

EXPROMISSIO OR FIDEIUSSIO?
A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY THEOLOGICAL DEBATE
BETWEEN VOETIANS AND COCCEIANS ABOUT THE
NATURE OF CHRIST'S SURETYSHIP
IN SALVATION HISTORY

by Willem J. van Asselt

Voetians and Cocceians

TOWARDS THE END of the seventeenth century a controversy erupted over the interpretation of the relation between the historical death of Christ and the associated doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. This controversy had its origin in the dissemination of the ideas of the Leyden professor Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669) and his followers. Resistance to these ideas came from the followers of the Utrecht professor Gisbertus Voetius (1587-1676). The discussion centered on the interpretation of the concept of Christ's *sponsio* or suretyship and was essentially an intensification of standing differences between these two strands in the Reformed Church of the seventeenth century, namely, on the interpretation of the fourth commandment (the Sabbath) and the doctrine of justification. While these issues may initially seem of merely academic interest, much more proved to be at stake as the debate developed. The theological quarrel had repercussions at the social and political level, and worked as a catalyst in the formation of group identity. Although the altercations between Voetians and Cocceians continued far into the eighteenth century, they were not as destructive as the Arminian/Gomarian conflict of the first half of the seventeenth century. Voetians and Cocceians continued to worship in the same church, and accepted a degree of pluriformity in church practice. To understand why the quarrels between Voetians and Cocceians dominated the life of the Republic for so long, one has to realize the extent of the uneasiness among

members of the Reformed Church over the rise of the new Cartesian philosophy and certain developments in natural science. Cocceian views appeared to be amenable to these new intellectual forces, and in some respects this was indeed the case. Moreover, in the social and ecclesiastical contexts, the theological disputes came to function as external identity markers by means of which one group could distinguish itself from another. Thus, the terms “Voetians” and “Cocceians” refer not only to theologians whose teachings followed closely that of Voetius or Cocceius, but also to ecclesiastical and social (and especially political) networks with shared interests.¹

A striking example of the way in which an initially academic debate could have social repercussions, is the so-called Sabbath-controversy.² Differences over the proper interpretation of the fourth commandment arose already in the middle of the seventeenth century. Cocceius defended the view that the Sabbath mentioned in Genesis 2 did not yet entail a differentiation between profane and holy days, but was rather an indication of the sanctification of all time. The Sabbath as a weekly day of rest was not instituted in paradise, but during the period of Israel’s sojourn in the desert. The social implications of this view were evident. Cocceius regarded the prohibition of work on the Sabbath day as a ceremonial law that was no longer binding for Christians of the New Testament. Accordingly, the Sunday observance of the Cocceians differed markedly from the strict manner in which the Voetians observed this day. Something that had begun as an academic dispute left deep marks on the ecclesiastical and social relationships of the time and into the period that followed. The

¹See J. van Sluis, “Het omzwaaien van Johannes vander Waeyen,” in F. G. M. Broeyer en E. G. E. van der Wall (eds.), *Een richtingstrijd in de Gereformeerde kerk. Voetianen en coccejianen, 1650-1750* (Zoetermeer, 1994), 101-103.

²For a detailed description of the Sabbath controversy in the Netherlands, see H. Heppe, *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der Reformierten Kirche, namentlich der Niederlande* (Leiden, 1879), 205-240; J.A. Cramer, *Abraham Heidanus en zijn Cartesianisme* (Utrecht, 1889); A.C. Duker, *Gisbertus Voetius*, 3 vols. and reg. (Leiden, 1879-1915); H.B. Visser, *De geschiedenis van den Sabbatsstrijd onder de Gereformeerden in de zeventiende eeuw* (Utrecht, 1939); C. Steenblok, *Voetius en de Sabbath* (Hoorn, 1941; Gouda 1975, 2nd. ed.); W.J. van Asselt, *Johannes Coccejus. Portret van een zeventiende-eeuws theoloog op oude en nieuwe wegen* (Heerenveen, 1997), 52-57.

difference between the ministers of the two camps could even be observed in their style of dress.³

Another disagreement that caused quite a stir in the church after 1660 was Cocceius's distinction between the forgiveness of sins (**pa, resij**) under the old covenant (Old Testament) and forgiveness (**a; fesij**) under the new covenant (New Testament).⁴ To the Voetians it seemed that Cocceius was defending the Roman doctrine of purgatory, something that rendered his views politically suspect. It could only strengthen the hand of those who favored an alliance with Roman Catholic France. Elsewhere, I have analyzed the conflict over these two modes of forgiveness more extensively.⁵ Here, I need only mention that Cocceius did not see any significance for the order of salvation in the different New Testament terms for forgiveness—**pa, resij** in Romans 3:25 and **a; fesij** in Hebrews 10:18—, unlike his Utrecht colleague Voetius, who saw this distinction as relating to the period before and after the conversion of the individual.⁶ Cocceius used these terms to refer to clearly demarcated economies of salvation within the covenant of grace. In Voetius's judgment, this distinction implied that the believers of the Old Testament had not received any actual forgiveness, and had therefore not been fully saved. True and full forgiveness could then only be received after death.⁷

The theological background to Cocceius's views on both the Sabbath and the forgiveness of sins—the main areas in which he

³See A. Ypey, *Geschiedenis van de kristelijke kerk in de achttiende eeuw*, 12 vols. (Utrecht, 1797-1815), VII, 252ff.

⁴See Johannes Coccejus, *Moreb nebochim: utilitas distinctionis duorum vocabulorum parese, wj et avfese, wj*, in *Opera Omnia*, Tomus VII (Amsterdam, 1675). This exegetical work was subtitled 'Ad illustrationem doctrinae de justificatione et reducendos ab errore judaeos, socinianos, pontificos.'

