

***Review Essay (Part One): 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***

David W. Ponter
dponter@rts.edu

Introduction

There has been a long-standing question and debate in modern Calvin studies whether or not John Calvin taught a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone. Did Calvin teach what we now call limited atonement in populist Reformed literature? Scholars are divided on the answer. G. Michael Thomas, Brian G. Armstrong, R. T. Kendall, Charles Bell, Kevin Kennedy, A. C. Clifford, and Paul Hartog are among those who believe that Calvin did subscribe to an unlimited satisfaction for all the sins of all men. Roger Nicole, Jonathan Rainbow, and Paul Helm (with qualification) believe the contrary. Pieter Rouwendal adopts a mediating position. Robert Peterson believes that Calvin's position on the extent of the satisfaction is indeterminate.² In his essay "John Calvin's Understanding of the Death of Christ," Tom Nettles has added his voice to those who side with the position that Calvin held to a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone.³

At first glance, Nettles seems to adopt the qualified argument made by Paul Helm. Helm argues that even though Calvin never overtly committed himself to a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone, he was, nonetheless, committed

¹Editor's Note: This is the first part of a two-part review essay (part two will be published in the next issue). David W. Ponter has a B.A. (Hons) in History and Philosophy, a M.L.S. from Queensland University of Technology, an M.Div from Reformed Theological Seminary, and is currently employed as a librarian at Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, MS).

²See G. Michael Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus* (UK: Paternoster, 1997); Brian Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (UK: Paternoster Press, 1997); Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985); Kevin D. Kennedy, *Union with Christ and the Extent of the Atonement in Calvin* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002); idem., "Was Calvin a 'Calvinist'? John Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement," in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010), 191-212; A. C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Paul Hartog, *A Word for the World: Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 2009); Roger Nicole, "Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 197-225; Jonathan H. Rainbow, *The Will of God and The Cross* (Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1990); Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1982); Pieter Rouwendal, "Calvin's Forgotten Classical Position on the Extent of the Atonement," *Westminster Theological Journal* 17 (2008): 317-35; and, Robert Peterson, *Calvin and the Atonement* (New Jersey: Mentor, 1999).

³See Thomas J. Nettles, "John Calvin's Understanding of the Death of Christ," in *Whomever He Wills: A Surprising Display of Sovereign Mercy*, ed. Matthew M. Barrett and Thomas J. Nettles (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2012), 293-315. Parenthetical citations in this review essay are to this essay.

to it. For Helm, in order for Christ's death to be truly substitutionary, a limited satisfaction for sins is necessarily entailed. Given that Calvin held to "substitutionary atonement," as defined by Helm, he must therefore have been committed to a limited satisfaction (even if he never expressly committed himself to it).⁴ As Nettles develops his thesis statement, he moves beyond Helm to the stronger claim of Nicole and Rainbow that Calvin actually did teach a limited satisfaction, if not by name, then by direct implication. To support this, Nettles claims that we can discern two critical lines of thought from Calvin. First, for all whom Christ died, faith and all the benefits of salvation are infallibly purchased. Second, that for Calvin, the high priestly and effectual intercession of Christ, assumedly for the elect as a class, delimits the scope and extent of the satisfaction.

When it comes to dealing with the evidence in Calvin suggesting that Christ died for the sins of all men, Nettles offers an interesting interpretation, one found in seed form in Nicole and Rainbow. In the many cases where Calvin says such things as, "Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world," Nettles says that Calvin merely meant to speak "from the human perspective," or from the perspective of human phenomenology. So when Calvin stated Christ suffered in the place of all men, he did not actually mean to speak from the divine "point of view" of what God in Christ accomplished in reality. Calvin was not saying what he believed Christ had actually accomplished for all men, or what was "theologically true." Unfortunately for Nettles, there does not appear to be any substantive support for the supposition in Calvin's writings at all. At most, Nettles can only point to Calvin's use of "classes" in his interpretation of 1 Tim 2:4-6. Nettles assumes that Calvin's apparent use of "classes" sets up a sort of "rule" to interpret all of Calvin's universal statements. There are two key problems with this assumption. First, Nettles, like Nicole and Rainbow, has misread Calvin's intent, and I think this can be demonstrated reasonably enough. Second, Calvin himself never applied this *rule* universally throughout his biblical exegesis, and even on key occasions he simply never refers to it.

The primary purpose of this essay, however, is not so much to prove that Calvin subscribed to an unlimited satisfaction for all the sins of all sinners, but to remove the objections to this possibility. The reader should understand that the following review is intended as a non-exhaustive *specimen* response to Tom Nettles' analysis of Calvin on the question of the extent of the satisfaction of Christ. My aim in this essay is to demonstrate that Nettles has treated Calvin 1) ahistorically and, therefore, inaccurately, 2) inaccurately with respect to critical comments from Calvin, and 3) illogically in terms of drawing conclusions from Calvin's statements.

The historian's inductive method shows us a better way to engage in historical analysis. The respective methods of Nicole, Helm, Rainbow, and Nettles, are driven *top-down* by their own systematic assumptions and not *bottom-up* by surveying the inductively derived data from Calvin. This top-down method is sometimes described as a deductivist approach that normally begins with a set of *a priories* and then attempts to posit them or identify them within the respective primary source texts. Proper historiography, on the other hand, works inductively to gather the data from the primary source texts, where the data form its own image or pattern. The only way to solve the question regarding Calvin's view of the extent of the Christ's satisfaction is to engage in inductive analysis. Unfortunately, the inductive method

⁴See Paul Helm, "The Logic of Limited Atonement," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 3 (1985): 47-54; and idem., "Calvin, English Calvinism and the Logic of the Doctrinal Development," *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981): 179-185.

is often disparaged or ignored. It is time consuming, demands patience, and requires that the researcher suspend certain personal assumptions and conflicts. Conflicts arise because reading a classical author often generates more questions than the researcher's personal theological "system" can handle. The temptation is to posit a quick answer on the basis of the researcher's own personal beliefs.

Another problem with the deductivist approach is that it can fall into the trap of isolating a given author from his historical-theological context. Rainbow does this repeatedly. As an example, he treats Martin Luther by way of a simple deductivist assumption that because Luther was a true *Augustinian* he would have held to limited satisfaction.⁵ Rainbow fails to locate Luther within Luther's own theological context thereby failing to identify what a true *Augustinian* might have looked like at the beginning of the 16th century. Indeed, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, and Wolfgang Musculus, et al, would have considered themselves good and true Augustinians, yet all held that Christ died for all men.

By applying the inductive approach to the question, "What would 'substitutionary atonement' have looked like in the early 16th century?" we need to survey the writings of not only Calvin, but also those of his contemporaries. By doing this, we can identify an early Reformation doctrine of vicarious satisfaction which was not seen as entailing the more modern view of a limited satisfaction of sins.⁶ Rather than fixate on the outdated "Calvin versus the Calvinist" thesis, or rather than treat Calvin in isolation, we should seek to identify and understand the early Reformation doctrine of unlimited vicarious satisfaction. If such a doctrine did exist, we can begin to examine Calvin afresh. Then the question becomes, "Does the data from Calvin fit this model of satisfaction, rather than the later model as defined by TULIP or strict five-point Calvinist orthodoxy?" To that end, this essay will produce numerous extended quotations from the various primary sources. The use of extensive primary source quotation is often criticized in some circles. In order to resolve this question, however, we must engage original authors, such as Calvin, with extensive quotations so that we can see their theology expressed in its proper context.

