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Review Essay (Part Two): John Calvin on the Death of Christ and the Reformation's Forgotten Doctrine of Universal Vicarious Satisfaction: A Review and Critique of Tom Nettles' Chapter in Whomever He Wills¹

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Evaluation and Response

The "Price of Redemption" Voided by Unbelief

There are many statements within Calvin's writings which speak of the price of redemption being cancelled or abolished and those for whom the redemptive price was given perishing in hell. For Calvin, the "price" of redemption refers to Christ's death. Some examples from Calvin:

He gave himself. No words can properly express what this means; for who can find language to declare the excellency of the Son of God? Yet he it is who gave himself as a *price for our redemption*. Atonements, cleansing, satisfaction, and all the benefits which we derive from the death of Christ, are here represented. The words for me, are very emphatic. It will not be enough for any man to contemplate Christ as having *died for the salvation of the world*, unless he has experienced the consequences of this death, and is enabled to claim it as his own (Calvin on *Galatians 2:20*, emphasis added).

It is this laying down of Christ's life as a redemptive price which forms the foundation for the following class of statements so prevalent in Calvin's writings:

Again when we see a man scourged at God's hand as fore as may be: let us consider not only that he was created after the image of God: but also that he is our neighbor, and in manner all one with us. We be all of one nature, all one flesh, all one mankind, so as it may be said that we be issued all out of one selfsame spring. [Since] it is so, ought we not to have consideration one of another? I see moreover *a poor soul that is going to destruction*: ought I not to pity him and to help him if it lie in my power? . . . Then we bethink ourselves, sure either we must needs to be hard-hearted and dull-witted, or else we consider thus, behold a man that is formed after the image of God, he is of the selfsame nature that I am, and again behold *a soul that was purchased with the blood of the Son*

¹Editor's Note: This is the second part of a two-part review essay. For part one, see *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 55, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 139-58.

*of God if the same perish ought not we be grieved?*²

For Calvin, this price of redemption could be voided or abolished. For example, Calvin:

But when we hear that they which disguise the word of God in such sort, as merchants of our souls, (as S. Peter also says) (1 Pet 2:2) and make traffic of us and of our salvation and make no bones at it, *to cast us headlong into hell, yea, and to abolish the price that was given for our redemption, it is certain that they destroy souls* and besides that, make a mock of the blood of our Lord.³

Rainbow, when confronted with Calvin's language of the price of redemption being abolished attempts to solve the apparent dilemma by asserting:

While stating that unfaithful pastors are charged with the souls they lose, and are guilty of sacrilege for profaning the blood of Christ, and have undone Christ's redemption . . . So the distinction must be made between Calvin's theological perspective of the church, grounded in election, and his pastoral perspective of the church, grounded in the judgment of charity, from which the pastor's marching orders come. . . . While stating that unfaithful pastors are charged with the souls they lose, and are guilty of sacrilege for profaning the blood of Christ, and have undone Christ's redemption . . . Calvin added "as much as in them lies" (*quantum in se est*). . . . Apostates, he said, are those who, "as much as is in them" . . . crucify the Son of God again. . . . They are, from the point of view of their intention, and from the point of view of the judgment of charity and pastoral practice, destroying the work of Christ.⁴

Though there is some truth to what Rainbow says, it fails to do justice to the then current theological climate, and that of subsequent generations. In terms of the wider picture of Reformation theology, the standard teaching was that Christ, in laying down a price of redemption for all mankind, was said to have *redeemed* all mankind. Musculus:

Secondly, we must see from whence *mankind is redeemed*. Redemption takes no place in men that be at liberty, as another giving life again to them which be alive. For from whence should he be redeemed which is under bondage to no body. But mankind is redeemed. Which gave himself (says the Apostle) *the price of redemption for all men* (1 Timoth. 2.). *Ergo all mankind was subject unto bondage, from which it is redeemed.*⁵

Bullinger confirms the same idea:

Wherefore our Lord Jesus Christ, being both God and man, was a fit Mediator for both parties. Which thing the apostle witnessing saith: "One God, and one Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

²John Calvin, *Sermons on Job* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993), 333. Emphasis added.

³Calvin, *Sermons on Timothy*, 572-573.

⁴Rainbow, *Will of God and The Cross*, 167, 169.

⁵Musculus, *Common Places of Christian Religion*, 304, 305. Emphasis added.

who gave himself the price of redemption for all [1 Tim 2:5, 6.]⁶

And again:

There is one God, and one reconciler (or mediator) of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, *who gave himself the price (or ransom) for the redemption of all* [1 Tim 2.].⁷

Zwingli affirmed the same doctrine:

In the same way also our sins are forgiven and we may come to God on the strength and efficacy of the suffering which Christ endured once, *for us and all persons*. So costly and precious it is before God that it has become for all eternity the pledge and *price for all humankind* by which alone they may come to God.⁸

If we look to Reformed writers after Calvin, we can see an even clearer explication of this point. For example, the Elizabethan puritan, William Perkins, quoting Pope Innocent, affirmed,

Christ's blood was shed effectually for those only he had predestined, *but for all men in regard of sufficiency*: for the shedding of the blood of that just one for the unjust, was so rich in *price*, that if everyone had believed in the redeemer, none at all had been held captive of the devil.⁹

Perkins goes on to state,

Whereas they [the fathers] write that *Christ redeemed all men and the world*, their meaning is, that he did it according to the sufficiency, and the common cause, and common nature of all, which Christ did take upon him: and not effectually, on God's part. This very thing does Prosper make plain: 'All men' [says he], 'are rightly said to be redeemed, in respect of the one nature of all, and the one cause of all, which our Lord did truly take upon him: and yet all are not delivered from captivity.' The propriety of redemption without doubt belongs unto them for whom the prince of this world is sent abroad—whose death was not so bestowed for mankind, as should also pertain unto the

⁶Bullinger, *Decades*, 1:131. Emphasis added.

⁷Ibid., 2:214-215. Emphasis added.

⁸Huldrych Zwingli, "Exposition and Basis of the Conclusions or Articles Published by Huldrych Zwingli, 29 January 1523," in *Writings*, trans. E.J. Furcha (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1984), 1:94. Emphasis added.

