

## Reframing Anselm and Aquinas on Atonement

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### Abstract

Thomas Aquinas's vision of atonement is generally considered more conceptually expansive than Anselm of Canterbury's. Where Aquinas's multipartite account of Christ's passion incorporates a variety of biblical motifs, Anselm appears to narrow the focus to satisfactory debt-repayment alone. This article proposes two approaches for reframing the comparison between the two accounts. I argue first that both Anselm and Aquinas considered debt-repayment necessary but not sufficient in itself to accomplish all that is needed for the remittance of sin and the restoration of humanity. For Anselm, as for Aquinas, Christ must also liberate captives, defeat the devil, amend Adam's sin by recapitulation and win merit in which his members participate. The first reframing thus locates Anselm in much closer proximity to Aquinas than has generally been supposed. The second reframing throws light on a significant divergence between the two. I argue that the kenotic trajectory of abasement and ascent, pictured in the Philippian hymn, is put to strikingly different use by each theologian. This second reframing throws into sharp relief Aquinas's emphasis on Christ's suffering as a theological priority which Anselm does not share. Looking to Anselm's Benedictine context, I contend, yields one possible means of accounting for this departure.

### Keywords

Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, satisfaction, atonement, debt

The relative merits of Thomas Aquinas's vision of atonement in comparison with Anselm of Canterbury's is not a topic which has yielded scholarly consensus. Aquinas's improvement (or otherwise) of Anselm's 'satisfaction theory' has been variously assessed, chiefly according to the coordinates of punishment, necessity, and juridical

language as they function in each man's schema.<sup>1</sup> Largely uncontroversial, on the other hand, is the claim that Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* features a broader and more expansive soteriological nexus than does Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*. Where Aquinas's multipartite account of the fittingness, efficiency and fruits of Christ's passion embraces a variety of biblical motifs - sacrifice, merit, liberation from sin and ransom from the devil, as well as satisfaction - Anselm's tighter focus on the logic of satisfactory debt-repayment appears the narrower of the two.<sup>2</sup> Anselm's seeming neglect of the 'subjective' side of atonement can also contrast with the deeper footprint left by Aquinas's redemptive logic in his discussions of grace, sacraments and sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> In the words of Adam Johnson, Aquinas's schema has the benefit of showcasing 'the wide array of redemptive effects brought about by the Passion, each with its discrete significance and role'.<sup>4</sup> By making satisfaction only 'one aspect of Christ's salvific work', Aquinas thereby 'resists the temptation to elevate the satisfactory aspect of Christ's work into a sufficient account of our redemption', a temptation to which Anselm, apparently, succumbs.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For Anselm's and Aquinas's approach to punishment, see Rik Van Nieuwenhove, "Bearing the Marks of Christ's Passion": Aquinas' Soteriology', in Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow, eds., *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 277-302; Brandon Peterson, 'Paving the Way? Penalty and Atonement in Thomas Aquinas's Soteriology', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 15 (2013), pp. 265-283; Matthew Levering, 'Juridical Language in Soteriology: Aquinas's Approach' *Angelicum*, 80 (2003), pp. 309-326; Daniel Waldow, 'Aquinas on the Nature of Christ's Punishment and its Role in His Work of Satisfaction', *New Blackfriars*, 103 (2022), pp. 7-28; Stephan C. Hayden, 'Is the God of Anselm unloving? A response to Eleonore Stump', *Religious Studies*, 57 (2021), pp. 418-433. For the concept of necessity, see especially Jerry Bracken, 'Thomas Aquinas and Anselm's Satisfaction Theory', *Angelicum*, 62 (1985), pp. 501-530. For contrasting views on the relationship between Anselm, Aquinas and penal substitution, see Gerald O'Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 133-140; Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Van Nieuwenhove, 'St Anselm and St Thomas on Satisfaction: or how Catholic and Protestant understandings of the cross differ', *Angelicum*, 80 (2003), pp. 159-176.

<sup>2</sup> *Summa theologiae* III, q.48 a.1; a.3; a.4, trans. Laurence Shapcote OP, ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón, 10 volumes (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012-2017). Hereafter *ST*.

<sup>3</sup> Both Weiderkehr and Fiddes cite Anselm as a representative of an 'objective' atonement. Van Nieuwenhove considers Anselm's failure to address humanity's participation in Christ's saving work 'the main weakness of his theory'. Dietrich Weiderkehr, *Belief in Redemption*, trans. Jeremy Moiser (London: J. Knox Press, 1979); Paul S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: the Christian idea of atonement* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1989); Van Nieuwenhove, 'St Anselm and St Thomas', p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> Adam Johnson, 'A Fuller Account: The Role of "Fittingness" in Thomas Aquinas' Development of the Doctrine of the Atonement', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 12 (2010) pp.302-318, here at p. 317.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, 'A Fuller Account', p. 311. Emphasis mine.

Weighing up the relative merits of two theologians' soteriological accounts is not my intention here. Instead, I offer two suggestions for reframing the comparison. The first reframing undercuts the notion that Anselm considered satisfactory debt-repayment by itself a 'sufficient account of our redemption'. Much more is required in Anselm's schema for the remission of sin and the rehabilitation of humanity, including the liberation of captives, the defeat of the devil, the recapitulatory action of the second Adam and the accruing of surplus merit. What the logic of twofold debt-repayment does is to provide Anselm with the conceptual structure which shapes and brackets the other redemptive dynamics he brings to bear. Anselm's vision is thus considerably broader (and considerably closer to Aquinas's) than has often been alleged. The second reframing posits the kenotic trajectory of abasement and ascent, pictured in the Philippian hymn, as a piece of conceptual scaffolding put to strikingly different use by the two theologians. In particular, Aquinas's emphasis on the extent and magnitude of Christ's suffering is a theological priority which Anselm does not share. Approaching the two soteriological accounts by means of this second frame throws into sharper relief the far-reaching implications of Christ's salvific suffering in Aquinas's account in comparison with Anselm's, and enables some preliminary conclusions to be drawn as to the reasons behind this divergence.

