Evil, sin, and redemption (preprint)

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*The problem of evil, cosmic and angelic*

We recognize one of a pair of opposites by means of the other, Aquinas says. Just as we understand what darkness is only by reference to the notion of light, we must understand what evil is by reference to the notion of good. What is good is what is desirable. Every nature desires its own being and perfection, so we can conclude that “the being and perfection of every nature has the character of goodness.”[[1]](#endnote-1) Evil, then, cannot be a being or nature; it must be an absence of good. Not every absence of good counts as evil, however. A stone lacks the power to see, but its “blindness” is not evil: the nature of a stone has no aptitude for sight, and so it is no part of the perfection of a stone that it should see. Thus, evil is not a simple *negation* of good, but a *privation* of good; and we recognize a privation by comparing it with the fullness of being that is characteristic of a thing’s nature.[[2]](#endnote-2) Evil is a *defectus*: a falling short of, or falling away from, what is good.

The fact that evil is not a positive reality but instead a *defectus* does not mean that evil requires no explanation. On the contrary, evil is in a sense *unnatural*, and “the fact that something falls short of its natural and appropriate condition”[[3]](#endnote-3) calls out for explanation. A part of the explanation is that in order to be perfect, the whole of creation must contain creatures of every possible level of being, including creatures that can fall away from good; and from the fact that they *can* fall away from good, it follows that they sometimes *do* fall away from good.[[4]](#endnote-4) The work of divine providence is not to override nature, but to preserve it, and many goods would be lost if God did not allow creatures to fall away from being as their natures allow them to do: “Fire would not be generated if air were not destroyed, and the lion’s life would not be preserved if the ass were not killed.”[[5]](#endnote-5) In this way the *defectus* that is unnatural for a *given* thing has its appropriate place in the good of the whole, and God is the *per accidens* agent cause of evil: agent cause in that he gives things their corruptible natures, *per accidens* because he does so with a view to the good of the universe and not for the sake of the *defectus* itself. In fact, no evil of any kind has a *per se* agent cause; no agent acts for the sake of evil, but only for the sake of a good thing that brings some evil with it.

Some evil, then, is simply built into the system of the universe. Such evil – the evil that is found among what Aquinas calls “natural things” – in no way calls into question the goodness or justice of God. But there is also evil found in what Aquinas calls “voluntary things” – that is, “rational creatures that have a will” – and this evil is theoretically and practically much more troublesome.[[6]](#endnote-6) Creatures endowed with will can, and sometimes do, fall short of the good that they are apt to have and should have, not merely in the way natural things fall short, but by acts of their own wills. Such voluntary defections from the good have an explanation as well: creatures with wills are themselves the *per accidens* causes of their own wrongdoing by the exercise of their free choice. (For more on the nature of the will’s freedom, see chapters 9 and 10.) But voluntary defection demands more than an explanation; it calls out for a remedy. For voluntary defection is doubly unnatural: not only is it contrary to the nature of the individual, just as natural defections are, but it is also not necessary for the order of the universe. Nothing about the good of the whole creation requires that any individual creature have a disordered will.

Both angels and human beings have disordered wills, but there is no remedy for the disordered angelic will, which is fixed in evil (*obstinata in malo*). Aquinas explains,

To investigate the cause of this fixity in evil, we must observe that the appetitive power in all things is proportioned to the apprehensive power by which it is moved. . . . Now an angel’s apprehension differs from a human being’s apprehension in that an angel through his intellect apprehends immovably – just as we too immovably apprehend first principles, of which there is intellectual understanding – whereas human beings through reason apprehend in a movable way, reasoning discursively from one thing to another, which leaves open a path to either of two opposites. Hence, the human will also cleaves to something in a movable way, as having the power to withdraw from it and cleave to its contrary, whereas an angel’s will cleaves to something fixedly and immovably. Accordingly, if the angelic will is considered before it cleaves to something, it can freely adhere to that thing and to its opposite (as regards objects that it does not will naturally); but once it has cleaved to something, it cleaves immovably. For this reason it has customarily been said that human free choice is capable of turning to the opposite both before choice and after it, whereas an angel’s free choice is capable of turning to the opposite before choice, but not after it. And thus the good angels, always cleaving to justice, are confirmed in justice, whereas the evil angels, once they sin, are fixed in sin.[[7]](#endnote-7)

There can be, therefore, no remedy for the disorder of (some) angelic wills, short of the annihilation of the evil angels, a prospect Aquinas does not contemplate.

