

JUSTYN TERRY

The Justifying Judgement of God

Justyn Terry argues our contemporary preaching of the gospel message of the cross would be improved by making better use of the much neglected and misunderstood subject of divine judgement. He considers the breadth of the biblical use of judgement and argues that judgement as a metaphor of atonement provides the wider context in which penal substitution should be understood. Furthermore, the metaphor of judgement can be a means of co-ordinating disparate biblical images of the atonement. Expounding Barth's 'The Judge Judged in our Place' in his *Church Dogmatics*, he proposes that judgement is the primary metaphor of atonement and that redemption, victory and sacrifice are best understood in its light as subordinate metaphors to judgement.

Introduction: Retrieving judgement

It is surprisingly rare these days to hear a sermon on the atonement. The cross is preached, certainly, but mainly as theodicy, as a consideration of the suffering of God in relation to human suffering, largely inspired by Moltmann's *The Crucified God*.¹ What we lack are sermons on the cross as the power of God for salvation for those who believe. These seem rather out of fashion at the moment; perhaps they are deemed too authoritarian for the present age. Whatever the reason, preaching the reconciling work of Christ is in decline. One recent writer even goes so far as to speak of the tacit 'abandonment of atonement.'²

Maybe this is not so surprising after a century during which views of the atonement went through such substantial revisions. It began with the battle between the 'subjectivists' (those such as Hastings Rashdall and R.S. Franks, who stressed the need for moral reform in response to Christ crucified) and the 'objectivists' (writers like R.W. Dale and James Denney, who expounded Christ's work in terms of penal substitution). Then, in 1930, Gustaf Aulén reintroduced the victory motif into the debate in his *Christus Victor*,³ which spawned numerous attempts to suggest how the different elements of the atonement should be arranged. By the end of the century, a near consensus had emerged that there are many images of the atonement – for example, sacrifice, redemption, victory and judgement – which are best understood as windows each offering a partial view of the atonement.

1 J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, SCM Press, London 1972/1973.

2 Colin Grant, 'The Abandonment of Atonement' in *Kings Theological Review* IX, 1986, p 1. Grant was drawing on an essay by D.M. MacKinnon in which he observed the readiness of theologians to 'drop (without conscious acknowledgement) the concept

of atonement'. D.M. MacKinnon, 'Subjective and Objective Conceptions of Atonement' in F.G. Healey (ed.), *Prospects for Theology: Essays in Honour of H.H. Farmer*, Nisbet, Letchworth 1966, p 170.

3 G. Aulén, *Christus Victor*, SPCK, London 1930/1931.

But what are preachers to say when we proclaim the gospel message? Focus on one of these images and try to suppress that nagging sense that we have not told the whole story? Or present all these New Testament images and risk baffling those who are inquiring about the Christian faith? This may be one reason why presenting the cross as theodicy has become so popular.

In what follows I challenge such a pluralist view of the doctrine of atonement and suggest that one of the New Testament metaphors should be given priority over the others. The one I propose that should enjoy such favoured status is probably the least favoured of them all at the moment: judgement. For many people judgement is inseparable from judgementalism, and that is one of the last taboos of the 'just do it' generation. The recent report by the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *The Mystery of Salvation*, articulated the opinion of many when it said:

[T]here is little doubt that the traditional patriarchal images of God as king, lord, judge, warrior, etc., that belong to the traditional vocabulary of atonement with its central themes of law, wrath, guilt, punishment and acquittal, leave many Christians cold and signally fail to move many people young and old, who wish to take steps towards faith. These images do not correspond to the spiritual search of many people today and therefore hamper the Church's mission.⁴

Such a view is by no means limited to Anglicans. The three year *Revised Common Lectionary*, used in the Roman Catholic, Methodist, United Reformed and some Baptist Churches as well as in the Anglican Communion, both reflects and exacerbates this tendency to avoid the subject of divine judgement. In a sequence of readings in a given biblical book, passages about the judgement of God are frequently omitted, especially on Sundays when they are most likely to be a sermon text. Perhaps the most notorious case in point is the reading for the Principal Service on the Seventh Sunday of Easter in Year C, when the verses to be read from Revelation 22 are specified as: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21. The verses omitted are: 'Outside [the gates of the new Jerusalem] are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood' (v 15), and, amazingly,

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of this prophecy God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy City, which are described in this book. (Rev. 22:18-19)⁵

Preachers face temptation enough to say nothing about verses that refer to the judgement of God when they occur in a sermon text but if they do not even arise there is an even graver danger that this aspect of the counsel of God will not be declared.

