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Craig on Penal Substitution: A Critique

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Summary: The recent atonement literature reveals a growing trend accepting the thesis that the Reformer's doctrine just is the biblical doctrine of penal substitution. This is the claim of William Lane Craig in his recent works on the atonement. In the present article, we challenge these set of claims in Craig's recent works and advance an alternative theory of the atonement that has some significant footing in the Reformed theological tradition, most notably reflected in the theologian, William Ames. Finally, we lay out several reasons why Craig's doctrine of the atonement fails to capture the biblical data on the atonement and fails to avoid the legal fiction problem parasitic on most, if not all, accounts of penal substitution.

Keywords: penal, substitution, reparative, rectoral, reformed, legal fiction

Zusammenfassung: Die jüngste Sühneliteratur zeigt einen wachsenden Trend, der die These akzeptiert, dass die Doktrin der Reformatoren die biblische Doktrin der Strafersetzung ist. Dies ist zumindest die Behauptung von William Lane Craig in seinen jüngsten Arbeiten zum Sühneopfer. In diesem Artikel stellen wir diese Behauptung in Frage und führen eine alternative Theorie der Sühne an, die in der reformierten theologischen Tradition eine bedeutende Grundlage hat und in ihren Grundzügen von William Ames entwickelt worden ist. Abschließend legen wir einige Gründe dar, warum Craigs Versöhnungslehre die biblischen Daten über das Sühneopfer nicht erfasst und das Problem der rechtlichen Fiktion nicht vermeidet, das bei den meisten Theorien über die Substitution von Sühne parasitär ist.

Schlüsselwörter: Strafe, Substitution, Wiedergutmachung, Rektorat, Reform, juristische Fiktion

Many American evangelical theologians who go by the name “Reformed” have become increasingly less friendly to the idea of a plurality of orthodox opinion

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about the nature of Christ's work.¹ By "orthodox," at least where the Reformed tradition is concerned, we simply mean a subordination to that doctrinal authority ensconced in various ecumenical symbols of the Church (e.g.: Nicaea or Chalcedon) and various confessional standards (e.g.: The Westminster Confession or The Three Forms of Unity). By "plurality of orthodoxy," we mean something like tolerance for theological opinion as it pertains to how sense is made of the work that Christ accomplishes by his death *within* the Reformed tradition. In what is not unjustifiably labeled a circling-the-atonement-wagons type of move, aversions to this sort of tolerance are evident from the number of recent efforts to defend penal substitution. Unfortunately, many of these efforts – popular and academic alike – leave much to be desired in terms of careful scholarship.²

The number of *robust* works to recently appear in defense of penal substitution makes for a rather short list. At the top of that list are two recently published monographs – ones with an overlapping literary ancestry – by William Lane Craig.³ In both cases, Craig's work is as one might expect them to be: thoughtful,

1 American Presbyterians and Baptists alike – Baptists often calling themselves "Reformed", no doubt, by virtue of their specific soteriological commitments – are fond of making such monolithic claims about the significance of Christ's death in terms of the exclusivity of penal substitution as, "unless the Son of God died in our place, taking the punishment we deserve for our sins, *we will not be saved and we will not be citizens of the kingdom*" (Greg GILBERT, "The Gospel: God's Self-Substitution for Sinners," in Kevin DEYOUNG, ed., *Don't Call it A Comeback* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2011], 81; emphasis added). DeYoung himself, much like Gilbert, asserts that, "Penal substitution is *not a theory* – one suggested idea that may or may not be true. Penal substitutionary atonement is the hope of sinners, the heart of the gospel, and the good news *without which all other news regarding the cross is null and void*" (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/substitution-is-not-a-theory-of-the-atonement/> [emphasis added]). Baptist theologians, Owen Strachan and Malcolm Yarnell similarly assert that penal substitution is "the burning core of the Gospel message and the *only hope of a fallen race*" (<http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2278/on-the-necessity-of-penal-substitutionary-atonement>).

2 See e.g.: S. JEFFERY, M. OVEY, A. SACH, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007).

3 William Lane CRAIG, *The Atonement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) and *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020). For the sake of reader ease, we shall henceforth refer to Craig's first work as *The Atonement* and his second as *The Death of Christ*. The first volume is what Craig calls 'an extract' (*The Death of Christ*, ix) of the second. Where possible, in what follows, we shall provide the reader with references to both volumes in order to show the conceptual overlap of Craig's argument between its first and second instalment. That said, given the close proximity of their composition, we shall not necessarily, in every case, privilege his latter work over his former. Lastly, for the sake of brevity, and because this article is admittedly ambitious, we will keep the number of direct quotes from Craig's work to a minimum and instead supply the reader with a healthy number of citations.

eloquent, and clear. For all their respective virtues, however, Craig's two volumes contain (at least) three not inconsiderable claims that we think, and will argue here, weaken his case that penal substitution should be regarded as the planetary fixture, as it were, around which Christian soteriology has its proper orbit.

To this end, this article unfolds in three parts to a conclusion. In the first part, we take issue with Craig's claim that the doctrine of penal substitution is *the* biblical account of atonement.⁴ We shall not be concerned in this part with a technically focused exposition and exegesis of passages like Romans 3 or Isaiah 53, both of which Craig deals with directly, and the latter extensively in his second work. Rather, we raise our objection on Craig's own argumentative ground by interrogating his use of scriptural motifs and the specific shape he claims they provide for our understanding of Christ's work. Here we consider the place of Scripture's Kingdom of God motif and its relationship to the doctrine of divine justice – a motif Craig makes much of – and atonement. In the second part of the article, we take issue with Craig's claim that the doctrine of penal substitution is *the* doctrine of the Reformers.⁵ Here, we argue that Craig's historical (and at times, revisionist) claims about the Reformer's wholesale buy-in on penal substitution over-steps the mark. Scrutinizing his various appeals – chiefly his appeal to Francis Turretin – we challenge Craig's second claim by laying out some of the rudiments of a much more medieval account of Christ's work issued by the English Puritan Reformed theologian, William Ames (1576–1633).⁶ Probably not a household name with the popular fame of John Calvin (sadly not even among those who would today call themselves Reformed), William Ames is a theological voice to whom most contemporary (especially American) theologians owe a monumental (and yet largely unconscious) theological debt; a debt far greater even than that owed to Francis Turretin.⁷ In the third part of this article, we take issue with Craig's claim that the

4 CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 20–5; *The Death of Christ*, 87–88. At one point Craig explicitly asserts that, “Essential to any biblically adequate theory of the atonement, it seems to me, is penal substitution. No atonement theory that neglects penal substitution can hope to account adequately for the biblical data.... A biblically adequate atonement theory must include penal substitution at its center,” 147.

5 CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 37; *The Death of Christ*, 125. According to Craig, “The Protestant Reformers, while appreciative of Anselm's satisfaction theory and recognizing that Christ's death satisfied God's justice, interpreted the satisfaction of God's justice in terms of penal substitution,” 125.

6 RICHARD A. MULLER, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 75.

7 For a thoroughgoing argument as to the pervasive theological influence of Ames on Reformed thought from the sixteenth-century onward, see: JAN VAN VLIET, *The Rise of the Reformed System: The Intellectual Heritage of William Ames* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, Studies in Christian History and Thought, 2013).

doctrine of penal substitution is not seriously undermined by such historic objections as the *legal fiction objection*, according to which (roughly), Christ can lawfully pay another individual's debt of punishment.⁸ Here we argue that Craig's appeal to a divine command theory does not supply him with the resources necessary to overcome what has historically been a metaphysical problem for those wishing to stand behind a theologically consistent and honestly reasoned doctrine of the Christ's atoning work. With all this now before us, let's take each one of these claims in turn. And with each claim we shall proffer our three objections, and then positively suggest ways of thinking about substitution consistent with the Reformed theological tradition that alleviates the problem of legal fiction.

Defining Some Terms

For the sake of clarity, and before we get to Craig's three claims and our objections thereto, we do well to define what we mean by atonement. For, what we mean by atonement could be a number of things, especially across the vast contemporary theological landscape. When we talk about atonement we mean, in short, the sacrificial work Christ accomplishes *by his death* to bring about the reconciliation of God and mankind. This definition, taking a historical cue from eminent Reformed historiographer, Richard Muller, points to Christ's sacrificial work in more specific terms of his making satisfaction for sin rather than his making "at-one-ment," which means, "to set at one."⁹ The difference between these two terms (i.e. satisfaction and atonement) may, at first, seem like a semantics game. History, according to Muller, would say otherwise. And for this reason, we ought probably refer to what Christ accomplishes by his death as satisfaction; this and the fact that to speak of making satisfaction for something naturally provokes questions of what or who requires it, where term atonement does not. That said, the word atonement invites discussion of scriptural *motifs* and *metaphors* about Christ's sacrificial work – itself a motif – that the term satisfaction apparently does not. Preference for the use of the term atonement bespeaks those contemporary efforts to forge an account of the significance of Christ's death like one does when looking at diamond with various facets, to use a common analogy.¹⁰ Putting these

⁸ CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 61–7; *The Death of Christ*, 183–93.

⁹ MULLER, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation*. Contra Muller, it is worth noting that the idea of 'at-one-ment', serves as the theological rubric for Eleonore STUMP's recent work, *Atonement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹⁰ We are not the only ones to point this out. See, e.g.: Oliver D. CRISP, *The Word Enfleshed: Exploring the Person and Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), ch. 7. Craig too admits of this when he

disclaimers aside for the purpose of meeting Craig on his own semantic ground, we shall make regular use of the word atonement, reserving the word satisfaction to describe Christ's work where dissent from this or that of Craig's assertions becomes necessary.

