

Your Application Is Being Processed: A New Ecumenical Model of Purgatory

Gregory R.P. Stacey
Saint Francis University

ABSTRACT: The Christian doctrine of Purgatory (CDP) is resurgent across confessional divides. Many philosophers and theologians have endorsed the Sanctification Account of CDP, according to which Purgatory provides the post-mortem moral purification required for believers to enter Heaven. The Sanctification Account can be embraced by Protestant and Orthodox Christians, who have historically disavowed CDP. However, its proponents typically ignore or repudiate traditional Catholic explanations of Purgatory's purpose. Consequently, despite claims that Catholic doctrine merely affirms the Sanctification Account, there is a fresh challenge to CDP's ecumenical reception. In this paper, I offer a new understanding of Purgatory—the Application Account—which should prove acceptable to Catholics and non-Catholics alike. I further show how the Application Account can incorporate Eleonore Stump's work on atonement to provide a theological development of Catholic teaching on Purgatory that avoids prominent criticisms of the latter.

1. Introducing Purgatory

The Christian doctrine of Purgatory (CDP) holds that after death, those who have ultimately accepted God's offer of salvation (or, their souls) may undergo purification from sin or its effects through some potentially painful process. Whilst CDP might not seem especially controversial, historically it has been fiercely contested by Roman Catholic advocates, and Orthodox and Protestant detractors. Calvin described Purgatory as “a deadly device of Satan” that “makes void the cross of Christ,”¹ whilst the twenty-second of the “Thirty-Nine Articles” castigates it as “a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.”

CDP perhaps owes its controversial status to its Latin character. Purgatory is a notoriously “Roman” Catholic doctrine in three ways. Firstly, Purgatory's existence is (at most) obscurely intimated in Scripture, and explicit reference to it only emerged gradually amongst Latin Christians.² Accordingly, CDP is speculative for Christians who deny the Catholic Church's competence to authoritatively define doctrines not clearly taught by Scripture or universal Christian tradition. I term this difficulty for CDP the “Motivation Problem.” Secondly, CDP has often been explained using legal terminology such as “temporal punishment” and “satisfaction.” As historical debates between Catholic and Orthodox Christians have demonstrated, this makes CDP problematic for those who deny that salvation involves the exaction or abrogation of divine punishment. Such Christians often characterise salvation as deification or the restoration of one's relationship with God. This is the “Legal Problem” facing CDP. Finally, CDP's development was associated with Medieval practices of sacramental penance, prayer for the dead, and indulgences. According to many Reformers, these practices were both corrupt and incompatible with the doctrine that we are justified solely by God's gracious action in Jesus Christ, through

¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1960), III.4.27.

² On CDP's development, see Le Goff (1984), Moreira (2010), and Sicienski (2023, 198–312).

faith in Him (Walls 2011, 35–57). I call the claim that Purgatory’s existence is incompatible with an adequate account of Christ’s role in salvation the “Justification Problem.”

Fortunately for ecumenically minded proponents of CDP, recent philosophical theology has urged that CDP should prove acceptable to non-Catholics. Protestant philosophers including David Brown (1985), Justin Barnard (2007), Jerry Walls (2011), and Gordon Graham (2017) argue that CDP is credible because after death souls require moral transformation before entering Heaven. They claim that plausibly, such transformation must be freely embraced in a process involving suffering (i.e., “Purgatory”). This explanation of Purgatory’s function, sometimes dubbed the “Sanctification Account” of CDP, undercuts the Motivation and Legal Problems. It offers a rationale for CDP which is in principle acceptable to non-Catholics and suggests that Purgatory aims at spiritual development rather than punishment.

However, while advancing the Sanctification Account, some philosophers notice that the Justification Problem may hinder the development of an ecumenical understanding of Purgatory. Barnard (2007, 325–326) and Walls (2011, 59–91) argue that the traditional Catholic conception of CDP differs from the Sanctification Account and is incompatible with Protestant soteriology. According to the “Satisfaction Account” of Purgatory, which is reflected in the Catholic Church’s Magisterial teachings, Purgatory facilitates the “temporal punishment” of those who die in a state of grace without having made adequate “satisfaction” for their sins through penance. Although Walls (2011, 71–82) appreciates that Catholics including Aquinas and Dante have historically affirmed the Satisfaction Account alongside the Sanctification Account, describing Purgatory as penal *and* morally transformative, he finds any endorsement of the Satisfaction Account problematic.

Modern Catholic theologians often explain CDP solely in terms of the Sanctification Account. Yet this leaves unexplained how Catholics should understand authoritative articulations of CDP which apparently endorse the Satisfaction Account. If Catholics are committed to the latter, one might wonder whether they can wholly share an understanding of CDP with Christians who believe that the Satisfaction Account succumbs to the Legal and Justification Problems. Indeed, Catholics may themselves worry that the Satisfaction Account is indefensible given the latter.

In this paper, I address these difficulties for CDP’s ecumenical reception. I outline a new account of Purgatory’s purpose that accommodates both the Satisfaction and Sanctification Accounts. I then show how one can develop Catholic interpretations of this account which avoid the Justification and Legal Problems.³ To this end, in Section 2 I explain the Satisfaction Account more precisely, exploring the challenge it faces from the Justification Problem. In Section 3, I then consider an argument that the Satisfaction Account avoids the Justification Problem, because under a plausible reading it is equivalent to the Sanctification Account. I contend that as exegesis of Catholic doctrine, this rejoinder is dubious. Section 4 therefore outlines a new model of Purgatory: the “Application Account.” The Application Account is compatible with both the Satisfaction Account and the Sanctification Account, so it should prove acceptable to Catholics and non-Catholics alike. I then show how on a “Catholic Interpretation,” the Application Account can endorse the key claims of the Satisfaction Account without succumbing to the Justification Problem. However, this position still faces the Legal Problem. Sections 5 and 6 therefore show how the Catholic Interpretation of the Application Account can be further developed to address this challenge, using Eleonore Stump’s work on atonement.

³ I set aside the Motivation Problem, but if my proposed accounts of Purgatory are plausible, they implicitly offer a modest response.

2. The Satisfaction Account of Purgatory

When elucidating Purgatory's nature and purpose, Catholics have often referred to the related concepts of "satisfaction" (*satisfactio*), "guilt" or "fault" (*culpa*) and "temporal punishment" (*poena temporalis*) (i.e., punishment of limited duration). The Second Council of Lyons, for example, taught that

If [those who have sinned after Baptism] die truly repentant in charity before they have made satisfaction by worthy fruits of penance for sins committed and omitted, their souls are cleansed after death by purgatorial or purifying punishments . . .⁴

The Council of Trent likewise related Purgatory to punishment:

If anyone says that fault is remitted and the debt of eternal punishment is removed from each penitent sinner so that no debt of punishment remains to be paid either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened [to him]; let him be anathema.⁵

Finally, Thomas Aquinas advanced the following argument for CDP:

It is sufficiently clear that there is a Purgatory after this life. For if the debt of punishment is not paid in full after the stain of sin has been washed away by contrition, nor again are venial sins always removed when mortal sins are remitted, and if justice demands that sin be set in order by due punishment, it follows that one who after contrition for his fault and after being absolved, dies before making due satisfaction, is punished after this life. Wherefore those who deny Purgatory speak against the justice of God: for which reason such a statement is erroneous and contrary to faith.⁶

