Theism, Atonement, and the State of Northern Baptist Theology in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Curious Interactions of Augustus Hopkins Strong and Alvah Hovey

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Introduction

It was in the last half of the nineteenth century that Baptists in America began to publish theology textbooks (or most any kind of theology book) in earnest. Of the names that lead this charge and gave the most consequential expositions of Baptist theology, Alvah Hovey (1820–1903)[1] and Augustus Hopkins Strong (1836–1921)[2] stand at the forefront (particularly in the North).[3] Both were systematicians. Both were seminary presidents. Both accumulated mountains of published material. And the two held perhaps unrivaled positions of theological prestige within the denomination.

In most studies of Strong, making sense of his unique theory of theism, which he called ethical monism, is the main task. Strong went public with his modified theism in the middle 1890s, yet his struggle not only predates the initial publication but also is couched within discussions of the atonement. As a matter of fact, of all the intra-Protestant debates in nineteenth-

[1] Alvah Hovey graduated from Newton Theological Institute in Newton Centre, MA in 1848 and then taught there from 1849 until his death in 1903, serving as its president from 1868–1898. Biographical information can be found in George Hovey, ed., *Alvah Hovey: His Life and Letters* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1928); and Matthew C. Shrader, *Thoughtful Christianity: Alvah Hovey and the Problem of Authority within the Context of Nineteenth-Century Northern Baptists*, Monographs in Baptist History (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021).

[2] Augustus Hopkins Strong was the President and Davies Professor of Biblical Theology at Rochester Theological Seminary in Rochester, NY from 1872–1912. Biographical information can be found in his autobiography (Augustus Hopkins Strong, *What Shall I Believe? A Primer of Christian Theology* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1922); Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Autobiography of Augustus Hopkins Strong*, ed. Crerar Douglas (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1981), as well as many published studies. A few of the more helpful include Carl F. H. Henry, *Personal Idealism and Strong's Theology* (Wheaton, Ill: Van Kampen Press, 1951); Grant Wacker, *Augustus Hopkins Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985); Gregory A. Thornbury, "Augustus Hopkins Strong," in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 139–62; John Andrew Aloisi, "Augustus Hopkins Strong and Ethical Monism as a Means of Reconciling Christian Theology and Modern Thought" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012). An updated version of Aloisi's dissertation is set to be published by Rochester University Press in August 2021.

[3] The focus of this paper is on the North. Southern Baptists followed a much different course due to at least a few factors: the earlier formation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845 (the Northern Baptist Convention was not formed until 1907), the presence of only one seminary (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was formed in 1859, the North had at least five seminaries that survived the century), and the presence of a doctrinal statement at their one seminary (this was the "Abstract of Principles"; northern seminaries did not accept a statement of faith until Northern Baptist Theological Seminary was founded in 1913).

century America, the subject of the atonement received as much focus as any other.[4] So, it ought not be surprising to find this was true of Strong.

Hovey, despite not having received as much historical attention as Strong, has his place in this story too. Hovey was a contemporaneous critic of Strong's view and a highly respected theologian in his own right. The task of this paper is to chronicle the interaction between the two theologians, both in private correspondence and in public record, and then suggest what this reveals about Baptist theology of the day. Within the disagreement over the nature of God was a complementary disagreement over the nature of the atonement. These were intertwined doctrines for very important philosophical and theological reasons. How one conceived of God's relation to the world (theism) was consequential on one's conception of how God atoned for sin (and of how all humans related to one another). More than demonstrating the interconnectedness of doctrines, these interactions shine a fascinating light onto the state of Northern Baptist theology in this critical era of Baptist development. One which reveals, even amongst these Baptist stalwarts, a level of departure from classic theological positions that ought not be missed.

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[4] One piece of the atonement debates surrounded variations of Calvinism and the debates between the "New School" and the "Old School." For some historical introduction, see George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970); Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 253–329, esp. 264; Douglas A. Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor, New Haven Theology, and the Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 341–94; Obbie Tyler Todd, *The Moral Governmental Theory of Atonement: Re-Envisioning Penal Substitution*, Re-envisioning Reformed Dogmatics (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021), 11–24. "New School" was a broad moniker which included many smaller groups such as New England Theology, New Haven Theology, New Divinity, Tasters, and Exercisers. These movements are normally connected to Jonathan Edwards and the theological tradition that developed in America after his death. "Edwardsian" (or Edwardsean, or other spelling variations) is another way to refer to the movement. For some introduction to these various groups, see the essays in Oliver D. Crisp and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds., *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). According to E. Brooks Holifield, Old School referred to more traditional forms of Calvinism (as they are found in the Post-Reformation dogmaticians and Princeton in particular) that "formed its identity in reaction against the innovations of New England, but it was selective in its attitudes toward Edwardeans." E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 372. They were selective toward Edwards' followers because they also tried to claim Edwards in most cases. New School referred to Calvinism that modified Calvinism, particularly in the areas surrounding Jonathan Edwards's theology of original sin, his idea of the will (and human moral accountability), and how this affects atonement theology. Most historians recognize that "New School" is difficult to define and to delimit. See, Holifield, *Theology in America*, 341–94, especially 370–77. Noll summarizes them as "those which welcomed New England insights," and those "which did not." Noll, *America's God*, 262–63.

