

“Be Imitators of God” (Eph 5:1): Aquinas on Charity and Satisfaction

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“Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ also loved us and handed himself over for us, an oblation and a victim to God in an odor of sweetness.” (Eph 5:1–2)

MANY SCHOLARS HAVE NOTED Thomas Aquinas’s emphasis on the role of Christ’s charity in satisfying for sins by the Passion. In one way or another, they have argued that, as Fr. Romanus Cessario puts it, “Love, not punishment, dominates Aquinas’s account of the efficacy of the Passion.”¹ Matthew Levering has shown that, for Aquinas, Christ’s Passion fulfils the ceremonial, moral, and judicial precepts of the Mosaic Law, inaugurating the New Law of love. He argues that Aquinas moves away from a more juridical interpretation of satisfaction by his focus on “the personal act of Christ as mediator and priest, whose actions are motivated by supreme charity.”² Rik Van Nieuwenhove points out that, for Aquinas, “‘punishments’ are not inflicted by God for their own sake, ‘as if God delighted in them,’ but for something

¹ Romanus Cessario, O.P., “Aquinas on Christian Salvation,” in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating, and John Yocum (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 117–137, at 124. See also Cessario, *The Godly Image: Christ and Salvation in Catholic Thought from Anselm to Aquinas* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1990).

² Matthew Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 57–58.

else, namely redirecting creatures toward their true goal. It is this that Aquinas has in mind when he talks of the right order of the universe.”³ While Thomas works with traditional categories derived from scriptural and theological teaching on debt, punishment, and justice in his treatment of satisfaction, these authors and others agree that his central concern is not to present a theory of vindictive justice, but rather to show in more relational terms how sinners may be restored to right order through Christ’s charitable suffering for human salvation and, so, be reconciled to God.⁴

In this essay, I will look more closely at how Thomas thinks this works; that is, why charity is so central to his account of Christ’s satisfaction and how it communicates the benefits of that satisfaction to us. In the background here is the complex picture of medieval theories of atonement, which include Anselm’s argument in *Cur Deus Homo* that God became human in order to offer satisfaction for sin and restore the order of justice by his voluntary death, a satisfaction that “none but God could make, and none but man ought to make.”⁵ It also includes Peter Abelard’s argument in his *Commentary on Romans* that it is not the death of the innocent Son that pleases the Father and justifies us, but rather that our redemption comes about through the demonstration of God’s love for us in the Passion, which kindles in us a salvific love for God and gives us a model to follow.⁶ Modern

³ Van Nieuwenhove is quoting the *Summa contra gentiles* (hereafter, SCG) III, ch. 144, no. 10; see “Bearing the Marks of Christ’s Passion,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph P. Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 277–302, at 289. Van Nieuwenhove argues that satisfaction, for Aquinas, is not a “legalistic transaction.” Christ satisfies for our sins because of the charity of his Passion, and by incorporation in him, we are changed so as to share in the divine life (291). I discuss this essay further below.

⁴ Eleonore Stump, too, argues that for, Aquinas, “the aim of any satisfaction (including vicarious satisfaction) is not to make debts and payments balance but to restore a sinner to harmony with God”; see *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 437.

⁵ *Cur Deus Homo* 2.6, in *St. Anselm: Basic Writings*, ed. S. N. Deane (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Classics, 1962; repr. 1994), 259.

⁶ *Commentary on Romans* 3.26 (book 2.117–18), in *Peter Abelard: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Steven Cartwright, Fathers of the Church Series, Medieval Continuation 12 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 167–68. Abelard was vehemently, if perhaps unjustly, attacked by William of Thierry and Bernard of Clairvaux, who accused him of teaching that Christ died for nothing; see Cartwright, *Peter Abelard*, 44 and William of St. Thierry, *Disputatio Adversus Petrum Abaelardum*, ed. Paul Verdeyen, CCCM

commentators sometimes call Abelardian-type views of atonement “moral” or “subjective,” since they focus on the human response to the Passion. Satisfaction theories like Anselm’s, which focus on the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice itself in offering a recompense on behalf of humanity, can be classified as “objective.”⁷ The value of classical objective theories of satisfaction has been questioned—or rejected altogether—by some recent theologians such as Robert Daly and Stephen Finlan on the grounds that such theories inherently perpetuate a harmful narrative of legal transaction and divine violence. In Daly’s extensive treatment, *Sacrifice Unveiled*, he argues that Christ’s sacrifice must be understood as a “self-offering response” of the Son within a Trinitarian dynamic of mutual self-giving.⁸ Daly emphasizes that Christ’s suffering in his humanity was contingent on this self-offering but his love was not.⁹ In saying that Christ’s suffering was not absolutely necessary, he claims something similar to Aquinas, but does not really answer, as I think Aquinas does, why Christ *did* suffer in God’s plan of providence—that is, how Christ’s suffering, as human, actually played some positively salvific role in his self-offering response to the Father and was not merely its unfortunate by-product. Finlan, in his book *Problems with Atonement*, argues more stringently than Daly that, while the Incarnation is a central Christian doctrine, atonement itself is not and proposes that, instead of attempting to salvage ideas of atonement, with their harmful baggage, we should focus on salvation as *theōsis*, or divinization, with “a more mature concept of the Divine Parent” who “needs no sacrifice or payment.”¹⁰

89A, (Turnhout, BE: Brepols, 2007), 7; Bernard of Clairvaux, *Epistola* 190. *Epistulae*, ed. J. LeClercq, C. H. Talbot, and H. M. Rochais, Opera 7–8 (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957) 8.22, 9.25 (also in PL, 182:1070C–10702C). This accusation seems allied to concerns about Abelard’s theology of grace, in which some saw a “pelagian” denial of the need for auxiliary grace; cf. Cartwright, *Peter Abelard*, 42, William of Thierry, *disp.* 6; Bernard, *Epistle* 190, 9.23–24 (also in PL, 182:1071A–1072A).

⁷ For instance, Gustaf Aulén refers to this common distinction in his influential systematization of ideas of atonement, in which he argues for the retrieval of a third “classic” view, the *Christus Victor* model, see *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Herber (London: SPCK, 1931; New York: Macmillan, 1969).

⁸ Robert Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009; repr. 2011), 11.

⁹ Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled*, 106, 236.

¹⁰ Stephen Finlan, *Problems with Atonement* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 124; cf., 62. Finlan has been criticized, however, by Michon Matthieson (I think justly), for speaking as if the “spiritual maturation” of divinization

I will argue that Aquinas, by foregrounding charity in his account of satisfaction, achieves two main things that help to address these objections. First, he is able to reconcile, synthesize, and go beyond the objective and subjective views of the salvific role of the Passion that he received from the tradition by showing how Christ, through his filial charity, is both the cause and model of our own satisfaction.¹¹ Although sometimes only the objective “Anselmian” elements of his thought are emphasized,¹² Thomas understands satisfaction in the context of filial/paternal love—that is, interpersonally—whether in relation to Christ or to us. Secondly, in the context of his mature teaching on charity, Thomas places satisfaction itself into its proper role as an integral step towards deification in his larger picture of the journey of rational creatures to beatitude by conformation to Christ through the Holy Spirit as God’s adopted children. In this, Thomas shows how satisfaction truly gives God honor by manifesting that the goodness of his wise plan of providence justly orders all things to their end. In doing these things, I think, Thomas helpfully addresses some of the valid concerns of contemporary objectors such as Daly and Finlan while offering a strong and coherent account of how Christ’s sacrificial suffering in the Passion is just, fitting, and truly a manifestation of the divine goodness. Thomas’s treatment is founded not on a narrative of divine violence, but on the basic Christian insights that “God is love” and that Christian life is a Spirit-led journey in imitation of the filial love of Christ for the Father. And yet, it is precisely in Christ’s sacrificial suffering as priest, victim, and Son

could take place for sinful humans without suffering; see Matthieson, *Sacrifice as Gift: Eucharist, Grace, and Contemplative Prayer in Maurice de la Taille* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 24. Both Finlan and Daly draw on René Girard’s argument about the religious role of violence against “sacred scapegoats”; see Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1972).

¹¹ The notion that Christ was both cause and model of salvation in his Passion was not original to Thomas. For instance, it is stated by Peter Lombard in *III Sentences* d. 28, ch. 5. But Thomas makes distinctive use of this idea in the context of his teaching on the saving mysteries of the Incarnation, as will be discussed below.

¹² In Daly’s brief treatment of Aquinas, he argues that the sophistication and influence of Aquinas’s “basically Anselmian satisfaction theory” contributed to the undervaluing of Abelard’s advanced insights until the nineteenth century (*Sacrifice Unveiled*, 114). However, Cessario notes that, in his early *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum*, Thomas already draws from both Anselmian- and Abelardian-type models for the redemption, the latter influenced by the pseudo-Augustinian *Liber ecclesiasticorum dogmatum* (*The Godly Image*, 77–78).

that Thomas presents him as the cause and model of satisfaction by filial charity. I will argue that this is so especially because our own satisfaction must involve some penitential suffering. So, while the Passion is an objectively satisfactory priestly act by Christ as the head of the body, it is also the cause and model of our own acts of satisfaction. Such satisfaction is offered in the exercise of the charity-infused virtue of religion, which allows us to render justice to God by giving to him the honor that is due and, so, enables us to participate in and subjectively appropriate the benefits won for us by Christ's priestly satisfaction as head of the mystical body.

The Satisfactory Sacrifice of Christ's Passion

In question 48 of the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae* (ST), Thomas discusses the various ways or modes by which the Passion brought about human salvation. I will focus on articles 2 (on satisfaction) and 3 (on sacrifice), but all six articles examine, from different interrelated perspectives, the Passion's work in restoring fallen humanity to union with God through the instrumentality of Christ's humanity united to the Godhead.¹³ In article 2, Thomas argues that Christ brought about our salvation *per modum satisfactionis*: the Passion satisfied for human sins by offering recompense (*recompensatio*) for the offense of sin. Thomas begins by saying that to properly satisfy for an offense one must give to the offended party something he loves equally or more than he hated the offense: "by suffering out of love and obedience Christ gave more to God than was required as recompense for the offense of the whole human race." He goes on to say that Christ's Passion "not only sufficiently but superabundantly satisfied" for human sins for three reasons: the magnitude of his charity, the dignity of the life he laid down as God and man, and the greatness of the pain he endured. This pain, Thomas had earlier argued, was greater than any other, in body and soul, in part because of Christ's "grief at the one time for all sins" that flowed from his perfect charity and wisdom.¹⁴ Thomas does not evade the

¹³ ST III, q. 48, a. 6. Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Latin are my own, although the English translation of ST by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1948; repr., Christian Classics, 1981) provided assistance at many points. For translations of the ST, I consulted the Leonine edition (vols. 4–12, 1888–1906) and the Ottawa edition (*Instituti Studiorum Medievalium Ottaviensis*, 5 vols. [Ottawa: Commissio Piana, 1953]). The Corpus Thomisticum website (www.corpusthomisticum.org) gave invaluable assistance for this project (incorporating the Index Thomisticus of Roberto Busa, S.J.).

