

THE WORK OF CHRIST
Part V: The Modern Church

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I. INTRODUCTION.

The eighteenth through the current century has been an era of theological and philosophical reevaluation. The view of Theology Proper and Christology is but a shallow, hollow fragment of the Reformation era when theology was queen of the sciences and philosophy her handmaiden. It is not at all surprising to the student of theology that the work of Christ was also subjected to a misapplication of the scientific method resulting in radical changes. As Christ was humanized so His work was evaluated in the same light as a “reaching out” to God. Christ’s work in the post-Reformation, as previously seen in the harbinger of Liberalism—the Socinians and Grotians, departed from a penal satisfaction to a moral influence or exemplary theory of the valiant, inspiring efforts of a good, wise man to gain victory over the difficulties of life. The purpose of this lesson is to review the nineteenth and twentieth century concept of the work of Christ as it evidenced a departure from the Anselmic-Reformation View.

II. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY GERMAN THEOLOGIANS.

To understand the nineteenth century and its “new thinking” concerning the Scriptures is to grasp the history and impact of the rise of “Enlightenment Thought” with its bare rationalistic hermeneutic. This has been repeated in two previous lessons (4, 9), so that it need not consume us again.

A. **Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834).**

1. **Schleiermacher and Religion.** Schleiermacher reflected the philosophic orientation of his day by beginning his theology with man and projecting to the knowledge of God within the context of a subjective feeling of god-consciousness, religion being man's feelings of himself. This is why he defines religion as "the feeling of absolute dependence," a mixture of Pietism and his own creative thought. The Trinity is conceived through the teachings of Sabellius and Christ, in His carnate life, was the penultimate example of God-consciousness.
2. **Schleiermacher and the Word of Christ.** The function of the God-conscious Christ is to mediate, revelate that consciousness through the Church, the God-conscious community, to the World. How then does Schleiermacher understand that Christ does this? Schleiermacher recognized that Christ functioned in a threefold office (i.e., prophet, priest, and king). He divides His priestly work into two parts, active and passive. In Christ's active obedience, he denied that Christ was "a perfect fulfillment of the divine will. He wrote of the accomplishments of Christ's active obedience as a moral influence. He wrote (*Christian Faith*. 2, 456-57):

"The second point is this, that if we are to express ourselves with any accuracy we cannot say, either, that Christ fulfilled the divine will in our place or for our advantage. This is to say, He cannot have done so in our place in the sense that we are thereby relieved from the necessity of fulfilling it. No Christian mind could possibly desire this, nor has sound doctrine ever asserted it. Indeed, Christ's highest achievement consists in this, that He so animates us that we ourselves are led to an ever more perfect fulfillment of the divine will. Not only so; but He cannot have done it in the sense that the failure to please God which is present in us in and for ourselves, should or could, as it were, be covered by Christ's doing more than was necessary to please Him. For only that which is perfect can stand before God; hence even Christ Himself had (to put it so) nothing to spare, which could be distributed among us, whether we regard the completeness of His fulfillment in outward acts (which, moreover, for reasons which will emerge more clearly later, would be quite un-Protestant) or whether we regard only the purity of the inward sentiment.

Neither can He have fulfilled the divine will in any way for our advantage, as if by the obedience of Christ, considered in and for itself, anything were achieved for us or changed in relation to us. The true view is that the total obedience—*dikaioma*—of Christ

avails for our advantage only in so far as through it our assumption into vital fellowship with Him is brought about, and in that fellowship we are moved by Him, that is, His motive principle becomes ours also—just as we also share in condemnation for Adam’s sin only in so far as we, being in natural life-fellowship with him and moved in the same way, all sin ourselves”.

Schleiermacher’s view of the passive obedience of Christ is essentially Abelardian or moral influence. Christ’s sufferings for our blessedness should fill us with love, god-consciousness. He wrote (*Christian Faith*. 2, 458-59):

