

“Shades of opinion within a generic Calvinism” The Particular Redemption Debate at the Westminster Assembly

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The debate between Protestant theologians over ‘particular redemption’ was one of the most fraught in the seventeenth century, and continues to be “one of the most controversial teachings in Reformed soteriology.”¹ The purpose of this essay is to examine a key public debate on this topic from that century. There was intense interest in the subject from the beginning of the century until near the end. The five-point Arminian Remonstrance and the subsequent Synod of Dort in 1618-1619 began several decades of passionate interchange. This arguably culminated in the Formula Consensus Helvetica of 1675, designed by its authors (including Francis Turretin) to exclude and condemn the Amyraldian ‘middle way’ between Arminianism and Calvinism. In between Dort and the Consensus comes the Westminster Assembly, a formative moment in Protestant creed-making which produced, according to Warfield, “the most thoroughly thought out and most carefully guarded statement ever penned of the elements of evangelical religion.”² According to the surviving minutes of the Assembly, this august body of British divines discussed the issue of particular redemption in plenary session on at least one occasion whilst hammering out the wording of the *Confession of Faith*. That debate in the autumn of 1645 is the subject of our study here.

The debate began in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey on Wednesday morning, 22nd October 1645. Detailed work on the *Confession* had been ongoing for the Assembly of Divines since the summer of 1644, a year in the English Civil War which also saw crushing defeats for the Royalist armies at Nantwich and Marston Moor. As part of the discussion on “God’s eternal decree”, Edward Reynolds’ committee responsible for this section of the Confession³ brought a proposition for debate concerning “Redemption of the elect only”. The debate lasted for several days, possibly until 31st October,⁴ although only the first three days are well minuted. We will examine it in three stages. First, we will see that there were at least four different approaches to the question at play in the discussion, which were brought out as the divines debated whether it was possible to dissent from the proposition without falling prey to Arminianism. Second we will examine how the debate moved on to look at God’s intent in the atonement and the question of the universal offer of the gospel. Finally, in light of the floor debate, we will scrutinise the final product of the Assembly’s debates to see how the *Confession* presents its teaching.

1. IS IT POSSIBLE TO DISSENT FROM PARTICULAR REDEMPTION WITHOUT BEING AN ARMINIAN?

Scene one of the Westminster Assembly’s debate revolved around the question of whether it is possible to dissent from particular redemption without being an Arminian. In the opening exchanges it is the Arminian question which is at the forefront of the delegates’ minds. Edmund Calamy opens by attempting to distance himself from the Arminian view. Clearly the proposition to be debated was asserting particular redemption (whether in the finally accepted form of words in WCF III.vi or not is uncertain), and he was immediately concerned to speak against this. Yet he felt constrained to do so carefully: “I am farre from universall Redemption in the Arminian sence,” he

¹ R. A. Blacketer, “Definite Atonement in Historical Perspective” in C. E. Hill and F. A. James III (eds.), *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological, and Practical Perspectives* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pages 304.

² B. B. Warfield, “The Significance of the Westminster Standards as a Creed: Address before the Presbytery of New York, November 8th, 1897” (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1898), Section III.

³ A. F. Mitchell & J. Struthers (eds.), *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (London and Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1874), page liv.

⁴ Mitchell & Struthers, page 160.

began, “but that that I hould is in the sence of our devines in the sinod of Dort.”⁵ The next four entries in the minutes from Palmer, Reynolds, Calamy and Seaman all revolve around the Remonstrant view. Reynolds’ statement is especially pertinent: he says of Calamy’s view that it “cannot be asserted by any that can say he is not of the Remonstrants opinion.”⁶ In other words, he accuses Calamy of only a pretended distance between himself and the Arminians, averring that it is not actually possible to dissent from the “redemption of the elect only” position without falling into Arminianism.

The Synod of Dort & James Ussher

The deliverances of Dort against the Dutch Arminian party were a key part of the immediate background to the Assembly’s deliberations. The Arminians had asserted in their second of five articles, “of universal redemption”, that:

“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 sins; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer.”⁷

The drawing up of the canons of Dort in response had been “a complex and acrimonious affair.”⁸ The rejection of Arminianism was a foregone conclusion since no Remonstrant delegates were permitted to vote; though they did attend and were interviewed about their teaching, their defeat was ‘predestined’.⁹ Yet the Synod (like the Westminster Assembly itself) was far from monochrome, with various shades of opinion expressed, not least on the controversial second head of doctrine. Their final agreed text replied to the Arminians with eight articles on the atonement confirming the “infinite price, and value” of the death of Christ which was “abundantly sufficient to expiate the sinnes of the whole world”, while also asserting that “God willed, that Christ by the blood of his crosse... should effectually redeeme out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all them, and them onely, who from eternity were elected unto salvation, and given to him of the Father.”¹⁰

This left several loose ends and unanswered questions. For instance, as G. M. Thomas points out, “an explicit link between infinite sufficiency and indiscriminate preaching is avoided... [and] no explanation is offered as to how the sufficiency of Christ’s death relates to the non-elect... As a result of the biggest disagreement of the Synod, it was impossible to find an acceptable way of relating universal and particular aspects of the atonement in the final document.”¹¹ It is interesting then, back at Westminster, that Calamy alluded not only to the Synod but to the British delegation that had been sent to Dort. The British divines had submitted their views on the five controverted points in a document called *The Collegiat Suffrage*. On the issue of relating the universal and particular aspects of the atonement, this stated that:

⁵ C. B. Van Dixhoorn, “Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly 1642-1652” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2004) Volume 6, page 202.

⁶ Van Dixhoorn, page 203.

⁷ P. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom volume 3: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996 [1876]), page 546. Note the slightly different Latin and English given in P. Heylyn, *Historia Quinquarticularis or, A DECLARATION of The Judgement of the Western Churches And more particularly Of the Church of ENGLAND in The Five Controverted Points Reproached in these Last times by the Name of ARMINIANISM* (E.C. for Thomas Johnson at the Key in St. Paul’s Church-yard, 1660), pages 50-51.

⁸ A. Milton (ed.), *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort (1618-1619)* Church of England Record Society volume 13 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2005), pages 295-296.

⁹ M. Dewar, “The British Delegation at the Synod of Dort: Assembling and Assembled; Returning and Returned” in *Churchman* 106.2 (1992), page 135.

¹⁰ *The Judgement Of The SYNODE Holden at DORT* (London: John Bill, 1619), pages 22-24 (articles 3 & 8).

¹¹ G. M. Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), page 133.

“Christ therefore so dyed for all, that all and every one by the meanes of faith might obtaine remission of sins, and eternall life by virtue of that ransome paid once for all mankinde. But Christ so dyed for the elect, that by the merit of his death in speciall manner destined unto them according to the eternall good pleasure of God, they might infallibly obtaine both faith and eternall life.”¹²

This is the same position taken by Calamy when he says in his opening statement that Christ “did pay a price for all, absolute <intention> for the elect, conditionall <intention> for the reprobate, in case they doe believe.”¹³ Hypothetically, then, all could be saved since provision had been made in the cross if only people would believe. Palmer also recognises this distinction, pointing out that the Arminians taught “all equally redeemed”, whereas others, presumably others holding a different form of ‘universal’ atonement, did not. Calamy was keen to distance his own view from that of the Remonstrants: “The Arminians,” he said, “hold that Christ did pay a price for this intention only: that all men should be in an equall state of salvation.” Clearly he did not agree with them about this, and stressed that his version of “universality” did not affect the doctrines of special election or special grace. That is, there was a further intention in the atonement: Christ died to actually save some. He would have agreed with Dort that special grace is reserved for only a part of mankind, that only the elect are *effectually* redeemed, although he would have been happy to say that all are redeemed in a different sense. The seventeenth century usage of the word “redeemed/redemption” allowed for such distinctions.¹⁴ What Calamy was saying is that Christ accomplished redemption for the elect and non-elect, but it was applied only to the elect. This position is not *mere* ‘hypothetical universalism’, which Clifford rightly says is “a description more applicable to the Arminians”, since they also believed in an absolute redemption of the elect (which the Arminians did not).¹⁵ More accurately it might be called Calvinist hypothetical universalism.

