

AMYRALDIANISM¹

Moyse Amyraut was born in Bourgueil (Touraine) in 1596. He studied law then theology at Saumur, where he was later pastor. In 1633 he was appointed Professor of the Protestant Academy. He spent most of his life in Saumur and died there in January 1664.

Amyraldianism is ambiguous by name and by nature. It could refer to the theology of the Académie at Saumur, in the Loire valley in 17th century France from John Cameron to Claude Pajon. For many it is a form of Calvinism that is a bit off-colour, the said school being embroiled in a series post-Dort controversies. Perhaps it is most commonly associated with the debate about limited atonement, and a four point TULIP, a variegated bloom with tints of Arminianism and Calvinism proper. Again there will be some for whom the word evokes the polemics around whether Amyraut was “the last Calvinist standing” against the high orthodoxy of Beza and Owen scholasticism.²

Some attendant difficulties: Amyraldianism is often referred to as “hypothetical universalism”. Careful, most of us are hypothetical universalists, including Pierre Du Moulin, Francis Turretin, and those who are not either hypercalvinists or outright universalists. As William Cunningham said, “No Calvinist, not even Dr. Twisse, the great champion of high Supralapsarianism, has even denied that there is a sense in which it may be affirmed that Christ died for all men.”³ TULIP itself is a modern transatlantic invention; there were not strictly speaking “five

¹ In *Sovereign Grace O'er Sin Abounding*, Westminster Ministers Conference, Dewsbury, 2018, 7-31.

² The debate on “Was Calvin a Calvinist?” Cf. Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition. On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 51-69. Alan C. Clifford even makes the claim that “Amyraut’s clear commitment to the *Canons of Dort* suggests that the Amyraldians are the true ‘five point’ Calvinists. If anything, the high orthodox may be styled ‘four and a half pointers,’ since they virtually deny the universal sufficiency of the atonement clearly expressed in the second canon.” *Calvinus: Authentic Calvinism, a Clarification* (Norwich: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 1996), 18.

³ William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (London: Banner of Truth, 1967/1862), 396.

points” at Dort.⁴ Limited atonement as an expression is highly unsatisfactory, as Carl Trueman has pointed out, suggesting in its place “particular or effectual redemption”.⁵ The word atonement overly focusses on the death of Christ, is modern English and therefore unknown to Calvin who used “réconciliation”. The cherry on the cake is Pierre Lombard’s expression “sufficient for all, efficient for the elect”, about which the Genevans at Dort had reservations. If the formula is neat, how can something be sufficient for the job if not efficient to do it? These are just a few elephant traps for Amyraldian hunters.

After a short historical introduction we propose a reflection on the main issue of Amyraldianism, the question of the hypothetical divine decree, its inner order and nature, followed by limited critical remarks in evaluation, concluding with some general thoughts.

I AMYRALDIANISM IN CONTEXT

Following the Royal Edict of Nantes in 1598, synods of the French Reformed church met every three years until 1628. In the seventeenth century there was no synod without royal authorization and the presence of a king’s commissioner. Subsequently, and before the French Revolution, there were only four further national synods—Charenton (Paris) in 1631 and 1644, Alençon in 1637, and the synod at Loudon in 1659. The Reformed churches were increasingly under pressure.⁶ It was at the latter three synods that issues relating to Amyraldianism were hotly discussed.

The main theological issue at the time in the synods was obviously the condemnation of Arminianism and the fear on the part of Pierre Du Moulin, André Rivet, and their ilk, that Amyraldianism, developed from the “universalism” of John Cameron, who had enormous influence on his students, was a half-way house to synergism.⁷ Du Moulin wrote pointedly about the Arminians who “ape the Pelagians” and his *Anatomy of Arminianism* (1619) reveals his gifts as a

⁴ Cf. Lee Gatiss, “The Synod of Dort and Limited Atonement”, in David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological and Pastoral Perspectives* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2013): “However, the central petal, the “L” of so-called “limited atonement,” was actually the second head of doctrine covered by the Synod, mirroring its place in the Arminian Remonstrance”, chap. 6, 328. Page references to this work are always to the ebook.

⁵ Carl Trueman, “Atonement and the Covenant of Redemption”, chap. 8 in *Ibid*, 431-2.

⁶ Cf. for the Synod of Alençon, the edited extracts by Alan C. Clifford from John Quick, *Synodicon in Gallia Reformata*, II (London, 1692), 352-7 in *Amyraut on Predestination*, transl. by Matthew Harding (Norwich: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 2017), 161-9.

⁷ Albert Gootjes, “John Cameron and the French Universalist Tradition”, in Martin I. Klauber, ed., *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches. From Henri IV to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2014), 169–96.

theologian and polemicist.⁸ The opponents of Amyraut were overly apprehensive that his two-stage view of the divine decree of salvation, with Christ dying hypothetically for all and subsequently being received through faith by those who believe, would inevitably collapse into Arminian prescience and the limitation of divine sovereignty in salvation.⁹ They considered that this was ploughing a different furrow from that of Dort, accepted by the Synod of Alès, with Du Moulin as moderator, in 1620.¹⁰

The debate went through three stages before the synods, including an imposed silence following the Acte de Thouars in October 1649.¹¹ The Amyraldians always affirmed their loyalty to Dort, and were never condemned for heresy.¹² The theology taught at Saumur by Amyraut, Josué de La Place, Louis Cappel and Claude Pajon in the line of Cameron, grew in attraction and was never formally condemned by a synod of the Church. Unfortunately, Amyraut, no mean theologian, is generally only remembered in this context, even though he was a prolific author publishing biblical studies, commentaries, sermons and polemical works, for the greater part in French.¹³

Two other controversies followed the one about Amyraut. Firstly, Josué de La Place's mediate view of the imputation of Adam's sin was examined at the synod at Charenton, but exonerated by the following synod at Loudon. Secondly, a controversy about the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion arose because of the ideas of Claude Pajon. Pajon published little, but his ideas circulated widely and were much discussed, generating two rounds of debate in 1665–1667 and

⁸ Martin I. Klauber, "Defender of the Faith or Reformed Rabelais? Pierre Du Moulin (1568–1658) and the Arminians", in Klauber, *Ibid*, 217–36.

⁹ On Amyraut and Amyraldianism see Richard Stauffer, *Moïse Amyraut: un précurseur français de l'oecuménisme* (Paris: Librairie Protestante, 1962); Clifford, *Calvinus; Amyraut Affirmed* (Norwich: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 2004).

¹⁰ Frans P. Van Stam, *The Controversy over the Theology of Saumur, 1635-1650* (Amsterdam and Maarsen: APA-Holland University, 1988), 18.

¹¹ Henri-Charles de la Tremoille, a Protestant nobleman, arranged a private meeting between Amyraut and his critics. An uneasy commitment was made by both sides to discontinue the polemic.

