

Alma and Anselm: Satisfaction Theory in the *Book of Mormon*

Seth R. Payne
Yale Divinity School
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Introduction

The concept of the Atonement as presented in the *Book of Mormon* is important not only for how it has shaped Latter-day Saint doctrine and dogma, but also because in itself, represents a unique, albeit not entirely original, theological position. Christ's salvific effort is presented in various forms throughout the *Book of Mormon*. However, the most common and consistent presentation aligns most closely with the Satisfaction Theory of Atonement as well as the related Penal-Substitution Theory. Some have attempted to read the *Book of Mormon* in less "legalistic" terms, preferring variants of the Moral-Exemplar model and even positing a "Moral Atonement", but such efforts overlook the very clear meaning of the text: at its center, the Atonement is the means of satisfaction. This is not to suggest, however, that *Book of Mormon* Christology is built purely on a penal or satisfaction model. There are numerous indications that Christ's atonement is multi-faceted and achieved much more than mere satisfaction. A form of satisfaction theory is at the core of *Book of Mormon* Christology, but the effects and meaning of the Atonement as described therein are much more far-reaching and expansive. Most importantly, satisfaction within *Book of Mormon* Christology requires action from both God and humankind. In the *Book of Mormon*, Christ's atonement stands at the center of an overarching "plan of redemption" which was "laid from the foundation of the world." The Atonement provides comfort and guidance, and as presented, sits as the centerpiece which calls humankind back to God while simultaneously providing the means to do so.

In an effort to illustrate the *Book of Mormon's* unique presentation of the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this essay will compare and contrast the "classical" satisfaction theory of Anselm as found in *Cur Deus Homo* with the expanded satisfaction theory as described within the *Book of Mormon*. Very brief reference will be made to the theological positions popular in New England leading up

to and surrounding the time of the publication of the *Book of Mormon* in 1830 in an effort to contextualize the influence these theological ideas may have had on Joseph Smith as he brought the *Book of Mormon* forth.

Of course, any discussion of *Book of Mormon* theology should begin with a brief introduction to the *Book of Mormon* itself. Its origins, structure, and relevance to the Bible are not widely known outside Mormondom. Therefore, an orienting survey to acquaint the reader with basic information necessary for further discussion is appropriate.

Origins of the *Book of Mormon*

The *Book of Mormon* was published in 1830 in Palmyra, New York by Joseph Smith Jr. Smith claimed to have been visited by an angel several years prior and instructed that “there was a book deposited [in a nearby hill], written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang.”¹ He was told that this book “contained the fullness of the everlasting Gospel... as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants.” After yearly visits with this angel, whose name was Moroni, Smith was allowed to take possession of the plates and begin translating them “by the gift and power of God.” To translate, Smith utilized both a Urim and Thummim given him by the angel Moroni, and a seer stone which he found shortly after Moroni’s first visit.²

The translation process was spread out over a period of two years with the bulk of translation occurring over sixty days in the second year.³ The book was published shortly before the organization of The Church of Christ⁴ on April 6, 1830.

¹ Joseph Smith History 1:34, PoGP

² D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998); 173

³ Terry L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); 35-37

⁴ Later to become known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The nickname Mormon was originally used a derogatory term to describe believers in the *Book of Mormon*.

The book itself is a compilation of history and prophecy abridged and arranged by a man Mormon and to a lesser degree, his son Moroni (the angel who appeared to Joseph Smith and announced the plates). It covers roughly a one-thousand year history from 600 B.C to 421 A.D and recounts the story of a small group being led by the Lord from Jerusalem before the Babylonian invasion and resulting Jewish exile. This group was eventually brought to “the promised land” which Joseph Smith indicated was somewhere on the American continent. The first several books of the *Book of Mormon* are first-hand accounts of the flight from Jerusalem and the establishment of settlements in the promised land. The books thereafter are the resulting compilation of that civilization’s history and prophecy by Mormon. Mormon often quotes primary sources and occasionally interjects with editorial commentary. The crowing event of the *Book of Mormon* is the visitation of the resurrected Jesus Christ to *some* of the inhabitants of the American continent shortly after his ascension in the Holy Land. It was Mormon’s son Moroni who eventually buried the abridged record and later revealed it to Joseph Smith.⁵