It is vitally important to note that this hypothetically universalist view had something of a heritage in Britain, being privately held by no less a man than the influential Irish Archbishop, James Ussher. In a letter dated March 3rd 1617, unpublished until after his death but widely copied, circulated, and talked about, he made the following distinction: “The *satisfaction* of Christ, onely makes the sinnes of mankind *fit for pardon*... The particular *application* makes the sins of those to whom that mercy is vouchsafed to be *actually pardoned*... [B]y the vertue of this blessed Oblation, God is made *placable* unto our *nature*... but not *actually* appeased with any, until he hath received his son.”¹⁶ He added that “the universality of the satisfaction derogates nothing from the necessity of the speciall Grace in the application”¹⁷ and that “in one respect [Christ] may be said to have *died for all*, and in another respect *not* to have died for all.”¹⁸

It may therefore be noted that Calamy’s approach to this issue is strikingly similar to Ussher’s, and in fact Ussher is behind a great deal of the hypothetical universalist case presented at Westminster. This can be seen with regards to the language of salvability used by Calamy and Seaman¹⁹ which

¹² G. Carleton et al, *The Collegiat Suffrage of the Divines of Great Britaine, concerning the five articles controverted in the Low Countries* (London: Robert Milbourne, 1629), pages 47-48.

¹³ Van Dixhoorn, page 203. The words in parentheses are interlined in the text of the Minutes.

¹⁴ W. Cunningham, *Historical Theology: A review of the principal doctrinal discussions in the Christian church since the apostolic age Volume 2* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960 [1862]), pages 327-328; A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding the Westminster Confession* (London: Banner of Truth, 1961 [1869]), pages 73, 154.

¹⁵ A. C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790 An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), page 154. A. C. Troxel, “Amyraut ‘at’ the Assembly: The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Extent of the Atonement” in *Presbyterion* 22/1 (1996), page 46.

¹⁶ J. Ussher, *The Judgement of the late Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, 1. Of the extent of Christs death and satisfaction* (London: for John Crook, 1658), pages 4-5.

¹⁷ Ussher, *The Judgement of the late Archbishop*, page 13.

¹⁸ Ussher, *The Judgement of the late Archbishop*, page 15.

¹⁹ Van Dixhoorn, pages 203, 204, 205.

echoes Ussher's on placability/fit for pardon. It can also be seen in the distinction Thomas Young makes between *pro natura Humana* and *electis*,²⁰ which I presume (in the absence of elaboration in the Minutes) regards the question of the object of Christ's work (human nature, or the elect). This finds an echo in Ussher's language too when he writes that Christ "[I]ntended by giving sufficient satisfaction to Gods Justice, to make the *nature of man*, which he assumed, a fit subject for mercy", and that "in respect of his mercy he may be counted a *kind of universal cause* of the restoring of our Nature."²¹

Archbishop Ussher, however, was not one "of our devines in the sinod of Dort" with whom Calamy claimed doctrinal solidarity. But a copy of Ussher's private letter concerning his judgement on the extent of the atonement had, the epistle "To the reader" at the start of the 1658 edition informs us, been carried to the Synod of Dort by "a Member of it." This editorial preface also tells us that "not onely in the forenamed subjects, but in the rest relating to the Remonstrants, the *Primate* concurred with *Bishop Davenant*, whose *Lectures De morte Christi, & prædestinatione & reprobatione*, he caused to be published." So the chain of influence is revealed: as Moore makes clear,

"Without wanting to go into print with his concerns, [Ussher] counseled ministers through an extensive correspondence and sought through his immense personal influence quietly to win the next generation of theologians to a more balanced position... Davenant was Ussher's key convert."²²

As the leader of the British delegation at Dort, John Davenant (later Bishop of Salisbury) was compelled to take a public stance on the issue and thus became the key figure in the development of a stream of English hypothetical universalism. At Westminster, Calamy explicitly claims to stand in this tradition. Davenant's most famous work on the subject, written in 1627, was not actually published until 1650, after his death and after the Assembly's debate.²³ Yet his influence was felt not just through the legacy of his work as Bishop of Salisbury, but through the publication of the *Collegiat Suffrage* (Latin: 1626 / English: 1629) and through other works which taught his approach to these questions such as his 1641 book replying to Arminians Samuel Hoard and Henry Mason,²⁴ which Calamy's grandson²⁵ called "learned and peaceable... a book not valued according to its worth."²⁶

That Calamy's approach was the same as Davenant's can perhaps be seen in a small detail overlooked by commentators on this debate. Palmer asks Calamy to clarify his position, regarding the conditional intention of the atonement for all "in case they doe believe". Palmer says, "I desire to know whether he will understand it *de omni homine*" to which Calamy replies, "*De adultis*."²⁷ This enigmatic exchange, on which further comment has not been preserved, could be explained by passages in Davenant's work on the atonement, where in response to an objector he also "refers to some difference to be observed in this matter between adults and infants" in terms of the conditional nature of universal grace.²⁸ It is "foolish" he says, to assert that Christ died for all infants (in the universal sense) "if they will believe", since "they have not the use of reason and free will." Yet the

²⁰ Van Dixhoorn, pages 203-204.

²¹ Ussher, *The Judgement of the late Archbishop*, pages 14-15, 28.

²² J. D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007), page 212.

²³ J. Davenant, *Dissertationes Duæ: Prima De Morte Christi... Altera De Prædestinatione & Reprobatione* (Cambridge: Rogeri Danielis, 1650). See J. Davenant, *A Dissertation on the Death of Christ* with an introduction by Dr. Alan Clifford (Weston Rhyn: Quinta Press, 2006), page x and Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, page 187 n.70.

²⁴ J. Davenant, *Animadversions... upon a Treatise intituled God's love to Mankind* (Cambridge: Roger Daniel, 1641).

²⁵ Edmund Calamy (1671-1732).

²⁶ Davenant, *A Dissertation on the Death of Christ*, page xviii.

²⁷ Van Dixhoorn, page 203.

²⁸ J. Davenant, *A Dissertation on the Death of Christ* translated by Josiah Allport (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co, 1832), page 446.

case is far different with adults, he concludes.²⁹ We can see, therefore, that at Westminster Calamy takes a Davenantian position regarding an objection previously put to the hypothetical universalist case.

English Hypothetical Universalism and Amyraldianism

It should be noted that Calamy is not best labelled an Amyraldian, as many are in the habit of doing.³⁰ This may be understandable as a general label for Calvinist universalism, and Moïse Amyraut quickly became *the* name attached to ‘universal redemption’.³¹ Yet it is also inaccurate in some important ways, not least of which is that Amyraut’s position depended on other distinctive theological commitments which were not shared by all hypothetical universalists, such as his ordering of the decrees, and his view on original sin and moral and natural ability, views which found him on trial at Alençon in 1637.³² He also held a unique and distinctive view on the trinity which flowed from his understanding of redemption, but which was not shared by other universal redemptionists.³³ So while ‘Amyraldian’ (or “near-Amyraldian”)³⁴ would certainly be an inappropriate anachronism for Davenant who learned his hypothetical universalism well before Amyraut had even begun to study theology,³⁵ it could also be inadequate and potentially misleading more widely. Mitchell refers to Calamy, Arrowsmith, Vines, and Seaman as “disciples of Davenant”³⁶ and this they more likely were first, prior to any acquaintance with the school of Saumur (Amyraut and his tutor John Cameron). They certainly were not all devotees of Moïse Amyraut.

