

Justice, Law, and Guilt – EA Symposium on Penal Substitution

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The Charges Against Penal Substitution

When he was with us, Steve Chalke said that he has felt ‘in the dock’ in this debate, but we need to remember that the controversy has really arisen because penal substitution has been put in the dock. The initiating accusation here is an accusation against the doctrine of penal substitution, and therefore against those who hold to it. They—we—are the ones in the dock. There is a move here to exclude a view of the atonement, to lay it to rest. This is ironic, since opponents of penal substitution often call for what Chalke describes as a ‘multicoloured rather than monochrome’ view of the cross, but it is they who reduce the historical diversity by rejecting one major model.¹

Steve Chalke and Professor Joel Green have both done this. On the most emollient reading, Professor Green opposes degenerate, demotic forms of penal substitution. On Wednesday he granted that he might possibly admit the place of a very carefully formulated version of penal substitution in what he terms the constellation of atonement models, provided it were not given any governing role. But it was clear that in his own mind he has not yet met such a carefully formulated position, in the work of the dead, or the living. He gave the clear impression that the problems with the popular form do in his mind track back into even the most sophisticated expression of the doctrine. So what are these problems?

They are legion, and they come like machine gun fire.² But I wish to cut through the thicket and focus on four main charges. First, penal substitution entails a mistaken doctrine of God, principally in that it ascribes retributive justice to God. Secondly, penal substitution conflicts with the doctrine of the Trinity by severing the Persons. Thirdly, penal substitution grows out of modern western individualism with its conception of ‘autobiographical justice’.³ Fourthly, penal substitution is a solipsistic doctrine. It cannot look beyond itself. Here we have in fact a cluster of three sub-criticisms with a common core. The claim is that penal substitution cannot embrace three vital aspects: a) the life of Jesus, b) the cosmic scope of the work of Christ on the cross, and c) the work of sanctification in the life of the believer subsequent to conversion. In its stronger form, the last sub-criticism develops into the charge that penal substitution not only cannot support sanctification, but also mandates wrong, abusive behaviour.

This is a heady brew of charges. The stakes are very high. The issue will not go away quietly. In this paper I wish to begin to address these four criticisms with an eye on the concepts of justice, law, and guilt.

¹ ‘Cross Purposes’, *Christianity* (September 2004), p. 44.

² See for example Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 148 for a ‘one-liner’ about how the ‘resurrection is not really necessary according to this model’.

³ *Recovering*, p. 29.

1) Penal substitution entails a mistaken doctrine of God, principally in that it ascribes retributive justice to God.

1.1) Faustus Socinus, Steve Chalke and the Example of Jesus

A key argument which is used against retributive punishment by theological opponents of penal substitution is that it is ruled out by Jesus's own teaching on how we should relate to one another. A form of this argument was used as far back as Faustus Socinus in 1578.⁴ A more recent form is found in the work of Walter Wink. He cites the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* myth as an ancient instance of the view that violence is 'the central dynamic of existence' which 'possesses ontological priority over good'.⁵ In this ancient 'myth of redemptive violence', the spiral of heavenly violence triggers the creation itself and then continues through history: 'Heavenly events are mirrored by earthly events, and what happens above happens below.'⁶ As in heaven, so on earth.

Now the opponents of penal substitution want to endorse this principle: the way you describe God is the way you will behave. Steve Chalke tells us that this kind of mirroring is contradicted by penal substitution in an unthinkable fashion when it says that we should not mirror God: 'If the cross has anything to do with penal substitution then Jesus' teaching becomes a divine case of "do as I say, not as I do". I, for one, believe that God practices what he preaches!'⁷ In short, Jesus says 'turn the other cheek', so how could God punish in a way that exacts satisfaction for sin? If God denies retribution to us, he must eschew it himself.

In reply to this Socinian argument there is a clear counter-case which suggests a quite different construal of the relation between divine and human justice. The Apostle Paul distinguishes sharply the different spheres of justice which operate within creation and between God and creation. At the end of Romans 12 he follows Jesus in teaching that we must not take revenge. Here, then, is his ideal opportunity to point out that we must not because God does not. But the striking thing is that Paul does the opposite. He explains that individuals must not take revenge precisely because God *is* going to do so: 'Do not take revenge my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord' (12:19, quoting Deut. 32:35). From here Paul moves to argue in 13:1-7 that God has given a limited remit to the state to implement this final justice in the present time by the power of the sword.

