

Escaping the Violence of Bad Atonement Theology – July 12, 2019

Bibliography – P. Shannon Mullen – *With thanks to so many friends who helped put this together!*

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These are in no particular order – don't read anything into it. Some I have read all of, many I have read part of, and some are recommended by trusted friends. While I made the bibliography, I ordered 4 more myself!

WRITTEN FOR ALL PEOPLE - No knowledge of seminary jargon required!

Brian Zahnd. *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God*

Brian McLaren "With too many American Christian leaders echoing the angry, arrogant, vindictive, and violent rhetoric of our political culture, it's hard to imagine a book more relevant and needed than Brian Zahnd's *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God*. Zahnd rightly helps us see that for better or worse, we reflect the image of the God we believe in. Zahnd's insights into Scripture are rich and deep, making clear that if we want a less violent future, we need a vision of a nonviolent God."

Emily Swan and Ken Wilson. *Solus Jesus: A Theology of Resistance*

"*Solus Jesus* not only grapples with the authority question in Christianity, but also provides a massive re-think of traditional atonement theories. Leaning on the work of René Girard, they conclude that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus together reveal a completely good, non-violent God who is on the side of the oppressed and scapegoated of this world. As a work of queer theology, the book is intersectional in its understanding of justice, and invites readers to reconsider our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus."

J.D. Myers, *Nothing but the Blood of Jesus: How the Sacrifice of Jesus Saves the World from Sin*

This book has amazing editorial reviews from many of the other authors on this list! For example:

Brian Zahnd: "When we talk about the cross of Christ and how it is that we find salvation in it, we inevitably begin to use words like sin, law, and sacrifice. But these words are always in danger of collapsing into empty religious cliché. Thankfully, J. D. Myers takes us beyond the realm of cliché and into substantive answers in his book, *Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*. The chief task in atonement theology is to think about the cross in ways that do not project upon God our own sins of retributive violence. This is what *Nothing but the Blood of Jesus* achieves."

Anthony Bartlett. *Seven Stories: How to Study and Teach the Nonviolent Bible*

A nonviolent account of the whole sweep of God's biblical action, and includes an essential intro on atonement.

Brian McLaren: "...provides a comprehensive overview of seven main story lines of the Bible, and helps us turn the Bible from a weapon (as it is too often used) into a pathway to justice, reconciliation, compassion, and peace."

Brad Jersak. *A More Christlike God*

"While not exclusively about atonement theology, this book covers a lot of ground in "unwrathing" (his word) the atonement."

"Jersek's book is based on the simple premise that God is like Jesus. This should be an uncontroversial assertion for many Christians, but if taken to its logical conclusion and its implications spelled out, the idea undoes many assumptions made by Christianity in the West... Jersek's Christology governs his view of atonement, i.e. what God did in the world through Christ. These two should not be different, if Christ was carrying out the mission of God in the world."

Derek Flood. *Healing the Gospel: A Radical Vision for Grace, Justice, and the Cross*

"*Healing the Gospel* challenges the assumption that the Christian understanding of justice is rooted in a demand for violent punishment, and instead offers a radically different understanding of the gospel based on God's restorative justice."

Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom. *Where is it Written? Understanding the Cross and the Church's Ministry of Love*

Article on P.Waldenström, 19th century author Swedish pastor who got into hot water with Swedish Lutherans in Sweden and the US for pushing back against "payment for sin" theology. There is nothing new under the sun!

Available here: <http://covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2010/05/0804-Where-Is-It-Written.pdf>

William Paul Young. *The Shack*

Novel in which God is depicted rejecting substitutionary atonement thinking.

Quote from the author in an interview: "...we're dealing with the concept of the wrath of God, and here's an underlying question: 'Do you believe that God does anything that is not motivated by love?'"

Richard Rohr. *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe*

Newly released. NY Times Best Seller. "Drawing on scripture, history, and spiritual practice, Rohr articulates a transformative view of Jesus Christ as a portrait of God's constant, unfolding work in the world. 'God loves things by becoming them...'"

Tony Jones. *Did God Kill Jesus? Searching for Love in History's Most Famous Execution*

Many Christians believe that God the Father demanded his only Son die a cruel, gruesome death to appease His wrath, since humanity is so irredeemably sinful and therefore repugnant to God. Tony Jones, popular progressive Christian blogger, author, and scholar, argues that this understanding is actually a medieval invention and not what the Bible really teaches.

Greg Boyd, *Crucifixion of the Warrior God*

Epic treatment – two volumes, comprising nearly 1500 pages.

"Developing a theological interpretation of Scripture that he labels a "cruciform hermeneutic," Boyd demonstrates how the Bible's violent images of God are reframed and their violence subverted when interpreted through the lens of the cross and resurrection. Indeed, when read in this way, Boyd argues that these violent depictions bear witness to the same self-sacrificial nature of God that was ultimately revealed on the cross."

