



Have We Misconstrued Christ's Priestly and Kingly Work? A Discussion on Analytic and Exegetical Christology

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Abstract

Within the framework of traditional Christology, the most common interpretation of Christ's three-fold office is that Christ's work as our High Priest culminated on the cross as He suffered divine wrath and judgment, while His kingly rule began at His resurrection and ascension. However, with respect to the priestly role, David Moffitt challenges this common understanding and argues that, based on a careful reading of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ's atoning sacrifice ultimately took place during His ascension. Complementing Moffitt's account, I argue that Christ's kingly work climaxed in His death on the cross. Using the tools of analytic method, I shall analyze 2 Chronicles 33:1-20 and offer an interpretation to support my argument. If Moffitt's and my account is Scripturally tenable, it is safe to conclude that traditional Christology has mistakenly reversed Christ's priestly and kingly role.

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Introduction

Munus triplex is the name of the concept about Christ's three-fold office—the Prophet, the High Priest, and the King. While this conception has been mentioned in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*,¹ many modern theologians attribute its development to the Reformed theologian John Calvin.² An interesting feature of Calvin's Christology is the description of Christ's redeeming works in term of the three offices. Basing his argument on Heb. 9:22, Calvin asserts, "the priestly office belongs to Christ alone because by the sacrifice of his death he blotted out our own guilt

¹ "And we have been told also that certain of the prophets themselves became, by the act of anointing, Christs in type, so that all these have reference to the true Christ, the divinely inspired and heavenly Word, who is the only high priest of all, and the only King of every creature, and the Father's only supreme prophet of prophets" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.3.8).

² See, for example, George W. Stroup, "Munus Triplex," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 247. Also, Donald K. McKim, *Introducing the Reformed Faith: Biblical Revelation, Christian Tradition, Contemporary Significance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 94.

and made satisfaction for our sins.”³ He further describes Christ’s priestly office in the *Catechism of Geneva* as “the office and prerogative of presenting oneself before the face of God to obtain grace, and of offering sacrifice, which may be acceptable to him, to appease [God’s] wrath.”⁴ What about the kingly office? Calvin states, “Christ by rising again began to show forth his glory and power more fully. Yet he truly inaugurated his Kingdom only at his ascension into heaven.”⁵ Thus, within the framework of Reformed tradition, the most common conception of *munus triplex* is that Christ’s priestly work reached its climax at His atoning death,⁶ while His kingly work in His triumphant resurrection and especially at His ascension.

David Moffitt challenges this notion of Christ’s priesthood. In his work *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* and several other works, he argues that it is by Christ’s resurrection that His humanity is perfected—that is, Christ “has been glorified, but not in such a way as to have lost his humanity”—and it is by His ascension that He is qualified to minister as the eternal, heavenly High Priest.⁷ In other word, it is not the crucifixion but rather the ascension into the heaven that is at the heart of His work as the High Priest.

However, there is a problem with Moffitt’s account. If it is the case that Christ atoning work is achieved in His ascension instead of His death, and if it is the case that, as Calvin stated, only in His offering of Himself as the sacrifice in His priestly work that Christ is able to appease God’s wrath, it seems that propitiation is never accomplished. Indeed, the discussion about propitiation and divine wrath in relation to Christ’ death on the cross is absent from his work. Moffitt even makes it clear that the sacrificial victim is never an object of wrath.⁸

This is what I shall be doing in this paper. Complementing Moffitt’s account, I argue that Christ satisfied the divine wrath in His crucifixion as our *covenantal representative*, and this satisfaction of divine wrath is the climax of Christ’s atoning work, not as the High Priest, but

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.15.iii.

⁴ John Calvin, “The Catechism of the Church of Geneva,” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. J. K. Reid (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2000), 95-96.

⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.16.vi.

⁶ See, for example, McKim, *Introducing the Reformed Faith*, 93.

⁷ David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 212-3.

⁸ David M. Moffitt, “It Is Not Finished: Jesus’ Perpetual Atoning Work as the Heavenly High Priest in Hebrews,” in *So Great a Salvation: A Dialogue on the Atonement in Hebrews*, ed. Jon C. Laansma, George H. Guthrie, and Cynthia Long Westfall (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 164.

rather as the Messianic King. To achieve this aim, I shall be using is the analytic method promoted by Logos Institute of St. Andrews.

This paper will be arranged as follows. The first part will be a very brief discussion on the analytic method I shall be employing. This is a preparatory stage for the readers to be able to engage with the arguments and discussions presented in this paper. The second part will survey Moffitt's account of Christ's atoning work. In the last part, which takes the bulk of this paper, I shall first argue for the reality of divine wrath and contend that divine wrath must be understood in the framework of covenant between God and His people. Then, I turn to the exegetical task of analyzing 2 Chronicles 33:1-20—the story I use as a case example to illustrate the link between divine wrath and covenantal representative—and finally argue that Christ is the covenantal representative.

