

THE WORK OF CHRIST
Part I: The Ancient Church

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I. INTRODUCTION.

After theologians discuss the preincarnate nature of Christ and the relationship of the two natures in his incarnate person, it is both customary and logical to turn to the accomplishments of Christ (from person to work). It is for this reason that our topical study now shifts to the doctrine of the atonement. The most fertile period in the delineation of this subject did not commence until the eleventh century with Anselm of Canterbury and proceeded through the Reformation era. Orr wrote (*Progress*, 210): “We may affirm, therefore, that from Anselm to the Reformation is the classical period for the formation of our doctrine as it appears in our creeds.” The purpose of this initial lesson shall focus upon the major explanations of the atonement prior to Anselm. By the “atonement” this writer means to focus upon the accomplishments of the death of Christ, meaning the nature, object, and purpose of His death.

II. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH FATHERS.

The Fathers generally maintain a vagueness, an unspeculative approach to the meaning of Christ’s death. Shedd states (*History of Christian Doctrine*, 2, 207): “Examining them, we find chiefly the repetition of Scripture phraseology, without further attempt at an explanatory doctrinal statement.” Orr said (*Progress*, 212): “The Apostolic Fathers are profuse in their allusions to redemption through the blood of Christ, though it cannot be said that they do much to aid us in the theological apprehension of this language.” A few brief examples will be cited.

A. Clement of Rome (ca. A.D. 95)

In four passages Clement, in his letter to the Corinthians, connects the blood of Christ with redemption. In 7:4 he stated, “Let us fix our eyes on the blood of Christ and understand how precious it is unto His Father, because being shed for our salvation is won for the whole world the grace of repentance” (cf. also 12:7 and 49:6). The blood of Christ appears as the means of redemption; it is procured by Christ; it is directed to the Father; and it has won the possibility of human repentance.

N.B. Clement has no doctrine of the atonement, simply scattered undefined, unrelated facts.

B. Ignatius of Antioch (ca. A.D. 110)

To the Trallians, he wrote (2.2): Christ “died for us that believing on His death ye might escape death”. The Philadelphia church “rejoices in the passion of our Lord ‘and is saluted’ in the blood of Jesus Christ (*Intro.*)” *To the Smyrnians*, he wrote (6.1): “Even the heavenly beings, if they believe not in the blood of Christ, judgment awaiteth them also.” Ignatius’ devotion to Christ’s cross is as notable as his love for His person (Ephesians 18:1), “My spirit is devoted to the Cross.” However, like Clement, he gives no theory of the accomplishments of the atonement.

C. Other Fathers

The Didaché (ca. A.D. 140) and Hermas (ca. A.D. 130) never connect redemption with the death of Christ. In *The Didaché*, Christ is a revealer of knowledge; in Hermas He is a laborer that reveals a new law). The Epistle of Barnabas connects forgiveness with blood (5:1—”For to this end the Lord endured to deliver His flesh unto corruption that by the remission of sins we might be cleansed which cleansing is through the blood of His sprinkling” and then quotes Isaiah 53. He then said (7, 2), “If then the Son of God suffered that His wound might give us life, let us believe that the Son of God could not suffer except for our sakes.” Elsewhere he speaks (14, 5) of Christ redeeming us out “of the darkness of our hearts.”

The Epistle to Diognetus, (ca. A.D. 180) which is collected in the corpus of the writings of the Fathers though it is actually late second century, has a lovely passage (1.2, 9): “And when our iniquity had been fully accomplished, and it had been made perfectly manifest that punishment and death were expected as its recompense, and the season came which God had ordained, when henceforth He should manifest His goodness and power (O to the exceeding great kindness and love of God), He hated us not, neither rejected us, nor bore us malice, but was long-suffering and patient, and in pity for us took upon Himself our sins, and Himself parted with His Son as a ransom for us, the holy for the lawless, the guileless for the evil, the just for the unjust, the incorruptible for the corruptible,

the immortal for the mortal. For what else but His righteousness would have covered our sins? In whom was it possible for us lawless and ungodly men to have been justified, save only in the Son of God? O the sweet exchange, O the inscrutable creation, O the unexpected benefits; that the iniquity of many should be concealed in One Righteous Man, and the righteousness of One should justify many that iniquitous! Having then in the former time demonstrated the inability of our nature to obtain life, and having now revealed a Saviour able to save even creatures which have no ability, He willed that for both reasons we should believe in His goodness and should regard Him as nurse, father, teacher, counselor, physician, mind, light, honour, glory, strength and life.”