***Book of Mormon* Historicity**

The question of *Book of Mormon* historicity is not directly relevant to the discussion here. However, it should be noted that this author takes a position similar to that held by Blake Ostler. Ostler argues that there is too much modern for the *Book of Mormon* to be an exclusively ancient document and too much ancient within the *Book of Mormon* to be exclusively modern.⁶ Therefore, in this essay, *Book of Mormon* theology

⁵ This brief overview does not do justice to the detail and complexity of *Book of Mormon* storylines. Perhaps the best general summaries of the *Book of Mormon* can be found in Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 43-55 as well as Richard L. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling A Cultural Biography of Joseph Smith* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005); 84-105

⁶ See Blake T. Ostler, “The *Book of Mormon* as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20 (Spring 1987). Ostler points to several anachronisms which can be found in the *Book of Mormon* but also highlights the existence of complex chiasmus within the book along with other indications of antiquity which Joseph Smith, as an uneducated young man would have been very

will be discussed in the context of the book's own narrative, rather than as an expression of Joseph Smith's own theological views. In other words, this essay will allow the *Book of Mormon* to speak for itself. Be it purely literature or quasi-historical, the *Book of Mormon* offers substantial and meaningful theological expression which has value in and of itself, separate from questions of origins and historicity.

The Anselmic Model of Satisfaction

In *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Man), Anselm wrestles with the question of "for what reason or necessity did God become man and, as we believe and confess, by his death restore life to the whole world?"⁷ The answer to this central question is essential because unbelievers "scoff at Christian simplicity" and seem to require a more robust answer. Additionally, Christian believers should be "gladdened by the understanding and contemplation of the things they believe, and as far as possible be 'ready always to satisfy every one that asketh' them 'a reason of the hope which is in them.'"⁸ To Anselm "the explanation is intelligible to all, and is appealing because of the usefulness and the beauty of the reasoning." Thus, within this framework, Anselm seeks to explain why it was necessary for God, in the form of Jesus Christ, to willingly suffer and die in order to bring salvation to humankind.

The Will and Intent of God

Following Augustine and Gregory, Anselm posits that God's purpose is to establish the "heavenly city" with a "particular reasonable and perfect number" of both angels, who were created as "blessed" and men, who were *to be made* "blessed" by God.⁹ Through their own will, some of the created angels became "fallen" by opposing the will

unlikely to insert without the aid of an actual source. Additionally, first-hand and extremely reliable accounts of the translation process affirm that Smith was dictating from an actual source.

⁷ St. Anselm of Canturbury, *Cur Deus Homo*, Book One Chapter I

⁸ Anselm quoting I Peter 3:15

⁹ Anselm, Book I, xvi

of God. Thus, through his foreknowledge “God intended to make up the number of the fallen angels from human nature, which he made without sin.” Further: “God intended to perfect both [angels and man] together.” The purpose of creation was that “every creature would delight in its own glorious and wonderful consummation, eternally rejoicing in its Creator and itself and its fellows, each in its own way.”¹⁰ Of course, man, like some of the angels before him, deviated from the will of God in the Garden of Eden and thus incurred a debt for which a payment is required.

The Problem – Sin

According to Anselm, “if an angel or a man always rendered to God what is due to him, he could never sin.”¹¹ Further: “every inclination of the rational creature ought to be subject to the will of God” for “this is the debt which angels and men owe.” Therefore, when Adam and Eve deviated from the will of God they failed to pay their debt and by choosing to pursue the will of the Devil, became subject unto him. Indeed, “if they had not sinned, [God] would have confirmed the first human beings at the time when in fact, they did sin, as he did the angels who persevered.” Also:

“it seems that, if they had conquered and not sinned when they were tempted, they would have been confirmed, with all their posterity, in the justice of what was theirs, so that they would not longer have been able to sin – just as, because they were conquered and sinned, they were so weakened that of themselves they could not exist without sin.”¹²

In other words, it was God’s original intention to make Adam and Eve, along with their posterity, “blessed”, incapable of sin, and set to assume their place in the heavenly city along with the angels which persevered. Because of their sin however, “the whole of human nature was conquered for sin in them” thus placing both Adam and Eve, and their posterity in the untenable position of having incurred a debt for which they had no means to pay.

