

Substitutionary Atonement In The Light Of Vicarious Liability

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Abstract

Classical atonement theories can be divided into two major categories: objective and subjective. Objective theories are not well received in contemporary society. The idea of the death of Jesus Christ being substitute to human punishment undermines the principal of morality; one dying in place of another person who does not even know why the other is dying for them is not readily received. In modern society, Christians would prefer to regard Jesus' action in terms of moral influence. Nonetheless, the Bible teaches the work of Christ as being both objective as well as subjective in nature. Since it is the aspect of one man dying for many (objective) that is problematic to modern moralists, this article argues that by use of vicarious liability; a modern legal concept familiar to modern moralists, the death of Christ as being vicarious could be best understood. The vicarious liability is both subjective as well as objective. Thus, this article argues that the work of Christ should be considered in its entirety. The article makes brief survey of some of the classical, medieval, Reformation and contemporary period atonement theories that attempted to explain the work of Christ as an atonement. In the research, the authors realized that some of those theories cannot find full acceptance today due to change of worldviews. The article applies the principle of analogia entis and nexus mysteriorum and uses contemporary doctrine of vicarious liability, a philosophy that is familiar, as its lumen sub quo in explaining the doctrine of substitutionary theory. The research is both library and field. For field data collection, a non-probability sampling was used.

Keywords: *Christ, Atonement, vicarious liability, substitutionary, recapitulation, analogia entis, nexus mysteriorum.*

Introduction

Atonement refers to the work done to reconcile the people, who had failed to keep God's covenant requirements, with God. The death of Christ was interpreted by his disciples in the light of the Old Testament sacrifices that atoned for the sins of the worshipers. Since then, many theories have been proffered. Apparently, every theory has emphasized different aspects of Christ's life. Some have emphasized his incarnation, work, suffering, death or resurrection and ascension. Those theories that emphasize his life, stress the importance of his ministry and suffering as moral influence that acts as example for human turning point (subjective). While those that put emphasize on the death, stress the importance of the shed blood which atones for human sins without human participation (objective). In this latter emphasis Christ's work is seen as a substitute for humankind; humans sinned and deserved to die, but Christ died as a substitute in their place.

In contemporary society it is difficult to explain the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God as being substitute for the errant humanity, who deserved death for their transgression. Such perspective elicits questions such as: Is it morally right that an innocent person dies in place of a guilty person? Scriptures are full of texts that teach personal responsibility. For example, Ezekiel 18:20 and Jeremiah 31:29 teach that children shall not be punished for the sins of their parents.¹ Yet, Christians in an attempt to explain the death of Christ as substitutionary have advanced theories that can be regarded as going against the doctrine of personal responsibility.

Besides the question of morality of one dying on behalf of many, lies the question of blood pacts. Whereas animal sacrifice and use of blood for cleansing in the first century people was well understood and embraced, in the contemporary society shedding of a human person's blood for others is scandalous. Contemporary atonement theorists would prefer to interpret the death of Christ in terms of moral influence instead of death being required for human redemption. They attempt to exclude Christ's death and shedding of blood as being necessary for human redemption.

¹ Ezekiel 18:20 "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." Similar teaching is found in Jeremiah 31:29; it says, "In those days people will no longer say, 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'"

The position of this article is that the work of Christ should be seen in its entirety, i.e., from the point of his self-emptying (*kenosis*), incarnation, life and ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation. We are therefore, arguing that for us to be able to understand Christ's death as being substitutionary to the human responsibility, we need to explicate it in the light of *vicarious liability*; a doctrine used in legal circles, as a *lumen sub quo* into the mystery of atonement and specifically the death of Christ as substitutionary. The article employs the principle of *analogia entis* in likening the innocent death of Jesus Christ to vicarious liability. Using this principle, the article employs various metaphors drawn from the vicarious liability to demonstrate how Christ's death was indeed substitutionary. It goes further to show how by Christ's death in our place we are saved. Using the vicarious liability theory, this article argues that substitutionary theory can be better understood when contemporary social metaphors are used.

