A Theological Appraisal of the Recapitulation and Ransom Theories of Atonement

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ABSTRACT

The patristic era represents the formative period of Christian theology. As such, this period witnessed remarkable theological immaturity and complexity. One theological issue that attracted much attention in this period was atonement. Patristic scholars, in an attempt to build on the apostolic tradition, expressed varied interpretations of Christ's death on the cross. Among the different patristic interpretations, Iranaeus' recapitulation and Origen's ransom theories of atonement became the most outstanding. The recapitulation theory emphasizes the restoration of the human race to their divine-given status. The ransom theory, on the other hand, stresses the transactional dimension of the atonement which resulted in the defeat of Satan. This paper critically examines these two theories using data gathered from books, journal articles, and dissertations, among other sources. The paper concluded that, though the recapitulation and ransom interpretations of the atonement are ancient theories, they are still relevant to the overall contemporary understanding of Christian soteriology. The findings from the paper will not only contribute to modern soteriological discourses but will also help readers to avoid some pitfalls that characterize the two interpretations discussed.

Keywords: *Atonement, Christ, Christians, Patristic, Ransom, Recapitulation*

INTRODUCTION

In church history, the patristic era refers to the period from the close of the first century to the middle of the fifth century. The patristic era represents the formative period for Christian theology and hence, it was characterized by theological immaturity and complexity in areas such as Christology (the study of the person and works of Christ), soteriology (the doctrine of salvation), eschatology (the doctrine of last things), and others. For example, Christological heresies featured prominently in this period as the church attempted to answer the question of the actual identity of Christ. Key heresies included Ebionism, the idea that Christ is solely human; Docetism, the belief that Christ was only divine, but not a real human; Gnosticism, the belief that spiritual things are good but material things are evil and therefore, incarnation is not possible; and Marcionism which held that Jesus' body was phantasmal (unreal or illusory).[1] In response to these heresies, apologists rose to contend that Christ is truly God and truly human. Some of these apologists include Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165 CE), Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 140–202 CE) and Origen Adamantius (ca. 185-254 CE).[2]

The early church struggled with soteriology. Patristic scholars, in an attempt to build on apostolic tradition, expressed varied interpretations of Christ's death on the cross. Patristic writers described the

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[1]   Marcionism rejected the Old Testament and denied the incarnation of God in Jesus as a human..
[2]   John D. K. Ekem, *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2005), 7.

process of salvation using the collective expression "economy of salvation" (*oikonomia tes soterias*), the term "economy" denoting "the active dynamic of God's work to rescue the world and achieve humanity's restoration to God's favour and the concomitant graces of immortality and divine communion."[3] The concept of God as Saviour was expressed in a more organic form using various poetic and biblical images. As this paper demonstrates later, the use of imagery in theological formulations became an important aspect of the patristic interpretation of atonement.

The doctrine of atonement gained prominence in patristic theological discourses because of the central place it has in Christian theology. According to John Anthony McGuckin, the term "atonement" in the modern sense refers to "a wide variety of patristic images and theories about the efficacy of the salvation brought to the world by Christ."[4] This means that modern understanding of atonement cannot be adequate without considering what the patristic church said about it. This, however, does not mean that the patristic era has the most orderly, orthodox and systematic doctrines of the Christian faith. On the contrary, the patristic era was a period when the church built on the apostolic tradition to formulate theology for the church. Patristic theology is therefore not free from theological immaturity and inaccuracies. The modern theologian needs to study patristic theology not only because this period offers a great wealth of orthodox Christian doctrine, but also because patristic theology can be used as a springboard for further theological explorations.

Although different views about the atonement were expressed by patristic scholars, two interpretations became the most influential; they are the recapitulation theory and the ransom theory espoused by Irenaeus of Lyons and Origen Adamantius respectively. This paper examines these two interpretations using information gathered from books, journal articles, and dissertations, among other sources. After a brief presentation of the historical antecedent to these theories, the paper presents each doctrine and then critiques them.

