

RTSF Monograph

What did the Cross Achieve?

The Logic of Penal Substitution

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What did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution

The task which I have set myself in this lecture is to focus and explicate a belief which, by and large, is a distinguishing mark of the worldwide evangelical fraternity: namely, the belief that Christ's death on the cross had the character of penal substitution, and that it was in virtue of this fact that it brought salvation to mankind. Two considerations prompt my attempt. First, the significance of penal substitution is not always stated as exactly as is desirable, so that the idea often gets misunderstood and caricatured by its critics; and I should like, if I can, to make such misunderstanding more difficult. Second, I am one of those who believe that this notion takes us to the very heart of the Christian gospel, and I welcome the opportunity of commending my conviction by analysis and argument.

My plan is this: first, to clear up some questions of method, so that there will be no doubt as to what I am doing; second, to explore what it means to call Christ's death substitutionary; third, to see what further meaning is added when Christ's substitutionary suffering is called penal; fourth, to note in closing that the analysis offered is not out of harmony with learned exegetical opinion. These are, I believe, needful preliminaries to any serious theological estimate of this view.

I. Mystery and Model

Every theological question has behind it a history of study, and narrow eccentricity in handling it is unavoidable unless the history is taken into account. Adverse comment on the concept of penal substitution often betrays narrow eccentricity of this kind. The two

main historical points relating to this idea are, first, that Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Melancthon and their reforming contemporaries were the pioneers in stating it and, second, that the arguments brought against it in 1578 by the Unitarian Pelagian, Faustus Socinus, in his brilliant polemic *De Jesu Christo Servatore* (*Of Jesus Christ the Saviour*)¹ have been central in discussion of it ever since. What the Reformers did was to redefine *satisfactio* (satisfaction), the main medieval category for thought about the cross. Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?*, which largely determined the medieval development, saw Christ's *satisfactio* for our sins as the offering of compensation or damages for dishonour done, but the Reformers saw it as the undergoing of vicarious punishment (*poena*) to meet the claims on us of God's holy law and wrath (i.e. his punitive justice). What Socinus did was to arraign this idea as irrational, incoherent, immoral and impossible. Giving pardon, he argued, does not square with taking satisfaction, nor does the transferring of punishment from the guilty to the innocent square with justice; nor is the temporary death of one a true substitute for the eternal death of many; and a perfect substitutionary satisfaction, could such a thing be, would necessarily confer on us unlimited permission to continue in sin. Socinus' alternative account of New Testament soteriology, based on the axiom that God forgives without requiring any satisfaction save the repentance which makes us forgivable, was evasive and unconvincing, and had little influence. But his classic critique proved momentous: it held the attention of all exponents of the Reformation view for more than a century, and created a tradition of rationalistic prejudice against that view which has effectively shaped debate about it right down to our own day.

The almost mesmeric effect of Socinus' critique on Reformed scholastics in particular was on the whole unhappy. It forced them to develop rational strength in stating and connecting up the

¹ Socinus' arguments were incorporated in the Racovian Catechism, published at Racow (the modern Cracow) in 1605, which set forth the Unitarianism of the 'Polish Brethren'. After several revisions of detail down to 1680 the text was finalised and in due course translated into English by Thomas Rees (London, 1818). It is a document of classical importance in Unitarian history.

various parts of their position, which was good, but it also led them to fight back on the challenger's own ground, using the Socinian technique of arguing *a priori* about God as if he were a man – to be precise, a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century monarch, head of both the legislature and the judiciary in his own realm but bound none the less to respect existing law and judicial practice at every point. So the God of Calvary came to be presented in a whole series of expositions right down to that of Louis Berkhof (1938) as successfully avoiding all the moral and legal lapses which Socinus claimed to find in the Reformation view.² But these demonstrations, however skillfully done (and demonstrators like François Turretin and A.A. Hodge, to name but two,³ were very skilful indeed), had built-in weaknesses. Their stance was defensive rather than declaratory, analytical and apologetic rather than doxological and kerygmatic. They made the word of the cross sound more like a conundrum than a confession of faith – more like a puzzle, we might say, than a gospel. What was happening? Just this: that in trying to beat Socinian rationalism at its own game, Reformed theologians were conceding the Socinian assumption that every aspect of God's work of reconciliation will be exhaustively explicable in terms of a natural theology of divine government, drawn from the world of contemporary legal and political thought. Thus, in their zeal to show themselves rational, they became rationalistic.⁴ Here as elsewhere, methodological

² See L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: Banner of Truth, 1949, 373–83. Berkhof's zeal to show that God did nothing illegal or unjust makes a strange impression on the post-Watergate reader.

