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Book of Mormon Atonement Doctrine Examined
in Context of Atonement Theology in the
Environment of Its Publication

David S. Wetzel

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Book of Mormon Atonement Doctrine Examined in Context of Atonement Theology in the Environment of Its Publication

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Alexander Campbell, a contemporary of Joseph Smith, was the first to publish a critique of the Book of Mormon after actually having read it. Among other allegations, he arraigned that Joseph Smith wrote the book to resolve, with a voice of prophecy, theological issues contemporary to its publication. This study undertakes to examine Campbell's charge with regard to atonement doctrine.

To assess the statement, this study first identifies the controversies about atonement doctrine in the years prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon, in the Northeastern region of the United States. It then compares the teachings inherent to those controversies to Book of Mormon atonement doctrine.

This study concludes that the doctrine in the Book of Mormon does appear to resolve some of the controversies surrounding the doctrine of the atonement in the time and place relative to its publication. However, on other important points of controversy, it does not resolve the issues. Furthermore, as it expounds atonement doctrine, it combines concepts in ways not germane to its environment. It does not fit any model of soteriology that was prevalent in the time period and place of its original publication.

Keywords: Atonement, Book of Mormon, Alexander Campbell, Soteriology, Joseph Smith.

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I dedicate this thesis to my sweet wife, Tara, who has been perfect in supporting my schooling, and to my children, Rae'lynn, Izaac, David Junior, Maria Virginia, and Jacob—thank you for your constant prayers for daddy's thesis. I hope you see someday how your father viewed pursuing an education as an important part of raising his children.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE BOOK OF MORMON, AUTHORSHIP, AND ATONEMENT

From the Biblical description, one can imagine the reaction of the children of Israel to the small, white, coriander-seed-like, honey-wafer-flavored bread that covered the ground like the hoar frost on manna morning. It was new to them. They must have eyed it, inspected it, prodded it, and finally tasted it. As they puzzled over it, they asked each other, *man-hu?* Or, *what is it?* The catchy question became the name, and the heaven-sent bread is ever after in the scriptures referred to as *manna*.

So it has been with the Book of Mormon. Ever since its appearance, humans have eyed it, investigated it, and wondered what to make of it. Is it really a book from God? Or, did Joseph Smith write it? If so, how did he do it? Is it good or bad or something in between? What is its unique position? Perhaps scholarly investigation can never answer those questions satisfactorily, but this investigation falls under the heading “further prodding the Book of Mormon.”

Ever since the Book of Mormon was published in 1830, some, unwilling to accept Joseph Smith’s account of its miraculous provenance, have propounded alternative explanations of its origins. Fawn Brodie, for example, suggested that the book, “can best be explained, not by Joseph’s ignorance nor by his delusions, but by his responsiveness to the provincial opinions of his time.”¹ She was not the first to suggest that the Book of Mormon was a product of Joseph Smith’s environment. Alexander Campbell, leader of the Campbellites, or Disciples of Christ, was the first to publish an informed explanation of the Book of Mormon—informed because he

¹ Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2d ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 69.

read the book prior to critiquing it. In 1831, he published “Delusions” in his own *Millennial Harbinger*. In his article, Campbell proposed:

This prophet Smith, through his stone spectacles, wrote on the plates of Nephi, in his book of Mormon, every error and almost every truth discussed in N. York for the last ten years. He decides all the great controversies—infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of freemasonry, republican government, and the rights of man. All these topics are repeatedly alluded to....He prophesied of all these topics, and of the apostacy, and infallibly decided, by his authority, every question.²

As Brodie would later do, Campbell made sense of the Book of Mormon by explaining it as a reflection of ideas common in Joseph Smith’s time and place. Campbell did not go on to elucidate what was controversial about each topic he identified. Nor did he explain his views on how the Book of Mormon decides those controversies. This omission leads us to ask: *What were the controversies surrounding those topics? Does the Book of Mormon decide the issues? If so, in what way does it?*

While answering those questions for each topic that Campbell proposed is beyond the scope of this inquiry, one of Campbell’s suggested topics—the atonement—relates to most of his other topics. That central topic of Christianity has occupied the minds and held the faithful gaze of Christians of every age. John Wesley explained, “Nothing in the Christian system is of greater importance than the doctrine of the atonement.”³ Similarly, Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints referred to the

² Alexander Campbell, “Delusions,” *The Millennial Harbinger* (Bethany, VA), February 7, 1831), 4.

³John Wesley, *A Compendium of Wesley’s Theology* ed. R. Burtner and R. Chiles (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1954), 279.

atonement as “the very root of Christian doctrine.”⁴ Campbell’s suggestion for a comparative study on atonement teachings would be particularly helpful in understanding differences in Christian soteriology. Jonathan Maxcy, a Baptist preacher contemporary to Joseph Smith, observed: “The sufferings of Christ for sin characterize the gospel scheme, and distinguish it from all others. The atonement made by them, adds to the Christian religion its chief superiority, and lays the only foundation of hope for all who have just views of the divine law, and the moral state of man. All the doctrines of the gospel will derive their peculiar complexion from the manner in which the doctrine of atonement is explained. A mistake here will be peculiarly injurious, and will infallibly lead into error in every part of divinity.”⁵ Another nineteenth-century Methodist preacher captured the impact of differences in this central doctrine. Referring to differences between Methodists, Calvinists, and Universalists, he said: “The substance of the entire controversy turned on the Atonement.”⁶ Beliefs regarding the atonement unavoidably shape a system’s soteriology. Narrowing this inquiry to a comparative study of Book of Mormon atonement doctrine and nineteenth century American atonement theology will at once provide focus for the study, and reveal differences in the soteriologies in question.

At Campbell’s suggestion, this study will seek to identify the controversies regarding atonement doctrine in the general time and place of the publication of Book of Mormon. Campbell claimed that the Joseph Smith sought to resolve the issues of his day through the prophetic voice in the Book of Mormon. After identifying the specific controversies, this study

⁴ Boyd K. Packer, “The Mediator” *Ensign* 7, no. 4 (May 1974): 54.

⁵ Jonathan Maxcy, *A Discourse Designed to Explain the Doctrine of Atonement* (Boston, MA: Manning & Loring, 1806), 5.

⁶ E. Brooks Hollifield, *Theology in America*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2003), 267.

will examine whether or not the Book of Mormon resolves the specific debates, and draw conclusions about the implications of the findings.

Campbell's comment also furnishes a geographical parameter for a comparative study—New York State. To Campbell, who believed Joseph wrote the book himself, it seemed natural to compare the Book of Mormon to the immediate context into which it was introduced. But, from an intellectual history standpoint, Joseph Smith's context is much bigger than New York. The state was ablaze with evangelization—frontier revivals left their mark on the people of upstate New York and had ripple effects across the nation. But they did not normally treat the complexities of atonement doctrine. Therefore study of atonement theology in the time period of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon will necessarily include more than frontier revival sermons. New York's frontier theology was informed by the religious discussions centering in New England. The theologians of this area dominated the theological discussion in Joseph's day. Contemporary periodicals and publications—especially tracts—played an important role in developing and disseminating theological discussions.⁷ Therefore, I will cite sermons, tracts, journals, and newspapers from the general northeastern United States area.

Campbell also suggested a chronological parameter—the ten years preceding the publication of the Book of Mormon. However, an examination of the ten years prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon would prove to be insufficient to develop an understanding of the discussion on atonement theology in the time period of the publication of the Book of Mormon. In an attempt to grasp the relevant conversation on atonement theology, my examination will include earlier years, going back to before the turn of the nineteenth-century. Additionally, I may include some Protestant teachings on Christ's atonement from the 1830s.

⁷ See Hollifield, *Theology in America*, 1.

A comparative study of atonement doctrine from the Book of Mormon will further our understanding of the context of the restoration. Richard L. Bushman and others have been particularly active in pioneering and promoting the study of the restoration environment.⁸ Many Latter-day Saints have taught about the atonement using the Book of Mormon as a source.⁹ Others have undertaken to show what Joseph Smith revealed on the subject in the Doctrine and Covenants and other revelations.¹⁰ But a study strictly comparing Book of Mormon atonement doctrine to what Protestants taught in New York in the nineteenth century has not been undertaken. Like other studies that investigate the historical and theological setting of the restored gospel, this study will describe the comparative position of early Mormon doctrine. Richard Bushman suggested, “the culture of that period bore directly on the success of the young church. . . . People would never be able to grasp theological ideas that were entirely foreign to them. They would need a basic preparation for the Prophet’s revelations.”¹¹

Briefly, I acknowledge my assumptions and biases. While I accept in full faith the teachings of the Doctrine and Covenants and those of Latter-day prophets, I do not assume that teachings from these sources are identical to those in the Book of Mormon. Although it has several authors, the Book of Mormon has its own distinct and coherent theological voice. I assume this to be true because it is an account of the Lord’s dealings with a particular nation in a particular place in the world at a particular time. I also assume its voice to be unique because it

⁸ See Richard Bushman, *Archive of the Restoration Culture: Summer Fellows’ Papers 1997–1999* (Provo, UT: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, 2003); see also Richard Bushman *Archive of Restoration Culture: Summer Fellows’ Papers 2000–2002*, (Provo, UT: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, 2005).

⁹ See, for example, Tad Callister, *The Infinite Atonement* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 2000); also Jeffery R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 1997).

¹⁰ See Chad Morris, *New Light on the Atonement* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort Inc., 2006).

¹¹ Richard Bushman, “The Archive of Restoration Culture, 1997–2002,” *BYU Studies* 45, no. 4 ((2006): 99.

was published before the other revelations, as a preparatory primer of fundamental doctrine, and as a means to gather Christians to the fullness of the gospel. While I believe that Book of Mormon doctrine is to be understood within the greater canon of LDS scripture—including and especially modern revelation—this study will consider solely Book of Mormon doctrinal contributions, independent of other canonical sources.

Another of my biases has already shown through in this introductory chapter—a deep regard and gratitude for pre-restoration Christians who preserved and recorded their understanding regarding the gospel. I assume at the outset that the theologians this study will cite were sincere in their faith.

Lastly, I embrace the Book of Mormon as the word of God. Yet, I acknowledge that this study on its own cannot prove or disprove the veracity of the Book of Mormon—nor can any other academic study. That is not my objective. I simply intend to examine the validity of Campbell's critique that the Book of Mormon resolves the religious controversies in his day by focusing on atonement doctrine.

CHAPTER 2: ATONEMENT THEOLOGY IN JOSEPH SMITH'S WORLD

Joseph Smith described his day as one of “unusual excitement on the subject of religion” that was “general among all the sects in that region of country.” (JS—H 1:5). He may not have realized that the excitement on religion was more pervasive than what he could observe in his own community. Elements of the Second Great Awakening were part of the larger context of what Joseph observed, and upstate New York was one of the most religiously active places in a country interested in religion. Joseph’s immediate environment would later be known as the burned-over district. In the first part of the nineteenth century, “western New York was more intensely engaged in revivalism than were other portions of the Northeast.”¹² The region fostered settlers who were, as a group, particularly responsive to revivalistic preaching. Lorenzo Dow and Charles Finney, two of America’s most enthusiastic and unconventional revival preachers, both evangelized in upstate New York with remarkable success. An overabundance of preachers made the rounds on these circuits as well. In the 1820s and 1830s, Western New York “experienced...a gradual transfer westward from New England of the center of gravity for spiritual stimuli.”¹³ While it may have been a spiritual center of gravity, it never achieved doctrinal independence from its mother New England. Historian Whitney Cross noted, “the automatic, natural development of religious sensitivity in western New York was reinforced by a more conscious and deliberate system of indoctrination from the Yankee homeland.”¹⁴ The populace was religiously sensitive, and New England churches targeted this area in their evangelization. In relation to New England’s influence, “no noticeable theological novelty arose”

¹² Whitney Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), 11.

¹³Ibid., 13.

¹⁴ Ibid., 13.

in western New York. In matters of theology, Western New York was a nursing child—it received doctrinal nourishment from New England. Therefore, a study of the theology of Joseph Smith’s context will include not only western New York, but also the New England region.

Additionally, it should be noted that the religious teachings in early nineteenth-century America were current developments in centuries-old discussions. While theology in American was influenced by New World ideals, America inherited issues from the Old World, and was never a theological island. The original Puritans were Calvinists, although not purely so. Some in the original colony of religious-freedom-seekers held Arminian views that conflicted with Calvinism. The issues being discussed in America (as those in post-Reformation Europe) were mainly soteriological in nature, rather than Christological.¹⁵ Arguments regarding Christ’s nature that overwhelmed early Christian thought were not entirely left behind, but ever since the Reformation began, deliberations regarding how to be saved were always in the forefront. Teachings regarding how a man could gain salvation inevitably touched on the most-important subject of the atonement of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament writers—from the gospel through the apostles’ epistles—testify that it was in his sufferings, death, and resurrection that Christ achieved the salvation of humankind. In the wake of the New Testament record, the Christian writers of the Patristic era saw overabundant prophecies of the sacrifice of the Lord in Old Testament figures. Christians through the ages have fixated their gaze on the atonement of Christ, trying to understand its significance. Using the entire Biblical canon as well as reasoning, they have discussed why the atonement was needed, and what purpose it serves. As Gregory Nazianzus put it in the fourth century: “It is worth our while to examine a point of doctrine which is overlooked by many but

¹⁵ They were often also ecclesiastical, as Campbell’s comment demonstrates.

seems to me deserving of examination. For whom, and with what object, was the blood shed for us, the great and famous blood of God, our high-priest and sacrifice, outpoured.”¹⁶

This query of queries continued in Joseph Smith’s day as well. William Cogswell, an influential Congregational minister in the early nineteenth century, explained Christianity’s basic doctrine this way: “The atonement, made by the Savior, is something done, on account of which, God can pardon and save sinners.”¹⁷ But, why was the shedding of blood necessary for mankind to be pardoned? Jonathan Maxcy, a Baptist minister who would later be the second President of Brown University and the first president of South Carolina University, noted, “Why God should require sufferings and the effusion of blood as a prerequisite to the remission of sin, has been a subject of much inquiry, and to many ‘a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.’”¹⁸

Nineteenth-century theologians faced no greater task than explaining what the sufferings of the Son of God had to do with God extending forgiveness to sinners. In an American context, this discussion began with the Calvinists. As others responded critically to the Calvinists, ideas and systems received further refinement. Retrospectively, the conversation may be viewed as a dialectic that reveals the relevant controversies to which Campbell referred.

The influence of Calvinism on American religious thought cannot be overstated. One historian explained: “A substantial part of the history of theology in early America was an extended debate, stretching over more than two centuries, about the meaning and the truth of Calvinism. . . . [It] attained to such a position of dominance in highly respected institutions, from denominations to colleges and seminaries, that most subsequent theological movements had to

¹⁶ Cited in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London, England: Adam & Charles Black: 1977), 383.

¹⁷ William Cogswell, *The Nature and Extent of the Atonement* (Boston, MA: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1816), 5.

¹⁸ Jonathan Maxcy, *A Discourse Designed to Explain the Doctrine of Atonement* (Boston, MA: Manning & Loring, 1806), 4.

define themselves in relation to Calvinist traditions. In a history of American theology, the Calvinists loom large.”¹⁹ Every major religious movement seems to have been a reaction to Calvinism’s looming tenets—defending them, amending them, or criticizing them.

Those in the Calvinist camp in the nineteenth century included Presbyterians, Particular Baptists, Reformed Baptists, and Congregationalists. Theology in America—including and especially atonement theology—started with the Calvinists. Their doctrine received opposition from those with Arminian leanings—including Methodists, General Baptists, and Free-will Baptists. Restorationists, such as the Disciples of Christ or Campbellites, shared similar views with Arminians on matters of soteriology. In this time period, the Universalists played a prominent part in the dialectic that began with the Calvinists. They propounded their views so vehemently that they often drew the fire of both Armenians and Calvinists. Unitarians shared many of the same views as Universalists, although they arrived at these conclusions from different starting places. Because of these attacks, Calvinism in Joseph’s day was not as uniform as it had been in days past. A strain of Calvinism referred to as the New Divinity responded to many of the challenges presented by Armenians and Universalists, and gained enough momentum that Theodore Woolsey described it as a “sort of net which catches all [Calvinists] but the Presbyterian eels, who slip through.”²⁰ The ongoing dialectic caused each party, to rethink and refine their positions in an effort to produce consistent theology.

The early nineteenth-century theological environment was very complex, and always shifting. While categorizations may fail to correctly convey the dynamics of the day, they will provide a starting place for understanding the theological milieu. Also, individual preachers did

¹⁹ E. Brooks Hollifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2003), 11.

²⁰ Quoted in Benjamin Warfield, “Edwards and the New England Theology,” in James Hastings ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 5 (New York, 1912), 227n.

not always fit neatly into one category, and that these discussions occurred within a context of religious activity. Even though articles of faith, manuals, and creeds aimed to systematize official doctrine, members of the different churches—including leading preachers—did not always conform to the dictated beliefs of their declared religion. Furthermore, lay Christians, preachers, entire congregations, and to some extent even denominations (the development of New Divinity Calvinists, for example), modified their positions and views over time. Although headings such as *Calvinist*, *Armenian*, *Universalist*, and *New Divinity Calvinist* will be used, the groups were neither homogenous nor static. In regards to religion, it was a time period in motion—a time of religious movement and change.

