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A COMPARATIVE STUDY  
OF THE  
CONCEPTIONS OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT  
TAUGHT BY THOMAS AQUINAS AND MARTIN LUTHER

by  
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## INTRODUCTION

A COMPARATIVE STUDY  
OF THE  
CONCEPTIONS OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT  
TAUGHT BY THOMAS AQUINAS AND MARTIN LUTHER

INTRODUCTION

I. Statement of the Problem.

The purpose of this study is to discover the conception of the theological doctrine of the atonement held and taught by Thomas Aquinas, formulator of modern Roman Catholic theology, and the conception held and taught by Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation. Having done this, it is the object of the author to show wherein these conceptions are alike, and wherein they differ.

2. Importance of the Problem.

There are many, among them prominent church leaders, who contest that to give much time and serious thought to the theological doctrines of the historical Church is not in keeping with the scientific spirit of the day, and hence should be avoided. Long ago (in A.D. 1867) Dr. Archibald Alexander Hodge wrote some words in this regard that may not have lost their significance:

"A man can outgrow systematic theology.....  
either by ceasing to be clear-headed, or by ceasing  
to be religious, and in no other way. I suppose  
some escape in their haste by both ways at once."(1)

"Of those who contend that "there are more urgent and practical tasks than that of theology" H. Emil Brunner in the introductory chapter of his "The Theology of Crisis" writes:

(1) Hodge, A.A., The Atonement, p.22.

"These people are like such gardeners as might think the branches of the tree more important than the sap because the branches are visible and the sap invisible."(1)

The often heard cry today to get back to the simple facts of apostolic Christianity is not a new one. It was common enough to cause comment before 1881 when, in a footnote of the introductory chapter of his "The Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement" Henry Nutcombe Oxenham cited the following quotation:

"There are those indeed who .... would rather fall back on the unreflecting simplicity of that early faith which rested only on the simple facts of the Gospel. But this is to be ignorant, that the gradual expansion of Christian doctrines was only the growth of the religious mind as, under the moulding power of the Holy Ghost, it compared the individual truths with which it had been instructed. Those truths must have resolved themselves into wrong combinations, if they had not been resolved into right ones. .... Those who seek to regain it (early simplicity of faith) by throwing away what was earned by the religious impulse then given to the age do but restore the imbecility of childhood without its innocence."(2)

The doctrine of the atonement has been the central teaching of the Christian Church, particularly since the time when the Reformed churches began to form their creeds. It was the principal element, though not then formally stated as a doctrine, in Luther's teaching of justification by faith, which he declared to be the greatest of all Christian affirmations. It is the foundation upon which our relation to God as our Father, and consequently all our present life and hope for the future, depend. In his "Atonement and the

(1) Brunner, H.E., The Theology of Crisis, p.xxi

(2) Oxenham, H.N., The Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement

the Modern Mind" James Denney considers the term "atonement" to be as comprehensive as Christian religion itself. He writes:

"When we speak of the atonement and the modern mind, we are really speaking of the modern mind and the Christian religion." (2)

Our understanding of this doctrine also influences our conceptions of other vital parts of the whole system of Christian truth, e.g., the moral attributes of God, the nature of divine law, of sin, and the person of Christ.

The investigation to be made in this thesis, of the conceptions of this fundamental Christian tenet held by such outstanding figures of the Church as Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther, is of great importance because of the eminent place this doctrine had in the theological systems constructed by these two men. Unfortunately for us here, a formal treatment of this subject was made by neither of these theologians. There are no specific articles dealing with this topic for us to use as a basis of our study.

In view of the significance of this doctrine, and of the tremendous outward results of the separation of Luther from Catholicism, one cannot refrain thinking seriously on the question: are there at this basic position any great differences of belief and teaching? If so, what are they? What are the beliefs held in common? To gain answers to these questions is the goal of this investigation.

### 3. Method of Procedure.

There are mainly five theories of the atonement. These are

- (1) Denney, James, Atonement and the Modern Mind, p.2.



all found in the theologies of the Protestant church denominations. The Catholic Church with its system of sacraments does not find place for a formal doctrine of the atonement objectively centered on Christ. It will be helpful for us to have a summarizing statement of each of these theories in mind from the beginning. The first one to take definite form was the Commercial Theory. It maintains that sin is a violation of divine honor; being committed against an infinite being it must have an infinite punishment. Christ the God-man, representing the guilty human race, made full satisfaction to the requirement of divine justice. His suffering was an exact equivalent for the sufferings deserved by sinning men. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) was the originator of this theory. (1)

According to the Example Theory, Christ by His human example of faithfulness to truth and duty has an influence upon man that will result in his salvation. This idea was developed by the Socinians in the middle of the sixteenth century. (2)

The Governmental Theory declares that Christ's sufferings were not necessary to satisfy the rigor of divine justice, and therefore Christ did not suffer the precise penalty of the law, but God as sovereign, with absolute rights, accepts His suffering as a substitute for the penalty. Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) was the author of this theory. (3)

The Moral Influence Theory holds that by an exhibition of self-sacrificing love Christ's sufferings win men's hearts to God, and subdue their tendencies toward evil. The outstanding proponent of this

- (1) Remensnyder, J.B., The Atonement and Modern Thought, p. 93.
- (2) Fisher, G.P., History of the Christian Church, p. 443.
- (3) Strong, A.H., Systematic Theology, Vol. II, p. 717.

theory in modern times is Horace Bushnell, (1802-1876). (1)

The next, and last, of these, bears three well-known titles -- The Satisfaction Theory, The Ethical Theory, and the Penal Theory. It represents the work of Christ as a satisfaction of infinite merit, to the infinite justice of God. Christ did for man what man could not do, satisfying the demands of the law, and on man's behalf bearing the penalty which his failure had brought upon him. (2)

It will be noticed that the Example, Governmental and Moral Influence theories arose after the period upon which we are to focus our attention. The first, the Anselmic or Commercial Theory appeared in the eleventh century, and the last is that about which the major portion of our study will center, for it arose in the period of the Reformation.

Charles Hodge, and other scholars in the field of theology, divide the historical study of their subject into four periods: the Patristic, the Scholastic, the Reformation, and the Modern. It is with the latter part of the second of these and the first part of the third that this work will treat in particular, but to make an intelligent approach to them it will be necessary to make a brief survey of the first period and the part of the second leading up to the time of Thomas Aquinas.

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- (1) Hodge, Chas., Systematic Theology, Vol. II, pp. 566-569  
Bushnell, Horace, On Vicarious Sacrifice, pp. 535-545  
(2) Hodge, A.H., Systematic Theology, Vol. II, p. 563.

CHAPTER ONE

TEACHING ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT  
BEFORE THE TIME OF THOMAS AQUINAS

## CHAPTER ONE

### TEACHING ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT BEFORE THE TIME OF THOMAS AQUINAS

#### Introduction.

It was not until the end of the eleventh century that the nature of the atonement received a thorough treatment. It was then that Anselm, in his "Cur Deus Homo?" developed the first actual theory of the atonement. In the early centuries of the Christian era that which later constituted the atonement doctrine was viewed by the Church as separate facts, with no attempt to systematize them into a formal doctrine.

All the early Fathers of the Church used the language of the Scriptures very extensively, with them showing that through the shed blood of Christ there was forgiveness and salvation. (1) Many of their views conform with later doctrinal developments of the subject, but were not formally constructed. In general these early Christians were content to express their cardinal beliefs with the use of biblical statements. They experienced the atonement, with deep emotion many of them, but had no desire, nor saw any need of fitting its intellectual basis into logical forms. This continued to be true even through the centuries of the most significant controversial councils of the Church.

At a comparatively early date the Church Fathers busied themselves about dogmas of the Trinity and of the Incarnation. Heresies sprang up about these points and drew out definite declarations from the orthodox bodies. (2) There appears not to have been any propagating concerning the nature, value or effect of the work of Christ in His

(1) Cave, Albert, The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice, p. 332.

(2) Cf. Denney, James, Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation, p. 27.

sufferings and death, hence, no official statements as to these things.

The Church in these first centuries of its existence was predominantly Greek, geographically and intellectually. It was most natural that its leaders should center their thoughts on the strictly theological rather than the anthropological aspect of the Christian faith; investigating the revealed nature and attributes of God and of the person of Christ, rather than the state of man and the work of Christ done for man. One of the best records of the thinking of the early Church is its hymnology. The objective viewpoint held then is clearly demonstrated in the liturgical hymns, such as, the "Gloria in excelsis", and the "Gloria Patri", and not less in such hymns as one attributed to Gregory Nazianzen (325-399), beginning:

"O Thou the One suprememo'er all!  
For by what other name  
May we upon Thy great name call,  
Or celebrate Thy fame?"(1)

The controversy that brought out a definition of *ὁμοούσιον* at the Council of Nicea, in 325, gave to the subsequent centuries dogmatic statements concerning the person of Christ, but there is nothing analogous to this in the early development of the teachings about the work of Christ for the redemption of man. (2)

#### I. THE ANTE-NICENE FATHERS.

Lest we fail to realize the significance to the later development of the atonement doctrine of the constant use of the Scriptures by the Church Fathers when they referred to the sufferings and death of

- (1) Breed, D.R., The History and Use of Hymns and Hymn-Tunes,  
cf. p.23.  
(2) Denney, James, Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation, p.28.

Christ, I shall here draw upon the writings of some of them. All the prominent writers ascribe a most vital efficacy to the sacrifice made by Christ on the cross, in changing sinful men into Christians with hopes of immortality. Of course, no attempt is made to show how this is brought about.

1. Clement of Rome.

Clement of Rome (lived last of first century) wrote:

"His blood was shed for our salvation; by the will of God He has given His flesh for our flesh, His soul for our souls."

Again:

"Let us look to the blood of Christ, and behold how precious is His blood to God, since being shed for our salvation it has offered to the whole world the grace of repentance." (1)

2. The Epistle of Barnabas.

The Epistle of Barnabas, written in the early part of the second century, contains these words:

"The Lord condescended to deliver His body to death, that by remission of our sins we might be sanctified, and this is effected by the shedding of His blood." (2)

3. Polycarp.

In his letter to the Philippians Polycarp (110-117) wrote the following words, (based on Peter's words) :

"He bore our sins in His body on the tree, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, but He endured all things for our sakes that we may live in Him." (3)

(1) Cave, Albert, The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice, p.332.

(2) Ibid. p.332.

(3) Ibid. p.332.

#### 4. Justin Martyr.

In the second century Justin Martyr wrote:

"The Father willed that Christ should take upon Himself the curses of all for the whole race of man." (1)

#### 5. Epistle to Diognetus.

The author of the anonymous Epistle to Diognetus (Ch.xi) went a long way in the direction of Reformation doctrine of justification:

"God hated us not, nor rejected us ... but in pity for us took upon Himself our sins, and Himself parted with His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy for the lawless, the faultless for the evil, the just for the unjust ... For what else but His righteousness could have covered our sins? In whom was it possible for us lawless and ungodly men to be justified save only in the Son of God? O sweet exchange, inscrutable operation, unexpected benefit! That the iniquity of many should be hidden in one righteous, and the righteousness of one should justify many lawless!" (2)

#### 6. Claudius Apollinaris.

Claudius Apollinaris, Bishop of Hieropolis in Phrygia, in the second century, calls our Lord,

"The Great Sacrifice, the Son of God... who was bound and bound the strong one, who was judged being Judge of quick and dead, who was delivered into the hands of sinners to be crucified, who poured from His side the two things which cleanse, water and blood, mind and spirit." (3)

#### 7. Summary.

In these allusions to the sufferings and death of Christ for sinful men there is no conception of vicarious sacrifice expressed; that

(1) Cave, Albert, The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice, p.333.

(2) Grensted, L.W., The Atonement in History and Life, p. 178.

(3) Oxenham, H.N., The Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement, p.124.

is, of man's sin being imputed to Christ, or of the idea that God was angry with His Son for man's sake and inflicted on Him punishment which was due the sinner. There is no mention of the justice of God in the formal sense of that term. The object for Christ's incarnation is not the preparation for the payment of a debt as maintained by Anselm in his *Cur Deus Homo*, but for the restoration of man from his fallen nature. These early writers testify that Christ died for us and by so doing delivers from the power of evil. The question why Christ must suffer and die in order to do this is not discussed.

## II. THE SATAN THEORY.

Before the beginning of the third century there arose a conception of the atonement so vague that it cannot be considered a doctrine, and yet it was the predominant theory and almost the only theory of the atonement that the Church held for eight centuries. It was what is commonly called the Satan Theory. Among its prominent advocates were Basil the Great, Ambrose, Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, and Bernard of Clairvaux.

