

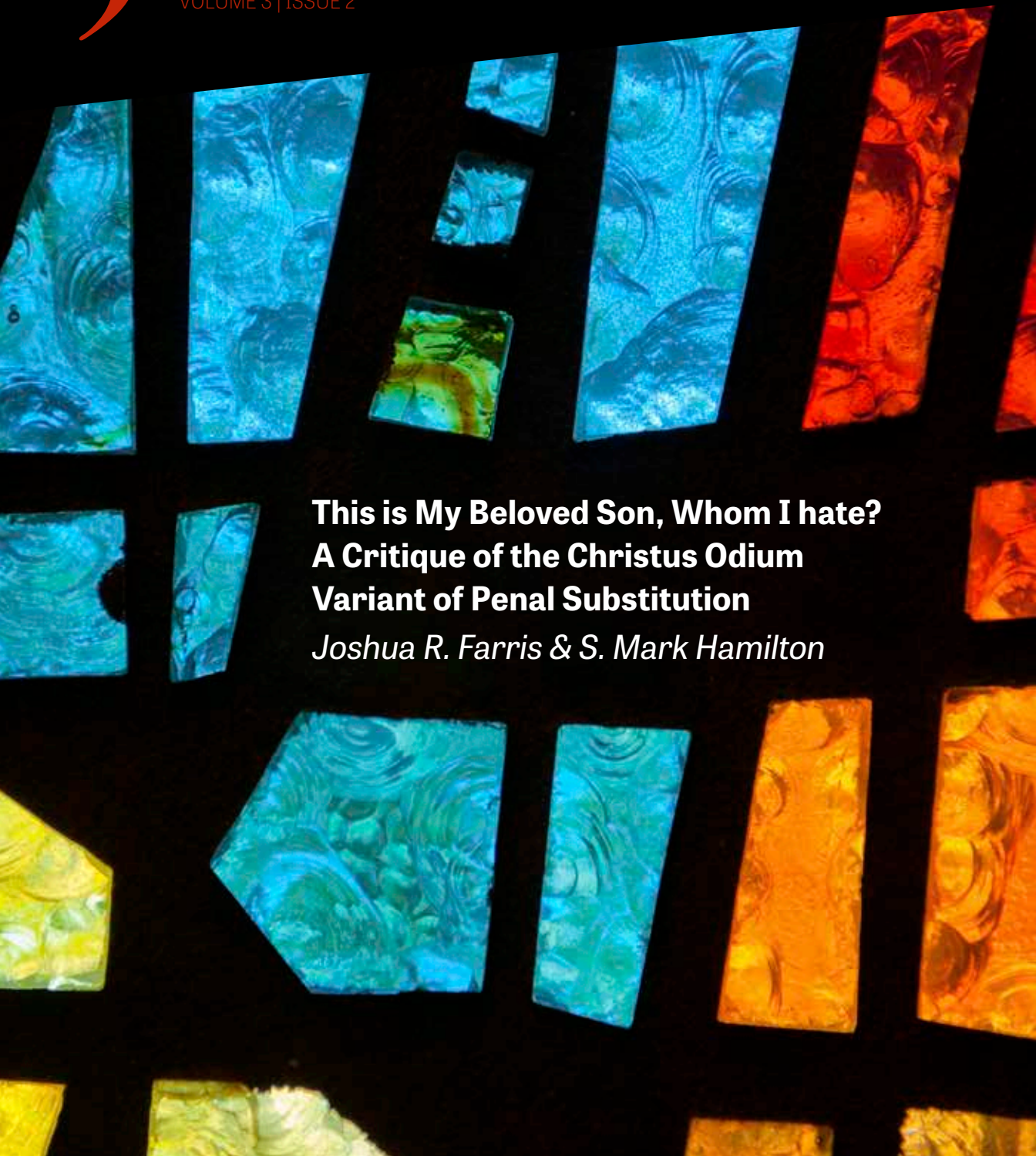
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Variant of Penal Substitution**

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This is My Beloved Son, Whom I hate? A Critique of the Christus Odium Variant of Penal Substitution

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Abstract: There is a subtle, almost imperceptible, theological metamorphosis underway and it is taking place not only in the academy and as a result, in the pulpit, it is taking place in the pew. For, in some evangelical quarters, it is no longer enough to simply believe that Christ absorbed the wrath of God as a penal substitute. Some have recently gone so far as to claim that, as a penal substitute, Christ became the object of the Father's perfect hatred. In this paper, we take a closer look at this rather frightening aspect of this Christus Odium variant of penal substitution—something that we think, if gone unchecked, may well become the logical (better still, illogical) deposit of a new dogmatic inheritance for the American evangelical tradition as it pertains to substitutionary atonement.

Key Words: retribution, rectoral, reparation, substitution, odium, satisfaction

I. Introduction

That the Scriptures are so explicit about God hating certain things is something inherently distressing. “There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him” (Prov. 6:16-19). God hates idolatry (Jer. 44:3); he hates hypocrisy (Amos 5:21); he hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). And lest we forget, God hates his Son too. If this seems problematic, it is because it is. And yet, the idea that Christ made atonement for sin by his being hated by the Father has gained some ground in recent years for a number of evangelicals. In what follows, we reflect on the nature of substitutionary atonement, particularly in light of this development of penal substitution theory in evangelical theology. The student, the pastor, and the scholar, all ought to take caution against doctrinal excess. Where penal substitution is concerned, we ought to re-think the nature of substitution and commit ourselves to no more than what the Scripture and tradition require of us. Re-thinking our theological commitments is a healthy exercise. By it, we are sure to avoid a variety of doctrinal hazards.