Limited atonement is defined as the doctrine that only the sins of the elect were imputed to Christ, such that, if we were to ask the question, "For whose sins was Christ punished?" the answer will invariably be, "For the sins of the elect alone." Throughout this essay, I will generally use my preferred term "limited satisfaction" in the place of "limited atonement," as the language of satisfaction was the term used in classic 16th and 17th century literature, and because the word "atonement" has a history of ambiguity. There will be no need to labor the point that the original Reformers, Calvin included, did believe in a vicarious satisfaction wherein Christ actually bore in his own person and body the curse of the law due to sinners. Rather, what is in view here is the question of the *extent* of this vicarious sin-bearing.⁷

⁵Rainbow, *Will of God and The Cross*, 181.

⁶Apart from the survey work of G. Michael Thomas, there is no substantive and balanced analysis of this first and second generation doctrine of an unlimited vicarious satisfaction in the literature.

⁷References to Calvin's *Commentaries* and *Institutes*, and Nettles' essay will be cited parenthetically. In some of the following quotations from the original 16th century sources, I have modernized the spelling, and occasionally reformatted both text and quotations within a quotation. Further, for my Calvin commentary material, I am using the older translations published by Baker Books. For our purposes here there is no significant translation differences.

Thesis Statement and Explanation

Nettles writes,

The thesis of this article is simple: Calvin's discussion of the atonement gives sufficient warrant for his theological progeny to infer that he believed that Christ's atoning work was intrinsically efficacious for the salvation of the elect only. Both the nature of the atonement, in Calvin's extended comments on it, and its connections as the necessary and pivotal means for God to execute His eternal purpose of redemption give warrant for one to conclude this limited atonement may be inferred from several pivotal exegetical/doctrinal discussions and is more consistent with his overall theological view than is a general atonement. It is not unwarranted from Calvin's writings to infer that for Calvin Christ's death merited from God all the subsequent blessings that would certainly be given to all for whom Christ purchased them (295, emphasis added).

To say that for Calvin, the atonement of Christ is intrinsically efficacious for the salvation of the elect only is rather generic, as all parties would agree. Further, to suggest that limited atonement is "more consistent with his overall theological view" is the older argument outlined by Helm that limited satisfaction is consistent with Calvin's writings. The third and final assertion turns out to be Nettles' central argument: Salvation (i.e., the blessings of) is effectually given to all for whom Christ died. It is the last statement that cannot be proven from Calvin, as he never uses this form of reasoning or argumentation. Rather, it may only be inferred based on certain statements found in Calvin. If it can be shown that Nettles' arguments either beg the question or are simply invalid, then perhaps there may be room enough to go back and read Calvin in his own theological and historical context without the later systematic and ahistorical grid which Nettles and others have imposed upon Calvin.

Nettles on the Concept of Substitution

First, Nettles' sub-heading, "The *Power* of Substitution in Calvin."⁸ For Nettles, substitution itself has power to save. Nettles does not elaborate upon the full nature of this power, other than its certain power to "purchase" people and "salvation" for the elect exclusively. What was Calvin's doctrine of substitution? While it is true that Calvin says Christ bore "our" sins and curses, this itself does not entail a limited substitution for the elect alone or an effectual substitution as later defined by TULIP or strict five-point Calvinism. Nettles' unstated assumption is that there is only one doctrine of substitution, as defined by strict five-point Calvinist orthodoxy, in Reformation theology and history. However, it is undeniable that Luther, Zwingli, Musculus, and Bullinger, contemporaries or near contemporaries of Calvin, understood that Christ really did bear "our" sins in "our" place, that is, he truly was a vicarious substitute *in our place*, suffering the wrath of God for our sins. Nonetheless, they all believed that Christ died for the sins of all men, of all who have lived, now live, and shall live. This shows that there was another conception of vicarious satisfaction in existence of which Calvin could have also shared.

We can identify the following factual assertions within the theology of Luther, Zwingli, Bullinger, and Musculus: 1) that Christ stood in the place of men, bearing

⁸Nettles, "John Calvin," 297. Emphasis added.

the wrath and curse for sin, in their behalf, and 2) that he accomplished this for all men without exception. If this can be demonstrated, then it is clear that, historically, there was a version of substitutionary atonement which was "other than" the version of "five-point Calvinist" orthodoxy. It would then show us that the simple one-to-one association between vicarious satisfaction and limited satisfaction (as made by Nicole, Helm, Rainbow, and now Nettles) is not a *necessary* entailment. From Ulrich Zwingli, three examples:

1. "How much more had the victim to be absolutely spotless which made atonement for the sins not only of all who had been, but of all who were yet to come!"⁹
2. "Therefore the blood of Christ, offered once for all, endures to remove all the sins of all men."¹⁰
3. "For He has atoned *for the sins of all from the founding of the world*, so is He even unto the end of the world, the bearer of salvation to all who trust in him; for He is everlasting God; through Him we were created and redeemed."¹¹

Heinrich Bullinger held that while Christ presented himself as a satisfaction for sin, he did this in behalf of all sinners:

1. "The Lord made to meet on him, as an expiatory sacrifice, not one or another or most sins of one or other man, *but all the iniquities of all of us*. Therefore I say, *the sins of all men of the world of all ages have been expiated by his death*."¹²
2. "Therefore, when he would sacrifice for the satisfaction of the sins of the whole world. . . . And that only sacrifice is always effectual to make satisfaction for all the sins of all men in the whole world. . . . Christians know that the sacrifice of Christ once offered is always effectual to make satisfaction for the sins of all men in the whole world, and of all men of all ages: but these men with often outcries say, that it is flat heresy not to confess that Christ is daily offered of sacrificing priests, consecrated to that purpose."¹³
3. "And it is not amiss in this place first of all to mark, that Christ is called a propitiation, or satisfaction, *not for sinners or people of one or two ages, but for all sinners* and all the faithful people throughout the whole world. One Christ therefore is sufficient for all: one intercessor with the Father is set forth unto all."¹⁴

From Wolfgang Musculus, one quotation will suffice at this point:

For like as God enclosed all under unbelief that he might have mercy upon all, so he will have this grace of *his mercy to be set forth to all men*: 'So God loved the world,' (says our Saviour), 'that he gave his only begotten son, that everyone which believes in him should not perish,

⁹Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1981), 112. Emphasis added.

¹⁰Ibid., 234.

¹¹Ibid., 235-236. Emphasis added.

¹²Bullinger, *Isaiah*, 266b, sermon 151, as cited in Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 75. Emphasis added.

¹³Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, ed. Thomas Harding (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 4th Decade, sermon 7, 2: 285-286, 287, and 296. Emphasis added.

