

**THE WORK OF CHRIST**  
**Part II: The Medieval and Reformation Church**

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**I. INTRODUCTION.**

What think ye of Christ? This can quite logically be extended to the question: What think ye of Christ's death? The person of our Lord is theologically inseparable from His work and is a paramount doctrine of our faith. In the Ancient Church elements, fragments, of an atonement satanward are evident, particularly in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa; but a propitiatory act focused Godward appears to have been the prevailing view from Irenaeus to Augustine.

The purpose of this lesson is to trace the doctrine of the nature and objective of the atonement through the Medieval Church and into the fringes of the Reformation, with special focus upon the classical period of the doctrine's development from Anselm onward.

**II. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH.**

**A. The Work of Christ Before the Schoolmen.**

**1. Gregory the Great (540–604)**

This significant bishop of Rome, commonly recognized as the first pope by Protestants, placed great stress upon the idea of sacrifice offered in the death of Christ. He starts from the concept of guilt, and from this derives the necessity of a theanthropic sacrifice. In chapter 17 of *Moralia* designated as "the complete test synthesis of Latin theology on the Atonement," he wrote: "Guilt can be extinguished only by a penal

offering to justice. But it would contradict the idea of justice, if for the sin of a rational being like man, the death of an irrational animal should be accepted as a sufficient atonement. Hence, a man must be offered as the sacrifice for man; so that a rational victim may be slain for a rational criminal. But how could a man, himself stained with sin, be an offering for sin? Hence a sinless man must be offered. But what man descending in the ordinary course would be free from sin? Hence, the Son of God must be born of a virgin, and become man for us. He assumed our nature without our corruption. He made himself a sacrifice for us, and set forth for sinners his own body, a victim without sin, and able both to die by virtue of his humanity, and to cleanse the guilty, upon grounds of justice.”

Gregory has no traces of a satisfaction rendered to Satan, but a penal substitutionary sacrifice rendered to God for sinners. Mozley stated (*Atonement*, 125): “Gregory’s concern with the problem of sin, guilt and redemption leads him to an appreciation of the expiatory value of the cross.”

## 2. **John of Damascus (d. 794)**

As indicated previously, Greek patristic thought culminates in his writings, particularly *The Orthodox Faith*. He regards the death of Christ as a sacrifice offered on the sinner’s behalf and in the sinner’s place to the Father, rejecting a Ransom to Satan view. He wrote (III, 27): “Since our Lord Jesus Christ was without sin, ‘because he hath done no iniquity, he who taketh away the sin of the world, neither was there deceit in his mouth,’ He was not subject to death, even though death had by sin entered the world. And so for our sake He submits to death and dies and offers Himself to the Father as a sacrifice for us. For we had offended Him and it was necessary for Him to take upon Himself our redemption that we might thus be loosed from the condemnation—for God forbid that the Lord’s blood should have been offered to the tyrant!”

In the commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians he speaks of the cause of grace being the goodness of God, the way of redemption through the blood of Christ. He also speaks, as do earlier Fathers, of Christ’s life as the restoration of humanity after the image of God (IV, 4): “The Son of God became man in order that He might again grace man as He had when He made him. For He had made him to His own image, understanding and free, and to His own likeness, that is to say, as perfect in virtues as it was possible for human nature to be, for these virtues are, as it were, characteristics of the divine nature—freedom from care and annoyance, integrity, goodness, wisdom, justice, freedom from all vice. Thus, He put man in communion with Himself and through this communion with Himself raised him to incorruptibility, ‘for He created man incorruptible.’

But, since by transgressing the commandment we obscured and canceled out the characteristics of the divine image, we were given over to evil and stripped of the divine communion. ‘For what fellowship hath light with darkness? Then, since we had been removed from life, we fell subject to the destruction of death. But, since He had shared with us what was better and we had not kept it, He now takes His share of what is worse, of our nature I mean to say, that through Himself and in Himself He may restore what was to His image and what to His likeness, while also teaching us the virtuous way of life which He has made easy of ascent for us through Him, and that, having become the first fruits of our resurrection, He may by the communication of life free us from death and restore the useless and worn-out vessel, and so that, having called us to the knowledge of God, He may redeem us from the tyranny of the Devil and by patience and humility teach us to overthrow the tyrant.’”

