

the atonement debate

papers from the london symposium
on the theology of atonement

including contributions from
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contents

About

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| abbreviations. | 7 |
| contributors. | 9 |

introduction

| | |
|---|----|
| preface. | 13 |
| derek tidball | |
| 1. atonement, evangelicalism and the evangelical alliance: the present debate in context | 15 |
| david hilborn | |
| 2. the redemption of the cross | 34 |
| steve chalke | |

biblical foundations

| | |
|---|-----|
| 3. the theology of the atonement | 49 |
| i. howard marshall | |
| 4. atonement in the old testament. | 69 |
| christopher j. h. wright | |
| 5. the atonement in the new testament. | 83 |
| geoffrey grogan | |
| 6. why did christ die? an exegesis of isaiah 52:13–53:12. | 96 |
| sue groom | |
| 7. penal substitutionary atonement in paul: an exegetical study of romans 3:25–26. | 115 |
| rohinton k. mody | |
| 8. the atonement in hebrews | 136 |
| steve motyer | |

theological contributions

| | |
|---|-----|
| 9. must we imagine the atonement in penal substitutionary terms? questions, caveats and a plea. | 153 |
| joel b. green | |
| 10. penal substitution: a response to recent criticisms . . . | 172 |
| garry williams | |

- 11. atonement, creation and trinity 192
graham mcfarlane
- 12. the logic of penal substitution revisited 208
oliver d. crisp
- 13. towards a unified theory of the atonement. 228
david t. williams

historical perspectives

- 14. bernard of clairvaux: theologian of the cross. 249
tony lane
- 15. ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven:
evangelical accounts of the atonement 267
stephen r. holmes
- 16. "live much under the shadow of the cross":
atonement and evangelical spirituality 293
ian randall

contemporary perspectives

- 17. the message of the cross is foolishness:
atonement in womanist theology;
towards a black british perspective 313
lynette j. mullings
- 18. atonement in contemporary culture: christ,
symbolic exchange and death 329
anna m. robbins
- 19. penal substitution: a pastoral apologetic 345
derek tidball

about the publisher 369

share your thoughts 370

preface

derek tidball

In the midst of the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement held at London School of Theology in July 2005, terrorist bombs struck at the heart of London's transport system, causing death and injury to many. The terrible events of 7/7 put in context the debate being held. On the one hand, they emphasised how important is the most crucial event of all time, that Jesus "was crucified under Pontius Pilate" for our fallen world, where evil stalks, and how central the message of the gospel is for the twenty-first century. On the other hand, they put some of the more abstruse points of conflict in perspective and underlined that some academic discussion can be a wasteful, not to say sinful, luxury.

The opening paper in this collection explains the reason for the calling of the symposium. While some evangelical theologians had expressed reservations about the way in which the penal substitutionary interpretation of the cross has often been communicated, it took the writing of a popular Christian leader to stoke the controversy and cause public debate. Part of the work of the Evangelical Alliance is to help different parts of the evangelical family to understand each other where controversy arises. So it was natural that EA should provide opportunities for those who, often passionately, differed from each other to talk and listen to one another. It was clear that a debate on the atonement hosted by EA in October 2004 was not an adequate forum to explore this issue. Hence a further opportunity was sought to consider the matter in greater depth. LST provided the academic context in which such a symposium could be held, and some two hundred participants gathered in July 2005 for further reflection and open engagement.

This book contains some of the papers given at the symposium. They have been reworked, in various degrees, since then. A few still bear the hallmarks of a spoken presentation. While we have sought to introduce coherence in style with regard to referencing and headings, the editors have not sought to impose a bland editorial conformity on the papers but rather have let the contributors speak for themselves. This inevitably leads to some unevenness and overlap. But few read such a book as this from cover to cover.

One presenter at the symposium requested us not to publish his paper, and another paper was left out of this present volume due to an administrative oversight. This has contributed to the *Christus Victor* theme not having as in-depth a focus as we would have wished. However, the issues are covered to some extent in other papers. Six papers have been added to make for a more rounded volume. These were offered for presentation at the symposium but could not be accommodated within the programme. These papers are those by Grogan, Crisp, David Williams, Lane, Randall and Tidball. Dr Simon Gathercole was to be at the symposium to present an exegetical paper on Romans 3:25–26 but was prevented from attending by the terrorist attacks. His paper was read for him by Professor Max Turner. It has subsequently been rewritten and augmented at Dr Gathercole's request by Rohintan Mody.

No attempt was made to produce an agreed statement at the end of the symposium. We believe the value of the symposium lay in the face-to-face interaction and in the papers, which now will enjoy wider circulation. Those who participated were self-selecting, and though a survey of opinions was conducted at the conclusion of our time together, it has no wider value than reflecting the views of those who remained until the end. A few stated that they had changed their position as a result of the debate. The final session consisted of a panel discussion, which included Alan Mann, the co-author of *The Lost Message of Jesus*. Those present will remember it as a significant time of healing of divisions.

All who took part in the symposium agree on three things: the central significance of the death of Christ to the Christian faith; the variety and richness of the way the New Testament interprets that death; and the urgent necessity to communicate the message of the cross in a way that is both faithful to the Bible's revelation and meaningful in the contemporary world. It is hoped that the publication of these papers will enable readers to explore the issues at stake in the debate about penal substitution more fully and, whatever their conclusion, to join with others with renewed energy in making known "Christ crucified".

atonement, evangelicalism and the evangelical alliance

the present debate in context

david hilborn

The Incarnation of the Son of God, His work of Atonement for the sinners of mankind, and His Mediatorial Intercession and Reign.

