

# SHORT COURSES IN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

*“There is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under  
heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

*- Acts 4:12*



## there is no other **NAME**

THE THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN EXCLUSIVISM AND  
WHY JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONLY WAY TO SALVATION

Scott M. Sullivan, PhD

# **“No Other Name”**

## **Why Jesus Christ is The Only Way to Salvation**

**By Scott M. Sullivan, PhD**

*For you are bought with a great price.*

**1 Cor. 6:20**

### **I. Introduction**

- A. A lot of people criticize Christianity for being “exclusive” or “narrow minded” because the Christian claim is that Jesus is the only way to salvation. Given the other religions in the world, how can Jesus be the only path? Can’t there be other ways to Heaven?
- B. To make matters worse, many Christians run around saying things that are true, like “Jesus Saves” and “Jesus is the only way” but without any justification or rationale for this claim. Just blurt-ing this out, especially to more educated people, is likely to drive more people away from Christianity rather than bring them to it.
- C. All of this is true. However, the problem is that most Christians really have no idea why this is so. So just saying “Only Jesus saves” sounds arrogant – why only Jesus? What does the death of some guy 2000 years ago have to do with me?
- D. But the doctrine is in fact true and in this course we are going to briefly look at the theological justification behind it.
- E. Although this is a mini-course in Catholic theology, what I have to say will be applicable to many other Christian congregations as well

### **II. Theological Data**

#### **A. Biblical Testimony**

- i. “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.” John 14:6
- ii. “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12
- iii. “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.” 1 Timothy 2:5-6
- iv. “No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also. 1 John 2:23

*So just saying “Only Jesus saves” sounds arrogant – why only Jesus?*

## B. Church Teaching

- i. “It [the Council] firmly believes, professes, and teaches that no one conceived of man and woman was ever freed of the domination of the Devil, except through the merit of the mediator between God and men, our Lord Jesus Christ; - Council of Florence (Denzinger, 711)
- ii. “If anyone asserts that this sin of Adam, which is one in origin and transmitted to all is in each one as his own by propagation, not by imitation, is taken away either by the forces of human nature, or by any remedy other than the merit of the one mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ... let him be anathema.” (Council of Trent, Session III, Canons on Original Sin, (Denzinger 790).
- iii. “If anyone shall say that man can be justified before God by his own works which are done either by his own natural powers, or through the teaching of the Law, and without divine grace through Christ Jesus: let him be anathema.” (Council of Trent, Session III, Canons on Justification, Can I. (Denzinger 811).
- iv. “If anyone shall say that men are justified without the justice of Christ by which He merited for us, or that by that justice itself they are formally just: let him be anathema. (Council of Trent, Session III, Canons on Justification, Can IO. (Denzinger 820).
- v. “Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 618, citing St. Rose of Lima, cf. P. Hansen, *Vita mirabilis* (Louvain, 1668).

**C. So this is the question we are considering:** Why is Jesus the only way to salvation? What accounts for this “Christian exclusivism? What is the theological justification for this claim?

## III. Theological Rationale:

- A. Before we respond, we first have to remember that, like many things in theology, this subject too is a *theological mystery*, that is, it is a revealed truth that goes the powers of natural reason. Here we are dealing with things like Trinitarian theology and the nature of Christ, etc. These are mysteries.
- B. But that doesn’t mean we can’t understand anything about it at all. Theology can at least go part of the way in explaining it.

*Why is Jesus the only way to salvation? What accounts for this “Christian exclusivism? What is the theological justification for this claim?*

*If one does not understand the problem, they cannot possibly understand the solution. If one does not understand the bad news, they cannot understand the Good News*

C. I think the best way to understand this topic is with a problem-solution approach.

#### **D. A Problem-Solution Approach**

- i. IMPORTANT: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM IS CRITICAL FOR UNDERSTANDING THIS ISSUE.
- ii. If one does not understand the problem, they cannot possibly understand the solution. If one does not understand the bad news, they cannot understand the Good News
- iii. If you understand the problem well, you'll understand why the solution is the way it is.
- iv. So we are going to look at what the problem is, and then what the solution is.

### **THE PROBLEM OF SALVATION**

#### **I. The Problem of Salvation Consists of TWO FACTORS.**

- A. When you combine these two factors together, you get a problem regarding salvation
- B. What are these two factors?
  - i. Sin is an infinite insult to God which creates an infinite disorder.
  - ii. God chose a perfect satisfaction to fix this disorder.