### First reframing: a broader Anselmian atonement

Both Anselm's and Aquinas's accounts feature the rendering to God of something owing. In Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*, this something-owing is the honour due to God which Adam in Eden failed to give. 'To sin', Anselm states, 'is nothing other than not to render to God what is due', namely, that 'the will of every rational creature ought to be subordinate to the will of God'.<sup>6</sup> In neglecting to submit his will to God's, Adam not only disrupts the order of the cosmos but also incurs a debt, the repayment of which is twofold.<sup>7</sup> First, since neglecting to honour God 'removes from [God] what belongs to Him' (so to speak), the sinner must return to God the 'stolen' honour in a repayment 'proportional to the measure of the sin'.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, as compensation for 'the wrong which has been inflicted', the sinner 'ought to repay *more* than [the

<sup>6</sup> *Cur Deus homo* I.11, in Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (trans.), *Anselm of Canterbury*, 4 volumes (London: SCM Press, 1974-5), vol. 3, p. 67 (hereafter *CDH*). Translations are taken from this edition unless indicated. Page numbers refer to this edition.

<sup>7</sup> *CDH* I.11, pp. 67-68. David Whidden argues that this twofold remedy for sin maps on to the bipartite structure of *Cur Deus homo*: David L. Whidden III, 'Sin and the structure of Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 75 (2022), pp. 23-32.

<sup>8</sup> *CDH* I.11, p. 67; I.20, p. 86.

sinner] has stolen', that is, offer to God a gift more valuable than the sin was deleterious.<sup>9</sup> Only a member of the human race bears liability for this gift, but only God actually possesses something of sufficient value to make it, that is, God's own life.<sup>10</sup> By laying down his life as a gift of infinite value, Christ the God-Man both repays the honour due to the Father proportionate to the gravity of the sin (which Anselm takes to be almost infinite), and renders to the Father a gift whose goodness outweighs sin's demerit. Christ thereby makes superabundant satisfaction for the members of the race whose human nature he shares.

Aquinas also features a twofold debt-repayment as one of the *Summa's* multiple soteriological models.<sup>11</sup> Like Anselm, Aquinas requires that sin be remitted via a restitution proportionate to the offense. Because sin entails the disordered movement of the will, 'a movement contrary to the previous movement' is needed.<sup>12</sup> This restorative movement occurs when the sinner willingly (*simpliciter*) or unwillingly (*secundum quid*) consents to undergo 'something contrary to what he would wish', that is, punishment or pain; for 'it is just that he who has been too indulgent to his will should suffer something against his will, for thus will equality be restored'.<sup>13</sup> As in Anselm's system, though, equivalent restoration is not enough. Aquinas also requires the rendering to the Father of something more lovable than the original offense was hateful. 'By suffering out of love and obedience, Christ gave *more* to God than was required to compensate for the offense of the whole human race', and Christ's passion was therefore 'not only a sufficient but a superabundant satisfaction for the sins of the human race'.<sup>14</sup>

For neither Anselm nor Aquinas, however, does this restorative and compensatory debt-repayment alone accomplish all that needs to happen in order for sin to be remitted and humanity rehabilitated. It is as essential for Anselm as it is for Aquinas that Christ's passion not only repay what is owing to the Father but also fulfil a number of other criteria: liberating humans from slavery to sin, defeating the devil, restoring humanity's lost rectitude by recapitulation, and supplying a surplus of merit in which Christ's members can participate.

<sup>9</sup> *CDH* I.11, p. 68. Emphasis mine.

<sup>10</sup> *CDH* II.6, p. 1032.

<sup>11</sup> For the development of Aquinas's soteriology across his career, see Romanus Cessario, *The Godly Image: Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020). For the development of satisfaction between Anselm and Aquinas, see Cessario, *The Godly Image: Christ and salvation in Catholic thought from St. Anselm to Aquinas* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1990); J. Patout Burns, 'The Concept of Satisfaction in Medieval Redemption Theory', *Theological Studies*, 36 (1975), pp. 285-304.

<sup>12</sup> *ST* I-II, q.86 a.2.

<sup>13</sup> *ST* I-II, q.86 a.6; I-II, q.86 a.4.

<sup>14</sup> *ST* III, q.48 a.2. Emphasis mine. Translation slightly modified.

First, Anselm is clear that whoever pays humanity's debt must also secure the liberation of sinners from servitude both to sin and to the devil. In his *Meditatio humanae redemptionis*, the devotional companion-piece to the *Cur Deus homo*, Anselm describes the salvation won by Christ as a freedom from captivity: 'See, Christian soul, here is the strength of your salvation, here is the cause of your liberty, here is the price of your redemption. You were held captive, but in this manner you were redeemed. You were a slave, and were thus set free'.<sup>15</sup> Despite being commonly credited with eschewing the motif of the victorious Christ freeing captives by championing over the devil, Anselm no-where argues that humans do not stand in need of liberation from Satan's dominion.<sup>16</sup> While Anselm stresses in *Cur Deus homo* that the devil can have no just jurisdiction over sinful humanity – as a rebel against God's sovereignty, the devil has forfeited his rights – Anselm does not argue that the devil does not in fact exercise an illegitimate kind of dominion.<sup>17</sup> On the contrary, the devil does torment sinful humans, and although the devil has no right to do so, that torment accords with justice as far as humanity's deserts are concerned:

For humanity deserved to be punished - and by no one more fittingly than by him to whom it had consented to sinning. But the devil was not entitled to punish humanity...Hence, [it is only] in this manner the devil is said to torment humanity justly, because God justly permits this tormenting and because humanity justly suffers it.<sup>18</sup>

Sinners, in Anselm's view, certainly do need liberation from the devil's persecution. Indeed, the recapitulatory tenor of Anselm's theological imagination demands that the devil be defeated by a second Adam so as to undo the first Adam's defeat:

[Adam], who was created without sin, was placed in Paradise with an inclination toward God - placed between God and the devil, as it were - in order that he would conquer the devil by not consenting to his inducement toward sin. [This conquest would] vindicate and honour God as well as confound the devil...although [Adam] was easily able to succeed at this, he freely permitted himself - merely because of the temptation and without being compelled by any force - to be conquered according to the devil's will and contrary to the will and honour of God.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Meditatio humanae redemptionis*, in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, 6 volumes (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1940-1951), vol. 3, p. 88. Translation mine.

