



## COMMENTARY ON BENJAMIN WHEATON'S SUFFERING, NOT POWER: ATONEMENT IN THE MIDDLE AGES

By T. R. Halvorson | Copyright © 2023

---

### Outline

Introduction

Citation

Author

Aulén's *Christus Victor*

The Questions

Wheaton's *Suffering, Not Power*

Ch. 1 – Introduction

Ch. 2 – Dante Part I: Penal Substitution in the *De monarchia*

Ch. 3 – Dante Part II: Penal Substitution and Satisfaction in *Paradiso*

Ch. 4 – Caesarius Part I: Sin Offering in *Christus Victor*

Ch. 5 – Caesarius Part II: Expiation and the Devil's Rights in *Christus Victor*

Ch. 6 – Haimo Part I: Expiation and Propitiation in a Sacrificial Offering

Ch. 7 – Haimo Part II: Sacrifice and Satisfaction in Christ's Crucifixion

Ch. 8 – Conclusion

Evaluation

Excursus

Distinction Between Anselm and Luther, Penal Substitution and Vicarious Satisfaction

Luther on Atonement and Wheaton's Critique of Aulén

## Introduction

In this commentary, we consider historical research by Benjamin Wheaton in *Suffering, Not Power: Atonement in the Middle Ages*. This book reexamines the popular claim by Gustaf Aulén that the *Christus Victor* idea of atonement prevailed throughout the Middle Ages until Anselm's focus on expiation and propitiation in *Cur Deus Homo*. This has significance for all Christians. It has special significance for Lutherans because Aulén's critique of Anselm's penal substitution figures largely into current rejections "in our circles"<sup>1</sup> and "in our church"<sup>2</sup> of Lutheran Orthodoxy's doctrine of Christ's vicarious satisfaction.

Aulén persuaded many Lutherans to reject the orthodox Lutheran confession of vicarious satisfaction. He did this not scripturally, exegetically, dogmatically, or apologetically, but historically. His is a historical study in which he claims *Christus victor* prevailed in the church to the exclusion of penal substitution. Aulén did not merely recognize *Christus Victor* in coordination with or complementary to Anselm. "Anselm is judged not simply inadequate, but anathema."<sup>3</sup>

Wheaton asks, is Aulén's historical assertion true? Or was penal substitution widely taught and assumed throughout the Middle Ages and throughout Europe? Wheaton is a historian and meets Aulén on Aulén's ground of history. How good is Aulén's history?

After a citation of Wheaton's book and a brief description of the author, we begin with a brief recall of Aulén's contentions. With that in mind, then we proceed to Wheaton's reexamination.

## Citation

Wheaton, Benjamin. *Suffering, Not Power: Atonement in the Middle Ages*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022.

## Author

Dr. Benjamin Wheaton is a medievalist and historian of late antiquity. He earned an MA in Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto after receiving a Bachelor of Humanities from Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario. He earned a PhD from the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto. He is a Visiting Assistant Professor of History at Houghton University.

Wheaton has written several peer-reviewed articles in *Francia* and the *Journal of Late Antiquity* on the topics of theology and society in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Among his other writings are:

*Venantius Fortunatus and Gallic Christianity. Theology in the Writings of an Italian Émigré in Merovingian Gaul*, Leyde–Boston, Brill, 2022; 1 vol., 300 p. (Brill's Series on the Early Middle

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles A. Gieschen, "Editorial." *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2008, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur A. Just, Jr., "The Cross, the Atonement, and the Eucharist in Luke." *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, vol. 84, no. 3-4, 2020, pp. 227-244, 228.

<sup>3</sup> Peter J. Scaer, "The Atonement in Mark's Sacramental Theology." *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2008, 227.

Ages, 29). ISBN : 978-90-04-52194-0.

“Gregory of Tours and Handbooks Against Heresy,” *Francia*, Band 47 (2020), 1.

“The *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri* and the Transformation of Civic Power in Late Antiquity,” *Re-Wiring the Ancient Novel* (ANS 24.1), 2018, 263.

## **Aulén’s *Christus Victor***

In 1930, Swedish Lutheran bishop and professor of systematic theology at the University of Lund, Gustaf Aulén, made a major abiding impact on the theology of atonement with the publication of *Den kristna försoningstanken: huvudtyper och brytningar*. The book appeared in English translation the next year, 1931, as *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*. Jaroslav Pelikan designated one of its achievements as setting the ground rules for discussion of atonement.

What did Aulén himself say he was doing?

My aim in this book has been throughout an historical, not an apologetic aim. It has been my endeavor to make clear, to the best of my power, the nature of the various types of teaching on the subject of the Atonement as they have emerged in history. ... I have not had the intention of writing an *apologia* for the classical idea, and if my exposition has shaped itself into something like a vindication of it, I would plead that it is because the facts themselves point that way.<sup>4</sup>

A. G. Herbert said in the translator’s preface: “This book is strictly an historical study; it contains no personal statement of belief or theory of the Atonement.”<sup>5</sup> Aulén developed and expressed his own theology of the atonement in theological writings. Curiously, those hardly receive attention while the historical study of *Christus Victor* has been:

the starting point for countless essays, articles and books ... and its title has established itself in the theological usage of Swedish, German, and English as a technical term in its own right, so that even those who have not read the book used the phrase.<sup>6</sup>

This is significant for our commentary on Benjamin Wheaton’s new book, *Suffering, Not Power* because Wheaton’s study is also historical. In other words, we are not pitting a theological work against a historical study. We are challenging history in a historical study with another historical study of the same issue.

Aulén asserts that the early church taught the classical or *Christus Victor* idea of the atonement, but in the Middle Ages, a new “Latin” doctrine largely displaced it. He identifies the Latin idea especially with Anselm and his *Cur Deus Homo*. In the classic idea, Christ is victor over our enemies. Atonement is a matter of power. In the Latin idea, Christ makes satisfaction to God for

---

<sup>4</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), 158.

<sup>5</sup> A. G. Herbert, “Translator’s Preface,” *Christus Victor*, xxi.

<sup>6</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, “Foreword,” *Christus Victor*, xi.

our sin. He accomplishes this by suffering on our behalf the just penalty for sin, which is death.

Aulén next asserts that Luther recovered the *Christus Victor* idea to the exclusion of penal substitution. Contrary to that, Albrecht Peters,<sup>7</sup> Theodore Dierks,<sup>8</sup> Jack D. Kilcrease,<sup>9</sup> Francis Pieper,<sup>10</sup> and others have shown that what Luther did was coordinate vicarious satisfaction and *Christus Victor* as compatible and complementary of one another. Instead of falling into the false dichotomy of choosing one and anathemizing the other, Luther:

- teaches both and gives prominence to both; and
- orients one as the ground and explanation of the other.

For example, in Luther's explanation of the second article of the creed in his Large Catechism, Luther teaches vicarious satisfaction as the ground and explanation of *Christus Victor*. Contrary to that view, Aulén did not recognize *Christus Victor* in coordination with or complementary to Anselm. Rather, "Anselm is judged not simply inadequate, but anathema."<sup>11</sup>

Aulén, along with Peter Abelard, the Socinians, and the Lutheran Johannes von Hofmann, contribute criticisms of vicarious satisfaction in Lutheran Orthodoxy that led to its rejection by the Lutheran Gerhard O. Forde and his Lutheran disciples such as Steven D. Paulson. The Fordean school replaces vicarious satisfaction by the active and passive obedience of Christ in our place under God's Law with an "up and forgive" theory.<sup>12</sup> Before and without the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, God just up and forgave sin. The atonement did not happen on the cross. Instead, it happens when a preacher preaches a sheer bloodless absolution and sinners believe it.<sup>13</sup> Following Forde's lead about atonement happening not on the cross but only when a sheer word of absolution is believed, James Arne Nestingen teaches that,

"[Christ] enters the conscience through the absolution, through the proclaimed Word and the administered Sacrament to effect the forgiveness of sin. This is the true substitutionary atonement, happening here and now."<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Albrecht Peters, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, *Commentary on Luther's Catechisms, Creed 2* (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis: 2011), 161-162.

<sup>8</sup> Theodore Dierks, *Reconciliation and Justification*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), 19, 21, 43-44.

<sup>9</sup> Jack D. Kilcrease, *The Doctrine of the Atonement from Luther to Forde* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 28-29, 44, 48 quoting Luther and citing LW 26:165; WA 40.I:280.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), II.343-344.

<sup>11</sup> Peter J. Scaer, "The Atonement in Mark's Sacramental Theology." *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2008, pp. 227-242, 227.

<sup>12</sup> Forde, Gerhard O. "Caught in the Act: Reflections on the Work of Christ," *World in World*, 3/1 1983, pp. 22-31.

<sup>13</sup> James Arne Nestingen, "Speaking of the End of the Law" in Albert B. Collver, Jr., James Arne Nestingen, and John T. Pless, eds., *The Necessary Distinction: A Continuing Conversation on Law & Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 174.

<sup>14</sup> James Arne Nestingen, "Speaking of the End of the Law" in Albert B. Collver, Jr., James Arne Nestingen, and John T. Pless, eds., *The Necessary Distinction: A Continuing Conversation on Law & Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 174. In that passage, Nestingen says, "Christ finishes [note, not fulfills] the Law in two ways." The first way is as quoted in the body here. The second way Jason D. Lane explains as "walking in the Law ... yet without compulsion (FC VI:18) "after justification." Jason D. Lane, "That I May Be His Own: The Necessary End of the Law," in Steven D. Paulson and Scott L. Keith, eds., *Handing Over the Goods* (Irvine, CA: 2018), 61. Hence, unless that walk is reclassified as being part of the atonement itself, that second way in Nestingen is not about the atonement itself but about one of its effects in the Christian life.

