

God as Dialysis Machine: The Sacrificial Calendar as the Renewal of the Covenant and the Retelling of Moses' Mediation on Mount Sinai

Mako A. Nagasawa

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The table comparison below is a summary of earlier work I have done on the Old Testament sacrificial system (see <https://newhumanityinstitute.wordpress.com/atonement-foundations-temple-sacrifices-and-a-bloodthirsty-god-new-humanity-institute/>). The comparison shows that the sacrificial system foreshadows Jesus as a medical substitutionary atonement. The sacrificial system does not foreshadow a penal substitutionary atonement.

Moses Ascends Mount Sinai	The High Priest Enters the Holy of Holies
Purpose: God purifies Moses and establishes the Sinai covenant	Purpose: God purifies Israel through the sacrifices, priests, and high priest, and renews the Sinai covenant
Mount Sinai: Three Vertical Levels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Base: People • Mid-Level: 70 Elders, Aaron, Moses, Joshua • Top: Moses (w/ Joshua) 	The Sanctuary: Three Horizontal Levels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outer Court: People • Holy Place: Priests • Holy of Holies: High Priest
‘...make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain’ (Ex.25:40; 26:30)	
Divine Fire on the Way Up the Mountain: Purifies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently’ (Ex.19:18). • God gave Moses blood to sprinkle on Israel to give them ‘new life’ (Ex.24:6 – 8) • God cleansed those who ascended; ultimately God made Moses’ face shine (Ex.34:29 – 35) because he alone ascended 	Fire in the Bronze Altar: Purifies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘The altar shall be most holy, and whatever touches the altar shall be holy’ (Ex.29:37) • In the sin offering (Lev.4), Israelites interacted with the fire. They laid hands on the animals, probably transferring their impurities symbolically. They sprinkled blood before the Lord and on various objects, cleansing them. The priests burned the kidney, liver, and intestinal fat (organs of waste and toxicity) in the fire of the altar (Lev.4:8 – 10, 19, 26, 31, 35) – ‘a soothing aroma to the Lord,’ not the death of the animals per se. The priests ate the flesh ‘to make atonement’ (Lev.6:24 – 30; 10:16 – 20), symbolically taking in impurity into themselves and bearing it. Once a year, the high priest represented all the priests, and all Israel, to bear the sin into God. • The bronze basin is connected to the altar, and is also for washing and cleansing afterwards (Ex.27:3; 38:8; 39:9).

<p>Moses and the Elders Eat Halfway Up the Mountain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel... and they ate and drank.’ (Ex.24:9 – 11) 	<p>The Priests Eat in the Holy Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the holy place: ‘You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me at all times.’ (Ex.25:30) ‘It shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy...’ (Lev.24:5 – 9)
<p>Moses Guided by a Vision of Fire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Now Moses... led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed’ (Ex.3:1 – 2) • Probably was guided by divine light through the divine darkness in the cloud (?) 	<p>The Priests Guided by Fiery Light</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the holy place: ‘Then you shall make a lampstand of pure gold... make its lamps seven in number.’ (Ex.25:31, 37) The golden lampstand was probably meant to symbolize God’s appearance in the burning bush.
<p>Divine Cloud on the Top of the Mountain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud.’ (Ex.24:15 – 16) 	<p>Cloud of Incense in the Holy Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘You shall make an altar as a place for burning incense... in front of the veil... in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony, where I will meet with you... perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.’ (Ex.30:1 – 8)
<p>Moses Goes to the Top of the Mountain Alone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin’ (Ex.32:30). ‘So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights’ (Ex.34:28) 	<p>The High Priest Enters the Holy of Holies Alone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest alone entered behind the veil, to send all the impurities into God, once a year (Lev.16) and renew the covenant. • The curtain blocks everyone else’s sight.
<p>The Sky and Heavens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the mountain top, all is sky (Ex.24:9 – 11; 34:1 – 4) 	<p>The Sky and Heavens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The gold-covered walls of the holy of holies (Ex.26:29) create an ‘infinite mirror’ effect, where all is sky
<p>God’s Appearance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God showed His glory partially to Moses (Ex.33:17 – 34:9). Implied is God as ‘fiery sword’ between two cherubim (Gen.3:24) – behind them stands the tree of life 	<p>God’s Appearance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the holy of holies stood God’s fiery pillar of light above and between the two cherubim on the lid of the mercy seat (Ex.25:17 – 22)

