



The Death of Jesus in Recent New Testament Study

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I. THE HISTORICAL FACTS

Until 1968 all our information about crucifixion in the ancient world was derived from literary sources, and this was sufficient to show that the presentation of the death of Jesus in the Gospels was in accord with the usual ancient practice.¹ But in that year Israeli archaeologists working at Ras el Masaref to the north of Jerusalem uncovered a number of ossuaries containing the remains of various individuals who had suffered violent deaths.² Research on the bones of a young man named Jehohanan has indicated that he died by crucifixion. The find confirms much of what was already known from the literary sources, and the following points are noteworthy: (1) The victim was nailed to the cross, not tied with ropes; nails were driven through the forearms, and one nail was used to pierce one or both ankles. (2) The cross incorporated a kind of support for the body, which would tend to prolong the period of torture. (3) The legs of the victim had been broken by blows with a blunt instrument to hasten his death. (4) The corpse had been given a private burial. The significance of these facts for the historical assessment of the Gospel narratives will be obvious.

The literary character of the crucifixion narratives has been the subject of much discussion. First, there is the question whether there was a continuous passion narrative current in the church from an early date.³ Various writers have denied this hypothesis and argued that the passion narrative consists of inde-

¹Josef Blinzler, *Der Prozess Jesu* (4th ed.; Regensburg: Pustet, 1969).

²J. H. Charlesworth, "Jesus and Jehohanan: An Archaeological Note on Crucifixion," *Expository Times* 84 (1972-73) 147-150; H. W. Kuhn, "Der Gekreuzigte von Giv'at ha-Mivtar," *Theologia Crucis - Signum Crucis*, ed. C. Andresen and G. Klein (Tübingen: Mohr, 1979) 303-334.

³For earlier discussion see Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (rev. ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 275-84; Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (New York: Scribner's, 1934) 178-217; and Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1966) 89-96.

pendent units, some of very little historical value,⁴ but this view has been strongly criticized by R. Pesch.⁵ The debate is not yet settled in one direction or the other.

Second, there is the question of the relation between history and interpretation in the crucifixion narratives. The Evangelists saw the crucifixion in the light of the Old Testament and deliberately drew attention to prophecies and types which they regarded as fulfilled in the dying of Jesus. A number of scholars have gone on to argue that various details in the story were manufactured out of the Old Testament in order to provide such evidence of prophetic fulfillment.⁶ In several cases, however, the details alleged to have been constructed out of the Old

Testament correspond with what we know to have been contemporary practice at executions, and a sceptical approach to the crucifixion narratives has become increasingly weak.⁷

A third literary question concerns the actual nature of the interpretation. Clearly the motif of fulfillment was important. But what about the idea of atonement? At first sight, this seems to be absent, and Jesus appears to be presented more as a martyr or innocent sufferer.⁸ For the moment we may simply make the point that the One who is crucified is the One whose messianic ministry is described earlier in the Gospels; so far as the final redaction of the Gospels is concerned, the crucifixion narratives must be seen in the total context of the Gospels in which they stand, and this means that we may find some important elements of explanation earlier in the Gospel accounts.

Finally, the contemporary evaluation of crucifixion has been given detailed examination by Martin Hengel in a book which originally bore the title *Mors turpissima crucis*, a phrase which says all that is necessary: crucifixion was the most horrible and contemptuous form of execution known to the ancient world.⁹

II. THE ROLE OF JESUS

But is it right to speak of Jesus as the crucified Messiah? Granted that this phrase was used by Paul within some 25 years of his death, was this the category under which the early Christians understood the role of Jesus?

1. In the so-called passion predictions in the Gospels it is prophesied that the Son of man must suffer; he must be handed over, be crucified, and rise from the dead. Few scholars have been willing to argue that this role can be deduced from references to the Son of man in the Old Testament, but C. F. D. Moule and M. D. Hooker have suggested that the suffering of the Son of man can be drawn from Daniel where the figure is representative of the saints of the Most High

⁴Eta Linnemann, *Studien zur Passionsgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1970); *The Passion in Mark*, ed. W. H. Kelber (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976). See also the writers listed by R. Pesch in the book cited in n. 5 below.

