

# ***Atonement: John's Gospel vs. Synoptic Gospels Reflected in Bach's John's Passion***

from

*Bach: Music In the Castle of Heaven* by John Elliot Gardiner  
Pages 389 – 396 (J.S. Bach 1685-1750) (Luther 1483 – 1546)

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More likely to offend, perhaps, was the Passion's ***weak overall emphasis on penitence***, its close resemblance to Francke's Pietist sermons, the ***failure*** of its interpolated movements (except for 'Erwäge') ***to interpret the Passion as God's act of atonement for man's fallen state and, above all, the 'sheer intensity of the Johannine world view' that Bach portrays.*** 34

In contrast to the image we gain from ***Matthew and the other synoptic Gospel writers***, who ***give repeated emphasis to Christ's humanity and his suffering***, ***John portrays Jesus as someone with preternatural powers of insight: serene and magisterially in control of his destiny – and, ultimately, a victor.*** 35

In this, ***Bach is utterly faithful to John***, showing Jesus to be seemingly unaffected by the vicissitudes of his trial, carrying out the mysterious will of the Father in full knowledge of what awaits him. His very dominance and confidence stands out above the typically human squabbling that surrounds him, a contrast that makes Bach's setting so extraordinarily dramatic. Such an approach reveals ***a perfectly respectable pedigree, which theologians have traced back to the early Greek fathers' view of the atonement, and one endorsed by Luther himself, who claimed that 'the gospel of John is unique in loveliness ... the one fine, true and chief gospel ... far, far to be preferred over the other three and placed high above them.'*** In it one finds a 'masterly account of ***how faith in Christ conquers sin, death, and hell; and gives life, righteousness and salvation***'. 36

36 Luther's preface to the New Testament in John Dillenberger, Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings (1961); and LW, Vol. 35, pp. 361-2.

Why, then, might this have been a controversial approach in Leipzig in 1724? According to the Swedish theologian Gustaf Aulén, 37 ***Luther was often misunderstood in this regard by his contemporaries and by later theologians, who saw in his teachings an unequivocal preference for the 'satisfaction' theory of the atonement [See Appendix A from Wikipedia] – the one articulated for example by Matthew and given further emphasis in Paul's epistles – whereby Jesus offers himself for punishment and sacrifice on behalf of sinful humanity and to win freedom from God's wrath, as opposed to from the power of evil.*** [A]

A) Where ***John celebrates Jesus' triumph over the forces of evil and the law*** (which he describes as a 'curse' or 'wrath'), ***Matthew underscores Christ's work of atonement to God's 'satisfaction'***. That ***Luther left no clearly defined statement on the subject of***

***atonement does not mean that he necessarily held a preference for one of these two different, though not mutually exclusive, theories, or that the two could not have coexisted in his theology.*** Aulén's view is that over time ***Luther was gradually drawn back to the far older Johannine (Christus victor) view 'with a greater intensity and power than ever before'.*** As he says, 'we have only to ***listen to Luther's hymns to feel how they thrill with triumph, like a fanfare of trumpets.***' ***This is equally true of Bach's settings of them in his cantatas.***

The view probably prevalent among the Orthodox Leipzig clergy of Bach's day, and passed on by them to their congregation, was that ***only the 'satisfaction' theory was legitimate. Bach,*** on the other hand, judging from the contents of his library (which, besides two editions of Luther's works, included a three-volume Bible with extensive theological commentary, and all the basic texts of both Pietism and Orthodoxy), ***seems to have understood and accepted the legitimacy of both views on the theory of atonement and their coexistence in Luther's work.*** His intention was evidently to give a balanced expression to each of these competing views in successive works – first in his John Passion and later in the Matthew. In constructing two such comprehensive but contrasted musico-theological statements – something not attempted by any contemporary composer Bach was behaving less like a musician and more like a painter, showing the same subject from two different angles, each with validity and conviction. 38

Was this just bravado on his part? Was he intentionally defying local susceptibilities? From our later perspective we see that the two Passions were designed to fit into – and indeed encapsulate – his two complementary cantata cycles adjusted to the Leipzig liturgy of the day. But to the consistory it may have looked like a deliberate flouting of their authority, made worse by his refusal to explain his aims in language that they could understand.