As a general summary of the lack of theological development from Gregory and John of Damascus to Anselm (800–1100), Mozley wrote (*Atonement*, 125): “The five centuries which separate Gregory from Anselm were not of a character to promise theological learning and penetrating thought. The only writer of outstanding genius to illuminate these dark ages was John Scotus Erigena—though to ascribe to his works the quality of illumination is scarcely correct. But soteriology is not a chief concern of his, at least in reference to the death of Christ, for his system as a whole might be described as a mystical soteriology, inclining toward pantheism.”

## **B. The Work of Christ in the Schoolmen.**

As stated previously the period from Anselm through the Reformation is the era of the classical development of the doctrine of the atonement, particularly through Anselm and Abelard to Luther and Calvin.

### **1. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109)**

Professor Denny (*The Atonement and the Modern Mind*, 116) has called Anselm’s classic, *Cur Deus Homo*, “the truest and greatest book on the atonement that has ever been written”; Harnack stated “no theory so bad had ever before his day been given out as ecclesiastical.” Gonzalez wrote (*History*. II, 166): “With Anselm a new era began in the history of Christian thought.” Anselm’s development of the doctrine has these features:

- a) The foundation for understanding the atonement to Anselm is the awful weight of sin that falls upon man. Sin, being an offense against God’s honor, cannot be unpunished if no reparation is

made. He wrote (*Cur Deus Homo*. I, 21): “Let us suppose that you do not owe all those things which you just now brought forward, and that you can therefore pay them in amends for sin; and then let us see whether they could suffice to make satisfaction for one sin, however small, when that one act is considered as opposed to the will of God.

“B. Did I not hear you bring this forward as a question, I should consider that one movement of compunction would cleanse me from that sin.

“A. You have not yet considered the exceeding gravity of sin.”

Or again (*Cur Deus Homo*. I, 22): “Man, created innocent and placed in paradise, was, as it were, stationed between God and the devil, that he might conquer the devil by not consenting to his persuasions to sin, for the vindication and honour of God, and to the confusion of the devil, had he, the weaker, on earth, not sinned when tempted by the same devil, who being the stronger had sinned, in heaven, without being tempted; now, when man could easily have done this, he being coerced by no power, voluntarily suffered himself to be overcome by persuasion alone at the will of the devil and against the will and honor of God.

“B. What are you aiming at?

“A. Point out yourself, whether it be not against the honour of God that man should be reconciled to him after the scandal of this insult caused to God, unless he should first have honored God by conquering the devil, in like manner as, being vanquished by the devil, he had dishonored God. But the victory should be such that whereas when strong and immortal in power he consented easily to the devil and sinned, whence he justly incurred the penalty of mortality; so when mortal and weak as he had made himself he should through the agony of death so conquer the devil as to be himself perfectly sinless; which he cannot do as long as by the wound of the first transgression he is conceived and born in sin.

“B. I assert again both that reason proves what you say, and that this is impossible.”

- b) Man hence is indebted to God, not to the devil, and God’s justice demands reparation. He wrote (*Cur Deus Homo*. I, 11): “This is