Much of this avoidance of the subject is, I believe, due to a misunderstanding of what the judgement of God means. God's judgement in the Bible is not, as many assume, simply about condemnation. It encompasses the whole process of bringing

4 The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *The Mystery of Salvation*, Church House Publishing, London 1995, p 113.

5 Biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1989.

justice. It includes evaluation, verdict, and vindication of the righteous as well as the condemnation of the wicked.⁶ As such, judgement may be helpfully compared to certain acts of human judgement such as an OFSTED inspection. The judges come and evaluate the quality of education. They then present their verdict and offer vindication or condemnation (or, more likely, some combination of the two). But their aim is to build up and not to destroy. Declaring a school to be a 'failing school' is a last resort, and even then the hope is that a new team can be brought in to 'turn it round', with all its resonance with repentance. So it is with the judgement of God: it is directed at bringing salvation. As such it is an act of grace and mercy and therefore good news for all who long for God's righteousness and peace.

But it is not only because judgement is much neglected that I believe it needs further consideration. It is also because, understood in this broader sense, judgement can help draw together the New Testament atonement images, enabling us to present the gospel more clearly and effectively. The Scottish Congregationalist, P.T. Forsyth, suggested that judgement might help to co-ordinate images of atonement.⁷ So too did the Swiss Reformed theologian, Karl Barth, who provides a highly developed account of the doctrine of reconciliation in terms of judgement.⁸ In order to see the significance of this it is necessary to take Barth's discussion of reconciliation through judgement and relate it to what he says about redemption, victory and sacrifice.

Jesus, the judge who sits upon the throne

The first step towards re-evaluating what we mean by judgement is to be clear what we mean when we describe Jesus as the judge. To do this we must consider the biblical context from which the title derives. We must begin, following Barth, by comparing the work of Jesus the judge to that of the Old Testament judges (IV/1, p 217).⁹ When God raised up such a judge and empowered him or her by his Spirit it was in order to deliver the covenant people from their enemies by executing God's just judgement against those enemies, as well as to administer justice amongst the people whom he or she had delivered. This judging was subsequently to become the work of Israel's kings, most notably King David and King Solomon. Such an understanding of the role of the judge is not limited to the Old Testament. As Barth goes on to say, '[I]n the New Testament – a fact which was later forgotten – the coming of the Judge means basically the coming of the Redeemer and Saviour' (IV/1, p 217).

6 See, for example, the separation of the sheep from the goats: Matt. 25:31-46. For judgement as vindication of the righteous see Ezek. 20:36-44; Dan. 7:22; Matt. 12:36f; Rom. 2:5-11 and 2 Cor. 5:10. For judgement as condemnation of the wicked see Exod. 12:12; Num. 33:4; Deut. 32:41; 2 Chron. 24:24; Ezek. 11:10f; 20:26-44; Hab. 1:12; Mal. 3:5; Matt. 12:36f; Rom. 2:5-11 and 2 Cor. 5:10.

7 Forsyth writes that 'judgement is a far greater idea than sacrifice' (P.T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, Independent Press, London 1910/1938, p 146) and speaks of

'redemptive judgement' and 'the sanctifying effect of judgement' (P.T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, Latimer House, London 1917/1948, pp 187 and 83).

8 Barth's principal account is in his *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, part 1 (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1975, pp 273ff. Subsequent references to the *Church Dogmatics* will be located in the main text and given in the form (IV/1).

9 At least one of these judges, Deborah (Judges 4:4), was a woman and so judgement should not be seen as a patriarchal image (*contra* the Doctrine Commission).