The Calvinist Deposition

American Protestants in Joseph's day inherited a legacy of reasoning from Christians of earlier ages. While the intellectual history of the Christian church is well beyond the scope of this inquiry, some cursory observations may indicate the place of the discussion in America relative to earlier ages. Many primitive Christians believed that the atonement was a ransom paid by God to Satan, who was the master of the souls of men because of their wicked deeds. Satan owned fallen humanity (mankind having sold themselves to him through sin), and God redeemed them from Satan through the atonement. This ransom theory of the atonement was taught by many leading Christians of the Patristic era, including Irenaeus, Origen, and Augustine. In the 11th century of the Christian era, Anselm of Canterbury challenged the ransom theory. He argued that God owed Satan nothing; Satan was not a rival God. He suggested that the atonement, rather than being a payment to Satan, was a payment made by Christ to God the Father, to satisfy a debt of honor that mankind owed to God on account of his sins, but was unable to pay. Christ's perfect obedience and sufferings were of a nature that they restored to God the honor owed to

him by man. Anselm's atonement views are often referred to as the satisfaction theory. The Reformers inherited this satisfaction view of the atonement.

The Reformers, and particularly Calvinists, altered this predominant atonement theory; they maintained the penal substitution view of atonement. In this model, God's justice was the force to be appeased—not God's honor. Rather than offending God's honor, humanity's sins violated his divine law, and divine justice required that punishment be meted out. Through his sufferings and death, Jesus Christ underwent the punishments that were justly man's to suffer. He suffered in the sinner's stead the very punishments that should have been experienced by the sinner. While this was not the only atonement view during the Reformation period, it gained dominance after Calvinism's decisive victory over Arminianism in the Synod of Dort in 1619. After that date, Calvinism—with its penal substitution theory of atonement—enjoyed the label of *orthodox*, and Calvinists snubbed other Christian camps as heretical.

The Puritans, who were chiefly Calvinists, were propelled to America on the waves of the Reformation. Calvinists were among the first to settle in America in hopes of finding religious freedom. This not only gave them the unique position that allowed them to shape American religious thought, it also meant that they inherited many of their views from the Old World. In Joseph Smith's America, as noted, Calvinism was the starting point of religious discussion.

The doctrine of God's sovereignty reigned supreme in their theology—Calvinism cannot be understood outside of their paradigm of God's sovereignty. God's sovereign will ruled supreme. For soteriology in Calvinism, sovereign grace meant that God would save every being that he elected to save—and his work is not frustrated by human wickedness or inability. One being chosen for salvation could not resist the grace of the election, nor fall from grace after being saved. Outside of this sovereign grace, humans were, by nature and because of the fall,

unable to serve God or turn to him. God chooses to save whom he will, and those not chosen are doomed to eternally suffer the punishments of God's justice according to their crimes. Such a view minimized the role of the individual in achieving salvation. Calvinists believed the atonement with which God saves his elect to be a limited atonement—effected and intended only for the elect. In their penal substitution view of the atonement, Jesus Christ cancelled the debt of punishment that the elect owed to God's divine justice by assuming their punishments personally—he was their substitute.

The scope of the atonement in Calvinism. Nineteenth-century Calvinists posited that Christ only atoned for God's elect; they did not believe that God intended to save all of his children, or that the atonement undertook to save all mankind. They believed Christ's redemptive power was sufficient to save those whom God predestined to be saved—that it was intended for only a select few, but that it would save all of those for whom it was intended. Ezra Ely Stiles, a faithful Old Calvinist of the Presbyterian camp, argued “The atonement . . . was frequently spoken of in the bible as *the righteousness of one*, which *came upon all men* that ever were justified, *unto justification of life*, and any *obedience unto death*, which had not secured unto all for whom that obedience was rendered actual *justification unto life*, would not have been any efficient, adequate, or real atonement.”²¹ Although Stiles used the term “all men,” he qualified it immediately with “that ever were justified.” He again justified the word “all” with the phrase “for whom that obedience [or, the atonement] was rendered.” He argued for a limited, or particular atonement, but in perfect Calvinistic style, affirmed that the atonement secured with certainty salvation for all whom it was intended. Phrases such as “all men” appeared with enough frequency in the vocabulary of Jesus Christ and his disciples that Calvinists had to offer some

²¹ Ezra Stiles Ely, *Retrospective Theology, or the Opinions of the World of Spirits* (Philadelphia: A. Finley, 1825) 30.

explanation of them. The explanation was simple. John Cleveland, brother of American revolutionary Robert Cleveland, and pastor of the second church at Ipswich, MA, explained, “And sometimes *all men signify all that the Father gave Christ out of the world of mankind-- all that the father chose in Christ before the foundation of the world, that they might be holy, &c. All that were predestined to the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ-- all that Christ calls his sheep* for whom he laid down his life . . . *all foreordained to be Christ's church, which he loved and gave himself for that—foreordained to be members of his body.*”²² God did not intend to save all men, but he would certainly save all of his chosen people. The doctrine of limited atonement goes hand in hand with the doctrine of limited election. In his autobiography, Elias Smith recorded the sermon of another preacher in the New York area, Elder John Waldo. Smith noted “He undertook first, to shew how God and Christ were one. 1. They were one in creating the world. 2. One in ruling the world. 3. One in the work of redemption. 4. One in election, or in choosing a few to the exclusion of all others.”²³ If God was only going to save a few of his children, it seemed logical that he would only require Christ to suffer for that subset.

While Arminians and Universalists alike abhorred the idea of a limited atonement on the grounds that God’s love and salvation should be extended to all of his children, Calvinists cherished it because it secured or guaranteed salvation to the elect. They felt that in other systems of belief that extended the effects of atonement to everyone, if they met certain conditions, no one was guaranteed salvation; and that lack of guarantee was a gross misrepresentation of God’s sovereign power. When Calvinists employed the concept of sufficiency with regard to the atonement, it was to express the idea that the atonement has

²² John Cleveland, *An Attempt to nip in the Bud the unscriptural Doctrine of Universal Salvation, and some other dangerous errors connected with it.* (Salem, MA: E. Russell, 1776), 32.

²³ Elias Smith, *The life, conversion, preaching, travels, and sufferings of Elias Smith, Vol. I.* (Portsmouth, NH: Beck and Foster), 149–50.

sufficient efficacy to save everyone in its intended scope—the elect. To believe otherwise was to disbelieve in sovereign grace. As the Bible taught that not all would be saved, this simply meant that God did not undertake to save everyone. The interplay between God’s sovereignty and the scope of the atonement was expressed by a Calvinist minister who reported on a dream he had of heaven: “Since I arrived in heaven I have learned, that to represent the atonement as having been *sufficient* for purposes for which *it was never intended* by God, is derogatory to the wisdom of our Heavenly King.”²⁴ God had all power to fulfill his purposes; he purposed to save the elect.

This was not to say that the gospel could not be preached to the entire world. The commandment to preach the gospel to all nations was evident in the Bible, but Calvinists did not accept it as evidence that God intended to save everyone. When opponents referred to that commandment as evidence for an atonement that included everyone, Calvinists pointed out that the gospel needed to be preached to everyone, because neither they nor any man could discern who were God’s elect and who were not. Therefore, they intended to carry out the Savior’s commandment to take the good news to the ends of the earth. They would preach the word and let God fulfill his will in the elect. If Arminians argued that such a system made God duplicitous or inconsistent, Calvinists explained that “that God may as sincerely offer salvation to such as he knows will never accept of it, as to such as he is determined to make willing to accept of it in the day of his power, for God may sincerely treat men as men or as reasonable creatures.”²⁵

Calvinists did not, however, feel it necessary to make provision for those who never heard the name of Christ. This exclusive view of the scope of the atonement is seen in this excerpt from Samuel Wylie’s sermon, published in the *Presbyterian Magazine*:

²⁴ Ely, *Retrospective Theology*, 31.

²⁵ Cleveland, *An attempt to nip in the Bud*, 36.

The *particularity* of the atonement is evidenced by the restriction of the means of its application to sinners. It is expressly declared, “This is life eternal, that they know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent;” which clearly implies, that not to know Jesus Christ, or, ignorance of him, is the opposite, viz. Eternal death. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of god. But how shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard?” It presents no consolation to the heathen, living and dying destitute of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. It pronounces them to be “without God, and without hope in the world.” Such is the mysterious, yet equitable constitution, established by God, who doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and also among the inhabitants of earth, and is obliged to give an account of none of his matters.²⁶

If God did not see fit that all men should hear the gospel of Christ, why should men assume that he intends to save all his children? To the Calvinist, the limited knowledge of Jesus as the Redeemer was evidence that God intends the atonement to be limited to his elect.

While Arminians criticized Calvinists for preaching a system that did not extend the hope of salvation to everyone, William Gibson, a highly-regarded Calvinist, taught that the Arminian system piled a heavy burden on individuals seeking salvation. Referring to Arminian doctrine, he lamented, “Loathe sin and leave sin and come unto Christ. Melancholy doctrine to a soul laboring under a heavy burden of sin, and short comings. . . nay—CHRIST, according to the plan of the gospel, searcheth out his sheep, wherever they are scattered, shews them their lost and undone state by nature, their need of a Savior, how suitable a Savior he is, and draws them with sweet willingness to himself, for all things. . . . But these men must be sanctified and fit for heaven, before they come to the LORD JESUS CHRIST.”²⁷ He held in disdain the system that ““always requires holiness of heart, or that love which is the fulfilling of the law. To anything short of this

²⁶ Samuel Brown Wylie, “Remarks on the Duration of Future Punishment,” *Presbyterian Magazine* (January 1821), 17–18.

²⁷ William Gibson, *A dialogue concerning the doctrine of atonement, between a Calvinist and a Hopkinsian wherein a number of the arguments on both sides of the question are endeavoured to be candidly examined, that the truth may appear intended as an answer to a late publication of Mr. L. Worcester's on that and other subjects connected with it written* (Windsor, VT: Alan Spooner, 1803), 15.

there is not a single promise of mercy in the gospel.’ Melancholy doctrine, indeed, if it were true.”²⁸ Gibson and other Calvinists felt hope in the belief that God would save his elect.

To Calvinists, scripture and reason indicated that God would save only the portion of his children that he chose to save. Their doctrine regarding the scope of the atonement was consistent with their system of beliefs. If it received criticism, at least its implications logically fit with the rest of their doctrines.

Justice and punishment—the reasons for the atonement in Calvinism. In the penal substitution view, the atonement satisfied God’s justice. Samuel Wylie, a scholar from Scotland who studied theology after his immigration to America, spoke from his Calvinist tradition when he taught in classic Calvinist adamancy, “*justice is a natural and necessary attribute of Jehovah; that this attribute is inexorable. . . . It is the very cement of the universe, without which it must instantly be converted into a moral chaos.*”²⁹ For traditional Calvinists, justice defined the need for the atonement. Justice demanded that offenders of the law be punished. A committee of Calvinist ministers contemporary to Joseph Smith concisely expressed the relationship between justice and punishment in the penal substitution view: “The atonement of Christ was necessary, in order to make it consistent with the justice of God to pardon sinners. God's justice is a disposition to punish the guilty. And his mercy is a disposition to pardon and save the guilty. . . . Hence it was absolutely necessary that Christ should make atonement, if sinners were to be saved consistently with the justice of God.”³⁰ The nineteenth-century Calvinist understood that “if God had saved sinners from threatened and deserved punishment without an atonement, he would

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

³⁰ Committee of Congregational and Presbyterian Ministers, “The Necessity of the Atonement,” *Utica Christian Magazine* 1, no. 4 (October, 1813), 223–25.

have sacrificed his justice. . . The conditions of salvation are consistent with full satisfaction to divine justice through the atonement.”³¹ Daniel Isaac explained the that a breached law of God resulted in eternal punishments: “It must be observed too, that the laws of God have infinite authority stamped upon them, and that God has laid us under infinite obligations, it will be difficult, if not impossible to prove, that sin is not an infinite evil: and if it is an infinite evil, it must merit infinite or eternal punishment.”³² God’s justice, not his honor, needed to be satisfied. Satisfaction took place as sinners suffered just punishments for their infractions.

This element of justice as a justification for the atonement was so common that even contemporary Christians without theological training recognized its centrality. Josiah Priest, a colorful figure of the time, and a self-proclaimed Reverend wrote simply, “if God cannot suspend his justice, you must admit the necessity of that very atonement.”³³ Priest’s comment has value precisely because he had no formal theological training, and yet perceived that the system of atonement in traditional thought depended on the idea of punitive justice.

Christ’s sufferings: a substitutional equivalent. One important aspect of the penal substitution theory was the idea that Christ’s punishments were equivalent to the punishments that the sinners should have received. Wylie wrote “In order to the salvation of the sinner, the covenant of grace required a substitutional equivalent.”³⁴ Having studied under Gibson, and licensed and ordained under the Reformed Presbytery, Wylie’s views were considered orthodox. In this interpretation, Christ’s sufferings were equal to the sufferings that were justly ascribed to

³¹ Committee of Congregational and Presbyterian Ministers, “The Necessity of the Atonement,” 225–26.

³² Daniel Isaac, *The Doctrine of Universal Restoration Examined* (New York, NY: J. Soule and T. Mason, 1819), 15.

³³ Josiah Priest, *The Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed* (Albany, NY: Josiah Priest, E. and E. Hosford, 1825), 135. Ironically, critics of Joseph Smith have suggested that similarities between the *Book of Mormon* and *Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed* support the idea that Joseph fabricated the *Book* from outside sources.

³⁴ Wylie, “Remarks on the Duration of Future Punishment,” 21.

mankind on account of sin. This substitution lay at the center of Calvinist atonement theology. Samuel Porter, Sr., a trained Presbyterian who pastored in Pennsylvania for over three decades, also expressed the need for Christ to be a substitute in the sinner's place, that the sinner might escape "the curse of the law; from condemnation, misery, and death." Porter taught a congregation in Pittsburg that Christ "redeemed or ransomed them by his being made a curse for them; enduring the curse in their stead and on their account."³⁵ Christ was a substitution for man, and suffered in man's place to the same degree that man would have suffered if no substitute—no Pascal Lamb or scapegoat—had stepped in between them and justice.

The idea that the Savior's sufferings were equal to the sufferings that were the sinners' due facilitated the idea that Christ cancelled a debt that sinners owed to God. Using debt and payment terminology to express the purpose of the atonement was common in classic Calvinism. The Westminster Confession of Faith, Calvinism's foundational creed, stated: "Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real and full satisfaction to His Father's justice in their behalf."³⁶ It also affirmed that through his atoning sacrifice Christ "purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for those whom the Father has given unto Him."³⁷ Although by the beginning of the nineteenth century the Westminster Confession was a century and a half Old, Calvinists still used debt language to express the need for atonement. For example, Wylie, in connection with routine explanations about the demands of justice, taught

³⁵ Samuel Porter, *A discourse relative to the atonement of Christ [microform] delivered in the First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, October 1, 1811* (Philadelphia, PA: S. Engles & Co., 1811), 5.

³⁶ Westminster Confession, Chapter XI.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter VIII.

that “by sin, we have contracted an infinite debt, and justice imperiously demands payment.”³⁸

Wylie used the concepts of punishments demanded by justice and payment demanded by justice interchangeably. This was typical of the larger group, and caused several theological problems.

The Universalist Response

The tenets of old Calvinism did not go unquestioned. The American Declaration of Independence was signed a short two and one-half centuries after William Tyndale translated the New Testament into English, and a shorter century and one-half since the King James Translation of the Bible joined the Old and New Testaments into a single English translation. The questioning influences of both the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment jumped the Atlantic Ocean to not only inspire the American Revolution, but also influence American theology. Historian Nathaniel Hatch has described the effect as “the democratization of American Christianity”—meaning that Americans felt liberty to depart from tradition and from oppressive authority—including in matters of religion. More than ever before, or in any other place, American theology had a distinct populist flavor.³⁹ With its trained ministers, systematized theology, and organized infrastructure, old Calvinism was viewed as the religion of the elite. Occupying such a position, classic Calvinism was bound to receive critical attacks in an American context. Even before the country was founded, the Calvinism that ruled the New World’s early decades felt scrutiny from unorthodox parties. Universalists were among of the most vocal critics of Calvinism.

In the decades leading up to the restoration, Universalism gained many adherents. It played a significant role in Joseph Smith’s world. In a letter dated June 5, 1818, David Millard

³⁸ Wylie, “Remarks on the Duration of Future Punishment,” 18.

³⁹ Nathaniel O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, Yale University Press, 1989.

reported that in Mendon, New York, less than fifteen miles of Joseph Smith's residence in Manchester, the doctrine of Universalism had been accepted by many:

In September last, a request was given brother Badger, to visit the south part of Mendon, and preach to the people in that neighbourhood. At that time the religion of Christ, was by many in that place, not only neglected, but ridiculed; the name of God blasphemed; while the cause of Jesus, lay wounded and bleeding. Universalism, was a predominant opinion in the place, and a neglect of Christian duties, with a corruption of morals, the fruit it bore... Much was said in the place, concerning a 'new people,' some had heard they were universalists, some called them one thing and some another. . . A large concourse assembled, at the first meeting attended by brother Badger, and a number of them returned home, wounded with the king's arrows. . . I am informed that seven universalists, in this Reformation, have been converted from that doctrine, to the truth as it is in Jesus, and have become followers of Christ.⁴⁰

This mission report fits Joseph Smith's description of dynamic religious activity in his region.

Joseph related that he exchanged ideas with Universalists: "During this month of April, I went on a visit to the residence of Mr. Joseph Knight, of Colesville, Broome county, New York, with whom and his family I had been for some time acquainted, and whose name I had previously mentioned as having been so kind and thoughtful towards us while translating the Book of Mormon. Mr. Knight and his family were Universalists, but were willing to reason with me upon my religious views, and were, as usual, friendly and hospitable."⁴¹

As the name implies, Universalists believed that God would save all of his children. They based their belief in God's universal love. The movement had many different strains, and in the time period under review experienced significant internal discord. But Universalists were unified by a shared belief that God would ultimately save all of his children—not just his elect. In many ways, it was a reaction to the Calvinist belief that God would only his elect.