Historical Antecedent

The theological understanding of the early church concerning the atonement of Christ was based on the church's understanding of the work of Jesus Christ and was referenced against the Old Testament sacrificial system. As a result, Jesus's death on the cross was linked to the sacrificial lamb that was slaughtered during the Jewish Passover feast (Exod. 12; 1 Cor. 5:7; cf. John 1:29). Few patristic scholars who gave various interpretations of the death of Christ can be noted and examined. One of the earliest Christian writers in the period immediately following the New Testament era was Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 35-108 CE), who was a student of John the Apostle.[5] The theology of Ignatius was developed in the context of his opposition to Gnosticism and Docetism. These are two heretic[6] schools of thought embraced not only the pagan dualism (that is, the idea that Satan is the evil opposite of a good God, and that the two are equal in power) but also argue that the spirit is good, and the flesh is evil.[7] Ignatius argued that Christ possessed both flesh and spirit; he was God existing in flesh, and by his suffering and death God achieved human redemption.[8]

Patristic scholars also described the atonement in substitutionary terms. Clement of Rome (ca. 30-100 CE) described Christ's death as a substitutionary death that demonstrates the love that the Father and the Son have for humanity.[9] Polycarp (ca. 69-155 CE) also referred to the substitutionary dimension of the atonement in stating that Christ "took up our sins in his own body upon the tree."[10] Justin Martyr (100-165

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[3]   John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 36.

[4]   McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, 36.

[5]   E. D. Andrews, *From Spoke Words to Sacred Texts: Introduction-Intermediate to New Testament Textual Studies* (Cambridge: Christian Publishing House, 2020), 340.

[6]   The word heresy from which "heretic" is derived, means a belief that contradicts orthodox Christian belief.

[7]   John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 151.

[8]   Apostle Horn, *The Epistles of Ignatius: Early Church Fathers Series* (Morrisville, North Carolina: Lulu Press, 2020), 15.

[9]   Ekem, *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting,* 5; Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), np; Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 453.

[10]   Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 453.

CE) argued that Jesus took upon himself the curse that Adam's sin placed upon humanity.[11] According to Justin, Christ experienced the curse of the human race, because "the Father of the Universe willed that his Christ should shoulder the curses of the whole human race, fully realizing that he would raise him again after his crucifixion and death."[12] No longer do humans look to the mere shadows of animal sacrifices, "but by faith through the blood and the death of Christ who suffered death for this precise purpose."[13] Another patristic interpreter of the atonement was Melito of Sardis (died ca. 180 CE). Melito interpreted the atonement in terms of sacrifice, and thus commented on Abraham's attempt to sacrifice Isaac as follows: "In place of Isaac the just, a ram appeared for slaughter, in order that Isaac might be liberated from his bonds. The slaughter of this animal redeemed Isaac from death. In like manner, the Lord, being slain, saved us; being bound, he loosed [freed] us; being sacrificed, he redeemed us."[14] Clearly, the substitutionary view of the atonement was common among the early Church Fathers. However, this interpretation was not well formulated until the time of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation when Protestant scholars developed and popularized it.

With this background, the paper now proceeds to consider the recapitulation and ransom theories of atonement in the sections that follow. These two theories are considered in this paper because they are the only two patristic interpretations of the atonement that exerted great influence on the patristic era and other epochs of church history.

The Recapitulation Theory

Writing about hundred years after the apostolic period, Irenaeus of Lyons became the first to articulate a complete theory of the atonement, the recapitulation theory.[15] His recapitulation theory - which is his most original contribution to Christian theology— is therefore the earliest identified atonement theory within historic Christianity. Born probably in Smyrna (near Ephesus, in what is now western Turkey), Irenaeus was a very brilliant "irenic" leader, thinker and by far the most outstanding Christian scholar of the second century.[16] Irenaeus was one of the early Fathers who opposed Gnosticism.

The English word "recapitulation" comes from the Latin *recapitulatio*, an ancient rhetoric term used to signify "the end of a speech when the speaker drives home the point with a summary of the strongest arguments."[17] Literally, it means "re-heading", or "providing a new head" in the sense of providing a new source, and it is therefore used to indicate "final repetition," "summing up," "drawing to a conclusion."[18] McGuckin noted that patristic interest in recapitulation "derived from a Christological starting point that envisaged the incarnational soteriology as a cosmic mystery of the summation of time and created destiny (2 Cor. 5:17-18)."[19] Irenaeus took over the classical meaning of *recapitulatio* and then added layers of historical and ontological significance arguing that Christ is not only God's "summary statement" but also "the logic or purpose in and through which the whole divine economy is conceived and implemented."[20] In Christ, God expressed his ultimate and conclusive argument, bringing together the logic and purpose of all things that had been divinely ordained beforehand.

