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ARTICLE

Repentance, Atonement, and Aquinas

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Abstract

Repentance is central to the message of Christianity. Yet, repentance has received little analysis in recent scholarship despite being emphasized by the church fathers. In particular, there has been minimal effort to understand the necessity of repentance in light of Christ's atoning work. With this as the background, I explore fundamental questions such as repentance's definition, scope, and role in salvation history. Furthermore, I attempt to more precisely outline repentance's role in Christ's salvific work. Underpinning the project is my view that repentance should be understood as *metanoia* or transformation. This transformation of repentance is ordered toward divine *metanoia* – participation in Christ. In developing repentance, I put forward a synthesis of Thomas Aquinas's framework of penance and John McLeod Campbell's account of Christ's vicarious repentance. Through this synthesis, I attempt to make sense of the relationship between repentance and atonement. I finish by suggesting that it would be appropriate to conclude that Thomas would endorse a vicarious repentance account of the atonement and hint at how it might fit into broader soteriologies.

Keywords: Aquinas; atonement; John McLeod Campbell; penance; repentance

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.
(Jesus Prayer)

> *Think only of repentance, continual repentance, but dismiss fear altogether. […] If you are penitent, you love. And if you love you are of God. All things are atoned for, all things are saved by love.*
>
> *(The Brothers Karamazov, Book II, Chapter III)*

In his homily, 'On Repentance and the Church', St John Chrysostom asserted, 'Repentance, which is terrible and formidable to the sinner, is a medicine to trespasses, a destruction to lawlessness, an end to tears, courage before God, a weapon against the devil, a knife that decapitates his head, the hope of salvation, the abolishment of despair. Repentance opens heaven, admits into paradise, defeats the

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devil […]'.[1] If Chrysostom is correct, why does repentance receive so little attention both scholarly and pastorally? In 1951, Damasus Winzen, a German Benedictine monk, concluded that humanity's general malaise regarding repentance was directly related to our 'general numbness' to sin.[2] For the modern person, sin is non-existent, and, therefore, thinking about it is both dangerous and a waste of mental energy.[3] On this view, repentance is unnecessary. On the other hand, reductive views of repentance interpret it as an external act, or simply turning away from sin – the mentality of 'I won't do that again', and nothing more. Alternatively, and just as reductive, repentance is exclusively penitential – confess sins to a priest and receive absolution. In the strict penitential sense, no moral change is required. *Prima facie*, this range of views appears to miss the mark. This does not seem to be what Jesus had in mind in Matthew 4:17 when He demands repentance. On a reductive account, how can one make sense of the New Testament biblical witness to repentance? Furthermore, what is the relationship between Christ's call to repentance and His work in the atonement? Why is repentance necessary if our sins have been forgiven? Moreover, reductive views do not speak to the breadth of the patristic witness and the conclusions of medieval scholars with regard to repentance.

Eleonore Stump argues that any theory of the atonement ought to include an account of how Christ's atoning work is a remedy for human sin.[4] Similarly, it is my view that any acceptable theory of the atonement must also account for Christ's call to repentance. As two sides of the same coin, a proper account of the atonement must satisfactorily address the question of how Christ saves humanity – objective redemption – while concurrently addressing how humanity participates in Christ – subjective redemption. In light of the biblical witness, repentance appears central to understanding how humanity participates in Christ's atonement. Yet, if humanity's repentance is sufficient for forgiveness of sins, why did Christ endure the passion? While I will hold to a standard account of the atonement, I will focus on drawing out the relationship between repentance and the atonement. In particular, I focus on the following question: What is repentance and how does repentance fit into Christ's atoning work? To that end, I will begin by outlining a robust understanding of repentance as *metanoia*–repentance (MR) underpinned by St Thomas Aquinas' account of penance, which provides the resources to connect repentance and the atonement. From there, I will develop my positive thesis of the efficaciousness of repentance through Christ's vicarious repentance. For vicarious repentance, I will synthesize aspects of John McLeod Campbell's and Thomas Aquinas' conceptions of repentance. In doing this, I will innovate on aspects of Thomas' understanding of penance in an attempt to shed light on the doctrine of the atonement. Ultimately, I draw the conclusion that Thomas would have endorsed an account of vicarious repentance, while I simultaneously emphasize that humanity's need for repentance is predicated on Christ's call to transformation. A vicarious repentance account of the atonement has the resources to address both the question of objective redemption – how Christ saved

[1]John Chrysostom, *On Repentance and Almsgiving*, trans. by Gus George Christo (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998), p. 112.

[2]Damasus Winzen, 'Metanoia: Penance, Virtue and Sacrament', *Orate Fratres*, 25 (1951), p. 145.

[3]Winzen, 'Metanoia', p. 145.

[4]Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 31.

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humanity – and the question of subjective redemption – humanity's participation in Christ's atoning work. Although, as I will argue, this account does have considerable explanatory power, it might also be argued that vicarious repentance deserves to sit on its own as a theory of the atonement. However, I suggest that it is best taken as just one of the pieces of a larger soteriological puzzle. I will have accomplished the task I have set for myself in this paper if I am able to show how it is that the centrality of vicarious repentance to Christ's atoning work helps to make sense of our need for repentance.

1. *Metanoia*–repentance

Jesus begins his public ministry with the words, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand' (Mt. 4:17 ESV). What does this mean? Modern interpretations have framed Jesus's words in three ways: first, to turn away from sinful behavior; second, contrition for sin; or third, a systematic framework of penance. In detailing the history of scholarship on repentance in his book, *Repentance in Late Antiquity*, Alexis Torrance notes that most scholarship has reduced the definition down to penitential confession.[5] In particular, the scholarship has focused on the Protestant–Catholic divide on the penitential system as it evolved in the Latin Church.[6] Alternatively, the biblical witness can lend itself to a false sense of moralism or external behavior in one's attempt to return to God.[7] In my view, these miss the mark. Repentance must be understood as *metanoia*–transformation. Torrance highlights that repentance (*metanoia*) in the early Christian world requires work and effort to properly define.[8] Repentance, while entirely sufficient terminologically, lacks nuance that *metanoia* provides.[9] *Metanoia* has broad interpretive scope. St. John Chrysostom's innumerable definitions of *metanoia* in his homilies on repentance provide a representative example of the patristic witness.[10] For my purpose, it is best defined as a 'complete change and renewal of heart and mind; from the heart and mind of sin to "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16)'.[11] This definition makes sense of the New Testament biblical witness[12] while also reframing what is necessary in a conceptual framework of repentance. To capture the thickness of this definition, I call this *metanoia*–repentance (MR).