⁵See W. J. van Asselt, "Voetius en Coccejus over de rechtvaardiging," in J. van Oort *et al.*, eds., *De onbekende Voetius. Voordrachten Wetenschappelijk Symposium 1989* (Kampen, 1989), 32-47.

⁶See Gisbertus Voetius, *Selectarum Disputationum Pars Quinta: In qua praecipue tractantur quaestiones ad primam theologiae partem spectantes* (Utrecht, 1669), 277-382.

⁷Voetius, *Disputationes selectae*, V, 321. Of this opinion was also the Voetian minister Henricus Brink, in his polemical treatise *Toet-steen der waarheid en der dwalingen ofte klaare en beknopte verhandeling van de cocceaansche en cartesiaansche verschillen* (Amsterdam, 1685), 355.

distinguished himself from other Reformed theologians of his day—was his doctrine of the abrogations. This doctrine presupposed a historical development in the covenant, whereby the covenant of works, already made with Adam in paradise, was progressively abrogated in the course of salvation history, while the influence of the covenant of grace increased proportionally. In this connection, Cocceius spoke of a “step-by-step disappearance,” thus indicating that salvation history is characterized by a decrease in condemnation and an increase in salvation. His theology was therefore also strongly eschatologically oriented.⁸

After Cocceius’s death in 1669, the discussion continued unabated, and his followers were confronted with the consequences of his thinking in the area of dogmatics and ethics, which evoked strong opposition from Gisbertus Voetius and his students. As I have mentioned already, the discussion now centered on the concept of the *sponsio* or suretyship of Christ, which was systematically reflected upon and developed further by the Cocceian exegetes of that period. The question at stake in the debate was how the nature of Christ’s mediating work during the Old Testament dispensation was to be construed. The distinction between *pavresi~* and *a[lesi~*, with which the Cocceians, following their teacher, distinguished between the forgiveness of sins in the Old and New Testament dispensations, made the Voetian opponents wonder how God had offered salvation in the Old Testament dispensation, i.e., in the period of salvation history when Christ’s death on the cross was not yet a historical fact. Could Christ also be called a surety with reference to that period, and if so, in what sense?

In what follows, we shall examine the course of the theological debate. We shall also consider the question of the new elements in Reformed Protestantism that were introduced through the use of these terms, and the arguments that were advanced for and against them. What were the strong and weak points in the position of each group as judged by their opponents, and what were the identity-conferring factors that motivated the different views?

⁸See W.J. van Asselt, “The Doctrine of the Abrogations in the Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669),” in *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994), 101-116.

Christ: Mediator and Surety

The different views concerning the concept of “surety” arose as a result of the exegesis of the Greek word *εγγουοι*. This word occurs only once in the New Testament, namely, in Hebrews 7:22. In this text, it is said of Christ that he has become “the surety of a better covenant.” The word had its origin in the sphere of Greek jurisprudence, and is related to the word *μεσιθι* or mediator.⁹ In his explication of Hebrews 7:22, Cocceius pointed out that there is a clear difference between the *concepts* of *εγγουοι* and *μεσιθι*. The latter term refers to a person who bridges the gulf between God and humanity, while the former, the surety, refers to someone who offers himself, his very person and life, as a guarantee of something. In this connection, Cocceius defended the thesis that the meaning of the concept of *εγγουοι* is subtly different from that of *μεσιθι*. After all, in the Scriptures (in Gal. 3:19) Moses is also called a *μεσιθι*, but never an *εγγουοι*.¹⁰ Therefore, according to Cocceius, to designate Christ a *μεσιθι* is not sufficient, for, as he argues, a mediator is a “mere” go-between. Moreover, via the concept of *εγγουοι*, which was translated *sponsor* in Latin, a link could be made between the Reformed doctrine of the *pactum salutis* and the doctrine of the atonement.

A Common Front against the Socinians

To begin with, both Cocceians and Voetians were engaged in a polemic with the Socinians over the meaning of Christ’s suretyship.¹¹ These Protestants from Poland and Germany denied, among other things, that satisfaction (*satisfactio*) was necessary for the forgiveness of sins. In both the Old and the New Testaments, God forgives sins without satisfaction. Thus Cocceians and the

⁹Cf. Walter Bauer, *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Berlin, 1963, 5. Aufl.), 424.

¹⁰Johannes Cocceius, *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento Dei*, §§ 157-158, in *Opera Omnia*, Tomus VI (Amsterdam, 1673). It is worth noting that Cocceius’s exegesis of Hebrews 7:22 resembles in many ways Otto Michel’s explanation of this text. See O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Göttingen, 1966), 275

¹¹See e.g., Herman Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus libri quatuor* (Utrecht, 1694, ed. tertia), Lib. II, cap. V, ii, pp. 168-169.

Voetians were united in their opposition to the views of someone like the Socinian Jonas Schlichtingius (1592-1661) and his exegesis of Hebrews 7:22. Schlichtingius claimed, namely, that the expression *ergo quod dicitur, Christus* concerned only the fact that Christ had come to confirm God's promises. Christ was not our surety before God, but rather God's surety before us.¹² Schlichtingius was criticized for interpreting Christ's *sponsio* in the light of his royal office. By contrast, Cocceius defended the received view in Reformed circles, namely, that the suretyship concerned Christ's priestly office:

The entire thrust and cohesion of Scripture makes it clear that it is not only because of the announcement of the promises and their confirmation through miracles, or through his innocent suffering and death, that Christ may be called a surety. He is called a surety because he has taken the payment for our guilt upon him in order to bring the testament into effect. . . . Thus he [Schlichtingius] makes of Christ a surety, not for us before God—who took it upon himself to fulfill the condition for the testament of our salvation—but a surety for God before us. Christ is then not a surety for our sins, but stands as surety for the divine truth. He does not offer himself to God through his priestly office, but reveals himself to us as a witness whose testimony proves true, on which they may rely because it has been confirmed by the faithfulness of a blood-witness. In that case, he is a surety who does not intercede like a priest, but who keeps his promises like a king. Thus he [Schlichtingius] absurdly confuses the priestly intercession of Christ with the exercise of power in the realization of salvation.¹³

The Internal Dispute over Suretyship

Since 1600, most Reformed theologians had made a distinction, in their doctrine of the covenant, between two forms of the covenant: the covenant of works, made with Adam in paradise, and the covenant of grace, which took shape after the fall. In the covenant of grace, established with sinful humanity after the breaking of the covenant of works in paradise, Christ was regarded as the mediator of this covenant of grace. But the mediator was also

¹²See G.H. Kühler, *Het socinianisme in Nederland* (Leeuwarden, 1912; repr. 1980).

¹³Cocceius, *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento Dei*, §§ 155, 159-161.

the one who made satisfaction for sins. He paid “bail” for sinners (*radimonium pro peccatoribus*). Thus the *sponsio* of the mediator was linked to the notion of a redemption price in the doctrine of the atonement: Christ as the surety is liable for paying the debt accumulated through our sin. However, in Cocceius’s view, the concept of “surety” also implies the act of standing surety, that is to say, an agreement or transaction on the part of the person who takes the liability upon himself:

It is necessary, however, that he who is the mediator of the testament [i.e., the inheritance or salvation, which God donates to the sinner in the covenant of grace] should also be the surety of the testament, Heb. 7:22. That is to say, that he has the desire to present himself as servant of the Lord in order to achieve righteousness, thus effecting God’s testament. . . . Consequently, the will of the mediator of the testament is the surety, insofar as it is the desire to provide whatever is necessary to condemn sin, so that the justice of the law was fulfilled in the sinner. However, this will is the will of the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14). For without the will of the surety and mediator of the testament, the testament could not become an eternal testament. Therefore it was made before the foundation of the world.¹⁴

To make clear how and when this suretyship took effect, Cocceius distinguished a third form of the covenant, which he had already encountered in embryonic form in Olevianus, and which, after him, acquired a permanent place in Reformed covenant theology.¹⁵ It became customary to speak of the *pactum salutis*, thereby indicating a covenant made in eternity between the persons of the Trinity. In this connection, the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* made it possible to give the eternal aspect of the suretyship a place

¹⁴Cocceius, *Summa theologiae ex Scripturis repetita*, cap. 34, 4-5, in *Opera Omnia*, Tomus VI (Amsterdam, 1673): “Qui autem est mediator testamenti, eum necesse est esse etiam sponsorem testamenti, Heb. 7, 22; hoc est, voluntatem habere se sistendi servum Dei ad justitiam adducendam et sic testamentum Dei exsequendum.... Ergo voluntas mediatoris, ut mediator testamenti, est sponsio, quatenus est voluntas id praestandi, quod requirebatur ad damnandum peccatum, ut meritum legis impleretur in peccatore. Est autem ea voluntas Spiritus aeterni. Heb. 9, 14. Neque enim voluntate sponsoris et mediatoris testamenti fieri poterat testamentum aeternum. Quod ante jacta mundi fundamenta factum est.”

¹⁵See L.D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids, 1996), 107-112.

within the trinitarian *pactum*. After all, in the *pactum salutis*, Christ was not viewed as a mediator, but as party to a covenant or transaction concerning surety. Although the provision of surety took place in time, the appointment as surety, or the offering of surety, as Cocceius saw it, took place in eternity.

This view presented a new issue around which the Voetians and the Cocceians took up their positions. The central question was whether the understanding of forgiveness propounded by Cocceius and his followers was compatible with *this* doctrine concerning the suretyship of Christ in the trinitarian *pactum*.

The Cocceians' salvation-historical differentiation between forgiveness in the Old and New Testament economies of salvation made the Voetian opponents wonder about the consequences for Christ's position as surety under the salvation economy of the Old Testament. If the believers of the Old Testament had not received full forgiveness, in the sense of *a;fesij*, then it followed, in their view, that Christ's suretyship must have had a different content under the Old Testament than under the New Testament dispensation. The question was all the more pressing because the Cocceians continued to hold fast to the idea of their teacher that Christ's appointment as surety (*constitutio sponsoris*) had taken place in the eternal *pactum* between Father and Son. According to the Voetians, this eternal dimension of the suretyship left no room for a distinction between two forms of forgiveness. In this respect, the Cocceian position was judged inconsistent.¹⁶ Cocceius and his followers were accused, moreover, of having pushed the distinction between the two forms of forgiveness so far as to contradict their own utterances about the *pactum salutis*. According to the Voetian minister and (later) Utrecht professor, Melchior Leydekker, Cocceius himself had caused the debate. He claimed that Cocceius's son-in-law, the Zeeland minister Willem Anslaer, had admitted in "friendly negotiations" that, in his later writings, his father-in-law had changed his mind.¹⁷ In Leydekker's view, the dispute could only be settled if the students returned to the original teachings of their teacher.

¹⁶For this issue, see Brink, *Toet-steen der waarheid*, 352-355.

¹⁷Melchior Leydekker, *Filius Dei sponsor*, 59, 179. For the full title of this work, see n. 21. On W. Anslaer, see Van Asselt, *Portret*, 10, 56, 59, 63, 65.

Fideiussio or *Expromissio*?