According to this theory, when man sinned he became the rightful possession of the devil. That man might justly acquire his freedom a ransom is paid to Satan. This payment is the life of Christ. It was implied by some that the conflict of Christ with Satan was maintained on the old principle that deception or trickery were fair in war; (1) The first attempt to arrive at an explanation of the work of Christ, strangely enough, settled on the effect of this work upon the kingdom of Satan.

(1) Cf. Cave, Albert, *The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice*, p.338.



There is no absolute agreement as to when, or where, this theory originated. Its earliest important representatives were Irenaeus of the second century and Origen of the third century. These two men were the leaders of the orthodox party in its struggle against Gnosticism. It was this opposition that appears to have caused these writers to begin a definition of the effects of the sacrificial sufferings of Christ.

According to the Gnostic heresy Jesus only apparently assumed human form -- the docetic view. Hence, Jesus' death was illusory. The logical consequence of this was a total rejection of the teaching of the Scriptures about the death of Christ for the sins of men. (1)

#### 1. Irenaeus.

In his fifth book, *Contra Haereses*, Irenaeus writes a paragraph that obviously reveals his acceptance of the ransom theory:

"The Mighty Word and True Man, redeeming us by His own blood in accordance with the dictates of right reason gave Himself as a ransom for those who had been taken captive; and since we were the subjects of God by nature, contrary to nature he has transferred our allegiance, making us his own disciples. The Omnipotent Word of God, having no lack of justice within Himself, against the apostasy itself proceeded justly, redeeming His own from its power -- not forcibly, as the apostasy did in the beginning, snatching with insatiable greed things which did not belong to it, but by moral suasion, as became God, who would attain His desire by persuasion, and not by force, so that neither should justice be violated nor the original creation of God perish." (*Patrologiae Graecae*, tom. vii, p. 1121). (2)

#### 2. Origen.

Irenaeus left this question in the second century, but it was

(1) For a fuller statement of Gnosticism see, Cave, Albert, *The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice*, pp. 385-386.

(2) *Ibid.* p. 387.

taken up even more emphatically by Origen, the voluminous writer who is styled the Father of Theology. He dealt with the redeeming work of Christ quite fully, under five aspects: His teaching, as the revelation of the absolute truth; His works, as the cleansing of the temple and His miracles; His life, as the great example; His suffering and death to which he attributes three-fold efficacy, in our redemption from the power of Satan, our reconciliation with God, and the purification of our corrupted nature; and His continual priesthood in heaven. The fourth of these contains his theory of the atonement. He taught that the death of Christ was necessary, both for our ransom and as a sacrifice for sin. He went beyond Irenaeus with the ransom theory, declaring that Satan was deceived in the transaction.

To the question, suggested by our Lord's own saying that He <sup>be</sup> would <sup>be</sup> given up into hands of men, By whom was He delivered up? Origen replies:

"Not all gave Him up with the same design, God delivered Him out of love for the human race (Rom. 8:32). But others delivered Him up with evil intent, each according to his own wickedness, Judas for avarice, the priests for envy, the Devil for fear, lest by His teaching the human race should be snatched out of his hands, not perceiving that the human race was to be still more delivered by His death than it had been by His teaching and miracles." (1)

Origen does not try to show how this deception was carried out, but later writers, Gregory of Nyssa and others, say that it was done by means of the Incarnation. (2) Origen expressed his belief that Satan thought he would get possession of Christ's soul by slaying Him and se-

(1) Oxenham, H.N., The Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement, p.137.

(2) Cf. Ibid. pp. 147-148.

cure for himself the place of rulership over man. In another place he declares the need of a ransom equivalent to the possession:

"Man has nothing to give as an equivalent for his soul. One alone was able to pay a price for our lost souls, He who bought us with His own precious blood."(1)

Satan had acquired an actual right over man through the original Fall. The soul, or blood, of Christ was the only adequate ransom. How Origen could square this idea of a price paid with the deception idea is difficult to understand. Maybe he never saw the difficulty.

Origen also dwelt on the necessity of a sacrifice to God. Jesus was the one true and sufficient sacrifice to God for the sins of men, because He alone was sinless and laid down His life in obedience to the will of God. Though this does not harmonize with the views mentioned above, it anticipates a very fundamental part of what became the accepted doctrine of the Reformed Churches.

### 3. Augustine.

The foremost theologian of the early Lat in Church, Augustine (354-430), wrote extensively on such subjects as the fallen state of man, sin, grace, and salvation, but his experience and feeling were so intense and varied that even his most profound teachings were not systematized. From his works, he is found to be strongly in sympathy with the ransom idea of Christ's death, holding that Satan would have had grounds for complaint, if having himself conquered man, he had been violently robbed of his prize without receiving any payment.

(1) Oxenham, H.N., The Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement, p.137.

Yet, as with Origen, there appears in Augustine's theology the teaching of the death of Christ as a sacrifice to God, though it may be inconsistent with the ransom theory. He wrote:

"A mediator was necessary, that is, a reconciler who by the offering of a unique sacrifice, of which all sacrifices of the law and the prophets were shadows, should appease this wrath." (1)

Referring to the power of demons, he wrote:

"It is overcome then in His name who assumed man and lived without sin, that in himself, priest and sacrifice, there might be made remission of sins, that is, through the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus: through Him, when He had made purgation of sins, we are reconciled to God." (2)

These two quotations from Augustine's pen show definitely that he considered Christ in His death as a sacrifice to God, a means of reconciling man to God.

#### 4. Summary.

The Satan theory of the atonement may now be summarized as follows: in the original Fall man became the slave of the conqueror Satan, and his rightful possession; Christ offered Himself a ransom, equivalent to this possession, to Satan, for man's freedom; Satan accepted the offer and renounced his right to retain man as his possession.

Until the appearance of Anselm's satisfaction conception of the atonement in the eleventh century this was the common understanding of Christ's redemptive work, by the entire Church. Even after the great

(1) Denney, James, The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation, p. 54

Taken from: Enchiridion de Fede, Spirit Charitate 10.

(2) Ibid. p. 55, Taken from De Civitate Dei x 22.

work of Anselm on this subject such notable figures of the Church as Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) and Peter Lombard (1100-1160) maintained the Satan theory as the solution to the question of how the death of Christ was made effective in the salvation of sinful men.

A word might be said here of Pierre Abelard (1079-1142). He rejected the ransom theory, and may be considered the first exponent of the moral influence theory. This theory finds the whole meaning of the work of Christ in its influence on man rather than anything accomplished for man. In this system Christ does not mediate God's grace to the sinner, but by His life in human form, and by His death, He is an example or an illustration of that grace to draw men from sin to God.(1)

### III. ANSELM'S CUR DEUS HOMO.

Several references have already been made to Anselm (1033-1109), bishop of Canterbury, and his monumental work, Cur Deus Homo. Anselm is the pioneer of the schoolmen of the scholastic period which attained its zenith in the thirteenth century, with Thomas Aquinas. With Anselm the theological treatments of the Church take the form of logic and abstractions. Dr. Oxenham, author of "The Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement, says that "the appearance of the Cur Deus Homo? forms an epoch in the history of Christian doctrine." (2) It was the first attempt to present the doctrine of the atonement in a scientific, systematized form. In it the idea of a ransom paid to Satan by the death of Christ, which had been held by the Church almost a thousand years, is wholly re-

(1) Cf. Fisher, G.P., History of the Christian Church, p.222.

(2) Oxenham, H.N., The Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement, p.18.

jected.

Up to this time the only dogma of the Church was the doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ, the God-man. For it the Church had passed through many severe struggles, and on it made numerous definite declarations. Anselm was eager to know the reason for the appearance of God in the form of man, hence: "cur deus homo?"—"Why did God become man?" In his pursuit of the answer to this signal question Anselm developed the first definite theory of the atonement, known to the Church.

This scholastic was seeking answers to questions that still rise in men's minds: "If God had to redeem men, why could He not redeem them by the mere exercise of His will?" and "If God condemned the innocent to set the guilty free, would not He Himself be judged worthy of condemnation?" (1)

In the opening of his work Anselm states that he will show the reasonableness and necessity for God to become man and by His death restore life to the world when this might have been done some other way; (2) the reasonableness and necessity of God taking upon Himself the humiliation and weakness of human nature to redeem men; (3) the righteousness, if there is any, in giving over the greatest man that ever lived to death for the sake of the sinner; (4) and how the death of Christ can be seen to be rational and necessary. (5)

To understand the author's solutions to these problems it will be necessary at the very beginning to get his conception of sin upon which he laid great stress, and which was unique. To him sin was a debt,

(1) Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, Bk. I, Ch. viii, Pub: Griffith Farran Okeden & Welsh, London, p. 13.

(2) *Ibid.* I, i, p. 1.

(3) *Ibid.* I, ii, pp. 2-4.

(4) *Ibid.* I, xviii, pp. 34-44.

(5) *Ibid.* I, x, pp. 19-23.

and to render satisfaction for sin it was necessary to pay the debt, which is due God. I shall quote from a paragraph which is of tremendous significance in the historical development of the doctrine of sin, and so to the development of the teaching regarding the atonement:

"If either angel or man always rendered to God what he owed, he would never sin: sin is therefore nothing else than failure to render to God His due... ....He who does not pay to God this debt of honor defrauds God of what is His own, and dishonours God, and this is to sin; and so long as what is taken is not paid, he remains, a defaulter. Nor is it enough to restore what has been withheld, but because of the contumely inflicted more must be repaid: for, as, when the health of anyone is injured, to restore to health without making some recompense for the pain that has been borne is an insufficient requital; so the violator of honour does not make adequate restitution, unless he repays proportionately to the irksomeness of the dishonour: so then, every sinner is under the obligation of paying to God the honour he has deprived Him of, and this is the satisfaction which every sinner owes to God."

(1)

In these lines we see that Anselm's conception of sin is not only the breaking of a law, but that a person has been wronged, and so an enormous liability is created. The effects of sin are so stupendous that one should not even take a glance contrary to the will of God, even if it were to save worlds. Sin is chiefly withholding from God honor due Him. If God ignored sin He would cease to be God, violating a universal moral order.(2).

Anselm sees two possibilities: God's honor may be restored by satisfaction done for the offence, or God's honor may be restored by the punishment for the offence being inflicted on the offender. The second of these is not satisfactory for two reasons: If God punished sin

(1) Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, I, xi, p.24.

(2) Cf. Denney, James, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, p.67.

He would be forcing upon the sinner, without his will, a condition in order to restore His own honor, and because the sinner would perish under the infliction. This latter is out of the question because it would defeat God's end in the creation of man. God created man to enjoy fellowship with Himself for eternity. That this intention of God should<sup>not</sup> be realized was an impossible supposition to Anselm. The fundamental supposition in all his theology is that God's end in<sup>the</sup> creation of man must be attained. (This almost exclusive consideration of God in the matter of salvation is a point to keep in mind, particularly when we reach the conception of the atonement that arises in the Reformation period.

If God destroyed man in the process of making good His honor, by punishment, the "all inclusive problem of man's creation" would arise: Why did God create rational beings if they were to perish? Why did He begin something He was unable to complete?

In his volume "The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation", Dr. James Denney says,

"According to Anselm it is inconceivable that God's purpose in creating man should be finally frustrated in this fashion; and as this is an assumption of reason, it is rationally necessary that not the easy way of punishment, but the hard way of satisfaction should be followed in dealing with human sin."((1)

Man cannot be forgiven sin for that would be marring the perfect order of God's kingdom. Man's debt is far too great for him to pay himself. The debt must be paid by a man or it will not be man's satisfaction. The debt was so great that only God could pay, it, and

(1) Denney, James, The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation, p.69

(2) Cf. Oxenham, H.N., The Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement, p.185



only man owed it, therefore the one who pays it must be both God and man. Hence, the need of the incarnation of Christ. But the incarnation of Christ (of God in Jesus Christ) alone would not be sufficient to meet man's need. Though Christ as man lived in perfect obedience to God, this would be of no redemptive value to other men, for as man He would owe this obedience to God. But living without sin, Christ did not deserve to die, His death was a voluntary offering, a supererogatory act, something beyond and above what was required, and in this case a sufficient satisfaction, even infinitely exceeding the payment needed for the sins of men. For this Christ deserved a recompense from the father, as a reward, the salvation of those for whom He died. (1) Thus man, infinitely in debt to God, has an infinitely sufficient provision made for his salvation, and possible realization of the purpose for which God created him.

There is no mention, nor any implication, in Anselm's system of a compensation due Satan for the redemption of man. The death of Christ is an absolute necessity; meets the demands of God, and saves him for his intended end.

#### IV. SUMMARY.

We have now seen that there was no definite doctrine of the atonement during the first ten centuries of the Christian era. The early Fathers expressed their conceptions of the work wrought by Christ, particularly in His death, with the use of Scriptural terminology. This practice prevented disagreement. The Satan theory has among its sympathiz-

(1) Cf. Oxenham, H.N., The Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement, p.185.

ers such illustrious men as Irenaeus, Origen and Augustine. In his *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm dealt with the subject in a very thorough way, preparing the ground for the scholastics and reformers that were to concentrate much of their intellectual effort at this point.