⁹William Perkins, *A Christian and Plaine Treatise of the Manner and Order of Predestination, and of the Largenes of Gods Grace* (London, 1606), 22. Emphasis and bracketed insert added. Jonathan Moore, in his *English Hypothetical Universalism; John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 27-68, argues that Perkins was a strict particularist in terms of the extent of the satisfaction. This is incorrect, however. It is true that Perkins was a transitional theologian moving in the direction of what we now have come to know as limited satisfaction or strict particularism, yet Perkins retained the classical medieval commitment to a universal price of redemption for all men. While it is admitted that Perkins' commitment to the medieval synthesis is slender, nonetheless, to characterize Perkins as a "norming" example of strict particularism is inaccurate and misleading. It is better to characterize him as a transitional theologian with respect to the extent of the satisfaction.

redemption of them, who were not to be regenerated.¹⁰

This thought is further asserted by the later Jacobean puritan, William Fenner who asserted, “for God intended his Son generally for mankind, to lay down a sufficient price to the remission of sins for the same, even for the reprobate men.”¹¹ Finally, one more author from a later period should make the point clear. In his exposition of 2 Peter 2:1, Archibald Symson sets out three non-mutually exclusive explanations. The first notes that the passage does not prove that Christ died for the reprobate absolutely or effectually. The second is that we are always to invoke a judgment of charity to those within the church who embrace and profess the Christian faith. The third remark, however, is the most interesting one:

Or finally in regard that in a large sense, all to whom the Gospel comes may be said to be bought by him; yea all men because the price by him paid, is sufficient to ransom all; neither is it by any default therein, any perish, but through their own wickedness and unbelief.¹²

From the above, certain central themes can be identified. First, we can see from Zwingli, Bullinger, and Musculus that there was an existent doctrine of universal redemption of all men which was accomplished by the act of laying down the price of redemption for all men. This theological idea was adopted and developed by later Reformed theologians—all of whom preceded Amyraut and the Amyraldian question. For Perkins, Christ shed his blood for all men, as to the sufficiency of the satisfaction, thereby laying down a price for all men, that is, for their sufficient redemption. What prevents all men from being saved is unbelief. Fenner, in more sophisticated language, affirms that Christ, by way of a general intention, laid down a sufficient price for all men. And from Symson, the same sentiment is present: to lay down a price of redemption for a person was to have redeemed that person. What voids the proper and full application of this redemption for both Perkins and Symson is unbelief. It was only post-Calvin that the idea of Christ properly or actually laying down a redemptive price for all men was denied.

Bringing this back to Rainbow and Nettles, while it is true that the apostate can void, “as much as is in them” the redemptive price *for them*, this is essentially all that Calvin is stressing. Unbelief voids the application of the benefit of Christ’s death.¹³ However, it would be wrong to claim from this that, for Calvin, the laying down of the price of redemption for those apostates and unbelievers was, itself, only a matter of human phenomenology. And so, Rainbow’s analysis, once again, treats Calvin as an isolated and a contextualized theologian. On the other hand, the

¹⁰Ibid., 105-106.

¹¹William Fenner, “Hidden Manna: Or The Mystery of Saving Grace,” in *The Works of W. Fenner. B. of Divinity* (Printed by E. Tyler for I. Stafford at the George near Fleet-Bridge, 1658), 388. Emphasis added.

¹²A. Symson, *An Exposition upon the Second Epistle General of Saint Peter: Plainly and Pithily Handled* (London: T. Cotes, 1632), 234. Symson’s name is sometimes spelled Simson or Simpson.

¹³In another place, Calvin says, “For though Christ has already come as the Redeemer of the world, *yet we know that this benefit is not come to all, and why? Because many through unbelief close the door against God and his grace through Christ.* Hence the faithful alone really know that God has spoken, and really partake of his favor, and for this reason, because they hear his voice; that is, they first by faith receive what God offers, and then they fall not away from his truth, but continue in the obedience of faith to the end” (Calvin, on *Zechariah* 6:15).

interpretation of Calvin, which locates his theological expression in the same stream as that of Zwingli, Bullinger, Musculus, and others, provides a better explanatory paradigm for understanding Calvin's theology. Seen in this way, Calvin held that Christ actually had redeemed all men generally and particularly, insofar as Christ had actually laid down a full redemption price for all men. However, in terms of application, the benefit of this price is voided by personal unbelief.

Calvin on "All," "Classes," and "World"

Part of the modern insistence that Calvin believed in a limited satisfaction is the belief that in 1 Tim 2:4-6, he opted for a reading of these verses which does not lend support to an unlimited satisfaction. Rainbow, for his part, further argues that the apparent universalism in Calvin's expression is just that, *apparent*. Nettles explains:

Calvin's discussion of 1 Timothy 2 gives a highly pertinent bridge to this discussion. In this place he quite clearly asserts that Paul does not mean each and every individual by his use of the words "all" and "world." Confronted with the challenge that the phrase, "willeth that all men be saved" contradicts predestination, Calvin turned aside that application of the phrase. Calvin believed that Paul referred to "classes and not of individuals." . . . In putting forth his interpretation, Calvin insisted that the word *all* should "always be referred to classes of men but never to individuals" (305).

The suggestion seems to be, then, that for Calvin, "all" functioned simply to denote classes or peoples as a general statement. Nettles further hints at this when he later adds,

That all men, that is, both Jew and Gentile, all classes and nations of men, are included in Christ's sacrifice and intercession justified Paul's mission to the Gentiles and calls for the universal proclamation of Christ as the only Savior of the world, freely available for all that will come to Him. By *all* Calvin referred to the New Covenant provision that brought the Messiah to people of every tongue, and tribe, and nation, none of them being omitted—both circumcision and uncircumcision may claim the Messiah as theirs for there is one Mediator between God and Man (306).