“. . . And from this presentation it must be possible to deduce whatever in the way of appropriation of Christ’s suffering (as distinct from its exemplary value, which belongs to His prophetic office) has proved fruitful in Christian piety. Even that form of the doctrine which sometimes appears one-sided, and which concentrates the whole power of redemption almost exclusively in the suffering of Christ, and so finds satisfaction in the suffering of Christ, and so finds satisfaction in this alone, may readily be understood in this light. For in His suffering unto death, occasioned by His steadfastness, there is manifested to us an absolutely self-denying love; and in this there is represented to us with perfect vividness the way in which God was in Him to reconcile the world to Himself, just as it is in His suffering that we feel most perfectly how imperturbable was His blessedness. Hence it may be said that the conviction both of His holiness and of his blessedness always comes to us primarily as we lose ourselves in the thought of His suffering. And just as the active obedience of Christ has its properly high-priestly value chiefly in the fact that God regards us in Christ as partners in His obedience, so the high-priestly value of His passive obedience consists chiefly in this, that we see God in Christ, and envisage Christ as the most immediate partaker in the eternal love which sent Him forth and fitted Him for His task”.

Schleiermacher then attacks what he calls the “triviality of the so-called ‘wounds-theology,’” He stated (*Christian Faith*. 2, 459-60):

“Although it seems now hardly necessary to stay to compare this simple presentation with those artificial constructions which never tire of bringing together all sorts of reasons to prove the necessity or the appropriateness of Jesus’ suffering and death, yet there still remain serious misunderstandings which we must dispose of. The first is this, that although it is in a specially impressive way from

His suffering that we gain a true understanding of Christ, yet this is no justification for the triviality of the so-called ‘wounds-theology,’ once very widespread but now almost obsolete, which thought to find the deep import of the suffering of Christ in its sensuous details, and hence, for the sake of allegorical trivialities, broke up into details the totality of Christ’s sufferings. Underlying this was a confusion of thought; what can only be attributed to Christ as a sacrifice or victim was transferred to His high-priestly dignity. The victim has no independent activity; it is completely passive in everything which happens to it. So Christ too was perfectly passive in respect of those details of His suffering as to which He had no choice, and which consequently are not to be regarded as being for Him significant elements in experience. The second misunderstanding is to take the formula, that through the suffering of Christ the punishment of sin is taken away—a formula perfectly correct when interpreted as explained above—to mean that He bore the punishment, that is, that His suffering was equal to the sum of the evils constituting the amount of the punishment for the sins of the human race, since otherwise the divine righteousness would not have been satisfied. For which it naturally follows, since the total sin of the human race cannot be reckoned anything less than infinite, that the suffering also was infinite. If now the suffering of Christ and His death, although limited to a definite space of time and relative to a capacity for suffering indefinitely diminished by His higher spiritual power, is thus to be equated to the total of human suffering for sin, postulated as infinite, then it is scarcely possible to avoid the supplementary assumption that the divine nature in Him also share in the suffering. This presentation of the matter, contradicting as it does the incapacity of the divine nature for suffering (a truth long recognized even in this doctrine), certainly can offer no defense to any serious attack by its opponents. But this misunderstanding only reaches its height in the view that the suffering of Christ is a transference of punishment in the still more exact sense that God (who nevertheless, according to the doctrine of the Church itself, is not in general the Author of punishment) appointed His suffering for the Redeemer as punishment, so that Christ is supposed to have felt the primary and most direct punishment of sin, namely, the divine wrath, as striking Him and resting upon Him”.

Schleiermacher pointedly rejects the phrase “vicarious satisfaction.” He wrote (*Christian Faith*. 2, 461): “But this satisfaction is in no sense ‘vicarious’; it could not have been expected of us that we should be able to begin this life for ourselves, nor does the act of Christ set us free from the necessity of pursuing this spiritual life by our own endeavors in fellowship

with him.” He would accept the word “vicarious” if used as a synonym for sympathetic. Then he wrote (*Christian Faith*. 2, 461-62):

“If, however, we wish to regard these two aspects of the high-priestly office of Christ in their indivisibility (that is, so far as it is possible to include the suffering under the activity), then we may turn the expression about, and call Christ our satisfying representative; in the sense, first, that in virtue of His ideal dignity He so represents, in His redemptive activity, the perfecting of human nature, that in virtue of our having become one with Him God sees and regards the totality of believers only in Him; and, second, that His sympathy with sin, which was strong enough to stimulate a redemptive activity sufficient for the assumption of all men into His vital fellowship, and the absolute power of which is most perfectly exhibited in His free surrender of Himself to death, perpetually serves to make complete and perfect our imperfect consciousness of sin. It was just like the complementary sacrifice of the High Priest: that had special reference to those trespasses which had not been consciously recognized, so that his sympathy, regarded as the source of his action, took the place of that consciousness, and the people then felt themselves as free from all anxiety about divine punishment for the sins they had committed as if each one himself had fulfilled everything that the law required where there was consciousness of sin”.

