



Christus Victor Motifs and Christ's Temptations in the Soteriology of Thomas Aquinas

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Abstract

Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor* soteriological/atonement motif is constituted by the central theme of divine victory over the devil. Few scholars discuss at length the significance of Christ's victory over the devil in Aquinas's soteriology. A comparative analysis of the two treatments of Christ's victory over the devil will unveil the role and significance of that victory in Aquinas's soteriology. According to Aquinas, Christ's humanity and all his human actions are the instrumental efficient causes of salvation and, necessarily, his victory over the devil. Therefore, Christ's life prior to his Passion may be examined for evidence of that victory. The most obvious event for such an analysis is Christ's temptations which will offer a unique insight into Aquinas's presentation of Christ's victory over the devil.

Keywords

Aulén, Christ, Aquinas, Devil, Temptations

Introduction

Romanus Cessario argues that satisfaction is the "key-notion" in Thomas Aquinas's soteriology.¹ Cessario states: "The economy of salvation ... requires the satisfaction of Christ as the archimedean point of the new dispensation."² Many scholars characterize Aquinas's soteriology in similar ways, usually combining satisfaction with some of the following elements: merit, sacrifice, charity, obedience, justice, or the fulfillment of the Old Law.³ Aquinas used

¹ Romanus Cessario, O.P., *The Godly Image: Christ and Salvation in Catholic Thought From Anselm to Aquinas* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1990), 158-166.

² *Ibid.*, 158.

³ For further reading on the soteriology of Thomas Aquinas, see Mark Armitage, "Obedient unto Death, Even Death on a Cross: Christ's Obedience in the Soteriology of

these terms in his *Summa Theologiae* when he examined Christ's Passion. Other scholars characterize Aquinas's soteriology as exemplarist,⁴ while some accuse Aquinas of offering a theory of penal substitution. For example, Gerald O'Collins acknowledges certain positive aspects of Aquinas's soteriology yet he is disgusted with the inevitable consequence of certain elements which, he argues, opens the door to a "monstrous version of redemption [with] Christ as the penal substitute propitiating the divine anger."⁵

Few scholars, however, discuss *at length* the significance of Christ's victory over the devil in Aquinas's soteriology. A rare example is Jonathan Morgan who argued that Aquinas employs Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor* motif (CVM) in his soteriological scheme. Morgan

St. Thomas Aquinas," *Nova et Vetera* vol. 8 no. 3 (2010), 505-526; Romanus Cessario, O.P., "Aquinas on Christian Salvation," in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, eds. Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M., Daniel A. Keating and John P. Yocum (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 117-137; Romanus Cessario, O.P., *Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas: Towards a Personalist Understanding* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982); Romanus Cessario, O.P., *The Godly Image: Christ and Salvation in Catholic Thought From Anselm to Aquinas* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1990); Adam Johnson, "A Fuller Account: The Role of 'Fittingness' in Thomas Aquinas' Development of the Doctrine of the Atonement," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, vol. 12 no. 3 (July 2010) 302-318; Matthew Levering, "Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002); Matthew Levering, "Israel and the Shape of Thomas Aquinas's Soteriology," *The Thomist* 63 no. 1 (1999), 65-82; William P. Loewe, *Lex Crucis: Soteriology and the Stages of Meaning* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 103-156; Aidan Nichols, O.P., "St. Thomas Aquinas on the Passion of Christ: A Reading of *Summa Theologiae* IIIa, q. 46," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990), 447-459; Brandon Peterson, "Paving the Way? Penalty and Atonement in Thomas Aquinas's Soteriology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, vol. 15 no. 4 (July 2013), 265-283; Philip L. Quinn, "Aquinas on Atonement," in *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, eds. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 153-177; Eleonore Stump, "Atonement according to Aquinas," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. Thomas Morris (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 61-91; Eleonore Stump, "Atonement and Justification," in *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, eds. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 178-209; Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Le Christ en ses mystères. La vie et l'œuvre de Jésus selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, vol 2, coll. Jésus et Jésus-Christ, 79 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1986); Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Encyclopédie Jésus le Christ chez saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Cerf. 2008), 701-843, 1165-1202; Rik Van Nieuwenhove, "Bearing the Marks of Christ's Passion: Aquinas Soteriology," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, eds. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 277-302; Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord; A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 340-379.

⁴ See Laurence W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (London: Longmans, Green, 1920), 151-157; Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 437-440.

⁵ Gerald O'Collins, S.J., *Christology: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 206-207.

argued that Christ's victory over the devil plays an equally essential role as satisfaction.⁶ He claimed that most scholars have undervalued this motif and either subordinated it to satisfaction or eschewed it altogether from Aquinas's soteriology.

My purpose in this article is twofold. First, I will comparatively analyze the victory motifs in Aulén and Aquinas in an attempt to establish the presence and significance of the CVM in Aquinas's soteriology. The CVM cannot be merely described as Christ's victory over the devil (and sin and death), but it must be precisely defined by the *specific characteristics* that Aulén ascribes to it. This comparative analysis may appear unwarranted, but it aims to achieve more precise clarity following Morgan's insightful claims. Additionally, *it will lead to an enlightened account of Aquinas's soteriology, which is my ultimate purpose*. It will unveil the role that Christ's victory over the devil *actually* plays in Aquinas's soteriology.