We therefore have to move away from seeing the judge as someone who wears a wig and sits on a bench in a law-court. That would reduce the task of Jesus the judge to being that of a law-enforcer rather than recognizing his position as the lawgiver. It would also suggest that there is no prior relationship between the judge and those he judges. In fact, judgement is the coming to God's people of their true king. This judge is the one whose task it is to promote the welfare of all his subjects. He is, as Emil Brunner describes him, the 'royal Judge'.¹⁰

But when we apply this title of 'royal judge' to Jesus we mean more than simply to claim that Jesus is an earthly ruler. He is the divine judge who does the work of God. As Barth says, 'it is not just any judgement which He exercises and executes, but the judgement of God' (IV/1, p 219). That is what makes this judgement so final, so decisive. It is 'ultimate judgement' (IV/1, p 219). There is no higher court to which appeal can be made. As such, when Barth applies the designations 'judge' or 'king' to Christ, it is important to recognize that he does so in a metaphorical fashion.¹¹ That is to say meaning from one sphere of reality (here, earthly rule), is being used to express that of another (divine rule). As with all metaphors, it must not be pressed too far. There is a uniqueness about Jesus the Messiah that requires us to transcend the language of kingship. But, with that in mind, we can properly say that Jesus is the judge who sits upon the throne.

Jesus, the judge who represents sinners and substitutes himself for us

The next question is 'What kind of judge is this Jesus? Is he good? Is he fair? Is he merciful?' The Gospels have a great deal to say about how astonishingly good and fair Jesus is. His judgement is not subject to the whims of the pressure groups or to political expediency. But is he merciful? Barth takes us to the heart of the matter when he explains that Jesus is the judge who submits himself to God's judgement. It is, of course, an amazing claim. He is not suggesting that Jesus himself did anything wrong or ceased to be the one who lives righteously and judges justly. But he is saying that Jesus takes upon himself the wrong-doing of other people by choosing to shoulder responsibility for their sin.¹²

[Jesus] gives Himself... to the fellowship of those who are guilty [of evil-doing and enmity against God], and not only that, but He makes their evil case His own. He is above this fellowship and confronts it and judges it and condemns it in that He takes it upon Himself to be the bearer and representative, to be responsible for this case, to expose Himself to the accusation and sentence which must inevitably come upon us in this case. (IV/1, p 236)

So we can say, 'Yes, he is merciful, astonishingly merciful'. And he shows his mercy by becoming the representative of sinners, by taking the condemnation that rightly comes against sinners upon himself. Jesus should not, therefore, be regarded as someone unconnected with us who does something to us from the outside. Rather

10 E. Brunner, *The Mediator*, Lutterworth Press, London 1927/1934, p 464.

11 See C.E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1988, pp 109ff.

12 In so doing Barth acknowledges his debt to Luther and his assertion that Christ was willing to stand as 'the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, blasphemer etc. that ever was or could be in all the world.' (M. Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, James Clarke and Co., London 1535/1953, p 269).

he is the one who stands in relation to us sinners as the one who voluntarily bears our sin.

For the fact that God has given Himself in His Son to suffer the divine judgement on us... does not mean that it is not executed on us but that it is executed on us in full earnest and in all its reality – really and definitely because He Himself took our place in it. That Jesus Christ died for us does not mean, therefore, that we do not have to die, but that we have died in and with Him, that as the people we were we have been done away with and destroyed, that we are no longer there and have no more future. (IV/1, p 295)

Barth's use of the term 'judge' helps us understand what he is saying here. As a royal judge, Jesus represents his people. The destiny of this one person carries the destiny of them all; any victories or defeats for this ruler are victories or defeats for his people. He is able to do what the young David was willing to do when the people of Israel were threatened by Goliath: to take on the giant on their behalf. Barth is therefore able to expand on how it is that an action which we cannot accomplish ourselves, nor even contribute towards, namely purification from sin, is achieved by Christ not apart from us, but by standing with us and for us as our representative.

But not only is Jesus our *representative*, he is also our *substitute*. This is a repeated theme of the Gospels, but it is seen especially clearly in the trial of Jesus when Pilate releases Barabbas:

The Jesus who was condemned to be crucified in the place of Barabbas (Mark 15:6-15) stands on the one side, and Barabbas who was pardoned at the expense of Jesus stands on the other; for he was not crucified, nor did he really contribute to his own liberation which came about when sentence was pronounced on that other. (IV/1, p 230)

Jesus exchanged his own position as the obedient Son of God for that of this disobedient son of Adam. As representative of sinful humanity standing under the judgement of God, however, he bore not just this one man's sin but the sin of the world, allowing it to take its course to death in him.