Yet here we must look at two pieces of evidence which are usually adduced to argue for Amyraut’s influence at the Assembly. First, a letter of Scottish delegate Robert Baillie on 24th October 1645 is quoted to show that Amyraut was being read and inwardly digested by the Westminster Divines:

“Unhappilie Amiraut's Questions are brought in on our Assemblée. Many more loves these fancies here than I did expect. It falls out ill that Spanheim's book is so long a-coming out, whileas Amiraut's treatise goes in the Assemblée from hand to hand.”³⁷

Baillie laments the fact that Frederick Spanheim, who was known to be composing a great work “destined to crush definitively Saumur”³⁸ had not yet published his *magnum opus*.³⁹ More pertinently, he laments the distribution of Amyraut’s work during the debate on the redemption of the elect only, thus proving to some that Amyraut’s influence was weighty. It is true that Amyraut’s new book *Dissertationes theologicae quatuor* addressing the issues of universal and

²⁹ M. Fuller (ed.), *The Life, Letters, and Writings of John Davenant D.D.* (London: Methuen & Co, 1897), page 199; Davenant, *A Dissertation on the Death of Christ* (Allport translation), page 567.

³⁰ E.g. D. P. Field, *Rigide Calvinisme in a softer dresse: The moderate presbyterianism of John Howe, 1630-1705* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2004), page 20; B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003 [1932]), pages 56, 142; Troxel, “Amyraut ‘at’ the Assembly”, pages 49-50; D. Blunt, “Debate on Redemption at the Westminster Assembly” in *British Reformed Journal* 13 (Jan -Mar. 1996), page 2; strongly implied in R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997 [1979]), page 184 n.2 and Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, page 241.

³¹ R. Baxter, *Certain Disputations Of Right to Sacraments and the true nature of Visible Christianity* (London: William Du Gard for Thomas Johnson, 1657), Preface.

³² B. G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), pages 88-96.

³³ Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, pages 172-177.

³⁴ Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, page 99 n.102.

³⁵ Contra H. C. Hanko, *The History of the Free Offer* (Grandville, Michigan: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1989) available at <http://www.prca.org/current/Free%20Offer/chapter5.htm> (accessed 21-12-07), chapter 5.

³⁶ Mitchell & Struthers, page lv.

³⁷ D. Laing (ed.), *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie* volume 2 (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle, 1841), page 324.

³⁸ Laplanche, quoted in Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, page 105.

³⁹ F. Spanheim, *Exercitationes de gratia universali* (Leyden, 1646) in three volumes (c. 2600 pages).

particular grace (as well as his doctrine of the trinity) rolled off the presses in 1645, the same year as this particular debate at Westminster.⁴⁰ Yet other books which made people aware of hypothetical universalism were also published around this time - in English, and without propagating either Arminian views or following the controversial Saumur *ordo decretorum* - including one by John Saltmarsh,⁴¹ a troublesome minister well-known to members of the Assembly.⁴²

More acceptable to the Assembly was *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* by John Ball, who Baxter later claimed was universalist on the point of redemption.⁴³ Whether or not Baxter's claim is accurate (which is not straightforward to determine),⁴⁴ Ball's book is certainly aware of a counter-Reonstrant, hypothetically universal doctrine⁴⁵ without the trinitarian or decretal distinctives of Amyraut. Ball was published posthumously by Simeon Ashe in 1645 and carried a laudatory "To the reader" from notable divines including Edward Reynolds, Anthony Burgess, and Edmond Calamy (*sic*). They confessed, however, that "our manifold employments have not suffered us to peruse it, so exactly, as otherwise we should have done" so we should not infer from their willingness to give testimony to the author's piety and sound learning approbation of all he wrote - on the intent of the atonement, Calamy and Reynolds came out in the Assembly's debates on different sides, after all.⁴⁶ We may well ask, then, whether if these men were unable to read a book by a friend in English that they gave their own names to, how much more might they have struggled to find time for the scholarly Latin writings of a more distant Frenchman? Which might have influenced them more in years previously as they formed their opinions on the issue at hand is not so easily answered as some might think.

The second piece of evidence usually adduced in favour of calling the 'opposition' by the name of 'Amyraldians' is that Gillespie explicitly names Camero and Amerauld (*sic*) in his first speech in the debate.⁴⁷ So, says Troxel, "It seems odd [to] maintain the influence of English sources when in fact the *Minutes* themselves record Mr. Gillespie mentioning Cameron and Amyraut by name amidst the very debate in which this issue is discussed."⁴⁸ Yet logically, of course, it does not follow that because one participant mentions certain theologians that other participants necessarily were in agreement with them or had even read them. Even if an equation was drawn between Calamy's position and the teachings of Amyraut (and it is not entirely clear from the Minutes that Gillespie was directly accusing Calamy of dependence), it is surely correct to ask whether such an equation is legitimate or would be accepted and acknowledged by Calamy himself.

It is interesting to note in this regard that Calamy's immediate response after Gillespie has cited the Salmurians is to protest that "[I]n the point of election I am for speciall election & for reprobation I

⁴⁰ Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, pages 103, 172.

⁴¹ J. Saltmarsh, *The Fountaine of Free Grace Opened By Questions and Answers proving the foundation of faith to consist only in Gods free love in giving Christ to dye for the sins of all, and objections to the contrary answered by the Congregation of Christ in London, constituted by Baptisme upon the profession of faith, falsly called Anabaptists, wherein they vindicate themselves from the scandalous aspersions of holding free-will, and denying a free election by grace* (London, 1645), pages 1-24. An annotation on the Thomason copy reads "Jan: 21 1644" with the 5 in the imprint date crossed out. This material is attributed to John Saltmarsh by Wing and DNB.

⁴² C. Hill, *Liberty Against the Law* (London: Penguin, 1997), page 217. W. Barker, *Puritan Profiles: 54 influential Puritans at the time when the Westminster Confession of Faith was written* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 1996), pages 159 and 243.

⁴³ Baxter, *Certain Disputations*, Preface.

⁴⁴ See the discussion in H. Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004 [1993]), pages 206-209.

⁴⁵ See J. Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (London: G. Miller for Edward Brewster, 1645), pages 204-264, esp. 205-206 which are quoted in Mitchell & Struthers, page lx.

⁴⁶ Contra Troxel, "Amyraut 'at' the Assembly", page 49 n.17.

⁴⁷ Van Dixhoorn, page 204.

⁴⁸ Troxel, "Amyraut 'at' the Assembly", page 50 n.22. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly*, page 142.

am for *massa corrupta*.”⁴⁹ Thus he indicates that he believes, as Ussher did,⁵⁰ that the object of predestination and reprobation is the sinful mass of mankind, i.e. that he is an infralapsarian. This answers the point Gillespie was just making about the order of the decree in Amyraut, and shows that Calamy is in fact in perfect accord with the later Formula Consensus Helvetica (the *formula anti-Amyraldensis*) on this point: God elected some of fallen humanity but decreed to “leave the rest in the corrupt mass” (alios vero in *corrupta massa* relinquere).⁵¹ Amyraut, on the other hand, taught that God elected out of the mass of *redeemed* humanity, the work of Christ to redeem all preceding the decree to save some and pass over others.⁵² Calamy therefore does not appear to be an Amyraldian, and distances himself from Amyraut at this point.