N.B. Shedd exclaimed (*History*, 2, 219): “Is not the whole doctrine of vicarious substitution contained in these words?”

III. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE APOLOGISTS.

A. The Western Apologists.

1. **Tertullian (ca. A.D. 155–240/60)** of Carthage’s view of the atonement is summarized by Mozley, who wrote (*The Doctrine of the Atonement*, 118): “... Tertullian were destined to have a far-reaching influence. Especially does this apply to the term satisfaction. His legal outlook naturally led him to emphasize the necessity of reparation when an offence had been committed, and he transferred the idea from law to theology. Only he applies it not to the work of Christ, but to repentance and good deeds. In this he is followed by Cyprian. Nevertheless, Tertullian lays great stress on Christ’s death, more indeed than his contemporary Irenaeus: denial of the reality of Christ’s body means denial of ‘the whole weight and fruit of the Christian faith (*nomen*)—the death of Christ.’ Christ was ‘sent to die,’ and this death is sacrificial, springing from Christ’s love and the Father’s will. Only by His death could our death be destroyed. While, therefore, we are debarred from ascribing to Tertullian later juridical theories, and it is even going too far to speak of his conception as that of ‘an expiation provided by Jesus Christ dying for us,’ we cannot rule out entirely from his meaning the idea of substitution, and of Christ’s death as determined by moral necessities, whether real or imagined, and therefore not to be described as simply object-lesson or self-sacrifice.” Tertullian, however, did not attempt to develop a synthesis of his diverse statements! A somewhat classic summary of his Christology/Soteriology is given in *Prescription Against Heretics*, 13: “We believe that there is but one God, who is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced everything from nothing through his Word, sent forth before all things; that this Word is called the Son, and in the Name of God was seen in divers ways by the patriarchs, was ever heard in the prophets and finally was brought down

by the spirit and Power of God the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb, was born of her and lived as Jesus Christ; who thereafter proclaimed a new law and a new promise of the kingdom of heaven, worked miracles, was crucified, on the third day rose again, was caught up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father; that he sent in his place the power of the Holy Spirit to guide believers; that he will come with glory to take the saints up into the fruition of the life eternal and the heavenly promises and to judge the wicked to everlasting fire, after the resurrection of both good and evil with the restoration of their flesh.”

N.B. Tertullian did not attempt to delineate the meaning of the Atonement. However, he is the first to use the term “satisfaction” in reference to the death of Christ.

2. **Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 140–202)** of Lyons attempted to present a more synthetic interpretation of the death of Christ which has come to us under the title, the Recapitulation Theory. In other words, some progress in the scientific statement of the atonement is being made.
 - a) Up to this point in the early churchmen the need for the atonement arises from the justice of God, that is also true of Irenaeus. Shedd quoted Dorner (*History*. 2.224-25): “Justice, in the scheme of Irenaeus, stands between the physical attributes of infinity, omnipotence, etc., and the ethical attributes of compassion and love, as a protector and watch. For this reason, God will and can accomplish no work that is spiritual in a merely physical manner; he must win over man by the manifestation of that which is spiritual, —that is, by the highest and fullest possible exhibition of his love. but love is of two kinds, active and passive; the former manifests itself by doing something to its object, the latter by suffering something for it. The highest and fullest manifestation of love would consequently include the passive form of the affection, as well as the active form,—an endurance namely, of suffering in behalf of the object of benevolence, if suffering is necessary from the nature of the case. But suffering is absolutely necessary, because now that sin and guilt have come into the world divine justice cannot be satisfied except by penal infliction. Consequently the manifestation of the love of God takes on a passive as well as active form, and vicariously bears the penalty of guilt in the place of the criminal.”
 - b) Spokesmen in the early church delineated the atonement in relation to the doctrine of Satan; that is, the death of Christ is often represented as ransoming man from the power and slavery of the