Second, I will analyze Aquinas's examination of Christ's temptations to help determine if the CVM is a significant aspect of Aquinas's soteriology. William Loewe offered a similar analysis in his critique of Aulén's use of Irenaeus as emblematic of the CVM in the early Church. Aulén claimed that Irenaeus's soteriology was supposedly "quite clear and its meaning indisputable."⁷ Loewe embarked on "a fresh reading of [Irenaeus's] work" in an effort to determine what role the CVM actually plays in Irenaeus's soteriology.⁸ Loewe examined how Christ's Passion and death "breaks the power of Satan" and frees man from "being Satan's disciples," according to Irenaeus.⁹ To facilitate his investigation, Loewe examined Irenaeus's analysis of Christ's temptations.¹⁰ I will utilize Loewe's proven method. Aulén also briefly identified Christ's temptations as a special example of Christ's victorious obedience which defeated the devil - which gives added impetus for my inquiry.¹¹ Finally, according to Aquinas, Christ's humanity and all his human actions are the instrumental efficient causes of salvation and, necessarily, his victory

⁶ Jonathan Morgan, "Christus Victor Motifs in the Soteriology of Thomas Aquinas," *Pro Ecclesia* vol. 21 no. 4 (2012), 409-421. Aulén described the *Christus Victor* motif in his classic text published in 1931 which was published in English under the title *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*.

⁷ William P. Loewe, "Irenaeus' Soteriology: Christus Victor Revisited," *Anglican Theological Review* 67 no. 1 (January 1985), 2; See Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*. Translated by A.G. Hebert (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), 16.

⁸ Loewe, "Irenaeus' Soteriology," 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6-10, 14.

¹¹ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*. Translated by A.G. Hebert (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), 29-30.

over the devil.¹² Therefore, Christ's life prior to his Passion may be examined for evidence of that victory. The most obvious event for such an analysis is Christ's temptations. Benjamin Heidgerken notes the lack scholarship on Aquinas's examination of Christ's temptations, and his own research helps fill this lacuna.¹³ There is even less scholarship dedicated to the soteriological significance of Christ's temptations; only Heidgerken devotes significant attention to this element.¹⁴ Furthermore, there is no scholarship which comparatively analyzes Aquinas's examination of Christ's temptations and Aulén's CVM.

Note: I will not examine the many problems with Aulén's work, including his interpretation of Anselm's satisfaction theory, his attachment of Aquinas to Anselm's theory without distinction, his troublesome reconstruction of the history of the doctrine of the atonement, or his rationalization for preferred characteristics of an atonement motif. Scholars have dealt with these issues.¹⁵

Characteristics of the CVM

In his effort to identify the CVM in Aquinas's soteriology, Morgan focused on Christ's Passion as a victory over the devil. He also discussed how Christ's Passion is victory over sin and death, but he subordinated them to the devil in his analysis. According to Aulén, Christ's victory over the objective, evil powers of sin, death and the devil constitute the objective content of the CVM. Morgan expectedly concentrated on Christ's Passion as the vehicle by which Christ accomplishes his victory over the devil, and Aulén focused on that event as well (although Aulén briefly acknowledged that the victory was attained throughout Christ's life).¹⁶

According to Aulén, however, the operative principles or characteristics/traits of the CVM are of ultimate significance, and they are key elements in his analysis of the sufficiency of other types of atonement

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (hereafter *ST*) (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1981), III, q. 48, a. 6.

¹³ Benjamin E. Heidgerken, *The Christ and the Tempter: Christ's Temptation by the Devil in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Thomas Aquinas*, Ph.D. Diss. (University of Dayton, May 2015), 21-22. As Heidgerken notes, Cajetan, Bañez, and Billuart devote little attention to Christ's temptations in their commentaries, and Garrigou-LaGrange does not comment on them at all. Only Paul Gondreau and Jean-Pierre Torrell discuss Aquinas's examination of Christ's temptations in significant detail. See footnote 61.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 418-434.

¹⁵ For examples, see Morgan, "*Christus Victor* Motifs," footnote 8.

¹⁶ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 29-32, 46.

motifs developed in the subsequent history of soteriology. He criticized all later atonement motifs, or “types,” because they did not operate in the same way as the CVM.¹⁷ He argued that they were subordinate to the CVM which expounds the pure, original teaching on salvation and atonement which is revealed in Scripture and was taught in the early Church.¹⁸ He argued that those “types” which did not conform to the CVM’s characteristics were essentially an honest misconception of, and deviation from, the Christian idea of salvation and atonement and “the genuine, authentic Christian faith.”¹⁹ Therefore, these specific traits must be acknowledged in any legitimate effort to establish the presence of the CVM in any soteriology.

According to Aulén, the major *characteristics* of his CVM are:²⁰

Trait 1: Non-rationalized, non-systematized, non-theory

Trait 2: Discontinuity of the legal order/justice

Trait 3: Continuous divine, salvific agency – God acts and God saves;
Descending divine movement – God comes to the world to save;
not humanity to God.

Trait 4: Double-sidedness – God reconciles the world to himself, *and is himself reconciled*; God’s Love battles God’s Wrath/Law (battle against the devil who is the punitive agent of God; the devil is in the service of God as executant of his justice; God opposes his own just punishments; deliverance from the devil is also deliverance from God’s judgment.)