Due to practical constraints, this study is unable to explore Moffitt's work in a greater depth. It is also important to note what my thesis is not: I do not claim that Reformed conception of *munus triplex* is false or unbiblical. Rather, I am arguing for a relatively modest claim that the combination of Moffitt's and my account of Christ's priestly and kingly better fits the Scriptural data than the Reformed account. If this is the case, then traditional Christology may have mistakenly reversed Christ's priestly and kingly role.

Method

Let us begin by asking the most obvious question, “do we need another branch of theology?”—especially something with a name like “analytic theology”? After all, what does the “analytic” part reminds us of but the infamous “analytic philosophy”? As Russell Reno laments in his provocatively titled article, “Theology's Continental Captivity,”

“Because analytic philosophy is a scholasticism that has shifted loyalties from theology to science, most modern theologians have thought it a godless antagonist... Add the verbal aggressiveness characteristic of analytic philosophers, an intellectual arrogance that quickly dismisses as fools those uninitiated into the specialized vocabulary, and, let's be honest, the natural human impatience with technical arguments (that old “empty formalism” complaint), and it is easy to see why modern theology would turn elsewhere.”⁹

⁹ Russel R. Reno, “Theology's Continental Captivity,” *First Things*, April 2006, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2006/04/theologys-continental-captivity>.

Another worry is that analytic theologians would smuggle foreign ideas from analytic philosophy into Christian theology as they attempt to “find “the right” metaphysics.”¹⁰ The enterprise is bound to end in a “Babylonian captivity for theology”.¹¹ This, however, is not the aim of analytic theologians. Instead, analytic theologians, in unison with Russel Reno, believe that “theology as a discipline has been beguiled and taken captive by ‘continental’ approaches, and that the effects on the discipline have been largely deleterious.”¹²

Let us be clear on what analytic theologians do. True, as the name denotes, they attempt to explicate abstract core claims of the Christian tradition with more clarity using the tools of analytic philosophy.¹³ Hence, they would often obsess over “precision, clarity, and logical coherence.”¹⁴ They would also, in contrast to non-analytic theologians, avoid using metaphor and vague terminology. However, it is not the case that analytic theologians simply throw away all underdefined terms from their dictionary. Instead, they would analyze said concept and formulate it using well-understood primitive concepts, or at least concepts that can be analyzed in terms of those.¹⁵ Indeed, analytic theologians believe it is their job to answer many theological difficulties that stems from ambiguous terminologies—e.g., the dual “nature” of Christ, “perichoresis”, etc.—with more clarity using the analytic approach.

Consequently, analytic theology does not treat the creeds and confessions of faith as an exhaustive set of doctrines. As analytic theologian Oliver D. Crisp, following Sarah Coackley, stated during one of his lectures, analytic theologians believe that creeds and confessions serve as boundaries by which one should not cross to stay within orthodoxy, rather than giving us a particular set of doctrine we must believe.¹⁶

To return to our first question, “do we need another branch of theology?” The answer depends on the exact meaning of the question. If the inquirer simply means what the question means, then the answer is no. However, if the question means, “do we need a new method to

¹⁰ Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *the Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 21.

¹¹ This term is coined by Oliver D. Crisp in “Robert Jenson On the Pre-Existence of Christ,” *Modern Theology* 23, no. 1 (2007): 27-45, accessed June 5, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2007.00351.x>.

¹² Oliver Crisp and Michael C. Rea, eds., *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

¹³ Oliver D. Crisp, “Analytic Theology as Systematic Theology,” *Open Theology* 3, no.1 (2017): 160-2, <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2017-0012>.

¹⁴ Crisp, eds., *Analytic Theology*, 5.

¹⁵ Crisp, eds., *Analytic Theology*, 5.

¹⁶ Oliver D. Crisp, “Incarnation” (lecture, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, Scotland, February 22, 2021).

approach systematic theology?" then the answer is yes, and analytic theology provides a fulfilment to that need.

Is there a way analytic approach as promoted by Logos Institute might contribute to the development of systematic theology? I believe it is. As Reno, Rea, and Crisp all contend, systematic theology is under the captivity of continental approach. The result is that the discipline is imperiled by too much terminological confusions, one being the discussion on the topic of the atonement. There are many theories regarding the atonement, such as *Christus Victor* theory, moral influence theory, penal substitutionary theory, governmental theory, etc. Disagreement rises from the lack of proper definition and categorization of the word "atonement." What is atonement? One answer offered by the Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof, for example, is that atonement is exclusively the work of Christ in his priestly office that is fulfilled on the cross. Thus, he embraces the penal substitutionary theory.¹⁷

However, is this the whole story of the atonement? I do not think that is the case. Hence, in the next two sections, I shall attempt to clear the confusion surrounding the doctrine of the atonement by presenting Moffitt's account of Christ's atoning work as the High Priest, and then developing my own account of Christ's atoning work as the King.

Discussion

Moffitt's Account of Christ's Priestly Work

Moffitt begins his account with a terminological clarification. Since 'atonement' is not a biblical term but a theological one, the word encapsulates numerous biblical conceptions about how Christ reconcile God and man (e.g., forgiveness, healing, living in peace, ransom, redemption, reconciliation, purification/expiation, propitiation).¹⁸ He then makes it clear that he only deals with a narrower definition of atonement—that is, the Levitical atonement. Moffitt states, "sacrificial atonement has to do with offering God a gift in order to effect purification and/or obtain forgiveness for sins."¹⁹

¹⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 411-432, <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/transcriptions/systematic-theology-louis-berkhof>.

