

THE NATURE OF ATONEMENT IN THE THEOLOGY OF JACOBUS ARMINIUS

J. MATTHEW PINSON*

Jacobus Arminius is one of the best known and least studied theologians in the history of Christianity. His writings have been neglected by Calvinists and Arminians alike. Calvinists have disliked him because of his opposition to scholastic predestinarian theology. Most Arminians have neglected him because what little they have read of him reminds them more of Calvinism than they like. Arminius scholar Carl Bangs is correct when he says that most modern treatments of Arminius assume a definition of Arminianism that does not come from Arminius. Bangs states that most interpreters of Arminianism

begin with a preconception of what Arminius should be expected to say, then look in his published works, and do not find exactly what they are looking for. They show impatience and disappointment with his Calvinism, and shift the inquiry into some later period when Arminianism turns out to be what they are looking for—a non-Calvinistic, synergistic, and perhaps semi-Pelagian system.¹

This is the approach many scholars have taken toward Arminius regarding his doctrine of atonement. For example, the Calvinist scholar Robert L. Reymond has said that the Arminian theory of atonement is the governmental theory, which “denies that Christ’s death was intended to pay the penalty for sin.” He claims that the governmental theory’s “germinal teachings are in Arminius.”² Similarly, well-known Wesleyan-Arminian scholar James K. Grider states: “A spillover from Calvinism into Arminianism has occurred in recent decades. Thus many Arminians whose theology is not very precise say that Christ paid the penalty for our sins. Yet such a view is foreign to Arminianism.”³

Recent scholars have taken one of two positions on the soteriology of Jacobus Arminius. One group says that his theology was a development of the Dutch Reformed theology of his day, while the other says that it was a departure from those Reformed categories. Scholars such as Carl Bangs and

* J. Matthew Pinson is president of Free Will Baptist Bible College, 3606 West End Avenue, Nashville, TN 37205.

¹ Carl Bangs, “Arminius and Reformed Theology” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1958) 14.

² Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998) 474.

³ J. K. Grider, “Arminianism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Walter A. Elwell; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 80.

John Mark Hicks fall into the first category, while Richard Muller is a recent example of scholars who fit the second.⁴

This article is representative of the first perspective.⁵ It argues that Arminius's concept of the nature of atonement was consistent with the theology of atonement that characterized Reformed theology in the seventeenth century.⁶ This conclusion is not surprising, given Arminius's description of himself as a Reformed theologian and his repeated affirmation of the Belgic Confession of Faith and Heidelberg Catechism. He made this clear in a letter to the Palatine Ambassador, Hippolytus a Collibus, in 1608: "I confidently declare that I have never taught anything, either in the church or in the university, which contravenes the sacred writings that ought to be with us the sole rule of thinking and of speaking, or which is opposed to the Belgic Confession or to the Heidelberg Catechism, that are our stricter formularies of consent."⁷ Given the dearth of scholarship on Arminius's theology of atonement⁸ and the current debates on the nature of atonement in the evangelical community,⁹ an understanding of Arminius's doctrine of atonement provides fresh and valuable insight.¹⁰

⁴ Carl Bangs, "Arminius and Reformed Theology"; idem, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971); idem, "Arminius as a Reformed Theologian," in *The Heritage of John Calvin* (ed. John H. Bratt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973); John Mark Hicks, "The Theology of Grace in the Theology of Jacobus Arminius and Philip Van Limborch: A Study in the Development of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Arminianism" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985); Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991). Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999) takes the second perspective (pp. 454–72), whereas in his newest book, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), he has come to agree with the first.

⁵ As I say elsewhere, while Arminius "veered from Calvinism on the question of how one comes to be in a state of grace (predestination, free will, and grace) he retained Reformed categories on the meaning of sin and redemption" (J. Matthew Pinson, "Introduction," in J. Matthew Pinson, ed., *Four Views on Eternal Security* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002] 14–15).

⁶ For examples of Reformed theologians before and after Arminius to whom he bears striking resemblance in his doctrine of atonement and the priesthood of Christ, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 501–3, 504–12 (2.25.6, 2.26.2–2.26.7) and Francis Turretin, "The Necessity of Atonement," online at <http://www.fivesolas.com/ftnecatone.htm>.