Thus Calvin, according to Nettles, only meant to posit a general or indefinite qualitative statement regarding the death of Christ, whereby, phenomenologically no person is to "view" himself qualitatively excluded from this position. "All," for Calvin, would have no real quantitative extension and never mean that Christ literally died for the sins of all men. In order to evaluate this claim, one must first survey Calvin's relevant statements on this verse range:

But I say nothing on that subject, because it has nothing to do with this passage; for the Apostle simply means, *that there is no people and no rank in the world that is excluded from salvation*; because God wishes that the gospel should be proclaimed to *all without exception*. Now the preaching of the gospel gives life; and hence he justly concludes that God invites all equally to partake salvation. But the present discourse relates to *classes*

*of men, and not to individual persons;*¹⁴ for his sole object is, to include in this number princes and foreign nations. That God wishes the doctrine of salvation to be enjoyed by them as well as others, is evident from the passages already quoted, and from other passages of a similar nature. . . . And one Mediator between God and men. This clause is of a similar import with the former; for, as there is one God, the Creator and Father of all, so he says that there is but one Mediator, through whom we have access to the Father; and that this Mediator was given, *not only to one nation, or to a small number of persons of some particular rank, but to all*, because the fruit of the sacrifice, by which he made atonement for sins, *extends* [Latin: *pertinere*] *to all*. More especially because a large portion of the world was at that time alienated from God, he expressly mentions the Mediator, through whom they that were afar off now approach. The universal term all must always be referred to classes: of men, and not to persons;¹⁵ as if he had said, that not only Jews, but Gentiles also, not only persons of humble rank, but princes also, were redeemed by the death of Christ. Since, therefore, he wishes the benefit of his death to be common to all, an insult is offered to him by those who, by their opinion, shut out any person from the hope of salvation (Calvin on 1 Timothy 2:4-5, emphasis added).

Using different language:

Who does not see that the reference is to orders of men rather than individual men? Nor indeed does the distinction lack substantial ground: what is meant is not individuals of nations but nations of individuals.¹⁶ At any rate, the context makes it clear that no other *will of God is intended than that which appears in the external preaching of the Gospel*. Thus Paul means that God wills the salvation of all whom He mercifully invites by preaching to Christ.¹⁷

On 1 Tim 2:4, Calvin in his *Institutes* says, “By this, Paul surely means only that God has not closed the way unto salvation to any order of men; rather, he has so poured out his mercy that he would have none without it.”¹⁸

When we read Calvin’s language of classes and orders, we must ask ourselves, “Did Calvin effectively mean *some men of all kinds*, or did he mean *all men of every kind*?”¹⁹ The idea that Paul, and by extension Calvin, meant some of all kinds of men

¹⁴Latin: *At de hominum generibus, non singulis personis, sermo est*. See John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatum, Joannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, ed. G. Braum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss (Brunsvigae: Apud C.A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1863-1900), 52:268.

¹⁵Latin: *Particula universalis semper ad hominum genera referri debet, non ad personas: ac si dixisset, non solos Iudaeos, sed gentiles quoque: non solos plebeios, sed etiam principes redemptos esse morte*. See Calvin, *Calvini Opera*, 52:270.

¹⁶Latin: *Non singulos generum, sed genera singulorum notari*. See Calvin, *Calvini Opera*, 52:303-04.

¹⁷John Calvin, *The Eternal Predestination of God* (London: James Clark, 1961), 108-109. Emphasis added. See also, John Calvin, *The Secret Providence of God*, trans. by John Lillie (New York: Carter Brothers, 1840), 28-29.

¹⁸John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:984.

¹⁹One might insist that by the terms “classes” and “orders” Calvin means only

dates back to Augustine. Augustine adopted the reading that the will of God in view here is the secret will. This assumption forced him to interpret the phrase “all men” as something like, all kinds of men, or men of all kinds of classes and races, not actually all men quantitatively. Thus, for Augustine, “all men” has a qualitative emphasis. The reader needs to understand that, for Calvin, the will of God is the revealed will, not the secret. It is the will “made known in the Gospel”²⁰ such that, for Calvin, recourse to Augustine’s strategy is unnecessary.

Given this, it would be impossible for Calvin to imagine that by the revealed will, God only desires the salvation of men (in abstraction) of every kind. The claim that Calvin meant only men of all kinds, or abstract classes, itself fails to attend to Calvin’s own expression from all of his comments on this passage. From his sermons on 1 Tim 2:4-6, Calvin expressly says,

Yet notwithstanding, (as we have here exhorted) let us not leave off, to pray for all men in general: For S. Paul shows us, *that God will have all men be saved*, that is to say all people and all nations. And therefore we must not settle ourselves in such sort upon the diversity which is seen amongst men, that we forget *that God has made us all in his image and likeness*, that we are his workmanship, that he may stretch forth his goodness over them which are at this day far from him, as we have a good proof of it.²¹

For Calvin, the phrase “all people” or “all nations” is distributed to mean all men of all people and all nations. Note also Calvin’s reference to all men being “image bearers” which is his way of emphasizing our equality as created children of God. Calvin makes the point that no one is to be excluded, nor is any man to exclude themselves, because the gospel is to be preached to all without exception. Indeed, Calvin notes that the gospel is not to be limited to a small number of individuals, or only to one nation, but to all. The restrictive reading of Calvin, in effect, reverses Calvin’s points. Implied in the restrictive reading is the idea that God wills that some men, or some individuals of all nations to be saved, which is the idea Calvin seeks to exclude when he says, “what is meant is not individuals of nations,” but “nations of individuals.” That is, whole collections of particulars. When Calvin refers to “individuals” his intent is to exclude the idea of “this person, but not that person.”

abstractions, not actual particulars. Theologically, the problem with this approach is that it has the will of God, itself, terminating upon abstractions or qualities and not on any specific persons. Turretin rightly rejects this idea: “The will of God is not indeed terminated on the classes, but on the singulars collected from them, and ought not therefore to be carried further to individuals. Thus when we say that we must pray for any people, we do not wish to pray for states and conditions of men, but for the undivided singulars in each class; not definitely for individuals, but indefinitely for any people; not so much positively (as if we should include all and particular persons in our prayers) as negatively (because we exclude no one precisely from our prayers)” (Turretin, *Institutes of Eclentic Theology*, 1:409-410). Even for Turretin, the term “individuals” denotes the equivalent of, “this man but not that man.” Turretin goes on to insist that Paul’s actual meaning is “some men of all kinds,” and not simply, “men of all kinds.” The problem is underscored by the fact that we do not pray for kinds of men, but actual particular men of every kind. Hence, we do not pray for abstractions either.

²⁰See also Calvin’s use of the same expression in his comments on 2 Pet 3:9 where he identifies the will of God in view as the revealed will by which God desires the salvation of the whole human race.

²¹Calvin, *Sermons on Timothy*, 160.

The will of God (namely, the will of God revealed in the gospel) is not to be limited to this or that individual, to the exclusion of others, but is to be extended to all persons in a class.

