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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

EQ
EQ
EQ
EQ
EQ
EQ
EQ
EQ
EQ
EQ
EQ
EQ
EQ

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Paternoster:
thinking faith

Penal substitutionary atonement in the Church Fathers

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Introduction

Derek Flood has argued in the pages of this journal that the texts adduced in *Pierced for Our Transgressions* to prove that a number of the early church fathers taught penal substitutionary atonement do nothing of the sort.¹ He maintains that they do teach a substitutionary atonement, but not a penal substitutionary atonement. Rather, he insists, ‘the dominant pattern found in these patristic writers is substitutionary atonement understood within the conceptual framework of restorative justice.’² Flood notes that the evidence contained in *Pierced for Our Transgressions* is taken from my own doctoral dissertation. I trust that this renders it appropriate for me to offer a reply to Flood’s case, though it is unfortunate that he in his article does not engage directly with my own material, especially since I was able to devote more space to close exegesis of the patristic texts than was available to the authors of *Pierced for Our Transgressions*. My aim here is to show by still closer exegesis that the passages in question do teach penal substitutionary atonement. I say ‘closer’ because the constraints of space still restrict the level of attention that can be given here to the passages. In due course I hope to publish a full-length treatment of the patristic evidence for penal substitutionary atonement that will offer more sustained exegesis of these passages and of a considerable number of further examples. The remarks here are limited to addressing the particular objections raised by Flood.

Definition

My doctorate employed the following definition as a touchstone to assay the patristic evidence for penal substitutionary atonement: ‘*An author can be held*

1 Derek Flood, ‘Substitutionary Atonement and the Church Fathers: A Reply to the Authors of *Pierced for Our Transgressions*’, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 82.2 (2010), 142–59, responding to Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2007), c. 5.

2 Flood, ‘Church Fathers’, 142.

to teach the Penal doctrine if he plainly states that the punishment deserved by sin from God was borne by Jesus Christ in his death on the Cross.³ Flood believes that this definition is too broad because it does not specify 'the working mechanism of the atonement'. In other words, 'only when the purpose of substitution is the *satisfaction of God's retributive justice via penalty* can an author be said to endorse penal substitution as it is understood in Reformed theology'.⁴ While the word 'retribution' is indeed not used in my definition, the idea is clearly implied by the words '*the punishment deserved by sin from God*'. It is a commonplace in the definition of retribution that its distinctive feature is the element of desert. For example, the philosopher Ted Honderich describes retributive theory in its Kantian form thus: 'A man *must* be punished if he has performed an act for which he deserves a penalty.'⁵ My definition does therefore specify this key element of desert, and, unlike a secular theory of retribution, it finds the basis of that desert in the attitude of God himself to sin.

Flood also thinks that the idea of satisfaction must be present. If this is intended as a verbal requirement then it over-specifies the definition. To require a verbal reference to satisfaction would be to impose an anachronistic expectation on earlier writers of some later ideal type of doctrinal expression. However, Flood probably means that the idea implicit in satisfaction must be present, in which case a minor addition to the definition would suffice. The root idea of satisfaction is the sufficiency of Christ's suffering to deal with God's retributive response to sin, as even the etymology suggests: *satis facere*. If a writer teaches that Christ effectively dealt with the penalty of sin deserved from God when he died bearing it, then he is teaching that his death made satisfaction. The actual terms used might be many: dealt with, paid, sufficed for, bore away, discharged, fulfilled, and so on. If a writer teaches that Christ bore the penalty deserved by sin from God and that this action was enough to deal with the penal aspects of sin, then he is teaching satisfaction. If we think that this element needs to be made more explicit in my definition, then it could be revised thus: *An author can be held to teach the Penal doctrine if he plainly states that the punishment deserved by sin from God was borne and dealt with by Jesus Christ in his death on the cross*. This additional requirement is easily met by all of the authors discussed, since they all affirm the efficacy of Christ's substitutionary bearing of God's penal response to sin.

Justin Martyr

We turn now to the specific examples. A refrain of Flood's article is that the authors of *Pierced for Our Transgressions* move too hastily from quoting a passage

3 'A Critical Exposition of Hugo Grotius's Doctrine of the Atonement in *De satisfatione Christi*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1999), 70.

4 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 143.

5 Ted Honderich, *Punishment: The Supposed Justifications*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 24.

to concluding that it teaches penal substitutionary atonement. This criticism begins in his comments on Justin Martyr: 'From this single quote they pronounce...'.⁶ Despite the critical tone of this comment and his own right plea for a sustained treatment of context, Flood himself argues from just one statement in the *Dialogue with Trypho* and a single sentence from Justin's *Second Apology*. Here is the disputed passage from the *Dialogue*:

Then Trypho remarked, 'Be assured that all our nation waits for Christ; and we admit that all the Scriptures which you have quoted refer to Him. Moreover, I do also admit that the name of Jesus, by which the son of Nave (Nun) was called, has inclined me very strongly to adopt this view. But whether Christ should be so shamefully crucified, this we are in doubt about. For whosoever is crucified is said in the law to be accursed (ἐπικατάρατος γὰρ ὁ σταυρούμενος ἐν τῷ νόμῳ), so that I am exceedingly incredulous on this point.'⁷

Justin answers Trypho's appeal to Deuteronomy 21:23 thus:

Just as God commanded the sign to be made by the brazen serpent, and yet He is blameless; even so, though a curse lies in the law against persons who are crucified, yet no curse lies on the Christ of God (οὐκ ἔτι δὲ καὶ κατὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ κατάρα κεῖται), by whom all that have committed things worthy of a curse are saved.

For the whole human race will be found to be under a curse. For it is written in the law of Moses, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.' And no one has accurately done all, nor will you venture to deny this; but some more and some less than others have observed the ordinances enjoined. But if those who are under this law appear to be under a curse for not having observed all the requirements, how much more shall all the nations appear to be under a curse who practice idolatry, who seduce youths, and commit other crimes? If, then, the Father of all wished His Christ for the whole human family to take upon Him the curses of all (ὁ πατὴρ τῶν ὄλων τὰς πάντων κατάρας ἀναδέξασθαι ἐβουλήθη), knowing that, after He had been crucified and was dead, He would raise Him up, why do you argue about Him, who submitted to suffer these things according to the Father's will, as if He were accursed, and do not rather bewail yourselves? For although His Father caused Him to suffer these things in behalf of the human family, yet you did not commit the deed as in obedience to the will of God.⁸

There are two strands in this passage which initially seem to pull in opposite

6 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 144.

7 *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, lxxxix; ANE, 1:244; *Dialogue avec Tryphon*, ed. and trans. by Georges Archambault, 2 vols (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard, 1909), 2:80. Trypho had already introduced this objection earlier at *Dialogue*, xxxii.

