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Jesus as *hilastērion*: The Aspect of Propitiation in St Thomas Aquinas' Commentaries and Joseph Ratzinger's Writings

Jezus jako *hilastērion*.

Motyw przebłagania według komentarzy św. Tomasza z Akwinu
i pism Josepha Ratzingera

ABSTRACT: This article aims to explore the aspect of propitiation (*hilastērion*) present in St. Thomas Aquinas' and Joseph Ratzinger's writings and to show it against the background of the whole soteriological reflections of both theologians, as well as to emphasise the novelty of their soteriology. In the first part, the author discusses the thought of St Thomas, accentuating the systematic teaching on salvation in *Summa theologiae*. Drawing on Aquinas' *Commentaries*, the author then goes on to present Jesus as propitiation, in whose blood the mystery of redemption is accomplished. In the second part of the article, analysing Joseph Ratzinger's writings, key soteriological terms and the biblical word *hilastērion* are explained. The study offers the following conclusions: the idea of propitiation (*hilastērion*) in *Commentaries* complements the whole of Thomas' soteriology demonstrated in *Summa theologiae*. On the other hand, in Ratzinger's writings the soteriological thought takes no systematic form, yet the aspect of *hilastērion* becomes for Joseph Ratzinger a symbol of the realisation of redemption.

KEYWORDS: *hilastērion*, mercy seat, propitiation/atonement, St Thomas Aquinas, Joseph Ratzinger, soteriology, redemption, Aquinas' biblical commentaries, soteriology in *Summa theologiae*

ABSTRAKT: Celem autora artykułu jest przedstawienie motywu przebłagania (*hilastērion*) obecnego u św. Tomasza z Akwinu i Josepha Ratzingera oraz ukazanie go na tle całości rozważań soteriologicznych obu teologów, a także zaakcentowanie oryginalności ich soteriologii. W pierwszej części autor zajął się myślą św. Tomasza, zwracając uwagę na systematyczny wykład dotyczący zbawienia obecny na kartach

Sumy teologii. Następnie, odwołując się do *Komentarzy* Akwinaty, ukazał Jezusa jako *przebłagalnika*, w którego krwi dokonuje się tajemnica odkupienia. W drugiej części artykułu, analizując pisma Josepha Ratzingera, przedstawił kluczowe terminy soteriologiczne oraz dokonał interpretacji biblijnego słowa *hilastērion*. Przeprowadzone badania pozwalają na wyciągnięcie następujących konkluzji: idea przebłagania (*hilastērion*) obecna w *Komentarzach* współgra z całością soteriologii Tomasza zawartą w *Summa theologiae*. Z kolei myśl soteriologiczna Ratzingera nie przybiera wprawdzie postaci systematycznej, jednak motyw *hilastērionu* staje się dla niemieckiego teologa symbolem realizacji odkupienia.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: *hilastērion*, przebłaganie, św. Tomasz z Akwinu, Joseph Ratzinger, soteriologia, odkupienie, komentarze biblijne Akwinaty, soteriologia *Summa theologiae*

Introduction

The Greek term *hilastērion*¹ (Hebrew *kapporeth*²) means the mercy seat, the lid covering the Ark of the Covenant; it also denotes propitiation. For the Old Testament worship, it was one of the key objects in the temple over which Yahweh appeared in the cloud: “the point of contact’ between God and man, the place of the mysterious presence of the Most High – God became as close here as was possible in the created world.”³ The object itself played a key role on the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*. Then the priest sprinkled the mercy seat with the blood of animals that had previously been offered in sacrifice, “instead of men deserving death.”⁴ In the Letter to the Romans, St Paul applied this very term to Jesus, calling him *hilastērion* “propitiation/atonement” (Rom 3:23–26a).⁵ It is this very aspect that Joseph Ratzinger drew on in his own vision of soteriology. Ratzinger also pointed to Chapter 10 of the Letter to the

¹ See *Hilastērion*, [in:] W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago–London 1958, pp. 375–376.

² See *Kapporeth*, [in:] *Wielki słownik hebrajsko-polski i aramejsko-polski Starego Testamentu* [The Great Hebrew-Polish and Aramaic-Polish Dictionary of the Old Testament], vol. 1, eds. L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J.J. Stamm, Warszawa 2001, p. 467.

³ J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, vol. 2, Katowice 2012, pp. 46–47. The motif of *hilastērion* is brought out and commented on in the second volume of the monograph dedicated to Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI by Jerzy Szymik, a Silesian theologian and poet (ibidem, pp. 31–51); this is also the title of one of the volumes of his poems; see J. Szymik, *Hilastērion. Wiersze z lat 2009–2014* [Hilastērion. Poems from 2009–2014], Katowice 2014.

⁴ J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, op. cit., p. 47.

⁵ C.K. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary. New Testament*, 2014, p. 432 (Kindle); cf. C.K. Keener, *Komentarz historyczno-kulturowy do Nowego Testamentu*, transl. Z. Kościuk, Warszawa 2000, pp. 318–319.

Hebrews as a key passage in the perspective of the new worship and the question of propitiation/atonement understood as one of the elements of salvation.⁶

Extending the analysis by the most recent translations of St Thomas' commentaries on the letters to the Romans and Hebrews, this article is intended to show the idea of *hilastērion* by juxtaposing the thought of Aquinas and Ratzinger in a soteriological perspective. Ratzinger's text, showing the Old Testament rite in the light of the Paschal events, was the immediate inspiration for my research on this theme. The importance of the aspect and its topicality,⁷ is the second reason for taking up the issue. Thomas Aquinas is quoted alongside Ratzinger due to the fact that Aquinas addressed this question in his extensive and multifaceted soteriology.

The aim of this article is then, firstly, to present the aspect of propitiation present in Thomas Aquinas' and Joseph Ratzinger's writings; secondly, to show it against the background of the soteriological considerations of both theologians; thirdly, to emphasise the novelty of their soteriology.

It should be noted that though the whole teaching on salvation and redemption in the New Testament texts is copious and multifaceted,⁸ theology

⁶ C.K. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary...*, op. cit., p. 708 (Kindle); cf. C.K. Keener, *Komentarz historyczno-kulturowy do Nowego Testamentu*, op. cit., pp. 518–522.

⁷ The *status quaestionis* of the issue under study points primarily to exegetical and biblical works; for an example see D.P. Bailey, *Jesus as the Mercy Seat: The Semantics and Theology of Paul's Use of Hilastērion in Romans 3:25*, PhD Thesis, Apollo – University of Cambridge Repository 1999, <https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/items/5e62c841-fce8-49ba-80e2-55feed1dbf38> [access: 17.02.2024]; M. Tiwald, *Christ as Hilastērion (Rom 3:25). Pauline Theology on the Day of Atonement in the Mirror of Early Jewish Thought*, [in:] *The Day of Atonement. Its Interpretations in Early Jewish and Christian Traditions*, eds. T. Hieke, T. Nicklas, Leiden 2012, pp. 189–209; A. Weiß, *Christus Jesus als Weiheschenk oder Sühnemal? Anmerkungen zu einer neueren Deutung von hilastērion (Röm 3,25) samt einer Liste der epigraphischen Belege*, "Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft" 105/2 (2014), pp. 294–302; V. Zywiets, *Representing the government of God: Christ as the hilastērion in Romans 3:25*, Master of Arts, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 2016.