⁴⁰ David Millard, "Letter to the Christian Herald," in "Religious Intelligence" section, *Herald Gazette*, 1, no. 2, June 5, 1818, 40–41.

⁴¹ Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B.H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 1:81.

Universalist objections to Calvinism. Although there was little amity between Calvinists and Universalists, some people from the Calvinist tradition found the transition to Universalism logical and natural because some of the fundamental beliefs about God were very similar. For example, if a Calvinist became convinced that God did not intend to save only a few of his children, Universalist doctrine provided a logical alternative. It not only taught that the atonement was unlimited, or universal; it retained many traditional Calvinist paradigms. In both systems of belief, God carries out his sovereign will in salvation—if God intended to save an individual—or all individuals—he would certainly do so. Moreover, Universalism allowed former Calvinists to retain their beliefs about mankind’s total depravity, and fallen humanity’s inability to perform good works if left to itself. Both systems of belief favored monergism, placing the burden of salvation upon God rather than on man. Some versions of Universalism, employed Calvinist penal substitution atonement theory to support the doctrine of universal salvation.

While nineteenth-century Calvinism and Universalism may have been similar in some respects, they were at odds with each fundamentally. The Calvinist camp churned out continuous harangue against the Universalists. Arminians, too, joined in anti-Universalist sentiment. By taking an opposing view, Universalists spurred on other ministers to clarify their own points of view, and to be zealous in evangelization. The Universalists played this important role in the theological conversation that the Book of Mormon would be born into. Historian Whitney Cross observed, “A healthy minority opinion, propagated with forthright zeal, often serves to develop strength in the majority group by furnishing a definite antithesis to be

controverted. . .the Universalists serve as this kind of foil for the evangelists.”⁴² As each camp further refined their thoughts, the difference between them became more apparent.

One of Universalism’s simplest objections to Calvinism’s view of the atonement was that it made God appear angry and vengeful, and that an atonement was needed to soften his disposition. Universalists, who cherished the notion of a loving God, spoke out against Calvinism’s model of atonement. Thomas Gross was among the Universalist preachers who contended against Calvinism. He received orthodox training at Dartmouth College, and preached Calvinist doctrines for twenty years before becoming convinced of the incorrectness of the doctrine of eternal damnation as taught by Calvinism. As with many others, a belief in God’s kindness drew him away from Calvinism. Because of persecution for his beliefs, he moved, and began publication of a newspaper, *The Gospel Advocate*. He asserted that the traditional Calvinistic explanations of the atonement “can never be understood in their literal expression without counteracting the plainest and most abundant declarations respecting the immutability of God; his love to the world as the reason why he sent his Son into the world, and his immutable purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began.”⁴³ God was a loving Father long before the atonement. Similarly, Leonard Worcester, a Congregational minister of a New Divinity mindset reasoned: “It must be evident that God was as much disposed to exercise mercy, before any atonement was made, as afterwards. Had it been otherwise, none would have been made. Had not God been disposed to exercise mercy, he would have never sent his only Begotten Son into the world, to be a propitiation for our sins. It was his disposition to show

⁴² Whitney Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), 17.

⁴³ Thomas Gross, “The Supposed Wise Man Taken in his Own Craftiness,” *Gospel Advocate* (May 2, 1823), 123.

mercy, if it could be done without bringing dishonor upon himself.”⁴⁴ Hosea Ballou, who was, along with John Murray, the nation’s most prominent Universalist preacher, detested the idea that the atonement rendered God loving. He taught that “the atonement of Christ was the *effect*, and not the *cause*, of God's love to man.”⁴⁵ He dramatized his case by comparing, as Jesus did on occasion, a good earthly father to a perfect Heavenly Father:

I ask each parent, for a moment, to imagine his child before him. That child has offended, but he, now, kneels to him for forgiveness. With streaming eyes and lifted hands, he says, Father forgive me. He weeps over his past disobedience, he promises amendment—nay, he says, take me on trial, and if I do not reform, then cast me out to die. What human parent would spurn from him a child like this? What human parent would say, I cannot forgive you; but if one of my long tried, dutiful, innocent children, will come and give his limbs to the fetters, his back to the scourge, and suffer the punishment which you deserve, then, I will forgive you and grant you my blessing.⁴⁶

God’s unbounded love precluded notions of vicarious atonement; it made a paying-off sacrifice unnecessary—he forgave freely and simply.

Firmly believing in an omni-loving God, many Universalists saw no need for a mediating sacrifice. Ballou boldly asserted that “The belief that the great Jehovah was offended with his creatures to that degree, that nothing but the death of Christ, or the endless misery of mankind, could appease his anger, is an idea that has done more injury to the Christian religion than the writings of all its opposers, for many centuries.”⁴⁷ George Ingersoll, a Universalist preacher, believed that the view of Christ’s atonement as an appeasement of God’s wrath relied “on pagan ideas of God.” He illustrated:

⁴⁴ Leonard Worcester, *Doctrine of Atonement and Others Connected with It, Stated and Vindicated* (Peacham, VT: Samuel Goss, 1802), 10.

⁴⁵ Hosea Ballou, *A Treatise on the Atonement* (Portsmouth: Oracle Press for Peirce, 1812), 99.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 93–97.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

The Pagan trembled before his god, and sought to win his favor or avert his anger. So he built his altar, and brought his sheaf, or slaughtered his victim; and as the flame ascended and the cloud of incense rolled, he felt happy in the thought that he had secured the goodwill of his deity. He went to him, as among men the feeble go to the strong, with a gift in his hands—to conciliate, to propitiate, to buy protection and kindness. He went to his God as the slave to his master, the subject to his king, and kneeled, and sung his song of praise, and offered his present, believing in his heart that his god would smile, even as the master and the king would smile.⁴⁸

Like other Universalists, Ingersoll did not deem such an appeasement to be necessary for God to exercise kindness toward his children.

Universalists reasoned that the Calvinist conceptualization of justice was in error. When traditional Calvinists interpreted Paul’s writings to mean that “a single transgression, though committed in our early and inconsiderate years, merits the eternal pains of hell,”⁴⁹ Universalists cringed. Ebenezer Bailey, a Congregationalist, believed that in the penal substitution model of atonement “the divine law is not in the least magnified by all its work, and consequently there is no merit in the death of Christ.”⁵⁰ Ballou pointed out that if sins are not transferable, and justice is not satisfied by the innocent party suffering in place of the guilty. He argued: “It is scripture, reason, and good law, never to condemn the innocent, in order to exculpate the delinquent.”⁵¹ These allegations struck at the heart of Calvinist atonement theory. If the Calvinist idea of justice was not justice at all, the entire system of belief was flawed.

In addition, Calvinists created several problems for themselves when they referred to the atonement as paying off a debt that humanity owed to God. This language allowed others to

⁴⁸ Ingersoll, George G., “A Sermon Preached before the First Congregational Society in Burlington, VA.,” *The Christian Examiner and General Review*, 31 vols., 3rd series, 13 no. 1 (September 1841), 132.

⁴⁹ William Ellery Channing, “Sermon delivered on the Ordination of the Rev. Jared Sparks,” *Universal Magazine*, 1, no. 2 (July 24, 1819): 13.

⁵⁰ Ebenezer Bailey, *The great doctrine of atonement, illustrated and represented in a scriptural point of light. In a letter to a friend*, (Walpole, NH: Thomas & Thomas, 1801), 6–7.

⁵¹ Ballou, *Treatise on the Atonement*, 71.

advance the claim that under the penal substitution model, God did not forgive at all. Unitarians and Universalists alike often advanced the criticism that God cannot at once receive payment for sins, and forgive them; the one precludes the other. Edwards referred to this problem as “one of the gordian knots” in Christian theology.⁵² This ostensible inconsistency in penal substitutionary atonement theory dissuaded some from believing the penal substitution model of the atonement. William Ellery Channing, the most prominent Unitarian in his day, held that penal substitution views of the atonement dishonored God by teaching that “God, instead of being plenteous in forgiveness, never forgives; for it is absurd to speak of men as forgiven, when their whole punishment is borne by a substitute.”⁵³ If God received payment for sins through the sufferings of Jesus, he could not simultaneously and consistently extend forgiveness to sinners. Ballou also pointed out the inconsistency: “It is contended by those who hold to this debt and the payment of it, that the salvation of the sinner is by being forgiven; yet they contend that the debt was paid. But how I can forgive a man a debt, and oblige him to pay it, is more that I can see.”⁵⁴

Similarly, others contended that if God only forgives after payment, then forgiveness is not out of grace, but rather out of obligation. This idea undercut God’s sovereignty in dispensing grace. If the debt was satisfied, God was obliged to let the sinner go free; it ceased to be a matter of God’s free grace. Maxcy pointed out, that “to represent Christ’s sufferings to be the same as those of his people, is to destroy all grace in salvation.”⁵⁵ Speaking of the atonement in terms of debt and payment perpetuated the idea that Christ’s sufferings were equal to the punishment owed by sinners, and this idea caused problems for the Calvinists.

⁵² Edwards, “The necessity of atonement,” 4.

⁵³ Channing, “Sermon delivered on the Ordination of the Rev. Jared Sparks,” 13.

⁵⁴ Ballou, *Treatise on the Atonement*, 71.

⁵⁵ Maxcy, *A Discourse Designed to Explain the Doctrine of Atonement*, 27.

Another problem arising from viewing the atonement as a payment of debt was that God gained nothing if he himself paid the debt to himself—such an act seemed redundant. Otis Skinner, revered pastor of the First Universalist Society in Boston, railed:

The system of vicarious atonement abounds with contradictions and absurdities. For instance, it represents the sinner as owing God an infinite debt, which he insists upon being paid; but the sinner is finite, and has no means of answering the demand. What shall be done? Shall the sinner be sacrificed? God cannot discharge the debt, for his law and authority have been dishonored, and he must vindicate his claims as a righteous Governor. What plan does he adopt? According to this system, he pays the demand himself!! Yes, God appeases his own wrath; and pours upon himself his own vengeance! A strange method this to vindicate his honor! How idle, how unnecessary does this make the atonement.⁵⁶

Because such allegations attacked the Calvinist idea of justice, they struck at the heart of the penal substitution model of atonement. The attacks were well-reasoned, insistent, and constant, putting Calvinists under pressure to respond.

Universalist soteriology. Universalists offered different explanations for what made the suffering of Christ necessary. John Murray, who was among the most influential Universalists in America, promulgated Rellyan Universalism in the new world. He had been converted from Methodism to Universalism in England. While he was not the originator of the system of belief, he was its greatest evangelist in America. Reasoning that Christ's sufferings cancelled a debt, Rellyans argued that everyone was thereby freed from their obligation to justice. They reasoned that if the atonement of Christ had met the demands of God's justice, God could not justly damn anyone for whom the atonement was made. As they believed that the atonement of Christ was not limited to God's elect, it naturally followed that all of God's children would be saved through the atonement of Christ, which cancelled the debt that humanity owed to God.

⁵⁶ Otis A. Skinner, *Universalism Illustrated and Defended* (Boston, MA: A. Tomkins, 1839), 116.

Rellyan Universalists based their conclusions of universal salvation on the idea that God is obliged to forgive all for whom Christ died. They agreed with Calvinists on this logic. Their difference lay in the scope of the atonement: Calvinists limited the effects of the atonement to God's elect; Universalists extended it to all mankind. Calvinists felt that their doctrine of atonement had been abused in Rellyan soteriology. A Calvinist minister, writing anonymously, explained the problem: "The nature of the atonement has been so explained, as, on the one hand, to give the Socinian⁵⁷ too much reason to charge those who believe in the necessity of an atonement, with representing God as unmerciful and implacable; and, on the other, of giving support to the unscriptural and soul-deceiving doctrine of universal salvation...the doctrine of universal salvation rests upon no other foundation than this view of the nature of the atonement."⁵⁸ The whole crux of Rellyan Universalism lay in a broadening of the scope of the atonement. One anonymous Universalist penned poetically: "Since power, and will, and love unite,/ And the whole law is satisfy'd,' What hinders that [Christ] will not gain/ A recompence for all his pain,/ And prove it true what Angels sang,/ 'Glory to God, and peace to man.'" He logically concludes, "When ADAM, and his num'rous race,/ Shall be restor'd to former grace;/ . . . When *all* shall have the meaning *all*,/ Whate'er frail mortals it shall call."⁵⁹ The poet's Rellyan inclination is seen in the idea that Christ's sacrifice satisfied the law's demands for all, resulting in the salvation for all.

⁵⁷ Socinians were anti-Trinitarians. Their belief in a single, unified God precluded the idea of God requiring an atonement in the person of his Son in order to extend forgiveness to his children. The nineteenth century descendents of the Socinian school of thought were the Unitarians.

⁵⁸ A Friend to Truth, *The Atonement, Being an Attempt to Answer the Question: Did Christ Die for All Mankind?* (New York: Whiting and Co., 1811), v-vi.

⁵⁹ Anonymous, *A poem on Universal Salvation, or A gentle stroke at Calvinism* (New York, NY: John Black, 1802), 15, 17.

Ballou had different ideas about the role of the atonement. He did not believe that God demanded that sinners or a legal substitute receive due punishment. He believed God could simply forgive. His rejection of Calvinism's tradition atonement theory required that he propose an alternate explanation of the role of the atonement. For what purpose did Christ suffer?

Ballou suggested the main purpose of the atonement was reconciling man to God. To him, it was evident that, "God was not the unreconciled, and, of course, did not require an atonement to reconcile himself to his creatures."⁶⁰ God had not departed from man, but rather man from God. Hence, the object of the atonement was to reconcile man with God—to persuade men to return to God, and to make their return possible. Gross also taught this object of the atonement: "The only idea, which I form of Atonement, *is reconciliation*. . . In the Atonement, which the Mediator has made, the parties are God and man. Between the parties there is a variance, but this variance is not mutual. Man. . . is an enemy to and at variance with God; but God is not an enemy to, nor at variance with man. . . As the Atonement did not respect the reconciliation of God to man; so neither did it respect any necessity of satisfying divine justice and rendering the salvation of man consistent with the divine perfections."⁶¹ Gross explicitly opposed Calvinism, and, like Ballou, argued that the purpose of the atonement was to reconcile man to God. Ballou, explained what he meant by reconciliation: "Reconciliation is a renewal of love, and love is the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. . . that power which causes us to hate sin, and love holiness, is the power of Christ, whereby atonement is made. . . the idea, that the manifestation of God's love to us, causes us to love him, and brings us to a renewal of love. . . is perfectly consonant to the necessity of the atonement, it shows us what atonement is, and the

⁶⁰ Ballou, *Treatise on the Atonement*, 100.

⁶¹ Gross, "The Supposed Wise Man," 113–14.

power which the Mediator must have and exercise, in order to reconcile all things to God.”⁶² The value of Ballou’s comment is that it provides an insight into how the atonement reconciles man to God, in the Universalist view. The atonement demonstrates God’s love for man and renews man’s love for God. It touches man’s deepest sympathies and awakens in man the desire to walk once more in God’s ways.

This system of thought, although newly employed by Universalists in their repudiation of Calvinist views, was not new. It was centuries-Old (Peter Abelard was one of its main proponents in the thirteenth century), and is often referred to as the moral influence theory. Those who held this view believed that being reconciled with God meant that through the atonement, man “becomes one in love, in desire and in happiness with God himself.”⁶³ The atonement effected this change by proving, through Christ’s sufferings, God’s love for man, thereby arousing man’s love for God. Man, thus moved, willingly sought reconciliation with God.

This reunion required man, not God, to change his position—his fundamental desires and characteristics. Calvinists and Arminians alike resented Universalists because they thought that their assertion that God would save everyone negated the requirement to leave behind the sinful life. Yet, most Universalists maintained that Christ’s example and sufferings proved God’s love to the world, convicted men of their sins, and brought them “to a disposition to confess and forsake their sin, and then the faithfulness and justice of God appears in its forgiveness.”⁶⁴ While non-Rellyan Universalists did not maintain that the purpose of the atonement was to appease God’s justice, in their system of belief, man still underwent a change of life, or way of being.

⁶² Ballou, *Treatise on the Atonement*, 116.

⁶³ Gross, “The Supposed Wise Man Taken in his Own Craftiness,” 113.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

They did not preach that the atonement would save men in their sins, although that is what their doctrine seemed like to Calvinists and Arminians. Ballou lamented that anti-Universalists endeavored to show the absurdity of believing that men could be received into the kingdom of glory and righteousness, in their sins; which no Universalist ever believed.”⁶⁵

Ballou’s model of atonement, while consistent with his conviction that a loving God needed no atonement in order to forgive his children, failed to explain the role of the atonement for the unrepentant. If a person, whether through rebellion against God or ignorance of Christian doctrine, died unreconciled to God, what was his fate, and what role did Christ’s atonement play in his salvation?

Earlier in his life, Ballou, along with most Universalists in his day, believed that the unrepentant would suffer for their sins in hell for a period of time. After having paid for their sins, they would go on to receive salvation. Believing that God’s punishments on the wicked prepare a soul for glory, Ballou explained, “The nature of just punishment must have a salutary tendency, and the quantity can be no more than the good designed requires.” Approaching punishment from that paradigm, Ballou concluded that “nothing can exceed in absurdity the supposition that God can design endless punishment for the good of the punished.”⁶⁶

Calvinists, of course, deemed such doctrine heretical. Daniel Isaac explained why, in a Calvinist view, the threat of eternal punishments cannot be diminished in the Christian system: “When we consider the powerful influence of sinful habits and examples, we cannot possibly suppose, that they are likely to be counteracted by the threatening, or rather the promise of punishment, which is *corrective* in its nature, *moderate* in its quantity, *limited* in its duration, and

⁶⁵ Ballou, *Treatise on the Atonement*, vii.