There is no direct testimony for any of this. But some kind of negative reaction seems to have been the precursor of further, more heated and, for the most part, undocumented disputes surrounding his John Passion over the next fifteen years, causing Bach to revise it no less than four times: twice with major readjustments to its contents and doctrinal slant; once, in 1739 [age 54], to abandon the work altogether for ten years; and then [age 64, the year before his death], in one last hurrah, to ***revive it a final time restored more or less to its original state.***

We can come close to gauging the clergy's reaction to Bach's first version of the John Passion by observing the drastic revisions he made to it exactly a year after its premiere. Out went the epic opening chorus ('Herr, unser Herrscher') and the offending closing chorale ('Ach Herr, lass dein lieb Engelein'), to be replaced by the chorale fantasia 'O Mensch beweine deine Sünde groß', planned and later used by Bach to conclude Part I of his Matthew, and a more elaborate concluding chorale, 'Christe, du Lamm Gottes', the final movement of the cantata he had presented at his Leipzig

audition (BWV 23). Not without a certain creaking of its joints, the John Passion was adjusted to its new position as the climax of the chorale cantata cycle. Gone, too, was the tenor aria 'Ach, mein Sinn', to be replaced by 'Zerschmettert mich' and a bass dialogue with soprano chorale 'Himmel reiße, Welt erbebe'. Perhaps the most draconian substitution of all was a new tenor aria, 'Ach, windet euch nicht so', in place of the magical 'Betrachte/ Erwäge' pairing, the keystone of Bach's original design for Part II. By any purely musical criteria, while the overall quality of the new numbers is consistently high, it would be hard to argue that these were 'improvements'. ***Taken as a whole, the effect was to dismember the initial patterning and structure of the original, as well as to alter its theological tone by giving greater prominence to the Pauline theology of justification by faith.***

***Only a strong consistorial rebuke can explain why Bach agreed to unpick key elements of his initial design and to jettison the consistent Johannine view of Jesus' atonement for humanity, and the far weightier importance he gave in each of the substituted movements to the acknowledgement of human guilt.***

If the consistory insisted that the Passion oratorio should give greater emphasis to the Orthodox 'satisfaction' theory, so be it: ***he would comply by introducing new music to match the sin-drenched imagery and the emphasis on God as 'strict judge'***. One of the effects – but surely not the motivation – of the 1725 revisions to the John Passion was to bring it into line with the tone of the chorale cantata cycle that he had been presenting for the past ten months (as we saw in Chapter 9).

***A more drastic result was to destroy what seems to have been his plan, stretched over two years, to make the two Gospel accounts and the two theories of atonement the pinnacles of his cantata cycles through successive and contrasted expression.*** By failing to complete the Matthew on time for Good Friday, Bach found himself boxed into a corner. Version 2 of the John Passion was a pis aller. By the time he next came to perform it, some five years later, all the interlopers had gone and the opening chorus was back in place, as was the 'Betrachte/ Erwäge' pairing. But now strangely excised were the insertions from Matthew and the final chorale. An aria no longer extant replaced 'Ach, mein Sinn' and an instrumental sinfonia took the place of movements 33 to 35 (the veil of the Temple recitative, the tenor arioso 'Mein Herz' and the soprano aria 'Zerfließe').

Perhaps the conflict never really died down. We know for example that in March 1739 an emissary from the town clerk came to tell Bach that 'the music he was planning to perform on the following Good Friday was not to be played until he had received due permission to do so, whereupon the latter replied that it had always been done so, it was of no particular interest to him, for he got nothing out of it anyway, and it was only a burden. He would notify the Superintendent that he had been forbidden to perform it. ***If there were objections to the text, why, it had already been performed several times before.***'<sup>39</sup> What pain and hurt and simulated indifference lie behind those words in that civil service reported speech!

