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Atonement without satisfaction

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Abstract: **According to Swinburne, one way of dealing with the guilt that attaches to a morally bad action is satisfaction, consisting of repentance, apology, reparation, and penance. Thus, Christ's life and death make atonement for human sin by providing a reparation which human beings would otherwise be unable to pay. I argue that the nature of God's creative activity entails that human beings can by themselves make reparation for their sins, merely by apology. So there is no need for additional reparation, and the satisfaction theory of the atonement is otiose. Following an insight of Swinburne's, I argue that satisfaction is not sufficient for forgiveness, since satisfaction does not place the wronged party under any obligation to forgive the wrongdoer. Christ's death merits the forgiveness of those sins for which human beings have made satisfaction. It does this in virtue of a divine promise to reward Christ's meritorious life with the forgiveness of such human sin.**

Finding a theory to explain how Christ's life, death, and resurrection can bring about human redemption has long been one of the more intractable tasks faced by the theologian. Perhaps the most interesting and convincing modern attempt to do this can be found in Richard Swinburne's work, *Responsibility and Atonement*.[1] Swinburne modifies the satisfaction theory first proposed by Anselm in *Cur Deus homo* and developed fully in the work of the medieval schoolmen. I shall argue that, while a satisfaction theory of the atonement cannot be adequately defended, Swinburne's nuanced account possesses many of the materials to allow us to develop a different theory, also based on ideas found in Anselm and developed by the later schoolmen. I shall label this alternative theory the *merit* theory of the atonement.

In what follows, I shall first describe Swinburne's theory. Secondly, I shall try to suggest why this theory is untenable. Thirdly, I shall try to show how the medieval merit theory might be developed as an alternative (and preferable) explanation of the process whereby Christ's life, death, and resurrection effect human redemption. Finally, I shall try to deal with two possible objections to this theory, showing how they can be satisfactorily overcome.

Swinburne's satisfaction theory of atonement

According to Richard Swinburne, there are two possible ways of dealing with the guilt that attaches to a human being as a result of his or her morally bad action. The first is by atonement or voluntary satisfaction, consisting of repentance, apology, reparation, and penance, culminating ideally (though not morally necessarily) in forgiveness by the wronged party.[2] (Forgiveness is not morally necessarily because, according to Swinburne, forgiveness is supererogatory – no-one has a duty to forgive someone who has wronged them. Nevertheless, Swinburne holds that, in interpersonal human relationships, guilt can be removed by voluntary satisfaction without the need of forgiveness. Both of these claims seem to me clearly true, and I will not discuss them further.) Such reparation is obligatory – 'a wrongdoer is under obligation to deal with his guilt' (81; see also 148).

Repentance and apology are obvious enough – the attempt to distance ourselves from the harm that we have done, where this distancing is both internal (repentance) and public (apology). But reparation and penance perhaps require a word of comment. Reparation is an attempt to remove the harm done – either straightforwardly, replacing like with like, or by appropriate compensation in kind, doing what can be done to remove the harm. And this too seems clear enough – as we shall see below, Swinburne rightly holds that the victim of wrongdoing has the right to claim these sorts of compensation. The wrongdoer's penance is some further token of sorrow,

> **… a performative act … whereby he disowns his wrong act (in a way which mere words do not do, where the wrong is a serious one). By doing his act of disowning, by doing something which costs him time, effort, and money, he constitutes that act as a meant and serious act.** (84)

Central to Swinburne's account is the claim that it is morally wrong for the victim of a seriously morally bad act merely to condone the bad act without any atonement at all – that is to say, without at least an apology from the wrongdoer. To do so would trivialize the bad act, and the value of those harmed by the act. But not only that; it would trivialize the wrongdoer too, failing to treat him seriously, and failing to take seriously his attitude to the wronged party. 'Thereby it trivializes human relationships, for it supposes that good human relations can exist when we do not take each other seriously' (86).[3]

The second way in which guilt can be removed, according to Swinburne, is by punishment – the wronged party (or somebody appointed by him, or with the due authority) 'taking reparation by force' (93). The wronged party's taking reparation is labelled by Swinburne 'revenge'; punishment is primarily justified as 'a substitute for revenge in circumstances where it is better that some authority act as the agent of the victim in exacting revenge' (94). Swinburne thus adopts a version of a retributive theory of punishment. This entails that

> **If *A* [the wrongdoer] has things which *B* [the wronged party] desires, *B* can choose them, be they money, goods, or service. But if *A* does not have things which *B* can use, *B* nevertheless has a right to take things from *A*, even if he cannot use them. That gives *B* the right to subject *A* to imprisonment or unpleasant experiences of various kinds. For a debt is a debt; and even if the creditor cannot use the only things the debtor has, such as his liberty and freedom from pain, he still has the right to take them.** (96–97)

Unlike more standard retributive theories, however, Swinburne holds that while the victim has the right to exact punishment, there is no obligation on the part of the victim so to do. Nevertheless, since atonement is obligatory, punishment must involve more than would be required by voluntary atonement (94), presumably since retribution must also be taken for failure in the obligation to make atonement.

Swinburne uses his account of satisfaction and punishment to elucidate the nature of Christ's redemptive work. Wrongdoers have a duty to atone for their wrongs. Each human wrong is also a sin, an abuse of 'the opportunities which [human beings'] creator gave them' (148). As such, each human being owes atonement to God, since atonement is obligatory. But, 'If you take seriously the theological background to human wrongdoing, you realize both the extent of atonement needed and the difficulty which man suffering from original sinfulness will have in making it. We need help from outside' (148). According to Swinburne, this help is provided in the sacrificial life and death of Christ, which put us in a position to offer something to God by means of reparation for our sin. Swinburne rightly does not hold that Christ makes atonement for the sins of human beings by substituting for their repentance and apology – as he notes, no-one can make this sort of atonement for another person. But satisfaction, according to Swinburne, involves – or can involve – two further components too: reparation and penance. What Christ provides is reparation (149) and penance (154). Given that Christ has made a contribution towards the reparation that God has a right to demand for human sin, human beings can 'plead Christ's death in atonement for their sins' (153). Christ's life and death are most appropriately what is needed for atonement: 'Since what needs atonement to God is human sin, men living second-rate lives when they have been given such great opportunities by their creator, appropriate reparation and penance would be made by a perfect human life, given away through having been lived perfectly' (157).