To understand Aquinas, it helps to distinguish the effects of sin, which he believes are healed through the virtue of "penance." In *ST* III.87, Aquinas mentions three elements of sin. Firstly, there is sin itself (*peccatum*): a disordered act grounded in an inordinate will, which separates the sinner from God. When sin is voluntary, Aquinas calls it fault (*culpa*), through which someone is blameworthy.⁷ Secondly, there is the "debt of punishment" (*debitum poenae*), which fault incurs. Aquinas believes that when a fault is committed, God restores justice by imposing appropriate suffering (*poena*) on the perpetrator.⁸ Whilst *poena* generally denotes non-moral harm or suffering (Waldow 2022, 14–15), in the context of the *debitum poenae* due to sin, it seems appropriate to translate *poena* as "punishment." Punishment (i.e., merited suffering) is either forcibly imposed on the offender (*poena*

⁴ For the original Latin, see Denzinger and Schönmetzer (1963, 857). References to this volume give (larger) paragraph numbers; translations are my own.

⁵ Trent, Session VI, Canon XXX (Denzinger and Schönmetzer 1963, 1580); cf. Session XXV, First Decree (Denzinger and Schönmetzer 1963, 1820). For related teaching on sacramental satisfaction cf. Session XIV, First Decree, Chapter 8 (Denzinger and Schönmetzer 1963, 1689–1691)

⁶ *Summa Theologiae* (*ST*), Supplement (Appendix II) 1.1, *resp.* Quotations from *ST* are from Aquinas (1922–1935).

⁷ *ST* I.21.2; *De Malo* II.2.

⁸ *Compendium Theologiae* (*CT*) 200; *Summa Contra Gentiles* (*SCG*) IV.54.9; *ST* I.II.87.6.

simpliciter) or accepted voluntarily as “satisfaction” (*poena secundum quid*).⁹ Finally, there are lingering psychological and spiritual “remnants” of sin, such as the disposition to commit similar sins.¹⁰

Crucially for his argument concerning Purgatory, Aquinas claims that even when sinners are restored to a state of grace through confession of and contrition for their sins, they can retain some debt of punishment.¹¹ Like many Scholastics, he takes this possibility to be confirmed by Old Testament passages including 2 Samuel 12:14, where David’s son dies even after God has forgiven David’s adultery. Aquinas’s position might seem surprising, because he holds that fault grounds liability to punishment and that penance removes fault. When someone turns to God in penance, God grants them grace, which both is merited for sinners by Christ and unites them to His satisfactory sacrifice.¹² Grace reorients the sinner’s will toward God, who is Goodness itself.

Yet Aquinas further notes that sin involves *both* the will’s turning away from God (mortal sin)—which, because God is Goodness, is an infinitely disordered act meriting infinite punishment—and a disordered orientation of the will toward some created good (venial sin). Accordingly, someone who has confessed their sins and accepted the re-orientation of their will toward God can retain a disordered attachment to some created reality. Because the disorder of such a will is finite, it accrues a finite debt of punishment. So, when someone retains a disordered will after their fault is remitted, they must make further “satisfaction” for this debt (i.e., voluntarily endure temporal punishment) either in this life or in Purgatory.¹³

However, other Scholastics denied that liability to temporal punishment after the remission of fault is grounded in the retention of a disordered orientation toward created goods. Francisco Suárez, for example, held that sinners owe temporal punishment due to *past* mortal and venial sins, even after repentance.¹⁴ According to Suárez, who follows earlier Franciscan theologians, penitent sinners are not naturally or necessarily liable to temporal punishment, due to their ongoing possession of disordered desires. Rather, they owe such punishment contingently because of God’s free choice to commute the punishment owed for mortal sins to temporal punishment (or, to lessen the temporal punishment for venial sins) upon their repentance, rather than to remit punishment entirely.¹⁵

One can summarise the Scholastic Satisfaction Account as follows:

Satisfaction Account: The (or, one) purpose of Purgatory is to allow those who die in a state of grace to pay a debt of “temporal punishment” which has not been previously remitted by penitential acts or profound contrition.

Protestants have often criticised the Satisfaction Account as incompatible with the Reformers’ insistence that salvation is secured solely through the appropriation of Christ’s sacrifice, and not through any human “work.”¹⁶ Calvin urged that since “the blood of Christ is the only satisfaction, expiation, and cleansing for the sins of believers, what remains but to hold that purgatory is mere blasphemy, horrid blasphemy against Christ?”¹⁷

⁹ *ST* I.II.87.6; *SCG* III.158.5.

¹⁰ *ST* III.87; cf. I.II.85.3.

¹¹ *ST* III.86.4.

¹² *ST* III.48.

¹³ *ST* III.86.4, *resp.*

¹⁴ Suárez, *Disputationes De Poenitentiae Virtute*, Disp. X, Sect. III, 11–13 (Suárez 1856, 188–189).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14–15. For Franciscan authors, see Spitzig (1948) on Alexander of Hales (117–120), Bonaventure (129), and Scotus (168–170).

¹⁶ Some Orthodox Christians have endorsed this critique; see Ware (1981, 185).

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.5.6

In the present day, Barnard (2007, 326) alleges that “the suggestion that additional satisfaction for sin must be made by sinners themselves in purgatory undermines the sufficiency of Christ’s work as a satisfaction for sin.”

To understand the Justification Problem, consider how *S*’s action to remove a debt of punishment from *D* may leave some debt accruing to *D*. This must happen because of at least one of two states of affairs: either (i) *S*’s action is intrinsically insufficient to remove the whole debt or (ii) something external to that action (say, the failure of *D* or some creditor to accept *S*’s action) prevents *S*’s action being applied to remove *D*’s debt. In the case of Christ’s work to atone for human sin, either option may seem impossible to Christians. Against the first alternative, according to Scripture and theological consensus, Christ’s sacrifice is given to atone for all sins (or minimally, all sins of the elect) and is sufficient to remit any debt or punishment that sinners owe to God because of their sins.¹⁸ Against the second, Christians hold that God has accepted Christ’s sacrifice, so that everyone to whom the latter is applied secures the forgiveness of sins.

On the classical Protestant perspective, the application of Christ’s sacrifice that “justifies” sinners is wholly accomplished by fiducial faith, prior to sanctification. But even if, as Catholics hold, more than fiducial faith *is* required to appropriate Christ’s sacrifice, by supposition those in Purgatory are in a state of grace and possess whatever is necessary for justification. Accordingly, the Justification Problem poses a dilemma for the Satisfaction Account. If any debt of punishment remains to those in Purgatory, either (i) Christ’s atoning work is intrinsically insufficient to remove it, or (ii) Christ’s work is not applied to remove the debt of those in Purgatory. Since both options are unacceptable, it follows that no debt of temporal punishment remains in this life or hereafter to those whose sins are forgiven through Christ.