⁵R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, II. Teil (Freiburg: Herder, 1977) 1-27.

⁶R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 280-82.

⁷W. Horbury, "The Passion Narratives and Historical Criticism," *Theology* 75 (Feb., 1972) 58-71, gives a useful survey, but concentrates his attention on the trial scenes.

⁸J. Pöbe, "The Cry of the Centurion—A Cry of Defeat," *The Trial of Jesus*, ed. E. Bammel (London: SCM, 1970) 91-102.

⁹M. Hengel, *Crucifixion* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

who are oppressed and defeated before their vindication by the Ancient of Days.¹⁰ For myself I find it hard to see that Daniel 7:21 ("This horn made war, with the saints, and prevailed over them") can be regarded as the source of the concept of the suffering of the Son of man.

At the other extreme we have the view of those who find no real problem here. They argue that the title Son of man was not used by Jesus with respect to himself as an earthly figure. Either the phrase was not used as a title but only as a kind of self-designation,¹¹ or it was originally used of the future judge and ruler.¹² When the term came to be used as a title in reference to Jesus, then it was natural to use it in statements based on what Jesus had actually done. That is to say, the early church fashioned Son of man sayings which referred to the

sufferings of Jesus as “prophecies after the event.” But this understanding of the origin of the sayings is most unsatisfactory. It assumes that Jesus did not use “Son of man” as a title to refer to himself, and further it fails to explain why it was this particular title rather than any other, like Messiah, that became associated with suffering.¹³

The traditional explanation is that the sayings arose from a creative combination of the Son of man and the Servant of Yahweh, the latter of whom is clearly a suffering figure in Isaiah 53. This understanding of the key saying, Mark 10:45, has been defended particularly by R. T. France, and it remains the most probable in my view.¹⁴ If this is correct, it means that the death of Jesus was understood against a background of vicarious suffering, and this is a factor of considerable significance for our study. In any case, of course, this Old Testament background is certainly present in some of the early church’s statements about the meaning of the death of Jesus.

2. A second type of approach lays emphasis on the concept of the righteous person who suffers precisely because of being pious and good, and who thus becomes the object of persecution. The passion narratives make use of motifs from Psalms 22 and 69, and there is some evidence that the motif was present in the early church (Rom 15:3). This background area has been emphasized by Eduard Schweizer,¹⁵ and there seems little doubt that it played some

¹⁰C. F. D. Moule, “From Defendant to Judge—and Deliverer,” *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1967) 82-99; M. D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark* (London: SPCK, 1967) 108-109.

¹¹G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (London: Collins, 1973); M. Casey, *Son of Man* (London: SPCK, 1979). For a survey of the various approaches to the interpretation of the death of Jesus, see especially Marie-Louise Gubler, *Die frühesten Deutungen des Todes Jesu* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1977).

¹²So, most recently, A. J. B. Higgins, *The Son of Man in the Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1980).

¹³For this “traditional” view, see Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981-) 1.178-205; O. Michel (and I. H. Marshall), “The Son of Man,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (3 vols.; Exeter: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-78) 3.613-34.

¹⁴R. T. France, “The Servant of the Lord in the Teaching of Jesus,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968) 26-52. The same view is accepted by recent commentators on Mark (e.g., R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 163-64), although there is an unwillingness to recognize the text as a saying of Jesus.

¹⁵Eduard Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship* (London: SCM, 1960) 22-41; see M.-L. Gubler, *Die frühesten Deutungen*, 95-205.

part in the early church’s understanding of the death of Jesus. However, it is very doubtful whether this understanding of the death of Jesus is adequate to explain the significance which the early church attached to it.¹⁶ It may explain why it is that Jesus was exalted by God through resurrection, but it does little to explain how his death came to be regarded as having significance for other people.