His idea of Christ “representing” the sinner has resemblance to a penal substitution. He told us (*Christian Faith*. 2, 463-64):

“ . . . The New Testament passages upon which the use of the term is chiefly based give little definite guidance, since it is not clear that in all of them the reference is to the High Priest; they seem rather to proceed from different points of view. Hence we had better keep to the conception of the high-priestly function and bring in chiefly His appearing before God on our behalf. And, if in doing so the distinction mentioned above is observed, then the representation will consist chiefly of two things: Christ appears before the Father, first, to establish our fellowship with Him, and then, further, to support our prayer before the Father”.

Otto Pfleiderer summarized Schleiermacher distinctly at this point (*Development of Theology*, 117):

“ . . . In the communication of the principle itself consists the work of Christ: his work as Saviour is that of imparting to others the strength of his consciousness to God; his work as Reconciler is the

communication of the happiness of this consciousness; effects which were at first the immediate work of Christ, but subsequently could only be produced by the continued operation of his spirit and example in the mind of believers. to the ecclesiastical dogma of vicarious satisfaction, Schleiermacher attaches the following meaning: Christ made satisfaction in so far that a source of inexhaustible blessing was opened in his person and activity as Founder of the Church; but this satisfaction is not vicarious, inasmuch as the blessing of it belongs only to those who also enter into fellowship with Christ; to his sufferings, on the other hand, a vicarious character attaches, since by virtue of his sinlessness, his own person would have been beyond the reach of the universal calamity connected with sin; but this form of substitution is not satisfaction, individuals in the Christian community having, as we all know, still themselves to suffer. In other words, Schleiermacher rejects the idea of a transcendental reconciliation through the atoning sufferings of Christ as the representative of mankind before God, and puts in its place the historical view of the matter, according to which Christ by the total impression of his personality had such a strengthening and beatifying influence on men's religious consciousness that they felt themselves saved and reconciled, that is, delivered, or gradually being delivered, from the hindering and miserable contradiction between the higher and lower self-consciousness".

N.B. The Abelardian view of the atonement will pervade the entire spectrum of nineteenth-century German Liberal thinking!

B. Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89).

Albrecht Ritschl is chosen as the second representative of that century, not because he departed from Abelard, but because of Ritschl's particular application of the Abelardian View. Schleiermacher applied his theory to the God-conscious life of the church, a narrow application; Ritschl applied the atonement to the world, the kingdom on earth.

1. **Ritschl and Religion.** Ritschl is essentially Kantian and Schleiermachian in his definition of religion in that he felt the essence of religion was somewhat the "common recognition of dependence on God" although in contrast to Schleiermacher he rejected the concept of "innateness." Religion, Christ, and God are simply "value judgments" (Feuerbian), reflections of one's self-concept. Christ is essentially the Christ of the Samosotians (dynamic Monarchians), the window of God. He is the religion about Jesus, not of Jesus.

2. **Ritschl and the Work of Christ.** To understand Ritschl's concept of our Lord's work, it must be conceived through the grid of His "vocation"; that is, in the foundation of the kingdom of God or of the universal ethical association of men as the divine object of the world. Ritschl is pointed in his disregard for a judicial satisfaction view of Christ's death. He wrote (*Reconciliation*, 473-74):

"It is unbiblical, then, to assume that between God's grace or love and His righteousness there is an opposition, which in its bearing upon the sinful race of men would lead to a contradiction, only to be solved through the interference of Christ. The righteousness of inexorable retribution, which would be expressed in the sentence *Fiat justitia, pereat mundus*, is not in itself a religious conception, nor is it the meaning of the righteousness which in the sources of the Old and New Testaments is ascribed to God. God's righteousness is His self-consistent and undeviating action in behalf of the salvation of the members of His community; in essence it is identical with His grace (v. 2:102). Between the two, therefore, there is not contradiction needing to be solved. It is unbiblical to assume that any one of the Old Testament sacrifices, after the analogy of which Christ's death is judged, is meant to move God from wrath to grace (v. 2:184). On the contrary, these sacrifices rely implicitly upon the reality of God's grace toward the covenant people, and merely define certain positive conditions which the members of the covenant people must fulfill in order to enjoy the nearness of the God of grace. It is unbiblical to assume that the sacrificial offering includes in itself a penal act, executed not upon the guilty person, but upon the victim who takes his place. Representation by priest and sacrament is meant not in any exclusive, but in an inclusive sense".