– *Doctrinal Basis of Faith of the World's Evangelical Alliance, 1846*

The substitutionary sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God as the sole all-sufficient ground of redemption from the guilt and power of sin, and from its eternal consequences.

– *Evangelical Alliance (UK) Basis of Faith, 1970*

The atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross: dying in our place, paying the price of sin and defeating evil, so reconciling us with God.

– *Evangelical Alliance (UK) Basis of Faith, 2005*

However it is defined, there is little doubt that the evangelical tradition is distinguished by a strong emphasis on the cross of Christ and on the atonement accomplished by Christ's death. Some might want to qualify David Bebbington's now familiar typology of evangelicalism, but it would be hard to deny his assertion that down the centuries, the "pre-eminent ground of agreement" between evangelicals has been "the cruciality of the cross".¹ Likewise, as Alister McGrath has expressed it, "Evangelicalism places an especial emphasis

on the cross of Christ” and sees the atonement as establishing “the centrality of Christ to Christian worship and adoration”.² Derek Tidball concurs, stressing that the atonement is “the central core of evangelical belief and preaching. Evangelicals make redemption the pivot of the faith. Where others place the doctrines of creation or of incarnation, evangelicals place the atonement. It is, quite simply, the heart of evangelicalism.”³

As co-sponsors of the July 2005 symposium from which this volume is derived, both the Evangelical Alliance UK (EA) and the London School of Theology (LST) bear out such crucicentrism in their respective Bases of Faith. Both bodies have revised their doctrinal statements in recent times, but their formal theological commitments remain as atonement-centred as ever. At the heart of LST’s Basis lies the affirmation that Jesus secured our salvation by “dying on the cross in our place”, thus “representing us to God” and “redeeming us from the grip, guilt and punishment of sin”.⁴ When EA was formed in 1846, its Basis concisely asserted Christ’s “work of Atonement for the sinners of mankind”. When that original Basis was reworded in 1970, this brief statement was superseded by a clause which spelt out more explicitly how the atonement defines evangelical belief. That clause affirmed “the substitutionary sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God as the sole and all-sufficient ground of redemption from the guilt and power of sin, and from its eternal consequences”. With comparable force, the present EA Basis affirms “the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross: dying in our place, paying the price of sin and defeating evil, so reconciling us to God”.⁵ Thus both EA and LST remain committed to the classical evangelical view that the atonement wrought by God in Christ on the cross stands at the heart of the gospel – that it critically authenticates Christian life and mission. Together, they look with Paul to “preach Christ crucified”; together, they seek “never to boast of anything except the cross of our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 6:14).

For most evangelicals, the central importance of the cross as such is not in dispute. Indeed, the current controversies surrounding atonement theology in evangelicalism have more to do with *how* the cross operates at the heart of Christian faith, rather than whether it does so. There are multiple aspects to this “how” question, and many are covered elsewhere in this book. In particular, though, argument has centred on a theory or model of the atonement which has defined evangelical faith more than any other, but which has latterly been subject to mounting critique – not only from liberal theologians but also from several more radical representatives of the evangelical

community. I am referring, of course, to “penal substitution”. The particular dispute which prompted the joint EA-LST symposium was catalysed by the stark critique of penal substitution presented by Steve Chalke and Alan Mann in their book, *The Lost Message of Jesus* – a critique subsequently elaborated by Chalke in various articles, interviews and statements, and by Mann in his monograph *Atonement for a Sinless Society*.⁶

In sketching this background, it should be stressed that the chief purpose of the London symposium was not to subject Chalke, Mann and their work to a heresy trial. Some may regret that the intrinsic diversity of evangelicalism inevitably dilutes attempts to exercise pan-evangelical doctrinal discipline, and some may have remedies to suggest on this front. The symposium, however, was not the place to apply them. Through more than 160 years, the EA has occasionally urged certain of its members to resign over theological matters: T. R. Birks over hell and restitution in 1870; the Jesus Army over ecclesiology in the 1980s; Maurice Cerullo over prosperity teaching in the mid-1990s; and Courage Trust over their changed stance on homosexual practice at the turn of the millennium. Yet it has always been negotiated resignation rather than summary expulsion. Moreover, the problems have been as much to do with practice as belief.

Indeed, throughout the *Lost Message* controversy, Steve Chalke has clearly affirmed both past and present EA Bases of Faith. In such circumstances, what the original 1846 Basis called the “right to private judgement” must pertain, at least while the terms of the debate are clarified and the theological arguments carefully weighed. EA did not rush to operate as a thought police in this matter; it did not presume to make “windows into men’s souls”. Besides, as this volume confirms, intra-evangelical dispute on penal substitution is much older, wider and more momentous than any such narrow *ad hominem* targeting of Chalke or Mann would suggest. In fact, a key point in favour of holding the symposium at LST was that it would foster concentration on the broader issues at stake in the atonement debate, rather than on the personalities most immediately and most recently associated with that debate.