The followers of the Leyden professor, however, took a different route. They tried to refute the criticism of their teacher by means of a distinction derived from Roman law rather than Scripture. The concept of suretyship was understood to allow for a distinction between suretyship in the sense of a *fideiussio*, and suretyship in the sense of an *expromissio*. It was pointed out that Roman law defined a *fideiussio* as a conditional suretyship, whereby the debt was transferred in such a way as to leave the liability of the debtor intact. By contrast, the term *expromissio* denoted an absolute suretyship, whereby the debt of the debtor was taken over completely and immediately by the one who stands as surety.¹⁸ Presented schematically, the distinction rested on the following argumentation. If A is the debtor, B the creditor, and C the person who provides surety, then, in the case of an *expromissio*, A no longer has any obligation towards B. Henceforth B can claim his due only from C as the *expromissor*. However, if A is in debt to B, and C intercedes as *fideiussor*, then B may still take action against A, until such time as C has actually paid the required amount.¹⁹ By means of

¹⁸See J.E. Spruit & R. Feenstra, eds., *Textus Iuris Romani* (Deventer, 1989). For the concept of *fideiussio*, see pp. 151-153 and 243-247; for *expromissio*, see p. 57. In Dutch literature on this subject *fideiussio* is translated as “borgsbelofte” and *expromissio* as “borgoverneming.” See B. Loonstra, *Verkiezing-Verzoening-Verbond. Beschrijving en beoordeling van de leer van het pactum salutis in de gereformeerde theologie* (’s-Gravenhage 1990), 132.

¹⁹The professors of law that the Cocceians appealed to were, among others, the Leyden professor Arnoldus Vinnius (1588-1657), who referred to the *corpus juris civilis* of Roman Law edited by emperor Justinianus (527-565), especially book III of the *Institutiones* (Tit. 21). His interpretation was contested by the Voetian, Willem Goes (geb. 1611), lord of Boekhorst and councilor of the Law Court at The Hague, who was a son-in-law of Daniël Heinsius. In his treatise *Pilatus Judex* (Hagae-Comit., 1677), he defended the view that the concept of “egguoj” used in Heb. 7:22 should be interpreted as an *expromissio*. For his biography, see A.J. van der Aa, *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden . . .* (Haarlem, 1852; Amsterdam 1969), III, 20. Among the professors who joined Goes’s opinion were Ulricus Huber (1636-1694) and his son Zacharias Huber, both professors of Law at the University of Franeker. In 1698 and 1699 Zacharias Huber discussed the subject in two disputations: *Dissertatio juridico-philologica, qua asseritur chirographum d. Pauli, quod extat Epistola ad Philemonem § 18 et 19, non*

this distinction, an attempt was made to answer the question of which form of suretyship in Roman law Christ's action as surety could best be compared with. Is Christ a *fideiussor*, who stands as surety for the debt in such a way that the Old Testament sinner remains liable for the debt until it has in fact been paid through Christ's sacrifice on Golgotha? Or is he an *expromissor*, who not only takes the obligation upon himself to pay the debt of the sinner, but, in his suretyship, actually takes over the debt of the debtor in an absolute sense, so that the sinner is released of any obligation to pay from the moment that the suretyship goes into effect (in eternity)?

Cocceian Arguments for the *fideiussio*

Cocceius himself did not use the designations *fideiussio* and *expromissio* as technical terms for the aforementioned problem. The problem was, however, discussed in the *praefatio* to his commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, and elsewhere in his work.²⁰ The commotion over the use of these terms and their implications in terms of content arose only some years later, in the wake of the publication of an anonymous booklet entitled *De staet des gemeynden verschils over het onderscheyd der vergevinge der sonden onder het Oude en Nieuwe Testament* ("The state of the serious dispute over the

continere obligationem constitutoriam, sed veram solidamque expromissionem [resp. Nicolaus Sautyn] and *Dissertatio juridico-philologica de conscientia debitoris per expromissorem tranquila, ad illustrandum d. Pauli chirographum, Epistola ad Philemon § 18 et 19* [resp. Everhardus Wielinga]. See F. Postma & J. van Sluis, *Auditorium Academiae Franekerensis. Bibliographie der Reden, Disputationen und Gelegenheitsdruckwerke der Universität und des Athenäums in Franeker 1585-1843* (Leeuwarden, 1995), 274. Johannes Voetius (1647-1713), a grandson of Gisbertus Voetius and professor of Law at the University of Utrecht (1675), and after that at Leiden University (1680), published a commentary on the concepts of *expromissio* and *fideiussio*. See Joh. Voetius, *Commentarius ad Pandectas parte posteriore, libro XLVI, Titulo 1, Thes. 1* (Lugduno Batavorum, 1698-1704), 935-936.

²⁰Especially in Cocceius's correspondence (e.g., Epist nr. 151 en 190, in *Opera Omnia*, VI, Amsterdam 1673-1675) one finds the pattern for the later discussions. Voetius was well aware of the topic, for he wrote a preface to Melchior Leydekker's treatise *Vis Veritatis, sive disquisitionum ad nonnullas controversias, quae hodie in Belgio potissimum moventur de testamentis et oeconomia foederum Dei libri V* (Utrecht, 1679). Lib. V, cap. 2, 3 and 12 of this book contains a sharp critique of the Cocceian *fideiussio* concept.

distinction between the forgiveness of sins in the Old and New Testament”), which the Utrecht professor Melchior Leydekker (1642-1721) mentioned in the preface (“Aan den leser”: “To the reader”) to his booklet on the suretyship of Christ, published in 1708 in Amsterdam under the title *Filius Dei sponsor*.²¹ In this publication, Leydekker looked back on the problems that had arisen over the suretyship of Christ, and suggested that Wilhelmus Momma (1642-1677), a faithful pupil of Cocceius, had been the author of the tract in question, and was therefore responsible for having set the ball rolling on the whole issue. At the time, Momma was a minister and professor in Middelburg (since 1676), and Leydekker, a former student of Cocceius in Leyden, a minister in Renesse and Noordwelle (1663-1678). Because of his familiarity with Cocceian theology, Leydekker was asked by his colleagues in Middelburg to reply to Momma’s publications.²²