¹⁴ ST III, q. 46, a. 6, ad 4.

notion that satisfaction for sin involves suffering that removes the debt of punishment—indeed, he even underlines the greatness of Christ’s suffering in proportion to the magnitude of the offense. However, as quickly becomes evident in the next article, he contextualizes this apparent necessity of suffering with the idea of true sacrifice in mind; what God loves and accepts as satisfaction for human sins, the sacrifice that gives him honor and appeases him, is not Christ’s suffering per se, but Christ’s suffering out of love and obedience.

Christ, of course, did not need to make satisfaction for himself because he was without sin; his will was perfectly ordered to God by grace (that is, by charity) from the moment of his conception.¹⁵ So, the first objection asks, if Christ was sinless, what satisfaction would he offer by his suffering? Thomas answers by explaining the *ratio* of Christ’s vicarious satisfaction, his charity and union with his members: “The head and members are as one mystical person. Christ’s satisfaction belongs to all the faithful as his members. And also, insofar as two are one in charity, one can satisfy for the other.”¹⁶ There are two related reasons here. As head of the mystical body, Christ communicates to his members all that belongs most eminently to him.¹⁷ Christ’s satisfaction is objectively superabundantly efficacious for the salvation of all. And Christ’s vicarious satisfaction is a special instance of the more general possibility of taking satisfactory punishment on oneself for another with whom one is “one in will by the union of love,” something Thomas has explained in his earlier treatment of the debt of punishment.¹⁸ This possibility, which Thomas discusses in a number of his works, depends upon the friendship between the one offering satisfaction and the one for whom he satisfies. Because the two are as one person in love, one can make satisfaction to God through the other, and this accords with the order of justice.¹⁹ Indeed, satisfactory punishments voluntarily accepted on behalf of another have spiritual benefit for the innocent one who

¹⁵ *ST* III, q. 34, a. 3.

¹⁶ *ST* III, q. 48, a. 2, ad 1.

¹⁷ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 1, a. 5.

¹⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 87, a. 7.

¹⁹ *Compendium theologiae* I, ch. 226: “Since . . . what we do or suffer through our friends, we ourselves are considered in some fashion to do or suffer (inasmuch as love is a mutual force that in a way makes two lovers one), the order of justice is not violated if a person is set free by the satisfaction his friend offers for him” (my own translation from vol. 42 of the Leonine edition, 1979).

suffers and a penal character for the friend for whom he suffers.²⁰ Thomas says in the *Summa contra gentiles* (SCG) that this is because “the punishment that a friend suffers for oneself, one regards as if it were suffered by oneself. Thus, one does not escape punishment, provided one suffer along with a suffering friend—and all the more so, the more one is the cause of his suffering.”²¹ Furthermore, “the love of charity in the person who suffers for a friend makes his satisfaction more acceptable to God than if he suffered for himself, for in the one case it is prompted by charity; in the other, by necessity.”²² Thomas asserts that Christ’s suffering does objectively and justly offer satisfaction to God, that this vicarious satisfaction depends on his love for the Father and for us, and that, in order to actually receive the benefits of that satisfaction, his members must be joined to him in charity and share his suffering (a point I will take up later).

Thomas continues this theme of charity and unity in article 3 of the same question (48), where he argues that Christ’s Passion worked for our salvation *per modum sacrificii*—as a true and perfect sacrifice. In the *sed contra*, he uses Ephesians 5:2 (a text he quotes numerous times in the context of discussions about satisfaction and sacrifice in the *ST* and other later works): “Christ . . . handed himself over for us, an oblation and a victim [*hostiam*] to God for an odor of sweetness.”²³ In his scriptural commentary on this text, he calls this self-offering of Christ the “immense sign of God’s charity.”²⁴ At the beginning of the

²⁰ *ST* III, q. 87, a. 8. Thomas does not fully explain in q. 87 how exactly this satisfaction has a penal character for the guilty, except that they are somehow “one” with the innocent. An example he gives is a child punished for its parents who is “one” with them because he is something belonging to them (*res eorum*). He remarks in q. 87, a. 8, ad 3 that, in addition to the punishment of those near to us redounding to us somehow, “domestic examples and domestic punishments are more moving.”

²¹ SCG III, ch. 158, no. 7. Drawing from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.3.1112b 28, he explains that “‘the things that we can accomplish through the efforts of our friends we seem to do ourselves,’ for friendship makes two persons one in love, and especially in the love of charity. And so, just as a person can make satisfaction to God by himself, so also can he do it through another person, especially in case of necessity” (all translation of SCG is my own from the Marietti edition, vols. 2–3, ed. P. Marc, C. Pera, and P. Caramello [1961]).

²² Ibid.

²³ The Vulgate Latin text of Ephesians 5:2 used by Thomas has *hostiam* rather than *sacrificium*.

²⁴ *Super Eph* 5, lec. 1 (Marietti no. 268). All English translation from *Super Eph* is my own from the Marietti edition.

response in article 3, Thomas gives a definition of sacrifice as “something done for the honor properly owed to God,” and so far, this sounds similar to his discussion, earlier in *ST*, of sacrifice as an act of the virtue of religion. Here in the context of the Passion, though, he adds that sacrifice is offered to God “in order to appease him [*ad eum placandum*].” In support of this definition, Thomas offers a quote from Augustine’s *City of God*: “a true sacrifice is every good work done in order that we may ‘cling to God in holy fellowship,’” and that refers us to eternal happiness. Thomas then argues that Christ’s voluntary self-offering for us in the Passion fits this definition: it was “maximally acceptable to God, as coming from charity,” and therefore clearly a true sacrifice. He indicates here that what primarily gives God due honor and appeases or is acceptable to him is the inward sacrifice or self-offering flowing from charity that unites humans to God and refers them to eternal happiness—and Christ’s charity above all. This too has its foundation in his earlier treatment of the virtue of religion, where he also refers to the *City of God* to establish that outward sacrifices are offered to represent one and direct one to offer the inward sacrifice of devotion to God, a devotion caused and fed by charity.²⁵ The focus on charity and unity with God as the substance and fruit of Christ’s sacrifice continues as Thomas ends his response with a quote from Augustine’s *De Trinitate* IV: “This one true Mediator reconciling us to God through the sacrifice of peace would remain one with Him to whom He offered it, and make one in himself those for whom He offered it, and Himself be the one who offered, and that which He offered.”

Sacrifice and satisfaction are closely related concepts here, for it is by sacrifice that the recompense of satisfaction is offered.²⁶ Christ’s voluntary sacrifice appeased God by offering the satisfactory recompense of his perfect human love and obedience. His inward self-offering of love, expressed outwardly in the sacrifice of his Passion, satisfied objectively for the offense of sins. In the answer to the first objection, Thomas argues that the Passion was, in fact, a “most perfect sacrifice,” going beyond the figural foreshadowing of the

²⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 86, a. 2, a. 4; cf. q. 81, a. 7.

²⁶ The Passion reconciled us to God, Thomas says in q. 49, a. 4, not only by taking away sin, but by his “most acceptable sacrifice,” which “was such a good act that, because of its being found in human nature, God was appeased for every offense of the human race with regard to those who are made one with the crucified Christ,” as head of the body. In this, Christ offered “a more acceptable recompense” to God (ad 2).

Old Law: besides being human, mortal, and sinless, he says, it was perfect because “it was acceptable to God on account of his charity in offering his own flesh.” Here Thomas draws again from Augustine’s *De Trinitate* with an allusion to the Eucharist: “What could be so pleasingly offered and received as the flesh of our sacrifice, made the body of our priest?”²⁷ Christ’s pleasing good work of self-offering in the priestly sacrifice of the Passion unites not only himself in his humanity but also us to God in holy fellowship and directs us with him to beatitude.

The *Immensae Caritatis Signum*

But why does the Father require satisfaction at all, and why through Christ’s suffering? This objection to a divine parent who requires payment for sins is of course what motivates contemporary scholars who would reject an objective model of satisfaction, which seems to make legal opponents of the Father, Son, and human sinners. Thomas thinks that we as humans need to offer satisfaction for sins for our own good (as I will discuss in the next section), but in a more objective sense, he clearly holds that the recompense of satisfaction does set right an imbalance or inequality in the order of justice, and he states this in his discussion of the debt of punishment, arguing that “God does not delight in punishments for their own sake, but he does delight in the order of his justice, which requires them.”²⁸ So, “the act of sin makes one deserving of punishment, insofar as he transgresses the order of divine justice, to which he cannot return unless he pay some sort of penal compensation, which restores him to the equality of justice.”²⁹ Taken out of context, statements such as these might suggest that Thomas is indeed proposing a simple legalism in which satisfaction for sin is governed by a somewhat impersonal law of justice rather than involving restoration of good relationship between humans and God. An examination of what Thomas means by the order of justice, however, indicates quite the opposite: God “delights in it” because it is founded in the divine love, which extends to all creatures.

Thomas discusses God’s justice together with his mercy as divine attributes, in question 21 of the *prima pars* of *ST*, right after the question on God’s love. This gives an indication that he views both attributes as rooted in God’s loving will, which orders all things to the end of

²⁷ *ST* III, q. 48, a. 3, ad 1.

²⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 87, a. 4, ad 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.* q. 87, a. 6.

the divine goodness—that is, to himself.³⁰ God’s plan of providence, the “type of the order of things toward their end” existing eternally in the divine mind, includes the ordering of each creature.³¹ Besides the good of existing in a certain substance, each creature also receives the gift of order, being directed to the last end of divine goodness. This being ordered is thus a good in itself that manifests God’s own goodness.³² God’s justice and mercy are seen in this good ordering of the universe and of each creature. As ruler of all, God is debtor to none, but is just to himself in carrying out the plan of wisdom he wills in creatures and just to creatures in giving them what that plan requires for the nature and condition in which he wills them to exist. Within that plan, he justly gives them what they need to reach the end he intends for them.³³ God’s justice thus “establishes things in the order conformable to the rule of his wisdom, which is the law of justice.”³⁴ As Levering points out, creation itself is therefore the foundational context for a coherent understanding of atonement, for “the created order is imbued with justice.”³⁵ Mercy and justice are closely related because they are different aspects of the communication of perfections that belongs, absolutely speaking, to the divine goodness. God is just in bestowing perfections proportionately and merciful in bestowing them to expel defects. Mercy is therefore not opposed to justice; God, in acting mercifully, does not overturn his justice but goes beyond it to give more than is proportionate.³⁶ Indeed, God’s justice begins and ends in mercy, for the gift of good order is given to a creature who exists only by the unwarranted goodness of God, a creature to whom God “out of the abundance of his goodness” gives even more than is needed to preserve the order of justice. This is especially clear in the case of the justification of the ungodly, “when God remits sins on account of love, though he has himself mercifully infused that love.”³⁷

For Thomas, then, the “order of justice” is not a legal system governing the payment of debts. Rather, it describes the primacy

³⁰ *ST I*, q. 19, a. 2; q. 20, a. 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, q. 22, a. 1, a. 2.