In the same way that atonement carries with it a number of candidate meanings, we also ought to define what we mean by the penal substitution *theory* of atonement, which as far as specific theories go, could itself mean a host of things.¹¹ We take it penal substitution is the doctrine according which, Christ assumes the legal responsibility for the sin(s) of human beings and through his substitutionary death, and pays their debt of punishment in order to satisfy the demands of God's retributive justice. Penal substitution is a theory that belongs categorically (and prominently) to those so-called restitution *models* of atonement. A model of atonement is a broad category that is representative of how several theories of atonement function. A *theory*, like penal substitution, refers to a more narrowly worked out, systematically detailed instance of an atonement model. Like biological species are to their genus, penal substitution, along with theories like *Non-penal Substitution* or *Penal non-substitution*, for example, belongs categorically to *restitution* models of atonement.

By most accounts, including Craig's account, the penal substitution theory consists of five fundamental and common constituents:

- I. Christ's atonement is necessary to the full scope of his redemptive work.¹²
- II. Christ dies as a substitute for (individual) human beings,¹³
- III. Christ dies in order to *absorb* the (penal) consequences of divine justice and wrath precipitated by the sin of humanity, being treated by God *as if* he were those individuals to whom the punishment were due.¹⁴

says plainly, "The biblical doctrine of atonement may be aptly compared to a multifaceted jewel, each facet contributing to the beauty of the whole gem" (*The Death of Christ*, 13, 15) and later on that, "With the Enlightenment came a proliferation of atonement theories, as theologians abandoned the traditional approaches" (*The Death of Christ*, 144). Perhaps there is more warrant in the literature for returning to a tradition use of terms like "satisfaction" that we first thought.

11 Oliver D. CRISP, *Approaching the Atonement: The Reconciling work of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020), 181. For a prime, though historic, example of the elasticity of terms like penal substitution and their use among theologians of the Reformed tradition, see: S. Mark HAMILTON, "Re-thinking Atonement in Jonathan Edwards and New England Theology," *Perichoresis* 15.1 (2017): 85–99.

12 CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 93–4; *The Death of Christ*, 173, n.1 (Craig chides Eleonore Stump for her "misleading" use of the catch-all term "Anselmian" to describe the penal substitution theory as it relates to the "necessitarian" nature of Christ's work to satisfy divine justice).

13 Ibid., 44–6 (Craig appears to be following Turretin on the point); *The Death of Christ*, 81–85, 125.

14 Ibid., 61–3; *The Death of Christ*, 148–50, 183–93.

IV. Christ's death pays a debt of punishment.¹⁵

V. Christ's death is a vicarious sacrifice.¹⁶

It is upon the skeletal structure of these five constituents that theologians like Craig en flesh, as it were, a variety of additional doctrinal features, some of which will feature in this article. For the sake of brevity and so that we might carve up Craig's doctrine at the joints, we shall make use of this more bare-bones definition of penal substitution in what follows rather than repeatedly rehearsing Craig's various and protracted definitional assertions. That said and in order that the tone of Craig's work(s) might be adequately set, consider the following excerpt from Craig's first monograph, *The Atonement*. This statement represents a sample of some bold assertions about the penal substitution theory that Craig makes throughout his work. Quoting him at length, Craig argues unreservedly that,

[A] biblically adequate atonement theory must not only include penal substitution as a central facet; it must also include propitiation, the appeasement of God's just wrath against sin. The source of God's wrath is His retributive justice, and so appeasement of wrath is a matter of the satisfaction of divine justice. We have seen that biblically the satisfaction of God's justice primarily takes place, not as Anselm thought, through compensation, but through substitutionary punishment. Here the superiority of a theory involving Christ's punishment emerges over penal theories according to which God does not punish Christ. For *it is hard to see how divine justice could be satisfied by Christ's voluntarily taking suffering upon himself if it were not a punishment meted out for our sins*. If the punishment for an offense were, say, deportation, how could justice be satisfied by someone else's voluntarily going or being sent into exile unless it were intended to be a punishment for the wrongdoing in question? If the suffering or harsh treatment is not punishment, then the demands of retributive justice seem to go unsatisfied.¹⁷

From this single statement Craig clearly commits himself to several claims we will go on to challenge in following sections, beginning with claims that the *biblical* doctrine of atonement is summarily explained by the centrality of the penal substitution theory.

¹⁵ CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 44–46, 51; *The Death of Christ*, 119 (Craig highlights Aquinas' discussion of "Christ's passion deliver[ing] us from the *debt of punishment*" (emphasis added), which he later says, "[approximated]" the Reformers doctrine of penal substitution (*The Death of Christ*, 125). Craig's reliance upon Turretin also bears this out, *The Death of Christ*, 132–37.

¹⁶ Ibid., 28, 44, 74; *The Death of Christ*, 186–93.

¹⁷ Ibid., 7, 76 (emphasis added).

Craig's First Claim- Penal Substitution is what the Scripture teaches.

Of course, we would be remiss were we to begin this section without highlighting the fact that Craig rightly situates his biblical discussion of Christ's atonement in terms of "cleansing" and the work of the Old Testament priestly office.¹⁸ Indeed, both of his monographs rightly sets out two fundamental and necessary criterion for theorizing about the atonement: 1) its biblical basis and 2) its theological (i.e. dogmatic) and philosophical coherence.¹⁹ In *The Atonement*, Craig offers up what he calls a 'survey of some of the *essential* elements that make up the *biblical* doctrine of the atonement,' rightly beginning with an emphasis on what the Scripture's say about the sacrificial system.²⁰ These motifs are supplemented at length and form the basis for the first four chapters of his latter work. In both works, his survey includes five "motifs" that he says are essential to a "right" understanding of the doctrine of atonement. These five motifs include: Sacrifice (chapter 1 of *The Death of Christ*), Isaiah's Suffering Servant (chapter 2 of *The Death of Christ*), Divine Justice (chapter 3 of *The Death of Christ*), Representation and Redemption (motifs which together comprise chapter 4 of *The Death of Christ*). "If any of these go missing," Craig asserts, "from a theory of the atonement then we know that we do not have a biblical theory of the atonement."²¹ (The careful reader will notice the shadow of these motifs in the five constituents we laid out in the last section to level-set our discussion). While there is a lot that could be said about all these motifs and how they inform our biblical understanding of atonement, we shall direct our attention (in this and in the next section) to Craig's discussion of the divine justice motif.

When it comes to the biblical account of divine justice, Craig ably situates his discussion in the lexicon (as well as in the grammar and syntax) of the original languages of both the OT and NT. In most cases, letting the NT drive his interpretation of the OT, Craig fixes his attention on the use "[f]orensic terminology," which he argues, "pervades both the OT and NT, especially Paul's epistles."²² His read on the OT notion of divine justice, one which clearly sets up his read on the

18 CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 5; *The Death of Christ*, ch. 1.

19 Ibid., 6; *The Death of Christ*, 149.

20 Ibid., 7 (emphasis added). In *The Death of Christ*, Craig says similarly (though less sharply) that, "Any adequate theory of atonement, if it is to commend itself to us as a Christian atonement theory must make peace with these [five] motifs," 88.

21 Ibid., 7, 76.

22 CRAIG, *The Death of Christ*, 77.

NT, is summed up in a singular observation about how “intriguing” it is that “the OT writers prefer a legal to any other imagery when they are referring to what God does.”²³ The emphasis on forensic terminology, Craig concludes, points specifically to “God’s righteousness [as] both an ethical and *legal normative concept*, a rich property of God Himself indicating His moral rectitude.”²⁴ And focusing the bulk of his concern thereafter on “a key atonement passage” in Paul’s epistle to the Romans (3.21–31), he identifies what he calls “ten interpretive turning points,” points which he admits to co-opting from D.A. Carson.²⁵

What is of so much interest to us here is not the useful word studies that litter virtually every paragraph of every page. Nor is it of Craig’s attempt to give a rational gut-punch, as it were, to those “reductionist” interpretations of Scripture by the New Perspective on Paul.²⁶ Our interest is, ironically, Craig’s own reductionism. For, the divine justice motif in Scripture is, as we shall see in a moment, far more nuanced than can be reduced to a discussion of God’s righteousness and retributivism.²⁷ By our lights as well as by the lights of many in the Reformed tradition (more on that in the next section), divine justice is a motif intimately related, if not, altogether inseparable from Scripture’s kingdom of God motif.²⁸

23 Ibid., 53.

24 Ibid., 77 (emphasis added).

25 Ibid., 53. The work from which Craig derives his ten points is: D. A. CARSON, “Atonement in Romans 3:21–26,” in Charles E. HILL and Frank A. JAMES III, eds. *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Perspectives* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 119–39.

26 A testimony to the overall quality of his scholarship on the atonement and his specific treatment of biblical motif of the divine justice, Craig does not hesitate taking aim at several authors allied with the New Perspective on Paul – a technical, but well known subject matter, well off the philosophical paths Craig is so often known for traversing – boldly labelling their view of “God’s righteousness,” as “implausible” and “reductionistic,” *The Death of Christ*, ch. 4.

27 We are conscious that from a philosophical perspective, were this criticism to properly ‘stick,’ so to speak, Craig might have to say something stronger about the necessary *and* sufficient conditions for this or that theory of divine justice and their relationship to his theory of atonement. Perhaps it would be better for us to say that Craig’s account of divine justice is reductionistic in the sense that bare retributivism simply doesn’t cut it when you make claims about a whole tradition of thinkers as Craig has. Tactically side-stepping, as it were, a doctrine that is so integral to discussions of the atonement as is divine justice with a defence like: “well, I am not trying to develop a full-orbed doctrine of penal substitution” is woefully inadequate and deleterious to Craig’s defence (see: *The Death of Christ*, 3–5),

28 It is certainly worth mentioning that the final paragraph of Craig’s chapter on the biblical motif of divine justice (*The Death of Christ*, 77) come ever-so conceptually close – save for those claims that Christ absorbed humanities penalty for sin – to summarizing a restitution theory we have elsewhere development under the name, *Reparative Substitution* (see: “Reparative Substitution and the Efficacy Objection: Toward a Modified Satisfaction theory of Atonement,” in Marc CORTEZ, Joshua R. FARRIS & S. Mark HAMILTON, eds. *Being Saved: Explorations in Soteriology and Human Ontology*

Now, lest you think we have some problem with Craig's five-motif criterion for atonement-theory making, we don't. That is, we don't have a *material* objection to Craig's assertions about the need to square any theory of atonement with these motifs. *These* motifs aren't the problem per se. Ours is a *formal* objection – one that likewise emerges from biblical theology – that directly relates to the Scripture's divine justice motif. And our objection is this: What if there is a motif that is missing from Craig's list of the minimum, "essential" motifs? What is more, what if the motif absent Craig's list of "essential" motifs governs how we ought to understand the other five that Craig proposes?²⁹ Such questions are kind of like asking whether God first reveals himself as Father or King? There is no doubt that the Scripture says he is both. And yet, the fact that the Scriptures reveal God as Father chronologically *after* they reveal him as King communicates something important about how Christians ought to understand him as Father. These are all important questions that Craig does not directly address. With them in mind, and taking a cue from the Scripture's not insignificant kingdom of God motif, let us look a bit more intently at the judicial demands of the divine kingdom in Scripture and more importantly for this article, how these demands are in fact met.

