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Appropriating Aulén? Employing *Christus Victor* Models of the Atonement

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1. Introduction

Gustaf Aulén is a name with which to conjure. A. G. Hebert's preface to his own translation of Aulén's best-known work in English, *Christus Victor*, struck a representatively laudatory note, while J. Macquarrie thought Aulén's case offered 'the most promising basis for a contemporary statement of the work of Christ…'.[1] It perhaps comes as a surprise to find that elsewhere Aulén has been castigated as in some respects superficial,[2] abounding in 'bold assertions without adequate proof',[3] and as having a doctrine of the Incarnation which departs from the orthodox doctrine laid out at Chalcedon and later Councils.[4]

This broad spectrum of views, the gravity of some of the charges levelled at Aulén, and the significance some attach to Aulén's work, suggest we must dig deeper than a simple 'I accept Aulén' or 'I reject Aulén' or a broad 'I'm relying on Aulén'. The aim here is to establish quite what Aulén was arguing, how that might be evaluated, and finally whether and how we might properly adopt Aulén's argument today. In doing this, this paper will try to show that Aulén's argument falls into two distinct parts,[5] a positive case and a negative case, and that the positive case, relating to the conquest of evil, in fact requires a notion that lies at the heart of penal substitution, justice.

However, we do well to recall why Aulén is so relevant to present evangelical deliberations on penal substitution. A rightly persistent question is, What is the objective work of the Cross, the work extrinsic to human beings? It remains relatively common ground amongst those identifying themselves as evangelicals that the Cross does have an objective work. It is also common ground amongst us, I think, that the Cross has a subjective work: it elicits a response in us and provides a model for our conduct. Yet many evangelicals are concerned to go beyond an exclusively subjective account, and defenders of penal substitution have asked those rejecting that doctrine 'What is your account of the objective work of Christ, if you reject penal substitution?' Aulén's argument answers just that question: it suggests an objective work

without penal substitution. Certainly, Aulén's argument has been used in this way in debates in the U.K. after the publication of *The Lost Message of Jesus*.[6]

Yet in fact Aulén's argument has a wider scope: he suggests not merely that there are other pictures of the Cross than penal substitution, but rather that penal substitution is not a legitimate picture of the Cross. Therefore, Aulén's argument is significant in our current debates because it offers opponents of penal substitution not only an alternative objective work of Christ in the Atonement but also reasons to deny that penal substitution is a legitimate picture of the Cross.

2. Aulén's Work

2.1. Aulén's Context

Before outlining Aulén's argument, he must be put in context. Born in 1879, he became professor at the University of Lund from 1913 where, with Anders Nygren, he was associated with so-called Lundensian theology. Prompted by the meeting of conservative Swedish Lutheran church life with the liberal theology emerging from some quarters of nineteenth century Germany, the Lundensian approach tended to have some characteristic emphases. The following are relevant here.

First, theology is separate from metaphysics.[7] This partly perhaps explains Aulén's evident antipathy towards Anselm and certain scholastic approaches both pre-Reformation and afterwards:[8] the risk, he thinks, of seeking a rational understanding and justification of the affirmations of faith—*fides quaerens intellectum* in that sense—is precisely that it mixes faith and metaphysics. Secondly, theology is a descriptive discipline which has as its 'object of study the Christian faith'.[9] Thirdly, the central task in this study is to '…remove all unnecessary accretions, and to bring out the very heart of the matter'.[10] This means Aulén, and indeed Nygren, are deeply concerned with separating out the underlying theme from the verbal formulae in which that theme may from time to time be expressed.[11] Particularly important is the axiom that the idea or theme can be separated from the form.[12] Such fundamental motifs provide the unity which underlies the varieties of verbal formulae.[13] Fourthly, for Christianity, the key idea or theme, certainly for Aulén, is God's love.[14] Fifthly, there is a commitment to the act of God in Christ, an affirmation to the importance of historic Christianity as against the allegedly moralising liberal

theology of A. Ritschl and others,[15] although there is also a willingness to use some of the biblical and historical criticism associated with that school.

For Aulén himself two other things require comment. First, he has a deep and persistent affection and respect for Luther.[16] Secondly, more importantly for current debates, Aulén is opposed to conventional theories of biblical inspiration, not least because historical criticism has, to his mind, made it impossible to think that the Bible has the uniformity a theory of inspiration suggests.[17] Moreover, he fears such theories of biblical inspiration mean the Bible carries its own authority as revelation, which would mean that the revelation of God in Christ ceases to be the supreme criterion for judging revelation.

Aulén keeps a special place for the New Testament, however. The New Testament writings are irreplaceable testimony to Christ.[18] The status of the unique testimony of the New Testament is certainly high in his estimation. Yet, logically enough given his presuppositions, this falls short of the New Testament being the decisive benchmark of acceptable faith. Aulén goes on: *But this [sc. The unique testimony of the NT] does not mean that no other conceptions of faith are permitted except those produced within this most ancient testimony, nor that every one of the conceptions of faith found within the New Testament should without further consideration be accepted as legitimate parts of the Christian faith*.[19]

Therefore, for Aulén, even the New Testament is not authoritative in itself to ground or exclude propositions of faith. This obviously differs from conventional evangelical understandings of the Bible such as that found in the Evangelical Alliance (UK) Basis of Faith.[20] Such a position on the Bible potentially affects evangelical attempts to appropriate Aulén's work. His theological method is not evangelical and does not claim to be.

2.2. Aulén's Argument relating to Christus Victor

Aulén's subtitle for *Christus Victor* is "An Historical Study of the Three Main types of the Idea of the Atonement".[21] The types in question are what he terms the Latin view (penal substitution is, strictly speaking, simply one species of this type) which involves satisfaction of some kind; the subjective view, associated with Abelard; and the dramatic or classic idea, which relates to the victory of God in Christ over what enslaves and tyrannises humanity.[22]

Two observations are necessary. First, *Christus Victor* is ostensibly an 'historical study', without 'personal statements of belief', although it is fair to say that *Christus Victor* strongly implies the correctness of the dramatic or classic idea.[23] In fact, the argument of *Christus Victor* appears more prescriptively in Aulén's *The Faith of the Christian Church*.[24] We may fairly see *Christus Victor* as setting out Aulén's own position.[25]

Secondly, the types are treated as alternatives. Thus Aulén does not deal with how one could combine, say, the Latin idea with the classic idea, as different perspectives on the work of the Cross. Rather, Aulén's argument is that there is essentially one perspective, the classic idea, with its related images. The reason Aulén does not think in terms of different perspectives is that he views both Latin and subjective ideas as resting on a view of divine and human action which is incompatible and inconsistent with the classic view, a point to be developed below.

His argument then breaks into two related parts. His positive case is that the classic idea has been unduly eclipsed and should be recognised for what it is, the authentic view of the early church and the New Testament. His negative case is that neither the Latin view nor the subjective view do justice to what God did in Christ. We must now flesh out these cases.

3. Aulén's Positive Case – the victory of Christ

3.1. Aulén on dualism and defiance of God's will

Aulén envisages a dualism in the world: *To Christian faith history appears as an arena where the conflict between the will of God and that which is inimical to it takes place.*[26]

He hastens to add that this is not an absolute dualism, for God created this world. Rather it is a dualism relating to conflict with God's will.[27] This conflict is universal in that it covers all human existence and God contests all that resists his will.[28] Defying God's will is central to Aulén's conception of sin:

Sin is a perverse will, and therefore the opposite of that which it ought to be. Whether it appears as indifference or hostility to the loving will of God, sin is the opposite of this will. Where sin and egocentricity hold sway, there a power rules which is hostile to divine love…[29]

Sin for Aulén has a double aspect. Negatively, it is unbelief because it refuses the fundamental relationship between God and humans, which is God's loving rule.[30] Positively, it is egocentricity, because something other than God rules – there is another power in the individual's life: 'This other power which rules man in sin is nothing else than his *own ego*.'[31]

Thus already Aulén has introduced notions of rule, so central to ideas of victory. It is arguable, though, that the language of 'other power' in a human being injects distance between the individual and her or his sin because the terms tend to externalise the human will out from the human individual, even moving, perhaps, towards the idea of a human being ruled by her or his will as if it were somehow distinct from that human being. Clearly, though, Aulén's argument envisages that sin has an individual component—unbelief and egocentricity at least include the individual level.

From here Aulén proceeds to note that 'Wherever this power rules, the fellowship with God is destroyed'.[32] This must follow since Aulén regularly defines the divine-human relation in terms of God's will. However, Aulén does not have an exclusively individual account of sin. He writes: *Sinfulness does not belong simply to separate individuals, it is characteristic of the whole human race.*[33]

He explains this more collective emphasis in terms of the network of relationships in which humans exist—we practise unbelief and egocentricity in relations with each other: *The solidary interrelationship of sin concretizes itself in inscrutable and obscure powers, a mysterious complex which cannot be accurately delimited and defined, and which slips away and becomes shadowy as soon as one tries to grasp and comprehend it. Nevertheless it shows its power in the most fearful manner and by the most cruel oppression of human life.*[34]

However, this corporate aspect does not simply subsume the individual. Aulén is emphatic that the individual aspect remains. *No matter how much personal sin stands in an intimate connection with sin as a demonic power,*[35] *this personal sin is nevertheless something which adheres to and determines the personal will as such and is a result of this personal will and a reflection of its character.*[36] As a result, Aulén's account of sin has both corporate and individual elements, both of which he argues must be retained.[37]

3.2. God's victory over the powers

3.2.1. Outline of the Victory motif

Aulén's discussion of the classic view of the Atonement takes place against this understanding of the human predicament. He defines the *Christus Victor* idea thus: *Christ—Christus Victor—fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the "tyrants" under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself.*[38]

Naturally, this prompts the question, Who are the evil powers? Aulén argues that the New Testament and patristic discussions of these ideas of victory bring several images to the fore: sin, death and the devil, along with 'law' (in Paul), and 'cosmos' (in the johannine writings), while Luther, to Aulén's approval, includes God's wrath as another tyrant.[39]

Yet these evil powers are not identical. They fall into two different categories. The first category of powers have, for Aulén, a twofold aspect. Sin is not in this category. But death, law, wrath and the devil are '…on the one hand, tyrannical powers which enslave humanity, and on the other hand the instruments of divine judgment'.[40] As instruments of divine judgment, these powers serve the divine will. This means, according to Aulén, that the victory on the Cross is, in a sense, God dealing with himself, for in dealing with them he deals with powers serving his own will.[41] The significance of this will become clear later.

