

Title: Johannes Piscator (1546-1625) and the Consequent Development of the Doctrine of the Imputation of Christ's Active Obedience

Author: Heber Carlos de Campos Júnior

Date: 2011 Degree: Ph.D., Calvin Theological Seminary

Supervisor: Richard A. Muller

External Reader: Cornelis P. Venema

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ABSTRACT

Though the forensic understanding of imputation of Christ's righteousness was consistently asserted by the Reformers, the discussion around what constituted this imputed righteousness was a Post-Reformation debate. However, secondary literature is often unaware of the development of such doctrine when they assert that early Reformed figures such as John Calvin, Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus were either in favor or opposed to the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's active obedience. These labels are preferable if attributed to those who responded to Johannes Piscator's disagreement with Theodore Beza's theology of imputation of righteousness, this being the debate which sparked the controversy in Reformed circles.

Piscator understood that justification consisted in its entirety of the remission of sins imputed to the believer. Justification, then, was a simplex *actio Dei*, the imputation of a one-part righteousness. He found basis for this understanding in the several passages of Scripture which tied justification to the blood or the cross. For him, Scripture never indicated Christ's life of obedience to the law being imputed to the believer. Moreover, he believed that the imputation of Christ's active obedience raised contradictions within theology: if Christ's life makes one righteous then there is no need for the cross; if Christ's obedience makes us right with the law, then God's punishment upon Christ to satisfy the law is an unjust requirement of a double payment; if Christ obeyed in our behalf then we are freed from the obligation to obey God's moral law.

As the majority of the Reformed contingent in the seventeenth century responded to Piscator and his followers, they gathered a defense which was founded on three theological areas: the law and the covenants, the meritorious cause of justification, and the person of Christ as mediator. The enhanced comprehension of these three interconnected areas consistently addressed in the seventeenth century demonstrates a significant maturity in the understanding of the imputation of Christ's active obedience.