Trait 5: Change in the entire situation – complete change in the relationship between God and the world, with a change in God’s own attitude

Trait 6: Dualism – the ultimate, salvific battle/drama is between God and the devil (and objective, evil powers); “A Note of Triumph Rings Out” – Divine victory! (***This is the CVM’s single most defining characteristic***)

Example: *ST* III, Q. 49, A. 2

Morgan cited Q. 49, a. 2 of the *Tertia Pars* as evidence of Aquinas’s employment of the CVM.²¹ Morgan quoted the Scriptural reference that Aquinas uses to justify his conclusion - “now will the prince of the world be cast out”²² Admittedly, Morgan cited this article to demonstrate that Scripture was a prominent source for Aquinas

¹⁷ Ibid., 159.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 4-7, 16-60, 143-159.

²¹ Morgan, “*Christus Victor* Motifs,” 413.

²² Ibid.

which forced Aquinas to deal with Christ's victory over the devil. Nevertheless, Morgan concluded that Aquinas uses the Scriptural citation "to show that through Christ's Passion the devil is deprived (*ejectus*) of his power over man."²³ He continued: "Christ's Passion not only makes satisfaction to an offended deity but frees mankind from the devil's dominion It is significant that Thomas includes Christ's overthrow of the devil as one of the effects (*effectibus*) of the Passion within this discussion."²⁴ But Morgan did not explain why it is particularly significant nor did he examine Aquinas's analysis of this victory. Does Christ's Passion achieve satisfaction which in turn frees mankind from the devil, or would mankind have been freed from the devil's dominion if Christ did not make satisfaction, i.e., is the deliverance from the devil and his overthrow possible *without* satisfaction? And what is the nature of this victory, i.e., how exactly does Christ defeat the devil?

In his response and replies to objections, Aquinas explains this victory. (*All references in this section are from Q.49, a. 2, unless otherwise noted*). Aquinas asks: "Whether we were delivered from the Devil's power through Christ's Passion?" In his response, Aquinas first explains that the devil exercises this power because man was overcome by temptation and by sinning justly deserved to be delivered over to the devil. He adds that God, in his justice, left man under the power of the devil who was allowed to wield such power because he hindered man from salvation. Aquinas then states that the devil was dethroned and that man was freed from the devil's domain. The order in which Aquinas explains his reasoning and the language he utilizes are extremely informative. *First*, Aquinas states that man was freed from the devil's power "*in so far as* the Passion is the cause of the forgiveness of sins."²⁵ Aquinas makes this freedom ultimately dependent on an alternate primary purpose and effect of Christ's Passion – the forgiveness of sins explained in his response to Q. 49, a. 1. *Second*, man was freed from the devil "*inasmuch as it reconciled us with God.*"²⁶ Again, Aquinas notes the victory's dependence on another purpose and effect of the Passion – the reconciliation between God and man which Aquinas explained in his response to Q. 49, a. 4. Forgiveness and reconciliation, which both depend on the meritorious satisfaction made by Christ with his sacrificial Passion (as explained in the responses throughout Q. 48), precede and establish Christ's victory over the devil. And *lastly*, Aquinas explains that the devil was directly confronted and defeated. Here, Aquinas states that the devil exceeded the limits of his power by conspiring to

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *ST* III, q. 49, a. 2. My italics.

²⁶ Ibid. My italics.

cause Christ's death. Aquinas quotes Augustine at length, including the following: "The devil was vanquished by Christ's justice."²⁷ But Aquinas does not *here* specifically elaborate on *how* Christ defeats the devil when he abuses his power.

In his replies to objections, Aquinas states that "the devil can *still* tempt men's souls and harass their bodies" after Christ's Passion, but men can access Christ's Passion as a remedy to this harassment.²⁸ Christ's victory over the devil is real but the devil can *still* exercise some power over man. The victory is not absolute in the sense that it requires continuous "re-application" when the devil engages man, whereas satisfaction was completed once on behalf of man with no need for man to again deal with the loss of access to Heaven and the requirement to make satisfaction. This element alone should be viewed as a significant difference between Aquinas's soteriology and the CVM presented by Aulén, who wrote that "the victory of Christ over the powers of evil is an eternal victory . . . [and] justification and atonement are really one and the same thing."²⁹

According to Aquinas, God's victory over the devil requires the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation between God and man accomplished by the satisfaction made by Christ. This is certainly not a constituent element of the dualism found in Aulén's motif in which there is a direct confrontation between God and the devil (and the evil forces). There are many entities at work in this drama, according to Aquinas, including Christ, man (the many who are to be saved as well as those who conspire to kill Christ), and the evil forces which appear on the periphery.

Aquinas states that God always acts according to justice and that the victory does not disrupt the order of justice (as in CVM).³⁰ Furthermore, Aquinas states that the victory is the result of the reconciliation between man and God, but God is not himself reconciled (as in CVM), even though Christ defeated the devil who exercised a power that was in the service of God's justice. Aquinas argues that Christ did not defeat the devil unjustly. Instead, Christ exacted justice precisely because the devil abused his power in conspiring against Christ, thereby violating the order of justice within which Christ reacted. Aquinas does not suggest that Christ defeated God's own justice or God's own wrath (as in the CVM), but rather that he simply defeated the devil who misused the power given to him by God. The double-sidedness that is the hallmark of Aulén's CVM is absent.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., q. 49, a. 2, ad. 2-3. My italics.

²⁹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 150.

³⁰ See *ST III*, q. 46, a. 2, ad 3; *ST III* q. 46, a. 3; *ST III*, q. 46, a. 3, ad. 3.