One response to this dilemma might claim that God requires more than sufficient satisfaction for human sins. Perhaps, He asks the debt of punishment to be paid in surplus by both Christ’s atoning work and sinners’ temporal punishment. But this implausibly suggests that God requires more than just compensation for sin. Surely, Christian soteriology implies that God’s love for humanity—which culminates in the Paschal Mystery—involves the wonderful mercy with which He desires to avoid punishing sinners to whatever degree is consistent with the demands of justice.

Alternatively, one could follow Suárez in holding that although Christ’s sacrifice suffices to remove all punishment from sinners, God only applies Christ’s merit to them in part, by freely commuting their debt of eternal punishment to temporal punishment in view of Christ’s meritorious sacrifice. Thus, God displays both mercy (in remitting eternal punishment) and justice (in commuting the debt of punishment rather than annulling it). God also thereby facilitates human cooperation in penance.¹⁹ Yet this defence of the Satisfaction Account is also unsatisfactory. Again, it posits that God punishes sinners more than justice requires. Further, it neglects the Reformers’ intuition that salvation is attained exclusively through participation in Christ’s work, and not through separate human actions. In short, Suárez’s explanation of Purgatory seems inconsistent with St Paul’s teaching that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1, NRSV).

The objection to the Satisfaction Account that I have been considering—the “Justification Problem”—is independent of the “Legal Problem.” Proponents of the Justification Problem do not object to characterising salvation as the removal of liability to divine “punishment” through “satisfaction.” Rather, they hold that any “satisfaction” required for sin is provided by Christ. Accordingly, those joined to Christ through grace

¹⁸ For the universal scope and efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice, see particularly Hebrews (e.g., 7:27, 9:26, and 10 *passim*; cf. John 3:16; 3:36; Acts 13:39; Romans 8:1).

¹⁹ Suárez, *Disputationes De Poenitentiae Virtute*, Disp. X, Sect. III, 5. (Suárez 1856, 187).

no longer owe any debt of punishment. As the English Reformer John Jewel (1571) maintained, “The only Purgatory wherein we must trust to be saved, is the death and blood of Christ, which if we apprehend with a true and stedfast faith, it purgeth and cleanseth us from all our sinnes.”

3. The Sanctification Account of Purgatory

Given objections to the Satisfaction Account, many Protestants who endorse CDP (including Brown (1985), Barnard (2007), Walls (2011), and Graham (2017)) argue that Purgatory’s purpose is the removal of the third effect of sin outlined by Aquinas: the “remnants of sin.” The salient “remnant” is the morally disordered desires and habits that can remain in believers after justification. *In nuce*, they suggest that to enjoy a perfect relationship with God in Heaven, these dispositions must be removed and replaced with moral virtues. Since the process of freely accepted sanctification in this life is gradual and difficult, they further propose that there is a similarly arduous post-mortem process of sanctification: “Purgatory.”²⁰

This conception of Purgatory is neatly elucidated by C.S. Lewis:

Our souls demand Purgatory, don’t they? Would it not break the heart if God said to us, “It is true, my son, that your breath smells and your rags drip with mud and slime, but we are charitable here and no one will upbraid you with these things, nor draw away from you. Enter into the joy”? Should we not reply, “With submission, sir, and if there is no objection, I’d rather be cleaned first.” “It may hurt, you know”-“Even so, sir.” (1964, 108–109)

Following convention, I term this the Sanctification Account:

Sanctification Account: The (or, one) purpose of Purgatory is the completion of the sanctification begun in this life, so that any remaining disordered volitions or dispositions are removed from those who die in a state of grace before they enter Heaven.

Several Catholic theologians—including two recent Popes—have endorsed the Sanctification Account.²¹ This intimates that it is an ecumenically acceptable elucidation of CDP. But can Catholics accept the Sanctification account as the *sole* explanation of Purgatory’s purpose, given the references to the “debt of punishment” in Magisterial articulations of CDP?

Neal Judisch (2009) has argued that the Satisfaction and Sanctification Accounts are “equivalent.” I take him to mean that—properly interpreted in Catholic theological context—the Satisfaction Account makes the same claim as the Sanctification Account, albeit using potentially misleading language. When the Satisfaction Account asserts that Purgatory remits “temporal punishment,” one should understand the latter to mean “sinfulness—the self-reinforcing urge to commit iniquity” generated by original or actual sin (Judisch 2009, 176). This is just what is removed from those in Purgatory on the Sanctification Account. Likewise, the Satisfaction Account’s talk of “making satisfaction”

²⁰ Although Vander Laan (2009) and Green (2015) suggest that sanctification happens in Heaven.

²¹ John Paul II, General Audience 4th Aug 1999 (<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/heaven-hell-and-purgatory-8222>); Ratzinger (2008, 28–33); Rahner (1963); Ombres (1978); Beckwith (2013).

or “undergoing purgatorial punishment” should be interpreted as referring to “the process whereby the forgiven-but-lapsable individual is purified of his disposition to sin and made inherently holy” (i.e., to sanctification (Judisch 2009, 178)).

To support the identification of temporal punishment with moral disorder, Judisch quotes the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* concerning “indulgences”:

To understand this doctrine and practice of the Church, it is necessary to understand that sin has a double consequence. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the “eternal punishment” of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the “temporal punishment” of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. A conversion which proceeds from a fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain.²²

Two remarks about this passage seem pertinent. Firstly, in denying that temporal punishment is “a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without,” the *Catechism* appears unfavourable to the Franciscan/Suárezian claim that temporal punishment remains to sinners because of God’s free decision to (only) partially commute their *poena* when they repent. Secondly, the supposed identification of temporal punishment with “an unhealthy attachment to creatures” in this passage is at most implicit. At first glance, it is suggested by the parallel between the two consequences of sin and the two punishments of sin. But the *Catechism* claims that “eternal punishment” *results from* the relevant consequence of sin (lack of communion with God); it does not explicitly assert that eternal punishment is identical to the latter. So, by parallel, one need not interpret this passage as maintaining that temporal punishment is identical to “unhealthy attachment to creatures.” Perhaps rather than supporting the claim that the Satisfaction and Sanctification Accounts are equivalent, the *Catechism* merely intends to affirm Aquinas’s explanation of how temporal punishment remains due to penitent sinners through their enduring inordinate attachments. However, the *Catechism*’s language, with its rejection of “externally imposed” punishment, echoes Karl Rahner, who like Judisch identifies temporal punishment with morally disordered appetites (Rahner 1963, 194). The *Catechism* therefore affords some plausibility to Judisch’s claim that as understood by the Catholic Church, the Sanctification and Satisfaction Accounts are equivalent.

Judisch’s analysis receives further support from interpreters of Aquinas including Eleonore Stump (2018) and Rik van Nieuwenhove (2012), who argue that according to Thomas, satisfaction for sin is not divinely imposed punishment required by God as a matter of justice. Rather, “its point is to make amends as one can to those who have suffered from the wrong done and to repair as one can what the wrong has injured in the world, including the stained soul of the wrongdoer and the relationships impaired by his wrongdoing” (Stump 2018, 63). Unfortunately for this exegesis, as Nikolaus Briener (2018) shows, Aquinas clearly characterises satisfaction as a form of punishment,²³ and explicitly states that the purpose of making satisfaction for the debt of temporal punishment is *both* to meet the demands of God’s vindictive justice and to ensure the moral restoration of

²² CCC 1472; Judisch (2009, 174–178).

