

How Q 5:75 Can Help Christians Conceptualize Atonement

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Along with most other Christian theologians in Germany, I regard atonement as the restoration of the union in love between God and humans and the overcoming of all obstacles that prevent this loving union.¹ All obstacles that make it impossible for a human to be in union with God and that are a result of human responsibility are called “sin.” Christian anthropology presupposes that all humans suffer in some sense from the condition that they are not in complete union with God. And the basic message of Christianity is that through Christ, and for many theologians through his suffering on the cross, a way to atonement has been opened to all humans.

I wish to show how difficult it is to establish a coherent theological theory of how the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ enables atonement—both in the Western and in the Eastern traditions of Christianity. Then, I will turn to a particular verse in the Qur’an to show how it sheds light on these difficulties. Finally, I want to use this light to modify my own Christological model of atonement.

Some Problems in Western Debates on Atonement

In her recent book on atonement, Eleonore Stump distinguishes three different models of atonement in Christian tradition.² The most prominent ones among them are the Anselmian and the Thomistic models, both of which can be located in the Western tradition of Christianity.³ As many probably know, the basic idea of the Anselmian model is that human sin makes it impossible for a just God to forgive humans for their sins without adequate satisfaction. Hence, the justice of God would be damaged if she forgave sins unconditionally. Moreover, in Anselm’s point of view,

her honor is threatened by human sin—an idea that was criticized by philosophers such as Nietzsche.⁴ However, Gisbert Greshake makes clear that the *gloria Dei* in Anselm's thought has to be understood as the order of the world. If Peter hurts his sister, the order of the world is objectively disturbed.⁵ There is a wound that has to be healed and that does not disappear through a divine decree. Something like an expiating deed from Peter is necessary. God cannot forgive because this would be against her justice and honor. With many theologians, Stump criticizes that, in this model, the obstacle for atonement lies in the loving God.⁶ However, as Greshake makes clear, this kind of criticism is unfair because God's honor is the order of the world. Hence, the real problem is a problem within humankind.

That is why the Anselmian model is not as far away from the Thomistic model as many theologians and philosophers think. The advantage of the Thomistic model, for Stump, is the fact that the obstacle for atonement is not in God, but only in humankind. It is the sin of humans that makes atonement impossible. God stays always accessible and stays, in unchanged love, open to humans. For Anselmian theologians, however, God is not open for the sinner anymore because of respect for the victims. Hence, the Anselmian God needs satisfaction, but not for himself—as Stump and many others think. He needs satisfaction because he cannot bring humans to reconciliation without their help. And if humans do not agree with his reconciling will, and if they do not want to love their brother or sister, God will not undermine their free will because love will never destroy freedom. Thus, the problem within all Western models of atonement is located in human sin, in the human denial of love. The problem is that “human beings do not will what God wills, and the result is distance between human beings and God.”⁷

In the Thomistic tradition, the solution to the problem is conceived like this: It is God who justifies humans as long as they do not resist God's good will. So, it is *grace alone* that makes justification happen. Humans have nothing to contribute here, but they can make it impossible for God to heal them by rejecting her love. The only thing that is necessary for humans to be justified is a surrender of their will—not submission but only surrender, as Stump points out repeatedly.⁸ After this first justification, which is done by God alone, the process of sanctification can start, which needs cooperation between God and humans.⁹ I do not want to go into details of this interesting model here, but I will quickly draw attention to its problem, a problem that is also seen by Stump herself.

Sanctification occurs through the cooperative grace of God together with the human, and God will help any human who simply asks for help here. Thus, Aquinas does not explain why this cooperation would need Christ. If justification does not need anything more than the surrender of human free will, it is not clear which role Christ can play here. Thus, the Thomistic tradition cannot explain why the suffering and death of Jesus are necessary for salvation.¹⁰

Stump tries to give her own interpretation to explain this need. She calls her own interpretation the “Marian interpretation of atonement” and summarizes it as follows: “On the Marian interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement, in his passion and death, Christ provides unilaterally one part of what is needed for union between God and human beings, namely the indwelling of human psyches in God; and he also provides the most promising means for the other part, namely, the surrender to God by human beings alienated from themselves and from God. . . . This return of estranged human persons *is* something that God would otherwise not have had; it *is* a gift given to God through Christ.”¹¹