<sup>16</sup> Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor: an historical study of the three main types of the idea of the atonement*, trans. A.G. Hebert (London: SPCK, 1931).

<sup>17</sup> *CDH* I.7, p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> *CDH* I.7, pp. 56-57. Translation slightly modified.

<sup>19</sup> *CDH* I.22, p. 90.

Whoever pays humanity's debt, then, needs to render honour to the Father in a manner which also operates 'by defeating the devil, just as [Adam] dishonored God when he was defeated by the devil'.<sup>20</sup>

Sinners in Anselm's schema also stand in need of liberation from slavery to sin. The scriptural concept of slavery to sin looms large in Anselm's theology; it constitutes a recurring motif in the trio of dialogues penned a decade or so before the *Cur Deus homo: De veritate* (*On Truth*), *De libertate arbitrii* (*On Freedom of Choice*) and *De casu diaboli* (*On the Fall of the Devil*). In the second of these dialogues, *De libertate arbitrii*, the debate between a master and his disciple centres on the Johannine phrase 'whoever sins is a slave to sin' (John 8:34). This slavery, Anselm explains, results from the loss of the will's original *rectitudo* discarded by Adam in Eden. Had Adam retained this *rectitudo* for its own sake, he and his descendants would have been at liberty to exercise their wills in accordance with their created end. When Adam voluntarily abandoned his *rectitudo* by failing to persevere in his will to retain it, he bequeathed to his descendants a lack which results in two grave consequences. First, the will lacking *rectitudo* is no longer free to choose that which constitutes its happiness; and second, it is now like a ship without a rudder, unable to avoid running aground.<sup>21</sup> 'This servitude' Anselm summarises, 'consists in nothing other than an inability to avoid sinning'.<sup>22</sup> Sinful humanity is all the more inextricably enslaved because original *rectitudo* cannot be recovered without God's giving it afresh:

when free will deserts *rectitudo* because of the difficulty of keeping it, then, assuredly, free will subsequently serves sin because of the impossibility of recovering *rectitudo* through its own efforts...indeed, just as before having *rectitudo*, no will was able to take it without God's giving it, so upon deserting the *rectitudo* which has been received, the will is unable to recover it unless God gives it again.<sup>23</sup>

Sinful humanity's restoration thus requires returning *rectitudo* to human wills, a feat which, in Anselm's words, would be more miraculous than resurrection from the dead: 'I think it a greater miracle when God restores to the will the *rectitudo* it has deserted than when He restores to a dead man the life he has lost'.<sup>24</sup>

In Anselm's scheme, then, whoever makes satisfaction for humanity's sins needs also to liberate sinners from their servitude; first, to the devil, whose exercise of power over them, though illegitimate, is

<sup>20</sup> *CDH* I.22, p. 91.

<sup>21</sup> *De casu diaboli* 26, in *Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Hopkins and Richardson, vol. 2, p. 175.

<sup>22</sup> *De libertate arbitrii* 12, in *Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Hopkins and Richardson, vol. 2, p. 122. Hereafter *DLA*.

<sup>23</sup> *DLA* 10, pp. 120-121. Translation slightly modified.

<sup>24</sup> *DLA* 10, p. 121. Translation slightly modified.

still real; and second, to the sin which results from a lack of *rectitudo* which humans, in a rightly-ordered cosmos, should retain. Humanity's restoration also requires that Adam's descendants be furnished with fresh *rectitudo*, and it is here that the logic of recapitulation comes once again to the fore. Christ retained the *rectitudo* of his own will by obediently 'keeping' the will given him by the Father:

when the Son freely and unwaveringly kept the will which He had received from the Father, He *became obedient* to the Father *unto death* (Phil 2:8) and He *learned obedience by the things which He suffered* (Heb 5:8)...For simple and true obedience occurs when rational nature freely and without necessity keeps the will which it has received from God.<sup>25</sup>

Through his obedience, Christ the new Adam preserves the *rectitudo* which the first Adam lost. Anselm's recapitulatory aesthetic also yields further specifics as to the manner in which the first Adam's missteps are to be corrected:

If humanity sinned through pleasure, is it not fitting that it make satisfaction through distress? And if...humanity was conquered by the devil so easily that it could not have happened more easily, is it not just that in making satisfaction for sin humanity should...conquer the devil by such a difficult means that it could not be done by any means more difficult? And is it not fitting that humanity, which, by sinning, so stole itself from God that it could not have removed itself to any greater extent, should, by making satisfaction, so give itself to God that it cannot give itself to any greater extent?<sup>26</sup>

Satisfaction must be made in such a way that it overturns the devil's conquest of Adam by conquering the devil, corrects the ease and pleasure of Adam's conquest by conquering in difficulty and pain, and amends the total theft of humanity from God by way of a total gift of humanity to God. This, in Anselm's view, can only be accomplished by the laying down of a life: 'for the honour of God, someone can willingly and out of no obligation suffer nothing harsher and more difficult than death; and someone cannot at all give themselves to God to any greater extent than when they hand themselves over to death for the honour of God'.<sup>27</sup>

However, just because Christ the God-Man could perform all of these salvific acts, it does not follow that he ought. Indeed, being sinless, Christ is the only human who does not owe the Father his death: 'God does not exact His life from Him as something owed. Indeed, since there will be no sin in Him, He will not be required to die'.<sup>28</sup> If Christ

<sup>25</sup> *CDH* I.10, p. 65.