These rejections of the suffering sacrificial atonement destroy justification. Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article V, paragraph 101 confesses:

We are justified only when we receive Christ as the Atoning Sacrifice and believe that for Christ's sake God is reconciled to us. Neither is justification even to be dreamed of without Christ as the Atonement.

To proclaim "justification, justification, justification" without the suffering sacrificial atonement of Christ is not justification. Justification cannot even be dreamed of without the suffering and self-sacrificing Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

## The Questions

*Query:*

How historical is Aulén's historical claim? That is Wheaton's question. We will keep a focus on it to let his work stand for what it purports.

For two reasons, however, I will sometimes interject commentary interacting with the material from the point of view of Lutheran Orthodoxy and other times leave that interaction for an excursus at the end of this commentary. The first reason to include these is that Aulén was a Lutheran and a large part of his influence is within Lutheran circles. The second reason is that I am a Lutheran with confessional commitments to the Lutheran confessions in the Book of Concord and dogmatic commitments to the dogmatics of Lutheran Orthodoxy. Of special interest for Lutherans, I address the

*Added query:* How solid a leg under the stool of the Fordean school is Aulén's anathemizing of the vicarious satisfaction of Lutheran Orthodoxy?

## Wheaton's Suffering, Not Power

### Ch. 1 – Introduction

#### *Conventional Narrative*

Wheaton renders the conventional narrative as follows:

The early church held that Christ's death on the cross was primarily a victory over death and the devil, achieved by means of a ransom (Christ's blood) paid to these enemies and also by tricking these enemies into performing a deed (Christ's murder) that nullified their claim over captive humanity. God could not save mankind from the devil's grip by any other means since after Adam's fall, Satan held rightful title over the whole human race. Christ's death was therefore a triumph over death and the devil, upon which is based the reconciliation of God and mankind. This "demonocentric" view of the atonement, while at times intruded upon by a more "theocentric" conception of Christ's death as a sacrifice for sin, dominated until the time of Anselm and his treatise *Cur Deus homo*, written around 1094, which successfully challenged it. Anselm, drawing on contemporary societal notions of feudal honor, advocated instead for a view that saw Christ's death as

an offering made to God that satisfied his wrath due to his wounded honor. Christ's death was an act of obedience that outweighed the wickedness of human sin, and thus, God's wrath was turned aside, and his honor, restored. At the time of the Reformation, this view was modified, and the new idea of penal substitutionary atonement—that Christ died in our place and suffered our punishment at the hands of the Father, thus freeing us from sin and its consequences—was widely adopted by Protestants.<sup>15</sup>

Because Wheaton is conducting a historical assessment of Aulén's historical study, to stay on his track, we will leave for the *Excursus* at the end of this commentary the dogmatic distinction between penal substitution in Anselm and vicarious satisfaction in Luther and Lutheran Orthodoxy.

### *Wheaton's Critique of the Narrative*

Wheaton says the conventional narrative is mistaken. "The reconciliation of God and mankind was not dependent upon the defeat of the enemy powers; rather the reverse."<sup>16</sup>

Wheaton is an Evangelical Protestant, and no doubt has dogmatic and confessional commitments. In this study, however, he is approaching the matter historically. His approach is not hampered by dogmatic or confessional commitments. He observes history and lets history speak for itself. His result observed from history.

We will leave for the *Excursu* at the end of this commentary a discussion of how Wheaton's critique of the conventional narrative is in accord with Luther in his explanation of the Second article of the Creed in the Large Catechism and with Lutheran Orthodoxy.

### *Rivière vs. Turmel and Aulén*

During the same years (late 1920s to early 1930s) when Aulén was espousing his view, the modernist Joseph Turmel was publishing similar views. Both Turmel and Aulén were espousing *Christus Victor* as predominant in the medieval and patristic church.<sup>17</sup>

Turmel met fierce opposition from Jean Rivière. He wrote a series of articles from 1927 to 1933 that became three volumes published 1928, 1930, and 1934. Rivière wrote them to refute Turmel's narrative about the history of atonement. Since Turmel's narrative was nearly the same as Aulén's, we may appreciate Rivière's work as also refuting Aulén.

In other words, during the same roughly eight years, Aulén, Turmel, and Rivière all were writing about the same thing: the history of atonement in the Middle Ages. Yet until Wheaton's *Suffering, Not Power*, most of us had heard only of Aulén.

Since Rivière was set to prove Turmel's history wrong, he showed vastly more evidence for his view than Turmel did for his. He wrote 437 non-repetitive pages to refute 109. He thoroughly buried Turmel's credibility,<sup>18</sup> displacing any impression that he had merely cherry-picked history.

---

<sup>15</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 3-4.

<sup>16</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 10-12.

<sup>18</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 12.

He did this by supplying a superabundance of evidence that should convince anyone that his view is the burden of history.

Rivière systematically investigates four questions:<sup>19</sup>

1. Did the devil have rights over humanity that God was obliged to respect?
2. Does the justice of God as revealed in the cross refer to his respect for the devil's rights?
3. How is this justice applied in the salvation of the human race?
4. What is the role of the devil in the whole of the divine plan?

He finds the church consistently teaching that the devil was the agent of God's wrath, and our slavery to him a result of divine decree.<sup>20</sup> The devil had no right of his own. His "right" is derived and dependent on God deputizing him to execute God's judgment. Captivity to the devil always is upon that ground. Captivity to death and the devil is constantly linked to human sin and is an effect of our guilt.<sup>21</sup> This is the same orientation between sin and its consequences of bondage and between vicarious satisfaction and its effect of deliverance carefully set out by Luther, Peters, Dierks, Pieper, Kilcrease, and Lutheran Orthodoxy.

[Rivière's] conclusion was that through all periods of Christian history, the atonement was at its root seen as a sacrifice of expiation and propitiation made by God to God, thereby reconciling mankind to God and God to mankind.<sup>22</sup>

What then did the cross do? What was the defeat of the devil? Was it primarily the devil's overstepping his rights by attacking the bait of Christ on the cross? Or was it achieved through a ransom to the devil or to death that resulted in our liberation? No: on the contrary, although these images are prominent in the rhetoric of preachers and moralists, they are always put alongside and even subordinate to the notion of a sacrifice made to God for the forgiveness of our sin.<sup>23</sup>

Remember, these are fruits of historical study. Rivière marshalled historical evidence showing that this was the teaching. He was not exegeting Scripture to show what the doctrine should be. He was researching and reporting history to show what the church in fact had been teaching. If true as a matter of history, this means that when Aulén claimed Luther recovered the "classic idea,"<sup>24</sup> he had the history wrong.

Given the superior quality, quantity, and thoroughness of Rivière's research to that of Aulén, it should be considered astounding that Aulén has had such influence and Rivière is practically unknown. Rivière's comprehensive, rigorous, and overwhelming research gave Wheaton reasons

---

<sup>19</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 13-14.

<sup>20</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 14ff.

<sup>21</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 101ff.

to put the plow in the ground and go back over the field.

The principal weakness in Rivière's work is simply that of outdatedness: we have many more edited texts available to us, and historical research has progressed to a remarkable degree since his death [in 1946].<sup>25</sup>

Thus, Wheaton is not recapitulatory of Rivière. Rather, Wheaton conducts original and extensive research benefiting from the advanced state of the corpus not available to Rivière. As a single volume produced in a few years, Wheaton does not pretend to be as comprehensive as Rivière<sup>26</sup> who spend a lifetime producing his three volumes. Rather, using the time available to him to date, Wheaton adopts a strategy for sampling medieval original sources to get a representative picture.

### *How to Get a Representative Picture*

The Middle Ages were about 1,000 years. Europe is almost 4 million square miles. It had many countries, ethnicities, languages, cultures, classes, and genres of literature. Was there anything like catholicity of faith about atonement in the European Middle Ages? If so, what was that catholicity and, historically speaking, how do we know what that catholicity was?

Before setting out to survey what the church taught and believed about atonement, one needs a strategy that stands a good chance of yielding a representative picture. Wheaton's strategy spreads the sources he samples:

- across the 1,000 years by selecting from the early, middle, and late Middle Ages
- across the geography of Europe
- across languages
- across cultural contexts
- across literary genres
- across the diversity of purposes of the writings examined
- across diverse types of authors

Wheaton uses reception history as a further criterion. Reception history is weighty evidence of a source being representative rather than idiosyncratic.

Reception history studies how and why ideas and texts are read, transmitted, and adapted by later readers. It enables us to understand why ideas remained and became popular in other eras. It explains who rejected ideas and why, who built on them and how. It observes the number of manuscripts of each work, who copied them, when they were copied, where they were copied, why they were copied, and how the originals and copies were used. Reception history allows us to see how popular a theology was, how it was criticized or adapted, and what it was responding to. Wheaton uses only sources that have strong reception history.

---

<sup>25</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 25.



*Cross section of Medieval Atonement*

Wheaton takes a cross section of the Middle Ages by examining the writings and reception of three diverse persons (supplemented by some additional authors). The following table provides a brief overview of their diverse eras, geographical locations, vocations, literary genres, and contexts in which they worked. The last row of the table shows that despite all their diversity, they were united in a single core doctrine of the atonement.