It took him a further ten years to cease to smart over the injustice; and it was only ***when he had two years left to live that he brought the John Passion back with the original 1724 version restored in all its essentials.***

If ever there was proof of the importance Bach attached to the work and, significantly, to its initial conception and design, it is the recently discovered evidence of consecutive performances in the last two years of his life: that on 4 April 1749 was perhaps the very last performance conducted by him. An autograph testimonial for Johann Nathanael Bammler (a former Thomaner prefect who helped Bach with the copying and textual revisions to the final version of the John Passion) dates from 12 April 1749, a week later; Bach's hand there<sup>40</sup> is noticeably steadier and more fluent than in the late entries in the performing parts for the Passion, which previously had been thought to be his last. The sudden, temporary collapse in his health seems to have occurred in the second half of April; but by June, though clearly weakened, he was back at work – on the B minor Mass and on the first set of proofs for The Art of Fugue. Based on the evidence of his handwriting, the last autograph entries in the performing material of the John Passion could not have been made before the spring of 1750. That performance took place on 27 March, perhaps under the direction of the senior prefect, one day before Dr Taylor operated on Bach's eyes, the Saturday before Easter. 41

***Had he at last reached some sort of accommodation with the consistory or was this a final act of defiance, a flouting of a consistorial decree, and an insistence that he had been 'right' all along?*** At all events he prepared a fresh score of the Passion in which he himself wrote out the first eighteen folios before turning the remainder over to a copyist. By endorsing the original version, this last version brings 'Fassung Erster' and 'Letzter Hand' into alignment.

There may have been other factors besides those of theological difference behind the enforced revisions of 1725 and 1729 that might help to explain Bach's ultimate return to his initial version of the work – perhaps more fundamental reservations about the music itself, a sensitive nerve touched in the ongoing debate about the very nature of music's role in worship. For, whereas the Leipzig clergy might have found it hard to find anything deliberately subversive in Bach's creative endeavour (***it is surely beyond reproach in its fidelity to John's Gospel***), it certainly reveals what they might have recognised as a dangerous strain of artistic autonomy. It ***points up the essential differences between the Logos as spoken word and as set to – and transmogrified by – music.*** Quite apart from whether they were interested in, or even capable of discerning, the veiled patterns Bach constructed behind the obvious foreground ones (such as his juxtaposing worldly and spiritual perspectives on Jesus' identity, etc.) – the very qualities which set his John Passion apart from those of his contemporaries – they could hardly have failed to notice the compelling emotive power unleashed in his music. ***Tactlessly, perhaps, Bach was doing the preacher's job more effectively than it could possibly be done by words alone.*** We might speculate whether the dialogues between Pilate and the crowd, Pilate and Jesus, things we find particularly poignant today, were perhaps

uncomfortably theatrical – just too ‘operatic’ for what in their view was suitable as church music (though it is interesting that they never succeeded in getting him to tone this aspect down in subsequent revisions). ***By returning to the work in the last two years of his life and by restoring his initial conception of it, Bach was powerfully reasserting his position on the role the music of his John Passion could play in directing people’s thoughts to the meaning of Christ’s Passion in their lives.***

Let us return one last time to view the work from our own standpoint. There has to be an explanation why, in our secular age, listening to the John Passion seems to provide so uplifting an experience for so many people. I would suggest that ***the multilayered structure underpinning Bach’s Passion can be ‘felt’, if not immediately seen or heard, by the listener,*** in the same way that flying buttresses, invisible to the visitor when entering a Gothic church, are essential to the illusion of lightness, weightlessness and the impression of height. In fact, the longer you study them the more numerous seem to be the geometric patterns of repetition, symmetry and cross-referring, varying in the sharpness or thinness of their outlines. To change the analogy, it is akin to the experience one gets when looking down on to the gravelly bed of a shallow stream through the filmy refractive prism of water constantly but subtly shifting these outline definitions. Only by looking beneath the surface do the patterns become clear, and at that point the inherently unstable relationship between words and music, and the dialectical one between voice and instrument, singer and player, can come into focus.

