

The Evangelical Library Lecture 2005: The Many-Splendoured Cross: Atonement, Controversy and Victory ¹

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Bible Reading: Colossians 1:15-23; 2:6-15²

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16** For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. **17** And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **18** And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. **19** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, **20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, **22** he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, **23** if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister...

6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, **7** rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.....**8** See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. **9** For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, **10** and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. **11** In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, **12** having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. **13** And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, **14** by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. **15** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

¹ This lecture is dedicated to my friend and brother in Christ, Bob Horn. A slightly shortened version of this lecture was given at the Swiss Church, Covent Garden, 6th June as the 2005 Evangelical Library Lecture, under the title of '*Creation, Conquest and the Cross*'.

² All biblical quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version* (Collins, 2002).

Can we then justify ourselves in holding a view of the atonement into which penal substitution does not enter? Ought we not to reconsider whether penal substitution is not, after all, the heart of the matter?³

Introduction

Birthdays, anniversaries and annual lectures are good opportunities for reflection and taking stock, for looking back and looking forward, maybe even for painful soul-searching. I am both honoured and humbled that the Trustees of the Evangelical library have invited me to speak on the cross work of Christ celebrating two anniversaries: James Denney's *The Death of Christ*⁴ (1905) and Leon Morris' *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*⁵ (1955). With the trustees permission, I would like two more honoured guests to gatecrash the party: Jim Packer's Tyndale Lecture 'What did the Cross Achieve' published in 1975, and John Stott's 'The Cross of Christ'⁶ which will be twenty years old in six months time. Here we have before us, spanning a century, four seminal evangelical texts on the work of Christ that have been read and that have influenced what must be hundreds of thousands of believers.

Although stylistically different, they are all fine examples of erudite scholarship and of a nuanced depth that at the same time is wonderfully lucid. Most importantly, they are all soaked in the Scripture, artfully integrating exegesis, biblical and systematic theology. All of them offer detailed and sophisticated defences of a substitutionary understanding of the atonement which is 'penal'

³ Jim Packer, What did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution (RTSF Monograph, 2002), 58.

⁴ James Denney, The Death of Christ (rev. and enlarged edition inc. Atonement and the Modern Mind) (Klock and Klock, 1982).

⁵ Leon Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (Tyndale Press, 1955).

⁶ John Stott, The Cross of Christ (IVP, 1986).

in nature: in Packer's words: 'Jesus Christ our Lord, moved by a love that was determined to do everything to save us, endured and exhausted the destructive divine judgement for which we were inescapably destined, and so won us forgiveness, adoption and glory.'⁷

Comfortably perched on the shoulders of these giants, who themselves sat on the shoulders of others, reaching back for two thousand years, one might assume that for evangelicals in 2005, debates over the nature of the cross need no longer concern us, any battles having been fought and decisively won by those we remember tonight. Because of their work in defending penal substitution against the old foe of theological liberalism, surely today there is evangelical unanimity, not only on the truth of penal substitution, but unanimity that penal substitution remains a fundamental tenet of the evangelical doctrine of salvation? There is little more to do than cry a big 'Amen' and depart from here, praising God for his saving provision in Christ and proclaiming the scandal of the cross to an unbelieving world.

Uncomfortably, as we are all too well aware, in reality the view is somewhat less scenic, as within 'evangelicalism' we are currently mired in a heated controversy, (some polemically might say 'civil war') over the precise meaning of the cross. There are those, who, with sometimes the laudable intentions of our evangelism and evangelical credibility, not only want to downplay the penal character of Christ's substitution, but who want to deny it all together.⁸

⁷ Packer, op. cit., 35.

⁸ Most recently a number of works spring to mind: ed. John Goldingay, [Atonement Today](#) (SPCK, 1995); Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, [Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts](#) (Paternoster, 2003); Steve Chalke, [The Lost Message of Jesus](#)

It is not my primary aim in this lecture to defend, once again, penal substitution against its critics. To misquote an oft-quoted preacher: 'Defend penal substitution? I'd as soon defend a lion!'⁹ I have neither the space nor expertise to think I can substantially improve upon the exegesis and arguments of a Denney, Morris, Stott and Packer, a Nicole or a Murray, let alone a Luther or Calvin. I am at 'cognitive rest' with their analyses of the biblical data and systematic formulation. If you are wavering on this issue and have not read them, then I urge you to do so.

What I would like to do in this lecture is to attempt some positive theological construction, examining a cluster of issues surrounding the theology of the atonement and the continuing debate over the theology of the atonement. My lecture will consist of three related sections.

I argue that under the sovereignty and providence of God we discern meaningful consequences out of doctrinal controversy. Next, I look to see whether the theological method known as 'multi-perspectivalism' or 'symphonic' theology can help us in our articulation of the atonement in the midst of such controversy. Finally, and as a worked example, I examine Christ's death from the perspective of His victory over Satan and the salvation of creation, and argue perspectively their inextricable link to penal substitution.

(Zondervan, 2003); Alan Mann, *Atonement for a 'Sinless' Society: Engaging with an Emerging Culture* (Paternoster, 2005).

⁹ A quotation attributed to C.H. Spurgeon.

Part 1: Understanding misunderstanding

For those of us who continue to teach and preach penal substitution there appears to be a frustrating intuitional incongruity. In light of the works that we are remembering, with their commitment to *sola Scriptura*, their nuance, depth and presupposed Trinitarian foundations, it is saddening but maybe still *understandable* how anyone who is 'formally' committed to an evangelical theological method, could and would not only suppress, but refute penal substitution. I don't want to be naïve or idealistic here, I am aware of the perversity and irrationality of unbelief in my own heart let alone others. I am also theologically shrewd enough to see that in some recent treatments, denial of penal substitution is simply the tip of a larger theological iceberg, or to put it another way the last domino which must topple from a chain reaction that started way back. Earlier moves include a denial of God's personal wrath against sin; a re-interpretation of God's holiness and sovereignty; post-modern sympathies in epistemology; and to be frank a theological method which descriptively seems more classically liberal than evangelical, and seeks to interpret the Word through the world and not the world through the Word. All of these are consistent with a denial of an understanding of the cross that is founded on trans-cultural concepts such as propitiation and retributive justice. Let me repeat, this is understandable although disorientating especially when within the evangelical constituency, leaders publicly side with a C.H. Dodd rather than a Leon Morris. Although it is a mute point, and itself part of the battle over 'evangelical history', what were in the past thought to be clear boundary markers defining evangelical identity, suddenly appear to be a great deal more opaque.