¹⁸ Moffitt, "It Is Not Finished," 166. Also, David M. Moffitt, "Hebrews and the Atonement," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles New Testament Studies*, ed. Patrick Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁹ Moffitt, "It Is Not Finished," 166.

A brief terminological remark is in place. Moffitt is right in asserting that the word “atonement” encompasses many concepts that is not limited to its particular use in Hebrews. It is a made-up word for “at-one-ment”, which has become “our common designation for the saving acts of Jesus Christ on behalf of the children of men and for the possibility of reconciliation.”²⁰ The question is then, what is it that Christ achieves for our *at-one-ment* with God? As St. Athanasius said, “Such and so many are the Saviour’s achievements that follow from His Incarnation, that to try to number them is like gazing at the open sea and trying to count the waves”²¹ that to attempt to limit it to Christ’s priestly work is reductionistic. Since His kingly work also brings us *at-one* with God, which I shall discuss in the next section, it could thus be appropriately said to be “atoning” as well. Hence, so as not to cause confusion, I avoid using the word “atonement” and instead use the word “*kipper-ing*” for Moffitt’s definition of atonement in this section. The word “*kipper-ing*” comes from the Hebrew word כָּפַר *kaphar* and will be the precise language I use to refer to the Levitical type of the atonement.

Before we delve deeper into Moffitt account, let me first begin by laying out Reformed view on the *kipper-ing* sacrifice. Simply put, the idea goes like this: Humans are sinful and, although God is loving, His wrath is upon them. If there is to be a reconciliation, then His wrath must be averted from them with the death of a *kipper-ing* sacrifice. The sacrifice is Jesus Christ, whose death satisfied God’s wrath. This is the framework that links divine wrath and Christ’s death on the cross, usually called *propitiation*.²² Let us call this the *propitiation story*.

The logic behind the propitiation story goes like this:

- P1. *Kipper-ing* sacrifice averts God’s wrath toward sinful humanity.
- P2. Christ died on the cross as the ultimate *kipper-ing* sacrifice.
- C. Therefore, Christ’s death averts God’s wrath toward sinful humanity.

I shall now demonstrate how Moffitt’s account contrasts the propitiation story.

²⁰ David R. Seely, “William Tyndale and the Language of At-one-ment,” in *the King James Bible and the Restoration*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 38.

²¹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 8.54. (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 373/1993), 93.

²² See, for example, Wayne A. Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 254; John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 20th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2012), 166-173; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), ch 8.

Moffitt states that Levitical sacrifice is a process that is both irreducible, directional, and hierarchical in nature, with some elements of the ritual hold more importance than the others.²³ Hence, Moffitt claims, “contrary to the assumption of many today, therefore, neither the verb nor the noun sacrifice are, in biblical terms, self-evidently synonymous with the ritual act of slaughtering a victim.”²⁴ This means that, suppose an animal is slaughtered, but is not brought to the altar to be offered to God, then no *kipper*-ing occurs.

Moffitt goes even further in one of his lectures. Not only is the process of slaughtering the victim insufficient to constitute a sacrifice, it is not even the most important process (if not the least important).²⁵ Basing his argument on Ezek. 44:10-16, Moffitt points out that God's punishment for the Levites for straying away is to minister farther from God's presence by being the slaughterers of the sacrificial animals. By contrast, the faithful priests from the line of Zadok were entrusted with the job of ministering near God's presence. They were even allowed to enter the Holy of Holies.

This is why Moffitt concludes that *kipper*-ing is never about the death of an animal, but rather about drawing “near to God's presence to present the gifts and offerings.”²⁶ Since gifts for God must be perfect in anyway possible, mistreating and abusing the sacrifice would render it ineligible to be offered to God. Hence, as Moffitt observes, “there is no hint that the animal is made to suffer, nor that the victim is an object of abuse or wrath.”²⁷ Thus, the sacrifices are never depicted as objects of divine wrath. This stands in stark contrast to the propitiation story.

Kipper-ing is not accomplished through slaughtering the sacrifice (which thought to be propitiating God's wrath), but rather through the bringing of the sacrifice to God's presence. Hence, it could not be the case that Christ's *kipper*-ing ultimately takes place in His crucifixion, as it would have “the Son of God moving in the wrong direction—the Son leaves his Father's heavenly presence to offer his sacrifice on earth away from God's heavenly presence.”²⁸ After all, Christ's direction of travel from the moment of His trials to the crucifixion is progressively moving

²³ Moffitt, “It Is Not Finished,” 163-164.

²⁴ Moffitt, “It Is Not Finished,” 163.

²⁵ David M. Moffitt, “Atonement and Reconciliation in Hebrews” (lecture, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, Scotland, October 13, 2020).

²⁶ Moffitt, “It Is Not Finished,” 167.