⁸ See P. Artemiuk (ed.), *Wiarygodność chrześcijańskiego orędzia zbawienia* [Credibility of the Christian Message of Salvation], Płock 2015; M. Paluch, *Traktat o zbawieniu* [A Treatise on Salvation], [in:] J. Szymik, M. Paluch, *Traktat o Bogu Jedynym. Traktat o zbawieniu*, Warszawa 2006, p. 235. For soteriological terminology in Scripture see J. Kudasiewicz, *Biblia księgą zbawienia* [Bible as the Book of Salvation], [in:] *Biblia o odkupieniu* [Bible on Redemption], ed. R. Rubinkiewicz, Lublin 2000, pp. 16–22. Helmut Hoping states that there is no shortage of attempts in theology that treat soteriology superordinately; in this way Christology becomes a function of soteriology; cf. H. Hoping, *Einführung in die Christologie*, Darmstadt 2004, pp. 19–22.

has not developed one soteriological concept, so the variations in this matter are discernible even in the typology of soteriological models.⁹

Thomas Aquinas' understanding of propitiation

Aquinas' soteriology has been described as a well-balanced synthesis,¹⁰ outstanding in its richness and multiplicity. In his search for new ways in soteriology, St Thomas, as Jean-Pierre Torrell put it, "without renouncing the heritage of

⁹ See T. Dola, *Problem komplementarności współczesnych modeli soteriologicznych* [The Problem of Complementarity of Modern Soteriological Models], Opole 1994, pp. 6–7; for example, Waclaw Hryniewicz distinguishes two models: descending and ascending. The former "emphasises the initiative of God himself," while the latter "emphasises the role of Christ's human nature, united in solidarity with all men and acting on their behalf"; W. Hryniewicz, *Chrystus nasza Pascha. Zarys chrześcijańskiej teologii paschalnej* [Christ our Passover. An Outline of Christian Paschal Theology], vol. 1, Lublin 1987, p. 289; while Gustav Aulén advocates a tripartite typology, where the criterion is the figure of Christ: the patristics describe him as *Christus Victor*, the Middle Ages as *Christus victima*, and modernity as *Christus exemplar*; G. Aulén, *Die drei Haupttypen des christlichen Versöhnungsgedankens*, "Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie" 8 (1931), pp. 501–538; Lothar Ullrich identifies the incarnational, staurocentric or paschal and practical-emancipatory model; L. Ullrich, *Soteriologische Modelle in der Dogmengeschichte. Eine Skizze als Orientierungshilfe*, "Theologisches Jahrbuch" 1988, p. 244; the Australian Jesuit Gerald O'Collins proposes three aspects of redemption: deliverance from evil, cleansing from guilt, and the transforming power of love; G. O'Collins, *Jezus nasz Odkupiciel. Chrześcijańskie ujęcie zbawienia* [Jesus Our Redeemer: A Christian View of Salvation], transl. J. Pocij, Kraków 2009; finally, Michał Paluch makes an attempt at systematisation by proposing two models explaining salvation: those related to Christ's death (sacrifice, redemption, atonement, vicarious propitiation) and those related to the whole life (and resurrection) of Christ; M. Paluch, *Traktat o zbawieniu* [Treatise on Salvation], op. cit., pp. 287–417. For example, Hans Urs von Balthasar puts forward five aspects of salvation: the self-surrender of the Son, the exchange of places, the liberation of man, the removal of evil and the initiating love of God; see H.U. von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, vol. 3: *Die Handlung*, Einsiedeln 1980, pp. 221–224.

¹⁰ Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, in collaboration with M. Konrad, H.P. Weber, Paderborn 2002, p. 267. On the Christology of the Viennese cardinal, see P. Artemiuk, *Chrystologia „zstępująca” kard. Christopha Schönborna* [Cardinal Christoph Schönborn's "descending" Christology], Tarnów 2011. In this part of the article I refer to selected excerpts from the monograph (pp. 217–251); see: P. Roszak, *Soteriologia zastugi i przyjaźni. Św. Tomasz z Akwinu wobec Cur Deus homo św. Anzelma* [Soteriology of Merit and Friendship. St Thomas Aquinas on St Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*], "Teologia w Polsce" 8/1 (2014), pp. 19–36; P. Roszak, *Odkupiciel i przyjaciel. U podstaw chrystologii soteriologicznej św. Tomasza z Akwinu w świetle Super Psalmos* [Redeemer and Friend. The Foundations of the Soteriological Christology of St Thomas Aquinas in the Light of *Super Psalmos*], Poznań–Warszawa 2020.

tradition, largely liberated himself from the overly tight yoke of authority by creating his unique teaching.”¹¹ His thought, grounded in the images of the New Testament, accentuates all their richness, avoiding one-sided definitions.¹² An attempt to grasp Aquinas’ conception should begin by describing the multiplicity of these soteriological aspects, in order to raise the question of the centre around which these aspects are arranged.

Aspects of redemption

Saint Thomas opens his soteriological considerations in *Summa theologiae* with the same question as Saint Anselm did, namely: Why did God become man? Christoph Schönborn noted, however, that Aquinas nowhere mentioned Anselm nor quoted his works; though *Summa theologiae* shares some teaching of the father of scholasticism, but no direct references can be identified. Aquinas rather drew on the authority of St Augustine, without exploring directly the thoughts by Anselm.¹³ However, it is impossible not to notice two significant changes between the theories of the two scholastics. In Anselm’s thought, man first appears righteous, then loses his righteousness through sin, and finally regains it anew thanks to God who gives a ransom. St Thomas, on the other hand, as if with this scheme in mind, presents Christ as “the Just One who pays this ransom with his own blood, even though he himself was not at fault.”¹⁴ The second difference lies, according to Ch. Schönborn, in the distinction between “possibility” and “being guilty.” Anselm believed that man should be just for the sake of God’s justice; however, man fails because of his sin. Therefore, Christ,

¹¹ J.-P. Torrell, *Święty Tomasz z Akwinu. Mistrz duchowy* [Saint Thomas Aquinas. Spiritual Master], transl. A. Kuryś, Poznań 2003, p. 151; Christoph Schönborn, reviewing the work of W. Mostert, *Menschwerdung. Eine historische und dogmatische Untersuchung über das Motiv der Inkarnation des Gottessohnes bei Thomas von Aquin*, Tübingen 1978, points out that Aquinas’s entire theology is soteriological; Ch. Schönborn, *Beschprechung*, “Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie” 26 (1979), pp. 618–626; on the Christology of St Thomas, see M. Przanowski, *Krótkie wprowadzenie do współczesnego teizmu kenotycznego* [A Brief Introduction to Contemporary Kenotic Theism], Warszawa 2018; M. Przanowski, *Unizony Bóg w myśli św. Tomasza z Akwinu* [The Humble God in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas], Toruń 2018.

