As I sat surrounded by ceramic ducks and cows dressed in crotched bonnets, Ruby described the abuse her daughter had recently come through. Ruby, a former factory worker who wore her hair in a truncated beehive and spoke in a thick Eastern Kentucky accent, was a member of one of the churches in my first appointment. Her son-in-law had fled the state after several years of dealing drugs and abusing her daughter. Now, several weeks later, he had turned up in a drug rehab center in North Carolina. His case worker had become triangled in the whole ordeal and had been calling Ruby’s daughter trying to convince her to take him back.

“Pastor, I have been praying about all this,” Ruby explained, “and the other day I got down on my knees in my prayer closet.” She had converted the closet in her sewing room into an alcove of religious kitsch featuring a large bulletin board on the door where she pinned various prayer requests. “I prayed that the precious blood of Jesus would be shed upon my daughter and that his holy blood would protect her,” she said, “and that the Lord’s blood would be shed upon him to forgive him and change his heart.” It was an atonement that was as bloody as you can get, and I, recently graduated from Union Seminary in New York and still saturated with feminist theories, was deeply troubled by what I was hearing.

Ruby’s prayer illustrates the contemporary dilemma over the atonement. In recent years, critiques of the atonement have centered on two fundamental problems: violence
and passivity. Theologians have asked, Does the cross sanction abuse and perpetuate violence? And, Do certain atonement theories promote human passivity in the face of oppression? This paper will not focus on the first question, but will address how the cross functions in the works of John Wesley and Dorothee Soelle to activate the believer to overcome sin and evil. By addressing the problem of passivity, we will be better able to form solutions to the problem of violence in the atonement.

Looking at the ways Wesley and Soelle used the cross helps us address the problem of passivity because both were attempting to recast the Reformation theology they had inherited in ways that would support Christian activism—for Wesley, in support of the comprehensive goal of holiness and for Soelle, in support of a mystical political activism. They complement each other in ways that enable us to overcome the problem of passivity in the doctrine of the atonement. And where their views of the cross disagree they have the potential to correct each other.

WESLEY’S USE OF THE CROSS

Wesley stands in the tradition of substitutionary atonement. While there are references to Christus Victor, they do not play a central role in his understanding. Maddox notes that there are few military or ransom images in his references to the atonement, which is surprising given that the Book of Common Prayer, from which Wesley often quotes, contains ample references to ransom. According to Lindstrom, the theme of the atonement as an act of deliverance is “implicit rather than explicit and found
chiefly in the earlier sermons. At best, he links victory over Satan with penal substitution.

Instead, Wesley posits victory over sin in the themes of regeneration and sanctification. In “The End of Christ’s Coming” Wesley explains how Christ destroys the works of the devil not with cosmic warfare but with an illumination of the heart. “It is by thus manifesting himself in our hearts that he effectually ‘destroys the works of the devil’.” Clearly, this is victory imagery but the action occurs in a different place—the human heart rather than in the cosmos—from the traditional models of Christus Victor. He “personalizes” Christus Victor while making this imagery one part of the framework of substitutionary atonement.

In even fewer places there are allusions to the moral influence model. At best, you see it in a few hymns in which the believer sees in the cross the supreme example of God’s love. But for Wesley, this example of love was expressed as the pardon that penal substitution secures.

Penal substitution works within the framework of recapitulation. In “Justification by Faith,” and in his notes on Romans, Wesley sees Christ as a “second general parent and representative of the whole human race.” As such, Christ is the Second Adam who has “tasted death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). As our representative, Christ satisfied the just requirement that we be punished for sin. The “propitiation made by the blood of his Son” is the supreme expression of the righteous mercy of God.

However, Wesley places more emphasis on the imagery of sacrifice than on the forensic dimensions. As Colin Gunton has demonstrated, even though they overlap, there is a contrast between the metaphors of justice and sacrifice. For example, in
“Justification by Faith” he relies heavily on Isaiah 53 but does very little with the metaphors of indebtedness or indictment. The sacrificial imagery may be more useful in his desire to create a “practical divinity” whereas the forensic metaphor may tend to divert attention toward metaphysical speculations that reinforce a passive trust in an acquittal that took place beyond time and space. It is the remembrance and (as is explained below) the present experience of the atonement which is the dynamic engine of his ordo salutis. Sacrificial imagery lends itself to this kind of active faith better than juridical metaphors.