⁴ Faustus Socinus, *De Iesu Christo Servatore*, iii. 2, in *Opera Omnia*, Vols 1-2 of *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum Quos Unitarios Vocant*, 8 Vols (Irenopoli: post 1656), 2:115-246: *Paulus itidem, ut alibi vidimus, monet nos, ut imitatores Dei sumus: et quemadmodum is per Christum peccata nobis condonavit, sic nos invicem condonemus. Quod si Deus ita per Christum nobis peccata condonavit, ut interim ab ipso Christo eorum poenas repetierit, quid vetat, quo minus eos, ex Pauli praescripto, Deum imitate, pro offensis proximi nostri non quidem ab ipso, se dab alio quopiam, ut modo dicebamus, nobis satisfieri curemus?* = 'As we saw elsewhere, Paul likewise instructs us to be imitators of God: just as he forgave our sins through Christ, so we should forgive each other. But if God so forgave our sins through Christ, that he yet demanded the punishments of them from Christ himself, what prevents us, on the basis of Paul's command, as imitators of God, from seeking satisfaction for ourselves for the offences of our neighbour not from the man himself, but from anyone else, as we were just saying?' (GW translation).

⁵ *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 14.

⁶ *Engaging*, p. 15.

⁷ 'Cross Purposes', p. 47.

Paul could therefore deny vengeance in the sphere of human personal conduct, and at the same time ascribe retribution to God, shared in limited part with the ruling authorities. Where Chalke would have us infer that God would never do what he tells us not to do, Paul argues exactly the opposite. God would have *us* not do what *he* does precisely because *he* does it. God says ‘do as I say, not as I do’, and justly so, since he is God and we are not.

1.2) Stephen Travis and Retribution

On another tack, it is argued, most notably by Stephen Travis on whom Professor Green and many others draw, that retribution has little place in the biblical doctrine of punishment as a whole. Travis writes that ‘the judgment of God is to be seen not primarily in terms of retribution, whereby people are “paid back” according to their deeds, but in terms of relationship or non-relationship to Christ.’⁸ Everything in Travis’s work rests on the definition of the nature of retribution itself. This should not surprise us: of course whether or not you find retribution in Scripture depends on how you first define it. At the start of his book he defines retribution as having five key characteristics. His list is drawn from W.H. Moberly’s work, *The Ethics of Punishment*, where it is given as an expansion of Hugo Grotius’s definition in his classic work *De Iure Belli ac Pacis*: punishment is ‘The infliction of an ill suffered for an ill done’. Travis summarizes Moberly thus:

- (1) What is inflicted is an *ill* – something unpleasant.
- (2) It is a *sequel* to some act which has gone before and is disapproved by authority.
- (3) There is some *correspondence* between the punishment and the deed which has evoked it.
- (4) The punishment is *inflicted from outside*, by someone’s voluntary act.
- (5) The punishment is inflicted on the *criminal*, in virtue of his offence.⁹

The emphasis on ‘act’ or ‘deed’ here is vital to Travis’s project. He explains:

We may pose the question whether there is any real place for retribution (in the sense defined above) in the context of personal relationships. People are rewarded or punished not because of their character, but because of some specific overt act which they have done. Retribution operates on a less than fully personal level, and it deals with externals.¹⁰

I wish firstly to take exception to point (4), the definition of the infliction of punishment *being from the outside* as integral to retribution. It is clear that a punishment can in a strong sense flow out of a deed and still be retributive. In a human system of justice we cannot re-design the natural order so that our acts have internal consequences. But with God the creator, it is quite possible for a punishment to be intrinsic, to follow from an act, and yet still to be retributive in character. It might still have all of the other characteristics: it might be an ill, following an act,

⁸ Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God: Divine Retribution in the New Testament* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1986), Preface.

⁹ *Christ*, p. 3, summarizing W.H. Moberly, *The Ethics of Punishment* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 35-36.

¹⁰ *Christ*, p. 5.

corresponding to it, and imposed on the criminal. The kind of ‘if you dig a hole you will fall in it’ material that we get in the Proverbs, can, when the process is seen as God’s process, still be seen as retribution.

There is something very strange going on here in Travis’s use of his sources. The problem is this. Moberly himself agrees with my reading at this point, and explicitly qualifies his fourth point in a way that distances his position from that taken later by Travis. When Moberly states the fourth element, he expresses it like this: ‘(4) The punishment is *inflicted*. It is imposed by somebody’s voluntary act.’ So far so good. But then he continues: ‘Disagreeable consequences which follow wrongdoing by natural causation, as disease or poverty sometimes follow, are not “punishment” unless they are supposed to be deliberately brought about by some superhuman personal agency.’¹¹ In other words, Moberly, in his very definition, states that point (4), externality, would not be required to find retribution in the actions of God. If a punishment is internal rather than external then it may, if it comes from God, still be retributive.