³² *Ibid.*, q. 22, a. 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, q. 21, a. 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, q. 21, a. 2.

³⁵ Matthew Levering, “Creation and Atonement,” in *Locating Atonement: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015) 43–70, at 59.

³⁶ *ST I*, q. 21, a. 3, corp. and ad 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, q. 21, a. 4, corp. and ad 1.

of divine causality proportionately ordering all things according to God's plan of wisdom and will, and it therefore manifests God's goodness and love. The goodness of God's justice is shown in rational creatures especially by the gift of free will proportionate to their nature, inclining them towards the good, with the potential to be raised by grace and charity to union with God himself, although they can turn away from this highest end. Levering notes that Thomas thinks rational creatures also owe something to God, "a debt of worship and service to the Creator" that is "both a debt of justice and a debt that rightly calls forth love."³⁸ This means that sin is not only a moral but an existential betrayal. Human beings whose wills are rightly ordered to God are living within the order of justice because they are aligned with the good order willed for them by God: their wills are united with God's will for them. Yet, the sinner, who misuses his free will by turning it away from God, still does not escape the order of justice, for God's will as the universal cause of this order is always fulfilled. So, "that which seems to depart from the divine will in [the order of particular causes] returns to it in [the order of the universal cause]; as does the sinner, who by sinning falls away from the divine will as much as lies in him, yet falls back into the order of that will, when by its justice he is punished."³⁹ Sin incurs a debt of punishment because, while it disturbs the right-ordering of the sinner as a particular cause, it cannot disrupt the overall order intrinsic to the good of the universe itself willed by God. So, according to the order of divine justice, "he who has indulged his will more than he should, acting against the commandment of God . . . suffers, either willingly or unwillingly, something contrary to what he wishes."⁴⁰ When penance is willing, as I discuss below, it is not only satisfactory but also medicinal on a subjective level, healing the disorder of sin by opposing it. But Thomas also thinks that, objectively, all penal compensation, willing or unwilling, restores the equality of justice precisely because it manifests the right order that is an aspect of God's goodness. To put it another way, on the level of the sinner as particular cause, the only thing that can fully restore his own good of order is that his will be reordered to God by voluntary satisfaction. On the level of God as the universal cause of good order,

³⁸ Levering, "Creation and Atonement," 60–61. Levering refers to Thomas's discussion of the virtue of piety, closely related to the virtue of religion, which gives to God the honor that is due to him (*ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 2; q. 101, a. 1).

³⁹ *ST* I, q. 19, a. 6.

⁴⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 87, a. 6.

even punishment of the unwilling can serve to manifest the divine goodness and justice, giving example to others.⁴¹ In either case, “the fact that sins are punished . . . does not imply that God’s mercy is subject to an external law of justice. The opposite is the case: the order according to which sin is punished and goodness is rewarded is a manifestation of God’s goodness and justice.”⁴²

Thomas’s understanding of the objective order of justice rooted in the divine nature and providential activity frames the question of satisfaction not as a matter of an impersonal legal rectification of disorder, but as one of the right ordering of human wills toward the end of God’s goodness—that is, in terms of love and obedience as objectively making one exist in conformity with the will of God. Grave sins, which destroy charity, incur a debt of eternal punishment because they destroy the very principle by which one’s will is subject to God, and such a disorder “considered in itself, is irreparable, although it is possible to repair it by the power of God.”⁴³ Because of original sin, all humans find themselves in this situation of eternal debt, “deprived of grace, without which there is no remission of sins.”⁴⁴ Sin has thus created a deficit of the love for him that God wills to exist in his rational creatures, which they have freely rejected and which ultimately can be restored only by God himself as the source of love. Christ, as both God and human, redresses this deficit on a cosmic scale through his voluntary self-offering, since his satisfactory sacrifice was a perfectly just act with unlimited efficacy, restoring for all the possibility of being rightly ordered to the divine goodness by union with God’s will. Thomas’s treatment of God’s justice and mercy is therefore complete only in light of what he has to say about the reasons for Christ’s Passion.

In fact, Thomas thinks, God hypothetically could have forgiven sins without Christ offering any satisfaction by suffering at all, and this would not have contradicted the order of justice, for as we have seen, mercy does not overturn justice. As the “sovereign and common good of the whole universe,” God’s complete pardon of fault against himself would not be unjust but merciful.⁴⁵ We know from Thomas’s discussion of God’s mercy that this would not mean simply leaving sinners in a sinful state (which would not satisfy the order of justice),

⁴¹ Ibid., q. 87, a. 3, ad 2.

⁴² Van Nieuwenhove, “Bearing the Marks of Christ’s Passion,” 285.

⁴³ *ST* I-II, q. 87, a. 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., q. 87, a. 5, ad 2.

⁴⁵ *ST* III, q. 46, a. 2, ad 3.

but rather the bestowal of perfections to expel defects even beyond what is proportionate to their state.⁴⁶ However, God did will for the human race to be delivered by Christ's Passion, and Thomas argues that this actually most greatly shows both God's mercy and his justice. God's justice is shown because Christ's Passion did in fact make satisfaction for sins, and so, "humans were set free by Christ's justice."⁴⁷ In "suffering out of love and obedience," Christ restored the order of justice for the entire human race by the perfect ordering of his human will to the end of divine goodness, to perfect union with the divine will. And because God, rich in mercy, "on account of his exceeding charity" (Eph 2:4), gave his only Son to satisfy for human sins, his mercy is even more abundantly shown than if he had required no satisfaction at all.⁴⁸ The Passion is a kind of icon manifesting God's goodness, justice, and mercy, for it reveals the love of both Father and Son and the union of wills between Christ and the Father for the salvation of the world.

Thomas's account of the causes of Christ's Passion in question 47 of the *tertia pars* focuses on this union of wills seen in the filial obedience of Christ and the causal love of the Father. Here he addresses a question framed in Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, one he first treated in his *Scriptum on the Sentences*, about whether the Father handed Christ over to death.⁴⁹ While similar elements can be found in the two accounts, he makes his expanded treatment in the *ST* the occasion for separate articles on Christ's voluntary suffering, his obedience to the Father, and the Father's gift of his Son, as well as on Christ's persecutors as instrumental causes of his death.⁵⁰ In the *ST*, too, as is often the case,

⁴⁶ *ST* I, q. 21, a. 3, ad 2. Cessario notes here a shift from the *Scriptum*, in which the younger Aquinas's treatment is still more like that of Anselm, for whom "the thought of God forgiving sin without punishment necessarily implies a disorder." The shift can be attributed to Aquinas's later placement of satisfaction into a "schema of final causality" in which the whole treatment of the Incarnation takes place in the context of a consideration of the divine goodness (Cessario, "Aquinas on Christian Salvation," 122).

⁴⁷ *ST* III, q. 46, a. 1, ad 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ In *III Sent.* d. 20, ch. 5, Lombard draws in turn from Augustine's commentary on 1 John 4:9 (*In I Ioannis* 7.7).

⁵⁰ In the *Scriptum* (*In III Sent.* d. 20, q. 1, a. 5), two *quaestiunculae* focus on whether the Father handed Christ over and whether the Passion was good, and in his answers, Thomas underlines the charity of Christ and his voluntary suffering. See also *In III Sent.* d. 20, q. 1, a. 3, where he deals with the satisfactory value of the Passion.

Thomas provides much more connection to Scripture, reflecting his intervening work on scriptural commentaries. Christ himself was the cause of the Passion in that he died voluntarily, suffering the violence inflicted on him though he could have prevented it (a. 1). Christ died because of obedience (a. 2), and by his obedience “the many shall be made just (Rom 5:19), and so we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10). In his Scripture commentary on this last verse, Thomas points out that Christ’s death was not acceptable to God simply because it was a death or because of the action of Christ’s killers, but rather because Christ “became obedient to death” (Phil 2:8), and “handed himself over out of love” (the “immense sign of God’s charity” in Ephesians 5:2, again).⁵¹

Thomas goes on to say in article 2 of question 47 that Christ willed to suffer out of both charity and obedience, because he “was obedient, out of love, to the Father’s command.”⁵² Obedience is better than all sacrifices, so “Christ’s death was a most acceptable sacrifice to God, according [again] to Ephesians 5:2: ‘He delivered himself for us an oblation and a victim to God.’” Furthermore, according to article 3, the Father “did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” (Rom 8:32). The Father was the cause of the Passion in that he preordained it for the deliverance of the human race, he inspired (*inspiravit*) Christ’s human will to suffer for us through the infusion of charity, and he permitted Christ’s persecutors to kill him. This was not cruel, Thomas says in answer to an objection, because it was not against Christ’s will. Thomas repeats again that the Father inspired Christ with the will to suffer for us and that, in this, not only his severity against sin but also “his goodness shines forth.”⁵³ *ST* places emphasis here on two things that arguably differ from Thomas’s treatment in the *Scriptum*: first, the manifestation of God the Father’s goodness in the Passion, as well as that of the Son;⁵⁴ second,

⁵¹ *Super Rom* 5, lec. 2 (Marietti no. 403). All translation from *Super Rom* are my own from the Marietti edition .

⁵² *ST* III, q. 47, a. 2, ad 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, q. 47, a. 3, ad 1.

⁵⁴ Cf., *In III Sent.* d. 20, q. 1, a. 5, qa. 2, where the focus is only on the goodness of Christ’s action (and the evil action of his persecutors): “If therefore the passion is considered according to all the circumstances of what is in the sufferer, namely, Christ’s charity and its efficacy, it can be called good simply speaking. If, however, it is considered only as a passion, namely inasmuch as it takes away life, nothing else being considered, it is evil . . . so it can be called good simply speaking, and evil in a qualified sense” (my own translation).

the “inspiration” of Christ’s will by the Father.⁵⁵ With regard to the latter, I will argue below that, in the *ST*, Thomas lays emphasis on the movement of Christ’s human will by the Holy Spirit. Christ as God was one in will and action with the Father, and as human, his will was perfectly obedient to God. Therefore, “the Father delivered Christ, and Christ surrendered himself, from charity, and so both are praised.”⁵⁶ Christ’s satisfaction restores the order of justice not as exacted from him by a vindictive divine parent, but (on the contrary) because he is perfectly united with his Father in love, manifesting God’s praiseworthy goodness in the divine plan.