¹² Cf. H.U. von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, op. cit., p. 242; for a concise characterisation of Thomas Aquinas’ Christology, see G. Kraus, *Jesus Christus – Der Heilsmitler. Lehrbuch zur Christologie*, Frankfurt am Main 2005, pp. 346–381.

¹³ See Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 270.

¹⁴ Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 270.

the God-Man offered an atonement for man to satisfy justice. Thomas, on the other hand, argues that God is not the only one who can atone for guilt; sinful man could also do so: “God, however, is the only one who can offer a salvific remedy, respecting the authentic freedom of man.”¹⁵

[The incarnation frees] 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 us. Now a mere man could not have satisfied for the whole human race, and God was not bound to satisfy; hence it behoved Jesus Christ to be both God and man.¹⁶

The Incarnation, bringing with it liberation from the bondage of sin, teaches man to use freedom in the right way. According to Schönborn, St Thomas emphasises the skilful use of freedom, which is a fruit of redemption.¹⁷

St Thomas’s holistic vision of the various dimensions of redemption is a novelty. Aquinas no longer focused, as Anselm or Luther did, on a single aspect, but provided grounds for their multiplicity and, for the first time, put forward the question of the ways in which the suffering of Christ operated.¹⁸ For Anselm the “way” was the atonement, for Luther it was the exchange of places, while Aquinas proposed four *modi*, “ways,” discussing them separately in four consecutive articles of *Summa theologiae*. These are: merit, atonement, sacrifice and redemption. Article 5 answers the question of whether it is exclusively proper to Christ to be the Redeemer or rather to God the Father himself. The whole concludes with the sixth question: did Christ’s Passion brought about our salvation efficiently?¹⁹ “It is here that Thomas excellently surpasses all that has been said so far on the subject by emphasising a strictly theocentric point of view.”²⁰

¹⁵ Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 271.

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 1 a. 2, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/> [access: 8.04.2024] [hereafter referred to as Thomas Aquinas, *ST*]; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 24: *Tajemnica Wcielenia Słowa Bożego*, transl. S. Piotrowicz, Londyn 1962, p. 16.

¹⁷ Cf. Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 271.

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 46–49; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 25: *Bóg–Człowiek Syn Maryi*, transl. S. Piotrowicz, Londyn 1964, pp. 149–315; q. 39–39 – Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26: *Droga Zbawiciela*, transl. S. Piotrowicz, Londyn 1968, pp. 7–38.

¹⁹ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 48 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., pp. 156–168).

²⁰ Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 271.

The first *modus* is the aspect of merit. Thomas quoted three objections that clarify the background. The first objection suggests that suffering is not an act of freedom. If only voluntary acts can be meritorious, then nothing can be merited by suffering. Secondly, if Jesus' whole life passes under the sign of merit, why should his passion have any special place. Thirdly, the root of all merit is love, and this, after all, reveals the whole life of Jesus.²¹ The procedure for refuting these objections is anchored by Aquinas in Phil 2:6–11: God exalted Jesus because of his suffering, and with him, exalted all those who believe in him. The glorification of Christ, Schönborn pointed out, has a communal dimension:

is not made in relation to Him as this one particular Person, but has in view the Head of the Church and thus the new humanity. This idea of the unity of Christ with the Church, of the Head with the members, *totus Christus* – as Augustine said – is relevant to any soteriology as a pre-biblical thought. No one lives only for himself, no one is an isolated island. Every act has some meaning for everyone. And this applies incomparably more to good than to evil (cf. Rom 5:12–19).²²

Thomas cites the following evidence in relation to the merit of Jesus' passion. First, the suffering itself cannot merit salvation, only when one bears it willingly. Secondly, the whole life of Christ merited. "From the beginning of His conception," noted Aquinas, "Christ merited our eternal salvation; but on our side there were some obstacles, whereby we were hindered from securing the effect of His preceding merits: consequently, in order to remove such hindrances, it was necessary for Christ to suffer."²³ Thirdly, the Passion of Christ was, for our sake, "suitable" in the sense of "fittingness": "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things?" (cf. Luke 24:26).²⁴

Investigating the aspect of atonement, Thomas Aquinas began with an objection, namely that, after all, one cannot repent for someone else; since everyone is responsible for himself, so only he can be responsible for his own actions. The same is true of punishment: everyone can atone only for himself. Aquinas responds to these objections: "He properly atones for an offense who offers something which the offended one loves equally, or even more than he detested the offense. But by

²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 48, a. 1 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., p. 157).

²² Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 272.

²³ Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 48, a. 1, ad. 2 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., p. 157).

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 48, a. 1, ad. 3 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., p. 157).

suffering out of love and obedience, Christ gave more to God than was required to compensate for the offense of the whole human race.”²⁵ While St Thomas does not use the word “punishment,” the term “atonement” appears with him, for which, as the Viennese theologian comments, there are three reasons:

firstly, the immensity of love; secondly, the value of Jesus’ life – He alone takes the place of us all; and thirdly, the quality of suffering. Suffering comes last here. The first rationale is thoroughly positive: the love with which God has loved people. But suffering is not forgotten either: it affected Him as wholly innocent, undeserved and with all its intensity. For these three reasons, Christ’s suffering is the atonement for all sins (1 John 2:2).²⁶

The third aspect of salvation present in the thought of the author of *Summa theologiae* is sacrifice. According to Schönborn, there are “the worst possible misunderstandings” in the interpretation of this issue.²⁷ They result from a misinterpretation of the sentence: “Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God” (Eph 5:2). Sacrifice was understood as the destruction of something very precious. Thomas, echoing Augustine’s teaching, chooses a middle way. “Thus a true sacrifice,” Augustine explained in *The City of God*, “is every work which is done that we may be united to God in holy fellowship, and which has a reference to that supreme good and end in which alone we can be truly blessed.”²⁸ Sacrifice, by uniting us with God, builds the communion. This has been the case since Old Testament times, when people, united with God and with each other, gathered after the sacrifice for a meal, a sign of a restored community (cf. Exod 24:11). In the New Testament times, this union is seen above all in the Eucharist, which builds the community of faith.²⁹

The aspect of redemption appears last and is, according to the Viennese theologian, to some extent problematic if one does not take into account its figurative character: “Man has sold himself doubly: on the one hand as a slave

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 48, a. 2 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., p. 159).

²⁶ Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 273.

²⁷ Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 273.

²⁸ Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* X, 6, vol. I; Augustine *The City of God*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1201.htm> [access: 12.04.2024]; cf. Augustyn, *O państwo Bożym*, transl. W. Kornatowski, Warszawa 1977, p. 448.

