

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

Summary:

- I. INTRODUCTION.**
- II. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH.**
 - A. The Work of Christ Before the Schoolmen.
 - B. The Work of Christ in the Schoolmen.
- III. THE WORK OF CHRIST IN THE REFORMATION.**
 - A. In the Roman Catholic Church.
 - B. In the Protestant Tradition.
- IV. CONCLUSION.**

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 lie:' 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 to 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. 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 is 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): “Notwithstanding 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

sinner's 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 God's honor, but righteousness is offended) and alone (not gracious enablement, but grace). Selah!

THE WORK OF CHRIST
Part III (Cont'd): The Reformation Church

Summary:

- I. INTRODUCTION.**
- II. THE WORK OF CHRIST IN THE REFORMATION (SIXTEENTH CENTURY).**
 - A. Martin Luther and the Atonement.
 - B. Calvin, Calvinism, and the Atonement.
 - C. The Church of England and the Atonement.
- III. THE WORK OF CHRIST IN THE POST-REFORMATION (SEVENTEENTH CENTURY).**
 - A. Faustus Socinius and the Atonement.
 - B. Hugo Grotius and the Atonement.
 - C. The Arminians and the Atonement.
- IV. CONCLUSION.**

I. INTRODUCTION.

The gospel of Christ, in terms of its ultimate meaning and significance, pivots on the mighty axis of the nature of sin and the nature of Christ's death. These two doctrines, like the facts which they represent, are mutually inseparable. If sin is merely a disease, non-constitutional, then the atonement should aim toward a non-constitutional purpose (i.e., moral influence, example theory); if, however, sin is constitutional (i.e., guilt), then the atonement must be a penal satisfaction. These concepts are crucial to understanding the gospel. The period from Anselm through the Reformation is the era of the development of the nature of Christ's death. As the previous lesson plan traced the atonement from Anselm to Luther, this lesson shall attempt to trace the same topic from Calvin to the rise of the Arminians.

II. THE WORK OF CHRIST IN THE REFORMATION (SIXTEENTH CENTURY).

- A. Martin Luther and the Atonement.**
- B. Calvin, Calvinism, and the Atonement.**
 - 1. John Calvin and the Atonement**

Calvin's concept of the atonement is clearly Anselmic with the advantage of clarification and refinement. Both stress the purpose of the incarnation

and the unique importance of the God-man as effecting a penal substitution. A classic passage of Calvin is found in (*Institutes*. II, 16.6):

“The very form of the death embodies a striking truth. The cross was cursed not only in the opinion of men, but by the enactment of the Divine Law. Hence Christ, while suspended on it, subjects himself to the curse. And thus it behoved to be done, in order that the whole curse, which on account of our iniquities awaited us, or rather lay upon us, might be taken from us by being transferred to him. This was also shadowed in the Law, since . . . , the word by which sin itself is properly designated, was applied to the sacrifices and expiation offered for sin. By this application of the term, the Spirit intended to intimate, that they were a kind of *katharmaton* (purifications), bearing, by substitution, the curse due to sin. But that which was represented figuratively in the Mosaic sacrifices is exhibited in Christ the archetype. Wherefore, in order to accomplish a full expiation, he made his soul to . . . , i.e., a propitiatory victim for sin (as the prophet says, Isaiah 53:5, 10), on which the guilt and penalty being in a manner laid, ceases to be imputed to us. The Apostle declares this more plainly when he says, that ‘he made him to be sin who knew no sin; that we might be made righteousness of God in him’ (2 Cor. 5:21). For the Son of God, though spotlessly pure, took upon him the disgrace and ignominy of our iniquities, and in return clothed us with his purity. To the same thing he seems to refer, when he says, that he ‘condemned sin in the flesh’ (Romans 8:3), the Father having destroyed the power of sin when it was transferred to the flesh of Christ. This term, therefore, indicates that Christ, in his death, was offered to the Father as a propitiatory victim; that, expiation being made by his sacrifice, we might cease to tremble at the divine wrath. It is now clear what the prophet means when he says that the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6); namely, that as he was to wash away the pollution of sins, they were transferred to him by imputation. Of this the cross to which he was nailed was a symbol, as the Apostle declared, ‘Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ’ (Galatians 3:13, 14). In the same way Peter said, that he ‘bare our sins in his own body on the tree’ (1 Peter 2:24), inasmuch as from the very symbol of the curse, we perceive more clearly that the burden with which we were oppressed was laid upon him. Nor are we to understand that by the curse which he endured he was himself overwhelmed, but rather that by enduring it he repressed, broke, annihilated all its force. Accordingly, faith apprehends

