

# “The Very Heart of the Christian Gospel”: Comparing Packer’s and Stott’s Theologies of the Cross

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## Abstract

Both J. I. Packer and John Stott wrote influential works on the cross. Packer’s article, “What Did the Cross Achieve?” was published in 1974, and Stott published his book *The Cross of Christ* in 1986. Stott quotes Packer’s reference to the cross as the global mark of Evangelicalism and being at “the very heart of the Christian gospel.” This article looks at both of these works to see the agreements shared in Packer’s and Stott’s theologies of the cross, as well as detailing the areas in which they seem to disagree. This exposition thus presents the overarching ideas both of these Anglicans believed to be held as central while also showing that the interpretation of these ideas can nevertheless vary.

## Keywords

*atonement, extent of the atonement, hypothetical universalism, Evangelicalism, Anglicanism, penal substitution*

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## Introduction

**J**. I. Packer and John Stott wrote influential works on the cross that were published a little over a decade apart. Packer’s article “What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution” was first presented as the Tyndale Biblical Theology Lecture in 1973 and then published in the *Tyndale Bulletin* in 1974.<sup>1</sup> Packer’s article has since been reprinted and has had a considerable impact.<sup>2</sup> In this article, Packer sets forth an articulation of the doctrine of penal substitution in his clear and systematic style.

In 1986, Stott published his highly influential book *The Cross of Christ*, which has likewise seen several printings.<sup>3</sup> On the first page of his preface, Stott quotes Packer’s article in reference to the cross being the “distinguishing mark” of global Evangelicalism and being at “the very heart of the Christian gospel.”<sup>4</sup> Packer even wrote an endorsement for Stott’s work, calling it Stott’s “masterpiece.”<sup>5</sup>

With Stott and Packer both writing works that espoused what they considered to be the central belief of global Evangelicalism, it is worth expounding on what views in particular they shared as central to the gospel. This article thus aims to look at both of these works to see what these core

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<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974): 3–45. For a brief look at the background to this presentation, see Leland Ryken, *J. I. Packer: An Evangelical Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 137–39.

<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution,” in J. I. Packer and Mark Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 53–100. This is the version that will be cited in this article.

<sup>3</sup> A recent printing from 2021 was produced in honor of the one-hundredth anniversary of Stott’s birth. This will be the edition used in this article. John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, Centennial Edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021). Concerning the influence of the book, Timothy Dudley-Smith writes, “*The Cross of Christ* circulated in many countries, well beyond the UK and North America, and attracted a weight of correspondence.” He then goes on to speak of accounts of the book being used in Australia, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. See Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: A Global Ministry: A Biography of the Later Years* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 344–45.

<sup>4</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 13; Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?,” 53. The high esteem in which Stott held Packer is seen in the first page of Stott’s chapter he wrote for Packer’s Festschrift. Stott calls Packer an “evangelical theologian *par excellence*” and his contribution to the volume as “akin to a shrimp paying homage to a whale!” Stott then writes, “I thank God specially for Jim’s extraordinary combination of gifts. He somehow manages, at one and the same time, to be faithful and innovative, godly and human, open and critical, profound and popular” (John R. W. Stott, “Theology: A Multidimensional Discipline,” in *Doing Theology for the People of God: Studies in Honour of J. I. Packer*, ed. Donald Lewis and Alister McGrath [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996], 3).

<sup>5</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 1.

agreements were and to detail the areas in which the authors seemed to disagree. This exposition will show the overarching ideas both of these Evangelical Anglican authors believed were key to the theology of the cross while also showing that the interpretation of these ideas can nevertheless vary and that such variation can coexist within the Evangelical world.

