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Since Jesus Lived for You : Incarnation in John's Gospel : a Feminist Model of Atonement

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SINCE JESUS LIVED FOR YOU
INCARNATION IN JOHN'S GOSPEL:
A FEMINIST MODEL OF ATONEMENT

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NRSV New Revised Standard Version.

CHAPTER ONE

FEMINIST CRISIS IN TRADITIONAL ATONEMENT MODELS

In their book, *Proverbs of Ashes*, Rebecca Parker and Rita Nakashima Brock share the story of a woman named Lucia. Lucia was regularly beaten by her husband. She tells,

“Mostly my husband is a good man. But sometimes he becomes very angry and he hits me. He knocks me down. One time he broke my arm. . . The priest said I should rejoice in my sufferings because they bring me closer to Jesus. . . He said, ‘If you love Jesus, accept the beatings and bear them gladly, as Jesus bore the cross.’”¹

If you love Jesus, accept the beatings and bear them gladly, as Jesus bore the cross.

Lucia remains in physical harm, beaten and bruised because she has been taught and has come to fundamentally believe that being a Christian means accepting her husband’s beatings. Lucia has been taught that loving God and loving neighbor mean being willing to be kicked in the gut or punched in the face. Salvation, Lucia has been taught and fundamentally believes, comes through a bloody, bruised, body that she, a disciple, is required to imitate. When we teach our children in Sunday School that they know God loves them because Jesus died for their sins, it should not surprise us when they grow up into women that believe that if they love God and their husband they will be willing to

¹ Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001) Preface.

suffer and die for his sins. Every day in the United States, three women are killed by a violent partner.² Every day women are murdered by their partners as the church continues to proclaim that suffering and dying for another person is salvific.

Unique to Christianity is the belief that there is something about the human condition that needs to be saved and something in Christ's being or work that saves. This belief has throughout Christian history been worked through by way of what has classically been called "Atonement Models," meaning models of understanding how Jesus brings humanity to an at-one-ment, a reparation, or reconciliation, with God. In every dominant model the focus of this salvific work lies in the death of Jesus. Current atonement models can be summed up simply by saying "You were sinful and so Jesus died for you." These atonement models and theories that tell how Jesus' death reconciles a fallen human to God have shaped our Christian claims and permeated our worship, our liturgies, our door knocking pamphlets, and our entire faith communities. And, as recent scholarship points out, our models of sacrifice contain a level of violence that helps to perpetuate the abuse of women and children (and men, but in lower numbers) in church and society.³

² According to NOW (National Organization for Women) in 2005, 1,181 women were murdered by an intimate partner. That's an average of three women every day. Of all the women murdered in the U.S. about one-third were killed by an intimate partner. Accessed at <http://www.now.org/issues/violence/stats.html> (Accessed May 18, 2011).

³ In the scope of this paper I have limited myself to feminist critiques of atonement, which are concerned with the ways in which these models have been used to do violence to women and children. This does not deny the very real existence of violence done to men (For example, Brock and Parker spend extensive time tracing the connection between the violence in atonement and the trauma suffered by men returned from war). There is much current scholarship on the violence of atonement being done by men. For example, D. Weaver critiques the violence of atonement from a Pacifist tradition (See D. Weaver's *Nonviolent Atonement*), James Cone's work *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011) critiques atonement models in view of African American Lynching's in the American South.

Traditional atonement models, which claim Christ to be the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins, or the one who follows through with an act of reparation that leads to death on a cross (as in Anselm), or who see Christ as the penal substitute, taking our punishment to fulfill God's law, honor and justice, or who see Christ's work on the cross as a salvific moral example of self sacrifice, all continue to call for violent sacrifice at the most intimate level. To say that Jesus died for humanity is to identify extreme suffering with love. Jesus loved us more than anyone, and so Jesus endured extreme physical suffering and a terrible death. If I love someone more than anything, I will endure suffering and die for them. The corollary to this logic is: If you are not willing to suffer for me, then maybe you do not really love me. Maybe you are not really following Jesus.

Every Sunday from the pulpit and every Monday in the quiet office visits, there are places where the church proclaims that to love is to suffer for the sake of another. To love is to suffer and die for the salvation of another. Jesus died for you, so you are called to die for another. But many feminists critique these models as violent, dangerous, and unnecessary for the church. Critical feminist scholarship has identified the violent problem with each of the 'classical' models of atonement as well as with several of the most central critical/contemporary models in the church today.

Satisfaction (Anselm)

To begin with, the 12th century bishop of Canterbury, Anselm, has come under perhaps the most fire from feminist theologians. Anselm's satisfaction model claims that human beings in their sin owe God a debt they cannot repay. For the sake of God's honor, this debt must be fulfilled, or "if no satisfaction for sin is given, the way to regulate sin correctly is none other to punish it. . . it is not fitting for God to allow

anything in his kingdom to slip by unregulated.”⁴ Humans do not have anything that they do not already owe God, and thus are incapable of making reparation, the punishment of which is death. Christ, who lived a perfect life, was not obligated to die (death is a punishment for sin, and Christ did not sin).⁵ Rather, he willingly and freely chose to obey God’s desire for the salvation of human life through his own suffering and death. By dying, “he paid, on behalf of sinners, a debt which he did not owe.”⁶

In critiquing Anselm, Rebecca Parker and Rita Nakashima Brock turn to Abelard who criticized Anselm in Anselm’s own time,

“Who will forgive God for the sin of killing his own child? How cruel and wicked it seems that anyone should demand the blood of an innocent person as the price for anything, or that it should in any way please him that an innocent man should be slain—still less that God should consider the death of his son so agreeable that by it he should be reconciled to the whole world!”⁷

Dorothee Soelle claims that in the Satisfaction model we worship God the executioner who takes the life of the innocent for the sake of society (Much like Hitler’s Germany claimed to do⁸). Further, feminists argue that this model assumes discipleship to be a similar willingness to suffer and potentially die for the sake of an offended ruler or parent. Parker and Brock point to the fact that this model leads us to believe that we are God’s disobedient children who need to be disciplined through violence. Parents are then justified in battering their children, because ‘I’m only doing it for your own good’ or

⁴ Anselm of Canterbury, ‘Why God Became Man’ in *Anselm of Canterbury, the Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 284.

⁵ Anselm, 277, 349

⁶ Anselm, 349

⁷ Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 30

⁸ Dorothee Sölle, *Suffering*, trans. Everett R. Kalin. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975): 28.

husbands hit their wife ‘because they love her.’⁹ We are justified in doing violence for the ‘good of others,’ just as God had Jesus crucified for the good of a sinful humanity. We are left with an austere and punishing God who demands violence for the sake of his kingly honor.¹⁰

Womanist theologian, Delores Williams, in her work *Sisters in the Wilderness*, describes how, for Black Women, it is the notion of surrogacy inherent in this model of atonement and redemption that she and other Womanist Theologians cannot affirm.¹¹ In United States history, Black Women have both been coerced into surrogacy positions during the many years of slavery and also “voluntarily” filled surrogacy roles dictated by

⁹ Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 31

¹⁰ More recent scholarship on Anselm, such as the work of D. Bentley Hart, has argued that the western theological tradition has unfairly interpreted Anselm, and that he is in fact not as violent as critics describe him. Hart argues that Anselm offers an incredibly nuanced model that Western theologians have tended to overly simplify as a mere transactional model. Hart argues that while critics criticize Anselm for doing no more than reflecting the penitential grammar of his time, Anselm in fact subverts the grammar to overturn the entire penitential system. If all sin, no matter how small offends God and no human action is big enough to satisfy for this sin, and only the death of Jesus can repay God, then penance has no place in the market of salvation but is rather an appropriate response of a grateful people to a gifting God. “In one stroke, Anselm has done away with the notion that penance is a punitive discipline intended to satisfy God’s wrath and shown it to be simply a thankful notion piety that responds to an unmerited and transforming grace.” (341). In providing satisfaction for humanity Christ “provides humanity. . . the assurance that it can always return to God, despite its inability to satisfy divine justice, because it is sustained by the grace of Christ’s gift.” (341). However, Hart acknowledges that “Anselm certainly depicts Christ’s sacrifice as an offering that, in the end, ‘secures’ forgiveness by satisfying the demands of divine righteousness, on our behalf.” (346). While Anselm’s language is not as bloody as critics would make it sound, he nonetheless sets up a logic system in which humanity owes God a debt which it cannot repay and which can only be fulfilled through the death of an innocent victim. God still finds satisfaction for the sins of the world in the suffering and death of Jesus. It is certainly a system of surrogacy, as Delores Williams suggests. While the more violent language of Christ’s suffering is the work of American theologians such as Charles Hodge and Jonathan Edwards, Anselm has nonetheless set up an understanding and logic system that even in his own time, was understood to have violent implications.

D. Bentley Hart, "A Gift Exceeding Every Debt: An Eastern Orthodox Appreciation of Anselm's Cur Deus Homo," *Pro Ecclesia* VII, no. 3 (1998).

¹¹ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993): 162.

white, male dominated society.¹² During slavery Black Women were surrogates for white women, white children, and black men. The most common surrogate roles were in nurturing, field work, and sexuality. Black Women were required to fill sexual roles in place of white women who were deemed by society to only be fit for sexuality when it led to procreation.¹³ Black Women in the fields were forced to take the place of black men in both their physical labor, and post war in providing for the families, roles usually ascribed to men by society.

In Anselm's Satisfaction model, Jesus on the cross is a surrogate for our punishment and our relationship with God. As our human substitute, Jesus takes surrogacy to a new level, standing in the place of all of humanity. When mainline theologies attach surrogacy to the divine personhood, "surrogacy thus takes on an aura of the sacred."¹⁴ Williams argues that surrogacy roles have long defiled and desecrated Black women, and that "Black women cannot glorify the cross. To do so is to glorify suffering and to render their exploitation sacred. To do so is to glorify the sin of defilement."¹⁵ There can be no redemption in a theology that glorifies the desecration and death of any person (however voluntary) in place of another.

¹² Delores Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption" in *Cross Examinations: Readings in the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008): 20.

¹³ Williams, 'Black Women's Surrogacy and the Christian Notion of Redemption,' 20

¹⁴ Ibid, 27

¹⁵ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 167

Christus Victor

The feminist critique of a second, older model of atonement, the *Christus Victor* model, focuses again on the necessity of suffering for salvation to become actualized. In the *Christus Victor* model, humanity is held captive by Satan. Jesus must enter hell in order to conquer Satan and free humanity. In his *Great Catechism*, Gregory of Nyssa describes how Jesus descends into the humility of human existence and then into death and hell in order to deceive Satan.¹⁶ Gregory compares Jesus to a hook baited by flesh that Satan (a ravenous fish) shallows. Through the disguise of the flesh God has ‘hooked’ and overcome Satan as light overpowers darkness.¹⁷

As this model is utilized in teaching, the Christian is said to go through a Dark Night or Via Negativa. Contemporary Dominican Theologian Matthew Fox describes how just as Jesus had to go through suffering and death for salvation, the Christian must let go of a seeking for control and simply experience pain and darkness as in them salvation are worked.¹⁸ In the ancient *Christus Victor* model, Jesus saves by going through suffering, death, and hell. As this model is worked out in Christian discipleship and spirituality, the Christian’s salvation is experienced “not from pain but through pain.”¹⁹ This model claims Jesus’ death, the comfortable Christian’s workaholic spiritual

¹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism in Nicene and Post-Nicene Father Series II*, v. 5. Ed. Phillip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/>: 697.

¹⁷ Gustaf Aulen describes how Martin Luther picked up on this analogy of Jesus as a fish/hook that the devil swallows in his working out of the Christus Victor model. Luther describes how Jesus becomes caught in Satan’s throat, thereby strangling Satan and defeating death. (Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003): 103-104.

¹⁸ Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*. (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1983): 159-161

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 162

tendencies, and the suffering of extreme poverty as comparable manifestations of the dark journey that leads to salvation light.²⁰

This atonement model, which assumes that Jesus must die a painful death in order to defeat Satan, and that humanity too, must pass through intense pain in order to experience salvation spiritualizes and thus undermines the reality of suffering, violence, and evil in our world.²¹ Feminists criticize this model because violence against anyone, whether Christ's crucifixion, the experience of extreme poverty, or violence against women is not just a spiritual struggle, especially when so often that violence ends in death.²² This model allows Christians to excuse the suffering of others as an experience of spiritual development, suppressing the need to work against violence. In domestic violence, the abuse a woman suffers is seen as her 'spiritual journey' towards salvation, when in fact she faces a real threat of death. The reality of the violence of the cross cannot be ignored. On a grand scale this model leads to claims that 'God has a purpose in the death of six million Jews' and on an intimate scale it holds women in violent relationships, believing the pain is necessary to their salvation.²³

Moral Influence (Abelard)

In Abelard's Moral influence theory it is humanity that must be convinced to turn to God. Thus, Jesus dies to show humanity the depth of God's love. By going to the cross, Jesus reveals to humanity the depths of its depravity and the steadfast, in-spite-of-

²⁰ Fox, 164-166

²¹ Brown and Parker, "For God so Loved the World?" 6

²² Ibid, 7

²³ Ibid, 7

it-all love of God.²⁴ This model has frightening implications for intimate relationships. An innocent woman or child continues in an abusive relationship, beaten, attacked, assuming that the love that she demonstrates by enduring the violence will lead to the salvific moment for her abuser when in her suffering he will recognize both his own evil and her love. To be blunt, the model fails, as statistics show an average of three women a day are killed by domestic partners²⁵. Violent men don't see their own evil and women end up dead. Love does not win, and hearts are not changed through suffering love, as Abelard wants to have it.

