

---

THE COVENANT  
QUARTERLY

---

*Fall/Winter 2022*

CONTENTS

Comment

*J. Nathan Clayton*

1

Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

*P. P. Waldenström*

2

Reconciled and Reconciling: P. P. Waldenström's Atonement Sermon  
150 Years Later

*Hauna Ondrey*

15

Reconciliation as Vocation: Waldenström's Challenge for  
Preaching and Congregational Life

*Mark Safstrom*

19

The Driving Force behind Divine Justice

*Dominique Gilliard*

40

Reconciliation as Mission: Practicing God's Love among the Nations

*Al Tizon*

46

Book Reviews

*Elizabeth Clayton, Tone Waters, Bridget Jack Jeffries*

56



## Comment

---

*J. Nathan Clayton, assistant professor of Old Testament  
North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois*

**O** April 8, 2022, the Commission on Covenant History and North Park Theological Seminary co-sponsored a virtual one-day conference entitled “Reconciled and Reconciling: Waldenström’s Atonement Sermon 150 Years Later.”

Hauna Ondrey (North Park Theological Seminary) moderated the event. The invited panel of scholars and ministry practitioners included Mark Safstrom (Augustana College), Al Tizon, (North Park Theological Seminary and Antioch Covenant Church), and Dominique Gilliard (Evangelical Covenant Church denomination). Each panelist presented their papers and further discussion ensued.

In this issue of the *Quarterly*, Ondrey first offers a brief introduction, orienting readers both to the significance of P. P. Waldenström’s 1872 sermon and to the perspective given by each panelist at this conference. In the remaining three essays, the edited versions of the panelists’ presentations are provided. Several book reviews round out this issue, and the original text of P. P. Waldenström’s sermon is also included after this short comment.

My thanks to Jonathan Teram (affiliate professor of biblical and theological studies at North Park University and current doctoral student in Hebrew Bible at the University of Oxford in the UK) who provided able editorial assistance in preparing these essays for publication, which included transcribing Dominique Gilliard’s recorded oral presentation.

# Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

---

*P. P. Waldenström, 1872*

**T**he kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:44-46).

1) In this Scripture the kingdom of Christ is presented to us as a treasure and pearl, more valuable and precious than anything this world has to offer. For everything offered us in this world is nothing but vanity, whereas this treasure is eternal and imperishable. The very highest riches in this world endure but for a while; then one must relinquish them with all the privileges that they have accorded. The kingdom of God, on the other hand, is the sort of treasure which, once possessed, one need never relinquish but may retain forever. It does not consist in silver or gold or other material things, but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

2) For this reason the Lord Christ would, through these parables, press home what he has said elsewhere: "Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness." "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?"

3) In regard to this kingdom, it is evident that here there is no reference to the universal reign of God, of which we read in Psalm 103:19: "The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom

rules over all,” and in the conclusion of the prayer “Our Father”: “Thine is the kingdom and the power.” But here the reference is to that messianic kingdom, promised of God through the prophets and expected of the holy fathers, which, symbolized by the institution of the Old Covenant, should come into being with the coming of Christ. This kingdom is called the kingdom of God because it has its origin not in human ingenuity, strategy, or power, but in the grace and power of God’s eternal purpose to save the fallen human race. It is further called the kingdom of Christ because it was erected in the death and resurrection of Christ and grounded on him and his work, and not on any human wisdom, power, or piety. As it is written, “No other foundation can any man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ,” and again, “His kingdom shall be upon his shoulders.” In addition to which, Christ also is the Lord and King of this kingdom, as it is written, “For us there is . . . one Lord, Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 8:6), and again, “Tell ye the daughter of Zion, behold thy king cometh,” and again, “He shall be a king over the house of Jacob forever.”

4) Further, this kingdom is called a spiritual kingdom in contrast to the kingdoms of this world. For these kingdoms are concerned with material and external concerns; the kingdom of Christ, on the other hand, with the things of the soul. And, inasmuch as the physical things are temporal and corruptible, whereas the concerns of the soul are spiritual, the kingdoms that have to do with the former are also temporal and transient, while the kingdom of Christ is eternal and imperishable (Psalm 145:13). In addition, the kingdom of God is called the kingdom of heaven, or a heavenly kingdom, because heaven is its fulfillment. For, while it is also here on earth, it nevertheless exists not for this world but for heaven, is here only in commencement, is hidden under an outer manifestation of humbleness and infirmity, but will in heaven be revealed in all its undying splendor. As a net cast out from land into the sea and then drawn to shore with its catch, so the kingdom of God has gone out from heaven and returns to heaven with those whom it has gathered. For this reason we make differentiation between the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory, referring by the former to the kingdom of Christ as it appears here on earth and by the latter to the kingdom of Christ as it will be in heaven.

5) Finally, the kingdoms of this world are by their nature characterized by law and order—by the freedom and security of the life and property of their subjects—while the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost for them who belong to it.

The kingdoms of this world commend themselves to people, take root, and are established through various external laws and institutions, whereas the kingdom of God comes to us only through the gospel, which, because it proclaims the righteousness of Christ appropriated through faith without the works of the law, addresses peace to the conscience, imparting the Holy Spirit and filling the heart with joy and a glad confidence in God.

6) Thus one can see what a treasure and precious pearl this kingdom of God is in comparison to all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory. For if the kingdoms of the earth were to combine all of their strength, they could not erase a single sin or give a trembling conscience peace. They can only, with all their glory, lull sinners to sleep in their carnal security and maintain them in such a slumber. This is clearly seen by the fact that those who own most of what this world has to offer, such as riches, power, glory, etc., are the ones who slumber most securely in their sins. As also the Apostle Paul says, "Not many noble are called." But wherever the kingdom of God comes through the gospel and is accepted by the heart in faith, there sin is blotted out through the righteousness of God, which it proclaims, and one is made the child of God and the heir of heaven.

7) Therefore, they are truly poor who do not possess the kingdom of God. Whatever else they may own can at best only give them "peace and good days" here on earth, although experience shows that it is not the usual thing that those who possess most of power, riches, and honor are the happiest even in this life. But even if such were the case, they are nevertheless wretched, miserable, and poor. For death has no respect for their power, glory, and display, but snatches them away after a few years from all that which composed their happiness and pleasure, and places them before the judgment. And there it will not help them that they have left great riches or an honored and respected name behind them on earth, so that many bless their memory. Their end is an end with terror, with weeping and gnashing of teeth.

8) On the other hand, they are rich over all measure who have found the kingdom of God. To be sure, their lot here on earth may be difficult and hard, as the history of the kingdom of God and daily experience show us. But during it all they are possessors of such a treasure that not even the angels are able to fathom its unmeasurable greatness. For, beneath all outer infirmity and wretchedness, they bear within themselves the kingdom of God. In this they possess, as we have seen above by the word of the Apostle Paul, an eternal righteousness. This righteousness is also the essence and the foundation for the peace, joy, and bliss that

belong to the kingdom of God. For, inasmuch as it was through sin that we fell under the wrath of God and lost all the glory that was given us of God in creation, it is clear that where righteousness is renewed, there this glory must also be restored and all wrath be taken away. For, inasmuch as righteousness is the canceling of all sin, so through it must all that be nullified which followed with sin, and all that be regained which because of sin was lost.

9) But to be righteous in the sight of another is to appear to him as one who has not sinned. This can come about in two ways: either in that one never has offended him, or otherwise because the sin and the offense have been canceled, taken away, and forgiven. It is the same way with righteousness before God. Wherever anyone is free of offense toward him, there he is righteous before him, as the good angels are righteous and as our first parents were before the day of the fall. Such a righteousness can never be a matter of discussion for us, inasmuch as we already are born in sin and with sin. Therefore, no other way remains for us to righteousness but through reconciliation. That, every person knows in his conscience. Now the question remains as to the way to such reconciliation. And here, above all else, is revealed that the thoughts of God are higher than our thoughts, as heaven is higher than the earth.

10) If we take note of the heathen, who have only the light of nature in spiritual things, we find that they have the following things especially in common with what the Scriptures teach. First, they know that there is a God on whom they are dependent. Second, they know that the right relationship between them and this God is broken through sin. Third, they know that their happiness and salvation depend on the restoration of a right relationship. But from this point they go astray with their thoughts. For they know that they themselves, if anyone offends them, become bitter and full of hate against such a one and must be appeased by acts of atonement if the good relationship is to be restored, and they carry this over in their thinking about God, believing that the hindrance to their salvation lies in a certain mercilessness which because of their sin filled the heart of God, who must therefore be appeased if they are to be saved. For this reason even the heathen speak of atonement, but the kind of atonement that proceeds from man and that has as its purpose to reconcile and appease the unmerciful God.

11) Here comes now the kingdom of God in the gospel with another message, which brings to naught all human speculation and renders the wisdom of the wise foolishness, teaching (1) that through our fall no change has entered the heart of God, (2) that because of this it was no

severity or anger against man which through the fall rose up in the way of man's redemption, (3) that the change that occurred with the fall was a change in man alone, in that he became sinful and thus fell away from God and from the life which is in him, (4) that for this reason an atonement indeed is needed for man's salvation, not an act of atonement that appeases God and presents him as being once again gracious, but one that removes man's sin and makes him once again righteous, and (5) that this atonement is in Jesus Christ.

12) That through our fall into sin no change from love to wrath has entered the disposition of God towards man, we ought already to know, because the Scriptures everywhere attest that God is unchangeable. He remains the one he is, whether man rises or falls. But the Scriptures bear further witness to this by positive statements. So John says, "God is love," not only, "God loves." No indeed, he is love in all his eternal, unchangeable nature and can never cease being love without at the same time ceasing to be God. In the same way the Lord speaks of the basis for our atonement when he says, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." But if God loved the world, the lost world, so that for her salvation he offered up his own Son, then he must have loved it in spite of its fall, and then through its fall no change could have been effected in his heart.

13) Here someone is likely to reply: To be sure, God loved the world after its fall, but this he could do because he foresaw the sacrifice of his Son, which he himself in the foreknowledge of the fall of man had purposed to make. But here that is decisive which in all spiritual concerns and questions must be the principle thing: Where is this written? And further, when God beforehand saw the fall of man and for this reason resolved to give his Son, what was it that moved him to this decision? Was it anything but his love to this same man, which he already saw lying helpless because of his fall? In truth, here behind this eternal purpose we find this once again to be fundamental: God so loved the world. And here we must end, for to ask what the basis is for the love of God is to ask why God is God. God loved because he loved, and for this reason he gave his Son.

14) From this it is clear that the obstacle to the world's salvation never has been any enmity toward the world in the heart of God. Truly the Scripture testifies that through the world's fall an obstacle was laid for its salvation, in that a wall of separation was raised between it and God. But this obstacle and this wall never consisted in that wrath toward the world took possession of the heart of God. No, there the love remained

so constant and unchanged that even upon the fall of man there followed in the fullness of time the highest expression of love, namely, the giving of the only begotten Son. From this there follows also that the reconciliation, which was effected in the giving of the Son, never has as its purpose to reconcile or appease God. For how could he be reconciled who loved, and so loved that his heart broke of compassion towards the sinner?

15) But, says someone, what happens then to all that the Scriptures say about the wrath of God? Answer: concerning the wrath of God the Scriptures speak in two ways, that is to say, partly as a wrath because of sin, partly as a wrath over the sinner. As concerns the wrath of God because of sin, we realize that this cannot be taken away through Christ. God must hate sin, as long as he is the holy God. Wrath over sin is, so to speak, the reverse of love for righteousness. For where the latter is, there must also the former be. With reference to God's wrath over the sinner, this can only be spoken of in the sense that he who remains in sin is overtaken by the wrath of God over sin. And this situation again is not changed through the death of Christ. The wages of sin for the sinner who through unbelief remains in sin is even yet today the wrath of God and death; here also the clear words of the apostle hold true: For to set the mind on the flesh is death; if you live according to the flesh, you will die; what a man sows, that shall he also reap, etc. Where sin is, there the wrath of God is also unchanged, as surely as God is a righteous God. And to be saved from this wrath comes only by being justified from sin (Romans 5:9). But, as was said, this is essentially the wrath of God over sin and not over the sinner, just as a father's wrath over his child is not a wrath over the child but over its sin, and yet nevertheless is called anger towards the child because it strikes the child that sins. But so far as the person of the child is concerned, there is in his heart only a fervent love and compassion.

16) For this reason, the Scriptures do not say in a single place that it is God who through the death of Christ has been reconciled. God's wrath over sin could not be taken away, and God's relationship to sinful man is described by the Lord Christ thus: "God so loved the world that he gave his Son." Therefore, God's love is never presented in the Scriptures as the result of the Son's sacrifice, but as the cause and basis of it. It does not say: because God gave his Son, he could once again love the world. No. Because God loved the world, for this reason he gave his Son.

17) In contrast to this, man needed to be reconciled in order to be saved, that is, his sins had to be removed so that he would not everlastingly and irremediably be overtaken by the wrath of God, which abides



over sin. And for this purpose would the giving of the Son serve, as John says: "He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." Therefore, we must on the other hand be on guard against the heresy that the giving of the Son was merely an expression of God's love. Scripture clearly teaches that it was an atoning sacrifice. But note: It was not God who through this sacrifice was to be reconciled, but man who through the same was to be justified, which was essential if he was to be saved. For it was on his side, in his sin, that the obstacle lay. It was man alone, and not God, who on the day of the fall fell from goodness. It was he who became the enemy of God and departed from him, and not God who became man's enemy and departed from him. No, when man departed in enmity from God, God loved him to the extent that in Christ he sought him, not in order to remove his own anger, but man's sins. For when he gave his Son, it was not in order that he might find a person on whom he could slake his anger, in order to be able to love the world, but in order to find a person through whom he could save man, his fallen child, whom he still loved.

18) Otherwise God would become not our savior but the savior of God. Therefore, our Lord Jesus in his passion and suffering was not our substitute in order to take away the wrath of God, but God's representative to take away our sins, even though he is our substitute to the extent that it is our sins he bore, for us he suffered and became accursed. In his exaltation he is the representative of the Father for the sake of our justification. As it is written, God has exalted him in order to give repentance and forgiveness to Israel. When he came in the flesh, he came on God's behalf as his only begotten Son, sent of him to remove our sins; and when he returned to God, he returned in order that he might on behalf of God, as our brother, complete the work which he had received from the Father for our salvation.