However, sin is an exception to this, and constitutes the second category of powers. It does not have this twofold aspect of being both tyrant and also instrument of judgment which serves the divine will. Aulén states: *This hostile power cannot serve the divine will except in so far as the divine will overcomes it and turns it into good.*[42]

This must follow, because Aulén, as we have seen, has defined sin in terms of a will distinct from God that defies God. Sin therefore cannot be an instrument of that divine will in the same way that divine wrath is, for it arises from wills distinct from God. We should also note that sin, in a category of its own as power, is in fact logically prior, since death, wrath, devil and law arise as powers on account of sin. It may seem surprising that the devil is included in this list of logically subsequent powers, but the reasons why this is so in Aulén's scheme appear below.

3.2.2. Centrality of the Victory motif

Aulén argues this view of victory over the tyrant powers is 'the dominant view' of both the New Testament and the early church.[43] A crucial part of his argument at this point depends on his first category of tyrannical powers, that they are both tyrants and also instruments of divine will. Using this two-fold aspect, Aulén argues that victory over these powers is an act of reconciliation. God is reconciling the world to himself by his self-giving sacrifice in Christ and this is an act of victory.[44] Consequently, reconciliation and ransom language are not categories that are distinct from victory, let alone categories that support Latin views: they belong with victory. Hence Aulén's view that victory is the global motif.

In making this case, he lays particular stress on Irenaeus,[45] while for the New Testament he states that the classic idea 'has never found more pregnant expression' than in 2 Corinthians 5:18f.[46] At first glance this is surprising since the passage does not contain explicit victory or defeat terminology, but, of course, Aulén has blended victory and reconciliation and hence sees the passage as an instance of the classic view. Further, Luther himself when properly understood was an exponent of the classic view rather than the Latin satisfaction view.[47]

3.2.3. Advantage of the Victory motif

For Aulén the critical advantage of the classic idea is that it means Atonement is a 'continuous' divine action, in which God is both reconciler and reconciled: all is of God. Atonement is 'from first to last a work of God Himself'.[48] God appears, it seems, as both subject and object of reconciliation, in particular, subject. In part one suspects that Aulén stresses this so much out of a wish to preserve the principle that salvation must be by God alone since humanity is helpless in its sin. Given this framework that victory/reconciliation is a 'continuous' divine act, reasons Aulén, Incarnation and Atonement are properly and clearly related,[49] one of the great merits Hebert sees in the *Christus Victor* model.[50] This takes us to Aulén's negative case.

4. The Negative Case—the exclusion of Latin theories

4.1. Aulén's Arguments for Exclusion

Aulén's argument is not merely that *Christus Victor* is a model of the Atonement that has been unduly neglected, so that with it we have a valuable

extra perspective. It also asserts that the Latin model is defective, and hence one cannot, Aulén thinks, have Latin and Victory views as complementary, different perspectives on the Atonement. Aulén's reasons are, however, rather different from what might be expected. This should be stressed. The arguments debated amongst us over the last two decades against penal substitution are not those that were central for Aulén. Again, that means when hearing or making a claim to accept Aulén, we must clarify whether this acceptance includes the rationale that Aulén holds for his position.

4.2. Continuous Action and the Latin view

The idea to which Aulén constantly returns is that the Latin view is not a 'continuous' act of God, an act of God, so to speak, from start to finish.[51] This is, he argues, 'the most marked difference' between the Latin view and the classic view.[52] The Latin view features an act from the human side. Aulén writes: *It is at this point, in the payment of the required satisfaction, that the continuity of Divine operation is lost; for the satisfaction is offered by Christ as man, as the sinless Man on behalf of the sinners.*[53] Such payment made as a man undermines the message of grace and re-instates, it seems, merit and law.

This outlook is not just present in, but decisive for, Aulén's handling of the biblical evidence. Aulén, naturally, thinks that the Bible, or rather more precisely, the New Testament, does not support the Latin view. However, his rationale for this conclusion repays attention. In discussing Romans 3:24, he suggests it lacks the idea of satisfaction being made by Christ on man's behalf, an offering 'made to God from man's side, from below,' and for this reason contends that this does not support a Latin doctrine.[54] The offering 'from below', feels Aulén, is indispensable to the Latin view.[55] Similarly, when discussing Hebrews, Aulén suggests that Hebrews contains a double aspect—Christ's sacrifice is both an act of God and an act offered to him. Aulén writes: *This double-sidedness is always alien to the Latin type, which develops the latter aspect and eliminates the former.*[56]

In other words, neither Hebrews nor Romans 3:24 support the Latin view because both texts lack this idea of offering from the human side. Aulén sees the discontinuity he describes as intrinsic and essential to the Latin view and, failing to find it, concludes these texts do not support the Latin view. Obviously the definition that stipulates discontinuity in the Latin view is a necessary

presupposition for Aulén's case on the New Testament material. Aulén's own definition of the Latin view precludes defenders of penal substitution from relying on these traditionally-cited texts.

4.3. Old Testament and Church History

Aulén refers to the Old Testament material which supporters of the Latin view also cite. He observes: *There is no doubt that there is plenty in the Old Testament that could serve as a basis for the Latin type of view…*[37]

However, there is a radical breach between 'Judaism and Christianity', and 'Judaism', as Aulén refers to the Old Testament revelation, has law as its dominating factor, so that in the New Testament we stand on the other side of a 'revolution'.[58] Accordingly, admitting the presence of elements supporting the Latin view in the Old Testament does not, Aulén thinks, affect his argument. Again, the method Aulén has for excluding material supporting Latin views repays attention: it depends on a displacement of Old Testament revelation.

Moving from the Bible to church history, Aulén suggests that the Latin view arises from Tertullian's and Cyprian's views of penance.[59] Aulén comments on such penitential thinking: 'Its root idea is that man must make an offering or payment to satisfy God's justice.'[60] He contends that this is essentially legalistic, and lays all its emphasis on what Christ has done as a man.[61] This, naturally, recalls his central criticism, that the Latin view involves a discontinuous act of God, and means that for Aulén the historical root of the Latin view carries assumptions of discontinuous act.[62] The criticism that there is no continuous act bulks large in his assessment of Anselm. He is well aware that Anselm himself does not assert penal substitution, knowing that Anselm saw satisfaction as alternative to punishment, but he sees vital common ground in this feature of discontinuous act. He contrasts Anselm with the Fathers: *They show how God became incarnate that He might redeem; he teaches a work of human satisfaction, accomplished by Christ.*[63] Anselm, he says, only treats Atonement as God's work 'in a sense', not 'in the full sense'.[64]

4.4. Aulén's Governing Perspective

So Aulén has theological, biblical and historical reasons for his negative case that penal substitution and other versions of the Latin view have no place in

proper Christian faith. Yet the theological reason keeps re-appearing even as Aulén discusses the biblical and historical matters. The Latin view is rejected on the basis of discontinuous act. One must conclude that the idea of continuous and discontinuous act was decisively important to him.

5. Evaluating Aulén's Positive case

5.1. Recovering a diminished strand

One of the most attractive features of Aulén's work is that he draws attention again both to biblical texts and to historical, especially patristic, texts which stress Christ's victory. L. Hodgson describes this as 'a most valuable contribution'.[65] After all, theologically, the principle of the whole counsel of God requires that if a truth is taught in the Bible, we accept it. Pastorally, this restored focus on victory is very welcome, not least because it supports the assurance and security of salvation, and encourages Christians in present difficulties. Moreover, many would feel that Aulén's unashamed discussion of victory over the Devil speaks of a full-blooded endorsement of spiritual realities, at odds with the anti-supernaturalism which has dogged post-Enlightenment Christianity in the West. Surely, then, Aulén's positive case can be accepted without further argument?

This is not, alas, so. The broad thrust of the criticisms we are about to examine is not that Aulén was wrong to point to the victory motif, but that he did not do full justice to that motif.

5.2. A demythologised devil? – J.C. Diamond's criticism

We outlined earlier Aulén's dualistic view, that this world is the arena of conflict between God's will and that 'which is inimical to it'.[66] We saw the way this opposition to God, rooted in unbelief and egocentricity, is inter-connected, comprising both individual and collective dimensions, culminating in a human network of sin that oppresses and tyrannises.[67] Christ overcomes this multi-faceted tyranny.

However, the surprising absentee here is a personal devil. Sin and evil have a fundamentally human origin. In this context J.C. Diamond draws attention to Aulén's distinction between forms of expression and the underlying motif or theme.[68] Diamond argues that 'devil' and 'demon' are for Aulén forms of expression, not underlying motifs, and that the underlying realities are sinful

human wills, notably in their collectivity.[69] Close examination of *The Faith of the Christian Church* supports Diamond. Aulén describes the power of evil in solidary human inter-relationships and says: *In the New Testament we often meet more or less mythologically formulated expressions* ***for this complex of evil powers*** *[emphasis added] (cf Rom. 8:38; Gal. 1:4; Col. 2:15; Eph. 6:12).*

Here the reference to the 'complex of evil powers' can only be to the powers generated by human collective sinfulness.[71] This interpretation receives further support from Aulén's later work. Thus he can note the doubts moderns have about the sick actually being demonically possessed (referring to the Synoptic accounts),[72] and go on to speak of humans being possessed by ideals: *Even Peter could run errands for 'Satan', 'possessed' as he was by 'the ideal of the Messiah' and its expectations*.[73]

He goes on to provide further instances of ideals as demonic: *There are plenty of ideals which lead to disastrous results. This world would not be what it is today of money and status did not function as demonic powers. Hitler's Nazism spread like a demonic pestilence. Racial discrimination is a demonic power with enormously damaging results*.[74]

Naturally many would firmly agree that such ideals are destructive, and aptly called evil, and that their conquest by God is vital, both as regards their obvious victims, for example Slavs, Jews, Christian dissidents, and homosexuals in the case of Nazism, and as regards, to continue the example, those whom Nazism 'possessed' through their belief in it. What is more questionable is the inference that human ideological or social constructions exhaust the 'demonic' as a category.

