

A theological appraisal of the satisfaction theory of atonement: Implications for the Ghanaian context

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Abstract

The doctrine of atonement is central to the logic of the Christian faith. As a core part of Christian theology, the subject of atonement has received much scholarly attention since the emergence of the Christian church. Different scholars have interpreted Christ's atoning sacrifice in different ways based on their socio-political milieu. One of such interpretations is Anselm's satisfaction theory which considers the atonement as a supererogatory act that provided satisfaction for humankind's disobedience of God. Like any other model of atonement, Anselm's model has its strengths and limitations. The lack of literature on the contextual application of Anselm's satisfaction theory to the Ghanaian context has prompted this study which appraises the theory and then discusses how it might address selected challenges facing the contemporary Ghanaian society. The methodology used for the first task comprised a synchronic historical review and conceptual analysis of existing literature on the satisfaction theory. Among other things, the study found that the satisfaction theory rightly considers God as the receiver of the atonement but fails to address pertinent issues regarding God's redemptive and covenantal nature. This was followed by a comparative study between Anselm's socioeconomic and political contexts and those of contemporary Ghana. Based on this, contextual applications of the theory were deduced for contemporary Ghana. The article contributes to the contemporary Christian discourse on the doctrine of soteriology and its relevance for the human society.

Keywords

Anselm; eco-theology; God; satisfaction theory; sin; sociopolitical

Introduction

The Christian doctrine of atonement has been a central theme throughout the history of the church. Theologically, the word “atonement” refers to the process by which God reconciles humanity with himself (Selvam 2017:6). Christian scholars generally agree that Christ’s death is the basis of salvation. However, there is no scholarly consensus regarding the meaning and the extent of the atonement. Historical theology reveals different interpretations of the atonement from people of different church traditions, eras, and socio-political settings. The different theories (models) of atonement include the recapitulation theory, the ransom theory, the satisfaction theory, the moral influence theory, the *Christus Victor* model, and the penal substitutionary theory (Erickson 1998:813; Morris 2001:118; Falconer 2015:37; Ryrie 1999:355). Even though these interpretations differ substantially, each of them contributes to the overall Christian understanding of the nature of the atonement.

Of interest to this article is the satisfaction theory which was propounded by Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) in the medieval period (that is, the period from 590 AD when Gregory I was made bishop of Rome to 1517 when the Protestant Reformation occurred) (Enns 2008:461). Before this period, Origen’s ransom theory of atonement, with its emphasis on the payment of a ransom to the devil for the redemption of humanity, had dominated the church for almost a millennium (Ryrie 1999:355). The medieval period, however, witnessed a shift from the ransom theory to the satisfaction theory of Anselm which was rooted in the feudal system that prevailed in this era (Walters 2004:246).

While one may trace the satisfaction theory to Anselm, this view seems to have been anticipated by Tertullian (ca 155–225 CE) who (centuries before Anselm) thought of the cross as a motivator for ethical conduct and repentance as a form of compensation to God (Laing 2018:np). Aulén (2003:81) notes that after Tertullian had prepared grounds for this

interpretation, Cyprian began to work it long before the time of Anselm. Tertullian considered satisfaction as the compensation which a human makes for his/her trespass in the form of payment. He argued that it is absurd not to perform penance and yet expect the remission of sin, or to leave the price for sin unpaid and yet expect sin to be forgiven (Tertullian cited in Hach 2011:26). Therefore, for Tertullian, penance may be considered as satisfaction; it is the acceptance of a temporal penalty to avoid eternal damnation.

A survey of literature on atonement reveals many publications on Anselm's theory. However, none of them has applied this theory to the Ghanaian context. This literature gap is the justification for this article which first, critiques Anselm's model and then deduces implications for addressing some of Ghana's societal needs. The article is a literature-based study which gathered data from books, theses/dissertations and journal articles, among others.

With the above introductory notes, the next section outlines the context/background of Anselm's theology.

Background of the satisfaction theory

Anselm was a monastic theologian whose theological perspectives were informed by a Platonic worldview. He is widely regarded as the founder of scholasticism, a method of learning that emphasizes "dialectical reasoning to extend knowledge by inference and to resolve contradictions" (Janin and Carlson 2023:79). Scholasticism involves critical conceptual analysis and carefully drawing of distinctions (Janin and Carlson 2023:79). Anselm developed his satisfaction model of atonement in the latter part of the eleventh century with the core teaching that the atonement of Christ was meant to compensate God, the Father (Erickson 2013:813–14; Schmidt 2017:217). As hinted earlier, before Anselm's model, Origen's ransom theory had dominated the church's view on atonement for a long time (Enns 2008:331). According to the ransom theory, the devil had a legal claim over human beings when Adam sinned and so after the Fall all human beings were under the dominion of the devil (Erickson 2013:810). It argues further that God had no legal right to claim humankind without

paying a redemptive price (a ransom). Therefore, it was necessary for Christ to pay what was required to redeem humanity from the devil's captivity. The devil, then, becomes a central party in God's redemptive plan.