### **I. *The Holy Love of God***

At the heart of the atonement for both Packer and Stott is the holy love of God. Packer calls the love of God the “source” of the atonement.<sup>6</sup> Because of the sinfulness of humanity, humans are in opposition to God and are therefore deserving of God’s judgment.<sup>7</sup> Because God is holy, he requires a payment for sin, but out of God’s love, God’s Son Jesus Christ dies “as the supreme expression of his love to men.”<sup>8</sup> The theme of God’s holy love is evident in Packer, even if he does not place the concepts of holiness and love together as explicitly and frequently as Stott does. God’s holiness requires the payment for sin, yet out of love, God in his Son Jesus Christ pays this penalty in the place of sinners.

In contrast to Packer’s more indirect interaction with this theme, Stott speaks about the holy love of God consistently throughout his book. It is a major theme for him and serves as the foundation for an understanding of the atonement. For example, Stott writes, “The only way for God’s holy love to be satisfied is for his holiness to be directed in judgement upon his appointed substitute, in order that his love may be directed toward us in forgiveness.”<sup>9</sup> And again,

Thus God took his own loving initiative to appease his own righteous anger by bearing it his own self in his own Son when he took our place and died for us. There is no crudity here to evoke our ridicule, only the profundity of holy love to evoke our worship.<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, then, the love of God stands at the heart of the atonement for both Stott and Packer. It is on account of God’s love that he satisfied his holiness so that sinners can be forgiven.

Notably, Tim Chester has pointed out in his new study on Stott that a more explicit focus on divine simplicity would have been beneficial to Stott’s

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<sup>6</sup> Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?,” 88.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>9</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 157–58.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 172–73.

argument, although Chester also admits that such discussions were not prevalent in twentieth-century Evangelical theology.<sup>11</sup> However, despite this criticism, both Stott and Packer acknowledge that God’s love cannot be set against God’s holiness. Both must be held together. And it is out of God’s love that his holiness is met in the sacrifice of God’s Son.

## II. *Penal Substitution*

Following the need for God’s justice to be met and for forgiveness to be granted, both Packer and Stott place the concept of penal substitution at the heart of the gospel. Stott writes,

There is, in fact, a biblical revelation of “satisfaction through substitution,” which is uniquely honoring to God and which should therefore lie at the very heart of the church’s worship and witness.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, Packer also holds to the primary importance of penal substitution, and his entire article is dedicated to explaining and clarifying it.<sup>13</sup>

Although Stott uses the word “satisfaction” in places, he also speaks specifically about the penal aspect of the atonement. Stott first quotes from Packer’s article, giving his definition of penal substitution, before then making the claim that when the Old Testament uses the phrase “bear sin,” it means “to endure its penal consequences, to undergo its penalty.”<sup>14</sup> By seeing Christ in line with this Old Testament imagery, Stott is offering a view on satisfaction and punishment different from the one offered in Anselmian satisfaction theory. Anselm presents Christ as having offered a satisfaction for sin in place of punishment, whereas Stott follows the tradition that sees Christ’s satisfaction as having paid for the punishment that is due because of sin. Packer also offers this view when he explicitly mentions the Reformers’ move away from Anselm’s concept of appeasing God’s honor and instead shows how the Reformers focused on Christ’s satisfaction as “the undergoing of vicarious punishment (*poena*) to meet the claims on us of God’s holy law and wrath (i.e., his punitive justice).”<sup>15</sup> This penal concept is connected to the concept of propitiation, something that both

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<sup>11</sup> Tim Chester, *Stott on the Christian Life: Between Two Worlds* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 97.

<sup>12</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 113.

<sup>13</sup> See Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?,” 53–54.

<sup>14</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 143.

<sup>15</sup> Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?,” 54.

