.5.1 Reclarification, Reaccentuation, Reinterpretation

#### 2.5.1.1 William Placher

Weaver puts William Placher forward as an example of a writer who claims that substitutionary suffering can avoid the standard objections aimed against it. It need not be classed as that which poses an image of a vindictive God, or that which fosters human suffering, or that which assumes a notion of vicarious punishment that makes no moral sense says Placher (Weaver, 2001:180).

Rather, says Placher, it requires *reinterpretation* based upon the following understanding. The quid pro quo notion of justice upon which it is based must be regarded as a fair one. Sin after all, must be punished. Jesus thus becomes the one who God punishes in sinful humankind’s place as we ourselves are saved because through Jesus we have avoided the punishment meant for us (Weaver, 2001:180,181).

And yet within this given scenario, Placher believes humankind has not drawn the appropriate lesson from Jesus’ atoning death that in a nutshell, he sees as hinging upon the following. Since Jesus has already borne the ultimate punishment the criminal justice system from hence forth need not focus on punishment as the means to remove guilt, and the human seeking of retribution must cease in favour of rehabilitation (Weaver, 2001:180,181).

Placher believes his reinterpretation responds to the standard objections of Anselm in the following way: it does not foster abuse or glorify suffering; it portrays God- not as the vengeful one requiring placation- but as the trinity bearing the suffering with Christ; it shows that bearing innocent suffering on the part of another is just when its cause and sacrifice is for the higher good and redemption of others (Weaver, 2001:181,182).

\(^{23}\) Anselm’s book *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Man) was first written by Anselm in 1098 (Weaver, 2001:16).
2.5.1.2 David Wheeler

By recovering concepts that he would see as having slipped out of sight, David Wheeler would reaccentuate the images of blood and vicarious sacrifice for a modern perspective. Thus rather than sacrifice being viewed as a form of divine punishment, Wheeler suggests that the notion of sacrifice be reaccentuated to be that which emanates from a concept of a compassionate God (Weaver, 2001:182,183).

In doing this Wheeler hopes to shift the emphasis away from the notion of sacrifice in satisfaction atonement which is seen as being juridical in nature, to that which is relational. Thus showing through the event of Jesus’ demise, God’s compassion for sinners. And God’s suffering with Christ as opposed to God being a harsh judgemental God orchestrating Jesus’ vicarious and bloody sacrifice (Weaver, 2001:182,183).

2.5.1.3 Thelma Megill Cobbler

As a counter proposal to the feminist argument accusing God of divine child abuse, Thelma Megill Cobbler suggests that the God portrayed as abusive does not represent the entire atonement tradition. Thus her solution here involves a shifting of emphasis from the image of a punishing God in penal substitution so as to reaccentuate the image of a God who identifies with victims and who intervenes at great cost to set things aright for us (Weaver, 2001:183,184).

In this scenario Jesus on the cross undergoes and upholds God’s judgement, not in the sense of Jesus having to endure retribution. But rather in the sense of him taking on the consequences of human estrangement in order to make justice. And in the process identifying with victims of suffering and showing that making justice involves struggle as well as endurance (Weaver, 2001:183,184).

2.5.1.4 Leanne Van Dyk

Leanne Van Dyk suggests that paying closer attention to the trinity will correct a critique of atonement. She asserts that the claim of divine child abuse suggests a relationship of domination between Father and Son whereas correct atonement theology would be that which
does the following. It would seek to reaccentuate trinitarian mutual cooperation and purpose for us and for our salvation, rather than being that wherein Christ’s death is aimed at satisfying God (Weaver, 2001:183,184).

2.5.1.5 Margo Houts

In openly acknowledging that atonement theology operates with an abusive edge, *Margo Houts* critiques the Reformers’ overemphasis on punishment and like Van Dyk also appeals to the mutual cooperation and suffering within the trinity for the sake of humankind’s salvation (Weaver, 2001:183,184).

2.5.1.6 Catherine Pickstock

Like Van Dyk, *Catherine Pickstock* blames the excesses of a judicial and penal view of satisfaction on Luther and Calvin. Anselm, she says, saw Christ as one of our kin taking our debt upon Christself and thus achieving reconciliation with God our ultimate parent. Thus we deduce here, says Pickstock that Anselm’s perspective of atonement did not feature reparations to an offended God. It was not God but “divine justice” that has been insulted says Pickstock - and it was this notion of restoring the bonds of kinship that was revoked by Luther and Calvin and replaced by atonement framed in juridical terms (Weaver, 2001:187,188).

When reclarified the Anselmian version of atonement includes roles for Father Son and Holy Spirit, claims Pickstock, which can be understood to indicate that it is the trinity that takes the debt of humankind upon itself in reciprocal manner. And that it was not just Christ who was made to bear the wrath of a vengeful father (Weaver, 2001:187,188).

2.5.2 Anselm and *Cur Deus Homo*

Weaver analyses Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo* (which was first written by Anselm in 1098) by way of studying the most recent reading of this biography of Anselm compiled by R.W Southern. Southern entitles his biography *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (). Here Southern, in his support of Anselm makes a number of points defending Anselm from various
contemporary concerns revolving around his (Anselm’s) understanding of punishment (Weaver, 2001:188).

One of these points concerns the attitude of Jesus toward his role in atonement. According to Southern Anselm argued that despite Jesus as an innocent being required to satisfy God’s honour, Jesus was not compelled or coerced by God. Rather Jesus, in perfect obedience, willed what God willed thus dying for sinners voluntarily to maintain justice. Yet although Southern and a number of other Anselmian defenders seek here to portray Jesus not as a helpless victim but as an active participant in opposition to evil, Weaver notes the following. Many Anselmian opposers including himself and especially feminists and womanists still see this image as being a toxic one for abused women/the abused (Weaver, 2001:190,191).

Another important point in Southern’s book on Anselm that Weaver considers very relevant to the contemporary atonement debate concerns the place of punishment in Anselm’s theory. Sin for Anselm, revolves around withholding obedience to God which incurs a debt owed to God’s honour. As long as the debt to God’s honour is not repaid the sinner remains at fault. To redeem sinners then requires the debt be repaid. And furthermore, this debt repayment if it is to satisfy the damage done to God’s honour must be in the form of punishment (Weaver, 2001:192).

And yet while Anselm indeed considered the punishment of sin necessary, it is far from his primary focus, there being no indication within his thinking that God is exercising on Jesus, the punishment that sinners deserve. Thus says Weaver the defenders of satisfaction atonement such as Pickstock whose strategy is to blame the worst excesses of penal substitution on Reformers like Calvin and to discover a different emphasis in Anselm are quite correct. Anselm did not have a penal substitutionary comprehension of vicarious suffering (Weaver, 2001:192).

Rather, in using the image of the medieval feudal system in which he lived which was hierarchical in nature and which portrayed the feudal lord and the vassals who owed him service, Anselm did the following. He explained how Jesus’ death paid the debt that sinful humanity owed to the honour of God (Weaver, 2001:194).
In the feudal setting, Southern explains, “honour” was different and more than a general sense of reverence. It encompassed a man’s due place in the hierarchy of authority. Thus a basic crime against anyone was to attempt to diminish this status. “Honour” therefore in this setting was also the essential social bond holding all ranks of society in their due place (Weaver, 2001:194).

Furthermore in this scenario, God’s honour is construed as being the complex of service and worship which the whole creation owes the creator. Withholding service makes a man guilty of attempting to put himself in the place of his creator, and so destroy order in the universe. His rebellion requires a counter assertion of God’s real possession of God’s honour so as to erase a blot on the universal order. To do this, God as man makes good the damage done to God’s honour by humankind’s withholding of service in the form of sinful rebelliousness, and order is restored in the universe (Weaver, 2001:194, 195).

2.5.3 Replying to Anselm’s Defenders

In Weaver’s opinion Anselm’s defenders, in spite of offering a number of different strategies, achieve nothing more than a camouflaging of satisfaction atonement’s foundation upon divinely sanctioned violence, leaving the problematic dimensions intact but blurred-over with other motifs and emphases. Satisfaction atonement’s basic assumption that making right depends on punishment is left undealt with except for Placher’s reaffirmation of it (Weaver, 2001:196).

Highlighting that Anselm portrayed God as a feudal lord to whom honour and obedience are due rather than a wrathful God who inflicts punishment covers over but does not alter the fact that paying the debt owed to the feudal lord requires death to balance prior sin. Here it was still God who needed the death (Weaver, 2001:196).

A version of satisfaction atonement with punishment redefined or with a renewed stress on God’s suffering with Jesus is still an image in which salvation hinges upon the necessary demise of Jesus as a debt payment. It is still an image within which justice hinges upon the violence of punishment. It is still salvation founded upon voluntary passive submission to necessary suffering (Weaver, 2001:196).
Emphasizing the voluntary nature of Jesus’ act rather than the Father’s requirement of it does nothing for the problem such an image upholds for those who have been the targets of direct abuse, it being still an image that makes submission to abusive authority a virtue. Furthermore, such blunting of the edges of Anselm’s theory in no way seeks to address the ahistorical character of the theory that focuses on death and says practically nothing about Jesus’ resurrection, and that is irrelevant for ethical reflection other than to encourage passive suffering (Weaver, 2001:196).

Finally, claims Weaver in his reply to the defenders of Anselm, the logic that points to God as author of the demise of Jesus in satisfaction atonement stems at its most basic level from Anselm himself and thus cannot be argued against. This hinges precisely on Anselm’s deletion of the devil from the equation. Since the death is aimed at God as part of the equation but sinners cannot pay the debt to God’s honour for themselves and since Satan is not paying anything to God nor obeying the will of God nor even any longer in the equation. God is the only possible one remaining, who can orchestrate the demise of Jesus so that it pays the divine debt of justice (Weaver, 2001:200).

2.5.4 Narrative Christus Victor: A Nonviolent Christ

2.5.4.1 Putting Satan Back into the Equation

In the final summing up of his motif, Weaver notes that in a sense narrative Christus Victor is simply undoing Anselm’s deletion by way of restoring Satan back into the equation. However, and importantly so, the form that Satan assumes here is very different (Weaver, 2001:210).

Weaver confirms that he follows Walter Wink’s understanding of Satan as being the accumulation of earthly structures or systems that have spiritual dimensions or powers not ruled by God’s reign. Weaver views this “devil” as being real but it is not a personified being who may or may not have rights in the divine order of things. None of these powers are good in and of themselves because they exist in a system of domination in which they are

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24 In order to extrapolate on his understanding of Satan Weaver draws on Walter Wink’s trilogy of books entitled: Naming the Powers; Unmasking the Powers; Engaging the Powers (Weaver, 2001:210).
accomplices. Yet as fallen powers, all are also redeemable and thus potentially good to the
degree that they submit to Christ’s lordship (Weaver, 2001:210).

Thus Wink’s portrayal of the powers, says Weaver, describes a comprehensive rule of
evil- ranging from the individual to the universal and whose reality is expressed via
institutions and the individuals within them. Evil in these institutions is cumulative often
leading to a mob spirit capable of committing acts individuals alone would not perform
(Weaver, 2001:210).

It was the total accumulation of evil- the reign of the devil- that slew Jesus and thus
the blame for his annihilation should not be limited to particular persons or institutions.
Specifically in the gospel narrative structures and people who represented this accumulation
of evil included imperial Rome, the Jewish holiness code, sleeping disciples, Judas and Peter.
But Jesus is triumphant over the rule of the devil only when all aspects of evil perceive Jesus
as a threat and then collectively try to destroy him. The subsequent rising again of Jesus then
exposes the reign of God as the ultimate sculptor of reality and power in the cosmos (Weaver,
2001:211).

There is no question as to whether these forces and systems of the world which serve
the devil and which slew Jesus have rights in the reign of God. Or whether they act in such a
way in order to pay a debt to the honour of God. They do not. The primary contribution of
narrative Christus Victor, confirms Weaver, is putting Satan back in atonement as it provides
a very different solution to the problem Anselm attempted to solve with the category of
“fittingness” (Weaver, 2001:211).

And the problem of “fittingness” for Anselm, Weaver goes on to explain, revolved
around the answer to the question about the necessity of the incarnation which was at the time
being labelled by unbelievers as an event that, in its being necessary, humiliated God and
placed limits on God’s omnipotence. Anselm thus responds in the following manner. In order
for him (Anselm) to keep God’s omnipotence undiminished, he tweaks the event of Jesus’
death to fit into the following scenario. God could forgive- but not without humankind’s
incurred debt being repaid - which only God could pay. Thus the God-man Jesus steps into
the scene here, willing himself to die. Anselm has this happening so that God can be absolved
of needing the Son’s death but not compelling it (Weaver, 2001:199,211).
In narrative Christus Victor the cause of Jesus’ demise is obviously not God. Thus, says Weaver, there is no need to use semantic nuances or what some have even termed as sleight-of-hand language as Anselm did concerning the question of whether Jesus willed himself to expire or whether God willed the expiration of Jesus. In either case the answer is decidedly “no.” Rather in narrative Christus Victor the Son is implementing the Father’s will by making God’s reign visible in the world- and that quest is so threatening to the world that sinful humanity and the accumulation of evil they represent collude to exterminate Jesus (Weaver, 2001:211).

Jesus came not to expire but to live, to testify to God’s reign in history. While he may have been aware that carrying out that quest would inflame inevitably fatal opposition his purpose was not to get himself annihilated (Weaver, 2001:211).

When Jesus confronts the rule of evil, as he does in narrative Christus Victor, there is no longer the obstacle of a problematic image for victims of abuse. Here Jesus, far from a passive victim submitting to suffering, actively participates in challenging evil. His saving life demonstrates how the reign of God confronts evil, and is thus our model for confronting injustice. While we do not save we participate in salvation and Jesus’ saving work when we live as Jesus lived (Weaver, 2001:211, 212).

2.5.4.2 Justice in Narrative Christus Victor: Not that which Hinges upon the Violence of Punishment

Of utmost priority in narrative Christus Victor says Weaver is the notion that salvation and justice are no longer founded on the violence of justice equated with punishment. Redemption does not hinge upon balancing sin by retributive violence. Making right no longer means the violence of punishment. Justice and salvation are accomplished in narrative Christus Victor by doing justice and engaging in God’s redeeming work. There is no longer any need to debate whether those who slew Jesus were in some manner enacting the will of God even as Jesus was enacting the will of God. And most importantly, God is obviously neither the agent of Jesus’ demise nor the ultimate punisher (Weaver, 2001:212).

In a previous part of his discussion Weaver sought to demonstrate that the expiration of what he has called narrative Christus Victor corresponds to a series of ecclesiological
changes in early Christian centuries symbolized by Constantine. Weaver now returns to this particular argument because he wishes to stress once again that Anselm’s feudally-based hierarchical assumption that the social order is specifically ordered under God, is thinking that has been influenced by this Constantinian shift in the social order (Weaver, 2001:213).

Before the shift symbolized by Constantine the church as the earthly manifestation of the rule of God stood in contrast to the systems of the social order not ruled by God. After Constantine however the church came to identify with the structures of the social order. Political structures were no longer seen to be in opposition to God’s rule/the church, but became the means whereby the church sought to extend its influence. For Anselm the feudal hierarchy “represented order.” (Weaver, 2001:213).

With history (namely the systems of the social order), now assumed to be under God’s providence there was no “place” left for the devil to rule under the structures of Christendom. The scope of the devil’s rule was reduced to individuals and pagans beyond the parameters of Christendom (Weaver, 2001:212, 213).

Anselm’s perception of the social order plainly mirrors the assumption that the social order mirrors God’s order, claims Weaver. With this sense that God’s providence rules the structures of the social order, there are virtually no systems for the devil to rule over within Christendom. It would seem that Anselm’s jettisoning of the devil from the atonement equation is a mirroring of just such a view, says Weaver (Weaver, 2001:213).

However, says Weaver the Church in the 21st century with its diminishing footprint is becoming increasingly aware of the rapidly dying assumption that the western world constitutes the Christian social order. And thus it is being increasingly called to the pre-Constantinian challenge to the social order rather than to work through its structures. Because of this, says Weaver, it thus becomes possible for us to visualize the rule of the devil in a manner not possible for Anselm. Narrative Christus Victor is that reading of God’s redeeming act in history with the devil reintroduced into the equation (Weaver, 2001:213).

2.5.4.3  Narrative Christus Victor: Highlighting the Sinfulness of Institutions

One very important dimension of putting Satan back into the equation with narrative Christus
Victor, emphasizes Weaver, is the reintroduction of a concept of sinfulness revolving around institutions and systems. Contrasting, as I claimed previously, Anselm, because he was immersed within the culture of the post Constantinian synthesis of Christendom that he inherited, assumed structures (the feudal system) to be extensions of God’s ordering of creation and thus to be that which cannot be fallen. However in bringing Satan back into the equation the structures of the social order are removed from God’s ordering and instead made to be human creations that then stand as human and fallen, but redeemable under God’s reign - as humanity is fallen but redeemable (Weaver, 2001:214).

2.5.4.4 Bringing the Devil into the Equation: Not that which Turns the World over to Evil

It is important to reassure those who on the one hand, are looking to jettison Anselm on account of it being an image of violence. And yet on the other hand, are fearful that the option of bringing Satan back into the atonement equation may be tantamount to turning the world over to evil. This is certainly not the case says Weaver. Narrative Christus Victor assumes the triumph of God’s reign in the resurrection of Jesus. Until the Parousia evil is present but its reign is limited. Thus the eschatological dimension of narrative Christus Victor, far from turning the world over to Satan is an evangelical call to believe that Jesus embodies the rule of God and to believe in the resurrection profoundly enough to dwell in the rule of God now. When Christians dwell by the rule of God now, Satan is being overcome (Weaver, 2001:214).

2.5.4.5 Narrative Christus Victor: Not an Invitation to Easy Forgiveness and Salvation

It is also important to reassure those who are looking to jettison Anselm and yet at the same time may be loath to let go here because of the fear that this may throw open the hatch to easy forgiveness and salvation that does not concern itself with guilt. This too is an ungrounded fear, Weaver assures us (Weaver, 2001:215).

Weaver confirms for us once again that Narrative Christus Victor does envision forgiveness- a forgiveness that is difficult and costly when visualized either from God’s side or the side of sinful humankind. In God’s compassion and mercy God continues to love us despite our rebellion against God’s reign. The compassionate and loving God sent the Son to make the Kingdom visible and invite sinners into it even while we were still rebellious.
siners resisting God’s rule. By virtue of what society is, all are in a sense the “devil” as all have participated in rebelling against God’s rule and killing Jesus (Weaver, 2001:215).

God’s offer of forgiveness is perennially open regardless of whether we accept it or not. True repentance involves confession on our side regarding our complicity in the killing of Jesus and rebellion against the Kingdom. When repentance occurs, God’s love and acceptance is there despite what we have done. That is God’s grace, and it is costly. God’s showing of God’s love cost God the life of the Son. And making Kingdom visible was also costly for Jesus - it cost him his life (Weaver, 2001:215,216).

However, being accepted into the Kingdom and receiving forgiveness under God’s gracious reign also entails that humankind pay a price. Here, genuine repentance involves the cost of giving up all that is not of God’s Kingdom in one’s life. In a nutshell this entails the following: a change in allegiance, transformation, resistance to evil, loss of earthly treasure, possible suffering for the sake of the Kingdom. Without true repentance occurring in the form of transformation of life, cessation of oppression, and the beginning of the confrontation of oppression— in narrative Christus Victor thinking, there is no reconciliation (Weaver, 2001:215,216).

2.5.4.6 Narrative Christus Victor’s Understanding of a Transformed Life: Can Never be Accused of Perfectionism

This transformation of life that is a manifestation of true repentance can never be fully achieved this side of eternity says Weaver. As long as evil is still present- and it will be until the parousia- total transformation remains unattainable to us. The context of this statement about transformed life can thus never be accused of perfectionism, notes Weaver25 (Weaver, 2001:216).

Furthermore in this regard, I would suggest that the satisfaction atonement image, because it is ahistorical, is accommodating of the notion of perfectionism. The transaction between Father and Son here is outside the historical world in which we live. And therefore it

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25 Perfectionism, according to Ferdinand Deist in his book, A Concise Dictionary of Theological and Related Terms, is the view that regeneration (salvation) in Christ roots out all sin and that a Christian can therefore become a sinless being in the world (Deist, 1992:189).
is cut off from the historical arena and what the reign of God looks like. And furthermore it is cut off from the notion that joining this reign entails joining the battle against the forces of evil- a task that none of us on this side of eternity are totally successful in achieving. And therefore we will always remain as sinners.

Contrastingly in the satisfaction notion of atonement wherein the transaction for our salvation is cut off from the historical world, it is possible via ones baptism into Christ and Christ’s kingdom to view oneself as redeemed, forgiven and sinless in the eyes of God. And this is regardless of the nature of ones behaviour. This is because the satisfaction notion of atonement in being ahistorical does not hold one responsible for fighting the forces of evil in the historical arena, and also as being an inevitable sinner in this historical arena.

2.5.4.7 Predestining Grace and Human Responsibility

Grace and forgiveness, says Weaver, are encountered when God invites us out of rebelliousness and we choose to begin transforming our lives under God’s rule. This sequence of events fits the paradox of predestining grace versus free will and human responsibility. God invites and chooses. It is impossible to evade the force of sin on human initiative and human effort alone. We are enslaved to sin, and only God can save. God does not forgive because we repent. Rather repentance is a reaction to God’s offer of unmerited forgiveness while we were still sinners (Weaver, 2001:216).

But on the other hand, we do make a choice to respond. We confess our complicity with the forces that annihilated Jesus; we choose to take responsibility for our life, and we choose to join the opposition to evil. We choose to change our adherence from the rule of evil to the rule of God. In fact it is not possible not to choose. The default position is to remain enslaved to evil. Nonetheless the reality of evil is such that one can only choose under the power of God. However a change in direction- a new allegiance- made with a firm commitment is never fully achieved and is a matter of both predestining grace and human responsibility. The transformation will never be finished and never perfected but the new commitment is real and ongoing and poses a visible contrast to a life not submitted to the reign of God (Weaver, 2001:216-218).
2.5.4.8 Elimination of the Devil: Unacceptable Outcomes for both Anselm and Abelard

Weaver reminds us that Abelard as well as Anselm in seeking to deny the rights of the devil, put the devil out of the picture. Yet with the devil out of the picture, whereas Anselm now made the purpose of the incarnation revolve around Jesus’ death as a debt payment to God and not the devil, Abelard responds differently. Abelard, with humanity unable to make a payment to God, and with the devil out of the picture, made the purpose of incarnation revolve around no debt payment at all. Rather than a debt payment Abelard portrayed Jesus’ death as God’s act of supreme love whose purpose was to revive (morally influence) sinful humankind’s love for God (Weaver, 2001:218).

Critics of Abelard have pointed out that this notion has no objective character. As an act of God’s love the demise of Jesus accomplishes nothing until a sinner responds to it. Thus for Abelard nothing changes until the individual changes in response to the love of God. And when that changes it is only the individual who changes. Contrastingly Anselm’s satisfaction motif had a plain objective character. Jesus’ demise paid the debt that restored the order of the cosmos quite apart from whether individual sinners made use of this opportunity of salvation thus provided (Weaver, 2001:218).

Whilst narrative Christus Victor indeed shares Abelard’s rejection of the notion that Jesus demise is a debt payment, Weaver reiterates once again that these two atonement notions differ radically. While the demise and resurrection of Jesus plainly impact the mind of the sinner narrative Christus Victor envisions a change in the cosmos quite apart from any person’s perception of it. With the demise and rising again of Jesus, the power structure of the cosmos is revealed to be different than it appears. The resurrection of Jesus is the definitive triumph of God’s reign over the reign of evil, whether or not any individual sinner perceives the resurrection. When an individual does perceive the redeeming work of Christ and begins a transformed life under God’s reign, that individual is joining a reality already established by Jesus’ resurrection (Weaver, 2001:219).

2.5.4.9 Two Different Kinds of Participation in Oppression

From a narrative Christus Victor point of view, notes Weaver, we are collaborators in different ways in sin against Jesus and God’s reign, according to our station in life. Those in
dominant categories have plainly shared in oppression. Oppressed persons participate in another manner, namely when they participate in systems that oppress. The important point here is to see that both oppressed and oppressors are implicated in the evil that Jesus challenged (Weaver, 2001:219).

These different kinds of participation in oppression have been a concern to both the critics of satisfaction atonement and those who have sought to rehabilitate it. As Weaver has noted, for the radical critics Jesus’ submission to death as a required penalty payment poses a model of submission to oppression that has been used to encourage oppressed people to submit to their oppression. That model has also been problematic to the defenders of satisfaction atonement, who seek to avert it. I will show currently how Weaver in his narrative Christus Victor model claims to successfully address this conundrum (Weaver, 2001:219).

2.5.4.10 Responding to Nancy Duff

An aspect within Nancy Duff’s defence of satisfaction was to deny Jesus’ action as a model, notes Weaver. In other words, what Jesus did for us was unique and final says Duff, and thus unrepeatable. Thus according to Duff, we do not become victims like Christ and Jesus cannot be presented as an example urging victims to submit to further violence. The problem with Duff’s answer, suggests Weaver, is that it forces a pick-and-choose approach to Jesus’ life and teaching. Defenders of satisfaction atonement still want to comprehend Jesus as a source of freedom for oppressed peoples. Denying his confrontation of evil as a model places one in a paradoxical position of claiming that Jesus both is and is not a model for oppressed peoples (Weaver, 2001:220).

2.5.4.11 Responding to William Placher

Weaver notes that Placher’s rehabilitation of the notion of punishment in penal substitutionary atonement offered a different solution to the problem of how atonement addresses oppressors and the oppressed. In essence Placher makes the suffering of Jesus a model that comfortable Christians in the oppressor category should imitate. Whilst agreeing with Placher that comfortable Christians ought to take risks for their faith Weaver suggests that this approach for atonement theology is flawed as it provides a theology that addresses
only oppressors and says nothing about how Jesus’ role in atonement should apply to the oppressed. Rather, Weaver’s suggestion here for a viable theology of atonement is that it address all people as sinners and speaks to the differing conditions in which they find themselves (Weaver, 2001:220).

Narrative Christus Victor acknowledges the sin of all people from all levels of life. It envisions a salvation that speaks to and for both the oppressed and the oppressors. Oppressors are clearly defined as those participating in any of the systems that mirror the reign of evil and oppose the reign of God. Recognising our complicity with these powers requires confession and repentance and a change in sides, and joining Jesus in his making of God’s reign visible in contrast to the world (Weaver, 2001:220).

Thus for transformation of life to occur in this view, oppressors are required to recognize their sin of allowing oppressive structures to define their reality and thus start to engage in resistance. At this level former oppressed and former oppressors are now on the same side having undergone a transformation of life (Weaver, 2001:221).

2.5.4.12 A Scenario that also Entails Punishment for Sin

This scenario wherein transformation requires a change of sides also entails punishment for sin notes Weaver. Violence breeds violence in an infinite vicious cycle. To remain on the side of evil that confronts the rule of God is to remain on the side of God’s punishment, (however one would define divine punishment). And it is also to remain a part of the ongoing cycle of violence and sin that gives rise to more violence and sin (Weaver, 2001:221).

2.5.4.13 Jesus Not a Passive Sufferer but an Assertive Activist

In this portrayal of narrative Christus Victor, Jesus is in no way the passive sufferer of satisfaction atonement, but the assertive activist who opposed sin, injustice, and oppression. Identifying with Jesus in this scenario may well entail suffering but it is not suffering that is salvific in and of itself but is a by-product of opposing evil (Weaver, 2001:222).

Apart from the issue of his supposed passive submission to abuse in satisfaction atonement, says Weaver, note has also been made of the absence of the life and works of
Jesus in satisfaction atonement. In contrast the life and works of Jesus are intrinsic to narrative Christus Victor. They become an integral part of the scenario precisely because it is via them that one knows what the reign of God looks like and how it challenges the world. Here, the ethical concerns of Jesus’ life and teaching form an essential aspect of salvation and of being Christian. Not to participate in making the reign of God visible is not to participate “in Christ” (Weaver, 2001:222).

In stark contrast to the above we are able to note the extent to which Anselm together with Nicean Chalcedonian Christology constitutes an ahistorical motif that is totally lacking in ethical content (Weaver, 2001:223).

Discovering the driving force for narrative Christus Victor in Revelation and the status of the early church is a way of comprehending the relationship of Christians and the church to the social order that was true for the first century and is still true in the 21st century, asserts Weaver (Weaver, 2001:223).

2.6 Conclusion

A few salient points for my argument for a nonviolent atonement that Weaver includes in the conclusion to his book are the following.

It appears to be inescapably so that satisfaction atonement is founded upon divinely sanctioned retributive violence, declares Weaver and I agree with him. Arguments adding additional biblical images, redefining punishment, pointing to other emphases, appealing to Trinity or stressing that the Father bears the suffering with the Son serve to soften or camouflage. However they do not alter the underlying presupposition that satisfaction depends on a divinely sanctioned death as that which is necessary to satisfy the offended divine entity, whether God or God’s law or God’s honour. Satisfaction atonement hinges on the assumption that doing justice means to punish, that a sinful deed is balanced by violence (Weaver, 2001:225).

The endeavours to refurbish Anselm render the edges of the offending violence less sharp but they do not get rid of it. Thus I agree with Weaver when he urges anyone unhappy
with the notion of a God who sanctions violence- a God who sends the Son so that his demise can satisfy a divine requirement- to jettison satisfaction and Anselmian atonement forthwith (Weaver, 2001:225).

Furthermore, I would also urge those seeking an alternative notion to explore one that seeks to reinstate the devil in some form into atonement. Challenging Anselm may for some be tantamount to a challenge to salvation itself. But this challenge does not challenge Jesus as saviour. What it brings to light is the centuries-long use of Christian theology to accommodate both systemic and direct violence (Weaver, 2001:226).

Thus jettisoning Anselm is not to challenge Jesus as saviour, nor is it rejecting of the saving work of Jesus. Jettisoning satisfaction atonement is to challenge one way of talking about how Jesus saves. Weaver’s challenge indicated the numerous ways in which this particular explanation of the how of Jesus’ redeeming work is linked to violence in some form. Proposing an atonement notion that puts the devil back into the equation is to propose a how explanation that focuses on Jesus’ life as the reign of God rather than on Jesus’ demise as an act of God (Weaver, 2001:226).

Putting the devil back into atonement such as in the Narrative Christus Victor theory is a biblical way of comprehending the saving work of Jesus without imaging God as one who abuses the perfect Son for the benefit of others. The God of narrative Christus Victor does suffer with Jesus in making the rule of God visible in the world. But this suffering was not the particular purpose of Jesus’ quest, nor was it required by a divine equation (Weaver, 2001:226).
Chapter 3
A RECONSIDERATION OF ATONEMENT- AN EVALUATION OF THE WORK OF S. MARK HEIM

It is my contention that S. Mark Heim’s thinking regarding atonement also fits in well with my own thoughts and aims. This is because his views and arguments are all targeted at addressing and supporting a view of Christ’s death that reveals God the father to be nonviolent. This is a way of thinking that (as I have already explained), goes contrary to the more popular thinking contained within the general view of atonement– i.e. the traditional theories, especially satisfaction and penal theories which when it comes to Christ’s death, portray God in a violent light.

Consequently, in this my third chapter, as I go on to note and discuss the content of Heim’s work in his book, Saved from Sacrifice– A Theology of the Cross (2006), I will use the same method that I used in my analysis of Weaver’s work for this task. I will formulate my own sub-headings under which I will group the various problems that I discern Heim to have with general atonement. I will also include here the arguments and counter-proposals he offers in defence of his own stance– many of which, as in the case of Weaver, I am in agreement with. I begin now with a necessary general introduction to, and contextualization of, Heim’s work.

3.1 Introduction

In his introduction Heim extrapolates upon his aim and his approach which in a nutshell is about seeking out clarity and understanding in terms of the problems the cross presents us with.

3.1.1 Groping in the Dark

Heim begins with the acknowledgement that the cross, which despite being seen in Christianity as the central reconciliatory act between humankind and God, is viewed mostly in today’s times as a question and a problem. Seeking understanding as to its true meaning,
tends to be an exercise lacking in clarity— or in fact groping around in the dark (Heim, 2006:3)

Many feel that the crucifixion— namely Jesus’ death and the atonement for sins and the reconciliation with the Father that this brought about— was the only important thing about Jesus’ life, notes Heim. Others disagree, seeing this view as distorted and noting that we can hardly form a clear idea of the crucifixion without knowledge of Jesus’ life and teachings. Others again, try to build an equally distorted view of Jesus as our saviour that drops all emphasis on the death (Heim, 2006:2).

The valid meaning as to why piety and tradition have lingered graphically on the bodily suffering and cannibalistic terms of the communion ceremony at the centre of Christian worship has become rather more puzzling than elucidating, continues Heim. Its graphic and disturbing nature has either been dulled from long familiarity or has become regarded as totally outlandish and meaningless (Heim, 2006:3).

Thus Heim has seen the need to write his book because many cannot make sense of the cross and also because many find it understandable and simultaneously totally objectionable as they struggle to reconcile the redemptive power of Jesus’ demise with violence, the masochistic idealization of suffering and the encouragement of the oppressed to embrace their misery “in imitation of Christ” (Heim, 2006:3).

Confusion in understanding the cross grows even more, says Heim, when one considers that the message of the cross is life-giving to some. And yet at one and the same time is associated with many historical evils that therefore make it impossible for others to view the cross as life-giving (Heim, 2006:3).

3.1.2 Variation in Tradition

Adding to the confusion around the question of the cross in our time says Heim, is the fact that historically speaking the crucifixion has never had universal agreed meaning. Early creeds and confessions specified belief in the incarnation and in the Trinity but there was however no similar formulation of exactly what Christ had done that saved us or specifically
why Christ’s demise was important. Through Christian history people have indicated to the cross as a solution. The church found no driving need to thin the ranks of explanation especially when one did not rule out another (Heim, 2006:4).

Thus one could say that Christian tradition has always had a multidimensional view of Christ’s redemptive activity with Christ redeeming and transforming humankind from three elements of falleness. These are sin (estrangement from God); evil (estrangement among humans); and death (mortality and our estrangement from nature). Furthermore the three offices of Christ, those of prophet, priest and king are a shorthand expression of how Christ addresses these areas of falleness (Heim, 2006:4).

Christ’s priestly work is to restore our connection with God. Associated with the substitution models it is seen as the way in which the legitimate claim of God’s justice against humankind can be satisfied and sinners forgiven. Christ’s royal work, associated with the Christus Victor theories is to restore and renew by his resurrection and gift of eternal life, the divine purpose in created nature defeating death’s power to reduce all nature to futility. And finally Christ’s prophetic work associated with the Abelardian theories, revolves around Jesus’ teaching and example, including the example of his selfless death, inspiring us to live different personal and social lives (Heim, 2006:4-5).

In giving us this background Heim is able to locate the corner of the landscape making up his own approach. He focuses on the death of Christ which is only one element of the whole work of Christ. And furthermore he focuses on the importance of this death primarily for one dimension of the human condition- the dimension of interpersonal evil. And finally even here he is concerned with how the cross might bear on one crucial and specific type of social evil - that of sacrificial scapegoating.

3.1.3 The Cross– An Anthropological Perspective

Sketching things in this manner already permits Heim to preview part of his argument. He is focusing on how the cross (which is part of Christ’s work) bears on our practice of sacrificial scapegoating (which is part of our fallen human condition). In this connection, we locate the special thread that leads to a comprehension of what is decisive and saving about Jesus’
demise, a comprehension of the need for it to occur in the particular manner the Gospels report it happening. Jesus’ demise has important meaning in relation to other dimensions of Christ’s work and our condition. It is obviously necessary to the Gospel message about resurrection and the hope of eternal life for example. However for most of these purposes another type of death would have sufficed just as well. Many dimensions of Jesus’ saving work may be represented in his demise in a general way, without needing to revolve around the particular character of the cross (Heim, 2006:10).

To put forward a significant example here, Jesus’ demise may have something to do with our separate individual sin and our “private” relation with God. One form of atonement theology has particularized this. All our various individual sins are cancelled out via Christ’s punishment on the cross. The details of Christ’s demise are specifically tweaked to build up a stockpile of merit that can then be credited to our personal accounts, one by one. In Jesus’ demise we do observe an overwhelming image of the truth such theologies assert- that forgiveness is costly and that God is willing to undergo pain on behalf of each individual in order to save us (Heim, 2006:10).

But, and this is the critical point, the cross represents that truth. It is not the precondition for it (except in the widest sense that one might declare God’s whole salvation plan is the precondition for any part of it). The divine purpose to forgive individuals for their multiple individual sins did not decree that Jesus must die in agony falsely accused of political and religious misdemeanors, via a conspiracy of all the relevant powers-that-be with the backing of an angry crowd by crucifixion, deserted by his disciples etc. The elements of violence and persecution are not prescribed and initiated by God. They stem from elsewhere and are accepted by God for a saving purpose, wholly consistent with the work of individual forgiveness (for we are each individually involved in the sin of scapegoating too) but also plainly distinct (Heim, 2006:10).

Regarding an individual’s purely individual sins that impact upon no other person (if it were possible to isolate such things) the correct doctrine of the cross may well be an exemplarist one, suggests Heim. But because our problem is bigger than sin so delineated, that doctrine is not sufficient. We require a theology that addresses sacrifice and substitution also. We commit an error however if we frame our comprehension of sacrifice wholly and exclusively in terms of individual “private” sin (Heim, 2006:10).
A core feature of Heim’s work is thus the contention that the importance and meaning of the cross becomes particularly lucid when viewed in the light of a specific facet of evil, a dynamic of scapegoating violence that embraces each person individually, as well as society. French philosopher and biblical scholar Rene Girard, the figure most responsible for valuable work in this field labels his own work here as “a search for the anthropology of the cross.” It has impacted and challenged various disciplines such as psychology, biblical studies, literature and anthropology. The many aspects of his thought centre around the simple question: How do victims become visible, or in other words: Where do our antisacrificial sensibilities come from? (Heim, 2006:11).