Stump begins her reflections with the observation that persons who are divided with themselves cannot be unified with God because their will is destroying their own wholeness. Atonement becomes impossible because of human sin, even if God is ready to forgive.¹² What we need here is a power that integrates the divided human psyche and that helps this integrated psyche to surrender to God. Stump’s idea for Christ’s suffering on the cross is that Christ, through his divine knowledge, gets to know all human psyches of all times and brings them in all their dividedness toward God. For Stump “the human psyche of the person of Christ is opened on the cross to the psyches of all human beings. At one and the same time, Christ mind-reads the mental states found in all the evil human acts human beings have ever committed. . . . Flooded with such a horror, Christ might well lose entirely his ability to find the mind of God the Father.”¹³ This is why he really suffers from the distance from the Father and this is her explanation of the cry of dereliction. Christ suffers under all human sufferings by literally feeling their sorrows, pains, fragmentations, and alienations in his mind. He even feels the separation from God, which is caused by this alienation. When he hangs on the cross all human sufferings are hanging with him, his brain is literally taken over by the burden of all human brains, and his surrender is also the surrender of all those psyches that are brought together in this moment. According to Stump, “[t]hrough mind-reading, then, Christ can

have all human sin within himself on the cross without himself being sinful.”¹⁴

It is simply inconceivable in Stump’s Christology (as in most traditional Christologies) that Jesus becomes sinful himself and is really distanced from God. Although, in Stump’s account, Christ struggles psychologically because he does not feel how close God is, because Christ bears the sins of all humans, he is still without any sin and true alienation from God. At least he is not morally responsible for the alienation. Hence, he cannot feel how it is to be responsible for the alienation from God. If he were really distanced from God because of his own deeds and broke down under the burden of the cross and lost any confidence in God, he would not be the son of the Father and the hypostatic union would break. This is inconceivable for Stump’s Thomistic account. That is why for her, as for Maximus Confessor, Jesus has no gnostic free will.¹⁵ He is not able to run away from Jerusalem in the night of his betrayal, nor is he able to give in to the temptation of Satan. Hence, there is no logically possible world in which Jesus Christ, who has a divine and a human nature, really loses his path. Thus, the solution for the drama of humankind is a human who so differs ontologically from the rest of humankind that he does not objectively suffer from the greatest danger of humankind. He cannot get lost, nor can he lose his identity, his integrity, or his relation to God. As omniscient as the Father, he can mind-read as God, and is not only sinless but impeccable.

I am not sure whether this is really a good solution. The big problem of humankind is solved by a human who simply mind-reads other humans¹⁶ who have a problem that he cannot have. Maybe we can find more convincing conceptions of atonement in the Eastern tradition.

Some Problems in Eastern Debates on Atonement

Eastern concepts of atonement are not so focused on the idea of human sin but on human development toward unification with God. The concept is based on the Greek idea of education (*paideia*). From a modern free will account, the Greek idea can be understood in a way that God or the divine Logos will try to help the human free will in a pedagogical process to grow and flourish and to gain more and more freedom through a relationship with God. The aim in this concept is human fulfillment and this is found in the imitation of God (*mimesis*) and in the participation (*methexis*) in divine life. Christ is the icon that will help humans in

their process of reconciliation and fulfillment. Hence, the aim of atonement is the dynamic-ontological participation in God.¹⁷

Here, the concept of sin becomes decisive because it is usually sin that hinders humans in their development toward God. But as the metaphysics of a universal human sin has been challenged in modern times, more and more Christian theologians in Germany are trying to rethink the Eastern model in a way that is independent from the idea of sin, especially from the idea of original sin.¹⁸ Let me focus on one interpretation of atonement in this line of thinking.

Thomas Pröpper, one of the most influential German theologians in the field of anthropology and atonement today, tries to understand salvation as the fulfillment of human freedom.¹⁹ The basis of his theology is an analysis of human free will, which can be summarized as follows:²⁰ Libertarian free will only exists if it is really the free agent who is acting. Humans are, of course, influenced by their education, environment, biological nature, and so on. But if they were determined by all of this, their free will would be a mere illusion. Thus, if actions can really be understood as free (which cannot be proven), free will must be conceived as formally unconditional. Formal unconditionality of freedom points to the fact that in the perspective of a transcendental analysis of free will, it cannot be determined by anything but itself without being eliminated. Or, to put it differently, the idea of an ultimately (unconditionally) free subject is a necessary formal condition if the idea of moral responsibility is to have an assignable meaning.

At the same time, free will has to be exercised in the material world in a concrete way, which means that it is materially conditional. Hence, free agents cannot exercise what free will seems to be in its transcendental structure. This leads to a dilemma, which is expressed in the language of Thomas Pröpper as the dilemma of the mere conditional realization of the formal or transcendental unconditionality of free will. Let me try to translate this into more existential language with the help of Albert Camus. Camus emphasizes time and again the absurdity of human existence.²¹ He sees this absurdity in the fact that human love always wants to be true and complete but will never succeed. Camus speaks of the quest for qualitative unity in human free will, and he tries to show in his novels, dramas, and essays that humans are only able to achieve moments of this unity and that longings for unconditional love are always in vain. He suggests that humans can be quite happy with this absurd structure of reality, but it is clear that from his perspective the most important

desires of the human heart cannot be fulfilled. Humankind is not only an unfinished project, but it is impossible to come to fulfillment.