the debt which angels and men owe to God: paying which, none sins; and every one who does not pay it, does sin. This is uprightness, or rectitude of will, which constitutes the just or upright in heart, that is, in will; this is the sole and whole honour which we owe to God, and which God requires from us. Only such a will, when it can act, can do works pleasing to God; and when it cannot act, it pleases by itself alone, since no work is pleasing without it. Whoever renders not unto God this due honour, takes away from God that which is His, and does God dishonor; and this is sin. Also, as long as he does not repay what he took, he remains in faulty; nor is it enough only to repay what was abstracted, but he ought for the insult done to return more than he took. For as it does not suffice, when one injures the health of another, to give him back his health, unless he make him some compensation for the injury of the suffering he has caused him: so, if one injures another's dignity, it is not sufficient that he rehabilitate that dignity, unless he restore something to give pleasure to the injured in proportion to the injury of the dishonor done. And this is also to be noted: that when anyone repays what he took unjustly, he ought to give somewhat which could not have been required of him had he not taken that which was another's. Thus, therefore, each sinner ought to repay the honour of which he has robbed God; and this is the satisfaction which every sinner ought to make to God."

God could not simply forgive a debt without any satisfaction, for this would be surrendering to disorder. Again (*Cur Deus Homo*. I, 12): "True is that which you state to His freedom, will, and benevolence; but we ought so reasonably to understand these as that we may not seem to impugn His dignity. For freedom is only as to what is expedient or fitting; nor is that to be called benignity which affects anything unworthy of God. And what we say—that what He willeth is right and what He doth not will is wrong, is not so to be understood, as if, should God will something inconsistent, it would be right because He willed it. For it does not follow that if God would lie it would be right to lie, but rather that he were not God. For no will can ever desire to lie except one in which truth is obscured, nay rather which is injured by deserting truth. Therefore, when it is said, 'If God will to life:' it is nothing else but 'If the nature of God be such that He desire to lie,' and thereupon it does not follow that deceit is right, unless it be so understood as when we say, speaking that: and as this is not, so neither is that; for instance, if one were to say, 'If water be dry, fire is damp;' neither being true, therefore it is true to say, 'If God wills it, it is right,' of such things only as it should rain, then it is right that it should rain; and if He wills any man should be slain, it is right he should be

slain. Wherefore, if it beseemeth not God to do anything unjustly or irregularly, it appertaineth not to His freedom, benignity, or will, to forgive, unpunished, the sinner who hath not paid to God that of which he robbed Him.”

- c) Man, however, is incapable of rendering satisfaction to God’s alienated honor; only God could render such a satisfaction. Anselm found resolution in the God-man (*Cur Deus Homo*. II, 7):

“A. But the divine and human natures cannot be so mutually interchanged as that the divine shall become human and the human divine; nor so intermingled as that out of two shall be made a kind of third, which shall be neither altogether divine nor altogether human. In fact, if it could be, that each should be changed into the other, there would either be only God and not man, or only a man and not God. Or if they could be so mingled as that out of two natures, both altered, a certain other third might arise (as of two individual animals, masculine and feminine, of different species, is born a third, which inherits the whole nature of neither father nor mother, but a third made up of both), this person would neither be God nor man. Therefore the God-man whom we are seeking cannot be made either by the conversion of one into the other, or by the commixture of both into a third, defacing both—for either were impossible; and even if possible, either result would be useless for the object of our search. But in whatever way these two natures be said to enjoined, it is be still so that God is not the same as man, it is impossible that both should do what is necessary to be done. For God will not do it, because He ought not, and man will not, because he cannot; therefore that God and man may do this, it is needful that the same person shall be perfect God and perfect man, who shall make this satisfaction; since he cannot do it unless he be very God, nor ought, unless he be very man. Thence, since it is necessary, preserving the entirety of either nature, that a God-man should be found, no less needful is it that these two natures should meet in one being: which can be done in no other way but that the same person should be perfect God and perfect man.

“B. I agree with all you say.”

**N.B.** Anselm can be criticized from our viewpoint at two places: (1) Anselm focuses on offended honor; we upon offended

righteousness and (2) Anselm stresses satisfaction or punishment (God is either satisfied or is wrathful); we stress satisfaction through punishment or punishment. He rightly stresses the atonement as the goal of the incarnation, a ransom to God and a substitution.