Some Christian writers, taking their cue from a passage in Paul’s Letter to the Romans, have held that the fall of rational creatures caused disorder in the rest of creation as well. Paul wrote:

The expectation of creation awaits the revelation of the sons and daughters of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but on account of the one who subjected it in hope, because creation itself will also be set free from enslavement to corruption, into the freedom of the glory of the sons and daughters of God. For we know that all creation groans and is in labor even until now.[[8]](#endnote-8)

Irenaeus of Lyons interpreted this passage to mean that the fall ruptured the Edenic perfection of the material creation, which will be restored when humanity too is fully restored. For Ambrosiaster, the fallen material creation suffers both because of humanity and in solidarity with humanity, and it cries out for redemption alongside us. By contrast, Augustine read “all creation” as referring only to humanity: human beings, who as spiritual, animal, and material contain within themselves every level of creation, await redemption, but the wider material universe does not share in the fall. Aquinas’s reading of the passage is broadly Augustinian, though he does allow that one possible meaning of “creation” includes the sensible creation. If we take the expression in that way, the “futility” (*vanitas*) to which creation is subjected is simply the *defectus* that comes along with mutability, which (as we have seen) is contrary to the natural appetite of each particular thing but in accordance with the general nature of things as created and ordained by God. Paul speaks of the sensible creation as “groaning,” Aquinas says, because such fallings-away are contrary to the natural appetite of individual creatures; he speaks of it as “awaiting” and “in labor” because the sensible creation is destined to be made new – not restored to a pristine natural perfection injured by the fall, as Irenaeus and Ambrosiaster would have it, but brough to a state of fulfillment that exceeds their natural capacity, just as the glory of redeemed humanity will exceed the capacity of human nature (“They will be like the angels of heaven,” as Aquinas likes to quote from Matthew 22:30).[[9]](#endnote-9)

*The problem of evil: human sinfulness*

With the angelic creation either excluded from the possibility of redemption or beyond the need for it, and the nonrational creation “groaning” only under the mutability and corruptibility that is its natural condition, only humanity’s disorder has both the need and the possibility of correction. Though this disorder entered the human race by a sin – that is, by “a thought, deed, or desire, contrary to the eternal law”[[10]](#endnote-10) – on the part of our first parents, the disorder itself goes beyond individual sinful acts; it ramifies into a complex system that we could call “sinfulness.” Our sinful condition includes original sin, the *fomes* of sin, and actual sinful acts, as well as ignorance, along with our liability to judgment and eternal condemnation. Some explanation of each of these aspects of our sinful condition will be necessary in order to understand God’s plan of repair as Aquinas expounds it.

Original sin is transmitted to all who derive their human nature by generation from Adam, which is to say, to every human being other than Jesus.[[11]](#endnote-11) All human beings descended from Adam are like members of a single body; we can even be “considered as a single human being insofar as we agree in the nature that we receive from our first parent.”[[12]](#endnote-12) Accordingly, the vitiation of our nature that Adam’s fall produced is found in all of Adam’s natural descendants, and along with it the guilt or blameworthiness (*culpa*) that attaches to it. To have original sin is therefore to be guilty and worthy of punishment.[[13]](#endnote-13)