<p>Moses Mediates the Covenant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moses' mediates for Israel and atones for sin, <i>not by being punished by God, but through his obedience and willingness to be purified</i>: 'If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people?' The Lord said to Moses, 'I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.' Then Moses said, 'I pray You, show me Your glory!'" (Ex.33:15 – 18) 	<p>The High Priest Mediates the Covenant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The high priest mediates for Israel and atones for sin <i>not by being punished by God, but through his obedience and willingness to be purified</i>, expressed by wearing white linen and offering the burnt offering of a bull (Lev.16:4, 6, 11) God consumed Israel's impurity through the sin offering (Lev.16:15) and simultaneously sent sin away through the scapegoat (Lev.16:21 – 22) God gave back blood to cleanse and purify sacred space and objects and land (Lev.16:14 – 20, 32 – 33) to renew His presence.
<p>Jesus became our eternal mediator, because he offered himself as a once-for-all sacrifice. He was priest (Heb.7 – 10) and both goats, taken together: the goat sacrificed (Heb.8 – 9; 13:11 – 12) and the scapegoat (Heb.13:13). He took sin into himself to death, and sent it away from us. He became the source of salvation (Heb.5:7 – 10).</p>	
<p>God Restores the Garden Land to Israel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> God leads Israel into the garden land, to be a partial restoration of Adam and Eve 	<p>God Restores the Garden Land to Israel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> God renews His presence with Israel in the garden land God enacts the Jubilee year every fifty years, on the Day of Atonement, to restore the garden land to all His children (Lev.25:8 – 12), and release servants from servitude.

Significance for Atonement Theology: Medical Substitution, Not Penal Substitution

1. God is not bloodthirsty. God is a blood donor.

God was acting like what we understand to be a dialysis machine. The Israelites passed their impurities to God through the mechanism of the animal sacrifices (specifically the sin and guilt offerings) and the priesthood. The priests, when they ate the sacrifices, stored up those impurities in themselves. Simultaneously, the priests shed the blood of the animals offered, since the animals' blood was not corrupted by sin. The innocent animal blood 'cleansed' the uncleanness of the Israelites and the objects they touched.

Meanwhile, every year, the priests stored up the contaminants in themselves until the high priest, representing all the priests, entered into the sanctuary on the annual Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) and sent the uncleanness into God. God consumed it. In the diagram above, the scapegoat and the sin offerings represented the "used dialysate with waste" which could not circulate back into the system by being eaten. The scapegoat had to carry the sin of the people far away into the wilderness as a representation that God separated sin from the people. And the other goat and the bull similarly could not be eaten.

2. God accepted Moses' mediation not by punishing him, but by purifying him.

Moses mediated the Sinai covenant, but Jesus mediated a better covenant (Heb.9:15). God accepted Moses as mediator not by making Moses bear a retributive punishment to satisfy His own retributive anger, but because Moses was faithful, and allowed himself to be purified to some degree.

3. Moses foreshadowed Jesus. The sacrifices foreshadowed Jesus also.

Likewise, God accepted Jesus as mediator not by making Jesus bear a retributive punishment to satisfy, exhaust, and drain God's retributive anger, but because Jesus was faithful, and purified his own human nature completely.

Jesus became our eternal mediator who offered himself as a once-for-all sacrifice. He was priest (Heb.7 – 10) and both goats, taken together: the goat sacrificed (Heb.8 – 9; 13:11 – 12) and the scapegoat (Heb.13:13). Jesus took the corruption of sin within himself to death, and sent it away from us. His death revealed and exemplified the central inner dynamic of his entire life: to resist every temptation and live his life faithfully unto God the Father.

'For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin' (Heb.4:15).

Though his suffering and obedience throughout his life, Jesus became the source of our salvation because he is the source of a cleansed, purified, new humanity:

'In the days of his flesh, he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his piety. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered. And having been made perfect, he became to all those who obey him the source of eternal salvation.' (Heb.5:7 – 9)

Therefore, Jesus' death on the cross was a capstone and crowning event, but his death cannot be separated from the cross he bore during his life. Jesus' death was his final victory over the corruption of sin in his human nature, but his death was a continuation of the victories he won every single moment.