2. **Abelard of Paris (1079–1142).** Shedd wrote (*History*. II, 287): “We perceive immediately, in passing from the writings of Anselm to those of Abelard, that we are in communication with a very different spirit. Attributes like that of justice, and facts like that of sin, are far less transcendent in their meaning and importance. The atonement is looked at from a much lower level.” Abelard’s theory is usually designated as the Moral Influence or Example Theory of the Atonement.
  - a) Abelard’s atonement pivots on the mighty axis of the benevolence of God, so stressed as to do violence to His holiness. Shedd wrote (*History*. II, 287), “There is nothing in the Divine Nature which necessitates a satisfaction for past transgression, antecedently to remission of penalty.” Abelard wrote: “Now it seems to us that we have been justified by the blood of Christ and reconciled to God in this way: through this unique act of grace manifested to us in that his Son has taken upon himself our nature and preserved therein in teaching us by his word and example unto death—he has more fully bound us to himself by love; with the result that our hearts should be enkindled by such a gift of divine grace, and true charity should not now shrink from enduring anything for him....Our redemption through Christ’s suffering is that deeper affection in us which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but also wins for us the true liberty of sons of God, so that we do all things out of love rather than fear....Let the foregoing suffice as a summary of our understanding of the manner of our redemption.”
  - b) God requires not justice but repentance whereby he remits transgression. Gonzalez wrote (*History*. II, 170), “Abelard developed a theory according to which the work of Christ consists in providing an example and teaching of the love of God.”
  - c) The life and sufferings of Christ were intended to exert a moral impression upon the impenitent heart whereby it is melted into contrition and then finds favor in the love of God. Gonzalez said (*History*. II, 170), “This example is such that it moves man to love God, who in turn forgives man on the basis of that love and of the intercessory prayers of the resurrected Christ.”

**N.B.** Criticism of Abelard's view comes from several quarters: (1) salvation is based on an emotional attitude, not satisfaction; (2) God's harmony of attributes are destroyed; (3) there is no need for Christ's death; (4) it is based on a weak view of sin; and (5) it is an elitist view of salvation because there is no hope for the hardened sinner.

**3. Thomas Aquinas (1224/25)** is quite helpful in his treatment of the atonement as to its nature, but contradicts himself at the level of procurement.

a) Aquinas speaks of a satisfaction view of the atonement in that He paid the debt of sin to God. He wrote (*Summa Theologia*. Q. 49, Article 2, pt. III): "It would seem that we were not delivered from the power of the devil through Christ's Passion. For he has no power over others, who can do nothing to them without the sanction of another. But without the Divine permission the devil could never do hurt to any man, as is evident in the instance of Job (1 and 2), where, by power received from God the devil first injured him in his possessions, and afterwards in his body. In like manner it is stated (Matthew 8:31, 32) that the devils could not enter into the swine except with Christ's leave. Therefore the devil never had power over men; and hence we are not delivered from his power through Christ's Passion."

Again (*Summa Theologia*. Q. 49, Article 3, pt. III): "I answer that, Through Christ's Passion we have been delivered from the debt of punishment in two ways. First of all, directly—namely, inasmuch as Christ's Passion was sufficient and superabundant satisfaction for the sins of the whole human race: but when sufficient satisfaction has been paid, then the debt of punishment is abolished. In another way—indirectly, that is to say—in so far as Christ's Passion is the cause of the forgiveness of sin, upon which the debt of punishment rests."

Again (*Summa Theologia*. Q. 48, Article 5, pt. III): "I answer that, Man was held captive on account of sin in two ways: first of all, by the bondage of sin, because (John 8:34): Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin; and 2 Peter 2:19): By whom a man is overcome, of the same also he is the slave. Since, then, the devil had overcome man by inducing him to sin, man was subject to the devil's bondage. Secondly, as to the debt of punishment, to the payment of which man was held fast by God's justice; and this, too, is a kind of bondage, since it savors of bondage for a man to



suffer what he does not wish, just as it is the free man's condition to apply himself to what he wills".