As we realize this, a crack shatters out through much of the exegesis in *Christ and the Judgment of God* because the use of externality to deny retribution is pervasive. Take this comment for example: ‘the Jesus of the synoptic gospels sometimes uses retributive words, and some of these judgment-sayings are expressed in talionic *form*. But the *content* of such sayings generally undermines a strictly retributive interpretation.’¹² How so? Because, for example in the treasure in heaven passage, ‘Jesus pictures people’s destinies as the end-result of their desires rather than as a recompense imposed from outside.’¹³ Now according to Moberly’s definition, this kind of connection between act and consequence, if established by God, is still retributive. At this Symposium Graham MacFarlane and Stuart Murray Williams have also adopted this naturalist view of punishment where it is reduced to being the organic consequence of an action. They too fall prey to the same criticism: if God created the process, then God is involved, and it is his process. The interposition of a mediating natural process between God and the sinner which brings about the punishment does not remove the retributive role of God, it simply shifts its imposition. Instead of being imposed at the moment of punishment, it is set up at creation. Or rather, because God sustains the creation, it is still imposed by God as it happens. In him we live and move and have our being, and that includes the penal processes of creation.

We should of course also note in passing with Howard Marshall that the picture of punishment flowing out of the act by itself will not account for much of the biblical evidence, most notably for events such as the plagues on Egypt and the last judgement. The plagues, as far as I am aware, did not just happen according to the biological processes. It wasn’t just a good year for frogs, gnats, flies and locusts, let alone for the death of firstborn children. Jesus Christ as judge intervenes in history. He stops the progress of world history, he raises the dead, and then he pronounces judgement on them. Left to itself, this would not happen to the world. Much punishment in Scripture is extrinsic. But even that which is not can still maintain the features of retribution.

¹¹ *Ethics*, pp. 35-36.

¹² *Christ*, p. 134.

¹³ *Christ*, p. 134.

Secondly, still on Travis, with a proper theological definition there can also be an account of retribution which does not make it deal with ‘overt acts’ rather than with ‘character’. At the day of judgement, for example, the judgement will be made using the evidence of works. This is clear in Matthew 25:31-46, as well as elsewhere. The deed of giving a drink serves as evidence of an attitude to Jesus himself. Here we are dealing with the theological link between the tree and its fruit. To hold that God is interested in the nature behind the deed does not mean that he cannot therefore punish retributively. There is no obvious reason to prevent God retributively punishing a person for their disposition as well as their acts.

Thirdly, it is clear in Scripture that when God punishes retributively, he punishes relationally. The picture that many of the critics of penal substitution have of retributive punishment is that it is non-relational and impersonal. Note the contrast Travis offers: judgement not as retribution but as ‘relationship or non-relationship to Christ’. There is, however, no reason why the retributive punishment of the sinner should not actually consist of non-relationship to Christ. Travis posits an antithesis where none need be found. Retribution entails two elements, as Grotius made clear. (I am happy to agree with Howard Marshall that it contains more, and that the public, governmental aspect is important). First, ‘an ill suffered *for* an ill done’, an ill *for* an ill on the principle of just desert, as Christ Wright emphasised on Wednesday. Secondly, an ‘*ill suffered* for an ill done’, the infliction of some kind of proportioned pain. So long as the non-relationship with Christ is the deserved result of character or conduct, and so long as it involves some kind of pain (which separation from Christ most surely does), then it is retributive *and* relational. For these three reasons we have no grounds for holding that retribution is incompatible with the justice that God exemplifies or demands in Scripture.

2) Penal substitution conflicts with the doctrine of the Trinity by severing the Persons.

Professor Green argues that ‘any atonement theology that assumes, against Paul, that in the cross God did something “to” Jesus’ is ‘an affront to the Christian doctrine of the triune God’.¹⁴ Following Stephen Sykes, he explains that the problem is with the idea of Jesus as the object of the Father’s action:

The New Testament portrays Golgotha along two story lines—one with God as subject, the other with Jesus as subject. It will not do, therefore, to characterize the atonement as God’s punishment falling on Christ (i.e., God as subject, Christ as object) or as Christ’s appeasement or persuasion of God (Christ as subject, God as object).¹⁵

Or again, specifically on Paul: ‘Paul does not treat God as the subject and Jesus as the object of the cross.’¹⁶ Now if the cross according to penal substitution *were* ‘God as subject, Christ as object’ as Green characterizes it, then we would indeed have

¹⁴ *Recovering*, p. 57.

¹⁵ *Recovering*, p. 113; cf. Sykes, ‘Outline of a Theology of Sacrifice’, in *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology*, ed. S.W. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 294-295), cited in *Recovering*, p. 96.