Perhaps the ultimate difference between the victory motif in the soteriology of Aulén and Aquinas (in Q. 49, a. 2) involves the agency of victory. According to Aquinas, the agent of victory is Christ, which includes the entire *human* activity of Christ, including all of his salvific work that he accomplished *as man*, which is a highly incompatible element with Aulén's motif. Aulén claimed that the CVM is constituted by singular, continuous, divine, salvific agency sans any requisite human element, and he (mistakenly) critiqued the Latin idea (Anselm's and Aquinas's soteriology) for what he claimed was a second, salvific, and *human* agent.³¹ In Q. 49, a. 2, Aquinas references the forgiveness of sins won in Christ's Passion as the cause of Christ's victory over the devil. Aquinas explains the nature of the forgiveness in the preceding article, and it involves an exemplary notion of salvation and merit.³² Aquinas states first, that by his Passion, Christ excites charity in human beings that will incite them to ask for pardon from their sins.³³ Second, Aquinas identifies Christ, a member of the human race, as the head of the body which is the Church and that through his Passion (endured out of love and obedience) achieved redemption and merited salvation for all of his members.³⁴ And third, Aquinas returns to the idea of Christ's flesh as the instrument of the Godhead which expelled sin.³⁵ In Q. 49, a. 2, Aquinas highlights the *human* elements that played a key role in Christ's victory over the devil.

Aquinas also references Q. 49, a. 4 which speaks of Christ's Passion as a sacrifice which is appeasing to God.³⁶ If God is appeased by the love which Christ expressed in his life, Passion and death, then perhaps one can argue that Christ is the sacrificial agent of salvation while God is the one appeased (the object) rather than the specific, active, salvific agent. Aquinas further states that the love out of which Christ experienced his human suffering was such a good act found in human nature that God was appeased for every human offence against God.³⁷ Aulén would again (incorrectly) identify this human agent of salvation, with God as a recipient of that which was offered by humanity as a sacrifice and who would only afterwards overlook the offense.

³¹ I believe his interpretation is faulty, and I deal with it briefly later in this article. For the purposes of this article, I will proceed with Aulén's interpretation only to demonstrate the difference between their uses of Christ's victory.

³² *ST* III, q. 49, a. 1.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* See also *ST* III, q. 48, a. 1.

³⁵ *ST* III, q. 49, a. 1.

³⁶ *ST* III, q. 49, a. 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Context is vital, thus more elements in Aquinas's soteriological scheme must be examined in order to understand his use of the victory motif. Because Aquinas's analysis of Christ's victory must be understood within his soteriological framework, it will necessarily involve the concepts of satisfaction, merit, obedience, love, justice, sacrifice, reconciliation, redemption, forgiveness, the Law, and many others. The victory itself appears within a highly rationalized, systematic, soteriological structure which contrasts sharply with a basic characteristic of Aulén's motif – which is a contradicting, non-rationalized, non-systematic account of atonement in which the solution to a double-sided, dramatic, dualistic battle between God and his judgment/Divine Wrath/the Devil “is not found in any rational settlement.”³⁸ Finally, a note of triumph or victory does not “ring out” Aquinas uses variations of the term “deliverance” far more often than “victory” or “vanquish” in Q. 49, a. 2.

There are additional, possible examples of the CVM in Aquinas's soteriology that Morgan cited in his article, and others that were not. This section demonstrates how to carefully examine the presence of Aulén's CVM in Aquinas's soteriology. In this present demonstration, the motif hardly appears. There are, perhaps, other instances where some of Aulén's characteristics are present in Aquinas's use of the victory motif - for instance, in Aquinas's explanation of the ransom theory, his spiritual interpretation of the stories of Behemoth and Leviathan in which Christ lures, captures and destroys the devil, or his interpretation of Christ's descent into Hell. While Aquinas may classify each of these as victories, they are almost certainly not as profound as the victory proclaimed in the CVM. They would likely not conform to many of CVM's characteristics and the victories would probably mirror the dependency on alternate primary causes as explained in this section.

Overview: *Christus Victor* Motifs Elsewhere in the *Summa*?

Trait 1: In the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa*, Christ's victory over the devil is a rationalized, component part of Aquinas's logical, systematic, soteriological structure which deviates from Aulén's CVM “characterized by a whole series of contrasts of opposites, which defy rational systematisation”³⁹ Aquinas argues that the victory is fitting for a number of reasons, including that the devil played a role in the fall of man and should be overthrown by man in the act of salvation.⁴⁰ There is reason, even if imagery, undergirding Aquinas's

³⁸ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 153.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴⁰ *ST* III, q. 46, a. 3.

presentation of the victory over the devil. The victory is essentially a fitting addition to his highly complex, multi-layered, rationalized explanation of salvation.