First Objection: Scripture, Divine Justice, and the Kingdom of God

According to the late and eminent Old Testament scholar, John H. Sailhamer, "the best big idea [in Scripture] is that which explains the most important features of the text [of Scripture]." ³⁰ Among those "best big ideas" – that is, those that ought to govern our understanding of how Scripture's various constituent parts and motifs cohere – is the Kingdom of God. ³¹ "The *centrality* of the idea of the kingdom

(London: SCM Press, 2018), 68–82; see also: HAMILTON and FARRIS, *Re-envisioning Substitutionary Atonement: Toward a Reformed Anselmianism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2022 [forthcoming]).

²⁹ It is of additional note that, assuming that Craig does not intend to his conditions for divine justice to necessary *and* sufficient conditions, this charge would be not that Craig's account is reductionist severely distorted what with his omission of the kingdom-motif concerning divine justice, assuming of course that the kingdom-motif should actually govern how one properly interprets I–V.

³⁰ John H. SAILHAMER, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 20.

³¹ According to Sailhamer, "the King and Kingdom metaphors readily appear as a central part of what he consistently calls the "compositional strategy" of the Pentateuch beginning in Genesis 1–2 (*Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 571–584 [emphasis added]). Highlighting the notion of a "composition

of God in biblical theology,” Sailhamer goes on to say, “is undisputed (cf. Mark 1.5).”³² So too is the kingdom of God’s thematic relation to justice and salvation, according to Sailhamer.³³ And this makes perfect sense since the judicial economy of the kingdom of God is governed by judicial demands *for which* the Scriptures indicate we must all account, and *from which* Christ’s work – his death in particular – is said to deliver us.³⁴ If Sailhamer is right, and clearly we think he is, Scripture has a lot more to say about the kingdom of God and its peculiar judicial demands than many contemporary theologians, including Craig, are wont to make systematic or constructive room for, particularly as it concerns the atonement.

It’s probably a fair bet, especially for the average American Evangelical, that Scripture’s kingdom of God motif is next to a non-factor for how one makes theological sense of the world, much less that it serves to organize one’s specific beliefs about the nature of justice or atonement. It’s also probably a fair bet that one’s first thoughts about such things as the kingdom of God and *divine* justice have to do with such subjects as retribution or wrath or hell. The same is likely true of one’s first thoughts about the kingdom of God and *atonement* having to do with little more than how Christ delivers people from the terrors of God’s retributive justice as a penal substitute. If we are right, and these are the first thoughts that many contemporary Christians have about divine justice, atonement and the kingdom of God motif in Scripture, we are left with really one rather simple question: Is that it? Retribution and deliverance from it – this is all Christ *died* for? Is that really the *full* picture of divine justice and atonement that the Scripture testifies to when it speaks of the kingdom of God? If it is, then the obviousness of the relation between kingdom, justice and atonement has somehow been lost on most contemporary theologians. This is where we think Craig’s five-motif proposal falls short. For, as we shall see in a moment, Craig’s assertions about divine

strategy” and the need for biblical interpreters to keep a fixed eye upon it is, somewhat ironic in light of Craig’s own appeal to the influence of Brevard Child’s “canonical” interpretation of Scripture upon his own (*The Death of Christ*, 14, n.1); Child’s and Sailhamer’s interpretive methods being so similar.

32 Ibid., 572.

33 Ibid., 578.

34 It is no surprise then that the recent re-discovery of Scripture’s kingdom metaphor in contemporary theology has gone on to fund a series of explorations of the public theology of Christian self-consciousness, the biblical-theological structure of the old and new covenants, and even more recently and more importantly for our purposes here, explorations of the work of Christ; see: SMITH, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker); et. al., *Awaiting the King* (Grand Rapids: Baker). GENTRY and WELLUM, *Kingdom Through Covenant* (Crossway). See e.g.: TREAT, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan).

justice are rather thin (both biblically and dogmatically speaking). And this, we argue is owing (at least in part) to Craig's exclusion of the kingdom of God motif from that which bears essentially upon theologizing about divine justice and atonement.

If, however, the bet we placed on the average American evangelical does not represent the actual full picture we ought to have in mind about this motif, then just what *are* the judicial demands of this divine kingdom? And more specifically, how are they structured? Is there, in fact, a structure? What is more, what is it about the work that Christ's death accomplishes that delivers humanity from these various judicial demands? Is the scope of Christ's work aimed at only one part of this supposed judicial structure (i.e. retributivism) as Craig suggests? If so, which part? If not, is it aimed at the whole? What then does a "whole" structure of divine justice look like? Since we are not exactly looking for a diagram or a map of said structure to simply emerge from the pages of Scripture, where do we start?

Well, arriving at *comprehensive* answers to all of these questions is not possible in this context. Arriving at *meaningful* answers to some of these questions, however, is not necessarily out of reach. To do so is a two-stage move. The first move involves a (very) brief survey of the Scripture, which will round out, as it were, the chief biblical-theological concerns of our first objection to Craig's five-essential-motif's assertion by seeing just how intimate is the Scriptural relationship between the kingdom of God, justice, and salvation. This will bring us right up to the second move and Craig's second claim that penal substitution is "the Reformer's doctrine." Here's the first move.

From the Mosaic acclamation of divine authority, "The LORD shall reign forever and ever" (Exodus 15.18), to the Mosaic reception of the commands like "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor" (Leviticus 19.15), there is clearly an understanding among the people of God about divine kingship and justice that is far more than merely retributive. This is an idea that is affirmed over and over in the Scripture from the conquest of Joshua and theocratic renewal of the covenant (Joshua 24), to the period when "God raised up Judges to rule of them" (Judges 2.16–19), while "there was no king in Israel [and] every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25), all the way to the Judges who ultimately "[perverted] justice" (1 Samuel 8:1), culminating in the people's demand for a king (1 Samuel 8.7); God, all the while, already ruling over them (1 Samuel 8).³⁵ It is the prophets and psalmists who then go on to fill out more of our

³⁵ It is noteworthy that from Leviticus to Samuel, it is the people's deliverance from slavery in Egypt that is the historical high-watermark event by which they are instructed to understand the

understanding of the relationship between the kingdom of God and justice. King David, for example, in Psalm 9.7–8, proclaims that “the LORD abides forever; He has established His *throne for judgment*, And He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with *equity*.” In Psalm 99.4, Ethan the Ezrahite proclaims that “the King is Mighty, He loves justice – you have established *equity*.” Both of these Psalmists point to God as king *and* judge. The careful reader will notice how these psalmists depict God’s execution of this justice, namely, with equity. Next, consider the Prophet Isaiah, who goes on to exclaim that “the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King; he *will save us*” (Isaiah 33.22). Note how Isaiah bundles the ideas kingdom, justice, and salvation together. Notice also how he speaks of salvation in the context of law-giving. Or take the Prophet Jeremiah, who records the promise, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land” (Jeremiah 23.5). Jeremiah, like those scriptural authors before him, has a far thicker notion of kingdom and justice than mere retribution. And of course, this list goes on and on.

From this all-to-brief survey let us consider the following five observations. First, there is a virtual mountain of scriptural evidence that appears to warrant our thinking that there is an intimate relationship between the kingdom of God, justice, and salvation. Second, there is strong evidence that supports Sailhamer’s claim that the kingdom of God is, in fact, a central motif in Scripture. Third, there is similarly strong evidence that supports our thinking that the subject of divine justice is potentially a subordinate and critical constituent of the kingdom of God motif. Fourth, consider that the judicial economy of this divine kingdom may equally and directly impact how we make sense of the economy of salvation. Fifth, and finally, we observe that Scripture’s account of the divine justice motif is by no means exhausted by retributivism. Retribution is but one part the larger picture of God’s judicial demands and atonement may or may not have an asymmetrical relationship to it. In the end, Craig’s development of the five motifs – Sacrifice, Isaiah’s Suffering Servant, Divine Justice, Representation and Redemption – may simply not be sufficient to carry explanatory payload required to make sense of what Scripture says about divine justice, much less atonement. If this is in fact the case, the next step in what remains of our argument requires that fill out our understanding of the specific structure of divine justice. Again, we are not looking for Scripture to provide us with a picture-like diagram of this judicial

character of God (i.e. as king and judge) and their status (i.e. as servants) in relation to him; a thing to which the scriptural authors consistently point.

structure so much as we are looking for a dogmatic account of it. With that, let us turn our attention to the next (historical-theological) section, Craig's second claim and our second move.³⁶

Craig's Second Claim: Penal Substitution is the Reformer's Doctrine

Simply put, Craig's second claim is that the doctrine of penal substitution is "the Reformer's doctrine."³⁷ In a statement common to each of his two monographs on the subject, he argues that,

*The Protestant Reformers, while appreciative of Anselm's satisfaction theory and recognizing Christ's death as satisfying God's justice, interpreted the satisfaction of God's justice in terms of penal substitution. That is to say, Christ voluntarily bore the suffering that we were due as the punishment for our sins. There is therefore no longer any punishment due to those who are the beneficiaries of Christ's death. God's wrath is propitiated by Christ's substitutionary death, for the demands of divine justice have been met.*³⁸

Of course, there are several notable claims here – large and small alike – worth tackling. The idea that the Protestant Reformers were somehow monolithically committed to the penal substitution theory is the one that we shall take head on. To do so, in keeping with the overall trajectory of our argument in this article, we shall focus our attention on one specific claim – one phrase, really – that Craig makes in the above statement that the "the demands of divine justice have been met" by Christ's work as a penal substitute.