Stott and Packer emphasize as crucial. Based on the justice and holiness of God, Packer claims that God was required to be propitiated by himself through Christ, “whereby his no to us could become a yes.”<sup>16</sup> Stott also writes about this in connection to the holy love of God. God’s wrath is required to be propitiated, and it was propitiated by God through Jesus Christ, who, as God incarnate, “died for the propitiation of our sins.”<sup>17</sup>

Both Stott and Packer connect the suffering of God’s wrath to a Reformed interpretation of Christ’s descent into hell, an important event, as described in the tradition of the Apostles’ Creed. In speaking about the darkness Christ experienced on the cross, Stott mentions that, in a way, one could say that “our sins sent Christ to hell.” However, this is not the hell spoken of in the Apostles’ Creed, Stott claims, but rather concerns the “‘hell’ (*gehenna*, the place of punishment) to which our sins condemned him before his body died.”<sup>18</sup> Stott goes on to quote John Calvin directly, where he writes about the soul of Christ suffering as one condemned on account of sin.<sup>19</sup> Stott then comments that Calvin believed that the suffering Christ experienced is connected to his “‘descent into hell’ after his death.” Stott considers this to be odd, however, and clarifies that the important point is not the timeline of when Christ specifically experienced this forsakenness but that he was forsaken “for us.”<sup>20</sup> In contrast, Packer states about Calvin, “Thus Calvin explained Christ’s descent into hell: hell means Godforsakenness, and the descent took place during the hours on the cross.”<sup>21</sup> Consequently, both Stott and Packer write about the descent of Christ being connected to the forsakenness Christ experienced on the cross on account of him bearing the sins of others; however, Packer says this is the view of Calvin, that Christ experienced this on the cross, while Stott claims Calvin understood this suffering to come after his death. Despite this difference, Stott and Packer seem to be in agreement on their interpretation of the descent into hell—it is to be understood as the forsakenness that Christ experienced while on the cross—and their disagreement concerns Calvin’s interpretation. Packer, the historical theologian, seems to be the one who was right.<sup>22</sup> And so, with

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>17</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 172.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 83, n. 23.

<sup>21</sup> Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?,” 95, n. 44. For Calvin’s treatment of Christ’s descent, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 2.16.8–12 (1:512–20).

<sup>22</sup> Stott also claims that Calvin follows the same interpretation of the descent as Martin Luther (see Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 83, n. 23). However, the idea that Calvin and Luther held the same opinion on this topic is discounted in contemporary scholarship. For a survey of

this in mind, both Stott and Packer follow the interpretation of Calvin and in so doing highlight the extent of Christ’s suffering on the cross—his descent into hell—that he endured for the sake of providing salvation.

With such a clear emphasis on Christ being a penal substitute who suffered the wrath of God as he died as a propitiation, both Stott and Packer mention the Reformed doctrine of double imputation. Stott writes of how Christ “bore the penalty of our sin instead of us” and how, in exchange, Christ gave his righteousness. He continues, “He took our curse so that we may receive his blessing; he became sin with our sin so that we may become righteous with his righteousness.” The penalty that Christ bore was the legal consequences for sin, and because he paid for the consequences, God’s people no longer need to.<sup>23</sup> But more than just being freed from punishment, those found in Christ now stand as righteous. Packer also writes clearly about double imputation as “the mysterious solidarity in virtue of which Christ could be ‘made sin’ by the imputing to him of our answerability and could die for our sins in our place, and we could be ‘made righteous’ before God through faith by the virtue of his obedience.”<sup>24</sup>

Throughout their descriptions of penal substitution, Packer and Stott carefully expound this doctrine. Both Stott and Packer use the example of Socinus’s work *De Jesu Christo Servatore* (1578) as a historical example of arguments that have been made against penal substitution,<sup>25</sup> and both authors clearly have in mind arguments from people like Socinus that have been used against penal substitution as they offer clear arguments in its defense. In one passage in particular, Stott goes so far as to state what some may see as a dismissal of penal substitution, writing that one must not “speak of God punishing Jesus.”<sup>26</sup> However, the argument Stott is making here is that the atonement has to be a work of God rather than of simply a human. It cannot be that Jesus as a human was an independent third party on whom God meted out his wrath. On the contrary, Jesus must be the Son of God. Thus, it is not as though God punishes an innocent third party; rather, it is that God in Christ substituted himself in the place of sinners. With this in mind, Stott argues,

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Luther’s and Calvin’s views of the descent into hell, see Catherine Ella Laufer, *Hell’s Destruction: An Exploration of Christ’s Descent to the Dead* (2013; repr. ed., London: Routledge, 2016), 80–89.