We are now ready to enter the specific field of our study. First, we shall note the conception of the atonement entertained by Thomas Aquinas, then the developments of theology between the time of Aquinas and Luther that may have been foreshadowings of the thinking of this reformer, on this subject, and finally, the conception of the atonement presented by Luther.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPTION OF THE ATONEMENT  
HELD BY  
ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CONCEPTION OF THE ATONEMENT HELD BY ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

In the church of St. Catarina at Pisa there is a painting by Francesco Traini which represents St. Thomas Aquinas. The picture of the saint presents him in huge dimensions. He has upon his knees four books representing the four parts of his *Summa contra Gentiles*. There is a larger volume in his hands; it is the sacred Scriptures. Above St. Thomas is the enthroned Christ, surrounded by Cherubim. There proceed from His mouth rays of light to each of the six Biblical teachers prostrate at His feet -- to His left, Moses, St. John and St. Mark; to His right, St. Paul, St. Matthew and St. Luke. Three rays lead to the head of St. Thomas from the mouth of Jesus and also one from each of the Biblical teachers. At the right of the saint stands Aristotle, holding up his *Ethics*, and at the left Plato, with his *Timaeus*. From these volumes are rays leading to the ears of the saint. From his own books emanate rays illuminating the faithful saints grouped about him.(1)

This picture fairly represents the position of the greatest scholar and teacher of the Medieval Church. He was a great philosopher as well as a great theologian. His knowledge of ancient philosophy and its method he applied to the theology of his day. He put into definite form and outline the traditional theology of the Church. It was here

(1) Hastings, James, *Ency. of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. I, p. 653, Heald, J.M., "Thomas Aquinas."

particularly that the influence of Aristotle was seen. St. Thomas was as strong "an Aristotelian as it was possible for any thinker to be who was at the same time an orthodox Christian and professed to accept en bloc a theology already steeped in Platonism." (1)

The system of Thomas Aquinas represents the complete Catholic theology of the Middle Ages. It is wider and more complicated than that of Anselm, but comes nearer to the Anselmic theory of the atonement than that of any other prominent scholastic. It fixed the satisfaction theory in theological thinking, not only as a sufficient satisfaction but as a superabundant satisfaction. On the whole the theology of St. Thomas has kept the position of highest authority in the Roman Church to our own day.

As in the thinking of Anselm, the Incarnation of Christ and the Atonement are very closely associated, but Aquinas believed that if man had not fallen the Incarnation of Christ would not have taken place.

Unlike Anselm he denied the necessity of satisfaction. He believed that God would not have violated justice if He had willed to free man without any satisfaction whatever. He reasoned that there is none over God to be injured if He should choose to follow such a course and therefore this way was open to Him. There was no other necessity than His self-determination.

In his monumental work, the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas asks and answers, in the scholastic manner, six questions the first four of which

(1) Rashdall, Hastings, *The Idea of the Atonement in Christian Theology*, p. 373.

deal directly with the nature of the atonement. They are: whether the sufferings of Christ have caused our salvation by their merit, or by satisfaction, or by their sacrificial nature, or by their redemption?(1)

In answering these Aquinas maintains that our salvation is caused by each and not by any one alone:"by merit inasmuch as He imparts to all His members the grace He had merited for them; by satisfaction seeing that the honor of God could not, <sup>but</sup> be satisfied, by the greatness of His dignity, sufferings and love; by sacrifice since the passion of Christ is the highest act of surrender ever offered to God; and by redemption in that the passion redeems us from the bondage and the punishment from sin."(2)

#### I. SUPERABUNDANT MERIT.

As has already been indicated, the first point of St. Thomas' conception of the atonement is that of superabundant merit. In submitting to a death that was undeserved Christ earned a store of merit which far outweighs all the demerit that has come upon man because of original sin, as well as all the actual sins of humanity. We do well to note here that in his ethics Aquinas was greatly influenced by the works of Aristotle. Though he definitely admits the need of divine grace for salvation he does not believe that by original sin alone a man merits damnation. To him sin was not infinite though considered as an offence against God.

Unlike Anselm, Aquinas believed that Christ merited eternal salvation for man from the beginning of His conception.(3) Anselm held

(1) Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, iii, qq. 46-49, pp 263-336.

(2) Cf. Cave, Albert, The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice, p. 344.

(3) Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Sum. Theol., iii, Q. 48, p. 311.

that the life of Christ constituted no merit, for in it Christ was obliged to submit to God; Aquinas considered obedience the highest sacrifice. Jesus lived in perfect obedience to the will of God, therefore, by His life of submission He earned merit, even as by His death. These provide a superabundant merit because God loved them more than He hates the sin of man. We shall have more to say about this in connection with our treatment of the sacraments of the Roman Church.

By his passion Christ won for man more than freedom from sin. He "also won for him justifying grace and the glory of blessedness." (1)

The superabundant merit of Christ's passion Aquinas explains as follows:

"By His love and obedience in suffering Christ displayed to God something more than was demanded as a recompense for all the offence of mankind: firstly, because of the greatness of the love in which He suffered; secondly, through the worth of that life which He offered as a satisfaction, being the life of God and man; thirdly, because of the universality of the passion and the greatness of the pains which He assumed ....and so Christ's passion was not only sufficient but also a superabundant satisfaction for the sins of mankind." (2)

## II. SUPERABUNDANT SATISFACTION.

As can be seen in the words of Aquinas, quoted just above, it is not easy to distinguish between the idea that Christ won salvation for us by the superabundant merit of His death and the idea that He caused our salvation by way of satisfaction. The two are almost identical. The proper relation that they hold here is maybe this: there is a superabundance of merit because a superabundant sat-

(1) Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Sum.Theol.,iii.Q.46,p.263.

(2) Ibid. Q.48,p.311.

isfaction has been rendered.

Aquinas treats the idea of satisfaction as being very much akin to that of punishment. He affirms that when man could not make a sufficient satisfaction by any penalty he might suffer, God gave him One to make satisfaction for him. (1) In a further statement he weaves together the ideas of satisfaction and redemption:

"Because then, Christ's passion was a sufficient and superabundant satisfaction for man's sin and liability to sin, His passion was, as it were, a sort of price freeing us from both our obligations. For that very satisfaction wherewith a man makes satisfaction either for himself or another, is called a sort of price, by which he redeems himself or another from sin and from punishment." (2)

Again he writes:

"It is a convenient mode of satisfying for another when anyone subjects himself to the punishment which another merited." (3)

According to this statement punishment makes satisfaction possible -- the satisfaction then being penal. By this method of working out man's salvation there is shown both the severity of God Who would not let sin go unpunished, and the goodness of God Who supplied what man could not to meet the penalty.

### III. SACRIFICIAL ASPECT OF CHRIST'S DEATH.

Aquinas also adapts the idea of sacrifice to the sufferings of Christ, as is seen in the following quotation:

(1) Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Sum. Theol., iii, Q. 47, p. 302.

(2) Ibid. Q. 48, p. 311.

(3) Ibid. Q. 50, p. 337.



"...the ceremonial precepts of the Law, which are especially ordained for sacrifices and oblations, Christ fulfilled by His passion, in that all the old sacrifices were figures of that true sacrifice which Christ offered by dying for us."(1)

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According to his theory, God was<sup>not</sup> moved to love man for the first time since his fall, by the death of Christ, but a barrier to that love was removed and a ransom was given:

"It must not be said that the passion of Christ reconciled us to God in such a manner that He began to love us anew, but because through Christ's passion the cause of hatred is removed, both by the removal of sin and by the repayment of a more acceptable benefit."(2)

With the voluntary suffering of Christ in human nature, and the union of the believers and Christ as the result of this suffering, God "was appeased."(3)

Aquinas eliminates the most grotesque features of the old Satan or ransom theory. The trick God practiced on the devil by the Incarnation does not appear. The price or ransom idea is present. However, it is paid to God and not to the devil. Man by his sin incurred the penalty of servitude to the devil, but only as subjected by a judge to a torturer. He should be redeemed, but only in respect to God. In this way the idea of God acknowledging the rights of Satan in man or paying a ransom to him are avoided. A vestige of the old Satan-rights idea, however, still appears, as he tries to explain man's escape from Satan, saying that Satan "exceeded the measure of the power intrusted to him by God, by devising the death of Christ who did not deserve death."(4)

(1) Thomas Aquinas, Sum.Theol.,iii, Q.48, p. 311.

(2) Ibid. Q.49. p.323.

(3) Cf. Ibid. Q.49,p.323.

(4) Ibid.Q.49,p.325.

#### IV. THE MYSTICAL UNION OF CHRIST AND THE BELIEVERS.

The chief peculiarity in St. Thomas' conception of the atonement lies in the prominence he gives to the idea of a mystical union of Christ and His people, using the Pauline symbol of the head and its members. It is by this union, he teaches, that man is able to appropriate the merits which Christ has won for him. Christ is the Head, and satisfaction is applied to all the members of the body. All the grace that has been won through Christ's sufferings is imparted, infused we might say, through the mystical union. (1)

Anselm had maintained the necessity of the Redeemer being of human stock, but did not develop this close and permanent union figure as did St. Thomas. Through this union, St. Thomas reasoned, all believers share in the satisfaction of Christ because they are part of one mystical person:

"the head and the members are as if it were one mystical person, and therefore the satisfaction of Christ extends to all believers as to His members." (2)

As the head of the Church grace was given to Christ sufficient not only for His own salvation, but sufficient to overflow to all its members, having earned eternal salvation for them.

Lest some should take him to mean that all men are members of Christ without some actual spiritual union with Him, Aquinas added:

"When satisfaction has been rendered liability to punishment has been removed; but the satisfaction of Christ takes effect in us only in so far as we become one body with Him, as members with the head, and the members ought to be conformed to the Head." (3)

(1) Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Sum.Theol., iii, Q.49, p.329.

(2) Ibid. Q.48, p.312.

(3) Ibid. Q.49, p.330.

Through this union there flows from Christ a healing stream of grace by which sin is forgiven and justification made effective. This justification is the actual making of men good through the virtue that God infuses into them.

Along with this theory is the Abelardian idea that we are freed from sin more and more as we are drawn to love God by the exhibition of His love in the death of Christ.

The principal ideas that make up St. Thomas' conception of the atonement may be represented by three words: merit, satisfaction, and union. To understand how these three work together in a complete experience of salvation, according to St. Thomas, it is absolutely necessary to take into consideration the sacraments of the Roman Church, the final enumeration of which was done largely by this scholastic.

#### V. THE SACRAMENTAL SYSTEM.

The theologians most prominent in developing the sacramental system were Hugo St. Victor, Peter Lombard, Alexander of Hales and Thomas Aquinas. Bernard of Clairvaux enumerated ten sacraments, including foot-washing. Abelard named five: baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, marriage and extreme unction. Hugo St. Victor likewise seemed to recognize five, identical to those of Abelard, except for one. He substituted penance for marriage. Thomas Aquinas set the number at seven which is the complete system recognized by the Roman Church today: baptism, the eucharist, confirmation, extreme unction, penance, ordination, and marriage. Most of the schoolmen held that all these were instituted by Christ Himself. (1)

(1) Schaff-Herzog Ency. of Relig. Knowledge, Vol. X, p. 143,  
Dave, R.W., "Sacraments."

It is very easy to see that according to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the sacraments there is a definite connection between the external ordinances and God's communication of Himself, or certain blessings, to those who observe the sacraments; that He has endowed the outward ordinances with a power to convey certain blessings. The failure to observe these deprives men of the spiritual blessings that they are said to confer.

According to the first part of the definition of sacraments given in the Catholic Encyclopedia, it seems the author (D.J. Kennedy) would convey the idea that in the Catholic system the sacraments are looked upon as the Reformers looked upon the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper -- "Sacraments," he writes, are "outward signs of inward grace." However, in the same sentence he reveals that he does not consider the sacraments as only "outward signs" of inward grace, for he adds: "instituted by Christ for our satisfaction." Hence, the Council of Trent:

"If anyone says that the sacraments of the new Law do not contain grace which they signify, or that they do not confer grace on those who place no obstacle to the same let him be anathema."