The driving force behind his embrace of penal substitution is the centrality of the doctrine of justification. Substitutionary atonement makes justification possible because we are pardoned by virtue of “the merits of Christ’s death and Passion”. Without the atonement as the objective foundation, our justification is either an illusion or relies upon our own merits. For Wesley, substitutionary atonement reveals that there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation. His embrace of penal substitution reflects the primacy of grace in his theology and is the back story for his ordo salutis.

All of this sprang from a deep personal crisis of faith. As a young man, Wesley had made an ardent attempt to practice the asceticism of William Law and others. Yet, the more he tried the more he failed, which created a frustrating paralysis in his faith. It was the personal appropriation of the doctrine of justification, and its proper relationship to sanctification, which saved him from this crisis. Even though he maintained human agency in his via salutis, he realized that it can only be initiated by God. The cross is the supreme expression of God taking the first step to reanimate human beings so that we can progress on toward holiness.
For Law, the crucifixion is not vicarious suffering for our sins, but a representational act of sacrifice to make our acts of mortification acceptable to God. Thus, salvation is dependent upon both Christ’s suffering and our mortification; we must practice self-denial (i.e. “the way of the cross”) in order to benefit from Christ’s atonement. According to “Law’s fundamentally mystical position … Christ’s death did not constitute any satisfaction to God, but was only a means to the transformation of man and a demonstration of Christ’s superiority to the world, death, Hell, and the Devil.” The death of Christ is substitutionary in the sense that it was the only way for God to overcome evil.

In the days leading up to his Aldersgate experience there was an exchange of letters between Wesley and Law in which Wesley criticized his mentor for not sharing with him the true meaning of the atonement. Wesley criticized Law’s asceticism as “too high for man” and “bringing us into deeper captivity to the law of sin” and that he never grounded his advice “upon faith in his blood.” Law replied, “If you are for separating the doctrine of the cross from following Christ, or faith in him, you have number and names enough on your side, but not me.” In the final letter, Wesley remarked on Law’s two maxims of the Lord (1. “Without me ye can do nothing;” and 2. “If any man will come after me, or be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me”) saying that they “may imply but do not express that…” He is our propitiation, through faith in his blood.”

Underneath their falling out over the atonement were two different understandings of the relationship between justification and sanctification. Because Wesley insists that we cannot achieve our justification through our works, the atonement must be the prior event
that secures our salvation. Because Law implies that sanctification is the precursor to
justification, the cross plays a different role other than propitiation.

The letters must be read in context. Wesley may not be a reliable interpreter of Law
for us, but it does express his dire situation to find a sufficient foundation for his quest for
holy living. For Wesley, we do not and cannot initiate the process of holy living. He
carried this belief throughout his life. “It is through his merits alone,” Wesley writes near
the end of his life, “that all believers are saved, this is, justified, saved from guilt,
sanctified, saved from the nature of sin, and glorified, taken into heaven.” Holiness can
only begin with and be sustained by our pardon from sin through faith in God’s initiative
on the cross. Anything less leads to utter futility.

Yet, Wesley also sees the limits of substitutionary atonement. It is essential but if taken
too far it has dire consequences for the pursuit of holiness. He criticizes Calvinists for
interpreting the righteousness of Christ in a way that leads to moral passivity. In turn,
Calvinists, such as Rowland Hill and James Hervey, criticize Wesley for putting too
much emphasis on human works and diminishing the grace of God.

For Wesley, the problem with the Calvinists’ “substitutionary justification” is that
they extend the righteousness of Christ as a substitute for the believer’s active growth in
holiness. In order to avoid the implication that we are saved by our works, this view
posits a distinction between Christ’s passive and active obedience. His passive obedience
(“righteousness”) was his suffering the punishment for our sins; his active obedience
(“righteousness”) was his fulfillment of the law. Christ is our substitute for the
punishment we deserve, which is accomplished by his passive righteousness, and for the
fulfillment of the law, which is accomplished by his active righteousness.
Echoing the Anglican tradition, Wesley rejects the false distinction they made between the passive and active righteousness of Christ. He affirms that it is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us that pardons us but limits the effects of the atonement to mean “neither more nor less than justification.” “Christ was a substitute only in suffering punishment,” Wesley writes, “not in His fulfilling of the law.” The righteousness of Christ (be it “active” or “passive”) does not fulfill (“satisfy”) the requirements of the law for us, which would make us exempt from having to obey the law.