My intention here is to call back to the centrality of *metanoia* in the classical Christian tradition. Rather than attempt to create new terms, I will lean on Thomas Aquinas' development of penance in the Tertia Pars of the *Summa*.[13] It might be asked why Thomas should be used, particularly when the task is to excavate a concept

[5]Alexis Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity: Eastern Asceticism and the Framing of the Christian Life c. 400-650 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 27.

[6]Torrance, *Repentance*, pp. 9–10.

[7]Mark J. Boda, *'Return to Me': A Biblical Theology of Repentance*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2015), p. 146.

[8]Torrance, *Repentance*, p. 2.

[9]Ibid., p. 32.

[10]For example, see Gus George Christo, 'Introduction', in John Chrysostom, *On Repentance and Almsgiving*, pp. xi–xviii.

[11]Ibid., p. xiv.

[12]Boda, '*Return to Me*', pp. 31, 164–65.

[13]It should be noted that this framework (penance as sacrament and virtue) is not unique to Thomas. Thomas was certainly working from Augustine, Peter Lombard, Albert the Great, and others. For historical context and Aquinas' development of Penance, see Eric Luijten, *Sacramental Forgiveness as a Gift of God:*

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that is native to Greek? It is also frequently heard that Aquinas has a penitentially focused account of repentance.[14] This latter objection is, however, based on a common misunderstanding; Thomas' development of penance penetrates deep into the heart of repentance. And concerning the former worry, Thomas' medieval precision combined with his deep understanding of the Greek fathers, particularly John Chrysostom, provides excellent tools to unpack what is at the heart of MR. John Chrysostom, in his homilies on repentance, casts an expansive vision for what ought to be incorporated into an understanding of repentance. Although imprecise at times, Chrysostom emphasizes repentance broadly across all modern theological categories – from repentance's interaction with the beatitudes to his strong use of atonement themes. In his mind, repentance touches everything.

It is my view that Thomas carries forward this vision. Thomas, like Chrysostom, also envisions repentance (called penance or *poenitentia* in the *Summa*) as something that stretches across theological categories, such as ecclesiology and soteriology. Unfortunately, Thomas died before completing his account of penance in the *Summa*, so we do not know exactly how broadly he intended the landscape of penance to extend.[15] What is clear from his treatment of penance in the *Summa*, however, is the fact that Thomas recognized the centrality of repentance in the Christian life. As I will show, his insights into the nature of repentance capture many of the elements I envision MR to possess. What makes him particularly useful, for my account, is his clear connection of penance and the atonement in the *Tertia Pars*. For that reason, I will focus next on developing his account of penance. While I will shift between using the terms penance, contrition, repentance, and MR, my intention is to treat them synonymously, while also utilizing the local vocabulary of the voice I am engaging with. Each term on its own leaves something to be desired, but taken together, wholistically, they are sufficient.[16] For Thomas, that is penance and contrition.

As important background, Thomas makes clear that Jesus Christ is humanity's model (*exemplum)* for virtue (*ST* III.46.3; III.46.4). By beginning His public ministry with a call to repentance, Jesus is not exclusively instructing one to reject old sinful ways. Rather, this pronouncement – the kingdom of heaven is at hand – reveals that transformation is upon us in the royal presence of God made man.[17] As Thomas points out in the *Prologus* to the *Tertia Pars*, Jesus Christ, in his own person, is the Way and shows us *the way*.[18] Time and again, we see *in Christ* the forgiveness of sins (Lk. 24:47, Eph. 1:7–8,

Thomas Aquinas on the Sacrament of Penance (Leuven: Peeters, 2003) and Maria C. Morrow, 'Reconnecting Sacrament and Virtue: Penance in Thomas's Summa Theologiae', *New Blackfriars*, 91 (2010), pp. 304–20.

[14]Luijten, *Sacramental Forgiveness*, pp. 48–52.

[15]Ibid., pp. 21–23.

[16]Regarding the inadequacy of the word 'penance', Winzen reflects this sentiment, 'Our word "penance" comes from the Latin *poenitentia*, a term which has been formed by the juridicial sense of the Romans. As a derivative of *poena* (punishment), it emphasizes the sinner's obligation to suffer the punishment assigned to him by divine justice. It fails to convey the deeper aspect of penance as a meeting of hearts between God and man, which makes penance more than a negative thing: a passing through judgment into peace, a restoration, a resurrection'. See Winzen, 'Metanoia', p. 146.

[17]Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word: Meditations on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1996), p. 158.

[18]Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1911–1925). Hereafter *ST*, all references in the text are to this work.

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Acts 2:36–38, Acts 13:38). Therefore, for Thomas, any answer to the question of repentance and the atonement must have Christ as the center of the solution.[19] Humanity is wholly contingent on the divine initiative.[20] But how can Jesus show us the way to repentance as one without sin? Before addressing this question directly, I will first locate repentance (or rather penance) within Thomas' work.

