

Amyraldianism and the Reformed Tradition: Hypothetical Universalism in Context

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Abstract

This essay explores Amyraldianism, or “hypothetical universalism,” as a distinctive current within seventeenth-century Reformed theology. Originating with Moïse Amirault and the Saumur Academy but anticipated by English divines such as John Davenant, the system affirmed that Christ’s atonement was sufficient and intended for all, though applied effectually only to the elect. The study situates Amyraldianism within the debates surrounding the Synod of Dort, the Westminster Assembly, and the Formula Consensus Helvetica, showing how it was alternately tolerated and resisted across Reformed churches. Far from being branded heresy, Amyraldianism was treated as a problematic yet intramural variant of orthodoxy, motivated chiefly by pastoral concern for the sincerity of the gospel offer. Its later reception in Puritanism, evangelical theology, and modern four-point Calvinism underscores its enduring significance as part of the Reformed tradition’s diversity

Introduction

Seventeenth-century Reformed theology, for all its scholastic rigor and its elaborate systems of *loci communes*, was not as monolithic as later textbooks or popular apologists sometimes suggest. Among the many crosscurrents within post-Reformation Protestantism, few were as controversial — and few as difficult to classify — as Amyraldianism, or so-called

“hypothetical universalism.”¹ The system took its name from the French theologian Moïse Amyraut (1596–1664), professor at the Academy of Saumur, though as David Wenkel has shown, it was never simply Amyraut’s own idiosyncratic thought but a broader stream of reflection involving John Cameron, Josué de la Place, Louis Cappel, and even English divines such as John Davenant and Richard Baxter.² The challenge, of course, is to locate Amyraldianism on the theological map: is it Calvinism with a softer edge, a mediating theology straddling the chasm between Dortian orthodoxy and Arminian freedom, or a theological hybrid that belongs fully to neither camp?

The essay that follows seeks to explore Amyraldianism not merely as a curious footnote in the history of Reformed scholasticism, but as a system with its own integrity, theological concerns, and enduring legacy. It will trace its origins in the Saumur school, examine its characteristic doctrines (especially the extent of the atonement), survey the heated debates it provoked, and consider its later reception. Along the way, I will allow myself a few asides, because

¹ Amyraldianism, because it rejects the doctrine of limited atonement while retaining the other four points of the Calvinist mnemonic “TULIP,” is frequently designated “Four-Point Calvinism,” “Moderate Calvinism,” or “Hypothetical Universalism.” In contemporary usage, the term often functions as shorthand for a form of Reformed soteriology that affirms total depravity, unconditional election, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints, but denies definite atonement; see, for example, Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 485–90.

² David Wenkel, “Amyraldianism: Theological Criteria for Identification and Comparative Analysis,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 11 (2005): 84–96. Indeed, Oliver Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014), 185, proposes the term “Scottish hypothetical universalism” to clarify its provenance from Amyraut’s theological mentor, John Cameron. Still, as Gerald Bray, *A History of Christian Theology: A Trinitarian Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024), 914, notes, Amyraut “attributed his main ideas to Cameron. For this reason, the theology attributed to Amyraut might more properly be assigned to Cameron, but as it was Amyraut who expressed it and propagated it, he is the one who takes both the credit and the blame for the ideas it expressed.”

Amyraldianism is nothing if not a story textured with personalities, polemics, and the sometimes-surprising twists of intellectual history.

The Academy of Saumur and Its Milieu

The Academy of Saumur in western France was founded in 1593, in the aftermath of the French Wars of Religion, as a Reformed theological institution meant to rival Geneva and Sedan. Its most famous professor of theology, Moïse Amyraut (who taught at Saumur from 1633 until his death in 1664),³ had studied under John Cameron, a Scottish expatriate whose own innovative emphasis on covenant theology and human freedom provided fertile soil for later developments. Cameron (1579–1625) held that the will is determined by the last dictate of reason, a subtle point of psychology that allowed him to defend both divine sovereignty and a kind of rational freedom.⁴ Amyraut would inherit and refine this idea, but more decisively, he would take up the doctrine of the atonement and press it in a new direction.

Saumur had something of a reputation for intellectual adventurousness. Alongside Amyraut's theology of universal grace, Louis Cappel taught a radical approach to the Hebrew text, questioning the antiquity of the vowel points — an idea that horrified the more conservative orthodox. Josué de la Place (Placæus) proposed a mediating view of original sin that sparked its own controversy. The Academy, in short, became a lightning rod, representing for its critics an unsettling

³ Biographical details are helpfully available in Alan C. Clifford, "A Quick Look at Amyraut," in *Amyraut on Predestination* (Norwich: Charenton Reformed, 2017), 15–36; and *Christ for the World: Affirming Amyraldianism* (Norwich: Charenton Reformed, 2007), 7–43; Roger Nicole, *Moyse Amyraut: A Bibliography with Special Reference to the Controversy on Universal Grace* (New York: Garland, 1981), 4–68.