Following Cocceius, Momma argued against the view that Christ’s eternal surety had redeemed the believers (of the Old Testament) from the punishment of guilt in an *absolute* sense. After all, if Christ had taken the debt upon himself from all eternity, then the historical datum of his death on the cross at Golgotha would no longer have any significance. At most, then, that death would have significance for Christ himself, by relieving him of his suretyship.²³ If an absolute transfer of debt had taken place, then it would have been “improper” to demand a “debenture” (record of debt) from the believers under the Old Testament. This **ceiro,grafon**, mentioned in Col. 2:14, was “demanded” of the believers under the

²¹The full title of this work is *Filius Dei sponsor of de loff en eere Jesu Christi onze Vredevorst en Borge in zijn volstreckte borg-belofte voor alle nutverkeorene, bysonder de geloovige des O. Testaments, verbreyd en betoont tot vermindering der verschillen, vereeninge der geoederen, en vrede der kerken, opgedragen aan alle verstandige ervarenen in goddelijke en borgerlijke regten* (Amsterdam, 1708).

²²For more biographical details on Leydekker, see *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlandse protestantisme*, vol. 4 [henceforth BLGNP] (Kampen, 1998), 307-310.

²³See W. Momma, *De varia conditione et statu ecclesiae sub triplici economia: patriarcharum, ac Testamenti Veteris et denique Novi libri tres*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1673-1675). Momma discussed the *sponsio Christi* extensively in vol. 3, 15f. The Dutch translation of Abraham Poot entitled *Drie boeken van de verscheidene gelegentheit en staat der kerke Gods onder de drierlei huishoudinge der patriarchen, des Ouden en eindelijk des Nieuwen Testaments* (Amsterdam, 1675-1677) dealt with the issue on pp. 40ff.

Old Testament until such time as Christ had actually settled the debt. According to Momma, this text could not be accounted for in the case of a surety in the sense of *expromissio*.

The “Middelburg” dispute escalated rapidly, and drew national and even international attention. Thus, in his *Corpus theologiae* (posthumously 1700), the Zürich professor Johann Heinrich Heidegger (1633-1698) took over Momma’s arguments and taught that Christ’s suretyship could not be an *expromissio*, since the forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament dispensation had involved no more than a suspension of punishment on the basis of surety (*non-punitio propter sponsorem*). The “culpability” could only be removed through an actual “payment,” which took place on the cross of Golgotha. Since, in his opinion, Scripture and theology nowhere speaks of the suretyship as an *expromissio*, Heidegger characterized, not the Cocceian, but the Voetian position on the suretyship as a recent opinion (*novella opinio*).²⁴

In the Republic, things were a bit more complicated. The first Cocceian professor in Utrecht, Franciscus Burman (1628-1679), was (according to Leydekker) somewhat more cautious in his utterances, and discussed the issue, not in his treatment of the eternal trinitarian *pactum* and the *sponsio* agreed upon therein, but incidentally, in the context of his treatment of “the faith of the fathers under the promise, their righteousness and hope of salvation.” Burman tried to meet Leydekker (with whom he had good personal relations) halfway by pointing, like his colleague, to the retroactive force of Christ’s historical death, which also affected the believers of the Old Testament.²⁵ The Cocceian Salomon van Til (1643-1713), who often spoke of Leydekker with appreciation, also took a more conciliatory approach in his writings. Although he clearly defended the *fideiussio*, he thought that the discussion over the differences was more at home in academic discourse than on the pulpit. On the pulpit, this issue could only give rise to useless controversy and unnecessary estrangement. In van Til’s opinion, the views at stake were such that one could well hold them without infringing on the

²⁴See J.H. Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae christianae* (Zürich, 1700), I, XI, lxxix, 406

²⁵See Franciscus Burmannus, *Synopsis theologiae & speciatim oeconomiae foederum Dei, ab initio saeculorum usque ad consummationem eorum* (Utrecht, 1681; 2nd. ed.), Liber ii, cap. 15 § 2; iii, cap. 4, §§ 13-15.

fundamental truths of the confession.²⁶ Leydekker disagreed with van Til on this point. He therefore concluded his *Filius Dei sponsor* with “A Serious Word to Mr. S. van Til,” in which he stated that van Til underestimated the differences.²⁷ Other prominent Cocceians, like Abraham Heidanus, Christophorus Wittichius, Johannes vander Waeijen and Petrus Allinga, spoke more strongly about the issue.²⁸ Their objections against the view of suretyship as *expromissio* concerned, first of all, the fact that the Voetians continued, wrongly, to use the concept of “surety.” In their judgment, one could no longer speak of surety if an absolute transfer of debt had taken place. In such a case, the person in question no longer stands as surety, but has become a debtor. That, however, would be below God’s dignity. To portray God’s eternal Son as in debt is to show contempt towards him. One would then be suggesting that God himself is guilty.

In the second place, the Cocceians pointed out that the *expromissio* would render the incarnation and the historical crucifixion superfluous. Even if Christ had remained in heaven, and had not died at Golgotha, the elect would have received forgiveness of sins—on the basis of the absolute transfer—and would be exempt from damnation.