Because of its prevalence today, Brock and Parker trace this theory through the Self-Sacrifice model of Liberal Protestant Theologies. In Liberal theology, sin is defined not as disobedience but as selfishness and self-centeredness. As feminist theologian Valerie Saiving states, Liberal Protestant theology has defined man's problem as that of limitedness and finitude, to which man's sinful response is a grasping for power and righteousness that will make him more significant.²⁶ Salvation and love are then found in complete self-giving and complete selflessness; "taking no thought for its own interest by only seeking the good of the other."²⁷ Jesus on the cross is entirely selfless, he gives away his very life in order to love and serve others, and change hearts and minds. The cross is the ultimate selfless sacrifice made for the sake of humanity. True disciples of Jesus think not of themselves but of others and selflessly give up their lives as well.

²⁴ Ibid, 12

²⁵ National Organization of Women, Accessed at <http://www.now.org/issues/violence/stats.html>

²⁶ Valerie Saiving, "The Human Condition" in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol Christ & Judith Plaskow. (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979): 26.

²⁷ Ibid, 26

However, Saiving argues that while this may well be the experience of the majority of men, the experience of women is such that their sin is not selfishness but selflessness.²⁸ In their role of nurturing mother, women are conditioned to develop identity only as they serve and care for others, to such a degree that leads to a loss of self identity, and with that, a loss of ability to discriminate and assert oneself. A loss of self leads to an inability to make important judgments and decisions as in the pinnacle of selflessness women give themselves completely in support of the family.²⁹ Rebecca Parker shares her own, intimate example, of aborting her pregnancy, for the sake of a husband who said he couldn't handle a baby at that time (even though they had been trying to conceive a child for months).³⁰ She cites how women, told that they must be selfless like Jesus, and endure suffering for the sake of their husband, remain in physically and emotionally abusive relationships every day. Women remain in abusive relationships believing that their selfless love is salvific. This model of atonement denies women their selfhood and endangers their lives. It also leads, as in Parker's case, to decisions by women that put men first rather than their children or their own bodies. In the name of selflessness, the needs of men, no matter how selfish or wrong, continue to receive priority at the destruction of the bodies of women and children.

Liberation Theology: The Crucified People of God

Where the Liberal Protestant Theology offers only sacrifice in the face of selfishness, the politicized strand of Catholic theology known as Liberation Theology

²⁸ Ibid, 32-36

²⁹ Ibid, 37-38

³⁰ Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 22

emphasizes the need to take a stand against violence and oppression.³¹ Liberation Theology claims that Jesus lived and died to free people from political and social oppression. In the words of Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, the body and blood of Christ “nourish us, so that we may give our body and our blood to suffering and to pain—like Christ, not for self, but to bring about justice and peace for our people.”³² Liberation Theology claims that in our world oppression means violence and suffering for those who resist. It calls disciples to sacrifice their bodies in the struggle against tyranny and oppression to the point of suffering, torture, and death – in other words, the cross – as well.

To this end, Liberation theology uplifts its martyrs who have sacrificed their lives in the pursuit of God’s justice. In his work, *Jesus the Liberator*, Jon Sobrino refers to the oppressed people who resist as the ‘Crucified People.’ He states,

“The crucified people also make Christ present in history through the fact that they are a people and not just an individual. They make Christ present first and foremost through the bare fact of being massively on the cross. But they also make him present because, like the lamb of God, they carry the sin of the world and by carrying it they offer light and salvation to all.”³³

The suffering and death of martyrs are significant not only as individual lives, but as the martyrs’ lives are the continual actualizing of God’s salvation in history. Sobrino argues that the suffering people of Latin America are the Suffering Servant described in Isaiah.

³¹ Brown and Parker, ‘For God So Loved the World?’ 20

³² Monseñor Oscar Romero, *Voice of the Voiceless: the Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements*, trans. Michael Walsh. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985): 93.

³³ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993): 264.

Like the suffering servant, they are chosen by God to seek justice and freedom from oppressors, a calling that costs them their lives but brings about the world's salvation.³⁴

The suffering of disciples in Liberation Theology is not a passive happening. Liberation Theology empowers the oppressed in resisting evil and seeking God's justice. Liberation Theology teaches that the oppressed and marginalized are God's chosen people.³⁵ Where the world names oppressors as blessed by God, Liberation Theology names the oppressor's evil and develops a community that stands together as one body in the face of persecution. This theology does not allow suffering or violence to go by unnoticed or unnamed. However, while Parker and Brown affirm Liberation Theologies' emphasis on the end of oppression they argue that

“To sanction the suffering and death of Jesus, even when calling it unjust, so that God can be active in the world only serves to perpetuate the acceptance of the very suffering against which one is struggling. The glorification of anyone's suffering (even voluntary suffering) allows for the glorification of all suffering. To argue that salvation can only come through the cross is to make God a divine sadist and a divine child abuser.”³⁶

As Brown and Parker point to in their critique of this theology, to glorify any suffering in violence (even as the perpetrator is named as evil) gives room for the glorification of all violence. In glorifying the killing of Jesus, and the sacrifice of the martyred people, a message is sent that a person's greatest worth happens in their death (their non-existence for others). Liberation Theology gives glory to innocent suffering of violence as divine and salvific action, thus teaching oppressed peoples that to be Christian is to suffer for others, to die for others, to have no life for one's own. While it

³⁴ Ibid, 258-264

³⁵ Sobrino, 262

³⁶ Parker and Brock, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 23

breaks the isolation of intimate violence with the strength of community, Liberation Theology teaches a woman that the most glorious act of rebellion that she can perform is to be murdered. It teaches women that their greatest worth is in their death. Women and oppressed peoples need a theology that teaches that their greatest worth is in living and that they have inherent worth by their participation in God's life. Actions of resistance are heroic. Suffering or violence inflicted upon those who perform heroic actions are tragic, and should be mourned without glory.

In any theology, even a model such as Liberation Theology's the Crucified People that stress the resistance of evil and oppression and the fight for justice, to necessitate Christ's death on the cross, to necessitate people's suffering for salvation is to sanction the suffering of women and children. All violence must be seen as evil and not as sanctioned by God. People need to be taught their inherent worth is in their living and not in their death.

The Crucified God

A theology of the Crucified God, as developed by Jurgen Moltmann, argues that the cross was necessary to proclaim the fullness of God's love and to fully unite God with humanity in all places. Jesus must suffer, die, and descend into hell so that there is no hell where God is not also present. On the cross is the 'Crucified God' of the Trinity- where the Father and the Son in true love identify completely with one another.³⁷ The father annihilates the Son (Jesus) in an act of true love (to love is to suffer) to make this presence of God in all places (including hell) for the sake of human kinds. Thus we can

³⁷ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993): 246

claim a ‘Crucified God’ who identifies completely with us in our own pain and violence. As Jesus is with us in all of sufferings, and as God the Father and God the Son are the same, so we can claim that God is with us in all our sufferings.

As Sölle states, in this model the church does not worship only or primarily the Jesus that suffers with us but “He (God) is simultaneously supposed to occupy the position of the ruling, omnipotent Father.”³⁸ In this Crucified God model, it is God the father who causes the suffering and pain inflicted upon the Son. Sölle points how the language of God suffering through having to watch his own son die (by God’s own hand) eerily resembles propaganda of S.S. leaders in Nazi Germany who spoke of the suffering of Nazi soldiers ‘enduring the hundreds of corpses’ (which they themselves had killed).³⁹ While Sölle affirms Moltmann’s desire to affirm a God who is present with and relates to humanity in its deepest suffering, Sölle states that she (nor any woman) cannot affirm this cross theology that leads the church to worship not only Christ on the cross, but God the executioner.⁴⁰

Rebecca Parker describes the effect that the Crucified God model has in light of her own experiences of violence. Parker describes her childhood experience of sexual abuse. As a small child trapped in the excruciating pain being perpetuated against her, she looked up to see similar painful terror written across the face of her abuser. Parker recalls how she realized in experience what is commonly described in therapeutic and

³⁸Sölle, *Suffering*, 27

³⁹ Ibid, 28

She references in particular a speech of Heinrich Himmler, given on October 4, 1943 and recorded in *Der Nationalsozialismus. Dokumente.*

⁴⁰ Ibid, 28

psychological handbooks: her abuser felt himself so small and detached from the ability to feel any emotion, that he was inflicting terror upon her, in order to create a space and relationship in which his pain would be real and he could experience another's empathy.⁴¹ Parker describes how her abuser erased her: After inflicting pain upon her, her abuser would see in her face not her person, but a tangible reflection of his own buried pain. Her abuser experienced the empathy he was searching for by creating a mirror of his own tragic experience in his victim's suffering.⁴²

The theology of Moltmann's crucified God is a theology of a divine child abuser in a similar sense that Parker describes her own abuser.⁴³ Moltmann states that God requires the suffering of Jesus but that God then looks on the son's suffering and feels that pain as if the Father and Son were one. "That is what the abuser does. He requires the other to feel pain and then imagines the other is himself. He finds life by externalizing his pain and then embracing the one he tortures."⁴⁴ This model of atonement describes precisely the behavior of a child abuser. Embracing Moltmann's Crucified God model worships God the executioner and God the child abuser. This theology belittles the intense suffering of victims, and justifies their suffering for the sake of the perpetrator's comfort. There is no justification for violence, no matter the depth of the perpetrators own suffering. Women cannot find comfort in claims that God knows our suffering if the relationship in the Trinity is so destructive that it is willing to discard

⁴¹ Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 197

⁴² Ibid, 197

⁴³ Ibid, 198

⁴⁴ Ibid, 198

its own self, a piece of the divine family. This is perhaps the most destructive cross theology for the flourishing of women and children.⁴⁵

Feminist Conclusions

Anselm's Satisfaction model, the *Christus Victor* model with its 'Dark Night of the Soul,' Abelard's Moral Influence model, Liberal Theology's principle of selflessness, Liberation Theology's Crucified People, as well as Moltmann's Crucified God are all atonement models which on some level grant a kind of divine sanctioning to violence committed against innocent victims. These models all assume that the suffering and death of Jesus are necessary to salvation. They all assume violence to be a necessary part of our world and they all define loving with dying. Furthermore, they all insist that the enduring of violence and suffering are both necessary to, and signs of, true discipleship. This is problematic for women who believe that if they just endure enough suffering they might save their partners. This is problematic for how we oppress entire populations of peoples dying from poverty; peoples who willingly enter violent death believing in its salvific power. This is problematic for children who are taught that if they love their parent/neighbor/family friend they will endure the suffering. Children too vulnerable and isolated to even form a vocabulary for the pain that penetrates their person. Equating true love with violence is literally deadly for women and children.

⁴⁵ It must be noted that in an article written in 2002, "The Crucified God: Yesterday and Today" Moltmann acknowledges the feminist critiques brought against his theology of the Crucified God. While I believe that he fails to offer a strong argument against these accusations, mainly naming that they are a critique of many atonement models in history, and not just his own, he does state that: "I am absolutely against the victimization of sons and daughters, because I myself hardly survived being "sacrificed" for my "holy fatherland" in World War II. As a matter of fact, the Christian theology of the cross of Christ ended sacrificial religions "once for all." (136). Feminist theologians would argue that intended or not, Moltmann has nevertheless continued a system utilized to perpetuate violence and suffering.

Jurgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God: Yesterday and Today" in *Cross Examinations: Readings in the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008): 136

Feminist theology has made it clear that the violence of atonement models centered in Christ's suffering and death are intolerable for women. Feminist theologians must find a life giving theology, if they are to claim a good God, or a desire to be female disciples.

To this end, Rebecca Parker and Joanne Brown conclude their critique of atonement theologies in "For God so Loved the World?" by stating "Christianity is an abusive theology that glorifies suffering."⁴⁶ They argue that humanity does not need to be saved from original sin but from the sins of Patriarchy (in the fullness of its racism, classism and sexism). Jesus for them is but one manifestation of Immanuel (God with us) who lived in a way that provides one example of how to live out of God's call to "justice, radical love and liberation."⁴⁷ It is these conscious, individual decisions to live out justice, radical love and liberation, and live away from death and abuse, like those made by Christ, that are salvific. There is resurrection when people choose to stand up against patriarchal and institutional abuse. Any claim to the uniqueness of Christ is one of violence and oppression. Redemption is not in Jesus, but rather in decisions against oppression and abuse.

Similarly, Womanist theologian Delores Williams, while maintaining more of an emphasis on Jesus Christ, concludes; "Jesus came to show humans a perfect vision of ministerial relations that humans had forgotten long ago."⁴⁸ This is to say, that for Williams the fundamental need of humanity is to be reminded of what God intended for

⁴⁶ Brown and Parker, 'For God so Loved the World?' 26.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 27

⁴⁸ Williams, 'Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption,' 32

humanity. God intended a just world free of the oppression of anyone, but particularly of Black women. Humanity has forgotten this. The fundamental issue is humanity forgetting God's vision for the world, and thus, not living it out. Jesus is salvific in exemplifying that which humanity has forgotten.