⁴ Alan Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 31. Bruce Demarest, "Amyraldianism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 41–42, notes similarly.

tendency to innovate under the guise of fidelity to Calvin.⁵ Yet Amyraut and his colleagues consistently claimed that they were not departing from Reformed orthodoxy but clarifying it, or even, as Alan Clifford put it, “perpetuating and reproducing Calvin’s theology.”⁶

Moïse Amyraut and Hypothetical Universalism

Amyraut’s central thesis was straightforward enough in formulation: Christ died for all men, hypothetically, on the condition of faith. God, in his universal salvific will, decreed that Christ’s atonement would be sufficient for all humanity, but efficacious only for the elect, to whom God grants faith by the Spirit. What is decisive in Amyraut’s formulation is not only that God grants faith to the elect but that the decree of Christ’s atoning death logically precedes the decree of election itself. In Amyraldian logic, God first willed that Christ should die for all, thereby making a universal provision of salvation; only then, in a subsequent decree, did God determine to apply this atonement effectually to the elect by granting them faith. As Rolland McCune observes, Ephesians 1 places election “in Christ,” which presupposes that the death of Christ stands logically prior to the decree of election.⁷ This doctrine, sometimes called “hypothetical redemption,” sought to balance the universal language of Scripture (“God so loved the world,” John 3:16) with the Reformed insistence on effectual calling and particular election.

In Amyraut’s own words — from his *Brief Traitté de la prédestination et de ses principales dependances* (1634) — God “desires the salvation of all men under the condition of faith,

⁵ Martin Klauber, *Between Reformed Scholasticism and Pan-Protestantism* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1994), 26.

⁶ Alan Clifford, *Calvinus: Authentic Calvinism; A Clarification* (Norwich, UK: Charenton Reformed, 1996), 15.

⁷ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3 vols. (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008–2010), 2:218–19. McCune’s concise discussion of the three major lapsarian schemes is helpful.

yet he has resolved to give faith to some only.”⁸ This “twofold will” of God (a distinction between His universal salvific will and His particular decree of election) became the hallmark of Amyraldianism. Louis Berkhof later summarized it rather pithily: “a combination of real particularism with a purely ideal universalism.”⁹

Yet to leave matters at that formula would be to underestimate the sophistication of Amyraut’s system. As David Allen has shown, Amyraut’s theology was not a novel departure but a carefully reasoned attempt to reconcile Reformed orthodoxy with the universal offer of the gospel. Like his teacher John Cameron, Amyraut believed that people cannot be summoned to believe in Christ unless it is objectively true that Christ died

⁸ Moïse Amyraut, *Brief Traitté de la prédestination* (Saumur, 1634), trans. Richard Lum (Springfield, IL: Scholarly Reprints, 1985), v. Originally published as *Traitté des religions contra ceux qui les estiment toutes indifferentes* (Saumur: Girard & Lerpinière, 1631, 1652). An early English translation is *A Treatise Concerning Religions, in Refutation of the Opinion Which Accounts All Indifferent* (London: M. Simons, 1660). Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvin and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth Century France* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1969), 82, writes that the *Brief Traitté* “did precipitate a ‘civil war’ within Reformed Protestantism,” and Frans Pieter van Stam, *The Controversy over the Theology of Saumur, 1635-1650, Disrupting Debates Among the Huguenots in Complicated Circumstances* (Amsterdam and Maarssen: APA-Holland University Press, 1988), 276, states, “The conflict of Saumur assumed the harshness of trench warfare: people opposed each other in publications without seeing each other’s faces, each from behind his own defenses.” As Armstrong, *op. cit.*, 166, 185 notes, “Orthodoxy manifested an almost neurotic fear that somehow a sacred theological system might crumble if certain interpretations were allowed” and “although Amyraut indicated that, if necessary, he was perfectly willing to leave these two wills in tension, such an idea was utterly inconceivable to the orthodox.” For a fair overview of Amyraut’s views on predestination and the atonement written by a critic, see Amar Djaballah, “Controversy on Universal Grace: A Historical Survey of Moïse Amyraut’s *Brief Traitté de la Prédestination*” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definitive Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 165–199.

⁹ E. F. Karl Müller, “Amyraut, Moïse,” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1951), 160.

for them. The free offer of salvation, in his view, requires an atonement of genuinely universal scope.¹⁰ His opponents, such as Theodore Beza, defined the atonement as limited by design, extent, and application exclusively to the elect. Amyraut, by contrast, argued that he was teaching nothing more than Calvin himself had maintained — namely, that Christ's death constituted an objective satisfaction for the sins of the world and thus formed the basis of the sincere gospel call.¹¹ As Andrew T. B. McGowan has commented,

Amyraut had no intention of rejecting the Reformed heritage stemming from Calvin. He believed that the Scriptures do have a universalist as well as a particularist view of the atonement and that both of these had to be expressed in any theology of the atonement. The problem was that Amyraut's solution suited neither the universalists nor the particularists.¹²

A key component of Amyraut's innovation was his covenantal framework. Whereas earlier Reformed theology operated largely within a twofold covenantal scheme — covenant of works with Adam, covenant of grace with believers — Amyraut developed “a tripartite covenantal structure”: the covenant of nature (with Adam, grounded in obedience to the natural law), the covenant of law (with Israel, grounded in the Mosaic code), and the covenant of grace (with humanity in Christ).¹³ Within the covenant of grace, Amyraut further distinguished between a universal, conditional covenant (God's offer of salvation to all on the condition of faith) and an unconditional covenant of particular grace (God's sovereign bestowal of faith upon the

¹⁰ David L. Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 163.

¹¹ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 164–65.

¹² Andrew T. B. McGowan, “Amyraldianism,” in *Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor Hart and Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 13.