devil (i.e., Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14). At this point Irenaeus rejects Ransom-to-Satan. Mozley wrote (*Atonement*, 100): “Irenaeus, like the Apologists, thought of men as enslaved by the powers of darkness, and of redemption as freedom from these powers: he goes beyond the Apologists by introducing the idea of the death of Christ as the Act (NOT SATAN’S) and power (NOT SATAN’S) which liberates.” In the classic passage on the atonement, there is no mention of Satan (*Against Heresies*.. 5.1, 1): “Redeeming us by His own blood in a manner consonant to reason, [He] gave Himself as a redemption for those who had been led into captivity. And since they apostasy tyrannized over us unjustly, and, though we were by nature the property of the omnipotent God, alienated us contrary to nature, rendering us its own disciples, the Word of God, powerful in all things, and not defective with regard to His own justice, did righteously turn against that apostasy, and redeem from it His own property, not by violent means, as the [apostasy] had obtained dominion over us at the beginning, when it insatiably snatched away what was not its own, but by means of persuasion, as became a God of counsel, who does not use violent means to obtain what He desires; so that neither should justice be infringed upon, nor the ancient handiwork of God go to destruction. Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, attaching man to God by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at His coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God,—all the doctrines of the heretics fall to ruin.”

N.B. The stress is upon a sacrifice that was both penal and substitutionary.

- c) This is not to say that Satan is entirely removed from the soteriological framework because Irenaeus is clear that in what Christ did he overthrew, destroyed the power of Satan; the focus, however, is Godward not satanward.

Christ’s death as the second Adam broke Satan’s grip over the descendants of the first Adam. Irenaeus is clear at this point (*Perscription*, 16.3): “And not by the aforesaid things alone has the Lord manifested Himself, but [He has done this] also by means of His passion. For doing away with [the effects of] that disobedience of man which had taken place at the beginning by the occasion of a tree, ‘He became obedient unto death, even the death

of the cross;’ rectifying that disobedience which had occurred by reason of a tree, through that obedience which was [wrought out] upon the tree [of the cross].”

Again (17): “And therefore in the last times the Lord has restored us into friendship through His incarnation, having become ‘the Mediator between God and men:’ propitiating indeed for us the Father against whom we had sinned, and canceling (*consolatus*) our disobedience by His own obedience; conferring also upon us the gift of communion with, and subjection to, our Maker.”

Again (18, 3): “Therefore, by remitting sins, He did indeed heal man, while He also manifested Himself who He was. For if no one can forgive sins but God alone, while the Lord remitted them and healed men, it is plain that He was Himself the Word of God made the Son of man, receiving from the Father the power of remission of sins; since He was man, and since He was God, in order that since as man He suffered for us, so as God He might have compassion on us, and forgive us our debts, in which we were made debtors to God our Creator. And therefore David said beforehand, ‘Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord has not imputed sin;’ pointing out thus that remission of sins which follows upon His advent, by which ‘He has destroyed the handwriting’ of our debt, and ‘fastened it to the cross;’ so that as by means of a tree we were made debtors to God [so also] by means of a tree we may obtain the remission of our debt.”

- d) The means through which Christ broke the power of Satan, whereby men are expiated by God, is commonly called the Recapitulation Theory. Men are delivered; justice is satisfied by Christ’s life. Irenaeus’ principle thought is that to which the word *anakezalaiosis* gives expression; when Christ was incarnate (*Against Heresies*. 3, 18.1): “He summed up in Himself the long roll of the human race, bringing to us a compendious salvation, that what we lost in Adam, namely, being in the image and likeness of God, we might regain Christ Jesus.” He also thinks of Christ as “reconciling us to God by His passion” (5, 16.3). Orr wrote (*Progress*, 213-14): “Irenaeus, the earliest of these Fathers, furnishes us, in the doctrine of the recapitulation, formerly adverted to, with a singularly interesting point of view from which to regard the atonement. Under this idea he brings the thought that Christ recapitulates in Himself all the stages of human life, and all the experiences of these stages, including those which belong to our state as sinners. He applies the idea first to a redeeming

obedience of Christ on our behalf—our redeeming Head passing through the whole curriculum of our experience, and in every part of it rendering a perfect obedience to God. Thus he retracted the disobedience of the fall, our salvation being achieved, as Dorner expresses it, by a recapitulation of the history of mankind *per oppositum*.”

