Dossier

Acceptilatio. Hugo Grotius on Satisfaction

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Abstract

In 1617, Hugo Grotius had his treatise On satisfaction published. Explicitly directed against Faustus Socinus's 1594 book On Jesus Christ as our Saviour, it purports to contribute to the confutation of the Italian scholar's teachings, which in the Netherlands were widely regarded as utterly heretical. The way in which he perceived Socinus, however, was mainly determined by the image of Socinianism as disseminated by its detractors, foremost Sibrandus Lubbertus of Franeker. Grotius did read Socinus's work, but not with much care, and at least unaccommodatingly. The reason for Grotius to intervene in this theological debate is often assumed to have been to vindicate his and his ecclesiastical party's views on religion as orthodox, or at least far removed from Socinianism and other heresies. In contrast, it is proposed here to take the explicit motivation in the preface at face value, and assume that Grotius wrote it to refute Socinus on the basis of his juridical, philological, and historical errors, simply because he could, and genuinely abhorred Socinianism as he had learned to understand it.

Keywords

In many surveys of Hugo Grotius's life and meaning, he is not unusually designated as an amateur theologian. His treatise *Defensio fidei catholicae de satisfactione Iesu Christi adversus Faustum Socinum senensem* of 1617 is then regarded as his first public venture into the theological domain. If 'theology,' however, is defined in the narrow sense, as the exposition of the Christian creed in an all-encompassing system of dogmas, Grotius does not seem to have ever had much inclination to dive into the discipline. He much preferred tolerance to the profuse Calvinist fanaticism of his days, and actively promoted tolerance, both in writing and in his political actions. He certainly did not regard theological rigor as conducive to it.

If Grotius’s *De satisfactione* is read as a contribution to theology in the narrow sense, this treatise would be an alien body in his oeuvre. Indeed, many commentators have struggled to find what moved Grotius to produce it, most often referring to his presumed wish to ward off association with the Socinian heresy when he would have felt pressure mounting on him in times of great church-political turmoil. To discuss the concept of satisfaction, however, one of the toughest challenges within theology, is a far from obvious means to that end. Moreover, there seems little reason to assume that Grotius felt actually threatened from the ecclesiastical angle, or could foresee his own dramatic demise, even in 1617.

It seems therefore advisable to me to attempt to read the *De satisfactione* not as an intended contribution to dogmatics. Its preface, not written by Grotius himself, but by his friend and collaborator Gerardus Vossius, emphatically states that the treatise is not intended as such. Instead, it claims that it aims to correct Faustus Socinus (who had newly, be it posthumously, entered the Netherlands' theological stage) in the domains of law, history, and philology. It is of course possible to assume that this stated intention is a pretext of its real intention, but because of the difficulty with which that 'real' intention fits in with Grotius's ambitions in general, I propose to take the stated intention as our lead in reading the treatise.


3 See the well-chosen subtitle of Nellen's biography, *Hugo Grotius: A Lifelong Struggle for Peace in Church and State, 1583–1645* (Leiden, 2014).

4 E.g., *De satisfactione*, ed. by Rabbie, pp. 16–18.
In this study, I shall first introduce the concept of satisfaction as a theological problem; Socinus’s assault on the traditional basics; and the first substantial anti-Socinian reaction in the Netherlands, from the Friesian theologian Sibrandus Lubbertus. Next, I dwell on the same Lubbertus’s involvement in the so-called Vorstius-affair, which triggered much of the upheavals of 1610–1619, including Grotius’s steep fall from power. These upheavals must be assumed to form the immediate context for Grotius’s treatise, published in 1617. I shall give a very basic survey of the argument of the De satisfactione from the legal point of view, and illustrate the old observation that Grotius has provided a misrepresentation of Socinus’s De Iesu Christo servatore. The comparison of both works will show that in various instances this misrepresentation was serious to the degree of a complete misunderstanding, explicable only by a fundamental disinterest in the work of Socinus. The main exhibit will concern the concept of acceptilatio. In fact, Grotius appears to have been combating, not Socinus, but an image of Socinus as set up and disseminated by Lubbertus. Only after the publication of De satisfactione, Grotius started to study Socinus more closely, developing a considerably less hostile attitude—an open-mindedness that suited his constitutional tolerance, which was irreconcilable with being an amateur of the theology of his time. The main purpose of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding of the reasons Grotius may have had for writing De satisfactione.

**Satisfaction, Socinus’s Objections, and the Anti-Socinian Reaction**

The belief that ‘Christ died for us’ and ‘for our sins’ belongs to the oldest layers of the early Christian creed. The exact meaning of the phrase, however, is not obvious and has often been a matter of contention within the Christian churches. Especially the extent to which Christ’s suffering and death served to discharge believers from justified punishment for their sins was at times hotly debated. The options for interpreting his death range from an exemplary effect (i.e., by his life, death, and resurrection, Christians are encouraged to lead a life free of sins) to a fully vicarious effect (i.e., believers are liberated from punishment because Christ suffered it in their stead). Orthodoxy (that is, the majority party that was ultimately victorious in the debate) usually leaned strongly towards the latter alternative. The medieval theologian Anselm of Canterbury argued in his Cur Deus homo that the compensation due for humanity’s offenses against God’s order was of such enormous proportions, that it could never be satisfied by humans, unless they were God himself—as Jesus Christ was. The incarnation was necessary for punishment for sins to be satisfied. This theory
of ‘satisfaction’ was widely embraced in the Christian tradition, including the Calvinist reformation.5

In 1594, the Italian thinker Faustus Socinus (1539–1604), published a treatise that made a frontal attack on this doctrine of satisfaction: De Iesu Christo servatore.6 He raised the question why Christ’s suffering and death were necessary for humankind’s redemption, if God could also forgive sins without exacting any punishment at all. Moreover, he questioned the morality of exacting it from Jesus Christ, who of all people was the only one truly without sins. According to Socinus, it was illegal and simply unjust to punish an innocent man for the offenses of others. Finally, he argued that it is legally and logically impossible to combine the concepts of satisfaction and remission, since the satisfaction of dues makes the notion of remission superfluous and void of meaning.

Socinus’s views met with considerable support, especially in anabaptist and reformed circles in Poland and Transylvania.7 In the Netherlands, however, his name and his ideas were unknown to most. A missionary visit by some Socinians in 1598 was quickly truncated at the authorities’ orders and soon became a largely forgotten incident. It did attract the attention of Sibrandus Lubbertus (ca. 1555–1625), professor of theology at Franeker university in Friesland.8 Lubbertus was a Calvinist of the Heidelberg school, and quite uncompromising in his views. His attention to Socinus’s treatise was stimulated by repeated messages from like-minded pastors in Westphalia, who reported that its teachings were being discussed among students, and therefore urgently needed a full and definitive refutation, for which they called upon Lubbertus.