¹³ Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 485; cf. Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 164.

elect).¹⁴ The tension of Amyraldianism therefore lies precisely in this double aspect: universal in scope, yet particular in execution.

This correlates with Amyraut's celebrated doctrine of the *twofold will of God*. God wills universally and conditionally the salvation of all, on the condition of faith, and God wills particularly and unconditionally to give faith to the elect.¹⁵ As Amyraut himself stressed, this was not a division of God's will into contradictory parts but a distinction within the one divine will — between what God reveals in the gospel and what God ordains secretly in election.¹⁶ His concern was to preserve the integrity of gospel preaching: preachers may say to every hearer, without deception, "Christ died for you."

For Amyraut, the atonement itself was truly universal in extent. Christ bore the sins of all humanity in his death, such that the atonement was objectively sufficient and designed for all. The limitation appears only in its application, restricted to the elect by God's sovereign gift of faith.¹⁷ This means that, in Amyraut's system, Christ did not merely make salvation possible but actually atoned for the sins of all men. The problem of unbelief, therefore, does not lie in the inadequacy of the atonement but in the absence of regenerating grace.¹⁸

¹⁴ Demarest, "Amyraldianism," 41–42.

¹⁵ E.g., Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 485–86; Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 164–65.

¹⁶ Contra D. A. Carson, "Calvinism/Reformed," lecture at EFCA Theology Pre-Conference, Trinity International University, January 28, 2015, comments at the 57:25–61:52 minutes mark, available online, <http://go.efca.org/resources/media/calvinismreformed>; cited in Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 165n98. Carson contends that Amyraut held to a doctrine of two distinct divine wills; however, contrast with Allen, who argues this is a caricature, maintaining instead that "Amyraut understood God's [single] will to have two aspects, a universal/conditional aspect and a particular/unconditional aspect." Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 164.

¹⁷ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 165.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

It is precisely here that critics pressed hardest. If Christ atoned for the sins of the reprobate, was the result not an “empty atonement”? How could Christ die for those whom God had eternally decreed to pass over?¹⁹ The Genevan theologians of the 1640s drew up theses rejecting the Saumur teaching as contrary to Scripture and experience, arguing that the “universality of saving grace” undermined the particularity of God’s decree.²⁰ Francis Turretin, though more cautious, nevertheless judged Amyraut’s ordering of the decrees dangerously close to the Remonstrants.²¹ Still, Turretin stopped short of condemning Amyraut as a heretic, acknowledging that his theology remained within the Reformed family.²²

Amyraut, for his part, steadfastly denied any kinship with the Arminians. He rejected synergism, affirmed total depravity, unconditional election, and effectual grace. His quarrel was not with Calvinism per se but with what he saw as Beza’s overly rigid “extreme Calvinism,” which, in his judgment, had provoked the rise of Arminianism in the first place.²³ The universal extent of the atonement was, for Amyraut, a necessary corollary of God’s revealed will and the very foundation of gospel proclamation. In his own defense, he tirelessly maintained his subscription to the Canons of Dort and was acquitted of heresy at multiple French national synods.²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid., 165–66.

²⁰ D. Grohman, *The Genevan Reactions to the Saumur Doctrines of Hypothetical Universalism: 1635–1685* (ThD diss., Knox College, 1971), 233–35; cited in Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 167.

²¹ Francis Turretin, *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (Geneva: Samuel de Tournes, 1679–85), 4.17.4.

²² Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:76–77.

²³ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 163.

²⁴ Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 15.

In retrospect, Amyraut's hypothetical universalism appears less as a betrayal of Calvinism than as one of its more ambitious internal restatements. As Robert Letham observes, Amyraut "died in the Reformed Church, remained within it, and believed himself to be carrying forward the theology of Calvin."²⁵ What divided him from his critics was not the fundamentals of grace but the scope of the Redeemer's intention.

The English Connection: Davenant, Ussher, and Baxter

One of the most interesting features of Amyraldianism is its Anglo-French bridge. Long before Amyraut's *Traitté* appeared, John Davenant (1572–1641), Bishop of Salisbury and delegate to the Synod of Dort, articulated a theology that was broadly Amyraldian.²⁶ In his *Dissertation on the Death of Christ*, Davenant taught that Christ's death was sufficient for all and intended for all conditionally, though efficacious only for the elect. He thus anticipated, almost verbatim, Amyraut's later points of doctrine.²⁷ Wenkel observes that Roger Nicole's summary of Amyraldianism is "nearly identical" to Davenant's outline.²⁸

David Allen underscores the importance of Davenant's work in bridging the French and English traditions. For Davenant, the universality of the atonement was grounded in the revealed will of God. He was careful to clarify that while Christ's death secured an objective reconciliation for all, its saving application was limited to those who believed.²⁹ Davenant

²⁵ Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 320.

²⁶ Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998), 36. On Davenant, see Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 177–80.

²⁷ For an explication, see Wenkel, "Amyraldianism," 94–96, drawing upon the *FCH* and Roger Nicole, *Moyse Amyraut: A Bibliography*, 9–10.

²⁸ Wenkel, "Amyraldianism," 90; cf. John Davenant, *A Dissertation on the Death of Christ, as to the Extent of its Benefits*, trans. Josiah Allport (London: Hamilton, Adams, 1832), 337–39.