²⁷ Moffitt, “It Is Not Finished,” 164.

²⁸ David M. Moffitt, “Atonement and Reconciliation in Hebrews.”

away from God: from the temple to the gentile court, then to the street of Jerusalem to His death outside the wall of Jerusalem, and ultimately His cry of dereliction.

How, then, does Christ accomplish the *kipper*-ing? This is where, I think, Moffitt's account takes an interesting twist. Contrary to the propitiation story, Moffitt argues that Christ's *kipper*-ing as the High Priest culminated at His ascension "into the heavenly holy of holies and remains there."²⁹ Christ is the eternal High Priest not only because He "always lives and is always at God's right hand,"³⁰ but also because He arose to indestructible life.³¹ Quoting Heb. 2:9-10, Moffitt argues that while Christ suffered death, His life was transformed when He resurrected from the death. Thus, it is this humanity, a perfected and glorified humanity, that entered the heavenly realm. He is thus qualified to be our eternal High Priest who always intercedes for us.

In his lectures, Moffitt explains further what he means by Christ being perfected in His resurrection. Is Christ not perfect before His resurrection? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, He is morally perfect.³² However, He is not bodily perfect as: (1) His body was still subject to decay, and (2) He came from a Judahite and not Levite line. By the Law, Christ is disqualified to be the High Priest on earth. How does the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews solve this problem? By mentioning that Christ has become the High Priest of the order of Melchizedek. However, contrary to common conception, Moffitt claims that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews does not appeal to genealogy for the legitimacy of Christ's priesthood when talking about Melchizedek.³³ "Rather," Moffitt states,

"those in this priesthood hold their office because of the quality of life they possess. Jesus, a member of Judah's tribe, is prevented by the Law from serving as priest in the earthly sanctuary (7:14; 8:4). The author argues that Jesus can nevertheless be the great high priest he is confessed to be because there is another priesthood, one whose legitimacy depends not on genealogy, but on the power of indestructible life."³⁴

It is by virtue of this indestructible life that He is qualified to be our eternal High Priest.

Another interesting feature of Moffitt's account is the implication that the blood that is sprinkled in the heavenly sanctuary is not the blood of Christ *that was shed on the cross* to, but rather the blood of *His perfected, resurrected body*. It is this blood that is sprinkled for the *kipper*-ing,

²⁹ Moffitt, "It Is Not Finished," 167

³⁰ Moffitt, "It Is Not Finished," 167

³¹ Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 213

³² Moffitt, "Atonement and Reconciliation in Hebrews."

³³ Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 213

³⁴ Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 148

not the blood shed on Calvary. This fits the logic of the Levitical sacrifice better. As Moffitt claims, a *kipper*-ing sacrifice needs to be perfect in every aspect, including the physical aspect, hence why the animal must be treated with extreme care rather than abuse. This, however, is not the case with Christ's crucified body. By contrast, this is indeed true of Christ's post-resurrection body.

This completes my brief survey of Moffitt's account of Christ's priesthood. The key difference that set it apart from Reformed soteriology is that while Calvin seems to think that the ascension is the climax of Christ's kingly work, Moffitt places it as the pinnacle of His priestly work instead. In other word, Christ's cross is *preparatory* rather than *performative* in the *kipper*-ing process. However, this does not mean that Christ's cross bears no significance to the whole atonement. The claim is simply that *in the kipper-ing element of the atonement*, the crucifixion seems to hold less importance than the ascension.

That being said, should Reformed theologians simply accept Moffitt's account? I do not think so. At least two problems will rise from incorporating Moffitt's account to Reformed soteriology. First, Reformed soteriology proposes the propitiation story as the framework by which Christ's death as *kipper*-ing sacrifice is linked to God's wrath. However, if Moffitt is right, *kipper*-ing sacrifice is not at all propitiating. Hence, the propitiation story is false. How then, should one understand divine wrath? Should we just deny it all together? After all, there seems to be no place for divine wrath in Moffitt's account on Christ's priesthood. Or perhaps, are there any alternative frameworks?

The second problem has to do with Christ's kingly office. If ascension should be understood as the focal point of Christ's priestly work, how should we understand Christ's kingly work? Is Calvin correct in asserting that ascension is the climax of Christ's kingship, and the kingly role thus has absolutely nothing to do with the atonement? Or could it be the case that we have entirely misunderstood Christ's kingly office, and that it actually is inextricably linked with the atonement?

This is what I shall be arguing in the next section. I argue that, *contra* Calvin, Christ truly inaugurated His Kingdom not at His ascension into heaven, but rather at His crucifixion. In attempting to complement Moffitt's account, I contend that while the crucifixion is *preparatory* for the priestly aspect of the atonement (the *kipper*-ing), it is *performative* for the kingly aspect of the atonement: (1) the triumph over the enemy forces, and (2) the satisfying of divine wrath. I

shall focus on (2) as it is related to the question of propitiation. On the cross, Christ satisfied God's wrath, not as the High Priest, but primarily as the King—that is, the covenantal representative of His covenant-breaking people.