1.0 Substitutionary theory of atonement in:

1.1 Scriptures: Old Testament and New Testament

The concept of Christ's death being a substitute or representative of humankind holds the idea that humankind deserved punishment (death), but that Jesus' work of atonement, (i.e., his life, death, resurrection, and continuous intercession) replaced the human responsibility. Jesus bore human responsibility and died in their place. Jesus' work of atonement is likened to the Old Testament animal sacrifices which atoned for the sins of the worshippers.

This concept of substitutionary is based on some of the Old Testament (OT) texts and Paul's New Testament (NT) teachings. For example, in the Old Testament, Isaiah 53:5 says, "He was wounded for our transgression." This text is read typologically and claimed to be speaking of Christ.

Underlying the idea of Christ's death as substitute for the sinners is the question: "How can God be just and yet justifying the ungodly when his wrath is revealed against ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."² Thus, substitutionary theory attempts to answer this question that "God

² TWJ Morrow. "Substitution and Representation", in *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Illinois: Intervarsity Press; 1988, 666.

the Son endures judgment as our substitute and becomes the propitiation whereby God is able to receive sinners.”³

In the NT, Paul “in Rom. 3:23-26 Christ is said to suffer in our place as a substitutionary bearer of the judgment which we deserve.”⁴ There are other passages in the NT which speak of Jesus as a ransom for many, e.g., 1 Tim. 2:6, Heb. 9:7, 12, 28.

The whole idea of Christ’s death as being substitutionary has been translated in the light of the OT atonement practices. TWJ Morrow observes that, “Similarly, the application of the OT symbolism of the scapegoat (Lev. 16:8) to Jesus is undoubtedly substitutionary (Heb. 9:7, 12, 28).”⁵

Substitutionary atonement has the idea of one taking the part of the sinner and bearing the consequences of sin on their behalf. There are texts in the NT on which this concept is based: “In 2 Cor. 5:21, Paul argues that Jesus, who is sinless, identifies with sin to such a degree that mysteriously he is said to be made sin for our sake.”⁶ Paul further argues in Galatians 3:13 that “in order for Jesus Christ to redeem us from the curse of the law, he himself must endure, in our place, the curse of sin which we deserve.”⁷

1.2 Atonement in Church History

During the NT period, the early Christians interpreted the work of Jesus Christ in the light of the old notion of atonement. Thus, some understood his death as an atonement or a ransom; a tradition that was very familiar to them.

St. Irenaeus’ (130-200) in his Recapitulation theory, teaches that Jesus restored fallen humanity to communion with God by summing up and completing all God’s purposes. This began in the incarnation when Christ took on flesh and lived through every human experience; his obedience reversed the effects of Adam’s disobedience. He died for humanity’s sake and by resurrection

³ Ibid,666.

⁴ Ibid,666.

⁵ Ibid,666.

⁶ Ibid,666.

⁷ Ibid, 666.

defeated the devil.⁸ According to Irenaeus, the cross, therefore, joins goodness and truth where God becomes man and man becomes God (*theosis* or deification) as he displays divine forgiveness; in the union of God and man; man is brought to life.⁹

St. Athanasius' (297-373) in his Physical and substitutionary theory, teaches that Christ came as the Son of God to renew humankind, who was lost; "to save the lost through the forgiveness of sins, in the new birth."¹⁰ In his physical theory, Athanasius uses two major imageries: the stained picture and the king visiting and living among his subjects. In the picturesque, Athanasius argues that if the picture was stained the person who had been drawn needs to come back and pose for the artist to redraw the picture to restore it. This explains why God had to incarnate for humanbeing to be able to recapture the lost image.

Regarding the death of Christ on the Cross, Athanasius develops his theology of the Cross from curse on the tree in the Garden of Eden. The curse would only be removed by both the one who incurred the curse and the one who did not –God/man. So Christ hanged on the Cross which is typified in the tree of the Garden of Eden to undo the curse thereon; this is substitutionary theory.