Of course, God did not need such a great offering as the life and death of a perfect man. As the wronged party, God

> **… has the right to choose, up to the limit of an equivalent to the harm done and the need for a little more in penance, how much reparation and penance to require before he will forgive … . But if it is good that there be reparation and penance, it is good that these be substantial; that the atoning sacrifice be not a trivial one.** (160–161)

Swinburne holds that it is good for us to be in a position to be able to make

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reparation, to 'take *proper* steps to cancel our actions', and that 'if we are in no position to make proper atonement for what we have done, it is good that someone else (even the victim) put us in that position and thereby allow us to make proper atonement' (149). It is, of course, precisely this that God has done in Christ.

Swinburne does not, in fact, hold that Christ's life and death is equivalent to the atonement that God has the right to require, but that it is 'simply a costly reparation sufficient for a merciful God to let men off the rest' (154). But, of course, God cannot forgive those who fail to repent and apologize – indeed, Swinburne rightly holds that it would be morally wrong of God to condone morally bad actions, for example by disowning these actions without any attempt on the part of the wrongdoer to disown them too. So the impenitent are justly punished, deprived of the friendship with God that is the result of divine forgiveness.[4] This is of course, wholly consistent with God's merciful nature. Indeed, Swinburne notes that one advantage of his retributive theory of punishment is that it allows a place for mercy – an agent's failure to exact the retribution to which the agent has a right. It would be morally wrong of God to be merciful to the impenitent. But God has a right to a reparation from us that, after a certain amount of costly satisfaction on our part, He simply and mercifully remits – failing to exact the retribution that is his due.

Reparation and the satisfaction theory

Swinburne's theory represents perhaps the most sophisticated defence of the satisfaction theory ever formulated. There seem to me, however, to be insurmountable problems with this theory as proposed by Swinburne. These problems focus on the nature of the *reparation* due for human sin. But before I look at this, I want to examine three prima facie arguments against the satisfaction theory which do not, in fact, constitute genuine arguments against every such theory.

Many modern theories of punishment reject retribution as a component of punishment. I am inclined to agree with this rejection. Swinburne claims, for example, that a debt remains a debt unless the wrongdoer be deprived of something – irrespective of whether this deprivation can be used as reparation to the wronged party (see Swinburne, 96–97, quoted above). I would argue instead that a debt remains a debt unless something can be given in reparation to the wronged party. The result of this is that punishment – *contra* Swinburne – does not provide a way for dealing with guilt.[5]

So retribution cannot be defended in terms of a theory of debt-payment. And it seems to me that all prima facie reasonable theories of retribution entail the claim that punishment is a form of (or strongly analogous to) debt-payment. There might, of course, be other reasons for punishing a wrongdoer; my claim is merely that punishment by itself does not pay any debt. Given this (which I do not want or need fully to argue for here), it would be an argument against the satisfaction

theory if it could be shown to presuppose a retributive theory of punishment. As I mentioned above, Swinburne clearly accepts a retributive theory of punishment. And punishment, on his account, clearly entails the legitimate possibility of a wrongdoer's being deprived of goods even if no benefit accrues thereby to the wronged party. But the theory of satisfaction Swinburne proposes does not require the possibility of the penitent's being deprived of goods in this way. The theory is a theory of reparation. Reparation entails that goods are restored to the wronged party. But this does not in itself entail the legitimacy of the wrongdoer's merely being deprived (or depriving himself) of goods without any consequent benefit being conferred on the wronged party. So the satisfaction theory does not entail a retributive theory of punishment.

John Hick suggests another putative objection to the satisfaction theory of atonement as defended by Swinburne. According to Hick, Swinburne's theory is too anthropomorphic. Our wrongful actions do not harm God except insofar as they harm his creation. Likewise, our good actions do not benefit God except insofar as they benefit his creation. Christ's life and death, then, do not benefit God, and thus cannot function as reparation for human wrongdoing.[6]

This objection relies on the claim that our rejection of God does not count among the things that can objectively harm God – not least since everyone has a duty to love God. More broadly, as Swinburne suggests, sin can be seen in terms of a failure in a duty to God: thus, every sin harms Him, at least by failing in a duty of service to God – perhaps a duty to use the goods given to the sinner by God. Even so it might be objected, how can our failing in duty to God be objectively harmful to God? (If it is not objectively harmful, then it is hard to see how it can require reparation to be made to God.) On the face of it, failing in a duty to someone is always in itself objectively harmful – even if it does not do that person any *further* injury. My intending to murder you harms you, even if I fail – and fail so miserably that you do not feel in any way threatened by my actions. My intending to murder you harms you even if I never translate this intention into any sort of action. In the case at hand, God is deprived of service that we owe Him. And this deprivation is objectively harmful. And the result of this deprivation is God's displeasure, our failure to please God. In this case, I do not see that it is overly anthropomorphic to argue that this harm done to God requires some sort of reparation, if reparation can be made.[7]

The third failed objection is what we might call the 'transference' problem: how Christ's life and death can be appropriated by us. According to Swinburne, Christ's life and death are not in themselves a reparation for sin. Swinburne's suggestion is that they can be used by us as a reparation for sin. (This does not mean that Christ's life, lived perfectly and without sin, did not please God. The only point at issue is how God's being pleased with Christ's life can be extended to include God's being pleased with us as well.) We might be tempted to think that there is no way in which Christ's life and death can be appropriated by us such that we can offer

them as reparation for our sins. But this would be mistaken. Clearly, we can think of Christ's life and death as replacing whatever God has been deprived of by human sin. And we can think of Christ's life and death, not only as replacing whatever God has been deprived of, but also as removing the obligation for sinners to pay this debt. All that is required is that all three parties (God, Christ, and the penitent sinner) agree that Christ's life and death can be used by the sinner as reparation. If I owe you a certain sum of money, my friend can pay the money to you. But so long as you, he, and I all agree that the payment cancels the debt, then that is indeed what it does.[8]

So none of the three objections proposed thus far is effective. But this does not mean that there is not an objection to Swinburne's theory. The objection focuses on the reparation that is appropriate for human sin. In effect, I shall argue that the only reparation required to be made to God for human sin, over and above the reparation that we owe each other, is *apology*. To see this, we need to think about the reasons why human sin displeases God. I shall suppose that all forms of displeasure are caused by (in some sense or other) deprivation. A person is displeased only if that person is deprived of something that that person wants or needs. This deprivation need not always have any moral trade-off; moral considerations enter in if the person has a *right* to what she is deprived of, or if others have a duty not to deprive her of the thing she is deprived of.