¹⁴Ibid., 4th Decade, sermon 5, 2:218-219. Emphasis added.

but have life everlasting.’ And in the first epistle of John, we read this: ‘But in case any man do sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for the sins also of the whole world.’ *I think that there is meant by the world, all mankind, by which the world does consist, from the beginning of it, until the end.* Therefore when it is said, that *God gave his son for the world*, and that he is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world what else is meant, but that *the grace of forgiveness of sins is appointed unto all men*, so that the Gospel thereof is to be preached unto all creatures? In this respect the gentle love of GOD towards man is set forth unto us to be considered, whereby he would not have any to perish, but all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. But for all that, this general grace has some conditions going withal, of which we will speak hereafter.¹⁵

The doctrine of unlimited satisfaction was held by Martin Luther,¹⁶ Rudolf Gualther,¹⁷ Juan De Valdes,¹⁸ as well as the English Reformers, such as Richard Hooper,¹⁹ and Thomas Cranmer²⁰ and many others. All these and others held to a doctrine of vicarious satisfaction wherein Christ stood in the place of all men, receiving in their place the curse and wrath due to all of them. One could easily say that the original Reformation doctrine of unlimited satisfaction is the forgotten doctrine of the Reformation. Further, in terms of actual history, this demonstrates to us that contemporary with Calvin there was a doctrine of satisfaction which *did not* entail a limited satisfaction for the sins of the elect alone, as expressed in the modern five-point Calvinist orthodoxy. Nettles’ first assertion, then, demonstrates that his historical analysis is system driven, that it is top-down, deductivist and *a priori*. However, when we compare Calvin to Zwingli, Bullinger, and Musculus, among others, we find identical expressions and language relating to the nature and extent of Christ’s death. Those who argue that Calvin held to a limited satisfaction cannot explain how it could be that when Calvin uses these identical expressions they did not mean the same for Calvin as they did for these other Reformers. On the other hand, reading Calvin in the light of his own historical context, gives us room to read

¹⁵Wolfgangus Musculus, *Common Places of Christian Religion*, trans. by John Merton (London: Imprinted by Henry Bynneman, 1578), 577-78. Emphasis added.

¹⁶For a sample of Luther’s many statements, see *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1955), 2:384; 3:372; 5:220; 12:371; 13:239-40; 19:102.; 22:459; 23:184-85; 24:279; 26:37-38, 277-81, 282, 283-84, 285-86, 287; 40:14; and 51:316-17.

¹⁷For example, Gualther says, “And so it is necessary to have Christ’s death preached in these days, that all men might understand the Son of God died for their sins, and that they were the authors thereof.” Radulpe Gualthere, *An Hundred, threescore and fifteen Sermons, uppon the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. by John Bridges (London: 1572), 108.

¹⁸Valdes: “Where it is especially to be understood that the duty of the Evangelical preacher is to persuade himself to know no other thing in this world but Christ crucified, since it is his proper office to publish the indulgence or general pardon made to men, confirmed by the blood of Christ, which He shed on the Cross; his duty is to preach nothing else but Christ crucified . . . for that in Christ, when hanging on the Cross, God punished the sins of all men, and for that in slaying His own flesh on the Cross, Christ slew that of all men.” Juan de Valdes, *Juan de Valdés Commentary Upon St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Church at Corinth* (London: Trüber & Co, 1883), 30-31.

¹⁹Hooper explicitly affirmed that Christ died in the place of all sinners who have lived, now live and shall live. See John Hooper, “Extracts From a Brief and Clear Confession of the Christian Faith,” in *Writings of Dr. John Hooper* (London: Religious Tract Society, [1800s]), 419.

²⁰Thomas Cranmer, “Disputations at Oxford,” in *The Writing and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge: CUP, 1844), 1:395.

Calvin in a more historically accurate manner, such that the *a priori* assumption of “limited satisfaction” is undercut and removed.

As an example, in the following quotation, Calvin rehearses a hypothetical speech Christ might say to a person on the day of judgment:

Behold our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory, abased himself for a time, as says S. Paul. Now if there were no more but this, that he being the fountain of life, became a moral man, and that he having dominion over the angels of heaven, took upon him the shape of a servant, *yea even to shed his blood for our redemption*, and in the end to suffer *the curse that was due unto us* (Gal 3:13):²¹ were it convenient that notwithstanding all this, he should nowadays in recompense be torn to pieces, by stinking mouths of such as name themselves Christians? For when they swear by his blood, by his death, by his wounds and by whatsoever else: is it not a crucifying of God’s son again as much as in them lies, and as a rending of him in pieces? And are not such folk worthy to be cut off from God’s Church, yea, and even from the world, and to be no more numbered in the array of creatures? Should our Lord Jesus have such reward at our hands, for his abasing and humbling of himself after that manner? (Mich 6:30). . . . For when the son of God, who is ordained to be judge of the world (John 5:22), shall come at the last day: he may well say to us: how now Sirs? You have borne my name, you have been baptised in remembrance of me and record that *I was your redeemer*, I have drawn you out of the dungeons where into you were plunged, I delivered you from endless death by *suffering most cruel death myself*, and for the same cause I became man, and *submitted myself even to the curse of GOD my father, that you might be blessed by my grace and by my means*: and behold the reward that you have yielded me for all this, is that you have (after a sort) torn me in pieces and made a jestingstock of me, and *the death that I suffered for you has been made a mockery among you*, the blood which is the washing and cleansing of your souls has been as good as trampled under your feet, and to be short, you have taken occasion to ban and blaspheme me, as though I had been some wretched and cursed creature. When the sovereign judge shall charge us with these things, I pray you will it not be as thundering upon us, *to ding us down to the bottom of hell?* Yes: and yet are there very few that think upon it.²²

Note the critical elements. Christ suffers the curse of the law and wrath of the Father for this person, and yet this person is not ultimately saved. Calvin also identifies

²¹Calvin, as does Luther (Martin Luther, “Sermons,” in *Luther’s Works*, 51:316-317), references Galatians 3:13 many times in his writings with a universal intent. For example, he writes, “Now, since the Son of God, although He was not only pure, but purity itself, still was *the representative of the human race*, He subjected Himself to the Law; and (as Paul teaches) submitted Himself to the Law, “to redeem them that were under the Law.” (Galatians 3:13, and 4:5.). John Calvin, *Leviticus* 12:2. And again: “It follows, therefore, either that he was crucified in vain, or *that our curse was laid upon him*, in order that we might be delivered from it. Now, he does not say that Christ was cursed, but, which is still more, that he was a curse,—intimating, *that the curse of all men was laid upon him*’ (Isaiah 53:6.).” John Calvin, *Galatians* 3:13.

²²John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 196. Emphasis added. Often it is claimed that such Calvin quotations are taken out of context. Readers are invited to peruse Calvin’s many universal statements in context found on the following webpage: “The Genius and Complexity of John Calvin: Citations From Calvin on the Unlimited Work of Expiation and Redemption of Christ” (<http://calvinandcalvinism.com/?p=230>).

“intentionality” in Christ’s suffering for this person: so that he “might be blessed by my grace.” If we were to assume that Calvin held to the “substitutionary” satisfaction defined by Nettles and others, such hypothetical language could never have been sensible to Calvin. This “rehearsal” demonstrates that Calvin could conceptualize a form of vicarious satisfaction, wherein, the person for whom satisfaction was made might fail to be saved. What would be the point of an impossible hypothetical presented as a pastoral counseling? Nor is this a case where Rainbow’s interpretative hermeneutic is applicable, for, as Calvin rehearses, Christ is speaking, no less, to a perishing sinner, for the resurrected Christ, the line of demarcation between the elect and the non-elect has never been “unclear.”²³

Calvin and the Doctrines of Sufficiency and Satisfaction

The third critical assumption in Nettle’s argument is his conflating of Calvin’s sufficiency-efficiency doctrine with that of John Owen’s later doctrine of sufficiency. Regarding Calvin’s apparent universalism, Nettles says,

The affirmations of universal provision in other passages should be filtered through two realities. One, Calvin did receive the formula that Christ’s death was sufficient for all but efficient only for the elect. He affirms this in connection with his exegesis of I John 2:2, a passage to be quoted later, and in his polemical treatise *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*. This is the same view stated later by the Synod of Dort under the second head of doctrine, articles three through six, and also affirmed by John Owen. Looking at the redemptive work of God from the standpoint of men, all that God provides for the reclaiming of fallen humanity is set before them as theirs if they will but take it. (299, emphasis added)

And then later Nettles says,

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. (308)

First, this misunderstands the doctrine of Christ’s sufficiency as set out by Lombard, Calvin, the Synod of Dort, even the revised version of Owen and others. Second, Nettles reproduces his mistaken reading of Owen in his earlier work *By His Grace and For His Glory*. Owen’s real doctrine of sufficiency is a *hypothetical* sufficiency for those not elected. It is not an actual sufficiency for all men.²⁴ For Owen, there is no sufficient provision for all men as men. There is only a sufficient provision for all men *who come to him*. It is a sufficiency “for all” which is only hypothetical; “if they come to him” they will find a sufficient provision for their sins. This is not an actual sufficiency for all men, simply considered. Owen writes,

²³See Rainbow, *Will of God and The Cross*, 173.