⁶⁶ Hosea Ballou, “Examination of the Doctrine of Endless Punishment,” *The Universal Expositor*, 1 (July, 1830):56–57.

glorious in its end.”⁶⁷ Calvinists felt that the threat of endless punishment was necessary to produce a virtuous life. Samuel Hopkins, the father of Hopkinsian Calvinism, contended that the scriptures “are opposed to the deliverance of the wicked from hell, by their being brought to repentance. . .and are not consistent with any future punishment, except an endless one.” He further argued that the doctrine of eternal punishment in the scriptures “militates directly against the notion that future punishment is salutary, and inflicted by God in mercy to the wicked, and tending to their repentance and amendment, in order to their being fitted for eternal happiness. Directly the reverse of this is the idea held up in these passages, and, indeed, throughout the whole bible: The door of mercy is shut.”⁶⁸

Arminians as well as Calvinists were against the merciful effects of the atonement reaching beyond the mortal probationary period. It was intended for people who confessed Christ and repented in this life. David Harrowar, a Methodist, delivered an anti-Universalist sermon explaining that “In the scriptures we have no express information that God is using the pains of hell, as means of conversion; nor of any repenting and preparing for future happiness, who are now in that wretched state. . .Christ does not speak of himself, as saying to any of mankind, ‘Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you’—for ye repented in hell, and confessed my name before devils and damned spirits. The evidence is therefore clear and irresistible, that there is not one of the human race restored from hell, from the creation of the world down to the general judgment.”⁶⁹ In the remainder of the sermon, Harrowar carefully explained that repentance will not work in a post-life state. He also carefully states that the pains

⁶⁷ Isaac, *The Doctrine of Universal Restoration Examined*, 33.

⁶⁸ Samuel Hopkins, *An Inquiry Concerning the Future State* (Newport, RI: Solomon Southwick, 1783), 83–84.

⁶⁹ David Harrowar, *A Sermon on the Eternity of Future Punishment, in Opposition to the Scheme of Universal Restoration* (Utica, NY: Merrill and Camp, 1815), 17.

of hell (in and of themselves) do not have a purifying effect. An anonymous author writing in *The Christian Advocate*—a periodical propagating Arminian viewpoint—similarly objected to “the notion of Universalism, or that men, although they might go to hell for a time, will finally be purified by fire and suffering, come out again, and be received into eternal glory.” His argument takes issue with the Universalist idea that suffering in and of itself can save someone who lived a sinful life:

Is suffering likely to reform and convert damned spirits? Have the devils become any better by suffering 'under chains of darkness for six thousand years?' . . . And if these have been made no better by going to hell and *suffering* so many ages, is it any way likely that *suffering* any given time, however long, will effect a Reformation and conversion in any man? Does not suffering sometimes harden men's hearts? And if it does not change their disposition and moral character, can they expect, by this means, to arrive at a state of perfect happiness? But if they could be purified and made holy by the fire of hell, would not this do away the necessity of the atonement? Would not the sufferings which such endure be considered as their savior?⁷⁰

The last allegation was a serious one. As opponents of Universalism carried Universalist teachings to their logical conclusion, they wondered if Universalism had created a new savior. At least, Universalist doctrine led to many questions. To whom did the atonement apply? If men who died in their wickedness were to be saved after death and punishment, were they saved by their sufferings or by Christ? While Universalists were certain that God would save all his children, they were less certain about the scope of the atonement—did all men achieve salvation through the power of the atonement? These unanswered questions provoked sharp criticism.

Cyrus Mann, a Congregationalist preacher, addressed the parishioners in Westminster the Sunday after a Universalist preacher had spoken. He based in arguments against Universalism in the scope of the atonement: “The punishment of the wicked must be endless, for the mediatorial office of Christ ceases at the day of judgment. From that period there will be no Mediator;

⁷⁰ Anonymous, “For the Christian Advocate,” *Christian Advocate*, 1 no. 18 (January 6, 1827): 69.

consequently no more pardon can be extended to the guilty . . . So long as Christ continues to act the part of a Mediator, those who are in a state of probation may become reconciled to God; but when he shall have delivered up that office, there will be no more possibility of obtaining salvation, than if no Saviour had ever been provided.”⁷¹ If the Savior’s atonement had no effect after this life, salvation was an offer extended to men only in this life. Universalism’s failure to clearly define their doctrine on atonement scope cost them some battles—it was an open chink in their armor.

Other divines keyed in on the weakness, reasoning that if individuals could be saved from their sins by suffering for them, humankind did not need a Savior. Cleveland contended “Now it is possible for a finite being to suffer as much as he deserves to suffer for his sins, in a limited duration of time, or it is not: If it is possible, then we did not stand in absolute need of Christ, as an infinite Person to become our surety, and to make atonement for our sins by suffering for us.”⁷² Universalists seemed to be offering salvation through a medium other than Jesus Christ. Methodist Timothy Merritt labeled it “another gospel,” because it did away with the need for Christ: “Were Universalism an error of moderate size,--did it affect the minor points only of our holy religion, charity, and humility would enjoin forbearance and Christian fellowship. But I take this modern doctrine to be another gospel; and, when considered as a system, to be totally unevangelical. It lays another foundation than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ our Redeemer and atoning High Priest, by teaching that sinners are saved (and we are all sinners) not by the merits of Christ, but by suffering in our own persons, and in this life, the whole penalty of the divine law: thus excluding the grace of God from having any proper efficiency, either in

⁷¹ Cyrus Mann, *The Future Punishment of the Wicked Certain and Endless* (Worcester, MA: William Manning, 1818), 14.

⁷² Cleveland, *An attempt to nip in the Bud*, 3.

forgiving our sins, or in renewing our souls after the image of God.”⁷³ In the view of Calvinists, the entire Christian system was at stake in this argument. If God could forgive without the atonement, then what purpose did the atonement serve? Some of Socinian heritage, held that the atonement was not necessary for man’s salvation. Jonathan Edwards also addressed the problem of “those who deny the necessity of the atonement of Christ, whether the mission, work, and death of Christ were at all necessary in order to the salvation of sinners.”⁷⁴ The Universalists did not offer a clear answer to the allegations. They didn’t make clear the role or the scope of the atonement. This was one of the biggest flaws in the theology of the nineteenth-century Universalist.

Later in his life, Ballou championed the ultra-universalism position (thereby alienating himself from many other Universalist leaders). Convinced that sin is its own punishment, or that sin naturally resulted in misery, Ballou held that at the time of death sinners had already suffered what justice required of them and were immediately received into a state of glory. Gross, a Universalist apologist contemporary to Ballou and Joseph Smith, also held ultra-Universalism sentiments. In extolling what opponents labeled “death-and-glory” theology, he intimated the scope of the atonement in ultra-Universalist thought:

Many have supposed that God will raise the dead in similar circumstances to those in which they departed this life, but the supposition is heathenish and anti-scriptural. . . . Our first state of being has been earthly, carnal, sensual, fleshly, corrupt and mortal; but our second mode of being, shall be heavenly, spiritual, intellectual, incorruptible and immortal . . . Blessed Saviour, never did the base notions of resurrection proclaimed by pretended orthodoxy, enter thy mind; nor were they known to thine apostles. On the contrary they proclaim glory, honor, and immortality to every soul of man, every son and daughter of Adam without distinction, as God’s free gift to the whole human race.⁷⁵

⁷³ Timothy Merritt, *A Discussion on Universal Salvation* (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1829), 11.

⁷⁴ Edwards, *The necessity of atonement*, 25.

⁷⁵ Gross, “The Supposed Wise Man Taken in his Own Craftiness,” 193–94.

While Gross's statement seems to imply salvation through the Savior, he does not connect salvation to the atonement of Christ. As Universalists insisted that God did not need an atonement to forgive his children, the atonement became a peripheral doctrine. The movement offered only vague explanation for the purpose of the atonement, and for this they received sharp criticism from other American Christians.

Unitarian opposition to Calvinism. The early American Unitarian movement deserves mention in light of Universalism. They were not the same movement, but their paradigms aligned to a significant degree on many doctrinal issues. Both were a reaction to Calvinism, but in different ways. Universalists reacted against the stern, angry God that Calvinists often portrayed, and they disliked Calvinism's insistence that a sovereign God would only save his elect—a few of his many children. Unitarian took issue with Calvinism on two crucial points. First, Unitarians were anti-Trinitarian; they believed that God was not three separate beings with separate personalities, but that rather God was a single entity with a united personality. While Calvinists, in general terms, pictured God as stern and Jesus as kind, Unitarians insisted that God had a united nature, not (as they viewed Calvinistic rhetoric) a contradictory one. God wasn't justice, and Christ wasn't mercy. There was only one God, who was both just and merciful. Therefore, like the Universalists, they maintained a belief in a loving, perfect Heavenly Father, and deplored the idea that a merciful Christ appeased the wrath of a vengeful God. Second, Unitarians believed that humankind possessed a great capacity for goodness, and energetically preached that it should be used. Like the Deists of their day, American Unitarians placed great emphasis on living a virtuous life.

Like the Universalists, Unitarians unitedly rejected Calvinism's traditional explanation of the atonement. Channing, the most influential Unitarian divine in the early nineteenth century,

expressed a common sentiment of opposing parties in saying that the penal substitution model of atonement “seems to carry on its front, strong marks of absurdity, and we maintain that Christianity ought not to be encumbered with it.”⁷⁶ Channing explained that in the traditional view of the atonement God’s justice was “now so severe as to exact infinite punishment for the sins of frail and feeble men, and now so easy and yielding as to accept the limited pains of Christ's human soul, as a full equivalent for the infinite and endless woes due from the world.”⁷⁷ Channing further argued that the traditional substitutionary theory of the atonement

is as destitute of justice as the common doctrine of condemnation is of mercy. This common doctrine of reconciling our heavenly Father to us, supposes that Jesus Christ effected this by suffering in our room and stead. It supposes that Jesus suffered the penalty of the law which man had violated, and that in consequence of his suffering what, in justice, we ought to suffer, we are liberated from condemnation. Now what justice do we see in this? This is condemning the innocent and clearing the guilty, which is forbidden in the divine law.⁷⁸

Also, like the Universalists, the Unitarians did not offer a clear explanation on the purpose of the atonement in salvation. But the Unitarians openly acknowledged this ambiguity. In his defining 1819 sermon “Unitarian Christianity,” William Ellery Channing, noted that while Unitarians “differ in explaining the connexion [sic.] between Christ's death and human forgiveness,” they unitedly, “reject with strong disapprobation” the idea that “Christ's death has an influence in making God, or merciful, in awakening his kindness towards men.”⁷⁹ This sermon was reprinted a number of times and copies sold numbered in the tens of thousands. It played a unifying role for the maturing Unitarian movement. But it did not define the role of the atonement for the movement. Channing said simply, “We believe, that he was sent by the Father

⁷⁶ Channing, “Sermon delivered on the Ordination of the Rev. Jared Sparks,” 13.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁹ William Ellery Channing, *Unitarian Christianity and other Essays* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1819), 13.

to effect a moral, or spiritual deliverance of mankind; that is, to rescue men from sin and its consequences, and to bring them to a state of everlasting purity and happiness.”⁸⁰ Channing explained that, rather than appeasing an angry God, Jesus had a “nobler errand, namely, to deliver us from sin itself, and to form us to a sublime and heavenly virtue.”⁸¹ Though Unitarians did not offer a systematic explanation as to the purpose of the atonement, they expressed belief that redemption came through Christ.

Reflecting on the development of Unitarianism in America, George Edward Willis of the Harvard Divinity School observed in 1857 that Unitarian preaching was “less doctrinal and more practical, in the technical sense of those words.”⁸² While this statement reflects the deep regard Unitarians had for a virtuous life, it also reflects the low priority placed on systemized doctrine. Here, we have seen, they did not set forth their own system of atonement soteriology; they did, however, unitedly oppose penal substitution atonement theory.

Arminianism in the Milieu

Arminians and Calvinists had been debating soteriology with each other since the late sixteenth century. The Synod of Dort (1619) defined the five points of Calvinism as a response to the Arminian Articles of Remonstrance (1610), which were drafted with the intent of formally opposing Calvinist doctrines. The Articles of Remonstrance affirm the role of man’s free will in achieving salvation. These articles express the Arminian beliefs that salvation is conditional on an individual’s faith; that the scope of the atonement included all humanity, but its saving effects were conditional, based on an individual’s use of free will; that grace is not irresistible; and that an individual may fall from grace through unrighteousness. Arminianism opposed Calvinist

⁸⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁸¹ Ibid., 15.

⁸² George Edward Ellis, *A Half Century of the Unitarian Controversy* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, 1857), 25.

monergism in affirming that individuals had to use their free will in cooperation with God to achieve salvation.

The atonement in Arminian soteriology. Arminians differed from Calvinists in that they believed that the atonement was for everyone. They differed from Calvinists and Universalists in their insistence that individuals were required to use their free will in cooperation with God in order to be saved by the atonement. Expressing both the universality of Christ’s atonement and the need for men to come to him, Elias Smith—of an Arminian mindset at the time—concisely explained the Arminian position: “The atonement extends as far as the kingly government of Christ; and now on that account, as a priest, he is able to save to the utmost, all who come unto God through him.”⁸³ Another Arminian-minded theologian expressed the unique position of Arminians as he wrote to his Universalist father: “It is abundantly evident that the atonement is universal, & it is as evident that some part of mankind will be *damned*, as it is that Christ has died for them. You will ask, 'how can a person be lost for whom Christ has died?' I answer, for not believing in that *Christ* who has died, and embracing that atonement which he presents.”⁸⁴

As Arminians emphasized free will, they also taught that those who misused their freedom to act could not be saved through Christ. Arminians were careful to explain that it is man’s fault, and not God’s, that some will not be saved. One Methodist minister’s explanation to a Universalist has implications toward Calvinists as well: “In all the Divine dispensations in relation to man, God has an eye to his Free Agency, and will not destroy it. Misery entered with the abuse of liberty; and the *possibility* of the abuse being continued, militates against the *certainty* of the restoration in question; for to say that a man endowed with the *liberty* to sin,

⁸³ Elias Smith, *The Whole World Governed by a Jew* (Exeter, NH: Henry Ranlet, 1805), 65.

⁸⁴ Zenas, Elias Smith, *An Affectionate Address of a Son to his Father, on the Doctrine of Universalism* (New York: Zenas, 1819), 7.

must *necessarily* be virtuous, is a contradiction in terms. I say then ... that the introduction of misery and its endless continuance, are owing to an abuse of moral liberty in man, and not to any deficiency in the wisdom, or power, or goodness of God.”⁸⁵ Calvinism held that God’s will in saving an individual could not be frustrated by that individual’s use of free will (grace was irresistible; the saints’ perseverance sure). Arminians disagreed. Each individual had a role to play in receiving the atonement.

Receiving the effects of the atonement through the proper exercise of free will. Arminians differed in their explanations of that role. Some Arminians argued that the only thing to do to be saved by Jesus Christ was to believe in his power to save them. One letter to *The Christian Baptist* argued that salvation came by faith alone:

That Jehovah, in all ages and at all times, under all dispensations, appointed but one way of redeeming guilty man, to wit, the sacrifice of his own Son. He, though pointed out in various manners, was to all, by faith, the only sovereign relief. Abel, and all the descendants of Adam down to John the Baptist, were directed to look forward to the blood of Christ which was to be shed, and the Bible gives the assurance that whoever understood this subject and cordially believed God's testimony concerning it, had their sins pardoned, and all who shall live upon the earth from the day of the resurrection until the last trumpet shall sound to call the dead to life and the living to immortality, who shall believe God's testimony concerning this fact, shall receive the remission of all their sins, peace with God, and the hope of eternal glory. This is all without the performance of any work, or without the loss of a moment of time⁸⁶

This excerpt repeatedly affirms the necessity of faith, and asserts that other works are not required to be saved through the sacrifice of God’s son.

However, many Arminians in Joseph’s day maintained that confessional faith was insufficient to receive the salvation offered through Christ. Works were also part of the equation. One article in the Methodist magazine, after having “established the doctrine of atonement for

⁸⁵ Isaac, *The Doctrine of Universal Restoration Examined*, 21.

⁸⁶ C. F., “To the Editor of the Christian Baptist,” *Christian Baptist* 7 no. 7 (February 1, 1830): 628.

sin, by the death of Christ,” then proceeded to consider “the benefits which are derived to man from that gracious procedure.” It continued “Among these are specified, justification, and its concomitants, regeneration, adoption, and the witness of the Spirit. . . Justification is shown to consist in the forgiveness of sins. . . [S]inners are justified before God by faith and works united.”⁸⁷ Some Arminians taught that the necessary works including living a virtuous life. While that order might be important for Arminians, it was equally important to them to simply note that a virtuous life and receiving grace were related—in their view, Jesus Christ doesn’t save people *in* their sins (see Alma 11:34). Timothy Merritt noted that a holy life is a condition of salvation: “That holiness (I speak of moral holiness) is required of man as the condition of his salvation, is reasonable from the consideration of the powers and faculties with which he is endued. He is an immortal, intelligent, moral, accountable creature. He is capable of knowing and loving the Author of his being. He is endued with the power of choice and liberty of will; and therefore he is capable, with the gracious succours afforded him, of performing the conditions of eternal salvation, and is justly accountable if he does not. Free agency has no place in the creed of a modern Universalist, and looks with a frowning aspect upon his whole system.”⁸⁸ Like many Arminians, Merritt argued that individuals must use their agency to live virtuous lives.