²³ SCG III.158.5; ST I.II.87.6–7.

penitents.²⁴ Consequently, to claim that the Satisfaction and Sanctification Accounts are equivalent, one must reject traditional Scholastic elucidations of the former. Judisch (2017) acknowledges this and nuances his claim that the Satisfaction Account is equivalent to the Sanctification Account. He now holds that the Sanctification Account offers a model of Purgatory that Catholics should find acceptable, whilst granting that to defend the Satisfaction Account as historically understood, one must hold that Purgatory has some purpose beyond assisting sanctification.

However, there is stronger reason for Catholics to doubt that the Satisfaction and Sanctification Accounts are equivalent. This is that the Council of Trent appears to authoritatively deny that satisfaction imposed in sacramental penance has the sole purpose of removing penitents' dispositions to sin. It reminds confessors that satisfaction is "not only for the protection of a new life and a remedy against infirmity, but also for the atonement and punishment of past sins"²⁵ and anathematizes the contrary suggestion that "the best penance is just a new life."²⁶ The language of "infirmity" is used by Aquinas—upon whom the Council Fathers drew extensively—to indicate the dispositions to sin and difficulties in doing good that can remain in sinners restored to a state of grace,²⁷ which penance aims to heal through satisfaction.²⁸ Accordingly, Trent should be understood to disclaim the position that the sole purpose of sacramental satisfaction is the removal of dispositions to sin, which Judisch (2009, 172) terms "sanctification." Since, according to Catholic teaching, purgatorial suffering completes sacramental satisfaction, Trent implies that Purgatory likewise has some "penal" function that is not identical to sanctification, at least insofar as the latter refers to the removal of dispositions to sin.

How should Catholics evaluate the Sanctification Account? As Rahner's discussion of Purgatory highlights, Catholics allow that doctrine "develops" (Rahner 1984, 181–183). Although the nature of such development is controversial (Levering 2014, 175–216), many Catholic theologians allow that "not everything that was actually and implicitly assumed at a particular time to be necessary for the clarification of the meaning of an article of faith is really and in principle an inseparable part of this article of faith itself" (Rahner 1984, 222). For instance, the Aristotelian understanding of substance prevalent at Trent need not determine the meaning of transubstantiation. Consequently, the Church can understand doctrines in new ways, so that (e.g.) the teaching of "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*"²⁹ need no longer be read to imply that all those who do not explicitly seek to enter the Church are damned.³⁰

These observations can be used to argue that historical understandings of temporal punishment and satisfaction in Purgatory are not definitive for Catholics. Although the Fathers of Trent understood satisfaction as retributive, this is not doctrinally binding. It therefore seems hasty to definitively assert—absent some detailed account of doctrinal development—that Catholics cannot regard the Satisfaction and Sanctification Accounts as equivalent. Indeed, I will shortly outline one possible "development" of the concepts of temporal punishment and satisfaction. Nevertheless, it is one thing to allow that doctrinal concepts can develop and another to maintain that they can develop in any direction. Since Trent explicitly indicates that satisfaction has a "penal" purpose besides providing "protection of new life" and a "remedy against infirmity," I submit that Catholics should

²⁴ *SCG* III.158.6; *ST* I.II.87.6 ad3, Supplement 13.2, *resp.*; *CT* 181.

²⁵ Session 14, Chapter 8 (Denzinger and Schönmetzer 1963, 1692).

²⁶ Session 14, Canon 13 (Denzinger and Schönmetzer 1963, 1713).

²⁷ *SCG* IV.73.2; *ST* Supplement 32.4; cf. *ST* I.II 89.1 ad3.

²⁸ *SCG* IV.73.2; *ST* Supplement 13.2, *resp.* Presumably, infirmity includes venial sins, which themselves constitute dispositions to mortal sin (*ST* I.II 88.3).

²⁹ See Council of Florence ((Denzinger and Schönmetzer 1963, 1351).

³⁰ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 15–16.

seek some explanation of Purgatory's purpose beyond extant versions of the Sanctification Account.

The Sanctification Account nevertheless remains useful for theologians who aim to secure ecumenical consensus on the existence of Purgatory in response to the Motivation Problem. Moreover, Catholics should accept that the Sanctification Account highlights one of Purgatory's functions. But given the difficulties that Catholics have in accepting the Sanctification Account as the *sole* explanation of Purgatory's purpose, one might hope for an account of CDP which traditionally minded Catholics and other Christians alike can accept as an adequate description of Purgatory's function. Such an account must leave open the possibility that Purgatory removes "temporal punishment," without definitively endorsing it.

4. The Application Account

Given the Justification Problem, many commentators hold that the Satisfaction Account must be abandoned or reinterpreted. Yet they rarely consider replies to the Justification Problem developed by Counter-Reformation theologians. Here, I explore one historical response to the dilemma introduced in Section 2 (i.e., that if those in Purgatory make satisfaction for outstanding temporal punishment, Christ's work is either insufficient to remit all punishment or not applied to them).

Frequently, Counter-Reformation authors replied that this is a false dilemma. Christ's satisfaction is often only fully applied to penitents *through* temporal punishment in penance or Purgatory. Whilst Christ's sacrifice is intrinsically sufficient for the complete removal of *poena* due to sin, its application to one's sins is not always completed when one repents with contrition. Although there is "no condemnation for those in Jesus Christ," penitent sinners may not have wholly joined themselves to the Lord. Sacramental or purgatorial satisfaction completes one's salvific union with Christ.

Robert Bellarmine, for example, contended that

Christ's merit is sufficient to remove all fault and punishment, but it must be applied to be efficacious, or else everyone would be saved. Moreover, this application is brought about through our acts and the Sacraments. For God willed that after Baptism, Christ's merit would be applied to remove fault through contrition and confession (with a priest's absolution), but that it would be applied to remove temporal punishment through works of satisfaction, for eternal punishment is commuted to temporal punishment when fault is remitted.³¹

Aquinas and Trent make similar arguments.³² Accordingly, one can develop an account of Purgatory which should be acceptable to Catholics and non-Catholics: the Application Account.

Application Account (Generic): The purpose of Purgatory is to complete the application of Christ's saving work to those who die in a state of grace, yet still suffer the effects of sin.

³¹ My translation from Robert Bellarmine, *De Controversiis* Vol. I., Controversy 6, Book 1, Chapter 9. (Bellarmine 1586, col. 1896).

³² See *STIII*.86.4 ad3 and Trent, Session 14, Chapter 8 (Denzinger and Schönmetzer 1963, 1691).

The Application Account does not specify which effects of sin can endure in those in a state of grace and are therefore repaired in Purgatory by the full application of Christ's work. Protestants can accept the Application Account whilst believing that since all punishment is remitted when one is justified through faith, only sinful desires require removal in Purgatory through Christ's grace. On this interpretation, the Application Account is equivalent to the Sanctification Account. However, Protestants might appreciate the Application Account's explicit reference to Christ's salvific work, which as the Reformers affirmed is the root of all sanctification.³³ As Jerry Walls (2011, 85) comments, "A fuller account of a sanctification model of purgatory must highlight how our sins have offended and disappointed God, and emphasize that our sanctification is ultimately the product of his gracious work in our life."