However, what I have described is not the perplexity on which I wish to focus. What is less understandable, is that in many expositions against penal substitution, what is rejected is *not* in actuality penal substitution but what amount to gross caricatures of penal substitution which are over-simplified, perverted and twisted expositions that at times lapse into both modalism and tritheism, and which overall betray both a systematic and historical theological illiteracy. This is not all, for in terms of a 'model' of the atonement, penal substitution is often portrayed as being necessarily narrow and monochrome, not taking into account the full range of language used to describe the cross work of Christ in the Bible.¹⁰

What are the sources of such misunderstanding? No doubt theological, historical, and sociological factors are involved. I wonder though whether one trail leads embarrassingly back to our doorstep? While we rightly uphold the best practice of a Packer or Stott, could we entertain the possibility that at times, in our passion and earnestness to uphold the truth of penal substitution, we have provided fuel for this fire?

First, have we been guilty of less than careful expositions and illustrations of penal substitution in our preaching and teaching, what Packer calls 'popular piety' which is 'devotionally evocative without being theological rigorous'?¹¹ Are our expositions of penal substitution fully consonant with our understanding of God's triune nature and God's character?

¹⁰ See above titles in n.6.

¹¹ Packer, *op. cit.*, 36.

Second, is it possible that because we have not always been totally sure of the precise systematic connections between the cross as propitiating God's wrath and the cross as victory over Satan, that in our insecurity we have tended to default to what we believe to be more central and less peripheral. Could it be that because penal substitution displays 'the offence of the cross' in all its ugly beauty (from Socinius to the present), it has continued to be the most offensive truth about the Christ's cross that is constantly under attack. As a result its battle weary defenders have been defensive and 'tunnel-visioned'. In 1965 Leon Morris could write 'upholders of the penal theory have so stressed the thought that Christ bore our penalty that they have found room for nothing else. Rarely have they in theory denied the value of other theories, but sometimes they have in practice ignored them.'¹²

It is not my role to apportion blame here or there. I confess a whiff of autobiography in the above analysis. My question is how I, how we, learn from such situations.

In the current climate, we are being naïve if we posit a simple declinism that pessimistically despairs and which, with embitterment retreats into a perceived ever-decreasing enclave. We must take advice from the preacher, 'There is nothing new under the sun' (Ecc. 1:9) and 'Say not "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this' (Ecc. 7:10). Has the truth of God's personal wrath on a proud rebellious race

¹² Leon Morris, The Cross in the New Testament (Paternoster, 1965), 401.

ever been popular? Are contemporary refutations of penal substitution more devastating than Socinius' *Of Jesus Christ the Saviour*, which was written over 500 years ago? If we were to discern a more cyclical or generational pattern concerning theological controversy, we would be less likely to be taken by surprise, or off-guard, with the inevitable resulting knee-jerk response, and more likely to be well prepared, to interpret a situation like ours in a biblically responsible way and act accordingly in wisdom.

In a recent essay, Wayne Grudem asks why God, in his sovereignty, allows false teachings to come into the church in different ages.¹³ Two of his reasons are pertinent to our topic. His first reason is that of the purification of the church that includes a belief in doctrinal progression over history which at times can be gradual and at other times explosive but which invariably comes through controversy: 'As the church has struggled to define its own beliefs clearly in distinction from false doctrine, it has grown in its understanding of the teachings of Scripture. So God has used controversy to purify the church. In the process of controversy old errors have been corrected, and church has refined its understanding of many things it had believed implicitly but not in a detailed or deeply understood way.'¹⁴ The recent events within British evangelicalism have certainly deepened and sharpened my thinking on the nature of Christ's cross. With the number of excellent treatments we have that are defending penal substitution, we have the opportunity not only to re-familiarise ourselves with them for apologetic value, but to build on their work,

¹³ Wayne Grudem, 'When, why, and for what should we draw new boundaries?' in eds. John Piper, Justin Taylor and Paul Kjoss Helseth, *Beyond the Bounds* (Crossway, 2003).

¹⁴ Grudem, *op. cit.*, 355.

knowing that there are always more riches to be mined from God's Word.¹⁵ Preaching and teaching on the cross should never become a tiresome trial! We must make use of this providential opportunity to understand the biblical complexity and nuances of penal substitution, and resolve to teach, rebuke, correct and train both clearly faithfully and graciously. Put simply, in the words of a friend of mine, 'Don't get bitter, get better!'

The second reason Grudem gives for the emergence of false teaching, is that God permits false teaching to test our attitude of heart toward false teachers. Here he quotes 2 Timothy 2:24– 26 (I will include v. 23 also):

23 Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. **24** And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, **25** correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, **26** and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Grudem writes: 'As we confront others who teach what we consider to be false doctrine today, God is testing not only our faithfulness regarding what we believe and what we write in our doctrinal statements but also how we act toward those with whom we disagree. Will we continue to act toward them in love and kindness, even when we come to the point when we feel we must exclude their teaching from what is allowed in our organisations or our

¹⁵ For example, the Oak Hill Theological symposium ed. David Peterson, Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today (Paternoster, 2001) contains fresh defences of penal substitution. I don't think I am over-stretching to say that the book seems to have been written in response to the St. John's College symposium ed. John Goldingay, Atonement Today (SPCK, 1995).

churches? God is testing our hearts toward these people with whom we disagree.’¹⁶ Similarly before quoting the same passage in 2 Timothy, Roger Nicole, (who, like Morris, wrote his defence of penal substitution against C.H. Dodd in 1955) has written elsewhere: ‘A Christian who carries on discussions with those who differ should not be subject to the psychology of the boxing ring, where the contestants are bent upon demolishing one another.’¹⁷

In practical terms, we need to take account of a number of things if we are to ‘speak the truth in love’. First, before we pronounce judgement, we need to make sure that those denying penal substitution are really guilty of denying a true exposition of the doctrine and not a second-hand and false caricature. Desperate as it is, we cannot presume that leaders and those in influence in our churches have had the quality and quantity of theological training commensurate for their position. Might we seek opportunities to present a biblical, Trinitarian exposition of penal substitution and so dispel some people’s long-held prejudices against this understanding of the cross? Second, we need to realise that ‘straw men’ can be constructed on both sides of an argument. It is hypocritical for us to accuse some people of caricaturing when we are doing the same thing.¹⁸ We should read the primary sources carefully and not engage in hearsay.

¹⁶ Grudem, *op. cit.*, 357.

¹⁷ Roger Nicole ‘Polemic Theology, How to deal with those who differ from us’ in Standing Forth: The Collected Writings of Roger Nicole (Mentor, 2002), 25.

¹⁸ In Nicole, *op. cit.*, the author gives three helpful questions to follow: 1) What do I owe the person who differs from me (e.g. an obligation to understand what they mean, to understand their aims); 2) What can I learn from them (e.g. what are the true things they do say? What are the dangers for me to learn?); 3) How can I cope with those who differ from me?