Caesarius of Arles	Haimo of Auxerre	Dante Alighieri
c.470-542 Late Antiquity, Beginning of Middle Ages	c. 820-875 Early Middle Ages	c.1265-1321 Late Middle Ages
Gaul, Provence	Carolingian Empire	Northern Italy
Statesman Bishop	Teacher Monk	Layman Poet
Sermon on the crucifixion	Commentary on Romans Commentary on Hebrews	1) Political pamphlet 2) Epic poem
Parishioners	Pastors, theologians, teachers, monks	1) Learned audience 2) Unlearned audience
Ecclesiastical reform under the Ostrogoths	Carolingian Renaissance	Papal estates
Sacrifice of expiation and propitiation by God to God	Sacrifice of expiation and propitiation by God to God	Sacrifice of expiation and propitiation by God to God Penal substitution integrated into a broader vicarious satisfaction

Wheaton investigates each of these figures as follows:

- First, an account of his life and times, his political context, education, and career.
- Second, their key texts on the atonement are identified with an introduction to their genres and contexts.
- Third, the relevant parts of each text are presented and explained.
- Fourth, key contemporary authors and texts that shed light on the conception of the atonement in the main texts area similarly introduced and examined.
- Fifth, the understanding of the atonement displayed in each central work and author is outlined.
- Sixth, what the modern scholarly voice of Jean Rivière (and, in the case of Dante, Bruno Nardi) says on the text and author.

- Seventh, Wheaton suggests a conclusion about the medieval view of the atonement that challenges the narrative of Aulén and others.

## Ch. 2 – Dante Part I: Penal Substitution in the *De monarchia*

This chapter:

- Introduces Dante, his life, education, and writings.
- Places *Monarchia* in its historical setting, laying out its message and intent.
- Looks at *Monarchia*'s use of atonement in its political argument.
- Examines the reaction of Dante's contemporary Guido Vernani to its argument and doctrine.

Dante addresses a learned audience in *Monarchia*. He appeals to the clergy to support the temporal power of the Holy Roman Empire as against a pretended temporal power of the pope. The atonement is a subpart of his overall political argument that the Holy Roman Empire is divinely identified as the legitimate and universal temporal power. The political argument itself and the way the atonement fits into it may not be satisfying to us, but our focus here is on Dante's atonement doctrine itself.

Dante says that Christ died to suffer the punishment for the sin of Adam and all of humanity. He is the penal substitute for everyone in the whole world.

Vernani replies with mocking scorn to both Dante's doctrine of atonement and political argument. As to the atonement, he asserts that Christ's death is propitiatory not because the full and correct punishment for sin has been meted out, but because a great act of obedience has counterbalanced the weight of original sin.

Note that both ideas of the atonement are about Christ dealing with our guilt for sin, not about the power of death and the devil. Aulén can find no support for his view in either Dante or Vernani.

Also note that the combination of atonement in Dante and Vernani corresponds roughly with Lutheran Orthodoxy which confesses that Jesus made satisfaction to God for us under the Law in two ways.

1. **Active Obedience.** On our behalf He lived a life of active obedience under the Law. He fulfilled all righteousness for us under the Law.
2. **Passive Obedience.** On our behalf He rendered passive obedience to God. He did this by his innocent suffering of the Law's penalty of death.

Dante emphasized the passive obedience of Christ in *Monarchia* because it fit his political argument, but that does not mean he denied active obedience. Thus, when Vernani emphasized the active obedience of Christ and criticized Dante for omitting it, the criticism was misplaced, as we will see in the next chapter on Dante's *Paradiso*. Dante's audience was the learned clergy, who understood Dante's selection of one part of the obedience of Christ for his political argument and that this selection was not, as a matter of religion aside from politics, a denial of the other part.

Leaving aside the political use of the doctrine of atonement and the dispute between Dante and

Vernani, their writings show that both teach an atonement that primarily deals with man's guilt for sin, and that both expected to find reception of their statements about atonement among the learned clergy. That in turn is reflective of what the learned clergy taught about atonement. The upshot for our purposes is a historical refutation of Aulén's historical study.

### **Ch. 3 – Dante Part II: Penal Substitution and Satisfaction in *Paradiso***

This chapter:

- Examines the doctrine of the atonement Dante puts forward in *Paradiso*.
- Investigates four fourteenth-century commentators on *Paradiso* to see how they reacted to Dante's account.
- Looks at how two twentieth-century scholars, including Jean Rivière, responded to Dante's portrayal of the atonement.

Whereas Dante wrote *Monarchia* in a Latin full of philosophical technicalities for a learned audience of university-trained clergy and laymen, he wrote *Paradiso* in Italian for a lay audience who could not read Latin.

The sin of Adam infected the whole human race. It required one of two solutions: either that God, of his own *cortesia*, "clemency" or "courtesy," should forgive it, or that mankind should suffer the penalties sufficient to satisfy the demands of justice.<sup>27</sup>

The sin of Adam was pride, the desire to be like God. Therefore, to satisfy the demands of justice, the human race would have had to humble itself to the same degree to which it had intended to raise itself up. That was impossible, so God had to act. Christ, to redress the sin of Adam, performed an act of humility and obedience to God that equaled the intended sin. God in Christ humbles himself to the death of the cross.

Christ's humiliation in obedience to God is what saves. . . . The penalties spoken of here are not punishments but acts of penitential obedience . . . . Dante places both penal substitution and vicarious satisfaction together in the same place. He clearly saw no contradiction between them.<sup>28</sup>

That use of the term "vicarious satisfaction" does not align with its use in Lutheran Orthodoxy. As Wheaton uses it, however, the doctrinal content he references by that term (along with his use of the term "penal substitution") is effective for his purpose. He is showing that Dante's atonement is first about a sacrifice for the guilt of sin before it is a conquest against the powers of death and the devil. Both Dante and Lutheran Orthodoxy agree as to that, even though their ideas about the term "vicarious satisfaction" are materially different.

God takes delight in acting in accord with the fullness of his character, described . . . as the *divina bonità*, the "divine goodness." So both mercy and justice, which are both integral to "goodness," are used to lift mankind from the depths of sin. God is more

---

<sup>27</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 63.

<sup>28</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 66.

merciful in descending to earth, becoming incarnate, and dying on the cross than if he had merely forgiven sin by his own power. But if he had forgiven sin by his own power, he would not have been acting in accord with justice, which is also part of his character. He therefore would not have taken delight in the redemption to the same degree or acted in a way that best displayed his character.<sup>29</sup>

Here again is a variance between Lutheran Orthodoxy and Dante. Lutheran Orthodoxy does not see the incarnation *per se* as part of the humiliation of Christ. This variance does not divide Dante and Lutheran Orthodoxy, however, as to the purpose of examining Christ's humiliation. Under either Lutheran Orthodoxy's view or Dante's view of Christ's state of humiliation, atonement is first about a sacrifice for the guilt of sin before it is a conquest against the powers of death and the devil.

The effect of what we have observed in Dante is this: Unless one can establish that Dante is merely regurgitating Anselm, Aulén has missed major historical evidence that runs contrary to his historical conclusions in *Christus Victor*.

Aulén's oversight becomes glaring when we observe the reception history for Dante's *Commedia*, of which *Paradiso* is a part.

The staggering popularity of the *Commedia* from the moment of its dissemination is very well attested. From the idle scrawling of lines from the *Purgatorio* and *Inferno* in blank spaces in notarial documents in Bologna between 1317 and 1321 to the public performances of adaptations of the poem by street singers in market squares in the years immediately following Dante's death, the *Commedia* was taken at once into the heart of its audience. It appealed to all levels of society: the learned professors of Bologna and Florence took to lecturing on its subtleties, and the middle classes, no matter how small their libraries, made it their business to possess a copy.

This popularity also resulted in a remarkable phenomenon: commentaries, a genre usually reserved for classic texts and Scripture, were written in great number on the poem. Beginning with the notes on the *Inferno* by Dante's son Jacopo Alighieri in 1324, eleven commentaries were written within the first half of the fourteenth century. Many more were to be written by the time the century had ended. Composed in both Italian and Latin, they sought to expound the allegory and clarify the historical references in the *Commedia* to its broad audience. The eager reception of some of these commentaries (Jacopo della Lana's survives in almost eighty manuscript copies) testifies to the *Commedia*'s difficulty for many of its readers alongside its striking popularity.

The relevance of these commentaries to our present project is in how they reacted to Dante's portrayal of the atonement in the *Paradiso*. Did they like Guido Vernani, angrily cite Anselm and dismiss the doctrine here as nonsense? By no means. Naturally the early commentaries were written to establish Dante as a great spiritual and literary authority and the later ones, to smooth the way for this great authority to operate among

---

<sup>29</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 64-65.

occasionally suspicious audiences, so their authors would have had no motivation to criticize. Still, one would expect a certain amount of explaining away to be done if the portrayal of the atonement were truly seen as odd and heretical. This was what occurred in other places—for example, Dante’s seeming denial of the doctrine of the resurrection in *Canto 13* of the *Inferno* in the wood of the suicides. But no: the dogma is explicated plainly as Dante wrote it, without any hesitation.<sup>30</sup>

After giving that sketch of *Paradiso*’s reception history, Wheaton looks at examples of that history in four commentators, Rivière, and in the dispute between Bruno Nardi and Guido Vernani over Dante’s atonement. During this examination, some interesting and important subsidiary issues appear: the role of the Roman Empire; the role of divine providence; the difference between justice and injury; some division of aspects of the atonement between Christ’s divine and human natures that sometimes tends toward Nestorianism contrary to Lutheran Orthodoxy; and the co-occurrence of what Wheaton calls vicarious satisfaction with penal substitution. These issues introduce variations in the exposition of the atonement, but none of the variations shift the atonement from being first about redressing the guilt of human sin before it is about victory over the tyrants and enemies of sinful man.

