Non-Penal Atonement and Anselm's Satisfaction Theory[1]

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Christ's work on the cross is traditionally understood as an act of retributive justice in which God punishes Christ in the place of sinful humanity. But this penal view of the atonement is inconsistent with the intrinsic relationship between God's justice and love. An examination informed by Anselm's Satisfaction Theory demonstrates the cross is punishment on sin alone and a declaration in which the Father manifests his justice and love in Christ's offering what we owe, bringing about a new world order of distributive justice.

Introduction

Jesus Christ crucified is the heart of Christian understanding and hope. The proclamation that the very Lord was crucified formed the climax of the church's first sermon and the foundational conviction of the greatest apostle (Acts 2:36; 1 Cor 1:22-24). On this basis, we have peace with God, the forgiveness of sins, and entry into eternal life.

An Ocean Vast of Blessing explores the meaning of the cross using five analogies: satisfaction, sacrifice, moral communication, ransom, and recapitulation. Given the constraints of a journal article, this essay will consider Anselm's argument that by offering satisfaction for sins, Christ vicariously achieved what we could not and averted the punishment due us.

It will further argue that compared with most traditional views, his explanation of a non-penal substitutionary atonement better explains the biblical data and the wealth of Christian tradition.

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[1] This is adapted from chapter five in Steven D. Cone, *An Ocean Vast of Blessing: A Theology of Grace* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014). Used by permission.

Satisfaction for Sins

In his theological masterpiece, *Cur Deus homo*, Anselm of Canterbury explored the question: "[F]or what cause or necessity, in sooth, God became man, and by his own death, as we believe and affirm, restored life to the world; when he might have done this, by means of some other being, angelic or human, or merely by his will."[2]

The meaning of "cause or necessity" in this question is by no means easy to parse.[3] Anselm had no disciples who were theologians to expound his work, and he produced no commentaries on his own writings.

If Anselm is read carefully, the basis of the "necessity" refers to divine love and compassion and to what is fitting for this wise, just, and compassionate God.[4] It would be a strikingly different analysis were the logic of love removed—in fact, one that bears no resemblance to Anselm's argument.

Anselm knew well and expressed explicitly that God is not subject to compulsion. Rather than viewing his understanding of the incarnation and atonement as God's adherence to a required standard, it is better to see it as the ultimate expression of divine rationality and love in the world.

Satisfying God's Judgment

Anselm explained the "necessity" of the incarnation in relation to salvation. In the beginning, God created humans in a state of original righteousness (justice), with the goal of bringing humanity into an even greater state of eternal blessedness and communion with himself.

Both the original righteousness and the intended eternal blessedness were contingent on obedience. Everything, however, did not go well. Through disobedience, humans introduced disorder into the universe.[5]

To explain the problem and the wonderful nature of God's solution, Anselm used an analogy with the world he knew, that of medieval European society. His analogy revolved around "honor," which was the basis of the feudal bonds that held together his civilization.

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[2] Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 1.1.

[3] Bernard S.J. Lonergan, "On Redemption," in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1958–1964* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 8.

[4] See, for example, Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 1.12; 1.15; 1.21; 1.23; 1.25; 2.16; 2.20. On fittingness in Anselm compared with Aquinas, see also Adam J. Johnson "A Fuller Account: The Role of 'Fittingness' in Thomas Aquinas' Development of the Doctrine of the Atonement," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12 (2010) 304-305, n. 7.

[5] Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 1.15.

According to his analogy, human sin is an offense against the honor of God, whom he pictures as an infinitely great king. Honor, in Anselm's society, had to do with a person's right to exist in the capacity which he or she held.

Offending a king's honor was to act as if and thereby claim the king had no right to be king, that he should not exist in society as king. To offend against God's honor is to say that we, not God, will be God. But, God's place in the order of creature and creator is absolutely secure.

While the "currency" of Anselm's analysis is the divine honor, he is also explicit that God's own honor can neither increase nor decrease.[6] Human disobedience does not damage God's honor because it cannot be damaged.

What it damages are the disobedient. Giving God right honor means existing in the universe as rightly related to him, and it is a contradiction to exist in justice with God while being unjust.

But existing in right relation with God is intrinsic to and constitutive of eternal blessedness, for which gift humans were created. God's eternal plans (making humans for blessedness and communion with himself), therefore, seemed frustrated by the factual character of his creation—an untenable situation.

The power of Anselm's analogy comes to the fore when he explores the question of how God's wisdom can overcome this dire situation. He sets up two questions dealing with the relation of human sin and God's justice: First, could God not just forgive humans, thereby solving the problem? Second, if it is not fitting for God simply to forgive humans, is there any other solution to the problem than a retributive justice of eternal punishment?

Notice that neither question inherently opposes God's justice and gracious nature. What is questioned is whether either simple forgiveness or the punishment that attends retributive justice are appropriate answers.