## **THE PROBLEM OF SALVATION**

HOW CAN SINFUL HUMAN BEINGS BE RECONCILED TO GOD?

### **The Problem of Salvation Consists of Two Factors:**

- 1.** Human sin is an infinite offense against God, and justice calls for some satisfaction.
- 2.** God has fittingly chosen that full satisfaction needs to be made.

## II. Human Sin is an Infinite Offense Against God and Justice Calls For Some Satisfaction.

- A. Original and actual sin BROKE our relation with God. The MORAL ORDER has been violated, divine law has been broken. That's what sin is – a violation of Divine Law
- B. As with any violation of a law, a moral disorder has been created. (Think of the “scales” of justice. A crime puts the scale out of balance.) How bad is the disorder? In this case an *infinite* disorder has been created.
- C. Why infinite? Principle: As St Thomas says, *the more dignified the person offended, the more grievous the offense.*
  - i. Imagine being in the military and slapping a private vs. slapping a general. Both violate order but one is a more grievous violation.
  - ii. Human sin is infinite because it violates the honor due to God.
- D. The human relationship with God has been destroyed by sin.
- E. Justice demands some sort of restitution for this violation. The scale of justice needs to be balanced. The wrong needs to be righted. We owe God an atonement or “payback”.
- F. Theological terms – “atonement” “redemption”, “satisfaction” etc.
- G. We know in this life that crimes must be paid for. If you do something wrong, you have to pay for that crime. You incur a debt to society. That's why when a man has been released from prison we say “he has paid his debt to society.”
- H. Violations of the Divine order incur a debt too and justice requires some payback for this offense.
- I. So what is the fix? What can counterbalance this insult to God? What can repair the injury to God's honor?
- J. As St. Thomas Aquinas points out, God could have allowed this disorder to be fixed in a number of ways:
  - i. **No Satisfaction:** God could just write it off. (No justice)
  - ii. **Imperfect Satisfaction:** God could accept a “partial payment.” (Partial justice)
  - iii. **Perfect Satisfaction:** God could justly require a full payment. (Full justice)

*Justice demands some sort of restitution for this violation. The scale of justice needs to be balanced. The wrong needs to be righted. We owe God an atonement or “payback”.*

K. What sort of satisfaction will suffice is up to God, not us. He is the One offended. It would be crass arrogance to tell God what sort of justice He needs.

L. What sort of satisfaction does He want?

### III. God has fittingly chosen perfect satisfaction to fix this disorder

A. Theology tells us that God wants *perfect satisfaction*. God wants the debt of man's sin to be paid in full.

B. Why did God choose this way? We don't know. Only God knows.

C. However, Aquinas says perfect satisfaction is more fitting with the nature of God who is not only infinitely merciful but also infinitely just. Merciful because man cannot save himself, just because full satisfaction can be made.<sup>1</sup> **So perfect satisfaction best fits with the nature of God.** So although there could have been other ways, this is the better way.

IV. Now we can begin to see the problem! BECAUSE OF SIN GOD IS OWED SOMETHING OF INFINITE VALUE. As sinners, we have incurred a debt that we cannot pay. Sinful man cannot provide infinite satisfaction, not only can we not make up for the infinite debt of past sins, we can't even stop sinning further.

V. Because man owes an infinite debt to God and God wants perfect satisfaction, man is utterly helpless. There is an infinite chasm between him and God and he cannot possibly bridge that gap.

### THE SOLUTION: GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

I. **God would be just in leaving us in this predicament.** He is under no obligation to fix our sin. However He does not leave us, but instead chose a plan of salvation.

II. **The plan of salvation consists of two theological doctrines: The Incarnation & Redemption. This is how God chooses to solve the problem.**

#### III. The Incarnation

A. The Eternal Son of God took flesh. This historical Christ is both fully God and fully man.

B. **"Hypostatic Union"** – The human and Divine Nature is united into the one divine person of Christ.

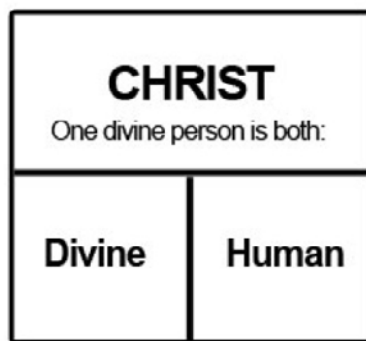
*Because man owes an infinite debt to God and God wants perfect satisfaction, man is utterly helpless. There is an infinite chasm between him and God and he cannot possibly bridge that gap.*