Original sin is in part a privation – a *defectus* of the righteousness with which our first parents were originally created – but has also a positive aspect: it is a disordered disposition of the parts of the soul. Aquinas compares it to bodily sickness, which likewise is both privative, in that it is a *defectus* of health, and positive, in that it is a disordered disposition of the body, an imbalance of the humors.[[14]](#endnote-14) From this spiritual sickness follow disordered desires and disordered acts: they follow from it indirectly, insofar as the righteousness of which original sin is a privation would prevent such disordered desires and acts[[15]](#endnote-15) and ensure that the human mind is subject to God.[[16]](#endnote-16) Original sin vitiates every power of the soul that can possess virtue – it produces ignorance in reason, wickedness in the will, weakness in the irascible appetite, and immoderate desire in the concupiscible appetite[[17]](#endnote-17) – and even affects the body, making it subject to various deficiencies and ultimately to death. All of these deficiencies of both body and soul are punishments for original sin, imposed by God according to his justice.[[18]](#endnote-18) If borne voluntarily, however, for the sake of the salvation of the soul and for God’s glory, they are no longer penal, strictly speaking, but medicinal.[[19]](#endnote-19)

Not only are both soul and body wounded by sin, but the relationship between soul and body is disrupted. Commenting on Paul’s lament, “I am carnal, sold as a slave under sin” (Romans 7:14), Aquinas says that there are two senses in which human beings are carnal. The first is that the body is in rebellion against the spirit; this carnality is part of the propensity to sin – called the *fomes* – that derives from Adam’s sin. (*Fomes* means “kindling” or “tinder.” The idea is that in our damaged state only a small spark of temptation is needed to kindle the fire of rebellion against God.) The second sense in which human beings are carnal is that we sometimes consent to the wayward desires that arise from the body; this carnality derives not solely from original sin but also from actual sin. The first kind of carnality is present even in those who have been restored by grace, though the second is not. Paul says that we have been “sold as slaves under sin” because “sinners sell themselves into slavery to sin as the price of fulfilling their own wills.”[[20]](#endnote-20)

*Atonement: the remedy for human sinfulness*

The sinful condition of human beings is therefore very dire indeed, and Paul cries out to be set free from the enslavement into which Adam’s sin and our own sins have thrust us. “Wretched human being that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?” he asks; and the answer comes immediately, “The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24–25). But how does this grace work, and in what sense does it come through Jesus Christ?

In order to appreciate Aquinas’s answer to these questions, it is useful to contrast his views with those of Anselm of Canterbury, whose speculations in *Cur Deus Homo* (1094–98) informed much of the later medieval discussion of the Atonement. Anselm had arguedthat the breach between God and humanity introduced by Adam’s sin could be repaired only if humanity offered adequate satisfaction to God. Only a God-man, by the voluntary self-offering of his own infinitely precious life, could make adequate satisfaction for human sin, which is of infinite disvalue because it is an offense against the infinite majesty of God. Therefore, God had to become incarnate and offer his life for the sins of humankind in order to reconcile us to God and restore us to that fellowship with God which was God’s intention for us in creation. Only by means of this satisfaction can God’s justice be served and his loving purposes for humanity be realized.[[21]](#endnote-21)

In certain contexts Aquinas can sound very much like Anselm. In his commentary on Romans 3, Aquinas argues that because of the sin of our first father, the whole human race has become enslaved to sin and is liable to punishment. By making satisfaction for sin, someone can redeem us – buy us out of our slavery and wipe out our liability to punishment – in the way that someone who paid another person’s fine would be said to redeem him from his debt. Only Christ can offer satisfaction for the whole human race and thereby redeem it, because only Christ is free from all sin. The satisfaction Christ offers

has efficacy both for justifying and for redeeming because God had ordained him for this purpose according to his own plan. . . . God put him forward for the sake of all people, because the human race did not have the wherewithal to make satisfaction unless God himself gave them a redeemer and satisfier.[[22]](#endnote-22)