That is not to say that Amyraut had no followers at the Assembly. Seaman does appear to go down the French route when he says God has “soe farre reconciled himselfe to the world that he would have mercy on whom he would have mercy” and later that “every man [is] *salvabilis* & God, if he please, may choose him, Justify him, sanctify him.”⁵³ God’s choice, Seaman says, is made out of the mass of humanity made salvable by the work of Christ. When Seaman spoke of salvability not “*quoad homines* but *quoad Deum*”⁵⁴ Ussher would have agreed, since he himself had written that “by Christs satisfaction to his Father he made the Nature of Man a fit subject for mercy, I mean thereby, that the *former* impediment arising on Gods part is taken away.”⁵⁵ Yet British hypothetical universalists such as Ussher, Davenant, and John Preston did not agree with the Amyraldian *ordo decretorum*.⁵⁶ They thus differed fundamentally from Amyraldianism,⁵⁷ and even denied elements of Amyraldianism.⁵⁸ It is historically most accurate to conclude with Moore then, that,

“hypothetical universalism is best seen as a relatively independent, earlier development, distinct from Amyraldianism and ‘the Saumur theology’ and worthy of its own place in the history of Christian doctrine.... If anything, its origins were neither Scottish (Cameron) nor French (Amyraut), but Irish (Ussher).”⁵⁹

Hypothetical universalism, or Calvinistic universalism, was certainly “a highly complex phenomenon with no one definitive formulation or uniformity of explanation.”⁶⁰ But then, as we will see, the ‘Calvinist’ or particularist position was not defended in a uniform manner either, or with homogenous exegetical tactics. If the reader will forgive me it would, therefore, be a calumny against Calamy to call him an Amyraldian. That is not to say he had no interest in or links to Saumur: his close friend and fellow Assembly member Samuel Bolton (whose funeral sermon Calamy was to preach)⁶¹ even translated and attached a work by Cameron to his famous (1645)

⁴⁹ Van Dixhoorn, page 204.

⁵⁰ Ussher, *The Judgement of the late Archbishop*, pages 41-42 for *massa corrupta*.

⁵¹ Emphasis mine. For the Consensus in English see A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1972 [1878]), pages 656-663 (657). For the Latin here quoted see P. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom volume 1: The History of Creeds* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996 [1876]), pages 478, 487.

⁵² Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, page 218; Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, pages 189-191; A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, page 231; R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996 [1871]), pages 235-236, 519-520.

⁵³ Van Dixhoorn, pages 203, 205.

⁵⁴ Van Dixhoorn, page 203

⁵⁵ Ussher, *The Judgement of the late Archbishop*, page 30.

⁵⁶ Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, pages 158, 161, 188. Contra Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, page 151.

⁵⁷ See Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly*, page 144.

⁵⁸ Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly*, page 139.

⁵⁹ Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, page 219.

⁶⁰ Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, page 225.

⁶¹ E. Calamy, *The doctrine of the bodies fragility: with a divine project, discovering how to make these vile bodies of ours glorious by getting gracious souls. Represented in a sermon preached at Martins Ludgate at the funerall of that worthy and reverend minister of Jesus Christ, Dr. Samuel Bolton, Master of Christ College in Cambridge, who died the*

book on Christian freedom,⁶² so it appears likely that Calamy was familiar with at least the broad outlines of the French doctrine. Reid says “his reading was very extensive.”⁶³ Yet despite having Huguenot ancestry,⁶⁴ he himself seems to have been an English hypothetical universalist in the Davenant-Preston mould, and not a Salmurian.

So far then we have seen that there were four points of view on the table in the Westminster debate. First, the proposition to be debated itself most probably reflected a particularism reminiscent of William Perkins, the most influential exponent and epitome of late Elizabethan Calvinism, which was to be stoutly defended by Rutherford, Gillespie and others. Second, given its prominence in the opening salvos of the debate, the Arminian doctrine and the controversy this had provoked up to the Synod of Dort was obviously a factor in the minds of those seeking to frame the Confession. Third, Calamy extolled the virtues of a third way, that of the hypothetical universalism espoused by Bishop Davenant and others at Dort. And fourth, there was also the foreign version of hypothetical universalism advocated by Amyraut, whose views were known and discussed in the floor debate at Westminster. This last position was similar to that of Calamy, but by no means identical, and provided another viewpoint in the somewhat fluid and variegated history of Reformed thought on the atonement.

2. DID GOD INTEND TO SAVE AND/OR TO SECURE AN OFFER OF CONDITIONAL SALVATION?

The second stage of the debate at the Westminster Assembly on particular redemption focused on the related issues of God’s intent and the offer of the gospel. The proposition to be debated was narrowed part of the way through the first day’s discussion: “This proposition to be debated. That Christ did intend to Redeeme the elect only.”⁶⁵ Why the proposition was changed is not stated, although on day three (24th October) Robert Harris says, “The best way to answer an erroneous opinion is well to state the question”⁶⁶ and this may have played some part in the thinking of those who altered the focus of the debate. The new subtly different proposition placed the emphasis on God’s intent, design, and purpose in sending Christ to die, a suitably ‘eternal’ perspective for a debate on “God’s eternal decree.” Yet the two perspectives (eternal and historical, divine and human) could not be easily disentangled, since the deputies quickly fell into a discussion of the universal offer of the gospel. Effectively, the question thereafter was did God intend to save his elect people, or to save them *and also* to offer a conditional salvation to anyone else who believes?

Calamy had said at the start that in sending Jesus to die God had a dual intent, “absolute for the elect, conditionall for the reprobate, in case they doe beleive”.⁶⁷ That second, conditional intent, was now examined. Calamy began by arguing from Scripture, and the debate would return several times to the exegesis of the texts he cited in favour of his position – John 3:16 and Mark 16:15 (the latter of which, we should note, is not considered to be authentic by modern critical scholarship).⁶⁸ Calamy argued that “the world” which God is said to love in John 3:16 could not signify merely the

15 of Octob. 1654. and was buried the 19 day of the same month. / By that painfull and pious minister of Gods Word Mr. Edmund Calamy, B.D. (London: Printed for Joseph Moore, 1654).

⁶² S. Bolton, *The true bounds of Christian freedome or a treatise wherein the rights of the law are vindicated, the liberties of grace maintained, and the severall late opinions against the law are examined and confuted. Whereunto is annexed a discourse of the learned Iohn Camerons, touching the threefold covenant of God with man. / faithfully translated, by Samuel Bolton minister of the word of God at Saviours-Southwark* (London: J.L. for Philemon Stephens, 1645), pages 353-401.

⁶³ J. Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982 [1811]), page 167.

⁶⁴ Barker, *Puritan Profiles*, page 208.

⁶⁵ Van Dixhoorn, page 204.

⁶⁶ Van Dixhoorn, page 211.

⁶⁷ Van Dixhoorn, page 203.

⁶⁸ B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: Second Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), pages 102-106. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark NIGTC* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), pages 685-688.

elect “because of that ‘whosoever beleiveth’”,⁶⁹ or as Richard Vines put it “the words doe not else run well.”⁷⁰ This was an argument which ‘universalists’ often leaned heavily upon, and which advocates of particular atonement would have to spend time and energy countering.⁷¹ Calamy then turned to Mark 16:15-16, using it to link the universal proclamation of the gospel to universal redemption saying, “if the covenant of grace be to be preached to all, then Christ redeemed, in some sence, all – both elect and reprobate... universall Redemption be the ground of the universall promulgation... else ther is noe verity in promulgation.” Stephen Marshall weighed in to the ensuing debate to reinforce the sense that for the Calvinist universalists, a key issue was “that ther can noe *falsum subesse* to the offer of the gospell”.⁷² Ussher and the British delegation at Dort, who also cited Mark 16:15 as warrant for linking the universal offer with universal redemption,⁷³ were equally concerned with the ‘verity’ of the offer.⁷⁴