4. The sacrifices also demonstrated God's interest in purification, by partitioning.

In the sin offering, the death of the animal per se did not please God. The death was a means to an end: the destruction of the waste and toxin organs by fire, which alone produced a soothing aroma to the Lord (Lev.4:31). See comments on the sin offerings, below. Taken individually, each sin offering represented an *extension* of the worshiper, not a substitute for the worshiper. Taken as a whole system, the sin offerings were the vehicles to transfer human uncleanness and impurity into God, and receive back from God the uncorrupted life-blood which cleansed and purified.

Likewise, the death of Jesus per se did not please God. His death was a means to a deeper end: the separating of the corruption of sin, the inward circumcision of something unclean from the heart (Dt.10:16; 30:6; Jer.4:4; 9:28 – 29; Rom.2:28 – 29; Col.2:12), so God could raise Jesus from the dead with a purified, cleansed, new humanity.

This is why Jesus' resurrection is part of the atonement, equally with his death, because we must participate in both, by the Spirit: 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins' (1 Cor.15:17). Jesus did not die *instead* of us; he died *ahead* of us.

5. Atonement covers all creation.

Symbolically (at least), human sin contaminated the physical world. Thus, in the Jewish sacrificial calendar, the cycle of atonement addressed not only human beings, but the physical world. We see this in the many ways blood was sprinkled on objects and land. God would 'atone for His land and His people' (Dt.32:43), not just people.

During the duration of the Sinai covenant, creation was serving a double burden for Israel. Not only was creation giving its life to feed Israel in an ordinary sense. Creation was also giving its life to address Israel's sinfulness.

This is helpful to remember when reading Hebrews and the Gospel of John, which are sometimes accused of being the most mystical, spiritual, Platonic, and anti-ecological in their orientation. But they are the most anti-temple, or anti-sacrificial system. They explain Jesus as fulfilling the entirety of the sacrificial system. This means, in addition, that Jesus relieved creation of its double burden with respect to the Sinai covenant. Animals and harvests no longer needed to be sacrificed. Thus, Hebrews and the Gospel of John are not anti-ecological.

6. Many advocates of penal substitution believe that the sacrificial system is the Old Testament lynchpin for penal substitution. But the sacrificial system does not actually support penal substitution. It supports medical substitution.

God's holiness doesn't mean He must punish every sin. God's holiness means He has to cleanse every impurity He touches. In the case of human beings, since God has entrusted with a free will to love Him or not, God's holiness means that He always calls us to be purified, with His partnership.

God's wrath is not against human persons per se. God's wrath is against the corruption of sin within our human nature. That is shown especially in the partitioning of the sin offering, and the burning of the organs associated with waste and toxins.

The Sin Offerings: The Transfer Mechanism

In the sin offering, the Israelites divided the animal into different parts: blood, flesh, skin, fat, kidneys and liver, and sometimes legs (e.g. Lev.1:3 – 13; 3:1 – 17; etc.). Out of all the offerings, the sin offering was special because it carried sin from people to priests, and from high priest to God.

All Year Round: Regular Sacrifices

1. The Israelite brings the animal to the priest at the sanctuary (Lev.4:4a)
2. The Israelite lays his hand on the head of the animal (Lev.4:4b)
3. The Israelite kills the animal (Lev.4:4c)
4. The priest sprinkles the animal's blood on the sanctuary furnishings (Lev.4:5 – 7), symbolically cleansing the objects and land
5. The priest separates the organs for waste and toxins – intestinal fat, kidneys, liver – and burns them in the altar in fire and smoke (Lev.4:8 – 10), burning away the most unclean parts
6. The priests are to burn the hide, head, legs, entrails, and refuse down to ashes (Lev.4:11 – 12)
7. The priests are to eat the meat of the sin offering 'to bear away the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord' (Lev.6:24 – 30; 10:16 – 20).