Yet although Aquinas affirms that only Christ can offer adequate satisfaction for the sin of the human race, he (along with almost all other medieval writers on the Atonement) denies that any such satisfaction was necessary: “if God had willed to liberate human beings from sin without any satisfaction, he would not have acted contrary to justice.”[[23]](#endnote-23) Even so, Aquinas argues, it was more fitting for humanity to be set free by Christ’s passion and death than by God’s will alone:

A way of attaining a given end is more fitting to the extent that that way incorporates more things that are serviceable for that end. And the liberation of humanity through Christ’s passion incorporates several things that pertain to human salvation, in addition to liberation from sin. First, through Christ’s passion human beings recognize how much God loves them and are thereby stirred to love God, which is what constitutes the completion of human salvation. . . . Second, by his passion he gave us an example of obedience, humility, constancy, justice, and other virtues. . . . Third, through his passion Christ not only freed human beings from sin but also merited for them justifying grace and the glory of happiness. . . . Fourth, his passion declares to human beings a greater urgency in keeping themselves unstained by sin. . . . Fifth, his passion brought greater dignity to humanity: just as human beings had been overcome and deceived by the devil, it would also be a human being who overcame the devil; and just as human beings had deserved death, so too a human being, by dying, would overcome death.[[24]](#endnote-24)

Since the superiority of Christ’s death as a means of reconciliation is at least in part a matter of the abundance of ways in which it effects human salvation and brings us to our ultimate end, there is no single controlling concept that does the systematic work for Aquinas that satisfaction had done for Anselm.

Note that Aquinas identifies both objective and subjective dimensions of Christ’s saving work.[[25]](#endnote-25) The objective aspects are realized independently of any human response: Christ makes satisfaction, merits grace and glory, and brings greater dignity to humanity simply by suffering and dying in the way that he did. The subjective aspects encompass the ways in which Christ’s passion effects changes in human beings: it shows the love of God and stirs us to love God in return, it gives us an example of outstanding virtue, and it impresses upon us the serious cost of sin and thereby the urgency of avoiding it. The systematic character of Aquinas’s account of Atonement is found, not in its use of a single controlling concept, but rather in the fusing together of multiple aspects of Atonement, both objective and subjective aspects, into a coherent whole. As I shall now show in detail, the objective aspects of Atonement are, for Aquinas, inextricably linked both with each other and with the subjective aspects.

*Merit, satisfaction, sacrifice, and redemption*

In the *Summa theologiae* Aquinas asks two central questions about Christ’s atoning work. First, how does his passion accomplish its effects? Second, what are those effects? Aquinas answer to the first question is that Christ’s passion accomplishes its effects in four different ways: by way of merit, by way of satisfaction, by way of sacrifice, and by way of redemption. Consider first the notion of merit. To merit is to earn a reward. Charity is the root of merit, and Christ’s human soul was graced with meritorious charity from the very moment of his conception.[[26]](#endnote-26) That merit was by itself sufficient to earn eternal salvation for us, because “Christ was given grace, not merely as an individual person, but as Head of the Church, so that grace would overflow from him into the members” of the Church.[[27]](#endnote-27) Why, then, did Christ need to suffer? Not because his charity would otherwise be too small or his merit insufficient, but because “there were obstacles on our part that were preventing us from attaining the effect of those previous merits; hence, it was fitting for Christ to suffer in order to remove those obstacles.”[[28]](#endnote-28) Sinful human beings need a vivid demonstration of God’s love that awakens an answering love in them; they need a preeminent example of “humility, obedience, constancy, justice, and other virtues”;[[29]](#endnote-29) they need to be shaken out of their complacency by being confronted with the horror of sin and its cost. All these needs are met, as we have seen, by the passion of Christ, which thus allows the objective merit of Christ to have its subjective effect.