The atonement debates were wider than just among Calvinists, however. For an introduction to this wider debate, see the four-part series of articles by David F. Wells, "The Debate over the Atonement in 19th-Century America, Part 1: American Society as Seen from the 19th-Century Pulpit," *Bibliotheca sacra* 144 (June 1987): 123–43; David F. Wells, "The Debate over the Atonement in 19th-Century America, Part 2: The Shaping of the 19th-Century Debate over the Atonement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144 (September 1987): 243–53; David F. Wells, "The Debate over the Atonement in 19th-Century America, Part 3: The Collision of Views on the Atonement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144 (December 1987): 363–76; David F. Wells, "The Debate over the Atonement in 19th-Century America, Part 4: Aftermath and Hindsight of the Atonement Debate," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (March 1988): 3–14.

Tracing the Narrative

Hovey was Strong's senior in age and so emerged onto the Baptist theological scene first. Hovey produced his first set of classroom theology notes (*Outlines of Christian Theology*) as early as 1861.[5] He then made them public in 1877 when he published his *Manual of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics*. This was one of the first systematic theologies to be published by an American Baptist, and solidified Hovey as a denominational leader. During the last third of the nineteenth century, Hovey was regularly asked to speak to issues of the day because his opinion carried such significant weight. George Merrill, the president of Colgate, related that he "heard [Hovey] called the Baptist pope of New England. It was not because he ever tried to exercise any authority. He never spoke ex cathedra. But it was because he was recognized as a safe teacher; because he would never take a position that he did not believe must be taken."[6]

Strong's place in the Baptist world is known better than Hovey's. Strong's *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students* was first published in 1886 and went through seven further revisions.[7] Strong's *Systematic Theology* outdid Hovey's in terms of its comprehensiveness in that it makes the student much more aware of the classical and contemporary theological discussions, though, as we will see, Strong sometimes veered from the classical positions. Strong is clearly a first-rate theologian. However, this should not be taken to mean that Hovey was not also highly skilled and enormously respected. As a matter of fact, since he was Hovey's junior, Strong often showed a tone of deference to the elder statesman. And as just mentioned, in the latter part of the nineteenth century no Northern Baptist surpassed the denominational influence of Hovey. The relationship of these men goes

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[5] The *Outlines* were notes printed for classroom use only. The common practice was that once the number of printed copies ran out (were handed out to enough students over the years), then a new edition would be printed. Importantly, these classroom notes were not available for public circulation and so are often difficult to attain. I am aware of three iterations of the *Outlines*: 1861, 1866, and 1870. Evidently the 1866 set were the same as the 1866 but with interleaved blank pages for notetaking. The 1870 are the most well-known, and the only that I have been able to access. Alvah Hovey, *Outlines of Christian Theology* (Boston: G. C. Rand & Avery, 1861); Alvah Hovey, *Outlines of Christian Theology* (Boston: G. C. Rand & Avery, 1866); Alvah Hovey, *Outlines of Christian Theology* (Providence: Providence Press Company, 1870); Alvah Hovey, *Manual of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1877); Alvah Hovey, *Manual of Christian Theology* (New York: Silver, Burdett, 1900).

[6] They full quote reads thus: "He was a leader with a conscience that not only made him loyal to the new demands of truth, but kept him loyal to the old faith until the new demands could be rightly obeyed. And so hosts of men, young ministers and old ministers, and the laymen of our churches, felt that a position taken by Doctor Hovey was the position they ought to take. I have heard him called the Baptist pope of New England. It was not because he ever tried to exercise any authority. He never spoke ex cathedra. But it was because he was recognized as a safe teacher; because he would never take a position that he did not believe must be taken." Quoted in George Hovey, ed., *Alvah Hovey: His Life and Letters* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1928), 244. Similar recognition of Hovey's significance can be easily multiplied. Both James Garrett and David Dockery describe Hovey as the "foremost" conservative Baptist theologian of his day: David S. Dockery, "Looking Back, Looking Ahead," in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 342; James Leo Garrett Jr., *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 279, 294.

[7] The years of each edition are: 1886, 1889, 1890, 1893, 1896, 1899, 1902, and 1907.

deeper than both being colleagues at sister schools. A handful of letters from Strong to Hovey show they discussed issues of atonement and theism extensively.[8]

Early Discussions: 1886–1892

When Strong was preparing the first edition of his *Systematic Theology* in 1886, he wrote to Hovey in the months leading up to its publication and asked Hovey to consider his positive view of the atonement and whether it was permissible or dangerous. He said he had not formally taught the viewpoint yet but was now at the point of publishing it. Strong had little time before the book was to be published and so asked Hovey to respond quickly and only with a short task: "All I ask is that you would read through these few pages, and then tell me whether my view, thus tentatively expressed, is in your judgment a permissible one, or whether it is so manifestly unsound and dangerous that I ought on no account to publish it. I feel great hesitation in taking a position which would expose me to serious criticism, and I think I feel more anxious even that the cause of truth should not suffer at my hands."[9] When one looks at Strong's first edition, Strong resists what he calls "arbitrary imputation and legal fiction" inherent in Old School federalism,[10] as it simply does not provide an adequate explanation for "how the innocent can justly suffer for the guilty." Instead, Strong argued for an "organic unity of the [human] race."[11] The organic unity meant that Adam's depravity, guilt, and penalty were all transferred to every human. This was true of Christ also, except the virgin birth meant that depravity did not transfer. A few years later, Strong related his dissatisfaction with the other major option, the New School. He disliked the "atomism" which he explained as "that system of thought which regards men merely as individuals, and which ignores the organic unity of mankind on the one hand, and its connection with God on the other."[12] Strong's realism—which was not yet grounded in ethical monism, that viewpoint developed in the 1890s—was sufficiently different from the reigning options that he sought Hovey's thoughts.[13]

Strong wrote to Hovey again in 1890, but this time about the general growth of monistic views. Strong asked Hovey to consider the viewpoint of Professor Jacob Schurman of Cornell, a

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[8] The following is a distillation and reorganization of a fuller presentation of this correspondence found in Shrader, *Thoughtful Christianity*, 188–99.