³ See F. Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, Geneva (1682), II. xiv, 'De Officio Christi Mediatoris', and A.A. Hodge, *The Atonement*, London: Nelson, 1868. Turretin's position is usefully summarised in L.W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1920, pp. 241–52. Cf. J.F. Heidegger's parallel account in his *Corpus Theologiae Christianae*, Zurich (1700), which R.S. Franks reviews in *The Work of Christ*, London: Nelson, 1962, 426ff.

⁴ In his influential book *Christus Victor*, tr. A.G. Herbert, London: SPCK, 1931, which advocated a 'dramatic', non-rational way of declaring God's conquest of evil through the cross, Gustaf Aulén describes the 'Latin' account of the atonement (i.e. that of Anselm and Protestant orthodoxy) as 'juridical in its inmost essence' (p. 106), and says: 'It concentrates its effort upon a rational attempt to explain how the Divine Love and the Divine Justice can be reconciled. The Love of God is regulated by his Justice, and is only free to act within the limits that Justice marks out. *Ratio* and *Lex*; rationality and

rationalism became in the seventeenth century a worm in the Reformed bud, leading in the next two centuries to a large-scale withering of its theological flower.

Now I do not query the substantial rightness of the Reformed view of the atonement; on the contrary, I hope to confirm it, as will appear; but I think it is vital that we should unambiguously renounce any such intellectual method as that which I have described, and look for a better one. I shall now try to commend what seems to me a sounder method by offering answers to two questions: 1) What sort of knowledge of Christ's achievement on the cross is open to us? 2) From what source and by what means do we gain it?

1) What sort of knowledge of God's action in Christ's death may we have? That a man named Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate about AD 30 is common historical knowledge, but Christian beliefs about his divine identity and the significance of his dying cannot be deduced from that fact alone. What further sort of knowledge about the cross, then, may Christians enjoy?

The answer, we may say, is faith-knowledge: by faith we know that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Yes, indeed; but what sort of knowledge is faith-knowledge? It is a kind of knowledge of which God is both giver and content. It is a Spirit-given acquaintance with divine realities, given through acquaintance with God's word. It is a kind of knowledge which makes the knower say in one and the same breath both 'whereas I was blind, now I see' (John 9:25) and also 'now we see as in a mirror, darkly ... now I know in part' (1 Cor. 13:12). For it is a unique kind of knowledge which, though real, is not full; it is

justice, go hand in hand ... The attempt is made by the scholastics to elaborate a theology which shall provide a comprehensive explanation of the Divine government of the world, which shall answer all questions and solve all riddles ...' (pp. 173-74). What Aulén fails to note is how much of this implicitly rationalistic cast of thought was a direct reaction to Socinus' rationalistic critique. In fact, Aulén does not mention Socinus at all; nor does he refer to Calvin, who asserts penal substitution as strongly as any, but follows an exegetical and Christocentric method which is not in the least scholastic or rationalistic. Calvin shows no interest in the reconciling of God's love and justice as a theoretical problem; his only interest is in the mysterious but blessed fact that at the cross God did act in both love and justice to save us from our sins. Cf. P. van Buren, *Christ in our Place: The Substitutionary Character of Calvin's Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957.

knowledge of what is discernible within a circle of light against a background of a larger darkness; it is, in short, knowledge of a mystery, the mystery of the living God at work.

'Mystery' is used here as it was by Charles Wesley when he wrote:

'Tis mystery all! The immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!