The exegesis of these verses was key to the remainder of the debate as recorded. It is interesting to note that although several deputies spoke up to disagree with Calamy’s handling of John 3:16, they were not unanimous in their own interpretations. For instance, Gillespie questioned whether ‘the world’ must always in Scripture mean ‘the whole world’, and he could not understand how God could be said to love those he had reprobated. Calamy admitted, “that it signifyes the elect sometimes” but he did not think it did here, and then he proceeded to make a distinction between God’s special love for the elect and his general love for the reprobate.⁷⁵ Lightfoot found a third way, saying “I understand the word ‘world’ in a middle sence. It is only in opposition to the nation of the Jews,”⁷⁶ or as Harris put it later, “By ‘world’ ther is meant the world of gentills as appears in the whole chap[ter].” The next day, Rutherford made a case that “love” in John 3:16 must be speaking of “the speciall, particular love of God commensurable with election”, since parallel passages spoke of such a love (e.g. John 15:13). He concluded from his study of “love” in Scripture that there was “not one scripture in all the New Testament wher it can be expounded for the generall.” Indeed, he adduced several texts (Ephesians 5:21, Galatians 2:20, Romans 5:8) which spoke of a “restricted special love.”⁷⁷

Regarding Mark 16, there was even more variety in the responses to Calamy. Gillespie stated that the command to believe there “doth not hold out Gods intentions” (note that key word), in the same way that his command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac was also not a measure of what he intended to actually take place. Thus he utilised the distinction between God’s will of decree and his will of command (or as he put it *voluntas/voluntis decreti & mandati*).⁷⁸ Whatever the reason for them, he said, the “general offers of the gospel are not grounded upon the secret decree”⁷⁹ which was, after all, the subject of that part of the *Confession* under discussion. Lightfoot saw another reason for a general offer to be made to the reprobate: “For the universal offer, God intends as the salvation of the elect, so the inexcusableness of the wicked.” Price questioned the logic of using Mark 16 at all declaring, “it doth not follow that Christ did dy intentionally for the redemption of all” and besides, “to a congregation of Reprobates the reason of the promisc[u]ous offer is be[cause] we do not know who is elect and reprobate.”⁸⁰ Harris summed up his concerns about the universalists’ handling of

⁶⁹ Van Dixhoorn, page 205.

⁷⁰ Van Dixhoorn, page 207.

⁷¹ J. Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* in W. H. Goold (ed.), *The Works of John Owen: Volume 10* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967 [1647]), pages 319-329.

⁷² Van Dixhoorn, page 205.

⁷³ *The Collegiat Suffrage*, pages 48-49.

⁷⁴ Ussher, *The Judgement of the late Archbishop*, pages 3, 24. *The Collegiat Suffrage*, page 46.

⁷⁵ Van Dixhoorn, page 206.

⁷⁶ Van Dixhoorn, page 207.

⁷⁷ Van Dixhoorn, page 209.

⁷⁸ Van Dixhoorn, page 206.

⁷⁹ Van Dixhoorn, page 207.

⁸⁰ Van Dixhoorn, page 207.

the conditional language of Mark 16 and John 3 saying, “I doubt whether ther be any such thing at all as conditionall decree.”⁸¹ He was, like Reynolds on the first day, also puzzled by the idea of a condition being set in God’s decree which the reprobate could not perform anyway and “God never intends to give them[!]”.⁸² Perhaps all of these reasons or some combination of them would have been held by Calamy’s other opponents in this debate. It certainly seems that there was a diverse and wide-ranging response on this point, but whether the concerns of Calamy, Vines, and others would be ignored completely in the final text of the *Confession* is something we must look at more closely.

3. WAS A COMPROMISE ENSHRINED IN THE *CONFESSIO OF FAITH*?

There is considerable debate amongst historians as to whether the finally approved text of the *Westminster Confession* leaves room for the hypothetical universalism of men like Calamy or not. This debate has taken place against the backdrop of calls for confessional revision in the Presbyterian churches, for whom the *Confession* acts as a subordinate doctrinal standard. We should also recognise that the historical debate has been conducted in a context where this doctrine has been the subject of particularly heated debate. John Macleod Campbell, for example, was tried for denying particularist doctrine in the Church of Scotland of the nineteenth century,⁸³ and he spearheaded opposition to limited atonement from *within* the Reformed camp.⁸⁴

Those who were in sympathy with the tradition of Turretin and the Helvetic Consensus such as Warfield, Cunningham, and A. A. Hodge wrote in such an atmosphere with the aim of resisting what they saw as latitudinarian tendencies.⁸⁵ Their view is that hypothetical universalism, Amyraldianism, or ‘post-redemptionism’ is ruled out by the *Confession*.⁸⁶ Alternatively, Mitchell was certainly aware of the debate raging over confessional subscription when he and Struthers edited their edition of the Assembly’s minutes.⁸⁷ His cautious conclusion is that things are not so clear, and it was not impossible that the “more ‘liberal views’”⁸⁸ of Calamy were to an extent tolerated in the final text.⁸⁹ Charles Augustus Briggs, on the other hand, claimed that, “The Westminster Confession... did not decide any of these mooted questions... There is nothing here to which a New School Calvinist need object. It does not enter into the question in dispute... A statement to which these divines [Calamy et al] agreed, made in view of such expressions of opinion, could not rule out these opinions... The chief English divines were in thorough sympathy with the School of Saumur. Therefore the Westminster Confession cannot be quoted against the so-called New School of Theology.”⁹⁰

Definite or limited atonement continues to be “one of the most controversial teachings in Reformed soteriology.”⁹¹ Today, neo-orthodox Barthians reject definite atonement,⁹² as do many within my

⁸¹ Van Dixhoorn, page 211.

⁸² Van Dixhoorn, page 203.

⁸³ G. M. Tuttle, *So Rich an Soil: John McLeod Campbell on Christian Atonement* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1986).

⁸⁴ R. A. Blacketer, “Definite Atonement in Historical Perspective”, page 305. J. McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement and its Relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life* third edition (London: Macmillan, 1869 [1856]).

⁸⁵ On which see W. G. T. Shedd, *Calvinism: Pure and Mixed: A Defence of the Westminster Standards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986 [1893]), pages :vii-xi.

⁸⁶ Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly*, page 142; *Calvin and Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003 [1932]), page 364. Cunningham, *Historical Theology: Volume 2*, pages 326-336. A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, page 73.

⁸⁷ Mitchell & Struthers, page xiii.

⁸⁸ Mitchell & Struthers, page xx.

⁸⁹ Mitchell & Struthers, pages lv-lxi.

⁹⁰ C. A. Briggs, *Theological Symbolics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914), pages 374, 377, 378, 379. See also C. A. Briggs (ed.), *How shall we revise the Westminster Confession of Faith? : A bundle of papers*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), page 22.

⁹¹ R. A. Blacketer, “Definite Atonement in Historical Perspective”, page 304.

⁹² J. B. Torrance, “The Incarnation and ‘Limited Atonement’” in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 2 (1984).

own Anglican Reformed tradition who follow David Broughton Knox and J. C. Ryle.⁹³ For a historian to acknowledge potential bias is a healthy prophylactic: for myself I confess to being not in complete exegetical but certainly in definite doctrinal sympathy with Rutherford and Gillespie, and I hold teachers like Warfield and Cunningham in very high esteem. That being said, I do not find their historical approach to the question at hand convincing, and it is as well to admit that I am somewhat surprised (if I were a Presbyterian, I might say disappointed) at my own conclusion.

It has been assumed by many that limited atonement won the day in the Westminster Confession.⁹⁴ John Murray claims that the Minutes do not support the contention that an ‘Amyraldian’ doctrine is allowed.⁹⁵ Yet, *pace* Murray, the Minutes of the debate on their own neither support nor contradict such a contention. Neither, *contra* Warfield, can we say with confidence where “the weight of the debate” lay because although what we have is “the most fully reported of all the debates on this chapter”⁹⁶ we do not have a comprehensive record of each divine’s contribution, and hardly any detail at all of what was said in the chamber October 24th-31st.⁹⁷ The Minutes do, however, alert us to the possibility at least that the learned and eloquent hypothetical universalists may have been able to exert an influence on the finally adopted text in such a way that they could interpret it in a manner not incompatible with their own position. Let us now examine the parts of the *Confession* which have been cited in this debate to see how they may have been understood by advocates of the different views expressed at the Assembly itself.