Finally, we need to recognise that in the New Testament error is dealt with in different ways according to the person in error. In a very helpful paper, the late Bob Sheehan offers a five-fold typology in the way the Apostles dealt with theological error. All were treated differently according to their particular context:

- *the sincerely ignorant* (e.g. Apollos in Acts 18). Here the apostles make no condemnation but privately explain the truth more fully.
- *the sincere misinterpreter* (e.g. some of the Corinthian problems). Here Paul removes all reason for misunderstanding by further clarification.
- *the temporarily inconsistent* (e.g. Peter in Gal. 2). Here, because Peter's sin was public and because of his prominence, Paul rebukes him publicly. Paul realises Peter's inconsistency is not a desire to repudiate the gospel but is motivated by fear. Paul does not condemn him as a heretic in confrontation, shows him the serious implications of his teaching and gains his restoration.
- *the deceived* (e.g. the 'bewitched' Galatians). Here Sheehan notes four strands of arguments in Paul's teaching: 'a positive teaching of truth, a negative denunciation of error, a forthright yet accurate exposure of the false teachers and a warning of the dire consequences of persistence in false teaching.'¹⁹
- *The deceivers* (e.g. the Judaizers). These people are enemies of the gospel who were fundamentally unwilling to be submissive to Apostolic teaching even after an orderly and responsible process of investigation, testimony and decision (the dogmata of Acts 16:4): 'there should not doubt

¹⁹ Bob Sheehan, 'Dealing with False Teaching' unpublished manuscript from BEC Conference.

that the teaching of the Apostle with regard to these wilful, persistent, stubborn heretics is that they are to be rejected and avoided; that their excommunication from the church is necessary. There is to be no sort of contact with them for religious purposes.²⁰

I do not believe that such categorisation is guilty of the death of a thousand qualifications. Indeed against the antiseptic sterility of much theological discourse within evangelicalism (let alone in the wider church and academy), I, like the New Testament, think that we should be willing to call false teaching, heresy and apostasy for what it is, providing we do not use these terms lightly, flippantly or gleefully, but in a technical 'biblical' sense and with the gravity and seriousness they deserve. Sheehan notes that a great deal of discernment is required in these situations but ultimately there are only two types of errorist: 'There are those who are in submission to the Apostles, yet for some reason are not doing what the Apostles had said, and there are those who are not in submission to the Apostles. Those who are biblically submissive, yet in error, and those who are biblically subversive and, therefore, in error.'²¹

In terms of discipline and censure, I understand the difficulty of ecclesiological 'translation' from the New Testament local congregation setting, to today's diverse ecclesiological structures, not to mention parachurch structures. However I still think there are clear principles that we can follow. I believe in 'innocent until proven guilty', and a biblical procedure

²⁰ Ibid., 13.

²¹ Ibid., 15.

for matters of discipline, involving relational contact, noting however, that procedures must conclude at some point in time.

If the above analysis is correct, how might we attempt some positive construction which both enhances our understanding of the cross and its penal substitutionary nature, and which, for those who deny this truth, might even clear up some misconceptions which, God willing, 'may grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and that they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.'

Part 2: Perspectives on Perspectivalism

Here I would like to draw on the theological approach called multi-perspectivalism or 'symphonic' theology, championed by Reformed theologians, John Frame and Vern Poythress respectively.²² There are several influences behind this approach, perhaps the strongest is Cornelius Van Til and in particular his thinking on the nature of religious language and epistemology. In terms of theology, multi-perspectivalism argues that there are both continuities and discontinuities between God's knowledge and our own. Truth is one and yet only God is omniscient, seeing reality simultaneously from all possible perspectives. In summary multi-perspectivalism recognises that 'because of our finitude, we need to look at things first from one perspective, then another. The more different perspectives we can incorporate into our formulations, the more likely those

²² John Frame, The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (P&R, 1987), 89-90, 191-194, 200-204, 206-212, 235; Vern S. Poythress, Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology (P&R, 1987).

formulations will be biblically accurate.²³ Frame notes that the Bible presents doctrinal relationships perspectively because this reflects the nature of the triune God, ‘God is one God in three persons; He is many attributes in one God-head – the eternal one and many. None of the persons is prior to the other, all are equally eternal, ultimate, absolute, glorious. None of the attributes is ‘prior to’ any of the others; each is equally divine, inalienable, and necessary to God’s deity.’²⁴ Poythress echoes this:

different perspectives, though they start from different strands of biblical revelation, are in principle harmonizable with one another. We as human beings do not always see the harmony straight away. But we gain insights in the process of trying to see the same material from several different perspectives. We use what we have gained from one perspective to reinforce, correct, or improve what we understood through the other. I call this procedure *symphonic theology* because it is analogous to the blending of various musical instruments to express the variations of a symphonic theme.²⁵

In summarising the qualities and characteristics of perspectives, the following can be said:

- Each perspective has a separate focus of interest.
- Each perspective is, in the end, dependent on the others.
- Each perspective is, in principle, harmonizable with the others.

²³ John Frame, ‘Machen’s Warrior Children’ in ed. Sung Wook Chung Alistair McGrath: A Dynamic Engagement (Baker, 2003), 142.

²⁴ Frame, *op. cit.*, 192.

²⁵ Poythress, *op. cit.*, 43.

- Any one perspective when expanded far enough involves the others and in fact encompasses the others. Each can be viewed as an aspect of the others.
- Because of the tendency to human oversight or one-sided emphasis, each perspective is useful in helping us to notice facts and relationships that tend to be further in the background in the other perspectives.²⁶

I recognise that I have had to present this approach quickly and baldly. Because it is relevant to our discussion on the atonement I would like note some qualifications given by Frame and Poythress. First, both are at pains to distinguish substantive disagreement from different, but complementary perspectives. This approach is not relativistic in its understanding of truth. Second, there is not a flat undifferentiation between perspectives in Scripture. Frame, for example, has no difficulty in affirming contextual exegesis and a central message in the Bible which is essentially Christological. However he notes some qualifications:

- To understand the full scope of Christ's redemptive work, we need the whole biblical canon.
- There is perspectival reciprocity between the central message of Scripture and its detailed particular messages. The central message is defined by the particular messages, and the particular messages must be understood in the light of the central message...
- Not all perspectives are equally prominent in Scripture or equally useful to the theologian. It is quite right for a theologian to prefer one perspective to another. He errs only when he gives to that perspective the kind of authority that is due only to the biblical canon as a whole, or when he seeks to exclude other perspectives that also have some validity.

²⁶ Ibid., 36.