The same comment may be made about the view which sees the death of Jesus as being in line with the deaths of the prophets who were put to death by the Jews.¹⁷ There was a tradition that the Jews killed their prophets, and undoubtedly Jesus saw his own approaching fate in the light of this. But the interest in this line of tradition lay in the guilt and punishment of the murderers of the prophets rather than in the persons of the dying prophets and any possible significance that they may have had.¹⁸

3. From the Maccabean period onwards we have evidence that Jewish martyrs were regarded as somehow dying for their people by taking more than their own fair share of the divine wrath which was poured out upon Israel for its apostasy and sin. This thought is present in 2 Maccabees 7, and it is expressed with complete clarity in 4 Maccabees. In the latter text the language of sacrifice is used of the death of the martyrs. The language of Paul is sufficiently close to that of 4 Maccabees to make it plausible that he was thinking of the death of Jesus in similar terms. It is true that the possibility of this influence on New Testament thinking has been denied by Jürgen Roloff who argues that the crucial concepts cannot be found in Palestinian Jewish sources until a later date,¹⁹ but I would dissent from his conclusions which result from a failure to recognize that the boundary between Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism is a very fluid one. It seems most likely that this particular concept was of great importance in the first century.²⁰

4. M. Hengel has drawn attention to the wide currency in the Hellenistic world of ideas of people dying for their city, for their laws, for truth, and as expiatory sacrifices to appease the wrath of the gods.²¹ The evidence which he lists consists of material of which scholars have long been aware; yet it is remarkable that little use has been made of it in an attempt to illuminate New Testament thinking. Hengel, however, claims that Hellenistic thought provides not only the background against which Christian missionaries preached to Gentiles but also the background to Jewish thinking about the martyrs.²² The concept of “dying for” was widespread and influential.

¹⁶See L. Ruppert, *Jesus als der leidende Gerechte?* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1972).

¹⁷O. H. Steck, *Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten* (WMANT 23; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967); M.-L. Gubler, *Die frühesten Deutungen*, 10-94.

¹⁸M. Hengel, *The Atonement* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 8.

¹⁹J. Roloff, “Anfänge der soteriologischen Deutung der Todes Jesu (Mk. X.45 und Lk. XXII.27),” *New Testament Studies* 19 (1972-73) 38-64.

²⁰David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings* (SNTSMS 5; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1967) 41-48; M. Hengel, *The Atonement*, 60-61.

²¹M. Hengel, *The Atonement*, 6-32.

²²The concept of sacrifice will be discussed in the next section, but we may note at this point that it was a familiar one in Judaism both through the existence of the temple with its associated rites and through the interpretation of martyrdom in sacrificial categories.

III. INTERPRETATIVE IMAGERY

The next stage in our investigation is to look at the imagery which is used to understand the significance of the death of Jesus. This area overlaps with the previous one, but it is concerned with images and metaphors rather than with roles and persons.

1. First, there is the broad area of redemption.²³ Here we are concerned with the use of language which implies that through the death of Jesus believers are set free from bondage to sin or death or the elements or undergo a change of ownership by becoming the property of God. The thought is associated with the blood of Christ which is most plausibly regarded as the cost or price of redemption. Behind the early church's use of the concept there can be traced the influence of the sayings of Jesus in Mark 10:45 and 14:24 which speak of his death as a ransom for many and use the metaphor of blood.

2. The language of redemption is closely associated with that of sacrifice.²⁴ Indeed, this is

probably the fundamental category for understanding how the death of Jesus “works.” There is, first of all, the concept of the sin offering and the offering of blood made in the holiest part of the temple on the Day of Atonement. The old debate regarding the efficacy of this sacrifice seems to have lost fire. If the sacrifice is regarded as expiatory in the sense that it cancels out the effect of sin, it does so in that it propitiates God against whom the sin was committed; and equally, if it is regarded as propitiating God, it does so by covering the sin which aroused his judgment. Expiation and propitiation are two sides of the same coin. And this view will hold, whatever precise nuance may be detected as uppermost in the use of the word *hilastērios*.²⁵ Second, the death of Jesus is seen in terms of the sacrifice in Exodus 24 by which the covenant between God and Israel was inaugurated, however precisely we may interpret the significance of that sacrifice. A third element in the picture is the death of the passover lamb, which I regard as the most probable central influence behind the picture of Jesus as the slain lamb.²⁶ Whatever its original significance, this sacrifice had probably come to be regarded as redemptive by New Testament times. It was part of the rescue from Egypt, and it protected the people from the divine wrath which broke out against Egypt.