19) If we take notice of the plain words of Scripture concerning the redemption of Christ, we find that it speaks only of the reconciliation of man. Thus it is written: "God hath reconciled us to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:18). "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). "And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh" (Colossians 1:21f.). And in Ephesians 2:16 it is written that Christ has reconciled us to God through the cross. Also in Revelation 5:9 we read that Christ has redeemed us to God, not God to us. No, us, us, you, you—this is the concern of his work. It is we who in the blood of Christ have redemption, that is to say, forgive-

ness of sins, and not God who through the blood has been freed from his wrath. It does not say: God vented his wrath on him; not, behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the wrath of God. No, but much more: the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world (Isaiah 53, John 1:29). And in Romans 5 it does not say: as through the sin of one, Adam, God hath become angry, so he through the second Adam's obedience has again become gracious. But rather: "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous."

20) In short, there is not a single place in the New Testament that reverses this relationship so as to say that it is God who has been brought together with us, but everywhere it is we who have been brought together with God through the death of his Son, at a time when we were as yet at enmity with him. In Hebrews 8, where both covenants are considered, it is not said: "I shall be appeased by sinners," but rather: "I will be merciful toward their iniquities," which is immediately explained thus: "And I will remember their sins no more" (v. 12), which again is what Paul says: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses."

21) If we now will turn to the teaching of the Old Testament in this matter, we will find neither in the one place nor the other, and least of all in the statements concerning the coming salvation through Christ, any mention of the reconciliation of God; but everywhere where atonement is spoken of, it is always a question of atonement for sin (Exodus 32:30, Leviticus 4:26, Daniel 9:24, etc.) or for sinners (Leviticus 4:20, 5:16, 6:7, Numbers 16:46, Psalm 49:8, Ezekiel 45:17) or else for something holy which through sin has become unclean (such as the sanctuary, Leviticus 16:16, or the altar, Leviticus 16:18, Ezekiel 43:22).

22) Most clearly of all, however, we see the great miracle of God's unchanging love to the world in the sacrifices, especially the atoning sacrifice. Concerning its significance—and note: its significance as a type of the sacrifice of the body of Christ—we read in Leviticus 16, first that the high priest shall make atonement for himself and for his house, and then that he shall make atonement for the holy place and for the tent of the meeting (v. 16) "because of the uncleanness of the people of Israel." Then he shall atone for the altar and hallow it from the uncleanness of the people of Israel—all with blood. When he has made an end of atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar (v. 20), he shall present the live goat, lay both of his hands upon the head of him, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel and all their

transgressions, all their sins, and he shall put them upon the head of the goat. Then the goat shall be driven out into the wilderness and “shall bear all their iniquities upon him.” Listen. Not God’s wrath, no, but the sins of the people shall the goat remove. And what does God now say about this sacrifice? Answer: on this day shall atonement be made for you. Hear! Not my atonement, but your atonement—to cleanse you from all your sins; you shall be clean before the Lord. Hear: not so that I am appeased, but so that you may be cleansed from all your sins (v. 30). Can anything be more clearly spoken of the meaning of the atonement that is in Christ Jesus? Read also Hebrews 10:1-17.

23) This the Scripture witnesses everywhere, and never to the contrary. But behold now, such is the blindness of human nature that it never fastens in our hearts that God at the time of our fall remained unchanged in his love, that when the spirit of sonship fled from our hearts, nevertheless the spirit of fatherhood remained in his heart. It so far surpasses our natural understanding that we of necessity, because of our conscience, keep insisting that through our fall some disorder must have occurred in the heart of God. Yes, so deeply rooted in us is this view of God that, though he has shown the unchangeableness of his love toward us (Romans 5:8) and sent his Son to be an atonement for our sins, we nevertheless, when we fall into any sin, at once are fearful that the heart of God also must be full of anger towards us.

24) But, someone asks, has not the demand of God’s righteousness been satisfied through the work of Christ? In answer to this, Scripture teaches that salvation consists in a living communion of the soul with God. But since God is righteous, no such blessed fellowship is possible for sinful man, for to the sinner the righteousness of God is no blessing but a consuming fire. If, therefore, the sinner is to come into a blessed relationship with God, then just because God is righteous, the transgressor’s sin must be taken away and he be made righteous, as God is righteous. But in order that this shall come about, Christ must be made to be sin for our sake (2 Corinthians 5:21).

25) Thus it was just because of God’s righteousness that the removal of sin became a necessary condition for man’s salvation. And for this reason it can of course be said that through the work of Christ God’s righteousness has in a certain sense been satisfied—not as a demand of God’s righteousness for vengeance toward the sinner, because God still loved him, but as a demand for the justification of the sinner as a condition for his salvation. In the unchangeable love of his fatherhood, God willed the blessedness of man; but, because he was righteous, the sinner

could not, on account of his sin, become blessed. Now, in contrast, since the Son is given, is crucified and risen, this becomes possible, not in opposition to the righteousness of God, but in truth as a necessary result of God's righteousness, that the one who trusts in Christ becomes blessed, no matter how wretched he is in himself. For in this faith he is no longer a sinner, but righteous, and this he is through Christ. For wherever righteousness abides, there the righteousness of God is nothing but favor, life, and bliss, as surely as the same righteousness of God is nothing but anger, death, and condemnation where unrighteousness abides. As surely as God is righteous, he who believes on Jesus shall be saved. So complete a redemption do we have. Paul also shows us in Romans 3:25-26 that God has put forward Christ as an expiation to show the righteousness of God, both in that under the old covenant he was indulgent towards the sins then committed and in that he now justifies him who has faith in Jesus.

26) This is the character of that which occurred in the death and resurrection of Christ, and Scripture never calls this the reconciling of God, but always the reconciling of us. It was not anything in God's heart, but something in us that needed to be altered or removed. In short, there was no contradiction between God's righteousness and his love, but the contradiction that had to be resolved if we were to be saved lay between the righteousness of God and our sin. It was the love that was in the heart of God that provided the sacrifice that was necessary, not for his reconciliation with us, but for our reconciliation with him.

27) It is in this great work of God, which he has consummated through his only begotten Son, that the kingdom of God is established here on earth. And here in this sinful vale of tears there is now heralded abroad, according to the command of God, the gospel concerning this person and his work. In his name there is now preached the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, life, and eternal blessedness, and this for sinners of every kind, of all people and all tongues. For all are invited to Christ, and everyone is free to come. Let the one who wills come! Broken down through the blood of Christ's cross is the great wall of partition between us and God. It is abolished and leveled with the ground, and now there is prepared a free and open access to the Father, yea, a bold and confident access (Ephesians 2:18, 3:12). Let the one who wills come! But to come is nothing else than in simplicity of heart to put all faith in Christ Jesus, with full confidence to trust in him as the only true Savior. For everyone who believes on him has redemption in his blood, namely, the forgiveness of sins, life, and blessedness.

28) Here it is possible for sinners, as Paul says, to exclude themselves through unbelief. And then they are lost, not because Christ was not given or because God in anger over their sins willed their destruction. No, their ruin consists in that they, despite the fact that God loved, called, and invited them, nevertheless chose to remain away from his kingdom and from the righteousness and blessedness which he in Christ prepared even for them. They are lost children over whose misfortune the Father's heart breaks and for whose recovery he has given his most precious possession, but who, despite all this, would rather remain far off in their sins, where the wrath of God and eternal death abide, than to return home to inherit eternal life.

29) On the other hand, where the preaching of the gospel is embraced by the sinner, so that he in his heart believes and trusts therein, and in this faith, together with the prodigal son, arises and returns to his Father to confess his sins and "to reconcile himself with him," there he is sure to see how unchangeable is the heart of his father, how buried in forgetfulness are his sins, how broken down and destroyed are all the walls, gates, locks, and bolts because of which he formerly thought himself shut out from the Father's house. Indeed, then may he in his heart well say, Why did I not return before? And when I did come to my senses, why did I not run at once straight to my Father's open arms instead of pursuing such circuitous ways, groaning, cringing, and laboring with the works of the law to break down the wall of partition, which already was broken down; to open the gate which already was open; to appease the paternal heart, concerning whose wrath I had such fantasies although it was already overflowing with compassion for me, the unworthy and lost child? It is impossible to describe the blessedness of such a return, the sinner's glorious embarrassment and the joy of the Father and of his angels, the foulness of the sin and the purity of the robe of righteousness, the sinner's confession and the kiss of forgiveness, the unworthiness and the Father's embrace; in short, the prodigal son in such a circumstance that he suddenly finds himself justified by grace, pure grace, and so free from accusation that his sins are held no more against him forever. Truly, this is riches, this and nothing else.

30) And here the sinner may now abide forever without expense, believe without charge, and be God's beloved child for free, unalterably justified without cost through the action of another, in the midst of the feeling of his own unworthiness. And for how long? As long as he wills. And on what conditions? On this condition only: that he does not spurn such grace, but remains and dwells in simple faith with all his sins at

the cross of Jesus. But what if he sins? Then his sin is blotted out. But if he falls? Then the kingdom of God nevertheless stands. But if he departs in unbelief? Then the gate still remains open. But if he does not return? Then the heart of God breaks. But if he nevertheless stays away? Then he is lost. But if he will return? Then the Father will hasten to him, fall upon his neck and kiss him, and remember his sins against him no more.

31) Of such a character is this treasure that is called the kingdom of God. Consider then how pitiable they are who make it their aim to win that which belongs to this world, rather than to seek this treasure and this precious pearl! They journey through time with toil and trouble, dig themselves wells that give no water, are without God, without peace, without the true joy, the slaves of sin and of this world for a time, and the children of doom forever. And yet such a precious ransom was given also for them.

32) On the other hand, no one can describe how happy they are who, with our predecessors in the Scripture, let everything go that would hinder them and who, above all, seek the kingdom of God. On them there rests this abiding righteousness, as we have already said and as one cannot say too often, despite all their sins. Through this righteousness they have peace with God (Romans 5:1) and are set free from all wrath and judgment. For how could there be any wrath where perfect righteousness abides? As also Isaiah says: "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isaiah 32:17). Through this righteousness they are God's elect children and heirs, and they shall never perish, but have everlasting life. Through this righteousness the Spirit of God abides in their hearts, helping their infirmity and making intercession for them with groanings that cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26), creating and maintaining within them a new holy and heavenly spirit through which they are engaged in the constant occupation of laying aside the old person and walking in newness of life, drawing their hearts more and more to heaven, filling them with joy in the certain hope of bliss—in brief, more and more preparing them for the glories of heaven, for which in Christ Jesus they are chosen of God and which through the righteousness of faith are their sure possession (Romans 4:13). And through such a work of the Spirit on their behalf, all must work together for the same purpose (Romans 8:28), even the troubles and tribulations that yet assail them (Romans 5:3ff., 2 Corinthians 4:17).

33) What a treasure is this not? Rejoice, then, always, all ye who have found the same. And you who stand and wonder where it is to be found,

you who have toiled and found nothing, why do you ascend to heaven to bring Christ down, or descend into the depths to bring Christ up from the dead? Is not the word nigh thee, the word of faith, the holy gospel? Search here—in this field! There is the treasure to be found, and the one who catches sight of the same has the right to take it for naught. But you who are loath to let go the world, your lusts and besetting sins, O that you might know to what your peace belongs! Why do you sow unto the flesh? What reward have you of that? The end of all this is death.

O Lord God, to thee be praise, that thou didst in thine only Son establish a kingdom on earth as a refuge for lost sinners. O Lord Jesus, to thee be praise for thy precious blood, which has erected for us this kingdom. O Holy Spirit, awaken in our hearts such a burning desire for this that nothing may hinder us from seeking first thy kingdom and its righteousness. Amen.

# Reconciled and Reconciling: P. P. Waldenström's Atonement Sermon 150 Years Later

---

*Hauna Ondrey, associate professor of church history,  
North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois*

In 1872, Paul Peter Waldenström published within the pages of the Swedish devotional paper *Pietisten*, a sermon that would serve as an important catalyst in the formation of several free church traditions, among them the Swedish Mission Covenant (Svenska Missionsförbundet, now Ekumeniakyrkan) and the Evangelical Covenant Church in North America.

Waldenström had risen to prominence within the Swedish revival movement ten years prior to the publication of that sermon through the serial publication of his popular allegory *Squire Adamsson*.<sup>1</sup> At that time, the revival had coalesced, somewhat uneasily, within the Church of Sweden under the leadership of the enormously popular lay preacher Carl Olof Rosenius.<sup>2</sup> When Rosenius died suddenly in 1868, Waldenström succeeded him as editor of *Pietisten*, an important organ of the revival movement.

In his “Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity,” published four years into his tenure as editor but reflecting the fruit of a two-year inquiry,

---

<sup>1</sup> P. P. Waldenström, *Squire Adamsson: or, Where Do You Live?: An Allegorical Tale from the Swedish Awakening*, trans. Mark D. Safstrom (Seattle: Pietisten, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of Rosenius’s ministry and its place within the broader Swedish evangelical revival, see Mark Safstrom, “C. O. Rosenius and the Reading Culture of the Mission Friends,” in *Sacred Migrations: Borderlands of Community and Faith*, ed. Hauna Ondrey and Mark Safstrom (Chicago: Swedish-American Historical Society, 2020), 163–80.



Waldenström takes up the question of whether in the atonement God was reconciled in Christ, bringing to that question the cipher that in “all spiritual concerns and questions must be the principal thing: Where is it written?”<sup>3</sup>

His conclusion is presented in concentrated form in section 11:

Here comes now the kingdom of God in the gospel with another message ... teaching

1. that through our fall no change has entered the heart of God,
2. that because of this it was no severity or anger against humanity which through the fall rose up in the way of our redemption,
3. that the change that occurred with the fall was a change in humanity alone, in that we became sinful and thus fell away from God and from the life which is in him,
4. that for this reason an atonement indeed is needed for humanity's salvation, not an act of atonement that appeases God and presents him as being once again gracious, but one that removes humanity's sin and makes us once again righteous, and
5. that this atonement is in Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, it is humanity that needs to be reconciled to God, not God to humanity. A foundational commitment for Waldenström here is that God is unchanging: God is always loving toward his creation and always wrathful toward sin, both before the cross and after the cross. God's love for humanity is unfailing. And that divine love is the cause of Christ's sacrifice, not its result.