In addition to living virtuous lives, many Arminians taught that the works required to receive salvation through the atonement included the Christian sacrament of baptism. Campbell, a Restorationist, was one of many who insisted that church doctrine and practices be aligned with the scriptures insofar as possible. The maxim of the Restorationist movement, first said by

⁸⁷ Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes; or A View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals and Institutions of Christianity* (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1834), 367.

⁸⁸ Merritt, *A Discussion on Universal Salvation*, 37.

Thomas Campbell, but often repeated by Alexander, was: “Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent.” Campbell was Arminian in his soteriology. For him, the works required at man’s hands included receiving sacraments, such as baptism. He explained:

the act by which we put on Christ, the act by which we come to Christ, the act by which we confess Christ, the act by which we become disciples of Christ, the act by which we receive the pardon of our past sins, the act by which we come into the actual enjoyment of the salvation of Christ in this present life - is the act of immersion into the name of Christ: which act presupposes faith in him. . . . while I contend that salvation is of grace, proceeding from the pure, unbought, and unsolicited philanthropy of God, exhibited in the mission and gift of his Son, the only begotten, I do not suppose it to be in reason, nor according to scripture, incompatible with the idea of pure favor, that we must receive the salvation, or that we cannot be saved.⁸⁹

Arguing in favor of the necessity of baptism as laid out in the New Testament, Campbell noted the relationship between grace and works. He believed that salvation is free, but must be received by certain actions on man’s part, including obedience to the requirement of baptism that Jesus Christ taught. Campbell restricted this argument to those “who are better instructed,” or those who knew the doctrine of Christ. For Campbell, the requirement of baptism didn’t necessarily exclude those who had never heard of Christ.⁹⁰ His teaching was clear, however. Without obeying the commandment to be baptized, a person who knew better did not receive salvation. Such a person remained outside of the scope of the Savior’s salvation. On another occasion, Campbell expressed his idea that baptism was necessary after Christ’s coming (just as animal sacrifice was necessary before his coming): “Under the former economy blood was necessary to forgiveness; and under the new economy water is necessary. . .and they are the means, not ‘agents,’ through which God imparted remission. Whatever inward change might have taken place, still the person was not, in the estimation of those who acted under the commission,

⁸⁹ Alexander Campbell, “A Reply to C. F.,” *Christian Baptist* 7 no. 7 (February 1, 1830): 629.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

converted, until he was immersed.”⁹¹ For Campbell, baptism wasn’t salvific in and of itself; it brought one to Christ, and Christ saves. Other Arminians, too, keyed in to the ordinance of baptism. One preacher taught in a magazine article that the Bible clearly requires faith, repentance, baptism, forgiveness of sins, and receipt of the Holy Ghost in order to receive salvation: “Considering the scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice, and believing that they mean what they say. . . [we] do not erect any standard but the Bible, nor do we receive those who merely assent to its truth, but those only who are willing to do what it commands. . . . The Apostles arrange the gospel thus: - 1st. Faith. 2nd. Repentance. 3rd. Immersion. 4th. Remission of Sins. 5th. The Holy Spirit. And 6th. Eternal Life. But sectarians have broken up the regular arrangement; and some put the Holy Spirit first; others Immersion; many change this into sprinkling, and others throw it away altogether.”⁹² Arguing specifically for baptism by immersion, this Arminian preacher puts that ordinance in context of faith, repentance, and receipt of the Holy Ghost.

Neither did Campbell limit man’s role to baptism only. He taught that man’s role also included the fruits of a virtuous life. Still arguing for baptism, he explained: “Pardon is ascribed to the blood of Christ as the worthy cause; but it is connected with, because promised through, certain actions. . . . If neither our confession nor our prayer, nor our forgiving those who trespass against us, precludes the idea of grace, nor impairs the value of faith in obtaining remission, baptism can impair neither the one nor the other, when proclaimed for the remission of sins.”⁹³ As he argued for baptism, Campbell compared the need for this ordinance to the need to live according to Christ’s teachings. By making this comparison, he evidenced his belief that both

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Discipulus, “Letter II to Bishop J., by Discipulus” *Christian Baptist* 7 no. 5 (December 7, 1829): 607–8.

⁹³ Campbell, A Reply to C. F., 632.

baptism and a righteous life are ways that man received the atonement of Christ. In his view, works did not only include sacramental ordinances, *a la* Catholic church, but also such daily righteous acts as prayer, repentance, and forgiving others. And through these works, individuals fulfilled their obligation in receiving the effects of the atonement of Jesus Christ.

The atypical cases of little children and heathen nations. Because Arminian soteriology made the atonement available universally, upon certain conditions, it posed questions regarding the salvation of people who had never heard of Christ. Arminians in Joseph's day did not necessarily bar heathen nations from salvation. They extended Christ's merits to them. Merritt explained that "unbelief is the rejecting of Christ and the gospel; and therefore it is evident that those who never had the offer of Christ, cannot be unbelievers, seeing that they cannot reject him to whom he was never offered."⁹⁴ Men would only be held accountable for the understanding that they had: "As to those who never heard of the mediator, it will doubtless be accepted of them according to what they have, and not according to what they have not. It must be through the mediator that they are accepted on the improvement of their talent, for 'none cometh to the father but by him,' he is emphatically 'the way.' But if they abuse the light accepted *through Christ*,—this is, in some sense rejecting the mediator and they are justly punished in proportion to the light they have sinned against."⁹⁵ Men would only be judged according to the light that they had. Arminians had faith that God would make provision for those who had never heard of Christ. This faith was consistent with their views of a universal, but conditional, atonement.

In a similar vein, Alexander Campbell placed those who die in infancy in the same category as those who had never heard of the gospel, and extended salvation to them through the

⁹⁴ Merritt, *A Discussion on Universal Salvation*, 60.

⁹⁵ Observer, "Examiner Observed," *The Candid Examiner*, 2 no. 2 (July 3, 1826): 9.

atonement: “The Jews, and the Gentiles too, many of them at least, were saved without any distinct knowledge of the sacrifice of Jesus. And I have much reason to think that infants dying will be citizens of the kingdom of glory, without, in this life knowing, or believing anything of the sacrifice of Christ, of faith, or immersion.”⁹⁶ Benjamin Morgan Palmer concurred: “There is ground for cherishing the belief of the future blessedness of such of them as die in infancy; and since many of the children of the wicked die before they commit actual transaction, the thought is not presumptuous, that the atonement of the second Adam takes away the pollution entailed by the Apostacy of the first, and that all who die at this early period go to increase the population of the celestial world.”⁹⁷ The normal conditions required for salvation in the Arminian system were suspended for little children.

In short, Arminian theology in America left open the possibility of salvation in those in particular circumstances. Alexander Campbell explained, “What portion of the human family may attain to the resurrection of the just, I presume not to say. How many Antediluvians, Patriarchs, and Jews—how many of the Pagan nations, before or since the Christian era - how many infants, idiots, and deaf and dumb persons—the testimony of God says not. But the intervention of the Mediator, the ‘obedience to death’ of the Messiah. . . is declared to be the ground and reasons which will render their salvation possible.”⁹⁸ In mentioning these cases, Campbell postulated that the scope of the atonement extends beyond those who have heard the name of Christ. While those who had heard the good news of Christ had to follow the gospel to receive Christ, God would not necessarily damn those who had not had that opportunity. Careful

⁹⁶ Campbell, “A Reply to C.F.,” 629–32.

⁹⁷ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *A Sermon Delivered at the Anniversary of the Sabbath School Administration*, Charleston, SC: Sabbath School Association, 1819), 10.

⁹⁸ Campbell, “A Reply to C.F.,” 629–32.

not to speak beyond the knowledge afforded by the scriptures, Campbell did not elucidate as to how they will be saved, except that he was certain that salvation in any case, even unusual ones, will be by “the intervention of the Mediator.” By referring to these cases, Campbell argued that even they are not barred from the possibility of being saved, but that their salvation, like the salvation of all the human family, rests in Jesus Christ. This is another example of how Arminians taught that the saving effects of the atonement were available to everyone.

Governmental Atonement theory and Arminianism. In the mid-nineteenth century, John Miley, a prominent Methodist theologian in the mid-nineteenth century, refined governmental theory in Arminian thought. He suggested that the atonement model that best fit Methodist teachings in the first half of the nineteenth century was the governmental mode, although the movement did not employ it systematically. More will be said of governmental atonement theory under the *New Divinity Calvinist* heading, as they carefully refined it. The governmental view of the atonement did not originate in eighteenth- or nineteenth-century America. Hugo Grotius presented the idea in the seventeenth century.

Writing a few decades after the publication of the Book of Mormon, and commenting on the atonement views of Methodism in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, Miley explained: “No system receives completeness at once; but such is the historic as well as the consistent doctrine in Wesleyan Arminianism. This position is verified, not so much by Methodistic literature directly on the doctrine of atonement—of which there is very little—as by that on intimately related cardinal truths; most of all by the common faith of Methodism and the uniform utterance of its many pulpits.”⁹⁹ The atonement model that best fit what Arminians had been

⁹⁹ John Miley, *The Atonement in Christ* (Madison, NJ: Phillips and Hunt, 1881), 15.

teaching all along, according to Miley, was the governmental view of the atonement, even if that had not been clearly stated by the movement.

One of the possible reasons that Methodist preachers did not present a uniform schema regarding the purpose of Christ's sufferings and death was their education level. Early nineteenth-century Methodists didn't value education as much as they did evangelism and conversion. Hollifield notes that "in matters of theology, the early American Methodists traveled light."¹⁰⁰ Some Methodists even viewed an educated ministry suspiciously. Calvinist ministers, on the other hand, were generally well-educated.

Miley's observations supply the lens through which to view the Arminian teachings in Joseph Smith's day. He noted that, although prior to mid-nineteenth century there is little systematic literature that defines Methodist position in regards to the atonement, any explanation of the atonement had to be compatible with Methodism's foundational beliefs. Miley explained that the central dogmas that historically defined the Methodist way of viewing the atonement included "the universality of the atonement in a real sufficiency for all, notwithstanding many perish; the true conditionality of salvation; the common gracious ability to believe in Christ and be saved."¹⁰¹ Each of these doctrines implied an Arminian view of humanity's free will, and governmental atonement theory was amenable to the free will of humankind. While those in the Arminian camp did not refine the governmental view systematically prior to mid-nineteenth century, New Divinity Calvinists did—and it was at the heart of their schema.

The Atonement in New Divinity Calvinism.

¹⁰⁰ Hollifield, *Theology in America*, 256.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

The attacks on Calvinism caused adherents to that brand of Christianity to re-examine their system of beliefs. Responding to the charges against Calvinism, New Divinity Calvinists—also called Hopkinsians, after Samuel Hopkins—re-fashioned Calvinism. Samuel Hopkins and his school of thought drew from Jonathan Edwards Jr., refining his ideas and extending them to their logical conclusions.

For example, in 1785, Edwards, the most influential theologian in antebellum America, and a Calvinist, recognized a chief problem with using debt imagery to describe the need for the atonement: “If we be, in the literal sense, forgiven in consequence of a redemption, we are forgiven on account of the price of redemption previously paid. How then can we be truly said to be forgiven; a word which implies the exercise of grace? . . . This is, at least, a seeming inconsistency. If our forgiveness be purchased, and the price of it be already paid, it seems to be a matter of debt, and not of grace.”¹⁰² Edwards’ ideas on atonement continued to be influential in the nineteenth century. His sermons continued to be printed and circulated. Furthermore, his ideas were perpetuated by Samuel Hopkins and others who used Edwardsean theology to construct New Divinity Calvinism, also sometimes called Hopkinsiansim, which was a major force in Joseph Smith’s day.

The aim of New Divinity theology was to preserve Calvinism by refining it and making it internally consistent. Nathanael Emmons, one of the most recognized New Divinity theologians in the early nineteenth century, expressed both his conviction in the basic strength of Calvinism and the need to revise it somewhat. He expressed that Calvinists retained the title “orthodox” because, “their scheme of doctrines stands upon an immutable foundation.” But he admitted that some Calvinists clung to beliefs that were “gross absurdities, or mere wens and protuberances,

¹⁰² Jonathan Edwards, Jr., *The necessity of atonement, and the consistency between that and free grace, in forgiveness* (Portland, ME: A. Lyman & Co., 1811) 3–4.

which must be pared off from true Calvinism, in order to make it appear consistent with both reason and scripture.”¹⁰³

Governmental Theory in New Divinity Calvinism. Central to this paring, New Divinity divines re-shaped atonement theory by employing an atonement model other than penal substitution theory. New Divinity theologians adopted governmental view of the atonement. Governmental atonement theory as expressed by New Divinity Calvinists viewed God as the supreme governor of the universe. As such, he is unable to extend forgiveness to offenders without weakening his moral government (although, in this view, God is certainly capable of extending forgiveness on a personal level). Jesus’ atonement did satisfy divine justice by bearing the exact punishments, pound for pound, that should have been justly heaped upon sinners. Rather, the atonement upheld God’s government and laws by displaying God’s hatred of sins. Having thus displayed his odium for that which is evil, God is able to extend forgiveness out of grace—not out of obligation—without appearing to be indifferent to sin, or permissive. This display made it possible for God to forgive sinners consistent with his moral government, but it did not oblige God to do so. Therefore, God was able to decree the conditions of forgiveness, and when he extended forgiveness, it was out of grace, not out of obligation, as in the penal substitution model.

Jonathan Edwards, from whom the movement drew strength and validation, had taught that punishments were necessary “to maintain the authority of the divine law.” He further explained, “If that be not maintained, but the law fall into contempt, the contempt will fall equally on the legislator himself; his authority will be despised and his government weakened. And as the contempt shall increase, which may be expected to increase, in proportion to the

¹⁰³ Nathanael Emmons, *The Works of Nathanael Emmons, D.D., Late Pastor of the Church in Franklin, Mass. With a Memoir of His Life*, Vol. 1, ed. Jacob Ide, (Boston, MA: 1842), xxv.

neglect of executing the law, the divine government will approach nearer and nearer to a dissolution, till at length it will be totally annihilated.”¹⁰⁴ Like Edwards, Hopkins taught that the key power to consider was God in his role as governor: “Man might justly be left to endless destruction without any remedy, having fallen under the curse of the divine law which is righteous and good. And that he could be saved consistent with this law, and the maintenance and honour of divine government, could not be known by any creature...until [God] revealed his will and design in this matter.”¹⁰⁵ Stephen West explained, “It is essential to the goodness of a Governor, or King, to guard the rights, secure the peace, and promote the prosperity of his subjects...No one can confide in his public spirit when he suffers the disturbers of the peace to go unpunished.”¹⁰⁶ Two decades later, an anonymous apologist of the New Divinity ideology explained what, by then, had become the mantra for the movement: “The law of God must be ‘magnified and made honourable.’ But this cannot be done by the violators of it, unless they remain forever under its condemnation, suffering its penalty.”¹⁰⁷ Christ’s sufferings satisfied the demands of eternal justice, which required that sinners be punished for their crimes. This idea was much the same as traditional Calvinism.

But satisfaction to justice occurred differently in the new soteriology. New Divinity theologians explained that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ had as its purpose to manifest to the view of all “the demerit of sin, and God’s holy abhorrence of it.”¹⁰⁸ The atonement was a display of

¹⁰⁴ Edwards, *The Necessity of Atonement*, 11–12.

¹⁰⁵ Samuel Hopkins, *The system of doctrines contained in divine revelation, explained and defended shewing their consistence and connexion with each other*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Boston Lincoln & Edmunds, 1811), 359–60.

¹⁰⁶ Stephen West, *The Scripture Doctrine of Atonement, Proposed to Careful Examination*, 2nd ed. (Stockbridge, MA: Herald Office, 1809), 17.

¹⁰⁷ A Friend to Truth, *The Atonement*, 8.

¹⁰⁸ Cogswell, *The Nature and Extent of the Atonement*, 7.

the true nature of God's governmental laws, as well as his disposition to extend clemency: "though none but God could find a being, who was able to take the place of man, and by suffering, display his inflexible disposition to punish sin: yet *he* was able to provide himself a lamb without spot or blemish, whose sacrifice would satisfy divine justice . . . it was absolutely necessary that Christ should make atonement, if sinners were to be saved consistently with the justice of God."¹⁰⁹ West likewise set forth the view that "a disposition to exhibit his character in his true colours, was the cause of his requiring atonement for sin, before he could exercise pardoning mercy."¹¹⁰ In New Divinity Calvinism, the atonement was a display.

In the new system, Hopkinsians made the distinction that in order to maintain the honor of God's law, Christ suffered satisfied public justice, as opposed to some personal debt between the sinner and God. Jesus Christ "voluntarily took upon him our nature, and in our stead fully satisfied PUBLIC JUSTICE, by suffering what was, as to the purposes of God's government, fully equivalent to the penalty of the law, which we had violated."¹¹¹ William Cosgwell, pastor of the South Church in Durham, for fourteen years, also made the distinction that Christ's atonement consisted in "His satisfying public justice, making God's government honorable; so that he can consistently grant pardon and salvation to all, who repent and believe."¹¹²

A major objective of the New Divinity scheme was to jettison the idea that Christ's sufferings were equal to what sinners should have suffered. Hopkinsians clarified that it was unnecessary for Christ to "suffer the same quantity of evil as that which was due to the violators

¹⁰⁹ Committee of Congregational and Presbyterian Ministers, "The Necessity of the Atonement," 224–25.

