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# Is Jesus' Death on the Cross a Satisfaction for the Sins of Humanity or a Demonstration of God's Love? A Theological Understanding of Atonement in Relation to the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

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**Is Jesus' Death on the Cross  
a Satisfaction for the Sins of Humanity or a Demonstration of God's Love?  
A Theological Understanding of Atonement in Relation to  
the Sacrament of Reconciliation**

By  
Raja Selvam

A Research Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Department of Theology  
Loyola Marymount University

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## Abstract

The concept of “atonement” in the doctrine of salvation is one of the most fascinating and challenging areas of theology. There are so many theories in the historical development of the doctrine of salvation. Those theories are varied with some mutually compatible and others not. They offered many different interpretations on the death of Christ. Besides all these, there raises a question, what is the real purpose of the death of Christ? Undoubtedly, there is a hidden rich theological meaning behind the suffering and death of Jesus. Why did Jesus have to die on the Cross? This is a perennial question for many, specifically for young Catholic people today. What is the significant meaning of his suffering and death? Was Christ’s suffering and crucifixion really God’s plan? How is Christ’s death on the Cross related to the Christian understanding of salvation today? To answer these questions in the context of modern believers, especially young Catholic people, who are preparing to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, this paper comparatively examines the question: Is Jesus’ death on the Cross a satisfaction for the sins of humanity or a demonstration of God’s love? Since this paper has focused on the life and thought of young Catholic people, at various points I do attempt to engage the theological understandings of the doctrine of salvation. In other words, though the focus is on dogmatic theology it also has a contextual focus. While providing a more meaningful interpretation of the death of Jesus for young people, I would like to make a claim that as a “God-Man,” Christ paid the ultimate sacrifice in order to redeem humanity; but at the same time, his death on the Cross was a more powerful affirmation of the love of God for humanity. That is, the atonement of Christ is both the satisfaction of our sins and the demonstration of God’s love.

Atonement is a vast subject, implicating the whole field of theology. There are biblical metaphors of atonement and there are theological theories of atonement. This research paper deals with the latter. It is of doing historical theology in a systematic perspective. There are historical theologians who each had something valuable to say in their time. Among those theologians, I would like to examine two theories of atonement, such as Anselm's satisfactory theory and Peter Abelard's moral influence theory. I will also discuss a feminine perspective of atonement using the imagery of San Juana de la Cruz and Julian of Norwich. Finally, I address the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where the sinner enjoys the forgiveness of sins and the gift of divine love. Ultimately, I argue that dying to sin and rising to new life in the Sacrament of Reconciliation has its foundation in the atonement of Christ's suffering and death. This atonement is best understood for young people as "atonement of love," an Anselmian and Abelardian that is expressed through feminine imagery of God as a mother always caring, loving, embracing, sacrificing and willingly suffering for her children.

This research paper is divided into four chapters. The first chapter defines the term "atonement" and discusses the "satisfaction theory" of Anselm. It discusses how to understand the manner in which the forgiveness of human sins is related to the death of Christ on the Cross. The second chapter studies the Cross as a demonstration of God's love. In the view of Peter Abelard's "moral influence theory," this section explains why and how Christ's death is to be understood as a demonstration of the love of God. The third chapter analyses the "maternal imagery" of Juana de la Cruz and Julian of Norwich's reflection on the Passion of Christ through a feminist perspective. While critically evaluating these theories, the fourth chapter addresses how the Sacrament of Reconciliation itself can be renewed through the atonement theology, which holds together Anselm, Abelard and feminist theology.

To my understanding, Calvary is full of mystery and contradiction, and our minds cannot fully cope with Christ on a Cross, yet there is a central message, and it is the message that Christ has reconciled the sinful humanity with God. Through his forgiving and suffering love, specifically by his divine will of reconciliation, this divine embrace has become proximate to every human life. In this divine reconciliation, can we compartmentalize his suffering and death in a constraint particular view? It may not, and should not. It has diversity of characters in its nature itself. In such a situation, can we conclude – Christ’s suffering and death is only for forgiveness of sins? Or can we say that is it only a demonstration of God’s love?

I would rather say that in the Cross both the love of God and forgiveness to humanity go hand in hand. They are inseparable in the suffering and death of Christ. We should take careful notice of the motive and the means of God’s redemption. It is God’s own steadfast love that moves his action to redeem the world and humanity in Christ. It is out of his abundant love for his creation and his creatures. To sum it up, in view of what Jesus did for us on the Cross, love is not an option that we may or may not accept, but a definite debt that we must pay. Hence, I would say that as a “God-Man,” Christ paid the required satisfaction in order to redeem humanity, but at the same time, his death on the Cross was also a more powerful affirmation of the love of God for humanity. Therefore, Jesus’ death on the Cross is the pattern and an example to be followed. Christ’s atonement served many other good purposes – including showing solidarity with humanity in the sufferings which he causes us to endure for good reasons, giving us an example of how to live, revealing to us important truths.

Finally, the theological understanding of Jesus’ suffering and death is a concrete foundation of Christian moral living. In light of this, Anselm’s satisfaction theory and Abelard’s moral influence theory both offer a critical resolution to the young people in this modern

situation. That is, “love and forgiveness” is the foundation of Christian moral living. This interpretation of “forgiveness” and “love” may help them to find the real meaning in following Christ, who suffered and died on the Cross. The constructive thinking of Christ’s suffering as related to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, I believe, may help the young people to form the structure of their new lives in Christ. The brutal suffering and death of Jesus on the Cross, undoubtedly, touches every aspect of the lives of believers. Those who believe, specifically the young people are thereby animated to be a witnessing community in loving engagement with the modern world, through the power of Christ. It is in this sense, I suggest, that Christ’s suffering love and forgiving love might be proclaimed and witnessed in this world. The God who revealed his love in Jesus Christ is the God who shows a particular concern for those in need, and that his children are called to translate love into action on behalf of the needy. I believe true love can only be with actions and in truth.

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## Introduction

The Christian doctrine of salvation focuses on Jesus Christ as the redeemer and savior of the world. The concept of “atonement” in the doctrine of salvation is one of the most fascinating and challenging areas of theology. The notion of atonement, a process by which humans are made right before God, is central to the logic of Christian theology. The subject matter of atonement is also closely related to several other branches of theology. In his book, *Patristic and Medieval Atonement Theory*, Junius Johnson states, “The concept that has come to dominate talk of the various theories of how this salvation was accomplished is ‘atonement.’”<sup>1</sup> Hence, there is no one thing atonement is taken to mean, no one story of how Christ accomplishes the work of human salvation.

In the historical development of the doctrine of salvation, theories are varied with some mutually compatible and others not. There are many different interpretations on the death of Christ. The early Christian traditions speak of Christ’s death as a sacrifice offered to the Father as a “ransom” for sinners. Some even see the death of Jesus as the Father’s wrathful punishment of his Son who freely and lovingly stands in our stead, accepting the punishment that should have been ours. It is presented as a triumphant “cosmic victory” over Satan and the forces of evil. The death of Jesus is also presented as the great unveiling of God’s love for humanity. All these theories are used to express the benefits of grace for the human community.<sup>2</sup> In fact, besides all these, there raises a question, what is the real purpose of the death of Christ? Undoubtedly, there is a hidden rich theological meaning behind the suffering and death of Jesus. Therefore, it is always remarkable to explore both the way atonement works and what it means. For some it might be a proclamation of mystery: Jesus died, Jesus rose, and Jesus will come

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<sup>1</sup> Junius Johnson, *Patristic and Medieval Atonement Theory: A Guide to Research* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1912), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Evans, “A Prologue to a Theology of the Atonement,” *Wiley* 77, no. 903 (April 1996): 185.

again. But why did he die? What is the significant meaning of his suffering and death? In this light, this research paper aims to discuss the importance and role of the death of Jesus. It also examines why Christ had to deeply suffer and violently die on the Cross.

### **Scope of This Paper**

George Gilbert Aimé Murray, an Australian-born British classical scholar stated in an autobiographical note: “My reaction toward the traditional religion of the society in which I was born began early as a moral rebellion in early childhood. I began in my teens to be uneasy about other elements in the New Testament including the concept of various atonement.”<sup>3</sup> He expressed the viewpoint of many high-minded humanists. But, we cannot just conclude that this intellectual difficulty is confined to only such great humanists. I would say this is the situation of everyone, including young Catholic people today. Why did Jesus have to die on the Cross? This is a perennial question for them. Bearing in mind the young people for whom the crucifixion of Jesus may present a greater or lesser difficulty in their deepest convictions about life, the scope of this paper looks for a theologically relevant and persuasive meaning for a doctrine that seems alien to the experience of young people. That is to say, for the young people who believe in a loving God, and who find it exceedingly difficult to reconcile this understanding of their God with one who would require the cruel death of Jesus. Therefore, it comparatively examines the question: Is Jesus’ death on the Cross a satisfaction for the sins of humanity or a demonstration of God’s love?

What is the significant meaning of his suffering and death? Was Christ’s suffering and crucifixion really God’s plan? How is Christ’s death on the Cross related to the Christian

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Winter, *The Atonement: Problems in Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 8.

understanding of salvation today? It purports to answer these questions in the context of modern believers, especially young Catholic people, who are preparing to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Therefore, this paper primarily discusses the theory of “The Cross and forgiveness” and the theory of “The Cross as a demonstration of God’s love.” While providing a more meaningful interpretation of the death of Jesus for young people, I would like to make a claim that as a “God-Man,” Christ paid the ultimate sacrifice in order to redeem humanity; but at the same time, his death on the Cross was a more powerful affirmation of the love of God for humanity. That is, the atonement of Christ is both the satisfaction of our sins and the demonstration of God’s love. It is a great sacrificial act that asserts God’s love. Since this paper has focused on the life and thought of young Catholic people, at various points I do attempt to engage the theological understandings of the doctrine of salvation. In other words, though the focus is on dogmatic theology it also has a contextual focus.

## **Methodology**

First of all, atonement is a vast subject, implicating the whole field of theology. There are biblical metaphors of atonement and there are theological theories of atonement. This research paper deals with the latter. It is of doing historical theology in a systematic perspective. There are historical theologians who each had something valuable to say in their time. Among those theologians, I would like to examine two theories of atonement, such as Anselm’s satisfactory theory and Peter Abelard’s moral influence theory. They will interpret their writings in the light of scripture. Therefore, for this reason, I do handle scripture though it is through the lens of these historical theologians and their writings. I will also discuss a feminine perspective of atonement using the imagery of San Juana de la Cruz and Julian of Norwich. Finally, I address the

Sacrament of Reconciliation, where the sinner enjoys the forgiveness of sins and the gift of divine love. Ultimately, I argue that dying to sin and rising to new life in the Sacrament of Reconciliation has its foundation in the atonement of Christ's suffering and death. This atonement is best understood for young people as "atonement of love," an Anselmian and Abelardian that is expressed through feminine imagery of God as a mother always caring, loving, embracing, sacrificing and willingly suffering for her children.

This research paper is divided into four chapters. The first chapter defines the term "atonement" and discusses the "satisfaction theory" of Anselm. It addresses the question raised concerning the atoning significance of the crucifixion: What does the death of Jesus mean with regard to human sinfulness? That is to say, it discusses how to understand the manner in which the forgiveness of human sins is related to the death of Christ on the Cross. The second chapter studies the Cross as a demonstration of God's love. In the view of Peter Abelard's "moral influence theory," this section explains why and how Christ's death is to be understood as a demonstration of the love of God. It explores how the incarnation of Christ and his death represents a powerful affirmation of the love of God for humanity. The third chapter analyses the "maternal imagery" of Juana de la Cruz and Julian of Norwich's reflection on the Passion of Christ through a feminist perspective. While critically evaluating these theories, the fourth chapter addresses how the Sacrament of Reconciliation itself can be renewed through the atonement theology, which holds together Anselm, Abelard and feminist theology. With these considerations in mind, this paper proceeds to define further to that stage called "atonement."

## Chapter 1

### Christ's Death on the Cross - For the Forgiveness of Human Sins

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God... For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried...<sup>4</sup>

Though the Nicene Creed is ecclesial, it is primarily soteriological. The Christian doctrine of salvation focuses on Jesus Christ as the redeemer and savior of the world. During the first few centuries, the scholars of the early Church began to elaborate the doctrine of atonement. They were trying to clarify and safeguard the Church's teachings. At this point, the Christian tradition claimed that the passion and death of Jesus were central to the whole process of salvation. Therefore, every Christian solemnly proclaims his/her faith in Christ as savior and redeemer: Christ died on the Cross for the salvation of the whole humanity. Though it is a matter of faith, basic questions arise: Why did Jesus have to die on the Cross? What is the atoning value of the death of Jesus? While seeking solutions to these questions, no simple answer can be given at this stage. The reason for this is because of the concept of suffering and death of Jesus is expressed in a variety of ways, and is not confined to any one particular technical phrase. Because of this, it is now time to pursue the inquiry more precisely about the origins and exact meaning of the formulae employed to speak of the death of Jesus.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Nicene Creed*: It is a Symbol of Faith widely used in Christian liturgy. It is called Nicene, because it was originally adopted in the city of Nicaea by the First Council of Nicaea 325. In 381, it was amended at the First Council of Constantinople, and the amended form is referred to as the *Nicene* or the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*.

## **Defining: At – one – ment**

To begin with, what exactly is meant by the atonement? Briefly, it can be described as the restoration of a reciprocal relationship of love between God the Father and the human race. In addition, Michael Winter explains, “The individuals who enjoy this privileged relationship are recast interiorly so that they can respond to this love through their lives.”<sup>5</sup> Absolutely, it may lead them into lives, which are inspired by the love of God and love of neighbor. Behind the simple statement lies the whole theology of grace. As a doctrine, atonement is an attempt to answer certain types of questions that arise from a Christian way of telling the story of divine-human relations. Hence, atonement is a generic term, concerning a wide variety of possible soteriological understandings.