There are other examples of this juxtaposition in Calvin's writings. In each case, the stress is on the rejection of the idea of one person, to the exclusion of others, or as opposed to the whole class. Calvin writes,

And as the great majority of men, despising all modesty, rush headlong into indiscriminate licentiousness, *the prophet speaks not only of individual men, but of whole nations*;²² in other words, he affirms, that however men may conspire among themselves, and determine to attempt this or that with great hosts, yet shall their purposes be brought to nought, because it is as easy for God to scatter multitudes as to restrain a few (Calvin on *Psalms*, 33:10, emphasis added).

Rather, he is merely taking away arrogance and rash overconfidence in our own strength so that after the Jews have been rejected, the Gentiles, received into their place, may not exult more wildly. Yet, he there not only addresses believers but in his prayer includes also the hypocrites, who gloried only in outward show. *And he does not admonish individual men, but makes a comparison between Jews and Gentiles*;²³ and he shows that the Jews in being rejected underwent the just punishments of their unbelief and ingratitude (Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.22, emphasis added).

We therefore teach that faithful ministers are now not permitted to coin any new doctrine, but that they are simply to cleave to that doctrine to which God has subjected all men without exception. When I say this, I mean to show what is permitted *not only to individual men but to the whole church as well* (Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.8.9, emphasis added).²⁴

In these three examples, Calvin is not alluding to "classes" as abstractions devoid of particulars. Rather, his intent is to prevent or deny the exclusion of "individuals" as proper members of the class. When Calvin says, "not to individuals," but "to classes," as a plural, he means, "not to this or that man," to the exclusion of others, but "to all men of every class," inclusively. The problem for Nettles, along with Nicole, Helm, and Rainbow is that they read Calvin uncritically as if he were asserting Augustine's hermeneutic, when a more thorough investigation reveals otherwise. When read in the context of his entire corpus, there is no evidence of limited satisfaction in Calvin's comments on these verses. Rather, there is evidence for unlimited satisfaction. Thus, Calvin says, "the fruit of the sacrifice, by which he made atonement for sins, extends to all," and, "Since, therefore, he [Christ] wishes the benefit of his death to be common to all an insult is offered to him by those who,

²²Latin: *Imo quia maior hominum pars contempta modestia, in confusam licentiam fertur, non de singulis tantum hominibus, sed de totis populis loquitur propheta, ac si diceret.* See Calvin, *Calvini Opera*, 31:329.

²³Latin: *Neque enim singulos homines admonet, sed comparatione inter Iudaeos et gentes posita.* See Calvin, *Calvini Opera*, 2:416.

²⁴Latin: *Hoc quum dico, non tantum ostendere volo quid singulis hominibus liceat, sed quid etiam universae ecclesiae.* Calvin, *Calvini Opera*, 2:852.

by their opinion, shut out any person from the hope of salvation.”²⁵

In each case, when Calvin refers to “all,” he means all people of every kind or class or order. “All” for Calvin functions in this inclusive quantitative and qualitative sense. We can see from Calvin’s writings, explicit times when he abandons this alleged rule. For example, Calvin on 2 Pet 3:9, adopts a universal reading that God desires the salvation of all men, the whole human race. And in another place, Calvin specifically says that by the term “world” he expressly means all mankind. For example, Calvin writes,

Whenever, therefore, we hear this designation applied to the devil, let us be ashamed of our miserable condition; for, whatever may be the pride of men, they are the slaves of the devil, till they are regenerated by the Spirit of Christ; for *under the term world is here included the whole human race* (Calvin on *John*, 14:30, emphasis added).

“But that the world may know.” . . . What chiefly deserves our attention is, that the decree of God is here placed in the highest rank; that we may not suppose that Christ was dragged to death by the violence of Satan, in such a manner that anything happened contrary to the purpose of God. It was *God who appointed his Son to be the Propitiation, and who determined that the sins of the world should be expiated by his death* (Calvin, *John*, 14:31, emphasis added).²⁶

Calvin on Expiation and Intercession

Nettles then expands his argument to assert that for Calvin the expiation and the intercession refer to the same group of people:

The effect of Christ’s expiation in His intercession is the seamless continuation of His favor, begun on the cross, toward those that the Father gave Him. Because of this He is called both our advocate and our propitiation for “he who procures grace for us must be furnished with a sacrifice.” . . . If Christ intercedes for us, then He has died for us; if He died for us, then He certainly will intercede for us. Since He has done the greater in dying, He cannot fail to do the lesser in interceding (307).

The problem is that neither this nor any of the quotations adduced by Nettles indicate that, for Calvin, Christ’s expiation and intercession respect the same group of people. While Calvin grounds the intercession in the expiation, he does not imply any limitation of the expiation to the scope of the intercession. For “whose sakes” does Christ intercede in Calvin’s mind? For Calvin, it is for the sake of believers. Calvin never attempts to enlist the scope of the intercession to limit the scope of the satisfaction.

One hopes that Nettles is not engaging in the fallacy of affirming the

²⁵Calvin, *1 Timothy*, 2:4-5. Latin: *Nam sacrificii, quo peccata expiavit, fructum ad omnes pertinere*. See Calvin, *Calvini Opera*, 52:269; Latin: *Quum itaque commune mortis suae beneficium omnibus esse velit*. See Calvin, *Calvini Opera*, 2:270. The better translation of *pertinere* is probably “concerns,” “pertains,” or “applies.”

²⁶Calvin on *John* 17:9 holds that the “world” signifies the world of the non-elect. There is no absolute rule to invoke when reading Calvin’s many universal expressions.

consequent: If A then B, B therefore A. While it is true that if Christ is praying for us, he must have died for us (as his prayer is grounded in his death), it does not follow that if Christ died for us (as men) that he will effectually pray for us. If this is what Nettles is arguing, this is a basic logical fallacy. It may be that the “us” for Nettles represents the qualified idea of “we who believe” which would be an unstated premise. If that is so, then all that is being asserted is if Christ intercedes for us, who believe, then he died for us, who believe. If he died for us, who believe, then he will certainly intercede for us, who believe. If Nettles means to affirm the first, then not only is he invalidly affirming the consequent, but also projecting his own *a priori* beliefs and the same fallacy into Calvin. For example, there is no necessary reason to believe that, for Calvin, Christ’s high priestly intercessory prayer limits the scope of the expiation. That is a “grand assumption” behind many arguments for limited satisfaction in Calvin’s theology.