¹⁰ Ibid., xviii

¹¹ Ibid, xi

¹² Ibid, xviii

Being subject to the will of God “is the sole and entire honor which we owe [and which] God requires from us.” Therefore, “one who does not render this honor to God takes away from God what belongs to him, and dishonors God, and to do this is to sin.”

Further:

“As long as he does not repay what he has stolen, he remains at fault. And it is not enough merely to return what was taken away; in view of the insult committed, he must give back more than he took away. For it is not enough for someone who has injured another’s health to restore his health without making some recompense for the pain and injury suffered, and, similarly, it is not enough for someone who violates another’s honor to restore the honor, unless he makes some kind of restitution that will please him who was dishonored, according to the extent of the injury and dishonor. We should also not that, when someone pays back what he unjustly took away, he ought to give something that could not be required of him if he had not stolen another’s property. So, then, everyone who sins must repay to God the honor that he has taken away, and this is the satisfaction that every sinner ought to make to God.”

Of course, man is incapable of providing such satisfaction and this presents a “problem” not only for man, but also for God. Anselm maintains that “man was made for blessedness” yet because of sin, is not qualified to become “blessed.” Therefore, a “remission of sins is necessary for a man, if he is to arrive at blessedness.” Yet God cannot simply forgive man’s sin without satisfaction being made because “just as man in sinning seizes what belongs to God, so God in punishing takes away what belongs to man.” To “remit sin in this way is the same thing as not to punish it” and as “it is not fitting for God to do anything unjustly or without due order, it does not belong to his freedom or kindness or will to forgive unpunished the sinner who does not repay to God what he took away.”

Thus, we are left with two forces of God’s nature which are in seeming opposition to one another. On one hand is God’s will that man become “blessed.” This includes all aspects of God’s love, kindness and mercy towards his creation. On the other hand is God’s honor and justice which require punishment or satisfaction for sin.

The Solution – Jesus Christ

The resolution of this tension comes in the form of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. By suffering the most gruesome, horrific, and unjust death possible, Christ satisfies the requirements of God's honor by accepting the required punishment as the consummate innocent Man. Satisfaction can come in no other way because "no one save God can make it and no one save man ought to make it." Therefore, "it is necessary for a God-Man to make [satisfaction for the sins of man and the dishonor done to God.]" Because Christ was without sin, or in other words: his will was one with God's will despite temptation and temporal affliction, he was the only man who had not dishonored God and was required to make no satisfaction, deserving no punishment. Anselm explains:

"No man besides him ever gave to God, by dying, what he was not necessarily going to lose at some time, or paid what he did not owe. But this Man freely offered to the Father what he would never have lost by any necessity, and paid for sinners what he did not owe for himself."

In reading Anselm it may be tempting to view the punishment inflicted on Christ as "tit-for-tat" payment for sin. Crudely meaning that if a man or woman lies or cheats this sin requires a corresponding equal punishment which was endured by Christ. Anselm does not conceive of sin in this way. Any sin or deviation from the will of God is *infinite* in itself and requires *infinite* satisfaction. Anselm does not conceive of some sort of heavenly accounting system wherein each sin incurs some level of debt and is then repaid by Christ. Rather, man's original and subsequent sin constitutes an infinite offense to God's honor which only God himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, can satisfy.

Through this satisfaction and payment for sin we see how the tension between God's mercy or intention, and God's honor are resolved. Through Jesus Christ, God is able to "[restore man] to the condition he was going to be in if he had not sinned" and also have the infinite dishonor done to him by man, made right through the infinite satisfaction or punishment endured.¹³ Further, "by enduring with gentle patience the

¹³ Anselm, Chapter Two, iii

injuries and insults and death on the cross with thieves... [Christ] gave an example to men, to teach them not to turn away from the justice they owe to God on account of any trials which they can experience.”

But how does this satisfaction and payment for sin bring salvation to humankind? Because Christ as man endured the full will of the Father, he is entitled to all that belongs to the Father. However, since Christ is also God, he is already in possession of all the Father has to give. Therefore, in mercy Christ extends the reward he fully earned to “they who will be his imitators” and follow his example. Thus men and women who imitate Christ gain both resurrection and salvation and are made blessed to fulfill the designs of their creation in the heavenly city.