His answer is uncomplicated. Those sensibilities are anchored in biblical revelation, especially in the Gospels and more specifically even, in the passion narratives. Girard has a firm and set response to condemnations of the cross as divine sadism: we could not charge the gospels of being guilty of victimization in this fashion if we had not already been converted by them. Our escalating unease with the cross is itself an effect of the cross. Far from being a rationalization of redemptive violence, the passion narratives absolutely and categorically undermine it (Heim, 2006:11).

At its broadest, Girard’s thinking offers a description of the beginnings of human religion and society– a theory about human nature itself. He illustrates a reality actually operating in human religion and communities as we find them in the past and in our current world (Heim, 2006:11).

He thus states that there is an anthropological aspect to the gospel text. But simultaneously he has never assumed that it constitutes the entirety of Christian revelation. Yet, says Girard, without it Christianity would hardly be truly itself, and would be unintelligible in areas where it need not be. To lose this element is to lose a vital part of the very humanity of Christ, the incarnation. We would not see plainly in Christ a victim of people such as we all are, and we would be in peril of falling back into the religion of persecution (Heim, 2006:13).

If the redeeming effect of Jesus’ demise refers only to the next life or to changes in the unreachable recesses deep within individuals then the entire question remains a matter of belief. Girard’s argument is that there is a clear empirical (experiential) level on which the
cross sheds light and affects human history, a level that can be comprehended rationally and is not a matter of subjective belief (Heim, 2006:13).

Girard’s theory illuminates a key turning point in the formation and maintenance of human society, and a basic dynamic that continues to underpin religion and culture. He is certain that the biblical tradition and passion stories in particular have been decisively instrumental in transforming the human condition. He believes quite outmodedly for a scholar of non-ethical disciplines that there is an objective revelation in the biblical tradition. Yet he is just as emphatic that Christians have often been fumbling and blinkered to the logic of their own tradition. Historical Christianity in its sacrificial versions stands under the judgment of its own gospel (Heim, 2006:14).

The ramifications of the cross pass through the church but are not restricted to the church. To comprehend the distinctive nature of the passion narrative and the biblical panorama behind it is to know the failures of the church more profoundly. To Girard’s way of thinking, this fact correlates with the true objectivity of the revelation. The substance is so real that it makes its impression felt not only by means of perfect teachings and total understanding but even via limited and unclear forms (Heim, 2006:14).

Girard’s view, claims Heim, is an intriguing mix of the apologetic and the critical. Consequently from one standpoint his view reaffirms traditional beliefs on the saving significance of the cross and orthodox perspectives of Jesus’ divinity but on the other hand it just as vehemently condemns much of the churches theology and practice as misshapen and requiring renewal. The work of Christ and even that of his death includes more than the reversal of sacrificial scapegoating. To comprehend this dimension does not relate the entire story. Yet that dimension is key for comprehending the mixed inheritance of atonement doctrines, a pathway of injurious as well as transforming effects. According to Heim it is key for our constructive comprehension of the cross here and now (Heim, 2006:14).

3.1.4 Outlining Heim’s Work

After his introduction, Heim engages in a preamble to his topic by reviewing what he specifically sees as the modern day crisis in atonement theology. This for him largely
includes criticisms against substitutionary notions of the cross with their underlying assumptions of Christ’s death as being an atoning sacrifice. Because they add weight to my own argument for a nonviolent atonement I will be summarizing Heim’s criticisms in the subsequent section which I have entitled, “Atonement in the Dock.”

The rest of the book is separated off into three sections that attempt to reflect how we may construe the demise of Jesus theologically today by inter-relating three dimensions of meaning. These three dimensions or “sides” of the cross, says Heim, can be taken in a number of ways: as three layers of meaning in the scriptural texts; as three cumulative stages in a historical development; as three aspects of revelation. Heim observes you cannot view all sides of a three-dimensional object at once but you have to register the reality of all three dimensions to perceive its full reality. Insofar as we gaze upon a three-dimensional object from only one secured viewpoint the surfaces directly opposite us remain invisible. Yet without us considering that obscured dimension our perception is deficient. So with the cross it is virtually impossible to view all three dimensions simultaneously in any description, but none can be discounted if we desire to understand the whole (Heim, 2006:14).

To start with Heim draws our attention to one specific dimension of depth that we require as a backdrop to comprehend the Gospel handling of Jesus’ demise. This forms the subject of section one, and is named by him as the mythological side of the cross. The narrative of Jesus’ demise fits into a pre-existing pattern- a pattern in existence ages before the Bible and which continues to exist aside from it. The passion narratives revolve around that plot in a way that they are able to expose it for what it is. In other words the biblical tradition within which Jesus’ demise is set, the illumination given to it by his teaching and resurrection, and the life of the community that remembered it, are all linchpins in just such a happening. We live in its aftermath. We take as given, what they brought into the spotlight. The irony is that to comprehend the gospel of the cross we have to remember or envisage a world without it, one where it has never been made manifest. The missing side of the cross is the mythological tale about sacrifice, the story we once told ourselves (and still do) in which victims remain invisible (Heim, 2006:15).

Undoubtedly says Heim the number one category for the arguments concerning Jesus’ demise is sacrifice. The Bible and Christian tradition construe the meaning of the crucifixion to a large degree through parallels to sacrifice (be this Abraham’s almost sacrifice of Isaac or
the Jerusalem temple ritual animal sacrifices). The practice of sacrifice is however much broader than what is portrayed in the biblical tradition. It is in fact anchored in the history of just about every culture and we are thus confronted with two crucial questions: What is sacrifice doing in human religious history? And is the biblical comprehension of sacrifice, anchored in the Hebrew Scriptures and then applied to Jesus’ demise, different in any significant manner from the more general phenomenon? (Heim, 2006:15).

Here is where Rene Girard’s work begins to feature. He argues that the practice of sacrificial scapegoating is a cornerstone of human society and religion. Communities solve their internal conflicts by uniting against a chosen victim. This violence wards off more generalized factional or retributive violence. The importance of this sacrificial foundation is perceived in the extraordinary aura that surrounds it, the sacred force ascribed to it. This aura is also necessary for the efficiency of the practice as it induces in the sacrificing community, agreement on the nature of the offering and total confidence in its necessity as a divine command (Heim, 2006:16).

Where the offering of sacrificial victims goes ahead untroubled, “successfully,” violence is done but none is perceived. Sacred killing does not make an impression on a person’s mind as killing. Sacrifice is looked upon as being as natural and as beneficial as the turn of the seasons. The shedding of leaves presents us with no moral issue, nor does sacred violence in mythical perspective. It utilizes a bad thing, collective violence against those on the fringe to avert even worse blood spilling and assures the good of social peace. What is evil about this ritual is totally engulfed in sacred veneration (Heim, 2006:16).

At this fundamental point of departure biblical sacrifice is no different from this sacrifice, and God sometimes figures as its champion. In fact what is different in the Bible requires this identity, for the difference is that in the Bible the violence of sacrifice is unveiled. In the Bible even when in the first instance sacrifice is affirmed in terms continuous with its broader practice, what it does is described in extraordinarily graphic terms. Elsewhere sacrifice is a type of magician’s work where violence is the essential act but in the representation of the happening one’s eyes are always averted at the instant that the blade falls. More than anything, what is typically concealed is the view and voice of the victim as victim. Yet the Bible relays to us in a startlingly upfront manner that the violence is the
magic. The power resides in the blood. In all unlikeliness and with enormous power, we in the Bible come to hear the grievances of the sacrificed (Heim, 2006:16).

Heim observes that the Bible overflows with violence, such as animal sacrifice, the descriptions of war, rape, persecutions, and the expressed desire for revenge. It is this uncomfortable material and its obsession with bloodshed that is a primary focus of Heim’s first section (Heim, 2006:16).

The other key reference point is the sacrificial world outside the Bible and those religious mythological traditions that appear free of the Bible’s brutal character. The Bible is often said to express religious patterns just like those inherent in other religions. It is also often said (by the same people) to express a unique and perversely violent religious vision different from other religious traditions. It is difficult to see, says Heim, how both can be true. Yet these comments make sense if we should suspect that mythical traditions that do not explicitly describe violence are not necessarily free from exercising it. One feature of the Bible, notes Heim, may be that it makes plain what is elsewhere shrouded and covered, a difference that requires similarity (Heim, 2006:16).

Heim’s section two turns specifically to the passion narratives themselves and to their re-interpretation of Jesus’ demise. Its focus is the paradox deeply rooted in the Gospels: Christ’s demise saves the world and it ought not to occur. This conundrum is the key to the drama in the passion accounts and to the interpretation of the subsequent differing types of atonement theories. The narrative of Jesus’ demise is in fact two stories superimposed one on top of the other. One is the description of Jesus’ slaying as a type of sacrificial business as usual, an explicit specification of the invisible pattern Heim discusses in his part one. The second story is of God’s saving action and purpose, played out “in, with, and under” the script of the first story, but to a hugely different effect. The good news of the cross can be heard only in this type of stereo, a sacrifice to terminate sacrifice (Heim, 2006:17).

We comprehend the crucifixion, says Heim, through the lens of the treatment of sacrifice in the Hebrew Scriptures. As sketched in part one that handling both exposed violence as the operative element in sacrifice and (as in the Psalms, the Book of Job, the prophets etc.), allocated a place to the cry of the victim. The Gospel passage narratives express the Christian conviction that in the demise of Jesus this revelatory process reached a
vivid climax. The hallowed dynamic of sacrifice is reversed. In unadulterated sacrificial myth scapegoats never appear as scapegoats. They are forgotten and concealed under other signs. The passion stories relate the old story of redemptive violence but relate it completely from the viewpoint of the sacrificed one. Even more dramatically, they relate the story of redemptive violence as a sinful human construct for peacemaking, not a divine institution. God is not the originator of the process but the one pulverized by it (Heim, 2006:17).

All this is displayed in the New Testament. But from very near the beginning, says Heim, there was a strong tendency to assimilate this new vision to the mythical pattern it was breaking. Two paradigmatic expressions of that tendency, points out Heim, are those of Gnosticism and Christian anti-Semitism, the discussion of which rounds off part 2 of his book (Heim, 2006:17).

Heim’s **section three** follows this story from the New Testament into the early church and later history. Christ’s resurrection undoes the “good” of sacrifice, an undoing that brings not only hope of eternal life, but also an apocalyptic challenge: How can human societies dwell without sacrifice? Much of the discussion in part one and two of his book may sound as if the primary impact of Jesus’ demise was simple revelation. It alters things by showing us the nature of the sacrificial web in which we are caught up. Once we were unsighted, yet now we have vision. But seeing alone is hardly a recipe for redemption points out Heim. Indeed such revelation does have an objective effect but insofar as that effect only undermines the effectiveness of sacrifice, the effect is not necessarily a peaceful one. The discussion of apocalyptic literature in this section illustrates that point (Heim, 2006:18).

To take possession of this revelation requires an additional transformation points out Heim. What difference does it make that Christ expired for us? What does it entail to live without sacrifice? The answers to these queries involve personal conversion and a new form of social reconciliation. The resurrection of the crucified one brought with it, not righteous vengeance but the coming together of an unconventional new community that assembled around him. This community utilized a whole selection of elements to substitute for scapegoating. Christians marked their celebratory commemoration of Jesus’ demise not with copycat slayings or new sacrifices, but with a meal of bread and wine. This constituted the “sacrifice of praise” that they believed to be sufficiently powerful enough to do what violent scapegoating had up until that point done in human history. Their celebration was not about
their united stand against a victim but their identification with the crucified one who was slain, and so with all those placed in a similar situation (Heim, 2006:18).

They recalled that at this death, Jesus’ disciples had played the roles of betrayer, deserter, and denier. Consequently they were confronted with a reminder that they too were not free of the sin that leads to the cross, and were in need of conversion (Heim, 2006:18).

This leads us into the final chapter, to a review and assessment of the theology of the cross, an endeavour to retell the doctrine of the atonement. The three sides of the cross scrutinized in these three parts do not represent a simple progression where the first two represent past stages of thought or faith and all one needs is the final step. In that scenario the first two would be of only historical interest like perusing through an old obsolete scientific theory before learning our best current science, says Heim. The three sides- myth revealed; sacrifice reversed; a new foundation of reconciliation substituted- go together. The truth of one fits together with the truth of the others. The history of the Christian faith/theology is not the story of gradual transition from one phase to the next but rather one of uneven struggle to maintain the depth of vision that comes with a grasp of all three at once (Heim, 2006:18).

We go adrift if we remythologize the passion by incorporating it totally and approvingly to the sacrificial pattern sketched in part one, says Heim. We go just as much adrift if we restrict our theology to a nonviolent ideal taken from part three without any grounding in the true nature of sacrificial realities. And we go adrift, if we narrow our context for the cross only to the scope of the material in part two, for then we too readily confine Gods becoming a victim of our violence to overcome it with God prescribing violence to redeem us. That is, without the surrounding context, and above all the Hebrew Scriptures, it is all too easy to abstract the passion from the problem it directly addresses. Such abstraction leads to the need to invent another problem for the cross to solve, which is what certain atonement theologies have done in shifting the emphasis to a concern for divine satisfaction or quantitative human moral debt (Heim, 2006:19).

In scriptural and theological context, the three sides of the cross are merely varying entry points for relating the same story, a story that always comes round all three points. We have no lucid knowledge of the cross without the context of myth on one hand and the context of the community with the crucified on the other. However the most definitive
reference goes in the other direction, for it is from the cross that we have come to know both of the others. With these three elements in our grip, claims Heim, we can direct our attention to the central problems of atonement theology. We have a substructure, for instance, for interpreting the differing and on occasion opposing scriptural excerpts pertaining to our subject. We can engage in a very concrete manner, the question of what saving purpose or need there may have proceeded from Christian understandings of the cross. We can understand why the elements grouped together under the sign reading substitutionary or sacrificial atonement are crucial to Christian faith even if they must be re-membered afresh (Heim, 2006:19).

3.2 Atonement in the Dock

In order to atone for humankind’s sin Christ the perfect human has to step in and suffer and die in our place as a substitutionary penal offering to the Father because as sinners our imperfect offering of ourselves would be an impossible gift unable to balance out our prior wrongs. This is a definition of the penal substitutionary model as Heim sees it, and against which, as a violent notion of atonement, he levels five serious accusations. I mention these accusations now (some of which naturally dove-tail with the accusations of other opponents of substitutionary atonement mentioned in the general introduction to my dissertation) as they serve to add substance to my own argument (Heim, 2006:21).

• First Accusation– Heim notes that this doctrine deals in the language of sacrifice- that which most people today find unintelligible and offensive. For people in Jesus’ day, ritual sacrifice was a known quantity and was used to explain the strange and wondrous meaning Christians had discovered on the cross. However in our cultural world it is this explanation that requires explaining. Sacrificial practice runs throughout human religious development yet there is no agreement on why these practices developed or as to their meaning. Few seek answers to these questions because the overall consensus is that sacrifice is primitive and irrelevant and atonement theology empty and outmoded (Heim, 2006:23).

• Second Accusation- the cross has been at the heart of Christian anti-Semitism. The charge that Jews are responsible for Jesus’ death draws its strength from the allegation that this
demise was uniquely heinous and uniquely significant says Heim. Based on a substitutionary penal understanding of the atonement, the Jews have become for many, the responsible nation that assisted God in the repugnant act of killing God. Thus those responsible here must be so evil they are beyond redemption and thus are condemned to persecution and suffering. Thus belief in atonement stands indicted for connecting Christian redemption with demonization of Jews (Heim, 2006:23-24).

- **Third Accusation** - This charge grows from the fact that our information regarding world religions and mythology places Jesus’ demise in an inevitably comparative context. According to Heim, the research of Rene Girard has shown us that unique significance is attributed to the cross by the gospels as a sacrifice to end sacrifice. However due to modern day anthropological knowledge and information we are also aware that stories of dying and rising deities in most cultures are commonplace. And when an awareness is lacking that the gospels reflect a story of the cross as a sacrifice to end sacrifice then we naturally tend to meld the gospel tale of sacrifice with other tales of dying and rising gods that revolve around the mythical understanding of sacrifice. And then the question is bound to arise as to how the Christ tale alone, can be special? Many view the Christian gospel of death and resurrection as being a mere variant amidst other common symbolic themes (the cycles of nature, the search for psychic wholeness and inner healing), historically successful yet degenerate in form (Heim, 2006:22-25).

- **Fourth Accusation** - Traditional understandings of the crucifixion come under fire for spiritual immaturity in terms of them being a conveyor of crude symbolic truth, and moral failings- especially regarding the image they sketch of God. How could our God possibly demand the suffering and demise of one innocent as the condition of mercy toward guilty others?- this tension between anger and mercy easily misshaping God into a dualistic God who induces both feelings of gratefulness and terror (Heim, 2006:25).

- **Fifth Accusation** - Many scholars, especially feminist, womanist and liberation theologians are charging that Christian notions of atonement often produce toxic psychological and social conditions. The exaltation of Christ’s demise here being that which glorifies innocent suffering and encourages people to passively accept roles of surrogate suffering for others, “in imitation of Christ.”
Heim ends off his critique of substitutionary atonement by acknowledging that even though this model in his opinion is not the meaning of the cross, God’s grace even in this skewed interpretation is still able to reside there. This is demonstrated by the testimony of the many who are still able to find redemption and comfort in this toxic model. If God’s grace is powerful enough to reside in a skewed model that despite bringing salvation to some also brings suffering how much more powerful will this saving grace be to the world in a model that can more accurately reflect the true meaning of the cross? This is Heim’s question. And it is here at this point that he now turns to this quest (Heim, 2006:27).

3.3 Things Concealed from the Foundation of the World

3.3.1 The Cross no one Recognizes- Indistinguishable Scapegoats

In this section as briefly mentioned in my outline of his work, Heim examines what he calls the dimension of meaning required as background to grasp the Gospel and New Testament understanding of Jesus’ death (Heim, 2006:14). It lays the foundation for his argument for a nonviolent view of atonement. Thus it is in the interest of my dissertation that this section be explored now in more detail than what was given in my outline to Heim’s work.

Heim begins here by affirming his view that Jesus’ demise is moulded around the story already begun in the Old Testament: the history of Israel reaching back to Genesis and including the practice of sacrifice and the language of the Psalms and the prophets. And that this referral back to the history of Israel as a background understanding upon which the Gospel treatment of Jesus’ demise is moulded, is indicative of a link between the way the good beginnings of the human story went astray and the way God has responded to set it right (Heim, 2006:38).

Something pivotal will be missed in our understanding of the meaning of the cross, says Heim, unless we begin (as the early Christians did) with this long view which sets the cross in the frame of all human history. The early Christians were adamant that the crucifixion directly addressed a universal human condition- a deep-rooted conflict between God and evil and not simply the peculiar religious needs of a special tradition. But they were also very cognizant of the fact that this was an odd claim to make for a slaying, an event in
which the world observed no such thing. The cross and the resurrection changed these believers by highlighting a problem they had never comprehended so fully until they saw it so decisively challenged (Heim, 2006:38).

If the work of the cross is a universal redeeming act then there must be something universally defective in human life that is directly involved in Jesus’ demise. However it must not be universally obvious otherwise the crucifixion would be apparent good news rather than folly and a stumbling block. This is an odd prescription notes Heim. We’re seeking for something invisible, a background so standard that we are unable to see it. As it turns out, in their use of the Old Testament to make sense of Jesus’ demise the early Christians perceived that this context was already provided. But that is the topic of chapter 3 of Heim’s section 1. In this his chapter 2 of Section 1, Heim presents one way that the death Jesus died is actually related to the very inner workings of our broader human life, to the manner in which we ward off uncontrollable violence and deal with crises of conflict in our societies (Heim, 2006:38).

And the path of his presentation here entails the following. Firstly, he addresses what for him is our skewed modern day problematical understanding of sacrifice. This becomes necessary due to the fact that the handling of Jesus’ death in the New Testament and later tradition is full of sacrificial language and images. And secondly he offers us an understanding of how Christianity which has a dying and rising God amidst multiple religions that have the same, can claim a special significance for the cross and Jesus’ sacrifice, above that of other gods (Heim, 2006:38)

3.3.1.1 Our Difficulty with Sacrifice

What needs to be understood here, says Heim, is the fact that ritual sacrifice, having had a purpose and function in every human civilization, is not now defunct and unscientific in our modern era as it is often thought to be true. But rather it is a process still very much operational in our modern day world. Furthermore what also needs to be understood in this regard is that historical myths that express this practice are not therefore obsolete projections or merely symbolic parables of earlier historical contexts, but have real moral implications. This is precisely the reason why the Bible engages so seriously with issues of sacrificial causality (Heim, 2006:44).
In originating from a key transitional moment when life in the earliest social groups was in the process of making us human, sacrifice is the discovery that stands poised at the structural emergence of both human society and human religion. It explains why the two emerge hand in hand. It has come into being due to the evolution of the human brain to the point where a capacity for mimesis develops—i.e., (learning to desire what we infer other notable individuals or models in our circle find desirable). This leads to rivalry that ultimately results in a sacred murder of a unanimously selected, vulnerable, friendless victim who has confessed guilt to having violated the society’s most sacred taboos. This murder in turn clears the air of retributive violence in the group bringing about a temporary peace that saves that society from total disintegration. The scapegoat is viewed both as guilty by the community because his/her death has led to peace, and as a revered god whose divine vocation is to be a bringer of peace (Heim, 2006:44).

### 3.3.1.2 Sacred Violence

In the offering of his own version of the origin of society Girard obviously has no direct evidence for a “founding murder.” However Girard’s hypothesis gains weight, says Heim, when we pay heed to the fact that many cultures and societies take sacrificial rites very seriously. Common features in these rites include: concern for unanimity against a victim; a dread of the catastrophic results should the event go wrong; and the taking of great measures to ensure the success of the event (Heim, 2006:47-49).

If we see in the mechanisms here only primitive and fickle practices, says Girard, then we are the primitives because we are failing to see that sacrifice meets a desperately real dilemma for which we have not yet entirely substituted a different solution (Heim, 2006:50).

### 3.3.1.3 Myths Containing Sacrifice

The scapegoating process itself is mysterious to those who participate in it. Its effectiveness has a quality of the miraculous about it. Its actual components are hidden on a number of levels (Heim, 2006:50).

Firstly, it is important to note here that the only dilemma that sacrifice truly has the power to solve is social division. And it solves this problem (which for example may be due
to fear of attack, or contagion or some other crisis) by way of averting mass conflict and chaos developing in the community due to the fact that at this time everyone becomes a model of the other’s desire. In other words all in the community at this point of crisis would be modelling the same desire: defensive fear, pre-emptive attack. And this would lead to mass conflict. The mechanisms holding the mimetic contagions of envy, suspicion, retaliation etc. have now fallen away. And the ritual of sacrifice and mob persecution of a scapegoat victim would quell this resulting uprising by restoring temporary peace in the community (Heim, 2006:50).

Secondly says Heim we find the cause of the crisis is misattributed in a consistent manner. The wrong that brings on the crisis is deemed to be so dire and contra to the sacred obligations of the society that it seems to draw collective annihilation upon the group. The worst violations are crimes that blur the distinctions among groups and individuals such as incest for example. The choice of a victim is an arbitrary act in that it hinges not on any guilt of the individual but on the need of the group. It is usually someone who differs in some way from the group (Heim, 2006:51).

The mechanics of the scapegoating system are such that both the nature of the crisis and the kind of behaviour responsible for it are described in mistaken terms. This enables the process to be much smoother and more effective, the unspeakable crime that is being committed here being kept hidden from plain sight (Heim, 2006:51).

Thus participants in sacrifice come to believe they are: revenging a horrific offence against the whole society; jettisoning a contaminating evil from their midst; obeying a divine mandate. The category of murder or killing never crosses the minds of those participating in sacrifice. Rather what is perceived and remembered is a mythical image of what the event does and what it means (Heim, 2006:52).

In a broad sense, ritual sacrifice is a feature of traditional religion with many of its myths being founded upon sacrificial content. Often these myths are featured in the sacrificial rituals themselves. Yet on the surface they describe something quite different from the sacrificial event. Myth is thus a record that derives from murderers who are unperturbed by any doubt about what they have carried out. The one sacrificed may be plainly present in the myth yet there is no apparent victim there, the sacrificed one having been dehumanized or
divinized beyond recognition. In an unbroken stream of consciousness, from generation to
generation, the invisibility of the victim as victim is maintained (Heim, 2006:54).

3.3.1.4 Myth and Failing to Practice a Hermeneutic of Suspicion

According to Girard, myths seem to modern-day people, not to be based in history or to have
an explicit violent theme, but to be purely about image and symbol. But rather than us being
fooled into this false thinking, Girard suggests that the exercising of a hermeneutic of
suspicion be applied to mythical stories wherein we are on the alert for a possible story of
historical fact and domination that runs against the surface meaning (Heim, 2006:56).

Our dominant interpretation of myth which revolves around “demythologizing” is
thus for Girard just as much an error as traditional literal readings. This is due to such
interpretations shielding myths from the hermeneutic of suspicion that has otherwise
extended to all historical texts. Before the mythologizing of the practice of violent
scapegoating came the actual practice of it. Thus behind the mythic stories are real victims
(Heim, 2006:59).

3.3.1.5 Sacrifice in this Modern Day and Age

What distinguishes Girard’s way of thinking is the conviction that sacrifice is a real solution
to a real problem. And even more contentiously, says Heim, Girard suggests that the problem
remains real for us as well. We have important features such as police forces and legal
systems and the great world religions of modernity all designed to assist people to combat the
mimetic temptations created by our emotional and cognitive sensitivity to each other. Yet
despite this we are subject to the same dangers and liable to practice the same solutions. Our
legal and political systems, which in principle are all curbs against sacrificial crises, can
become and have become in various ways consumed by sacrificial practices. Some examples
here include the Stalinist terror in the then Soviet Union, and the global practice of racial
segregation (Heim, 2006:60).

Our modern conventional perception that ritual sacrifice has faded within our culture
and that we do not live by myth any more is to a large degree correct says Heim. Yet he is
also of the opinion that to believe we have entirely replaced them and that we are not
weakened by this type of practice is naïve. Our ancestors after all saw the scapegoating practice as that which upheld our social world. Thus it is no small matter to ask how we will do that job without it (Heim, 2006:61-62).

By way of scapegoating sacrifice being a shape-shifting dynamic, there is no permanent class of victim, no permanent victims of the unanimous mob. But rather scapegoats such as those racially and economically exploited and gender discriminated against may be co-opted to sacrificial ends according to varying situations. Because humans have always been divided by race, class, gender, language etc. there is always a special premium on a process that can thwart disintegration and smooth over division (Heim, 2006:62).

Thus according to Heim, although at first glance the two topics of: (a) sacrifice and myth– i.e. the killing of animals or persons in religious settings, and (b) the death of Jesus don’t look anything alike. And although Jesus’ death is a public crucifixion and not carried out upon an altar, Girard’s insight connects sacrifice and myth in a way directly relevant to the cross. Girard contends that the enduring significance of sacrifice is based upon a real connection between collective violence and social reconciliation, and its effectiveness depends on the fact that people who practiced scapegoating sacrifice systematically misrepresented that connection in mythic constructions. This suggests that ritual sacrifice has an original setting (the founding murder) and prescribes an ongoing practice (scapegoating) that is not limited to ritual, and that myth mirrors a reality different from what it directly describes (Heim, 2006:62-63).

If this is so then the truth behind both ritual sacrifice and certain founding myths is a fact that looks uncannily like Jesus’ demise– the exclusion and execution of a scapegoat to reconcile a community in crisis. There is a profound relation between Jesus’ demise and mythical sacrifice, but it is the reverse of what is usually supposed. The issue is not to interpret Jesus’ demise in terms from the practice of cultic, ritual sacrifice, or to interpret it in terms drawn from myth. Rather the point is to interpret both of those things from the perspective of the reality of Jesus’ demise. To comprehend the cross the Gospels insistently present to us in Jerusalem, we have to gaze by its light at the landscape beyond. The connection to the world of sacrifice and myth is the invisible victim behind both, the cross nobody sees. What lies behind both the practice of sacrifice and the formulation of founding
myths is in fact a cross just like that of Jesus. To know this, let alone to alter it, required something special to occur in history. Thus Heim can claim here that in Girard’s thinking the Bible is a book that builds an entire religion on the victim (Heim, 2006:63).

3.3.2 Job’s Cry- Sacrifice Unveiled and Challenged

In their quest to make sense of Jesus’ death, the early Christians both perceived that Jesus’ death was involved with the universal defectiveness (the practice of ritual sacrifice) present in human life. And that the Old Testament provided them with the context to understand Jesus’ death in that light (Heim, 2006:38). Having discussed what he sees as being the true meaning behind ritual sacrifice and myth, Heim now pursues this conviction in his chapter 3. It is thus important that I go ahead and explore his avenue of insight here so as to add weight and support to my own argument for a nonviolent atonement.

So far Heim has argued that scapegoating is the prototypical “good bad thing” in human culture, a measured dose of unjust violence that keeps at bay broader unrestrained violence. It is one of the deepest structures of human sin inbuilt into our religion and politics. It is demonic due to it being infinitely flexible in its choice of prey and is most effective where it is most invisible. So long as we are in its grip we do not see our victims as victims (Heim, 2006:64).

If this is a fact of human history and community, says Heim, then some significant conclusions follow: texts that conceal scapegoating foster it whereas those that show it for what it is undermine it. Nonmythical description, even if it is in support of sacrifice and in which God Godself is portrayed as being entangled in the dynamics of mythical sacrifice (as many Old Testament texts and some New Testament texts indeed portray) start to drain much of the power and mystery from the process. And most disruptive of all in these texts is any recognition of the authentic voice of the sacrificed. For Heim, the dangerously honest texts of the Bible are engaged in a struggle over the sacred- i.e. a struggle to show up scapegoating/sacred violence for what it is, culminating in the antisacrificial message of the cross (Heim, 2006:64-70).
To put it another way Heim suggests there is far from an arbitrary logic present that connects Old Testament texts and their ambivalent features with each other and with Jesus’ death. This logic testifies to an ongoing struggle- a consistent theme which is to expose, undermine and unveil the sacrifice and violence of scapegoating evil (Heim, 2006:64-70).

Although portrayed as indeed being brutal in some biblical texts the true biblical God is not held to be violent by Heim. This is because in line with modern hermeneutics, Heim reserves the right to interpret some texts in terms of others scholars believe are the clearest and deepest focus of the biblical message. For Heim this message is antisacrificial (Heim, 2006:64-70).

3.3.2.1 Creation and Assassination

In line with the above, and standing out as a sharp exception to the prevalence of violence in the Bible are the Genesis creation myths notes Heim. These particular myths are also strikingly different to creation myths of other religions. Because whereas other religions show the world as founded on violence or the expulsion of a cosmic scapegoat, the Bible insists the true origin is nonviolent, an ontology of peace being more fundamental than the reality of conflict (Heim, 2006:70).

Yet soon after, Adam and Eve fall away from the preconditions of peace which paves the way for the Cain and Abel story of murder and violent origins- the original social sin. This later Genesis story, told in concrete antimythical terms reflects in Heim’s view the fact that sacrifice is not the source of creation but a strategy to deal with a fallen creation (Heim, 2006:70-71).

There is no foundational violence in God or in God’s creation of the world. But due to the reality of human sin and conflict the biblical God is quickly implicated in killing when after the Cain and Abel story the world spirals into the evil of scapegoating violence. In the following Noah story, God is thus portrayed as destroying the entire world and enforcing prohibitions to avoid the escalation of violence- and in the process becoming a power who underwrites sacrifice to diffuse it. A few chapters on however God relents by drawing up a covenant with a righteous remnant. Here God’s desire is that these few will promote a righteous life of antiscapegoating (Heim, 2006:74).
3.3.2.2 Exercising Sacrifice

The new arrangement/covenant with Noah will not hold. The first number of chapters in Genesis lay the foundation upon which scapegoating sacrifice appears, but they do not deal with it yet. In the huge stretch of the Bible that remains however that will occur with striking regularity. The phenomenon of scapegoating sacrifice is regularly and explicitly addressed. But here, as is typical in the biblical texts the description is presented in flat concrete non-mythical terms (Heim, 2006:75-76).

Even in the sacrificial act of the Day of Atonement as described in Leviticus chapter 16, the thoroughly sacrificial act of sending the scapegoat into the desert has taken on antisacrificial overtones. It has become an act in which unlike the sacred myth stories, the ritual has become very open about transference in which it is actually the guilt of offences of all the people that are placed on the victim and expelled. They are the ones who are guilty but the substitute sacrificed will remove that guilt. Fasting and repentance by the people is also required here for repentance of their sins, the sacrifice of the goat not being purging of their sins here but rather their purging coming out of their own repentance. The Day of Atonement turns entirely toward this inward reconciliation with God and neighbour and thus according to Heim becomes explicitly antisacrificial (Heim, 2006:77).

3.3.2.3 Giving Ear to Scapegoats

In addition to its violence the story of Cain and Abel marks other elements common in scripture: envy, rivalry and family conflict. The Bible dwells on these with the conviction that they are of religious importance. In this way via its series of dramas the Bible breaks down the dynamics that lead to scapegoating in lucid small scale understandable terms rather than shrouding them in mystical confusion as is the case with other traditions (Heim, 2006:78).

A good example of this observation says Heim is the very human story of Joseph in which we see the way persecution arises. Jacob’s preference for the younger brother Joseph evokes rivalry among the brothers who overcome this dissention by collectively turning against Joseph. We see the reality that unanimity has to be manufactured, all brothers reaching a consensus regarding Joseph’s victimization. We see the agreement on a cover story that eliminates all responsibility for the violent act. Joseph is the cause of the dilemma.
in the brothers’ eyes but the scriptural perspective clearly points out that his primary crime was to be an occasion for resentment (Heim, 2006:78-79).

With Abel and Joseph, Genesis begins a long series of biblical texts we might label the true lives of scapegoats. This is true of the Abraham and Isaac text that expresses the following. Rejection of human sacrifice. And recognition of the innocence of the victim as reflected in God’s decision to set Isaac free along with the clear moral that Abraham’s faith in God is no less radical than that required by such sacrifice (Heim, 2006:79-80).

The biblical Psalms also provide revelatory glimpses into a dynamic (mythical violence) all too common elsewhere but rarely directly displayed. Many of them such as Psalm 137 and 109 are formulated not just as righteous anger against evil, but contain the unbridled desire for revenge against fellow community members and other tribes and nations, thus becoming an unrestricted horizon of escalating hatred. The value herein is to bring us face to face with our own condition- a condition that cries out for transformation (Heim, 2006:81).

However says Heim the most striking thing about the Psalms goes even further than this. Because, in giving the general theme of revenge a twist they reveal what the sacrificial scapegoating practice looks like from the side of the victim- e.g. Psalm 142. Here at its harshest level we hear the cry of a helpless victim lusting for revenge and calling upon God to assist. This alerts us to the fact that righteous revenge is no necessary solution but a source to yet further fragmentation (Heim, 2006:82). Beside the lament of the victim being turned to revenge, on other occasions the dominant note is not the desire for retribution. But rather it is the hope of ultimate vindication and restoration for the victim as is indicated in Psalm 22 which is the scapegoat Psalm Jesus quotes from the cross and which I’ll subsequently say more about (Heim, 2006:84).

3.3.2.4 Forsaken Scapegoat and a Test for God

There is good reason says Heim for the placement of the book of Job next to the Psalms. This is because the evil it has in view is precisely the type under discussion in the Psalms. And furthermore the book is able to advance this discussion on the primary scriptural plot of
sacrifice. It does this by picking up on the topic within the Old Testament wherein the issue of sacrifice actually becomes an issue of God’s character (Heim, 2006:84-85).

In a nutshell what we have in the book of Job is an interview with a scapegoat. It presents yet another biblical instance of a mythical scenario interrupted, examined and to some extent reversed (Heim, 2006:84-85).

The text takes as its starting point the premise that Job’s suffering does in fact come from God. The victims of violence in the Psalms generally express confidence or at least plaintive hope that God will answer their cry. Yet Job makes no such assumption and instead includes God as his enemy. The book of Job thus confronts directly the presumption that the sacrificial dynamic is itself God’s work (Heim, 2006:86-92).

Job decides that if “god” is in fact the divinity requiring sacrifice of the innocent then he, Job will appeal to God for support against a person’s right to justice against God- (justice against this god of the violent sacred). Thus this book can be read as a type of battle for the soul of the biblical God, a trial as to whether this is a divinity of the classic, mythical, sacrificial sort, or something different. Job appeals to God for help against God. He appeals to God’s better nature we might say (Heim, 2006:86-92).

Deprived of all human support, Job the victim turns to God, thus embracing the concept of a God of victims. This turning to a God of victims by Job may seem like a natural thing for us, says Heim, but in fact what it represents is a new departure as there is nothing naturally religious in assuming God would side with scapegoats. Although prompted, Job refuses to curse the God who sides with victims. If only he would do this, all would be right in the world of sacrifice. But instead Job denounces the sacrificial God’s actions- in what becomes a scenario reflecting the historical battle between two religious realities (Heim, 2006: 89-92).

Throughout the book Job insists on his innocence, at least with regards to the enormity of the crime of sacrifice. And iddn the end, the God who transcends and opposes the victimimage mechanism sides with Job by way of rebuking Job’s friends who are supporters of a sacrificial god. This story shows God to be a true God who sides with victims (Heim, 2006:89-92).
When exploring the topic of sacrifice in the Hebrew Scriptures Heim suggests the prolific subjects of violence and ritual cultic practice should be viewed as one connected topic. Animal sacrifice, he suggests, is originally derived from human sacrifice and retained an awareness of its substitutionary nature. Although being positive as an attempt to halt human violence and bloodshed, it nevertheless remained as a reinforcement and validation of the sacrificial mechanism it exhibited. Thus upon its failure the volume of human scapegoating subjects increased (Heim, 2006:93).