acquittal in the condemnation of Christ, and blessing in his curse. Hence it is not without cause that Paul magnificently celebrates the triumph which Christ obtained upon the cross, as if the cross, the symbol of ignominy, had been converted into a triumphal chariot. For he said, that he blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross: that, 'having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it' (Colossians 2:14, 15). Nor is this to be wondered at; for, as another Apostle declared, Christ, 'through the external Spirit, offered himself without spot to God' (Hebrews 9:14), and hence that transformation of the cross which were otherwise against its nature. But that those things may take deep root and have their seat in our inmost hearts, we must never lose sight of sacrifice and ablution. For, were not Christ a victim, we could have no sure conviction of his being *apolutrosis*, *antilutron*, *kai hilasterion*, our substitute-ransom and propitiation. And hence mention is always made of blood whenever Scripture explains the mode of redemption: although the shedding of Christ's blood was available not only for propitiation, but also acted as a laver to purge our defilements."

Differences do emerge between Anselm and the Reformers (particularly Calvin). First, three general differences, then one particular difference.

- a) All the Reformers stressed faith to a great degree within the idea of substitution. Shedd stated (*Systematic Theology*. II, 366), "The soteriology of the Reformation, while adopting with equal heartiness this objective view of the Anselmic theory, unites it in a greater degree than did this latter, the subjective element of faith."
- b) Anselm stressed satisfaction of the honor of God, while the Reformers stressed satisfaction of the righteousness of God, a penal sacrifice.
- c) Anselm stressed satisfaction or the alternative wrath of God, while Calvin and Luther stressed satisfaction through punishment or the alternative wrath of God.
- d) Calvin differs from Anselm relative to the active and passive obedience of Christ. While Anselm saw the atonement based solely in Christ's death, the passive aspect, Calvin saw Christ providing the atonement through

his life and death. Shedd explained (*History*. II, 343):
“Hence not only that obedience to God his father which He exhibits in His passion and death but also that obedience which He exhibited in voluntarily subjecting Himself to the law and fulfilling it for our sakes is imputed to us for righteousness.” Calvin wrote (*Institutes*. II, 16.5):

“When is it asked then how Christ, by abolishing sin, removed the enmity between God and us, and purchased a righteousness which made him favourable and kind to us, it may be answered generally, that he accomplished this by the whole course of his obedience. This is proved by the testimony of Paul, ‘As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous’ (Romans 5:19). And indeed he elsewhere extends the ground of pardon which exempts from the curse of the law to the whole life of Christ. ‘When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law’ (Galatians 4:4, 5). Thus even at his baptism he declared that a part of righteousness was fulfilled by his yielding obedience to the command of the Father. In short, from the moment when he assumed the form of a servant, he began, in order to redeem us, to pay the price of deliverance. Scripture, however, the more certainly to define the mode of salvation, ascribes it peculiarly and specially to the death of Christ.”

N.B. Calvin’s emphasis of active obedience appears difficult to grasp; the Scriptures place imparted righteousness as emanating from the cross. However, active obedience is crucial and without it there could be no cross. The life he lived qualified Him to die the death He died, but the life itself was not of itself propitious.