¹¹⁰ West, *The Scripture Doctrine of Atonement*, 15.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

¹¹² William Cogswell, "The nature and extent of the Atonement: a sermon preached on Communion Sabbath, May 5, 1816" (Boston, MA: Samuel T. Armstong, 1816), 7.

of the law,” because the purpose of the atonement was to display as great an evidence “to all intelligent creatures of the evil nature and demerit of sin, of God’s abhorrence of it, and fixed determination to punish it, as could be given by the eternal punishment of all the human race.”¹¹³ Cogswell taught that “crimes are not transferable, as debts are; and, that a person cannot remove the crimes as he would cancel the debts of others.” For this reason, it was unnecessary for him “to suffer, the same quantity and kind of evil, that the finally impenitent will receive, in order to magnify and make honourable the law.”¹¹⁴ Ebenezer Bailey, reflected this same idea, “I deny the idea of justice, punishing our sins in Christ in weight and quantity as much as they deserve; and while I deny that justice sought a satisfaction that way, it was not punishment upon us or our surety that procured us a pardon, or effected our redemption. Law and justice in punishing crimes is never considered so magnified and made honorable as to procure blessings for criminals.” Bailey even went so far as to say that to “represent that our sins were imputed to Christ, and that justice punished our sins in Christ. . . is a doctrine that is agreeable to every wicked heart among the wicked race of Adam’s guilty family.”¹¹⁵ Joseph Bellamy explained, “Christ came down from heaven and died to purchase this abatement of the law of God, and procure this lawless liberty for his rebellious subjects.”¹¹⁶ A main intent of the new schema was to avoid all of the problems that debt theology posed.

While the New Divinity system eliminated the idea Jesus suffered the very quantity of sufferings owed to God by sinners, it retained the idea that the sacrifice was substitutionary:

¹¹³ A Friend to Truth, *The Atonement*, 9–10.

¹¹⁴ Cogswell, *The Nature and Extent of the Atonement*,” 6.

¹¹⁵ Ebenezer Bailey, *The great doctrine of atonement, illustrated and represented in a scriptural point of light. In a letter to a friend*, (Walpole, NH: Thomas & Thomas, 1801), 6–7.

¹¹⁶ Joseph Bellamy, *The Works of Joseph Bellamy, D.D., First Pastor of the Church in Bethlem, Conn., with a Memoir of his Life and Character*, edited by Tryon Edwards (Boston, MA: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1850), vol. 1, 291.

“Christ bare our sins, by bearing the sufferings due to us for them. Although our sins were not transferred to him, yet we are abundantly taught in the Scriptures, that his sufferings were vicarious; that he died as a substitute for sinners of Adam’s race, and for them only.”¹¹⁷ West also, while holding that it was “not necessary. . .to compare the evils which must have come upon the sinner, with those which were actually endured by Christ” believed that “the language, the expressions, of the sacred writings. . .convey the idea of Christ’s being a substitute, and dying in the room, and stead of the sinner.”¹¹⁸ Where Calvinists had considered that a substitutionary atonement signified that the sufferings were of the same quantity as what sinners owed God, New Divinity ministers claimed a and un-equivalent, yet substitutionary sacrifice.

By eliminating the debt metaphor from their explications of the atonement, New Divinity Calvinists were able to assert that God forgave out of grace, not out of obligation of a debt having been cancelled. Samuel Hopkins contended that “God was infinitely far from being under any obligations to show favour to man; it depended upon his will to determine whether man should be redeemed not and if he were redeemed it must be by the most free undeserved sovereign mercy.”¹¹⁹

Because redemption was a product of God’s grace, God could consistently decree requirements on what must be done receive saving grace. The transfer of its effects was not automatic. Responding to the Calvinist idea that all for whom the atonement is made must inevitably be saved, Hersey disparaged: “what privileged order; what a favourite legion of honor

¹¹⁷ A Friend to Truth, *The Atonement*, 11.

¹¹⁸ West, *The Scripture Doctrine of Atonement*, 14–15.

¹¹⁹ Samuel Hopkins, *The system of doctrines contained in divine revelation, explained and defended shewing their consistence and connexion with each other*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Boston Lincoln & Edmunds, 1811), 359–60.

these persons must be. The Calvinian school furnishes indulgences at a far cheaper rate than the pontiffs and Bishops of Rome”¹²⁰ He felt that New Divinity offered a better model. Worcester taught that the wrath of God “abideth on the elect as on the non-elect” until through the power of the atonement “they are in their minds.” He explained that the scriptures do not teach “that the elect are saved, but rather ‘he who believeth.’”¹²¹ The atonement did not bring “the Almighty under obligation to save those for whom he died, but hath made it consistent with the divine glory for him to pardon them, upon such terms as he pleases.”¹²² The system preserved God’s gracious sovereignty in dispensing forgiveness to whom he pleased, on conditions of his specifying, which included faith. Man did not receive the atonement automatically: “Faith in Christ is required of sinners that they may be saved. Their faith is not saving on account of its own virtue, or excellence; but simply because it receives the remedy God has provided for the salvation of sinners. Though his justice be fully satisfied by the atonement, still it is consistent and proper for him to require sinners to believe on Christ that they may be saved.”¹²³ Because the operation of the atonement had become conditional, free will took a more important role in New Divinity than in Old Calvinism, yet without adopting the Arminian position. New Divinity ministers did, however, agree with the Arminians that the scope of the atonement was all humanity, and that God set the conditions for receiving salvation through it. Leaving behind the Old doctrine of limited atonement, they had evolved from five-point to four-point Calvinists.

Classic Calvinism Continued. In spite of attacks on Calvinism in the first part on the nineteenth century, “some Old Calvinists simply ignored the philosophical problems and

¹²⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹²¹ Worcester, *Doctrine of Atonement and Others Connected with It*, 6.

¹²² Friend to Truth, *The Atonement*, 11.

¹²³ Committee of Congregational and Presbyterian Ministers, “The Necessity of the Atonement,” 228.

continued preaching the Old truths in the Old ways.”¹²⁴ Some of the modifications made by New Divinity Calvinists were viewed by Old Calvinists as a compromise with Arminianism—as a sell-out. Porter snubbed Hopkinsian ministers as “professed Calvinists” and derided their attempt to “reconcile all its doctrines, and remove all the inconsistencies, which every little jaundiced eye imagines it perceives in the divine system.”¹²⁵ He remarked that they introduced their ideas “under the protection of Arminian and Pelagian artillery.”¹²⁶ Referring to Hopkinsian doctrine, he lamented: “[I]t is becoming fashionable to degrade the character of God by holding that the divine Redeemer . . . endured the wrath and curse of God . . . as much for Judas as for Paul . . . and by teaching that it was neither vicarious, nor special . . . but that it was made to give such a display of the moral character of God, as would render it consistent with the honor of his character and government, to shew mercy to all, or any of the human race; being under no obligation from the atonement to shew mercy to any of them.”¹²⁷ By *special*, Porter meant *particular*; and by *vicarious*, he meant that Christ suffered the actual punishments that sinners would have in the absence of a Savior. In his view the new system did away with both of these aspects of the traditional atonement model.

Along with Porter, Stiles adamantly defended classic Calvinism. Keying in on a crucial—and in his mind fatal—distinction between Calvinism and Hopkinsianism, he criticized that the latter school of thought reduced the atonement to little more than an exhibition. He explained, “This display of the divine hatred of all sin, however, was merely incidental to the making of the

¹²⁴ William Breitenbach, “The Consistent Calvinism of the New Divinity Movement,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 41 no. 2 (Apr. 1984), 242.

¹²⁵ Porter, “A Discourse Relative to the Atonement,” 19–20.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

atonement, and not the chief object of the atonement.” Referring to God’s displeasure with all sin, as “clearly taught in the divine word,” Ely queried, “does the written display of God’s glory, in loving mercy, while he loves his law and hates sin, make an atonement? The eternal damnation of the rebel angels is a display of the same truths; but does the exhibition of the smoke of torment, ascending for ever, prepare the way for any sinner’s justification?” For Old Calvinists, a display of God’s displeasure with sin did not warrant the sufferings and death of Christ.¹²⁸ He fumed that, according to the New Divinity schema, “the atonement is simply an exhibition of justice and mercy in the person of Jesus Christ, in consequence of which, God can pardon any number of sinners, but is bound by no obligation of justice to save anyone for whom Christ died.”¹²⁹ Accurately capturing the main thrusts of the New Divinity model of atonement, Ely disputed both the universal scope of the atonement and the purpose of the atonement as expressed by Hopkinsians. He also criticized that the new Calvinism was nothing more than Old Arminianism: “Noah Webster, Esq. in his dictionary, defines an Arminian to be “one who denies predestination, and holds to freewill, and universal redemption.” In its proper place he might have introduced the name Hopkinsian before the same definition.”¹³⁰

In response to the ongoing theological debate regarding the truth and meaning of Calvinism, Porter maintained, “The character of God affords every reason to believe, that the gospel system is consistent in all its parts; but the ground on which we stand is too low to enable

¹²⁸ Ezra Ezra Stiles Ely, *A Contrast Between Calvinism and Hopkinsianism* (New York, NY: S. Whiting and Co. 1811), 104.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

us to trace that consistency in every point of view, with unerring precision.”¹³¹ If there were perceived inconsistencies in Calvinism, he was still persuaded of its validity.

Summary

The time period in which the Book of Mormon came into being was not just a flourishing era of revivalism, but also of theology. It was the heyday of American theology in the technical sense of the word—“the coherent, systematic study of God and divine things.” The theologians of the day were busily engaged in the task of providing “an orderly, organized, coherent understanding of God—his nature, his works in creation and redemption, and his will.”¹³² The conversations between the different groups of thought in Northeastern America in the early nineteenth century were part of larger conversations that spanned centuries and continents. The discussion centered on Calvinism. Hollifield characterizes American theology as “an extended debate...about the meaning and the truth of Calvinism.”¹³³

The dialectic about the purpose and scope of the atonement caused the different camps to refine their views, while at the same time scrutinizing the views of their opponents. The scrutiny revealed the weakness of each unique system of belief. No theological system of the time was so consistent—or so complete, or refined—that it silenced the well-reasoned, sophisticated criticism of its adversaries.

As Alexander Campbell observed, there were questions regarding the atonement to be settled. Campbell believed that Joseph Smith, through the Book of Mormon, “infallibly decided,

¹³¹ Porter, “A Discourse Relative to the Atonement,” 21.

¹³² Clarence Bouma, “Calvinism in American Theology Today,” *The Journal of Religion*, 27, no. 1 (January 1947):45.

¹³³ Hollifield, *Theology in America*, 15.

by his authority” contemporary soteriological questions.¹³⁴ Regarding the atonement, the questions were: Is an atonement necessary? Is it intended to soften God’s attitude toward humankind, or humankind’s position toward God? Is the atonement a pound-for-pound sacrifice, or a satisfactory demonstration of God’s displeasure toward sin? For whom was the atonement wrought? Do individuals for whom the atonement was wrought receive its effects automatically? If not, what are the conditions upon which individuals lay hold on its saving effects? Our question is, does the Book of Mormon resolve those questions?

¹³⁴ Alexander Campbell, “Delusions,” *The Millennial Harbinger* (Bethany, VA), February 7, 1831), 4.

CHAPTER THREE: ANCIENT ANNALS ARBITRATE

From the outset, we may assume that a book that has as its purpose to convince “the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting himself unto all nations” will have soteriological implications (Book of Mormon, title page). As it testifies of the Savior, the book teaches constantly about the atonement. Campbell expressed that he was persuaded that the content was germane to nineteenth-century dialogues. But he also claimed that the Book of Mormon “decides...the controversies” regarding the atonement? This chapter will focus on the atonement doctrine in the Book of Mormon that relates to the controversies outlined in the previous chapter. However, it should also be noted that its teachings on the atonement go beyond the discussion in question.

Is an Atonement Necessary for Salvation?

The Universalists and Unitarians churned out a continuous harangue against the traditional penal substitution view of the atonement. Unitarians and non-Rellyan Universalists claimed that God could forgive without any propitiating sacrifice. The controversy they incited was whether an atonement was necessary for God to forgive and save humankind. Arminians, Old Calvinists and New Divinity ministers alike deemed the system to be unchristian.

The Book of Mormon decides this controversy against the Universalists and Unitarians. From beginning to end it tirelessly affirms that forgiveness and salvation come through Christ, and through Christ alone. The Book of Mormon rules out the possibility of being saved in any way independent of Christ. The prophets throughout the Book of Mormon successively advance the claim that salvation comes only through Christ, and through Christ alone. Nephi testified towards the end of his writings, “as the Lord God liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved” (2 Nephi

2:25). Jacob affirms “if there should be no atonement made all mankind must be lost” (Jacob 7:12). An angel declared to Benjamin: “I say unto you, that there shall be no other name given, nor no other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:17). Abinadi likewise testified: “Were it not for the atonement which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish . . . there could not any man be saved, except it were through the redemption of God” (Mosiah 13:32). Alma the elder also taught that “the redemption of the people . . . was to be brought to pass through the power, and sufferings, and death of Christ, and his resurrection and ascension into heaven” (Mosiah 18:2). The missionary Aaron added his uncompromising witness that “there could be no redemption for mankind, save it were through the death and sufferings of Christ, and the atonement of his blood” (Alma 21:9). Amulek, another missionary, echoed, “for it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God, there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish” (Alma 34:9). Alma the younger taught his son “there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ” (Alma 38:9). Following that same pattern, Helaman reminded his sons that “there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, which shall come” (Helaman 5:9). Each of the above citations explicitly states that salvation can only come through Christ. On this point, above all others, the Book of Mormon is abundantly clear, and excludes the Universalist concept that salvation can come as a result of punishment. These teachings also militate against the idea that because God is loving, He can simply forgive sinners, independent of an atonement.

Is the Atonement Intended to Soften God’s Attitude Toward Humankind, or Humankind’s Disposition Toward God?

The different religious parties offered various explanations regarding the purpose of the atonement. The Book of Mormon, like the Bible, offers scriptures that support aspects of each of the positions. However, it plainly confronts some nineteenth-century atonement teachings, labeling them heretical. On other points, it neither affirms nor rejects the teachings, refusing to acknowledge that a controversy even exists.

Reconciliatory view of atonement. The Unitarians did not uniformly propound an explanation as to why an atonement was necessary. Non-Rellyan Universalists often remarked that the purpose of the atonement was to reconcile man to God, not God to man. The expression of love in Christ’s sufferings persuaded man to give up sin and follow righteousness and be saved. The Book of Mormon speaks of being reconciled to God through the atonement. Jacob invites the Nephites, “be reconciled unto him through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son, and ye may obtain a resurrection. . . .And now, beloved, marvel not that I tell you these things; for why not speak of the atonement of Christ, and attain to a perfect knowledge of him” (Jacob 4:11–12). Reconciliation requires one to unite his or her will with God’s—to become “submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the father seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father (Mosiah 3:19). The Book of Mormon views this reconciliation as a necessary step in receiving saving grace. Nephi writes to a future audience that no one can be saved, “except they shall be reconciled unto Christ, and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path which leads to life, and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation” (2 Nephi 33:9).

However, the Book of Mormon does not view reconciliation of man to God as the sole purpose of the atonement, to the exclusion of all other purposes. Jacob suggests that the

atonement performs redemptive functions after one is reconciled to God: “My beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh; and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved. Wherefore, may God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God, that ye may praise him through grace divine” (2 Nephi 10:24–25). Likewise, after speaking of reconciliation, Nephi teaches that the remission of sins comes through the atonement: “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved. . . .And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins (2 Nephi 25:23, 26). Though the Book of Mormon speaks of man’s duty to be reconciled to God, and indicates that this is accomplished through the atonement, it views this as only one function of Christ’s sacrifice. Contrary to what Universalists believed, it holds that the atonement plays a role for an individual seeking forgiveness from God. Specifically, Universalists railed against the penal substitution view of atonement of Old Calvinism. If this view is present in the Book of Mormon, this would be another point of contention between Book of Mormon atonement doctrine and nineteenth-century Universalist teachings.

Eternal law dictates that sinners be punished. As New Divinity theology was Old Calvinism modified, atonement theories from these theologies had much in common with each other. In penal substitution theory as well as in governmental theory, law, justice, and

punishments feature prominently. Likewise, these cosmic elements loom large in Book of Mormon atonement doctrine.

The Book of Mormon maintains that eternal law requires that those who break divine law suffer punishments. Lehi, the first prophet in the Book of Mormon storyline, is among the prophets who teach this view of eternal law. Before his death, Lehi taught his family that “by the law, men are cut off” because of their disobedience (2 Nephi 2:5). Lehi did not teach that keeping all the law is an impossibility for humans, but rather implies that breaking the law is an inevitability. Arguing for the need for opposites, Lehi noted that sin, law, and punishment are interconnected—that they don’t exist without one another: “And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness.—And if there be no righteousness, there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness, there be no punishment nor misery” (2 Nephi 2:13). In Lehi’s ontology the existence of a law—as well as the existence of happiness—requires that punishment be meted out as a result of sin. Lehi also taught that “the ends of the law,” or the requirements of the law, include “the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed” (2 Nephi 2:10). Punishments must follow disobedience to divine law. Lehi taught that the atonement satisfies the requirements of the law: “Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah: for he is full of grace and truth. Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Nephi 2:7). As Lehi deemed the “ends of the law” to be required punishments, his intent seems to be that Christ’s suffering satisfies the requirements of the law.