Anselm argues it is not fitting for God simply to forgive sinners out of compassion because that would be contrary to his honor; however, if read carefully, Anselm's point is if God were merely to forgive without the incarnation, it would be a false compassion.[7]

Without Christ's satisfaction, no real change would occur in any member of the human race concerning the conditions of eternal blessedness, which requires not only an absence of punishment but also the reestablishment of a right relationship with God.[8]

Anselm argues a greater justice of God exists, established and declared by the incarnation, than the punishment that attends retributive justice. Within Anselm's

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 1.24.

[8] Ibid., 1.20-21.

feudal society—the basis of his analogy—an unjust offense against a person's honor could be dealt with in more than one way.

It would be just for the offended party to demand retributive justice that would punish the offender. However, it would also be just for the offended party to accept an offer of satisfaction instead of demanding punishment.[9] For an offender to make satisfaction is to offer something of greater worth—something more pleasing to the offended party.

Herein lies a problem: all of creation pales in significance to the honor of God offended by sin. Humans have nothing adequate to offer God in satisfaction.[10]

Because God is an infinitely great king, the least aspect of his will is of greater value than all of creation. Sin, therefore, deserves an infinitely great punishment. A life of suffering and physical death followed by eternal damnation does not reach the gravity of offending God's honor. With no satisfaction to offer, humans can only await punishment.

The good offered for satisfaction in this case must be of infinite worth. God, of course, has himself the ability to make this satisfaction—his worth is infinite, as are his resources.

However, it is not right for God, in his own terms alone, to make the satisfaction: He is not the one who committed the offense.[11] Anselm's famous solution is that if God took on human nature, the God-man would have the resources to make satisfaction (being God) and the right to make satisfaction (being human).[12]

But even should the God-man Christ come to exist, as a human, he owed God perfect obedience (just as every other human). Everything he could ever do in life was already owed to God (James 4:17). What, then, could even Christ offer to make the satisfaction?

Because Christ was human, he owed God everything in his life. But because he was sinless, he did not owe God death, for death is the wages of sin (Rom 6:23). So Christ's willing acceptance of death on behalf of helpless humankind would be something he could offer God to make satisfaction. And it would be something of infinite worth—the life of the incarnate God.[13]

By this analysis, it is quite important for Anselm that Christ's death on the cross was not a mere act of obedience.[14] Being a monk, bishop, and theologian, Anselm knew very well the Scriptures describing Christ's death as an act of obedience (Heb 5:8; Phil 2:8).

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[9] Ibid., 1.15.

[10] Ibid., 1.20.

[11] Ibid., 2.6.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 2.10.

[14] Ibid.

His point, however, is that Christ's death must be something he freely chose, not merely something he was compelled to do by the Father. Otherwise, it would fall under the rubric of "what is owed God," on the basis of which no satisfaction may be offered. The way Anselm pictured Christ's obedience, therefore, was not as someone who receives an order that he is under compulsion to follow, but as someone who follows—by free will and out of love—an agreed-upon plan he is given to complete.[15]

The rationale of Anselm's analogy strongly opposes the idea that the satisfaction made by Christ lay in taking the punishment of retributive justice. According to the justice of Anselm's society, one could choose either satisfaction *or* punishment in response to an offense, not both. So the cross is the good by which Christ offers satisfaction to God for sin, not a punishment.[16] This does not mean retributive justice has no place in the cross.

Retribution pays back what is owed, and Christ's work on our behalf—a great good which went beyond anything he was required to do—deserves a payment of great merit. Being perfect, Christ did not need the reward for himself. Therefore, out of love, he asked that it be credited to our account, as satisfaction for our sins.[17]

That Christ satisfies the honor of God means he fully acknowledges and credits God with being God. In so doing, he stands as a member of the human race so that right relationship with God may be reintroduced into the human race. Because temptation was not able to conquer Christ, human nature was not conquered by human disobedience and its consequent injustice.

To enter into an eternal blessedness while being, in fact, a miserable and unjust creature is a contradiction in terms and the state in which humans would have been left had God merely forgiven and not made satisfaction through the incarnation. But because of the work of Christ, the status of humans can change.

The "debt" owed to God in Anselm's analogy is a stand-in concept for the obedience of secure, right relationship with God. Because of Christ's death, the universe is different and humans are different that they may be effective in giving this obedience, in being in this right relationship that leads to eternal life.

The counterpart of retributive justice is distributive justice,[18] which has to do with the right arrangement of a society or of whatever whole is being contemplated. Distributive justice is more fundamental, for it is only in the context of a society that the rights and wrongs satisfied by retribution may be given their appropriate measure.

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[15] Anselm, *Cur Deus homo* 1.9-10; 2.17; see also Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, III 47.2 re 1.

[16] Anselm, *Cur Deus homo* 1.15.

[17] Ibid. 2.19-20.

[18] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 5.2; *Summa theologica* II–II 61.1.

In his *Cur Deus homo*, Anselm demonstrates the friendship between God's grace and his justice. Rather than measuring out punishment for sin, God fulfills the requirements of retributive justice (by accepting satisfaction and awarding merit) in a way that shows the wisdom of his providence, declaring in the cross a distributive justice that gives life by overcoming evil and sin.