²⁹ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 165.

never abandoned particular election; rather, his hypothetical universalism allowed him to hold both to the sincerity of the gospel offer and the certainty of salvation for the elect.³⁰ As Theophilus Gale later observed, divines like Davenant and Ussher “held Christ’s death to be an universal remedy applicable to all, but yet far from asserting an universal subjective grace.”³¹ In other words, they affirmed the extent of Christ’s atonement as universal without collapsing into Arminian synergism.

James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, occupied a similar middle ground. He spoke of Christ’s death as having “purchased reconciliation” for all men, though applied only to believers.³² His careful distinctions reveal just how porous the borders between “strict” Calvinism and “hypothetical universalism” could be. Ussher shared with Davenant the conviction that the revealed will of God entails a genuine desire for the salvation of all men, even while God’s secret will ordains the salvation of the elect only.³³ For both divines, this double aspect of God’s will safeguarded the universal proclamation of the gospel.

Richard Baxter (1615–1691), the restless Puritan pastor of Kidderminster, also gravitated toward Amyraldian categories. His *Catholic Theology and Universal Redemption of Mankind* (1694) developed a soteriology that left him — as Edward Dowden quipped — “too Arminian for the high Calvinists and too Calvinistic for the Arminians.”³⁴ Baxter’s practical concern was pastoral: he sought a ground for the free and well-meant

³⁰ John Davenant, *A Dissertation on the Death of Christ, as to the Extent of its Benefits*, trans. Josiah Allport (London: Hamilton, Adams, 1832), 337–39.

³¹ Theophilus Gale, *The Court of the Gentiles* (London: William Freeman, 1682), 4:3:150.

³² W. Robert Godfrey, “Reformed Thought on the Extent of the Atonement to 1618,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 37.2 (1975), 169.

³³ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 165–66.

³⁴ Richard Baxter, as quoted in Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 224n51.

offer of the gospel, while still upholding particular election. That “Baxterianism” became almost a sub-variant of Amyraldianism tells us something about the elasticity of the label.

Allen notes that Baxter’s view was not a carbon copy of Amyraut’s, but a pastoral development of the same impulse: to maintain that the atonement was universally intended in some sense, such that any hearer of the gospel could be told with sincerity that Christ died for them.³⁵ Baxter’s voluminous writings, though sometimes inconsistent, reveal his deep anxiety to protect the integrity of the free offer of grace. The Kidderminster ministry — famous for its catechetical rigor and evangelistic fervor — was powered by precisely this conviction: that no sinner was excluded from the call of the gospel.³⁶

Even John Bunyan has been pulled into the orbit. Though there is little evidence he read Amyraut, some historians have detected Amyraldian tendencies in his doctrine of atonement.³⁷ Whether fair or not, the association indicates how “Amyraldian” could become shorthand for any Reformed theology that resisted a tightly defined limited atonement.

In retrospect, the English connection demonstrates that Amyraldianism was never simply a French peculiarity. Hypothetical universalism was alive at Dort through men like Davenant and Martinius of Bremen, it was systematized in England through Ussher and Baxter, and it continued to influence Puritan preaching and pastoral theology well into the later seventeenth century. Richard Muller rightly cautions against treating Amyraldianism as an aberration: figures like Davenant and Baxter, despite their differences, “stood within

³⁵ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 167.

³⁶ Richard Baxter, *Universal Redemption of Mankind by the Lord Jesus Christ: Stated and Cleared by the Late Learned Mr. Richard Baxter, Whereunto Is Added a Short Account of Special Redemption, by the Same Author* (London: T. Parkhurst, 1694)45–48.

³⁷ Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism* (Dallas: Scholarly Reprints, 1990), 73. Cf. Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 465–467.

the boundaries established by the major national confessions and catechisms of the Reformed churches.”³⁸

Synod of Dort and Westminster: Contours of the Debate

The great international Synod of Dort (1618–19), convened to answer the Remonstrants, looms large in the background. Its canons famously asserted that Christ’s death was “abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world” but effectual only for the elect.³⁹ This balance is reflected in the Canons’ treatment of unbelief:

“However, that many who have been called through the gospel do not repent or believe in Christ but perish in unbelief is not because the sacrifice of Christ offered on the cross is deficient or insufficient, but because they themselves are at fault.”⁴⁰

Such language, emphasizing that unbelief stems from the sinner and not from any deficiency in Christ’s sacrifice, resonates with Amyraldian formulations and shows how close the Synod came to speaking in hypothetical universalist terms. That phrase, ambiguous as it was, left space for divergent interpretations. Amyraut and Baxter both claimed continuity with Dort, arguing that their hypothetical universalism was simply an elaboration of Dort’s sufficiency–efficiency distinction. Critics, however, insisted that they were undermining the very intention of the canons.

Allen points out that Dort was intentionally crafted as a compromise between conservative delegates, such as those from Geneva, and more moderate voices from England and Bremen.⁴¹ It should also be kept in mind that a significant

³⁸ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:79–80.

³⁹ Canons of Dort, Second Head, Article 3.