And again:

"If anyone says grace is not conferred by the sacraments *ex opere operato* (1), but that faith in God's promises is alone sufficient for obtaining grace, let him be anathema." (2)

- (1) i.e. by virtue of the action, meaning that the "efficiency of the sacraments does not depend on anything human, but solely on the will of God as expressed by Christ's institution and promise." See. Cath. Ency. Vol. XIII, p. 297.
- (2) Cath. Ency., Vol. XIII, p. 297, Kennedy, D.J., "Sacraments"

All the sacraments were not considered of equal importance. Baptism alone was thought essential to salvation. This sacrament and the eucharist were thought the most significant. The supposed effect of each is given very concisely by R.W.Dove in the Schaff Herzog Encyclopedia as follows:

"Baptism is the door to the other sacraments and to the kingdom of God; confirmation completes what baptism has begun and confers the grace of ever-increasing strength; the eucharist confers the food of spiritual life in the very body and blood of Christ; penance deletes the guilt of actual transgressions as baptism regenerates from the guilt of original sin; extreme unction heals the soul from sin not already remitted by penance, and is also intended to heal the body; ordination empowers persons to administer the sacraments; and marriage makes the union between two persons perpetual and in harmony with the union between Christ and the Church."(1)

According to St. Thomas the passion of Christ is, as it were, a fountain from which, by means of the sacraments, there flows a healing stream of grace, forgiving, justifying and sanctifying.(2)

These sacraments are therefore, not mere signs of grace, nor even only channels of grace, but "contain and confer" grace. They confer grace and make righteous by a virtue inherent in them, and further, they impart virtue, if necessary, without the presence of active faith.

Penance is the most elaborately developed of all the sacraments of the Roman Church. It arose with the belief that taking the sacrament of baptism removed the guilt of sins committed up to that time, but all post-baptismal sins would have to be expiated in some other way. This way came to be by works and satisfaction, through confession, priestly absolu-

(1) Schaff Herzog Ency. Vol.X, p.143, Dove, R.W., "Sacraments."

(2) Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Sum. Theol., iii, Q 49, p.323.

St. Thomas was a great exponent of the efficacy of the sacrament of penance. He taught that it was absolutely essential to salvation to anyone who had committed an actual mortal sin. (1) Salvation is made to depend primarily, not upon any direct effects of Christ's atonement, but upon a mysterious influence that effects the soul in a semi-physical manner through external means. Good works are made obligatory, and they generally consist of penance and observation of ecclesiastical regulations.

If merits thus earned are insufficient for some penitent they can be supplied from others who have earned an over-supply. It was here that the merit of Christ may also be applied. In this way the doctrine of indulgences arose. The Church enjoined temporal penalties upon the sinner. These had to be paid by penal sufferings or good works, in pains of purgatory if the saint had not satisfied sufficiently in this life. But the merits of Christ were more than sufficient for the redemption of the human race, and the saints by their works of supererogation had increased their merits, so the pope or bishop had the power to apply these surplus merits to the covering of penalties on any condition they wished. (2) This brought about the practice of paying for indulgences in money, attendance of masses, or maybe by joining a crusade.

(1) Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Sum. Theol., iii, Supp. Q vi, Art. i.

(2) Cf. Ibid. iii, Supp. Qq 25-27.

## VI. SUMMARY

The conception of the atonement formulated by Thomas Aquinas was strictly objective. It was framed to fit into the theological system of the Church, and with Christ and the Father predominantly in view. It is largely Anselmic -- the idea of a complete satisfaction for sin, but not altogether true to this principle in the light of the additional emphasis on human merits. It is of a superabundant satisfaction resulting in superabundant merit for man because of the uniqueness of the obedience, suffering and sacrifice of Christ which caused God to love Him more than He hates sin. Through a mystical union with the Head the believing member benefits by this merit won for him and is made righteous. The instruments by which this union is established and fostered are the sacraments.

The doctrinal view which we are to consider along with and against this one of Thomas Aquinas was not developed until two whole centuries later. Its author and chief exponent, Martin Luther, began his well-known activities as a controversialist in the year 1517.

It was not out of the theological system just as Aquinas left it that the conception taught by the Great Reformer sprang, so we shall next briefly treat what may be looked upon as some of the roots from which grew this variant view of the atonement which has influenced such a large portion of the Christian Church for four centuries.

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CHAPTER THREE

FORESHADOWINGS OF LUTHER'S THEOLOGY



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### FORESHADOWINGS OF LUTHER'S THEOLOGY

#### I. DUNS SCOTUS.

The adherents of the theological system as developed by Thomas Aquinas, which made up the major part of the Church after the thirteenth century, became known as the Thomists. Opposed to them were the Scotists, disciples of Duns Scotus (1265-1308 A.D.) This theologian differed from Aquinas at almost every point. He taught that all things relative to Christ and man's redemption were the result of God's free and arbitrary will. Their values were dependent upon His acceptance of them. If He willed to accept the passion of Christ as of infinite worth it ~~was~~ of infinite worth. However, sin is not infinite in nature, and God might have used any method whatever, as He willed, to restore man; even the satisfaction made by some man. The value of meritorious acts is determined similarly. Scotus does eliminate Aquinas' inconsistency between the conception of superabundant merit and the doctrine of penance, by denying the former. Applying his acceptance principle to human merits their standing is somewhat altered, as can be seen in these words:

"It is true that merit is attainable by me upon the general conditions that I have use of free will, and that I possess grace. But complete realization of the idea of merit is not in my power, except by Divine institution. The principal thing in merit thus proceeds from God, although this is not equivalent to saying that it is God Himself who merits ... thus the principal thing in merit proceeds from God, if by the principal thing is meant its final completion." (1)

Thus we see that right along with the doctrine of human merits, which is so antithetical to the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone, there appears the idea that all merit is finally based upon

(1) Lib.i.dist.17,qu.3, Taken from Ritschl, A., Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, p.84.

the mercy of God as it is by this that they are made possible.

## II. THE MYSTICS OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

Among the writings of the mystics of the Middle Ages have been found ideas that appear to foreshadow some Reformation views of the atonement, even though the <sup>mystics</sup> were more concerned about practical piety than about theology. Most of them were members of ~~one~~ of the two great mendicant orders -- the Franciscan and the Dominican.

Such famous figures as Bernard of Clairvaux of the twelfth century and St. Francis of Assissi, and others who emulated them, rose above the thought of merits toward God. Spending much time thinking of their own sinfulness and unworthiness they attributed the good done by them to God's grace. Bernard affirmed that the only merit which has any value is the humility that renounces all claim to merit and trusts in God alone. (1) But it was usual among the members of these orders to seek merit by accepting ascetic habits of living.

Luther assigns a place of considerable influence to the writings of some mystics. He asserts that next to the Bible and Augustine he is most indebted for what he has learned of "God, Christ, man and all things" to the Deutsche Theologie. (2) In this work are expressions that seem very nearly to have the meaning of later Lutheran doctrine, e.g.

"He is at once God and man, and able to make satisfaction for mankind, in that he intervened and freely took our guilt."

and

"Who by His sincere love redeemed human nature from evil and made satisfaction to the Divine justice for all our guilt." (3)

(1) Cf. Ritschl, A., Christian Doctrine of Justification & Rec, p.99

(2) Cf. Ibid, p.105.

(3) Spiegel des ewigen Heils, C.44, Taken from: Grensted, L.W., A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement, p.167.

We should not overlook, however, the fact that one of the chief principles of mysticism, then, as in most forms of mysticism of any time, was the annihilation of personal individuality in order to gain absorption in the being of God. This is distinctly different from the idea of disclaiming personal merit and placing all confidence in Christ's merit for a redemption from sin and a standing before God.

Ritschl thinks that German mysticism had little in it that contributed to the formation of Luther's theology (1), but Julius Köstlin, in discussing the development of the doctrines held by Luther, at the time that he was forming the ninety-five theses, writes: "The dominant influence is here already decidedly that of Mysticism, and we shall find the same to be true to a still greater extent of the labors and public utterances of Luther to which we now turn our attention." (2) Of course this influence will not be seen in the expression of the justification tenet of Luther, but we shall find that similar views can be traced in what the Great Reformer has to say concerning the vital union of the believer and Christ.

### III. JOHN WYCLIF (1324-1384)

The names of John Wyclif and John Huss are usually thought of in connection with the evangelical protestantism of the Middle Ages. Surely they were protestants, even if not in the Lutheran sense. Hastings Rashdall (in his "The Idea of the Atonement in Christian Theology") only makes a mere mention of them, in a brief note attached to one of his lectures. He speaks of their having some views in common with Luther but does not state that they influenced him at all. (see p. 393). Ritschl criticizes those who

(1) Cf. Ritschl, A., Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, pp 107-108.

(2) Köstlin, Julius, The Theology of Luther, Vol. I, p. 123.

claim to find in their teachings any source for Luther's doctrine of justification. (1) Having in mind only the actual declarations of Wyclif and Huss, Ritschl is no doubt right, but it appears that he has failed to recognize the significance of these two men as predecessors to the German Reformation, in their strenuous opposition to some of the doctrines and practices of the Church.

As far as we know Luther had no direct contact with any of Wyclif's works. But he knew what their strongly condemned points of emphasis were; (They had been condemned by the Council of Constance, 1414); especially that he emphatically claimed the supreme authority of the Scriptures, renouncing therefore the supreme authority of the Church, with its many ranks of priesthood. The temporal rulers who were opposed to papal interference in civil affairs had in Wyclif a strong ally. Luther knew that Wyclif had taught that the bread and wine of the sacrament were not changed into the body and blood of Christ by priestly consecration, but that Christ was bodily present along with these in virtue of the consecration -- consubstantiation as against transubstantiation. (2)

Wyclif spoke against priestly absolution, maintaining that it was not the prerogative of the priest to remit sins, that he can declare the remission of sins but that God alone absolves. In his "The Babylonian Captivity" Luther has a paragraph that indirectly is strong evidence of his sympathies with Wyclif and Huss, and further it may be concluded from it that he was influenced by them:

"I do not intend to listen or attach the least importance to those who will cry out that this teaching of mine is Wyclifite, Hussite, heretical, and contrary to the decision of the Church.....If Wyclif was once a

(1) Cf. Ritschl, A., Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 114, 115.

(2) Cf. Mackinnon, James, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. II., p. 252.

heretic, they are heretics ten times over, and it is a pleasure to be suspected and accused by such heretics and perverse sophists, whom to please were the height of godlessness. Besides, the only way in which they can prove their opinions and disprove those of others, is by saying, 'That is Wyclifite, Hussite, heretical!'" (1)

In addition to rejecting the supreme authority of the Church, in teaching as well as in temporal power, Wyclif disclaimed the efficacy of the sacraments of confirmation and extreme unction, together with penance as held by the Church. There was nothing in this that actually presaged the doctrine of justification by faith alone, but the knowledge of such opposition to the traditional beliefs of the Church of the fourteenth century, and the protesting spirit that its influence disseminated had its effect on the mind of the Great Reformer.

#### IV. JOHN HUSS

John Huss (1369-1415), who was a pupil of Wyclif, denounced many of the practices and doctrines of the Church, one hundred years before Luther posted his theses. For his protestings he was burned in 1415.

Luther believed that the Council of Constance did wrong in condemning Huss; that some of his teachings were "Christian and evangelical," and was willing to defend them. (2) In this regard he wrote in "The Babylonian Captivity":

"Let this stand fast, -- the Church can give no promises of grace; that is the work of God alone. Therefore she cannot institute a sacrament. But even if she could, it would not follow that ordination is a sacrament. For who knows which is the Church that has the Spirit? since when such decisions are made there are usually only a few bishops or scholars present, it is possible that these may not be really of the Church, and that all may err, as councils have repeatedly erred,

(1) Works of Martin Luther, Holman, A. J., Pub., p. 189.

(2) Cf. Köstlin, Julius, The Theology of Luther, pp. 315, 428.

particularly the Council of Constance, which fell into the most wicked error of all." (1)

In his dispute with John Eck in Leipzig, in 1519, Luther said:

"It is certain that among the articles of John Huss, there are many that are absolutely Christian and evangelical, which the Church Universal cannot condemn." (2)

Eck used as an argument against Luther, as we have already seen from Luther's own words, that heresies such as his were condemned by the Council of Constance, in the case of Huss. In the controversy over the communion Luther's opponents contended that he was a disciple of Huss (3). In answer to some publications after the Leipzig controversy Luther asserted that the Council of Constance, in condemning John Huss, was guilty of condemning Christ over again, and also Paul and Augustine. "The very stones cry out against the murderers of Huss," he wrote. (4)

John Huss did not definitely influence Luther at the time that he developed his doctrine of justification by faith, we may have to admit, but he had followed Wyclif in disavowing the supreme authority of the Church, with its councils, acknowledging no other authority as final, except the Scriptures, and also as to the civil powers of ecclesiastical rulers. He rejected transubstantiation and throughout Bohemia the laity partook of the wine in observing communion. Here were, in spirit at least, forces opposing the basic doctrines of the Roman Church, and their strength was not abated when Luther appeared in Wittenberg with his theses.

In the second decade of the sixteenth century, independent of the works of Huss, Luther went further than had the Bohemian martyr, in his digression from traditional beliefs of the Church, but when such works did

(1) Works of Martin Luther, Holman, A.J., Pub., pp. 274-275.

(2) Jacobs, H.E., Martin Luther, p. 140.