Etymologically, “atonement” seems to come from the composition of its literal parts: “at-one-ment,” meaning to cause two parties to be united or to bring together that which was separated. The earliest usage of the word by Thomas More in 1513 may treat it as the price paid to bring about reconciliation. Perhaps the other 16th century usages seem to explain it as the fact of reconciliation itself, as that which was accomplished by some work or payment.<sup>6</sup> It expresses the idea that the way has been cleared for humans to enter into the desired fellowship with God. In Christian theology, “atonement” means the act of God in human history to re-establish the relationship between God and man by dealing with sin. In other words, “atonement” means “reconciliation.” That is, God became “at one” with humanity, so that humanity might become truly “at one” with him, and with one another.<sup>7</sup> The Scottish theologian John McLeod Campbell says, “Atonement is to be regarded as that by which God has bridged over the gulf which separated between what sin had made us, and what it was the desire of the divine love that we

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Winter, *The Atonement*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, *Patristic and Medieval Atonement Theory*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Evans, “A Prologue to a Theology of the Atonement,” *Wiley* 77, no. 903 (April 1996): 188.

should become.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, atonement is the work that Christ came to accomplish. In other words, atonement focuses on the end result, the unity between the two parties involved or to a state of a right relationship between them. Hence, whatever Christ did and for whatever reason, the desired result was known as “atonement.”

Thus, the role of atonement as a doctrine is to account for how the problem between God and humanity is overcome. Taking into this account, the concept of atonement brought out the variety of great intellectual approaches within the Christian tradition. Hence, there were different understandings on the work of Christ. These different theological viewpoints paved the way for the different theories of atonement. In consideration of this view, this chapter focuses on Anselm’s “satisfaction theory,” one of the dominant atonement theories today, and developments of Anselmian atonement theory.

### **The Content of *Cur Deus Homo***

Anselm’s book *Why God Became Man* has an enormous influence in the history of the doctrine of atonement and has caused many responses. Anselm (1033-1109) is a great contributor to atonement theory, which is impossible to ignore. James Denney described the work as “The truest and greatest book on the atonement that has ever been written.”<sup>9</sup> His book is the first ever sustained treatment of the subject of atonement and the first ever attempt to articulate the work of Christ in a rational and comprehensive way.<sup>10</sup> In this longest sustained piece of argumentation about atonement, Anselm discusses by what logic or necessity did God become human. The starting point that is more true to Anselm is the Chalcedonian Christ, the God-Man, and the need to explain this is a way that preserves God’s freedom to act how he

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<sup>8</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011), 315.

<sup>9</sup> Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories: A Way Through the Maze* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 45.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

chooses. He further examines Jesus' sacrificial death as to restore life to the world. He also explains why Christ willingly did it, while he could have done this by some other persons. In his *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm explains that Jesus laid down his life to suffer death in order to bring "salvation," as the gift of his life surpassed all sins of humanity.<sup>11</sup>

At this point of "salvation," Anselm's approach to this theory of atonement is of the "Cross and forgiveness." It is centered on the idea that the cruel death of Christ provides the basis by which God is enabled to forgive sins of the world. It describes how human beings were reconciled to God by his forgiveness. It refers to the forgiving or pardoning of sins through the death of Jesus on the Cross, which made possible the "reconciliation" between God and his creation. Is it a unique event in which the crucified Jesus vicariously bore the divine judgment against the human sin? Anselm was dissatisfied with the historical "*Christus Victor*"<sup>12</sup> (Christ the Victor) approach, which was based on highly questionable assumptions about the "rights of the devil." For him, the Christ Victor theory gave the devil far too much power. Hence, Anselm gave a different answer, "Jesus' life was paid as a ransom not to the devil, but to God."<sup>13</sup> His emphasis falls totally upon the righteousness of God.

Developing this theory, Anselm proposed his argument for the necessity of the incarnation of Christ. According to him, salvation is a debt paid by Jesus, the God-Man to the Father on behalf of the human being. For him, salvation is confined to "religious" sphere.<sup>14</sup> It further examines the questions, such as who is Jesus Christ? What is salvation? How are we

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<sup>11</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo - Why God Became Man*, trans. Joseph M. Colleran (San Bernardino, CA: Beloved Publishing, 2014), 116.

<sup>12</sup> *Christus Victor* (Christ the Victor): The theory of atonement known as, *Christus Victor* ("Christ the victor") was the classic view held in the early church. It has at its center continuous divine action: from beginning to end, atonement is the act of God through Christ, in which the powers of sin, death, and the devil are overcome, and the world is reconciled to God. Paul's statement that "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19)" epitomizes this view. It assumed a narrative of conflict between God and the powers of evil, sin, and death, in which God triumphs over these powers.

<sup>13</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 146.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.



saved? Why should Christ save us? If it is in Jesus, how did his life, death and resurrection save us? By discussing these questions, Anselm explores the necessity of the incarnation and the saving potential of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **The Necessity for a Perfect God Becoming Man: God-Man**

Why did God become human? Why should Jesus, the God-Man die? What is the meaning of the death of Jesus on the Cross? While discussing about Jesus and salvation, Anselm speaks about the necessity for a perfect God becoming Man. The argument goes as follows: We have all robbed God of the honor that is due to him. In order for that honor to be fully repaid, something greater than all creation needs to be offered to God in compensation, because our situation is that serious.

He who does not render this honor, which is due to God, robs God of his own and dishonors him; and this is sin. Moreover, so long as he does not restore what he has taken away, he remains in fault; and it will not suffice merely to restore what has been taken away, but considering the contempt offered, he ought to restore more than he took away.<sup>15</sup>

Since it was humanity who stole from God, it should be humans who return to God. Therefore, no other than a human could make satisfaction. But a human could not do it because of inability.<sup>16</sup> That is to say, for him, human nature was made holy to enjoy eternal blessedness. This blessedness requires the perfect and voluntary submission of man's will to God. But the whole human race has failed, and refused to make this submission. This compensation must only be made by a human person. No one must pay it for him, because that would be unjust.<sup>17</sup> In this situation, no member of the human race can restore the lost blessedness. By this absence

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<sup>15</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 34.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-88.

of eternal aid, the whole human race has permanently lost the blessedness for which it was created.<sup>18</sup> So, what is the better solution? Who has the power to make this compensation? Consequently, only man ought to make this satisfaction, but only God can, who alone has the means to pay it. The answer is a God-Man. The conversation between Anselm and Boso explains the fact.

Anselm: Therefore none but God can make this satisfaction.

Boso: So it appears.

Anselm: But none but a man ought to do this, otherwise man does not make the satisfaction.

Boso: Nothing seems more just.

Anselm: If it be necessary, therefore, as it appears, that the heavenly kingdom be made up of men, and this cannot be effected unless the aforesaid satisfaction be made, which none but God can make and none but man ought to make, it is necessary for the God-Man to make it.<sup>19</sup>

This is the starting point of his argument. So, Anselm establishes a God-Man who is necessary for human's salvation. By the device of holding that rational nature, it was made to attain perfect happiness, a state possible only when the proper relation between God and rational creatures exist. A member of Adam's race must make this satisfaction to secure the possibility of man's happiness, which must be achieved if God's plan to create man for happiness is to succeed, a necessary occurrence.<sup>20</sup> According to Anselm,

If the race of Adam be reinstated by any being not of the same race, it will not be restored to that dignity which it would have had, had not Adam sinned, and so will not be completely restored; and besides, God will seem to have failed of his purpose, both which suppositions are incongruous: It is, therefore, necessary that the man by whom Adam's race shall be restored be taken from Adam.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> R.W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 206.

<sup>19</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 91.

<sup>20</sup> Steven S. Aspengren, "In Defense of Anselm," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (January 1990), 37.

<sup>21</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 95.

In light of this, Athanasius also holds that the salvation of man must all be of God, otherwise man is not saved.<sup>22</sup> Thus, it is clear that in order to rescue the human race, the Son of God desired his own death on the Cross. He, then, preferred to suffer, rather than see the human race being lost.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Christ, the God-Man in his death on the Cross “atoned” for the sins of humanity in such a way that God is satisfied and reconciliation is accomplished for the whole humanity. Why did Christ allow himself to be killed? It is because of what he came to do. He came to offer something to God, on our behalf, that could be sufficiently valuable to make recompense for sin.<sup>24</sup> Christ had not sinned, he did not have to die. But he still chose to die, and that gave him something to offer God, freely and voluntarily, that was equal to the magnitude of our sin. It was not just his life that he gave, but rather, he gave his whole person. He thus offered himself more than enough to satisfy divine justice. According to Anselm,

No man except this one ever gave to God what he was not obliged to lose, or paid a debt he did not owe. But he freely offered to the Father what there was no need of his ever losing, and paid for sinners what he owed not for himself. Therefore he set a much nobler example, that each one should not hesitate to give to God, for himself, what he must at any rate lose before long, since it was the voice of reason; for he, when not in want of anything for himself and not compelled by others, who deserves nothing of him but punishment, gave so precious life, even the life of so illustrious a personage, with such willingness.<sup>25</sup>

Since that person is divine as well as human, it is of the necessary magnitude to counterbalance sin. Since the value of what is given is determined by the honor of the giver, and he is God, his death is infinitely valuable. Therefore, it satisfies for infinitely many possible offenses against God. At this point, Anselm concludes that by the infinite value of the death of Christ, no debt remains, and all is well.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 57.

<sup>23</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 138.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-140.

## The Necessity for Christ to Die

Perhaps of greatest significance is that Anselm answers the significant question of “Why?” Why was it necessary for Christ to die? God is understood to be both loving and just, and both to an infinite degree. God must maintain who He is in the face of human sin. His love for the sinner and his righteous hatred of sin must both be maintained, so that God is “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Anselm is probably right in saying that the whole humanity does not fully understand how serious an issue sin is to a holy God. Neither do they fully understand the full extent of his love for them.”<sup>27</sup>

At the point of necessity of Christ’s death, Anselm argues that Christ’s great sacrifice earned a reward, that at the end, the sin was remitted as a reward to Christ. His atoning death was not humanity’s payment to God in exchange for being spared the penalty of sin, but Jesus himself was God’s personal gift to them. According to Anselm, Jesus was the one who God graciously provided for the sake of their salvation. He was the one through whom God extended mercy and forgiveness of sins in order to cleanse humanity from impurity and reconcile them to himself.<sup>28</sup> This is the very idea expressed by Paul in his message of the Cross: Jesus’ life and death, signified and offered “in his blood,” is God’s gracious gift for the justification. In Anselm’s thinking, Christ offers himself to God as an equivalent to the punishment of sinners. In his understanding, the action is from God-Man (Christ) to God.<sup>29</sup> Within Anselm’s logic, it is the very fact that God is not demanding this self-giving death from his Son that makes it meritorious. It merits an overflow of reward and blessing, which he having no need of, distributes to his

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<sup>27</sup> Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 58.

<sup>28</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 117.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

people.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Anselm concludes that God couldn't forgive sins by any mechanism whatever if satisfaction hasn't previously been offered. Therefore, Christ's death is satisfaction for our sins. At this point, Steven S. Aspenson would say, "By setting an example to men of how steadfastly one should honor God in how He honored God, by going beyond the call of duty. Though it caused His death, that is, by crucifixion, Christ honored God to an extent, which could not have been justly required of Him."<sup>31</sup> We have seen that, given Anselm's understanding, the incarnation of God the Son is necessary for payment of the societal debt of Adam's race, and thereby restoring people, while God's mercy is extendable only to those who, seeing their guilt, that is, personal debt, do whatever is required to attain forgiveness.<sup>32</sup> In this light, Anselm's term debt as "social debt" explores the social context of his time?

### **The Social Context of Anselm's Theory**

In the 11th century with the disappearance of paganism the phenomenon of sacrifice was unknown to ordinary experience. At this period, serious attempts were made to give a rational answer to a perennial question as to why Jesus died. There were a series of questions in the theological discussion, such as whether his death was a sacrifice, and how it effected the reconciliation between the human race and God the Father. The majority of the Church Fathers followed a theory that stressed the redemptive work of Christ as a victor over devil. However, Anselm's theory put forward a solution to the question, which was widely accepted as a forensic explanation of the atonement. It has had widespread influence ever since it was first propounded in the early Middle Ages. According to Michael Winter, Anselm's solution to the problem of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Steven S. Aspenson, "In Defense of Anselm," 36.

<sup>32</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 94-95.

Christ's death and humanity's reconciliation is basically an analogy of the situation of a medieval peasant insulting a king.<sup>33</sup> Reconciliation would not be achieved until satisfaction had been made for the affront to the king's honor. Anselm argued that since Jesus was the Son of God, his death had a moral value, which was literally unlimited. To be precise it was not so much the death, as the moral excellence of the liberator's love and obedience in accepting the cruel death, which constituted an act of infinite homage to the Father. Thanks to the reality of the incarnation Jesus was authentically a member of the human race, which was henceforth, on balance, more pleasing than displeasing to God. Therefore, the Father could now welcome back his wayward children without patching up a fictitious reconciliation by merely turning a blind eye to their sins. Indeed to have condoned such wickedness would have been unfitting for a just and all-wise God.<sup>34</sup> Thus did Anselm present his solution to the vexed question as to why Christ died on the Cross. It basically provided a relational answer to the fundamental questions as to the purpose of the death of Jesus and its causal role in the moral liberation of the human race. Hence, Anselm's atonement theory arises in relation to the social context that he was preaching and teaching in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Hence his atonement theory was accepted so widely in the Western Church as to obscure the older patristic theory. His theory had great influence in the history and still make significant advance in its understanding of Christ's death and his forgiveness.

### **Jesus' Death: Forgiveness of Sins and Progress Understanding**

Anselm insisted that God is totally and utterly obliged to act according to the principles of justice throughout the redemption of humanity. This approach made an important advance in

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Winter, *The Atonement*, 63.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

the understanding of Christ's death as God's forgiveness for human sin. In taking up Anselm's reflections as a foundation, and keeping it as an appropriate model for God's forgiveness of human sin, in the 16th century, three main models came to be used to understand the manner in which the forgiveness of human sins is related to the death of Jesus. The three main advance models are as follows:

### **The Model of Representation**

This model speaks about Christ as the covenant representative of humanity. This covenant theology is seen in its most fully developed form in New England Puritanism during the 18th century. According to this model, through faith all believers come to stand within the covenant between God and humanity. Christ's death on the Cross is understood as a covenantal act. Therefore, all that Christ has achieved through the Cross is available on account of the covenant. Christ, by his obedience upon the Cross, represents his covenant people, winning benefits for them as their representative. By coming to faith, individuals come to stand within the covenant. And this way, they share in all its benefits, specifically the full and free forgiveness of our sins, won by Christ through his suffering and death on the Cross. It paved a way for the new understanding and development of covenant theology. According to this model, Adam was humanity's representative under the old covenant of works, but now Christ has become our representative under the new covenant of grace.<sup>35</sup> In other words, through the Cross, God aims to restore the rightness of the world by rightful means. We the sinners are brought back to the covenantal relationship with God. By Christ's death on the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins we are reunited with God. It is an act of reconciliation with God by Christ's representation on our behalf. That is the central theme of Anselm's doctrine of atonement.