'Mystery' in this sense (traditional in theology) means a reality distinct from us which in our very apprehending of it remains unfathomable to us: a reality which we acknowledge as actual without knowing how it is possible, and which we therefore describe as incomprehensible. Christian metaphysicians, moved by wonder at the world, speak of the created order as 'mystery', meaning that there is more to it, and more of God in it, than they can grasp; and similarly Christian theologians, taught by revelation, apply the same word for parallel reasons to the self-revealed and self-revealing God, and to his work of reconciliation and redemption through Christ. It will be seen that this definition of mystery corresponds less to Paul's use of the word *mysterion* (which he applied to the open secret of God's saving purpose, set forth in the gospel) than to his prayer that the Ephesians might 'know the love of Christ which passes knowledge' (Eph. 3:19). Knowing through divine enlightenment that which passes knowledge is precisely what it means to be acquainted with the mystery of God. The revealed 'mystery' (in Paul's sense) of Christ confronts us with the unfathomable 'mystery' (in the sense I defined) of the Creator who exceeds the comprehension of his creatures. Accordingly, Paul ends his full-dress, richest-ever exposition of the mystery of Christ by crying: 'O depth of wealth, wisdom, and knowledge in God! How unsearchable his judgements, how untraceable his ways! Who knows the mind of the Lord? ... Source, Guide and Goal of all that is – to him be glory for ever! Amen' (Rom. 11:33ff., New English Bible). Here

Paul shows, and shares, his awareness that the God of Jesus remains the God of Job, and that the highest wisdom of the theological theorist, even when working under divine inspiration as Paul did, is to recognise that he is, as it were, gazing into the sun, whose very brightness makes it impossible for him fully to see it; so that at the end of the day he has to admit that God has much more to him than theories can ever contain, and to humble himself in adoration before the one whom he can never fully analyse.

Now the atonement is a mystery in the defined sense, one aspect of the total mystery of God. But it does not stand alone in this. Every aspect of God's reality and work, without exception, is mystery. The eternal Trinity; God's sovereignty in creation, providence, and grace; the incarnation, exaltation, present reign and approaching return of Jesus Christ; the inspiring of the Holy Scriptures; and the ministry of the Spirit in the Christian and the church – each of these (to look no further) is a reality beyond our full fathoming, just as the cross is. And theories about any of these things which used human analogies to dispel the dimension of mystery would deserve our distrust, just as rationalistic theories about the cross do.

It must be stressed that the mystery is in each case the reality itself, as distinct from anything in our apprehension of it, and as distinct therefore from our theories, problems, affirmations and denials about it. What makes it a mystery is that creatures like ourselves can comprehend it only in part. To say this does not open the door to scepticism, for our knowledge of divine realities (like our knowledge of each other) is genuine knowledge expressed in notions which, so far as they go, are true. But it does close the door against rationalism, in the sense of theorising that claims to explain with finality any aspect of God's way of existing and working. And with that, it alerts us to the fact that the presence in our theology of unsolved problems is not necessarily a reflection on the truth or adequacy of our thoughts. Inadequate and untrue theories do of course exist: a theory (the word comes from *theōrein*, to look at) is a 'view' or 'sight' of something, and if one's way of looking at it is perverse one's view will be distorted, and distorted views are always full of problems. But the mere presence of problems is not enough

to prove a view distorted; true views in theology also entail unsolved problems, while any view that was problem-free would certainly be rationalistic and reductionist. True theories in theology, whether about the atonement or anything else, will suspect themselves of being inadequate to their object throughout. One thing that Christians know by faith is that they know only in part.

None of this, of course, is new or unfamiliar; it all belongs to the main historic stream of Christian thought. But I state it here, perhaps too laboriously, because it has not always been brought to bear rigorously enough on the doctrine of the atonement. Also, this position has linguistic implications which touch the doctrine of the atonement in ways which are not always fully grasped; and my next task is to show what these are.

