# Luke's Theology of the Cross Agnus Victor in Luke-Acts

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#### THE ATONEMENT

### The State of the Debate

In 1930 Gustaf Aulén published Christus Victor (1969) in which he challenged the primacy of Anselm's theory of the atonement known as penal satisfaction that says that the purpose of the atonement is to satisfy the justice of God regarding human sin. In its place Aulén sought to reclaim what he believed to be the "classic," or Christus Victor view that says that the primary purpose of the cross was to defeat the devil. More recently, Joel B. Green and Mark Baker (2000) in their book The Scandal of the Cross have also called the penal view into question on other grounds, namely that any view of propitiation that sees the need to assuage God's anger against sin can be offensive in honor-shame cultures, and it certainly misses the mark in power appearement cultures.<sup>2</sup> Green has since called this the "kaleidoscopic" view (2006)<sup>3</sup> saying that the we have an array of biblical metaphors of the atonement to use when sharing or teaching the gospel, not just one. A lively debate has now opened up within evangelicalism that has produced a virtual cottage industry of literature. One side supports the God-ward view that sees the central problem of sin as having to do with an offense against God.<sup>4</sup> Another side affirms the Satan-ward view that sees the primary victory at the cross as the defeat of the devil.<sup>5</sup> Still another camp has grown out of the work of René Girard in his book I Saw Satan Falling from Heaven like Lightening (2001) that rejects any view of the atonement that supports violence.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This view was not in any sense "classic." The early church Father's clearly affirmed the primacy of the substitutionary view while also acknowledging that the cross had accomplished the victory of God over all satanic power.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Anthropologists (e.g., Muller 2000) have noted that the world can be broken up into three types of societies, honor/shame based peoples (primarily Asian), guilt/innocence peoples (primarily western), and fear/appeasement peoples (primarily tribal groups).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. John Driver (*Understanding the Atonement*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> E.g., J. Stott (*The Cross of Christ*), Charles H. Hill & Frank A. James, Eds. (*The Glory of the Atonement*); John Piper (*Counted Righteous in Christ*); David Peterson, Ed. (*Where Wrath and Mercy Meet*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> E.g., Gregory Boyd "Christus Victor View" in James B. Beilby & Paul R. Eddy, Eds. (*The Nature of the Atonement*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> E.g., Walter Wink (Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way); Steve Finlan (Problems with the Atonement), J. Denny Weaver (The Nonviolent Atonement).

#### **Luke: A Test Case**

The purpose of this paper is not to present my own view but to attempt to discover where Luke might fall in this debate. My starting point in discovering Luke's view of the atonement is to examine Hans Conzelmann's groundbreaking study of redaction criticism in Luke-Acts called *The Theology of St. Luke* published in 1953. Conzelmann claimed that in Luke's redaction of Mark he has exchanged Mark's theology of the cross for a theology of resurrection. Conzelmann bluntly concludes that that Luke gives no soteriological significance to the death of Jesus (1960: 210).

A cursory study of Acts shows that the apostles ground their proclamation of the gospel on the resurrection of Jesus, not the cross, and discovery that might lead the interpreter to agree with Conzelmann. If there is any place in the New Testament to call into question the need for there to be a specific theology of the atonement at the center of the gospel message, this would appear to be the place to begin. In the gospel Luke's Jesus states only that it was God's will for him to suffer and does not offer a reason for how his suffering atones for sin. In Acts the apostles put the primary emphasis on the resurrection in their preaching. Does this mean that Conzelmann is right and that Luke offers no interpretation of the cross? To get to the bottom of what Luke is doing I propose to ask two questions of our ancient author and one of his readers to ask how we might apply our findings. First, assuming that the apostles actually did put the resurrection out front in their preaching, why would they do this at the expense of the cross? Second, if we can uncover such a reason, are there indications that Luke places value on the cross? If so, what is it? Finally, can we learn something from the way that Luke has cast his first century evangelists that might be helpful for us in our context? I will briefly explore each question in turn.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> To quote Conzelmann: "There is no "direct soteriological significance drawn from Jesus' suffering or death. There is no suggestion of a connection with the forgiveness of sins" (Conzelmann 1960: 201). Cadbury takes a similar view (1999: 280f); see Fitzmyer (1981: 219f) for a review of the issues.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> While Luke clearly shows in the trial narrative (Acts 21-28) that Paul is innocent of all charges leveled at him by the Jews, his main interest is to demonstrate that the real reason Paul is on trial is for his preaching that the Messiah had been raised from the dead. Paul makes the issue plain in his defense before the Sanhedrin: "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of a Pharisee. Concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged" (Acts 23.8). He asserts the same thing before Felix, Agrippa and the Jews in Rome (cf. Acts 24.21; 26.8; 28.20; Cunningham 1997: 280-281).