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<sup>35</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 328.

## **The Model of Participation**

The New Testament leaves no doubt that atonement is accomplished through the believer's participation with the Lord in his death rather than merely by Christ's death on the cross. This model describes the faithful participating in the resurrection of Christ. Through faith, the believers participate in the risen Christ. They are in Christ, and they are caught up in him, and share in his risen life. As a result of this, they partake in all the benefits won by Christ, through his death on the Cross. One of those benefits is the forgiveness of sins, in which they join through faith.<sup>36</sup> Hence, participation in Christ entails the forgiveness of sins, and sharing in his righteousness. As McGrath quotes from the New Testament scholar E. P. Sanders, "The prime significance which the death of Christ has for Paul is not that it provides atonement for past transgression, but that, by sharing in Christ's death, one dies to the power of sin or to the old aeon, with the result that one belongs to God. The transfer takes place by participation in Christ's death."<sup>37</sup> This idea is central to Luther's soteriology too. Therefore, in some way, faith unites us to Christ, and enables us to participate in his attributes. In this model, again Anselm's understanding of forgiveness of sins is reaffirmed as a "divine gift" to the faithful who keeps his faith in the risen Christ.

## **The Model of Substitution**

Substitutionary–atonement is a broad category. Many models of the atonement are "substitutionary" in the sense that they portray Jesus as having taken our place or having done something for us that we are unable to do for ourselves. Christ is understood here to be a substitute, the one who goes to the Cross in our place. Sinners ought to have been crucified on

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid



account of their sins. But here Christ is crucified in their place. God allows Christ to stand in our place, taking our guilt upon him, so that his righteousness that was won by his death on the Cross might become ours.<sup>38</sup> J.I. Packer has helpfully observed that Charles Hodge’s penal substitution is just one type of substitution. According to Ben Pugh, “Penal Substitution” simply means that Jesus died to bear the penalty for my sins, hence “penal,” and that he did this in my place, hence “substitution.”<sup>39</sup> Substitution is a stronger word than representation. Representation is what Jesus does with our implicit participation. Substitution implies that there were certain things that only Jesus could do for us. He did these things alone, without us, and indeed, to spare us. As our representative, he suffers with us. As our substitute, he suffers instead of us, and it is this latter note that penal substitution emphasizes. Hence, it is a new development and reworking of Anselm’s theory.

In conclusion to this chapter, specifically, Anselm’s theory tends to understand the death of Christ as having to do with mercy and forgiveness. Forgiveness is the key concept here. His theory explains the question of how divine mercy can be explained and what the Cross answers. It supports more toward the satisfaction of humanity and pictures Christ as a representative rather than substitute. Though the atonement was meant to have an effect upon the Father, it is often portrayed as being propitiated by the perfect self-offering of Christ. It does explicitly explain that satisfaction to God is possible and forgiveness of sinners can be proper. Mark Baker says that Anselm made an effort to encourage people to trust in divine mercy instead of living in fear of divine wrath.<sup>40</sup> Having explored Anselm’s understanding of atonement as satisfaction for the sins of the humanity, the next chapter studies Christ’s death as a demonstration of God’s love.

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<sup>38</sup> Mark Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 166.

<sup>39</sup> Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 63.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 160.

## Chapter 2

### Christ's Death on the Cross – A Demonstration of God's Love

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.  
Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,  
but, in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:16-17).

This is the prologue to a theory of atonement that sees Christ's death as a demonstration of God's love. John 3:16-17 explains the will of God, and draws our attention to the heart of God's good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. That is, God's own Son became a human being, died a human death on the Cross and was raised from the dead "for us and for our salvation" is the core of any truly Christian faith. Thus, Jesus' death on the Cross spells out the true meaning of divine love. While Anselm had put forward a forensic explanation to the problem of Christ's death and humanity's reconciliation,<sup>41</sup> a contemporary opponent of Anselm, Peter Abelard (1079-1142) affirms that Christ's death is fundamentally a demonstration of God's love, which in turn evokes repentance. He proposes that the Cross changes our ethical behavior because there, in the crucified Christ, we come to understand something of God's love for us.<sup>42</sup> That is, God uses the Cross as the supreme example of his love toward sinners. At this point, the central aspect of the Christian understanding of the meaning of the Cross relates to the demonstration of the love of God for humanity.

In the early Church, this specific understanding of Christ's death as a demonstration of "divine love" could be seen in the writings of Clement of Alexandria (150-215). He pointed out how the incarnation of Christ and especially his death represents a powerful affirmation of the

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Winter, *The Atonement*, 63.

<sup>42</sup> Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 129.

love of God for humanity, and a demand that humanity demonstrates a comparable love for God. In accordance with the same line of thought, Augustine of Hippo also stressed the mission of Christ was the “demonstration of the love of God toward us.”<sup>43</sup> For Augustine, this was but one element in a Christian understanding of the Cross. Abelard upholds the Augustinian idea of Christ’s incarnation as a public affirmation of the love of God, and proposes a “moral influence theory” that underlines the “subjective” impact of the Cross.

### **Abelard’s “Moral Influence Theory”**

Abelard’s account of atonement has been described as the “moral influence theory”<sup>44</sup> because it emphasizes the impact of God’s love, demonstrated in Christ’s death on the Cross for sinners. It has also been described as a “subjective theory” because Christ’s death on the Cross has not achieved any objective change between God and humanity, but subjective change on the sinners. The only change occurs when sinners return to God because they are touched by his love. Abelard believed that by dying on the Cross, Christ demonstrates the extent of God’s love for sinners. This demonstration of divine love is so compelling that sinners will be moved to repent of their sins and return to God. Charles B. Cousar would say that contemplation of such an astounding expression of divine love as displayed in the Cross is bound to breed in men and women a responding love, leading to forgiveness and a fresh obedience to the will of God.<sup>45</sup>

However, in this saving action of God, he turns out to be both the author and the object of the reconciliation. In this “divine will” and “act,” thus God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto him. At this point, there arises a question, how can the depth of God’s love be measured?

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<sup>43</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 331.

<sup>44</sup> Junius Johnson, *Patristic and Medieval Atonement Theory*, 119.

<sup>45</sup> Charles B Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 83.

According to Abelard, the only answer is “the Cross.” The Cross is the yardstick to measure the greater love of God. It also does need to explore the will of God the Father. Who can ever describe it in all its fullness? Every attempt to understand or to depict the meaning of it falls short of its reality. The measure of God’s love is nothing less than the giving of his Son to die for our sins. He was rich in mercy and loved humanity with a great love. The wonder of God’s merciful love is revealed above all on the Cross.<sup>46</sup> He says that the Cross changes our ethical behavior because there, in the crucified Christ, we come to understand something of God’s love for us. This love motivates us to change the way we live. God thus so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son (John 3:16). Earnest Burton states that God’s infinite love is being manifested in his Son. And Christ, himself the object of divine love, is also himself full of love for humanity. He is the Son of God’s love, and the revelation of the Father.<sup>47</sup> This love is shown, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his only Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10). This may lead to further discussion on what is the necessity of the Cross. If it was only a demonstration of love, to what purpose was this extravagance. Did this demonstration really achieve that purpose?

The answer is yes. The death of Christ on the Cross shows that God loves humanity, even the sinful humanity. It is the expression of God’s unconditional love. It is the supreme expression of the love of God in Christ. According to Ernest Burton, “Christ’s expression of love is possibly and also ought to be actually participative. That is, the death that Christ died is ours, both in that it was for us, and in that it belongs to us to enter into it, and share it with him, living no longer for the fulfillment of our own purposes and ends but for his, who for us suffered and died.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Evans, “A Prologue to a Theology of the Atonement,” *Wiley* 77, no. 903 (April 1996): 184.

<sup>47</sup> Ernest De Witt Burton, “The Biblical Doctrine of Atonement: X. Atonement in the Teaching of Paul,” *The Biblical World*, 32, (1908): 259.

<sup>48</sup> Ernest De Witt Burton, “The Biblical Doctrine of Atonement,” 255.

Therefore, it is beyond question that the death of Jesus is a disclosure and demonstration of God's love for humanity. Following this lead, one may clearly understand that Jesus' death on the Cross distinctly brought out the close connection between what God in Christ has done for us, and what he expects of us in response to his love. It is agape, gift-love, sacrificial self-giving for the sake of others. This love demands the believers to love one another.

## **Justice and Love**

Like Anselm, Abelard's Christology is vitally Chalcedonian. That is Christ's two natures fully human and fully divine play an essential part in his theology. As he writes in his commentary,

By the faith which we hold concerning Christ, love is increased in us, by virtue of the conviction that God in Christ has united our human nature to himself and, by suffering in the same nature, has demonstrated to us that perfection of love of which he himself says, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn. 15:13). So the believers, through his grace, are joined to him as closely as to their neighbors by an indissoluble bond of perfection.<sup>49</sup>

Hence, according to Abelard, Christ lived and died for no other purpose than that he might teach humanity how to live by his words and example, and point out, by his passion and death to what limits everyone's love should go.<sup>50</sup> However, Abelard approaches his subjective theory with a philosophical mind. He is very much concerned about justice and love. Particularly, he feels that we often don't make suitable enough distinctions in our moral judgments and that we don't understand how deep divine love goes.<sup>51</sup> As Abelard quotes from Romans 3:23-25, "For there is

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<sup>49</sup> Peter Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Stephen R. Cartwright (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 278.

<sup>50</sup> Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 130.

<sup>51</sup> Junius Johnson, *Patristic and Medieval Atonement Theory*, 119.

no distinction; all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God. They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption of Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as an expiation, through faith, by his blood, to prove his righteousness because of the forgiveness of the sins previously committed.”<sup>52</sup> In his commentary on Romans, specifically on this section, Abelard reinterprets this passage to be exclusively about love. According to him, “righteousness” and “justice” are relentlessly explained as “love” throughout the entire passage on the grounds that it is “love” that justifies the humanity. Having made this move to ground this fundamental passage in the divine love, Abelard says that we are reconciled by Christ, because in the grace (love) of taking on our nature and teaching us, even to the point of death, in that nature, God has shown God’s great love and bound us to God-self in love.<sup>53</sup>

As he stated at the outset, to be righteous is to love God; therefore, being made more righteous is simply becoming a better lover of God. In this sense, is it true that Christ’s death is not what buys us forgiveness? God just forgives us, and Christ’s death is merely demonstrative of his love. According to Abelard, however, God doesn’t just forgive everyone, but rather, God forgives only those who believe in Him and cling to Him in love.<sup>54</sup> So in order that he/she be forgiven, it is necessary that he/she love God first. Christ’s death on the Cross enkindles humanity’s love for God. Therefore, in dying, Christ is giving that which is the necessary precondition for the forgiveness. Through this righteousness, “love,” one may obtain the forgiveness of sins. This is what we find in the gospel, concerning the woman sinner, Jesus says, “Her many sins are forgiven, because she loved much (Luke 7:47).” Therefore, loving God is the precondition for the forgiveness. At this point, the entire humanity has sinned and need the glory

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<sup>52</sup> Peter Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 162-163.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

of God, everyone has a need as if from an obligation to glorify God. And they are all justified freely, not by their preceding merits, but by his grace “love.” As He says, it is his free and spiritual gift, through which Christ made the redemption possible. Thus, Jesus became the reconciler through his death. And because this atonement is put forth, that is, established by God not for everyone but only for those who believe through faith, because this reconciliation extends only to those who believed and waited for it.<sup>55</sup> Believing in God thus becomes the necessary condition for forgiveness of humanity. At this point, how do the believers understand the “act of pardoning” for sins in the process of reconciliation with God?

### **The Concept of Sin: Contempt of God**

The concept of sin for Abelard is considered as “contempt of God.”<sup>56</sup> However, this contempt of God is dealt with only by the repentant sigh. In this sigh we are instantly reconciled to God and we gain pardon for the preceding sin. Therefore, the repentant sigh is, by definition, a renunciation of prior contempt for God and a “turning to God in love.” This ability to turn to God in love, however, is itself a gift of God’s love. This love that is aroused in response to the crucified Christ is the thing that denotes the petition “delivers us from the bondage of sin.”<sup>57</sup> At this point, it is good to discuss for what purpose was this brutal suffering. Is it not in the nature of love to rescue from some tangible danger and provide for real needs? Of course, the Cross reveals the nature of love giving life to the other. It speaks, revealing Christ to humanity. This revelation is understood to save and change humanity without the need for any kind of objective

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<sup>55</sup> Peter Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 163.

<sup>56</sup> Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 131.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

transaction taking place on their behalf. The profound witness to the exemplary character of Christ's suffering could also be traced in 1 Peter 2: 21-25, "Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving you a pattern in order that you might follow in his foot-steps who committed no sin." This new pattern of Christ's "sacrificial love" leads to further discussion on the importance of the suffering and death of Christ.

### **The Suffering of Christ**

In many Christian circles today, "the importance of the suffering and death of Christ" is virtually equated with "the meaning of atonement." Christ fulfilled the prophetic pattern: rejection, suffering and violent death. The affirmation that "Christ died for our sins" has increasingly been articulated in the last two centuries, in the form of the doctrine of "penal substitution" or "penal satisfaction." Hence, there were a number of interpretive motifs surface from examination of this passion material of Christ. However, the most dominant of all approaches is the location of the Cross of Christ at the center of God's redemptive plan: in other words, explaining why did Jesus have to suffer and cruelly die on the Cross.