***Potentially every performance moves through this process of deciphering and clarification towards an unknown goal.*** Any fragmentary contextual knowledge we can piece together will not – cannot – recapture the experience of listeners at its first performance, though it might serve to sharpen our response each time we encounter the music now. Although its original habitation is irretrievably lost, the work carries with it a potential novelty for those who themselves are open to novelty; for ‘this is a music that seems supremely wedded to a world of certainty and interconnectedness, yet its results, for many listeners at least, seem to be utterly unexpected and transformative.’ 42 ***Musicians (who of course have a vested interest here) tend to believe that what Bach expressed in his first Passion – and indeed the manner of its expression – has a perennial validity and therefore merits re-application in every new performance.***

While we might aim to produce something that is close to Bach’s performance, it will inevitably manifest itself differently on every occasion and in each new context. There is a sense that the musical material he has left us is both complete and unfinished, and in thinking about the meaning of our performances we should recall the emphasis T. S. Eliot placed on ‘a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence’. 43 It is by anchoring it in our time that we re-connect with the timeless fertility of Bach’s imagination.

***The springboard of his achievement is his direct interaction with the Gospel itself – its underlying themes, its antitheses and symbols – here more perceptibly than in the following Matthew Passion.*** The symbols spring to life every time the music is performed and help us to make sense of the outrage and pain of suffering, the contradictions and perplexities of the Passion story. Bach connects all along with the underlying human drama in John's account and brings it to the surface with the sympathetic realism of a Caravaggio or a Rembrandt. The equivalent to their masterly brushwork is his highly developed sense of narrative drama and his unerring feel for an appropriate scale and tone for each and every scene. Akin to the priority both painters gave to the play of darkness and its opposite is the way Bach's music is suffused with a translucency exceptional even by his standards. ***When speaking of Rembrandt's religious paintings, Goethe implied that the painter not so much 'illustrated' biblical events as took them 'beyond their scriptural basis'.<sup>44</sup> That is exactly what Bach does here: but rather than pigment it is the musical substance that is 'shone through'.***

***It is peculiarly difficult for us to grasp the prodigious craftsmanship and palpable sense of purpose in a work as complex as the John Passion.*** Bach seldom draws attention to the technical workings that underpin his compositional skills. Yet, like Brahms, he would have been quick to acknowledge that 'without craftsmanship, inspiration is a mere reed shaken in the wind'. oo ***Whether this can mean that his music was spiritually inspired (or, as some might claim, divinely engendered) depends of course on how we choose to reflect on the sources of his inspiration.***

When questioned further about the source of his inspiration, ***Brahms*** pointed to John's Gospel and to ***Jesus' words: 'the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works ... He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do'*** (14: 10– 12).

***Bach's answer could have been identical. The John Passion holds our attention from beginning to end – its music stirring, disturbing, exultant and profoundly moving. In this work Bach found his own first triumphant vindication of Luther's injunction that 'Christ's Passion must be met not with words or forms, but with life and truth.'***

Gardiner, John Eliot (2013-10-29). *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven* (Kindle Locations 8440-8444). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

## **Appendix A**

### **Wikipedia – Satisfaction Theory of Atonement**

The **satisfaction theory of atonement** is a theory in [Christian theology](#) that [Jesus Christ](#) suffered the [Crucifixion](#) as a [substitute](#) for human sin, satisfying God due to Christ's infinite merit. The theory draws primarily from the works of [Anselm of Canterbury](#) **Saint Anselm of Canterbury** (1033 – 1109). It has been traditionally taught in the [Roman Catholic](#), [Lutheran](#), and [Reformed](#) traditions of [Western Christianity](#). Theologically and historically, the word "satisfaction" does not mean gratification as in common usage, but rather *"to make restitution"*: mending what has been broken, or *paying back what was taken*. *Since one of God's characteristics is justice, affronts to that justice must be atoned for.*<sup>[1]</sup> *It is thus connected with the legal concept of balancing out an injustice.*

Anselm regarded his satisfaction view of the [atonement](#) as a distinct improvement over the older [ransom theory of atonement](#), which he saw as inadequate. Anselm's theory was a precursor to the *refinements of [Thomas Aquinas](#) (1225 – 1274) and [John Calvin](#) (1509 – 1564; lawyer), which introduced the idea of punishment to meet the demands of divine justice.*

### **Development of the theory**<sup>[edit]</sup>

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The classic Anselmian formulation of the satisfaction view should be *distinguished from penal substitution*. Both are forms of *satisfaction theory* in that they speak of *how Christ's death was satisfactory*, but penal substitution and Anselmian satisfaction offer different understandings of how Christ's death was satisfactory.