A good starting point for the discussion of the recapitulation theory is Irenaeus' harmatiology (doctrine of sin). Irenaeus considered the story of Adam and Eve as a direct parallel to the story of Jesus. He maintained that Adam and Eve were created as infants and were set to grow into adulthood just as Jesus

[11] Robert Jewett, *Commentary on Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 247.

[12] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho: Selections from the Fathers of the Church,* Vol. 3 edited by M. Slusser (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 146.

[13] Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 22.

[14] Melito cited in Jewett, *Commentary on Romans,* 759.

[15] J.D. Laing, *Middle Knowledge: Human Freedom in Divine Sovereignty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2018), np.

[16] H. A. Snyder, "John Wesley, Irenaeus, and Christian Mission: Rethinking Western Christian Theology," *The Asbury Journal* 73(1) (2018):138-159, 141. [Accessed online, on 15/5/2020, from DOI:10.7252/Journal.01.2018S.07].

[17] John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2014), 38.

[18] O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 38; McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology,* 289.

[19] McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology,* 289.

[20] O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 38.

was born as a baby in Bethlehem.[21] His view on "being infants" is literal rather than Paul's or Peter's use of this expression in the spiritual sense in reference to the infancy of new believers (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:2).[22] As infants, they could not grasp their full humanity, their full potential or their full perfection. For this reason, God created them as imperfect beings who were to grow into perfection. Irenaeus wrote, "God had power at the beginning to grant perfection to man; but as the latter was only recently created, he could not possibly have received it, or even if he had received it, could he have contained it, or containing it, could he have retained it."[23] God created them in a state of immaturity so that by growing they could become more human and consequently, become mature. Irenaeus wrote: "Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord."[24] It was at their mature state that Adam and Eve were going to have access to both the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.[25] God therefore had the intention of eventually making humans immortal, though not through the rebellious way that Adam used in his attempt to become immortal. Thus, according to Irenaeus, the Fall is a mistake about means more than ends, "impatience rather than pride."[26]

That is, "in their effort to take the divine life early, human beings render themselves unfit for participation in it because the divine life is essentially only receivable. It proves elusive to all clutching, clinging, and clasping."[27] Because of impatience, Adam and Eve could not wait to be given a share in the divine nature; they hastily attempted to take it for themselves. For Irenaeus, pride means considering oneself greater than he/she actually ought to. Adam and Eve did not actually consider themselves greater than they actually are. Rather, they were unwilling to wait for God's own appointed time to be great and their impatience caused them to lose their potential of becoming great as they could be.[28] Sin then, according to Irenaeus, is the loss of potential. Given this understanding, it follows that the Fall of humanity resulted not in the total depravity of humanity but in losing the potential of becoming what God intended them to become—that is, "the ability to live into the fullness and eternality of God."[29] The inability of humanity to recover that lost potential on their own necessitated the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah came into the world to restore humanity to their full potential through his atoning and reconciliatory work.

Irenaeus argued that Christ achieved reconciliation through his incarnation, life, death and resurrection. Irenaeus' atonement theology has many dimensions. First of all, Irenaeus' interpretation of the atonement theology is based on the Second-Adam motif. He considers Christ's salvific work as his whole life and ministry, rather than just his death on the cross. For Irenaeus, all human beings participated in the Fall of Adam and are therefore incapable of living according to God's will. The bondage in which humans find themselves prevents them from developing and relating with him the way he wants. Humans were not in any position to free themselves from this bondage and so they needed a liberator. To avert the situation, it was necessary for a Second Adam to come in the form of the First, and to make the right choices at every step where the First Adam failed, thereby giving humans a second lineage, and bestowing on them life and righteousness rather than death and sinfulness.[30] In the same way, just as the First Eve disobeyed God in the Garden and made all humanity sinful, so the Second Eve (the Virgin Mary) reversed this curse by her obedience to God.[31] Christ achieved his salvific task by reversing Adam's disobedience through his own perfect obedience to God's Law. The Son of God reworked and fixed the elements that led to the enslavement