Anselm's satisfaction theory became dominant in scholastic soteriological discourses. Early in the development of scholasticism, Anselm raised key themes such as the relation between faith and reason. This is what he said of those who had asked him to write about atonement: "They make their request not in order to approach faith by way of reason but in order to delight in the comprehension and contemplation of the doctrines which they believe, as well as in order to be ready, as best they can, always to give a satisfactory answer to everyone who asks of them a reason for the hope which is in us" (Anselm cited in Boa and Bowman 2012:18). Later, he pointed out that "although they [unbelievers] seek a rational basis because they do not believe whereas we seek it because we do believe, nevertheless it is one and the same thing that both we and they are seeking" (Anselm cited in Boa and Bowman 2012:18). Anselm's work was apologetic in nature. Even though his intention was not actually to displace faith as the basis of the certainty of Christianity, he aimed at giving reasoned arguments that could convince unbelievers to come to rational faith with Christ (Boa and Bowman 2012:18). By so doing, he rendered unbelievers without rational excuse not to accept Christ.

With this approach to theology, Anselm argued out rationally for the necessity of the atonement involving the Son of God who was both God and human. In his *Cur Deus Homo?* ("Why God Became Man?"), Anselm completely opposes the classic view that the devil had a right of possession over humanity and that God needed to ransom humanity through the shedding of Jesus's blood as a ransom paid to the devil. Anselm then presents his own theory, which is the first thorough and scientific exposition of the doctrine of atonement. Anselm is described as "the most original thinker the church had seen since the days of Augustine" (Schmidt 2017:217). His view about the atonement has been upheld within Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed circles. What are the major tenets of Anselm's theory? The next section deals with this question.

Major components of Anselm's satisfaction theory

Sin as debt owed God

Anselm's theory must be understood in relation to his doctrine of sin, for what sin is understood to be will strongly affect one's view of what needs to be done in order to counter it. Therefore, the right place to begin a discussion of Anselm's theory is his concept of sin. According to Anselm (2004:1), God created humans as rational beings so that they might be happy in enjoying him (cf. Gen. 1:26–28; 3:1ff.); therefore, humanity's happiness is informed by their obligatory subordination to the perfect will of God. The obligatory subordination of human will to God's will is the debt humans owe to God – that is, the honour that human beings are supposed to give to God (Walters 2004:243). The one who pays this debt (of sin) is righteous; while the one who does not pay it is a sinner. Hence, for Anselm (2007:202; cf. Erickson 2013:815; Berkhof 2000:385) sin is nothing other than a non-payment of debt of honour due to God. In this sense, Anselm considers sin as stealing from God what rightly belongs to him and hence dishonouring him (Erickson 2013:815; Walters 2004:243; Lewis and Demarest 2010:375; Berkhof 2000:385; Enns 2008:465). In short, sin can be understood as a debt, signifying the shortfall in providing complete and rightful obedience to God.

Anselm's depiction of sin as debt one owes God finds support from Matthew 6:12 where Jesus metaphorizes sin as debt that needs to be remitted (forgiven; cf. Lk 11:4). This text, in Anselm's view, is God's guidance to prevent humans from assuming actions – vengeance – reserved for him alone. The act of taking vengeance is exclusive to the Lord, who reigns over all (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30).

Anselm locates sin in the use of human will. He argues that God created Adam with an upright and just will which has an affection and desire for willing what is good and just. The human will also have freedom to maintain this perfect state. Anselm identifies three senses of the human "will" as follows (Grant 2008:1; Visser and Williams 2004:179–203). As a tool, the will is the soul's power for "desiring"; as an affection, the will serves as the means by which the will as a tool is inclined to desiring something. The will as "employment" comes to play when, with the will as

tool, one actually and consciously turns towards and desires something to which they are inclined by will as affection. The use of the will occurs when one actually desires something that they are consciously thinking about (Grant 2008:1–2).

For Anselm (cited in Richardson and Hopkins 1976:139), the devil sinned when he willed “something which he did not already have and was not supposed to will at the time.” This paradigm of the devil’s misuse of will equally applies to human beings who, by virtue of their moral nature, are able to make moral judgement and choices according to their will. Human beings have freedom to will; therefore, sin occurs when one wills what they are not supposed to will. Before the Fall, the affection for happiness was perfectly under the harmonious control of the affection for justice and so one was able to choose happiness without any conflict with the desire for justice. The Fall of Adam resulted in the loss of his initial perfect state; that is, the state of justice in which he was created (Gwozdz 2013:7). Consequent to the Fall, human beings are no longer able not to sin. The post-fall human, having lost the gift of justice and the affection for it, is now subjected to inordinate desires, and now experiences an unchecked desire for happiness. This does not mean that Adam lost his freedom by which he could make reasonable and responsible choices between what is right or wrong. Adam lost his rectitude of will without losing what belonged essentially to his rational nature; namely, freedom (Gwozdz 2013:7). Adam’s sin adversely affected the harmony and beauty of the universe by disrupting the perfect hierarchy of subjection (Lewis and Demarest 2010:375). Sin in general pushes one outside the divinely willed order in which God constantly delights.

Anselm’s satisfaction theory was informed heavily by the feudal system, which, though was waning during his lifetime, had had a huge influence on the church and society (Walters 2004:246). The next section considers this sociopolitical paradigm.