These Feminist and Womanist models have taken seriously concerns about the violence of traditional models. They have embraced Jesus as one whose teaching is life giving for women. However, in each of these cases, the divine mission of Jesus, and in fact, humanity's basic need for divine intervention, essentially becomes eradicated. For Brown and Parker what we need is to choose to make decisions that stand up and resist violence and suffering. They make the assumption that this is a capacity that rests entirely within us. For Brock and Parker, there is nothing in humanity that demands an external help. We have the capacity for our own salvation within human existence. What society needs is human community that together stands up against oppression and struggles to create lives free of patriarchy and abuse. In Delores Williams' proposal, humanity needs someone to reteach us the ways of justice and mercy; ways which we once knew but since have forgotten. Justice and mercy are within human experience, we need only to be reminded of the reserve that rests within us. Both Williams and Brown and Parker claim incredibly optimistic views of anthropology. Accountability and reminder is all humanity needs to save itself. However, if a good example to teach us the ways of justice and mercy were all that we needed, then Ella Baker, Septima Clark, Rigoberto Menchu, Harriet Tubman, Mother Teresa, Rosa Parks, Dorothy Day, and Queen Esther should have succeeded by now. Our history is full of strong, courageous, justice seeking women (and men) who have shown us mercy, taught us justice, defied

patriarchy and lived lives that exemplified love. Yet, humans are as evil today as we've ever been. Genocide continues today, killing tens of thousands in the last decade, religions continue to perpetuate violence, children continue to be abused every single day, nations continue to kill each other, and we continue to exclude and oppress neighbors based on gender and ethnicity.

Feminist theology takes seriously the value of human life. Feminist theologians demand that we know that each and every human life is fundamentally valuable, fundamentally important, fundamentally good and fundamentally empowered. Inherent in feminist concerns about atonement is the concern that women come to understand themselves as only having worth in giving up or denying themselves. Feminists deny any theology that does not give highest worth to the full flourishing of a woman's life in her own right. However, while I am convinced that each and every woman, child, and man's life has inherent worth in its individual flourishing, and I am convinced that there must be an alternative to the violence experienced by so many women in our current models of atonement, I also believe that we can claim an anthropology of worth and value while still understanding humans to also contain a deep need for God. Women can be empowered and valued while also needing the gifts of God in the working out of a good life and world. In the midst of deep suffering, in the midst of experiences of violence, abuse, oppression, selflessness, is there a God who comes to give us the fullness of life and empowerment that we fundamentally need (as is attested in the continual presence of violence and selflessness in our world)?

Brock and Parker, in their more recent narrative work, *Proverbs of Ashes* conclude that in the midst of their suffering and abuse, there was a 'presence' which

sustained them.⁴⁹ It is this ‘presence’ they argue, that gives life even in times of violence. It is the presence both of fellow human beings and of the divine which they find to be salvific.⁵⁰ They argue that presence is not lighthearted. Salvific presence is one of healing and love.⁵¹ And, they argue, in presence we “embrace a passion for life. . . . to see life flourish.”⁵² It is a presence, they argue, which offers humanity a fleeting glimpse of the face of God. But while fleeting, glimpses of the presence of God are enough to sustain in ‘the race set before us.’⁵³

They offer Feminist Theologians concerned with this violence of atonement models a place for God’s giving of life to our places of need. They aren’t overly optimistic about this presence, they believe that there are people for whom generations of violence have done so much harm, that even God cannot reach. However, this ‘presence’ offers a glimmer of hope for women.

In the Christian tradition, the Incarnation is often spoken of as the presence of God in the human flesh. While Brock and Parker indicate no more specificity to ‘presence’ than a sense of the divine or the sharing of space with another, within Christianity God’s presence in the human flesh is a significant, life giving presence with

⁴⁹ Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 248.

⁵⁰ Brock and Parker refer back to the story of a young man who returned from the Vietnam War traumatized. He sat silently in the family’s living room, not speaking for months. His sister learned to come and sit with him each day. She sat and was present, at times respecting the silence and at other times sharing her thoughts. After months of simply being present in the room together the brother began in sobbing tears to tell his story, through which she continued to be present. Brock and Parker argue that it was the sister’s very presence through the traumatic silence and the horrific story telling that healed the woman’s brother.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 251

⁵² *Ibid*, 252

and for God's people. In the church, Incarnation is a way in which God gives life and salvation to humanity through God's presence in the flesh. In the Gospel of John, the Christian doctrine of Incarnation holds a much stronger emphasis on salvation. Salvation in John's Gospel happens when the presence of God in the incarnation of Jesus Christ restores humanity's relationship with God, the source of life. It is not a salvation accomplished by the death of Jesus, but by the presence and complete experience of God in human flesh. It is a salvation that brings abundant life to people in the moment of Christ's encounter, and not only after their death. For women unwilling to accept atonement models steeped in violence, the Gospel of John's *theology of Incarnation* offers an alternative model within the Christian canon which proclaims the salvific work of Christ apart from sacrifice and violence. To construct an argument for incarnation as women's model of atonement, I propose first to explore Incarnation in the Gospel of John, primarily through the work of Johannine Scholar, Gail O'Day. I will argue that in the Gospel of John by the incarnation of God in Christ, the gift of immediate abundant life is offered, and that those scholars that claim a cross based salvation in John's gospel are reading through a Synoptic/Pauline lens which cloud John's unique contribution to Christian Theology. Secondly, I seek to show how this theology of incarnation does not do violence to women but offers a fullness of salvation life. Third, I explore both how John's incarnational theology was present in the ancient church but has been largely masked through the historical turns of violence in the church, and how we can see this theology present today in the example of James Cone and Jaquelyn Grant. Lastly, I make a proposal for what a life giving liturgy formed from the incarnational message of John's

Gospel might look like for women who struggle to worship with current liturgies steeped in violence and sacrifice.

CHAPTER TWO
 INCARNATION IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

Atonement as Reconciliation

Before engaging with incarnation in the Gospel of John, I turn first to consider how contemporary thinkers have defined the word atonement. The Feminist and Womanist critiques of traditional and contemporary models of atonement all center on the ways in which they glorify Jesus' suffering and death. However, while western atonement theologies locate the place of atonement's action in Jesus' death, atonement theologies are not theologies of death but of reconciliation.⁵⁴ *The Oxford Theological Dictionary* defines atonement as "man's reconciliation with God through the sacrificial death of Christ." *Westminster Theological Dictionary* defines atonement as "The death of Jesus Christ on the cross, which effects salvation as the reestablishment of the relationship between God and sinners." By their very definition, atonement theologies seek to explain how humanity is reconciled with God, and not necessarily how or why the death on the cross acts in the divine-human relationship.

Whether through paying a debt to repair God's honor or defeating the devil to free captive humanity, atonement models assume that humanity and God have been separated and explain how that relationship is repaired in Jesus. How is it that God and humanity

⁵⁴ Gail O'Day, "A Fresh Perspective on Atonement: The Gospel of John," *Perspectives* 10 (March, 1995): 12.

are brought back to right relationship? The imperative question for Christian theology needs to be not ‘why did Jesus die?’ but rather, ‘How does Jesus reconcile humanity to God?’ If Christian theology assumes that humanity in its sinfulness cannot reconcile its relationship to God and thus to one another and the earth within its own strength, then Christian theology must ask what is it that God in Jesus does to bring about that reconciliation. How does God in Jesus ‘save’ humanity from our own destruction? It is true that death on the cross is a part of the life of Christ, but it is not the only part.

If we turn the focus of our study of atonement to John’s Gospel, we find that the loci of the reconciliation of humanity to God is located not in the death, but in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is God the Word born in human flesh and ascended to the father in human body which reconciles humanity to God the Father. This does not deny or ignore death as a part of the incarnation, but rather situates that death as one particular move in a much larger work of God in Jesus Christ. Understanding atonement as the work of Jesus Christ which reconciles humanity to God is necessary for appreciating the Gospel of John’s unique contribution to atonement theory.

John and the Synoptic Gospels

While John’s Gospel comes from within the canon and dates back to the first century of the church, its unique understanding of the incarnation as atonement has been largely ignored by the modern Protestant Church.⁵⁵ Johannine Scholars have posited several reasons as to why John’s gospel has not had a larger voice in atonement and soteriology studies. Most obvious is the fact that while each of the four gospels of the New Testament Canon offers a unique contribution to Christian theology, John in

⁵⁵ O’Day, “A Fresh Perspective on Atonement,” 13

particular stands out among the four gospels in its unique telling of Jesus Christ.⁵⁶ From the absence of Synoptic parables and the unique stories such as those of Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman to the lack of suffering in John's gospel, the Fourth Gospel's telling of the life and work of Christ differs greatly from the three Synoptic Gospels.⁵⁷ As Johannine scholar Dorothy Lee states in her commentary for the *New Interpreter's Bible*, "In its religious and theological perspective it (John's Gospel) stands alone in the New Testament, offering a unique vision of Jesus Christ for the life of the believing community."⁵⁸ Other Johannine scholars agree that John is a unique, and often unrecognized voice in Christology and theology in the New Testament.⁵⁹

Within the modern western tradition, the church has tended towards a construction of atonement theology based primarily on a synthesis of Paul and the synoptic overlaps.⁶⁰ The Synoptic Gospels and Paul claim a Jesus who suffers for humanity, and a passion narrative of redemptive death. Thus atonement theology built out of these texts derives meaning out of Jesus' suffering and death. However, suffering and a redemptive death are elements entirely missing in John's Gospel. The claims that are

⁵⁶ Craig Koester, "The Death of Jesus and the Human Condition: Exploring the Theology of John's Gospel" in *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown*, ed. John R. Donahue. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005) 141.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 142

⁵⁸ Dorothy Ann Lee, "John," in *The New Interpreter's Bible One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Gaventa and David Petersen. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010): 709.

⁵⁹ O'Day, "A Fresh Perspective on Atonement" 12

Martin Hengel, "The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth" in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham & Carol Mosser. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008): 266.

George A. Turner, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19 (September, 1976): 271.

⁶⁰ O'Day, "A Fresh Perspective on Atonement" 12

made about Jesus in John's gospel are unique among the four Gospels of the New Testament canon.⁶¹ Thus the atonement theology constructed out of John's gospel must be distinguished from that built upon Paul or the Synoptic Gospels.

A careful study of the Gospel of John's particular telling of the life and work of Christ must be made if we are to consider how John's Gospel contributes to our understanding of atonement. However, this careful study of the Gospel of John's unique contribution is difficult for many reasons. New Testament scholar, George A. Turner argues that little is written about John's doctrine of salvation because the doctrine is both permeated throughout the gospel, and is not contained in a concise, thesis-like statement.⁶² John's Gospel expresses the meaning of Christ and salvation in analogies which make a claim to precise doctrine difficult.⁶³ Jesus is the light of the world, the living water, the bread of life, and the vine for our branches. The analogies leave scholars to interpret these metaphors through the lens of the Gospel's narrative in order to make any claims from the Gospel of John. Given the uniqueness of the narrative and the difficulty in drawing concrete claims from metaphors, John's Gospel has gone under-utilized in a Synoptic-majority-driven, and overwhelmingly Pauline theological tradition.

⁶¹ Koester, "The Death of Jesus and the Human Condition," 143

O'Day, "A Fresh Perspective on Atonement" 12

Martin Hengel, "The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth," 266

George A. Turner, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John" 272

⁶² Turner, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John," 271

⁶³ Ibid, 271

Removing Cross-Centered Blinders

The death of Jesus in John's Gospel is also not an isolated event.⁶⁴ As Koester states, "The Gospel of John carries no separable theology of Jesus' death. John's understanding of the death of Jesus must be discerned in and through his telling of the story."⁶⁵ John's Gospel leaves much of the meaning of the death to be interpreted and understood through the full narrative in matters of both life and death. Koester argues that the meaning of the crucifixion in John's gospel can be understood by interpreting the death through four frames that he sees developed in the larger gospel narrative: as an expression of love in human terms, a sacrifice for sin, a conflict with evil, a revelation of divine glory. He argues that by interpreting the death event through these frames that it can be concluded of the death in John's gospel that "Jesus died to make God's love known."