Pröpper tries to show, with the help of the transcendental analysis of free will of Hermann Krings, who argues in the tradition of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, that this existential longing for the unconditional is a necessary part of the development of free will.²² But even if this cannot be proven, it is still compelling that every human is desperately searching for true and unconditional love, and philosophy has to reflect on what to do with this fact.

So, what is Pröpper's response to this existential desire, which seems to be at the very heart of human free will? Pröpper makes clear that humans can symbolically try to express unconditional love. Parents, for example, can love their children without preconditions, and, one hopes, many parents do this. They don't typically say before the birth of a child that it has to be beautiful and kind, but, rather, that they will love it no matter what. At least this should be the case as most will agree. Most parents will—again, one hopes—also not stop loving their children when they do not fulfill their expectations. Even if they do a lot of stupid and even evil things, parents will not stop loving them. That is why theologians such as Karl Barth and Wolfhart Pannenberg see in the love of parents the very best symbol or icon of divine love.²³ But still, this love is not unconditional: Parents will not always understand their children, will sometimes choose the wrong way to show their love, and will one day die. They might love without making claims and without insisting on certain conditions before or after love, but their love is not unconditional. It is a "real symbol," in the tradition of Karl Rahner, a symbol that already starts to realize what is still promised. But at the same time, this promise might be given in vain.

Only an unconditional being who is nothing other than unconditional free will can realize unconditional love completely. Hence the analysis of free will leads to the notion of God as absolute or unconditional free will. Free agents cannot know whether this God exists, but they can know that such a God who is freedom itself and who uses this unconditional free will for loving humans in an unconditional way will be the only solution for the existential problem of free will. However, this unconditional love can only reach humans in a human form. Therefore, the basic problem of humankind can only be changed by a human who embodies God's unconditional love. Only if God shows her love to me in an unconditional way through the means of a human will I know that I can be

loved, that I am really loved unconditionally here in this world, and that my symbolic representation of unconditional love makes sense. And only if God enables me to love unconditionally will I be able to trust that it is I who can respond to this unconditional love adequately—a capacity that is given to humankind by the Holy Spirit.²⁴ For Pröpper, God reveals herself as the unconditional love in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. He claims repeatedly: “Without the incarnation of Jesus and the way he was as a human being one could not conceive God as love. Without Jesus’ willingness to die, the unconditional seriousness of this love could not be seen. And without his resurrection, God would not be revealed as its true origin.”²⁵ Thus, the life of Jesus shows God’s love for us, his death makes clear that God will only use the means of love to show her love, and the resurrection proves the unconditional nature of this love.

What does this theory mean for the question of sin, which is so central to Western theories of atonement? As the love of God is conceived as unconditional here, God’s love will forgive every sin without imposing any form of condition. German theologians like to call this the categorical indicative of God’s affirmation of humankind.²⁶ According to Pröpper “[i]n Jesus Christ the sinner is able to stand against himself with God by his side because God has already gone to stand by him.”²⁷ Therefore, the power of sin is broken “because there is forgiveness for every person who only accepts it.”²⁸ Even the difficulty of the distance to God has been abolished in the relationship of Jesus to his Father. In the end, the solution for the problem of sin is very similar to the Thomistic solution presented by Eleonore Stump. The difference is simply that Pröpper claims to be able to develop his theory without any reference to sin. For him, atonement is about human fulfillment, which is desperately needed by humans because of the structure of their free will, not because of their sins.

Let me summarize Pröpper’s account of atonement with his own words: “The death and resurrection of Jesus ultimately shows what has already begun in the preaching of Jesus: God’s self-revelation as unconditional love to the people. And this revelation is our redemption provided only that one understands revelation as the occurrence of freedom, in which God’s self-determination becomes reality for the people through the respective freedom of Jesus.”²⁹ This theory has become very influential in German theology today because it fits very well with a modern theory of revelation in which it can be said that the message, the sender,

and the means of divine revelation are identical: God in her love is the sender, God's love the message, and divine love the means through which this love is revealed. This understanding of revelation makes clear that this revelation is our salvation and enables atonement. It is God's loving presence in Christ that helps us to encounter the fulfillment of our deepest desires.

Pröpper's theory of atonement has several problems, which I have discussed elsewhere³⁰ and which have been the subject of extensive studies.³¹ Let me concentrate here on the Christological nucleus of Pröpper's theory of atonement. It consists in the claim that the human free will of Jesus is identical with God's self-determination in the logos. Pröpper's former student Georg Essen worked out this idea in his habilitation thesis, and he claims that the human free will of Jesus is numerically and formally identical with the free will of the divine Logos.³² Essen is aware that a human free will cannot be materially identical with a divine free will, but he develops a Kenosis Christology, which says that the free will of the inner-trinitarian logos decides to become a human free will.³³ That is why the human free will is, from its very first moment of existence in the human life, numerically identical with the divine free will. At the same time, it has the same form as the divine will and is related to God and humans as the Logos relates to the Father and to humankind. The advantage of this theory, in comparison with Stump's Christology, is that it makes clear that Christ, as the kenotic Logos, has no omniscience in the sense of classical theism. He cannot mind-read and he has no other supernatural powers. Materially speaking, his free will is conditional as is everything human.³⁴