The King's Atoning Work

Before I begin, let us revisit the key premises of the propitiation story:

P1. *Kipper-ing* sacrifice averts God's wrath toward sinful humanity.

P2. Christ died on the cross as the ultimate *kipper-ing* sacrifice.

C. Therefore, Christ's death averts God's wrath toward sinful humanity.

Aside from being Scripturally untenable as Moffitt's account has shown, one would find the propitiation story theologically problematic as it reduces God of the Bible to the level of pagan deity who requires a sacrifice to appease his wrath. The sacrifice, be it human or animal, atones for people by being the object of the deity's wrath. The picture of a deity who finds pleasure in inflicting torture and pain to the sacrifice inevitably comes to mind. If such conception is to be applied to God, it will lead to a disturbing implication that God finds it satisfying to see His Son bleeding and dying on the cross in such a gruesome manner. Crisp in his objection against penal substitutionary theory calls this objection "the problem of "divine violence" or "divine child abuse".³⁵

As the last section has concluded, the propitiation story is not the answer. It is thus wrong to assert "*kipper-ing* sacrifice" as the middle term.

P1. ____ averts God's wrath toward sinful humanity.

P2. Christ died on the cross as ____.

C. Therefore, Christ's death averts God's wrath toward sinful humanity.

What is the correct middle term to fill in the blank? This is my aim in this part. To answer the question, I proceed in three steps. First, I shall begin by arguing for the reality of divine wrath and propose a covenantal understanding of divine wrath. Secondly, I shall turn to the exegetical task of analyzing 2 Chronicles 33:1-20, the story I use as a case example to illustrate the link between divine wrath and covenantal representative. In the last step, I shall argue that Christ, as the King, is the covenantal representative of humanity.

³⁵ Oliver Crisp, *Approaching the Atonement: The Reconciling Work of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 100.

Step 1: Establishing Divine Wrath as the Covenantal Curse

At this point, it is tempting to just deny the reality of divine wrath altogether. After all, many theologians have done that. C.H. Dodd, for example, contends “the “Wrath of God” is...brought into the sphere of cause and effect: sin is the cause, disaster the effect.”³⁶ This means that “Wrath of God” is just a language used to refer to some natural consequence of sin. Dodd also argues that the word *hilasterion* in Romans 3:25 should be translated as “expiation” instead of “propitiation” to avoid the interpretation that Christ’s death serves as an appeasement for an angry deity.³⁷

Against this view, Leon Morris replies, “There are more than twenty words used to express ‘wrath’ as it applies to Yahweh... These are used so frequently that there are over 580 occurrences to be taken into consideration.”³⁸ He points to the plethora of evidence for divine wrath in Scripture which shows that there is no way to explain it away as mere impersonal force or effect of sin. Abraham Heschel agrees, stating, “it is, indeed, impossible to close one’s eyes to the words of the wrath of God in Scripture.”³⁹ Against Philo who claims that God “is not susceptible to passion of any kind,” and those words are mere “expressions to admonish those who could not otherwise be brought to their senses,” Heschel claims, “the word about the divine anger points to a stark reality, to the power behind the facts, not to a figure of speech.”⁴⁰

On one extreme is the tendency to deny divine wrath altogether while attributing its enactment (e.g. disaster, exile, etc) as simply a logical consequence of human sinfulness. On another end of the spectrum is what Rudolf Otto calls, “sinking into anthropomorphism,”⁴¹ that is, viewing divine wrath as univocal to human wrath. Divine wrath is conceived as affective reaction toward offenders. What do we make of this? I propose to examine divine wrath under the lens of covenantal framework.

A full discussion on the covenantal relationship between God and His people demands a paper of its own. In short, George Mendenhall, whose work has demonstrated the striking

³⁶ C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*. Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), 22.

³⁷ Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul*, 72.

³⁸ Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (London: Tyndale Press, 1965), 149-150.

³⁹ Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 359.

⁴⁰ Heschel, *The Prophets*, 359.

⁴¹ Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 77.

resemblance between Hebrew Scriptures and a treaty of a covenant between a suzerain and his vassal in the Ancient Near East, states that it is a “valuable lens through which one can recognize and appreciate the biblical idea of religious community.”⁴² He also comments that, “The names given to the two parts of the Bible in Christian tradition rest on the religious conception that the relationship between God and man is established by a covenant.”⁴³ The covenant image does not begin in Sinai. It does not even begin with God’s promise to Abraham. According to Hosea 6:7, God has established a covenant ever since the first page of the Scripture with Adam.

The clearest portrayal of The LORD as a suzerain who is establishing a covenant with His vassal is most apparent in the Decalogue, which is the beginning of the Mosaic covenant. It starts with a titlature, “I am The LORD your God” (Ex. 20:2a), followed by a short historical information to remind the Israelites about God’s past deed and continues with the stipulations. The logic goes, “since The LORD has redeemed you from Egypt, you are now to be His vassal and obey the following commandments.” The first commandment is, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (20:3). The same message is echoed in the *shema*, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” (Deut. 6:4) and expounded in even more detail in the following verse (6:10-15). It should be noted that this statement does not necessarily carry metaphysical commitment. While they believed there were many gods, they were only to worship The LORD as their national God.⁴⁴ This stands in parallel to how a vassal is not allowed to forge alliance with other suzerains.