Apart from some preliminary research, Lubbertus does not seem to have taken up this challenge in earnest until around 1608.9 At least, it was from that year onwards that he showed himself seized by an increasingly obsessive suspiciousness against Socinianism, which he perceived to be germinating wherever he looked. His refutation of De Iesu Christo servatore was published in 1611.10

6 F. Socinus, De Iesu Christo servatore, hoc est, cur et qua ratione Iesus Christus noster servator sit [Cracow], 1594.
8 C. van der Woude, Sibrandus Lubbertus. Leven en werken, in het bijzonder naar zijn correspondentie (Kampen, 1963).
10 S. Lubbertus, De Iesu Christo servatore, hoc est, cur et qua ratione Iesus Christus noster servator sit libri quatuor, contra Faustum Socinum (Franeker, 1611). The title of Lubbertus’s
He had decided to include Socinus’s own text, making it widely available in the Netherlands for the first time—a fact that led one of his enemies to famously comment that no one had done more for the dissemination of Socinianism than Lubbertus himself.11

Lubbertus put forward against Socinus that God was not at liberty to waive punishment, because one of his essential attributes was justice, including retributive justice. God necessarily acts on justice, Lubbertus argued, not only in principle (as Socinus believed), but also effectively, when meting out punishment. Whereas Socinus distinguished between God’s essential justice (his unwaveringly fair and equitable disposition) on the one hand, and acts of justice as mere effects of his will (meaning that he can punish if that is just, or refrain from justified punishment without being unjust himself), Lubbertus maintained the identity of both concepts, enabling him to conclude that punishment for sin is absolutely necessary, and cannot be forgone without injustice being done.12 In contrast, it was an act of free will for Christ to take upon himself the required punishment, so that full satisfaction was made; and another act of free will for God to forgive believers their sins on that account.13

While this view agrees on the demand that complete satisfaction is made, its emphasis on the absolute necessity of punishment considerably tightened up the view as it had been usual among Calvin and his followers until then. It would become the standard position in reformed scholastic theology.14

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11 J. Drusius, *Ad fratres belgas epistola, in qua calumnia diluitur recens sparsa de Logo creato*, (Leeuwarden, 1615), pp. 7–8; cf. J. Taurinus, in the anonymously published *Brand-clock* (*ghegoten ten deele van de stoffe ghecomen wt de Camer der E.H.M. Heeren Staten, soo der Geunieerde Provintien in ’t ghemeyn, als int particulier van Hollandt*), noodich ghetrocken in dese bedroefde, vruchtbare tijden der ghevaerlijcke, van ouds begraveren nieuwicheden, s.l. 1611, who was one of the very few pamphletists defending Vorstius, and commented on one accusation against Vorstius: ‘Is dit ooc Sociniaensch … en zijn d’ander dolingen Socini niet arger, seker ick soude by na wel lust criegen om die wat nader te ondersoecken’ (no page number).

12 E.g., *Contra Faustum*, pp. 6–9, 309–13.


Lubbertus Contra Vorstius

The publication of Lubbertus’s book almost coincided with the news of Conradus Vorstius’s appointment to succeed Jacobus Arminius, the recently deceased Leiden professor of theology.

Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) had been a highly controversial theologian, who for years had held a fierce debate with his nearest colleague, Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641), at the same university. The debate went public, and eventually engendered (or revealed) two parties within the reformed church in the Netherlands, Remonstrants (the followers of Arminius) and Counter-Remonstrants (the followers of Gomarus). The former represented a more easy-going, relaxed type of religion, in which the recognition of the uncertainty of many details in theology, and hence a degree of dissidence was emphatically allowed; the latter actively strove for a closed and detailed doctrinal system that demanded perfect congruence between theology and actual religious beliefs. Until the coup d’état by Prince Maurice in 1618, the Remonstrants clearly had the upper hand in ecclesiastical and political matters, even if they might have been the numerical minority.15

Arminius’s appointed successor, Vorstius, was a professor at the Gymnasium Arnoldinum in the Westphalian town of Steinfurt, known for his learning, his open-mindedness and kind manners.16 In the years 1598–1599 he had come under suspicion of Socinianism. He had been rebuked for that by his teacher Paraeus, and had to answer to the Heidelberg theologians—already, the questions asked included matters of satisfaction.17 Vorstius, however, whose views

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15 A minority, that is, within the Reformed Churches; other religious currents, such as Mennonites and Roman Catholics (the latter possibly representing the majority of the Republic’s population), were of no consequence in public life; cf. P. Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed. A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven/London, 2002), chapter 10.


were then identical to those of later years, for the time being succeeded in convincing the learned panel of his orthodoxy.

After Arminius's death the university curators in 1610 decided to appoint Conradus Vorstius to Arminius's chair. The choice had fallen on him, because the curators ostensibly acted on the principle that both parties remain equally represented in the theological debate. In any case, they could not bear the thought of having another outspoken opponent of the Remonstrants in addition to Gomarus; the city of Leiden and the States of Holland gladly agreed to the appointment.

When the rumour of Vorstius's appointment came out, a substantial number of mainly Friesian theologians, organised by the Leiden pastor Festus Hommius, started a campaign against it, with eventually the Franeker professor of theology, Sibrandus Lubbertus, as the main antagonist. Informed by the Heidelberg theologians of their original and their renewed doubt about the appointee, they warned the university, the governments of the province of Holland and the Dutch Republic as a whole, and in the end even the king of England, against the heretic tendencies of Vorstius, whose views, presented as full-blown Socinianism, they deemed extremely dangerous.

At first, the university remained steadfast in their decision, supported by the city's and the provincial government. The campaign itself was seen by the States of Holland as an outrageous interference in matters under their exclusive jurisdiction. On their behalf, Hugo Grotius, Holland's former Attorney General, published an unusually caustic pamphlet against Lubbertus, the Ordinum pietas of 1613.

In this work, Grotius defended both the exclusive privilege of the States to appoint professors at Leiden university, and their continued concern for reformed orthodoxy in the Netherlands, which, as he argued at length, was not

19 Van der Woude, Lubbertus, chapter 9.
20 It started with R. Acronius et al., Bedenkingen over de beroepinghe D. Conradi Vorstii tot de professie der H. Theologie in de Universiteit tot Leyden (s.l. 1611); The Ministers of the Reformed Church in Leeuwarden, Waerschouwinghe aen alle ghereformeerde Kercken ende vrome ingestetenen van de vereenichde Nederlanden, Leeuwarden 1611; idem, Naeder Waerschouwinghe over seeckere verantwoordingen D.D. Vorstii onlanx tot syner verschooninghe uytgeheeven (Leeuwarden, 1611); cf. Vorstius, Responsum plenius ad scripta quaedam eristica, non ita pridem a diversis Fratribus contra ipsum editum, praeertim vero ad scriptum illud nuperum ministrorum leowardiensium quod Commonefactionem ampliorem vocant (Leiden, 1612).
21 Hugo Grotius. Ordinum pietas, ed. by Rabbie.
at all endangered by the theological views of Arminius and his adherents, the Remonstrants. In so doing, he came out as siding with the Remonstrants, incidentally ranging Vorstius with them, as well, and indelibly marked himself as a Socinian as bad as Vorstius in the eyes of the Counter-Remonstrants. Unsurprisingly, at least with hindsight, a new stage in the pamphlet war had started. In effect, the leading politicians in Holland, who until then, and at least officially, had impartially been presiding over the conflict within the reformed churches, now officially sided with one of the parties. It can be argued that this provided Prince Maurice, commander of the armed forces, with the opportunity to choose the opposite side in 1617, and carry out his coup d’état a year later.

Grotius against Socinus on Satisfaction

So far, this series of events can easily be presented as a dramatic, but coherent story, in which one thing more or less logically leads to another. The same cannot be said of the Defensio fidei catholicae de satisfactione Iesu Christi adversus Faustum Socinum senensem, which Grotius began composing in 1614, and was published, after much hesitation on the author’s part, in 1617. The reasons for choosing this subject are not immediately clear. It seems obvious that the treatise joins an apparently ongoing debate on the subject, but it contains not the slightest reference to it. On the one hand, it is certainly not written in defense of Vorstius, and it is hardly conceivable, on the other, that Grotius would have chosen an anti-Socinian subject to ingratiate himself with Lubbertus. A weaker option would be to think that Grotius would at least have wished to distance himself from Socinus for political reasons. Before discussing that matter further, a concise survey of Grotius’s treatise and of the ongoing debate on the doctrine of satisfaction is in order.