Meanwhile, Catholics can claim that one of Purgatory's purposes is to apply Christ's atonement to the debt of punishment owed by penitent sinners through venial sin. They might endorse a "Catholic Interpretation" of the Application Account:

Application Account (Catholic Interpretation): One purpose of Purgatory is to apply Christ's work of satisfaction to remit the remaining debt of temporal punishment due to sinners who die in a state of grace.

But on either interpretation why think that Christ's salvific work is applied to sinners through temporal punishment (i.e., merited suffering) in Purgatory? Various possibilities suggest themselves. One might argue that for Christians, "suffering can make a special intimacy with Christ" (Stump 2018, 334). Here, I tentatively offer another suggestion. It seems unfitting that sins are forgiven which one has not at least implicitly repudiated. But as Aquinas argued, one can repent of sins half-heartedly—say, by retaining commitment to the disordered desires that occasion them. Consequently, it is plausible that before the penalty for such sins is entirely remitted, one must repent more deeply. Developing the Sanctification Account, Walls (2011, 85) considers that "perhaps God's work of purging us could be understood as an extended examination of our lives in the searching light of his word." This might eventually "motivate true repentance, a profound change of mind, and a resolution to want to please [God] by returning the love he has generously given to us." Similarly, I suggest that one purpose of temporal punishment is to foster fuller penitence for venial sins, in virtue of which one is eventually so united to Christ's work so that all punishment for these sins is remitted.³⁴ The process that fosters such *metanoia* may justly laborious, but Christians undergoing it can find consolation in sharing Christ's sufferings and cooperating with His grace. This explanation of the necessity of satisfaction for the application of Christ's work is congruent with the belief of the Tridentine Fathers that perfect contrition wholly remits all debt of punishment (Beer 1974, 471–474). It also upholds the *Catechism's* assertion that satisfaction follows from "the very nature of sin."³⁵

A reviewer worries that even if the Catholic Interpretation of the Application Account proves acceptable to Catholics, Protestants should reject it because of the Reformers' contention that the sole necessary condition for justification is faith. If the doctrine of justification "*sola fide*" is understood in this way, it seems that neither the reception of the sacraments, nor equally wholehearted repentance, are necessary to perfectly unite someone

³³ Calvin, for example, insists that justification and sanctification are equally the result of union with Christ—see *Institutes* III.16.1; McGrath (1998, 224).

³⁴ Nevertheless, in Purgatory one cannot revisit one's fundamental choice to renounce sin and unite oneself to Christ; one can merely strengthen that decision by (e.g.) renouncing one's remaining disordered desires.

³⁵ On my explanation of the Catholic Interpretation, temporal punishment merely *facilitates* the full application of Christ's satisfaction to those in Purgatory: the application is itself achieved through deepened repentance. But one could instead hold that enduring temporal punishment itself directly applies Christ's satisfaction, as Baptism does according to Catholics.

to Christ, so that their debt of punishment is remitted. To be clear, I agree that many Protestants—especially from the Reformed tradition—will likely reject the Catholic Interpretation for just this reason. Consequently, I am *not* claiming that Protestants should accept the Catholic Interpretation, although I do suggest that they have reason to accept the generic Application Account. If this is correct, then the Application Account will not solve *all* interdenominational debates about Purgatory, but it does provide a conceptual framework for Catholics and non-Catholics to affirm a common understanding of Purgatory’s purpose, albeit at a high level of generality. Additionally, the Catholic Interpretation may reassure Catholics that they can maintain that Purgatory involves the endurance temporal punishment due to sin without denying the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

Nonetheless, Protestant theologies of justification vary. Some Protestants hold that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is compatible with the claim that repentance and/or reception of the sacraments is necessary for sinners to be fully united to Christ. Such Protestants might be more open to the Catholic Interpretation. Notably, Lutheran tradition both affirms “*sola fide*” and teaches that Baptism “works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this.”³⁶ According to Luther, Baptism is an ongoing event, so that “a Christian life is nothing else than a daily Baptism, once begun and ever continued.”³⁷ For this reason, he criticised attempts to separate penance from Baptism. As Heiko Oberman writes, penance “does not reestablish baptismal grace which has been lost; it is a return to the beginning that God made there” (Oberman 1989, 231). Indeed, we can note with Alister McGrath (1998, 200) that for Luther justification itself is an ongoing “process of becoming: *feri est iustificatio*,” which involves “continually returning to Christ.” Luther therefore highlighted the importance of penance, which “is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism, that we repeat and practise what we began before, but abandoned.”³⁸

Still, Luther maintained that we are justified through faith in God’s promise, which is delivered to us in Baptism (see Trigg, 2014, 314). When discussing Baptism in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he therefore insists that only the loss of faith, which itself makes the sacrament effective, can bring condemnation to Christians: “All other sins, so long as the faith in God’s promise made in Baptism returns or remains, are immediately blotted out through that same faith.”³⁹ However, some later Lutherans insisted more stringently on the necessity of repentance for the ongoing effectiveness of Baptism. Thus, the seventeenth-century Pietist Philipp Jacob Spener urged that “it will be in vain that you comfort yourself in your Baptism and in its promise of grace and salvation if for your part you do not also remain in the covenant of faith and a good conscience or, having departed therefrom, return to it with sincere repentance.”⁴⁰

Since Luther famously asserted in the first of the Ninety-Five Theses that the Christian life is a life of penance, could he have allowed that the process of justification begun through Baptismal faith can be completed in post-mortem repentance? If Lutherans were to accept this, they could adopt the Catholic Interpretation of the Application Account as outlined above. They might hold that a penitential return to Baptism in Purgatory constitutes the final confirmation of a Christian’s faith, which by receiving God’s promise of salvation in Christ secures the remission of all liability to divine punishment. Alternatively, they may demur, by drawing a clearer line than Luther between the event of

³⁶ Luther, *Small Catechism* (1529), translated in Evangelical Lutheran Church (1921, 551).

³⁷ Luther, *Large Catechism* (1529), quoted in Trigg (2014), 315. See also Trigg (2014, 314-316).

³⁸ Luther, “Holy Baptism” in the *Large Catechism* (1529), translated in Evangelical Lutheran Church (1921, 751).

³⁹ Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), quoted in Spinks (2006, 6).

⁴⁰ Spener, *Pia Desideria* (1675), as translated in Spener (1964, 66).

justification through faith and Baptism (which secures remission of any liability to punishment) and the subsequent process of sanctification. My suggestion that Lutherans might feel able to accept the Catholic Interpretation is merely speculative, and I will not comment further on which Protestants might find the Catholic Interpretation congenial. But the foregoing discussion of Luther is intended to illustrate how *some* Protestants may be open to the Catholic Interpretation.