Finally, they also advanced an exegetical argument. A suretyship in the sense of *expromissio* could not account for Colossians 2:14. After all, this text presupposes that a **ceiro,grafon** (debenture) could be demanded of believers under the Old Testament. Yet, by designating Christ an *expromissor*, the Old and New Testament dispensations are made to coincide. The distinction between the Old and New Testament is thus erased. The “better” (Heb. 7:22), which God has provided for believers under the New Testament, is thus darkened. Thus no justice is done to “the blood of the cross,” and the gratitude owed to God by the believers in the New Testament is removed.

²⁶See Salomon van Til, *Antidotum viperinis morsibus D.J.* [= Pierre de Joncourt] *oppositum* (Leiden, 1707). Van Til reduced the controversies over Christ’s *sponsio* to “quaestiones de nomine” or “problemata.”

²⁷Leydekker, *Filius Dei sponsor*, 194-227.

²⁸For a fair rendering of their positions, see Leydekker, *Filius Dei sponsor*, 196-218.

Proponents of the *expromissio*

In his already cited *Filius Dei sponsor*, Melchior Leydekker stated that “the Reformed teachers were unanimous in their conviction that Christ as *expromissor* was an absolute surety under the Old Testament.”²⁹ However, this judgment was not entirely accurate, since some of those on the orthodox side had qualified their position somewhat in the course of the debate. Moreover, some of those whom he counted as being on his side had never addressed the problem explicitly at all, or had never committed themselves in any significant sense to his point of view. In this connection, he referred to Samuel Maresius, Johannes Cloppenburg, Johannes Maccovius, Hermannus Witsius, Johannes Marckius and Petrus van Mastricht. His appeal to Johannes Cloppenburg (1592-1652), a colleague of Cocceius during his professorship in Franeker, is questionable. Cloppenburg had, after all, explicitly defended the distinction between *pa, resij* and *a; fesij*—Cocceius had even appealed to him for this distinction.³⁰ Leydekker was right to the extent that Cloppenburg had explicitly rejected a suretyship conceived as *fideiussio*. Christ’s eternal *sponsio* was an absolute or strict surety.³¹ The case of Herman Witsius is also rather complicated. Although he rejected the Cocceian distinction between the different forms of forgiveness, he nevertheless characterized Christ as *fideiussor*.³² Finally, Leydekker also cited Samuel Maresius (1599-1673) as a witness. Although this Groningen professor had never used the term *expromissor*, Leydekker inferred from his description of Christ’s suretyship in his commentary on the *Confessio Belgica* and in his anti-Socinian, *Hydra socianismi*, that Maresius had already taught some form of *expromissio*, even before the controversy over this topic had openly erupted.³³

²⁹Leydekker, *Filius Dei sponsor*, 61.

³⁰See Van Asselt, *Portret*, 30.

³¹Johannes Cloppenburg, *Disputationes XI de foedere Dei et testamento veteri et novo* (Harderwijk, 1643), § 96-97. For a description of Cloppenburg’s distinction, see Van Asselt, *Portret*, 30ff.

³²H. Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum*, IV, cap. XII, xliii: “Expiatio peccati est, qua reatus a delinquente ablati, & in fidejussorem translatus, a fidejussore expiatur, ferente omnem poenam, ad quam delinquens obligatur, ut iustitia Dei non habeat quod ultra exigat, nedum infligat.”

³³Samuel Maresius, *Foederatum Belgium orthodoxorum; sive confessionis ecclesiarum Belgicarum exegesis; qua illius veritas ex Verbo Dei et Antiquitate*

Leydekker also mentioned some Reformed theologians from outside the country who, in his opinion, had rejected the *fideiussio*. In this connection, he referred to Francesco Turretini (1623-1687), who, in his posthumously published *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (1688), had considered the Dutch discussion in a separate *quaestio* and—according to Leydekker—had rejected the Cocceian view.³⁴ Here, Leydekker was indeed not mistaken, but he failed to mention some of the qualifications put forward by Turretini. Turretini did not regard the terms *fideiussio* and *expromissio* as suitable for a discussion of Christ's suretyship, because the matter at stake could not be compared to the procedures of civil law. However, given that the question had been raised at this level, the Genevan professor felt that preference had to be given to the concept of *expromissor*, since it more closely approximated the sufficiency and power of the suretyship. Yet, according to Turretini, Christ's *sponsio* could not be called an *expromissio* in every sense. If the issue at stake is one of criminal guilt rather than monetary debt, then the former is not in all respects transferable to the one who stands as surety. In the case of criminal guilt, however, a distinction can be made between the obligation to bear a concrete punishment (*obligatio poenalis*) on the one hand, and moral guilt (*obligatio personalis*) on the other. Whereas the former is transferable to Christ as the one who stands as surety, our moral guilt cannot be transferred to Christ; by grace, it is, however, annulled in Christ.³⁵ In this manner, Turretini tried to account for the Cocceian critique of the *expromissio*.

Catholica asseritur, et adversus oppositos errores vindicatur (Groningen, 1652), 285; idem, *Hydra Socinianismi expugnata*, 3 vols. (Groningen, 1651-1662).

³⁴F. Turretini, *Institutio theologiae elencticae, Pars secunda* (Geneva, 1688), 263-270. *Quaestio ix* of locus 12 (*De foedere gratiae*) runs as follows: "An Christus sub V.T. habuerit tantum rationem Sponsoris fidejussoris, et etiam expromissoris? Pr[ior] neg[atur]. Post[erior] affirm[atur]."