On reflection, this reductionist turn is unsurprising since Aulén rejects any historical reference for the Fall.[75] Thus human sinfulness cannot originate as Genesis 3 outlines with an external temptation. The demonic is not a pre-existing category or creature that comes from outside to tempt an originally pure humanity, since the demonic has a human origin. Despite the terminology, Aulén has a demythologised view of Christ's victory, arising in part from his rejection of Genesis 3 as referring to history.[76]

A number of misgivings now surface. First, it is highly questionable whether the New Testament's attitude to demons can be quite so easily dismissed. There

is the obvious point that Jesus apparently treats demons as real personal entities in synoptic exorcism passages.[77]

Secondly, is Aulén quite reproducing the thought of Irenaeus and Luther as he claims? Aulén acknowledges that both of them use 'grotesque' language to describe demonic opposition to Christ. What is far less clear is whether Irenaeus and Luther would consent to their thoughts about the demonic being re-written as mere forms of expression which can be re-translated into Aulén's chosen underlying motifs.[78] Diamond notes that where the New Testament sees possession in particular in terms of external evil forces, Aulén internalises matters so that possession relates to the perverted inclination of our own wills.[79] Possession in that New Testament sense seems to be an empty set.

This means one might say that Aulén has abolished that characteristic western way of describing the human predicament, that we are oppressed by the world, the flesh and the devil. In Aulén's scheme, this reduces to two, the world and the flesh. Far from being robustly supernaturalist at this point, Aulén seems if anything covertly anti-supernaturalist.

More than that, Aulén's claim to articulate the 'classic' view of the New Testament and the patristic period is much less straightforward. He retains some of the phraseology certainly, but distances himself from what New Testament and patristic writers thought the phraseology referred to. The claim to historical continuity is weakened.

5.3. Victory and Justice

A further problem is the relation of victory to justice. Aulén quite rightly draws attention to the victory language associated with the Atonement. What is less clear in Aulén's account is the intimate association of victory with justice. Thus John 16:11 speaks of the work of the Spirit in terms of conviction that the prince of this world now stands condemned—a justice concept. Earlier in John 12:31 Christ's victory is again associated with an act of judgement: 'Now is the time for judgement on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.' A rightly key reference for victory concepts is 1 John 3:8 and the statement that the Son came to destroy the devil's works. But this is in the context of a discussion about sin, in which we are told that sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4), that the Son came to take away our sin (v. 5), implying he came to take

away our lawlessness, and that the Christian does what is righteous, just as God is righteous (v. 7: the terminology for righteous coming from the *dikaios* word group, which includes justice ideas in its semantic range). Destruction of the devil's works is then related to the eradication of sin and this is loaded with justice concepts. Nor is this theme of victory with legal notions just johannine, for Colossians 2: 15 speaks of a victory (disarming the principalities and powers), but only after, or with, the cancellation of the 'bond' with its legal demands (v. 14). Victory and justice notions are joined.

Moreover, forgiveness of sin in 1 John has earlier been associated not simply with love but precisely with faithfulness and justice (1 John 1:9: 'he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness'). We rightly marvel at God's love in the sending of the Son, but strikingly here John grounds the confidence of our forgiveness in God's faithfulness and justice. Aulén, of course, dismissed the Old Testament evidence,[80] amongst other things because there even grace and mercy stood on a 'legalistic' basis, i.e. was shaped by law concepts. But John bids us rely on just these concepts.

The significance of this is two-fold. First the presence of justice concepts in this way raises the inevitable question: how can a just God justly forgive the unjust? This question prompts the reflections of Paul, of course, in Romans 3:24-26, where the sacrifice of Atonement of the Son is a demonstration of justice, a point often made by defenders of penal substitution and an aspect of their argument with which Aulén does not directly deal. Put sharply, if victory in its New Testament fullness involves justice, victory necessarily raises the question of how a just God deals with those who deserve condemnation.

This takes us to our second point. If we exclude justice considerations from God's victory, what is the nature of that victory? It becomes difficult to see it as resting on anything other than power: it would not necessarily be immoral, of course, but it would at best be amoral. One problem this creates is that defiance of the Son's kingdom is met with judgment and condemnation (2 Thessalonians 1:8,9, for example). This implies that such defiance deserves punishment. But the justice of such punishment is far from obvious if the rule defied cannot itself establish its legitimacy because it is amoral. The risk here is that God's victory becomes naked power. Justice concepts tell us not merely that God is powerful, but that his reign is just. But, as we have seen, justice

concepts pose the questions that penal substitution is designed to answer, and which victory (including its cognates in Aulén's scheme of reconciliation and ransom) on its own does not.

A further problem is that God's final eschatological victory is praised because of the way justice has been executed: *Revelation 19:1b-2: Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.* Yet it is far from clear that this aspect of praise for God's victory is similarly stressed in Aulén's account.

Aulén faces a dilemma here. On the one hand the Latin view insistently faces the question of God's justice—it is rightly said that Anselm's account in *Cur Deus Homo*? springs from *iustitia*[81]—and Aulén is critical of the 'legalistic' relationships this implies. So his negative criticism of the Latin view requires some marginalisation of justice notions. On the other hand his source material for his positive view of Christ's victory requires recognition of justice notions. This is present in both New Testament and patristic sources.

Aulén's language may well reflect this dilemma. Speaking of his positive case he suggests that legal language associated with victory reminds us that God's dealings with evil have the 'characteristic of "fair play"'.[82] Yet when contrasting the classic idea with the Latin view, Aulén is keen to stress that on the classic view there is 'discontinuity in the order of justice', but not on the Latin view, in which there is 'continuity' of justice.[83] This means Aulén, overall, affirms that the classic view has both the 'characteristic of "fair play"', and yet also 'discontinuity in the order of justice'.[84] The manifest difficulty in holding both propositions is that a discontinuity in the order of justice seems necessarily to mean a lack of fair play.

In fact, to make much sense of Aulén's formulation, we need to know what the difference is between Latin views of 'continuous' justice and the 'fair play' that Aulén insists is present in God's dealings in the Atonement. We also need to know why 'fair play' is not simply a different definition of God's justice from the ones stipulated by the Latin views. If it were simply a different definition, we could examine biblical material to see which definition of justice was best supported. Unfortunately the content of 'fair play' and its distinction from

justice remains opaque in Aulén. It is regrettable that Aulén does not specify how there can be discontinuity in the order of justice that does not amount to injustice, nor how God can transcend the order of justice, while remaining righteous, as Aulén insists.[85]

5.4. Victory and Sin

Our next heading relates to a further way in which Aulén's account in fact gives an incomplete conquest of evil. The problem here centres on sin in Aulén's scheme. Earlier descriptions of Aulén's case pointed out that he has two categories of tyrannical powers: death, the devil, wrath, law and the cosmos on the one hand, and sin on the other. Members of the first category, it will be recalled, have a double aspect, they are tyrants and also instruments of judgment serving the divine will. Sin, though, 'cannot serve the divine will...'[86] The first category is also, in a sense, logically dependent on the second, in that it is sin that calls forth death and wrath and so forth. Even the demonic is logically secondary in this sense, arising as it does out of solidary human defiance of God's will.

It will also be recalled that Aulén envisages the history of the world in dualistic terms in which God confronts and must conquer that which opposes him. He argues that in the Cross there is victory and reconciliation when God as reconciler and reconciled, subject and object, deals with the powers that tyrannise humans in one continuous divine action.

However, Aulén's explanation of how this occurs in fact features the first category of powers only: he deals with death, the devil, law and wrath.[87] Because they have the double aspect mentioned above, their conquest is, as outlined earlier, in a sense God dealing with himself.[88] Therefore the principle of continuous divine action, God being both reconciler and reconciled, subject and object, is satisfied. Sin, on Aulén's own definitions, is not amenable to this kind of treatment. It is related instead to human wills, individual and collective, which defy God's will in unbelief and egocentricity. In conquering sin, the defiant human will, God does not deal with himself.

Aulén attempts briefly to gloss this difficulty by combining sin with death, commenting that that they are regularly regarded as two 'expressions for the same thing'.[89] This, though, will not suffice, for Aulén's own definitions mean

that sin and death cannot be reduced to the same thing. Sin is defined in terms of individual and collective defiance, with a notable insistence on the preservation of the individual dimension.[90] It is a question of our wills opposing God and, says Aulén, this does not serve the divine will.[91] Death is defined to include separation from God 'in accordance with God's will…'.[92] Sin, then, cannot be reduced to death and must remain a distinct category precisely because of the defiant human will, which is not in accord with God's will.

However, why should it matter that sin is a unique category that does not serve the divine will? In Aulén's dualistic conflict, God remains antagonistic to what opposes his will: *Since the divine will is radically antagonistic to evil, and since God cannot, therefore, be reconciled to evil, this reconciliation entails the destruction of the power of evil and its dominion.*[93]

In the case of sin this should entail the destruction of the will that is locked in unbelief and egocentricity. The problem is, this is the human will, not just at a collective level, but as Aulén himself insists, at an individual level. To be completely victorious in the cosmic battle, God must be victorious over these individual human wills, so that they are obedient not rebellious.

At this stage it is clear that Aulén's scheme in fact demands God conquer individual human wills. This sits uncomfortably with his scheme in other respects. He has used a criterion of 'continuous' divine action in which God is both reconciler and reconciled, subject and object, to criticise and reject both Latin and also subjective views of the Atonement. In the case of death, devil, wrath and law he preserves continuous action in which God is both reconciler and reconciled, subject and object, by his view that death, devil, law and wrath have a double aspect: they are outworkings of his will so that God acts, in a sense on himself. Yet in the case of sin, which lacks this double aspect, God cannot be said to act on himself. For what Aulén's scheme requires is that God (subject) conquer the rebellious human will (object). But this is not a continuous divine action which is 'from first to last a work of God Himself'.[94]

Ironically, there is even a perverse resemblance to some presentations of the subjective view of the Atonement, that God's action in the Cross warms our hearts to submission and obedience instead of rebellion, so that Aulén emerges as a subjective Abelardian despite himself. Similarly Macquarrie envisages the

classic view as actually incorporating a subjective aspect as humans contemplate and are inspired by Christ's own personal conquest of the demon of idolatry on the Cross.[95]

This leaves the Aulén scheme with something of a problem. It cannot argue that the issue of sin can be ignored, because defiance of God's will is at the root of the dualistic view of the world and its history. Moreover, as has been said, human sin is the logically prior category compared to death, devil, law, wrath and cosmos. It could concede that God's final victory is not simply a continuous divine action in which he is both reconciler and reconciled, subject and object. To concede this, though, would be to surrender the most important criterion Aulén uses to delegitimate the Latin view. An uncomfortable dilemma, then, either to surrender the completeness of God's salvation or the argument which rules out the Latin views.

