

Teacher's Notes Film Three

Defeating Evil

The Coming of Satan

During the two centuries before Christ's birth, the portrayal of Satan underwent a radical change. Historically, for the Jews, Satan had rarely been personified. He was not a being but a force of hindrance. Even the Satan in the creation story was nothing more than a snake – it was during the intertestamental years that the two were correlated. Just as those late, anxious years had given rise to the cosmic Son of Man, so they also gave rise to a cosmic Evil One.

By the time of the 1st century this personification had been completed. To the Gospel writers – and indeed apparently to Jesus – Satan was the Prince who ruled the world. He appears throughout the Gospels: Jesus is tempted by Satan (*Matthew 4:1-3, Luke 4:2*) and the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons in the name of "*Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.*" (*Matthew 12:24*).

For Jesus and his disciples, illness was the expression of evil. Mental illness and disabilities were caused by inner demons or "*unclean spirits*". People, "possessed", self-harmed, foamed at the mouth, or thrashed around on the floor. Interestingly when Jesus heals people, the word that is commonly used is 'sozo' which actually translates from the Greek equally accurately as 'saves'. Healing from illness was not different to saving from sin.

ATONEMENT THEORIES

At the very heart of Christianity is the doctrine of the Atonement:

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures"
(I Corinthians 15: 3-4)

Running throughout the Old Testament is the idea that sacrifice somehow appeases God or makes amends for human sin. When

Abraham raises the knife to kill his son Isaac, it is a ram caught in the thicket that is substituted as a sacrifice. Every year at the festival of Atonement a bull was sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on the altar. Two goats were also brought up, one killed and the other sent out into the wilderness to wander as a 'scapegoat'. God's anger was first calmed down (propitiated) by the sacrifice and the sin removed from the people by the goat in the wilderness. Their sin was 'expiated' or somehow cancelled by the wandering animal who carried the sum total of the annual sin on his shoulders.

So the idea that sin can only be cancelled by pain (normally not human) is intrinsic to the Old Testament understanding of God and it is not surprising that the early Christians saw Jesus' death in those terms. As St Paul wrote: ". . . *without shedding of blood is no remission*", (Hebrews 9:22). With Jesus' death the annual animal sacrifice became a once for all event. Neither was it the merely the substitution of human for animal blood – the genius of the Christian perception is that in Christ, God sacrifices *Himself*.

The Ransom Theory

One of the earliest ways in which the death of Jesus is explained is through the idea of ransom. Twice in the New Testament we read of Christ being a 'ransom' – the Timothy passage mentioned in the film but also in the Gospel of Mark: "*For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a **ransom** for many.*" (Mark 10:45)

The idea was fairly simple. Satan was in control of humanity. In order to free people from him God had agreed to arrange the death of his son to compensate for Eve's mistake in the garden and the onset of Original Sin. As suggested by Origen, who first put forward a sustained account of the theory, Satan was tempted by the offer as he thought he would then have ownership of Jesus. What he didn't know was that this was a "sting operation" and Jesus would escape and be resurrected. So Satan was left empty handed and Jesus was reunited with God. The people, for whom the whole operation was designed to save, can then also be reconciled with God. If we are standing back from this theory we would point out that there is no biblical evidence to say that Satan has any kind of legitimate claim on mankind. In the book of Job, Satan is a kind of devil's advocate for God, tempting Job almost on behalf of the Almighty – it is a big step to take to say that he rightfully owns mankind. But the

difficulty with Ransom theory that also really rattled Anselm was that it forced God into the position of trickster and – as Anselm wrote – ‘God cannot lie’.

Satisfaction Theory

Sin, for Anselm, was the inability of humans to make every action/wish/desire that which God would want. It is inevitable that man sins - man is not God. Just as a feudal Lord could demand compensation from a serf who insulted him, God also demands recompense. Just as in Anselm’s time capital or corporal punishment would ‘satisfy’ the aggrieved Lord, so God needs satisfaction or compensation for the dishonour created by human sin. ‘If someone sins he has to restore what he has taken away before he can be clear of fault.’ (De Cur Homo)

But man is not equal to the task – he has nothing to give. Only Christ is able to satisfy the depth of the debt owed to God and his dual nature provides it – his divinity making him worthy of God and his humanity represents all mankind. It was necessary for God to descend to earth in the form of a man in order to restore the honour of God – nothing else would do.