³⁶ At this point, you might be thinking that Craig could respond by saying something like: "of course, a *comprehensive* biblical conception of divine justice would be multifaceted.... Must *every* aspect of a biblical conception of divine justice be a constituent of the kingdom motif?" To this we would say, having provided a hardly dismissible, thorough-going example of the centrality of the kingdom motif in William Ames, that the burden of proof is on Craig to demonstrate that the kingdom motif is not as integral to the doctrine of divine justice and its place in the development of the doctrine of atonement.

³⁷ CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 37ff; *The Death of Christ*, 125–7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 36–7 (emphasis added); *The Death of Christ*, 125.

To make his defense for this claim, Craig looks first to Martin Luther,³⁹ ever so briefly to Calvin,⁴⁰ and somewhat more extensively to both Francis Turretin⁴¹ and

39 Craig's use of Luther's doctrine of atonement – a doctrine for which he, himself, never made a systematic defense – as the means of getting the Penal Substitution theory off the ground as 'the Reformer's doctrine' is a bit overstated. The bewildering number of places where Luther speaks about what the death of Christ accomplishes is at best irreducible to the singular affirmation that he believed in penal substitution simply because he talks at times about the penalty of sin that Christ does something with in our stead. A close reading of the Augsburg confession relative to the articles on atonement (i.e. what they called [and we ought to henceforth call] "Satisfaction"), together with a cursory survey of Luther's sermons indicates that Luther was *at least* committed to a theory of atonement far more nuanced than what we are calling penal substitution theory here and *at most* committed to something more a kin to a sort of Christus Victor-heavy understanding of Anselmian Satisfaction. Luther himself states, "the death of Christ is a satisfaction not only for guilt, but also for eternal death", *Defense of the Augsburg Confession*, Article 6: Of Confessions and Satisfactions, (http://bookofconcord.org/defense_11_satisfaction.php.) In Luther's sermon on Luke 24:36–47, for example, he states quite clear that, quoting him at length, "if God's wrath is to be taken away from me and I am to obtain grace and forgiveness, some one must merit this; for God cannot be a friend of sin nor gracious to it, nor can he remit the punishment and wrath, unless payment and satisfaction be made. Now, no one, not even an angel of heaven, could make restitution for the infinite and irreparable injury and appease the eternal wrath of God which we had merited by our sins; except that eternal person, the Son of God himself, and he could do it only by taking our place, assuming our sins, and answering for them as though he himself were guilty of them. This our dear Lord and only Saviour and Mediator before God, Jesus Christ, did for us by his blood and death, in which he became a sacrifice for us; and with his purity, innocence, and righteousness, which was divine and eternal, he outweighed all sin and wrath he was compelled to bear on our account; yea, he entirely engulfed and swallowed it up, and his merit is so great that God is now satisfied and says, 'If he wills thereby to save, then there will be a salvation,'" *Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. 2, 344. For a helpful sketch of what we might think of as a "thicker" account of Luther's doctrine of atonement, see: Adonis VIDU, *Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in historical and Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), ch. 3.

40 CRAIG, *The Death of Christ*, 126–7. The Calvin-origin story for penal substitution is corroborated by a variety of historical (and Reformed) sources; see e.g.: VIDU, *Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts*, 118–19; William G.T. SHEDD, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3rd edn. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed), 451–55; Henrich HEPPE, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. THOMSON (London: Collins, 1950), 475–79ff; Herman BAVINK, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John BOLT, trans. John VRIEND (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 455ff.

41 CRAIG, *The Death of Christ*, 131–37. Francis Turretin (1623–87) is the go-to Reformed theologian for post-Reformation polemical defence of penal substitution. This helps explains at least some of the reason Craig privileges his more systematically detailed account over Calvin's. Defending the idea that Christ's endured what he calls the "punishment of desertion," Turretin argues, for example, that, "But as to a participation of joy and felicity, God suspending for a little while the favorable presence of grace and the influx of consolation and happiness that he might be able to suffer all the punishment due to us (as to the withdrawal of vision, not as a dissolution of union; as to the want of the sense of divine love, intercepted by the sense of the divine wrath and vengeance resting upon

Hugo Grotius.⁴² Drawing focused (though brief) attention to the decidedly forensic basis of Luther and Calvin's soteriology in *The Death of Christ*, Craig tees up his engagement with Turretin and Grotius with a fairly detailed interaction with the sixteenth century threat of Socinianism.⁴³ Socinus is commonly known for, among other theologically worrisome things, being one of the fiercest opponents to the doctrine of penal substitution (along with the suite of doctrines commonly associated with it, such as the doctrine of imputation) during this period. Highlighting this as Craig's starting point is worth mentioning for at least four reasons. The first reason is because, most obviously, it is part of the overall strategy of Craig's argument. The second reason is because Craig claims (rather curiously) that the "unmistakable influence" of Socinus' attacks on penal substitution bear the "remarkably" similar (though more forceful) content of contemporary attacks on the doctrine.⁴⁴ The third reason this is worth mentioning is because Turretin – the theologian that Craig appears to think represents the dogmatic standard on

him, not as to a real privation or extinction of it.) And, as the Scholastics say, as to the 'affection of advantage' that he might be destitute of the ineffable consolation and joy which arises from a sense of God's paternal love and the beatific vision of his countenance (Ps. 16); but not as to the 'affection of righteousness' because he felt nothing inordinate in himself which would tend to desperation, impatience or blasphemy against God," *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George MUSGRAVE GIGER, ed. James DENNISON JNR. (Phillipsburg, NJ.: Presbyterian and Reformed, Vols. 1–3, 1992–1997), 14, i, vi (hereafter, *Institutes*)

42 Craig's appeal to Grotius (1583–1645) – the Dutch (Arminian) theologian, and jurist – is, well, curious. For, he recasts Grotius' *Moral Government* theory in (revisionist) terms as penal substitution. Such an assertion merits a second and far more critical look. For, according to Garry Williams' unpublished and quite illuminating Oxford DPhil thesis, together with Oliver Crisp's recent exposition of the atonement theology of the younger Jonathan Edwards (and what he calls Edwards Jr.'s commitment to a *Penal non-Substitution* theory in *JTS*), Grotius' claims about the penal nature of the atonement find their most thorough explanation in terms of a broader Anselmian satisfaction theory. See: Garry WILLIAMS, "A Critical Exposition of Hugo Grotius's Doctrine of the Atonement in *De Satisfactione Christi*" [D.Phil Thesis, Oxford University, 1999]). An expanded version of Crisp's *JTS* article appears in Oliver D. CRISP, "Penal Non-Substitution", in Oliver D. CRISP, ed., *A Reader in Contemporary Philosophical Theology* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 299–327. That said, we can whole-heartedly agree with Craig that Turretin offers, perhaps more than any other theologian of the period, a thoroughgoing exposition of the work of Christ's death, explicitly cast in terms of what many contemporary theologians call penal substitution.

43 CRAIG, *The Death of Christ*, 127–31.

44 These are rather bold statements on Craig's part, particularly in light of the other unorthodox claims that he (rightly) ascribes to Socinus – the denial of Christ's divinity, for example. This is a bold statement because, there are a number of contemporary theologians – including ourselves – who are committed to theories of atonement other than penal substitution and are perfectly orthodox. The association of Socinus' thinking and contemporary thinking on the atonement is likely true, but, by no means in all cases.

the atonement among of those of the Reformed tradition—directly engages Socinus’ various attacks (Craig’s own defense for penal substitution is in many ways a co-opting and contemporizing of Turretin’s objections to Socinus).⁴⁵ The fourth reason this is worth mentioning is because, once again, Craig’s (rightful) condemnation of Socinianism comes at the expense of any substantive engagement with Socinus on the subject of divine justice outside of retributivism (i.e. punishment).

Now, to Craig’s credit, when he gets to Turretin’s actual defense of penal substitution he clearly states that “the foundations of Turretin’s atonement doctrine are laid in his treatment of divine justice.”⁴⁶ Craig also correctly (albeit only momentarily) observes that divine retribution is a dogmatic subcategory of what theologians of the period once commonly referred to as “Distributive justice.” Distributive justice, Craig says,

[M]ay be either *punitive* (inflicting punishment) or *premiative* (bestowing rewards).... The former is exercised when God imposes punishment not only on sin but also on the punishment on the very person of the sinner. The latter is exercised when God grants a moderation in the imposition of punishment either in time (by delaying it) or in person (by transferring it) or in degree (by mitigating it). Justice demands necessarily that all sin should be punished but does not equally demand that it should be punished in the very person sinning or at a certain time and in a certain degree.⁴⁷

So stated, Craig (almost dismissively) returns to his singular interest in the punitive aspect of justice. Limiting his attention to this one aspect of divine justice as he discusses the atonement, thereby neglecting the larger picture of God’s judicial demands – a picture that we will explore in more detail in a moment – is, once again, at the heart our objection to Craig’s overall defense for penal substitution. And this, once again, recalls our previous and still unanswered questions: Is that it? Is that all that Christ’s sacrifice was for? Perhaps this is case; perhaps penal substitution is a judicial monolith and has nothing really to do with meeting what we shall see are a host of other explicit judicial demands of the kingdom of God.