To begin with, I shall briefly summarise Grotius’s treatment of Socinus’s criticism of the reformed doctrine of satisfaction. This summary will be restricted to main outlines of the argument, and not contain references to the numerous and elaborately discussed underlying details. For both Grotius and Socinus, philological considerations played a leading part in the discussion, as they

22 Nellen, Hugo Grotius, p. 529.
23 Grotius had been opposed to Vorstius’s appointment from the beginning (bw I 219; Ordinum pietas, pp. 444–45; in 1613), Grotius wrote to Casaubonus: ‘Nemo Vorstium defendet, nisi ipse Vorstius’ (bw I 295; Ordinum pietas, pp. 481–83). Quite likely, his assertion in Ordinum pietas 10 that he was not intending to defend Vorstius was sincere.
24 E.g., Nellen, Hugo Grotius, pp. 232–33.
both considered the Biblical facts as decisive and fundamental (while both of them were also well aware that the Biblical facts are not always unequivocal). However, both Grotius and Socinus also laid great value on proper legal principles that should be accounted for in a theological matter that has so much overlap with law, as it concerns such issues as debt and redemption, crime and punishment, vengeance and grace.

With regard to Socinus’s first main argument, that God can decide to forgive sins if he likes to, even if no compensation whatsoever is provided, Grotius agrees to it.25 He adds, however, that Scripture is quite clear about the fact that in whatever ways God could have come to forgive, he chose the one of satisfaction. This is a return to the view that was dominant before the anti-Socinian introduction of the absolute necessity of this one option.26 His response to the second argument, that it is unjust to punish an innocent man, is again primarily Scriptural: in the Bible, there are various instances in which God is said to have punished innocent people, and if God does so, it cannot be inherently unjust. It is true that there are also instances in which God is said to have explicitly forbidden the practice, but this Grotius explains as a positive law, to which God himself is not subject. Finally, Grotius has set up an elaborate argument to counter the view that satisfaction and remission are mutually exclusive. We shall have to look at this argument at some more detail.

Grotius makes a sharp distinction between constitutional, private, and criminal law, blaming Socinus for having neglected it. A judge in a penal case cannot condemn an innocent, or acquit a guilty person without being unjust. In this matter, however, God should not be seen as a judge, but as a ruler. A ruler has the authority to decide that a law is relaxed, or dispensed with, in the case of particular individuals. Without the law being abolished, it can be dispensed with, for instance because new circumstances have given rise to a situation in which full and universal application would have unwanted consequences (in this case, the perdition of humankind, and the uprooting of creation’s most beautiful asset, namely religion). This new situation emerged when Christ made satisfaction for our sins. Satisfaction and remission are not mutually exclusive in those cases in which an obligation is not automatically fulfilled by a certain act, as Socinus had argued, but only after the one to whom the obligation exists has decided to regard that act as satisfactory. In the case of Christ’s suffering and death, God and Christ have agreed that the latter (and only the latter) could adopt the obligation of the sinners.

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25 Grotius to Walaeus, June 29, 1615; BW t 412 (De satisfactione, ed. by Rabbie, p. 465).
26 Heppe and Bizer, Die Dogmatik, p. 376.
(a ‘subrogation’ by which the sinners are liberated from their obligation, namely, to undergo eternal death). It was also in the agreement that he would endure the punishment due, by suffering a very similar kind of death that the sinners would have had to die (except that it was not eternal), and that thereby satisfaction would be made. Seen in this way, satisfaction and remission from punishment are not mutually exclusive, but distinct decisions and actions.

It has been remarked that Grotius’s rendering of Socinus’s theories is regularly off the mark. In 1623, the Polish Socinian pastor Johannes Crellius published a critique of De satisfactione, and pointed out numerous instances of misrepresentation, not to say distortion of Socinus’s text and intentions. Two examples from these may illustrate that these concern no minor misunderstandings, but reflect a careless and superficial reading of Socinus on Grotius’s part.

Zaleucus

A telling example occurs in De satisfactione 4.21, the chapter in which Grotius defends the view that Christ could be punished for our sins, without injustice being done. Socinus had argued that it would be unjust to inflict punishment on an innocent man because of the offenses committed by others. Such injustice is incompatible with the righteousness that is an essential attribute of God, meaning that God will under no circumstance act against justice. Therefore, it is impossible that the doctrine that Christ bore the punishments for our sins is true.

One of the arguments Socinus put forward, is that the principle intended is shared by all nations. To counter this argument, Grotius mentions various examples from classical history to prove the opposite. In this connection, he mentions one that was adduced by Socinus himself, and which concerned the case of king Zaleucus of Locri. The story of this king relates that his son was condemned for some criminal act, and that the prescribed punishment was to have both his eyes taken out. The king, instead, had only one of his son’s eyes taken out, but offered one of his own eyes. According to Grotius, this is an example of an innocent man taking the punishment due to an offender upon

27 Numerous instances, including the ones indicated here, have been noted in Rabbie’s notes; see, e.g., De satisfactione, ed. by Rabbie, pp. 339, 367, 384, 394, 408, 416, 424.
himself. Grotius expressed his astonishment at Socinus’s inclusion of this example, stating:

One may well wonder, too, at Socinus’ statement with regard to the act of Zaleucus, whose story is in Diodorus Siculus and Aelianus; he says that he had a very bad reputation and that his name was numbered among the violent and audacious rulers and judges of peoples. All antiquity certainly praised Zaleucus, not only for his very wise laws, but the most for this deed, as becomes clear from the authors which I have mentioned and from Plutarch and others; and I do not think that any ancient author has judged this deed differently.29

This is a clear misrepresentation: Socinus never claimed that antiquity disapproved of Zaleucus’s action. What he did state, as Crellius indignantly spelled out,30 was that there should be disapproval of Zaleucus’s action, because it did not answer to justice, at all, but failed to execute the punishment as ordered by the judges:

This deed is most worthy of censure, because, while the father attempts to both spare his guilty son, and satisfy the law, he does neither, since he horribly mutilates his son, but clearly infringes upon the law that had commanded that his son would be deprived of two eyes, not just one; and to his own detriment, he is foolishly cruel to himself, when he thinks that he is repairing a situation by tearing out his own eye as the other one. (…) He deserves that posterity think low of him, and reckon his name among the cruel, impotent, and thoughtless rulers and judges of people.31

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29 Grotius, De satisfactione 4.21: Illud quoque mirari libet, quod de Zaleuco facto, cuius historia est apud Diodorum Siculum et Aelianum, ita pronuntiat Socinus, ut dicat eum pessime audire eiusque nomen inter impotentes et temerarios principes ac populorum iudices censeri. Antiquitas sane omnis Zaleucum tum ob leges sapientissimas, tum et istius facti nomine maxime laudavit, ut ex his quos dixi scriptoribus et Plutarcho alisque apparet; neque puto ulla scriptorem veterem de eo facto aliter iudicasse.