Against this assumption, Musculus is historically instructive. Musculus, by way of the French Reformer, Augustine Marlorate:

M. [Musculus] Moreover it is the office of a Mediator not only to pray but also to offer. And he offered himself upon the Cross for all men. For (as says Paul) “Christ died for all men.” Finally Saint John says that he is the “propitiation for the sins of the whole world.” *How then says he that he prays not for the world seeing he died for all men, and was the propitiation for the sins of the whole world?*²⁷

Musculus does not see a contradiction between Christ’s universal expiation and his limited intercession. Therefore, one cannot presuppose that in early Reformation theology, including Calvin’s, the existence of a one-to-one correspondence between the intercession of Christ and the satisfaction of Christ. Such an assumption is foreign to Calvin, and the other Reformers.

Calvin on Christ’s Death and its Infallible Application

Nettles’ next line of argument is the suggestion that salvation is infallibly applied to all for whom it was purchased. Nettles:

God is for us, not against us, in all these trials because He spared not His own Son; and that was precisely for the reason that He might grant His elect all that the Son brings in His substitutionary death and resurrection with the intercession that follows. . . . The argument, Calvin observed, is from the greater to the lesser—“since He had nothing dearer, more precious, or more excellent than His own Son, He will neglect nothing which He foresees will be profitable to us.” The giving over to death of God’s Son naturally means the bestowal of all blessings that are resident within this death; the Father will never fail to bestow what the Son has purchased to those for whom He has purchased them (312–313, emphasis added).

Nettles is asserting the basic argument that all for whom Christ died, salvation is infallibly purchased and applied. Then, by way of a standard form of a *modus tollens* argument, it is claimed that if salvation is not applied to a given man, Christ,

²⁷Augustine Marlorate, *A Catholike and Ecclesiasticall Exposition of the Holy Gospel after S. Iohn*, trans. Thomas Timme (Imprinted at London by Thomas Marshe, Anno Domini, 1575), 560. Emphasis added.

therefore, did not die for that given man. The critical weakness of the argument is there is no evidence in Calvin (as in Scripture) of this line of reasoning at all. On the contrary, for Calvin, many “souls” within the visible church have been “purchased” by the blood of Christ and yet are not saved. This fact alone should dispense with this argument.

As a theological excursus: the argument from the “lesser to the greater” regarding the alleged infallible application of the death of Christ relies on a chronologically later argument, which itself is never proposed by Calvin. The argument is based on Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for *us all*, how will He not also with Him freely give *us* all things?” The proper scriptural sentiment paraphrased might look like this: “Seeing Christ died for us all, how much more will he give us, all things.” But this scriptural premise is unwisely converted into a formal premise, which might look something like this: “All—irrespective of belief or unbelief—for whom Christ died will infallibly be given all things.” Now this newly created “general” statement or “general” premise is converted into a *modus tollens* argument which will look something like this: “If any person is not infallibly given all things, then Christ did not die for that person.”

If, however, we reject the move to convert the Scripture premise into the above formal premise, the conclusion of the *modus tollens* does not follow as it begs the question. Paul is writing to believers.²⁸ All his predications are restricted to believers. It is believers for whom all things work for good. It is believers who are justified. It is believers for whom the Spirit intercedes. Paul assumes an unstated or enthymematic premise, that his readers comprise of the faithful, and so all conclusions, predications and assurances are limited to them. Thus, Paul’s point would look something like this: “Seeing that Christ died for us—who have believed—how much more will he not give us—who have believed—all things?” Even if we see the “us” as a group defined by the infallible election of God, nothing changes.²⁹ Paul’s *a fortiori* argument is still limited in its conclusions and application to believers. This is the basic sentiment Calvin on this chapter is seeking to draw out, not an argument for limited satisfaction.

Logically, the set “us” (v32b), if construed as believers should not be assumed to be identical with the set “all for whom Christ died.” If the set “us” respects all believers, then the conclusion to Paul’s *a fortiori* argument is limited to believers. The challenge needs to be made: “On what basis from the text do limited satisfaction proponents justify the term conversion?” If we accept that the “us all” (v32a) respects all mankind, as Calvin implies, would this then entail universalism? No. Again in terms of logic, Calvin (and Paul) would be operating on the assumption that the second “us” respects believers. And thus we would have a bi-conditional syllogism and argument: If A + B, then C. If Christ died for *us all*, and now that we also have believed, how much more will he also freely give us all things?

Paul follows this bi-conditional form exactly in Rom 5:8-10, when he states, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, *having now been justified by His blood*, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, *having been reconciled*,

²⁸In terms of logic, even if one insists that Paul is writing to the believing elect, the point of my argument remains unchanged.

²⁹If we assume that Paul speaks to believing elect persons, all that could be concluded is something like this: “Seeing that Christ died for us—we who are believing elect—how much more will he not give us—we who are believing elect—all things?”

we shall be saved by His life.” Here Paul identifies two conditions: 1) Christ died for us, and 2) now that we have been justified and reconciled he concludes: “much more then, shall we be saved from his wrath.” When Paul uses the same form of the *a fortiori* argument in 8:32, he has no need to restate the second condition, as it is obviously assumed, in that he is *now* expressly counseling believers. This is probably how Calvin also understood this passage. When Romans 8:32 is understood in this way, universalism is not entailed, as the *modus ponens* and *modus tollens* arguments are voided.