The substitutionary theory states that since the Word was not able to die, therefore, He took to Himself a body which could die and the body since it participated in the Word would be sufficient for death on behalf of all. It was a body free from spot which was offered as a sacrifice in place of man. This act was fitting, congruous and entirely reasonable, because of the just considerations which show that only through the cross, could the salvation of all have been properly achieved.¹¹ Christ's dying on the cross pays the debt which all owed since all were doomed to death, being the wages of sin (Rom. 2:23). It satisfied the divine justice and appeased the wrath of the Father.¹² This vicarious sacrifice, penal substitution led to victory over sin and death and Satan's power

⁸ Loewe, W.P. 1985 "Irenaeus' Soteriology: Christus Victor Revisited," *Anglican Theological Review* Vol 21, 67(1), 3.

⁹ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (n.d.) III.18.2.

¹⁰ Athanasius, S. and Lawson, P. *St. Athanasius on the incarnation. The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*. 1953.54.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 26

¹² Baddeley, M. and Edwards, M. *The nature of the atonement in Athanasius*. 3rd ed. (England: University of Oxford. 2017,5-10.

destroyed; indeed, the destruction of Satan. In Christ, humanity is given a new head for those who are made alive (Rom 5:6-11).

St. Anselm (1033-1098) of Canterbury, in his question, *Cur Deus Homo?* (Why did God become man?), advances the Satisfaction theory. According to this theory, God's honour had been offended by man's sin. It is the basis that any sin gives rise to infinite debt whose repayment requires infinite time, which only God could repay such a debt; and that its repayment is exacted from Christ. Humankind who sinned directly owed the satisfaction to God but was unable to pay. Only God is greater enough to be able to pay it. Therefore, he who paid it had to be both God and man. This is the reason why God became man. The only penalty that could appease a holy God was that which Jesus Christ paid in his own body in death on behalf of man who was directly liable,¹³ thereby saving man.¹⁴ Thus, for Anselm the cross was necessary to appease God's offended honour.

Peter Abelard (1079-1142), another medieval period theologian advanced a Moral Exemplar doctrine. He says that Jesus Christ bore the punishment for our sins on the cross as the example of God's love for us; love that loves unto the bitter end and this in response on behalf of man provokes in us love of God who loves us and has forgiven us.¹⁵ Christ's suffering and death on the Cross which demonstrates God's ultimate love results in softening our hearts and leading us to repentance.

However, this moral influence theory has been criticized as trivializing Christ's death and the seriousness of human sin and God's holiness and justice. That is, it does not deal seriously with the biblical teaching on God's holiness and God's justice on sin and the death of the sinner. Thus, Abelard is criticized for taking Jesus' death on the cross as mere example for his disciples and failing to emphasize the importance of the blood that was shed. Nonetheless, Abelard has been

¹³ Anselm. *Cur Deus Homo*, n.d., II. xviii(b).

¹⁴ Ibid, II. xix

¹⁵ Denis, Kaiser. "Peter Abelard's Theology of Atonement: A Multifaceted Approach and Reevaluation." *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 26 (1) 2015. <https://www.atsjats.org/kaiser-abelard-on-atonement-format.pdf>. Accessed on 21/07/2022.

exonerated by theologians like Denis Kaiser, who have argued that Abelard does not deny the substitutionary effect of Jesus' death.¹⁶

John Calvin (1509-1564) in his justification theory, believed that it is God's justice as holy and righteous that had been offended. God could not overlook sin, which had broken his law. A satisfaction had to be paid to meet its penalty. But man, who owed the satisfaction to God could not pay. Only God is holy enough to pay it. So, Jesus Christ who is God had also to become man to pay that penalty in himself. Christ satisfied God's own justice by God's own sacrifice in God's own way for sin by man. Christ substituted himself for guilty man, and died on his behalf, a death, which satisfied the holiness and righteousness of God.¹⁷ This is called substitutionary atonement, a voluntary act through which he took the place of sinful humanity. In 2 Cor. 5: 19, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. This means Christ is one with the Father and therefore he is one with the sinners he saves as they are in him. As a result of justification, the sinner is no longer regarded as guilty, instead he is declared to be righteous. As such he has access into the presence of God and enjoys peace with God (Romans 5:1, 2).