It was to fulfil this judgement on sin that the Son of God as man took our place as sinners. He fulfils it – the man in our place – by completing our work in the omnipotence of the divine Son, by treading the way of sinners to its bitter end in death, in destruction, in the limitless anguish of separation from God, by delivering up sinful man and sin in His own person to the non-being which is properly theirs, the non-being, the nothingness to which man has fallen victim as a sinner and towards which he relentlessly hastens. (IV/1, p 253)

The judgement of God in Jesus Christ is thus to be understood essentially as the judgement of the sin of the world in the one who was without sin but who took it upon himself to be the one great sinner and to be judged in the place of sinners.

Judgement and punishment

So how does this judgement of God relate to the subject of punishment? For many evangelicals, myself included, punishment occupies a central place in our understanding of the atonement: Jesus Christ suffered the punishment for our sins in our place, allowing us to be forgiven and set right with God. Where does the view of judgement developed here leave the question of punishment?

We begin by noticing that 'punishment' is actually a word little used in relation to the work of Christ in the New Testament. Its influence mainly stems from Isa. 53. However, because our sin calls down God's wrath to bring the sinner to destruction, we can properly say that Christ bore our punishment for sin since Christ has made our sinful situation his own. Barth himself affirms, 'We can say that He fulfils this judgement by suffering the punishment which we have all brought on ourselves' (IV/1, p 253).

This punishment is no fit of rage; it is the natural expression of God's fatherly love for his unruly children, who depend on him totally for their well-being. Barth does not, however, want punishment to become the major focus of this doctrine, whether in terms of Christ's suffering delivering us from future suffering, or of his punishment satisfying the wrath of God. The punishment he suffered does indeed deliver us from the punishment we deserve, but the punishment Christ endured is not to be understood mechanistically as a means by which the burden of our sin is released. Punishment is a consequence of a judgement that yields condemnation, not a process that must be undergone in its own right. Barth thereby distinguishes his position from some forms of penal substitution theory, not by denying that penalty and substitution have a vital place in the doctrine of reconciliation, but by reassessing what that place is. It is not so much that Jesus bore the punishment that we deserved in order to save us from it, but that Jesus bore the judgement of God against sin as the representative sinner, and thereby delivered us from the punishment which that judgement justly demanded.

Setting punishment in the wider context of judgement offers two significant advantages to penal substitution theories. Firstly, it makes the account of the atonement more relational: this is our righteous ruler acting in accordance with his own holiness for our good, not merely complying with the demands of some abstract law. In an age that sets such a premium on relationships, this point matters a great deal. Secondly, it avoids the danger of appearing to set an angry Father against an innocent Son. Jesus has been entrusted all judgement by the Father and willingly submits to his own judgement against human sin when he bears the condemnation justly deserved by sinful humanity. This is especially important in the light of the recent criticisms of penal substitution theories made by Steve Chalke.¹³ It is not cosmic child abuse, as he and others are suggesting; nor is it justification for judgementalism. It is the grace of the Trinitarian God acting for the salvation of his creation. Setting penal substitution in this broader context of judgement can, therefore, greatly strengthen our proclamation of the gospel message.

¹³ See S. Chalke, 'Cross Purposes' in *Christianity*, September 2004, pp 45-48.

The judgement of death

But what is the form which this judgement takes? This is a question where Barth offers us very significant help. He says that the sign of judgement is death. 'Death as it actually encounters us... is the sign of God's judgement on us' (III/2, p 596). What falls upon the living in death is nothing less than the shadow of judgement. As such, death is not to be seen as something essential to being human,¹⁴ but rather as a result of human sin. We find support for this claim in several New Testament texts: Rom. 5:12 ('death came through sin'); Rom. 6:23 ('the wages of sin is death'); Rom. 8:13 ('if you live according to the flesh you will die') and Jas. 1:15 ('sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death'). Barth, then, sees death as the stark and unavoidable evidence that we live under the judgement of God. And when Jesus died, he submitted to that judgement, the judgement on sin that results in death.¹⁵

