Substitution and the Biblical Background to *Cur Deus Homo*

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Anselm and others have frequently been criticized for one consequence of the notion of substitution implied in the theory of satisfaction: it appears to make the saving work of Christ a remote matter, alien from the human subject of salvation and appropriated remotely by that subject. Anselm is often blamed for introducing this notion into Christian theology. When the biblical background of Anselm's theory is considered and it is noted that substitution is a relatively accidental feature of Biblical models of human salvation through Christ, this criticism may appear to be mistaken. This paper will examine briefly several biblical images for salvation, identifying the relevance of substitution to each of them, as a preparation for a consideration of the relevance of substitution for Anselm's account. It will be argued that substitution is an inevitable feature of the model of satisfaction, which Anselm took from sources ultimately biblical, and it conveys an important truth about salvation in Christ. It does not necessarily become, however, on that basis, an inevitable feature of the theological account of Christ's saving work and is not unduly emphasized by Anselm, at least in comparison with some of his successors. This argument will involve a revisiting of the older position of Jean Rivière on the satisfaction of Christ.

Possibly the most influential passage in all of Saint Anselm for subsequent Christian theology and spirituality has been the passage in *Cur Deus Homo* I, 11 wherein Anselm defines satisfaction for sin as the repayment of what is owed to God. The debt owed to God by every rational creature, human and angelic, is that the creature subordinates the creaturely will to the will of God. Sin is the non-payment of this debt or obligation, and robs God of the honor due to God.

This vocabulary of satisfaction was to become a commonplace of subsequent accounts of the saving work of Christ through medieval theology and the theology of the sixteenth century reformation. All agreed that Christ's saving death involves a satisfaction to God of what the human being owes God but cannot pay God.

Yet this model of salvation through the satisfaction worked by Christ is also frequently criticized for an apparent consequence: it appears to make Christ's saving work a remote matter, alien in origin from the human subject of salvation and alien in effect, since it is appropriated remotely by that subject. And Anselm is often made to bear the blame for this consequence.

Anselm did not himself invent the model of Christ's work as satisfaction and its coordinate concept of sin as debt. Before Anselm, these ideas were embedded in the liturgy, as in the Easter Proclamation *Exultet* (7th to 9th century), which lauded the "only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, who paid for us to the eternal Father the debt of Adam's transgression" [*qui pro nobis aeterno patri adae debitum soluit*]. These ideas had already been raised by early Christian theologians such as Athanasius, who described Christ's death as the

payment of a debt.[1] More significantly, however, these ideas are found in the Christian New Testament, where Christ's death is referred to as a ransom or purchase price and human sin is described as debt.

The New Testament, in fact, provides a rich variety of models for Christ's saving work, particularly his saving death. I would like to turn briefly to some of the principal models, dividing them in two main groupings for reasons that, I hope, will become apparent.

Group I

There are three main and independent models in the first group: the sacrifice model, the ransom model, and the satisfaction model.

A) The Sacrifice Model. "Christ offered for all time in a single sacrifice" (Hebrews 10.12). Christ's death is not infrequently compared to a covenant sacrifice for sins. Christ's own words in the New Testament narratives of institution of the Eucharist imply this model: "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."[2] It is elaborated much more fully in the Epistle to the Hebrews, wherein Jesus as the High Priest of the New Covenant enters the immediate presence of God with the perfect sacrifice of his own life-blood (Hebrews 9.11-28).

The sacrifice model speaks to an assumption behind much religion: human sin is thought of as pollution that requires purification through the spilling and ritual offering of the blood of an innocent victim substituted for the sinful human being whose sins are thereby atoned and their pollution removed. In the religious institution of sacrifice, the person for whose benefit the ritual is performed usually purchases or otherwise comes to own the victim who dies for him, thus "owning" the benefits of the sacrificial death and pouring of blood.

Closely related to the model of the covenant sacrifice, and mingled with it, is the model of expiation through suffering and, in the ultimate case, through death. This ancient idea of the required compensation for trespass, intentional or not, is behind several Old Testament narratives (for example, I Kings 2.31, where the execution of Joab offers expiation for the blood-guilt he had brought on the royal house, and II Samuel 24, where the king's sin in numbering the people is atoned for by a pestilence in which seventy thousand of the people perish). It appears to be behind the striking passage in Isaiah 53.5,6,10, a passage that would come to be used in interpreting the suffering of Jesus, in which the bruises of the suffering servant are the means of healing for those who have offended. The model of expiation appears prominently in the New Testament, both within the Pauline writings – "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3.13) – and outside them – "He himself bore our sins in his

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[1]*De Incarnatione Verbi xx.2* Compare also Fortunatus' words "sola digna tu fuisti pretium saeculi" in the hymn to the Holy Cross, *Pangue lingua gloriosi*.
[2] Matthew 26.28*; compare Mark 14.24, Luke 22.20, and I Corinthians 11.25.

body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (I Peter 2.24).