Thomas clearly proposes an objective model of Christ’s sacrifice offering satisfaction for sins, which emphasizes that, in his loving obedience, he gave the most acceptable recompense for sin, in union with the Father’s will, for the members of his body. Interwoven with this objective model, though, is a more subjective one. This is especially clear among the arguments Thomas makes to explain why Christ satisfied for sins precisely by his suffering. As we have seen, Thomas argues in the first article of question 46 (of *ST* III) that there was actually no absolute necessity for Christ to suffer, even to satisfy for sin; it was necessary only in the sense that it was preordained by

⁵⁵ Cf., *In III Sent.* d. 20, q. 1, a. 5, qa. 1, ad 1, where Thomas simply says that the Father handed Christ over without cruelty, “by giving him the will, and the charity, by which he willed to suffer” (“voluntatem dando, et caritatem, ex qua pati voluit”).

⁵⁶ *ST* III, q. 47, a. 3, ad 3. So, even Christ’s cry of dereliction on the Cross (Mark 15:34; Matt 27:46) can be understood in the context of a union of wills between Christ and the Father for human salvation. Thomas Joseph White, O.P., draws on Aquinas to argue convincingly that, as Christ possessed the beatific vision even in his Passion, filling him with intense charity and longing for the salvation of sinners, “the final cry of Christ on the Cross cannot be interpreted as a cry of either despair or spiritual separation from God. By contrast, it must be understood theologically as a prayer of desire related to Christ’s abandonment to the Father and his hope to introduce humanity into the eschatological gift of redemption”; see *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 310; 336–38. Bruce Marshall, responding to modern theologians who would conclude from Christ’s cry of abandonment that God must be passible, demonstrates the essential role of an orthodox Christology and doctrine of the Trinity for a coherent understanding of Christ’s suffering and death on the Cross in his human nature (“The Dereliction of Christ and the Impassibility of God,” in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, eds. James F. Keating, Thomas Joseph White, O.P. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009], 246–98).

God.⁵⁷ In article 3 of the same question, Thomas explains further why, nevertheless, there was no more fitting way for God to liberate the human race.⁵⁸ Christ, as head of the body, actually merited our eternal salvation by his charity from the moment of his conception, but “there were some impediments on our part to receiving the effects of his preceding merits; consequently, in order to remove these impediments, it was fitting for Christ to suffer.”⁵⁹ In addition to his arguments for the objective efficacy of Christ’s Passion, many of the reasons Thomas gives for the fittingness of Christ’s suffering on the Cross focus on how it removes impediments on our part by eliciting a subjective response in us and providing a model for us to follow.

The first reason given in article 3 sounds like Abelard: “By this, man knows how much God loves him, and is provoked to love God in return, and in this the perfection of human salvation consists; Rom 5:8: ‘God commends his charity towards us, for when we were sinners, Christ died for us.’” In his commentary on Romans, he remarks that this verse “indicates a certain immensity of the divine love.”⁶⁰ In article 1 of question 49, Thomas also quotes Romans 5:8 and combines objective and subjective explanations for how the Passion causes the forgiveness of sins, to which satisfaction contributes: it (objectively) does so by the efficacy of Christ’s humanity as instrument of the Godhead, and by his redemptive work as head for his members, but the first reason given is again that it (subjectively) “provokes our charity,” by which sins are forgiven. Thomas may have adopted this more subjective theme from Lombard, who perhaps was drawing on Abelard, as he often does in the *Sentences*.⁶¹ Lombard quotes the same text from Romans 5:8 and argues that one reason we are freed from sins by Christ’s death is that God’s charity toward

⁵⁷ ST III, q. 46, a. 1–2.

⁵⁸ Aidan Nichols notes that the reasons Aquinas gives for the fittingness of Christ’s Passion indicate that “liberation from sin is not the whole of salvation”; understood positively, “it is gracious reunion with God”; see “St. Thomas Aquinas on the Passion of Christ: A Reading of *Summa theologiae* IIIa, q. 46,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990): 447–59, at 449.

⁵⁹ ST III, q. 48, a. 1, ad 2.

⁶⁰ *Super Rom* 5, lec. 2 (Marietti no. 399).

⁶¹ Although, Lombard was not the only possible source. Ian Levy points out that Bruno the Carthusian writes of Christ’s Passion “in what we might call ‘Abelardian’ terms, although many decades before Peter Abelard composed his own Romans commentary c. 1137”; see Levy, “Bruno the Carthusian: Theology and Reform in His Commentary on the Pauline Epistles,” *Analecta Cartusiana* 300 (2013): 5–61, at 43.

us while we were still sinners is so greatly manifested that “charity is excited in our hearts” towards God in return: Christ’s death elicits charity in us, and we are justified and freed from sins by that charity.⁶²

Christ’s Passion also provides a model for us to follow. The questions in *ST* on Christ’s Passion, death, Resurrection, and exaltation are the culmination of Thomas’s unique treatment of the mysteries of Christ’s life, which is his presentation, organized with reference to scriptural sequence, of “all the things the Incarnate Son of God did or suffered in the human nature united to him,”⁶³ all of which, Thomas says, “were done for our instruction.”⁶⁴ In article 3 question

⁶² *III Sent.* d. 19, ch. 1: “But how were we released from sins by his death? Because ‘by his death’ as the Apostle says, ‘God’s charity to us is commended’ (Rom 8); that is, the excellent and commendable charity of God towards us is seen, in that he handed over his own Son to death for us sinners. As so great a pledge of love towards us was shown, we are moved and enkindled to loving God, who has done so much for us, and by this we are justified; that is, released from sin we are made just. So, the death of Christ justifies us, as by it charity is excited in our hearts” (my own translation from PL, 192:795A). In Thomas’s commentary on this text, he is careful to distinguish between faith and charity excited by the Passion as efficient causes of the removal of sins, on the one hand, and the “true sacrifice” of Christ’s death as the sufficient cause, on the other (*In III Sent.* q. 1, a. 1, qa. 1, ad 4). Cf., Lombard, *Commentary on Romans* 5:8 (PL, 191:1384A) and Abelard’s own commentary on Romans 5:8 (2.155–56), where he repeats the idea that Christ “died for the wicked that charity might be poured out in our hearts” (*Peter Abelard: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 206–07). Thomas was surely aware of medieval accusations against Abelard by Bernard of Clairvaux and others that, by his emphasis on the role of Christ’s death in eliciting and modeling charity, he undervalued its objective power to satisfy for sins (see note 6 above). I have not found any direct reference to this dispute in Thomas’s writing, but he does quote in several places a saying attributed to Bernard, that “minima gutta sanguinis Christi suffecisset ad redemptionem humani generis [The least drop of Christ’s blood would suffice for the redemption of the human race]” (e.g., *Questiones quodlibetales* II, q. 1, a. 2, and the *Adoro te devote*; my own translation), the source of which in Bernard seems to be unknown, but which may derive from his *Epistle* 190 (against Abelard) 8.22: “The blood that was shed was so powerful for pardoning that it wiped away that greatest sin itself, by which it was shed” (my own translation from PL, 182:1070C). Perhaps Thomas, aware of the controversy, preferred to remain crypto-‘Abelardian’.

⁶³ *ST* III, q. 27, prol.

⁶⁴ See e.g., *ST* III, q. 40, a. 1, ad 3. Cf., Richard Schenk, “*Omnis actio Christi nostra est instructio*: The Deeds and Sayings of Jesus as Revelation in the View of Thomas Aquinas,” in *La doctrine de la révélation divine de saint Thomas d’Aquin*, ed. Leo J. Elders, *Studi Tomistici* 37 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), 104–31.

46 (*ST* III), Thomas goes on to say that Christ gave an example of all the virtues needed for salvation in his Passion, such as obedience and humility, “leaving an example that you should follow in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21). Christ’s Passion also merited grace and glory that bring us to that salvation, teach us to refrain from sin and give greater dignity to human nature. These reasons for the fittingness of the Passion, reminiscent of the reasons Thomas gives for the fittingness of the Incarnation itself, point to a contextualization of human healing and liberation from sin within the larger picture of the whole journey to glory for the children of God.⁶⁵ In his death on the Cross in particular, Christ shows us how to live righteously and is our teacher, and Thomas here quotes Augustine’s dictum (more poetic in Latin): “The tree on which were fixed the members of him suffering, was the chair of the Master teaching.”⁶⁶ Thomas also writes of Christ crucified as a model of charity in his commentary on our text from Ephesians 5:1–2 (“Be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us”), and in these verses, Thomas says, the author first “sets down the way to imitate God, which is in charity; second, he shows the immense sign of charity [*immensae caritatis signum*],” in Christ’s self-offering on the Cross.⁶⁷ He echoes here what he said at greater length in his beautiful exegesis of Ephesians 3:19: “To ‘know the charity of Christ’ is to know all the mysteries of Christ’s Incarnation and Redemption, which have poured out from the immense charity of God,” and he describes the height, depth and breadth of this charity measured by the dimensions of the Cross, chosen by Christ out of love, and imitated in the virtue of the saints.⁶⁸ The love kindled by the Passion thus brings about conforma-

⁶⁵ *ST* III, q. 46, a. 3; cf. III, q. 1, a. 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid., q. 46, a. 4, quoting Augustine, *In Ioannis* 119: “Lignum in quo fixa erant membra patientis, etiam cathedra fuit magistri docentis” (my translation from PL, 35:1950).

⁶⁷ *Super Eph* 5, lec. 1 (Marietti no. 268). This Ephesians text appears only once in the *Scriptum* (*In III Sent.* d. 20, q. 1, a. 5, qa. 2, sc 1), evidently because Lombard had used it in the question under discussion, that of who handed Christ over in the Passion. By contrast, the verses, separately or together, appear at least ten times in *ST*, and many more in other later works, especially the Scripture commentaries, in the context of discussions about sacrifice, satisfaction, charity, and divine filiation, e.g., *Super Ioan* 21, lec. 2 (Marietti no. 2599).

⁶⁸ *Super Eph* 3, lec. 5 (Marietti no. 178–80). Thomas draws in his exegesis from a traditional interpretation by Augustine (see the latter’s Sermon 53.16). Augustine’s interpretation was recorded, among others, in the *Glossa Ordinaria* on this passage.

tion to Christ in the Passion. While Christ's satisfaction is objectively superabundantly sufficient for human salvation, it seems that, for it to have its full effect in us, we must imitate, and indeed participate in, Christ's charitable satisfaction as God's beloved children by our own filial sacrifice of loving obedience, which must involve the cross—that is, some temporal suffering for us—as part of the journey to holiness.