5.5. Summary

In short, while Aulén rightly stresses an important aspect of the Atonement, victory, his positive case needs revision to capture the scale of Christ's victory and its nature. For his demythologised view of demons and his inadequate account of the dealing with sin, on his own definition, understate Christ's victory, while the biblical stress on the victory as a just and righteous act of merited judgment is not adequately represented in the idea God has observed the rules of 'fair play'. Moreover, the notion of just victory inevitably takes one to the questions of the justice of God.

6. The Negative case

We turn now to Aulén's negative case, that the Latin view, including penal substitution, is not a legitimate picture of the Cross.

6.1. The theological criticism—the Latin view involves 'discontinuous' divine action

Aulén's fundamental theological criticism of the Latin view is that it involves discontinuous divine action—the action is by a human being towards God. This criticism, though, is open to several objections, two of which relate to how Aulén applies his criticism, one to the content of the criticism itself.

6.1.1. Aulén's application of his criticism

The application of Aulén's criticism is open to objection on two grounds: that it is

inconsistently applied, and that it is applied to a distorted account of the Latin view. First, then, we examine the idea that Aulén does not apply his principle of continuous action consistently. In the book *Christus Victor*, Aulén lays great stress on the work of Irenaeus, bringing out Irenaeus' doctrine of Recapitulation.[96] He summarises Irenaeus thus: *He shows how the disobedience of the one man, which inaugurated the reign of sin, is answered by the obedience of the One Man who brought life. By His obedience Christ 'recapitulated' and annulled the disobedience.*[97]

This is a good summary of Irenaeus on this point: Jesus is the new Adam, Adam as he should have been, so to speak. But Irenaeus' scheme of Recapitulation requires that, as the first Adam's disobedience was as a human, so must the new Adam's obedience be as a human: hence the Incarnation of the Son. But the obedience must be as a human. We need to look again at the dismissal of the Latin view by Aulén: *It is at this point, in the payment of the required satisfaction, that the continuity of Divine operation is lost; for the satisfaction is offered by Christ as man, as the sinless Man on behalf of the sinners.*[98]

Continuity is lost, argues Aulén, because Christ offers as man. Yet Irenaeus' account of Recapitulation stresses that Christ obeys as man. For instance Irenaeus writes: *So, 'the Word became flesh' that* ***by means of the flesh*** *[emphasis added] which sin had mastered and seized and dominated, by this, it might be abolished and no longer be in us.*[99]

But if the continuous action principle means Christ cannot offer as man, then why should he be able to obey as man without violating the principle? Conversely, if Christ can act in obedience in his human nature and yet the act still be an act of which God is the subject, then the obvious question is why Christ, the Son of God, cannot act as a divine subject, but in his human nature, to make an offering as the Latin view suggests? Aulén's failure to deal with this point at any length leaves outstanding doubts as to whether he applies the principle of continuity of action consistently.

Secondly, there is the question whether Aulén applies his continuous action principle to a distorted account of the Latin view. Aulén's use of the continuous action principle necessarily suggests that the acts of Christ in his humanity in the Latin view are not acts of God. When attempting to state how God's

involvement in the Latin view differs from the classic view, Aulén envisages the Latin view as being the work of God in that '…He is regarded as planning the Atonement…'.[100] This, though, inadequately describes the ideas of proponents of the Latin view, who envisage the Atonement as an act of God. Thus, Anselm, Aulén's *bête noire*, sees salvation as God's act, not merely his planning.[101] This is, moreover, integral to Anselm's argument. He insists God is our saviour because if God does not save, then we should not be his servants, but rather the servants of the one who did save us.[102] The identity of our saviour matters to Anselm and he would therefore strongly resist the description of his view as one in which man is the agent, not God.[103]

However, the obvious response to this latter point is that, whatever Anselm's intentions, in fact his account of the Atonement boils down to man (subject) acting on God (object), such that God is no longer reconciler and reconciled. This takes us to the content of Aulén's continuous action criterion.

6.1.2. The Content of the Continuous Action Criterion

Aulén himself has been criticised for using the continuous action criterion from which to attack the Latin view.[104] The point here is that Aulén analyses actions by Jesus in his human nature as being other than actions of God. The attack circles around the notion that Aulén's account of the Incarnation is defective. Fairweather's comments are representative. Fairweather notes that the Chalcedonian settlement of 451 involved the Son being fully God and fully Man—one person in two natures is a convenient summary. As developed in subsequent anti-monophysite/monothelite debate, this Chalcedonian settlement was held to entail that the one Person of the Son had, in respect of his two natures, two wills and two 'operations' (or modes of working). This line of thought was fully expressed in the Third Council of Constantinople (681 A.D).

The Council concluded: *We glorify two natural operations indivisibly, immutably, inconfusedly, inseparably in the same our Lord Jesus Christ our true God, that is to say a divine operation and a human operation…* . The echo of Chalcedon in the 'indivisibly…[etc]' terminology is unmistakeable. Certainly the logic is clear: *if the two natures each retain their integrity after the Incarnation, as Chalcedon insists, then that integrity will include the ways the natures work, their distinctive operations. Human nature will continue to work (operate) as human nature.*

The Council continued later: …*[W]e make briefly this whole confession, believing our Lord Jesus Christ to be one of the Trinity and after the Incarnation our true God, we say that his two natures shone forth in his one subsistence in which he performed the miracles and endured the sufferings through the whole of his economic conversation and that not in appearance only but in very deed, and this by reason of the difference of nature which must be recognised in the same Person, for although joined together yet each nature wills and does the things proper to it and that indivisibly and inconfusedly. Wherefore we confess two wills and two operations, concurring most fitly in him for the salvation of the human race.*[105]

In other words, just as there are two natures, joined hypostatically, that is through the one person (the hypostasis) of the Son, so all that goes with those two natures, their natural wills and their natural operations, are alike performed by the one person. There is no objection, then, Fairweather reasons,[106] within Chalcedonian orthodoxy to the idea that the Son performs an operation in his human nature: it is God the Son acting, he is the subject, but in a nature he has assumed. In answer to the question, *Who* is the subject of the actions of Jesus in his human nature, Chalcedonian Christology and its successors answer: 'God the Son'. It is he who performs the miracles and he too who endures the sufferings.

However, if it is God the Son who is the subject of the actions, then Aulén cannot be correct to depict the Latin view as discontinuous action, in which God is not the subject. To establish his case, Aulén would have to show that the answer to the question, 'Who is the subject of the human actions?' is another person than God the Son. Yet that architect of the Latin view, Anselm, would strongly resist such an answer: he makes it quite clear in *On the Incarnation of the Word* that in the Incarnation there is one divine Person, not two persons, one divine and one human: 'For the Word made flesh assumed another nature, not another person.'[107]

The significance of this is clearer if we take a contemporary definition of penal substitution. J. I. Packer describes it: …*[T]hat Jesus Christ our Lord, moved by a love that was determined to do everything necessary to save us, endured and exhausted the destructive divine judgement for which we were otherwise inescapably destined, and so won us forgiveness, adoption and glory.*[108]

Suppose one asks, *Who* endured and exhausted the destructive divine judgment? The answer within a Chalcedonian framework is, 'God the Son did'. Aulén's standpoint from which he launches his most persistent criticism of the Latin view is mistaken.

6.2. Aulén's account of Incarnation and Trinity

Critics are right that there is something a little odd in Aulén's Christology. This arises, I think, from two crucial moves Aulén makes, although it is perhaps also questionable whether Aulén's translators have served him well here.[109]

6.2.1. The Substance of God

The first move is Aulén's use of 'essence' or 'substance' terminology. This takes us into some perhaps abstruse but still highly important areas of Trinitarian theology. Conventional Nicene Trinitarian theology speaks of three divine Persons who are of the same substance as each other. Typically 'Person' is a term of relation (Father and Son are persons in relation), and because a relationship presupposes at least two, 'Person' is a term that readily connotes plurality. 'Substance' or 'nature' is readily taken as referring to what each of the three Persons is (each is just, wise, good, holy, but with the same justice, wisdom, goodness and holiness). It is associated with unity, for the Persons are wise with the same wisdom, holiness and so forth.[110] The usage of these terms, 'substance' and 'person', remains well-settled, and provides a resource to speak of the unity and plurality of the Triune God.

Aulén compares the essence of God to the essence of a human being, concluding that it relates to 'disposition of…heart, will, personality and character…'[111] God's disposition is loving,[112] and Aulén therefore comments: *God's essence is his loving will, not some obscure 'substance' behind this will. It is meaningless to attempt to draw a distinction between God's will and his nature or his 'substance.*[113] This ties in with the uncontroversial idea that God is not a material, physical substance, he is not made of 'stuff' in that sense. Moreover, Father and Son are of the same substance, he notes,[114] reproducing the terms of the Nicene Creed.

However, given that Father and Son are of the same, one, substance and that this substance is the one, single, divine loving will, it is natural to ask about the loving relations that exist between the Trinitarian Persons. For, on this view,

the question is, What distinguishes the Trinitarian persons in their relations between themselves? When love is located at the level of *nature*, or *substance*, which all three Trinitarian Persons hold alike, there seems no way for the Father to love the Son in a way that is unique to him in his identity as Father.

This, though, stands at odds with Jesus' understanding of the Father's love for him. Notably, in John 5:19ff Jesus says he relates to his Father as Son. He says the Father loves him (v. 20) and goes on to describe the Father's treatment of him, which includes the gift of 'life in himself' (v. 26), and the divine prerogative powers of life-giving and judgement. Yet this pattern of loving relation is not reversible: the Father gives these things to the Son, not vice versa.[115] What is revealed in the Incarnation is a pattern of mutual love, but a pattern in which the Son loves *as Son*, and the Father loves *as Father*.

This matters because Trinitarian theology stresses not merely that the triune God is eternally personal, but that the Trinitarian Persons are individuated: the Father begets the Son but is not begotten by the Son. They are not interchangeable with each other, but unique. Augustine pithily says that the Trinity is not a community of Persons who are three friends.[116] His point is that in such descriptions as 'three friends' the relations are reversible and the persons in such a network are not distinguished and individuated by their relations. The biblical descriptions of the Persons, Father, Son and Spirit do convey not merely personal relations, but non-reversible personal relations in which the Persons are individuated by their relations with each other.