Greg Boyd. *Cross Vision: How the Crucifixion of Jesus Makes Sense of Old Testament Violence*

A follow-up to *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God*. Less than 300 pages.

"Boyd shows how the death and resurrection of Jesus reframes the troubling violence of the Old Testament, how all of Scripture reveals God's self-sacrificial love, and, most importantly, how we can follow Jesus' example of peace."

N.T. Wright. *The Day the Revolution Began*

Mike McHargue: "With this work, N.T. Wright topples the simplistic, personalized view of the cross and the bloodthirsty God that once wrecked my own faith. Instead, we find the cross illuminated by a God that invites us to bring goodness into this world instead of trying to escape it."

Danielle Shroyer. *Original Blessing: Putting Sin in its Rightful Place*

Not strictly atonement theory, but deeply connected.

"The wrathful God of the Old Testament overshadows the gracious "Abba Father" that Jesus taught his disciples to pray to. A wrathful frightening portrayal of God can be found in both the Old and New Testaments, but fortunately it is not the only picture scripture conveys! Shroyer brings this more gracious and loving picture into focus."

Richard Beck: "Original sin is one of the most hurtful doctrines within Christianity. Hurtful to ourselves and to others. But what if our identities flow out blessing rather than total depravity? Danielle Shroyer's profound and compelling Original Blessing is a life-giving paradigm shift that draws us out of fear, shame, and guilt and deeper into joy, love, and grace."

Gil Baillie. *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads*

J.D. Myers: "Of all the books I have read so far on Girard's mimetic theory and the practice of scapegoating and how this helps us read and understand the violence of God in Scripture, this book by Baillie was the most helpful one yet. If you

want to understand the violence of Scripture, or mimetic theory, or the Christus Victor view of the atonement, or what Jesus accomplished on the cross, this is one of the books you absolutely must read.”

Michael Hardin. *The Jesus Driven Life: Reconnecting Humanity with Jesus*

The Jesus Driven Life looks at the Bible through the lens of Rene Girard's mimetic theory to develop a way of understanding the authority of scripture within Christianity apart from a theory of the inspiration of the Bible.

J.D. Myers: “This is a great book, with groundbreaking information that will transform how you read the Old Testament and the New Testament, and how you understand the role of religion in society and culture. This book provides a great move forward in the discussion on non-violence.”

Caveat: “...the book seemed to follow a "stream of consciousness" approach. Each section was incredibly insightful and helpful, but one section rarely fit well with what preceded or followed it. If you can get past that, this book will challenge everything you think you know about the violence in Scripture, the role of the church in the world, and how you view your enemies.”

James Alison. *Knowing Jesus*

Delves into a topic most often associated with evangelical Protestant Christianity: having a personal relationship with Jesus. At the heart of *Knowing Jesus* is the idea of "the intelligence of the victim." Alison explains "the intelligence of the victim" as Jesus' self-understanding of his role as victim, and his freely given self-offering in sacrifice. This "intelligence of the victim" only becomes apparent to the disciples of Jesus after their experience of the crucified and resurrected Christ--and even then it took some time for it to sink in. As we ourselves apprehend "the intelligence of the victim" we can experience the freely offered grace of God's forgiveness and at the same time extricate ourselves from the role of victimizer, as participant in the violence of the world that led to Christ's death and that causes so much pain and destruction to this day.

Sharon Baker. *Executing God: Rethinking Everything You've Been Taught about Salvation and the Cross*

Brian McLaren: "I've grappled with the subject of this book for years and read piles of books on it. Sharon has crystallized the problems so clearly and proposed solutions so gently and graciously that I know I'll be recommending it widely. Young Christians especially should take advantage of this chance for Sharon to be their professor. She's a consummate educator and a trustworthy guide."

Sharon Baker. *Razing Hell: Rethinking Everything You've Been Taught about God's Wrath and Judgment*

John D. Caputo: "A lively, thoughtful and accessible rethinking of one of the most disturbing notions in Christian theology, the prospect of eternal damnation. Put this book on your 'must read' list."

Brian McLaren: "What I tried to do in my book *The Last Word and the Word After That*, Sharon Baker has done in *Razing Hell* - with more brevity, more levity, and probably with more clarity and accessibility too. Highly recommended."

Jacqueline Bussie. *Love Without Limits: Jesus' Radical Vision for Love with No Exceptions*

Not atonement theology per se, but a must read about the radical Love of God. My congregation members (with average attendance of 140) purchased 120+ copies. People gave it as gifts to dozens.

Jessica Mesman Griffith: "I want to press this book into the hands of every Christian who has despaired of our faith being choked by narrow moralism, prejudice, nationalism, and all those who sought Jesus and were greeted by a door slammed in the face instead of a seat at his banquet table. I want to stock it in every church pew where I've heard something contrary to the love of Christ preached. Bussie's words reminded me of how vast and expansive Christ was (is)--and that Christian love shook the earth precisely because it extends to every single person without exception, even to me. Bussie's a gifted preacher with the voice of a friend who will grab you by the shoulders, look you in the eye, and say, no matter what your family of origin says, no matter what your church says, no matter what you say, you are beloved. Full stop."