"Since, then, Christ's Passion was a sufficient and a superabundant atonement for the sin and the debt of the human race, it was a price at the cost of which we were freed from both obligations. For the atonement by which one satisfies for self or another is called the price, by which he ransoms himself or someone else from sin and its penalty, according to Daniel 4:24: "Redeem thou thy sins with alms". Now Christ made satisfaction, not by giving money or anything of the sort, but by bestowing what was of greatest price—Himself—for us. And therefore Christ's Passion is called our redemption."

He speaks of the atonement as both satisfaction and the accumulation of merit (one by active obedience, the other passive). Shedd says (*History*. II, 310): "We find in the theory of Aquinas an anticipation of the later distinction between active and passive righteousness of Christ."

- b) Aquinas seems to confound things when he grounds the atonement in both Christ's satisfaction and the sacrament of baptism (*Summa Theologia*. Q. 49, Article 4, pt. III): "As stated above (A, 1, ad 4, 5), in order to secure the effects of Christ's Passion, we must be likened unto Him. Now we are likened unto Him sacramentally in Baptism, according to Romans 6:4: For we are buried together with Him by baptism into death. Hence no punishment of satisfaction is imposed upon men at their baptism, since they are fully delivered by Christ's satisfaction. But because, as it is written (1 Peter 3:18), Christ died but once for our sins, therefore a man cannot a second time be likened unto Christ's death by the sacrament of Baptism. Hence it is necessary that those who sin after Baptism be likened unto Christ's suffering by some form of punishment or suffering which they endure in their own person; yet, by the co-operation of Christ's satisfaction, much lighter penalty suffices than one that is proportionate to the sin."

Shedd stated (*History*. II, 312-13): "Not with standing all that he has said, and well said, respecting the claims of justice, and the vicarious satisfaction of the Son of God, Aquinas, as does the subsequent Tridentine scheme, vitiates all that he has hitherto maintained on these points, by teaching that the remission of sin depends to a certain extent upon the character and conduct of the individual, as a ground, or procuring cause. The confusion of justification with sanctification, which we have observed in some

passages of Augustine, re-appears in Aquinas in a more distinct and settled statement. In conformity with this view, Aquinas represents the expiatory value of the atonement as dependent upon the believer's conformity to law. In order that the satisfaction of Christ may be an adequate one for the sinner, he must be 'configured' to Christ. The atonement is not sufficient alone and by itself. It must be supplemented by personal character and good works, and in some cases by penances. This 'configuration' to Christ, requisite in order that His satisfaction may be complete, is brought about in a sacramental manner by baptism. In case of sin after baptism, the believer must be 'configured' to Christ by a personal suffering in the form of penance, as well as by the acceptance of the sufferings of the Redeemer. Aquinas concedes that the suffering of Christ is of far greater value than that of the man himself, yet plainly teaches that the latter enters as a co-operating factor with the former, in laying the foundation for the remission of the committed sin."

#### 4. Other Schoolmen.

- a) **Peter Lombard's (1100–60)** view is captured by Shedd who tells us (*History*. II, 289): "Lombard's real views were the same as those of Abelard, and the fact that the work of Christ must be supplemented by baptism and penance accounts for the remarkable popularity which the *Liber Sententiarum* has always enjoyed in the Papal Church."
- b) **Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153)** stands within the Anselmic view rather than that of Abelard. He rejected any concept of Satanic satisfaction and that remission of sins may occur by a sovereign act of will without any satisfaction of the claims of the law. He differs from Anselm in that the atonement is not an absolute necessity, being based upon the divine nature, but based upon the optional will and arrangement of God.
- c) **Bonaventura (1217–74)**. The Italian scholastic-mystic, is essentially Anselmic. Shedd summarized him as follows (*History*. II, 294-95): "Redemption by the method of legal satisfaction is the most fitting method, because God is both merciful and just, and consequently both attributes should be manifested and maintained together. Hence it was fitting that God should demand satisfaction for the dishonor and injury done to himself by man's transgression, and if man could not render this satisfaction, to provide a Mediator who could satisfy for him and in his stead. If God had been inherently unwilling to pardon sin, and had inexorably insisted

upon the infliction of penalty upon the criminal, he could not have manifested his attribute of mercy. If, on the other hand, he had pardoned sin without any satisfaction of law, he could not have manifested his attribute of justice. Thus the method of forgiveness though a satisfaction is the most befitting, taking into view the entire nature and character of God. But the same fitness is apparent if we take into view the nature and character of man.”