Israel’s greatest prophets thus purposely connected their outspoken condemnation of violence and exploitation in community with a critique of sacrifice. At the most basic level they attacked those who held that fulfillment of cultic obligations was more significant than meeting God’s covenant commandments for justice and mercy to ones neighbours. The key point of disagreement here is about what Heim calls the trajectory of sacrifice. Existing sacrificial rituals were seen as an extension and affirmation of the logic of founding scapegoating sacrifice (albeit that the cessation of using human victims was viewed as serving to weaken this logic) (Heim, 2006:94).

In their critique of sacrifice, the prophets wished to see the weakening of the logic of cultic sacrifice extended even further. Consequently most of the prophets did not call for a total end to the rituals, but insisted that their true value should be found more in the spirit of the worshippers. The value should be found not in the number and kind of animal victims substituted for human ones, but in the empathy and justice shared with human victims (Heim, 2006:94).

The Bible’s Prophets see the scapegoat theme behind sacrificial practice and how it is applied to the social world around them. They follow ritual sacrifice back to its roots as that which stems from our social conflicts. Thus Prophets such as Hosea and Amos continually warn that people who believed that the practice of sacrifice would maintain peace were wrong- Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21-24 (Heim, 2006:95).
For later Christians, the revelation of persecuting sacrifice identified by the prophets and embedded deeply in the Old Testament reaches a special climax in Isaiah’s Servant Songs and especially the 4th song- Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Here, in the figure of the Suffering Servant we discover perhaps the single most outstanding scriptural text for early Christian interpretation of the cross. This text should be considered not as a mystical job description for a unique messiah but as an anthropological account of a repeated reality says Heim. In the Servant Songs two insights are combined. Firstly, that the victim was innocent and his oppressors wrong. And secondly that his victimization was socially beneficial and that his punishment brought the community peace (Heim, 2006:96-98).

The beginning of the song declares the victim has been chosen and will suffer due to our problem- our collective ailment of rivalry and conflict. The impetus here stems not from some transgression in the victim but from a need in us. Though the problem is ours we deemed it to be that of the servant- the one who deserved the Job and the Joseph and the Abel treatment (Heim, 2006:97-98).

It is in fact because we could not maintain peaceful relations that we require a sacrifice. We torture because of our iniquities. And wounding is another iniquity. We are actually reunited and liberated by this violence even though the victim is wrongly charged and we are the ones who stand guilty. Hating in unison halts our divisions. What wounds him assists us. We are all implicated. We do this together; we have all succumbed to scapegoating. The entire procedure via which we carry out this slaying may claim to have some moral foundation but there is no justice in it (Heim, 2006:98-99).

This is about as transparent as it can be about religious scapegoating violence, suggests Heim. It is an unequivocally bad thing with an undeniably good outcome. To discern this sacrificial mechanism in others is unusual, a breakthrough. To face it explicitly in our own behaviour may be, literally, miraculous (Heim, 2006:99).

The passage is undoubtedly giving an uncannily lucid description of violent sacrifice as the unjust if fruitful persecution of an innocent victim. Yet there is another element in the text that appears contradictory to this, says Heim, the wording of which appears to attribute
the persecution of the victim to God rather than our own evil. Isaiah 53 says “the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all and yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain.” It seems here that these particular lines appear to turn around and state it was all God’s idea after all (Heim, 2006:99).

But, says Heim, this isn’t what the text is saying. The writer is not talking about divine approval for sacrificial business as usual, and the sign is in the manner in which God’s will is distinguished from the will of the persecutors. Isaiah declares that, we the sacrificers considered the victim stricken by God. But the whole drift of the text is that it was wrong to think that. We are the ones who hurt and pulverized the scapegoat with our sins. If what is being done is so plainly wrong why would God support it? If it was wrong to think that God inflicted the chastisement what does it mean to turn around and say that God laid on him the sins of all? It can mean only that there are two different things going on. When we inflict our sins on the victim it is not the same event as when God lays those sins on him. The writer of the Servant Song brings these two together with the suggestion that the victim was allowed to be punished by a God who counted his sufferings as an atonement for the iniquities of the very crowd that inflicted them on him (Heim, 2006:100).

God is doing something different from what the persecutors are doing. The Isaiah text gives us numerous plain indications of this shift. It ends with exaltation of the servant. And it starts with verses that already presume the vindication of the sacrificed one. Though what is occurring is ancient and common (even if the blunt description of it is new) this instance of it is going to be dramatically different. It has a purpose counter to, but superimposed on, the standard purpose of sacrifice (Heim, 2006:100).

The text of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 declares that “when you make him an offering for sin, yet he shall see his children and live a long godly life.” In other words when you sacrifice him as a sin offering it won’t work. He will have longevity and prosper the Lord’s word. He will be blessed and a blessing to others. Traditional sacrifice may achieve something very real. It may calm our conflict momentarily. However one thing it cannot do is make its practitioners righteous, because they must commit sin to carry it out. Somehow the servant’s demise is to redeem them from what led to the killing (Heim, 2006:100).
We can comprehend this better says Heim by comparing the servant in this passage with Job. Job is a full-scale resister to his scapegoating whereas the servant is patient. Job protests his personal innocence while his friends enlist God to argue his guilt and the outcome is up in the air. The servant songs are very plain that the servant is suffering unjustly for the iniquities of others and it is a mistake to think the servant guilty. Job insists on some type of vindication from God. He does have his earthly prosperity replenished but gets no unequivocal verdict in his favour, no reply to his plea for an accounting from God. The entire episode of his ordeal is still posed as a test proposed to by God by Lucifer, an episode that turns out to be a test of God too. By contrast the servant song is framed by an affirmation of the triumph of the victim. The servant doesn’t protest because the protest has been heard and validated by God. The song directly proclaims the innocence of the servant and the injustice of the persecution. The servant is collaborating with God to change this dynamic. This sacrifice is not meant to be one in a long line. The servant is a singular figure and the upshot of his life will be something new (Heim, 2006:101).

The Servant Song relates a tale like that of Job from a different angle. This time there is no doubt about the scapegoat’s innocence, no doubt whose side God is on. The focus has moved. Now it lies on the sins of the victimizers. Us. Job poses a question: How can God be justified in face of the arbitrary suffering of a righteous person turned upon by everyone including God? The servant poses a different question. Assuming that God decides to side with the scapegoat how can those who do the violence ever be justified? If the first was about how the one can be rescued, the second is about how the many can be saved (Heim, 2006:101).

3.3.2.7 Commencing with This Scripture

We find violence in the Bible confirms Heim, because it tells us the truth about our human condition- about the fundamental dynamics leading to human bloodshed, the truth about the integral connection between religion and violence. There is no way to be truthful without spotlighting these things (Heim, 2006:102).

The violence in the bible diagnoses our humanity to us by revealing the kind of violence whose nature is not evident to us because it goes under another name. This is reconciling violence which we rather term as revenge or purification or divine sacrifice. And
because this kind of violence is not being faced it is being justified. However the lack of this kind of violence being explicitly described does not signify its absence but its invisibility. To exhibit violence is indeed to enflame people’s appetite for it. However to veil it under euphemism and myth and to be piously quiet before its sacred power is to grant it absolute rule (Heim, 2006:102).

Heim claims critics of Christianity vilify the Old Testament God as a sociopathic cousin in a family array of much better adjusted deities. However the offence of the Bible may be viewed another way around notes Heim. It suggests the better adjusted deities are (literally) myth. This is because the God of the Bible in assuming God’s most crude and vengeful warrior stance and delighting in blood as a sign of reconciliation, suggests this is the place to start because this is what all gods of the traditional sacred are (Heim, 2006:102).

The fact that the God of the Bible is described in a variety of characterizations is a cue for critical-historical investigation. This in turn can lead us to deduce that certain more sophisticated notions of God may be chosen in preference to more primitive ones. Yet the historically and theologically less valued elements have a place in the scriptures says Heim. This is because they reveal something not duplicated elsewhere and of continuing relevance that forms a necessary part of our comprehending (Heim, 2006:103).

The Bible does not take the approach of merely describing the nature of the gods of the traditional sacred and making it plain through that externalization that this does not apply to the true God- the Biblical God- our Christian God who is always untouched by them. This is because of the perils of the amplification of triumphalism explains Heim. Thus instead the Bible’s presentation makes it uncomfortably plain that this description does apply to our God and our religion since they can easily be caught up in just the same sacrificial dynamic- and have been. In the biblical tradition the scapegoat critique via the prophetic voices, emerges as a critique of that tradition. Israel is reminded by the prophets that despite the calling of the new and true God, it continuously reverts to old iniquitous ways- doing so even in God’s name (Heim, 2006:103).

The Old Testament is an anti-myth. It is piled high with bodies, the voices of victims and threatened victims. This landscape is either the product of an idiosyncratic, bloodthirsty imagination or the actual landscape of history and religion. If the latter, then what is
remarkable is not that the scriptures describe it, but that we should think it normal not to (Heim, 2006:103).

3.4 Visible Victim- The Cross we Can’t Lose Sight Of

Examination of this second section of Heim’s work is necessary to my argument for a nonviolent atonement because the crucifixion is viewed by Heim through the lens of the treatment of sacrifice in the Hebrew Scriptures. The passion narratives and New Testament scriptures thus according to Heim, tell the story of redemptive violence as being a sinful human construct for peacemaking, not a divine institution. God is not the author of the process but the one annihilated by it. God through the Son, is the suffering and yet ultimately victorious author of the reversal of sacrificial violence.

3.4.1 The Paradox of the Passion: Redeemed by What Shouldn’t Happen

In his understanding of the passion narratives and their interpretations of Jesus’ death, Heim to begin with, draws attention to a key paradox built into the passion: Jesus’ death saves the world and it ought not to happen. It is God plan and an evil act. It is a good bad thing. It is not something endorsed by God, but is ultimately used by God for our redemption which includes saving us from this evil way of living. We are lost in terms of gaining a true understanding of the meaning of the cross if we don’t grasp this paradox and hold it continually before us because it is there for a reason. It is related to the other good/bad thing Heim has discussed, that being sacrifice (Heim, 2006:108).

3.4.1.1 Omitting the Cross

Heim’s understanding of the passion narratives requires also that we not omit the cross- that we don’t try to sanitize it and thus leave out the brutality at its core as some versions of Christianity have tried to do. This is because the masking of violence here would avert our eyes from the real suffering historical victim behind it and fail to trouble our consciences in any way and thus simply endorse the process of scapegoating violence that the true meaning behind the cross sets out to save us from (Heim, 2006:108-110).
3.4.1.2 Just One more Myth

Heim’s understanding of the passion narratives requires also that we do indeed in a certain sense see Jesus’ death as being “just one more myth.” But this is only with the goal of seeing how it differs from myth. We are to see Jesus’ life, work and death as unique, and yet having this sameness to it because other religions mythically symbolize dying and rising gods. Yet this sameness need not be seen as disparaging but rather that the Jesus story relies on this kind of sameness in order to show that it is different. Because in Jesus’ case we are able to uniquely gain, through biblical revelation, insights behind the mythical story of dying and rising gods. And these insights serve not to cover up the evil dynamic of ritual sacrifice as is the case in other religions but to expose it for the human evil that it is. And to show how our God is able to rescue us from it (Heim, 2006:110-114).

The New Testament passion story related from the point of view of the actual human victim blatantly shows the victim unjustly accused and wrongly murdered by the crowd. God in this scenario being not the one demanding of the Son’s death but the one enduring the suffering inflicted upon him by us. And yet ultimately experiencing unmistakable and universal vindication. The accusation levelled against Christianity by its critics as being “just another myth” is thus simply not true and as a result we should not let it bother us (Heim, 2006: 108-110).

3.4.1.3 The Same Old Story

Heim’s understanding of the passion narratives requires a recognition on our part that the Jerusalem of Holy Week is certainly that which qualifies as a basic setting for scapegoating. Not only does tension exist here in a political, cultural and religious sense between Roman authorities and the Jews as a subject people, but Jesus also bears the classic marks of a candidate for sacrifice. An outsider of humble birth with a following that threatens political leaders, he is charged with sedition by the Romans and blasphemy by the Jewish authorities. A key aspect of scapegoating sacrifice is its unanimity as collective violence in this Passover setting forms against Jesus. Calls for his crucifixion are made with one voice. Even his closest friends desert him having no alternative meaning to propose regarding his death (Heim, 2006:116).
3.4.1.4 This Man was Surely Innocent

Thus in the passion narratives all the pieces are in place for a standard scapegoating murder. Yet the big difference here is that they are visibly in place. Successful sacrifice is like a magic trick. What actually happens and what everyone believes is happening are two different things. The passion narratives shatter that spell. They describe the trick with all its moving parts. They spotlight what is always in shadow: the innocence of the scapegoat; the arbitrary and unjust way the victim has been chosen; the ulterior purposes sacrifice exists to serve. The reversal can be described very simply. In traditional sacrifice the community is unquestionably in the right and the scapegoat is universally condemned. But in the passion text the cast of characters playing a role in Jesus execution stand for active evil. The sacrificial model may be a war of all against one. But this telling condemns the many not the one (Heim, 2006: 116)

The Gospel accounts, written in stereo, have on one hand the underlying pattern with all its mythic components in position. On the other is a perennial counterpoint of elements that expose the hidden realities, the true structure of scapegoating. Judas, for example, returns the money confessing his sin- Matthew 27:3; in Luke’s Gospel the centurion claims “surely this man was innocent?” The centurion’s claim here is decidedly not the voice of myth but a profound counter confession. The assumption that Jesus is a heinous criminal who has brought disaster on the entire people does not go unquestioned. We observe what is actually occurring- the slaying of an innocent victim- and we see the real reasons behind this, not the stated ones (Heim, 2006:116-117)

We see the explicit social crisis; we see the motives based upon sedition and blasphemy which lead various factions to select Jesus; we see the power of this process at work and the fear, hatred and contagion upon which it is based. Examples here are Peter’s denial of Jesus; the high priests false testimony against him- (Mk 14:56). In short we see the mystery of the sacrificial process ruthlessly burst open. The charges against Jesus are delivered in plain “demythologized” form so that they transport us to the root of the matter: the unity of the community in the midst of escalating division and conflict. Things are very much in the open. Pilate for example declares that he finds no guilt in Jesus yet is quite willing to execute him in the interest of peace (Heim, 2006:117-118)
Furthermore, the Roman soldiers’ dressing of Jesus in royal robes is portrayed as sadistic persecution and not some sacred ritual; the collective nature of sacrificial violence is emphasized due to the crowds portrayal as a collective throng bent on Jesus’ destruction; even the disciples shy away from Jesus’ defence at this point, being portrayed even as tacit participants in his death.

3.4.1.5 Clean Only on the Outside

Heim’s understanding of the passion narratives also requires that we see the passion not only in terms of it being a description unfolding from the side of the scapegoat. But also that commentary exists here in this regard. Some of the most significant commentary stems from Jesus’ own words anticipating his death. In Jesus’ “Woes to the Pharisees”- Matthew 23:27-59, as Heim sees it, Jesus anticipates his death at the hands of the Pharisees accusing them of making him yet another in the long line of scapegoating victims. Thus here the Pharisees are accused of hypocrisy as is often assumed to be the case in biblical study of this passage, and also very specifically of the self-deception involved in sacrifice which as leaders of the people they represent on a communal level. In this regard Jesus portrays the Pharisees as beautiful on the outside by way of their adornment with the social benefits stemming from death, and yet filthy on the inside due to their unacknowledged lies, arbitrary violence, and unclean persecution (Heim, 2006:118-120).

Jesus is also saying here that although the Pharisees acknowledge the revelation within their biblical tradition that condemns persecution, they nevertheless, and tragically so, are in denial of their own persecutory ways, having in fact become part of the scapegoating pattern (Heim, 2006:118-120).

Two other most direct forms of commentary are those spoken by Jesus himself from the cross. The first revolves around Jesus’ prayer seeking the Father’s forgiveness of “those who know not what they do.” This refers to the collective dynamic of sacrificial blindness affecting us all, and how sacrifice benefits from our conviction we are doing something else (Heim, 2006:121).

The second instance brings us to Jesus’ cry to the Father on the cross asking why he has been forsaken- Mark 15:34. Based on Psalm 22, these words give a shorthand
characterization of the victim in the scapegoating scenario. It is the cry of the victim whom
the crowd misguidedly view as truly deserving of God’s condemnation and punishment. And
more than this it is the victim’s appeal for God’s deliverance and for God not to agree with
those who say persecution is God’s mandate. The voice of the Psalmist here is key to
understanding the death of Jesus because it fits so consistently with the passion narratives as
a whole (Heim, 2006: 122).

All three synoptic Gospels have Jesus quoting Psalm 118:22-23 wherein the psalmist
says “the rejected stone has become the capstone. This is the Lord’s doing and wonderful to
our eyes.” Here the stereoscopic commentary of the gospels is very apparent. The sacrificial
mechanism comes to the fore in the sense that the one who is rejected becomes the
foundation of social harmony. And overlaid on this description is also the perspective that
Jesus has become one of the rejected ones who shows this pattern up becoming the kind of
cornerstone of a new sacrificial community. This, the unveiling and its alternative way to
reconciliation– is the Lord’s doing and marvelous to our eyes (Heim, 2006:123-124).

In recognizing the identification of Jesus with the voice of victims, Christian tradition
according to Heim, advises that the psalms be prayed spiritually “through Christ” and the
words figuratively be placed on his lips (Heim, 2006: 124).

3.4.1.6 Who Believes In Saving Sacrifice

The accounts of Jesus’ death, in Heim’s view, contain a tension in the sense that “it saves the
world and it ought not to happen.” And furthermore, says Heim, another related oddity exists
here. In these descriptions of Jesus’ last days there are only a few plain positive references to
the reconciling effect of Jesus’ demise as a sacrifice for others, to an explicit atonement
theology. The oddity is that this view of the crucifixion is endorsed by the wrong people. The
Gospels make it plain that it is Jesus’ antagonists who view Jesus’ demise as a redemptive
sacrifice, one life given for many. An example here is the uniting in friendship of Herod and
Pilate who previously were enemies. Here we have a prime example that sacrificial violence
is real and that it really works, the Gospels portraying the sacrificial mechanism with
Caiaphas the Jewish high priest in John 11:45-53 also endorses the sacrificial mechanism’s effectiveness by firstly prophesying about and then planning Jesus’ death in the sacrificial vein of scapegoating as that which would unite the nation. The stereoscopic character of the Gospels once again is apparent here as Caiaphas expects Jesus to die in one way (according to the sacrificial pattern) - and yet in truth, Jesus would perish to save the people from the logic of scapegoating (Heim, 2006:125).

There is a theory about the saving power of Jesus’ death already in existence in the Gospels. It is believed and nurtured by the persecutors of Jesus. Atonement is the good they have in mind. According to the gospel writers, it is this quest for sacrificial atonement that slays Jesus. And thus a caution is to be noted in the Gospels in the sense that in our reception and interpretation of these Gospel, we don’t end up entering the passion story on the side of Jesus’ murderers, says Heim. Jesus prophesies his demise and so does Caiaphas. Both view it as sacrificial in some sense. But not in the same sense. When Christians affirm the reconciling value of Jesus’ demise they must mean something different than Pilate and Herod did- a view which of course needs to dovetail with the view that Jesus’ death comes about not due to the will of an avenging heavenly Father, but the evil human process of scapegoating evil (Heim, 2006:125-126).

3.4.1.7 Exiting the Tombs

To grasp how Heim understands the resurrection at the conclusion of the passion narratives requires our bearing in mind that in mythic treatments of sacrifice, the sacrificed one is not perceived as a subject of persecution by those participating in collective scapegoating. And for that reason the victim disappears from memory, as in unity and peace, the community shares this story without labelling it as unjust. In the Jesus story however, the situation is reversed. Just as the “Woes to the Pharisees”– Matthew 23:27-59, connect Jesus’ demise with all past murders, the text of Matthew 27:51-53 connects Jesus’ death and resurrection with that of others who have perished. In place of unmarked graves upon which we walk without realizing it, this text reveals there are now resurrected bodies marching along to Jerusalem where they cannot be avoided (Heim 2006:126-7).

As the story of the crucifixion maintains clarity about the forces conducive to Jesus’ death, so the resurrection is that which decisively shatters any possibility of mythologizing it.
The victim in place of remaining sacrificed, returns to give his own testimony. The resurrection is the vindication of the victim— that which Job so desperately sought from God (Heim, 2006:127).

Furthermore, Jesus’ resurrection meant that the peace that past persecutors had achieved by mythical sacrifice was no longer going to hold. In the sense of mythical sacrifice being that which unites community, keeps silence regarding the victim, and creates calm, the cross is a failed sacrifice. Because despite the near unanimity with which Jesus was killed, the crucified one himself appears, vindicated by divine power. A new counter-community forms around the risen Christ proclaiming his innocence. Society is split, not united by his death. Yet no avenging of Jesus’ death is desired as in the case with failed sacrifice. Rather this new community explicitly jettisons both the sacrificial violence that killed Christ and the contagion of revenge that the sacrificial system existed to contain. Nor is the resurrection here tantamount to the deification of a victim as in the mythical system, wherein the victim disappears transmuting into a “god” as the replacement. Contrastingly, the risen Christ is the one who was persecuted, the resurrected Lord carrying the wounds of the crucified one. There is no mistaking this link. Collective amnesia is not an option (Heim, 2006:127-128).

3.4.1.8 The Miracle of Scapegoating Revealed

Heim indicates that for him, the points covered so far in the passion are not supernatural or earth shattering, but portray Jesus as an innocent victim upon whom evident wrongness has been exercised. This fact has led to the criticism that the Christian faith has made its central image an act that is evil (Heim, 2006:128).

According to this criticism Christians make all kinds of problematic supernatural claims about Jesus’ divinity, about Jesus dying for our sins, and about resurrection and eternal life says Heim. Those are debatable questions of belief. But the clear unmistakable reality is the obvious wrong of the crucifixion, a bad thing that Christians have exalted with unhealthy intensity (Heim, 2006:128-9).

In contrast what Heim is suggesting is that the first truly “supernatural” thing about the passion was its ability to observe what we now take for granted. An evil act of sacred violence was already at the heart of human religion and community, but unremarked and
unresisted. The wrongness of scapegoating violence was anything but evident. It required God’s incarnate presence and resurrection power to make it so. The thing that now seems most obvious, needing no religious conviction to identify was what was revealed (Heim, 2006:131).

The logic of sacrifice pulls everyone together against the subject. In the passion the antiscapegoating logic exposes the evil of mythic sacrifice by telling the story from the victim’s viewpoint thus revealing Jesus’ innocence. Prior to Jesus’ death there is a direct reinforcing parallel to this event in John’s gospel, points out Heim (Heim, 2006:132).

In the story of the woman caught in adultery- John7:53-8:11, Jesus is challenged and questioned by the crowd gathered around the accused woman as to what should be her fate. Jesus appears to be caught in a double-bind situation here. This is because in his choice in terms of a sentence he can either side with the crowd in its evil choice of an act of mythical murder. Or he can oppose the divine law that supports stoning in which case he would bring this selfsame fate upon himself. Jesus’ response is to ask a question. In asking as to who would stand out alone as responsible for the violence (who will throw the first stone?) he short circuits the unanimous sentiment that drives mob violence. The mob disperses. Jesus’ antiscapegoating handling of the situation shows the woman to be innocent of charges being deployed in the service of an agenda which really has nothing to do with her (Heim, 2006:132).

Jesus’ opposition to the stoning refers not to the woman’s perfect righteousness but to the impurity and motives of her accusers. He is not rejecting the moral commandments of the Mosaic Law (rather refining them), but rejecting the mobs violence that can be initiated from sin which we all commit and require mercy for (Heim, 2006:131-133).

It is unlikely, says Heim that we would have heard the story of the woman taken in adultery if not for the story of the man taken to the cross. Different though they are, the miracles of the first stone and the 3rd day point in the same direction. The miracle Jesus does at the temple prevents sacrifice. The miracle Jesus lives from Good Friday to Easter reverses his own (Heim, 2006:132-133).
3.4.2 Sacrifice to Terminate Sacrifice

Heim’s specific task as he sees it, is to lift up the dimension of liberation from scapegoating (as one aspect of Jesus’ saving work). So far he has shown this dimension to be integral to the passion narratives. And now he sets out to show how this approach is also in agreement with the explicit interpretation of the cross in much of the rest of the New Testament. In other words Heim now explores as to whether the early Christians actually read the critique of surrogate social violence and its religious rationale coded in the passion. He concludes that this understanding did indeed belong to the heart of the faith they received and proclaimed (Heim, 2006:134).

Even where sacrificial language and categories are used positively in the New Testament to describe Jesus’ death, Heim believes this language can often be the medium for revelation and critique of sacrificial practice. Although the nonsacrificial antiscapegoating dimension is not the totality of the gospel, says Heim, there is plenty of evidence to suggest it was at the core of the good news the first Christians observed in Jesus’ death and resurrection (Heim, 2006:134-135).

3.4.2.1 I Am Jesus Whom You are Tyrannizing

According to Heim, the Book of Acts strikingly presents the new Church and its witness in the sermon of Stephen- Acts 7:1-60. This is part of a story of Stephen’s own martyrdom and death arising from a stoning by a mob. As is the case with Jesus, Stephen is accused by false witness of blasphemy and about to be killed. Stephen, in response, gives a long speech which is essentially a key presentation of faith of the young church- this proclamation of the Gospel here showing that Christians perceived sacrificial violence as a major focus of Jesus’ saving work. Steven’s story makes it apparent that a witness that testifies on behalf of victims can well end up becoming one (Heim, 2006:136-137).

In essence Stephen’s confession revolves around a summary of Israel’s history over four main phases wherein Abraham, Joseph and Moses all prefigure Jesus as “types of Jesus.” The line connecting these three is the line of the sacrificial victim. Little is said of Jesus
directly but this long line of victims that prefigure him is meant to point to him (Heim, 2006:137-138).

3.4.2.2 Set Free by Resurrection

According to Heim, most people would say that Paul is the New Testament’s source of the church’s theology of a sacrificial and atoning death. Heim however disagrees, stating that what must also be kept in the picture when seeking to understand Paul’s notions on the atonement is the framework set by Paul’s own conversion (Heim, 2006:140).

The Pauline passage used by Heim as a specific example here is Romans 3:21-26, a key passage in most atonement discussions. What Heim deduces from this passage in accordance with his view is that all people fall under the power of scapegoating sin, and that the law, although God-given and expressive of God’s will for human behaviour is that which falls captive to sacrificial use. Although many of the commandments in the law are indeed the kinds of prohibitions that particularly aim to block the subjective reciprocal escalations of desire that are conducive to social crisis, and so to sacrificial violence, the law nevertheless becomes the basis for sacrificial accusations. Thus the cornerstone to redemption says Paul, is not righteousness according to the law. But faith in the crucified one whom God put forward “as a sacrificial atonement” in the sense that this is a place taken up by Christ in the service of God’s purpose to redeem and ransom humanity (Heim, 2006:140-141).

In other words, far from Christ becoming a sacrifice in the sense that this is an occurrence that lies specifically at the heart of God’s purpose, Christ becomes a sacrifice in the sense that God enters into a position of the victim of sacrificial atonement (a position already defined by human practice) and occupies it so as to be able to act from that place to reverse sacrifice and redeem humankind from it. God steps out in Jesus to be one subject to the human practice of atonement in blood, not because this is God’s desire, but because this is the location where human enslavement and sin are enacted. God launches Godself into this location as part of the larger purpose of changing this situation from within. The effectiveness of the situation being located not in blood or violence but relating to faith (Heim, 2006:142-143).
In the past due to God’s forbearance, God’s righteousness has passed over the collective victimization of the innocent, says Paul in Romans 3:25-26. But God has acted now in Jesus Christ to prove Godself righteous and vindicate the victim and justify the one who has faith in Jesus. Jesus’ resurrection is a sign that God will not fail on this count. Not only does God rescue and vindicate Jesus the scapegoat from unjust accusation and death. But Paul in this passage, indicates that God in Christ Jesus sees fit to acquit sinners (even scapegoaters- which is all of us) by way of Jesus’ resurrection. One would expect that the resurrected vindicated one would return to exact righteous retribution on all of us as sinners says Heim. Yet this is not so, and for Paul and other New Testament writers, the reversal of this expectation is the final wonder of the resurrection (Heim, 2006:144-145).

In the Book of Acts (10:42-43), Paul is shown to keep the important logic alive of the universality of sin and the fact that Jesus could well return as an avenger, but that he does not. Rather, as our appointed judge, Jesus according to Paul, invites all people to preach the good news and announce Jesus to be judge of all the earth. And Jesus reassures those with faith in him whether they be scapegoaters or scapegoating victims, that his resurrection is indeed good news. As a living reality now through the power of the Holy Spirit it manifests in an advocacy on our behalf rather than in a desire for our punishment. It is our acquittal and our assurance of forgiveness. The ones responsible for Jesus’ death can be declared innocent of his death because he is not dead (Heim, 2006:146-147)

3.4.2.3 Lucifer’s House Divided

When reading the wider themes of Satan (or Lucifer) and the Holy Paraclete (or Holy Spirit) in the light of Heim’s reading of the Passion narratives, these interpretations also come to support and add weight to a nonviolent view of the atonement. In the interests of reinforcing my own argument what follows is thus a brief summary of Heim’s understanding of these two themes.

Satan, an ambiguous (paradoxical) figure in scripture and Christian tradition, makes only episodic appearances in the Bible as an instigator, seducer, tempter, accuser and ruler of this world. The paradox of most interest to Heim is that Satan is a sower of discord and also a bringer of order. Satan instigates conflict amongst humans and the rivalry that splits
community apart. And then Satan restrains that conflagration through mythical scapegoating sacrifice for a period of time (Heim, 2006:147-148).

The evil of sacrifice is a supernatural transpersonal power that really works albeit temporarily. And it is also a profoundly personal reality. Satan attempts for example in the story of Jesus in the Wilderness found in all 3 gospels to plant competitive or suspicious responses in Christ’s mind. Here Satan offers Jesus all the territories of the world if only Jesus would worship him and take him as a model- in other words, as one who follows the way of scapegoating evil (Heim, 2006:149-150).

Between a New Testament vision of the power of Satan and demons and a completely depersonalized and secular understanding of evil as nothing but ignorance or selfishness, Heim prefers the first as an empirical description. Satan the instigator is the supernatural driving force behind Jesus’ demise- not God (as some atonement theories would have us believe). When Jesus won’t give in to Satan in the desert, Satan sets about eliminating Jesus by becoming the instigating power behind human hostility towards Jesus. If Jesus can’t be recruited to expand the disease of human conflict, evil (and not God) will be just as happy to eliminate him as part of the cure (Heim, 2006:147-149).

In the passion narratives, at the point where Peter declares that the crucifixion must never happen, Jesus says to Peter “get behind me Satan.” Jesus responds here by identifying Peter with Satan because Peter’s picture of God here forbids the Messiah’s identification with a victim. Peter, in his humanity is attached to Christ and so rejects the idea of Christ having to suffer, being lead rather to prefer a victim who is not part of his closest group. Peter is also being used as Satan’s instrument here by hitting on the weakest point of Jesus’ resolve in that Satan through Peter is dissuading the innocent Jesus from doing God’s work. A work which of course lies in the very difficult task of having to accept the agony of the cross so as to expose and reverse the practice of scapegoating sacrifice (Heim, 2006:147-149).

3.4.2.4 Holy Paraclete

The character of Satan has a parallel in the New Testament in the figure of the Holy Spirit or Paraclete which means advocate says Heim. Satan is the power that instigates mimetic rivalry and conflict amongst humans. Thus Satan and not God is the power behind the human
decision to murder Christ. God on the other hand is the resurrecting power of the Christ who uses the death of the Son to expose and reverse the evil dynamic of scapegoating violence. Thus the risen Christ, the vindicated victim is one who unavoidably presents the hidden reality of scapegoating and God’s opposition to it. And when the risen Jesus departs the earth shortly after his resurrection, John’s gospel tells us it is the ongoing power of God sent into the world in the form of the Paraclete who continues God’s work of opposing the evil power behind the sacrificial dynamic- John 15:26-27.

The Paraclete poured out on the world by the risen Christ becomes an advocate for victims and continues to convict the world of the wrongness and evil of the scapegoating dynamic. In John 16:7-11 we read that the Paraclete is to convict the world (that crucified Jesus) of its wrongness in terms of sin and righteousness and judgment, because it wrongly accused Jesus of sin and refused to see the righteousness confirmed by God’s raising of Jesus. And it is wrong about judgment because the verdict against Jesus has been reversed. In other words with the coming of the Paraclete the sacrificial process with Satan as its instigator remains on trial and Satan has been condemned (Heim, 2006:153-154)

According to Heim, scripture identifies the Paraclete as a power that is supportive of victims and opposed to the human evil of the scapegoating dynamic (Heim, 2006:154). Surely then this power cannot emanate from a redeemer God who practices violence against God’s own Son in order to save us, as some atonement theories suggest? Surely, rather it must emanate from (and support the notion of) a nonviolent God who opposes the human evil of scapegoating and who thus uses the son’s death to reverse it and the ongoing convicting power of the Paraclete in the world to keep this evil dynamic at bay?

3.4.2.5 Sacrifice to End Sacrifice

Heim takes a final example as evidence to show that the wrongness of Jesus’ death and the critique of scapegoating which he identifies in the passion are also elements at the heart of the Good News the first Christians saw in Jesus death and resurrection. He chooses the Book of Hebrews- that which in his opinion most appears to prove his approach wrong (Heim, 2006:156,157).
The Letter to the Hebrews is however, to Heim’s way of thinking a book wherein Christ’s work as liberator from scapegoating violence is strongly identified. He sees the book’s single key theme as being the significance of Jesus’ demise as a sacrificial offering understood through detailed parallels with the practice of temple sacrifice in Jerusalem. The benefits of Christ’s demise in this context are exalted. His blood brings into being a new covenant and is the foundation of our redemption. The entire history of sacrifice is reinforced in the cross and the significance of the cross is that it is a super-sacrifice- the Hebrews writer accepting rather than opposing the history of ritual sacrifice in Israel (Hebrews 9:11-14) (Heim, 2006:156,157).

Whereas Stephen and Paul look back through Israel’s history and trace a line to Jesus through the voices of scapegoats and victims, the Hebrew’s writer on the other hand, traces a line to Jesus through all of Israel’s prior sacrificial practices. These are quite different approaches. It is remarkable then that they reach the same conclusion: Christ has ended sacrifice. The one approach stresses that the cross has revealed what was always wrong with sacred violence. The other stresses that Christ’s sacrifice is better than all the others. These views are not so much opposed to each other as they are two sides of the same coin (Heim, 2006:157).

This is mirrored in the way the writer in Hebrews touches upon the things that were imperfect in prior sacrifice. The imperfect pattern followed in prior sacrifice wherein the priest offers victims again and again is eradicated by the shedding of Christ’s own blood once for all, thus indicating the eradication of Christ’s ongoing need to suffer and the previous ongoing suffering of victims (Hebrews 9:24-26). This shows that the nature of sacrificial violence is exactly what Christ’s demise is not about- rather it is the opposite, and the end of that dynamic (Heim, 2006:157-158).

Consequently for his purposes the Hebrews writer according to Heim adopts some of the strongest antisacrificial language from the tradition by placing on Christ’s lips, language from the Psalms and Isaiah which say in essence that Christ comes to do God’s will by abolishing sacrifice- “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire….I desire to do your will”- Psalm 40:6-8 (Heim, 2006:157-158).
The Hebrew writer also points to Jesus as the mediator of a new covenant in that his blood, unlike Abel’s does not spark revenge. And thus if there is abuse to be suffered for standing with Jesus it should be borne but not through the continuance of the sacrificial cycle but rather through praise, doing good and sharing what one has (Heim, 2006:159-160).

3.4.2.6 Tricking Satan

In this final section of his chapter 5, Heim points out that the outline he has given of the cross in Christian faith may appear both strange and familiar: familiar because he has covered well known sections of scripture, strange because these portions are assembled in ways that may appear unusual. Most strikingly Heim has been saying that the gospel of the crucified one is directly opposed to a practice and comprehension of sacrifice that is sometimes put forward precisely as the very meaning of that gospel. There is a sacrificial transaction taking place at the cross, says Heim, but it is one that humankind has orchestrated, not God. And yet God has made this evil transaction the occasion for a better one, one in which scapegoating itself can be ousted (Heim, 2006:160).

And what is more, says Heim, the fact is that the early church assembled these materials into a shape that closely fits his own outline, albeit that this shape may well appear odd to the average Christian in the pew who probably understands atonement in purely substitutionary terms. When writers in the first Christian centuries handled Jesus death explains Heim, they placed paramount stress on the cross as a huge triumph over death and sin. Christ conquered the powers that held humanity prisoner and succeeded in restoring the intimacy with God and participation in eternal life that had been lost (Heim, 2006:161).

In order to express this general conviction in more specific terms these early Christian writers made use of two Christus Victor images: ones wherein God either barters with the devil or resorts to deceit respectively (and which I mentioned earlier on in my dissertation). Later theologians have often been embarrassed by these images, observes Heim, which they view as personalizing the power of evil and being conducive to a morally questionable characterization of God. Yet these ancient writers seem to have chosen especially fitting images and to have demonstrated that they were sensitive to exactly the dynamic Heim has described. Reference to Satan, says Heim, is the most effective way they could make plain the stereoscopic perspective of the cross, the fact that Jesus’ demise is not the work of God
but the product of a diabolical process, even as God turns it against itself to a saving purpose (Heim, 2006:162-164).