⁷ Jacobus Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius* (trans. James Nichols and William Nichols; Nashville: Randall House, 2007) 2.690.

⁸ There has been almost no scholarly research conducted on Arminius's doctrine of the nature of atonement. Scholars tend to rely on secondary sources for their information on Arminius's views on this subject, making brief assertions of only a few sentences without supporting them with primary research. Three exceptions to this rule are Olson, *Arminian Theology*; Hicks, "The Theology of Grace in the Theology of Jacobus Arminius and Philip Van Limborch"; and William Witt, "Creation, Redemption, and Grace in the Theology of Jacobus Arminius" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1993), but the general nature of these works allow their authors only a few pages each to discuss Arminius's thought on the nature of atonement. These authors would be in agreement with the basic thesis of this essay that Arminius's views on the nature of atonement are closer to Reformed views than later Arminian ones.

⁹ See, e.g., Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, eds., *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament & Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000); Charles E.

I. THE THREEFOLD OFFICE OF CHRIST

Arminius rooted his doctrine of atonement in the priesthood of Christ. The threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king was a popular motif in Reformed theology both on the continent and in the British Isles. A classic expression of the threefold office is found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which reads:

Q. 23. What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?

A. Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

Q. 24. How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?

A. Christ executeth the office of a prophet in revealing to us, by his Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.

Q. 25. How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?

A. Christ executeth the office of a priest in his once offering up of himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.

Q. 26. How doth Christ execute the office of a king?

A. Christ executeth the office of a king in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.¹¹

The Belgic Confession of Faith, to which Arminius himself subscribed, goes into greater detail on the priestly office of Christ in Article XXI, “The Satisfaction of Christ, Our Only High Priest, for Us”:

We believe that Jesus Christ is ordained with an oath to be an everlasting High Priest, after the order of Melchizedek; and that He has presented Himself in our behalf before the Father, to appease His wrath by His full satisfaction, by offering Himself on the tree of the cross, and pouring out His precious blood to purge away our sins, as the prophets had foretold. For it is written: *He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and numbered with the transgressors; and condemned by Pontius Pilate as a malefactor, though he had first declared Him innocent. Therefore, He restored that which he took not away, and suffered, the righteous*

Hill and Frank A. James III, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical & Practical Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Roger R. Nicole* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004); James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006); Garry J. Williams, “Penal Substitution: A Response to Recent Criticisms,” *JETS* 50 (2007): 71–86; and other debates over the views of atonement in movements such as the New Perspective on Paul, the Emerging Church, and Federal Vision theology.

¹⁰ I give a much fuller description of the ways in which Arminius defies both modern Calvinistic and Arminian interpretations in J. Matthew Pinson, “Will the Real Arminius Please Stand Up? A Study of the Theology of Jacobus Arminius in Light of His Interpreters,” *Integrity: A Journal of Christian Thought* (Summer 2003) 121–39. (This issue is available free of charge by emailing president@fwbbc.edu.) See also Pinson, “Introduction,” in *Four Views on Eternal Security*.

¹¹ The Westminster Shorter Catechism, in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part I: Book of Confessions* (New York: Office of the General Assembly, 1983) 7.023-026.

for the unrighteous, as well in His body as in His soul, feeling the terrible punishment which our sins had merited; insomuch that *his sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground*. He called out: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* and has suffered all this for the remission of our sins.¹²

These two Reformed confessional statements summarize Arminius's essential views on the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. The priestly office of Christ provides the theological framework for Arminius's doctrine of atonement.

II. THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

Arminius, like all Reformed theologians of his time, believed that sin demands atonement for individuals to be reconciled to God.¹³ He argues from the Letter to the Hebrews that Christ is the only possible priest or mediator between sinful humanity and a holy God. In his priestly office, Christ exercises two "sacerdotal functions."¹⁴ The first of these functions is "oblation," the offering or sacrifice of himself to God as the perfect "expiation" or "propitiation" for the sins of humanity, and the acquisition of righteousness and eternal life for the faithful.¹⁵ The second of these functions is intercession, whereby Christ intercedes presently to the father in heaven for the sins of his people.¹⁶

In his exercise of these priestly functions, Christ the Messiah is both priest and victim: "For 'He offered himself,' (Heb. ix, 14) and 'by his own blood has entered into heaven,'" (ix, 12) and all this as it is an expiatory Priesthood."¹⁷ Christ as priest exercises his office by fulfilling the law in complete obedience to his father in his life and death. Christ "could not perform" his priestly duties "except through true and [*solidam*] substantial obedience towards God who imposed the office on Him."¹⁸ Christ the Priest "was prepared by vocation or the imposition of the office, by the sanctification and consecration of his person through the Holy Spirit, and through his obedience and sufferings, and even in some respects by his resuscitation from the dead."¹⁹ Christ the victim "was also prepared by separation, by obedience (for it was necessary that the victim should likewise be holy,) and by being slain."²⁰

One of Arminius's chief concerns in discussing the priesthood of Christ is who qualifies as the priest to offer this expiatory sacrifice. In a manner remi-

¹² The Belgic Confession of Faith, article 21, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, v. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983).

¹³ Though Arminius does not use the word "atonement."

¹⁴ Arminius, *Works*, 2.220, Public Disputation 14, "On the Offices of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 2.219–21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 2:217.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Bracketed word from original. Cf. Private Disputation 35, "On the Priestly Office of Christ" (2.380–81).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 2.381, Private Disputation 35, "On the Priestly Office of Christ."

²⁰ *Ibid.*

niscent of Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo*, Arminius asks the question of who is qualified to fulfill this sacerdotal function. He argues that this person must be both priest and sacrifice, but “in the different orders of creatures neither sacrifice nor priest could be found.”²¹ An angel could not qualify as a priest, because priests were to be representatives of humanity (Heb 5:1) and the death of an angel could never serve as expiation for human sin. A human being “could not be found” to fulfill the priestly office, because human beings were sinners held captive under the “tyranny of sin and Satan.”²² Because of this sinfulness, humans cannot approach God, “who is pure light,” to make a sacrifice.²³ Still, however, “the priest was to be taken from among men, and the oblation to God was to consist of a human victim.”²⁴ The divine wisdom determined that a human was required who had humanity in common with “his brethren,” being “in all things tempted as they were” and thus “able to sympathize” with them in their sufferings.²⁵ Yet this individual could not be under sin’s dominion. Arminius here cites Heb 7:26, which speaks of Jesus’ being “born in the likeness of sinful flesh, and yet without sin. For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.”²⁶ For such a state of affairs to obtain, such a person must be conceived by the Holy Spirit. Moral purity, Arminius maintains, is only one qualification of this cosmic priest. The priest must be divine: “Therefore the Word of God, who from the beginning was with God, and by whom the worlds, and all things visible and invisible, were created, ought himself to be made flesh, to undertake the office of the priesthood, and to offer his own flesh to God as a sacrifice for the life of the world.”²⁷

In this same oration, “On the Priesthood of Christ,” Arminius explains what he means by “expiatory sacrifice” in his discussion of Christ’s priestly oblation of an expiatory or propitiatory sacrifice. The “immolation or sacrifice of the body of Christ” consists of the shedding of his blood on the priestly “altar of the cross” and subsequently dying.²⁸ In this sacrifice, Arminius explains, Christ “pa[id] the price of redemption for sins by suffering the punishment due to them.”²⁹

III. JUSTICE

To understand Arminius’s doctrine of atonement as it relates to the priesthood of Christ, one must delve more deeply into his view of divine justice. Only then can one grasp the need for the mediation of Christ as priest and the nature of that priesthood. In his oration “On the Priesthood of Christ,”

²¹ Ibid. 1.414, Oration IV, “The Priesthood of Christ.”

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. 1.415.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. 1.419; 2.256; 2.381.

²⁹ Ibid. 1.419.