Alma also teaches that justice requires offenders to be punished for their sins. Corianton, his son, committed sin of a serious nature, and in the aftermath believed “that it is injustice that

the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery” (Alma 42:1). Like Universalists in Joseph’s day, Corianton questioned the doctrine that sinners must be punished for their sins. In correcting his son, Alma taught that “because of his own disobedience,” mankind had brought upon itself a state of misery (Alma 42:12). Justice requires unrepentant sinners remain in that state, because “the work of justice could not be destroyed: if so, God would cease to be God” (Alma 43:13). Alma refuses to allow Corianton to discount or diminish the work of justice with its requirement that individuals suffer adverse consequences for their sins. This stance is typical of the prophets in the Book of Mormon. Like Lehi, Alma sees that laws inextricably have punishments attached to them: “Now repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment, which also was as eternal as the life of the soul should be, affixed opposite to the plan of happiness, which was as eternal also as the life of the soul . . . How could there be a law, save there was a punishment? Now there was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto man . . . the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God” (Alma 42:22). In God’s plan of salvation presented in the Book of Mormon, the work of justice must be preserved. The teachings of both Lehi and Alma disagree with Hosea Ballou’s opinion that law can exist without associated punishments. However, in the governmental view of the atonement and in penal substitution theory, punishments at the hand of the law figure prominently.

Substitutionary nature of the atonement. Old Calvinism and New Divinity models also agreed with each other that Christ suffered in the sinner’s stead. The Book of Mormon also sets forth a substitutionary atoning sacrifice. Alma taught that “God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice” (Alma 42:15). In a different sermon given to the church at Gideon to build their faith in Christ, Alma is more

definite on the substitutionary nature of the atonement: “Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh, that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions, according to the power of his deliverance” (Alma 7:13). The substitutionary nature of the atonement is shown in the phrase “take upon him the sins of his people.” Abinadi uses similar language in his testimony of Christ to King Noah and his court: “[Christ] stand[s] betwixt them and justice; having. . . taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgression; having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice” (Mosiah 15:9). Abinadi also lifts a phrase from Isaiah that indicates the substitutionary aspect of the atonement: “All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all” (Mosiah 14:6). Christ’s sufferings were on behalf of his people—he was their substitute.

William Ellery Channing criticized Calvinism’s substitutionary aspect of atonement. He argued that substitutionary atonement theory “is as destitute of justice as the common doctrine of condemnation is of mercy. This common doctrine of reconciling our heavenly Father to us, supposes that Jesus Christ effected this by suffering in our room and stead. It supposes that Jesus suffered the penalty of the law which man had violated, and that in consequence of his suffering what, in justice, we ought to suffer, we are liberated from condemnation. Now what justice do we see in this? This is condemning the innocent and clearing the guilty, which is forbidden in the divine law.”¹³⁵ For Channing, it makes no sense to use the word “justice” as the hinge pin for the theory of penal substitution: justice would require that the offender suffer for his own sins. The Book of Mormon speaks on this subject. As if he were aware of this quandary, Amulek, the junior missionary companion to Alma, explained to the Ammonihahites, “Now there is not any

¹³⁵ William Ellery Channing, “Sermon delivered on the Ordination of the Rev. Jared Sparks,” *Universal Magazine*, 1, no. 2 (July 24, 1819): 13.

man that can sacrifice his own blood, which will atone for the sins of another. Now if a man murdereth, behold, will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother? I say unto you Nay. But the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered; therefore there can be nothing, which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world” (Alma 34:12). Amulek acknowledged that earthly justice (Channing called this “common justice”) cannot tolerate the transfer of punishment from the guilty party to another party. He argued that for the transfer of our punishments to Christ to be valid, Christ’s sacrifice had to be infinite. Because His atoning sacrifice was infinite, Christ is able to bear punishments in the place of guilty individuals. The infinite nature of the atonement makes possible the substitution.

Although Amulek is arguing for an infinite atonement, his reasoning implies that the substitutional nature of the atonement was understood commonly among the Nephites. He bases his argument for an infinite atonement on the grounds that Christ suffered the punishments of the law in place of sinners. By basing his argument on the premise that the Christ suffered in the place of the guilty, he implies that even his audience of apostate Nephites was familiar with this aspect of the atonement. The substitutionary view of the atonement is perhaps most clearly seen in this teaching by Amulek than by any other Book of Mormon preacher.

Satisfactory sacrifice. A subtle divergence occurred in the way that new divinity ministers and traditional Calvinist ministers spoke of the purpose of the atonement. The former, as a matter of course, maintained that through the atonement God maintained the integrity of his government. The latter were more inclined to teach that Christ’s sufferings preserved God’s justice, while allowing him to extend mercy. This distinction is subtle because government and justice are related concepts, but the consistency with which each party employed the respective terminology makes it a real distinction worthy of investigation.

The Book of Mormon speaks of the atonement as satisfying God's justice. Amulek taught that the intent of the sacrifice of Christ is "to bring about the bowels of mercy" which "can satisfy the demands of justice" (Alma 34:15–16). Jacob used the same language. Speaking of those who never hear the gospel in this life, he taught: "For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them" (2 Nephi 9:26). Abinadi also taught that through the atonement Christ "satisfied the demands of justice" (Mosiah 15:9). Alma, in a statement packed with penal substitution dogma, taught his son that "the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also" (Alma 42:15). By speaking in terms of satisfying the demands of justice, the Book of Mormon leans toward the penal substitution side of Calvinism. Its doctrine sounds like the Westminster Confession's doctrine that through the atonement, Christ made "a proper, real and full satisfaction to His Father's justice."¹³⁶

Is the Atonement an Equivalent Substitution or Satisfactory Display?

Perhaps the most prominent distinction between Old Calvinism and New Divinity soteriology was that the new system denied a pound-for-pound, lash-for-lash substitution, and held forth, instead, a sacrifice that displayed to God's entire kingdom the awfulness of sin. On this question, as well, the Book of Mormon, if pressed, comes up on the Old Calvinist side of the equation. When the resurrected Jesus instructed the congregation assembled at the Bountiful temple a version of the Lord's prayer, he taught that they are to petition God, "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (3 Nephi 13:11). While King Benjamin teaches that debts owed to God include having been created by him, as well as having been sustained by him since the

¹³⁶ Westminster Confession, Chapter XI.

moment of creation, Jesus' use of the word *forgive* easily evokes the idea that the debt to which he is referring is sin. Additionally, the word *debt* in the corresponding New Testament passage comes from the Greek word *opheilema*, which implies sin or offense.¹³⁷ If Jesus had sin in mind with the word debt in the original Sermon on the Mount, it stands to reason that this was his intent when he spoke to the Nephites, as well. By referring to sin as a debt, the Book of Mormon uses the same language that old Calvinists use, and Christ's atonement can be viewed as paying off that debt owed to God.

Although the Book of Mormon does not overtly preach that Christ's sufferings were equivalent to the punishments that should have justly been heaped upon sinners, the Lord's instruction implies that idea. And, taken together with its consistent terminology that the atonement *satisfies the demands of justice*, it leaves some evidence of penal substitution leanings. These leanings are significant. While Unitarians, Universalists, and New Divinity Calvinists systematically rejected the idea that the atonement was a lash-for-lash sacrifice, the Book of Mormon not only refuses to deny it, but subtly implies it.

In contrast, the Book of Mormon does not use any language that invokes the idea that the atonement allowed God to maintain the dignity of his government by effecting a display of God's abhorrence of sin. Jacob teaches that "sin appeareth very abominable. . . unto God" (Jacob 2:5). Alma similarly stated that God "cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance" (Alma 45:16). As Abinadi recites the ten commandments, he reminds his hearers that God is a "jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate [him]" (Mosiah 13:13). The Book consistently maintains that God loathes sin, but it does not explicitly make the case that the atonement preserved order

¹³⁷ See Strong's Number 3783

in God's kingdom by effecting a display of his hatred toward sin. It makes no case for or against this New Divinity idea, maintaining oblivion to the argument. Although the Book of Mormon's teachings on the atonement have many points in common with Hopkinsianism, on the points that distinguish the new Calvinism from traditional Calvinism, the Book's language favors tradition.

For Whom was the Atonement Wrought?

In addition to the need for an atonement and the purpose of the atonement, nineteenth-century divines argued the scope of the atonement. While the Book of Mormon text is subtle in its penal substitution bent, it is overt in its teachings on the scope of the atonement.

Though the Book of Mormon sides with the Calvinists on their view of penal substitution, it disagrees with the Calvinists' view of a limited atonement. Like the Bible, it uses language that could be interpreted to mean that the atonement was intended only for God's elect. For example, in his sermon to the church in Gideon, the high priest Alma teaches that Christ "will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people; and he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh, that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions" (Alma 7:13). Alma repeatedly used the phrase "his people" to refer to the object of the atonement. Taken alone, this could easily sound Calvinistic. But in the sentence immediately following, Alma taught that the Lamb of God "taketh away the sins of the world" (Alma 7:14).

The Book of Mormon refutes the doctrine of limited atonement. Calvinists who explained that Bible passages extending the atonement and salvation to all men meant that salvation through the atonement was extended to "*all* that the father chose in Christ before the foundation of the world," would have had more difficulty in explaining away Book of Mormon teachings

that were expressly clear.¹³⁸ Jacob deliberately declared, “And he cometh into the world that he may save all men, if they will hearken unto his voice: for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men; yea, the pains of every living creature, both men women and children, who belong to the family of Adam” (2 Nephi 9:21). The Book of Mormon proclaims an atonement with a world-wide scope.

All will be resurrected through the atonement of Christ. Although the Book of Mormon systematically condemns some Universalist doctrine, it grants one concession to Universalists. One element of the atonement that the Book of Mormon spells out with greater clarity than the various voices comprising its nineteenth century context is that through the atonement all will be resurrected. It universally redeems mankind from physical death. Amulek unmistakably teaches that the resurrection “shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but all things shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now” (Alma 11:44). Amulek taught that this universal resurrection come to all, including the wicked: “therefore the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death; for behold, the day cometh that all shall rise from the dead and stand before God, and be judged according to their works” (Alma 11:41). Helaman also teaches that the death of Christ “bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind...the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind” (Helaman 14:7). Jacob taught that the resurrection is brought to pass “according to the power of the resurrection which is in Christ” (Jacob 4:11). The Book of Mormon makes the distinction that Christ had to die in order to be resurrected, so that he could bring to pass the resurrection of all. All, bar none, are resurrected.

¹³⁸ John Cleveland, *An Attempt to nip in the Bud the unscriptural Doctrine of Universal Salvation, and some other dangerous errors connected with it.* (Salem, MA: E. Russell, 1776), 32.

Do Individuals for Whom the Atonement was Wrought Receive its Effects Automatically?

In the Book of Mormon, the atonement is universal, but also conditional. In the same breath that Jacob affirms the universal scope of the atonement, he also notes that it is contingent upon individuals hearkening to the voice of the Lord: “If they will hearken unto his voice” (2 Nephi 9:21). God will tell people what they must do in order to be saved. Jacob’s teachings are perfectly consonant with Elias Smith’s words: “The atonement extends as far as the kingly government of Christ; and now on that account, as a priest, he is able to save to the utmost, all who come unto God through him.”¹³⁹ In his declaration to the church at Zarahemla, Alma taught: “I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come. . . . And behold, it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world; yea, the sins of every man which steadfastly believeth on his name” (Alma 5:38). For Alma, the atonement included the sins of all the human family, and they were required to believe to access its saving power.

In the Book of Mormon text, Jesus Christ also affirmed that all may lay hold on the mercies of the atonement if they will follow his instructions on how to do so. Speaking to the Nephites, he extended the invitation: “Behold, I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin; therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive; for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved” (3 Nephi 9:22). Later, he again taught that the atonement is extended to the all humankind on conditions of repentance: “Nothing entereth into his rest, save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end. Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of

¹³⁹ Elias Smith, *The Whole World Governed by a Jew* (Exeter, NH: Henry Ranlet, 1805), 65.

the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:20). Jesus Christ repeated that message to Mormon, as he was writing the record: “Therefore, repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and believe in my Gospel, and be baptized in my name: for he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned” (Ether 4:18).

The Book of Mormon illustrates a universal, conditional atonement with its stories as well as through its sermons. While the Nephites were initially “favored,” the gospel was also eventually extended to the Lamanites. In Alma chapters 18 and 19, the king of the Lamanites underwent a miraculous conversion after Ammon preached Christ to him. Following his conversion, King Lamoni declared to his people: “For as sure as thou livest, behold, I have seen my Redeemer; and he shall come forth, and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name” (Alma 19:13). Many more were converted, and Mormon, the narrator of the story moralized, “And thus the work of the Lord did commence among the Lamanites; thus the Lord did begin to pour out his spirit upon them; and we see that his arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name” (Alma 19:36). Half a century later, in a particularly prosperous year when tens of thousands of people joined the church among the Nephites, Mormon made a similar comment: “Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name; yea, thus we see that the gate of Heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, which is the Son of God” (Helaman 3:28). By applying this observation to a people who were, previous to their conversion to Christianity, guilty of many sins, Mormon illustrated the depth and breadth of the atonement. Simultaneously, his comment maintained humanity’s need to

exercise free will properly in order to receive it. Clearly, the Book of Mormon teaches that the effects of the atonement are extended to everyone, but individuals do their part to receive the offer of salvation.

This emphasis on the proper exercise of free will, coupled with Nephi's insistence that "it is by grace that we are saved," aligns Book of Mormon teachings with nineteenth century Arminianism in with regard to the scope of the atonement. It touts free will in opposition to Calvinism's doctrines of unconditional election, yet avoids stepping off the Pelagian cliff, which was doctrinal suicide, by preaching salvation through Christ alone. It is, as Arminian Richard Watson said of his *Theological Institutes* "neither Calvinistic on the one hand nor Pelagian on the other."¹⁴⁰

On What Conditions do Individuals Receive the Saving Effects of the Atonement?

One of the purposes of the Book of Mormon is to teach individuals what their part is in receiving the atonement. Nephi taught that the Book of Mormon will help its readers "come to the knowledge of . . . the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved" (1 Nephi 15:14). Taken as a whole, the Book of Mormon outlines humanity's responsibilities in coming to Christ and receiving the effects of the atonement.

As did nineteenth-century Arminians, the Book of Mormon teaches that individuals must exercise faith in Christ to receive the salvation he offers. An angel declared to King Benjamin that Christ "cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men, even through faith on his name" (Mosiah 3:9). As a missionary Aaron taught the principle of faith to

¹⁴⁰ Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes; or A View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals and Institutions of Christianity* (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1834), 4.

the King of the Lamanites: “And Aaron did expound unto him the . . . plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name” (Alma 22:14). In these verses, faith is set forth as the specific requirement to receive the atonement, and the salvation that comes as a result of that faith. Though these verses of scripture seem to list faith as the only requirement to receive Christ, most often, when the Book of Mormon refers to faith, it adjoins other requirements. The Book of Mormon, along with many Arminians in Joseph Smith’s day, teaches that Christ’s disciples must repent, be baptized, and receive of gift of the Holy Ghost.

Alma emphasized the importance of faith leading to repentance: “And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance, is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance, is brought about the great and Eternal plan of redemption” (Alma 34:16). Samuel, the Lamanite prophet, also taught the requirement that a person must repent to receive forgiveness: “And if ye believe on his name, ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have a remission of them through his merits” (Helaman 14:13). Helaman’s recorded testimony to his sons holds that repentance “bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls” (Helaman 5:11). During his visit to the Nephites, the resurrected Christ invited the people to do the same: “And behold I have given you the law and the commandments of my Father, that ye shall believe in me, and that ye shall repent of your sins, and come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit . . . therefore come unto me and be ye saved” (3 Nephi 12:19). Rather than holding that repentance has salvific value intrinsically, the Book of Mormon teaches that it brings individuals to Christ, and that Christ saves.

Just as the Book of Mormon connects faith to repentance in receiving the atonement, so it connects repentance to baptism. Alma taught the people of Ammonihah that these three principles work together mutually: “And behold, he cometh to redeem those who will be baptized unto repentance, through faith on his name” (Alma 9:27). Alma’s phraseology indicates his understanding that full repentance is expressed through baptism. Commenting on the church’s baptism practices in Nephite history, Mormon records, “Now I would have you to remember also, that there were none who were brought unto repentance, who were not baptized with water” (3 Nephi 7:24). As remission of sins comes strictly through the atonement of Christ, these verses indicate that repentance and baptism are necessary steps that bring individuals to the full saving power of Christ. Moroni recorded words that the Lord declared to him: “Therefore, repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and believe in my Gospel, and be baptized in my name: for he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved” (Ether 4:18). Faith leads to repentance, and repentance to baptism.

The Book of Mormon teaches that God will baptize individuals with the Holy Ghost after they are baptized with water.¹⁴¹ Nephi testified that, “The voice of the Son came unto me, saying, He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me . . . Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son . . . witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism . . . then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:12). Alma aptly summarized that faith, repentance, baptism, and receipt of the Holy Ghost brings about spiritual rebirth, each of which are necessary steps to access the saving powers of the atonement: “Now I say unto you, that ye must repent, and be born again: for the spirit saith,

¹⁴¹ See Mormon 2:2-3 for a discussion on the ordinance of bestowal of the Holy by the laying on of hands.

If ye are not born again, ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness” (Alma 7:14). The Holy Ghost cleanses and purifies the sinner, through the power of the atonement. This shared relationship between the workings of the Holy Ghost (which occurs after one has exercised faith and repentance unto baptism) and the atonement, demonstrates that faith, repentance, baptism, and receipt of the Holy Ghost are necessary steps that an individual must follow to experience the atonement firsthand.¹⁴² In Jesus’ visit to the Nephites following his resurrection, the Savior taught that faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost are the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and those who do not follow these principles “shall be damned” (3 Nephi 11:34). Jesus repeated three times the need to exercise faith, repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost, or “ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God” (3 Nephi 11:38).