2. Calvinism and the Atonement. A few examples of Calvinist creeds will be given to sustain that the Reformed Tradition follows the precepts of its mentor.

a) The Scots Confession of 1560 has a lovely section on Christ’s death (*Creeds of Christendom*. 9, 169-70):

“That our Lord Jesus offered Himself a voluntary sacrifice unto His Father for us, that He suffered contradiction of sinners, that He was wounded and plagued for our transgressions, that He, the clean innocent Lamb of God,

was condemned in the presence of an earthly judge, that we should be absolved before the judgment seat of our God; that He suffered not only the cruel death of the cross, which was accursed by the sentence of God; but also that He suffered for a season the wrath of His Father which sinners had deserved. But yet we avow that He remained the only, well beloved, and blessed Son of His Father even in the midst of His anguish and torment which He suffered in body and soul to make full atonement for the sins of the people. From this we confess and avow that there remains no other sacrifice for sin; if any affirm so, we do not hesitate to say that they are blasphemers against Christ's death and the everlasting atonement thereby purchased for us."

b) The Belgic Confession of Faith, 1561 stated (*Creeds*. 21, 202-203):

"We believe that Jesus Christ is ordained with an oath to be an everlasting High-Priest, after the order of Melchizedek: who hath presented himself in our behalf before his Father, to appease his wrath by his full satisfaction, by offering himself on the tree of the cross, and pouring out his precious blood to purge away our sins; and the prophets had foretold. For it is written, He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed; he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and numbered with the transgressors; and condemned by Pontius Pilate as a malefactor, though he had first declared him innocent. Therefore, he restored that which he took not away, and suffered the just for the unjust, as well in his body as in his soul, feeling the terrible punishment which our sins had merited; insomuch that his sweat became like unto drops of blood falling on the ground. He called out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And hath suffered all this for the remission of our sins. Wherefore we justly say with the Apostle Paul, that we know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified; we count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord: in whose wounds we find all manner of consolation. Neither is it necessary to seek or invent any other means of being reconciled to God, than this only sacrifice, once offered, by which believers are made perfect forever. This is also the reason why he

was called by the angel of God, JESUS, that is to say, SAVIOUR, because he should save his people from their sins.”

- c) **The Second Helvetic Confession** of 1566 follows Calvin, but does not stress the active obedience of Christ in the atonement, being based “solely on account of Christ’s sufferings and resurrection” (*Creeds*. 15, 255-56):

“We Are Justified on Account of Christ. Now it is most certain that all of us are by nature sinners and godless, and before God’s judgment-seat are convicted of godlessness and are guilty of death, but that, solely by the grace of Christ and not from any merit of ours or consideration for us, we are justified, that is, absolved from sin and death by God the Judge. For what is clearer than what Paul said: ‘Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus’ (Romans 3:23f.).”

“Imputed Righteousness. For Christ took upon himself and bore the sins of the world, and satisfied divine justice. Therefore, solely on account of Christ’s sufferings and resurrection God is propitious with respect to our sins and does not impute them to us, but imputes Christ’s righteousness to us as our own (2 Cor. 5:19ff.; Romans 4:24), so that now we are not only cleansed and purged from sins or are holy, but also, granted the righteousness of Christ, and so absolved from sin, death and condemnation, are at last righteous and heirs of eternal life. Properly speaking, therefore, God alone justifies us, and justifies only on account of Christ, not imputing sins to us but imputing his righteousness to us.”

- d) **The Heidelberg Catechism, 1563** has a particularly instructive section (*Creeds*. II, 307-308, 311):

“Q.12. Since, then, by the righteous judgment of God we have deserved temporal and eternal punishment, how may we escape this punishment, come again to grace, and be reconciled to God?
A. God wills that his righteousness be satisfied; therefore, payment in full must be made to his righteousness, either by ourselves or by another.

“Q.13. Can we make this payment ourselves?

A. By no means. On the contrary, we increase our debt each day.

“Q.14. Can any mere creature make the payment for us?

A. No one. First of all, God does not want to punish any other creature for man’s debt. Moreover, no mere creature can bear the burden of God’s eternal wrath against sin and redeem others from it.

“Q.15. Then, what kind of mediator and redeemer must we seek?

A. One who is a true and righteous man and yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is at the same time true God.

“Q.16. Why must he be a true and righteous man?

A. Because God’s righteousness requires that man who has sinned should make reparation for sin, but the man who is himself a sinner cannot pay for others.