Arminius personifies justice, mercy, and wisdom, explaining the role of each in the divine decision to impose the office of priest. On one hand, Justice, he explains, “demanded, on her part, the punishment due to her from a sinful creature,” and rigidly enforced this judgment.³⁰ Mercy, on the other hand, “like a pious mother, moving with bowels of commiseration,” wanted to turn aside the punishment that Justice demanded.³¹ Yet Justice, “tenacious to her purpose,” countered that “she could not bear with patient indifference that no regard should be paid to her” and that “the authority of managing the whole affair was to be transferred to mercy.”³² Yet, she agreed that, if there could be a way in which her “inflexibility” and “the excess of her hatred of sin” could be acknowledged, she would yield to Mercy.³³

Arminius explains that ascertaining such a method was not the province of Mercy but of Wisdom, who devised a plan that would please both Justice and Mercy. This method was “expiatory sacrifice” or “voluntary suffering of death.”³⁴ Such a sacrifice, Wisdom concluded, would “appease Justice” yet “open such a way for Mercy as she has desired.”³⁵ Thus, according to Arminius’s anecdote, both Justice and Mercy assented to Wisdom’s terms.

Arminius repeats this juxtaposition of justice and mercy throughout his writings, explaining how divine salvific grace is an exhibition of both without sacrificing the demands of either. In his disputation, “On the Offices of Our Lord Jesus Christ,” he argues that God’s love is “two-fold”: a love for the creature and a love for justice.³⁶ God’s love for the creature expresses itself in his desire to save sinners. His love for justice expresses itself in “a hatred against sin.”³⁷ Similar to his discussion of divine wisdom finding a way to meet the demands of both justice and mercy, Arminius states that it “was the will of God that each of these kinds of love should be satisfied.”³⁸ Thus, God

gave satisfaction to his love for the creature who was a sinner, when he gave up his Son who might act the part of Mediator. But he rendered satisfaction to his love for justice and to his hatred against sin, when he imposed on his Son the office of Mediator by the shedding of his blood and by the suffering of death; (*Heb. ii. 10*; v, 8, 9;) and he was unwilling to admit him as the Intercessor for sinners except when sprinkled with his own blood, in which he might be made the propitiation for sins. (ix, 12).³⁹

Thus, God satisfies his love for the creature by forgiving sins, while at the same time satisfying his love for justice by inflicting the punishment for sin (“inflicting stripes”) on his Son.⁴⁰ Arminius states that “it was not the

³⁰ *Ibid.* 1.413.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* 1.413–14.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 1.414.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 2.221, Public Disputation 14, “On the Office of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

effect of those stripes that God might love his creature, but that, while love for justice presented no hindrance, through his love for the creature he could remit sins and bestow life eternal."⁴¹ In this satisfaction of God's love for the creature and for his own justice, Arminius explains, God "rendered satisfaction to himself, and appeased himself in the Son of his love."⁴²

In his Private Disputation 33, "On the Restoration of Man," Arminius underscores the importance of the divine justice being satisfied in the salvation of sinners: "But it has pleased God not to exercise this mercy in restoring man, without the declaration of his justice, by which He loves righteousness and hates sin." Thus, Arminius says, God has appointed a mediator to intervene between himself and sinful humanity. This mediation "should be so performed as to make it certain and evident, that God hates sin and loves righteousness, and that it is his will to remit nothing of his own right except after his justice has been satisfied."⁴³

In his "Reply" to the Calvinist Junius, Arminius argues that God's justice can be upheld only if either the sinner is punished or a divine-human mediator is punished in the sinner's place. The latter is the more noble way, the way of the gospel rather than of the law.