The Day of Atonement: Special Sacrifices

1. The high priest goes in once a year on the appointed day (Lev.16:2)
2. The high priest wears clean white linen (Lev.16:4)
3. The high priest sacrifices a bull for himself and his family (Lev.16:6, 11)
4. The high priest sprinkles the bull's blood on the furnishings of the sanctuary (Lev.16:14 – 20)
5. The high priest sacrifices a goat as a sin offering, sprinkling its blood on the mercy seat in the holy of holies, and then the holy place, cleansing it (Lev.16:9, 15 – 19)
6. The high priest lays his hands on the live goat, the scapegoat, confessing all the sins of Israel onto the head of the scapegoat, and send it away into the wilderness (Lev.16:20 – 22)
7. The priests will *not* eat the flesh of the bull or first goat, which is absolutely unusual and unique, but rather burn it to ashes, so the sin does *not* symbolically cycle back into the priests (Lev.16:26 – 28)

Comments on the Sin Offerings: Partitioning the Animal

One cannot help but be struck by the connections to various motifs of separation that occurred before in Scripture. The fiery sword of Genesis 3:24 represented cutting/burning sinfulness away, separating something from us if ever we were to return to the garden of Eden. Now, we observe the separating of the fat, kidneys, and liver from the rest of the animal. With the sin offering, in particular, the parts of the animal that handles waste and toxins are cut away and burned.

This sheds light on why God was pleased with the sacrifice of Abel in Genesis 4:4. Abel separated the ‘fat portions’ from the animals, presumably for God to consume by fire. And this made Abel like God. God separated good things from good things in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3, and even Eve from Adam in Genesis 2:21 – 22. Human beings had to partner with God to continue in this work of separating, but with a new significance. Because of the fall into corruption, human beings had to separate sinfulness from themselves, in partnership with God. Abel was demonstrating this, through his offering, in microcosm.

The principle of separation continues in what became the dominant symbol for salvation: circumcision. Circumcision in Genesis 17 represented the cutting of sinful attitudes of male privilege away, separating those attitudes from Abraham and Sarah so they could return to the creational ideal of Adam and Eve insofar as childbearing was concerned (as I have explained here). Circumcision was an act of separation from uncleanness for the sake of restoration to God’s original creation ideal. Moses described salvation from sinfulness using the motif of ‘circumcision of the heart’ (Dt.10:16; 30:6). Something has to be cut away from us, from our human nature, in a partnership between each human being and God. Internalizing the commandments was synonymous with acquiring virtues and cutting sinfulness away (Dt.10:16; Jer.4:4; 9:28 – 29). But only God would be able to fully grant the circumcised heart (Dt.30:16; Rom.2:28 – 29; Col.2:12).

This principle of separation demonstrates agreement with medical substitution, not penal substitution. When Jesus died, God was not pleased by his death per se. Death was a means to another, deeper, end. Through death, God separated out from Jesus’ humanity the most sinister ‘toxin,’ the corruption which must be ‘circumcised’ from the human heart (Dt.10:16; 30:6), ‘the flesh’ (Jn.1:14; Rom.7:14 – 25), ‘the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom.8:3), ‘the old self’ (Rom.6:6), the ‘venom’ of the serpent (Lk.10:19). Thus in his resurrection, Jesus emerged without it.

The Blood

The blood of the animal was the cleansing agent that restores sanctity, life, and health to what it touches. The Israelites were to never eat the blood.

The Organs for Waste and Toxins

Interestingly, the kidneys, liver, and intestinal fat are the parts of the body which process waste or store toxins within the body. Very importantly, the kidneys, liver, and intestinal fat were to never be eaten (Lev.3:17; 7:22 – 25; 8:16, 25; 9:10, 19 – 20, 24; 10:15). They were reserved for God alone. When they were consumed in fire, the Lord smelled the smoke of the fat, kidney, and liver as ‘a soothing aroma’ (Lev.3:3 – 5, 9 – 11, 14 – 16).