[21]   Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* edited by Anthony Uyl (Woodstock, ON: Devoted Publishing, 2018), 304.
[22]   Mathew Thomas Hollen, *Irenaeus of Lyons: A Defense of Recapitulation* (Master of Divinity Thesis: George Fox University, 2015), 16. [Accessed online, on 8/5/2020, from http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/seminary_masters/18].
[23]   Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* 304.
[24]   Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* 305.
[25]   Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* 305.
[26]   Hollen, *Irenaeus of Lyons,* 18.
[27]   Irenaeus cited in Hollen, *Irenaeus of Lyons,* 18.
[28]   Hollen, *Irenaeus of Lyons,* 18.
[29]   Hollen, *Irenaeus of Lyons,* 18.
[30]   Hollen, *Irenaeus of Lyons,* 23; O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 38.
[31]   O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 39.

of humanity to sin, death and the devil, thereby releasing humanity from that slavery and hence reconciling humanity back to God. The idea of the Second Adam originates from the writings of St. Paul, who stated that: "The first man, Adam, became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45 RSV, cf. Rom. 5:18-21). However, while Paul simply considered Christ's coming (as another human being) as the rectification of the wrongs of the first Adam, Irenaeus considered Christ "as ontologically the same as Adam", or "the second iteration of that same archetype", who is Adam.[32]

Another emphasis of the doctrine of recapitulation is the restoration of humanity's potential. As hinted earlier, sin leads to loss of potential. Irenaeus held a holistic view of Jesus's life, considering it impossible to separate some aspects of Christ's life as more significant than others with respect to God's salvific plan. Against this backdrop, he argued that Christ needed to pass through every stage of human existence, including conception, birth, baptism, growth to maturity, subjection to temptation, betrayal, and, eventually, death, resurrection and ascension in order to accomplish his task as the Savior of the world.[33] Opposing Gnosticism, Irenaeus argued that the cross proves Jesus's humanity beyond doubt. He also contended, based on Pauline's Christology of the cross, that it is on the cross that God's image in humanity became perfect in Christ. Christ, as fully human and fully God, sums up and renews humanity on the cross by showing infinite love to the same people who were causing his suffering.[34] Though it is the cross that gave Christ the opportunity to reverse Adam's acts, placing too much emphasis on the role of the cross in God's salvific agenda makes one miss the significance of the incarnation, and the divine power living among humanity. By participating in human nature through the incarnation, Christ restored human dignity and glory which was marred by the Fall of humanity.

Further still, Irenaeus' recapitulation theory holds that Christ's death defeated Satan. Irenaeus perceived Satan and his threat as a reality rather than as an abstract concept. He, therefore, reasoned that the recapitulation must not only reconcile humanity to God but must also defeat Satan's power on this earth.[35] This defeat, according to the Church Father, was achieved not only on the cross but through a battle Christ fought with Satan (throughout his life), the final defeat occurring on the cross and proven by the resurrection.

Following Irenaeus' teachings, T. N. Finger shared the view that every aspect of Christ's life was a form of battle, which he won until his final battle on the cross. He wrote: "In the wilderness, for instance, the devil tempted Jesus to disobey God's law by quoting from it; yet Jesus, by responding according to the law's true intent, showed that his opponent was transgressing the law and was condemned by this act."[36] Finger's line of thought links well with Irenaeus' assertion that Christ has "summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning led us away as captives in Adam."[37] One could therefore conclude that it is not enough for Christ to bring humanity into the right relationship with God without defeating Satan, the adversary, so he cannot continue to make fruitful attempts to lead humanity astray. By defeating Satan, Christ accomplished two things, namely, freeing the believer from the grasp of temptation, and completing the antithesis to the defeat of Adam by the devil in the Garden. Therefore, the recapitulation achieved by Christ goes beyond his victory over hostile powers which held humanity captive to empowering the church to overcome these powers through the work of the Spirit. Irenaeus, however, admitted that Satan can make some attempts to deceive humanity as he did in the Garden (Gen. 3). Yet, such an attempt will fail because Christ has given believers power over Satan, such that any believer who abides in Christ and utilizes this power will not be led astray by Satan's schemes.[38] From this discussion, the recapitulation view of the atonement sums up as follows: "Everything Adam did, Jesus undid. Everything

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[32] Hollen, *Irenaeus of Lyons,* 23.

[33] D. A Brondos, *Jesus's Death in New Testament Thought: Two-Volume Complete Edition* (Mexico City: Comunidad Teológica *de* México, 2018), 1229.