At this point it is also important to discuss what does the suffering of Christ mean for Abelardian framework. According to Abelard, "It is to teach us by example, preserved to the death and bound us to himself even more through the supreme love, so that when we have been kindled by so great a benefit of divine grace (love)."<sup>58</sup> Therefore, our redemption is that supreme love in us through the passion of Christ, which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but gains for us the true liberty of the sons of God, so that we may complete all things by his love.<sup>59</sup> In other

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<sup>58</sup> Peter Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 167-168.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.



words, it is to show us such great grace (love), than which a greater cannot be found anywhere in the world. As he said, it is to prove “No one has greater love than this: that he lays down his life for his friends (John 15:13). For him, the suffering of Christ on the Cross is primarily subjective. It is primarily to make a change within humanity. For him, suffering was not so much about removing an objective barrier between God and humans but rather a demonstration to the humanity of God’s matchless love.<sup>60</sup> It is in this way that Christ’s death becomes central to God’s plan.

Etymologically, the word “passion” comes from the Latin word *passio*, which means “to suffer.” It is a close kin of the Greek word *pascho*, which means “to suffer.”<sup>61</sup> Christ’s suffering and death is firmly embedded in multiple narrative contexts in the New Testament. One of the most pervasive interpretations centers on his faithful life with the suffering he encountered on the Cross and his vindication of love by God. This pattern could be found in multiple New Testament texts, particularly Paul’s writings of his own claim to be a servant of Christ in terms that mirror the sufferings of Christ. For example,

For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh (2 Corinthians 4:11).

We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; <sup>9</sup>as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything (2 Corinthians 6:3-10).

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<sup>60</sup> Mark D. Baker, and Joel B. Green. *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, 2 ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 163.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

The Cross is positioned as a model for the believers. The suffering of Christ is thus often discussed in positive terms with an emphasis on its “value” for our salvation. At this point, how can we articulate meaningfully the significance of Christ’s suffering? It is less concerned to tie down to a single account of how Christ’s death was effective in bringing about the salvation of the world. But for Abelard, it is to explore that Christ lived an exemplary sinless life but also that humans live differently in response to the example of Christ’s life. It is to focus on Christ’s life and death moving everyone to love and to be reconciled with God. Having attributed such favorable value to the suffering of Christ, Abelard concludes as an expression of God’s love. Accordingly, René C. Padilla, would agree, “If God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us nothing can be too much for him to give us in order to accomplish his purpose in us and through us!”<sup>62</sup> Therefore expressing love in Christ and through his death is the greatest gift of God to humanity.

However, a contemporary theology at this situation needs to be critical in its approach. Therefore, first of all, Anselm’s atonement theory and Abelard’s moral influence theory need to be critically looked at in the light of modern young believers, who prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is from this point of view, that we need to have constructive thinking in relation to atonement, which could be so admirably set forth.

### **Critical Analysis on Both Theories**

1. **Biblical Source:** Both Anselm and Abelard hold the scriptural source as the foundation for their arguments. However, Ben Pugh argues that though Anselm gives a logical

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<sup>62</sup> René C. Padilla, “A Message for the Whole Person,” *Transformation* 10, no. 3 (July 1993): 1.

explanation for the necessity of Christ's death on the Cross, in his *Cur Deus Homo*, he uses a framework of an imagery taken, not from the Bible, but from the legal and social norms of his time.<sup>63</sup> It is out of his contextual issues. While discussing the necessity of Incarnation of "God-Man," Anselm greatly uses the Book of Genesis, for the story of sin and fall of creation. But for Abelard, he places the biblical texts as the basis for his theological construction of his arguments as a "demonstration of God's love." Perhaps Abelard has a fairly obvious way of translating a number of key Pauline terms into concepts that all basically equate to *caritas*: "Love," for instance: "faith in Jesus Christ, meaning the love which comes from faith in our salvation through Christ. Even Paul's "righteousness of God" means, "love" according to Abelard. At this point, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which speaks of forgiveness, and love of God, has its base in the scriptural text too (John. 20:23). Therefore, ultimately both the theories lead us to further understanding of the suffering and death of Christ from biblical perspective. The fruit of its understanding is of great support to comprehend the essence of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which also has the biblical foundation and explains the fruit of those theories "love" and "forgiveness."

2. **Concept of Sin:** Sin is an extraordinary problem that necessitates extraordinary measures, yet in his theory, Anselm takes a narrow view of sin. His focus is on "honor," wherein he emphasizes dealing with the "debt of sin," and not on eradicating sin itself. Anselm's concept of sin is relational, but his focus on honor causes him to fall short of the relational understanding of sin, which is so central to the biblical writings. As Mark

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<sup>63</sup> Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 54.

D. Baker observes, the emphasis on meeting the debt to the honor of the offended, the Lord is given importance, whereas, it gives no attention to the impact a restored relationship with God will have on a person's relationship with others.<sup>64</sup> For Abelard, human sin becomes a cause for the love of God to be revealed at the Cross. It is God's own love for us that is demonstrated in Christ's death "while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8). When God's love is revealed in such a maximal way our mistrust of him is dealt with and an obedient response to Christ's example is secured. According to Ben Pugh, the important thing was the way God's justice is revealed. He says, "The Cross serves as a sobering example of what sin really deserves, inspiring us all to see the full horror of our sin and duly repent."<sup>65</sup> Therefore from Abelard's theory we may understand that sin alienates humanity from God, not God from humanity. Thus, God is able to, and in fact does, reconcile sinners without need of punishment. It is being enacted every time in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, when the penitent repents for the sins, he or she is reconciled to God and never be punished for the sins committed.

3. **Concept of Grace:** While Anselm speaks about sin and honor in relation to the salvific work of Christ, Abelard defends the grace of love and reconciliation as the fruit of the Cross. While explaining more about grace, Abelard underlines a significant role of grace in his theory, in which God takes the initiative to act in a way that will lead to our reconciliation. We are reconciled, he says, because in the grace (love) of taking on our nature and teaching us, even to the point of death. In addition, in that nature, God has shown his great love and bound us to himself in love. As he stated, at the outset, to be

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<sup>64</sup> Mark D. Baker, and Joel B. Green. *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 157.

<sup>65</sup> Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 149.

righteous is to love God. Therefore, being made more righteous is simply becoming a better lover of God.<sup>66</sup> Further, Ben Pugh says that in Jürgen Moltmann a German Reformed theologian, it is the divine empathy and solidarity revealed at the Cross. At the Cross he got so involved with humankind that the whole Godhead was opened up to humans and the destiny of God became bound up with the race.<sup>67</sup> He assumes that, awakened by the example of God's love, we can arrive to a point of living righteously. This is the core message of his moral influence theory. In both theories, it is clear that Christ's death on the Cross is God's gift to us for our sake, not our payment to God for our sins. Jay Sklar comments that God shows his grace not only by granting forgiveness, but also by providing sinners with the means of forgiveness to begin with.<sup>68</sup> Thus, God is the sole and sufficient provider for our lives in every regard, providing even the means of dealing with our sins. Therefore, it is true to say that God the Creator, who gives life to all creatures, is also God the Redeemer, who cleanses and forgives sins by means of his gracious gift. The underlying principle of these theories, therefore, is nothing other than God's grace.

4. **Concept of Salvation:** In Anselm's thoughts, salvation is too easily equated with the remission of debt. Thus, according to him, because of Jesus' work humans do not have to make any attempt to offer recompense and satisfy the huge hurt humanity caused to God, because it will be done by the great sacrificial act of Christ. But for Abelard, Christ's death doesn't redeem us, but our love redeems us. According to him, God forgives only

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<sup>66</sup> Peter Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 161-162.

<sup>67</sup> Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 150.

<sup>68</sup> Darrin W. Synder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and The Mission of the Church* (Michigan, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 196.

those who believe in him and cling to God in love.<sup>69</sup> Since Christ's death is not universally efficacious, we must account for why not everyone is redeemed. This must be because not everyone responds to the Cross with enkindled love. Therefore, we must accept what Christ offers us since the precondition for our salvation is not automatically efficacious. However, love is a power of the will, it lies ultimately within our power to create the conditions in us that determine salvation.<sup>70</sup> Also, he does not explain why Jesus' death on the Cross was necessary for our salvation. It appears his atonement model could function logically without the Cross.<sup>71</sup>

It is the fact, that Christ's death on the Cross tells, our world is already saved, reconciled and redeemed. Therefore it is no longer the devil's world, but God's world, Christ's world. Though the act of atonement is complete and final work of salvation, according to Thomas F. Torrance, it has two dimensions. On one hand, when we look from the side of God, the whole work of salvation is accomplished in the Son. But on the other hand, when we look from the side of sinners in the fallen world, it is not seen completed and fulfilled as yet. It is not in such a way, the perfect and finished work of reconciliation is fully actualized in us, in our estrange world.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, this process may be completed and Christ's work of reconciliation may be finished only through the fruitful participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Catholic Church.

5. **Forgiveness and Reconciliation:** Forgiveness is divine gift. For Anselm, since Jesus earns forgiveness from God, grasping for forgiveness is God's gracious gift. What the

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<sup>69</sup> Junius Johnson, *Patristic and Medieval Atonement Theory*, 123.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Mark D. Baker, and Joel B. Green. *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 164.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press, 2009), 174.

Cross reveals to us about God may be as significant as what is accomplished on the Cross. In addition, this divine gift was not gained through marked trade, but blood in exchange for mercy.<sup>73</sup> While encouraging people to trust in divine mercy, Anselm offers the Cross as a positive model for mercy and forgiveness of God. While speaking about the Cross as a symbol of love, Abelard does include Jesus' death as part of what moves us to love. Though Jesus' life and death moving individuals to love and to be reconciled with God, it leads the individual into a communitarian relationship. Therefore, these individuals could then come together and form a Christian community in a voluntary way. However, the community-forming nature of Christ's work or the sense of reconciliation with others does not appear to be integral to Abelard's explanation of the atonement. The primary effects of the Sacrament of Reconciliation are receiving forgiveness from God and reconciling with him and the community of believers. Since humanity experienced the love and forgiveness of God through the death of Christ on the Cross, Abelard's moral influence theory demands the followers of Christ to love one another, and to be instrument of God's love and forgiveness in their faith community and in the world.

Both approaches to the atonement then, are relevant to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. But the problem of suffering remains. Can young people find healing through the Sacrament of Reconciliation when suffering continues to be so prominent in either atonement theory? I will now turn to feminist theology, as it has been very concerned with the ways suffering and love can be related.

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<sup>73</sup> Darrin W. Synder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 197.

## Chapter 3

### Christ's Suffering and Love - Feminist Perspective: Maternal Imagery

For a long time I have held my peace,  
I have kept still and restrained myself;  
now, I will cry out like a woman in labor,  
I will gasp and pant (Isaiah 42:14).

In Isaiah 42, Yahweh is portrayed as a warrior to defend his people. The cry of God is compared to a woman in labor. It is a female image of God. In light of this, some questions emerge: Can the Christian doctrine of God, specifically the doctrine of atonement accommodate a detailed feminist approach? Can feminist theology learn anything from classical Christian discourse about the atonement? Of course, the feminist approach can move the tradition from an androcentric to a genuinely liberating view of God, in particular with an acute sensitivity to the varieties of women's experiences today. By joining a critical conversation that has been in the process for some time, feminist theology has its own reconstructive contribution to make. The 21st century feminist theologians show in countless ways how feminist language about God could be addressed, and how the classical tradition can be enriched by feminist speech about God. Feminist theology insists that women's reality is fully capable not only of receiving and bearing the divine but of symbolizing as well. Here, I look at how women's theological reflections can make atonement theology more true to the ways suffering and love are related.

What this chapter has outlined are some developments on the atonement theory, specifically feminist perspective. It also underlines how does it get its foundation in Anselm and Abelard's understanding of atonement. On one hand, Anselm's theory tends to understand the death of Christ on the Cross as having to do with mercy and forgiveness. Forgiveness is the key



concept in his theory. It explains the mercy of God and his absolute gift of forgiveness. It describes Christ as our representative. Explicitly having explained the aspect of Christ's satisfaction to God, it also illuminates the nature of the Father, who could now welcome back his wayward children without punishment, but merely forgiving their sins. On the other hand, Abelard emphasizes that the Cross is the yardstick to measure the greater love of God. The death of Christ on the Cross shows that God loves humanity, even sinful humanity. It is the expression of God's unconditional love. It is the supreme expression of the love of God in Christ. Though both theories focus on different characteristics of Christ's death, in light of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, they both complement each other. For example, forgiveness and love become underlined elements in the process of bringing a new life to the humanity. But forgiveness, love, and suffering need to be retrieved critically, through feminist approaches to the cross. They look at Christ and God the Father as a "mother" who never punishes her children, rather loves unconditionally in whatever situations the children are. In light of Anselm and Abelard, the comparative study on feminist perspective in this chapter paves a way for a deeper understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in which the penitent experiences the motherly love of God in forgiveness and in the expression of unconditional love.

### **Female Metaphors**

Christ's suffering on the Cross was primarily a great deed of love carried out once for all by God. It is a remarkable affirmation of the depth of God's love. Cousar states, "God's love is incredible, it exceeds the boundaries of human imagination."<sup>74</sup> It is impossible to measure the

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<sup>74</sup> Charles B. Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 26.

love of God. According to Juana Ines de la Cruz,<sup>75</sup> the love of God that was revealed in Jesus' death on the Cross does not need to be defined, but it could be experienced in Jesus' self-sacrifice, especially in his suffering on the Cross.<sup>76</sup> In such a way, Julian of Norwich<sup>77</sup> is more focused on God's love. She would say, "God who made humankind by love, in the same love would restore us to the same bliss, even surpassing it."<sup>78</sup> She develops her central insights in line with an understanding of the depth and nature of this love. Both, Juana de la Cruz and Julian of Norwich compare the suffering of Christ to a woman giving birth. Much earlier before feminist theological approach gets popular, they both used the "maternal imagery" to express Christ's love. Juana says, "Christ gave birth to us all with very great pains and torments at the time of his cruel and bitter passion."<sup>79</sup>

Juana's thought includes an elaborate discussion on feminine perspectives. Her reflection is notable in several respects, particularly, her explicit use of "feminine image" to unlock its theological significance. For Juana, the pain and sorrow that Christ suffered on the Cross was to give life to the children of God. It is a relationship of love. She looks at the sufferings of Jesus with a feminine lens. She is reframing the "suffering" and "love" as a powerful affirmation of the love of God for humanity. Thus, her reflection of the feminine way of conceiving the love of God for humanity gave rise to faith in individuals, as they respond to God's love. In most of her writings, Juana also interprets the challenges of her lifetime, specifically the social and historical

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<sup>75</sup> Juana Ines de la Cruz was a Mexican poet and nun born mist likely in 1648. She was one of the most compelling authors of the seventeenth-century Hispanic world. As a religious woman, she forged a unique path as a writer based largely on her convictions. Her writings translate the challenges of her life into stunning poetic concepts, philosophical and theological language.

