

***Amyraldus redivivus*: a review article**

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Someone who chanced to see this book¹ lying on my desk instantly quipped, ‘Are there still Amyraldians?’ The remark was natural enough in a day when old distinctions are largely obsolete. Evangelicalism may still be riven, but the fault-lines are no longer those of yore. Calvinists and Arminians have been superseded by Dispensationalists, Charismatics, the Emerging Church and the Federal Vision.

But, yes, there are still Amyraldians, marshalled by the crusading Dr. Alan C. Clifford of Norwich,² editor of this collection of papers delivered at the 2006 Conference of the Amyraldian Association.

Dr Clifford belongs to an interesting species: the ardent, passionate advocate of the *via media*. The overall purpose of these papers is in accord with this. They seek to portray Amyraldianism as the biblical middle way, offering a balanced alternative to both Calvinism and Arminianism. Unfortunately, advocacy of the middle way does not always imply moderation, and this book makes considerable use of derogatory labels. Dr Clifford himself, in the introductory chapter (8), notes that, ‘up until about the year 1600 being an “Evangelical” and being a “Calvinist” meant one and the same thing.’ To Clifford, however, the term ‘Calvinist’ itself requires modulation. There is authentic Calvinism, namely Amyraldianism; and there is the supplanter, variously designated as Bezan Calvinism, Owenite Calvinism, Extreme Exaggerated Calvinism, High Calvinism, Scholastic Calvinism, So-called Calvinism and Ultra Orthodoxy.

The root of such labelling is the old argument of a radical breach between the theology of Calvin and the theology of Beza: an argument originated by Amyraut’s mentor, John Cameron, in the 17th century,³ invoked by Fraser of Brea (the father of Scottish Amyraldianism),⁴ revived by Alexander Schweizer (a student of

1 Alan C. Clifford (ed.), *Christ for the World: Affirming Amyraldianism* (Norwich: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 2007. 173 pp. pbck.).

2 See, for example, Alan C. Clifford, *Calvinus: Authentic Calvinism: A Clarification* (Norwich: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 1996); Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Alan C. Clifford, ‘Justification: the Calvin-Saumur perspective’ (*Evangelical Quarterly*, LXXIX.4 [October 2007], 331-348).

3 Clifford recalls (26) that Cameron came to be known as ‘Bezae mastyx’ or ‘Beza’s scourge’.

4 ‘I perceived that our divinity was much altered from what it was in the primitive reformers’ time. When I read Knox, Hamilton, Tindal, Luther, Calvin, Bradford &c., I thought I saw another scheme of divinity, much more agreeable to the Scriptures and to my experience than the Modern.’ (*Memoirs of the Rev. James Fraser of Brea in Select Biographies Edited for the Wodrow Society* (Edinburgh: The Wodrow Society, 1847). Vol. 2, 305.

Schleiermacher's) and re-cycled more recently by Brian G. Armstrong⁵ and R. T. Kendall.⁶ Clifford simply assumes the case against Beza fully proven, completely ignoring the contrary arguments of such scholars as William Cunningham in the 19th century,⁷ and Paul Helm⁸ and Richard Muller⁹ in the 20th.

The 'Calvin versus the Calvinists' case draws all its strength from comments scattered throughout Calvin's vast corpus to the effect that Christ is to be offered to all, died for all, is the Saviour of all men, and is sufficient for all. Similar comments could be quoted from even the highest Calvinists, particularly when in preaching mode, but surely some allowance must be made for the fact that Calvin, precisely because he died almost fifty years before the Arminian controversy, never addressed the precise question posed by the Remonstrants in 1610: the question, namely, whether 'Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for them all, by his death on the cross, redemption and the forgiveness of sin'.¹⁰ In this particular debate precise formulation of the question is everything, and it is unfair to adduce the magisterial authority of Calvin on an issue he never faced. Where he does handle material bearing on the extent of the atonement (as in his comments on 1 Timothy 2.4 and 1 John 2.2) he signally fails to take the opportunity to propound a doctrine of universal redemption.

Amyraldians, by contrast, do face the precise question whether Christ by his death obtained redemption for all men. Indeed, it is their *raison d'être*. Their answer, however, is ambiguous: the death of Christ is applicable to all, applied only to the elect; offered to all, effective only for the elect. This, as Clifford puts it, is a 'two-sided conception of things': an attempt to graft the Arminian doctrine of universal redemption on to the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election. It leads, at best, to a merely hypothetical universalism. Christ redeemed all men, on condition that they believe. That being so, all are hypothetically died for, hypothetically redeemed and hypothetically forgiven. In practical evangelistic terms, that does not carry us much further forward.

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- 5 Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvin and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969)
 - 6 R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
 - 7 William Cunningham, 'Calvin and Beza' in *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 345-412.
 - 8 Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982).
 - 9 See, for example, Richard Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986); Richard Muller, 'The Use and Abuse of a Document: Beza's *Tabula predestinationis*, the Bolsec Controversy and the Origins of Reformed Orthodoxy' in Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (eds.), *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 33-61; Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), Vol. 1, 60-84.
 - 10 See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1877), 546.

Dual understanding of the divine will

This 'two-sided conception of things' is confidently buttressed with an appeal to a dual understanding of the divine will, distinguishing between the *decretive* (secret) will of God and his revealed will. The distinction, current long before Amyraut, is invoked here because it allows Amyraldians to bring in the idea of a double reference for the atonement. According to the secret will of God, the benefits of the death of Christ are to be applied to the elect only; but according to the revealed will, he is for all.

The problem with this is that what both the Arminian and the Calvinist view of the extent of redemption are concerned with is precisely the *secret* will of God. Was it the eternal intention of God that the death of his Son should redeem each and every human being? Arminians answered, Yes! Calvinists answered, No! There cannot be a mediating answer, responding, with mock modesty, Yes and No! The question as put was concerned specifically with (secret) divine foreordination.