When discussing the commentary on *Paradiso* by Pietro Alighieri, Wheaton clarifies how he has been using the term vicarious satisfaction. He is distinguishing it from penal substitution. In penal substitution, the penalty of sin is exhausted on Christ. In vicarious satisfaction, the obedience of Christ is removing – expiating – sin from man by a supremely humble obedience. Pietro says, Christ “was humiliated for this reason that he should merit to be attended by redemption for our sake, having preserved righteousness in his own stern duty.” This is different from the passive obedience of suffering the Law’s penalty of death for sin. This is active obedience, a preservation of righteousness, and accomplishment in his own stern duty, which Christ actively performed, albeit in the same act of suffering and dying on the cross that is also his passive obedience.

We will leave for the *Excursus* at the end of this commentary a discussion of a variance between Wheaton’s use of the term “vicarious satisfaction” from its use in Lutheran Orthodoxy. That variance notwithstanding, as to the question that Wheaton is studying about whether Aulén’s historical conclusions are true, the variance does not affect the proposition that Aulén is historically wrong. Dante’s doctrine that Wheaton calls vicarious satisfaction, with Dante’s enormous historical reception, represents the Middle Ages with an atonement that is about Christ’s suffering, not power.

Dante’s son, commented on *Paradiso* as follows:

For all other men were debtors, and hardly anyone’s virtue and humility were sufficient even for themselves; but Christ the sufficient human being was a perfect offering who was humiliated by much more, by tasting the bitterness of death, than Adam was prideful by enjoying the poisonous delight through eating from the old tree; and although God might have been able to proceed in another way, nevertheless, that way was more greatly suited to his divine righteousness. For by that way the devil was

---

<sup>30</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 66-67.

overcome by righteousness, not power; for the devil in his wickedness is a lover of power and a forsaker of righteousness.<sup>31</sup>

#### **Ch. 4 – Caesarius Part I: Sin Offering in *Christus Victor***

This chapter focuses on a sermon on atonement by bishop Caesarius of Arles, aided by looking at two anonymous sermons of his contemporaries. In this period of late antiquity, sermons were the principal means of inculcating the faith of both high and low estate. Sermons were one of the main conduits by which patristic teaching passed into the medieval world. The power and prestige of the preached word were taken as a given.

This chapter:

- Introduces Caesarius and lays out his historical context.
- Explores the nature of the sermon in late antiquity.
- Examines Caesarius’ sermon on atonement and makes plain its doctrine.

This period is characterized by a Christianity passionate about the contemplative life and strict adherence to the orthodoxy of the fathers and the councils.

Caesarius was well educated, adept in Latin, and able to adapt his language to different audiences. His episcopacy lasted 40 years, was remarkably successful and left a spiritual legacy that would nourish future generations for a long time. He strove to reform pastoral care and advance the discipleship of those under his charge both clerical and lay. His position was essentially like what the later term archbishop would entail.

What might surprise our prejudices today is his promotion of Scripture among the laity. He urged parishioners to attend church daily, to listen carefully to readings of the Bible in church, and then to reread the same passages themselves at home. If this was not possible for those whose work hours were long, they should memorize key texts such as the Apostles’ Creed and Psalm 50 and recite them as they worked.

“Lower clergy were generally forbidden from preaching sermons in their churches. This was because they did not possess the theological education necessary to craft sermons that could be trusted to be orthodox.”<sup>32</sup> Caesarius encouraged priests and deacons to preach via reading sermons prepared by gifted preachers. This diffused a high quality of sermon and doctrine even to modest village and countryside parishes. It engaged the priests and deacons with good sermons. Caesarius edited over 200 sermons and compiled them in several collections. Such “homilaries” contained hundreds more sermons and were a common part of ecclesiastical libraries in the Middle Ages. “It was in these humble texts, not the grand treatises of the church fathers, that Christianity was taught to and experienced by the vast majority of the laity in the Middle Ages.”<sup>33</sup> Caesarius’ homiliary clearly addresses people of all levels of society, diverse cultures, and both urban and rural people.

---

<sup>31</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 93.

<sup>32</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 103.

<sup>33</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 106.

This was one of the means by which his influence endured for generations.

Caesarius held four councils attended by a steadily growing number of bishops. The most well know today was the Council of Orange that dealt with predestination.

Many of Caesarius' sermons begin with a question someone had asked him or one that he detecting simmering in his audiences. In *Sermo XI* he answers a question frequently posed to him: why did God not send Christ to simply destroy the devil by force as He surely was able to do, rather than work salvation by suffering and dying; or, why did He who had given life in the beginning by his word not destroy death by his word?

Why was it necessary for our Lord Christ to receive so harsh a period of suffering when he was able to free the human race through his power? Why his incarnation? Why his infancy? Why the course of his life? Why the insults? Why the cross? Why his death? Why his burial? Why did he take up all these things for the sake of man's restoration?<sup>34</sup>

Without doubt, our Lord would have been able to triumph over the devil by his divine authority and to free man from his rule. He would have been able, yes, but reason resisted, justice did not give its permission.<sup>35</sup>

"There is nothing here of seeing man's predicament as simply a captivity to Satan."<sup>36</sup> "The 'captivity' to the devil should be seen not as something brought upon us unjustly by Satan but rather as something that reflects our just sentence from the divine judge."<sup>37</sup> "[T]he devil is God's agent in our punishment."<sup>38</sup> This is quite like Luther and Lutheran Orthodoxy. Remember, this is in late antiquity or the early Middle Ages, and Aulén completely missed what was then being preached far and wide, put into homilies, and passed on for generations.

In developing this view, the way Caesarius renders Christ's statement to John the Baptist is interesting. Our English translations render Christ speaking of fittingness and righteousness in the saying, "thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15 NKJV, ESV) "For thus it becommeth vs to fulfyll all rightwesnes" (Tyndale) "For thus it be commeth vs to fulfyll all righteousnes." (Coverdale) "For thus it becommeth vs, to fulfyll all righteousnes ." (Bishops' Bible) "This is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness." (The World English Bible).

But Caesarius renders it "For thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all justice."<sup>39</sup> Where our English translations usually say "righteousness," Caesarius says "justice." This again sounds like Luther: "Galso gebührt es uns, alle Gerechtigkeit zu erfüllen." (Matthew 3:15, Luther 1545). Not that it excludes righteousness or fairness, *Gerechtigkeit* is justice. The Greek, *πρεπον εστιν ημιν πληρωσαι πασαν δικαιοσυνην*, can be rendered "It is proper for us to pay for all justice." This

---

<sup>34</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 109, citing and quoting in translation Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo XI*, ed. G. Morin, CCL. 103 (Turnhour: Brepola, 1953) 1, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 109-10, citing and quoting in translation Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo XII*, 2, 54-55.

<sup>36</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 111.

<sup>37</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 112.

<sup>38</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 112.

<sup>39</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 113, citing and quoting in translation Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo XII*, 3, 55.

conveys an idea of vicarious satisfaction in Christ's active obedience of submitting to Baptism. Regardless of how we think the Greek should be rendered, the point of this historical study is to show how, as a matter of history, this was being preached in an era embraced in Aulén's historical study. Rightly or wrongly, Caesarius preached vicarious satisfaction as the ground and explanation of Christus Victor, and based it in part on how he translated this text of Scripture. That is a matter of history.

From this, Wheaton carries on,

Caesarius uses the example of Christ being baptized to illustrate his point about power giving way to justice; the Lord Jesus did not have to be baptized since he was without sin. Yet he did so because it was necessary to remain true to *iustitia*. ... For him, "fulfilling all *iustitia*" means that Christ, by living a righteous life, resisting the devil by righteous means and living sinlessly during the time of his life on earth, uplifted the human flesh that ordinarily would sin.<sup>40</sup>

In Luther and Lutheran Orthodoxy, that "uplifting" in this life is primarily by imputation of Christ's righteousness to us, and his righteousness includes the active obedience that Caesarius and Wheaton describe.

Another remarkable correspondence between Caesarius, Luther, and Lutheran Orthodoxy is the insistence that the whole person of Christ with the personal union in him of divine and human nature accomplishes his work of atonement. Atonement is ascribed not only to his human nature or only to his divine nature. Caesarius quotes Christ's statement, "The Prince of this world comes, and he possesses nothing in me." Of course, Satan possesses nothing in God, but by original sin he possesses something in man, but not in Christ the Son of Man. Because of his resistance to temptation and his active obedience, the devil has nothing in him. Caesarius says, "If divinity alone had conquered, the devil would not have been in great confusion, and it would not have inspired confidence in bodily men that it would conquer."<sup>41</sup> See here the language of Christus Victor – conquering the devil – not by power, but by suffering temptation and active obedience to God under the Law. Here, satisfaction is not only the ground and explanation of Christus Victor. Vicarious satisfaction itself is the conquest. The power is the power of voluntary self-humiliation not for himself but for us, vicariously rendering to God what we owe. Jesus says, "It is proper for us to pay for all justice."