Gail O'Day, in her response to Koester's frames of reference argues that while these frames are extremely helpful for understanding John's theology, they misplace emphasis, as the death is not the foci for understanding in John's Gospel. "In John, Jesus' death is inseparable from his life, which is why love comes to the center in each of Koester's categories."⁶⁶ *Jesus did not die to make God's love known; Jesus lived to make God's love known.*⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Koester, "The Death of Jesus and the Human Condition," 141

⁶⁵ Ibid, 143

⁶⁶ Ibid, 143- 153

⁶⁷ O'Day, "Love of God Incarnate," 159

While O'Day appreciates the frames which Koester illustrates, and argues that they are helpful in interpreting layers of meaning, she argues that they should be interpreted through the particular lens of the *life* of Jesus, through the way he *lived*. The interest and need to draw meaning in the death of Jesus comes not from John's Gospel, but from the cross-centered lenses that have been formed from the emphasis on Jesus' death in Paul and the Synoptics. Gail O'Day's rebuttal to Koester's argument regarding the significance of Jesus' death in John's Gospel brings us to the central crisis for research and theological writing from John's Gospel. What is the framing question from which scholars begin their theological inquiry? In our modern context, which prioritizes the reformation's emphasis on Paul and Christ on the cross, it is second nature to start any question in Jesus death. However, O'Day argues that "John's shaping theological question is not about the meaning of the death of Jesus; it is about the meaning of the life of Jesus."⁶⁸

O'Day is not the first to argue for the incarnation rather than the death as the focus in study and theological inquiry in John's Gospel. Rudolph Bultmann also wrote about the incarnation as critical to the Gospel of John. In *New Testament Theology* Bultmann argues that while Paul claims incarnation as a part of the whole of the 'salvation event' of Jesus Christ, for John, "it is the decisive salvation-event."⁶⁹ In fact, Bultmann argues that Jesus' death has 'no preeminent importance for salvation, but is the accomplishment of the 'work' which began with the incarnation."⁷⁰ Bultmann goes on to

⁶⁸ O'Day, "Love of God Incarnate," 158

⁶⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament Volume II*, trans. Kendrick Grobel. (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1955): 52

⁷⁰ Ibid, 52

argue that John's gospel is marked by the incarnation of the one who first descends and then ascends.⁷¹

W.G. Kummel in his *The Theology of the New Testament* argued that "In John the removal of guilt by Jesus' death does not play a central role," and that "the death can be pushed into the background without endangering the concept of Jesus coming to save men from sin."⁷² Another Johannine Scholar, Martin Hengel, agrees that the incarnation is the most central theme in the Gospel. Dorothy Lee and Karoline Lewis both argue that the 'Word made flesh' is the most central focus of the Gospel and is indicative of the Gospel's unique contribution to the life of the believing community.⁷³ While not universally embraced by contemporary scholars, or the dominant lens through which to view atonement in the Bible, O'Day is not alone in claiming the incarnation and not the cross as the focus of salvation in the gospel of John.

Prologue as Theme

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. ⁴What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. . . . ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. . . . ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. . . .⁷⁴

⁷¹ Ibid, 53

⁷² Turner, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John," 271

⁷³ Hengel, "The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth," 266

⁷⁴ John 1:1-14 NRSV. All Biblical texts cited are NRSV unless otherwise noted.

It is readily agreed among Johannine scholars that the Prologue serves as a thesis to John's Gospel.⁷⁵ The telling of the 'Word made flesh' is the lens through which the rest of the Gospel of John must be read and interpreted.⁷⁶ The prologue literally sets the stage for the act to follow, as John's gospel tells of salvation through analogy, and interweaves the work of atonement and the place of Jesus' death through the whole of the gospel narrative. Hengel argues that "the one decisive point which is developed in the whole gospel has already been made in the four words in verse fourteen, 'the Word became flesh.'⁷⁷ Wainwright refers to verse fourteen as not only the central claim of John's gospel but the central affirmation of the Christian faith, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."⁷⁸ That God became flesh (and not that God died) is the most central affirmation of the Gospel of John (and perhaps of the Christian faith)

The prologue is a critical lens for interpreting the whole of John's gospel because it immediately lays out the significance of the 'Word made human' for the world. O'Day states,

"Jesus' revelation of God is thus not simply that Jesus speaks God's words and does God's works, although that is part of it. It is, rather, that Jesus *is* God's Word. . . Jesus' word and works, his life and death, form an indissoluble whole

⁷⁵ Jerome H. Neyrey, S.J. *The Gospel of John in the New Cambridge Bible Commentary Series*, ed. Ben Witherington, III. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 24.

⁷⁶ Geoffrey Wainwright. *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997): 4.

⁷⁷ Hengel, *The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth*, 268

⁷⁸ Wainwright, *For our Salvation*, 4

that provides full and fresh access to God.”⁷⁹

Indeed, the incarnate Word made flesh speaks the promises of God. Indeed, Jesus reminds people of God’s teachings and shows human beings how God wants the world to live. But much more significantly Jesus *is* God. The emphasis in John is not so much on something that God gives through the Son but that the Son *is* Light and *is* Life⁸⁰. “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”⁸¹ Jesus, in this moment *is* life, and he is here in the flesh so that humanity might be restored to a life-giving relationship with God. Where humanity has been separated from God by darkness- meaning death, deceit, and emptiness, God has entered into the flesh so that by God’s very presence God restores humanity’s relationship and in so doing providing light, life, truth, and fullness. Present in the flesh, Jesus restores God’s life giving relationship to humanity.

Jesus’ life is the fullness from which all of humanity receives grace upon grace. In Jesus, God’s own being and self has entered the world, bringing life into the darkness such that life will not be conquered again. It is in God’s very entrance into the flesh that humans are brought to one with the living God. This is how John’s gospel begins, and this is the lens through which one must read the analogies of salvation that proceed through the following chapters. God has become incarnate so that the very presence of the divine in human flesh might restore humanity’s relationship with the source of light and life in a dark and dying world.

⁷⁹ Gail O’Day, “Gospel of John” in Volume IX of *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Leander Keck. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995): 495.

⁸⁰ Turner, “Soteriology in the Gospel of John,” 172

⁸¹ John 1:4

I AM

The Living Water

As God has become incarnate in Jesus Christ, bringing salvation and life to the world by his very presence, Jesus in the Gospel of John claims to be many things for the world. As Turner notes, John's Gospel speaks of salvation mostly in analogous terms. Jesus states that "I am the Living Water, the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, the Vine in which we abide and the Resurrection and the light." As Turner suggests, understanding these I am statements are key to understanding how Jesus is salvation in the Gospel of John. The first analogies appear in the prologue, and narratively shortly after (three chapters later) in the story of the Samaritan Woman at the well as Jesus claims to be 'living water' so that she might never thirst again. Jesus explains the promise of salvation in terms she can understand- salvation is compared to one of humanity's basic needs- water which can be found in abundance here on Earth. Jesus is the 'I am' who provides 'living water' not only in the future but by his *present* moment as well.

In the narrative, the Samaritan woman recognizes Jesus as a prophet and she asks about worship: "Are we to worship on this Mountain or in Jerusalem?"⁸² Within the Jewish and Samaritan conflict, it is a question of God's abiding presence. Is God located in the temple as the Jews assert or on this holy mountain as the Samaritans believe? Jesus says neither, for 'the hour is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the

⁸² John 4:20

Father in spirit and Truth.”⁸³ As the prologue announced that “The word became flesh and tabernacled among us”⁸⁴ the woman can now worship the God present before her in the flesh. God, who in Jewish tradition was understood as dwelling fully only in the holy of Holies, first in the traveling tabernacle and then in the temple in Jerusalem, is now fully present in the flesh. The people no longer need the temple or tabernacle to know their God, for Jesus is standing before them as God fully present in the flesh of the world. Where conflicts over location have separated people from God and created boundaries between humanity and God, God’s birth in the flesh restores the relationship.

As Jesus is the presence of God incarnate before the Samaritan woman she is saved by the restoration of her relationship with God in Jesus’ presence. As she returns to her village, and announces to other Samaritans the presence of Jesus, they invite Jesus to come and ‘abide.’ It is in this abiding of God with the Samaritan people that John’s Gospel first announces that ‘this man is surely savior of the world.’ This Jesus is God in the flesh, offering the people of Samaria (outcasts in Jewish practice) the living water that will sustain them in their present living. This man Jesus is God in the flesh, offering people by his dwelling a renewed relationship with their creator and sustainer of life. This man is the savior of the world because he brings the presence of God, which has been bound up in the Tabernacle into the full relationship with all flesh. The hour has come when Jesus will abide with the people and provide the living water so that they may thirst no more.

⁸³ John 4: 21-24

⁸⁴ John 1:14

Furthermore, not only does Jesus claim to be the source of Living Water, in response to the Samaritan woman's pronouncement that she knows 'the Messiah is coming' Jesus announces in verse 26 that he is the *I am*. "He said to her, 'I am.'⁸⁵ He is referencing what all the Jews and Samaritans of the time would have recognized as the divine name that first appears in Exodus 3:14. "I Am" the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.⁸⁶ I am the God you go to the temple to worship, here in the flesh. I am the God of the Hebrew people. In the Exodus Narrative 'I am' is the name given to the God who has seen the misery of God's people and has chosen this moment to liberate them from their suffering.⁸⁷ This is the I am who through God's presence liberates the people from their suffering and leads them to a land flowing with milk and honey. This I am is the God who accompanies God's people, always before them, through forty years of wilderness wandering, who protects their babies from the angel of death. This I am is here in full revelation in the flesh to bring liberation to the Samaritan woman. I am the present saving God who offers you the Water of Life. Just as God's revelatory presence saved God's people from Pharaoh's tyranny, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ saves the Samaritan woman at the well. Where worldly constraints have stood between her and the revelation of Christ, God's full revelation is present before her, reconciling this woman with God. By the revelation of his presence, Jesus assures her that he is her savior.

⁸⁵ John 4:26

⁸⁶ Exodus 3:15

⁸⁷ Exodus 3: 7-9, 16-19

Bread of Life

Jesus is the source of living water, the present savior of the people, and the bread of life. In chapter six of John's Gospel the disciples ask Jesus for a sign that they might see and believe in him, something like the manna which God provided their ancestors in the wilderness.⁸⁸ To this Jesus replies,

“I tell you that it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”⁸⁹

Again, John's gospel provides us with an analogy rather than a doctrinal statement of salvation. Who is this savior of the world?⁹⁰ He is the manna from heaven, God's daily provision for all of God's people. The crowds in this chapter, like so many of the people in John's Gospel, have trouble seeing beyond the literal.⁹¹ They want bread enough for 5,000 so that they might see and believe. And while Jesus has just done this (fed 5,000 people)⁹² he attempts to point to what is in front of the people. He is incarnate- *He* is the manna that is in front of them. He is the bread which will sustain them in every day of

⁸⁸ John 6:30

⁸⁹ John 6: 32-35

⁹⁰ John 4:42

⁹¹ O'Day, “John” in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* ed. Walter Harreson. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003): 1921.

⁹² John 6

their wilderness journey. He is the Savior here to provide life to the people. God's salvation for the people, like daily bread provides for the sustaining of *this* life. When the people needed it, God provided enough manna from heaven for all. God is bread of life because in the midst of human deficiency and need God in Jesus satisfies the human need and provides that which is lacking so that all may live in abundant life.

The Vine in Which we Abide

As Jesus' incarnate time draws near the end, he again tells of the life he offers the world. "I am the true vine, and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."⁹³ Christ is our vine, our very source of life. In him we are sustained by the presence of God, the source of all life. What branch can exist apart from the vine? What fruit can grow not on a tree? What human can live apart from her relationship with God, the giver of life? Christ is our Savior because he is our nutrients, our sustenance, our ground of being. It is through abiding in Christ that we have life.

This abiding – of the divine and of us among ourselves -- has been a major theme throughout John. The verb μένω appears in John 40 times. Its repetition alone signifies its importance for the author of John. However, we often miss this repetition in English, because the word enters the gospel in so many ways: remain, stay, dwell, endure, hold, permanent place, hold, wait, live. But all these words- when the spirit comes to remain in Jesus, when Jesus first invites the disciples to come and see, every time that Jesus stays with someone or is invited to keep time with someone, stays in a city, remains with the

⁹³ John 15: 5

disciples (or they with him) it is abiding (μένω) that is occurring. μένω first appears when John the Baptist tells how the spirit came to abide in Jesus, and then in the following verses as Jesus invites his soon to be disciples to come abide with him.

Now, as he nears his death, Jesus tells the disciples; abide in me (as I have abided with you in the flesh) so that you might know life. In me, as in a vine, I will forever sustain you in the abiding presence of God, the giver of life.

Resurrection and the Life

The last I Am statement which this paper will consider, is not an analogy but Christ's claim to be life. It is made after Jesus arrives in Bethany following Lazarus' death.

John's gospel tells of an encounter between Martha and Jesus:

Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'
 Martha answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'
 Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection *and the life*. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.'⁹⁴

That Martha would believe in Resurrection 'at the last day' is not unique to the presence of Jesus. Pharisaic Judaism held to the belief in the resurrection on the last day and so Martha is simply affirming a part of her Jewish faith.⁹⁵ But Jesus corrects Martha, stating "I am the resurrection *and the life*." Text critics have noted that later manuscripts have dropped the words "and the life" from John 11:25, most likely because the scribes

⁹⁴ John 11: 23-25 (Italics my own)

⁹⁵ O'Day, "Gospel of John," 688

George Beasley- Murray, *John*, Volume 30 in *Word Biblical Commentary Series* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1999): 190.

assumed that Jesus was being redundant here. All that was necessary, the scribes thought, was, “I am the resurrection.”⁹⁶ But the author or John was not simply being redundant. Jesus is telling Martha that in his presence in the flesh, he has brought life to the here and now. Yes, she (and all who hear Jesus’ proclamation) know that there is resurrection in the last day but in Jesus there is also life *in the now*. The presence of Jesus restores God’s relationship with Marta and in so doing serves as the light that brings life, the bread and water that sustains, the Good Shepherd that tends; the life of the world and the life of Martha, Lazarus and every other contemporary woman and man.