30 Crellius, Ad librum, pp. 275–76.

31 Socinus, De Iesu 3.3, p. 252: Dignissimum quoq veduperetur est factum istud, propterea quod, dum pater et nocenti filio parcere, et legi simul satisfacere curat, neutrum facit, quippe qui filium foede mutilet, legem autem, quae illum utroque oculo, non altero tantum, privari iubebat, aperte infringat; cui malo, dum sibi ipsi alterum oculum effodiendo mederi se putat, in seipsum stulte crudelis est. (…) [Dignus] apud posteros male audiat et eius nomen inter crudeles et impotentes atque adeo temerarios principes et populorum iudices censeatur.
Grotius has misquoted Socinus quite gravely, which may at least be taken as proof of a rather careless reading of Socinus’s text\textsuperscript{32}—in this instance perhaps coupled, as Crellius suggested, with the inability to imagine that someone could actually form an opinion on his own, independent of ancient authorities.\textsuperscript{33}

τὸ πρῶτον ψεῦδος

As a second instance of Grotius’s questionable handling of the arguments of his self-chosen opponent, I mention the distinctions of private and criminal law, and of the diverse roles of injured parties, judges, and rulers. These Grotius claimed to be crucial in the discussion, but they were certainly less rigidly applied by Socinus. Grotius designated this as a failure which he called Socinus’s ‘basic error,’ τὸ πρῶτον ψεῦδος.

But although in the place cited above Socinus regards God as the highest sovereign, yet he often ascribes to him a far different position in this situation, viz. that of an offended party. Now, he wants every offended party to be the creditor of the punishment, and in this to have the same right as other creditors in things due to them, a right for which he often even uses the term ‘ownership’; therefore, he repeats very frequently that God must here be regarded as an offended party, as a creditor, as an owner, putting forward these three notions as if they amount to the same. Since this error of Socinus’ is spread very widely through his whole treatise and may almost be said to be in this matter his fundamental mistake, it ought to be carefully refuted.\textsuperscript{34}

Grotius accuses Socinus of interchanging terminology from constitutional, private and criminal law by speaking now about God as lawgiver, then about debt in terms of owed money, then in terms of punishable offenses, and finally

\textsuperscript{32} Crellius, \textit{Ad librum}, p. 275: ‘Sed et hic non ea qua decuit diligentia usus est Grotius in verbis Socini vel considerandis vel adscribendis.’

\textsuperscript{33} On pp. 276–77, Crellius continues his correction of Grotius’s error with an eloquent exposition on the important difference between simply adhering to \textit{idées reçues} (κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι) and using one’s own rational capacities.

\textsuperscript{34} Grotius, \textit{De satisfactione} 2.4: At Socinus, quamquam loco supra citato Deum ut summum principem statuit, passim tamen in omni hoc actu longe aliam ipsi σχέσιν tribuit, nimirum partis offensae. Vult autem partem omnem offensam esse poenae creditorum, atque in ea tale habere ius quale alli creditoribus in rebus sibi debitis, quo ius saepe etiam ‘domini’ voce appellat, ideoque saepissime repetit Deum hic spectandum ut partem offensam, ut creditorum, ut dominum, tria haec ponens tantundem valentia. Hic error Socini cum per totam ipsius tractationem latissime diffusus sit et dici ferme possit in hac materia esse ipsius τὸ πρῶτον ψεῦδος, accurate refelli debet.
about God as the ‘owner’ of a punishment. Put in this way, this indeed makes the impression of a spectacular confusion. It can be argued, however, that this is another misrepresentation, or at least the outcome of a fundamentally unaccommodating reading of Socinus’s text.

It is true that Socinus throughout his work took recourse to comparisons with various branches of law, but always to clarify a certain point, as an analogy, a way of explaining how forgiveness and remission works in the interaction between two parties, God and humanity. Moreover, Scripture itself uses the analogy of a creditor forgiving debts. An important proof-text for this, Matthew 18.35, was dismissed by Grotius as a mere comparison. Next, Socinus was perfectly aware of the difference between private and criminal law (see, e.g., De Iesu 3.1, p. 225). More importantly, the notion that God relates to humankind as a perfectly independent ruler to his subjects is central to his thought. Fundamental to his thinking was the notion of God being absolutely free, not subjected to any force or law (being himself the fountain of all forces and laws), and therefore at unlimited liberty to do whatever pleases him—including forgiving sins without receiving anything in return. For Socinus, the juridical and regal roles of God are metaphors only, not realities per se, as Grotius seems to view them.

Crellius’s criticism was very to the point when he wrote:

Here, Grotius’s error in laying out Socinus’s view becomes abundantly clear. He separates the two sides to the quality that God maintains in this matter (scil. the quality of perfect freedom and independence). These two sides Socinus presented jointly, but Grotius opposes them as two different qualities, not as two aspects of one. (...) It has never been Socinus’s intention to subtly and precisely define this quality, according to which he would punish on the one hand, and remit on the other, but only to show that God has the right to pardon our sins, if he wants to, also without satisfaction, or to respond to the objections of others.

35 See the discussion in Gomes, Faustus Socinus’ ‘De Jesu Christo servatore,’ pp. 51–53, 279–84.

36 Socinus, De Iesu 3.1, p. 221: ‘Quis est qui nesciat, delicta nostra debita sive aes alienum quod cum Deo contraxerimus in divinis litteris appellari? ’; Grotius, De satisfactione 2.15, p. 140: ‘Sed ut supra ostendimus, comparatio non exegit ut res genere proximo conveniant, sed quavis similitudine contenta est’; compare the notes of Crellius, Ad librum, pp. 188–89.


38 Crellius, Ad librum, p. 156: Hic iam aperte patet Grotii in Socini sententia explicanda error. Duas enim illius σχέσεως, quam in hoc negotio Deus sustineat, partes, quas Socinus
In his conclusion to this point Crellius, much-praised by posterity for the dignified and civilised nature of his response to Grotius, could not help himself writing:

It would have been better to either present Socinus’s view in his own words, or, if Grotius preferred to paraphrase him, to do it in such a way that the reader would not be occasioned to form a wrong idea of what Socinus intended. Truly, Socinus’s statement, as described by us, is not a ‘basic error’ of his in this matter; but the opposite error, as we have explained above, is that of Grotius.40

**Grotius on Acceptilation**

For a third, highly informative example, we shall in some detail have to enter into the historical context of Grotius’s treatise. The example concerns the concept of ‘acceptilation,’ designating the release of debt without requiring satisfaction (from *acceptum ferre*, ‘to book as paid’; the discharge designated as *solutio imaginaria*). The procedure is described in Justinian’s *Digesta* 46.4. Important for the discussion below is that acceptilation requires the creditor’s formal declaration that the debt is paid, and that the debtor at the very same moment is definitively liberated from the obligation to repay: the debt is at once to be considered as no longer existing.

On two occasions Grotius accused Socinus of presenting the remission of sins as a form of acceptilation, in 3.1 and in 6.14. Grotius asserts that this is wrong on two counts: not only because acceptilation belongs to the domain of private law (3.1; 6.14), but also because acceptilation is imaginary payment,

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39 E.g., *De satisfactione*, ed. by Rabbie, p. 45.
41 Contrast his much wider application of the term in *De iure belli ac pacis* 2.4.2 (2nd edn, 1631).
while Scripture clearly speaks of Christ having paid a price, i.e., a real fulfillment of the obligation to pay (6.14).