The relevant deprivation in the case of the harm human beings do to God is a deprivation of *service*. There seem to me to be two different ways in which someone can be deprived of service. In the first way, the deprivation of service in turn entails a further deprivation; in the second case, it does not. Suppose I have a son, and that I ask him to do the washing up. He fails to do this, and in so doing fails not only in a duty of service, but also brings it about (in a loose sense) that I have to do the washing up. But suppose instead I ask him to tidy his bedroom. He fails to do this, but in so doing fails me in no more than a duty of service. The only other harm he does is to himself, not to me: my request that he tidy his bedroom was made not for my good but for his, that he might not have to live in unpleasant surroundings.

Clearly, there are some cases in which we fail God merely in a duty of service in a way that is analogous to the second sort of case just discussed – perhaps the failure to love God sufficiently would be a case in point, or failing in such a way to act that this failure is sufficient to deprive us of friendship with God. What is appropriate sort of atonement for sins of this nature? The answer to this depends on precisely on how we understand the obligation to service that we have to God.

So let me pause to consider more closely the source of the obligation to service that we have to God. I agree with Swinburne that this obligation is fundamentally the obligation that any beneficiary has to his or her benefactor (see e.g. 123).[9] But Swinburne's persistent use of financial analogies obscures the point here. For the gifts that God gives to human beings come at no expense to Himself, and their

abuse causes God no other harm than the deprivation of service. So there is an important sense in which these divine gifts to us differ from standard cases of benefaction, which involve some kind of cost. (Indeed, it is this costliness that gives them their distinctively moral character: we regard a benefaction from a poor person as more morally valuable than monetarily the same benefaction from a wealthy one.)

In this way, God's benefaction to human beings that generates this obligation to service in itself causes God no loss, and human sinfulness causes God no harm other than a loss of service. So the only loss to God in the sort of case that I am sketching is a loss of service. It seems to me that there is a fairly close analogue to the sort of sin that I am describing. Suppose I fail you by secretly intending to murder you. (I mean 'intention' here to be taken as seriously as possible: I really would murder you if the occasion arose. But I do not mean it to entail my being involved in any actual conspiracy to murder you. My intention has not yet been put into any sort of action, howsoever minimal. Adultery, to take a different example, would not count as a wrong merely in intention, though a mere intention to commit adultery would.) In a case such as this, I have injured you in some way: I have deprived you of something – your right not to have me intend to murder you. The deprivation of this sort of right in this sort of way seems close to the deprivation merely of service that I am trying to describe here. In neither case is *further* harm done to the person wronged.

Given this analogy, can we cast any further light on the sort of atonement relevant in the case of a failure merely in service? We can do so by exploring a little more closely the sort of atonement relevant in the case of a failure merely in intention. It seems to me that appropriate reparation in such cases is merely apology, where such apology of course presupposes genuine repentance. Repentance is sufficient to remove a bad intention. As such, repentance does not pay back any loss to the wronged party. So it cannot function as reparation. Repentance, after all, is simply a way of restoring an attitude that we are obliged to have, whether or not we ever fail in any duty. But *apology* can be thought of as reparation in cases of a failure merely in intention. Apology is an act that would not be required if the wrong had not been done, and it is an act that is specifically and explicitly directed to the wronged party. It is, furthermore, an act that obviously *gives something* to the wronged party: apology constitutes an overt disavowal of the past wrong act, and (more importantly) openly gives an explicit assurance of future good intention. (This assurance is presupposed in a morally healthy relationship, but there is no duty to provide such an open and explicit affirmation of it in such a relationship.) As such, it seems to me that apology is just the sort of act that would satisfy the requirements of reparation: apology is a compensation in kind for the harm done in cases where no injury has been done over and above a bad intention – in cases, that is, where nothing further has been taken from the wronged party.[10]

If I am right about this, we can use this analysis to help come to a conclusion about the sort of reparation appropriate in cases merely of failure in service. Suppose my son fails to tidy his room when I ask him. He has failed in a service to me, but he has not failed me in any other way. I think that we would regard apology as sufficient reparation in such cases. Of course, apology involves an undertaking to perform the task required – at least if I still want it done. (Presumably it does not involve any such duty if I have changed my mind about the desirability of the task, or if the required task has been done in some other way.) But the crucial *reparative* component here is the apology.[11] If this is right, then there is a set of sins – those that deprive God of service without harming any other person other than the agent – for which human beings can indeed make sufficient reparation.

We can fail in our duty of service to God in another way too. Every time we sin against each other, we are failing in our duty of service to God. And there are two kinds of such failure. If I injure someone in a way which does not affect that person's ultimate standing *coram Deo*, I fail in my duties both to God – that I use for good purposes the goods He has given me – and to the other person. But suppose, secondly, I injure someone in such a way that the result is her turning away from God. In this case my failure in service not only frustrates God's plans in a very serious way, preventing God's plan for this person from coming to fulfilment, it also deprives God of the good of friendship with the person I harm in this way. What sort of reparation is appropriate in these two cases? In the first case, God's ultimate plans are not affected. So it seems to me that the wrong that we do to God in such a case is adequately dealt with by the following two acts: first, apology and further reparation to the person I injure; secondly, apology to God, where this apology counts, as outlined above, as sufficient reparation for the injury I do to God directly.[12]

The second case requires much more careful treatment. Not only are God's ultimate purposes frustrated by my actions, God is possibly deprived of someone's friendship. And this might seem to do more harm to God than would be done merely by a failure in intention. But again it does not seem to me that the reparation required for the 'Godward' aspect of this sin need be any greater than our apology to God (and, of course, making whatever additional reparation is required to the person that we harm). God does require reparation from me – but this reparation is identified as my apology.

Why should we accept this account of the case I am considering here? The reason depends on a particular view of God's reasons for creation. This account of God's creative purposes might strengthen the exposition I have given of the appropriate reparation for other sins than those I am considering right now; but the account is necessary for the particular case of the frustration of God's ultimate purposes for another human being. The account of God's creative purpose that I am thinking of now is that all of God's creative activity is *altruistic*: 'motivated merely by the belief that someone else will benefit or avoid harm by it'.[13] God

creates the world to benefit not Himself but others – in fact, to benefit the creatures He creates. (It does not matter for my purposes just how creatures benefit – whether it is by seeing God's glory, or by being able to share in God's love. Neither does it matter for my purposes that the very existence of the beneficiaries of creation depends on creation.) I shall suppose that God's having made the world entails certain moral obligations for any moral creature that inhabits it. In particular, it entails a duty of service to God. It might also (and I shall suppose in the case of the actual world certainly does) entail duties to the created order too, both duties of care to the environment and more complex duties to other created moral agents. It is this last sort of case that I am interested in here. We clearly wrong God by wronging each other, and this failure in one of our obligations clearly entails that reparation is made to God. But what sort of reparation should God demand here? On the account of altruistic action I have been sketching, God's loss is a loss of something that He wants not for Himself but for the sake of someone else. So my wrong actions deprive God of a service, but they deprive God of a service that He wants for the sake of another. Suppose I do what I can to apologize and make reparation to this other person. Does this adequately deal with what I owe to God? Not quite, but presumably very nearly. Not quite, because I do still, objectively, owe God a duty of service that I have failed in. But very nearly, because this duty, although owed to God, is owed to Him precisely and only because He wants the good of the other person. If I deal with the debt I owe to this other person, then it is hard to see that God could reasonably require a vast additional reparation to be made by me to Him. God's pleasure consists fundamentally in the good of the third person; if I make reparation to this third person, then I have done almost all of what is required to restore God's good pleasure. In dealing with the debt I owe to the third person, I have dealt with the fundamental harm done to God's intentions. All that remains by way of reparation is apology to God.