Wheaton speaks of that active obedience as the "first stage" of Christ "fulfilling all justice."<sup>42</sup> He then goes on to what he calls the "second stage," Christ's death on the cross.<sup>43</sup> We Lutherans call this the passive obedience of Christ in suffering for us the Law's just penalty of death for our sin. In Lutheran theology, the two together – active obedience and passive obedience – comprise vicarious satisfaction. Wheaton's terminology is different, speaking of a first and second stage of

---

<sup>40</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 113.

<sup>41</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 114, citing and quoting in translation Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo XII*, 3, 56.

<sup>42</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 114.

<sup>43</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 114.



fulfilling all justice, but the substance is roughly the same.

Also remarkable is Caesarius' outright and direct use of the language of penal substitution.

Now, it is necessary for this to be believed to have been done in this way. Christ the Lord, without any guilt, without any blame, underwent a penal sentence; the innocent man was crucified without sin. . . . the death of Christ benefitted man; what Adam owed to God, Christ paid by undergoing death, having been made without any doubt a sacrifice for the sin of men and for their race, just as the blessed Paul taught: "Christ," he says, "loved us and handed himself over for us as an offering and sacrificial victim to God in a pleasing aroma."<sup>44</sup>

Given Caesarius' stature and reception history and this kind of preaching in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, it hardly can be maintained that penal substitution was concocted hundreds of years later by Anselm against the grain of the entire history of the church up until then. Aulén is wrong as a matter of history in his historical study. As Wheaton comments on Caesarius' sermon,

Christ, by dying in human flesh, paid what Adam and his progeny owed to God. More specifically, Christ was a sacrifice for sin, a sacrifice made to God himself—not to the devil or any other power but to God alone, who alone had been sinned against and who alone could remit that sin.<sup>45</sup>

There is nothing here of paying a ransom to the devil.

Along with the language of penal substitution is the language of propitiation. Caesarius says:

For that original sin was not easily able to be forgiven unless a sacrificial victim had been offered for the fault, unless that holy blood of propitiation had been poured out. For the saying of the Lord at the time of the Exodus remains in force now: "I will see the blood, and I will protect you." For that figure of the lamb points to this passion of the Lord Christ.<sup>46</sup>

On this, Wheaton comments:

The blood of the sacrificial Lamb, Christ, was necessary to protect humanity from the wrath of God as personified in the angel of death from the Exodus. Here is the attribute of *iustitia* that Caesarius insists must be part of God's salvation plan since it is a part of God's character. Sin, not the devil's power, is the problem for humanity; thus, it is sin that must be dealt with first. And sin can only be dealt with by the shedding of blood since without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness.<sup>47</sup>

Caesarius elaborates:

When blood is paid out for blood, death for death, and a sacrificial victim for a fault, even

---

<sup>44</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 116-117, citing and quoting in translation Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo XII*, 5, 57.

<sup>45</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 117.

<sup>46</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 117-118, citing and quoting in translation Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo XII*, 5, 57.

<sup>47</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 118.

so did the devil lose what he was holding. It is now rightly said to him: “O enemy, you do not have that on account of which you had a legal case. The first Adam sinned, but I, the last Adam, did not receive the stain of sin, let my righteousness benefit the debtor. You are no longer able to hold man in endless death, for he conquered, overcame, and crushed you through me. You were not truly conquered through power but by justice; not by domination but rather by equity.”<sup>48</sup>

In short, as Wheaton says, “Satan lost his right to hold humanity in captivity because humanity was no longer liable for sin.”<sup>49</sup> This is just what Luther says in his explanation of the Second Article of the Creed in his Large Catechism. It is just what the Lutheran confessions, Lutheran Orthodoxy, Pieper, Peters, Dierks, Kilcrease, Eckardt, and others say. As a matter of history, as a matter of investigating Aulén’s claims, the high correspondence between this in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, with its impressive reception history, severely erodes Aulén’s historical claims. All the more so when we know that this sermon “draws on earlier sources for the bulk of its material then edits them for a contemporary audience.”<sup>50</sup> The next chapter begins an exploration of the sources.

## **Ch. 5 – Caesarius Part II: Expiation and the Devil’s Rights in *Christus Victor***

This chapter:

- Explores two anonymous sermons from the fifth century on which Caesarius drew for his own sermon on atonement.
- Sums up the doctrine of the atonement found in all three sermons.
- Looks at how Jean Rivière interacted with Caesarius’ sermon and assesses the accuracy of his engagement.

These two sermons were part of the *Eusebius Gallicanus* collection of 43 sermons. Hundreds of manuscripts dating from throughout the medieval period contain groups of sermons drawn from this collection. Thomas Aquinas, Gratian, Columbanus, Isidore of Seville, and Paul the Deacon are only a few of the theologians who drew on these sermons for their own works. These two are part of a group of 12 Easter sermons that were especially popular among medieval preachers. They appear in a large number of later homiliaries and other religious texts. This is an impressive reception history.

The first of the two sermons is designated De Pascha VII. Indeed, it does say what Caesarius says. Caesarius was not innovating anything. He was a conduit of the Patristic doctrine. He selected and edited this, with other sources, to adapt it to his audience. As a matter of history, this is in continuity with the church catholic and the catholicity of vicarious satisfaction as the ground of *Christus Victor*.

De Pascha VII poses the question:

---

<sup>48</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 118, citing and quoting in translation Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo XII*, 5, 57.

<sup>49</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 119.

<sup>50</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 120.

Why is it that divinity humbled its own self? Was it not able through the strength and power of its own arm to free man—his own creation—from the power of the devil, so that it would not have been necessary for it to assume a human body, to experience the wounds of universal misery and of our condemned condition, to be affected by spitting and flogging, by insults and sorrows, or to be fixed to the beam of the cross.<sup>51</sup>

The chief reason is that of justice, just as the Lord himself says: “Without delay; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all justice.” For the first man had sinned by his own fault and fall of disobedience and by the movement of his own will, having been seduced by the devil and not forced, just as the same man says in Genesis: “The serpent seduced me.”<sup>52</sup>

It pleased God in accordance with his justice to offer up for the sake of the human race a man pure and immaculate, “separate from sinners.” But such a man our land did not possess. One who was guilty of a similar sin would have been able neither to be of assistance to sinners nor to intervene on behalf of slaves since he himself was bound by the laws of slavery. Therefore, he would have to come from another land, so that an absolved man might be able to be offered up for debtors, a righteous man for the wicked, an innocent man for sinners, a lamb for the goats.<sup>53</sup>

I commented above about what sounds like Nestorian ideas on Christology. Here, however, Wheaton clears that up. He says while commenting on *De Pascha VII*,

The union of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ serves not only to defeat the devil and raise up fallen humanity but also to set up the conditions necessary for an effective sacrifice for sin. How this works out is the subject of the remainder of the sermon.<sup>54</sup>

It is not only that “Christ’s two natures, divine and human, work together to defeat the devil,” as Wheaton will later<sup>55</sup> say, but the “*union* of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ.” From the perspective of Lutheran Orthodoxy, this is a most welcome statement by which we enjoy with Wheaton, Caesarius, and the author of *De Pascha VII* the catholicity, consolation, and joy of the Incarnation and the Atonement.

The second anonymous sermon is designated *De Pascha VIII*. A lengthy section explains that man’s captivity is first to sin and then, by that captivity, to the devil. Thus, atonement must first deliver from sin and thereby deliver from the devil.<sup>56</sup> Wheaton summarizes, “The captivity of humanity was due to its own sin, not the devil’s power. Sin had to be dealt with first.”<sup>57</sup>

Wheaton observes that the three sermons accord with Augustine in *De Trinitate* written beginning

---

<sup>51</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power* 126, citing and quoting in translation *Eusebius Gallicanus*, “*De Pascha VII*” 4, 216.

<sup>52</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power* 126, citing and quoting in translation *Eusebius Gallicanus*, “*De Pascha VII*” 5, 216-217.

<sup>53</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power* 126, citing and quoting in translation *Eusebius Gallicanus*, “*De Pascha VII*” 5, 217.

<sup>54</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 125-126.

<sup>55</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 138.

<sup>56</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 131-133.

<sup>57</sup> Wheaton *Suffering, Not Power*, 136.

in 400 AD.<sup>58</sup> Here, again, Aulén missed it. Jean Rivière caught it. Rivière observed that “Augustine is careful not to assign the devil any actual right over humanity that is anything other than that of performing God’s just punishment.”<sup>59</sup> Rivière says, “Here [in Augustine] we see that the devil’s ‘right’ relies on sin and refers to the mission that requires him to punish.”<sup>60</sup> “Christ’s death has a dual function:”<sup>61</sup>

A sacrifice first and foremost because it achieves before all else the destruction of sin; ransom follows because once sin has been destroyed, our enslavement no longer has a reason to exist.<sup>62</sup>

Rivière clarifies that reason and justice do not form a monism outside of God that rule over him. “Rivière sees Caesarius of Areles ... maintaining that God is not bound by reason and justice as if they came from outside of him and restrained him, but rather, is bound by his character and free choice.”<sup>63</sup>

## Ch. 6 – Haimo Part I: Expiation and Propitiation in a Sacrificial Offering

This chapter and the next one:

- Outline Haimo of Auxerre’s life and times.
- Give a brief account of the commentary tradition of the Carolingian era (780-900).
- Focus on Haimo’s commentaries and how they did biblical exegesis.
- Examine two sections from his commentaries on Romans 3:21-26 and Hebrews 9:1-10:18 and what they have to say about atonement.