“Q.17. Why must he at the same time be true God?

A. So that by the power of his divinity he might bear as a man the burden of God’s wrath, and recover for us and restore to us righteousness and life.

“Q.18. Who is this mediator who is at the same time true God and a true and perfectly righteous man?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is freely given to us for a complete redemption and righteousness.”

“Q.37. What do you understand by the word ‘suffered’?

A. That throughout his life on earth, but especially at the end of it, he bore in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race, so that by his suffering, as the only expiatory sacrifice, he might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and might obtain for us God’s grace, righteousness, and eternal life.”

N.B. This Catechism stresses both active and passive obedience (311):

“Q.36 What benefit do you receive from the holy conception and birth of Christ?

- A. That he is our Mediator, and that, in God's sight, he covers over with his innocence and perfect holiness the sinfulness in which I have been conceived."

C. **The Church of England and the Atonement.**

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England does not have a particular section devoted to the meaning of Christ's death, but it does contain scattered statements. Article II reads: "Who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men." Again (Article XI), "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour." Article XV states:

"Christ in the truth of our nature was made like unto us in all things, sin only excepted, from which he was clearly void, both in his flesh, and in his spirit. He came to be the Lamb without spot, who, by sacrifice of Himself once made, should take away the sins of the world; and sin . . ."

III. **THE WORK OF CHRIST IN THE POST-REFORMATION (SEVENTEENTH CENTURY).**

As previously indicated, the doctrine of the Atonement received considerable attention in the era from Anselm through the Reformation. Toward the conclusion of the Reformation a biblicistic rationalism became evident in the Protestant churches. The radical form of this hermeneutic gave rise to the resurgence of Unitarian ideas particularly in Servetus and Socinius; the moderate form gave rise to Grotius' reevaluation of the atonement.

A. **Faustus Socinius and the Atonement.**

The Socinian Movement began in the late sixteenth century through the teachings of Michael Servetus, but most particularly through Faustus Socinius as a movement within the Reformed Church of Poland.

In order to understand their view of Christ's death one must presuppose their Unitarian, monarchian view of the Person of Christ. The "rationalism" of the Socinian Movement is clearly seen in the doctrine of Christ's death.

1. **Socinius and the Justice of God.** Socinius built his theology of the atonement upon a distortion of God's attributes, that is, he subjected the justice and mercy of God to His will (justice and mercy are in His optional will). Sin, therefore, is what God determines it to be on the basis of a will divorced from His character. Shedd wrote (*History*, II, 378-79):

“. . . it is plain that Socinius conceived of the attributes of justice and mercy as less central than will. By a volition, God may punish sin, or he may let it go unpunished. He has as much right to do the latter as the former. There is no intrinsic right or wrong in either case that necessitates his action. Justice like mercy is the product of his optional will. It is easy to see that by this definition of justice Socinius takes away the foundation of the doctrine of atonement; and that if it be a correct definition, the Socinian theory of forgiveness upon repentance is true. If sin is punishment only because God so determines; and if he decides not to punish it, then it is no longer punishable,—if punitive justice is the product of mere will, and may be made and unmade by a volition, then it is absurd to say that without the shedding of blood, or the satisfaction of law, there is no remission of sin.”

Socinius tells us “if we could but get rid of this justice, even if we had no other proof, that fiction of Christ’s satisfaction would be thoroughly exposed, and would vanish (*Works*. III, 1).” Hence man’s repentance (i.e., self-effort) causes God to will forgiveness and that alone. The Racovian Catechism states (chapter 8):

“What then is your opinion concerning this matter?

“It is this;—that since I have shown that the mercy and justice which our adversaries conceive to pertain to God by nature, certainly do not belong to him, there was no need of that plan whereby he might satisfy such mercy and justice, and by which they might, as it were by a certain tempering, be reconciled to each other: which tempering nevertheless is such that it satisfies neither, and indeed destroys both;—For what is that justice, and what too that mercy, which punishes the innocent, and absolves the guilty? I do not, indeed, deny that there is a natural justice in God, which is called rectitude, and is opposed to wickedness: this shines in all his works, and hence they all appear just and right and perfect; and that, no less when he forgives than when he punishes our transgressions.”