This impression that Aulén's account of divine love undercuts the individuation of the Trinitarian Persons is heightened by the way he tends to discuss divine love only as divine love for sinful men and women.[117] The revelation of divine love in Christ is divine love towards human beings. We should agree with Aulén that it is gloriously true that God has shown his love for a sinful human world. What is more problematic is defining divine love by reference to this alone, as Aulén ultimately apparently does. Thus he states that divine love is characterised by spontaneity (it is uncaused) and self-giving.[118] This has important elements of truth for God's disposition towards us both in creation and redemption. It could not, though, be said in quite such easy terms for the love between the Father and the Son. Thus Jesus does not simply see the Father's love for him as uncaused: John 10:17 reads 'For this reason the Father

loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again.'[119] This problem arises in part from too restrictive an account of what is revealed in Christ. Christ does not merely reveal divine love towards us, but also that there is a relation between Father and Son and that this is a loving relation between Father and Son. This revelation of the relation between Father and Son may not be exhaustive, but nevertheless true.

This sense of difficulty about Personal distinction within the Trinity is heightened by Aulén's later discussions: he speaks repeatedly of the threefold 'viewpoint' of Christian faith.[120] But such phrasing risks sounding as though the three-folded-ness is only a viewpoint, and not an inner reality of the life of the godhead. This impression is again re-inforced by Aulén's use of the maxim *opera dei ad extra indivisa sunt*—the external works of God are undivided. Aulén rightly notes this maxim relates to the preservation of monotheism and adds, 'Every divine act is an act of the entire Trinity.'[121]

What he omits is the qualification that Augustine, a great advocate of inseparable operation in the Trinity, puts in, which is that although operation is inseparable, nevertheless particular actions have asymmetrical involvement: it is the Son who is incarnate, not the Father or Spirit and so forth.[122] Augustine's phrasing tends to run that a particular Person acts 'not without' the other Persons, a formula that allows both for an inseparability of action (because the Persons are inseparable) and also distinguishability and asymmetric participation in actions (for the Persons are distinguishable and are in asymmetric relations). The characteristic objection to inseparable operation is that it can erode personal distinction. Aulén, though, lacks the qualifications Augustine puts in to avoid just this.

In these various ways, Aulén's account of divine substance and divine love tends to undermine the individuation of the Trinitarian Persons. This is significant because if the individuation of the Trinitarian Persons is not properly preserved, formulae in which the incarnate Son (subject) acts on the Father (object) can very readily be seen simply as a human (subject) acting on God (object), the phrasing which lies at the heart of Aulén's criterion of continuous action.

In fact, it is merely preserving the biblical data to envisage one Person of the Trinity (subject) acting on another Person of the Trinity (object): for example,

God sends the Son (John 3:17). As a matter of simple grammatical observation, there are phrases and sentences where one Person does something to another: '*…the Father loves the Son…*' (John 5:20). One would add that the Father does not act on the Son despite the Son, against his will or in the Son's ignorance, for the two mutually indwell each other. The Trinitarian Persons are not 'pure' objects in that sense, but willing and consenting objects. To deny in principle that one Person can so act on another is to exclude the idea that the Trinity is a community in which inseparable yet distinguishable Persons genuinely love other Persons, not just themselves. This denial uncomfortably resembles modalism.[123]

This point, naturally, is significant beyond the discussion of Aulén's continuous action criterion, for some in the penal substitution debate currently argue that one Person of the Trinity cannot be the subject of an action of which another Trinitarian Person is the object.[124] This, too, risks undercutting the real distinctions between the Persons in a modalist direction.

These issues of relationality and individuation are enormously significant in the modern urban cultures of the West. In such cultures there are pressures for human persons to be seen atomistically rather than relationally and as uniform and indistinguishable rather than uniquely individualised. Against those pressures, classical Trinitarian doctrine sets forth an account of personal identity which is relational and individualised, without being individualist. Yet modalist thinking, including Aulén's, impoverishes Christian apologetics and social engagement by obscuring this aspect of the Gospel presentation of the triune God.

6.2.2. The Incarnation—what was incarnate?

Aulén's second move relates to the Incarnation itself. The issue here is what was incarnate in the human Jesus. Aulén answers, '…[The] "substance" of the Father is "incarnate in Christ".'[125] We should note the term: substance. Aulén continues: *It [sc. Terminology of Incarnation] affirms that the 'essence' of God, or in other words the divine loving will, 'dwells' in Christ (John 1:14).*[126]

This second move is remarkable for two reasons. First, this statement about the Incarnation of the substance takes place against a patristic tradition which insists that the Son (a term of Trinitarian **personhood**) assumes a further

nature. We have seen that Anselm uses just such formulations, and in doing so stands firmly within the Chalcedonian account of the Incarnation.[127] But put sharply, Aulén has not preserved the person-nature distinction that Nicaea, Chalcedon and its successors have bequeathed to us, so that his account is of a divine nature or will being incarnate.

Now, of course, Aulén may be right to reject the Chalcedonian account of a divine Person assuming a further nature, for Chalcedon attempts to synthesise the biblical data, but is not itself inspired. Yet it would perhaps have been useful to have signalled this rejection explicitly, particularly when he so emphatically castigates Anselm and others for forsaking patristic Christology.

The Chalcedonian tradition, in return, would regard Aulén's proposition of a divine nature becoming incarnate with little enthusiasm. There are several reasons. To begin with, Chalcedon and its successors stressed the integrity of both natures after the Incarnation.[128] This could not quite be the case with Aulén's proposal: he does not think the divine nature is material, as we have seen, but for the *nature* to become incarnate it would have had to surrender at least this attribute of immateriality, so that the divine nature itself changed by virtue of the Incarnation, a position distinctly redolent of the Eutychian heresy.[129]

The second reason why this account of an incarnate nature is remarkable relates to who Jesus is. The Chalcedonian answer to the question, 'What was incarnate?' in fact is in terms of a 'who': the Person we know as the Son, Jesus, was incarnate. However, this account of who Jesus is fits very poorly in Aulén's scheme, for he has insisted that it is the divine nature that is incarnate. Aulén writes: *the 'essence' of God, or in other words the divine loving will, 'dwells' in Christ.*[130] In support he cites John 1:14. Yet in fact John 1:14 reads: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.*

Aulén's citation misses a number of things. John writes the Word dwelt 'among us' (*en hēmin*), not, as Aulén does, 'in Christ'. To 'dwell among' certainly implies presence, but not unity.[131] If so, to say John 1:14 deals with the Word (understood as essence or substance) dwelling in Christ, is to imply that there is not unity between Christ and the Word: it could even mean Christ is not to be identified with the Word. Moreover, the term 'the Word' cannot be taken as

equivalent to God's essence or substance or will. Even by this stage of the Prologue in John there are hints that the Word exists in relation to God ('…and the Word was with God…': John 1:1), and the indication that the 'the Word' is to be seen in terms of the Trinitarian Persons is confirmed within verse 14 itself when the Word's glory is spoken of as the glory of the only Son.[132] It is, then quite proper to see the Word becoming flesh as the Incarnation of the Person, the Son. For Aulén's argument to work at this point we would have to construe terms equating to Son as terms dealing with divine substance, not Trinitarian Persons. Clearly we are here back with the problem outlined earlier, that Aulén has an inadequate view of Trinitarian Persons.

Thirdly, if the Nature, not a Person, is incarnate, the obvious question is, To what extent is this an Incarnation of the Son? Certainly some evangelical statements of belief (notably that of the Evangelical Alliance (UK)) retain more Chalcedonian-style phrasing than Aulén, speaking of the Incarnation of the **Son**.[133] One might answer this by saying one cannot divorce the Son from his Nature, and that if the Nature is incarnate then we should by extension be saying the Son is too. The problem with this response is that this reasoning is equally true of the Father and Spirit: they too cannot be divorced from the divine Nature. This would therefore mean that the Father and Spirit are incarnate in the same manner as the Son: he is not uniquely incarnate. This sits poorly with conventional accounts. Thus Augustine summarises Nicene Trinitarian teaching on the Incarnation thus: *It was not however this same three (their teaching continues) that was born of the virgin Mary, crucified and buried under Pontius Pilate, rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven, but the Son alone.*[134]

Ironically, it was one of Anselm's opponents, Roscelin, who is associated with the proposition that all three Persons of the Trinity were alike incarnate.[135] Yet Aulén's position seems to imply just the position posed by Roscelin.[136]

Indeed, if it is the divine nature that is incarnate in Christ, who is Jesus? Which person is he? The most obvious answer is that the 'who' of Jesus is a purely human 'who'. The trajectory of Aulén's argument is that the Incarnation is not a Trinitarian Person, the Son, assuming a further, human, nature, but rather a human person being assumed by a divine will or essence. This might at least help explain why Aulén could think that Anselm denied that Jesus' work on

the Cross was a true work of God, but was rather a work by man, for the 'who', the personal identity who does it, is, on this view, only a man.[137]

In any case, the effect of this tendency to elide person and nature so that what is incarnate is a nature, a substance, is that Aulén lacks just the vocabulary to express, or indeed appreciate, what Anselm and others asserted: that the Son, a person, acts in a human nature, and, because the actor is a divine person, this is properly called an act of God. Naturally this tends to underline that Aulén's reduction of Anselm and others in terms of discontinuous action is a distortion.

6.3. Summary on Aulén's Theological Criticism

In short Aulén's decisive objection to the Latin view is marred by his inconsistent application of his principle and anyway relates to a series of positions that are markedly and seriously at odds with patristic accounts of the Incarnation and Trinitarian theology—these positions relate in particular to the disappearance of the concept of Person. This results in an account of the Incarnation that overlooks the operation of two natures in their integrity, and envisages the Incarnation as an Incarnation of a nature, not a Person, and in a Trinitarian account markedly deficient in personal distinction.

6.4. Other considerations

After this, further consideration of the negative case seems almost superfluous. It should be added that biblically Aulén's case fails to reproduce the continuity between Old and New Testaments that the New Testament itself seems to envisage—the failure to deal at length with the citation in the New Testament of Isaiah 53 is especially striking, perhaps. Further, Aulén's rebuttal of the use of New Testament passages by defenders of penal substitution involved his presupposition of continuous as against discontinuous divine action, which, as we have seen, is open to grave suspicion.