As was noted by Crellius, however, Socinus does not regard the remission of sins as a form of acceptilation. He uses the term on one occasion, in *De Iesu* 4.2, in an entirely different context. In this chapter, Socinus argues against the concept of satisfaction as something that may be ‘imputed’ to us. His thesis is that the concept of acceptilation can at best be applied to a situation in which someone is regarded as debt-free because someone else made satisfaction for it. In such a situation, however, it matters not if the debt is paid by the debtor himself or by someone else, because the creditor is satisfied by the payment, and it makes no sense for the creditor to ‘impute’ it to the original debtor as the imaginary redeemer of the debt. In other words, something like ‘imputed satisfaction’ is a perfectly useless notion. In this context, Socinus points to what he sees as a mistake in Beza’s annotations to Romans 4.4. Beza states that λογίζει τὰς ζησθαι, in contrast to its meaning in that verse, should in the preceding verse be understood as *acceptum ferri*: ‘acceptum ferri dicitur quod non ipsi exolvimus, sed alius pro nobis.’ Socinus, in contrast, stresses that if something has been paid for, there is no sense in ‘imputing’ the act of payment to the formal debtor. Strictly speaking, Socinus adds, ‘acceptum ferre’ belongs in a context where no payment at all is made, but the debtor is nonetheless liberated from his obligation by a mere declaration to that effect: ‘Quid aliud est ipsa acceptilatio, quam per sola verba obligationis liberatio?’

If we set aside for the moment the matter of private vs. criminal law (which Socinus in this passage rather upholds than neglects), it is clear that Socinus wishes to clarify that the act of satisfying a debt cannot be imputed to anyone other than the one who performed that act. It is possible to cancel debts without payment being done, and it is therefore possible to regard someone as debt-free, *as if* payment had been done; but to say that the act of real payment (which *ipso facto* leads to the liberation of an obligation) by someone else is imputed to the original debtor, makes no logical sense. Socinus’s point, then, is that one cannot apply the legal concept of acceptilation to a situation in which real payment is made.

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42 Crellius, *Ad librum*, p. 211.
43 *De satisfactione*, ed. by Rabbie, p. 394, following Walaeus in his 1615 letter to Grotius (ibid., p. 462), refers to Beza’s *Apologia de iustificatione* (1594), which may have been unknown to Socinus (*De Iesu Christo* was printed in the same year); had he known it, he would no doubt have reprimanded Beza for confusing, in that passage, acceptilation and ‘novation,’ the transfer of debt from one person to another (cf. *De Iesu Christo* 3.2, p. 241; and Grotius, *De satisfactione* 6.15; see also *De satisfactione*, ed. by Rabbie, pp. 390–92).
44 Socinus, *De Iesu Christo* 4.2, p. 320.
As noted above, Grotius in response argues at great length (6.11–16) that there are many situations in which remission does not automatically follow from a punishment being endured. This may be relevant in connection with Socinus’s fundamental claim that satisfaction and forgiveness are mutually exclusive. That connection, however, is not made by Socinus himself, who only noted that the phrase ‘to impute satisfaction’ is nonsense. Apart from being another indication that Grotius’s reading of Socinus has been quick and superficial, his curiously laborious exposition about a phrase of no substantive importance in Socinus’s work raises the question why Grotius gave it a relatively prominent place in his own. In the next section, we shall see that this was probably due to Sibrandus Lubbertus, who had made quite a point of the concept in his hunt for heresies a few years before.

Acceptitation in Lubbertus’s Disputes with Bertius and Vorstius

In 1606, the Leiden college regent Petrus Bertius had sent to Sibrandus Lubbertus theses, defended under his presidency, that concerned faith in Christ as the reason for God to regard believing sinners as righteous (‘justification by faith’). At the time, Lubbertus had replied to thank and congratulate Bertius. Two years later, however, it had come to Bertius’s knowledge that Lubbertus had recently been venting his disapproval to others, for which Bertius demanded explanation. Lubbertus replied that he was not at all pleased by Bertius’s thesis that faith is called justifying, because God is willing to regard it as the fulfilment of the entire law ‘per gratuitam acceptilationem Dei in Christo.’ According to Lubbertus, this gracious or indulgent acceptance of the act of faith in lieu of true obedience to the law would substitute perfect abiding to the law by one single instance of obedience. Also, it would nullify the doctrine of satisfaction of divine justice by Christ. In Lubbertus’s opinion, all of this reeked of Socinianism, and he was not prepared to accept Bertius’s assurance that he had never read anything by Socinus.

45 The understanding of this passage is greatly assisted by the analysis of Schaede, Stellung, pp. 439–47.
46 For this paragraph, see Van der Woude, Sibrandus Lubbertus, chapter 8.
47 S. Lubbertus and P. Bertius, Epistolica disceptatio de fide iustificante deque nostra coram Deo iustificatione (Delft, 1612), pp. 4–5.
48 Epistolica disceptatio, pp. 5–8.
49 Epistolica disceptatio, pp. 85–89.
50 Epistolica disceptatio, p. 161.
The debate between Lubbertus and Bertius, which did not lead to an agreement, was an epistolary exchange between the two men, published only years later. Also, while Lubbertus had certainly not refrained from the crudity that flowed so naturally from his pen, he had at least exerted some control over his inflammable temper—at least in comparison with the totally unchecked rage against Vorstius which seized him in the controversy starting in 1611, and led him to incriminate Vorstius in Dutch, i.e., in public.

The polemics between Lubbertus and Vorstius lasted for about two or three extremely intense years. The series started with Lubbertus's Declaratio respon- sionis D. Conradi Vorstii of 1611, an explanation in malam partem of Vorstius's reply to the several public warnings against his appointment, the Christiana et modesta responsio, addressed to the States General.51 These warnings had consistently pointed to Vorstius's treatise De Deo, published in 1610, as a writing that would be replete with theological teachings of an utmost questionable nature. The Christiana responsio included some elucidations of the sections referred to, contending that a careful reading of these would show that he nowhere transgressed the bounds of minimal orthodoxy.52 Lubbertus's Declaratio was intended to cast doubt on the sincerity of Vorstius's account, and pretended to unmask him as a heretic, for instance by extensively quoting from writings of his which he had not published, but had allegedly brought into circulation in writing on an underground mission to spread the abject heresy of Socinianism.

A provisional reply was presented in Vorstius's Prodomus plenioris respon- sioni, suo tempore cum Deo secuti, ad Declarationem D. Sibrandi Lubberti, et iteratam ministrorum leowardiensium Cautionem, aliaque plura id genus aliorum eristica scripta, recenter in lucem adversus ipsum emissa of 1612. This was followed in the same year by his Catalogus errorum sive hallucinationum D. Sibrandi Lubberti ex libello ipsius cui titulum fecit: Declaratio responsionis &c., in which Vorstius listed ninety-nine neatly numbered instances where he claimed Lubbertus had misrepresented his views.

To Vorstius's less than sixty pages, Lubbertus hit back with the well over 800 pages of Commentarii ad nonaginta novem errores Conradi Vorstii of 1613. Again a quick and brief response followed in the same year, the Paraenesis ad Doctorem Sibrandum Lubbertum, qua recentes aliquot huius in illum iniuriae aper- taeque calumniae Commentarii eiusdem nuper editis infertae, ac summatim in

51 Christiana et modesta responsio ad articulos quosdam, nuper ex Anglia transmissos, et typis hic descriptos, passimque in vulgus late dispersos (Leiden, 1611).