Penal Substitution Theory

The Penal Substitution Theory as taught by Martin Luther (1483 - 1546 CE), John Calvin (1509 - 1564 CE) is not all that dissimilar. In Satisfaction theory, human sin defrauds God of the honour he is due and Christ’s death is substitutionary – he pays the honour to the father rather than us paying anything. Penal substitution is different in that it sees Christ’s death as paying not for lost honour but for standing in place for us when it comes to pay the penalty of sin – normally seen as death. Whereas Christ’s death was an *alternative* to punishment for Anselm, in Penal substitution the punishment *is there* to satisfy the demands of justice.

For Luther, Divine Justice couldn’t just be ignored – someone would have to pay, as the common criminal has to pay the penalty for his petty sin. To ignore his sin or let him off would be to undermine the whole fabric of law. So Christ steps in and takes the entire human punishment on himself ‘*He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for*

our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole and with his stripes we are healed' (Isaiah 53).

God is right to be angry with sinners. Only the sinless man-God Jesus, can take on the infinite sins of the world and be punished for these sins. By perfectly keeping the Law, Jesus earned salvation. By suffering our punishment in our place, Jesus extends this salvation to us.

Johann Tetzel (1465-1519), featured in this film (**Time- Code: 09:17 – 09:26**) was a German Dominican Friar. Tetzel was not an important theologian but he is interesting because he really believed that money could buy reduced suffering in purgatory. Luther of course, believed nothing of the kind and was vehement that these 'hawkers' were undermining the wholeness of the sacrifice made by Christ. His death did not buy a partial release. It didn't just half-buy salvation along with whatever else of a person's character could be thrown into the mix – good deeds and money given to the church. For Luther, Calvin and the reformers, eternal life was won 'by grace alone.' Nothing could be further than the fulminations of Tetzel as seen in this 1517 sermon:

“Don't you hear the voices of your dead parents and other relatives crying out: 'Have mercy on us, for we suffer great punishment and pain'. From this, you could release us with a few alms. We have created you, fed you, cared for you and left you our temporal goods. Why do you treat us so cruelly and leave us to suffer in the flames, when it takes only a little to save us?”

Evaluating Ransom and Penal Substitution theories

Could a good God really demand the death of an innocent man as some kind of 'justice'? Jesus' teachings of forgiveness and love are in stark contrast to this demand for blood and sits uncomfortably in the light of Jesus' own teachings.

Although humanity is the guilty party, in both the Satisfaction and Penal theories, humans contribute nothing and Jesus everything.

Logically, the Penal Theory requires that any new human sins committed after Jesus' death would also have to be punished.

If Jesus' death satisfied God's need for justice, and if humans made no contribution to the process, then salvation and atonement should be granted to everyone and not just to those who accept Christ as Saviour.

(This actually is the view of the reformers – many of whom were universalists while others thought that only the elect (a small pre-determined group) would gain access to heaven.

The theory supposes that human sin incurs an infinite debt to God which can only be cancelled by an infinite satisfaction through the death of the sinless Jesus. But by using the same logic, a small good human act should result in an infinite amount of good. There is imbalance – why does human sin count for more than human good?

Christus Victor

The Christus Victor (Christ the Victor) Theory asserts that Christ is victorious over sin, death, and the devil. This theory was dominant in the first millennium of Christianity and revived by Gustaf Aulen in his book, *Christus Victor*, first published in 1931. For Aulen: "*The work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over the powers which hold mankind in bondage: sin, death, and the devil*".

Aulen argues that the idea of ransom led people away from what the early church had meant. The crucifixion was not payment to the devil but represented rather the saving of humanity from the shackles of sin, death and the devil. Christ was victorious over something. In an open cosmic drama (in keeping with what we do know was the world view of the early Christians) the death of Christ was God pitting himself against the hostile powers and beating them. The sin is cancelled not because God is paid back, or his honour restored but because Christ fights evil and beats it. Man is a passenger on the journey – when he aligns himself to Christ he is participating in the cosmic event of good overcoming evil.

Activities;

1. Make a pictorial representation of the evolution of Satan from a shadowy insubstantial figure to the evolved Tempter in the New Testament. At what point did the serpent in the Garden of Eden become the Devil?
2. List the wrongs in the world that could be said to be 'evil'. Do these include sickness, injustice, poverty and if so, are they 'evil' or just 'natural'?

3. In common with many peoples, 1st century Jews ascribed illness they didn't understand to supernatural forces. Modern man is the opposite, thinking that everything can be healed by science and that what we don't understand now, we eventually will. Make a list of things/events/ that are not yet understood. Would the world be a better or worse place if all mystery was taken away?

4. Wittgenstein argued that when we talk about religion we use 'language games.' In the way a chess player knows the rules of the games and *assumes others know too*, so people talking about religion use internal rules that make sense only to them.
 - a) Define the words Atonement and Incarnation
 - b) Do the words mean anything to a non-religious person or do only make sense within the language game of Christianity?