# The Stigma of the Cross in the Ancient World

We begin by noting that ancient Mediterranean society was based on three foundational concepts: 1) collectivism, the idea that the group is more important than the individual; 2) the need to preserve and gain honor and avoid shame, or status, and 3) patronage and reciprocity, the sense of obligation that one who has greater honor need to bless those of lesser honor, thereby raising status and requiring as "payback" (Witherington 2009: 16-18). With these worldview assumptions in mind, we now need to ask why the resurrection might have been given front billing in the apostolic *kērygma*. Another way of asking this question is, "Why would the cross *not* have had the place of prominence in the apostle's preaching?"

To answer this we need to get to the bottom of how the cross was viewed in the first century. When we realize that honor and shame were essentially group realities (one can only gain or lose honor in a relational exchange), it is up to the group, then, to monitor a person's status. This was often done with the use of names and roles that had stigmas attached to them that located someone on an unwritten status-meter that Jerome Neyrey calls a "cultural map" (1991: 274-294). Ancient Mediterranean society had a clearly defined cultural map that archived the accepted norms of behavior, and one was expected to remain within the latitude of acceptance that was circumscribed by the group.

#### The Cross: A Scandal for Jews and Gentiles

Verbal Status Reducing Strategies

It is clear in Luke's gospel that from the outset Jesus found himself in trouble with the Jew's cultural mapping for acceptable behavior. In a foreshadowing that was cast in relief against his (allegedly) illegitimate birth, Simeon had prophesied over the baby Jesus that he would be a sign that would be spoken against (Lk 2.34). From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus fulfilled that prophecy. He overturned social convention when he broke his apprenticeship with the family business, his father Joseph being a *tekton*, a

carpenter or mason. When he stepped out into the role of traveling prophet and miracle-working rabbi, the people of his home town turned on him when he accused them of having less faith than two Old Testament Gentiles, an abhorrent offense to Jewish sensibilities. In their first instance of deviance control, the townspeople attempted to throw him off a cliff (Lk 4.24-30). From there on out Jesus was, negatively labeled as a "blasphemer" (5.21), "glutton" (7.34), "drunkard" (7.34), "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (7.34), and even "Beelzebub," a satanic magician (11.15). Bruce Chilton (2002) says that the term manzer ("bastard") would have followed him like a shadow.

When negative labeling didn't work, the Jewish purity guardians initiated smear campaigns among the community designed to slander Jesus and shame the deviant back into alignment. The strategy of the Jews was to destroy Jesus' reputation amongst the group by demonstrating once and for all that he was a false prophet. The problem was that the people weren't buying it, thus forcing the Jewish boundary police to go to even greater measures.

## The Cross: The Ultimate Status Degradation Ritual

When these strategies didn't work, they needed to find a status degradation method so foolproof that Jesus' legal guilt could be established and his status reduced to nothing (Kraft 1996: 345-353). This meant proving that Jesus was disapproved by God. Death by stoning, the punishment prescribed for a false prophet in Deuteronomy (13.10), would not do; Jesus would become more as a martyr than when he was alive. They concluded that there was only one way they could do it, by having Jesus hung on a "tree." According to Deuteronomy 21.22, death on a tree proved that one was under God's curse. This, then, was how the Jews could gain a full group consensus and end the Jesus movement once and for all. And since Roman crucifixion was the ultimate status degradation ritual in Ancient Near East society, the stigma alone would snuff the Jesus' kingdom of God campaign out like a candle.