Coming back to Calvin, it is important to keep in mind that, for Calvin, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the first “us all” in Romans 8:32a, respects all mankind. We can discern this on the basis of his repeated verse conflation. Calvin conflates the “world” of John 3:16 with the “us all” of Romans 8:32a on a number of occasions. We know, also, that the “world” of John 3:16 for Calvin is all mankind, universally.³⁰ The conflation further supports the claim that, for Calvin, Christ died for all mankind. Examples:

So likewise, when it is said in the holy scripture, (1 Timothy 1:15) that this is a true and undoubted saying, that *God hath sent his only begotten son, to save all miserable sinners: . . .* And since it is said. *That God so loved the world, that he spared not his only begotten son: but delivered him to death for us* (John 3:16; Romans 8:32).³¹

Again:

But this must conduct us to God a great deal higher: that is, unto the inestimable love of God the Father, who spared not his only son, but delivered him to death for us [Romans. 8:32]. When the principal cause of our salvation is showed unto us, the scripture [John 3:16] sets before us the love of God: *God then so loved the World, as that he spared not his only son.*³²

And again:

Notwithstanding forasmuch as God has given his Son to death, as the Scripture bears witness, that he loved the world that he has not spared his only Son, but has delivered him up to death for us: Let us assure ourselves that God meant to show to our faces, that he laid upon him the curse due to us, so as the thing which we had deserved was laid upon the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.³³

Lastly, the claim that, for Calvin, those purchased blessings of salvation are infallibly applied to any and all for whom they were obtained is negated by the following statement from Calvin:

As for example, behold the Turks, *which cast away the grace which was purchased for all the world by Jesus Christ:* the Jews do the like: the

³⁰See Calvin’s comments on John 3:16-17.

³¹John Calvin, *Sermons on Psalm 119* (Audubon, New Jersey: Old Paths Publications, 1996), 133-134. Emphasis added. Original footnote cited inline in parenthesis.

³²John Calvin, *Sermons on Melchizedek & Abraham* (Willow Street, PA: Old Paths, 2000), 50-51. Emphasis added.

³³Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, 764. Emphasis added. See also Calvin’s remarks on Isaiah 52:12 in his *Sermons on Isaiah’s Prophecy*, 140-141; and in his *Sermons on Galatians*, 34.

Papists, although they say not so openly, they show it in effect. And all they are as well shut out, and banished from the redemption which was purchased for us, as if Jesus Christ had never come into the world. And why so? For they have not this witness, *That Jesus Christ is their redeemer*: and although they have some little taste, yet they remain always starved, and if they hear but this word, Redeemer, it brings them no substance, neither get they any profit by that which is contained in the Gospel. *And thus we see now, how men are not partakers of this benefit, which was purchased them by our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .* Therefore we must weigh that that Saint Paul says here, so much the more, to wit, that then we enjoy the redemption purchased by the death of Jesus Christ, when God bears witness that he is with us: when such a benefit is presented to us: and we can receive it by faith, thus we enjoy it. And this is the reason, why there are so few nowadays, that are reconciled to God, by the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. For we see how a great part of the world deprives itself of this witness, *and we see how other[s] cast it away*, or at the least, profit so little by it, that Jesus Christ dwells not in them by faith, to make them partakers of all his benefits.³⁴

Here Calvin connects “grace” and redemption which are purchased for all the world, yet which are cast off. At this point, if we wish to sustain Nettles’ thesis, our interpretation of Calvin must become very contrived. For we must have a *purchased grace*, connected with redemption, which itself was not *redemptively purchased*.

Evidence for Limited Satisfaction in Calvin

In classical Calvinist scholarship, there are normally three lines of argumentation and evidence presented to prove that Calvin held to the doctrine of a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone. The first one is normally Calvin’s statement to the Lutheran Heshusius. Given that Nettles does not reference this, however, I shall only attend to it briefly. The original statement from Calvin to Heshusius is,

But the first thing to be explained is, how Christ is present with unbelievers, as being the spiritual food of souls, and, in short, the life and salvation of the world. And as he adheres so doggedly to the words, I should like to know *how the wicked can eat the flesh of Christ which was not crucified for them?* and how they can drink the blood which was not shed to expiate their sins?³⁵

William Cunningham was probably the first to allude to this statement as evidence that Calvin held to a limited satisfaction doctrine:

This is a very explicit denial of the universality of the atonement. But it stands alone,—so far as we know,—in Calvin’s writings, and for this

³⁴Calvin, *Sermons on Timothy*, 177, 178. Emphasis added.

³⁵John Calvin, “Clear Explanation of Sound Doctrine Concerning the True Partaking of the Flesh and Blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, in Order to Dissipate The Mists of Tileman Heshusius,” in *Selected Works of John Calvin*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 2:527. Emphasis added. Latin: *Scire velim quomodo Christi carnem edant impii, pro quibus non est crucifixa, et quomodo sanguinem bibant, qui expiandis eorum peccatis non est effusus*. See Calvin, *Calvini Opera*, 9:484.

reason we do not find much upon it; though, at the same time, we must observe, that it is not easy to understand how, if Calvin really believed in a universal atonement for the human race, such a statement could ever have dropped from him. We admit, however, that he has not usually given any distinct indication, that he believed in any limitation as to the objects of the atonement; and that upon a survey of all that has been produced from his writings, there is fair ground for a difference of opinion as to what his doctrine upon this point really was.³⁶

Cunningham, and many others, have failed to take note that Calvin does not use the word “reprobate” but rather the word “ungodly.” If Calvin had used the word reprobate, then there would be strong evidence for limited satisfaction in Calvin’s theology.

After noting Nicole and Helm both reference this comment, Rouwendal acknowledges that the comment to Heshusius is in a single isolated tract on the subject of communion and not on the redemption of Christ, and it is not credible to use this one statement to ignore Calvin’s many statements that Christ died for the whole world. He points out that Calvin does not actually say that Christ did not die for “some” ungodly or that Christ did not die for all men, but simply that Christ did not die for the ungodly. Rouwendal’s explanation of this comment in light of Calvin’s wider theology is:

In the immediate context of the quoted sentence, he uses the argument that if Christ were present corporeally, the ungodly would eat his flesh and drink his blood, which Calvin deemed impossible. Hence, it is not implausible to interpret the quoted words as follows: “I would like to know how the ungodly can eat from Christ’s flesh, and how they can drink the blood of which they have no part through faith.” Another (maybe even more plausible) interpretation would be that since the context is about eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Christ by faith, Calvin here had in mind the efficiency of Christ’s death, so that the quotation can be read as follows: “I would like to know how the ungodly can eat from Christ’s flesh that was not crucified for them effectively, and how they can drink from the blood that was not effectively shed to reconcile their sins.”³⁷

The second line of argument pertains to Calvin’s use of “classes” and “orders” in 1 Timothy 2:4-6. As I have already responded to this, I need not attend to it here. The third line is Calvin’s comments on 1 John 2:2. Regarding Calvin on this verse, Nettles says,

Calvin’s comments on the next phrase in 1 John, “And not for ours only,” etc. fits with his comments on 1 Timothy 2. Calvin asked “how the sins of the whole world have been expiated.” Some dream that the reprobates and even the devils themselves eventually find salvation

³⁶William Cunningham, “Reformers and Theology of the Reformation,” in *Collected Works of the Rev. William Cunningham* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1862), 1:396. Cunningham attempts to ground his case in his interpretation of Calvin’s exegesis of 1 Timothy 2 and 1 John 2:2; Cunningham, 400.

