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Response to Stephen Finlan

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It is difficult to respond to a paper with which one agrees to such a large extent, as is the case for me with Stephen Finlan's piece of work. There are, however, a few points that I would like to ask some questions about, and others that I think would merit some further discussion and reflection. In particular I wish to mention certain issues and perspectives that I think deserve to be highlighted, because they are important contributions.

The problem outlined by Finlan to begin with is a real one that should be insisted upon, and Finlan has taken it as one of his main tasks to do this. The way in which Christian atonement theology has been imposed on interpretations of the Hebrew Bible must be revealed and resisted, unless one would like to reduce the role of Biblical Studies to apologetics in the service of confessional theology. At the same time, modern concerns – to some degree perhaps also confessional – about problematic notions of atonement, should not prevent us from seeing some of the more unpleasant aspects of certain sacrificial images found also in the New Testament. Finlan would be the first to point this out, too, but then we may perhaps ask whether in the end it is fair that Hebrews should receive so much of the blame and Paul so little. To this we will return.

Although I agree that there are unpleasant connotations to *kipper*, including appeasement through violence, I am not sure that this is simply *the* background which P then suppresses. P for sure tries to systematize and to a certain extent neutralize a wide array of variegated practices, ideas and conceptions, bringing them into a ritual “system,” and in doing so suppresses some demonic and – for lack of a better term – “primitive” traits.¹ While such features certainly surface in *kipper* rites, and also in practices tagged with the cognate noun *kofe*r, I find the most likely underlying idea to be the removal of that which is found objectionable. This can be described as a restoration of a sort of balance or homeostasis, which has been disturbed by an offence or by an infringement on someone's

¹ Cf. Thomas Kazen, *Emotions in Biblical Law: A Cognitive Science Approach* (Hebrew Bible Monographs, 36; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 129–137.

property or integrity. Such restoration applies to disturbances in intra-human relationships as well as in the more asymmetrical relationship between human beings and the divine power.²

I should, however, stay with the focus of the paper, which is on sacrificial images in the New Testament. Finlan's conclusions from the way Jesus' death is treated in Mark's theological narrative are valid, I think, as well as the observation that sacrificial overtones only enter with Matthew. Again, the near complete absence of atonement theology in Luke's writings needs to be emphasized repeatedly, because in many contexts this is overlooked or passed over with silence. A key question, which Finlan mentions, but does not discuss at any length here, is what to do with the Markan ransom saying. Its interpretation is a moot issue that has been much discussed through the history of Markan interpretation.³ What, if any, associations are there to be found between the Markan *λύτρον* and the Hebrew concepts of redeeming (פדה) and ransoming (כפר) respectively? Here I suspect that a closer examination of the practice and understanding of *kofer* in Israelite tradition might suggest some new nuances in the old debate; while Mark 10:45 to some extent does provide a ritual image, this might not be only or predominantly a sacrificial image, and is perhaps not as "out of place in the Gospels" as Finlan suggests.

Dealing with the historical Jesus, Finlan concludes that Jesus, by his practice of forgiving sins, indicates the irrelevance of the priestly cult. This is, as far as I am concerned, going beyond the evidence for the historical Jesus, although it could represent an implicit theology of a particular gospel author. I think there is little evidence that Jesus ignored the temple cult – he rather assumed it – and Matthew's use of Scripture (Hos 6:6) in 9:13 and 12:7 I take as early Christian anti-cultic polemics. The reference to John 9 in the context of the historical Jesus is, from my point of view, inappropriate, as is the attempt to explain away some of Jesus'

² Kazen, *Emotions*, 141–164.

³ See for example the discussion between Dowd & Malbon and Collins: Adela Yarbro Collins, "Finding Meaning in the Death of Jesus," *Journal of Religion* 78 (1998): 175–196; Sharyn Dowd and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "The Significance of Jesus' Death in Mark: Narrative Context and Authorial Audience," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 271–297; "Mark's Interpretation of the Death of Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 545–554. For a classical essay, see C. K. Barrett, "The Background of Mark 10:45," in A. J. B. Higgins (ed.), *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 1–18; also in idem, *New Testament Essays* (London: SPCK, 1972), 20–26.

behaviour as for the sake of his patients, as if Jesus' himself would not have shared standard beliefs and attitudes of common Jews at the time. In fact, most of these arguments that I find unconvincing I also find unnecessary for Finlan's main point and from his own initial position, which indicates that many problems originate with a Christian lack of understanding of Israelite sacrifice. With this in mind, there is no absolute contradiction between Jesus forgiving sins and the sacrificial cult, since most sacrifices were not about forgiveness, and those that were (mainly the *ḥaṭṭa't* and the *'āšām*), were only partly for that purpose, and associated with particular types of trespasses. The idea that forgiveness was limited to the sacrificial cult only must thus be questioned, in spite of the role of *Yom Kippur* for the people at large. This could also suggest a reason why it is the rites associated with *Yom Kippur* that seem to provide most of the sacrificial metaphors in Pauline thought, to which we turn next.

I find Finlan one of the most interesting interpreters of Pauline sacrificial metaphors and the blend or mix of metaphors and conflation of images by which Paul attempts to convey meaning and associate Jesus' martyr death with a wealth of concepts and ideas that belong to his recipients' frame of reference. This is a main achievement and I will discuss a few details.