Scholars writing biblical commentaries in the Carolingian era produced “a dizzying array of texts whose surface has barely begun to be scratched by historians and theologians.”<sup>64</sup> Haimo’s biblical commentaries, like the works of Dante and Caesarius, have an impressive reception history. They,

were copied more than any other for use in the libraries of cathedrals and monasteries throughout Europe. It is Haimo’s commentaries, too, that became popular in lay circles in the later Middle Ages, in which we find manuscripts belonging to wealthy merchants. The followers of Jan Hus treasured them and deployed them (as did their adversaries) in the theological controversies occurring in Bohemia in the fifteenth century. Haimo’s commentaries were popular across Europe throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 148-149, citing Augustine, *De Trinitate* 4.13.17 (*Patrologia Latina* 42.899-900).

<sup>59</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 150.

<sup>60</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 150, citing and quoting in Jean Rivière, “Le dogme de la redemption chez saint Augustin,” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 7, no. 3 (1927).

<sup>61</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 150.

<sup>62</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 150, citing and quoting in Jean Rivière, “Le dogme de la redemption chez saint Augustin,” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 8, no. 1 (1928).

<sup>63</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 154-155.

<sup>64</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 164.

<sup>65</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 160.

Remigiuss's use of Haimo played an especially important role in the long afterlife of these works. In the twelfth century, much of Haimo's commentary was included in the great *Glossa Ordinaria*, the standard Scriptural commentary for the later Middle Ages made up of many sources, both patristic and early medieval. While (again) far from the only means by which Haimo's commentaries insinuated themselves into the spiritual bloodstream of the Middle Ages, this is the paradigmatic and most influential example. In short, Haimo's exegesis formed a substrate for all medieval exegesis.<sup>66</sup>

The number of manuscripts in which [Haimo's commentary on Romans] appears dwarfs those containing the writings of other medieval theologians. Moreover, this commentary was *used*: its readers extracted excerpts from it with wild abandon, annotated it, made sermons out of it, and integrated it into other exegetical works.<sup>67</sup>

Before coming to the portion on the atonement *per se*, Wheaton presents Haimo's commentary on the early verses of Romans 3:21-26. In this section, there is amazing evidence that what is called Luther's breakthrough on what Paul means by "the righteousness of God" already had been the doctrine of the church catholic until roughly the last 200 years before Luther. In other words, Luther's was a conservative reform to the prior teaching of the church, not an abandonment of the teaching of the church.

In this vein, first, Paul's term "the 'righteousness of God' refers not to one of God's attributes but rather to that righteousness which he imparts to us to make us holy."<sup>68</sup> That is Lutheran because it is catholic and Luther is catholic, just not the papistic Romanism of the preceding 200 years.

"Second, Haimo suggests that the 'righteousness of God' refers to Christ, by whose work we are made righteous."<sup>69</sup> This already is anticipating something about the atonement, namely, that Christ by his obedience has righteousness that can be imputed to us for our salvation.

Wheaton observes a third meaning of God's righteousness later in Paul's text, which is an attribute of God, that his righteous character is shown in his punishing sin in Christ, and in his justifying sinners who by faith receive the righteousness of Christ.<sup>70</sup>

Wheaton summarizes how Haimo explains the nature of Christ's passion.

First, we become righteous by means of the shedding of Christ's blood—in other words, expiation. Second, God handed over his Son to death for our sake—an echo of substitution, given that death here is clearly a punishment. Third, that Christ's shed blood empowers the sacrament of baptism, by which our original sin from Adam and our sins committed before baptism are forgiven. The emphasis is on cleansing from sin as the means of forgiveness.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 162-163.

<sup>67</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 166.

<sup>68</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 174.

<sup>69</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 174.

<sup>70</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 182.

<sup>71</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 180-181.

Note the reduction of the power of Baptism to exclude actual sins committed after Baptism. This is contrary to Luther and Lutheran Orthodoxy. But, contrary to Aulén and other deniers of vicarious satisfaction in the atonement, it shows that the blood of Christ, not a sheer word of absolution coupled with so-called faith, empowers Baptism; and it shows that this was taught as the catholic faith before Anselm and Luther. As a matter of history, here again, Aulén missed it. Wheaton summarizes Haimo's commentary on this Romans passage:

First, note that the devil only appears once, and the captivity into which he leads humanity is one brought about by the sin of Adam. In other words, there is no notion here that human beings are just victims of the devil's power. Our own sin is the problem, and that sin must be dealt with before we can be saved. Second, Christ's death cleanses us from sin in accordance with God's predetermined plan. The cross is neither a tragedy nor a trick played on the devil but a vital part of the divine plan of salvation that deals with human sin and reconciles humanity to God. The cross also brings about the propitiation of God by expiating human sin and being the object of a faith that pleases God.<sup>72</sup>

Aulén's distortion of history dissolves in the face of this.

Haimo's commentary on Hebrews 9 and 10 is lengthy and careful. Whereas Wheaton presented his commentary on Romans 3 more or less phrase by phrase, the length of the commentary on Hebrews prevents Wheaton from that approach. Instead, he must resort to summarizing some parts of Haimo's commentary. Here is one example.

All those things are given figuratively. For the bull that was usually the sacrifice of the priest indicates Christ, who, standing forth as the true priest, offered the bull, that is himself, to God the Father on the altar of the cross. He is that bull whom the loving father slaughtered upon the return of the prodigal son. The goat, too, that was offered for sin indicates the same Christ, who was offered as a sacrifice for sinners, according to that which the same apostle elsewhere says: *He who knew not sin, God the Father made to be sin for us*, that is, a sacrifice for sin.<sup>73</sup>

This view centers on sin and Christ rather than on captivity and the devil.

Also of significant note is its exposition of Paul's text in Corinthians about Christ being "made sin for us." (2 Corinthians 5:21) Three interpretations have been given:

- Christ was "made sin" under the law by legal imputation of our sins to him.
- Christ was "made sin," that is, a sacrifice for sin.
- Christ sinned his own actual sins and Christ sinned his own original sin.

The last of those views is taught by Steven Paulson in *Lutheran Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 104-105. This is a bizarre, heretical, and blasphemous teaching that even his theological father Gerhard O. Forde never enunciated. The first two both are orthodox expositions, and the

---

<sup>72</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 182-183.

<sup>73</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 190, citing and quoting Haimo of Auxerre, In *Epistolam Hebraeos*,

first is the ground and explanation of the second. Because our sins were legally imputed to Christ, he, having been made sin by imputation, can be sin sacrificially. In both the imputation and sacrifice, Christ is the substitute for sinful man.

Haimos brings the text of Hebrews to bear upon the exegesis of 1 John 2:1-2. He renders those verses, “We have an advocate with the Father, the righteous Jesus, and he is the propitiation for our sins.” Christ to do two things:

First, enter the Holy of Holies in Heaven to appear before God; and

Second, advocate for us, intercede for us, and making God propitious toward us?

What made him able to do those two things? His sacrificial death on the cross allowed him to enter where otherwise no man could have because sin has no place in the Holy of Holies. Once there, his sacrificial death also gave him the forensic ground of his advocacy for us, his intercession for us. By his blood he made propitiation for our sins and the sins of the whole world. Therefore He can advocate his blood in his intercession to turn away God’s wrath and make him propitious to us.<sup>74</sup>

In Forde’s and Paulson’s theology, there is no point in Christ entering the Holy of Holies and no point in his intercession. According to them, before and without the cross, God always was ready from mercy without justice to “up and forgive” sin. The problem was that we would not believe it, so the cross was necessary as a word to us. Of course, we do preach the word of the cross to sinners. Yet, in his intercession, Christ speaks the word of the cross to God. That helps reveal what the word of the cross is that we preach to men. The word of the cross is not a crossless, bloodless word. It is not a word of forgiveness before and without the cross. It is not a sheer absolution that, when believed by a sinner, “is the true substitutionary atonement, happening here and now,”<sup>75</sup> as Forde’s disciple James Arne Nestingen teaches. The substitutionary atonement happened on the cross and Christ said “It is finished.” That finished atonement is Christ’s key to the door of heaven and the substance of his advocacy in his intercession for sinners before the holy God.

Simply, what was foreshadowed by the sacrifices of the Old Testament is real and fulfilled in Christ. As the blood of those sacrifices foreshadowed cleansing, substitution, and forgiveness, the blood of Christ actually cleanses, actually substitutes for the guilty death we deserve, and actually achieves both expiation and propitiation.

## **Ch. 7 – Haimo Part II: Sacrifice and Satisfaction in Christ’s Crucifixion**

This chapter:

- Analyzes commentaries on the same Romans and Hebrews passages by two

---

<sup>74</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 191-192.

<sup>75</sup> James Arne Nestingen, “Speaking of the End of the Law” in Albert B. Collver, Jr., James Arne Nestingen, and John T. Pless, eds., *The Necessary Distinction: A Continuing Conversation on Law & Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 174. In that passage, Nestingen says, “Christ finishes [note, not fulfills] the Law in two ways.” The first way is as quoted in the body here. The second way Jason D. Lane explains as “walking in the Law ... yet without compulsion (FC VI:18) “after justification.” Jason D. Lane, “That I May Be His Own: The Necessary End of the Law,” in Steven D. Paulson and Scott L. Keith, eds., *Handing Over the Goods* (Irvine, CA: 2018), 61. Hence, unless that walk is reclassified as being part of the atonement itself, that second way in Nestingen is not about the atonement itself but about one of its effects in the Christian life.

contemporaries of Haimos to seek how Haimos' thoughts fit with his contemporaries.