<sup>76</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 332.

<sup>77</sup> Julian of Norwich was a fourteenth-century young woman who at the age of thirty had a series of vivid visions centered on the crucified Christ. The trend in modern scholarship is to place Julian in the category of mystic rather than visionary.

<sup>78</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Love*, ed. and trans. John Skinner (Broadway, NY: Image Books, 1996), 23.

<sup>79</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 333.

context from a feminist perspective. Her writings reflect the expression of the agony and misery of love. Throughout her writings, it has been impossible to separate her figure from her writings. According to her, Christ's death is an incomprehensible act of love through which he had suffered such a shameful death on our behalf.<sup>80</sup> In her reflections, she does compare this expression of God's love through Jesus with the feminine imagery of "motherhood." In the same line of thought, Julian of Norwich also explains the redemptive motherhood of Christ.

### **The Motherhood of God**

In her book, *Showing of Love*, Julian of Norwich states, "In our making God almighty is our natural Father, and God All Wisdom is our natural Mother, with the love and the goodness of the Holy Spirit, which is all one God, one Lord."<sup>81</sup> She understands three ways of beholding the motherhood of God: the first is grounded in the making of our kind; the second is his taking our kind, and then begins the motherhood of grace; the third is the motherhood of working, and there begins his going forth, by the same grace, all the length and breadth, to every height and in all depths without end. And it is all of God's own love.<sup>82</sup> Julian expresses eloquently the working of God with us. She speaks of three properties working of the blessed Trinity: the property of fatherhood, the property of motherhood, and the property of the Lordship in one God. According to her,

In our Father Almighty we have our keeping and our bliss as regards our human substance, which is ours by our making without beginning. And in the Second Person, in wit and wisdom, we have our keeping as regards our sensuality, our restoring, and our

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<sup>80</sup> Juana Ines de la Cruz, *Juana Ines de la Cruz Selected Works*, ed. Anna More, trans. Edith Grossman (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 154.

<sup>81</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Showing of Love*, ed. and trans. Julia Bolton Holloway (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 87.

<sup>82</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Love*, 132.

saving: for he is our Mother, Brother, and Savior. And in our good Lord the Holy Spirit we have our rewarding and our recompense for our living and our labors, which will far exceed anything, we can desire, owing to his marvelous courtesy and his high plenteous grace.<sup>83</sup>

From this perspective, additionally, Julian develops the theme of Christ's Motherhood. Not only does he mother us as our "again-buyer" and Savior, but his working is also seen in our human experience of parenting. This was shown in those mysterious, rich words: "I it am that you love."

I it am: the might and the goodness of the Fatherhood.  
I it am: the wisdom of the Motherhood.  
I it am: the light and the grace that is all blessed Love.  
I it am: the Trinity.  
I it am: the Unity.  
I am the sovereign goodness of all manner of things.  
I am that makes you to love.  
I am that makes you to long.  
I it am: the endless fulfilling of all true desires.<sup>84</sup>

The above refrain "I it am" now repeats to tell the working of the Trinitarian God in mercy and grace. Since, Christ mothers us in kind by our first making and in grace by taking our flesh as his own, it is true to say that, even as rightly God is our Father, so is God rightly our Mother.

### **Christ's Motherhood**

According to Julian, the Savior is our true Mother in whom we are endlessly born yet we will never come out of him. He made humankind for love, and in the same love he wanted to become a human.<sup>85</sup> God is our endless home. He only made us for himself. Again Christ now remakes us by his blessed passion and always keeps us in his blessed love. That is to say the

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<sup>83</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Love*, 129.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

humankind fell by sin so wretchedly and so deeply that there was no other way to restore us than by him who made us. In other words, it is he who made human by his love, in the same love would restore humanity to the same bliss. Since Jesus Christ does good against evil, he is our true Mother. We have our being in him where the ground of motherhood begins, with all the sweet keeping of love that follows endlessly. In so far as Julian states that in the figure of Jesus Christ, sensuality and substance achieve perfect equilibrium.<sup>86</sup> The pain Jesus suffered by becoming sensual is equal to the love, without beginning, which caused him to fall with Adam. The Incarnation and Passion had to occur for the reformation of the sensual and substantial aspects of the soul to be possible, because it is only Jesus that was able to bear the pain of both in equal proportion to his love. Julian combines the image of equilibrium and reformation with the saving activity of Christ as “perfect-man.” She says, “For in that same time that God knitted him to our body in the Maiden’s womb he took our sensual soul. In this taking, having enclosed us within himself, he oned it to our substance and in his oneing became perfect man.”<sup>87</sup>

At this point, Julian describes this “perfect man” as our true Mother. She explains that the work of motherhood is exclusively Christ’s because he was joined to creaturely sensuality in order to restore personhood. Julian describes the mother’s service as “nearest, readiest and surest.”<sup>88</sup> These words assure Julian that the motherhood of Christ suffers for love and our bliss. This assurance is important for Julian because she recognizes that the human suffering caused by sin is the cause of Christ’s suffering. In the service of Christ’s motherhood, one is reminded of Julian’s conviction that the human condition is not blamed for sin. Christ does not blame the human condition for the sin that requires his suffering in the same way that a mother does not

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<sup>86</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Showing of Love*, 90.

<sup>87</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Love*, 127.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

blame a newborn child for the pains of labor. Julian combines these insights in a wonderful redemptive metaphor of gestation and birth:

We know that all our mothers bear us is to pain and to dying. And what is that? But our true Mother Jesus, he is all love, bears us to joy and to endless living, blessed must he be. Thus he sustains us within himself in love and travailed into the full time that he would suffer the sharpest throes, and the most grievous pains that ever were, or ever shall be, and died at last. And when he had done and so born us to bliss, yet might not all this make amends of his marvelous love.<sup>89</sup>

Our Mother works in diverse ways for us, so that our parts are held together. For in our Mother Christ we profit and increase as in mercy he reforms and restores us, while by the power of his passion and his death and rising, he ones us to our substance. And so our Mother works in such a merciful way with all his children, making them substantial and obedient.<sup>90</sup> I am sure it is true to say that Christ's motherhood is truly redemptive because the pain suffered for love alone eliminates any possibility of blame. With great precision, Julian assimilates the point of Christ's greatest suffering with the bliss into which redeemed personhood is born. According to her, it is the unchanging love of Christ's motherhood that reveals the mutability of our own attempts at loving.<sup>91</sup>

### **Metaphors and Its Modern Significance**

It is the fact that metaphors work within the cultures and traditions. Therefore, Christ's suffering assumes its modern significance depending on the perspective within which it is located. In the 21st century, women's experience of suffering is worldwide, such as the pain of labor and childbirth, suffering by the oppressive social situation and personal degradation because of gender. All these sufferings could be compared to the sufferings of Jesus on the Cross

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<sup>89</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Showing of Love*, 90.

<sup>90</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Love*, 130.

<sup>91</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Showing of Love*, 91.

symbolically. In this metaphorical comparison, undoubtedly, the suffering during women in labor bearing and birthing each new generation, is an inseparable mystery with a strong sense of creative power and joy. It is the fact that pain and joy hands together in the mystery of human birth. At the time of labor bearing, a mother willingly accepts this suffering for the greater cause of giving a new life to the child, which also brings greater joy to her. According to Elizabeth A. Johnson, women's experiences of suffering while attending labor and childbirth are inseparable. In these two instances women's suffering is the coin of creative advance.<sup>92</sup> The pain of childbirth is a wanted, successful pregnancy is accompanied by a powerful sense of creativity and issues in the joy that a new child, one's own, is born. This experience of labor and delivery offers a superb metaphor for Sophia-God's struggle to birth a new people, even a new heaven and a new earth.<sup>93</sup> In recent decades the same question about God and suffering has come to specific focus in contemporary feminist theology as it ponders the crucifixion.

### **Divine Suffering: A Self-Giving Love**

God is love (1 John 4:8). However, I would claim, God's love on the cross is his unconditional "self-giving love" to humanity. It is a giving of oneself to them and for them to receive. His love was an act upon them and an act to them. The self-giving of God in love is to take human cause upon himself. In pouring out his love upon humanity, God affirms humankind as loved one. God's love is his unconditional assertion that he is for humanity, on human's side.<sup>94</sup> Exploring the suffering of women and responding to that suffering do shape the language about

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<sup>92</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 254.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>94</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker, Milton Keynes (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 147.

God in the field of feminist theology. It makes divine mystery more religiously accessible in the midst of a disaster. However, his suffering needs to be deeply studied in the context of love to humanity. This may lead to further discussion as to whether God can love humanity without in some way entering into suffering? According to Johnson, Christ's suffering can be conceived of ontologically as an expression of divine being insofar as it is an "act" freely engaged as a consequence of care for others. Of course love includes the willing of the beloved. Hence, the personal analogy makes it possible to interpret divine suffering as Sophia-God's act of love freely overflowing in compassion.<sup>95</sup> In relation to insights of feminist theology, biblical scholars are pointing out that the root word for compassion in Hebrew is the same as the root word for woman's womb (*rhm*). It is to say that God has compassion on us is literally to say that God has womb-love for us and loves us the way a mother loves the child in her womb. Johnson underlines that this love is costly.<sup>96</sup>

For Johnson, the idea of God simply cannot remain unaffected by suffering and death. She believes that who is not in some way affected by such pain is not really worthy of human love and praise. A God who is simply a spectator at all of this suffering, who even "permits" it, falls short of the modicum of decency expected even at the human level.<sup>97</sup> Thus, God participates in the suffering of the world and overcomes from within through the power of love. Since love includes willingly the good of the beloved, it is the inconceivable power that gives life to the world. As Johnson quotes from Boff's *Passion of Christ – Passion of the Word*, "This is the manner of God's suffering: to suffer as the fruit of love and of the infinite capacity of love for

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<sup>95</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is*, 265.

<sup>96</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 117.

<sup>97</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She who is*, 249.



solidarity.<sup>98</sup> In other words, when human beings who God loves suffer, God is present with them, compassionately loving them through the suffering, desiring life for them, and acting to bring it about when human forces have played themselves out.<sup>99</sup>

In the line with Boff, Darby Kathleen Ray interprets atonement as the work of Jesus, “being for others,” especially in solidarity with others, and in the understanding of suffering as the fruit of love. According to her, in Jesus’ death, God’s compassion for those who suffer and God’s solidarity with victims is made undeniably clear.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, God indeed suffers out of love. According to Jürgen Moltmann, “It is out of love God freely choose to be affected by what affects others, so that when people sin and suffer this influences the divine being. In this view, God suffers not out of a deficiency of weakness in the divine nature, but out of the fullness of love.”<sup>101</sup> Hence, Moltmann argues very strongly that if God could not suffer in this way, then God would not be love. For, it is of the essence of love to be affected by what is happening to the one, who is loved, and to suffer or rejoice as a result. Thus, the symbol of divine suffering appears not as an imperfection but as the highest excellence of his love. Consequently the feminist theologians want to have not only a feminine image of God, but also a very dramatic one, conveying the idea of God’s suffering in labor to bring forth the new creation.<sup>102</sup> To sum it up, in the light of Christ’s suffering and of his degrading death on the Cross, which is metaphorically compared to “feminine imagery,” we can understand his great love and compassion toward people who are suffering for greater cause, specifically women who give new life to their own children.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>99</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, 115.

<sup>100</sup> Darby Kathleen Ray, *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1998), 92.

<sup>101</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, 120.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 117.

In accordance with Abelard, both, Juana de la Cruz and Julian of Norwich agree that God so loved the world, and thus, the love of God was revealed in Jesus' death on the Cross. In other words, God made humanity by his love and in the same way with this love he restored us to himself, who is full of love. Like Abelard, for both women theologians and 21st century feminist theologians, the suffering of Christ on the Cross is Christ's willful acceptance. Feminist theologians interpret this willful act into a mother's suffering in a labor. It is giving new life to the humanity that a mother gives life to the newborn. In short, the motherhood of Christ expresses the great sacrifice, dedication, suffering, and love of a mother to her child. Hence, it is true to say that Abelard's theory of the Cross as demonstration of God's love paved a way for further development of theologies, specifically feminist theology to interpret God's love in the perspective of motherhood. In other words, maternal imagery holds both theories together and provides us with a powerful symbol for Reconciliation.

On one hand, like Abelard while we experience God's love on the Cross, on the other hand like Juana, we need to interpret the suffering of Christ into the challenges of our lifetime, specifically in the social and historical situation, and vis-a-vis. It is identifying one's suffering with the suffering of Christ; or identifying one's broken-self with the broken world. It is reproducing the expression of the social oppression and agony and misery of love, in light of Christ's greatest suffering. In the same way, Julian's love, like Anselm's justice, is deeply situated in contemporary social understandings. Her redemptive theology also challenges us in any form of personal link with Christ's suffering for love. Thus, like a mother who is fulfilled in the happiness of her child, everyone needs to see the multifaceted value in others, to seek fulfillment in the love and happiness of others. Julian's desire for suffering as a means of unity with Christ leads us back to Christ's sufferings and prompts the question: was there reason to

suffer beyond the courtly considerations of a demonstration of great love? Such demonstrations would amount to an Abelardian example of love and so would tend in the direction of a moral influence theory. The metaphorical imagery of God, specifically the female imagery of God helps to understand the motherly nature of God. In addition, it explores the suitable meaning to the scriptural text, to wit: “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you (Isaiah 66:13).”