God's justice can be declared by the exaction of punishment from those who have sinned: the same justice can also be declared by the exaction of the same punishment from him who has offered himself according to God's will as bail and surety for sinners. [He cites 2 Cor 5:21, "He hath made Him (to be) sin for us, who knew no sin."] This way is more excellent and more noble than the other: for thereby it is more clearly manifested how greatly God abhors sin."⁴⁴

God's justice, as exhibited in either the legal way of punishing the sinner, or the evangelical way of punishing Christ in the sinner's place, is inflexible and rigorous. Thus, individuals can receive eternal life only when God "impose[s] upon His son the punishment due from sinners, and taken away from them, to be borne and paid in full by Him."⁴⁵ In this way, Arminius explains, "the rigour of inflexible justice was declared, which could not pardon sin, even to the interceding Son, except the penalty were fully paid."⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid. See also "Declaration of Sentiments" 1.653: "The third Divine decree is that by which God decreed to administer in a sufficient and efficacious manner the means which were necessary for repentance and faith; and to have such administration instituted (1.) according to the Divine Wisdom, by which God knows what is proper and becoming both to his mercy and his severity, and (2.) according to Divine Justice, by which He is prepared to adopt whatever his wisdom may prescribe and put it in execution."

⁴³ Ibid. 2.378–79, Private Disputation 34, "On the Restoration of Man." See also Public Disputation 1, "On the Authority and Certainty of the Sacred Scriptures" 2.86: "the admirable attempting [*sic*] of the justice of God by which he loves righteousness and hates iniquity, and his equity by which he administers all things, with his mercy in Christ our propitiation."

⁴⁴ Ibid. 3.195, "Conference with Junius."

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. With regard to rigor and inflexibility, see also Oration IV, "On the Priesthood of Christ" (1.409), where Arminius speaks of "the invariable rule of Divine Justice." It is remarkable, after having read the statements above, how theologians for centuries have misread (or, more likely, not read) Arminius in ways similar to the following views of the eminent historical theologian H. D.

Arminius's emphasis on the importance of God's maintaining his love for his own justice is borne out strongly in an interesting passage from his "Declaration of Sentiments." Arminius is arguing against the Calvinistic idea of election to faith rather than in view of faith or in view of one's union with Christ. He believes that this concept involves God settling his elective love on people without regard to Christ's work or one's participation in it. He argues that this schema is inconsistent with God's justice "because it affirms, that God has absolutely willed to save certain individual men, and has decreed their salvation without having the least regard to righteousness or obedience: The proper inference from which, is, that God loves such men far more than his own justice [or righteousness.]"⁴⁷

For Arminius, divine justice is at the essence of the divine nature. In his "Examination of Perkins's Pamphlet," Arminius argues against the Calvinistic doctrine of divine reprobation by saying that it impugns the justice of God. In making that argument, Arminius emphasizes that divine justice is not something outside of God but arises from his own holy nature:

"God," indeed, "is not bound by created laws," but He is a law to Himself; for He is Justice itself. And that law according to which it is not allowable to inflict punishment on any one who is not deserving of it, is not created, nor made by men, nor does it hold any such place amongst men; but it is the eternal law, and unmoveable Divine justice, to which God is bound by the immutability of His own nature and justice.⁴⁸

IV. DIVINE WRATH

For Arminius, divine justice intertwines with three central concepts: divine wrath, satisfaction, and payment. Wrath is an expression of divine justice against humanity's violation of divine law and gospel. Sinners' violation of the law provokes God's wrath and brings punishment. Sinners' rejection of the gospel causes God's wrath to abide on them, "preventing the remission of punishment."⁴⁹ This wrath abides on all people, owing to the imputation of Adam's sin to the human race.⁵⁰ The effect of God's wrath on

McDonald, who repeated the oft-stated maxim that certain "latent" ideas in Arminius's doctrine of atonement are "made fundamental in later Arminian statements. There is, first, the view that Christ's expiatory sacrifice was not an equivalent for the punishment due to sin. The sacrifice was not the payment of a debt, nor was it a complete satisfaction for sin." McDonald continues to discuss these ideas "latent" in Arminius: "What Christ did on the cross was not to bear the penalty for sin." His sufferings are "a substitute for a penalty." "Christ did not endure the full penalty due to sin . . . he did not make a complete atonement for sin by bearing the full penalty" (H. D. McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985] 200–201). Unfortunately, secondary sources for four centuries, both Calvinist and Arminian, have been replete with such lack of attention to Arminius's actual statements on atonement and a host of other doctrines (for examples, see Pinson, "Will the Real Arminius Please Stand Up?").