¹⁶ *Recovering*, p. 96.

problem. But it is not, nor has any thoughtful proponent of penal substitution ever held it to be so in this fashion. Witness John Stott, for example: ‘We must never make Christ the object of God’s punishment or God the object of Christ’s persuasion, for both God and Christ were subjects not objects, taking the initiative together to save sinners’.¹⁷

The reason that no one thinks of the Son simply as Object is that the doctrine of penal substitution has been formed within a conscious, mature doctrine of the Trinity. Penal substitution in fact relies on a careful grounding in Augustine’s principle that since the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are inseparable, so they work inseparably.¹⁸ The principle is plainly stated and applied to the work of Christ by Reformed theologians. John Owen, for example, in the *Death of Death*, puts it like this:

The agent [for which read the Subject] in, and chief author of, this great work of our redemption is the whole blessed Trinity; for all the works which outwardly are of the Deity are undivided and belong equally to each person, their distinct manner of subsistence and order being observed.¹⁹

The Reformed conception of the covenant of redemption between the Persons in eternity shows how Christ is in every action of God *ad extra* the Subject. The Persons of the Trinity covenant with each other in eternity to act together in all of their purposes.²⁰

In Scripture too Christ is plainly the Subject in going to the cross. He lays down his life ‘of his own accord’ (John 10:18), he ‘gave himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20). So in agreement with Professor Green we must absolutely reject the ludicrous railroad illustration where the father switches the points to rescue his passengers and in so doing kills his wandering son.²¹ The son has no idea of what is going on, and presumably should not have been standing around on a railway track in the first place. Let me be clear: this illustration is a total travesty of penal substitution. But the critics of the doctrine have a responsibility more carefully to distinguish the crude from the sophisticated.

Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ was the Subject of the atonement. But is there a problem with him also being the *willing* Object of the Father’s act? Clearly he cannot be the Object pure and simple as Stott explains, because an Object pure and simple does not will what happens to him. But might he not be the willing Subject and willing Object? The Subject purposing what happens to him as the Object? It should be obvious that we cannot on the basis of Trinitarian theology say that the Son can *never* be the willing Object of the Father’s activity. Witness the description of the multiple activities where the Father is the Subject and the Son the Object in Scripture: ‘The Father loves the Son’ (John 3:35); the Father sends the Son (John 3:16-17 and *passim*); even ‘the Father has granted the Son also to have life in himself’ (5:26), the

¹⁷ John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 2nd edn (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), p. 151.

¹⁸ *De Trinitate*, I. iv. 7.

¹⁹ *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, i. 3 in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 23 Vols (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 10:163.

²⁰ Hence Owen speaks of ‘An authoritative imposition of the office of Mediator, which Christ closed withal by his voluntary susception of it, willingly undergoing the office’, i. 3; 10:164.

²¹ *Recovering*, p. 141.

Father sets the Son forth as a (Romans 3:25). So no one can deny that the Father acts on the Son, provided we are clear that the Son too wills the action.

More likely then, the problem is meant to be specifically with the activity of laying suffering on the Son. The difficulty here is that there is plain biblical testimony to the Father acting on the Son in the cross, in the suffering of the cross, and specifically in the penal suffering of the cross. In Isaiah 53:6 we are told that ‘the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all’, and then in verse 10 that ‘it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain’. In Mark 14:27 and Matthew 26:31 Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7: ‘You will all become deserters; for it is written, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.’ Interestingly, the Hebrew and the LXX have a second person imperative here, addressed to Yahweh’s sword: ‘Awake, O sword [...] Strike’.²² But in the Gospels this is changed to the first person future, , thus actually emphasising the personal involvement of Yahweh rather than the more impersonal image of the sword: ‘I will strike’. Joel Marcus notes this in a book edited by, yes, Professor Green. He explains that in the Gospels ‘divine responsibility for the attack on the shepherd is made explicit’ in what he describes as a ‘forthright acknowledgement of the divine role in the wounding of the shepherd’.²³ Here then are two statements that the Father purposes the suffering of the cross, even wills the crushing and striking of the Son, who wills the same acts.

It is of further significance that in the context of Isaiah 52-3 the suffering in question is specifically penal. This emerges at the end of the chapter with the use of the two expressions, in verse 11 ‘he shall bear their iniquities’ (*sḥal ‘āwōn*), in verse 12 ‘he bore the sin of many’ (*nḥsḥ +ē**). These phrases (and the reversed pairings) are used widely in the Old Testament to describe bearing sin, guilt, and punishment (e.g. *inter alia* Genesis 4:13; Leviticus 5:17; Numbers 5:31; 14:34; Lamentation 5:7). Here, in Isaiah 53, it is evident from the connection with sin and the suffering of the Servant that they have a penal connotation. So we have in verses 6 and 10 statements that the Lord willed the suffering of the Servant in a context where that suffering is defined as being penal, and indeed atoning (verse 5). Likewise, in the New Testament we have the Father condemning sin in the flesh of the Son (Rom. 8:3). There is therefore biblical testimony to the action of the Father toward the Son, specifically in laying iniquity on him and condemning it. We state again what has been stated before: he punishes the sin which has been transferred to Christ, not Christ regarded in and of himself, with whom because of this very act he is well pleased.