Human knowledge and thoughts are expressed in words, and what we must note now is that all attempts to speak of the mystery of the unique and transcendent God involve many kinds of stretching of ordinary language. We say, for instance, that God is both plural and singular, being three in one; that he directs and determines the free acts of men; that he is wise, good and sovereign when he allows Christians to starve or die of cancer; that the divine Son has always upheld the universe, even when he was a human baby; and so forth. At first sight, such statements might appear nonsensical (either meaningless or false). But Christians say that, though they would be nonsensical if made of men, they are true as statements about God. If so, however, it is clear that the key words are not being used in an everyday way. Whatever our views on the origins of human language and inspiration of the Scriptures (both matters on which it seems that options are currently being broadened rather than reduced), there can be no dispute that the meaning of the nouns, adjectives and verbs that we use for stating facts and giving descriptions is anchored, at least in the first instance, in our experience of knowing things and people (ourselves included) in this world. Ordinary language is thus being adapted for an extraordinary purpose when we use it to speak of God. Christians have always made this adaptation easily in their prayers, praises and proclamations, as if it were a natural thing to

do (as indeed I think it is), and the doubts articulated by living if somewhat old-fashioned philosophers like A.J. Ayer and Antony Flew as to whether such utterance expresses knowledge and conveys information about anything more than private attitudes seem curiously provincial as well as paradoxical.⁵ Moreover, it is noticeable that the common Christian verbal forms for expressing divine mysteries have from the first shown remarkable consistency and steadiness in maintaining their built-in logical strangeness, as if the apprehended reality of God was itself sustaining them (as indeed I think it was). Language about the cross illustrates this clearly: liturgies, hymns and literature, homiletical, catechetical and apologetic, all show that Christians have from the start lived by faith in Christ's death as a sacrifice made to God in reparation for their sins, however uncouth and mythological such talk sounds (and must always have sounded), however varied the presentations of atonement which teachers tried out, and however little actual theologizing about the cross went on in particular periods, especially the early centuries.⁶

Christian language, with its peculiarities, has been much studied during the past twenty years, and two things about it have become clear. First, all its odd, 'stretched', contradictory- and

⁵ Ayer voiced his doubts in *Language, Truth and Logic*, London: Gollancz, 1936; 2nd edition, 1946; and Flew his in 'Theology and Falsification', *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A.G.N. Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, London: SCM, 1955, 96–130. There are replies in, among other books, E. L. Mascall, *Words and Image*, London: Longmans, 1957; *Faith and Logic*, ed. Basil Mitchell, London: Allen and Unwin, 1957; Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic and God*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1962; Fontana edition 1970; W. Hordern, *Speaking of God*, New York: Macmillan, 1964.

⁶ Of the church in the patristic period H.E.W. Turner writes: 'Its experience of Redemption through Christ was far richer than its attempted formulations of this experience.' *The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption*, London: Mowbray, 1952, 13; cf. chapter V, 'Christ our Victim'. On T.F. Torrance's sharp-edged thesis in *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1948, that the Apostolic Fathers lapsed from New Testament faith in the cross to a legalism of self-salvation, Robert S. Paul's comment in *The Atonement and the Sacraments*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961, 37, note 2, is just: 'To me he has made his case almost too well, for at the end I am left asking the question, "In what sense, then, could the Church change this much and still be the Church?"' In fact, Torrance's thesis needs the qualification of Turner's statement quoted above.

incoherent-sounding features derive directly from the unique Christian notion of the transcendent, tri-personal Creator God. Christians regard God as free from the limits that bind creatures like ourselves, who bear God's image while not existing on his level, and Christian language, following biblical precedent, shakes free from ordinary limits in a way that reflects this fact. So, for instance, faced with John's declaration in 1 John 4:8–10, 'God is love. ... Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins,' Calvin can write without hesitation: 'The word propitiation (*placatio*; Greek, *hilasmos*) has great weight: for God, in a way that cannot be put into words (*ineffabili quodam modo*), at the very time when he loved us, was hostile (*infensus*) to us till he was reconciled in Christ.'⁷ Calvin's phrase 'in a way that cannot be put into words' is his acknowledgement that the mystery of God is beyond our grasp. To Calvin, this duality of attitude, love and hostility, which in human psychological terms is inconceivable, is part of God's moral glory; a sentiment which might make rationalistic theologians shake their heads, but at which John certainly would have nodded his.

