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DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE AND THE MYSTERY OF SALVATION ACCORDING TO THOMAS AQUINAS

Henk J.M. Schoot

1. *Introduction*

Salvation has become a difficult subject in Church and Theology. Admittedly, it has always been surrounded by controversy and strife, and sometimes still is. In our days, however, we have come to the point where it is not discord, but lack of understanding and fundamental indifference, which are the predominant problems.

Joseph Ratzinger confirms the widespread unease concerning this part of the Christian faith, stating that the thought that God has gone so far as to give up his Son in order to remit sin and to heal humankind from within has become obsolete for us. It makes no sense to us anymore.¹ Ratzinger mentions evil as causing this lack of understanding, both as something which people belittle, and as something which has never been so pervasive as in recent times; it results in denying the existence of a good God, and in the degradation of man, his creature. Not only liberalism and atheism, but also individualism is an important issue, since it closes the eyes to the way in which all human evil is interwoven, and to the possibility of carrying each others' burdens.

Most theologians probably agree on this, but they adopt different strategies to engage the problem. An unfortunate strategy consists in largely ignoring the concept of salvation, and taking refuge in liberal approaches that centre on human freedom and autonomy. Even the facts that our Western culture, at least, seems increasingly at odds with the optimistic scenario in which man eliminates evil of his own accord, and that a certain sensitivity is developing in which it is felt that evil and guilt are much bigger than man can handle, do not seem to breed much new interest in salvation through the cross of Christ. Van Nieuwenhove recently remarked that "the cross has become somewhat problematic in modern Catholic theology".²

So, huge hermeneutical difficulties have arisen. Very importantly, salvation concerns a mystery of faith, which creates its own hermeneutical problems as well. The fact that it is a mystery of faith is put forward as such in Scripture (Col 1.26): "...the mystery which has been hidden for ages and generations. But now it has been revealed to his saints." This entails at least two things. The first is that we have to depend on divine revelation in order to develop any understanding of salvation. And the second is that we will only ever be able to speak incompletely on the subject. Taken together, neither conform to the modern ideal of science, in which there is no place for accepting truth on (divine) authority, nor for the absence of ordinary evidence. Another hermeneutical difficulty concerns the history of the theology of salvation. Several large schemes have been put forward in order to account for the historical development of the theology of salvation. Aulén's study of Christ the

¹ "...will uns heute nicht mehr einleuchten", *Jesus von Nazareth* (Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 2007), p. 194 ("... no longer seems plausible to us today", English edition p. 159). Ratzinger mentions an insight of Cardinal Newman, who said that while God could create the world out of nothing with just one word, he could overcome men's guilt and suffering only by bringing himself into play, by becoming in His son a sufferer who carried this burden and overcame it through his self-surrender.

² 'Bearing the Marks of Christ's Passion, Aquinas' Soteriology', in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. by Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, 2005), pp. 277-302, p. 277.

saviour has been very influential, in which he suggests the development of the concepts of *victor*, *victima* and *exemplar*, the second term being medieval, and the third being the dominating modern interpretation of Christ the saviour.³ More recently, Greshake has mentioned the successive ideas of salvation as ‘paideia’ (education), inner grace, and freedom.⁴ The plausibility of these schemes may be surmised if one focuses, for an instant, on the idea of substitution, or even penal substitution.⁵ In the seventeenth century, a number of protestant theologians took offence at the concept of vicarious satisfaction, which they wrongly attributed to Anselm, the father of the idea of satisfaction. They considered this at odds with individual human responsibility, and also attributed to it the assumption that only a cruel God would have his Son killed for the sake of the well-being of humankind, even though he himself knew no sin and was innocent. Such a God needs blood, but such a God is a far cry from the father that Jesus describes in his parable of the prodigal son. The concept of substitution/representation or *Stellvertretung* has undergone an enormous development since then.⁶

And yet, if one comes to the writings of Thomas Aquinas, which are the central focus of this study, one will not encounter any talk of substitution. Modern struggles to leave this concept behind, and to think of *Stellvertretung* as *Pro-Existenz*, as being-for-others without being victimized or punished, come to a halt. Admittedly, Aquinas assumes that the satisfaction which Christ performs bears a penal character, as does all satisfaction. And admittedly, Christ does something for us human beings which is beyond our capacity. But this does not entail that our salvation bears an exclusively objective character; on the contrary, as we will see below. And surprisingly, Aquinas is well aware of the objection of the supposedly cruel God.⁷ He counters it several times by emphasizing the fact that Christ voluntarily underwent passion and death on our behalf. The Holy Trinity inspired him to do so, bestowing love of God and love of human beings upon him, but it did not violate his human freedom. This argument is valuable, but may under some circumstances lack credibility. The most important circumstance in this respect is a lack of understanding of the hypostatic union in Christ. The hypostatic union concerns the ontological constitution of the person of Christ. The essential guide here is the doctrine of two natures, formulated at the Council of Chalcedon (451). Christ is one person who exists in both divine and human nature, both of them being perfect and true. The relationship between these two natures can only be approached employing negative categories: undivided, inseparable, unmixed and unchanged. This formulation states that we have here, once

³ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: an historical study of the three main types of the idea of the Atonement* (London, 1945 [1931]).

⁴ Gisbert Greshake, ‘Der Wandel der Erlösungsvorstellungen in der Theologiegeschichte’, in *Erlösung und Emanzipation*, ed. by L. Scheffczyk (Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1973), pp. 63-101.

⁵ A representative is Gerald O’Collins, in his recent *Jesus Our Redeemer. A Christian Approach to Salvation* (Oxford, 2007). O’Collins accuses Aquinas of adjusting Anselm’s theory of satisfaction into a ‘sad version of redemption’ (p. 137). The history of the use of the word satisfaction among Christians shows that it has always had a penal character, cf. das *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*³, s.v. ‘Genugtuung’ (IV, 473-4). It belongs to the essence of Aquinas’ understanding of satisfaction, that Christ’s satisfaction enables man to offer satisfaction of his own, and does not substitute for him in any strong sense.

⁶ K.-H. Menke, s.v., *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*³. See also his monograph: *Stellvertretung. Schlüsselbegriff christlichen Lebens und theologische Grundkategorie* (Einsiedeln-Freiburg, 1991); Stephan Schaede, *Stellvertretung. Begriffsgeschichtliche Studien zur Soteriologie* (Tübingen 2004).

⁷ *STh* III, q. 47 a. 3 ad 1; *In III Sent* d. 20, a. 5, qc. 1, ad 1 (cf. d. 20, a. 1, qc. 2 ad 3); *ScG* IV 53 (17), 55 (18).

again, a mystery of faith, i.e. the mystery of the incarnation.⁸ Apart from guiding our interpretation of Christ, this doctrine also guides our interpretation of the relationship between God and the world, because the union of God and man in Christ bespeaks the contents of the union of God with the world as well as the union of God and man in faith, hope and charity. This doctrine is impressive.; However, all major concepts that purport to approach the relationship between God and the world, be it the concept of analogy, or the concepts of identity and difference, or the concept of participation, or the concept of *Stellvertretung*, are relevant to the interpretation of the mystery of the incarnation. But more than this, the reverse is true as well: the mystery of the incarnation teaches important things on the general relationship between God and the world and God and man. The concepts of transcendence and immanence are just another pair that belongs to this category of attempts to approach this relationship. God is said to transcend the world in not being part of it. But God is also said to be immanent, in being present to it in ways of which creation is barely aware . Divine immanence influences the understanding of divine transcendence up to the point where one can no longer uphold a sharp, as if black and white, contrast of God and the world. God differs from the world, but not in the way created things differ from each other, that is, differing while being of the same genus. It is said that Christianity has learned this teaching on divine transcendence from the Christological controversies leading up to the definition of Chalcedon.⁹ It is also said that such a divine transcendence is the necessary condition for God to be able to create and to save. However, only if God can be ‘part’ of Christ’s life in ways unknown to us, can he be thought of as upholding and realizing his salvific action.¹⁰

This latter insight will be the central idea of this study. How can we understand the relation between divine transcendence and salvation through the cross? What relationship does Aquinas see between the mystery of salvation and the mystery of incarnation? What does this entail for our understanding of both divine transcendence and human salvation? Firstly, we will compare the orders of treatment Aquinas adopts in the two larger texts on the meaning of the cross. The second section will be devoted to the study of some key concepts of Aquinas’ ‘soteriology’: merit, satisfaction,

⁸ See my book *Christ the ‘Name’ of God. Aquinas on Naming Christ* (Louvain, 1993), in which Aquinas’ employment of *mysterium* as well as his interpretation of the hypostatic union is studied.