Thus, in Christ - the God/man, the sinful human being encounters the righteous, just, holy, and loving God. It is in this God/man that the justice of God against man who had sinned meets with the grace of God in the act of Christ on the cross as a vicarious liability.

1.3 An Analysis of Atonement theories in the History of the Church

As you can note, most of the foregoing atonement theories either emphasize the work of Christ as objective or subjective in nature. Irenaeus' theory explains how Christ's life and work recapitulates Adam's life; wherever Adam failed, Christ succeeds. This acts as a moral example for humankind to succeed in the manner of Christ; this theory introduces Christ's work as subjective in nature.

Athanasius' physical theory is subjective in nature, especially as demonstrated in the imageries of the king living among his subjects and the imagery of the picturesque. In this imageries, the incarnation of God was to reinstate the lost *imago Dei*; this is subjective too. However, the imagery

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John, Calvin. *The Institutes of The Christian Religion*, trans. by Henry Beveridge, (Grand Rapids, WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), III.11.738). (Henceforth simply referred to as *Institutes*).

of tree in the Garden of Eden as a type of Christ's Cross, it leads to the objective. It is objective in the sense that it is on the Cross that human salvation is achieved for the sinner who does not participate in the process.

In Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?* human helplessness is rescued by God/man. God who does not owe joins up with man (human) who owes to pay the debt. This theory is both subjective as well as objective.

Peter Abelard's moral influence theory which argues that Christ's work on the Cross; demonstrates God's ultimate love is meant to elicit human response, to love God. This response achieves human salvation by way of human participation in the process of their salvation. This is clearly a subjective theory.

Therefore, we clearly see that in the history of the Church, Christ's life, work and death have been interpreted in these two major categories: objective and subjective.

2. Substitutionary Atonement in Contemporary Society

Although this concept of Christ's death as being a substitute or representation in place of humankind received general acceptance among Christian theologians, especially in early Church, with time it has been opposed on equal measure.

A simple random non-probability sampling carried out at St. Paul's university among Anglican, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, and Methodist pastor-theologians on the contemporary views about substitutionary atonement, revealed that, blood sacrifices in the contemporary society is viewed differently from the way it was viewed in the first century Palestine. For example, among ethicists, atonement through blood sacrifices arouses controversy due to the value system and modern perspective on the value of human life. This is because blood is life and to shed blood is to tamper with or destroy life. They noted that although Jesus' death on the Cross in his cultural context was

considered as punishment (Matt 26:57-68), today, human blood sacrifice would be considered murder and cultic.¹⁸ This would elicits both moral and legal reactions.

The survey also observed that from a legal point of view, intentional killing of another person is a capital offence against the state because life is sacrosanct. The culprits are liable to punishment in accordance with the law under sections 203-4 of Penal code CAP 63 of Laws of Kenya. Human sacrifice offends human rights because the right to life is one of the inalienable rights under Article 26 of the Constitution of Kenya. In this global village, it will evoke reactions from the human rights activists across the world in the same manner the Kenya's Post-election Violence of 2007/8, the Rwandan genocide of 1994 or the George Floyds murder in the United States of 2020 did.

The survey among Christian pastors studying Christian-Muslim relations observed that emphasizing the death of Christ as vicarious atonement encourages martyrdom and religious fanaticism. An example to such emphasis is the incident during the medieval period which led to the infamous Crusades.¹⁹

The idea of one person dying on behalf or in place of another; and for that matter guiltless person dying for the guilty person, has been opposed by some scholars. T. W. J. Morrow in an article in the *New Dictionary of Theology* notes that "Vincent Taylor (1887-1968) for example argues that Paul consistently does not use the substitutionary preposition *anti* ('instead of, in place of'), but rather the representative *hyper* ('on behalf of, for the sake of')..."²⁰ Thus, he dismisses the notion of substitutionary on the basis of the words used. According to Taylor, Paul does not say Christ dies in place of but on behalf or for the sake of. Working for the sake of someone is different from working in their place. For example, a parent working hard for the sake of their child does not replace them. In other words, the parent does not take the child's place e.g. in school but sacrifices his energy and resources so that the child can be in school and benefit from the parent's hard work. Thus, according to Taylor Christ does not die in place of humanity but his sacrifice is so that humankind may draw benefits from it.