¹² Alan Clifford, "A Quick Look at Amyraut, in *Amyraut on Predestination*, 11-36; Amar Djaballah, "Controversy on Universal Grace", chap 7 in Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*; also Roger Nicole, "Brief Survey of the Controversy on Universal Grace (1634-1661)", <https://www.monergism.com/brief-survey-controversy-universal-grace-1634-1661-roger-nicole>, consulted 11/2018. As the synods only reprimand the hypothetical universalism of Amyraut, there was no such thing as "the Amyraut heresy" as Brian G. Armstrong argues, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004/1969).

¹³ Richard A. Muller, "Beyond Hypothetical Universalism: Moïse Amyraut on Faith, Reason, and Ethics," in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 198.

1676–1685.¹⁴ This disagreement did not reach synodical level, as no synods were authorized by the king during this time. Pajon went further than Amyraut, who proposed that if the Holy Spirit works immediately on the intellect in conversion, the Spirit operates only mediately on the will, since his work passes through the intellect. Pajon denied an immediate operation of the Spirit on both the intellect and the will. His opponents, who included such influential figures as Jean Claude and Pierre Jurieu, deemed that Pajon’s teaching implied difficulties not only with relation to man’s depravity but also with regard to providential *concursum* in conversion. Pajon was never condemned and avoided charges by making himself useful, directing his energies toward replying to the able Jansenist Pierre Nicole’s work *Legitimate Arguments against the Calvinists* (1671).¹⁵

Finally, if the French synods never formally took sides, owing to the increasing influence of the Saumur school, its ideas were reviewed and rejected by the Swiss representatives of Zurich, Geneva and Basel in 1675 in The Formula Consensus Helvetica.¹⁶

II THE ORDER OF THE DIVINE DECREE AND ELECTION

The broad theological framework of redemption through the death of Christ, both its accomplishment and its application, is provided by the idea that salvation is the fulfillment of a prior divine decree, or the plan of God. In accord with Scripture, Reformed theology spoke of the decree as singular (*eudokia, prothesis*), and decrees were simply subsets of oneness, in a logical not a chronological order.¹⁷ The order perceived in the decree has implications for the extent of the atonement, both particular and universal. Is the atonement definite and particular, or did Christ die to obtain redemption for “all and every man”? Such is the question of the relation between the particular and the universal raised at Dort by the Remonstrant theses.

A good many statements of both the particular and universal aspects of Christ’s work can be found in Calvin’s corpus, but the question of the order of the decrees does not appear to have been

¹⁴ *Disputatio de imputatione primi peccati Adami* (Saumur, 1655). Cf. David Llewellyn Jenkins, *Saumur Redux. José de La Place and the Question of Adam’s Sin* (Harleston: Leaping Cat Press, 2008) presents the question in a partisan way.

¹⁵ Albert Gootjes, “Politics, Rhetoric, and Exegesis: Claude Pajon (1626–1685) on Romans 8:7”, in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 296–306.

¹⁶ Martin I. Klauber, “The Formula Consensus Helvetica” (1675), *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990): 103-23. The Formula was penned by J. H. Heidegger (Zurich) with help from Francis Turretin (Geneva) and L. Gernler (Basel). It deals with Amyraut’s hypothetical universalism in Canons 4-16, his views of the salvation of unevangelized heathen in Canons 17-20, and natural and moral ability in Canons 21-2.

¹⁷ As Pierre Du Moulin explains in his *Esclaircissement des controverses salmuriennes ou Defence de la Doctrine des Eglises Reformees* (Genève: Aubert, 1649), 2. Cf. Heinrich Hepp, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 133-8.

present, as it was in the generation of Dort and following. The issue was not addressed directly by him. It is therefore hardly fitting to seek in Calvin a reply to a question he did not ask.¹⁸ It is even more debatable to claim that Beza removed the universal aspect from Calvin and created a “high orthodoxy” in place of the Reformer’s biblicism, which Amyraut subsequently rediscovered and restored.¹⁹

Nowhere has the issue been more clearly presented than in Benjamin B. Warfield’s small classic, *The Plan of Salvation*:

“As supernaturalism is the mark of Christianity at large, and evangelicalism the mark of Protestantism, so particularism is the mark of Calvinism. The Calvinist (...) holds with full consciousness that God the Lord, in his saving operations, deals not generally with mankind at large, but particularly with the individuals who are saved.” (Different varieties of Calvinism are) “distinguishable from one another by the place they give to particularism in the operations of God (and) by the place they give to the decree of election in the order of the divine decrees.”²⁰

Two observations can be made. Firstly, what rules Arminianism out in the terms of the Reformed theology of Dort, which was a compromise, is what rules Amyraldianism in. Can one speak of the Amyraut heresy or apostasy, when Amyraldianism clearly maintained particularism?²¹ However, the question raised by the Amyraldians remains: If the merit of Christ’s death is of infinite value, could salvation not have been obtained for all? Warfield did not envisage a strict particularism that ruled out the other pole: “it is a mere caricature of Calvinistic particularism to represent it as finding its center in the proclamation that there are few that are saved. What particularism stands for in the

¹⁸ Helm, “Calvin, Indefinite Language, and Definite Atonement” in Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, chap. 4. Helm also comments: “Amyraut seems to have preferred to think in terms of an *antecedent* will of God which could be frustrated by the will of men and women, and a *consequent* divine will which could not be frustrated. These differently understood divine ‘wills’ took the place of a set of absolute decrees. So the idea of one all-encompassing decree seems to have played little or not part in his thought.” in Amyraut and Amyraldianism, <http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2015/02/amyraut-amyraldianism.html>, accessed 11/2018.

¹⁹ Van Stam, *The Controversy over the Theology of Saumur*, 431.

²⁰ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 87-8.

²¹ Amar Djaballah, “Controversy on Universal Grace”, in Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, chap. 4, 356: “Amyraut gives the strong impression that he views the doctrines he expresses not only as consonant with Scripture but also as faithful to Calvin and the first generation of Reformers, and indeed as compatible with the Canons of Dort.” Cf. Muller, “Beyond Hypothetical Universalism”, in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 208: “the Amyraldian model ought to be situated in the still fluid development of Reformed covenant thought in the first half of the seventeenth century... Amyraldianism is a form of Reformed orthodoxy...”; Michael G. Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement. A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 250, concludes following a discussion on Amyraldianism in part 3 of his book, “Nor can it be claimed on the basis of a survey of the Reformation and classical period that there was ever such a thing as a coherent and agreed “Reformed position” on the extent of the atonement.”

Calvinistic system is the immediate dealing of God with the individual soul.” So Warfield had his cake and ate it too, maintaining particularism and the “wideness of God’s mercy”.²²

The two focal issues in the theology of the Remonstrant Arminians were the justice of God and the freedom of man. These are intertwined, one conditioning the other. But which should have primacy? If man does not have the freedom to accept the gospel, how can God be fair? If God is just, how can man not be recognized as a partner in the work of salvation? These problems Arminius sought to resolve by importing the foreknowledge of medieval Middle Knowledge into Protestant theology.²³ However, the question of the freedom of the will cannot be resolved without some consideration of the capacity of human nature and its present condition. All theological positions that stand over against the Augustinian line attribute some quality of action to human nature in the realm of the intellect, and consequently the will. They also reinterpret what Scripture says about how man acts in receiving salvation, and the general efficacy of the cross. In this way the meaning of total depravity is changed, rendering man saveable, and the effect of the cross is broadened in its intention. Human effort in salvation is given room through cooperation, whether it be small or great. Without a biblical doctrine of sin, in terms of man’s total depravity, there is no biblical doctrine of grace.