He concluded (*Reconciliation*, 477-78):

"Thus it is impossible to accept an interpretation of Christ's sacrificial death which, under the head of satisfaction, combines in a superficial manner His death and His active life, while at bottom it ascribes to the death of Christ quite a different meaning, namely, that of substitutionary punishment. I have shown how alien this interpretation is to the whole biblical idea of sacrifice as rightly understood, also how little the only utterance of Paul which points in this direction (Galatians 3:13) has to do with the idea of sacrifice, how exactly rather it corresponds with Paul's apocryphal conception of the Mosaic law, a conception which cannot as such be theologically binding (v. 2:248). I have shown that the asserted necessity of a penal satisfaction to God as a condition of the

exercise of His grace has no foundation in the biblical conception of God; on the contrary, it is an intellectual inference from the principle of Hellenic religion that the gods practice a twofold retribution, a principle further supplemented by the assumption that the original adjustment of the relation between God and man is to be interpreted in terms of a legal ordinance. It only remains, therefore, to show that the idea of a penalty borne for others in the manner in which this is here asserted, is as inconsistent with the conditions of moral life in the individual as it is foreign to the words of Christ”.

Having demonstrated that Ritschl rejects any concept of satisfaction, it now is logical to demonstrate his positive conception of the atonement.

N.B. Ritschl’s concept of sin is “a lack of fellowship with God,” so that the atonement’s focus is on reconciliation.

He wrote (*Reconciliation*, 468-69):

“When we investigated the Kingdom of God as the correlate of the thought that God is love, it appeared that this organization of men can be construed as the object and end of God’s love, only in so far as it is conformed to the type of its Founder, the Son of God. The harmony with God and likeness to Him which the Kingdom of God must maintain in order to be understood as the objective of God’s love, attaches to the said Kingdom only in so far as it is called into being by the Son of God, and bows to Him as its Lord (281). In other words, it is in the son of God that in the first place the Father’s love falls, and, only for His sake, on the community of which He is Lord. Moreover, if these relations are eternally involved in God’s will of love, it follows from our recognition of this fact, that the special significance Christ has for us is by no means exhausted in our appreciation of Him as a revelation conditioned by time”.

He stated his view of Christ’s “vocation” as he summarized (*Reconciliation*, 483-84):

“. . . In so far as the speech and conduct and patience under suffering, which make up the life of Christ, arise out of His vocation to exercise the moral lordship of God and realize God’s Kingdom, and are the perfect fulfillment of this vocation, even to the extent of His willingly and patiently enduring the pains of death, it follows from the relation of this purpose of Christ to the essential will of God, that Christ as the kingly Prophet is the

perfect revelation of God; that, in virtue of the motive which inspired Him, namely, love, and the lordship which in His estimate of Himself and in His patience He exercised over the world, He is equal to God; and that He is the eternal object of the Divine love, and as such also the ground of the eternal election of the community of the Kingdom of God.

In so far as the unbroken faithfulness of Christ to His vocation not only exhibits in detail the religious relation of the Son of God to God as His Father, but always arises out of this relation, Christ maintains in His whole life His priestly relation toward God. If, therefore, His Priesthood is to be regarded as availing for others, it can only be in virtue of this fact”.

Swing summarized Ritschl at this point (*Theology of Albrecht Ritschl*, 108-109):

“. . . he emphasizes, as one of the essential elements, in Christ’s mediatorial work, what he considers as fundamental in the Old Testament conception of sacrifice. What Ritschl sees in the ministering sacrifices of the priest is “that which covers the people, or the individuals, before the presence of God. The gift, brought according to the divine order, is the covering or protection under which those in covenant with God are in thought brought into His presence. . . . In the sin-offering there is no rite which could signify any different conception from that of the burnt-offering and the peace-offering When God thus suffers the national community which is conscious of sin, to draw near Him in prescribed ways, in these acts the separation from Him resulting from sin is done away. This bringing near to a gracious God thus accomplished, is the ground of the fact that sins are forgiven, that is, that they no longer separate from God”.

N.B. Nineteenth-century German theologians conceived Christ’s work as Abelardian. The specific application of the Abelardian view took various semantical turns (God-conscious in the community, vocation in the kingdom), but the concept of moral influence or example remained dominant.

III. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND KARL BARTH.

The importance of Barth has been rehearsed in previous lessons (4, 9), but it must not be forgotten whenever you pass from the nineteenth into the twentieth century. He is a massive theological influence away from the ideas of his training toward evangelical

perspectives (we have noted his orthodox statements on Theology Proper and Christology).

A. Barth on the atonement. When one approaches Barth on the atonement a sense of uncertainty, confusion, and perplexity emerges. Barth, like Ritschl, did not accept the threefold role distinction of Christ, feeling that it is impossible to separate, even in a discussion, His person from His work. Barth speaks of Christ bearing the punishment of sin, but the essence of the atonement is not the punishment of sin nor a satisfaction of the wrath of God—his focus is upon the result of the atonement, reconciliation, not its essence (there is no systematic treatment of the atonement in the *Dogmatics*).

N.B. Barth's different emphasis when it comes to express the meaning of the atonement makes it difficult to see his view of Christ's death.

My comments on Barth's view are taken from a chapter in the *Dogmatics* (chapter 4) entitled "The Judge Judged in our Place." Christ is conceived as the servant to perform the work of reconciliation; this occurs according to the title of our chapter. However, it is not a penal satisfaction and beyond this he is vague! He said that the judging of Christ does affect reconciliation. (*Dogmatics*. 4.1, 222-23):

"But what did take place? At this point we can and must make the decisive statement: What took place is that the Son of God fulfilled the righteous judgment on us men by Himself taking our place as man and in our place undergoing the judgment under which we had passed. That is why He came and was amongst us. In this way, in this "for us," He was our Judge against us. That is what happened when the divine accusation was, as it were, embodied in His presence in the flesh. That is what happened when the divine condemnation had, as it were, visibly to fall on this our fellow-man. And that is what happened when by reason of our accusation was, as it were, embodied in His presence in the flesh. That is what happened when the divine condemnation had, as it were, visibly to fall on this our fellow-man. And that is what happened when by reason of our accusation and condemnation it had to come to the point of our perishing, our destruction, exactly as it had to happen, but because God willed to execute His judgment on us in His Son it all happened in His person, as His accusation and condemnation and destruction. He judged, and it was the Judge who was judged, who let Himself be judged. Because He was a man like us, He was able to be judged like us. Because He was the Son of God and Himself God, He had the competence and power to allow this to happen to Him. Because he was the divine Judge come amongst us, He had the authority in this way—by thus giving up of Himself to judgment in our place—to exercise the divine justice of grace, to pronounce us righteous on the ground of what happened to Him, to free us therefore

from the accusation and condemnation and punishment, to save us from the impending loss and destruction. And because in divine freedom he was on the way of obedience, He did not refuse to accept the will of the Father as His will in this self-giving. In His doing this for us, in His taking to Himself—to fulfill all righteousness—our accusation and condemnation and punishment, in His suffering in our place and for us, there came to pass our reconciliation with God. *Cur Deus homo?* In order that God as man might do and accomplish and achieve and complete all this for us wrong-doers, in order that in this way there might be brought about by Him our reconciliation with Him and conversion to Him”.

Further he speaks of Christ as a substitute (*Dogmatics*. 4, 1, 230):

“Jesus Christ for us” means that as this one true man Jesus Christ has taken the place of us men, of many, in all the authority and omnipotence and competence of the one true God, in order to act in our name and therefore validly and effectively for us in all matters of reconciliation with God and therefore of our redemption and salvation, representing us without any co-operation on our part. In the event of His, the Gospel history, there took place that which permits and commands us to understand our history as a history of redemption and not of perdition. It has happened fully and exclusively in Him, excluding any need for completion. Whatever may happen in consequence of the fact that Jesus Christ is for us cannot add to it. It can only be the consequence of that which has taken place fully in Him and needs no completion. We can speak of it only as we look back to the fact that this One has acted as very man and very Son of God, that He has acted as our Representative and in our name, that His incarnation, His way of obedience has had and has fulfilled as its ultimate meaning and purpose the fact that He willed to do this and has done it; His activity as our Representative and Substitute”.