⁹ Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason, Foundations of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame and London, 1982), p. 35ff: ‘The Council of Chalcedon, and the councils and controversies that led up to it, were concerned with the mystery of Christ, but they also tell us about the God who became incarnate in Christ. They tell us first that God does not destroy the natural necessities of things he becomes involved with, even in the intimate union of the incarnation. What is according to nature, and what reason can disclose in nature, retains its integrity before the Christian God. And second, they tell us that we must think of God as the one who can let natural necessity be maintained and let reason be left intact: that is, God is not himself a competing part of nature or a part of the world. (...) The reason the pagans could not conceive of anything like the incarnation is that their gods are part of the world, and the union of any two natures in the world is bound to be, in some way, unnatural, because of the otherness that lets one thing be itself only by not being the other. But the Christian God is not a part of the world and is not a ‘kind’ of being at all. Therefore the incarnation is not meaningless or impossible or destructive. (...) The Christian distinction between God and the world, the denial that God in his divinity is part of or dependent on the world, was brought forward with greater clarity through the discussion of the way the word became flesh.’ Kathryn Tanner has applied these basic insights of Sokolowski to the Christian teaching on creation: *God and Creation in Christian theology. Tyranny or empowerment?* (Oxford, 1988).

¹⁰ Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Change? The World’s Becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River, Mass., 1985). The opposite understanding is defended by Gianni Viattimo and Slavoj Žižek, who suppose that the incarnation amounts to the end of God’s transcendence. See Frederiek de Poortere, *Christ in postmodern philosophy* (London-New York, 2008).

sacrifice, redemption, as well as the fruits of Christ's passion. After this I will attempt to relate this teaching to Aquinas' understanding of the hypostatic union, and discuss a number of texts where it seems that the theory of the hypostatic union upholds and determines salvation. In conclusion I will address the concept of divine transcendence that soteriology yields.

It is imperative to end this first section by stating that I do not intend to give a full interpretation of Christian salvation according to Aquinas. I shall limit myself to the passion and death of Christ. Seen from a broadly christological point of view, however, salvation concerns more subjects than just these, crucial as they are. It concerns the birth of Christ, his names, the temptations, his teaching, the way he addresses people, and, from a certain angle, most of all, his resurrection. According to Aquinas, the death and resurrection of Christ are two sides of the same coin, of the same salvation brought by Christ, one being the negative, restoring side, and the other being the positive, life-giving, side:

“Sicut autem Christus sua morte mortem nostram destruxit, ita sua resurrectione vitam nostram reparavit. (...) Pulchre autem Apostolus peccatorum remissionem Christi attribuit morti, iustificationem vero nostram resurrectioni, ut designetur conformitas et similitudo effectus ad causam.”¹¹

It is also imperative to draw attention to one other feature of Aquinas' approach which is easily overlooked in our days, though not by all.¹² The fruits of Christ's passion are applied to those who live in communion with him through the sacraments. This basic insight of Aquinas is indispensable when reflecting on the salvific value of Christ's death. When satisfaction or sacrifice is mentioned, these words participate in an analogy that comprises satisfaction and sacrifice performed by those who are sacramentally conformed to Christ. The passion and death of Christ shape the lives of his followers. Consider how the Preface of Holy Eucharist II (the Feast of Corpus Christi) brings into remembrance that “Christ has given us this memorial of His passion to bring us its saving power until the end of time”. We are very interested in the ways in which, according to Aquinas, the fruits of Christ's passion come to us, for in our days the universality of this particular historical event has become a problem. But we should, from the outset, be aware of the fact that it is the idea of the mystical body of Christ, to whom all those who are baptized belong, which is Aquinas' starting point here.¹³

2. *Comparing structures of treatment*

Aquinas agrees that the redemption which the passion of Christ has brought about, is a mystery of faith. Our intellect can hardly grasp what it means, Aquinas says, when preaching on the Symbol of Faith:

“Hoc autem, scilicet quod Christus pro nobis est mortuus, ita est arduum quod vix potest intellectus noster capere; immo nullo modo cadit in intellectu nostro. Et hoc est quod dicit apostolus, Act. XIII, 41: *opus operor ego in*

¹¹ *Compendium Theologiae*, I 239.

¹² Romanus Cessario, ‘Aquinas on Christian Salvation’, in *Aquinas on doctrine, A critical introduction*, ed. by Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating and John P. Yocum (London and New York, 2004), pp. 117-137. See also his *The Godly Image: Christ and Salvation in Catholic Thought from Anselm to Aquinas* (Petersham MA, 1990).

¹³ “L'Église, on le dit à juste titre, naît sur la croix, parce qu'elle n'est du fond que la reprise par tous les hommes de tous les temps et de toutes les latitudes, de l'acte de charité du Christ posé sur la Croix.”, Bernard Catão, *Salut et Rédemption chez S. Thomas d'Aquin. L'acte sauveur du Christ* (Paris, 1965), p. xi.

diebus vestris, opus quod non credetis, si quis enarraverit vobis; et Habac. I, 5: opus factum est in diebus vestris quod nemo credet cum narrabitur. Tanta est enim gratia Dei et amor ad nos, quod plus ipse fecit nobis quam possumus intelligere” (In Symb Apost 4).

The fact that it is hard to understand, should primarily be attributed to the abundance of divine grace and charity. God does more for us than we can understand. This conviction guides the totality of Aquinas’ treatment of the passion and death of Christ. For him it is, indeed, a theological premise. We will see.

There are two more or less integral treatments of the salvific value of Christ’s passion in the writings of Aquinas.¹⁴ The comparison of the different ways in which the questions and subjects are ordered is fruitful for interpreting Aquinas’ thought. First there is Aquinas’ commentary on the sentences of Peter Lombard, the *Scriptum super sententiis*. Lombard’s distinctions 18, 19 and 20 of his third book concern – according to Aquinas in his *divisiones textus* – the merit of Christ in regard to the good for himself and for others, the merit of Christ in regard to the removal of evil in us, and thirdly, the reasons for, and causes of, Christ’s passion. Aquinas’ commentary consists of a considerable number of questions that only generally match the subjects that Lombard has brought forward. Aquinas deems it suitable to pay more specific attention to the question of whether there actually is an operation in Christ which is different from divine operation. This is the fundamental question, on the affirmative answer to which depends the possibility of Christ’s meriting as such. Here, Aquinas explicitly recalls the doctrine of two natures in order to safeguard human action in Christ.

From this the focus passes to several other questions concerning merit. Most of them return in the *Summa Theologiae* in the corresponding section of III qq. 46-49. This is the section in the *STh* that deals with what the incarnate Son of God has done and suffered in the human nature in which he subsists. The questions on the operations in Christ, however, are relocated and treated earlier, in III q. 19, in the large section on the consequences of the hypostatic union. Questions of a more ontological nature are separated from questions of a more historical nature.