CURRICULA

James Alison. "Jesus the Forgiving Victim" series

"Alison's work is refreshing and eye-opening, making sense of things in an inspiring way, and laying to rest old systems of belief that help to perpetuate violence and retribution in society. While his other work can be hard to traverse in its scholarship and vocabulary, *Jesus the Forgiving Victim* is written for lay church groups uninitiated in theological jargon. Especially when experienced in a community (like a book club/discussion group) or in conjunction with the available videos, this is a most satisfying theology that starts from who we are as people, and from that scientific, anthropological foundation, makes a case for a God who created us for a different kind of life here on this planet, and personally shows us the way to make that happen."

David Lose. *Making Sense of the Cross*

Good Sunday School/small group material - but incomplete. Doesn't address violence head on and does not get to Girardian theory.

ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

From my good friend Paul Nuechterlein, editor of www.GirardianLectionary.net

www.girardianlectionary.net/learn/atonement-and-mimetic-theory

MORE ACADEMIC – PERHAPS MORE SUITABLE FOR SEMINARY EDUCATED READERS:

Michael Gorman. *The Death of the Messiah and the Birth of the New Covenant*

Gorman argues that New Covenant atonement understanding is an ancient model in need of rediscovery, but also a more comprehensive, integrated, participatory, communal, and missional model than any of the major models in the tradition. Life in this new covenant, Gorman argues, is a life of communal and individual participation in Jesus' faithful, loving, peacemaking death.

Darrin Belousek. *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church*

"Long and challenging (but actually reads well) - an excellent book for anyone who wants a detailed examination of the biblical material."

"The most comprehensive and persuasive biblical critique of penal substitution currently available (and possibly ever written). Belousek analyzes in detail virtually every nut and bolt in the edifice of penal atonement theology as it is presented in current mainstream evangelicalism and does so with the kind of exegetical precision and theological commitment necessary to command a hearing from those he critiques. This is exactly the kind of book I would like to have on my shelves so that when someone asks me, 'What about Isaiah 53?' or 'What about God's wrath?' or 'What about no forgiveness without the shedding of blood?', I would know where to turn for a carefully reasoned answer."

S. Mark Heim. *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross*.

Highly recommended by many. A good, scholarly introduction to Girardian, non-violent, atonement theory.

Michael Kirwan and Sheelah Treflé Hidden, editors. *Mimesis and Atonement: Rene Girard and the Doctrine of Salvation*

Collection of essays.

Ed Willard Swartley, editor. *Violence Renounced*

Collection of essays.

Relating to chapter 7: "Robin Collin, Theory of Mimetic participation...the best thing out there!"

Andrew Sung Park. *Triune Atonement: Christ's Healing for Sinners, Victims, and the Whole Creation*

"The book surveys historical views but also proposes that the atonement be seen as the death of Christ for both victims and the oppressed, for sinners and oppressors, for the whole creation--including animals and nature."

Gustaf Aulen. *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*

The 1931 work which sparked a rethinking of the three classic models.

Sallie McFague. *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*

Offers a great Feminist critique of and corrective to the historic doctrines that ought not be overlooked. Academic work.

Catherine LaCugna. *God For Us: the Trinity and the Christian Life*

Offers a great Feminist critique of and corrective to the historic doctrines that ought not be overlooked. Academic work.

Sally A. Brown. *Cross Talk: Preaching Redemption Here and Now*

Homiletics – for preachers. "Brown proposes a metaphorical and pastoral model for preaching about the cross. Preachers can reclaim preaching on the cross, she urges, by joining New Testament metaphors to pastoral situations rather than adapting atonement theories for the pulpit. She offers specific examples in sermons designed for particular homiletical occasions."

Stephan Finlan. *Problems with Atonement*

"The origins of atonement are found in Paul's writings. Popular Christian theology has understood them to mean that God demanded a bloody victim to pay for human sin. In *Problems with Atonement* Stephen Finlan examines the Christian doctrine of atonement and current debates about it. He considers its biblical foundation in Pauline texts, the Old Testament background, and the theological questions under discussion about atonement. He provides ancient historical background and raises questions, such as whether the Incarnation must be understood through the lens of atonement."

Dennis Weaver. *The Nonviolent Atonement*

A provocative study that cuts to the very heart of Christian thought, *The Nonviolent Atonement* challenges the traditional, Anselmian understanding of atonement — along with the assumption that heavenly justice depends on Christ's passive, innocent submission to violent death at the hands of a cruel God. Instead J. Denny Weaver offers a thoroughly nonviolent paradigm for understanding atonement, grounded in the New Testament and sensitive to the concerns of pacifist, black, feminist, and womanist theology. While many scholars have engaged the subject of violence in atonement theology, Weaver's *Nonviolent Atonement* is the only book that offers a radically new theory rather than simply refurbishing existing theories.