52 A more detailed explanation soon followed in Apologetica exegesis, sive plenior declaratio locorum aliquot quae ex libro ejusdem De Deo, sive de natura et attributis Dei excerpta, eique pro erroneis imposita, hoc titulo late in vulgus scripta (Leiden, 1611).
epistola et praefatione libri propositae, breviter refutantur. The full reply of 1614 were the Scholia ἀλεξίκακα ad commentarios Doct. Sibrandi Lubberti.

The Scholia were the last volume in the series. In it, Vorstius declared to have had enough of the polemics:

Let them publish their Reviews, Critiques, Moles, Notes, Harmonies, Discussions, Declarations, Commentaries &c. as much as they like. I think I have by now sufficiently responded to them. They may be masters of their own tongue, if they take pride in that, but I hope to remain master of my own ears.

Lubbertus had other things on his mind, too. By 1614, he had found a greater adversary in Hugo Grotius, and the year after he turned against his close colleague Drusius. Apparently, his numerous enmities prevented him from pursuing Vorstius any further. Moreover, Vorstius had left Leiden in 1612, ostensibly for a cool-off period, but chances were small that he would ever return there, so that Lubbertus could regard his mission as accomplished.

In this discussion the problem of satisfaction played no prominent role at first. It mainly concerned Vorstius’s views on such matters as God’s corporeality, immutability, infinity, omnipresence and omniscience. Vorstius had many interesting and thought-provoking things to say about these matters, but these will not detain us here. It was in Lubbertus’s Commentarii, his 1613 reaction to the Catalogus errorum by Vorstius, that the issue of satisfaction was first addressed on a grand scale. In earlier exchanges between both, the concept and its meaning had been mentioned, but in the Commentarii, Lubbertus pulled out all the stops, causing Vorstius to complain in his Scholia:

It may be noted that others took over, including, in the fateful year 1618, Festus Hommius, Specimen controversiarum belgicarum, sive Confessio ecclesiariarum reformatarum in Belgio (Leiden, 1618); occasioning Vorstius to write Apologetica responsio ad ea omnia quae Festus Hommius nominatim ipsi nuper impedit in eo libro cui titulum fecit Specimen controversiarum belgicarum &c. (s.l., 1618).

A reference to the anonymous pamphlet Sorex vorstianus, ‘the Vorstian Mole,’ of 1614. Pliny notes about the shrew-mouse (sorex) that its noise was regarded as an ill omen.

Edant Crises, Hypocrises, Sorices, Notas, Harmonias, Disceptationes, Declarationes, Commentarios &c. quamdiu volent. Ego satis et publice et privatim hucusque hujus rei respondisse me puto. Sint ipsi, si quidem id sibi laudi duxerint, linguarum suarum domini. Spero me aurium meorum fore (Scholia, Preface to the reader).

Van der Woude, Lubbertus, chapter 11.

For Vorstius’s theological views, see Schweizer, ‘Conradus Vorstius (2)’; Rohls, ‘Calvinism,’ pp. 22–28; Ordinum pietas 17 (with Rabbie’s notes, Ordinum pietas, pp. 265–69).
you jump upon the occasion to furiously rage against me in more than 60 pages, seeming to have no sense whatsoever of truth, justice, or shame (let alone Christian love or mildness).  

It was in the context of this row that the concept of acceptilation was included. In the 1611 *Declaratio*, Lubbertus referred on several occasions to Bertius, who, it may be recalled, had used it to indicate God’s gratuitous acceptance of the act of believing as ground for justification. Lubbertus’s quotations from Vorstius’s work include a passage from the *Anti-Bellarminus*, where Vorstius discusses the formidable Jesuit apologist’s views on justification. He stated that he had no problems with the thesis that a faith that is alive and inspired by love is imputed to us as justice. After having argued that this rendering does no justice to Bellarminus, Lubbertus proceeds to demonstrate that Vorstius’s views are identical to those of Arminius ‘and his associate’ (Lubbertus’s consistent designation for Bertius, nowhere mentioned by name):

That his accomplice saw it this way appears from his dissertation *On justifying faith*. For in it, he writes: ‘That justification is universally brought about by faith.’

Through a flood of Aristotelian logic, Lubbertus had deduced this from Vorstius’s statement cited. If Vorstius protested that he did not at all intend to teach this, but only that the justification of believers presupposed a living faith, this did not matter to Lubbertus.

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58 C. Vorstius, *Scholia ἀλεξίκακα ad Commentarios Doct. Sibrandi Lubberti, ubi variae quaesiones theologicae, et partim philosophicae, more scholastico discutiuntur; et nominatim centuria errorum D. Lubberti (praeter innumeras eiusdem calumnias et loidorias) amplius detegitur ac refutatur* (Gouda, 1614), p. 125; hinc occasionem tu arripis per 60 amplius paginas adeo impotenter in me debacchandi, ut nec veritatis, nec iustitiae, nec verecundiae (nedum christianae charitatis, aut ἐπιεικείας) rationem ullam habuisse videaris.


61 C. Vorstius, *Catalogus errorum sive hallucinationum D. Sibrandi Lubberti ex libello ipsius, cui titulum fecit Declaratio responsionis &c.* (Leiden, 1612), p. 45 (Error No. 78).

62 S. Lubbertus, *Commentarii ad nonaginta novem errores Conradi Vorstii* (Franeker, 1613), pp. 631–33.
Lubbertus also discussed at length Vorstius's manuscript of a writing, *De satisfactione* (according to Vorstius, this was no substantive treatise, but concerned notes for his own use, never intended to be published, and not to be assumed to express his opinions: ‘His talibus, inquam, simpliciter urgeri nolo’).\(^{63}\) Lubbertus writes:

On God's acceptilation his words are unclear. In a legal context, nobody can suffer the punishment for someone else's crime, unless the legislator permits it; unless, that is, he wishes to transfer the crime to someone else, nothing will help the person guilty of homicide, even if a hundred thousand people would like to undergo death in his place. This much is true, that God in his justice has indeed wanted to transfer our offenses to Christ (...) Next, it is also necessary that the legislator, or the highest lord, to whose jurisdiction the guilty one is liable to punishment, agrees to it that the punishment is endured by someone else in the guilty one's place (...) and that he imputes the punishment's fulfilment by someone else to the guilty one, and releases and remits him (...) Because of Jesus Christ's endurance of punishment in our place, imputed to us on the basis of faith, God declares us righteous. This is the acceptance that our Church teaches. But Dr Conradus wants that Christ did not satisfy for us, but only showed us the road to justice and holiness, and that we should walk that road. For if we walk it, and seriously strive for holiness and obedience, then our holiness and obedience will be regarded by God as perfect obedience to the law, and in that way we shall be justified.\(^{64}\)

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\(^{64}\) *Declaratio responsionis*, p. 58: De acceptilatione Dei loquitur ambigue. In judicio enim nemo potest pro alio poenam delicti luere, nisi legislator hoc permittat: nisi (inquam) ille velit crimen in alium transferre, nihil profuerit homicidae, qui reus est, etiamsi centies millies homines pro illo mortem luere vellent. Hoc adeo verum est, ut etiam Deus in suo judicio voluerit crimina nostra in Christum transferre (...) Praeter hoc etiam necesse est, ut legislator, vel supremus dominus, cuius iurisdictioni reus obnoxius est, poenam ab alio pro reo exantlatam approbet (...) et ut illam poenam ab altero praestitam imputet reo, eunque propter illam absolvat et dimittat (...). Deus propter poenam a Jesu Christo pro nobis exantlatam et nobis per fidem imputatam justificat nos. Hanc acceptationem probat Ecclesia nostra. At vero D. Conradus vult, Christum pro nobis non satisfecisse, sed tantum ostendisse nobis viam justitiae et sanctitatis et nos eandem viam ingredi debere. Cum vero hanc viam ingressi sumus et serio studemus sanctitati et obedientiae,
A little further on, he adds:

Arminius’s accomplice argues for this very acceptilation theory; in his dissertation on justifying faith he explicates that God regards faith as the law’s perfect observance, and testifies that Arminius felt the same.65

Vorstius recorded this representation of his view as Error No. 55. He protests to have never said anywhere that Christ is only an example, whereas he insists that he firmly holds the doctrine of real and full satisfaction by Christ. With regard to ‘acceptilation,’ he writes:

Acceptilation as I see it, is the assumption that God has accepted Christ’s obedience as of equal value, instead of full satisfaction; in the meantime, he did not require from Christ everything that he could require from us, sinners, according to the full strength of law. For certainly, the punishment of hell, eternal death properly speaking, combined with perpetual desperation, he did not require from Christ.66

This is certainly not the legal technical meaning of the term, and when in 1612 Vorstius was invited to address the meeting of the States of Holland,67 he more or less withdrew the term ‘acceptilation,’ saying that it was perhaps less apposite to the concept intended, namely ἐπιείκεια or ‘a certain degree of
indulgence'; he added the suggestion that some of his opponents apparently denied such mildness to God. In the *Commentarii*, Lubbertus showed himself infuriated by Vorstius's claim (not made in the *Catalogus*) that Lubbertus would have denied this concept of acceptilation. Lubbertus repeated all his words from the *Declaratio*, and invited his readers to judge whether himself had given an orthodox definition of acceptilation or not. He then proceeded to accuse Vorstius of teaching the correct thing in the open, but full Socinianism in secret. To substantiate his claim, Lubbertus quotes at length from unpublished writings by Vorstius, which would show that the latter was actually in perfect agreement with Socinus, and unmask him as no better than Arminius and his associate. Vorstius was almost at a loss for words when rejecting the accusation, reminding Lubbertus of the fact that the passages ascribed to him were actually Socinus's, not his. Vorstius's final reply in the *Scholia* on this particular issue was:

Some of us (i.e., reformed theologians) make in this matter no allowance for *acceptilation* whatsoever. But it is good that you recognise that at least some must be allowed for, even if your definition is not perfect (…) What you say about *Arminius* and his *accomplice*’s view is no truer than what you say about mine, when you claim that it was borrowed from *Socinus* and *Servetus*. And next, you still appear to agree to the same, ceding that Christ did not at all suffer eternal death with perpetual desperation (…). If you think the same as I, whom are you fighting here?  

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68 *Commentarii*, pp. 507–08. Lubbertus reacts to what Vorstius had said about this matter in his speech before the States of Holland in 1612: ‘*acceptilationem* Dei gratiosam, seu iuris stricti remissionem, hinc prorsus excludit,’ *Oratio apologetica*, p. 50.  
69 ‘*Reicio acceptilationem* Harminii eiusque Astitis et adversarii nostri, quam ex Socino et Serveto mutuali sunt,’ *Commentarii*, p. 509.  
70 *Scholia*, pp. 126–27.  
71 *Scholia*, pp. 140–41: *Non desunt inter nostros, qui nullam prorsus acceptilationem* in hoc negotio admittunt. Sed bene habet, quod tu *aliquam* saltem admittendam esse hic agnoscis, eti minus recte eam definis (…). De acceptilatione ab *Arminio* eiusque *astite* recepta non magis verum dics, quam de sententia mea, dum a *Socino* et *Serveto* hanc mutuo sumptam esse dicis. Et tamen eandem reipsa mox admissit, cum Christum mortem aeternam, proprie dictam, cumque perpetua desperatione conjuncta minime subisse concedis (…). Quodsi tu nunc idem sentis, quem igitur hic oppugnas? Vorstius had already formulated his views on the suffering and death of Christ and its satisfying effect (without using the term acceptilation) in his letter to the Heidelberg theologians in 1598, a letter Lubbertus knew very well; see *Praestantium virorum &c.*, p. 69.
At this point, it is important to see that the term ‘acceptilation’ was used by the discussants in different meanings. Lubbertus strongly associated it with what he sees as Bertius’s gratuitous grace (‘gratuita acceptilatio’), but Vorstius used it as the equivalent of ἐπιείκεια, a certain measure of ‘indulgence.’ Neither of them, however, used it in the precise legal meaning that Grotius would put forward.

**Grotius against the Strawman of Socinus**

The previous sections have shown that in attacking Socinus, Grotius attributed to the latter a term, ‘acceptilation,’ that, in the narrower context of the remission of sins, Socinus had actually never used. Vorstius originally had not used it either, while Lubbertus adopted it from his debate with Bertius, and introduced it to accuse Vorstius of agreeing with Bertius on justification. Vorstius took it up in his response, using it in a loose sense, and publicly withdrew it as less apposite, explaining that he meant ‘a degree of indulgence’ with it, i.e., a certain degree of mildness with which God exacted punishment—which all of them allowed for.

Apparently, there was much confusion about the term acceptilation. Grotius’s effort to create terminological order might have been laudable, had he not added to the confusion by not reading carefully Socinus, the author he sat down to correct. All this strongly suggests that Grotius was primarily driven to combat, not Socinus, but a set of theological views generally regarded as typical of ‘Socinianism.’

If Grotius was more interested in what he knew as Socinianism than in Socinus himself, this might explain why he contented himself with a superficial reading of *De Iesu Christo servatore*. As noted, Socinus’s work was hardly known, and practically impossible to obtain until Lubbertus’s re-edition-with-refutation of 1611. By that year, however, rumours about this apparently horrific heresy already abounded (witness, for instance, the debate between Bertius and Lubbertus), and it may well be that Grotius started his reading of Socinus thoroughly biased by the image of Socinianism as depicted by the likes of Lubbertus. To his own mind, he already ‘knew’ what Socinianism was all about when he speedily went through Socinus’s book.

Lubbertus, in his confutation of Socinus, may more than once have been Grotius’s lead. At least it was Lubbertus who in his notes on *De Iesu Christo servatore* 4.2 wrote:

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72 Explicitly so in *Scholia*, p. 142.
I shall not discuss the term *acceptilation*, both because it is not found in the Bible, and because it is used by lawyers only in the context of liberation of pecuniary debts, which has no resemblance at all to the guilt from which we are liberated by Christ's blood.\(^73\)

That had been Socinus's view, too, but Grotius may not have noticed that already Lubbertus was here attacking Socinus on a point he had never made.\(^74\)

This confirms the impression that Grotius, when writing *De satisfactione*, has been prey to the illusion of fighting, not Socinus, but a strawman dressed up by public opinion as Socinus.

This brings us back to the question of what reasons Grotius may have had for composing *De satisfactione* in the first place. It would be surprising, indeed, to suddenly find Grotius in Lubbertus's camp, or to think that he perhaps composed *De satisfactione* to serve a humble pie to the Franeker theologian. He nowhere mentions Lubbertus. Moreover, he had every reason in 1614, the year in which he started working on his treatise, to regard himself as victorious over Lubbertus in the Remonstrant affair,\(^75\) and had no immediate cause to relieve tensions from that perspective, either. Even if his worst enemies had tried to associate him with Socinianism, that matter had not yet seriously come under discussion, so Grotius had no real reason to explicitly dissociate himself from it.