³⁵Turretini, *Institutio theologiae elencticae*, XII, ix, 16: "Non eadem est ratio translationis debiti pecuniarii in sponsorem, & debiti poenalis. Illa potest esse absoluta & plena quoad omnem rationem debiti, quia non attenditur quis solvat, sed tantum quid solvatur, non persona, sed pecunia. Sed in criminalibus ubi respicitur persona, & non tantum poena, obligatio nequit quoad omnes partes transferri in Sponsorem, sed tantum quoad aliquam, nimirum quoad certam poenam Vadi infligendam loco rei, non vero quoad obligationem personalem, seu poenam in propria persona ferendam. Peccata nostra dicuntur in Christum translata ratione prioris, non posterioris; nec personalis nostra obligatio est in Christum translata,

Finally, Leydekker also invoked the views of some orthodox Lutheran theologians against the Cocceian *fideiussio*. These were Johann Gerhard (1582-1637), Balthasar Meisner (1587-1626) and Valentin Alberti (1635-1697), of which the first was a professor at Jena, and the other two at Wittenberg. Although these Lutherans had published their work long before the dispute over the suretyship had erupted, their interpretation of Revelation 13:8, with which they opposed the Roman Catholic doctrine of limbo, was well suited to be used as an argument against the Cocceians. When this biblical text says of Christ that he is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” then this applies not only to the eternal decree as such, but also to the execution of this decree in time. After all, the power and effectiveness of Christ’s merit does not depend on a “point in time” at which Christ could be said to have acquired it through his death and suffering. Leydekker’s Lutheran colleague from Jena, Johann Franz Buddeus (1667-1729), openly agreed with this interpretation. According to Buddeus, Lutheran theologians also regarded it as a mistake to link the actual effectiveness of Christ’s merit with a particular moment in time.³⁶

Although Leydekker was not the only one to defend the Voetian view concerning Christ’s suretyship, his *Filius Dei sponsor* distinguishes itself from other publications in this area by its clear presentation of the diverging positions.³⁷ Thus he classified the Voetian opposition to the Cocceian interpretation of the *sponsio* under three headings: exegetical, dogmatic, and practical objections.³⁸

Exegetical Objections to the *fideiussio*

At the exegetical level, Leydekker rejected the Cocceian interpretation of Hebrews 7:22. His main objection to this interpretation was the fact that jurisprudence was invoked to

sed gratiose dissoluta.”

³⁶Leydekker, *Filius Dei sponsor*, “Aen den leser,” 15ff.

³⁷E.g., Everardus van der Hooght (1642-1716), Voetian minister in Nieuwendam, who defended Leydekker’s *Filius Dei sponsor* in his treatise *Christi volstreckte borgtogt ende de leernyse van de huysbouding Gods ...* (Amsterdam, 1709).

³⁸In what follows I summarize Leydekker’s argument in his *Filius Dei Sponsor*, 27-100.

explicate the text and adapt it to the Cocceian system. The appeal to Roman law portrayed Christ as a financial surety (Dutch: geldborg), and sins as “monetary debt” or “shop-credit” (geld- of winkelschulden). In Leydekker’s view, however, sin constitutes criminal guilt, which deserves corporal punishments and death. Thus he stated explicitly that Christ was no financial surety, but rather a “personal surety” (Lijf-Borg), who had offered his life as a “sponsor antipsycho.”³⁹ Leydekker, moreover, regarded it as extremely inappropriate to compare God, in the drama of salvation, as a distrustful creditor. God’s “tribunal,” according to him, does not at all resemble a worldly court where people deal with civil cases. Here, the saying applies: *omne simile claudicat*.⁴⁰

Isaiah 53:6 and Revelation 13:8 in particular were seized upon by Leydekker in order to refute the juridical maneuvers of the Cocceians in their exegesis of Hebrews 7:22. From these texts, he concluded that Christ was a *personal* surety, who was appointed in our place, not by people, but by God. Since this substitution had occurred from eternity, Christ was an unchanging surety, who could not fail or—in the case of a hypothetical suretyship of a *fideiussor*—renounce his mission, thereby frustrating God’s counsel and decrees. In the pre-temporal *pactum salutis*, an absolute transfer of guilt had occurred, because an absolute substitution had taken place. The transfer did not take place on the cross. Therefore, in the Old Testament, Christ could not be a hypothetical or conditional surety. In the eternal counsel of peace, he became a surety for insolvent sinners, i.e., sinners who were by no means able to pay. In that context, Leydekker was indeed inclined—despite his objections to the juridical terminology—to speak of Christ as an *expromissor*.

And behold him as One who stands as surety, who was appointed an absolute Surety or expromissor by more than a mere renewal or revival of the commitment to punishment! Behold how the elect could be released even before their Surety was released.⁴¹

³⁹Leydekker, *Filius Dei Sponsor*, 10-12. Here Leydekker refers to a term (antipsycho) used by Athanasius in his *Opera*, Tomus I, pp. 52, 66.

⁴⁰Leydekker, *Filius Dei sponsor*, 12-18.

⁴¹Leydekker, *Filius Dei sponsor*, 117.

Dogmatic Objections to the *fideiussio*

The dogmatic objections to the *fideiussio* related especially to the doctrine of God, and to the doctrine of the divine attributes in particular. Thus Leydekker argued that the validity of any theological position is determined by the correct understanding of God's attributes. Therefore, if the doctrine of the *sponsio* is to be consistent, it should correspond to the following attributes of God: eternity, immutability, sovereignty, truth, holiness, wisdom, and justice.⁴²

Leydekker paid most attention to the question of whether the Cocceian interpretation of the *sponsio* could be reconciled with God's eternity. He was of the opinion that the *sponsio* was among the immanent acts (*actus immanentes*) of God. These immanent acts are not subject to time. On this basis, the *sponsio* could be only an *expromissio*, because the temporal factor could not play a role in the *expromissio* as an immanent act of God. Although the divine economy with respect to believers is indeed characterized by "times" and "seasons," it is unthinkable for God's immanent being, since that would render it subject to time, and therefore not eternal and perfect. By postulating a *fideiussio* for the Old Testament, the Cocceians rendered God, and his immanent decree concerning believers, subject to time.⁴³ In that case, God would have altered his judgment. Yet it is impossible that the satisfaction made by Christ in time could depend on time as far as its operation is concerned. Christ underwent his death as a human being and, as such, was subject to time. Yet the power of that death depended on his divinity. It was that divinity which bestowed on his death an infinite value and a powerful operation, and this value and operation would be annulled if God were subject to time.