8 *Dialogue*, xciv-xcv; ANE, 1:247; *Tryphon*, 2:102-104.

directions. First there is the affirmation that Christ bore the curse due to all, then there is the denial that he was cursed. Flood emphasizes the fact that Justin states that Christ was not cursed by the law and infers from it that 'Justin is not thinking of Christ bearing our curse in the legal categories of penal substitution'.⁹ Thus Flood seeks to distinguish 'the curses of all' that Justin says Christ bore from a legal kind of curse. This interpretation is contradicted by Justin's own explanation of the curse. When Justin describes 'the curses of all' they are clearly legal in the strongest sense. He quotes from Paul's paraphrase of Deuteronomy 27:26 in Galatians 3:10 to show that the curse is the curse due to all Jews who do not keep the whole Old Testament law. It is also the curse against the idolatrous Gentile nations. Both of these were curses from God himself. It was these curses that the Father caused Christ to suffer, there being no other curses mentioned or implied in the passage. How, given Justin's explanation of the curse as the curse of the law in Deuteronomy and the curse on Gentile idolatry, can it be anything other than a legal curse?

As well as arguing that the curse does not operate in a legal category, Flood also claims that other material in Justin suggests that his words should not be read in a penal substitutionary sense. We see here for the first time an interpretative step that Flood often takes: without properly discussing local evidence in the passage for the meaning of the curse, he departs from the context and quotes a sentence from elsewhere to sustain his reading. In this case he quotes from the *Second Apology*: 'He became a man for our sakes, that, becoming a partaker of our sufferings, he might also bring us healing'.¹⁰ Flood uses this sentence to ground his dichotomized conclusion: 'Where Justin does address the purpose of Christ's substitutionary death elsewhere, he does so in terms of our *healing* rather than of God's appeasement'.¹¹ Thus, because Justin in the *Second Apology* holds that the atonement was about healing, he cannot hold a propitiatory sense for Christ's curse-bearing work in the *Dialogue*. While the delineation of different models of the atonement can be a useful pedagogical servant for a church historian, it becomes a dangerous master when the categories are taken to be mutually exclusive. Here the fixed categorization forces Flood to squash the specific evidence in the *Dialogue*. Given the general richness and diversity of patristic teaching, we would need very strong reasons from a text to think that an author held one view of the cross 'rather than' another. Why should we not think that Justin maintained that Christ bore the curse understood legally *and* that he viewed the cross as healing in its effect? Justin himself gives us no reason to think that his view in the *Apology* rules out a retributive sense for the curse in the *Dialogue*, especially since the key term *κατάρα* is not used in the *Apology* passage. The antithesis exists only in Flood's mind, not Justin's. Even if strong verbal links were present, for example with Justin stating that Christ bore our *κατάρα*

9 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 145.

10 *Second Apology*, 13, cited in Flood, 'Church Fathers', 145.

11 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 145.

for our healing, that would say nothing about him holding this view ‘rather than’ a penal substitutionary view, unless we come with Flood’s penological presupposition. Indeed, Justin does obliquely connect healing and the curse, since in chapter 95 itself he postulates a reply from the Jews where they allude to Isaiah 53:5, a reference that Flood does not mention. But even with the connection explicitly made there is no reason to think that for Justin penal substitutionary atonement and healing are alternatives. We must allow the amplitude of Justin’s teaching to stand.

If Flood’s attempt to de-legalize the curse fails, then we are left looking for another way of finding coherence in Justin’s statements about Christ bearing the curse and yet not being cursed. Can we show that a penal substitutionary reading of Justin is more likely by demonstrating its capacity to show how his statements fit together? The clue to his coherence lies in the historical context of statements such as ‘no curse lies on the Christ of God’. As we see in Trypho’s introductory challenge, the issue here for Justin and his Jewish interlocutor concerns the identity of Jesus as the Christ: how could the Messiah be cursed? Justin is evidently very sensitive to Trypho’s accusation that Jesus could not possibly have been the Messiah since he was crucified and therefore cursed. When Justin says that no curse was on the Christ, the Messianic reference is pointed. He is saying that the cross is no obstacle to identifying Jesus as the Christ because he did not *of himself* deserve the curse. He is not making an absolute statement denying that the Christ was in any sense cursed, since in this very section he states plainly that he took the legal curses of ‘the whole human family’ upon himself. Justin believes that Christ was cursed instead of others, but with their curse rather than his own. In this way he distinguishes carefully between the blasphemous claim that Jesus was cursed in his own right (and so by implication was guilty of his own sins and could not be the Messiah), and the claim that Jesus bore the curse due to the sin of the world. By attending to the historical apologetic context, Justin’s teaching is found to cohere without Flood’s resort of over-emphasizing the negative statements about the curse or his attempt to redefine it by appealing to a passage in another work to neutralize its legal sense. Justin clearly and consistently taught that Christ bore for the whole human family the penal curse that was deserved from God by law-breaking Jews and idolatrous Gentiles.

Eusebius of Caesarea

It might be objected that Flood does not really dichotomize views of the atonement, but that he is simply using one passage to shed light on another, that he expatiates rather than squashes the language of curse and penalty. I have tried hard to adopt such an emollient interpretation of his argument, but it is unsustainable, as we will see from his comments on Eusebius of Caesarea. His claim here is that the authors of *Pierced for Our Transgressions* ‘end up taking statements by these patristic authors out of their larger soteriological context’.¹² He

12 Flood, ‘Church Fathers’, 145.

thinks that by reading the sentence before the passage that they quote from Eusebius, ‘we can already see problems with their conclusion’. Here is how Flood quotes this sentence:

How can he make our sins his own, and be said to bear our iniquities? ... He 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.¹³

From this Flood concludes:

The context in which Eusebius says that Christ bore our curse was the same in which he bore our *sickness, sorrow, and burdens* as well. The paradigm here is not one solely of bearing a legal penalty, but of one bearing another’s burdens in love – both our hurtfulness, and the hurt we encounter in a fallen world: sickness, woes, labours.¹⁴

If Flood intended the ‘not... solely’ here to allow a penal substitutionary element in Eusebius provided we see that it is coupled with the idea of sympathetic suffering, then his interpretation would be valid since Eusebius does indeed describe the cross as an act of shared suffering. Flood’s ‘solely’ is, however, hardly such a concession, since he thinks that even just the evidence of this sentence raises ‘problems’ with the claim that Eusebius stated penal substitution, and he insists roundly that the fathers do not teach penal substitution.

The problem with Flood’s interpretation of Eusebius is that he misses out some rather important words that come between the sentence that he appeals to and the passage quoted in *Pierced for Our Transgressions*. Here is the passage up to where Flood stops his quotation:

And how can He make our sins His own, and be said to bear our iniquities (πῶς φέρειν λέγεται τὰς ἀνομίας ἡμῶν), except by our being regarded as His body (καθ’ ὃ σῶμα αὐτοῦ εἶναι λεγόμεθα), 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.