Before exploring the Application Account further, I should also forestall one Catholic objection. The Application Account is anticipated not only by orthodox Catholics including Aquinas and Bellarmine, but also by the Counter-Reformation polemicist Michael de Bay (“Baius”), whose views were condemned by Pius V. Notably, Pius rejected the following proposition, taken almost verbatim from Baius’s tract on Indulgences:

[W]hen through almsgiving or other works of penance we make satisfaction to God, we do not offer an appropriate price to God for our sins (as some who are in error say), for otherwise we would at least in part be our own redeemers; rather, we do something in view of which Christ’s satisfaction is applied and communicated to us . . .⁴¹

Here, I note two points. First, the condemnation of Baius’s teaching is not absolute: his opinions are condemned as variously “heretical, erroneous, suspect, rash, scandalous, and offensive to pious ears,” whilst granting that some might bear acceptable interpretations. Second, we can identify the element of Baius’s theology which troubled Pius by consulting the works of Baius’s opponents, including Bellarmine and Suárez. Both interpret Baius as holding that through penitential works, only Christ—and not sinners themselves—makes satisfaction for sin. This, they argue, is incompatible with Catholic tradition and Tridentine doctrine.⁴²

Yet it is consistent with the Application Account that those in Purgatory make satisfaction for their sins through Christ. According to Catholic doctrine, those united to Christ participate in His satisfactory sacrifice, when through their own actions they cooperate with grace (Waldow 2020, 26–7). As the *Catechism* teaches, “By virtue of the Holy Spirit, Christian life is already now on earth a participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ” (CCC, 1002). Consequently, “grace, by uniting us to Christ in active love, ensures the supernatural quality of our acts and consequently their merit before God and before men” (CCC, 2011). So, through voluntarily enduring the punishment which fully applies Christ’s work to their sins, those in Purgatory cooperate with grace and share in Christ’s redemptive sacrifice. Insofar as they participate in Christ’s atoning work, they make satisfaction. However, as Trent insisted, human satisfaction is only effective when made “in Christ, in whom we live, in whom we merit, in whom we make satisfaction, bringing forth fruits worthy of penance, which have their efficacy from Him, by Him are offered to the Father, and through Him are accepted by the Father.”⁴³ On the Catholic Interpretation of the Application Account, those in Purgatory make satisfaction in a real but derivative sense.

In sum, the Application Account is doubly useful. Firstly, its generic form supplies an account of Purgatory’s function that Catholics and non-Catholics alike may regard as doctrinally adequate. Secondly, under its Catholic Interpretation, it maintains the Catholic

⁴¹ Pius V, “Ex Omnis Afflictionibus”, Proposition 59 (Denzinger and Schönmetzer 1963, 1959); cf. de Bay, *De Indulgentiis*, VIII (1696, 204).

⁴² Bellarmine, *De Controversiis* Vol. I., Controversy 6, Book 1, Chapter 10 (Bellarmine (1586), col. 1899); Suárez, *Disputationes De Poenitentiae Virtute*, Disp. XXXVII, Sect. I, 1 and 7. (Suárez (1856), 776 –778). Cf. Trent, Session 14, Chapter 9 (Denzinger and Schönmetzer 1963, 1693).

⁴³ Session 14, Chapter 8 (Denzinger and Schönmetzer 1963, 1691).

claim that those in Purgatory make satisfaction for their sins whilst denying that either (i) Christ's atonement is intrinsically insufficient to remove all punishment due to sin, or (ii) Christ's work is not applied to remove the debt of those in Purgatory.

5. Non-Penal Atonement

But if the Catholic Interpretation of the Application Account avoids the Justification Problem, it nevertheless faces the Legal Problem: the charge that it mistakenly characterises salvation as redemption from retributive divine punishment.

The Catholic Interpretation uses the juridical language of “temporal punishment” and “satisfaction.” Catholic Scholastics typically claimed that whilst divine punishment typically promotes sanctification, God primarily punishes sin to secure retributive justice. But many Christians deny that God justly demands retributive punishment for sin. Peter Bouteneff alleges that Eastern Orthodox theology rejects the Anselmian concept of “a God whose honour, justice and majesty were defiled [by sin] and who demanded satisfaction or repayment” (Bouteneff 2008, 98). Similarly, feminist theologians have criticised the notion of punishment for sin as supportive of patriarchal domestic violence (see Guðmundsdóttir (2017)). I will not evaluate the claim that punishment is due to sin as a matter of retributive justice here. For present purposes, the widespread rejection of this claim ensures that the Legal Problem threatens the Catholic Interpretation's ecumenical endorsement.

However, since this paper aims to advance the Catholic Interpretation as an ecumenically palatable version of CDP, it is worth pausing to consider whether Orthodox Christians can embrace it. Orthodox theologians have largely rejected CDP since they first encountered it in the thirteenth century (see Sicienski (2023), 249ff), although recently some such as Georges Florovsky (1976, 262) and Kallistos Ware (1986, 185) have hinted at endorsing the Sanctification Account. One highly influential and representative historical Orthodox critique of CDP was provided by Mark of Ephesus at the Council of Florence, so I now briefly examine his position, with a view to assessing broader Orthodox attitudes to CDP.⁴⁴

Some of Mark's worries about CDP which were echoed by later Orthodox polemicists, including his charges that Purgatory cannot involve torture by material fire and that defenders of Purgatory endorse Origen's universalism (see Larchet (2021), 176) appear surmountable. As the Papal Bull “*Laetentur Caeli*” indicated by omitting any reference to fire and distinguishing Purgatory from Hell, they concern non-essential elements of the doctrine.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, two of Mark's criticisms indicate more formidable obstacles to any Orthodox endorsement of CDP, including the Catholic Interpretation. The first is the Motivation Problem: Mark argued that there is insufficient evidence in Scripture and the Fathers to posit Purgatory as a third post-mortem state alongside Heaven and Hell (Bathrellos 2014, 94; Larchet 2021, 175). Accordingly, although he allowed that after death some souls suffer psychological pain upon recognition of unrepented sins, he believes that this happens in Hell (or rather, a “Hades” in which souls experience a foretaste of eternal punishment prior to the general resurrection).⁴⁶ Yet speculations on “location” of Purgatory are not essential to CDP as understood in this paper. As Andrew Louth notes, if Orthodox theologians such as Mark are prepared to accept that this suffering is purificatory, they appear close to accepting the Sanctification Account of CDP (Louth 2007, 243). At points, Mark indicates that souls in Hell can indeed undergo purification,

⁴⁴ On Mark's views, see Bathrellos (2014), Larchet (2021, 166–182) and Sicienski, (2023, 278–289).

⁴⁵ See Denzinger and Schönmetzer (1963, 1304–1306).

⁴⁶ Larchet (2021, 169); Sicienski, (2023, 278 n.18).

which is sometimes brought about through their torments of conscience (Bathrellos 2014, 89; Larchet 2021, 169). The suggestion that souls may be purified after death is echoed by Florovsky, Louth and Ware.⁴⁷ It should be noted, though, that Mark elsewhere implies that souls cannot undergo post-mortem cleansing and that this opinion is embraced by some modern Orthodox such as Jean-Claude Larchet (2021, 188–189).