Waldenström's sermon generated heated debate in published responses by the hundreds and resulted in Waldenström and his supporters being ostracized within the Lutheran church and the revival movement that strained to remain within it.<sup>5</sup>

As important as the theological and soteriological points were and would be—and Waldenström would go on to refine and elaborate these claims in subsequent writings—equally consequential was the challenge

---

<sup>3</sup> P. P. Waldenström, “Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity (1872),” in *Covenant Roots: Sources and Affirmations*, 2nd ed., ed. Glenn P. Anderson (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1999), 102.

<sup>4</sup> Waldenström, 101–102, slightly altered to match contemporary conventions.

<sup>5</sup> To read more about the sermon's immediate reception and outcomes, see Karl A. Olsson, *By One Spirit* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1962), 105–20.

his conclusion posed to confessional orthodoxy of the national Church of Sweden, namely the Augsburg Confession, the binding standard of orthodoxy in Sweden since 1593. Though Waldenström himself was ordained within the Church of Sweden, his sermon exemplified his broader challenge to that body's confessionalism.

The conflicts that followed from this sermon further strained existing tensions within the revival movement, resulting in a formal division within the Swedish revival and the start of the Swedish Mission Covenant, and playing a key role in the shape the North American Covenant would adopt at its organization in 1885.

In April 2022, a day conference co-sponsored by North Park Theological Seminary and the Commission on Covenant History commemorated the 150th anniversary of this consequential sermon. Three presenters offered fresh insights into the ongoing relevance of Waldenström's sermon and broader legacy: Mark Safstrom, associate professor of Scandinavian studies at Augustana College, presented on "Reconciliation as Vocation: Waldenström's Challenge for Preaching and Congregational Life"; Al Tizon, affiliate professor of missional and global leadership at North Park Theological Seminary and executive pastor of Antioch Covenant Church in Antioch, California, spoke on "Reconciliation as Mission: Practicing God's Love among the Nations"; and Dominique Gilliard, director of racial righteousness and reconciliation for the Evangelical Covenant Church, addressed "The Driving Force behind Divine Justice."

Together, through their presentations, conversation, and engagement with participant questions, Safstrom, Tizon, and Gilliard guided us in considering the relevance of Waldenström's atonement theology for the church's calling today—to restorative justice, global mission, preaching, and congregational life—modeling constructive dialogue both with each other and between the past and present.

Covenanters today receive our historical inheritance no more uncritically than did Waldenström in 1872. Rather, precisely as inheritors of Waldenström's legacy, it is fitting for us to ask again and again, "Where is it written?"—to interrogate the fidelity of our belief in the good news of reconciliation in Christ and the integrity of our witness to this gospel in our own time. It is especially fitting for us to do so as we enter into Holy Week; to think afresh of what was accomplished on the cross and its corresponding call to proclaim and enact the gospel of reconciliation.

The conference was initially held in April 2022, as we journeyed from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, so let us continue, with that spirit, in proclaiming the fullness of the gospel in word and deed (Gilliard): the

great sacrifice, great peace, and great renewal (Tizon), remembering, as Safstrom concludes in the words of Waldenström, that “[God’s] word does not give you a reconciliation to believe in, but it gives you a reconciler, a living person, the Son of God, in whom you can believe, upon whom you can rely with full confidence of heart, and to whom you can wholly surrender yourself.”<sup>6</sup> May you be inspired by these articles to surrender to the living person of Christ, taking confidence of heart to, in the words of Al Tizon, “wage reconciliation.”

---

<sup>6</sup> P. P. Waldenström, *The Reconciliation: Who Was to Be Reconciled? God or Man? Or God and Man? Some Chapters on the Biblical View of the Atonement*, trans. and ed. J. G. Princell (Chicago: John Martenson, 1888), 108.

# Reconciliation as Vocation: Waldenström's Challenge for Preaching and Congregational Life

---

*Mark Safstrom, associate professor of Scandinavian studies,  
Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois*

“**A**tonement” is an English word. “*Försoning*,” meaning, “reconciliation,” is the word used in Swedish for the same concept. The emphasis on the word “reconciliation” in the context of Paul Peter Waldenström’s sermon explains our choice of theme for the symposium “Reconciled and Reconciling: P. P. Waldenström’s Atonement Sermon 150 Years Later,” which took place on April 8, 2022.

Atonement does not exist in a theological vacuum, but has a purpose, indeed many purposes. When Christians affirm that God has reconciled us to God through the work of Jesus Christ, it can be easy to neglect that this reconciliation is for something. We are reconciled *for God’s purposes*. The prophet Isaiah speaks of the word of God, saying:

so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

It will not return to me empty,

but will accomplish what I desire

and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.<sup>1</sup>

Waldenström, too, preached that reconciliation was for some purpose.<sup>2</sup> These purposes are not limited to the past. Instead, as this is the living

---

<sup>1</sup> Isa 55:10–11 (NIV).

<sup>2</sup> Echoing Isa 55:11, Donald Frisk emphasized that for Waldenström, “God’s love is a dynamic, powerful, untiring, working love.” See chapter 7, “The Work of Jesus Christ,” in Frisk, *Covenant Affirmations: This We Believe* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1981), 101.

word of God, we may also approach it as such, and ask what does this historical discussion about reconciliation, about atonement, in the nineteenth century have to do with the history and present-day concerns of the Covenant Church or of American Christianity more generally? The believer is to be reconciled to God, but is also to be reconciled to other people, and to be part of the broader reconciliation work ushering in the kingdom of heaven. “Reconciliation” as a theme for this anniversary year can also be an opportunity for Covenanters and Christians broadly to signal an alternate path to the rancor that has plagued society and the church in recent years.

To me, it has always been poignant that the Covenant Church was born in the midst of earnest discussion and debate about the meaning of being reconciled to God and to one another. This is a profound origin story, I think. As a historian and translator of Waldenström’s writings, I will focus on connecting the 1872 sermon with the rest of his works and providing some historical context for understanding his view of reconciliation. To give this discussion some thematic structure, I have chosen to look at Waldenström’s idea of atonement through the lens of Lutheran understandings of vocation and calling. In this lens, the follower of Christ is called to reconciliation in at least four areas of life: to personal relationships, to the congregation, to work, and to society.

## **Waldenström’s 1872 Sermon on Reconciliation and Ensuing Responses**

The Swedish atonement debate (*försöningsstriden*) was set in motion by a sermon that appeared in June of 1872 in a Swedish devotional journal called *Pietisten* (“The Pietist”).<sup>3</sup> The editor, Paul Peter Waldenström, had been in the role for four years, but was still finishing a sermon series left to him by his predecessor, Carl Olof Rosenius. When Rosenius died in 1868, he was in the midst of a massive project to write sermons on each of the assigned texts for the church year (“Sermons on the Church of Sweden’s New Texts for the High Mass”). It had been Rosenius’s widow, Agata Rosenius, who extended the invitation to Waldenström to assume the editorship. The journal was privately owned, and the agreement was that Waldenström would work for a stipend until the series was completed, after which he would assume ownership. Though a private enterprise, the journal was a central organ for the revivalists in the Evangelical

---

<sup>3</sup> Karl A. Olsson, *By One Spirit* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1962), 672, note 16. Olsson notes that the sermon was printed in two parts in March and June, with the controversial second half appearing in June.

Homeland Foundation or EFS (Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsen) within the Church of Sweden, the Lutheran state church. Deference to Lutheran doctrine was taken for granted, as the focus within this mission society was on practice.

By the spring of 1872, Waldenström had arrived at the “Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity” on Matthew 13:44–46 and chose this occasion to critique the Lutheran definition of the atonement found in the Augsburg Confession.<sup>4</sup> His interest in the atonement had begun at least two or three years earlier.<sup>5</sup> While sitting one day in the city park in Umeå in conversation with two other clergymen, Hellman and Genberg, one of them exclaimed, “Think how marvelous it is that God has been reconciled in Christ.” Waldenström famously blurted out, “where is that written”—“Var står *det* skrivet.”<sup>6</sup> This launched him on an intensive study of scripture, in which he became increasingly confident that the answer was “nowhere.”<sup>7</sup>

The sermon prompted a firestorm of responses—about 200 in all—both affirming and denouncing Waldenström’s views. Perhaps there was some naiveté on his part, but he was aware that this could provoke controversy. Nevertheless, the response was overwhelming, and became painfully personal. He therefore dug in on his position. As Covenant historian Karl A. Olsson explains, the sermon had struck a fault line between low-church, new evangelical Pietists of the Rosenian type, and the more churchly revivalists, for whom it was essential to defend Rosenius’s line of deference to the Lutheran confessions. Whereas Rosenius had demonstrated a kind of biblicist preaching within the guardrails of confessional orthodoxy, Waldenström’s biblicism was not concerned with defending confessions, and increasingly found them deficient.<sup>8</sup> The atonement debate quickly spiraled out into other questions of ecclesiology and mission. Those who sympathized with Waldenström’s reading, or with his view of scripture more generally, also found that this sidelined

---

<sup>4</sup> Olsson treats the atonement controversy and its background in his *By One Spirit*, 108–18.

<sup>5</sup> Waldenström was lecturing on the topic of the atonement as early as September 1869. See *Med Gud och hans vänskap: Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsen genom 100 år*, ed. Allan Hofgren (Stockholm: Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsens Bokförlag, 1956), 103.

<sup>6</sup> *Paul Peter Waldenströms minnesanteckningar 1838–1875*, ed. Bernhard Nyrén (Stockholm: Svenska Missionsförbundets Förlag, 1928), 269.

<sup>7</sup> Olsson, *By One Spirit*, 110.

<sup>8</sup> Olsson, 109.

them within the EFS.<sup>9</sup>

We should pause here to recognize that in 1872, theological disagreements were *not* prompting reconciliation, but in fact, division. There is a cruel irony in reading Waldenström's sermon against this backdrop, since his message was embedded in a sermon about the kingdom of heaven, the parable of the treasure hidden in the field. The highly confessional climate in Sweden in the 1870s, as well as similar denominational exclusivism in the United States, made faithful dissent on *one* point of *one* article in the Augsburg Confession impossible. This was the point: "That Christ was crucified, died, and buried, that He might *reconcile the Father* unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all the sins of men."<sup>10</sup>

Waldenström's correction was this: "that the change, which occurred with the fall, was a change in man alone" and that the reconciliation that was needed for human salvation was "not an act of atonement which appeases God and presents him as being once again gracious but one which removes man's sin and makes him once again righteous."<sup>11</sup> Yet, Waldenström's larger argument was that if an honest reading of scripture found a binding, confessional document to be out of sync with scripture, then the Bible should not rank second. In his mind, a preacher preparing a sermon should not defer to a fixed confessional formula from the sixteenth century, but to the source itself, to scripture, *ad fontes*. Even Luther himself would not have read the Bible this way. It is also telling that the slogan, "where is this written," is borrowed from Luther, as the phrase "Var står det skrivet" is straight from the Swedish translation of Luther's catechism. Dissenting Pietists used this rhetorical strategy for centuries to defend themselves against church authorities who accused them of not being Lutheran enough. The Pietist response was often to explain that they were modeling themselves on what *Luther* said and did.<sup>12</sup>

Waldenström's approach, furthermore, was a rationalist's line of reasoning. He has taken a Rosenian idea to its logical consequence. If God's nature remains constant, and if God is love, then for God to become anything other than love would be to change God's basic nature.

<sup>9</sup> Olsson, 115–16.

<sup>10</sup> Augsburg Confession, Article III: "Of the Son of God."

<sup>11</sup> Paul Peter Waldenström, "Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity," in *Covenant Roots: Sources and Affirmations*, ed. Glenn P. Anderson (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1980), 119–20.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Safstrom, "Defining Lutheranism from the Margins: P. P. Waldenström on Being a 'Good Lutheran' in America," *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 63.2–3 (April–July 2012), 112–13.

In this he rests heavily on passages like 2 Cor 5:18–19 (e.g., “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself”). The notion that Christ would somehow be of another nature than God the Father meant that careless preachers, for instance, might end up presenting sermon illustrations that were illogical or ludicrous, such as that a loving Christ shields sinners from the wrath of an angry God. Hymn writer Oscar Ahnfelt conflicted with Waldenström on exactly this point.<sup>13</sup> Waldenström thought such preaching was unhealthy and cautioned against the idea that the Father is somehow more “severe” than the Son.

But now Christ is the very image of God’s person, or substance, and hence we know that in God there is no attribute which is not found in the Son. What God loves, the Son loves; what God hates, the Son hates. Where God condemns and is angry, there also the Son condemns and is angry. The Father is not more “severe” than the Son, and the Son is not milder or more gentle than the Father. Perhaps you are amazed at such a saying. But quiet yourself before the word of God. It is no jest, but a divine truth, that “he that seeth the Son seeth the Father” [cf. John 14:9].<sup>14</sup>

Covenant scholar Arne Fritzson points out that the new evangelical Pietists had long preferred a view of God that was best reflected by the father of the prodigal son, who rushes out to meet his wayward son.<sup>15</sup> Waldenström also preferred this image and even included it in on the cover of later years of *Pietisten* alongside one of Moses and the bronze serpent. God has done everything. All that the believer can and must do is “look up in faith and live.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Paul Peter Waldenströms minnesanteckningar, 275, 285.

<sup>14</sup> P. P. Waldenström, *The Reconciliation: Who Was to Be Reconciled? God or Man? Or God and Man? Some Chapters on the Biblical View of the Atonement*, trans. and ed. J. G. Princell (Chicago: John Martenson, 1888), 24.

<sup>15</sup> Arne Fritzson, “En Gud som är god och rättfärdig: Betydelsen av gudsbilderna och de teologiska formerna i Paul Petter Waldenströms teologi om den kristna försoningstanken,” in *Liv och rörelse: Svenska Missionskyrkans historia och identitet* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2007), 361; Donald Frisk makes this same point. See Frisk, *Covenant Affirmations*, 100.

<sup>16</sup> Frisk explains Waldenström’s later clarification of his view in 1875, namely, amending his theory “to indicate that the *purpose* of Christ’s coming into the world was to reconcile the world but that such reconciliation is actualized only where there is response in faith.” Frisk, *Covenant Affirmations*, 101.





Figure 1. Cover of *Pietisten*, November 1902, showing Moses and the bronze serpent and the return of the prodigal son.