Christ's Satisfaction and Ours

Why is this needed? Is Christ's satisfaction not enough? Thomas establishes in the first question of his treatment of the Incarnation, in agreement with Anselm, that the infinite efficacy of Christ's satisfaction was a reason that God became human.⁶⁹ And yet, in saying this, Thomas makes an interesting qualification. In answer to an objection that it seems humans should be able to satisfy for sin themselves, he begins to outline how Christ's satisfaction is actually realized for each individual. Because of the union, Christ's satisfaction is “condign, as adequate recompense for the fault committed,” in a way the satisfaction of a mere human being cannot be because of both the corruption of all human nature and the offense against the infinity of God's majesty. However, Thomas says, even an ordinary human being can offer an imperfectly sufficient satisfaction that God accepts in light of Christ's condign satisfaction.⁷⁰ Although Thomas does not term our imperfect human satisfaction “congruous” here, there is a similarity to his discussion of condign and congruous merit, where he argues that, because grace internally moves the human free will through its own acts of charity, both the condign merit of the Holy Spirit and the congruous merit of the free will can be attributed to the human creature on its way to beatitude.⁷¹ In effect, the condign merit of divine action makes the congruous merit of human action possible in the context of God's ordination in his plan of providence for rational creatures; they are fittingly rewarded for using well the limited powers he gives them.⁷² There is a similar relationship between Christ's satisfaction and ours: “Because everything imperfect presupposes something perfect, by which it is sustained, so every satisfaction of a mere human has efficacy from the satisfaction of Christ.”⁷³ Christ not only satisfies objectively

⁶⁹ *ST* III, q. 1, a. 2; cf. a. 3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2.

⁷¹ *ST* I-II, q. 114, a. 3, a. 4.

⁷² *Ibid.*, q. 114, a. 1.

⁷³ *ST* III, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2.

for sin but also is a kind of efficacious principle for the possibility of individual humans to cooperatively offer satisfaction. Our offering of congruous satisfaction, although imperfect, becomes part of the divinely initiated plan of salvation in Christ.

Thomas's treatment of the virtue and sacrament of penance makes clear that it is not only possible but also necessary to cooperatively offer one's own satisfaction, imperfect as it is, for post-baptismal sins. The forgiveness of sins includes both the forgiveness of guilt and the remission of the debt of punishment for which satisfaction is required. Christ's Passion suffices to remove the guilt of sin and all debt, both of eternal punishment for turning away from God, and of temporal punishment for turning inordinately to temporal things.⁷⁴ However, each person is released from the debt "according to the mode in which he participates the power of Christ's Passion."⁷⁵ In baptism, Christ's satisfaction removes the whole debt of eternal and temporal punishment from the one who receives the sacrament in faith, "just as if he himself had offered sufficient satisfaction for all his sins," because baptism is a total participation in the power of Christ's Passion, as Paul teaches in Romans 6.⁷⁶ Therefore, no works of satisfaction are required for the newly baptized, as this would "do injustice to the Passion and death of Christ, as if it were insufficient for the plenary satisfaction" of their sins.⁷⁷ In the subsequent sacrament of penance, however, one "shares in the power of Christ's Passion according to the measure of his own acts," and the debt of punishment is not fully remitted until the three acts of the penitent—contrition of the heart, confession in words, and satisfaction in deeds—have been completed.⁷⁸

These three human actions, which constitute the matter of the sacrament, are the fruits of the virtue of penance moving the will to detest past sin as an offense to God with the intention to make amends by cooperating with his grace.⁷⁹ The sinner is justified by the

⁷⁴ Ibid., q. 86, a. 4, ad 2–3. Both eternal and temporal punishment are due for mortal sin; for venial sin, temporal punishment is due (I-II, q. 87, a. 5).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ *ST* III, q. 69, a. 2; III, q. 86, a. 4, ad 3.

⁷⁷ Ibid., q. 68, a. 5.

⁷⁸ Ibid., q. 86, a. 4, ad 3; cf. I-II, q. 113; III q. 90, a. 2. That is, insofar as this remission is an effect of the acts of the penitent (the matter), which are subordinated to the power of the keys (the form) (III, q. 86, a. 6). In this sacrament, the power of Christ's Passion "operates through the priest's absolution and the acts of the penitent, who cooperates with grace for the destruction of his sin" (III, q. 84, a. 5).

⁷⁹ *ST* III, q. 85, a. 2.

will's double movement away from sin (by penance) and toward God (by faith and charity), and this is the effect of operating grace, since God alone can turn the heart to himself.⁸⁰ Given God's divine initiative, and by the power of Christ's Passion, this conversion is sufficient for the forgiveness of the guilt of mortal sin and the remission of the debt of eternal punishment, since by it, "the aversion of the mind to God is taken away." The remission of the eternal debt is therefore the effect of operating grace.⁸¹ However, there still remains the material element of the sin: an "inordinate turning to a created good, for which some temporal punishment is due."⁸² The remission of the latter "belongs to co-operating grace, insofar as one, by bearing punishment patiently with the help of divine grace," is released from the temporal debt.⁸³ So, the full debt of punishment is not completely removed until "satisfaction in deeds," the final act of the penitent that completes the matter of the sacrament, has been freely offered in cooperation with grace, even when one has already been reoriented by the first movement of penance and charity to God.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ ST I-II, q. 113; cf. q. 111, a. 2. While God alone can bring about this conversion and, so, is the first principle of the habit of penance, its act results when we "cooperate with God operating" by servile fear, faith, hope, and love, and finally filial fear, prompting us to make amends for the offense against God (III, q. 85, a. 5).

⁸¹ ST III, q. 86, a. 4. Bruce Marshall points out that, in Thomas's understanding of justification, the remission of sins involves, on God's part, not only the will to bestow grace that transforms the penitent but also "the element of a purely forensic disposition" whereby God "covers" or forbears to punish us for past sinful acts that, though forgiven, can never be undone. So, "Aquinas cannot . . . be summoned as a chief witness for a transformational theology of justification, in opposition to a dispositional and forensic one. For him the two evidently are not opposites"; see "*Beatus vir*: Aquinas, Romans 4, and the Role of 'Reckoning' in Justification," in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 216–37, at 229, 234, 236–37. Marshall's conclusion provides a corollary to one of the arguments of this essay, that Aquinas synthesizes objective and subjective models of satisfaction: objectively, God graciously wills to forgive sins on account of Christ's satisfaction; subjectively (but also by the transforming gift of grace won by Christ on the Cross), we cooperate with God's initiative by our own charity and obedient satisfaction.

⁸² ST III, q. 86, a. 4.

⁸³ Ibid., q. 86, a. 4, corp. and ad 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid., q. 86, a. 4, ad 3. Thomas allows, though, that sometimes, as with Mary Magdalen, God "turns the human heart with such power" that all effects of sin are completely removed (q. 86, a. 5, ad 1). The *Supplement*, drawing from *In*

It is necessary for us to cooperate in offering temporal satisfaction because not only are we restored to the equality of justice by this—as in all penal compensation, willing or unwilling—but through the voluntary right ordering of our will, we imitate Christ’s charity and become more like him through suffering. As we have seen in the case of Christ, what pleases God and satisfies above all is the charity and obedience of the one who offers. Penitential temporal satisfaction is offered by one who seeks with a good will to repair their relationship with God. It is offered voluntarily out of love for God and sorrow for sin, for “charity demands that one should grieve for an offense committed against his friend, and that he should seek to make satisfaction to that friend.”⁸⁵ This makes temporal penance very different from the punishment that is exacted unwillingly by retribution, even though both belong to justice, for in penance, “we seek not only the restoration of the equality of justice, as in vindictive justice, but also and still more the reconciliation of friendship, which is accomplished by the offender making satisfaction according to the will of the person offended.”⁸⁶ Punishment voluntarily taken upon oneself or patiently accepted from God’s hand is satisfactory; indeed, satisfaction even “loses somewhat of the nature of punishment” because it is willingly offered.⁸⁷

Yet, human penitents, unlike Christ, have sinned, and so satisfaction also has a remedial aspect, helping to heal the disorder of sin by acting contrary to it.⁸⁸ The penitent is existentially in a situation that must be put right for friendship with God to reach its fullest dimension. Even after justification, his or her will is still afflicted with the remnants of sin, inordinately directed to temporal things. Van Nieuwenhove argues that, while Aquinas shares with Anselm the view that “satisfaction excludes punishment,” he more greatly emphasizes its medicinal character as a corrective to the disorder created by sin, in line with his “sophisticated theological psychology.”⁸⁹ Aquinas

IV Sent. d. 17, q. 2, a. 5, qa. 2, states that this can occur because of the intensity of the acts of charity and penance in perfect contrition. Ordinarily, though, “one cannot be sure that his contrition suffices for the remission of both punishment and guilt,” and true contrition should lead him to confess and make satisfaction in any case (*ST Supp.*, q. 5 a. 2 co. and ad 1).

⁸⁵ *ST* III, q. 84, a. 5, ad 2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, q. 90, a. 2; q. 85, a. 3.

⁸⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 87, a. 6.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, q. 87, a. 6, ad 3.

⁸⁹ Van Nieuwenhove, “Bearing the Marks of Christ’s Passion,” 282, 286, 289.

understands sin as an illness of the soul that the punishment of suffering can heal by redirecting the will back to God, and it is in light of this redirection that the restoration of the order of justice, emphasized by Anselm, takes place for Aquinas.⁹⁰ That is, freely accepted temporal suffering helps to counteract the inordinate movement to temporal things, and restores to the will the right order to the last end intended by God for rational creatures. Van Nieuwenhove examines Aquinas's most complete discussion of satisfaction in *SCG*, noting that his teaching, far from promoting any notion of penal substitution, is grounded instead in the participation of the faithful in Christ.⁹¹ By "our incorporation in Christ" in the mystical body, individual temporal suffering "may acquire a 'satisfactory' value," so that "through Christ's satisfaction we begin to participate in God's redeeming work: satisfaction is an inchoative participation in our abiding with God."⁹²

We saw in the questions on the Passion in *ST* that Thomas argues that Christ's vicarious satisfaction is extended to others only insofar as they are joined to him in the mystical body and in charity.⁹³ It is as head of the mystical body that Christ is "a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Yet, only those who are united to Christ in faith and charity are actually fully members of his body; all others are members only in potentiality. Even those who have been incorporated into Christ by baptism but have lost charity by mortal sin are actual members "only in an imperfect sense," by formless or dead faith.⁹⁴ To actually share the benefits of Christ's satisfaction, one must return by penance to a share in the charity by which he satisfies—that is, be "one in will [with him] by the union of love." Christ's vicarious satisfaction, while sufficient and superabundant objectively speaking, must nevertheless be appropriated to each individual through their own graced offering of satisfaction, and it makes that subjective satisfaction possible. Satisfaction is something only Christ's friends can offer, and that they must offer, paying the debt of temporal punishment by which they actively cooperate with grace and are transformed by it. So Christ's satisfaction avails only for those who receive and cooperate with the gifts he bestows as head.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 286.