Nothing else triggered this response from God, including the death of the animal. This strongly suggests that penal substitution advocates are making unfortunate oversimplifications about the whole process of sacrifice. For sin offerings, in particular, burning the toxin-bearing organs became ‘a soothing aroma’ to God (Lev.4:21). And this step in particular is connected to ‘making atonement.’ For example, in the sin offering,

‘Then he [the priest] shall remove all its fat, just as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of the peace offerings, and the priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar, on the offerings by fire to the LORD. Thus the priest *shall make atonement for him* in regard to his sin which he has committed, and he will be forgiven.’ (Lev.4:35; emphasis mine)

The partitioning of the animal indicates that God is not ‘soothed’ by simply causing death or otherwise doling out punishments. Rather, death is a means to another end, where God separates waste-related organs from the organism and consumes them. This was surely instructive for the Israelite onlooker. Atonement via the sin offering, therefore, is connected to the act of separating one thing from another.

The Legs, Skin, and Digestive Tract

Perhaps the exterior of the animal and its digestive tract represented the way the animal made contact with the land, which had been cursed because of Adam and Eve's fall into corruption, and further desecrated by the sins of others. In the burnt offering, the legs and entrails of the animal needed to be washed before being offered to God (e.g. Lev.1:9, 13).

The Flesh

The flesh of the animal, in the peace and sin/guilt offerings of Lev.3 – 7, was consumed by the priests or the common people. This is a non-negotiable part of how the priests 'made atonement' for the people (Lev.6:24 – 30; 10:16 – 20). The priests had to internalize the sin that was symbolically placed by the Israelites onto the animals. They were 'sin-bearers' in their role as priests.

Patristic Evidence for the Sacrifices as Cleansing and Purifying

Patristic writers are cited here because of their historical significance and theological acumen. They interpreted the Jewish sacrificial system in terms of cleansing and purification. The early Christians are historically significant because they were much closer to the apostles in time. The fact that there was no centralized church organization in the first few centuries must be kept in mind, because for a widespread movement to believe the same thing, they must have believed it at the historical source.

Their theological acumen is also significant because they strove to be consistent with Scripture and with God's self-revelation as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To them, this meant God is a communion of love by nature, and since 'deeds must correspond to natures,'¹ which means that all His activities must be explained in terms of His love.²

Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130 – 202 AD)

Irenaeus was mentored by Polycarp of Smyrna, who knew the apostle John. Hence, Irenaeus came from Western Asia Minor, then the center of Christian faith, and later served in Roman Gaul as bishop of Lyons, then a major city. He wrote in Greek, was the first integrative and comprehensive theological writer after the apostles, and evidenced the New Testament canon through quotation. His stature was such that he corrected the bishop of Rome, Victor, over the Quartodeciman Controversy.

'For at the beginning God had respect to the gifts of Abel, because he offered with single-mindedness and righteousness; but He had no respect unto the offering of Cain, because his heart was divided with envy and malice, which he cherished against his brother, as God says when reproving his hidden [thoughts], Though you offer rightly, yet, if you do not divide rightly, have you not sinned? Be at rest; since God is not appeased by sacrifice. For if any one shall endeavour to offer a sacrifice merely to outward appearance, unexceptionably, in due order, and according to appointment, while in his soul he does not assign to his neighbour that fellowship with him which is right and proper, nor is under the fear of God — he who thus cherishes secret sin does not deceive God by that sacrifice which is offered correctly as to outward appearance; nor will such an oblation profit him anything, but [only] the giving up of that evil which has been conceived within him, so that sin may not the more, by means of the hypocritical action, render him the destroyer of himself. Wherefore did the Lord also declare: 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whited sepulchres. For the sepulchre appears beautiful outside, but within it is full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness; even so you also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within you are full of wickedness and hypocrisy.' [Matthew 23:27-28] For while they were thought to offer correctly so far as outward appearance went, they had in themselves jealousy like to Cain; therefore they slew the Just One, slighting the counsel of the Word, as did also Cain. For [God] said to him, 'Be at rest'; but he did not assent. Now what else is it to be at rest than to forego purposed violence? And saying similar things to these men, He declares: 'You blind Pharisee, cleanse that which is within the cup, that the outside may be clean also.' [Matthew 23:26] And they did not

¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 16.4

² My exploration of the 'systematic theology' of the patristic writers, especially atonement, *Penal Substitution vs. Medical-Ontological Substitution: A Historical Comparison*, is found here: <http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/pdfs/article-penal-substitution-vs-ontological-substitution-historical-comparison.pdf>

listen to Him. For Jeremiah says, 'Behold, neither your eyes nor your heart are good; but [they are turned] to your covetousness, and to shed innocent blood, and for injustice, and for man-slaying, that you may do it.' [Jeremiah 22:17] And again Isaiah says, 'You have taken counsel, but not of Me; and made covenants, [but] not by My Spirit.' [Isaiah 30:1] In order, therefore, that their inner wish and thought, being brought to light, may show that God is without blame, and works no evil — that God who reveals what is hidden [in the heart], but who works not evil— when Cain was by no means at rest, He says to him: 'To you shall be his desire, and you shall rule over him.' [Genesis 4:7] Thus did He in like manner speak to Pilate: 'You should have no power at all against Me, unless it were given you from above'; [John 19:11] God always giving up the righteous one [in this life to suffering], that he, having been tested by what he suffered and endured, may [at last] be accepted; but that the evildoer, being judged by the actions he has performed, may be rejected. Sacrifices, therefore, do not sanctify a man, for God stands in no need of sacrifice; but it is the conscience of the offerer that sanctifies the sacrifice when it is pure, and thus moves God to accept [the offering] as from a friend. 'But the sinner,' says He, 'who kills a calf [in sacrifice] to Me, is as if he slew a dog.' [Isaiah 66:3]

Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329 – c.390 AD)

Gregory was bishop of Sasima in Asia Minor, and, while he cared for his aging and dying father, served in Nazianzus. He became bishop of Constantinople in 380. He presided over the second ecumenical Council, the Council of Constantinople of 381, then requested release from his role and returned to Nazianzus as bishop there. Gregory was the leading theologian of his generation, especially of the Trinity. The Orthodox Church honors him with the title 'the Theologian,' which is a title only given to the apostle John and the much later Simeon the New Theologian. He is most appreciated for his Five Theological Orations.

God was purifying Moses: 'Now when I go up eagerly into the Mount – or, to use a truer expression, when I both eagerly long, and at the same time am afraid (the one through my hope and the other through my weakness), to enter within the cloud, and hold converse with God, for so God commands – if any be an Aaron, let him go up with me, and let him stand near, being ready, if it must be so, to remain outside the cloud. But if any be a Nadab or an Abihu, or of the Order of the Elders, let him go up indeed, but let him stand afar off, according to the value of his purification. But if any be of the multitude, who are unworthy of this height of contemplation, if he be altogether impure, let him not approach at all, for it would be dangerous to him; but if he be at least temporarily purified, let him remain below and listen to the voice alone, and the trumpet, the bare words of piety, and let him see the mountain smoking and lightening, a terror at once and a marvel to those who cannot get up. But if any is an evil and savage beast, and altogether incapable of taking in the subject matter of contemplation and theology, let him not hurtfully and malignantly lurk in his den among the woods, to catch hold of some dogma or saying by a sudden spring, and to tear sound doctrine to pieces by his misrepresentations, but let him stand yet afar off and withdraw from the Mount, or he shall be stoned and crushed, and shall perish miserably in his wickedness... What is this that has happened to me, O friends, and initiates, and fellow lovers of the truth? I was running to lay hold on God, and thus I went up into the Mount, and drew aside the curtain of the cloud, and entered away from matter and material things, and as far as I could I withdrew within myself. And then when I looked up, I scarce saw the back parts of God; although I was sheltered by the rock, the Word that was made flesh for us.' And when I looked a little closer, I saw, not the first and unmingled nature, known to itself—to the Trinity, I mean; not that which abides within the first veil, and is hidden by the cherubim; but only that nature, which at last even reaches to us. And that is, as far as I can learn, the majesty, or, as holy David calls it, the glory which is manifested among the creatures, which it has produced and governs. For these are the back parts of God, which he leaves behind him, as tokens of himself, like the shadows and reflection of the sun in the water, which show the sun to our weak eyes, because we cannot look at the sun himself, for by his unmixed light he is too strong for our power of perception. In this way then you shall discourse of God; even were you a Moses and a god to Pharaoh; even were you caught up like Paul to the third heaven, and had heard unspeakable words; even were you raised above them both, and exalted to angelic or archangelic place and dignity. For though a thing be all heavenly, or above heaven, and far higher in nature and nearer to God than we, yet it is farther distant from God, and from the complete comprehension of his nature, than it is lifted above our complex and lowly and earthward-sinking composition.'³

³ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Second Theological Oration (Oration 28)*, paragraphs 2 – 3

John Chrysostom (c.347 – 407 AD)

John originally hailed from Antioch, in Syria. Antioch and Alexandria had the two strongest intellectual traditions in the church, with Antioch described as more Semitic than Hellenistic in its orientation, more focused on the historical-grammatical meaning of the biblical text. John Chrysostom was probably both Syriac and Greek speaking, and is known as the most brilliant expositor of Scripture in the early church. The word 'Chrysostom' means 'golden-mouthed.' He was a priest and preacher in Antioch from 386 – 397, and was called to be bishop of Constantinople in 397. Next to Augustine of Hippo, he left behind the largest amount of writings from the early church.

Commenting on Romans 12:1, John Chrysostom speaks of the sacrifices in terms of purification: 'So Paul also here bids us present our bodies a living sacrifice. And how is the body, it may be said, to become a sacrifice? Let the eye look upon no evil thing, and it has become a sacrifice; let your tongue speak nothing filthy, and it has become an offering; let your hand do no lawless deed, and it has become a whole burnt offering. Or rather this is not enough, but we must have good works also: let the hand do alms, the mouth bless them that cross one, and the hearing find leisure evermore for lections of Scripture. For sacrifice allows of no unclean thing: sacrifice is a first-fruit of the other actions. Let us then from our hands, and feet, and mouth, and all other members, yield a first-fruit unto God. Such a sacrifice is well pleasing, as that of the Jews was even unclean, for, their sacrifices, it says, are unto them as the bread of mourning. [Hosea 9:4] Not so ours. That presented the thing sacrificed dead: this makes the thing sacrificed to be living. For when we have mortified our members, then we shall be able to live. For the law of this sacrifice is new, and so the sort of fire is a marvellous one. For it needs no wood or matter under it; but our fire lives of itself, and does not burn up the victim, but rather quickens it. This was the sacrifice that God sought of old. Wherefore the Prophet says, 'The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit.' [Psalm 51:17] And the three Children offer this when they say, 'At this time there is neither prince, or prophet, or leader, or burnt offering, or place to sacrifice before You, and to find mercy. Nevertheless, in a contrite heart and an humble spirit let us be accepted.' [Daniel 3:15 – 16] And observe how great the exactness wherewith he uses each word. For he does not say, offer ποιήσατε [Exodus 29:39, Septuagint] your bodies as a sacrifice, but present (παρστήσατε see below) them, as if he had said, never more have any interest in them. You have given them up to another. For even they that furnish (same word) the war-horses have no further interest in them. And thou too hast presented your members for the war against the devil and for that dread battle-array. Do not let them down to selfish appliances. And he shows another thing also from this, that one must make them approved, if one means to present them. For it is not to any mortal being that we present them, but to God, the King of the universe; not to war only, but to have seated thereon the King Himself. For He does not refuse even to be seated upon our members, but even greatly desires it. And what no king who is but our fellow-servant would choose to do, that the Lord of Angels chooses. Since then it is both to be presented (i.e. as for a King's use) and is a sacrifice, rid it of every spot, since if it have a spot, it will no longer be a sacrifice. For neither can the eye that looks lecherously be sacrificed, nor the hand be presented that is grasping and rapacious, nor the feet that go lame and go to play-houses, nor the belly that is the slave of self-indulgence, and kindles lusts after pleasures, nor the heart that has rage in it, and harlots' love, nor the tongue that utters filthy things. Hence we must spy out the spots on our body upon every side. For if they that offered the sacrifices of old were bid to look on every side, and were not permitted to offer an animal that has anything superfluous or lacking, or is scurvy, or scabbed [Leviticus 22:22 – 23], much more must we, who offer not senseless animals, but ourselves, exhibit more strictness, and be pure in all respects, that we also may be able to say as did Paul, I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. [2 Timothy 4:6] For he was purer than any sacrifice, and so he speaks of himself as ready to be offered. But this will be brought about if we kill the old man, if we mortify our members that are upon the earth, if we crucify the world unto ourselves. In this way we shall not need the knife any more, nor altar, nor fire, or rather we shall want all these, but not made with the hands, but all of them will come to us from above, fire from above, and knife also, and our altar will the breadth of Heaven be. For if when Elijah offered the visible sacrifice, a flame, that came down from above consumed the whole water, wood, and stones, much more will this be done upon you. And if you have anything in you relaxed and secular, and yet offerest the sacrifice with a good intention, the fire of the Spirit will come down, and both wear away that worldliness, and perfect (so Field: some manuscripts read 'carry up') the whole sacrifice. But what is reasonable (λογική) service? It means spiritual ministry, conversation according to Christ. As then he that ministers in the house of God, and officiates, of whatever sort he may be, then collects himself συστέλλεται [Ezekiel 44:19], and becomes more dignified; so we ought to be minded all our whole life as serving and ministering. And this will be so, if every day you bring Him sacrifices (3 manuscripts read 'yourself as a sacrifice'), and become the priest of your own body, and of the virtue of your soul; as, for example, when you offer soberness, when almsgiving, when goodness and forbearance. For in doing this you offer 'a reasonable service' (or