The New Testament contains a very sophisticated meditation on the model of sacrifice, which radically alters the model. The Epistle to the Hebrews first employs, and then undermines, the whole institution of religious sacrifice by declaring that the obedience Christ showed in his death was the object of the institution of sacrifice all along. The sacrifices ordained in the Jewish Law were "only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities," which in fact showed their own inadequacy in having to be repeated year by year (Hebrews 10.1-3).

This discourse begins with the sacrifice model to illustrate, first, that biblical models should not always be taken simply in a literal sense, and, second, that biblical material may involve subtle reorganization of the models, as in the re-interpretation of sacrifice in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Many later Christian theologians have ignored that epistle's thesis that Christ and his obedience are the realities of which sacrifices were the shadows, and have reduced Christ's saving work more or less directly to a literal sacrifice. Anselm, as will be seen, was clear about the centrality of Christ's obedience and opts for another model.

B) The Ransom Model. "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10.45). Elsewhere in the New Testament, as we have noted, Jesus' death is seen as a ransom or purchase price. This model is based on the model of the emancipation of slaves or the ransom of prisoners taken in war, who might, in the ancient world, have become slaves by that very mishap. Sin in this model is equated with slavery or imprisonment. The person whose freedom is to be purchased must rely on another to purchase and restore the freedom that is the presumed natural state.

Although not made explicit in the New Testament, this model invited the question, "To whom was the ransom to be paid?" Since it did not seem that God was the cause of the enslavement, the obvious candidate for receipt of the ransom was the devil. This idea was to weave its way through Irenaeus[3], Origen[4] and Gregory of Nyssa[5], Augustine[6], Gregory the Great[7], and later Peter Lombard[8] and Bernard of Clairvaux[9]. And it was to be given particularly fanciful treatment in Pope Gregory, where Christ's humanity is compared to the bait placed on the hook of Christ's divinity and in Peter Lombard, who describes the Cross as a mouse-trap baited by Jesus' blood. Sometimes these early Christian writers, such as Irenaeus, denied that the devil had absolute rights in the matter, but only relative rights, for instance to God's

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[3] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* v, 1

[4] Origen, *Comm. in Matthaeum*, xvi, 8. See R.C. Moberley, *Atonement and Personality* (London, 1924), 345-7.

[5] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, chap. 24. This having to pay a ransom to anyone was explicitly repudiated by Gregory of Nazianzus (*Oratio* 24.22), but did not disappear.

[6] Augustine, *de Trinitate*, xiii, 12-15

[7] *Moralia in Librum Job*, xxxiii, 7

[8] Peter Lombard, *Liber Sententiarum*, III, dist. 19 (especially, chap. 1)

[9] *Tractatus ad Innocentium II Pontificem contra quaedam capitula errorum Abaelardi* (Ep. *190*).

graciousness in not taking by force from the devil what was rightly his. Mostly, as in Augustine, the devil was considered to be exercising his legitimate ownership. Anselm quite clearly limited the extension of the ransom model to this striking conclusion: even in sin, the human being belongs to God and it is absurdity to speak of the devil's rights in the matter (*CDH* II, 7). That is, Anselm refuses to elaborate this model to an inappropriate conclusion. Anselm's challenge to the tradition is important to note. It shows that the biblical models are not to be treated like allegories wherein every detail addresses some separate mysterious detail. Each model illustrates a central point, but it is not necessary to hold that some questions that one might ask in extension have definite answers. And when such a question leads to an answer that is not in accord with other teachings, it may be rejected.

One appeal of the ransom model for Christian theology and doctrine is clear. Of all the models, it uniquely well emphasizes the necessity of the vicarial character of Christ's saving work: slaves or prisoners are clearly unable to ransom themselves, and require another. This point is also conveyed in the satisfaction for debt model, to which we now turn.