But there is at least one serious problem with Essen's (and Pröpper's) Christology. If the free will of Jesus shares the formal unconditionality of all human free will, he must have the power to do otherwise. Thus, Jesus must have the option to run away from Jerusalem in the night of his betrayal and to give in to the temptation of Satan. As I will explain later in greater depth, this is a consequence that I like in Pröpper's theory. However, it becomes unacceptable in the framework of its application to the Trinity. As for Pröpper and Essen, the free will of the divine Logos and the free will of Jesus are formally and numerically identical;³⁵ the inner-trinitarian Son also seems to have the option to run away or to be tempted. Although this is a very nice idea, it is obviously polytheistic, and it should be unacceptable even for social trinitarianism.³⁶ Georg Essen also does not seem to be willing to accept this consequence. Hence,

he needs something that ensures that the inner-trinitarian Son (who is formally identical with Jesus) will not run away. With Eleonore Stump, Maximus Confessor, and many others, he thinks that Christ has no gnostic free will and so is not able to sin.³⁷

I have to admit that the question of whether Christ was only sinless or whether he was sinless and impeccable is not the first one that stood out to me in Christology and it is also not the first that will be relevant in the dialogue with Muslims. But it is interesting that the theories of atonement of Stump and Pröpper both seem to imply that Jesus is impeccable and therefore has no gnostic free will. Although this position is widespread in Western and Eastern theories of atonement, it has never been defined as a dogma by the magisterium—at least in my own reading of Constantinople III. So, there is some dogmatic space here and it makes sense to see whether we can learn something from the Qur'an.

The Qur'anic Intervention of Q 5:75

It is clear that the Qur'an emphasizes the humanity of Christ. There are many verses in the Qur'an that develop critical interventions against classical Trinitarian Christology, especially in surah al ma'ida (= Q 5), but it would be another paper to deal with these criticisms.³⁸ What is less obvious is the question of how the Qur'an relates to the question of gnostic free will and of the impeccability or sinlessness of Christ. In scholastic Muslim theology, the doctrine of the *'isma* of the prophets is understood by many theologians in a way that it implies impeccability and infallibility. This also implies that Jesus, as prophet and messenger, has to be considered as impeccable. Before verifying whether this teaching is in coherence with the Qur'an, let us first of all have a closer look at the Christological teaching on this subject in the sixth and seventh centuries.

A quite popular teaching in Christology in that time was the idea of the incorruptibility of the body of Christ. This teaching was developed in the sixth century by Julian, bishop of Halicarnassus, who believed that Jesus had an uncorrupted human nature—as did Adam before the fall. In his understanding, this incorruptibility implied that Christ's human nature was not affected by the consequences of the fall—that is, it was not necessary for him to eat and drink or to suffer and die. This theory does not imply a docetist teaching,³⁹ though some adversaries tried to show that Julian was a docetist.⁴⁰ He simply wanted to say that it was not necessary for Jesus to eat and drink or to suffer and die in his human

nature because this human nature was the nature before the fall. Hence, Jesus was only eating because he wanted to eat, not because it was a necessity.

Although Julianists were quite influential on the Arab Peninsula at the time of the formation of the Qur'an—which we know from acts of visitations of monasteries⁴¹—the theology of this sect alone would not justify its mention here; it did not survive very long. However, the basic idea of Julianism, the incorruptibility of the body of Christ, became official theology in the Byzantine Empire. In his last decree, in 565, Emperor Justinian made the incorruptibility of the body of Christ the official doctrine of the Empire, which everyone had to believe.⁴² This imperial politics of religion was backed up by the theology of the most important theologian in Byzantium of that century, Leontios of Byzantium, who is well known still today as one of the most important defenders of the neo-Chalcedonian doctrine of enhypostasis. Leontios, as most theologians at that time, was convinced that the human nature of Christ was uncorrupted by original sin⁴³ and that this is why he did not need to eat and drink. We might still think that this is simply a weird idea of some sects and misled theologians. But even Maximus Confessor, the big defender of orthodox Christology at the time of the formation of the Qur'an and the last theologian who defended the human will of Jesus, believed that Jesus was only hungry because he wanted to be hungry, and he made clear that the fear and the hunger of Jesus was superior to our fear and hunger.⁴⁴ Moreover, he explicitly said that Jesus was without gnostic free will and that Jesus was impeccable.⁴⁵ In both respects, he agreed with his opponents in the debate on monotheletism. Both respects seem to belong together and to form one package in the Christology at the time of the formation of the Qur'an: Jesus did not need to eat and drink or to suffer and die, and had no problems resulting from a gnostic free will.