We must also note that the reverse is the case with the Persons of the Trinity. Just as the Son cannot be the Object pure and simple, but can be the willing Subject and Object, so the Father cannot be the Object pure and simple, but can be the willing Subject and Object. This emerges most clearly not in the doctrine of the cross but in the intercessory work of the Son and the Spirit. The Son intercedes with the Father for us (Rom. 8:34). So too the Holy Spirit intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26). The Father is the willing Subject and Object of the intercessory work of the Son and the Spirit. If we

²² , hifil imperative masculine singular of ; , 1st person singular future indicative active of .

²³ ‘The Role of Scripture in the Gospel Passion Narratives’, in *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity*, ed. John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1995), pp. 205-233 (pp. 225, 226).

deny that the Persons of the Trinity can be at once willing Subject and Object of one another's actions, then we must deny not only penal substitution, but also the love of each Person for the others, the sending of the Son, and the intercession of the Son and the Spirit. Most seriously, if we so reduce the distinction between the Persons as to hold that one Person cannot act on another, then it is hard to see how we are not Modalists.

3) Penal substitution thrives in the soil of modern Western individualism

Professor Green asserts that penal substitution coheres fully with 'the emphasis on autonomous individualism characteristic of so much of the modern middle class in the West'.²⁴ This is actually a very strange line of criticism of penal substitution, since penal substitution itself *relies on* a denial of individualism. No proponent of penal substitution has ever conceived of it as the transfer of punishment between two wholly unrelated persons. Indeed, the more individualistic penal substitution becomes, the less tenable it is, since it holds precisely that the guilty individual is *not* punished for his or her sins. Rather, corporate categories are powerfully at work in the historic doctrine of penal substitution.

The corporate-covenantal context of penal substitution is clearest in the seventeenth century, the period when it reached its zenith in response to the Socinian critique. Here is Owen setting out his emphasis on the corporate Christ as the ground for substitutionary punishment:

He [God] might punish the elect either in their own persons, or in their surety standing in their room and stead; and when he is punished, they also are punished: for in this point of view the federal head and those represented by him are not considered as distinct, but as one; for although they are not one in respect of personal unity, they are, however, one,—that is, one body in mystical union, yea, *one mystical Christ*;—namely, the surety is the head, those represented by him the members; and when the head is punished, the members also are punished.²⁵

What we find here is not an account of penal substitution which is, as Professor Green charged, mechanistic, as if it stemmed from Cartesian contraptions. Rather it is mystical, stressing as it does the spiritual bond between the believer and Christ.

It is also notable that there are patristic examples of the consciously reflective use of union with Christ to explain the justice of penal substitution. Here, for example, is Eusebius of Caesarea:

And how can He make our sins His own, and be said to bear our iniquities, except by our being regarded as His body, according to the apostle, who says: 'Now ye are the body of Christ, and severally members?' And by the rule that 'if one member suffer all the members suffer with it,' so when the many members suffer and sin, He too by the laws of sympathy (since the Word of God was pleased to take the form of a slave and to be knit into the common tabernacle of us all) takes into Himself the labours of the suffering members, and makes our sicknesses His, and suffers all our woes and labours by the laws of love. And the Lamb of God

²⁴ *Recovering*, p. 213.

²⁵ *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, ii. 15, in *Works*, 10:598.

not only did this, but was chastised on our behalf (ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κολασθεῖς), and suffered a penalty (τιμωρίαν ὑποσχών) He did not owe, but which we owed because of the multitude of our sins; and so He became the cause of the forgiveness of our sins, because He received death for us, and transferred to Himself the scourging, the insults, and the dishonour, which were due to us, and drew down on Himself the apportioned curse, being made a curse for us. And what is that but the price of our souls? And so the oracle says in our person: ‘By his stripes we were healed,’ and ‘The Lord delivered him for our sins,’ with the result that uniting Himself to us and us to Himself, and appropriating our sufferings, He can say, ‘I said, Lord, have mercy on me, heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee’ [...].²⁶

Hence we find even in the early church a thoroughly theological account of the unique justice of substitutionary atonement. If penal substitution really is as Chalke says ‘not even as old as the pews in many of our church buildings’, then there must be some very old pews out there somewhere.²⁷

There is an irony here. It is in fact the critics of penal substitution who have embraced individualism, not its proponents. Here is the view, for example, of the Church of England’s 1995 Doctrine Commission report *The Mystery of Salvation*: ‘in the moral sphere each person must be responsible for their own obligations. Moral responsibility is ultimately incommunicable’.²⁸ Penal substitution is denied in this report because the report endorses individualism. If, as Professor Green argues, we are heading into a post-modern culture which holds to ‘a communal accounting of human nature’, then penal substitution has a bright future and will preach well.²⁹ Not that we should ever determine what we preach by what we think the natural mind will accept: presumably we all have more confidence in the power of the Spirit than to do that!