3.4.3 The Mark of Jonah and Susanna: Innocent Blood and False Accusers

Heim’s primary quest is to trace a constructive theological view of the cross. He has done this so far mainly by examination of scripture. Now as I move on to examine his chapter 6, the direction he takes and the conclusions he draws are also a very significant for my own argument for a nonviolent atonement. Many have argued that even though elements of an anti-scapegoating interpretation of the cross appear to be evident in the New Testament and early centuries they had little to do with the church’s later theology or tradition. Heim, however sets out to demonstrate in this section that an anti-scapegoating interpretation of the cross (despite some major counterexamples when the church was itself immersed in the practice), is a major theological strand implicit and explicit of Christian faith. It is found not only within the theology of the early church but also within the Christian faith throughout the ages (Heim, 2006:165).

Heim’s constructive concern in this section is to ask what kinds of theologies of the cross have been at play in different situations, and especially what kind of theology of the cross has exercised the most liberating power in contexts of evil and oppression. He specifically peers into some of the darker instances of Christian history to see if the theology he is describing is present at all, and if so, what kind of influence it exerts (Heim, 2006:165-166).

3.4.3.1 Images of the Cross

Heim notes that in the early centuries although visual images of the cross were conspicuously missing, this should not lead us to conclude that an emphasis on Jesus’ death as a saving mechanism arose only as a later distortion as some scholar’s suggest. The fact that antisacrificial interpretations are only indirectly evident in both artistic and textual forms showed that it was too risky for early Christians to identify with the cross. This is because this practice could be taken by the Roman authorities as an incitement to violence on the part of those following their fallen saviour. Yet at the same time the context of early Christian life
as a persecuted minority was that which made it easy to grasp and preserve the antisacrificial dimension of the cross which was a present reality amongst them (Heim, 2006:168).

3.4.3.2 The Sign of Jonah

The so-called Brescia casket made some three and a half centuries after Christ is in Heim’s view, a good example of indirect artistic forms used to portray antisacrificial interpretations of the cross. This carved ivory box depicts images of the life stories of 3 failed scapegoats-Jonah, Susanna and Daniel whose anti-scapegoating stories are depicted so as to parallel the crucifixion of Christ. The stories of each of the three illumines the meaning of Christ’s passion by way of each having its own antisacrificial plot. Each story is thus about averting such a demise (Heim, 2006:167-173).

If the point of Jesus’ demise is the need for blood to be spilt in order to satisfy God’s justice, then none of these portrayals get the point, says Heim. Taken together, their commentary on the cross indicates in one consistent direction: Jesus’ demise is about saving victims, disrupting collective violence, and “poisoning” the mechanism of scapegoating violence in its entirety (Heim, 2006:169-174).

3.4.3.3 We Can Put Away our Blades and Hatchets (Liberation from the Dynamics of Sacrifice)

The fact that early Christians comprehended the cross as a sacrifice to end sacrifice is also reflected in much of their behaviour says Heim. Their individual lives were transformed. In their practice of community special care was offered to those standing in the location of a victim as they associated also the implications of Jesus’ death with eschatological fulfilment (Heim, 2006:176-177).

However having said this, Heim also concedes that because this anti-sacrificial vision of the early Christians is carried in tandem with the sacrificial tradition that it is meant to highlight and reverse, it is itself subject to confusion and misappropriation. Thus Heim is not suggesting that early Christians comprehended and carried out the meaning of the cross in all its aspects. There was no beginning point of perfection, but a bumpy continuing process of
realization on both a knowledge and practice level. Christianity could and did produce sacrificial readings of its own revelation (Heim, 2006:177)

An example here would be the fact that it is not long after Christianity’s rise to official power that an explicit iconography of the cross begins to thrive, more in the manner we have come to know, claims Heim. Some take this as evidence that atonement theology is associated with Christianity’s endorsement of state power and that the visible images of the cross dovetail with a new acceptance of violence. When the emperors became Christian, Christian theology became imperial- and so the argument goes- exaltation of the cross somehow corresponds to this change. It is definitely true, says Heim that the transition to brandishing power rather than being subject to it presented a challenge for the faith he has described. The major test in this new context was whether Christians could perceive the connection between the victims of their own power and the victim on the cross. And as Heim confirms- they frequently failed that test (Heim, 2006:177-178).

The contrast however of an early nonviolent Christianity without a cross and a later imperialist Christianity with a cross is far too simple, says Heim. For one thing 700 years would go by before a fully-fledged substitutionary theology of the atonement would materialize. The supposed effects seem to flourish long before their cause. Insofar as Constantine the first Christian emperor had a “theology” of the cross, it was not focused on substitutionary bloodshed but on victory over opposing powers- exactly the themes that contemporary opponents of atonement theology and the “fall” of the church often want to reclaim as the liberating meaning of the cross. (Weaver, as I have pointed out is one such person here) (Heim, 2006:179).

Secondly, asserts Heim, if emphasis on the cross is supposed to be the favoured theology in the marriage of church and state, it is an inconvenient fact that in the eastern half of the Church where an actual Christian empire was manifest for a millennium, an emphatic theology of atonement did not materialize at all (Heim, 2006:179).

Historical Christianity does indeed wrestle with the cross at the core of its gospel. And the nature of that battle, according to Heim, has to do with how the meaning of Jesus’ death is translated through time and practice. Under the same broad outline of the gospel
narrative and even under similar emphasis on the cross, quite contrasting implications can be drawn (Heim, 2006:179).

Two major contrasting examples within historical Christianity that Heim mentions and which I briefly summarize here are those of Charlemagne’s 9th century conquest of the Germanic people on the one hand and the monastic system on the other (Heim, 2006:180).

In the case of Charlemagne the centrality of the cross would assume the violent traditions of the warrior people it came to. Here the interpretive framework from the Hebrew Scriptures and the Old Testament types fall away, and so too does a sense of a universal dynamic of sin and sacrifice from which we require redemption. This results in the notion of a crusade ideology, a Christian knight- a feudal warrior who unlike the New Testament risen Christ takes and commands revenge against those deemed as persecutors of the Christian faith. It is important that we be aware that this note would play its role in the background of Anselm’s atonement theology, his own era and culture being saturated in this emphasis, says Heim (Heim, 2006:180).

Yet in total contrast to the above example of a blunting of the sacrificial impact of Jesus’ death, we have the medieval monastic system springing up. This movement at its most basic level was an attempt to live a new form of community through prayer and worship and through a disassociation of the processes that ordinarily lead to crises of division (Heim, 2006:181).

3.4.4 God’s Wisdom and Two Errors: The Trial of Historical Christianity, Gnosticism, Anti-Semitism

The cases of witch-hunting in early modern Europe and the Atlantic African slave trade are also examples of a sacrificial blunting of Jesus’ death. They are undeniable cases of evil in Christian history says Heim, albeit that the cross also figured in these cases as a successful resistance to those same evils (Heim, 2006:183-187).

It is when Christianity loses touch with the paradox seeded through the passion story: the cross saves and it ought not to happen, and with the closely linked Gospels insistence that
it was decisively significant that Jesus perished in the particular way he did, that it becomes very prone to mythologizing its tradition. We have observed that the paradox is not there by accident. It is at the core of the Gospel story itself. The challenge for a theology of atonement is to stay faithful to that paradox (Heim, 2006:192).

Gnosticism and anti-Semitism are further important current examples of two paradigmatic ways in which historical Christianity has evaded and remythologized the paradox of Jesus’ death. In being alive and well to this day, they go to the very root of Christian belief (Heim, 2006:206).

Gnosticism in essence rejects the goodness of the created world, the creator God and the Hebrew Scriptures for revealing that God. In jettisoning Israel’s God and the Hebrew scriptures Christian Gnostics cut themselves off from the critique of scapegoating sketched there. The entire Jesus story is drawn into the mythic framework because Christ is not a real human. He is a spiritual saviour impervious to the things of the flesh and thus making light of his own crucifixion and by implication its role in exposing and reversing the evil of mythical sacrifice. And in this way re-mythologizing the evil of scapegoating (Heim, 2006:201)

The revelation of and challenge to scapegoating as that which stands out in the Gospel accounts are dismissed by Gnostics along with the interest incarnational faith has in the historical grounding of the passion narrative and the resurrection. In their view, orthodox Christians are caught up in inconsequential bodily material concerns, obsessed with the sordid details of condemnation and execution, moralizing about considerations of guilt and innocence, and somehow connecting Jesus’ demise with their own sin. Gnosticism in contrast has tried to downplay the cross. It follows myth by erasing any evidence of a victim or victimizer (Heim, 2006:201-206).

Christian anti-Semitism on the other hand (although also being that which re-mythologizes and evades the paradox of Jesus’ death), graphically emphasizes the cross making a clear identification of both victim and victimizers (Heim, 2006:207).

The evil of Christian anti-Semitism occurs when Christians forget that Jesus died for everyone’s sins, his death being an example of our paradigmatic shared sacrificial sin. And then alongside their forgetfulness of this truth they pick up on certain ethnic tensions between
Jews and non-Jews (often being religious in nature). And together with certain scriptures that are highly susceptible to being used to make a distinction between Jews and as a platform of evidence for a Jewish responsibility for Jesus’ death, they make Jews into sacrificial victims. Stephen’s speech in Acts 7:51-52 is a prime example here of scripture that has been used in this way. The Jews are labelled as a stiff-necked people by Stephen thus fuelling a distinction between Jew and Christian. Thus in Christian anti-Semitism the old pattern is repeated across history. Jews now become sacrificial victims. And the persons persecuting them sin as people always had sinned (Heim, 2006:208-212).

The perspective Heim has offered so far as an insight into the cross and atonement theology has told us why the doctrine should go wrong in the particular ways that it does and why it should be associated with the peculiar types of good that it is. His explanation goes beyond the assumption that sees the cross as merely a general precious truth, at times misunderstood and misused, or as an intrinsically abusive framework whose evil influence at times was overbalanced by decent people who refused to take its meaning to heart (Heim, 2006:214).

This is summed up in Heim’s view that the Gospel narrative follows an ancient pattern of sin (in the course of revealing and opposing it) that can be read as a prescription rather than a diagnosis. And even when the truth it offers is received, it can be skewed into a novel rationale for sacrifice. These liabilities are not simply accidental, because they are in a sense built into the core of the gospel. They cannot be totally subtracted without eliminating what is essential. Their negative power is parasitic on a distinctive good in the story of the cross. Simultaneously, the saving and transforming power that so many witness they have found in the cross is also no accident. It emanates from a special clarity about sacrifice and victims, from an illumination that breaks on the scapegoat and the mob and a power that speaks with grace to both (Heim, 2006:214).

The message of the cross exposes and jettisons this sacrificial process and the myth that goes along with it. The outcome is a new awareness of victims and a call for us to be converted from the mob of persecutors into a new community that vindicates scapegoats and strives to dwell without them. That is the theme of Heim’s section 3 (Heim, 2006:114-115).
3.5 In Memory of Me- The Cross that Faith Keeps Unoccupied

It is necessary that I include Section 3 of Heim’s book in my argument because so far our eyes have become opened to the nature of the sacrificial web in which human beings are enmeshed. We’ve seen that as a result of this evil system, humankind and not God are responsible for Christ’s death. And that in fact God in Christ uses the death and resurrection of the son to expose and reverse the evil of this sacrificial system. And yet what also needs to be understood here is that this revelation includes within it, an objective effect that revolves around the challenge to live life without sacrifice, an apocalyptic challenge that is not always a peaceful one. In other words a nonviolent understanding of the atonement has an anthropological aspect to it wherein God in Christ blesses our flesh by becoming flesh and so uses Jesus’ death to redeem us from the human evil that is preventing us from living redeemed lives in the now (on this side of eternity).

Thus to understand the atonement in nonviolent terms is also about grasping that as sinful human beings we stand not free of the sin that leads to the cross, but in constant need of conversion from that way of living. And that through the gracious transformation of our lives via Christ’s death and resurrection, and in the power of the Spirit our challenge is to begin living out this redeemed life already on this side of eternity. God reveals that the redeemed life is about striving for justice for this world’s victims and living without scapegoating evil in the now. Thus without the inclusion of the content of this 3rd section of Heim’s any dissertation claiming to argue for a nonviolent notion of atonement would be incomplete because participation in the redeemed life requires something from us.

3.5.1 Substitute for Sacrifice: Dwelling with an Unoccupied Cross

Heim points to 3 revelatory dimensions of the cross that dovetail together as 3 integral steps that make up his model. The first dimension discussed in his section 1 has by way of Biblical text laid bare the mythical evil of scapegoating. The second dimension in his section 2, in specifically considering the passion accounts as explicit antisacrificial testimony, explains the process of scapegoating and our complicity in it. And furthermore it witnesses to God’s vindication of the victim as part of God’s desire and hope for the end of redemptive violence.
At each turn of the passion narratives God reverses the role of the divine in the script of sacred mythic sacrifice (Heim, 2006:219-220).

And now in his 3rd section we come to Heim’s 3rd dimension that completes the incomplete first 2 steps which on their own have limited revelatory or saving power says Heim. This is because although an act of divine power in the form of the resurrection may have truly overturned our assumptions about sacrifice and shown the cross to have a dramatic saving effect there is more involved than merely showing forth the truth (Heim, 2006:220).

Simply seeing through the myths of sacrifice or identifying with victims rather than with the unanimity of the mob is not enough because of the very real danger that sacrifice exists to avert. In other words knowledge of these first two steps, in being taken alone may because of the problem sacrifice addresses (and because its solution has been effective) still develop its own persecuting practice. Knowledge of these first two steps may point us to passive acceptance which merely reinforces the violent process or on an apocalyptic path where sacrifice grows even bloodier and less effective. This truth alone, says Heim, cannot redeem us unless there is an alternative peaceful way of overcoming the rivalry and reciprocal violence that sacrifice exists to contain (Heim, 2006:220).

But, asks Heim, how then can we live without sacrifice? How can we live with an empty cross? An alternative put in the place of sacrifice would need its own means to prevent and/or dispel crises of conflict. It would need its own positive form of contagion. And this is made possible, the New Testament tells us, through Christian faith and God’s new creation in Christ- the Church- which is a remaking of the grounds of human community. It proposes a new way of living- a substitute for sacrifice made possible by God’s new creation in Christ, linking Christ’s death with his nonviolent life and teaching. It puts a primary focus on changing the root dynamics of sacrifice and social unity- a characteristic transforming essential feature of Christianity aimed also at extending into the greater community (Heim, 2006:221).

3.5.1.1 Change Emanating from Within

In his last section, Heim drew attention to the double bind that seems to trap opponents of sacrifice. The only models we have are to imitate the persecutors or imitate their victims,
both of which serve to reinforce the violent process. Christ however opens a path out of this problem. His path to the cross abstains from all violence yet it exposes the evil of scapegoating at every step. The resurrection vindicates the victim and condemns the persecutors but without turning to vengeance (Heim, 2006:221).

As opponents of sacrifice, the Christian faith community faces the same problem as regards the double bind I mentioned above. Should the resurrection vindication of Jesus inspire them into taking revenge against persecutors or should it spur them on to become victims? As long as one limits the question to which role one will choose in the standard plot, the bind still remains. What is required is to change the plot, to construct community in a new way and to resolve it’s crises in a new way. This is the work of the crucified one that only the Spirit can complete (Heim, 2006:222).

In Heim’s view Jesus, in resolutely living a new way of life, and very importantly by way of his incarnational belonging to the web of relations of the entire human family, was able to change its destructive pattern. From a psychological perspective, says Heim, research has shown that any such person concerned in a quest to change a human family’s destructive pattern will find themselves exposed to isolation and suffering. Yet if the person’s course is well-founded and he/she can persist in it without retaliation a breakthrough point is attained wherein all the fellow members of the family network can shift into a new configuration of relations. It is impossible to maintain the old pattern due to the firm alteration in one person, and a new healthier equilibrium establishes itself (Heim, 2006:222-223).

As in the Jesus story, when one party in a network of relations truly and definitively changes, the whole has been objectively changed. Each member is under pressure to change. They have been offered the inspiration of a new possibility and even before responding to it their world has been objectively altered. To change the system in this way Christ had to belong to its web of relations. He had to be human. Yet to persevere to the point of new life and to have a transforming effect on others, divine power was also needed that no human has. In having just highlighted the integral connection between the specific event of Jesus’ death and a new order of life for human communities wherein victimizers are inspired to live without victims, I have just laid bare the element I wish to explore further in this 3rd section (Heim, 2006:223-224)
3.5.1.2 Living Differently: Spirit and New Community

According to Heim, when early Christians spoke of new life in Christ, a key element they were referring to was an alternative to sacrifice. Via the death and resurrection of the crucified one, the early Christians perceived a new platform for reconciliation had been established and this was reflected among them on individual, social, ecclesial, mystical and liturgical levels. Here the Holy Spirit was perceived to inspire a siding with victims and a new kind of unity and peace across division that replaces rivalry and conflict. It is upon this understanding that the early church is born- Acts 2:44-47; John 14:26-27. Importantly early Christians rejected the standard-issue ritual means for cementing community order. They believed and demonstrated that there was another means than sacrifice to achieve this end (Heim, 2006:226-229).

3.5.1.3 Baptism into his Death; Eucharistic Feast

Understanding the atonement in violent terms (a cosmic forensic transaction between the Father and the Son) can lead many to perceive they stand completely freed of sin and thus stand fully redeemed no matter what the nature of their behaviour in life may be like. Whereas understanding atonement in nonviolent terms is about grasping that we do not stand free of the sin that leads to the cross, (and by implication any other sin) and therefore we stand in constant need of conversion (Heim, 2006:231-236).

As one who understands the atonement in nonviolent terms Heim at this point, draws attention to various means of greater conversion that enable Christians to live out the saved life by utilizing this other means than sacrifice for cementing community order and reconciliation across the deepest divisions. It is in constantly seeking out this other means to greater conversion that we live out our salvation in this life already (Heim, 2006:231-236).

Baptism is the ritual entry into the Christian community. This initiation is held by Christians (who understand the atonement in antisacrificial terms) to be an act of identification with Christ and his death as an unjustly scapegoated victim. Consistent with belief in the cross as a sacrifice to terminate sacrifice and a death “once for all” each baptized person enters into what in effect is a reversed sacrifice looking not to share in the benefits of
an offered victim but to walk in the newness of life of one who overcame scapegoating (Heim, 2006:229-231).

The celebration of Eucharist (as understood in antisacrificial terms) involves the community gathered around the altar and the victim. Feeding on the body and blood of Christ (the bread and wine given here) represents the spiritual practice of making Christ’s own inner life the model for ours. This is the communion that points communicants to an alternative practice to replace sacrifice. It points to the contagious unity of peace in Christ’s name (Heim, 2006:231-236).

3.5.1.4  The Contagion of Peace

According to Heim, the new contagion of peace constituted through our relation to the risen Christ is also that which is used by Christians (who understand the atonement in antisacrificial terms) to cement order rather than sacrifice (Heim, 2006:236).

In diagnosing the particular problem of sacred violence Heim traced its root to our human capacity for mimetic sensitivity. And as a consequence of this to our capacity to develop family systems that display locked in patterns of behaviour reflective of the model’s behaviour that we are following. If we make human beings our models of desire then learning to want what they want will make us competitors. On the other hand when God in Jesus becomes our model of desire (because the potential for conflict rises as models and their subjects occupy the same plane), God who is deemed to be on a higher plane becomes the ideal non-rivalrous model (Heim, 2006:236-238).

The risen crucified one, as the model for Christians is not only one who embodies an opposition to sacrificial violence- but is also one whose status is quite beyond rivalry. And even if those who follow Christ, rival each other as to who is following Christ more closely, they will have to resort to non-rivalry to win the competition. A powerful mimetic path toward non-rivalry is thus constituted through our relation with Christ via prayer, action, worship and community. As a special kind of model Christ the risen victim inspires a new contagion- that of peace and the avoidance of conflict and violence (Heim, 2006:236-240)
3.5.1.5 The Mysterious Way of the Cross

Grasping the mystery of the cross, is also an element that Christians (who understand the atonement in antisacrificial terms), use to cement order rather than sacrifice, says Heim. A question automatically arising in this regard is the following: are Christians called to suffer as Christ suffered for others and ourselves, or are we to resist such a fate to the utmost? (Heim, 2006:244).

It is important to remember here says Heim that Jesus seeks to end sacrifice first and foremost without any suffering, including his own. Thus to follow Christ is to live a life without sacrifice. It is about taking up our crosses daily and following Jesus. It is about uprooting crosses of execution and making them the sign of an ongoing way of life. It’s about the necessary path away from scapegoating on both a cognitive and practical level. And yet with such identification also comes the risk of sharing victims’ suffering and fate. Thus in terms of this understanding, carrying ones cross is never about suffering for suffering’s sake. Yet Christians cannot rule out ending up on a cross. But it’s the last thing they should intend (Heim, 2006:245-246).

I have mentioned that one of the most serious and accurate criticisms of the cross is that it holds up the ideal of suffering like Jesus- an ideal that promotes dysfunction in healthy individuals and rationalizes the pain of the oppressed. The Christian life is however, far from the notion of suffering per se. It is about the reformation of our desires which may not be acquired without effort and pain, but the purpose is to form a life of joy. Resistance to evil may well involve the Christian in nonviolent active resistance, asserts Heim. But this suffering should arise out of the Christians mandate not to become a victim (Heim, 2006:247-251).

3.5.1.6 The Span of Sacrifice

According to Heim refraining from the use of redemptive violence (but not necessarily all coercive practices) is also an element used by Christians (who understand the atonement in antisacrificial terms) to cement order rather than sacrifice. The theology of the cross, says Heim has been critiqued not only for inviting suffering but also for endorsing domination and violence (Heim, 2006:252).
As I’ve previously mentioned, supposition that Christ’s death provided a satisfaction to God to offset humankind’s sin, and that some individuals have regarded this notion as that which gives them the right to crush and condemn others, has been severely attacked. The cross is there neither for Christians abasement and nor for their exaltation confirms Heim. Rather, the way of life following the cross depends on the recognition that Jesus’ innocent death ought not to occur. It is not God’s recipe that innocent suffering be required to restore peace. Rather God’s purpose is to end such a pattern (Heim, 2006:252).

Rather than insist on victims, the Christian life calls us to live without victims, and in place of our employing the structures of sacrificial violence, to find alternative forms to build community. Faithfulness in that endeavour, for Heim, does however not mean that valid human order is stripped bare of all elements of coercion. This is because as Heim sees it the cross does not address all conceivable violence. Its span or scope is sacrificial violence, and at the most tributaries thereof. Other forms of coercion that fall outside of sacrificial violence such as the levelling of taxes, or a legal system, or a police force or war for example, are therefore not necessarily condemned by God. Thus, says Heim, Christian theology is called to make assessments regarding so-called coercive acts as to whether the pattern of sacrificial violence applies in regard to these acts or not (Heim, 2006:253).

The reconstructions of the theology of the cross of Weaver in his *The Nonviolent Atonement* (2001) and Wink in his *Engaging the Powers* (1992) conclude that the only authentic Christian life is one of total nonviolence notes Heim. But in limiting the scope of his theological approach to the cross and sacrificial violence Heim cannot agree with them on this point. This deduction may be correct says Heim, but if so it requires more than an analysis of the cross to establish it. The assumption of total nonviolence cannot be based on an antisacrificial reading of the passion narratives by themselves (Heim, 2006:254). I will deal more with this issue in my section 4.

3.5.1.7 \*Towards a Banning of the Cross*

Working toward a banning/abolition of a sacrificial reading of the cross (as understood as the height of human cruelty and the depth of God’s suffering with humanity– the scandal of a crucified world) is also an element used by Christians (who understand atonement in antisacrificial terms) to cement order rather than sacrifice (Heim, 2006:255).
As I’ve mentioned previously, the thinking behind this quest, (along with liberation theologians) is that the churches existing theology is an obstacle in the attempt to confront the scandal of a crucified world. The reverence for the cross in the church appears unrelated or even counter to the battle to end the suffering of the oppressed (Heim 2006:255).

The issue of scapegoating sacrifice around which Heim builds his approach provides a clear specific link that connects all liberation theologies with his and an added biblical root that supports each one. An analysis of the sacrificial process in light of the cross is something that all of these differing approaches can share even while each liberation theology retains a unique slant (Heim, 2006:255).

The anthropology of the cross lays out God’s concrete solidarity with victims and a cutting critique of the collective mechanisms of violence turned against them- a dimension that cuts across all the varying liberation theologies uniting them yet not detracting from their prioritizing of different factors in their individual analysis (Heim, 2006:255).

One of the points emphasized by liberation theologians (and which complies with and broadens Heim’s thinking), is that social division cannot always be seen as an evil for which sacrifice is an evil remedy. Liberation theology points to Jesus himself as creating division by opposing settled features of the social and religious order. Thus liberation theology sets out to show that social conflict is not an unequivocally bad thing, even if sacrificial responses to it are. The return of the crucified one is a witness that this crisis cannot be abolished by sacrifice but only by a resolution of the injustice (Heim, 2006:255-256).

3.5.1.8 Picking Up On the Model of Jesus’ Desire

When attempting to understand the cross, the formulating of their intentions and behaviour through the model of Jesus’ desire and not the imitation of Jesus’ actions is also an element used by Christians (who understand the atonement in antisacrificial terms) to cement order rather than sacrifice.

In the section above, I mention Heim’s claim that the anthropology of the cross lays out God’s concrete solidarity with victims and that this is a dimension that cuts across all liberation theologies. Furthermore in this regard, Heim, in his book, Saved from Sacrifice
(2006), draws attention to (in the context of South American Liberation theology), the image of a crucified peasant on a make-shift cross. This image of protest comes from a context that clearly does not passively accept suffering. Now images like this when considering the trajectory of the cross in history increasingly strike us as protest. But taken alone in conjunction with certain kinds of theologies, the representations could be taken as counsels of resignation or invitations to imitate Christ’s supposed tame submission to oppression. This example points to the fact that concrete images of the crucifixion are liable to the same ambiguity that attaches to any images of suffering (Heim, 2006:257).

When presented with a representative image of Jesus on the cross (such as the crucified peasant I’ve just mentioned) our gut responses witness to the way the saving power of the cross is intertwined with sacrificial and mythical tendencies. Those who would object to a representative image because for them it would not be representative of the historical Jesus, and thus no explicit parallels would be acceptable, miss the point that part of the saving effect in that unique death was enabling us to see others in the same place. Those who would dismiss these objections and who would willingly replace focal emphasis on the cross of Jesus with a variety of representations of the oppressed miscomprehend the ambiguous nature of images of suffering in themselves (Heim, 2006:258).

Images of violation, suffering and condemnation can readily become incitement, says Heim. Without a tie to the specific objectivity of God’s demise on the cross, the sight of a suffering victim from my social circle can stir only a desire for retribution. It is displayed as an atrocity that reinforces the unity of our anger against our enemies. Such images are by no means equivalents to the cross. For an integral element of the cross is that we cannot attribute it only to others. Without a tie to the cross of Jesus the sight of a suffering victim who is outside my social circle can evoke a sense of just condemnation. Likewise this is also no equivalent to the cross. For an integral element is that we must identify with its victim (Heim, 2006:258).

There will be those who jettison the cross for just such reasons mentioned. Some advocates of the oppressed will jettison it because they believe no hesitation should fall on the anger of the oppressed against their oppressors. And there will be those holding power who will jettison it for essentially the same reason. Because the cross requires them to ask afresh who their victims are. If when we gaze at the cross, we see only and always the face of
Jesus, its redeeming power has not fully reached us - as is the case in the Anselmian model. If it had we would be able to see others. But this substitution should not only apply to our preferred others. Because to be converted is to be able to see ourselves and our loved ones on the cross- and it’s also about seeing our own faces in the murderous crowd assembled against a Christ who looks like an enemy (Heim, 2006:258).

For the Christian life generally and specifically for comprehending the cross, the key thing is not imitation of Jesus’ actions (as some embracing the substitutionary model have erroneously understood to be the case), but the forming of our intentions and behaviour through the model of Jesus’ desire. A perennial desire that drives Jesus’ ministry, his antisacrificial death and his risen witness, is the desire to overcome scapegoating as the means of social reconciliation. There is in Jesus no desire in itself for death or suffering. If we want to become “like Jesus in his death,” then the likeness we must imitate is the longing to empty the world of crosses. We should have no desire to join him on the cross. If we do suffer in our following of Jesus it is acceptable only in its resistance. It is legitimate only if its desire is to terminate what it must endure (Heim, 2006:259).

3.5.2 The Bad Tidings Concerning Revelation: Two Kinds of Apocalypse

It is indeed important that I include Heim’s view on the apocalyptic in my argument for a nonviolent atonement. This is because Heim shows the apocalyptic to be a genre of writing that against popular opinion does not endorse a violent image of God (both in terms of the way God saves and judges us). By way of the more developed apocalyptic writings featured in the synoptic passion narratives, Heim shows that these passages endorse a nonviolent notion of atonement as he proceeds in this chapter to explain how the notion of final judgement fits in with the notion of a nonviolent God who saves us through anthropological means in a nonviolent manner.

Christians claim that Christ’s death changed the world. And furthermore that the life of the church endeavours to embody the alternative that change made possible. However, says Heim, believers and nonbelievers alike will probably not be able to agree on the extent of the effectiveness Christ’s death has actually had on the world. Many may well query that if
it were an event whose very occurrence objectively changed the world, then surely the world would look changed in some more obvious and consistent way? (Heim, 2006:260).

Well, in fact it does look changed, says Heim. And this is apparent in the sense that victims have become visible. A concern for victims exists in our societies. And no faith is necessarily required here to recognize this. Stemming originally from biblical tradition this gradual uneven recognition in even a secular society, says Heim, is directly related to biblical revelation. And more specifically from the passion narratives themselves (Heim, 2006:261-262).

In a world where victims have become visible, the workings of sacrificial mechanisms have become more obvious and the reality of victims less avoidable. Thus as a consequence society is thrown into a new kind of sacrificial crisis. Scapegoating solutions can be applied only with greater effort and more limited success. And furthermore the nonsacrificial social alternatives presented mainly in the gospels require radical personal and social transformations that have at best only partially been realized. Thus sacrificial crises can become more acute as the mythological solution fades and nonviolent alternatives battle to be birthed (Heim, 2006:263-264).

This thinking and challenge, centered on the ambiguity of the cross, is captured in the biblical genre of the apocalyptic says Heim. Apocalyptic confronts us with judgement. Its primary focus is not the judgement and division of individuals but the final resolution of world history and the fate of human community. Apocalyptic happens when the old reconciling power of sacred violence shrivels and a new way to peace fails leaving two distinct paths wherein for each the cross has a catalytic role (Heim, 2006:264).

On one path the unveiling of sacrifice and its victims does indeed serve to deconstruct the mechanisms of sacrificial scapegoating. But its effect is merely to redouble the sacrificial dynamic with more frenzy than before causing the social world to fall in on itself under its own weight. On the other path the divine vindication of victims objectively changes the world by calling forth attempts at new forms of solidarity. New constructions are organized in the name of victims. Yet injustice here, on the part of leaders against scapegoats, becomes a charter for an unrestrained tide of righteous wrath against their oppressors (Heim, 2006:264).
From the New Testament’s point of view from the moment of Christ’s demise and resurrection the future of a world that does not convert like Paul to the side of the scapegoat, that does not learn how to live reconciliation without crosses, has been set (Heim, 2006:264).

According to Heim the apocalyptic understanding in the synoptics is more developed as opposed to The Book of Revelation understanding which has an older and less accurate interpretation. Thus both Heim and I disregard the older understanding in favour of the synoptic understanding. And here, regarding judgement, there is no direct claim that a violent wrathful God will rain disaster on the earth (as in the Book of Revelation 6:9). Rather there is a simple description of human society tearing itself to pieces- Matthew 24:7-12; Luke 17:26. And yet ultimately even here, we are assured that the Gospel God rescues the faithful from a world in dissolution- Matthew 24:30-31. And the form of God’s judgement when it comes, makes the practice of mercy and the avoidance of sacrifice its norm (Heim, 2006:266-267).

In scriptural apocalyptic we have the assurance that ultimately Christ’s victory over mythic sacrifice will prevail. A New Jerusalem will come down from heaven thus rendering the apocalyptic scenarios as default options, as false labour pains, painful but unproductive. Furthermore scriptural apocalyptic acts as a warning to those pursuing a variety of alternative apocalyptic paths such as the reactionaries of this world, or the revolutionaries, romantics, fascists, Marxists and even oppressive capitalists. It points to the futile outcome of their ways as they still try to achieve lasting order/peace by way of mythical means (Heim, 2006:268-290).

The poignant message of a biblical apocalyptic vision when pivoting upon a nonviolent understanding of the atonement revolves around the notion that if the knife of revelation doesn’t cut to heal, it cuts to wound. The world is in a race between the effects of the cross and the power of the Spirit. No one may know the day or hour or particular outcome of that race. But there is no turning back what has been set in motion from Jesus’ death and resurrection (Heim, 2006:290-291).

3.5.3 Saved from Sacrifice: Remodeling the Theology of the Cross

It is important that this 10th chapter of Heim’s be included in my dissertation because within
it Heim discusses the way in which he sees both Abelardian and Anselmian interpretations veering off track so as to end up with an atonement formulation that is erroneously violent. Heim’s aim at the beginning of his book was to look for the good and the bad associated with the theologies of the cross. The theology of the cross Heim has adopted revolves around the unbeknown practice that generates all human cultures- that of scapegoating sacrifice (Heim, 2006:292).

Yet although the Biblical tradition and passion narratives clearly represent this practice of scapegoating (which in itself is a distinctive achievement) says Heim, their purpose is not to endorse what it represents. However because of the very fact that the theme of the sacrificial victim is so (unusually) obvious in the Bible- this can lead interpreters in the reverse direction. It can lead them to uphold as a divine mechanism what was revealed in order to be opposed (Heim, 2006:292-293).

According to Heim, the Bible has 3 varying kinds of texts that: (a) to some degree directly show the reality of scapegoating events and yet still endorse or accept their necessity; (b) explicitly reveal the sacrificial mechanism and oppose it; (c) not only describe and protest the victimage mechanism but also proclaim its reversal and replacement. Precisely because of this situation, says Heim, the danger is that atonement theology will interpret the antisacrificial elements in terms of the more mythical ones (Heim, 2006:292-293).

The influential penal substitution notion of atonement is a case in point here says Heim. Insofar as this notion pivots on God’s demand for violent sacrifice, satisfaction by Christ’s suffering, it takes on the sacrificial assumptions that Jesus’ demise discredits. It accepts too much of the logic concealed behind myth merely because it can be found openly described in the Gospels (forgetting that it is most openly portrayed and affirmed in these texts by those who annihilate Jesus). Consequently it blocks both the true revelation of the cross and its deep continuity with Jewish tradition. It makes Jesus our principal scapegoat rather than our saviour from sacrifice (Heim, 2006:294).

A jettisoning of that notion now often entails a jettisoning of any consideration of Jesus’ death as a sacrifice, of Jesus dying for us, of the cross as representing any type of transaction or “ransom,” of the passion as an event with any objective effect as opposed to it being purely illustrative. However says Heim, the theology of the cross cannot be set back on
track by tossing out this entire complex of ideas. There is good reason why they are anchored in scripture and tradition. We cannot comprehend Jesus’ death without comprehending that it was a sacrifice, since this is the footing for knowing what it was doing to terminate sacrifice (Heim, 2006:294)

The reconciliation realized by those who believe in Jesus can be comprehended only in contrast with the business-as-usual dynamic of sacrificial unity that sent him to his death, asserts Heim. We cannot merely run away to other models of Christ’s work (as both Heim and I note is the case with Weaver) and look past or expunge all those elements that have fed “sacrificial” doctrines of the atonement. They are decisively significant. That set of terms and ideas— the building blocks that many contemporary theological architects reject— needs to be reassembled says Heim, so that the structure he has suggested and put forward is evident. Because when we learn to reassemble these pieces in such a manner the outcome is not an insignificant modification but a much changed scenario. We recover the way the antisacrificial dimension of Christ’s work at the cross coheres with and reinforces the other strands of his ministry and teaching (Heim, 2006:294).

Having given us the above introduction to how he sees the task of the renewal of the cross successfully unfolding, Heim at this point does the following. He moves in earnest to review his renewed theology of the cross with the classic Anselmian view of Christ’s death as a satisfaction for Christ’s justice. He approaches this task by turning back to the basic concrete terms in which the theology of the cross features in ordinary Christian experience, to the phrases and notions that are a necessary part of the life of faith but that in the modern period have often been taken prisoner totally by penal sacrificial interpretations. The way to proceed here, says Heim, is not to go around all these elements but to go through them to review our understanding of the confession that Christ “died for us” and a number of the associated traditional notions regarding guilt and substitution. And to integrate them in the biblical vision of God’s work to overcome scapegoating sacrifice (Heim, 2006:294-295).

3.5.3.1 Seeking Out the Rescue

“Christ died for us. Christ took our place.” This phrase clearly expresses thanks to Jesus for saving us from death, suffering and sin by intercepting this “blow” aimed at us before it could reach us. What is not plain here however is how the death of Jesus actually fits that image.
The broad shared church tradition maintains that it is the sin and evil that we visit upon each other and ourselves that Christ intercepts on our behalf. And consequently that Christ suffers in our place (Heim, 2006:294).

Now uneasiness with the theology of the cross arises here, suggests Heim, mainly because it is difficult to see in a concrete sense what Jesus is rescuing us from apart from some supposed cosmic benefit occurring as a result of Christ’s death. If Jesus’ death were perceived to be literally saving in some way, it would be less offensive and Jesus wouldn’t be blamed for setting a bad example in the process (Heim, 2006:294).

What Heim has tried to say in his approach is that there is a concrete rescue in the cross- the rescue and vindication of a scapegoating victim. And more widely still there’s a rescue of all of us from the imprisonment to that violent way of keeping peace and unity. This is a saving transaction wherein God is willing to be subjected to our torture in order to deprive it of future victims and terminate its power. That is the simple rescue on which the other meanings of the cross are constructed (Heim, 2006:296).