Yet there are problems with the question itself. One is that it tempts us to forget that the secret/decretive will of God is trinitarian. The issue is not simply the intention of 'God', but the intention of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In later, 'Owenite Calvinism' this trinitarian foundation of redemption was expressed in the idea of an eternal Covenant of Redemption (*pactum salutis*) between the three persons of the trinity: a covenant in which all three persons are fully and equally involved in proposing, accomplishing and applying our salvation. But whatever our view of such a federal understanding of the divine action, we have to assume as axiomatic the complete agreement of the trinitarian persons on every aspect of redemption, including its scope. Such an agreement is hard to reconcile with the Amyraldian view, which clearly implies that Christ undertook to accomplish redemption for all, but the Holy Spirit undertook to apply it only to the elect.

There is also a serious Christological issue. The heavenly (ascended) Christ is as fully involved in redemption as is the earthly, which means that the application, as well as the accomplishment of redemption, is his domain. Indeed, the whole point of his glorification is to put him in a position where he can give eternal life to those the Father has given him (John 17:2), and it is precisely the story of that on-going work that is told in the Book of Acts. Christ not only died for Lydia. He opened her heart (Acts 16:14).

But there is an even more fundamental problem with the question of the extent of the atonement as posed by the Remonstrants. Should it have been asked at all? This certainly troubled the 19th century Scottish theologian, Thomas Chalmers, as appears clearly in his comments on Particular Redemption in the course of his Prelections on Hill's *Lectures on Divinity* (his course text-book).¹¹ Clifford and his fellow Amyraldians like to claim Chalmers as one of their own,

11 Thomas Chalmers, *Institutes of Theology, with Prelections on Hill's Lectures in Divinity* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1856), Vol. 2, 424 – 442.

but there is little evidence to support this.¹² Chalmers was a high predestinarian, explicitly committed to Jonathan Edwards's theological determinism, and it is hard to imagine him arguing that the cross was set within an eternal divine counsel which simultaneously foreordained the hypothetical redemption of all and the actual redemption of some. The doctrine of limited atonement certainly caused him unease, but he expressed that unease in terms which made plain that his quarrel was not with the doctrine itself. Particular redemption, he said, is 'a doctrine, but a doctrine sadly misunderstood and misapplied.'¹³

But while Chalmers made plain that he acquiesced formally in the position taken by the Westminster Confession he made it even more plain that he was unhappy that the issue had ever been raised. More than any other Scottish theologian Chalmers epitomised the principle that we should have no interest in any theology which does not help us to evangelise, and he was particularly concerned lest irreverent probing into the divine counsel should compromise the immediacy and urgency of the gospel. Chalmers did not simply believe in the full and free offer of the gospel: he regarded it as the preacher's primary duty to knock at the door of every human heart and to press upon it the gift of reconciliation. He also believed that when sinners are confronted by the gospel, the question they should ask is not, 'What is God's role in this?' but, 'What is *our* role?' They have no right to delay a decision while they investigate whether their names are in the Book of Life or whether they are destined to be sheep or goats at the Last Day. Their attention must be focused exclusively and intently on the present: a present in which the one point that matters is that here and now Christ is offering himself to them. That offer immediately puts Christ within their reach. Not only so: it makes faith in Christ a categorical imperative.

As far as Chalmers was concerned, it was an abuse of the doctrine of predestination to allow it to dilute that sense of obligation, and he put the blame firmly on 'the perversions of heresy', which had made it necessary to introduce the question of the extent of the atonement into the Reformed Confessions in the first place.¹⁴ In Chalmers's own mind, rightly or wrongly, the doctrine of universal redemption was logically linked to the doctrine of universal salvation, and while he had great personal respect for Erskine of Linlathen and his circle he feared (with good reason) that 'the train of his thoughts' would lead him to universalism.¹⁵ The prospect filled him with foreboding. It would be more calamitous by far than any abuse of the doctrine of particular redemption. But this did

12 John McLeod Campbell, contemporary with Chalmers, clearly had no doubts as to the latter's commitment to the doctrine of particular redemption. He brackets him with Owen and Edwards, and describes him as one who 'recognises the importance of the appropriating act of faith, while adhering to the doctrine of limited atonement.' (*The Nature of the Atonement* [London: Macmillan, 6th edition 1915], 43, 53).

13 *Institutes of Theology*, Vol. 2, 428.

14 *Institutes of Theology*, 425.

15 William Hanna, *Memoirs of Thomas Chalmers* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1854), Vol. 2, 194.

nothing to deter him from lamenting the fact that speculation on the extent of the atonement had ever moved from the school to the pulpit, particularly when such speculation inhibited the preacher in pressing home the claims of the gospel.

Human inability

The insistence that every human being is bound to believe the gospel the moment they hear it leads us into another perennial debate. Do we have the ability to respond? Here, once again, Amyraldianism seeks a *via media*, introducing yet another 'two-fold conception of things'. This time it is the distinction between *natural* and *moral* inability.¹⁶ 'We are still,' writes Clifford, 'able to repent but *unwilling* to do so.' (15) And again: 'man has a *natural* ability which becomes a *disability* when rendered useless through *moral* inability or unwillingness.' (16)

The truth contained in the distinction is that human beings possess inalienably and by their very nature the gift of will; and this will is naturally free.¹⁷ We are able to review the options before us, decide which we prefer and resolve to pursue them. These choices are not constrained or necessitated by heredity, upbringing, experience, environment or any other factors external to ourselves. They are *my* decisions, adopted spontaneously, prompted by *my* reasoning. From this point of view, the Greeks were right to describe free-will as *autoexousia*: self-authorisation. We are authorisers and authors of our own acts; and these acts are our exclusive personal responsibility, even to the extent that we must hesitate to concede that 'character determines conduct.' The good tree will indeed bear good fruit, but only on average and only as a general principle. It will also produce some bad fruit. Every saint will make some evil decisions, and every rogue will make some good ones. Peter may deny his Master, and Herman Göring may be nice to his niece. Each individual decision is a personal option, even to the extent that if an observer knew every detail of the context he would still not be able to predict it. In this sense, the principle of indeterminacy is as integral to human behaviour as it is to sub-atomic physics. It is this right and power of self-authorisation which sets the human race apart from every other earthly species; and far from being undermined by divine foreordination this

16 This distinction was never formally rejected by Reformed theology. There is a sympathetic discussion of it in Edwards's *Freedom of the Will*, 156-162: 'the thing wanting is not a being *able*, but a being *willing*.' (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards* [New Haven: Yale University Press, Volume 1, 1957], 156-62. See further, William Cunningham *Historical Theology*. See, too, Archibald Alexander, 'The Inability of Sinners' in *Princeton Versus the New Divinity: Articles from the Princeton Review* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 115-140.