Instead, the righteousness of Christ must also be implanted in us after the pardon has been given (“imputed”) to us. Regarding this implanted righteousness of Christ, Wesley believes in it but “in its proper place; not as the ground of our acceptance with God, but as the fruit of it; not in the place of imputed righteousness, but as the consequent upon it. That is, I believe God implants righteousness in every one to whom he has imputed it.”

He rejects the imputation of Christ’s active righteousness to believers because it removes the motivation to seek Christian perfection and with it the moral activism in the ordo salutis. It was “undercutting the place for responsible Christian growth in response to God’s grace.”

Wesley has a paradox. One the one hand, he maintains the exclusive primacy of God’s grace to save us, as expressed in penal substitution. On the other hand, he contends that human agency is an essential element in the pursuit of holiness. How does he avoid both the futility of Law’s mysticism and the passivity of Hervey’s Calvinism? He must go beyond despair and self-righteousness.
The answer is “participatory atonement.” By “participatory” I am borrowing from the work of Morna Hooker who demonstrates that Paul’s understanding of the cross was an act of solidarity with humanity that creates the way for human beings to enter into solidarity with Christ’s death and resurrection which creates new life. We see this in key passages, such as Romans 6 and Galatians 2:19-20. Instead of Christ being a substitute that replaces human responsibility, the cross is literally our way to die with Christ and to be reborn in Christ.

Wesley combines participatory and substitutionary dimensions of the atonement in order to hold together this paradox of God’s grace and human agency. The substitutionary aspects are more apparent, but the participatory elements are saturated throughout his works. It is the synthesis of these two functions of the atonement that enable Wesley to avoid the problems of Law and Hervey, of despair and passivity.

We hear participatory atonement throughout the hymns he selected for the Methodist movement. There are a number of Charles’ hymns that urge the believer to participate in the atonement in order to personally appropriate the salvific benefits of substitutionary atonement. For example, hymn 24 typifies the participatory nature of the atonement. Verse one calls our attention to “the Man of griefs condemned for you” and then verses two through seven recreate the Passion story and end with the question, “Where is the King of glory now?....Th’ Almighty faints beneath his load.” Then, verses eight through fifteen bring the atonement into the heart of the believer. The believer longs to experience the crucifixion in order to experience the new birth. Verse nine says, “Help me to catch thy precious blood/Help me to taste thy dying love” and it climaxes in verses ten and eleven:
“Give me to feel thy agonies,
One drop of thy sad cup afford!
I fain with thee would sympathize,
And share the sufferings of my Lord.
The earth could to her centre quake,
Convulsed, while her Creator died;
O let my inmost nature shake,
And die with Jesus crucified!”

Hymn 352 is even more direct:

“Now, Jesu, let thy powerful death
Into my being come,
Slay the old Adam with thy breath,
The man of sin consume….
My old affections mortify,
Nail to the cross my will,
Daily and hourly bid me die,….
So shall I live; and yet not I,
But Christ in me shall live.”

The interplay between substitutionary and participatory themes is seen in Wesley’s Notes on chapters five and six of Romans. In his note on Romans 5:6, he declares that the cross is more than an example to inspire love and devotion. Christ’s death is “not only to
set them a pattern, or to procure them power to follow it” but first and foremost it is “to atone for” our sins.

Then, when discussing the baptismal imagery of chapter six, he introduces the Holy Spirit to make the Atonement a reality in the life of the believer. “In baptism we, through faith, are ingrafted into Christ; and we draw new spiritual life from this new root, through his Spirit, who fashions us like unto him, and particularly with regard to his death and resurrection.” The sinful self is “crucified with Christ, mortified, gradually killed, by virtue of our union with him.” Here we see the asceticism of his early days, which he had learned from Law and others. The end result is “complete victory over [sin] to every one who is under the powerful influences of the Spirit of Christ.” He describes our experience of the Holy Spirit as melted metal being cast in a mould. The mould is the cross, and the agent using the mould is the Spirit.

In his sermons, participatory atonement functions as the map to coinherence. One enters the territory of the new birth through the cross. The new birth is marked by an activation of our “spiritual senses,” which have atrophied because of sin. In order to activate the senses the sin in one’s heart must be crucified. He uses participatory atonement language to describe the effect of the new birth in new believers:

“The Word of God plainly declares that even those who are justified, who are born again in the lowest sense, do not 'continue in sin'; that they cannot 'live any longer therein'; that they are 'planted together in the likeness of the death of Christ'; that their 'old man is crucified with him, the body of sin being destroyed, so that thenceforth they do not serve sin'.”
Substitutionary atonement is the initiator and basis for justification, while participatory atonement makes it a reality in the life of the believer. Participation is the way in which justifying and sanctifying grace are held together.