Maria C. Morrow rightly emphasizes the importance of justice as it relates to penance. Through penance, a sinner attempts to make satisfaction, or compensation, for one's sins (*ST* III.85.3). One can make penance to God or to a human being, while oftentimes both are necessary in attempting to rectify sin. The encompassing act of penance itself, to remedy an offense against God, situates the virtue of penance as a species of justice (*ST* III.85.3).[21] Thomas directly connects this attempt at making a remedy, for sin, with the atonement by calling penance 'a kind of sacrifice' (*sacrificium*) (*ST* III.85.4). If a relationship between two parties is equal – such as person to person – a satisfaction can be made with respect to the sinner's debt. The satisfaction, from offender to offended, would wipe the slate clean, so to speak. But the relationship between God and sinner is not equal, making it impossible for a sinner to fully make satisfaction for their sins (*ST* III.85.3.2). If perfect equality cannot be achieved through penance, there can only be relative justice.[22] Relative justice, as Thomas defines it, is, 'When it is between parties of whom one is subject to the other' (*ST* III.85.3). Thomas then makes an interesting move to connect penance to all the other virtues (*ST* III.85.3.4). Penance, in some sense, is the first of the other virtues as it regards justification of sinners.[23] Pointing back to the question of repentance and atonement, it is important to see that Christ, in calling us to *metanoia*, is opening the door for all other virtues. This first-mover phenomenon occurs through sorrow for past sins (*ST* III.85.1). Thomas argues as follows, 'One should grieve for a proper object of grief as one ought to grieve, and for an end which one ought to grieve' (*ST* III.85.1). Fundamentally, this sorrow, or contrition, initiates repentance and the removal of sin. This makes contrition the principal act of penance (*ST* III.90.2).[24]

Contrition's connection to MR is first made clear in the linguistic connection between contrition and *metanoia*; both possess strong connotations of regret and missed opportunities.[25] Robert C. Roberts calls contrition a 'moral perception', contrasting it with guilt; contrition, unlike plain guilt, possesses confident hope in God's mercy.[26] Roberts' intuition is very similar to Thomas' definition in the Supplement to the *Tertia Pars*, where he quotes Gregory the Great, "'Contrition is humility of the

[19]I want to kindly thank Anton ten Klooster for reminding me of this point.

[20]Anton ten Klooster, "'Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand!" (Mt 3:1 and 4:17): Conversion in the Gospel and the Christian Life', *Journal of Moral Theology*, 10 (2021), p. 52.

[21]Morrow, 'Reconnecting Sacrament and Virtue', p. 311.

[22]Ibid., p. 314.

[23]Ibid., p. 314; *ST* III.85.6, 'Nevertheless, in a certain respect, [penance] is the first of the other virtues in the order of time, as regards its act, because this act is the first in the justification of the ungodly […]'.

[24]Anthony T. Flood, 'Aquinas on Contrition and the Love of God', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 95 (2021), p. 235.

[25]ten Klooster, "'Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand!'", p. 57.

[26]Robert C. Roberts, 'The Logic and Lyric of Contrition', *Theology Today*, 50 (1993), p. 198–200.

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soul, crushing sin between hope and fear'" (*ST* Suppl. IIIae.1.1).[27,28] For Roberts, it is important that contrition is understood as central in the transformation of the will. Contrition needs to move from an act out of fear of punishment to the virtue of awe of God.[29] Finally, Roberts puts forward that after a penitent receives absolution, there is a new recognition of who one is; accepted and transformed by God.[30] He summarizes, 'When the Christian confesses to the "almighty and most merciful Father", she does so in the hope of the atonement'.[31] Again, this view agrees with Thomas, 'Consequently Penance comprises faith in Christ's Passion, whereby we are cleansed of our sins, hope for pardon, and hatred of vice, which pertains to charity' (*ST* III.85.3.4). In a similar way, Khaled Anatolios, in his book *Deification Through the Cross*, summarizes Thomas' position on contrition as follows: 'contrition is the form that the human glorification of God takes in the face of human sin'.[32] Taking these various approaches, contrition is fundamental to both repentance and our understanding of the atonement. Contrition desires righteousness, thus enabling it to be the first actor in the movement of the other virtues (as Thomas clarifies).[33] If Thomas is right, that acts of penance, or more fully MR as I am developing it, direct us to hope in what Christ has done in the atonement, then it is critical to understand the 'how'. How does Christ model this perfect penitence?[34]

2. Objective redemption: vicarious repentance

Now that MR has been located within Thomas' work, principally through contrition as the first mover of virtue, it is time to revisit the atonement. Athanasius, in his *On the Incarnation*, asserts that repentance alone cannot fix humanity's transgressions of sin – repentance merely halts sin.[35] Repentance, the virtue, has an intrinsic dependence on something more to fix humankind. His recognition of this fact is important. The virtue of repentance – principally contrition – is entirely subservient to the inner work that Christ has done, is doing, and will do (Rev. 1:8). In order for repentance to be effective, a sinner needs a means of participating in this work of Christ – this

[27]While not explicitly citing Thomas, Roberts' definition of contrition seems to be clearly influenced by him and thus, I believe, Roberts provides helpful exposition of Thomas' thoughts on the matter.

[28]For Thomas, *contritio*'s Latin definition as 'crushing' or 'grinding' is important in clarifying his understanding of contrition as an act of the will, whose principal effect is 'crushing sin'. For more on Thomas' exposition of *contritio*, see Luijten, *Sacramental Forgiveness*, pp. 56–58.

[29]Thomas makes a similar point in *ST* III.85.5, 'Whether penance originates from fear?'.

[30]Roberts, 'The Logic and Lyric of Contrition', p. 200.

[31]Ibid., p. 207.

[32]Khaled Anatolios, *Deification Through the Cross: An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), p. 339: 'Contrition is the form that the human glorification of God takes in the face of human sin. Inasmuch as sin itself should be considered ultimately a "disglorification" of God, contrition is the disavowal of that disglorification and the repentant "return" (*shub*) to the true glorification of God. In speaking of Christ's salvific work as doxological contrition, we are saying that Christ translates his perfect divine glorification of the Father in the Spirit into a human mode and that, in the face of human sin, he performs that glorification in and through the mode of contrition'.

[33]Roberts, 'The Logic and Lyric of Contrition', p. 202.