⁴⁰ Canons of Dort, III/IV.6)

⁴¹ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 168.

portion of the delegates at Dort were sublapsarian rather than supralapsarian. As G. Michael Thomas has demonstrated, nearly two-thirds of the assembly affirmed some kind of universal sufficiency in Christ's death, even if coupled with particular efficacy for the elect. Thus the Synod's canons were not drafted in a vacuum but reflected this broader consensus within Reformed orthodoxy.⁴² While the Genevan divines pressed for a more exclusivist definition of grace, the majority of the Synod left the canons sufficiently broad to accommodate differing formulations.⁴³ This ambiguity explains why men like Davenant, who were active at Dort, could subscribe to the canons with integrity while espousing a form of hypothetical universalism. Donald Grohman makes the same point: the Synod "decidedly did not rule out the liberal theology of the delegates from England and Bremen."⁴⁴

Yet not all Reformed churches were content with Dort's compromise. The Genevan pastors, suspicious of Saumur's influence, drew up a series of theses in 1641 demanding subscription from Alexandre Morus, a suspected Amyraldian. These theses, eventually codified as the *Genevan Articles of 1649*, categorically rejected hypothetical universalism.⁴⁵ They insisted that Christ's death was destined solely for the elect, and they explicitly repudiated the idea that Christ died "for all conditionally if they believe."⁴⁶ As Allen has pointed out, the Genevan Articles represented a more rigid stance than Dort itself, effectively excluding even Calvin and Bullinger had they been judged by its standards.⁴⁷

⁴² G. Michael Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 214–18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 168–69.

⁴⁴ Donald Grohman, *The Genevan Reactions to the Saumur Doctrines of Hypothetical Universalism: 1635–1685* (ThD diss., Knox College, 1971), 154–56; cited in Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 168.

⁴⁵ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 167–68.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 168–69.

This tightening of boundaries highlights the contested reception of Dort. On the one hand, Dort provided a capacious formula: Christ's death was "sufficient for all, efficient only for the elect." On the other, Geneva and later Switzerland attempted to foreclose Amyraldian interpretations by issuing documents like the Genevan Articles and, later, the Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675).⁴⁸ Muller rightly observes that this illustrates the internal diversity of Reformed orthodoxy: Dort's canons set minimum boundaries, but regional confessions could and in fact did press the line more narrowly.⁴⁹

In England, the Westminster Assembly (1643–1653) leaned more decisively toward particular redemption. Its *Confession of Faith* (ch. 8.5) states that Christ "did, by the price of his obedience and sacrifice, fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf." Though not naming Amyraldianism, the confession's wording resists a universal intention. Indeed, the Assembly debated whether to include a broader sufficiency clause, but the majority declined.⁵⁰

Allen notes, however, that the Westminster Confession was drafted to allow some latitude.⁵¹ As both Warfield and Muller have emphasized, the framers sought to accommodate both infra- and supralapsarians, and in the same way they left room for "moderate Calvinists" like Davenant or Martinus,

⁴⁸ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols., 6th ed., rev. David S. Schaff (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1:486.

⁴⁹ Richard A. Muller, "Diversity in the Reformed Tradition: A Historiographical Introduction," in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Oakville, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 19.

⁵⁰ Chad Van Dixhoorn, *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University, 2012), 3:212–15.

⁵¹ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 169. See also Lee Gattis, "Shades of Opinion with a Generic Calvinism: The Particular Redemption Debate at the Westminster Assembly," *Reformed Theological Review* 69.2 (2010), 101–118.

whose formulations of universal grace were not judged heretical.⁵² In this sense, Westminster mirrors Dort: while the prevailing tone favored strict particularism, the language stopped short of explicit exclusion.

This did not stop English divines from holding Amyraldian positions privately. Davenant's *Dissertation* circulated widely, and "moderate Calvinists" found ways to reconcile their Dort subscription with hypothetical universalism. Here we see a pattern: Amyraldianism often flourished less as a confessional norm and more as a tolerated variant, whispered rather than trumpeted. The canons and confession drew a perimeter broad enough to include, if uncomfortably, those who sought to affirm both the universal offer of the gospel and the certainty of election.

The Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675)⁵³

The most decisive reaction against Amyraldianism came not in France, where Saumur itself was closed in 1681, but in Switzerland. Johann Heinrich Heidegger, with the assistance of Francis Turretin and Lucas Gernler, drafted the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (FCH) of 1675 as a bulwark against Saumur's influence. Philip Schaff memorably called it a "Formula anti-Salmuriensis, or anti-Amyraldensis,"⁵⁴ and described it as "the product of scholasticism, which formulated the faith of Calvin into a stiff doctrinal system, and

⁵² B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (New York: Oxford University, 1931), 56; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:76–77.

⁵³ For the text, see *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 4 vols., Compiled with Introductions by James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014), 4:516–530. See also Martin I. Klauber, "The Helvetic Formula Consensus (1675): An Introduction and Translation," *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990), 103–123; Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 1:477–489. Klauber's translation of the Formula is used in *Reformed Confessions*, along with the original introductory preface translated by Richard Bishop.

⁵⁴ Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 1:478.

anxiously surrounded it with high walls to keep out the light of freedom and progress.”⁵⁵

The FCH directly targeted the five points of Saumur theology: it rejected the notion of a universal salvific will, insisted on the immediate imputation of Adam’s sin (against de la Place), and underscored the strict particularity of Christ’s atonement. Article XVI even mocked the “impossible condition, provided they believe,” as a hollow offer.⁵⁶ The consensus did not endure long — Swiss churches eventually abandoned it as too divisive — but it demonstrates the degree to which Amyraldianism was perceived as a threat to orthodoxy.