17 'God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined, to good or evil.' (*Westminster Confession*, 9.1).

freedom is itself part of that foreordination. God has predestined freedom and contingency.¹⁸

But if we possess this natural ability of will, what then can be meant by our being hindered by a *moral* inability? This relates, allegedly, to our inability to believe and repent. The problem lies, we are told, not in our nature, but in our wills. Surely, however, our wills are part of our nature; and surely if our nature is able, our wills are able? In matters of the spirit, if our will is disabled, we are disabled, and it then becomes utterly vain to argue that we *could* repent if we *would*. We cannot, precisely because we are unwilling; and we are unwilling by nature. After all, we are self-determining and self-authorising, and these selves are now such that in everything pertaining to God 'every inclination of the thoughts of our hearts is only evil all the time.' (Gen. 6:5)

These words point clearly to the indissoluble link between thought and action, cognition and volition. Our powers of spiritual cognition are so impaired that we can see no beauty in Christ (Isa. 53:2, Matt. 16:17); and our emotions so disordered that the God we ought to love has become a hated enemy. In these circumstances we are by nature unwilling (utterly averse, indeed) to choosing Christ. Beauty has become ugliness and Friend has become foe. *We*, both naturally and morally, cognitively and volitionally, are in bondage, and the bondage is such that our only hope lies in our being born again (John 3:3). The effect of such a new birth will be to change our very selves; but the change must come from above (John 3:3).

Such Protestant creeds as the Westminster Confession use strong language in their deliverances on this subject,¹⁹ but even stronger language is used by the Apostle Paul, most notably in Eph. 2:1, where he describes the whole human race as dead in transgressions and sins. 'Dead' means 'incapable of responding to any stimulus'. The most awful warnings of judgement fall on deaf ears, the most moving portrayals of Christ strike only blind eyes and the most earnest gospel pleadings hit the buffers of an impotent will. Only God can help us. Only a supreme act of divine regeneration can save us. It is to this, precisely, that

18 Cf. the caveat appended by the *Westminster Confession* to its statement of the doctrine of divine foreordination: 'yet so, as thereby neither is... violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.' (3.1, my italics). See, too, Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Q. 103, Art. 5: 'Thus by the one art of the Divine governor, various things are variously governed according to their variety. Some, according to their nature, act of themselves, having dominion over their actions; and these are governed by God, not only in this, that they are moved by God Himself, Who works in them interiorly; but also in this, that they are induced by Him to do and to fly from evil, by precepts and prohibitions, rewards and punishments.' (*Summa Theologica*, tr. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province [Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 1981], Vol. 1, p. 508).

19 'Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereto.' (*Westminster Confession*, 9.3).

Paul directs us in Eph. 2:4-10. What is striking about this passage is the parallel it draws between the conversion of a sinner and the exaltation of Christ. That exaltation consisted in three movements: resurrection, ascension and heavenly session. Precisely these same three movements constitute, from the divine side, the conversion of a sinner. There is resurrection ('made us alive with Christ'); ascension ('raised us up with Christ'); and heavenly session ('seated us with him in the heavenly realms'). Our hope as evangelists is that concurrently with our preaching, and even through our preaching, God will effect these three great movements. We have to keep reminding ourselves, however, that 'God' is the triune God, and that the application of redemption is the common work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is also (and this is no less important) the culmination by Christ of the work which he began on earth, but which he consummates only when *he* fashions our bodies in the likeness of his own in the glory of the resurrection (Phil. 3:21).

This underlines once again the indissoluble link between the accomplishment of redemption and its application, but the distinction itself has not gone unchallenged. According to Bruce McCormack, Barth rejected the 'traditional' doctrine that, 'the redemption accomplished in Jesus Christ needs to be applied to the individual through the Holy Spirit's work in him or her'²⁰ Instead, 'God's eternal will has been *fully and completely* realized in Jesus Christ. It is not only the case that the work of the Holy Spirit does not complete a work of Jesus Christ which was incomplete without it: the work of the Holy Spirit does not even make effective a work of Jesus Christ which was ineffective without it!'

If this means that the post-Pentecost work of the Spirit (and of the Father) does not proceed independently of Christ, it is absolutely true. And if it means that the *transforming* ministry of the Spirit was secured by the forensic work of Christ on the cross, it is, again, absolutely true. Neither of these, however, appears to be Barth's meaning. It is the need for an application that he disputes: any application at all. The *tetelestai* of John 19.30 must be taken completely literally. The whole redemptive work of Christ is finished, and Book III of Calvin's *Institutes* ('The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ') becomes wholly redundant.²¹ Not only our reconciliation to God, but our regeneration and renewal were accomplished (and applied?) by the earthly work of Christ.

A personal reminiscence may, perhaps, be forgiven at this point. The late Dr. T. F. Torrance, prince among Barth's British disciples, once recounted to me the story of an encounter he had with a zealous Evangelical elder, a fellow commis-

20 See Bruce L. McCormack, 'The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism' in Bruce L. McCormack (ed.), *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 229.

21 The question Calvin addresses in Book III.I, 1 is, 'How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son – not for Christ's own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men?' (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960], Vol. 1, 537).

sioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. The elder, obviously deeply suspicious of the spiritual state of any Professor of Theology, demanded to know, 'Dr. Torrance, are you born again?' 'Yes!' came the emphatic reply. Undaunted, the elder continued his attack: 'Dr. Torrance, when were you born again?' 'I was born again on the cross of Calvary!' (and if the professor answered the elder with the same force as he thumped my desk, the elder was probably never the same again).

But is the answer defensible, not only in terms of 'traditional theology', but in terms of scripture itself? The New Testament points clearly to an on-going work of the risen Christ (in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit), and its paradigms of conversion accord ill with the notion that we were all born again on the cross of Calvary. Nicodemus clearly was not, nor was Lydia, whose heart the Lord had to open (Acts 16:14). Indeed, if Titus 3:6 is to be believed, none of us can be saved except 'through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit'; and if Eph. 2:5 is to be believed we remain objects of wrath till Christ raises us from spiritual death.