Whereas to merit is to earn a reward, to make satisfaction for an offense is to offer to the offended party something that he loves as much as or more than he hates the offense. “By suffering out of charity and obedience,” Aquinas explains, “Christ offered God something greater than was required as a recompense for the whole offense of the human race.”[[30]](#endnote-30) It is “not merely a sufficient but indeed a superabundant satisfaction for the sins of the human race” because of the greatness of the charity with which he bore his suffering, the worth of the divine-human life that he laid down as a satisfaction, and the scope of his suffering and the greatness of his pain.[[31]](#endnote-31) And because Head and members are one mystical person, the satisfaction that Christ makes belongs to all the baptized as members of Christ.[[32]](#endnote-32) Thus note that the mystical union between Christ and his Church, into which human beings are incorporated by baptism, is a key part of the mechanism (so to speak) by which both merit and satisfaction effect human salvation. In this way Aquinas develops the Pauline theme of Christ as a second Adam. Sin is transmitted to us because we are members of one body with Adam, salvation because we are members of one body with Christ; and the dignity of human nature is restored, and more than restored, because a human being recapitulates perfectly the obedience that the first human being refused to offer.[[33]](#endnote-33)

The fact that the Incarnation was intended as a means of satisfaction helps explain why Christ, though not himself subject to original sin, was subject to the bodily failings that are the penal consequences (*poenalitates*) of original sin. Someone makes satisfaction on another’s behalf, Aquinas says, by taking upon himself the requisite punishment for the other’s sin. Bodily failings such as death, hunger, and thirst are “punishments for the sin that was introduced into the world by Adam.”[[34]](#endnote-34) It was therefore fitting that in taking on human flesh for the sake of making satisfaction, Christ should also take upon himself our liability to pain and death. But failings in the powers of the soul would have impeded his work of satisfaction, so Christ did not take on the *fomes* of sin or any of our inherited defects in the sensory appetite, will, or intellect.[[35]](#endnote-35)

Christ’s death also effects human salvation as a sacrifice:

Something done for the honor that is properly owed to God, in order to conciliate him, is properly called a sacrifice. . . . “Now Christ offered himself for us in his passion,” and this very deed – Christ’s voluntarily undergoing suffering – was in the highest degree acceptable to God, because it proceeded from charity. Thus it is clear that Christ’s passion was a true sacrifice.[[36]](#endnote-36)

It might seem that sacrifice, so understood, is difficult to distinguish from satisfaction; and indeed in the next question the notion of sacrifice is discussed in the same language, and with the same definition, that Aquinas uses to explain satisfaction.[[37]](#endnote-37) Rather than indicating conceptual fuzziness in Aquinas’s account of Atonement, however, this connection between the notions of satisfaction and sacrifice effects an integration of the Anselmian language of satisfaction with the more Scriptural language of sacrifice.

Aquinas accomplishes a still larger synthesis with the theories of his predecessors by the way he talks about redemption, the final way in which Christ’s passion effects human salvation. Redemption, like sacrifice, is a Scriptural image: to redeem is to buy back (*redimere*), to pay a price to free captives. “You were bought with a great price,” Paul says; Aquinas comments, “and therefore you are servants of the one who redeemed you from enslavement to sin.”[[38]](#endnote-38) In some places Aquinas understand redemption as Anselm did, in terms of satisfaction: “Because Christ’s passion was a sufficient and superabundant satisfaction for the sin and guilt of the human race, his passion was a sort of price by which we were set free” both from enslavement to sin and from our liability to punishment in accordance with God’s justice.[[39]](#endnote-39) Elsewhere he explains redemption in terms of merit, invoking again the mystical union between Christ and the Church.[[40]](#endnote-40)

One way of understanding human enslavement to sin is as enslavement to the devil, and Aquinas engages in a most subtle way with the venerable understanding of Christ’s passion as a payment to buy us back from the devil’s control.[[41]](#endnote-41) Some authorities held that the devil, by successfully tempting our first parents, had acquired rights over humanity. It was either necessary or at least fitting – accounts differed – for God to redeem us from Satan’s power in a way that respected Satan’s rightful claim on us. Anselm had expressed nothing but scorn for the idea that the devil had any such claim on us: though God justly handed us over to Satan’s dominion to punish us, and it was just that we be punished, Satan himself was always acting unjustly, and we remained under God’s dominion, not the devil’s.[[42]](#endnote-42)