³⁷Rouwendal, “Calvin’s Forgotten Classical Position,” 330-331. See also Thomas, 39-40 (footnote 58).

through Christ's expiation, a notion that Calvin calls the "dreams of the fanatics" and "a monstrous idea not worth refuting." Some apply the formula that "Christ suffered sufficiently for the whole world but effectively only for the elect," as an explanation of the text; that was common among the scholastics, and Calvin affirms that the theological proposition is in itself true. That proposition, however, does not apply to this case for the answer is simple. "John's purpose," Calvin states, "was only to make this blessing common to the whole Church." He then clearly states the same principle already used in 1 Timothy, "under the word 'all' he does not include the reprobate, but refers to all who would believe and those who were scattered through various regions of the earth." The language is appropriate for such a use, for by it "the grace of Christ is really made clear when it is declared to be the only salvation of the world." Truly there is no other name.

His universal language, therefore, in relation to Christ's atoning work, without exception, finds its meaning in the context of these three things: one, Christ alone is the savior of all who will be saved and there is no other savior; two, it is a linguistic device to express the expansion of the Messiah's saving work beyond the Jews to the whole world, that is, the New Covenant inclusion of the Gentiles, the uncircumcised; three, Calvin explicitly says that Christ's propitiatory work, both in justification and intercession, does not include the reprobate, and thus includes only the elect (307-308).

This is all he gives us to understand Calvin's explication of 1 John 2:2.³⁸ First, for Calvin the concern is the claim that all men, elect and non-elect, even demons, will someday be saved. And so, Calvin, while committed in principle to the Lombardian formula, does not want to allow Georgius' false doctrine of absolute universalism any exegetical foothold. It is probably the case that Calvin understood the Greek *hilasmos* or the Latin *propitiatio* of 1 John 2:2 as referring to the efficacy of the expiation. In other words, its effectual application and power in the same way Girolamo Zanchi interpreted this verse.³⁹ If this is so, this would not only explain Pighius's⁴⁰ and Georgius's use of this verse, but also explain Calvin's singular move to a particularist reading of this seeming universal text—something which has no other precedent in Calvin's writings other than his reading of "field" and "world" in Matt 13:28 and where he again follows Augustine. It is in this light that he settles for something similar to Augustine's reading of the passage. Second, there is no evidence that Calvin is parsing the word "world" along ethnic lines. Further, the *world* for Calvin, contrary to Nettles' assertion, does not represent "classes" or "orders," or "Gentiles," even elect Gentiles, or even believing Gentiles, but believers simply considered. Calvin is not, therefore, applying his 1 Tim 2:4 "rule." In Calvin's mind, John speaks to believers being scattered throughout the world.

Third, in his tract, Calvin most likely follows the basic medieval model of

³⁸Nettles overstates his case when he inserts the clause "without exception."

³⁹Hierome Zanchius, *Speculum Christianum*, trans. Henry Nelson (London: Printed by George Eld, 1614), 347.

⁴⁰See also Calvin's earlier rebuttal of Pighius: "however he may mangle this sentence, he can never stretch its efficacy to cover [Latin, *extendat*] all men"; Calvin, *The Eternal Predestination of God*, 114.

stating two sides of a question or problem, and then positing the solution.⁴¹ On one side, he has identified Georgius' claim that all men will be saved, ultimate universalism. On the other side, it is "incontestable that Christ came for the expiation of the sins of the whole world." Calvin's solution is to undercut Georgius' appeal to this verse by positing that, while it is true that Christ so suffered for all the world, with regard to his expiation, all that John is saying in this verse, is that the benefit of Christ's death is applied to the "believers" scattered throughout the world. We can see this because of Calvin's use of the Latin word *extendo* in both the tract and in the commentary, respectively:

And not for ours only. He added this for the sake of amplifying, in order that the faithful might be assured that the expiation made by Christ, *extends* to all who by faith embrace the gospel. . . . who under this pretense *extend* salvation to all the reprobate, and therefore to Satan himself.

We even see the same English and Latin word being used in his comments on Romans 5:18:

He makes this favor common to all, because it is propounded to all, and not because it is in reality *extended* to all; for though Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world, and is offered through God's benignity indiscriminately to all, yet all do not receive him.

For Calvin, while the expiation is for all the sins of the world, the application, i.e., its extension, which he also calls its efficacy, is limited to the faithful, as Calvin goes on to explain in his tract:

For the present question is not how great the power of Christ is or what *efficacy* it has in itself, but to whom he gives Himself to be enjoyed. If possession lies in faith and faith emanates from the Spirit of adoption, it follows that only he is reckoned in the number of God's children who will be partakers of Christ. The evangelist John sets forth the office of Christ as nothing else than by His death to gather the children of God into one (Jn 11:52). Hence we conclude that the reconciliation is offered to all through Him, *yet the benefit is peculiar to the elect*, that they may be gathered into the society of life. However, while I say it is offered to all, I do not mean that this embassy, by which on Paul's testimony (II Cor 5.18) God reconciles the world to Himself, reaches to all, *but that it is not sealed indiscriminately on the hearts of all to whom it comes so as to be effectual.*⁴²

After noting that within Calvin we can identify two seemingly contradictory strands of thought, Bell posits an explanation. First, Bell notes that within Calvin's writings there is evidence of clear universalism with regard to the satisfaction.⁴³ Then he acknowledges the evidence of particularism with regard to the death of Christ, "Even the ungodly are included precisely because Calvin consistently teaches that 'no one is excluded from this salvation' wrought for all by the death of Christ,

⁴¹Ibid., 148-9.

⁴²Ibid., 149. Emphasis added.