Trait 2: Aquinas argues that man is justly placed under the dominion of the devil, yet the devil wields power unjustly.⁴¹ This is not a disruption of God's justice (as in Aulén's motif) from God's side, or from man's side, but only on the part of the devil. Nevertheless, Aquinas still claims that God deals justly with the devil in his victory and that the devil is justly defeated when he breaches his dominion and attacks the sinless Christ.⁴² In Aquinas's soteriological system, satisfaction or any method of salvation will always retain the order of justice.⁴³ Aquinas argues that simple divine forgiveness could have effected salvation, and perhaps Aulén would have agreed with Aquinas.⁴⁴ According to Aulén, this solution would have preferential characteristics because forgiveness alone would cause a disruption of the order of justice (Aquinas disagrees on the disruption). Aulén and Aquinas agree that forgiveness alone was a possible solution for salvation, but they disagree on its effect on the order of justice (while Anselm of Canterbury argues that simple forgiveness was impossible precisely because it would have constituted a disruption of justice, opposing both Aulén and Aquinas).⁴⁵

Trait 3: According to Aulén, divine love and obedience are the underlying, principal causes of the divine victory over the devil (i.e. Divine Love and obedience conquers Divine Wrath/Law, the devil, sin and death).⁴⁶ In his analysis of Irenaeus's soteriology, Aulén concluded that while Christ's Passion plays the central role in Christ's victory and is the decisive battle, Christ's entire life of love and obedience also plays a role.⁴⁷ In Aquinas's soteriology, charity and obedience are the principles by which Christ achieves satisfaction.⁴⁸ Although Christ's passible body/suffering is the matter, as it were, of that satisfaction,⁴⁹ it could not be achieved sans love and obedience.

⁴¹ See *ST* III, q. 46, a. 3, ad. 3; *ST* III, q. 48, a. 4; *ST* III q. 48, a. 4, ad. 2; *ST* III, q. 49, a. 2; *ST* III, q. 49, a. 2, ad. 1.

⁴² *ST* III, q. 49, a. 2.

⁴³ See *ST* III, q. 46, a. 2, ad 3; *ST* III q. 46, a. 3; *ST* III, q. 46, a. 3, ad. 3.

⁴⁴ *ST* III, q. 46, a. 3, ad. 3.

⁴⁵ Anselm of Canterbury. *Why God Became Man*, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, eds. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans. Translated by Janet Fairweather (hereafter *CDH*) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), I, 12-13, 24.

⁴⁶ "The obedience is the means of His [Christ's] triumph." Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 29. "The Incarnation has its basis in God's Love. The work of the Incarnate is the work of Divine Love. This it is that overcomes the tyrants and effects atonement between God and the world." Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 46.

⁴⁷ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 29-32.

⁴⁸ *ST* III, q. 48, a. 2; *ST* III, q. 14, a. 1, ad. 1.

⁴⁹ *ST* III, q. 14, a. 1, ad. 1.

In a limited way then, at least the principal causes of salvation in both Aulén's CVM and Aquinas's soteriology are identical albeit Aulén would claim that in Aquinas's scheme, Christ's *human* love and obedience effects salvation. Aquinas identifies the *human* love and obedience, and all *human actions* of Christ, as the instrumental causes of salvation, with God/God's love as the principal, yet remote, cause of salvation,⁵⁰ the latter being identical to the principal cause in Aulén's scheme (yet it is not remote for Aulén). Aulén's claim that man is an agent of salvation in Aquinas's soteriology has merit, *but Aulén's claim that this human factor necessarily expunges singular, divine agency is faulty.*

A more faithful interpreter of Aquinas would identify the salvific agent as a single *suppositum* which is the divine person/subject who acts. Utilizing the classical Chalcedonian definition of Christ as understood by Aquinas, God the Son assumed a human nature and made the satisfaction and sacrifice.⁵¹ The Son is a single, continuous divine agent who did not change (or cast off his divinity) when he assumed human nature. This is similar to Aulén's own terminology when he writes that "God in Christ," or "God through Christ," achieved victory over the devil and accomplished salvation.⁵²

Trait 3/Trait 4: Aquinas interprets Christ's Passion as a sacrifice. According to Aquinas, a proper sacrifice appeases the offended party when one does something for the honor that is due to God.⁵³ Christ's voluntary Passion was an acceptable sacrifice to God because it proceeded from supreme charity.⁵⁴ Aulén also interpreted the victory as sacrificial in nature.⁵⁵ One might presume that Aulén could not interpret the divine victory as sacrificial in nature because it would appear to contradict the prominent characteristic of his motif that there is one continuous, divine agent of salvation who achieves victory. If

⁵⁰ *ST III*, q. 48, a. 5; *ST III*, q. 48, a. 5, ad.1-2; *ST III*, q. 48, a. 6.

⁵¹ Aquinas explains this himself: "It is the same Person and hypostasis of the Divine and human natures . . . the Passion [and satisfaction] is to be attributed to the suppositum of the Divine Nature . . . by reason of the passible [human] nature assumed." *ST III*, q. 46, a. 12.

⁵² E.g.: "The work of man's deliverance is accomplished *by God Himself in Christ.*" Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 20 (my italics); "The Divine victory accomplished *in Christ . . .*" Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 21 (my italics); "The redemptive work is accomplished *by the Logos through the Manhood as his Instrument*; for it could be accomplished by no power but that of God Himself." Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 33, italics original in text (Aulén here interestingly describes the Manhood as the "Instrument" of the Logos which resembles Aquinas's description of Christ's humanity as the "instrument" of the Godhead). "God in Christ combats and prevails over the 'tyrants' which hold mankind in bondage." Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 55 (my italics). All of these statements by Aulén resemble the Pauline formula that he quoted on page 31: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself."

⁵³ *ST III*, q. 48, a. 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 31, 57-58, 77, 153.