[34]I am borrowing language from C.S. Lewis, who devotes a chapter to repentance in *Mere Christianity* called 'The Perfect Penitent'.

[35]Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. by John Behr (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), p. 56.

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divine *metanoia*. Athanasius speaks of the need for human participation (*metaousia*) in God – deification.[36] This participation, or subjective redemption, will be the means by which one is transformed from the mind of the sinner into the mind of Christ.[37] To this end, it might be said that Christ's atonement 'covers us in the sacrament of penance'.[38] But how is this objective redemption made possible? I propose that this objective redemption is achieved through Christ's vicarious repentance of humanity's sin.

John McLeod Campbell, in his 1856 book *The Nature of the Atonement*, is the first to put forward the concept of vicarious repentance. More recently, this idea of vicarious repentance was brought to the popular eye through C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, where he called Jesus 'the perfect penitent'. In vicarious repentance, Campbell saw a way to reject Jonathan Edwards' penal notion of vicarious punishment.[39] The core of Edwards paradigm was that Jesus Christ, although entirely free from sin, was declared guilty, on behalf of sinners, by God the Father and punished in the place of sinners. Christ's death satisfied the necessity of God's justice to punish the guilty, whereby the guilty – the sinners – receive no punishment. The debt payment of Christ is legally imputed onto sinners, which eliminates the need for further punishment from God to sinners. Today, Edwards' view is most commonly known as 'penal substitution'.[40] Chief among Campbell's concerns was rejecting the problems created by the 'legal fiction' within vicarious punishment.[41] A penal punishment understanding of the atonement seemingly puts God's love into conflict with his justice, thereby yielding a tension that needs to be resolved. As Edwards saw it, the only two ways that satisfaction for sin might be made on behalf of sinners were that either one would endure an equivalent punishment for sin or one would present an adequate repentance to God.[42] Edwards rejects the latter as unachievable. Campbell excuses Edwards' mistake and asserts that Edwards mistakenly conceived of repentance exclusively from sinner to God, not recognizing the possibility of repentance from Christ to God.[43] Christ's vicarious repentance is the 'higher and more excellent […] moral and spiritual satisfaction'.[44] For Campbell, it was clear that Christ's atonement is the 'perfect confession', 'perfect repentance', 'perfect sorrow', and 'perfect contrition' to the Father – satisfying Edwards requirements.[45]

[36]Anatolios, *Deification,* p. 172.
[37]Winzen, 'Metanoia', p. 147.
[38]Ibid., p. 149.
[39]John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement and Its Relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life* (London: Macmillan, 1869), p. 137; Chapter VI, 'Retrospective Aspect of the Atonement', is the primary chapter that develops vicarious repentance, pp. 129–50.
[40]While I recognize there are a variety of forms that 'penal substitution' might take, I see Edwards' penal punishment view as the standard understanding of the term. For an excellent assessment of 'penal substitution' as a model for the atonement, see Anatolios, *Deification*, pp. 411–21.
[41]Christian D. Kettler, 'The Vicarious Repentance of Christ in the Theology of John McLeod Campbell and R. C. Moberly', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 38 (1985), p. 531.
[42]Campbell, *Nature of the Atonement*, p. 137.
[43]Ibid., p. 138.
[44]Ibid., p. 137.
[45]Ibid., pp. 135–37.

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This language of Christ 'repenting' might at first seem uncomfortable.[46] In our modern usage, it appears to imply that Christ is sinful and in need of repentance. Neither Thomas, Campbell, nor myself would endorse that understanding. Rather, it is entirely consistent with Thomas' account to say that Christ is 'perfectly contrite', or 'the perfect penitent' as stated above. He has a proper perception of the gravity of sin, but in light of this knowledge, he is confident in the Father's mercy on humanity. His will is perfect, entirely submitted to the awe of God.[47] He provides the equality of justice necessary to satisfy for all sin. Christ, in the act of perfect penitence, is the first mover of humanity in enabling all other holiness. Lastly, Christ himself is the absolution, or satisfaction, of sin, transforming all who come into contact with him. Anatolios, sounding nearly identical to Campbell, succinctly summarizes the concept of vicarious repentance:

> Christ saves humanity by speaking forth the plight of the human condition within his divine dialogue with the Father in the Spirit; Christ confesses human sinfulness to the Father; Christ performs an integral repentance for human sin through the 'return' of his own sinless, sanctified, and deified humanity; Christ's repentance is the basis for the reversal of the divine judgment on humanity's sin.[48]

That is to say, Christ satisfies divine justice through a perfect repentance on behalf of humanity.

Although not giving an exhaustive treatment, I will provide brief points of agreement between Thomas and Campbell on satisfaction to elucidate how Christ satisfies divine justice.[49] Campbell and Thomas both maintain that repentance (*poenitentia)*, as a species of justice, provides satisfaction for sins (*ST* III.85.3).[50] Thomas perceives that sadness (*tristis)* is a means of satisfying (*satisfactionis*) for sins (*ST* III.46.6.2).[51]

[46]For two recent examples, see Ian A. McFarland, 'Response or Remedy? A Reflection on the Role of Contrition in the Economy of Salvation', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 25 (2023), 22–38 and Maximos Constas, 'Did Christ Repent? The Greek Fathers and the Vicarious Repentance of Christ', last modified 21 December 2021, <https://www.pappaspatristicinstitute.com/post/did-christ-repent-the-greek-fathers-and-the-vicarious-repentance-of-christ> [accessed 2 February 2023].

[47]While I do not underscore the importance of the will in this paper, there are interesting parallels between this idea of the 'perfectly contrite will' and St. Maximos the Confessor's understanding of the 'deified will'. For more on this idea, see Ian A. McFarland, '"Willing Is Not Choosing": Some Anthropological Implications of Dyothelite Christology', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 9 (2007), pp. 1–23 and Anatolios, *Deification*, pp. 345–46.

[48]Anatolios, *Deification Through the Cross*, p. 196.