[9] A. H. Strong to Alvah Hovey, 15 January 1886. Alvah Hovey Papers [AHP], Yale Divinity School Library (underlining original). Strong was asking whether he should include a section that he entitled: "The Atonement as related to Humanity in Christ."

[10] Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Rochester: Press of E. R. Andrews, 1886), 413.

[11] Strong, *Systematic Theology* [1st ed.], 412.

[12] Strong, *Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism*, 151.

[13] Strong explained that he was dissatisfied with the way that imputation was dealt with in contemporary theology. And this would be imputation in three places: Adam's sin to humanity, human sin to Christ, and Christ's righteousness to humanity. The struggle for Strong was that, in federalism, imputation seemed like a legal fiction, or an arbitrary transfer of sin, guilt, and/or righteousness. This and his own explanation of how he changed on the issue can be seen in Augustus Hopkins Strong, *What Shall I Believe? A Primer of Christian Theology* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1922), 85–96.

view which greatly troubled Strong.[14] This short letter is significant for the twin reasons that Strong still sought to have the elder Hovey's help and approval and because it shows Strong was now seriously considering monism. By this point, Hovey had already published a systematic textbook in which he argued for a traditional form of theism in distinction to pantheism and deism.[15] In 1892, Hovey published *Studies in Ethics and Religion*, a collection of essays which included several essays on theism. The second essay in this section is entitled, "The Relation of God to Nature: Review of Lotze and Schurman," which seems to be a direct attempt to respond to Strong's letter of October 6, 1890. In the essay, Hovey argued again for a traditional view of theism wherein he gave several reasons why monism was unacceptable. He argued that Scripture and tradition affirm that "nature or the world was created, that is brought into being, by the will of God. It is eternal neither in substance nor in form. It is an effect of which God is the cause, rather than a body of which God is the soul. Moreover, every part is dependent on the will of God for its continuance in being, and the same is true of the sum-total of its forces whether organic or inorganic."[16] In sum, Hovey found monism completely out of step with traditional Christian theism.

After this book was published, Strong wrote a letter to Hovey congratulating him on the "handsome appearance" of the volume, thanking him especially for his second essay, and admitting his struggle with monism.[17] In fact, Strong said about monism that "I am trying to work my way through it and still come out an orthodox believer, but I see much to attract in the doctrine of Lotze and Schurman."[18] Hovey's work evidently gave some pause to Strong, but not

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[14] A. H. Strong to Alvah Hovey, 6 October 1890 (AHP). "I want to call your attention to a book by Prof. Schurman of Cornell, entitled 'Belief in God.' It is a series of lectures delivered at Andover Theological Seminary. Prof. S is nominally a Baptist, and has been spoken of prominently for important positions in Baptist Institutions. He is a bold advocate of the Lotzean monism and of almost unqualified Evolutionism, as applied to religious history. He seems to me that he brushes away every Christian doctrine,—sin, Christ's deity, atonement, retribution. Now I want to ask you, whether we old fashioned theologians ought to let this part of teaching go without protest or whether we ought to fight it? I confess I am distressed by it, and am at a loss to know what my duty is. Please advise me, and oblige, Yours faithfully, A. H. Strong."

[15] Hovey, *Manual of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics*, 88–104.

[16] Alvah Hovey, *Studies in Ethics and Religion; or, Discourses, Essays, and Reviews Pertaining to Theism, Inspiration, Christian Ethics, and Education for the Ministry* (Boston: Silver, Burdett, 1892), 52.

[17] Schurman also wrote a cordial letter to Hovey, thanking him for fairly representing his views. Jacob G. Schurman to Alvah Hovey, 10 March 1892 (AHP).

[18] A. H. Strong to Alvah Hovey, 7 February 1892 (AHP). "Dear Dr. Hovey, I thank you heartily for the copy of your new book of 'Studies in Ethics and Religion.' I congratulate you on its handsome appearance. I am under special obligations for the second essay, which I have read with unusual interest. The subject of the relation of God to nature has been and upon which I have had very anxious thought. Your treatment of it is very helpful and suggestive. I am trying to work my way through it and still come out an orthodox believer, but I see much to attract in the doctrine of Lotze and Schurman. It seems to me more and more that this doctrine, in its philosophical and theological aspects, is the great speculative question with which we shall have to deal with for the next twenty years. I find all the recent philosophers ranged on one side. Prof. James of Harvard, Prof. Bowen of Boston, Prof. Ladd of Yale, all stand with Prof. Schurman of Cornell, and it will be a great wonder if Prof. Schurman does not appear at the head of the philosophical department at Chicago. I find Dr. Lyman Abbott declaring the "divinity of man," and Dr. C. H. Parkhurst comparing the relation between man and God to the relation between the waves and the ocean. If we wish to be popular, I am afraid we shall have to be Monists. Ah, if it were not for <u>sin</u>, and for the Holy Spirit who convinces us of sin, I almost think we might be! I wish I could talk this matter over with you. With revered thanks, I am, ever faithfully yours. A. H. Strong" (emphasis original).