The consequences of this are far-reaching. “Sin, in other words, in keeping with the intellectualism of Arminius’ theology, distorts the function of the will and the affections, but leaves the intellect quite intact.” This “satisfies the demands of the new rationalism and of the dawning of the modern scientific perspective of the early modern era.” It is of great importance not only for the development of Protestant theology, but also for that of modern culture. “Of the three major systematic models arising out of Protestantism, the Lutheran, the Reformed, and the Arminian, only one, the Arminian, proved generally open to the new rationalism, particularly in its more empirical and inductive forms.”²⁴ At this point, Arminianism met the humanism of the Renaissance at the crossroads. The dilution of the biblical doctrine of sin is a feature of this type of thought. Whereas humanism does not believe in a Fall, but in the perfectibility of man, Arminianism proposes that sin’s ef-

²² Warfield, *The Plan*, 97. Warfield affirmed that “Post-redemptionism... is not necessarily a good form of Calvinism, an acceptable form of Calvinism, or even a tenable form of Calvinism... It is a logically inconsistent form of Calvinism and therefore an unstable form of Calvinism.”, 93-4.

²³ Henri A. G. Blocher, “‘Middle knowledge’: Solution or Seduction?”, *Unio cum Christo*, 4 (2018:1): 29-46.

²⁴ Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 283-285; Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Wilmore KY: Francis Asbury Press, 1985).

fects are limited. Somehow, in the intellect or the will, depending on which one puts first, lies the possibility of opening up to the gospel.²⁵

Arminius separated God's eternal decree from the providential order of the world, which is a "mode of administration" foreknown to God.²⁶ In this perspective, the order of the divine decrees is presented in this fashion:

- ▶ Provision of salvation for all by sending Christ ("antecedent decree")
- ▶ Salvation for all who believe
- ▶ General grace sufficient for all to believe
- ▶ Election of those foreseen as having faith and obedience ("consequent decree").²⁷

The Arminian view provides for salvation *before* election, and makes election depend on God's foreknowledge of human virtue, faith, and obedience. It founds election on experiential sanctification (good works) instead of sanctification being the result of election. Arminianism *formally* achieves its aims of protecting divine justice and human indeterminism, but at what cost? If external obstacles to salvation are removed, and reconciliation is for all, there is no provision in this schema for the salvation of a single person, or deliverance from the power of sin.²⁸ Herman Bavinck says Pelagianism "traded predestination for foreknowledge and described foreordination as the decree of God in which he determined either eternal blessedness or eternal punishment for people, depending on whether he foresaw their persevering faith or their undying unbelief."²⁹

The issue then at Dort, was not about the sufficiency of Christ's death, but about the limitation of its efficiency and preaching.³⁰ Christ's sacrifice is recognized to be "of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world".³¹ In this perspective, and in all the Reformed variants of it, including the hypothetical universalism of a John Davenant, election always *preceded* the sacrifice of Christ and the application of salvation. Thus the Reformed infralapsarian version of the order in the decree was:

²⁵ Cf. Paul Wells, "Did Arminius Win?", *Unio cum Christo*, 4 (2018:2): 6-8.

²⁶ Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 250-251.

²⁷ As presented by Du Moulin, *Eclaircissement des controverses*, 4-6.

²⁸ Donald Macleod, "Definite Atonement and the Divine Decree", Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, chap 15, 862-869, on Arminianism.

²⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, II (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 377.

³⁰ *Ibid*, III, 460-1; Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 77, 206.

³¹ Canons of Dort, II, §3.

- Election of some to life in Christ and leaving others
- Sending of Christ as reconciliation for the elect
- Gift of the Holy Spirit to save those redeemed by repentance and faith.³²

Du Moulin criticized the Arminian position presented above as having two antecedent absolute decrees and two consequent conditional decrees. The problem lies in this distinction, since the antecedent decrees in terms of grace are absolute, and the consequent are conditional. Therefore God can be frustrated as he may will eternally to save all, whereas in time he cannot will to save any. And if the number of the elect is not determined by God, there is really no election.

The Calvinistic view of the decrees is the opposite of the Arminian. The will of God in the antecedent absolute decree is accomplished through the consequent revealed will of God, in Christ and in salvation. In other words, the end precedes the means and the means accomplishes the end that God has established, of bringing “many sons to glory”. Contrary to the naturalism of Arminianism in salvation through human choice, Calvinism establishes the supernaturalism of divine grace.

How does particular redemption tally with the “all” passages of Scripture and the universal character of gospel proclamation? Can the gospel be preached to all, if it was not the intention of the Father to give the Son for all, and that of the Son to offer himself for all? Can there be sincerity in the absence of intention? These were the kind of questions that preoccupied the Amyraldians.³³ Arminianism as such was virtually unknown in France and those who had ratified the Canons of Dort at the Synod of Alès, the likes of André Rivet and Pierre Du Moulin, were perhaps over wary that the Saumur school was deviating toward it.³⁴ There was also a little geographical rivalry between Saumur and the Academies of Sedan and Montauban.

The influence of the Scot John Cameron was considerable in the development of Amyraldian hypothetic universalism. His writings were published posthumously only in 1642 after the appearance of Amyraut’s treatise on predestination in 1634. Cameron proposed a structure of the decrees in which “there are two universal decrees that pertain to the restoration of the image of God and the sending of the Son, and two particular decrees that pertain to the giving of faith and

³² Du Moulin, *Eclaircissement des controverses*, I.1 refers to the order of the Canons of Dort, I, §7 and Romans 8.28.

³³ Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 76-8.

³⁴ Apart from Daniel Tilenus a teacher at Sedan, who relinquished his post after Dort. Cf. Donald Sinnema, “The French Reformed Churches, Arminianism and the Synod of Dort (1618-1619)”, in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 98–136.

to the saving of those who have faith.”³⁵ In this frame, the first three decrees are absolute and only the decree concerning those who have faith is conditional, because it is conditioned and prepared by faith. This provides the foundation for the hypothetic universalism of Amyraut, in which the work of salvation has universal reference, but on the condition of faith. It will be noticed that in this formulation the gift of faith in election *follows* the giving of the Son for the salvation of the world. So the Calvinistic order of the decrees is modified in Amyraldianism:

- The desire to save all (“first mercy”)
- The sending of the Son, remission of sins for all (impetration)
- The election of some to faith
- The saving of those morally renewed by faith.³⁶

The universality of the death of Christ precedes election in this presentation, and this raises several issues regarding the relation between the accomplishment and the application of redemption, the universality and particularity of the death of Christ.