There is much Johannine scholarship that supports this claim that in the Gospel of John the incarnation has brought salvation to the present reality. Referred to as “realized eschatology” Raymond Brown states,

“For the Synoptics, ‘eternal life’ is something that one receives at the final judgment or in a future age, but for John it is a present possibility: *‘The one who hears my words and has faith in Him who sent me possesses eternal life. . . . he has passed from death to life.’*”⁹⁷

Brown goes on to discuss the also future aspects of John’s eschatology; that eternal life does come through death and resurrection (it comes through Jesus’ ascension). Eternal life is a gift of Jesus, a gift that begins in *this* moment. As Brown states, “Bultmann, Dodd, and Blank are correct in insisting that the main emphasis in the Gospel is on

⁹⁶ Ibid, 668

⁹⁷ Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*. (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 2003): 239-240.

John 5:24

realized eschatology.”⁹⁸ After all, one of the main purposes of the gospel is to teach what a gift we have received in Jesus who is and gives all life.⁹⁹

And so it is that Jesus, the life and the resurrection, calls Lazarus out from death and back into the fullness of life so that all might know the glory of God in Jesus. O’Day states,

“As the resurrection and the life, Jesus defeats death in the future and in the present. The power of death to separate people from God is reduced to nothing by the presence of the power of God in Jesus. This defeat is no longer merely eschatological promise; its eschatological reality.”¹⁰⁰

Jesus has chosen this moment to resurrect Lazarus in order to show that in his presence, there is no longer separation from God. Even death, that ultimate, unbreachable divide has been crossed by the presence of the incarnate Word. A people that were separated from the sustaining relationship of God have been rejoined through the presence of God incarnate. Life is here and now. O’Day states,

“Jesus’ powerful announcement to Martha suggests that the church needs to embrace Jesus as the resurrection and the life not only at times of death, but also in the daily moments of human life, because these moments, too, whether one names them so or not, are also lived in the face of death. John 11 asks the church to reflect that Jesus is the resurrection and the life not just for the crisis moment of death, but for all moments in life. . . . Jesus’ words here invite the church to claim that God’s life-giving power in Jesus is the power that determines the believer’s existence, not the power of death.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Brown, 245

⁹⁹ Ibid, 245

¹⁰⁰ Gail O’Day, “Gospel of John,” 816

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 799

Salvation is not only about our being in the time following our finite existence on earth. Salvation is about the presence of God in Jesus restoring the relationship of humanity to God that humanity might have life. Not only will Martha and Mary not lose their brother in this moment, they will come to be known as daughters of God, beloved and embraced by the Father in heaven. In the presence of Jesus their relationship with God is rendered familial and thus permanent. They are daughters of God, in lasting, familial relationship through Jesus.

Jesus' Control and Lack of Suffering

While it is true that in John's Gospel the incarnation does require Jesus' death, unlike the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus remains both completely in control through his trial and completely free from any reported suffering. As Koester states, "Where the Synoptics tell of Jesus suffering, John tells of Jesus' triumph."¹⁰² Where the Synoptics tell of how Jesus must suffer and be killed, John tells of how Jesus must be "lifted up suggesting exaltation to glory."¹⁰³

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus states again and again that 'his hour had not yet come' as he intentionally chooses to avoid a city, or enters Jerusalem in secret, all to keep himself safe from the leaders who wish him harm. When Jesus knows that others would seek violence against his person, he makes choices to remain safe.

While the church is filled with images of a beaten, bloody Jesus sacrificed on the cross, John's Gospel simply does not include any of this suffering or agony. In John's

¹⁰² Koester, "The death of Jesus and the Human Condition," 141

¹⁰³ Ibid, 141

Gospel Jesus dies because he is the Word of God incarnate, and everything incarnate must die. But when the time comes for Jesus' arrest in the garden, he is in control. It is in the garden where 500 soldiers are knocked to the ground by Jesus' simple proclamation, "***I am.***"¹⁰⁴ A reminder in John's Gospel that Jesus has the power to knock over armies at the sound of his name. Jesus has the power to resist any violence or harm wished against him. Jesus goes with the soldiers, not because they have inflicted violent force upon him or have forced his person, but because he is the word incarnate and everything incarnate must die.

Even as he dies, Jesus remains in control. In place of a cry of abandonment from the cross, is Jesus words of care for his mother, placing her in the hands of the 'beloved disciple.' In his last breathe he announces that 'it is finished' as he hands over his spirit and dies.¹⁰⁵ Thus it is clear that

"The traditional nomenclature of 'passion narrative' is actually a misnomer for the story of Jesus' death in the Fourth Gospel. 'Passion' refers to Jesus' suffering, and in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is not presented as the one who suffers. Rather, as the Fourth Gospel has repeatedly underscored in the Gospel, Jesus' death is the hour of his exaltation and glorification."¹⁰⁶

In John's Gospel Jesus does not need to suffer for humanity. He does not need to suffer in his ministry and he does not need to suffer agony in his death.

In Jesus' fully human life the entire finite experience of Incarnation is brought through his divine presence from life through death and resurrection to the glorious

¹⁰⁴ John 18:6

¹⁰⁵ John 19:30

¹⁰⁶ O'Day, 160

ascension. Jesus must die, not for the sake of salvation which was accomplished through his incarnation but because everything incarnate must die. Before Jesus ever entered the cross he brought life to people through his presence in their world and he brought resurrection to Lazarus through the Word's command. Jesus has been the light and the life dwelling in the flesh.¹⁰⁷

The Death, Resurrection and Ascension as One Event

Jesus death replaces 'suffering' with triumph' and abandonment with glory because for John's gospel, the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus are one event.¹⁰⁸ Again and again the Gospel tells about how the one who descended will ascend.¹⁰⁹ Again and again, the Gospel refers to the "hour that must come" when Jesus will be glorified.¹¹⁰ It is not the glory of death but rather it is an hour of glory because it will be the place where Jesus the Word incarnate will bring his humanity into God. In the ascension the

¹⁰⁷ It is a weakness of this model of atonement, that incarnation does not answer why it is that Jesus must die on a cross and not of old age or sickness or any other less dramatic and less violent means. Even as John's Gospel does not describe suffering or death, it remains obvious that the cross is inevitably violent and painful. One could speculate that the cross was a public death, such that humanity would know the reality of Christ's carnate nature, that there could be no mistaking that he really was flesh, and that flesh really did ascend. It could also be speculated that given that sin in the model of incarnation happens when humans, operating out of deprivation take life away from other people, and in deprivation, also separate themselves from God, the source of life, thereby gradually engaging in the process of death; Jesus' death on the cross is the climax of human sin. Walking in the darkness that comes separated from God, humanity is so blinded by its emptiness that it does not even recognize the very source of life, and thus kills Jesus the Christ. To this point Jesus has repeatedly avoided situations such as 'Jerusalem' where he might be harmed, but in control, knowing that he has chosen to be fully carnate and thus must die, allows for the enactment of human sin, even as his death will be one part of the incarnation-ascension cycle that will bring human flesh into the divine being and thus overcome the divide that first created the darkness. However, all that can be said definitively is that the reason for the cross as opposed to other forms of death is not central to the model, and remains an unanswered question.

¹⁰⁸ O'Day, "Gospel of John," 842

¹⁰⁹ John 3:13

¹¹⁰ John 12:23

incarnation is brought into the bosom of the father, and the flesh of Jesus forever dwells within the being of God. This is Christ's glorification and this is the ascension which promises humanity the glorification of our own carnate persons.

This is why in John's Gospel, when Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene in the garden he says to her,

“Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”¹¹¹

Despite our congregational recitations that “He is Risen. He is risen indeed!” it is not “he is risen” that Mary is sent to tell but rather that “He is *ascended!*” The resurrection in John's gospel is a part of the move of the incarnate one who first descended into the flesh, lived, died, resurrected from the dead, and then ascends to the Father's bosom, as only the one who descended can do. Protestant Theology is too quick to stop at the Resurrection and miss Jesus' glorious ascension. In the ascension the word which has become flesh is brought into the Father's bosom and being, placing the incarnation in the permanence of God's being. Christ's very presence in the flesh is redeemed and preserved. God is forever to be known in the incarnation of the word.

“His ascension ensures that ultimate fulfillment of his promises to those he loves. In returning to the Father, Jesus makes it possible for his disciples to share fully in his relationship with God. This is underscored in the expression, ‘My Father and your Father, my God and your God. The ascension completes the promise: All that is true of Jesus' relationship with God is now true of the disciples' relationship with God. They are Children of God.’”¹¹²

¹¹¹ John 20:17

¹¹² O'Day, “The Gospel of John,” 843

O'Day argues that while the cross brought incarnation to a close and while resurrection brings Jesus back to earth,

“The story of the Logos finds its conclusion only in Jesus’ return to God, which is the counterpart to the descent from heaven. This return makes new life possible for the believing community because Jesus’ ascent to God render permanent that which was revealed about God during the incarnation. The love of God embodied in Jesus was not of temporary duration, lasting only as long as the incarnation. Rather, the truth of Jesus’ revelation of God receives its final seal in his return to God. Cross/resurrection/ascension is the decisive eschatological event for the Fourth Evangelist, because it forever changes the way God is known in the world and makes God’s new age a reality.”¹¹³

Therefore, we cannot say that it is Jesus’ death that saves humanity, but rather the fullness of Jesus’ incarnation (descent) and ascension. Jesus’ death was a part of the incarnate event. Jesus was God fully human. Jesus was God fully flesh. Jesus was God fully finite through death, because everything human, everything flesh, everything finite must die. But Jesus does not end with death. Jesus ends in ascension, in the incarnation’s return to the bosom of the father such that God is forever revealed and present in incarnation for the sake of the world. God’s incarnate presence giving life to the world is a permanent reality.

John 3:16

In John’s Gospel Jesus is God incarnate for the sake of the world. The word made flesh abides among the people to restore humanity to saving relation with God. This salvific incarnate presence of God in Jesus is summed up in John 3:16, perhaps the most frequently quoted verse in all of scripture.

¹¹³ Ibid, 844

“For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only Son, that all believing in Jesus may not perish but have life eternal.”¹¹⁴

For God so loved the world that God gifted the world, that God placed in the world, God’s son. Note that this word, ἔδωκεν, has its root in the word “gift” and is also used in ancient sources to mean ‘place.’ Today this verse tends to assume the word ‘gave’ to mean “handed over” or ‘sacrificed.” Koester, in his article on the death of Christ, goes so far as to add his own words “For God so loved the word that God gave God’s only son *in his death on the cross. . .*” But the words are not in the scripture, they are biblical interpreter’s own add on. They do not exist in the text. If John, the brilliant wordsmith of the Greek language, had wanted to state that God sacrificed Jesus then he might have used the same word used of Pilot or Judas who both ‘give over’ (In English) Jesus to his death. Or John’s author might have used the Greek word for sacrifice. But John’s author does not. He states that God so loved the world that God gifted the world God’s only son so that all believing (present tense) may not perish but have (present perfect) eternal life. God gave the world God’s son that eternal life might begin in the now. God placed God’s son in the world, that by the incarnation of the Word, humanity might be brought to experience ‘at-one-ment’ with God

¹¹⁴ John 3:16, translation NRSV with my own inclusive adaptations in the language of God (there is no masculine pronoun in the Greek, but rather it is given by English translators).

CHAPTER THREE
INCARNATION AS FEMINIST MODEL OF ATONEMENT

In the Gospel of John, humanity needs relationship with God.¹¹⁵ From the beginning God has been and continues to be the source and giver of life. It is through relationship with God that humanity receives this life. It is the breaking of this relationship that causes humanity to seek darkness. Humanity needs God because in God humanity finds that which sustains life. As Koester notes about the needs implied by Jesus' claims to be light, water, and bread, "The images of hunger, thirst, and darkness are based in human experiences of deprivation. All of them recognize the need for things that come to people from outside themselves."¹¹⁶

People walk in darkness when they live away from relationship with God the giver of light and life. Living apart from God "moves people to take away life from other people" and "to the death of the sinner themselves. In John's Gospel, death is a process. If true life is lived in relationship with God, then those who are hostile to God separate themselves from the source of life."¹¹⁷ Death in John's gospel is not only a reality that comes at the end of finite life. It is a process that begins in the bodily experience of deprivation and if not corrected, continues to the ultimate death of the un-beating heart. Thus, the reconciliation that Jesus must offer is a restored relationship with God in the

¹¹⁵ Koester, *The Word of Life*, 33

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 33

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 66

present moment. This relationship with God is the source of life that comes to humans to provide abundance and fullness as opposed to death's deprivation and darkness.