Second Christian speech verbalizes the apprehended mystery of God by using a distinctive non-representational 'picture-language'. This consists of parables, analogies, metaphors and images piled up in balance with each other, as in the Bible itself (from which this language is first learned), and all pointing to the reality of God's presence and action in order to evoke awareness of it and response to it. Analysis of the functioning of this language is currently in full swing,⁸ and no doubt much remains to be said. Already, however, the discussion has produced one firm result of major importance – the recognition that the verbal units of Christian speech are

⁷ *Inst.* II. xvii. 2. This thought is picked up in Anglican Article II: 'Christ ... truly suffered ... to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.' On propitiation, cf. note 21 below.

⁸ For surveys of the present state of play, cf. Ferré's *Language, Logic and God*; Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms*, London: SCM, 1974; John Macquarrie, *God-Talk*, London: SCM Press, 1967.

'models', comparable to the thought-models of modern physics.⁹ The significance of this appears from John MacIntyre's judgement 'that the theory of models succeeds in reinstating the doctrine of analogy in modern theological logic ... and that analogy is to be interpreted in term of a theory of models and not vice versa.'¹⁰ The doctrine of analogy is the time-honoured account, going back to Aquinas, of how ordinary language is used to speak intelligibly of a God who is partly like us (because we bear his image) and partly unlike us (because he is the infinite Creator while we are finite creatures).¹¹ All theological models, like the non-descriptive models of the physical sciences, have an analogical character; they are, we might say, analogies with a purpose, thought-patterns which function in a particular way, teaching us to focus one area of reality (relationships with God) by conceiving of it in terms of another, better-known area of reality (relationships with each other). Thus they actually inform us about our relationship with God and through the Holy Spirit enable us to unify, clarify and intensify our experience in that relationship.

⁹ The pioneer in stating this was Ian T. Ramsey: see his *Religious Language*, London: SCM Press, 1957; *Models and Mystery*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964; *Christian Discourse*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965. For further discussion of models in theology cf. John MacIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*, London: SCM Press, 1966, especially 54–81; Thomas Fawcett, *The Symbolic Language of Religion*, London: SCM Press, 1970, 69–94; Barbour, op. cit. The pioneer in stating this was Ian T. Ramsey: see his *Religious Language*, London: SCM Press, 1957; *Models and Mystery*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964; *Christian Discourse*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965. For further discussion of models in theology cf. John MacIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*, London: SCM Press, 1966, especially 54–81; Thomas Fawcett, *The Symbolic Language of Religion*, London: SCM Press, 1970, 69–94; Barbour, op. cit.

¹⁰ *The Shape of Christology*, 63.

¹¹ The idea of analogy is formulated by the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v., as follows: 'A method of predication whereby concepts derived from a familiar object are made applicable to a relatively unknown object in virtue of some similarity between the two otherwise dissimilar objects.' Aquinas' account of analogy is in *Summa Theologica* I. xiii, and can be read in *Words about God*, ed. Ian T. Ramsey, London: SCM, 1971, 36ff. For Thomists, the doctrine of analogy serves to explain how knowledge of creatures gives knowledge of their Creator (natural theology) as well as how biblical imagery gives knowledge of the God of both nature and grace (scriptural theology). For a technical Thomist discussion, concentrating on analogy in natural theology, see E. L. Mascall, *Existence and Analogy*, London: Longmans, 1949, 92–121.

The last song in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* assures us that 'any dream will do' to wake the weary into joy. Will any model do to give knowledge of the living God? Historically, Christians have not thought so. Their characteristic theological method, whether practiced clumsily or skillfully, consistently or inconsistently, has been to take biblical models as their God-given starting-point, to base their belief-system on what biblical writers use these models to say, and to let these models operate as 'controls', both suggesting and delimiting what further, secondary models may be developed in order to explicate these which are primary. As models in physics are hypotheses formed under the suggestive control of empirical evidence to correlate and predict phenomena, so Christian theological models are explanatory constructs formed to help us know, understand and deal with God, the ultimate reality. From this standpoint, the whole study of Christian theology, biblical, historical and systematic, is the exploring of a three-tier hierarchy of models: first, the 'control' models given in Scripture (God, Son of God, kingdom of God, word of God, love of God, glory of God, body of Christ, justification, adoption, redemption, new birth and so forth – in short, all the concepts analysed in Kittel's great *Wörterbuch* and its many epigoni); next, dogmatic models which the church crystallised out to define and defend the faith (*homoousion*, Trinity, nature, hypostatic union, double procession, sacrament, supernatural, etc. – in short, all the concepts usually dealt with in doctrinal textbooks); finally, interpretive models lying between Scripture and defined dogma which particular theologians and theological schools developed for stating the faith to contemporaries (penal substitution, verbal inspiration, divinization, Barth's 'Nihil' – *das Nichtige* – and many more).