To help unpack this assertion, and set up our objection, we shall conscript the voice of another, often overlooked, Reformed theologian, namely, the English Puritan, William Ames (1576–1633). For, if Craig’s assertion about penal substitution being “the Reformer’s doctrine” extends to Turretin and then Grotius, and clearly it does – both of whom belong categorically speaking to the early (Grotius) and high (Turretin) period of the Protestant scholastic tradition of the post-Refor-

⁴⁵ CRAIG, *The Death of Christ*, 127–31.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴⁷ CRAIG, *The Death of Christ*, 132 (emphasis added).

mation – our appeal to Ames, who belongs uniquely to both the early and high periods must be no less regarded as representative of Reformed opinion at the time. But before we move on to defend this claim, let us make a few observations, specifically about Craig's take on Turretin (we will look at Grotius a bit further in the final section when we look at Craig's account of legal fiction).

Craig carves up his inquiry into Turretin in several parts. He builds his case, for instance, on such subjects as Turretin's account of the divine nature, and more specifically his account of divine freedom. He appeals to Turretin's commitment to a *Divine Command Theory* of ethics, according to which (roughly), "God is not bound [to act] by some external natural law."⁴⁸ He also touches on Turretin's forensic notion of imputation (and its foundation for the Protestant Reformed doctrine of forensic Justification), and eventually his strictly forensic notion of faith and union with Christ as the ground of the imputation of sin to Christ and righteousness to the beneficiaries of his atonement.⁴⁹ The attention Craig pays to these matters help him validate his claim that Turretin is, indeed, committed to a doctrine of penal substitution. In part, these doctrinal constituents are common to most Reformed arguments for penal substitution and we somewhat anticipated them. For our own specific purposes, the most important section of Craig's interaction with Turretin appears when he elaborates on the nature of sin and the nature of atonement, both in three points and both in the context of Socinius' "capital error."⁵⁰

In a well-crafted distillation of Turretin's thinking on these matters, Craig says that the nature of sin is "(1) a debt which we owe to divine justice or (2) a mutual enmity between us and God or (3) a crime for which we deserve everlasting death before God, the supreme ruler and judge of the world (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology* 14.10)."⁵¹ Regarding the nature of atonement, Craig likewise says of Turretin,

Satisfaction for sin must therefore involve (1) payment of a debt, (2) appeasement of divine wrath, and (3) expiation of our guilt. This multifaceted character of satisfaction is important because the right to punish is not the private right of a creditor, though sins are sometimes compared to debts, for sins are also crimes that cannot remain unpunished without prejudice to the laws (1.19).... [In] a penal or a criminal debt, the act of a judge is required if the guilty person is to be freed without the strict [i.e. personal, individual responsibility] en-

⁴⁸ CRAIG, *The Death of Christ*, 133.

⁴⁹ It is of at least some note at this point that Craig is ultimately repelled by notions of union that go beyond those of a purely forensic character (i.e. realist notions); see e.g.: *The Death of Christ*, 206, n. 22)

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

forcement of the law. This judicial act is known as *relaxation*. In such a case the very thing that is owed is not paid (namely, the criminal's undergoing punishment), but in the judge's forbearance something else is allowed [i.e. the substitution of one not personally, individually responsible for the offense, like Christ]. So with respect to our sin, God can be regarded as (1) the creditor or as (2) the offended party or as (3) the judge. The 'capital error' of Socinus is neglecting the last role [i.e. the judge].⁵²

In other words, Craig's argument is that Socinus has no room for God *as judge* in the sense that he makes provision for God to relax the strict demands of the law that require lawbreakers be liable to punishment for offenses against the law.⁵³ Of course, Turretin (and later, Craig himself, *The Death of Christ*, 203–209) argues to the contrary. That is, and with a metric-ton riding on the divine command theory, Turretin (and Craig) thinks that God can relax these strict demands to make provision for a non-lawbreaker (i.e. Christ) to substitute himself for another and in so doing be liable to punishment. And this is the crux of the matter. Craig says precisely this, explaining that, "[i]n God's role as judge a certain forbearance can be admitted, either in relation to the *time* by the delay of punishment or in relation to the *degree* by mitigation of the punishment or in relation to the *person by a substitution*."⁵⁴ In other words, according to Craig (and his reading of Turretin), because God can do whatsoever he pleases, he can (as judge) modify the strict legal demands of various legislation of which he himself is the author in order to justifiably treat one person *as if* he were another (i.e. legal fiction), and all this without worry of any sort of moral protestation of the creature.⁵⁵ "God [simply] adopts [this] for the administration of justice,"⁵⁶ Craig says. At this, he then lays out five "necessary conditions" (one's that he says Christ meets) that he thinks justify his reasons for this sort of judicial relaxation. These five necessary conditions include: 1) the common nature of Christ's humanity and ours, 2) the consent of Christ's will to perform this substitutionary act, 3) the authority Christ has over his life to do with it what he will, 4) the substitute's power to successfully bear the punishment for the sin of others, and 5) the innocence of Christ.⁵⁷ Such are the inner workings of the rationale for Turretin's (and, in part, Craig's) assent to the penal substitution theory of atonement.

This small section pulls back the veil, so to speak, on Craig's own view more than at any point in his dealings with Turretin. He directs his reader's attention

⁵² CRAIG, *The Death of Christ*, 133.

⁵³ Craig takes this subject again later when he walks through legal fiction and vicarious liability objections (*The Death of Christ*, 183–93).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 134 (emphasis added), 197 ff.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 185, 197.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁵⁷ CRAIG, *The Death of Christ*, 134.

back to it at several points in latter parts of his work. In the end, Turretin represents a strong source of historical leverage, as it were, for Craig's proposal that penal substitution is "the Reformer's doctrine." So too does Turretin represents an argumentative backdrop for some the mechanics of Craig's own view. The effect of Craig's reading of Turretin, however correct in its interpretation, unfortunately falls far short of being as representative among theologians of the Reformed tradition as Craig supposes. For, as we've suggested throughout this article, giving such focused attention to the subject of retributivism, Craig takes little interest in developing the larger picture of divine justice. The story of divine justice is far thicker than mere demands of retributivism and neglecting it as such is much more than a mere crack in the argumentative fortress Craig thinks his appeal to Turretin aids him in building. So also is the story of how Christ meets these demands by making atonement. To demonstrate this, let us move on then to consider another Reformed theologian, one whose account of divine justice is as robust as is his theory of atonement.

Second Objection: A Larger Picture of Divine Justice

Our objection to Craig's second assertion, namely, that penal substitution is "the Reformers doctrine" consists in two inseparable but distinguishable parts. The first part is simply that there are other (prominent) voices in the Reformed tradition that are committed otherwise; case in point, William Ames, who is committed to some version of Anselm's Satisfaction theory of atonement.⁵⁸ Roughly, on the satisfaction theory, Christ gives up his life in order to restore honor to God by paying a debt – not of debt of punishment, mind you (as in the case of penal

⁵⁸ According to John Dykstra Eusden, "Ames presents basically an Anselmic interpretation of the atonement, stressing Christ's 'Satisfaction'" ('Editor's Introduction', in John DYKSTRA EUSDEN, ed., William AMES, *The Marrow of Theology*, [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968], p. 20, n. 44). For more on Anselm's satisfaction theory, see: St ANSELM, "Concerning the Redemption of Mankind," in Clement C. J. WEBB, ed., *The Devotions of Saint Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: Methuen & Co., 1903), 105–19; St ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *Why God became Man* in Brian DAVIES and G.R. EVANS, eds. *The Major Works*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Dániel DEMÉ's, *The Christology of Anselm of Canterbury* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); David BROWN, "Anselm on Atonement" in Brian DAVIES and Brian LEFTOW, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to St Anselm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 279–302; Richard CAMPBELL, "The Conceptual Roots of Anselm's Soteriology" in D.E. LUSCOMBE and G.R. EVANS, eds., *Anselm: Aosta, Bec, and Canterbury* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

substitution), but of debt of honor. While we will not go further in defending this particularly assertion, it is worth considering the following excerpt from Ames as indicative of this claim. According to Ames,

It is called satisfaction because it is for the honour of God as a kind of recompense for the injury done to him by our sins... This satisfaction had sufficient and, in a way, infinite worth, first because of the person who offered it, who was God; second, because of the value and excellence of the thing offered, for he offered himself, God and man; third, because of the manner of offering in which there was a certain divine perfection in the person... In satisfaction, not only the act or the suffering, but the person himself who acts and suffers, voluntarily complies with the will of him to whom the honour is yielded. Work always depends on the worker. The death of Christ is the last act of humiliation in which he underwent extreme, horrible, and most acute pain for the sins of men. It was an act of Christ and not a mere matter of enduring because he met and endured it purposely.... [T]he death of Christ was the same in kind and propagation as the death justly due for the sins of men. It corresponded in degree, parts, and kind.⁵⁹

The second part of our objection to Craig's assertion has to do specifically with larger picture of divine justice about which Ames (and others) have a great deal more to say than either Turretin or Craig. Ames' theory, like Turretin's (and Craig's), makes sufficient sense of divine retribution. But, unlike Turretin or Craig, Ames also makes sufficient sense of the other numerous demands of divine justice. Like a photographer who opens the aperture on his camera in order to let more light into his shot, let us consider in more detail just what these other judicial demands are.

⁵⁹ AMES, *Marrow*, 1.10.6, 18, 20, 135–7; 1.22.1–3, 6, 141–2. This sounds quite like Anselm when he says, "... [S]in is nothing other than not to give God what is owed him.... Therefore, everyone who sins is under obligation to repay to God the honour which he has violently taken from him, and this is the satisfaction which every sinner is obliged to give to God (1.11).... [I]f there is nothing greater and nothing better than God, then there is nothing, in the government of the universe, which the supreme justice, which is none other than God himself, preserves more justly than God's honour (1.13). To forgive sin in this way [that is, by mercy alone, without reparation] is nothing other than to refrain from inflicting punishment. And if no satisfaction is given, the way to regulate sin correctly is none other than to punish it (1.12). It is a necessary consequence, therefore, that either the honour which has been taken away should be repaid, or punishment should follow," *Why God became Man in The Major Works*, 283, 286, 288, 349 (emphasis added). By way of contrast, compare with Turretin: "*The satisfaction here discussed, is not taken widely for a simple and indiscriminate reparation of injury (as when one purges and excuses himself to him who has suffered injury)*. Rather it is taken strictly for the payment of a debt, with which is paid what another owes and with which he satisfies the creditor or judge who requires the *debt of punishment*... [T]he satisfaction exacted by the justice of God principally demanded two things: 1) that it should be paid by the same nature which had sinned; 2) that nevertheless it should be of an infinite value and worth to take away the infinite demerit of sin" (*Institutes*, 2.14.1, 3, 7, 418, 421 [emphasis added]).