To resume on the order of the decree in the three positions³⁷:

| Arminianism | Calvinism | Amyraldianism |
|--|---|---|
| Christ and antecedent grace for all | Election of some to life, leaving others | Divine desire to save all (first mercy) |
| Salvation of all who believes | Sending of Christ to redeem elect | The Son of God sent as Saviour of all |
| Gift of persuasive grace for all | Holy Spirit regeneration, repentance and faith, union with Christ | Election of some to faith |
| Election by prescience of faith, consequent grace | | Salvation of those who believe |

Amyraldianism is on the side of Calvinism in the particularism of election, faith and the salvation of those who believe, and so irresistible grace can be claimed. It is comparable to Arminianism in the universal aspect of grace in Christ and that Christ died for all. It disagrees with Arminianism which makes faith and sanctification a work of the human being in response to salvation in Christ. Only Arminianism places election after the prescience of faith and breaks the biblical order of salvation as the result of election. In doing so, it reverses the order of human and

³⁵ Gootjes, “John Cameron and the French Universalist Tradition”, 186.

³⁶ Du Moulin, *Eclaircissement des controverses*, I.3, says Amyraldianism is “pure Arminianism”, making only the election of grace particular.

³⁷ Following Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*, 31.

divine action in the order of salvation. In the Amyraldian scheme the sticking point is the nature of universal grace in Christ, and its relation to particularist election. For this reason Amyraldianism is appropriately named “Post-redemptionism”.

When we consider these three interpretations of the divine decree, it must not be forgotten that we are considering the divine will, which is one and is expressed in the decree. There is only one singular divine decree. The problem of the Arminian construct is that it is all too logical and mixes divine and human actions. Therefore it seems to create a multiplicity of decrees in contradiction to the one divine good pleasure. As Warfield says, it is “naturalistic” and if it satisfies human logic, it is in opposition to the biblical order. In the Calvinist perspective the one decree is unfolded sequentially, not temporally, each new aspect of the decree developing from the preceding one. It is not humanly logical, because it contains the problem that some are called to life, but not all are saved, even though the gospel addresses all. This paradox is embraced and elucidated in various ways. The Amyraldian position, which is also not a chronological unfolding of the decree, has its own inner dynamic. The point of contention is the relation of the second and third aspects of the decree. How can *universal* redemption be hypothetical, *and* related to the infralapsarian salvation of the elect?

We propose in the following to examine the nature of the decree in Amyraldianism, which is the heart of the question.

III THE NATURE OF THE DIVINE DECREE IN AMYRALDIANISM

Moïse Amyraut began his theological study at Saumur about the time Cameron arrived there in 1618 and although the Scot’s stay was short, his influence was considerable. Amyraut succeeded Jean Daillé as pastor of the Reformed church in the town in 1626, and began lecturing at the same time. Named professor in 1633, he was principal of the Academy from 1641, and remained until his death in 1664. The following year, 1634, he published the *Brief Traitté de la Predestination et de ses principales dependances*.³⁸ His ideas were supported by two of the Saumur Triumvirate, Louis Cappel and Josué de La Place, by the three influential pastors in the Charenton-Paris church, Charles Drelincourt, Jean Daillé and Jean Meztretat, and by Paul Testard. He was, however, opposed by Pierre Du Moulin, André Rivet and Antoine Garrisoles. So the lines were drawn in the Re-

³⁸ *Amyraut on Predestination*, transl. by Harding, including “A Quick Look at Amyraut” by Alan C. Clifford, 11-36. Djaballah, “Controversy on Universal Grace” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, chap. 7; James T. Dennison, “The Life and Career of Francis Turretin” in Francis Turretin, *Systematic Theology*, III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 642-45. Turretin studied several months in Saumur in 1645 on the way from Paris to Montauban and Nîmes, before returning to Geneva in 1649.

formed churches for what Pierre Baille rather unfortunately named “the Protestant civil war” over universal grace. Cameron and Amyraut had a marked distaste for Theodore Beza, but an admiration for Calvin. Amyraut was apparently the first to quote Calvin verbatim in preaching, a practice disapproved by certain contemporaries.

The controversy itself over universal grace went through three phases, finely documented by François Laplanche, Roger Nicole, or Alan Clifford in their academic presentations.³⁹ The first phase began with the publication of the *Traité* and concluded with the 1637 Synod of Alençon, when the charges against Amyraut and Testard were “honorably dismissed”, but with the recommendation to use “prudence and discretion”.⁴⁰ The second phase, from 1641-49, was sparked by the publication in latin of Amyraut’s *A Defence of J. Calvin’s Doctrine of Absolute Reprobation*. This stage ended when a French nobleman gathered the protagonists together and signed them up to an uneasy agreement. The “Acte de Thouars” restrained debate, and furthered personal reconciliation between Amyraut and Du Moulin. The third phase, from 1655-61, ended when Daillé was elected moderator of the Synod of Loudon in 1659 and the orthodoxy of Amyraldianism was implicitly recognized. That however, was not the end of the affair. Amyraut’s defenders are right to claim that their iconic theologian was not the “gravedigger of the French churches” as some opponents have claimed. However, controversy did weaken the church during this period and channelled its energies away from its real struggle for survival against growing persecution. Richard Muller’s estimation could well be close to the reality of the situation: Amyraldianism was one current in the development of Reformed theological spectrum during the period of scholasticism and one that remained, perhaps by the skin of its teeth, within the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy.⁴¹

Amyraut’s *Petit Traité* has been recently published in English and a useful chapter analysis to be found in Amal Djaballah’s article “Controversy on Universal Grace” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*.⁴² Rather than repeating the broad outline, we propose to zero in on the main issue, as stated in Amyraut’s chapter 7, which presents the decree concerning the sending of the Son, its design, its extent and its hypothetical condition. Chapter 8 follows with man’s inability to

³⁹ Cf. François Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et prédication. L’oeuvre d’Amyraut et la querelle de la grâce universelle* (Paris: PUF, 1965), 102ff; Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*; Roger Nicole, *Moïse Amyraut. A Bibliography with Special Reference to the Controversy on Universal Grace* (New York and London, Garland, 1981), *Standing Forth: The Collected Writings of Roger Nicole* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2002), 313-30; Clifford, *Calvinus*.

⁴⁰ Harding, *Amyraut on Predestination*, 163-9: “Amyraut at Alençon”.

⁴¹ Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, chaps. 4, 5.

⁴² Harding, *Amyraut on Predestination*. Outlined by Djaballah, “Controversy on Universal Grace”, Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 520-533. Many of the French works of Amyraut are now available in reedition.

comply to that condition and then chapter 9, “The election and predestination of God by which he has ordained to accomplish salvation in some and not in others.”