“Of Gods Eternall Decree”

We begin, naturally, with WCF III.vi which was the text under discussion in October 1645.⁹⁸ After asserting the redemption of the elect by Christ, the final clause reads, “Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.” In my view, Mitchell is probably most correct when he writes:

“Those who in modern times have pronounced most confidently that the more restricted view is exclusively intended, seem to me to have unconsciously construed or interpreted the words, ‘neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, *and* saved, but the elect only,’ as if they had run, ‘neither are any other redeemed by Christ, *or* effectually called, *or* justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.’ But these two statements do not necessarily bear the same meaning. Calamy, Arrowsmith, and the others who agreed with them, may have felt justified in accepting the former, though they might have scrupled to accept the latter.”⁹⁹

He is correct about the restrictive reading of the sentence since A. A. Hodge gives precisely that “or... or... or” reading in his commentary on the *Confession*.¹⁰⁰ Later, he glosses it as “Neither are

⁹³ T. Payne (ed.), *D. Broughton Knox, Selected Works, Volume 1: The Doctrine of God* (Kingsford NSW: Matthias Media, 2000), pages 260-266. J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John: Volume 1* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987 [1869]), pages 61-62.

⁹⁴ Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, page 184 n.2.

⁹⁵ J. Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray Volume 4: Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), page 256.

⁹⁶ Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly*, pages 142, 138.

⁹⁷ *Contra* Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly*, page 142. See Van Dixhoorn, page 210 n.1032-1034, 211, 212.

⁹⁸ The text of WCF III.vi reads: “As God hath appointed the Elect unto glory; so hath he, by the eternall and most free purpose of his Will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, 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. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified and saved; but the Elect only.” The *Confession of Faith*, and the *Larger Catechism* are both quoted throughout this article from the facsimile of the original 1648 edition published as *The Westminster Standards: An Original Facsimile* (Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, 1997).

⁹⁹ Mitchell & Struthers, page lvii.

¹⁰⁰ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, page 74.

any other redeemed by Christ,.....but the elect only”, passing over a crucial part of the sentence.¹⁰¹ At this point the *Confession* itself says, however, that only the elect are redeemed, called, justified and saved. The hypothetical universalists would have been happy to agree with this concatenation since they believed the terms following “redeemed by Christ” were part of the application of redemption, not the achievement of the atonement or the purchase of redemption itself. They restricted the application of redemption to the elect as much as the particularists, and would be perfectly happy to affirm, with WCF X.1 that effectual calling, for instance, is restricted to the elect.¹⁰²

This can be seen in the debate: Rutherford countered Calamy’s position by saying “I deny this connexion be[cause] it houlds as well in election [and] Justification as in redemption: if he beleive he is as well elected & justified as redeemed.” Calamy replied, “We doe not speake of the application, for then it would bring it in” but Rutherford came back and said “Ther is noe difference betwixt redemption & justification in this.”¹⁰³ If the *Confession* had said, “neither are any other redeemed by Christ but the elect only” the evidence of this exchange suggests that Calamy would have disagreed. The final text, however, rolls redemption and application together and applies both to the elect only, which Calamy was not denying. Thus the *Confession* could be understood here to be asserting no more than when the Canons of Dort declare it was God’s will that Christ should “effectually redeeme out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all them, and them onely, who from eternity were elected unto salvation.”¹⁰⁴

There is a question over this interpretation. Cunningham avers that reading the list of terms in WCF III.vi as if it was being asserted “merely that the whole of them, taken in conjunction, cannot be predicated of any others” is “a mere truism, serving no purpose.” This final sentence of WCF III.vi “was manifestly intended to be peculiarly emphatic, and to contain a denial of an error reckoned important”, so “[T]he Confession, therefore, must be regarded as teaching, that it is not true of any but the elect only, that they are redeemed by Christ, any more than it is true that any others are called, justified, or saved.”¹⁰⁵ This seems to strain the plain reading of the sentence’s grammar, and to be a case of special pleading. Moreover, if the sentence were truly designed to be “peculiarly emphatic” as a denial of hypothetical universalism then in the context of the debate on the floor of the Assembly it certainly could have been made much clearer.¹⁰⁶

Looking at the proof texts which the Assembly attached to this sentence does not lend credence to the more restrictive view. The 1645 “Westminster Annotations” on John 17:9, written by John Ley, had commented that Jesus interceded “Not for reprobates.”¹⁰⁷ This verse was alluded to in the debate by Henry Wilkinson who said “You know they cannot be partakers of Redemption against whom Christ takes speciall exception. Christ prayed not for the world.”¹⁰⁸ He may have meant that as an argument against Calamy, but hypothetical universalists following Ussher said that it simply did not follow that “He *prayed* not for the world, Therefore, He *payed* not for the world.”¹⁰⁹ They pointed out that the intercession of Christ was part of the *application* of redemption,¹¹⁰ which was a

¹⁰¹ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, page 154.

¹⁰² The text of WCF X.1 reads: “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call...”

¹⁰³ Van Dixhoorn, page 205.

¹⁰⁴ *The Judgement Of The SYNODE Holden at DORT*, page 24 (Article 8).

¹⁰⁵ Cunningham, *Historical Theology: Volume 2*, page 328.

¹⁰⁶ Contra Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly*, page 143.

¹⁰⁷ J. Downname (ed.), *Annotations Upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament* (London: Printed by John Legatt and John Raworth, 1645) on John 17:9. Wing lists this work under J. Downname, who may have been the editor or compiler.

¹⁰⁸ Van Dixhoorn, page 205.

¹⁰⁹ Ussher, *The Judgement of the late Archbishop*, page 13.

¹¹⁰ Ussher, *The Judgement of the late Archbishop*, pages 13-14.

different matter, so there is nothing here for someone like Calamy to take exception to on their own terms. Romans 8:18-39 is again arguably about the application of predestination and cited to demonstrate the inevitability of the elect's perseverance, and does not help to decide the issue regarding our sentence's intended interpretation one way or the other. John 6:64-65 is a proof for effectual call, which is mentioned after redemption; again, for someone like Calamy this would be part of redemption applied rather than accomplished. John 10:26 and the similar John 8:47 both 'prove' that only the elect of God will hear and believe in God's word, but they do not address the issue of whether Christ died for the non-elect who will not believe. 1 John 2:19 concerns the perseverance of those who are "of us", no doubt understood here as the elect. It is not denied that the elect are redeemed: the previous sentence in WCF III.vi asserts as much, and the proofs (1 Thess 5:9-10 and Titus 2:14) would seem to be adequate to make that point. But it is clear that the proofs (attached at the request of Parliament some months later on 20th January 1646)¹¹¹ do not imply the restrictive or 'non-collective' meaning for the final sentence of WCF III.vi and would in fact be compatible with a contemporary hypothetical universalist reading of it. Whether such a reading of those Scriptures is legitimate is, of course, a different issue.

"Of Christ the Mediatour"

The issue of particular redemption appears to surface again in the *Confession* in chapter 8, and in *Larger Catechism* Q. 59. WCF VIII.v asserts that the Lord Jesus "purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him"¹¹² while section viii goes on to say that, "To all those for whom Christ hath purchased Redemption, he doth certainly, and effectually apply, and communicate the same."¹¹³ This is often cited as attempting to link redemption accomplished with redemption applied in such a way as to make them coterminous – *everyone* for whom Christ died, *everyone* for whom he has purchased redemption, has redemption applied to them. As Murray says, commenting on WCF VIII.viii, "impetration and application are coextensive... This excludes any form of universal atonement."¹¹⁴ It does, on the face of it, do just that. Yet, again, we find that seventeenth century universalists, such as Ussher, were happy to affirm this same truth, by making fine distinctions. Ussher wrote that,

*"Impetration... I hold to be a fruit, not of his Satisfaction, but Intercession; ... it is a great folly to imagine that he hath impetrated Reconciliation and Remission of sinnes for that world [for which he prayed not, John 17:9]. I agree therefore... That application and impetration, in this latter we have in hand, are of equall extent; and, That forgiveness of sinnes is not by our Saviour impetrated for any unto whom the merit of his death is not applied in particular."*¹¹⁵

Richard Baxter, another seventeenth century hypothetical universalist (convinced by reading Prolocutor Twisse, no less),¹¹⁶ would hold something similar a few years later.¹¹⁷ If Baxter is right about Ball's universalism then we should also note that Ball too affirmed coextensive impetration and application, writing of "the acquisition of righteousnesse by the death of Christ" that "for

¹¹¹ Mitchell & Struthers, page 323.