In my understanding, I believe, with related to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, this metaphorical description helps the sinner to understand and experience the unconditional love of God as a Mother. It is experiencing motherly love, which never punishes her child, rather always with open arms ready to embrace, to comfort, and to hug and kiss her child. As Julian says,

Mother may give her child to suck of her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus, he may feed us with himself. He does most courteously and most tenderly with the Blessed Sacrament of his body and blood. That is precious food of his very life and with all the sweet Sacraments he sustains us most mercifully and graciously. The mother may lay the child tenderly to her breast, but our tender Lord, Mother Jesus, he may homely lead us into his blessed breast by his sweet open side and show us therein part of the Godhead and the joys of heaven with ghostly secureness of endless bliss.<sup>103</sup>

Finally, God is Love, and thus his love has the power of response and responsibility. His love is relational, persuasive, connected, loving, playful and empowering. His compassionate love is an empowering power. As Julian states that for truly it is the most joy that may be, as to my sight, that he who is highest and mightiest, noblest and worthiest, is lowest and meekest, homeliest and, most courteous. And truly and surely this marvelous joy shall be shown us all when we see him.<sup>104</sup> Having been critically evaluated the above theories in the previous chapters, the next chapter addresses how the Sacrament of Reconciliation itself can be renewed through the atonement theology, which holds together Anselm, Abelard and feminist theology.

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<sup>103</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Showing of Love*, 90-91.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

## Chapter 4

### A Renewal of Sacrament of Reconciliation Through the Atonement Theology

“Theology should not be concerned simply with interpreting the past (no matter how momentous the events may have been) but it must also concern itself with transforming the present world,” says Jürgen Moltmann.<sup>105</sup> However, every theology is a matter of question and challenge for the believers in their specific situation. Though every theology has a universal significance, it is the fact that any understanding of faith has its roots in the particularity of the given situation. However, authentic universality does not consist in speaking precisely the same language of the Christian belief, but rather in achieving the full understanding within the setting of each Christian situation. This last half-century of development in the Christian understanding of faith in Christ, brings into clear view the fact that the Christian community is relocated in a living tradition. According to the need of different situations, culture and time, the tradition is being creatively responded to based on the new faith experiences of the community. Undoubtedly, the witness of generations who have lived before us has brought this faith community to this moment in its journey.

To underline this historical factor, Pope Francis in his homily on January 10, 2016, encouraged parents and grandparents to nurture the faith in the lives of their young children, because it is the greatest inheritance they can give.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, in turn, now modern young believers have the responsibility to understand critically their faith practices, personally and collectively as a faith community, so that faith in Jesus Christ may be passed on to the next

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<sup>105</sup> Michael Winter, *The Atonement*, 3.

<sup>106</sup> Pope Francis, January 10, 2016, 2016. “General Audience,” accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.ncregister.com/pope-to-parents-faith>.

generation in a truly living state. At this point, the theory of atonement Christ's suffering and death on the Cross needs to be reinterpreted in order to make them understand the true meaning of the salvific act of Christ in their living context. Therefore, the suffering and death of Christ is not only a past, datable and verifiable fact in the theological discipline, but also an ever-present reality to guide and determine the individual's life. In other words, the understanding of Jesus' death needs to move from an academic exercise into practical life. Cousar points out that for Karl Barth, our biblical debates and interpretation have to lessen the distance between the world of the text and the world in which we earn our living, educate our children, care for aging parents, and seek to function as responsible citizens.<sup>107</sup>

Accordingly, this section addresses how to reinterpret the crucified Christ for the life of the particular group of Catholic young people who are preparing to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, so that they can experience forgiveness and the love of God. It is to explain to them the effects of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the light of Christ's suffering as forgiveness of sins. This interpretation of "forgiveness" and "love" may help them to find the real meaning in following Christ who suffered and died on the Cross, and form the structure of their new lives in Christ. The brutal suffering and death of Jesus on the Cross, undoubtedly touches every aspect of the lives of the believers. The realities of suffering and pain deeply challenge the young person's faith. Likewise, theological reflection on Christ's death leads to questions of: Who am I? What is the meaning of true Christian life? What does Christ's death mean to me personally? What are the ethical challenges of the Cross? How can I be an instrument of God's love and forgiveness? How can I find true happiness, true peace and true love? In this light, the Sacrament of Reconciliation emphasizes forgiveness and the love of God

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<sup>107</sup> Charles B. Cousar, *Theology of the Cross*, 4.

as the fruit of the Sacrament. Thus, the death of Christ needs to be examined and reinterpreted in relation to the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a gift of love and forgiveness.

### **Sacrament of Reconciliation: God's Love and Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is the greatest gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The whole reason why Jesus came into this world as a man and suffered and died on the Cross was to give humanity “the gift of reconciliation” with his Father and with each other. His whole purpose was to heal the rift that had been caused by the sin of humanity. Since, Jesus’ goal was to offer love and forgiveness to the humanity, he wanted the entire humanity to have that amazing experience of being forgiven not just for a moment but also for all eternity. The penitent should experience through the Sacrament of Reconciliation God’s unconditional love, mercy and forgiveness, brought about by Jesus’ suffering and death on the Cross.

Atonement is a central doctrine of Christianity in so far as it proclaims and brings home to the heart of man the supreme Christian truth that God is love, and that love is the most precious thing in human life.<sup>108</sup> In atonement, God acted “in” and “through” the death of Christ to bring about reconciliation. The suffering and death of Christ on the Cross thus united the humanity with God. Likewise, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, through the merciful love and forgiveness of Christ, unites the sinner with God again. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we open ourselves up to God and the mysterious gift of God his forgiveness, mercy and love. According to *Lumen Gentium* 11, “Those who approach the Sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God’s mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled

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<sup>108</sup> Mathews, Shailer, “The Functional Value of Doctrines of the Atonement,” *The Journal of Religion* 1, no. 2 (March 1921): 147.

with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example and by prayer labors for their conversion.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, the sinner comes to this Sacrament to reconcile with the self, with God, and with the community. That is the primary effect of this Sacrament – receiving forgiveness from God, and reconciling with him and the community of believers.

Of course, forgiveness of sins is the fruit of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. From where and how does our faith lay on the mystery of this Sacrament? Undoubtedly, it is from the Sacrament of Initiation, the Baptism. The ceremony during the Sacrament of Baptism is the entry to the Christian faith. The Nicene Creed echoes the affirmation of belief in one baptism, particularly “for the forgiveness of sins.” It is in this way that God gives his forgiveness to those who seek it. At baptism all Christians were baptized in to the death of Jesus, as adults they appropriate it for themselves. Of course, in all the Sacraments the baptized person enjoys and experiences the love of God, specifically in the Sacrament of Reconciliation his love and forgiveness. As we explore these thoughts on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we might well reflect that the deepest spiritual joy each of us can sense is the freedom from whatever would separate us from God. It is the restoration of our friendship with a so loving and merciful God, a Father who receives each of us with all the forgiveness and love. Renewed, refreshed, and reconciled in this Sacrament, we who have sinned become a “new creation.” Once more we are made new. It is this newness of spirit and soul that I hope all of us experience in our life.

Though there are exceptional cases, all over the world it is an undeniable fact in the Catholic Church that the number of participants to the Sacrament of Reconciliation goes down in the recent times. Specifically among the young people it is very less. Therefore, it is the need of the hour to insist them the importance of the Sacrament and encourage them to participate in it

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<sup>109</sup> Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1987), 362.

regularly. In his *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Reconciliation and Penance"* Pope John Paul II emphasized the subject of reconciliation and invited to the Sacrament of Reconciliation the whole of humanity and every section and portion of the human community.<sup>110</sup> This may explore the question, what is the need of this document on the Sacrament of Reconciliation in our time? The reason is the loss of the sense of sin among the people of this generation. Hence, the Pope states that it is to make the Catholics to understand the progressive weakening of the sense of sin, precisely because of the crisis of conscience and crisis of the sense of God.<sup>111</sup> As he further underlines, the loss of sense of sin can disappear only through proper education to youth, in the mass media and even in education within the family.

Therefore, to speak of reconciliation and penance is for the young men and women of our time an invitation to rediscover their faith in Christ and in his redemptive suffering. It is also to accept the good news of love, of adoption as children of God and hence of community. Why does the church put forward once more this subject and this invitation? It is to help modern people to understand the contemporary world, to solve their puzzle and reveal their mystery, to discern the ferments of good and evil within them. It is also to all young men and women of upright conscience, be a means of purification, enrichment and deepening in personal faith.<sup>112</sup>

Therefore, for a Christian the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the primary way of obtaining forgiveness. Also a more frequent celebration of this Sacrament may fill us completely with the merciful love of God.

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<sup>110</sup> Pope John Paul II. 1978-2005. *Apostolic Exhortations* December 2, 1984. [http:// www.vatican.va/02121984-reconciliation-et-paenitentia.html](http://www.vatican.va/02121984-reconciliation-et-paenitentia.html), no. 6.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 100.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 17.



1. **Unchanging Love:** It is the unchanging love of Christ's motherhood that reveals in this Sacrament of Reconciliation. God as a Mother loves us endlessly. Through this Sacrament God finds the appropriate meaning to the scriptural text, in which he promised us, "As a mother comforts her son, so will I comfort you" (Is 66:13). Therefore, undoubtedly, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the sinner may experience the unconditional love of God.
2. **Loving Care and Protection:** As Julian describes the mother's service as nearest, readiest and surest, I believe, in this Sacrament Reconciliation God is near to us, to embrace us, ready to love us, and sure to forgive us. God as a loving mother always protects us, cares for us and walks beside us. This Sacrament assures Christ's blessings. As the blessing prayer reminds us, "May the Lord Jesus Christ our true Mother be amongst us, to defend us! Within us, to preserve us! Before us, to guide us! After us, to guard us! Above us to bless us!"
3. **Not Punishment, but Unconditional Love:** Again, it is experiencing motherly love, which never punishes her child, rather always with open arms ready to embrace, to comfort, and to hug and kiss her child. In addition, in this Sacrament of Reconciliation Christ does not blame the sinners for the sins committed, but rather willingly takes up their Cross (accepts their sins), and graciously forgives sinful human condition. Through this Sacrament of Reconciliation Christ offers new life to the penitent. It is the same way that a mother does not blame a newborn child for the pains of labor.
4. **Merciful Love and Willful Suffering:** In this Sacrament of Reconciliation, Christ our Mother, works in such a merciful way with all his (her) children, making them substantial

and obedient. The redemptive metaphor of motherhood of Christ challenges every penitent to love one another, and to willingly take up the Cross of his neighbors, in order to give new life to them from their suffering. As the penitent experiences the merciful love of God, so he or she needs to be an instrument of God's mercy and love.

Encountering Christ as a mother sacrifices herself totally for the betterment of her children. The penitent should sacrifice himself or herself completely for the betterment of the community, in which he or she shares the one faith in Christ.

5. **Fearless Love – Face to Face:** In this Sacrament of Reconciliation the penitent may sit with the Lord without any fear. It is like sitting with own mother in the family without fear. Today, the Catholic Church encourages the penitent to participate in this Sacrament face to face, in which we may encounter Christ our Mother fearlessly. Finally, it is the unchanging motherly love of God and Christ's motherhood that's being revealed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Therefore, the first and fundamental fact concerning the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the Lord's merciful love and forgiveness, which is revealed in the suffering of Christ on the Cross. Hence, to Catholic young people, who are not regular for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is the right time and a great opportunity to taste the motherly love of God and his forgiveness in this Sacrament. It is the wonderful visible sign to experience the forgiving love of an invisible God, who redeemed and reconciled us to himself in and through Christ's suffering and death. In seeking theological understanding of Jesus' suffering and death as a concrete foundation of Christian moral living, Anselm's satisfaction theory and Abelard's moral influence theory need to be critically viewed in the light of a modern situation. It is from this point of view that young people need to have a constructive thinking of Christ's suffering as related to the Sacrament of

Reconciliation. This interpretation of “forgiveness” and “love” may help them to find the real meaning in following Christ, who suffered and died on the Cross, and may form the structure of their new lives in Christ. In essence the young people by frequently participating, the Sacrament of Reconciliation serves them as a powerful leverage to keep them one with God and a means to avoid a near occasion of sin.

### **Crisis of Catholic Young People Today**

There are several aspects of the social and moral crisis among young people today. They face many distinct problems in this modern world. What are the biggest challenges facing Christian youngsters today? There certainly are many. I compiled a list from my experience over the last few years working with and counseling young people here in United States. Here’s what I came up with: **Spiritual crisis (ritual):** Personalizing/living out the faith, Living in an anti-Christian culture, forsaking God, **Personal (physical) crisis:** Sexual purity pressures, temptations to immorality, drugs, alcoholic beverages, lack of discipline (including bodily discipline), **Psychological crisis (relational):** Identity and self-image issues, dishonest, busyness and **Social crisis (relational):** Divorce and family issues, Negative media/social media influences, Materialism, lack of respect for authority

These are issues that youngsters have all dealt with to some extent at some time or another. These crisis most of the time will end up committing “sin” in the spiritual sense. As they mature and grow in their faith, they gain experience in battling them. Each age of life has its blessings. Youth is a time for preparing for future life. Unless they learn to handle today, it will be extremely difficult tomorrow. Life is to be lived and we are gifted, in Christ, to successfully live out. Because of these problems, too many youngsters build ceilings over themselves. At this

situation, they must be prepared socially, mentally, physically, and most important of all, spiritually. Of course, the Catholic Church is very much concerned about the spiritual welfare of young people. The good news is that with an upward shift of our perspective, off of our circumstances we will be presented with more opportunities, such as Sacraments, specifically Sacrament of Reconciliation in this regard.

### **The Problem of Sin and Sacramental Conversion**

There has been a decline in the sense of sin. Moreover, many Christians, especially young people, are reluctant to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation because, with repeated failures, the solution seems too easy, too hurried, too mechanical, a little like magic. On one hand, they raise many questions, such as should not the return to God cost something more? Should not sacramental conversion impinge more upon daily life? Is contrition really authentic when after only a few hours after receiving sacramental absolution the same or even worse sins are committed with their attendant guilt? And since many sins are against one's neighbor would it not be better simply to request pardon from one's neighbors and change one's attitude toward them rather than to settle the matter with God? On the other hand, if the Church confessor (priest) insists too much on guilt and sin, the penitents become anguished and anxious. They see in religious faith only heaviness, insupportable difficulties, not new impulses of life, not positive aspects, not love, not personal friendship and not paternal or maternal embrace. And thus it happens many will become discouraged and show signs of indifference and of rejection.