- Examines Jean Rivière's contribution to our knowledge of Carolingian atonement doctrine and the predecessors of Anselm.
- Looks at how Rivière described the import of Anselm's work in the context of his predecessors.

The first contemporary is Claudius of Turin. Claudius was the bishop of Turin. He was influential in the court of Louis the Pious, son of Charlemagne.

Claudius' view of atonement tracks directly the phrases of Hebrews 10:5-10. The sacrifices of the Old Testament, though commanded by God, did not please him. Those laws and sacrifices really are about Christ who would come. Christ speaks of himself coming to fulfill them. We hear him in Psalm 40:7, which is quoted in Hebrews 10:7. In the NKJV, we read "'Behold, I have come— In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God.'" In the ESV we read, "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" Claudius treats the "volume of the book" or "the scroll of the book" as the book of Leviticus. In this view, Leviticus and the Psalm are about Christ who, in his body (the Incarnation), would be the sacrifice for sin. The sacrifices of the Old Testament foreshadowed Christ's sacrifice as both expiatory and propitiatory. Haimos drew heavily from this.

There is another strain in Claudius' thought, as with many of the authors Wheaton considers: that the devil killed an innocent man, Jesus Christ, and hence his loss of power over sinners in just. This is not carried forward by Luther or Lutheran Orthodoxy. But it is significant for evaluating Aulén's historical claim. This idea does sound in *Christus Victor*, victory over the devil. But the victory is a matter of justice based on the innocent suffering of Christ. It still is a matter of suffering, not power, as Wheaton says from the title of his book onward throughout its text.

The second contemporary is Hrabanus Maurus. He studied under Alcuin and was bishop of Mainz. He wrote an impressive number of works in various genres including biblical commentaries. He commented on the same Romans and Hebrews chapters we considered in Haimos' commentaries. Hrabanus draws on the anonymous commentary on Romans by Ambrosiaster. That commentary is from the fourth century. Further, "Both Claudius of Turin and Hrabanus Maurus composed their commentaries largely by extracting passages from the fathers and then combining them into a compendium of authoritative interpretations."<sup>76</sup> This shows continuity of thought from that earlier time to Hrabanus' day. The thought is: "God put in process the redemption to make his own self favorable to sinful humanity. Christ's death on the cross defeated sin and death even as it enabled God's change in attitude."<sup>77</sup> This sounds in *Christus Victor* as to the defeat of death, but the defeat is based on the propitiation of God by the blood of Christ.

In his commentary on Hebrews 10, Hrabanus portrays the death of Christ as a sacrifice of expiation to cleanse man from sin. Jesus accomplishes this in the body he took in the Incarnation. This again

---

<sup>76</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 213.

<sup>77</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 201-202.



is suffering and sacrifice, not power.

In all three – Haimos, Claudius, and Hrabanus – “at [their] center was the altar of the cross upon which a sacrifice of expiation and propitiation was made by God to God.”<sup>78</sup>

The atonement for Haimo of Auxerre is theocentric, not demonocentric. In other words, the cross solves a problem that revolves around God, not the devil, and solves it by a means that focuses on God, not the devil.<sup>79</sup>

Sin is the basic problem. Bondage and captivity to death and the devil result from sin. In his body and blood, Christ expiates (cleanses) our sin and propitiates God (changes God’s attitude to a favorable one). Atoning for sin removed the ground of bondage and captivity. By vicarious satisfaction for the guilt of sin, Christ delivers us from death and the devil.

Jean Rivière’s study predated the recent and sizeable improvement in our knowledge of theology in the Carolingian era. Nevertheless, Rivière treats the Carolingian era through the then already exiting medium of the *Patrologia Latina*.

What Rivière insists upon is that the work of Anselm, far from being a radical break with a dominant Christus Victor model of the atonement, was in essential continuity with the teaching of the fathers and the best of the Carolingians and their immediate successors. For all of them, the central feature of the atonement is Christ’s sacrifice for sin made by God to God, reconciling mankind to God and God to mankind.<sup>80</sup>

The devil’s so-called rights, “properly understood, merely refer to the consequences of our sin. God does not have to pay the devil a ransom to rescue captive humanity.”<sup>81</sup> By the eleventh century, the talk about the devil’s “rights” had often, though not always, become distorted into some type of actual legal rights. This distortion was out of continuity with the past. Against this distortion, it became necessary for Anselm to object.<sup>82</sup>

To show what the Middle Ages believed about atonement, Rivière brings forward not only Haimo but Atto of Vercelli, Bruno of Cologne, Peter Damian, Jonas of Orleans, Fulbert of Chartres, and Manegold of Lautenbach. In these writers, Hebrews shows the weight and enormity of man’s sin. Because of the magnitude of sin, nothing but a sacrifice by God to God can avail for the reconciliation of God to man and man to God, or for the deliverance of man from bondage and captivity to death and the devil. Thus, Anselm was not innovating something new, but reconnecting his and successive eras into continuity with all prior eras of the church.<sup>83</sup>

Rivière dislikes Anselm’s term “satisfaction.”<sup>84</sup> But it is a dislike of it as a term, not for the substance that Anselm references by it. The term satisfaction, like the term Trinity, is not a

---

<sup>78</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 213.

<sup>79</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 214.

<sup>80</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 218.

<sup>81</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 221.

<sup>82</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 221-226.

<sup>83</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 227-232.

<sup>84</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 233.

scriptural but an ecclesiastical one. As David Hollatz (1648-1713) says, “Satisfaction is not a Scriptural but an ecclesiastical term, yet its synonyms exist in the holy volume.”<sup>85</sup> Pieper says the same.<sup>86</sup> Wheaton says that despite Rivière’s dislike of the term, he views Anselm’s teaching as “a clear expression of the biblical and traditional view of Christ’s crucifixion as a sacrifice of expiation and propitiation made by God to God.”<sup>87</sup> “Anselm was not departing from traditional doctrine but instead expressing it in different and more developed ways.”<sup>88</sup>

## Ch. 8 – Conclusion

“Without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness of sins.” (Hebrews 9:22) The sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is the central and foundational element in atonement in the Middle Ages.

Aulén’s influential idea was that Christus Victor was the center and foundation of atonement until Anselm broke the continuity with the past and innovated a new idea. His view does not stand up to the evidence of the Middle Ages.

These are historical statements. Regardless what the doctrine of atonement should be, as a matter of history, the orthodox doctrine was taught from the apostles to Anselm and onward. Dante, Caesarius, and Haimo “were thoroughly mainstream thinkers in their time and place.”<sup>89</sup> The common thread through them is sacrifice. In the sacrifice of Christ, God deals with the primary problem, the sin and guilt of man. Christus Victor is part of the atonement in the Middle Ages, but as an effect of Christ’s suffering and sacrifice for our sin.

“Orthodoxy is not novelty in Christian history.”<sup>90</sup>

To be sure, there are several themes in the medieval doctrine of atonement that are eccentric from the orthodox center. Sometimes images of the devil and the demonic power are overwrought. Sometimes talk of the devil’s “rights” are sloppy and indistinct about their basis and hence about their nature. Aulén and others have allowed themselves to be misled by those secondary themes. Jean Rivière and Benjamin Wheaton demonstrate by ample evidence that in the Middle Ages, those themes are secondary. They demonstrate that the orthodox doctrine was the primary theme throughout the Middle Ages and throughout Europe.

---

<sup>85</sup> Holazzius as cited and quoted in Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3rd ed. Rev., trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1875, 1889, 1899). Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 5th ed., trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1876), Chapter II, § 36, “The Sacerdotal Office.”

<sup>86</sup> “The expression vicarious satisfaction is an ecclesiastical term. It is not found in the Bible, but its meaning — that Christ vicariously (in the place of man) rendered to God, who was wroth over the sins of man, a satisfaction which changed His wrath into grace toward men— fully and adequately expresses what Scripture teaches on the redemption which Christ procured. As the ecclesiastical term *ὑποστάσιος* summarizes what Scripture teaches concerning the true deity of the Son of God, so the ecclesiastical term vicarious satisfaction, over against all heresies, is a concise epitome of what Scripture teaches on the work of Christ.” Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), II.344.

<sup>87</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 233.

<sup>88</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 234.

<sup>89</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 243.

<sup>90</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 242.

Yes the doctrines taught by Scripture have undergone development, but that development is based on clarifying and going deeper into fundamental truths that have always been affirmed by the church in every era, so long as it was faithful to Scripture. For Rivière, the fundamental truth in the case of the atonement was a theocentric sacrifice. History, he was confident, would back that up against the attacks of the church's enemies.<sup>91</sup>

Aulén “breezily dismisses Rivière with two brief mentions of [his] early [article],” *The Doctrine of the Atonement: A Historical Essay*,” (1905), as if Rivière subsequent mature work comprising three books and 1700 pages did not exist.<sup>92</sup> Aulén simply failed to engage the work of Rivière.

## Evaluation

Wheaton modestly calls his book an “experiment.”<sup>93</sup> The Middle Ages are long and Europe is wide. He could only sample the enormous works of that era and continent. His experiment was to adopt a strategy for sampling the works to get a representative picture. In that, yes, it is only an experiment.