(3) Cf. Mackinnon, James, Luther and the Reformation, p. 166.

(4) Ibid. p. 217.

fall into his hands he expressed his complete acceptance of them, and was encouraged by them.

In October, 1519, Huss's work on the Church was sent to Luther by a Bohemian who considered Luther the Huss of Saxony. He was greatly impressed by this work and claimed Huss as his fore-runner. To a sympathizer he wrote:

"Without knowing it, I have hitherto been teaching all that John Huss taught and so has Staupitz. In short we are all Hussites, though hitherto unconscious of the fact. Yea, Paul and Augustine themselves were really Hussites. See the marvellous pass to which we have come without a leader and teacher from Bohemia! I know not for very stupor what to think, in the face of these terrible judgments of God among men, of the fact that the clearest evangelical truth, publicly consumed more than 100 years ago, is still regarded as damnable error and is not allowed to be confessed. Woe to the earth!" (1)

Luther here underestimates his own originality, for we know that there was more in his teachings at this time than could be found in the works of Huss. This testimony, however, indicates how much these two had in common, and that Luther was anticipated by Huss. There did exist in the teachings and reforms of Huss a germ of the real Reformation doctrine of the Great Reformer.

#### V. JOHN GERSON.

When Luther was in the monastery at Erfurt, we are told by Melancthon, he diligently studied the works of John Gerson (1363-1429). He was a great mystic and a nominalist in theology. He maintained that God gave His Son to suffer and bear man's sin in order that justice might be met, which was very definitely a teaching of the Reformation. He wrote:

(1) Mackinnon, James, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. II, p.169.

"God would never permit unpunished evil and therefore laid all our sins and faults upon Jesus Christ....."

Sin is very greatly to be hated because it very greatly displeases the Divine justice; for you behold God suffering the penalty due to sin, in order to destroy it." (1)

"Laid all our sins and faults upon Jesus Christ," and "the penalty due to sin," is phraseology that very much resembles that from the pens of the Reformers, and contains concepts that are no doubt fore-runners of prominent Protestant theological affirmations.

#### VI. JOHN WESSEL.

The last man that we shall mention as being in the group of those who maybe set out stakes that led, or guided, Luther in setting out from the main road of Medieval theological thinking, is John Wessel (1420-1489). So many of the teachings of this predecessor of Luther were in line with the Reformer's views, the latter said that if he had studied them earlier his enemies might have plausibly accused him of borrowing everything from them. (2)

Ritschl here also feels that we do wrong if we apply the term "reformer," but there is sufficient reason for Wessel's being classed among those whose attitude and teaching foreshadowed the Reformation. He sharply criticized the doctrine of penance, and could not see how there could be any further sacrifice for sin than the sacrifice, sufferings and death of Christ. Such is his language:

"He who hears and believes the Gospel ... whatever he does and suffers to gain Him, praises not his own works or himself as working....he attributes nothing to himself, knowing that he has nothing from himself." (3)

(1) Grensted, L.W., A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement, p.393.

(2) Cf. Fisher, G.F., History of the Christian Church, p.276.

(3) Grensted, L.W., A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement, p.171.



Wessel declares the work of Christ, and faith in it, as the only means of justification. He asserts that men are not made righteous by the works of the law. This can be seen in the lines quoted above. However the faith of which he speaks is not that with the emphasis on belief, but on love -- a faith operating in love -- directed toward the sacrifice of Christ. He maintained that the justification of the sinner and the continued justification of the saint were not the result of participation in any sacrament, but the result of the attitudes of the heart of man, those of contrition and love. The accompaniment of these is forgiveness and an infusing of righteousness. The latter of these was, of course, a strong point in the teaching of Aquinas as opposed to Luther's doctrine of Imputation of which we shall see more in the next chapter.

## VII. CONCLUSION.

We agree with Ritschl that the German mystics, Gerson and Wessel, and even Wyclif and Huss, were not reformers of fundamental doctrine, such as that of the atonement, but we feel justified in maintaining that they produced a religious attitude, and in a small way, a trend in theological thinking that makes the birth of Reformation theology seem quite natural, if not inevitable.

Those who we may term more evangelical, specifically, Wyclif and Huss, very definitely anticipated even the doctrine of the Reformation, in their challenge of the rights of the Church, the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the validity of the sacraments.

We shall now take up the points of theology postulated by Luther that have a bearing upon the doctrine of the Atonement, and see how they are related to the teachings of Thomas Aquinas on this subject.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### MARTIN LUTHER'S CONCEPTION OF THE ATONEMENT COMPARED WITH THAT OF THOMAS AQUINAS

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#### INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther (1483-1546) did not begin his career, as a reformer, in the realm of theology. The ninety-five theses posted on the door of the church in Wittenberg were aimed at certain practical abuses in the Church, (most notable among them, the sale of indulgences). The beginning of new theological views in the life of Luther came out of his own religious experience as he tested it by the Scriptures. In one of his commentaries he writes:

"We have both, viz., the certain testimony of Scripture and also experience. These are to be regarded as the two witnesses and touchstones of sound doctrine....Thank God, I can preach from experience that no work can help or console me against sin and the judgment of God, but that Christ alone pacifies, and consoles the heart and conscience. To this all Scripture bears witness, as well as the examples of many godly men." (1)

Out of Luther's religious experience came principles that formed the greater part of the basis upon which rested the Reformation controversy -- justification by faith alone and the supreme authority of the Bible.

The doctrine of the atonement was not formally dealt with by Luther, but in the new presentation of the idea of justification as over against the doctrine of merits there is developed an explanation of the atonement.

Justification by faith alone was the cardinal doctrine of the Reformation. "In my heart," wrote Luther, "there dominates but the one

(1) Com. on I Cor.15, Taken from, Jacobs, H.E., Martin Luther, p.349

article, viz., faith in my Lord Christ, who is the sole beginning, and end of all my spiritual and divine thought that I have day or night." (1) This is his standard; not any formal doctrine of systematic theology. It is such that a man can judge for himself his own religious experience and standing before God. Nevertheless, the problem faced was that of man's salvation and the means to it which, of course, is the concern of the doctrine of the atonement.

Hastings Rashdall (in his *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*, p. 397) states that the Reformation "introduced little that was the really new into the theology of the atonement and much less than is commonly supposed into the doctrine of justification." (2) It will be the burden of this chapter to discover to what extent this contention is true, or false. We know that at the outset Luther had no intention of forming a new theory of the atonement. Nevertheless, the Penal Theory of the atonement which became the accepted view of the greater part of the Protestant theologians after Luther's time had its main source in his own teachings. Put very simply the genius of this interpretation of the atonement is that Christ, by His death on the cross, bore the punishment for all sin.

We shall now seek to discover wherein Luther's conception of the atonement differs from that of Aquinas and what points he held in common with the scholastic. In an earlier chapter we presented the prominent features of Aquinas' interpretation -- superabundant merit, superabundant satisfaction, mystical union, and the efficacy of the sacraments. This was a purely objective approach to, or definition of, salvation. The effect of Christ's work upon man was little noted, except in the treatment of the inner union of the Head and its members, hence the idea

(1) Preface to Gal. (1535), taken from Jacobs, H. E., *Martin Luther*, p. 349.

(2) Rashdall, Hastings, *The Idea of Atonement in Ch. Theol.*, p. 397.

of justification did not receive the amount of attention that the Reformers came to give to it.

We do well to remember here that in focusing interest on the doctrine of justification Luther was not occupying himself with all that is included in the doctrine of redemption, but incidentally it was all given due treatment. Aquinas placed his emphasis on the manner in which salvation was worked out by Christ, while Luther made his on the way in which it is appropriated by man. Of course these are not exclusive of each other. The doctrine of justification was the battleground where the opposing views met. Is man justified before God by works, or by faith? Is this position reached through the mediation of the Church, or by the sinner independent of the Church, or its mediation.

Though the story of Luther's sudden grasping of the justification-by-faith-alone doctrine when he was ascending the marble steps in Rome is often told, yet the impression given by it is frequently an erroneous one. Ritschl repudiates, on behalf of Luther, the idea that "in the thought of justification by faith he propounded something that up to his time had been utterly unheard of." (1) This does not mean, however, that it was in harmony with the main thought of medieval theology on this subject; rather that it can be traced in the works of a few individuals as far back as to Augustine.

Luther's contention at this point was not in keeping with the popular thought of his day. This is clearly seen in a statement from the papal council which met at Trent (Dec. 13, 1545--Dec. 4, 1563) with this new "heresy" for one of its chief considerations --

(1) Ritschl, A., Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, p. 164.

"That said author, having commenced with attacking indulgences, seeing that he could not accomplish his object without destroying those works of penance, the default of which indulgences supply, had not found a better means than the unheard-of doctrine of justification by faith alone ...that as a consequence, he had denied the efficacy of the sacraments, the authority of priests, purgatory, the sacrament of the mass, and all other remedies instituted for the pardon of sin-- and that by opposing argument it was necessary for the establishing of Catholic doctrine to destroy this heresy of justification by faith alone and to condemn the blasphemies of the enemy of good works." (1)

In the pronouncement of the last line is indicated what the contemporaneous Roman Church put over against Luther's claim -- justification by faith alone-- at least partially, justification by works. That Luther's understanding of redemption allowed no place for the sacramental system of the Church as it then existed is also plain from this statement. In a later discussion we shall give our attention to this.

There were in every century those within the Church who saw as the ultimate ground of forgiveness, merit, and justification, the sacrificial work of Christ. We noticed a few of these in our last chapter -- Bernard of Clairvaux, John Gerson, John Wessel, and even Thomas Aquinas shared this conviction in some degree. But the divine act of justification as taught by Luther was not in the minds of any of these. At least so we conclude from their writings. There was the difference of removing the guilt and declaring a sinner righteous before God because of Christ's propitiatory work, and the making a sinner righteous by infusing into him a new nature.

#### I. ORIGINAL SIN.

In order to fully appreciate Luther's opposition to the current apprehension of redemption we need to see how he differed with the Roman

(1) Orr, James, The Progress of Dogma, p.245.

Spaced underlining means that the words above are italicized in the original.

doctrine concerning the original state of man, or the doctrine of Original Sin. Oxenham writes that "for understanding rightly the point of departure of the Reformed systems it is necessary to indicate their relations to the Catholic doctrine on the state of innocence, and the Fall, for here the root of all further differences will be found to lie"(1)

Here Luther is a close disciple of Augustine. He taught that as a result of original sin man is totally depraved and utterly helpless in bringing about his salvation; he cannot even respond to God's grace.

According to a statement of Luther the schoolmen held that man originally possessed a righteousness that was not actually a part of his primitive being, "that is, not a part of human nature as originally created; but a certain ornament, only additionally bestowed on man as a separate gift. Just as if one should place a garland on the head of a beautiful maiden." (1) Luther did not believe that primitive man possessed any righteousness, but was rather in a state of innocence, and so of neutrality. "I call Adam's primitive, creative innocence the childhood of glorious innocency," he wrote, "because Adam, if I may so speak, was in a middle state, or a state of neutrality or liability." (2)

In view of this difference in the understanding of the original state of man it is not surprising that the fall of man is described differently. To the scholastics it consisted of the loss of the original righteousness that they attributed to the first parents, but that was all. (3) This Luther calls an absurdity and madness. It was his conviction that in the Fall man's natural properties did not remain as they were originally created but were completely corrupted --

"Since therefore it is evident that all these natural powers are lost, who is so mad as to assert that the faculties and properties of nature are still sound and whole? And yet, there was nothing more common nor fully

(2) Commentary on Gen. III, Luther's Works, Lenker, Vol. I, p. 257.

(3) Ibid. p. 183.

(4) Ibid. p. 257 (Cf.)

(1) Oxenham, H.N., The Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement, p. 206.

received in the schools than this doctrine.....The natural faculties in man therefore created originally sound and whole, ~~were~~ knowledge of God, faith in God, the fear of God, etc. All these Satan corrupted by sin in the same manner as leprosy defiles the whole flesh. The will and reason of man therefore are so corrupted by sin, that he not only does no longer naturally love God, but flees from him and hates him and wishes to live without him, and to be without him altogether. ....Are all these woeful things proofs, I pray you, that the qualities and faculties of man's original nature still remain sound and whole?" (1)

Thus to Luther's way of thinking human nature was utterly deprived of its soundness in intellect, will and affection. And this is the condition of man from his earliest formative stages. In his commentary on Psalm LI he interprets David as meaning exactly this --

"I am a sinner, not because I committed adultery and murder, and caused the death of Uriah, but I committed adultery and murder, because I was born a sinner, aye, conceived and formed in the womb as such.." (2)

The natural powers of man, then, are altogether debased, his desires are all evil, his reason is utterly unreliable, his will is subject to sin, without God's intervention man can do nothing but sin.