<sup>26</sup> *CDH* II.11, p. 113.

<sup>27</sup> *CDH* II.11, p. 113.

<sup>28</sup> *CDH*, II.11, p. 113.

were to lay down his life, then, it would not be as something obliged of him, but as something completely gratuitous. A gift given in such unprompted kindness accrues merit, and this merit deserves a reward. Christ, however, already possesses everything belonging to the Father (John 16:15). Deciding that it is unfitting for such a meritorious gift to go unrewarded, Anselm alights on the perfect recipients:

To whom will the Son more fittingly give the fruit and the recompense of His death than to those for whose salvation He became a man (as sound reasoning has taught us) and to whom (as we said), by dying, He gave an example of dying-for-the-sake-of justice? Surely, they would imitate Him in vain if they would not share in His merit. Or whom will He more justly make to be heirs of the reward He does not need, and heirs of His overflowing fullness, than His own kinsmen and brethren (whom - bound by such numerous and great debts - He sees languishing with need in the depth of miseries), so that what they owe for their sins may be forgiven them and what they lack on account of their sins may be given to them?<sup>29</sup>

The rehabilitation of sinners is not complete in Anselm's view without their 'sharing' in the superabundant merit earned by Christ. Sinful humans only receive the benefits of the restoration won for them in Christ by standing in the current of his surplus merit, which brims over from his 'overflowing fullness' to inundate his human family.<sup>30</sup>

To summarise: the bipartite debt-repayment which Anselm's satisfaction entails – the restitution of 'stolen' honour and the extra compensation for the 'theft' – supplies the conceptual structure which contains and scaffolds the redemptive dynamics of recapitulation, liberation and merit. The first wing of debt-repayment requires a proportional restitution of what sin 'removed'. This entails regaining the *rectitudo* which Adam lost, realigning human wills in obedience to God, and thus rendering to God the honour which ought never have been withheld. Within this frame, the logic of recapitulation is brought to bear, requiring that a second Adam correct Adam's disobedience with obedience, defeat the devil where Adam failed, accomplish with difficulty that which Adam succumbed to with ease, and purchase in pain that which Adam plundered in pleasure. This is precisely what Christ does. By maintaining his own *rectitudo* in obedience to the Father's will, he thereby liberates those under his headship from slavery to sin by restoring *rectitudo* to their wills and thus rendering honour to the Father. Yet, as Anselm stresses, retaining *rectitudo* of will in obedience 'would not be a case of giving what God does not already exact from [humanity] as a debt. For every rational creature owes this obedience

<sup>29</sup> *CDH*, II.19, p. 134.

<sup>30</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the Anselm views the redemptive potency of Christ's plenitude as bound up with the metaphor of debt: see Rachel Cresswell, 'The image of the *fons* and the role of the saints in Anselm of Canterbury's vision of redemption', *American Benedictine Review*, 73 (2022), pp. 163-181.



to God [even had they not sinned]'.<sup>31</sup> As such, this is only sufficient for the first dimension of the debt. The second wing requires making compensatory amends for having failed in the first obligation. This can only be achieved by rendering to God a gift which is great enough in value to outweigh all of sin's demerit. This gift must constitute something 'extra', that is, something not already owed to God in the first part of the debt. When Christ lays down his life, his gift actually constitutes something even greater than the 'extra' because Christ himself was under no obligation to offer it. A gift of infinite value given entirely without obligation merits a reward, and it is this abundant surplus which enables those who share Christ's nature also to 'share in his merit'.<sup>32</sup>

This reframing returns to Anselm's soteriological schema the conceptual scope which many secondary accounts have denied it. It also locates him in far closer proximity to Aquinas than has often been supposed. For Anselm, as for Aquinas, the model of twofold debt-repayment cannot function properly when denuded of the other complementary soteriological agencies needed to accomplish all that is required for the restoration of sinners. The distinctive aspect of Anselm's account, though, is the manner in which the twofold obligation acts as a structuring framework into which the other redemptive dynamics are gathered up. Where Aquinas spreads his soteriological motifs widely across the *Summa's* terrain, Anselm's are contained within the conceptual exoskeleton of what he means by 'satisfaction'.

This first reframing, then, facilitates a meeting between the two theologians. It is in the context of this meeting that a second reframing can take place, one which highlights a key juncture at which Anselm's and Aquinas's accounts diverge.

### Second reframing: abasement and ascent

The scriptural model of Christ's abasement and ascent looms large in both theologians' soteriologies. Both Anselm and Aquinas mobilise the kenotic hymn (Philippians 2:6-11) in their accounts of Christ's passion, and attention to the deployment of this motif lays bare the different emphases given by each man to the nature of Christ's self-abasement.<sup>33</sup> While the theology of kenosis is more readily associated with nineteenth- and twentieth-century theological concerns, I believe this second reframing – one which spotlights the structures of

<sup>31</sup> *CDH* II.11, p. 112.

<sup>32</sup> *CDH* II.19, p. 134.

<sup>33</sup> For an account of Aquinas's use of the Philippian hymn treating the theme of obedience, see Mark Armitage, 'Obedient unto Death, Even Death on a Cross: Christ's Obedience in the Soteriology of St. Thomas Aquinas', *Nova et Vetera*, 8 (2010) pp. 505-526, especially pp. 506-511.

humility-and-exaltation brought to bear in both accounts— can serve as a fixed point to anchor the comparison.<sup>34</sup> Framing the two accounts in terms of their use of this kenotic trajectory throws into particularly sharp relief Aquinas's departure from Anselm on the question of Christ's suffering. The conclusion of this article proposes one possible reason for this departure.