Yet, if accomplishment and application are not one and the same, they are certainly part of the same divine plan, executed by the same triune Redeemer. This being so, all the parts must cohere together. The outcome intended by the Son cannot be more comprehensive than the outcome intended by the Spirit; and the outcome intended by the earthly Christ cannot be more comprehensive than the outcome intended by the heavenly one.

What does this mean, then, if we return to the question which ought not to have been asked: Whom did Christ, in dying, intend to redeem? The answer must be that he died for those whom the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit intended to save; and he died for those whom, one day, he will glorify. But it is still doubtful if we should have asked in the first place. The question verges on the one put to Jesus, 'Are only a few people going to be saved?' And the only answer he gave was, 'Make every effort to enter'. (Luke 13:23)

Unlimited love?

Inevitably, in the sort of survey undertaken by this collection of papers, some thinkers will be beatified and others will be vilified. The saints are Amyraut and his mentor, John Cameron. The vilified (perhaps 'demonised' might be the more appropriate word) are Beza and John Owen.

The key issue is summarised in Clifford's attribution to Owen of what he calls 'limited love': a concept which, he says, has no precedent in Calvin's theology. The horror with which we are meant to react to Owen takes for granted that Amyraldianism proclaims unlimited love, but this is, to say the least, profoundly misleading. Not even the most Arminian reading of John 3:16 will sustain the idea of an unlimited divine love. The Father does indeed love the world, but this love is not unlimited in the sense that he is committed to bestowing eternal life on each and every human being. Only those who 'believe' are going to receive eternal life. Amyraldianism itself recognises this limitation. The divine love pro-

poses a universal redemption, but it does not propose a universal application. No one comes to Christ unless the Father draws him (John 6:33), but he does not, even on Amyraut's terms, draw each and every man. Why, if his love is unlimited?²²

The truth is that all discourse on God's love has to acknowledge some limitation. None of his gifts is bestowed indiscriminately and even-handedly on all human beings. On the particular issue raised by Amyraldianism, we must either limit the divine love as to its range or limit it as to its nature. This means that the real issue in the dispute between Owen and Amyraldianism (or Arminianism) was not about how many people God loved, but what kind of love it was. In the sense in which Amyraldians define love, Calvinists can easily agree that it is universal. God provides in Christ a salvation sufficient for all human beings; and God offers it to all human beings, even authorising his ambassadors to plead with each and all to be reconciled to him. But Amyraldianism then acknowledges that no one enjoys this salvation unless they believe; that no one believes except by the grace of God; and that God does not bestow this grace on all.

Reformed theology has never excluded such language as that Christ died for all men or that God loves all men. But it has insisted that there is a special love which has not only 'redeemed all men, on condition that they believe', but has also resolved to bestow that very faith itself. God loves some so much that he is totally committed to their actual and complete salvation: determined to present them before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy (Jude 24).

This must be borne in mind when we speak of Arminian love as universal, Calvinist love as limited and Amyraldian love as hypothetical-universal. We are not speaking of the same love. We are comparing one love which creates the bare possibility of salvation for all men, with another committed to making the salvation of a vast multitude absolutely certain. The issue resolves itself at last into the question posed by James Packer in his 1973 Tyndale Biblical Theology Lecture, *What Did the Cross Achieve?*²³ According to Amyraldianism, whatever the cross achieved it achieved for all men. But what was that? The answer varies. It made the salvation of all men possible; it removed all legal impediments to the salvation of all men; it removed all forensic obstacles. The one thing it did not actually do was to save (in the full sense of salvation). It did not save each and every man from both the guilt and the power of sin.

Yet that is exactly the point Owen laboured, and this is why his *Death of Death in the Death of Christ* strikes one at first glance as such a strange book.²⁴ Granted,

22 This is precisely the fact which governs Calvin's treatment of Eternal Election in the *Institutes*. '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.' Calvin, *Institutes*, III.XXI, 1.

23 *Tyndale Bulletin* 25/1974, 3-45.

24 For Owen's doctrine of the nature of Christ's satisfaction see Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998),

‘The Whole Controversy about Universal Redemption is Fully Discussed’, but the way this is done is by focusing on ‘the proper end of the death of Christ.’²⁵ Owen’s burden is not that the cross avails for only a few, but that the cross actually saves, in the full sense of the word. It is in this form, too, rather than in the form of polemical denial of universal redemption, that the doctrine of limited atonement is set forth in the Westminster Confession. The cross secured not only redemption, but the entire inheritance.²⁶ It purchased not only atonement and reconciliation, but the calling, regeneration, faith and repentance that unite us to Christ; and the sanctification, perseverance and glorification that bring his work to completion. ‘The death and blood-shedding of Christ,’ wrote Owen, ‘hath wrought, and doth effectually procure, for all those that are concerned in it, eternal redemption, consisting in grace here and glory hereafter.’²⁷ Its impact, to use the terminology of Geerhardus Vos, was not only *forensic*, redeeming us from the guilt of sin, but also *transformational*,²⁸ securing our total renewal, including all that belongs to the domain of eschatology: glorification, resurrection and even the *palingenesis* of our entire global environment. Everything streams from Calvary and from the love that prompted it.

This is the gospel interest that delivers the doctrine of particular redemption from the charge of being only an arid scholastic dogma. On the face of things, it is profoundly non-evangelical. Indeed, it is hard to imagine even the most thick-skinned Hyper-Calvinist trumpeting forth the message, ‘I have good news for you. Christ did not die for all men!’ But when Owen and others rose to the challenge posed by the Remonstrants and the Amyraldians (notably Richard Baxter),²⁹ they moved the discourse away from the sterile issue of number (‘For how many did Christ die?’) to the much more fundamental issue of quality (What did the death of Christ achieve?) The ultimate issue is not the extent of the atonement, but its nature; and what Owen, in his own cumbersome way, achieved,

199- 226. If Owen’s doctrine seems to belong to a different world from Calvin’s we must remember that unlike Owen the reformer was never called upon to respond to Grotius, any more than he was called on to respond to Arminius or Amyraut.