Of course, it might be that I owe this third person a great deal. I have, after all, been instrumental in depriving him of his ultimate goal. Still, although instrumental, I am not in fact the only cause of this deprivation. If someone is deprived forever of his final goal, this must ultimately be because of his own choice to place himself in a position in which his desire for the good is eliminated. If his being in this position were not the result of his own free choice – or at least the result of his own voluntary action – it is hard to see how God could reasonably allow him to remain in such a position.[14]

This issue does, however, highlight a potential problem here. Might reparation to the human being I wrong in some cases not be beyond my power? And if it is, how can I deal with the objective guilt that attaches to me? One solution here is to appeal to a retributive theory of punishment, according to which a person I wrong retains the right to take things from me even if that person can make no use of these things. I have suggested already that retributive theories of punishment are false. But suppose a retributive theory of punishment were true. In this case,

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penitent human beings on my view would be punished not for the wrong they do to God (since the guilt attaching to this is sorted out by repentance and apology) but for the wrong they do to each other – some of which cannot be sorted out by adequate reparation. This punishment would not be equivalent to damnation, since the wrongs that we do to each other would on a retributive view all have merely finite punishment. Could Christ substitute for this punishment? Perhaps he could,[15] but it looks massively implausible to suggest that Christ's atoning work is required only to deal with the wrongs we do to each other, so I would take this as further evidence against believing a retributive theory of punishment to be true.

Still, this line of argument is in any case not open to me, since I reject retributive theories of punishment. How can I allow a human being to make sufficient reparation, supposing a wronged person to exercise her right in demanding this? My strategy here is to deny that there are cases in which the payment of finite reparation is beyond any human being's power. For we do not need to restrict the payment of these sorts of debts to this life. Christians hope for a future life of happiness, and in this future life, there might indeed be countless occasions and opportunities to make reparation to each other for the wrongs that we do to each other. This explains how on my theory no wrong that human beings do to each other is such that reparation is impossible: a murderer can even make reparation to his victim on this view. Our opportunities for reparation are *eschatological*.[16] These opportunities need not be associated with the enjoyment of the bliss of heaven: we could indeed invoke notions of purgatory in this context, or of some other state of moral growth or purification intermediate between this life and the vision of God.[17]

There is one further aspect of human sin that I have thus far neglected: the harm that human beings do to the environment. There are three aspects of this: the duty that we owe to God not to harm something that He cares for; the duties that we owe to the environment itself (including for example the duty to treat animals with care); and the duties that we owe to future generation of humans for whom we have the world on trust. The second and third of these are complex issues, but I do not think that they present any difficulties for the theory of the atonement. The first is, however, relevant here. I would suggest that harming God's creation in general is precisely reducible to the harm done to someone when we harm something she cares for. This harm – to the carer – is adequately satisfied when we both apologize (and repent) and attempt to repair the thing cared for. If we harm the environment, we make satisfaction to God by doing what we can to repair the harm we have done, and by apologizing to God for this harm.

So the gist of all this is that I can deal with the Godward aspect of my sinfulness by apology and by dealing with the 'manward' aspect of it, and that I can deal with the manward aspect of it by apology and making sufficient additional reparation, as outlined by Swinburne. So human beings can indeed make sufficient reparation for the Godward aspect their sins. They thus do not need to plead Christ's life and

death as reparation for their sin. Indeed, they cannot do so, since a debt cannot be paid twice, and their own reparation – their repentance and apology – sufficiently pays it. Their dealing with their guilt is, of course, required of them. It certainly is not supererogatory, or meritorious, and if we adopt Swinburne's claim that the wrongdoer's successful attempt to deal with his or her guilt does not morally necessitate forgiveness, it certainly places no necessity on God to forgive the penitent.

In general, then, our repentance and apology to God is sufficient to deal with the Godward aspect of sin. Human beings on this account could in principle do more than is required of them. This would be penance. Perhaps a human being, in the normal run of things, could do sufficient penance to merit a reward from God – possibly the forgiveness of sin. But I see no reason not to be more sympathetic to the intuitions of the Christian tradition about original sinfulness: the 'difficulty which man suffering from original sinfulness' (adapting a passage from Swinburne) will have in doing the sort of supererogatory action sufficient to merit forgiveness surely means that human beings simply cannot act in this sort of way, caught up as they are in their own wrongdoing, in the sinfulness of their fellows, and in the disordered social and political structures in which they live.

A merit theory of atonement

I have argued that satisfaction theories of the atonement are false for the prima facie striking reason that we can make sufficient reparation to God for our sins. I hope to have shown that this view is not as outlandish as it might at first appear. If satisfaction theories are false, what sense can we make of the redemptive value of Christ's death? Swinburne's insightful account of the nature of repentance and forgiveness provides the tools to enable us to formulate an alternative theory that remains faithful to the tradition while not relying on a theory of satisfaction and the objections to which it seems open.[18]

In *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm develops a two-pronged approach to his analysis of the redemptive value of Christ's death. The dominant – and more famous – side is the satisfaction theory. But towards the end of the work, he develops a different (and in principle independent) theory, according to which Christ's death *merits* certain rewards for human beings. I shall label this theory the merit theory. In what follows I will try to show – making use of some of the tools provided by Swinburne – how a merit theory might be developed independently of a satisfaction theory of the atonement.

Supposing that Christ's death cannot be made to function as a reparation for human sin, what sense can we make of its atoning value? The first step in sketching out a merit theory is to recall that satisfaction to God for sin – if my argument is sound – can be adequately made by sinful human beings themselves, since this satisfaction consists of no more than repentance and apology. The second step is

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to recall Swinburne's important point that the forgiveness of sins is supererogatory. God is thus not obliged to forgive sins.[19] If God does not forgive sins, we are not restored to friendship with God, and thus ultimately suffer what theologians sometimes call the *poena damni* – the deprivation of the undeserved good of the vision of God.[20] Given that this deprivation is a bad thing, God is merciful if He decides not so to deprive the penitent – He is, in other words, merciful if He decides to restore the penitent to His friendship.