Although the use of sacrificial language has been regarded by some scholars as comparatively scanty in the New Testament outside Hebrews, it is

²³I. H. Marshall, “The Development of the Concept of Redemption in the New Testament,” *Reconciliation and Hope*, ed. R. J. Banks (Exeter: Paternoster, 1974) 153-169; cf. E. Pax, “Der Loskauf: zur Geschichte eines neutestamentlichen Begriffes,” *Antonianum* 37 (1962) 239-278.

²⁴Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice* (London: Macmillan, 1937); F. M. Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ* (London: SPCK; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975); R. J. Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978); P. Garnet, *Salvation and Atonement in the Qumran Scrolls* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977). See also D. J. Antwi, *The Death of Jesus as an Atoning Sacrifice: A Study of the Sources and Purpose of New Testament Soteriology, with Particular Reference to Selected Texts* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Aberdeen, 1980).

²⁵For the debate subsequent to the fundamental works of C. H. Dodd, L. Morris, and R. Nicole, see D. Hill, *Greek Words*, 23-36; P. Garnet, “Atonement Constructions in the Old Testament and the Qumran Scrolls,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974) 131-163.

²⁶Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (3rd ed., London: Inter-Varsity, 1965) 129-143, surveys the possibilities.

more likely that it was of central significance. But opinions can differ regarding its point of entry into Christianity. There would seem to be two main routes, which need not be regarded as exclusive possibilities.²⁷ On the one hand, there is the possibility of direct influence from the language of the cult. This is most clearly the case in Hebrews where an elaborate typology is worked out with Jesus as high priest and sacrifice. On the other hand, there is the possibility that the theology of martyrdom led to the use of sacrificial language of Jesus since it was already used of the martyrs. The widespread use of sacrificial language in the Hellenistic world created a climate of thought in which it was easy to apply such language directly to the death of Jesus, so that it may be fair to say that the choice between the two possibilities is an unreal one.

This understanding of the death of Jesus arose early in the development of Christian thought. There is a good case that the language which Paul uses was taken over from the early church, although we may be sceptical as to whether he quotes earlier formulations. But in fact we can go back to Jesus himself. There are no cogent reasons for denying that the cup-saying at the

Last Supper goes back to his lips, and a reference to his blood is the most certain part of the cup-saying. But the blood cannot be understood in any other way than as a metaphor for a sacrifice which benefits the participants in the Supper. And if the Supper belonged to the central act of fellowship of his followers, then it would seem to follow that the sacrificial significance of his death goes back to the earliest days of the church and occupied a central place in its thinking. If this hypothesis is correct, it refutes the view that the early church did not begin to ascribe atoning efficacy to the death of Jesus until a somewhat later date, and that for some time it saw his death in more neutral terms as, say, that of a good man who was then vindicated by God who raised him from the dead.²⁸

3. A third type of interpretation is in terms of justification.²⁹ This is an essentially Pauline way of thinking, and I am doubtful whether the actual terminology, as distinct from the concept, can be traced back earlier in the church. Paul uses it of course mainly in polemic with those who insist that salvation can be achieved by human works and claims that one is put in the right with God by faith and not by works that fulfill the Jewish law. But how does the death of Jesus come into this process? It is faith in Jesus which leads to justification, so that clearly Jesus has some role to play. According to Galatians, Christ set us free from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us in his death on the cross (3:13). This curse rests upon us for not keeping the law. According to Romans we are justified through the act of redemption in Jesus as a result of which God

²⁷A third possibility lies in the concept of the offering of Isaac (the *Aqedah*). See M.-L. Gubler, *Die frühesten Deutungen*, 336-375, for a survey of the discussion. The date of the concept is a matter of dispute; see P. R. Davies and B. D. Chilton, "The Aqedah: A Revised Tradition History," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978) 514-546.

²⁸I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). On the silence of Acts regarding the atoning significance of the death of Jesus, see I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971) 169-75.