Participatory atonement also helps Wesley describe the on-going process of sanctification. In “The Law Established Through Faith, II” he describes how the law is established in our hearts by faith. “While we steadily look, not at the things which are seen, but at those which are not seen, we are more and more crucified to the world and the world crucified to us.”

Another key passage expressing participatory atonement plays a key role in his description of Christian Perfection. In “Christian Perfection” he quotes Romans 6 extensively to describe the character of a “real Christian” and utilizes Galatians 2:20 to explain how “evil tempers” are removed from the believer. In “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion” Wesley states that Christian perfection “does imply the being so crucified with Christ as to be able to testify, ‘I live not, but Christ liveth in me.’”

Given his abiding interest in holiness and good works, it seems ironic that Wesley does not follow Abelard or make use of a moral influence perspective. Yet, Wesley’s view of sin demands that the believer becomes activated (the imago dei is reactivated) for good works by something other than ourselves and that the effects of the atonement can operate in the human heart. Experiencing the atonement in one’s heart frees human agency from the power of sin and perpetually empowers us for the pursuit of holiness. For Wesley, Christ is an ineffective role model unless the Spirit of Christ can first crucify sin in us so that we can quite literally allow that role model to be embodied in us.
Throughout the \textit{via salutis} the theme of participatory atonement helps ground the experience of the believer in substitutionary atonement and enables the atonement to become relevant and effective in the individual. It becomes the dynamic that enables Wesley to combine elements of Christus Victor and Moral Influence into his substitutionary framework\textsuperscript{32}.

SOELLE’S USE OF THE CROSS

Like Wesley, Dorothee Soelle’s writings center on the relationship between human responsibility and divine grace. On the one hand, she rejects any view of the cross that reproduces the dynamics of oppression. On the other hand, she is acutely aware of the anemia of liberal theology’s reliance on human initiative to address the social dynamics of sin.

She affirms the universality of sin but rejects all attempts to reduce sin to metaphysical categories. Sin must be understood in concrete, historical terms in order to prevent theology from being irrelevant or complicit with social injustice. Specifically, capitalism creates “objective cynicism” in which we involuntarily participate in the exploitation of workers and the environment. The subjective side of sin manifests itself as apathy and “neutrality,” which is a middle class tactic for avoiding responsibility for their participation in objective cynicism\textsuperscript{33}. There is a vicious cycle of the objective and subjective sides of sin reinforcing each other.

Soelle begins with a critique of substitutionary atonement because it reinforces this sinful cycle. The traditional view of Jesus as a divine hero reinforces the passivity. His
suffering is so unique and complete that all we can do is admire his stamina. If his suffering is all-sufficient then all human suffering is insignificant. Also, this either makes God remote, or worse, it projects a “sado-masochistic theo-ideology of God as a hangman.”

Because substitutionary atonement places Christ on a pedestal, the cross distracts our attention from seeing God in the poor and from experiencing Christ in our solidarity with the oppressed. When Christ is a substitute we cannot see how to follow him, how to be “in Christ.” Instead, avoid the voluntary suffering of solidarity because he paid it all.

These problems stem from the lack of importance given to the historical and political realities of sin and crucifixion (literally, denying that Jesus Christ “suffered under Pontius Pilate”). Thus, substitutionary atonement is incapable of revealing real suffering in the world today to first world Christians, for whom objective cynicism insulates them from seeing these problems. “In the apartheid of the middle class,” she writes, “we can easily avoid the cross.” Instead, salvation is limited to an amorphous human experience and Christianity is reduced to a cult of personality that is little more than a reflection of the individualism and consumerism of capitalism. The net result is what she calls “Christolatry.”