¹⁸ BBC. 'Kenyan arrests for 'witch' deaths. 22May 2018. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7415502.stm> Accessed on 18th July 2022.

¹⁹ *A Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity*, (Oxford England: Lion Publishing PLC, 1977), 277

²⁰ T. W. J. Morrow. *Ibid*, 666.

It is for this very reason that substitutionary theory is received with varying reactions that this article endeavours to explicate it in the light of contemporary familiar legal doctrine known as vicarious liability. The reason why Christ's death as a substitute must be explained, is because it is also Biblically based as already cited. To achieve this endeavour, we shall first explain the principle of *analogia entis* that we intend to apply in the process.

3. Doctrine of Vicarious Liability

3.1 Analogia entis and Nexus Mysteriorum

We now turn to the process of constructing a theology of substitutionary atonement in the light of vicarious liability. But before we construct the doctrine of vicarious liability, it is imperative for us to understand the methodology we shall apply in doing so. The methodology we are applying in this study is known as *analogia entis* and the principle of *nexus mysteriorum*.

Analogia entis is a principle which argues that "God provides humanity with the gift of reason to use to infer from the created order, the existence of God."²¹ God at creation created humankind in His own image and likeness. It is by this *imago Dei* that humankind can reason. It is also by this divine element that principles of human morals are derived. Thus, human morality is patterned after God's own moral principles. Therefore, we can use human legal principle of the doctrine of vicarious liability to explain the divine mystery of Christ's self-emptying, incarnation, life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection as a vicarious atonement.

Using the principle of *nexus mysteriorum*, we argue that God has revealed His will to all human beings in every place at every time (Rom 1:19-20). The principle of *nexus mysteriorum*, the argument is that one can study any divine mystery via another divine mystery. It is also premised on the principle that cultural elements are *logoi supermatikoi* and *evangelii preparatio*. Therefore, vicarious liability as a legal principle can be said to be a revelation of some kind to humankind. If this is accepted, then it can be used in understanding the revealed divine mystery of substitutionary atonement.

²¹ John, Michael Kiboi, *The Tripartite Office of Christ in the Light of Worgoondet: Towards a Sabaot Christology of Inculturation*, Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2017, 187.

3.2 Meaning and Case Studies of Vicarious Liability

Right from the beginning of this article we have stated that the purpose of this article is to demonstrate how Jesus' death on the cross was a vicarious liability for all humanity, that is, the one for the many. In this doctrine of vicarious liability, we demonstrate that Christ does not only die for the sake of the many but also dies in their place.

Vicarious liability is a doctrine whose general rule is that an employer is liable for any civil wrong committed by his/her employee in the course and scope of his/her employment. However, the general principle applicable to civil wrongs is that a person is liable only for acts committed by him/herself personally.²² Contemporary perspective about vicarious liability is that it is essentially immoral for someone else to be asked to carry our responsibility in order to make reconciliation.

Nonetheless, in this legal doctrine of vicarious liability, it is expected that for an employer to be held liable to third parties, the following requirements should be complied with: An employment contract should exist to create an employer-employee relationship at the time of the commission of the wrongful act by the employee; the employee commits a wrongful act; the employee commits this wrongful act in the course and scope of employment.²³

Further requirement is the fact that the conduct in question has been expressly prohibited by the employer or was done maliciously or constitutes an offence or mere failure to perform his/her duties, will not absolve the employer from liability if the employee was otherwise acting in the course and scope of his/her employment when the act concerned was performed.²⁴

Therefore the "vicariously liable" party is assumed to have more capacity to bear the liability than the one who was directly responsible for the wrongful act. Should the employer pay the full amount of the damages of the third party, he will be able to claim his amount from the employee.²⁵

Apart from employer-employee relationship, this doctrine also applies to children and parents. It holds that parents will be liable for wrongful acts/damage done by their under-age children.

