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I. Introduction

1. Historical Background

In the fierce debates between the Socinian and Protestant orthodox divines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Socinians marshalled their greatest forces in an attack against the doctrine of Christ's satisfaction.[1] The most important Socinian work against the doctrine of satisfaction is Faustus Socinus' *De Jesu Christo Servatore*.[2]

Written in 1578, this is Socinus' main treatise on the work of Christ. Socinus wrote the work during a three-year stay in Basel. It was the outgrowth of an oral dialogue that took place between Socinus and one Jacques Couet (Covetus), a French Protestant minister who was then in Basel. Not much is known about the background of Covetus.[3] It seems that his primary claim to fame is that he was the one against whom Socinus wrote his most famous work.

Covetus met with Socinus to challenge his views on the doctrine of satisfaction. As Wilbur recounts, the oral debate was then continued in writing for more than two years before Socinus could finish his contribution to it. It was not printed at first, but circulated in manuscript copies. At the urging of a Polish nobleman it was printed in Poland in 1594, sixteen years after Socinus had written it in Basel. *De Jesu Christo Servatore* is the first work Socinus published under his own name.[4]

The affirmative thesis of the work is that Christ is our Savior because he has announced to us the way of eternal salvation. [5] We obtain this salvation by imitating him.[6] Negatively, "the doctrine of satisfaction, which the Reformers urged, is keenly canvassed and its difficulties are set out in an animated dialectic."[7] But the doctrinal issues raised in

De Jesu Christo Servatore reach far beyond Socinus' isolated soteriological concerns. The significant place he gives to reason and ethics in framing doctrine; his hamartiology, with its proclivity to view sin primarily as a pecuniary debt; and a theology proper in which some see an almost Nominalistic emphasis on God's *potentia absoluta* inform Socinus' view of Christ's work at every turn. Clow observes, "to stand with Socinus at his conc...

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