[49]There are many intriguing areas of overlap between Campbell, Thomas, and Anatolios. One I regretfully had to exclude was Campbell's reflection on the man of joy and sorrow (p. 131), which echoes the famous term 'joy-bearing grief' that Anatolios expounds (p. 337, 368). For more reflection on this idea specifically, see Alexis Torrance, 'Witnesses of His Sufferings, Partakers of His Glory: Exploring the Doxological Contrition of the Saints', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 25 (2023), pp. 60–72.

[50]Contrary to some criticisms, Campbell does clearly maintain that satisfaction for sin is necessary. Campbell is opposed to the view that God can forgive arbitrarily. For more on this topic, see Trevor A. Hart, 'Anselm of Canterbury and John McLeod Campbell: Where Opposites Meet?', *Evangelical Quarterly*, 62 (1990), pp. 311–33.

[51]Thomas, in his commentary on Matthew, also states that penance provides satisfaction for sins. See ten Klooster, '"Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand!"', pp. 60–63 for further insight: 'Aquinas

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'To atone (*satisfaceret*) for the sins of all men, Christ accepted sadness (*tristitiam*), the greatest in absolute quantity […]' (*ST* III.46.6.2). Anatolios points out that Christ's interior suffering, what Thomas calls sadness (*tristis)*, should be seen as vicarious repentance for human sin.[52] He further affirms that Thomas is explicitly stating this when he describes contrition as satisfaction.[53] To that end, Thomas directly describes Christ's grief (*doluit*) as for the sins of the whole world (*ST* III.46.6.4). Conversely, Campbell appeals to the human heart as that which provides the first clue that repentance is a means of expiation for sin. The human heart yearns for right relationship with God. This desire for true repentance enlivens the awareness of the need to be made anew. Yet, the human heart also acknowledges that this repentance falls short of an adequate repentance needed to satisfy divine justice.[54] Thomas calls this falling short of perfect repentance, 'relative justice' (*ST* III.85.3). Relative justice, as previously defined, involves subjection of one to another; humanity to God. To rectify the insufficiency, Campbell quotes Whitefield and says, '[Humanity's] repentance needs to be repented of […]'.[55] Humanity's repentance will always fall short of God's demands for perfect justice. Thus, for satisfaction of sins, humanity must place their faith in something else, namely Christ's passion (*ST* III.85.3.4), where Christ was capable of meriting salvation (*ST* III.48.1; III.49.6). For Thomas, repentance is ultimately satisfying divine justice (*ST* III.46.6.4).[56] In asking the question of whether Christ's repentance is an adequate satisfaction, Campbell echoes Thomas, 'We feel that such a repentance as we are supposing would […] be the true and proper satisfaction to offended justice, and that there would be more atoning worth in one tear of the true and perfect sorrow […] than in endless ages of penal woe'.[57] To summarize, Thomas argues that Christ's contrition for humanity's sin grants satisfaction of divine justice. Satisfaction, via repentance, can be offered, on behalf of humanity, by no one other than Christ. In utilizing Campbell's categories to interpret Thomas, Christ's vicarious repentance, as a means of satisfaction, ought to be viewed as a normative element of the atonement.

If repentance as a means of satisfaction is correct, then it would solve a few problems with most theories of the atonement. First, it maintains the Father's love of the Son through the Passion, which Campbell does not see as being possible in a penal punishment framework.[58] Likewise, Thomas describes the differences between punishment and repentance as means of making satisfaction, one of which is that repentance is aimed at friendship with God:

> An offense is atoned otherwise in Penance than in vindictive justice. Because, in vindictive justice the atonement is made according to the judge's decision, and not according to the discretion of the offender or of the person offended; whereas, in Penance, the offense is atoned according to the will of the sinner,

argues that John and Jesus do not merely call on those who listen to stop sinning but ask that they indeed satisfy for their sins'.

[52]Anatolios, *Deification*, pp. 332–33.

[53]Ibid., p. 332.

[54]Campbell, *Nature of the Atonement*, pp. 144–45.

[55]Ibid., p. 144.

[56]Anatolios, *Deification*, p. 334.

[57]Campbell, *Nature of the Atonement*, pp. 145–46; See *ST* 46.6.4 for similar language from Thomas.

[58]Campbell, *Nature of the Atonement*, pp. 139, 148–49.

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> and the judgment of God against Whom the sin was committed, because in the latter case we seek not only the restoration of the equality of justice, as in vindictive justice, but also and still more the reconciliation of friendship, which is accomplished by the offender making atonement according to the will of the person offended (*ST* III.90.2).[59]

Second, this satisfaction absorbs and exhausts the divine wrath on behalf of humanity through a perfect response, 'which was possible only to the infinite and eternal righteousness in humanity'.[60] Implicitly for Campbell, Christ's humanity is the means by which humankind participates in this repentance to the Father.[61] His whole life is the confession to God.[62] Christ's intercession presupposes a complete response to sin for humanity.[63] Christ's perfect sorrow for sin provides the model for those who want friendship with God. Third, this resolves Athanasius' acknowledged limits of repentance – one needs to participate in Christ's merit for transformation to take effect. 'The incarnation and the death of Christ are the *metanoia* through which the heavenly Father saves mankind'.[64] Fourth and most importantly, for Campbell, this 'adequate sorrow' and 'adequate confession' for the sin of humanity possesses no legal fiction; humanity is truly in Christ who perfectly repents on behalf of humanity.[65]

> […] as compared with the enduring as a substitute a penal infliction, this adequate sorrow for the sin of man, and adequate confession of its evils implies no fiction—no imputation to the sufferer of the guilt of the sin for which He suffers; but only that He has taken the nature, and become the brother of those whose sin He confesses before the Father and that He feels concerning their sins what […] He must feel.[66]

Using Thomas' language, through His contrition, on behalf of humanity, Christ fully merits satisfaction by providing the equality of justice necessary for humanity's redemption. In light of this understanding, one can also reject the view that the repentance could be from God to humanity.[67]

Through Campbell and Thomas, I have shown how Christ merits salvation for humanity. This objective redemption is achieved through Christ offering repentance on behalf of humanity. While it was necessary to overlay Thomas' treatment of penance onto Campbell's vicarious repentance framework, I believe I have offered preliminary proof that Thomas would accept a vicarious repentance view of objective redemption.