⁴⁷ Ibid. 1.624, "Declaration of Sentiments, On Predestination."

⁴⁸ Ibid. 3.357, "Examination of Perkins's Pamphlet."

⁴⁹ Ibid. 2.157, Public Disputation 8, "On Actual Sins"; see also Public Disputation 7, "On the First Sin of the First Man."

⁵⁰ Public Disputation 8, "On Actual Sins"; see also Public Disputation 7, "On the First Sin of the First Man."

sinful humanity is divine punishment: "Punishment was consequent on guilt and the divine wrath; the equity of this punishment is from guilt, the infliction of it is by wrath."⁵¹

In his Private Disputation 20, "On the Attributes of God Which Come to Be Considered under His Will," Arminius states that love "is an affection of union in God, whose objects are not only God himself and the good of justice, but also the creature, imitating or related to God."⁵² Hatred, on the contrary, "is an affection of separation in God" whose object is "injustice or unrighteousness."⁵³ God loves his own nature and thus his justice and so is naturally repulsed by injustice or human sin. In this disputation, Arminius makes a distinction that he does not explicitly make in his other writings. He describes God's love for the creature and the creature's blessedness as secondary to his love of his essential nature and justice. Still, since he hates the misery wrought in the creature by sin, God desires to find a way to remove it. Yet for the creature that persists in unrighteousness, God hates the creature and loves his misery. However, this hatred does not arise from God's free will but from "natural necessity."⁵⁴ In other words, God's love for human beings provides a way for them to escape the hatred for their sin that arises necessarily from his holy nature. God's act of love toward human beings in their sin is one of "deliverance from sin through the remission and the mortification of sin. And this progress of goodness is denominated mercy, which is an affection for giving succour to a man in misery, sin presenting no obstacle."⁵⁵

V. SATISFACTION

The concept of satisfaction plays a vital role in Arminius's view of divine justice. He portrays God as a judge who must sentence individuals to eternal death if they do not meet his requirements. Arminius employs the analogy of "a judge making an estimate in his own mind of the deed and of the author of it, and according to that estimate forming a judgment and pronouncing sentence."⁵⁶ In his Disputation 48, "On Justification," Arminius declares that God as judge demands satisfaction:

We say, that "it is the act of God as a judge," who though as the supreme legislator he could have issued regulations concerning his law, and actually did issue them, yet has not administered this direction through the absolute plenitude

⁵¹ Ibid. 2.374; Private Disputation 31, "On the Effects of the Sin of Our First Parents. On punishment, see also Private Disputation 19, "On the Various Distinctions of the Will of God": "Thus he wills the evils of punishment, because he chooses that the order of justice be preserved in punishment, rather than that a sinning creature should escape punishment, though this impunity might be for the good of the creature" (2.346).

⁵² Ibid. 2.347, Private Disputation 20, "On the Attributes of God Which Come to Be Considered under His Will. And, First, on Those Which Have an Analogy to the Affections or Passions in Rational Creatures."

⁵³ Ibid. 2.348.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 2.256, Public Disputation 19, "On the Justification of Man before God."

of infinite power, but contained himself within the bounds of justice which he demonstrated by two methods, First, because God would not justify, except as justification was preceded by reconciliation and satisfaction made through Christ in his blood; Secondly, because he would not justify any except those who acknowledged their sins and believed in Christ.⁵⁷

However, the satisfaction demanded by the divine judge does not mitigate divine mercy. Arminius responds to opponents of penal satisfaction who held that God's acceptance of sinners according to the rigor of his justice would mitigate the mercifulness of his salvific action. Arminius replies that, when he says Christ's reconciliatory work is gracious and merciful, he says it

not with respect to Christ, as if the Father, through grace as distinguished from strict and rigid justice, had accepted the obedience of Christ for righteousness, but with respect to us, both because God, through his gracious mercy towards us, has made Christ to be sin for us, and righteousness to us, that we might be the righteousness of God in him, and because he has placed communion with Christ in the faith of the gospel, and has set forth Christ as a propitiation through faith.⁵⁸