⁹¹ Ibid. 290.

⁹² Ibid. 291. See *SCG* IV, ch. 55, no. 29.

⁹³ *ST* III, q. 48, a. 2.

⁹⁴ Ibid., q. 8, a. 3, ad 2.

But as we have also seen, Christ, in his Passion, helps his members to do so by giving them the example of his own sacrificial suffering. This not only elicits their charity but also teaches them how to offer their own satisfaction for post-baptismal sin in the sacrament of penance, following his sacrificial pattern. And this makes sense. For those whose wills are weak and passions disordered, satisfaction, insofar as it requires turning away from temporal attachments, must involve some suffering, even if voluntariness mitigates its penal character. As Thomas says in the *Compendium of Theology*, a human “can satisfy only by feeling pain in himself, and loss in external goods.”⁹⁵ And to put it simply, we cannot suffer as well as Jesus. We need him to show us how and to inspire us and help us to do so. This helps us to understand why Thomas emphasizes that, although charity was the substance of Christ’s true inward sacrifice, and although, because of the greatness of that charity, he merited human salvation from his conception, it was not only objectively but also subjectively important for us that he did suffer to satisfy for our sins. So, Christ’s suffering removed the impediments on our part that “impeded us from receiving the effect of his preceding merits.”⁹⁶

Satisfaction and Deification

The objective and subjective ways in which the Passion effects satisfaction are linked at the deepest level because both ultimately derive from the initiative of divine love by which God conforms humans to Christ by grace as his adopted children, rightly ordering them to final union with himself. That is why Thomas’s teaching on satisfaction cannot be fully understood outside of his larger picture of the deifying journey to God for the rational creature in God’s wise plan of providence. From the outset of his treatment of the Incarnation in *ST*, Thomas emphasizes its dual role not only as a remedy for sin, removing humans from evil, but also as a principle of deification, promoting them in the good. These two roles of the Incarnation correspond to the two roles of grace outlined in the *prima secundae*: grace, which flows from the Incarnate Word, both heals and elevates.⁹⁷ When he argues for the fittingness of the Incarnation, Thomas puts the latter role first: the Incarnation confers “the full participation of divinity which is true human beatitude and the end of human life . . . for ‘God became man

⁹⁵ *Compendium theologiae* I, ch. 226 (my own translation; see note 19 above).

⁹⁶ *ST* III, q. 48, a. 1, ad 2.

⁹⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 2.

so men might become God.” Secondly, it causes our liberation from the servitude of sin by Christ’s satisfaction for the whole human race.⁹⁸ Christ not only satisfies for sin but also deifies, and it could be said that one is the necessary preamble to the other in the divine plan of providence that allowed the evil of sin yet brought out of it a greater good.⁹⁹ Christ’s satisfaction works in his members to free them from all debt of punishment: “yet so we first receive in our souls the ‘spirit of adoption of sons’ . . . and afterwards, configured to the sufferings and the death of Christ, are led to immortal glory (Rom 8).”¹⁰⁰ In thinking about satisfaction in *ST*, Thomas always has in mind God’s plan to deify his adopted children and lead them to beatitude in spite of the obstacle presented by corrupt nature.

As head of the body, Christ not only offers satisfaction for his members but also gives them a participation in his own fullness of habitual grace.¹⁰¹ Grace is bestowed on Christ’s human soul “as on a universal principle for bestowing grace on human nature, according to Ephesians 1 (5–6): ‘He has graced us in his beloved Son.’”¹⁰² The Incarnation is therefore a principle of perfection in every way for human nature.¹⁰³ In *ST*, Thomas presents this perfection in terms of a progressive participation in divinity by conformation to Christ.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ *ST* III, q. 1, a. 2. The quote from Pope Leo that Thomas provides at the end of the corpus makes the final point that Christ is both cause and model for human salvation because of the union: “Were he not true God, he could not provide the remedy; were he not true man, he could not set an example.”

⁹⁹ *ST* III, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3. Cessario points out that in the *Scriptum*, Thomas “subordinates the incarnation to the requirements placed on the human race by original sin,” whereas in *ST*, his discussion is controlled by a consideration of the divine goodness (*The Godly Image*, 124). In the *Scriptum* (e.g., *In IV Sent.* d. 15, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 3) and the *SCG* III, ch. 158, Thomas defines satisfaction in terms of compensation for past sins and preservation from future ones, but there is no such clear connection to deification.

¹⁰⁰ *ST* III, q. 49, a. 3.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, q. 8, a. 5; cf., III q. 7, a. 9: “For the soul of Christ so received grace, that in a manner, it is poured out from it upon others. And so it behooved him to have the greatest grace; as fire which is the cause of heat in other things, is of all things the hottest.” In Christ’s “fullness of grace,” of which “we have all received” (John 1:16), he fulfills the role of “mediator of God and men” (1 Tim 2:5) (III, q. 7, a. 1).

¹⁰² *ST* III, q. 7, a. 10.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, q. 1, a. 6.

¹⁰⁴ See *ST* I, q. 12, a. 5; q. 43, a. 5; q. 93, a. 4; I-II, q. 112, a. 1; III, q. 23, a. 3, among other loci in *ST* related to this theme. Recent studies have underlined the importance of deification (and its relationship to adopted sonship) in Thomas’s

The grace that Christ possesses in fullness and gives to others as head, according to Thomas's mature definition in *ST*, is a participation in the divine nature that deifies its recipients and perfects them in the divine image.¹⁰⁵ This grace gives Christ's members a new relationship to God: Christ bestows on others a participation in his own sonship,¹⁰⁶ making them God's adopted children, their intellects and wills elevated by the infused virtues and gifts that all depend on charity for their operation.¹⁰⁷

A closer look at what charity is according to Thomas sheds further light on why it plays such a key role in his understanding of how Christ's satisfaction and ours bring us to the end of deification, rightly ordering us to God. It also reveals the important role of the Holy Spirit in satisfaction, which might otherwise go unnoticed. In *ST*, Thomas describes charity repeatedly in two ways: as a friendship founded on God's communication of beatitude to us that calls us into the fellowship of his Son,¹⁰⁸ and as a participation in the Holy Spirit that is an infused created virtue of the will.¹⁰⁹ These two ways of understanding charity are closely related: charity is the virtue of adopted sons that directs them to union with God in beatitude because their wills are so conformed to the Holy Spirit as to be ordered to the object of God's own love, God himself. God communicates a share in his beatitude to his adopted children through the created *habitus* of charity precisely by causing their wills to participate in the divine procession of Love that has God as end.¹¹⁰ By the gift of charity, then, God causes in us a love that moves us in freedom toward himself by a participation in the divine likeness that deifies

understanding of sanctification. For instance, see Luc-Thomas Somme, O.P., *Fils adoptifs de Dieu par Jésus Christ: La filiation divine par adoption dans la Théologie de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1997); A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Daniel Keating, "Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas," in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and J. P. Yocum (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 139–58; Daria Spezzano, *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification according to St. Thomas Aquinas*, Faith and Reason Studies in Catholic Theology and Philosophy (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁵ *ST* I, q. 93, a. 4; I-II, q. 110, a. 3.

¹⁰⁶ *ST* III, q. 23, a. 1, ad 2; a. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Charity is the root and form of the virtues, directing them to the last end (*ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 8), and the source of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (I-II, q. 68, a. 5).

¹⁰⁸ E.g., *ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 1; q. 24, a. 2.

¹⁰⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 2, ad 1; q. 24, a. 2; a. 5, ad 3; a. 7.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *ST* I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2.

the will. Charity, therefore, conforms our will to God's will.¹¹¹ Charity and obedience to God are closely allied, Thomas says, because "friends have the same likes and dislikes."¹¹² And from charity flow the gifts of the Holy Spirit that help us to be moved more perfectly by the grace of the Spirit toward the end of beatitude.¹¹³

To have the virtue of charity, then, is to have a will assimilated to the Holy Spirit and capable of being led by the Holy Spirit so as to be moved by the Holy Spirit in docility.¹¹⁴ This is an active docility that allows the person to cooperate fully with the movement of grace. Christ is the cause and model of both satisfaction and deification because he is not only the cause of grace for others but also himself the perfect model of a graced human nature in *operation*. In his fullness of grace, he has the fullness of the virtues and gifts.¹¹⁵ His human will is perfectly deified by participation in the Holy Spirit and, so, is perfectly ordered to God by charity, and it is therefore united to the divine will, in obedience even unto death. This obedience makes of Christ's human will a perfect instrumental cause of human salvation.¹¹⁶ As Corey Barnes notes, Thomas's view of Christ's satisfaction as mediator *secundum quod homo* in *ST* depends upon his mature conception of the instrumental efficient causality of Christ's human nature. The free activity of the divine Word's human will must be given its full import, for "only Christ's human will can freely will the passion as sacrifice to make satisfaction."¹¹⁷ Thus, Thomas places

¹¹¹ *ST* I-II, q. 19, a. 10. Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., notes that of the 236 places where Thomas uses the vocabulary of "conformity" in his works, "the overwhelming majority (175) is found in the context of the conformity of our wills to God"; see "Imitating God as His Beloved Children: Conformity to God and to Christ in the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas," in *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Bernhard Blankenhorn, O.P. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 110–25, at 111.

¹¹² *ST* II-II, q. 104, a. 4. Here, obedience to God is in fact demanded by natural law: since God is the first mover of wills, "all wills, by a kind of necessity of justice, are bound to obey the divine command." Sin, of course, disrupts this order of justice. Religion too is a natural virtue, and the internal sacrifice of a devout mind obedient to God is required of all.

¹¹³ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2, a. 5.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Super Rom* 5, lect. 3 (Marietti nos. 635–420), on Romans 8:14: "For whoever are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God."

¹¹⁵ *ST* III, q. 7, a. 2, a. 5.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, q. 19, a. 1.