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<sup>1</sup> As Aquinas says, "That man should be delivered by Christ's Passion was in keeping with both His mercy and His justice. With His justice, because by His Passion Christ made satisfaction for the sin of the human race; and so man was set free by Christ's justice: and with His mercy, for since man of himself could not satisfy for the sin of all human nature." S.T. III.46.1

# THE DIVINE PLAN OF SALVATION

THE ROLE OF THE INCARNATION AND REDEMPTION  
IN MAKING SATISFACTION FOR HUMAN SIN



## INCARNATION

Christ is one divine person with both a divine nature and a human nature.

It is the Incarnation that makes a *theandric* (God-man) redemptive act possible.

## REDEMPTION

The God-man act of redemption fixes the problem.

Since this is an act of a man, the debt is paid by a man, which is just.

Since this is also an act of God, the *value* of this act is infinite.

C. This Incarnation lays the groundwork for what theologians call a *theandric act*.

- i. A theandric act is an act that is both divine and human.
- ii. Greek *the-* + *-andros* - a God-man act.

D. Why do we need a theandric act?

- i. Only man owes infinite satisfaction. But only God can give infinite satisfaction
  - a. We saw why man owes infinite satisfaction earlier.
  - b. The reason why only God can give infinite satisfaction is because, although insults are measured according to the dignity of the person offended, honors are measured by the dignity of the person who gives them. The value of a gift is measured by the dignity of the giver. (Imagine getting a thank you plaque from your local neighborhood organization vs. getting an award from the President of the United States.)

*The reason why only God can give infinite satisfaction is because, although insults are measured according to the dignity of the person offended, honors are measured by the dignity of the person who gives them.*

- ii. **So in this case, the God part of the act needs to be there because only God can offer infinite payment or reparation.**
- iii. **But the human part needs to be there because it is humanity that owes that reparation.** It is fitting that the atonement be made by a member of the human race.
- iv. *Only a being that is both divine and human can do an act that is divine and human.*
- v. Since God wants full satisfaction from man, the Incarnation is necessary.
- vi. By being both God and man, Christ is the perfect “bridge”. *As man* he can act on behalf of all men (pay back man’s debt) *as God* he can offer a satisfaction of infinite value. **By joining God and man together we get an act that is both human and of infinite worth.**
- vii. When we look at the problem this way, the only solution is a God-Man act of reparation.
- viii. This is why a *theandric* or God-man action is called for.

**E. The necessity here is the result of a *hypothetical* divine decision** – granted that God has decided to save the world by way of perfect satisfaction, it is necessary that a God-Man Savior step in.

F. This God-Man is the *perfect* and *sole* mediator between God and men. NO ONE ELSE CAN SATISFY THIS DISORDER WITH A PERFECT SATISFACTION

#### IV. Redemption

- A. By redemption we mean that Jesus Christ offered up his sufferings on behalf of the whole human race to pay back and make satisfaction for all sins and reunite all men to God.
- B. A redeemer is one who buys back something which had been lost (pawn shop example).
- C. The God-man does not owe his life because he has not committed any sin. Jesus freely chooses to offer his life.
- D. This is how the problem is solved. Only man owes infinite satisfaction, only God can give infinite satisfaction. The God-man can do both.

*This is how the problem is solved. Only man owes infinite satisfaction, only God can give infinite satisfaction. The God-man can do both.*



- E. In fact, Christ gave more to God than was needed to compensate for the sins of the whole human race.
- F. Christ's death on the cross reconciled us with God – it paid the debt and fixed the problem
- G. "When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." Rom 5:10
- H. The fruit of this act is GRACE and it is grace for all. Christ died for all.