The idea that God the Father hated his Son in order to make (or as a by-product of his making) atonement is one such hazard; one that has for some such reason been given a recent wide berth. As one scholar has recently proposed, “The culmination to Jesus’ time on earth was His death on the cross... In that death the wrath of God was poured out on Christ, and the darkness exploded. In that instant God cursed Jesus, putting Him in a position of absolute, perfect hatred. God hated Him and desired to make Him nothing.”¹ Another pair of scholars have gone so far as to propose that, “God chose to violate His Son in our place. The Son stared into the mocking eyes of God; He heard the laughter of the Father’s derision and felt Him depart in disgust... In a mysterious instant, the Father who loved the Son from all eternity turned from Him in hatred. The Son became odious to the Father.”² Provoking a moment of sudden alarm was the recent comment—a comment that we would like to point out was quickly revised because of the sort of criticism it subsequently received for its lack of clarity—of an undoubtedly wide-read Pastoral proclamation that, “If you see Jesus losing the infinite love of the Father, out of his infinite love for you, it will melt your hardness.”³ But this trend does not end here. How about some personal testimony from one of us who was recently told by a somewhat-theological educated church leader and adult Sunday school teacher that it is “fundamental to the gospel that Christ not only paid our penalty, but that in paying it, he endured the violent anger and rage of his Father on the cross.” From the academy, to the pulpit, to the pew, for those who affirm that the Son made atonement by being hated by the Father—albeit temporarily—Christianity has a new message, the simple logic of which goes like this. “The Son became sin; the Father cannot look upon sin without hatred; The Son willingly took our place of condemnation—and for an instant the Son bore the fury of God.”⁴ Is this the new logical deposit of an all-new dogmatic inheritance for American evangelicals? Some seem poised to accept it as such.

In this paper, we argue that this new logical deposit—what we henceforth refer to as the Christus Odium variant of the penal substitution theory—is a dangerous piece of theology. To this end, this paper unfolds in three parts. In order to help us distinguish the standard theory from the Christus Odium variant, in part one, we lay

1. <https://www.adamsetser.com/blog/2015/7/25/the-big-picture-of-gods-mission-a-concise-over-view-of-the-entire-bible-by-dr-abner-chou> (hereafter, Big Picture of God’s Mission). [June 19, 2018]

2. Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman, *In the Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions About God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, [1999] 2015), pp. 184-85 (emphasis added; hereafter, *In the Cry of the Soul*).

3. <https://calvinistinternational.com/2017/07/27/tim-keller-the-cross-and-the-love-of-god/>. Granted Tim Keller’s statement does not entail Christus Odium it could easily be categorized as a version of the view. It certainly reflects other Trinitarian problems that are controversial in light of traditional Nicene Trinitarianism as well as Chalcedonian Christology, something relevant to the arguments we posit below. What does it mean for Christ to lose the infinite love of his Father in exchange for what? While we would not want to categorize it as such, necessarily, it comes close and is another example of pastoral rhetoric at work in the development of doctrine that is one step away from something like Christus Odium.

4. Allender and Longman, *In The Cry of the Soul*, p. 185 (emphasis added).

out what we call the minimalist criterion for penal substitution.⁵ Upon this foundation, in part two, we consider several dogmatic worries that we think exponents of the Christus Odium variant ought to seriously consider. In the third part, we propose an alternative substitution theory of atonement, in addition to a minimalist penal substitution theory, one that elides all the worries of the Christus Odium variant as well as those worries commonly associated with the classic penal substitution theory. We are not arguing against penal substitution. Far from it. We make it clear that both penal substitution and reparative substitution are live substitutionary options on the table for further consideration. Finally, we conclude with a plea.

II. Whence Penal Substitution? Origins and the Minimalist Criterion

Outside the various interpretations of the scriptural record of Christ's atoning work and various confessional statements about the atonement, like *The Three Forms of Unity* or the *Savory Declaration*, there is no source of authority—no ecumenical symbol, like Ephesus or Chalcedon—that governs what one must believe about what Christ's atonement accomplishes. If you are a Presbyterian (say, of the PCA variety), you look to the *Westminster Confession*, say, for a consensus of belief about the atonement. If you are a Baptist (say, of the SBC variety), you look—now more than ever—to the *Baptist Faith and Message* for it. In other words, what one thinks about the doctrine of atonement has much more to do with both the collective and individual voices of the theological tradition that inform what they believe, and these are in some sense negotiable, depending on the sort of tradition with which they ally themselves.

Despite some recent and rather awkward attempts to forge a genetic link between contemporary evangelical articulations of this doctrine and the Fathers and Medieval Schoolmen, proponents of the penal substitution theory ought to be cautious when looking for the origin of this theory not to look much beyond the Reformation, particularly John Calvin.⁶ For, before Calvin there was Anselm and

5. Before we go any further, attention needs to be drawn to some confusion in contemporary theology when doctrines like the atonement are described in one context as a "model" and in another context as a "theory." We too have fallen prey to this. For the sake of clarity, when we say "model" we mean, a broader category, which is representative of how several theories of atonement function. When we say "theory," we are referring to a more narrowly worked out, systematically detailed instance of a model. For example, both the satisfaction and moral government theories of atonement fall under what we have elsewhere described as belonging to restitution models of atonement.