In the same way that Craig ties his discussion of Turretin's doctrine of atonement – and more specifically, the doctrine of divine justice – to the divine nature, so shall we begin our foray into William Ames. According to Ames, “we cannot honor [God] rightly if we are ignorant of his nature and will.”⁶⁰ For this reason, we begin our inquiry into the structure of the judicial economy of this divine kingdom by starting with what Ames refers to as God's “sufficiency and efficiency.”⁶¹ The ensuing and relatively brief exposition of Ames will help us see – contra Craig's assertion – that “the Reformer's doctrine” is not as narrowly definable and singular as he suggests.

Ames' discussion of the kingdom of God is a feature of his thought that appears scattered throughout his various works. In several places, he speaks explicitly about the kingdom and its judicial economy, at each point, beginning with the premise that God is a Perfect Being *a la* St Anselm and other medieval schoolman.⁶² If it sounds like we're backing up really far into the discussion of Ames' doctrine of God to get at what the Scriptures say about divine justice, we are, sort of. It's important that we get some theological running room, so to speak, so that we can make the jump to Ames' discussion of divine government and thereby, the structure of divine justice and all without getting tripped by a lot of other curiosities. This is a move that in turn will set in sharp relief Ames' Satisfaction theory. We are also starting with Ames' assent to Perfect Being theology, because, as far as assumptions go for doing constructive theology, this is one that no less of an important assumption for Ames as it is for Craig, however different their respective theological results.

Ames defines the kingdom of God, “as a polity or state in which God has supreme power, and men are thus subject so that from him they may secure their own good, or eternal felicity.”⁶³ And at more than one point he distinguishes be-

60 AMES, *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, trans. by Todd M. RESTER (Grand Rapids, Reformation Heritage Books, 2008, Classic Reformed Theology Series, Vol. 1), 158; et. al., *The Marrow of Theology*, ed. John DYKSTRA EUSDEN (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 1.4.84.

61 Ames' *Sufficiency and Efficiency* distinction of divine attributes is as equal to the explanatory task of this article as would be the *Incommunicable* and *Communicable* attributes distinction used by such theologians as Loius BERKHOF (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, 52–81] or the *Ectypal* and *Archectypal* divine attributes distinction of early Protestant Scholastic theologians like Franciscus JUNIUS, *A Treatise on True Theology* [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014], 91–113. Though a significantly less detailed exposition, Junius' account (Thesis 26) may well be cashed out in largely Amesian terms: Perfect Being Theology – God in himself and God revealed – God as “holy, just and perfect,” *A Treatise on True Theology*, 187–91.

62 Ames goes so far as to argue that “The kingdom of God nearly approaches God himself in its perfection,” *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, 210.

63 *Ibid.*, 210.

tween what he calls the *sufficiency* of God, that is, “[God’s] quality of being sufficient in himself for himself and for us” and the *efficiency* of God, that is, “God’s essence in his omnipotence.”⁶⁴ From here, he makes a series of dogmatic moves – moves that takes us through his doctrine of the divine decrees, creation, and providence – arriving at a discussion of divine governance,⁶⁵ by which he means God’s rule, his infinite knowledge and inscrutable wisdom, as he conserves, disposes, and directs all creation to its appointed end(s).⁶⁶

Upon reaching the doctrine of divine providence, he further subdivides his discussion into what he calls God’s “common” and “special” (i.e. moral) government. Strictly speaking, Ames describes God’s *moral* government, which he says is established by the moral law, as something specific to his rational creatures. Here, he argues that it is the moral law that is the means by which God displays the righteousness (i.e. rectitude) of his self-love – making his moral perfection and holiness comprehensible to these rational creatures and threatening those who despise his general benevolence and authority. And it is here that we see his development of the kingdom motif and divine justice. “The revealed will of God [i.e. the moral law], which is the rule for the moral life, applies to the rational creature at this point,” says Ames.⁶⁷ This, he continues, “is the way of entering into covenant, not between those who are equal before the law but between *Lord* and *servant*.”⁶⁸ These are not throw-away distinctions. According to Ames, this covenant is established on the footing of God’s moral government, by which, he says, the *Lord* demands two things from the *servant*: 1) *religion* and 2) *justice*.

Ames defines *religion* as, “the observance whereby we do those things which directly pertain to *God’s honor*, [which] must necessarily begin with God himself. It would not be observance towards God unless it brought honor to God and it would not bring honor to God unless it proceeded from a religious attitude.”⁶⁹

⁶⁴ AMES, *Marrow*, 1.4.84; 1.6.92.

⁶⁵ For theologians of the Reformed Orthodox tradition, like Ames, divine governance is a dogmatic subcategory of the doctrine of divine providence.

⁶⁶ See e.g.: TURRETIN, *Works* 1.1.489; cf. Richard A. MULLER, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol. 3, *The Divine Essence and Attributes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 384–92.

⁶⁷ AMES, *Marrow*, 1.10.110–11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.10.111 (emphasis added).

⁶⁹ Ames cites Romans 1.21, 2 Corinthians 8.5, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Matthew 6:33, *Marrow*, 2.4.237 (emphasis added). Elsewhere he say, similarly, that “The proper act of religion is bestow honor upon God and is called worship and adoration (Exodus 12:25, 26),” *Marrow* 2.4.239. Elsewhere, he argues, similarly, that “Religion gives chief honor to God and brings about obedience to his will in the things which directly affect creatures; thus all who neglect their duty toward men [justice and love] deny honor to God and actually show him scorn, 1 Samuel 2:30. The love toward God con-

Ames goes on to define *justice* as “an inseparable sign of true religion,”⁷⁰ Notice the order of this theological couplet of religion *and* justice. Religion begins with honor because God’s chief design for his moral creature is that they honor him, from which follows his command to honor one another.⁷¹ Honor in this context is what theologians of the period often refer to as *rectitude*⁷² or God’s *rectoral* justice, which, as we will see has two parts, and from which all of Ames’ other judicial distinctions and their specific demands make their egress.

Laid out in outline form below, are the broad features of the structure of Ames’ account of God’s judicial economy, vestiges of which also appear, for example, in the works of such famed, albeit latter, Reformed theologians as Jonathan Edwards, William Shedd and Louis Berkhof.⁷³

- A. Rectoral Justice (Divine *Rectitude* and Holiness)
 - a. Absolute Rectitude (Honor *ad intra*)
 - b. Relative Rectitude (Honor *ad extra*)
 - i. The Moral Law (The reflection of divine holiness)
 - 1. Distributive Justice
 - a. Remuneration (i.e. emendative justice)
 - b. Retribution

This broad structure is helpful to a point. Laying it out as we have, the position of retributive justice ought to stick out. Subordinated to a subcategory of *Distributive* justice – something we saw Craig draw attention to while expositing Turretin’s doctrine – this once again begs the all-important question of Craig’s claims and of the penal substitution theory at large: If by Christ’s death, humanity (or some number of persons less than the total number) has their debt of punishment (i.e. retribution) paid, thereby meeting the demands of “divine justice,” (*en toto*) what

tained in religion of its own nature produces love toward men, for they are in some sort partakers of the image of God. Therefore we are said to love God in men and men in God, which is one reason for the phrase, Beloved in the Lord,” *Marrow*, 2.16.301.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.4.237.

⁷¹ It is worth noting that Ames clearly distinguishes that, “no inartistic good can be added to God, but is an outward good – a testimony to the virtue of another which adds to his glory or esteem. This is all a creature can do for God,” *Ibid.*, 2.4.239.

⁷² For an extended and helpful argument about God, truth and rectitude, see: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/anselm/> (section 4.1).

⁷³ Louis BERKHOF, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996 [1938]), 2.7.75ff; William SHEDD, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed., Alan W. GOMES (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2003), 3.5.290–304. See also: S. Mark HAMILTON, “Jonathan Edwards, Anselmic Satisfaction, and God’s Moral Government,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17.1 (January 2015): 1–22.

is the rest of the structure of divine justice doing? Has human transgression or atonement anything at all to do with any of these other features? What is the relationship between retribution (and atonement for it) and these other feature of divine justice?⁷⁴

The sort of effect that Christ's death has on divine justice that Craig envisions, is like some sort of spark that lights a long fuse, as it were, detonating a small charge at each divine justice obstacle until it reaches the final obstacle and 'blows,' clearing the largest obstacle out of the way and by consequence the path from the believer's to God. Perhaps there is simply some sort of asymmetrical relation between God's judicial demands at large, per Ames, and what Christ's atonement supplies to meet those demands, per Turretin and Craig. But, are we to believe, on Craig's reading, that by meeting only the demands of retributivism, all the other demands of all these other fixtures of divine justice are likewise met; like some sort of domino effect perhaps?