²⁴See Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 302-414.

Sufficient we say, then, was the sacrifice of Christ for the redemption of the whole world, and for the expiation of all the sins of all and every man in the world. *This sufficiency of his sacrifice has a twofold rise*: First, The dignity of the person that did offer and was offered. Secondly, The greatness of the pain he endured, by which he was able to bear, and did undergo, the whole curse of the law and wrath of God due to sin. And this sets out the innate, real, true worth and value of the blood-shedding of Jesus Christ. This is its own true internal perfection and sufficiency. That it should be applied unto any, made a price for them, and become beneficial to them, according to the worth that is in it, is *external* to it, doth not arise from it, but merely depends upon the intention and will of God. It was in itself of infinite value and sufficiency to have been made a price to have bought and purchased all and every man in the world. That it did formally become a price for any is solely to be ascribed to the purpose of God, intending their purchase and redemption by it. . . . Hence may appear *what is to be thought of that old distinction of the schoolmen*, embraced and used by divers protestant divines, though by others again rejected, namely, “That Christ died for all in respect of the sufficiency of the ransom he paid, but not in respect of the efficacy of its application;” or, “The blood of Christ was a sufficient price for the sins of all the world;” *which last expression is corrected by some, and thus asserted*, “That the blood of Christ was sufficient to *have been made a price for all*,” which is most true, as was before declared: for its being a price for all or some doth not arise from its own sufficiency, worth, or dignity, but from the intention of God and Christ using it to that purpose, as was declared; and, therefore, *it is denied that the blood of Christ was a sufficient price and ransom for all and every one, not because it was not sufficient, but because it was not a ransom*.²⁵

For Owen, therefore, the sufficiency of the satisfaction has two divisible elements. There is an internal (and abstracted) sufficiency which speaks to its inherent value. This guards Owen from falling into the trap of suggesting that Christ *suffered so much* for so much sin. That is, had God elected more, Christ would not have had to suffer more. But there is also the external or extrinsic aspect of the sufficiency of the satisfaction. For Owen, there is no external sufficiency for all men. The internal and external sufficiency relative to all mankind is purely hypothetical: *had* God elected more, then the one intrinsically infinitely valuable and sufficient satisfaction, *would have been* sufficient for them as well. The critical sentence fragment from Owen is, “therefore, it is denied that the blood of Christ was a sufficient price and ransom for all and every one, not because it was not sufficient, but because it was not a ransom.” For Owen, Christ did not formally lay down a redemption “price” for all men, therefore, there is no actual sufficiency for all men.²⁶ This is a marked

²⁵ John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Gould (London: Johnston and Hunter, 1851), 10:295-296. Emphasis added.

²⁶Later in *Death of Death*, Owen scorns the idea of an actual external, albeit non-effectual, sufficiency for all men. Owen: “Fifthly, If the words are to be understood to signify all and every one in the world, then is the whole assertion useless as to the chief end intended,—namely, to administer consolation to believers; for what consolation can arise from hence unto any believer, that Christ was a propitiation for them that perish? Yea, to say that he was a sufficient propitiation for them, though not effectual, will yield them no more comfort than it would have done Jacob and his sons to have heard from Joseph that he had corn enough, sufficient to sustain them, but that he would do so was altogether uncertain; for had he told

departure from the earlier Reformation tradition that Christ did formally lay down a sufficient price for all men. Owen's distinction of the internal sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction retains continuity with the Anselmic tradition. His latter distinction of the external sufficiency, however, departs from it. This departure for the Reformed scholastic orthodox became the new standard from the first half of the 16th century, and it is the revision of the Lombardian formula which is generally understood and adopted by modern Reformed writers.

Owen's language matches that of Witsius, Turretin, and many others who modified the Lombardian Formula.²⁷ Herman Witsius' expression of the formula is a good case in point: "That the obedience and sufferings of Christ, considered in themselves, are, on the account of the infinite dignity of the person, of that value, *as to have been sufficient for redeeming not only all and every man in particular*, but many myriads besides, *had it so pleased God and Christ, that he should have undertaken and satisfied for them.*"²⁸

Unlike the revised version, Peter Lombard, and later Thomas Aquinas, held that Christ actually sustained a universal satisfaction for all sins, which effected a universally sufficient satisfaction for all sinners.²⁹ Christ also accomplished this universally sufficient satisfaction with the intention that the elect be effectually saved. This formula, however, was probably revised first by Theodore Beza. Pieter Rouwendal explains:

After the Reformation, Beza was the first to criticize this formula. During his conflict with Jacob Andreae, the latter maintained that Christ had "satisfied sufficiently for the sins of all individuals." Beza remarked that this, if rightly understood, was true, but it was said "very roughly and ambiguously, as well as barbarously." Beza's criticism of barbarous language was not against words such as "sufficient" and "efficient," but against the ambiguous use of the word "for" (*pro*). The humanistically educated Beza was skilled in Latin and understood that the preposition *pro* declared a plan and effect. Hence, the statement "Christ died for . . ." can only be completed by "the elect" or some equivalent. Calvin himself was dissatisfied with the formula sufficient-efficient, as will be shown in a separate paragraph, but he was not as critical as Beza. Calvin nowhere criticized the content of the formula, but thought it did not answer all questions regarding the atonement. Beza, however, criticized the formula itself as "ambiguous and barbarous." Beza did not deny the all-sufficiency of Christ's merit, but he denied that it was the intention of Christ to die for all men.³⁰

them he would sustain them sufficiently, though not effectually, they might have starved notwithstanding his courtesy" (*Works*, 10:337). Owen misunderstands the import of the classic doctrine of the sufficiency, and in his analogy he fails to insert the condition of faith. The sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction was never intended to communicate any certainty to any sinner apart from the presence of faith.

²⁷See, for example, Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 2:458-459.

²⁸Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants* (Escondido, CA: The Den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), 1:256. Emphasis added.

²⁹See Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* (Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2008), 3.20.5; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 3.48.2, 3.49.3; and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 4.55.25, 27, 29.