However, other theologians did (and continue to) argue that there are good reasons not to blur the attributes of the persons of the Trinity or neglect the objective dimension of the atonement.<sup>17</sup> Others charged that Waldenström's theory potentially eliminated the need for salvation, and so they reaffirmed the satisfaction and substitution metaphors that

<sup>17</sup> Lars Lindberg and Arne Fritzson each point out that in Waldenström's day and afterward, critics have often misunderstood his theory due to a simple confusion of the term "subjective." For Waldenström, subjective means that God is the one who acts in atonement as the agent from beginning to end, rather than the one acted upon as an object of Christ's atoning work. Lindberg explains that when critics like Oloph Bexell or Agne Nordlander have dismissed Waldenström's theory as "subjective," it has been due to mistakenly associating it with the subjective or moral influence theory, or an interiorized, subjective Christianity. See Lars Lindberg, "En strid i försoningens ljus: Waldenström omläst och omvärderad," in *En historia berättas—om missionsförbundare*, ed. Rune W. Dahllén and Valborg Lindgärde (Falköping, Sweden: Kimpese, 2004), 52–56. In responding to John Stott among others, Fritzson argues that Waldenström indeed affirmed that the atonement had an objective significance, namely in that it mattered to God and was necessary in removing the sins of humanity. It was not simply an expression of God's love, to which people must individually respond in faith. Note Fritzson, "En Gud som är god och rättfärdig," 362–65.

he rejected.<sup>18</sup> To such criticisms, Waldenström responded:

I would pose this question in return: On what foundation does that doctrine stand most securely—on the foundation that in Christ's death, God was appeased, or on the foundation that in Christ's death the race of Adam was made righteous? On the former foundation, there can be no higher doctrine built than exemption-from-punishment by faith [straffrihet genom tron]; the latter foundation alone is sufficient to support the doctrine: justification by faith—and that is more, infinitely much more.<sup>19</sup>

Since Waldenström's theory challenged the Augsburg Confession, this was a non-starter for the Church of Sweden, as it questioned its very ecclesiology. This was also the case for the North American Lutheran churches founded by Swedes, such as the Augustana Synod. Karl Olsson points out that Lutheran leaders like Tufve Nilsson Hasselquist viewed adherence to the confessions as the only way to unite the low-church Rosenian pietists with the more orthodox Lutherans, no easy task in the American Midwest where denominational structures were young, immature, and in constant flux.<sup>20</sup> Waldenström's sermon was denounced by Hasselquist and others in the synod as being "hyperevangelical"

---

<sup>18</sup> Similar themes appear in more recent discussions among those seeking to distance themselves from satisfaction and substitution theories of atonement. Scot McKnight makes a case that all five of the main metaphors for the atonement should be retained in a holistic perspective, while cautioning against overemphasizing any one theory: "The legal element of [the satisfaction theory] can be easily overcooked, and the theory itself often has been burnt on such theorizing. ... When overly judicialized or reified, penal substitution distorts the fullness of the atonement." See McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007), 111, 113. Mark Noll goes further in echoing John Stott's assertion (1986) that not only should the substitution theory be retained, but that it is "the key biblical metaphor for the atonement," and that Aulén's view is inadequate on its own, and can only partly be harmonized with the other two major theories, substitution and moral influence. See Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 68. Tony Jones leans in the opposite direction, underscoring the inherent weakness in the idea that a theory that did not emerge until a millennium after Christ can claim to be central to Christian theology. He instead makes a general case against penal substitutionary atonement theory. See Jones, *Did God Kill Jesus? Searching for Love in History's Most Famous Execution* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Translated in Mark Safstrom, *The Swedish Pietists: A Reader: Excerpts from the Writings of Carl Olof Rosenius and Paul Peter Waldenström* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 90–91 (from *I ingen annan är frälsning*, 1877).

<sup>20</sup> Olsson, *By One Spirit*, 103–05, 194–95.

[*hyperevangelisk*]. The term refers to the Waldenströmians' aspiration to form congregations that were comprised of "only believers," and to their skepticism of any binding confessions that might prevent these congregation from being able to accommodate "all believers."<sup>21</sup> In this latter sense, even the Rosenian Pietists had been accused of overemphasized grace at the expense of the law.<sup>22</sup> The Waldenströmians were depicted as ravenous grasshoppers gnawing, buzzing, and eating everything in sight, a reference to the damage left behind in Augustana congregations that split over this teaching.<sup>23</sup> Waldenström was also accused of being antinomian or Socinian.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 2. Amy Moberg and Lina Sandell-Berg, from B. Wadström's *Ur minnet och dagboken*, vol I, 159, vol II, 200.

Many revivalists in the EFS such as Amy Moberg and Linda Sandell, found Waldenström's argument scandalous because of its apparent combative spirit. It seemed counter-productive and unnecessary to argue

<sup>21</sup> Safstrom, "Defining Lutheranism from the Margins," 119–20.

<sup>22</sup> Gunnar Westin, *George Scott och hans verksamhet i Sverige* (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelsens Bokförlag, 1929), 36.

<sup>23</sup> L. O. Hultgren of Jamestown, New York, wrote to T. N. Hasselquist on 20 February 1878: "The Waldenstromians are worse than grasshoppers in Minnesota and Kansas, genuine insects, they buzz, bite, eat, and gnaw wherever they advance." Quoted in O. Fritiof Ander, *T. N. Hasselquist: The Career and Influence of a Swedish-American Clergyman, Journalist and Educator* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Historical Society, 1931), 166.

<sup>24</sup> Karl A. Olsson, "Paul Peter Waldenström and Augustana," in *The Swedish Immigrant Community in Transition: Essays in Honor of Dr. Conrad Bergendoff*, ed. J. Iverne Dowie and Ernest Espelie (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Historical Society, 1963), 111, 115.

a point, which was not in the spirit of Rosenius. Why pick an unnecessary fight that will complicate or disrupt ministry? Amy Moberg had been Rosenius's assistant, and a trusted confidante of Waldenström's. She cautioned him beforehand not to print the sermon. She later sympathized with his viewpoint and lost her job at another EFS-affiliated newspaper.<sup>25</sup> Waldenström explained himself to critics, friends, and former friends alike by pointing out that, though Rosenius hadn't challenged the confession, it was from Rosenius that he had gotten these ideas. He didn't think he was departing from Rosenius in spirit, only in deference to the confession. Waldenström writes:

“God so loved the world.” And here we must stop, for to ask what the foundation is for God's love, this is to ask, why God is God. “God loved, because he loved, and therefore he gave his Son,” says Rosenius, quite to the point.”<sup>26</sup>

From the other perspective, the fierce reaction, or overreaction, of people in positions of power in the Church of Sweden, the EFS, and the Augustana Synod seemed to validate for many people Waldenström's larger and more important claim that the Augsburg Confession shouldn't be weighed more heavily than scripture. Why was *defending* the Confession a fight worth picking if it will complicate or disrupt ministry and, more importantly, hurt individuals who are standing by their consciences?



J. G. PRINCELL

Johan Gustav Princell, from *Missionsförbundets minneskrift 1885–1910*, 20.

<sup>25</sup> Olsson, *By One Spirit*, 116.

<sup>26</sup> Translated in Safstrom, *The Swedish Pietists*, 87 (from *I ingen annan är frälsning*, 1877).

Johan Gustav Princell is emblematic of this side of the atonement debate. Princell had been a clergyman in the Augustana Synod but was defrocked in 1878 for aligning with Waldenström. By 1875, the synod adhered to the so-called Galesburg Rule: “Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran ministers only, and Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only.” There was no space for dissent on the Augsburg Confession in the 1870s. Princell’s experience with what he saw as overreach of church authority led him to be critical of denominations altogether, and he eventually became a leader for the Evangelical Free Church.<sup>27</sup>

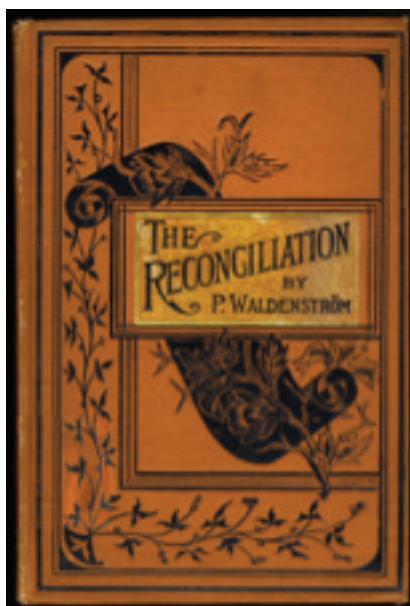


Figure 3. Cover to Princell’s translation of *The Reconciliation*, 1888.

It was also Princell who translated Waldenström’s writings into English. The 1872 sermon was the catalyst for the atonement debate, but Waldenström expanded his ideas in a couple of versions in 1873

<sup>27</sup> Josephine Princell, *J. G. Princells levnadsminnen: på uppmaning av Svenska Evangeliska Frikyrkan samlade och utgivna* (Chicago: Martenson, 1916), 41. Princell’s experiences with the Augustana Synod and his defense of Waldenström’s theory, as well as his visit with Waldenström in Gävle, are recounted especially on pages 30–31, 38–49, 89–90. For the development of the Galesburg Rule, see also Mark Granquist, *Lutherans in America: A New History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 181.

in *Om försoningens betydelse* (“On the Meaning of the Atonement”).<sup>28</sup> Princell translated and published this as *The Reconciliation* in 1888.<sup>29</sup> That same year, Princell also translated Waldenström’s *The Blood of Jesus* (*Jesu blod*), and *The Lord Is Right* (*Herren är främ*), which also expanded on the atonement.<sup>30</sup> When Yale University awarded Waldenström an honorary doctorate in 1889, these were the texts available for English-speakers to evaluate his ideas. This honor came while Waldenström was touring the United States. He would later visit Yale again in 1901 as a guest at its bicentennial. Princell’s translations helped garner particular interest among Congregationalists and make Waldenström’s name known. The Chicago newspapers even heralded Waldenström with the grandiose title “The Martin Luther of Sweden,” when he visited, which gives some sense of how he was viewed at the apex of his international influence.<sup>31</sup>



Figure 4. Waldenström in academic regalia at Yale, 1901, from *Nya färder*, 48.

<sup>28</sup> Waldenström, *Om försoningens betydelse* (Stockholm: Pietisten och A. L. Normans Förlagsexpedition, 1873). Karl A. Olsson explains that the printing of 3,000 copies of this booklet in Chicago represents a wide interest, both among supporters as well as critics. See Olsson, “Paul Peter Waldenström and Augustana,” 115.

<sup>29</sup> P. P. Waldenström, *The Reconciliation: Who Was to Be Reconciled? God or Man? Or God and Man? Some Chapters on the Biblical View of the Atonement* (Chicago: John Martenson, 1888).

<sup>30</sup> Josephine Princell, *J. G. Princells levnadsminnen*, 173; P. P. Waldenström, *The Blood of Jesus: What Is Its Significance? Meditations on All the New Testament Passages in Which the Expression Occurs* (Chicago: John Martenson, 1888); P. P. Waldenström, *The Lord Is Right: Meditations on the Twenty-Fifth Psalm in the Psalter of King David* (Chicago: John Martenson, 1889).

<sup>31</sup> Mark Safstrom, *The Religious Origins of Democratic Pluralism: Paul Peter Waldenström and the Politics of the Swedish Awakening 1868–1917* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick 2016), 6–7.

Though academic interest in Waldenström's ideas had a brief moment in the sun, this quickly subsided as the twentieth century dawned. By the 1930s, for instance, when another Swede, Gustaf Aulén, published his treatment on the atonement, *Christus Victor*, Waldenström's work was already marginal.<sup>32</sup> Even in the Covenant Church in the United States, Mission Covenant president C. V. Bowman would explain later that while most Covenanters certainly tended to support Waldenström's idea, it was by no means universally accepted.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, although Waldenström himself is not widely remembered, the theory he advanced has indeed had a long-lasting impact in both contexts.<sup>34</sup>

### Waldenström's View of the Atonement and His Broader Theology

Waldenström continued to regularly apply his atonement ideas to his overall pastoral and congregational concerns, and he weaves this leitmotif throughout the rest of his many devotional writings. Josephine Princell, quoting her husband, comically summed up Waldenström's preaching legacy by saying, "His instrument has only one or two strings, but those strings he plays masterfully."<sup>35</sup> This might be a bit reductive, but it rings true that the atonement was a favorite theme that he expounded regularly. In order to understand the significance of his view, we need to go beyond

<sup>32</sup> Gustaf Aulén does not mention Waldenström in *Christus Victor*, but in several places does invoke other Pietists and Pietism generally as perpetuating Luther's rediscovery of the classical idea of atonement, particularly in the imagery used in their hymnody and devotional writings. Note Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 98, 134, 144. Lars Lindberg also points out that in 1977, on the eve of the centennial for the Mission Covenant Church in Sweden, Aulén wrote the following appraisal of Waldenström's theory in the journal *Tro och liv*: "My critique [of the objective satisfaction theory] certainly proceeded in a different manner than the one that prompted the origin of the Mission Covenant. But the very fact that both the Mission Covenant's and my own critique concerned the unbiblical idea that God could have been reconciled instead of that he, according to the Bible, is the one who in Christ reconciled the world with himself (2 Cor 5:19)—this common front naturally gave me a special interest in and understanding for, appreciation of, and sense of affinity with the Mission Covenant. I have also been glad about the fact that this outlook of mine has found a certain resonance there." Lindberg, "En strid i försoningens ljus," 61.

<sup>33</sup> C. V. Bowman, *The Mission Covenant of America* (Chicago: Covenant Book Concern, 1925), 93–99.

<sup>34</sup> Lars Lindberg suggests that Aulén's *Christus Victor* was as well received as it was in Sweden *because* it had already been preceded by the popular movement led by Waldenström, and furthermore, that virtually no one in Sweden today argues for the Anselmian view, pointing to a far-reaching residual legacy—"almost everyone seems to be a Waldenströmian." Lindberg, "En strid i försoningens ljus," 60.

<sup>35</sup> Josephine Princell, *J. G. Princells levnadsminnen*, 89–90.



the 1872 sermon, and look at the rest of his writing and career.

Though atonement was a rally cry for the Missions Friends, this was soon eclipsed by other questions, such as the significance of Holy Communion and congregational polity. These were far more important to the discussions in 1876 through 1878 that led to the founding of the Mission Covenant in Sweden, and later, to the founding of the Covenant Church in North America.<sup>36</sup> For Waldenström, the atonement was never isolated from ecclesiology and missiology, and neither was it individualistic in nature. Below are some examples of how Waldenström's ideas about the atonement are connected with his broader concerns for preaching and congregational life.