Bonaventura, like Bernard, Hugo of St. Victor and Aquinas, held that the form of the atonement was of relative, not absolute, necessity.

- d) **John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265–1308)** maintained that the atonement, relative to the sin of mankind, was an arbitrary and constituted one. God accepted Christ’s sacrifice because He so pleased, not due to its intrinsic value. Because he rejected sin as infinite demerit, he could see Christ’s suffering as of finite value (i.e., no payment of a debt; no justice vindicated). Luther would reply (*Works*, 10, 465): “Among the distinguished teachers there are some who say that forgiveness of sins and justification by grace consist entirely on divine imputation, that is, in God’s accounting it sufficient that he to whom He reckons or does not reckon sin is justified or not justified from his sins by this . . . . If this were true, the whole New Testament would be nothing and in vain. And Christ would have labored foolishly and uselessly by suffering for sin. Thus even God Himself would have practiced more humbug and trickery unnecessarily . . . . Against this horrible, terrible understanding and error the holy apostle has the custom of always referring to faith in Christ.”

### III. THE WORK OF CHRIST IN THE REFORMATION.

#### A. In the Roman Catholic Church.

The Romish statement of their estimate of the death of Christ was most vividly delineated at Trent as religious Europe became polarized into two dissident camps, Protestant and Catholic. While Catholics and Protestants agreed theologically upon the doctrines of the person of Christ, both preincarnate and incarnate, they sharply divided over the meaning of his death. This was the issue of the Reformation.

1. The Tridentine theory makes inward holiness in conjunction with the merits of Christ the ground of justification; that is, the Romanists fuse justification and progressive sanctification. The Reformers stated that

forgiveness of sin is distinct and different from the sanctification of the heart! Shedd wrote (*History*, II, 322): “The Council of Trent resolved justification into sanctification, and in the place of a gratuitous justification and remission of sins through the expiation of the Redeemer, substituted the most subtle form of the doctrine of justification by works that has yet appeared or that can appear.”

2. The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent are quite deceiving, note article VII on Justification. “This disposition, or preparation, is followed by Justification itself, which is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just, and of enemy a friend, that so he may be an heir according to hope of life everlasting.

“Of this Justification the causes are these: (1) the final cause indeed is the glory of God and of Jesus Christ, and life everlasting; while (2) the efficient cause is a merciful God who washes and sanctifies gratuitously, signing, and anointing with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance; but the meritorious cause is his most beloved, only-begotten, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when we were enemies, for the exceeding charity wherewith he loved us, merited Justification for us by his most holy Passion on the wood of the cross, and made satisfaction for us unto God the Father; (3) the instrumental cause is the sacrament of baptism, which is the sacrament of faith, without which [faith] no man was ever justified; lastly, the alone (4) formal cause is the justice of God, not that whereby he himself is just, but that whereby he maketh us just, that to wit, with which we, being endowed by him, are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and we are not only reputed, but are truly called, and are just, receiving justice within us, each one according to his own measure, which the Holy Ghost distributes to every one as he wills, and according to each one’s proper disposition and co-operation.”

The Reformers rejected this view arguing that in this view man is not justified at the bar of justice by his external acts of obedience to the moral or ecclesiastical law, but by an inward, spiritual act, an act of faith. Through Christ’s merits, God works in the sinful soul to will and to do, and by making it inherently just justifies it. But in the Romish view there is no atonement to justice, no absolute payment. It denies the doctrine of satisfaction for a progressive embetterment.