N.B. In summary, Irenaeus makes a remarkable advance on the development of the atonement, the first such synthetic delineation. He stresses the need of atonement (i.e., justice of God), the focus of the atonement (i.e., God, not Satan), the means of the atonement (i.e., the life and death of Christ and the results of the atonement) (i.e., Satan defeated, Adam’s life restored) [though he errs in that man is not restored to Adam’s pre-fall state nor to the image of God]. He does stress satisfaction and forgiveness in Christ!

B. The Eastern Apologists.

Mozley wrote (*Atonement*, 98): “There is little to detain us in the Greek Apologists of the second century. Christ for them is pre-eminently the Teacher of divine truth, and the Savior from the power of demons.” A passing exception is Justin Martyr.

1. **Justin Martyr’s (ca. A.D. 100–165)** thought is but little developed and the idea of expiation is not prominent. He seems to have little regard for a ransom-to-Satan concept, but his ideas are too infrequently presented to know for sure. He wrote (*Apology*. 1, 32): “After this He was crucified in order that the rest of the prophecy be verified . . . He was to endure, purifying with His own blood those who believe in Him.” To Trypho he said (74): “All who know this mystery of salvation (the Passion of Christ) through which He saved them (are) to sing out.” And yet to Trypho he connects the Cross and water baptism as cleansing from sin (86): “Christ, by being crucified on the wood of the cross and by sanctifying us by water raises us up who had been immersed in the mire of our mortal sins.”
2. **Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150–211/16)** is perhaps representative of an attempted bridge between Greek philosophy and Christian belief. Mozley wrote (*Atonement*, 102): “In his more important works Clement’s soteriology, when judged by any standard that tries to do justice to the New Testament, is seriously defective, and has more in common, now with Stoic, now with Gnostic, than with distinctly Christian conceptions. Christ is for him Saviour by being the Teacher who endows men with true knowledge, and leads them on to a love which has no desires, and a righteousness whose best fruit is contemplation.”

In his work, *Who is the rich man that shall be saved?*, he speaks of a debt paid, Christ a ransom, and death for every man. He wrote (23): “But on the other side hear the Saviour: ‘I regenerated thee, who were ill born by the world to death. I emancipated, healed, ransomed thee. I will show thee the face of the good Father God. Call no man thy father on earth. For thee I contended with Death, and paid thy death, which thou owedst for thy former sins and thy unbelief towards God.’”

In Chapter 37 he said, “And about to be offered up and giving Himself a ransom . . . for each of us he gave his life.”

- C. **Origen (ca. A.D. 185–253/4)** of Alexandria’s view of the atonement has been roundly debated; most conservative scholars finally saying that he championed a fully-developed Ransom-to-Satan Theory. Mozley wrote (*Atonement*, 104): “No one conclusion can be pronounced exclusively right.” Therefore it appears best to summarize his confused ideas without a label. Harnack understands four concepts in Origen’s view (*History*. 2, 367): “Accordingly he propounded views as to the value of salvation and as to the significance of Christ’s death on the cross, with a variety and detail rivaled by no theologian before him. He was, as Bigg (209ff.) has rightly noticed, the first Church theologian after Paul’s time that gave a detailed theology of sacrifices. We may mention here the most important of his views. (1) The death on the cross along with the resurrection is to be considered as a real, recognizable victory over the demons, inasmuch as Christ (Colossians 2:14) exposed the weakness of his enemies (a very frequent aspect of the matter). (2) The death on the cross is to be considered as an expiation offered to God. Here Origen argued that all sins require expiation, and, conversely, that all innocent blood has a greater or less importance according to the value of him who gives up his life. (3) In accordance with this death of Christ has also a vicarious signification. (4) The death of Christ is to be considered as a ransom paid to the devil.”
1. In justification of those who hold that he taught a purely Ransom-to-Satan view, he does speak in places (Matthew 26:8) that Satan through our fall obtained certain rights over us which Christ annuls by ransoming us. Orr wrote (*Progress*, 215): “Too much, however, may be made of these casual utterances, for undoubtedly Origen’s prevailing view is that sacrifice was offered to God.” Perhaps Mozley gives us the clue to the contradictory Origen when he wrote (104-05): “Whenever Origen dealt with any passage in Scripture, actually or conceivably bearing on the redemptive Work of Christ, he did it the fullest possible justice on its own lines; but how all these lines were to meet in one centre of unity was a problem that he never set himself to solve, and which—for his writings at least—may be regarded as unsolvable.”