²² R. van Jaarsveld "Labour Law" in *Commercial Law*, 2nd Ed. LexisNexis Butterworths, 2000, 544.

²³ Ibid, 23.

²⁴ Ibid, 23.

²⁵ Ibid, 24.

Further, commanders and other superiors will be held liable for international criminal crimes under Article 28 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), 1988. In this statute, commanders are held responsible for crimes committed by their forces under their effective command and control as a result of their failure to exercise control properly over such forces. Such responsibility is assumed where they either knew or, owing to the circumstances at the time, should have known that the forces were committing or about to commit such crimes and they failed to take all necessary and reasonable measures within their power to prevent or repress their commission or to submit the matter to the competent authorities for investigation and prosecution. This principle applies in all superior and subordinate relationships.

Similarly, co-conspirators would be vicariously liable for one another's wrong doings. These are persons engaged in wrong doings with one another or others as Adam and Eve did on persuasion by the serpent, a horizontal relationship among creatures. It renders them personally liable.

However, there are exemptions to these requirements. For example, the employer will not be liable where the employee totally abandons his work in order to promote his own interests; he is acting outside the scope of his employment- he is 'on a frolic of his own' – because the civil wrong is not committed in the course of the employee's duties.²⁶

The employer is not liable for the civil wrong of an independent contractor.²⁷ The exception is where the employer has neglected to take preventative action:

- i. where the employer has given incomplete instructions to the independent contractor.
- ii. where the employer has given instructions to the independent contractor to do something which he himself was not authorized to do.
- iii. where the employer gave an unlawful instruction to the independent contractor or ratified unlawful act of the contractor; and

²⁶ Ibid,24; In *Rossouw v Central News Agency* 1948 2 SA 267 (W) accessed on <http://www.saflii.org>; In *Carter & Co (Pty) Ltd v McDonald* 1995 1 SA 202 (A) accessed on <http://www.saflii.org>.

²⁷ In *Board of Governors St. Mary's School v Boli Festus Andrew Sio* 2020 eKLR accessed on <http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw/view/208058>.

- iv. where the acts the employer instructed the contractor to perform are potentially dangerous and the employer neglected to take precautionary steps.²⁸

From the foregoing understanding of the vicarious liability, we can now construct our substitutionary atonement theories in the light of vicarious liability.

3.3 Substitutionary Atonement in the light of Vicarious Liability

At this point we must ask ourselves questions such as: What was the state of Adam and Eve at creation regarding their maturity? Were they infants or adult? Did a covenant or instruction from God to the first human beings exist? I.e., did God instruct them on what to do and what not to do? Part of the answer to these questions can be inferred from Gen. 3:1-5 that God had given the first couple instructions or commands on what to do and what not to do.

According to St. Irenaeus' recapitulation theory, Adam and Eve were infants who were expected to grow up into adulthood to grasp their full humanity and their full perfection.²⁹ They were to grow into full knowledge of God. The originally intended knowledge through which Adam and Eve were meant to grow into so that they could not sin, was the knowledge of God and knowledge of the self. This knowledge is well explained by John Calvin who states: "Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."³⁰ He however notes that the two seem to be intertwined to an extent that it is not possible to know which one comes first: knowledge of God or knowledge of the self. Nevertheless, he notes that "it is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God and come down after such contemplation to look into himself."³¹ Thus the nature of Adam's fall entailed human selfish effort to understand himself without waiting for such knowledge to trickle down from above as a gift which was graciously given. Calvin states:

²⁸ Ibid, 24-25.

²⁹ Irenaeus 1997 *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Crestwood, N.Y: St Vladimir's Seminary Press.1997:12

³⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998. 1:1:1. (Henceforth simply cited as *Institutes*, Bk, chapter and paragraph).