²⁹ Cf. Ch. Schönborn, *Pokarm życia. Tajemnica Eucharystii* [Food of Life. The Mystery of the Eucharist], transl. B. Widla, Warszawa 2006, pp. 55–67. For an explanation of the sacrificial character of the Mass, see *ibidem*, pp. 68–81.

of sin, and on the other as guilty of sins committed.”³⁰ With human freedom in mind, St Thomas interpreted redemption and the ransom as a liberation, which enables people to control their lives anew. In relation to Christ, this means that his suffering is a payment in which, instead of money, Christ gives himself for us. And it is not a ransom given to Devil, but only to God, for the sake of communion with Him.

Because, with regard to God, redemption was necessary for man’s deliverance, but not with regard to the devil, the price had to be paid not to the devil, but to God. And therefore Christ is said to have paid the price of our redemption – His own precious blood – not to the devil, but to God.³¹

The four articles in which Thomas presented how Christ, through merit, atonement, sacrifice and redemption, acts in his humanity for salvation, are followed by Article 5 on the work of redemption as an act of the whole Trinity. Finally, Thomas returns to the causes of salvation:

Christ’s Passion, according as it is compared with His Godhead, operates in an efficient manner: but in so far as it is compared with the will of Christ’s soul it acts in a meritorious manner: considered as being within Christ’s very flesh, it acts by way of satisfaction, inasmuch as we are liberated by it from the debt of punishment; while inasmuch as we are freed from the servitude of guilt, it acts by way of redemption: but in so far as we are reconciled with God it acts by way of sacrifice.³²

Propitiation in the light of St Thomas’ commentaries

With regard to the question of propitiation, a commentary on the relevant passage in the Letter to the Romans (Rom 3:23–26a) is found in Lecture 3 (Rom 3:21–26),³³ numbers 299 to 311. Aquinas, analysing St Paul’s text on

³⁰ Ch. Schönborn, *Gott sandte seinen Sohn*, op. cit., p. 274.

³¹ Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 48, a. 4, ad. 3 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., p. 165).

³² Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 48, a. 6, ad. 3 (Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, vol. 26, op. cit., p. 168).

³³ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Romans*, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Rom> [access: 10.04.2024] [hereafter referred to as Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*]; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Wykład Listów św. Pawła: List do Rzymian* [Interpretation of the Letters of St Paul:

divine righteousness, in no. 302 first points to its cause: “*the justice of God is through the faith of Christ Jesus, i.e., which he delivered.*”³⁴ It follows, as Thomas observes, that man cannot earn justification, “*as if faith exists from ourselves.*”³⁵ In the act of justification “by which we are made just by God, the first motion of the mind toward God is through faith,”³⁶ meaning that “faith, as the first part of justice, is given to us by God.”³⁷ This faith is formed by charity and applies to everyone, not just Jews. The key is the human heart, not “fleshly observances.”³⁸ In the following numbers (305–306), Aquinas points to the need for justification arising from the sin that all have committed. Therefore, people “need the glory of God, i.e., the justification that redounds to God’s glory.”³⁹ However, it is not possible for man to obtain justification by himself; “they need some other cause to make them just.”⁴⁰ According to Thomas, the word “justified” testifies to this. “Such justification exists without the law, i.e., that it does not come from the works of the law, when he says being justified freely, i.e., without the merit of previous works.”⁴¹

The second observation concerns the cause of justification. It takes place – firstly – through redemption.

From this slavery a man is redeemed, if he makes satisfaction for sin. For example, if a man owes a king a fine for some guilty action, the one who paid the fine would be said to have redeemed him from the debt. Now, this debt involved the whole human race, which was infected by the sin of the first parent. Hence no other person could satisfy for the sin of the entire human race except Christ alone, who was immune from all sin.⁴²

Secondly, Aquinas points to the source of the efficacy of redemption, and this is Jesus: “For Christ’s satisfaction was efficacious for justifying and redeeming by the fact that God had assigned him to this in his plan, which he designates

Letter to the Romans], Series: Dzieła Wszystkie Tomasza z Akwinu 64, transl. J. Salij, Toruń–Warszawa–Poznań 2023, pp. 129–134.

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 130.

³⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 130.

³⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

³⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

³⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 131–132.

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom* 307; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 132.

when he says *whom God has proposed to be a propitiation*.⁴³ According to Thomas, the key term is the word “proposed.” It signifies the placing of Jesus in lieu of all sinners, for the human “the human race had no way of making satisfaction unless God himself gave them a redeemer and satisfier.”⁴⁴ This expression is confirmed in other Old and New Testament passages. In the Psalms (111:9 and 79:9), reference is made to the redemption which the Lord sends, being the answer to the people’s request. In the First Letter of John (2:2), on the other hand, Jesus is called “a propitiation.” This event is foreshadowed by a passage in Exodus (25:17) in which the command to make an atonement appears. According to Thomas, it signifies that “Christ, [was] placed on the ark, i.e., the Church.”⁴⁵

The third theme that emerges in this section of Thomas’ analyses is the question of the efficacy of redemption. It was accomplished “through faith in his blood, i.e., faith concerning his blood poured out for us.”⁴⁶ Thomas explains it as follows:

in order to satisfy for us, it was fitting that he undergo the penalty of death for us, a penalty man had incurred by sin [...]. This death of Christ is applied to us through faith, by which we believe that the world has been redeemed by his death [...]. For even among men payment made by one man does not benefit another, unless he considers it valid. And so it is clear how there is justification through faith in Jesus Christ, as has been stated above. (Rom 3:22)⁴⁷

In Thomas’ commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews, in Chapter 10 we find the first lecture on the new worship.⁴⁸ Aquinas’ key statements concern the superiority of Christ’s sacrifice over the Old Testament sacrifices. Thomas emphasised that the author of the letter sees the failure of “the condition and

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 132.

⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom* 308; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 132.

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 132.

⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom* 309; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., p. 132.

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *In Rom*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Rzymian*, op. cit., pp. 132–133.

⁴⁸ See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, transl. F.R. Larcher, <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/SSHebrews.htm> [access: 13.04.2024], nos. 479–499 [hereafter referred to as Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*]; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Wykład Listów św. Pawła: List do Hebrajczyków* [Interpretation of the Letters of St Paul: Letter to the Hebrews], Series: Dzieła Wszystkie Tomasza z Akwinu 68, transl. P. Chojnacka, Toruń–Warszawa–Poznań 2023, pp. 221–229. On the authorship of the Letter to the Hebrews, see M. Healy, *List do Hebrajczyków* [Letter to the Hebrews], Series: Katolicki Komentarz do Pisma Świętego, transl. E. Litak, Poznań 2023, pp. XVI–XX.

rite of the Old Law,”⁴⁹ which “did not cleanse perfectly.”⁵⁰ This is evidenced, firstly, by the fact that “there was frequent repetition of the same sacrifices,”⁵¹ which were offered every year, which means, according to Aquinas, that the people were not cleansed. Secondly, since there was an annual recollection of the sins of the people in the Old Testament, this means that they were not removed in any way.⁵²