Therefore, in this esteem, how can we encourage youngsters to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation? How do we animate them to understand the importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation? How might love be experienced so that it can fully realize its

human and divine dimensions? How does it heal the broken “self” and help to reconcile self with God, self and other and body with the soul? In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, not only we receive God’s forgiveness, rather it is also an embodied, relational practice that can heal the profound separation that everyone has, specifically young people have today. With the healing power of God, the “self” enjoys the unconditional love from the motherhood of God. In addition, Christ is not in the metaphysical world, rather in the Sacrament of Reconciliation “in-person of Christ” he embraces us, touches us and blesses us. In relational aspect, the broken relationship is healed, reconciled with the divine. In the same way, from the status of stained, now the grace-filled soul gets reunified with the body. In the world of Internet age, young people are more estranged from in-person relationship. The relationship with “own self” and with “other people” is becoming more alienated. The practice of Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is enacted through the in-person interaction between the priest and the repentant, becomes a new way to heal the separation.

For such reasons, we need to urge young people to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation with a great confidence in God, sorrow for their sins, and to make firm decision to be faithful to Christ’s love and a more Christian life. In addition, the atonement of Christ, his suffering and death has to be remembered often. Thanks to the love and mercy of God, there is no sin too great to be forgiven; there will never be a sinner who is rejected. Every person who repents will be received with forgiveness and love by Jesus Christ. The Sacrament of Reconciliation has to be received as often as possible, because frequent confession helps us uproot bad habits. It renews our love for Christ in the face of our failures, and to have a more sensitive conscience. How shall the young secure their hearts, and guard their lives from sin? It is by following the Christ. Life in Christ is a wonderful life, full of purpose and meaning, blessings and benefits, with each day

being worthwhile and productive. May God help them to defeat the evils and bring glory to God in life.

## **Conclusion**

Calvary is full of mystery and contradiction, and our minds cannot fully cope with Christ on a Cross, yet there is a central message, and it is the message that Christ has reconciled the sinful humanity with God. Through his forgiving and suffering love, specifically by his divine will of reconciliation, this divine embrace has become proximate to every human life. Therefore, forever into God human being has been taken up and forever into human being divine being has entered. In other words, there is a total penetration, a full mutuality, and a total possibility of a complete relationship. That is, Creator and creatures are reconciled, but more than reconciled. They can now be joined in a way that was never before possible. In this divine reconciliation, can we compartmentalize his suffering and death in a constraint particular view? It may not, and should not. It has diversity of characters in its nature itself. In such a situation, can we conclude – Christ’s suffering and death is only for forgiveness of sins? Or can we say that is it only a demonstration of God’s love?

I would rather say that in the Cross both the love of God and forgiveness to humanity go hand in hand. They are inseparable in the suffering and death of Christ. We should take careful notice of the motive and the means of God’s redemption. It is God’s own steadfast love that moves his action to redeem the world and humanity in Christ. It is out of his abundant love for his creation and his creatures. To sum it up, in view of what Jesus did for us on the Cross, love is not an option that we may or may not accept, but a definite debt that we must pay. Hence, I would say that as a “God-Man,” Christ paid the required satisfaction in order to redeem humanity, but at the same time, his death on the Cross was also a more powerful affirmation of

the love of God for humanity. Therefore, Jesus' death on the Cross is both a satisfaction for our sins, and at the same time a demonstration of love, the pattern and an example to be followed. Christ's atonement served many other good purposes – including showing solidarity with humanity in the sufferings which he causes us to endure for good reasons, giving us an example of how to live, revealing to us important truths.

Finally, the theological understanding of Jesus' suffering and death is a concrete foundation of Christian moral living. In light of this, Anselm's satisfaction theory and Abelard's moral influence theory both offer a critical resolution to the young people in this modern situation. That is, "love and forgiveness" is the foundation of Christian moral living. This interpretation of "forgiveness" and "love" may help them to find the real meaning in following Christ, who suffered and died on the Cross. The constructive thinking of Christ's suffering as related to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, I believe, may help the young people to form the structure of their new lives in Christ. The brutal suffering and death of Jesus on the Cross, undoubtedly, touches every aspect of the lives of believers. Those who believe, specifically the young people are thereby animated to be a witnessing community in loving engagement with the modern world, through the power of Christ. It is in this sense, I suggest, that Christ's suffering love and forgiving love might be proclaimed and witnessed in this world. The God who revealed his love in Jesus Christ is the God who shows a particular concern for those in need, and that his children are called to translate love into action on behalf of the needy. I believe true love can only be with actions and in truth.

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### I. Primary Source:

**Abelard, Peter.** *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.* Translated by Stephen R.

**Cartwright.** Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011.

Peter Abelard is the proponent of the “moral influence” theory of atonement. This medieval commentary functions as an encyclopedia of Christian doctrine, most notably on redemption, grace, original sin, intention, faith and the Trinity. It also speaks additionally, the significance of “theology of love”, in which he states that Christ came primarily to show to us the depth of God’s love and thus to awaken in us the love that is required in return. In the second section of this commentary, he rejects ransom and satisfaction theories. Instead, he holds that to be righteous is to love God, and therefore he argues that what Christ did to save us is to get us to love God more. Christ’s death shows us the depth of God’s love, and this aims to enkindle love in us. It is not the case that God merely forgives on the basis of nothing; rather, our love of God is a precondition for God’s forgiveness. Thus, he concludes that our redemption is that “supreme love” in us through the Passion of Christ, which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but gains for us the true liberty of the sons of God, so that we may complete all things by his love. This text serves as one of the primary sources for my research, in particular to construct my argument that Jesus’ death on the cross is the demonstration of God’s love.

**Anselm. *Cur Deus Homo - Why God Became Man*. Translated by Joseph M. Colleran.**

**San Bernardino, CA: Beloved Publishing, 2014.**

Anselm's book *Cur Deus Homo - Why God Became Man*, is the longest sustained piece of argumentation about atonement. This is the single most important medieval text on the atonement, influencing many present-day undertakings. It is the classical work for the satisfaction theory of atonement, that God demands satisfaction for the outrage of our sins. The central question of the work is "By what logic or necessity did God become man?" This text as a dialogue between Anselm and a converser Boso, attempts to answer the question "Why God became man?" This work is divided into two books: In the first book, Anselm proves that humanity is in the position of needing to make satisfaction to God and that humanity is entirely incapable of doing so. Therefore he concludes that salvation by Christ is necessary possible. The second book resumes the argument, showing how only Christ could make atonement, and what sort of Christ had to be in order to make this atonement. For the majority of the book argues that we have a debt to pay and that is greater than we can pay, and so Christ pays it for us. Since this text has greater argumentation about atonement in general, and specifically about satisfaction theory, I could make use of this text considerably for my arguments. It is one of the major primary sources for my research; precisely to build my argument on Anselm's view of Jesus' death on the cross is a satisfaction for the sins of humanity.

**Finlan, Stephen. *Sacrifice and Atonement: Psychological Motives and Biblical Patterns*.**

**Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016.**

In this book Stephen discusses both the chronological and functional dimension of atonement. For him, Christian atonement is a paradoxical mixture of hope and fear. According to

him, the surface of atonement theology involves the love of God, but the underlying (unconscious) pattern involves coping with parental rage. In the first two chapters Stephen talks about the two main functions of sacrifice in the Old Testament, purification and compensation. For my research, the chapter four “Paulian understanding of atonement” serves greatly for the argument on Jesus’ death as a demonstration of God’s love. At the end, Stephen claims that we can certainly say that Christ died to demonstrate how God could triumph through nonviolence. It is a behavior of a nonviolent witness to the truth. According to him, Jesus died “for us” in the same sense that he taught “for us” – to reveal the truth about God, love and salvation. His death was a part of his continuous revelation of God.

**Johnson, Junius. *Patristic and Medieval Atonement Theory: A Guide to Research*. Lanham,**

**MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1912.**

Johnson aims to explain how the doctrine of atonement functions in Christian theology in general. He discusses the important differences between our concepts and values, and certain ideas about Christology. He also describes the certain major moments in the development of doctrine and explains as clearly and concisely as possible. Johnson made an attempt to discuss conceptual and contextual issues of the particular theories such as, ransom, sacrifice, redemption, reconciliation, victory, deliverance, adoption, and so on. There is a series of essays on each author such as, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine of Hippo, Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas and Julian of Norwich. It also gives a very brief survey of the New Testament record that offers to the doctrine of atonement. It serves as one of the primary sources for my research to discuss with the different understanding of atonement theories in the Early and Medieval Periods.

**Synder Belousek, Darrin W. *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and The Mission of the Church*. Michigan, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing**

**Company, 2012.**

W. Darrin's book provides the biblical theology of the cross with a view toward the mission of the gospel of the Church in the world. This book addresses itself primarily to Protestant Christianity; however, the author seriously intends to be both evangelical and authentically ecumenical. He aims to reframe our thinking about the message of the cross within the biblical story of redemption, critiquing the popular theology of the cross. He engages dialogue with ancient and medieval Christian sources, including Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, as well as contemporary theologians, including Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann. The second part of the book, "Christ Dies for Us: The Cross, Atonement, and Substitution" elaborately discusses the "Penal Substitution view" (in chapter-8), and the meaning and notion of "ransom" (in chapter-9). This section of the book strengthens my arguments especially to discuss the manner in which the forgiveness of human sins is related to the death of Christ on the cross.

**Winter, Michael. *The Atonement: Problems in Theology*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995.**

Winter's book is an attempt at a constructive account of the atonement. With the help of the Scripture and tradition, he wants to give the modern readers a clear account of how exactly human race was reconciled to God the Father. He takes it as settled that all Anselmian understandings are off the table for contemporary thought and offers his analysis as an attempt at

a different paradigm. In this discussion, the constructive account of his proposal owes much to liberation understandings of sin and what humans need from God. In this light of discussion, Winter argues that the brief examination of the New Testament evidence indicates the death of Jesus as a sacrifice, and it has a causal role in the atonement. In chapter three and four, he offers a consideration of the patristic and medieval discussions. The chapter five describes Christ as the intercessor for the human race, who is competent to act as our spokesman, seeking reconciliation with God on behalf of all mankind. Thus he concludes the basic reconciliation established by Jesus remains for individuals to respond to the offers of grace, and take up their lives pattern according to the will of God. These reflections of Winter is of great help to construct theological arguments on the reciprocal act of the individual in response to the death of Christ on the cross.

## **II. Secondary Source: Books**

**Baker, Mark D., and Joel B. Green. *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in***

***New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP**

**Academic, 2011.**

My conversation with this book clarifies my understanding of the atonement in New Testament and contemporary contexts. While examine the extended arguments against a penal substitution theory of atonement, the authors do focus entirely in conversation with the whole history of theological reflection on the topic. The first four chapters of the book speak about the variety of images and language used to describe the atonement in the New Testament. In particular, chapter four explains the saving significance of Jesus' Death. In chapters-5 and 6, the authors discuss on the historical theories of atonement including, such as incarnational,

satisfaction, moral influence, dramatic, governmental, mimetic, ransom, penal substitution and so on. It is to explain, how the Christian theologians interpreted the atonement in and for their own days. At the end, the authors recommend that an atonement theory that is not multifaceted is not a good reflection of the biblical source material. This book also examines the relevance of the New Testament understanding of the atonement today; for example, the association of liberation with violent and unjust death of Jesus on the cross. The authors also argue that the cross is the revelation of God's love expressed through Jesus' shameful death on the cross. This book supports to discuss constructively both the argument of Jesus' death as satisfaction for sins and expression of God's love.

**Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology*. New York, NY:**

**The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990.**

Elizabeth Johnson argues logically and chronologically through the various "waves of renewal" that have affected our understanding of Jesus Christ. As a result, in the last five chapters she addresses the new understanding of Christology, specifically in the light of Jesus Christ and justice, liberation Christology and feminist Christology. In the chapter "God and Cross" she also explains the sufferings of Jesus in comparison with the expression of motherly love. She states that God has "womb-love" for us and loves us the way a mother loves the child in her womb. It is not only a feminine image of God, but conveying the idea of God suffering in labor to bring forth the new creation. In her reflection she strongly argues that a God who is not affected by this in some way, is a God not really worthy of our love. Johnson's reflection on Jesus' suffering on the cross as compassion and love of God revealed in Jesus is a significant thought in the field of feminist theology. It adds strength to my argument to claim Jesus's death as a demonstration of God's love, precisely to discuss the love of God in feminist perspective.



-----*. She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse. New York,*

**NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993.**

In this book Elizabeth Johnson aims to present a bridge between classical theology and feminist theology. In doing so, he gives solid arguments by using women's experience and female imagery to describe the Christian experience of God. She also shows in countless ways how feminist language about God belongs in our preaching and worship. Significantly, the twelfth chapter "Suffering God: Compassion Poured Out" explains the female metaphors, divine suffering and divine power. While speaking about God's suffering, Elizabeth Johnson states as the pain of childbirth in a wanted, successful pregnancy for the joy at the birth of the new child, so Christ's redemptive suffering is for the betterment of his people. In view of this fact, she states that God is a woman in the labor of childbirth; and God is a woman courageously engaged on behalf of justice. Therefore, according to her the approach of God's suffering is to suffer as the fruit of love and of the infinite capacity of love for solidarity. Hence, the suffering of God on the cross signifies the power of suffering love to resist and create anew. This book is of a great help to understand the suffering and compassionate love of God from feminist perspective.

**Kathleen Ray, Darby. *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom. Cleveland,***

**OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1998.**

The question of how God works in the world to confront evil is *the* question at the heart of this book. Darby Kathleen Ray, as the feminist theologian discusses atonement from below. She aims to present how God in Christ rejects the tools of evil, but without glorifying passivity or suffering. She provides a narrative about the saving work of Christ that speak to the concerns

of contemporary feminist and liberation theologians about the reality and scope of human evil. For her, God is God of life and justice; He desires fullness of being for all. However, God's affirmation of life can and does occur even in death, even in experience of suffering and injustice. In the line of Boff, she interprets atonement as the work of Jesus "being for others", especially in solidarity with others, and in understanding of suffering as the fruit of love. According to her, in Jesus's death, God's compassion for those who suffer and God's solidarity with victims is made undeniably clear. At the end, she strongly claims that Jesus' suffering and death is a part of God's salvific response to evil. This book supports to discuss Jesus' death from feminist and liberationist perspectives.