These are some important questions that need answering. And these are only the beginning. For, looking at a yet more narrow and explicit (and more helpful) account of this judicial structure that appears elsewhere in Ames' works, we see just how intimate the relationship between all these structures are. Notice again the relation of one judicial constituent to another – each having it unique demands – and notice the position of retributive justice within this overall structure. According to Ames, *Rectoral Justice* (Divine *Rectitude* and Holiness) has two parts: 1) *Absolute Rectitude* (Honor *ad intra*) and 2) *Relative Rectitude* (Honor *ad extra*). From this relative rectitude issues the *Moral Law* – what Ames calls “the revealed will of God, which is the rule for the moral life” (1.10.110–11). The Moral law, says Ames, also has two parts: 1) *Distributive Justice*, which Ames says is a “giving to each his own” (2.16.307) and *Emendative* (i.e. Remunerative) *Justice*, which is a “restoring to each his own” and are “remote ends of the law” (2.16.307). Emenda-

74 It is worth mentioning that there is a subtle inconsistency of sorts at play in this discussion about the private versus public nature of sin's offence. Penal substitution theorists make much of the fact that divine retribution for offenses against God are *private* legal affairs. What we mean by this is that they think sin's offense is against God *himself* by individual, morally responsible creatures, in contrast to say, a *public* offense, which is an offense against a society, or more specifically a law or set of laws to which a society upholds. And herein lies the inconsistency. If penal offenses are both criminal and punishable, they are not, strictly speaking, private or individual so much as public or societal and are thus punishable by the authority of a laws, not an individual lawmaker. What we are suggesting is that penal substitution theorists might offer a more consistent theory by clarifying that the object of Christ's atoning work – like the object of sin's offense – is a matter of the retributive demands of the moral law, and not, strictly speak, God. We discuss this further in “Which Penalty? Whose Atonement? Revisiting Christus Odium,” *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* (forthcoming, 2021).

tive justice likewise has two parts: *Commutative Justice* or “equality between what is given and what is received” (2.16.307) and *Corrective Justice*, which “presupposes an injustice; it is either civil or criminal” (2.16.307). *Civil Justice* – correcting the injustice of things in general (i.e. the natural moral order) – and *Criminal Justice* – correcting the injustice between persons – are the two parts of corrective justice. It is at this point that Ames distinguishes between *Punishment* and *Restitution*. Punishment Ames defines as “an act of corrective justice by which penalty is inflicted on a violator of justice. The end should be the amendment or restraint of the offender, peace and admonition to others and the preserving of justice and God’s honor” (2.16.307), whereas Restitution he defines as “an accord of corrective justice in which a person is given possession of something of his own which was unjustly taken away. Hence an act which calls for restitution is against justice strictly so-called and not only against love” (2.16.307).

If this structure is even remotely representative to what we have to this point referred to as the full picture of divine justice (and we think it does), then it looks like Craig’s assertions about penal substitution being “the Reformer’s doctrine” has a great deal more to answer for than the singular demands of God’s retributive justice. For, clearly, Ames’ account of divine justice has all sorts of demands. Just how Christ meets all these demands is, of course, well beyond the constraints of this article. The point here is two-fold: first, to show that Ames adheres to a theory of atonement contra Craig’s claims about the broader tradition and second, that Ames’ theory meets more than the demands of mere divine retribution. And with that, let us move on to Craig’s third claim. In this next and final section, we shall see that the problems that Craig’s proposal faces are compounded further when we consider his doctrine of penal substitution in light of the legal fiction objection.

This is not something about which Craig is unaware. However, his defense against this objection is, well, puzzling. This is because Craig’s attempt to shore up the challenges presented by the legal fiction objection to penal substitution appears to fall short of delivering penal substitution’s chief benefit, namely, the issuance of a punishment that Christ absorbs for human agents that violate his law. For, the law itself knows no partiality. Instead, the law doles out its various demands in a manner that is lawfully connected to the agent who violated it. More than this, Craig’s account appears to open the door to consider alternative theories of atonement under the auspices of the judicial economy we have just laid it out here. Let us consider Craig’s third claim then.

Craig's Third Claim: Penal Substitution and Legal Fiction

Among the standard (and often simply dismissed) objections to penal substitution is the infamous legal fiction objection, which, when paired-down, is a resistance to the idea of *Representationalism*. Representationalism is roughly the idea that God establishes a relationship between persons such that the act of one person is treated *as if* performed by another (or group of persons), despite their not having been present in either time or space at the moment the representative person performs the act. Representationalism is a doctrine advanced by most (federal or covenant) theologians of the Reformed tradition. In the case of penal substitution, federalists argue that the righteousness accruing to Christ's work is justly attributable to its beneficiaries because Christ acts as their representative. This is often referred to as the "great exchange" or (dogmatically speaking) the doctrine of Imputation.⁷⁵ This set of ideas, recalling the previous section, is integral to Craig's defense for penal substitution.

Representationalism in its various theological uses is sometimes confusing. There are some helpful political parallels that might help us understand its theological use. Consider, for example, how Senators John Cornyn and Ted Cruz – representatives of the state of Texas – advanced the interests of the people/state of Texas to among the other forty-nine states. Serving in this capacity, their representative status gives them the legal authority to act on behalf of those who elected them as such, the consequence(s) of their success or failure justly accruing to those who elected them as such. This is quite different than, say, a United States Ambassador who holds representative office of the United States to the other nations of the world and is appointed by the President. Do you see the difference? Cornyn and Cruz were elected by the *people* to be the legal representative of the interests of Texas. This is quite different than the legal responsibility of an Ambassador who, as a representative of the United States to another country, might be in dereliction of their duty were he to represent the interests of the United States poorly. Because Ambassadorships are by Presidential appointment, their failure redounds to the one who appointed them to their post.

Here's what this means for representationalism/legal fiction and atonement. Christ is like an Ambassador. He is appointed by God; not by those whom he represents (neither was Adam – the *homo primus*). In terms of Christ's legally re-

⁷⁵ Laurence W. GRENSTED, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1920), 216.

presenting humanity as such, few would likely complain, what with his success in securing redemption. Not so in the case of Adam, who of course, was not successful in his “work.” Indeed, Adam’s representation of all humanity is something many find wholly unjust – treating one man *as if* he were all humanity; his failure affecting everyone thereafter. It is this “as if” treatment that Craig labors to explain is, simply by divine command, justifiable when it comes to Christ’s representation of humanity.

Craig responds to the objection from legal fiction by suggesting, among other things we noted earlier, that the concept of legal fiction actually is not foreign to various systems of law. In fact, so he claims, it can be said of Christ that he literally pays our debt of punishment to the law because the law gives allowances for substitutes to pay the debt that they do not individually owe. Craig spends a great deal of time on what we referred at the beginning of this article as the *moral variation* of the legal fiction problem, according to which, he claims, that it is immoral for an innocent person to suffer for the debt of another – this is a focus on what he calls *retributivism* and *consequentialism* (more in a moment).⁷⁶ And yet, the problem Craig’s moral variation runs into is more fundamentally, metaphysically problematic that he admits. For, Christ cannot metaphysically assume the debt of punishment owed by another, at least not without a set of hefty metaphysical assumptions about one’s account of Christ’s human nature and its relation to other human natures. For Christ to assume another’s moral debt would presume that Christ is somehow metaphysically united to each individual human nature, or perhaps some subset of the collective of the human creation. For if it is the case that someone accrues a debt of punishment to the moral law (or to God), then it is that someone that owes the debt to the moral law. No one else owes that particular debt. While there may be cases where a debt can be paid by another, debts of punishment are logically tied to the individual(s) that accrue that specific debt in question. For simple debts, the representative is not absorbing a debt of punishment but paying a credit to satisfy the debt. For debts of punishment, the situation is altogether different. These debts cannot be paid for in the way that simple debts can.

Third Objection: One-Size-Fits-All Legal Fiction?

While there are several subtle variations of the legal fiction objection in the literature to penal substitution, the conceptual hard core of the objection is largely the

76 CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 56–64.

same among variants. Before we dive into Craig's account of legal fiction, it is certainly worth mentioning that, wanting to avoid the legal fiction objection, some contemporary theologians have suggested that there may yet be some sort of special metaphysical union that exists between the representative (i.e. Christ) and the represented (i.e. humanity) such that the act of one can be said to quite literally be the act of another, thereby vanquishing any sort of legal fiction. Aptly referred to as *realist* penal substitution goes something like this:⁷⁷

- I. Christ's atonement is necessary to the full scope of his redemptive work.⁷⁸
- II. Christ dies as a substitute for (individual) human beings.⁷⁹
- II.₁ Christ is united to these individuals along the lines of some version of Augustinian realism, such that these individuals are regarded in some sense as Christ—together as some sort of singular morally responsible entity.
- III. Christ dies in order to *absorb* the (penal) consequences of divine justice and wrath precipitated by the sin of humanity, being treated by God *as if* he were those individuals to whom the punishment were due.⁸⁰
- IV. Christ's death pays a debt of punishment.⁸¹
- V. Christ's death is a vicarious sacrifice.⁸²

Of course, there are several ways that II.₁ might be unpacked, much of which depends on how one makes sense of the nature of personhood and persistence through time. To such detailed out-workings, we direct our readers elsewhere, as there is a great deal more that is of interest to it that recommends attention and further scrutiny.⁸³ The point of highlighting it here is to show that a recent alternative to the standard penal substitution theory is part of the contemporary theological discussion and that this alternative has answered one of the most significant liabilities of the standard view with a legitimate, albeit exotic, metaphysical innovation. For, if something like realist penal substitution is not taken as one legitimate rationale for working around the legal fiction objection, then it seems to us that either Christ is not a penal *substitute* or he does not satisfy all the demands of divine justice related to individual debts of punishment. Interestingly,

⁷⁷ This proposal is something that Craig chides Oliver Crisp for developing (*The Death of Christ*, 206, n. 22).

⁷⁸ CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 93–4; *The Death of Christ*, 173, n.1.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 44–6 *The Death of Christ*, 81–85, 125.

⁸⁰ CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 61–3; *The Death of Christ*, 148–50, 183–93.

⁸¹ Ibid., 44–46, 51; *The Death of Christ*, 119, 132–37.

⁸² Ibid., 28, 44, 74; *The Death of Christ*, 186–93.

⁸³ See e.g.: S. Mark HAMILTON, "Jonathan Edwards on the Atonement", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15.4 (October 2013): 394–415.