³⁰Rouwendal, 319-320. Thomas notes the same point with regard to Beza: "Thus the statement that Christ died sufficiently for all could only be accepted in a hypothetical sense, which to Beza, made

In English, as in Latin, there is what is called a hypothetical contrary-to-fact subjunctive. Normally this is identified by statements which contain a conditional, *if* or *had*, with *could have been*, or *should have been*, or *might have been*, and so on. For example, "If John had reached out, he would have been saved," or, "Had Mary studied for her exam, she would not have failed." The point of this form of the subjunctive is that it is not actually the case that John was saved, nor that Mary passed her exam. Owen, Turretin, Witsius, along with Abraham Booth³¹ and others, all use this form of expression. To paraphrase Witsius, "Had it pleased God to elect more, the satisfaction *would have been* sufficient for them, in that, for then Christ *would have* undertaken to make a satisfaction for them as well." The reality is, as God did not elect more so Christ did not satisfy for them, the death of Christ is not extrinsically or externally sufficient for them, only that it could have been sufficient for them.³² Here the sufficiency is only a potential sufficiency for all. The satisfaction's internal sufficiency functions for Owen, Witsius, and others in this way: 1) Christ need not suffer *so much* for so much sin, and 2) all who actually come to Christ, will never fail to find a completely sufficient satisfaction for their sins.³³ On the other hand, Calvin held to the classic Lombardian expression of the formula, not the revised Bezarian version.³⁴ To read the revision back into Calvin is anachronistic. It is highly implausible, therefore, to read Calvin's universal statements as expressions of the revised hypothetical contrary-to-fact sufficiency-efficiency formula. If we must insist that his universal statements be read in the light of the sufficiency-efficiency formula, then they are to be read in the light of the original Lombardian version which advocated an actual universal vicarious satisfaction for all men.

The second critical point is Nettles' stress on the human perspective. As emphasized in the above quotation, he imagines we can look at the redemptive work of God in two ways. We can look at it from the perspective of what God actually says and actually accomplishes, or we can look at it *from the human standpoint*. Nettles writes,

Even though only by the secret operations of His electing grace does the Spirit apply any of the benefits, *from our standpoint we are to regard every person as a candidate to receive those blessings that Christ has died to procure*, and that their refusal is the result of sin, not of non-election per se, and constitutes a criminal resistance to the divine benevolence (300, emphasis added).

This assertion forms the core presupposition which Nettles will invoke to explain the apparent universal statements in Calvin. Whenever Calvin speaks of Christ dying for all men or the world, Nettles assumes that Calvin merely meant to communicate

it irrelevant," Thomas, 57.

³¹Abraham Booth, "Divine Justice Essential to the Divine Character," in *The Works of Abraham Booth* (London: Printed by J. Haddon, 1813), 3:61.

³²In his work, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, Nettles creates a false dichotomy between Abraham Booth and John Owen. Because of his misreading of William Shedd and Owen, Nettles posits that Owen taught an actual external sufficiency for all, while Abraham Booth did not. However, when both men are read in context, both held to only a hypothetical sufficiency for all, namely, *had it so pleased God to elect more*, the death of Christ *would have been* sufficient for them, too (See Nettles, *By His Grace*, 302-314).

³³Undergirding the theological point of the sufficiency of Christ's death is the related question of savability. If Christ did not sustain a penal relationship with all men, then his penal remedy cannot be sufficient for all men—only that it could have been sufficient for all men, had he also sustained a penal relationship for them as well.

³⁴A. A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1868), 333.

the idea that, from our perspective, we are to regard all men as fit candidates for salvation, and that a provision of salvation has been made for them.

This idea is not new. Rainbow, for instance, applies the same interpretative method to Calvin's many statements that there are souls who have been redeemed by Christ, who yet perish in hell. Rainbow even extends this to Calvin's understanding of general love and the divine revealed desire that all men be saved. Rainbow writes,

Did Calvin mean that Christ died for every one of these wretched unbelievers? Did Calvin base this exhortation to pray for all men on the doctrine that Christ died for all individuals? Before this question can be answered, we must take some account of Calvin's general view of the activities of Christians toward unbelievers. . . . As in the case of church discipline and pastoral care, Calvin believed that Christian activity must be based, not on the elective decree of God (about which we have no firm knowledge in cases other than our own), but a practical working assumption. The assumption in the case of unbelievers was one which dovetailed with the universal saving will of God revealed in preaching: God loves all sinners and wills all sinners to be saved. *This we have seen, was not for Calvin theologically true. But it was the assumption which has to be made concerning Christian activity toward the world of men outside of the church.*³⁵

Rainbow further states,

In the final analysis, Calvin's doctrine of church activity toward the world was not unlike his doctrine of church discipline. . . . In both cases, there is an important working assumption which must be made for this help to be given: the wayward brother, it is that because he is a member of the visible church he is a blood-bought soul; with the unbeliever outside the church, it is that Christ's death extends to him as well. In both cases the assumption is based on a degree of ignorance about election and reprobation. And in both cases, the assumption creates a kind of ethical imperative which to ignore is really to despise the blood of Christ and the souls for whom it was shed. So, *in the end, Calvin extended a kind of "judgment of charity" even beyond the pale of the visible church.* Only on the last day will the line of demarcation between the elect and the reprobate be as clear to human perception as it now is to God, and only then will God's treatment of human beings fully correspond to his decree.³⁶

Rainbow is incorrect to claim that Calvin did not believe it was theologically true that God loved all mankind and truly desired the salvation of all men by the revealed will. The evidence for this in Calvin is so overwhelming that Rainbow's comment is indefensible.³⁷ Second, if Rainbow is wrong on the first point, then there is no support for his second assertion that when Calvin said Christ suffered for and redeemed all men he simply meant it as a judgment of charity. Third, Rainbow, like Nettles, adduces no textual evidence from Calvin where he indicates he only meant

³⁵Rainbow, *Will of God and The Cross*, 171. Emphasis added.

³⁶Ibid., 173. Emphasis added.

³⁷See Calvin's various comments on such verses as 2 Pet 3:9, John 3:16-17, Ps 81:13, Matt 23:37, and Lam 3:33 in his *Commentaries*.

to speak "from the human point of view."

There is no evidence from Calvin that he meant to suggest that we are to treat the unsaved "as if it were" the case that Christ has died for them, too, as he has died for us. It is simply an inference which contradicts all the *prima facie* evidence from Calvin. Nettles cites Calvin on Romans 5:18. First the text from Calvin:

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 (Calvin on *Romans* 5:18, emphasis added).

Regarding this Nettles says,

The language is carefully constructed, and Calvin's precise affirmation will become clearer below. One can see that what Christ accomplished through His death, *was accomplished for the world*, a reality that justifies preaching the Messianic redemption to all nations. The gospel also is offered to all men irrespective of their being Jew or Gentile. Though so openly and freely declared, not all of those to whom the gospel is preached receive Christ (300, emphasis added).