Anselm concludes in summary:

“We have found how great [God’s mercy] really is, and how it is in such harmony with his justice that it cannot be conceived to be greater or more just. For, indeed, what greater mercy could be imagined, than for God the Father to say to the sinner, condemned to eternal torments, and without any power of redeeming himself from them, ‘Receive my only-begotten Son, and give him for yourself,’ and for the Son himself to say, ‘Take me, and redeem yourself.’”¹⁴

Book of Mormon Christology

As mentioned above, *Book of Mormon* Christology closely aligns with the Anselmic model in many respects. Sin requires satisfaction and only an “infinite atonement” can provide it. However, the atonement as described in the *Book of Mormon* provides far more than satisfaction. Many of these “extensions” to the satisfaction model can be explained simply by the different theological assumptions expressed by Anselm and *Book of Mormon* prophets. However, the nature of, and need for *satisfaction itself* is also presented quite differently. While Anselm and *Book of Mormon* prophets agree that satisfaction for sin is necessary, they disagree as to its nature, precursors, and effect. Most significantly, *Book of Mormon* prophets discuss satisfaction as an act of both

¹⁴ Ibid, xx

God and humankind, requiring the active participation of both parties not to satisfy offenses to God's honor, but rather, "the demands of justice" (Alma 34:16, 42:15)

"Laid from the Foundation of the World"

Both Anselm and *Book of Mormon* prophets maintain it is God's intention to make humankind holy so that they "should inherit the kingdom of God." However, this inheritance in the *Book of Mormon* is meant to reward men and women so that "their joy shall be full forever" (2 Nephi 9:18). It is the eternal joy of man which is God's intention in creating humankind. His entire creation was made to "bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man" (2 Nephi 2:15). These eternal purposes are joy for those who "have believed in the Holy One of Israel" and "endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it" (2 Nephi 9:18).

Lehi teaches that humankind's attainment of this joy is only possible through the experience of "opposition in all things." Without this opposition "righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad" (2 Nephi 2:11). Without this opposition there would have been "no purpose in the end of [the world's] creation" and "the eternal purposes, and also the power and the mercy and the justice of God" would have been destroyed. Man must be exposed to both wickedness and holiness so that "he should act for himself [because] man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other" (2 Nephi 2:16). It is the act of choice and experience of opposition which enables humankind not only to experience eternal joy, but also to understand and comprehend it.

Therefore, God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden with "the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter" (2 Nephi 2:15). God then allowed "that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies" to tempt Adam and Eve in opposition to his command to not partake of the forbidden fruit. God did this with the full intention that Adam and Eve would choose to partake of

the fruit and by so doing “[bring] forth children; yea, even the family of all the earth” (2 Nephi 2:20). Unlike Anselm, Lehi puts forth that:

“If Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. *Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.*” (2 Nephi 2:22-25) (emphasis added)

God then, created the world along with Adam and Eve knowing and intending that they would fall and that through their experience of opposition and their freedom to choose, they would have the opportunity to experience eternal joy.

The Two Deaths

Of course, Adam’s transgression had its consequences which put separation between God and humankind. Indeed “men [became] lost, because of the transgression of their parents” (2 Nephi 2:21). Jacob, Lehi’s son, described this separation and lost state in terms of two types of death: temporal and spiritual. Temporal death is the separation of the spirit and body and spiritual death is the separation of God and humankind due to sin.

The effects of temporal death, or the spirit in eternal separation from the body which God created, is that the spirits of humankind become “like unto [the devil], and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself” (2 Nephi 9:9). Here Jacob is emphasizing the importance of the physical body which God created. It is what separates human nature from that of the devil, who has no created body but is only spirit. The physical body is a merciful gift from God, which creates separation in the natures of humankind and the devil and prevents humans from becoming “subject to

that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more" (2 Nephi 9:8).

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve walked and talked with God. There was no separation between God and his creation. However, by transgressing God's law and partaking of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve became separated from God and were cast out of the Garden. Jacob refers to this separation as the "death of the spirit" (2 Nephi 9:10). A later *Book of Mormon* prophet Alma explains "all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence" because they had transgressed his law (Alma 42:14).