- This sort of talk sometimes sounds like relativism. – It is far from that, and the motive behind it is quite the opposite. The main point of my argument for perspectivalism is to defend the absolute authority of Scripture as a whole, against all the pretensions of theologians. It is Scripture that is our authority. It is not a ‘theology of’ something or other. Nor is it this or that ‘context’ within Scripture.²⁷

Similarly Poythress nuances his overall approach by arguing that: in the Bible there is an inequality of perspectives, with some being more prominent than others; not all perspectives are equally useful for all purposes; and it is misleading to say that all perspectives are valid: there are many unbiblical perspectives.²⁸

Is multi-perspectivalism such a revolutionary method and how legitimate is this method when looking at the doctrine of the atonement? I say ‘no’ to the first question and ‘yes’ to the second. I would argue that what I am suggesting is merely explicitly drawing out what is implicitly present in some of the best recent evangelical expositions of the cross. Let us begin with Packer in his 1975 lecture.

The first thing to note is that the opening half of the lecture concentrates on methodological issues concerning epistemology and religious language with Packer arguing *against* an over-rationalistic formulation of penal substitution, and *for* the legitimate place of ‘mystery’ in our doctrinal formulations. Here

²⁷ Frame, *Doctrine*, op. cit., 192ff.

²⁸ Poythress, op. cit., 43f.

Packer's concern compliments multi-perspectivalism's focus on religious language, God's archetypal knowledge and our true but limited knowledge. Next, remember Packer's helpful typology delineating three ways the church have explained the death of Christ, 'each reflecting a particular view of the nature of God and our plight in sin, and of what is needed to bring us to God in the fellowship of acceptance on his side and faith and love on ours....'²⁹ The first sees the cross having its effect entirely on men, and the second sees the cross having its effect primarily on external spiritual forces. Now note how Packer introduces the last alternative, which is in essence the penal substitution view:

...The third type of account *denies nothing asserted by the other two views save their assumption that they are complete*. It agrees that there is biblical support for all they say, but it goes further. It grounds man's plight as a victim of sin and Satan in the fact that, for all God's daily goodness to him, as a sinner he stands under divine judgement, and his bondage to evil is the start of his sentence, and unless God's rejection of him is turned into acceptance he is lost forever. On this view, Christ's death had its effect first on God, who was hereby propitiated (or, better, who hereby propitiated himself), *and only because it had this effect* did it become an overthrowing of the powers of darkness and a revealing of God's seeking and saving love...³⁰

He continues:

²⁹ Packer, op. cit., 29.

³⁰ Ibid., 30.

It should be noted that though the two former views regularly set themselves in antithesis to the third, the third takes up into itself all the positive assertions that they make; which raises the question whether any more is at issue here than the impropriety of treating half-truths as the whole truth, and of rejecting a more comprehensive account on the basis of speculative negations about what God's holiness requires as a basis for forgiving sins. Were it allowed that the first two views were misunderstanding and distorting themselves in this way, the much disputed claim that a broadly substitutionary view of the cross has always been the mainstream Christian opinion might be seen to have substance after all. *It is a pity that books on the atonement so often take it for granted that accounts of the cross which have appeared as rivals in historical debate must be treated as intrinsically exclusive.* This is always arbitrary, and sometimes quite perverse.³¹

To take an example from a different perspective: Richard Gaffin has recently written a superlative essay on the atonement in Pauline theology.³² On the topic of the efficacy of Christ's death, Gaffin again starts with the nature of religious language. Here the aim is not that of refuting an unhealthy rationalism but rather those who wish to stress that Paul's language in describing the meaning of Christ's death is entirely metaphorical and not subject to 'clinical analysis'. Gaffin's response tackles this view, and in doing so further sharpens our understanding of multi-perspectivalism. He writes:

Paul is quite well aware of the 'dialectic' that marks all sound theological knowledge; it is memorably put, 'to know the love of Christ that surpasses

³¹ Ibid., 31.

³² Richard Gaffin, 'Atonement in the Pauline Corpus' in eds. Charles E. Hill & Frank A. James III, The Glory of the Atonement (Apollos, 2004), 140-163.

knowledge' (Eph. 3:19), and surely with his death primarily in view (2 Cor. 5:4) ... considered comprehensively, God gift, in Christ, is 'beyond words'. But – and this is the point to be noted here – Paul *understands* this. He is confident that he not only comprehends, truly if not exhaustively, the incomprehensible mystery of God that Christ is, but his able to provide his readers with 'the full riches of complete understanding', a 'knowledge' that enables them to recognise and refute spurious though fine sounding arguments. In other words, Paul's gospel involves adequate discursive knowledge.³³

Gaffin also comments on the concept of metaphor:

Much is made today of the great variety of metaphors Paul uses for the meaning of Christ's death. Based on this plurality, it is alleged that no one image is central or captures all the truth of the atonement. In response, at least three things need to be said. First, while it is surely true that Paul speaks of Christ's death in a variety of ways and it is important not to neglect any one, there is no inherent reason why one may not be more predominant than any other ... Second, there is no inherent reason why this variety cannot be accounted for in a body of teaching, a doctrine if you will, that is unified and coherent ... Third, it does not follow from the variety of images Paul uses that no one image is indispensable under all circumstances, that any one, say sacrifice or penal substitution, may be disposable under some circumstances.³⁴

³³ Ibid., 154.

³⁴ Ibid., 155.

Are not both Packer and Gaffin instinctively affirming a version of multi-perspectivalism? They are against a pick-and-mix compartmentalisation that under the umbrella of 'contextualisation' allows one to isolate only those images of the cross that resonates with contemporary culture, ditching others into the dustbin of Christian history. Rather both Packer and Gaffin affirm an organic relatedness which weave together all the biblical metaphors and images concerning the atonement language or in Packer's words 'complementary models expressing different elements in the single complex reality which is the mystery of the cross'.³⁵ Also, they both note that there may well be an asymmetry between these different perspectives on the cross and a particular relational dynamic between them that is not uniform. Elsewhere they both observe that the atonement is just one element in the totality of our understanding of salvation, again organically related to the other elements. So, for example Christ's cross work is inextricably related to his resurrection (remember, for example, Calvin's insight into the *synecdochic* relationship between the two), and the doctrine of union with Christ that links, in complimentary fashion, substitution and representation, and that through the work of the Spirit binds redemption accomplished to redemption applied.³⁶

Part 3: A Vicarious Victory

Armed with these insights on the divine purposes behind false teaching, and our multi-perspectival approach to doctrine, let us once again return to the frontline of the debate over the nature of the cross. We now have suitable weapons which will not only allow us to plunge deeper into the belly of truth,

³⁵ Packer, *op. cit.*, 32.