Of course, God is merciful. But this mercy is not something on which anyone can rightly presume – God is merciful if He gives the undeserved gift of His friendship to just one penitent person. But God can place Himself under an *obligation* to forgive after due satisfaction. He can do this, of course, by a direct promise. But He can do it as the result of an indirect promise too. For example, God can place Himself under an obligation to forgive after due satisfaction if the following two conditions are satisfied: (1) He promises that He will do as person *x* asks, and (2) *x* asks God to forgive the sins of the penitent. What good reason could God have in this case for promising to do what person *x* asks? One such good reason would be that God does this – makes this promise – as a reward for a meritorious action. On this view, underlying (1) is a further essential step: a prior meritorious action, an action that merits from God a reward that, as it happens, coincides with the reward stated in (1).

According to St Anselm, this is exactly what God does in the case of the supererogatory merit of Christ's sacrificial life and death:

> **It is necessary that the Father should compensate the Son. … On whom is it more appropriate for [Christ] to bestow the reward and recompense for his death than those for whose salvation … he has made himself a man, and for whom, as we have said, he set an example, by his death, of dying for the sake of righteousness?**[21]

On this scheme, Christ's death is a supererogatorily good act that merits a reward from God. The reward is to be whatever Christ asks for. (This reward is not rashly or irresponsibly ascribed by God if we suppose that Christ is necessarily good, and thus incapable of asking for anything bad.) Christ asks that God forgive the sins of those who repent and apologize to God. God is then obliged to do so. So the redemptive result of Christ's sacrifice is God's being obliged to forgive those who call upon him in penitence and sorrow.

I will explain in a moment both the possible precise content of Christ's request and the advantages of this indirect sort of divine promise over and above a direct promise to forgive sins after repentance and apology. But first, I want to clarify the details of my proposed Anselmian scheme by looking more closely at the nature of the relationship between a meritorious action and its reward. Again, we can profitably adopt wholesale from Swinburne's account. According to Swinburne, supererogatory actions place their recipient under an obligation to gratitude; and supererogatory actions of sufficient magnitude place their recipient under an obligation to more than merely gratitude (64–66). Both of these sorts of super-

erogatory action are labelled by Swinburne 'meritorious' (70). Christ's death thus seems to place God under an obligation to reward it in some way. Of course, the nature of this reward is appropriately determined by God. So, in relation to the atonement, there is nothing about Christ's death that in itself guarantees the forgiveness of sin: there is, in other words, nothing that guarantees in advance that the reward is to be whatever Christ asks for. Christ sets out, as it were, in hope; God rewards this hope by promising to do whatever Christ asks. Given both (1) this promise, and (2) Christ's request that God forgives the sins of those who repent and apologize, God is obliged to forgive the sins of those who repent and apologize.[22]

What precisely is the content of Christ's request made on our behalf? Thus far, I have spoken of it merely as a request to forgive the sins of those who repent and apologize. But I think we will need to affirm rather more than this. For one thing, it appears to omit any mention of the 'manward' aspect of sin – the wrong that we do not to God directly but rather to each other. Secondly, it might be thought that there are objections of a theological nature: does Christ's request, as I have outlined it, not make forgiveness conditional on our doing certain things? And – related to this – does it not omit any reference to the role of *faith* in the forgiveness of sins?

I have dealt with the manward aspect of sin at length in the previous section. In line with this, part of the content of Christ's request to God would need to be that God forgive us provided we repent and apologize to him. But this repentance itself requires that we do what we can to deal with the wrongs we do to other human beings. As I made clear in the previous section, it also involves doing what needs to be done to repair the harm we do to God's creation in general. Does all of this not make our forgiveness conditional on our performing certain good deeds – whether this be our repentance *coram Deo* or whatever reparation we can offer to our fellow human beings? Perhaps it does, but even the most convinced Augustinian must affirm that forgiveness is conditional at least on our *acceptance* of it: and it is hard to see how this acceptance could not presuppose at least repentance and apology. Perhaps it will involve thankfulness as well, gratitude for a gift given: but no-one holds that the gift is given to the *impenitent*. The link of all of this with traditional theories of justification by faith is clear enough – though I would not want to be tied into a requirement of explicit faith here, since it seems to me that a theory of salvation that is inclusive of all people of goodwill is immeasurably preferable to one that is not. Equally, the only person able to merit the forgiveness of our sins in this scheme remains Jesus.

This scheme, of course, creates further obligations on the part of human beings: specifically, an obligation of service to Christ as the benefactor who bestows on us the rewards of his meritorious action. But this obligation is easily satisfied: we serve Christ precisely when we make good use of the gift he has given us, by repenting and apologizing. (I take it that there is a similar duty of service in

Swinburne's account, and that we satisfy this obligation on Swinburne's account when we plead Christ's death in reparation for our sins.)

Why is it better for God to place Himself under an obligation in this way than to do so merely by a direct promise? Part of the traditional Christian doctrine of the atonement is that Christ is a divine person. So this complex scheme of redemption would very effectively show the extent of God's love – as traditional atonement theories invariably claim. It also gives us an example of the sort of life that it is good for us to lead: not merely satisfying all our obligations, but doing more than is required of us, and in this way pleasing God.[23]

It is important to understand this aspect of the theory. In effect, I am claiming that the sinner need not know that Christ has acted in this meritorious way. For that matter, the theory does not require any knowledge of Christ at all. To this extent, the theory is transactional in way that Swinburne's is not. A result of this is that the only difference *knowledge* of Christ's redemptive activity makes is exemplary: Christ gives the believer a pattern of behaviour. These seem to me to be advantages, since they allow Christ a role in redemption that does not exclude people of other faiths or of no faith. But at any rate it is worth being clear about this. Of course, none of this entails that Christ's life is not good in itself. Its goodness lies not in its being a reparation, but in Christ's performance of God's will to the extent not merely of satisfying all his obligations but also of living a self-sacrificial life of supererogatory goodness.