All of this became a question of power and politics. Justinian thought that the teaching of the incorruptibility of Christ's nature could help to reconcile the separation of the churches after Chalcedon. A main argument of miaphysite churches against Chalcedon was that it is inconceivable that a human and a divine nature can come together in one person. As the divine nature is immortal, this nature cannot be one with a human nature that is mortal, has a gnostic free will, and is needy of food and many other things. With the doctrine of the incorruptibility of Christ's body, this problem is overcome because an uncorrupted human nature is not in need of food, is not mortal, and has no gnostic free will.

How does the Qur'an react to this kind of Christology? If we are seeking a reaction of the Qur'an to the theology of the Byzantine Empire, we have to look at the very last period of the development of the Qur'an. Most scholars agree that *surāt al mā'ida* (= Q 5) is one of the very last surahs of the Qur'an, and in the perspective of traditional Islamic exegesis was revealed in the last two or three years of the life of the prophet Muhammad. Historically speaking, it makes sense that the Qur'an deals critically with the Byzantine Empire of this time. Byzantium defeated the Persian Empire after decades of struggles and wars in 628, and the Emperor Herakleios brought back what was believed to be the Holy Cross to Jerusalem in 630. Likely, there was a first battle between Muhammad's Arabs and the army of the Byzantine Empire at Mu'ta in 629,⁴⁶ and some classical Muslim commentators claim that Muhammad was afraid in 630/631 of an attack at Tabūk in the north of Syria.⁴⁷

Surāt al mā'ida seems to reflect all these struggles and we have a lot of polemical debates with Christians in it. Sometimes it is very likely that these Christians are Byzantine Christians. I believe the following passage has such an anti-Byzantine connotation:

They do blaspheme who say: "Allah is Christ the son of Mary." . . . They do blaspheme who say: "Allah is one of three in a Trinity" . . . Christ, the son of Mary, was no more than a messenger. . . . His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food. (Q 5:72f.75 in the translation of Yusuf Ali)

Let me provide a bit of historical explanation for some of the peculiar formulations of the passage. Why does the Qur'an claim that Christians say that God is Christ? It is true that some Christians like to say that Christ is God. Personally, I prefer Trinitarian speech here—that is, I prefer to say that Christ is the Son of God or the Logos of God—but many Christians would say that Christ is God. Nonetheless, I have never encountered anyone who put it the other way around. Christians might say that Christ is God, but they never say that God is Christ. So why is the Qur'an criticizing Christians for something they do not say?

Sidney Griffith argues that here the Qur'an is simply using polemical language. But a polemic that turns the word in your mouth is not very powerful. Hence, we should have a closer look at the question of whether such a Christology was defended in the sixth or seventh century. And interestingly enough we find this theology among the theologians who were promoted by Justinian. John Maxentios, the leader of the Scythian

monks in the Theopaschite controversy in the 530s, insisted on the fact that we cannot only say that Jesus Christ is God, but also that God is Jesus Christ.⁴⁸ In the tradition of Philoxenos from Marbug, he insisted even on the idea that God himself suffered on the cross.⁴⁹ Justinian tried to use the theology of those monks to reconcile miaphysite and diphysite Christologies. He introduced their title for Christ *unus e trinitate* in the Empire, and he even convinced Rome to accept the title.⁵⁰ The Arabic formulation in Q 5:73, *thālithu thalāthatin*, which is usually understood as a critique of the trinity, is a loan word from the Syriac formulation and simply the transformation of the Syriac title into Arabic.⁵¹ Hence, it is directed against Byzantine Christology. Those Christians are criticized who say, like Justinian's theologians, that God is Christ and that God is *thālithu thalāthatin*.

Q 5:75 argues that Jesus and Mary "had both to eat their (daily) food." This weird formulation is a very detailed response to the mainstream Christology of the Byzantine theologians who claimed that Jesus did not need to eat. That Mary is included here shows that, in Byzantine theology, not only was Jesus Christ the new Adam who did not suffer under the consequences of the fall, but also that Mary was the new Eve who likewise did not suffer under original sin. For Mary it is even clearer that the Qur'anic formulation can only be explained by imperial theology.⁵² For theology at the time of the formation of the Qur'an, this meant that Jesus Christ did not need to eat and drink or to suffer and die. It is the very same Christology which said that Jesus was impeccable and that he had no gnomonic free will. When the Qur'an says that Christ was no more than a messenger, this seems to imply that Jesus had a message to deliver and that he did not have any superhuman attributes or properties. Hence, the Qur'an says here that Jesus was like us. He had to eat and drink and to suffer and die. He was sinless but not impeccable, and he had the same gnomonic free will as everybody. Why is this intervention so important for the Christian teaching of atonement?

How the Qur'an Helps My Understanding of Atonement

I have defined atonement as the restoration of the union in love between God and humans and the overcoming of all obstacles that prevent this loving union. Christians believe that through Christ, and for many theologians through his suffering on the cross, a way to atonement has been opened to all humans.