Having said all this, Alister McGrath is quite right to note that evangelicalism *on the ground* is one of the most personality-driven of all Christian traditions.⁷ As the Alliance’s head of theology at the time of the London symposium, my work was funded by a charitable body which for the most part operated not in scholarly arenas but through local evangelical congregations, parachurch organisations, and networks. In these contexts, it can take some

time for doctrinal debates to filter through from the academy. They tend to remain relatively obscure until a high-profile preacher, evangelist or church leader popularises them – and in Britain few evangelical personalities enjoy as high a profile as Steve Chalke MBE. Hence, when he decided to question penal substitution in *The Lost Message of Jesus*, an issue which had barely registered in EA's postbags and inboxes for decades swiftly galvanised the evangelical community. As a personal member of EA who leads organisations which are in turn corporate members, it was inevitable that Chalke's relationship with the Alliance, and with its Basis of Faith, would be questioned. It was also inevitable that having thus been drawn into the controversy, there would be pressure on EA to do something about it. Before examining EA's response and how that response led to the London symposium, it will be helpful to put the *Lost Message* issue more fully into context.

The Lost Message of Jesus was published in December 2003. Its chief aim was not to expound a detailed theology of the cross but rather to demonstrate “the core of Jesus’ life-transforming, though often deeply misunderstood, message”.⁸ This core message was summarized in terms of God’s kingdom or “inbreaking shalom” being available now to everyone through Jesus Christ.⁹ However, it was Chalke and Mann’s interpretation of the death of Christ which attracted the most attention.

Typically, evangelical crucicentrism has emphasised the “objective” nature of the atonement, whereby Christ’s death is seen once and for all to have effected reconciliation between God and fallen, sinful human beings. Historically, this has been explained by various theories drawn from a wide range of biblical imagery, and evangelicals have characteristically acknowledged that orthodox understanding of it depends on a combination of such theories, rather than on any one in isolation. As the leading evangelical expositor of atonement, Leon Morris, put it, “Christ’s atoning work is so complex and our minds are so small. We cannot take it all in. We need the positive contributions of all the theories, for each draws attention to some aspect of what Christ has done for us. And though in the end we cannot understand it all, we can thankfully accept ‘so great a salvation’.”¹⁰ Thus, in accordance with Romans 5:15–21, evangelicals have recognised the theory of recapitulation, in which the life and death of the sinless Christ reverse Adam and Eve’s disobedience and make human beings right with God. On the basis of texts like Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45, they have appreciated the dramatic theory, in which Christ’s death achieves victory in a cosmic conflict between

good and evil and secures humanity's release from bondage to sin. Citing John 10:18, evangelicals have also valued the commercial theory, in which Christ's death is seen as bringing infinite honour to God – an honour which is applied to human beings and thereby redeems the dishonour which attends their sinful state.¹¹

Yet amidst these and other theories, penal substitution has widely been regarded as the “controlling model” within mainline evangelicalism – the *sine qua non* of evangelical soteriology. As construed from texts such as Isaiah 53:6–10, Romans 3:25, Hebrews 9:11–10:22 and 1 Peter 3:18, penal substitution presents Jesus' crucifixion as a vicarious sacrifice which appeased or “propitiated” God's wrath towards sin by paying the due “penalty” for that sin, which is suffering, death and condemnation. Whereas sinful humanity stood to incur this penalty, the sinless Christ incurred it for us on Calvary. Precisely because he is without sin, he was thus able to cancel or “expiate” the guilt which attends it, so bringing us forgiveness, imputing righteousness to us and restoring our relationship with God.¹²

The origins of penal substitution as a systematic model are much disputed, as the reader will see in various contributions to this volume. Sympathetic evangelical accounts characteristically trace its development through Clement of Rome in the first century, Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth, Augustine in the fifth, John Calvin in the sixteenth, and John Owen in the seventeenth, ultimately ascribing its more detailed form to the nineteenth-century Princeton theologians Charles Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield.¹³ With this pedigree, penal substitution is often deemed by evangelicals to be the most fulfilling description of the role of the cross in the process of salvation.¹⁴

However, Steve Chalke and Alan Mann take a different view. In [chapter 10](#) of *The Lost Message of Jesus*, they reject penal substitution on the grounds that it turns God from a loving Father into a vengeful tyrant, who “suddenly decides to vent his anger and wrath on his own Son”. Then, either consciously or unconsciously echoing feminist theologian Rita Nakishima Brock, they provocatively cast this version of the atonement as a “form of cosmic child abuse”.¹⁵ They claim that as well as its being a “total contradiction of the statement ‘God is love’”, it “makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil”.¹⁶ In a subsequent solo article, Chalke emphasises that this critique of penal substitution extends even beyond questions about “how the cross works” to “the very nature of

God, and as a consequence, the task of Christian mission and the attitude of the Church".¹⁷

Unsurprisingly, these charges have drawn a strong reaction. Reviewing *The Lost Message of Jesus* in June 2004, Mike Ovey and Andrew Sach accused Chalke and Mann of propounding "a wrong view of God", "a wrong view of man" and "a wrong view of the cross". Whereas the Bible often portrays God's "white-hot moral purity and indignation at sin", they wrote, *The Lost Message of Jesus* had "airbrushed" such divine attributes out of the picture. Similarly, they asked, "If God is not angry, and humans are not essentially guilty, then what job remains for the cross?"¹⁸ Underlining these concerns, Garry Williams wrote that *The Lost Message of Jesus* offered no more than a "caricature" of penal substitution which would simply "not do".¹⁹ Similar sentiments were expressed by Greg Haslam in a robust defence of penal substitution, which countered point by point the proposals made by Chalke and Mann.²⁰