In a desperate moment during the trial the Priests and Sadducees discovered the way to break through the juggernaut of Jesus' innocence. They would exploit Pilate's political vulnerabilities by threatening to lower his status with a smear campaign. In so doing they manipulated him into condemning an innocent man to die the worst death for the worst of crime in the empire. Jesus was ultimately crucified for the crime of insurrection allegedly claiming to be the King of the Jews.

Preaching the cross to Jews, therefore, meant proclaiming to worship a crucified god, a virtual contradiction in terms. One can see how the cross would have been a tough sell in reaching the Jews. On the Roman side it was believed that only the most horrific criminals died by crucifixion. Although the Scriptures are silent on the subject, most crucifixion was also done with full frontal nudity, the posture of ultimate shame and degradation (Hengel 1977: 130).

# Summary

A crucified messiah, therefore, was a *non sequitor* for both Jews and Romans and functioned as an absolute scandal for the preaching of the gospel in the first century. Indeed, the rolling of the stone in front of Jesus' sepulcher was the proverbial "nail in the coffin" for both groups on the subject of whom and what Jesus was—a criminal cursed by the Jewish God and the Roman gods. Furthermore, Jesus died shamefully with a crown of thorns, the head being the most important body part for the display of either honor or shame. He might even have died naked, although Luke here is silent.

## Preaching the Resurrection and Exaltation of Christ

And yet...a burgeoning, grass roots movement arose quickly, initially comprised of Jews, but later expanding through a groundswell of Gentiles of all different social rankings. This movement claimed that

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> It is debated as to whether Jesus would have been crucified naked because the Romans often made concessions to the Jewish repugnance for nudity (Jub 3.30-31; 7.20) and allowed a loin cloth to be used. The fact that Jesus wore clothing to the crucifixion might imply that this was true (Brown 1994: 953).

Jesus, a Jew from a backwater town in Galilee, a mixed Jewish/Gentile area in the worst Roman outpost in the empire, who had been shamefully crucified no less, was now being proclaimed as Messiah (to the Jews) and Lord (to the Romans). It was the most ridiculous thing either society had ever heard—except for one thing—eyewitnesses were claiming with great passion that Jesus was alive, thus vindicating him of all charges and validating his entire ministry. But this wasn't all. The apostles were also saying that Jesus had been exalted to the most honorable position in the universe, God's right hand. As such, he had been given authority to pour out God's Spirit and power.

It is not surprising, then, that the reader of Acts notes that in Luke's narration of the apostolic speeches, it is the resurrection of Jesus that receives front billing in the kērygma. It was the conviction and strategy of the early evangelists that in their context, the preaching of the resurrection, along with the exaltation of Jesus would reverse the stigma of the cross, thus opening the way to affirm that God himself had made Jesus Lord and Christ (Acts 2.29-36). On this basis, people repented and turned from their wickedness to God. All of this was confirmed by miraculous signs and wonders that proved that what they were saying was true.

# Does Luke have a Theology of the Atonement?

We have now answered our first question as to why the resurrection and exaltation might have laid the foundation for evangelistic preaching in the first century: these divine activities restored Jesus' honor and elevated his status to God's right hand man. We now move on to our second inquiry as to whether Luke has abandoned the cross altogether, as Conzelmann has claimed, or whether the cross is alluded to within the text. If this is true, has Luke offered an interpretation of the cross, albeit lying under the surface of the narrative? If Luke has rejected a theology of the cross, then he has nothing to offer the current conversation on the atonement. Even if it can be demonstrated that Luke was being implicit or even cryptic

with his support of an atoning value to the cross, the interpreter needs to explain why Luke seems to redact the vicarious nature of Jesus' suffering out of his account. While Luke has retained Mark's statement that Jesus died "for" our sins in his retention of Mark's account of the Last Supper (see below), he does not interpret what "for" means. While it is always healthy to realize that Luke might not be asking our questions or attempting to be theologically precise—this is certainly true on both accounts—is it possible that Luke assumes a particular theology of the cross but chooses to emphasize a theology of glory to contextualize the gospel for his first century audience? It is to these questions that we now turn.