The justice of God Anselm extolls is the expression of the divine wisdom that justifies sinners, giving his own righteousness to them by joining to them in Christ that they may become joined to him in eternal fellowship. God's relentless pursuit of this justice does not stop until we are fully and truly restored.[19]

The cross does not result from a legal necessity balancing God's justice against his desire to forgive. Rather, the cross is the declaration of the Father's justice—the right arrangement of the universe—in which his love is made manifest as the righteous God-man's performing for us what we could not do; giving to the Father what we owe, rightly because he is one of us and perfectly because he is himself God.

God and Violence

Anselm's analogy raises several questions not dealt with completely in his work. First, how could a violent murder satisfy God? Second, how could someone else's actions have moral worth for us? Third, is it right to exclude the notion of punishment from the cross?

Peter Abelard strongly protested Anselm's satisfaction analogy, arguing Christ's violent death was the worst crime ever committed and that such an offense, rather than satisfying God, was repugnant to him.[20] A number of modern scholars, particularly Anabaptist and feminist theologians, have also argued Anselm's solution seems to conceive God as a wrathful being who loves violence.[21]

In the logic of Anselm's analogy, that which is offered to God must indeed be something pleasing—in fact, infinitely pleasing—to him, or else no satisfaction may be made. How could a violent and unjust death please God?

In his multifaceted analysis of the atonement, Aquinas offers an insight that helps solve this quandary. The murder of Christ was an offense against God and did not please him. However, Christ's perfect willingness to sacrifice himself on behalf of humanity was pleasing to God, and that made the satisfaction.[22]

This willingness of Christ was his willingness to say, "Yes," in the actual deliberation of accepting the death of the cross. It was not a hypothetical consideration.

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[19] Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 1.24.

[20] Abelard, *Romans*, 2.2.

[21] See, for example, J. Denny Weaver, "Violence in Christian Theology," *Cross Currents* 51 (2001) 155-159; and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000) 97-100.

[22] Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, III 48.2.

His being willing to make satisfaction intrinsically included the actuality of his death: not Gethsemane alone but also Golgotha, for the "Yes" was not complete until he gave up his spirit into the Father's hands.

The murder of Christ was an evil, and neither injustice nor violence pleases God. Yet Christ's great love for us, the attitude by which he cared more for our good than for his situation, is cherished by God and rewarded by him as the greatest possible human good (John 15:13; Phil 2:5-11).

The evil wills of those who betrayed, deserted, falsely tried, and killed Christ, then, and their evil deeds consequent upon that bad will, were instances of moral evil. God never wills moral evil (*malum culpae*), but neither does God entirely stop it from occurring. The suffering of Christ, a *malum poenae* (penal evil, or the evil from which humans suffer), was willed by God only insofar as he willed Christ's participation in a greater good, even in the face of moral evil (Rom 8:28; Heb 12:2).

The good will by which Christ accepted suffering and death was both a particular good and the very foundation of this whole universe's good of order—the heart of the divine economy. This great good was directly willed by God and made satisfaction for sins.[23]

This analysis reveals the great difference between the wholeness of personhood by which Christ voluntarily proceeded to the cross and the loss of personhood implied by cycles of abuse. What was pleasing to God was Christ's perfect will, in which his human will perfectly cohered with his divine will.

A good will reflects the ultimate rightness of being because completion and fullness of freedom is found in right relation to God. A situation in which a person, due to violence, loses rightness of being is not analogous to Christ's satisfaction but one of the evils from which Christ's death saves us. It is not violence that pleases God but a heart that is both free and upright.

Even in his exercise of retributive justice, God is demanding that evildoers participate in some aspect of the good for which they were made. Rather than turning them away from their true natures—by choosing moral evil, they have made that choice themselves (as do all to some extent)—God insists they participate in the good of his divine ordering of the universe: the good according to which human nature exists and toward which it naturally tends.

The violence in God's judgment against evil, then, is performed by the evildoers themselves, upon themselves. Turning to evil means turning away from their own natures, for humans are created good. God gives evildoers participation in the

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[23] See Bernard S. J. Lonergan, *The Divine Redeemer: A Supplement to De Verbo Incarnato* (trans. Michael Shields; Toronto: Lonergan Research Institute, 2000), 105-106; and Mark Miller, "Why the Passion?: Bernard Lonergan on the Cross as Communication" (Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 2008) 214-217. See also ch. 3 of *An Ocean Vast of Blessing* on moral, penal, and natural evil, especially with respect to the will of God.

good, demanding participation in the gift of having a self and a God-given nature, either by receiving the punishment of retributive justice or redemption that restores us to ourselves and to God.

The function of God's wrath, then, is to bring us to account for the gift of creation if we will not accept his redemption (Matt 25:14-30), not to turn us away from our true selves (Luke 8:16-18). God does not model violence, then, but rather calls us to self-transcendence in love (Rom 5:1-5).