Despite these harsh appraisals, *The Lost Message of Jesus* attracted robust support from the Christian political think tank Ekklesia, from members of the Anabaptist Network and from correspondents to various Christian periodicals, not least the newspaper of Chalke's own denomination, the *Baptist Times*.²¹ Furthermore, as early as June 2004, the Spring Harvest Leadership Team, of which Chalke is a prominent member, issued a statement stressing that he continued to uphold its own theological position.²² Significantly, that position was and still is defined by the Evangelical Alliance Basis of Faith, as well as by the Lausanne Covenant (1974). Indeed, once Spring Harvest had issued this statement, it became impossible for EA to stay on the sidelines of the dispute.

As the Alliance sought to handle the growing debate on penal substitution responsibly, it needed to look beyond the few paragraphs that Chalke and Mann had devoted to the issue and facilitate a broadly based dialogue on the place and understanding of the atonement within evangelicalism. EA's theological commission was well aware that, while Chalke's profile had done much to bring evangelical doubts about penal substitution into the open, these doubts had been aired in various parts of the evangelical academy for some time. It knew Chalke and Mann were not the first evangelicals to critique the penal substitutionary theory, and they were unlikely to be the last. It noted that under the influence of William Law, certain nineteenth-century theologians like Thomas Erskine and George MacDonald had either significantly softened penal substitution or effectively abandoned it.²³ It realised

that many in the so-called Liberal Evangelical movement of the 1920s had jettisoned penal substitution as “crude”.²⁴ It also recognised that more recently a growing number of professing evangelical scholars had questioned penal substitution from various angles, among them Stephen Travis, Tom Smail, Nigel Wright, Clark Pinnock, Robert Brow, J. Denny Weaver, Christopher D. Marshall, Mark Baker and Joel Green.²⁵ Indeed, while acknowledging that *The Lost Message of Jesus* had done much to publicise this “dissenting” evangelical position, the commission stressed that it had not pioneered that dissent. Consequently, EA undertook to address the points Chalke and Mann had raised with reference to its own theological position, but to do so in the context of the wider academic evangelical debate. This strategy was then developed in three main stages.

First, on 7 October 2004, the Alliance convened a public dialogue on *The Lost Message of Jesus*, with a focus on the atonement.²⁶ Initially, it booked a room to hold 150 people for this event, but the interest aroused by the debate forced the venue to be switched to a larger space in the Emmanuel Centre, Westminster, which was filled by an audience of around seven hundred. Although Chalke was a keynote speaker, he was partnered by Stuart Murray Williams. On the other side, apologetics for penal substitution were offered by Simon Gathercole and Anna Robbins, with Mike Ovey appearing on the panel at Chalke’s request in the question-and-answer session.

After hosting the October 2004 meeting and listening carefully to the arguments on both sides, the theological commission, board, and senior staff of the Alliance embarked on the second phase of its work on the atonement dispute. In early November 2004, it released a statement clarifying its stance on *The Lost Message of Jesus* and the interpretative parameters of its Basis of Faith with respect to the cross.²⁷ In this statement, EA acknowledged that certain self-identified evangelical scholars had questioned aspects of the penal substitutionary view, and it recognised the need to interact with their work. However, while welcoming careful and constructive reflection on the cross of Christ, it expressed concern that in Chalke’s case there had been insufficient appreciation of the extent to which penal substitution had shaped, and continued to inform, evangelical understanding of the atonement. The statement went on to address the significance of this for the interpretation of its Basis of Faith. It noted that while the Basis did not use the explicit terms “penal”, “penalty” or “punishment” in relation to what it called the “substitutionary sacrifice” of Christ, the executive council which approved the Basis in 1970

took it as entailing and implying penal substitution. It emphasised that its affirmations of universal human sin and guilt, divine wrath and condemnation, and the substitutionary, sacrificial and redemptive nature of Christ's death together comprised the key elements of penal substitution. The statement then urged that instead of dismissing penal substitution, Chalke should recognise its significant place in the range of atonement theories to which evangelicals have subscribed. It expressed concern that Chalke not only had pressed for his own anti-penal substitutionary view to be accepted within the Alliance but also had asserted that those who do hold it were doing serious damage to the church's witness and should abandon it for the sake of the gospel. This, said the statement, might compromise the spirit of the Alliance's so-called Practical Resolutions, which urge charity in evangelical disputes, not least where objections are being raised against well-established mainline evangelical doctrine.²⁸

The statement accepted Chalke's point that evangelicals are often perceived as harsh, censorious and ungracious, and that this can hamper evangelism. But it denied his construction of a causal or necessary link between affirming penal substitution and *being* harsh, censorious and ungracious. In conclusion, it called on him to reconsider his approach to the issue. A month later, on December 10, 2004, Chalke and the EA general director, Joel Edwards, issued a joint statement pledging to "wrestle honestly together in applying the truth of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, which is so central to our faith".²⁹ In keeping with this, they confirmed the third stage in the Alliance's strategy: the convening of the summer 2005 symposium on which this book is based.