On the theory I am proposing, God is obliged to forgive the penitent. On the face of it this seems to preclude divine mercy. After all, if God is obliged to forgive the penitent, then His so doing can hardly count – as it does in Swinburne's proposal – as an act of mercy. And this in turn seems to render otiose standard Christian prayers for mercy – prayers that form a central part of the liturgy. I think it is clear that the merit theory I am proposing entails – at the very least – a modification to the traditional accounts of mercy that Swinburne's system copes with so elegantly. There is nothing about my proposal that is inconsistent with the claim that God *helps* sinners to repent. And this – God's helping sinners to repent – is certainly supererogatory. There is nothing about the repentance of a sinner that obliges God to help. God is thus merciful when he helps a sinner repent, and thereby achieve salvation and friendship with God.[24] (I do not need, of course, to be committed to the view that people can repent *only if* God helps them. There might be all sorts of advantages to divine help, and thus it be good that God help people repent and apologize, even if this help is not a necessary condition for their repentance and apology.) Alternatively, we could understand all pleas for mercy as simply ways of formally expressing our repentance and apology.

This theory is, in principle, neutral on all questions of predestination (for example, before or after foreseen good actions, and so on). After all, we do not know to what extent grace is necessary to allow us to repent and apologize to God, or to allow us to do whatever can be counted as such repentance and apology. Equally,

we could appropriately think of the only properly meritorious action in our redemption being that of Christ: Christ merits the forgiveness of those who repent. Our repentance could properly be seen merely as an occasion for this forgiveness, not a cause of it.

The theory is also neutral on the question of the possibility of damnation. Central to the merit theory I am proposing is that repentance and apology is necessary for salvation, and thus for friendship with God. People who fail to repent and apologize for their sin are deprived are friendship with God. This deprivation is equivalent to the theologian's *poena damni*, traditionally understood retributively as a punishment. But there is no need to understand the deprivation of friendship with God as a punishment. By freely choosing not to repent and apologize, people freely choose enmity with God. But this does not mean that God is not mercifully trying to help such people to repentance and apology. Equally, if such repentance and apology is free, God does not know whether someone suffering the *poena damni* might not in future repent and apologize. God's help can be – if need be – everlasting.[25]

Objections and replies

There seem to me to be at least two prima facie objections to this theory that need dealing with. The first, and perhaps most troubling, is that all this talk of God rewarding Christ's action with a promise to do whatever Christ chooses appears decidedly lacking in scriptural warrant. The second is that it seems to involve the absurd claim that God rewards Himself in some way, given the standard Christian claim that Jesus is a person who is both divine and human.

The scriptural objection requires careful treatment. Clearly, the New Testament contains no more than inchoate suggestions about the nature of Christ's redemptive work – hints at models and metaphors that Christians might want to use to state with force *that* Christ's death is somehow redemptive, without stating *how* it is redemptive. Still, my account can make sense of two important strands of New Testament material: that which sees Christ's death as a sacrifice, and that in which Christ himself promises the forgiveness of sins. In terms of sacrifice, I have been arguing that Christ's death is indeed Christ giving up something valuable, and giving something of benefit to God. Christ himself is portrayed in the Gospels as promising the forgiveness of sins to the penitent. And that God has promised the forgiveness of sins to the penitent is just what I am proposing. Given the way in which New Testament theology is developed – suggestively and metaphorically, and fundamentally through narrative – it should come as no surprise that the precise mechanism whereby this promise is put in place is left mysterious.[26] Indeed, my theory is not conspicuously worse off in this respect than any other.

Secondly, there is the Trinitarian aspect of all this. Christ is a divine person, and insofar as he merits a reward from God in effect – and oddly – rewards himself for

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certain supererogatory deeds. One way to deal with this is to point out that he does so under different descriptions, and in different functions. And this removes the putative oddity. Suppose, for example, that a town council offers a prize for a race that all inhabitants of the town – including members of the council – are eligible to enter. The race is won by one of the councillors. In this case, the winner of the race is part of a body that awards the prize to him. *Qua* winner of the race, he receives the prize; *qua* town council member, he awards the prize. An analogous situation would obtain in the case of Christ's meritorious action. *Qua* man, he merits reward; *qua* God, He gives the reward. As far as I can see, this does not raise any insurmountable logical problems.[27]

Another way of dealing with this would be to adopt the more Anselmian insight that there is a sense in which the Son merits a reward from the Father. This proposal would allow the theologian to affirm the continuity of the Son's work before and after incarnation: the Son always pleads that the Father will mercifully restore human beings to his friendship; the Incarnation allows the Son to merit such restoration, removing it from the realm of divine mercy, and placing it in the realm of divine justice.[28]

Notes

1. Richard Swinburne *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Unless otherwise indicated, all references are to this work.
2. For Swinburne's account of satisfaction, see *ibid.*, ch. 5.
3. Note that Swinburne holds that it is logically impossible for the victim of a seriously morally bad act to forgive the wrongdoer without any atonement at all: 'A victim's disowning of a hurtful act is only to be called forgiveness when it is in response to at least some minimal attempt at atonement such as an apology' (87).
4. On hell and damnation, see *ibid.*, ch. 12.
5. I will discuss below the prima facie consequence that some guilt on this account may *never* be dealt with. I will show there that my theory by no means entails this conclusion.
6. John Hick *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 122–123.
7. It has been objected to me that spelling out sin in fundamentally moral terms – as opposed to (say) relational terms – yields an impoverished account of the nature of sin, failing to heed its interpersonal and dysfunctional aspects. But it seems to me that giving a moral account here allows us to see precisely what it is that goes wrong in sinful interpersonal relationships. It is clearly wrong to understand moral accounts of sin in purely 'transactional' terms; central to Swinburne's account, for example, is a discussion of the real harm that we do to each other, and of the sorts of steps required for proper interpersonal relationships to be restored. I would argue that the components of disordered relationships are our moral failings to each other and to God. Theological accounts of sin talk about the matter with greater richness of rhetorical density, but they do not seem to add any clearly discernible further analytic component. As Swinburne notes, we are all involved in the sin of each other, and there are ways of being so involved that are somehow beyond our individual control to fix. But these accumulated communal wrongs are still moral in character, the social disorder emergent from the moral wrongs of many individuals. I will return to this matter below. Equally, I deal below with the question of the psychological disorder that results from human sin. Another related objection might be that, whatever our account of interpersonal human relationships, God at any rate is not a moral agent, and so such moral categories cannot be appropriate in an analysis of the relationship between God and human beings. I discuss the status of divine goodness in note 19 below.