25 See the title-page of *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (John Owen, *Works* ed. William H. Goold, [reprinted London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967], Vol. 10, 139.

26 ‘The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself... hath purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.’ (Westminster Confession,, 8.5). The statement in 3.6 takes a similar approach, focusing on the link between accomplishment and redemption: ‘they who are elected being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ; they are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation.’

27 Owen, *Works*, Vol. 10, 159.

28 See, for example, Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 148-49: ‘the forensic principle is supreme and keeps in subordination to itself the transforming principle.’

29 Baxter’s views were set forth (with Owen very much in his sights) in the posthumous treatise, *Universal Redemption* (London, 1694).

was to bring out as never before the meaning of Paul's remark that with Christ God gives us all things (Rom. 8:32).

The crucial truth here is that there is an indissoluble link between the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. This goes beyond the point made earlier that the three divine persons have communion in the same redemptive plan. It means that the work of the Spirit rests on the work of Christ. It is secured by it. This is precisely the point that Paul makes so clearly in Gal. 3:13-14: 'He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, *so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*' He redeemed us so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit.³⁰

What, then, did the cross achieve? The transforming, glorifying ministry of the Spirit! For how many? Is it ours to ask?

Evangelism

What is the bearing of all this on evangelism? According to Dr. J. E. Hazlett Lynch, author of the final article in this collection,³¹ only Amyraldianism (or Arminianism) can provide a logical foundation for evangelism. By contrast, Calvinism and evangelism are mutually exclusive; the typical Calvinist cannot go the whole way in preaching Christ; and any Calvinist who is passionate in his evangelism has qualms of conscience, fearing that he is being disloyal to his theological roots. Such is the legacy of 'Owenite scholasticism'.

If this affected only the reputation of Calvinism it would not be worth responding to, but it affects much deeper issues, particularly the warrant for evangelism and the terms in which the gospel is to be expressed. Besides, if there really are Calvinists of the type described by Dr Lynch the sooner they are delivered from their shackles (or exterminated) the better. Belief in the full, free and indiscriminate offer of the gospel has been a core dogma of Reformed orthodoxy from the beginning. It has not merely been conceded. It has been insisted on, as a dogma of such importance that any doctrine inconsistent with it would have to be instantly jettisoned.

The seminal statement on the subject is that of the Synod of Dort, convened in 1618 precisely to deal with the questions posed by Arminius. Under the Second Head of Doctrine (*Of the Death of Christ, and the Redemption of Men thereby*) the Fifth Article declares as follows: 'Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel.'³²

30 Cf. 1 Peter 1:1, where election by God the Father, sanctification by the Spirit and the sprinkling of the blood of Christ are again linked together indissolubly.

31 'Evangelistic Preaching, Amyraldian Style'.

32 See Schaff, *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches*, 586.

One of the curiosities of Amyraldianism is Amyraut's claim (according to Clifford on page 13 of this collection) that the Synod of Dort supported his position, just as James Fraser of Brea would later claim (with rather more justification) that his Amyraldianism was fully consonant with the Westminster Confession.³³ What this points to is a tendency on the part of Amyraldians to view anyone who advocates the free and unfettered offer of the gospel as one of themselves. On this basis, for example, they claim Thomas Chalmers. Yet Chalmers's position on the free offer of the gospel was no different from that of William Cunningham, 'a theological iron-clad'³⁴ who, as we have seen, wrote a definitive essay contesting the Amyraldian argument that Beza betrayed Calvin's legacy, but also wrote:

God has commanded the gospel to be preached to every creature; He has required us to proclaim to our fellow-men, of whatever character, and in all varieties of circumstances, the glad tidings of great joy, – to hold out to them, in His name, pardon and acceptance through the blood of atonement, – to invite them to come to Christ, and to receive Him, – and to accompany all this with the assurance that that 'whosoever cometh to Him, He will in no wise cast out.'³⁵

Nor was this an inoperative dogma confined to the Calvinist class-room or lecture-theatre: affirmed in theory, but denied in practice. In any parade of passionate evangelists C. H. Spurgeon would surely be in the first rank, yet no one could ever describe him as an Amyraldian. Hear him preaching, for example, on Luke 14:23, 'Compel them to come in.'³⁶ He speaks very plainly to those who are already believers, and tells them, 'I shall have little or nothing to say to you this morning: I am going straight to my business – I am going after those that will not come – those that are in the byeways and hedges, and God going with me, it is my duty now to fulfil this command, 'Compel them to come in.' As he develops the theme he is acutely conscious that he is personally charged with compelling sinners to come, and he follows them into every corner of the labyrinth of evasion and excuse:

Stop brother, I was not told merely to tell you and then go about my business. No; I am told to compel you to come in... You may despise your salvation, but I do not despise it; you may go away and forget what you shall hear, but you will please to remember that the things I now say cost me many a groan ere I came here to utter them. My inmost soul is speaking out to you my poor brother, when I beseech you by him that liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore, consider my Master's message which He bids me now address to you.'

33 James Fraser, *A Treatise on Justifying Faith* (Edinburgh, 1749), 251.

34 A. C. Cheyne, *The Transforming of the Kirk* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1983), 79.

35 William Cunningham, *Historical Theology* (reprinted London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960) Vol. 2, 345.

36 C. H. Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit*, Vol. 5 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1884), 17-24.

And what is that message?

Come, I beseech you, on Calvary's mount, and see the cross. Behold the Son of God, He who made the heavens and the earth, dying for your sin. Look to Him, is there not power in Him to save? Look at His face so full of pity. Is there not love in His heart to prove Him willing to save?

This is not some aberrant dilution of Calvinism. It is evangelism as practised by 'high orthodoxy': the evangelism demanded by Dort and represented not only by Spurgeon, but by Rutherford, Edwards and Whitefield, and even by the arch-Owenite, Owen himself. It is an evangelism in which the words 'beseech', 'entreat' and 'plead' occur repeatedly, but it is also evangelism according to the Calvinistic norm. Anyone who does not preach in this way is not a Calvinist.