much. Two years later (1894), Strong made his views of ethical monism public in a series of articles that were later published as *Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism*.[19]

Strong's Ethical Monism and Hovey's Response

Atonement debates were not the only reason monism was difficult for Strong to resist. Quite simply, he saw it becoming the dominant philosophical view of reality and thus unavoidable. To use his own words: "The tendency of modern thought in all its departments, whether physics, literature, theology, or philosophy, is to monism."[20] While he felt the pull of monism, he was too skilled as a theologian (and perhaps had learned something from Hovey) to not recognize the serious discord that monism has with classic Christianity. He knew it tended toward pantheism and materialism. He clearly rejected materialism for forgetting that all material originates in God,[21] and he rejected pantheism because it did not allow God to retain his personality over and above creation.[22] To ameliorate, Strong put forth his suggestion of "ethical" as a modifier to monism. As I have noted elsewhere, "With ethical monism Strong felt he could do several things all at once. The two central things were to allow him to use the leading model of reality of the time and to let traditional Christianity adequately modify this model. He accepted the monistic idea that let him see God as thoroughly immanent in reality and it allowed humanity to have some sort of ontological unity. He also retained the traditional Christian ideas of transcendence and personality of God as well as the sin, responsibility, and personality of humans."[23]

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[19] One can also look to Strong's fifth edition (1896) of his *Systematic Theology* as the place that ethical monism shows itself explicitly.

[20] Strong, *What Shall I Believe?* 16. See my discussion in Shrader, *Thoughtful Christianity*, 182–83. This extended quote gives a nice encapsulation of Strong's thought process: "It is of great importance, both to the preacher and to the Christian, to hold the right attitude toward the ruling idea of our time. This universal tendency toward monism, is it a wave of unbelief set agoing by an evil intelligence in order to overwhelm and swamp the religion of Christ? Or is it a mighty movement of the Spirit of God, giving to thoughtful men, all unconsciously to themselves, a deeper understanding of truth and preparing the way for the reconciliation of diverse creeds and parties by disclosing their hidden ground of unity? I confess that I have come to believe the latter alternative to be possibly, and even probably, the correct one, and I am inclined to welcome the new philosophy as a most valuable helper in interpreting the word and works of God. Monism is, without much doubt, the philosophy of the future, and the only question would seem to be whether it shall be an ethical and Christian, or a non-ethical and anti-Christian monism. If we refuse to recognize this new movement of thought and to capture it for Christ, we may find that materialism and pantheism perversely launch their craft upon the tide and compel it to further their progress. Let us tentatively accept the monistic principle and give to it a Christian interpretation. Let us not be found fighting against God. Let us use the new light that is given us, as a means of penetrating more deeply into the meaning of Scripture. Let us see in this forward march of thought a sign that Christ and his kingdom are conquering and to conquer" (Strong, *What Shall I Believe?* 22).

[21] "The element of truth in materialism is the reality of the external world. Its error is in regarding the external world as having original and independent existence, and in regarding mind as its product." Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students*, 8th ed. (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907), 90.

[22] "The elements of truth in pantheism are the intelligence and voluntariness of God, and his immanence in the universe; its error lies in denying God's personality and transcendence" (Strong, *Systematic Theology* [8th ed.], 100).

[23] Shrader, *Thoughtful Christianity*, 183.

Strong's unique theory intended to hold together a key insight from monism while modifying typical monism to satisfy Christian sensibilities. The key insight was that God is the substance of all reality. In other words, "there is but one substance, one underlying reality, the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, who contains within his own being the ground and principle of all other being."[24] The way he tried to satisfy Christian sensibilities was to retain a place for the personalities of God and man. And so, even though monism suggests a fundamental unity of all things, Strong insisted upon dualism within the monism. God and humanity are distinct and separate, thus this is a dualism.[25] With this understanding of how "ethical" modifies "monism," we can understand Strong's definition of "ethical monism": "Ethical Monism is that method of thought which holds to a single substance, ground, or principle of being, namely, God, but which also holds to the ethical facts of God's transcendence as well as his immanence, and of God's personality as distinct from, and as guaranteeing, the personality of man."[26] This is a combination of philosophical monism and psychological dualism.

As mentioned in the introduction, what ethical monism did to Strong's theology has received sustained attention. Strong himself admitted in the final edition of his *Systematic Theology* that it was "the key to his theology."[27] Among the many parts affected, his view of imputation is important. As has been noted, Strong never found the atomism of the new school thinkers sufficient, but he did initially agree with some form of federalism before moving toward what he called "realistic theology."[28] Ethical monism was his missing piece. He explained that "While I still hold to the old doctrines, I interpret them differently and expound them more clearly, because I seem to myself have reached a fundamental truth which throws new light upon them all."[29]

Ethical monism now provided the theological categories to explain how Christ was sufficiently united to humanity so that he could bear the guilt of human sin. Christ's intimate unity to humanity (as the substance of all reality) meant their guilt was his own. Through the incarnation Christ had brought on himself "all the legal liabilities of the race to which he united himself, and enabled him so to assume the penalty of its sin as to make for all men a full satisfaction to the divine justice, and to remove all external obstacles to man's return to God."[30] The basic logic of the atonement was based on both the incarnation and the cross: "Christ therefore, as incarnate, rather revealed the atonement than made it. The historical work of atonement was finished upon the Cross, but that historical work only revealed to men the atonement made both before and since by the extra-mundane Logos. The eternal Love of God

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[24] Strong, *Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism*, 65.