2. Socinius on the death of Christ

- a) The attack on the Satisfaction View is waged in no uncertain terms in the Racovian Catechism (chapter 8) both from logic and Scripture:

“But did not Christ die also, in order, properly speaking, to purchase our salvation, and literally to pay the debt of our sins?”

“Although Christians at this time commonly so believe, yet this notion is false, erroneous, and exceedingly pernicious; since they conceive that Christ suffered an equivalent punishment for our sins, and by the price of his obedience exactly compensated our disobedience. There is no doubt, however, but that Christ so satisfied God by his obedience, as that he completely fulfilled the whole of his will, and by his obedience obtained, through the grace of God, for all of us who believe in him, the remission of our sins, and eternal salvation.

“How do you make it appear that the common notion is false and erroneous?”

“Not only because the Scriptures are silent concerning it, but also because it is repugnant to the Scriptures and to right reason.

“How is this opinion repugnant to the Scripture?”

“Because the Scriptures every where testify that God forgives men their sins freely, and especially under the New Covenant (2 Cor. 5:19; Romans 3:24, 25; Matthew 18:23, etc.). But to a free forgiveness nothing is more opposite than such a satisfaction as they contend for, and the payment for an equivalent price. For where a creditor is satisfied, either by the debtor himself, or by another person on the debtor’s behalf, it cannot with truth be said of him that he freely forgives the debt.”

N.B. Socinius then argues that “free forgiveness” leads to libertinism and is contrary to God’s character:

“State in what manner this opinion is pernicious?”

“Because it opens a door to licentiousness, or at least, invites me to indolence in the practice of piety, in what way soever they urge the piety of their patron. For if full payment have been made to God by Christ for all our sins, even those which are future, we are absolutely freed from all liability to punishment, and therefore no further

condition can by right be exacted from us to deliver us from the penalties of sin. What necessity then would there be for living religiously?"

- b) **The Meaning of the Atonement.** The Socinians de-evaluate the death of Christ by stressing His resurrection. In answer to the question, What does it mean that Christ died for us? Socinians replied (chapter 8):

“The second signification is, that Christ died for the highest benefit of us all. When Christ is said to have ‘died for us,’ the words may bear both these significations; which are therefore used interchangeably, the one for the other. Thus, what the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans (chap. 14:15) wrote, ‘for whom’ (προ θυε, υθπερ ουθ) that is, ‘thy brother,’ ‘Christ died’;—he wrote (1 Cor. 8:11), in expressing the same things, ‘for (or on account of) whom (προπτερ θυεμ, διφ οθν) Christ died.’ For the example of those very victims which were sacrificed for men who had sinned, shows that no substitution of things equivalent to each other can be inferred from these words; and therefore that they were not offered as an actual compensation for an offence, but for the forgiveness of it. Nor indeed can any substitution be inferred from the words taken by themselves. For, not to proceed further, when the Scripture says (1 Cor. 15:3) that Christ died for our sins, it does not certainly declare that he died in the place or stead of sinners, but that he died ON ACCOUNT OF (προπτερ, δια) our offences, as is stated in Romans 4:25”.

But what is the meaning or purpose of the atonement if it is not a satisfaction of man’s guilt and God’s wrath? The Catechism states:

“But what reason was there that Christ should suffer the same afflictions, and the same kind of death, as those to which believers are exposed?

“There are two reasons for this, as there are two methods whereby Christ saves us: for, first, he inspires us with a certain hope of salvation, and also incites us both to enter upon the way of salvation and to persevere in it. In the next place, he is with us in every struggle of temptation, suffering, or danger, affords us assistance, and at length delivers us from eternal death. It was exceedingly conducive to both these methods of saving us, that Christ

our captain should not enter upon his eternal life and glory, otherwise than through sufferings, and through a death of this kind.”