Jesus offers this restored relationship with God through his incarnation in the flesh. Where humanity lacks relationship with God, Jesus brings God into human flesh itself that by his presence all might experience God, the giver of life. Thus it is as Gail O'Day asserts that,

“When the Word becomes flesh, flesh is at that moment redeemed. Jesus death is not necessary to redeem humanity; he redeems flesh by becoming flesh. Flesh is now the habitation of the holy. Human flesh is now the embodiment of God in the world. The presence of God dwells in the flesh, not in the shekinah of the wilderness tabernacle or of the holy of Holies. God can be seen and known in a human life and in the fullness of that life. The Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. The intimacy of this theological moment cannot be overemphasized. God is known because the Word, who dwells near the Father's heart, also dwells with human hearts. Indeed, the Word has a human heart. The incarnation places the most positive value on human life.”¹¹⁸

Where humanity has had to turn outside itself to find the habitation of the God of life, Jesus brings that habitation into human flesh. Humans in desperate need of the life-giving presence of God need look no further than human flesh. In the incarnation God is seen and known in the fullness of a human life. In incarnation, death and suffering are not necessary to give life. Only the presence of God is required. In the incarnation God becomes flesh thereby breaking down any barriers of separation that come between the relationship of God and humanity. God enters into that which we know better than any other that we might know God better than any other. As O'Day states, the incarnation is the most intimate of relationships. The Word, which dwells in the Father's bosom has a human heart.

¹¹⁸ O'Day, NIB 843

This incarnation places the greatest value on human life. God chooses human flesh as the place of God's dwelling for the sake of human life. God chooses human flesh to provide abundant human life in this very moment. Where death would slowly deprive the life of a person, the incarnation occurs to fill that person with life abundant.

Where in the Satisfaction Model Jesus can be seen as being offered as a surrogate for our sins, with his life and death repaying God in our place, in incarnation Jesus is the one who brings the fullness of God's presence to human flesh. There is no substitute for our lives and women, in turn, are not called to be surrogates for any other. Rather, all people, men and women are offered the fullness of life by the presence of God in the flesh.

Where the *Christus Victor* model requires Jesus to suffer, die, and enter hell in order to save humanity, and requires humans to pass through suffering and pain as our own 'Dark Night of the Soul' to reach resurrection light, the incarnation requires only Jesus' full presence in life. Jesus does not suffer in John's Gospel. It is not his need or purpose. Humans do not need to suffer to come to a future salvation, the incarnation acts to restore life in the immediacy of its presence, where death had daily deprived humanity of more and more of herself. Reconciliation comes in the moment of God's presence in our lives and calls us to full, fed, nourished and illuminated life.

In the Moral Influence theory of Abelard Jesus must die in order to show the full extent of God's love to humanity. As Liberal Protestant Theology picks up on this model, Jesus must selflessly give away all of himself in order to save people. Humans must see this selflessness and know the evil of their own ways. Disciples of Jesus become selfless, giving up all of their humanity for the sake of saving others. In the

incarnational model Jesus does not give up any of himself. Jesus does not suffer. Jesus brings the fullness of Godself to dwell in the incarnation.¹¹⁹ Thus Jesus restores humanity's relationship with the source of all life, providing the presence of God for the fullness of human life. This fullness does not require the sacrifice of one in order to provide for another. The abundance of God is sufficient for all to have enough. The Bread of Life multiplies and the Living Water never runs dry.

Discipleship in the incarnation is not about one person giving up their life to another; discipleship is about everyone abiding together in the fullness of God. Discipleship is about the care of all people that arises out of that life. While not discussed in chapter two of this paper, John's Gospel ends in a conversation between Jesus and his disciple Simon Peter. The disciples had been out fishing, but had caught nothing.¹²⁰ After daybreak, Jesus encounters the disciples on the beach, and tells them to move their nets to the other side of the boat. Remarkably, where there had been nothing their catch is abundant. As they share a breakfast from this remarkable catch, Jesus talks with Peter. He says,

“Simon, Son of John, do you love me more than these?” Simon said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

¹¹⁹ O'Day, “The Love of God Incarnate,” 160

¹²⁰ John 21:3

If you love me, and you say that you do, then feed my sheep. In the Incarnation, Jesus, who comes so that we might be given the abundance of life, calls his disciples to share the abundant Bread of Life and Living Water with all his ‘sheep.’ In the incarnation model, discipleship is a call from God that by the *fullness* of our life in Christ we might share life. For Jesus does not off-handedly make this proclamation to Peter, but rather, Jesus enters into the disciples lives when they are experiencing scarcity, provides a miraculous abundance of fish, and *then* invites them to lovingly share that abundance with his people. By the abundance of God’s provision in the incarnation we are invited to *first* feed from the plethora of fish and bread that God has provided and *then* to share that with others. This means that a woman is not called to give up her life for another in the midst of a broken abusive relationship, but rather Christ calls that woman to share her life with others when her joy, love and peace is in abundance- when it can hardly be contained by her being- like the nets holding the fish. In John, there is a call to discipleship, which is a call to feed and care for others, but it is a commission that is born out of the fullness of God’s presence and the fullness of our own beings that is provided by God.

Thus, while Liberation Theology calls for lifting up the martyrs and calls on disciples to voluntarily suffer for the sake of the world, incarnation calls us to voluntarily live for the sake of the world. Jesus did not need to suffer to give us life, and we do not need to suffer in order to give others life. God does not sanction violence. In fact, in the Gospel of John, when Jesus suspects that the powers of the city would harm him, he avoided places, or snuck in in city in order to keep his body safe from evil.¹²¹ When the

¹²¹ John 7:9

poor suffer and die it is not the work of God, it is death. The death of the oppressed does not bring about the salvation of society any more than the death of Jesus brought about the salvation of the world. The full, abundant living and caring of the oppressed will be the salvation of society.

And what of the comfort that the Crucified God model offers to hurting people? Moltmann's theology of the Crucified God argues that Jesus suffers and dies so that by God's triune being there will be no hell where God has not been. The Gospel of John's model of incarnation claims that God in Jesus (also deeply triune) enters into the fullness of human flesh. As Jesus is born, lives, breathes, dies, resurrects and ascends Jesus enters fully into human life. Jesus incarnate puts on the fullness of human life. And thus, God is present with and for us in the depths (and sometimes terror and confusion) of our human experience. As O'Day was quoted earlier in reference to Jesus' raising of Lazarus, "Jesus defeats death in the future and the present. The power of death to separate people from God is reduced to nothing in Jesus."¹²² God, the source of all life enters incarnation so that no matter what power of death might enter a person's life, God's life is there. When death beats a woman, bruises a woman, curses her existence or causes her doubt, the life giving presence of God is there. The incarnation means that there is no power of death great enough to separate a woman from the source of life. Incarnation means that the source of life is present in the flesh such that we are saved by its presence.

Like the 'presence' which Brock and Parker name from their own lives in *Proverbs of Ashes*, the incarnation is God's being with and for us, in a way that makes no demands for suffering, in a way that need not mirror any other kind of violence, divine or

¹²² O'Day, "Gospel of John," 715.

earthly. Suffering, death, and evil do not succeed in driving a woman to death because death is stopped by the presence of God who is Life.

In *Proverbs of Ashes*, Rebecca Parker writes that sacrifice has become her ritual. When her husband asked her to abort her baby for the sake of their marriage, she writes that the “gesture was familiar. I knew the rubrics of the ritual by heart: you cut away some part of yourself, then peace and security are restored, relationship is preserved, and shame is avoided.”¹²³ A model of incarnation calls women and the church to the difficult work of constructing new rituals. Rather than cutting away a piece of herself in a move that silences her pain and avoids shame, a ritual of incarnation begins with the presence of another that brings light to the pain, and does not allow for silent shame. Like the woman at the well, a ritual of incarnation starts with the presence of Jesus that breaks the woman’s isolation.¹²⁴ She is not alone. She is not to be shamed. The ritual starts with the breaking of isolation and moves to feeding and drinking. As God is the Living Water and the Bread of Life, God’s presence in Jesus offers each woman the fullness and strength that she needs to sustain her person. God has come because God values the fullness of her life, and God has come because it is only out of fullness that another can be sustained. As the Samaritan woman leaves Jesus, nourished by water and empowered by his presence in and for her, she returns to her village, breaks her isolation and is empowered to tell the good news of God’s presence. A model of incarnation, of a God who values human life so much that in Jesus he comes to dwell in human flesh, is a

¹²³ Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 25

¹²⁴ John 4: 6-8. Biblical scholars note that the fact that the narrative tells of the woman going to the well at noon notes her social isolation in the village. Common geographic practice would have been for women to go to the water earlier in the morning, before the heat of the noon day.

model that breaks down isolation. It starts with the presence of Jesus, and it quickly moves to the presence of the community. As Jesus abided with his disciples, with the woman at the well, and with all human flesh, he calls his disciples to abide with one another and feed his sheep through the abundance that he provides. A model of incarnation invites women and the church to the work of creating a new ritual: In her time of pain Rebecca can know: God in Christ is with me. I am not alone. I am not ashamed. I eat of God's fullness. I drink of God's life. I turn to the community that in turn surrounds me. I am empowered by God's dwelling beside and within me to dwell beside and within others. It is the work of discipleship to abide with me, and to feed from God's abundance. In incarnation I am not alone. I have the power to resist violence for the sake of God's life.

When Lucia shows up in her Priest's office, seeking advice about her relationship with her abusive husband, he must begin by understanding and questioning what keeps her in this relationship. Most likely she has stayed because she believes that sacrificing herself to this abuse will save the marriage and change his behavior, showing him her sacrifice. She also probably stays because "she is terrified he will become more violent if she leaves, that he will try to take the children, that she can't make it on her own. He has probably threatened her life. . . Since batter's often isolate victims, she might feel cut off from any support."¹²⁵ Incarnation speaks in this situation not only to Lucia, but also to the priest and the discipleship community. If you love me, and you say that you do, then feed my sheep, from the abundance I have provided you. The church is the community that God has begun, God has gathered and abided together to give the fullness of life. In

¹²⁵ Marie Fortune, "Domestic Violence Frequently Asked Questions," The Faith-Trust Institute: www.faithtrustinstitute.org (accessed December 3, 2011).

this moment, the incarnation calls the priest and the church to abide with Lucia. It calls the church to feed Jesus' sheep with the abundance of God's provision. God's catch is abundant, God's well does not run dry. Discipleship is not an isolated sacrificing of self. God has given the fullness of human life, the fullness of community, the fullness of bread and water and light to sustain Lucia in this moment. So incarnation in this moment begins with that fullness. The priest then says to Lucia, 'you are not alone.' There is a community beside you. We will be with you in accessing the fullness of God's bread (of shelter and food and support for her children). The incarnation says again and again, you are not alone. God has provided abundantly. So, Lucia, in this place of abuse and this place of sacrifice you are not only called to life, but the abundant presence of God will provide you all the bread (all the community, all the networks, all the food and shelter) that you need to seek life. It's a scary move for her, but like Jesus' promise, he is not only her resurrection, but also her life. Incarnation does not define Lucia by her victimhood, it defines her by the life strength that God's presence in Christ offers her, the abundance that assures her that she has all that she needs to step forward into life.

In that incarnational presence of community, and outpouring of strength, Lucia will come to hear that love is not enduring suffering no matter the cost. Discipleship is the presence of God providing all that she needs to be sustained. Discipleship is living and caring for others out of the fullness of life gifted to you. The flourishing of one's husband does not ask for the emptying of your own life. God's abundance provides plenty for the abundance of all.

CHAPTER FOUR
INCARNATION IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Incarnation in Athanasius

A model of incarnation in the church is neither new to theology, nor unique to the Gospel of John. One classic example of an incarnational model in Christian theology is found in the fourth century thinker, Athanasius. In his work, *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius writes of how Christ's incarnation saves humanity. To understand this work of Christ, Athanasius starts with two pivotal claims. The first is that God created all living things out of nothing.¹²⁶ He clarifies that God is not a carpenter; rather God is a tree creator. God literally makes to exist seeds, water, trees where absolutely nothing existed before. God is the source of all life. The second is that Jesus is the Word that first spoke all things into being. That Jesus is the word that created all things out of nothing is critical to how Jesus saves humanity.¹²⁷ Jesus saves humanity because "he saw how unseemly it was that the very things of which he himself was the Artificer should be disappearing."¹²⁸ He states that

"As they [humans] had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence, so were they now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again. The presence and love of the Word had called them into being; inevitably, therefore, when they lost the knowledge of God, they lost existence with it; for it is God alone who exists, evil is non-being, the negation and antithesis of God."¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. A Religious of C.S.M.V. (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996): 32.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 34

¹²⁸ Ibid, 34

¹²⁹ Ibid, 35

For Athanasius, the fact that God is the source of all life in John's Gospel leads him to simply claim that *God is*.¹³⁰ God cannot not be. God is that from which everything else derives life. Sin and death are a disappearing; they are the fallen move towards non-existence. Death and non-being are what happen when humanity is separated from God the source of life. Thus the Word in Jesus becomes incarnate, enters into human flesh, which has become corrupt and is moving towards non-being. As existence itself, Jesus cannot move towards non-existence. When the Word is incarnate in human flesh, flesh is held in life because it has been inhabited by that which will always live, that which gives life: God. Jesus takes on the incarnation, because he is the source of all life who first created humans and now must enter flesh to keep humanity in life. By taking on the flesh Jesus is not taking on human punishment, but rather reversing humanity's movement towards death. It is the moment of divine presence in human flesh that stops this movement. Sin drives women and children towards non-existence, as perpetrators erase a woman's existence in order to satisfy themselves; as violent aggressors physically take the life from women and children; as society and often the church, teach women to give up themselves, to take up less space, to become nothing for the sake of the other; in the face of this drive to non-existence, the Word incarnate comes to hold women in existence and in life. By Jesus' very presence in flesh he holds women's lives in the here and now and sustains them in abundance. The model of incarnation of Athanasius can be seen to give life to women and children, sustain them in the world, and ward off the destruction of violence. As Athanasius claims, God is life, and where God dwells there cannot be death, there cannot not be life. In the theology of

¹³⁰ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 35

Athanasius, God in Jesus inhabits human flesh bringing the presence of the source of life back to human beings.