When it comes to the Anselmic view he clarifies, or confuses our understanding of the above statements (*Dogmatics*. 4, 1, 253):

“The concept of punishment has come into the answer given by Christian theology to this question from Isaiah 53. In the New Testament it does not occur in this connection. But it cannot be completely rejected or evaded on this account. My turning from God is followed by God’s annihilating turning from me. When it is resisted His love works itself out as death-dealing wrath. If Jesus Christ has followed our way as sinners to the end to which it leads, in outer darkness, then we can say with that passage from the Old Testament that He has suffered this punishment of ours. But we must not make this a main concept as in some of the older presentations of the doctrine of the atonement (especially those which follow Anselm of Canterbury), either in the sense that by His suffering our punishment we

are spared from suffering it ourselves, or that in so doing He “satisfied” or offered satisfaction to the wrath of God. The latter thought is quite foreign to the New Testament. And of the possible idea that we are spared punishment by what Jesus Christ has done for us we have to notice that the main drift of the New Testament statements concerning the passion and death of Jesus Christ is not at all or only indirectly in this direction.

The decisive thing is not that He has suffered what we ought to have suffered so that we do not have to suffer it, the destruction to which we have fallen victim by our guilt, and therefore the punishment which we deserve”.

B. Bloesch on Barth’s Concept of the Atonement. Donald Bloesch was a student of Barth and has written a helpful little work entitled *Jesus Is Victor!* His analysis of Barth at this point is helpful since he was his student.

1. First, Barth, says Bloesch, takes Christ’s death outside the sphere of humanity and it becomes a triumph of God’s love, a moralism (45-46):

“Yet in Barth’s thought can be seen a profound divergence from the satisfactionist or juridical view, which was accepted with only slight modification in Protestant orthodoxy. For Barth God’s forgiveness is not conditional upon a prior satisfaction for the hurt done to his glory, but this forgiveness itself satisfied the demands of his righteousness. The cross is to be understood primarily not as the fulfillment of a legal contract calling for the shedding of innocent blood but as the triumph of sovereign love over enmity and alienation, which invariably resulted in the shedding of blood. The sacrifice is performed not simply by Jesus as man but by the Son of God in the form of man. It is consequently a divine self-sacrifice: God not only demands but also makes the offering. In this perfect sacrifice the Old Testament sacrificial system is both fulfilled and superseded.

Barth opposes the popular view that through the propitiatory offering of Jesus God changed from wrath to love. Instead he insists (in apparent agreement with Luther) that the work of Christ presupposes and does not create a gracious God. God’s wrath is not appeased or turned away by the blood sacrifice of Jesus: it is precisely in this sacrifice that his wrath is revealed—but as the obverse side of his love. The wrath of God is the purity and holiness of his love that will forgive at the cost of utter self-sacrifice but at the same time will never condone any compromise with sin. God’s wrath is therefore a means of grace as well as of judgment”.

2. Thus, the death of Christ is not so much an event as a revelation (47-48):

“In the Anselmian view God receives compensation for Christ’s death. The superfluous merit earned by the man Christ is credited to his brethren. In the Barthian view Christ’s death is a revelation that God’s forgiveness is assured to all men despite their demerits; it is an incomparable and efficacious sign that all men are now included in the kingdom of his righteousness. The message of the cross is not that merits are now available to the sinner that satisfy the law of distributive justice; rather the cross proclaims that God’s grace goes beyond the strict requirements of justice, that the law of retribution has been both duty met and abrogated by the forgiving love of God. The cross is basically to be understood not as a ritually prescribed instrument of propitiation directed to eternity but as an incursion of divine grace into the arena of human history. The cross reveals that God has identified himself with our sin and misery and has thereby overcome and expelled the powers of sin, guilt, and death. Barth said that we are saved not from the hand of God but by his hand, even though this first note is not denied when seen in its proper context”.

- Bloesch is classic, so I quote at length (50-52):