God as feudal Overlord

The Middle Ages witnessed a number of relationship models involving several written and unwritten codes of behaviour. Anselm’s concept of the preservation of divine honour is reminiscent of certain aspects of one of such models – that is, feudalism (or the feudal system). This system prevailed

in medieval Europe between the 9th and 15th centuries. Feudalism is a sociopolitical and economic system in which small towns develop around the local lord who owes the land. The poor would often work their lord's land, give him honour and obey every ruling of the lord while the lord provided them with security.

At the time of formulating this theory, the Roman view of justice had been substituted by the more concrete personal dignity of the feudal overlords (Walters 2004:246). The feudal system, not the Roman Empire, was the most dominant system in the society. Under this system, a breach of the law, be it public or private, was viewed as a direct offense against a person; therefore, justice and law had now turned into a personal matter (Erickson 2013:814; Oladini 2011:30). This accounts for Anselm's shift from the conception of God as a Judge to perceiving God as an Overlord who deserves honour, safeguards his honour and demands satisfaction for any infringement of it (see Oladini 2011:30). Thus, Anselm's God is a feudal Lord and all of human beings are indebted to him.

In the feudal system, when a serf dishonoured the dignity of the lord, a debt was paid the value of which depended on the person's status. Just as the serfs had the responsibility of honouring their lord, so, Anselm taught, human beings have the responsibility of honouring their Overlord, God. Thus, in the Anselm's view, there was only one necessary allegiance, which is the allegiance to God. Anselm rejected the ransom theory on the basis that it makes humans have dual allegiance; that is, allegiance to God and allegiance to the devil (Walters 2004:242). Anselm rejected Origen's view that the devil had a legal right to hold humankind captive because of sin and argued that God is the legal owner of humans. Obviously, Anselm did not take the devil out of the story of atonement but redefined his role and the focus of the atonement.

Satisfaction as a necessity to deal with sin

The increasing emphasis on the concept of satisfaction due to the Roman Catholic Church's emphasis on penitence contributed to Anselm's shift to the satisfaction view of atonement (Erickson 2013:814). The penitential system held that one could avoid punishment for certain offenses by rendering some form of satisfaction. This agreed with the legal system of that time which allowed various forms of satisfaction to substitute punishment in

matters of private offenses (Erickson 2013:814). This concept of satisfaction had infused into the feudal system and so Anselm expressed the atonement in terms of the satisfaction imagery taken from his society.

From the analogy of the feudal system (examined above), Adam's sin of not upholding God's honour (cf. Gen. 3) parallels a vassal's failure to render services to the feudal lord. Certainly, sinners need to restore to God the honour they have taken from him because God's honour cannot go unrecompensed. Anselm could not think of anything more unjust and intolerable than to let one's sin go unpunished. If sin goes unpunished then God has not discharged his just duty. That would be unbecoming of God because it means he does not differentiate between the guilty and the innocent. That is, allowing sin to go unpunished would give both the sinner and the righteous equal standing before God, with no distinction made between the two. Anselm supports his point by arguing that the notion of divine reward for righteousness is universally recognized (cf. Deut. 5:32–33). From this premise, he contends that if sin remains unpunished – neither paid for nor punished – it ceases to be under any law or regulation. Also, without restoration of God's honour justice would be overturned and the creature would rob God of what is due him (God).

The restoration of God's honour demands either infinite punishment (condemning humanity) or adequate satisfaction if justice is to be upheld (Lewis and Demarest 2010:375; Berkhof 2000:385). That is, forgiveness of sin was only possible through the offer of adequate satisfaction to God or through punishment. Under this circumstance, God opted for satisfaction, knowing that the infinite punishment which sinners deserve would destroy humanity, and thus impede his purpose for creation and redemption (Lewis and Demarest 2010:375). God made humans as rational and responsible beings to live happily for eternity, enjoying and loving him forever. Thus, punishment is undesirable for everyone involved, as it could hinder God's plan to bestow eternal happiness upon his creation. Satisfaction, therefore, emerges as the sole viable alternative.

According to Anselm, God chose satisfaction because of his desire to save some human to compensate himself for the loss of the fallen angels (Erickson 2013:815; Lewis and Demarest 2010:375). The point is that since

fallen angels cannot be saved, God must save at least some humans to replace these angels.

Humankind's inability to offer adequate satisfaction

The question of how the satisfaction ought to be offered needs attention at this point. In medieval society, two conditions needed to be satisfied for a satisfaction to be accepted. According to Roman civil law, satisfaction was an alternative to punishment in matters regarded as private offenses. Such an offense requires punishment unless satisfaction is made. Satisfaction is the payment for or the return of a stolen item to the victim, together with an extra payment for dishonouring the victim (Rosato 2013:413; Erickson 2013:815). Therefore, in the process of reconciliation what is offered to God ought to exceed what was taken from him. Applying this principle to the satisfaction required by God, Anselm (cited in Schmitt 1946:68) writes, "it is not sufficient to pay back only what was taken, but for any offense one ought to payback more than what he took." Therefore, sinners are not only required to return to God what they have taken from him but also to give additional compensation for the injury that has been done to him (Erickson 2013:815; Ahn 2018:122; Laing 2018:np). This is so because the original intent of jurisdiction is not just "to inflict punishment on offenders, but also to rehabilitate victims from dishonour and pain" (Ahn 2018:122).