In my estimation he got well beyond a proof-of-concept. Unless he or someone else carries the method forward to a denser sampling of the corpus, Wheaton's work in *Suffering, Not Power* should acquire and retain status as the standard in this area of historical theology. It ought to displace Aulén's *Christus Victor*. Lutherans along with all other Christians will have more need and derive greater benefit from knowing Wheaton's work than Aulén's.

## Excursus

### Distinction of Anselm and Luther: Penal Substitution and Vicarious Satisfaction

Wheaton sometimes uses the term vicarious satisfaction in *Suffering, Not Power*. His use could be based on his own confessional or dogmatic commitments, or it could be only reflective of the material he examines in his historical study. Either way, to an orthodox Lutheran reader, Wheaton's use of the term could result in an unintended equivocation. We will begin with a formulation of vicarious satisfaction, and then proceed to the distinction between that and penal substitution.

#### *Formulation of Vicarious Satisfaction*

Lutheran Orthodoxy teaches that an indispensable part of the mighty work that God has done in Christ is atonement by vicarious satisfaction. This is not the only aspect of the atonement. The atonement is a manifold panoply of salvation.<sup>94</sup> But vicarious satisfaction remains indispensable,

---

<sup>91</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 248.

<sup>92</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 245.

<sup>93</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 1, 25, 241.

<sup>94</sup> Scripture speaks of atonement in words and themes of covenant, testament, sacrifice, Day of Atonement, Passover, Pascal Lamb, redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, justification, the blood of Christ, Lamb of God, payment, Surety, covering, mercy-seat, deliverance, victory over our enemies (the Devil, the world, our sinful selves, death), and ransom, to name some. Themes of Christus

and some of the other aspects are grounded upon vicarious satisfaction. They are effects of Christ making satisfaction for us.

From a survey of explanations of the *Small Catechism*, we may draw a useable formulation of vicarious satisfaction. Jesus made satisfaction to God for us under the Law in two ways.

- **Active Obedience.** On our behalf He lived a life of active obedience under the Law. He fulfilled all righteousness for us under the Law.
- **Passive Obedience.** On our behalf He rendered passive obedience to God. He did this by his innocent suffering of the Law's penalty of death.

Vicarious satisfaction presupposes the fall into sin; God's justice; the accusation, verdict, judgment, condemnation, and curse of God's Law; and God's truthfulness and trustworthiness in his Law. It confesses Christ as our substitute, who stood condemned in our place under God's justice and God's Law. It confesses that by imputation our sins were charged to Christ and by imputation his righteousness by both active and passive obedience is given to us.

Jesus's suffering and death is called "vicarious" Atonement. A vicar is one who acts for someone else, in someone else's stead. Jesus suffered in our stead.<sup>95</sup>

"God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law." (Galatians 4:4) "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21) "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14)

God demonstrated his satisfaction with the redeeming work of Christ by resurrecting him from the dead (Romans 4:25). God announces his satisfaction by his "word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19) which He proclaims by the apostles and pastors in the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

God is "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:26). In that saying we see both Law and Gospel. We see both justice and mercy. We see Law in the word "just." We see Gospel in the words "justifier" and "faith." In the atonement, neither God's justice nor his Law is arbitrarily set aside. Instead, Christ fulfills and satisfies justice and the Law.

The adversaries of vicarious satisfaction say it has no Gospel. They say it is not gracious, merciful, or loving because justice and the Law were satisfied. Their critique overlooks that it was not satisfied by us guilty sinners, but by our Mediator, Vicar, and Substitute. A stroke of justice pierced Christ, and by a gift of grace God imputes his death and righteousness to us. Both of God's Words, Law and Gospel, are trustworthy.

Recapping, the elements of vicarious satisfaction are:

---

Victor, ransom, and others hold prominent places in Lutheran theology along with vicarious satisfaction.

<sup>95</sup> J. A. Dell, *Senior Catechism: Luther's Small Catechism in Question and Answer Form* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1939), 103.

- God’s justice, Law, verdict, judgment, condemnation, and curse
- Substitution
- Active obedience
- Passive obedience
- Imputation, counting, reckoning
- Satisfaction

These elements are facets of the jewel of atonement for which we thank, praise, serve, and obey Christ. They also are an index of denials of atonement by the adversaries. This list of elements catalogs the angles of attack on vicarious satisfaction. In every attack, one or more of these elements are denied.

### *Distinction of Anselm and Luther*

Adversaries of Lutheran Orthodoxy critique its vicarious satisfaction as if it were more or less identical with Anselm’s penal substitution. A significant distinction between Anselm and Luther needs to be realized.

Luther’s and Lutheran Orthodoxy’s atonement is not only the penal substitution of Anselm, but the full vicarious satisfaction. As Pieper explains, Anselm’s penal substitution, which is right as far as it goes, embraces the passive obedience but not the active obedience of Christ for us.

Anselm of Canterbury declared in his book *Cur Deus Homo* (II, 11) that Christ’s obedience did not form a part of the satisfaction rendered for men because Christ, as every other rational creature, owed God his obedience.<sup>96</sup>

Forde, who is among the chief adversaries of atonement in Lutheran Orthodoxy, says Lutheran “orthodoxy differs from Anselm in its emphasis upon active obedience in the fulfillment of the law as well as passive obedience.”<sup>97</sup> Thus, he sometimes recognizes the distinction even if at other times he proceeds against Lutheran Orthodoxy as if the distinction did not exist.

That is not the only difference between Anselm and Luther, but it suffices for present purposes. For a thorough comparison of Anselm and Luther, see Burnell F. Eckardt, Jr.’s doctoral dissertation, *Anselm and Luther on the Atonement: Was it “Necessary”?*<sup>98</sup>

This difference between the “Anselmic model” and Lutheran theology has immense practical effects. Hear Luther in the following from Pieper:

This teaching of Scripture is of great practical importance. In his life of faith the

---

<sup>96</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), II.373.

<sup>97</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, “The Position of Orthodoxy,” in Gerhard O. Forde, *The Essential Forde: Distinguishing Law and Gospel*, eds. Nicholas Hopman, Mark C. Mattes, and Steven D. Paulson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 39.

<sup>98</sup> Burnell F. Eckardt, Jr. *Anselm and Luther on the Atonement: Was it “Necessary”?* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992). See T. R. Halvorson, “Commentary on Burnell F. Eckardt, Jr.’s Anselm and Luther on the Atonement: Was It ‘Necessary’?”, [https://trhalvorson.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Commentary\\_BurnellEckardt\\_AnsemlutherOnAtonement.pdf](https://trhalvorson.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Commentary_BurnellEckardt_AnsemlutherOnAtonement.pdf)

Christian continually resorts to Christ's vicarious fulfillment of the Law. Luther: "He satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all his mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; to Him I cling; He fulfilled it for me and gave his fulfillment to me." (Erl. XV, 611, 63.)<sup>99</sup>

Thus, while orthodox Lutherans ought to defend the Anselmic position up to a point, defending Lutheran Orthodoxy is not identical with defending Anselm. To refute Anselm where he is errant or incomplete can be used by the adversaries as a sleight of hand in purporting to refute Lutheran Orthodoxy. That is a fallacy that we should not fall into and that we should be ready to expose when the sleight of hand is used against orthodoxy.

That aside, however, as to the question that Wheaton is studying in this book about whether Aulén's historical conclusions are true, this distinction does not affect the proposition that Aulén is historically wrong. Under a formulation that has significant variance from Lutheran Orthodoxy, the sources Wheaton studies, with their impressive and sometimes enormous historical reception, represent the Middle ages with an atonement that is about Christ's suffering, not power. Wheaton has that right. Lutherans can appreciate and applaud Wheaton for that and the heavy lifting that went into his labors.

### **Luther on Atonement and Wheaton's Critique of Aulén**

Wheaton says the conventional narrative that has had influence since Aulén's *Christus Victor* is mistaken. "The reconciliation of God and mankind was not dependent upon the defeat of the enemy powers; rather the reverse."<sup>100</sup>

Wheaton's assertion here accords well with Luther in his explanation of the Second Article of the Creed in the Large Catechism, and atonement as presented by Lutheran theologians such as Dierks, Pieper, Peters, and Kilcrease. Our enemies the devil and death held us in their power not by some right of their own. Rather, based on the just verdict of guilty under the Law, God confined us under them as jailer and hangman. With our sin imputed legally to Christ as our substitute, and with his suffering the Law's penalty of death in our place, the judgment was exhausted. The exhaustion terminated the legal authority of the devil and death as jailor and hangman.

Wheaton is an Evangelical Protestant, not a Lutheran. But he is approaching the matter historically. His approach is not hampered by dogmatic or confessional commitments of his being an Evangelical Protestant. He observes history and lets history speak for itself. His result observed from history, namely that "the reconciliation of God and mankind was not dependent upon the defeat of the enemy powers; rather the reverse," is compatible with Luther and Lutheran Orthodoxy. The theologians of the Augsburg Confession assembled a Catalogue of Testimonies to show that not only was their theology of the two natures in Christ scriptural, it also was the catholic faith from the apostolic era onward. Wheaton's *Suffering, Not Power* serves a similar

---

<sup>99</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, II.375.

<sup>100</sup> Wheaton, *Suffering, Not Power*, 4.

purpose regarding the relationship between vicarious satisfaction and Christus Victor in the Lutheran confessions. It amounts to a fledgling catalogue of Middle Ages testimonies showing the catholicity Lutheran Orthodoxy's doctrine of atonement.