Moral Good from a Friend

The second question Anselm's analogy must face is how Christ's action can solve the moral problem humans have with God. Can one person truly act in a way that has moral significance for another? For Western individualists recovering from the Enlightenment this question gives great difficulty (Immanuel Kant flatly denied the possibility[24]) because we see our true selves as closed in on ourselves and isolated.

The ancient world, to the contrary, saw humans as fundamentally connected. Who we are is really and essentially bound up with other people with whom we share life. Lonergan is again worth quoting at length on this matter:

> So it is that a friend is said to be one's alter ego;[25] and Augustine in the Confessions exclaims, "Well has someone said of his friend that he is "half of his soul.'"[26] As to the greatness and excellence of Christ's love for us, he himself has given ample testimony by his deeds and also in his words: "There is no greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15.13). . . .
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> Now if between husband and wife and between friends "all mine is yours and all yours is mine" (see John 17.10), how could it be otherwise than that Christ should make our cross his own? So thoroughly did he do so, in fact, that we forget it is our cross and usually refer simply to "the cross of Christ." But in point of fact it is through the mystery of the cross that sinners are to come into friendship with God. Christ, however, was sinless (1 Peter 2.22) and a stranger to sin (2 Corinthians 5.21), tempted in every way as we are, though without sin (Hebrews 4.15); he was a holy priest, innocent, unsullied, set apart from sinful men and, while not needing to offer sacrifice for his own sins (Hebrews 7.26-27), offered himself to God as a pure and spotless lamb (1 Peter 1.19). Thus did he make his own a cross that was not his. He knew well that we are taught more effectively by example than by precept. And this also he knew, that "if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself" (John 12.32). In this way, then, he not only assimilated and united himself to us, but in a most compelling manner invited us into assimilation and union with him.[27]

[24] Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: HarperOne, 2008) 48-49.

[25] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 9.4.

[26] Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.6; see *ST* I-II 28.1.

[27] Lonergan, *The Divine Redeemer*, 155-156.

Therefore, we who were enemies of God are brought into peace with God through the actions of one who came to be our closest and truest friend, who laid down his life for us. We are saved not as isolated selves—for that is not who we are—but in communion with the Friend of Sinners, our savior.

Satisfaction or Punishment?

The final question Anselm's analogy must face is whether it is right to exclude the notion of punishment entirely from an understanding of the cross. While *Cur Deus homo* addresses a great number of issues and scriptures in its treatment of the atonement, it includes no discussion or explanation of Isaiah 53.

While some later Western theologians did follow Anselm in arguing the cross is not a punishment, most followed the traditional language and logic that included punishment. However, in Anselm's logic, Christ's vicarious satisfaction absolutely excludes punishment; to accept satisfaction and also give punishment would be unjust, for exactly in accepting the satisfaction a just judge is laying aside punishment.

This question offers three significant points to consider. First, what, specifically, is intended by "punishment." Second, is God essentially wrathful such that he has to punish sin? Third, is punishment related in any way with the cross?

What Is Meant by Punishment?

Christ's death was certainly a *malum poenae*, an example of evil suffered as a consequence of some sin. *Malum poenae* is traditionally translated as "penal evil," or "the evil of punishment."[28]

But not every penal evil is an example of a person actually being punished, let alone being punished by God. In some cases, it indicates the result of being in the wrong place at the wrong time or suffering as the result of another person's sin.

The category is wide and simply indicates the suffering of a rational being, with or without an actual punishment. However, much Christian tradition does understand the cross to be a punishment of Christ *by God*.

Just punishment—the negative consequence of retributive justice—normally indicates suffering imposed either on a wrongdoer receiving punishment as retributive justice or on a person in need of amendment, for whom the punishment is therapeutic.[29] The former instance refers to a specific wrong action that deserves punishment, while the second refers to discipline for the improvement of the soul.

However, Christ was not a wrongdoer, nor did his character need improvement. Therefore, rightful punishment in the usual sense cannot apply to the cross. But it remains to be seen whether it or any third sense of punishment rightly applies to Christ.

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[28] See the "three-lane highway" discussion of ch. 3 in Cone, *Ocean Vast.*

[29] Lonergan, *The Divine* Redeemer, 166-167.

Is God Essentially Wrathful?

Punishment has connection with the wrath of God (Num 16:46; Deut 9:8; Ps 38:1; Isa 13:9; Rom 2:5; Eph 5:6). Wrath, however, cannot be an eternal—that is, an essential—aspect of the character of God. God's character is not different from his being, and no eternal reality except God himself exists.[30]

For wrath to be an eternal aspect of God's character, an appropriate expression of wrath among the immanent Trinitarian persons would have to exist. That means that just as a mutual interpenetration of wisdom and love exists among the Father, Son and Spirit, so would the appropriate use of wrath exist among them.

This wrathful expression would need to attend eternal, not temporal reality. Because wrath only rightly attends some situation or aspect of wrong, to affirm wrath as an aspect of God's eternal character would therefore be to deny his goodness, either by saying wrong exists in one (or more) of the persons of God to which wrath can rightly attach or by saying God is inappropriately wrathful.