“Barth’s objectivistic and universalistic penchant can be seen in the peculiar twist that he gives to the concept of substitutionary atonement, as presented in his *Church Dogmatics*. IV, 1 and 2. In contradistinction to historical orthodoxy he affirms not a unilateral substitution but rather an “exchange” whereby God condescends to man while man is taken up in the unity of the life of Jesus Christ. Whereas the humiliation is peculiarly associated with and manifested in the divine nature of Christ, the exaltation is realized in his human nature. In the self-sacrificing Son of God, who takes upon himself the burden of our sin and guilt, mankind is crucified and buried. In the triumphant Son of Man, who upholds and participates in the lordship and glory of God, mankind is exalted not as God but to God, to fellowship with him. The substitution is not a work that takes place outside of us and is then subsequently applied to us but a work in which our dying and rising again is enacted. It is not that Christ has borne the judgment of God in our place, thereby enabling us to escape judgment. Instead the judgment has been executed upon us in Christ, and therefore we and all men have already passed through this judgment. Salvation is not the imputation of the alien righteousness of Christ to those who believe (as in Luther) but the entering into a righteousness that has now become our own and that rightly belongs to all humanity. What occurs in the cross is more than the defeat of sin and the vindication of righteousness: there sin is removed from the life of man and replaced by righteousness. Berkouwer observes that for Barth the substitution lies not

in the traditional “not we, but He” but in the destruction of the old man and the resurrection of the new. The man of sin is wiped out, and the new man, in whom we are all included, is raised in his place.

Jesus Christ is portrayed as both our Substitute and our Representative, but these terms are laden with new meaning. He suffers the punishment of sin on our behalf, but only in a qualified sense can it be said that he suffers and dies in our stead, since we suffer and die in and with him. The substitutionary atonement connotes not so much the purchase of salvation by the blood of Christ (though he does not discount this motif) as the conversion of man to salvation in the death and resurrection of Christ. Barth does not break completely with the traditional understanding of substitution, but he reinterprets it in such a way that it appears that not only the objective but also the subjective change has taken place in Jesus Christ. His position is that in the life and death of Jesus Christ a destiny irrespective of his attitude or response. Barth sees in the event of the atonement not simply the removal of the penalty of sin but the renewal of the world.

A second area of difference between Barth’s conception and that of much traditional theology is that he depicts reconciliation as having been accomplished in the act of humiliation and incarnation. The cross and resurrection simply confirm and reveal what has already taken place. He also speaks of these events as the climactic unfolding of the eternal decision of the Son of God to unite himself with human flesh for the sake of our salvation.

We now come to Barth’s view that the events of the atonement happen in the realm of sacred or inner history (*Geschichte*), not objectively discernible history (*Historie*); only the latter is available to empirical investigation. It was possible to observe the crucifixion but not the reconciling work of Christ, which is hidden from all sight and understanding. The atonement which occurred in Him, he says, is an invisible atonement which is contrasted with any soul-and-sense relationship between us and Jesus as impossibility is contrasted with possibility, death with life, non-existence with existence.

Thus, the cross is a moral conquest of the world’s evil by the Victor.

N.B. Barth’s doctrine of the atonement cannot be understood apart from his concept of Election, which he treats with primacy. Barth’s view of election is really the “electing Christ” and his “electing” appears universal. Unbelief is the denial of being elect. Faith is knowledge of election and the elector’s death is to cause people to recognize their election.

N.N.B.B. While Barth is quite encouraging in his doctrine of God and Christ's person, he is difficult, vague in the work of Christ. He appears to portray his nineteenth century heritage!

IV. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE AMERICAN THEOLOGIANS.

When one turns to the American scene, the topic of the atonement must be treated in two segments. In the nineteenth century, within the Calvinistic tradition, a Grotian view emerged and in this century Classic Liberalism, NeoLiberalism, and the Radical Theologies emerged with a moral influence theory.

A. In the Nineteenth Century.

Within New England Calvinism, which in post-revolutionary America rapidly evolved into New England Divinity, the Anselmic view of Puritanism was de-evaluated and a governmental view emerged that was to penetrate the church down to grass roots evangelism.

1. **Jonathan Edwards, the Younger (1745–1801)** rejected the penal view of his father and introduced into New England Grotius' views (Ferm, *Jonathan Edwards*, 116). To Edwards the atonement was a demonstration that disobedience to moral government brings punishment. He wrote (*Works*. 2, 24-27):

“That is the atonement of Christ be considered as the payment of a debt, the release of the sinner seems not to be an act of grace, although the payment be made by Christ, and not by the sinner personally But, the fact is, that Christ has not, in the literal and proper sense, paid the debt for us The sense of this is, that since the atonement consists, not in the payment of a debt, but in the vindication of the divine law and character; therefore it is not at all opposed to free grace in pardon”.