Already, in the preceding chapter, 6, Amyraut affirmed the basic principle. “Because God has foreseen that which would come to pass, since he himself ordained it, nothing happens in the universe except by the disposition of His eternal ordination.” Following Calvin, Amyraut maintained the penal sacrificial character of Christ’s death:

“God ordained to send his Son into the world and caused Him to put on our human nature for two purposes: the first is to satisfy the justice of God by the suffering of the penalties which we alone deserved, and by this establishing our guarantee. . . . He was able by His suffering to take the punishment for our offenses equal to their demerit and by this means to satisfy, by his infinite worth, God’s perfect justice. The other purpose is that in consequence of His suffering to which He so freely and voluntarily submitted in order to obey His Father and to procure the salvation of the human race, Christ has the right and the honor Himself of accomplishing the work of their salvation and being the perfect example of it.”⁴³

So far so orthodox, even down to the “Owenian” punishment being “equal” to demerit.⁴⁴

The crucial chapter 7 begins as follows, quoting *in extenso*.

“The misery of men being equal and universal, because of the compassion He had for them as His creatures fallen into such great ruin, and since they are still His creatures, God desired to deliver them from it by a similarly great Redeemer. The grace of redemption that He offered and procured for them, must be equal and universal, provided that they are also to be found equally disposed to receive it. Hitherto there is no difference between them. The Redeemer was taken from their race, and made participant with them all in the same flesh and blood, that is in the same human nature joined in Him with the divine, in the unity of one person. The sacrifice He offered for the propitiation of their offenses was equally for all; and the salvation that He received from His Father to communicate it to men in the sanctification of the Spirit and the glorification of the body, was destined equally to all, provided that, as I say, the disposition necessary to receive it is also equal.”⁴⁵

In this complex statement, Amyraut affirms five things:

1. Sin and misery are equal and universal in all, as is also the compassion of God
2. Grace and redemption procured are equal and universal, provided men believe
3. Christ participated with all in their humanity

⁴³ *Ibid*, 91, 95-6.

⁴⁴ Cf. Trueman, “Atonement and the Covenant of Redemption”, chap 8 in Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 431-2.

⁴⁵ Moyse Amyraut, *Brief Traite de la Predestination et de ses principales dependances* (Saumur: Lesnier/Debordes 1634), 76-7, translations are mine. Cf. Harding, *Amyraut on Predestination*, 99-100. The word “equal” used repeatedly is more precise than “universal”, since it affirms the equivalence of those in sin and those for whom Christ died.

4. Sacrifice, propitiation and salvation was made equally for all
5. The condition: an equal disposition in men to receive it.

Amyraut will not accept a reduced universality, underlined by the words “equal” and “equally”. If there are many who have not heard the gospel preached, “it is not necessary to think that there is either any people, or even a single man excluded by the will of God from the salvation that He has acquired for the human race, provided that he takes advantage of the testimonies of mercy that God had given to him.”⁴⁶ Referencing 1 John 2.2, 1 Timothy 4.5-6, Titus 2.11 and John 3.16, Amyraut claimed that God “invites the whole world to a grace which He has destined for all humankind, if one does not show himself to be unworthy.”⁴⁷ How so? Amyraut develops the idea that as well as the preaching of the word, there is a preaching of natural revelation in divine providence and patience. Although the name of Christ is not clearly known, one may therefore be a participant in the remission of sins, sanctification and immortality. There is a faith based on the mercy of the gospel, and a faith based on the mercy of providence which removes the hindrance of sin, if men do not show themselves to be unworthy. They may “believe in Him without knowing Him.”⁴⁸ However, any salvation rightly so-called must come from divine justice and the sacrifice of the Son. Propitiation is for all, salvation is presented to all, on condition that they believe:

“The words ‘God desires the salvation of all men’ (1 Timothy 2.4) necessarily receive this limitation, ‘providing that they believe’. If they do not believe, He does not will it. The will to make the grace of salvation universal and common to all human beings is therefore conditional, and without the fulfillment of the condition, it is entirely ineffectual.”⁴⁹

This is not to be mistaken as a denial of irresistible grace, since Amyraut is not talking at this point of the election of some to grace, but of the general offer of salvation to all, and the fact that Christ died for all. However a non-accomplished will of God is expressed, and a desire to save that is frustrated by man. “If they do not believe, He does not will it”, must have smacked of Arminianism to Du Moulin and Co.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Harding, *Amyraut on Predestination*, 101.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 103.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 104.

⁴⁹ *Amyraut, Traité*, 90. Harding, *Ibid*, 106.

⁵⁰ Du Moulin, *Eclaircissement des controverses*, II.1, Du Moulin thinks Amyraut makes *means* for accomplishing the decree *conditions*. He affirms, as John Owen would do later, that “there are no conditional decrees in God”, 15. “One will not find an orthodox author for whom God has decreed with an “if” or a “provided that”, 16.

How then is the condition “and consequently the efficacy of universal grace” fulfilled?

Since man is sinner, he contributes nothing to his salvation:

“The nature of men being such, that if God had no other intention in ordaining to send His Son into the world other than to present Him as Redeemer equally and universally for all... both the sending and the sufferings of His Son would have been useless to humankind and totally ineffective (*frustatoires*)... It is all therefore within God’s counsel... to show His mercy to those whom He has elected and predestined in order to give them faith...”⁵¹

At this point intervenes a decree of particular predestinating grace which is not “universal like the other, but (God) restricts it to some and leaves others to themselves. For unlike the preceding grace which regards the whole human race in general, this one only regards one part and leaves the other destitute.”⁵² The only cause of the diversity of God’s favour to men is His will alone.

Consequently Amyraut speaks of two differing forms of predestination relating to the two distinct forms of the will of God, in his *Traitté*, chapter 13:

“One must carefully distinguish between the (decree of) predestination to salvation, the means and condition by the fulfillment of which we attain it, and the predestination to faith: in so far as the latter (predestination to faith) is absolute, as stated, it depends on no condition; the former (predestination to salvation) can only take place as to its effect on the ground (*presupposition*) of its prior condition”⁵³

What this means, in fact, is that the decree of predestination to salvation refers to God’s desire of salvation for all, and the offer of salvation elicits man’s conditional response, its means, to the offered gospel. Predestination to salvation is conditional and general, predestination to faith is the realization of God’s absolute will in predestination, the election to faith.

There are therefore in Amyraut’s presentation, in reply to the question of for whom Christ died:

- two aspects of the one divine will expressed in the two decrees in operation
- two forms of mercy, each requiring a precedent character in its recipients
- two predestinations, to salvation and to faith
- and two covenants, one creational and legal, and the new covenant of grace.

⁵¹ Amyraut, *Traitté*, 102-3. Harding, *Ibid*, 113.

⁵² Harding, *Amyraut on Predestination*, 115.

⁵³ Amyraut, *Traitté*, 163. Harding’s translation is not precise here, although his footnote is correct, *Ibid*, 143. This distinction seems to run counter to the Canons of Dort, speaking of course of Arminianism, I, §8: “there are not various decrees of election, but one and the same decree respecting all those who shall be saved.” Dort rejects that “there are various kinds of election of God unto eternal life: the one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite...” And “the Scripture declares the good pleasure, purpose and counsel of the divine will to be one.”

The question this construal raises is as to whether there is a “dual divine intention” present in the thought of Amyraut? Does it exist in Calvin, and beyond Calvin, in Scripture?