The second condition for making an acceptable satisfaction is that what is used to repay the one against whom sin has been committed cannot have been something already owed to him/her (Erickson 2013:815). This means that to make satisfaction requires one to "perform supererogatory act of sufficient goodness to pay the debt if sin" (Rosato 2013:414). That is, the payment must be made on the payer's meritorious deeds and not on the basis of what already belongs to the offended party.

Humankind was not in any position able to render such satisfaction to the infinite God. There are at least two reason for this. Firstly, when humans sin against God, the disgrace it brings to God's honour is like an infinite insult such that the greatest compensation from a finite human being is still finite and unworthy of the infinite injury to God's honour. Anselm (2007:221) insists that "the punishment of the sinner" fails to give "honour to God," because "when the sinner does not repay what he took away, but is punished, if the punishment of the sinner is not to the honour of God, then

God loses his honour and does not regain it.” The sin against God is infinite because of his (God’s) infinite holiness. For this reason, the satisfaction had to be made by someone greater than everything except God (Lewis and Demarest 2010:375).

Secondly, no amount of good works can settle the debt because God created humankind “out of nothing” to maintain a master-slave relationship with him (God). In this context, a slave is obligated to obey their master.

Humans have a continuing duty of complete allegiance and obedience to God so that they have nothing (meritorious) to pay for wrongs committed in the past. They cannot perform enough deeds to satisfy God because they were created to honour God and so when they perform deeds that honour God, they have not done anything extra to merit any satisfaction (Lewis and Demarest 2010:375). As Erickson (2013:815) puts it, “Humans could not possibly have rendered satisfaction on their own behalf, for even if they were to do their best, that would be nothing more than giving God his due.” Humans could, therefore, not provide the needed satisfaction.

Given the above conditions for the satisfaction, it follows that only God was capable of providing satisfaction for sin. This situation necessitated the coming of the Son of God to offer satisfaction to God. The next section considers this issue more closely.

The cross as necessary and adequate satisfaction

Logically, the answer to the question of the nature and means of offering the needed satisfaction is found in Jesus Christ (Ahn 2018:122; Lewis and Demarest 2010:375; Erickson 2013:816; Peterson 2016:877). Since adequate satisfaction could not come from a being so inferior to God as humankind is, the eternal Word of God became flesh (John 1:14) to pay human debt. The Savior needed to be God-man for at least two reasons. First, being divine made him capable of paying the infinite debt required for the satisfaction of divine justice. The Savior had to be human because it was humanity that he was to represent on the cross (Lewis and Demarest 2010:375; Erickson 2013:815–816). The Incarnation and the virgin conception, then, are a logical necessity in Anselm’s theology of the atonement (Ekem 2005:13; Erickson 2013:816). The virgin conception ensured that Christ was free from the pollution of the human race due to Adam’s sin.

As both God and sinless human being (cf. Jn 1:1, 14; 8:46; 1 Jn 3:5), Christ did not deserve death (Erickson 2013:816; Berkhof 2000:385). Therefore, his voluntary death on the cross became a supererogatory act that secured forgiveness for his kindred (Berkhof 2000:385). Anselm illustrated this point with a parable. He told of a city in which all the inhabitants (except one) sinned against their king so severely that they were to die as a punishment. In response, the innocent person decided, out of love, to do something that would please the king. The innocent person's act pleased the king so much that he absolved all his subjects who either before or after that day desired "both to obtain pardon on the basis of the work done on that day and to assent to the agreement then contracted" (Anselm cited in Walters 2004:245). The satisfaction offered to the king by the innocent person also became the basis for pardoning the sins committed after that day. Christ is the innocent inhabitant in the parable. The work he did on the cross merited him a reward from God. However, since he (being God himself) had everything, he could not receive anything as reward from God (the Father). The only way he could be rewarded was to allow him transfer (bestow) the benefits of his death to his siblings (humanity) so that they could be freed from the guilty and penalty of their sins (Berkhof 2000:385).

Anselm acknowledges that Christ's personality has so much dignity that confers infinite value on the things that he does. It seems, therefore, that Christ could offer satisfaction with the many good things which had sufficient goodness that was proportionate to the debt of sin (Rosato 2013:415). Perhaps, the merit of Christ's exemplary life could outweigh the sin of the world and so could atone for sin. Yet, he argues that because such good was already owed to God apart from sin, it could not be used as payment for the debt that was owed God (Rosato 2013:415; Berkhof 2000:385). Thus, the satisfaction theory assigns no salvific relevance to Christ's life. Anselm (cited in Schmitt 1946:68) then contends that, there was only one way by which Christ could pay the debt of sin; that is, to die. Anselm reasons, based on Isaiah 53:7 and John 10:18, that Jesus willingly sacrificed himself without anyone forcing him.

Since Christ was not obligated to die because he was sinless, dying in honour of God constituted both an act of sufficient goodness to satisfy God and something that was not already owed to God. Christ's death, therefore,

became logically necessary simply because there was no other way of performing supererogatory act.

The next section outlines some strengths and weakness of Anselm's satisfaction theory to equip the reader to build upon the strengths and to avoid potential pitfalls.