God's wrath, then, is an external (*ad extra*) relation. It reflects his eternal character, but it is not a part of it. Aquinas saw wrath as reflecting God's justice with respect to those who are disobedient.[31] It is important to note, however, that God is simple, not divided against himself, and it would be inappropriate to suggest wrath reflects God's justice in a way opposed to, exclusive of, or lacking with respect to his love.

Justice and love cannot compete in God because no real distinction between them exists. They are both ways in which humans, as complex and developing beings, understand the one, eternal, and simple, substance of God.

God's love and wrath function quite differently. His love is true and present, even to the worst of sinners, for it is an aspect of the being that God is. Wrath, however, is a temporal relation given in response to a sinful act or situation. If the reason for the wrath were gone, then no wrath would remain, for God is not angry without reason.

To the extent Christ's vicarious work effectively satisfies for sin (or to use a different metaphor, to the extent his sacrifice expiates sin), no basis remains for wrath. But, it would be great impiety to suggest the effectiveness of Christ's satisfying work is incomplete, as though the life he had to offer to the Father were of less than infinite worth or as though the intention by which he offered it was incomplete or impure.

Perhaps, though, the requirements of justice, not his wrath, led God to punish Jesus in our place on the cross. Justice is an eternal characteristic of God. Although God expects humans to forgive sin without punishment, would it actually be good for the one who governs on a cosmic scale to do the same?

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[30] See Augustine, *The Trinity*, V; see also Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, I.3.

[31] Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, I-II 47.1 ad. 1.

Aquinas, conversely, argues it is precisely because of God's preeminent nature that he alone is truly able simply to forgive sins without violating justice:

> Even this justice depends on the Divine will, requiring satisfaction for sin from the human race. But if He had willed to free man from sin without any satisfaction, He would not have acted against justice. For a judge, while preserving justice, cannot pardon fault without penalty, if he must visit fault committed against another—for instance, against another man, or against the State, or any Prince in higher authority. But God has no one higher than Himself, for He is the sovereign and common good of the whole universe. Consequently, if He forgive sin, which has the formality of fault in that it is committed against Himself, He wrongs no one: just as anyone else, overlooking a personal trespass, without satisfaction, acts mercifully and not unjustly. And so David exclaimed when he sought mercy: "To Thee only have I sinned" (Psalm 50:6), as if to say: "Thou canst pardon me without injustice."[32]

To say God is required to punish because of the requirements of justice would either be to say an external standard exists that God must meet (which is absurd) or that the magnanimity God gives to humans—indeed, commands of humans in imitation of him—is something he cannot rightly have in himself.

But, in that case, freely forgiving our enemies from our heart would not be an imitation of the life of God; it, therefore, could not rightly be part of the Christ-life God creates in us. In reality, however, forgiveness is so central to salvation that Christ strictly warned no one can participate in his kingdom without it (Matt 6:14-15).

God will avenge (Deut 32:35; Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30), but this assurance does not indicate his moral operations are such that actions evil by any other consideration are good when done by him. We know what evil is because we learn about good from God's character and actions.

For example, in Rom 9:19-24, Paul applies the standards of human ethics as having explanatory power for God's moral decisions. That Paul can do so indicates the rupture between human and divine ethics is not so radical that evil for us is good for God.

In Matt 5:48, Jesus explains imitating God as the very basis of the ethics of God's kingdom. If God, precisely by being God, is vindictive, then the ethics Jesus commanded in Matthew 5–7 simply have no relation to God's perfection. Or rather, they have a contrary relation and to follow Jesus, we must learn that imitating God means only to do what he says and not what he does. But this is exactly the hypocrisy for which Jesus condemned the Jewish leaders (Matt 23:2-3), not the method by which we should try to obey God.

To say God's standard of ethics is different from ours in this respect does not honor God's transcendence; it inadequately understands our absolute dependence

[32] Ibid., 46.2 re 3.

on him.[33] God's goodness is assuredly something very strange and beyond human understanding, but this is because God himself perfectly and completely exists as the infinite perfection to which humans are finitely ordered.

If God's judgment reflects Jesus' character, it indicates God gives to evildoers participation in retributive justice when they will accept no other good. Jesus did not oppose the corrupt Jewish leaders with parables rather than fire from heaven because he was limited in the scope of his power.

Jesus taught them in parables because he is the infinite and omnipotent God, whose fullness dwells in human form (John 11:22). In the face of corruption, the omnipotent Christ offered education, healing, and a call to repentance; he also sternly warned of the horrible consequences of refusing this participation in the good (Matt 24:45-51). God exercises power only according to his will, and his will is *always* good.

Punishment on the Cross?

It may seem the factual nature of the cross leads to the conclusion that it is a punishment. Christ died on it, and death seems to be a punishment.[34] Christ also died hanging on a tree, and Scripture points especially to this death as being under God's curse (Deut 21:23).

As discussed in chapter three of *An Ocean Vast of Blessing*, death relates to human reality and sin in more than one sense. Considered one way, it is a gracious limiting of the human capacity for evil and is not in itself a punishment.