Again:

“In two ways. First, because he did not suffer himself to be deterred from inculcating his doctrine even by the most painful death; but particularly, because he ratified the New Covenant by his blood, and confirmed the New Testament by his death (Hebrews 13:20). Hence the blood of Christ is called ‘the blood of the New Testament, which speaketh better things than that of Abel’ (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 12:24). And Christ is himself called ‘the true and faithful witness’ (Revelation 1:5, 3:14). Secondly, because through his death he was led to his resurrection, from which principally arises the confirmation of the divine will, and the most certain persuasion of our resurrection and the obtaining of eternal life.”

N.B. According to the Socinians, the death of Christ is not a substitution, but a “Moral Impetus” founded on Duns Scotus’ doctrine of arbitrary will. Justice is destroyed; Christ encourages man to repent. If man will of his own ability, God will forget his character and grant forgiveness (i.e., the act of repentance is itself grace). Shedd said positively of the Socinian view (*Systematic Theology*. II, 385-86):

“The positive part of Socinius’ soteriology is found in the position, that forgiveness is granted upon the ground of repentance and obedience. There are no legal obstacles in the way of pardon, because the will of God is sovereign and supreme over law and penalty. Nothing is necessary, consequently, but sorrow for sin, and an earnest purpose to obey the commandments. Christ has set an example of obedience, and man is to follow it in the exercise of his natural powers.”

B. Hugo Grotius and the Atonement.

Aberrations to the Anselmic view of the atonement arise from two fountainheads: first, a failure to balance, or keep in balance, the attributes of God and, second, to deposit God’s will outside the expression of His attributes. The Socinians, the Grotians, and the Abelardians separate the atonement from a causation in God’s

nature for a cause within His “arbitrary will,” thus no penal substitution but simply a moral influence. That is, non-Anselmic theologians follow Duns Scotus by placing the atonement outside the necessity of God’s character.

1. Hugo Grotius: the Man (1583–1645) was a Dutch jurist and statesman who was enmeshed in the religious struggles of the Dutch church in the era of Dort. He was imprisoned by Prince Maurice for his non-Calvinism and later fled to Paris.
2. Hugo Grotius and the Atonement: Grotius’ view of Christ’s death is commonly designated as the “Governmental View” but has the same theological assumptions as Socinianism. Shedd wrote (*Systematic Theology*. II, 350): “As the Grotian theory is the best form in which the doctrine of a relative necessity of the atonement has been stated, as it has exerted considerable influence upon the history of this doctrine during the last two centuries, it merits a particular examination.” Grotius is summarized thusly by Gonzalez (*History*. III, 261-62): “Grotius developed an interesting theory of atonement, affirming that the reason that Christ had to suffer was not to pay the sins of humankind or to give us an example, but rather to show that, although God was willing to forgive us, he still considered the transgression of his law a serious offense that could not go without consequences.”
 - a) **Grotius’ Idea of Law** (i.e., Government). Grotius begins by establishing the law (government of God) as merely a product or effect of His will, not His will itself. “It is not something inward in God, or in the Divine nature and will, but is only the effect of his will.” Hence as an enactor of a positive statute, he has the same power to alter it, or to abrogate it, which the law-making power among men possesses. Therefore, penalty is not a necessary arrangement, not out of the nature of the law, but is an optional, mutable action by God. God can alter anything He wishes; that is, He can act contrary to His attributes! He writes (*Defense*. III, 310):

“All positive laws . . . are relaxable. Those who fear that if we concede this we do an injury to God, because we thereby represent him as mutable, are much deceived. For law is not something internal in God, or in the will itself of God, but it is a particular effect or product of his will. But that the effects or products of the Divine will are mutable is very certain. Moreover, in promulgating a positive law which he might wish to relax at some future time, God does not exhibit any fickleness of will. For God seriously indicated that he desired that his law should be valid and obligatory, which yet at the same time he reserved the right

of relaxing it, if he saw fit, because this right pertains to a positive law from the very nature of the case, and cannot be abdicated by the Deity. Nay more, the Deity does not abdicate the right of even abrogating law altogether, as is apparent from the instance of the ceremonial law . . . It is objected to this view, that it is naturally just that the guilty should be punished with such a punishment as corresponds to their crime, and therefore that punishment is not a matter of optional choice, neither is it relaxable. In answer to this objection, it is to be noticed that it does not always follow that injustice is done when justice is not done.”