Moreover, it seems to appear from the considerations above, that Grotius, like most of his contemporaries, intuitively really did not like the reports about Socinus's teachings at all, being as devastating to the common Christian creed of the time as they were. In doing so Grotius restricted himself to the field of law, history and philology, which were his fortes, and in which his authority was doubted by no-one. He may have had no ulterior motives for writing this treatise, other than the ones Vossius and he explicitly indicated. According to Vossius's preface to *De satisfactione*, it had been Grotius's intention to disprove many legal, historical, and philological details underlying Socinus’s argument (*Praefatio* 5-6),\(^76\) and not to enter into the domain of theologians (*Praefatio* 7).

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\(^73\) Lubbertus, *Contra Faustum*, p. 456: *Phraseologiam acceptum ferre praetereo, cum quia in sacrís litterís non invenitur, tum etiam quia apud iurisconsultos tantum usurpatur de liberatione a debitis pecuniariis, quae cum nostris debitis a quibus per Christi sanguinem liberamus nullam habet similitudinem.*

\(^74\) A detailed comparison of Grotius's *De satisfactione* with Lubbertus's notes on *De Iesu Christo* might reveal more of these instances.

\(^75\) *De satisfactione*, ed. by Rabbie, pp. 18–19.

\(^76\) See also his letters to Walaeus of June 5, 1615, *BW* 1 410 (*De satisfactione*, ed. by Rabbie, p. 461); and to Lingelsheim, August 31, 1617, *BW* 1 527 (*De satisfactione*, ed. by Rabbie, p. 480).
His intentional avoidance of theological matters is explicit in the letter in which he thanked Walaeus for his comments on the draft for his treatise;\footnote{Grotius to Walaeus, June 29, 1615: ‘Studui vitare eam quae inter Milnaeum et Tilenum nuper efferbuit controversiam,’ \textit{bw} 1 412; also in \textit{De satisfactione}, ed. by Rabbie, p. 464.} his abhorrence of the excessively polemical ways in which the theologians were used to conduct their debates is well-known.\footnote{E.g., Grotius to Lingelsheim, August 31, 1617.}

Grotius was strongly of the opinion that theologians had their own arena to fight their battles, and should not be meddling with politics or government. He explicitly says so in the first lines of \textit{Ordinum pietas}, where he addresses Lubbertus to tell him that he was free to fight Vorstius, but that he should stay away from politics, and not try to interfere in government by involving even foreign authorities (\textit{Ordinum pietas} 1). In his eyes, theology should remain within the academy; outside of it, it was only due to stir unrest, and thereby harm society. He was no less convinced that Socinus's teachings would raise disturbances, as well, and Vossius in his preface explicitly expressed the concern that spreading these would cause damage to both the state and the church (\textit{Praefatio} 9). Therefore, Grotius had seen it as his duty as a Christian expert in law to refute Socinus's arguments where they were based on legal principles (\textit{Praefatio} 4-5).

These reasons, if taken at face value and accepted as sincere, may well be sufficient explanation for Grotius's writing of this treatise. In those days, Socinianism was the talk of the day, and he genuinely regarded that as a dangerous threat to society. Lubbertus had made the subject topical, but Grotius may have felt that, after having corrected the Friesian theologian in the field of politics, it was now the Sienese theologian's turn in the field of law and history.

\textbf{Grotius's Change of Heart}

One of the questions relating to \textit{De satisfactione} concerns the reasons for which Grotius changed his mind about the justice of punishment for innocent people. In \textit{De satisfactione} Grotius had argued against Socinus that it is not against natural justice that God made Christ bear the punishment for human-kind's sins, but only against positive law; in other words, that God did not act against the justice that is an essential attribute of his, but that he did forbid the practice in his statutes to which humans are bound. Later, in \textit{De iure belli ac pacis} (1625), he no longer made the distinction, but rejected the punishment
of innocents without qualification.\footnote{De iure belli ac pacis 3.11.2. It must be noted, however, that Grotius maintains God’s right to take away anyone’s life without reason, although avoiding the word ‘punishment’; see 3.11.9.} It may be asked what made him change his mind.

I should like to suggest the possibility that the main reason for the change of heart was a genuine and sincere recognition that his position in De satisfac-tione was simply untenable. If we return to the text of the treatise once more, it can easily be seen how Grotius himself must have reached the conclusion that the foundation of that position was too shaky to bear its weight. He states that doing something is not unjust, because Biblical passages relating how God actually did do it, demonstrate that it is not unjust (4.4). He also states that the Bible shows that God explicitly prohibited the practice by positive statute only (4.5–6). He cites instances from antiquity to show that Socinus’s appeal to the consensus gentium is not valid, but cannot help himself to add that these instances ‘are certainly not to be approved of’ (4.15). He praises the Romans for their equity in restricting the practice (4.18). He concludes with a section that can be read as a legal paraphrase of the dictum that God may do what cattle may not (4.23). All this leaves me with the impression that he is defending a position much in the way a criminal lawyer might do, finding grounds for justifying a defendant who has all appearances against him. In comparison, the ease with which he states the opposite view in De iure as an obvious matter of principle, seems to sit much more easily on him. Insofar as I know, Grotius has never made a statement on whether this implied a different view on satisfaction, but this is unlikely in light of his stance on theology in general, as I shall suggest in a final consideration.

Another question concerns the possible development of Grotius’s theological stance towards Socinianism. Already during his lifetime Grotius bore the suspicion of having grown into a full-blown Socinian, and it is certain that he made liberal use of Socinus’s De auctoritate Sacrae Scripturae for his most famous contribution to religious writing, De veritate christianae religionis.\footnote{J.P. Heering, Hugo Grotius as Apologist for the Christian Religion: A Study of his Work De veritate religionis christianae (1640). Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, 111 (Leiden, 2004) (Dutch original, 1992), pp. 116–37.} Also, he maintained friendly and warm contacts with several leading Socinians, even if, as Nellen rightly stresses, without ever acceding to some of their main tenets.\footnote{Nellen, Hugo Grotius, pp. 529–30.}
It is also clear, however, that *De veritate* owes much of its success to its avoidance of any dogmatic or scholastic detail. As noted above, Grotius emphatically wished to stay out of dogmatics when commenting on legal aspects of the doctrine of satisfaction. Already in the unpublished *Meletius* (1611), he had pleaded for religious peace to be brought about by reducing the number of unrelinquishable articles of faith to a bare minimum. In *De veritate* (and in *Via ad pacem ecclesiasticam*) he actively promoted the unification of the church on the basis of the bare fundamentals of the Christian religion. According to Grotius, there was no room for theological niceties on the road toward that unification.

In this light, the question of whether Grotius eventually was a Socinian himself is perhaps less relevant. Even if Socinus's theological argument consists of many elements that are refreshingly down-to-earth, it is nonetheless as polemical and minutely detailed as any theological treatise of the time. There is little doubt that Grotius longed for religion to be liberated from the heavy burden of hairsplitting and logomachy, both fruitless and divisive. He himself was increasingly loath to side with any party within Christianity, be they Reformed or Remonstrant, Socinian or even Roman Catholic. Although it would be an easy exercise to list points of view in Grotius's writings where he agrees with Socinus, such a list would only confirm the assumption that Grotius was, so to speak, beyond Socinianism: he was strongly convinced of the limitations of theology in the narrow sense, and saw no advantage in siding with one dogmatic party or the other. Far from being an amateur theologian, Grotius is perhaps best characterised as an anti-theologian.