Returning to the *Scriptum*, we find Aquinas changing his focus to two other topics. The first is a discussion of the fruits: the effects that the passion of Christ has merited for mankind. These fruits are liberation from sin, liberation from the power of the devil, and liberation from punishment. The second topic concerns a part of the merit that Christ has gained for himself, i.e. the exaltation of his name (Phil. 2,9). Closely following Lombard, Aquinas discusses the names of *Redemptor* and *Mediator*. The name *Redemptor* provides him once again with the opportunity to reflect on the way in which the salvation Christ brings is connected with both of the natures in which Christ exists. These five questions find their way to the treatment of the subject in the *STh*. The name *Mediator*, however, is once again not discussed in the ‘historical’ section but in the more ‘ontological’ one, of which it is the last question (III, q. 26). The other questions are discussed in III q. 48 a. 5 and q. 49. It is fascinating to see how consistent, in fact, Aquinas’ account of the fruits of the passion of Christ is (liberation from sin, the devil and punishment), even though he makes a neat division in the material, according to topics concerning the hypostatic union, and topics concerning the life and passion of Christ.

¹⁴ In *III Sent* dd. 18-20 and *STh* III, qq. 46-49. Cf. *ScG* IV c. 55, *Comp Theol* II 227-240, *De Rat Fid* 5-7.

Lombard avoids talking about the satisfaction brought about by Christ's passion. In the face of this, it is remarkable that most of Aquinas' commentary on d. 20 is, on the contrary, devoted to the very concept of satisfaction. Lombard keeps his sentences on satisfaction until he treats the sacrament of penance, in book IV d. 15. Here, he mentions both traditional definitions brought forward by Anselm (*satisfactio est honorem debitum Deo impendere*) and by Augustine (*satisfactio est peccatorum causas excidere et eorum suggestionibus aditum non indulgere*). At this stage in his commentary, Aquinas discusses satisfaction extensively, as well as the three kinds of work man should perform in order to make satisfaction: prayer (for one's soul), fasting (for one's body) and almsgiving (for others). But, in the section on Christ, however, Aquinas, in contrast to Lombard, also includes an elaborate discussion on several questions concerning satisfaction: was it fitting that human nature was restored by way of satisfaction; was it necessary that it was done this way; could a (pure) creature have made sufficient satisfaction; did satisfaction have to be made through the passion; was another mode possible or more fitting? Of these questions all but one return in *STh* III, qq. 46-49, and in greater detail as well, for Aquinas reflects on the fittingness of the cross, on the time of the passion, and its place, on the two thieves that were crucified with him, and on the nature of the sorrow that Christ had. But the one question that does not return is the question of whether a (pure) creature could have made sufficient satisfaction. This topic is treated right at the beginning of the *Tertia Pars*, in the famous question concerning the fittingness of the incarnation as such (III, q. 1 a. 2 co). Once again, Aquinas locates a question that needs reflection from the angle of the hypostatic union in the first section of the *Tertia Pars*.

Why did Aquinas, other than Lombard, think that it was fitting to discuss satisfaction on the part on Christ as well? A historical approach would probably point to the importance that Aquinas attaches to the insights of Anselm. Let us, however, not be detained by the many, and so diverse, opinions on the relationship between Anselm and Aquinas.¹⁵ Theologically I find it more interesting to return once more to Lombard's distinction 18 on the merit of Christ. This distinction contains a remarkable passage that I quote in full:

“Ad quid ergo voluit pati et mori, si ei virtutes ad merendum illa sufficiebant? Pro te, non pro se. Quomodo pro me? Ut ipsius passio et mors tibi esset forma et causa. Forma virtutis et humilitatis; causa gloriae et libertatis; forma Deo usque ad mortem obediendi et causa tuae liberationis ac beatitudinis. Meruit enim nobis per mortis ac passionis tolerantiam, quod per praecedentia non meruerat, scilicet aditum paradisi et redemptionem a peccato, a poena, a diabolo; et per mortem ejus haec nos adepti sumus, scilicet redemptionem et filiorum gloriae adoptionem. Ipse enim moriendo factus est hostia nostrae liberationis.”

Having argued that Christ did not need the merit that the passion provided in order to receive the rewards that he indeed received, among which the manifestation of his name (Phil 2), Lombard asks ‘what for?’, that is, for what did Christ want to suffer and die?. ‘For you, not for himself’, he says. ‘Why for me?’ ‘So that his passion and death would be form and cause for you.’ These two words, *forma* and *causa*, summarize the theological position of both Lombard and Aquinas. ‘Form’ indicates the moral meaning of the passion of Christ, inasmuch as Christ offers striking examples of human virtue. ‘Cause’ represents the objective efficaciousness of Christ's passion, yielding the fruits it does. On the moral, exemplary side, Lombard mentions

¹⁵ e.g. Rik van Nieuwenhove, ‘St Anselm and St Thomas Aquinas on “Satisfaction”: or how Catholic and Protestant understandings of the Cross differ’, *Angelicum* 80 (2003), pp. 159-176.

virtue, humility, obedience and the endurance of the passion. On the causal side, the keywords are glory, liberty, access to paradise, redemption from sin, from punishment and from the devil, redemption and adoption to become sons of glory. Christ is the victim for our liberation. In Lombard's understanding, these two cannot be separated, since for him the means by which salvation is effected centres around humility. The greatness of the humility of the Only-begotten Son of God is placed opposite the pride of Adam, and the death of the former conquers the death which has fallen upon the descendants of the latter. Form and cause fit together, as those who want to follow Christ should take his virtuous action as the prime example for their own lives.

Aquinas agrees fundamentally with this. There are a number of texts in which he elaborates his own versions of the togetherness of the form and cause of the passion. These texts ask about the fittingness of the passion and death of Christ. Such a text is contained, for example, in *De Rationibus Fidei* (7), which is the text in which Aquinas' most elaborate presentation of the poverty of Christ is given. His poverty: his humble birth, the simplicity and austerity of his life, his uneducated disciples, and the desolation and agony of his death, all serve as an example and exhortation for people to seek a virtuous life, as a means to 'prove' the truth of his and his disciples' message, and as a means to teach man not to trust in his own pride, but in God. All of this we could summarize as 'form', as example. 'Cause', then, is contained in the last part of Aquinas' answer to the question about the fittingness of the passion and death of Christ, in which he gives a succinct presentation of the need for a Godman to make satisfaction in order to do away with sins.

Similar but different is Aquinas' treatment in the *STh* (III, q. 46 a. 3), where he explains why it is more fitting that we were liberated through the passion of Christ, than just by the will of God. Unlike in *De Rationibus Fidei*, Aquinas is not trying to find his answer in weighing divine justice and divine mercy, and contemplating whether it would have been more merciful to forgive sins without the need for the passion of Christ.¹⁶ Here he mentions five points with respect to the meaningfulness for human salvation of being liberated by Christ's passion. That Christ died for us, shows us how much God loves man, and provokes man's charity. Through his passion Christ gives us an example of obedience, humility, perseverance, justice and other virtues necessary for human salvation. Christ merits for us not only liberation from sin, but also justifying grace and the glory of beatitude.¹⁷ The immense cost of this redemption shows a greater necessity for man to keep himself from sin. And lastly it means that a greater dignity is acquired for man, now that the devil is conquered through someone who exists in human nature.¹⁸ These five points are aptly distinguished according to form and cause: the example of divine love, the example of human virtue, and the example of the great cost of the passion belong to form,

¹⁶ Two questions earlier, Aquinas had already settled this important problem: *STh* III, q. 46 a. 1 ad 3. Satisfaction corresponds with divine justice, and mercy with the sending of the Son to fulfill this office. Sending his Son shows greater mercy than the forgiving of sins alone, Aquinas says.

¹⁷ This point probably becomes understandable against the background that justifying grace is given because of Christ's resurrection, and for that he had to undergo death.