In terms of the patristic evidence, some recent scholarship notes the similarities between Anselm and Athanasius at various key points. Especially important here is the idea of debt, which features in *De Incarnatione* 2-9 as Athanasius discusses why the Word had to assume flesh.[138] Debt, naturally, features in Anselm's account of why satisfaction was required. Indeed, in Athanasius *De Incarnatione* 9 we are told that the Son fulfilled the debt by his death as a substitute. This example tends to indicate the danger of asserting, as Aulén does, that substitutionary ideas are absent in the Fathers. For they are present

here at a decisive stage of Athanasius' argument. Space precludes dealing with early patristic candidates for teaching penal substitution as well as other accounts of the Cross, such as the Epistle to Diognetus or the Homilies of Melito of Sardis.

6.5. Summary

This means that Aulén's negative case is open to objection theologically, biblically and historically.

7. Conclusions

First, it is not desirable to speak in any blanket way of 'adopting' or 'rejecting' Aulén's argument. We must distinguish between Aulén's positive and negative cases. Secondly, Aulén's positive case that victory is an important motif for understanding the Cross remains undoubtedly valuable, but Aulén does not go far enough with the victory motif. It requires extension in two respects, and also a qualification. One extension is to remove the demythologising elements in Aulén's account which restrict Christ's victory to human sin rather than including personal demons. This extension restores the victory motif to its original force.

The second extension is similar, and re-emphasises Christ's victory as a just victory and not the mere application of force. This preserves the nature of God's actions as not being mere acts of power. However, this revision of Aulén's proposals brings back exactly the motifs of justice that penal substitution is designed to resolve. This means that Aulén's positive case when applied in this way does not preclude penal substitution but involves similar ethical values. The corollary of this is that an exclusion of justice values for the sake of excluding penal substitution will alter the character of Christ's victory, and change our worship from veneration of a just and loving God to adoration of amoral force. This would be apologetically fatal in our culture which is deeply suspicious of power as just that, amoral. This means that Aulén's original case risks re-inforcing contemporary cynicism about religion as a mask for power.

The qualification relates to sin. We have seen how sin in Aulén's scheme does not in fact fit into his pattern of victory, by which God deals with himself in one continuous action. At this point Aulén has to surrender, it seems, the idea of victory and its cognates as an exhaustive account of the Cross. There is more to Christ's work that Aulén originally allowed.

Thirdly, Aulén's negative case by which he criticises the Latin view revolves around a central criterion, the need for continuous divine action. This criterion is inconsistently applied, and applied to a distorted version of his opponents' cases. The criterion itself is related to a Christology which lies at odds with Chalcedonian orthodoxy and imperils the genuine distinction of Persons within the Godhead, with consequent distortion of the Incarnation of the Son. If penal substitution is to be rejected it would have to be for other reasons than the major one Aulén himself cites.

How do we evaluate Aulén? We gratefully affirm aspects of his positive case with the extensions and qualification proposed, and deny his negative case. This means stating with care just what is meant by an endorsement of Aulén.

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ENDNOTES

1. J. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* rev.ed. (London: SCM, 1977), 317.
2. T. Peters, "The Atonement in Anselm and Luther, Second Thoughts About Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor*," Lutheran Quarterly 24 (1972):314.
3. G.O. Evenson, "A Critique of Aulén's *Christus Victor*," Concordia Theological Monthly 28:738-749.1957:740.
4. E.g. J. MacIntyre, E. R. Fairwether and from the Orthodox perspective, S. Rodger.
5. L. Hodgson, The Doctrine of the Atonement (London: Nisbet & Co. 1951), 146 envisages a similar division.
6. See e.g. S.Chalke, "Cross Purposes," Christianity Magazine (September)2004.
7. '[the] affirmations of faith are of a different nature than metaphysical theses, and that no combination of the theses of faith and metaphysics can be allowed.' Aulén 1948:95.
8. Aulén's unease with what he envisages as a somewhat arid rationalism is a constant theme in Aulén 1948.
9. Aulén 1948:3.
10. Aulén 1948:5.
11. Aulén 1948:77. 'The essential element is not the forms as such, but that which underlies the whole, that which those forms seek to express.'
12. Aulén 1948:78.
13. Cp. N. Ferré, "Theologians of our Time IX. The Theology of Gustaf Aulén," *Expository Times* 74:824.
14. Note especially Aulén 1948:130. Ferré 1962-63:825 speaks of the 'definitive centrality of agape as the fundamental motif of the Christian faith.'

15. Aulén 1948:79, 87ff.
16. Luther is, one might almost say, a touchstone in both Aulén 1931 and Aulén 1948.
17. Aulén 1948:82.
18. Aulén 1948:90 '…they [sc. The NT writings] are the first and decisive testimony to that deed of Christ which is the fundamental fact of Christianity.'
19. Aulén 1948:90.
20. Article 3 of that Basis of Faith affirms 'The divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, which are the written Word of God—fully trustworthy for faith and conduct.' Its predecessor was Article 2 of the 1970 Basis of Faith which was in very similar terms and affirmed 'The divine inspiration of the Holy Scripture and its consequent entire trustworthiness and supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.'
21. Aulén 1931.
22. Aulén 1931:17-23.
23. A. G. Hebert's preface to Aulén 1931:v.
24. Aulén 1948:223-241.
25. So too C. Gunton "Christus Victor Revisited. A Study in Metaphor and the Transformation of Meaning," *Journal of Theological Studies* 6.1:129-145.
26. Aulén 1948:167. Cp. Aulén 1931:27 especially note 1.
27. Aulén 1931:27 n. 1.
28. Aulén 1958:141.
29. Aulén 1948:266.
30. Aulén 1948:262.
31. Aulén 1948:263.
32. Aulén 1948:264.
33. Aulén 1948:273.
34. Aulén 1948:274f.
35. The translators' term for sin's supra-individual power (*syndens överindividuella makt*) 1948:270-271 n. 1.
36. Aulén 1948:276.
37. Aulén 1948:276.
38. Aulén1931:20.
39. Aulén 1948:226,227. 'Cosmos' is in fact rarely mentioned as a tyrannical power by Aulén compared to the others.
40. Aulén 1948:229,230.
41. Aulén sees this most clearly in the case of divine wrath, where the Cross is an act of God's self-giving love by which his wrath is reconciled. See Aulén 1948:231.
42. Aulén 1948:229.

43. Aulén 1931:22.
44. Aulén 1948:230 'the victory over the destructive powers is at the same time a reconciliation.' Later, in respect of divine wrath: 'But this act of Atonement through which wrath is reconciled is at the same time a divine act, the act of divine love itself.' Aulén 1948:231.
45. Aulén 1931:33-51.
46. Aulén 1931:88-9.
47. Aulén 1931:119.
48. Aulén 1931: 21 see also e.g. Aulén1931:107 and 162-3.
49. Aulén 1931:169.
50. Hebert in Aulén1931:v.
51. Gunton, 1985:130 also notes unenthusiastically Aulén's antipathy to 'rational' theology as a consistent theme of criticism. More strongly L. Hodgson 1951:147 feels Aulén's anti-rational approach is itself disobedience to God. However, the use of reason is less central a criticism for Aulén than that of continuous action.
52. Aulén 1931:21.
53. Aulén 1931:163. See also pp. 21-22, 102, 107, 147.
54. Aulén 1931:89.
55. Aulén 1931:89.
56. Aulén 1931:93.
57. Aulén 1931:95.
58. Aulén 1931:95.
59. Aulén 1931:97.
60. Aulén 1931:98.
61. Aulén 1931:98.
62. Aulén 1931:104.
63. Aulén 1931:104.
64. Aulén 1931:104.
65. Hodgson, 1951:146.
66. Aulén 1948:167. Cp Aulén 1931:27 especially note 1.
67. Aulén 1948:274f.
68. Diamond, 1973:29. Hence the importance of locating Aulén in his Lundensian framework.
69. Diamond, 1973:34.
70. Aulén 1948:275.
71. Macquarrie, 1977:318 thinks Aulén has not adequately recognised the 'mythological background' of the principalities and powers, and proposes developing Aulén's classic view along demythologised lines, recognising idolatry as that which enslaves

humans. Diamond's point is that Aulén had already himself done something similar, and his view is preferable to Macquarrie's for the reasons outlined in the text.

72. Aulén 1976:145.
73. Aulén 1976:146.
74. Aulén 1976:146.
75. Aulén 1948:279.
76. Following Diamond, 1973 and contra Macquarrie, 1977.
77. Aulén provides very little comment on Jesus' exorcisms either in Aulén 1931 or Aulén 1948, despite the narrative significance of such exorcisms in the Synoptics.
78. This is an underlying question about Lundensian theological method, the apparent ease with which central ideas are discovered within a writer's forms of expressions which might well not be fully endorsed by the writer himself.
79. Diamond, 1973:34.
80. Aulén 1931:95.
81. E.g. K. McMahon, "The Cross and the Pearl: Anselm's Patristic Doctrine of Atonement," 57-69 in *Saint Anselm—His Origins and Influence,* J. R. Fortin (ed.), (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001):57f.
82. Aulén 1931:70.
83. Aulén 1931:107.
84. Aulén 1931:70 and Aulén 1931:107.
85. Aulén 1931:106-7.
86. Aulén 1948:229.
87. Aulén 1948:229-231.
88. See especially Aulén 1948:231.
89. Aulén 1948:229.
90. Aulén 1948:276.
91. Aulén 1948:229.
92. Aulén 1948:229.
93. Aulén 1948:228.
94. Aulén 1931: 21 see also e.g. Aulén1931:107and 162-3.
95. Macquarrie, 1977:320, does not necessarily endorse Aulén's criterion of continuous action.
96. Aulén 1931:37ff, 46ff. Recapitulation involves God 'going over again', so to speak, the imperfect features of creation to make them perfect. This vindicates him as sovereign creator and entails a new Adam to recapitulate/ 'go over' by his obedience the errors of disobedience of the first Adam. W. P. Loewe, "Irenaeus' Soteriology: *Christus Victor* Revisited," *Anglican Theological Review* XVII:1-15 indicates that Irenaeus' soteriology in any case contains more elements than Aulén allows.
97. Aulén 1931:46.

