



Introduction to “ ‘Life Is Bound Up’ ”

Review of Previous Article

There are fundamental differences between the biblical concepts of contractual law, which governs property, goods and services, and of covenant, which defines ultimate personal relationships. From a contractual viewpoint sin is the violation of command, control or possession, while from the covenantal standpoint sin is the denial, disruption and dismissal of relationship with an “other.” Similarly, in a contractual context “atonement” ultimately requires the death of the entire created order. For only the death of all “otherness” will restore the at-one-ment — the uncompromised oneness — of the uncreated god and his solitary self-existence. On the other hand, in a covenantal context that which has been misidentified as “atonement” is actually insurance coverage to protect and restore the threatened relationship with an “other.” God himself is our self-giving, self-emptying, self-limiting (*kenotic*) shield, our protection, our cover (*kippur*) — both now and forever. In this context God’s protection of humanity extends to death — even to the death of solitary, uncreated self-existence.

In this context it is now appropriate to examine the subject of religion.

Overview of This Article

Unlike animals, humans are inescapably religious — and thus religion is evidence of a critical advance in the journey of *Homo sapiens* toward humanity. Yet religion also is prominent in mankind’s most fundamental distortions and most serious evils.

Both culture and civilization emerge out of religion. Religion therefore lies at the root of the way in which human beings think and act. Why has religion occupied such a prominent role in human history? Why is religion the cause of so much misunderstanding and inhuman violence? And has the God of faith given humanity a way to escape the religious presuppositions that haunt our

minds and divide us — too often into warring camps. These are fundamental areas of human existence that begin to be addressed in the accompanying essay.

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