People come to Christ by following these mandated principles, and then Christ saves them through the atonement. These principles are steps mankind must follow to receive the full blessings and power that comes from the atonement. These principles—faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost constitute what Jesus referred to as “my doctrine . . . which the Father hath given unto me” (3 Nephi 11:32). Nephi also referred to these specific requirements as “the doctrine of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:2, 21; 32:6). Speaking to the Nephites at the temple in Bountiful after his resurrection, Jesus Christ gave the additional title “my gospel” to these specific teachings (3 Nephi 27:13, 21).

¹⁴² They also share the function of spiritually begetting fallen man.

His expression indicates that his gospel is actually made up of two parts. The first part is the atonement of Christ: “This is the gospel which I have given unto you: That I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me; and my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross” (3 Nephi 27:13). The second part consists of the things an individual must do to receive the gospel: “Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day. Verily, verily I say unto you, this is my gospel” (3 Nephi 27:20). These two parts form one gospel that humankind must follow to access Christ’s atonement and be saved. Through repetition, and by assigning special headings to faith, repentance, baptism, and receipt of the Holy Ghost, the Book of Mormon emphasizes the need for individuals to follow these principles in order to receive salvation through the atonement of Jesus Christ.

The Book of Mormon carefully and repeatedly sets forth the principles of faith, repentance, baptism, and reception of the Holy Ghost as requirements to receive the Savior, or to come unto the Savior. Arminians in the Northeastern United States during the first half of the nineteenth century would have been very comfortable with this position; it was their position.

Speaking to the Nephites, the Savior significantly included the phrase “endureth to the end” with the other noted requirements” (3 Nephi 27:16). Centuries before, Nephi expounded the same requirement to endure. He wrote that the voice of Christ taught him “After ye have repented of your sins, and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water, and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. . . and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me” (2 Nephi 31:14). Nephi also heard the voice of the Father testify: “Yea, the words of my

beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved” (2 Nephi 31:15). Faith, repentance, baptism, and receipt of the Holy Ghost are not the finish line, but rather the gate. The path is marked by relying on the salvation that Christ extends through the atonement: “And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” (2 Nephi 31:18–19). For Nephi, faithful endurance to the end, means remaining steadfast and continually relying upon the saving grace of Jesus Christ. King Benjamin also taught that to be saved through the atonement, the disciple must endure to the end: “I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of . . . the atonement which hath been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life; I mean the life of the mortal body; I say, that this is the man that receiveth salvation, through the atonement . . . and this is the means whereby salvation cometh” (Mosiah 4:6–8). While the role of a virtuous life in the Christian system was a topic of debate amongst nineteenth-century American Protestants, the Book of Mormon connects it with the core doctrine of salvation through the atonement.

In summary, the Book of Mormon teaches that faith, repentance, baptism, receiving the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end are the required conditions to being saved by the atonement. Each element of the path that the Book of Mormon prescribes is designed to bring one closer to the Savior, and ultimately to be saved through His power.

The atonement saves those without a knowledge of Christ, as well as little children. As with Arminians, the Book of Mormon recognizes that the requirement to exercise agency in accordance with the gospel poses problems for those who have never heard the message of Christ. While Arminians expressed their belief that God would save those who were ignorant of Christ, they were characteristically cautious to not speak beyond the boundaries of the scriptures. In contrast, the Book of Mormon extends salvation through the atonement to those who lived without a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. King Benjamin taught that the blood of Christ “atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died, not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned.” Conversely, he “who knoweth that he rebelleth against God” cannot be saved “except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Mosiah 3:11–12). Those who sin in ignorance are saved by the atonement of Christ, while those who sin knowingly are held accountable for that knowledge.¹⁴³ They are only saved through the atonement if they repent. Jacob also taught that “the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them,” but likewise warns, “wo unto him that has the law given; yea, that hath all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state” (2 Nephi 9:26–27).

Through its storyline, the Book of Mormon illustrates that God extends mercy to the ignorant. For hundreds of years, the Lamanites reared their children in ignorance, teaching them nothing about God. While preaching repentance to the wicked people of Ammonihah, Alma taught the Nephites that “it shall be more tolerable for them (the Lamanites) in the day of judgment, than for you, if ye remain in your sins . . . for it is because of the traditions of their

¹⁴³ While Mormon theology holds that those who sin ignorantly (not children) will need to repent in the spirit world, the Book of Mormon does not make that case

fathers that causeth them to remain in their state of ignorance; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them, and prolong their existence in the land” (Alma 9:16). God extended mercy to the Lamanites because of their ignorance. This illustration of God’s mercy to those ignorant of the gospel of Christ militates against Calvinism’s limited atonement doctrine. The Book of Mormon affirms what Arminians sanguinely surmised—that the atonement is effective for both the enlightened saint, and the ignorant heathen. All would be judged “according to what they have.”¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, the Book of Mormon teaches that little children who die are saved through the atonement of Christ. King Benjamin taught, “the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy; but men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ” (Mosiah 3:18). Writing to his son Moroni, Mormon speaks forcefully regarding the salvation of little children: “Little children cannot repent; wherefore, it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of God unto them, for they are all alive in him because of his mercy. And he that saith that little children need baptism denieth the mercies of Christ, and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption. Wo unto such, for they are in danger of death, hell, and an endless torment. I speak it boldly; God hath commanded me. . . .For behold that all little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that are without the law. For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law” (Mormon 8:19–22). Mormon extends the effects of the atonement to little children and to those ignorant of the gospel. Likewise, Alexander Campbell, as well as other Arminians, mentioned the special instance of little children in conjunction with the particular group of the heathen nations. In an article published in his own

¹⁴⁴ Observer, “Examiner Observed,” *The Candid Examiner*, 2 no. 2 (July 3, 1826): 9.

Christian Baptist, the month before the Book of Mormon was published, Campbell placed both groups in the same category of “uninstructed persons.” He distinguished people in these groups from those “who are better instructed”—a group which, he contended, needed to follow the principles of faith and baptism in order to receive salvation.¹⁴⁵ The Book of Mormon clearly teaches that those who are ignorant regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ, and little children are saved through the gracious merits of the atonement of Christ.

Summary

Irrespective of Alexander Campbell’s claim that the Book of Mormon resolved the great controversies that were present at the time of its publication, we can assume that a book that is a treatise on the gospel of Jesus Christ will relate to any Christian soteriological discussion of any era. In this chapter, we have seen how it relates to the arguments of the early nineteenth century in the Northeastern United States. The doctrine of the book does not favor Universalist teachings. It excludes the possibility that a person can obtain salvation through undergoing the punishments for his or her own sins, thereby satisfying a personal debt to justice. It likewise rejects the idea that a loving God can simply extend forgiveness without a propitiating sacrifice. It testifies that salvation can only come to humankind through the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Regarding the purpose of the atonement, it affirms reconciliation of man to God, but not to the exclusion of other purposes. This, again, goes against Universalist claims. Like penal substitution and governmental theories of the nineteenth century in America, the text affirms eternal laws, the justice of God, and required punishments in explaining the need for an atonement. It affirms, along with Old Calvinists and New Divinity theologians, that the atonement actually satisfies justice. It does not claim, as Hopkinsians in Joseph Smith’s day, that

¹⁴⁵ Campbell, “A Reply to C.F.,” 629.

the atonement effects this satisfaction through its display of God's wrath. Rather, its language implies that in the atonement, Christ suffered the punishments that were sinners' due. Although its language implies this, it does not argue the case loudly, or elucidate the more technical aspects of Calvinist atonement theology. The Book teaches that the guilty will suffer exquisitely for their sins (unless they repent), but it does without casting God as vindictive.

On the matter of the scope of the atonement, the Book of Mormon clearly takes an Arminian stance: the atonement is intended for all, not just an elect few, and individuals receive its saving effects as they properly exercise their agency. It teaches that to come to Christ and be saved *through the atonement* individuals must exercise faith, repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost. It extends salvation through the atonement to those who die before they are able to take these steps to follow Christ, including little children and those ignorant of the gospel.

Having as its primary purpose to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Book of Mormon teachings obviously relate to the nineteenth-century discussion about the atonement of Christ. But, does it resolve the issues of the day as Alexander Campbell claimed it did?

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

Alexander Campbell was not entirely amiss in his observation that the Book of Mormon speaks in the tone of a prophet, rather than that of a theologian. It simply does not delve into technical theology. Its terminology more resembles the Bible than that of nineteenth-century discourse. While some may point to this as evidence that Joseph Smith, who was not a trained theologian, wrote the book himself, certainly the opposite finding—that the book bore strong resemblance to theological terminology of his era—would be stronger evidence that he authored the book. As it stands, the Book of Mormon is much more interested in affirming fundamental biblical Christianity than it is in taking part of the discussion in its nineteenth century context. By not speaking in the theological terms of its day, the Book of Mormon remains true to its claim that it is ancient prophet-authored. Rather than grounding its teachings in philosophical reasoning, it speaks with ancient prophetic authority. This pattern holds true across its broad range of writers. The prophets in the book base their teachings in personal experience with God and in revelation. David Paulsen observed that Joseph Smith “challenged Christianity with answers he claimed were revealed, not reasoned.”¹⁴⁶ The Book of Mormon prophets are of the same ilk. By speaking apostolically, the Book of Mormon avoids many technical conundrums.

That distinction noted, the Book of Mormon shows some relevance to nineteenth-century discussion on the purpose and scope of the atonement. A comparison of its teachings on the atonement with those of its nineteenth-century neighbors reveals that on some points, it seems to resolve “the great controversies.”¹⁴⁷ Dan Vogel illustrated that its teachings are at variance with

¹⁴⁶ David Paulsen, “Joseph Smith Challenges the Theological World,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005), 202.

¹⁴⁷ Alexander Campbell, “Delusions,” *The Millennial Harbinger* (Bethany, VA), February 7, 1831), 4.

nineteenth-century Universalist teachings.¹⁴⁸ In harmony with his observations, this study has shown that with regard to atonement doctrine, the Book of Mormon does not harmonize with nineteenth-century Universalist ideology. However, in its atonement theology, the Book of Mormon proclaims that all will be resurrected through the power of Christ's atonement. The Book even extends this reunion of spirit and body to the wicked and unrepentant. In this doctrine, the Book of Mormon upholds an aspect of Universal salvation, which Vogel completely overlooks in his study.

Also, in the vein of deciding controversies, it flagrantly preaches down Arminian party lines in its views regarding the scope of the atonement. In doing so, it repudiates Calvinism's claim of limited atonement. On these points, Campbell's claim is justified. This finding should not be too surprising, since by its own admission, the Book's purpose is to work in tandem with the Bible "unto the confounding of false doctrines, and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace" (2 Nephi 3:12).

If the Book of Mormon preaches down Arminian lines on some aspects of its atonement theology, this not does not prove Campbell's implication that Joseph Smith authored it. Moroni suggests a different reason for the relevance. Speaking to his latter-day audience, Moroni prophesied:

O ye wicked and perverse and stiffnecked people, why have ye built up churches unto yourselves to get gain? Why have ye transfigured the holy word of God, that ye might bring damnation upon your souls? Behold, look ye unto the revelations of God; for behold, the time cometh at that day when all these things must be fulfilled. Behold, the Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you. Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing (Mormon 8:33–35).

¹⁴⁸ See Dan Vogel, "Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon," *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, edited by Brent Lee Metcalf (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1993).

Moroni testified that the Lord showed him those who would, centuries later, read the writings in the Book of Mormon.

While the Book speaks relevant to some aspects of atonement controversies, on other points it does not resolve some of the most important theological controversies contemporary to its original printing. Regarding the purpose of the atonement, the Book affirms that it atonement satisfies the demands of justice, as did Old Calvinists and New Divinity ministers alike. In this stance, the Book of Mormon again rebuffs Universalist and Unitarian clamorings that the atonement serves no such purpose. But it does not explicitly resolve the debate between the Calvinist and New Divinity ministers on this point—and this was one of the most significant soteriological debates in the years leading up to the publication of the Book of Mormon. If scrutinized, the language of the text leans toward the penal substitution model of Old Calvinism. Consistently, it does not support Hopkinsians' model of a satisfactory display of God's hatred of sin. However, the Book of Mormon feels much more comfortable staying on a theologically less-technical level by simply affirming that the atonement satisfies justice. Unless Campbell considered that Joseph Smith, through the Book of Mormon, intended to render a verdict on this debate through subtle implication, his claim cannot be supported. On the crucial point of the debate between Old Calvinists and Hopkinsians on the purpose of the atonement, the Book cannot be said to resolve the controversy.

However, its penal substitution murmurings should not be overlooked, either—particularly in light of its apparent Arminianism. The Book of Mormon conjoins the two schools of thought in a way that does not harmonize with nineteenth-century American atonement soteriology. Those who held to traditional Protestant views on the purpose of the atonement—namely Calvinists and Relyyan Universalists—viewed the salvation of the human soul as the

work of God. They preached monergism. Although they differed in their views on the scope of the atonement, they each believed that sovereign God was able to save all those for whom the atonement was wrought. If Christ had suffered the sufferings that were sinners' due, thereby cancelling their debt to God's justice, then all those for whom he suffered were saved. Through the atonement, God extended mercy and grace. He issued a call to salvation, he infused the unregenerate with a desire to come to Christ and be saved, and he gave his saints strength to persevere. Individuals had little say in the matter of their own salvation. Those who preached penal substitution did not propound free will. This is seen in Merritt's allegation, "Free agency has no place in the creed of a modern Universalist, and looks with a frowning aspect upon his whole system."¹⁴⁹

Free will and penal substitution views were not combined in the New Divinity movement, either. One aim of New Divinity theology was to make the tenets of Calvinism internally consistent. In this endeavor, they revised both the traditional view of the atonement and Calvinism's views on the agency of humankind.¹⁵⁰ At least one of the objectives of the alterations was to harmonize humankind's apparent free will with atonement soteriology. The new system preached governmental atonement theory. Additionally, New Divinity theology, taking cues from Jonathan Edwards' teachings on free will, preached a kind of human agency that fell somewhere in between Old Calvinism and Arminianism. The new system carefully avoided marrying an affirmation of free will to penal substitution atonement views. Divergently, the Book of Mormon prophets seem to believe in an equivalent, substitutionary atonement while at the same time, preaching that salvation is accomplished synergistically. Both the individual

¹⁴⁹ Timothy Merritt, *A Discussion on Universal Salvation* (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1829), 37.

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion on the revised view of humankind's free will, see William Breitenbach, "The Consistent Calvinism of the New Divinity Movement," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 41 no. 2 (Apr. 1984), 244–56.

and God have a role to play in their salvation, and salvation is accomplished as they work in tandem.

The Book of Mormon distinguishes itself from the nineteenth-century dialogue on the atonement in this way. Holding penal substitution and synergistic salvation simultaneously, it does not fit Campbell's description of it. Rather than deciding controversies, it introduces new possibilities into the conversation on soteriology.

Although the Book of Mormon's combination of penal substitution and synergistic salvation was unique in theological milieu in question, some early Christian theologians had held the two views concurrently. J.N.D Kelly indicates that Ambrose, Jerome, concurrently held an affirmative view of human free will with views of the atonement that resemble penal substitution.¹⁵¹ Although they did not refine the system or coin the phrase *penal substitution*, their explanations on atonement include the concepts of justice, punishment, law, and substitutional suffering. Examining the Book of Mormon's atonement model against that of Patristics may be grounds for a future study. Finding the combination of penal substitution views of the atonement combined with an affirmation of humankind's free will suggests two things. First, it suggests that, in this aspect of doctrine, the Book of Mormon's soteriological views coincide more with early Christian thinkers than with its nineteenth-century neighbors. Second, it suggests that although the Book of Mormon combined views in unique ways, the combination is defensible. The implications of Book of Mormon atonement theology are intriguing because they are fundamentally different from nineteenth-century American paradigms, and yet they are logically coherent. Though Campbell's statement has some validity in that the Book of Mormon does seem to settle some important doctrinal issues contemporary to

¹⁵¹See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, fifth ed. (London, England: Adam & Charles Black: 1977), 356, 389.

its publication, this study has shown that, with regard to controversies surround the doctrine of the atonement, his allegation that the Book of Mormon is a nineteenth-century production is not so easily defended.

In his assessment of the Book of Mormon, Richard Bushman remarked: “All the efforts to situate the *Book of Mormon* in the nineteenth century are frustrated by contradictions. . . . The book elusively slides off the point in one crucial issue after another. . . . The text repeatedly trespasses standard categories.”¹⁵² With regard to atonement doctrine, the Book of Mormon does not fit neatly into any one nineteenth-century camp—it resists being classified with any of the common movements contemporary to its publication. In some ways, it seems Universalist; in others, Arminian; in others, Calvinist. The label it most readily accepts is Christian; but among Christian voices, it is unique.

Stephen H. Webb recently suggested that “the Christian faith has always grown through intellectual clashes and vigorous disputes. Of all the branches of Christianity, Mormonism is the most imaginative, and, if nothing else, its intellectual audacity should make it the most exciting conversational partner for traditional Christians for the twenty-first century.”¹⁵³ While Webb is speaking of the entire spectrum of Mormon theology in a modern arena, his comment has some relevance to this study. While its soteriology is relevant to the conversation of its nineteenth-century neighbors, a careful inquiry into its atonement doctrine reveals paradigms that different from its Protestant neighbors, yet, at the same time, tenable. For these reasons, the Book of Mormon can be regarded as a sound source of doctrine for Latter-day Saints, and as a worthy

¹⁵² Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 99.

¹⁵³ Stephen H. Webb, “Godbodied,” *BYU Studies* 50 no. 3 (2011), 92

conversation partner for other Christians—and a significant voice in the interfaith dialectic in pursuit of truth.

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