6. See e.g.: S. Jeffery, M. Ovey, A. Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007). Such [gross distortions] have of course been recently and convincingly challenged by Adonis Vidu, in his excellent work: *Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 1ff (hereafter, *Atonement, Law, and Justice*). For an excellent treatment of the atonement in the patristic era, see: Ben Myers, *The Patristic Atonement Model*, in Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders, eds. *Locating Atonement: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,

those, like Aquinas and Duns Scotus, for instance, who re-visioned Anselm's satisfaction theory.⁷ After Calvin, the doctrine that contemporary theologians refer to as penal substitution underwent a series of developments, being co-opted, augmented and explained in a number of ways by a variety of British and Continental post-Reformation theologians, like, for example, Ames and Turretin.⁸ There are several recent historical works that underwrite this account of the trajectory of the atonement tradition from Anselm to Calvin.⁹ (That said, there is far more work that needs

2015), pp. 71-88. For more discussion on the history of the development of the penal substitution model of atonement in the Reformed tradition, see: William G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3rd edn. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed), pp. 451-55. Henrich Heppel, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: Collins, 1950), pp. 475-79ff; Herman Bavink, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), p. 455ff.

7. See e.g.: Robert Franks, *A History of the Doctrine of the Work of Christ* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2001). According to what we might think of as a classical Anselmian Satisfaction theory, Christ gives up his life in order to restore honor to God by paying a debt, one that satisfies the creditor; not of debt of punishment (as in the case of penal substitution), but of debt of honor. This again, is something that Vidu carefully treats at length, and in concert with the broader articulation and later development of the satisfaction theory amongst Abelard, Aquinas and Duns Scotus (Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice*, pp. 45-88). Hitting on the major themes related to Anselm's satisfaction theory—his Platonic and realist philosophical assumptions, his theological approach to law, his emphasis the private (rather than the public) offense of sin, his contrast of punishment versus satisfaction, the necessity of the incarnation, the sufficiency of Christ's meritorious work to pay humanities debt to God—Vidu shows with great precision and clarity why Anselm's theory became epoch-making for later medieval. Summarily speaking, Anselm's theory can be expressed (roughly) in the follow set of numbered theses: (i) Christ's atonement (or a suitable equivalent) is necessary to his larger redemptive work; (ii) Christ's death procures an infinite merit (i.e. the mechanism); The infinite merit of Christ's death pays a debt of honor to God; (iii) Christ's death is a work of supererogation and therefore sufficient for all humanity; (iv) Christ's death is efficient for those who by faith are united to Christ. It should be clear from this that the mechanism of atonement on Anselm's theory is built around the idea that Christ's death somehow restores honor to the Father, namely, by virtue of the infinite merit of the sacrifice of his infinite self, thereby offsetting the infinite demerit of human sin. In this, Christ's act is one of equity to a debt; again, not a debt of punishment but a debt of honor.

8. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James Denison Jnr. (Phillipsburg, NJ.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992-1997), 1.1., p. 489; William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, ed. John Dykstra Eidsen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 1.9.14-18, 108-9.

9. Looking closely Louis Berkhof's early 20th century reception history of the Anselmian tradition in Calvin, Vidu enumerates four-points of departure that Berkhof distinguishes Calvin from Anselm. These are worth rehearsing *en toto*. "First, the satisfaction theory focuses on the honor and dignity of God rather than his justice. The context is that of private rather than public law. Second, there is no place in Anselm's thought for the biblical idea of Christ's bearing of our punishment on our behalf. Rather, Christ offers himself as a sacrifice acceptable in lieu of our being punished (Is. 53:10). Third, Berkhof argues that there is no place for the active obedience of Christ. This might seem puzzling, yet it is not the death that effectively procures atonement for Anselm, but the infinitely valuable offer of Christ's life. Finally, the fourth weakness sensed by the Reformers is that the Latin satisfaction model turns on a purely external transfer of merits. The believer is left to his or her own devices to continue to earn the surplus merit of Christ. While, as we shall see, an economy of exchange will continue to characterize the Reformed understanding of the atonement, the satisfaction of God is construed in such a way that it can only be accomplished by the redeemer, and cannot be replicated by believers seeking to earn salvation. Christ's work is final (Heb. 7:27; 9:28; 1 Pet. 3:18) and unrepeatable." See: Vidu, *Atonement, Law and Justice*, pp. 118-19.

to be done on the development on the doctrine of atonement during this period). Among the most useful and certainly the most systematic treatment of the atonement in reception history appears in the Romanian scholar, Adonis Vidu's work. From Vidu's treatment of Calvin, we have distilled no less than six constituents of the penal substitution theory—constituents that consistently appear in its various expressions in the literature since Calvin.¹⁰ The following six propositions are what we will henceforth call the minimalist criterion for penal substitution.¹¹ If you hold to penal substitution this is what you are minimally committed to:

1. Christ's atonement is necessary to his redemptive work.
2. Christ's death is sufficient to assuage divine retribution for all humanity.¹²
3. Christ dies as a penal substitute for individual persons.
4. Christ is punished in our place. (One could revisit the theory and modify it by saying that Christ dies in order to absorb the retributive (penal) consequences of divine justice precipitated by human sin, being treated by God as if he were those individuals to whom the punishment were due) (i.e. the mechanism).
5. Christ's death pays a debt of punishment.
6. Christ's death is a vicarious sacrifice.

We should be careful to note that the mechanism of the penal substitution theory is bound up in the act of Christ's death absorbing the cumulative force of divine retributive justice against sins of particular human persons whom Christ is said to represent. In this act, Christ's death pays the debt of punishment owed by those over whom he is a so-called federal head. This is what you are minimally committed to if you are a penal substitution theorist. Of course, there are several ways that this minimum criterion has been adapted since Calvin, sometimes for good and sometimes for ill.¹³ That said, it should be clear that much of the Reformed tradition

10. According to Turretin, for example, "The satisfaction here discussed, is not taken widely for a simple and indiscriminate reparation of injury (as when one purges and excuses himself to him who has suffered injury). Rather it is taken strictly for the payment of a debt, with which is paid what another owes and with which he satisfies the creditor or judge who requires the debt of punishment. . . [T]he satisfaction exacted by the justice of God principally demanded two things: 1) that it should be paid by the same nature which had sinned; 2) that nevertheless it should be of an infinite value and worth to take away the infinite demerit of sin," *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. by James Dennison Jnr., trans. by George Musgrave Giger (Philipsburg, NJ.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992-1997), 2.14.1, 3, 7, pp. 418, 421 (emphasis added). It is noteworthy that Turretin is often held up, and rightly so, we think, as an exponent of the penal substitution view.