Leaving aside the distinctives of his atonement theology, it can surely be agreed that the "honest wrestling" to which Chalke committed himself is a pledge which all in the debate should make. Even those who have reached what Dan Strange has called "cognitive rest" on penal substitution³⁰ need Leon Morris's reticence about any Christian's ability to exhaust the glory of the atonement with their human explanations. Yet of course, as we resolve to "know nothing except Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), we must at least *try* to articulate why Christ died and in what way. As the Alliance has sought to do this in the *Lost Message* controversy, one might wonder how it was so clear that the original drafters of the 1970 Basis meant to imply penal substitution, even though the text does not explicitly use the terms "penal" or "penalty". Herein lies an intriguing story – one whose twists and turns help

to account for why EA arrived at the particular formulation of the atonement contained in the more recent version of its Basis of Faith, which was drafted between 2002 and 2005 and formally adopted in September 2005.

In helping to write EA's November 2004 statement on penal substitution, I consulted the Alliance archive and reviewed the executive council minutes to see if they shed any light on why the 1970 Basis was worded as it was.³¹ Although the drafting process spanned three years from 1967 to 1970, and although other clauses went through several drafts, the relevant section on the cross – clause 4 – seems to have been settled early on and to have stayed the same almost to the end.³² As we have seen, when the Alliance was formed in 1846, it adopted a doctrinal statement which affirmed Christ's "work of atonement for sinners of mankind". Clearly, the many disputes about the atonement which had developed between that point and the late 1960s prompted the EA executive council to tighten up its language on the cross. This it did with alacrity, as is seen by the introduction of terms like "substitutionary", "sacrifice", "sole", "all-sufficient", "redemption" and "guilt" in the revised Basis, all of which readily occupy the semantic field of penal substitution. Indeed, this vocabulary would appear to echo an even more explicit endorsement of the penal substitutionary view from an official Alliance report of the same period. *On the Other Side* was a special study on evangelism commissioned by the Alliance's executive council and was published in 1968. Here one finds a clear, unequivocal affirmation of penal substitution, which, given its parallel dating, can logically be read as an exposition of the language of the revised Basis:

The judgement upon sin has been endured for man by Christ. God in Christ has taken the initiative in dealing with our sin and with the judgement upon it. By voluntarily giving himself to die upon the cross Christ suffered the worst that sin can do, including separation from His Father. God laid upon him all the consequence of human wrong-doing and wrong relationships, and He took upon Himself the penalty of our sin. This understanding of the Atonement, which is both clear and prominent in the New Testament, lies at the heart of the various biblical descriptions of Christ's death – e.g. sacrifice, redemption, justification, reconciliation.³³

Given the clarity and directness of this statement, it seems unlikely that the final text of the revised Basis issued just two years later, in 1970, might imply any qualification of the classical penal substitutionary position. However, this deduction would be even more obvious were it not for the fact that

an apparently inexplicable deletion was made from the revised Basis just prior to its adoption.

Right up to the eve of its incorporation into the Alliance's constitution, in the minutes of EA's executive council dated January 1970, the then-new EA Basis of Faith affirmed Christ's death as offering redemption from the "guilt, *penalty* and power of sin". This phrasing would have been familiar to many, as it had been lifted directly from the 1928 Basis of the InterVarsity Fellowship. Yet in the text eventually adopted into the constitution at EA's annual general meeting in July 1970, the word "penalty" had mysteriously disappeared, leaving the shorter formula "redemption from the guilt and power of sin". The mystery is especially deep given that the minutes from January 1970 record that everyone on the council accepted the draft with "penalty" in it, with the exception of Rev Ronald Taylor – a Methodist, now deceased. He, however, only wanted time to consult with Methodist Revival Fellowship about strengthening the clause on justification: he is not noted as having any objection to the word "penalty" in the clause on the cross.

Given that the minutes offer no explanation for this eleventh-hour omission of "penalty", I spoke to all those still alive who were on the executive council when the Basis was approved in July 1970. Only a minority are still living, but remarkably, none recalled any specific discussion on the cross at the time, and all were surprised when I pointed out the deletion of "penalty". Still, each took it as clearly implied in the text as they voted it through. Like everyone else consulted, David Pawson recalled no discussion of it at the council. Canon David Winter was a member of the drafting group appointed by the executive council to revise the Basis at that time. He recollected "one or two" on the executive council – himself included – who might have had "questions" about the traditional expression of penal substitution, but told me that this did not arise in discussions on the Basis itself. He added that the Alliance then was, if anything, more doctrinally conservative than it is now, and that the executive council as a whole would have taken the clause in question to affirm penal substitution, with or without the explicit term "penalty". Gordon Landreth was on EA's staff when revision of the Basis commenced in 1967, and took over as general secretary from Morgan Derham in 1968. He was *ex officio* on the drafting group but similarly could not recollect any specific discussion on the wording of the atonement clause. However, like David Winter, he did emphasise that the executive council at that time was a "fairly conservative group" and would certainly have seen penal substitution