God is the sole victor and Christ is the sacrifice and priest, it would appear that Christ as man would be involved in the offering and, thus, the victory, while God would be standing as an object and recipient of Christ's sacrificial act. As Aquinas explains, quoting Augustine: "There are four things to be noted in every sacrifice - . . . to whom it is offered, by whom it is offered, what is offered, and for whom it is offered."⁵⁶ Aulén would perhaps characterize the salvific offering of Christ as a human offering (proceeding from supreme *human* charity) in violation of continuous, salvific divine agency. However, if Aulén were to acknowledge Christ simply as the divine Son who is God, this sacrificial arrangement would seem to align with his conclusion that a well-reasoned, logical and rationalized system should *not* account for salvation. There would exist a double-sidedness in this sacrificial transaction that would be difficult to explain according to reason - that God is the sacrifice, the priest, and the one to whom the sacrifice is offered, an idea that would fit well in Aulén's preferably disordered and double-sided system of salvation. In fact, Aulén claimed that "God in Christ" or "God through Christ" makes the sacrifice.⁵⁷

Trait 5: According to Aquinas, the relationship between God and man is restored, but Christ does not create an *entirely new* situation and there is no change in God's own attitude,⁵⁸ nor does Aquinas claim that God is somehow reconciled himself. (How could he be reconciled with himself if he is not battling that which is somehow *of* himself, as Aulén claims for God's justice or Law?)

Trait 6: The "note of triumph" present in Aulén's motif does not "ring out" in Aquinas's soteriology, but it lies in the background. It is present, but it is not the highlight. The major drama (not so much a battle) in Aquinas's soteriology involves Christ's human will and love, God, man, and the relationship between man and God. It does not involve a major, all-consuming battle between God and the devil (and objective, evil forces). These are two different salvific paradigms in which the central concepts are different. In Aquinas, they are satisfaction and the restoration of human nature (among other elements), while in Aulén, they are divine victory over the evil forces/the devil and reconciliation, as Aulén writes: "Its [CVM's] central theme is the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and

⁵⁶ *ST* III, q. 48, a. 3.

⁵⁷ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 31, 57-58, 77, 153.

⁵⁸ "Christ is not said to have reconciled us with God, as if God had begun anew to love us" *ST* III, q. 49, a. 4, ad. 2. "[Christ's] 'satisfaction' changes us (and our relationship with God), not God as such." Rik Van Nieuwenhove, "Bearing the Marks of Christ's Passion: Aquinas Soteriology," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, eds. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 291.

victory; Christ – Christus Victor – fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the ‘tyrants’ under which mankind is in bondage and suffering”⁵⁹

Preliminary Conclusion: There is great dissimilarity between Aulén’s and Aquinas’s employment of Christ’s victory over the devil. While there may be some inevitable overlap in the motifs, the victory is prominent for Aulén, and the battle between God and the devil is central. Aulén wrote: “The central idea of Christus Victor is the view of God and the Kingdom of God as fighting against the evil powers ravaging in mankind.”⁶⁰ For Aquinas, the victory lies in the background and results from the central purpose of the Incarnation which is satisfaction in the effort to restore human nature and the broken relationship between man and God, allowing man to access Heaven. Christ the God-man brings ascending humanity to God with sacrificial human love and obedience by way of meritorious satisfaction. For Aulén, God descends to the battlefield/world to engage the evil forces and defeat the devil which is an act of atonement and salvation itself. According to Aquinas, it appears that the ultimate and minimal, instrumental purpose of the Incarnation is for the God-man to make satisfaction on behalf of man and to alter man’s salvific status. The relationship between God and man is dominant for Aquinas, while the relationship between God and the evil powers is primary for Aulén (in Aulén’s scheme, man remains on the periphery, awaiting the results; in Aquinas’s scheme, the devil remains on the periphery, awaiting the results). In Aquinas’s soteriology, *Christ’s human nature and all of his human activities play a leading/instrumental role*. In contrast, according to Aulén, salvation is the direct victory of God over the devil (and all evil forces) and *divine activity is the overarching factor*.

Christ’s Temptations

If, according to Aquinas, Christ’s humanity and all of his human activities serve as the instrumental efficient causes of salvation, then analyzing Christ’s life for examples of his victory over the devil should help determine how prominent the CVM, or a variation of it, operates in Aquinas’s soteriological scheme. The most obvious event for such an examination is Christ’s temptations in the desert.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁶¹ For further reading on Aquinas’s analysis of Christ’s temptations, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Encyclopédie Jésus le Christ chez saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: Cerf, 2008), 1137-1143; Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Le Christ en ses mystères. La vie et l’œuvre de Jésus selon saint Thomas d’Aquin*, vol 2, coll. Jésus et Jésus-Christ, 78 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1986),

I will rely on the *Tertia Pars* of Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* and the *Commentary on Matthew*. Both were written after Aquinas conducted the great mass of his historical research in the 1260s and present Aquinas's most developed theology.⁶²

In Q. 41 of the *Tertia Pars* concerning Christ's temptations, Aquinas first asks: "Whether it was becoming that Christ should be tempted?" Aquinas responds that Christ willed to be tempted in order to strengthen man against his own temptations and, quoting Gregory, "in order that by His temptations He might conquer our temptations . . ." ⁶³ This is certainly a victory, but it is a victory over temptations, which is essentially an instrumental cause of man's victory over his temptations. In his *Commentary on Matthew*, Aquinas similarly writes: "He [Christ] himself willed to be tempted, so that just as he conquered our death by his own, so he might overcome all our temptations by his temptation."⁶⁴ Continuing in his *Summa*, Aquinas states that Christ endured temptations after his own baptism in order to teach man that he must not think himself free from temptations even after baptism.⁶⁵ Christ teaches by example that the baptized will experience temptations for the following reasons: to experience Christ's justice, to prevent arrogance, to confound the devil and show the strength of Christ, to strengthen oneself, and to know one's own dignity.⁶⁶ Aquinas states that Christ was tempted in order to give us an example and to teach man how to overcome temptations of the devil.⁶⁷ Aquinas quotes Augustine: "Christ allowed Himself to be tempted by the devil, that He might be our mediator in overcoming temptations, not only by helping us, but also by giving us an example."⁶⁸ And finally, Aquinas states that Christ wished to be tempted in order to fill man with confidence.⁶⁹