The second significant criticism which underpins much of Mark's negative reaction to CDP is a version of the Legal Problem (Bathrellos 2014, *passim*). He rejects the claim that penance involves any satisfaction required by divine justice. Rather, acts of penance imposed in this life are simply meant to aid sinners' moral and spiritual repair (Bathrellos 2014, 116–117; Larchet 2022, 181–182). In Mark's view, God mercifully forgives those who repent of their sins in this life, and likewise freely pardons some in Hades—who are presently incapable of penitence—through the Church's intercession (Bathrellos 2014, 117). There is no place in his soteriology for a penitent sinner to owe satisfaction. Such rejection of the Latin concept of satisfaction rendered the Satisfaction Account of CDP presented by the Catholics at Florence deeply unattractive to their Orthodox interlocutors, although as Demetrios Bathrellos (2014, 87–88) argues, the Orthodox might have been more amenable to a Sanctification Account.

Must the belief that there is no need for satisfaction after penance mean that Orthodox theologians cannot accept the Catholic Interpretation of the Application Account? This is less clear, because according to the Catholic Interpretation, everyone who fully repents of their sins post-mortem secures complete remission of temporal punishment, through union with Christ's sacrificial death. Still, as indicated above, many Orthodox theologians deny that God imposes *any* punishment for sin simply to maintain the order of justice.⁴⁸ Rather, following Mark, they understand divine punishments as “self-inflicted consequences of sin” (Bathrellos 2014, 115). Insofar as the Catholic Interpretation implies that God demands retributive punishment, it remains alien to Orthodox sensibilities.

In sum, Orthodox theologians have raised many objections to traditional articulations of CDP. But at least for those who accept the possibility of post-mortem sanctification, the most serious is their rejection of the claim that divine justice requires satisfaction for sin: the Legal Problem. For the Catholic Interpretation to avoid the Legal Problem, “temporal punishment” and “satisfaction” must be interpreted in some non-retributive way. Plausibly, they must be read as metaphorical descriptions of sin's effects which follow (as the *Catechism* states) “from the very nature of sin” rather than from God's desire for vengeance. I now offer one such interpretation, drawing on Eleonore Stump's *Atonement* (2018), which offers a comprehensive, non-penal explanation of Christ's salvific work. In this section, I briefly summarise her “Marian” theology of atonement,⁴⁹ before considering how it might be incorporated into the Application Account in the section following.

According to Stump, the ultimate good for humans is union with God (Stump 2018, 31; 41). Union is a relationship of love between persons, where each not only cares for the other and co-operatively wills their good, but also chooses to be connected through shared attention. In the deepest form of union, shared attention includes the sharing of mental states, so that each person gains non-propositional knowledge of what it is like “to be” the other whilst recognising that their mutual distinction (Ibid. 123–133). For example, in empathetic suffering one experiences another person's pain without that pain being integrated into one's system of behaviour and deliberation as if it were one's own (Ibid., 130). The most profound union humans can have with God is mutual indwelling, where

⁴⁷ See the references above.

⁴⁸ Cf. Louth (2007, 242). For a strident Eastern critique of retributive divine punishment developed by Isaac the Syrian, see Wessling (2021).

⁴⁹ Stump (2018, 378–9) names her account of atonement after several biblical “Marys” (including Christ's mother and Mary Magdalene) who exemplify her understanding of God's love.

“what is united is not just thoughts and feelings but [divine and human] persons themselves” (Ibid., 139).

God always desires union with humans and offers to forgive us if we turn away from Him through sin. His forgiveness is not contingent on sin’s punishment. Accordingly, the only obstacle to someone’s union with God is enduring sin or its effects. (Ibid., 363). There are several effects of sin which hinder this union. First, when humans sin our wills become morally disordered and we become internally fragmented, making us unwilling and incapable of union with a perfectly good God. (Ibid., 16–17; 59). Second, even after we have ceased to willingly distance ourselves from God, sin leaves marks on our psyche including guilt and shame at performing or suffering wrongdoing. Guilt is the feeling that another person should not will one’s good, and shame is the feeling that another person should not want union with oneself. Both feelings have objective correlates: one may fail to deserve goodness or union (Ibid., 44–46). Guilt and shame are obstacles to union with others because they weaken one’s hope or desire for union (Ibid., 45). Further, shame divides one against oneself, because although at some level one recognises the moral worth of humans, one also rejects part of oneself as unlovable and inhuman (Ibid., 49–52). Finally, there are problems related to guilt which Stump calls the “stain” on the soul. After a sinner repents, the harm to themselves or to others remains, together with experiences and memories of inflicting harm. This constitutes a moral blemish on the sinner and their relationships (Ibid., 47–61; 340–341).

How, then, do Christ’s life and death facilitate our union with God and remove the obstacles created by sin? As regards the former, the Incarnation allows God to take to Himself a human nature, so that despite divine simplicity, God can share our mental states in Christ’s human mind. (Ibid, 134–135). On Stump’s (admittedly, highly speculative) account, this takes place on the cross, where God opened Christ’s mind to receive all the mental states which humans experience through history, including those involved in wrongdoing (Ibid., 162–174). The other requisite for mutual indwelling—God’s presence in our psyche—is achieved by God causing the Holy Spirit to indwell those who cease to resist God’s renovation of their will and accept union with Him (Ibid., 135–139).

Christ also repairs sin’s effects. When someone stops resisting grace, God “justifies” them, instilling in them a higher-order desire for the Good. If they continue to cooperate with grace, God gradually aligns their first-order desires with His will, removing the first effect of sin: the disordered will (Ibid., 227–228). Although God encourages sinners to cease resisting grace in many ways, the most propitious is the presentation of Christ’s life and passion, which reveal the depths of divine love and the attractiveness of living in relationship with God (Ibid., 233–289). Experiences of suffering can also contribute to one’s conversion, *inter alia* by encouraging one to seek consolation in relationship with others and with God (Ibid., 327–332).

Further, Christ removes our shame. In Stump’s view, shame cannot simply be overcome by the introduction of compensating honour. Shame is problematic because it impedes relationships, not because it renders someone all-things-considered unlovable. For the shame which impedes union with God to be removed, shameful human actions or mental states must be appropriately connected to compensating honour so that they no longer occasion regret (Ibid., 349–352). On Stump’s telling, Christ’s atoning work defeats the feeling that one is unworthy of union with God because one has committed or suffered sin in two ways. Firstly, shameful mental states related to sin become a means by which one indwells God because these states are amongst those which enter Christ’s mind on Calvary. (Ibid., 356–357) These states are therefore made honourable, because they enable the greatest possible good for humans. Further, insofar as shame involves suffering, it can provoke one to deeper union with God, providing another means for shame to enhance one’s honour (Ibid. 357–362).

Finally, the atonement solves the related problems of guilt and the “stain of sin.” I here focus on the harm done by sinners to others and the consequent damage to their relationship with those they have harmed. According to Stump, the harm which requires repair is not damage to God, but to one’s fellows or oneself (Ibid., 366–367). Such harm is repaired—and relationships restored—by the perpetrator making “satisfaction.” Satisfaction is not penal but involves “making amends” to victims (Ibid., 54–55; 63). Since humans harm one another in awful ways, we can often not make adequate amends to others through our own efforts (Ibid., 365–367). To explain our moral repair in this area, Stump therefore makes use of Aquinas’s understanding of vicarious satisfaction,⁵⁰ whereby someone can make satisfaction on another’s behalf, if that person lovingly accepts the act of satisfaction (Ibid., 659). In His passion Christ offers adequate satisfaction to all humans for any suffering inflicted on them, by affording them the opportunity to be more intimately united to Himself, if they allow their pain to draw them closer to God so that they “suffer with him” (cf. Romans 8:17). By aligning themselves with Christ who makes this offer, sinners therefore make adequate satisfaction for all harm done to themselves or to others. In Christ, humans thereby repair their relationships with all those whom they have hurt (Ibid., 368–372).