Then comes the section quoted in *Pierced for Our Transgressions*:

And the Lamb of God not only did this (οὐ μόνον δὲ ταῦτα πράξας), but (ἀλλὰ καὶ) was chastised on our behalf (ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κολασθεὶς), 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

13 Flood, ‘Church Fathers’, 145.

14 Flood, ‘Church Fathers’, 145-46.

to us, and drew down on Himself the apportioned curse, being made a curse for us.¹⁵

The important words are these: ‘not only did this, but...’. Flood argues that the language of sympathy in the preceding sentence shows us the meaning of the penalty borne by Christ. Against this claim, the Greek syntax clearly marks a distinction between the two ideas: *not only* sympathetic suffering and healing, *but also* penalty. Eusebius was quite capable of stating that Christ shared our labours and sicknesses, but he did not explain his penal statements in those terms. Rather, he marks Christ bearing the penalty for sins as a distinct further aspect of his saving work. Moreover, he describes Christ bearing τιμωρία, a term redolent with the idea of retribution. Contrary to Flood’s claim, the sentence about sympathy is expressly not explanatory of the words that follow it.

This is actually just a preliminary point in Flood’s reading of Eusebius. His main argument is more categorical:

Eusebius then proceeds over the next several chapters to attribute the sufferings of Christ, not to the Father and divine retributive justice, but to evil powers who ‘inspired the plot that was carried through by men’ who ‘did evil to him instead of good, and gave him hate in return for his love’.¹⁶

On this basis Flood concludes that ‘by reading Eusebius in context, we find that what he is actually describing is substitutionary atonement understood in the context of a Christus Victor model of the atonement’.¹⁷ This, he explains, shows us the purpose of substitution for Eusebius: ‘it is to *annul* death’s dominion (the opposite of penal substitution’s appeasement of divine retribution)’.¹⁸

Here we find a double knot of false antitheses: the cross was caused by evil powers, and so was not penal substitution; the cross was about Christ annulling death’s dominion, and so was not penal substitution. This argument shows conclusively that Flood’s interpretations depend on dichotomizing descriptions of the cross: annulling the dominion of death is taken as the opposite of penal substitution. Flood may think this, but where is the evidence that Eusebius did? Moreover, Flood seems to grant that Ambrose held the two together, and I cannot think of a single advocate of penal substitutionary atonement who denies the idea of Christ conquering death.¹⁹

Flood’s most substantive point in support of his interpretation is that Eusebius attributes the sufferings of Christ ‘not to the Father and divine retributive justice, but to evil powers’. Unfortunately for his argument, Flood does not interact with another passage in the *Proof*, cited in my thesis, where Eusebius plainly describes the cross as an offering by God to God. In this passage, Eusebius is

15 *Demonstratio Evangelica*, x. 1; ΒΕΤΕΣ, 28:55; *The Proof of the Gospel*, ed. and trans. by W. J. Ferrar, 2 vols (London: SPCK; New York: Macmillan, 1920), 2:195.

16 Flood, ‘Church Fathers’, 146.

17 Flood, ‘Church Fathers’, 146.

18 Flood, ‘Church Fathers’, 146.

19 Flood, ‘Church Fathers’, 152.

explaining why Christians do not offer sacrifices. He uses the example of Abel to counter the Greek view that the original sacrifices made by men were vegetable rather than animal, and to show that animal sacrifice is not to be rejected as murder (i. 10). He then explains how the animal sacrifices worked, giving a substitutionary reading based on Leviticus 17:11: 'it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life.' From this verse he argues that 'the blood of the victims slain is a propitiation (ἐξιλάσκεσθαι) in the place of human life (ἀντὶ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ψυχῆς)'.²⁰ Here already we have the idea of propitiation with the verb ἐξιλάσκομαι. Eusebius then supports his argument for substitutionary atonement from the procedure for the peace offering prescribed in Leviticus 3. From this example he explains the substitutionary character of the Old Testament sacrifices: 'the victims are brought in place of the lives of them who bring them (ἀντίψυχα τῆς αὐτῶν ψυχῆς προσήγετο τὰ ζωοθυτούμενα)'.²¹ Christ, however, made the final sacrifice, thus rendering all further sacrifices unnecessary and illegitimate. Eusebius extols the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, making clear that he has borne sin and its curse. Revealing his debt to Origen's Christology, he explains how the Logos took to himself a human life to deal with sin. It is here that we come to the key passage. Remember that Flood tells us that Eusebius does not attribute Christ's suffering to God and does not hold that Christ made a propitiatory offering to appease God:

He then that was alone of those who ever existed, the Word of God, before all worlds, and High Priest of every creature that has mind and reason, separated One of like passions with us, as a sheep or lamb from the human flock, branded (ἐπιγράψας) on Him all our sins, and fastened (περιάρψας) on Him as well the curse that was adjudged by Moses' law, as Moses foretells: 'Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.' This He suffered 'being made a curse for us; and making himself sin for our sakes.' And then 'He made him sin for our sakes who knew no sin,' and laid on Him all the punishments (τιμωρίας ἐπιθείς) due to us for our sins, bonds, insults, contumelies, scourging, and shameful blows, and the crowning trophy of the Cross. And after all this when He had offered such a wondrous offering and choice victim to the Father (τῷ πατρὶ), and sacrificed for the salvation of us all, He delivered a memorial to us to offer to God continually instead of a sacrifice.²²

Eusebius thus teaches that Jesus was the final penalty-bearing sacrifice, using the term τιμωρία. The origin of his penal suffering is unmistakable: it was the Word who branded sins and fastened curses on his own humanity, an action strikingly described with the two rhymed aorist participles. It was he who laid the punishment on himself. The direction of the offering is as clear as its origin: Eusebius specifically states that Christ's death was a sacrificial offering to the

20 Eusebius, *Demonstratio*, i. 10, BETPEΣ, 27:49, *Proof*, 1:56.

21 Eusebius, *Demonstratio*, i. 10, BETPEΣ, 27:50; *Proof*, 1:56.

22 Eusebius, *Demonstratio*, i. 10, BETPEΣ, 27:51-52, *Proof*, 1:59.

Father. Following this offering there is no further need for sacrifice other than the memorial sacrifice of the Lord's Supper, itself offered 'to God'. Here is the Word offering himself to God, the Word offering a penal sacrifice intended to propitiate the Father.