Since the apostolic preaching in Acts is based on the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, and not the cross per se, we will now try to see if a theology of atonement might not lie under the surface in Luke-Acts. If it does we will then ask what kind of theology this might be. The heart of the cross on the lips of Luke's Jesus has to do with his clear statements that the Christ "must" suffer (paschō). There are five references to Jesus' suffering in Luke (e.g., 9.22; 22.15) and four in Acts (e.g., 1.3; 3.18). The interpreter hears loud and clear that God willed that the Christ must suffer, but one is constrained, then, to go on to ask how the suffering of the innocent atones for sins and makes forgiveness possible.

## Luke and Isaiah's Suffering Servant: Four Pieces of Evidence

The most obvious doorway to Luke's theology of the atonement is to explore how Luke portrays Jesus' self understanding as the fulfillment of Isaiah's suffering Servant. I am going to examine four test pieces where Luke makes this connection to Isaiah 53. We will look first at Luke's use of the Greek term *pais*, meaning son or servant, second at the language used at the Lord's Supper, third at Luke's use of Isaiah 53 in the account of the Ethiopian eunuch, and finally what it means that Luke says that Jesus "hung on a tree."

<sup>10</sup> "Must" (dei) is the language of divine necessity (see Squires 1993).

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## The Pais (Son/Servant)

The fact that Luke's Jesus is considered the *pais* ("servant/son") of God at his baptism tells the reader that Jesus is being viewed from God's perspective through the perspective of the LXX version of the Servant of Isaiah (Martin 1974: 31). *Pais tou theou* (son/servant of God) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew term *ebed Yahweh* (servant of Yahweh) that is used in the "Servant Songs" in Isaiah 42-53. Oscar Cullmann asserts that the *ebed Yahweh* concept implies a *vicarious* atonement and is the overarching schema that ties the entire New Testament together:

The atoning death of Jesus is not only the central act of his earthly life, but also the central act of the total history of salvation from the first creation at the beginning of time to the new creation at the end of time...It understands Jesus as the one who at the decisive point in time carried out the decisive work of the total plan of salvation. This is the classical expression of the principle of the whole New Testament Heilsgeschichte."<sup>12</sup>

Overall I believe that Cullmann is correct and have concluded elsewhere that the biblical story is ultimately about God's plan to resolve the problem of sin, thus repairing the God/Human relationship and removing the legal ground that Satan has to keep his people from imaging God throughout the earth and rule it as his ambassadors (Jackson 2009). Because Jesus paid for human sin, God's plan for history and creation will come to its appointed *telos* (goal). The vicarious atonement, then, *is* at the heart of the general New Testament story. The question is where Luke stands on this subject. Does Luke's emphasis on the divine necessity of Christ's suffering imply a vicarious atonement in alignment with the implications of Isaiah 53? To examine this we need to delve into Luke's view of the Lord's Supper.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> 42.1-9; 49.1-13; 50.4-11; 52.13-53.12

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> *Heilsgeschichte* is the German word meaning "salvation history." It is used in New Testament theology to denote history and time seen from God's perspective as the linear process by which he brings salvation to his entire creation (Cullmann 1949).

# The Supper

# The Cup Language

While Luke does not develop the theology of the Supper beyond the historical event itself, does his retention of Mark's language about the cup as the New Covenant in Jesus' blood mean that it is foundational for his own theology of the cross? Cup language consistently refers to the outpouring of God's wrath in the prophetic literature (Is 51.17; Jer 25.15; Ez 23.32-33; Hab 2.16). As N.T. Wright has pointed out, the prophets taught that Israel would need to drink the cup of God's wrath because this was the price for her sins (1992: 273-279). Yet, even though the prophets had interpreted Israel's exile as a kind of national death (Jer 4.23-26; Ez 37), they had also declared that a national resurrection was coming and an end to the exile (Jer 4.27; Ez 37). It is an easy step to see how Second Temple writers would then have construed Israel's suffering as having redemptive, even expiating power (see 4 Maccabees here); the time of Jacob's trouble, or severe testing (Jer 30.7) would lay the ground for the coming Day of Yahweh when Daniel's Son of Man would set everything right (Dan 12.1-3); God's plan had always been to use Israel as the people of God for the world and the coming Son of Man would get Israel back on track after his suffering and vindication. For Jesus to take the cup, then, was for him to take the place of Israel, drink their judgment, forgive their sins and end the exile