Theological appraisal of Anselm's satisfaction theory

Strengths of the satisfaction theory

The satisfaction theory was influential during Anselm's time and the period that followed. It is considered as one of Anselm's major contributions to Christian theology. His *Why God Became Man?* has been described as "the truest and greatest book on the atonement that has ever been written" (Denney cited in Ekem 2005:13). This section considers the strengths of this model of atonement. First of all, the satisfaction theory rightly emphasizes God's sovereign role in the salvation of humanity. Anselm (2007:258) maintains that the immutability of God's honour and his sovereign will to maintain the order of his perfect creation are the two decisive factors that must be required for the restorative satisfaction of his honour. Anselm's argument that God, not the devil, had the legal right over humanity highlights God's sovereignty. For Anselm (2006:108), the devil has no "right of possession" over humanity because humans are God's possession and he shares this right with no one. Therefore, God did not have to purchase humanity from the devil. God's sovereignty is also upheld when Anselm (2007:288) argues that God was not under compulsion to save humankind after they sinned. Thus, the atonement was God's self-decision intended to preserve his perfect nature and to do his divine work of creation and salvation. By emphasizing divine sovereignty in the redemption process, Anselm rightly maintains the orthodox teaching that salvation is a gift and not based on one's merit (cf. Eph. 2:8-9). The satisfaction theory is Godward, emphasizing that the atonement was necessitated God's free will (Berkhof 2000:385).

Secondly, Anselm's emphasis on satisfaction has the potential of promoting true worship, genuine spirituality, and piety (Walters 2004:252). By extension, the satisfaction theory means that God needs to be satisfied

through one's mode of life. This view encourages the believer to satisfy God's will in all aspects of their lives. This might explain why Anselm's generation and those which followed made piety central to their spirituality (Walters 2004:252). It is important to add that even though religious piety is deeply rooted in Anselm's satisfaction theory, Anselm in no way considered human works as necessary to complement Christ's work in order to achieve salvation of humankind.

Thirdly, Anselm's theory exposes one to the "immutable nature of God" (cf. Mal. 3:6; 1 Sam. 15:29)—immutability being God's quality of not changing – by which one can only see that God is God of justice. God would not allow the violation of his honour to go unpunished because his justice demands that he deals justly with any human violation against his honour. If God is just, then the believer can be assured that God will not discriminate against them.

Weaknesses of the satisfaction theory

In spite of the above strengths, Anselm's satisfaction theory has some defects. First, it is argued that the satisfaction theory is defective in overemphasizing God's honour and majesty at the expense of his character in which his honour and majesty are rooted. It is argued that this model of atonement puts so much weight on God's honour that he seems to diminish God's attributes of holiness, mercy and covenantal justice (Rom 1:16–17) (Enns 2008:332; Hach 2011:28; Bromley 1956:57). This erroneous emphasis, it is argued, originated from the medieval society which was characterized by exaggerated ideas regarding the authority of overlords and dishonour done to the overlord's majesty was the greatest offence one could make (Bromley 1956:57). In this context, the people thought heaven was organized like the feudal society. The feudal analogy employed by Anselm ended up undermining core divine attributes. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (or "of the Loving/Merciful Father" cf. Luke 15:11–32), the role of God's love and mercy in his salvific plan is prominent. When the prodigal son returned after squandering his share of his father's property, the father mercifully greeted him with open arms, cloth him and organized a feast for him. Concerning how Anselm's God compares to the God in the Parable, Weaver (2011:96) writes:

The God envisioned in satisfaction atonement is not actually a merciful God. This God forgives only after receiving his “pound of flesh,” only after having divine justice or divine honour restored through the death of Jesus. God can forgive sinners only because Jesus has first done something to satisfy the demand of God that sin be dealt with. If the father of the parable acted on the model of satisfaction atonement, he might demand a work program for the son to repay the squandered inheritance [...] [Genuine forgiveness] is not predicated on balancing sin and evil with punishment. It is truly grace.

Weaver notes that forgiveness in Anselm’s model is contingent, depending on recompense first being made. Peterson (2016:878) asserts that “It is indeed difficult to reconcile the genuinely merciful God illustrated by Jesus’ parable with the popularly understood “Anselmian” God whose favour is a function of extracting such recompense, who stands in need of placation, and whose wrath and justice take such a dark, penal shape.” In this sense, Anselm’s God does not compare well with the God whose love for the world caused him the life of his only begotten Son (cf. Jn 3:16). The following comment by Rahner (1988, vol. XXI:249) supports this point: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, and it was not because the son gave himself that an angry God with great effort changed his mind about the world.”

While the foregoing argument seems impressive, it seems to the author that this position, in a way, overlooks the voluntary and self-sacrificial nature of the atonement. Anselm identifies two possible ways by which God could deal with sin; namely, by punishment and by satisfaction. God’s choice to spare humanity and take on the responsibility of fulfilling justice for sinners, rather than leaving them to endure eternal punishment, underscores his love and mercy towards humanity. Anselm (Nguyen 2018:42) himself dealt with this issue when he said:

... the compassion of God, which appeared to be lost entirely when we were considering the justice of God and the sin of man, we have now found to be so great and so consistent with justice, that nothing greater or more just can be conceived of. For what compassion can equal the words of God the Father addressed to the

sinner condemned to eternal punishment, and having no means of redeeming himself: “Take my only begotten Son, and make him an offering for thyself;” or the words of the Son: “Take me, and ransom thy soul?” For this is what both say, when they invite and draw us to faith in the gospel.