98. Aulén 1931:163. See also pp. 21-22, 102, 107, 147.
99. *On the Apostolic Preaching,* 31.
100. Aulén 1931:163.
101. *Cur Deus Homo?* I.3. 'For God has shown the magnitude of His love and devotion towards us by the magnitude of his act in most wonderfully and unexpectedly saving us from the evils, so great and so deserved, by which we used to be beset'
102. *Cur Deus Homo?* I.5. See also MacIntyre, 1954:128 on why it is essential for Anselm that the divine Person be the agent for our salvation.
103. This is not the first time that one encounters the point that Aulén re-phrases other thinkers' arguments in ways they might well find unacceptable: compare his demythologisation of victory over Satan in Irenaeus, his re-interpretation of merit and satisfaction language in Luther into a victory framework, as well as the current instance with Anselm.
104. E.g. Fairweather, Hankey, Macintyre, Rodger.
105. Constantinople III 681 A.D.
106. Fairweather 1961:171ff.
107. *On the Incarnation of the Word,* 11. See also 9 and 10. See MacIntyre, 1954:127 for comments on Anselm's Chalcedonian approach.
108. J. I. Packer, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), p. 105.
109. That said, the regularity of the phrasing of the translators in Aulén 1948 is striking, and the immediate concern of this paper is the appropriation of Aulén in the English-speaking world, that is, through his works as translated.
110. Compare the Athanasian Creed, for instance 'the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty; and yet not three almighties but one almighty.'
111. Aulén 1948:213.
112. Note Aulén 1948:130.
113. Aulén 1948:213.
114. Aulén 1948:211, 214.
115. Nor can these gifts simply be seen as gifts to the Son in his humanity, for John 5:26 speaks of 'life in himself', parallel to the eternal life that God the Father himself has. The human life the Son possesses is not 'life in himself' comparable to the Father's: apart from anything else, the Son's human life has a beginning.
116. *De Trinitate*VII.7 and VII.11.
117. Aulén 1948:131-134. 'the divine love active in Christ is that love which seeks sinful man and enters into communion with him.' Aulén 1948:132.
118. Aulén 1948:133-134.
119. It would be inadequate to reply that this is only of the Son in his humanity: the point would remain that the Father loves the Person, the Son. In any case, even if this were

simply referred to the humanity, the point remains that this is a caused love.

120. Aulén 1948:254-258.
121. Aulén 1948:256.
122. Augustine *De Trinitate* I.7.
123. For the Persons are not being treated as 'other' from each other. Cp. Augustine on Sabellianism or modalism *Answer to Maximinus* I.xiii
124. E.g. Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 96.
125. Aulén 1948:211. This phraseology is not unique, see also 208: '[Christian faith] speaks of the Incarnation of the divine "essence", the divine love, in Christ.'; 211: 'the "substance of the Father is "incarnate" in Christ'; 216: 'it is the divine nature itself which is incarnate in Christ, not an intermediary being.' With such statements one should also note statements about the incarnation of the divine will, since Aulén identifies 'will' with 'substance': 214, 221. Since 'love' is God's substance for Aulén, even Aulén's statements about the incarnation of divine love have to read in the context of the incarnation of substance or nature: 211, 212, 219.
126. Aulén 1948:211.
127. *On the Incarnation of the Word,* 11. See also 9 and 10.
128. Thus the Council speaks of 'the distinction of the natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one subsistence'.
129. In that the divine nature does not continue in its integrity after the Incarnation.
130. Aulén 1948:211.
131. This would particularly be the case if the 'dwell among' of John 1:14 is an echo of God's presence amongst his people in the Tabernacle: see R. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* Vol. I:I-XII (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971), I:32f.
132. A. J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.,2004) 40 comments: 'The major burden of 1:14-18 is to identify the Word explicitly with Jesus.'
133. E.g. The Evangelical Alliance (UK) Basis of Faith Article 5 confesses belief in 'The incarnation of God's eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ' Its predecessor in Article 4 of the 1970 Basis speaks of 'the incarnate Son of God'
134. Augustine *De Trinitate* I.7.
135. Roscelin's work was the occasion of *On the Incarnation of the Word*.
136. Although possibly not for the same reasons.
137. This would not, of course, deal with the criticism that Aulén applies his continuous action criterion inconsistently.
138. See McMahon, 2001.

Calvin's Preaching and Homiletic: Nine Engagements Part 2

Peter Adam

In Part One we saw that the key to Calvin's preaching was that he engaged with God who was present in the sermon, that he engaged with the 'texts' or books of the Bible in expository preaching, that he engaged with theology, and engaged his own humanity in his preaching.

In Part Two we will find that Calvin also engaged with the congregation, and with them as hearers, engaged them in training and in God's global gospel plan, and engaged in raising up future preachers.

5. Engage with the congregation in the sermon

For Calvin ministry preaching should be contextual, contemporary, engaged with the congregation. Timeless truths, remote Biblicism, disengaged ministry, or unapplied preaching are unsatisfactory.

> Many people would like me to preach with my eyes closed, not considering where I live, or in what locale, or in what time. As if those whose responsibility it is to proclaim God's message did not proceed the way it was done in the time of the apostles—as if the prophets did not apply the law of Moses to their day and time, as if the apostles did not follow the same practice![1]

For Calvin: 'Doctrine without zeal is either a sword in the hand of a lunatic, or lies cold and useless and serves a perverse ostentation.'[2] God accommodates himself to us in Christ, in the Scripture, and in providing human preachers and teachers.[3]

> For it would be a cold way of teaching, if the teachers do not carefully consider the needs of the times and what is appropriate to the people, for in this matter nothing is more unbalanced than absolute balance.[4]

As van der Walt comments: 'Calvin's style of exegesis as revealed in his sermons is true homiletical exegesis, which means that it is not simply exposition but exposition and application.'[5] Application must be clearly expressed:

> We rightly divide the word of God when we give such lessons as the hearers are able to bear, and each one received a portion that he or she is able to receive. It is like a father feeding his children, when he gives each on the right amount.[6]

God accommodates to us through preachers, for 'imparting too much would only result in loss'.[7] Yet it is the task of preachers to challenge their hearers, 'it is the duty of a good teacher to be always moving higher, until perfection has been reached'.[8]

Calvin knew that the right use of language was essential:

> And so it came to pass in Papistry…that the Holy Scripture became as it were a strange language, which men call Divinity, not as doctrine common to all God's family, but as a craft or science for a few only. For what is true divinity? That which our Lord would have common to all his children both to small and great...[9]

For the Bible was addressed in the most part to the people of God, and God expected the ordinary believers at Rome, at Corinth, at Thessalonica and Ephesus to be theologians, able to understand the Scriptures, as he had expected his people in Moab to receive Moses' preaching.[10]

Calvin used familiar and colloquial language. 'We always labour to make the Scriptures familiar, so that we may know that it is God who speaks to us'.[11] Calvin used the persuasive power of the Bible texts, including vivid contrasts, language and imagery.[12] T. F. Torrance commented that Calvin used 'a mode of *persuasion* which throws the reader back upon the truth itself and its inherent validity'.[13]

His homiletic was a comprehensive appeal to the mind, emotions, memory, will, and actions.[14] Blair Reynolds wrote—

> Thus, Calvin's goal in preaching is far more than merely expressing the cognitive characteristics of faith in order to ensure doctrinal purity, although he is often interpreted that way. Rather, his is essentially the aesthetic-affective quest to lure the congregation to greater depth and breadth of feeling. Although we are accustomed to defining Calvin as a theologian, this definition is too limiting; he was also a very talented artist and actor.[15]

Brevard Childs described Calvin's ability to relate the message of the Bible to his own time as 'one of the most impressive aspects of Calvin's interpretation of Scripture'.[16]

Calvin had what his publisher Conrad Badius described as the gift of prophecy.

> It exists for the purpose of clearly understanding and purely expounding to God's people the holy Scripture according to its *vray et naturel sens* and of understanding how to apply it properly to one's own time and in accordance with those with whom one has to do.[17]

This came out of his daily personal and pastoral engagement with his people. His contemporary Colladon described Calvin's life and ministry as follows.

> Calvin for his part did not spare himself at all, working far beyond what his powers and regard for his health could stand…He never failed in visiting the sick, in private warning and counsel, and the rest of his numberless matters arising out of the ordinary exercise of his ministry.[18]

Effective, contextual and transformative preaching only comes about through sustained ministry with people. Skills are no substitute for loving understanding and insight.

6. Engage with the congregation as hearers

One of the great traps for conscientious preachers is that they prepare full notes or texts of their sermons, but that these are designed to be read, not heard. They are in 'essay' style, which is designed to be read, and is very difficult to hear read! Spoken language is very different to written language, because reading is very different to hearing.

Calvin recognized the need for different styles of verbal communication. He had three styles of published writing, each with its intended purpose, genre and audience. The first was his theological writing, most notably *The Institutes*. Here he addressed the universal church and responded to its issues. The genre was dense explanation of an outline of theological topics. The second style was exposition of the Bible texts in his Commentaries, which were his lectures to students or ministers in written form. These were also intended for the universal church. These two were originally in Latin, though Calvin then translated them into French.

The third style was that of his sermons. These were in vernacular French, oral in style, addressed to the congregations at Geneva, and responded to their issues. The genre was exposition and application of books of the Bible. They were originally intended to be heard, rather than read, and were addressed to his own congregation. However from 1549 his sermons were systematically recorded by shorthand and then published. Badius commented, that at first '[Calvin] desired that his sermons should not extend further than his pastorate, both because they were preached especially for his sheep, to whose capacity he accommodated himself as best he could.'[19] Later Calvin agreed to their publication for a wider audience. So sermons designed to be heard by the church at Geneva then became available for the wider people of God.

We have much to learn from Calvin the preacher. Calvin had a specific style of communication in his sermons.[20] He identified with the congregation. One striking feature of his homiletic was that he used 'we' and 'us', rather than 'I' and 'you'.

> When we come to a sermon, if we do not understand all that is spoken to us, let us wait and, in the meanwhile, honour our God and reverence him in the things that are too high for our understanding to reach to.[21]

This meant that he and the congregation were joint recipients of God's words. This promoted solidarity with the congregation. He did this too when he used corporate monologue, in which he meditated with the congregation on shared experiences and struggles. He also articulated the instinctive responses that he knew people would have to the Scriptures.[22] So when he preached on giving to those in need, he added our common excuses—

> Thus we say, 'Oh, I'll do that some other time, for if I give all away today, tomorrow when I am approached, I will have nothing left! It is best if I keep this for myself.'[23]

He applies the Bible to the whole congregation, including himself.