Those who criticize atonement theology perceive in the accounts of Jesus’ demise no literal saving example. And they are in a sense correct, says Heim, for the Gospels themselves stress the wrongness of this evil act. As critics view things, the theology of the cross seems to suppose that the heavenly value of Jesus’ demise increases in direct proportion to its failure to do any earthly good. The cross does not deliver to us a parable of behaviour that is commendable in some general sense. In place of a concrete demonstration of a rescue the passion narratives speak of Jesus’ predictions of his demise, an assurance that it will occur according to the scriptures and an assurance that it will be offered for us. It appears to critics that no meaningful explanation of why that death would help is present. In being an “empty death” it appears to require the theorizing of some hidden divine transaction to give it the meaning it lacks on the face of things (Heim, 2006:297).

3.5.3.2 The Incorrect Paradox

The Anselmian penal substitutionary theology of atonement constructs the terms of just such a hidden transaction says Heim. It lays claim to a cosmic bargain that takes place on a plane quite distinct from the historical reality of the crucifixion. This mistaken move has decisive
consequences. There are however many positive effects that Anselm has managed to incorporate in his vision says Heim, which account for the multiple positive effects that his teaching has had despite its deep flaws. It is due to a misaligning of the elements which are made up of the right material that the result is faulty (Heim, 2006:297).

The significant positive effects Anselm manages to incorporate in his vision include many points in line with the basic critique of historical sacrifice present in the Gospels. He assumes as scripture does the injustice of the crucifixion, the falseness of the accusations, the innocence of the victim and the uniqueness of the divine act that takes place in this event, separate from the intentions (explicit and implicit of its human actors). And that in the wake of Christ no innocent suffering can be propounded as required by God (Heim, 2006:297-298).

In these basic ways Anselm recognizes and affirms the antisacrificial trajectory of the passion narratives. It is the presence of all these dimensions in his theology that accounts for its many liberating as well as destructive effects. So for example even a very sacrificial reading of the cross that treats Jesus as a divine scapegoat, often still powerfully deflects our tendency to cast our own guilt onto a human scapegoat allowing it to be discharged instead by Christ. Those who have opposed sacred violence from within the Anselmian perspective have done so on the basis of these resources (Heim, 2006:299).

However the Anselmian view of the cross is defined by two major additional steps. The first is the decision to privilege legal images to represent the fundamental dynamic of “death for us.” Anselm senses the enormity of God’s gracious universal unexpected unique and final act on the cross that has universal impact. And thus he seeks to define the scope of grace via a legal quantification of our moral debt and Christ’s merit (Heim, 2006:299).

The second step is to conflate (blend together) this legal framework with a vision of divine justice that dictates God’s purpose in suffering death. If Christ steps in to intercept a blow destined for us, where does that blow itself come from? It is occasioned by our sin (so far a view entirely in accord with the general tradition). Anselm’s departure is to insist with new systematic rigor that it is actually stemming from God. What we need to be saved from is the deserved anger and punishment of God. God desires to be merciful and so God becomes the one to be punished on behalf of all of us. God strikes the same blow that God protects us from (Heim, 2006:299).
In responding to the criticisms of his day which complained that only a weak incompetent God would be forced to go to the lengths of incarnation and especially death by crucifixion to save a straying creation Anselm explained the necessity of incarnation by spotlighting the enormity of the human offences. This was something only the infinite merit of God’s undeserved suffering could overturn. The paradoxes of Anselm’s satisfaction model try to mirror the paradox in the gospels. The scriptural account of the crucifixion as both a bad thing and a good thing is translated to mean that the bad (undeserved) suffering of an innocent victim is finally a good thing when it provides the merit to allow God to remit the punishment rightly due humankind. The debt to God can be paid only with what is not already owed. The wrongness of the cross is part of the solution (Heim, 2006:300).

This motion draws it power from points of genuine contact with the gospel passage narrative. But it has gone off track at a point where even a small difference can do maximum damage. Jesus’ wrongful suffering- the evil the passion is meant to terminate- becomes the essential good to be celebrated in it. The primary error is to refer both the meaning and need of Jesus’ demise to its character as an offering to God. What Anselm jettisons at the level of human community he recreates at the level of community between God and humankind. A community whose reconciliation depends on the offering of an innocent victim. Most significantly Anselm presents God as the one who requires this sacrifice and also as the one to whom it is offered (Heim, 2006:300).

Sacrifice to end sacrifice is an accurate and biblical way to describe Jesus’ demise. Yet it is an ambiguous notion. Anselm has taken it to mean that God does the same thing that human scapegoaters do. In place of God plotting an end to human sacrifice Anselm’s God has endorsed its workings. These fatal steps deform the theology of the cross. In place of Jesus stepping in between us and an evil bearing down on us (the evil of scapegoating) Anselm declares that what is bearing down on us is God and God’s wrath. This severely bifurcates (divides into two branches) the God of justice and the God of forgiveness and it appears to require a plan of salvation that sets Christ and God against each other. In contrast Heim has argued that the actual transaction at the cross is one in which God is handed over to our redemptive violence in order to free us from it, not the transaction between God’s left hand and God’s right hand that Anselm portrays (Heim, 2006:301).
Anselm’s error is to make primary what is derivative. God did not become human only to perish. And Christ did not perish as he did to cancel deserved punishment for humankind with the undeserved suffering of innocent divinity. The legal apparatus is not there due to God having a satisfaction case to prosecute and a punishment to inflict on humankind but because the machinery of false accusation and political and religious legitimacy are part of the way sacred violence works. The demise of Jesus follows the script of human persecution because that is the ongoing evil into whose path Jesus steps to save us from sacrifice, to open the roadway to new community (Heim, 2006:301).

Anselm’s model preserves paradox but the wrong one. He has made the cross a celebration of the sacrifice it is meant to overcome. Heim reiterates that overlaid in the passion story are two things: a bare description of scapegoating sacrifice along with the thinking of its practitioners; and then a counter-script of criticism, jettisoning, and reversal of that practice. The second is the meaning of the cross. At a key point Anselm has crossed these wires and taken over part of the sacrificial rationale that was being jettisoned. As he sees it there is a crisis of conflict that threatens to tear creation permanently asunder. It is the conflict between humankind and God. Sin has placed them at irreconcilable odds. The only way peace can be restored is for God and humankind to join together in sacrificing an innocent victim (Heim, 2006:302).

The obvious change Anselm must make when this sacrificial scenario makes inroads into his thought from the realm of mythical sacrifice is an inescapably Christian one. Given his commitment to scripture the true nature of the sacrificial logic cannot remain invisible. It must be directly faced whereas in classical sacrifice no victim is recognized and innocent suffering works to bring peace. For Anselm however, since the Gospels have made the victim unavoidably visible, it is the acknowledged innocent suffering of the victim that becomes the hinge of the entire process (Heim, 2006:302).

The effectiveness of Jesus’ demise in reconciling us with God hinges upon our being aware that it is unjustified persecution. The Gospels unmasked the concealed truth of sacrifice— the innocent victim’s unmerited suffering. They revealed what was wrong and what must be changed. But Anselm insists that what we view behind the mask is right. God has come into the business of redemptive violence and by that very act made it a good thing. This injustice becomes the entire purpose of the incarnation and not one of the major evils Christ
came to conquer. In place of a strategic act of resistance to overthrow sacred violence the cross becomes a divine endorsement of it. This is the missed connection so close to the truth yet so far that has mixed up our thinking about substitutionary atonement (Heim, 2006:302).

3.5.3.3 *Starting with Barabbas*

When considering the observation that Jesus’ death is not an obvious rescue in the ordinary sense it is helpful to realize that people of the first century believed sacrifice worked. For them redemptive violence accomplishes something. Consequently they could understand what it meant when Gospel writers portrayed the story of Jesus’ execution in sacrifice-related terms. To have this killing of an innocent openly presented as an evil thing, an act against God, and yet simultaneously exemplifying the practice of sacrifice strongly imparted the message that there is something wrong with that practice. The similarity is there as a critique (Heim, 2006:303).

Thus the people of the first century were more easily able to see in the passion accounts than we are today, a concrete rescue. A rescue wherein the scapegoated Jesus steps into the path of an evil process- an evil power, bearing down on all of us, (victims and perpetrators alike). And in intercepting the” blow” so to speak, he effectively brings about a broad transformation for all others in an event that has an objective constitutive effect. The Anselmian view of the atonement on the other hand might represent saving in some generic sense but it has no objective concrete rescue attached to it. And nor does it have any broad transforming effect for others (Heim, 2006:303).

The reason the passion doesn’t conform to our modern day immediate intuitive image of rescue, is due to our intuitions themselves having already undergone the process of conversion by the cross says Heim (Heim, 2006:303).

Thus we too readily deduce from the passion narratives that Jesus must be dying to satisfy some cosmic debt since he’s obviously not perishing literally for anyone’s sake. Yet this is simply not true. Because Jesus literally takes the place of Barabbas. Yet this Jesus/Barabbas exchange constitutes far more than just a one victim for one victim substitution, as it does in fact overturn the entire mechanism of victimage. It is an instrumental element of the story that in this once-for-all act the saving comes by substituting, says Heim. The early
Christian theologians emphasized this when they treated that exchange as a divine trick. God turns the indiscriminate hunger for victims in the sacrificial process against itself so that it pounces on the unique one who can discontinue its power. Switching victims is a providential tactic. In the incarnation God acts savingly by exchanging his divinity for our humanity so that we may exchange our falleness for participation in the divine nature (Heim, 2006:303).

That is the big exchange, a genuine model for the mutuality of the Christian life generally. However the particular exchange by which Jesus takes the victim’s place on the cross is a means not a model. Pilate highlights the arbitrariness of the sacrificial process by offering the crowd a choice- Jesus or Barabbas? It could easily be someone else than Jesus. It could be us. The connection between Jesus dying for this one individual and faith’s perception of a universal saving effect of Christ’s death is the scapegoating practice which prescribed sacrifice in the first place. That is the practice Jesus’ death and resurrection bring into the light and reverse. Barabbas’ ransom is a concrete event that represents a general amnesty (Heim, 2006:305).

As surely as Jesus came between Barabbas and the cross Jesus’ demise on the cross comes between us and one particular evil under whose spell we stand collectively imprisoned. This is the 3rd party whose blow was directed at Barabbas until Jesus intercepted it. It is a power of our own sinful construction, under which we fall captive and thus do not command. And which is destructive for victims and perpetrators alike (Heim, 2006:305).

Salvation from this habit of buying unity through persecution while not being the sum total of Jesus’ saving work is however the saving work of the cross. God’s reaching out in the incarnation involved a variety of things. Overcoming death itself and, through the resurrection, sharing the promise of eternal life was part of that mission. In that respect dying by some means is something Christ came to do. But superimposed on that saving work is yet another that dictates a certain mode of death. A specific death that takes on the particular profile it does (as described in the passion) so that it can simultaneously triumph over death and vindicate the victim from the sacrificial bondage that resides at the core of our religion and our politics. The two saving aims are conjoined in one event so that a resurrection that testifies to the triumph over death is at the same time the vindication of the victim. It is at once a promise about a life to come and a radical transformation in life here and now (Heim, 2006:306).
The rest of the pieces fall into place only when this starting point of a concrete rescue that is further built on, is grasped. Jesus’ demise is the start of a concrete effect of exposing and undermining sacrifice. What slew Jesus was not God’s justice but our redemptive violence. Jesus stepped in between our violence and our victims and his challenging presence remains there still (Heim, 2006:306).

3.5.3.4 With His Stripes we are Healed

It is important when arguing for a nonviolent understanding of the atonement to keep in hand a key that can help us decipher most of the traditional language about Christ’s death, which Heim acknowledges is not wrong but balances on a knife’s edge of interpretation (Heim 2006:306).

Thus to Heim’s way of thinking the confession that “Jesus died for us,” pivots on the understanding of Jesus’ revelatory identification with the scapegoat. And that we locate the process that killed him in our own social history, and not within the realm of God’s justice (Heim, 2006:306-307)

The confession “Jesus died for our sins,” amplifies the above. This is so in the sense that Jesus died to put an end to our sin of the sacrificial mechanism that killed him- not due to God’s justice. Once we grasp the above points, we realize that the theology of the cross must always be reading the first-level descriptive statements about sacrifice in light of the action God is taking to change what is described. The confession “Jesus bears the punishment for our sins,” can thus be viewed in the light that this punishment is not coming from a God seeking justice for our sins by demanding Christ’s death but from the collective weight of the scapegoating mechanism which we, the crowd, foist upon our scapegoating victim (Heim, 2006:306-307).

“Upon him was the punishment that made us whole and with his stripes we are healed.” Once again this confession reflects an understanding of the facts of scapegoating. Because of Christ’s stripes (that is his acceptance to be subject to the entire scapegoating treatment) we can be cured of the addiction to that treatment (Heim, 2006:308-309).
The challenge for the theology of the cross, asserts Heim, is to keep the first level description of the sacrificial exchange that is being condemned and overcome in Christ’s death from bleeding back into the formulation of what God is doing via that death and what Christians celebrate in faith. One check on this can be found in the relation between God and Jesus that atonement theories assume. We have observed that Anselm’s theology requires the two take up opposing positions in the work of salvation, one inflicting God’s vengeance, the other bearing it. It is core to Anselm’s doctrine that this must be a quite literal opposition where divine mercy and divine justice settle their differences by violence. The lifting up of that opposition is however indicative of a mistaken theology, says Heim (Heim, 2006:309).

The truth is rather that God and Jesus together submit themselves to human violence. By virtue of their love and communion with each other both suffer its results. Both unmask and overcome it. The son’s death is no more required by God as a satisfaction than it is the son’s desire to see the Father’s bereavement. They are not warring with each other in the heart of God, but rather (in a much more accurate image put forward by the early Christian writers) they stand together presenting an apparent helplessness before the diabolical sacrificial powers, that was in truth the disarming of these powers (Heim, 2006:310).

Those scholars who claim that the earliest doctrine of the cross emphasized Christ’s victory are right in that Christians emphasized Jesus’ demise as a confrontation with the powers of sin. But it is erroneous to suppose that such a view should downplay the significance of the category of sacrifice, or jettison it. Its importance rests primarily in comprehending what dimension of sin is most specifically at issue at the cross, and how it is being overcome (Heim, 2006:310)

3.5.3.5  The Capstone the Builders Jettisoned

The confrontation with scapegoating sacrifice is the objective work involved in the plot of Jesus’ death. This is key to understanding Jesus’ death as a transformative act, one that has altered our situation. Much rides on us maintaining this interpretation says Heim. Anselm’s conviction that a legal exchange is the core of the objective meaning of the cross leads him to focus most strongly on the forensic elements in the passion narratives and to interpret all the other data in those terms. When it comes to the elements of guilt and punishment that are so significant in the atonement doctrine, says Heim, these also come to have very different
interpretations depending upon whether they are interpreted through the Anselmian forensic lens or through Heim’s lens of confrontation with scapegoating sacrifice (Heim, 2006:310-311).

Anselm begins his atonement theory with the global extent and enormous depth of human sinfulness, both of which are realities, says Heim. However this general truth is not an adequate launching pad from which to comprehend the particular importance of the cross. It should be the other way around. We must start with the concrete nature of the sin in Jesus’ death in order to articulate its link to our broader human condition. Treating guilt and sin as a singly undifferentiated quantitative value was one of Anselm’s errors. Jesus did after all confront the realities of sin throughout his pre-passion life. And in every case he encountered those realities in concrete shapes, like greed or jealousy etc. The general truth has a specific face in the case of the crucifixion as well. Specific understanding of the cross must begin not with the query of how God can be justified in forgiving the guilty. That is a second-level query. The beginning point is provided by the biblical context for the cross- the connecting link that runs through the likes of Abel and Job and the Psalms and the Prophets. Its question is how can God be justified unless God sides with the unanimous victim, unless God vindicates and redeems the scapegoat? (Heim, 2006:310-311).

Only the amazing conviction that God does in fact save the victim, coupled with the Gospel revelation that God has actually shared the place of the scapegoat, can lead to a further query. If God vindicates the sacrificed, if God has even been the object of our sacred persecution, then how can God be justified in redeeming the guilty i.e. the victimizers? And the guilty are all of us because, Christ excepted, there is no one of us who would not or has not belonged to the mob. Now the dimension of guilt arises vividly, for if God is to do justice for victims, how can God fail to do justice against their persecutors? (Heim, 2006:312-313).

In seeing Christ on the cross, in the light of the resurrection, believers see what has occurred…and not just to Jesus. What is exposed is not just the enormity of such violence against God, but the evil of our longstanding scapegoating against each other. No longer can we say we know not what we do. And when this realization dawns upon us the order of enormity of this sin seems virtually infinite. It is the element of grace that brings home to us the real nature of wrong. We realize Jesus does not deserve to be on the cross. That permits us to see that those we put on the cross in the same place Jesus occupied, for the same
socially unifying purpose, do not deserve their scapegoating at our hands (no matter what their real sins may be). And when this awareness dawns, a third link falls into place. We are the ones who deserve to be in Jesus’ place, yet he has taken ours (Heim, 2006:313).

By way of his parable of the landlord in the vineyard– Matthew 21:40-42 Jesus lets us see that in terms of our collective propensity toward scapegoating sin, we, are the ones upon whom the wrath of God should fall. Yet it is the sacrificed one– the stone the builders rejected- the one that we have sacrificed that has become not another member of that ancient baseline of human redemptive violence, but the capstone. In other words, our Lord does something new here. He refrains from exacting retaliatory violence/revenge upon us. He points not to the descriptive norm of scapegoating, but to a new kind of community founded on recognition of the victim and reconciliation without blood, of which he is the foundation stone. And which is founded upon recognition of the victim and reconciliation without blood (Heim, 2006:313).

Anselm is not wrong to connect the scope of wrong done to Christ with the scope of the fault among us. Yet he is wrong to suppose that God’s whole purpose was to somehow balance these out. We have rightly understood the cross only when we understand it is the same wrong done to others, when we connect it with a practice in which we all participate and stand guilty of. And thus we are the ones who must take responsibility for Jesus’ death and upon whom judgement must fall. We are able to clearly see our sin here however only when we see how God has acted to save us from it (Heim, 2006:314).

3.5.3.6 The Grace of Confronting Guilt

Heim notes that guilt and punishment have been, and are, key themes in the theology of the cross. He has also suggested that when Anselm took the quantitative magnitude of human guilt as his first general truth for atonement he went off course. We stay much closer to the truth, says Heim, if we begin by focusing on our shared (and universal) guilt for the particular evil directly manifest in the crucifixion: scapegoating. When we do this we reverse the assumption that God’s justice needed a victim in favour of the recognition that it was our helpless social medication that required one. We realize that God did not crush our evil through domination by power and violence, but rather God facilitated it to be brought down
by its own weight. To alter things irreversibly, God stepped into the place of the victim, and remained God (Heim, 2006:314).

In Anselm’s thinking an important dimension of the question of guilt lies not with the depth of the condemnation we deserve, but with the perfection of blessedness God wants us to enjoy. In other words, if our sins were merely forgiven without any “satisfaction” needing to be paid to God, then the righteous among us would be left longing to offer recompense. Our goodness would dictate our sadness (Heim, 2006:114).

Thus Anselm’s argument in terms of the need for a recompense offering to be made to God is actually based not on satisfying God, but on satisfying the saved. It is not the justice or wrath of God that must be appeased here but it is the saved persons own sense of fairness that must be satisfied (Heim, 2006:313-314).

Thus in order for the righteous not to be always pained by their own sin and regretting painfully their failure to repay God, Anselm deduces that the lavish uncoerced gift of our salvation needs to be given by a human being as well as God. This is important to Anselm because since sin is human, satisfaction must be human also. It must be no lie that the offering must come from our side. We have contributed something. This is the particular reason Anselm gives for validating the union of humankind and divinity in the act of redemption (Heim, 2006:316).

We as human beings are not only objects of utmost charity but sisters and brothers of the Saviour. It is our nature that has offered up this gift as well. It is not only the judgement of some external court that is set aside, but also the quite legitimate reasons we may continue to refuse to let ourselves off the hook, because we had literally done naught to put things right. This, which might appear at first like conscientious virtue, could only ultimately go bad. Because if we maintain that anything remains unexpiated, the prescription on which we insist will at some point be additional sacrifice, ours or someone else’s. Anselm says God’s economy has forestalled this problem by seeing that the means of redemption are drawn basically from humanity as well as from God (Heim, 2006:316).

What is significant for Anselm here, says Heim, is not only that humankind be saved, but that it be saved in such a manner that the groundwork is established for new life, for
freedom from repetition of the same sinful dynamic. The helplessness of humankind must be overcome in such a manner that does not stimulate humiliation or resentment. These would be situations for renewed sin, and specifically the occasion for the type of sacrifice that claims Jesus and that Jesus’ demise and resurrection is to end (Heim, 2006:316).

There is wisdom there, though its value is to a big extent lost in the strong general current of Anselm’s theory which is his near exclusive stress on the relations of humans with God. Focus here falls heavily upon sin as an offence against God with little attention to our sin against others. Our violence and sin against each other deeply estrange us from God as well (Heim, 2006:316).

Anselm’s insight is to see that just as it is difficult for victims to accept vindication without revenge, it is difficult for sinners, by way of our pride to accept forgiveness without restitution. Thus it is therefore an additional grace and blessedness towards us on the part of God that Jesus, one of us offered back to God everything that was needed and more (Heim, 2006:316-317).

For Anselm, Jesus’ demise was steered by a divine order that human suffering must be offered to meet God’s justice and the issue I have just mentioned was a secondary issue argument as to why a divine-human one was required to be the actor in the saga. Heim instead suggests that the true objective event in the cross is God’s action to free us from scapegoating which gives its own account as to why Jesus’ demise was liberating and gives a different infrastructure for the questions of guilt and punishment. From this vantage point we can see Anselm’s argument about true blessedness as part of the subjective work of the cross. As the cross operates in history and society to alter our sacrificial practice and foster new forms of reconciliation, the cross operates at a secondary level in our emotions and inner life to make us more capable of accepting reconciliation (Heim, 2006:317).

This is because in Christ, who acts on an intermediary level between us and the Father each of us can believe something has been offered up to God on our behalf (in the face of all the unmerited grace we have received) and each of us can believe that a wondrous unlooked for gift has been given to us (in the face of all our sins and evils). The first can assist us to accept grace, the second can help us share it. Anselm’s view is on the very brink of this realization. Bluntly put, his theology says that God is unreasonably gracious to us because
Jesus has been unreasonably gracious to God. Stating Anselm’s theology in this way describes both what is wrong with his approach (God must wait upon some expiation to be gracious) and his comprehension of the right logic (God’s saving work is to infect us with peaceful reconciliation (Heim, 2006:318-319).

The part that Anselm gets right in his understanding of the cross- i.e. the logic that God’s saving work is to infect us with peaceful reconciliation, is for Heim the first-order work of the cross in overcoming sacrifice. Heim thus unequivocally advocates a reversal of polarity in the common theology of the cross. We are reconciled with each other because, at the cost of suffering, God offered us an alternative to our archaic machinery of unity. So long as our peace hinges on scapegoats, we are never truly reconciled with each other. We only seem to be one community until the next crisis, at which point the short straw of exclusion will be drawn by some one or more of us (Heim, 2006:320).

Heim claims the traditional categories describing Christian faith do indeed exist in his (Heim’s) approach but are described differently. Firstly the conviction of sin in Heim’s presentation comes with our realization of our participation in sacrificial scapegoating. Secondly, conversion is when we are drawn to commit ourselves to the vindicated victim. Thirdly, sanctification is the spirit-filled life of a new community without sacrifice (Heim, 2006:320).

Justification and sanctification have in a classical sense always been contrasted by theology, says Heim. The questions that emerge here are: on one hand, how can God accept us while still sinning against God and neighbour? On the other hand, how can we become truly righteous friends of God, new creatures, as long as we bear the burden of divine judgement? This seems to pit an amnesty so absolute so as to delete any ethical urgency against a demand for righteousness so strict so as to cancel out all mercy. Virtually all theologies straddle this gap by emphasizing a free obedience that follows from gratitude and grace (Heim, 2006:320).

However in providing a cross section of one dimension of Christ’s work, Heim’s approach allows him to be much more specific about the way these two dimensions fit together. Christ’s demise and resurrection are acts that- prior to any change on our part—objectively alter our imprisonment to the particular sin of sacrifice and definitively declare to
us God’s intention to accept us despite our failures. This act touches us in the midst of our imprisonment to sin, and bestows upon us the means for a new and different life— a community without scapegoats (Heim, 2006:320).

Only as we give ourselves to that new life is it fully realized. We can rightly say on the one hand that real effects of this event are moving through history even apart from our belief or unbelief. And on the other hand that until we are genuinely converted by it, true peace is not ours. In one sense Heim admits he is saying nothing different from what a variety of traditional types of Christianity has declared. However in having an antisacrificial (nonviolent approach) to the atonement. And wherein Christ dies at the hands of humanity to rescue us from the clutches of an evil mechanism to which we are prisoner. He is grounding the new life we receive in Christ in much more concrete terms (Heim, 2006:320-321).

He is backing the general claim that in Christ God has acted to change us objectively and subjectively across many dimensions of life within the specific instance of scapegoating sacrifice. In Anselm’s understanding wherein a cosmic transaction takes place between father and son. And wherein the understanding is that God’s justice must be appeased and not the evil of scapegoating unmasked and overthrown. The grounding of the saved life is far less concrete, less anthropological and less pertaining to nature (Heim, 2006:320-321).

3.5.3.7 One Sin and a Multiplicity of Sins

Heim has stressed that we need to view the cross in the light of a very specific kind of evil, and God’s quest to overcome that evil. The first-order issues are about our universal participation in scapegoating and the way to a new process of reconciliation. But from an early time in the tradition Heim acknowledges that a type of transference has indeed happened wherein Christians take it that Jesus perished to atone for a multiplicity of miscellaneous sins. And that these sins have no link to the crucifixion or its particular causes. Heim’s answer as to whether Christ’s death applies to sins of every conceivable description and to our guilt for them, is at the most immediate level, no. Christ practices forgiveness toward tax collectors and women taken in adultery etc. without waiting for an atoning death as a condition. Jesus seems able to elevate God’s mercy over wrath quite apart from any violence at all (Heim, 2006:321).
But Christians without doubt came to speak and worship in terms of Jesus perishing “for the forgiveness of sins” in comprehensive terms. For Heim this makes sense in two respects. The first is that many if not all of our individual sins are tributary to sacrifice in that they sow the disputes that flower in social crisis and lead to redemptive violence. They are part of a single complex. Since Jesus was a victim of sacrifice, we can say that Jesus perished for private sins (like theft, envy, sloth etc.) because these sins set people at loggerheads, creating the disputes that sacrifice is deployed to resolve. In this sense, Christ objectively perished for “private” sins (Heim, 2006:322).

The second respect in which we can refer all sin to the cross is a representative one. Once Christ has suffered and died to liberate us from the economy of scapegoating violence, it becomes possible to refer to that event in a second-level manner. The objective event by which Christ overcame this particular sin now stands as the sign and guarantor of God’s general character and disposition toward us. In other words once we get an insight into what Christ did on the cross in terms of concretely rescuing humankind from sacrifice, we come to know how God deals with all our sins. This representative meaning rests on the truth that in Jesus’ death, God does address some of my sins directly and effectively, not only symbolically. Once we have grasped the primary distinctive work of the cross, what uniquely takes place there, we can also appreciate that it has this derivative dimension as well (Heim, 2006:322).

The notion that the cross is related to individual sins in a representative way is that which is presented in exemplary views of atonement. Here however in the communication of God’s merciful nature a blood sacrifice is required as a condition. The cross is an especially affecting demonstration of what God is willing to bear as a result of coming to model love and teach us God’s will. This, says Heim, is insufficient as a description of the primary objective work of Christ’s demise. If no other purpose is served by Jesus’ suffering than to appeal to our emotions, to emphasize what we could observe in other episodes in Jesus’ life already, then this doctrine seems to deserve as much criticism as Anselm’s, and for the similar reason that it makes God an instigator of gratuitous violence. The cross is not effecting any rescue. It is merely exhibited for the sake of pain’s effect (Heim, 2006:322-323).
Heim’s argument is that the cross is both an objective transformation and a representative one (it being representative in the sense that we are affected by the cost Jesus endured). Yet this occurs within an objective saving act we needed. If the cross is not to limit its meaning exclusively to a subjective impression or lead to a sacrificial view where the value of the cross is found only in suffering, the cross requires the structure he has sketched, argues Heim. If Jesus’ suffering on the cross for our salvation is taken purely as an end in itself this leads us astray. The point of the cross is not that there is some all-purpose value to generic suffering, or that Christians should look for suffering in order to identify with Christ as a model. Jesus’ suffering was part of the very particular task of confronting a very particular evil. But once given that fact, it is also true that those who suffer for reasons unrelated to scapegoating sacrifice (such as sickness) know that Christ has shared the reality of their anguish and pain. He has truly representatively suffered with them (Heim, 2006:323).

3.5.3.8 Conclusion– Three Facets of the Cross

Heim’s purpose has been to attempt to trace a renewal of the theology of the cross- a suggested change that touches every facet of the theology of atonement. Yet it is also subtle, because its purpose is not to jettison the language of sacrifice but to transform our view on it (Heim, 2006:326).

The debt/payment image around Jesus’ death is senseless to many Christians and would-be Christians, concludes Heim. For them it would be helpful to approach Jesus’ death in a new manner demarcated by our addiction to socially vicarious sacrifices and God’s confrontation with the evil of scapegoating. Here they can locate the point of departure to appropriate Jesus’ death as part of a saving work, and to relate it to their own lives. That invitation involves a new interpretation of traditional language and also a reconciling participation in the dimensions of church life that before posed a barrier (the celebration of communion, baptism, Paul’s language, the sign of the cross itself) (Heim, 2006:326).

Furthermore, says Heim, those who experience the familiar terms of atonement as life-giving and transforming have different work to do. They will need to separate the source of that power from problematic formulations long linked with it. And here they may experience a sense in which, although the basic terms of faith haven’t changed much- that a change has indeed come about. And that this new reformed inner logic will have flowed from
the sources themselves and not from an illogical imposition of them. This new approach must validate itself by its ability to sustain the saving power they have experienced, but also be much less liable to lead people down the destructive roads that atonement language sometimes encourages (Heim, 2006:326).

It is Heim’s opinion that some theological formulations should be decisively jettisoned. Yet for him the significant change is to recover a different orientation toward the work of the cross, one that then permeates the meaning of each of the individual traditional elements. So, for example says Heim, we have observed the mistake in the way Anselm constructs a hidden transaction at the cross, a transaction between God’s justice and God’s mercy expressed in quantitative equations whose variables are legal guilt and unmerited suffering. But there are transactions at the cross, emphasizes Heim, and if we miss them we miss the core of the matter. There is a repetition of a very ancient transaction in which we trade in our hostilities toward each other for a shared hostility toward our common victim. This is no new fact but the consciousness of it is a new thing, one we owe to the Hebrew Scriptures, without whose light the cross would not even be distinguishable to us (Heim, 2006:327).

And there is another different transaction overlaid on the first. In this one God submits to be handed over to the sacrificial process that has come to hold humankind imprisoned to its power. When God becomes flesh, the quest includes (as a part, not as the whole) the willingness to be offered as a type of ransom. This ransom is not a payment made according to the law, but one demanded by crime. God’s response is not dictated by recognition of the “justice” of the devil’s claim to humankind, but to the need to avoid falling prisoner to the same evil. To triumph over the sacrificial powers by violence and domination would be to participate in the same evil. Divine resistance to our sin must find another way (Heim, 2006:327).

Therefore God accepts to be a victim of our original social sin, to walk into the place of the scapegoat, and to do what no human being can do. Humans fitted to the role of sacrificial victim are inflated beyond their true status. The transgressions they are charged with always outgrow their actual offences and capabilities. They are held responsible in a grossly disproportionate way. And every victim proves inadequate, in the sense that even when sacrifice works, it works only temporarily and requires repetition. If the victim were
truly responsible then eradicating the victim would truly resolve the problem. Just as the sacrificial subjects are not really adequate to the condemnation they receive, so they are not adequate to overcome the powers that come together against them. They do not have the means to prove their innocence of the inflated charges. They cannot fight against the judgement of a unanimous community. They cannot change the script of their own demise that is written after them, in which any protest is erased (Heim, 2006:327).

In exchanging an ordinary victim for the incarnate one, all this changes. The “ransom” is like money that leaves an indelible dye on the fingers of the kidnappers. Resurrection vindicates the victim, and makes him a living witness against the process that sacrificed him. Faith preserves the account of the cross, from the perspective of the crucified, and destabilizes all myth. A new community looks for peace by remembering what hitherto communities generally united by forgetting. The powers of sacrifice from now on must contend with a permanently visible victim, a fact that will steadily but irrevocably have its effect (Heim, 2006: 328).

Our original sin was to turn our backs on God. Instead of forming our desires on the positive model of the divine love, and on the image of God in each other’s inner lives, we fell headlong into the conflictive contagions of rivalry and envy. These alienations dovetailed with the emergence of scapegoating. Our divisions with each other call forth sacrifice as the solution, a practice that still further alienates us from God and each other. In acting to reverse this process, God at the same time addresses our sins against each other and our separation from God (Heim, 2006:328).

The unique meaning of Christ’s demise depends on its similarity to countless others. It reveals what it is meant to terminate. Christianity’s focus on the cross must be seen first of all in contrast with religious outlooks where it is invisible. Scapegoating sacrifice quite assuredly takes place where it is not registered and remembered. It cannot be reversed until it is recognized (Heim, 2006:328).

Christian representations of the cross have assumed many forms. Three of the most common are the crucifix of the suffering Jesus, the image of Christ in glory on the cross, and the simple sign of the empty cross. Various Christian communities have tended to hold up one of these, often to the exclusion of the others. However all three have a necessary place in
representing the full theology Heim has sketched. The crucifix corresponds to the visible victim, to the fact that at the core of sacrifice there is a real suffering person, whatever mythic tales or horrific accusations may be implemented to obscure that fact. To recognize this, to recognize those who may be relegated into this place by our own communities, and to recognize that this is the place to which we consigned Christ, is part of the meaning of the cross (Heim, 2006:320-321).

The resurrected Christ in glory on the cross speaks to the vindication of the victim. God’s identification with the suffering and weakness of the crucified one should not be construed as idealization or submission to scapegoating. Christ returns in the Holy Spirit as an advocate, a power to overcome sacrifice. The risen Christ “occupies” the cross, as one might occupy an air terminal to prevent its use to transport prisoners to a concentration camp. It cannot be used for that purpose without opposition, an opposition that has infiltrated our language and our consciousness. The empty cross stands for a life without sacrifice. It is a cross left in disrepair and unused, by virtue of reconciliation that proceeds without violence or victims. It calls to our attention the fact that an empty cross is no historical souvenir, but a repeated accomplishment. For a church or any human community, to rise above a moment of crisis without turning to sacrifice is one of the true, basic signs of the manifestation of God’s kingdom (Heim, 2006:328).

Our faith cannot do without any of these images and their meanings, says Heim. The cross has three facets. The theology of the cross embraces them all. Scapegoating sacrifice is the stumbling stone we placed between God and us. It is a primary sin in the depths of our life together. The passion is a divine act revealing, reversing, and replacing our redemptive violence, which we for eons back stubbornly concealed from ourselves in the very name of the sacred. When our sin had so separated us from God and formed our peace on blood, God was willing to come and perish for us, to bear our sin and suffer the condemnation that we visit upon our victims and so deserve ourselves. God redeemed us from our form of reconciliation, healed us from our dependence on that tragic medicine (Heim, 2006:329).

Jesus died for my sins. This is concretely true, says Heim, in the ways he has portrayed. And it is therefore also representatively true in countless additional ways. The God who surrendered his life to save ours in one way, who laid down his life for his friends, even while they insisted on being his adversaries is a God who will save us in many. The God who
paid the cost of the cross was not the one who charged it. We are saved from sacrifice because God suffered it. To be reconciled with God is to recognize victims when we see them, to convert from the mob that gathers around them, and to be reconciled with each other without them (Heim, 2006:329).
Chapter 4
COMPARISON AND EVALUATION OF APPROACHES

As I come now to the 4th and final chapter of my dissertation, I feel I have reached an appropriate point at which to begin to evaluate the various atonement views and more specifically, who out of Weaver and Heim presents with the most convincing argument.

My evaluation takes the following approach:

• I begin by examining and critiquing the work of Hans Boersma whose overall approach I reject, and yet who in his own critique of Weaver and Heim presents me with many valuable insights both on the topic of atonement and on Weaver and Heim’s work in particular;

• I then examine Boersma’s profound insights on violence. I use his observations to evaluate not only his own work but also that of Weaver and Heim, and to draw my own conclusions on the topic;

• Next, I discuss my problem with Weaver's model; compare methodologies between Weaver and Heim; examine similarities and differences; examine agreements and differences regarding Anselm’s mistake; give my reasons as to why I favour Heim’s approach as being the more feasible of the two;

• Hereafter in section 4.2, I present and evaluate but cannot agree with various critiques of Weaver and Heim by Anselmian defenders;

• Finally in section 4.3, before going on to explicate nonviolent atonement in terms of orthopraxis, I evaluate the Incarnational Model’s compatibility with a nonviolent understanding.
4.1 Who out of Weaver and Heim presents the Most Convincing Argument?

4.1.1 The Helpful Work of Hans Boersma: Introduction

Although not without their similarities, the approaches of Weaver and Heim differ significantly. In order to assist me discern who out of the two, in my opinion, presents with the most convincing argument I have chosen to draw on the work and insights of theologian Hans Boersma. In his book, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross* Boersma argues for and presents his own notion of atonement. And although I don’t support his atonement notion, in the final analysis, I have found his insights to be of valuable assistance to me. Especially in terms of Boersma’s challenge to his readers to think very carefully about the categories of violence and nonviolence.

4.1.2 Boersma’s Context in a Nutshell

It is necessary at this point, in order to effectively draw on Boersma’s insights, to give a short overview of Boersma’s context, approach to atonement and the general thinking behind his work.