It is helpful to think of theology in these terms, and of the atonement in particular. Socinus went wrong in this matter first by identifying the biblical model of God's kingship with his own sixteenth-century monarchy model (a mistake later repeated by Hugo Grotius), second by treating this not-wholly-biblical model as his 'control', and third by failing to acknowledge that the mystery of God is more than any one model, even the best, can

express. We have already noticed that some orthodox writers answering Socinus tended to slip in a similar way. The passion to pack God into a conceptual box of our own making is always strong, but must be resisted. If we bear in mind that all the knowledge we can have of the atonement is of a mystery about which we can only think and speak by means of models, and which remain a mystery when all is said and done, it will keep us from rationalistic pitfalls and thus help our progress considerably.

II. Bible and Model

2) Now we come up to our second question, my answer to which has been hinted at already. By what means is knowledge of the mystery of the cross given us? I reply: through the didactic thought-models given in the Bible, which in truth are instruction from God. In other words, I proceed on the basis of the mainstream Christian belief in biblical inspiration, which I have sought to justify elsewhere.¹²

What this belief means, in formula terms, is that the Holy Scriptures of both Testaments have the dual character which the *viva voce* teaching of prophets, apostles and supremely Jesus had: in content, if not in grammatical form, it is both human witness to God and God's witness to himself. The true analogy for inspiration is incarnation, the personal Word of God becoming flesh. As a multiple confession of faith in the God who rules, judges and saves in the space-time continuum which we call world history, the Bible consists of occasional documents, historical, didactic and liturgical, all proclaiming in various ways what God has done, is doing and will do. Each document and each utterance within that document, like Jesus Christ and each of his utterances, is anchored in a particular historical situation – this particularity marks all the Christian revelation – and to discern within these particularities truths from God for universal application is the interpreter's major task. His guideline is the knowledge that God's word for today is

found through understanding and reapplying the word that God spoke long ago in identity (substantial, not grammatical) with the message of the biblical authors. The way into God's mind remains *via* their minds, for their assertions about God embody in particularised form what he wants to tell us today about himself. In other words, God says in application to us the same things that he originally said in application to those to whom the biblical books were first addressed. The details of the second application differ from the first in a way that corresponds to the difference between our situation and that of the first addresses, but the truths of principle being applied are the same. Divine speech is itself, of course, a model, but it is a controlling one. It signifies the reality of mind-to-mind instruction from God to us by verbal means, and thus teaches us to categorise all other didactic models found in Scripture, not as hypothesis or hunch, but as revelation.

How do these revealed models become means of God's instruction? Here, it must regretfully be said, Ian Ramsey, the pioneer exponent of model-structure of biblical thinking, fails us. He describes vividly how these models trigger off religious disclosures and so evoke religious responses, but instead of equating the beliefs they express with divine teaching he leaves quite open, and therefore quite obscure, the relation between the 'disclosures' as intuitions of reality and the thoughts which the models convey. This means that he lacks criteria for distinguishing true from false intuitions. Sometimes he speaks as if all feelings of 'cosmic disclosure' convey insights that are true and self-authenticating, but one need only mention the Buddha, Muhammad, Mrs Mary Baker Eddy, the false prophets exposed by Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Micaiah in 1 Kings 22, and the visionaries of Colossians 2:18–19, to show that this is not so. Also Ramsey seems to be without criteria for relating models to each other and developing from them a coherent belief-system, and he nowhere considers what the divine-speech model implies.¹³

¹² See my *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God*, London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1958, *God has Spoken*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965; 'Inspiration' in the *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J.D. Douglas et al., London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962.