**N.B.** Thomas Hooker, the Congregational Puritan, spoke to the issue precisely (*Works*, II, 538): “Then what is the fault of the church of Rome? Not that she requireth works at their hands which will be

saved: but that she attributeth unto works a power of satisfying God for sin.”

Justification, in the Romish view, was a renewing, sanctifying act on the part of God, not a declarative one (i.e., sin is not pardoned, but purged!).

3. This concept is made even more evident in the anathematizing clauses which were added in the *Dogmas and Decrees of Trent* to explain and guard the “faith.” Canon IX reads: “For God forsakes not those who have been once justified by his grace, unless he be first forsaken by them. Wherefore, no one ought to flatter himself up with faith alone, fancying that by faith alone he is made an heir, and will obtain the inheritance, even though he suffer not with Christ, that so he may be also glorified with him.”

Again, Canon XI: “If any one saith, that the sacramental absolution of the priest is not a judicial act, but a bare ministry of pronouncing and declaring sins to be forgiven to him who confesses; provided only he believe himself to be absolved, or [even though] the priest absolve not in earnest, but in joke; or saith, that the confession of the penitent is not required, in order that the priest may be able to absolve him: let him be anathema.”

Canon XI states: “If any one saith, that bishops have not the right of reserving cases to themselves, except as regards external polity, and that therefore the reservation of cases hinders not, but that a priest may truly absolve from reserved cases: let him be anathema.

Canon XXIV is explicit: “If any one shall assert that the righteousness received [in justification] is not preserved and also increased before God by good works; but that good works are only the fruit and signs of a justification already attained, and not the cause of an increase of justification: let him be accursed.”

**N.B.** Thus, from a Romish viewpoint the death of Christ is not an absolute, penal satisfaction. The effect of the atonement is not instantaneous, but gradual. It does not absolve guilt, but provides a basis for progressive sanctification; this is so because to the papist sin is not guilt, but only a disease, a pollution. Inward holiness which is said to precede succeeds the forgiveness of sins is made to take the place of the atoning death and the imputed righteousness of the Redeemer. The Romish view of the Atonement is simply a Satisfaction View that does not satisfy God’s righteousness!

## B. In the Protestant Tradition.

As stated previously, the nature and implications of the death of Christ was the major issue in the Sixteenth century. Christ substituted by His death for the sinners guilt; God was propitiated cried the Reformers! The Catholics said no: Christ's death infuses us to receive grace through the sacraments and gain merit, that is to merit the merit of Christ! The issue of the nature of the atonement is the heart of the gospel itself!

1. **Martin Luther (1483–1546).** It is little wonder then that Luther's great theme was "justification by faith alone". He caught the issue of his day. Luther, like all the Protestant Reformers, is essentially Anselmic in his grasp of the cause and nature of the atonement.
  - a) Luther predicates the atonement on the character of God in light of his offended righteousness. His attributes demand retribution; He is simply not able to forget. His love is manifest within the context of all His many-faceted attributes. The forgiveness of sinners must be consistent with His person. He wrote (*Works*. X, 121): "All this does not take place for nothing or without the satisfaction of God's righteousness; for mercy and grace cannot be thought of as being effective over us and in us or as helping us to eternal blessings and salvation unless God's righteousness has previously been completely satisfied . . . for no one can come to God's rich grace unless he has absolutely and completely satisfied God's commandments."
 