[25] "Ethical monism is a monism which maintains both the freedom of man and the transcendence of God" (Strong, *Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism*, 25).

[26] Strong, *Systematic Theology* [8th ed.], 105.

[27] Strong, *Systematic Theology* [8th ed.], vii.

[28] Strong, *What Shall I Believe?* 91.

[29] Strong, *Systematic Theology* [8th ed.], vii.

[30] Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Union With Christ: A Chapter of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1913), 52.

suffering the necessary reaction of his own Holiness against the sin of his creatures and with a view to their salvation—this is the essence of the Atonement."[31]

Strong felt the stresses of the nineteenth century, both in atonement theory and in theism. In reaction to them, he was willing to take to heart the new philosophy of the day and severely modify his own theology accordingly. Strong's theory of ethical monism was certainly unique. And since his atonement theory was built out of his theism, his atonement theory was also unique. It rejected both the old school and the new school.[32] James Garrett even refers to it as "*sui generis* in Baptist theology."[33] Strong is a clear example of a theologian influenced by his own day, to the point of creating novel theories of both theism and atonement.

Not surprisingly, Hovey had a response. He replied in a series of articles in the *Watchman* in 1894[34] and in a paper at the Baptist Congress in 1895[35] to Strong's ethical monism. Hovey disagreed "with the notion of God, implied in this philosophy. It is wanting in unity, simplicity, consistency. It is the notion of being infinitely complex, and internally discordant."[36] Hovey gave further reasons why Strong's view was not convincing, which can be summed up by saying that he felt they created significant theological problems with classic theism, they were based on unconvincing scriptural interpretation, and were overly dependent on philosophical speculation.

Hovey's paper at the Baptist Congress was on the "Relation of Monism to Theology." The paper did not address Strong by name but did speak to the challenges Strong posed. Hovey addressed three kinds of monism (materialistic, idealistic, and absolute), critiqued them each, and then gave a few potential positives of monism (though he also listed negatives with each positive). The article was a philosophical and theological rebuttal of monism. Hovey was not the only critic of Strong, but it is evident in his critique that he simple did not see how Strong's theory could work alongside traditional Christianity and not be contradictory.

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[31] Strong, *Systematic Theology* [8th ed.], 762.

[32] As Gregory Thornbury has remarked: "Since Strong preferred neither the Old School nor the New School accounts of the doctrine of imputation, as a creative theologian formed one of his own, drawn from his principle of ethical monism and union with Christ" (Thornbury, "Augustus Hopkins Strong," 155).

[33] James Leo Garrett Jr., *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 301. One other study concluded that Strong was close to universalism: Peter S. Van Pelt, "An Examination of the Concept of the Atonement in Selected Northern Baptist Theologians: William Newton Clarke, Augustus Hopkins Strong, and Shailer Mathews" (Th.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994).

[34] Alvah Hovey, "Dr. Strong's Ethical Monism," *The Watchman* 75, no. 50 (December 13, 1894): 10–11; Alvah Hovey, "Dr. Strong's Ethical Monism," *Watchman* 75, no. 51 (December 20, 1894): 10–11; Alvah Hovey, "Dr. Strong's Ethical Monism," *Watchman* 75, no. 52 (December 27, 1894): 11–12.

[35] The Baptist Congress was originally called the Baptist Autumnal Conference. It was held from 1881–1913 and was an opportunity for leading Baptist to discuss theology. Hovey served as its president in 1883 and delivered a presidential address. For more on Hovey place in this see, Shrader, *Thoughtful Christianity*, 162–64 and 194–95. For some introduction to the Baptist Congress, see William H. Brackney, "The Frontier of Free Exchange of Ideas: The Baptist Congress as a Forum for Baptist Concerns, 1881–1913," *Baptist History and Heritage* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 8–27; Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 327–30; Craig A. Sherouse, "Toward a Twentieth-Century Baptist Identity in North America: Insights from the Baptist Congresses, 1881–1913," *Baptist History and Heritage* 47, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 76–90.

[36] Hovey, "Dr. Strong's Ethical Monism, Part 1," 10.

Further Interactions and Hovey's Atonement Theology

The theological sparring died down for a few years before it was taken up again, both in public and private.[37] Strong supplied an interesting response to Hovey—on no less of an occasion than Hovey's fiftieth anniversary of teaching at Newton in 1899.[38] Despite the meeting being a celebration of Hovey, Strong clearly expressed that his views of theism had essentially won the day. As was now the custom, they exchanged letters afterward.[39] Hovey still disagreed with Strong's viewpoint and Strong again defended it. While this was ongoing, Strong collected and published many of his essays on ethical monism in 1899.[40] Hovey then wrote a letter of congratulations to Strong on this publication, to which Strong wrote back, "Your kind letter about my book is very gratifying to me. I hardly dared to hope that you could find so much to agree with. . . . I owe a great deal to your counsel and example, and I join with all our people in wishing to you continued life and blessing."[41]

The back and forth between Hovey and Strong was clearly respectful while also vigorous. Both men were willing to tackle the pressing theological questions of the day, and even be changed by them. In this back and forth, Strong's unique theism provided the major topic. As has been demonstrated, Strong's change in theism depended on his struggle with atonement theology and in turn transformed his atonement theory. A contemporary philosophical development influenced his theology in profound ways. Hovey noticed this struggle and development (which Strong asked him to do) and took issue with them (which Strong respected him for). The story does not end here, though.