**Cruz, Sor Juana Ines De La. *The Answer*. Translated by Electa Arenal and Amanda**

**Powell. New York: The Feminist Press, 2009.**

Juana de la Cruz (1648-1695), one of the most reflective Spanish writers compares the suffering of Christ to a woman giving birth. Her religious writings and spirituality has led to a more nuanced appreciation of her significance not only as a poet and rationalist thinker but also as a theologian. The values and emphases of a modern secular feminism are the major features of her work. She uses the 'maternal imagery' to express Christ's love. She says that Christ gave birth to us all with very great pains and torments at the time of his cruel and bitter passion. Juana's reflection includes an elaborate discussion on feminine perspectives. Her reflection on the passion of Christ is notable in several respects; particularly, her explicit use of "feminine image" to unlock its theological significance. For Juana, the pain and sorrow that Christ suffered on the cross was to give life to the children of God. For her, it is a relationship of love. She looks at the sufferings of Jesus with feminine lense. She is reframing the "suffering" and "love" as a powerful affirmation of the love of God for humanity. Juana's reflection of feminine way of

conceiving the love of God for humanity gave rise to faith in individuals, as they respond to God's love. It supports me to have discussion on God's love in feminine perspective.

-----.*Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz Selected Works. Edited by Anna More. Translated by Edith Grossman. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016.*

In this selected works of the Mexican poet and nun Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz interprets the challenges of her lifetime, in particular examines the social and historical context from feminist perspective. In her writings, the first person adjective "I" indicates the female authorship and the feminine voice of the poet. They all set the feminine quest for knowledge and their equal continuum with the masculine. Her writing, the "*First Dream*" is a philosophically and theologically sophisticated account of the human desire for knowledge. It is of a journey of the soul in search of absolute knowledge. Most of her writings reflect the expression of the agony and miserable of love. Throughout her writings it has been impossible to separate her figure from her writings. While writing about Jesus' death, she states that it is incomprehensible act of love through which Christ had suffered such a shameful death on our behalf. In her reflections, she does compare this expression of God's love through Jesus with the feminine imagery of "motherhood".

### **III. Secondary Source: Articles**

**Aspenson, Steven S. "In Defense of Anselm." *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (January 1990): 33-45.**

In this article Steven S. Aspenson aims to defend Anselm's account of the atonement, his satisfaction theory presented in *Cur Deus Homo*. He argues from the objections of Jasper

Hopkins, Philip L. Quinn and Duns Scotus. Steven explicitly discusses the two components of satisfaction, such as 1) restoring the original condition or fulfilling the original obligation, and 2) something of appropriate value, in addition to the fulfillment of, not justly required before the offense. He also focuses his arguments on the requirement of a God-Man; even if Christ, a God-Man owes nothing due to personal moral guilt, necessary for accomplishing God's goals. He examines the societal debt that exists due to Adam's race not supplying the indicator, and personal debts, which exist due to personal disobedience by individuals who establish the societal debt and the personal debt. At this point, Steven argues, only Christ who has the two natures can rectify man's relation to God. Since Christ meets the requirements of justice, his chosen reward is that God forgive those qualified. Thus, he concludes that satisfaction to God and forgiveness of sinners could be only by a God-Man, Christ. This article explains critically Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, which is a great source to construct my arguments on Jesus' death is satisfaction for the sins.

**Burton, Ernest De Witt. "The Biblical Doctrine of Atonement: X. Atonement in the Teaching of Paul." *The Biblical World* 32, no.4 (October 1908): 252-261.**

Ernest De Witt Burton argues that Paul's understanding of the death of Jesus is a disclosure and demonstration of God's love for men. He states that in the death of Jesus, the apostle sees the supreme expression of the love of Christ. As a result, Paul keeps this thought as the basis of his preaching; that God loves men, even sinful men, his enemies, as the death of Christ shows that he does love them. Earnest also discusses Paulian understanding of universal significance of Jesus' death; it sets forth to men the ideal of their own life and appeals to them, moved by its manifestation of his love, to reproduce it in themselves. In the later part of this article, Earnest presents other thoughts of Paul on Jesus' Cross and death, such as act of

profound moral significance (Rom. 6:10), its cosmic significance of reconciling to him all things in heaven and earth (Col. 1:20), of his righteous hostility to sin (Rom. 3:25), of his love (Rom. 5:8), a ransom for all (Col. 1:21), and forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7). He concludes that God the Father, because of the love wherewith he loves us, deliver us out of the power of darkness and translate us into the kingdom of the Son of his love. This article supports to discuss Jesus' death as demonstration of God's love.

**Evans, Michael. "A Prologue to a Theology of the Atonement." *Wiley* 77, no. 903 (April 1996): 182-189.**

In this article Michael Evans provides a clear concise, and fascinating very detailed accounts of the different interpretations of the saving power of Christ's death. He presents the several theories of atonement: forgiveness of sin, victory over evil and total liberation from everything that oppresses us, renewing God's image and likeness deep within us, eternity as a real sharing in the inner life of God, restoring humanity and the whole of creation here and now. With the simple message of "God's love" on 'John 3.16', he draws our attention to the heart of God's good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. That is, God's own Son became a human being, died a human death on the cross and was raised from the dead "for us and for our salvation". He describes the meaning of "atonement" as "reconciliation". He states that God became at one with us so that we might become truly at one with him, and with one another and all creation in him. While explaining the deepest, richest and ultimate meaning of 'save' and 'salvation', Evans clarifies each with its own nuance of meanings, such as 'redemption', 'justification', 'liberation', and 'divinization.' He also discusses the basic questions about how we are saved, who can be saved and what it means to be saved. This article helps to find answer to the above stated questions in order to strengthen my theological arguments with various atonement theories.

**Leftow, Brian. “Anselm on the Necessity of the Incarnation.” *Religious Studies* 31, no. 3**

**(June 1995): 167-185.**

Brian Leftow aims to discuss Anselm’s questions, why was God unable to save humanity in any other way. If he was able, why did he will to save humanity in this way? As a result, Brian argues first that features of Anselm’s concept of God and treatment of necessity make the very claim the incarnation and atonement is a “necessary” means of salvation problematic. He shows that for Anselm all conditions, which make incarnation and atonement in any sense necessary for human salvation, stem solely from God’s nature and prior choice. Thus, he concludes that incarnation and atonement’s being necessary for our salvation is compatible with the possibility of other means of salvation and with God’s being fully able to have used those other means. In the last section of this article, he also discusses the similarity of thinking in this case by Anselm and Aquinas. For my research, this article clarifies the necessity of Jesus suffering on the cross.

**Martin, John J. “The Nature of the Atonement.” *The American Journal of Theology* 14, no.**

**3 (July 1910): 382-405.**

This article speaks about the nature of atonement, specifically the two main courses that the doctrine of atonement has taken in the history. John Martin gives a comparative study between Anselm’s objective theory and Abelard’s subjective theory. Expressing atonement is not a definition or doctrinal formula, Martin holds the idea that it is a spiritual fact and principle. According to him, it is the great central fact of Christian experience, and experience being what it is. He discusses the question of Anselm, why God in man? He explains that Jesus disclosed his kinship with the heavenly Father, unfolded the creatively mutual relation between the will of

man and the will of God, and conceived it as his supreme task to remove every obstacle, which prevented a perfect correspondence between the two. Thus, he says that the function of the atonement is to bring us to God, neither to save us from hell nor to bring us to heaven. Therefore, for him, the atonement is not man's, but God's task. He also speaks about the need of atonement. Hence, it is to emancipate, to organize and to augment the lives of men. It is also to reconcile with the world-order in which he lives. He strongly emphasizes that man must know that God loves him better than himself. Therefore, God answers through the cross to the cry that rises out of the depths of the human soul. The death of Christ on the cross expresses in time the timeless and ever-present urgency of God's love. Finally, according to him, the atonement of Christ is the urgent of God's love, or God's nature, or God's Spirit, pressing upon the individual lives of men through a variety of agencies, but especially through the Church, and ordained of God to make men what they were predestined to become in relation to himself and one another. This article helps to have comparative study on both the theories.

**Mathews, Shailer. "The Functional Value of Doctrines of the Atonement." *The Journal of***

***Religion* 1, no. 2 (March 1921): 146-159.**

Shailer Mathews' article focuses on the volume of Dean Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (1915). This entire article discusses Dean Rashdall's interest in finding an interpretation of the death of Christ, which shall be acceptable to modern thinkers. In the light of Dean's understanding of atonement based on the view of Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard, Shailer states atonement the very central doctrine of Christianity proclaims the supreme Christian truth that God is love; and it is an answer to the need of moral justification of God's gracious act. He also examines the New Testament exposition of the death of Christ, such as Jesus as sacrificial, Christ as the Passover, God's act as moral, Christ's death as a ransom and

men receiving a new life in Christ – the sacrificial gift, reconciliation and forgiveness. From this point of view, for Shailer, a moral influence theory is good as far as it goes, but no doctrine of the atonement is likely to function in our world, which does not integrate the divine forgiveness with our best moral practices. This article serves to find common elements between Anselm and Peter Abelard in their interpretation of death of Christ, as to conclude in Shailer’s terms that the death of Christ on the cross shows the “forgiving love of God”.

**Miller, Kevin E. “Giving the Devil His Due?: St. Anselm on Justice and Satisfaction.” *New Blackfriars* 78, no. 914 (April 1997): 178-186.**

In this article Kevin E. Miller addresses the question of the meaning of salvation and the need for Christ as savior. He argues in the light of Anselm’s *Cue Deus Homo*. Kevin goes on to detail discussion; as a result he states that Anselm must clarify what is meant by salvation. He argues that without knowing this, we could not know weather salvation could be brought only by Christ. Therefore, Kevin aims to examine these questions with regard to the relationship between salvation and our deliverance from the evil. Also, he argues that Anselm’s rejection of the idea that our salvation requires payment of a ransom to the devil has to obscure. As a result, Kevin explains in what respect has God shown mercy? According to him Anselm’s own examination of the justice of satisfaction involves a qualified acceptance of the notion that something is due the devil, as a matter of justice, as part of our redemption from his grasp. This article helps to understand why there must be human involvement in the act of redemption and a God-Man must redeem us. Also it clarifies how only Christ can make this satisfaction, and will proceed to show in what way man is saved through Christ, the God-Man.



**Padilla, René. "A Meditation on 1 John 3:16-18." *Transformation* 6, no. 1 (1989): 15-18.**

C. Rene Padilla's article describes God's love in Jesus Christ. He says that Jesus' death is a demonstration of love and at the same time a pattern, an example to be followed. According to him, the measure of God's love is nothing less than giving of his Son to die for us sinners. If God did not spare even his own Son for us but gave him up for us, nothing can be too much for him to give us in order to accomplish his purpose in us and through us. For him, the love of God was revealed in Jesus' death on the cross. Therefore, the love with which we respond to his love is certainly to be put in practice with in the Christian community, and not only with in it but also beyond it. According to him, the God who revealed his love in Jesus Christ is the God who throughout the Scripture shows a particular concern for those in need, and that his children are called to translate love into action on behalf of the needy. For him, Christ's death on the cross has an ethical value. It has to do with God's infinite love manifest in his Son, but also with the love that he demands from us as his children. It is a close connection between what God in Christ has done for us and what he expects of us in response to his love. It strengthens my argument to state that Jesus' death on the cross is a demonstration of God's love.

**Swinburne, Richard. "Christ's Atoning Sacrofoce." *Archivio di Filosofia* 76, no. 1/2**

**(2008): 81-87.**

In this article Richard Swinburne aims to present how one person can provide atonement for the sins of another. Given certain Christian doctrinal and historical claims Richard does provide atonement for human sins. He interprets the death of Christ from New Testament perspective, in particular the account given in the Letter to the Hebrews of Christ's death as Christ's voluntary sacrifice. Richard goes on to detail explanation on the four components of

atonement – repentance, apology, reparation and penance. While discussing what would be a proper reparation for us to offer to God, he states that ordinary humans are in no good position to make atonement for our sins. Therefore, in line of Anselm’s thought, he claims that only Jesus Christ could provide the atonement. Thus, he concludes Christ’s passion was a true sacrifice; that is, Christ’s death as an effective sacrifice, which achieved what the sacrifices in the Jewish temple could not. He holds that Christ’s life ending in his death was God’s glorious voluntary act designed to help us to deal with our guilt. So, he gives a theory of how Christ’s act made it possible for the guilt of our sins to be removed. This article serves to construct my argument that Jesus’ death on the cross as satisfaction for our sins.

**Johnson, Elizabeth A. “Jesus and Salvation.” *Catholic Theological Society of America:***

***Proceedings* 49 (1994): 1-18.**

Elizabeth A Johnson’s article elaborately discusses the question, how are we to understand the relation between Jesus and salvation. More precisely, she explains how in the light of historical consciousness we are to understand Jesus as the concrete foundation of salvation coming from God. While quoting Tertullian’s satisfaction theory and Augustine’s sacrificial theory, she also argues the eleventh century biblical and patristic interpretations of Jesus and salvation. She explores Anselm’s brilliant reconstructing of the satisfaction theory, stating that God became human being and died to pay back what was due to the honor of God offended by sin. While unveiling the severe criticism on the satisfaction theory in the recent years, she strongly expresses that salvation refers not only to the eschatological reality of heaven but also to *this* world. She calls for reconstruction of the doctrine of salvation pertain also to political, social, economic, and cultural structures. Discussing how the story of Jesus continues to be used in non-redemptive ways against women, Elizabeth Johnson applies the gender

analysis and in particular the oppression of sexism. She opens the path for the restoration of harmony, justice, and equality to all human relationships everywhere. This article helps to understand how God not only relates to the suffering and death of Jesus, but also to the suffering of his people. It enlightens my understanding of God entering into solidarity with suffering people in order to bring hope of new life. To explain the young adults about the salvation by Christ, Johnson's article provides a practical framework for recognizing how Jesus is the concrete foundation of salvation.