[34] Jeff Vogel, "The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation: An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption," *Anglican Theological Review,* 89(3) (2007):443-168, 452.

[35] Brondos, *Jesus's Death in New Testament Thought*, 1229.

[36] T. N. Finger, "*Christus Victor* and the Creeds: Some Historical Considerations," *Mennonite Quarterly Review,* 72(1) (1998):31-52, 46.

[37] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 345.

[38] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 349-350.

Adam failed to do, the Second Adam did."[39]

The Ransom Theory

C. D. Darnell traces the roots of the ransom theory to first-century scholarly reflections on the death of Christ.[40] However, it was Origen Adamantius (ca. 185-254 CE) who, in the third century, developed and popularized this theory using financial imagery to describe what went on during Jesus's death and resurrection.[41] According to Ekem, Origen was the first Christian theologian to explicitly formulate the ransom theory of atonement.[42] Origen's ransom theory emerged from Jesus's statement that he came to give his life as a "ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, cf. 1 Tim. 2:5-6; see also 1 Cor. 6:20). Also called the classic or dramatic view of atonement, the ransom theory contends that Christ's death on the cross was a price paid to satisfy the debt humanity owed due to Adam's Fall.[43] In other words, by his death, Christ paid a ransom in exchange for human souls, which Satan had held captive on account of sin. This theory begins from the premise that God and Satan compete for souls such that those stained by sin, belong to Satan and are under his grip while the "clean" ones are God's. If God wants sinful humanity as his possession, then he must not violate the rules of competition by simply snatching them back from the devil. Rather, God is obliged to pay an acceptable price to cause the release of the people under Satan's control. Christ, therefore, died at a price that earns God the right to human souls despite the sinful lives of humans.

The idea that theological formulations are culturally conditioned is true for the ransom theory. Proponents of this theory, such as Origen and others, lived in a society full of "social unrest characterized by capturing and ransoming."[44] This background led to the assumption that redemption means "to buy back" the human race from the grip of the devil. The concept of ransom begs the question: "To whom was the ransom paid?" In the view of Origen, the ransom was paid to Satan, who established control over humanity through a cosmic struggle between good and evil in which Satan prevailed. Through the sin of Adam and Eve, Satan usurped God's rightful ownership of humanity; thus, all sinful humanity legitimately belongs to Satan.[45] Origen argued that since it is Satan, rather than God, who was holding sinners in captivity, the ransom to release people from captivity had to be paid to no other person than Satan. God could not "steal" humanity back (after losing them to Satan) and so he needed to pay a price in order to justly bring back humanity under his control. While it is not clear how Satan established his control over humanity, the Bible tells us that Satan is the ruler of this world (John 14:30) and that he is "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4.4).

Origen's theory was developed further and popularized by Gregory of Nyssa (335-395 CE), a fourth-century Cappadocian theologian, who most vividly illustrated the ransom theory through his fish-hook imagery. Gregory, like Origen, argued that Satan obtained legal rights over humanity after the Fall and that God's salvific plan could only materialize after redeeming back that legal right to himself. Gregory maintained that because humanity freely chose to be under Satan's dominion, it was fair for God not to use any arbitrary means to deprive Satan of his captives. According to Gregory, Satan was tricked by God into taking Christ in the same way as a fish is tricked to take a bait. God used the humanity of Christ as a bait to deceive Satan into accepting Christ as a ransom with Christ's divinity serving as a hook. Gregory stated, "The deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, so that, as with the ravenous fish, the hook of the deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh."[46] In other words, the incarnation of Christ became an event by which the hook was hidden "beneath the form of human flesh" to entice the ruler of this age to a contest that Christ "might offer [Satan] his flesh as a bait and then the divinity which lay beneath might catch him fast with its hook."[47]

[39] Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories: A Way through the Maze* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers. 2014), 26.

[40] Charles Van Divier Darnell, *Who Art Thou, Lord?: The Good News Jesus Preached* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Publishing Company, 2013), 100.

[41] Ekem, *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting,* 9; Darnell, *Who Art Thou, Lord?,* 100.

[42] Ekem, *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting,* 9.

[43] Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology,* 331.

[44] Ekem, *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting,* 10.

[45] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 810.

[46] Gregory cited in Kate E. Crell, *Cooperative Salvation: A Brethren View of Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Wipf&Stock, 2014), 24.