¹⁸ The same argument, but more forcefully brought forward and centred around satisfaction, is contained in *In III Sent* d. 20 q. 1 a. 2 sol: "...congruum etiam fuit quod natura humana per satisfactionem repararetur. (...) Secundo ex parte hominis, qui satisfaciens, perfectius integratur: non enim tantae gloriae esset post peccatum, quanta erat in statu innocentiae, si non plenarie satisfacisset: quia magis est homini gloriosum ut peccatum commissum satisfaciendo plenarie expurget, quam si sine satisfactione dimitteretur; sicut etiam magis homini gloriosum est quod vitam aeternam ex meritis habeat, quam si sine meritis ad eam perveniret: quia quod quis meretur, quodammodo ex se habet, in quantum illud meruit. Similiter satisfactio facit ut satisfaciens sit quodammodo causa suae purgationis. (...)" Cf. also ad 2, ibidem.

whereas the other two belong to cause, including the most important one concerning the liberation from sin.¹⁹

Now we are in a good position to understand why a text such as the one just discussed, does not occur in the *Scriptum*. Let me recall the fact that it was Aquinas' initiative to add a large discussion on satisfaction to Lombard's reasoned collection of authorities on the passion of Christ. In doing so, Aquinas connects the human action of the believer, through the sacrament of penance, with the passion of Christ itself. Via the sacrament, instituted by Christ, and the means through which this passion is applied to the faithful, a foundation for connection is laid in Christ's passion itself. For this reason Aquinas presents an argument concerning the coherence of Christ's satisfaction and the satisfaction of the faithful, with respect to which he states that their relationship is one of order and one of exemplarity:

“Christi satisfactio fuit non pro uno homine tantum, sed pro tota humana natura; unde duas conditiones concernere debuit: ut esset universalis respectu omnium satisfactionum quodammodo, et ut esset exemplaris omnium satisfactionum particularium. Universalis autem erat non per praedicationem de multis, quasi per multas particulares satisfactiones multiplicata, sed habens virtutem respectu omnium; unde non oportebat quod ipse omnes poenas quae ex peccato quocumque modo consequi possent, assumeret in seipso; sed illam ad quam omnes ordinantur, et quae continet in se virtute omnes poenas, quamvis non actu. Finis autem omnium terribilium est mors, ut dicit philosophus, 3 Ethic.; et ideo per passionem mortis debuit satisfacere. In quantum vero fuit exemplaris respectu nostrarum satisfactionum, debuit habere magnitudinem excedentem omnes alias satisfactiones, quia exemplar debet esse praestantius exemplato; et ideo secundum maximam poenarum debuit satisfacere, scilicet mortem. (*In III Sent d. 20 q. 3. sol; cf. STh III, q. 1 a. 2 ad 2*)

This argument shows that it would be wrong to assume that satisfaction is always on the side of ‘cause’ only. It reminds us of the way in which the compensation for our failures and sins which we give to God in the senses of prayer, fasting and diaconal action, is grounded in the passion of Christ himself.²⁰

3. *The remarkable distinction between modes and fruits of salvation*

We have seen thus far, how Aquinas tried to improve upon Peter Lombard, by including the subject of satisfaction in his treatment of the salvific value of Christ's passion, while nevertheless being faithful to Lombard's groundplan of form and cause. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas makes radical adjustments in his order of treatment, for he is no longer dependent on Lombard's books. Some topics, namely the ones concerning the constitution of Christ's person and its consequences, are

¹⁹ A similar text can be found in *In Symb Apost 4* and in *Comp Theol I 227*.

²⁰ At this point we should mention that there are, apart from the questions concerning the fittingness of the incarnation as such, at least two other subjects that are of great importance to them. The first is Christ being the head of the mystical body of the church. This is treated in *In III Sent d. 13 q. 2* and *STh. III, q. 8*. The name ‘Head of the Church’ derives from Eph 1, 22 and is of particular importance since it will help us in assessing the communication between the fruits of Christ's passion and the faithful. Communion is an essential part of salvation as well. The second is Christ being priest for eternity. This is not discussed in the *Scriptum*, and apart from Aquinas' commentary on Hebrews, from which the idea springs, is only treated in *STh III, q. 22*. A priest mediates between God and the faithful, offering God's gifts to the faithful, and the prayers and sacrifices of the faithful in satisfaction and reconciliation to God.

contained in a large initial section on the hypostatic union, whereas the rest of the treatment of salvation through the cross is contained in an even larger treatment on the 'history' of Christ. Thus Aquinas inserts an extensive historical section between the mystery of the incarnation and the mystery and history of salvation. Another important change with regard to his previous treatment is contained in the distinction that underpins the treatment of the effects of Christ's passion: the manner of effecting, (q. 48) and that which is effected (q. 49).

Aquinas' formulation is quite precise: does Christ's passion cause our salvation after the manner of merit, after the manner of satisfaction, after the manner of sacrifice, after the manner of redemption, after the manner of effecting? The answer to all these questions is affirmative. Each of these modes of salvation is mentioned by a biblical authority, which serves as the argument *sed contra*. Each article may be interpreted as an explanation of the quoted authority. For example, what is meant by the implication in Philippians (2, 6-11) that through emptying himself, taking the form of a servant, humbling himself, and being obedient to the death of the cross, Christ deserved to be exalted by God? It means that Christ was given personal grace, but because of his being the head of the Church this grace extends itself to his members as well. Christ deserved this salvation, because whoever suffers persecution because of righteousness' sake, will be blessed (Mt 5, 10). Obviously, in the case of satisfaction things are somewhat different, since no biblical equivalent can be found for that concept. Nevertheless the *responsum* ends with a relevant quotation from 1 John 2, 2: "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Concerning sacrifice, the chosen authority is Eph 5,2: "[And walk in love, as Christ loved us] and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God". The first letter of Peter (1, 18-19) mentions the word 'redemption' in the context of Christ's passion: "knowing that you were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from the useless way of life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a faultless and pure lamb, the blood of Christ", and so does Galatians 3, 13: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"." And finally the first letter to the Corinthians (1, 18) attests to the truth of the conviction that it is God's power which is at work through the cross: "For the word of the cross is [foolishness to those who are dying, but] to us who are saved (it) is the power of God."

What is Aquinas' intention in making this distinction between modes and fruits of salvation through the cross? He avoids saying that merit or satisfaction is a fruit of the cross. The same goes for sacrifice or redemption. I suggest that Aquinas may have two reasons for doing this. The first reason concerns his argumentation. When we come to the fruits of salvation, Aquinas will once again take his point of departure from Scriptural authorities. This time, however, he will attempt to elucidate the reality of each fruit mentioned in Scripture by taking recourse to a combination of the modes of salvation mentioned in q. 48. The argument for each of the fruits of salvation consists of a combination of modes through which salvation is effected. The combination of modes together forms the argument concerning why the passion of Christ should be interpreted as resulting in the forgiveness of sins, in liberation from the devil, in liberation from the punishment for sin, in reconciliation, and in the opening of the door of heaven.

In a moment I will give an example, but let me first mention the second reason I suggest for the distinction, as such, between modes and fruits. This reason is more theological in scope. Aquinas translates his awareness that being united with God:

being friends with God, bound by charity, is the ultimate goal of all salvific action. Being able to identify modes of salvation that lead to the fruits of forgiveness of sins, conquering the devil, liberation from the punishment of death, reconciliation with God, and opening the door of heaven is, at the same time, a way of strengthening the conviction that these five are, indeed, the most important fruits of salvation, and of stating that the modes of merit, satisfaction, sacrifice, redemption and instrumental causation are only of penultimate interest. This is what happens with the concept of satisfaction in the *STh*: it does not lose anything of its truth, for satisfaction is constantly mentioned when interpreting the fittingness of the incarnation, but it is put in perspective. The goal of the passion of Christ is not to make satisfaction, but to liberate from the consequences of sin.