³⁶ See Packer, *op. cit.*, 31f, 42ff; Gaffin, *op. cit.*, 141-145.

but which will be able to cut through some unnecessary and unhelpful misunderstandings that exist between those who rightly maintain the truth of penal substitution and those who wrongly do not. On the latter, Poythress has two useful comments. First he notes that error is parasitic on the truth:

To be at all plausible, errors and lies must somehow look like the truth. They cannot sustain themselves long, and they will not be believed long, unless to some degree they disguise themselves as angels of light. (2 Cor. 11:14) ...

These illustrations [talking about Jehovah's witnesses and Christian scientists] remind us that there is a distinction between truth and error and that some errors in doctrine are very serious ... We ought never to forget this fact. And yet, even in such cases, we find mixtures of truth and error. It is worthwhile asking what grain of truth makes the error more plausible.³⁷

Second, in theological debates, we should preempt the other person's strong points:

As we saw under the previous maxim, sometimes we are dealing with outright error, not just a harmonizable difference of viewpoint. In such cases, it is often worthwhile trying to figure out what other people fear and what are the strongest points in their arguments. We should try to find some grain of truth in their fears, in their strong points, and in the things that they care for most intensely. Even if there is only a distant similarity between what they assert and what is actually true, we can find the primary points of similarity. Starting with the actual truth closest to their viewpoint, we can develop a perspective from which to expand to the truth that we want them to learn. We can, in other words, 'steal their thunder,' or preempt their strong points.³⁸

³⁷ Poythress, *op. cit.*, 89.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

This final section focuses on one example or case study. Although he is by no means original in his thinking or 'academic' in terms of theological rigour, at a popular level (using the term descriptively and not pejoratively), Steve Chalke's writing and speaking has been at the centre of the current debate over the nature of the atonement, and his influence on sociological evangelicalism is significant. In his article '*Redeeming the Cross*' he writes the following:

Has Christ's death on the Cross got any relevance or meaning beyond the individual eternal destiny of his followers? What does it mean, if anything, for wider affairs of our communities; the UK's foreign policy; the war on terrorism; trade justice; people trafficking; the hopes, ambitions and fears of countless millions of people? Can it offer us any direction as we think about the global challenges humanity faces at the beginning of the 21st century? Was there a cosmic reason for Jesus' death? And what are the implications today for us as individuals, as the Church and society as a whole?

But, if penal substitution does not do justice to the story of our salvation through Christ, what other options are open to us? For me, the most empowering and motivating understanding of the atonement is that which most closely resembles the thinking of the Early Church. As they struggled to make sense of Jesus' death and resurrection, the Early Church leaders (notably Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa and Origen) wrote about the cross in terms of a ransom. Of course, Jesus said himself that he came 'to give his life as a ransom for many.' (Mark 10:45). But to whom was this ransom paid? The Early Church was adamant that it was not to God. As Origen put it: '*To whom did he give his life as a ransom for many? Assuredly not to God, could it then be to the Evil One? For he was holding fast until the ransom should be given*

him, even the life of Jesus; being deceived with the idea that he could have dominion over it, and not seeing that he could not bear the torture in retaining it.'

This early model which, following the work of Gustav Aulen in 1930, has become known as *Christus Victor* (Christ the Conqueror) sees Christ's life, death *and* resurrection put together as his victory over all the forces of evil and sin, including the earthly and spiritual powers that oppress people. It is Jesus' resurrection that gives the hope of the new heaven and the new earth, where sin is banished and all things are made right again. Jesus' emergence from the grave shows us no political power, no unjust regime, no sinful structure can triumph, even in death. It is Easter Sunday, not Good Friday, that shows the new kingdom in all its glory and God's love in all its fullness. It is the resurrection which finally puts the *Victor* in *Christus Victor*! On the cross Jesus does not placate God's anger in taking the punishment for sin, but rather absorbs its consequences and, in his resurrection, defeats death.³⁹

Rather than an immediate rush of blood to the head, let us aim to understand this type of statement in its best possible light. We need to acknowledge that the social questions Steve asks at the beginning of the quotation are important questions that evangelical Christians need to answer and to answer in the public sphere. An unhealthy pietism that forgets the Lordship of Christ in all areas of life just will not do (and certainly is not 'Reformed'). We read, in Colossians 'From in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross' (1:19,20) The idea of cosmic

³⁹ Steve Chalke, 'Redeeming the Cross' available at {<http://www.oasistrust.org/temp/RedeemingspthespCross.pdf>}

salvation and the salvation of creation is a biblical theme demanding of our attention.

Second we do need to note the not insignificant strand of biblical teaching that speaks of Christ's death in terms of conquest and victory over the powers of darkness and the Evil One. In 1955 no less than John Murray commented, 'It is surely significant ... that the first promise of redemptive grace, the first beam of light that fell upon our fallen first parents, was in terms of the destruction of the Tempter.'⁴⁰ In the New Testament there are in total eight passages that talk about the work of Christ in terms of conquest and defeat of Satan. (Matt. 12:29; Lk. 11:21–22; Jn. 12:31; 16:11; 1 Cor. 15:24–26; Col. 2:13–15; Heb. 2:14–15; 1 Jn. 3:8). The crucial questions to ask are precisely *how* does a shameful death on a wooden cross crush Satan, and whether jettisoning penal substitution is going to help or hinder our answer. Let us attempt to answer these questions.

In our analysis of Christ's victory over Satan, we start with a metaphysical conundrum that is illustrated by Henri Blocher in his majestic essay 'Agnus Victor'.

The main query is basic indeed: *How* is the battle fought and the victory gained? If the metaphor is to bear doctrinal fruit, it should yield at least some intelligence in the mode and process. The picture of two wrestlers or duelists is hardly congruous when *spirits* are in conflict. If *quanta* or spiritual 'energy' may be thought of perhaps, in the case of creatures, how can *God* fight

⁴⁰ John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied (Banner of Truth, 1955), 49.

against creatures, even high-ranking ones? There is no common measure between his infinite power – one of his names is *Pantokrator*, Master of all – and the devil's limited power; the fact that the devil can act only on God's sovereign permission (Job!) highlights this radical breach of symmetry.⁴¹

What then might we ask is the source of Satan's power that is so powerful and captivating? The answer lies in Satan's title of 'Accuser'. He is the 'accuser of our brothers' (Rev. 12:10).⁴² Satan's role is that of chief public prosecutor, this is the source of his power. As Blocher explains:

How is Satan's role as the Accuser related to his power? If Satan's opposition to the Lord were a matter of mere power, the rebel's finite resources would equal zero confronted with infinity. But the Accuser can appeal to justice...The righteous Judge of all the earth, who can do only right, cannot refuse to hear the charges the Accuser brings without denying himself. In other words, the weapon in the devil's hand is God's own law, God's holy and perfect law...In this light, we may interpret the statement in Hebrews that the devil holds the power (*kratos*) of death (2:14). Throughout Scripture, death appears as a punishment *God* brings down upon sinners...the devil...secures their condemnation as the prosecutor of humanity. Using the force of the law, he demands successfully that they die.⁴³

⁴¹ Henri Blocher, 'Agnus Victor: The Atonement as Victory and Vicarious Punishment' in ed. John Stackhouse, What Does It Mean to Be Saved? : Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation (Baker, 2002), 78.