[59]Thomas also points to *ST* III.85.3.3 in his discussion of these differences.
[60]Campbell, *Nature of the Atonement*, p. 146.
[61]Kettler, 'The Vicarious Repentance', pp. 531–32.
[62]For an interesting analysis of this idea and J.M. Campbell's argument, see Oliver Crisp, 'Non-Penal Substitution', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 9 (2007), pp. 415–33.
[63]Campbell, *Nature of the Atonement*, p. 147.
[64]Winzen, 'Metanoia', p. 148.
[65]Campbell, *Nature of the Atonement*, p. 146.
[66]Ibid.
[67]'God also sacrifices Godself—the Word made flesh, […] *to us*. […] Although God, as naturally impeccable, cannot confess sin, God can do something analogous to acknowledging Divine *responsibility* for creating us in world like this'. See Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 275–76.

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It offers an account of satisfaction, makes use of his own understanding of the role of contrition in the atonement, and it is principally aimed at friendship with God. However, and as I explain in the next section, Thomas would not accept Campbell's notion of 'vicarious' as such.

3. Subjective redemption: Sacramental participation

In my view, the most significant shortcoming of Campbell's account is that it is unable to account for humanity's subjective redemption in Christ. Although Campbell believes his account does not include imputation of satisfaction from Christ to humanity, there is no clear account provided to solve for this other than Christ's implicit humanity. *Prima facie*, one legal fiction – imputation of punishment – has been substituted for another – imputation of repentance. In my view, the mechanism of satisfaction might seem different, but the vicarious substitutionary nature is the same. On Campbell's account, the effects of Christ's repentance are simply imputed onto the rest of fallen humanity.[68] While the solution appears to be that by being 'in Christ', humanity is atoned for in the objective redemption of Christ, this still leaves too many unanswered questions regarding the humanity's participation in the atoning work – the subjective redemption. First, how exactly is humanity in Christ? How does Campbell avoid universalism if there is an imputation on humanity? Would one be forced to accept a 'limited atonement' view of Christ's vicarious repentance? More personally, how does one know that their individual repentance participates with Christ? To clarify these questions, Thomas' sacramental understanding of incorporation (*incorporatus*) and application (*applicare*) is particularly helpful in amending Campbell's thought. For Thomas, Campbell's (or Edwards') idea of vicarious atonement is completely foreign. In no way does Thomas envision a strictly legal imputation from Christ to humanity. Nor would Thomas see the two opposing spectrums of universalism or limited atonement as viable options. Rather, Thomas' understanding is that through the sacraments one is incorporated into Christ, and that through this incorporation, the merits of the passion are applied.[69] The sacraments are necessary for salvation in that they apply (*applicare*) to man the effects of Christ's passion, which is the source of the sacramental power (*ST* III.61.1.3; *ST* III.62.5). The Latin word *applicare*, while translated 'applied to' could also be defined 'attached to' or 'joined to', while *incorporatus* indicates 'uniting into one body' so as to become part of it. Rightly so, Thomas recognizes we are joined to Christ in baptism – the door to transformation.[70] This transformation, through baptism, cements a proper understanding of *metanoia*, which is aimed at such

[68]Crisp, 'Non-Penal Substitution', p. 423; Crisp summarizes as, 'God treats Christ's act of vicarious penitence as *if* it were an act offered by fallen human beings, such that Christ's act may be *imputed* to fallen human beings who may thereby benefit from Christ's vicarious action'.

[69]'Baptism opens the gates of the heavenly kingdom to the baptized in so far as it incorporates (*incorporat)* them in the Passion of Christ, by applying (*applicando)* its power to man' (*ST* III.69.7.2); '[…] Christ's Passion is, so to say, applied (*applicatur*) to man through the sacraments according to the Apostle (Romans 6:3): "All we who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in His death"' (*ST* III.61.1.3).

[70]In *ST* III.68.6 *respondeo*, Thomas calls baptism 'the door of all the sacraments'. The biblical language of being 'in' or 'joined to' Christ is immense. As an example of a Latin synonym, *adhaereo* stresses this point in the 1 Cor. 6:16-17 (Latin Vulgate). ESV: 'Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh". But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him'.

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a transformation into Christ. To build on Thomas' understanding of incorporation, it is fair to say that Thomas has a twofold view of humanity's subjective redemption in Christ: first, baptism into Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3), and second, penance as a perpetual outworking of the transformation that took place in baptism.[71] Through baptism, Thomas emphasizes that one is incorporated into Christ and made His member, opening the gates of heaven by applying to the baptized the power of the passion (*ST* III.69.3; *ST* III.69.7). Seeing baptism as the door to heaven points to Jesus' baptism in Matthew and Mark, which precedes the ministerial call to repentance that takes place almost immediately afterward.[72] Most basically, Jesus himself shows us the path to repentance through perfect contrition (as explained above) and baptism.[73] The imagery of Christ's objective redemption and our subjective redemption through Christ's baptism is stark. 'Christ entirely abolished the punishment of hell, so that those who are baptized and truly repent, should not be subject to it' (*ST* III.69.3.2). Again, Anatolios clarifies the connection of baptism and repentance:

> […] it is striking that [Paul's] descriptions [in Romans 6] of both Christ's death and the sacramental death of the Christian baptized make use of the concept of repentance […]. Paul's meditation on our participation through baptism in Christ's death and resurrection thus intimates that repentance, ours and Christ's, is intrinsic to both Christ's salvific work and our appropriation of it.[74]