Lehi, Jacob and Alma all emphasize the importance of the God's law and the necessity for its full consequences to be carried out. Lehi explains:

"And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God." (2 Nephi 2:13)

Thus, God's law must be carried out with all its consequences, else it is of no effect and "God would cease to be God" (Alma 42:13,22,25) Lehi states there for the law of God there is a "punishment which is affixed which punishment that is affixed is in opposition to that of the happiness which is affixed" (2 Nephi 2:10) Therefore, if God's law is either kept or broken, the consequence of punishment or happiness must be carried out. Following his father, Jacob also assigns punishment or happiness to God's law. Later *Book of Mormon* prophets Alma and Amulek, also discuss the necessity of God's law being seen through and carried out. Their specific contributions to *Book of Mormon* atonement theory will be discussed below.

Just as in Anselm, the *Book of Mormon* describes the tension between two aspects of God's nature and both man and God are caught in an unseemly Catch-22.

Humankind was created to experience eternal joy, yet because of the fall, which was

required for men to experience opposition and choice which allow for the comprehension of joy, they are unable to inherit the kingdom of God because of the transgression of God's law. Yet, this same law was given to provide the means wherein humankind could experience what God intended.

Atonement – Resolving the Catch-22

According to the *Book of Mormon's* King Benjamin, the act of atonement "has been prepared from the foundation of the world" (Mosiah 4:6). Thus, the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ were all part of God's original purpose and intent unlike in Anselm where the atonement functioned to realign and restore God's original plan. God created humankind intending them to transgress the law he gave in the Garden but he also intended to provide atonement through a savior, to resolve the conflict introduced by the transgression of the law. Therefore, the atonement is meant to provide men and women with victory over the temporal death, which separates their spirit and their body, as well as victory of spiritual death, which is eternal separation from God.

Jacob ties Christ's suffering and death directly to the resurrection of all humankind:

"He suffereth the pains of all men, yea the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children who belong to the family of Adam. And he suffereth this that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day" (2 Nephi 9:21-22).
(emphasis added)

Jacob also explains: "it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection." Otherwise, "this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more" (2 Nephi 9:6-7). Jacob describes this aspect of the atonement as "the power of the resurrection" (2 Nephi 9:12, 10:25, Jacob 4:11). The resurrection is universal and "all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are

living souls” (2 Nephi 9:13). Jacob implies that the physical resurrection is necessary in order for humankind to even stand before God to be judged. Why a physical body, or living “soul” is necessary in order to stand before God is not explained, but simply assumed.

Amulek also teaches of the universal resurrection brought about by the death and resurrection of Christ:

“Now, there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death. The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we are now at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt. Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil” (Alma 11:42-44).

The prophet Abinidi relates Christ’s suffering and death to both the resurrection and Christ’s ability to feel compassion. Abinidi correlates Christ’s ministry, suffering, death and resurrection with redemption and the satisfaction of justice. After quoting Isaiah 53¹⁵ Abinidi explains:

“[Christ] suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people. And after all this, after working many mighty miracles among the children of men, he shall be led, yea even as Isaiah said, as a sheep before the shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. Yeah, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father. And thus God breaketh the bands of death, having gained the victory over death; giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men – Having ascended into heaven, having the

¹⁵ This passage presents one of the biggest challenges to claims of *Book of Mormon* historicity since Abinidi would not have had access to this section of Isaiah. The records Abinidi would have been quoting from (the Brass Plates of Lehi) date from 600 B.C and Isaiah 53 is part of 2nd Isaiah and thought to have been written much later. This, and other similar Isaiah quotations lead Blake Ostler to conclude that such modern quotations of Isaiah are an expansion of an ancient idea in the source material Joseph Smith was working from.

bowels of mercy; being filled with compassion towards the children of men; standing betwixt them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice" (Mosiah 15:5-9).

Going further than Abinidi, Alma teaches that Christ not only assumes iniquity and transgressions, but also "the pains and the sicknesses of his people" (Alma 7:11).