Anselm speaks of human sin as defrauding God of the honour he is due. Christ's death, the ultimate act of obedience, brings God great honour. As it was beyond the call of duty for Christ, it is more honour than he was obliged to give. *Christ's surplus can therefore repay our deficit. Hence Christ's death is substitutionary; he pays the honour to the Father instead of us.*

*Penal substitution* differs in that it *sees Christ's death not as repaying God for lost honour but rather paying the penalty of death that had always been the moral consequence for sin* (e.g., [Genesis 2:17](#); [Romans 6:23](#)).

*The key difference here is that for Anselm, satisfaction is an alternative to punishment, "The honor taken away must be repaid, or punishment must follow."*<sup>[2]</sup> *By Christ satisfying our debt of honor to God, we avoid punishment.*

In *Calvinist Penal Substitution*, *it is the punishment which satisfies the demands of justice.*<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

*Another distinction must be made between penal substitution (Christ punished instead of us) and substitutionary atonement (Christ*

*suffers for us*). Both affirm the substitutionary and vicarious nature of the atonement, but *penal substitution offers a specific explanation as to what the suffering is for: punishment.*<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

**Augustine** (354-430) *teaches substitutionary atonement.* However, the specific interpretation differed as to what this suffering for sinners meant. The early Church Fathers, including *Athanasius* (296-373) and *Augustine* (354-430), *taught that through Christ's suffering in humanity's place, he overcame and liberated us from death and the devil.*

*Thus while the idea of substitutionary atonement is present in nearly all atonement theories*<sup>[citation needed]</sup>, *the specific idea of satisfaction and penal substitution are later developments in the Latin church.*<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

## **St. Anselm links the atonement and the incarnation**<sup>[edit]</sup>

**St. Anselm of Canterbury** (1033 – 1109) first articulated the satisfaction view in his *Cur Deus Homo?*, as a *modification to the ransom theory* that was postulated at the time.<sup>[3]</sup> *The then-current ransom theory of the atonement held that Jesus' death paid a ransom to Satan, allowing God to rescue those under Satan's bondage.*<sup>[4]</sup> *For Anselm, this solution was inadequate. Why should the Son of God have to become a human to pay a ransom? Why should God owe anything at all to Satan?*

*Instead, Anselm suggested that we owe God a debt of honor: "This is the debt which man and angel owe to God, and no one who pays this debt commits sin; but every one who does not pay it sins.* This is justice, or uprightness of will, which makes a being just or upright in heart, that is, in will; and this is the sole and complete debt of honor which we owe to God, and which God requires of us."<sup>[5]</sup>

*This debt creates essentially an imbalance in the moral universe; it could not be satisfied by God's simply ignoring it.*<sup>[6]</sup> *In Anselm's view, the only possible way of repaying the debt was for a being of infinite greatness, acting as a man on behalf of men, to repay the debt of honor owed to God.*<sup>[7]</sup> *Therefore, when Jesus died, he did not pay a debt to Satan but to God, His Father.* In light of this view, *the "ransom" that Jesus referred to in the Gospels would be a sacrifice and a debt paid only to God the Father, in behalf of "many".*

*Anselm did not state specifically whether Jesus' payment of debt was for all of mankind as a group or for individual people, but his language leans in the former direction.*<sup>[8]</sup>



Thomas Aquinas' later developments specifically **attribute the scope of the atonement to be universal in nature**. It could not be said that Christ as God Incarnate died for this theory was condemned as **Patripassionism**, and Theopassionism, as it was taught by Sabellius because it required the Father to suffer equally with the Son since the Trinity is God. This unity of God in the "Homoousion" (coined by Sabellius) required the Trinity be understood by what was called the heresy of Modalism. **None of the substitutionary models accept that any part of the trinity dies**. As R.C. Sproul says "Some say, "It was the second person of the Trinity Who died." That would be a mutation within the very being of God, because when we look at the Trinity we say that the three are one in essence, and that though there are personal distinctions among the persons of the Godhead, those distinctions are not essential in the sense that they are differences in being. Death is something that would involve a change in one's being.