⁴³Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985), 14. This brings us back to Calvin's statement to Heshusius.

provided they believe.” From this Bell asks the question:

Does this mean that Calvin’s teaching at Comm. 1 John 2:2 is contradictory? It does not! Calvin’s use of the term ‘all’ becomes consistent when we bear in mind the relation between atonement and faith in his writings. In several places he maintains that while Christ’s atonement is universal, the gift of faith is limited to the elect. This is precisely the situation at 1 John 2:2. Concerning the words ‘and not for ours only, but also for the whole world’, Calvin states that these are included ‘for amplification’, to convince believers that Christ’s expiation ‘extends to all who by faith embrace the Gospel. The key term in his entire discussion here is ‘faith.’ Because faith is given only to the elect, Calvin rejects the idea that salvation extends ‘to all the reprobate and even to Satan himself’. He rejects this idea not in light of the extent of the atonement, but of the extent of saving faith. Because faith is the interpreting factor in this passage, Calvin can state that under the term ‘all,’ John ‘does not include the reprobate, but refers to all who would believe.’⁴⁴

Given the wider data from Calvin, this is probably the best explanation. Calvin on 1 John 2:2 seeks only to speak to John’s meaning of “world” in this verse, thereby limiting the efficacy of the satisfaction to believers only, not that Calvin was positing a general statement about the extent of the satisfaction, as *he* understood the satisfaction of Christ. Indeed, as part of the “problem,” his wider understanding is that it is “incontestable that Christ came to expiate the sins of the world.”

Conclusion

In Nettles’ treatment of Calvin, there are essentially six lines of argumentation and response. First, Nettles’ misstep is that he retrojects in Calvin what is clearly a later version of substitutionary atonement, one which is defined and determined by the dictates of a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone. When Nettles reads Calvin affirming that Christ died in our place, Nettles assumes this means essentially the same thing for Calvin as it did for Owen, and as it does for Nettles. At this critical juncture, Nettles fails to engage Calvin historically, as a theologian in his own context. We have seen evidence that for the early Reformers, there was a model of vicarious satisfaction, that neither entailed some sort of debased form of the governmental view of the satisfaction, nor a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone. However, if this model of satisfaction can be allowed to stand and be understood on its own terms and merits—that is, as not being recast as some sort of pre-Grotian anomaly, or some distortion of Augustinianism (as Rainbow suggests)—this can give us space to treat Calvin on his own terms. His various statements can now be seen as meaningfully coherent in the light of this wider theological context.

Second, this essay has sought to demonstrate that the doctrine of Christ’s sufficient satisfaction for all the sins of all men is not the same as Owen’s commitment to the revised version of the Lombardian sufficiency-efficiency formula. This being the case, it is impossible to use this as a grid to explain many of Calvin’s universal statements. For Calvin, as one committed to the true sentiment of Lombard’s formula, Christ truly did suffer the curse for sin in behalf of all men. Yet he did this

⁴⁴Ibid., 15-16.

with the special intention that this be the means whereby the benefit of his work be “extended” to all the elect, to all the faithful.

Third, this essay has argued that the modern reader is confronted with a pivotal question: When Calvin spoke of “classes” or “orders” did he mean to parse or distribute those terms to mean either “some men of all kinds” or “all men of every kind”? Modern scholars like Nicole, Helm, Rainbow, and Nettles, assume the former, but without any direct evidence from Calvin. Indeed, in the case of 1 Tim 2:4-6, this interpretation is actually anachronistic, as Calvin is not speaking to the secret will of God, which was the key concept which motivated Augustine’s exegesis. All the internal textual evidence strongly suggests that for Calvin the terms “classes” and “orders” were meant to deny the idea that the grace of God belonged to privileged individuals or groups, meaning this individual, but not that individual, this group but not that group. He meant to include all individuals, all members, of every possible class or rank or order in society. No one was to be excluded.

Fourth, with regard to the expiation and intercession argument, there is no evidence in Calvin that the intercession delimits the scope of the expiation or that both are restricted to the same group. All that can be shown, and which is entirely correct, is that, for Calvin the intercession is grounded upon the expiation, such that no expiation, then no intercession is possible. There is no evidence for the inverse, that if there is an expiation for a person, then there will be an effectual high-priestly intercession for that same person.

Fifth, with regard to the claim that, for Calvin, the benefit of Christ’s death is infallibly applied to all for whom Christ died. Such a proposition flies in the face of the scores of statements from Calvin where this cannot hold true. The argument that the expiation carries within itself its own application or that it infallibly purchases faith and salvation is a post-Calvinian argument. For Calvin, faith and salvation are purchased by Christ for all the world, but the application is conditioned by faith which can be voided by the sinner’s unbelief. In Calvin’s wider theology, the gift of faith to some is determined, not by the extent or nature of the satisfaction, but by election, and then secondarily by the effectual call.

Sixth, regarding the data within Calvin’s writings which suggests he was committed to a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone, there are two competing methods when approaching Calvin on this topic. One method seeks to collate and identify all the varied and nuanced statements by Calvin which clearly speak to an unlimited expiation and redemption. This approach argues that the great body of data supporting this must regulate the three occasions which seemingly support the case that Calvin held to limited satisfaction. This side argues that these three instances must be read in the light of the larger body of evidence.

The other method argues that these three instances regulate and determine the meaning and intent of all that Calvin says regarding the extent of the satisfaction. What are these three instances? There is the famous statement Calvin made to Heshusius. Cunningham, while finding such a statement odd on the assumption that Calvin held to unlimited satisfaction for all sin, admits that it would be unwise to rest a case on this one statement. Then there is the argument from Calvin’s various comments on 1 Tim 2:1-6 which suggests a limited satisfaction for sin. Cunningham, and others, simply present, as it were, another grand assumption that the terms “classes” and “orders” either mean an abstraction or some men of every kind. And lastly, there are Calvin’s comments on 1 John 2:2, which, when understood against the backdrop of Georgius’ true universalism explain Calvin’s apparent need

to limit John's use of "world." There is no actual evidence that Calvin was, therein, positing any statement limiting the satisfaction as understood by Calvin generally, to the elect alone.

The claim that Calvin actually held to a doctrine of limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone, thereby placing Calvin on a line of discontinuity—in spite of all the identical or near-identical statements regarding the nature and extent of the satisfaction—is, indeed, an astounding claim to make. I would argue that there is no evidence in Calvin's writings which prove or entail the doctrine of a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone. Rather, when the objections are removed, the evidence for Calvin's biblical universalism speaks for itself. Thus, Calvin's theology of satisfaction fits better with the Reformation's original, albeit forgotten, doctrine of universal vicarious satisfaction.