This divine justice must be satisfied. As cited above, God "rendered satisfaction to his love for justice and to his hatred against sin, when he imposed on his Son the office of Mediator by the shedding of his blood and by the suffering of death."⁵⁹ There is no satisfaction, Arminius explains, except through "the obedience of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the justice of God can be satisfied either for sin or for its punishment, even for the very least of either."⁶⁰ Arminius speaks of God as having the "right" to demand satisfaction from sinners "for the injuries which He has sustained" because of their sin. God is the "Divine Person in whose hands rest the right" to receive satisfaction for his justice. It is not fitting, Arminius argues, that God should "recede . . . or resign any part of it," because of "the rigid inflexibility of his justice, according to which he hates iniquity and does not permit a wicked person to dwell in his presence."⁶¹

Arminius also argues that the satisfaction made by Christ in his reconciling work was a satisfaction of the divine law. This is another way Arminius employs to say that the work of Christ satisfies the divine justice. In his Disputation 12, "The Law of God," Arminius argues that the primary use of the law is that human beings "might perform it, and by its performance might be justified, and might 'of debt' receive the reward which was promised through it (Rom. ii. 13; x, 5; iv, 4)."⁶² Of course, since they cannot perform it, Arminius stresses, Christ the mediator must perform it on their behalf. God's law, Arminius explains, is twofold, consisting of obedience and punishment. "That of obedience is first and absolute: that of punishment is the later,

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 2.06, Private Disputation 48, "On Justification."

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 2.221, Public Disputation 14, "On the Office of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 2.241, Public Disputation 17, "On Repentance."

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 1.12–13, Oration, "On the Priesthood of Christ."

⁶² *Ibid.* 2.198, Public Disputation 12, "On the Law of God."

and does not take place except when obedience has not been rendered.”⁶³ Thus, he avers, there is a “twofold satisfaction of the law: one, by which the obedience prescribed by the law is rendered; the other, by which the punishment imposed by the law on disobedience is suffered. He who fulfills [satisfies] the one is free from the other requirement of the law. He, therefore, who undergoes the punishment [pays the penalty] enacted by the law is thereupon freed from the obligation of rendering obedience. This is true in general of every sort of punishment.”⁶⁴

VI. PAYMENT

In various writings, Arminius uses motifs common in Reformed circles to describe this satisfaction of the divine justice. The most common among these are “paying the debt,” “paying the penalty,” and “paying the price” of sin. We have already mentioned Arminius’s discussion, in his oration “On the Priesthood of Christ,” of God’s right to demand satisfaction for injuries against himself (that is, his justice). In that same passage, he describes these injuries as “debt” that sinners must pay if God is to reconcile them to himself.⁶⁵

The first of those relations which subsist between God and men, has respect to something given and something received. The latter requires another relation supplementary to itself—a relation which taking its commencement from men, may terminate in God; and that is, an acknowledgment of a benefit received, to the honour of the munificent Donor. It is also a debt, due on account of a benefit already conferred, but which is not to be paid except on the demand and according to the regulation of the Giver; whose intention it has always been, that the will of a creature should not be the measure of his honour.⁶⁶

In the passage cited above from his “Examination of Perkins’s Pamphlet,” Arminius uses the imagery of “paying the penalty,” that is, suffering the punishment that is due for sins.⁶⁷ Of course, Arminius argues, no human being can pay this penalty. It must be paid by another—a sinless priest.⁶⁸

However, the most common imagery Arminius uses in describing the satisfaction of divine justice made in the work of Christ is the payment of the price of redemption. He describes Christ as “pay[ing] the price of redemption for sins by suffering the punishment due to them.”⁶⁹ He speaks of

⁶³ Ibid. 3.477, Examination of William Perkins’s Pamphlet on the Mode and Order of Predestination.

⁶⁴ Ibid. The bracketed words are alternate translations from William Bagnall’s translation in the Boston edition of Arminius’s *Works*.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 1.406, Oration IV, “On the Priesthood of Christ.” See also Public Disputation 12, “On the Law of God” (2.198).