**We should shrink in horror from the idea that God actually died on the cross.** The **atonement was made by the human nature of Christ**. Somehow people tend to think that this lessens the dignity or the value of the substitutionary act, as if we were somehow implicitly denying the deity of Christ."<sup>[9]</sup>

## **St. Thomas Aquinas codifies the substitution theory**<sup>[edit]</sup>

**St. Thomas Aquinas** (1225 – 1274) considers the atonement in the *Summa Theologiae*<sup>[10]</sup> into **what is now the standard Catholic understanding of atonement**.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> For Aquinas, the main **obstacle to human salvation lies in sinful human nature, which damns human beings unless it is repaired or restored by the atonement**.

**In his section on man, he considers whether punishment is good and appropriate. He concludes that**

1. **punishment is a morally good response to sin**: it is a kind of medicine for sin, and aims at the restoration of friendship between the wrongdoer and the one wronged.<sup>[11]</sup>
2. **"Christ bore a satisfactory punishment, not for His, but for our sins,"** and
3. **substitution for another's sin is entirely possible**<sup>[12]</sup> **as long as the offender joins himself in will to the one undergoing punishment.**

**So the function of satisfaction for Aquinas is not to placate a wrathful God or in some other way remove the constraints which compel God to damn sinners.**

***Instead, the function of satisfaction is to restore a sinner to a state of harmony with God by repairing or restoring in the sinner what sin has damaged.*** <sup>[13]</sup>

***This is Aquinas' major difference with Anselm. Rather than seeing the debt as one of honor, he sees the debt as a moral injustice to be righted.***

In his section on the Incarnation, Aquinas argues that ***Christ's death satisfies the penalty owed by sin,***<sup>[14]</sup> and that ***it was Christ's Passion specifically that was needed to pay the debt of man's sin.***<sup>[15]</sup> For Aquinas, the Passion of Jesus provided the merit needed to pay for sin: "Consequently ***Christ by His Passion merited salvation, not only for Himself, but likewise for all His members,***"<sup>[16]</sup> and that ***the atonement consisted in Christ's giving to God more "than was required to compensate for the offense of the whole human race."***

So, Aquinas believes that ***the atonement is God's solution to two problems.*** Christ's passion and death, insofar as they serve to make satisfaction, are

1) ***the solution to the problem of past sin;***

and, ***insofar as Christ merits grace by his passion and death, they are***

2) ***the solution to the problem of future sin.*** <sup>[17]</sup>

In this way, Aquinas articulated the formal beginning of the idea of a ***superabundance of merit, which became the basis for the Catholic concept of the Treasury of Merit*** (see [Indulgence](#)). Aquinas also articulated the ideas of salvation that are now standard within the Catholic Church: that justifying grace is provided through the [sacraments](#); that the [condign merit](#) of our actions is matched by Christ's merit from the Treasury of Merit; and that ***sins can be classified as mortal or venial. For Aquinas, one is saved by drawing on Christ's merit, which is provided through the sacraments of the church.***<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

This sounds like penal substitution, but Aquinas is careful to say that he ***does not mean this to be taken in legal terms.***<sup>[18]</sup>

"If we speak of that satisfactory punishment, which one takes upon oneself voluntarily, one may bear another's punishment.... If, however, we speak of punishment inflicted on account of sin, inasmuch as it is penal, then each one is punished for his own sin only, because the sinful act is something personal. But if we speak of a punishment that is medicinal, in this way it does happen that one is punished for another's sin."

— Thomas Aquinas

***What he means by "satisfactory punishment," as opposed to punishment that is "penal," is essentially the Catholic idea of penance.*** Aquinas refers to the practice

saying, "A satisfactory punishment is imposed upon penitents"<sup>[19]</sup> and defines this idea of ***"Satisfactory Punishment" (penance) as a compensation of self-inflicted pain in equal measure to the pleasure derived from the sin. "Punishment may equal the pleasure contained in a sin committed."***<sup>[20]</sup>

Aquinas sees *penance as having two functions.*

**1) First to pay a debt, and**

**2) second "to serve as a remedy for the avoidance of sin".**

In this later case he says that "as a remedy against future sin, the satisfaction of one does not profit another, for the flesh of one man is not tamed by another's fast" and again "one man is not freed from guilt by another's contrition."<sup>[21]</sup> According to Aquinas "Christ bore a satisfactory punishment, not for His, but for our sins."<sup>[22]</sup> ***The penance Christ did has its effect in paying the "debt of punishment" incurred by our sin.***

This is a concept similar to Anselm's that ***we owe a debt of honor to God, with a critical difference: While Anselm said we could never pay this because any good we could do was owed to God anyway, Aquinas says that in addition to our due of obedience we can make up for our debt through acts of penance "man owes God all that he is able to give him...over and above which he can offer something by way of satisfaction"***.