Further:

"He will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance" (Alma 7:12-13)

Alma, in quoting an unknown prophet Zenos, speaks of God's judgments being turned away because of Christ. Zenos in prayer exclaims: "it is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions ... for thou has turned thy judgments away from me because of thy Son" (Alma 33:11).

The Atonement as described reconciles man to God and provides victory over both temporal and spiritual death. However, Christ through his suffering, also experiences the consequences of simply being human. Sickness, pain, and misery, all of which may or *may not* be related to sin, are experienced by Christ so that he may "know how to succor his people according to their *infirmities*" (Alma 7:12). (emphasis added)

The Atonement extends well beyond sin.

We see then, in the *Book of Mormon*, a complex dynamic between the concepts of death, suffering, resurrection, sin, forgiveness, sickness, and mercy; all of which relate to the Atonement in one way or another. Yet, in the midst of these descriptions is the common theme of justice and the need for the demands of justice to be satisfied through Christ's atoning work. Nowhere is this more explicit than in Alma 34, and 42.

As R. Dennis Potter has pointed out, because both Lehi and Alma have spoken of both punishment and happiness being “affixed” to God’s law, it is easy to read these two chapters with the presupposition of the penal-substitution model.¹⁶ That is: by breaking God’s law we deserve punishment and therefore, Christ sits in as a substitute for the punishment we deserve. However, a careful reading reveals that the *Book of Mormon* in fact flatly rejects this concept!

In speaking of the need for a “great and last sacrifice” Amulek rhetorically asks: “Now is there not any man that can sacrifice his own blood with will atone for the sins of another. Now, if a man murdereth, behold will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother? I say unto you, nay.” Rather, “the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered” (Alma 32:11-12). Many Latter-day Saints assume that the reason such an arrangement as described by Amulek is unjust is because a mortal cannot, or should not assume the punishment of another – especially in the case of a crime as serious as murder. They then assume that Christ, as an infinite and sinless being both mortal and divine, is the only suitable substitute to stand in for the deserved punishment. Let’s assume for the moment that this reading is correct. In this case, justice would require punishment for sin and in fact, Christ stands in and endures the punishment for all sins. Amulek tells us that those who accept Christ and his message are “[encircled] in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice” (Alma 34:16) This would mean then, that a faithless person would suffer the punishment they deserved according to the demands of justice. This scenario presents a big problem because according to a strict penal model, Christ suffered for all sins, and not just the sins of those who would accept him. Therefore in this reading, justice would be inflicting punishment twice for the same sin which in itself, would be unjust! In order to make such a reading work, we would be forced to

¹⁶ R. Dennis Potter, “Did Christ Pay for Our Sins”, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32 (Winter 1999)

adopt some sort of idea of pre-destination wherein Christ suffered for the sins of those whom he foreknew would accept him. This seems to run counter to the *Book of Mormon* message that salvation is available freely to all and not just some.

If not through punishment, how then does justice become satisfied? Amulek states that the atonement “bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance... and thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice” (Alma 34:15-15). Note that it is mercy that satisfies the demands of justice and not punishment. Alma also teaches “God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15). Further Alma explains that through the atonement “justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus none but the truly penitent are saved” (Alma 42:24). Of course, even if we are to accept that it is mercy, and not punishment which satisfies justice, the question still remains: how can mercy overpower or satisfy the demands of justice and God’s law?

Potter argues that the suffering of Christ and all of his mortal experience allows him to fully understand our condition and thus be sympathetic to the reasons we sin.¹⁷ Therefore, since we have become subject unto Christ and he becomes our judge, he is able to extend mercy due to our extenuating circumstances. Alma 7 would seem to support this reading. While this may be part of the solution, I believe it still fails to account for the explicit need, repeated over and over again within the *Book of Mormon* for justice to be satisfied through fulfillment of the law.