<sup>23</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 148.

<sup>24</sup> Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?,” 88.

<sup>25</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 141; Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?,” 54–56.

<sup>26</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 151.

For in giving his Son he was giving himself. This being so, it is the Judge himself who in holy love assumed the role of the innocent victim, for in and through the person of his Son he himself bore the penalty that he himself inflicted.<sup>27</sup>

This was something Jesus took on freely, as he followed his Father's will in accordance with Scripture.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, Packer places a high emphasis on the Trinitarian formulation of penal substitution. The Father and Son work together to provide atonement; thus, it is not as though the Father and the Son are to be placed against each other.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the Father and Son were one in their will to love sinful humans, and the Son willingly accepted death for the sake of those he loved.<sup>30</sup> In both Packer and Stott, then, one sees a classical articulation of penal substitution: God in Christ willingly paid the penalty for sin that was imputed to him, being a propitiation and suffering the descent into hell so that in return people can be forgiven of their sins and Christ's righteousness can be imputed to them.

In addition to penal substitution, both Packer and Stott acknowledge the prevalence of other themes present in a holistic exposition of the atonement (e.g., subjective elements and Christ's victory over Satan). However, these themes, in and of themselves, are not adequate; they are only of use when they are placed around the centrality of penal substitution. For substitution, according to Stott, is not one of several themes to pick and choose from; on the contrary, substitution is "the essence of each image and the heart of the atonement itself."<sup>31</sup>

### III. *The Extent of the Atonement*

At this point in the study, we turn from looking at where Stott and Packer agree to a key area of divergence. Up to this point, we have covered everything Packer claims is "the beliefs of all who would say that penal substitution is the key to understanding the cross." Now, we move to the area he claims is "a point of uncertainty and division."<sup>32</sup> This leads to Packer's explicit discussion on the extent of the atonement—a topic on which Stott remains mostly silent. Packer understands the concept of substitution as implying

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>29</sup> Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve?," 93.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>31</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 199.

<sup>32</sup> Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve?," 89.

that Christ is a substitute for each individual sinner that Christ died for.<sup>33</sup> The implication of Christ being a substitute for individuals is that Christ either died for all people, thus leading to universalism, or Christ died in the place of specific individuals, thus securing salvation only for a specific number of people, and therefore leading to the conclusion of a limited atonement.<sup>34</sup>

For Stott, however, the question of the extent of the atonement is not addressed so clearly. In his annotations of Stott's work, Ligon Duncan mentions Stott's silence on this issue, declaring the possibility of him following "in the train of J. C. Ryle as a 'four-point Calvinist' Anglican who has no interest in polemicizing against five-point Calvinists."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, David Allen also points out Stott's lack of specificity on the topic, yet he nevertheless indicates, based on Stott's exposition of Isaiah 53, that he seemed to be "a moderate Calvinist who rejected limited atonement."<sup>36</sup> Elsewhere, Allen states plainly that Stott "did not adhere to limited atonement."<sup>37</sup> Allen refers to Stott's comments on the biblical language of "many" used in verses such as Mark 14:24 and Isaiah 53:12 and how this language is to be understood inclusively rather than exclusively.<sup>38</sup> Although Allen points to this potential location in Stott's work, neither Duncan nor Allen offers a concentrated argument for Stott's denial of limited atonement, nor do they display how the view of universal atonement might work out in Stott's thought.

Lawrence Oladini's dissertation, which compares the atonement theologies of Stott and Ellen White, focuses much more on Stott's view of the extent of the atonement.<sup>39</sup> His conclusion is that Stott is potentially a four-point Calvinist; nevertheless, he claims that for Stott the logical outcome is that the extent of the atonement is still limited, as only those elected to salvation will be saved.<sup>40</sup> Oladini dismisses Stott's view—that is, that the atonement is unlimited yet restricted in application to the elect—as illogical.<sup>41</sup> However, Oladini does not discuss the viability and historicity of Stott's view within

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>34</sup> See *ibid.*, 89–93.