Unlike Anselm, ***Aquinas claims that we can make satisfaction for our own sin, and that our problem is not our personal sin, but original sin. "Original sin...is an infection of human nature itself, so that, unlike actual sin, it could not be expiated by the satisfaction of a mere man."***<sup>[20]</sup> ***Thus Christ, as the "second Adam," does penance in our place - paying the debt of our original sin.***

***Why does he do that? By love. The whole of the work of redemption begins with God's love: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16).***

## **Calvin attributes atonement to individuals**<sup>[edit]</sup>

*Main article: Penal substitution*

***John Calvin was one of the first systematic theologians of the Reformation. As such, he wanted to solve the problem of Christ's atonement in a way that he saw***

*as just to the Scriptures and Church Fathers*, rejecting the need for **condign merit**.<sup>[23]</sup> His solution was that Christ's death on the cross paid **not a general penalty for humanity's sins, but a specific penalty for the sins of individual people**. That is, *when Jesus died on the cross, his death paid the penalty at that time for the sins of all those who are saved*.<sup>[24]</sup> One obviously necessary feature of this idea is that *Christ's atonement is limited in its effect only to those whom God has chosen to be saved*, since the debt for sins was paid at a particular point in time (at the crucifixion).

*For Calvin, this also required drawing on Augustine's earlier theory of predestination*.<sup>[25]</sup> Additionally, in rejecting the idea of penance, *Calvin shifted from Aquinas' idea that satisfaction was penance (which focused on satisfaction as a change in humanity), to the idea of satisfying God's wrath*. This ideological shift places the focus on a change in God, who is propitiated through Christ's death. *The Calvinist understanding of the atonement and satisfaction is penal substitution: Christ is a substitute taking our punishment and thus satisfying the demands of justice and appeasing God's wrath so that God can justly show grace*.

*John Stott has stressed that this must be understood not as the Son placating the Father, but rather in Trinitarian terms of the Godhead initiating and carrying out the atonement, motivated by a desire to save humanity. Thus the key distinction of penal substitution is the idea that restitution is made through punishment*.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

*Hence, for Calvin, one is saved by becoming united to Christ through faith*.<sup>[26]</sup> *At the point of becoming united with Christ through faith, one receives all the benefits of the atonement. However, because Christ paid for sins when he died, it is not possible for those for whom he died to fail to receive the benefits: the saved are predestined to believe*.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

## Further developments<sup>[edit]</sup>

*Anselm's theory was vague enough that Thomas Aquinas' modifications have completely overshadowed it*.

*Aquinas' theory is still official dogma within the Catholic Church, and it was affirmed at the Council of Trent*.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

*Calvin's development was affirmed at the Synod of Dort and is a part of the doctrinal positions of most Reformed denominations*.

*The Governmental view of the atonement of Hugo Grotius (1583 – 1645)*

*is, historically, a modification of Calvin's view, although it represents in some ways a return to the general nature of Anselm's theory. According to Grotius, Christ's death is an acceptable substitute for punishment, satisfying the demands of God's moral government. In this view, in contrast to Calvin, Christ does not specifically bear the penalty for humanity's sins; nor does he pay for individual sins. Instead, his suffering demonstrates God's displeasure with sin and what sin deserves at the hands of a just Governor of the universe, enabling God to extend forgiveness while maintaining divine order. The Governmental view is the basis for the salvation theories of Protestant denominations who stress freedom of the will as in Arminianism.*

*Other theories on the nature of Christ's atonement such as the **Moral Influence view**, originally formulated by **Pierre Abélard**, can also be seen as opposed to the Substitutionary view.*