Kevin Van Hoozer of Trinity Evangelical School, who writes on the back cover of Boersma’s book, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross*, claims the following:

Boersma responds to postmodern sensibilities—i.e. (the problematic notion that associates God with violence) with a nonreductionistic reappropriation of the moral influence, penal and Christus Victor theories. All of these theories are what Boersma sees as being but moments in a wider ecumenical recapitulation theory dating back to Irenaeus.

And interestingly I have found this notion is also embraced by contemporary scholar Tom Wright who in his *Jesus and the Victory of God*, modernizes and retranslates the word “recapitulation” as being “reconstitution” (Wright, 1996:169).
Wright’s retranslation here according to Boersma, views Christ’s saving work in terms of his three-fold office of prophet, priest and king (Boersma, 2004:18). An example of other contemporary scholars I have come across who like Boersma and Wright have explored the recapitulation theory of Irenaeus with a view to reformulating an understanding of the atonement are Brad Jesak and Michael Hardin in their book, *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ* (Jesak & Hardin, 2007:380,432,464).

### 4.1.3 Boersma’s Atonement Approach in a Nutshell

Boersma’s atonement approach is to show by scripture and tradition, what he calls God’s conditional hospitality- (reconciliation and fellowship) for this world which is not devoid of violence and which is expressed both in the forms of exclusion, and the *necessary sacrifice of the incarnate Word*. These coercive acts do however ultimately result in divine hospitality so that we (as church) may share eternal fellowship with God in Christ- (or in other words, find reconciliation and participate in divine hospitality) (Boersma, 2004:14).

Here, as in the case with Tom Wright, Boersma has God bring/redeem all creation under Christ as head (recapitulation) by way of drawing on all three “offices” of Christ. Firstly: that of high priest (priestly) wherein Christ’s death is to be regarded as a sacrifice that propitiates (placates/wins the favour of/forgiveness of) the Father. This penal understanding of the cross which embraces divine violence, according to Boersma does not endanger hospitality (God’s loving work of reconciliation in Jesus Christ) as does the juridicizing of the cross (as in Calvin’s double predestination understanding) which legitimizes unnecessary violence (Boersma, 2004:162).

Secondly, Boersma also employs Christ’s prophetic office wherein: Christ acts as a moral example by way of his self-sacrifice/self-giving love and obedience; uses his voice to stand up for the victims of power and violence; reveals his readiness to oppose religious and political powers (Boersma, 2004:118).

Thirdly, Boersma employs Christ’s royal office which sees Christ as victor over Satan and evil. Boersma’s approach here draws on Irenaeus who sees human sin as the bonds and chains Satan uses to bind humankind. And Christ’s victory on the cross as God putting Satan
in chains. Yet this binding of Satan is not that which plays itself out only in the struggle in the cosmic realm. This is because Boersma draws on the prophetic work of Christ which also touches base with the human life of Christ and thus also our own human concrete struggle against sin in the existence of church today. Also, God, according to Irenaeus gains the victory here not by violent means, but by “persuasion” says Boersma (Boersma, 2004:187-189).

Thus in a nutshell, based on David Heim’s assessment of Boersma’s work in the *Christian Century* article, “Rethinking the Death of Jesus,” Boersma’s linking of atonement with divine violence takes the following form. Although God’s nature and eschatological design point toward universal hospitality, which revolves around nonviolence- (the incarnation being indicative of this fact). Under the conditions of time and sin, hospitality is conditional and thus has an intrinsic dimension of exclusion. This exclusionary coercive aspect of God’s character in our world revolves around two aspects. The first is God’s refusal to be hospitable to our sin, this entailing our separation from God due to our own sinful choices. And the second aspect revolves around God’s redemptive requirement that the incarnate Son suffer the pain of God’s judgement being rendered on that evil for our sakes. This in turn reveals God as violent- a concept with which Boersma is satisfied because for him in our world of sin there can be no such thing as a nonviolent God or humanity (Heim, 2005).

4.1.4 Boersma’s Thought-Provoking Comments on Violence as Harm or Injury

Boersma, according to Mark Heim in his book “*Saved from Sacrifice,*” defends what he sees as the inevitability of violence as part of the divine redemptive activity (the struggle against sin in our imperfect world being the cause of the fact that there can be no such thing as total nonviolence either on the part of God or humankind) (Heim, 2006:252).

Boersma says further, (according to David Heim in his *Christian Century* article, Rethinking the Death of Jesus: Cross Purposes) that a vision of unrestricted hospitality and total nonviolence is appropriate only to our eschatological hope, but is misleading if applied to the historical battle against sin. Thus, Boersma claims that the dogmatic rejection of a God
in any way tarnished by contact with violence is akin to the complaint of a drowning man who insists his rescuer should not get wet (Heim, 2005). For Boersma, hospitality in our world of sin necessarily involves violence, yet retains its integrity in hospitality (Boersma, 2004:17).

Boersma critiques scholars who he says fear implicating God in violence, such implication, he says clearly being understood as a negative thing. It seems unthinkable, he says, especially in our late modern context, to link God with violence. The problem of God and violence seems to be to us analogous to the problem of God and evil. We find it just as inconceivable to worship a God who is associated with violence as to worship a God who is the architect of evil. The underlying assumption in many discussions of divine violence seems to be that violence is inherently evil and immoral: a violent God necessarily leads to a violent society since “what occurs above occurs below.” Boersma suggests however, that here we need to test our sensibilities. Especially we need to ask whether violence is under any and all circumstances, a morally negative thing (Boersma, 2004:43).

4.1.5 Boersma, Weaver and Heim on the Topic of Violence: And My Own Conclusion Here

In commenting upon and critiquing Weaver’s definition of violence as harm or injury, Boersma notices that Weaver insists that many nonphysical acts of resistance that irrefutably bring harm such as economic sanctions/strikes, do not count as violence, while other nonphysical acts that might bring harm (tax policies or cuts in education funding, for example) can be violence (Boersma, 2004:45).

Antithetically some physical coercion that may harm someone- e.g. (throwing a child to the ground out of the path of an oncoming vehicle, or forcibly preventing an attempted suicide) is not held to be violence. Boersma suggests here that Weaver and others are specifically concerned to stress that nonviolence does not negate effective and active forms of resistance to evil. And he (Boersma) goes on to question whether the above merely amounts to excluding anything on our personal list of “good force” from violence by definition. In other words, says Boersma, Weaver offers a definition of violence which appears similar to
his own- he (Weaver) sees violence as causing harm or damage. This is inclusive of physical harm or damage to bodily integrity as well as systemic types of violence (Boersma, 2004:45).

However, and remarkably so, Weaver’s comprehension of violence fails to include active nonphysical resistance, (e.g. boycotts etc.) or positive physical and nonphysical coercion, (e.g. restraining children from playing in traffic etc.). Thus according to Boersma Weaver wants to retain the possibility of active resistance without describing such activity as violent (Boersma, 2004:45).

It would be possible of course, asserts Boersma “to refer only to morally reprehensible or unacceptable harm as violence– as long as we acknowledge that there are situations in which both physical and nonphysical harm are acceptable and even morally required” (Boersma, 2004:47).

However for the sake of consistency here, Boersma feels we should refer to all such acts of damage/injury (including morally acceptable ones) as violence. Any use of force or coercion that involves some kind of hurt or injury– whether the coercion is physical or nonphysical– is a form of violence. But it is not therefore morally reprehensible (Boersma, 2004:47). “Would it not be more honest to admit that there is such a thing as redemptive violence, utilized on occasion by faithful people and even a loving God?” questions Boersma (Boersma, 2004:45).

This, however, is a stance that does not resonate well for me as a feminist. Thus I prefer the following definition of violence which receives support from Mark Heim but from neither Weaver nor Boersma. I concede that in our imperfect sinful world, some types of violence (that which Mark Heim would class as coercion which falls outside of the scapegoating profile), is not morally reprehensible but is employed to maintain valid human order. In not being morally reprehensible, as a last resort, it is inevitable and acceptable (Heim, 2006:252). I nevertheless along with both Mark Heim and Weaver can never support the notion of divine redemptive violence as being that which is utilized by a “loving” God.
4.1.6 My Problem with Weaver’s Model

My acceptance of the inevitability of the practice of violence on the part of humankind consequently makes it hard for me to accept as feasible, the working assumption of Weaver’s model which revolves around total nonviolence (Weaver, 2001:7). Living the saved life, for Weaver, arbitrarily in my opinion, includes humankind’s assuming of a totally nonviolent lifestyle. This must consist of our active and at times injurious yet “nonviolent” participation in the opposing of worldly forces of evil, as modelled within the narrative life of Jesus. A life- which to me- was indeed inclusive of violence, albeit as that which would be deemed “good force.” Jesus’ clearing of the temple is but one such example here– John 2:13-16 (Barker, 1995:1594).

Weaver believes that by way of his narrative Christus Victor motif he can clear the Christian faith and in particular the atonement of the charge of violence by presenting an unequivocally nonviolent interpretation of the cross (Weaver, 2001:7). Heim on the other hand, holds that his own approach indeed clears the atonement of the charge of divine violence. But it is unable to clear the Christian faith entirely of the possibility of violence.

Throughout history, claims Heim, Christian theology has had to make assessments as to what violence fits the pattern of sacred violence, and feeds that profile and what violence falls outside of that profile. As a consequence there are dimensions of collective coercion and even violence that can be both physical in form- e.g. (a police force that at the extreme exercises deadly force). And nonphysical in form- e.g. (the levelling of taxes upon one), that do not constitute sacrificial violence. And as long as these acts don’t become captive to sacrificial violence, Heim, to me, implies that certain acts of violence falling within the nonsacrificial category make up an inevitable aspect of human life short of the eschaton. Even though he does not see this as figuring in the final Christian hope for the redeemed life (Heim, 2006:253-4).
4.1.7 Comparing Methodologies

Both Weaver and Heim make use of methodologies, that when compared, contain both similarities and differences. Firstly though before I go into any comparisons, I believe some comments on Mark Heim’s approach are necessary at this point. I along with Boersma (who writes before the publication of Heim’s *Saved from Sacrifice*), have had a lot of reservations about certain aspects of the work of Girard upon whom Heim’s work is based. However in my opinion Heim has resolved a lot of the problems inherent in Girard’s work by way of refining Girard’s thinking and positively building on a lot of his weaknesses. For example, Boersma argues quite rightly that Girard’s theological rationale for nonviolence originally came at a theological cost. Especially in his early writings, Girard had problems maintaining a clear line of continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament- (a factor that according to Boersma) has led to some like Christof Schroeder to go as far as suggesting that Girard follows the infamous path of Marcion) (Boersma, 2004:140).

Yet Boersma acknowledges that Girard, in subsequent writings withdraws notions of a disjuncture between Old Testament and New Testament (as, in terms of my own observation, so does Heim)- pointing to models throughout the Old Testament that act as evidence of a breakdown of mimetic patterns of behaviour. Nonetheless I am aware that the Girardian/Heimian stance has come under a lot of critique from a number of sources- (not least of which is Boersma himself), and others like Boersma who in their approaches, would retain the traditional atonement images or some variation of them. Boersma especially critiques the non-traditionalist Girardian objections to the following: Deuteronomic election theology with its accompanying notions of violence and exclusion, and of sacrificial atonement; the Girardian/Heimian move to turn the nonviolence of the cross into the ultimate hermeneutical key, and to spurn anything that doesn’t appear to fit this hermeneutic as a vestige of the mythology of mimetic rivalry and of the scapegoat mechanism (Boersma, 2004:140-141).
4.1.8 Similarities between Weaver and Heim

4.1.8.1 Variants of Abelard

Boersma claims that both Weaver and Heim ultimately fit quite well within the moral influence tradition of the atonement, being variants of that tradition. Yet having said this, neither Heim nor Weaver according to Boersma, hold to a typically Abelardian or liberal comprehension. Both go off in very different directions in terms of this motif says Boersma. And this, for Boersma, can be labelled as unhelpful and even peculiar (Boersma, 2004:142).

For Girardian scholar Heim, these differences according to Boersma, take the following shape. Heim holds that the force of the Gospels lies chiefly in their revelatory ability. After Jesus resurrection, the disciples who had earlier disowned and denounced their leader, came to view the scapegoat mechanism operating in the cross, including their own involvement in this process. The insight of the disciples after the resurrection broke the unanimity of the mob (Boersma, 2004:141).

The explanation of the cross here, says Boersma, fits fairly well within the moral influence motif in that it is the cross as revelation that rescues people from the force of mimetic violence. Yet, says Boersma, even though in a Girardian sense the power of the cross lies in its revelatory character, this is not typically Abelardian but peculiarly so. For one thing it takes the divinity of Jesus seriously and stresses the close link between the human and divine natures. Thus when Jesus suffers on the cross, God Godself suffers. What makes the demise of Christ unique is precisely that he is the divine Son of God. It is his divinity that ensures that Jesus does not get ensnared in the mimetic cycle of violence. For Girardian scholars, Jesus being the Son of God, was the only one entirely outside the cultural system which is founded on the scapegoat mechanism. Hence Jesus was the only one not infected by human culture which is based on concealment of this mechanism. The divinity of Jesus means for Girard (Heim) that God Godself accepts the role of the victim of the crowd (Boersma, 2004:142).

Christ’s submission to the scapegoating mechanism of the mob entails a second Girardian distinctive (Boersma, 2004:142-143). The cross saves when human beings come to see the scapegoat mechanism operating in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and they become
aware of the violent legacy of the mimetic process. The outcome is a stress on salvation as knowledge. This new knowledge begins (subjectively) with a faith in Christ the innocent victim, (the exemplary one revealing the mimetic process and inspiring a new way of life), and it becomes the leaven that will work itself out and expand to the point that the concern for victims becomes the absolute value in all societies moulded or affected by the spread of Christianity. The Girardian notion of “knowledge” as the key to salvation is indicative of a Girardian/Heimian stress on the power of the cross to unmask and so teach awareness of the heinous character of the scapegoating mechanism (Boersma, 2004:142-143).

In my own observation whereas Weaver claims categorically that he excludes all three of the traditional atonement themes from his motif- (the Anselmian, traditional Christus Victor and Abelardian) (Weaver, 2001:10; 73-74; 226). Heim on the otherhand goes as far as implying that his (Heim’s) approach is partially made up of an Abelardian variant theme. Heim does this by admitting that his theme features a God who goes to the cross out of love for humankind. However Heim also claims to see this Abelardian theme alone, as being insufficient as an atonement model, in that it is a notion that is purely subjective. It is not a transaction but an inspiration, says Heim (Heim, 2006:5, 13).

If, says Heim, the saving effect of Jesus’ demise refers only to transformations in the inaccessible inner lives of individuals, then the entire question remains a matter of belief (Heim, 2006:5, 13). Whereas it is Heim’s contention, (as is Weaver’s) (Weaver, 2001:78-80, 154-155), that there is a distinct empirical level on which the cross illuminates and affects human history, a level which can be rationally grasped and is not a matter of subjective belief (Heim, 2006:305-306). Hence Heim’s as well as Weaver’s adding of a reworked Christus Victor theme into the mix wherein the power balance within the universe is dictated by Jesus’ victory on the cross (Heim, 2006:5, 13).

Boersma, as I’ve said, also maintains that Weaver’s motif remains largely Abelardian. This is despite Weaver’s attempts (in the form of his Narrative Christus Victor formulation) to remove the divine involvement in the cross from his approach (Boersma, 2004:143).

Moral influence theories, says Boersma, have always tended to stress the salvific value of the life of Christ. Here Christ’s teaching throughout his life and his exemplary humiliation throughout his life, are meant to restore us to the image of Christ. But these
notions have on the whole recognized that—with divine intent—Christ’s life culminated on the cross. Thus one can deduce here that a moral theory of the atonement only truly avoids the problem of divine violence if it focusses wholly on the life of Christ, so that there is no way in which God uses the death of Christ as a redemptive event (Boersma, 2004:143).

Both Weaver and Heim place focus not only on the life but on the death as well as the resurrection. And thus both in essence do not truly avoid the problem of divine violence. These being the very reasons as to why Boersma can label both Heim and Weaver’s motifs as being Abelardian variants (Boersma, 2004:43,117).

In agreeing with Boersma on this point as regards Weaver, Mennonite Ted Grimsrud in his *Direct Journal* critique of Weaver’s the Nonviolent Atonement comments that some might question as to whether Weaver actually has succeeded in expunging the idea that Jesus had to die. By attributing a type of cosmic transformation to Jesus’ resurrection is he not implicitly still arguing for the necessity of Jesus’ demise? How could there be a necessary resurrection without a necessary death? (Grimsrud, 2002).

I would apply the same line of questioning to Heim’s approach. How would he justify God’s requirement of the resurrection in order to redeem us from the evil of scapegoating, without linking this to God’s prior requirement of the death? With regard to this kind of questioning, Heim himself admits the following. That in his opinion God’s willingness for the Son to suffer to redeem humankind can indeed be said to be valid. *But* only in the widest sense that one might say God’s entire redemptive plan is the precondition for any part of it. Nevertheless and very importantly, I also agree with Heim when he further suggests that it is also valid to say in the immediate sense, that the cross represents that truth, and is not the precondition for it- an insight that I will cling to within my own argument (Heim, 2006:10).

4.1.8.2 Heim and Weaver: Understanding of Revelation and Resurrection

Boersma notes that for Heim, the cross does not have revelatory power in and of itself. Thus there is a strong connection between the crucifixion and the resurrection. It is the resurrection of Christ that enables the first Christians to break ranks with the crowd and to see the scapegoating mechanism for what it is. Until the resurrection no one could foresee the
reversal of the violent contagion that almost totally overcame the disciples themselves. Thus atonement is the result of the combination of cross and resurrection. The Girardian stress on the revelatory power of the cross, as well as its theory that we can now positively imitate Jesus rather than fall into patterns of mimetic rivalry, makes this a fitting Abelardian type classification (Boersma, 2004:143,146).

Likewise in Weaver’s motif the cross does not fully reflect the revelatory power of Christ’s saving work. The victory revolving around Jesus’ work on the cross stems not from the death itself, but rather victory is attained via the resurrection overcoming the death and through this occurrence, enabling repentant individuals to join a new objective reality already established and in which they work with Christ to the furtherance and conclusion of his eschatological Kingdom (Weaver, 2001:219).

Agreeing with my assessment of Weaver’s work, Mark Heim, in his review of Weaver’s work “The Nonviolent Atonement,” in the Anglican Theological Review, explains that Weaver calls his view “narrative” Christus Victor for two reasons. First, Weaver emphasizes that the cross cannot be isolated as a saving act but must always be interpreted as a moment in the whole narrative of Jesus’ life, including particularly the resurrection. Second, the reconciliation or atonement offered by Christ is one that is also narratively realized in the life of the believer. The whole complete gospel story reveals the pattern for God’s work and authentic human life: triumph over the powers comes for individuals and Christian communities only through the same nonviolent resistance and sometimes apparent defeat that marked Jesus’ path (Heim, 2003).

Placing emphasis not only on the cross but also on the resurrection is for me a favourable point in the theologies of Weaver and Heim as this takes the focus off a cruciform understanding of atonement which I argue against. This Anselmian cruciform understanding is essentially based upon a Reformist Barthian 20th century reductionist slant confirms Alister McGrath (McGrath, 2001:424). And as Van Niekerk says, leaves blood and guts all of the hillside. And has little meaning for the resurrection which includes the call to our own redemptive participation in bringing about kingdom.

Thus I too in agreement with the observations of Van Niekerk, and when talking of revelation, view it as the following. That which can only be through God’s glorious acts of
creation of everything—reconciliation (cross and resurrection), renewal (Pentecost’s ongoing affirmation of the salvific newness of the resurrectiv elements in our lives in this era already) and consummation and fulfilment towards the end (eschatology) (Van Niekerk, 2007).

Understanding Revelation as being that which is limited exclusively to the person of Jesus Christ results in one placing the cross at the centre of one’s faith. This downplays the resurrection. It denies the resurrection the opportunity to feature as God’s main salvific tool. We are saved, at-one-with God not on the basis of the cross alone but chiefly because of Jesus’ resurrection— the fact of his rising from the dead being the chief facilitator of our salvation, empowerment and liberation (Van Niekerk, 2007).

The type of atonement model I have bought into steers one’s focus toward emphasizing the resurrection as one of God’s main liberative tools. Here the main emphasis is not only on the cross (with the resurrection as an appendix— that is thus treated with a focus of its own, as in Anselm). Rather the focus revolves around the process or movement from cross to resurrection as centre of the message of reconciliation and salvation. I have deduced that this is of course also the focus of both Weaver (Weaver, 2001:219) and Heim (Heim, 2006: 296-297; 302) and many contextual theologians. It is one grand act of God in the meandering of the Kingdom of God through, in and with God’s grand acts of creation, reconciliation (cross and resurrection), renewal (Pentecost) and consummation (eschaton) which are four revelatory acts of God— God’s revelation consequently not being just in the person of Jesus Christ alone (Van Niekerk, 2007). Some specific examples of contextual theologians whose focus is on both cross and resurrection are black theologian James Cone in his God of the Oppressed (Cone, 1999), and liberationists Gustavo Gutierrez in his A Theology of Liberation (Gutierrez, 2000), and Jose Bonino in his Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation (Bonino, 1986).

Mark Heim, in his “Saved from Sacrifice,” notes that when images of Christ on the cross began to emerge, that it was a raised and reigning Jesus that was portrayed there. This was the cross seen from the side of the resurrection, the scapegoat vindicated (and in Weaver’s case the victim of oppression vindicated) and the death reversed. This is the exact view of the atonement that according to Van Niekerk so frightened the Reformers under Luther and Barth’s influence. In Heim’s motif, it is the resurrection of Jesus that enables the
first Christians to break ranks with the crowd and to see the scapegoating mechanism for what it is (Boersma, 2004:143,146). Until the resurrection no one could foresee the reversal of the violent contagion- atonement being for Heim the result of the combination of cross and resurrection (Heim, 2006:310)

The Anselmian doctrine on the other hand has little use for the resurrection, as the focus is placed on the death in order to settle a legal debt. Whereas for Heim and Weaver, the resurrection is hugely significant because it shows the true nature of power in the universe. And it constitutes an invitation to salvation, an invitation to repentant individuals to submit to the rule of God. To submit to new life, a life objectively transformed by the rule of God and no longer in bondage to the powers of evil that killed Jesus. It is this revelation of the true balance of power whether acknowledged or not by sinful humanity that distinguishes the Christus Victor based approaches of Heim and Weaver from Abelard (Weaver, 2001:44-45).

4.1.8.3 Common Christus Victor Theme

I agree with Boersma in his observation that it is the practice of Girardian theologians to combine their version of the moral influence theory with aspects of the Christus Victor theme. Here Heim appeals to patristic comprehensions of Christ’s victory over Satan by means of trickery. And he (as does Girard) laments the loss of these traditional Christus Victor notions, seeing their loss as a loss in the realm of anthropology (Boersma, 2004:146).

In the Girardian Christus Victor view, I along with Boersma note that in place of Christ engaging in immoral trickery, he (Christ), attains his triumph on the cross precisely via his “renunciation of violence.” Because Christ submits to violence, this violence ends up reconciling what it desires to hide. In this context, the trick that deceives Satan includes no violence or dishonesty on God’s part. It is not really a trick; it is rather the inability of the devil to comprehend the divine love. It is the devil himself who transforms his own mechanism into a trap and he topples headlong into it. The devil’s trickery had always managed to conceal the violence of the scapegoat mechanism behind the smokescreen of the alleged guilt of the victim. This however fails when applied to Jesus. In place of concealing mimetic violence, the cross shows it off and exposes it (Boersma, 2004:146).
Likewise in Weaver’s narrative Christus Victor motif, the “ruse” that defeats the devil is not about Christ engaging in immoral trickery with the devil in personified form as in classic Christus Victor. But rather in being in a demythologized and historicized form, it is about renunciation of violence/confrontation occurring between the forces of the social structure created by Jesus on the one hand and the forces of the world on the other. In this situation the powers of evil that reside herein also bring themselves down via their inability to comprehend the divine love (Weaver, 2001:74, 86).

Yet whereas Heim agrees with Weaver in terms of the correctness of viewing Jesus’ death as a battle with the powers of sin and bondage, Heim claims the following. It is erroneous to suppose such a perspective should downplay the significance of the category of sacrifice, or eliminate it altogether- exactly that which Weaver does. Rather in Heim’s view the importance of the Christus Victor imagery rests chiefly in comprehending what aspect of sin is most particularly at issue at the cross, and how it is being overcome (Heim, 2006:310).

4.1.8.4 Embracing a Revised Demonology

The strong leaning towards divine nonviolence of the Girardian/Heimian version of the Christus Victor theme is not its only distinguishing feature, notes Boersma. It also employs a revised demonology that removes the traditional personal characteristics of the devil (Boersma, 2004:147). Satan, for Heim becomes the very process of violent contagion. This process of mimetic contagion ultimately leads to the transference of misery and disorder onto the scapegoat. The crowd’s utilization of the scapegoat mechanism is the devil’s self-expulsion. In other words, here, Satan drives out Satan by first of all fomenting mimetic rivalry and then by expelling the disorder he has created by means of the scapegoating mechanism. Heim sees the victory of the cross as a disarming and exposing of these violent diabolical powers that guarantee an order built on mimetic contagion. In other words the triumph in the case of the cross is the unveiling of the violent origin of culture. The powers are not put on display because they are defeated, but they are defeated because they are put on display (Heim, 2006:147-152).

For the Girardians, says Boersma, the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism is the means of victory. They have combined their own specific version of the moral-influence and Christus Victor theories. While their comprehending of the actual functioning of the cross is
that of revelation and imitation (moral influence) the revelatory power of the cross serves, and turns out to be, Christ’s victory over Satan (Boersma, 2004:147).

Heim’s approach has a strong leaning towards divine nonviolence. This occurs by way of his utilization of a variant Christus Victor dimension wherein evil brings upon itself its own demise (by way of Christ’s refusal to defeat evil with violence). This is a most distinguishing feature in Heim’s motif (Boersma, 2004:147).

Likewise, this is also true in the case of Weaver who also employs a revised demonology that removes the traditional personal characteristics of the devil. Satan, for Weaver becomes the accumulation of earthly structures that are not ruled by God’s reign. In being real, this Satan is however not a being as such who may or may not have rights in the divine order of things. The principalities and powers and demons of the Bible are the spiritual dimension of material structures. The moral identity and character of these powers hinges upon whether or not they assert their existence over against or under the lordship of Christ. Weaver sees the triumph of the cross as the defeat of these evil forces. The revelatory power of the cross thus revolves around Christ’s nonviolent victory over these powers and his invitation to humankind to tackle evil nonviolently (Weaver, 2001:210).

4.1.8.5 Compatibility with Liberation Theology

Both Weaver (Weaver, 2001:5) and Heim claim their respective theologies have promise for fruitful interaction with liberation theologies (Heim, 2006:256-257). The main undergirding reason for them being able to make this claim, I propose, is that (in the thinking of both Boersma and myself), both their respective motifs are based upon the twin themes of Christus Victor and Abelard (Boersma, 2004:146) - the very themes upon which most liberation theologies are based. James Cone’s black theology for example is based upon a politicized Christus Victor theme (Cone, 1999:212,213), whilst most feminists/womanists are in essence Abelardian based as for example is evident in the work of feminist Rita Nakashima Brock (Brock, 1998:52)

Heim and Weaver, and most liberationists such as James Cone, all view Anselm’s motif as being a useless lever against oppression. This is because, according to Cone, the Anselmian model dehistoricizes the work of Christ. In other words reconciliation in Anselm’s
thinking is defined on timeless “rational” grounds and is thus separated from God’s liberating deeds in history. In contrast liberationists emphasize that Jesus entered history making clear that the conditions of the oppressed contradict the divine intentions for humanity. In this context, via his cross and resurrection Jesus defeats slavery and he brings about reconciliation and delivery from bondage not only on a spiritual level but in a manner grounded in history (Cone, 1999:211-212).

According to Cone Abelard’s approach is also open to critique as a useless lever against oppression. This is because Abelard also dehistoricizes the work of Christ- or in other words as Cone specifically states, “Abelard de-emphasizes the objective reality of divine revelation.” This is because for Abelard, Jesus died as the demonstration of God’s love. And thus the change that results from the loving death is not objective, but is only in the subjective consciousness of sinners. Thus in Cone’s thinking, the de-historicized Abelardian idea of how Christ saves us on the cross “fails to grasp the radical quality of evil and oppression.” (Cone, 1999:211-212).

However as Weaver notes (Weaver, 2001:147), an Abelardian motif or even an Abelardian variant motif, is not without appeal to liberationists when it comes to reaching for a theology in defence of a social and political praxis. An example of an Abelardian variant liberation theology formulated specifically in defence of a social and political praxis is that of feminist Julie Hopkins. In her Towards a Feminist Christology Hopkins places huge emphasis on God’s identification with the oppressed (Hopkins, 1995:56). I (along with Weaver) propose this is precisely because liberationists, in a typically Abelardian move, find in the suffering of the crucified peoples, the emotive power to bring about conversion (Weaver, 2001:147).

Weaver is in agreement with black, feminist and womanist theologians who critique the theological tradition of much of Christendom for being responsible for that which has accommodated patriarchy, military violence, slavery and racism (Weaver, 2001:156). He particularly agrees with the description of penal substitution as being divine child abuse (Weaver, 2001:156). Examples of some of the feminists with whom Weaver is in agreement are: Carter Heyward in her Saving Jesus from those who are Right (Heyward, 2001: 149-150) and Rita Nakashima Brock in her Journeys by Heart (Brock, 1998: xii). Examples of some of the womanists with whom Weaver is in agreement are: Delores Williams in her Sisters in the

Weaver’s affinity with these theologies stems essentially from the working assumption of his motif. This holds that the rejection of violence whether direct violence or the violence of racism/sexisim should be visible in expressions of Christology and atonement (Weaver, 2001:7) He achieves this by excluding from his motif any divine purpose in the cross, thereby breaking the traditional Christus Victor theme and focussing instead on the nonviolent life of Jesus of Nazareth. And by way of this theme which depicts Christ’s victory over the forces of evil, also historicising Christ’s saving work so as to show Christ’s victory over the forces of evil has real objective meaning in the realm of the world (Weaver, 2001:45).

As a consequence both Weaver and Cone agree with the feminist/womanist attempt to develop an understanding of atonement that does not harbour divine violence (Cone, 1999: xvi) (Weaver, 2001:227). Yet having said this Weaver rates his motif, together with that of Cone as being more successful in this common quest to rid atonement of divine violence. This according to Weaver is due to the feminist/womanists basing their attempts largely on Abelard and thus failing to show an objective change in the forces of power in the realm of this world. Thus these attempts are to quote Weaver, “merely remakes of Abelard” (Weaver, 2001:147).

One noteworthy objection that Weaver has against Cone is that Cone, seemingly on one hand makes the nonviolent life and teachings of Jesus appear as a central component of his (Cone’s) approach. And yet on the other hand Cone seems to condone violence as a legitimate means of confronting one’s oppressors. The nature however of the violence that Cone advocates seems to me to be that which can be classed as “good force.” Thus it is my view that Cone’s seemingly conflicted view regarding violence is merely reflecting the tension within Boersma’s argument that life- Christian or not- in our imperfect world, cannot but include the use of violence. Because the use of “good force” or violence that is not morally reprehensible is often in this imperfect world, the best choice of the choices open to a person (Boersma, 2004: 43-46).
Heim also acknowledges that the common task that he and liberationists (widely defined) share is that which does the following. It revolves around working toward the abolition of the cross as comprehended as the height of human cruelty and the depth of God’s suffering with humankind. In other words Heim is of the view that he and liberationists have a common quest to challenge the church’s existing theology, as they see it as being a barrier in the mission to confront the scandal of a crucified world. The reverence for the cross in the church, seems for Heim and liberationists and Weaver alike, often to be unrelated or even opposed to the quest to terminate the suffering of the oppressed (Heim, 2006:255).

Heim goes on to note that the distinctive theological approaches of black, feminist, womanist and Latino theologies each contain more than the issue of sacrifice. And yet his theology of the cross is nevertheless able to provide a plain particular link that enjoins them all. And an added biblical root that undergirds each one. This, says Heim, is of course the dynamic of scapegoating sacrifice that in Heim’s view figures so forcefully in all the contexts liberation theology addresses (Heim, 2006:255).

There are other types of oppression than scapegoating notes Heim, but few fail to generate their own version of it. An analysis of the sacrificial process in the light of the cross is something all these differing approaches can share even whilst retaining their own unique viewpoints (Heim, 2006:255).

The anthropology of the cross sets God’s concrete solidarity with victims, and highly critiques the collective mechanisms of violence turned against them. In being the flexible instrument that it is, it extends to root dynamics of division, contagion, violence and unity, its application being that which extends beyond one social setting or one specific cluster of issues (Heim, 2006:254-5).

Weaver identified that his own theology could enhance and help to solve lingering problems within these theologies without replacing the unique features and perspectives of each individual contextual theology. And that it could do this in fact by offering them a central rootedness to his version of the anthropology of the cross- the nonviolent life and teachings of Jesus central to their doctrines (Weaver, 2001:5-7).
Weaver and Heim are in agreement that Anselm’s thinking radically bifurcates (divides into two branches) the God of justice and the God of forgiveness as Anselm’s motif requires a plan that sets Christ and God against each other (Weaver, 2001:78). In other words Anselm’s theology requires God and Jesus to take up opposing positions in the work of redemption. One member of the Godhead or Trinity inflicts God’s wrath. The other member bears it. For redemption to occur it is central to Anselm’s doctrine that this must be quite a literal opposition when divine mercy and divine justice settle their differences by violence (Heim, 2006:309).

Weaver and Heim’s theology, however, in that both pivot on Christus Victor imagery, do not have motifs that require a plan that sets Christ and God against each other. Both Weaver and Heim agree that the elevation of the opposition between God’s mercy and God’s justice is the sign of a mistaken theology. This is because by way of the Christus Victor imagery we come to see the truth that God and Jesus together submit themselves to human violence. Both suffer its results. Both reveal and overcome it. Specifically in Heim’s motif, both intercept the blow of the evil of scapegoating as represented in human beings (Heim, 2006:309). In Weaver’s case specifically both intercept the blow of the evil of oppressive systems of direct and systemic violence (Weaver, 2001:78).

As Weaver points out, when one bases one’s motif on reconstructed Christus Victor imagery, God’s role does not change from mercy to judgement. Rather what changes is where we stand in the drama of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. Do we stand on the side of evil and sin? Or do we stand on the side of the reign of God? If we refuse Christ’s invitation and stand on the side of sin, we heap judgement on ourselves. Yet God remains merciful, holding open the opportunity for a transformed life (Weaver, 2001:78).

The wrath of God and the love of God represent the two stances from which we view the salvation drama, the two perspectives from which we view the act of God in Christ. An act of judgement as long as we continue in slavery to the evil powers that imprison us, and as an act of love that liberates us from the powers of evil. These are not consecutive stages in
God’s attitude toward humanity, but differing stages in humankind’s perception of God (Weaver, 2001:78).

4.1.8.7 Similar Notions of the Nature of Sacrifice, Sin and Guilt

Evangelical James Merrick in his article, “Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross,” in The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, states the following. The chief studies of Israelite sacrifice of which he is aware recognize that sacrifice was the means of dealing with human immorality and ritual impurity that were blockages to communion with God; sacrifice dealt with human falleness.

However, continues Merrick, we see with Heim, that sacrifice is not the solution but rather humankind’s most profound problem. Thus from the point of view of sin, according to Merrick, when Heim applies his theory to Jesus’ demise there is no room for the way in which the sacrificial aspect of the cross which traditionally speaking is the basis for divine-human relationship objectively alters humankind’s legal status or procure covenant fellowship. Heim, according to Merrick fails to acknowledge materially that broken communion with God is part of the human dilemma. In other words, Heim’s view of salvation does not revolve around Jesus having to die for our sins to settle any moral and legal debt humankind has with God (Merrick, 2007)

Heim, according to Merrick jettisons these traditional ideas, because for him sin is no longer a moral and ontological blemish that calls for sacrifice, but the practice of sacrifice itself. Thus here, justification, according to Merrick, is entirely lost because Christ’s death is not a sacrifice that creates the covenantal status of righteousness for humankind. In addition to this, the object of faith has been changed from Christ’s atoning death (his saving us from the moral and legal aspects of sin) to God’s vindication of scapegoats (Merrick, 2007)

Heim, in his “Saved from Sacrifice,” confirms that the nature of his work with regard to the particular plot of Jesus’ demise is indeed the confrontation with scapegoating sacrifice which he also sees as being key to comprehending Jesus’ demise as a transformative act objectively changing our situation. And furthermore, in terms of his changed notion, justification as Heim sees it, is not so much lost as altered. No longer is it about a traditional covenantal state of righteousness for humankind. But rather it’s about being brought into
right relationship with God via the fact that Christ’s death and resurrection have the ability to open our eyes to the practice of scapegoating. And thus convert us from this practice so as to enable us to dwell in a gracious realm that opposes it (Heim, 2006:310).

Anselm, on the other hand is lead to put enormous primary focus on the forensic (legal) dimensions in the passion narratives. And to interpret all other data through this lens because of his conviction (as it is Merrick’s) that a legal exchange is the core of the objective meaning of the cross. Whereas Heim’s differing focus on sacrifice leads us to interpret the same traditional features, (two of which are guilt and punishment), differently (Heim, 2006:311).

Rather than making the breadth and depth of human sinfulness his departure point for comprehending the cross, Anselm, according to Heim, should have made the concrete nature of the sin in Jesus’ death the departure point. This needed to be so in order to articulate its link to our broader human condition. The treatment of guilt and sin by Anselm as a single undifferentiated quantitative value was one of Anselm’s errors, says Heim. After all, Jesus confronted the realities of individual sinfulness in concrete shapes already in his pre-passion life. And what is more the event by which Christ overcame sacrifice, stands not only in a representative way as a sign and guarantor of God’s general merciful character and disposition towards us in terms of our individual sin. But it also shows in an objective sense that his dying was for our individual sin insofar as this sin leads to, and is connected with, the sin of scapegoating (Heim, 2006:321-322).