Nettles is trading on an ambiguity. The question should be, Does the "world" function for Nettles in the same way it does here for Calvin? The problem is that Nettles provides no evidence from Calvin that the term "world" is to be understood phenomenologically. In as much as Rainbow suggests that Calvin is exhorting us simply to act "as if" Christ had died for all men, when in fact he had not, Nettles is advocating the same basic idea. The real line of investigation should be how Calvin means to employ the term "world" in the wider context of his writings. Given that Calvin specifically says Christ "suffered for" the *sins* of "all the world," the most natural reading of Calvin suggests a universal vicarious satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. On what *textual* grounds from Calvin on Romans 5 could Nettles suggest otherwise? Nettles applies his interpretative method to another famous Calvin statement:

"Which he hath purchased." The four reasons, whereby Paul doth carefully prick forward the pastors to do their duty diligently, because the Lord hath given no small pledge of his love toward the *Church in shedding his own blood for it*. Whereby it appears how precious it is to him; and surely there is nothing which ought more vehemently to urge pastors to do their duty joyfully, than if they consider that the price of the blood of Christ is committed to them. For hereupon it follows, that unless they take pains in the Church, *the lost souls are not only imputed to them*, but they be also guilty of sacrilege, because they have profaned the holy blood of the Son of God, *and have made the redemption gotten by him to be of none effect*, so much as in them lies. And this is a most cruel offense, if, through our sluggishness, the death of Christ do not only become vile or base, but the fruit thereof be also abolished and perish; and it is said that God hath purchased the Church, to the end we may know that he would have it remain wholly to himself, because it is meet and right that he possess those whom he hath redeemed (Calvin on *Acts* 20:28, emphasis added).

Nettles comments,

Calvin represented this as the danger of the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. From a purely *phenomenological standpoint*, the potential within every aspect of saving truth can be rendered of no effect by the unfaithfulness of men and their blind refusal to consent to the purpose of God in each part. Faithless ministers not only endanger souls but profane the sacred blood of the Son of God and make ‘useless the redemption acquired by Him, as far as they are concerned.’ It is not useless in the infallible purpose of God but ‘as far as they are concerned,’ to the degree that their faithless work is concerned in the matter, it is useless (301, emphasis added).

Nettles would have us believe that Calvin only means to suggest that the redemption price only appears to have been voided from the human point of view. While there is some truth to this, Nettles cannot adduce evidence which indicates that Calvin spoke of the redemption of the visible church as only a *phenomenological* redemption.

The next text of interest which Nettles cites is Calvin on 2 Pet 2:1. Here is Calvin’s commentary on 2 Pet 2:1 and Jude 4:

Though Christ may be denied in various ways, yet Peter, as I think, refers here to what is expressed by Jude, that is, when the grace of God is turned into lasciviousness; for Christ redeemed us, that he might have a people separated from all the pollutions of the world, and devoted to holiness, and innocency. They, then, who throw off the bridle, and give themselves up to all kinds of licentiousness, *are not unjustly said to deny Christ by whom they have been redeemed* (Calvin on 2 Pet 2:1, emphasis added).

And, indeed, in the Second Epistle of Peter, Christ alone is mentioned, and there he is called Lord. But He means that Christ is denied, *when they who had been redeemed by his blood*, become again the vassals of the Devil, *and thus render void as far as they can that incomparable price* (Calvin on Jude 4, emphasis added).

Regarding Calvin’s comments on 2 Pet 2:1, Nettles says,

We see the same defeat of grace in Calvin’s look at 2 Peter 2 when he pointed out that ‘those who throw over the traces and plunge themselves into every kind of license are not unjustly said to deny Christ, by whom they were redeemed.’ That does not mean that Christ’s purpose to ‘have us as a people separated from all the iniquities of the world, devoted to holiness and purity’ will fail in any instance (302).

Nettles’ phenomenological argument suffers from a serious flaw that brings us face to face with the problematic of his method and interpretation. Nettles’ hypothesis proposes that when Calvin spoke in terms of universal satisfaction he merely meant to describe Christ’s redemption from the human point of view, that is, no man is to be *a priori* excluded from redemption. We are to “view” all men as potential candidates of salvation and redemption. When we meet individuals within the church, we are to view them from this charitable perspective. When we meet individuals outside of the church, similarly, we are to also see them in this most charitable light as viable

candidates for redemption, for, as Nettles would explain, there is provision enough, on the terms of limited satisfaction, for them as much as there is for any man in the world. As noted, this is a modification and extension of Rainbow’s “judgment of charity” argument.

Evaluation and Response

Calvin and the Language of Redemption

How can we test this hypothesis? What evidence could one adduce to falsify this hypothesis? Or what evidence would make it improbable? I would argue that in Calvin’s comments on 2 Pet 2:1 and Jude 4 we have exactly such falsifying data which invalidates Nettles’ “point of view” hermeneutic. We have here a case of known apostates, men who have left the church, repudiating it by denying Christ anew. From the human point of view, these apostates are known exactly for what they are, or at least in the eyes of Peter and Jude. They are men who have been accursed a second time. Peter says, “These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, *for whom the black darkness has been reserved*” (2 Pet 2:17). Jude writes, “For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, *those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation*, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). If we assume for the moment that Calvin really did hold to limited redemption, on what basis would it have been sensible for him to imagine that known apostates, men doomed to hell according to the inspired writers, had been redeemed by Christ? Rainbow’s judgment of charity idea falls apart at this point. Nettles’ “human point of view” hermeneutic suffers the same problem. The *human point of view* is clearly laid out for us by Peter and Jude: these men are doomed to hell. How meaningful is it for someone to propose that, from our standpoint we are to regard these persons as candidates to receive those blessings that Christ has died to procure, or further, that they have been redeemed?

To state this in another way, how sensible would it have been for John Owen to say of these apostates, “They have been redeemed”? Note, Calvin does not say, that we, or Peter or Jude, had *assumed* they *had been* redeemed. Surely the more plausible explanation is that Calvin believed that in some actual sense, in some objective and real sense, Christ had redeemed these men. These are not the only statements we have from Calvin which further demonstrates the inapplicability of Nettles’ interpretation of Calvin here. Calvin, for example, says, “It follows, moreover, that the *poor souls whom our Lord Jesus Christ has bought* so dearly that he did not spare himself to save them, *perish and are given into Satan’s possession*.”³⁸ Calvin expressly affirms that there are souls which “perish” and are given into Satan’s possession but which had been “redeemed.” Calvin could not have been talking about some hypothetical counterfactual provision of salvation which would have been for them had they not fallen away. What limited satisfaction advocate has ever spoken of redeemed souls perishing in hell?

Again, to come back to our earlier question, “What evidence could Nettles present from Calvin to suggest that the *prima facie* reading should not be the accepted reading here?” When unbelievers are in view, the same problem presents itself. Calvin later writes,

³⁸Calvin, *Sermons on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 525. Emphasis added.

However, St. Paul speaks here expressly of the saints and the faithful, but this does not imply that we should not pray *generally for all men*. For *wretched unbelievers* and the ignorant have a great need to be pleaded for with God; *behold them on the way to perdition*. If we saw a beast at the point of perishing, we would have pity on it. And what shall we do when we see souls in peril, which are so precious before God, as he has shown in that *he has ransomed them with the blood of his own Son*? If we see then a poor soul going thus to perdition, ought we not to be moved with compassion and kindness, and should we not desire God to apply the remedy?³⁹

To incorporate Rainbow's terminology, "What actual evidence from the text of Calvin is there to believe that Calvin did not think this was theologically true, but only an *assumption* for the sake of Christian ministry to these unsaved, yet all the while, there is actually no actual satisfaction accomplished for them, that is, "in their behalf"? Calvin, as expositor of his own theology writes,

And that speaks not only to those who are charged with the responsibility of teaching God's word, but to *everyone in general*. For on this point the Holy Spirit, who must be our guide, is not disparaging the right way to teach. If we wish to serve our Master, that is the way we must go about it. *We must make every effort to draw everybody to the knowledge of the gospel. For when we see people going to hell who have been created in the image of God and redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that must indeed stir us to do our duty and instruct them and treat them with all gentleness and kindness as we try to bear fruit this way.⁴⁰

From the human point of view, these men are "going to hell." Note the tense again, and that he clearly speaks to an accomplished reality, not to a potential one. Calvin again:

And now there is another reason we must extend this teaching a bit further. It is, as I have already said, that, *seeing that men are created in the image of God and that their souls have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ*, we must try in every way available to us to draw them to the knowledge of the gospel.⁴¹

On the other hand, when Luke speaks of the priests, he is speaking of the responsibility of those who hold *public office*. Principally, they are ordained to bear God's word. So when some falsehood appears or Satan's wicked disseminations proliferate, it is their duty to be vigilant, confront the situation, and do everything in their power to protect poor people from being poisoned by false teachings and *to keep the souls redeemed by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ from perishing, from entering into eternal death*.⁴²

The language of "redeemed souls perishing" is not unique to Calvin. For

³⁹Calvin, *Sermons on Ephesians*, 684-85. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰Calvin, *Sermons on Acts 1-7* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2008), 587-588. Emphasis added.