I agree with Eleonore Stump and scholars such as Hans Urs von Balthasar that, in the moment of the cross, Jesus Christ really suffers from the distance of the Father and that this is the explanation for his cry of dereliction. Christ suffered not only because of his own sufferings, but also because of the sufferings of the people he knew. He was affected by their sorrows, pains, fragmentations, and alienations in his mind and in his body. He might even have felt the separation from God, which is caused by this alienation. When he hung on the cross, those human sufferings were hanging with him. But I do not agree with Stump that this theological idea can be defended by his capacity to read the minds of all humans throughout all time periods. I do not agree with her that he was literally affected by all human beings of all times.

I rather share the Christology of the school of Karl Rahner, which sees in Jesus Christ the real symbol of God's love and care for humankind. Thus, the cross reveals who God really is. Through the death and suffering of Jesus, we can learn that God is affected by all the sufferings of her beloved creatures. The cross is the real symbol of God's love for humankind. Hence, it realizes already that which still has to be completed. With Wolfhart Pannenberg, I would say that Jesus is the eschatological prophet in whom the final destination of humankind is present in a proleptic way.⁵³ It is true that God suffers with all human beings in the Logos, that she shares all our needs and problems literally in the Logos, and this is revealed and already realized in Christ. But Christ is not a superhuman figure with superhuman properties. With Pannenberg and Essen, I would say that the Divinity of Christ is simply the unique intimacy of his relationship with the Father, which is identical to the inner-trinitarian relationship of Father and Son.⁵⁴ In this theology, Divinity is not a question of substance ontology but of relational ontology.⁵⁵ The basic idea is simply that we can share Christ's relationship to the Father through the power of God's Spirit and through the love of Jesus Christ. In this relational concept, atonement becomes possible because we can participate in the love of Christ toward God, and at the same time we can participate in God's love for us, which became reality in Christ. As God shares in Jesus our human condition with all its needs, sorrows, and pains, it becomes possible for humans to identify with this love and to overcome the ways we distance ourselves from God.

The old church always taught that what has not been shared by God cannot be saved.⁵⁶ The idea here is that God shares our problems, needs, and sorrows in Christ. We are not alone with them anymore and Christ

heals them through his presence. In the logic of this theory of atonement, it is very important that Jesus Christ shares our human condition in all its ambiguity and that he also shares our libertarian free will. Only this makes it possible that my humanity, in all its ambiguity, is confronted with God's healing presence.

Our human problem is not that we are sometimes voluntarily hungry, but that we are hungry when we desperately want to eat. Our problem is not that we suffer when we want to suffer, but that there is suffering that alienates us and that destroys our identity. Our problem is not death in principle, but the early death of somebody who has so many unfulfilled hopes and dreams. Our problem is not a free will that always knows what is good and that knows how to realize the good, but the gnomonic free will, which is sometimes torn back and forth. If we seek help in this situation through the healing presence of God in Jesus Christ, we cannot accept the incorruptibility of the body of Christ. We cannot accept a theory that conceives the human nature of Christ in such a way that he does not need to eat and drink or to suffer and die. If it is true that healing needs communion and that the only danger for this communion is my refusal to surrender, we simply cannot be healed by somebody who does not know what it is like to be endangered in one's identity through temptation. Only if Christ knows how much we are sometimes torn back and forth in our free will, only if Christ really has to fight in Gethsemane and on the cross, only if Christ is in real danger of losing his identity and betraying his mission, only then can he help me in my own struggles and distress, only then can he give hope to me in my weakness, only then can he convince me to surrender myself.

If all of this is true, Q 5:75 is an extremely helpful intervention for Christian theology. It encourages us to see the corruptibility of the body of Christ. It shows us how much Christ is with us in our despair and hopelessness, in our struggles and doubts. In some sense, it defends a crucial idea of Christianity—maybe one of the most important cornerstones for any coherent theory of atonement—against Christian mainstream theology of its time.

Notes

1. I am thankful for very helpful comments from Johannes Grössl and Aaron Langenfeld on earlier versions of this essay.
2. Cf. Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