<sup>35</sup> Ligon Duncan, "Annotated Bibliography," in Packer and Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, 184.

<sup>36</sup> David L. Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2016), 399–400.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 629.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 399–400; Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 146.

<sup>39</sup> For the sections on Stott's view of the extent of the atonement, see Lawrence O. Oladini, "A Comparative Study of the Concept of Atonement in the Writings of John R. W. Stott and Ellen G. White" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2011), 161–77, 351–59.

<sup>40</sup> See *ibid.*, 177.

<sup>41</sup> See *ibid.*, 177, 357–59.

the Anglican tradition, and it is evident that he is more interested in showing how Stott's view is inconsistent and less favorable to White's<sup>42</sup> than in showing how Stott's view may be viable.

Although Stott does not have a chapter or section on the extent of the atonement, it does seem possible to piece together his thoughts on the topic based on a variety of his claims. For one, Stott does not shy away from the idea that atonement was made for all people. In the opening section of the chapter on satisfaction, Stott quotes Thomas Cranmer's 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*, which describes Christ's atonement as "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world."<sup>43</sup> It seems evident that Cranmer, both here and elsewhere, presented Christ's atonement as universal,<sup>44</sup> and Stott quotes this doctrine approvingly without qualification.

In speaking about Christ's time in the Garden of Gethsemane before he was crucified, Stott mentions the cup that he was to drink. The drinking of this cup, according to Stott, symbolized "the spiritual agony of bearing the sins of the world—in other words, of enduring the divine judgement that those sins deserved."<sup>45</sup> Later, Stott writes of the value of all humans being based on "his determination to suffer and die for them."<sup>46</sup> In these sections, along with the previous ones, Stott writes of Christ paying for the sins of the world and dying for all people without qualification.

In addition to such examples, the implications of Stott's view of substitution also seem to point to a universal atonement. Stott argues that "the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man."<sup>47</sup> The use of "man" here seems to be representative of the entire human race rather than that of individuals. While Packer specifies the substitution of Christ in the place of individuals, Stott alludes to God in Christ substituting himself in the place of humanity as a whole. Quoting 2 Corinthians 5:19, Stott writes, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself"<sup>48</sup> and then presents Karl Barth's Christological position in his *Church Dogmatics*.<sup>49</sup> For Barth,

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<sup>42</sup> For example, in *ibid.*, "Abstract," Oladini writes, "Overall, White's theology seems to be broader in its presentation of the scope of the atonement and seems to be more consistent with the scriptural evidence."

<sup>43</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 113.

<sup>44</sup> See Michael J. Lynch, "Richard Hooker and the Development of English Hypothetical Universalism," in *Richard Hooker and Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. W. Bradford Littlejohn and Scott N. Kindred-Barnes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 292, n. 97.

<sup>45</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 78.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> See *ibid.*, 159–60.

as for Stott, the fact that Jesus is fully God and fully human is crucial. Only as one who is fully human can Christ take the place of all humanity. Stott includes the following quote from Barth:

the eternal God himself, who has given himself in his Son to be man, and as man to take upon himself this human passion .... It is the Judge who in this passion takes the place of those who ought to be judged, who in this passion allows himself to be judged in their place.<sup>50</sup>

Stott seems to follow and affirm Barth's view of substitution in *Dogmatics*, which is likewise one in which Christ takes the place of all humanity. Some, such as Oliver Crisp, have argued that Barth's view of substitution logically leads to a view of universalism.<sup>51</sup> Yet, while Stott may hold to a view of atonement being accomplished in the place of all humanity, he clearly shows that he does not believe this to mean that the atonement is effectively applied to all. Rather, Stott teaches the need for a personal response in the application of the atonement. In detailing the process of salvation, he writes,

God finished the work of reconciliation at the cross, yet it is still necessary for sinners to repent and believe and so "be reconciled to God." Again, sinners need to "be reconciled to God," yet we must not forget that on God's side the work of reconciliation has already been done.<sup>52</sup>