⁴² Cf. Ps. 109:6; Zech. 3. For more details on the verb *śāṭan* see Blocher, *op. cit.*, 82.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 83.

In this respect then, similar to Satan's *being*, which is preserved in existence by a sovereign God, so Satan's *power* is entirely parasitic feeding off a theocentric host.

When we come to the cross, I hope we start to see the lines of connection between vicarious punishment and the defeat of Satan? The *locus classicus* is Colossians 2: 13– 15:

13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, **14** by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. **15** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Here we see the so-called 'models' (or might we say) say melodies of the atonement, blending together in beautiful harmony. God's triumph over Satan and the forces of evil can only be preserved by the penal-substitution theory.

Milliard Erickson summarises this well:

...The message of the cross is that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law and thus freed us from the slavery in which Satan held us. The Bible makes it clear that we are freed from the curse of the law precisely because Jesus took our place; in him our penalty has been paid; in him we have died and been made alive again. In dying with Christ we are no longer slaves to sin (Rom.6:6– 8). 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming

a curse for us' (Gal. 3:13). 'Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:1). There is no-one (including Satan) who can condemn, for God justifies us, and Christ, who died and was raised from the dead, intercedes for us. (vv.31– 34). Thus, Paul can challenge the power of death and sin. Christ has fulfilled the law for us, and therefore sin no longer had the power of death.

If Christ's death, on the other hand, had been nothing more than the payment of a ransom to Satan, the law could not have been fulfilled in the process and Satan would not have been defeated. It was not the payment of a ransom to Satan that ensured his defeat and the triumph of God, but Christ taking our place to free us from the curse of the law. By bearing the penalty of our sin and satisfying the requirements of the law, Christ nullified Satan's control over us at its root – the power to bring us under the curse and condemnation of the law. Christ's death was God's triumph over the forces of evil, but only because it was a substitutionary sacrifice.⁴⁴

From the perspective of contextual exegesis, while it would be entirely legitimate to focus on the cross from the perspective of the defeat of the Evil One, in terms of theological explanation, without the perspective of penal substitution also in view, the cross becomes both incoherent (what is Satan's power and how does Christ overcome it?), and ineffective (Satan might well be defeated on the cross but I am still under God's wrath, in Adam, dead in sin, without God and without hope (Eph. 2:1, 11–12) destined for the judgement of God (Heb. 9:27) and eternal condemnation (Mt. 25: 31–46; Rom. 5:12–21).

⁴⁴ Millard Erickson, Systematic Theology (Baker, 1998), 839.

From the perspective of systematic formulation, our theology of atonement is enriched by both the vicarious and the victorious *together*. As Blocher notes, in an intuitively multi-perspectival way:

The key position of the doctrine of vicarious punishment answers to the privilege of personal-relational-judicial categories, within the framework of covenant, to deal with divine communication over against that of ontological participation and moral assimilation in other strands of the Christian tradition. This 'mind' is biblical. However, such a position does not make other languages and schemes superfluous, and it does not rule out ontological dimensions and moral influence. The polemic presentation, especially is a welcome complement: When one understands that Christ's victory was based on his sacrifice, one should unfold the fruit of his death as radical and universal victory! Understanding that Satan was defeated as the Accuser may help us to retain the particle of truth in the awkward suggestion that God's attributes of mercy and justified had to be 'reconciled' by the cross: Though God's attributes are one (description of God's essence), once evil entered the world (through God's wholly mysterious, inscrutable permission), his justice became in a way the enemy's weapon – until the divine wisdom (and love) provided the way for God to be both just and the one who justifies sinners through faith in Jesus (Rom 3:26)⁴⁵

Is it not a glorious and liberating truth to know that in Christ there are no accusations against God's people. (Rom. 8:33) There is no-one, not even Satan, the most cunning legal prosecutor of all time, who can make the charge stick. The case is closed – Christ is our righteousness. We can

⁴⁵ Blocher, *op. cit.*, 90.

therefore sing with gusto ‘When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see Him there who paid an end to all my sin.’⁴⁶ Amen!

Stating these inter-connections between models of the atonement is of course not new, (although due to our poor theological education may seem new). In an essay on Calvin’s view of the atonement, Blocher writes that ‘the coalescence of the sacrificial, penal and the polemic themes reflects a remarkable inclination and ability of Calvin’s thought: broad comprehension that majors on solidarities and does not stumble over artificial separations between topics.’⁴⁷ Similarly Gustav Aulén in *Christus Victor*⁴⁸ was woefully reductionist in his reading and his claim that Luther had trumped the legal view of the atonement with the ‘classic’ or dramatic view’. As Robert Letham writes:

Certainly Luther regarded Christ as battling with and triumphing over the demonic powers (*LW*, 26,281, 373; 53, 257). He saw these powers, however, as agents of God’s wrath. It was our guilt and the wrath of God that, in his estimation, was the immediate context of Christ’s atoning death. He saw freedom from the power of the devil as a fruit of deliverance from God’s wrath (*LW*, 26, 276– 291; 27,4). His stress is on Christ’s death as a sacrifice of substitutionary for human sin (*LW*, 13,319; 23, 195; 24, 98; 25, 25,249, 284, 349).⁴⁹

⁴⁶ This words form the second verse of the Hymn *Before the Throne of God Above* by Charitie Bancroft, 1863.

⁴⁷ Henri Blocher, ‘The Atonement in John Calvin’s Theology’ in ed. John Stackhouse, What Does It Mean to Be Saved? : Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation (Baker , 2002), 292.

⁴⁸ Gustav Aulén, Christus Victor: A Historical Study of the three main types of the idea of the Atonement trans. A.G. Herbert (SPCK, 1931).

⁴⁹ Bob Letham, The Work of Christ (IVP, 1993), 162.