as entailed in the final wording, regardless of whether the word “penalty” was included. He did remember that certain executive council members were more influenced by the liberal trends of the time, but did not recall their pressing for any divergence from the traditional view of Christ’s death as penal and propitiatory. Bishop Maurice Wood was present at the July 1970 AGM at which the Basis was adopted but could not recall any dispute about the wording of the atonement clause, nor any deliberate attempt to delete the term “penalty” from it. Even so, he insisted that the executive council would “unanimously” have taken the Basis to affirm penal substitution, since the elements of clauses 3 and 4 taken together (universal sin, human guilt, divine wrath, substitution, sacrifice, redemption) “clearly imply” it. The bishop also pointed out that John Stott was very much involved with the theological work of EA at the time and was and is a staunch proponent of penal substitution. David Abernethie was present when various drafts of the Basis were discussed but was absent from the July 1970 AGM which adopted the final version. He could not recall any direct discussion on the atonement. Like David Winter and Bishop Maurice Wood, he could not imagine why “penalty” fell out in the final stages, but told me that the relatively conservative council of the time would have “plainly assumed the Basis in its adopted form to affirm penal substitution”. He added that an EA pamphlet produced and widely distributed in the 1980s under the title *Who Do Evangelicals Think They Are?* plainly uses the language of “penalty” in explaining what the EA Basis affirms about Christ’s sacrificial death. Glyn Macaualy served on the executive council in the latter stages of the revision process and was present at the July 1970 AGM. However, he likewise did not recall any discussion on the atonement clause. He commented that some members of the executive council were certainly “more open than others” to influence from non-evangelical quarters, but did not think any of them would deliberately have sought to divert the EA from penal substitution.

All this presents a conundrum. Someone, for reasons lost in the mists of time, appears to have removed the key word “penalty” from the 1970 Basis of Faith. Possibly this happened by mistake, perhaps through a typing error. More likely, though, it was deliberate. We might speculate that the motive was a liberalising one, but we cannot be sure. Perhaps the anonymous deleter or deleters simply thought that “penalty” was already implicit and so removed it on the grounds that it was redundant. The point of this little exercise in redaction criticism is that it reveals a possible ambiguity on penal substitution within the

surface wording of the 1970 Basis, even though all who were there and are still alive took the final, penalty-free version to imply penal substitution.

This curious manuscript quirk is worth considering not only in its historical context but also with respect to the updating of the 1970 text, which was well under way when the *Lost Message* dispute emerged, and which was completed shortly after the 2005 London symposium. There has been a degree of misapprehension and misinformation surrounding this process, so a factual account is in order.³⁴

In January 2002, the Alliance theological commission formed a working group for the purpose of revising the 1970 Basis of Faith. At that point, a timetable for the project was produced which scheduled the adoption of a new Basis for February 2005 and legal incorporation of it into EA's constitution in September the same year. These deadlines were duly met; there was no modification of the schedule in reaction to the development of the atonement debate through 2004.

The Basis revision group met for the first time in March 2002. By the autumn of 2003, it had settled on the form of the words on the atonement which would be approved by the council in September 2005. Other clauses took longer to finalise: indeed, the paragraph on the last things was substantially reworded on the floor of the council in February 2005. Yet the atonement section was one of the earliest to be fixed. To recap: *The Lost Message of Jesus* was not published until December 2003 and did not begin stirring serious controversy until well into 2004. As such, it did not influence the wording of the atonement clause in the new text.

If the Alliance had introduced the language of “penalty” or “penal substitution” in the later stages of the revision process specifically to target Steve Chalke or any other individual, it could justifiably be accused of making one person more important than the whole organisation. To do this would abuse the Basis of Faith. Instead, the process of revision went much further back than the *Lost Message* controversy and reached its final stage according to EA's original intentions. Granted, if more radical members of the EA board or council had wished to alter the wording of the new Basis in a direction more explicitly favourable to a non-penal or anti-penal substitutionary view, they could have sought to do so during the revision process. However, no such alteration was proposed.

Despite all this, some have suggested that EA should have suspended or delayed the Basis revision process until well after the London symposium, to demonstrate its openness to new ideas on the atonement and to integrate

those ideas into its statement of faith. Again, though, this mistakenly links two quite different processes. The production of the new Basis stood chronologically and motivationally distinct from the atonement controversy. EA's purpose when it began the revision in 2002 was not to change the substance of the 1970 version but rather to update and refine the style. Certainly, it aimed to add significant doctrinal content which the old text had overlooked – for example, on the virgin birth, mission and the general resurrection. Thus, the language of divine wrath and judgment is directly carried over from clause 3 of the 1970 text to clause 4 of the new Basis. However, since for whatever reason the 1970 Basis did not explicitly use the language of “penalty” and “penal” substitution, EA did not deem it appropriate to introduce it explicitly in the new version. Hence, it preferred the more straightforwardly biblical imagery of Christ’s “paying the price” of our sin (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and allowed this to carry the implication of penal substitutionary sacrifice which the EA council of 1970 had so clearly inferred from the earlier text.

This approach, in turn, raises a further question; namely, how much leeway might be allowed in the *interpretation* of the Basis, particularly with regard to those, like Chalke and the other doubters of penal substitution mentioned above, who wish to construe it in a non-penal substitutionary way? As one who affirms penal substitution, I find it difficult to endorse the statement in clause 4 of the new Basis which says that we are “corrupted by sin”, and that this sin “incurs divine wrath”,³⁵ without reckoning that part of the price paid by Christ was to suffer this same divine wrath on our behalf. Whether the Father suffers in some way with the Son or metes out his anger on Christ “from a distance” is a long-standing issue addressed elsewhere in this volume. However, I accept that the mercantile imagery of price-paying and “redemption” is not always or necessarily synonymous with the language of propitiation in Scripture.³⁶ I would also concede that this is a discorsal rather than a sentential inference on my part and may not be obvious from either of the two clauses taken in isolation.