We are restrained from living eternally on our own terms, apart from communion with God, and from practicing and receiving the destruction that would attend that eternal state. Lossky states:

> The curse of death has never been a judgment of God. It was the punishment of a loving father, not the obtuse anger of a tyrant. Its character was educative and restorative. It prevented the perpetuation of an estranged life, the apathetic induction into an anti-natural condition. It not only put a limit on the decomposition of our nature, but, by the anguish of finitude, helped man to become alive to his condition and turn to God.[35]

Although Lossky uses the language of "curse" and "punishment," his statement rules out connotations of retributive justice. In this sense, death is the wound given by a faithful friend (Prov 27:6).

However, this understanding of death cannot explain the death of Christ. Christ never practiced evil, and he resisted every temptation. Death in this sense is

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[33] See "the distinction," in ch. 1 of Cone, *Ocean Vast.*

[34] Lonergan, *The Divine Redeemer*, 173.

[35] Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978) 113.

the wages of sin, for it results from God's compassion on a sinful humanity that needs to be restrained. But Christ did not need to be restrained; he lived in the way the first Adam could not, always and only for the good.

The second sense of death, discussed in *Ocean Vast's* third chapter, is the way in which humans are swallowed by the whale, that is, subject to the forces of evil of their own being. This understanding of death—the Sign of Jonah—explicitly does apply to the death of Christ, but must be examined carefully (Matt 12:39-41; Luke 11:29-32).

Christ was not subject to any evil of his own being, whether from any sense of actual or original sin (Heb 4:15). The darkness tried to claim him, but it could not because it did not understand him and had no place in him (John 1:5; 14:30).

Christ submitted himself to be swallowed by the whale so that death itself might be swallowed up by his victory (1 Cor 15:54-57). Rather than a punishment, then, Christ's dereliction and suffering indicate the great battle by which he overcomes the evil of the world, the flesh, and the devil.[36]

With respect to the curse of hanging on a tree, it must remembered that the intelligibility of the cross can be dynamic—transformative—not purely syllogistic.[37] According to a straightforward syllogism, if God curses those who hang on a tree, and Christ hung on a tree, then Christ must be accursed.

But the logic of the cross is a great inversion. It transforms, stepping outside and reversing the way things normally come to be. Rather than himself being cursed by God, Christ overcame our curse by hanging on the cross. Here, as in the examination below of Isaiah 53, the focus is Christ's victory, not punishment.

Perhaps one must fall back on the language of Scripture and submit to Isaiah's dictum that in the cross, God laid on Christ the punishment for all (Isa 53:5). While the Fourth Song of the Suffering Servant (Isa 52:13–53:12) has complex history of interpretation by Jewish interpreters leading up to the time of Christ, early Christians came to understand this passage as speaking centrally and definitively about Jesus and his work on the cross.

The NT and surviving literature from the era of the Apologists and the Patristic writers testifies to this.[38] The authorization to interpret the Scripture this way comes from Jesus' own words.

For example, in preparing his disciples for his passion, Jesus tells them, "For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was counted among the lawless'; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled" (Luke 22:37, NRSV).[39]

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[36] This understanding of Christ's death will be treated more fully in the ransom analogy, as discussed in ch. five of Cone, *Ocean Vast.*

[37] See Lonergan, "On Redemption."

[38] See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66* (NAC; Nashville: B&H, 2007) 464-473.

[39] Jesus here refers to Isa 53:12. For just a few of the more substantial direct references in the NT to Isaiah 53, see also Matt 8:17, John 12:38, Acts 8:32–33, Rom 10:16, and 1 Pet 2:22–24.

To be "counted among the lawless" indicates Christ's expectation that he will die a transgressors' death, and Isa 53:5 specifically labels this death a "punishment" (NRSV).

The readers of Scripture leading up to Christ's coming did not understand Isaiah 53 to refer to God's dying on a cross. As frequently as the earliest Christian communities, including the NT authors, used Isaiah 53 to help them understand what happened on Calvary, the fundamental interpretive principle and fact was the death and resurrection of Christ.

That is to say, it is important to see exactly how the NT uses Isaiah 53—both in remembering Christ's words and interpreting his meaning—and not simply to apply modern notions about the meaning of Scripture.[40] The reality of Jesus illuminates the meaning of Isaiah 53, and from it we can come back enlightened to him, but the fundamental principle and test of all understanding remains him.

The NT's application of Isaiah 53 to Jesus follows a number of rationales. Matthew 8:17 dynamically connects Christ's taking on our infirmities (Isa 53:4) with his ministry of divine healing and exorcism. John 12:38 connects Isa 53:1 with the moral impotence and refusal of the covenant people to believe in Christ and receive the light.

Acts 8:32-33 proclaims Jesus incarnates the meaning of the Song itself, especially in his suffering and death. Romans 10:16 connects Isa 53:1 with the need of the unevangelized to hear the gospel and come to faith. And 1 Pet 2:22-24 encourages those who are "servants" or "slaves" in the present world order to look to the way in which Christ, through his innocence in the face of suffering, overcame evil by good (referring to Isa 53:9).