C) The Satisfaction for Debt Model. "And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6.12).[10] Although, as we have noted, the New Testament is a source for the model that treats human sin as a form of debt or obligation, so important to Anselm, the model does not seem to be fully worked out in the New Testament in terms of Christ's saving work. Rather, at first glance, for the New Testament God seems to be a forgiver or writer-off of such debt, with the provision that human beings deal likewise with their fellow debtors. Had the model been fully worked out in the New Testament in terms of Christ's saving work, it could have been developed entirely along parallel lines to the ransom model, but without the pitfalls of giving the devil any due. This is almost precisely the development that Anselm followed. Anselm actually cites the Gospel of Matthew in his analysis of sin as debt, but makes clear that God indeed forgives or writes off such debt only on the condition that satisfaction is being done by the subject of the forgiveness.[11]

Group 2

In the second group are found the familiar Biblical models of justification, reconciliation, victory, and adoption or grafting.

The Justification Model. "We are now justified by his blood" (Romans 5.9). This model, central to Paul's argumentation in Galatians and Romans, is based on a courtroom, perhaps an eschatological one. It looks upon human sin as involving guilt and salvation as the effective dealing with that guilt. The model has been subject to considerable debate, particularly since it came into prominence in the Reformation through its use by Martin Luther. Without entering the debate about the meaning of the term "justification," we can note that, for Paul, the action is a

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[10] Compare also the parable of the unforgiving servant at Matthew 18.23-35.
[11] Matthew 6.12, cited in *CDH* I, 15 and 19.

gracious act of God's on account of the decisive work of Christ in dealing with human sin, God's act extending to those who have faith, that is, trust in Christ's decisive work (Romans 3.21-26).

The Reconciliation Model. "Through him to reconcile to himself all things … making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1.20). Here the basis of the model is some sort of social setting, whether family or political group. In this model, human sin is interpreted in terms of estrangement from God and estrangement among human beings. Christ's saving work in this model is the reconciliation or peace achieved by his death.

The Victory Model. This model is taken from war and the battlefield. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15.57). Christus Victor, by his saving work, accomplishes a victory for, through and over those who are embattled (see Colossians 2.15, Romans 8.37, I Corinthians 15. 24-28, 57). This is the model Gustaf Aulén chose to promote as the "classical theory" in his highly influential work *Christus Victor* (London, 1931), in which he developed his famous criticism of Anselm's model.

The Adoption or Grafting Model. This model is taken from family law or viniculture. "So that we might receive adoption as children" (Galatians 4.5); "You, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree" (Romans 11.17). It is generally assumed that this model came from Roman family law and that adoption of children was relatively rare in Jewish circles, but Moses' adoption by Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2.10) and Esther's adoption by Mordecai (Esther 2.7, 15) are possible examples. In any case, the metaphor is readily used for the incorporation of Christians into the family of God (Romans 8.15, 23; Galatians 4.5; Ephesians 1.4-5). This may be taken to be a vivid form of the reconciliation model, whereby all Christians become children of God, Christ being the first-born. In the grafting version of this model, Gentile Christians, from a strange wild stock, are grafted onto the stock of God's people through the instrumentality of Christ (Romans 11.17, 19, 23, 24).

Let this brief listing be evidence of the wide range of metaphors and models that are used in the New Testament for the saving work of Christ. Some obviously turned out to be more useful for the later development of Christian theology, but all are in some way getting at the same basic conviction that God, in Christ, and particularly in Christ's death, was saving the human race from its sinful condition, this condition and the salvation from it variously presented.

The reasons for my twofold grouping is this: in the first group, all the models require that Christ's work be one of substitution for the sinful human beings being saved. In the second group, substitution is not implied. That is, the New Testament has ways of referring to and describing salvation that do not require the substitution of Christ for the sinful human being. The Ransom Model and the Satisfaction Model, which is closely parallel to it, do have this implication, but the reality that all are pointing to apparently does not, since there are models wherein it is not implied at all.

Further, although this has been denied,[12] substitution of the death of one person for the death of another itself is clearly a New Testament concept, particularly in the Fourth Gospel, which has the famous dictum that "greater love hath no man that this, to lay down one's life for one's friends", that is *in substitution for* his friend's life. (John 15.12-15) Jesus' own work will involve this love, and it will be a model for his disciples, now called "friends," to imitate. Thus friendship binds the one deliberately substituting his life to the one for whom he substituted. This friendship may not be at the root of other noble substitutions, such as the fictional and concealed substitution by the idler Sydney Carton for the less expendable Charles Darnay in Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities,* or the real and recognized substitution of Blessed Maximilien Kolbe in 1941 for someone randomly selected for execution by German soldiers, but love almost certainly is.