8. For this misunderstanding, see e.g. Steven S. Aspenson 'Swinburne on atonement', *Religious Studies*, **32** (1996), 187 – 204, 203. Perhaps the most interesting and illuminating critical response to Swinburne's theory is that proposed by David McNaughton – interesting and illuminating not least because it includes the report of further important clarifications of Swinburne's theory provided by Swinburne in correspondence with McNaughton. According to McNaughton, Christ's life and death, even though they confer a benefit on God, cannot constitute a reparation for sin. McNaughton argues that the relevant benefit is merely God's forgiving the sinner – a 'wholly circular' state of affairs: 'The person wronged has made forgiveness conditional on the offering of some benefit in reparation; he cannot, therefore, coherently accept as a fulfilment of that condition, a benefit which flows from his forgiving the wrongdoer, since his forgiveness of the wrongdoer is itself to be a consequence of that condition being fulfilled'; David McNaughton 'Reparation and atonement', *Religious Studies*, **28** (1992), 129–144, 141. This objection is based on a misunderstanding of the implications of Swinburne's theory. According to Swinburne, complete reparation places the wronged party in a position to forgive. But it does not *oblige* the wronged party to forgive the wrongdoer. So Swinburne's theory entails that Christ's death as offered by us confers on God the benefit not as such of forgiving us, but of being in a position to forgive us: it gives God the *opportunity* to forgive us, an opportunity that He would not otherwise have. And this opportunity is a good for God irrespective of His actual forgiveness of us. Distinguishing between forgiveness and having the opportunity to forgive – a distinction that follows directly from Swinburne's account – is sufficient to block the vicious circularity identified by McNaughton.
9. The argument of Aspenson's article, 'Swinburne on atonement', is that the benefits conferred on human beings by God are unasked for, and therefore not such that they can entail duties of service. Aspenson's argument seems to me to show that someone who does not want these benefits has no duty to be grateful. (This insight could perhaps be used as part of an argument, one that I do not want to explore here, on the moral justifiability of suicide.) But many people – probably most people – want to be alive and to enjoy the blessings of life, such as they are. And I do not see that Aspenson's argument would show that these people have no duty of service to God.
10. There is a prima facie objection to this scheme. There are degrees of bad intentions: e.g. an intention to murder is much worse than an intention to steal. But on the scheme proposed, the satisfaction required in the case of an intention to murder – viz. apology – appears identical to the satisfaction required in the case of an intention to steal. Thus the scheme cannot distinguish between degrees of bad intention. In reply, I would suggest that both repentance and apology require far more of the wrongdoer in the first case – murder – than in the second case – theft. In the first case, but not to such an extent in the second, genuine repentance would involve the confrontation of the darkest and most repugnant of moral characteristics, a process that would be painful and deeply disturbing. Equally, apology would be harder and more exacting than any apology required for an intention to steal. Clearly, the real difficulty here lies in repentance, not in apology. So we should have to say that the difference in the two cases cannot be discerned primarily in the degree of reparation, but in the effort required in the act of repentance that is presupposed to the reparation itself. So there is no obvious way, on this scheme, of making a difference in the amount of reparation in the two cases. But perhaps difference in the amount of reparation is not all that important, given that in both cases the harm done to the victim seems to me *relatively* slight – it does not, for example, constitute a real physical or even psychological injury as I have been describing it. (If it did, of course, then more reparation would be required. But cases such as this are not the sort of cases I am focusing on here.) In the case of merely bad intentions, in fact, we are not always obliged to apologize, since it might be the case that sometimes interpersonal relations are better restored if the wronged person simply does not know that she or he has been wronged by a bad intention. Indeed, it may be that there are cases where we are obliged *not* to apologize – cases where the wronged party might feel more threatened by the knowledge of a bad intention than he or she would have felt without such knowledge. This perhaps suggests that reparation is simply the wrong category to appeal to in cases merely of bad intentions, which in turn might suggest that merely bad intentions do not genuinely deprive the wronged party of anything at all. But perhaps we could claim instead of this that repentance could indeed count as reparation just in those cases – if such there be – where apology is morally wrong. Of course, none of these observations can apply in the case of our wronging God.

11. We could deny the appropriateness of the category of reparation here at all. But I do not see that we should. If we acknowledge that apology counts as reparation, we can have a consistent account of all moral wrongs as, *ceteris paribus*, involving an obligation to make reparation. Equally, if we regard apology as insufficient, it seems to me very plausible that it is nearly sufficient, enough 'for a merciful God to let [us] off the rest'. There is no way of representing in this story God's original benefaction to us. But this original benefaction does not alter the moral dynamic of the situation, since it does not in itself involve God in any cost.
12. Or, again, sufficient for a merciful God to let us off the rest; and likewise for the case I discuss in the next paragraph.
13. For this standard definition of 'altruism', see Thomas Nagel *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 16, n. 1.
14. I return to this briefly in note 25 below.
15. The most interesting modern attempt to defend a penal theory of the atonement is perhaps that proposed by John E. Hare *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance*, Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 243–259. But I find Hare's 'expressive' theory of punishment, according to which punishment is a visible corrective exacted from the wrongdoer as a 'vindication of the victim's value' (247) so implausible that I not think the theory can ultimately succeed. On Hare's scheme, punishment results in the victimization of the wrongdoer, and thus does not appear to rectify any moral balance. For a modern response to Swinburne that presupposes a retributive theory of punishment, see Philip L. Quinn 'Swinburne on guilt, atonement, and Christian redemption', in Alan G. Padgett (ed.) *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honour of Richard Swinburne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 277–300.
16. The supposition I am making here is that a wronged person actually exercise her right in demanding the reparation required for the removal of any objective guilt attaching to the person who has wronged her. The Christian religion counsels mercy; so perhaps we could think that the wronged person is obliged to forgo the *full* reparation that she could demand. (In this case, someone would have a duty to forgo a right. It is hard to see that objective guilt could attach to a wrongdoer if the person wronged herself fails in a duty of mercy to the person who has wronged her.) And this, of course, tends to reduce the amount of reparation *required* from human beings for the wrongs that they do to each other.
17. Equally, fallen human beings live in a world some of whose disorder they might take collective responsibility for, but for which they cannot take individual responsibility: this I take it is part of the content of traditional doctrines of original sin. (The disorder is still moral; it is merely outside the scope of any individual to deal with.) I think that individuals can indeed make reparation sufficient for dealing with guilt in these sorts of circumstances. To see this, we need to see that (as I suggested above) the disorder for which human beings might take collective responsibility is itself *moral*: it is something that emerges from, and is parasitic upon, the individual wrongs that we do to each other. If there were no individual wrongs, there would be no collective disorder; and the individual wrongs that we do to each other are sufficient for the emergence of the collective disorder. On this view, if all human beings were to deal properly with their individual guilt, there would be no collective disorder. So a person deals with this guilt simply by dealing with the guilt that attaches to her in virtue of the wrongs she does to individuals, and perhaps by doing whatever she can of whatever would be required of her were human beings collectively to deal with their guilt – perhaps voting for the interests of the community, local or global; encouraging the support of ethical policies; or simply giving to charity. In any case, Christians await the creation of a new heaven and a new earth; if such human beings do all they can to sort out their guilt, they can rely on God to sort out the rest. Indeed, if the forgiveness of sins ultimately requires that God renew or replace the structures that provide the context for individual human sinfulness, then the reward for Christ's meritorious work would indeed include the recreation of the universe.
18. There are, of course, several alternative theories found in the tradition. Swinburne outlines the most important at 150–155 and 162. In general, Swinburne's objections seem to me sufficient to rule out these alternative theories. Theories of deification, mentioned by Hick in the passage I cited above as a further alternative to Swinburne's, seem to presuppose that the guilt attaching to sin has been sorted out: they appear in other words to be theories about sanctification.