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[37] The president of the Baptist Congress the year Hovey critiqued monism was a former student of Strong's, Walter Rauschenbusch, who exchanged letters with Hovey before the Congress met. It seems that Hovey had written to Rauschenbusch about Strong's views and asked how Strong felt now that he had received significant pushback from many places. Rauschenbusch replied: "I can well understand your feelings in regard to the discussion of Monism, but you are doubtless right in saying that the matter is in the air now and will have to be worked over until the air is clear of it again. Dr. Strong, by the way, has not spiked his guns, but is only waiting for a good opportunity to fire again" (Walter Rauschenbusch to Alvah Hovey, 1 June 1895 [AHP]).

[38] This was printed as "Fifty Years of Theology" in Strong's *Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism*.

[39] A. H. Strong to Alvah Hovey, 14 June 1899 (AHP). Consider Strong's letter:

"I think that your objections to my doctrine would in part disappear, if you took my idealistic point of view. My conception of immanence is derived from my relation to my own thought and volitions. I am not my thoughts and volitions, nor am I measured by them. I am immanent in them, yet transcendent, as not exhausted by them but as having in myself the spring and source of every future thought and volitions.

You may recall that I said God's relation to <u>nature</u> was that of simple immanence. Nature <u>is</u> the thought of God made objective by his will. But man is more. In him the objective becomes relatively independent, so that which he lived moved and has his being is God, he still is capable of resisting God and of resisting him forever. In other words, man is free, responsible, capable of sin, capable of morally separating himself from his Creator, while yet he is dependent upon his Creator for every breath.

I expect you to say that this is but a formulation of contradictions. Perhaps so,—but I think not. It is true, I do not see fully the <u>nexus</u> between the two sets of truths. But I believe both are given us in reason and in Scripture.

Some day, not so far off, we shall enter the ABC class of the heavenly Seminary. I anticipate the course with great joy, and I expect to have you for—not a classmate, for you will be too high up for that—but a fellow student. Meantime I congratulate you again on the things you have already attained and so nobly taught."

[40] Strong, *Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism*.

[41] A. H. Strong to Alvah Hovey, 11 January 1900 (AHP).

When Hovey published the final version of his own theology in 1900, Strong wrote to congratulate his friend, naming many areas of agreement. But Strong's theological acumen is also apparent as he commented on a particular area of disagreement: "As to imputation of sin, it has always seemed to me that Paul intended to teach Augustinianism, and that has made me an Augustinian. If I cannot trust Paul's methods of reasoning, can I trust him in Romans 5:12–19? Your resting the responsibility for inborn depravity on our sympathy with Adam's Sin seems to me a deciding verging toward the New School view. But when I read of your imputing to Christ the sins of men because of Christ's natural union with the race I go with you wholly."[42]

It was not Hovey's dealing with monism, but his view of imputation which Strong pointed out. Strong's rejection of New School atomism has already been mentioned, and so it should not be surprising to see his theological antenna perk up at the possibility that Hovey was accepting that view. As a child of the nineteenth-century, Hovey was also highly interested in atonement theory, and, like Strong, he allowed contemporary debates to affect his views.[43] A short presentation of Hovey's atonement views are helpful here.

As was hinted throughout the discussion on Strong, atonement debates among Calvinists in the nineteenth century were centered around the idea that the Old School idea of imputation contained a legal fiction. Critics of the Old School argued that "there was an arbitrary transfer of guilt and penalty to people who did not commit the sin being punished."[44] The New School view rethought how imputation worked in original sin and atonement. In this thinking, the guilt and penalty for the sin of Adam could not be imputed to later humanity because they were not guilty of his sin. Such literal transference was the legal fiction they decried. This is true not only because Adamic imputation is rejected, but also because it seemed absurd. If you forgave a sin, then you could not also satisfy it literally. In other words, literal remission of sin and satisfaction were mutually exclusive.[45] What is known as the American version of the moral government view of the atonement was the major solution to these challenges.[46] This view believed that Christ did not suffer the literal penalty for sin, but he suffered as a suitable equivalent in order to satisfy the rectoral (not distributive) justice of God. Such a scheme could adequately demonstrate the "general demands of justice within God's moral government"[47] and provide the necessary conditions for sinners to then be remitted upon the exercise of faith.

In Hovey's own thought, he consistently held that a sinner is not guilty for Adam's sin, but "is accountable for the degree of sympathy which he has for the whole system of evil, and for

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[42] A. H. Strong to Alvah Hovey, 15 October 1900 (AHP).

[43] A full explanation of Hovey's atonement views and some of where they come from can be found in my essay: Matthew C. Shrader, "New England Baptist Alvah Hovey: A Later Chapter in Baptist Edwardsianism," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 48–64.

[44] Shrader, "New England Baptist Alvah Hovey," 55.