2. A more seriously defective point in his concept of the atonement is that punishment for sin, since that punishment is disciplinary and not judicial, is not endless. Shedd wrote (*History*, 2, 234): “A third opinion of Origen conducing to a defective view of the atonement was, that the punishment of sin is not endless. This opinion flows logically from the preceding one that punishment is not penal, but disciplinary. For an eternal suffering for sin, from the nature of the case, cannot consist with the amendment of the sinner. When, therefore, owing to the exceeding strength of human sinfulness, punishment has so lost its reforming power that even if continued forever no change of character could be wrought by it, God sends the Redeemer who by his death in a mysterious way breaks this power of sin, and thereby restores him to holiness. The death of Christ is thus a manifestation of love alone, and not of love and justice in union.”

IV. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE THEOLOGIANS.

It might seem reasonable that since theology proper, Christology, and soteriology (nature of man, free grace) are so fully delineated in this era, that the atonement would be similarly clarified. Such was not the case even in Augustine; the atonement was not a focus of discussion.

A. Athanasius of Alexandria (*ca.* A.D. 295–373)

Athanasius appears to have a two-fold understanding of the atonement: First, he focuses upon a restitutorial view of the atonement (i.e., Christ took our humanity to give us what we lost, God’s image) and, second, a penal substitution.

1. The human race, being under condemnation, is bound to sin and unable to set itself free. This judgment is judicial and God must be appeased for God’s veracity is held in question. He wrote (*On the Incarnation*, 6): “For this cause, then, death having gained upon men, and corruption abiding upon them, the race of man was perishing; the rational man made in God’s image was disappearing, and the handiwork of God was in process of dissolution. 2. For death, as I said above, gained from that time forth a legal hold over us, and it was impossible to evade the law, since it had been laid down by God because of the transgression, and the result was in truth at once monstrous and unseemly. 3. For it were monstrous, firstly, that god, having spoken, should prove false—that, when once He had ordained that man, if he transgressed the commandment, should die the death, after the transgression man should not die, but God’s word should be broken. For God would not be true, if when He had said we should die, man died not. 4. Again, it were unseemly that creatures once made rational, and having partaken of the Word, should go to ruin, and turn again toward non-existence by the way of corruption. 5. For it were not

worthy of God's goodness that the things He had made should waste away, because of the deceit practiced on men by the devil. 6. Especially it was unseemly to the last degree that God's handicraft among men should be done away, either because of their own carelessness, or because of the deceitfulness of evil spirits. 7. So, as the rational creatures were wasting and such works in course of ruin, what was God in his goodness to do? Suffer corruption to prevail against them and death to hold them fast? And where were the profit of their having been made, to begin with? For better were they not made, than once made, left to neglect and ruin. 8. For neglect reveals weakness, and not goodness on God's part—if, that is, He allows His own work to be ruined when once He had made it—more so than if he had never made man at all. 9. For if He had not made them, none could impute weakness; but once He had made them, and created them out of nothing, it were most monstrous for the work to be ruined, and that before the eyes of the Maker. 10. It was, then, out of the question to leave men to the current of corruption; because this would be unseemly, and unworthy of God's goodness."