³¹ *Institutes*, 1:1:2.

For, in the first place, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts towards the God in whom he lives and moves; because it is perfectly obvious, that the endowments which we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves; nay, that our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone. In the second place, those blessings which unceasingly distil to us from heaven, are like streams conducting us to the fountain.³²

Unfortunately, the first couple in their infant naïvetés, tried to take quickly what could only be graciously bestowed to them and therefore forfeiting the ability to obtain immortality.³³ Thus the fall affected their original potential when due to impatience they disobeyed God's commands and offended His honour.³⁴

However, this view would elicit such a question: If they were infants, would God expect them to execute the commands He gave them? If their initial state at creation was that of infants, then as infants God takes full responsibility for their error as a father would of his child's mistake. But if their initial state was of mature beings, then they are held responsible for their actions.

Whereas they were infants for St. Irenaeus, for St. Augustine the couple was mature with free will of choice. The fact that God assigned them dominion over other creatures and commanded them to be fruitful and fill the earth, is an indication that they were mature and thus bore responsibility for their actions.

Where Adam and Eve are regarded as adults, God entrusted to them as his stewards the management of earthly resources to use and enjoy in his glory through communion (Gen 1:27-30; 2:15). To enjoy eternal blessedness, that is, immortality, humans owed God absolute obedience and honour,³⁵ both in word and in life to invariably maintain truth and justice.³⁶ They were therefore, given rules to obey through the suzerain covenant. This is a conditional promise where the suzerain (God/ Great King) claimed absolute right of sovereignty, demanded total loyalty and service and pledged protection of the subject's realm and dynasty, conditional on the vassal's (his people/subjects) faithfulness and loyalty to him.

³² Ibid, 1:1:1

³³ Vogel, Jeff. "The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation: An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption." *Anglican theological review*. 2007. 89(3).443.168.

³⁴ Behr, John. *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Crestwood, N.Y: St Vladimir's Seminary Press. 1997:12

³⁵ Anselm. *Cur Deus Homo*, (n.d.) II. ii; Cairns, D. and Bridge, M.A. Anselm's 'Cur Deus Homo': A Critical Essay. *The Expository Times*. 2015.415.

³⁶ Ibid, I. ix.

Therefore, they were both infants and adults. Using their adult property of free will, they rebelled against God and thereby being responsible for their action as co-conspirators yet as infants, God takes responsibility for their action. Therefore, where Adam and Eve were regarded as infants/children, God takes parental responsibility and thus assumes liability of their wrongful conduct. And where they are regarded as adults, they bore their responsibility for their own actions.

Nevertheless, the scenario is that even as adults, they are unable to repair the relationship already broken due to their fall. The error committed by a finite against the infinite demands an infinite recompense which a finite cannot offer, but only an infinite can. It is for this reason, God the Son (infinite) takes up the responsibility of the superior. God does all these (self-emptying, incarnation, ministry and death) not because He had failed in his superior responsibility to instruct, but because human beings in childlike manner had fallen. God and human covenantal relationship is suzerain in nature as set out above. It is akin to the Employer-Employee contractual relationship; Master-Stewards relationship; Parent-child relationship;³⁷ Superior-Subordinate relationship or Co-conspirators relationship. God takes the liability as a superior or father would of his child's mistakes.

Christ is referred to as Lord and Saviour, and therefore he takes on the roles of Sovereign, Parent, Employer and Superior as necessary. In the circumstances in which human sinned and is unable to pay, then Christ becomes vicariously liable to settle the debt owed to God the father. The redeemed is then eternally obligated to the redeemer, their Lord and Saviour- to believe, trust and do according to the latter's teaching.

In the NT, God in Christ intervened to develop humanity through rebirth and teaching and to redirect them through praxis to raise their potential towards the final goal where the many will be united into one through the latter's conduct. In the mystery of the Trinity, the loving Father who is aggrieved sends the Son (John 3:16) who by the act of self-emptying (Phil. 2:5-11) is incarnated in Mary through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:32,35) and born as flesh (John 1:14). This begins the final restoration process of maturing to become like Christ, first in his humanity and then in his divinity; not becoming God but becoming divinely human. This is living a fully mature human life in the

³⁷ In Luke 3:23-38, Luke-Act gives the genealogy of Jesus where he ends with Adam as the Son of God.