This section points out a two-step process: God first provides atonement for all, and then sinful people apply the atonement by means of repentance and belief. Connecting this thought with the previous one concerning substitution, it seems as though Stott presents Jesus as substituting himself in the place of the human race, thus making a way for all humans to be reconciled with God. Although this work has been accomplished by God, it remains to be applied by individuals. This view is also seen in Stott's discussion of the Last Supper. There, Jesus broke the bread and blessed the wine, but the disciples had to eat and drink what they were given. Likewise, Jesus gave "his body and blood in death," yet it is up to individuals "to make the blessings of his death our own." For, Stott claims, "God does not impose his gifts on us willy-nilly; we have to receive them by faith."<sup>53</sup> He also mentions

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 160, citing Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 246.

<sup>51</sup> See Oliver D. Crisp, "On Barth's Denial of Universalism," *Themelios* 29.1 (2003): 18–29.

<sup>52</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 198.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 73.

the story of the Passover Lamb: not only was the lamb slain, but its flesh was to be eaten and the blood put on doorposts. Likewise, Christ the Passover Lamb has been slain, but his death needs to be personally applied.<sup>54</sup> For there to be a genuine call to all to apply the atonement, there must by implication have been an atonement made for all. However, this implies that people can thus reject Christ. Stott writes, “For in giving his Son to die for sinners, God made himself vulnerable to the possibility that they would snub him and turn away.”<sup>55</sup> Taken together, these sections can be seen to present a view of the atonement that extends to the entire human race—yet is rejected by some—but is effective only for those who receive it as they “repent and believe.”

Certainly, this formulation of Stott's, as presented here, would fit well into the framework of hypothetical universalism, a doctrine being shown to be deep in the history of the Anglican tradition. Stott's thought, in many ways, seems to be an echo of those like John Preston, who, according to Jonathan Moore, implied that “the death of Christ has done all it can, and now salvation hangs on the individual's response to the evangel.”<sup>56</sup> This is also the view of John Davenant. In his monograph on Davenant's hypothetical universalism, Michael Lynch shows the importance of faith and repentance for the application of the atonement. Lynch points out that Davenant “contends that only union with Christ by faith brings about the transfusion (as it were) of Christ's saving virtue.”<sup>57</sup> While Stott presents the need for repentance and belief, he also speaks of union with Christ in his section on double imputation. There, he mentions that it is “when we are united to Christ a mysterious exchange takes place,” the exchange being double imputation.<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere, he elaborates, “our sins were imputed to the sinless Christ in order that we sinners, by being united to him, might receive as a free gift a standing of righteousness before God.”<sup>59</sup> Put together, the order for Stott seems to imply that there is repentance and belief that leads to a union with Christ that involves double imputation. Based on the wider corpus of Stott's writings, we know this belief comes as a result of election,

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>56</sup> Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 110.

<sup>57</sup> Michael J. Lynch, *John Davenant's Hypothetical Universalism: A Defense of Catholic and Reformed Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 126.

<sup>58</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 148.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

not as a result of human initiative.<sup>60</sup> However, Stott shows that all people still have a duty to believe; even though people “cannot” believe without divine intervention, they nevertheless still have a choice, and therefore also “will not” believe, even though it is their responsibility to do so.<sup>61</sup> In sum, it may be formulated that there is a call and duty for all to repent and believe, especially considering that Christ has genuinely died for all; yet only those who have been elected to salvation will be saved, and the rest are left without excuse due to their own choices.

In contrast to Stott’s teaching, which is connected to such Anglicans as Preston and Davenant, Packer offers the teaching of limited atonement, which is likewise seen in the Anglican tradition in John Owen and Augustus Toplady, the latter of whom Packer quotes explicitly in his section on limited atonement.<sup>62</sup> For Packer, following what he terms the Puritans’ “application of redemption,” there can be no separation between Christ’s work accomplished and Christ’s work applied. He claims that the death of Christ necessarily leads to justification and glorification.<sup>63</sup> While for Stott, the atonement can be accomplished for all yet only applied to those who believe, for Packer, the atonement accomplished involves the securing of the salvation of the elect. Therefore, Christ’s work necessarily leads to all that is required for an individual’s salvation. In Packer’s framework, universal atonement would necessitate universal salvation.

