

REDEMPTION 2

The Substitutive satisfaction

There are two consequences of sin, the guilt and its atonement. The atonement requires another distinction between the punishment and the satisfaction. The essence of satisfaction is more a matter of Love than of punishment. Therefore, the punishment has a satisfactory value only insofar as it is accepted for the Love of God.

We must beware anthropomorphism. It attributes to God human traits, emotions, and intentions. The Most Holy Trinity cannot be lowered to the level of a created and innate tendency of human psychology. However, this is the common trap in which so many fell into heresy. We have to keep firmly the truth that sin, which is human disorder, deprives nothing to Divine perfection.

In the strict sense, according to the councils of Ephesus and Trent and to the Roman Catechism, the cause of the death of Christ is not sin, neither His own sin nor ours. The cause of His death is His Love for his Father and for us on the occasion of our sins. Vindictive justice is stranger to the mystery of Redemption. It would be unjust and cruel to punish an innocent in the place of a culprit.

Regarding our Lord Jesus Christ, St Thomas states that there is neither penal substitution nor wrath upon Him. *“When wrath is attributed to God, it is not as a passion of the soul, but more as of judgment of justice, inasmuch as He wills to take vengeance on sin. Certainly, the sinner, by sinning, cannot do God any actual harm. But so far as he himself is concerned, he acts against God in two ways. First, he offends Him by despising his commandments. Secondly, insofar as he harms himself or another; which injury redounds to God, inasmuch as the person injured is an object of God’s providence and protection”* (I-II Qu.47 a.1).

If a punishment is inflicted by sin, under penalty itself, only the sinner can be punished for his sin out of justice. If it is a question of satisfaction freely assumed, it may happen that one carries it for the other, which is a substitute satisfaction.

The substitute satisfaction is an act of Charity to which no one is bound. No justice can oblige one to pay a fine instead of the poor, but to pay it allows one to save justice for the love of the poor.

To offer satisfaction for the sin of the neighbor is to carry the penalty due to sin in his place. The term “penal substitution” should be avoided in favor of “penal solidarity”. It receives its efficacy by virtue of the Merciful Love shown towards the guilty.

St Thomas specifies that two conditions are necessary to satisfy for the neighbor. There must be a moral solidarity between the guilty party and the one who repairs the fault and the acceptance of this solidarity by the offended person. *“One man can satisfy for another, provided he be in a state of charity, so that his works may avail for satisfaction. Nor is it necessary that he who satisfies for another should undergo a greater punishment than the principal would have to undergo, as some maintain, who argue that a man profits more by his own punishment than by another’s, because punishment derives its power of satisfaction chiefly from charity whereby man bears it. And since greater charity is evidenced by a man satisfying for another than for himself, less punishment is required of him who satisfies for another, than of the principal”* (Sup Qu. 13, a. 2).

Christ did not die in our place, but *“Christ died for us”* (Rom 5:9) says St Paul and St Peter explaining that *“Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps. Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.”* (Pet 2:21-22). *“Christ bore a satisfactory punishment, not for His, but for our sins”* concludes St Thomas (I-II, 87, 7). It is, therefore, necessary to exclude any exercise of vindictive justice on the part of the person offended against the person who repairs. The *substitute satisfaction* is the best expression of this greatest act of Charity.

Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect substitute to perform such satisfaction. He is man who can suffer and die, which is matter of satisfaction. He is God made man Who loves with a burning heart His Father and us. His Charity is infinite and ready for an infinite expiatory work.