References to Philippians 2:8-9 – *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross; for which cause God also hath exalted him* (Douai-Rheims) – appear with frequency in Aquinas's treatment of Christ's passion in the *Summa* (questions 46 to 49 of the *tertia pars*). Philippians 2:8 stands alone as Aquinas's *sed contra* in several of the articles concerning the crucifixion. On the subject of 'whether Christ ought to have suffered on the cross', the *sed contra* reads: 'It is written: *He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*'.<sup>35</sup> On the subject of 'whether by his passion Christ merited to be exalted', the *sed contra* reads: 'It is written: *He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; for which cause God also exalted Him*'.<sup>36</sup> Articles concerning Christ's obedience and Christ's merit feature only the relevant parts of the quotation: on the topic of 'whether Christ died out of obedience', the *sed contra* reads: 'It is written, *he became obedient to the Father unto death*; and to the question 'whether Christ's passion brought about our salvation by way of merit', the *sed contra* responds: 'in the words of Philippians 2, *Therefore God exalted Him*'.<sup>37</sup>

The downward-motion of obedience followed by the upward-motion of exaltation functions as a template for sketching out the salvific import of each detail of Christ's passion. When Aquinas asks 'whether by his passion Christ merited to be exalted', the Philippian hymn appears not only as the *sed contra* – 'It is written: *He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; for which cause God also exalted Him*' – but also as a model for tracing the shape of Christ's exaltation in the features of his passion.<sup>38</sup> It is Christ's fourfold abasement in humility – his passion and death, the descent of his body into the tomb and his soul into hell, his shame and mockery, and his subjection to human authority – which befits a fourfold exaltation – his resurrection from the

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Gilles Emery, 'Kenosis, Christ and the Trinity in Thomas Aquinas', *Nova et Vetera*, 17 (2019), pp. 857-60; Dominic Legge, 'The Remedy for Confused Kenoticism: Aquinas as a kenotic theologian', in Michael Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer and Roger W. Nutt (eds.), *Thomas Aquinas and the Crisis of Christology* (Ave Maria, Florida: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2021), pp. 56-89. For a more critical approach, see Karen Kilby, 'The seductions of kenosis', in Karen Kilby and Rachel Davies (eds.), *Suffering and the Christian Life* (London: T & T Clark, 2019), pp. 163-174.

<sup>35</sup> *ST* III, q.46 a.4.

<sup>36</sup> *ST* III, q.49 a.6.

<sup>37</sup> *ST* III, q.47 a.2; III q.48 a.1.

<sup>38</sup> *ST* III, q.49 a.6

dead, his ascension into heaven, his enthronement at the Father's right hand, and his assumption of judiciary authority.<sup>39</sup> Philippians 2:8-11 also serves as Aquinas's scriptural justification for the third exaltation, Christ's enthronement:

it is written: *He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross: for which cause also God hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above all names*—that is to say, so that He shall be hailed as God by all; and all shall pay Him homage as God. And this is expressed in what follows: *That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.*<sup>40</sup>

In response to the question 'whether it was necessary for Christ to rise again', Aquinas indicates that the inverted arc of abasement-and-ascent is established by 'Divine Justice'. The first of the five reasons he gives for the fittingness of the resurrection states that, since it belongs to God's justice to 'exalt them who humble themselves for God's sake', consequently, 'because Christ humbled Himself *even to the death of the cross*, from love and obedience to God, it behooved Him to be uplifted by God to a glorious resurrection'.<sup>41</sup>

Aquinas employs the Johannine motif of the 'lifting up' of the Son of Man (John 3:14 and John 12:32) to suggest that it is Christ's very suffering which constitutes his exaltation. On the topic of 'whether it was necessary for Christ to suffer for the deliverance of the human race', Aquinas's *sed contra* reads: '*as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but have life everlasting*' (John 3:14).<sup>42</sup> On the topic of 'whether Christ should have suffered on the cross', Aquinas responds that Christ thereby 'prepares for us an ascent into heaven...*If I be lifted up from the earth I will draw all things to myself* (John 12:32)'.<sup>43</sup> And to the question 'whether Christ suffered at a suitable time' the second objection states that 'Christ's passion is *called* his uplifting, according to John 3: '*So must the Son of Man be lifted up*'.<sup>44</sup> The suffering of Christ not only prepares the way for his exaltation and sketches out its nature and shape; inasmuch as it bespeaks the extent of Christ's love for humanity, it *is* his exaltation.

Anselm's and Aquinas's accounts part ways here. The quantity, nature and extent of Christ's suffering are significant in Aquinas's system

<sup>39</sup> ST III, q.49 a.6.

<sup>40</sup> ST III, q.49 a.6.

<sup>41</sup> ST III, q.53 a.1.

<sup>42</sup> ST III, q.46 a.1.

<sup>43</sup> ST III, q.46 a.4.

<sup>44</sup> ST III, q.46 a.9. Emphasis mine.

in a way they simply are not in Anselm's.<sup>45</sup> For Aquinas, Christ in his humanity suffered to a maximal degree, enduring all classes of suffering from all classes of people, and experiencing maximal bodily pain and maximal spiritual sorrow.<sup>46</sup> Christ's suffering is mapped and contoured in almost every article of question 46 of the *tertia pars*. For Anselm, by contrast, though it is important that Christ's death be difficult (to overcome the ease of Adam's temptation) and painful (to overcome the pleasure of the first sin), it need not involve greater suffering than all other human suffering. Indeed, when the question is posed in *Cur Deus homo* as to whether Christ was made unhappy by sharing in humanity's misfortune, Anselm replies decidedly in the negative: 'by no means...to experience something detrimental wisely and willingly, without being compelled to, is not [a cause of] unhappiness'.<sup>47</sup> Anselm does not elaborate on the topic of Christ's putative sadness, but when he raises the question of whether Christ assumed ignorance along with other human frailties, he concludes that such ignorance would have been fruitless, since it would have contributed nothing to Christ's salvific mission.<sup>48</sup> It is reasonable to suppose that Anselm would have thought maximal suffering on the part of Christ similarly surplus to requirements.