¹¹² The full text reads: "The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternall Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the Justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him."

¹¹³ The full text reads: "To all those for whom Christ hath purchased Redemption, he doth certainly, and effectually apply, and communicate the same, making intercession for them, and revealing unto them, in, and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation, effectually perswading them by his Spirit to beleeve, and obey, and governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit, overcoming all their enemies by his Almighty Power and Wisedome, in such manner, and wayes, as are most consonant to his wonderfull and unsearchable dispensation."

¹¹⁴ Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray Volume 4*, page 256.

¹¹⁵ Ussher, *The Judgement of the late Archbishop*, pages 19-20.

¹¹⁶ Baxter, *Certain Disputations*, Preface.

¹¹⁷ Mitchell & Struthers, page lviii.

whomsoever it is acquired, to them it is applied.”¹¹⁸ Ussher could hold to this coextensive purchase and application idea only by separating two aspects of Christ’s high priestly work – his satisfaction (for all) from his intercession (for the elect), and speaking of the latter alone as impetration. WCF VIII.viii makes reference to Christ’s intercession, citing Romans 8:34 and 1 John 2:1-2 in support (ironically, the very text used by the Remonstrants in support of universal atonement).¹¹⁹ Here, Christ’s intercession for his people is certainly one aspect of redemption applied, not purchased/impetrated to use the usual distinction. This makes it difficult for the hypothetical universalist like Ussher who identifies impetration with intercession to agree with WCF VIII.viii in its more natural and usual sense. It may not have been the way they would have preferred to phrase things, but it was possible to harmonise such a statement with their universalism (albeit, perhaps, with some intricate mental gymnastics).

The proofs on the first sentence of WCF VIII.viii are John 6:37, 39 and 10:15-16: Christ lays down his life for the sheep, who subsequently hear his voice, come to him, and are raised up. To my mind the most natural explanation of those verses in their contexts and this section of the *Confession* is in accord with particular redemption. But it is not completely clear that a *sophisticated* Calvinist hypothetical universalist would not also be able to affirm the truths enshrined here; some in the seventeenth century itself clearly did, even if their interpretation was, as Warfield puts it, “more subtle than satisfactory.”¹²⁰ Perhaps the fluctuations of Assembly life and politics enabled the particularists to have their way more on some days and on some sections of the *Confession* than on others.

“Of Gods Covenant with Man”

Finally, it is instructive to note that the hotly disputed texts in the Assembly’s debate on God’s Eternal Decree are both cited later as proofs for WCF VII.iii on the covenant of grace:

“Man, by his Fall, having made himself incapable of Life by that Covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a Second^e, commonly called the Covenant of Grace; Wherein he freely offereth unto sinners Life and Salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them Faith in Him, that they may be saved^f, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto Life, his holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to beleeve^g.”

John 3:16 and Mark 16:15-16 are both cited with regard to the offer of salvation to sinners at footnote f (after the word “saved”) along with Romans 10:6, 9 and Galatians 3:11. Hanko asserts that in this clause “the idea of the offer as used by the school of Amyraut and as promoted by the Davenant men was not intended by the Westminster divines,”¹²¹ but he does not note the explicit use here of the proof texts so beloved of “the Davenant men”. English hypothetical universalists and their more particular brethren could agree that whoever believes is saved, and that the gospel could be presented as “if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).¹²² The particularists would have wanted to add the final clause about God granting the elect the ability to believe.¹²³ Calamy and others would have been delighted to ensure mention of both effectual salvation and a general gospel offer, “the truth they were mainly anxious to conserve.”¹²⁴ Moreover, when debating WCF III.vi Marshall had insisted, in response to Gillespie’s argument that man is bound to believe, that “there is not only a *mandatum* but a promise,”¹²⁵ and this too

¹¹⁸ Ball, *Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, page 255.

¹¹⁹ Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom volume 3*, page 546.

¹²⁰ Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly*, page 144.

¹²¹ Hanko, *The History of the Free Offer*, Ch. 5.

¹²² The Bible is quoted throughout this article from the 1769 Blayney Edition of the 1611 Authorized Version.

¹²³ *Larger Catechism* Q. 59 (page 15).

¹²⁴ Mitchell & Struthers, page lviii.

¹²⁵ Van Dixhoorn, page 206.

(despite Warfield's put down)¹²⁶ is explicitly enshrined in WCF VII.iii with the language of both "requiring" and "promising". Careful distinctions have been made, and this point of debate (which is about the covenant, as Burgess pointed out to Marshall) has been rightly addressed not in the text of WCF III.vi but in WCF VII.iii where it more properly belongs.

Schaff is incorrect to say that WCF VII.iii "is in substance the theory of the school of Saumur."¹²⁷ Chapter 7 of the *Confession*, for instance, presents a standard Reformed bi-covenantal approach to Scripture (covenant of works, covenant of grace) whereas Saumur was famous for Cameron's unique threefold covenant view.¹²⁸ This gained both circulation and currency in England when Assembly member Samuel Bolton attached "Certain Theses or Positions of the Learned John Cameron, Concerning the three-fold Covenant of God with Man" to his work on Christian freedom, published in 1645.¹²⁹ In addition, Amyraut taught "that man has the natural ability so that he *can* respond to the offer of grace but that he *will* not inasmuch as he is morally corrupt"¹³⁰ and so it is doubtful whether he could have affirmed the final clause of WCF VII.iii (or *Larger Catechism* Q. 67) with its insistence on spiritual assistance being necessary to make us both willing *and* able to believe. There is also no room for a conditional decree in WCF II.ii (which states that nothing is contingent to God) or indeed chapter III. So WCF VII.iii is highly unlikely to be a "compromise between conditional universalism taught in the first clause, and particular election taught in the second."¹³¹ Rather it is an affirmation of both particular election and universal offer in their proper places and relations. Chapter III was the place to confess truths about election and divine intentionality; Chapter VII was the place to confess the complimentary truth of the gospel offer and to mention the promise of the Spirit who applies election through faith. One has reference to God's eternal perspective, the other to his temporal dealings with humanity. "These [two] classes of truths, when drawn face to face," says Dabney, "often seem paradoxical," but "there is no real collision" since "God's sovereignty is no revealed rule for our action."¹³²

"Of the Lords Supper"

Chapter XXIX of the *Confession* states that the Lord's Supper is a "Commemoration of that one offering up of himself, by himself, upon the Cross, once for all: and, a spiritual Oblation of all possible praise unto God, for the same: So that, the Popesh Sacrifice of the Mass (as they call it) is most abominably injurious to Christs one, only Sacrifice, the alone Propitiation for all the sins of his elect "(WCF XXIX.ii). It is certainly in complete harmony with limited atonement to say that the cross is the only propitiation for the sins of the elect (the context being a desire to rule out any other propitiatory sacrifice), and that it is the propitiation for all their sins (not just some). We should certainly note, however, that the text does not say the cross is the propitiation for the sins of the elect only. In that sense, hypothetical universalists of various kinds would potentially be able to affirm this statement, though they may not have chosen to phrase it in precisely this way, and could quibble that the final clause does not accurately reflect 1 John 2:2 (the propitiation "for *the sins of the whole world*") since it puts "elect" where 1 John has "whole world." Yet the *Confession* does not at this point cite 1 John 2:2 as its proof, preferring Hebrews 10:14 where the cross is said to have perfected "them that are sanctified." The other proofs at this point (Hebrews 10:11, 12, 18) focus on the unrepeatable nature of Christ's sacrifice, which is what is meant by saying his offering was made "once for all." This section of chapter XXIX is not, therefore, a compromise attempting

¹²⁶ Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly*, page 142.