In our discussion of Aquinas' theory of superabundant merit we noted that he did not believe man merited damnation because of original sin alone. This would be the natural outcome of the traditional interpretation of the Fall. If this were true, Luther asks: "Was it not utterly vain that Christ should be sent into the world as the Redeemer of man, if it was man's original righteousness only, which was merely a foreign and separate addition to his nature that was lost; and if that loss still left the faculties and qualities of his original nature sound and perfect?" (3).

- (1) Commentary on Gen. 3:7, Luther's Works, Lenker, pp 258, 259.
- (2) Jacobs, H.E., Martin Luther, p. 353.
- (3) Commentary on Gen. 3:7, Luther's Works, Lenker, p. 259.



Thus we can see that Oxenham is justified in giving the interpretations of the original state of man and the Fall such an important place in the development of the Reformation conception of the atonement. In the belief of the Roman Church the man who is to be justified is not of an essentially evil nature, nor is his sin infinite. These factors must have figured in Aquinas' conviction that God could have chosen some other way of making atonement for man than the incarnation and death of His Son, if He had so wished.

## II. JUSTIFICATION.

Luther has left us a declaration of his belief concerning justification that is too plain to need explanation:

"I, Dr. Martin Luther, the unworthy evangelist of the Lord Jesus Christ, thus think and thus affirm:—that this article, viz., that faith alone, without works, justifies before God, can never be overthrown, for . . . . Christ alone, the Son of God, died for our sins; but if He alone takes away our sins, then men, with all their works, are to be excluded from all concurrence in procuring the pardon of sin and justification. Nor can I embrace Christ otherwise than by faith alone; He cannot be apprehended by works. But if faith, before works follow, apprehends the Redeemer, it is undoubtedly true that faith alone, before works, and without works, appropriates the benefit of redemption, which is no other than justification, or deliverance from sin. This is our doctrine; so the Holy Spirit teaches and the whole Christian Church. In this, by the grace of God, will we stand. Amen." (1)

### 1. The Work of Christ.

"By faith alone," and "by faith alone, without works" are watchwords in Luther's theology. They contain the idea that man is justified, that is, forgiven, and considered righteous before God, by

(1) Orr, James, The Progress of Dogma, p. 259.

the work and merit of Christ only, and that these are effective for man only as he appropriates them by faith.

The theology of Aquinas (as we saw in Ch.II) includes: forgiveness through the sacrament of baptism, added grace in confirmation, removal of post-baptismal sins by penance and extreme unction, and an infusing of righteousness through the eucharist and other good works. These good works were chiefly the observing of the sacraments.

We must, from the first, note the difference in Luther's view of the objective work of Christ in comparing it to the superabundant satisfaction conception of Aquinas.

Luther's testimony upon the subject of Christ's work is extremely abundant, particularly upon that of His death, but it is nowhere brought together as a uniform, organized treatment. It must be gathered from various sermons or publications, mostly those on controversial themes, and from his commentaries.

Though the theology of Luther is concentrated on the death of Christ it is difficult to find any reason given for the necessity of this death. Rashdall holds that he accepts the sacrifice of the Son as sufficient for the redemption of man solely because he believed this to be according to the Father's arbitrary will and pleasure. (1) This statement does not appear to be altogether accurate in the light of some of Luther's words, e.g.--

"We are offenders; God, with his law, is he which is offended; and the offence is such that God cannot pardon it, neither can we satisfy for the same....Moreover God cannot revoke his law, but he will have it observed and kept." (2)

It was Luther's belief that God has laws which are indispens-

Cf.

(1) Rashdall, H., *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*, p.398.

(2) *Commentary on Gal.3:20*, Miles, p.402.

ible to His nature. These cannot be ignored. If God forgave sin, the violation of His laws, without punishment having been born, He would not be true to His being. This is practically identical to Anselm's answer in the beginning of *Cur Deus Homo*, but it has the further step of bearing punishment to meet justice, in the explanation of the necessity of the sufferings of Christ.

In his superabundant merit idea Aquinas proposed that by His life of obedience, and by His death, Christ won, merited, for man, more than was sufficient for his redemption. . Luther resorts to the language of the apostle Paul, especially that used in his letters to the Galatians and the Romans. It is here that the penal theory of the atonement appears. That is, that Christ, by His death on the cross, vicariously endured the curse which rests upon the sinner. In his commentary notes on Galatians 3:13 he states:

"..our most merciful Father, seeing us to be oppressed and overwhelmed with the curse of the law, and so to be holden under the same, that we could never be delivered from it by our own power, sent His only Son into the world, and laid upon Him all the sins of men, saying, Be thou Peter that denier; Paul, the persecutor, blasphemer, and cruel oppressor; David, that adulterer; that sinner which did eat the apple in paradise; that thief which hanged upon the cross, and briefly, be thou the person which hath committed the sins of all men: see, therefore that thou pay and satisfy for them. Here now cometh the law and smith: I find Him a sinner, and that such a one as hath taken upon Him the sins of all men, and I see no sins else but in Him: therefore let Him die upon the cross; and so he setteth upon Him and killeth Him. By this means the world is cleansed and purged from all sins, and so delivered from death and all evils."(1)

## 2. Differs From Aquinas' Satisfaction Theory.

All this is of course very different from the satisfaction theory of Thomas Aquinas in which because of God's great love for Christ,

(1) Commentary on Galatians, Pub: Miles, 1843, p. 361.

as He lived in perfect obedience to Him and suffered, satisfaction is made for sin -- however, not apart from the penitential system of the Church. By the aid of the sacraments the saint must do good works to make the satisfaction complete, though this may appear, and be, inconsistent with the idea of <sup>the</sup>superabundant satisfaction of Christ.

Luther's emphasis is that, in dying on the cross, Christ was actually cursed and punished for the sinner. As we have already seen: "Here now cometh the law and saith: I find Him a sinner." Shortly after this, in the same discussion he declares:

"...he is made a curse for us, and is hanged upon the cross as a wicked man, a blasphemer, a murderer and a traitor...For all the curses of the law are heaped together and laid upon Him, and therefore He did bear and suffer them in His own body for us. He was therefore not only accursed, but also was made a curse for us."(1)

This thought, that Christ became ~~a~~ sinner to properly bear the punishment due men for their sins, Luther reiterates time and again. The following words are similar to those we have already quoted, but present the idea a bit more forcibly:

"And this, no doubt, all the prophets did foresee in spirit, that Christ should become the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel and blasphemer, that ever was or could be in the world. For He being made a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, is not now an innocent person and without sins, is not now the Son of God born of the Virgin Mary; but a sinner....and, in short, he is the person who hath taken upon himself and beareth in his own body, all the sins of all men in the whole world, who ever have lived, are now living, or who shall hereafter live."(2)

Whatever the necessity of satisfaction in the system of Aquinas, it was meant for God, not for the sinner. For God because He was offended

(1) Commentary on Galatians, Pub: Miles, 1840, p. 368.

(2) Ibid. p. 358.

by man's sin. As the quotations we have already noted clearly indicate, Luther apprehended far more than this in the work of Christ. Not that the removal of God's wrath was not included in Luther's understanding of Christ's atoning work. Notice how the two aspects are blended in the following lines taken from one of the Reformer's New Year's sermons:

"It being impossible for us to purchase forgiveness, God ordained in our stead one who took upon himself all our deserved punishment and fulfilled the Law for us, thus averting from us God's judgment and appeasing His wrath." (1)

The outstanding peculiarity of Luther's explanation of Christ's redemptive work is that Christ bore the penalty of sin for the sinner. Hence, the penal theory. The death of Christ was not so much a sacrifice of highest honor to God, as thought by Aquinas, as it was pre-eminently a vicarious death, endured that the curse of sin might be completely removed, and the wrath of God terminated.

### 3. The Peculiarity of Christ's Suffering.

Luther points out that not the bodily sufferings, nor the sense of being rejected by His people, made up the greatest agony of the dying Savior, but the spiritual agony that necessarily accompanied the act of becoming a sinner for man's sake. Together with this the greatest cause for suffering was the consciousness of the wrath of God being upon Him. We might say that it was Luther's view that Jesus died from the deadly effects of sin and the wrath of God. Köstlin presents this view of Luther very lucidly:

"Sin and the wrath of God were the cause of His death, just as death in the first instance, came by sin. His death was a 'death from sin(Sündentod)' and

(1) Luther's Works, Vol. 7, p. 284, Editor: Lenker, E.S.N..

a death of (due to) the wrath of God. Thus, the inner sufferings, or agony, of Jesus, in comparison with which the agony and fear of all other men are but trifling experiences, was, in particular, a consciousness of this divine wrath. Thence came the terror which preceded His death. Luther very frequently described the condition into which Christ was then brought as an abandonment by God.....God, says he, is life, light, wisdom, righteousness, mercy, power, peace, salvation, and everything that is good. To be abandoned by God is to be in death, darkness, folly, sin, weakness, distress, despair, and eternal condemnation. This is the crowning suffering (summa passio) of Christ." (1)

#### 4. Two Points of Partial Agreement.

Both Aquinas and Luther held that the attitude of God toward the sinner was changed by Christ's death. As we have noted, Luther laid great stress at this point. With his Augustinian emphasis upon the magnitude of sin this is a natural consequence. Toward the removal of the wrath of God Aquinas finds the sacraments of great value.

The death of Christ holds the great central place in Luther's thought concerning the atoning work of Christ but for him as for Aquinas Christ's ministry as Savior began with the incarnation. This <sup>was</sup> a humiliation which would make possible the greater humiliation of becoming a cursed sinner on the cross. (2)

#### 5. The Significance of Christ's Resurrection.

In the resurrection of Christ Luther finds an essential part of the provision for man's redemption. This is not the case in the teachings of Aquinas. Just how the resurrection of Christ assists in the process of salvation Luther does not treat definitely, but he often refers to its vital importance as an article of faith. Commenting on the sermon of Peter in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:34-43) he writes:

(1) The K stlin, Julius, The Theology of Luther, Vol. II, pp. 398, 399.

(2) Cf. Ibid. p. 396.

"The meaning of the new message of comfort, the new declaration of peace, is that Christ, through His resurrection, has in Himself conquered our sin and death, has turned away the wrath of God and procured grace and salvation; that He has commanded forgiveness to be preached unto us, desiring us to believe He gives it and confidently to receive it through faith." (1)

and again:

"Faith ..... must believe that by virtue of Christ's resurrection we obtain remission of sins." (2)

In his treatment of the passage, Col. 3:1-7 ("If then ye were risen together with Christ, etc") he writes:

"The text declares unto us the supreme blessing and happiness the resurrection brings within our reach ... remission of sins and salvation from eternal death." (3)

In his notes on some verses from James I he finds occasion to speak of the "blessings in Christ's resurrection." Among them he gives these:

"Our hearts are enlightened and filled with joy, and we have passed from the darkness of sin, error and fear into the clear light.... We have a good, joyous conscience, one able to withstand every form of sin and temptation." (4)

In addition to these blessings there will be others in the future life--

"the consummation of resurrection blessings," "Perfect gifts." (5)

From these words of Luther one would almost gather that man's salvation depended wholly upon the resurrection of Christ. If in the resurrection Christ "has in Himself conquered our sin and death, has turned away the wrath of God and procured grace and salvation" (see first quotation on this page) it would seem that the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ holds the most prominent place in Luther's theology. We

(1) Luther's Works, Vol. 8, pp. 196, 197, Editor: Lenker, J.N.

(2) Ibid. p. 198.

(3) Ibid. p. 218.

(4) Ibid. p. 293.

(5) Cf. Ibid. p. 294.

know this is not the case, but the over-emphasis of this point in Luther's theology reveals a common tendency of the Reformer, that is, giving such great prominence to whatever feature of the subject he is presenting. His basis was always found in the Scriptures, and usually filled him with such enthusiasm, it is no wonder that it was difficult for him to maintain a perfect balance of emphasis in proclaiming the new truths that were so vital to him.

#### 6. Differences in Relation to Good Works.

In Luther's most eminent teaching, justification by faith, the place of human merits becomes the chief point of controversy. It was his contention that, because of his state of total depravity, man could not merit for himself any forgiveness or justification before God by his good works, or own worthiness. He is justified by faith alone. Hence, we shall first consider the grounds of justification in Luther's theology. We have already seen (Ch. II) that in Aquinas' theology human merits avail with God; that they contribute toward a man's salvation.

##### (1) Grounds of Justification.

Luther denies that any human, before or after being justified, is capable of doing anything that is good before God. In his ninety-five theses he said: "The just man sins in every good work," and "our best good work is a venial sin." In commenting on the latter he made a still more radical statement asserting that "every good work of the just man is a damnable and a mortal sin if it were judged by the judgment of God." (1) In a passage already quoted (p. 48) we have this plain declaration: "faith alone, without works, justifies before God .... Men, with all their works,

(1) Cf. Rashdall, Hastings, The Idea of the Atonement in Christian Theology, p. 402.



are to be excluded from all concurrence in procuring the pardon of sin and justification." Luther was very vehement in pronouncing utterly fallacious the doctrine of merits in good works. To him anyone who preached any other Gospel than that of justification by faith alone was accursed; or at least their gospel should be so.