When the cross is turned into a “magical symbol of what he has done for us” and it loses its ability to reveal social injustice, then the cross can actually be misused to actively support policies that oppress people. When this happens, it is “Christofascism.” She saw the Religious Right’s support of Reagan’s policies in Central America as an example of this perversion of the Gospel.
In her early writings she solves these problems by describing Christ as our “representative.” The concept of a substitute mirrors our contemporary experience of being replaceable in a capitalist society. Instead, she argues that Christ should be seen as a representative of God and of us to God because the concept of a representative is temporary until the one being represented can stand for him or herself. There is an eschatological element to her understanding of representation and the concept of Christ the Representative does not annihilate human agency.\(^{39}\)

The only adequate representative is one that identifies with us. Christ is a “new profane and worldly representation of God” in the “helplessness and suffering” of the world today.\(^{40}\) His suffering was more than a one-time event in the distant past but keeps open God’s place in the world today. However, God’s identity is not completely emptied into the world; otherwise, the status quo would be justified. Instead, “representation permits a form of suffering which does not make us blind, impotent and sterile.”\(^{41}\) Christ the Representative identifies with us even in our punishment and thus sensitizes us to those whom we have harmed. “Christ makes the prison warders aware of the prison in which they themselves live, and he does so by showing that he himself is its prisoner….In this identification the relation of agent and acted upon is abolished. Christ belongs to both parties at the same time; he punishes and is punished.”\(^{42}\)

Identification implied dependency for Soelle. We are dependent on Christ to represent God to us in a post-theistic age, but God is also dependent on us. He is dependent upon our sins to be put on him, otherwise he did not really suffer. The very nature of suffering implies dependency, which she sees in Philippians two. Without the dynamic of dependency, Christ’s suffering is lost in metaphysical meaninglessness. We
are dependent upon Christ to represent us to God but God is dependent upon us to represent God’s Kingdom in the world.\textsuperscript{43}

How exactly does Christ as the representative of God to us and us to God enact our salvation? Here Soelle falls back into a moral examplar framework. “Christ, the man of God, reveals in his life what liberation from the powers….would be like. He demythologizes them.\textsuperscript{44}” In \textit{Christ the Representative}, she uses the metaphor of a teacher who secures time and space for the pupil to mature in his or her education.\textsuperscript{45}

In her later works she lifts up the idea of Christ as an attracting image or icon to which we are drawn and transformed by our participation-imitation in the image. In \textit{Thinking About God}, she used an analogy (which is similar to the Teacher in \textit{Christ the Representative}) of Christ as an icon or image to which we conform. In one sense, it is an example of the moral exemplar paradigm, but for Soelle the Christ image is so powerful that it acts on us. It is an image that disturbs us and draws us into the love and mystery of God.\textsuperscript{46} This is echoed in \textit{Theology for Skeptics} where she claimed that in the cross—in all of its historical and political dimensions—we see Christ as the man for others and that “this touches us to the bottom of our heart” causing us to love and follow him because the crucified “Christ lets us see into God’s heart.”\textsuperscript{47}

Her understanding of salvation is predicated upon several Christological assumptions. One, Jesus and his crucifixion must be understood in their original historical sense. The cross does not express the relationship between the Father and the Son in an obscure metaphysical dimension that is abstracted from the real suffering of the world. Rather, “the cross expresses the bitter, realistic depth of faith and is a symbol of this-worldliness and history.”\textsuperscript{48} Two, Jesus Christ is more than an heroic figure in the past. To say that
Jesus was a “mere man” overlooks God’s power in him. He has “collective meaning” which is rooted in the suffering of the historical Jesus. “Christ is the name which for me expresses solidarity, hence suffering with, struggling with.” Christ is the mysterious power which was in Jesus and which continues on in the struggles for liberation.

When she talks about the cross she usually makes an immediate leap to the ethical implications of bearing one’s cross as an act of faithful resistance. The cross not involuntary suffering or suffering in general. It is the “unavoidable consequence of doing the will of God” in working for human liberation and resisting injustice and oppression. In contrast to some feminist theologians, Soelle retains a positive role for voluntary suffering in her theology.

Thus, the cross functions in two ways in her theology. On one level, it is an expression of God’s solidarity in Christ with those who are suffering injustice today. “It is impossible to distinguish Jesus’ suffering from that of other people as though Jesus alone awaited God’s help. The scream of suffering contains all the despair of which a person is capable and in this sense every scream is a scream for God.”