[45] Oliver D. Crisp, "Penal Non-Substitution," *Journal of Theological Studies* 59 (April 2008): 160–61.

[46] This is not to be equated with the moral government view as it came from Grotius. See Crisp, "Penal Non-Substitution." The best explanation of this American viewpoint is given in Todd, *The Moral Governmental Theory of Atonement*.

[47] Shrader, "New England Baptist Alvah Hovey," 55.

the disobedience of Adam."[48] Hovey saw a difference between personal sin and inherited sinfulness. Some of his earlier writings had some qualification on this whereby he opened the door for Adamic imputation, but his 1900 edition had removed any such qualifications. It is at this point that Strong's comments are helpful. He recognized that Hovey was verging toward the New School. Strong considered the New School to be "atomistic" because it did not allow the ontological unity of humanity (denying this is what makes imputation impossible). In other words, behind the New School's insistence against traditional imputation views was a shift in metaphysics. Strong was pointing this out. It was a driving factor in why he sought a new metaphysics. Hovey followed the New School view and its nominalist metaphysic.[49] This can be seen in his imputation theory, but it also surfaced in one of his critiques of Strong's ethical monism wherein Hovey found Strong's ontological realism without substance: "Our conception of the personality of the human race, in distinction from the personality of every individual composing it, is too shadowy to serve any purpose in reasoning. When we try to grasp it mentally, we find nothing real in our possession."[50] If you reject ontological realism in favor of some form of nominalism, then it follows that monism makes no sense.

Hovey's atonement theology follows from here. Theologically speaking, Hovey wore his own hat and so is difficult to fit into any neat category. To summarize his view of the atonement, I would offer this extended quote:

> Hovey considered his view to be penal and substitutionary rather than a divine expedient (which he identifies with governmental views). Yet, penal and substitutionary were broadened terms in his view (the penalty borne is not the actual penalty, it is only a spiritual suffering, nor is it a full substitution of guilt), he denied that guilt is imputed to Christ, and he used consistent governmental language. Clearly, he held to a species of the governmental theory. He saw the atonement as primarily satisfying the demands of God's moral law. Guilt was neither transferred nor literally paid.[51]

Thus, Hovey was like Strong in that he allowed a contemporary metaphysic to help him construct his atonement theology. They simply utilized competing schemes. The American moral government view of the atonement—which Hovey accepted a species of—found unique

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[48] Hovey, *Manual of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics*, 151.

[49] The creeping nominalism of the New School and Edwardsians is given a helpful explanation in Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor, New Haven Theology, and the Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, 83–90.

[50] Hovey, "Dr. Strong's Ethical Monism, Part 2," 11.

[51] Shrader, "New England Baptist Alvah Hovey," 60–61. Hovey did not buy into the full scheme of Edwardsianism, he charted a unique path. He was looking to satisfy both the biblical data and theological reasoning. He offered this summation: "Without professing to have set forth *the* way, and the only way, in which Christ actually bore the penalty due to men for their sins,—without asserting that Christ bore just the amount of suffering which awaited sinners, unredeemed, in eternity, and without overlooking the dignity of his person, which gave inestimable value to his death, we think *a* way has been indicated by which he could have borne penal woe; and if so, however different in some of its elements may have been the actual suffering of soul endured by him from that which we have suggested, the objection to our doctrine has been sufficiently met" [Hovey, *Outlines of Christian Theology*, 174; Hovey, *God With Us*, 150–51; Hovey, *Manual of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics*, 226; Hovey, *Manual of Christian Theology*, 277–78. Italics original. This quote appears unaltered in all four of these works.].

expression among Edwardsians, but it has since disappeared from the theological scene. Like Strong, Hovey was a child of his time.

Understanding a Baptist Tradition

This paper has considered some private and public theological interaction between two of the most consequential Baptist theologians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the very least, both these men demonstrated an openness to new theological conceptions, including in their own thought. Particularly, they were open to the theological changes of the nineteenth century. Hovey to the earlier developments surrounding the creeping nominalism of the New School, and Strong to the monistic impulse. Of course, these were more than an openness, they were actual departures. Granted, the Edwardsian tradition that Hovey was drawn to was not heterodox and claimed many significant American theologians.[52] But Strong is more difficult to defend on that regard. Carl Henry aptly noted that Strong was purposefully trying to bridge the gap between the old and new into some new synthesis, but in the end satisfied neither conservative nor liberal. Indeed, Henry suggests that Strong failed to fully implement his monistic theology and had Strong been able to see the full implications of it he would probably have discarded it in favor of evangelical Christianity.[53]

While Strong is often labeled a moderate because his views are easily identified as a departure from conservative Christianity,[54] Hovey is regularly understood as a conservative, and rightly so. However, even outside of metaphysics and atonement theology Hovey demonstrated the tendencies toward openness and modification.[55] He hardly addressed Trinitarianism at all in his *Manuals*, he held to Monothelitism (which was rejected by the Third Council of Constantinople—the Sixth Ecumenical Council in AD 680–681), and he considered eternal generation superfluous.[56] As I've written on Hovey before: "There seems to have been a freedom to depart from and/or a tendency to neglect classical discussions."[57]

A few things about the larger Baptist story needs to be remembered. Baptists were a relatively small denomination at the time of the American Revolution who then experienced

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[52] Todd has recently argued for the benefits of this uniquely American theology in *The Moral Governmental Theory of the Atonement*. Another demonstration of the benefits could be found in their influence on revivalism in America, as shown by Robert W. Caldwell III, *Theologies of the American Revivalists: From Whitefield to Finney* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017).