By this quote, Anselm caters for God’s love and mercy, contrary to what his critics have assumed.

Furthermore, the satisfaction theory fails to explore how the atonement is appropriated by the believer. Anselm gives a picture of the external transfer of the merits of Christ to humanity without any clue as to how Christ’s salvific merit is applied to humanity (Berkhof 2000:386; Bromley 1956:57). Such concepts as the mystical union between Christ and believers, and the necessity of faith in salvation are not addressed in this model. The New Testament teaches, as Anselm also rightly acknowledges, that salvation is not based on human merit (cf. Eph. 2:8–9). However, it also teaches that one has to express faith in Christ and have a vital inner relationship with him for salvation to be applied (cf. Jn 3:16). By ignoring these aspects of salvation and simply considering it as bestowing righteousness on those in whom there is no merit, the satisfaction theory “makes salvation appear to be largely a matter of bookkeeping” (Bromley 1956:57). Also, Anselm did not account for the role of the Holy Spirit in God’s salvific plan; all he noted was that the Holy Spirit deserves honour because he belongs to the Godhead. Perhaps, Anselm could have developed the transformation of humanity through sanctification that comes as a work of the Holy Spirit.

In addition, the satisfaction theory has been criticized for paying less attention to the penal and substitutionary nature of Christ’s suffering (Enns 2008:332; Lewis and Demarest 2010:375). Scripture alludes to the substitutionary nature of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross (cf. Isa 53; Mk 10:45; Mt. 20:28; Jn 1:29). Here, the death of Christ is considered merely as tribute paid voluntarily in honour of God the Father (Berkhof 2000:386). Rather than highlighting the payment for the penalty of sin, the satisfaction view (informed by the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance) embraces “so much satisfaction for so much violation” (Enns 2008:332).

Also, Anselm’s failure to acknowledge the salvific significance of the life of Christ is a major theological downside of his model (Enns 2008:332). A

balanced theology of atonement needs to consider the salvific significance of the life of Christ.

Aside appraising the satisfaction theory, this article also aims to discuss how it may be applied to the Ghanaian sociopolitical context. Therefore, having critiqued this theory in the above section, the article proceeds to outline relevant contextual applications of this theory to the Ghanaian society.

Implications for the Ghanaian context

Socioeconomic implications

Ghana, like other sub-Saharan African nations, grapples with socioeconomic obstacles affecting citizens' well-being and hindering overall development. Despite efforts to achieve sustainable economic growth, pervasive poverty persists. High youth unemployment poses a threat to social stability, exacerbated by limited job opportunities and a growing population. Inadequate infrastructure, encompassing roads, electricity, and water supply, impedes economic activities and diminishes the quality of life in many regions. The educational sector faces challenges such as insufficient resources, overcrowded classrooms, and educational quality disparities between urban and rural areas, despite ongoing attempts at improvement. The 2020 in economic inequality between 2012 and 2016 (World Bank 2020:17). This situation makes residents of some regions in Ghana vulnerable and reduced their chance of breaking the shackles of poverty. The level of vulnerability was more intense in rural communities than in urban communities (World Bank 2020:18).

The contemporary Ghanaian context is similar to Anselm's context in term of the ownership and management of agricultural land. Agriculture forms a major sector in the Ghanaian economy. Most people depend on farming activities for their living. However, not everyone owns their own land; many people depend on others for farmland. The land owners not only provide other with land, but they also provide them with shelter and security, similar to feudalism in Anselm's time. The landless – most of whom are migrants from economically less endowed regions of Ghana –

are expected to honour their land owners and also give them their share after harvesting their crops based on agreed principles.

As a result of economic inequality and other factors, Ghana shows three main social classes, namely, upper class, middle class, and lower class. The upper middle class – comprising people of high education, high levels of occupation, urban dwellers, highly skilled – mostly exploit those in the other classes. The lower class is rendered poor and vulnerable without anyone to speak on their behalf. Consequently, the lower class, for instance, finds it difficult associating themselves with the middle class. The notable gap between the rich and the poor, the social disparities it brings is also exacerbated by limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities in less endowed communities. The situation has led to oppression and the marginalization of the poor as well as political, social, and economic injustice against the poor.

Corruption remains a pervasive issue, impacting various sectors and hindering effective governance. The political leaders (who are expected to reduce the plight of the vulnerable) are among the major actors in this social canker (Odartey-Wellington 2014:2; Andoh 2021:32–35). Instead of serving the nation, some Ghanaian political leaders use their position to their advantage and amass state resources for themselves. Many of them use corrupt practices to become wealthy and are not dealt with because of the seeming immunity of persons in authority against persecution (Asante 2014:103). In instances where individuals involved in corruption face prosecution, their sentences often fall short of serving as effective deterrents for others. These sentences tend to be less severe compared to those received by ordinary (lower-class) individuals for similar offenses. Consequently, although there are occasional instances where a few politicians may be held accountable, in most cases, corrupt senior public officials leverage their political influence, prominence, and wealth to manipulate the judicial system and evade serious consequences for high-level corruption (Asante 2014:103). In such a context, Anselm's emphasis of justice may provide a useful paradigm for dealing with socioeconomic challenges. The following sections attempt to offer contextual applications for dealing with the above challenges based on the satisfaction theory.