4) Penal substitution is a solipsistic doctrine:

First, it is claimed that penal substitution cannot make sense of the life of Jesus. It may be true that the link has not been made sufficiently clearly, but it certainly can be made. Let me give you one very important example. Recent New Testament scholarship, for instance the work of N.T. Wright, has shown how Jesus is depicted in the Gospels as the one in whom the destiny of Israel is fulfilled. Jesus, the

²⁶ *Demonstratio Evangelica*, x. 1; the text from *The Proof of the Gospel*, ed. and tr. W.J. Ferrar, 2 Vols (London: SPCK; New York: Macmillan, 1920) is available online at:

http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_de_12_book10.htm. Likewise Cyril of Alexandria, *De adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate*, iii. 100-102; *PG*, 68:293, 296: γέγονε δὲ ἄνθρωπος ὁ Μονογενῆς, καὶ τῷ θανάτῳ φυσικῶς ἐνεχόμενον πεφόρηκε σῶμα, καὶ κεχηρημάτικε σὰρξ, ἵνα ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀνατλάς τὸν ἐξ ἁμαρτίας ἡμῖν ἐπαρτηθέντα θάνατον, καταργήσῃ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, καὶ παύσῃ λοιπὸν ἐγκαλοῦντα τὸν Σατανᾶν ὡς ἐκτετικῶτων ἡμῶν ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ Χριστῷ τῶν εἰς ἁμαρτίαν αἰτιαμάτων τὰς δίκας: αἴρει γὰρ ἡμῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας, καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν ὀδυνᾶται, κατὰ τὴν τοῦ προφήτου φωνήν. Ἡ οὐχὶ τῷ μάλωπι αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς ἰάθημεν; = ‘The Only-begotten was made man, bore a body by nature at enmity with death, and became flesh, so that, enduring the death which was hanging over us as the result of our sin, he might abolish sin; and further, that he might put an end to the accusations of Satan, inasmuch as we have paid in Christ himself the penalties for the charges of sin against us (ὡς ἐκτετικῶτων ἡμῶν ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ Χριστῷ τῶν εἰς ἁμαρτίαν αἰτιαμάτων τὰς δίκας): ‘For he bore our sins, and was wounded because of us’, according to the voice of the prophet. Or are we not healed by his wounds?’ (GW translation).

²⁷ ‘Cross Purposes’, p. 45.

²⁸ *The Mystery of Salvation* (London: Church House, 1995, repr. 1997), p. 212.

²⁹ *Recovering*, p. 29.

representative Messiah of Israel, is the New Israel. As such, like Israel, he is tempted in the wilderness. Yet, unlike Israel, he stands. In significant senses, Israel in the first century remains in exile. Jesus is the one who as the representative of Israel is exiled on the cross and in his resurrection returns from exile. He thus renews Israel and opens the door to the blessing to come through her on the nations. This theme explains much of the teaching and many of the symbolic actions of Jesus. Here then is a dominant aspect of the life of Jesus. Yet here too we have, rooted in the life of Jesus, the pattern of penal substitution. Jesus is Israel and he is exiled. Exile, of course, is the punishment for Israel's disobedience, and Jesus takes it on himself as the new Israel. He then rises and brings forgiveness having borne the penalty for sin. Now from this historical basis penal substitution explains how the curse borne by Jesus was not just the curse of the Jews, but the curse of all those under bondage. And so it is very clearly tied to the life of Jesus as the new Israel. This is one example, but it may begin to make the point.

Second, it is asserted that penal substitution cannot make sense of the cosmic scope of the work of Christ on the cross.³⁰ Professor Green writes: 'A gospel that allows me to think of my relationship with God apart from the larger human family and the whole cosmos created by God—can it be said that this gospel is any gospel at all?'.³¹ Let it be said that we must affirm the personal relationship with God: every individual's greatest need is reconciliation with God. But clearly the *merely* personal is inadequate. Penal substitution actually explains very well the cosmic effect of the cross. The narrative of Genesis 2-3 shows that the fall disordered the whole creation, with the serpent seeking to rule Eve, and Eve Adam, and Adam God. The whole resulting complex of woe was the death threatened in Genesis 2:17. The serpent said that man would not die, but he was wrong. Though he did not die bodily at once, he died spiritually. To put the entire creation right, to reverse the effects of sin, to reorder all of the different relations, something had to be done with that curse of spiritual death. Penal substitution teaches that on the cross the Lord Jesus Christ exhausted the disordering curse in our place. It is thus that there can be resurrection and new creation, because the curse, the punishment, has been spent. Penal substitution is therefore the prerequisite for a strong doctrine of the resurrection as the beginning of the new creation, not a detractor from it. If the penalty has not been born by Christ, then the creation is still under the curse, still disrupted, incapable of being renewed. It is deniers of penal substitution who advocate an atonement doctrine that fails to account for the impact of the work of Christ on the whole cosmos.