Surely Althaus' assessment of Luther is more accurate: 'The satisfaction that God's justice demands is the primary and decisive meaning of Christ's work, in particular of his death. All the rest hangs on this, the Powers spoiled of all right and power.'⁵⁰

Part 4: A Re-created Creation

I would like to argue, although in far less detail, that we see the same structure and pattern when looking at the salvation of creation. In summary, from the perspective of creation, the Fall and its consequences can be characterised as a 'double de-creation.'⁵¹ Sin is a de-creation in that the God ordained hierarchy of relationships of Genesis 1 (God, Man, women, creation) are reversed in Genesis 3 (creation, women, man, God) with God's sovereign, effective and good Word (Gen. 1), disbelieved, disobeyed and seen to be disingenuous (Gen. 3).⁵² Furthermore, God's direct and interventionist judgement on sin in Gen. 3:14-24, all have de-creating consequences (death as a penalty for sin, the ensuing conflict between men and women, the curse of the ground e.t.c.). The disbelief and disobedience of Adam and Eve led to what Murray calls a 'cosmic revolution'⁵³ – an implication of the Fall. In his typical style, Francis Schaeffer puts it like this:

It is interesting to note that almost all of the results of God's judgement because of man's rebellion relate in some way to the external world. They are not just bound up in man's thought life; they are not merely psychological.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Blocher, 'Agnus Victor', op. cit., 89

⁵¹ This terminology and argumentation comes from Mike Ovey, 'The Cross, Creation and the Human Predicament' in ed. David Peterson, Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today (Paternoster, 2001), 100-135.

⁵² Ovey, op. cit., 106-111.

⁵³ John Murray, 'The Fall of Man' in John Murray, Collected Writings Vol. 2 (Banner of Truth, 1977), 72.

Profound changes make the external, objective world abnormal. In the phrase *for thy sake* God is relating these external abnormalities to what Adam has done in the Fall...Why is it like this? Because, one might say, you O unprogrammed and significant Adam, have revolted. Nature has been under your dominion on (in this sense it is as extension of himself, as a king's empire is an extension of himself). Therefore, when you changed, God changes the objective, external world. It as well as you is now abnormal.⁵⁴

Notice the pattern here: the *focus* of the Fall centres on humanity and the physical and spiritual death penalty announced by God, the *consequence* of the Fall is the cursing of creation. When we come to the effect of the cross on creation i.e. recreation, or as in Irenaeus' words 'recapitulation, we discern a similar pattern: the focus on the salvation of humanity and the exhausting of divine punishment by Christ's cross, and then, and only then, the salvation of creation as consequence. Therefore the cross works in an indirect way on creation. The cross saves creation but through the saving of God's people. It acts on creation through acting on humanity, which precisely is what Romans 8:19 is talking about:

19 For the creation waits with eager longing *for the revealing of the sons of God.* **20** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

⁵⁴ Francis Schaeffer, Genesis in Space and Time (IVP, 1972), 95.

Therefore to compartmentalize the effect of the cross on humanity from the effect of cross cosmically, is to separate something the Bible joins together. There is an inextricable link between the two and a particular dynamic between the two that will effect Christian preaching and praxis. In exploring this theme in relation to penal substitution, Mike Ovey calls 'the exclusive re-creation argument,' any atonement theory which claims penal substitution to be redundant because in God's plan to renew and restore a fallen creation (secured by our union with Christ in his resurrection), "penalty aims simply at restoring the *status quo ante*, which does not extend as far as new, better, recreated world." However, as he finally concludes, such a view:

presents a false antithesis between penal substitution on the one hand and the restoration of creation of creation on the other. In reality, the very cosmos that is being restored and vindicated is one which upholds a penalty for sin. So a soteriology stressing the restoration of this cosmos has to face the question of what happens to the penalty for sin. A restoration soteriology that does not deal with this aspect of penalty has either failed to achieve a full restoration or, as Guillebaud observed, leaves the penalty still in operation (scarcely and encouraging thought). It is thus clear at this point that restoration of this cosmos, the one God actually created, demands a penal substitution. Restoration may well involve more than penal substitution, but it cannot be less and still be restoration. As restoration exclusive of penal substitution is thus not a full restoration, for it involves a God whose word has been and remains unbroken. To preach Christ necessarily involves penal substitution.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ovey, *op. cit.*, 124f.

In concluding this section, we are now in a better position to answer Steve Chalke's penetrating questions about the relevance and meaning of the cross in the context of the wider affairs of our communities; the UK's foreign policy; the war on terrorism; trade justice; people trafficking; the hopes, ambitions and fears of countless millions of people. The answer is not to reject penal substitution but precisely the opposite. We will only be able to speak prophetically and hopefully into a sin-cursed world by proclaiming the One who was cursed by God but who was vindicated, was risen and is alive: '14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery' (Heb. 2:14, 15).

Part 5: The Crux of the Cross

Let us join some of the dots. There is a profound depth in the biblical revelation of Christ's cross work that we can view from many perspectives. Let us return to Poythress' qualities of perspectives this time with the cross in focus: Each perspective on the cross has a separate focus of interest. e.g. propitiation presupposes divine wrath, reconciliation presupposes divine alienation, redemption presupposes slavery etc; Each perspective on the cross is, in the end, dependent on the others; Each perspective on the cross is, in principle, harmonizable with the others; Any one perspective on the cross when expanded far enough involves the others and in fact

encompasses the others. Each perspective on the cross can be viewed as an aspect of the others.⁵⁶ So we demonstrate the organic and interweaving quality of God's revelation.⁵⁷

However, there is one more thing to say, and that is the distinctive relationships between these perspectives. I would contend that when we talk perspectivally about the cross as say, the victory of Satan and vicarious punishment, that because of first, the theological connections between the two perspectives which sees the victory as parasitic on the vicarious, and therefore which second, explains the reason behind the biblical weight given to vicarious punishment both explicitly (in terms of image, metaphor and typology) and implicitly (possessing the explanative 'workings' of other perspectives), that there is a prominence and centrality to vicarious punishment *not* given to victory over Satan. I would like to argue the same can be said for other perspectives in relation to penal substitution. How might we describe these perspectival relationships? Musically the difference between major and minor themes? Narratively the difference between major plot and a subplot? Geographically the difference between an epicentre and ripple? Roger Nicole puts it like this:

A linchpin in a mechanical contrivance makes possible the unified function of several other parts. If the linchpin is removed, the other parts no longer perform their own functions but float away in futility. This, I believe is precisely

⁵⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁷ For more details on the exact correlations of biblical terminology see Roger Nicole, 'The Nature of Redemption' in Roger Nicole, Standing Forth: Collected Writings of Roger Nicole (Mentor, 2002), 245-282.

what occurs in the doctrine of atonement... Thus penal substitution of Christ is the vital centre of the atonement, the linchpin without which everything else loses its foundation and flies off the handle so to speak.⁵⁸