¹²⁷ P. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom volume 1*, page 773.

¹²⁸ Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, pages 167-171.

¹²⁹ Bolton, *The true bounds of Christian freedom*, pages 353-401.

¹³⁰ Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, pages 94. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom volume 1*, page 481.

¹³¹ Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom volume 1*, pages 772-773.

¹³² Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, page 527.

to say that the atonement was “for all” and also for the elect, nor is it a contradiction of WCF III.vi (as some alleged in the seventeenth century).¹³³

“*Are the elect onely effectually called?*”

One last word should be spared for the *Larger Catechism* debate of May 1647. Mitchell avers that, “when the *Larger Catechism* was being prepared, another effort was made by the representatives of the Davenant school to get their opinions distinctly sanctioned and positively expressed in that formulary.”¹³⁴ The committee suggested:

“Q. What common favours redound from Christ to all mankind?

A. Besides much forebearance and many supplies for this life, which all mankind receive from Christ as Lord of all, they by him are made capable of having salvation tendered to them by the gospel, and are under such dispensations of Providence and operations of the Spirit as lead to repentance.”¹³⁵

“Capable of having salvation tendered to them” sounds like the language Calamy used at the start of the WCF III.vi debate when he said Christ “did pay a price for all... that all men should be *salvabiles*... Christ in giving himselfe did intend to put all men in a state of salvation in case they do beleive.” Lazarus Seaman used similar language when he affirmed that, “All in Adam were made liable to damnation, soe all lyable to salvation in the second Adam.”¹³⁶ The Assembly seemed unhappy with this, and the question was recommitted and “the Commissioners from the Church of Scotland are desired to be present.”¹³⁷ The influence and skill of Rutherford and Gillespie was no doubt required by the particularists in the committee room against these ideas. A compromise was attempted whereby it was said “the gospel where it cometh doth tender salvation by Christ to all”¹³⁸ but the final text of *Larger Catechism* Q.68 speaks only of the elect and others who are “outwardly called.”¹³⁹ The ‘Davenant men’ failed to get their opinions distinctly sanctioned, but they did, it seems, force the Assembly to express itself carefully and in such a way that they could assent to.

CONCLUSIONS

Michael Dewar insists that “it cannot be urged that the ‘Dordracenists’ and the Westminster Fathers were other than polemical in their intentions, and divisive in their results.”¹⁴⁰ With regard to Arminianism and Roman Catholicism that may well be true; yet in relation to British Calvinist hypothetical universalism the picture is not quite so stark. Commenting on chapter 8 of the *Confession*, Richard Baxter is emphatic that it is not against his universalist view (which he claims was that of “half the Divines in England”), and goes on to say,

¹³³ See John Owen’s letter to Peter Du Moulin on the equivalent clause in the *Savoy Confession* (XXX.ii) in P. Toon (ed.), *The Correspondence of John Owen (1616-1683) with an account of his life and work* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1970), pages 165-166.

¹³⁴ Mitchell & Struthers, page lix.

¹³⁵ Mitchell & Struthers, page 369.

¹³⁶ Van Dixhoorn, pages 203, 204.

¹³⁷ Mitchell & Struthers, page 369.

¹³⁸ Mitchell & Struthers, page 393.

¹³⁹ The full text reads: “Q. Are the Elect onely effectually called? A. All the Elect, and they only, are effectually called; although others may be, and often are, outwardly called by the ministry of the Word, and have some common operations of the Spirit, who, for their wilfull neglect and contempt of the grace offerd to them, being justly left in their unbelief, doe never truly come to Jesus Christ.”

¹⁴⁰ M. Dewar, “The Synods of Dort, the Westminster Assembly and the French Reformed Church 1618-1643” in *Churchman* 104.1 (1990), page 38.

“I have spoken with an eminent Divine, yet living, that was of the Assembly, who assured mee that they purposely avoided determining that Controversie, and som of them profest themselves for the middle way of Universal Redemption.”¹⁴¹

This harmonises with the view of Richard Muller who claims that the *Westminster Confession* was designed to be inclusive of those hypothetical universalist views which were “consciously framed to stand within the confessionalism of the Canons of Dort.”¹⁴² He writes:

“The Westminster Confession was in fact written with this diversity in view, encompassing confessionally the variant Reformed views on the nature of the limitation of Christ's satisfaction to the elect, just as it was written to be inclusive of the infra- and the supralapsarian views on predestination.”¹⁴³

Troxel may be technically correct to say that “the *Westminster Confession of Faith* does not teach or endorse the Hypothetical Universalism of Moyses Amyraut.”¹⁴⁴ Yet there were a number of ‘middle ways’, not all of which were, as we have seen, so obviously excluded. Perhaps this has been overlooked because our view of seventeenth century hypothetical universalism has been too monochrome and ‘Amyraldian’, not sufficiently sensitive to the variation which existed at the time. This may well be the fault of Richard Baxter, who found the merger of British hypothetical universalism and Amyraldianism a convenient oversimplification since it gave the impression of “a united and coherent testimony to the correctness of his own version of ‘the middle way’.”¹⁴⁵

It could also be that modern versions of Calvinist universalism are not as sophisticated as the carefully framed Calvinist universalism of a more scholastic age. The most natural reading of parts of the *Confession* could appear to us today to be straightforwardly particularist, but seventeenth century universalists were able to affirm such things by making fine distinctions, even if the language finally adopted did not, as they might have hoped, reflect their own preferences. As Moore comments, this lends credence to the thesis that it was “the universal redemptionists who availed themselves most of scholastic distinctions, whereas it was the strict particular redemptionists who upheld an Augustinian simplicity in their soteriology.”¹⁴⁶

Examined in its historical context, the *Confession* is perhaps less precise on this issue than some would have liked it to be. Whether this came about because of the explicit intent and design of the Assembly as a whole or simply because of the exigencies and fluctuations of ecclesiastical politics it is difficult to say. We cannot conclude with certainty that the Assembly *qua* Assembly was aiming to be tolerant of diversity at this point, though it is clear that Reformed scholars generally at the time did not consider it an issue of such primary importance that they condemned Amyraldian opponents as heretics (particularists like Owen even appreciating much of the work of “the illustrious Amyrald”).¹⁴⁷ There is, nevertheless, the potential for intra-Reformed unity in the end-product of the deliberations at Westminster. Writing at a time when his denomination was considering confessional revision (which he opposed) to allow a large group of Arminians and hypothetical universalists into the fold, B. B. Warfield heartily and eirenicly allows Amyraldians “a right of existence” under the *Confession*, though he thinks “the letter of the symbol scarcely

¹⁴¹ Baxter, *Certain Disputations*, Preface.

¹⁴² R. A. Muller, “John Cameron and Covenant Theology” in *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006), pages 36-37.

¹⁴³ R. A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), pages 76-77.

¹⁴⁴ Troxel, “Amyraut ‘at’ the Assembly”, page 55.

¹⁴⁵ Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, page 219.

¹⁴⁶ Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, page 222 n.19.

¹⁴⁷ See C. R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), page 76 n.38.

See also pages 30-31, 43 n.22.

justifies it.”¹⁴⁸ To put it another way, on this issue as on some others, the Westminster Fathers may well allow for some “shades of opinion within a generic Calvinism.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly*, page 144 n.94 from an article first published in 1901.

¹⁴⁹ Barker, *Puritan Profiles*, page 176.