While the Supper is the only time that any kind of substitutionary language ("for you") is used in Luke-Acts, <sup>13</sup> it is important because it comes off the lips of Jesus himself. The very nature of the cup saying was tied to the animal sacrifice at the exodus that rescued Israel from experiencing the coming judgment of God. Wright concludes that even though the language of atonement that is common in other New Testament authors is absent in Luke, the reference to the cup, along with the allusions that will be

<sup>13</sup> Although see Acts 13.39 where Luke's Paul uses the word "justified" in his speech in Pisidian Antioch and refers to the salvation that Jesus had purchased for the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.28.

examined next, "could (emphasis mine) have been part of the matrix from which that theology developed" (1997: 574).

It would appear, then, that Luke's consistent focus on the divine necessity of Jesus' suffering shows that he understands Jesus' suffering to be atoning, but he is not committal about how that is so. Perhaps if dig deeper we can find out more about how Luke understands Christ's death to be atoning.

When we revisit Luke's retention of Mark's use of *hyper* ("for") in his redaction of the cup saying, "This cup is my body poured out for you" (Lk 22.20), it should be pointed out that Mark has substituted *hyper*, which means "on behalf of" (with the genitive), for the LXX of Isaiah 53.5 which has *dia*, meaning "because of" or "for the sake of" (with the accusative). While Mark's redaction seems intended to help his readers understand Jesus' death to be substitutionary, is Luke trying to tell us something here?

While we concede that it cannot be proven that Luke is alluding to Isaiah 53.5 because Luke is following Mark (so Fitzmyer 1985: 1401), we can note a couple of other connections that shore up possible connections to a substitutionary Servant. Luke has also retained Mark's *ekcheō* ("poured out"). He then makes another overt reference to Isaiah 53 when he says that Jesus has been "numbered with the transgressors" (Lk 22.37=Is 53.12). This shows that Luke understands the crucifixion as a type of exodus sacrifice made on behalf of "transgressors." This is why Luke changes Mark's *polus* ("many") to the second person plural *hymin* ("you") when quoting Isaiah 53.5, 12 in the phrase "poured out for you."

When we add this evidence together,

- "Numbered with the transgressors,"
- "Broken/poured out"
- "For" meaning "on behalf of"
- "You," meaning collective Israel,

...and join them to both Peter's statement in Acts 10.43 where he asserts that forgiveness comes only *through* the name of Jesus i.e., through what he did on the cross to, and Paul's statement to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.23 that Jesus has "bought [the church] with his own blood," it appears that Luke understands there to be a substitutionary connection between Jesus death and the forgiveness of sins for the nation but chooses not to nuance how substitution atones.

# The Ethiopian Eunuch

Having examined the Servant and the Supper, we now look at Luke's use of Isaiah 53 in Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Here the Ethiopian is reading from Isaiah 53.7-8 where the prophet says God's Servant would be "familiar with suffering." Rather than connecting directly to the atoning work of the Servant, it is the virtuous silence of the sufferer that Luke wants to focus on with the eunuch. Because suffering was part of the calling of the righteous in the Old Testament, those who suffer should do so with a dignity befitting such a privilege.

Isaiah cast his Servant as a type of the righteous sufferer when he says that it was "the Lord's will to crush him and cause his soul to suffer" (53.10-11) and that "like a lamb before the shearers is dumb" (Is 53.7 in Acts 8.32). This is what it means that the Servant will suffer silently (righteously). In a moment when he could have hammered home the substitutionary connection between the Servant and Jesus, Luke focuses here on the suffering of the righteous? I see two possible reasons that he does this.