N.B. Grotius’ reduction of everything to arbitrary Divine will is contrary to Anselm and the Reformers. The Reformers could not separate Divine will from Divine Nature, absoluteness is demanded by the Divine essence.

b) **Grotius’ idea of atonement (relaxation).** Grotius, upon the above premise, claims that God simply relaxes the claims of the law (no real satisfaction) and saves sinners; God dispenses of the penalty. God deems it unwise and unsafe to remit sin without some satisfaction (he is not a total Socinian), so he grounds the necessity of the atonement in the creature, not in the attributes of the Creator!

Therefore to show His hatred of sin, which is moral evil, the sufferings and death of Christ become a mere exhibition (his death is not necessary except to prevent libertinism). The Satisfaction of Christ is not a payment of equivalent worth, but a nominal gesture.

N.B. This view is properly called “Relaxation” or “Acceptilation,” using Scotus’ term. Grotius calls it “satisfaction,” but this is a misnomer. There is no payment of debt, no one-for-one substitution, no vicarious suffering, simply a passive “slap on the arm.” Grotius’ view is between the Socinians and Reformers.

Grotius tells us:

“That, therefore, he who sins deserves to be punished, and is therefore punishable, follows from the very relation of sin and the sinner to a superior power, and is strictly natural and necessary. But that any and every sinner be punished with such a punishment as corresponds with his guilt is not absolutely (simpliciter) and universally necessary; neither is it strictly natural, but only fitted and accommodated to nature (*sed naturae satis conveniens*).

“Whence it follows, that nothing prevents the relaxing of the law which orders this punishment. There is no mark or sign of irrevocability in the law, in the case of which we are speaking, neither is the law accompanied with a promise; therefore, neither of these two things stands in the way of a relaxation of the law. Furthermore, a threat to punish is not like a promise to reward. For from the promise to reward, there accrues a certain right or claim on the part of him to whom the promise is made; but the threat of punishment only declares the transgressor’s desert of penalty, and the right to punish on the part of him who threatens. Neither is there any reason to fear lest God’s veracity should suffer in case he does not fulfill all his threatenings. For all threatenings, excepting those to which the token of irrevocability attaches, are to be understood as in their very nature diminishing nothing from the right of the author to relax them, if he shall think proper . . . At the same time, there are reasons that dissuade from the exercise of this right. These may arise from the nature of law in the abstract, or from the nature of a particular law. It is common to all laws, that in relaxing them something seems to be worn away from their authority. It is peculiar to this law (i.e., the moral law given in Eden), that although it is not characterized by an inflexible rectitude as we have remarked, it is yet very consonant to the nature and order of things. From which it follows, not indeed that this law is never to be relaxed, but that it is not to be relaxed with facility, or for a slight cause. And the all-wise Legislator had a most weighty cause for relaxing this law, in the fact that the human race had lapsed into sin. For if all mankind had been given over to eternal death, as transgressors, two most beautiful things would have utterly perished out of the universe—reverence and religion towards God, on the part of man, and the exhibition of a wonderful benevolence towards man, on the part of God. But in relaxing the Law, God not only followed the most weighty reasons for so doing, but also adopted a peculiar and singular mode of relaxing it, concerning which we shall speak hereafter” (*Defense*. III, 353-54).

Perhaps a comparative chart will be helpful:

	<u>Socinians</u>	<u>Grotians</u>	<u>Reformers</u>
Purpose:	Unnecessary	Demonstrate the government of God	Protect the government of God and save the creature
Fact:	Optional	Optional	Necessary
Focus:	Exemplary	Exemplary	Retributive
Result:	Encouragement	To prevent future sin	To deal with past, present, future sins

C. The Arminians and the Atonement.

The Arminians of Holland attempted to locate the atonement between the Grotians and Reformers, the principle formulators being Episcopius (1583–1643), Curcellaeus (d. 1659), and Limborch (1633–1712).