I have chosen the Lutheran concept of vocation as a framework to organize my analysis. Vocation is the idea that each Christian has a calling from God, or more specifically, multiple spheres into which they are called. Luther had revolutionized the meaning of Christian vocation. In the Middle Ages, to have a vocation was very specific and meant to be called to a holy order as a priest, monk, or nun. Ordinary laypeople did not have vocations in this sense. Luther, by contrast, held that each person had a vocation, thereby elevating the daily lives and work of laypeople. Working as a cobbler was now holy work and a calling. Managing a household was a calling. Breastfeeding a baby and changing diapers was a calling. There was a calling to the family and personal relationships, to one's work, to the church, and to the state.<sup>37</sup> The calling of a Christian was multidirectional. These are the four areas that I have chosen to use when looking at Waldenström's view of reconciliation. Updating the language for today, one can substitute the "state" for "society," and "family" can be broadened to "interpersonal relationships." For Waldenström, the congregation was nothing more than the local manifestation of the global church.

It mattered for Waldenström that preaching on the atonement accurately emphasize that love is the motive for both God the Father and Jesus Christ. Love is the motivating reason for reconciliation, as well as the goal of all preaching. Preaching should move human beings to love and to reconciliation. As he writes:

A higher degree of love cannot be conceived of than this,  
that God gives his only begotten Son. But with such a love

---

<sup>36</sup> Olsson, *By One Spirit*, 87–97.

<sup>37</sup> Jason Mahn, "Introduction," in *Radical Lutherans/Lutheran Radicals* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 18.



he has loved Cain as well as the virgin Mary, Judas as well as John, Demas as well as Paul. ...he has given Christ for the ungodly just as well as for the godly; and this he has done, not as a help for himself to love them, but that he might help them out of sin, and help them to true love.<sup>38</sup>

Waldenström explains that God's motives for reconciliation proceed out of love, precisely because the purpose of God's reconciliation is that human beings are to learn to love. If wrath were the emphasis, how exactly does this show humans how to love? God models love, so that humans will love.

In writing about reconciliation, Waldenström uses the language that the Christian is called to be an ambassador:

An ambassador has nothing else to do than to deliver the words of his sender to him whom they concern. ...Now, such was the position of the apostles in their relation to God. ...they were only to deliver to all peoples, both to Jews and to Gentiles, plainly and artlessly the word of God—not to explain or maintain it, but only to proclaim it. It is this that gives their preaching such an extraordinary weight.<sup>39</sup>

Exactly how Waldenström meant that preaching could be done “artlessly” is vague, yet one important aspect of this is certainly to liberate preaching from the constraints of confessional documents. This would also liberate preachers from being bound to use inherited rhetorical tropes and illustrations that they found to be extra-biblical, and which especially may result in harmful preaching.

In his discussion of how to preach about reconciliation, Waldenström draws an illustration from the prophet Jonah. Jonah's disappointment over the fact that God did not show his wrath to the people of Nineveh exemplifies for Waldenström how the preacher is called to preach but has no control over how the preached word will be received. How the hearer will respond is up to them. More important, the preacher does not know the mind of God. Jonah is disappointed because God did not show God's wrath, which Jonah hoped God would. Waldenström writes:

---

<sup>38</sup> Waldenström, *The Reconciliation*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Waldenström, 110.

The ways and judgments of God are always right. It is our heart that is wrong. ...In Jonah you see the thoughts of man; and as the grace of God came in conflict with them, Jonah became so angry that he wished to die. O how foolish it is to be provoked at God's abounding grace! But such is the darkness of nature. However, God stood by his right, reproved the prophet, judged according to truth, and let Nineveh stand. Think what a blessed lesson. Let us open our hearts fully for the inexpressible mercy of God.<sup>40</sup>

Preaching reconciliation that originates in the *mercy of God*, rather than emphasizing wrath, is at the center of how Waldenström understood both the method and purpose of preaching.

Similarly, Waldenström uses the pattern of God's reconciliation as the model for interpersonal reconciliation. This he grounds in Matthew 5:24, in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, just following the Beatitudes. He writes:

What does it mean for any one to be reconciled to his brother? Does it mean to pacify, to appease, or conciliate, his brother? Not at all. Because it may be so that the brother does not need to be appeased, or conciliated; it may be that his mind and loving relation have not at all been disturbed. But still it is necessary for him who has wronged him to go and be reconciled to him. ...the Lord did not say: "Go, and reconcile thy brother." But this he said, "Go, and be thou reconciled to thy brother."<sup>41</sup>

As translator, Princell has pointed out that the word used for "reconcile" is a reflexive verb—if it does not have an object, then it must have a reflexive pronoun: "att försona sig" is to allow oneself to be reconciled.<sup>42</sup> Just as Waldenström urges us not to think of God as needing to be "appeased," we should also not think of justice between people as being based in appeasing wrath.<sup>43</sup> Vengeance or revenge is not what humans are called to, and neither is this any part of God's justice. God's righteousness is his love. "Righteousness is no antithesis to love, no limitation of love, no restraint or check on love."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Waldenström, 33–34.

<sup>41</sup> Waldenström, 107.

<sup>42</sup> Waldenström, 107.

<sup>43</sup> Waldenström, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Waldenström, 19.

Waldenström explains that what it means to be an ambassador is to speak a word of reconciliation, not in Christ's place (vicariously), but for the sake of Christ (as his ambassador), because he told us to do it. The assumption is not that the brother needs to be appeased, or that the brother has wrath in his heart that can be cancelled. What happens in the heart of the wronged brother is not in the control of the one seeking to be reconciled. Loving enemies (as in Matt 5:44-48) is the highest example God's righteousness, explains Waldenström:

To love enemies is therefore a likeness of God's righteousness. Imagine two men who have been offended. One of them says: "My righteousness, or sense of justice, is violated or offended, and requires satisfaction if I am to show any favor towards him who offended me." But the other one, so far from demanding any satisfaction, sacrifices all that he has, that he may restore and reconcile the offender to himself.<sup>45</sup>

Waldenström also references the Good Samaritan in this context (Luke 10:25-37). It is in looking at Christ that we understand who God is. Christ models the restorative reconciliation of the Samaritan, which is what we are supposed to do in turn.

From interpersonal relationships, Waldenström expands and applies this rationale to reconciling differences within the congregation. A congregation, he thought, should have "room for all who believe in Christ" and "not exclude any of the members of the body of Christ," only the unbelievers. Waldenström responds preemptively to claims that this view is impossible, by saying:

First and foremost, there is no congregation which does not contain a number of different opinions in sway. But these different opinions need not prevent them from staying together. ...There have existed and do exist congregations, which are built solely on the grounds that their members are believers in Christ. All of the apostolic congregations were such. And they demonstrated themselves capable of staying together, despite many different opinions. "Well then, how long?" you say. Answer: as long as love prevails within them. "But what about after that?" Well, when the love has grown cold,

---

<sup>45</sup> Waldenström, 17.

then the congregation is dead and what help would it be to attempt, with the aid of confessional documents, to try to hold the corpse together?<sup>46</sup>

Waldenström held that a congregation that does not make room for everyone who is in Christ is sectarian. His vision for the congregation was as a place where differences of opinion can be reconciled precisely because it is held together not by confessional documents, but by common faith placed in Christ, the Reconciler.

Donald Frisk explained that the faith these revivalists emphasized was as reliance and trust (*fiducia*), rather than intellectual assent (*assensus*). When Waldenström speaks of a faith that will hold the congregation together, this is also what he means.<sup>47</sup> Making room for a diversity of opinions in peripheral matters of biblical interpretation became an aspirational principle of the Covenant Church. Waldenström explains further:

Such a heartfelt reliance on Jesus can exist in the midst of very poor and very incorrect knowledge. ...It is such a reliance that we find among all of those people in the New Testament who are called believers, as we shall soon see. If one were to have tested them according to our catechisms and spiritual textbooks, then they would surely not have performed well. ...See, in this way when you hold fast to and rely upon Jesus with all your heart, then you have a proper faith in him, and whether you are Lutheran, Reformed, Catholic, or whatever else, then you are yet a Christian.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the high anti-Catholic sentiment of the period, it is remarkable that Waldenström includes “Catholic” in his congregational view. Any Christian, even a Catholic, could find a place in his ideal congregational model. This was an ecumenical vision, and he frequently urges Christians to “lower the walls” between different Christian traditions and communions.

Regarding a Christian’s calling to their work, Waldenström also connects this to the Sermon on the Mount, as he explains what it means to be salt and light:

---

<sup>46</sup> Translated in Mark Safstrom, *The Swedish Pietists*, 107 (from *Den Kristna församlingen*, 1899).

<sup>47</sup> Frisk, *Covenant Affirmations*, 100.

<sup>48</sup> Translated in Safstrom, *The Swedish Pietists*, 188-90 (from *Guds eviga frälsningsråd*, 1891).

This is how the Lord intends for the believers to be light in the world. They may be greater or lesser lights, they might stand in the market square, in the streets or inside a room, they may shine by the beds of the sick and the poor, or in some other place—each and every one of them is to shine with the light one has, until that point when their light has burned down or the master of the house has blown it out.<sup>49</sup>

In regard to the analogy of what it means to be “salt,” Waldenström chooses to emphasize how salt can sting. When Waldenström compares John the Baptist to Herod, and sets John Wycliff, Jan Huss, Peter Waldo, and Martin Luther in opposition to the kingdoms of this world, he explains that in delivering their prophetic critiques they were “stinging in the wounds” of the temporal and religious authorities. And it was for their prophetic voice that they suffered.<sup>50</sup> Being salt and light is the calling to Christians to transform the context of their daily lives, and to sanctify their work, wherever they have been placed. The phrase he uses—“wherever we have been placed”—can be understood in a nineteenth-century Swedish social context in which there is still a lack of upward mobility for most people. There was not usually much agency in any modern sense. So, whatever one’s context, wherever one has been placed, the Christian is to embody the Sermon on the Mount in their work.

As members of Christ’s kingdom, Christians are called to the work of reconciliation between nations. Law and order in the kingdoms of this world is based in wrath, that is, the force of weapon and the subjugation of peoples.<sup>51</sup> Christ’s kingdom is diametrically opposed to this, as Christ offers human society notions of justice that are not based in wrath or external force, but which proceed from God’s love. Referencing Gal 3:28, in which the distinction between Jew and Greek is removed, Waldenström sees the congregation as the only conceivable way of uniting all nations into one. He writes:

In the Christian congregation, on the other hand, a

---

<sup>49</sup> Translated in Safstrom, *The Swedish Pietists*, 218 (from *Samlade predikningar II*, 1902).

<sup>50</sup> Rebekah Eklund, *The Beatitudes through the Ages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), 263. Eklund connects Waldenström’s sermon on “salt and light” with the Beatitudes, as well as identifying this within the context of a prophetic protest of empire.

<sup>51</sup> Translated in Safstrom, *The Swedish Pietists*, 108 (cf. “Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday After Trinity,” 116–17).

melting together is supposed to happen, in which all the differences of class and nation are supposed to disappear. Even if it goes slowly, it happens nonetheless—and it is surely happening. This is not only a matter of a superficial unification, but a true melting together, and even now one can already start to see the faint beginnings of this. For wherever on earth believers meet together, they feel themselves drawn together as brothers and sisters. This is God's love in Christ Jesus, which makes them soft and melts away that which previously held them at a distance from one another.<sup>52</sup>

Waldenström's references here to "melting together" bear some resemblance to the melting pot ideologies that would develop about this same time. Yet the melting pot is something that he seems to reject elsewhere in his commentary on Swedish immigration. Rather, this imagery can be read as his attempt to radically interpret Gal 3:28, particularly in "slaying the enmity" between peoples. This imagery expresses what it could mean for congregational members to truly become bonded together in the work of reconciling nations.

Activism is also one of the hallmarks of historical evangelical movements, as historian David Bebbington has defined them, and this was certainly a hallmark of nineteenth century Swedish Pietism. There were many Mission Covenanters who felt a calling into the political arena, and a remarkable number of them became members of the Swedish parliament. Waldenström himself served in the Riksdag from 1884 to 1905. Chief among his political concerns were issues related to the temperance movement, democratizing representation, alleviating poverty, stemming emigration through Liberal strategies (rather than Socialist ones), and separating the Church of Sweden from the state.<sup>53</sup>

Waldenström tended to keep his religious writings separate from his commentary on politics and society. However, in his published travel accounts from his tours of North America, he shares frequent critical commentary on race relations in the United States. For instance, he expresses his bewilderment at racially segregated schools, theatres, restaurants, and train cars, quoting reports from Swedish-American newspapers. He found the phenomenon of lynching particularly

---

<sup>52</sup> Translated in Safstrom, *The Swedish Pietists*, 108 (from *Davids Psalmer med utläggning*, 1904).

<sup>53</sup> Safstrom, *The Religious Origins of Democratic Pluralism*.

abhorrent and a miscarriage of justice, explains to his readers that the breaking of treaties with Native Americans was duplicitous on the part of the American government, and makes the case that the Chinese Exclusion Act, which had recently gone into effect, represented a double standard. He includes this litany of examples of American hypocrisy as part of an effort to convince Swedish immigrants to maintain a critical view of their new homeland.<sup>54</sup> At the end of one chapter of his 1890 travel account, after listing such critiques, he even concludes with this ominous picture of God's judgment:

As I have said before and will say again: America has certain good things to teach us. ...But the acknowledgment of all of this must nevertheless not make the objective observer blind to all of the social injustices that are allowed to exist in the same country, and which threaten the health of the union with perils that once led a prominent American statesman to exclaim: "I tremble for my country, when I reflect that God is just."<sup>55</sup>

I am struck by his choice of quoting Thomas Jefferson's words here, and I think it is telling that Waldenström's rejection of references to God's wrath in preaching does not at all seem to mean a rejection of the notion of God's judgment as being severe. The gravity of the social injustices he critiques in the United States is not *lessened* by the fact that God's justice originates in his love, rather than his wrath. In following Waldenström's reasoning, if the people of Nineveh can heed the words of the prophet and allow themselves to be reconciled, then perhaps there is hope for the people of the United States to do the same.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, these are just some examples of the ways I have found Waldenström's atonement ideas throughout his devotional writings and social commentary. Whatever limitations there may be in Waldenström's idea of the atonement on a theoretical level, I would say that the practical application of his ideas for preaching and congregational life demonstrate great potential to connect with contemporary interests in restorative justice, among other concerns. Waldenström himself emphasized that our ideas about the atonement—what we believe—are secondary to the one

---

<sup>54</sup> Waldenström, *Genom Norra Amerikas Förenta Stater* (Stockholm: Pietistens Expedition, 1890), 284–292.