Again (*Works*. X, 470): "Now although God purely out of grace does not impute our sins to us, still he did not want to do this unless his law and his righteousness had received a more than adequate satisfaction. This gracious imputation must first be purchased and won from his righteousness for us."
  - b) Luther finds the righteous demands of God met fully in a penal substitution ("Jesus Christ, God's only Son, Into our place descending"). He wrote (*Works*. X, 49): "Christ, the son of God stands in our place and has taken all our sins upon his shoulders . . . He is the eternal satisfaction for our sin and reconciles us with God, the Father." Again (*Works*. XXIX, 578), "Christ has taken our place."
  - c) The nature of this penal satisfaction is two-fold: first, it fulfills the will of God expressed in the law and, second, He suffers the punishment of sin, the wrath of God. Althaus has a remarkable comparison between Luther and Anselm (*Theology of Martin*

*Luther, 203*): “For Anselm, there were only two possibilities, either punishment or satisfaction. For Luther, satisfaction takes place through punishment, not of the sinner but of Christ. The punishment of sin consists in God’s wrath together with all that this wrath brings upon men. So Christ stands under God’s wrath. He suffers it in his passion. He dies the death of a sinner. But, unlike us sinners, he suffers and dies an ‘innocent and pure death.’ Thereby he has ‘paid God’ and brought it about that God takes his wrath and his eternal punishment away from us.”

In a moving section Luther wrote (*Works*. XXXIV, 91): “I, Dr. Martinus Luther, unworthy evangelist of our Lord Jesus Christ, I say that this article (faith alone, without any and all works, makes one righteous before God) shall be allowed to stand and to remain . . . Let that be my Dr. Luther’s inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the real holy Gospel. For this is the very article which the children pray, ‘I believe in Jesus Christ, crucified, dead,’ etc.

“No one has died for our sins except only Jesus Christ, God’s Son—only Jesus, God’s Son. And once again I say, Jesus, God’s Son, alone, has redeemed us from sin. That is certainly true and is the whole of Scripture, and even if all the world and the devils tear themselves and burst, it is still true. If, however, it is He alone who takes away our sin, then it cannot be with our works.

“It is indeed impossible for me to grasp and attain to this one and only Redeemer from sin, Jesus, except through faith. He is and remains beyond the grasp of works. Since faith alone, before any works follow it, can lay hold of this Redeemer, so it must be true that only faith, before and without works, grasps hold of this redemption, which means nothing else but becoming righteous. For to have been redeemed from sin or to have sin forgiven must be the same as being or becoming righteous, etc.

“Good works, however, follow such faith or redemption or forgiveness of sin or righteousness as the fruit of faith. That is our teaching, as is taught by the Holy Spirit and all of holy Christendom, and with this we remain in God’s name. Amen.”

- d) Lutheranism has reflected Luther’s concept of the atonement. The fourth article of Augsburg states: “Also they teach that men can not be justified [obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness] before God by their own powers, merits, or works; but are justified freely [of grace] for Christ’s sake through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and their sins forgiven for

Christ's sake, who by his death hath satisfied for our sins. This faith doeth God impute for righteousness before him. Romans 3 and 4."

Luther's *Small Catechism* simply stated (Article 11): "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord; who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned man, secured and delivered me [even] from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood, and with his innocent sufferings and death; in order that I might be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead, and lives and reigns forever. This is most certainly true."

#### IV. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to trace the doctrine of the Atonement in the classical period of its development. The period is inaugurated by Anselm and his delineation of the atonement as a satisfaction to appease the dishonor of God's righteousness based on the necessity of God's nature. Bernard and Bonaventura follow Anselm, but base the atonement in the optional, not absolute plans of God. To them the atonement was not necessitated by God's own character. Abelard, followed by Lombard, holds to a non-substitutionary, example (mystical) view. Aquinas is Anselmic; Lombard is Abelardian, but both anticipate Trent and classic Romanism by linking justification with progressive sanctification, a weak view of sin (e.g., disease or pollution) inevitably leads to a perversion of the atonement (Aquinas, Lombard, Scotus, and Rome). A man with ability simply does not need a penal substitute. Rome sees it clearly; why does not Protestantism?. Luther is Anselmic, but he clarifies his mentor with two crucial words: penal (not only Gods honor, but righteousness is offended) and alone (not gracious enablement, but grace). Selah!