¹³ For Ramsey's overall view of models, see the works cited in note 9. On most theological subjects his opinions, so far as he reveals them, are unexceptionably middle-of-the-road, but it is noteworthy that in his lecture on 'Atonement Theology' in *Christian Discourse* (28ff.) he hails Hastings Rashdall's Aberlarian treatise *The Idea of Atonement*

Must our understanding of how biblical models function be as limited or as loose as Ramsey's is? Not necessarily. Recognition that the biblical witness to God has the logic of models – not isolated, incidentally, but linked together, and qualifying each other in sizeable units of meaning – is compatible with all the views taken in the modern hermeneutical debate. Central to this debate are two questions. The first is whether the reference-point and subject-matter of biblical witness is just the transformed psyche, the 'new being' as such, or whether it does not also, and indeed primarily, refer to saving acts of God and a living divine Saviour that were originally 'there' as datable realities in the space-time continuum of world history, and that owe their transforming power 'here' in Christian lives now to the fact that they were 'there' on the stage of history then. To the extent that the former alternative is embraced, one has to say that the only factual information which the biblical writers communicate is that God's people felt and thought in certain ways at certain times in certain situations. Then one has to face the question whether the writers thought this was all the factual information they were communicating; if one says no, then one has to justify one's disagreement with them; if one says yes, one has to explain why so much of their witness to Christ has the form

in Christian Theology (1919) as 'definitive' (pp. 29; no reasons given); limits the 'cosmic disclosure' evoked by the cross to a sense of 'the victorious will of God', whose plan to maintain a remnant did not fail (pp. 32, 34), and whose love this victory shows (pp. 59–60); rejects the grounding of justification on substitution or satisfaction as involving 'frontier-clashes with the language of morals' (p. 40; the old Socinian objection); and criticizes the exegeting of justification, substitution, satisfaction, reconciliation, redemption, propitiation and expiation as if these words 'were *not models at all, but* described procedural transactions ... each describing a species of atonement engineering' (p. 44). Profound confusion appears here. Certainly these words are models, but what they are models of is precisely procedural transactions for achieving atonement, transactions in which the Father and the Son dealt with each other on our behalf. The contexts of apostolic argument in which these models appear make this unambiguously plain, and to assume, as Ramsey seems to do, that as models they can only have a directly subjective reference to what Bultmann would call a new self-understanding is quite arbitrary. Indeed, Ramsey himself goes on to show that the model-category for biblical concepts does *not* require an exclusively subjective reference, for he dwells on 'love' as a model of *God's activity* (p. 59); and if love can be such a model, why not these other words? It seems evident that Ramsey brought Abelardian-Socinian assumptions to his study of the biblical words, rather than deriving his views from that study.

of factual narration about him – why, indeed, the 'gospel' as a literary form was ever invented. If, however, one takes the latter alternative, as all sober reason seems to counsel, then the second central question arises: how much distortion of fact is there in the narrating, and how much of guesswork, hunch, and fantasy is there in the interpreting, of the historical realities that were 'there'? I cannot discuss these massive and complex issues here; suffice it to declare, in relation to this debate, that I am proceeding on the basis that the biblical writers do indeed give true information about certain historical events, public and in principle datable, which have resulted in a Saviour and a salvation being 'there' for sinners to receive by faith; and that the biblical thought-models in terms of which these events are presented and explained are revealed models, ways of thought that God himself has taught us for the true understanding of what he has done for us and will do in us.

Also, I proceed on the basis that the Holy Spirit who inspired prophetic and apostolic testimony in its written as well as its oral form is now active to teach Christians through it, making them aware of its divine quality overall, its message to themselves, and the presence and potency of God in Christ to whom it points. Since the Spirit has been teaching the church in this way in every age, much of our listening to the Bible in the present will rightly take the form of reviewing theological constructions of the past, testing them by the written word from which they took their rise. When a particular theological view, professedly Bible-based, has over the centuries proved a mainspring of Christian devotion, faith and love, one approaches it, not indeed uncritically, but with respect, anticipating the discovery that it is substantially right. Our present task is to elucidate and evaluate one historic line of biblical interpretation which has had an incalculable impact on countless lives since it was clarified in the century of the Reformation; it will be strange if it proves to have been entirely wrong.¹⁴

¹⁴ Cf. Vincent Taylor's remark, in *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching*, London: Epworth Press, 1940, 301–302: 'The thought of *substitution* is one we have perhaps been more anxious to reject than to assess; yet the immeasurable sense of gratitude with which it is associated ... is too great a thing to be wanting in a worthy theory of the Atonement.'