⁴¹Ibid., 593. Emphasis added.

⁴²Ibid., 112. Emphasis added.

example, Rudolph Gualther, a near contemporary of Calvin, wrote,

But this man of sin . . . will be under the judgment of no man, *although he bring infinite souls of men, (that were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ)*, and bind innumerable people prentices, with the common enemy of mankind the Devil, *unto the slaughter-house of everlasting damnation*.⁴³

It is undeniable that Gualther held to an actual unlimited satisfaction for all the sins of all men, without exception. His language, therefore, demands to be taken in a straightforward manner. Luther's wording is nearly identical:

But you are no longer of the church, or members of the church, for in this holy church of God you are building your own new apostate church, the devil's brothel with limitless whoredom, idolatry, and innovation, by which *you corrupt those who have been baptized and redeemed along with yourselves. And you swallow them down through the jaws of hell into the abyss of hell itself*, with a *countless multitude*, along with the terrible wailing and deep sorrow of those who see this with spiritual eyes and recognize it.⁴⁴

From another source, William Tyndale:

And I wonder that M. More can laugh at it, and not rather weep for compassion, *to see the souls for which Christ shed his blood to perish*. And yet I believe that your *holy church* will not refuse at Easter to receive the tithes of all that such blind people rob, as well as they dispense with all false gotten good that is brought them; and will lay the ensample of Abraham and Melchizedec for them.⁴⁵

In the original Reformed polemic against Rome, one line of argument was that due to Roman Catholic indulgences and negligence countless multitudes of souls which had been redeemed by the blood of Christ were being lost to eternal destruction. With that understanding, statements like these from Calvin now make perfect sense:

Hence it ought to be observed, that whenever the Church is afflicted, the example of the Prophet ought to move us to be touched (*sumpatheia*) with compassion, if we are not harder than iron; for we are altogether unworthy of being reckoned in the number of the children of God, and added to the holy Church, if we do not dedicate ourselves, and all that we have, to the Church, in such a manner that we are not separate from it in any respect. Thus, when in the present day the Church is afflicted by so many and so various calamities, and *innumerable souls are perishing, which Christ redeemed with his own blood*, we must be barbarous and savage if we are not touched with any grief. And especially the ministers of the word ought to be moved by this feeling of grief, because, being

⁴³Rudolphe Gualter, *Antichrist* (Imprinted in Sothwarke by Christopher Trutheall, 1556), 120b and 121b. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴Martin Luther, "Against Hanswurst," in *Luther's Works*, 41:209-210. Emphasis added.

⁴⁵William Tyndale, "Answer to Sir Thomas Moore's Dialogue," in *The Works of the English Reformers William Tyndale and John Frith*, ed. Thomas Russell (London: Printed for Ebenezer Palmer, 1831), 2:131. Emphasis added.

appointed to keep watch and to look at a distance, they ought also to groan when they perceive the tokens of approaching ruin. (Calvin, *Isaiah* 22:4, emphasis added)

When the language of Calvin is compared to Luther we again see strong similarities of expression. Both make mention of God's compassion to countless souls perishing who have been redeemed in the context of churchly indifference, and the lack of true pastoral care and ecclesial oversight.

Calvin has many statements where he apparently asserts that Christ shed his blood for the whole world. For example, he comments, "Also when we minister the Lord's Supper, we rehearse what was said by our Lord Jesus Christ: This is my body which is delivered for you: *this is my blood which is shed for the salvation of the world* (Matt 26:26 and 1 Cor 11:24)."⁴⁶ This essentially parallels Calvin's statements regarding texts which use the phrase "the many" in reference to the death of Christ, especially his comment on Matt 20:28. In many of these instances, Calvin expressly notes that "many" means "all" as in Romans 5, where "all" in Adam die. He also explicitly connects them to John 3:16. When his comments are seen cumulatively, there is no reasonable way not to take him at his word:

That, then, is how our Lord Jesus bore the sins and iniquities of many. But in fact, this word "many" is often as good as equivalent to "all." And indeed, our Lord Jesus was offered to all the world. For it is not speaking of three or four when it says: "For God so loved the world, that he spared not His only Son." But yet we must notice that the Evangelist adds in this passage: "That whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but obtain eternal life." Our Lord Jesus suffered for all, and there is neither great nor small who is not inexcusable today, for we can obtain salvation through him. Unbelievers who turn away from Him and who deprive themselves of him by their malice are today doubly culpable. For how will they excuse their ingratitude in not receiving the blessing in which they could share by faith?⁴⁷

Yet I approve of the *ordinary reading*, that he alone bore the punishment of many, *because on him was laid the guilt of the whole world*. It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that "many" sometimes denotes "all" (Calvin, *Isaiah* 53:12, emphasis added).

The word "many" (*pollon*) is not put definitely for a fixed number, but for a large number; *for he contrasts himself with all others*. And in this sense it is used in Romans 5:15, where Paul does not speak of any part of men, *but embraces the whole human race* (Calvin on *Matthew* 20:28, emphasis added).⁴⁸

⁴⁶Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, 1208. Emphasis added.

⁴⁷Calvin, *Sermons on Isaiah's Prophecy of the Death and Passion of Christ*, trans. T.H.L. Parker (Cambridge: James Clark, 2002), 140–41.

⁴⁸Compare Thomas Tymme's translation of Marlorate's quotation of Calvin on this passage: "But Christ here puts, many, not definitely for any certain number, but for a great number: because he opposes or sets himself against many. And in this sense the Apostle Paul takes it when he says: 'For through the sin of the one, many be dead: much more plenteous upon many was the grace of God, and gift by grace: which was of one man Jesus Christ.' In the which place Paul speaks not of any certain number of men,

"Which is shed for many." By the word "many" *he means not a part of the world only, but the whole human race*; for he contrasts many with one; as if he had said, that he will not be the Redeemer of one man only, but will die in order to deliver many from the condemnation of the curse. It must at the same time be observed, however, that by the words for you, as related by Luke, Christ directly addresses the disciples, and exhorts every believer to apply to his own advantage the shedding of blood. Therefore, when we approach to the holy table, *let us not only remember in general that the world has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but let every one consider for himself that his own sins have been expiated* (Calvin on *Mark* 14:24, emphasis added).

"To bear," or, "take away sins," is to free from guilt by his satisfaction those who have sinned. He says the sins of many, that is, of all, as in Romans 5:15. *It is yet certain that not all receive benefit from the death of Christ; but this happens, because their unbelief prevents them*. At the same time this question is not to be discussed here, for the Apostle is not speaking of the few or of the many to whom the death of Christ may be available; but he simply means that he died for others and not for himself; and therefore he opposes many to one (Calvin on *Hebrews* 9:28, emphasis added).