> But since he has gathered into his flock, and united us in his name, and since we call upon him with one voice as our Father, we must show brotherly love to one another.[24]

Calvin's preaching style was designed to be heard, not read: it was for ears, not eyes. He had a rhetoric that he used for *The Institutes*[25] and different oral rhetoric for his sermons. He preached to be heard, and usually preached for

between 40 and 60 minutes.[26] He opposed grandiloquence that obscured the text, personal 'inspiration' that bypassed it, and misusing the text and so profaning it.[27]

7. Engage the congregation in training

Calvin preached not only to convert and transform, but also to train the congregation. This aspect of preaching is not always present, and churches suffer as a result.

i. *Receive God's words in sermons*

Some of Calvin's congregation were eager to hear his preaching: others he still had to win over many to accept this model of ministry, and the Scriptures that he taught. So he had to train the congregation to hear sermons and to honour preachers. The wise believer will welcome the ministry of the preachers. To hear the preacher is to hear Christ: '[F]or it is the will of Christ to exercise his ministry as Prophet by the mouths of those whom he ordains to be ministers among the faithful.'[28]

When so much had changed in church buildings, the pulpit remained:

> So the pulpit…has prominent place in the church building…so that the teaching which comes from the mouth of the preacher may be received with greater reverence, and everyone submit to it.[29]

Calvin wanted to train his people to hear God's words in sermons.

ii. *Calvin wanted to train ordinary people to read the Bible.*[30]

Calvin's aim was to ensure that lay people read and understood the Bible:

> When, therefore, we see that there are people from all classes making progress in God's school, we acknowledge His truth which promised a pouring out of his spirit on all flesh.[31]

This represented one of the most significant changes achieved by the Reformation, for before the Reformation, as Calvin wrote to Cardinal Sadoleto—

> Among the people themselves, the highest veneration paid to the Word was to revere it at a distance, as a thing inaccessible, and abstain from all investigation of it.[32]

He trained lay people to assess what they heard by the Scriptures for—

> no doctrine is worth believing except as we perceive it to be based in the Scriptures…which makes it all the clearer that individuals are called to read the Scriptures.[33]

The need for ordinary believers to know their Bibles is even more evident when we see Calvin's expectations in terms of their ministries of the Word. In his sermons, he trained a ministry team which included all the laity.

iii. *Teach and convert others*

In his 'Reply to Sadoleto,' Calvin wrote, 'It certainly is the part of the Christian man to ascend higher than merely to seek and secure the salvation of his own soul.' So Christians are to serve others, not just in ordinary matters of daily life, but also in sharing words of eternal life.

> Although not all have the office of Preaching the word of God, yet a private person who is a member of the church may beget spiritual children to God if he has the occasion and ability to win a poor soul and enlighten him with the faith of the gospel.[36]

He also warned of failing to take those opportunities:

> But when most people see that God provides an opening for them and a way to instruct the uninformed, they will remain silent, keep their mouths shut, and not say a word…He will be guilty of other people's sin because he had the means to admonish them and did not.[37]

So Christians are to know their Bibles, and be trained and active in teaching and exhorting others.

iv. *Serve God in the world*

The congregation must learn to serve God in the world, by doing good works of daily work and voluntary service.

> So therefore it becomes every man to apply his vocation in such a way that he may do all he can for his neighbours…we must be ready to do all good works.[38]

To care for others is to express true and godly humanity.

> Since [God] has stamped his image upon us, and since we share a common nature, this ought to inspire us to provide for one another. The one who seeks to be exempt from the care of his neighbour is disfiguring himself and declaring that he no longer wishes to be a man. For whilst we are human

> beings, we must see our own faces reflected, as in a mirror, in the faces of the poor and despised…even if they are people who are most alien to us.[39]

The best good works include our daily tasks of, 'digging earth…sewing and tailoring,'[40] for by these we honour God and benefit our neighbours.

8. Engage the congregation in taking part in God's global gospel plan

Calvin wanted the church in Geneva to have a global gospel vision, to take part in a strategy to convert the world to Christ in their own day, and also to make provision for gospel ministry in the future. For, 'God places no higher value on anything than the preaching of the gospel for he wants his kingdom to be dominant in this world, and preaching is the way to lead men to salvation.'[41] And the church in Geneva should work with God: 'To draw the world to God and to build up the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ that he may rule among us.'[42] And all believers have this responsibility:

> For the knowledge of God must be known through the whole world, and every one must share in it, and we must take pains to bring all that wander. And we must think not only of our own time, but also of the time after our death…we must labour to make God known throughout the whole world.[43]

The gospel will go to the world as churches are planted, and godly ministers are provided:

> The gospel cannot be maintained without the means of which Paul speaks, that there be ministers appointed in every town, for the means to maintain the church is by preaching…which is the incorruptible seed by which we are born of God, it is the milk of little children, and food of the great ones. So the Church cannot but decay and perish unless it be maintained by the preaching of the word of God.[44]

What are the implications of this? Firstly, that civil and church leaders should take great care in the selection and appointment of ministers.[45] Secondly that people should think strategically and sacrificially of the need for good ministers: 'But men have so little care to serve God and his Church, that no man would have his son be a Preacher.'[46]

The congregation also needed to be conscious of the need to training preachers, and what kind of preparation was appropriate. This was important for their

support of their preachers, and for those who were thinking of becoming teachers or pastors.

9. Engage in training up future preachers

Calvin wanted to train people to recognize the significance of the ministry of preaching, and he also wanted to train up future preachers. This process began in the church, and was completed in the Academy. Future preachers were formed by present sermons.

All this sets high standards for preachers, who need to engage with the texts of Scripture, know how to help their congregations engage with God, how to think theology, and how to love and serve people. Here are some of the requirements God places on preachers.[47]

> Chose out the ablest in the world, yet they must acknowledge that they cannot speak of God with such majesty and reverence, unless God govern them and give them new speech, altering and reforming their tongues so that they may not speak after the manner of men but may show that it is the Holy Spirit who rules them.[48]

Preachers must be rigorous in orthodoxy, zealous in ministry, with a desire to honour God, and to be an example to their people:

> The first thing that is required of those whom God send to preach his word is that they continue in pure doctrine, not ending in falsehoods or going astray from true religion, but maintaining true uprightness. It is not enough for us to teach people faithfully, unless we have a zeal to edify and care for the salvation of all, and do this with a desire to honour God and show the way, and be an example to those we lead.[49]

They must be able to do public and private ministry of the Word:

> And then, when a man will be a preacher, it is not just a question of making a sermon, but it is necessary for him to proclaim the Word of God both publicly and privately in order to edify, so that the word may be profitable.[50]

Preachers must be students of God's word: 'No man shall ever be a good minister of God's word unless he first be a student of it.'[51] They must be able to teach and preach: 'For though a man walk uprightly and have great and excellent virtues, yet if he does not teach, he may be a good Christian, but he is no Minister.'[52]

They must be willing to face hardship and suffering: 'not only diligent and indefatigable in pursing the task of teaching, but…ready to undergo the danger of death for the defence of the doctrine.'[53] They must be able to rebuke sin: 'When the word of God is rightly applied, then there must be conflict and war against all vices…So our Lord will have his word rightly applied.'[54] They must know how to serve people: 'We cannot serve God except by serving his people.'[55] They must avoid arrogance: 'One of the greatest virtues of those who have the charge of governing the Church and preaching the Word of God, is that they guard themselves from being puffed up and have a foolish arrogance which carries them away.'[56] They must be resilient enough to face the opposition of the world and of Satan: 'they cannot preach the word of God, but Satan on the one side will do what he can to hinder them, and the world will be in an uproar.'[57]

They must know what condemnation they face if they betray their trust:

> If private people who run riot against God are worthy to be condemned, then [ministers of the gospel] who do this are rightly called devils. Jesus Christ called them so in the person of Judas. So therefore those who are called to so honourable an office should take heed to themselves, because God has chosen them in his service.[58]

Preachers must use their gifts to serve others, not themselves:

> Let them not seek to be esteemed for their brave babbling and lofty speech, for their subtleties, for the fine and sharp wits, for the passing bravery: all these things must be laid under foot, or else we can never serve God and his Church.[59]

They must realize the privilege and responsibility they carry:

> All they to whom God has appointed to be Ministers of his word must realize that as the keys of the kingdom are committed to them, so they must keep this treasure so that it does not perish.[60]

Conclusion

Certainly Calvin set a high standard for preachers. While one may be gifted in bring people to meet God, in reading and communicating texts, in thinking theologically, in working with people, and in training, it is rare for any one person to have all these gifts. The lesson is not that sermon preparation is hard work, though it is, but that preachers need to undergo rigorous and demanding

preparation for their ministries, and need to maintain the equivalent standards throughout their ministries.

Calvin did not always meet the high standards that he set for himself.[61] His sermon on 1 Timothy 3:16 loses the shape and content of the text and focuses entirely on the topic of the divinity and humanity of Christ.[62] His usual pattern was to preach from 4-8 verses. This works well in texts that are theologically dense, but in extensive narratives it is less successful, as the momentum of the text is lost because he divides up the units of meaning. In his series on Job, he cannot avoid the idea that after all Job must have sinned, and so favours Elihu that he is taken to speak as a Reformed believer.[63] Preaching from a Harmony of Matthew, Mark and Luke, as Calvin did for his Sunday sermons from 1559-1564 was not the best way to present those three distinct texts. Yet it seems petty to throw stones, when Calvin preached so faithfully and effectively, and when he helped to set the standards by which we might now judge him. If we want to find a good model of preaching, we will not imitate Calvin's style in *The Institutes*, or in the Commentaries, but the style of his sermons.

The creator and focus of preaching is God, the purpose is the conversion, transformation and training of the congregation, and the two means are the Scriptures and the preacher. May God raise up such able preachers for our church and our world.

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ENDNOTES

1. John Calvin, *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles* Rob Roy McGregor, (trans.), (Edinburgh/Carlisle, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), p. 327.
2. Commentary on Acts 18:25, as cited in Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, p. 228.
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