Let me give a full example of how the relationship between the fruits and modes of salvation works, for there is yet a little more at stake. The first fruit of the passion of Christ is the liberation from, the forgiving of, sins. The biblical authority quoted is *Apk* 1, 5: “[Jesus Christ the faithful witness] loves us, and washed us from our sins by his blood”. Aquinas assigns three modes of salvation to this fruit: that of provoking charity, that of redemption and that of instrumental effecting. In reverse order, the power to forgive sins belongs to God and God alone, but the body of Christ in which he suffered, is united with divinity through the hypostatic union, and may therefore be seen as an instrument in God’s hands. The second says that forgiveness of sins is a fruit caused through the mode of redemption, but in fact the argument is based on the idea of the Church as the mystical body of Christ: because Christ is the head of this body, the ransom that Christ has earned through the passion which he endured out of love and obedience, can be understood to flow, as it were, into the members of the body. The idea of the mystical body with Christ as its head, was also mentioned in q. 48a.1 and 2, and goes back to III q. 8 where Aquinas discusses the *gratia capitis* of Christ. The membership of the faithful of the body of Christ is nothing else than the relationship which exists in charity and faith; through charity and faith the faithful are one with Christ, and share in the fruits of salvation.²¹ But how does this charity come about? Here we have the first of the modes of salvation mentioned: the passion of Christ is the proper cause of the remission of sins through the mode of evoking charity. Paul says: “God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (*Ro* 5, 8). Love, however, means forgiveness of sins: “her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much” (*Lk* 7, 47). God’s love arouses our love, and so our sins will be forgiven.

Interestingly enough, it seems that the three modes are not on equal footing, which is made clear in the answers 3, 4 and 5. For the mode of evoking charity and the mode of redemption/mystical body answer the question of how the passion of Christ in reality effects the forgiveness of sins, in a subjective sense, in each and everyone of the faithful, whereas the mode of instrumental effecting explains how Christ’s passion can objectively lead to forgiveness of sins. The first two belong to efficient causality, the third to sufficient causality.²² To put it differently: the passion of Christ needs to be applied (through the particularity of the sacraments, and of faith and charity), and can also be seen as the universal cause of healing for all time.

One question remains: why didn’t Aquinas mention the modes of evoking charity in q. 48? He mentioned merit, satisfaction, sacrifice, redemption and instrumental

²¹ Explicitly so in *In III Sent* d. 13 q. 2 a. 1 ad 5. Cf. d. 13 q. 2 a. 2 qc. 2 sol.

²² Cf. *STh* III, q. 49, a. 1 ad 4; a. 3 co. and ad 1. The distinction between sufficient (or universal) and efficient causality regarding the passion of Christ is already put forward by Peter Lombard (*III Sententiarum* d. 20 nr. 5).

effecting; why not evoking charity? Here we stumble over the hidden key of Aquinas' treatment of the salvific meaning of the passion of Christ. Whether it is merit, or satisfaction, or sacrifice, or redemption, the root of each of these concepts lies in the concept of charity. Let me explain.

4 *Charity as the root of salvation*

Of the five concepts Aquinas suggests as modes of salvation, merit is most fundamental. Merit is the conceptual underpinning of satisfaction, sacrifice and redemption. The order of treatment by both Peter Lombard and Aquinas makes this perfectly clear. Distinction 18 is totally devoted to merit, and Aquinas only inserts the discussion on satisfaction when he comments on distinction 20. Of the four concepts it is also the first which is treated in *STh* III, q. 48. When discussing merit, it needs to be settled which conditions must apply in order to be able to merit. Satisfaction and redemption, and to a certain extent sacrifice as well, can be seen as kinds of merit, or at least as impossible without merit.²³ This entails that whatever is said of merit, can also be said of the others. Well now, in the works of Aquinas, he says nearly a hundred times: *radix merendi est caritas*, or *principium merendi est caritas*. An alternative is: *radix/principium merendi est gratia*. Grace is the cause of charity, and charity is the principle or root of merit. This axiom means that charity cannot be earned, cannot be brought about by man, but it is presupposed to the ability to merit. When he is discussing grace, Aquinas explains twice why this is the case.²⁴ Charity moves the human mind to the enjoyment of God, and directs all other virtues to this end. The merit of this enjoyment of God in eternal life, therefore, belongs primarily to charity. And whatever we do out of love, we do voluntarily. This means that both conditions of merit are fulfilled: it is a good which is divinely ordained to the act of man as its proper end, and this act is voluntary. Whether it is an act of fortitude, endurance, or faith, if charity does not direct it, the human act is not meritorious. One will indeed recognize the fundamental influence of 1 Cor 13 (3.13): "If I dole out all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but don't have love, it profits me nothing. (...) But now faith, hope, and love remain - these three. The greatest of these is love." Aquinas reads this as stating that the ability to merit eternal life fundamentally derives from divine generosity. It is not imposed on man, for the exercise of his free will is a condition as well. Aquinas is well aware of the importance of this thesis. In the disputed questions on Truth, in a question on the merit of Christ, he mentions that Augustine proved to the Pelagians that grace cannot fall under merit, since if grace is absent, all merit is evil.²⁵

The consequences of this can, for instance, be seen, when Aquinas argues that the incarnation of Christ should not be thought to be properly earned in some sense; neither by himself, (which would betray a wrong understanding of the hypostatic union) nor by the Old Testament patriarchs, nor by Mary, nor by anyone else. In refuting this last option, Aquinas compares the union which consists of enjoying God

²³ "Christus pro nobis satisfacit: I Io. II, 2. Ipse est propitiatio pro peccatis nostris. Sed satisfactio sine merito esse non potest. Ergo Christus nobis meruit.", *De Ver* q. 29 a. 6 s.c. Elsewhere merit seems to be on equal footing with satisfaction, inasmuch as merit seems to be aimed at good works, and satisfaction on compensating the wrong done; cf. e.g. *Supplementum STh* q. 13 a. 2 co.

²⁴ *In III Sent d.* 30 q. 1 a. 5 and *STh* I-II, q. 114 a. 4: *utrum gratia sit principium meriti principalius per caritatem quam per alias virtutes.*

²⁵ *De Ver* q. 29 a. 6: "... quia contrariatur probationi Augustini, per quam contra Pelagianos probat, gratiam sub merito cadere non posse, quia ante gratiam nulla sunt merita nisi mala; cum ante gratiam homo sit impius, et meritis impii non gratia, sed poena debetur."

in eternal life, with the personal union in Christ. This personal union transcends the union of the blessed with God, since the first is unique in being of the level of *esse*, whereas the second is through a human act (of fruition). To be God transcends the enjoyment of God. And since man is ordered, not to being God, but to the act of fruition, no human act can merit this goal. The first condition mentioned above in *STh* I-II, q. 114 – being divinely ordained as proper goal - is not fulfilled. A second reason why the incarnation cannot be merited, is that grace is never the result of merit, but is its principle, and since the incarnation is the principle of grace (cf. Jn 1, 17: “Grace and truth are made through Jesus Christ”), it is all the more impossible that the incarnation be the result of merit.

Aquinas’ reflection on the modes and fruits of salvation contains several references to the above mentioned axiom that charity/grace is the root of merit.²⁶ Interestingly enough it is also brought forward in the context of an objection which states that through the passion of Christ we do not seem to be reconciled to God, for how can this grace be the meritorious effect of Christ’s passion of which the principle lies in God’s love: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son...” (Jn 3, 16)? Principle and effect can never be the same, and since love is the principle, it cannot be the effect. Aquinas deftly counters the argument in stating that God’s love can never be the result of any meritorious action, since God’s love does not change. God never stopped loving man; there is no new beginning of God’s love. Reconciliation means that the cause for hatred has been removed, since his sins are forgiven and an acceptable recompense has been made.²⁷

Divine love is the principle of the incarnation, and it is the principle of the passion as well. God has given Christ the charity with which he was able to love the Father and give heed to his call. The Father delivered the Son, and one of the ways in which this should be understood is that the Father inspired in him the will to suffer, by filling him with charity. But as the suffering servant, it was Christ’s own will.²⁸ Christ obeyed the Father, both in the sense that he obeyed a command that he received from the Father, and in the sense that he fulfilled all the precepts of the Old Law, including the moral precepts that command charity, inasmuch as his passion was out of love for his Father and out of love for his neighbour.²⁹ The latter is the foundation of the merit of the passion, as Aquinas, approaching the issue from another angle, explains in the *Summa contra Gentiles* (IV c. 55), quoting Jn 15, 13 on the greatest love of all which consists in laying down one’s life for one’s friends; charity gives birth to obedience:

Non est autem procul a vero quod Filius Dei incarnatus obediens praecepto patris mortem sustinuit, secundum doctrinam apostoli [Phil 2]. Praeceptum enim Dei est ad homines de operibus virtutum: et quanto aliquis perfectius actum virtutis exequitur, tanto magis Deo obedit. Inter alias autem virtutes

²⁶ *STh* III, q. 48 a. 1 obj. 3; q. 49 a.4 obj. 2; q. 49 a. 6 obj. 2 and ad 1.