Part of the problem is the association of the word “punishment” with justice by Lehi and Alma. When Lehi and Alma refer to punishment, they are really speaking of the consequence of sin, and in particular, the first transgression which brought about the fall. Notice that neither Alma nor Lehi use the plural “punishments” but rather the singular “punishment.” Punishment in this context refers to the consequence of the fall

¹⁷ Potter, “Did Christ Pay for our Sins?”

of Adam and Eve and not individual “punishments” for sins committed. Consider Alma’s words: “there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law; and the law inflicteth the punishment” (Alma 42:28). What law (notice singular!) is Alma referring to? The original law given to Adam and Eve that if they ate of the forbidden fruit that they would surely die. All of the consequences of sin, including all the realities of a mortal existence, follow from that single transgression. With this in mind, the descriptions of Abinidi and Alma of Christ taking upon himself not only sins, but also infirmities and sickness and ultimately death, take on new meaning. By voluntarily suffering, Christ took upon himself the consequences of sin: pain, sickness, death, and even a brief separation at the end from his Father. Through this experience he offers to lift these consequences from those who show faith in him. Yet, even if we accept that Christ suffered the consequences of sin (of which punishment may be a part) we are still left with the issue of justice being “overpaid” by inflicting its consequences twice: first on Christ, and then on the unrepentant sinner. It seems then, that Christ’s suffering and assumption of sin’s consequences *alone* is insufficient to satisfy the demands of God’s justice.

The crux of the problem may be that we are placing all of the work of satisfaction on Christ. When Alma and Amulek speak of justice being satisfied, it is always in the context of the “repentance of men in this probationary state” (Alma 42:13). Also after giving his explanation of the justice/mercy dynamic Amulek teaches: “begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you” (Alma 34:17). Repentance and contrition on the part of humankind seem to be a necessary requisite for God’s justice to be satisfied. Atonement, then, requires the action of both Christ and humankind. Christ’s suffering alone (as illustrated by the problem of double-suffering), as well as repentance and contrition alone, cannot satisfy the demands of justice.

More Work to Be Done

Of course, there is more work to be done on exactly how this combination of the suffering of consequences and individual penitence satisfies the demands of justice. Potter has taken a good step forward in explaining this dynamic but questions still loom as to the relation of boundless mercy and the requirements of the law. Regardless of the mechanism however, one thing remains clear in the *Book of Mormon* text: satisfaction is necessary for salvation and Christ plays the central role in providing that satisfaction.

New England Theology

Brief mention should be made of New England theology regarding the Atonement being debated leading up to the publication of the *Book of Mormon*. There are many similarities between the way the *Book of Mormon* discusses justice, mercy, and the law and how these same ideas were being expressed by prominent New England theologians. For example, Dr. Edwards (Jonathan Edwards Jr.) speaking of the nature of God's law in 1785:

“In order to be moral law, there must be a penalty; otherwise it would be mere advice, but no law. In order to support the authority and vigor of this law, the penalty must be inflicted upon the transgressors... [Therefore], the atonement is the substitute for the punishment threatened in the law; and was designed to answer the same ends of supporting the authority of the law, the dignity of the divine moral government, and the consistency of the divine conduct in legislation and execution.”¹⁸

These arguments sound very much like the arguments provided by Lehi and Alma. *Book of Mormon* atonement theology also shares some similarity with the work of Nathaniel Emmons, Caleb Burge and N.W. Taylor. Critics of the *Book of Mormon* are quick to point out these similarities and suggest that the *Book of Mormon* merely echoes theological trends popular at the time of its publication. However, as this essay illustrates, while *Book of Mormon* Christology may not be entirely original, it does represent a unique, subtle and nuanced interpretation of the Satisfaction Theory of atonement which its critics often overlook.

Conclusion

The Anselmic Satisfaction Theory of atonement and *Book of Mormon* Christology share the common idea that God, due to his very nature, requires satisfaction for sin. This essay has illustrated the development of two very different conceptions of

¹⁸ Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History Of The New England Theology*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907) 201-202

satisfaction and atonement yet, each is faithful to the idea that God's law and honor must remain in tact. Else God, as defined by his very nature, would "cease to be God." This essay has also shown that the *Book of Mormon*, separate from questions of origin and historicity, provides a complex yet subtle theory of atonement which can contribute to general theological discussion. Too often, *Book of Mormon* scholarship gets caught up in issues of evidence, either for or against, the claims Joseph Smith made for book and its origins. To borrow a phrase from Hans Kung, such scholarship is like "boxing at shadows" and completely obscures the true value of the *Book of Mormon*.

This author hopes that *Book of Mormon* theology will continue to be considered on its own terms due to the richness and depth of the theological meaning found therein.