Warrant

But what is our warrant for such preaching? According to Amyraldians, Christ can be offered to all only if he died for all. Recalling his pre-Amyraldian days, Dr Lynch writes, 'If Christ died only for the elect, I reasoned, what is the point of offering him to people who might not be the elect?' (157). One response to this might be that God gathers his elect precisely by preaching the gospel to all; and preaching it to all on exactly the same terms. He has not given one gospel for the elect and another for the non-elect. But the most appropriate response is that this is precisely the kind of logic that Amyraldianism professes to deplore. Logical inferences, they say, are dangerous. We may not, for example, infer the doctrine of limited atonement from the doctrine of election. Agreed! But, then, neither may we infer the doctrine of universal redemption from the doctrine of universal proclamation. By the Amyraldians' own admission, logic is the enemy: the very essence of the dreaded scholasticism.³⁷

What, then, can Reformed theology propose as the basis for the free, unfettered preaching of Christ?

First, the organic link between Christ and the whole human race. This was particularly stressed in the Scottish Secession tradition, represented by such redoubtable Calvinists as Adam Gib, leader of the Antiburghers. Its roots lay in Fraser of Brea's *Treatise on Justifying Faith*. There Fraser laid down that because of the incarnation the fallen human race was in a totally different position from that of fallen angels: 'It may be said that all Sinners of Mankind have greater Interest in Christ's Death than Devils have, whose Nature he did not assume... surely there is a relation founded on the specific unity of that human nature which Christ did assume, to which every individual of that kind may challenge some relation'³⁸ Gib (in many ways the ultimate arbiter of Scottish Calvinist or-

37 It should be noted, however, that Amyraldians sometimes have recourse to scholastic distinctions to formulate their own position. Richard Baxter, for example, adopted the Thomist distinction between God's *antecedent* will and his *consequent* will. See Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 205.

38 *A Treatise on Justifying Faith*, 184.

thodoxy) adopted this basic principle. Christ did not take the nature of angels, but he took human nature, the nature of Adam, and as such he was to be offered to every member of Adam's race; and every member of that race had a right to him. 'The warrant to receive Christ,' wrote Gib, 'is common to all, as they are sinful men and women of Adam's family: "unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men".'³⁹ This means that in the offer of the gospel, Christ is given to the world as its Saviour, 'and his salvation is a *common salvation*; so that mankind lost have a *common* interest in him, which fallen angels have not; it being lawful and warrantable for us, not for them, to take possession of Christ and the whole of his salvation.'

Secondly, the universal offer of the gospel is founded on the intrinsic sufficiency of the obedience of Christ as a sacrifice perfectly adequate to expiate the sins of the whole world. This sufficiency was intrinsic. Christ's obedience was not sufficient because God condescended to accept it as such.⁴⁰ It was sufficient in itself; and it was sufficient because of the glory of his divine person, as the one who not only offered the sacrifice, but became himself the sacrifice. He *himself* is the expiation, writes John: *autos hilasmos* (1 John 2:2). This is a commonplace of Reformed orthodoxy, but no one expressed it more clearly than Owen: 'The value, worth and dignity of the ransom which Christ gave himself to be, and of the price which he paid, was infinite and immeasurable; fit for the accomplishing of any end and the procuring of any good, for all and every one for whom it was intended, had they been millions of men more than ever were created... It was in itself of infinite value and sufficiency to have been made a price to have bought and purchased all and every man in the world.'⁴¹

Owen then went on to draw two vital inferences from this fact.

First, 'the general publishing of the gospel to "all nations," with the right that it hath to be preached to every creature: because the way of salvation which it declares is wide enough for all to walk in. There is enough in the remedy it brings to light to heal all their diseases, to deliver them from all their evils. If there were a thousand worlds, the gospel of Christ might, upon this ground, be preached to them all'.⁴²

The second inference follows: 'the preachers of the gospel, in their particular congregations, being utterly unacquainted with the purpose and secret counsel of God, being also forbidden to pry or search into it, may from hence justifiably call upon every man to believe, with assurance of salvation to every one in particular upon his so doing, knowing, and being fully persuaded of this, that there is enough in the death of Christ to save every one that shall do so; leaving the purpose and counsel of God... to himself'.⁴³

39 *The Present truth: A Display of the Secession Testimony* (Edinburgh, 1774), Vol. 1, 179.

40 This is the concept known as *acceptatio*, according to which God accepts a partial payment as fully meritorious.

41 Owen, *Works*, Vol. 10, 231.

42 Owen, *Works*, Vol. 10, 298.

43 Owen, *Works*, Vol. 10, 298.

It was from such theology as this that Spurgeon drew inspiration.

The universal offer of the gospel rests, thirdly, on the universal lordship of Jesus. This particular rationale is not prominent in the Reformed (or indeed any other) tradition, but it is crucially important nonetheless, not least because it provides the theological foundation for the Great Commission: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.' Mission proceeds on the basis that Jesus Christ is lord of every people-group on earth, and lord of every human being. It is with the ringing affirmation of this lordship that Paul concludes his great hymn in Phil. 2:5-11. Before that lordship, every knee will one day bow. The evangelist must demand, imperiously, that every knee bow *now*.

What is crucial here is that the lordship of Jesus is a public fact and has nothing whatever to do with the subjective, spiritual state of the hearer. This is the truth hidden in Bonhoeffer's concept of 'religionless Christianity'.⁴⁴ Whether or not he is correct to suggest that the 'religious *a priori*' no longer exists (and in the light of Rom. 1:18-31 I do not believe that he is), the lordship of Christ is not limited to those who are religious. He is Lord of the un-churched, the indifferent, the agnostic and the atheist as much as he is of the convinced sinner and the earnest seeker. He has a right to every inch of their space and to every moment of their time, because, quite regardless of how they feel or where their interests lie, he has risen from the dead and been appointed 'Son of God with power' (Rom. 1:4).

But it was in none of these that Reformed theology found its main impulse to bring the gospel to the whole world. It found it in the divine commission. This exists in two basic forms, the Matthaean and the Markan. According to Matthew, the charge given by Christ was to go and make disciples of all nations. It is worth noting here that the aim of the mission was not merely the general dissemination of the gospel, but the winning of converts. The preacher labours to secure *disciples* and to bring men and women to the point of baptism. This leaves little space for the complacent adage that our calling is to be faithful, not successful. Conversion, as Spurgeon reminded us, is our aim,⁴⁵ and where that aim is not realised the genuine preacher cannot simply shrug it off and keep plugging away, indifferent to the fruitlessness of his ministry. Instead, he cries out like Isaiah, 'For how long, O Lord?' (Isa. 6:11).