²⁷ *STh* III, q. 49 a. 4 obj. 2 and ad 2. The same argument is given a slightly different answer in *In III Sent* d. 19 q. 5 a. 1 ad 2. See G.P. Kreling o.p., ‘De objectieve verlossing’, in *Het Goddelijk Geheim*, ed. by F.J.A. de Grijs a.o. (Kampen, 1979), pp. 294-305, p. 301; J. Wissink, ‘De sacramenten geven de kruisgenade die zij betekenen, Over het verband tussen het heilswerk van Christus en de sacramenten’, in *De lengte en de breedte, de hoogte en de diepte: peilingen in de theologie van de sacramenten*, ed. A.H.C. van Eijk and H.W.M. Rikhof, (Zoetermeer, 1996), pp. 234-261. The opposite, i.e. God needs to be reconciled, is defended by A. Janssens, *Het mysterie der verlossing* (Antwerp, 1931), I p. 42.

²⁸ *STh* III, q. 47 a. 2 co, Is 53, 7.

²⁹ *STh* III, q. 47 a. 2 ad 1. The third answer underlines that charity and obedience are equal reasons for Christ’s suffering. He fulfilled the precepts of charity out of obedience, and was obedient because of his love for the Father who had given him the command. Obedience goes before sacrifice, Aquinas states in the corpus, just like love.

praecipua caritas est, ad quam omnes aliae referuntur. Christus igitur, dum actum caritatis perfectissime implevit, Deo maxime obediens fuit. Nullus enim est actus caritatis perfectior quam quod homo pro amore alicuius etiam mortem sustineat: secundum quod ipsemet dominus dicit: *maiolem caritatem nemo habet quam quod animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis*. Sic igitur invenitur Christus, mortem sustinens pro salute hominum et ad gloriam Dei Patris, Deo maxime obediens fuisse, actum caritatis perfectum exequendo.

If charity is indeed the root of merit, and if merit is, as it were, the root of satisfaction, we should be able to present some texts of Aquinas in which he actually associates – perhaps *mirabile dictu* in the eyes of some – satisfaction with charity. And yes, there are. In fact, the text that we just quoted from the *Summa contra Gentiles* is very similar to the one I am about to quote: the central text in the *Summa Theologiae* on satisfaction as one of the modes of salvation through the cross. But because of the fact that this text speaks about satisfaction as a kind of merit and as one of the modes ordered towards salvation, it becomes very clear that at the end, so to speak, lies the principle of charity, the charity that enables merit to be:

“Respondeo dicendum quod ille proprie satisfacit pro offensa qui exhibet offenso id quod aequae vel magis diligit quam oderit offensam. Christus autem, ex caritate et obedientia patiendo, maius aliquid Deo exhibuit quam exigeret recompensatio totius offensae humani generis. Primo quidem, propter magnitudinem caritatis ex qua patiebatur. Secundo, propter dignitatem vitae suae, quam pro satisfactione ponebat, quae erat vita Dei et hominis. Tertio, propter generalitatem passionis et magnitudinem doloris assumpti, ut supra dictum est. Et ideo passio Christi non solum sufficiens, sed etiam superabundans satisfactio fuit pro peccatis humani generis, secundum illud I Ioan. II, *ipse est propitiatio pro peccatis nostris, non pro nostris autem tantum, sed etiam pro totius mundi.*” (*STh* III, q. 48 a. 2)

The principle source for the kind of merit which is satisfaction that Aquinas here adduces, is charity. The term ‘magnitude’ tacitly refers once again to Jn 15.13 – greater love does not exist. But it is not only the meritorious character of the passion which rests on the love of Christ, this is also true of the vicariousness of the satisfaction. Only if two persons are united in love, Aquinas says in the *ad* 1, can one offer satisfaction for the other. And Christ is in fact united in love with the faithful, because together they are, as it were, a mystical person, head and members:

“...caput et membra sunt quasi una persona mystica. Et ideo satisfactio Christi ad omnes fideles pertinet sicut ad sua membra. In quantum etiam duo homines sunt unum in caritate, unus pro alio satisfacere potest, ut infra patebit.”

The communion of Christ with his faithful is a communion of charity which makes it possible for satisfaction to be made by the one for the others. Merit presupposes the grace of the communion (cf. III 48.1 c, the previous article), and satisfaction as a kind of merit presupposes the same communion, bound together in charity and faith.

The same is said somewhat differently in the *Summa contra Gentiles* (IV c. 55):

“Sciendum autem est quod mors Christi virtutem satisfaciendi habuit ex caritate ipsius, qua voluntarie mortem sustinuit...”

The power of satisfaction comes from charity. This applies to Christ, but to all the faithful as well:

“Poena quidem satisfactoria est quodammodo voluntaria. Et quia contingit eos qui differunt in reatu poenae, esse unum secundum voluntatem unione amoris, inde est quod interdum aliquis qui non peccavit, poenam voluntarius pro alio

portat, sicut etiam in rebus humanis videmus quod aliquis in se transfert alterius debitum.”³⁰

The possibility of freely bearing punishment for someone else depends on the bond between the one and the other. They need to be in a bond of charity. They have to be one, *quodammodo* (I-II, q. 87 a. 8 co). And the one who is actually offering satisfaction, needs not only to be one with he for whom he is offering satisfaction, but also needs to be one in love with God, since it is in this that the capacity to make satisfaction originates.³¹

However, whether satisfaction is offered for someone else, or for oneself, no work can make satisfaction without charity³²:

“... in satisfactione oportet quod, amicitia restituta, justitiae aequalitas restituatur, cujus contrarium amicitiam solvit, ut philosophus in 8 Ethic. dicit. Aequalitas autem in satisfactione ad Deum non est secundum aequivalentiam, sed magis secundum acceptationem ipsius, ut est dictum; et ideo oportet quod et si jam offensa sit dimissa per praecedentem contritionem, opera satisfactoria sint Deo accepta, quod dat eis caritas; et ideo sine caritate opera facta non sunt satisfactoria.”

Needless to say, that which applies to satisfaction, applies to sacrifice and redemption as well.³³ All of them originate in love, and can only function as a mode of salvation through the passion of the cross because of the love between Christ and the faithful.

5. *The hypostatic union as the underpinning of salvation through the cross*

Up till now we have not paid much attention to the fifth and last mode of salvation which Aquinas presents in III q. 48 (a. 6): Christ’s passion brings about our salvation as an efficient cause, through the mode of effecting. This mode is crucial, since without it there would be no salvation. Salvation is the proper effect of God’s power, whereas Christ’s passion, as such, belongs to his human nature. Don’t we need physical contact with the cause of our salvation, just as the leper was healed upon being touched by Jesus? Moreover, can the passion be both meritorious and efficient, since usually the one who merits does not possess the ability to bring about the desired effect by himself? Aquinas takes his point of departure from the famous saying in the first letter to the Corinthians (1, 18): “For the word of the cross is [foolishness to those who are dying, but] to us who are saved (it) is the power of God.” The cross *is* the power of God. It is through the cross that God speaks his word of salvation.

³⁰ *STh* I-II, q. 87 a. 7; cf. *In IV Sent* d. 20 q. 2 a. 3 co: “Sed quantum ad solutionem debiti, unus potest pro alio satisfacere: dummodo sit in caritate, ut opera eius satisfactoria esse possint.”