This example, in which Eusebius expounds the offering of Christ in some detail, is from Book 1 of the *Demonstratio*. But even in Book 10, which Flood does discuss, we find Eusebius stating plainly that the sacrifice of Christ was a propitiatory offering made by the divine Word to God. In the introduction to the book, Eusebius states that Christ as God offered sacrifice 'propitiating the Father (ἰλεούμενος τὸν πατέρα)', that as man he sacrificed the firstfruits of the human race like a lamb 'to the Father (τῷ πατρί)', and that it was necessary that this lamb of God 'should be offered as a sacrifice to God (τῷ θεῷ)'.²³ The existence of these passages in Eusebius should warn us off the kind of sweeping statements that Flood makes about what the church fathers do *not* teach. It is much easier to prove the existence of a white swan than to disprove the existence of any black swans.

Athanasius

Flood states that 'the quotations from Athanasius in *Pierced for Our Transgressions* are all taken from his *On the Incarnation of the Word*'. This is a careless error, since the second paragraph on Athanasius in *Pierced for Our Transgressions* begins: 'Athanasius wrote several works countering Arianism, two of which are of interest to us'. This is then followed by a quotation from *Against the Arians* which is found to be 'a straightforward statement of the doctrine of penal substitution'.²⁴

Law and in/corruption in De Incarnatione

Flood's argument regarding *De Incarnatione* is essentially that Athanasius does not teach penal substitutionary atonement because he emphasises other aspects of hamartology and soteriology. In particular, Flood stresses that Athanasius interprets '*sin as sickness*, as opposed to the more familiar Western judicial idea of *sin as transgression*'. Thus for Athanasius the 'guiding framework for understanding sin and salvation is not of sin as transgression, and salvation as an escape from punishment, but a medical paradigm of sin as corruption, and salvation as an escape from death'. On this basis Flood judges that for Athanasius 'the problem of the atonement is not an angry God, but a sick and dying humanity'.²⁵ Sin thus requires recreation as its remedy, a deeper cure than substitutionary punishment or repentance could effect. The idea of healing is tied, Flood tells us, to the conquest of the dominion of death. At this point he seeks to explain how for Athanasius the death of the Logos frees us from the tyranny of sin: 'Athanasius explains that because Jesus was human he could die, but because he

23 Eusebius, *Demonstratio*, x, introduction, ΒΕΤΕΣ, 28:51, *Proof*, 2:190, 191.

24 Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced*, 169.

25 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 148.

was also God ('the indwelling of the Word') the Life of God in him overpowered Death, setting us free.²⁶

In maintaining this interpretation, Flood misreads Athanasius on both the human plight and its solution. In each case Flood uses one strand of teaching to control another, as he did with Justin. On the plight, he excludes the legal idea of the debt of punishment owed by mankind by appealing to the category of sickness and naturally resulting corruption. On the solution, he excludes the idea of Christ paying the debt of penalty by appealing to the category of Christ bringing recreation, healing, and incorruption. The verb 'excludes' is not too strong here. Flood's language is clear: '*as opposed to the more familiar Western judicial idea; 'not of sin as transgression'; 'not an angry God'*. Indeed, his claim needs to be this strong, because without it Athanasius might be left as at least a low-key advocate of penal substitutionary atonement, a possibility which Flood denies.

Unlike Flood, Athanasius in the text of *De Incarnatione* clearly delineates a double aspect to both the plight of humanity and the solution, one which persistently maintains the legal framework alongside the medical. This emerges, for example, throughout his explanation of the 'primary cause' of the incarnation in chapters 1-10.²⁷ His syntax, to which we must attend closely, marks the distinction in both plight and solution. On the plight, he distinguishes penal debt from corruption. On the solution, he distinguishes debt payment from triumph. He thus sets out a double necessity in his soteriology: the need is for both the removal of the legal debt of death, and the bringing of life and incorruption. Both needs are met through the cross, but they are persistently distinguished. Rather than using healing, recreation, and incorruption as such enveloping categories that the legal and penal language is redefined and loses its legal and penal aspects, Athanasius depicts the two categories maintaining their integrity.

This is clear at several points in the text. Athanasius sets out in *De Incarnatione* to expound the 'divine manifestation' of the Word in the incarnation, with the aim of inducing greater piety.²⁸ The incarnation, he explains, was for our salvation. He then shows that understanding the salvation of the world requires giving an account of its creation, since 'its renewal was effected by the Word who created it in the beginning'.²⁹ He outlines and refutes the positions of the Epicureans, Plato, and Marcion, before affirming the creation of the world out of nothing by the Word. Here we come to the relevant material. In the creation God gave to Adam and Eve an 'added grace' to preserve them in a blessed state in paradise. He did this by 'making them in his own image and giving them also a share in the power of his own Word'.³⁰ The creator then protected that grace by giving the law: 'knowing that men's faculty of free will could turn either way, he first secured the

26 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 149.

27 Athanasius, *De incarnatione*, c. 10, in *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, ed. and trans. by Robert W. Thomson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 159.

28 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 1, 135.

29 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 1, 137.

30 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 3, 141.

grace they had been given by imposing a law and a set place'. If Adam kept the grace he was given, he would enjoy paradise, and he also had 'the promise of immortality in heaven'.³¹ If, however, they turned away from God, then they 'would suffer the natural corruption consequent on death, and would no longer live in paradise, but in future dying outside it would remain in death and corruption'.³²

This material is important because it shows us how Athanasius understands the original relationship between the categories of law and incorruption in Eden. Law is not here subsumed within the category of incorruption, but is a distinct addition to Adam's created state of grace. It is, however, certainly true that law serves the purpose of preserving Adam's incorruption. Hence, a little later, Athanasius quotes Wisdom: 'the keeping of the law is the assurance of incorruptibility'.³³ But the very fact that law is an instrument for preserving incorruption shows that Athanasius maintains a distinction between the two. This distinction continued after the fall. When Adam sinned, law reversed its role. While it had been given to preserve Adam and Eve in incorruption, now corruption used it against them, gaining power because 'it had taken up against them the threat of God concerning the transgression of the law'.³⁴ Given sin, the law became a means to death: 'by the law (νόμῳ) death thenceforth prevailed over us'.³⁵ Later Athanasius states: 'the threat of the transgression was firmly supporting corruption over us'.³⁶ In these ways, law is a subordinate category to incorruption and corruption, intended initially to protect the former but after sin empowering the latter. Law is subordinate rather than subsumed or nullified, and is not robbed of its legal or penal character by being located in this context.

The twofold pattern of law and in/corruption recurs when Athanasius comes to explain the purpose of the incarnation:

He took to himself a body which could die, in order that (ἵνα), since this participated in the Word who is above all, it might suffice (ικανὸν γένηται) for death on behalf of all (ἀντὶ πάντων), and because of the Word who was dwelling in it, it might remain incorruptible (ἀφθαρτον διαμείνη), and so corruption might cease (παύσηται) from all men by the grace of the resurrection.³⁷

Here the syntax marks the distinct purposes of the incarnation: the sufficient substitutionary death, the preservation of Christ's own body in incorruptibility, and the bringing of incorruptibility from Christ to his people by the resurrection. The two distinct purposes of incorruptibility and sacrifice are repeatedly articulated in parallel:

31 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 3, 141.