Where Anselm makes use of the Philippian hymn in *Cur Deus homo*, moreover, the hymn does not function to lay stress on Christ's suffering. Neither trajectory, descending nor ascending, is associated with salvific suffering: rather, the passage is used to demonstrate that the inverted arc of humiliation-and-ascent is God's chosen means by which divine omnipotence should be revealed and human salvation achieved. Amid his discussion of whether the demands of obedience compelled Christ to die (chapter nine of the *Cur Deus homo*'s first book), Anselm argues that Christ's exaltation was not conditional upon his abasement. Rather, God's decision to bring about Christ's exaltation in no way other than via that abasement represents a common biblical pattern, present not only in the Philippian hymn, but also in the Psalm 109:7:

Now, after the apostle [Paul] had said 'He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross', he added: 'For this reason God has also exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name' (to which the words of David are similar: 'He drank of the stream in the way; therefore, he lifted up his head').<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> For Aquinas on suffering, see especially Van Nieuwenhove, 'Protest theism, Aquinas and suffering' in *Suffering and the Christian Life*, pp. 71–86; and Bracken, 'Of What Benefit to Himself Was Christ's Suffering?: Merit in Aquinas's Theology of the Passion', *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, 65 (2001), pp. 385–407.

<sup>46</sup> *ST* III, q.46.

<sup>47</sup> *CDH* II.12, p. 114.

<sup>48</sup> *CDH* II.13, pp. 114–115.

<sup>49</sup> *CDH* I.9, pp. 61–62. Psalms follow Vulgate numbering.

‘This addition’, he clarifies, did not mean to suggest that ‘Christ could not at all have arrived at this exaltation except by obedience unto death’, or that ‘this exaltation was conferred only as a reward for this obedience’, for Christ stands in need of no reward. Rather,;

the addition was meant in the sense that the Son, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, had decreed that He Himself would manifest to the world, in no other way than by dying, the loftiness of His omnipotence.<sup>50</sup>

Where the Philippian hymn is referenced elsewhere in chapters nine and ten of the *Cur Deus homo*’s first book, it appears in support of Christ’s freedom of choice against the charge that the Father compelled him to die.<sup>51</sup> Anselm places no notable accent on Christ’s suffering in his depiction of abasement-and-ascent. Instead, the Philippian hymn functions primarily to outline a particular divinely-instituted trajectory which can also be traced in other biblical witnesses.

Why, then, does Aquinas lay such a distinctive emphasis on the salvific value of Christ’s suffering? One possible clue lies in his multiple allusions to the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

This chapter is famous for the ‘suffering servant’ passages long subject to Christological interpretation, both exegetical and liturgical. The suffering servant motif, moreover, is one which recurs like a heartbeat throughout questions 46 to 49 of the *tertia pars*. On the topic of whether humanity was ‘freed from the punishment of sin through Christ’s passion’, the *sed contra* reads: ‘It is written, *surely he hath borne our iniquities and carried our sorrows*’ (Isa 53:4).<sup>52</sup> In arguing that ‘the pain of Christ’s passion was greater than all other pains’, Aquinas states that Christ grieved not only his own death but also the sins of all others: ‘he grieved at the one time for all sins, according to Isaiah: *surely he hath carried our sorrows*’.<sup>53</sup> And his response to ‘whether God the Father delivered up Christ to the passion’ states that the Father handed over Christ to his passion in three respects, two of which the suffering servant illuminates:

In the first way, because by His eternal will He preordained Christ’s Passion for the deliverance of the human race, according to the words of Isaiah (53:6): *The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquities of us all*; and again (Isa 53:10): *The Lord was pleased to bruise Him in infirmity*. Second, inasmuch as, by the infusion of charity, He inspired Him with the will to suffer for us; hence we read in the same passage: *He was offered because it was His own will* (Isa 53:7).<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *CDH* I.9, p. 62.

<sup>51</sup> *CDH* I.9, p. 61, p. 62, p. 64; I.10, p. 64.

<sup>52</sup> *ST* III, q.49 a.3.

<sup>53</sup> *ST* III, q.46 a.6.

<sup>54</sup> *ST* III, q.47 a.3.

Aquinas's arguments for Christ's crucifixion among thieves ('it was foretold by Isaiah [53:12]: *And He was reputed with the wicked*') and Christ's descent into hell ('he came to bear our penalty in order to free us from penalty, according to Isaiah: *Surely He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows*'), similarly look to the suffering servant for their scriptural justification.<sup>55</sup>

Aquinas's deployment of Isaiah 53 reaches beyond the questions directly concerning Christ's passion. In his discussions of the defects of body and soul proper for the Son to assume (questions 14 and 15 of the *tertia pars*), he uses Isaiah 53 to locate salvific suffering within the redemptive purpose of the Incarnation. The suffering servant features as the *sed contra* to the question of whether Christ experienced sensible pain: 'it is written (Isa 53:4): *Surely He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows*'.<sup>56</sup> To the objection that the bodily defects which are penalties for sin ought not be assumed by Christ, Aquinas replies that the penalty can be suffered by the one performing satisfaction rather than the one who earned the penalty: 'And so it was with Christ, according to Isaiah: *He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins*' (Isa 53:5).<sup>57</sup> In the same article, he clarifies that since bodily frailties are penalties for sin, it was 'useful for the end of the Incarnation that He should assume these penalties in our flesh and in our stead, according to Isaiah (53:4), *Surely He hath borne our infirmities*'.<sup>58</sup>

The suffering servant also glosses Aquinas's discussions of sacrifice. Isaiah 53 often appears where the suffering Christ is identified as a sacrificial offering. To the objection that there must have been sin in Christ, Aquinas observes that 'God made Christ sin' not in the sense that Christ became a sinner, but in the sense that God 'made Him a sacrifice for sin'; 'and in that way it is written (Isa 53:6) that *the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all* (i.e., He gave Him up to be a victim for the sins of all)'.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, another major site for allusions to Isaiah 53 is question 22 of the *tertia pars*, the question on Christ's priesthood.<sup>60</sup> To the objection that Christ could not be 'both priest and victim' because that would entail slaying himself, Aquinas responds that 'Christ did not slay Himself, but of His own free-will He exposed Himself to death, according to Isaiah (53:7): *He was offered because it was His own will*'.<sup>61</sup> On the topic of whether Christ's priesthood effects

<sup>55</sup> *ST* III, q.46 a.11; III, q.52 a.1.