224-242; Paul Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2009); Benjamin E. Heidgerken, *The Christ and the Tempter: Christ's Temptation by the Devil in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Thomas Aquinas*, Ph.D. Diss. (University of Dayton, May 2015).

⁶² The *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae* was written in approximately 1272-73 and the *Commentary on Matthew* in approximately 1269-70. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, vol. 1: The Person and His Work*. Translated by Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 147, 212, 240, 261, 339.

⁶³ *ST III*, q. 41, a. 1.

⁶⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, Chapters 1-12 (hereafter *In Matt.*). Translated by Jeremy Holmes (Wisconsin: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013), 4 lec. 1, 311.

⁶⁵ *ST III*, q. 41, a. 1.

⁶⁶ *In Matt.*, 4 lec. 1, 307-308.

⁶⁷ *ST III*, q. 41, a. 1.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Ultimately, Christ allowed himself to be tempted by the devil and he conquered his temptations for the following purposes: to strengthen man, to teach man, to conquer man's temptations, to warn man, to set an example, and to fill man with confidence. Aquinas does not argue that Christ's victory in the desert achieves satisfaction or accomplishes salvation; however, because Christ's human actions are the instrumental efficient causes of salvation, the temptations absolutely possess soteriological significance. Christ's temptations alone do not achieve satisfaction, and they do not in the absolute sense seem necessary within Aquinas's soteriological paradigm, yet they are a fitting element of Christ's salvific mission which includes more than just suffering and dying, and they certainly contribute to the satisfaction made by Christ and our salvation.

In Reply to Objection Two, Aquinas states that "Christ came to destroy the works of the devil . . . so as to conquer the devil." This would certainly please Aulén and is undoubtedly additional evidence of the presence of a victory motif in Aquinas's soteriology. However, in this reply, Aquinas also quotes Augustine who writes: "the devil was to be overcome, *not* by the power of God."⁷⁰ This would certainly displease Aulén. Aquinas here explains that Christ conquers the devil with his human will via suffering and righteousness. Aulén would argue that this is evidence of a broken chain of divine, salvific agency. Additionally, this victory is not a direct, ultimate defeat of the devil, but is a victory which is meant to teach, strengthen, instill confidence, and conquer man's temptations.

Double-sidedness is not present in this victory because even if the devil is somehow in the service of God's justice, the devil does not have the right to harass the God-man who is not under the penalty of sin or the bondage of the devil. He is not conquering his own justice or his own Divine Wrath/Law. Additionally, in a. 1, Aquinas does not highlight the battle or the victory, but the lessons of the event and the graces that man receives as a result of Christ's encounter. Again, there is not much similarity between the CVM and the victory of Christ in the desert according to Aquinas.

In Q. 41, a. 2, Aquinas asks: "Whether Christ should have been tempted in the desert?" The locale is the emphasis of this question, and in his response, Aquinas utilizes key concepts of the CVM, or at least its imagery. The desert is a battlefield! Christ's provoked the devil! He picked a fight! He conquered the devil! Aquinas writes: "And so it was that Christ went out into the desert, as to a field of battle, to be tempted there [by his own free will] by the devil. Hence Ambrose says . . . *that Christ was led into the desert for the purpose of provoking the devil. For had he, i.e. the devil, not fought, He, i.e.*

⁷⁰ My italics.

Christ, *would not have conquered . . .*”⁷¹ And in his *Commentary on Matthew*, Aquinas writes: “For it was fitting that he should go out into the desert, as though to a one-on-one combat with the devil.”⁷² But yet again, Aquinas states that Ambrose sets forth other reasons for the locale, including that Christ “*set forth the mystery of Adam’s delivery from exile, who had been expelled from paradise into the desert, and set an example to us, by showing that the devil envies those who strive for better things.*”⁷³ Aquinas concludes that Christ conquered the devil on the field of battle by withstanding the devil’s temptations, and that he additionally showed forth a mystery and again set himself as an example for man to follow. To understand the nature of the explicit victory on the battlefield, see Q. 41, a. 1 as explained above, which notes that the devil is defeated in the sense that Christ inspires, teaches, warns, and conquers man’s temptations. There is indeed more direct mention of Christ’s victory over the devil in Article Two, but the victory is accomplished in a number of ways dissimilar to the victory described by Aulén. According to Aulén, it is as if Christ looks directly into the eyes of the devil as he confronts him in the desert, and elsewhere, while according to Aquinas, it is as if Christ instead looks over the devil’s shoulder to keep his eyes focused on man. In the later Replies to Objections in Q. 41, a. 2, Aquinas again emphasizes the exemplary nature of Christ’s temptations. He writes that “Christ is set as an example to all through faith”⁷⁴ and that just as Christ demonstrated, man should not feel the need to avoid occasions of temptations on the part of the devil since they now have access to divine power and can use the occasion to do something great.⁷⁵

A specific “note of triumph” does not “ring out” in Aquinas’s descriptions. In his *Commentary on Matthew*, Aquinas notes that after Christ resists the devil’s temptations, his victory is ultimately set down simply by the fact that the devil retreats and leaves him.⁷⁶ This is a rather anti-climactic end of the battle in which the devil is not so much defeated as he chooses to simply leave Christ for the time being after failing, only to return again later.