'High orthodoxy' did not think it had any right to delay complying with this commission until it had reconciled it with divine foreordination, election and limited atonement. If, as B. B. Warfield argued, the fundamental principle of Calvinism is 'a profound apprehension of God in His majesty'⁴⁶ Calvinists, above all others, will recognise here the voice of sovereign authority, and comply instantly

44 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM Press, Enlarged Edition, 1971), 279-81.

45 C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1890), 374-387.

46 *Calvin and Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 354.

and unconditionally with the divine command. God's will is clear: 'Go!' And just as the hearer in the pew has no right to seek assurance that he is elect before he responds with the obedience of faith, so the church has no right to take time out to clarify the metaphysics of predestination before complying with the missionary imperative. 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law.' (Deut. 29:29) The revealed things now include the fact that the nations belong to Christ and that the church is sent to enforce his claim. Neither preacher nor hearer is allowed the luxury of non-compliance on the grounds of unresolved *theologoumena*.

The Markan form of the Great Commission occurs in the Longer Ending (verse 15), now regarded by all modern editors as inauthentic. The divines of the 17th and 18th centuries were unaware of the textual problem and simply accepted the KJV rendering, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.' Here the focus shifts from ethnic universalism to the individual; and here the Calvinist, John Preston, offered a striking paraphrase: 'Go and tell every man, without exception, that there is good news for him.'⁴⁷ This was incorporated into *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*,⁴⁸ published in London in 1645 on the recommendation of Joseph Caryl, official Licenser of Books to the Westminster Assembly. In Scotland, *The Marrow*, with Preston's version of the Great Commission at its very heart, was endorsed by such magisterial Calvinists as Thomas Boston, Ebenezer Erskine and Adam Gib.

But what good news, precisely? Calvinism, and Scottish Calvinism in particular, gave an unambiguous answer: 'Tell everyone, 'Christ is yours. Christ is for you.' By this they meant something very specific: 'Christ is offered to you and that offer makes him yours. It gives you a right to take him and a right to come to him.' The offer was utterly unconditional. It was made to human beings simply as human beings. It was not confined to the elect or to the seeking or to the interested or to those who were really hungering and thirsting or to those who were already weary and heavy-laden. All forms of preparationism were eschewed. Even repentance was seen not as a pre-condition of faith, but as its consequence, the heart broken by the sense of the love of God. The so-called Auchterarder Creed (condemned by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1717, but stoutly defended by Adam Gib)⁴⁹ even went so far as to lay down that it is not necessary to forsake sin in order to come to Christ. We come simply as sinners, and while we are still sinners; not least because if we wait till we have ceased to be sinners we will never come at all. None are excluded but those who exclude themselves (and, of course, those whom the church excludes by not bringing them the gospel in the first place). Even where there has been nothing remotely resembling pre-evangelism, we are to treat individuals exactly as Paul and Silas

47 John Preston, *The Breastplate of Faith and Love* (London; 1634), 8.

48 *The Marrow of Modern Divinity, with Notes by the Rev. Thomas Boston* (Edinburgh, 1818), 148.

49 *Display of the Secession Testimony*, Vol. 1, 173.

did the Philippian jailer, commanding them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and assuring them that if they do so they will be saved.

But may we also go on to say to the sinner, 'God loves you'? It is, undoubtedly, theologically correct. God loves every member of the human race, showering them with blessings, providing a Saviour for them and pressing that Saviour upon their faith and acceptance. It is in this love that the evangelist asks the sinner to believe, and it must exist before it can be believed in.

But (to fall back on a distinction used by Karl Rahner)⁵⁰ is it *kerygmatically* correct? How is it going to be heard? Will it be heard as an announcement that all is well with the soul? Will it be heard as an announcement that one is already saved and there is nothing to worry about? May it even be heard as an announcement that we are all elect and all redeemed and all already born again?

The problem here, as D. A. Carson points out, is that for human beings the *default* position is not salvation, but the wrath of God.⁵¹ If the sinner does nothing, he perishes; and if the sinner is misled or misinformed, he perishes. This is made utterly clear in John 3:16: whoever *believes* will have eternal life. Not everyone has it, nor will have it: only those who believe. The message is spelt out fully in John 3:36, 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.' Luke 13:5 is plainer still: 'unless you repent, you too will all perish.'

Evangelists have no authority to convey to unbelievers and impenitents the impression that they are already saved. To fall back on yet another old distinction, Christ is theirs in the gospel *offer*, but he is not theirs in *possession*; and the mere offer does not make them possessors. It follows from this that evangelists have to choose their words with care. The doctrine of universal redemption too easily becomes the doctrine of universal pardon, and the doctrine of universal pardon easily becomes the doctrine of universal salvation. If we tell the world that Christ redeemed each and every man on the cross of Calvary, people have every right to ask, 'In that case, what kind of redemption do we now possess?' Are we all redeemed? Are we all pardoned? Are we all saved? Or are we all by nature children of wrath, without God, and without hope?

It is here that Calvinism (and historical evangelicalism as represented by Baxter and Wesley) insists that even after all that God has done for us there is still something he *requires* us to do ourselves: and until we do it we are neither redeemed nor saved. When the jailer asked Paul and Silas, 'What must I do to be saved?' they didn't reply, 'Nothing! God loves you and you are already saved.' They told him to believe. The offer of salvation is to be extended to all. The assurance that one is saved is to be extended only to believers.

Yet there is a dramatic asymmetry between what God has done and what he

50 'Not every objectively true statement is also kerygmatically correct.' (Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2nd edition 1965), 128-9.

51 From D. A. Carson, 'The Wrath of God' in Bruce L. McCormack (ed.), *Engaging the Doctrine of God*, 50.

requires us to do. God sacrificed his Son. He asks nothing comparable of us. He asks only our trust. The gift is without money and without cost (Isa. 55:1). We merely take it.