From these statements we can see that "the many" for Calvin is the same as "all" in Rom 5:15: "But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many." In Rom 5:15, it is obvious that the phenomenological reading is impossible. Nor could it be objected that "all" denotes "classes" of men, but not individual persons. That being obviously so for us and for Calvin, our only reasonable conclusion can be that "the many" in such passages as Heb 9:28 was literally equivalent to the "all" of Romans 5:15. Furthermore, Calvin writes,

Thus ye see in effect, whereunto we should refer this saying, where Saint Paul tells us expressly, that the Son of God gave himself. And he contents not himself to say, that *Christ gave himself for the world in common*, for that had been but a slender saying; but [shows that] *every [one] of us must apply to himself particularly*, the virtue of the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas it is said that the Son of God was crucified, we must not only think that *the same was done for the Redemption of the world*: but also *every [one] of us must on his own behalf join himself to our Lord Jesus Christ, and conclude, It is for me that he has suffered. . . . Also when we receive the holy Supper*, every man takes his own portion, to show us that our Lord Jesus Christ is communicated unto us, yea even to every one of us. Saint Paul therefore doth purposely use that manner of speech, to the end we should not

but comprehends all mankind." Augustine Marlorate, *A Catholike and Ecclesiastical Exposition of the Holy Gospel after S. Mathew, gathered out of all the singular and approued Deuines (which the Lorde hath geuen to his Churche) by Augustine Marlorate. And translated out of Latine into Englishe, by Thomas Tymme, Minister, Sene and allowed according to the order appointed* (Imprinted at London in Fletestreate near vnto S. Dunstones church, by Thomas Marshe, 1570), 453.

have any cold imagination, after the manner of diverse ignorant persons, which take themselves to be Christians, and yet in the meanwhile are as wretched beasts. But when we once know that *the thing which was done for the redemption of the whole world, pertains to every [one] of us severally*: it behooves every [one] of us to say also on his own behalf, The son of God hath loved me so dearly, that he has given himself to death for me . . . But when we once know that the thing which was *done for the redemption of the whole world, pertains to every [one] of us severally*.⁴⁹

There are a number of points that can be adduced. First, this language is strikingly similar to that of Bullinger:

It is true that the faithful man, by believing, before received the food that gives life, and still receives the same, but yet when he receives the sacrament, he receives something more. . . . Moreover the same man obeys the Lord's institution and commandment, and with a joyful mind gives thanks for his and *the redemption of all mankind*; and makes a faithful remembrance of the Lord's death, and witness the same before the church, of which body he is a member. This is also sealed to those which receive the sacrament, that the body of the Lord was given and *His blood shed, not only for men in general, but particularly for every faithful communicant whose meat and drink He is, to life everlasting*.⁵⁰

Calvin's communion language is almost a direct image of Bullinger's. The force of this argument is buttressed by the fact that it is undeniable that Bullinger held to universal redemption of all mankind and a universal satisfaction for all sin. For this, two more quotations will suffice:

Our Lord therefore became man, by the sacrifice of himself to make

⁴⁹John Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians* (Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, 1995), 299-300, 212-213. Emphasis added. All page numbers after the ellipsis refer to the Childress translation: John Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians*, trans. Kathy Childress (Edinburg: Banner of Truth, 1997). See also Marlorate's interesting conflation of two Calvin comments: "That our savior Christ under the name of many, does mean not only a part of the world, *but all mankind also*. For he opposes or sets many against one: as if he should say that he is the redeemer not of one man only, but that he suffered death to deliver many from the guilt of sin, and curse. Even so in the fifth to the Romans, S. Paul takes many for all men, by a comparison between one and many [Rom. 5.]. Neither is there any doubt, but that Christ speaking here to a few, meant to make the doctrine common to more. Notwithstanding we must also not that in Luke, he speaking to his Disciples by name, exhorts all the faithful, to apply the effusion of his blood to their use. *Therefore, when we come to the Holy Table, let not only this general cogitation come into our mind, that the world is redeemed by the blood of Christ, but also let every man think with himself that Christ has satisfied for his sins*." Augustine Marlorate, *Matthew*, 643-644. Emphasis added.

⁵⁰Heinrich Bullinger, "Chapter XXI Of the Holy Supper of the Lord," *The Second Helvetic Confession*, in James T. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries, in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 2:867-868. Emphasis added. Though this confession was first composed in Latin by Bullinger in 1562, and Calvin's *Sermons on Galatians* were preached earlier in the years 1557-1558, the striking similarity most probably reflects a common underlying theology. For example, compare Zwingli's statement: "But now I come to the words I quoted [Jn. 6:53]: 'Except ye eat, i.e., *except ye firmly and heartily believe that Christ was slain for you, to redeem you, and that His blood was shed for you*, to wash you thus redeemed (for that is the way we are in the habit of showing bounty and kindness to captives—first freeing them by paying a ransom, then when freed washing away the filth with which they are covered), 'he have no life in you.' Since, therefore, *Christ alone was sacrificed for the human race*, He is the only One through whom we can come to the Father." Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1981), 128. Emphasis added.

satisfaction for us; on whom, as it were upon a goat for the sin-offering, when all the sins of the whole world were gathered together and laid, he by his death took away and purged them all: so that now the only sacrifice of God has satisfied for the sins of the whole world.⁵¹

And:

Also they declare by the way, whom he has redeemed: that is to wit, men of all tribes, etc. In which rehearsal he does imitate Daniel in the 7. chap. and signifies an universality, *for the Lord has died for all: but that all are not made partakers of this redemption, it is through their own fault*. For the Lord excludes no man, but him only *which through his own unbelief, and misbelief excludes himself*.⁵²

Coming back to Calvin, we can see that in these cases, Calvin's language mirrors the language of his contemporaries, which lends weight to the argument that Calvin's theology of satisfaction was continuous with them as well. We can see from the examples of Calvin's language of "redeemed souls perishing" and of the redemption of the world relative to the individual, striking parallels between his expression and that of Gualther, Luther, Tyndale and Bullinger, all of which held to an unlimited satisfaction and universal redemption.

The point then is this: Why are we to imagine that the same language for Calvin apparently meant something completely different? What evidence is there within the data of the various texts that he himself adopted a different understanding of the critical terms like "world" or "redeemed souls perishing"? In terms of the pure historical data, there is no evidence to suggest this reading. It appears that what drives the conclusions of Helm, Rainbow, and now Nettles, is not the actual historical texts understood in terms of their own historical contexts, but their own systematic theological pre-commitments. They approach Calvin assuming that he shares their own *a priori* theological presuppositions.

⁵¹Bullinger, *Decades*, 1st Decade, Sermon 7, 1: 136.

⁵²Henry Bullinger, *A Hundred Sermons Upon the Apocalypse of Iesu Christ* (London: Printed by John Daye, Dwellyng ouer Aldersgate, 1573), 79-80. Emphasis added. Note the parallels here with Calvin's statement on Heb 9:26. There are too many such similarities of expressions between Calvin and his contemporary Reformers to suggest that it was Calvin, rather uniquely, who stood apart from his Reformed brothers and advocated a doctrine of limited satisfaction.

***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***

David W. Ponter
dponter@rts.edu

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 referrri 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 found 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.