Commenting on this Ferm wrote (*Jonathan Edwards*, 119):

“. . . The Christian life is obedience to the moral law, fitting in with divine government. The death of Christ is clear and unmistakable evidence that God will punish wrongdoing. Divine government must be upheld at any cost, and fear of vindictive justice becomes the weapon to enforce obedience. Paradoxically, however much other items of New Divinity dogma offended the spirit of the time, this theory blended well with the current political temper. Edwards himself wrote: ‘. . . So long as the established powers rule according to law, justice, and the constitution, none can pretend

that it is lawful to resist them.’ But ‘the apostle (Paul) did not mean to teach that it is never lawful to resist the higher powers’; ‘the truth is, and the whole spirit of Scripture sustains it, that rulers are bound to rule in the fear of God and for the good of the people; and if they do not, then in resisting them we are doing God’s service.’ If God’s government is not justly upheld by the King, armed rebellion and ‘vindictive’ punishment is not just desirable but necessary. If God’s government is not upheld by man, vindictive punishment is necessary for those who transgress His law”.

The Grotian View permeated New England Theology, dominating the schools and teachers from Edwards to Taylor (Taylorism) until the Abelardian innovations of Horace Bushell. The impact is even seen in the preaching of the gospel!

2. **Charles Finney (1792–1875)**, the great antebellum evangelist, clearly adopted the modifications of Edwards and Taylor. Finney begins his discussion of the atonement by denying the Anselmic view, although he sees penal substitution in the biblical terms (*Systematic Theology*, 271):

“I must say that the atonement was not a commercial transaction. Some have regarded the atonement simply in the light of the payment of a debt; and have represented Christ as purchasing the elect of the Father, and paying down the same amount in his own person that justice would have exacted to them.”

He further rejects the belief “that the atonement is the literal payment of a debt” (*Systematic Theology*, 281) and defines the atonement by saying that “the atonement of Christ was intended as a satisfaction of public justice” (*Systematic Theology*, 271). He then stated:

“His taking human nature, and obeying unto death, under such circumstances, constituted a good reason for our being treated as righteous. It is a common practice in human governments, and one that is founded in the nature and laws of mind, to reward distinguished public service by conferring favors on the children of those who have rendered this service, and treating them as if they had rendered it themselves. This is both benevolent and wise . . . the public service which he has rendered to the universe, by laying down his life for the support of the divine government, has rendered it eminently wise, that all who are united to him by faith should be treated as religious for his sake”.

- N.B.** The atonement is not for sinners, but for society at large.

B. In the Twentieth Century.

The American churches adopted the teachings of Classic Liberalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in part, though not exclusively, from Germany. In the 1960s Post-Bultmannian theology bore fruit in the “Radical Theologies,” a parallel to the political radicalism of the day. An example of the “Radical Theology” relative to the doctrine of Christ’s death can be cited in Paul Tillich’s “Theology of Being.”

Tillich rejects the so-called Classic View because he thinks it negates responsibility, the Abelardian View because it negates God’s justice, and the Anselmic View because he feels it makes the mediator a “third reality” (half-god). Tillich, then, formulates an entirely separate view. McKelway wrote (*Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich*, 172):

“Atonement means God’s participation in man’s estrangement. The element of non-being which is eternally conquered in the divine life . . . is the suffering that God takes upon himself. We see in the Cross the divine participation in man’s estrangement. However, the Cross is not the cause but the effective manifestation of God’s taking the consequences of human guilt upon himself. When man participates in (accepts?) the New Being in Jesus as the Christ, he also participates in the atoning act of God. The atonement is God’s saving act in Christ, but in Tillich’s thought this act is not effective alone. It requires on the part of man “participation in the divine participation, accepting it and being transformed by it”.

N.B. He denies the Anselmic view entirely for a Moral Influence-Example View. The atonement is a psychological re-evaluation in the light of the reality of “abridgement” from quasi-being to being; it is not so much actual as mental.

V. CONCLUSION.

This lesson has sought to delineate the nineteenth and twentieth century conception of the nature and purpose of Christ’s death. Nineteenth-century Germans generally, if not totally, followed an Abelardian concept whether expressed in terms of “God-consciousness” or “eschatological vocation.” Barth’s view is definitely not Anselmic; at best he borders on the Grotian governmental theory, although it is better to leave him in a cloud of vagueness at this point. In this country the Grotian theory gained popularity in the early nineteenth century within New England Theology, in the early Modern Era the Abelardian theory, and in the 1960s Radical Theologies a psychological atonement prevailed.