⁶⁶ Ibid. 1.406.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 3.477, Examination of William Perkins’s Pamphlet on the Mode and Order of Predestination.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 1.415, Oration IV, “On the Priesthood of Christ.”

⁶⁹ Ibid. 1.419. Arminius’s use of the imagery of paying a price is consistent with Francis Turretin’s approach in Topic 14, question 10 of *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (trans. George Msgrave Giger; ed. James T. Dennison Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994) 2.417–26.

“the price of our redemption paid by Christ,” God being the one “who receives that price.”⁷⁰ While Arminius occasionally uses the word “ransom” and utilizes ransom imagery in his doctrine of the work of Christ, he usually uses it without comment. He never speaks, for example, of a price paid to the devil. Rather, God the Father is the person who receives the price of redemption from the divine Son.⁷¹ In his “Oration on the Priesthood of Christ,” Arminius utilizes his paying the price imagery in a passage that encapsulates his approach to the work of Christ. He explains that God required of Christ “that he should lay down his soul as a victim in sacrifice for sin, (*Isa. liii. 11*) that he should give his flesh for the light of the world, (*John vi. 51*) and that he should pay the price of redemption for the sins and the captivity of the human race.”⁷²

VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Arminius asserts that God’s wisdom allowed his justice and mercy both to maintain their interests in the imposition of Christ’s priesthood. The only individual who could fulfill the duties of this priesthood was a sinless person who was fully human and fully divine. Arminius’s understanding of priestly sacrifice is intimately entwined with his emphasis on the sinfulness of humanity and the inflexible justice of God. The inexorable demands of divine justice cannot be set aside without doing damage to the divine essence. However, mercy requires a way for people to be released from the sufferings of divine punishment that results from human sin. Thus, in his wisdom, God the Son offers Himself as divine-human priest-sacrifice to offer a way out of the divine wrath while not requiring a relaxation of the divine justice. He offers an expiatory or propitiatory sacrifice. Such a voluntary propitiation, Arminius contends, is necessary to appease the divine justice. Furthermore, Arminius stresses that the oblation—the offering—that Christ as priest makes to God must be a “human victim.” Yet the priest-sacrifice must be a divine being to qualify as priest.

Christ, in his execution of the role of priesthood, becomes the human victim that is offered up to God to appease his justice. Indeed, as the priest-sacrifice,

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 3.74, Sixth Proposition of Arminius: Arminius’s Reply, or Consideration of [Junius’s] Answer to the Sixth Proposition.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.* 1.46, Oration IV, “On the Priesthood of Christ.” Elsewhere, Arminius favorably quotes Prosper of Aquitaine to the effect that “the blood of Jesus Christ is the price paid for the whole world” (Article 12). See also Public Disputation 20, “On Christian Liberty”: “The external cause [of Christian liberty] is the ransom, or the price of redemption, and the satisfaction, which Christ has paid. (Rom. v. 6–21; vii, 2, 3)”; Private Disputation 79, “On the Sixth Precept,” where Arminius says that Christians “have been redeemed by Christ with a price”; his “Letter to John Uytenbogard”: “that blood by which God hath redeemed the church unto himself, which is the price of redemption”; Public Disputation 14, “On the Offices of Our Lord Jesus Christ”: “All these blessings really flow from the sacerdotal functions of Christ; because he hath offered to God the true price of redemption for us, by which He has satisfied Divine justice, and interposed himself between us and the Father, who was justly angry on account of our sins; and has rendered Him placable to us. (*1 Tim. ii. 6; Matt. xx. 28*).”

he offers himself up as an oblation to God. This oblation, this offering, consists of the sacrifice of his body—his shedding of blood and subsequent death. Arminius describes this oblation as a payment that Christ renders to God as the price of redemption for human sin. In Christ's oblation, Arminius argues, Christ as priest and sacrifice suffers the divine punishment that is due for human sin. This suffering constitutes the satisfaction or payment to the divine justice for redemption of humans from sin, guilt, and wrath. Thus, Arminius presents an understanding of atonement in the context of his view of the priestly office of Jesus Christ that is consistent with the penal-substitution motifs regnant in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Reformed theology.