One line of scholarship claims, against Beza’s scholasticism, that there exists a dual divine intention in both the Reformer and his disciple.⁵⁴ Richard Muller and others, on the other hand, have presented a strong argument against the discontinuity of Calvin and the Calvinists: “Where Amyraut has begun to move toward an argument concerning two divine mercies and two divine wills, Calvin insists on a single divine volition. Further, also in contrast to Amyraut’s reading, Calvin nowhere raises the issue of different covenant relationships or of two different mercies of God, deployed, as Amyraut does in relation to differing covenants.”⁵⁵ Muller further indicates how Calvin comments on Matthew 23.37:

“It may justly be said that he wills to gather all to himself. It is not, therefore, the secret purpose of God, but his will which is manifested by the nature of the word, that is here described. For certainly, whoever he efficaciously wills to gather he inwardly draws by his Spirit, and does not only invite by the outward voice of human beings. If it be objected that it is absurd to support a double will in God, I reply, that we believe nothing other than that his will is one and simple; but since our minds do not penetrate the abyss of secret election, because of our weakness, the will of God is set forth to us in a double manner.”⁵⁶

The question in Amyraut is as to how the two aspects of the decree are related, one being universal and conditional and the other particular and absolute. Amyraut seems to have been aware of the problem but was reticent to speak of two decrees, because in the mind of God there is only one, “formed in God in one and the self-same Moment, without any succession of thought, or order of priority and posteriority.”⁵⁷ However, if in the one decree there are two forms of predestination, how may the conditional and the absolute exist at the same time? The key lies in the order of the decree proposed: universal redemption prepares particular redemption.

⁵⁴ The discussion on Ezekiel 18.23 as presented by Clifford in *Amyraut Affirmed*, 28-9 and *Calvinus*, 27-8. Cf. also Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 188-9, 198-205, and the reply by Muller in “A Tale of Two Wills. Calvin, Amyraut, and Du Moulin on Ezekiel 18:23”, in *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 107-25.

⁵⁵ Muller, art. cit, 114. “Calvin does not posit a duplex willing or diverse modes of willing when one compares the universal preaching of salvation that the prophet does mention to the secret counsel or decree that the prophet does not mention”, 115.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 115. *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846), III, 109.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Quick, *Synodicon in Gallia Reformata*, II, 355. Cf. Clifford, *Calvinus*, 11.

| Amyraut | Calvin |
|--|---|
| A decree expressing two wills, hypothetical and absolute | One simple absolute decree, the eternal counsel |
| Antecedent and consequent will of God | The secret and revealed will of God |
| Two forms of mercy | Mercy to the elect and general mercy |
| Two forms of predestination | One predestination to life (and reprobation) |
| Two covenants, legal and gracious | One covenant of grace from the Fall |
| Dual divine intentionality | One divine intention throughout |

In his order of the decrees Amyraut places the conditioned universal decree *before* the special absolute and unconditioned decree. This does not necessarily deny that the will of God is one and eternal, but it expresses itself in two different modes, one being antecedent and one being consequent, representing two desires in God. Therefore, Amyraut appears to place the means before the end. God desires the salvation of all; Christ accomplishes redemption, propitiation and remission of guilt—salvation for all—equally. However since there is “none righteous”, God predestines the elect to faith and life. There are two differing expressions of the divine will, one which is frustrated, and one which is efficacious. Since the first “means”, the universal salvation, is ineffective, a new “means” is introduced to procure the proper end of life for the elect. There are two different desires in God, one hypothetical, and the other absolute. So Du Moulin rejected the Amyraldian notion of a “a frustrated will of God” (*des conseils de Dieu frustratoires*)⁵⁸, as did the Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675):

“Wherefore, we can not agree with the opinion of those who teach: 1) that God, moved by philathropy, or a kind of special love for the fallen of the human race, did, in a kind of conditioned willing, first moving of pity, as they call it, or inefficacious desire, determine the salvation of all, conditionally, i.e., if they would believe, 2) that he appointed Christ Mediator for all and each of the fallen; and 3) that, at length, certain ones whom he regarded, not simply as sinners in the first Adam, but as redeemed in the second Adam, he elected, that is, he determined graciously to bestow on these, in time, the saving gift of faith; and in this sole act election properly so called is complete.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Pierre Du Moulin, *Eclaircissement des controverses salmuriennes* (Leiden: Jean Maire, 1648), 233, quoted in Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 152-6.

⁵⁹ Klauber, “The Formula Consensus Helvetica”, VI.

The problem is that throughout the means are not subordinate to the end.⁶⁰

In Calvin and classic Reformed theology God establishes his end purpose, the salvation of his people, and the means are enacted in accordance with it, both divine and human causes having their respective functions. Christ efficaciously dies for his own. The gospel is applied through the Spirit in regenerating faith, it is universally proclaimed to call those for whom Christ died to newness of life. There are also graces for all that flow from the cross: all are sincerely called to accept Christ for salvation, and God will save all who repent and believe. Benefits of the cross flow out to unbelievers, and reconciliation has a universal aspect.⁶¹ God will save the human race.⁶²

IV COMMENTS IN EVALUATION

From the time of Du Moulin's virulent objections against Amyraut, a good many criticisms have been made, far too many to go into here.⁶³ Sometimes objections to Amyraut have been made on the basis of the implications of his theory, not on what he actually said. The reply from the Amyraldian side to objections has often been to counter the criticisms one by one, from the perspective that Amyraut was a true Calvinist and that the inner dynamic of his thought is misunderstood by his "scholastic" opponents. Pursuing our remarks above on the order of the divine decree, we will limit ourselves to four comments from this angle.

1. *A Hypothetical Decree*

Decrees of God are efficacious actions of the divine will, and accomplish their purpose. The idea of God willing hypothetically is itself strange.⁶⁴ How can this be understood? It can be argued that coming *after* the decree of the Fall and *before* election, since man is a sinner, it could hardly be otherwise, because all are evidently not saved. Christ really died and procured redemption for all in

⁶⁰ On "means and end" see Helm, "Calvin, Indefinite Language, and Definite Atonement" in Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 251-5.

⁶¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxi.1. "In actual fact, the covenant of life is not preached equally among all men, and among those to whom it is preached, it does not gain the same acceptance either constantly or in equal degree. In this diversity the wonderful depth of God's judgement is made known."

⁶² Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*, 102-4: "There is no antinomy in saying that Christ died for his people. His people may be few today: the world will be His people tomorrow." Jonathan H. Rainbow, *The Will of God and the Cross. A Historical and Theological Study of John Calvin's Doctrine of Limited Redemption* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1990), 156 states: "Calvin's universalistic language expressed the theological conviction that the elect, chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and gathered through the Spirit from all places and peoples, constitute a new and representative humanity. Calvin was not content to think of the elect as a scrap of mankind or of Christ's redemptive work as a desperate salvage operation. It was in fact a construction of a glorious perfected humanity."

⁶³ Cf. Ian Hamilton, *Amyraldianism—is it Modified Calvinism?* (Worcester: EPCEW, 2003) and Clifford's reply in *Amyraut Affirmed*.