Third, it is alleged that penal substitution cannot ground the work of sanctification in the life of the believer subsequent to conversion. Here we need to remember the link in Paul's theology between the definitive death of the believer in Christ, and the on-going death of the believer day by day. This is particularly clear in Romans 6: we have been baptised into the death of Christ (v. 3), we have died with him (v. 5). Therefore, we must consider ourselves dead to sin (v. 11). This idea of being united to Christ in his death is integral to penal substitution; it is its explanation of the justice of the transfer of sin to Christ, that we are 'one body in mystical union, yea, *one mystical*

³⁰ Professor Green writes: 'A gospel that allows me to think of my relationship with God apart from the larger human family and the whole cosmos created by God—can it be said that this gospel is any gospel at all?' (p. 213).

³¹ *Recovering*, p. 213.

Christ' as Owen put it.³² So, the logic of the Gospel runs, if we have died with him as he died, as he bore our penalty for us, so we must reckon ourselves dead to sin. The link from penal substitution to sanctification is via their common share in the doctrine of union with Christ.

But what, lastly, about the dark side of this criticism, its accusation that penal substitution, is, as Chalke says, tantamount to a form of child abuse?³³ The claim is that any infliction of pain on a child by a parent is unjust, and that penal substitution mandates such infliction. There is an immediate problem here with the criticism, namely that the Lord Jesus Christ when he died was a child in the sense that he was a son, but not in the sense that he was a minor. As an adult, he had a mature will which could choose to co-operate or not with the will of his Father. So we are in fact looking at a father and an adult son who will together for the father to inflict suffering on the son, as we have seen in our Trinitarian exploration.

But there is a major problem here for the critics of penal substitution. While they have used the feminist critique of the cross as a critique of penal substitution, it is in its original form a critique not of penal substitution but of the Christian doctrine of redemption generally. It attacks the general idea that the Father willed the *suffering* of the Son, not the specific idea that he willed the penal substitutionary suffering of the Son. Let me give you the criticism, as found in the work of Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker:

The central image of Christ on the cross as the savior of the world communicates the message that suffering is redemptive. [...] The message is complicated further by the theology that says Christ suffered in obedience to his Father's will. Divine child abuse is paraded as salvific and the child who suffers "without even raising a voice" is lauded as the hope of the world.³⁴

Furthermore, it is evident that Brown and Parker attack not just the idea that Jesus was a passive sufferer, but even the idea that he was the active Subject of the cross, an idea Green endorses. If Jesus was active in accepting his suffering, then we have a model of the *victim* of suffering being responsible for it. Such a model will mandate blaming victims.³⁵

For many feminists their criticism results in the rejection of Christianity because it undeniably involves the idea that God purposed the sufferings of Christ. Others try to rescue a re-invented theology, but I have to say I am with the rejectionists. If purposed redemptive suffering is an insurmountable problem, then Christianity must go. The child abuse problem in their minds remains with *any* model of the atonement which maintains divine sovereignty, even in a limited form. Unless we remove the suffering of the Son from the realm of events over which God rules, then God wills

³² See above n. 25.

³³ 'Cross Purposes', p. 47.

³⁴ Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, 'For God So Loved the World?', in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim, 1989), pp. 1-30 (p. 2).

³⁵ Here is how they criticise Jurgen Moltman's statement that Jesus suffered actively: 'Jesus is responsible for his death on the cross, just as a woman who walks alone at night on a deserted street is to blame when she is raped', 'For God So Loved', p. 18.

it.³⁶ Hence there is a trajectory from unease with penal substitution to a denial of the rule of God over the cross, and thence, we may presume, the world. In the more frank writers, this trajectory emerges clearly. J. Denny Weaver, for example, in arguing for a non-violent view of the atonement which he terms ‘narrative Christus Victor’, sees that to succeed he must remove the cross from the plan and purpose of God. He explains that Jesus was not sent to die, that his death was not the will of God, that it was not needed or aimed at by God.³⁷ Yet in terms of the metaphysics of the divine relation to creation, even this view is unsustainable. So long as God sustains the world in which the Son suffers, then in a strong sense he wills the suffering of the Son. If he does not stop history as the first blow is struck, then he wills that the Son suffer. There is something which prevents him intervening to rescue his beloved Son, some purpose he intends to achieve through the suffering, and therefore a strong sense in which even such a diminished god as Weaver’s wills the suffering. If someone else had wrested from God his work in sustaining the world, if we lived and moved and had our being *elsewhere*, then perhaps we could say that God did not will the suffering of the Son. But my hope is that none of the participants in this debate think that. Which means that any view where God maintains control, even at arm’s length, succumbs to the feminist criticism. Their target is not just penal substitution.