First, the passage that this God-fearing man wanted explained was one that he identified with; he too had been "sheared," just as Jesus had been. He too had been deprived of justice; who could speak of his descendents (Morris 1965: 112)? Although an argument from silence, by the time Philip was done with his explanation, however, it would appear the Ethiopian knew enough about the gospel to understand what it meant to go down into the waters of baptism and share in the resurrection of the Servant who Isaiah said

would "see his offspring." The conversion of this man, whom the reader assumes goes back to North Africa to his influential position, proleptically foreshadows that he would go on to have spiritual offspring in the same way that Jesus' disciples would go on to "catch men" (Lk 5.10). It seems likely, but not provable, that Luke intends the reader to understand that Philip began his gospel presentation with the man's felt need but then would have gone on to expand Isaiah 53 into its full implications. <sup>14</sup>

The second reason that Luke might want to focus on the Servant as a type of righteous sufferer it seems probable that Luke's readers needed assurance that even though they too would need to pick up their cross and suffer, perhaps even unto death as Jesus had, they could look also forward to their own resurrection from the dead. In this way, Jesus and his followers were part of a long tradition of the vindication of the righteous sufferer, such as Job, David, Daniel, and all those that followed in redemptive history. Here Luke appears to be portraying Jesus as the Prophet like Moses (Deut 18.15; cf. Acts 3.22) that must suffer at the hands of the wicked and be vindicated in the end. Once again we can see that when the larger picture is taken into account, Luke believes that Jesus' death had atoning value but is not committal about exactly how that is so.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> That this might be true can be seen in the construction of Isaiah 52.13-53.12, the fourth Servant Song. The author has written his oracle in a chiastic A B C B' A' pattern. Both A and A' put the emphasis on the resurrection and exaltation of the Servant. The chiastic, stair-stepped pattern moves toward C, which is about the atoning death of the Servant. We can thus see in the literary construction of the passage that the lead message is the resurrection and the heart of the message is the atoning blood sacrifice. It is to be noted, however, that while the Servant's blood does atone (thus the causal use of the prefixed min, "because of our transgressions"; Is 53.5), *how* the blood atones is unstated. Furthermore, Geoffrey Grogan (2008: 87-88) thinks that because Luke's speeches are essentially summaries of what would have been longer sermons, the apostles would have gone on to explain the significance of the cross in more depth. Based on what we have seen as likely with Philip's evangelism with the eunuch and the sub-textual evidence cited above showing how Luke understood Jesus as *ebed Yahweh*, this hypothesis is plausible, even though it is an argument from silence.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> The question as to whether Luke's community was experiencing persecution or whether it was only anticipating persecution is difficult to ascertain. For a full discussion see Scott Cunningham's excellent monograph, *Through Many Tribulations: The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts* (1997: 328-342).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Cf. John Squires (1993) for the use of the language of divine necessity in Luke-Acts.

# Hanging on a Tree

Lastly, to the connections to the Servant, the Supper and the Ethiopian eunuch, we present one more piece of evidence to test. In two of Peter's sermons in Acts (5.30; 10.39) and one of Paul's; 13.29), the apostles accuse the Jews of hanging Jesus on a "tree," a reference to Deuteronomy 21.23 where Moses says, "Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree." This is an example of synecdoche, a rabbinic method where a part is allowed to represent the whole (Soulen and Soulen 2001: ad. loc.). Peter and Paul assume that their Jewish listeners would immediately understand this to mean that Jesus had rightfully come under God's curse by dying on a Roman "tree."

In the Old Testament, a curse involved invoking a particular fate upon an individual or a collective that had violated a moral or societal standard. This applied even to Israel when she violated God's covenant (VanGemeren 1997: 491-493). The invoking of curses finds its basis in Genesis in the punishments meted out on Adam, Eve, the serpent and creation itself (3.14-19). As the story moves forward, God typologically took upon himself humanity's curse by passing between the pieces of the animal sacrifices in 15.12-21. The fact that life was to be understood in the language of blessing and cursing is cemented in the blessings and cursings of the covenant renewal ceremony in Deuteronomy 28-30. In the Jewish mind the fact that Jesus was crucified meant that he had come under God's curse. In the Roman mind it meant that Jesus had been grossly shamed by the gods. In both cases the punishment was just. The question is whether Luke intends his readers to understand this suffering to be substitutionary. It seems the obvious next step but it does not appear that Luke clearly takes it.