Thomas called the rite of sacrifice, even as solemn as on the Day of Atonement, after the Apostle, a shadow, “an obscure and imperfect representation of heavenly things.”⁵³ He emphasised that no animal blood has the power to take away sins. He states: “But if any sins were remitted, it was due to the power of Christ’s blood.”⁵⁴ In doing so, Aquinas mentioned four types of sacrifices offered in the Old Testament:

the sacrifice (*sacrificium*) was either of inanimate things, such as bread or incense, and then it was called an offering (*oblatio*); or of animate things, and then it was offered either to placate God, and was called a holocaust (*holocaustum*), which was most fitting, because it was completely burned and gave honor to God, or it was offered for cleansing from sin, and was called a sacrifice for sin (*sacrificium pro peccato*). But this latter had two parts: for one part was burned on the altar and the other was granted to the ministers for their own use; or it was for God’s benefits and was less fitting, because only one third was burned, one third given to the ministers, and one third to the ones who made the offering; and this was called a holocaust of peace (*sacrificium pacificorum*).⁵⁵

After this specification of the Old Testament sacrifices, Thomas concludes: “Now the offering of Christ’s body in the New Testament corresponds to all of these, because God was placated by the body of Christ, i.e., in offering Himself on the cross.”⁵⁶ And he adds: “by it we are introduced to eternal goods, and merit God’s benefits.”⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 221.

⁵⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 222.

⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 222.

⁵² See Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 223.

⁵³ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 223.

⁵⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb* 483.; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 223.

⁵⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb* 486; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 224.

⁵⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 224.

⁵⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 224.

Commenting on Heb 10:5 (“sacrifice and offerings you did not desire, and then adds: but a body you have prepared for me”), Thomas points out that this refers to preparation for sacrifice. The body was to be “most pure, to wipe away all sin” (cf. Exod 12:5), because “it would suffer and be immolated” (cf. Rom 8:3). “That body is a true sacrifice (*hostia*) and a true oblation (*oblatio*),”⁵⁸ according to the words of the Letter to the Ephesians: “He has delivered himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odor of sweetness” (Eph 5:2). Thomas, considering the sentence “In burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure” (Heb 10:6), emphasises that the Old Testament sacrifices in themselves never pleased God and were not accepted, they nevertheless took place and were practised because “they were a figure of Christ Whose passion was accepted by God, for He was not pleased with the killing of animals but in faith in His passion.”⁵⁹

In terms of the priestly ministry, which is realised during the offering of sacrifices, Aquinas distinguished between the Old and New Testament priests. Regarding the ancient rites, he stated: “there were two solemn sacrifices in the Law: one on the day of atonement offered by the high priest alone; the other was the continual sacrifice, where one lamb was offered in the morning and another in the evening”⁶⁰ (cf. Num 28:4). Both sacrifices prefigured Christ and “the eternity of Him Who is a lamb without blemish.”⁶¹ Referring directly to His salvific act, Aquinas stated that Jesus, “*offered one sacrifice*, because He offered Himself once for our sins, and sat down at the right hand of God, not as a minister always standing, as the priests of the Old Law, but as the Lord [...]; *at the right hand of God* the Father with equal power in the divine nature, but with the more important goods in the human nature [...]; *and this forever*, for He will not die again”,⁶² because he rose from the dead (cf. Rom 6:9).

Thomas emphasised the unique and unrepeatable nature of Christ’s sacrifice. The expression “a single sacrifice” (Heb 10:14) indicates the reason for which, Jesus “sits as Lord and not as a minister similar to the priests of the Old Testament, who could not take away sin by one sacrifice and, consequently, had to offer many others frequently [...]; but the sacrifice which Christ offered takes away all sins”⁶³ (cf. Heb 9:28). And the whole phrase, “by one offering he has perfected for all time” (Heb 10:14) means that Christ “did [this] by reconciling

⁵⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., pp. 224–225.

⁵⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb* 488; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 225.

⁶⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 227.

⁶¹ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 228.

⁶² Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb* 497; Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 228.

⁶³ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 229.

us and uniting us to God as to our principle; those who are sanctified, because Christ's sacrifice, since He is God and man, has power to sanctify for every"⁶⁴ (cf. Rom 5:12).

The conclusion of Thomas' analysis is as follows:

Sins are remitted in the New Testament by Christ's sacrifice, because the blood of Christ was shed for the remission of sins; therefore, in the New Testament, in which sins and iniquities are forgiven, as the authority indicates, there is no offering to be repeated for sins [...]. Therefore, where there is forgiveness of sins, there is no longer any offering for sin. For this would be to demean Christ's sacrifice.⁶⁵

Aquinas' soteriology found in *Summa theologiae* takes a systematic form, centred on four *modi*, which Thomas discussed separately. These are: merit, atonement, sacrifice and redemption. In Article 5 of *Summa theologiae* (q. 46 a. 5), crucial for this teaching, Aquinas presented redemption as an act of the whole Trinity. Selected excerpts from Thomas' commentaries on the Letter to the Romans and the Letter to the Hebrews provide a soteriological supplement and a theological interpretation of the question of propitiation/atonement. Aquinas saw Jesus as the *propitiation* in whose blood he accomplishes atonement and redemption. Commenting on Chapter 10 of the Letter to the Hebrews, Thomas points to the uniqueness and uniqueness of Christ's sacrifice, which, unlike the Old Testament sacrifices, has the power to cleanse mankind from sins. He also saw in the salvific act of Jesus a sacrifice that needs not to be repeated.

Hilastērion in Ratzinger's soteriology

Substantial soteriological themes can be found in volume 6/2 of Ratzinger's Opera Omnia,⁶⁶ where he explores such soteriological concepts as salvation,

⁶⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 229.

⁶⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb*; cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *List do Hebrajczyków*, op. cit., p. 229.

⁶⁶ Ratzinger's soteriology has nowhere taken a systematic form. His writings include sketches, entries developed for theological lexicons and valuable intuitions. On Ratzinger's Christology and soteriology see G. Bachanek, *Tajemnica grzechu pierworodnego w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera* [The Mystery of Original Sin by Joseph Ratzinger], "Studia Theologica Varsaviensia" 49/1 (2011), pp. 171–190; J. Szymik, *Prawda i mądrość. Przewodnik po teologii Benedykta XVI* [Truth and Wisdom. A Guide to the Theology of Benedict XVI], Kraków 2019, pp. 121–177; T. Söding (ed.), *Tod und Auferstehung Jesu. Theologische Antworten auf*

redemption, mediation, atonement/satisfaction (part D). Ratzinger was aware of the difficulties posed by their very definition, for he stated:

Redemption is the central term of the Christian faith; it is also one of the words most devoid of content; even the faithful find it difficult to discover any reality in it. If they juxtapose the hardships of their daily lives, their struggles, trepidations and uncertainties with the Christian message, it often seems almost impossible for them to recognise this redemption as something real. Besides, the words with which the message of faith is spoken here have become bleak: atonement, substitution, sacrifice – all these seem to have no real connection with the experiences and views of today's existence.⁶⁷