Heim wishes to stress that in the crucifixion this general truth that Jesus forgives our sins has a very specific face. It revolves first and foremost, not around the question of God’s justification in forgiving the guilty. But around the question of God being justified in forgiving the guilt of the scapegoating victimizers via God’s siding with and vindicating the victim. And also forgiving the guilt of the victimizers (all of us) via his mercy which seeks not to retaliate in terms of the normal pattern of scapegoating violence. But to bring to the descriptive norm of scapegoating, a new kind of community founded on recognition of the victim and reconciliation without blood. When we connect the story of Jesus’ demise with a practice in which we participate, the reflexive response is a sense of our own guilt. This sense of guilt in us being a sign that one has been savingly affected by it (Heim, 2006:314).
As with Heim, Weaver also has a different notion of sacrifice and sin to that of the traditional satisfaction motif. Like Heim, Weaver acknowledges that Anselm went horrendously wrong when he took human guilt as the reason for the cross. Both Weaver and Heim view the satisfaction motif as having a forensic view of the passion- (the divine economy’s need for a death penalty to balance the sin of humanity as the basis for restoring justice). In the narrative Christus Victor motif Jesus’ mission is not about dying but about testifying to God’s reign. And Jesus dies not because of divinely instigated violence but at the hands of the powers opposed to God’s reign. Rather than cooperate with divinely sanctioned violence Jesus counters the violence of the powers. As he submits to the evil of the violent powers rather than meet it on its own terms he makes visible the fact that God’s reign does not depend on violence. The God revealed by Jesus, and the reign of God revealed by Jesus do not respond to violence with violence (Weaver, 2001:74)

Thus in terms of Weaver’s thinking, Jesus’ death becomes a “sacrifice” for us (if we must use that word, he says) in the sense that Jesus died for us while we were still identified with and imprisoned by the powers of death. However this vicarious sacrifice is neither a payment to God, nor a payment to a plan laid out by God nor a quest to punish Jesus in our place for our falleness (as is Merrick’s preferred notion of atonement). Rather, this “sacrifice” of Jesus’ life exposed the full character of the forces that imprison sinful humanity and that oppose God’s rule. Via the resurrection, God in Christ, has triumphed over these forces- and it is only as we acknowledge our complicity with and imprisonment to these forces in their opposition to God’s reign (that is, confess our sin) - that we can begin to envision salvation from them (Weaver, 2001:75-76)

Harmatiologically speaking, Weaver, like Heim, jettisons traditional notions claiming God saves us from sin by punishing Jesus for our falleness. Jesus of Nazareth was already forgiving individual sins as part of his mission to make present and visible the reign of God says Weaver. As far as sin and Jesus’ saving work on the cross is concerned, sin is no longer defined as a moral and ontological blemish that cries out for sacrifice (for quid pro quo justice). But rather it involves our complicity with the evil forces that killed Jesus. And thus forgiveness and redemption does not hinge around God’s requirement of a debt payment but around our repentance and our confessing of our sin. Our salvation thus depends in this scenario upon God’s grace in being willing to forgive us while we are still sinners. And upon
how we respond to the grace of God in living the transformed nonviolent life of narrative Christus Victor (Weaver, 2001:76)

4.1.9 Differences between Weaver and Heim

In this important section I highlight a number of differences between Weaver and Heim that decisively influence me in my choosing of one scholar over the other. Some key points under discussion are the following:

- Weaver’s unconventional thinking regarding church history and tradition as opposed to Heim’s more conventional thinking in this regard.
- Weaver’s discarding of sacrificial images as opposed to Heim’s retaining of them.
- Heim’s more feasible explanation of Anselm’s mistake.

4.1.9.1 Understanding History of Christian Thought Differently

I believe there is a lot of truth to Boersma’s claim that Weaver’s search for a nonviolent atonement underpins his entire undertaking and in the process, creates an imbalance in his approach to the church’s tradition (Boersma, 2004:195-196). This is a factor within Weaver’s approach that for me as well as Boersma and Heim, makes it all the less credible. Weaver himself admits that his thinking in this regard is “out of the box” (Weaver, 2001: xi).

In his understanding of church history and the doctrine of Christology, Weaver (in what has become known as the Fall Model) gives the impression that the early Church interpreted the cross as Christ’s victory over the principalities and powers and that this theme vanished into the background with the establishment of the Constantinian Christendom arrangement in the 4th century (Weaver, 2001:82). Here, the understanding of a biblical narrative structure of salvation was replaced by the harsh and violent Anselmian notion of the cross as satisfaction atonement. It was due to the Constantinianizing of the church, states Weaver that the early Church Christus Victor motif fell out of favour. Once the Church lost its sense of confrontation with the world, the Christus Victor imagery of confrontation no longer made sense (Weaver, 2001:86).
Anselm’s model, according to Weaver, gradually replaced the traditional Christus Victor model until a time came when discussing atonement in terms that assumed confrontation between Church and social order no longer made sense. Narrative Christus Victor left the radar screen when the Church came to support the world’s social order, to accept the intervention of political authorities in churchly affairs, and to look to political authorities for support and protection (Weaver, 2001:86-88).

This change in atonement theology, as the consequence of the Constantinianizing of the Church is especially embodied in the Nicean Chalcedonian Christological councils of 325 and 451 respectively, says Weaver. He holds that these theological Christological formulas entailed the jettisoning of ethics in favour of ontology (Weaver, 2001:85). It was conducive to a focus on Jesus’ demise at the cost of a concern for what he did and taught throughout his life on earth. The consequence was an atonement theology that was: defined with the assistance of a legal paradigm rather than focussing on ethical transformation; individualized (concerned only with individuals and no longer with systemic and structural problems); and de-historicized (snubbing) the biblical narrative structure of salvation (Weaver, 2001:86-88).

The biblical narrative structure of salvation is of course that which Weaver has made into a theology that assumes the nonviolence of the narrative of Jesus. Weaver deduces that this “fall model” approach to atonement mirrors a church that has reached accommodation of violence within the social order (a church wherein the Christian life of ordinary lay people resembles the minimal expectations of polite society). The Anselmian theory built on the Constantinian arrangement is the culprit behind the hampering of God’s saving and it has facilitated violence to go unchecked, asserts Weaver (Weaver, 2001:9, 86-88).

In offering a differing description of the history of the Church, Heim suggests that Weaver’s reconstruction contains several historical and theological errors. For one thing, Weaver’s contrast of an early nonviolent Christianity without a cross and a later imperialist Christianity with a cross is far too simple (Weaver, 2001:178). If, questions Heim, the Constantinian arrangement of the 4th century was indeed responsible for the demise of the Christus Victor theme, why did it take the lapse of 700 years before a fully developed Anselmian model would appear as a viable alternative? (Heim, 2006:178-179).
Heim asserts that the early Christians did indeed understand the cross as a sacrifice. But precisely because the vision is carried in tandem with the sacrificial tradition that it means to bring to light and reverse, it is itself subject to confusion/misappropriation. Thus Heim cannot suggest (as Weaver does) that the early Christians grasped and implemented the meaning of the cross in all its dimensions. There was no originating point of perfection, but an uneven and ongoing process of realization (in terms of both knowledge and practice) (Heim, 2006:177-8).

Furthermore, insofar as Constantine had a theology of the cross it was according to both Heim and Boersma (Boersma, 2004:157), one that was focussed on victory over opposing powers- the Christus Victor motif- precisely the theme that contemporary opponents of atonement theology and the “fall” of the Church such as Weaver, want to reclaim as the liberating meaning of the cross (Heim, 2006:179).

Boersma, in his Violence, Hospitality and the Cross, draws our attention to D.H. Williams and his book, “Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism” (Boersma, 2004:157). In his book Williams describes the fall model as being constructed on a faulty comprehension of the history of the Church. And as that which has caused lasting historical damage, the renunciation of Constantinianism meaning an abdication- tacitly or explicitly- from the theological and spiritual history of the post-apostolic church (Williams, 1999:111). Boersma confirms the fall model overlooks the historical continuity between the patristic and the period after Constantine in which Christian leaders and churches faithfully preserved doctrinal orthodoxy, apart from and sometimes in opposition to prevailing imperial power (Boersma, 2004:157).

Boersma goes as far as to say that Constantine (as represented in the writings of Eusebius) did not see a discrepancy between the Christus Victor theme of the atonement and an imperial embrace of the Christian faith (Boersma, 2004:158).

Thus Weaver’s claim that the Christus Victor theme depended upon a situation of confrontation between Church and state appears, when weighed up against the more conventional understandings of dogma and of church history of those such as Heim (Heim, 2006:178-179) and Boersma (Boersma, 2004:158), to simply not be borne out by the facts. As Boersma notes Constantine drew on the Christus Victor tradition to validate/ratify his
imperial power. The Christus Victor theme in this scenario thus not lending itself to easy assimilation in the service of a stance of nonviolent opposition to the existing structures of society (Boersma, 2004:158).

Thus for both Heim and myself, Constantine’s use of a cross as a motif of military victory and power portrays rather that the danger of using the cross as a symbol of violence is by no means a danger limited to the Anselmian branch of atonement theology (Heim, 2006:179). Rather the danger in terms of the cross being used and understood as a symbol of violence revolves around the struggle that has to do with how the meaning of Jesus’ demise is translated through time and practice. Heim notes that under the same broad outline of the gospel story, and even under a similar stress on the cross, quite divergent implications can be drawn (Heim, 2006:179).

Heim would agree with Boersma’s suggestion that a more balanced approach to the history of doctrine recognizes firstly that the Christus Victor theme continued well beyond the Middle Ages. And secondly that notions of sacrifice, satisfaction and substitution did not begin with Anselm but followed a long tradition throughout the history of the Church (Boersma, 2004:158-159). The Church would often fall back into a sacrificial understanding of the cross says Heim. And in addition says Heim, the tension between the anti-scapegoating work of the cross and the sacrificial script that it is working to overcome is an ever present issue and potential danger around the cross, says Heim (Heim, 2006:178-179).

Boersma confirms that it would indeed be inappropriate to seek out a careful elaboration of one of the 3 main branches of atonement theology in the early church as Weaver has done. However, says Boersma, Anselm was indeed a type of milestone in that the 11th century demarcated the point at which the various themes became the subject of more explicit and intense conversation and conflict. As the notions became more detailed and distinct, the tensions and incompatibilities between them also grew (Boersma, 2004:159).

A point of agreement between Weaver and Heim, in terms of church history and atonement theology, is the notion that Anselm came to formulate his 11th century theory against a backdrop of feudalism which they both claim influenced his thinking (Weaver, 2001:88,212) (Heim, 2006:180). This was a time in history, says Heim, in which (contrary to the New Testament account of the risen Christ wherein Christ doesn’t command any revenge
against his persecutors), that absent note was projected back into the story. This was because Anselm’s era was heavily immersed in the concept of feudalism which was built around the fidelity of loyal soldiers who would defend their Lord’s honour (Heim, 2006:180).

4.1.9.2 Retention and Jettisoning of Sacrificial Images

Heim notes that those who seek to purify Christianity of sacrificial and atonement theologies fill the resulting void with some combination of the other models such as within Weaver’s own argument to replace those sacrificial dimensions with narrative Christus Victor. And yet as Heim observes, there is nothing about Christus Victor views (or for that matter Abelardian or incarnational ones) that essentially rules out combination with sacrificial dimensions. For that purpose they must assume a distinct new absolutism, purged of any subsidiary sacrificial dimensions that may have attended them (Heim, 2006:6-7).

Two challenges thus present themselves to those such as Weaver whose goal it is to extinguish substitutionary beliefs: to convince people that a previously prominent view should now be prohibited, and to reinterpret (or justify the dismissal of) those dimensions of scripture and tradition that point toward sacrifice and atonement. The weakness here, asserts Heim concerns the fact that excluding the substitutionary motif from Christian belief can indeed silence the criticisms that atonement theology draws to itself- yet the result positions the alternative views as “atonement lite,” purged of sacrificial images.” The snag is that the language of sacrifice remains indelibly intertwined in liturgy, sacrament and hymnody even while theology (such as Weaver’s) is mute about it. And this contrast serves to fortify the notion that substitutionary views are more biblical and more inclusively Christian since they do not disregard other approaches and include positive readings of the central sacrificial texts and image of the tradition that are jettisoned by Weaver (Heim, 2006:6).

Thus whereas Heim sympathizes with Weaver who finds sacrificial atonement inappropriately violent and primitive, he unlike Weaver, is unwilling to jettison sacrifice as he sees it as being integral to the biblical witness, and an essential aspect of the human plight. Critiquing Weaver in his attempt to sanitize Christianity of all sacrificial images, Heim claims what is required is an interpretive roadway through the problematic texts and a theological vision that does not exclude all atonement themes but provides the most convincing account of their true significance. Thus Heim believes sacrificial themes have
been misunderstood, and that once their true significance is unmasked, the complaints will be extinguished (Heim, 2006:6-7). And from within the Girardian slant from which he hails, it is clear that this means comprehending sacrifice not as a divine event wherein human sins are cleansed through an act of atonement, but as a human mechanism in which humankind appeases its own aggression by focussing it on a scapegoat (Heim, 2006:10,11,12).

4.1.10 Agreements and Differences Regarding Anselm’s Mistake

James Merrick in his review article, “Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross,” in The Evangelical Society Journal notes, and I concur with him, that both Weaver and Heim see Anselm’s mistake as revolving around the fact that Anselm took human guilt as the reason for the cross. In Heim’s view, according to Merrick, what killed Jesus was not God’s justice but humankind’s redemptive violence- i.e. our evil practice of sacrificial scapegoating. In Weaver’s view, according to Merrick, what killed Jesus was not God’s justice but the powers of evil (the fallen but redeemable earthly structures that are not ruled by God) (Merrick, 2007).

In Heim’s view to be reconciled to God is not to have our guilt atoned for, but to recognize victims when we see them, to convert from the crowd that gathers around them, and to be reconciled with each other without them (Heim, 2006:329). In Weaver’s view to be reconciled to God, is not to have our guilt atoned for, but leaving the rule of evil (acknowledging our bondage to those powers that killed Jesus and enslaved us) and joining the reign of God in resisting evil and making the rule of God visible (Weaver, 2001:75).

Out of Heim and Weaver it is Heim who I believe gives the most feasible explanation for Anselm’s mistake (Heim, 2006:301-302). I choose Heim over Weaver because Weaver’s explanation of Anselm’s error is based on an inaccurate reading of church history and tradition- which I have discussed in more detail above in section 4.1.9.1 (Weaver, 2001:9, 86-88).

For Heim, the main reason Anselm’s theology becomes problematical, is not as Weaver would suggest, because the early Church lost its sense of confrontation with the social order (Weaver, 2001:86). But because within the generic idea of salvation in which
Christ dies for us and takes our place, it is hard to see how Jesus’ demise is saving in any concrete way (Heim, 2006:296). Precisely because of this it invites the theorizing of a hidden transaction to imbue it with meaning (Heim, 2006:297) Thus Anselm, in failing to discern the existence of a concrete meaning to the cross- (a dimension which Heim stresses is already there in the form of the rescue and vindication of a victim of scapegoating violence and by extrapolation the rescue of all of us), does the following.

He goes ahead, within his feudalistic influenced context, and builds the terms of just such a hidden transaction which assumes: a cosmic bargain taking place in a cosmic realm distinct from the historical reality of the crucifixion; a blending together of this legal framework with a vision of divine justice that dictates God’s purpose in suffering death-Christ stepping in to intercept a blow intentioned for all of us and occasioned by our sin; this blow which Christ steps in to intercept and which is occasioned by our sin, coming directly from God (Heim, 2006:296-302).

Thus in Anselm’s eyes, according to Heim what we need to be rescued from is the deserved wrath and punishment of God, Anselm seeking to define the scope of grace via a legal quantification of our moral debt and Christ’s merit (Heim, 2006:299). Of the two elements stereoscopically overlaid in the passion narratives (the naked illustration of scapegoating with the thinking of its practitioners; the counter script of criticism, jettisoning and reversal of that practice), Anselm selects the wrong one, taking over the rejected sacrificial rationale which the passion narratives subvert and the resurrection denies (Heim, 2006:300-301). The challenge for the theology of the cross, says Heim is to retain the first-level description of the sacrificial exchange that is being condemned and overcome in Christ’s death from bleeding literally back into the formulation of what God is doing via that death and what Christians celebrate in that faith (Heim, 2006:309). Anselm’s requirement that God and Jesus take up a relationship in opposition to each other- (a situation wherein divine mercy and divine justice settle their differences by violence), confirms Anselm’s error, asserts Heim (Heim, 2006:309).

4.1.11 Conclusion

Although I commend Weaver’s attempts to render God free of divine violence, along the way
in my discussion I have found his approach problematical in a number of areas which I now go on to list. Firstly, we have his problematic definition of violence- with nonviolence being the very unfeasible working assumption around which his entire theology stands or falls (Weaver, 2001:7-10); his bypassing of large tracts of scripture involving sacrifice, noticed by both Heim (Heim, 2006:6-7) and myself, constitutes a huge weakness, whereas Heim chooses rather to face these passages and give them meaning in the context of his argument (Heim, 2006:6-7); Weaver also radically excludes any divine purpose for the cross in the sense that Christ’s death as far as his motif is concerned could occur in any manner. It need not specifically be on a cross, whereas the very meaning of Heim’s approach hinges on the fact that the death occur specifically on a (sacrificial) cross (Heim, 2006:9-10).

Both Weaver and Heim present with motifs that have a lot of appeal for me as a feminist from the point of view that they avoid a very important weakness- albeit to Boersma- a perceived weakness of each of the traditional atonement theologies- that of divine violence (Weaver, 2001:7), (Heim, 2006:10). Further in this regard, Boersma suggests that theologians in fear of implicating God in violence need to seriously ask whether violence is really a negative thing (Boersma, 2004:43). Yet Boersma also admits that Heim’s understanding of the cross is a motif with a lot of appeal precisely in that it “has neither divine trickery nor divine violence present and thus is one that is radically devoid of violence” (Boersma, 2004:134). Weaver also seeks to attain to this goal of total nonviolence. But as I’ve indicated above at the beginning of this chapter (section 4.1.11), Weaver does so in a manner that picks up too many other problems along the way.

Another appealing point for me in terms of Heim’s handling of the problematical issue of violence revolves around him limiting the scope of his approach which forces him to frame the question of violence in a more modest light (Heim, 2006:252-253). Heim does not see the passion narratives themselves as being able to resolve the question. Thus his approach is able only to reject violence falling within the scapegoating profile and that which is tributary to it. Violence or coercion which falls outside of that profile, is not morally reprehensible, and which contributes to human order- he is unable to rule out, even though he does not see this as featuring within the fully redeemed life of God (Heim, 2006:253-254). For me this understanding of the problem of violence is more reasonable than that of Weaver whose whole theology stands or falls on total nonviolence (Weaver, 2001:7-10).
Unlike Anselm, Heim avoids drawing on the priestly aspect of Christ’s work and draws rather on Christ’s royal work which is associated with the Christus Victor image (Heim, 2006:8). And especially in this regard, I find the particular manner in which Heim utilizes this image very appealing because his view of Christ’s royal work does not show God in an immoral light as tricking or bargaining with the devil (Heim, 2006:304-305). But shows God’s triumph over evil on the cross by way of evil bringing itself down. In the words of Heim, “God turns the indiscriminate hunger for victims in the sacrificial process against itself, so that it seizes the unique one who can break its power” (Heim, 2006:304-305).

Heim also draws on Christ’s prophetic work in a non-traditional sense which also appeals to me. This image of Christ’s work, associated with Abelard, revolves around Jesus’ example of his selfless death to inspire us to live different social lives (Heim, 2006:9). Specifically Heim creates a variant of this image by arguing that the only violence associated with the cross is human violence and that God uses the cross to bring about a nonviolent society. Here, by exposing human violence on the cross, God works towards justice and equality (Heim, 2006: xii). For the Girardian’s, says Boersma, the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism is the means of victory. They have combined their own specific version of the moral-influence and Christus Victor theories. While their comprehending of the actual functioning of the cross is that of revelation and imitation (moral influence) the revelatory power of the cross serves, and turns out to be, Christ’s victory over Satan (Boersma, 2004:147).

Finally, Heim for me, also gives from a historical point of view, a far more feasible account of the history of doctrine (of ecclesiology, Christology and atonement) (Heim, 2006:192-215). This is of course opposed to Weaver with his non-conformist views (Weaver, 2001:82). In conjunction with his historical perspective, Heim also specifically gives a far more feasible account of how Anselm who although sincere in his atonement attempts to honour scripture, and thus in having so many nonsacrificial aspects to his work, still manages to go enormously off-course (Heim, 2006:297-302).
4.2 Criticism of Weaver and Heim by some of Anselm’s Defenders

In this section I discuss various defenders of Anselm critiquing the approaches of both Weaver and Heim, and their conclusion that Weaver and Heim should be rejected. Yet in examining these critiques and in weighing them up, I go on to state that I find the majority of them to be less than compelling.

In the case of Heim, especially James Merrick in the *Evangelical Society Journal* (Merrick, 2007) argues on many levels accusing Heim of: twisting the OT notion of sacrifice to suit himself; misreading scripture; bringing an anthropological thesis into scripture; reducing Israel’s sacrificial cult to scapegoating; avoiding divine violence; delivering unacceptable theology on soteriological, harmartiological (sin), justification, and ethical levels.

In the case of Weaver, we have mainly Telford Work in the *Theology Today Journal* (Work, 2002), and Paul Gallagher in *Trinity Journal Fall 2003* (Gallagher, 2003) delivering a multi-levelled critique of his approach. Work accuses Weaver of: denying all divine violence; having an erroneous approach to sin; rejecting large tracts of scripture; blaming theological power of retributive justice on Constantinianism and punitive Western structures. Gallagher accuses Weaver of: formulating an atonement notion in nonviolent terms; an erroneous exegesis of Pauline material.

4.2.1 Heim under Fire

Heim’s thinking on atonement and more specifically his claim that the reason for the cross is our human redemptive violence as opposed to God’s need for a sacrificial victim to assuage God’s wrath is harshly critiqued by James Merrick. Writing in the *Evangelical Society Journal* Merrick describes Heim’s approach as being that which is predicated on Heim’s radical rereading- and even misreading of scripture (Merrick, 2007).

Quite often Heim seems too eager to locate that for which he is looking, says Merrick (Merrick, 2007). Is it really the case, for example, that for Paul "to accept Jesus is to be converted from scapegoating persecution to identify with those against whom he had
practiced it” (Heim, 2006:139). Can this really be so, asks Merrick—especially in light of Seyoon Kim's much more measured *The Origins of Paul's Gospel*? When formulating an understanding of Paul, Kim in his own words, “takes Paul’s testimony of his Damascus event seriously and without the addition of any psychologising and romanticising as some exegetes have done” (Kim, 1984:2). And, in addition asks Merrick, what of Heim's remark, that in Hebrews, Jesus' sacrifice is the "opposite" of Israel's sacrificial cult? (Heim, 2006:158). Most scholars, says Merrick, comprehend the writer to be saying that Jesus' cross is the fulfilment of the Old Testament type (Merrick, 2007).

In addition in this regard, says Merrick, Barnabas Lindars in his, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Lindars, 2003:129,131) deduces that the author of Hebrews is far from an "anti-ritualist," one who saw the perfection of the Day of Atonement sacrifice in Christ's death where the covenantal burden of sin is definitively removed, as Heim would claim (Heim, 2006:158). Furthermore says Merrick, Heim totally ignores the theme of high priesthood, itself a cultic concept in Hebrews, a theme that has great bearing on the nature of Jesus' sacrifice. Donald Hagner in his, *The Son of God as Unique High Priest: The Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (which forms a contributing chapter in the book *Contours of Christology* edited by R.N. Longenecker (Longenecker, 2005:247-267), has also according to Merrick argued that the high priesthood of Christ is central to Hebrews' Christology. So how well could Heim understand sacrifice in Hebrews without consideration of this theme? (Merrick, 2007).

Heim hardly ever interacts with standard commentaries, continues Merrick. He (Heim) perennially reads Girard's anthropological thesis into his texts, evinced by his consistent redefinition of “sacrifice” as scapegoating and the “offering” as a victim, refusing to take note of the fact that no biblical author thought of these cultural artefacts in this way. Nor does he discuss the historical-cultural and linguistic evidence concerning the key concepts of “sacrifice,” “atonement,” “purity,” “sin,” etc. And he unconcernedly simplifies the complexity of Israel's sacrificial cult by reducing it to scapegoating- a misreading that extends into his comprehension of the Eucharist as well. Surely Christians are not congregating around a sacrificial victim (represented in the bread and wine) to soothe their scapegoating tendencies (Heim, 2006:232-233). Rather, suggests Merrick, they are celebrating how Christ's demise has brought them communion with God (Merrick, 2007).
Heim avoids a very important element of each of the traditional atonement theologies—that of divine violence (which Heim perceives as a weakness), says Merrick. Therefore according to Merrick, Heim is very selective with sources as he remains mute about those commentators who would legitimately object to his interpretations and those texts that cannot be incorporated into his motif. While his proposals might be compelling to anthropologists, exegetically and historically speaking they appear both naïve and irresponsible. Thus, those concerned with comprehending Christian sources on their own terms will often find Heim's Girardian interpretations violently contrived and utterly fanciful. “So while he is successful in meeting his own goals, I wonder whether Heim has sacrificed disciplined scholarship in the process,” queries Merrick (Merrick, 2007).

Merrick critically questions the meaning of Heim’s work in terms of soteriology, hamartiology, justification, and Christian ethics, and in a nutshell deduces the following. Soteriologically, because Heim removes the positive aspects of sacrifice vis-à-vis sin, he at the very least owes us an account of how the moral and legal aspects of sin are overcome. Hamartologically, Heim seems to abandon traditional notions because sin is no longer a moral and ontological stain that calls for sacrifice, but the practice of sacrifice itself. Justification is wholly lost because Christ's death is not a sacrifice that creates the covenantal status of righteousness for humankind (Merrick, 2007).

“Furthermore,” says Merrick, “the object of faith has been altered from Christ's atoning work to God's vindication of scapegoats. And what has Heim done with the Christian ethic of self-sacrifice? Gone, then, are huge swaths of traditional Christian theology, making Heim's proposal an entirely new worldview, the vocabulary of which, while similar to traditional theological vocabulary, has undergone huge redefinition.” Merrick also claims at this point that he is reminded of a comment in Douglas Farrow's review of Weaver's “The Nonviolent Atonement” in the *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (Farrow, 2004:93-96) - (words which Merrick sees applying to Heim as well): “I am against the kind of violence represented by this book, which does harm to the life, limb and dignity of Christian theology” (Merrick, 2007).

Merrick continues by stating that Heim has so redefined Christ's sacrifice that its salvific benefits stem not from the event itself, but from the revelation accompanying it in the Gospels and manifest in the resurrection. This, according to Merrick is solely a moral
influence theory, and a relatively weak one at that. (Most moral exemplar models at least see the cross itself as revelatory). By removing the sacrificial features of Christ's death, Merrick sees Heim as jettisoning the priestly dimension of Christ's work, and collapsing it into the prophetic. And because the core of salvation is reduced to revelation- true knowledge about scapegoating- his proposal shares more in common with Gnosticism than Christianity (Merrick, 2007).

“Saved from Sacrifice,” thus for Merrick becomes, a speculative re-reading of Scripture and tradition. It is one that does violence to the sources, amounting to a complete revision of the Christian worldview that according to him, will not prove persuasive under serious analysis. Consequently, for Merrick, Heim's contribution lies solely in his drawing our attention to the pervasiveness of scapegoating (Merrick, 2007).

I believe I have responded to at least some of what I see as the more important criticisms of Merrick. Yet furthermore, in my reply here to Merrick's critique, I would remind him of Heim's observation that notes that theology's constant task is to give clear and concrete content to aspects of faith that may be at once inherently mysterious and historically distorted in their expression- (the atonement, especially that of satisfaction in my estimation, and in that of countless others, fitting very well into this category). And doing this in Heim’s view always involves illustration and appropriation from other consonant disciplines. The danger in doing this however, says Heim, revolves around reducing the Christian faith to nothing more than an example of the theory one is using as one’s interpretative tool to explain it- (in my estimation, the very thing Merrick accuses Heim of doing) (Heim, 2006:11-13).

Heim however claims he is aware of this danger which Merrick accuses him of falling headlong into. And thus whilst denying that he himself (Heim) falls prey to this danger, Heim nevertheless accuses Girard of doing so. Girard, says Heim, seems to suggest that all that is needed in one's approach in terms of Christ's work is a tool to demonstrate a truth we need to learn. Yet Heim claims his own approach falls far from suggesting this. This is because, first and foremost Heim acknowledges Christ’s work as a divine act by whose power we are transformed, and furthermore that when one can succeed in maintaining this vital emphasis when drawing on Girard, Girard’s perspective can then become something crucially important and offer a genuinely new perspective to bring to some of our traditional problems.
(traditional atonement theology being a hugely significant example here) (Heim, 2006:11-13).

4.2.2 Weaver under Fire

In terms of Weaver’s approach, we find evangelical Telford Work in the *Theology Today Journal*, critiquing Weaver for taking some “cheap shots” in his criticism of Anselm. An example here says Work, is Weaver’s charge that the satisfaction motif puts “atonement completely outside of history,” (Weaver, 2001:69) and “says nothing about a transformed life” in response (Work, 2002).

Work also critiques Weaver’s denials of all divine violence as being less than convincing. In working from the assumption that Christology and atonement must jettison violence (substitutionary or not), Weaver according to Work, is forced to ignore critical themes in both the Old Testament and New Testament. “One senses here,” says Work, “that God not only refuses to punish Jesus, but refuses to punish anyone.” All human suffering from sin seems self-inflicted. “Is this the same heavenly father, questions Work, who Jesus likens to a king who tortures the unforgiving?”- (Matthew 18:34-35). “Just because the law and gospels have been twisted to curse innocents does not mean that they never justly curse the guilty,” says Work (Work, 2002).

I cannot agree with Work’s implied understanding of sin here that obviously concurs with Merrick’s understanding- (sin, for Merrick being a moral and ontological stain that calls for sacrifice) (Merrick, 2007). As I see it both Weaver’s and Heim’s theologies do indeed include the dimension of God’s judgement of the guilty. The process however differs in their case in that sinners judge themselves via their own failure to repent and conform to God’s reign thus placing themselves outside of God’s gracious realm (Weaver, 2001:41). Or as in Heim’s case- sinners judge themselves by failure to repent from scapegoating and to conform to God’s antisacrificial reign thus placing themselves outside of the realm of God’s grace (Heim, 2001:290).

Work also critiques Weaver’s selectivity as being that which is jarring (Work, 2002). Work notices that Weaver appeals to the Leviticus scapegoat ritual on the Day of Atonement,
yet overlooks the bloody scenes on each side of it in order to make the claim that for the most serious and comprehensive sins blood is not involved. Also in order to support his approach, Weaver, according to Work, simply bypasses Isaiah’s suffering servant passages and the Passover itself (Work, 2002).

Weaver blames the unremitting theological power of retributive justice on Constantinianism and punitive Western and American structures of justice, asserts Work, but contrary biblical evidence is a more important explanation for it and for the appeal of something like satisfaction theory from as early as Athanasius (not just Anselm) (Work, 2002). I agree with Work that Constantinianism is wrongly blamed by Weaver for the ongoing power of retributive justice and I also agree with Work that scripture and satisfaction atonement are far more responsible elements here (Work, 2002). And yet for me, this is scripture wrongly interpreted and an atonement image which has gone astray- precisely because they are interpreted in a way that supports the notion of retributive justice. I agree with Weaver that the ongoing theological power of retributive justice does hinge to a large degree on punitive Western and American structures of justice (Weaver, 2001:2).

Work concludes his critique of Weaver’s approach by way of commending Weaver’s observation that neglecting the apocalyptic Jewish narrative context for Jesus’ crucifixion has indeed been conducive to abusive soteriologies. And that Weaver’s approach indeed suggests a way to rehabilitate legal visions of atonement by widening their focus from the singular instance of crucifixion forwards to resurrection and return, and backwards to the ministry that initiates in baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins and terminates in a show trial (Work, 2002).

I agree with Work that some of the above elements in Weaver’s approach can indeed be utilized as rehabilitative instruments in one’s understanding of atonement, yet I disagree that they can be used successfully to rehabilitate satisfaction atonement in that this is a notion that insists on defining sin as being a moral and ontological stain that calls for sacrifice (divinely sanctioned violence) as humankind’s form of rescue.

In his critique of The Nonviolent Atonement in Trinity Journal, Fall 2003, Paul Gallagher remains unconvinced that the atonement can be discussed in nonviolent terms (Gallagher, 2003).
Furthermore Gallagher says that what Weaver’s thesis specifically lacks, is a convincing exegesis of Pauline material which interacts with the language of the cross, substitution and sacrifice. Gallagher claims Weaver’s understanding of Paul, which is too limited, pivots on a simplistic contrast of Paul and Anselm: Anselm’s satisfaction atonement has no necessary role for resurrection….. Resurrection is the basis of Paul’s thinking and is what gives Paul’s thinking its apocalyptic orientation….. It appears straightforward that since satisfaction atonement lacks a role for resurrection in salvation, it is not apocalyptic in orientation, and consequently is incompatible with Paul (Gallagher, 2003) Gallagher is of the opinion that Weaver fails to demonstrate how the substitutionary and sacrificial aspects of Paul’s theology of the cross, which he (Gallagher) claims are indeed there, “fit” with the narrative Christus Victor notion. Here, as elsewhere, says Gallagher, Weaver is trying to make his argument by focusing on what he views as the problematical dimensions of Anselm’s notion alone rather than developing his own positive exegesis of Paul (Gallagher, 2003).

In Weaver’s defence I would remind Gallagher that Weaver sees the postmodern atonement debate as revolving around how various theologies mirror Christian resources like the Bible and the story of Jesus and whether the contexts of some of these theologies are able to mirror and restate more of the meaning of those sources better than others (Weaver, 2001: 6-7). Yet having said this, even though Weaver obviously sees his Mennonite context as justifying his sparse engagement with Pauline theology I agree with both Gallagher and Heim who both imply that the by-passing of/lack of engagement with, large tracts of scripture in one’s approach is that which must surely serve to weaken the credibility of one’s argument (Heim, 2006:7).

4.3 The Incarnation within Atonement– (The Incarnational Model’s Compatibility with, and Enhancement of a Nonviolent Understanding)

4.3.1 Introduction

Shortly I will go on in this my final section, to discuss four practical examples of living out
the antisacrificial reign of God within my own life, ministry and community. But before I do this, and in the interests of enriching my approach. I feel compelled to extrapolate upon and give further scope to a vital aspect of the Christian salvation event so pertinent to the work of Weaver and Heim and indeed mentioned by both of them (Weaver, 2001:35), (Heim, 2006:242). This is the importance of the incarnation- and how a focus on the humanness of Jesus which he shares with us and therefore not only a focus on his divinity affects our understanding of what it means to be redeemed in Christ.

4.3.2 An Examination of some Recent Exploratory Work done to Illustrate an Incarnational or Participatory Model of Atonement: Tim Bayne and Greg Restall

By way of their Internet Draft Essay, “A Participatory Model of the Atonement,” by Tim Bayne from the St Catherine’s College, University of Oxford, and Greg Restall, from the School of Philosophy University of Melbourne, I have established the following. The Incarnation or Participatory Model of atonement is dated all the way back, past more recent proponents such as Irenaeus, to Paul (Bayne & Restall, 2007).

And furthermore with regard to Paul I have also established that an important common Pauline thread links the theologies of Heim, Weaver and Bayne and Restall. And that this is based upon all four of them understanding Paul’s theology as that which undergirds an ontic understanding of sin. And an ontic understanding of sin is of course not sin understood as immoral behaviour resulting in debt in our moral ledger (which is a deontic understanding of sin), but rather, a relational conception of sin consisting of the fact that our relationship with God and each other is not what it ought to be (Bayne & Restall, 2007).

We thus come to see here that deontic sin and ontic sin are substantively different and treatments of the atonement tend to privilege one conception at the expense of the other. Bayne and Restall claim that Paul’s thought according to New Testament scholar, Morna Hooker, can be summarized as follows:

The transgression of Adam was reversed and the possibility of restoration opened up when Christ dwelt and perished in obedience and was raised from life to death. Those who are ‘baptized’ into him are able to share his death to sin
(Rom. 6:4-11) and his status of righteousness before God (2 Cor. 5:21). Since Adam’s transgression brought corruption to the world, restoration involved the whole universe (Rom. 8:19-22; Col. 1:15-20) ... [Christ] shared our humanity, and all that means in terms of weakness... in order that we might share in his sonship and righteousness.

To do this, however, claim Bayne and Restall, Christians must share in his demise and resurrection, dying to the realm of flesh and rising to life in the Spirit. Thus Paul speaks of being crucified with Christ in order that Christ may dwell in him (Galatians 2:19-20). The process of death and resurrection is symbolized by Baptism (Romans 6:3-4). By baptism “into Christ,” believers are united “with him,” so that they now dwell “in him.” These phrases (in particular “in Christ”) express the close relationship between Christ and believers that is so significant for Paul (Bayne & Restall, 2007).

According to Bayne and Restall, from the perspective of philosophical discussions of the atonement this is a remarkable passage, because it contains no trace of exemplary and deontic language. Christ’s demise is not presented as something we must emulate, nor is it presented as persuading God to forgive us, as constituting restitution for our debts, as castigation for our transgressions. Instead, the passage portrays Paul as focused on ontological and relational matters. This focus is encapsulated in Paul’s frequent references to Christ as “the Second Adam,” a phrase that is code for Paul’s notion that Christ’s demise brings about a new human nature (a new Adam) (Romans 8:19-22; Colossians 1:15-20); we are quite literally born again in the sense that we are literally new creatures (Galatians 2:20). This new identity, grounded in the Christian’s participation in the demise and resurrection of Christ as the Second Adam, is symbolized- and perhaps even constituted- by the rites of Baptism and the Eucharist. Baptism symbolizes death to the old self and rebirth, participating in new life “in Christ”; the Eucharist involves partaking in the blood and body of Christ (Bayne & Restall, 2007).