So much, then, for methodological preliminaries, which have been tedious but necessary; now to our theme directly.

III. Substitution

The first thing to say about penal substitution has been said already. It is a Christian theological model, based on biblical exegesis, formed to focus a particular awareness of what Jesus did at Calvary to bring us to God. If we wish to speak of the ‘doctrine’ of penal substitution, we should remember that this model is a dramatic, kerygmatic picturing of divine action, much more like Aulén’s ‘classic idea’ of divine victory (though Aulén never saw this) than it is like the defensive formula-models which we call the Nicene ‘doctrine’ of the Trinity and the Chalcedonian ‘doctrine’ of the person of Christ. Logically, the model is put together in two stages: first, the death of Christ is declared to have been substitutionary; then the substitution is characterised and given a specific frame of reference by adding the word penal. We shall examine the two stages separately.

Stage one is to declare Christ’s death substitutionary. What does this mean? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines substitution as ‘the putting of one person or thing in the place of another’. One oddity of contemporary Christian talk is that many who affirm that Jesus’ death was vicarious and representative deny that it was substitutionary; for the *Dictionary* defines both words in substitutionary terms! Representation is said to mean ‘the fact of standing for, or in place of, some other thing or person, especially with a right or authority to act on their account; substitution of one thing or person for another’. And vicarious is defined as ‘that takes or supplies the place of another thing or person; substituted instead of the proper thing or person’. So here, it seems, is a distinction without a difference. Substitution is, in fact, a broad idea that applies whenever one person acts to supply another’s need, or to discharge his obligation, so that the other no longer has to carry the load himself. As Pannenberg says, ‘in social life, substitution is a universal phenomenon ... Even the structure of vocation, the division of labour, has substitutionary character. One

who has a vocation performs this function for those whom he serves.’ For ‘every service has vicarious character by recognising a need in the person served that apart from the service that person would have to satisfy for himself’.¹⁵ In this broad sense, nobody who wishes to say with Paul that there is a true sense in which ‘Christ died for us’ (*hyper*, on our behalf, for our benefit), and ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us’ (*hyper* again) (Rom. 5:8; Gal. 3:13), and who accepts Christ’s assurance that he came ‘to give his life a ransom for many’ (*anti*, which means precisely ‘in place of’, ‘in exchange for’¹⁶), should hesitate to say that Christ’s death was substitutionary. Indeed, if he describes Christ’s death as vicarious he is actually saying it.

It is, of course, no secret why people shy off this word. It is because they equate, and know that others equate, substitution in Christology with penal substitution. This explains the state of affairs which, writing in 1948, F.W. Camfield described as follows:

If there is one conclusion which [has] come almost to be taken for granted in enlightened Christian quarters, it is that the idea of substitution has led theology on a wrong track; and that the word ‘substitution’ must now be dropped from the doctrine of the Atonement as too heavily laden with misleading and even false connotations. By ‘liberal’ or ‘modernist’ theology the idea of substitution is of course rejected out of hand. And even the theology which prides itself on being ‘positive’ and ‘evangelical’ and which seeks to maintain lines of communication with the great traditional doctrines of atonement is on the whole disposed to reject it. And this, not merely on the ground that it holds implications which are irrational and morally offensive, but even and specifically on the ground that it is unscriptural. Thus Dr Vincent Taylor as a result of

¹⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, tr. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe, London: SCM Press, 1968, 268, 259.

¹⁶ See R.E. Davies, ‘Christ in our Place – the Contribution of the Prepositions’, *Tyndale Bulletin* 21 (1970), 72ff.

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