Because of this divine solidarity, the cross draws us into their struggles for liberation. So on another level, the cross is a symbol of our acts of faith that challenge oppression. “When I read of [the deaths of King., Bonhoeffer, Romero, and other modern-day martyrs] I find pieces of life, of ongoing, indestructible life. I see in the dead ones and in their dying something that transcends the tragedy, that is more than a despairing cry to God. God is here, also in the dying.” The death of Christ is only significant when we see its “continuation” in the modern day suffering of those who struggle against injustice.
Her understanding of the cross can best be described as a mystical-revolutionary reworking of Moral Influence theory. Her interest in mysticism appears in her early work, such as *Suffering*, and comes to fruition in her later work *The Silent Cry*. As she moves toward mysticism she shifts from being Christocentric to universalistic, but loses the ability to further refine her earlier insights into Christ as the Representative. Instead, she explores a wide variety of mystical expressions which she believes can cultivate activism.

The two mystics which come closest to helping her further develop her views of the cross are Simone Weil and Thomas Muntzer. Weil helps her understand the experience of suffering, but more importantly, Muntzer provides her with a model process for engaging the cross. Supporting his revolutionary activities in the Peasants’ War was a three-fold mystical process (“wonderment,” “entgrobung,” and “lange Weile”). Soelle updated Muntzer with her own three-fold “praxis of mysticism.” The first stage is “being amazed” during which God gives us a sense of radical amazement, be it through nature, eroticism or other forms of beauty. It is a “via positiva” that is qualitatively different from the temporary satisfaction of commodities and manipulated passions. In order to embrace this experience of amazement, the believer must enter the second stage of “letting go.” This is the “via negativa” of relinquishing the possessions, violence and ego that comes from the objective cynicism of capitalism. This stage allows for us to experience the third stage, which she referred to as “healing/resistance.” The experience of being healed extends outward in compassion and justice. It is the “via transformativa” in which the mystic is the revolutionary.

She was never fully satisfied with the Moral Examplar model, because of its inherent weakness to assume that knowledge is power. Yet, she always rejected the conservative
paradigm of substitutionary atonement because of the ways it reinforced human passivity in the face of injustice. She found a way in the mystical tradition by combining it with her political theology.

**CONCLUSION**

Soelle rightly criticizes conservative versions of substitutionary atonement for reproducing oppressive forms of human passivity which support the status quo. Her insistence on the historical and political dimensions of the crucifixion is a helpful correction to the misdirection that Wesley’s understanding of atonement can take. By equating faith with resistance she keeps the *ordo salutis* from being reduced to an individualistic emotionalism that reinforces objective cynicism. Thus, one of the marks of the new birth is faith as resistance because it is grounded in Jesus’ act of resistance to evil on the cross. To be sure, faith is more than political resistance, but it is a necessary expression of faith in the one who “suffered under Pontius Pilate.”

However, resistance to oppression requires that one be able to see and acknowledge one’s place in a system of oppression. Yet the self-deception inherent in sin prevents us from sustaining such a level of honesty. It either degenerates into self-defense or shame. Even if one can overcome the self-deception and look squarely at one’s situation, paralysis will set in because the individual will be overwhelmed with a sense of guilt for having participated in the relationships of oppression, or he or she will be stymied by a sense of fatalism about the hopelessness of the situation. In other words, neither guilt nor truth alone can sustain faith as resistance over the long haul. Thus, we need a source of
validation outside of our context to sustain this conversion process. We need a source of forgiveness and acceptance—justification—that does not come from us.

It is at this point that the residual of Soelle’s Moral Influence paradigm is not powerful enough to do this. It runs the risk of reinforcing other aspects of the status quo. But her description of the function of the cross in Christian activism can too easily slip into a prescription for what one should do to be saved. It can become a works-righteousness with a politically progressive slant. This mirrors capitalism which only values people for their work. In an economy where your value is inseparably linked to the exchange value of your labor, any definition of salvation must acknowledge our inherent worth before God that has nothing to do with our ability to act. Unfortunately, she fails to see that helplessness is not equivalent to worthlessness.

Here is where Wesley helps Soelle. Wesley rightly sees substitutionary atonement as God’s initiating act to overcome our helplessness. Leaving aside the specific way he construed the doctrine of atonement, Wesley’s insight is that our activism is predicated upon the prior activism of Christ on the cross. He had to die for us in order for us to carry the cross.

To say that the grace of Jesus Christ pardons us for our participation in objective cynicism is to say that our sinful context is not the source of our identity and validation. Because apathy is no longer the foundation for our lives, we are free to resist sin by embracing God in life. And yet, we are still held accountable for our participation in objective cynicism by the one who was crucified by it and yet loves us.