Then again, even if the Alliance *had* chosen to describe Jesus as paying the “penalty” rather than the “price” of sin, would even this absolutely have clinched the matter? After all, one might say with Paul that the penalty or “wages” of sin endured by Jesus was death (Rom. 6:23) without dwelling on the propitiatory aspects of his passion. More subtly, Christopher Marshall and Nigel Wright alike affirm the penal nature of Christ’s substitutionary atonement, but do so in ways which decouple the concept of penalty from

that of propitiation, leaving the latter behind. Thus Marshall argues that “God suffers the penalty of sin not because God transfers our punishments onto him as substitute victim, but because Christ fully and freely identifies himself with the plight and destiny of sinful humanity under the reign of death, and pays the price for doing so.”³⁷ Thus, too, Wright denies that Christ suffers “extrinsic” punishment at the hands of a wrathful Father but rather “bears that ‘intrinsic’ punishment whereby sin produces alienation from God, becoming vulnerable *to our self-inflicted judgement*”.³⁸

Faced with the sophistication of a Marshall or Wright, it becomes necessary to ask not only what the language of penal substitution might mean in and of itself but also what function it has come to perform within the pan-evangelical community – how it delineates evangelical orthodoxy, defines evangelical networks and drives evangelical discipleship. Such considerations take us beyond the sphere of semantic definition and into the sphere of speech act theory and linguistic pragmatics, where the use of language in particular contexts is taken to bear vitally on the construction of meaning.³⁹ Just as linguistic pragmaticians would ask what evangelicals *do* with the model of penal substitutionary atonement, so evangelicals need to ask the same question, even as they argue about what penal substitution itself refers to, and whether that reference is coincident with biblical reference to the death of Christ.

Addressing these broader questions of usage, context and social semiotics will prompt consideration of the extent to which penal substitution ought to define the limits of evangelical orthodoxy, whether it should function for evangelicals as a “centred” or a “bounded” set.⁴⁰ No doubt, faithful exposition of Christ’s atoning death goes to the heart of true gospel ministry. Yet alongside all the key exegetical and theological work which appears in this book, these further ecclesiological and relational issues warrant close attention, lest the division which has plagued evangelical life and mission in the past be too heedlessly championed and that same gospel ministry be hampered.

Notes

1. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin and Hyman, 1989), 17. Bebbington proposes that evangelicalism is characterised by biblicism, conversionism, activism and crucicentrism. It is often overlooked that this “quadrilateral” is an historian’s description of what makes the evangelical movement distinctive

in relation to other strands of the Christian church, rather than a comprehensive prescription for evangelicalism as such. For alternative typologies of evangelicalism, see J. I. Packer, *The Evangelical Anglican Identity Problem: An Analysis* (Oxford: Latimer, 1978), 15–23; Robert Amess, *One in the Truth? The Cancer of Division in the Evangelical Church* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1988), 23–26; John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), 15–39.

2. Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 62.

3. Derek Tidball, *Who Are the Evangelicals? Tracing the Roots of Today's Movements* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), 98.

4. The full text of the LST's Doctrinal Basis can be viewed at www.lst.ac.uk/howeare/basis.php.

5. For the new EA Basis and its predecessor, see www.eauk.org/contentmanager/content/aboutthealliance/missionandbof.cfm.

6. Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); Steve Chalke, "Cross Purposes," *Christianity*, September 2004, 44–48; Steve Chalke, interview on the atonement for BBC Radio 4 "Sunday," 24 October 2004; Steve Chalke, opening statement and response, "The Lost Message of Jesus: A Public Dialogue, 7/10/04," CD recording available from the Evangelical Alliance (London, 2004); Alan Mann, *Atonement for a Sinless Society: Engaging with an Emerging Culture* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).

7. McGrath, *Evangelicalism*, 156–65.

8. Chalke and Mann, *Lost Message of Jesus*, 16.

9. *Ibid.*, 113.

10. Leon Morris, "Atonement," in *NDT*, 56.

11. For evangelical summaries and assessments of the key atonement theories, see H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 104–8; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 798–840; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: IVP; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 568–607.

12. Tidball, *Evangelicals*, 98–115.

13. For a typical account along these lines, see Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 378–82.

14. James Denney, for instance, described assent to the defining component of penal substitution (propitiation) as the point “which ultimately divides interpreters of Christianity into evangelical and non-evangelical” (James Denney, *The Atonement and the Modern Mind* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903], 82). Similarly, Millard Erickson devotes a whole chapter to it in his evangelical systematic theology, and titles that chapter “The Central Theme of the Atonement” (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 798–840).

15. Chalke and Mann, *Lost Message of Jesus*, 182. Cf. Rita Nakishima Brock, “And a Little Child Will Lead Us: Christology and Child Abuse,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Child Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim, 1989), 42–61.

16. Chalke and Mann, *Lost Message of Jesus*, 182–83.

17. Chalke, “Cross Purposes,” 44.

18. Andrew Sach and Mike Ovey, “Have We Lost the Message of Jesus?” *Evangelicals Now*, June 2004, 27.

19. Garry Williams, “Cross Purpose: Replying to Steve Chalke on Penal Substitution,” *Evangelicals Now*, October 2004, 26.