32 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 3, 141, 143.

33 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 4, 145.

34 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 5, 145.

35 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 6, 147. Here and elsewhere the Greek quoted can be found on the page before the translation.

36 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 8, 151.

37 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 9, 155.

And then, indicating the reason why no other save God the Word himself should be incarnate, he says: 'For it was fitting that he, for whom are all things and through whom are all things and who brought many sons to glory, should make the leader of their salvation perfect through sufferings'. By this he means that it was the task of no one else to bring men from the corruption which had occurred save God the Word, who also in the beginning had created them. And that (ὅτι δὲ) for a sacrifice on behalf of the bodies similar to his the Word himself had also taken (καὶ αὐτὸς Λόγος ἔλαβεν) to himself a body, this also they declare (καὶ τοῦτο σημαίνουσι), saying: 'So, since the children have partaken of blood and flesh, he equally partook of them, that by death he might destroy him who held the power of death, that is the devil, and might free all those who by the fear of death were condemned to servitude all the length of their lives.' For by the sacrifice of his own body he both put an end to the law which lay over us, and renewed for us the origin of life by giving hope of the resurrection.³⁸

Athanasius here explains that Christ came to bring men out of corruption, as shown by Hebrews 2:10. As a further purpose, with the distinction marked in the Greek by δὲ and the repeated use of καί, Christ came to sacrifice his body for similar bodies. As with the previous passage, in bringing new life the cross is required in part as a prerequisite for the resurrection. The work of fulfilling the old was thus completed by the substitutionary death of the cross itself, while the beginning of the new creation awaited the resurrection that followed it.³⁹ Athanasius thus gave a central role to the resurrection in his soteriology. Flood thinks that for the authors of *Pierced for Our Transgressions* Athanasius teaches that 'God's anger being spent on Christ somehow automatically leads to our renewal'. He finds their account of this unsatisfactory: 'How exactly God "exhausting his punishment" would lead to humanity's healing they do not explain.'⁴⁰ But the reason that they do not explain this is that they do not believe it, nor do they attribute it to Athanasius. They are perfectly clear that Athanasius teaches the centrality of the resurrection in bringing renewal: 'In taking a human body and dying, the Son suffered the penalty for sin promised in Genesis 2:17, thus maintaining God's truthfulness. Since the Son has power to give life, he was then able to overcome death through his resurrection.'⁴¹

The law: abolition by fulfillment not displacement

According to Flood, the presence of the law theme does not support a penal substitutionary interpretation of *De Incarnatione* because Athanasius rejects the idea that 'death is upheld and fulfilled through Christ's punishment' and insists

38 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 10, 157, 159.

39 It is worth noting that the dual aspect continues beyond the first argument in cc. 1-10. See, for example, cc. 13, 14, 16, and 20.

40 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 150.

41 Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced*, 171.

that it was ‘abolished and destroyed’.⁴² On this basis Flood concludes that Athanasius teaches a non-retributive view of justice:

This represents a paradigm of justice not based on a punitive model, but one focused on setting us right by transforming us, and setting the world right by overthrowing ‘the law of sin and death’ (Ro 8:2). In this later sense it reflects a model of justice that is in fact the *opposite* of retributive justice, because it seeks ultimately to abolish retribution, not to appease it.⁴³

Casting Athanasius as a non-retributivist, let alone an anti-retributivist, is an ambitious move. It is hard to square with his statements about hell, which he clearly believed would be real and populated.⁴⁴ More importantly, the key argument that retribution is abolished rather than fulfilled is contradicted by the very words of Athanasius:

He saw that the rational race was perishing and that death was reigning over them through corruption, and he saw also that the threat of the transgression was firmly supporting corruption over us, and that it would have been absurd for the law to be dissolved (λυθῆναι) before it was fulfilled (πληρωθῆναι).⁴⁵

The verb πληρώω has strong connotations of completion and even payment, and is used to contrast with the idea of simple abolition: ‘I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil (πληρῶσαι) them’ (Matt. 5:17). For Flood the abolition of the law and death involves the abolition of the entire system of retribution leaving its sentence unfulfilled, but Athanasius here describes the idea of abolition without fulfillment as an absurdity. Certainly the law is abolished in the sense that it is transcended in God’s dealings with men, but its demands are not simply set aside and left unfulfilled.

In the same chapter, Athanasius is emphatic that the Word did not bypass the legal liability of the creature, as if it were simply displaced by a new system of restorative justice. What did the Word do when he saw ‘the liability (ὀψεύθυνον) of all men in regard to death’? He met the liability:

And thus taking a body like ours, since all were liable (ὀψεύθυνους) to the corruption of death, and surrendering it to death on behalf of all (ἀντὶ πάντων), he offered it to the Father. And this he did in his loving kindness in order that, as all die in him, the law concerning corruption in men might be abolished – since its power was concluded (πληρωθείσης) in the Lord’s body and it would never again have influence over men who are like him.⁴⁶

The justice that rendered humanity liable was not set aside, its demands were met: the liability was to death, and Christ died for all. The power of the law was

42 Flood, ‘Church Fathers’, 150.

43 Flood, ‘Church Fathers’, 149.

44 See, for example, Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 56, 275.

45 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 8, 151.

46 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 8, 153.

‘concluded’ in the sense that it was fulfilled. It is further striking that Athanasius speaks about the Word offering his body ‘to the Father’ in this context. The liability is a legal liability, and it is dealt with by the Word offering himself to the Father.

Thus far Flood’s interpretation has been contradicted by Athanasius in two ways. We have seen first that Athanasius maintains the integrity of the law as law within his emphasis on in/corruption, and second that he insists that death is abolished by being fulfilled. In one passage these strands come together as he explains how the abolition of death by substitutionary fulfillment results in the bestowal of incorruption:

As an offering and sacrifice free of all spot, he offered to death the body which he had taken to himself, and immediately abolished (ἠφάνισε) death from all who were like him by the offering of a like. For since the Word is above all, consequently by offering his temple and the instrument of his body as a substitute for all men, he fulfilled the debt (ἐπλήρου τὸ ὀφειλόμενον) by his death. And as the incorruptible Son of God was united to all men by his body similar to theirs, consequently he endured all men with incorruption by the promise concerning the resurrection.⁴⁷

Death was abolished by the debt being paid, and alongside this the Son of God brought incorruption to all men by the promise of the resurrection.