"So we also say: 'Our preaching and the foundation of our faith, is that by faith alone, independently of the Law and of works, justification and salvation stand. And were the whole world Carthusians and taught otherwise, let it be accursed. Were the whole world barefooted friars, preachers, Augustines, Benedicts, and taught otherwise, let it be accursed. Or, again, if there were one whole world of holy Augustines, another of holy Francises, a third of holy Dominics, a fourth of holy Benedicts, a fifth of holy Anthonys, a sixth of St. Pauls, a seventh of angelic Gabriels -- what then? If they teach otherwise, let them be accursed.'" (1)

Luther was so firm in denouncing the teaching that good works are efficacious in obtaining salvation because to him it undermined the central pillar of his soteriology and Christology:

"Now, if God confers his grace because of their good works, their careful preparation, Christ must be without significance. What need have they of Christ if they can obtain grace in their own name and by their works? .....What does Christ signify if by effort of my own human nature I can obtain God's grace? ...

It being impossible for us to purchase forgiveness, God ordained one in our stead ~~who~~ who took upon himself all our deserved punishment, and fulfilled the Law for us, thus averting from us God's judgment and appeasing his wrath. So it is true that grace is given us gratuitously --without cost to ourselves." (2)

#### (2) Penance.

The sacrament of penance which was an important part of Aquinas' theological system had greatly deteriorated by Luther's time. The scholastics had worked out these distinctions:-- the "form" which was

(1) Luther's Works, Vol.7, p. 393., Editor: Lenker, J.N.

(2) Ibid. pp.283, 284.

absolution, the "effect," which was the forgiveness of sins, and the "material," which consisted of three things that the sinner must do: confess, be contrite, and make satisfaction. In the time of Aquinas, satisfaction was made mainly by observing ecclesiastical regulations. By Luther's time the practice of indulgences had been united with the sacrament of penance. Punishments for both venial and mortal sins were removed by the Church when indulgences were paid. They were of a large variety. Some were: adoration of relics, worship at certain shrines, pilgrimages and contributions of money. The last was a great source of monetary income for the Church in Luther's day. Aquinas' idea of the saints earning merit for those in purgatory was taken over into this system also.

Luther's ninety-five theses were posted October 31, 1517. For more than a year he had been preaching against the practice of buying indulgences as a means to salvation. It was only as a conscientious prophet within the Church that he made this protest, not at all anticipating the cleavage that it was to precipitate.

October 6, 1520 there was published the work that marks Luther's break with the Roman Church -- "The Babylonian Captivity." In this Luther attacks the sacramental system of the Church, maintaining that through it the Romish Church has imposed upon the people an intolerable bondage. The forms of bondage that he sees are: restricting the communion cup to the priests, the doctrine of transubstantiation, the teaching "that the mass is a good work and a sacrifice," and the false form of penance. (1)

Cf.

- (1) Works of Martin Luther, Publisher: Holman, A.J., Vol. II., pp. 180, 186, 187, 188, 194, 199-203, 245-255.

It is the last of these that particularly interests us here. We have said that penance came to consist of three things, namely, confession, contrition and satisfaction. These were to assist in the development of more godly lives, and to each was attached merit. But they were secularized and commercialized until they miserably failed to function as aids to faith in Christ, and purer living. They had been so distorted said Luther "so as to destroy whatever of good there might be in any of them and to establish here also their covetousness and tyranny." (1)

The sacraments of confirmation, marriage, ordination and extreme unction Luther rejects, not finding any Scriptural warrant for their existence.

In closing this treatise (The Babylonian Captivity) He summarizes his view of the sacramental system:

"..it has seemed best to restrict the name of sacrament to such promises as have signs attached to them. The remainder, not being bound to signs, are bare promises. Hence there are, strictly speaking, but two sacraments in the Church -- baptism and bread; for only in these two do we find both the divinely instituted sign and the promise of forgiveness of sins. The sacrament of penance, which I added to these two, lacks the divinely instituted sign ... Nor can the scholastics say that their definition fits penance, for they too ascribe to the sacraments a visible sign... But penance, or absolution, has no such sign;...

Baptism, however...will truly be a sufficient substitute for all the sacraments we might need as long as we live. And the bread is truly the sacrament of the dying; for in it we commemorate the passing of Christ out of this world, that we may imitate Him. Thus we may apportion these two sacraments as follows: baptism belongs to the beginning and the entire course of life, the bread belongs to the end and to death." (2)

Thus we see that Luther gives no place to remission from sin through the deeds of penance, the sacrament that was carefully developed by Aquinas.

(1) Cf. Works of Martin Luther, Publisher: Holman, A. J., Vol. I, p. 247.

(2) Ibid. Vol. II, pp. 291-292.

(3). "Good Works" According to Luther.

From the strong statements that the Great Reformer has made about man's utter helplessness in doing any good because of the entire corruption of his nature it might be thought that he considered man at no time, and under no circumstances, capable of doing good works of any kind. This is not the case. In the same year that he published "The Babylonian Captivity" he sent to Melanchthon a fifty-eight page work entitled: "Of Good Works." In the opening paragraph of this treatise he eliminates from what is to be looked upon as good works much that was commonly accepted as such; those things that we have already dealt with. But in the next two paragraphs he commits himself to a definite doctrine of good works:

"The first and highest, the most precious of all good works is faith in Christ, as He says, John vi. When the Jews asked Him: 'What shall we do that we may work the works of God?' He answered: 'This is the work of God that ye believe on Him Whom He hath sent.'... in this work all good works must be done and receive from it the inflow of their goodness...

We find men who pray, fast, establish endowments, do this or that, lead a good life before men, and yet if you should ask them whether they are sure that what they do pleases God, they say, 'No'; They do not know, or they doubt. ... Now all these works are done outside of faith, therefore they are nothing and are altogether dead. For as their conscience stands toward God and as it believes, so also are the works which grow out of it. Now they have no faith, no good conscience toward God, therefore their works lack their head, and all their life and goodness is nothing. Hence it comes that when I exalt faith and reject such works done without faith, they accuse me of forbidding good works, when in truth I am trying hard to teach real good works of faith." (1)

In these last two lines lies the heart of Luther's doctrine of good works, and proof that he did not deprecate the value of human effort and accomplishments. Of course, Luther's understanding of this value was alto-

(1) Works of Martin Luther, Publisher: Holman, A. J., Vol. I, pp. 187-188.

gether different from that of Aquinas. It was not in the actual works themselves but the state of heart and mind of the doer. Aquinas taught that the good works should come out of, and be accompanied with, love, but he placed no stress on the need of faith. Here Luther placed the greatest stress. Any work to be "good work" must flow from faith, which itself is the greatest of all works. Just the fact that Aquinas made no mention of this latter whatever separates the two systems by a great distance.

Another point of great significance is that Luther widens the field for good works, extending it to include all of life's activities: Whatever is "done, spoken, or thought in faith." (1) "Even if it were so small a thing as picking up a straw," if it is done in faith, it is a good work. (2) No matter how apparently virtuous the act, "although it should raise all the dead and the man should give himself to be burned," if the performer hasn't faith it is of no consequence. (3) Faith is the absolute criterion.

The difference in motives can be seen by the following contrast that Luther himself makes; (in a treatise entitled; Works and Faith):

"A Christian who lives in this confidence toward God...can do all things,.... does everything cheerfully and freely; not that he may gather many merits and good works, but because it is a pleasure for him to please God thereby, and he serves God purely for nothing, content that his service pleases God. On the other hand, he who is not one with God, or doubts, hunts and worries in what way he may do enough and with many works move God. He runs to St. James of Compostella, to Rome, to Jerusalem, hither and yon, prays Bridget's prayer and the rest, fasts on this day and on that, makes confession here, and makes confession there, questions this man and that, and yet finds no peace." (4)

- (1) Works of Martin Luther, Publisher: Holman, A.J., Vol. I, pp 188.
- (2) Ibid. 189.
- (3) Ibid. 189.
- (4) Ibid. 191-192.

Thus we see that Luther believed firmly that every Christian should practice good works; that works are good only if they are the outcome of faith, and are accompanied by faith; that in diametrical opposition to Aquinas he taught that good works could not merit the favor of God, causing Him to forgive sin and bestow righteousness. To him every part of salvation is the result of faith in Christ and in this only.

#### 7. The Nature of Faith.

But what is the nature of this faith that plays the central rôle in Luther's understanding of man's appropriation of salvation --- by which he is justified, and which makes his works acceptable to God?

In the teaching of St. Thomas at this point love is of greatest importance; the good works that merit God's favor and grace are to be the outcome of love.

Luther conceives faith as being, first, of the intellect; the acceptance in the mind of the truth of God's Word and His Promise in the Gospel; the assurance that God will perform in Christ all that He has declared He will. But this is only an essential beginning. He is eager that men see that a mere mental assent to Scriptural truths is not sufficient, e.g.:

"Paul's intent is not to make us aware that before we can become Christians, this power (of Christ) must operate within us; otherwise, though we may boast and fancy ourselves believing Christians, it will not be true. The test,... Is it merely a doctrine of words, or one of life and operating power?" (1)

In his introduction to Romans He speaks of some who are liable to think of faith as nothing more than a superficial repeating of a formula:

(1) Luther's Works, Vol. 8, p.219, Editor: Lenker, J.N.

"when they hear the Gospel, immediately devise, from their own powers, the imagination in their hearts, to which they give expression in the words: 'I believe.' This they regard as right faith. Nevertheless, it is nothing but man's thought and imagination, which is never experienced at heart; hence it accomplishes nothing and no amendment follows." (1)

The faith that Luther advocates is one that is supported by the volition and emotions of man as well as by his intellect. "It feels," he writes, "that what is said is certainly true .... The word of itself must satisfy the heart, must so enclose and lay hold upon man, that he, though ensnared in it, feels how true and right it is." (2) In a passage of his commentary on Galatians II he gives a fine description of the working faith. It is as follows:

"Faith taketh hold of Christ, and hath him present, and holdeth him enclosed, as the ring doth the precious stone. And whosoever shall be found having this confidence in Christ apprehended in his heart, him will God account for righteous. This is the mean, and this is the merit whereby we attain the remission of sins and righteousness." (3)

In his Treatise on Good Works Luther has two paragraphs that deal definitely with the question of the source of faith. Briefly, he affirms the source to be: the mercy and love of God as revealed in Christ, and the Word that proclaims this truth. Every sentence of the paragraphs is worthy of our notice here. The following are they:

"But if you ask, where the faith and the confidence can be found and whence they come, this it is certainly most necessary to know. First: Without doubt faith does not come from your works or merit, but alone from Jesus Christ, and is freely promised and given; as St. Paul writes, Romans v: 'God commendeth His love to us as exceeding sweet and kindly, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;' as if he said: 'Ought

(1) Jacobs, H.E., Martin Luther, p.363.

(2) K6stlin, Julius, The Theology of Luther, Vol.II., p.227.

(3) Luther, Martin, Commentary on Galatiana, p.237.

not this give us a strong unconquerable confidence, that before we prayed or cared for it, yes, while we still continually walked in sins, Christ died for our sin?' St. Paul concluded: 'If while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, how much more then, being justified by His blood, shall we be saved from wrath through Him; and if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.'

Lo! thus must thou form Christ within thyself and see how in Him God holds before thee and offers thee His mercy without any previous merits of thine own, and from such a view of His grace must thou draw faith and confidence of the forgiveness of all thy sins. Faith, therefore, does not begin with works, neither do they create it, but it must spring up and and flow from the blood, wounds and death of Christ. If thou see in these that God is so kindly affectioned toward thee that He gives even His Son for thee, then thy heart also must in its turn grow sweet and kindly affectioned toward God, and so thy confidence must grow out of pure good will and love -- God's love toward thee and thine toward God. We never read that the Holy Spirit was given to anyone when he did works, but always when men have heard the Gosppl of Christ and the mercy of God. From this same Word and from no other source must faith still come, even in our day and always. For Christ is the rock out of which men suck oil and honey, as Moses says, Deuteronomy xxxii."(1)

Luther resorts to the use of the actual words of the Scripture in a great many of his explanations, as we have seen just above. In describing the process of the effects of true faith, in one of his sermons, he uses the same method:

"The process is this: When the individual hears the Gospel message of Christ -- a message revealed and proclaimed not by the wisdom and will of man, but through the Holy Spirit -- and sincerely believes it, he is justly recognized as conceived and born of God. John in his gospel (ch.1,12) says: 'As many as received Him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name.' And in the first verse of the chapter including our text, he tells us: 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God.' Through that faith, for the sake of his Son, God

(1) Works of Martin Luther, Publisher, Holman, A.J., Vol.I., pp.203-204.



accepts us as his children, pleasing to him and heirs of eternal life...