Explanation of key terms

However, regardless of the arising problems, Ratzinger attempted to describe the basic soteriological terms in a biblical-historical and theological perspective. The very first remark that Joseph Ratzinger noted next to the word “salvation” is crucial. He stated:

“Redemption,” like “salvation,” is a translation of the Greek term *soteria*. While “redemption” illuminates the more negative side of the Christ event, “salvation” more strongly expresses its positive sense. This is compounded by the fact that “redemption” has become a theological term which presents Christ's act

das Buch des Papstes, Freiburg im Breisgau 2011; for a collection of homilies on salvation, see Benedykt XVI, *Blask zbawienia. Homilie papieskie* [Splendor of Salvation. Papal Homilies], Kraków 2018; see also: J. Skarczyński, *Soteriologiczne znaczenie posłuszeństwa w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI* [Soteriological Meaning of Obedience by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI], Doctoral dissertation, University of Silesia, Katowice 2021; on contemporary soteriology see K. Kałuża, *Zbawienie przez Krzyż? O niektórych problemach współczesnej soteriologii* [Salvation Through the Cross? On Some Problems of Contemporary Soteriology], “Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne Śląska Opolskiego” 33 (2013), pp. 173–198; H. Szmulewicz, *Chrystus drogą człowieka. Argumentacja soteriologiczna we współczesnej refleksji teologicznej ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem kontekstu antropologicznego* [Christ the Way of Man. Soteriological Argumentation in Contemporary Theological Reflection with Special Reference to the Anthropological Context], Kraków 2013.

⁶⁷ J. Ratzinger, *Odkupienie – coś więcej niż frazes* [Redemption – More than a Platitude], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii* [Jesus of Nazareth. Studies in Christology], eds. K. Góźdz, M. Górecka, transl. W. Szymona, vol. 2, Opera Omnia 6/2, Lublin 2015, p. 863.

unilaterally from the perspective of the concept of original sin and the doctrine of the atonement assigned to it, whereas “salvation” has never become a proper component of the specialised language of theology, but precisely for this reason it has always offered a more open horizon, so that the new formulation of the essence of Christ’s work initiated by this concept has led to the negative statements on the classical doctrine of redemption being supplemented and deepened with positive aspects.⁶⁸

In defining the essence of salvation, Joseph Ratzinger points to the person of Jesus and his work. He emphasised that

salvation is not accomplished by any human endeavour, but by the event of the action of God who becomes present in Christ. Salvation in the proper sense of the word is an act of God which is directed towards man and by his personal action, by his graciousness, makes him a participant in salvation.⁶⁹

In the following sentences, Ratzinger elaborates on what the Christocentrism of salvation is based on. “His salvific significance rests ultimately not on some separable word or work from Him, but on the fact that person and act, person and word constitute an indivisible unity in Him. He *is* the word, He *is* the act of God penetrating us.”⁷⁰ Christ is therefore salvation, which means that “salvation is a Person.”⁷¹ Ratzinger emphasises: “wherever Christ (and through Him God) reigns, there is salvation.”⁷²

For soteriology, the idea of mediation remains a key category. Ratzinger, from the dogmatic perspective, first pointed to a fundamental doctrinal text, the *Letter to Flavian (the Tome)*, in which Pope Leo I interprets Christ’s mediation ontologically, “from the perspective of the two natures by which Christ is at the same time fully man and fully God, so that in his person a bridge has been thrown over the infinite abyss separating Creator and creature and the one has been united with the other.”⁷³ Ratzinger then quoted the Letter to the

⁶⁸ J. Ratzinger, *Zbawienie* [Salvation], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 823.

⁶⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Zbawienie*, op. cit., p. 824.

⁷⁰ J. Ratzinger, *Zbawienie*, op. cit., p. 825.

⁷¹ J. Ratzinger, *Zbawienie*, op. cit., p. 825.

⁷² J. Ratzinger, *Zbawienie*, op. cit., p. 825.

⁷³ J. Ratzinger, *Pośrednik* [Mediator], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 828; cf. *Letter 28 (The Tome)*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3604028.htm> [access: 11.05.2024].

Hebrews to support the soteriological argumentation. He showed at the same time that Christ's "humanity is not a suspended state of being, but a living reality realised through suffering and love."⁷⁴ Such a point of view makes it possible to remove "the opposition between incarnational theology and the theology of the cross, ontological and actual thinking."⁷⁵ In the perspective of the Letter to the Hebrews, Christ appears as a priest sacrificing himself. His act of self-giving, of proto-existence, of being for others, ultimately turns out to be a Passover – a passage. For Ratzinger, this was a fundamental law of biblical revelation.

The fact that Christ not only offers the sacrifice, but "is" the sacrifice, and thus leaves no area of his being to himself, but as a whole constitutes an act of surrender to the Father, reveals the deepest essence of Christ's mediation, in which the problem of ontology and actualisation, of being and history, is annulled. His being is an act and His act is being, and both, being and act receive their proper depth and dignity from the other.⁷⁶

Substitution, the vicarious sacrifice, on the other hand, according to Ratzinger, remains a fundamental biblical term which, however, is underdeveloped in theology.⁷⁷ The idea of substitution has a strong Old Testament foundation, which reaches its fullness in the event of Jesus Christ. Because of it, "New Testament theology is first and foremost a theology of substitution."⁷⁸ According to Ratzinger, it reaches its highest form in the writings of Paul and John. The former "shows the whole previous history of Israel in a new light, reinterprets it by giving it its ultimate meaning,"⁷⁹ which it finds in the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus. In John, in turn, there is an extension of Christ's vicarious ministry to all Christians: "By this we have come to know love, that He laid down His life for us. We too should lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 John 3:16). Ratzinger also recalled John's account of the events of the Upper Room, where he shows "the Lord performing to his disciples the slavish service of washing

⁷⁴ J. Ratzinger, *Pośrednik*, op. cit., pp. 828–829.

⁷⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Pośrednik*, op. cit., p. 829.

⁷⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Pośrednik*, op. cit., p. 829.

⁷⁷ See J. Ratzinger, *Zastępstwo* [Substitution/Vicarious Sacrifice], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, vol. 2, op. cit., pp. 833–844.

⁷⁸ J. Ratzinger, *Zastępstwo*, op. cit., p. 837.

⁷⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Zastępstwo*, op. cit., p. 839.

their feet and thus giving them a practical sign of what Christian existence is henceforth and forever to consist in.”⁸⁰

Atonement in a Christological perspective means that “the subject of the atonement is God Himself, who, on the initiative of His great love, repairs the disturbed legal order when, by His creative mercy, He justifies man and so restores justice, which is also grace.”⁸¹ According to Rom 3:25 and 1 John 2:2; 4:10, the atonement is made through the cross, taking a descending form: “a movement going from top to bottom – as an expression of that ‘mad’ love of God which gives itself in humiliation in order to save man.”⁸² Ratzinger drew another conclusion from this:

In Christianity, worship and even existence as a whole is also given a new direction through the atonement – the dimension of the gift defines the whole structure of Christian existence. However, the atonement also includes a truly human component stemming from the real humanity of Jesus Christ, by virtue of which He is the very representative of humanity before the Father.⁸³

In the idea of the atonement, Joseph Ratzinger saw its connection with Old Testament theology of worship and its influence on the theology of martyrdom. With a fundamental difference, however.