These rites according to Bayne and Restall are thoroughly participatory. This is thinking that surely must draw one right back to the prescript of my dissertation wherein I speak of Koenig’s view of Christ and the Last Supper event? Koenig views this event as a transhistorical salvation event wherein humankind finds redemptive enlistment more profoundly than ever before within the “new” body of Christ via their ritual eating and
drinking. Surely Christ is viewing his incarnation here as involving a mission to bring God’s Kingdom to earth? (Koenig, 2000:41).

Furthermore, according to Bayne and Restall, Paul’s understanding of the Church (which he describes as the body of Christ) is also infused with participatory language. Paul also describes the Spirit as marrying the Christian to Christ so that “the two become one flesh” (Romans 7: 1-4; 1 Corinthians 6:15-18) (Bayne & Restall, 2007).

How exactly does participation deal with sin? According to Paul, our change of identity frees us from sin: since we are no longer bound by (or under the sway) of sin, we are liberated to participate in a restored relationship with God. In fact, Paul seems to think that we in some way participate in Christ’s relationship with God (Romans 6:8–11: the Christian is “alive to God in Christ Jesus”). The key point to note here is that Paul’s conception of sin is not, primarily, deontic. Paul doesn’t see Christ’s demise and resurrection as the balm for a troubled conscience- indeed, Paul is adamant that his conscience was clear (Acts 23:1, 2 Corinthians 1:12) (Bayne & Restall, 2007).

Instead, he regards Christ’s demise as dealing with sin as part of the human (indeed: cosmic) condition. The participatory thread in Paul’s theology takes sin to be a problem of our identity. The atonement does not simply adjust our “moral standing” but instead inaugurates a change in the kind of beings we are (Bayne & Restall, 2007). This is also true for Weaver and Heim’s similar understanding of sin atonement. For both of them Christ’s death ushers in a new era of redemption, a new objective reality wherein each human being as “a new Adam” having been redeemed by Jesus also having been a human being, is invited to participate (Bayne & Restall, 2007).

But one might enquire: isn’t there some sense in which sin is a deontic problem? How does the participatory model deal with sin as a problem of moral culpability? Bayne and Restall adopt the view here that the atonement deals with sin as a deontic problem as a byproduct of dealing with the sinner: if the sinner is the “old person,” and the old person died with Christ on the cross, then there is no one who ought to be regarded as guilty for their sin; indeed, there is no longer anyone who ought to feel guilty for their sin. The moral debt we owe to God (if such there be) is not punished or forgiven, nor is satisfaction or reparation made for it. Instead, it is dealt with by changing the identity of the sinner: strictly speaking,
the person who is in the wrong before God no longer exists. Bayne and Restall think that this is an advantage of the model. God’s forgiveness cannot be coerced or merited, even by Godself (Bayne & Restall, 2007).

Heim and Weaver also share similar thinking here with Bayne and Restall (Heim, 2006:320-321) (Weaver, 2001:54-55). Weaver specifically is in agreement with Bayne and Restall in the sense that for him (Weaver) the language of atonement (which Weaver identifies as being based on Paul) expresses a new ontological state of life wherein forgiveness means the destruction of the power of sin or the new creation of the Christian’s participation in the resurrection mode of life- i.e. - transformed life lived under the power of the reign of God (Weaver, 2001:54-55).

Heim, on the same topic and in similar vein states that Christ’s death and resurrection are acts that– prior to any change on our part- objectively alter our bondage to the specific sin of sacrifice and definitively declare to us God’s intention to accept us despite out failures. This act reaches us in the midst of our captivity to sin, and provides us the means to a new and different life- community without scapegoating (Heim, 2006:320-321).

In addition here both Weaver (Weaver, 2001:41) and Heim (Heim, 2006:265) stress the point that although God’s nature is merciful and always forgiving, God’s judgement does indeed exist in the sense that we ourselves bring the negative consequences of our wrong choices- (our choices to live unconverted lives outside of kingdom) upon ourselves.

4.3.3 Robin Collins

In his work-in-progress Internet Essay “The Incarnational Theory of Atonement,” Robin Collins, professor of philosophy at Messiah College in Pennsylvania USA, and also a proponent of Incarnational atonement claims there is a great affinity between an Incarnational and Girardian model of the atonement (Collins, 2009).

In a nutshell, this statement of Collins can be understood in the following way: because Christ’s life is fully human, we can participate in it. We do this by participating in Christ’s “subjectivity” (as Collins calls it) i.e. in Christ’s attitudes, orientations, perspectives, commitments and values that make Christ who he is as an individual and we who we are as individuals. Collins sees a huge affinity between Girard’s “desire”- i.e. (Girard’s notion that
Christ invites humankind to participate in a non-rivalrous mimetic relationship with him) and his (Collins’) “subjectivity” notion. The Incarnational model in general also has, in my opinion, much affinity with Weaver’s model in that the entire working assumption of Weaver’s model (Weaver, 2004:49), revolves around the divine yet fully human Jesus of Nazareth’s invitation to us to do nonviolent battle against sin and the evil forces of this world (Collins, 2009).

In drawing on Collin’s essay I have listed a number of what we both see as being the most important advantages and practical implications of the Incarnational motif in contrast to the Satisfaction and Penal motifs (points which of course serve to complement rather than clash with the approaches of both Weaver and Heim):

- A more ethically adequate image of God. Instead of a God as a ruthless judge whose love conflicts with his justice, we have a God who is consistently portrayed as a passionate lover of creation, one who fervently desires an intimate relationship with his creatures and who continually invites us into this relationship with him;

- Incarnation itself, we are reminded, is a kingpin of salvation portraying a God who is not merely a God who is far removed from us, but is a God who has come to us, and who shares, as fully as possible, in the very life of his creatures. This is what it means to affirm the most basic Christian doctrine that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine;

- Unites the post-Easter gospel (literally, ”good news”) preached by the Apostles with the pre-Easter gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven preached by Jesus- that is, the message that God and God’s reign, are now breaking into the human situation;

- Jesus’ High Priestly role is more than the redeeming act of paying the penalty for our sins, but Christ is able to perform a mediatorial role as High Priest because he was made like his brothers/sisters in every way, and consequently can sympathize with our weaknesses and assist those who are being tempted- (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15);

- Aims to take biblical terms like sin and God’s wrath and judgment seriously whilst comprehending them differently as part of God’s transforming love;
The forgiveness of God is comprehended to be, not as an annulment of the punishment that justice requires, but as the removal of the blockage to full communion with God, which is essentially our alienated or sinful condition (Collins, 2009).

To me the most outstanding of the practical implications of the Incarnational theory in contrast to the Satisfaction and Penal theories identified by Collins are the following:

- Alters our fundamental view of God’s relation to the world from that of a judge spurred on by moral duty to that of a friend, a loving parent who yearns to see us safely home, and a lover of creation;

- To receive God's grace is to receive God's love and actually to participate in God's life in an ongoing way of ethical living that evidences love, joy, peace, etc., rather than strongly distinguishing justification as a legal transaction and sanctification as gradual moral perfection;

- Salvation occurs in all aspects of life because God is with us whatever our situation, ready to redeem it with us, rather than denying the reality of our situation or simply waiting for rescue in the next world. God is there in our human situation with us, ready to redeem it with us, not by imposing a divine love and power which is foreign to our human condition but by uniting himself with us in our life-situation. This in turn transforms us from the inside through the power of a divine love which operates from a fully human standpoint. Divine redemption, therefore, does not occur by denying the reality of our practical condition or current life situation; by attempting to reach some new spiritual plane; or by simply awaiting rescue in the next world. Rather it occurs by recognizing and acting on the truth that Christ's love and redeeming presence is available in whatever situation we are in. This will be especially good news for those who are the most alienated and downtrodden of all;

- Christ-followers are summoned to share in Christ’s redemptive activity by actively sharing the life-situation of others, especially the poor and the suffering, rather than emphasizing suffering for its own sake or for penance. In partaking of Christ's fully human/fully divine subjectivity we are called to do the following. To fully engage with
the world and our life-situation, and fully acknowledge all those things which we have repressed and scapegoated, both in our own psychic lives and in society. Only by doing this can we also fully partake of the faith, hope, and love that are in Christ. Christ-followers are called to enter into, rather than ignore or avoid, the life-situation of others, even if this means sharing their pain and vulnerability;

- To take up one's cross in this view entails sharing in the suffering and vulnerability of others, for this is what Christ did on the Cross. Just as Christ, sharing in our suffering and life-situation made it possible for us to participate in his Resurrection, we as Christ's body share in the sufferings and life-situation of others so that they in turn may be enabled to participate in Christ through us. This view, however, does not stress suffering for its own sake or for penance, but for the sake of the joy of empowering each other to participate more fully in the life of God and one another. The image of a body used by Paul in Scripture well expresses this notion of participating in a common life and redemption: when one part suffers, the others suffer along with it; and when one part is honoured, the others rejoice too (1 Corinthians 12:26);

- Offers a transformative view of evangelism- responsive and accessible to the broad variety of human cultures and conditions in the world rather than focusing on concepts of punishment and condemnation which may be culturally foreign or distancing;

- Incarnational language not only takes us to a variety of biblical images of God’s initiative in Christ (redemption, sacrifice, reconciliation, grace, etc), but takes us instantly to Christology. This is significant for a people intently concerned about following Jesus in everyday life- i.e. discipleship. Other theories tend toward abstract concepts rather than praxis;

- Incarnational language affirms the importance of nature and the physical body. If at the centre of the atonement is God’s concern for what humans do with the physical body as well as spiritual welfare, then Christians cannot take lightly annihilating another human life (war, capital punishment, abortion) or persons suffering hunger, deprivation, disease, or homelessness. Incarnation also affirms care for how we treat the body sexually, for
belief in resurrection of the body, and for the environment. Incarnational language is not Docetic or Gnostic;

- Incarnational language is missional- looking at what God has done and is doing in the world and yearning to participate in God’s activity in God’s way. Since God reached out to us, his enemies, in the cross of Christ, then we will want to reach out to our enemies with reconciling love. If God enters all types of human situations, especially among the poor and suffering by identifying with them, then Christians will do the same;

- Incarnational language is concerned about peace and justice as the Bible defines these terms. Western culture comprehends peace as absence of conflict while the Bible depicts peace as well-being, wholeness, shalom. Likewise, Western culture comprehends justice as retribution and punishment, whereas the Bible identifies justice as just actions and right relationships. Peace and justice are achieved by incarnational actions in solidarity with the human plight and through service and loving relationships as opposed to aggression and violence (Collins, 2009).

4.4 Explicating Nonviolent Atonement in Terms of Orthopraxis

4.4.1 Introduction

This involves me grasping that a new foundation for reconciliation has been established through the death and resurrection of the crucified one. Through the humanity (as well as the divinity) of our saviour, our own humanity has been redeemed, making it possible to live differently (Heim, 2006:227). As Robin Collins says in his Internet Essay, “The Incarnational Theory of Atonement”- “It is looking at what God has done and is doing in the world and yearning to participate in God’s activity in God’s way” (Collins, 2009).

At many levels- individual, social, ecclesial, mystical, liturgical- a new way has been established. The emphasis is shown up in the foundational aspects of Christian faith and practice. In Heim’s specific view, in the power of Christ’s Holy Spirit, we are to expose and oppose the sacrificial solution to community harmony (Heim, 2006:227). This challenge must seek the nonviolent route as far as possible in as far as the avoiding of scapegoating violence
and its derivatives is concerned. Yet, on the other hand, in our imperfect sinful world, it cannot rule out the possibility of the use of coercion that is not morally reprehensible and which falls outside of the scapegoating profile. We are to side with sacrificial victims and inspire others to do the same. In the power of the Spirit, we are to inspire and nurture a new kind of community (Heim, 2006: 227)

According to Heim a good summary of both of these aspects of our calling to antisacrificial living in the power of the Spirit is found in Acts 4:27-33 (Barker, 1995: 1654). Beginning here with a recollection of the collective violence against Jesus in which we are all involved, it contrasts this with the disciples who now in the power of the Spirit speak up boldly in the name of the victim and are in a very different kind of unity in which believers share their possessions rather than a murder (Heim, 2006:227).

The notable work of the Holy Spirit in addition to testifying with scapegoats is to bring unity across difference and division. It is the crisis of fragmentation that calls forth the violence of sacrifice. If the call of the gospel is to stop sacrifice, then a new force for reconciliation is required. The account of the believers having everything in common is a picture that replaces rivalry and escalating conflict with peace and mutual care (Heim, 2006:227).

In confirming Heim’s slant here, Collins responds by noting that Western culture understands justice as retribution and punishment, whereas the Bible identifies justice as just actions and right relationships. Thus, in solidarity with both Weaver and Heim I echo the words of Collins when he asserts, “peace and justice are achieved by incarnational actions in solidarity with the human plight and through service and loving relationships as opposed to aggression and violence” (Collins, 2009).

4.4.2 Four Practical Examples of Living out the Antisacrificial / Incarnational Reign of God within My Own Life

My present areas of concern and community outreach involve the following:

• My involvement in our Diocesan Interracial Reconciliation Initiative.
• My involvement in engaging with material from the Ujamaa Centre in KwaZulu Natal.
• My involvement with our Churches outreach project to the Zandspruit Squatter Camp outside Johannesburg.
• My involvement with our Churches Diocesan based Eco Portfolio.

4.4.2.1 Reconciliation Initiative

Concern number one, involves me as a church leader facilitating work in the area of what I see as being the vitally necessary ongoing reconciliation process in this country. In his book Saved from Sacrifice, Heim draws attention to the sad and tragic legacy of apartheid in our country. And even more specifically he mentions those black leaders who had unusual power for reconciliation like for example, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. Yet, exclaims Heim, for reconciliation to work, there must also be the de Klerk’s of this world (Heim, 2006:319).

Now in essence what Heim is saying here is the following: the hatred of victims can often result in them presenting to the world as hate-filled individuals bent on getting revenge- (unlike Mandela and Tutu). Alternatively, perpetrators of violence can be left as individuals who (unlike de Klerk), are hugely resentful in terms of any suggestion of them having to own their guilt. Thus unless these different temptations on both sides can be overcome- unless victims can be heard and thereafter come to a point of willingness to forgive. And perpetrators are prepared to listen and so come to a point where they receive a type of exorcism/amnesty wherein they are willing to own their guilt and seek repentance- there simply can be no peace (Heim, 2006:319).

Heim further points out that our own South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was able to recognize this profound insight. This Commission, claims Heim recognized that truth is what must not be denied the victims- and in many cases, though not all, this includes a requisite legal punishment for the offenders. And it recognized also that reconciliation is not possible without some exorcism of the guilt of those who will accept it (Heim, 2006:319).

Now many South Africans recognise the profound insights of this particular commission, yet they also recognise that its effectiveness has only scratched the surface in
terms of its dealing with the extent of the hurt and need for healing and repentance in our land. Thus the leadership in our church has deduced that to help get previously racially divided South Africans to come to at least some point along the road to reconciliation, a much more protracted process using the TRC roughly as a model is required to be engaged in. This process (although often not a popular one because of the pain it brings to the surface) will assist victims to speak their painful truth in terms of them being the crucified victims of a system which pivoted on scapegoating. And it will also assist perpetrators of this system (which includes the unoppressed who merely went along with the apartheid status quo without resisting it) to own their guilt and ask for forgiveness. (Heim, 2006:319).

Insofar as the legacy of the cross informs this process, says Heim, it is not a theory that claims all sins are already expiated for, all offenders are free, and no accountability is needed. Instead it is a legacy of the ability to recognize victims, the understanding of the false ideas of unity to which they have been sacrificed and the profound knowledge that Christ died to oppose sacrifice and to end violence (Heim, 2006:319).

Within our various archdeaconries (made up of clusters of churches deliberately placed together because of their diversity in terms of race, wealth and geographical location, across the Johannesburg Diocese), we have begun this process of congregating in Christ. After congregating in a common location, we begin by sharing in an appropriate scriptural passage and prayer. And then, in respect and humility thereafter we break up into small groups to share our human stories of being South African. To share in truth and love, to listen, to ask for forgiveness as well as to forgive, to cry together. To laugh together to engage in relationship building, to vent anger and the pain of not being able to forgive/receive forgiveness, to be heard without comment or condemnation, to express dismay at the current corruption of our post 2004 political leadership which is, it seems rapidly joining the old regime in terms of the degree of its sinfulness and ungodliness, to sit together in silence, bearing together the cruciform pain of the sin that such a beautiful land such as ours has to face.

We as leaders acknowledge that the scope of our particular church endeavour here, is merely reaching the tip of a much bigger iceberg. Yet it is an obedient start in the right direction and we believe it should be encouraged as a grassroots level. It should be an
exercise facilitated through churches, corporates, schools etc for as many as possible of our country’s citizens.

4.4.2.2  *Ujamaa Centre in KwaZulu Natal*

With regard to concern number two, the Ujamaa Centre falls under the auspices of the Centre for Contextual Theology at the University of KwaZulu Natal. Essentially it is a centre for Biblical and theological development and research. Furthermore it acts as an interface between socially engaged biblical scholars and theological scholars and local communities of the poor, working class and marginalized. Together they use biblical and theological resources for individual and social transformation. In partnership with the Australian Agency for International Development, the South African Council of Churches, the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness, the Church Community Leadership Trust, the Midlands Women’s Group and Learn with Echo, it fairly recently did the following. It launched the Tamar Campaign-Breaking the Chains of Silence, which was targeted to begin operating specifically from National Women’s Day August 9th 2009 to International Human Rights Day December 10th 2010, and then to continue indefinitely beyond this date.

The Tamar Campaign, as its biblical name suggests, focusses glaringly on rape and violence against women and children (the statistics of which in our predominantly patriarchal based Southern African/African cultures) are extremely and unacceptably high. The project is based upon a two day workshop focusing on relevant Biblical passages and group discussion. Important foci in these workshops revolve around: breaking the taboo of silence that often exists around incidents of rape, incest and violence; clarifying the wrongness and inappropriateness of rape/forced sex and dealing with the situation in which the victim often holds herself responsible for the attack; helping especially mothers/mother figures deal with incest in the family and to speak out and not to give in to fear and denial. I attended a Tamar Campaign workshop run by the Ujamaa Centre and hosted by our church a few years ago. And I have become part of a training team to equip future leaders to facilitate more ecumenical workshops of this nature in the greater Gauteng area.

A key verse utilized by the Tamar campaign is found in 2 Samuel 13:12 where Tamar daughter of King David exclaims poignantly to her half-brother Amnon, son of David:
“Don’t my brother. Don’t force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel. Don’t do this wicked thing” (Barker, 1995:438)

The project works primarily with women and young girls who are survivors of gender violence. But it also addresses male socialization, providing resources to identify the complicity of males in gender violence. Furthermore, the project deals directly with the church, enabling it to become a safe site within which to talk about and deal with gender violence and gender socialization, and to provide links to ongoing counselling and support groups that victims so desperately need.

This project also addresses directly the link between gender and HIV and AIDS and governance. The Tamar text is not only a text about gender violence, it is also a text about the failure of family and governmental structures to protect women and about the effects of gender violence on other aspects of life. This project can then be used as a way of integrating these related concerns.

4.4.2.3  Zandspruit Squatter Camp outside Johannesburg

The third concern in which I am involved is our Zandspruit Squatter Camp Outreach Programme. This goes hand in hand with the Golang Schooling Project also situated in the Zandspruit squatter camp (a location not too geographically distant from our church). With the help of US overseas funding and sponsors we have been responsible for establishing the Golang Preprimary and Primary Schools here. These schools accommodate local children many of whom are abandoned orphaned or HIV positive.

Many parishioners including myself, give of our money and time in the form of teaching, facilitating day care, bible studies, music lessons, sports coaching, food and clothing donations, and the facilitation of self-help workshops. Our parishioners also sponsor learners, offer bursaries for secondary school attendance for promising scholars, run soup kitchens in the area and offer legal and medical help. A specific focus of our Bible study classes which have sought to address the recent outbreak of xenophobic attacks in the camp has been on God’s love. And the creation of all human beings in God’s image and hence their intrinsic preciousness. It has also been on our Christian call to love our neighbour, and
forgiveness and reconciliation - in other words the working towards an antiscapegoating understanding of life).

The challenges the apartheid system has left in its wake are multiple and very deep-set with seemingly one corrupt regime being replaced by another in our country. Yet our calling as Christ followers remains clear. We are to stand up for justice for the poor and oppressed in all circumstances. This must include the Churches prophetic role of advocacy and challenge of the present day government. This must especially be so with regard to issues of finance, good governance, service delivery, ethics and justice etc. Much needs to be said/challenged in terms of the following. The present government’s corrupt practices of enriching itself and its members at the expense of the poor and its misappropriation of much public funding allocated for the upliftment of the poor. Through various channels my specific church does indeed engage in challenging local government in terms of its handling of various issues in Zandspruit. (And in addition we support local police and policing in a project that the police have named, “Operation Divine Intervention”). My prayer is that all churches including our own can be more courageous and forceful in our common role as “watch dogs of the poor and of our constitution” in the future.

4.4.2.4 Diocesan Based Eco Portfolio

The fourth concern in which I am involved is our churches Eco Portfolio. Within this portfolio we recognize that participating in Jesus’ saving work in a world where evil has sway, also involves acting against violation of the environment/natural creation. (This type of eco-violence, although not directly falling into the scapegoating profile, is in my opinion tributary to it as it involves endangering the environment and thus lives of others).

In following this Christian injunction to save our planet, our church has become the first eco registered parish with our own environmental policy within the Johannesburg Anglican Diocese. We thus feature “green” tips for better environmental living on our pew leaflets issued afresh each Sunday, and we hold various video evenings, seminars, lectures etc. all to do with the subject at hand. We are also members of the JAEI- Johannesburg Anglican Environmental Initiative. This is a formal body of the Johannesburg Diocese which seeks to meet the challenges being faced by this generation with regards to environment,
(which includes conservation of fauna and flora). It is a body that believes passionately that it is God’s will that we look after this precious planet that we call home.

JAEI which consists of a steering group and several portfolios such as eco-congregations, theology and ethics, eco-breakfasts and spirituality and liturgy, represents various fields of expertise and experience in environmental matters. It has been formed to: create an awareness especially among Anglican Christians of environmental concerns; encourage environmental education; develop position papers on major environmental issues to serve as guidelines for theological reflection and diocesan advocacy.

Current involvement from our diocese is in the areas of peace gardens, organic farming (specifically the assistance of the Lodirele High School in Soweto with organic vegetable growing in order to feed hungry scholars not receiving sufficient food at home), development and use of environmental liturgies, interest groups and outings e.g. botanical gardens etc., waste management and energy saving practices e.g. newspaper and glass bottle collections, instruction on the growing of vegetable gardens in poor areas etc.

Internationally the eco-congregation concept is an ecumenical environmental project providing free resources and support to churches. In order to develop a long term and sustainable approach to the eco-congregation concept in our diocese, JAEI has approached several parishes (my own parish being one such parish here) to be a part of an initial pilot project. The eco-congregation material is essentially a tool kit that begins with a parish environmental audit. The audit covers twelve areas of congregational life such as mission, worship, theology, children’s work, youth, adult education, property, management, land use, personal lifestyle, community outreach and global concerns. The JAEI will be offering further modules to be used as needed depending on the outcomes of the initial audit.

4.4.3 Conclusion

It is my opinion, especially as a feminist, that S. Mark Heim’s work in his Saved from Sacrifice, (when compared with the work of others whose atonement attempts strive to portray divine nonviolence), saves us in the most reasonable, feasible and persuasive way, from having to think of God as a cruel sacrifice-demander. Heim’s approach however, in my
opinion should always remain open to and even extrapolate upon the complementary views of incarnational atonement theology. For me the blend of these two approaches is the understanding that is desperately needed in our contemporary world and especially in our own country with its large patriarchal African-based society, as it unveils the inherently un-Christian nature of violence. And the extent of the love of God who is prepared to die, to save us from sacrifice.

Bayne and Restal begin their draft-essay, “A Participatory Model of the Atonement,” with a little vignette that outlines the absurdity of the logic behind traditional atonement notions. I end my dissertation now with this vignette- (the importance of which I feel merits the fact that I choose to portray it in italics and bold type). It is my hope that it will help to serve as a shock treatment and a wakeup call for proponents of traditional atonement notions to re-evaluate their views. May it be the final nail in the coffin for these often very sincere but misguided versions of the atonement.

What? Humanity sins but its God’s Son who pays the price? I tried to imagine Father saying to me, “Piscine, a lion slipped into the llama pen today and killed two llamas. Yesterday another one killed a black buck. Last week two of them ate the camel. The week before it was painted storks and grey herons. And who’s to say for sure who snacked on our golden agouti? The situation has become intolerable. Something must be done. I have decided that the only way the lions can atone for their sins is if I feed you to them.” “Yes, Father, that would be the right and logical thing to do. Give me a moment to wash up.”… What a downright weird story. What peculiar psychology- Life of Pi, Yann Martel (Bayne & Restall, 2007).
Appendix A:
IMAGES OF ATONEMENT
[An exposition of traditional/classical models as background to the study]

Within my dissertation I argue for a revised notion of atonement based on nonviolence— the word “nonviolence” here indicating the flawed thinking within all four classical motifs that views the Father as requiring the Son’s death. And therefore as a vital backdrop to this proposal, it is necessary that I offer an analysis of all of the major traditional atonement models. In his book “Christus Victor,” Gustaf Aulen (1879-1978) according to evangelicals Beilby and Eddy in their book, “The Nature of the Atonement– (four evangelical views)” gave credence to a threefold classification of atonement images. They are: the classic/dramatic model, or Christus Victor, the satisfaction theory (objective), and the moral influence theory (subjective) (Beilby & Eddy, 2006:11). Each image here is related and has a number of modifications, claims Weaver (Weaver, 2001:14).

This concurs with McGrath’s thinking mentioned earlier in my Chapter One except that McGrath has separated the satisfaction theory into two parts– the substitutionary and the penal (McGrath, 2001:411-429).

A.1 Christus Victor Motif

According to Beilby and Eddy in their book, “The Nature of the Atonement,” this was the classic or dramatic view which can be described as Satanward in its focus and which emphasised the motif of victory (Beilby & Eddy, 2006:12). According to Weaver, Gustav Aulen (1879-1978) renewed this model in the modern era in his book Christus Victor (appearing in the 1930’s) giving it renewed visibility as an alternative to both Anselm and Abelard (Weaver, 2001:15).

Furthermore according to Weaver, it used the image of cosmic battle between good and evil- (between God’s forces and Satan’s forces). God’s son Jesus was killed in that battle, an apparent loss for God and win for Satan. Jesus’ resurrection however turned the apparent
defeat into a landmark victory which sealed forever God’s control of the universe and released sinful humanity from sin’s power and Satan’s clutches. In being the prevailing view of early church theologians, this motif became known as “classic.” (Weaver, 2001:15).

A modification of the classic or victory image portrays the death of Christ as a ransom price paid to Satan in exchange for the freeing of sinners held prisoner by Satan. Via his resurrection, Christ then evades Satan’s grip, and sinners are liberated from Satan’s power. But paying a ransom assumes that Satan has rights that need to be respected. Another modified version here denies such rights and illustrates the devil’s demise as coming about via deception. Failing to identify Christ’s deity which is concealed under his flesh at it were, the devil consumes Christ as “easy prey” and is trapped by the deity concealed under Christ’s human nature (Weaver, 2001:16).

Here Church Father Origen argued that God deliberately deceived the devil by coming to earth as a mere man. Jesus’ humanity was the “bait” on the fishhook. Augustine used a mousetrap to portray the same point (Scott, 2007:61). In these various motifs, the emphasis on victory via resurrection identifies this image as Christus Victor (Weaver, 2001:16).

With the approach of the 11th century and Anselm’s satisfaction theory (together with Anselm’s critique of the more peculiar/eccentric aspects of the ransom theory), we find the predominance of the Christus Victor motif beginning its decline (Beilby & Eddy, 2006:12).

Whilst elements of the Christus Victor perspective and Aulen’s interpretation of it, have been criticised—e.g. since Anselm’s eminent critique many have charged that it nurtures an ominous dualism that threatens God’s sovereignty— it nevertheless is hailed as underlining a significant aspect of the atonement which went neglected for centuries. Since the emergence of Aulen’s book in 1931, Beilby and Eddy confirm Weaver’s observation above that various scholars have embraced the Christus Victor theme and have made it a significant if not core theme by which to comprehend Christ’s atoning work (Beilby & Eddy, 2006:14).

Weaver tracks the decline of the Christus Victor image to an earlier point in time than do Beilby and Eddy— as far back as the 6th century (Weaver, 2001:15). Yet he confirms along with Beilby and Eddy that it has endured growing criticism in modernity. Waldron Scott
however, in his book, “What about the Cross?” reminds us that this motif remains the choice of the Greek Orthodox church to this day (Scott, 2007:59). Weaver puts forward several reasons for Christus Victor’s decline in popularity in the West. They are: rejection of the notion that God would acknowledge Satan has rights, or that God would defeat Satan via deceit; unease with the model’s military and battle imagery; incompatibility within a modern cosmology of both the image of a cosmic war and the paying of a ransom to Satan; lack of proof of God’s reign within our world; in the light of a modernistic outlook that embraces gray areas, Christus Victor in contrast has a dualistic view of things (Weaver, 2001:15).

In the classical model proposed by Irenaeus and other classical theorists the Christ-event is interpreted in the following way. It is viewed as a continuum that initiates with the Incarnation. It then runs through the whole of the earthly life of Jesus, to his crucifixion and beyond death to his resurrection and the out-pouring of his Spirit which ensured continued victory till the eschaton. As Scott notes, no one point in this continuum claims an exclusive emphasis. Thus Irenaeus is free from the tendency of later theologies to stress Christ’s death in such a manner as to diminish the significance of the rest of his earthly life- and hereby to make the atonement doctrine into one that mainly stresses bloody butchery. Irenaeus highlights Jesus’ obedience and his teaching showing that Jesus came to dispel error and reveal truth– (in other words in modern terminology, to bring Kingdom, to bring transformation to us in our very state of being human and to thus make sacred all of creation/life) (Scott, 2007:64).

As becomes evident in my dissertation, Irenaeus’ classical model and the importance of his continuum approach that includes the incarnation, is that which resonates deeply with the nonreductionist nonviolent approaches of not only Weaver and Heim. But also with those proposing an incarnational or participatory model of the atonement such as Tim Bayne and Greg Restall in their Internet Draft Essay, “A Participatory Model of the Atonement,” (Bayne & Restall, 2007) and Robin Collins in his internet essay An Incarnational Theory of Atonement (Collins, 2009). A nonreductionist approach is of course one that does not focus only on the death, and this nonviolent continuum approach is thus also one that resonates deeply with my own thinking.
A.2 Satisfaction Motif

Living more than eight centuries after Irenaeus, Anselm-1032 CE, held that the Classical/Ransom theory was incorrect because it allocated too much credence to the devil. Thus according to Scott, Anselm put forth a different explanation– Jesus’ life was paid as a ransom not to Satan but to God. Living in a feudalistic society, Anselm was immersed in a culture characterised by relationships of loyalty, obedience and protection amongst nobles and vassals. Thus, Anselm imagined God as the great King of the Universe, who like any sovereign cannot overlook dishonour. Humankind has dishonoured God by its sinful disobedience thus defrauding God of the honour that is due to him. Consequently a “satisfaction” is required to pay the debt to God’s honour (Scott, 2007:73).

According to Anselm, satisfaction (compensation, reparation) is absolutely necessary– no sin can be forgiven without it. A debt to divine justice has been run up, and that debt must be paid to balance the scales and restore the broken relationship between humanity and God. As Weaver notes, for most people even today- that is the essence of justice (Weaver, 2001:3). And Anselm thinks exclusively in terms of the justice of God– stating according to Scott that “if you don’t understand the need for satisfaction, you neither grasp the holiness of God nor the awfulness of sin” (Scott, 2007:73).

Sinful humanity, according to Anselm, is unable to undo the dishonour to God’s name and make sufficient satisfaction. So the only way humankind could be forgiven was by way of God becoming a redeemer who was both God and human. Jesus offers himself so that a perfect man might offer perfect sacrifice as an oblation (or offering to a divine being) to God– not a sin offering. This is a significant distinction claims Scott because it differentiates the Satisfaction motif from the Penal Substitution model (Scott, 2007:74).

Jesus’ death then, is a payment not by God to Satan, but to God by humankind. The cross as a voluntary sacrifice and the ultimate act of Jesus’ lifelong obedience allocates God great honour. Because it was beyond the call of duty for Jesus, it is actually more honour than he was obligated to bestow. Jesus’ excess obedience can consequently repay our debt. Once the satisfaction of God’s honour has come about, God is liberated to freely forgive our sins,
which he does (Scott, 2007:74). The success of Anselm’s motif can be evaluated by the fact that many Christians today—especially Roman Catholics, not only adhere to his explanation but they are also oblivious to the fact that any other explanation exists (Scott, 2007:75).

The incarnation for Irenaeus was key, asserts Scott. For Anselm the incarnation is not key but is still significant for two reasons: It is Jesus’ totally obedient life which brings God the honour that humanity has failed to do; it is as a human being that Jesus Christ offers his life on the cross as the sacrificial atonement. “It is also a fact,” claims Scott, “that by the 11th century, Jesus’ death had become of greater weight than his life in the popular way of thinking and also within scholarly thought at that time” (Scott, 2007:75).

Weaver concurs with Scott that Anselm’s comprehension of atonement revolved around the fact that the sin of humanity had offended God’s honour bringing disharmony and injustice into the universe. Only Jesus could pay this debt by dying in our place—his death being a payment to God’s honour in order to restore justice and harmony in the universe. The death was a “propitiation” when the image is of the sacrifice offered as compensation to the offended honour of God, and “expiation” when it concerns the sinner’s guilt and penalty which are covered (Weaver, 2001:16).

Scott proposes that Anselm’s intention was to stress Christ’s sacrificial death as “propitiation” as opposed to the reformers Luther and Calvin placing stress on the death as being an “expiation” or penalty for humankind’s sin—thinking which led to the reformers’ “penal” notion of atonement (Scott, 2007:74). This harsher penal substitution theory, relatively recently emanating from Calvin is an offshoot of the Satisfaction theory as originally codified by Aquinas says Scott. It is a theory that insists not only that satisfaction be rendered, but also that the said satisfaction must take the particular form of punishment (Scott, 2007:153).

The attractiveness of Anselm’s theory according to Beilby and Eddy is at least partly due to the fact that it capitalized on an idea that was deeply rooted to the church’s practice of penance as well as the recently arisen feudal system—namely the notion of satisfaction. The satisfaction motif had the advantages of steering clear of the eccentricities of the ransom theory while giving an explication of Christ’s work that both takes human sin seriously and
offers a reasonable explanation of how Jesus’ death satisfies the demands of God’s honour (Beilby & Eddy 2006:16)

A.3 Moral Influence Motif (Abelardian)

Within a generation after Anselm introduced his new motif of the atonement, Pierre Abelard (1079–1142), a significant French theologian and philosopher challenged it (Scott, 2007:83). According to Beilby and Eddy, the atonement motifs that assume a subjective trajectory (alternatively known as the moralistic, humanistic or Abelardian paradigm) are related via the common conviction that the fundamental focus of the atonement is humanward. In other words the atoning work of Christ is designed first and foremost to incur a change in humankind (Beilby & Eddy 2006:18). Subjective motifs are grounded fundamentally on New Testament themes like the reconciliation, revelatory- (Jesus as revelation of God’s love), family-adoption- (God as loving father), and healing motifs. For many a key passage expressing the moral influence paradigm is Paul’s assertion: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”- Romans 5:8 (Beilby & Eddy 2006:18).

According to Beilby and Eddy, Abelard along with Anselm had little time for the early church ransom theory with its notion that Satan possessed legitimate rights over sinful humankind. Such a dualistic stance was equivalent to making a rival god out of Satan. Abelard also rejected various aspects of Anselm’s theory which could be viewed as turning God into a vengeful devil (Beilby & Eddy 2006:19).

Weaver concurs with Beilby and Eddy concerning the fact that Abelard rejected the notion of Jesus’ death as a ransom paid to the devil or as a debt paid to God’s honour. Abelard disliked the emphasis on God’s judgement required in the satisfaction theory, asserts Weaver. And furthermore Abelard also objected to the fact that it appeared to portray a change in God’s attitude toward the sinner after he/she had accepted Jesus’ death on his/her behalf (Weaver, 2001:18).

To Abelard’s way of thinking, the perfect impassable God doesn’t change, thus the problem of atonement is not how to change an offended God’s mind toward the sinner, but
how to bring sinful humanity to see that the God they held to be harsh and judgemental was in fact, loving. Therefore for Abelard, Jesus died as the demonstration of God’s love. And the change that manifests from that loving death is not in God but in the subjective consciousness of the sinners who repent and halt their rebellion against God and turn toward God. It is this psychological or subjective influence worked on the sinner’s mind that imbues this notion with its name of moral influence motif (Weaver, 2001:18).

Weaver claims that much of the atonement debate since the medieval period has been characterized by debates between versions of the motifs of Anselm and Abelard. Since Anselm, some version of satisfaction atonement has been the majority view for both Catholics and Orthodox Protestants. However, whilst Catholicism has not doctrinised a specific atonement theory we find 19th and early 20th century conservative Protestants allocating creedal status to satisfaction atonement. On much the same basis 19th and early 20th century Protestant liberals backed a version of the moral influence motif as opposed to the satisfaction theory embraced by fundamentalism and evangelicalism (Weaver, 2001:19).
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