<sup>56</sup> *ST* III, q.15 a.5.

<sup>57</sup> *ST* III, q.14 a.1.

<sup>58</sup> *ST* III, q.14 a.1.

<sup>59</sup> *ST* III, q.15 a.1.

<sup>60</sup> For Christ's priesthood, see Peter J. Leithart, 'Christ's Christened into Christ: Priesthood and Initiation in Augustine and Aquinas', *Studia liturgica*, 29 (1999) pp. 68-83.

<sup>61</sup> *ST* III, q.22 a.2.

the expiation of sins, Aquinas argues that the stain of sin is cleansed and the debt of punishment satisfied by Christ's offering, appealing to the suffering servant in support of the latter: 'he satisfied for us fully, inasmuch as *He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows* (Isa 53:4)'.<sup>62</sup> Aquinas uses Isaiah 53 to yoke Christ's suffering not only to the purpose of the Incarnation, but also to Christ's priestly office, his identity as the sacrificial victim, and the redemptive effects of his self-offering.

Yet is this preferential evocation of Isaiah 53 not simply a case of standard scholastic proof-texting? Can we not observe a similar frequency of reference to other biblical passages relevant to the themes of suffering and sacrifice, such as Ephesians 5:2?<sup>63</sup> A glance at Aquinas's commentary on Isaiah, I contend, suggests a weightier role for the suffering servant, namely, that of aligning the salvific power of Christ's suffering directly with the kenotic trajectory of descent-and-ascent. Aquinas deliberately structures a large part of his commentary on Isaiah's fifty-third chapter after the pattern of abasement and exaltation (deliberately, since Philippians 2:8-9 appears several times in direct quotation). For Aquinas, the opening verses of Isaiah 53 depict Christ's descent into humility, and the subsequent verses Christ's exaltation and triumph. The biblical prophet therefore illustrates Christ's salvific work by twofold 'similitude': 'first as to his humiliation' and 'second as to his exaltation'.<sup>64</sup> The 'humiliation' section of the 'similitude' treats first Christ's humility (Isa 53:2-3), then, the contempt Christ suffered in humiliation (Isa 53:3-4), and third, the fruit of his humiliation (Isa 53:3).<sup>65</sup> After this exposition of 'the humility of his passion', the chapter then 'begins to set out the glory of his exaltation, which is the reward of his passion, as it says in Philippians 2:9: *for which cause, God also has exalted him*'.<sup>66</sup> Aquinas reads the next verses of Isaiah 53 as detailing the various aspects of Christ's exaltation: 'first, as to his escape from dangers (Isa 53:9)', 'second, as to vengeance against his enemies (Isa 53:9)', 'third, as to the justification of men (Isa 53:10)', and 'fourth, as to his victory over the rebellious (Isa 53:12)'.<sup>67</sup> In the second exaltation, Aquinas declares that Christ was vindicated 'as to the obedience of his death', *and the Lord, the Father, was pleased*

<sup>62</sup> *ST* III q.22 a.3.

<sup>63</sup> See Dario Spezzano, "'Be Imitators of God'" (Eph 5:1): Aquinas on Charity and Satisfaction', *Nova et vetera* 15 (2017), pp. 615-651.

<sup>64</sup> *Expositio super Isaiam ad litteram (Literal Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah)*, trans. Louis St Hilaire (2019), used with permission by The Aquinas Institute Inc., accessed September 30, 2022, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Isaiah>, cap. 53, n.957. Hereafter *Isa*.

<sup>65</sup> *Isa* cap. 53, n.957-964.

<sup>66</sup> *Isa* cap. 53, n. 957-970.

<sup>67</sup> *Isa* cap. 53, n.970.

(Isa 53:10), and he was obedient to the Father unto death: *becoming obedient unto death* (Phil 2:8).<sup>68</sup>

The embeddedness of the suffering servant within the skeletal structure of the kenotic hymn casts light upon Aquinas's insistence on the maximal extent of Christ's suffering. Christ's suffering, as signaled by the figure of Isaiah 53, is redemptive (at least partly) inasmuch as it traces the pattern of abasement and ascent expressed in the Philippian hymn. It is as the manifestation of this trajectory that all aspects of Christ's suffering bear redemptive power, since it is according to this trajectory that a descent to the maximal reaches of pain and sorrow is matched by an ascent to the uttermost heights of grace and glory.

If this is a plausible means of accounting for Aquinas's emphasis on the suffering of Christ, it remains to be explained why the same connections did not occur to Anselm. The only citations of Isaiah 53 in *Cur Deus homo* appear in reference to Christ's free will (Isaiah 53:7, '*he was offered because it was his own will*').<sup>69</sup> In fact, the suffering servant appears fewer than half a dozen times in Anselm's entire corpus. How, then, to account for this absence? There are several possibilities. One would be to underscore the role of sacrifice in Aquinas's account (a concept which Anselm hardly touches). It would be tempting to argue that the burgeoning enthusiasm for Eucharistic devotion which characterised Aquinas's thirteenth-century environs drew the attention of theologians to the office and powers of the priesthood.<sup>70</sup> Matthew Levering has argued that the period's fascination with the Hebrew Bible may have been responsible for the significance of Old Testament figures in Aquinas's atonement account.<sup>71</sup> Or, perhaps it could be attributed to the aftermath of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, whose emphasis on the moral and spiritual education of the laity prompted the fleshing out of penitential theologies and the training of priestly confessors, particularly within Aquinas's own Dominican Order.<sup>72</sup> These explanations, however, are in danger of attributing to Anselm's own eleventh and twelfth centuries a relative lack of interest in Eucharistic theology

<sup>68</sup> *Isa* cap. 53, n.972.