According to Leydekker, suretyship in the sense of *fideiussio* also conflicts with God's wisdom. The Cocceians assumed, namely, that it was possible that Christ could have refused to provide the surety. Yet such an idea would imply a change in God's eternal counsel, and would reduce his wisdom. Thus the possibility that Christ could have failed to provide the *sponsio*—Christ as *fideiussor hypotheticus*—was, by definition, excluded. Leydekker called such a line of thought a *casus impossibilis*, which could not be applied to the eternal Son of

⁴²Leydekker, *Filius Dei sponsor*, 68-76.

⁴³Leydekker, *Filius Dei sponsor*, 69ff.

God, who is of one substance with the Father. With their *fideiussio*, the Cocceians introduced a hypothetical or conditional element into God's eternal decree. Nor could steps or degrees be distinguished in God's counsel, for that would make God's decrees dependent on external factors.⁴⁴

Practical Objections to the *fideiussio*

According to Leydekker, the doctrine of *fideiussio* also had very negative consequences for the Reformed doctrine of election, and for the certainty of salvation that believers could derive from it, especially the believers under the Old Testament dispensation. By upholding the doctrine of *fideiussio*, the Israelites are degraded and placed, with the Papists, in the state of limbo. For New Testament believers, the rejection of the absolute transfer of their sins to Christ implies a rejection of their absolute election. If, however, one confesses an absolute election of both Old and New Testament believers, one is thereby compelled to conceive of Christ's *sponsio* as *expromissio*. According to Leydekker, the reverse of this argument is also true: whoever denies Christ as *expromissor*, thereby also rejects God's absolute election. Consequently, the Cocceian doctrine of the *fideiussio* was seen as a direct attack on the Reformed doctrine of election and an attempt to undermine the certainty of salvation. Thus, according to Leydekker, the Cocceian "fabrication of Christ's suretyship" had already caused much evil in the churches:

The passion for the new doctrine of the covenants grew more intense by the day; the excitement increased.... In self-glorification, the churches were infiltrated with the new sentiments; the catechesis was flooded with it according to written booklets. It was suggested that the new doctrine would bring the church to the summit of Christian and scriptural wisdom; People would thus progress towards perfection; they would receive solid food instead of milk.... The followers of Mr. Cocceius might have discerned such truth, clarity, and wisdom in his doctrines, but we did not.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Leydekker, *Filius Dei sponsor*, 73-74.

⁴⁵Leydekker, *Filius Dei sponsor*, 150.

Concluding Remarks

From the above it is clear that the dispute over Christ's suretyship did not remain limited to Zeeland, but acquired even international scope over the years. This suggests that more than a mere rearguard action was at stake. Theologically, certain fundamental systematic questions concerning the relation between time and eternity, Old and New Testament, the order and history of salvation, soteriology and Christology were at stake. By insisting that the suretyship as *expromissio* involved the total transfer of the guilt of the elect to the one who stands as surety, the anti-Cocceians left little room for the idea of a salvation-historical differentiation and development, as proposed by the Cocceians. All the emphasis thus came to be placed on the subjective experience, according to the order of salvation, of forgiveness of guilt and atonement. The Cocceians, by contrast, sought, through their stress on the *fideiussio*, to forge a link between the order and the history of salvation as aspects of God's action in forgiving sins.

The debate between Cocceians and Voetians on the Sabbath, the forgiveness of sins, and Christ's suretyship is not without significance for the evaluation of the respective theological approaches. The Cocceians made use of a historical method, which sought to do justice to the historical structure of the Bible. Over against Voetian orthodoxy, with its strongly confessionally determined exegesis, they defended the idea of development and difference in the knowledge of God's action in history. However, whereas the conflicts over the Sabbath and forgiveness turned mainly on the point of the social consequences, the dispute over the *sponsio* showed that, despite these differences, there was nevertheless a common systematic frame of reference in terms of which the debate could be carried on. In this connection, it is noteworthy that, in their explication of Christ's suretyship, both the Cocceians and the Voetians employed scholastic and juridical concepts in order to clarify their respective positions.⁴⁶ This fact relativizes to some

⁴⁶See Chr. Strohm, *Ethik im frühen Calvinismus. Humanistische Einflüsse, philosophische, juristische und theologische Argumentationen sowie mentalitätsgeschichtliche Aspekte am Beispiel des Calvin-Schülers Lambertus Danaeus* (Berlin, 1996), 198-204; 223-235. The fact that Cocceius's father and especially his brother Gerhard were prominent jurists suggests that Cocceius himself might have thought in juridical terms. For the influence of legal thinking

extent the dominant perceptions regarding the era in question. The historiography of the seventeenth century sometimes tends to portray the (theological) positions of the Cocceians and the Voetians as mutually exclusive alternative approaches.⁴⁷ The “strict” scholastic theologizing of the Voetians is then contrasted with the “biblical” thinking of the Cocceians. Without minimizing the theological differences that have been discussed, this contribution may well have qualified *this* typology to some extent.

on Cocceius and Reformed theology, see Willem J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669)*, (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 2001), 330-332.

⁴⁷See for example Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall (1477-1806)*, 662f.