We can therefore say that when Christ died he was judged. It was not the degree of pain Jesus endured or the amount of blood he shed that makes his passion effective in cleansing us from sin. The mode of his death helps us understand what kind of judgement he was under but it is not required in order to establish his death as one under the judgement of God. Death is always to be seen as the judgement of God.¹⁶

The vindication of resurrection

The resurrection of Christ can also be understood in terms of divine judgement if we remember again that judgement is not just about condemnation. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is God's verdict of vindication. It is, in the first place, the vindication of God himself. God did not ignore or excuse sin, nor did he destroy all sinners, but instead he brought sin down to destruction in the death of Christ. Secondly, it is the vindication of Jesus Christ, showing that he had been fully obedient to his Father. This is his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased (Mark 1:11), his holy One whom he would not allow to see decay (Ps. 16:10). Thirdly, it is the vindication of sinners who repent and put their trust in him. They are raised to new life in Christ. The resurrection of Christ is an act of unimaginable grace and mercy undertaken by the Father in the Son through the Spirit. If it had not been foretold, it could not have been foreseen. Understanding the resurrection as vindication, therefore, gives it the decisive place it commands in the Gospel accounts without making it an inevitable sequel to Christ's death, nor allowing it to loom so large as to obscure the central significance of the cross. It is instead the indispensable evidence that the judgement of almighty God has fallen on Jesus Christ in his crucifixion and revealed his perfect righteousness.

14 We should note here that Barth also wants to give a positive assessment to the value of death in providing a limited time span (III/2, p 557), distinguishing it from the second death, which is corruptive and unnatural (III/2, p 637). However, Barth is not clear here whether that would be true of a world without sin; it might only be a blessing in that it brings an end to suffering in a sinful world rather than actually being part of God's good creation.

15 The connection between the death of Jesus and human sin is made repeatedly in the New Testament: John 1:29; Rom. 4:25; Gal. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:3; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24 and 3:18.

16 We notice in passing that this view makes much of the incarnation, since it was only by taking mortal flesh, as opposed to the immortal 'flesh' of the resurrection body, that Christ was able to bear the sin of the world. However, we do not have space to explore that further here.

In the light of such an understanding of the resurrection we may now see how divine judgement provides justification for sinners who truly turn to Christ; in other words why this divine judgement is good news for a sinful world. It means that sinful humanity is set free from sin and made right before God when we repent and are baptized, because that is how we are united with Christ and with his death as the judgement of God (Rom. 6: 3-11). As such there need be no fear of condemnation at the last judgement as there is for those who face it separate from Christ and unforgiven. The judgement of Jesus Christ can thus be the justification of sinners as well as the justification of God. God is justified in pardoning human sin when we seek his mercy, and sinners are justified by having their sin so pardoned, removing what destroyed communion between God and the world, and reconciling sinners to God.

The justifying judgement of God and the other metaphors of atonement

Developed in this way, we can see that judgement, far from being a negative image to be avoided, is a remarkably rich metaphor of the atonement. It can speak lucidly about the righteous ruler of the world assuming human flesh, taking the sin of the world upon himself as representative and substitute and bringing it to death, then rising from the dead for the justification of God and sinners. So Barth might indeed have a basis for the bold claim he makes towards the end of his section on 'The Judge Judged in our Place':

[T]his is the place for a full-stop. Many further statements may follow, but the stop indicates that this statement is complete in itself, that it comprehends all that follows, and that it can stand alone. (IV/1, p 273)

In the brief discussion of redemption, victory and sacrifice that immediately follows this statement, Barth is therefore not intending to add anything new, although he does admit that without these metaphors we miss 'certain definite insights' (IV/1, p 273). The discussion is rather in order to confirm the completeness of what he has already said in his discussion of judgement. Such is the scope of his discourse on the judgement of Jesus Christ that all other New Testament images of atonement are seen as alternative ways of expressing some of these same ideas.