Allen emphasizes that Turretin’s role in the controversy was crucial. Though he opposed Amyraldianism, he never claimed it lay outside Reformed boundaries. Instead, he regarded it as a problematic but still intramural position, too close to the Remonstrants on the ordering of the decrees but distinct in its affirmation of unconditional election and effectual grace.⁵⁷ Turretin’s involvement in the FCH was therefore motivated less by a desire to excommunicate Saumur than to preserve doctrinal clarity for the Swiss churches.

Muller notes that the preface of the Formula Consensus consciously referred to the Saumur faculty as “respected foreign brethren,” acknowledging their place on the same “foundation of faith” even while censuring their theology as troubling to the confessional unity of the church.⁵⁸ In this way, the FCH illustrates a central feature of Reformed

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1:486.

⁵⁶ John H. Leith, *Creeeds of the Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 316.

⁵⁷ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 166; citing B. T. Inman, *God’s Covenant in Christ: The Unifying Role of Theology Proper in the Systematic Theology of Francis Turretin* (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2004), 390–93.

⁵⁸ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:76–77; *Formula Consensus Helvetica*, preface, in H. A. Niemeyer, *Collectio confessionum* (Leipzig: Julius Kinkhardl, 1840), 729–30.

orthodoxy: it was capable of sharp internal polemics without necessarily drawing the line of heresy.

The irony, of course, is that Amyraut himself had been acquitted of heresy by the French national Synods Alençon (1637), Charenton (1644–1645), and Loudon (1659). His theology was controversial, yes, but not condemned outright. The contrast between his reception in France and the vehemence of Swiss Calvinists illustrates the regional diversity of Reformed orthodoxy. What was tolerated as a variant in France and England was resisted in Switzerland as an existential threat.

The short-lived authority of the FCH also demonstrates how intramural battles could quickly lose their urgency. By the eighteenth century, the Formula had largely fallen into desuetude, and its rigid stance came to be regarded as excessive. Muller aptly summarizes: Amyraldianism “was not identified as a heresy but as a problematic teaching,” symptomatic of the variety within Reformed scholasticism rather than evidence of decline.⁵⁹

Theological and Pastoral Stakes

Why did Amyraldianism matter so much? At one level, the dispute turned on scholastic minutiae, such as orders of decrees, logical priority, sufficiency versus efficiency. Yet not all agreed that the issues were merely scholastic; indeed, to reduce the controversy to fine distinctions of logical order obscures its pastoral and evangelistic weight. For many, Amyraldianism’s real significance lay in its robust insistence that the gospel could be preached freely to all without hesitation. But at another, more existential level, it concerned the very proclamation of the gospel. Could a preacher, with integrity, say to every hearer, “Christ died for you”? Amyraldians thought yes, because Christ’s death was

⁵⁹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:77.

universally intended, conditionally.⁶⁰ High Calvinists feared such a claim undermined assurance, grounding it in a hypothetical rather than the concrete decree of election.

Here Amyraut's pastoral and homiletical concern comes into focus. Following John Cameron, he insisted that no one can be called to believe in Christ unless it is true that Christ actually died for them.⁶¹ For him, the "object of faith" had to be universally suitable; otherwise, the preacher's summons to repent and believe would lack sincerity. The universal extent of the atonement thus functioned as the foundation for the free and well-meant offer of the gospel. Without it, Amyraut feared, the proclamation of salvation risked collapsing into a proclamation only for the elect — something no preacher could know in advance.⁶²

Amyraut's critics charged him with inconsistency: if Christ bore the sins of the reprobate, did this not amount to an "empty atonement"?⁶³ But Amyraut countered that the problem lay not in the atonement itself but in man's inability. God's revealed will offers salvation to all, but the hidden will of election determines its application. In this way, he could preserve both the universal call and the certainty of particular redemption.

There were also pressing pastoral questions about assurance. Joel Beeke has shown how seventeenth-century Reformed Christians wrestled with the quest for "full assurance" of salvation.⁶⁴ For many, strict particularism raised an unsettling problem: could one know if Christ died for them personally?

⁶⁰ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1948), 3:190–91. Cf. Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 194–95.

⁶¹ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 163.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 164.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 165–66.

⁶⁴ Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 223–28.

Amyraldians believed their system offered a more pastoral answer. Since Christ died for all, the gospel invitation could be addressed to each sinner without hesitation. As Allen notes, “Universal atonement was necessary to Amyraut’s universal, conditional covenant and expression of the universal saving will of God.”⁶⁵ For the anxious believer, this meant that the call to faith was not shadowed by hidden exclusion.

The dispute, then, was not merely logical but profoundly practical. Baxter, for example, was driven by his pastoral burden in Kidderminster. His theology of universal redemption undergirded his famous preaching ministry, which sought to impress upon every parishioner that Christ’s sacrifice was relevant to them personally.⁶⁶ For Baxter, to proclaim otherwise would risk dulling the edge of evangelistic urgency. His Amyraldian leanings were, at their core, an attempt to make sure the gospel call rang clear in every ear.

For their critics, however, this universality risked diluting assurance rather than strengthening it. High Calvinists argued that grounding confidence in a hypothetical atonement left believers suspended in uncertainty until they discerned their own election. Turretin, for example, complained that Amyraldianism blurred the sharpness of God’s decree, replacing concrete intention with conditional possibility.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, the persistence of Amyraldian theology across France and England suggests that its pastoral appeal outweighed its scholastic difficulties. The balance it sought — between the universality of the gospel call and the particularity of saving grace — addressed not only theological coherence but also the lived experience of preaching and believing the gospel.