The most essential feature of covenant is the swearing.⁴⁵ Extra-biblical sources show that ANE treaty was usually accompanied by the taking of solemn oath in the name of the god(s) who served the role of the witness. The idea here is that two parties who decided to bind themselves in a covenant relationship must invoke the name of their god to call them and be the witness and god would “hold the swearer responsible for what he has said.”⁴⁶ The wrath of god(s) would fall upon the transgressing party. As such, it is therefore no wonder that one of the last sections of

⁴² George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion, “Covenant,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman *et al.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 1179.

⁴³ George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: The Biblical Colloquium, 1955), 24.

⁴⁴ William Wainwright, “Monotheism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/monotheism/>. See also, John L. McKenzie, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E. Brown *et al.* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1287.

⁴⁵ Gene M. Tucker, “Covenant Forms and Contract Forms,” *Vetus Testamentum* 15, no. 4 (1965): 495, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/156853365x00071>

⁴⁶ Tucker, “Covenant Forms,” 491.

Deuteronomy, modeled after a suzerain-vassal treaty, is the pronouncement of blessings and curses (Deut. 28). Israel as God's vassal state should obey God's law, or they would incur divine wrath. The severest punishment is exile, that is, they would be handed over to the Gentiles. As history shows, they failed to keep the covenant and were exiled from their land.

Note the difference between this framework and the propitiation story. Here, divine wrath and curse is not directed upon the individuals but the people as a collective. According to N.T. Wright, the theme of divine curse "is not so much the question of what happens when *this or that individual sins*, but the question of what happens when *the nation as a whole fails to keep the Torah as a whole*."⁴⁷ This curse, however, is not limited to covenant people, that is, the family of Abraham, but all humanity. After all, the first divine covenant is not the Abrahamic covenant, but the Adamic covenant in Eden.⁴⁸ The purpose of the Abrahamic covenant that follows is to make Abraham's descendant the instrument by which God will bring about His blessings to the whole world. Since Israel failed, the Gentiles could not receive God's blessing. They too, were under divine wrath.

In this framework, perhaps even the proponent of divine impassibility can say that God is wrathful because wrath is not so much about God's emotion or affective capacity as it is about God's "reactive decree."⁴⁹ If divine wrath is incurred, what is needed is not appeasement but rather punishment. This does not have anything to do with God's passion, but more about the fulfilment of the covenant. In fact, the most important divine attribute in OT is God's covenant-faithfulness (*hesed*). Thomas McCall states, "perfect love, rather than being incompatible with impassibility, *demand*s impassibility."⁵⁰ If perfect love demands impassibility, then so much more is perfect covenant-faithfulness! Since the divine covenant includes the pronouncement of curse, the execution of divine wrath upon the covenant-breakers is inevitable if God is to be covenantally faithful. At the same time, since the covenant includes the promise of restoration, God in His

⁴⁷ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (New York: T&T Clark, 1991), 146.

⁴⁸ This covenant is usually called "Covenant of Vocation" (see N T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2016), ch. 4, pdf e-book format) or "covenant of creation," "nature," "laws," or "works," (see Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 83-104).

⁴⁹ Robert Oakes, "The Wrath of God," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 27, no. 3 (1990): 130, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/bf00143573>.

⁵⁰ Thomas H. McCall, *Forsaken: The Trinity and the Cross, and Why It Matters* (Downers Grove: IVP Academics, 2012), 70.

covenant-faithfulness will forgive His people. In His covenant, God, to borrow Robert Oakes word, “tempers mercy with justice.”⁵¹

To sum up, I agree with the proponents of the propitiation story that divine wrath is a reality which should not be denied. I also proposed a covenantal framework as an alternative to understand divine wrath. This means that perhaps there is a way to affirm divine wrath while rejecting the propitiation story.

Step 2: A Study Case on the Exilic Curse and Covenantal Representative

Aside from the stories of David and Solomon, the Books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are rarely mentioned in the discussion on the atoning work of Christ, especially His death on the cross. Here, I attempt to find an OT example on how a king suffer the divine curse as the representative of the covenantal people.

After the reign of Solomon, Israel was split into two: Northern Kingdom of Israel and Southern Kingdom of Judah. The former practiced idolatry under the reign of Jeroboam and those after him. The Books of Kings tells us that all these kings “did evil in the sight of the LORD” (except Shallum, due to his very short reign). Another recurring clause to describe the wickedness of the king of Israel is *heḥēṭî 'et-yiśrā'el* אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל חֵטְאָה, translated as “made Israel sin.” Twenty times of its occurrence in the First and Second Book of Kings are in relation to Israel kings.⁵² The idea behind this is that the king is responsible for the covenant people. To borrow Wright’s word, “the king holds the key to the destiny of the people.”⁵³

What about the Southern Kingdom of Judah? Although some kings were wicked, never once they were said to *heḥēṭî 'et-yəhūdāh*, אֶת־יְהוּדָה חֵטְאָה “made Judah sin,” with the exception of one king: Manasseh (2 Kgs. 21:11, 16). The idolatry established by Manasseh was so abhorrent that it caused Judah to “do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed” (21:9). It is at this point that God finally decreed their exile (21:12-15). Just as He drove those nations out of the land, He too would drive them out. This exile ultimately took place in 597-539 BC under the agency of a Babylonian king.