This appropriation, or joining to Christ, does not end with baptism. Participation in Christ's repentance is meant to be continuous. Thomas comments that internal sorrow for past sin must remain for an entire life (*ST* III.84.8) and acknowledges that penance, in order to be effective, must be habitual (*ST* III.84.9).[75] Contrition then, both included in and an outworking of baptism, is continuous. Habituated acts,

[71]One might also argue, and correctly so, that the Eucharist deserves to be placed here in addition to baptism and penance. However, for my purposes, I am focusing exclusively on the sacraments that represent the new life, or *metanoia*-transformation, brought about through Christ's passion. See *ST* III.69.9.5, 'Both sacraments, viz. Baptism and the Eucharist, are a representation of our Lord's death and Passion, but not in the same way. For Baptism is a commemoration of Christ's death in so far as man dies with Christ, that he may be born again into a new life'. Also see *ST* III.79.5.1, 'The sacrament of Baptism is directly ordained for the remission of punishment and guilt: not so the Eucharist, because Baptism is given to man as dying with Christ, whereas the Eucharist is given as by way of nourishing and perfecting him through Christ. Consequently there is no parallel'.

[72]Matthew 3 and 4; Mark 1; Anatolios sees Jesus' baptism as clearly indicating vicarious repentance: Anatolios, *Deification*, pp. 154–58.

[73]Emphasizing Jesus as the model for receiving baptism is rooted in the patristics, for example, St. John of Damascus: 'He, however, was baptized not that He himself stood in any need of purification but that by making my purification His own he might "crush the heads of the dragons in the waters", wash away the sin and bury all of the old Adam in the water, […] and become for us a model and example for the reception of baptism. And we, too, are baptized with the perfect baptism of the Lord […]'. From The Orthodox Faith Book 4, Chapter 9; John of Damascus, *Writings*, trans. by Frederic H. Chase, Jr. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), p. 347.

[74]Anatolios, *Deification*, p. 158.

[75]While Thomas cites Augustine in *ST* III.84.9, this also echoes Chrysostom's reflection on Psalm 50:5 in Homily 7, 'You, for the safety of your soul, must always have the sin before your eyes. For the memory of past sins hinders future ones; and he who is bitten by his past sins demonstrates the will to be steadfast about the next ones'. Chrysostom, *On Repentance*, p. 95.

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or continuous penance, Thomas calls the 'virtue of penance'.[76] Without this habituation of penance (the virtue), one's will is not genuinely changed and risks forfeiting forgiveness (*ST* III.86.6).[77,78] Through perpetual (or habitual) contrition, one is endlessly incorporated into Christ's passion. John Chrysostom figuratively describes the continuous property of repentance as a 'second baptism'. In connection with Peter's weeping after denying Jesus, he imagines, 'Peter began crying and did not simply cry but wept bitterly. He performed a second baptism with the tears from his eyes. By crying bitterly, he wiped away his sin […]'.[79] The continuous need for repentance is the road to divine *metanoia*, that is, to possess 'Christ-like repentance'.[80]

Thomas, once more, explains incorporation sacramentally in penance. The means of incorporation through contrition is the 'form' of sacramental penance: the priest (*ST* III.84.3). Thomas points directly to the passion for a priest's divine power,[81] '[a priest] does not speak as of something uncertain, because just as the other sacraments of the New Law have […] a sure effect through the power of Christ's Passion […] so is it with [penance]' (*ST* III.84.3.5). Furthermore, '[…] it is from the power of the name of Jesus Christ suffering and rising again that [penance] is efficacious unto the remission of sins' (*ST* III.84.7). By standing *in persona Christi*, a priest acts in the person of Christ to a repentant sinner. In light of this, the absolution possesses even more importance in incorporating one into Christ's passion. There is no doubt Campbell would disagree with this sacramental understanding; however, I believe seeing divine power working through human agents is consistent with both Campbell's and Thomas' accounts of vicarious repentance. On this view, when a person repents to a priest, *in persona Christi*, and receives absolution, they are incorporating their repentance into the perfect repentance of Christ as one body in Christ (1 Cor. 12). The need for repentance then, as articulated by Christ at the beginning of His ministry, is essential insofar as it is a critical piece of making forgiveness possible. Thomas connects these together, 'Consequently, it is necessary for the sinner's salvation that sin be taken away from him; which cannot be done without the sacrament of Penance, wherein the power of Christ's Passion operates through the priest's absolution and acts of the penitent, who co-operates with grace unto the destruction of his sin' (*ST* 84.5). Sacramental absolution reinforces Thomas' point, in the *Prologus* to the *Tertia Pars*, that we must go *through* Christ for salvation. In concluding, both baptism and penance incorporate one into Christ. These doors to being 'in Christ' are not plagued by legal fictions, nor do they require vicarious imputation. To be sacramentally joined to Christ provides the fullest meaning of transformation and fundamentally provides *the way* to divine *metanoia* – the principal aim of MR.

[76]Morrow, 'Reconnecting Sacrament and Virtue', p. 312.

[77]Penance is by necessity a virtue, because it involves an act of the will – choice by means of right reason (*ST* III.85.1).

[78]It is at this point that the virtue of penance, as discussed, is most clearly understood as ordered toward love; While I am focusing principally on repentance's relationship to the atonement, charity and love of God must be the proper ends of repentance. For a helpful analysis of the relationship between penance and love, see Anthony T. Flood, 'Aquinas on Contrition and the Love of God', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 95 (2021), pp. 235–48.

[79]Chrysostom, *On Repentance*, p. 40.

[80]Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity*, p. 29.

[81]The words of a priest carry the divine power instrumentally and also effectively (*ST* III.84.3).

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I began this section by saying Thomas would reject a vicarious account, with respect to subjective redemption, as articulated by Campbell – strict imputation from Christ to humanity. A clear distinction needs to be made on how one might claim Thomas would understand 'vicarious'. By highlighting how Thomas understands humanity's incorporation into Christ and Christ's merit applying to humanity – through baptism and penance – I believe one can suggest his support of a vicarious repentance account of the atonement – on both objective and subjective grounds. In light of these distinctions, I see Thomas affirming Jesus Christ as 'the perfect penitent' and as the one who was 'perfectly contrite'.