When commenting on Rom 3:25 and 8:3, Finlan understands Paul to imply "that Jesus is the *new* mercy seat or the *new* purification sacrifice, by which Israel is cleansed and restored."⁴ Later, however, he points out that Paul never says that the cult was only a type and the sacrificial system was insufficient, although his metaphors might imply this for some of his readers. So what exactly are the metaphors doing for Paul? Finlan suggests that Paul presents a theology of fulfilment – a typology – in which the type (sacrifice) "ceases to have much value apart from its newly revealed *meaning*."⁵ Paul's use of metaphors is illustrative rather than literalizing, and different from that of Hebrews, which oscillates between a logic of fulfilment and a logic of replacement. So what does Paul really imply? In my mind, metaphors arise when we use terms or concepts from one domain, where they are intrinsic, in a discourse belonging to another domain, in which they do not originally belong, and the point of this is to bring associations belonging to the former domain into the latter. Such

⁴ Finlan, "Sacrificial Images in the New Testament," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 78 (2013): 57–86, here 68.

⁵ Finlan, "Sacrificial Images," 73.

imports may influence the new domain but do not immediately transform it.⁶ It is a kind of “crossover,” creating new tastes. Paul, then, by his metaphors does not necessarily suggest that Jesus’ death replaces these cultic categories or constitutes an upgraded version of sacrifice, but rather that there is something with Jesus’ death or with the effects of Jesus’ death or with the meaning of Jesus’ death that is similar to the (function or meaning of the) mercy seat and the *ḥaṭṭa’t* sacrifice. I think this is in line with Finlan’s conclusions, which focus on how Paul’s audience understood the *function* of Jesus’ death as similar to that of cultic offerings.

Finlan suggests that a conflation of scapegoat and sacrificial images can be traced back to Isa 53. I think that this is true of the LXX version, which has turned the *’āšām* sacrifice of the MT into a “sin-offering,” i.e., a *ḥaṭṭa’t* sacrifice, thus providing a possible link to *Yom Kippur*, including the scapegoat ritual. The text of these verses is notoriously difficult and often considered corrupt; the Qumran copies differ as well from the MT, but agree on *’āšām* against the LXX. Since the *’āšām* is the sacrifice that removes the objectionable and redresses the imbalance particularly caused by treacherous or unfaithful behaviour,⁷ it makes sense to use it as a metaphor for effects achieved by the martyrious suffering of part of the people. Taken in this way, the Hebrew text provides food for subsequent martyr ideology, but does not supply explicit scapegoat imagery. Possibly the *ḥēṭ’-rabbîm nāsā’* in v. 12, although different from the priestly *nāsā’ ’āwōn*, might have provided a trigger for subsequent interpretation, linking Isa 53 to *Yom Kippur*, with its *ḥaṭṭa’t* and scapegoat rituals.

I am not fully convinced that divine forgiveness is necessarily undermined by every notion of payment. Ideas of completely free forgiveness are ill corresponding to human practice and experience. This is a tricky issue, however. I suspect that *kofer* practices are part of the background to Paul’s purchase and ransom metaphors, and although a *kofer* is no full compensation or payment for an abuse or an infringement, but rather a mitigating token in appealing for restored relationships, such practices could easily be understood as substitution payments or even as bribes. So while restored relationships require reciprocal interaction, sometimes in-

⁶ For an introduction to conceptual metaphor theory, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, for example in “Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980): 453–486.

⁷ Cf. Kazen, *Emotions*, 158–162.

cluding some costly signalling, this is not tantamount to paying for salvation.

Turning to Hebrews, finally, I understand Finlan to say that the writer misinterprets and misrepresents the Israelite cult and, in addition, is inconsistent, using “the logic of fulfillment or the logic of replacement”⁸ when it suits his argument. Following what Finlan calls “old sacrificial logic,” Hebrews also fails to take advantage of the “philosophic transcendence” that Platonizing exegesis would have been capable of.⁹ Hebrews also “fails to achieve the better potentials of the biblical moral vision.”¹⁰ Hebrews is likened to a latter-day Deuteronomist who introduces sacrificial thinking and turns Jeremiah’s new covenant into a priestly rather than a prophetic idea.

It is difficult not to sense a certain value judgment here. Finlan has an interesting point about mediated forgiveness in Hebrews, in contrast to some of the prophets, which I take to suggest that a theological watershed with subsequent consequences not only for early Christian soteriology, but also for incipient ecclesiology, can be seen already here. While I think this is true, I doubt that the NT epistles bring to life a sacrificial thinking that had been more or less abandoned by the prophets (Jesus included). Perhaps this is because I am very hesitant at the idea that the prophetic critique of sacrifice aimed at abolishing this ancient mode of communication altogether. I rather see such criticisms as examples of what is sometimes called “dialectic negation,”¹¹ and I think that forgiveness was neither tied to the sacrificial cult, nor its main purpose, to begin with.

Without subtracting from Finlan’s comparison between Paul and Hebrews, and without being very fond of Hebrews myself, I would nevertheless suggest that for all their differences, Paul is similar to Hebrews in using logic inconsistently in order to make his point, and that Hebrews is similar to Paul in using sacrificial metaphors to make meaning out of Jesus’ death, or, to put it otherwise, by transposing associations from the domain of sacrifice into another domain. Finlan would perhaps object that for Hebrews, discourse about Jesus’ death belongs intrinsically to the do-

⁸ Finlan, “Sacrificial Images,” 77.

⁹ Finlan, “Sacrificial Images,” 79.

¹⁰ Finlan, “Sacrificial Images,” 79.

¹¹ For this expression as referring to a Semitic idiom, affirming one statement by denying another, see H. Kruse, “Die ‘dialektische Negation’ als semitisches Idiom,” *Vetus Testamentum* 4 (1954): 385–400. Examples from the New Testament include Mark 7:15; 9:37; 13:11.

main of sacrifice – and I would then have to concede. In any case, both Paul and Hebrews are part of the problem that subsequent atonement theologies present to modern people.