Craig appears to have no taste for such versions of penal substitution. Rather, he appears to believe that legal fictions can actually be put to better use on standard accounts of penal substitution.⁸⁴

One of the ways that Craig attempts to avoid the legal fiction objection is, as we have already suggested, by limiting his attention to divine justice in terms of retributivism and what he calls *Consequentialism*.⁸⁵ Consequentialism is a term of art that Craig appears to have appropriated from ethical theory as a way to parse out his moral variation of legal fiction. What consequentialism does for Craig's view is get at the most ethical outcome of this or that situation – in this case, atonement – using mathematical calculations to determine the result that is of most benefit to the greatest number of people rather than measuring what is ethical by what it is that is intrinsically valuable. Craig argues that,

Theories of justice may be classified as broadly retributive or consequentialist. Retributive theories of justice hold that punishment is justified because the guilty deserve to be punished. Consequentialist theories of justice hold that punishment is justified because of the extrinsic goods that may be realized thereby, such as deterrence of crime, sequestration of dangerous persons, and reformation of wrong-doers.⁸⁶

In this way, the logic of penal debts found in retributive accounts of penal substitution is replaced with a theory that separates the satisfying of the effects of the agents from the causes. This is quite important. For, according to Craig, “[the] Christian consequentialist could say that punishment in hell does have a consequentialist justification, namely, the sequestration of the wicked from the community of the redeemed, just as hardened criminals are removed from society.”⁸⁷

Taking this consequentialist cue, Craig argues that Christ is then actually able to make atonement as a *penal* substitute, however much it seems oddly inaccurate to classify penal substitution apart from a fundamentally retributive understanding of how one might substitute oneself for debts of punishment. Accordingly, the agents themselves provide the causal link between the actions and the legal debt of punishment that accrues. By separating the agent causing the offense from the agent taking the offense to the agent-cause introduces a certain ambiguity and provokes the question of whether it is even possible that Christ can assume individual debts of punishment.

⁸⁴ Oliver D. CRISP, in “Original Sin and Atonement”, in Thomas P. FLINT and Michael C. REA, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 430–51.

⁸⁵ CRAIG, *The Death of Christ*, 174–176.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸⁷ CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 68.

By limiting his focus in this way, Craig then attempts to situate all other aspects – in some case, entire theories of the atonement – under the auspices of the penal substitution theory; a single theory to rule them all, as it were. This move is how Craig thinks he can simply rebrand Grotius's theory of atonement as penal substitution rather than what is commonly accepted as penal non-substitution (i.e. moral government) or what some have called the penal example theory.⁸⁸ In one place, Craig seems to think that if we deny that Christ assumes our debt of punishment then there are two ways to parse out Grotius' theory in a way that is compatible with and accurately termed penal substitution. "On Grotius's view Christ was thus completely innocent, both personally and even legally. God chose to punish him for our sins so that our debt of punishment might be remitted and we be liberated," he says.⁸⁹ Notice however, that on this understanding, punishment is not remitted because Christ is a penal substitute. This is, Craig maintains, because Christ satisfies some unspecified debt that eliminates the need to pay for debts of punishment. He proceeds to delineate ways in which Christ is not punished for our sins. Yet, in both cases, his interpretation of Grotius, while out of sync with common interpretations, amounts to Christ assuming a public debt to the moral law. Christ's assuming of this public debt, however, does not clearly satisfy debts of punishment, along the line of what is commonly (and accurately) held up as penal substitution. Accordingly, Christ does so *not* by assuming my debt of punishment, which retributive justice demands, but by paying off some general or simple (i.e. non penal) debt that satisfies the demands of justice to such an extent that humanity is no longer liable to the debt of punishment. In this way, Christ becomes a global substitute.

An important distinction must be made here, however, between what it means for Christ to be a global substitute versus, say, a local substitute. This becomes important when we consider that on penal substitution what needs satisfying are the debts of punishment logically connected to agent-violators of the moral law. Insofar as Christ is a global substitute for humanity, it is unclear how it is that he is a substitute for individual debts of punishment logically connected to agent-violators of the moral law. For on nearly all atonement theories, Christ is a global substitute for humanity in that he is taking their place (somehow) in this world to satisfy some moral demand unmet by the rest of humanity. Take for instance the moral influence theory. On this view, Christ is a global substitute for humanity in that no one individual can provide the sufficient influence to make amends in the world. Presumably, however, Christ is doing more as a penal sub-

⁸⁸ CRAIG, *The Death of Christ*, 137–42.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

stitute insofar as he is actually taking the place of humans who owe a debt of punishment by taking their loss on their behalf and in their place. The distinction between Christ being a global substitute versus a local substitute is important for distinguishing penal substitution from other atonement theories that equally recognize that Christ serves as a substitute in some general or global sense for all of humanity.

Craig needs, once again, to distinguish his view from Grotius's theory, which claims that Christ satisfies the debt owed to God's moral law. He suggests that Christ could assume the penal *consequences* of sin by taking on the suffering that would otherwise be due to the lawful violator. On this way of thinking, Christ experiences suffering as a suitable equivalent, as it were, to punishment rather than the actual punishment for specific sins that due to actual, specific sinners. For Craig, "consequentialist theories of justice hold that punishment is justified because of the extrinsic goods that may be realized thereby, such as deterrence of crime, sequestration of dangerous persons".⁹⁰ Assuming the moral lawgiver accepts this as "payment," then, according to Craig, this definition is aptly categorized as penal substitution. But how this is distinct from penal non-substitution as outlined earlier (reflected prominently in Crisp and Williams) remains unclear. What is more, it leaves unanswered how it is that Christ actually solves the problem of individual debts *of punishment*.

The second way that Craig thinks he can avoid the legal fiction objection is by what he calls an *expressivist* view of penal substitution. Expressivism, like consequentialism, is also a term of art in meta-ethics that measures states of affairs with language that functions to expose an evaluative state. Christ's passion, on this view, is an event that exposes an evaluative state. In other words, Christ's death is a public event (i.e. penal example) that sheds light on that which is required of individual lawbreakers. If this sounds much more like penal non-substitution, you would be correct. This view does not presume moral realism in that regard, whereby Christ makes a payment to a public offense. However, there are concerns with both of these articulations of penal substitution.

Of primary concern is the fact that it remains unclear that Christ experiencing the consequences of humanity's violation would in fact eliminate or cancel out their individual debts of punishment. Mere consequences are not synonymous with debts of punishment logically or lawfully connected to the agent-violator. And this raises other significant questions that may need addressing. For example, can someone experience the cumulative weight of the individual debts of punishment collectively? Or, could someone literally die the cumulative somatic

90 CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 67; *The Death of Christ*, 175.

deaths of each individual person? No doubt, we are suspicious about affirming such things. For, it is not clear to us that a singular individual could experience the cumulative weight of the debt of punishment of all individuals. Neither is it clear what would it mean for a single individual to experience a spiritual death of every human being or even some number of human beings. Assuming expressivism, it is not clear that it actually provides a way to work out the penal substitutionary account because Christ is not actually absorbing a penalty for the debt that humanity accrues, which is precisely the promise that penal substitution is supposed to hold out. On Craig's expressivist proposal, Christ gives exposure to the public offense that is against the moral law and satisfies that public offense by his death. Consider, for example, when says,

Holding that God, in His role as supreme Judge, adopts for the purposes of our redemption the legal fiction that Christ himself had done the deeds in question in no way implies that our forensic justification before His bar is unreal. Thus, through the device of legal fictions we do, indeed, have some experience of how legal responsibility for acts can be imputed to another person who did not really do the actions, thereby producing real differences in the world outside the fiction.⁹¹

Such a claim is, once again, virtually indistinguishable from penal non-substitution (i.e. moral government), according to which Christ dies a penal example, thereby paying a simple debt to the moral law. Rather than eschewing legal fictions, Craig actually seems to think that expressivism is a way to actually make good use of them to explain the significance of Christ's death—and all this, at the expense of the very thing that advocates of penal substitution make so much noise about, namely, humanity's deliverance from owing a debt of punishment. For Craig, legal fictions are not a liability. They are a tool, best put to use to explain how Christ dies in such a way as to fortify the penal substitution theory of atonement.

Conclusion

In this article we set out to challenge several common assumptions that, together, have become something of a consensus regarding the doctrine of atonement among many in the contemporary Reformed theological tradition, particularly among those in American Neo-evangelical and Neo-calvinistic circles. Using William Lane Craig's recent defense of penal substitution to showcase these com-

91 CRAIG, *The Atonement*, 63.

mon, albeit debatable assumptions, we showed that the Reformed tradition offers other, legitimate options for table discussion. More to the point, we showed first that Craig conflates penal substitution as *the* biblical theory of the atonement, as if there is *a* theory of the atonement that falls right off the pages of Scripture. We also showed that rather than retribution standing at the heart of a biblical conception of justice and the atonement, the notion of honor and kingdom should drive the central motif of one's articulation of the biblical portrayal of justice and the atonement.

Second, we showed the weakness of Craig's assertion that there is genetic connection between contemporary articulations of penal substitution and that offered up by the historic Reformed tradition, as if there is one monolithic view of the atonement from Calvin onward. Expositing the work of William Ames—again, not a small voice within the Reformed tradition—we showed that this is not the case at all. There is much more of a plurality of orthodoxy within the tradition, even among theories of atonement. This is something we tried to make clear by touching on some of the other more fundamental concerns of a theory of divine justice.

Third, and finally, we showed that Craig's theory of penal substitution tends to absorb all the other theories and atonement metaphors in such a way that all other theories lose their various distinctions from penal substitution. For far too long, contemporary theologians have been searching for that one theory to rule them all. This is a significant problem and deserves disambiguation. For our part, we showed that not only is penal substitution held up as this 'one theory', but that penal substitution continues to be tripped-up, as it were, by an often ignored legal fiction objection. And in the final analysis, the legal fiction objection we developed above shows that either Christ is not truly a penal *substitute* (although he may be a global substitute that satisfies various simple debts or a public debt) or Christ does not satisfy all the demands of the moral law for individual debts of punishment. For these reasons, at least, there is warrant for reconsidering Craig's proposal as representative as the contemporary consensus view of the atonement among Reformed theologians today.