This carries the implication that Calvinism, no less than Arminianism, must 'preach for decision'. Every conversion involves an act of will, and that act of will is precisely what evangelism seeks to produce. No merely human word can elicit such a decision, but the evangelist knows that God is Lord of the hearing as well as of the speaking. When he opens the heart (Acts 16:14) we come to Christ 'most freely, being made willing by his grace.'⁵² None of God's children are adopted against their will.

Amyraldianism and Scottish Presbyterianism

One of the most fascinating features of the story of Amyraldianism is the fateful influence it was destined to have on the church history of Scotland. From the outset it had a strong Scottish dimension, one of the major influences on Amyraut being John Cameron, who became Professor of Divinity at Saumur in 1618. But the real story of Scottish Amyraldianism began with James Fraser of Brea's fateful *Treatise on Justifying Faith*. Written between January 1677 and July 1679, while Fraser was a prisoner on the Bass Rock, the manuscript lay unpublished till fifty years after his death. In the interval it was probably in the possession of George Mair of Culross, and it was a relation of Mair's, Rev. Thomas Mair, a minister of the General Associate Synod (a branch from the Secession of 1733), who had it published in 1749. The crucial part of the treatise was an 'Appendix concerning the Object of Christ's Death', in which Fraser argued (claiming the support of Protestant divines in general and of the professors of Saumur in particular) that, 'Christ did by one infinite, indivisible satisfaction and ransom satisfy divine justice for the sins of all mankind, though with different intentions and ends according to the different objects thereof.'⁵³ Remission of sins had been purchased for all, though it would be effectual only for the elect.⁵⁴

Whether or not Fraser ever intended his *Treatise* to see the light of day is a moot point (Adam Gib even questioned whether he was its author at all), but by the time it was published he was far beyond the reach of censure. Mair did not fare so well. He was deposed for his pains, but it proved less easy to put an end to his influence, and the seed he had sown persisted until Amyraldianism became endemic in the Scottish Secession tradition. In 1841 James Morison of Kilmarnock was deposed by the United Secession Church,⁵⁵ and in the course

52 *Westminster Confession*, X.1.

53 *Treatise on Justifying Faith*, 222.

54 *Treatise on Justifying Faith*, 183.

55 The original charge against Morison contained no explicit reference to the extent of the atonement, but his full-blown Arminianism became apparent in his later work, *The Extent of the Atonement* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1882). In 1843, Morison was one of the co-founders of the Evangelical Union.

of his trial, he implicated his professors at the Divinity Hall, Robert Balmer and John Brown. From them, he said, he had imbibed his ideas. There followed the Atonement Controversy (1841-45).⁵⁶ Balmer died in 1844, before the proceedings against him could be concluded. Brown was acquitted by the Synod of 1845.

This acquittal had dramatic implications for Scottish Presbyterianism. None doubted Brown's Amyraldianism, least of all himself. The real effect of the Synod's judgement, therefore, was to declare that Amyraldianism was not an error. It was, however, at variance with the Westminster Confession, to whose every doctrine Brown and his colleagues had sworn sincere allegiance, and this inevitably gave the Seceders an uneasy conscience. In 1847 the United Secession Church linked up with the Relief Church to form the United Presbyterian Church, and the newly formed body eventually relieved its conscience by passing (in 1879) a Declaratory Act, far more revolutionary in effect than was seen at the time. This Act declared in its preamble that the Church had already allowed exception to be taken to the teaching of the Westminster Confession 'on one important subject' (the extent of the atonement); went on to distance the Church from any precisely Calvinistic understanding of the doctrines of redemption, the divine decrees and human depravity; and concluded by laying down that liberty of conscience would be allowed on such points in the Church's standards as did not enter into 'the substance of the faith'.⁵⁷

This complex and carefully drafted Act arose from the need to accommodate Amyraldianism, and it set off a chain reaction which within thirty years would revolutionise world Presbyterianism. The majority of the Free Church had set their hearts on bringing the United Presbyterian Church and the Free Church together in one body, but no such union could take place unless and until the Free Church passed a similar Declaratory Act. This it did in 1893, using almost identical terminology to the earlier UP Act, and allowing diversity of opinion 'on such points in the Confession as do not enter into the substance of the Reformed Faith therein set forth'.⁵⁸ Not to be outdone, the Church of Scotland in 1905 secured parliamentary permission (necessary for an established church) to modify its subscription to its Confession of Faith, allowing them, too, 'liberty of opinion on such points of doctrine as do not enter into the substance of the Faith'.

Other Presbyterian churches worldwide followed the example of their Scottish parents. Amyraldianism had proved a powerful catalyst, dissolving the bond between the Presbyterian churches and their historic creed. Loosed from their Confessional moorings they were left to drift on uncharted seas with only the undefined 'substance of the faith' for a compass, each preacher free to choose

56 For a brief history, see John Cairns, *Memoir of John Brown* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1860), 203-255.

57 For the full text of this Act see Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Church in Late Victorian Scotland 1874-1900*, (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1978), 36-7.

58 The full text of the Free Church Declaratory Act is published in Alexander Stewart and J. Kennedy Cameron, *The Free Church of Scotland: the Crisis of 1900* (Edinburgh: The Knox Press, 1989), 69-70.

his own position on the ocean of unlimited theological pluralism. Presbyterianism had lost the one thing that bound it together: common preaching. Two ministers in the one Communion could now be as far apart as Friedrich Nietzsche and John Gill.

If it is true, as Drummond and Bulloch allege,⁵⁹ that when R. S. Candlish died in 1873 Disruption Calvinism was also on its death-bed, these Declaratory Acts coffined it. That is probably Amyraldianism's most significant achievement.

Abstract

This article explores recent Amyraldian commentary on post-Dort Calvinism, including the charge that it preaches only a limited love and paralyses evangelism. As part of the response to this latter claim it reflects on the actual content of biblical evangelism, and on Calvinist commitment to universal mission and the free offer of the gospel. Analysis is offered of the Amyraldian appeal to a dual understanding of the divine will and to its use of the distinction between natural and moral inability. The concluding section briefly traces the impact of Amyraldianism on modern Scottish Presbyterianism.

59 *The Church in Late Victorian Scotland 1874-1900*, 290.

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