19. Swinburne spells out God's goodness in ways which include God's duties to act in certain ways. But we do not need to follow him in this. We could hold, for example, that God, while having no duties, necessarily acts in ways which would represent duties for a moral agent; (for a defence of this sort of approach, see Thomas V. Morris 'Duty and divine goodness', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, **21** (1984), 261–268). When I talk of God's duties and obligations, I intend to speak loosely, also allowing for this second possible understanding of divine goodness. On Morris's account, God is not a moral agent, and this might be the gist of Hick's objection to Swinburne too. But we have duties to God whether or not God is a moral agent. So there seems no reason why sin should not be understood – as Swinburne does – in ultimately moral terms, and consequently why the notion of atonement too should not be so understood.
20. On Swinburne's scheme, reparation might be sufficient to remove guilt even if the wronged party – God in this case – does not forgive. In the case at hand, we should think of our guilt as removed even if we do not receive the (additional) good of the vision of God. So although I talk in traditional terms of the *poena damni*, I mean rather the deprivation of an undeserved good, not a punishment as such.
21. Anselm *Cur Deus Homo*, 2. 19, in Franciscus Salesius Schmitt (ed.) *Opera Omnia*, 6 vols (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946–61), vol. 2, 130; ET in Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (eds) *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, Oxford's World Classics (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 352–353.
22. The Resurrection has no redemptive place in this scheme – and perhaps it ought not to in any case, given that the resurrection of the body is a hope for all the saved. But the Resurrection certainly can be, as Swinburne – and the majority of the Western tradition – holds, God's showing that 'he accepted the offering as sufficient for the purpose for which it was made' (160). The Resurrection can also have an instrumental role in the general resurrection, and in the recreation of the universe and sanctification of humankind: see e.g. Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* IIIa, q. 56, A. 1, 2. One further point. My account thus far has ignored the psychological aspects of human sin: the psychological disorder, for example, that results from our sinful treatment of each other. The moral component here is dealt with in the way that I have outlined. The psychological component requires a different sort of treatment – perhaps the infusion of divine grace – and I could build such healing into the content of Jesus's request to God: not only that God forgive the sin of the penitent, but that he heal their psychological disorder; or perhaps that God heal psychological disorder in a way sufficient to allow the process of repentance to begin.
23. On this exemplary aspect of Christ's work, see too Richard L. Purtill 'Justice, mercy, supererogation, and atonement', in Thomas P. Flint (ed.) *Christian Philosophy*, University of Notre Dame Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 37–50, 44–45. (Purtill's account presupposes a theory of punishment that has retributive components, and this renders his theory of the atonement to my mind unacceptable.) On the account I am sketching, it is worth keeping in mind that it is sufficient but not necessary for human salvation that Christ live and die in the way that he did. To show us how much God loves us, the sufficiency of Christ's life and death for human salvation are indeed themselves sufficient. Aquinas is here in a similar position. He clearly affirms that God could save us in ways other than the one He has chosen – perhaps even merely by forgiving us. But it is good for God to save us by living a perfectly good life and death, so that 'through it a human being might know how much God loves humankind, and through this might be inspired to love [God], which is the perfection of human salvation': Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* IIIa, q. 46, A. 3, c. A theory that would make these things necessary for salvation would be able more effectively to show us the extent of divine love. But such a theory might be less good than mine (or Aquinas's) in other respects – e.g. it might rely on the (false) retributive theory of punishment. There might in any case be other reasons too that make it good for a divine person to become incarnate. Perhaps it would allow God to experience things – suffering and ignorance – that He could not otherwise experience. (This is not the same as the claim made by Stephen R. L. Clark in *God, Religion and Reality* (London: SPCK, 1998), 118: 'God himself must become an ignorant individual, and suffer as we do, so that He can manage real sympathy and support for us: without these there are things He does not know.' It is not that God is ignorant of the notions of suffering and ignorance, but that He does not *experience* these things unless he becomes incarnate.)
24. In a different way, Aquinas again is open to an analogous problem with the notion of mercy. For Aquinas, Christ's satisfaction is sufficient for the forgiveness of sins; divine mercy is identified as God's

freely providing satisfaction for our redemption: see Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, q. 46, A. 1 and 3. If we wanted to develop an account of the work of the Holy Spirit, we would doubtless do it in part here: it is the Holy Spirit who without coercion moves us to repentance, and thus to receive the reward merited by Christ – just as the work of sanctification after forgiveness can be ascribed to the Holy Spirit.

25. On the face of it, annihilation is a possible alternative here. But annihilationism seems to me to be false, since I would want to allow that God can never tell whether or not a person will repent and apologize. Annihilation destroys someone's chances of repentance when there is still a real chance – perhaps even a likelihood, given God's help – that he will repent. God's not annihilating such a person would of course be an act of mercy, since God is not obliged to save such a person. Swinburne argues that people can choose to place themselves in a position where repentance is not an option – where the desire for the good as such is eliminated (173–178). I am not sure about this, since it is not clear that character traits are as indelible as Swinburne supposes, particularly if we allow the action of God always non-coercively drawing people to the good. Supposing that no character traits are indelibly fixed, then I do not suppose that we should want to affirm annihilation.
26. This does not require that Christ be aware of this promise by means of, or in virtue of, his human mind, and thus it does not require that any of the proposed scheme be made clear by Christ in his life and death.
27. This is not to say that all potential Christological problems of a logical nature can be dealt with by the expedient of this sort of qualification – what the medievals called 'reduplication'. But I do not see a reason why the problem I have been discussing here cannot be so dealt with.
28. I would like to thank Martin Stone and Richard Swinburne for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper, and Essaka Joshua for talking at length about some of the issues with me. A very early version was read at a graduate seminar on doctrine at Oxford University; thanks to the participants there, especially Joseph Jedwab, Christopher Jones, Joseph Shaw, and Daniel von Wachter.