²⁹Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (London: Macmillan, 1941); E. Jünger, *Paulus und Jesus* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1964); D. Hill, *Greek Words*, 82-162; J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul* (SNTSMS 20; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1972).

could overlook past sins (3:21-26). Here the release of the sinner from sin and consequent condemnation takes place as the basis of justification. At the same time Paul regards the death of Jesus as a sacrifice which makes justification possible.

The particular way in which Paul relates justification to the death of Jesus in Galatians is of great importance. Death by crucifixion is capital punishment, and a curse is an expression of condemnation. Here, if anywhere in the New Testament, we have the thought of a penalty for not abiding by all the things written in the law, and this penalty has been borne by Christ so that we are set free from the penalty imposed by the law and are thus justified. The language is plainly that of substitution.

4. The fourth type of interpretation of the death of Jesus is in terms of reconciliation.³⁰ The language used by Paul here has no direct background in the Old Testament, but it does have a background in 2 and 4 Maccabees where the martyrs hope that their sufferings will bring an end to God's wrath against Israel and that thus God will be reconciled to his sinful people. But whereas in 2 Maccabees something is done by humans to placate God, in Paul the verb

“reconcile” is used actively with God as subject, and the thought is that God opens up the possibility of peace between himself and humanity by no longer counting their sins against them, and this he achieves through Jesus who became sin, i.e., “a sinner” (though not in the sense that he personally sinned) in order that they might become righteousness, i.e., “righteous.” But something more than a mere identification of Jesus or alignment with sinful humanity is meant; the decisive event which wrought reconciliation was the death of Jesus (Rom 5:10; Col 1:20, 22), so that it seems likely that we must think of sin being removed by Jesus dying a death which somehow cancels it out. This general understanding is confirmed by the way in which Paul uses reconciliation language in almost the same way as justification language and regards the operative factor in both processes as being the death of Jesus.

IV. THE DEATH OF JESUS AS SAVING EVENT

The final part of our investigation is concerned with exploring how the relationship of Jesus to the Christian is to be seen in the light of this discussion.

The first point that needs to be made and indeed to be heavily emphasized is that Jesus appears as the representative or agent of God. There is a strong tendency in current Christology to think “from below” and so to think of Jesus as primarily representing humankind to God. This is contrary to the emphasis of the New Testament, which stresses how God sent Jesus, or how God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, or how the Son of God “loved me and gave himself for me.” In the cross we see primarily an action of God through Jesus.

From this fact it is a short distance to interpreting the death of Jesus as the visible proof that the ultimate reality in the universe is the sin-bearing love of

³⁰R. P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (Atlanta; John Knox, 1981), with bibliography.

God. But this idea can be understood at three levels. It may simply mean that God in Christ endures the worst that sinful humankind can inflict on him, is not overcome by it, and loves to the very end. On this view the cross shows the ultimate victory of invincible love.³¹ True though this is, it does not appear to do full justice to the language of the New Testament with its concepts of sacrifice and the like. At the second level the cross is the place of God's alignment with humankind in all its need and suffering. God in Christ endures the worst that ever falls to the lot of the human race, namely innocent suffering, and thus declares that he is on the side of justice and love, and will bring life out of death and joy out of suffering. This is a congenial thought in a world of violence, and it is right that it should be developed.³² But again it must be insisted that the thought of God siding with the poor against their oppressors is not the central thought in the New Testament language used to describe the death of Jesus. And so we reach the third level at which the action of God in Christ is seen as the action of divine love which takes on itself the consequences of human sinfulness against God and exhausts them so that peace can be restored between God and humankind, and there is no longer any condemnation for those who are in Christ. It is surely this kind of conception which lies at the center of the New Testament imagery about the death of Jesus.³³

All this raises the question of relationship of the dying Jesus to humankind. The two traditional interpretations of his role are substitution and representation. Both of these terms express the thought that Jesus identified himself with sinners and did something on their behalf.