Later on the same ideas are found in a passage that explicitly describes a double purpose for the incarnation in fulfilling the law and ending corruption. Athanasius considers the incarnation of the Word in his body:

Through the coming of the Word into it, it was no longer corruptible according to its nature, but because of the Word who was dwelling in it, became immune from corruption. And the two things (ἀμφότερα) occurred simultaneously in a miraculous manner: the death of all was fulfilled (ἐπληροῦτο) in the Lord’s body, and also death and corruption were destroyed because of the Word who was in it. For there was need (χρεία) of death, and death on behalf of all had to take place in order that what was owed by all men might be paid.⁴⁸

This is the abolition of the debt of death by death, enumerated alongside the end of corruption. Flood denies that for Athanasius ‘death is upheld and fulfilled through Christ’s punishment’ and insists that it was ‘abolished and destroyed’. Athanasius knows nothing of these alternatives: it is abolished and destroyed *by being* upheld and fulfilled. Only in this way could God remain truthful to the word of Genesis 2:17.⁴⁹

47 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 9, 155.

48 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 20, 183, 185.

49 See Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 6, 147, 149.

Death as a natural consequence and retributive imposition

Flood might still appeal to his assertion that the death borne by Christ was for Athanasius not a judicial imposition but a natural outworking of sin: 'Being separated from the source of Life, we die. This "corruption" and resulting "death" is not understood by Athanasius in terms of a punishment externally inflicted, but as the *inevitable* consequence of sin.'⁵⁰ This over-simplifies the complex thanatology that we find in Athanasius, who works with an expansive definition of death as both consequence and imposition. When he speaks of Jesus dying our death, he intends not simply the physical end of this earthly life, but the entire nexus of the results of human sin, including the second death itself. By saying that Jesus died our death, therefore, Athanasius means that he bore in himself the state of hell, a state of corruption which he thinks of as a terrible form of continued non-existence.

The idea of death as continued non-existence, which may seem paradoxical, is explained by the Platonist ontology that Athanasius holds. He defines evil as the privation of the good, and so thinks that any finally abandoned state of existence such as the second death or hell, is really a form of diminished existence which is close to non-existence. The principle is clear in *De Incarnatione*: 'what does not exist (οὐκ ὄντα) is evil, but what does exist (ὄντα) is good since it has been created by the existent God (ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος Θεοῦ)'.⁵¹ Hence, he is able to state that the devil, who still 'exists', is dead following the coming of Christ: 'As for the devil, who previously used to exult wickedly in death, "since its pains have been loosed" (Acts 2:24) only he remains truly dead (ἀληθῶς νεκρός)'.⁵² On the basis of this view of evil Athanasius uses the term 'death' to describe the whole penal process of abandonment to corruption. This is the diminished existence in which the devil and his demons are presently caught, the very hell in which they have their non-existence. There is an eschatological aspect here: when men were deprived of the knowledge of God 'they were also deprived of eternal existence. But this means that when they perished they would remain in death and corruption'.⁵³ Athanasius envisages a continued suffering in an existence-deprived condition. This is the death to which Christ submitted himself. We know this because it is also the curse threatened in Genesis 2:17: 'this "you shall die by death", what else is it save not merely to die, but to remain in the corruption of death'.⁵⁴ It was this curse that, as we have seen, Athanasius insists was fulfilled in the death of Christ on the cross.

These are some of the key elements in the thanatology of Athanasius. In one sense this 'death' can, as Flood argues, be construed as a natural outworking of turning away from God the source of life. The turning of the sinner is obviously key in bringing punishment on himself. Nonetheless, so is the active response of

50 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 147.

51 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 4, 145.

52 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 27, 201.

53 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 4, 145.

54 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 3, 143.

God. Later in the work it becomes clear that for Athanasius the state of continued non-existence is the result of divine intervention in judgement. This occurs with the parousia, the 'second manifestation' of the Word:

He will come no more with simplicity but in his own glory, no more with humility but in his own greatness, no more to suffer but thenceforth to bestow the fruit of his own cross on all – I mean the resurrection and incorruption – no more judged but judging all according to the works each one has done in the body, whether good or evil; wherefrom for the good is reserved the kingdom of heaven, but for those who have done evil, eternal fire and outer darkness.⁵⁵

Whatever elements of moral naturalism are present in Athanasius's view of death, there is also a strong emphasis on divine judgement as hiatus and intervention. It is an oversimplification, therefore, to insist that for Athanasius death was simply the natural consequence of sin.⁵⁶

Restoration and retribution

We should leave the prize for imposing over-stated categories in the historiography of the atonement safely in the hands of Gustav Aulén. Flood is right that Athanasius teaches the restoration of creation, but he does not do so by an exclusively restorative account of justice. Rather, the restoration involves the fulfillment of the legal liability of the sinner to retribution by Christ bearing the condemnation of death in his place. This is part of the saving work that brings about the restoration of the sinner, and indeed the whole creation. Athanasius does not believe in 'restorative justice' in the manner that a manual of penology speaks of competing theories of justice, so that the retributive and restorative become two alternative accounts of justice. Rather, he believes that the cross was the fulfillment of the retributive sentence on sin for a restorative purpose. The subordination of retribution to the purpose of restoration does indeed suggest that restoration is the over-arching theme for Athanasius, yet it remains the case that within this wider arc of argument in *De Incarnatione* the fulfillment of the demand of the law by penal substitutionary atonement is a pivotal moment. That Flood should force the two apart is made all the more strange given his recognition that some writers argue that the satisfaction model can be and has been 'rooted in a model of restorative justice'.⁵⁷

Gregory of Nazianzus

Flood's argument on Gregory repeats the point already seen in his account of

55 Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, c. 56, 273, 275.

56 On the significant problems with using any kind of moral naturalism to provide an alternative to penal substitutionary atonement, see Garry J. Williams, 'The Cross and the Punishment of Sin', in *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet*, ed. by David Peterson (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001; repr. 2002).