3. The third one is a model that she calls the Patristic model and that can be identified with the Eastern model, which will be our subject shortly.
4. Cf., for example, Friedrich Nietzsche, “Die fröhliche Wissenschaft,” in *Kritische Studienausgabe vol. 3: Morgenröte. Idyllen aus Messina, Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, ed. Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari, 343–651 (München: dtv, 1999), 135: “Ob mit der Sünde sonst Schaden gestiftet wird, ob ein tiefes, wachsendes Unheil mit ihr gepflanzt ist, das einen Menschen nach dem andern wie eine Krankheit fasst und würgt—das lässt diesen ehrsüchtigen Orientalen im Himmel unbekümmert: Sünde ist ein Vergehen an ihm, nicht an der Menschheit!”
5. Cf. Gisbert Greshake, “Erlösung und Freiheit. Zur Neuinterpretation der Satisfaktionstheorie Anselms von Canterbury,” in *Theologische Quartalsschrift* 153 (1973): 332–45.
6. Cf. Stump, *Atonement*, 115.
7. Stump, *Atonement*, 23. Stump’s statement refers only to the Thomistic models. But I think that it is true for all Western models.
8. Stump, *Atonement*, 210, 369.
9. Stump, *Atonement*, 27, 202.
10. Some scholars might think that the Anselmian model is stronger here. But its strength is dependent on several premises that can be challenged today, such as medieval corporate order, platonic philosophy, and the Augustinian concept of original sin. As extensive critique of these premises cf. Aaron Langenfeld, *Das Schweigen brechen. Christliche Soteriologie im Kontext islamischer Theologie* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016), 68–154.
11. Stump, *Atonement*, 397.
12. Cf. Stump, *Atonement*, 127.
13. Stump, *Atonement*, 164–65.
14. Stump, *Atonement*, 169.
15. Cf. Karl-Heinz Uthemann, *Christus, Kosmos, Diatribe: Themen der frühen Kirche als Beiträge zu einer historischen Theologie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 172: “Ein gnomischer Wille ist ein Wille, der zur Entscheidungs- und Willensfreiheit befähigt ist oder, richtiger gesagt, nicht befähigt ist, sondern mit dieser Wahlfreiheit belastet ist und nur in defizienter Weise frei sein kann.” Thus, a person without gnostic free will has no alternatives in his or her free decisions, i.e., no libertarian free will.
16. It might be that Stump wants to say that Christ is not only reading the minds of other humans but that he takes over their first-person perspective. But as I think that it is logically spoken simply impossible to take over the first-person perspective of another person I cannot follow this idea.
17. Cf. Gisbert Greshake, “Der Wandel der Erlösungsvorstellungen in der Theologiegeschichte,” in *Erlösung und Emanzipation*, ed. L. Scheffczyk, 69–101 (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1973).
18. Cf. the critique of the tradition of original sin in Thomas Pröpfer, *Theologische Anthropologie*, Vol. II (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 2011), 981–1091.
19. Cf. Pröpfer, *Theologische Anthropologie*. Cf. Thomas Pröpfer, *Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte: Eine Skizze zur Soteriologie*, 3rd ed. (München: Kösel, 1991).
20. Cf. Pröpfer, *Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte*, 182–94.

21. Cf. Albert Camus, *Le mythe de Sisyphe. Essai sur l'absurde* (Paris: Edition Gallimars, 1942); Camus, *L'étranger* (Paris: Edition Gallimars, 1957); Langenfeld, *Das Schweigen brechen*, 158–81.
22. Cf. Hermann Krings, *System und Freiheit. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Freiburg-München: Alber, 1980), 15–68, 161–84.
23. Cf. Klaus von Stosch, “Wunder Kinder. Was es bedeutet, Kinder zu haben,” in Herder Korrespondenz Spezial: *Kinder, Kinder. Ethische Konflikte am Lebensanfang* (2017): 4–6.
24. This second aspect is not so much focused in Pröpfer’s school, and it is not my focus here too because I want primarily to discuss the Christological side of theories of atonement here. But I want to mention this very important aspect at least.
25. Pröpfer, *Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte*, 197.
26. Cf. Pröpfer, *Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte*, 202. Pröpfer borrows this formulation from Gotthard Fuchs, “Glaubenserfahrung—Theologie—Religionsunterricht. Ein Versuch ihrer Zuordnung,” in *Katechetische Blätter* 103 (1978): 199.
27. Pröpfer, *Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte*, 203.
28. Pröpfer, *Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte*, 207.
29. Pröpfer, *Erlösungsglaube und Freiheitsgeschichte*, 59.
30. Cf. Klaus von Stosch, “Über Erlösung reden,” in *Religionsunterricht an höheren Schulen*, Vol. 52 (2009): 80–87.
31. Cf., for example, Langenfeld *Das Schweigen brechen*.
32. Cf. Georg Essen, *Die Freiheit Jesu. Der neuchalkedonische Enhypostasiebegriff im Horizont neuzeitlicher Subjekt- und Personphilosophie* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2001), 291.
33. Cf. Essen, *Die Freiheit Jesu*, 312.
34. Cf. Essen, *Die Freiheit Jesu*, 310f.
35. Cf. Essen, *Die Freiheit Jesu*, 295.
36. Cf. Klaus von Stosch, *Trinität* (Paderborn: UTB/Ferdinand Schöningh, 2017), 112–36.
37. For a more extensive debate of Essen’s Christology, cf. Magnus Lerch, *Selbstmitteilung Gottes: Herausforderungen einer freiheitstheoretischen Offenbarungstheologie* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2015).
38. For an extensive debate of these verses, see Mouhanad Khorchide and Klaus von Stosch, *Der andere Prophet. Jesus im Koran* (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 2018).
39. Cf. René Draguet, *Julien d’Harnicasse et sa controverse avec Sévère d’Antioche sur l’incorruptibilité du corps du Christ: Etude d’histoire littéraire et doctrinale suivie des fragments dogmatiques de Julien* (Texte syriaque et traduction grecque) (Louvain, 1924), 104.
40. In the polemical literature of late antiquity, Julianists were often supposed to claim that Jesus did not eat like us, nor did he use the bathroom. But this is a misunderstanding of his teaching. Cf. *Ibid.*
41. This is something I learned from Sidney Griffith.
42. Karl-Heinz Uthemann, “Kaiser Justinian als Kirchenpolitiker und Theologe,” *Augustinianum* 33 (1999): 79; Alois Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, Bd. 2/2: *Die Kirche von Konstantinopel im 6. Jahrhundert*, unter Mitarbeit von Theresia Hainthaler (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1989), 492. Some scholars challenge this opinion today. But at least everybody agrees that there was some activity in 565 that could be understood and was understood as Julianism. Cf., for example, the letter of the bishop Nicetius from Trier who accuses the emperor as heretic in summer 565 (Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*. Bd. 2/2, 494).