11. Oliver D. Crisp, "The Logic of Penal Substitution Revisited," Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker, eds. *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement* (2008), pp. 208-27; James I. Packer, "What did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution" *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974), pp. 3-46.

12. We realize that one might make some further distinctions here. One could contend that the object of the atonement is Divine wrath, without moving into Divine hatred. One might also contend that the object of the atonement rather than wrath (that might be the consequence or effect) is Divine retribution set up according to the moral law.

13. On some of these constructions, the benefits of the atonement are mediated via other doctrines.

has *not* endorsed a theory that we will consider in a moment, and we are convinced that the following theory is *not* obviously or clearly the logical entailment of penal substitution. Do not miss that. For, by assuming the objective of the atonement is meeting the demands of the moral law itself, penal substitution could simply have as its focus the satisfaction of the moral law. This does not necessarily anticipate the Christus Odium variant, despite some whom we have shown have argued for such.

III. Christus Odium

If you are committed to the minimalist criterion for penal substitution you are not necessarily committed to Christus Odium. If you think, as some have in the past and do now, that Christ's work as a penal substitute requires that the Son be hated by the Father, not only do you subscribe to the six propositions of the minimalist criterion, you are also committed to the following additional propositions.

7. The demands of divine retributive justice \approx the exercise of divine wrath \approx the divine exhibition and human experience of divine hatred.
8. Paying the debt to retributive justice, the Son is (temporarily) hated by the Father.
9. The Son of God died on the cross, which was motivated by Fatherly hate.
10. The object of the atonement is Divine hatred.
11. These additional propositions beg all sorts of questions. For the sake of brevity, we shall limit ourselves to considering only a few of them, beginning

The Holy Spirit seems to have some important role in effecting the results of the atonement. So, it is not, as if, the atonement does all of the work or transmits all the soteriological benefits of Christ's work to the elect in its own right. While many contemporary Reformed theologians suggest that there is one way of working out the penal substitution theory, this is simply not the case as reflected in the Reformed tradition. [For one popular and respected Reformed theologian who endorses penal substitution and the logical necessity of the efficacy of Christ's atoning work for the elect (as understood in what is oft called limited atonement) as the theory of atonement, [see, e.g.: R.C. Sproul. <http://calvinandcalvinism.com/?p=13943> (cited on May 16, 2017) See also: R.C. Sproul: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/biblical-scholasticism/> (cited on May 16, 2017). This is a fairly common and singular way of understanding penal substitution theory. This is, also, often used as the ground for rejecting all other atonement theories or constructions of the penal substitution theory. But as we will see, the discussion is quite a bit more complicated. There are several ways to work out the theory that takes into account other doctrinal loci of making sense of how it is that the benefits are transferred from Christ to the elect. For one example, we could look to William Shedd, who constructively works out the meting out of the atonement benefits via the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the elect. In other words, as Shedd understands the efficacy of Christ's atonement, it is the Holy Spirit that extends/applies it to the elect [Shedd 2003, 464]. Alexander Hodge articulates the penal substitution of Christ to actually remove the legal demands on all people, which as we will see below, is similar to how we understand and develop Anselm's theory [Hodge 1972, see ch. 25.9, 25.10, 25.17]. With these various understandings of soteriological benefits within the Reformed tradition clearly secured, we can begin to see the implausibility of linking the necessity of the penal substitution theory as the theory of atonement that offers us the only, or even necessarily, the best way to articulate efficacy. If we are honest, the efficiency/sufficiency distinction, so often employed throughout Reformation history, is quite a bit more complicated than contemporary theologians let on, even when we consider the largely celebrated penal substitution theory.

with a set of scriptural and biblical-theological questions, followed by a set of Christological questions.

III.1. Scriptural and Biblical-Theological Worries

Perhaps the most pressing questions—concerns that the present readership is likely most concerned with—are the scriptural ones. Thus, our first question is: What scriptural evidence is there that the Father hates the Son? The short answer is, you may have guessed: None. There is no direct statement in all of Scripture that comes close to making the claim that God hated the Son. If this is the case (and it is) there must be some indirect statement in the Scripture—that, and some biblical-theological gymnastics—that gets one to the point of opting for the Christus Odium theory. Perhaps the most obvious indirect statement in Scripture is Isaiah 53:10, “The Lord was pleased to bruise (or crush) him.” Let us look briefly at this verse to see what it says and then look at the biblical-theological gymnastics that are going on to see if the “Christus Odium” supporters have rightly understood what this verse actually means.

If we break up this statement into its two clauses: 1-“The Lord was pleased” and 2- “to bruise him” and go looking for some inner-textual translation help to discern the author’s intention behind the use of this word in this particular context, we find that Isaiah 1:11 and Isaiah 6:24 offer us some helpful clarity. In all three cases, the word translated pleased is used. The author’s intent in this clause seems fairly plain obvious. It is bare meaning is the same in all three instances, describing the pleasure God experiences with this or that circumstance. When, however, the same word is the very next verse—53:11, “the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hand”—it seems from this that author’s emphasis on the pleasure of God does not so much terminate on the violent abuse of the suffering servant, but on what this terrible event will in the end accomplish. It seems then that 53:11 modifies or explains the whole of the suffering-servant passage. What then about the bruising or crushing of the servant? Well, if we look a few verses back to 53.5, the same word, bruise, is employed and helps us clarify the author’s intent in 53.10, namely, that this servant will undoubtedly undergo physical suffering. Now, putting all this together, it seems that God’s pleasure is at least in part, directly interested in what the servant will accomplish by this physical suffering, namely, “the good pleasure of the Lord that will prosper” in the hands of the God-man. This seems like an altogether faithful reading of this passage that in no way commits one to the Christus Odium variant, which says that God somehow takes pleasure in the physical violence that his Son endures. So, how does one get there?