4. Soteriological implications

The obvious omission from my account, thus far, is its relation to Christ's passion. An account of the atonement that neglects to make the passion central lacks merit. Thomas points out that all the power in the sacraments is granted by Christ's passion. Yet, there are recent critiques of Thomas' approach, such as from Eleonore Stump, in her book *Atonement*. She accuses Thomas of putting forward a gratuitous view of the atonement.[82] She argues that on Thomas' account, God could have saved humanity through a means other than Christ's passion. '[…] Christ's passion and death seem to have no intrinsic role in the production of [salvation]'.[83] Stump reasons that Thomas offers an abundance of means by which Christ might satisfy for sins, thus neglecting the passion's unique role. The passion is thus 'gratuitous' in that humanity could have been saved without it. Though it lies beyond the bounds of the paper to discuss it fully here, it is worth pointing out how my account of MR might fit into the broader soteriology of 'deification' to answer this question.[84] In examining MR, I have shown that it has four key dimensions: first, it is moved by contrition for sin; second, it is made possible through sacramental transformation; third, it is continuous in nature; and fourth, it is aimed at divine metanoia – to be transformed into the mind of Christ. Based on the dimensions described, I believe MR is well suited to be integrated into a 'deification' soteriological framework. Deification, or *theosis*, describes human existence as enjoying such a high degree of unity with God that humanity ought to be described as 'like God' in being.[85] With respect to the passion and deification, MR sheds light on our understanding of the need to overcome the consequences of sin – death (Rom. 6:23). First, as Athanasius observed, repentance halts sin but does not reverse death. Christ would not have fully accomplished a vicarious repentance had he not taken death on himself as the natural consequence of sin.[86] Thus, the passion and death of Christ is the 'consummation' and 'perfection' of repentance in that through Christ's vicarious

[82]Stump, *Atonement*, pp. 30–31.
[83]Ibid., p. 30.
[84]There are alternative frameworks that also work well with my development of vicarious repentance. One that is plausible might be Christ's 'vicarious humanity' as developed by Oliver Crisp, where Christ's vicarious repentance culminates in the necessity of the passion. See Crisp, 'Non-Penal Substitution', p. 431. For a more detailed discussion of an account of Christ's vicarious humanity, see also Oliver Crisp, 'On the Vicarious Humanity of Christ', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 21 (2019), pp. 235–50.
[85]Anatolios, *Deification,* p. 178.
[86]Ibid., p. 380.

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repentance, death was defeated by sin dying in Christ.[87] Christ's death is necessary, for in it the death of sin is necessary. Further as I pointed out already, Thomas understands penance as a type of sacrifice (*ST* III.85.4). Thus, Christ's passion can be affirmed both as a sacrifice for sin and as a vicarious repentance for sin. By participating in Christ's vicarious repentance, humanity likewise overcomes death and becomes like Christ – deified. Second, God promises that the one who repents of sin and returns to Him will not die, but live (Ez. 18:25–28). Keeping in mind Thomas' foundational understanding of Christ as our model (*exemplum*), it is fitting that Christ would unveil eternal life through his death and resurrection in a consummation of vicarious repentance. Through His perfect repentance of humanity's sin, Christ rises from the dead, granting incorruptibility to those who participate in Him. The power of Christ's passion reinforces how the prophet Ezekiel correctly foreshadowed our path from death to life through the merit of Christ's vicarious repentance.[88] In conclusion, it is incorrect to view an account of vicarious repentance as discounting Christ's passion. Both of these responses retain the centrality of the passion, while also integrating Christ's vicarious repentance – aimed at divine *metanoia* – into a deification soteriology.[89] Although brief and insufficient, I have hinted at two ways MR incorporates the passion and might fit into broader soteriologies, such as deification.

5. Conclusion

Although unlikely companions, Thomas Aquinas and J.M. Campbell provide insights into how one might develop an account of repentance that combines its salvific necessity and its role in making satisfaction for sin. Pulling together their thought yields a synthesis across satisfaction, sacramental incorporation, and the role repentance might play in deification. This account of MR is especially well-suited to provide insight into debated questions of the atonement while also clearly capturing the beauty of what Christ did in His humanity on our behalf.

In developing this approach to repentance, I see wide-ranging benefits. It is grounded in transformation, both moral and spiritual, but aimed at divine *metanoia*. It provides an account for why repentance is necessary – it is a participation in Christ's atoning work. It fits within broader soteriologies, such as *theosis*, while providing an answer to Christ's call to repentance in His earthly ministry. MR as I developed it has the potential to interact with many doctrines but ultimately focuses on and elevates what Christ is doing in our individual acts of repentance. Our merit alone, in repentance, leads to an inequality of justice in satisfaction. Humanity's repentance alone necessitates a definitive movement of Christ in us. Christ's vicarious repentance provides the satisfaction necessary to establish justice for humanity. In baptism and individual acts of repentance, humanity is participating in Christ's perfect repentance.

[87]Ibid., p. 381.

[88]This passage, Ez. 18:26–28, is the subject of brief reflection by Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo* 1.20, where it is left implicit that Christ's passion enables repentance's merit.

[89]While he takes a different approach to integrating vicarious repentance and deification, I see Anatolios' project as particularly helpful in this respect. He is unwilling to see different models as binary, but rather as complimentary pieces in a larger puzzle of Christ's salvific work. See Anatolios, *Deification*, pp. 375–83.

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Lastly, I hope my insight into how Thomas might have laid out a vicarious repentance account of the atonement, by developing his insight of contrition as satisfaction and sacramental incorporation, furthers recent projects to reemphasize the importance of repentance in the Christian life – both theologically and spiritually.

All in all, I pray this discussion provided insight into the complexity of repentance and encouraged fruitful attempts to understand Jesus Christ's call to *metanoia*.

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