‘worship,’ λατρείαν), that is, one without anything that is bodily, gross, visible. Having then raised the hearer by the names bestowed, and having shown that each man is a priest of his own flesh by his conversation, he mentions also the way whereby we may compass all this. What then is the way?’⁴

Pseudo-Macarius (4th – 5th century)

Macarius of Egypt (c.300 – 391) learned Christian monasticism from Anthony of Egypt in the desert, became a priest and the presiding elder of a monastic community that still bears his name. The Fifty Homilies were attributed to him a few generations after his death in 391 AD, but modern patristics scholars believe that the author was from Upper Mesopotamia where the Roman and Persian Empires bordered each other, and that the Homilies were written not later than 534 AD.

‘For as in the natural world kings are not waited upon by boorish people, but by those who are good-looking and well-educated, so in the heavenly palace those who wait upon the heavenly King are the blameless, the irreproachable, the pure in heart. As in the palace good-looking maidens, that have no kind of blemish, the handsomest, go into the society of kings, so in the spiritual order, it is the souls that are adorned with all good manners which have the society of the heavenly King. In visible things, where a prince goes to stay, if it should happen that that house contains anything that is not clean, it is put to rights, and much cleaning takes place, and sweet odours are poured out; *how much more does the house of the soul, in which the Lord rests require cleaning, that He may be able to enter in and rest there, who is without spot or blemish!* In such a heart God and the whole church of heaven rests.’⁵

‘Moses came, but he could not bestow a complete cure. Priests, gifts, tithes, sabbaths, new-moons, washings, sacrifices, burnt offerings, and every other righteousness, was performed under the law, and the soul could not get cured and cleansed from the unclean issue of bad thoughts. Every righteousness of the soul was unavailing to heal man, until the Saviour came, the true Physician, who cures without cost, who gave Himself a ransom for mankind. He alone accomplished the great, saving deliverance and cure of the soul. He set it free from bondage, and brought it out of darkness, glorifying it with His own light. He dried up the fountain of unclean thoughts that was in it. Behold, it says, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.’⁶

Recent Commentators

T.F. Torrance on the High Priest Retelling Moses’ Ascent on Sinai: ‘We recall that in the Old Testament liturgy of the day of atonement the most important part of the deed of atonement is done within the veil beyond human sight. After the sacrifice made on the altar in the holy place, the high priest took some of the blood shed in sacrifice and disappeared behind the veil, ‘ascending’ (as it was put) into the holy of holies. He entered shrouded with a cloud of incense and at the very risk of his life he approached the divine mercy seat, sprinkled the sacrificial blood upon it under the shadow of the golden cherubim and there held communion with God and made intercession for Israel.’⁷

‘When this concept of atonement... is applied to relations with God... it is not used to speak of the covering of the face of God and so of conciliating him, but is used to speak of the covering of sin before his face or presence. God is thus not the object of the atonement but the contrary.’⁸

⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homily 20 on Romans*, Romans 12:1

⁵ Pseudo-Macarius, *Homily 15.45* emphasis mine

⁶ Pseudo-Macarius, *Homily 20.6*

⁷ T.F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p.2

⁸ *Ibid*, p.34