Incarnation in Early Church History

A focus on the saving work of incarnation as is found in the Gospel of John and the theology of Athanasius, was a predominate theme in the early church. Our current exclusive focus on the violence and suffering of the cross has come through centuries of theologies interaction, and often manipulation of politics and power. Rebecca Parker and Rita Nakashima Brock claim in the very first line of their work *Saving Paradise* that “it took Jesus a thousand years to die. Images of his corpse did not appear in churches until the tenth century.”¹³¹ And, while on a five year pilgrimage of travel through the oldest preserved churches, works of art, and catacombs they did not find one image of the cross or the suffering/crucified Jesus’ body from the first 700 years of Christianity, they did find the Johannine images of the Samaritan woman receiving living water, the good shepherd carrying his sheep and the raising of Lazarus.¹³² At the end of their final search in Ravenna, for a crucified and suffering Jesus of the early church, they state,

“We found no crucifixions in any of Ravenna’s early churches. The death of Jesus, it seemed, was not a key to meaning, not an image of devotion, not a ritual symbol of faith for the Christians who worshipped among the churches’ glittering mosaics. The Christ they saw was the incarnate, risen Christ, the child of baptism, the healer of the sick, the teacher of his friends, and the one who defeated death and transfigured the world with the spirit of life.”¹³³

¹³¹ Rita Nakashima Brock & Rebecca Parker, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008): ix.

¹³² Ibid. ix

¹³³ Ibid, xi

This comes as a complete surprise to Brock and Parker. “Like most Western Christians, we were accustomed to images of a Christ who died in agony. We had learned in church and in graduate school that Christians believed the crucifixion of Jesus Christ saved the world and that this idea was the core of Christian faith. . . . While we challenged this idea. . . we never questioned its centrality to Christianity.”¹³⁴

Brock and Parker find that in place of images of suffering and death, early churches were filled with images of Paradise. And not paradise in the modern sense (of heaven after death) but paradise in the Johannine sense of abundant life granted by Jesus’ presence in the here and now. ‘Paradise’ they state, “first and foremost—was this world, permeated and blessed by the Spirit of God. It was on earth.”¹³⁵ Like the Gospel of John’s incarnate message of new life in the presence of God incarnate, early churches celebrated the saving presence of the Spirit of God revealed in this world in such a way that brought life abundant; images of animals, living water, baptism and the care of the shepherd.

The catacombs are full of images of the loaves and fishes, full of the Bread of Life come down. This is partially because, Brock and Parker learn, that the early churches often met in the safety of the Catacombs and share the meal of thanksgiving. The earliest known church order or liturgy, found in ‘*The Didache*’ is believed by scholars to have been written and utilized as early as A.D. 60.¹³⁶ Unlike our contemporary Eucharistic prayers of sacrifice and suffering, *The Didache* gives thanks

¹³⁴ Ibid, xi

¹³⁵ Ibid, xv

¹³⁶ R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990): 20.

for life, creation, food, drink, the vine of David and the glory of God. And it gives thanks for the bread of life:

“As this broken bread was scattered over the mountains, and when brought together became one, so let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for yours are the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forevermore.”¹³⁷

The Eucharist celebrates Jesus the Bread of Life, who in his life brings together all people into the one abundant life. In the Gospel of John Jesus’s ascension brings the unity of all people into Christ Jesus, the unity of all people into the abundant life which is sustained in Jesus’ name. In place of our contemporary images of blood shed as a sacrifice or a tortured body hung on the cross, the earliest Eucharist celebrates the bread of life scattered to nurture the whole earth and to gather that earth into one abundant life in the presence of God. It is this abundant life that Brock and Parker find as the Paradise that dominates ancient church art and liturgies. Brock and Parker outline how the Gospel of John contains these early church images. Each of the ‘I am’ claims

“Identify Jesus with the return of Moses and with earthly paradise. Each ‘I am’ statement lifts up Jesus as the one who shows the way to paradise, with its pastoral landscape, rich vegetation, and abundant harvest.”¹³⁸

A paradise the early church found in affirming the beauty of the world that God created and inhabits. A paradise found in celebrating the gift of life in the presence of Jesus Christ.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 23

¹³⁸ Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, 43

Why then, is there so little about this paradise of God's abundant, salvific presence in our contemporary theology? How has Jesus' violent suffering and death come to be the central claim proclaimed by the Christian faith? Brock and Parker, in their historical pilgrimage come to the Gero Cross, the earliest surviving crucifixion, from Saxony, created around 960 C.E.¹³⁹

The Saxons had converted to Christianity under Roman rule, but theirs was a deeply enculturated Christianity, that blended Pagan practices with Christian faith¹⁴⁰. However, Charlemagne, during the late 8th and early 9th centuries, launched a religious war that sought to convert the Saxons to 'correct' Christianity.¹⁴¹ During this campaign, theologians in Charlemagne's court praised the 'conversions' as opportunities for Saxons to follow Christ who defeated death through the crucifixion and descent into hell before resurrection. They sought to justify the violent 'conversion' tactics through this divine imitation. The Saxons must be put to violence/hell that they might encounter the resurrection of true Christianity.¹⁴² As a result of their violent suffering and oppression, the Saxons themselves embraced a cruciform Christ, as a savior who suffered with them in violence's molestation.¹⁴³

Violence was continually used to hold Saxons in 'correct' Christianity. Both as a sword at their throats in baptism and as the guilt of Christ who 'suffered violence for

¹³⁹ Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, 223

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 225

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 229

¹⁴² Ibid, 229

¹⁴³ Ibid, 230

them' from the pulpit. In a couple of generations, Parker and Brock note, the violence is internalized.

“To the Saxons along the Rhine, this Christian theology arrived at the point of a sword. The cross—once a sign of life—became for them a sign of terror. Blood seeped through the gold. Within a few generations of their forced conversion, the Saxons hewed an image of the tortured and dead body of Christ hanging from the tree. Pressed by violence into Christian obedience, the Saxons produced art that bore the marks of their baptism in blood. In the Gero Cross, their once-sacred oak was carved into an elegiac effigy of brutalization.”¹⁴⁴

Charlemagne's continual struggle to maintain power led to the imposition of one universal Eucharistic rite in all his territories. Prior to this imposition, Saxons, and other Non-Roman worshippers were known to use a Gallican liturgy which focused on thanksgiving and praised God who “in your manifold goodness and inestimable majesty sent the saving Word from heaven, that he should be made flesh by taking a human body.”¹⁴⁵ The Eucharist understanding of Saxony and non-Roman territories held “with the traditional doctrine: the glorified, resurrected body—not the crucified body—was present in the ritual.”¹⁴⁶ But Charlemagne instituted a Eucharistic rite that celebrated a suffering, perfect sacrifice in the crucified body of Christ the judge. Not only did this rite name Christ as “a pure victim, a holy victim, an unspotted victim” but it named that Crucified body as God the judge. In the eating and drinking, fear of this Christ would force the compliance and contrition of the conquered peoples.¹⁴⁷

Following this institution, there ensued a “9th century theological debate” about the meaning of the Eucharist.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 232

¹⁴⁵ Saving Paradise, 234, Cuming and Jasper, 148

¹⁴⁶ Saving Paradise, 235

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 236

“Either the Eucharistic elements made the incarnate, transfigured, risen, and glorified body of the living, eternal Christ present and united the church with the Resurrection, or the Eucharist reenacted the Crucifixion and made the bleeding, dead body of the past, historical Christ present, and united communicants with his suffering and dying.”¹⁴⁸

By the eleventh century Charlemagne’s suffering and death centered theology came to dominate in Europe, and images of the cruciform Christ would come to prevail in Europe. Parker and Brock note that by the 14th century ‘images would show Christ dying in a chalice.’”

From the violence of forced conversions to “correct” Christianity Pope Urban II moves the church to the “Holy Wars” of the First Crusades. The Crusades against the Turkish Muslims of the Holy Lands were not in response to Muslim Turkish violence or hostility, in fact there remains a letter from Pope, Pope Gregory VII to a Muslim leader, expressing his love for Muslims, and his desire for their prosperity.¹⁴⁹ Pope Urban II begins the Crusades not out of defense, but in response to the needs of the European Church to form a stronger unity.¹⁵⁰ As an incentive to further his war he offers that “whoever goes on the journey to free the Church of God in Jerusalem. . . can substitute the journey for all penance of sin.”¹⁵¹ In this proclamation Urban II all but completes a theological move from a focus on the Abundant Life offered by Christ’s incarnation to a theology that glorifies earthly sacrifice for the sake of paradise after death. He also effectively reverses the Christian teaching against human bloodshed. Suffering and violence in this life contribute to heavenly paradise to come.

¹⁴⁸ Saving Paradise, 237

¹⁴⁹ Saving Paradise, 263

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 264

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 264

It is in the wake of this use of sacrificial salvation to justify Holy War that in 1098 Anselm of Canterbury writes *Why God Became Man*. Within this Christian culture of justified violence he proposed that the only satisfaction for human sin is the death of an innocent man, Jesus, in reparation for human evil.¹⁵² The basis of his logic model is the feudal system of his day, in which peasants often found themselves under a crushing debt owned to the rich landowner. He utilizes this feudal system to craft his analogy of God as landowner and humanity as she who is crushed by debt and in need of saving. While (as outlined in Chapter One of this thesis) Anselm's theory is questioned through the next century (including by Abelard in his own time) his claim of God's acceptance of the sacrifice of God's own son to repay God's honor, based upon his own human reason, political context, and Rome's need to justify the violent crusades, have nonetheless continued to significantly influence how we understand the work of God in Christ Jesus. Despite what may have been Anselm's intention otherwise, his logic has been used to call for the imitating of self-sacrifice for the sake of God's justice.¹⁵³ This is a logic that is construed to justify the thousands who would kill and be killed in the crusades, and which continues to bind the church to its sacrificial models of discipleship. The "Peace by the Blood of the Cross" is not, as we so often think, the peace of Jesus knitting us together but rather the violent conquest of the Western Church against Jews and Muslims, filled with the blood of the sword. Peace is no more than Western domination and the blood of the cross no more than the sword. It is this legacy of violence, and the way theologians, bishops, missionaries, and others translated the Christian message to the

¹⁵² Ibid, 266

¹⁵³ Ibid, 268

Saxons and their own soldiers that involved and internalized the violence that was taking place in the culture, that has shaped the paradigm of Christian Theology into one of violence and death, and has often drown out theologies such as the Gospel of John's life giving language of incarnation, that offers life to all people through the full presence of God in the here and now.

Incarnation as Empowerment in James Cone and Jacquelyn Grant

While violent language continues to be the norm in atonement discourse, a place in contemporary theology where the incarnation of Jesus is celebrated as the presence of God that gives life, is in the theologies of both Black Liberationist Theologian, James Cone and Womanist Theologian, Jacquelyn Grant. While both Cone and Grant build their Christologies out of a Synoptic Jesus who suffers very much, they nonetheless integrate a strong theology of incarnation. In her introduction to *White Woman's Christ, Black Woman's Jesus*, Jacquelyn Grant writes of how the emphasis that her parents and grandparents placed on Jesus taught her:

“The theology of somebodiness which they lived out without pretention, conveyed to their children that in spite of the world's denial of you, Jesus (God) affirms you. So you must go on. . . My commitment to Jesus. . . affirmed me and projected me into areas where, I later learned, ‘I was not supposed to go,’ by virtue of my race and gender.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989): ix.

Grant writes that black women “Identified with Jesus because Jesus identified with them.”¹⁵⁵ While Grant draws on a Christology that understands Jesus as one who suffers in life and crucifixion, she understands and claims in this suffering an incarnate Jesus who is present and lives with and for black women. For black women first and foremost, “Jesus is God incarnate.”¹⁵⁶ The presence of Jesus with black women affirms their worth and value and gives them freedom from the racial and gender lies placed upon them by society.¹⁵⁷

Grant makes reference to the theology of James Cone who argues that because of the particularity of Jesus’ Jewishness, Cone can now claim that Jesus is black. As Jesus dwelled in the body of an oppressed, poor Jewish man, so he dwells today in the body of the oppressed, black man. Claiming that Jesus is black is claiming that God finds God’s dwelling place in African American flesh. God enters African American flesh to fill it with abundant life where the world wishes its oppression. As the world walks in the darkness of racism the incarnation of Jesus means that in Jesus God inhabits the flesh of the African American, giving the black body utmost worth and dignity and forever identifying every black person as the Brother and Sister of Christ. For Cone, Christianity is about the “Liberating character of God’s presence in Jesus Christ as he calls his people into being for freedom in the world.”¹⁵⁸ For both Cone and Grant the presence of Jesus incarnate affirms the wholeness, beauty, and integrity of the black man and woman in face of society’s demand that the black person accept less than abundance from life.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 212

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 215

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 215

¹⁵⁸ James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. (Marknoll: Orbis Books, 2001): 8.