Trusting in the grace of Jesus Christ to justify us is the first act of resistance. If all people, regardless of their social or economic status, are saved by the work of Christ on
the cross and not by their own efforts, then all social distinctions are relative and ultimately arbitrary. If a person who is abused or exploited is accepted and protected by the blood of Christ, then the power of shame and fatalism recedes under the power of grace. Grace, then, is the great social leveler and the revolutionary presence of God.

What makes this more real and vibrant is the political-historical dimensions of the cross which Soelle emphasizes. Precisely because this atonement, which is for all people of every age, took place in a political-historical context, it has the capacity to address our political-historical context through the Spirit of Christ which activates it in our lives today. By integrating Soelle’s political emphasis with Wesley’s substitutionary logic the participatory experience, on which they find common ground, becomes a wholistic experience of salvation that integrates the spiritual and the political, the individual and the social.

The necessity for substitution—or representation, which is more acceptable to Soelle—does not imply that satisfaction or penal substitutionary theories are the only valid interpretation of the cross. One can find a substitutionary elements in Christus Victor, and, to a lesser degree, in Moral Exemplar. Nor does substitution necessarily demand that God be the agent of the violence of the cross. However, the ironic solution to the problem of passivity necessitates a substitutionary dimension to one’s understanding of the cross.

The problem with substitutionary theories of atonement, as with any other theory, often stems from the way other doctrines are conceived and influence it. Soelle’s understandings of sin and transcendence and Wesley’s understanding of the Holy Spirit illustrate this. And so, one’s understanding of the cross can be very “bloody,” but it need
not lead to passivity as long as it is supported by the correct formulation of other doctrines.

So, what about Ruby and her daughter? As she described her intercessory prayers I was scrambling in my mind to be ready with a good response. I was convinced that she was going to advise her daughter to take him back and how was I going to explain to that her that her faith in the blood of Jesus might exacerbate the crisis.

Then she said something that jarred me out of my patronizing pastoral care. “Pastor,” she said with no hint of guilt or apology, “after I got done praying I went in the kitchen and called that social worker. And I told him that if he ever called my daughter again I personally was going to drive down there and cut his balls off!” For Ruby, the cross gave her daughter protection and assurance in the midst of her helplessness and it gave her the power to act in solidarity with her daughter. It was a theory of atonement that would have made Wesley and Soelle proud.

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1 Dorothee Soelle (1929-2003) was a German Protestant theologian, poet and mystic who was known for her political activism on a variety of progressive causes. During the late 1960s and early 1970s she led the Politisches Nachgebet, a vespers service which combined spirituality and political activism in Cologne. She was a visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary (New York).
2 p. 97-98.
3 p. 71.
5 For example, see hymn 145.6-7 and hymn 160. 7 in “A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists.” *Works*, Franz Hildebrandt, Oliver A. Beckerlegge, with James Dale, editors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) vol. 7, pgs. 251, 282. Maddox claims there is more affinity between Abelard and Wesley than is usually acknowledged, even though Wesley would reject the basic premises of Abelard’s argument, p. 106. Like the Christus Victor themes, elements of moral influence are taken up in the personal application of substitutionary atonement.
6 1.7-8, II.5, *Works* (Outler) vol. 1, pgs. These fragmentary statements of penal substitution stand in contrast to other theories of the atonement in Wesley’s day. There are no references or allusions to Anselm’s divine satisfaction. For Wesley, the restoration of God’s honor is not at stake. Even though Wesley vigorously defended Arminianism, he never articulated the Governmental Theory of Grotius. He certainly did not embrace the Commercialist Theory of the hypercalvinism of John Owen because of its implications favoring limited atonement. According to Alan Clifford, “Wesley’s theology owes more to Reformation
Anglicanism than to any other source….Like Wesley, Calvin paid little or no attention to Anselm….John Wesley is closest to Calvin “in Atonement and Justification, English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790 An Evaluation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 134.

7 The Actuality of Atonement


9 Lindstrom, p. 68.


13 Sermon 127, “On the Wedding Garment” §6, Works (Outler) vol.4, p. 143. This sermon was written in 1791.

15 Maddox, p. 103.

16 Works (Outler) vol. 1, II.9.


18 Lindstrom, p. 73.


20 Maddox, p. 104.


22 Galatians 2:20 is the most frequently cited scripture reference in the collection of hymns. Works (Hildebrandt, Beckerlegge, Dale) vol. 7