The Jewish martyr is merely one who vicariously bears the fate of others, while Christ is at the same time a witness to the incomprehensible love of God who has taken over the fate of others (all). Thus, at the same time, the one-sidedness of the austere top-down construction is annulled and Christ appears here as the Ebed of Yahweh, as the man in whose Passover on the cross the blessed exodus of humanity returning to unity with God is accomplished.⁸⁴

Hilastērion – the most compelling image of propitiation

Ratzinger analyses this theme in the same part of *Jesus of Nazareth* in which he reflects on the death of the Saviour. He adopted three perspectives: the exegetical perspective to explain the words uttered on the Cross; the historical perspective

⁸⁰ J. Ratzinger, *Zastępstwo*, op. cit., p. 840.

⁸¹ J. Ratzinger, *Zadośćuczynienie* [Atonement], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 845.

⁸² J. Ratzinger, *Zadośćuczynienie*, op. cit., p. 845.

⁸³ J. Ratzinger, *Zadośćuczynienie*, op. cit., p. 845.

⁸⁴ J. Ratzinger, *Zadośćuczynienie*, op. cit., pp. 845–846.

to examine the credibility of the event; and the soteriological perspective to address the question of the salvific dimension of Christ's death. Ratzinger wants to unveil "how the early Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, slowly penetrated more deeply into the truth of the Cross, in order to grasp at least remotely why and for what purpose it happened."⁸⁵ And he adds at the same time: "with the Cross of Christ, the old Temple sacrifices were definitively surpassed. Something new had happened."⁸⁶ Ratzinger justifies this thesis by citing selected texts from the Old and New Testaments and interpreting them.

Firstly, Joseph Ratzinger paid attention to the thought present in the Psalms concerning the inadequacy of animal sacrifices. This is a prophetic critique that foreshadows a different, new kind of worship. "God did not want to be glorified through sacrifices of bulls and goats, whose blood is powerless to purify and make atonement for men."⁸⁷ In the passion events of the Master of Nazareth, the new worship becomes a reality. "In the Cross of Jesus, what the animal sacrifices had sought in vain to achieve actually occurred: atonement was made for the world."⁸⁸ As St Paul put it: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal to us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:19–20). Although there were discrepancies about the validity of the Mosaic Law among the early Christians,⁸⁹ when it came to the cultic sacrifices, an agreement was kept. From the perspective of Jesus' death, they had lost their meaning. "Christ had taken their place."⁹⁰ Although the nascent Jerusalem Church went to the

⁸⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, transl. Ph.J. Whitmore, San Francisco 2011, p. 229 (Kindle); cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, [in:] J. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu. Studia o chrystologii*, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. M. Górecka, W. Szymona, vol. 1, Opera Omnia 6/1, Lublin 2015, pp. 540–541.

⁸⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 229; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 541.

⁸⁷ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., pp. 229–230; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 541.

⁸⁸ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 230; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 541.

⁸⁹ M. Rosik, *Church and Synagogue (30–313 AD). Parting of the Ways*, Berlin 2019, pp. 75–83; cf. M. Rosik, *Kościół a Synagoga (30–313 po Chr.). Na rozdrożu*, Wrocław 2016, pp. 89–98.

⁹⁰ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 230; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 541.

Temple and saw it as a place of prayer and preaching,⁹¹ “its sacrifices, though, were no longer relevant for Christians.”⁹²

Secondly, Ratzinger, pointing to the New Testament attempts to interpret the event of the Cross in the perspective of the new cult as “the true atonement and the true purification of this corrupted world,”⁹³ first mentioned the passage from the Letter to the Romans (3:25), which remains a mark of early Judeo-Christian tradition referring to Jesus as *hilastērion* (Hebrew: *kapporeth*). In Jewish tradition, *kapporeth* meant the lid covering the Ark of the Covenant. It was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement during the expiatory sacrifice with the expiatory blood.⁹⁴ Early Christians interpreted this Old Testament rite in a Christological key. Ratzinger explains it as follows:

It is not through the blood of animals touching a holy object that God and man are reconciled. In Jesus' Passion, all the filth of the world touches the infinitely pure one, the soul of Jesus Christ and, hence, the Son of God himself. While it is usually the case that anything unclean touching something clean renders it unclean, here it is the other way around: when the world, with all the injustice and cruelty that make it unclean, comes into contact with the infinitely pure one – then he, the pure one, is the stronger. Through this contact, the filth of the world is truly absorbed, wiped out, and transformed in the pain of infinite love. Because infinite good is now at hand in the man Jesus, the counterweight to all wickedness is present and active within world history, and the good is always infinitely greater than the vast mass of evil, however terrible it may be.⁹⁵

Ratzinger is of the opinion that the Christian interpretation of this rite protects against the accusation of the cruelty of God, in which it is suggested that, because of the purity of the Creator's image, notions of propitiation should be eliminated. In this context, he emphasised that calling Jesus *a hilastērion*

⁹¹ M. Rosik, *Church and Synagogue (30–313 AD). Parting of the Ways*, op. cit., pp. 68–75; cf. M. Rosik, *Kościół a Synagoga (30–313 po Chr.). Na rozdrożu*, op. cit., pp. 81–89.

⁹² J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 230; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 541.

⁹³ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 231; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 541.

⁹⁴ See J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 231; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., pp. 541–542.

⁹⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., pp. 231–232; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 542.

means “the real forgiveness accomplished on the cross functions in exactly the opposite direction.”⁹⁶ In what specific way? Ratzinger explains it as follows:

The reality of evil and injustice that disfigures the world and at the same time distorts the image of God – this reality exists, through our sin. It cannot simply be ignored; it must be addressed. But here it is not a case of a cruel God demanding the infinite. It is exactly the opposite: God himself becomes the locus of reconciliation, and in the person of his Son takes the suffering upon himself. God himself grants his infinite purity to the world. God himself “drinks the cup” of every horror to the dregs and thereby restores justice through the greatness of his love, which, through suffering, transforms the darkness.⁹⁷

Thirdly, it is not only the passage in the Letter to the Romans that testifies to a new understanding of worship, but also the theology of priestly prayer found in the Gospel according to St John⁹⁸ and the Letter to the Hebrews and the interpretation of worship present therein in terms of the theology of the Cross. This issue is dealt with by Joseph Ratzinger in far greater depth. From the Letter to the Hebrews, he selects Chapter 10, which describes the Old Testament worship as a “shadow” (Heb 10:1) devoid of the power to remove sins (Heb 10:4). The New Testament text adapts Psalm 40, interpreting it as a dialogue between the Son and the Father in which “the Incarnation is accomplished and at the same time the new worship of God is established.”⁹⁹ Ratzinger drew attention to the modification of the original text made by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews: “a body have you prepared for me,” whereas the psalmist had said: “but you have given me an open ear.” This represents “the conclusion of a threefold development in the theology of worship.”¹⁰⁰

In explaining this change, Ratzinger first addressed the question of obedience:

⁹⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., pp. 231–232; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 542.