57 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 154.

the destruction of the curse in Athanasius. He quotes Gregory's statements that Christ 'was called a curse, who destroyed my curse' and 'destroyed the whole condemnation of your sins (ὅλον τὸ κατὰκριμα λύσας τῆς ἀμαρτίας)' to argue that for Gregory the goal of the atonement was 'the destruction of the curse, rather than its fulfilment'.⁵⁸ Flood warms to his theme:

The implications here are staggering: *condemnation* itself is wholly destroyed, dissolved, undone. This effectively takes us out of the bounds of any theory of the *satisfaction* of legal retribution. It is the overturning of the economy of wrath with the superior economy of grace. Christ became condemnation-itself in order to abolish condemnation-itself.⁵⁹

The problem here is revealed in the final sentence: 'Christ became condemnation-itself'. This is a correct statement of Gregory's position that contradicts what Flood has just said about being taken out of the bounds of legal satisfaction. As with Athanasius, for Gregory the economy of grace is indeed larger than a purely legal economy, since if God's government were solely based on law then all sinners would simply be condemned. The economy of law, strictly conceived as operating only legally and apart from mercy, is over-turned. But there are two ways for an economy of grace to overturn an economy of law: by side-stepping it, or by fulfilling its demands and then transcending it. Like Athanasius, Gregory teaches the fulfillment of the demand rather than its abolition. This is what it means for Christ to become 'sin itself and the curse itself (αὐτοαμαρτία καὶ αὐτοκατάρρα)', as Gregory says.⁶⁰ This means that Christ became what the law demanded, not that Christ bypassed the requirement of the law. The verb λύω which Flood takes to mean 'destroy' in the sense of 'annul' can also have the sense of fulfilling or even releasing by making payment. Given that Christ becomes the curse according to Gregory, the verb carries this sense here rather than the idea of simple annulment. If Flood were right that atonement occurs outside the bounds of legal satisfaction, then no one would have to become curse-itself or sin-itself and the astonishing statement that Christ became the curse itself would be wholly unnecessary: there would simply be no curse. According to Gregory the way of retributive justice is not destroyed as Flood says, but is fulfilled and then surpassed with mercy.⁶¹

58 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 150-51. The quotations are from *Orations*, xxx. 5, *NPNF2*, 7:311, and *Orations*, xl. 45, SC, 358:306, *NPNF2*, 7:377.

59 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 151.

60 *Orations*, xxxvii. 1. The translation, cited by Flood, is from Jean Rivière, *The Doctrine of the Atonement: A Historical Essay*, trans. by Luigi Cappadelta, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner; St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1909), 1:207. *NPNF2*, 7:338 has 'very sin and very curse'. The Greek is in SC, 318:272. Note that Flood incorrectly writes αὐτοαμαρτία.

61 Flood next comments briefly on Ambrose, conceding that he maintained 'the idea of Christ bearing punishment as a satisfaction of retributive justice' (153). Flood warns that he did so in a different wider soteriological context from later Calvinism, but this is obvious and uncontroversial.

Augustine

The same pattern of misinterpretation that we have already seen continues in Flood's treatment of Augustine. Flood argues that for Augustine death was borne by Christ for victory *as opposed to* satisfaction: 'for Augustine the purpose of Christ bearing the punishment of death was not in order to fulfil a legal demand for punishment, but to overcome death.'⁶² As with Athanasius and Gregory, Flood finds one system of justice replacing another: 'This is not the satisfaction of punishment, it is the overthrowing of the system of punishment and death that held humanity captive.'⁶³ In Augustine the idea of the devil being defeated further suggests to Flood that 'condemnation and retribution are not satisfied or "exhausted" as they are in penal substitution's retributive model, rather they are *bound, abolished, destroyed*.'⁶⁴

Again, however, we find that Flood imposes a false dichotomy. It is indeed the case that, considered as purely condemnatory, the old system of law, death, and punishment is according to Augustine abolished. It is, however, transcended as the final word in God's relationship with sinful humanity by its requirements being met and fulfilled. There are many passages relevant to this issue in Augustine, but one will suffice to make the point. In Book 1 of *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione*, Augustine seeks to defend his doctrine of original sin against the Pelagians, arguing that death came into the world as the punishment of Adam's sin, and came upon all of his offspring. In so doing, he states a penal substitutionary interpretation of the cross on the basis of a Christological reading of the bronze serpent. His argument here serves the polemical purpose of describing the kind of change that is necessary for someone, including infants, to be saved. Augustine dwells on the work of Christ because the doctrine of sin can be proved by the doctrine of salvation. As so often, his argument is dense. In brief, it may be reduced to two parallel patterns of the union between heaven and earth. The first heaven-earth union describes the salvation of sinners: for men to be saved they must ascend from earth to heaven. This ascent is made possible by the second heaven-earth union, the joining of the heavenly (divine) and earthly (human) natures of Christ in one person. Augustine explains that the reunion also required the cross because 'this great and wonderful dignity can only be attained by the remission of sins'.⁶⁵ It is at this point that he turns to the bronze serpent in John 3 and Numbers 21:

What means the uplifted serpent but the death of Christ, by that mode of expressing a sign, whereby the thing which is effected is signified by that which effects it? Now death came by the serpent, which persuaded man to commit the sin, by which he deserved to die. The Lord, however, transferred to His own flesh not sin (*in carnem suam non peccatum transtulit*),

62 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 154.

63 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 154.

64 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 156.

65 Augustine, *De Peccatorum Meritis*, i. 61; *NPNFL*, 5:39.

as the poison of the serpent, but He did transfer to it death (*sed tamen transtulit mortem*), that the penalty without the fault (*poena sine culpa*) might transpire in (*ut esset in*) the likeness of sinful flesh, whence, in the sinful flesh, both the fault might be removed and the penalty (*et culpa solueretur et poena*). As, therefore, it then came to pass that whoever looked at the raised serpent was both healed of the poison and freed from death, so also now, whosoever is conformed to the likeness of the death of Christ by faith in Him and His baptism, is freed both from sin by justification, and from death by resurrection.⁶⁶

This passage is easier to fathom when we realize that Augustine is reading together not just John 3 and Numbers 21, but also Genesis 3. The bronze serpent is a type of Christ, but the serpent here is also the serpent in Eden, the one who ‘persuaded man to commit the sin’. This yields the following definitions. The cause (‘that which effects’) is the serpent who tempted Adam and Eve. The effect (‘the thing which is effected’) is death. The bronze serpent thus represents the cause, the effect, and the solution: sin, death, and salvation. Christ, as the one lifted up, is the antitype of the bronze serpent, but Augustine applies only two of the elements to Christ: Christ became salvation by transferring to himself the penalty of death, but not sin as the cause. That is, Christ did not sin, but he did remove the punishment for sin to himself. As with Gregory, Augustine here teaches that the punishment is removed, but it is removed by being borne not by the replacement of the sentence on sin with another economy. The passage thus contradicts Flood’s interpretation because it so clearly explains what happens to the penalty for sin: it is not removed by the abolition of the entire penal system but is transferred to Christ (note the repeated use of *transfero*) and actually transpires in him (*ut esset in*). It is removed, but only by being fulfilled.