<sup>55</sup> Waldenström, 291–92. Translation by the author.

in whom we place our faith.<sup>56</sup> His challenge was to encourage preachers to present their congregations with a picture of a God that is worthy of our trust, a reconciling God, whose reconciliation models the love that God expects from us. I will close with these words from Waldenström:

But his word does not give you a reconciliation to believe in, but it gives you a reconciler, a living person, the Son of God, in whom you can believe, upon whom you can rely with full confidence of heart, and to whom you can wholly surrender yourself.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Frisk sums up his assessment thusly: “Waldenström’s doctrine served as a corrective to the overemphasis on the penal and forensic dimensions in the prevailing doctrine of his day, but not even the most ardent Waldenströmiens would contend that their hero spoke the final word on atonement. But he did direct attention to the organic unity of the incarnation, the death on the cross, and the resurrection in the work of atonement and also highlighted the necessity of subjective involvement in the atonement which has its basis in an objective historical act.” Frisk, *Covenant Affirmations*, 104.

<sup>57</sup> Waldenström, *The Reconciliation*, 108.



# The Driving Force behind Divine Justice

---

*Dominique Gilliard, director of racial righteousness and reconciliation,  
Evangelical Covenant Church, Chicago, Illinois*

**T**he gospel is not a “get out of hell free” card. It is an invitation to participation.<sup>1</sup>

We are invited by a gracious and loving God to participate in the reconciling work that God is already up to in the world, as the hands and feet of Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit. Similarly, atonement is not about appeasing God’s wrath. It is about realigning humanity to live into its created purpose—to live on mission and to live in right relationship with our Creator and creation. In the words of Cecilia Williams, “We are reconciled so that we can make God’s name known, and love shown, throughout the world.” This is the mission of the church. This is what our witness should prioritize according to the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandment. We are ambassadors of reconciliation. We are called to be repairers of the breach, rooted in Jesus’s mission statement founded in Luke 4:18–19 and in Isaiah 58, which is where God tells us about the nature of the fasting we are called to do.

One of the core issues that undergirds Waldenström’s convictions is the belief that the kingdom consists of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit. At a time when Christian nationalism is re-emerging, we should

---

<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: The following is a transcription of Dominique Gilliard’s talk at the April 8, 2022, conference, “Reconciled and Reconciling: Waldenström’s Atonement Sermon 150 Years Later,” sponsored by the Commission on Covenant History and North Park Theological Seminary. Since this is a transcription of Gilliard’s informal oral presentation, we have not included the few sources mentioned in the piece.

heed the wisdom of Waldenström and learn from his clarity regarding the distinction between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God.

Waldenström wrote, “The kingdoms of this world are by their nature characterized by law and order, while the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” For those who belong to it, the law and order of worldly kingdoms is not usually an accurate reflection of God’s will. The laws and the enforcement of earthly laws are ordered by human interests and logic that are commonly in direct opposition to the will of God and the principles and priorities of the kingdom of God. While too many churches conflate being a good citizen with being a faithful follower of Christ, Waldenström is explicit about the ways worldly kingdoms and the kingdom of God are not synonymous.

Worldly kingdoms—which I prefer to describe as empires—do not reflect the love, mercy, and justice of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Worldly empires place profit over people, and in doing so, refuse to equitably affirm the *imago Dei* in all of God’s children—a biblical truth that we find in the beginning pages of scripture. Therefore, they often create a sliding scale of humanity in which it is believed that some people reflect the divine image more than others. This anti-gospel worldview creates categories of “us and them,” and dehumanizing practices, policies, laws, systems, and structures that infringe upon shalom. They engender flourishing for some at the expense of others. These worldly ideologies and practices are incapable of yielding good news, much less the righteousness, justice, and reconciliation the gospel calls us to pursue. Waldenström explains, “For if the kingdoms of the earth were to combine all of their strength, they could not erase a single sin or give a trembling, conscious peace. They can only, with all of their glory, lull centers to sleep in their carnal security and maintain them in such a slumber.”

Worldly empires make false promises. They proclaim that they can bring peace, prosperity, and abundant life, but they pursue these things through warfare, oppression, and rugged individualism. God’s word tells us that these things come through Jesus Christ alone—through sacrificial love first modeled for us and extended to us by Jesus, through a mutuality that declares that we belong to Christ, and through an interdependence that causes us to function as an interconnected body.

Waldenström demonstrates an unrelenting commitment to the word of God and a willingness to suffer for proclaiming an unpopular truth, speaking a prophetic word amid a culture that desired a different accounting or articulation of what is understood as good news. But what the culture and much of the church desired to be defined as goodness

was something that actually conformed to the pattern of this world and was not rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Waldenström writes, “As concerns the wrath of God because of sin, we realize that this cannot be taken away through Christ. God must hate sin, and as long as he is the holy God, wrath over sin, so to speak, is the reverse of love over righteousness, for where the latter is, there must also be the former.”

My Old Testament professor at North Park Theological Seminary, Dr. Jim Bruckner, was helpful for me in talking about the wrath of God. In his classes, Bruckner commonly explained that God’s wrath is good news for those who suffer in the world, especially amid oppressive realities and where those who drive oppression are not held accountable for their sins. God’s wrath forbids the violation of the divine image in his people and will not allow the shalom that God desires for all God’s children to be thwarted. This is good news. Wrath in this sense is probably better understood or articulated today as accountability. Accountability is requisite for any understanding of justice. It is important that God hates injustice. I think we shy away from this when we describe who God is—God’s character and nature. Just as God hates injustice, the people of God should hate injustice. The hatred of injustice should drive us into a particular type of witness. It should drive us into advocating for things to be as God intended them to be.

The justice that Christians pursue is always distinguished by the fact that we are God’s children. We do not go out and pursue justice, or try to rectify systems and structures, in the same way everyone else does. We are marked by the cross of Christ, and that informs our ethic in the world. However, we should have a righteous indignation toward sin when we see sin—the distortion of the image of God in humanity, or systems and structures that infringe on collective shalom. We are called to pursue this justice that is first modeled by God, from whom we take our cues. Later on in his sermon, Waldenström explains, “For when he gave his son, it was not in order that he might find a person on whom he could slake his anger in order to be able to love the world, but in order to find a person through whom he could save man, his fallen children, whom he still loved.”

This is important because in the atonement we understand that God was not freed from wrath. We were forgiven of our sins and freed from our captivity to sin, but it was not God who was liberated from an anger that allowed God to love us. God always loved us. God’s love is unrelenting, unceasing, never ending even in the face of our sin. It was we who were actually reconciled to God, not the other way around. God’s

love was not impeded because of sin; rather, we needed to be reconciled into right relationship with God so that we could live into the mission as the people of God. This might seem like just semantics, but it is really important for our ethic and our witness in the world.

Waldenström took a unique approach to rebutting the critics of his atonement theory. Instead of quoting other theologians or reverting to a philosophical debate, he simply asked the question, “Where is it written?” Waldenström believed the truth about the atonement was rooted in God’s word, not in human theory. This is what empowered him to go against the popular discernment of the time. The question, “Where is it written?” not only served as a north star for Waldenström, but continues to be a guiding light for the Evangelical Covenant Church today.

I see parallels between the nuances that Waldenström articulates regarding atonement to the way I believe we are called to read a passage like Micah 6. In both cases, humanity is tempted to make God too much like us. The theological purpose of Micah 6 is to illustrate that Israel does not know the only authentic way to come before the Lord, which is total personal conversion. Israel, because of sin, is separated from God. Israel is therefore unable to see and recognize God’s true character. God did not want blood sacrifices like other gods at the time were understood to desire. Yahweh did not, and does not, need our material sacrifices, regardless of their extravagance. There is only one sacrifice that the Lord truly desires from us, and that is what the ever-popular Micah 6:8 encapsulates.

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God. (Mic 6:8, NIV)

Without understanding the attempted sacrifices of Israel in Micah 6:6–7, and the Lord’s refusal of these prideful, sinful attempts to atone for sin, the Lord’s requirements in 6:8 are incomplete and prone to be misapplied and misunderstood. The Godhead requires a change of heart, a change of lifestyle, and a disposition toward both God and neighbor. God requires us to be faithful stewards of the resources we are entrusted with, including our money, possessions, and the earth on which we live. God wants our hearts and lives. Despite the good deeds we might do or the evangelistic efforts in which we may partake, any offering that falls short of a changed heart and life is simply insufficient. This is what Micah tried to convey to the masses in Micah 6:8. The prophet aggregates the essence of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah by connecting the proper atonement

for human sin, authentic worship, and the covenantal requirements of God. Amos professes that God desires justice rather than sacrifices. Hosea depicts what it means to love compassionately with mercy. Isaiah stresses faithfulness and obedience to God which leads to social activism that produces liberation, as well as justice for the oppressed.

Because our atonement theology is important in expressing what we truly believe about God, an atonement inspired by the appeasement of God's wrath is problematic, and for a multitude of reasons. First, it declares that punishment was needed for reconciliation to transpire. It then says that Christ took on flesh, not because of love, as John 3:16 says, but to endure punishment in our stead, thereby disputing the fundamental biblical truth that God's love inspired the incarnation and reducing or eliminating the significance of Jesus's incarnation. An atonement to appease God's wrath emboldens theories like penal substitution to covertly function as gnosticism—a kind of disembodied faith, which teaches us that only our spirits truly matter, not our material bodies or the conditions and circumstances of the world in which we live. Atonement theories rooted in the view that the Passion is about the appeasement of God's wrath are reductionist. They reduce Jesus's body to punitive surrogacy.

The majority of these theories assume that Jesus merely came into the world to clean up our mess outside of establishing the possibility of reconciliation—again, not by love. These theories would have us believe that the mechanics of atonement are more important than the life, witness, and ministry of Jesus. For example, the Spirit descending on Jesus after his baptism, his inauguration of the kingdom, his calling, and the sending the disciples are all minimized in ways that are not true to scripture.

Penal substitution also fails to hold in tension the wrath and love involved in God's justice. Retribution and isolation are incapable of breeding true transformation. They merely induce vengeance and retaliation. When issued within the context of relational accountability, and done with a restorative paradigm, scripture shows that measured retribution can be an important part of holding accountable individuals who commit relational violations. We must not lose sight of the fact that justice is ultimately manifested in the restoration of righteousness within relationships, not in pain inflicted or time served behind bars.

As Christians, the cross undoubtedly frames our understanding of divine justice. Christopher Marshall, a theologian from New Zealand, writes, "The logic of the cross actually confounds the principle of retributive

justice, for salvation is achieved not by the offender compensating for his crimes by suffering, but by the victim—the one offended against—suffering vicariously on behalf of the offended.”

Penal substitution is most problematic because it makes God’s response to sin too much like our own. It recasts God in our own image as opposed to allowing the divinely inspired scriptures to speak for God’s motives. Marshall also writes that restoration, not retribution, is the hallmark of God’s justice and is God’s final word in history. Restorative justice must be the aim of the people of God. God’s intent to restore all things and all people must inform and transform our understanding and pursuit of justice in the world. God was in Christ reconciling the world to God’s self. Christ reveals that God is self-giving, relational, merciful, restorative, and just. Moreover, in restoring the world through Jesus, we see that God consistently chooses to work from within creation, pointing and moving toward salvific redemption. To redeem the world, God became contextual and intimately relatable. Jesus is the archetype of self-giving love through the redemptive power of the Trinity made manifest in the resurrection. He thereby affords us access to reconciliation with God, liberating us from the shackles of sin, death, and subordination to the powers and principalities that breed material oppression in the world. Jesus makes right relationship possible.

This undeserved grace has given us a new identity and a new missional purpose in the world. It invites us into a life with God that is empowered by the Spirit, a life in which we get the opportunity to bear witness through how we choose to live and love. This opportunity is made possible, equally accessible to all, indiscriminately and exclusively through Jesus Christ.

# Reconciliation as Mission: Practicing God's Love among the Nations

---

*Al Tizon, affiliate professor of missional and global leadership,  
North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, and executive pastor of  
Antioch Covenant Church, Antioch, California*

**I**t is time to break out of a reductionist view of the Great Commission and to understand it as Jesus inviting us to participate with him in God's whole mission to reconcile all things.<sup>1</sup>

One of the sources for this conviction is a sermon that was written by Covenant forebear Paul Peter Waldenström 150 years ago.<sup>2</sup> This famous sermon (or infamous, depending on one's perspective) had a part to play in my approach to mission. His thoughts on our salvation as rooted in God's love reinforced my developing understanding of the church's mission as participating with a loving God in the reconciliation of all things in Christ.

Waldenström emphasized love as the driving force for God the Father to send God the Son to save the world through the cross, and he did so amid the prevailing view that Christ's work on the cross was mainly to appease God's wrath. Does the cross of Christ represent salvation by the love of God or salvation from the wrath of God? While this might seem hairsplitting for some, I contend that it makes a profound difference for mission, for it determines the church's essential message to the world. Is it, "God loves you and invites you back in right relationship," or is it,

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is an adaptation of Al Tizon, "Reconciliation and the Great (Whole) Commission," *International Review of Mission* 110.1 (May 2021): 16–26. Published with permission.

<sup>2</sup> P. P. Waldenström, "Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity (1872)," as cited in Glenn P. Anderson, ed., *Covenant Roots: Sources and Affirmations* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1999), 113–31.

“Turn or burn?”

I hope we can agree that the first message aligns better with the gospel message. The good news of God’s love is in fact what the church has been commissioned to announce to the world. Mission in the way of Waldenström is rooted in, and announced and practiced as, love for the world in the name of Jesus. Only by basing our mission in God’s love can we talk about reconciliation. Love leads to reconciliation; or in academic-speak, a soteriology of love leads to a missiology of reconciliation.