On a macro level this idea makes sense if we want to affirm in some sense the God-centred nature of theology, life, the universe and everything. As Poythress notes 'we may state the obvious: the most important and central theme of the Bible is God himself.'⁵⁹ Robert Reymond, therefore, is I think basically correct when in his rich systematic exposition on the character of this cross work of Christ he writes the following concerning propitiation:

All of this means that a major revision is essential in the thinking of Christian minds accustomed to viewing the cross work of Christ as being directed primarily, if not solely towards men. In light of the fact that Paul and John expressly represent it as a *propitiating* work, it is important to recognise that Christ's cross work had a *Godward* reference. Indeed, if one reflects even for a moment on the sinful condition of the race vis-à-vis that holy character of God, it will become clear that *its Godward reference was the cross's primary reference*. The Bible plainly teaches the wrath of God. It teaches that God is angry, and that his holy outrage against the sinner must be assuaged if the sinner is to escape his due punishment. It is for this reason a death occurred at Calvary. When we look at Calvary and behold the Saviour dying for us, we should see in his death not first our salvation but our damnation being borne and carried away by him.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Roger Nicole, 'Postscript on penal substitution' eds. Charles E. Hill & Frank A. James III, The Glory of the Atonement (Apollos, 2004), 446.

⁵⁹ Poythress, op. cit., 38.

⁶⁰ Robert L. Reymond, A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith (Thomas Nelson, 1998), 639.

Pastorally, I think some of the following applications apply. First, in our preaching and teaching, exclusively affirming the cross as vicarious punishment and forgetting (rather than rejecting) the cross as victory over Satan, or the cross as moral example, we are certainly impoverished in our understanding of the atonement and are guilty of not letting the whole counsel of God speak on Christ's cross work. Put a different way, if someone wants to write a book on the atonement as 'moral example' in terms of 1 Pet. 2:21, such a book could potentially be valuable and edifying. However, the usefulness of such a book would be person specific; if the book's perspective did not include the perspective of penal substitution then for someone who needed basic teaching on the cross, the book could hinder rather than help. In the context of what we said earlier about different gradations of 'error', what we might be talking about here is discerning, not so much *false* teaching, but *poor* teaching – a competence to teach and preach the whole counsel of God. I am uneasy about putting someone in Christian leadership who does have a good doctrinal understanding and the skill and motivation to communicate it. The evangelical church has a corporate responsibility here. Alas, we can and do, come up with leadership criteria that do not match biblical criteria, and where theological competence and communication is shoved to the back of the queue.

Second, and with great sadness, we need to say one more thing because in our current situation the issue is not just one of different perspectives but of substantive disagreement: the explicit rejection of penal substitution. In

affirming any perspective of the cross, (and remember revelation must guide us as to what are legitimate perspectives on the cross and what are illegitimate perspectives) and deny vicarious punishment, we are guilty not only of exegetical blindness and gross theological incompetence, but also theological bankruptcy. At this point I would contend that given the analysis of the human predicament, without penal substitution we have no 'good news' to offer, but have a different gospel which is really no gospel at all. To continue willingly to teach, preach and lead others astray in an explicit denial of penal substitution is extremely serious and warrants censure and separation.

Conclusion

In writing a new introduction to Packer's monograph, The Chairman of the Trustees of the Evangelical Library defined that a 'good' lecture 'should finish some business and identify further business for others to finish.'⁶¹ I hope I might have done this in this lecture. In conclusion, let us make some anniversary resolutions.

Let us thank God for those like Denney and Morris, Packer and Stott who have built up the Body of Christ by faithfully exercising their gifts. Let us not be complacent but build on their work. Let us strive for doctrinal excellence and commit ourselves to preach and teach the whole counsel of God. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will graciously open eyes in our study of the Word. Let us pray for opportunities to speak to those who differ with us and pray that in our discussion and debate we can speak the truth in love.

⁶¹ Paul Helm's introduction to Packer's What did the Cross Achieve?

The doctrine of the atonement is a many-splendoured thing. Let us not settle for a monochrome understanding of the cross, but let us proclaim to ourselves and to an unbelieving world, the scandal and glory of the cross in all its glorious technicolour. And let us never forget that the atonement is not simply doctrine about God's love and provision of salvation, but is doxology, about God's love for *me* and *my* salvation, 'intrinsically adequate to meet all the exigencies'⁶² created by a holy God and a sinful people. For I was an object of wrath but Christ took the punishment for which I was destined, I was alienated from God but through Christ I have been reconciled, I was under the curse of the law but have been redeemed by Him who was cursed on that tree. I was a bond-servant of Satan, gripped by the fear of death, yet the Lamb who was slain destroyed him and set me free. Thanks be to our gracious God!

For the last five years Daniel has been co-ordinator of the Religious and Theological Studies Fellowship, part of UCCF. In August he will take up the position of Tutor in Religion, Culture and Public Theology at Oak Hill Theological College, London.

⁶² John Murray, *op. cit.*, 57f.

Appendix 1 - The Definition of the Atonement: Roger Nicole⁶³

Moved by his incomprehensible love for mankind the triune God was pleased not to abandon our rebellious and corrupt race to the misery and hell that it justly deserved, but to undertake to save a great multitude of human beings who had absolutely no claim on His mercy. In order to bring this plan into execution, the Second Person of the Godhead, the Son took unto himself a full human nature, becoming all things like his brethren and sisters, sin excepted. Thus he became the 'second Adam', the head of the new covenant, and he lives a perfect life of obedience to the divine Law. Identifying with his own, he bore the penalty for human sin on the cross of Calvary, suffering in the place of the sinner, the just for the unjust, the holy Son of God for the guilty and corrupt children of man. By his death and resurrection he has provided the basis for the reconciliation to God to human and humans to God; for the propitiation of a righteous Trinity, justly angry at our sins; for the redemption of a multitude of captives of sin whose liberty was secured at the great price of his own blood. He offered himself as an expiatory sacrifice sufficient to blot out the sins of the whole world and secured the utmost triumph over the enemies of our soul, sin, death and Satan. Those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ are thus to be absolved from the guilt of all their sins and are adorned with the perfect righteousness of Christ himself. In gratitude to him they are to live lives of obedience and service to their Saviour and are increasingly renewed into the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. This good news of salvation by grace through faith is to proclaimed indiscriminately to mankind, that is to every man, women and child that we can possibly reach.

'Unto him that loves us and loosed us from our sins by Hid blood, and made us a kingdom and priests unto Hid God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.' (Rev. 1:5,6)

⁶³ Roger Nicole, 'A Definition of the Atonement' in Roger Nicole, Standing Forth: Collected Writings of Roger Nicole (Fearn: Mentor, 2002), p. 244.