We therefore need to ask about that criticism itself. Are they right? They are evidently not so with regard to penal substitution itself. According to penal substitution, the cross does not have the character simply of suffering, but of necessary penal suffering for a good end. It is in this sense ‘violent’, but not reducible to the category of ‘violence’. Can we conceive of scenarios in which an adult son and father rightly together will the suffering of the son? Indeed we can, we can imagine endless such scenarios, such as a father who directs teams of Médecins Sans Frontières, sending a son into an area where he knows the son may suffer greatly. He wills it, the son wills to go. There is no injustice here, because the purpose is good. The same applies in the case of penal substitution. In fact the feminist criticism really only applies when we deny penal substitution, because it is then that we are in danger of denying the necessity of the suffering of the Son. According to penal substitution the necessity of punishment arises from God’s own nature and his divine government.³⁸ He is bound only by who he is, by faithfulness to himself. On the other hand, if we opt for some kind of voluntarist account wherein the suffering of the Son is not a necessity arising from divine justice, then we are left with a very difficult question, with the feminists’ question at its most acute. If God can freely remit sins, we must ask, why did the Father send the Son purposing his death, as Acts 2:23 says? The more deeply we grasp the Trinity, the love of the Father for the Son, the more we will ask why a

³⁶ Here I agree with Hans Boersma in *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 41: ‘Only by radically limiting Christ’s redemptive role to his life (so that his life becomes an example to us) or by absolutely dissociating God from any role in the cross (turning the crucifixion into a solely human act) can we somehow avoid dealing with the difficulty of divine violence.’ Cf. p. 117.

³⁷ *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 132: ‘In narrative Christus Victor, Jesus’ mission is certainly not about tricking the devil. Neither did the Father send him for the specific purpose of dying, nor was his mission about death [...]. And since Jesus’ mission was to make the reign of God visible, his death was not the will of God as it would be if it is a debt payment owed to God. In narrative Christus Victor, the death of Jesus is clearly the responsibility of the forces of evil, and it is not needed by or aimed at God.’

³⁸ *Contra* Joel Green: ‘Within a penal substitution model, God’s ability to love and relate to humans is circumscribed by something outside of God—that is, an abstract concept of justice instructs God as to how God must behave.’ (*Recovering*, p. 147).

loving Father would lay the burden of suffering on his eternally beloved Son. Penal substitution preserves a necessity, which alone explains why this needed to happen as part of God's saving plan. Remove the necessity, deny penal substitution, and *then* you are left with the unjustifiable suffering of the Son. Then you feel the full force of the feminists criticism, because you have the Father willing the suffering of the Son for no necessary reason.

For instance, Christus Victor by itself without penal substitution does not explain why Christ needed to suffer like this. Deny penal substitution and you ham-string Christus Victor. Hence it is that in Colossians 2:13-15 the victory over the rulers and authorities is accomplished by forensic means, by the cancellation of the legal bond (Colossians 2:14). Penal substitution is central in terms of its explanatory power with regard to the justice of the other models, and that claim affirms rather than denies the existence of other models. Without penal substitution, the rejectionist feminists are right that the Father has no sufficient reason to inflict suffering on the Son. A cross without penal substitution therefore would indeed mandate the unjustified infliction of suffering on children, because it would have no basis in justice.

Conclusion

Let me conclude. It is no escalation to say that proponents of penal substitution are charged with advocating a biblically unfounded, systematically misleading, and pastorally lethal doctrine. If the attack is simply on a caricature of the doctrine, all well and good. Then the way forward is simple: the critics need to say that they do believe in penal substitution itself and just not in warped forms of it. But if the accusation is indeed an accusation against penal substitution itself, as I suspect it is, then I fear that we cannot carry on as we are. As much as I would like to, and mindful of the injunctions of the Lord Jesus Christ himself to seek peace, I find it impossible to agree that this is just an intra-mural, within-the-family dispute, when it has been acknowledged by all parties that we are arguing about who God is, about the creedal doctrine of the Trinity, about the consequences of sin, about how we are saved, and about views which are held to encourage the abuse of women and children. So long as these issues *are* the issues, and I believe that they have been rightly identified, then I cannot see how we can remain allied together without placing unity above these truths which are undeniably central to the Christian faith. I say this with a heavy heart.