23 Works (Hildebrandt, Beckerlegge, Dale) vol. 7, p. 110.

24 Ibid., p. 519-20. Other examples include hymn 505 describes the role of participatory atonement in the creation of Christian fellowship. “Witnesses that Christ hath died,” Charles writes, “we with him are crucified.” One can see the connection between spiritual illumination and participatory atonement in hymn 118:

> “Vouchsafe us eyes of faith to see
> The Man transfixed on Calvary,
> To know thee, who thou art—
> The one eternal God and true;
> And let the sight affect, subdue,
> And break my stubborn heart….
> The unbelieving veil remove,
> And by thy manifested love,
> And by thy sprinkled blood,
> Destroy the love of sin in me,
> And get thyself the victory,
> And bring me back to God….
> Now let thy dying love constrain
> My soul to love its God again,
> Its God to glorify;
> And lo! I come thy cross to share,
> Echo thy sacrificial prayer,
> And with my Saviour die.”

The theme of participatory atonement is also reflected in the widespread use of Galatians 2:20 in the hymns. There are twenty-two hymn that refer directly to or make allusions to this verse making it the most frequently used Bible verse in the hymnal.

Participatory atonement not only appears in Charles’ hymns but also in the hymns that John translated and wrote. John translated several German hymns from Herrnhut which contain imagery of the believer personally experiencing the crucifixion. Hymn 25 expresses the desire for participatory atonement that we “thirst, thou wounded Lamb of God….To dwell within thy wounds” because we are “blest….who still abide/close sheltered in thy bleeding side!” John’s translation of a Paul Gerhardt hymn reiterates a popular image for John: “Thy wounds upon my heart impress.” Even though he criticized mystical Pietists
like Gerhard Tersteegen as “the most dangerous of all [Christianity’s] enemies” he still used one of his hymns that expresses participatory atonement:

“O hide this self from me, that I
No more, but Christ in me may live!
My vile affections crucify,
Nor let one darling lust survive.
In all things nothing may I see,
Nothing desire or seek but thee.”

Among the hymns that John probably wrote himself the imagery of participatory atonement appears. He associates it with the conversion experience. Under the heading, “Groaning for Full Redemption,” John begins hymn 341 with references to substitutionary atonement and then moves to a participatory emphasis. The first verse invites us to trust in the atonement:

“Come, and my hallowed heart inspire
Sprinkled with the atoning blood
Now to my soul thyself reveal
Thy mighty work let me feel
And know that I am born of God.”

But the verse ends on a note of desire for coinherence:

“Be Christ in me, and I in him,
Till perfect we are made in one.”

By the third verse, the participatory nature of atonement is made explicit:

“Let earth no more my heart divide;
With Christ may I be crucified,
To thee with my whole soul aspire;
Dead to the world and all its toys,
Its idle pomp, and fading joys,
Be thou alone my one desire.”

25 Romans 6:3, 6, 14.
29 Ibid., II.25, p. 118.

32 “One is tempted to describe this as a Penalty Satisfaction explanation of the Atonement which has a moral Influence purpose, and a Ransom effect!” Randy Maddox, Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Pracital Theology (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), p. 109.
33 Choosing Life, 52.
34 Suffering 130.
35 Theology for Skeptics., 100.
36 Thinking About God, p. 131, 134.
She criticized Barth for conceiving of representation as pure dependence at the expense of responsibility (and with it reproducing the dynamic of replaceability of society) and Bonhoeffer for thinking of responsibility without dependency. *Christ the Representative*. 92.

52 with Fulbert Steffensky, *Not Just Yes and Amen* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 77-78. In this same vein, she critiques Luther’s avoidance of identifying Jesus’ suffering with ours as a works-righteousness. The result is “that [it] means an end to the worth that human suffering had as an extension or completion of Christ’s suffering. The assertion that in Christ everything has been fulfilled remains in that case completely without content, an ideal of lordship that excludes us.” Thus, it renders our suffering as inconsequential. It belittles us,” *Suffering* 131.

53 “Reclaiming some form of the image of Christ as representative that functioned as Soelle’s early Christological vision could actually provide a more robust image for her later Christology. Since she claims that it is Jesus as the Christ who enables her to see God in a different way, Jesus really does re-present God and fundamentally changes our understanding of the God-world relationship. This is exactly the power of Soelle’s theology when it comes to her political, mystical vision.” “Christ in the World: The Christological Vision of Dorothee Soelle,” Dianne L. Oliver, *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, ed. Sarah K. Pinnock (New York: Trinity Press International, 2003).

54 *The Silent Cry* 88-93.