Thus whether Jesus' words in Luke 22:37 were intended to be read according to a syllogistic logic that would apply punishment for transgression to Christ is by no means certain. Rather, according to the scriptural examples, it is at least as likely that the logic Christ intends is dynamic, indicating the way that by dying a criminal's death, he would redeem transgressors from their crimes.

Luke's Gospel, in fact, states and restates Christ was innocent, and the injustice lay with his accusers and condemners (Luke 23:4,13-16,22-24,40-41,47). Rather than by receiving the application of just punishment in retributive justice, Christ overcomes and brings new life by a deprivation of (human) justice.

Despite its extensive use of Isaiah 53, the NT nowhere clearly connects divine punishment with Christ's death. Perhaps the closest referent is Heb 12:6, which states, "for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts" (NRSV). The word here translated, "disciplines," is παιδεύει (*paideuei*), and it has the same root as the word the LXX uses for "punishment" in Isa 53:5: παιδεία (*paideia*).

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[40] See Smith, *Isaiah*, 472, n. 454 and 472, n. 455, for a bibliography on NT use of Isaiah 53.

This is, of course, the ordinary Greek word for education and child rearing, but it can have the sense of "chastisement."[41] That this passage would apply to the cross could be indicated by its close proximity to mention of Christ's crucifixion (Heb 12:2), and the importance Hebrews places on Christ's being the Son (see, for example, Heb 5:8).

Two things should be noted. First, the reference to the crucifixion specifically indicates Christ was "despising its shame" (Heb 12:2 NRSV). Christ despised nothing that came from God. As applied to what Christ received from God, the verb discipline παιδεύω (*paideuō*) cannot then indicate anything that brings shame, yet it is exactly the condemnation that attends retributive justice that rightfully brings shame.

Second, Heb 5:8-9 indicates of Christ, "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek." Learning obedience by what he suffered does seem to refer to the cross, and learning (from μανθάνω, *manthanō*) does seem to be the desired result of educating (παιδεύω, *paideuō*).

Hebrews, furthermore, emphasizes Jesus, our high priest, is able to sympathize with us in our weakness, having been tested in every way while remaining without sin (Heb 4:15). While we may never understand completely the human consciousness of the Christ, Scripture clearly indicates Jesus learned.[42]

To remain consonant with the message of Hebrews, though, Christ's education and learning must occur not by having a share of sin but by his being apart from it. Thus "discipline" in Hebrews 12 may refer to the education, by suffering, of Christ's human nature without any sense of condemnation from God on Christ but in complete sympathy with God's condemnation of sin.

Perhaps, though, the Christian tradition of redemptive suffering, expressed especially in the genuine sorrow of repentance leads to the perception that although Christ makes satisfaction for sins, some punishment in the cross must remain. Many Christian understandings of Christ's death have connected it with the sacramental functioning of penance.[43]

Even those who would reject a sacramental-penance system may look to the Christian experience of freedom from sin, based on confession and repentance and attested by each generation and each strand of Christian tradition.

In this case, how repentance is understood matters greatly. In the Catholic sacrament of penance, the guilt of sin is absolved, but some temporal punishment for sin remains and is applied to the penitent as an act of contrition. By analogy with

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[41] See LSJ, παιδεύω (*paideuō*), 1287.

[42] In addition to this passage from Hebrews, see Luke 2:40,52. See *ST* III 9.

[43] Lonergan, *The Divine Redeemer*, 189-190.

this penitential system, one might expect the redemptive suffering of Christ on the cross to include a punishment, even if he is not afflicted by guilt.

The Orthodox sacrament of repentance and confession, however, differs from the Catholic understanding at exactly this point.[44] Repentance, in Orthodox understanding, always brings healing, not punishment.

Any act of contrition required by the priest receiving the confession is always therapeutic, not punitive. While Orthodoxy has a strong understanding of redemptive suffering, it is not a punishment from God but rather an aspect of deification.

It goes without saying the Protestant understanding of confession and repentance accords better with the experience of the Orthodox Church than with the explanation given by Roman Catholicism. By proclaiming indulgences and the (late-medieval Catholic) penitential system to be travesties of the gospel, Luther was declaring a justice from God that justifies sinners freely, without the fear of punishment.[45] Repentance brings freedom and reconciliation, not further punishment.

However, Luther insisted freedom from punishment results from God's having punished Christ and imputed our sins to him.[46] The imputation of sin and righteousness are difficult concepts to account for both biblically and theologically.

As the various authors connected with the New Perspective on Paul argue, imputation has a dubious-at-best pedigree in the Jewish context of the NT.[47] These authors would not doubt we are redeemed by Christ and our sins are paid by him, but they show the horizon of the NT has no real place for the logic of imputed sin and imputed righteousness.

With respect to a theological account of imputation, Lonergan's comments are again instructive. His first complaint is that an imputed sinfulness does not reconcile with the real status of Christ's suffering and death.