<sup>69</sup> *CDH* I.10, p. 66; II.17, p. 127.

<sup>70</sup> The classic, though imperfect, study is Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in late medieval culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). See also Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Power in the Blood: Sacrifice, Satisfaction and Substitution in Late Medieval Soteriology', in Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (eds.), *The Redemption: an interdisciplinary symposium on Christ as redeemer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Stephen E. Lahey, 'Late Medieval Eucharistic Theology', in Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy and Kristen Van Ausdall (eds.), *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 499–539.

<sup>71</sup> Matthew Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

<sup>72</sup> See William H. Campbell, 'Confession and Penance', in *The Landscape of Pastoral Care in 13th-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 140–168.



and the office of the priesthood – something which is manifestly not the case for a period which witnessed an energetic speculative renewal in precisely these areas.<sup>73</sup>

Perhaps a more persuasive explanation can be found in Anselm's Benedictine context. The salient aspect of the Philippian hymn's trajectory for Anselm is not Christ's suffering, but rather his humility. As a Benedictine, Anselm would have heard almost daily the injunction to climb the 'twelve degrees of humility' marked out by the *Regula Benedicti*, steps by which 'we descend by exaltation and ascend by humility'.<sup>74</sup> The twelve degrees of humility are marked by signs of self-abasement, from the monk who accepts the most menial and humiliating work without complaining (sixth degree), and the monk who 'not only admits with his tongue but is also convinced in his heart that he is inferior to all and of less value' (seventh degree) to the one who 'manifest[s] his humility in his bearing no less than in his heart', and who goes about the world with bowed head and downcast eyes (twelfth degree).<sup>75</sup> So fundamental were the degrees of humility to Anselm that he wrote his own amended version, with seven degrees rather than twelve.<sup>76</sup>

In Benedictine monasteries like Anselm's Bec, moreover, ritualised acts of humility functioned as a crucial mechanism for reconciliation. The ordinary disciplinary procedure for rehabilitating a wrongdoer was a combination of confession and prostration: a kind of performative self-abasement. After committing a fault, even a sin as small as displeasing a more senior member of the community, the offender should 'then and there without delay' 'cast himself on the ground at the other's feet'.<sup>77</sup> Following more serious offenses such that the perpetrator required readmission to communion, the *Regula* stipulates that he prostrate himself in the monastery church before the abbot and the whole community, and that he to do so at every Office until the abbot invite him to rise.<sup>78</sup> Benedictines such as Anselm would have been accustomed to the notion that performing humility by self-abasement was in itself the mechanism for the reparation of a wrongdoing and the

<sup>73</sup> See Gary Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period: a study of the salvific function of the sacrament according to the theologians, c. 1080-c. 1220* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

<sup>74</sup> *Regula Benedicti*, trans. Timothy Fry as *RB 1980: the Rule of St Benedict in Latin and English with notes* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1981), 7.7, pp. 192-193. Hereafter *RB*.

<sup>75</sup> *RB* 7.51, pp. 198-199; 7.62-6, pp. 200-201.

<sup>76</sup> *Liber Anselmi Archiepiscopi de humanis moribus per similitudines*, ed. Southern and Schmitt as *Memorials of St Anselm* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 101-8, p. 81.

<sup>77</sup> *RB* 71.8, pp. 292-293.

<sup>78</sup> *RB* 44.4-5, pp. 244-247; 44.8, pp. 246-247.

rehabilitation of the wrongdoer. Indeed, it is this very performance of humility which the *Regula* terms '*satisfacere*'.<sup>79</sup>

Where the first reframing located Anselm and Aquinas at a point of convergence, then, the second reframing highlights the divergence which can follow from differing interpretative approaches to a shared scriptural image. Aquinas interprets Isaiah 53 as tracing the blueprint of the Philippian hymn, and so Christ's suffering, as mapped out by the suffering servant, is an inalienable element of Christ's abasement and ascent. Anselm's understanding of Christ's kenotic descent, on the other hand, was shaped by the categories of Benedictine monastic observance, in which the restorative power of humility lay not in the extent of the suffering it entailed, but simply in the self-abasement which cancelled out the sinner's pride. The magnitude of Christ's suffering thus features only cursorily in Anselm's account, where for Aquinas, it constitutes a crucial index of the efficacy of Christ's passion, the loftiness of his elevation and the infinity of his love. When the two theologians are seen to stand on the common ground of the multiplicity of redemptive motifs they employ, their differing usages of shared biblical phrases become all the more evident. These two reframings can thus offer useful coordinates for replotting the similarities and differences between Anselm's and Aquinas's soteriological accounts. The contrasting associations attached to common biblical images, and the imprint left by those associations on the two men's theological reflections, can shed fresh light on the junctures at which Aquinas and Anselm meet, and those at which they part.

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<sup>79</sup> For the Benedictine roots of *Cur Deus homo*, see Guy Mansini, 'St. Anselm, "Satisfac-tio", and the "Rule" of St. Benedict', *Revue Bénédictine*, 97 (1987), pp. 101-121; Nicholas Cohen, 'Feudal Imagery or Christian Tradition? A Defense of the Rationale for Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*', *The Saint Anselm Journal* 2 (2004), pp. 22-29; Whidden, 'The Alleged Feudalism of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* and the Benedictine Concepts of Obedience, Honor, and Order', *Nova & Vetera* 9 (2011), pp. 1055-1087.