New Eden. This is achieved through a combination of grace being showered upon humanity and humanity looking to Jesus as a moral guide and patriarch. I.e. by submitting to the life God has created us to live, and by living into the recapitulated creation. It bears the same reward: the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and the fruit from the tree of life. Based on the texts in Galatians 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, Irenaeus concludes that deification (*theosis*) is a relational process through adoption and communion that culminates in the resurrection life of incorruptible and immortality.³⁸

Christ recapitulates Adam's position and teaches us afresh on the way to come to true knowledge; the knowledge of God the Father and of the human self. He teaches us that true knowledge begins in the contemplation of God before the self. Our true knowledge lies in the knowledge of God and not in the knowledge of ourselves. Christ in his incarnation reveals the Father in His fullness and our acquisition of such knowledge equals our salvation.

Christ takes the responsibility of the superior and sacrifices His honour and glory He received in heaven to incarnate and experience humiliation on earth for the sake of our redemption, is what we are referring to as vicarious liability. He enters our situation to show us the way to recapturing our initially intended position of immortality.

4.0 Practical Implication of the Vicarious Liability

Knowing that Christ's entire life was sacrificial, reveals the seriousness of His work of salvation. It indeed reveals to us the nature of God; that God is loving and caring about our being. This knowledge reveals to us the importance of every stage Christ undertook in the process of salvation.

Understanding the work of Christ through the doctrine of vicarious liability is an encouragement to us sinners; it is an assurance that our past, present and future failures have already been paid for, are being paid for and will be paid for. It is an assurance that we do not need to depend on our own power and understanding but that we have one responsible for us. However, this does not mean that we are not responsible for our actions; as adults we are also held responsible for our actions. Yet as infants who are incapable of telling between what is right and wrong, God our Father takes it up and pays for it.

³⁸ Blackwell, Ben C. "Christosis Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria." In *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*. Tübingen: Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. 2011.50

Since both in history and through his Spirit, Jesus sealed our victory over sin and continues to reveal the Father, our response is mediated through the believing community, Scripture, dogma, doctrine, devotions, prayer, and religious experiences. God's grace and our free response now work together to allow us to become the persons God calls us to be. We are humanized by becoming increasingly Christ-like. Through our cooperation, all creation gets Spirit-filled because the glory of God is human fully alive in knowing, in loving and in seeing God³⁹. This way, we discover that God has been walking at our side all the time and calling us to himself. Thus, the many to one is realized by the one who dies for the many. Even those whose appropriate response is delayed will ultimately desire to recognize the One as they proclaim him Lord and Savior (Phil 2:10-11).

Conclusion

In this article we have used a socio-cultural doctrine of vicarious liability to elucidate the divine mystery of Christ's death as substitution to human punishment. Using various metaphors like the suzerain relationship, employer-employee contractual relationship; master-stewards relationship; parent-child relationship, we have demonstrated the justification of taking Christ's death as substitute to human punishment.

Application of the doctrine of vicarious liability to explicate the doctrine of substitution is based on the principle of *nexus mysteriorum*. This principle holds that divine mysteries are interconnected and therefore, one divine mystery can be used to understand any other mystery. It is for this very reason we applied the principle of *analogia entis* to liken Christ's death as substitutionary to the socio-cultural doctrine of vicarious liability. The justification for doing this lies on the understanding that God has always revealed His will through human morals and nature (Rom 1:19-20). Thus, the principle of vicarious liability is social norm which we can argue was revealed to human beings as an *evangelii preparatio*.

Therefore, through the doctrine of vicarious liability we have been able to explain why Christ's kenosis, incarnation, life, ministry, and death should be understood as being substitute to human punishment

³⁹ Mueller, J.J. *What are they saying about Theological Method?* N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1984:13

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