### Four Test Pieces: A Summery

Having now studied Luke's use of the term *pais*, the language used at the Supper, the connection to Isaiah 53 with the Ethiopian eunuch and the language of hanging on a tree, we have established that it is

probable that Luke shows Jesus to be working out of Isaiah's Servant paradigm to understand his death. It also seems likely that this is Luke's frame of reference for why Jesus had to suffer: he suffered *for us*. But how did Luke want his readers to understand this? To this evidence we could add, 1) that Luke has placed on Paul's tongue the language of justification (Acts 13.39 re: Is 53.11), that 2) the forgiveness of sins that is available through the name of Jesus (Acts 2.38; 5.31; 10.43) could be a reference to the guilt offering of Is 53.10, and 3) the references to peace through Christ (Lk 2.14: "peace to those on whom God's favor rests"; Acts 10.36: "the good news of peace through Jesus Christ") appears to be reference to Is 53.5: "the punishment that brought us peace was upon him." In all this I conclude that Luke does have a theology of the atonement: Jesus, who was righteous, suffered on behalf of the guilty and obtained forgiveness through his death on the cross. Luke uses allusions to the exodus and the Servant but does not see the need within his purposes to nuance, or tease out the implications of these great traditions. The cross atones; of that Luke is clear. As to the nature of that atonement, Luke does not say. Did he see it through the vicarious lens of the Servant—his allusions to Isaiah 53 show that he knew of this view—or was he interpreting the cross through an atoning martyr theology as in 2 Maccabees? The former seems more likely.

We now pose an answer to our second question. It is possible that Luke believes Jesus' death to be substitutionary but he rejects the thematic development of that trajectory that would cement that case and opts to develop the motif of the righteous sufferer. It is highly possible that the reason for this arises out of the needs of his readers. Luke wants his readers to understand that the growth of the church ultimately comes from God's sovereign hand and that this inevitably involves Jesus' followers sharing in that suffering. They are not to be discouraged, however, for God's righteous sufferers will be vindicated through Christ's resurrection into a glorious future after their time of tribulation.

#### Conclusion

In putting this all together I offer the following synthesis: while Luke chose to focus on the resurrection as the tip of the evangelistic spear in his first century context, the heart of his theology was *Agnus Victor* (Blocher 2002), victory through suffering (on the cross). As to how this death atones, Luke hints that he understands Christ's death in light of Isaiah's Servant, but the motifs that he brings out from that connection are more aligned with the vindication of the righteous sufferer than the atoning nature of the death itself. Having said that, it would seem that Luke understood that it was at the cross that sin has been atoned for and the primary battle has been won—the relationship between God and Humankind has been restored and available to all those who repent. It was this victory that paved the way for *Christus Victor*, the ultimate defeat of satanic powers. On this foundation the gospel of "the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ go forth unhindered (Acts 28.31).<sup>17</sup> In the end, I don't believe that Conzelmann was right in his claim that Luke has *no* theology of atonement but he *was* on the right track in recognizing that Luke has put his emphasis elsewhere.

Having laid the case for the cross as the atoning foundation for the gospel and the resurrection as the preaching point that made sense in the first century, we can now pose and answer to our third question as to what relevance this might have for our modern context. Because the basis for preaching in Acts is based on the resurrection and exaltation while other metaphors for atonement are used in the New Testament, it would seem that contextual transmission of the gospel is not only Luke's but the New Testament's priority. In this I agree with Green and Baker who challenge the use of penal substitution as the sole basis for evangelism that has characterized much of post-Reformation evangelicalism. Luke's gospel is straightforward. It was necessary for Jesus to suffer for us to obtain forgiveness of sins and that because he is risen and exalted he is the Author of Life, a life that he continually pours out to his people by the Spirit from God's right hand.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> The last word in the Greek text of Acts is *akōlytōs*, "unhindered."

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