## SUMMARY

- I. The reason Jesus is the only way to salvation is because only a God-man can solve the problem of salvation: a) human sin causing an infinite disorder and b) God wanting perfect satisfaction for fixing that disorder.
- II. This is the theological rationale behind saying Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation because **only Jesus Christ, the God-Man, was capable of making perfect satisfaction to God for our sins. Nobody else did this. Nobody else could do this.**
- III. We can't get to God unless our sins are atoned for, and we are helpless to atone for them ourselves. If we don't want Jesus to pay the price for them, then we have to pay the price ourselves.
- IV. For this reason then, the New Testament is certainly correct when it says:

*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

Acts 4:12

*This is the theological rationale behind saying Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation because **only Jesus Christ, the God-Man, was capable of making perfect satisfaction to God for our sins. Nobody else did this. Nobody else could do this.***

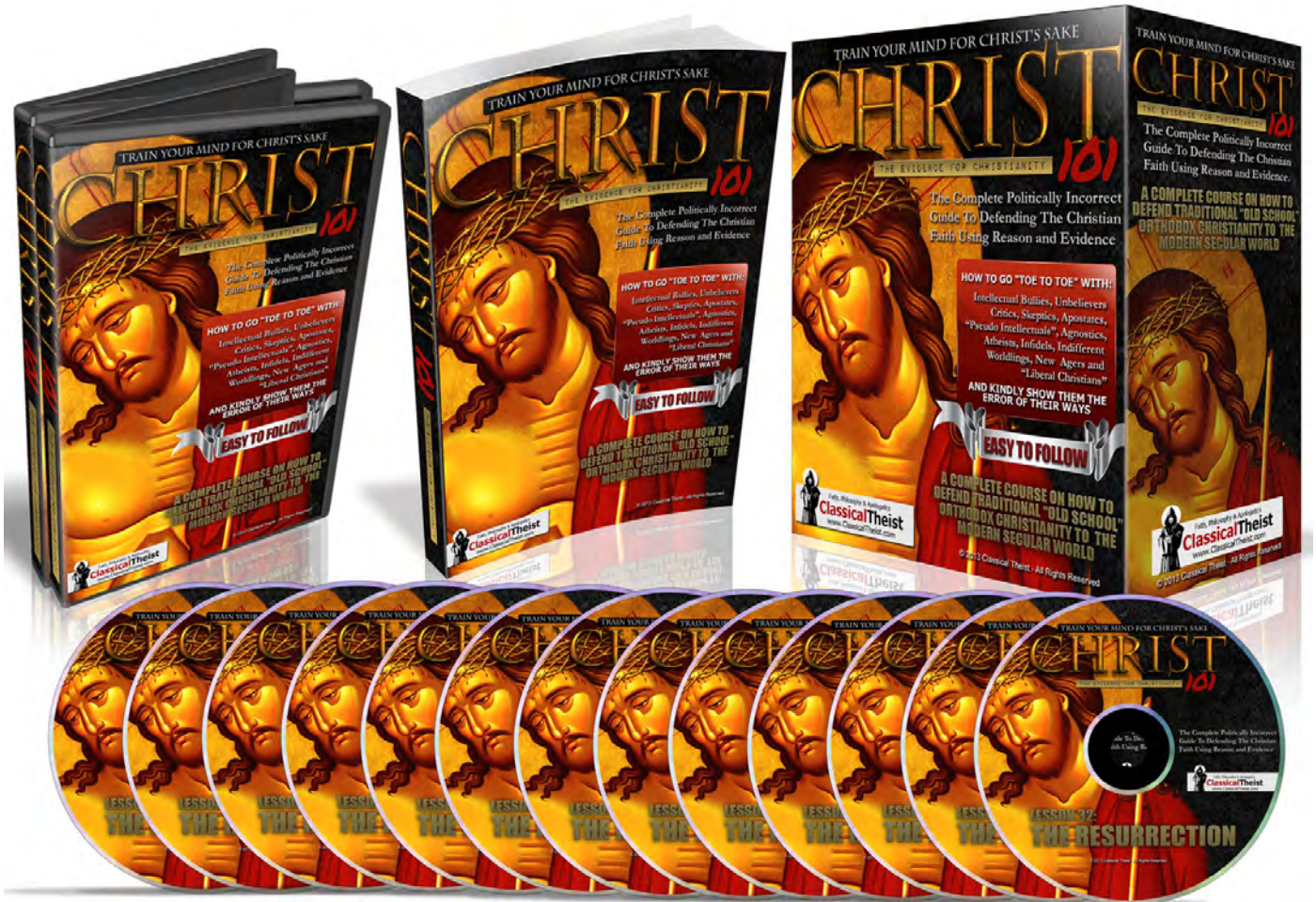
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