This doctrine condemns those arrogant teachers who presumptuously expect to be justified before God by their own merits and works."(1)

## 8. Conclusion.

To conclude our special consideration of Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone, we have a good summary of his explanation of it in some lines from his Treatise on Christian Liberty:

"Although, as I have said, a man is abundantly justified by faith inwardly, in his spirit, and so has all that he ought to have, except in so far as this faith and riches must grow from day to day even unto the future life: yet he remains in this mortal life on earth, and in this life he must needs govern his own body and have dealings with men. Here the works begin. ..... Nevertheless the works themselves do not justify him before God, but he does the works out of spontaneous love in obedience to God, and considers nothing except the approval of God, Whom he would in all things most scrupulously obey."(2)

Man is justified by faith alone because his sinful state makes it impossible for him to do any works that will merit God's grace; because there rests upon him a curse that only Christ could remove. This he did by taking it upon Himself when He died upon the cross. This was the punishment for sin that Jesus endured for all sinners. According to the teaching of Aquinas, Jesus, by His sublime and supreme sacrifice, voluntarily made, won for man even more grace than he needs to be redeemed, yet man earns this grace for himself by his good works. Aquinas did not see Jesus bearing the penalty of sin for man, nor declared that there was any particular contribution made to the redemptive scheme by Jesus' resurrection. Luther taught a doctrine of good works. Chief among the good works, however, is faith. This faith consists not mainly of love toward God, as held by Aquinas, but confidence in the promise of His Gospel. The life that flows from this faith makes all human activity good work.

(1) Luther's Works, Vol. 8, p.233, Editor: Lenker, J.H.

(2) Works of Martin Luther, Vol.II., pp 328, 329, Pub: Holman.

### III. SANCTIFICATION.

We have noted Luther's conception of the natural state of the unbeliever, what Christ has done to redeem him, and how he comes into the experience of this salvation that has been made possible. To complete the work of the atonement in the man of the present theologians of all times have found some provision in God's plan of salvation for man's sanctification. In the theology of Aquinas this began with baptism when the sinner, having been forgiven all his past sins, was united to Christ in a mystical way. At that time Christ began to be infused into him, and as he observed other sacraments, particularly that of penance, this process continued, making the sinner more and more righteous. In some undefined way this bestowal of grace and actual transformation of the sinner was connected with the passion of Christ. As the righteousness of Christ makes the sinner more righteous he becomes capable of doing meritorious works of his own free will. Thus man's standing before God was based on his own righteousness.

Like Aquinas Luther believed in a vital union existing between the believer and Christ; that the believer is in Christ as Christ is in the Father; so closely incorporated that the two are as one person. To illustrate this he uses the image of the marriage bond and presses it to most daring limits: (In his Treatise on Christian Liberty)

"The third incomparable benefit of faith is this, that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. And by this mystery, as the apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh. And if they are one flesh there is between them a true marriage, nay, by far the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but frail types of this one true marriage, it follows that all they have they have in common, the good as well as the evil,

so that the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as if it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as His own.

..... He by the wedding-ring of faith shares in the sins, death and pains of hell which are His bride's, nay, makes them His own, and acts as if they were His own, and as if He Himself had sinned; He suffered, died and descended into hell that He might overcome them all..... Thus the believing soul by the pledge of its faith is free in Christ, its Bridegroom, from all sins, secure against death and against hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life and salvation of Christ, its Bridegroom. So He presents to Himself a glorious bride, without spot or wrinkle, cleansing her with the washing in the Word of life.

..... Here this rich and godly Bridegroom Christ marries this poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil and adorns her with all His good..... she has that righteousness in Christ her husband of which she may boast as of her own, and which she can confidently set against all her sins in the face of death and hell, and say, 'If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in Whom I believe, has not sinned, and all His is mine, and all mine is His.' (1)

Though there is here in common with the teaching of Aquinas the idea of a close union with Christ the significance of that union is conceived as being altogether different from that in Aquinas' theology. There is nothing here of the idea that Christ's righteousness is "infused" into the believer making him actually good. Instead of that there is a bold reckoning of Christ's righteousness to be the believer's, by faith, as the believer's sin has become Christ's -- "The believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as if it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as His own," and "all His is mine, and all mine is His." This is the doctrine known in the field of theology as that of Imputation. It is not that the believer is actually becoming more and more righteous in his nature, but that before God, by faith, the

(1) Works of Martin Luther, Vol. II, pp. 320, 321, 322, Pub: Holman, A. J.

righteousness of Christ is accounted his, and likewise his sin accounted Christ's. In regard to the latter, showing that our justification and sanctification does not depend on the actual elimination of all evil from human nature, Luther writes in his Treatise on Baptism:

"For as long as I believe that God is willing not to count my sins against me, my baptism is in force and my sins are forgiven, though they may still, in a great measure, remain."(1)

Because of this interchange, the believer having reckoned to him the righteousness of Christ and Christ the sins of the believer, Luther's view of sanctification is directly linked to the atoning work of Christ, for it was on the cross that Christ identified Himself with the sins of all believers. This association cannot be made in Aquinas' teaching of sanctification, or of the believer becoming more righteous.

Some of the German princes feared the consequences of Luther's teaching concerning justification by faith alone, and the doctrine of imputation. If the masses were taught that good works were to be done away with, that they were of no value in the system of the Church, would not general immorality be the result? The Treatise on Good Works was written particularly to correct this erroneous conception. It was dedicated to John, Duke of Saxony. Our treatment of the subject of good works (pp55-61) resulted in the conviction that Luther not only thought *maintaining* good works an obligation of the believer, an inevitable outcome of true faith, but that the right faith issues in a life all the activities of which are good.

Luther did not fail to see the necessity of moral change in the life of the believer. The point he made and stressed emphatically

(1) Works of Martin Luther, Vol.I, p.66, Pub: Holman, A.J.

and repeatedly, and for which he suffered so much calumny and persecution, was that man's justification does not depend on this moral change or any of the deeds that are its result. In our study of Luther's conception of true faith (see pp61-64) we found that he stressed the need of such to accompany faith. In fact that it was by these that it proved its existence. The moral change and the good works following upon it would be greater and more numerous because this understanding and experience of justification would inspire men to live lives of good works instead of keeping to a certain restricted list. (1)

Luther despised the common practice of men professing to be believers and not supporting that profession with lives of high moral standards. In an Easter sermon he has this to say on this point:

"If you will not desist from the vice of covetousness, then know you are not a Christian, not a believer, but as Paul calls you, a base, detestable idolater, having no part in God's kingdom....Truly, Christ died for you, but if you continue in your wickedness, using this revelation as a cloak for your mean covetousness, do not...by any means apply that comforting promise to yourself. Although Christ indeed died and rose for all, yet unto you he is not risen; you have not apprehended his resurrection by faith."(2)

In practical Christian living Luther had a place for the equivalent of Aquinas' more righteous life, resulting from the infused righteousness of Christ, in the higher, purer, godlier life of the believer as a result of receiving God's grace and the Holy Spirit into the heart. Speaking of the believer he says:

"..he still lives in sinful flesh, he is not without sin, and not in all things pure, but has begun to grow into purity and innocence....from that hour (of baptism) (God) begins to make you a new man, pours into you His grace and Holy Spirit, Who begins to slay nature and sin."(3)

Cf.

(1) Works of Martin Luther, Vol.I, p. 188, Pub: Holman, A.J.

(2) Luther's Works, Vol.8, p.226, Editor: Lenker, J.N.

(3) Works of Martin Luther, Vol. I, pp 60, 61, Pub: Holman, A.J.

Luther was firmly convinced that moral change must follow justification. Imputed righteousness should be paralleled by growth of actual righteousness which, however, will have its source wholly in God, be the result of faith and not merit anything from God.

In Luther's theology the sanctification of the believer through a union with Christ is just as much a matter of faith as is justification. First his sins are reputed to Christ and Christ's righteousness is reputed to him; then the improvement, moral regeneration that goes on in his life, is the result of a believing, trusting relationship to Christ, done, not to gain any merits, but because of a divinely given desire to obey God. This faith-union is very different from the mystical union of Aquinas in which Christ is the Head and the believers the members who through love have become one with Christ, the righteousness of the Head flowing into the members making them good and righteous before God and capable of doing works that are worthy of merit.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

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At the beginning of this work we set out to compare the conceptions of the atonement in the theological systems of Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther. That of Aquinas we have found quite simple because it consists mainly of two things, one based upon the other -- super-abundant merit of Christ available for the sinner because of the super-abundant satisfaction that Christ made to God by His life and death. Through the agency of the sacraments man gains, sometimes earns, the merits of Christ. The result in the life of the believer is the changing of his nature by the transfusion of Christ's righteousness into him, transforming him.

#### I. POINTS OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN AQUINAS AND LUTHER.

Luther and Aquinas are agreed in the following: that both the life and death of Christ enter into His ministry of saving man; that it was because of sin, and to free men from the effects and power of sin, that Jesus was crucified; that the provision of salvation and the means of their appropriation all have their ultimate source in the grace of God; that the wrath of God upon the sinner was mitigated by Jesus' death; that in order to enjoy the benefits won by Christ there must be a proper inner personal attitude toward God (there was strong difference in opinion as to what this attitude should be); and that there is a strong union between Christ and the believer. Some of these are very general working out in detail very differently.



## II. POINTS OF DISAGREEMENT.

### 1. The Nature of Man.

At the beginning of the redemptive process, the natural state of man is seen by Luther to be totally corrupted and unable to cooperate with God in the work of salvation. In the Fall man became totally depraved, spiritually, intellectually and morally. This fact alone was sufficient to incur <sup>con</sup> eternal damnation from God. This Aquinas did not see. Man to him was not so thoroughly depraved, nor had he earned such a fearful judgment.

### 2. The Work of Christ.

As to the atoning work done by Christ, Aquinas considered that because of the love God had for His Son, the perfect obedience and the great sacrifice of His life was so acceptable it appeased the wrath of the Father and drew His grace toward sinful man. By the merits of Christ's sacrifice man is saved, but not without effort upon his own part. Aquinas interpreted the work of Christ from the point of view of God primarily.

In the death of Christ Luther saw the curse for sin of all men, for all time, being borne. Jesus, in dying on the cross, suffered the penalty that was due men. It was not a sacrifice to please the Father and change His attitude toward men, as much as it was an infinite work for man.

### 1. The Appropriation of Benefits Provided.

In the system of Aquinas the abundance of merits won by Christ is effective for man when he maintains a practice of good works; observing the sacraments, particularly doing penance. Luther taught that man

is incapable of doing any good works, and that all that can be done toward his salvation was done by Christ on the cross. Man can earn nothing from God. Anything he tries to do to earn God's favor or merits for himself, is judged an evil thing by God. His forgiveness and entrance into fellowship with God as a justified sinner is all the result of faith. Aquinas taught that the attitude man must have toward God to gain salvation is that of love. Luther maintained that it must be pre-eminently that of faith, a confidence that on the cross, as the Gospel declares, Christ bore the penalty due him.

#### 4. Sanctification.

As a baptized believer, observing the sacraments of confirmation, the eucharist and penance, Aquinas taught, one forms a mystical union with Christ. Christ enters his person and changes him into a being who actually becomes more righteous in the sight of God. Luther declared this to be madness. He was convinced that man is always altogether unworthy before God. Nevertheless he maintained that there is a very vital union formed between the true believer and Christ. This does not make the believer inherently more righteous before God. He is righteous before God, sanctified, because by His death Jesus took men's sin and by the cross He gives the man of faith His own righteousness, so that God reckons him altogether justified and righteous. Not that Luther does not look for a moral regeneration in the believer. He firmly taught that the saint should constantly be shaping his life after the pattern of Christ. Yet, it is not by this that he is judged by God.

### III. ADDITIONAL POINTS IN LUTHER'S CONCEPTION OF THE ATONEMENT.

Luther developed a doctrine of good works that was very significant. It was that all of man's doings are good works when they are preceded, accompanied by, and the outgrowth of faith. Faith itself is a good work. These are not good because they are done to please God, but because they are done as the result of a faith given by God.

The spiritual agony which Jesus suffered on the cross, which Luther taught, would not fit into Aquinas' interpretation of the atonement, because he did not conceive of Jesus taking upon Himself any curse for man.

Luther found the resurrection of Christ a necessary complement to His death in order to make the provision for man's redemption complete.

Thus we have found Luther and Aquinas in agreement at some points in the great doctrine of the atonement, but fundamentally Luther's conception was very revolutionary. He differed with Aquinas strongly in his view of: the source of the atonement as provided by the life and death of Christ, the method of man's appropriation of it, and its development in the earthly experience of the believer.

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THE END

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