Lastly, Flood engages in a spectacular piece of interpretative gymnastics. He quotes this sentence from Augustine: ‘Does this mean then that the Son was already so reconciled to us that he was even prepared to die for us, while the Father was still so angry with us that unless the Son died for us he would not be reconciled to us?’⁶⁷ Flood then comments: ‘The later half of this sentence is in fact exactly what advocates of penal substitution often claim’, and he gives an example from John Piper in the foreword to *Pierced for Our Transgressions*. Flood then states that ‘in response to this’ Augustine affirms that God loved us before the Son died and before he even made the world, thus implying a contradiction between Augustine and Piper at this point.⁶⁸ Flood, who often urges the importance of context, here removes half of Augustine’s statement from its context, finds someone saying what it now says in its dismembered form, and then returns to the original context to conclude that Augustine contradicts it. But Augustine disagrees with the *entire* statement as he wrote it, not with Flood’s ver-

66 Augustine, *De Peccatorum Meritis*, i. 61; *NPNF1*, 5:39; *CSEL*, 60:62.

67 Flood, ‘Church Fathers’, 156, citing *De Trinitate*, 13. iv. 15.

68 Flood, ‘Church Fathers’, 156.

sion. Taken as he wrote it, the statement Augustine rejects contrasts the Son and the Father (marked in the Latin by *vero* and the repeated *usque adeo*) as merciful and wrathful. Such a contrast cannot be found among careful advocates of penal substitutionary atonement. The dismembered version simply asserts the need for propitiation, which is a wholly different claim. As Flood himself says, 'it is a matter of context'.⁶⁹

There is a further problem here. Flood does acknowledge that 'at least since John Stott's book *The Cross of Christ*, most advocates of the Reformed notion of penal substitution have not framed the atonement as a dichotomy between a loving Son and angry Father, but as God's own sacrifice for us'. The words 'at least since' leave Flood some leeway for someone finding earlier examples than Stott, but the evidence of care in this regard goes so far back that Flood's attribution of the development to Stott suggests a fragile grasp of the history of the doctrine. Here, for example, is John Calvin, quoting Augustine himself:

God's love is incomprehensible and unchangeable. For it was not after we were reconciled to him through the blood of his Son that he began to love us. Rather, he has loved us before the world was created, that we also might be his sons along with his only-begotten Son – before we became anything at all. The fact that we were reconciled through Christ's death must not be understood as if his Son reconciled us to him that he might now begin to love those whom he had hated.⁷⁰

This position was maintained by the later Reformed writers, and was strengthened by their teaching on the covenant of redemption, the covenant in which the Father and the Son together will our salvation from eternity.⁷¹

Conclusion

The chief problem that pervades Flood's article is one of method. Again and again he cites against the penal substitutionary interpretation of the patristic evidence other statements made by the writers, and then reads the penal language within bounds supposedly set by those other statements. Thus, he cites the language of *Christus Medicus* or *Christus Victor* and uses it to maintain that a writer understood death as a disease to be removed or an oppressor to be defeated, *rather than* as an aspect of divine retribution against sin. As we have seen, this method of interpretation is forced and flawed. It involves using one strand of material to determine the meaning of another when the text itself does not give

69 Flood, 'Church Fathers', 144.

70 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols, The Library of Christian Classics, 20-21 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), II. xvi. 4, 1:506.

71 See, for example, John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. by William H. Goold, 16 vols (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965-68; repr. 1993), i. 3, 10:163.

it this role. In every instance, the language of restoration or oppression is not used by the church fathers to exegete the idea of penalty. None of the writers themselves give us reason to think that the idea of penalty is determined by the other concepts used. It is Flood who chooses to use one to explain the other, and then imposes that use on the texts. This is done even when the specific Latin or Greek vocabulary used to refer to punishment is the vocabulary of retribution. In the case of Eusebius, the text is read this way even though explicitly disjunctive language occurs between the two depictions of the work of Christ. Flood is right to plead for close contextual readings of the language used by our writers, but quoting neighbouring words or sentences that do not stand in an explanatory relationship and pressing one to explain and limit the natural sense of the other is not exegesis.

Even where one set of terms is used within a framework broadly shaped by the other, as with Athanasius, a second, still deeper problem remains. Flood's interpretations repeatedly assume that broader concepts of restoration and oppression exclude the idea of retributive penalty. Thus, if the language of healing or conquest frames the penal language, the kind of justice in view must be restorative as opposed to retributive. This interpretation relies on supposing among the fathers an implicit framework of dichotomized penal theories wherein one functions to exclude another. Flood imposes an interpretative grid of competing penal theories that locks down the texts into discrete categories of atonement doctrine and denies that they teach penal substitutionary atonement.⁷² The distorting effect is clear: it must be *Christus Vicarius or Christus Victor*, *Christus Vicarius or Christus Medicus*.⁷³ We might ask why the dichotomy should not be pressed to become a trichotomy, taking *Christus Medicus* to exclude not only *Christus Vicarius* but also *Christus Victor*. Why should each model exclude only one other?

How then should we read the fathers? My plea is not for *Christus Vicarius* to the exclusion of all other language and concepts. Again, let Aulén have his prize. Certainly the themes of restoration and victory were present, and in some writers they were the primary categories. But that does not mean that they excluded retributive notions. Rather than adducing general evidence of restoration or victory and using it to trump specific retributive vocabulary, we should maintain the integrity of all of the descriptions in the passages in question and allow the richness of patristic views of the cross to stand out. Proper exegetical attention to the details of their writings, which I have begun to set out here, demonstrates that for Justin Martyr, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose, and Augustine, this richness included penal substitutionary atonement.

72 It is further clear from his website that Flood himself maintains such a dichotomy, for example in the title: 'Understanding the Cross: Penal Substitution vs. Christus Victor' (http://therebelgod.com/cross_intro.shtml, accessed 30th April 2010).

73 I use *Christus Vicarius* here as shorthand for *Christus Vicarius poenalis*: I recognize that Flood himself affirms that Christ died as a substitute (*vicarius*).

Abstract

This article replies to the claim of Derek Flood that the church fathers did not teach penal substitutionary atonement. It revisits examples cited in *Pierced for Our Transgressions* from the author's own doctorate. Flood's claim is met in two ways: by closer exegesis of the primary texts, and by a critique of his method. It is shown that Flood repeatedly uses restoration or victory themes in the writers to trump their specific retributive vocabulary and concepts. Against this approach, it is argued that we should maintain the integrity of all of the descriptions in the texts and allow the richness of patristic views of the cross to stand out, a richness that includes penal substitutionary atonement.

Aspects of the Atonement Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity

I. Howard Marshall

The Christian understanding of the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ and its relationship to the salvation of sinful humanity is currently the subject of intense debate and criticism. In the first two chapters Howard Marshall discusses the nature of the human plight in relation to the judgment of God and then offers a nuanced defence of the doctrine of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for sinners. The third chapter examines the place of the resurrection of Christ as an integral part of the process whereby sinners are put in the right with God. In the final chapter Marshall argues that in our communication of the gospel today the New Testament concept of reconciliation may be the most comprehensive and apt expression of the lasting significance of the death of Christ. The papers are expanded versions of the 2006 series of Chuen King Lectures given in the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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