Aquinas is enough of an Anselmian on this point that he does not even entertain the idea that the devil had *rights* over humanity. He speaks instead of the devil’s *power* over humanity, and here he shows a defter hand than Anselm’s in preserving what he can of the patristic theory. The devil’s power over humanity had three aspects: on humanity’s part, on God’s part, and on the devil’s part. Humanity deserved to be handed over to the devil, who had overcome us by tempting us; God in his justice left us in the power of the devil because we had offended against God by sinning; and the devil “by his utterly wicked will thwarted human beings from attaining salvation.”[[43]](#endnote-43) The passion of Christ frees us from the power of the devil in its first aspect by bringing about the forgiveness of sins,[[44]](#endnote-44) and in its second aspect by reconciling us with God. As for its third aspect,

Christ’s passion freed us from the devil because in Christ’s passion the devil overstepped the boundaries of the power that God had handed over to him, by conniving at the death of Christ who, being sinless, did not deserve death. This is why Augustine says in *De Trinitate* XIII that “the devil was overcome by the justice of Christ, because he found nothing worthy of death in Christ, yet he killed him. And indeed it is just that the debtors whom he had in his control should be set free by believing in the one whom he killed even though no debt was owed.”[[45]](#endnote-45)

Note that the justice at issue here is not the rights of the devil, but the righteousness of Christ, along with the poetic justice that those in Satan’s power would be set free by believing in the righteous one whom Satan unrighteously killed.

*Faith, charity, and the sacramental life*

Believing in Christ, then, is a crucial notion in Aquinas’s account of the economy of redemption. It is precisely “through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:25) that the redemptive effect of Christ’s death reaches us. And it was only through the blood of Christ that both present and past sins could be forgiven (*remitti*), “because the power of the blood of Christ works through human faith, a faith that those who lived before the passion of Christ had, just as we too have it.”[[46]](#endnote-46)

Faith in Christ is not the only means by which the benefits of Christ’s merit, satisfaction, sacrifice, and redemption are made available to human beings. Aquinas also lays great stress on participation in the sacramental life of the Church as mediating both the objective transaction and the subjective transformation that represent the completeness of Christ’s atoning work. As we have already seen, the sacrament by which we are joined to Christ and become members of his mystical Body, and thereby first receive the fruits of his redeeming work, is baptism. Aquinas speaks of our being shaped or fashioned after Christ in baptism (*conformari*, *configurari*). We are fashioned after his death in that we die to sin. What Paul calls “the old human being” – that is, the decrepitude introduced by sin, by which our nature is corrupted – is crucified with Christ, “put to death by the cross of Christ.”[[47]](#endnote-47) The guilt and stain of original sin are completely removed, and the power of the *fomes* (and even of the habit of sinning, in the case of those baptized late enough in life to have committed actual sins) is diminished.[[48]](#endnote-48) In this way we are also fashioned after the resurrection of Christ, raised to a new life of wholeness.[[49]](#endnote-49) The baptized person is liberated from enslavement to sin and has the power never to surrender to it again.[[50]](#endnote-50) Thus, the grace of baptism does not merely free human beings from past sin, both Adam’s sin and our own sins; it also gives us strength to resist future sins.[[51]](#endnote-51)

The newness of life into which the faithful are baptized is not, however, a complete restoration to Edenic perfection. The desires of the flesh remain, and although reason can resist them sometimes, it cannot resist them always; venial sin, at least, is therefore inevitable. And because of those desires “many objects strike us in such a way that we draw back from God in order to attain or to avoid them, in contempt of his commandment, and thus we sin mortally.”[[52]](#endnote-52) No one, Aquinas says, has made such spiritual progress as to be beyond the need for constant vigilance in guarding against sin.[[53]](#endnote-53)