[47] Rufinus cited in Dennis Oh, *I Will Repay: A Cinematic Theology of Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Wipf&Stock, 2018), 24.

Satan erroneously thought that he could hold Christ in hell. Like a sea monster, Satan snaps at the bait and then realizes, too late, the hook. With the divinity of Christ "dressed *incognito* as human flesh as the hook, God got Satan gulped down and then defeated."[48] Christ powerfully arose from the grave on the third day and as a result, the devil released both Christ and human souls, which he had held captive from Adam's time. Satan was obliged to forfeit his legal rights because he unjustly claimed authority over a sinless person, Jesus Christ, something he had no right to do. Gregory taught that Job's allusion to Leviathan (41:1-2) and Jonah's story foreshadowed the ransom theory of atonement.

Aware of the moral problem which Origen's idea suggested, Gregory expanded the theory to explain how a just God can deceive Satan without compromising his justice. Robert S. Paul therefore rightly noted that "Gregory is not unaware of the moral problem of how to reconcile the absolute justice of God with perpetrating a deception in order to achieve his ends."[49] Gregory began by outlining two conditions required for an act to be just, namely, all parties involved in the act must have their due, and the motivation behind the act must be love for humanity. He argued that these two conditions were all met in the redemption process. The act is justified in that Satan got his due in the transaction and God's motive for the transaction was pure. Origen reasoned that it was right for God to deceive Satan to redeem humanity because Satan was the one who first used deception to get humanity into his bondage. He argued further that the reason why Satan's deception should be condemned while God's should be approved lies in the purpose behind the deceptions. In the case of Satan, his deception was to ruin human nature, while for God, his deception was for the good purpose of saving humanity.[50] That being the case, the devil has no ground for a just complaint regarding the method God used to ransom humanity from his grip, since human beings voluntarily bartered away their freedom. After a lengthy discussion of the issue, Paul concluded that the deceit was in reality "a crowning example of justice and wisdom"[51], in the sense that what God did was the best example of paying the devil in his own coin. In Gregory's defense, one must note that the picture he presents is not a statement of what happened but an analogy of what happened. Therefore, a point-by-point correspondence between the two scenarios in the comparison should not be sought.

Augustine also held the ransom view of the atonement, with a different explanation as to how God defeated Satan.[52] Augustine used the "mousetrap" analogy, which views Satan as being trapped like the mouse, to explain the atonement transaction.[53] Like Gregory, Augustine argued that Satan rightly had power over sinners and that the cross was a bait, which hooked him. So, Augustine argues that from the time the first human couple sinned all humanity became the legitimate property of Satan.[54] However, Christ "came to the captives not having been captured himself. He came to redeem the captives, having in himself not a trace of the captivity, that is to say, of iniquity, but bringing the price for us in his mortal flesh."[55] He pushed the argument further by stating that Satan was not deceived by God but he (Satan) deceived himself under God's permission and this deception led to the event that brought about human salvation. It was Satan who determined the price, received it and accepted it as worthy enough to free humanity. In exchange for the freedom of souls held under his sway, Satan demanded the blood of Christ as a *pretium,* ("a price" or "ransom"). Having accepted the ransom, Satan had no right to keep humanity any longer and so God was able to free humanity from Satan's grip. Satan realized after accepting Christ that he could not enslave Christ because of his (Christ's) holiness.[56] He was therefore deceived into thinking that he could capture the Son of God, not having realized initially the unbearable torture involved in such an attempt. Christ overcame both

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[48] Crell, *Cooperative Salvation*, 26.

[49] Robert S. Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacraments: The Relation of the Atonement to the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wipf&Stock, 2002), 55.

[50] Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Cosimo Inc., 2007), 495.

[51] Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacraments*, 55.

[52] Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology,* 331.

[53] Oh, *I Will Repay*, 24.

[54] Stanley P. Rosenberg, "Not so Alien and Unnatural After All The role of Privation and Deification in Augustine's Sermons," *Journal of Religion and Society, Supplementary Series,* 15 (2018):170-196, 185.

[55] Rosenberg, "Not so Alien and Unnatural After All The role of Privation and Deification in Augustine's Sermons," 186.

[56] Ekem, *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting,* 10.