It is out of this presence of Christ that black women and men rise up to seek their liberation from the sacrifices imposed on them by society. Out of the presence of Jesus, which affirms their somebodiness, black women and men are empowered to seek full and abundant life, despite societies lies. Abundant life begins with the presence of Jesus in a woman's life, offering her the renewal of relationship with God who is the source of all life. From the fullness received she is then empowered to seek life for herself and for her community. The incarnation model leads to an understanding of the presence of God that is both tangible and empowering in the lives of women and men. Incarnation also leads to the care of the community, but it comes out of the fullness of one's being, from knowing that God's presence has made the most oppressed and marginalized person a somebody of inherent worth and value, a somebody worthy of the presence of God and a somebody called to seek the inherent worth and dignity of all somebodies. The incarnational model grounds the empowerment of all people and the resistance of evil in the presence of God and the fullness of each and every person's worth.

Kamitsuka and the Limits of Language

The theology of incarnation as a model of atonement in John's Gospel is a theology that tells of how God becomes fully human in order to bring God's life giving presence more fully to the world. It is the presence of God that gives life to all people, and calls women and children to share abundant life with one another. The theology of incarnation offers women who have been oppressed, abused, beaten and bruised an alternative to models of atonement that all contain at some level violence and suffering. However, as post-structuralist theologian Margaret Kamitsuka reminds feminist theologians that there is no removing ourselves from the cultural discourses that form us.

There is no place outside of language (and thus no place outside of the presence of the cross in our western culture) into which to start over.¹⁵⁹ A feminist theology cannot simply deny the cross, pick up incarnation, and assume a fresh start. The cross remains in our history.

Kamitsuka argues that there are positive ways of interpreting the cross when frames of limits are placed upon its meaning. For example, she interprets the cross as a Technology of Care for the Self. In this model the cross becomes a disciplinary discourse which can turn old desires (for example, capitalist consumption) into a re-orientated spirituality of gratitude to God.¹⁶⁰ The cross can be a place where we turn what is evil (death) into life (resurrection). What Kamitsuka, as a post-structuralist insists is that while we are required to acknowledge and respond to the very real oppressive effects that the cross continues to have in the lives of women, we should also allow the possibility of redemption in the empowering ways in which people continue to find pleasure in the cross.¹⁶¹

Her work requires feminists to acknowledge that nothing in society has a fixed meaning. Rather, as societies we give meaning to the vocabulary of discourse that manifests into lived realities.¹⁶² I think this is to say that the men who constructed the language for our classical models of atonement did not do so in order to do violence to women and children. Jurgen Moltmann, for example, in a response to feminists critiques

¹⁵⁹ Margaret Kamitsuka, *Feminist Theology and the Challenge of Difference*. (Oxford: University Press, 2007): 101.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 103

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 106

¹⁶² Ibid, 104

of his *Crucified God*, writes that he did not intend to cause violence in any way, and, given his own history of being ‘sacrificed’ for the ‘Fatherland’ in World War 2, is very concerned about preventing child abuse.¹⁶³ His intent was to offer a God who was present with people in the face of despair; a God who promises that no matter the hell, we are never left alone or abandoned; a God who demands that Christians cannot sit by in affluence and apathy while brothers and sisters the world over suffer. Feminist theologians must acknowledge that for Moltmann and many others suffering in the wake of World War Two, this theology contained the power to comfort many people. The theologies which this paper criticizes so sharply have meanings and places in society that do good. Not only do the constructs of language not allow us to erase all other atonement theologies, there are contexts in which they have served, as Kamitsuka suggests, as technologies of care.

Language is alive, and it holds a multiplicity of meanings. Feminist theologians like myself who critique the violence of the atonement models must also acknowledge that for many people these languages of atonement have held meanings of comfort and meanings that called people to the work of caring for the suffering and marginalized. However, in turn, these theologians must be challenged by the fact that their language takes on meaning as it is utilized in society, and thus, a woman repeatedly raped as a child can be taught by Moltmann’s theology that being forced to share in the suffering of her perpetrator is in some way an imitation of the Divine Trinity in the world. Despite Anselm’s intent to demonstrate that God intended Christ to take the debt of all that we owe upon Godself, to give us a priceless gift beyond any repayment in order to free

¹⁶³ Moltmann, “The Crucified God Yesterday and Today”

humanity, there is also the reality that discourse has constructed a meaning that has taught black women in particular that they must pay another's debt and bare another's suffering. And, while Abelard intended for everyone to know of the incredible love of God, his language has also taken on the power to kill women who are taught in the construct of discourse that as Christ gave salvation through showing his divine love in death, she too must take a bullet to the head for her partner, attempting to salvifically show him the depth of her love in the grandness of her sacrificial act. Liberation Theology has both given empowerment to poor and oppressed peoples who through its theology encounter a God who calls the people to rise up against oppression, and taught some women (and men) that their greatest value is in their death.

It was the intention of these men to construct theologies that would tell the story of a good God. Violence and the sacrifice of women were not their intended meaning or praxis. However, they are meanings that have come to life as the language has been lived and construed in a patriarchal dominated society. The meanings of violence and sacrifice do not negate the good that has been offered by these theologies, however, the reality of the role of classical atonement theologies in implicitly or explicitly supporting the sacrifice of women and children demand an alternative language that can be lifted up beside the other models, so that women who face violence and abuse can find a language of freedom and a discourse of life to grasp to in the midst of the cacophony of meanings our vocabularies of faith contain as they reverberate through pulpit and pew.

CHAPTER FIVE
LITURGY OF INCARNATION: A PROPOSAL

The concerns which began this project were practical. The lived experiences of women give painful critique of the violence of classical atonement models. The experience of a woman unwilling or unable to leave an abusive husband because she has been taught that loving means self-sacrifice, demands another theology. For women, children and vulnerable people who have been taught that to love is to suffer, we must create and renew models and languages, such as the model of incarnation in John's Gospel that will bring life and wholeness.

This work must end in the practical. It must end in new places in preaching, pastoral care, teaching, and liturgy that offer God's life giving presence to women who have been or might one day be bruised and battered by sacrifice. While it is my hope that the work of this project offers a Biblical language of the canon for lay leaders and pastors to share with women, I turn this Biblical language now to liturgy. The concerns of women must alter all of our church ministerial work; our pastoral care, preaching, Sunday School teaching, justice building, and small group support. However, I turn first to the work of integrating the concerns of women and an alternative atonement model of incarnation to the liturgy of worship. The liturgy is that of Church life which we recite over and over week by week until it becomes the language so ingrained in our beings that we don't even notice how it has shaped our reality. Lucia's story is told from the perspective of her pastoral care visit. She goes to the priest's office to ask for pastoral care and advise in her suffering of abuse. However, her concerns, that she must be like Jesus in self-sacrifice and suffering, the theological framework that has constructed her

understanding for months and years before she ever steps foot in the priests office comes from the weeks and months and years of worship attendance. From weeks and months of learning the rituals of sacrifice taught in liturgy. All of the churches ministerial work is important; I begin with worship because it is the place of church engagement that contains the most people. It is the place of church engagement where people go first. It is the place of church engagement that is ritual and routine, week in and week out, that I would argue has the broadest impact on the theological shaping of women's lives. The words of liturgy are the words a woman hears when she cowers alone in the darkness of night. As many liturgies continue to be formed out of violent and sacrificial language of the atonement models, I offer here a simple proposal: A Liturgy of Incarnation, built upon the language of John's Gospel. I seek not to permanently replace but to offer an alternative model to be written on women's hearts, built out of the language of John's Gospel.

A Liturgy of Incarnation¹⁶⁴

Opening: As God the Word was born to give us life so we gather to worship the one from whose fullness we have all received grace upon grace.¹⁶⁵ Amen.

Confession: It is true that we are people who have walked in darkness. We have not seen God standing in our midst. Seeking out of our own deprivation, we have harmed one

¹⁶⁴ Simply because I am a Lutheran, this liturgy follows the form of the worship litanies found in the Lutheran Hymnbook: *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

¹⁶⁵ John 1:4, 14

another by our lack. God, lead us into the light so that by your presence we might live and love in the fullness of your life.¹⁶⁶

Affirmation: As God so loved the world, as God so loved you; God became human that in Jesus God might live among us. God came into the world not to condemn, but so that we might be found in God's abundance of life. By God's presence you are sustained. From God's fullness you are invited to share the abundance with all whom you meet. Now, may we join together as a worshipping community to proclaim in our faith that the Word of God was made flesh, lived among us, so that God's glory might be seen then and today. Amen.

Gathering Song

Invocation: The grace and truth of Jesus Christ,¹⁶⁷ the Love God showed for the world,¹⁶⁸ and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit¹⁶⁹ be with you all. (And also with You).

Kyrie: In peace let us pray to God: God, we abide in your fullness.

For the peace from above and for life abundance, let us pray to God: God, we abide in your fullness.

For the care of every person, for the feeding of every sheep, for the unity of all, let us pray to God: God we abide in your fullness.

For all gathered here, for all who need the depths of your grace: God we abide in your fullness. Feed, Nourish, Comfort and Sustain us, God of Life: Amen.

1st and 2nd Readings: Word of God, Word of Life. Thanks be to God.

¹⁶⁶ John 8:34, 20:22-23, 3:17-18

¹⁶⁷ John 1:17

¹⁶⁸ John 3:16

¹⁶⁹ John 14:26

Gospel and Gospel Acclamation: To the Word of God incarnate, who came to give us life. We give you thanks.¹⁷⁰

Sermon and Sermon Hymn.

Creed:¹⁷¹

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God:

who has created and is creating,

who has come in Jesus,

the Word made flesh,

to reconcile and make new,

who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:

to celebrate God's presence,

to live with respect in Creation,

to love and serve others,

to seek justice and resist evil,

to proclaim Jesus, born, died, risen and ascended

our judge and our hope.

In all of life. God is with us.

¹⁷⁰ John 6:68

¹⁷¹ The following is "A New Creed" created by the United Church in Canada in 1968 (and revised in 1980 to contain more inclusive language). However, I have adapted a few of the lines, to better reflect the Incarnational theology of John's Gospel. The full original creedal text can be found at: <http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/creed>. (Accessed October 29, 2011).

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

Sharing of the Peace: As Jesus greeted his disciples after the resurrection, let us greet one another: “Peace be with you.”¹⁷²

Offering: As God provided the disciples with a full catch of fish before commanding them to feed his sheep, we receive from God’s bounty that we might in turn feed God’s sheep, seeking to care for the life of the world. What we offer today is out of the abundance of God.

Foot Washing: The night before his death, knowing that he had come from God and was returning to God, Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.¹⁷³

Then Jesus said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² John 20:19

¹⁷³ John 13: 3-5

¹⁷⁴ John 13:12-17

As friends of God we are invited to do as Jesus taught. We are invited to this holy moment in which God gently bathes our feet in water, and dries them with his towel. As Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, we invite you forward to have your feet washed. And, as Jesus taught, with your feet washed and cared for, we invite you to turn and wash the feet of a brother or sister, caring for the dignity of their body. Sharing in the sustaining of their life, in the simple gesture of cleaned feet. Everyone is welcome to participate in a foot washing at this time.

Communion Meal: Following his death, Jesus, in wholeness of Body, appeared to share a meal with his disciples.¹⁷⁵ As the disciples were at sea, nets cast for fish Jesus provided an abundant catch, so that in the meal of abundance the disciples again ate what we all know: Jesus is our Bread of Life, our Living Water which will never run dry. As we eat this bread together, we eat the life giving presence of the sustaining God. We eat the promise that Jesus is all the bread we ever need, that like the Manna given for the Hebrew people, Jesus provides all the abundance that each day needs. By God's presence we are sustained.

May we join together in sharing this small meal, remembering that those who drink of the water God provides will never be thirsty, remembering that Jesus is the Bread of God which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."¹⁷⁶

Sending: Go now in the grace of God. As the Samaritan Woman was offered Living Water that she might thirst no more, Go with great Joy into the fullness of your life. As

¹⁷⁵ John 21

¹⁷⁶ John 4:14 and John 6:33

branches rooted in the vine, go rooted in the God who promises by his presence to provide your very breathe. Go in peace, abiding in God's abundance. Thanks be to God.

Conclusion

At stake in this work are the lives of women. Everyday that women and men continue to believe that to love is to suffer contributes to the death of three more women a day who were only 'loving' their partners. The needs of the church for models of praxis built upon life affirming models of atonement and love are many. In the Gospel of John, the incarnation of God in Jesus restores humanity's relationship with God, the source of life. God comes to share the fullness of God's abundant life with humanity. In the Gospel of John humanity is invited to care for others out of the abundance of God. Women are invited to live and breathe in God's abiding, abundance, and fullness so that in the moments of life and death they might choose life.

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