1. The Work of Limborch and Curcellaeus countered Grotius' focus of the atonement by contending that Christ's death as a sacrifice had reference to God as well as the universe. Curcellaeus wrote (*Opera Theologica*. 25, 300:

“That God might show how much he hates sin and might hereafter more effectually deter us from it, he willed not to forgive us, (*noluit id facere*) except upon the intervention of that sacrifice by which Christ offered his own slain body to him.”

Limborch is equally clear (*Theologia Christiana*. 26, 262:

“Our own view is that the Lord Jesus Christ was a sacrifice for our sins, truly and properly so called; by sustaining the most grievous tortures and the cursed death of the cross, and afterwards, when raised from the dead, by entering with his own blood into the celestial sanctuary, and presenting himself there before the Father, he appeased him angry with our sins, and reconciled us to him. Thus he bore for us and in our place the most grievous affliction, and so turned away from us deserved punishment.”

Having said this, the Arminian theologians vary from the Reformers by qualifying their statements (or by hiding things).

- a) The death of Christ is denominated a sacrifice, but a sacrifice not as the payment of a debt, nor as a complete satisfaction of justice for sin. Limbroch tells us that the satisfaction is not for all sin forever. Curcellaeus wrote (*Institutes of Christian Religion*. 19, 15): “Christ did not make satisfaction by enduring the punishment which we sinners merited. This does not belong to the nature of a sacrifice, and has nothing in common with it.”
- b) Christ’s sacrifice was not a substitute penalty, but a substitute for a penalty. A substituted penalty is a strict equivalent, but a substitute for a penalty may be of inferior worth by the method of acceptilation. Curcellaeus stated (*Institutes*. 22, 2):

“Jesus Christ may be said to have been punished (*punitus*) in our place, in so far as he endured the greatest anguish of soul, and the accursed death of the cross for us, which were of the nature of a vicarious punishment in the place of our sins (*quae poenae vicariae pro peccatis nostris rationem habuit*). And it may be said that our Lord satisfied the Father for us by his death, and earned righteousness for us, in so far as he satisfied, not the rigor and exactitude of the divine justice but, the just as well as the compassionate will of God (*voluntati Dei justae simul ac misericordi*), and went through all that God required in order to our reconciliation.”

Again, a chart may prove helpful.

	<u>Socinians</u>	<u>Grotians</u>	<u>Arminians</u>	<u>Anselm & Reformers</u>
Purpose:	Unnecessary	Demonstrate the government of God & save the creature	Demonstrate the government of God	Demonstrate the government of God & save the creature
Fact:	Optional	Optional	Necessary	Necessary
Focus:	Exemplary	Exemplary	Retributive (substitute for a penalty)	Retributive (substitute penalty)
Result:	Encouragement	To prevent future sin	To deal with past sin	To deal with past, present, and future sin

Again:

The Example Theory Family

(Scotus' Arbitrary, Optional Will)

ABELARD

SOCINIANS (UNITARIANS)

GROTIANS

The Substitution Family

(Necessitation)

ANSELM

REFORMERS

ARMINIANS

IV. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to trace the doctrine of the atonement from the Reformation to the Post-Reformation era. The Reformers stood in the thought of Anselm, although they refined their mentor in their study of the Scriptures. In the context of the embryonic stages of the rise of the Enlightenment, churchmen subjected their minds, and the Bible, to the unwise application of the scientific method [i.e., they rejected the possibility of external revelation which did not meet the criteria of inward (and might I add, fallen) logic]. The Socinians and Grotians followed the option of Abelard and placed the atonement outside the nature of God in an “optional will of God”—Grotius calls it

“Relaxation;” Scotius, “Acceptilation,” but it denies the justice of God. The Arminian scholars reacted to the Socinians and Grotians, but did not adopt a fully Reformationist, Anselmic view because they made Christ’s death penal and substitutionary for the idea of God’s wrath for sin, but not the very payment of the individual sinner’s sin.