> Our first objection, then, against this opinion imputing guilt to an innocent Christ is its inconsistency, in that it mixes fact and fiction. The passion and death of Christ were not fictions, nor were his innocence and his sinlessness, indeed his impeccability. But if to these very true and real facts you add an imputation of guilt, you only confuse your own mind rather than attain in whatever way you can the truth of the matter. You maintain that Christ was condemned by a just judge for sins that were not his but were simply imputed to him; but at the same time you know that this just judge was aware that Christ was totally innocent, and therefore that in reality God the Father did not condemn his Son. Because this imputation of sins is a fiction, so also is his condemnation. You hold that Christ received punishment in the strict sense, and

[44] Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, "Repentence and Confession."

[45] See Luther, *95 Theses*, in *Selected Works of Martin Luther*.

[46] See Luther's commentary on Galatians in *Luther's Works*, 26:279; 26:277; 26:288.

[47] See, for example, N.T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

> yet you know that he was innocent and was not really condemned but simply satisfied vicariously for the sins of others. Therefore just as the imputation of guilt and his condemnation were fictitious, so also was this punishment that is said to be punishment in the strict sense. You say that the anger of God towards sinners was through imputation redirected towards Christ, yet you know that Christ was innocent and the beloved Son of God the Father; so on top of fictitious imputation and fictitious condemnation and fictitious punishment you add the fictitious anger of God. But the passion of Christ was real, and so was his death. You seem to be playing games, trying to explain realities by means of fictions. No, let us rather 'in all things show that we are God's servants . . . by a love free of pretense, by a word of truth' (2 Corinthians 6:4,6-7). For sincere love can only diminish when we depart from the word of truth.[48]

If Christ dealt with sin—and he did—he did so according to reality. Both as a biblical and as a theological concept, imputation introduces confusion. It therefore does not serve as a clear basis for affirming that in the cross, God punished Christ.

Perhaps, in the end, Anselm's analogy may be judged inadequate, tied too closely to medieval European society and insufficient in explanation to amend the traditional notion of the cross as a punishment.

However, the problem with Anselm's analogy is that it cannot give enough credit to the work of Christ, who is a divine Person; it is assuredly not Christ's work that falls short of Anselm's explanation. Nor does Christian tradition speak with one voice on this issue; the Eastern Orthodox tradition, mirroring many patristic voices, has never accepted the cross was a punishment from God visited on Christ.[49]

The strongest indication the cross was not a punishment by God visited on Christ is that Christ is the exact revelation of the Father (John 1:18). But on the cross, Jesus was not condemnatory: His every word and action was to forgive (Luke 23:24).

If the cross was a condemnation of Christ by God, then Christ did not reveal the Father on the cross. The seven sayings of the cross contain the dereliction of Christ's suffering but have no word of wrath (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:34,43,46; John 19:26,27,28,30). To picture the Father as wrathfully pouring out punishment on the Son while the Son meekly submits and offers forgiveness would be to propose a bifurcation in God's character in exactly this most revelatory moment.

Maximus the Confessor has an intriguing understanding of punishment and the cross. According to him, Christ "suffered, and converted the use of death so that in him it would be a condemnation not of our nature but manifestly only of

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[48] Lonergan, *The Divine Redeemer*, 186; on page 187, Lonergan goes on to add four further significant arguments against the teaching that, on the cross, God imputed sin to Christ.

[49] Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 113.

sin itself."[50] Christ's mortal body, and his suffering, serve as the fulcrum by which God condemns and punishes the destructiveness of our sinful nature and of our enemy.[51]

The cross, then, is a divine punishment but not of Christ; rather it is that by which God visits divine retribution on sin, the powers of darkness, and the logic of this fallen world (Rom 8:3-4; 1 Cor 1:27-28; Col 1:15-23). Christ's complete satisfaction opened the way for God to condemn them without condemning us, too.

Conclusion

According to Anselm's analogy of satisfaction, Christ died because in his death, he offered to God the perfect willingness to atone for our situation, fulfilling and declaring the divine justice, going the whole way and holding nothing back. In this way, the retributive justice of God was satisfied and a new order of the world—a distributive justice—put into effect (Rom 5:6-11; 8:31-38).

It seems best, though, to affirm the death of Christ was a punishment in three senses only: it was a human punishment (an unjust execution); it falls into the general category of *malum poenae* (but only as the suffering of a rational being or as a punishment applied unjustly by humans); and it is the fulcrum by which God visits divine retribution on sin, the powers of darkness, and the logic of this fallen world (but not on us or on Christ). However, it is not right to affirm the death of Christ was a punishment visited upon Christ by God.

The nonpenal character of the atonement shows the wisdom and love of God, not any way that God is satisfied by violence. It furthermore coheres with the character of God, who is justice and love and who is not essentially wrathful. In the death of Christ, we see the generosity of God, who sets right, at his own cost, the universe he made and is determined to redeem. SCJ

[50] Maximus, *Ad Thalassium*, 61.

[51] I thank Christopher Ben Simpson for this insight, and the language of "fulcrum."