Barth does not, however, go on to say how judgement might be able to unite these other strands of the atonement. He indicates that they are somehow subordinate to it, but in exactly what sense he does not say. It is to a brief outline of what that relationship might be between judgment and other metaphors that we now turn. We shall do so by following Colin Gunton in treating judgement, victory, redemption and sacrifice as metaphors of atonement, taking these words from their familiar setting into another context in order to illuminate it.¹⁷ We are not attempting to find a grand unified theory of atonement, nor to suggest that

¹⁷ See further, Gunton, *Actuality*. His use of the term 'metaphor' in no way calls into question the reality of the atonement. As he says, 'These biblical metaphors, then, are ways of describing realistically what can be described only in the indirect manner of this kind of language. But an indirect description is still a description of what is really there.' (p 65).

these images provide interlocking *mechanisms* of atonement. It is instead an attempt to place these four atonement metaphors in mutual relationship in the hope of providing a more coherent account of this central Christian doctrine.

The victory of Christ as an act of God's judgement against his enemies and for his obedient people

By referring the work of Jesus the judge to that of the Old Testament judges and kings, Barth provides a connection between the judgement of God and the victory of God. The judge is a warrior king who actively pursues the well-being of his people in order to create and sustain a society of justice and peace. The repeated pattern in the book of Judges is that God allows his people to be overrun by their enemies when they sin, as judgement for their disobedience. Then, when they cry out for mercy and return to the Lord, God raises up a judge to overthrow that enemy. The defeat of these enemies is to be understood as God's judgement against them.¹⁸

We see evidence of victory as the judgement of God when we examine the life of Christ, especially in connection with moments of conflict associated with the devil and his demons. When Jesus is confronted by words of temptation from Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1ff; Luke 4:1ff), from the lips of Simon Peter (Matt. 16:22) and, more implicitly, in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46) and at Golgotha (Matt. 27:40-44), Jesus responds with contradiction.¹⁹ The words of the devil are not merely resisted but exposed for their error and refuted. In other words, they are judged. As Barth says in his consideration of the temptation of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane,

And Satan, the evil one, and the world ruled by him, and the [sinners] as his agents and instruments? Is it not clear that in the prayer prayed in this hour the 'prince of this world' is judged (John 16:11), 'cast out' (John 12:31)? 'He hath nothing in me.' (IV/1, p 272)

We notice here that the prince of this world is judged as he is cast out. The moment of judgement is the moment when the devil is defeated and driven out. It was in his death, the sign of judgement, that Jesus, 'disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them' (Col. 2:15) in order that he 'might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil' (Heb. 2:14). When Jesus judged the sin of the world by bearing that judgement in himself, he thereby triumphed over the prince of this world and the whole dominion of darkness.²⁰

The redemption by Christ as the liberation of his covenant friends brought about through judgement

Closely related to the metaphor of victory is that of redemption. Prisoners of war may be redeemed as a result of military conquest as were Lot and his family by Abram; and slaves may be set free from their bondage by the defeat of those who enslave them, as the Hebrews were through the ten plagues and the drowning of the Egyptian army (Ex. 14). The judgement of God, which reveals itself as punishment on the enemies of Israel, is also the means of liberation for the people of God (Ex. 6:6).

18 See Exod. 12:12; Deut. 9:4-6; 32:41 and Isa. 10:12.

19 See Barth, IV/1, pp 260-264.

20 The benefits of this victory are therefore not limited to human beings. It is for the salvation, 'of the whole cosmos' (III/2, p 501), because God's judgement is universal in its extent.

By describing Jesus as the royal judge, Barth suggests how redemption might be related to judgement in the work of Christ: redemption is the liberation of God's covenant friends brought about through judgement. The redemption of the world occurred when Christ died. It was then that he gave up his life as a ransom for many. It was by undergoing the judgement of God in death that Christ redeemed his kinsmen. He hung on the cross under the condemnation of God in order to vindicate his people, thus paying the ransom that set them free. By undergoing judgement for us, Jesus redeemed us and delivered us from our slavery to sin. The redemption Christ achieved may therefore be seen as what is secured for those in whose favour judgement is made.