⁵¹ Oakes, *The Wrath of God*, 130.

⁵² 1 Kgs. 14:16 (Jeroboam I); 15:26,30 (Nadab); 15:34, 16:13 (Baasha); 16:13 (Elah); 16:19 (Zimri); 16:26 (Omri); 21:22 (Ahab), 22:52 (Ahazia), 2 Kgs. 3:3 (Jehoram), 10:29, 10:31 (Jehu); 13:2, 6 (Jehoahaz); 14:24 (Jeroboam II), 15:9 (Zechariah), 15:18 (Menahem); 15:24 (Pekahiah); 15:28 (Pekah). The occurrence in 2 Kgs. 21:17 either refers to Jeroboam I or all the Israel king.

⁵³ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*, 168.

Before one complains that this makes God sound like some petty, spiteful Greek deities, recall that this exile should be seen in light of divine-human covenant. The Book of Deuteronomy has made it clear that the divine curse in store for idolators is exile. As Frederick Mabie comments, "the enumeration of Manasseh's wicked practices is the essence of Deuteronomic covenantal unfaithfulness".⁵⁴ If Manasseh wrote for himself a copy of the Torah, as is the custom commanded by God in Deut. 17:18, he must have been aware of the prohibition in Deut. 18:9-13. If one breaks the covenant, divine wrath is superseded upon his head. The curse of exile awaits them.

While the 2 Kings portrays Manasseh in such a negative light, 2 Chronicles makes a slight modification. First, the pronouncement of future exile in 2 Kgs. 21:12-15 is omitted. Rather, the exile happened during his own reign (2 Chr. 33:11)! Furthermore, the verse states that while God "brought the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria against *them*," it only mentions Manasseh as the one who was exiled! There is no mention of other Judahites exiled alongside Manasseh even though Manasseh is not the only individual who is idolatrous. The image of Manasseh being taken "with a hook in his nose and bound with bronze shackles" is used "to describe a consequence of covenantal disloyalty" as in Isa. 37:29, Eze. 19:4, and Am. 4:2.⁵⁵ But why is not every covenant-breaking Judahite taken with him?

This is the reason why Manasseh's exile is commonly seen as personal chastisement which led him to repentance. This indeed is a very plausible reading. But perhaps there is another sense in which the story of Manasseh's exile could be understood that explains why Manasseh is specifically punished with *exile*, instead of any other forms of punishment. If what is needed is a mere personal chastisement, God can simply discipline him with famine, military defeat, or plague like He did David (2 Sam. 24:13-15). This, however, is not the case. It is therefore my contention that Manasseh's exile should not be seen as chastisement but an enactment of the covenantal curse.

The problem with this is that exile is a divine curse reserved for a covenant-breaking nation, not an individual. According to the Deuteronomic curse, the entire Kingdom of Judah should be exiled, and not just the king (as it eventually happened during the reign of Zedekiah).

⁵⁴ Frederick J. Mabie, *1 and 2 Chronicles*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, rev. ed (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 458, pdf e-book format.

⁵⁵ Mabie, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 458.

Here the concept of covenantal representative is useful. It is true that the covenantal people had broken the covenant. But God somehow saw it sufficient to exile only the king instead of the entire nation. Perhaps the reasoning goes along the aforementioned principle, “the king holds the key to the destiny of the people.” As the phrase *heḥēṭi ’eṭ-yiśrā’ēl* (or *’eṭ-yāhūdāh*) indicates, if the people are sinful, it is because of the king. The same principle applies to the bearing of divine curse. If the king has borne the curse, the people is reckoned to have done so as well.

In this framework, it is plausible for a single representative to suffer divine wrath in the place of his people. When the curse in the form of exile is executed upon him, the wrath of God is satisfied. Note that this has nothing to do with the concept of *kipper*-ing sacrifice as in the propitiation story. Manasseh is a representative, not a sacrifice. The story of Manasseh’s exile, I believe, would help us understand what actually took place during Christ’s death on the cross. This is what we should be discussing in the next section.

Step 3: Christ as the Covenantal Representative

According to the propitiation story, Christ’s death satisfies God’s wrath. This is true in the present account as well. The difference is the sense by which He satisfies the divine wrath. From our previous discussion, we have learnt three things:

- (1) The element of divine curse is a necessary part of covenant. Divine wrath is not caused by some *individuals* failing to reach God’s moral standard. It is caused by the entirety of covenantal *people* trespassing the covenant.
- (2) Divine wrath would result in exile.
- (3) It is possible for the covenantal people to be spared from this exile by directing the Deuteronomic curse upon one single individual who serves as the representative, usually the king.