N.B. Athanasius' restitutionalism is much like Irenaeus' recapitulation, but the former goes beyond the latter.

2. Athanasius stresses that Christ's death was both penal and substitutionary (he denies a ransom-to-Satan). He stated (*Incarnation*, 8): "For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God comes to our realm, howbeit he was not far from us before. For no part of Creation is left void of him: He has filled all things everywhere, remaining present with His own Father. But He comes in condescension to shew lovingkindness upon us, and to visit us. 2. And seeing the race of rational creatures in the way to perish, and death reigning over them by corruption; seeing, too, that the threat against transgression gave a firm hold to the corruption which was upon us, and that it was monstrous that before the law was fulfilled it should fall through: seeing, once more, the unseemliness of what was come to pass: that the things whereof He Himself was Artificer were passing away: seeing, further, the exceeding wickedness of men, and how by little and little they had increased it to an intolerable pitch against themselves: and seeing, lastly, how all men were under penalty of death: He took pity on our race, and had mercy on our infirmity, and condescended to our corruption, and, unable to bear that death should have the mastery—lest the creature should perish, and the Father's handiwork in men be spent for nought—He takes unto Himself a body, and that of no different sort from ours. 3. For He did not simply will to become embodied, or will merely to appear. For if He will merely to appear, He was able to effect His divine appearance by some other and higher means as well. But He takes a body of our kind, and not merely so, but from a spotless and stainless virgin, knowing not a man, a body clean

and in very truth pure from intercourse of men. For being Himself might, and Artificer of everything, He prepares the body in the Virgin as a temple unto Himself, and makes it His very own as an instrument, in it manifested, and in it dwelling. 4. And thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death he gave it over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father—doing this, moreover, of His lovingkindness, to the end that, firstly, all being held to have died in Him, the law involving the ruin of men might be undone (inasmuch as its power was fully spent in the Lord's body, and had no longer holding-ground against men, his peers), and that, secondly, whereas men had turned toward corruption, He might turn them again toward incorruption, and quicken them from death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of the Resurrection, banishing death from them like straw from the fire.”

Again (*Incarnation*, 9): “He surrendered it to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father . . . in order that by all dying in Him the law with respect to the corruption of mankind might be abolished The Logos of God, being above all, by offering His own temple and bodily instrument as a substitution for the life of all, satisfied all that was required by His death.”

B. Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. A.D. 315–86)

Cyril is quite clear, even opponents do not deny it, that the death of Christ is both expiatory and substitutionary; it satisfies the wrath of God and is endured in the place of sinner. He wrote (*Catechetical Lectures*. 13, 2): “Do not wonder that the whole world was redeemed, for it was no mere man, but the Only-begotten son of God who died for it. The sin of one man, Adam, availed to bring death to the world; if by one man's offense death reigned fro the world, why should not life reign all the more ‘from the justice of one’? If Adam and Eve were cast out of paradise because of the tree from which they ate, should not believers more easily enter into paradise because of the Tree of Jesus? If the first man, fashioned out of the earth, brought universal death, shall not He who fashioned him, being the Life, bring everlasting life? If Phineas by his zeal in slaying the evildoer appeased the wrath of God, shall not Jesus, who slew no other, but ‘gave himself a ransom for all,’ take away God's wrath against man?”

Again (13, 33): “The Savior endured all this, ‘making peace through the blood of the cross, for all things whether in the heavens or on the earth.’ For we were enemies of God through sin, and God had decreed the death of the sinner. One of two things, therefore, was necessary, either that god, in His truth, should destroy all men, or that in His loving-kindness, He should remit the sentence. But see the wisdom of God; He preserved the truth of His sentence and the exercise of His loving-kindness. Christ took our sins ‘in his body upon the tree; that we, having

died to sin,' by His death 'might live to justice.' He who died for us was of no small worth; He was no material sheep; He was no mere man; he was more than an angel, He was God made man. The iniquity of sinners was not as great as the justice of Him who died for them; the sins we committed were not as great as the justice He wrought, who laid down His life for us; He laid it down when He willed, and took it up again when He willed. He did not lay down His life perforce, or yield up His spirit against His will, as you may learn from His words to His Father: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' I commend it, to take it up again. 'And having said this, he expired,' not for long, since He quickly rose again from the dead."