The point of this excursus for Anselm is this: perhaps the concerns that have from time to time been expressed about the Anselmian model of satisfaction are attending to something incidental to the model and not to the point of the model since, for the Bible at least, the reality does not necessarily include a substitution of any kind. In other words, is substitution, venerable though it may be, essential to the explanation of Christ's saving work? Secondly, if substitution is essential to that explanation, does substitution necessarily make Christ's saving work alien in origin and in effect?

Anselm and Substitution

At first glance, it appears that there is a sense in which it is essential: Anselm has concluded that the sinful human being cannot do what is required. It must be done by another. That is, there is an essential vicarial and substitutionary element. But is this other an unrelated stranger?

The God-Man, who alone can offer the satisfaction required and avert the punishment, is not a stranger in kind. It must be a human being who offers the satisfaction, since only human beings owe it. Thus, to the extent that the God-Man must be human in Anselm's model, there is a real relation between the one who offers satisfaction and those on whose behalf it is offered.

As well, many have attempted to show other relations Anselm assumes between the sinful human being for whom Christ offers satisfaction and Christ himself. Various authors have referred to Anselm's monastic assumptions and the "transformational" concept of flesh[13], and to his prayers[14], many of which point to Anselm's recognition of the close union of Christians with Christ in passion, death and resurrection. These assumptions temper the conclusion some have

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[12] For instance, Vincent Taylor, "The Idea of the Atonement in the New Testament." Referred to in F.W. Camfield, "The Idea of Substitution in the Doctrine of the Atonement," *Scottish Journal of Theology* I (1948), 282-293

[13] J.T. Gollnick, "The Monastic-Devotional Context of Anselm of Canterbury's Theology," in *Monastic Studies* 12 (1976), 239-48 and *Flesh as Transformation Symbol in the Theology of Anselm of Canterbury, Texts and Studies in Religion*, vol. 22 (1985).

[14] Benedicta Ward, "The Place of St. Anselm in the Development of Christian Prayer," in *Cistercian Studies* 8 (1973), 72-81. Compare Anselm's *Oratio* 3, "Prayer Before Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ," in *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm* (Penguin, 1973), 100-1.

drawn that, for Anselm, Christ's saving work is to be treated as "external" to those who are the subjects of it and involved only in terms of a juridical substitution.

Jean Rivière, in an influential article published in 1934, "Sur la «satisfaction» du Christ,"[15] in trying to resolve an apparent direct contradiction between two well-known manualist theologians, offered the distinction between the penal element and the moral element in the received Catholic treatment of satisfaction, and concluded that the penal element must be treated as secondary to the moral element, or else serious problems would ensue. By the "moral element", Rivière referred to the "intimate feelings" by which the death of Christ is made a reparatory act, as opposed to the death itself, which gives it its expiatory character.[16] When this distinction is turned back to the biblical models, it is apparent that some, by their very nature, bring out the idea of substitution without much reference to the moral linkages between Christ and the redeemed, while others do not rely on substitution at all, but have a high association with a moral linkage. One might say that substitution and moral linkages are, in some sense, complementary, but independent.

Does Anselm include such a "moral element" in his account? In the first place, for Anselm, what gives value to the death of Christ is not its penal quality at all, but its moral quality of obedience. Thus, in Rivière's terms, Anselm avoids the penal element in his account of satisfaction.   Furthermore, the obedience is not primarily obedience to a command to give up his life, but obedience to justice, *"iustitia,"* which means holding unwaveringly to justice and truth in his deeds and words, not just in his death (*CDH* I, 8-9).[17]

In the second place, there is a linkage of compassion between Christ and his brothers and sisters. Towards the end of *Cur Deus Homo,* as Anselm is arguing for the salvation of Adam and Eve, which is not explicitly referred to in Scripture, he offers one of his illustrations, or *picturae:*

> There is a king against whom all the inhabitants of one of his cities – except for one sole inhabitant, who is nevertheless of their race – so sinned that none of them is able to perform that meritorious work in virtue of which he would escape condemnation to death. But this inhabitant who alone is innocent has such great favour with the king that he is able – and has such great love for the guilty ones that he is willing [*tantam delectionem erga reos ut velit ipsi regni placituro*] – to bring about reconciliation for all who will trust in his plan.[18]

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[15] *Bulletin de literature ecclésiastique* 35 (1934), 174-187.