Some might arrive at the Christus Odium variant through the use of enthusiastic pastoral rhetoric that overburdens the Biblical-theological category of kingship and misunderstands the meaning of cursedness.¹⁴ Now, certainly the enthusiasm of

14. We are simply offering one way in which this could be worked out along these lines. For one

pastoral rhetoric has its place. As we shall see, it is just not when we are making doctrine.¹⁵

Let us look to the prophetic and priestly tradition, specifically Isaiah's vision, and his idea of what the future King will satisfy.¹⁶ One might take Christ's prophetic and priestly mission to be something of a parallel between God's relationship to humans and God's relationship to Christ's humanity. But this, we think, goes too far. For, if we are charitable, the logical implication could be worked out along these lines. Such that if we press the biblical categories, listed above, of God hating—even hating fallen sinful humanity—then that logic could extend to God the Father's Son. Herein, the idea is that the Father transfers his hatred away from fallen humanity and places the full force of that same hatred on the King who satisfies everything, namely, Christ the son. Now, as far as Christ's kingship goes, we have no desire to diminish what it means for him to be the legal representative of his people. We do, however, want to resist making more of the idea of representationalism than Scripture's legal paradigms permit. This is the first part of the problem.¹⁷

In terms of Christ's cursedness, which is the second and arguably the crux of the problem on this line of thinking, Paul is quite explicit that "Christ became a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). This, as Calvin carefully points out, does not mean that Christ *was* cursed, but that he became *a* curse. This is quite an important distinction. It is not the case, recalling one of the statements at the beginning of this paper, that "God cursed Jesus, putting Him in a position of absolute, perfect hatred. God hated Him and desired to make Him nothing."¹⁸ Instead, the curse that was due to others terminated on him. This is what it means for Christ to represent others! In other words, the relational categories employed should not necessarily yield the notion that the Father hated the Son *because* he hated humanity (if one is willing to make the latter assumption), but that as the representational substitute the Son became a curse by bearing the brunt of sin's offense. This is not the idea that Christ the Son was hated in an actual sense, but that the effects of the Father's seeking restitution or pouring out his wrath transferred from one class of people to a person. Interestingly, Calvin himself goes on to point to John 8:29, which says that the Son, "always [does] those things that please Him," and argues that, "[Christ] could not cease to be the object of

example as to how a biblical-theologian could work it out, see, Chou, *Big Picture of God's Mission*.

15. Unbridled enthusiasm of this sort smacks of the unthinking passion of the 18th century American evangelist, James Davenport, who during a book-burning of "immoral books and expensive possessions" (one that he instigated) in the name of Christ took off his pants and threw them into the fire! For more on this bizarre story, see: Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), p. 1. The dangers of such pastoral rhetoric are reflected in the development of penal substitution in the direction of Christus Odium.

16. See again for one example of someone who follows this logic, Chou, *Big Picture of God's Mission*. He says, "The prophets show that all is not lost, for there will be a King to fulfill everything."

17. It is not clear whether Chou understands kingship-representationalism in terms of owing a debt or owing a debt of punishment.

18. Chou, *Big Picture of God's Mission*.

the Father's love, and yet he endured his wrath. For how could [Christ] reconcile the Father to us, if he had incurred his hatred and displeasure?"¹⁹ The obvious answer to Calvin's rhetorical question is: he could not. What all this means is that at some point the idea of Christ's paying a debt of punishment for sin metastasized into the idea that being liable to punishment is equivalent to a payment of a debt owed to violent divine anger for sin. And here in lies the next question.

When did the *Christus Odium* argument first appear? If penal substitution has its origin in Calvin, the fact that he was already defending against this idea says something about when. And there are several sources that among Reformed Scholastics that make us think that this idea was in circulation at more than one historical period after Calvin and among more than one group of thinkers. Consider the Swiss-Italian theologian Francis Turretin (1623-87), for instance, who when he speaks of Christ's endurance of what he calls the "punishment of desertion," says,

But as to a participation of joy and felicity, God suspending for a little while the favorable presence of grace and the influx of consolation and happiness that he might be able to suffer all the punishment due to us (as to the withdrawal of vision, not as a dissolution of union; as to the want of the sense of divine love, intercepted by the sense of the divine wrath and vengeance resting upon him, not as to a real privation or extinction of it.) And, as the Scholastics say, as to the "affection of advantage" that he might be destitute of the ineffable consolation and joy which arises from a sense of God's paternal love and the beatific vision of his countenance (Ps. 16); but not as to the "affection of righteousness" because he felt nothing inordinate in himself which would tend to desperation, impatience or blasphemy against God.²⁰

A generation later, the Dutch theologian Herman Witsius (1636-1708), offers a more explicit and lengthy consideration and *rejection* of, "Whether Christ was abominable to God on account of the sins which he had taken upon himself."²¹ His answer is quite revealing. He says that,

it is so far from being true that by the voluntary susception of our sins the love of God to him was any how diminished that on the contrary he never pleased the Father more than when he showed himself obedient unto death even the death of the cross. For this is that excellent that incomparable and almost

19. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), pp. 91-2. It is of some additional note that later in John 10.15 and 17, John records Jesus as saying, "I lay down my life for the sheep... For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again", and in John 17.4, John records Jesus saying, "Father, I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which you gave me to do." In this context, Calvin is discussing the theory in his own Reformed context.

20. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 14, Q. II, VI.

21. Herman Witsius, *Conciliatory Or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain Under the Unhappy Names of Antinomians and Neonomians* (Glasgow: W. Lang, 1807), p. 39.

incredible obedience which the Father recompensed with a suitable reward of ineffable glory.²²

From such statements as these it seems that the contemporary evangelical flirtation with the “Christus Odium” variant of penal substitution is not something new. However, looking closely at the content of Wititus’ larger argument against this divine hatred of the Son, there are several, significant Christological questions that Wititus’ treatment left untouched; ones that we see as bearing directly upon contemporary proposals of the Christus Odium variant. Taking propositions (7)-(9) in their turn, in this next section, we lay out a set of Christological concerns.

III.2. Christological Worries

“The Son became sin; the Father cannot look upon sin without hatred; The Son willingly took our place of condemnation—and for an instant the Son bore the fury of God.”²³ This statement, you will recall, is what we said comprises the logical footing of the Christus Odium variant. And it is from statements like this one that propositions (7)-(10) follow from (1)-(6) of the standard view. For the sake of brevity and clarity, let us consider each proposition (7)-(10) on its own.

The demands of divine retributive justice \approx the exercise of divine wrath \approx the divine exhibition and human experience of divine hatred.

12. Paying the debt to retributive justice, the Son is (temporarily) hated by the Father.

We will consider 7 & 8 together. There are two questions here, one having to do with who is hated by the Father and another having to do with the timing of this hatred. Let us take the question of who is hated first. Did God the Father hate the human nature of Christ, just not his Divine nature? Surely, it would be a logical contradiction for the Father to hate his own nature.²⁴ For one thing, the violation of the Divine nature would yield an unorthodox Trinitarianism. Why is it that God could not also hate the human nature of Christ? To answer this question, we must first point out the fractured portrait of Christ this yields, something that would certainly force one to re-think the Old Testament portrayal of Christ as the perfect image of God (Col. 1:16) pointing us back to the Genesis image where humans are portrayed as representatives in their entirety, body and soul. Christ fulfills the image bearing relation we humans have toward God. More importantly, when we consider the traditional Chalcedonian statement and the history of interpretation on Christ’s nature, we are confronted with the fact that Christ was first a Divine person (with a corresponding Divine nature), which assumed an impersonalized

22. Ibid., p. 44.

23. Allender and Longman, *In The Cry of the Soul*, p. 185 (emphasis added).

24. These worries both echo and in several important ways extend beyond what Tom McCall has recently and helpfully labeled broken-Trinity theology, see: *Forsaken: The Trinity and the Cross, and Why it Matters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012), p. 22 (hereafter, *Forsaken*).

human nature not a personal human nature—averting Nestorianism. This is the anhypostasis interpretation of the divine and human nature relationship that come to comprise Christ's person.²⁵ It is Christ's Divine person that supports the human nature. It seems hardly conceivable that the Father hates the human nature (which is a perfect representation of humanity) divorced from the Divine person when in fact the human nature lacks any personal agency apart from the Divine personhood of Christ. The problem for 'Christus Odium' is that Christ's Divine and human natures are divided in a way that is not only unnatural, violating the Scriptural account of his representational work, but also violates traditional catholic Christology—something we think all should be loath to do.

Did God the Father literally hate Christ's soul or body? If it is his death that is taken as evidence that the Father hates his Son and this act is God's pouring out his wrath motivated by retributive justice, then it yields an interesting conclusion, namely, that God hates the Son's physical body. But why? What did the Son's body ever do to the Father? Does this not yield a fractured picture of Christ's work on the cross? What about Christ's human soul? Could it be that the Father pours his wrath out on the human soul of Christ? But, then, this raises other serious concerns about Christ as the perfect substitute, our representative that accurately represents God's intentions of what we ought to be for God. The gnostic picture emerges in a new way.

Another question emerges regarding the timing of the Father's turning wrath from humans toward Christ. At what moment did the Father turn in his wrath (assuming this is motivated by hate) and direct it at his Son? Presumably, the Father did so at some point while Christ was on the cross. This is a common assumption. Why is it this moment rather than an earlier moment in Christ's sacrificial work as the suffering servant? One could make the case that the Father's wrathful stance occurred much earlier when the Logos assumes the lowly estate of human nature and becomes one of us. By identifying with us in our weakness and sin, Christ identifies with something that many take to be deplorable to the Father.

(9) The Son of God died on the cross

In what follows, we want to raise more questions than offer answers. Consider this a Christological reflection on what it means for Christ to die and how that exhibits most acutely Divine hatred in the Son. Recall, once again, what we saw earlier, 'God hated Him and desired to make Him nothing' and the language of absolute separation of the Father from the Son during this one instant. Our big question, what does that mean or what are we to make of it? This is a pretty specific claim, one that for the Christus Odium exponent suggests a more fundamental belief that God himself can die, that is, cease to exist. To make such a claim is to make a dangerous metaphysical misstep. Can the *Son* of God die? According to dogmatic teaching in all three expressions of catholic Christianity (i.e., the Nicene tradition), neither the