C. Gregory of Nyssa (d. A.D. 395)

This famous Cappadocian retreated back to the remnants of Ransom-to-Satan Theory, as perhaps in Origen.

D. Gregory of Nazianzus (A.D. 329–89)

This Gregory, a friend of his namesake from Nyssa, repudiated with scorn the idea of a ransom paid to Satan. He wrote (*Oration. 45, 22*): "Now we are to examine another act and dogma, neglected by most people, but in my judgment well worth inquiring into. To Whom was that Blood offered that was shed for us, and why was It shed? I mean the precious and famous blood of our God and High priest and Sacrifice. We were detained in bondage by the Evil One, sold under sin, and receiving pleasure in exchange for wickedness. Now, since a ransom belongs only to him who holds in bondage, I ask to whom was this offered, and for what cause? If to the Evil One, fire upon the outrage? If the robber receives ransom, not only from God, but a ransom which consists of God Himself, and has such an illustrious payment for his tyranny, a payment for whose sake it would have been right for him to have left us alone altogether. But if to the Father, I ask first, now? For it was not by Him that we were being oppressed; and next, On what principle did the Blood of His Only begotten son delight the Father, Who would not receive even Isaac, when he was being offered by his Father, but changed the sacrifice, putting a ram in the place of the human victim? Is it not evident that the Father accepts Him, but neither asked for Him nor demanded Him; but on account of the Incarnation, and because Humanity must be sanctified by the Humanity of God, that He might deliver us Himself, and overcome the tyrant, and draw us to Himself by the mediation of His Son, Who also arranged this to the honour of the Father, Whom it is manifest that He obeys in all things? So much we have said of Christ; the greater part of what we might say shall be revered with silence. But that brazen serpent was hung up as a remedy for the biting serpents, not as a type of Him that suffered for us, but as a contrast; and it saved those that looked upon it, not because they believed it to live, but because it was killed, and killed with it the powers that were subject to it, being destroyed as it deserved. And what is the fitting epitaph for it from us? 'O death, where is thy

sting? O grace, where is thy victory?’ Thou art overthrown by the Cross; thou art slain by Him who is the Giver of life; Thou art without breath, dead, without motion, even though thou keepest the form of a serpent lifted up on high on a pole.”

Beyond this he speaks of an expiatory substitution made to God to satisfy His judicial demands. He said (*Oration. 30, 20*): “He sets us free, who were held captive under sin giving Himself a Ransom for us, the Sacrifice to make expiation to the world. In (*Oration. 30, 5*) he said: “For my sake He was called a curse, who destroyed my curse; and sin, who taketh away the sin of the world and became a new Adam to take the place of the old just so he makes my disobedience His own as Head of the whole body.”

E. **Augustine (A.D. 354–430)**

Augustine did not speak to the issue of the atonement except in a tangential manner while discussing the Trinity; thus, it is not fair to press his words. Having said this, however, these concepts emerge.

1. He does speak of mankind as being debtors in the devil’s power with references to the devil’s rights (this does not to me appear to necessarily embrace a Ransom-to-Satan theory of the atonement).
2. Augustine seems abundantly clear on the penal, substitutionary significance of Christ’s death; it is an expiation to satisfy God though he never uses the term “satisfaction”. He wrote of a penal sacrifice to God (*Enchiridion, 33*): “And so the human race was lying under a just condemnation, and all men were the children of wrath. Of which wrath it is written: ‘All our days are passed away in Thy wrath; we spend our years as a tale that is told. Of which wrath also Job said ‘Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.’ Of which wrath also the Lord Jesus said: ‘He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth on the son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.; For every man is born with it; wherefore the apostle said: ‘We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.’ Now, as men were lying under this wrath by reason of their original sin, and as this original sin was the more heavy and deadly in proportion to the number and magnitude of the actual sins which were added to it, there was need for a Mediator, that is, for a reconciler, who, by the offering of one sacrifice, of which all the sacrifices of the law and the prophets were types, should take away this wrath. Wherefore the apostle said: ‘For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.’ Now when God is said to be angry, we do not attribute to Him such a disturbed feeling as exists in the mind of an