In Q. 41, a. 3, Aquinas asks: “Whether Christ’s temptations should have taken place after his fast?” He reverts to his standard response - that it was becoming for Christ to fast to set an example for man who should fast in order to strengthen themselves against

⁷¹ *ST III*, q. 41, a. 2.

⁷² *In Matt.* 4 lec. 1, 309.

⁷³ *ST III*, q. 41, a. 2.

⁷⁴ *ST III*, q. 41, a. 2, ad. 1.

⁷⁵ *ST III*, q. 41, a. 2, ad. 2.

⁷⁶ *In Matt.* 4 lec. 1, 345.

temptation.⁷⁷ Aquinas again interprets the temptations as a teachable moment. Christ warns man that the devil will not retreat from those who fast, just as the devil will not depart from those who have just been baptized.⁷⁸ In this response, Aquinas again refers to Christ's victory over the devil, but he offers a stark contrast with Aulén's CVM. Quoting Hilary, Aquinas writes: "For the devil was to be conquered, not by God, but by the flesh."⁷⁹ This is not the single, continuous divine, salvific agency in which God conquers the devil, as we find in Aulén. Instead, in a rephrasing, Aquinas reiterates his claim that Christ's human nature is the instrumental, efficient cause of salvation and victory over the devil.

An examination of Q. 41, a. 4, would not diverge much from Articles 1–3. Ultimately, Aquinas believes that all of Christ's human actions retain soteriological significance. Therefore, understanding his analysis of Christ's temptations can only improve our understanding of his soteriology, and furthermore, his use of Christ's victory over the devil.

Conclusion

Aquinas did not utilize the CVM in his soteriology, but, relying on Scripture and the Fathers, he undoubtedly utilized the image and reality of Christ's victory over the devil. Aquinas operated in a different philosophical and intellectual milieu than the Fathers of the Church, and within a distinct, religious consciousness he diverged from earlier conceptions of Christ's victory over the devil and formulated new methods of explaining that victory and salvation.

According to Aquinas, in the desert and during the temptations, *Christ the Exemplar* and *Christ the Teacher* are more apt titles for Christ than *Christus Victor*. Aquinas's employment of the victory motif is exemplary and pedagogical in nature. With respect to Christ's victory over the devil in the Passion, perhaps a more fitting title for Christ is *Christ the Satisfier*. The victory depends at least on satisfaction (and other elements listed in my introduction) insofar as victory only results with satisfaction as its cause. For example, in response to the question on the necessity of the Incarnation, Aquinas writes: "In order to free man from the thralldom of sin, which . . . *ought to be done in such a way that the devil should be overcome by the justice of the man Jesus Christ*, and this was done by Christ satisfying for

⁷⁷ *ST* III, q. 41, a. 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

us.”⁸⁰ While Aquinas explains the multiple purposes of the Incarnation, he focuses on the need for God to free man from the thrall of sin and he says that it ought to be done in way in which the devil is defeated. This defeat and Christ's victory is accomplished by the primary, satisfaction-accomplishing mission of Christ. In a later question, Aquinas reiterates this idea: “With his justice, because by His Passion Christ made satisfaction for this sin of the human race; and so man was set free *by* Christ's justice.”⁸¹ And once again later, Aquinas writes: “It was fitting that through justice man should be delivered from the devil's bondage *by* Christ making satisfaction on his behalf in the Passion. This was also a fitting means of overthrowing the pride of the devil . . . *in that Christ should vanquish him and deliver man* [quoting Augustine]”⁸² The idea of victory does not appear in the forefront of Aquinas's soteriology while victory is the chief characteristic of Aulén's CVM. Therefore, Christ's victory over the devil is not as significant in Aquinas's soteriology as in Aulén's soteriology, nor is it as significant as satisfaction (or other elements) within Aquinas's own soteriological structure.

How necessary is Christ's victory to Aquinas's soteriology? If all references to Christ's victory over the devil were excised from Aquinas's soteriology, would his soteriological structure collapse like a house of cards? - Certainly not. What if, instead, satisfaction was removed? - Certainly. For Aquinas, victory over the devil is a “secondary” effect of Christ's salvific, satisfaction-accomplishing mission, albeit it is an *extremely fitting* and *important* secondary effect. The victory has an extremely powerful effect and is an instrumental cause of our victory over the devil and our temptations. The victory is fitting and even “necessary” in the pre-ordained economy of salvation, and was ultimately a purpose of the Incarnation. But, if Aquinas excised every mention of Christ's victory over the devil and evil powers from his soteriology, could he still explain salvation? - Certainly. Aulén could not.

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⁸⁰ *ST* III, q. 1. a. 2. The first series of italicized words is in the translation and is a quote from Augustine. The separated italicized word “by” is mine.

⁸¹ *ST* III, q. 46, a. 2, ad 3. My italics.

⁸² *ST* III, q. 46, a. 3, ad. 3. The italicized word “by” is mine.