⁶⁴ Helm, "Amyraut and Amyraldianism", *Reformation* 21, Cf. n. 15.

equal manner. Amyraut affirms: “God does not act out at random or at lost causes, but He necessarily acts with purpose and a goal in mind.”⁶⁵ Why then a hypothetical decree? Because “the principle end to which God sought in the creation of the universe was that He willed to reveal his own goodness.”⁶⁶ All men being lost, the goodness of God, his unmeasurable love, must be made known in the death of Christ “equally and for all”. Amyraut’s concern, against the Arminian accusation, is the justice of God, the manifestation of his goodness and love, and this is procured in the non-discriminatory death of Christ for all. This is by necessity hypothetical, as man is incapable of seeing it, such is his sin. So the goodness of God is secure, but his purpose is frustrated. Hence there follows the decree to save the elect through the same death of Christ.

Several objections arise because of the nature of this decree, as formulated by Amyraut. Firstly little is gained by a hypothetical decree, since *de facto* it accomplishes nothing; in it Christ dies for all, and yet for none.⁶⁷ A Mediator without a people for whom to effectively mediate is counterfactual with regard to the reward Christ claims in John 17.2: “you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all you have given him.” Secondly, if God in his foreknowledge knew the nature of man’s sin, and if all are not saved, why the “frustrated” hypothetical decree at all? It seems demeaning to the wisdom and the power of God. Finally, how is it possible that in the one decree (which is not chronologically ordered), Christ die for all equally and for the elect at one and the same time? “God decreed that the cross should purchase salvation for all men on the condition that they believe, but also decreed that it should be applied to the elect only.”⁶⁸

2. *The Work of Christ*

Amyraut affirms, “The grace of redemption which He has offered and procured for them ought also (like the misery of man) be equal and universal, provided that they are also found to be equally disposed to receive it.”⁶⁹ This means that Christ really procured salvation for all, but it is only effectual when and if the condition of faith is met. John Owen says that this is like “promising a blind man a

⁶⁵ Harding, *Amyraut on Predestination*, 58.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 68.

⁶⁷ John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ. A Treatise in Which the Whole Controversy about Universal Redemption is Fully Discussed* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 178: “To affirm that Christ died for all men is the readiest way to prove that he died for no man, in the sense Christians have hitherto believed.”

⁶⁸ Macleod, “Definite Atonement and the Divine Decree” in Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 1007. On the tension of the “two wills” Armstrong states, *Calvin and the Amyraut Heresy*, 166, 185: “Orthodoxy manifested an almost neurotic fear that somehow a sacred theological system might crumble if certain interpretations were allowed” and “although Amyraut indicated that, if necessary, he was perfectly willing to leave these two wills in tension, such an idea was utterly inconceivable to the orthodox.”

⁶⁹ Harding, *Amyraut on Predestination*, 99.

thousand pounds upon condition that he will see.”⁷⁰ Is this not salvation by faith, not by grace? It looks like it. Armstrong, an Amyraut sympathizer, comments:

“there is no necessary cause and effect relationship between the salvation as procured by Christ and its application... Strictly speaking, while (Amyraut) maintains repeatedly that no salvation would have been possible without Christ’s death and resurrection, in this economic understanding of Christ’s work of satisfaction, no one can be saved simply through his work.”⁷¹

This means that the strong link between the accomplishment of salvation through the earthly work of Christ and its application is broken in this order of the decree. The New Testament doctrine of union with Christ is taken down. But did believers not die with him when he died, and were they not raised to life with him in newness of life? Were they not elect with him before the foundation of the world, and did he not mediate for them in his whole human activity?⁷² Robert Reymond states, “The upshot of the Amyraldian arrangement is that the actual discrimination comes not at the point of Christ’s redemptive accomplishment but at the point of the Spirit’s redemptive application.”⁷³ Although Amyraldians deny this evaluation, it is hard to gainsay. Can we imagine Christ having a dual intention when he offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross?

3. *The Gospel Mandate*

Can the gospel be preached in Amyraldian mode? Obviously yes, but will not one find oneself working, out of faithfulness to Scripture, against the Amyraldian system? This is so because of the bifurcation of God’s will in terms of the decree: the revealed and antecedent will and the secret and consequent will. The decree of election being *after* that of redemption, comes in on the failure of the universal salvation procured by Christ. If Christ died for all, but if he died for no individual personally, where does the offer of good news originate? In Amyraut, it is the secret will of God that post-redemptively secures the salvation of elect sinners. But no-one preaches, “Come and know

⁷⁰ John Owen argues that this condition cannot be met by sinful man, in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 122-3. “God intendeth that he shall die for all, to procure for them remission of sins, reconciliation with him, eternal redemption and glory; but yet so that they shall never have the least good by these glorious things, unless they perform that which he knows they are in no way able to do, and which none but himself can enable them to perform, and which concerning far the greatest part of them he is resolved not to do... Christ did not die for any upon condition, *if they do believe*, but he died for all God’s elect, *that they should believe*, and believing have eternal life.”

⁷¹ Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 201, quoted in Djaballah, “Controversy on Universal Grace”, Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 429. Cf. Armstrong, *Ibid*, 165-6.

⁷² Westminster Confession of Faith, VIII, 8: “To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption he doth certainly and effectually apply the same; making intercession for them and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation, effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey...”

⁷³ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1998), 477. Cf. Clifford, *Amyraut Affirmed*, 11, argues two intentions in reply to Hamilton, *Amyraldianism—is it Modified Calvinism?* 4. The issue here is as to for whom Christ thought he was dying. Did Christ also die with the intention of saving the reprobate?

your election!” Nor can one preach, as in the hypothetical decree: “Christ died for all, but you are incapable of believing!” Preaching the gospel is based on the free offer of salvation in Christ for all, and the elect *will* come to faith in Christ.⁷⁴ The gospel is preached on the basis of the commission of Christ, not out of respect to the fact that Christ made all saveable.

4. Finally, Trinitarian questions

Although Amyraut and his allies opine to the contrary, affirming the unity of the Trinity in the *opera ad extra*, there is in the order of the decrees a deficit of harmonious involvement of the three persons.⁷⁵ As Robert Letham comments, “The electing purpose of the Father and the work of the Spirit are in conflict with the intention in the death of the Son on the cross. This is contrary to the simplicity of God and the indivisibility of the Trinity.”⁷⁶ Since Amyraut affirms that Christ made satisfaction for all without exception and procured salvation for all, the death of Christ is not in and of itself intrinsically efficacious. The Father chose some, the Spirit applies the work of Christ to some, but Christ died for all and procured salvation for them, albeit hypothetically, as all are not saved. This seems to be a mystery beyond the biblical mystery.