25. See: Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 75ff.

Divinity of the Son nor the humanity of the Son died in the sense that they fall into non-being. Maximally speaking, somatic death reflects our common-sense belief of what will inevitably happen to all humans (excepting Enoch and Elijah). Somatic death is portrayed as something of a spiritual loss of God's presence, which in the case of Christ's death may amount to nothing more than Turretin's "punishment of desertion." What or who then absorbed the penalty of God's wrath? If the penalty is death, then is it just the body of Jesus? The Son, the soul of Jesus, and the indwelling Spirit are certainly not resident in the body after it expires. It seems from this set up that the Son—whom exponents of *Christus Odium* say is hated by the Father—must not be the one who is hated after all if he is not the one absorbing the penal consequences for sin, namely somatic death. That seems like a significant problem for the *Christus Odium* variant. So, what are we to make about this select time on the cross? If, "the culmination to Jesus' time on earth was His death on the cross," and if at that particular temporal instance he was hated by the Father and if he was hated at no previous time prior to those hours of agony, then what are we to make of the Father's disposition toward him when he was scourged, or when he was beaten, or when he was mocked, or when he was arrested, or when he sweat drops of blood, or when he was abandoned by his disciples and followers?²⁶ In other words, why is it that the Father only hated the Son at this one instance? Presumably, the Father would have hated his Son at some prior moment, assuming the Son assumed the guilt of humanity (or some portion of humanity), which originally precipitated Divine hate in the first place. These and other related Christological questions about the atonement-making work of Christ deserve additional attention, but our point is not only to raise perplexing questions about *Christus Odium*. It is also to point out the logical and metaphysical problem of claiming that the Father hates his Son (tantamount to saying that God hates God), and that the Father hates the Son for whom we know in other passages of Scripture that God was in fact well pleased with the Son's work of suffering. These Trinitarian and Christological problems are significant for the defender of *Christus Odium*.

(10) The object of the atonement is Divine hatred.

It seems a natural, even a necessary entailment, that *Christus Odium* adherents understand Divine hatred as the object of atonement. Rather than placing divine law at the center of the atonement, the emphasis is on Divine hatred. The object is not the paying off of some debt or satisfying the moral law, but the opportunity for God to vent his wrath motivated by hate. This certainly raises other questions that we, at present, cannot determine with certainty. Does the *Christus Odium* theory of atonement presume that hatred is a central characteristic, or attribute, of God? Like some Reformed theologians of the past, one of God's primary characteristics is hatred. As such, with this in mind, there is a metaphysical necessity for the manifestation of Divine hatred in relation to God's creation. So the logic goes, all of

26. Chou, *Big Picture of God's Mission*.

the Divine attributes must be manifest in God's relationship to creation, particularly in redemption, in order to adequately reveal his nature/essence to that creation.

As we see it, this is not so for a classical or standard penal substitution theory of atonement where the honoring of Divine law by covering the debt owed is central. On the classical penal substitution theory it is not that hatred must be vented in some way or on some person, but that the debt of punishment be satisfied, so that the moral law be honored or satisfied. However, this does not presume that hatred is central to the atonement nor does it suppose that hatred is a primary defining characteristic of God. What is required is that the demands of the law are met, and this is precisely, on a classical articulation of the penal substitute, that which Christ achieves on behalf of those he is representing.

Short of moving in this direction to affirm the divine hatred of the Father for the Son, traditional defenders of penal substitution could affirm that Christ satisfies the demands of the moral law for which God measures the quality of human actions, but this never becomes the measure by which the Father measures the quality of the Son's works—as if the Son literally was a sinner or became a wicked person representing us sinners.

The tradition has consistently affirmed that Christ was without sin as the spotless lamb (1 Peter 1:19). In fact, the death of Christ is construed as a pleasing fragrance to the Father (2 Cor. 2:15-16; Phil. 4:18; Eph. 5:2). While one might affirm that God re-directs his wrath away from humans, it is not necessary that one affirm that wrath is literally poured out on Christ in the sense that God's wrath is motivated by his displeasure with the Son.

Thus, if *Christus Odium* is to become the new logical deposit of penal substitution, then we suggest that one look elsewhere for a substitutionary theory of atonement or stay contented within the bounds of penal substitution's minimalist criterion by developing it a bit more in terms of its biblical basis and the theological receptions of it throughout history, and resist the move toward *Christus Odium*. This will require dealing with its other liabilities, which include, most notably, the "legal fiction" objection, which states that Christ's representational substitution fails to make restitution on behalf of fallen humanity because he cannot literally bear the penalty (i.e., Divine wrath or satisfaction of retribution) for that which he did not commit and could not otherwise be held liable. Alternatively, you could re-consider a view that is often disregarded and taken for granted in the contemporary evangelical theological literature, but, itself, has a varied reception throughout the history of Christian thought, including Reformation history.

IV. Substitution of a Different sort?

This theory or something near it, we call Reparative Substitution, which is a development from Anselm's satisfaction theory in the context of the Reformed

tradition. In this way, there is more than one way to parse out the substitution relation between Christ and humanity. A retrieval of Anselm deserves some reconsideration. For, there are aspects of Anselm's theory that he left largely undeveloped; these developments being significant enough in our minds as constitutive of a theory separate unto itself. We call it the Reparative Substitution theory of atonement, according to which Christ dies in an act of divine love to pay a debt of divine honor owed by humanity to God by offering himself up in act of supererogation that procures an infinite merit (of honor), offsetting the infinite demerit of human sin in order to satisfy the rectoral demands of divine justice, thereby restoring honor to God (and by consequence, his moral law). Now, we will not spend a great deal of time here, so here is a sketch:

1. Christ's atonement is necessary to his work.
2. Christ's death is an act of divine self-love.
3. Christ's death procures an infinite merit (i.e., the mechanism).
 - a. The infinite merit of Christ's death pay the full sum of humanity's debt of honor to God (Christ does this qua his divine nature).
 - b. The infinite merit of Christ's death pays the full sum of humanities debt of honor [not a debt of punishment] to God's moral law (Christ does this qua his human nature).
4. Christ's death is sufficient for all humanity (what we might call a global substitute).
5. Christ's death efficiently defers divine wrath for all humanity until the consummation/Judgment.²⁷
6. Christ's death effectively defers wrath for those who by faith are united to Christ's work.