Socioeconomic justice

The satisfaction interpretation of the atonement, with its emphasis on divine justice, may be applied to these spheres of life to liberate people from injustices. According to Anselm, human injustices have stolen from divine justice of God and therefore, must be paid back. Similarly, one unjust act towards another human being ultimately robs God of the honour due him. And just as God require just satisfaction for dealing with sin, so humans should also emulate him by acting justly towards others. This understanding of the satisfaction theory is applicable to the social, economic, and political oppression in contemporary Ghana. Christians should view economic inequality as unjust. Here, the injustices in the society may be considered as a form of collective sin that need to be addressed and rectified to restore justice. Among other means, the rectification and restoration of justice requires identifying with the suffering. Societal leaders ought to formulate policies aimed at redistributing resources to narrow the gap of inequality. Ensuring socioeconomic justice may require taxing some of the rightfully earned income and capital of the more affluent to benefit the less privileged.

Furthermore, the idea that Christ's sacrifice satisfies divine justice can be associated with a call for societal and political structures that advocate for the marginalized and oppressed. The satisfaction theory often employs legal and juridical language to describe the atonement. In a political context, this can be related to concepts of justice within human legal systems to provide theological grounding for resisting and challenging structures that perpetuate oppression. Therefore, the satisfaction theory charges believers to seek justice, fairness, and righteousness in societal structures and political institutions. Christians ought to demonstrate mercy and love through tangible actions. Anselm's emphasis on justice is a call to political and religious leaders to provide sustenance to the hungry, solace to the grieving, and support to the sick.

For socioeconomic justice to be achieved, the rule of law must be enforced, whereby everybody is placed equally before the laws of the country. To enhance this, the civil magistrate, for example acting as the "minister of God for justice" to address crime and civil offenses should base his/her work on the principles that mirror how God addresses sin through the atonement, without fear or favour (Tuomala 1993:222). This will in turn

ensure that corrupt political leaders are adequately and fairly dealt with to serve as a deterrent for others who intend to use power to their advantage. At the same time, the satisfaction theory can inspire efforts to change laws that perpetuate inequality and discrimination and oppression.

Reconciliation and social/societal transformation

The satisfaction theory says that Christ's work establishes an objective basis for reconciliation by satisfying justice. If Christ's death reconciles humanity with God, then addressing social injustices may be considered as a way of participating in the ongoing work of reconciliation and redemption. In this sense, the satisfaction theory offers theological language to articulate the transformative power of the Gospel in addressing not only personal sin but also societal and structural injustices. Tuomala (1993:222) rightly asserts that "Properly understood, atonement establishes the ground of justice for reconciliation between an offended party and the offender." Though this assertion was made with the general view of atonement in mind, it resonates well with the satisfaction interpretation of the cross due to its emphasis on justice. The satisfaction theory, when integrated with liberation theology, can therefore amplify the call for social transformation. The existence of social classes and the discrimination against people of "lower" socioeconomic status need to be dealt with. As the satisfaction reconciles the divine overlord and his servants, so the various levels within the socioeconomic and political space need to be reconciled as one people with dignity and common identity.

A person's sense of dignity is not exclusively self-generated but is influenced by their interactions with others. Fundamentally, human sense of value requires acknowledgment from others to be genuinely fulfilled. When a person is offended morally, it is not the intrinsic value that is violated, but rather the expectation of respect associated with that value (Oxenber 2017:6). Disregarding this expectation results in real harm to the individual who has been violated, affecting both their social and psychological well-being. The person who has been marginalized or discriminated against is affected both socially and psychologically. For Oxenber (2017:6) "Satisfaction is a means through which the self-worth of the violated is reaffirmed by society at large, an affirmation necessary to the psycho-

social well-being of the violated party.” Oxenberg (2017:6) further notes that “The human demand for respect is based in human psycho-social interdependency, such that human beings require respect from one another in order to be fully well in themselves.” This fact – that is, “the fact that a human being’s self-relation depends upon healthful relation with others” – underscores human finitude (Oxenberg 2017:7).

The satisfaction theory also underscores the authority of God and the submission of humanity to that authority. In a political context, this can be interpreted as a call for individuals and societies to recognize a higher moral authority and to align political structures with principles of justice and righteousness. This understanding of the satisfaction theory resonates with Paul’s encouragement for believers to respect and obey the ruling authority (cf. Rom. 13:1–7). Romans 13:1–7 asserts that God instituted the state with the magistrate serving as his representative, functioning as an “agent of wrath” to mete out punishment to wrongdoers. Acting with delegated authority, the magistrate is obligated to dispense justice in alignment with the principles observed by God in dealing with all sins through the atonement of Christ (Tuomala 1993:232). This is an encouragement for people to obey the laws of their society. Such practices as tax evasion and breach of the law have no place in the satisfaction theory. It must however be added that believers have the responsibility to obey God rather than human when human laws contradict divine laws. In such situation, believers have the responsibility of advocating for and fostering the peace of the society. This application of the satisfaction theory whereby citizens respect authority and those in authority treat their subjects fairly can propel Ghana to the path of sustainable societal transformation and development.