The sacrifice of Christ as judgement on sin revealed in death

The way that sacrifice may be related to judgement is suggested by a remark Barth makes in his discussion of sacrifice: 'In sacrifice Israel – fallible, sinful and unfaithful Israel – is summoned to bow beneath the divine judgement, but also to hold to the divine grace' (IV/1, p 278). Sacrifice is a submission to God's judgement, making the cultic offering an expression of God's righteous condemnation of sin. To offer sacrifice for sin and to be sacrificed for sin is to undergo the judgement of God. The former aspect is to be identified with the positive judgement of God's vindication of righteousness in obediently offering a sacrifice. The latter is to be identified with the negative judgement of God's condemnation of wickedness in the death of the sacrificial victim.

The basis for asserting such a relationship between sacrifice and judgement lies again in the interpretation of death. Since death is the sign of judgement, and since sacrifice for sin demands death – an obedient life is not enough, only an obedient death can remove sin – we may say that sacrifice enacts God's judgement on sin revealed in death. To make a sacrifice for sin is to come into the holy presence of God the judge bringing an offering. The humble, obedient attitude of the one who makes the offering and the purity of that which is offered are both submitted to God's judgement. It is a moment of reckoning. This is particularly clear in the work of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. If Aaron or his successors entered the holy of holies without the young bull for a sin offering for himself and a ram for a burnt offering, dressed in the garments the Lord decreed, offering incense, he would die (Lev. 16:2-13). In the presence of the Lord, all that is ungodly is destroyed and all that is righteous and good is transfigured so that its glory is revealed. Whilst Jesus was seen in something of his own sinless glory on the mount of transfiguration, it was 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Rom. 8:3) as the representative of sinners that he brought the sin of the world under the judgement of God so that it could be destroyed. And it was in his death that the sin of the world was taken away, because it was then that Christ brought sin under the judgement of God where it was condemned and destroyed.

Bringing these insights together, we observe that Barth's account of the judgement of Jesus Christ enables us to place other New Testament atonement metaphors in relationship to the judicial metaphor:

- Victory may be seen as God's judgement against his enemies and for his obedient people.

- Redemption may be regarded as the liberation experienced by his covenant friends in whose favour that judgement is given.
- Sacrifice for sin may be treated as God's judgement on sin revealed in death.

As such these other metaphors are not only to be understood *in relation to* judgement, but *in terms of* judgement, whether it be in the condemnation of sin or the vindication of Christ and his people. Victory, redemption and sacrifice could indeed be described as metaphors of judgement, since each of them is able to illuminate some aspects of judgement in language taken from another context:

- Victory expresses the judgement of God on oppressive tyranny;
- Redemption is the liberation by God's judgement of those held under the thrall of that tyranny;
- Sacrifice conveys the costliness of undergoing that holy and purifying judgement.

Each of these three metaphors therefore articulates certain aspects of judgement, which in turn expresses the atoning work of Christ. We may therefore describe judgement as the *paradigmatic* metaphor of atonement, which so fully and profoundly expresses the doctrine of reconciliation that the other metaphors should be treated as *subordinate* to it. Judgement provides the pattern to which other metaphors can be compared and to which they may be related. That is not to say that judgement is able to contain all that is said by these other metaphors of atonement. Nor is it to claim that judgement or even all these metaphors between them are able to articulate the whole story of salvation. But it is to say that judgement should be treated as the primary metaphor of atonement, and that victory, redemption and sacrifice should be given a subsidiary place in expounding the atonement.

Conclusion

The judgement of Jesus Christ, especially as it has been expounded by Karl Barth, offers the basis for a more coherent account of the doctrine of atonement than those in popular currency. It has the capacity to span the gospel message from the incarnation, through the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, right through to his coming again to judge the living and the dead. And it is able to draw together other New Testament metaphors of atonement such as victory, redemption and sacrifice. We must not, therefore, fear the language of judgement despite its negative connotations today. Instead, our preaching should proclaim a fully biblical understanding of the metaphor and a recognition that in the cross we encounter the justifying judgement of God. With such an understanding and such a paradigm for preaching the cross there is hope that we can restore iron to the anaemic blood of much contemporary preaching and present a more compelling account of the saving work of Christ.

The Revd Dr Justyn Terry is Vicar of St Helen's Church, North Kensington, London.