[16] Bernard Lonergan's distinction between Context R (the context of retributive justice) and Context S, the context of satisfaction and of interpersonal relationships, in *De Verbo Incarnato* fulfills the same function as Rivière's distinction. See Charles C. Heflung, "A Perhaps Permanently Valid Achievement: Lonergan on Christ's Satisfaction" in *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 10 (1992), 51-76. I owe this observation to Matthew Petillo, another participant in the Second Anselm Conference.

[17] Anselm is here going to pains to stress that Christ, in his obedience, died freely and willingly.

[18] II, 16 *Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (Toronto, 1976) iii, 120.

As the *pictura* expands there is reference not only to the great love [*dilectio*][19] of the sinless one, but also absolution for all those, past and future, who acknowledge their desire both to obtain pardon on the basis of the work done on that day and to assent to the agreement then contracted. There is then an apparent reference to the satisfaction performed by the penitent in the penitential system. Thus the faith and consent of the human race, and the participation in the penitential system, are implied. This closes the link of intimate feelings – first the feelings of the redeemer and then, in penance, the feelings of the redeemed.

Conclusion

One could hardly find a clear expression of what Rivière refers to as the moral element.

In summary, this paper has sought to establish that a recurring criticism of the notion of substitution in the Christian theology of salvation, and of St. Anselm, the supposed source of the notion, is misguided. When the biblical sources are exhibited, it seems clear that substitution, although a clear biblical notion, is not implied in all the models of Christ's saving work, and is therefore not an inevitable part of biblical accounts of salvation. It does, however, emphasize the crucial vicarial element in salvation. The "moral element" of various accounts, including that proposed by St. Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo*, that is, the element of the intimate feelings between the savior and the saved, is just as crucial and protects the satisfaction model from the criticisms that have been leveled against it.

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[19] It is *dilectio* for the human race that God is assumed, throughout *CDH*, to have shown in restoring human nature (*CDH* I, 3 *et passim*).

In the biblical tradition sacrifice was a common practice or ritual. In making an offering to God or a spirit, the person making the sacrifice hopes to make or mend a relationship with God. St Augustine too wrote on the theme of sacrifice The theory is thought out by Anselm in his work Cur Deus Homo or Why God became Man. The cross as a moral example. Moral influence theories or exemplary theories comprise a fourth category used to explain the atonement. That idea is called penal substitution and is summed up by Reverend Rod Thomas, from the evangelical group Reform, as "When God punished he showed his justice by punishing sin but he showed his love by taking that punishment himself". The debate. When the biblical background of Anselm's theory is considered and it is noted that substitution is a relatively accidental feature of Biblical models of human salvation through Christ, this criticism may appear to be mistaken. This paper will examine briefly several biblical images for salvation, identifying the relevance of substitution to each of them, as a preparation for a consideration of the relevance of substitution for Anselm's account. It will be argued that substitution is an inevitable feature of the model of satisfaction, which Anselm took from sources ultimately biblical, and it c... Anselm's Cur Deus Homo (CDH) provides a satisfaction theory of the atonement. The concept of satisfaction has tainted Latin theology from the time of its introduction by Tertullian. In Anselm it makes a foray into Medieval atonement theory where it is then adopted and confused by ecclesiastical indulgence and penitential systems. This supposition will be proven by surveying the biblical account of atonement and the witness of historical theology. This survey will then be used to systematically and practically. 122 Churchman. He expresses ideas associated with sacrifice, ransom, substitution and redemption; but with a sense that the ransom is paid to, or made from, the devil. Of the Greek Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa is attributed with the devil-ransom theory. Anselm's Cur Deus Homo attempts to give a coherent and rational basis for understanding why God became human, why the God-Man (Jesus) died, and how his death benefits us. Anselm's answer is, in short, "if only God can make this satisfaction and only a man ought to make it: it is necessary that a God-man make it" (II.6).[4]. The penal substitution model is arguably the most popular and most foundational model for evangelicals. Penal substitution can be defined as follows: Out of great love for humanity, the Father sent his Son in the person of Christ to satisfy God's justice. The punishment and penal consequences reserved for sinful humanity were laid on Christ instead of us. The cross, thus, shows both God's holiness and love.