The new life that is inaugurated in baptism is strengthened, renewed, and replenished in the Eucharist. “In this sacrament the whole mystery of our salvation is contained”:[[54]](#endnote-54) it is therefore the central sacrament of the Christian life and the means by which Christ’s redeeming work is made present and effective in us again and again.[[55]](#endnote-55) Spiritual life requires spiritual food, for the fervor of charity in us is depleted daily by the fire of concupiscence in much the same way that our body is depleted by its natural fire.[[56]](#endnote-56) The Eucharistic food, which is Christ himself, becomes one with us, just as physical food becomes one with those who are nourished by it.[[57]](#endnote-57) Through our union with Christ in the Eucharist we receive forgiveness of past sins, and our charity is increased so that we are better able to avoid future sins.

Yet we receive the effects of the Eucharist in a way commensurate with our human condition: unlike the angels, we have free choice that can be turned to either good or evil.[[58]](#endnote-58) When we freely choose evil, “the abundance of divine mercy and the efficacy of Christ’s grace do not allow the sinner to be left without recourse.” We have a remedy in the sacrament of penance. As baptism imparts spiritual life and the Eucharist spiritual nourishment, penance effects spiritual healing through Christ, “the physician of our souls.” Christ’s merit is sufficient to take away all sins, but not all who approach the sacrament of penance receive the full effect of his merit; each penitent receives forgiveness and healing to the extent that he or she is joined with Christ as suffering for our sins.[[59]](#endnote-59)

It is initially surprising to see Aquinas speaking of penitents as making satisfaction for their sins by carrying out the punishment imposed on them by the judgment of the confessor, who acts with judicial power as Christ’s representative. If Christ’s suffering really was “not merely a sufficient but indeed a superabundant satisfaction for the sins of the human race,”[[60]](#endnote-60) how can there be a place for works of satisfaction on our part? The answer to this question highlights a thread that runs throughout Aquinas’s account of Christ’s atoning work and its sacramental appropriation. What Christ does is done *for* us, but not *to* us, except insofar as we freely cooperate with divine grace in appropriating the benefits of Christ’s passion. And that appropriation is a matter of becoming more Christ-like: like Christ in his death, like Christ in his resurrection, like Christ in his perfect charity (by which alone any offering is acceptable to God), like Christ in his unstinting conformity with the divine will. When we freely submit to divine judgment and carry out a work of satisfaction, we become more like Christ in his suffering, in that we suffer something for his sake as he suffered for ours: “yet a much lesser suffering than is commensurate with the sin is sufficient, because the satisfaction made by Christ works together with our own satisfaction.”[[61]](#endnote-61)