43. Cf. Uthemann, "Kaiser Justinian als Kirchenpolitiker und Theologe," 80.
44. Cf. Maximus Confessor, *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, 297D, quotation from Guido Bausenhart, "In allem uns gleich außer der Sünde," in *Studien zum Beitrag Maximus' des Bekenners zur altkirchlichen Christologie* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verl., 1992), 203: "[W]ie er auch wahrhaft hungerte und dürstete, hungerte und dürstete er doch nicht auf die Art und Weise wie wir, sondern auf eine uns überlegene Art und Weise, nämlich freiwillig; so fürchtete er sich auch, als er sich wahrhaft fürchtete, nicht wie wir, sondern auf eine uns überlegene Weise." I owe this hint to the dissertation of Cornelia Dockter.
45. Cf. Essen, *Die Freiheit Jesu*, 45f.
46. Cf. Walter E. Kaegi, *Heracilius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 233.
47. Cf. Ğ. Sobhāni, *forūge abadiyyat* (Tehran: 1993), 385–410.
48. Cf. Uthemann, "Kaiser Justinian als Kirchenpolitiker und Theologe," 20–23.
49. Cf. Dana Viezure, "Philoxenus of Mabbug and the controversies over the 'Theopaschite' Trisagion." *Studia Patristica* 47 (2010): 137–46, 139: "Philoxenus argues that the strong formulations 'God the Word died,' 'God died,' 'the Immortal died,' 'One of the Trinity died' are needed in order to maintain the uniqueness of subject in Christ and to uphold orthodoxy."
50. Cf. Uthemann, "Kaiser Justinian als Kirchenpolitiker und Theologe," 34f.
51. Cf. Sydney Griffith, "Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'an': Who Were 'Those Who Said Allāh Is the Third of Three' According to al-Mā'idā 73?" in *A Word Fiftly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an*, ed. M. M. Bar-Asher et alia (Jerusalem, 2007), 100–8.
52. There is quite a lot of evidence for the fact that the Syriac fathers conceived Mary as a new Eve who is without sin—at least after the conception of Christ. Cf., for example, Jacob of Serug, *On the Mother of God*. Translation by Mary Hanbury. Introduction by Sebastian Brock (St. Vladimir Seminary Press: Crestwood, New York, 1998), Homily I, 36. However, we only have evidence for just a few Julianists talking of an incorruptibility of Mary's body; see, for example, the anti-Julianist references in Leontius of Byzantium, *Complete Works*, ed. Brian E. Daley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 350–52; Sebastian Brock, "A letter from the orthodox monasteries of the orient sent to Alexandria, addressed to Severos," *Severos of Antioch, His life and times*, ed. John D'Alton/Youhanna Youssef (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 32–46, 39). This idea seems to have become popular in Byzantine imperial theology because of the incorruptibility of Mary's clothes, which protected the city at the siege of Constantinople in 619 (Antoine Wenger, "Les interventions de Marie dans l'église orthodoxe et l'histoire de Byzance," *De primordiis cultus Mariani*, ed. Ponteficia Academia Mariana Internationalis, Rome 1970, 423–31, 424).
53. Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, Vol. 2, 336–64.
54. Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, Vol. 2, 433; Essen, *Die Freiheit Jesu*, 290–97.
55. Cf. Klaus von Stosch, "Jesus als Gott der Sohn? Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Christologie von Karl-Heinz Menke," in *Die Wahrheit ist Person: Brennpunkte einer christologisch gewendeten Dogmatik*, ed. Julia Knop, Magnus Lerch, and Bernd J. Claret, 129–49 (Regensburg: Pustet, 2015).
56. Cf. Gregory of Nazianz, ep. 101, 32: SC 208, 50.