Satan and death, both for himself and his followers, making Satan a victim of his (Satan's) own scheme.[57] Rosenberg observed that the idea of ransom only partially represents Augustine's view and incompletely describes his theological position; he also emphasized the refashioning of human nature as a key component of Christ's act of ransoming humanity. Augustine linked this idea of the ransom theory to the reformation that took place through the ransom, stating (regarding Isaiah 53), that "Christ's deformity is what gives form to you.[58] If he had been unwilling to be deformed, you would never have got back the form you lost. So, he hung on the cross, deformed; but his deformity was our beauty."[59] In this sense, "Christ is the former and reformer of humans, the creator and recreator, the maker and remake."[60]

Augustine's view of the atonement also involves the priestly role of Christ in which he was both the representative of humanity on the cross and the one who made an atoning sacrifice in the stead of humanity.[61] For Augustine, Christ became the true Mediator between God and humanity when he assumed the form of a servant.[62] Though as God, he (Christ) receives sacrifice together with the Father, he chose to offer himself as a sacrifice rather than to receive it, thereby, making him both the offeror and the offering at the same time.[63] Augustine was, however, careful not to separate the Godhead in the atonement drama. Augustine's view seems to have anticipated the God-ward dimension of the atonement advocated by Anselm as well as the penal substitutionary view of the Reformers.[64]

Theological Appraisal

The recapitulation theory sums up as follows: Jesus went through each stage of human life, perfectly fulfilling God's covenant which had been broken and by so doing reorders the human situation by restoring humanity to God. In therapeutic or medicinal terms, one may say Jesus' perfect obedience to God became the balm that heals humans of the disease and disfigurement of sin, thereby restoring in humans the true Image of God which was damaged due to the Fall. In any case, there is a victory won for humanity. As Jesus overcame sin and temptation in his life, so has he freed humanity of the power of sin and temptation; therefore, any believer who yields to the power of the Holy Spirit will not be overcome by sin and temptation. Believers are thus delivered from "captivity to demons or malign forces that deceive and enslave us."[65] The fact that the believer is no more in bondage to sin is very comforting. Again, the idea of Christ overcoming evil forces and their activities through his willful obedience assures the believer that "no weapon that is fashioned against him/her shall succeed" (Isa. 54:17). Such an assurance is very important to believers whose traditional worldview holds the existence of evil forces that usually fight against humans.

Furthermore, Irenaeus did well in recognizing the key role of the atonement in the salvific plan of God. The Second Adam motif as well as the idea that Christ reversed humanity's course from disobedience to obedience is biblical. Irenaeus' use of cyclical imagery based on the Pauline scheme of cosmic soteriology introduced a new perspective into the Christian idea of soteriology and this became very influential in the Alexandria school of theology in the third century, especially in the works of Clement and Origen.[66] Irenaeus' recapitulation theory has an eschatological significance in that Jesus (by obeying God throughout his incarnate journey) recapitulates the exile of humanity from the Garden of Eden. One recalls that after their Fall, Adam and Eve (representing humanity) were cut off from the Garden of Eden and the cherubim with the flaming swords prevented their reentry (Gen. 3:24). In his death, Christ experienced the cutting off

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[57] Ekem, *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting,* 10.

[58] Augustine cited in Rosenberg, "Not so Alien and Unnatural After All The role of Privation and Deification in Augustine's Sermons," 186.

[59] Rosenberg, "Not so Alien and Unnatural After All The role of Privation and Deification in Augustine's Sermons," 185.

[60] Rosenberg, "Not so Alien and Unnatural After All The role of Privation and Deification in Augustine's Sermons," 186.

[61] C. C. Pecknold and Tarmo Toom (eds.), *The T&T Clark Companion to Augustine and Modern Theology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 43.

[62] Pecknold and Toom (eds.), *The T&T Clark Companion to Augustine and Modern Theology,* 43.

[63] Pecknold and Toom (eds.), *The T&T Clark Companion to Augustine and Modern Theology,* 43.

[64] Ekem, *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting,* 10.

[65] Ivor J. Davidson, "Atonement and Incarnation" In *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement* edited by Adam J. Johnson 35-56 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 50.

[66] McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology,* 289.

on behalf of others and in so doing, removed its sting and victory (1 Cor. 15:54–57), thereby giving humanity access to reenter the Garden. This serves the purposes of God's eschatological justice. The eschatological prospects that the recapitulation theory gives to the individual believer have the potential of encouraging believers to be committed to the *missio Dei.* If Christ has given mankind the hope of eternal life through his atoning sacrifice, then this hope must be preached to all people in the world as demanded in the Great Commission (cf. Matt. 28:19-20 and its parallels).