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1. *ST* I q.48 a.1; see also *ST* I q.5 a.1. All translations are my own. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *ST* I q.48 a.5 ad 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *ST* I q.49 a.1 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. For the conception of possibility at work here, see Knuutilla 2019, pp.99–137. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. *ST* I q.48 a.2 ad 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. *ST* I q.48 a.5. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. *ST* I q.65 a.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Romans 8:19–22 (translated from the Vulgate). Tyra 2014 provides a helpful overview of patristic exegesis of this passage. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. *In Rom* cap. VIII, lect. 4, nn. 665, 668, 671. For a discussion of the issues raised by Aquinas’s account of perfect happiness and our likeness to angels, see Van Dyke 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. *ST* I-II q.71 a.6. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. *ST* I-II q.81 a.3. Aquinas denies that the mother of Jesus was conceived without original sin: *ST* III q.27 a.2. Theologians who affirm that doctrine are nonetheless in agreement with Aquinas that but for a miraculous intervention on God’s part, original sin would have been transmitted to Mary in the usual way, and that the virginal conception of her Son meant that he was free from original sin. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. *ST* I-II q.81 a.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. *ST* I-II q.81 a.1 and ad 1, 2, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. *ST* I-II q.82 a.1 and ad 1, 2; *In Rom*. cap. V, lect. 2, n. 395. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. *ST* I-II q.82 a.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. *ST* I-II q.82 aa.2, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. *ST* I-II q.85 a.3. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. *ST* I-II q.85 a.5, q.87 a.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. *ST* I-II q.87 a.7. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. *In Rom*. cap. VIII, lect. 3, nn. 560–61. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. See Williams and Visser 2009, pp.213–32, for an exposition of Anselm’s argument in *Cur Deus Homo*. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. *In Rom*. cap. III, lect. 3, nn. 307–308. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. *ST* III q.46 a.2 ad 3. Likewise at *ST* III q.1 a.2 denies the Anselmian claim that the Incarnation was necessary for humanity to be reconciled with God: “God, in virtue of his almighty power, could have restored human nature in many other ways.” Oddly, Aquinas says at *CT*  l.1 c.200 that “if God had restored human beings by his own will and power, the order of divine justice, according to which satisfaction is required for sin, would have been preserved”; whatever might account for the appearance of this claim in *CT*, it is clearly not Aquinas’s considered view. For a survey of medieval accounts of the Atonement, including a number of authors who deny the necessity of any satisfaction, see Williams 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. *ST* III q.46 a.3. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. See Crisp 2020, pp. 22–23, for a brief explanation of the use of “objective” and “subjective” in contemporary discussions of accounts of the Atonement. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. *ST* III q.34 a.3. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. *ST* III q.48 a.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. *ST* III q.48 a.1 ad 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. *ST* III q.46 a.3. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. *ST* III q.48 a.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. *ST* III q.48 a.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. *ST* III q.48 a.2 ad 1. See also *ST* III q.49 a.3. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Aquinas explores the theme of Christ as second Adam most fully in his commentaries on Paul. See especially *In Rom* cap. V, lect. 3–5 and *In I Cor* cap. XV, lect. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. *ST* III q.14 a.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. *ST* III q.15, a.2. See also *CT* l.1 c.226. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. *ST* III q.48 a.3, quoting Augustine, *City of God* X.6. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. *ST* III q.49 a.4. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. *In I Cor* cap. VI, lect. 3, 310. “Great” appears in the Vulgate but not in the Greek text or most English translations. Aquinas explains, “The price of redemption is said to be great because it is not corruptible: no, it has eternal power, because it is the blood of the eternal God himself.” [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. *ST* III q.48 a.4. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. *ST* III q.49 a.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. So subtle, indeed, that my own account of it in Williams 2021 is mistaken; the remainder of this section clears up my confusion. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. *Cur Deus Homo* I.7. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. *ST* III q.49 a.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. The passion of Christ brings about forgiveness of sins in three ways: by enkindling charity, by redeeming us as members of his mystical Body, and insofar as his flesh is an instrument of Godhead and therefore its passions and actions are effective by divine power in driving out sin: *ST* III q.49 a.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. *ST* III q.49 a.2. See also *ST* III q.46 a.3 ad 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. *In Rom* cap. III, lect. 3, n. 310. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. *In Rom* cap. VI, lect. 2, n. 479. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. *In Rom* cap. VI, lect. 2, n. 480. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. *In Rom* cap. VI, lect. 1, n. 476. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. *In Rom* cap. VI, lect. 2, nn. 484–91. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. *In Rom* cap. VI, lect. 1, n. 468. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. *ST* I-II q.109 a.8. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. *In I Cor* cap. XV, lect. 4, n. 963. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. *ST* III q.103 a.4. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. I do not have space to do justice to Aquinas’s account of the Eucharist as the ordinary vehicle by which the benefits of Christ’s passion are made available to us. For fuller accounts, see Van Nieuwenhove 2012, pp.442–444, and Stump 2003, pp.445–452. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. *ST* III q.79 a.3. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. *ST* III q.79 a.5. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. *ST* III q.79 a.6 ad 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. *SCG* IV.72. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. *ST* III q.48 a.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. *ST* III q.49 a.4 ad 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)