⁹⁷ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 231; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 542.

⁹⁸ See J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., pp. 231–232; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., pp. 436–453.

⁹⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 232; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 543.

¹⁰⁰ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., pp. 232–233; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 543.

Obedience had already replaced the Temple sacrifices here: living within and on the basis of God's word had been recognized as the right way to worship God. In this respect, the psalm was reflecting a strand of Greek thought from the period immediately prior to the birth of Christ: the Greek world also sensed more and more acutely the inadequacy of animal sacrifices, which God does not require and in which man does not give God what he might expect from man. So here the idea of spiritual sacrifice, or "sacrifice in the manner of the word" was formulated: prayer, the self-opening of the human spirit to God, is true worship. The more man becomes "word" – or rather: the more his whole existence is directed toward God – the more he accomplishes true worship.¹⁰¹

Ratzinger stressed that in the Old Testament (from the Books of Samuel to the Book of Daniel) one can find a regularly appearing idea that concerns "love for God's guiding word, the Torah. God is rightly venerated when we live in obedience to his word and are hence thoroughly shaped by his will, thoroughly godly."¹⁰²

However, obedience to the Word is always insufficient on man's part. The human will often takes the upper hand. Ratzinger expressed this condition in the following words:

The deep sense of the inadequacy of all human obedience to God's word causes the urgent desire for atonement to break out again and again, yet it is not something we can accomplish by ourselves or on the basis of our "rendering of obedience." Repeatedly, therefore, alongside talk of the insufficiency of sacrifices and offerings, the longing for them to come back in a more perfect form breaks out anew (cf., for example, Ps 51:18–19).¹⁰³

According to Joseph Ratzinger, the version of Psalm 40 given in the Letter to the Hebrews fulfils "this longing: the longing that God will one day be given what we cannot give him, and yet that it should still be our gift."¹⁰⁴ Ratzinger interpreted the exchange in terms of Christology:

¹⁰¹ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 233; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 543.

¹⁰² J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 233; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 543.

¹⁰³ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 234; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., pp. 543–544.

¹⁰⁴ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 234; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 544.

The psalmist had prayed: "Sacrifice and offering you do not desire; but you have given me an open ear." The true Logos, the Son, says to the Father: "Sacrifices or offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me." The Logos himself, the Son, becomes flesh; he takes on a human body. In this way a new obedience becomes possible, an obedience that surpasses all human fulfillment of the commandments. The Son becomes man and in his body bears the whole of humanity back to God. Only the incarnate Word, whose love is fulfilled on the Cross, is perfect obedience. In him not only does the critique of the Temple sacrifices become definitive, but whatever longing still remains is also fulfilled: his incarnate obedience is the new sacrifice, and in this obedience he draws us all with him and at the same time wipes away all our disobedience through his love.¹⁰⁵

Ratzinger noted that man is unable, based on his own morality, to truly glorify God. St Paul emphasised it in the dispute on the subject of justification. Ratzinger insisted that:

Yet the Son, the Incarnate One, bears us all within himself, and in this way he gives what we ourselves would not be able to give. Central to the Christian life, then, are both the sacrament of Baptism, by which we are taken up into Christ's obedience, and also the Eucharist, in which the Lord's obedience on the cross embraces us all, purifies us, and draws us into the perfect worship offered by Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁶

According to Ratzinger, in this New Testament interpretation of Psalm 40, the conviction of the early Church comes to the fore, "how man can become just before God and, conversely, how he can understand God aright, the mysterious and hidden one, insofar as this is possible to man at all."¹⁰⁷

The soteriology present in Ratzinger's writings nowhere takes a systematic form. What appears here are sketches, entries developed for theological lexicons and valuable intuitions. Among them, the interpretation of the term *hilastērion*. In the context of Jesus' death on the cross, Joseph Ratzinger draws on the interpretation of this event found in other New Testament writings (Rom, Heb). Using the temple aspect of propitiation, he portrays Christ as *hilastērion*, the new and only sacrifice that took away the sins of the world.

¹⁰⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., pp. 234–235; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 544.

¹⁰⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 235; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 544.

¹⁰⁷ J. Ratzinger, *Holy Week...*, op. cit., p. 236; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Od wjazdu do Jerozolimy do zmartwychwstania*, op. cit., p. 544.

Conclusions

The author of the Letter to the Romans called Jesus the propitiation/atonement (*hilastērion*). This aspect was taken up by Joseph Ratzinger in his Christology; he saw it as one of the essential dimensions of the doctrine of salvation. Inspired by this approach, the aspect of propitiation/atonement was explored both in the biblical commentaries of St Thomas and the writings of Ratzinger. By juxtaposing the thought of Aquinas and Joseph Ratzinger, the entire soteriological considerations of both masters were presented.

The aim of this article was, firstly, to show the aspect of propitiation present in Thomas Aquinas and Ratzinger; secondly, to present it against the background of the whole soteriological teaching of both theologians; thirdly, to emphasise the novelty of their soteriology.

For Thomas, selected commentary passages from the Letter to the Romans and the Letter to the Hebrews are theological interpretations of the atonement issue, referring to biblical texts. They constitute an important soteriological addition, taking a biblical form. According to Aquinas, Jesus is the *propitiation* in whose blood the mystery of redemption is accomplished. St Thomas accentuates the uniqueness and singularity of Christ's sacrifice, which has the power to purify humanity from sins. The idea of propitiation composes itself with Aquinas' soteriology, present in *Summa theologiae*. There it takes a systematic form, centred on four *modi*, which Thomas discussed separately. These are: merit, atonement, sacrifice and redemption. The aspect of propitiation present in the biblical commentaries is an important supplement.

In addressing the question of salvation, Ratzinger drew attention to key soteriological terms. His thought takes the form of sketches, by intuition, without being developed into a definitive or systematic form. The interpretation of the term *hilastērion* is unique in Ratzinger's Christology. Ratzinger analysed the idea of propitiation in a profound, biblical and stylistically exquisite way. He saw in the symbolism of *hilastērion* the fulfilment of the redemption accomplished by Christ's death on the cross.

The aspect of propitiation, according to Ratzinger, already present in the Psalms and therefore in the Old Testament texts, points to the inadequacy of animal sacrifices. Ratzinger identified in these passages the foreshadowing of the one sacrifice that will be accomplished by the blood of the Messiah. Drawing on the New Testament attempts to interpret the event of the Cross in the perspective of the new cult, Ratzinger insisted that *hilastērion* remains a sign of the early Judeo-Christian tradition pointing to Jesus. In his view, the Christian interpretation of the rite of propitiation refutes the accusation of

God's cruelty; moreover, it indicates real forgiveness, which has its source in the mystery of the Cross.

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