5. Atonement theories are connected to what Christians believe about the Problem of Evil. In the Augustinian theodicy, God made a perfect world which man ruined by committing the original sin (following his own will over that of God). Evil is therefore man's fault – not God's. In the Irenaean theodicy, evil is to enable a place of 'soul making' (i.e. suffering is a necessary part of God's creation)
 - a) Draw a diagram with a 'hierarchy' of sin (e.g. murder/cheating on your partner/ruining the planet/ bullying – your diagram may not be a hierarchy so much as a broad grouping and will be different to other class members.
 - b) Try and indicate which evils you think God should be blamed for/which man and which neither.
 - c) Is God or man actually responsible for evil in your view? Is the theory of Original Sin a rather blunt way of keeping God innocent? Discuss.

6. There are differences between denominations within Christianity as a result of different beliefs. Since the reformation, the United Kingdom contains both Catholic and Protestant denominations. Are the following Protestant or Catholic beliefs?
 - a) Man is saved and forgiven for sin, not because of anything he/she can do but by grace alone
 - b) The priest – who has to be male – stands as an intermediary between man and God
 - c) The bread and the wine are only symbols of the body and blood of Christ

- d) The Pope stands in a direct line of authority that originated with Jesus' disciple Peter
 - e) Man inherits original sin – he is fallen and ultimately corrupt
 - f) All humans have been given a natural law that recognises good from evil. Sin is when we mistakenly confuse evil for good
 - g) There is an intermediary place between heaven and hell known as purgatory where we are prepared for heaven
7. Sacrifice could be seen as intimately linked to power. Someone usually sacrifices something less powerful than himself in order to approach/satisfy/connect with something more powerful. Sacrifice is a part of every world religion and originally meant animal and, occasionally, human sacrifice. In order for it to be worthwhile, the sacrifice had to have value and there is still the notion of self-sacrifice in festivals such as Lent. Mark the following statements true/false according to your personal belief
- 'There's no gain without pain'
 - 'I would die for the person I love'
 - 'To die for your country is the ultimate sacrifice'
 - 'I like to give something up for Lent – it reminds me to be grateful for what I have'
 - 'Sacrifice is part of what it means to be human – you can't always keep the thing you love. On occasions it is right to give it up for the greater good.'
8. True or false
- The bread and wine are placed on the 'altar' during Church services to remind us of the sacrifice of Christ
 - The place outside Jerusalem mentioned by Jesus Gehenna and translated as 'hell' was originally a valley where pagans offered child sacrifice before becoming a rubbish pit.
 - All the gospels record Jesus as saying 'I have taken on the devil for you, fought and beaten him'.
 - In Milton's Paradise Lost the Devil is originally a woman
 - God could not have created the devil as evil because perfect goodness cannot create perfect evil

Defeating Evil

FILM SCRIPT

For the Jews of the Old Testament the devil was more an idea than an actual being. 'Satan' is an old Hebrew word meaning 'stumbling block' or obstacle and the Old Testament references to Satan nearly always only mean a shadowy unhelpful presence.

But as we've seen, around the time of the birth of Christianity, Babylonian ideas were in the air. In the Apocryphal writings – just as the Son of Man had evolved – so had the figure of Satan.

When the book of Job was translated into Greek around 200 BCE, Satan was this shadowy tempter. But by the time of Jesus, Satan had solidified into a being that was evil incarnate. Born an angel, distanced through pride from God, he was the Prince of the world – and since the time of Eve, he had claimed mankind for his own.

RANSOM THEORY

St Paul was aware of this Satan. Convinced that the sordid ignominy of the cross was not the end of Jesus' mission and his death had somehow 'saved sinners,' the apostle told his listeners that they were bought at a price, implying that Jesus death paid something. In both the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, the death is described as a ransom.' And in 1Timothy we read: *"the man Christ Jesus... gave himself as a ransom for all people."*

So if Jesus' death was some kind of deal, it could have been a ransom to Satan. Although Irenaeus is often credited with fleshing out the idea of ransom it is Origen who lays it out plainly:

"If then we were bought with a price as Paul asserts, we were doubtless bought from one who... named what price he would for releasing those whom he held...it was the devil who held us... he asked, therefore, as our price the blood of Christ."

Origen
Theologian (184 -254 CE)

The assumption is that it's the devil who has power and his claim to man is legitimate. God would have to deceive him – so He'd wrapped Jesus up as a frail human being and the devil had swallowed the bait.

“To secure the ransom on our behalf...the Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, so as with a ravenous fish the hook of deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh.”