CONCLUSION

Firstly, in conclusion the question might be raised as to possible reasons for the development of the Amyraldian interpretation of Christ dying for all in Reformed theology at this time, and the appeal to Calvin. The French churches prior to the edict of Nantes in 1587 had gone through a bloody and divisive civil war. The hour was to pacification and conciliation. The leaders of La Religion Prétendue Réformée were members of the upper crust, whose social contacts were with their own, the nobility and the professional classes, the majority of whom were Roman Catholics. Such were the people they were having commerce with every day. A lively intellectual minority, the Protestants were called upon to make their faith credible to their cultured despisers. What better way than to present their founder as being a universalist with a gospel for all, and not just the Bezan few? The Saumur region of France, the Loire valley, is a very Catholic region down to the present day, one that provided martyrs for their faith at the time of the Terror during the French Revolution. Limited atonement might be plausible in a majority Protestant situation in the Low Countries or Scotland,

⁷⁴ Macleod’s remarks on Evangelism and Warrant in his review of Clifford’s *Amyraldus Redivivus*, in *Evangelical Quarterly* (81:3): 220-7.

⁷⁵ Clifford, *Amyraut Affirmed*, 28.

⁷⁶ Robert Letham, “The Triune God, Incarnation and Definite Atonement”, in Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 1050.

but with Catholics breathing down one's neck it seems less credible, unless one is willing to withdraw into an oppositional attitude to society as a whole. And for those Catholics who did not believe, Amyraut also had a fall-back with his doctrine of two faiths. His concern, if it might be so stated without anachronism, seems to have been pastoral, ecumenical and apologetic.⁷⁷ The Amyraldian synthesis certainly had more in common with middle knowledge Catholicism than the Canons of Dort.

Secondly, the focus on the atonement of the cross, the priestly aspect of Christ's work is in itself limiting.⁷⁸ As Mediator and representative of his people, Christ the second Adam not only fulfills the priestly office but is also the King and Prophet of a new humanity, as proposed in the Heidelberg Catechism. Christ not only died for sinners, but he lived his whole life for them, was raised for them, and intercedes for them. Union with Christ is union with the whole work of Christ as Mediator, not just the cross. Salvation involves not just Christ dying for us, but Christ living and interceding for us as heavenly Advocate, who gives faith, hope and love. Christ will bring those for whom he died to glory, and all of them too! Salvation involves as much the active as the passive obedience of Christ. Any version of salvation that separates the offices of Christ, the person and the work, the cross mediation from the glorious heavenly intercession, devalues gospel currency.⁷⁹

In addition, the cross involved not simply the Son, with the Father and the Spirit as spectators. Christ presented himself to the Father in the Spirit as an acceptable offering for sin. This implies that redemption concerns the cross, but also the Trinitarian agreement in the *pactum salutis*. If the divine decree is one single decree, based on the simplicity of God, logical priorities exist, from a human point of view, in the one decree. To recognize these different elements is not speculative. John Fesko suggests that election and the counsel of peace are to be considered in tandem.⁸⁰ In the counsel of peace the *logos asarkos* is established as the *logos incarnandus*. The Word made flesh is the Mediator in whom the elect are chosen by the Father, according to the locus classicus of Ephesians 1.3-14, before the foundation of the world, for adoption, to be sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise for the inheritance. "It was fitting that that God, for whom and buy whole all things exist,

⁷⁷ Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 201; Armstrong, *Calvin and the Amyraut Heresy*, 72.

⁷⁸ Amyraldians tend to refer to the atonement in an imprecise way. Cf. Armstrong, *Ibid*, 165-166, states: "Scripture taught both a universalist design in Christ's atonement and a particularist application of its benefits." Only a vague use of the term "atonement" could permit such a statement.

⁷⁹ Cf. Trueman, "Atonement and the Covenant of Redemption", in Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 490-1; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 466ff.

⁸⁰ John V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn S: Mentor, 2016), 209-14.

in bringing many sons to glory should make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.” (Heb 2.10) Christ’s triple office runs from before the foundation of the world to future glory. As Mediator of the new covenant, Christ covenants a kingdom to his people, just as his Father covenanted a kingdom to him.” (Luke 22.29)⁸¹

Finally, Amyraut, with a heart as broad and deep as the Loire, was singularly impressed by the “all passages” and “for the world” references of Scripture. Surely they must be taken literally! Either an evangelical desire for the salvation of sinners or a universalistic liberalism would have it so. Discussions are interminable and are not solved by lists of universalist tendency quotations, or by indicating that even the learned Roger Nicole might have some difficulties aligning his particularist presuppositions with the “one act of righteousness that leads to justification and life for all men” (Ro 5.18).⁸² I recognize that exegetical difficulties remain, but find the following considerations helpful. Firstly, the “alls” themselves are characterized by a certain semantic diversity that belies total inclusivity. Secondly, as Paul Helm points out, “Calvin (or anyone else) may (and perhaps must) consistently use indefinite, universalistic language about the scope of Christ’s atonement even if being committed to definite atonement.”⁸³ It is implied in the universal offer, which does not mean that Christ died for all. Finally, Herman Bavinck’s argument seems to carry some weight: “The New Testament, after all, is a very different dispensation from that of the old covenant. The gospel is not restricted to one people but must be preached to all creatures (Matt: 28.19)... Christ did not die for a few, but for *many*... Scripture is not afraid that *too* many people will be saved.”⁸⁴ After two thousand years of the global spread of Christianity, and setbacks, the context of the apostles is foreign to us. God’s people had been identified with a very small unimportant nation. An enormous change of mentality was needed to shift from the idea that God’s people was not just Israel, but the foreign others, the world, and initial resistance was strong. In this context, the “all” passages take on a significantly different meaning—not just Israel, but the world, which would have been the na-

⁸¹ Beza’s “exegetical pebble”, according to Fesko, *Ibid*, 5.

⁸² Nicole saw three different types among these texts. “Brief Survey of the Controversy on Universal Grace (1634-1661)”, Cf. n. 9.

“1. Passages which are construed to teach that there is a universal saving will of God toward all men and every man (Ezek 18:23; 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; John 3:16).

2. Passages which are construed to teach that some men for whom Christ died may ultimately perish (Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 8:11; Heb. 10:29; 2 Pet. 2:1).

3. Passages which are construed to teach that the saving work of Christ is intended for all (Isa. 53:6; Rom. 5:18; 8:32; 2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:11), for every one (Heb. 2:9), for the world (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2).”

⁸³ Helm, “Calvin, Indefinite Language, and Definite Atonement” in Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 223-4.

⁸⁴ Bavinck *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 465.

tural understanding of the apostles. The universal references are best understood as being related not to a hypothetical will of God, but to his revealed will as the history of salvation moves from centripetal to centrifugal, from the confines to the nations.

In conclusion, what about today? Perhaps that should have been our starting point. The default position of postmodern social acceptability is “one-worldism” “all-in-ism” with the idea that human beings are from “anywhere” rather than “somewhere”. The “oneism” of inclusive non-discriminatory equality rules. This makes the gospel in general and the doctrine of limited atonement in particular doubly scandalous, and to accept it doubly difficult. Calvinistic particularism is more “underdog theology” and counter-cultural than ever. But is not that its attraction as “Christianity come into its own”?

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