⁶⁵ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 164.

⁶⁶ Baxter, *Universal Redemption of Mankind*, 45–48.

⁶⁷ Francis Turretin, *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (Geneva: Samuel de Tournes, 1679–85), 4.17.4.

Amyraldianism in Retrospect

By the eighteenth century, Amyraldianism had largely faded as a distinct school, though its influence lingered. In New England, Jonathan Edwards engaged with the works of English hypothetical universalists.⁶⁸ In the nineteenth century, Heinrich Heppe's dogmatics textbook presented Amyraldianism as a legitimate Reformed variant, influencing generations of students.⁶⁹ In the twentieth, Lewis Sperry Chafer of Dallas Theological Seminary adopted a broadly Amyraldian view of the atonement, bringing the system into evangelical circles.⁷⁰ More recently, Norman L. Geisler has explicitly identified himself as a 'moderate Calvinist,'⁷¹ and Bruce A. Demarest,⁷² Millard J. Erickson,⁷³ and Rolland McCune⁷⁴ have similarly articulated a four-point Calvinist position that rejects limited atonement while generally affirming the other distinctives of Reformed soteriology, thereby perpetuating the Amyraldian pattern in contemporary evangelical theology. Across the pond, Alan C. Clifford is a leading British Amyraldian pastor of Norwich Reformed

⁶⁸ Stephen Strehle, "Universal Grace and Amyraldianism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51.2 (1989): 356.

⁶⁹ Heinrich L. J. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. E. Bizer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978).

⁷⁰ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:184–189.

⁷¹ See Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2010), *passim*, where he explicitly identifies his position as "moderate Calvinism," i.e., four-point Calvinism.

⁷² Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 158–66, 189–95, affirms a universal provision of the atonement with particular application to the elect, thus articulating a four-point Calvinist position though without employing the "moderate Calvinist" label.

⁷³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 753–768. Erickson, *op. cit.*, 761, summarizes: "We conclude that the hypothesis of universal atonement is able to account for a larger segment of the biblical witness with less distortion than is the hypothesis of limited atonement."

⁷⁴ Rolland D. McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3 vols. (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008–2010), 2:205–219.

Church in England who has written extensively on the subject of Amyraldianism and the extent of the atonement.⁷⁵

Allen observes that the enduring appeal of Amyraldianism lay less in its scholastic precision and more in its pastoral practicality.⁷⁶ Even when dismissed as logically inconsistent, it offered a framework in which the preacher could proclaim Christ's death to all with sincerity, while the theologian could still affirm God's particular decree of election. In this sense, it mediated between what he calls "the rigor of Beza and the looseness of Arminius," allowing the gospel call to remain wide without surrendering the sovereignty of grace.⁷⁷

Some modern Amyraldians have articulated the doctrine of "temporal atonement," by which Christ's death universally averts immediate judgment and secures a provisional reprieve from divine wrath for all humanity. This reprieve grants space for the gospel to be offered during earthly life, so that the universal conditions of salvation remain genuinely open while life lasts, though they are effectually applied only to the elect. In this sense, Christ may be called the "Savior of all men, especially of believers" (1 Tim 4:10),⁷⁸ and the development of

⁷⁵ E.g., Alan C. Clifford, *Amyraut Affirmed or 'Owenism, a caricature of Calvinism'* (Norwich, UK: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 2004); idem, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640–1790* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); idem, *Calvinus: Authentic Calvinism: A Clarification* (Norwich, UK: Charenton Reformed, 1996); idem, "Justification: The Calvin-Saumur Perspective," *Evangelical Quarterly* 79.4 (October 2007), 331–348; idem, ed. *Christ for the World: Affirming Amyraldianism* (Norwich, U.K.: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 2007).

⁷⁶ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 169–70.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 170.

⁷⁸ See e.g. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 142–43, 163–64, 190–91, and recent discussions in contemporary Amyraldian circles, as in, e.g., Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died: A Biblical Case for Unlimited Atonement*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 67, 72–3; Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3: *Sin, Salvation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2004), 359; Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 2:409–10. For a Calvinist and delegate to the Synod of Dort who cited 1 Tim 4:10 in support of universal atonement, see Ludovici Crocie (Ludwig Crocius, AD 1586/7–1653/5), *Syntagma sacrae theologiae quatuor libris*

this temporal category illustrates the ongoing adaptability of Amyraldian theology to new contexts.

Today, the debate continues in muted form. Contemporary Reformed theologians still spar over whether Calvin himself leaned toward a more universal atonement (the so-called “Calvin versus the Calvinists” debate).⁷⁹ Amyraldianism has been reevaluated not as a betrayal of Calvinism but as one possible development within its diverse tradition. Muller is insistent on this point: “There is no justification for identifying any one of these strains of Reformed thought as outside the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy.”⁸⁰ Amyraut, Davenant, Baxter, and their like were not renegades but representatives of the breadth of post-Reformation Reformed identity.