## **Reconciliation: The New Whole in Holistic Mission**

More than ever before we need to talk about reconciliation and to understand that reconciliation, holistically understood, is the paradigm of mission that will best bear witness to Jesus in today’s fragmented and fragmenting world. I had the privilege of writing a book a few years ago wherein I propose that reconciliation is the new “whole” in holistic mission.<sup>3</sup> Holistic mission, as we know, has referred to an approach of mission that attempts to put back together the ministries of evangelism and social responsibility. These two ministries should never have been separated in the first place, and we need to continue to affirm their integrity. But as I have reflected on the cracks in the foundation of the world, I am compelled to rethink what it means to be holistic.

In a world so divided, holistic mission can no longer be just about putting word and deed back together again; it needs to be about putting the world back together again. It needs to be about participating with God in the ministry of reconciliation between God and people, between people and people, and between God, people, and creation.

Though Waldenström’s sermon dealt almost exclusively on the vertical dimension of reconciliation, I think he would have approved this broader understanding. In fact, if we look beyond the sermon to other writings, particularly his small book entitled *Reconciliation*, we would see that he was more explicit about the necessity of loving our neighbor, and he argued this in terms of reconciliation—what I identified in my book as the horizontal dimension.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, though the sermon spoke almost exclusively of the vertical nature of reconciliation—that is, how

---

<sup>3</sup> Al Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled: Gospel, Church, and Mission in a Fragmented World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018). This essay includes several quotes from Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled*. Used by permission from Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group. See <http://bakerpublishinggroup.com>.

<sup>4</sup> P. P. Waldenström, *The Reconciliation: Who Was to Be Reconciled? God or Man? Or God and Man?* (Chicago: John Martenson, 1888).



the cross paved the way for humankind to be reconciled to God—I imagine Waldenström smiling right now as we consider reconciliation in broader terms.

## What Is Reconciliation?

Reconciliation is a rich, biblical, theological idea that is based on God's big vision to make whole the world and everyone in it. As I noted in my book, "God's vision of reconciliation only makes sense in light of the biblical story of creation and fall. In the beginning God created *shalom*—a social order wherein perfect harmony existed between the Creator, humanity, and ecosystem—until that *shalom* was shattered by sin (Gen 1–3).

Reconciliation means God's initiative to restore wholeness to a shattered creation. Colossians 1:20 beautifully sums up God's agenda in terms of reconciliation. This biblical text states that 'through [Christ], God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.' The ministry of reconciliation, therefore, to which God has called the church (2 Cor 5:18–20), refers to our participation in God's big vision 'to reconcile all things in Christ'.<sup>5</sup> This is our mission.

I have already alluded to reconciliation as involving at least three dimensions: the vertical (between God and people), the horizontal (between people and people), and a third, which probably stretches Waldenström's work on reconciliation to the limit—namely the circular dimension (between God, people, and creation). These dimensions provide the basic framework of the paradigm of "reconciliation as mission." The vertical, horizontal, and circular, or "triple reconciliation for individual persons, society, and creation," point to the main objects of God's mission and therefore, the church's mission.

Missionally speaking, these dimensions express themselves in the ministries of (1) evangelism, facilitating reconciliation between God and people; (2) peacemaking, between people and people; and (3) stewardship, between God, people, and creation. The church as evangelist, peacemaker, and steward equals the church as reconciler, the church being commissioned by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to make disciples of and among the nations as it participates with God in the reconciliation of all things.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled*, xviii.

<sup>6</sup> The last two paragraphs quote directly from Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled*, 87, 174.

## The Not-So Great Commission

Only when our understanding of the Great Commission is holistic like this can we call the Great Commission great. Let me say it another way: the greatness of the Great Commission requires evangelism, peacemaking, and stewardship; it requires God's whole mission of reconciliation if it is going to be truly great, if it is going to be truly loving. The Great Commission is not so great and not very loving when it is only one-dimensional instead of three-dimensional.

And here, let me humbly reprimand us as evangelicals, who popularized the term "Great Commission" in the first place. As a consequence of our narrow theology, we have essentially equated the Great Commission with the ministry of evangelism. Matthew 28 has become our premiere evangelistic missionary text. Inspired by it, we have gone about the task of world evangelization with abandon, creating strategies based on unreached people groups, the 10/40 window, and the homogeneous unit principle to help us fulfill the Great Commission. I argue that a one-dimensional, evangelism-only theology and practice of the Great Commission is incomplete at best and dangerous at worst. It has been the cause of devastating sins against humanity over the centuries.

As New Testament scholar Mitzi Smith disturbingly points out in the context of colonized Africa, "Many missionaries, in collusion with European colonizers, separated the physical, unjust, inhumane treatment and oppression of Africans ... from the saving of their souls."<sup>7</sup> Referring specifically to the tragic misinterpretation of the Great Commission in which social justice had no place, she continues her strong critique and writes, "Teaching and baptizing black souls trumped the liberating of black bodies from the shackles of their white oppressors."<sup>8</sup>

There are literally millions of what I call "victims of the Great Commission"—people, primarily among black and brown cultures, whose dignity, lifeways, and loved ones were profoundly messed with and some gone forever in the service of the one-dimensional Great Commission-inspired evangelization of the world. The undeniable history of colonial missions screams for the necessity of rethinking the Great Commission, and I contend that we do that by defining it in terms of God's mission

---

<sup>7</sup> Mitzi J. Smith, "'Knowing More than Is Good for One': A Womanist Interrogation of the Matthean Great Commission," in *Teaching All Nations: Interrogating the Matthean Great Commission*, ed. Mitzi J. Smith and Jayachitra Lalitha (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014), 128–29.

<sup>8</sup> Smith and Lalitha, 129. And this paragraph is quoted from Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled*, 157–58.

to reconcile *all things* in Christ.

Or we could just do away with the Great Commission paradigm altogether. Contrary to popular belief, “the Great Commission” is not a biblical phrase. It originated with Justinian Von Welz in the 17th century but was popularized by famous missionary Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission in the latter part of the 19th century.<sup>9</sup> The iconic labeling of Matthew 28 as the Great Commission evidently caught on so thoroughly that it has been confused through the years with scripture itself, as if written by the very finger of God.<sup>10</sup>

Mitzi Smith opts to do away with the iconic label so we can interpret the passage anew through a different lens. While this approach has merit,<sup>11</sup> I propose a different one for us as evangelicals, because as far as we are concerned, it is tattooed on the body of Christ. I propose, therefore, instead of trying to remove the Great Commission tattoo, that we fill in, deepen, beautify, and complete it. Let us make the Great Commission truly great and truly loving, by rethinking it or redesigning it, if you will, in terms of the three-dimensional paradigm of reconciliation as mission. Let us fill it out with other passages that we could easily label as “great” as well. I am convinced that the greatness of the Great Commission depends on other “Bible Greats.” Taking our cue from Justinian Von Welz and Hudson Taylor, let us label as “great” specific passages that correspond with the ministries of evangelism, peacemaking, and stewardship.

## The Great Peace

Beginning with the horizontal dimension of peacemaking, let us turn to the Great Peace passage of Revelation 7:9–10 (NRSV):

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the lamb.”

This is the Great Peace to come. The greatness of the Great Commission depends on how seriously we let the Great Peace shape our practice of

<sup>9</sup> Robbie F. Castleman, “The Last Word: The Great Commission Ecclesiology,” *Themelios* 3.3 (May 2007), 68.

<sup>10</sup> See Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled*, 166.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled*, 166.

mission among all tribes, peoples, and languages. In the Great Peace passage, the seer caught a glimpse of a future worship service that included countless people from every people group (v. 9). We see them there poised for worship because the One standing before them put an end to persecution, hunger, natural disasters, mourning, tears, and death (vv. 14–17).

Paul certainly understood that the ministry of the gospel involved breaking down dividing walls and becoming an intercultural fellowship in Christ. He reminded the Ephesian believers, for example, that Christ was their peace, “who has made [Jew and Gentile] one, and [who] has broken down the dividing wall of hostility ... that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two” (Eph 2:14–15). I believe Paul knew intuitively that by making peace between Jew and Gentile, he reflected the Great Peace to come.

Peacemaking strives in the Spirit to reflect nothing less than the *shalom* of God in social relationships, going beyond the mere absence of conflict to full-on, relational embrace between oppressed and oppressor, victim and victimizer, abused and abuser.

Reverend John Kiruga, who served as the moderator (or president) of the Evangelical Covenant Church of Kenya, was killed a few years ago by members of the extremist group Al-Shabaab, ironically, while traveling home after conducting a peace seminar between Muslims and Christians. Just a few days prior, Kiruga emailed Dave Husby, then director of Covenant World Relief and Development, “[I’m] at Garrisa ... heading to Mandera tomorrow. Pray for us. Pray for Kenya. Political temperatures are high. ... Mandera is not safe, but we must preach peace at all costs.” It turned out that the cost of preaching peace for John was his life.<sup>12</sup>

Kiruga was not always a peacemaker. His earlier views of Muslims included the belief that God did not love them. Prejudice formed in his heart, and Kiruga’s conversion to Christ did not immediately change this. The combination of zealous faith and a one-dimensional view of

Islam meant for him only one kind of legitimate interaction with

---

<sup>12</sup> This account, including quotes, is based on several articles, which slightly differ in detail: “Bus Ambush in Northern Kenya Kills Six,” *Deutsche Welle*, July 1, 2016 <http://www.dw.com/en/bus-ambush-in-northern-kenya-kills-six/a-19370980>; Stan Friedman, “Kenya Church Moderator Led Peacemaking Seminar Prior to Death,” *Covenant Companion*, July 3, 2016 <http://covenantcompanion.com/2016/07/03/kenyan-church-moderator-led-peacemaking-seminar-prior-to-death/>; John Kiruga with introduction by David Husby, “Peace at Any Cost,” *Covenant Companion*, November 21, 2016.

Muslims: evangelism through traditional apologetics and secret meetings. Muslims need to be saved, plain and simple.

Kiruga reported several success stories in winning Muslims to Christ. But as these new converts experienced heavy persecution from their families and communities, he began to realize the complexity of Muslim evangelism. A deep, underlying distrust between Christians and Muslims exposed the inadequacy of his methods. “That’s when God revealed to me,” he shared, “that we needed to move beyond debates and arguments. We had to start preaching the gospel of peace.”

This revelation of the need to preach Christ’s peace resulted in a more relational approach for Kiruga, ministering with and among Muslims to better their communities. He began to minister in this way among the isolated, dispossessed, Muslim community of the Waata people. Such an approach contrasted sharply with the aggressive evangelistic methods of many churches (including Kiruga’s), which only exacerbated the Christian-Muslim tension, and thus hindering the spread of the gospel.<sup>13</sup>

If the practice of the Great Commission does not include the Great Peace as a part of its vision and therefore its mission, if it does not find its inspiration in the all-tribes-and-nations future of God in Revelation 7, then I contend that the Great Commission is not so great.

## **The Great Renewal**

Another essential “Bible great” corresponds with the circular dimension of reconciliation, what I call the Great Renewal found in Isaiah 65:17–25 (NRSV):

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and

---

<sup>13</sup> The preceding three paragraphs are quoted from Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled*, 172.

eat their fruit. ...They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—and their descendants as well. ...[And] the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The Great Renewal passage is replete with God's renewing work of creation. It says that God is about to recreate the heavens and the earth (v. 17), indicated by justice, fertile land, majestic mountains, long life, zero percent infant mortality rate, and harmony between wolves and lambs.

The greatness of the Great Commission depends on how seriously we allow the Great Renewal to shape our practice of mission—in other words, how we incorporate ecological stewardship or creation care in our practice of mission. The church as steward has been entrusted by God to care for, manage, and cultivate that which belongs to God. This includes everything from financial holdings to the environment and everything in between. From coins to creation, the call to be good stewards is an integral part of authentic Christian discipleship.

It is not incidental that the Great Commission passage begins with Jesus's declaration of his authority over "heaven and earth." Chris Wright points out that the "combination 'heaven and earth' is the typical scriptural way of referring to the whole of creation,"<sup>14</sup> and, according to Matthew 28:18, Jesus is Lord over all of it. Wright observes that "the Great Commission does not begin with a command, but with an affirmation," referring to Jesus's opening words, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me" (v. 18).<sup>15</sup> As I noted in my book, the statement declares the authority or lordship of Christ, but not just over humanity as the church typically thinks, but over the whole created order.<sup>16</sup>

Realizing creation's inclusion in God's mission should disturb us because we have not done well in this area. As I wrote in my earlier work, we have in fact "done great violence to the earth and its inhabitants. By assaulting creation, we have assaulted ourselves, and have disrespected the Lord of heaven and earth. Based on a faulty theology of dominion, the church has helped to perpetuate the idea that the earth and its nonhuman inhabitants are primarily 'natural resources' to satisfy humanity's needs and fancies without caution or compassion. Misinterpreting dominion

---

<sup>14</sup> Chris Wright, *Five Marks of Mission: Making God's Mission Ours*, M-Series (Milton Keynes, UK: Micah Global, 2015), 29.

<sup>15</sup> Wright, 29.

<sup>16</sup> See Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled*, 179.

as domination, broken humanity has cleared forests, blown up coral reefs, dumped waste in oceans, hunted animals for sport, created factory farms, and experimented cruelly on animals."<sup>17</sup> For such tragedies, I believe humanity will be held accountable. When the church does not see the care of God's creation—the Great Renewal—as part of the Great Commission, then it paints a less-than whole picture of God's mission to reconcile all things.<sup>18</sup> Worse, when the church participates in the earth's destruction, we do an injustice to the gospel.

If, for example, a man enters a church who claims to be a follower of Jesus but tracks cakes of mud into the foyer, litters in the sanctuary, carves his name on the pew in front of him, and decorates the bathroom stall with graffiti; would not the ushers do their job and not-so-kindly escort him out? Furthermore, upon discovering the man's dog near dead from the summer heat because he left it in the car with the windows closed, would not the ushers report him to the authorities for animal cruelty? Indeed, as Peter Harris notes, "If we proclaim Christ the Creator but demonstrate an abusive or indifferent relationship to creation, we send confused signals."<sup>19</sup>

From coins to creation, the call to be good stewards is an integral part of authentic Christian discipleship and mission. Stewardship is integral to the Great Commission. To the extent that the church serves the world as steward, it bears witness to the coming Day when creation will stop groaning, when the lion will lie down with the lamb, when the trees of the field will clap their hands. At the end of time when God in Christ will reconcile all things, we will see not only the redemption of humanity, but also a restored ecology.<sup>20</sup> Engaged in the Great Commission, the church as steward bears witness to "the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ... On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit ... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Rev 22:1–2). The greatness of the Great Commission depends on taking seriously the Great Renewal of Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21 and 22.

