

c. Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (the Summa author) thought deeply about the atonement and concluded that all of Christ's life had a deliverance aspect to it. When his passion was accomplished it did the following things:

(1) His death merited the blessing of salvation which is passed to those who believe in him...

(2) The benefits of that death are communicated to the believer in light of the mystical union he has with Christ.

(3) The salvation is achieved-for in Him God has the voluntary and perfect sacrifice in which he is delighted.

(4) His death, in reclaiming the faithful for God, redeems them from the power of the devil who had no rightful hold on them anyway--certainly not by creation.

From a rather prejudiced view, the Schoolmen are at their best in describing the work of Christ and probably at their worst in helping folk to appropriate it. As far as subjective Christology goes, they showed a real grip for comprehending what Christ had done in our behalf. Had they been as successful in seeing how it was ministered by grace, the total picture would have been more healthful, in my opinion.

2. The Means of Grace among the scholastics

During much of this age the power of the hierarchy is growing. Politically it came to a climax with Innocent III (1215, etc). Political uniformity in the church is achieved (if we may speak of it that way) well before theological uniformity. Thus among the varied writers of the church one may find expressions of the means of grace that are more helpful and others that are less appreciated. The general understanding is as follows:

a. Grace is needed for salvation but not to the extent described by Augustine. Both prevenient grace and subsequent grace are still in focus and the church has become the means of dispensing both through its message and sacraments. The means of grace, to put it crudely, is the church. Fallen man needs the church in its implementation of the mediaeval pattern. Hence the idea that the church saves or condemns and thus the fearful aspects of excommunication. With this concept in mind the church will express herself often in the political arena...threatening whole nations with Hell, as may be necessary.

b. Faith is needed for the reception of grace. There is a faith of assent (mere agreement with what God has declared) and the faith of love which is the positive willingness to trust in the wider areas of life and experience. The first of