6. A Gentler Application Account

Stump’s work illustrates how sin’s effects are broader than those discussed in modern literature on Purgatory, which typically overlooks the shame and damage to relationships which sin produces.⁵¹ Accordingly, one might ask whether on Stump’s soteriology, these effects of sin may be removed in Purgatory rather than in the present lives of those who co-operate with grace.

First, consider shame. It might seem that on Stump’s account, shame is fully “defeated” for any justified person, because they are united to God in virtue of their shameful mental states which Christ experienced on the cross, and because suffering shame affords them an opportunity to grow closer to God. But shame need not be completely removed before death in this way. Many people die without understanding how their shame is redeemed in Christ, so that after death they still experience psychological fragmentation. Presumably, God remedies this by displaying His plan of salvation to them post-mortem. Yet for some, this revelation may involve initial psychological pain upon confrontation with their perceived unloveliness. Moreover, even if shame is compensated because it provides opportunities to draw nearer to God, many people die without having made much of such opportunities. Indeed, the fact that they have thus spurned God’s mercy seems itself shameful. A natural extension of Stump’s work would therefore posit that after death, undefeated shame is redeemed by its sufferers being allowed to patiently bear it in some way which permits them to grow closer to God in Christ.

What of the stain of sin—particularly, the barrier to union with God due to the moral disorder attendant on having hurt oneself or others? On Stump’s account, this is cleansed through alignment with Christ, who makes vicarious satisfaction for one’s actions. But as previously noted, one can die in a state of grace without fully repenting of “venial” sins. So, one may not even implicitly share Christ’s intention to make amends to the victims of some of one’s venial sins. Stump does not discuss whether the mutual indwelling with God which begins at justification is enough to so unite oneself with Christ that He makes satisfaction for all of one’s sins. But if vicarious satisfaction depends on one’s alignment

⁵⁰ *ST I.II.87.7–8*; Supplement 13.1.

⁵¹ One rare exception is Thurrow (2017).

with the action of the satisfier, it should only extend to actions for which one intends to make satisfaction. Accordingly, as suggested above, Purgatory might allow sinners to properly align themselves with Christ's satisfaction for their venial sins through ongoing reflection and repentance.

On Stump's account, it is therefore plausible that shame and the stain of sin are removed in Purgatory. Since only union with Christ defeats shame and sin's stain, it seems felicitous to say that Purgatory might complete the application of Christ's work to sinners. With this in mind, I offer a new, "Marian" version of the Application Account:

Application Account (Marian Interpretation): One purpose of Purgatory is to apply Christ's atoning work, including His vicarious satisfaction for sin, to any shame or damaged relationships which endure in those who die in a state of grace.

The Marian Interpretation follows the strategy of the Catholic Interpretation in responding to the Justification Problem. It also avoids the Legal Problem, because following Stump it does not claim that God punishes sin to secure retributive justice. It understands satisfaction as restorative rather than penal. However, I suggest that proponents of the Marian Interpretation might advance a further claim, to clarify the proper theological meaning of "temporal punishment." They may suggest that "temporal punishment due to sin," which plays an important role in the traditional Satisfaction Account and the Catholic Interpretation of the Application Account, should be interpreted as shame and the stain of sin. These, it claims, are removed from sinners in Purgatory through the full application of Christ's atoning sacrifice. In other words, following Judisch's strategy, my proposal is that one can regard the Marian Account as "equivalent" to the Satisfaction Account and/or the Catholic Interpretation.

By intimating a new interpretation of "temporal punishment," the Marian Interpretation provides a development of the Catholic understanding of Purgatory which retains traditional language while responding to prominent criticisms. But this gloss of temporal punishment has an important advantage over Judisch's identification of temporal punishment with disordered desires: it is compatible with Trent's insistence that temporal punishment does not merely assist sanctification. Moreover, following the *Catechism*, on the Marian Interpretation "punishment" is not voluntarily imposed by God, but naturally follows from sin. In sum, the Marian Interpretation offers a conception of Purgatory which both avoids the Justification and Legal Problems and suggests prospects for the theological development of the Satisfaction Account. A fuller articulation of the latter project would motivate the identification of temporal punishment with shame and the stain of sin, but I lack space to provide such motivation here.

7. Conclusion

I now reprise my argument. CDP faces three challenges: the Motivation, Legal, and Justification Problems, which especially threaten the traditional "Satisfaction Account." Some philosophers have defended the "Sanctification Account" as an ecumenically acceptable explanation of CDP which avoids these criticisms. However, because Catholics appear doctrinally committed to the Satisfaction Account, the Sanctification Account cannot provide an explanation of Purgatory's purpose which all Christians should regard as adequate. Although others have sought to resolve this difficulty by interpreting the Satisfaction and Sanctification accounts as equivalent, this is problematic given Trent's teaching that sacramental satisfaction does not solely aim at sanctification.

In place of the Sanctification Account, I offered the Application Account as an alternative, ecumenically acceptable explanation of Purgatory's purpose. The Application Account holds that in Purgatory, Christ's salvific work is fully applied to sinners to remove any of sins effects which endure after death. In response to the Justification Problem, Catholics may further specify—although other Christians may reasonably dissent—that Christ's atonement is applied to the debt of temporal punishment owed to venial sin. Such purgatorial application may be fitting because sinners often fail to completely renounce venial sins in this life.

However, this Catholic Interpretation of the Application Account remains vulnerable to the Legal Problem because it speaks of temporal "punishment." I therefore used Stump's account of atonement to suggest that there are effects of sin besides moral damage: shame and disruption to relationships. I termed the claim these effects of sin are removed through the application of Christ's work to sinners in Purgatory the "Marian Interpretation" of the Application Account. Since the Marian Interpretation can avoid the Justification and Legal Problems, it may constitute an ecumenically acceptable model of Purgatory. I further suggested that one might use the Marian account to offer a reinterpretation of the Catholic Interpretation and/or the Satisfaction Account, by holding that the "temporal punishments" to which Christ's work is applied in Purgatory just are shame and the stain of sin.

Not everyone will agree that the Satisfaction Account can be reinterpreted to avoid the Justification and Legal Problems. But as this article illustrates, sin's effects are more complex than the Sanctification Account indicates. Any comprehensive treatment of CDP must consider how all of sin's wounds can be healed, so that "in Christ . . . everything old has passed away."⁵²

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⁵² 2 Corinthians 5:17, NRSV. My thanks to Simon Hewitt, Alec Siantonas, and Tyler McNabb, members of the University of Leeds Centre for Philosophy of Religion and Theology, and an anonymous reviewer for their comments.

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