---

<sup>17</sup> See Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled*, 179.

<sup>18</sup> Tizon, 170

<sup>19</sup> This paragraph is quoted from Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled*, 180, and see also: Peter Harris, "Living and Serving in God's Creation," in *Down-to-Earth Christianity: Creation-Care in Ministry*, ed. W. Dayton Roberts and Paul E. Pretiz (Wynnewood, PA: Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organizations and Evangelical Environmental Network, 2000), 167.

<sup>20</sup> This sentence is quoted from Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled*, 181.

## The Great Sacrifice

If the two previous Bible greats emphasized the peace and creation care side of the gospel, then the Great Sacrifice emphasizes the atoning work of the gospel, again, where Waldenström's sermon focused. I call 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 the Great Sacrifice passage:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Central to the greatness of the Great Commission is the church's message of Jesus Christ, who died to atone for the sins of the world and who rose again to become the hope of the world. The Great Sacrifice defines the good news of forgiveness and hope in terms of Jesus, Savior of the world. In Waldenström's words, "In [Jesus's] name, there is now preached the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, life, and eternal blessedness, and this for the sinner of every kind, of all people and all tongues."<sup>21</sup>

Without this kind of specificity, we reduce the Great Commission to a mere humanitarian mission like Red Cross, the United Nations, and other international relief, development, and peacekeeping organizations.<sup>22</sup> As such, the Great Commission would fall short of God's desire to bring lost and alienated people back to God's own self. The Great Commission takes seriously the transformation and healing of the human heart or else reconciliation would be tragically incomplete. The church must preach nothing less than the Great Sacrifice—the crucified and risen Jesus, and thus make disciples of Jesus.

Evangelism is the embodied communication of the good news of the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ the king to those who have not yet appropriated God's love and forgiveness in their lives, paying attention to both what we proclaim (what is the gospel?) and how we proclaim

---

<sup>21</sup> Waldenström, "Sermon," 127.

<sup>22</sup> See Tizon, *Whole & Reconciled*, 169.



it (how do we preach the gospel to this generation in this culture?). Without this kind of specificity, without proclaiming the Great Sacrifice, the Great Commission is just average, not great. The Great Commission derives its greatness from the clear conviction of the hope found in the crucified and risen Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

The Great Commission is great and fueled by love because of the Great Peace, the Great Renewal, and the Great Sacrifice. The Great Commission is the Whole Commission as it engages in evangelism, peacemaking, and stewardship—reconciliation as mission. The mission of the church is to participate with God in the reconciliation of ALL things in Christ; it is to practice the Whole Commission in Jesus's name and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now more than ever before, the church needs to wage reconciliation upon the earth, until Christ returns.

## Book Reviews

---

*Elizabeth Clayton, MPhil candidate,  
Keble College, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK*

*Tone Waters, MDiv candidate,  
North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois*

*Bridget Jack Jeffries, PhD candidate,  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois*

**Rebekah Eklund, *Practicing Lament* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), 122 pages, \$17**

In the accessible and illuminating *Practicing Lament*, Rebekah Eklund sets out to persuade readers “not only that lament is worth knowing about, but also that it is worth practicing” (xiii). She does so through well-researched exegesis and insightful examples of lament in Christian and Jewish tradition. Her vulnerability sets a tone of deep pastoral care and assures readers of the author’s authoritative analyses and exhortations. That most Christians today are unfamiliar, or even uncomfortable, with lamenting is a profound problem in the church. Being able to lament well is a necessary practice in a world still in the “not yet” of God’s kingdom. Eklund’s timely book offers a helpful starting point for those individuals and communities looking to practice lament.

In chapter 1, Eklund outlines a structure of lament, including the steps: invocation, complaint, petition, and trust. She unpacks each of these with helpful examples before turning to examine aspects of God’s

character commonly called into question in biblical laments. After setting out the centrality of lament in Israel's story, Eklund moves on to show how lament remains relevant in the New Testament. Chapter 2 focuses on the laments of Jesus in the Gospels and the christological portrait which emerges from these. (Curious readers should consult Eklund's book *Jesus Wept: The Significance of Jesus' Laments in the New Testament*, The Library of New Testament Studies, 515 [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015]) These chapters set the foundation of Eklund's argument: lament is worth practicing, and remains worth practicing for Christians, because of Christ's example as the "author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

In chapter 3, Eklund offers various apologies of the practice of lament. By anticipating and responding to possible objections to the practice of lament, Eklund affirms the transformational *telos* of lamenting—it "inclines toward hope" (40). Eklund uses chapter 4 to comment on and distinguish between two "streams" of lament: penitence and protest (59). The chapter concludes with a precise and clear engagement with the imprecatory psalms. While acknowledging the potentially dangerous nature of these texts, Eklund orients them toward God and God's justice.

In the final chapter, "Lord, Teach Us How to Mourn," Eklund offers further exhortations to practice lament. In reflecting on lamenting in and as community, she offers advice from her own relatively privileged position on how to most lovingly and respectfully "weep with those who weep" and respond to injustices. Eklund offers examples of using scripture in crafting laments that respond to injustices, which have rightly come to more widespread public attention in recent years.

Much of the strength of this book lies in Eklund's engagement with a diversity of voices—everyone from Mother Teresa to Dale C. Allison Jr. to W. E. B. Du Bois contribute to Eklund's constructed theology of lament. In doing so, she highlights the ways in which lament has not only been a crucial part of faith traditions, but also that it remains relevant for the modern world. Eklund creatively uses familiar biblical stories to inform a robust understanding of the depths to which the Christian story can make sense of grief and pain. The book engages with a plethora of biblical texts across different genres, which has the cumulative effect of accomplishing her stated aims. One skeptical of the relevance of lament to the Christian tradition would surely be convinced by Eklund's arguments, which are firmly rooted in the Old *and* New Testaments.

While Eklund refrains from offering overly specific prescriptions of the

practice of lament, this book would certainly benefit leaders who desire to see the culture of their congregations grow more hospitable to grief and suffering. The reflection questions at the end of each chapter are well suited to personal contemplation as well as small group discussion. Recovering the Christian practice of lament will be a necessary task if the church is to carry out its duty in the world. Eklund's book helps to do just that.

ELIZABETH CLAYTON

**Amy Kenny, *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022), 194 pages, \$20**

Amy Kenny's book is a must-read for anyone participating in the ministry of the body of Christ. Utilizing her own perspective as a disabled woman, Kenny guides the reader through her lamentable encounters with people inside and outside the church. She demonstrates these occurrences by illustrating the unfortunate similarities between how the world and the church perpetuate the mistreatment of disabled people. Citing her own research, as well as research by others from the disabled community, Kenny illuminates the discrimination disabled bodies and minds face on a daily basis. Although churches and ministers need to improve their approach regarding disability ministry, Kenny provides wit, wisdom, and a way forward by pointing people to Scripture and the voices of the disabled community. Her hope is that we would communally move from a mindset of curing the disabled to embracing the *imago Dei* in this "extraordinary" community of people (110).

As a minister, seminary student, and disability ally, I was emboldened by this book to reflect more deeply on who God is by learning more from the disabled community. Readers may feel that my usage of identity-first language (e.g., "disabled woman," "disabled bodies," and "disabled community") is disrespectful. However, Kenny and many others in the disabled community prefer identity-first language over person-first language. Identity-first language proclaims that disabled people are "not a euphemism or a metaphor" (ix). Because disabled people are proud of who they are, Kenny encourages churches to shift their mindset of curing the disabled to healing the brokenness created by the nondisabled through the structural systems that infect and reject the disabled from

belonging in community.

Exploring a variety of narratives from the Old and New Testaments, Kenny confirms what Christians know to be true about God: if we want to experience God, we need to stand with and listen to people on the margins. Using the dislocation of Jacob's hip at the River Jabbok as an example, Kenny teaches the reader that whenever the Israelites "butchered an animal, they were reminded of Jacob's disability through this embodied practice. We do the same today by partaking of the Lord's Table. In eating the bread and drinking from the cup, we remember Jesus's disabled body" (86). These biblical examples convey the value of the disabled. Disabled community members' lives are worthy—our life in the church is incomplete without them. My disabled daughter and the community of people with whom we enjoy life constantly instruct me to push against the rugged individualism dominant in our American evangelical context and to strive toward the "interdependent flourishing" we are called to as the body of Christ (138). "Interdependent flourishing," as seen through the lens of disability, embodies what it means to model life together in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Kenny's teaching on interdependence would greatly benefit pastors. Being personally privy to the thoughts within the disabled community regarding the topic of church, I recommend that readers use this book as a springboard to embrace the disabled perspective. Church is sometimes a harmful place focused on fixing people's problems instead of bearing one another's burdens, and congregations too seldom implement guidance from disability culture. It would be helpful to glean insight from Kenny because she approaches this topic with an honesty, grit, and humor that encompasses the spirit of the disabled community. Given that a quarter of Americans will struggle with a disability at some point in life, it is imperative that we work with, and not against, our disabled sisters and brothers. Pastors must also remember that Kenny's voice is only one voice from this beloved community. She recommends the work of several disability theologians such as Nancy Eiesland, Lamar Hardwick, and Amos Yong. These prophetic witnesses continue to refine my knowledge and praxis of disability justice and advocacy. If we, the Church, desire to co-labor with and for our disabled siblings, then we must actively strive to do so under their leadership.

TONE WATERS

**Kat Armas, *Abuelita Faith: What Women on the Margins Teach Us about Wisdom, Persistence, and Strength* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021), 224 pages, \$18**

When one peruses lists of “books every Christian should read,” it does not take long to see that recommendations of books by women—and, especially, recommendations of books by women of color—are in short supply. Given that women make up more than half of professed Christians, and non-white Christians now outnumber white Christians even in America (let alone globally), this exclusion of the voices of so many in the body of Christ cannot be justified.

Yet it persists. The Church has too often failed to sit at the feet of its sisters of color and seek out their wisdom.

Kat Armas, a Cuban American Latina and graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary, is keenly aware of this exclusion and has set about partially remedying it with *Abuelita Faith*. “I often wonder,” she writes, “in the demonizing or disregarding of other expressions of Christian faith, have evangelicals forgotten that the church, rightly understood, is a communion of saints—not just here on earth but also in heaven?” She continues to explain how she has been influenced by this communion, namely, by “the women throughout history who have gone before us paving the way, building their own tables, and offering a perspective of the divine, without which our faith would be lacking.” Armas beckons us to learn from these “often-ignored women who make up the cloud of witnesses alluded to in the book of Hebrews” (36).

While Armas does cite some established theologians (such as Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Mayra Rivera), the book is not primarily an exploration of existing *mujerista* theology or other strains of theology from women of color. Rather, it is an exploration of some of the Bible’s lesser-known women, skillfully interwoven with accounts of the actions and faith of women (especially women of color) throughout history, punctuated by Armas’s own personal and family stories. While more familiar biblical women (such as Esther, Ruth, and Hannah) and historical figures (such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, who has graced Mexican currency) are sometimes revisited, it is in the excavation of little-known biblical and historical women that Armas shines.

For example, Armas recounts the resurrection of the widow Tabitha in Acts 9, focusing on how the mourning widows showed Peter the garments their fallen friend and leader had made for them (89-92). In the same chapter, Armas covers the *arpilleristas* of Chile who, in the 1970s, “came

together to sew political images and protest the loss of their loved ones,” beautifully asserting the spirituality (and sometimes, resistance) of the things women craft with their hands (85).

As another example, Armas covers the story of Rizpah in 2 Samuel 21, who watched over the bodies of her politically murdered sons for five months until David gave them a just burial. She fuses Rizpah to the 2020 murder of George Floyd, who died “calling out to his mother,” and provides readers with other examples of women who organized in protest against injustice (117). In “the midst of [her] sorrow, Rizpah does something radical and remarkable,” Armas tells us (121). “Remarkable” is the correct word for the skill with which Armas breathes new life into this unheralded biblical story and relates it to modern events.

The book is not without its stumbles and flaws. Armas’s advocacy for calling the Holy Spirit by the feminine “la Espíritu Santa” instead of the traditional Spanish “el Espíritu Santo” fails to account for the neuter and masculine references to the Spirit in the New Testament; it also seems rooted in a misunderstanding of how Hebrew grammatical gender works (28, 95n14). Furthermore, Armas does not offer a biblical basis for her identification of the Spirit with the Wisdom of Proverbs 8 and seems unaware of the many early church leaders who identified Christ with the figure of Wisdom during the critical Trinitarian debates. There may be more historically or scripturally sophisticated arguments for referring to the Holy Spirit in feminine as opposed to masculine terms, but Armas does not make them here, leaving her claims less nuanced and supported than one might hope. A few final indices of Scripture references and historical figures mentioned in the book would have also been useful.

However, these flaws do not diminish the value of the book, which should be a treasured addition to any pastor who wants to understand women of color better. More generally, it should be a treasured addition to any Christian looking to grow in their faith.

BRIDGET JACK JEFFRIES

---

THE COVENANT  
QUARTERLY

ISSN 0361-0934 (print)  
ISSN 2380-8829 (online)  
Vol. 80, No. 2  
Fall/Winter 2022

**Editorial Committee**

J. Nathan Clayton, interim editor  
Cathy Norman Peterson, managing editor  
Beth Ernest, associate editor  
Will Barnett, book review editor

**Library & Publications Committee**

Dennis Edwards  
Evan Kuehn  
Andrew Meyer

THE COVENANT QUARTERLY is published two times a year (spring, fall) in Chicago, Illinois. Copyright ©2022 Covenant Publications, 8303 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631.

The *Covenant Quarterly* is the ministerial journal of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Published by North Park Theological Seminary through Covenant Publications, the *Quarterly* seeks to foster theological reflection on ministerial praxis in service to ECC pastors and the broader church.

Editorial correspondence should be sent to the interim editor, J. Nathan Clayton, c/o North Park Theological Seminary, 3225 W. Foster Ave., Chicago, IL 60625; (773) 244-5226, [jnclayton@northpark.edu](mailto:jnclayton@northpark.edu).

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606; (888) 665-ATLA; [atla@atla.com](mailto:atla@atla.com); [www.atla.com](http://www.atla.com).

This periodical is also abstracted by *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, P.O. Box 215, Myerstown, PA 17067, (717) 866-6734; [admin@rtabstracts.org](mailto:admin@rtabstracts.org); [www.rtabstracts.org](http://www.rtabstracts.org).