Gregory of Nyssa
Theologian, (335 – 395 CE)

It's not surprising that this brutal idea of ransom made sense and continued to do so for the next 900 years. Times were harsh and ransom was commonplace. People were routinely bought at a price. No one really asked why an omnipotent God has to pay the devil anything for claiming his own creatures back, until, in 1099, a Frenchman who had become Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote a little book called 'Why God Became Man.'

For Anselm, ransom theory didn't work not only because it gave too much power to Satan but also because God was caught up in skulduggery. Being deceitful is no way for an all good God to behave. For Anselm, Christ's death is necessary, not to buy creatures back but in order to satisfy God.

SATISFACTION THEORY

Imagine God as goodness. Every time we sin – every tiny unkindness or theft – short changes our creator. We are in permanent debt. Clearly the debt needs addressing but how can finite beings repay an infinite debt? So Christ steps into the picture. Christ who is infinite takes on finite flesh as a substitute, to cancel the debt. His crucifixion in obedience to God showed God a surplus of honour so that all the evil of humanity is outweighed by this supreme good.

Anselm's theory is known as the Satisfaction theory – which doesn't mean God is feeling fat after a good meal but that his honour is restored. Perfect justice demands perfect justice and – for Anselm – Christ's death affords that. Christ stands in for humans to restore the balance between perfect God and imperfect man: wholeness is regained.

PENAL SUBSTITUTION THEORY

A few hundred years later and times had moved on. For John Calvin, Martin Luther and Puritans, human sin loomed large. There was no escaping it – the very act of being born meant inheriting the original sin of Adam, quite apart from what you did next, and you could be put in the stocks for dancing on the Sabbath, or hung for stealing a rabbit.

Christ however is born of a virgin – he has no original sin. And it is this perfect man, this God, who stands in for humans and takes the punishment of death on himself.

Luther's Penal Substitution Theory has its roots in Anselm but it stresses punishment as a way of making amends. Christ suffers all the punishment that should properly have come to man. His death was hideous in a way we cannot know. It stood in the place of every other death. And when Christ cries 'My God why have you forsaken me' he means more than we can imagine.

Before the Reformation, Anselm's theory that Christ's death had won a surplus had given people a way out of sin. From the surplus there could be pardon and travelling friars sold Indulgences.....if you had the money, you could literally buy your way into heaven.

With Luther all this changed. Focussed on the wrath of God, man's sin is so deep and Christ's death so awful, that no amount of good works will do. Man is incapable of soothing this God. Only Christ's death can do it. Eternal life is won not by pardons, indulgences, or even by being good - but by the grace of Christ alone.

Many Christians still hold to some version of Luther's view even though others see punishment of one innocent man as sickening and unjust. The idea of retribution; of cosmic punishment heaped onto Jesus has been described as the opposite of morality - too violent, too legal, too crude. And yet it's there....in *Romans* St Paul says that '*Christ was put forward as propitiation by his blood.*' Propitiation means *appeasing*. God was angered by humanity's sin and Christ took the wrath on himself. This is what Penal substitution means.

THE CHRISTUS VICTOR THEORY

Jesus was as aware as anyone of the power of evil in Satan. In the first century, demonic forces were perceived to be everywhere – so when He healed the man possessed by spirits or the woman with blood loss he was as much saving them from evil as healing them. The Christus Victor idea of atonement sees a cosmic battle between good and evil. If Jesus' life was on the side of good – talking to prostitutes, healing people on the Sabbath, then his death was an ultimate act. If Christ was God – says the theory - by his death, he took on himself the weight of evil in the world and destroyed it. He swept through it. He beat it.

In the 1930s the Swiss theologian Gustav Aulen wrote a book that re-launched the old idea of Christ as victor. The differences between this and substitution theory are subtle – in both, good overcomes evil but the idea of victory stresses three things. Firstly humans are trapped and need freeing with the emphasis on mankind as victims of evil rather than contributing to it through sin. Secondly although God is still made distraught by evil instead of being vengeful he heals it and lastly this Christ is a cosmic force - the battle is won for all time in the single act of his death.

Since the 1930's Christus Victor has become the atonement theory that most Christians recognise in some form. Modern culture is no longer comfortable with the acute sense of sin and guilt that people used to feel and this theory does distance itself from personal sin. But all the atonement theories are inextricably linked to Jesus as the incarnate son of God. It is God that defeats evil, not man, not even a perfect or idealised man. The victory – the power of good over evil - is bought by and paid for by a being who was both fully God but twisted and contorted in full human pain, as he hung dying one afternoon on a hillside.



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