Another theological significance of the recapitulation theory is its emphasis on the incarnation. The incarnation is an indispensable doctrine in Christianity. Both the human and divine natures of Christ are crucial to the salvific plan of God. Without being truly human, Christ could not die in the stead of sinful humanity. Humans sinned and so it was required that a human being atoned for their sin. Had Christ not been truly and fully God, he could not have borne God's wrath through his death on the cross. He could also not have achieved perfect obedience to God to make recapitulation possible. Again, he could not have paid the highest sacrifice required for the redemption of humanity. The recapitulation theology, therefore, places a great theological value on the dual nature of Christ (his full humanity and divinity).

From the foregoing discourse, it is apparent that Irenaeus had peculiar and rich insights about the role of the atonement. However, it seems Irenaeus over-emphasized the bestowal of life rather than forgiveness, and the believer's victory over hostile powers rather than over sin. Christian soteriology points to the fact that even though the atonement offers life to humanity, the bestowal of life is made possible because of the divine pardon achieved through death on the cross. Forgiveness precedes the bestowal of life. Similarly, while the believer's victory over evil powers is assured, such victory cannot be achieved without first of all overcoming sin.

Evaluating the ransom view, one notes that the use of the image of the cross as a victory over the evil powers and the use of the metaphor of ransom or redemption is in line with New Testament usage. The ransom metaphor powerfully communicates the salvific importance of the cross and the critical need of humanity for liberation from enslavement to sin and the powers of evil at both the personal and corporate levels. Nonetheless, the ransom theory has been criticized for some reasons. In the first place, it seems to make God less than omnipotent. The proposition that Satan was the one who demanded Christ's blood as a price undermines God's sovereignty and makes him (God) one who can owe Satan something and then be under Satan's command to pay a price to him.[67] Given this fact, the ransom theory not only gives Satan (a created being and a fallen angel who disobeyed God) too high a role in human redemption but also ignores the demands of God's justice with regard to sin.

Secondly, the Bible teaches that no one is equal to or greater than God; for this reason, no one can compel God to do anything. The ransom theory has the potential of implying that God and Satan are two equal and opposing powers and this is inconsistent with Christian doctrine and biblical teachings. By arguing this way, the ransom theory fails to acknowledge that God is the constant supplier of life to everyone, including Satan and his followers (cf. Job 12:10; Psalms 36:9; Luke 20:38; Acts 17:28).

Thirdly, the ransom theory makes God a deceitful trickster, an idea that is very difficult to accept in the light of a broader theological and ethical perspective.[68] The explanation given by advocates of the ransom theory about God maintaining his justice while deceiving Satan is not satisfactory. Finally, contrary to the idea that, on the cross, Christ paid a ransom to Satan, several passages in the Bible allude to the fact that Christ's death was a sacrifice to God rather than Satan (Isa. 53:10; Eph. 5:2).

Nonetheless, the ransom theory relates Christ's death to God only in the secondary sense. According to this theory, Satan was the primary focus of the atonement. The theory, therefore, does not deal adequately with passages that speak of Christ's death as a propitiation offered to God the Father for the forgiveness of human sins (see, for example, 1 John 4:10).

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[67] Crell, *Cooperative Salvation*, 27.
[68] Crell, *Cooperative Salvation*, 26.

CONCLUSION

The doctrine of atonement aroused much interest among Christian scholars during the patristic era. Two main interpretations emerged namely, the recapitulation theory and the ransom theory. Though each of these theories had its own flaws, they contribute to the overall Christian understanding of the atonement. The recapitulation theory highlights the restoration of the human race to their divine-given status. What was lost through the disobedience of the first Adam was restored through the obedience of the second Adam. The ransom theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the transactional dimension of atonement. The defeat of Satan and his host through the atonement frees Christians from bondage to sin and evil powers. Obviously, each theory has some truth to contribute to the holistic understanding of the atonement. Therefore, the study of atonement must be approached, on the one hand, expecting to find some truth in all the views that have been espoused in an attempt to make meaning of it, and on the other hand, with a conviction that after all that people have said about the subject, there remain other areas of the subject that have not been explored, and doubtless, the future brings discoveries.

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