³¹ Love, according to Aquinas, even influences the severity of the punishment due, since there is greater love involved in offering satisfaction for someone else, than for one’s own sins. *In IV Sent* d. 20 q. 2 a. 3 co (= *Supplementum STh* q. 13 a. 2 co, cf. q. 14).

³² *In IV Sent* d. 15 q. 3 a. 2 co. Cf. *STh* III, q. 14 a. 1 ad 1: “Non enim esset satisfactio efficax nisi ex caritate procederet ...”

³³ In the text that we read closely here, *STh* III, q. 48, there is ample evidence. In article 3 on sacrifice, Aquinas states that Christ’s passion was very acceptable to God because it was offered out of love (c). The death of Christ is a great evil, which as such is not salvific, but it nevertheless is salvific because of the love of the one who suffered it (ad 3). Redemption, the subject of article 4, is defined closely with satisfaction, which may also be called some sort of ransom, Aquinas says. So what goes for satisfaction, goes for redemption as well.

But how can this be? The key here is the idea that the humanity of Christ is united to God as an instrument of His divinity. The passion of Christ, belonging to his humanity, receives its efficient power because of its being an instrument in the hands of God. From God the flesh receives a power which is infinite, the flesh itself being weak, as it shows itself to be in the passion. In being united to his divinity, Christ's flesh, which suffers so much, is able to build up a spiritual contact with all those to whom the word of salvation is spoken. Through faith, and the sacraments of faith, man is able to be united to the flesh of Christ. For as Paul says, "God has set him forth as an atoning sacrifice or a propitiation through faith in his blood" (Ro 3, 25).

This analysis accounts for the passion of Christ being both human and salvific for all. The salvific effect comes from its union with God. On the one hand satisfaction is given through the magnitude of charity through and for which Christ suffered, while on the other hand it was the dignity of his life, being a life of God and man, which determined the infinity of its value and the (more than) sufficiency of the satisfaction (q. 48 a. 2 co). The flesh in which Christ endured his passion is an instrument of divinity, and therefore his sufferings and actions have a divine power to drive out sin (q. 49 a. 1 co, cf. ad 1 and 2).

Obviously enough, all of this supposes a sound doctrine of the hypostatic union. In fact, to call the humanity of Christ, or his body, an instrument of his divinity, is another attempt to approach the mystery of the hypostatic union. The concept 'instrument', borrowed from John of Damascus, signifies the relation between humanity and divinity in Christ, and is an alternative for the comparison of the same union with that of the union of body and soul.³⁴ In one respect it is a rather dangerous comparison, for, as Aquinas mentions, Nestorius took as his position the opinion that the Son of God did not assume human nature to his person, but only as an instrument, which would not result in a personal, but only in an accidental, union. So we should not think about the instrumental relationship between the Son of God and his human nature as a relationship similar to that between a man and an implement he uses for work, such as a saw, but, indeed, more in terms of the relationship between soul and body. Yet, in another respect, the structure of instrumental relationship shows that there are two actions involved when a man saws wood to make a bed; the saw cuts the wood and the man makes the bed. But humanity – unlike a saw or a sword – is an animated, living instrument, and living instruments are moved through their will, as the example in the *Scriptum*, shows, in what happens in slavery.³⁵

It is quite obvious that to portray Christ's humanity as an instrument in the hands of his divinity, risks serious misunderstanding, to say the least. An instrument does not enjoy the free will which is needed to make satisfaction, and to compare the relationship of Christ's humanity with his divinity either to that of a corpse to the soul, or to that of a slave to a master, only seems to make things worse. We should emphasize in the first place, however, that here we are not dealing with a literal portrayal of Christ. Aquinas does not portray *Christus homo* as an instrument; he does not describe him as such. Aquinas attempts to understand the conditions of the possibility of human salvation through the passion of Christ. He is engaged in explaining the metaphysics of salvation, so to speak. Moreover, Aquinas himself is aware of the misunderstanding that this traditional concept of instrumentality, which he embraces in the *Summa Theologiae* as in no other work, may cause. In the *Scriptum* he was still wrestling with a proper understanding of the hypostatic union, to

³⁴ This we learn from the *Scriptum*: III d. 18 a. 1 obj. 4; IV d. 48 q. 2 a. 5 exp.text; *STh* III, q. 2 a. 6 obj. 4 and ad 4; *De Ver* q. 27 a. 4 ad 7.

³⁵ Aquinas mentions the similarity with slaves himself, e.g. *De Ver* q. 29 a. 5 ad 2.

which his famous discussion of the three theories of the hypostatic union attests (*In III Sent* d. 6). But the solution he found, in his endorsement of the so-called subsistence theory, gave him the confidence to dismiss these possible misunderstandings. In the *Summa Theologiae* he knows that his intellectual grip on the theology of the hypostatic union is firm, and that there is a good opportunity to approach the balance which is needed. Essential here is Aquinas' recognition that to conceptualize Christ's human nature as an instrument, does not necessarily entail that his human nature does not belong to the unity of the hypostasis or supposit. Or to put it otherwise: to be an instrument does not prevent Christ from substantially existing in his human nature. The key here is 'substantially'. If there were only an accidental relation between Christ and his human nature, it would be impossible to state of Christ, 'Deus est homo' as well as 'Homo est Deus' (*STh* III, q. 2 a. 6 ad 4).

This understanding of Christ's hypostatic union enables Aquinas to approach the way in which Christ's passion may be said to cause human salvation. Saving humankind principally belongs to God. Restoring humanity belongs to divine spiritual power. God causes salvation to be. All of this is true, just as it is true that all that Christ does and suffers, being instrumentally one with his divinity, operates for the salvation of humankind. When Paul says that Christ our Lord was "delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification" (Rom 4, 25), Aquinas mentions the same idea of efficient causality, based on Christ's humanity as in instrument of divinity:

"Et ideo dicendum est quod mors Christi fuit nobis salutaris, non solum per modum meriti sed etiam per modum cuiusdam efficientiae. Cum enim humanitas Christi esset quodammodo instrumentum divinitatis eius, ut Damascenus dicit, omnes passiones et actiones humanitatis Christi fuerunt nobis salutiferae, utpote ex virtute divinitatis provenientes. Sed quia effectus habet aliquantulum similitudinem causae, mortem Christi, qua extincta est in eo mortalis vita, dicit esse causam extinctionis peccatorum nostrorum: resurrectionem autem eius qua redit ad novam vitam gloriae, dicit esse causam iustificationis nostrae, per quam redimus ad novitatem iustitiae." (*In Rom* c. 4 l. 3)

This is as close as Aquinas can get to explaining why salvific activity is ascribed to the passion and death of Christ, to Christ as a human being. Some have alluded to this as 'physical realism', in view of the Pauline metaphor of head and body, probably having in mind the controversy between catholicism and protestantism on Church and Eucharist.³⁶ I doubt whether this does justice to Aquinas' approach, who seems to focus on showing that Christ's passion indeed 'works' our salvation, in the end, because his passion and death are borne by his divinity. Christ's divinity is the source of the power of his salvific work. Aquinas' understanding of the hypostatic union enables him to articulate this. According to this understanding it is true, as I mentioned above, to say 'Homo est Deus' and 'Deus est Homo', when speaking about Christ. And one of the things this means, is that it is equally true to say of Christ 'Homo salvat hominem' and 'Deus salvat hominem'.