[53] Henry, *Personal Idealism and Strong's Theology*, 228–29.

[54] Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 294, lists Strong as a mediating theologian.

[55] Tom Nettles has also noticed this tendency in Hovey: Tom J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 232.

[56] "In his initial theology textbook, the 1870 *Outlines of Christian Theology*, Hovey did not see any need or biblical defense of the doctrine. In his next edition, the 1877 *Manual of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics*, Hovey shortened his comment on the issue and relegated it to a footnote. And by his final edition, the 1900 *Manual of Christian Theology*, the footnote, and any reference to eternal generation, was left out" [Matthew C. Shrader, "Hidden Bridges? Progressive Tendencies among Non-Progressive 19th-Century Northern Baptists" (Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Virtual Meeting, 2020), 10.].

[57] Shrader, "New England Baptist Alvah Hovey," 64n59.

explosive growth in the nineteenth century.[58] As Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins have shown, they went from cultural outsiders to insiders.[59] Within this context, Baptist seminaries in the America were founded, along with much of the northern Baptist theological tradition. We should also remember that these two men were denominational leaders who were unrivalled in the North for their theological authority and influence. They helped define this new Baptist tradition as much as anyone else. And it was a tradition without a guiding confession because Baptist seminaries in the North purposefully declined to have statements of faith.[60] The first to change this course was Northern Baptist Theological Seminary *in 1913*. This context combined with the tendency toward change prompts us to ask what this says about the northern Baptist theological tradition.

I would like to offer two observations. First, the Strong/Hovey interaction illustrates how the ground had already shifted underneath the northern Baptist theologians by the time they were producing their own theologies in the last third of the nineteenth century. Looking at the end of that century, Kevin Bauder and Robert Delnay have argued that Baptist liberals of the time had success due in some measure to ignorance and imprecision on the part of the conservatives.[61] I agree and would add that included in ignorance and imprecision was a genuine openness to substantive change (among both conservatives and moderates). Speaking about New School Calvinists and Edwardsians, George Marsden, Douglas Sweeney, and others have argued that the neglect of confessionalism,[62] along with the fact that they shared the same sources and methods with liberals,[63] contributed to the rise of liberalism. The story presented here of Strong and Hovey seems to corroborate such suggestions. The shifted, and shifting, ground they built their theology on helps to explain the greater theological change of the day.

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[58] As is normal with this kind of growth, they began to institutionalize and develop their theological tradition, both of which carried extensive challenges. At the same time this tradition building occurred, the American theological scene experienced tumultuous change. The revivalist tradition, the new republic, the American Enlightenment(s), and the disestablishment of state-sponsored religion created the larger context that Baptists were thrown into. And this was all before the gauntlet that was the nineteenth century brought fresh challenges. Darwinism, higher criticism, sweeping philosophical changes, and the liberal New Theology are only the most well-known of what the nineteenth century offered.

[59] Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[60] Many seminaries followed Newton Theological Institute, as the first Baptist seminary in America, in this regard. For an introduction to Newton's story, see Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *A School of the Church: Andover Newton across Two Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 25–42, as well as William H. Brackney, *Congregation and Campus: Baptists in Higher Education* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 258–62.

[61] Kevin T. Bauder and Robert Delnay, *One in Hope and Doctrine: Origins of Baptist Fundamentalism 1870–1950* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 2014), 39–43. Their list of reasons include: a changing intellectual climate, charismatic leaders, public support, ignorance and imprecision on the part of conservatives, political ability of the liberals, and social support.

[62] George M. Marsden, "The New School Heritage and Presbyterian Fundamentalism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 32 (May 1970): 129–47.

[63] Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor, New Haven Theology, and the Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, 151–53. Sweeney also points to Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), and Daniel Day Williams, *The Andover Liberals: A Study in American Theology* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1941).

Second, the shifted ground itself was a symptom of the lack of rootedness. Or perhaps a better way to express this would be to say that they were often cavalier with classical Christian conceptions of the faith (the Christian Tradition). Steven Harmon has suggested that Baptists in the Enlightenment era experienced a "decline in credal terminology" so as not to "limit the freedom of the individual conscience." This would include the nineteenth century. Harmon goes on: "Confessions that expressed doctrine simply by means of biblical texts and biblical terminology allowed individuals to interpret those texts according to the dictates of their consciences."[64] This freedom of conscience is certainly reflected in Hovey and Strong. The freedom to improvise on key doctrines of historic Christianity was part of the tendency to change.

I find that the story of the founding and early development of the northern Baptist tradition is one of caution. We ought to learn the dangers of wandering from the foundation laid by the greater Christian Tradition. Because, as R. Lucas Stamps has said, "without the categories provided by the history of interpretation and the history of doctrine, we [Baptists] have sometimes left ourselves open to idiosyncratic ways of synthesizing the biblical teaching."[65] Hovey and Strong were giants in their day who are little more than historical curiosities today. The facts that they lacked confessional boundaries, were tolerant toward new conceptions, and were willing to move their own theology beyond the Tradition in favor of novel viewpoints is a possible factor in this omission.

[64] Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 81.

[65] R. Lucas Stamps, "Baptists, Classic Christology, and the Christian Tradition," in *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity*, ed. Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 105.