The similarities to Anselm's theory are clear. The present theory is motivated by Anselm's satisfaction theory of atonement. Christ bears or absorbs no penalty on this theory, thus it is not to be confused with penal substitution.²⁸ Rather, the mechanism of atonement is the restoration of divine honor (i.e., a commercial framework, which highlights the King in relation to his kingdom) where the earth is conceived as God's kingdom and wherein the moral law functions, not the assumption of a debt of punishment or chance for God to dole out his wrath on Christ for sin. On reparative

27. There are several additional constituents of the Reparative Substitution that could be mentioned, about which we have said more in detail elsewhere, including: (6) The incarnation establishes both a vital union and legal union between Christ and all humanity, without which Christ's work would not obtain for all humanity; (7) The resurrection generates a newly constituted humanity, whose members include those who by faith (as the relative union), at the Judgment will receive their remunerative benefit; (8) Christ's work is efficient for the elect by settling all debts and eliminating eternal death.

28. There remains debate as to whether Christ, because he died and because death is a penalty, incurred his own penalty. That is, whether he paid a penalty—death—for the human nature that he was united to.

substitution it is the love of Christ for his Father that is the primary motive in his making atonement. Through Christ's death the God's honor is publically restored. What does reparative substitution do then? It restores to God the glory that was taken from him, who, as the apostle says, graciously "passed over former sins," the result of which was his willingness to be dishonored for a time. Then came the fullness of time. What does reparative substitution do for humanity? It defers divine retribution until all moral accounts will be settled. It fixes both the private and public problems that humanity faces for having transgressed God's rectoral justice. In this way, the reparative substitution theory is radically theo-centric, an idea we suppose few would want to publicly resist, and which is the principal reason for God's patient endurance of the reproach of sinners.

IV. Conclusion

The mere suggestion that a theory of atonement other than penal substitution might have some theological purchase is nothing short of anathema in some circles. While the present exercise is not strictly about penal substitution, but rather about the development of penal substitution in a quite problematic direction, we have taken this as an opportunity to re-visit the nature of substitution. For those in favor of the "Christus Odium" variant, this paper will be a cautionary tale. It is about how unchecked doctrinal development sometimes has results like that of a government program; once the people have it, it is hard for them to let it go. For those not quite sure what to think, this paper is a brief exercise in - systematic theological analysis; a feature that is signally absent from the scholarship of those who maintain the "Christus Odium" variant because as seen above the theory is motivated by pastoral rhetoric and exaggerated biblical-theological reasoning.

Moving beyond the radical developments of penal substitution, we are convinced, once again, that the present exercise is an opportunity to revisit the nature of substitutionary atonement. Whilst the merits of penal substitution are clearly spelled out in the recent evangelical theological literature, there is one other version of substitution that has not received the attention it deserves. We offer this not as the final conclusion to the discussion, but as one consideration along with penal substitution. We are not convinced that either are the necessary deliverances of biblical moorings, but both have merits deserving further consideration from students, pastors, and scholars alike. Tentatively, we believe that reparative substitution actually does more than penal substitution theorist's think their theory does. For example, in what way does the penal substitution theory do anything positive or efficacious for God that is also efficacious for all humanity? Simply put, we are not sure that it does. To put it rather bluntly, it seems that nothing is restored to God on the penal substitution theory. Neither are the benefits that follow from Christ's work beneficial for all humanity. Instead, and quite to the contrary of the apparent demands of God's

retributive justice, penal substitution seems only to make provision for God to make amends concerning the moral law for some part of humanity or the opportunity for God to work out his wrath, leaving God dishonored and his Son crushed (as the prophet says) for this dishonor, and what is more, all of this being of no apparent benefit to himself, save perhaps for the opportunity to vent his just wrath. In other words, upon closer examination and a comparison of mechanism and efficacy with other theories of atonement, penal substitution seems rather anthropocentric. Not so for the reparative substitution theory, according to which Christ's sacrificial act actually achieves something for all humanity and for God, namely, the restoration of divine honor.

Christ bore the miseries of the debt for sin from the moment he assumed a human nature. His was an affliction that was parceled out across the whole of his life. His most acute experience of this misery began in the garden when in distress he sweat drops of blood and it culminated in the moment he breathed his last. His whole life was necessary for giving himself up as a sacrifice to the Father, but this should in no wise be identified with Divine hatred instanced in one time, namely, on the cross.

Moving toward our conclusion, we leave the student, the pastor, and the scholar with a question. Is this really what we are supposed to lead with when we speak of God's salvation? "God hated his Son so that he could love you." Rather should we not lead with God loved his Son so much that he received Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. While there was something unlovable about humans, this is not true of God the Father's son. Instead, it was Christ's work of love for the Father (see John 15:10) that established and secured our salvation in Christ's sacrifice, beginning with his life and ending in his death. This, we suggest, is an important distinction in the gospel message the Church proclaims.

If Christus Odium is the new evangelistic message, which in some places it apparently is, we no longer have good news. Instead the Son becomes the object of the Father's derision. Is it not preferable that the Father be pleased with the Son's sacrificial work? That is the picture we wish to portray of the atonement. Furthermore, this is the picture we believe accurately represents the wider Scriptural teaching expressed in the Church's appropriation of it. For this to work, the defender of penal substitution must reject the Christus odium variant of penal substitution preferring instead to work out the logic of the traditional variation differently or, what we will suggest, consider taking up an alternative.