This understanding forms the background to Aquinas' prior answer to the question of whether it was necessary for the restoration of humankind that the Word of God became man. This is one of the first questions raised, concerning the fittingness of the incarnation, which is the opening of the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas mentions ten reasons, five connected to man's furtherance in good, and five

³⁶ Liam Walsh o.p. in the Blackfriars Edition and Translation of the *STh* (London and New York, 1974), volume 49, p. 57, note f.

to the delivering of man from evil. The last reason Aquinas formulates, is to rescue man from slavery to the devil. Christ accomplished this by making satisfaction:

“...homo autem purus satisfacere non poterat pro toto humano genere; Deus autem satisfacere non debebat. Unde oportebat Deus et hominem esse Jesum Christum.” (*STh* III, q. 1 a. 2 co)

Aquinas quotes Pope Leo the Great, whose writings played such an important role in the preparation of the christological definition of the Council of Chalcedon:

“Unde et Leo Papa dicit, in sermone de Nativ., *suscipitur a virtute infirmitas, a maiestate humilitas, ut, quod nostris remediis congruebat, unus atque idem Dei et hominum mediator et mori ex uno, et resurgere posset ex altero. Nisi enim esset verus Deus, non afferret remedium, nisi esset homo verus, non praeberet exemplum. Sunt autem et aliae plurimae utilitates quae consecutae sunt, supra comprehensionem sensus humani.*” (ibidem, cf. ad 2)

Unless he were truly God, he could not provide a cure, and unless he were man, he could not offer an example. Christ the mediator accomplishes this, and this is one of the major reasons for the fittingness of the incarnation. Satisfaction demands a proper understanding of the hypostatic union.³⁷

At this point we are reminded of our findings when comparing the treatments in *Scriptum* and *Summa Theologiae* in the first section of this contribution. We found that at least three essential topics that Aquinas discussed in the *Scriptum* when dealing with merit and satisfaction, were relocated in the *Summa* to an earlier stage, in which he deals with the hypostatic union and its consequences. We just paid attention to one of these topics, i.e. the discussion on whether man is able to offer satisfaction simply in himself, or not. The quotation from Leo reminds us of one of the other topics, i.e. the discussion of the name ‘mediator’ for Christ (which fits him best according to his human nature). The third topic, on whether there is a distinct human operation in Christ, is also based on a proper understanding of the doctrine of Chalcedon.³⁸

In concluding this section, we can say that Aquinas’ understanding of the hypostatic union progressively influences his account of the salvific meaning of Christ’s passion and death. The way in which he orders his material, the use of the concept of efficient causality as well as his approach to Christ’s human nature as an instrument of his divinity, the analysis of a distinct human operation in Christ (which we were not able to discuss at length) and of Christ being named mediator (*idem*), all point in this direction. The mystery of salvation is explained on the basis of his understanding of the mystery of the incarnation, the latter serving the former.

Conclusion: Divine transcendence and the mystery of salvation

Bernard Sesbouë once made an important distinction between two types of soteriology: ascending and descending soteriology.³⁹ As may be surmised, the first type emphasizes salvation as a human accomplishment, or an accomplishment of

³⁷ Cf. E. Perrier, ‘L’Enjeu Christologique de la Satisfaction’, *Revue Thomiste* 103 (2003), (I): pp. 105-136 ; (II): pp. 203-247.

³⁸ *In III Sent* d. 18 q. 1 and *STh* III, q. 19 a.1. Cf. the quotation in the text of the *STh* of the acts of the third council of Constantinople (680-681), where the four negative adverbs of the council of Chalcedon, indicating the ineffable relationship between Christ’s divinity and humanity, are employed: “Et ideo rationabiliter in sexta synodo haec opinio est condemnata, in cuius determinatione dicitur, *duas naturales operationes indivise, inconvertibiliter, inconfuse, inseparabiliter, in eodem domino Iesu Christo, vero Deo nostro, glorificamus*, hoc est, divinam operationem et humanam.”

³⁹ *Jésus-Christ l’Unique Médiateur. Essai sur la rédemption et le salut*, T I: Problématique et relecture doctrinale (Paris, 2003²).

Christus homo, whereas the second type focuses on salvation as a divinely bestowed gift. According to expectations, models such as merit, satisfaction, sacrifice and redemption would belong to the ascending type of soteriology, since they are predicated of Christ according to his human nature. Sesbouë shows that this type of soteriology has increasingly lost its attractiveness, despite the modern predilection for the intrinsic value of independent human effort. Especially models such as satisfaction and redemption seem to rely too much on a juridical or commercial basis, which is foreign to the biblical image of a loving and forgiving God. The universal criticism of a cruel God who sacrifices his own innocent Son is but one expression of this widespread interpretation.

Above, however, I have attempted to show that the christology and soteriology of Thomas Aquinas – both concepts are admittedly anachronistic – are far more sophisticated than the scheme of ascension and descendance supposes. For this I have developed a number of arguments.

(1) The distinction between christology proper and christological soteriology, or between the person and work of Christ, that Aquinas develops in his work, may have contributed to the separation of both, but in fact bespeaks a growing insight into the dependence of soteriology on the proper understanding of the hypostatic union, and vice versa.⁴⁰ I have shown how Aquinas relocated some topics from his soteriology to his christology proper in order to strike the right balance concerning the modes and fruits of Christian salvation brought about by the passion and death of Christ.

(2) It may be the case that, when discussing merit, satisfaction, redemption and sacrifice, Aquinas emphasizes their human background, or their background in the human operations of Christ. It may also be the case that Aquinas introduces the concept of the instrument of divinity, derived from John of Damascus, to relate Christ's passion and death to the divine power which enables them to bring salvation about. But Aquinas is well aware of the fact that the very concept of satisfaction itself presupposes divine incarnation, and that the very concept of merit presupposes divine grace and charity as its root and principle, and that to say that Christ brought salvation about presupposes a divinity to which his human operation is instrumentally connected. In fact, Aquinas is well aware that satisfaction, redemption and sacrifice are not to be equated with salvation itself. The former are not the final goals of Christ's mission. Among themselves they serve the interpretation of different biblical and theological authorities, which partly explains their juxtaposition. All of them are possible only on the basis of the possibility of merit to be gained by Christ, which can only come about through the absolute principles of divine grace and charity.

(3) It may be the case that modern anthropology runs counter to the thought that someone else has taken our place and was punished instead of us, but Aquinas never supposes that Christ substituted himself for us, and, on the contrary, again and again connects the satisfaction made by Christ to satisfaction made by his faithful. He emphasizes that Christ's mission was voluntary, and undertaken on the basis of a charity which was divinely bestowed upon him. In fact, it seems never to cross Aquinas' mind to suppose an opposition between the man Christ and God his Father. His understanding of the ontological constitution of Christ would not allow for it, but one can easily suppose that, without such a background conception, some sort of opposition might be developed. This is exactly the point where a non-Chalcedonian christology is likely to fail, since it is much too vulnerable to the criticism of a cruel God, which was already voiced in Aquinas' days. But Christ was never detached from

⁴⁰ Hans Kessler, 'Christologie', in *Handbuch der Dogmatik*, ed. by Theodor Schneider (Düsseldorf, 2002), pp. 241-444, esp. 358-375.

his divinity, not even when he suffered and died (cf. *In III Sent* d. 22 and *STh* III, q. 50 a. 4 ad 1).

(4) Such is the 'kind' of divine transcendence which Aquinas' treatment of Christian salvation bespeaks. The hidden presence of God in Christ is such that Christ's ways and person cannot be thought of as absolutely contradistinguished from divinity as such. The cross teaches that Christ died, but was not abandoned, which means that it teaches that salvation needs a Godman to establish it, and that a doctrine of one person who subsists both in divine, and in human, nature exactly voices such an understanding without ignoring the mystery it contains: unseparated, undivided, unmixed and unchanged (definition of the Council of Chalcedon). Such is the concept of divine transcendence which is advocated and presupposed by Aquinas' teaching on Christian salvation through the passion and death of Christ. The fruits of this mission come to all who are united to Christ the Head, as members of his mystical body, through faith, love and the sacraments, as Aquinas states. And Christ's suffering and death present those who belong to him with multiple ways to assimilate to his virtues, and to his works of satisfaction and sacrifice, through works of love, prayer and fasting. Far from being a magical affair, as one might in general suppose substitution/*Stellvertretung* to be, it is a lifelong vocation, which leaves no room for indifference.