Let us call this the *covenant representationalism* story. I contend that Christ, like Manasseh, is the representative of the covenant-breaking people.⁵⁶ The exile that is meant for the entire nation fell upon Him. In the third instance Jesus prophesied His death, He mentioned that He

⁵⁶ By this, I am not claiming that Manasseh is a typology for Christ. That would be an awkward claim. I simply claim that his exile serves as an example by which we might understand the concept of covenantal representative.

would be handed over to the Gentiles and killed by the means of crucifixion, a foreign capital punishment (Mat 20:17-19; Mrk. 10:32-34, Luk. 18:31-34). Coincidence? I think not. Christ's crucifixion is exile *par excellence*. His cry of dereliction (Mat. 27:46; Mrk. 15:34) seems to support this interpretation. On the cross, Christ satisfied God's wrath by suffering the curse of exile as "King of the Jews."

To complete my account, I shall state the key points of the concept of covenantal representationalism:

P1. A covenantal representative averts God's wrath toward sinful humanity.

P2. Christ died on the cross as a covenantal representative

C. Therefore, Christ's death averts God's wrath toward sinful humanity.

In the framework of covenantal representationalism, Christ, like Manasseh, is a covenantal representative who bore the divine wrath in the form of exile on the cross, suffering the Deuteronomic curse as the King of His covenant-breaking people.

This completes my account of Christ's kingly atoning work. In this account, Christ's victory over evil forces as well as the inauguration of His Kingdom through bearing the exilic curse—and as such satisfying the divine wrath—is not achieved in His resurrection, much less ascension, but rather in His crucifixion. The resurrection is the declaration of His victory. As such, the cross is *performative* for the kingly aspect of the atonement while the resurrection and the ascension are *supplementary*. Compare this with Moffitt's account of Christ's priesthood: the crucifixion is *preparatory* while the resurrection and ascension are *performative* for the priestly aspect of the atonement—the *kipper*-ing element.

Is this an acceptable way to understand Christ's atoning work with respect to His kingly and priestly office? One might worry that this might contradict Acts 2 which connects the resurrection and ascension to His enthronement. Further, Peter's claims that resurrection signifies that Christ was not abandoned in Hades suggests that death is not the climax of His kingship. My answer to this would be that the fact that Peter quotes Psalm 110 near the end of his sermon (v. 34-35) means that the passage is talking about Christ's enthronement as *both* the *priest-king*, not just king *per se*. This does not contradict the present account.

Still, one might be uncomfortable with the idea of drawing a parallel between Manasseh and Christ. After all, Manasseh is a wicked king. Does Manasseh's exile cause the sinful nation of Judah to be spared in *the same way* as Christ's death brings about atonement for His people?

I shall answer this objection in two steps. First, it is important to note that my claim is a rather modest one: that the representative mechanism is not a foreign concept in Old Testament. Indeed, Manasseh's exile and Christ's death works differently since, unlike Manasseh, Christ is an innocent and faithful Representative of His people. Where, then does the difference lie?

The second step is to consider Eleonore Stump's contention that atonement must deal with both the past sin and the sinner who is prone to engage with sin again in the future (what she calls, "the forward-looking component").⁵⁷ The same principle applies here. The problem is not merely the past covenant-breaking, but also the fulfilment of the covenant blessings ("the forward-looking component"). A representative like Manasseh can only deal with the former and, even then, only one single instance of covenant-breaking. The curse must be dealt with. But the ultimate purpose of the covenant is the bringing about of God's restoration to all creations. Only Christ, the faithful Representative, can achieve this. Being faithful, He fulfilled the covenant as the representative of the covenantal people and restored all creations.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to present an alternative account of the *munus triplex* using analytic method. I argued that this combination of Moffitt's account and mine offers an alternative understanding that better makes sense of the Scriptural data. To achieve this, I began by describing the method I employed throughout this paper. Then, I proceeded to survey Moffitt's account of Christ's *kipper*-ing work as the High Priest and argues that his account better fits the Scriptural data, specifically the Epistle of the Hebrews, than the rival account. Moffitt's account shows that (1) *contra* the propitiation story, it is never the case that *kipper*-ing sacrifices function as the object of God's wrath. Instead, it is a gift by which God's people draw closer to Him, and (2) Christ's atoning sacrifice ultimately took place in His ascension, not death.

Lastly, I have defended the view that divine wrath is real and, using the story of Manasseh's exile, explained how the concept of covenantal representative work. I argue that Christ, like Manasseh, is a covenantal representative who does not only bear the Deuteronomic curse against Israel, but also extend God's mercy and blessing to all creation. Thus, it is my conclusion that the

⁵⁷ Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 16-18.

traditional Christology, especially the Reformed version, has mistakenly reversed Christ's priestly and kingly role.

It is my hope that that this study will contribute to our understanding to Christ's three-fold office, specifically on His priestly and kingly office. As many would have noticed, the main weakness of this study was the lack of exploration on Christ's prophetic office. This would be a fruitful area for further work to complete this alternative understanding of the three-fold office of Christ.

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