This difference of view between Stott and Packer, then, likewise displays the difference of views held in the history of the Anglican Church. This shows that while both of these Anglican theologians held to substitution as being key, they nevertheless disagreed on the mechanics of how it is to be understood. Packer argues for a substitution of individuals that leads to limited atonement; Stott, it seems, presents a substitution for humanity

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<sup>60</sup> In his commentary on Ephesians, Stott writes, “Now everybody finds the doctrine of election difficult. ‘Didn’t I choose God?’ somebody asks indignantly; to which we must answer ‘Yes, indeed you did, and freely, but only because in eternity God had first chosen you’” (John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, rev. ed. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020], 19).

<sup>61</sup> Stott calls this “the ultimate antinomy between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.” See Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 97.

<sup>62</sup> See Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?,” 91. Packer is clearly and explicitly indebted to the Puritan tradition; Stott, on the other hand, approvingly draws on a more diverse array of the Reformed Protestant tradition, as is evidenced by his interaction with theologians like P. T. Forsyth, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Jürgen Moltmann. For Packer’s indebtedness to John Owen’s *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, see J. I. Packer, “‘Saved by His Precious Blood’: An Introduction to John Owen’s *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*,” in Packer and Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, 111–44.

<sup>63</sup> Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve?,” 93. Although Packer does not cite him, it is possible he has in mind here John Murray’s work; see John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).

that leads to universal atonement but limited application. Despite this more nuanced disagreement, they both agree on the overarching focus of substitution: that God has substituted himself in the place of sinners, making a way for sinners to be reconciled with him, based not on the initiative of the sinners but on the work of God on their behalf.

## Conclusion

By comparing Packer and Stott on their articulation of the cross, one sees the areas that are put “at the very heart of the gospel.” The atonement is rooted in the holy love of God and is accomplished through penal substitution, whereby God in Christ takes the place of sinful humans to pay the penalty due them because of their sin and in return clothes them in his righteousness. This stands at the heart of what both Packer and Stott believe to be the essence of global Evangelicalism, and their sentiments can be seen clearly in later Evangelical articulations as well.<sup>64</sup>

Yet, at the same time, this article has also argued that Packer and Stott disagree on the mechanics of substitution and subsequently the extent of the atonement. While both remained firmly in the Anglican tradition that they were a part of, Packer followed in teaching limited atonement, and Stott in teaching hypothetical universalism. Yet this disagreement, although real, did not terminate their support for one another. Instead, Stott and Packer united over their agreement with the concept of penal substitution and allowed for differences concerning the specifics of how this doctrine could be worked out. This points to a diversity in the thinking about the atonement in the Evangelicalism of Stott and Packer. There was a need to be united on matters that lay “at the very heart of the gospel,” yet an openness was granted to the areas that branched from this center.

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<sup>64</sup> For example, in the introductory paragraph on the first page of his chapter on penal substitution, Thomas Schreiner writes, “The theory of penal substitution is the heart and soul of an evangelical view of the atonement.” He calls it the “anchor and foundation” of the other themes. He offers a summative definition of the doctrine as follows: “The Father, because of his love for human beings, sent his Son (who offered himself willingly and gladly) to satisfy God’s justice, so that Christ took the place of sinners. The punishment and penalty we deserved was laid on Jesus Christ instead of us, so that in the cross both God’s holiness and love are manifested” (Thomas R. Schreiner, “Penal Substitution View,” in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006], 67).

In these various quotations, one sees a clear echo of many of the themes presented by Packer and Stott. These similarities show the areas of agreement of Evangelicals like Schreiner with Stott and Packer decades later.