The difference between them is that substitution means that Christ did that which sinners would otherwise have had to do themselves, and traditionally the idea is that he has borne the penalty which otherwise they would have had to bear themselves. Representation, however, is usually taken to mean that Christ did something not necessarily identical with what sinners would have had to do themselves but rather something which has the effect of releasing them from this obligation. On this kind of understanding Jesus did not suffer the judgment which sinners ought to bear but, for example, offered some kind of compensation to God as a result of which their debt is cancelled. In both cases Jesus acts on behalf of humankind and for their good; in the former he bears what they should have borne, but in the latter he makes a plea to God on the basis of which their sin is cancelled.

The concept of substitution has a long history, and its acceptance is a necessary mark of orthodoxy in various statements of faith and confessional writings. There is no doubt in my mind that it is present in the New Testament. Yet there are those who have sought to replace it by ideas of representation, expressed in various ways. It has been argued, for example, that in Jesus we see an expression of penitence and repentance toward God which is effective on our behalf and with which we can identify. This idea has a distinguished history

³¹J. Denney, *Letters of Principal James Denney to His Family and Friends* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921) 187.

³²It is developed as *one* aspect of the cross by G. O'Collins, *The Calvary Christ* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977). Cf. J. Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (London: SCM; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978), ch. 6.

³³J. Denney, *Studies in Theology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1894) 108.

from J. McLeod Campbell to Vincent Taylor, the latter of whom developed the idea of Calvary as the perfect sacrifice with which we can identify ourselves as our approach to God.³⁴ More recently, D. E. H. Whitely and M. D. Hooker have developed representational theories as well. Whitely has written that, for Paul, “Christ shared all our experience, sin alone excepted, including death, in order that we, by virtue of our solidarity with him, might share his life.”³⁵ Professor Hooker speaks of “interchange in Christ,” and the central thought is that Christ became what we are in order that we might become what he is.³⁶

For all the merits of representational theories—particularly their emphasis on the incarnation of the Saviour and on our union with him—they share a fundamental weakness in that they do not explain (1) how the interchange works, and (2) why the New Testament uses language which speaks of Christ doing something on our behalf. In laying all the stress on our sharing in the life of Christ or our becoming what he is, they fail to bring the *pro nobis* character of the gospel to expression.

Representational theories have been developed partly in opposition to substitutionary views. But representation and substitution ought not to be put in opposition to each other, especially in such a manner that the one replaces the other. The concept of substitution is essential for an understanding of the atonement. It appears in those Pauline passages which speak of God's giving up Christ for us all (Rom 8:32), Christ's being made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21), of God's condemning sin in the flesh (i.e., in Christ's death, Rom 8:3), and of Christ's having died for all, so that all have died (2 Cor 5:14). It also appears in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which

the death of Christ is a sacrificial offering to God, by which something is done on behalf of humanity and for humanity; Christ's death is a voluntary act on behalf of humanity in order that the latter need not bear the wrath of God and suffer death.³⁷

We may sum up by saying that four things should be distinguished. First, there is the *motivation* for the death of Christ, which the New Testament uniformly understands as the love of God the Father; it was his will that his Son should suffer death for us, and the Son himself demonstrated his love for us by accepting the Father's will, becoming incarnate and going to the cross. Second, there is the *character* of the death of Christ. It is basically understood as the offering of a sacrifice, but this theme is expressed in various ways, such as the bearing of the curse due to breaking the law or as the payment of a ransom. Third, there is the *effect* of the death of Christ. It is the means of redemption, justification, and reconciliation, in addition to the more straightforward and consistent interpretation as sacrificial atonement for sin. And fourth, there is the *relationship* of the death of Christ to those who benefit from it. Through faith in Christ

³⁴J. McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (London: Macmillan, 1856); V. Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*.

³⁵D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964) 130.

³⁶Cf. M. D. Hooker, "Interchange in Christ," *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971) 349-361.

³⁷The concept of substitution is given a profound exposition by J. I. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve?," *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974) 3-45. Unfortunately Packer mars his case by arguing, clean contrary to the New Testament evidence and quite unnecessarily, that we must hold to a doctrine of limited atonement.

the believer is joined to him so that such a one participates in his death and its benefits, the result being that this person's sin is removed, the person is reconciled to God, and there is reproduced in him or her the character of the Saviour.