20. Greg Haslam, “The Lost Cross of Christ,” *Christianity*, November 2004. Available online at www.christianitymagazine.co.uk/engine.cfm?i=92&id=254&arch=1.

21. For Ekklesia’s comments on the atonement controversy prompted by *The Lost Message of Jesus*, see www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news_syndication/article_040723pen.shtml. See also www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news_syndication/article_04108ato.shtml. For comment on the Anabaptist Network website, see www.anabaptistnetwork.com/atonement. For a review of the *Baptist Times* coverage, see www.christiantoday.com/news/ministries/leading.newspaper.rebuk.es.evangelical.alliances.views.on.chalke/159.htm.

22. The statement read as follows: “Questions have been raised following the publication of Steve Chalke’s book *The Lost Message of Jesus*. It is of course the case that this book is not a treatise on sin and the atonement, but is rather, as its title states, a fresh exploration of the teachings of Jesus Christ in his earthly ministry. In response we wish to make the following points:

- As a member of the Leadership Team, Steve Chalke affirms the Spring Harvest theological position as outlined above
- He remains firmly committed to what David Bebbington calls the quadrilateral of priorities that mark the boundaries of evangelical faith; namely, crucicentrism, biblicism, conversionism and activism

- That the atonement lies at the heart of the Christian gospel
- Exploring the atonement is like gazing at a diamond with different facets
- Historically theological debate has focussed on different aspects of the atonement
- Steve's recent book should be read as a contribution to that ongoing discussion
- He, in common with all members of the Leadership Team, writes as an individual

Finally, we affirm the wonderful truth that 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.'

23. For a thorough analysis of Erskine, MacDonald and others of this persuasion, see Don Horrocks, *Laws of the Spiritual Order: Innovation and Reconstruction in the Soteriology of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

24. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 200–202.

25. Stephen Travis, "Christ as Bearer of Divine Judgment in Paul's Thought," in *Atonement Today*, ed. John Goldingay (London: SPCK, 1995), 21–38; Tom Smail, "Can One Man Die for the People?" in Goldingay, *Atonement*, 73–92; Nigel Wright, *The Radical Evangelical: Seeking a Place to Stand* (London: SPCK, 1996), 58–72; Clark H. Pinnock and Robert C. Brow, *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the Twenty-first Century* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), 99–110; J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids / Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2001); Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime and Punishment* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans / Auckland and Sydney: Lime Grove, 2001), 59–69; Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2000), 23–32, 90–97, 173–75.

26. A recorded CD of this event is available from the Evangelical Alliance: "The Lost Message of Jesus: A Public Debate, 7/10/04." For details, see www.eauk.org/contentmanager/Content/lmoj/questions.cfm.

27. Online at www.eauk.org/contentmanager/Content/press/statements/lostmessage.cfm.

28. These Practical Resolutions were originally passed at the Alliance's inauguration in 1846. Having been updated, they now form part of a document

called the “Evangelical Relationships Commitment.” Available online at www.eauk.org/contentmanager/content/aboutthealliance/relationships.cfm. The relevant clauses read as follows: “6. We call on each other, when speaking or writing of those issues of faith or practice that divide us, to acknowledge our own failings and the possibility that we ourselves may be mistaken, avoiding personal hostility and abuse, and speaking the truth in love and gentleness. 7. “We owe it to each other, in making public comment on the alleged statements of our fellow Christians, first to confer directly with them and to establish what was actually intended. Then to commend what we can, to weigh the proportional significance of what we perceive to be in error, and to put a charitable construction on what is doubtful, expressing all with courtesy, humility and graciousness.”

29. Available online at www.eauk.org/contentmanager/Content/press/2004/12/10.cfm.

30. Daniel Strange, “Creation, Conquest and the Cross,” Evangelical Library Lecture, 2005. Available online under the title “The Many-Splendoured Cross: Atonement, Controversy and Victory” at www.elib.org.uk/lectures/el_2005_thecross.pdf.

31. For the text of the 1970 Basis, see www.eauk.org/contentmanager/content/aboutthealliance/missionandbof.cfm.

32. “The substitutionary sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God as the sole all-sufficient ground of redemption from the guilt and power of sin, and from its eternal consequences.”

33. *On the Other Side: Report of the Evangelical Alliance’s Commission on Evangelism* (London: Scripture Union, 1968), 65.

34. Not least on the website of Ekklesia: www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news_syndication/article_050315alliance.shtml.

35. “The dignity of all people, made male and female in God’s image to love, be holy and care for creation, yet corrupted by sin, which incurs divine wrath and judgement.”

36. Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Leicester: IVP, 1983), 169.

37. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution*, 62.

38. Wright, *The Radical Evangelical*, 69. My emphasis.

39. The seminal works on speech acts and speech act theory are J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), 1962; and John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969). Helpful textbooks on the broader

contextual linguistic discipline of pragmatics are Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983); Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward, eds., *The Handbook of Pragmatics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

40. For a helpful consideration of this “functional” problem for doctrine in pan-evangelical contexts, see Darrell L. Bock, *Purpose-Directed Theology: Getting Our Priorities Right in Evangelical Controversies* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2002).