

Atonement: Soundings in Biblical, Trinitarian, and Spiritual Theology

Chapter 3: Renewing a Spiritual Theology of Atonement

- * The Triune God leaves room for our participation in the Son's work of atonement.
- * On the Cross, Christ's "exchange of place" with us sinners is not a mere "taking our place" as if Christ *displaced* us. Rather it is an *emplacement* of us, a re-establishment of us as sons of God. Hence the *Catechism* states: "Christ enables us to live in Him all that He Himself lives, and He lives it in us" (#521). And "from the beginning, Jesus associated His disciples with His own life ... and gave them a share in His mission, joy, and sufferings" (#787).
- * Accordingly, the Holy Spirit is sent to prolong the mission of the Son into the realm of our personal, historical existence. By the working of the Spirit of Sonship in our hearts, we are empowered as "sons in the Son" to be and act as God's filial beloved in bearing sin away. In fact, atonement coincides with the realization of our vocation to divine filiation in this sin-marred world; every Christian must inevitably live out his identity as a beloved son/child of God by way of sharing in Christ's work of atonement.
- * Our yes to sonship in Christ – made effective by the Spirit – is a yes to co-atonement in Christ.
- * Certainly the atoning work of Christ is not deficient. Yet it is meant to be productive, effective, not simply of itself (independently of us) but in us and with us. Christ's vicarious substitution for sinners reaches its complete denouement when converted sinners become co-atoners. This is what it means to say that, in us, Christ's atonement "blossoms."
- * Moreover, Christians are enabled by the Triune God to atone in a *representative* capacity.
- * With, through, and in Christ, we are called to the awesome task of becoming vicarious atoners in the Atoner. This task is at the heart of the universal call to holiness.
- * In virtue of our baptism we are equipped and commissioned to bear one another's burdens, even the burden of other's sins, so that all might be "recapitulated" in Christ.
- * "You will be redeemers with the Redeemer, just as you are sons in the Son." (Benedict XVI)

Personal and Pastoral Reflections

1. How does this theology and spirituality of atonement...
 - apply to the problem of the excommunicate? (Ratzinger's reflections)
 - apply to fasting from the Eucharist on Good Friday? (Ratzinger's reflections)
 - find support in the witness of recent saints? (Therese of Lisieux and Teresa of Calcutta)
 - Other reflections? comments?
2. How can the recovery and renewal of a spirituality of atonement...
 - guide you in preparing for the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation?
 - apply to prison ministry?
 - challenge and change the mindset of an unforgiving "cancel culture"?
 - prime us to be co-atoners in our secular age characterized by the "eclipse of God"?
 - Other reflections? comments?