angry man; but we call his just displeasure against sin by the name 'anger,' a word transferred by analogy from human emotions. But our being reconciled in God through a Mediator, and receiving the Holy Spirit, so that we who were enemies are made sons ('For as many as are led by the Spirit of god, they are the sons of God'): this is the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Again (40, 1): "Begotten and conceived, then, without any indulgence of carnal lust, and therefore bringing with Him no original sin, and by the grace of God joined and united in a wonderful and unspeakable way in one person with the Word, the Only-begotten of the Father, a son by nature, not by grace, and therefore having no sin of His own; nevertheless, on account of the likeness of sinful flesh in which He came, He was called sin, that He might be sacrificed to wash away sin. For under the Old Covenant, sacrifices for sin were called sins. And He, of whom all these sacrifices were types and shadows, was Himself truly made sin. Hence the apostle, after saying, 'We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God,' forthwith adds: 'for He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' He does not say, as some incorrect copies read, 'He who knew no sin died sin for us,' as if Christ had Himself sinned for our sakes; but he said, 'Him who knew no sin,' that is, Christ, God, to whom we are to be reconciled, 'hath made to be sin for us,' that is, hath made Him a sacrifice for our sins, by which we might be reconciled to God. He, then, being made sin, just as we are made righteousness (our righteousness being not our own, but God's, not in ourselves, but in Him); He being made sin, not His own, but ours, not in Himself, but in us, showed, by the likeness of sinful flesh in which He was crucified, that though sin was not in Him, yet that in a certain sense He died to sin, by dying in the flesh which was the likeness of sin; and that although He Himself had never lived the old life of sin, yet by His resurrection He typified our new life springing up out of the old death in sin."

In the treatise on the Trinity he said (4, 14): "They do not understand, that not even the proudest of spirits themselves could rejoice in the honor of sacrifices, unless a true sacrifice was due to the one true God, in whose stead they desire to be worshipped; and this cannot be rightly offered except by a holy and righteous priest; nor unless that which is offered be received from those for whom it is offered; and unless also it be without fault, so that it may be offered for cleansing the faulty. This is at least all desire who wish sacrifice to be offered for themselves to God. Who then is so righteous and holy a priest as the only Son of god, who had no need to purge His own sins by sacrifice, neither original sins, nor those which are added by human life? And what could be so fitly chosen by men to be offered for them as human flesh? And what so fit for this immolation as

mortal flesh? And what so clear for cleansing the faults of mortal men as the flesh born in and from the womb of a virgin, without any infection of carnal concupiscence? And what could be so acceptably offered and taken, as the flesh of our sacrifice, made the body of our priest? In such wise that, whereas four things are to be considered in every sacrifice,—to whom it is offered, by whom it is offered, what is offered, for whom it is offered,—the same One and true Mediator Himself, reconciling us to God by the sacrifice of peace, might remain one with Him to whom he offered, might make those one in Himself for whom He offered, Himself might be in one both the offerer and the offering.”

Mozley wrote a fitting conclusion to Augustine when he stated (*Atonement*, 123): “One feels that had the occasion of great controversy been present, Augustine might have anticipated Anselm, and given to Western Christendom such a synthesis of all the various elements of his thought as would have constituted an authoritative soteriology; but the battle with Pelagianism, though really involving questions of vital moment in connection with the value and effects of the death of Christ, concentrated on other points.”

V. CONCLUSION.

The focus of this lesson has been on the development of the doctrine of the work of Christ, particularly the atonement, in the Ancient Church. Indications of a Ransom-to-Satan view are evident in the early theologians with its clearest expositor being Gregory of Nyssa. The Fathers demonstrate strong evidence of a partial, if not total, rejection from this position to a penal satisfaction theory as evident in Irenaeus (through the Recapitulation mode), Origen, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Augustine. However, the most productive period in the delineation of the meaning of the atonement is yet before us from Anselm through the Protestant Reformation.