¹¹⁷ Corey Barnes, *Christ's Two Wills in Scholastic Thought* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2012), 278. Theophil Tschিপke argues for a development in Thomas's view of the instrumentality of Christ's humanity: in

“a remarkable stress on the role of Christ’s human will in salvation. A perfect human will in obedience to God is the (instrumental) cause of salvation, crowning the fittingness of the Incarnation as the wisest means for redemption.”¹¹⁸ I would only add that this perfection is wrought by Christ’s charity giving to his human will a fullness of freedom as instrument. God the Father infused such charity into Christ’s soul from his conception that, as we have seen, “he inspired [*inspiravit*] Christ with the will to suffer for us” in the Passion.¹¹⁹ This language of “inspiration” seems to indicate that Thomas is thinking of the *instinctus* of auxiliary grace working on a will made docile by the Spirit’s gifts.¹²⁰ Indeed, in his *Commentary on Hebrews*, he says that the shedding of Christ’s blood “was by the Holy Spirit, through whose movement and instinct, namely, by the love of God and neighbor, he did this.”¹²¹ In Thomas’s treatment of charity itself, he argues that charity in a wayfarer increases by being reduced more to its act of fervent love, and so it participates more perfectly in the likeness of the Holy Spirit.¹²² This reduction to act is the work of auxiliary grace.¹²³ Christ’s will, perfectly active in charity as a *comprehensor*, was perfectly moved by *auxilium*. So, his human will, conformed to the Holy Spirit and led by the Spirit, was a perfectly operating conjoined instrument with the divine will in his suffering.

the *Summa* Thomas underlines that Christ’s humanity, as an instrument that shares in the power of his divinity, is an efficient instrumental cause of human salvation, *L’humanité du Christ comme instrument de salut de la divinité* (PhD diss., Albert-Ludwigs-Universität de Freiburg im Breisgau, 1939), introduction by B. D. de La Soujeole, trans. P. Secretan, *Studia Friburgensia*, n.s. 94. (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2003).

¹¹⁸ Barnes, *Christ’s Two Wills*, 283.

¹¹⁹ *ST* III, q. 47, a. 3. Cf., *Super Ioan* 3, lec. 3 (Marietti no. 478): The Father gave the Son for the death of the Cross both because “as the Son of God he willed for eternity to assume flesh and die for us, and he had this will from the Father. Second, because the soul of Christ was inspired by God with the will to suffer” (my own translation from the Marietti edition).

¹²⁰ For a discussion of Thomas’s use of the notion of the *instinctus* of the Holy Spirit, especially in his later works, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 206ff.

¹²¹ *Super Heb* 9, lec. 3 (my translation from the Marietti edition). Thomas is commenting on Hebrews 9:14 to explain why “the blood of Christ, who through the Holy Spirit offered himself unstained to God” is more efficacious than that of Old Testament sacrifices.

¹²² *ST* II-II, q. 24, a. 4, ad 3; a. 5, corp. and ad 3.

¹²³ Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 111, a. 2.

In this docility to the Spirit, Christ models for the faithful a union of wills with the Father that satisfies for sin and restores a rightly ordered relationship with God so that they live according to the order of justice. The penitent who “walks in love,” imitating Christ in offering satisfaction as one of “God’s beloved children” (Eph 5:1), unites his will to God again in friendship, which union *is* God’s will for him. This right ordering gives justice to God by rendering the honor that is due him precisely by freely conforming to the divine will for his salvation. As Levering points out, “God wills that rational creatures intimately share in his justice by sharing perfectly in his divine will,” which orders the universe—that is, in his divine charity.¹²⁴ Conformity to God’s wise plan gives him honor, most fundamentally, by manifesting the divine goodness. Sin hides God’s goodness by withdrawing one from the order of that goodness of which he is the source, but graced conformity to the divine ordination reveals it, giving glory and praise to God.¹²⁵ So, the virtue of penance in initial conversion is a kind of justice that can even be called a sacrifice in its act. “Insofar as it proceeds from reverence for God,” it, like the sacrifice of obedience, is governed by the virtue of religion, which gives due honor to God.¹²⁶

Christ’s Priesthood as Model of the Virtue of Religion

Here one can see the close connection in the children of God between sacrifice, satisfaction, charity, and the virtue of religion, which gives honor to God, restoring the order of justice lost by sin and, so, giving God worship and praise.¹²⁷ Sacrifice, one of the external acts of religion, is the outward expression of its essential internal acts of prayer

¹²⁴ Matthew Levering, “Juridical Language in Soteriology: Aquinas’ Approach,” *Angelicum* 80 (2003): 309–26, at 321.

¹²⁵ Cf., *ST* III, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3. R. Jared Staudt argues that, for Aquinas: sin is a “personal offense” to God, disrupting the rightly ordered obedience that is one’s deepest personal obligation to him; all sin fundamentally works against the virtue of religion; it is related to idolatry, which honors something other than God, rather than living in “the friendship created by obedience”; see “Sin as an Offense against God: Aquinas on the Relation of Sin and Religion,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 9.1 (2011): 195–207, at 195–96 and 201.

¹²⁶ *ST* III, q. 85, a. 4. Cf. II-II, q. 81, a. 4, ad 1; q. 104, a. 3, ad 1.

¹²⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 80; q. 81, a. 1, ad 4. Religion is a potential part of justice in that it offers God the special honor due him, although it cannot render all that is due. It offers honor according to a kind of justice of proportion, similar to what Thomas says about merit (cf. I-II, q. 114).

and devotion. Prayer subjects the intellect to God out of reverence.¹²⁸ It is a filial act, dependent on faith and charity, and most perfectly expressed in the Lord's Prayer, for when we call God "Our Father," we excite confidence in God's goodness by considering his charity towards us.¹²⁹ Devotion is "the will to give oneself readily to things concerning the service of God,"¹³⁰ and it is related to obedience, for one prefers God's will to one's own. Charity is the principle of religion and works through religion as a medium, causing one to worship God in order to adhere to God: "charity causes devotion (since love causes one to serve one's friend) and feeds on devotion. All friendship is safeguarded and increased by the practice and consideration of friendly deeds."¹³¹

The greatest of all such friendly deeds is, of course, Christ's self-offering out of love on the Cross, and so, as we have seen, it provides the greatest example for practical imitation, as well as the greatest object for consideration. Anticipating his treatment of the Passion, Thomas says in the earlier questions on religion that Christ's humanity is the chief incentive to devotion that leads to the love of God, especially the "consideration of Christ's Passion," which brings both sorrow for sin and joy in "God's loving-kindness to us in giving us such a deliverance."¹³² The acts of religion directed to God as Father are like those of the virtue of piety for parents, although more excellent,¹³³ and the reverence for God shown by the virtue of religion is perfected by the gift of filial fear,¹³⁴ the fear of separation from God, which makes one grow in humility, increases in proportion to charity, and is perfect in heaven.¹³⁵ Christ, who, as the Letter to the Hebrews says, "was heard by God because of his reverence," perfectly exemplifies this filial dimension of the virtue of religion elevated by the gift of fear: his soul "led by the Holy Spirit . . . had this act of

¹²⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 3, ad 3; a. 15, ad 3. It depends on faith and charity for its efficacy.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, q. 83, a. 9, ad 5.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, q. 82, a. 1.

¹³¹ *ST* I-II, q. 82, a. 2, ad 1–2. The theological virtues, whose object is God, command the acts of religion, which give honor to God, and also direct all of the other moral virtues to this end. Throughout the questions on religion, Thomas examines the way in which, under the influence of grace, religion is elevated in the context of Christian faith and, so, offers the greatest honor and true sacrifice to God.

¹³² *ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 3, ad 2; a. 4, ad 1.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, q. 101, a. 3, ad 2.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, q. 81, a. 2, ad 1.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, q. 19, a. 10; a. 11.

reverence towards God in a fuller sense and beyond all others.”¹³⁶ Christ in his Passion is thus, as the cause and model of salvation, also the model of the filial virtue of religion: he teaches us to act like true children of God.

Thomas’s treatment of Christ’s priesthood in question 22 of the *tertia pars* of *ST* presents Christ precisely in this way, as both the objective cause of satisfaction and deification and the model of the virtue of religion for the children of God. Christ’s priesthood is a specification of his headship, by which, in his humanity, he is “mediator between God and men” (a. 1). As priest, Christ accomplishes two primary things: he “bestows divine things” on the people—that is, the gift of grace, which, Thomas repeats here, confers a participation in the divine nature—and he makes satisfaction to God for sins.¹³⁷ In other words, Christ both satisfies and deifies specifically through his priesthood, as head of the body. In article 2 of the question, Thomas considers Christ’s sacrifice, as he does later in article 3 of question 48, on Christ’s Passion. Here too, he begins by quoting from Ephesians 5:2—“Christ loved us and handed himself over for us, an oblation and a victim to God in an odor of sweetness”—and he refers to the *City of God* to establish that Christ’s outward sacrifice was a sign of his inward sacrifice, connecting here as well to the idea of sacrifice as an external act of the virtue of religion. In question 48, Thomas will focus on how the sacrifice was acceptable to God because of Christ’s obedient charity, but here his attention is on the effects that it causes in us and the way in which Christ’s sacrifice as both priest and victim is a model of the perfect religion of the New Law. Christ conferred on us all the effects of the sin offerings, peace offerings and burnt offerings of the Old Law named in Leviticus, fulfilling them in a more perfect way. Through him, sins were remitted, grace was given to us to cling to God, “in which peace and salvation consists,” and we acquire the perfection of glory, in which we will be completely united to God.¹³⁸ This perfection is signified by the total holocaust of the burnt offering, which, Thomas explains in his treatment of the

¹³⁶ *ST* III, q. 7, a. 6.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, q. 22, a. 1.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, q. 22, a. 2. There is perhaps a hidden link here to Thomas’s *Commentary on Ephesians*, where, discussing Ephesians 5:2, he remarks (also with reference to Leviticus) that Christ was an “oblation and a sacrifice” in that he accomplished by the “sweet-smelling oblation” of his body what was commanded to be offered in the Old Law for sin and peace-offerings (*Super Eph* 5, lec. 1 [Marietti no. 270]).

Old Law, especially shows reverence to God, love of his goodness, and total subjection to him.¹³⁹ The priesthood of Christ “has full power for expiating sins” both because “by its virtue grace is given” to convert the sinner’s heart and remove the stain of sin and because it removes the debt of punishment by fully satisfying for sin.¹⁴⁰ It is specifically as priest and victim, then, that Christ, the head, offers satisfaction and confers all the deifying gifts needed for the journey to beatitude—the forgiveness of sins, grace, and glory. And by bringing about the exercise of the New Law of grace in us by his sacrifice, his eternal priesthood far surpasses Old Law worship.