Eco-theological implication

Ghana is blessed with resources and majority of the populace are in the agricultural sector (Essegbey and Maccarthy 2020:1). Unfortunately, due to unethical practices, land-related activities have rendered many lands in deplorable states. Ghana currently experiences environmental challenges such as poor agricultural practices, surface mining, desertification, climate variability and change, pollution due to the absence of waste treatment,

and ineffective management (Attua, Annan and Nyame 2014:25; Mantey et al. 2020:2). Interpreting the satisfaction theory in the light of social transformation can lead to a holistic understanding of redemption that encompasses both spiritual and social liberation, including not only human-human relationship but also human-environment relationship. Therefore, a holistic view of the application of the satisfaction theory needs to include an ecological dimension.

Anselm's view of atonement holds that human sin and disobedience leads to disruption in the ordered relationship of beauty and harmony of nature. Anselm's view about sin resonates with the traditional Ghanaian/African worldview which recognizes sin as the main cause of disharmony in the universe. The satisfaction theory holds that the death of Christ satisfies God's honour and also restores order to creation (Weaver 2011:232). The idea of sin disrupting the beauty and harmony of nature provides a useful foundation for eco-theology. The point is that since sin affects the natural environment, salvation must also have environmental ramifications. Salvation is not only meant for humankind but the entire creation. Therefore, the church cannot preach salvation to the society without developing and promoting a credible theology of the environment. The church in Ghana needs to encourage her members to live responsibly so as to preserve and sustain the natural environment. Thus, Anselm's theology of atonement, therefore, offers a strong foundation for developing a theology that is not only anthropocentric (human-centred) but also biocentric (ecological-centred). That is, the atonement is God's own initiative, to save humankind from their sin and to save the environment from destruction.

Religious implication

Ghanaian traditional religious worldview has it that sin makes the wrongdoer becoming ceremonially impure, disrupting the harmony between the physical and spiritual realms. Traditional sacrifices are offered to mend the broken relationship between the sinner and supernatural powers such as ancestors, lower divinities, and the Supreme Being (God) (Wiafe, Anson, Enam 2016:2515; Awoniyi 2015:68–69; Quarcoopome 1987:91–92). The ancestors may be reached directly and the deities may be approached through traditional priest trained to mediate human-

divine relationships. However, like other Africans, Ghanaians have no shrine or priest dedicated to God. The reason is that God is considered so majestic and holy that no human priest may qualify to mediate his relationship with humankind. Offering and prayers are offered to God through lower divinities and ancestors, among others. There is, therefore, a religious vacuum which remains in the Ghanaian traditional religious set-up. Aside the religious vacuum, the fact is that traditional sacrifices for atoning purpose are repetitious and incapable of removing sin and dealing permanently with sin.

The satisfaction theory provides the needed answer to the question of who qualifies to reconcile God and humanity. Like other theories of atonement, the satisfaction theory present Christ as God-human who qualifies as priest for God's relationship with human. Christ is human and so represents humanity in the perfect sense; he is God and so offers the highest satisfaction for the salvation of humankind. Anselm's theory demonstrates that the *kenosis* of Christ (cf. Phil 2:7) was a sacrificial act to atone for the sins of the entire human race (Adebo 2016:16). He argues that Adam's sin corrupted all of humanity, and for the removal of sin and the reconciliation of humankind with God, a perfect person must undertake this task to restore God's honour, which was damaged by sin (Adebo 2016:16). The essence of the sacrifice, according to Anselm, is God sacrificing himself to address the universality of sin.

Anselm's atonement theory aligns with conservative evangelical views on salvation, emphasizing the need for a perfect sacrifice to address humanity's sin (Adebo 2016:16). This serves as a foundation for refining the Ghanaian religious thought to conform to biblical soteriology. Unlike Ghanaian/African religion which promote religious pluralism and universalism Anselm's theory stresses that salvation is exclusively in Christ (Acts 4:12) (Adebo 2016:16). His theory highlights the shortcomings of Ghanaian/African indigenous sacrificial practices and questions their ability to permanently remove sin. Also, his theory, having presented Christ as the only one who qualifies to atone for sin, renders any traditional priestly and/or sacrificial system in any human society obsolete. Christ's satisfaction was sufficient and remains potent for human salvation.

Conclusion

The brief analysis of Anselm's satisfaction theory of atonement has depicted salvation as God's sovereign act that was planned and executed out of his own volition. One way that Anselm achieved this was by his identification of God as the recipient of the atonement, contrary to Origen's idea that the atonement was offered to the devil. The article established that this model of atonement ignores the penal and substitutionary nature of atonement and fails to account for the process by which the benefits of the atonement are applied to humans, among others. The article also demonstrated how the satisfaction theory may be applied to address selected aspects of Ghana's socioeconomic, political, and environmental challenges. The religious implications of Anselm's theory is expected to yield ethical renewal whereby Ghanaian believers will wholeheartedly dedicate their lives to Christ and trust him for the physical and spiritual needs. Finally, it must be stated that Anselm's model has something to offer for a holistic understanding of the Christian doctrine of atonement; therefore, it should not be neglected in contemporary soteriological discourses. Contemporary theologians need to incorporate relevant aspect of the satisfaction theory in their formulation of soteriology for their socio-political environment.

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