A look at the structural context of question 22 further supports the idea that Christ’s priestly sacrifice is the model for the perfect exercise of the virtue of religion. This question falls in a section on Christ’s relation in his humanity to the Father and to us. Question 22, on Christ’s priesthood, comes after two questions on Christ’s subjection to the Father (q. 20) and his prayer (q. 21). By this placement, Thomas seems to be drawing an intentional parallel with questions on the virtue of religion discussed above. Religion itself “denotes properly a relation to God,” giving God honor as one’s source and end: by reverent worship of God, “the mind is subjected to him, wherein its perfection consists,” and so from religion comes obedience to God.¹⁴¹ Question 20 treats Christ’s relation of subjection, as human, to his Father, not only on account of the derived goodness and power of that nature itself, but especially because of his perfect obedience unto death. Question 21, on Christ’s prayer, seems to echo the questions on religion’s internal acts of devotion (the will to give oneself readily to serve God) and prayer (a filial act directing the intellect to God out of love).¹⁴² Christ, as God, did not need to pray, but as human, he did so for our instruction, to give us an

¹³⁹ ST I-II, q. 102, a. 3, ad 8: “This kind of sacrifice was offered to God specially to show reverence to His majesty, and love of His goodness: and typified the state of perfection as regards the fulfillment of the counsels. Wherefore the whole was burnt up: so that as the whole animal by being dissolved into vapor soared aloft, so it might denote that the whole man, and whatever belongs to him, are subject to the authority of God, and should be offered to Him.”

¹⁴⁰ ST III, q. 22, a. 3. I do not address here the important question of the relationship of Christ’s priesthood to the ordained priesthood, but see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., “Le sacerdoce du Christ dans la *Somme de théologie*,” trans. Robert Williams, *Revue Thomiste* 99 (1999): 75–100, and references therein.

¹⁴¹ ST II-II, q. 81, a. 1 and a. 7; q. 104, a. 3, ad 1.

¹⁴² Ibid., qq. 82–83.

example.¹⁴³ And all of his prayers were fulfilled because his will was in perfect conformity with the Father's.¹⁴⁴ Christ as priest and victim in question 22, then, can be seen as the perfect example of religion's external acts of oblation and sacrifice, flowing from internal devotion and prayer, in filial subjection to God.¹⁴⁵ Immediately prior to this section, Thomas establishes that Christ, as head, in his humanity, can efficaciously merit for others, sharing with them the grace of salvation.¹⁴⁶ Immediately after the question on priesthood comes question 23, on Christ's sonship and our divine adoption as a participation in Christ's natural filiation by which we share in Christ's union with the Father through grace and charity.¹⁴⁷ Question 24 treats his predestination (and so his exemplarity for us as predestined). Questions 25 and 26 treat our adoration of Christ and his role as mediator. The consideration of Christ's sacrifice in question 22 is set firmly in the context of the communication of deifying grace and offering of satisfaction for the members of his body through his own Spirit-led exemplary practice, as Son, of the virtue of religion. This section thus provides an illuminating bridge between questions 7 and 8 of the *tertia pars*, on Christ's grace of headship, and the later questions on his Passion.

The effects of Christ's priestly sacrifice are communicated to the faithful in all of the sacraments, which "derive their power from Christ's Passion" as conjoined instruments of his humanity. Because Christ both delivered us from sin and "inaugurated the rites of the Christian religion by 'offering himself, an oblation and victim' (Eph 5:2)" by his Passion, sacramental grace both heals the guilt of past sins and elevates the soul, "perfecting [it] in things pertaining to divine worship in regard to the Christian religion."¹⁴⁸ That is, the sacraments communicate the two (healing and elevating) effects of grace bestowed by the Incarnate Word specifically for the exercise of New Law religion, itself made possible by a participation in Christ's priesthood conferred by baptismal character. In the questions on the Eucharist especially, the interrelationship Thomas has established between Christ's priestly sacrifice, charity, satisfaction, and deification comes to fruition. Baptismal grace is directly ordained for the remission of sins (by forgiveness of guilt and satisfaction for debt) and

¹⁴³ *ST* III, q. 21, aa. 1–3.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, q. 21, a. 4.

¹⁴⁵ *ST* II-II, qq. 85–86.

¹⁴⁶ *ST* III, q. 19, a. 4, ad 3.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, q. 23, a. 3.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, q. 62, a. 5.

incorporation into Christ by the power of his Passion: the focus in the questions on Baptism is its healing effect. But this power is united to his members in a special way in the Eucharist, for “the sacrifice which is offered every day in the Church is not something other than the sacrifice which Christ himself offered, but is its commemoration.”¹⁴⁹ As the sacrament of Christ’s priestly sacrifice, the Eucharist both satisfies and deifies.¹⁵⁰ As the “sacrament of charity,” it is specifically ordained for the perfection and spiritual nourishment of the faithful through union with Christ, who is truly present, a union that will be complete in heaven. So, Thomas foregrounds the Eucharist’s elevating effects—grace and glory—before its power for the forgiveness of sins.¹⁵¹ The Eucharist’s satisfactory effect for those who receive the sacrament is secondary, produced by “a kind of concomitance” from the fervor of charity in those who are spiritually united to Christ by it.¹⁵² It can satisfy for venial sins because it excites the act of charity in the recipient, but it is not a remedy for those in mortal sin, so long as they remain cut off from charity’s union with God.¹⁵³ As in the sacrament of penance, one participates in the effects of the Eucharist according to the measure of one’s own acts. Christ’s Passion, offered up in the Eucharist as a memorial sacrifice, is itself sufficient to remit all sins and bring all to grace and glory, but just as “it has no effect except in those who are conjoined to Christ through faith and charity; so also this sacrifice, which is the memorial of the Lord’s Passion, has no effect except in those conjoined to this sacrament through faith and charity.”¹⁵⁴ The Eucharist’s satisfactory power depends—for those who offer it and for the recipients, those for whom it is offered—on “the measure of one’s devotion,” the internal act of the virtue of religion flowing from the fervor of charity.¹⁵⁵ Received with devotion, it is “the consummation of the spiritual life,” for charity is the inner reality of this sacrament, “making one perfect in union with Christ who suffered.”¹⁵⁶ In Thomas’s treatment of the Eucharist,

¹⁴⁹ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 3, ad 2.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *ST* III, q. 79, a. 5; a. 8, sc.

¹⁵¹ *ST* III, q. 79, a. 5 (note the order of articles in this question).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, q. 79, aa. 3–4.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, q. 79, a. 7, ad 2.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, q. 79, a. 5

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, q. 73, a. 3, ad 3. Reinhard Hütter examines the important role for Thomas of almsgiving as a second “pillar of the restored arc of charity” after the sacraments in those who are united to Christ’s priestly sacrifice. Almsgiv-

even more than in that of the Passion, charity comes to the fore as the way in which the faithful can be conformed to Christ crucified, who ordered his whole self in loving obedience to the Father as cause and model for human satisfaction and deification.

Conclusion

In spite of the theological and historical importance of the idea of atonement, no creed or council has formulated one exclusive interpretation of its meaning, and so, “it is possible for there to be a variety of interpretations, all of which count as orthodox.”¹⁵⁷ This seems especially true in recent times, when debate about atonement has taken on a new vigor, but it was also true for Thomas Aquinas and his contemporaries, who drew on diverse models of atonement, both objective like Anselm’s satisfaction theory and more subjective like that of Abelard. Among scholars today who accept the notion of atonement at all, many are suspicious of classical objective models that foreground the idea of Christ’s satisfaction through his suffering on the Cross. The notion that the Passion could provide compensatory payment for sin to restore the order of justice, more widely accepted in the Middle Ages, often seems to modern sensibilities to perpetuate a legalistic, impersonal, and ultimately violent view of redemption. Underlying some of these objections, perhaps, is disagreement about what it means to say that there is an order of justice in the first place.¹⁵⁸ Thomas offers the widest possible perspective: the law of justice describes God’s own wise and loving ordering of the universe, to which creatures must be conformed in order to reach their proper end. Far from opposing God’s mercy, God’s justice reveals a further aspect of the divine goodness, and this is nowhere more clearly seen than in the doctrine that Christ has won salvation by his superabundant satisfaction, allowing sinners to cooperate secondarily by loving penance in their own redemption.

Any Christian doctrine of atonement that is orthodox and robust must meet many theological demands, accounting at least for scriptural claims of the centrality of Christ’s Passion in attaining human

ing with charity is an act of both mercy and justice; see Hütter, “The Debt of Sin and the Sacrifice in Charity: A Thomistic Echo to Gary Anderson’s *Sin: A History*,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 9.1 (2011):133–48, at 145–46.

¹⁵⁷ Eleanor Stump, “Atonement and Eucharist,” in *Locating Atonement: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 209–25, at 210.

¹⁵⁸ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to develop this point.

salvation, the gravity of human sin, and the unlimited scope of God's justice and mercy. I have argued that Thomas's placement of charity at the core of his doctrine of satisfaction makes a significant contribution to this tradition of reflection, giving deeper insight into the generosity of God's plan for fallen humanity. Thomas takes seriously the existential cost of sin, for it disturbs the gift of good order in which human persons are created to flourish. The disorder sin creates is not cheaply remedied, either by Christ or by us, not because of the vengefulness of an angry divine parent, but because sin willfully and tragically averts us from God, destroying our very capacity to return to him, and because God, in the Incarnation and Passion, chooses radical means to restore us to right order again. Therefore, a theology of human sanctification cannot focus on deification alone but must take account of sin's damage. Thomas's arguments for the fittingness of Christ's satisfactory suffering in spite of its non-necessity, are, I think, most significant in this regard. That God could have forgiven sins without requiring satisfaction but willed nevertheless that Christ should suffer "most greatly shows God's mercy and justice" because, in the priestly sacrifice of his Passion, the incarnate Word shows that satisfaction is, in the end, an expression of love directed against the disorder that would separate humans from God. Integrating elements of both objective and subjective models of atonement, Thomas places satisfaction into the larger picture of the rational creature's deification by grace in God's justly ordered plan to communicate his goodness and so draws out its doxological purpose. In this, his doctrine is truly orthodox, giving right worship to God.

In his charitable sacrifice, Christ is both the objective cause of satisfaction and the model for our subjective imitation, an imitation made possible only by the power of God's own gift of grace and charity. In this, the Son restores the right order of justice, manifesting God's goodness so that we can too. For Thomas, at least, the notion of satisfaction is not tied to a legalistic or impersonal narrative of divine violence. God the Father's love and forgiveness is not grudgingly given, nor is satisfaction vindictively exacted. But the Father wants the obedient love of his children, for their own good, and for the revelation of his goodness, and this obedience carries a cost of suffering for those who are sinners on the way to salvation. And so, in God's own providence, Christ, as head of the body, "loved us and handed himself over for us" as the "immense sign of God's charity," offering the satisfaction of obedient filial love perfectly on our behalf,

stirring us to love and praise God, and giving us a model of how too to offer satisfaction and so be deified by imitating him, as “God’s beloved children.”

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