Muller further reminds us that Amyraldianism never led to schism. “On none of these issues,” he writes of the seventeenth-century debates, “did the Reformed churches rupture into separate confessional bodies or identify a particular theologically defined group as beyond the bounds of the confessions, as had been the case at the Synod of Dort.”⁸¹ Amyraut was exonerated repeatedly by French synods, and the Formula Consensus Helvetica, though severe in tone, still acknowledged Saumur as composed of “respected brethren.” Far from being a heresy, Amyraldianism was a “problematic teaching” — one of many internal debates that gave texture to the diversity of Reformed scholasticism.

In this light, Amyraldianism’s legacy persists not as a failed experiment but as a reminder of Reformed theology’s internal

adornatum, Quo exhibetur idea Dogmatum Ecclesiasticorum, Pro conditione ecclesiae Sardensis (Bremæ: Typis Bertholdi Villeriani, 1636), 1013–14.

⁷⁹ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 65, notes, “In 1983, the *Evangelical Quarterly* devoted an issue to the discussion of the ‘Calvin vs. the Calvinists’ debate, including papers given at the 1982 Historical Theology Study Group of the Tyndale Fellowship.”

⁸⁰ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:79–80.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1:76–77.

range. Whenever preachers insist that Christ's death is sincerely offered to all while salvation is effectually applied only to the elect, they stand, knowingly or not, in the shadow of Amyraut.

Conclusion

Amyraldianism is a reminder that Reformed theology was never frozen in what would become the five points of the TULIP,⁸² but a living, contested, and richly varied tradition. Moïse Amyraut, John Cameron, John Davenant, Richard Baxter — these figures struggled to articulate a gospel that could be both universally offered and particularly applied. Their hypothetical universalism sought to thread the needle between Arminian openness and strict Calvinist particularism.

Whether one judges their effort a noble clarification or an inconsistent compromise depends largely on one's theological instincts. Yet historically speaking, Amyraldianism deserves recognition not as a fringe heresy but as a serious attempt to wrestle with the breadth of God's love and the depth of his decree. As Allen has shown, the real issue at stake was not scholastic curiosity but the integrity of gospel preaching.⁸³ Could the minister, with sincerity, tell every hearer that Christ died for them? Amyraut and his heirs insisted yes, grounding the free offer in the universal intent of the atonement. Their opponents feared such universality blurred the sharpness of

⁸² The familiar TULIP acrostic, often assumed to originate with the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) or John Calvin, is in fact a twentieth-century development. Evidence points to a 1905 lecture by Presbyterian theologian Cleland Boyd McAfee before the Presbyterian Union in Newark, New Jersey, as its origin. McAfee devised TULIP as an English mnemonic for the Five Points of Calvinism; the earliest printed attribution to him appears in a 1913 article by William H. Vail. Its widespread use came later through Loraine Boettner's *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932), which popularized the acronym in Reformed circles. See further Kenneth J. Stewart *10 Myths About Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), chap. 3.

⁸³ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 170.

divine election, but the debate itself demonstrates the enduring struggle to reconcile divine sovereignty with the universality of the call.

Moreover, Amyraldianism exposes the diversity of the Reformed tradition. Muller has persuasively argued that seventeenth-century Reformed theology cannot be reduced to a single, monolithic model.⁸⁴ Cocceians, Voetians, Cartesians, Saumurians, and English “moderates” all pressed their formulations without rupturing the confessional fabric.⁸⁵ Amyraldianism thus belongs not to the margins but to the spectrum of Reformed orthodoxy, tolerated in some contexts, resisted in others, but never declared heretical by the broad church.

Its legacy persists in unexpected places. From Baxter’s Kidderminster pulpit to Edwards’s reflections in New England, from Heppe’s dogmatics in the nineteenth century to Erickson’s systematic theology in the twentieth, the impulse toward a universal atonement within a particularist framework has never vanished. Whenever a preacher

⁸⁴ Muller, “Diversity in the Reformed Tradition: A Historiographical Introduction,” 17–19. Elsewhere, Muller expresses an axiom that is certainly relevant to the present study: “On the one hand, generalized conceptions of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation fail to do justice to the complexity of history and on the other hand, they fail to illuminate very specific trajectories of thought that bear directly on the specifics of Calvin’s own work.” See Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University, 2000), 185.

⁸⁵ Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 766, lists the following as “Classic/Moderate Calvinists” who held to a form of universal atonement: “J. Calvin, P. Vermigli, W. Musculus, J. Oecolampadius, G. Zanchi, A. Marlorate, H. Bullinger, U. Zwingli, M. Luther, Z. Ursinus, J. Kimerdoncius, D. Paraeus, R. Rollock, T. Cranmer, H. Latimer, M. Coverdale, J. Ussher, J. Davenant, E. Culverwell, S. Ward, J. Hall, L. Crocius, J. H. Alsted, M. Martinius, J. Cameron, M. Amyraut, J. Daille, J. Preston, G. Bucanus, R. Baxter, E. Polhill, R. Harris, J. Saurin, E. Calamy, S. Marshall, R. Vines, L. Seaman, H. Scudder, J. Arrowsmith, T. Adams, J. Bunyan, S. Charnock, J. Howe, W. Bates, J. Humfrey, J. Truman, G. Swinnock, J. Edwards, D. Brainerd, A. Fuller (later writings), J. C. Ryle, T. Chalmers, R. Wardlaw, A. Strong, N. Douty, A. C. Clifford, M. Erickson, B. Demarest, C. Daniel, B. Ware.”

proclaims that Christ's death is sufficient for all while effectual only for the elect, the Saumur voice echoes across the centuries.

To borrow a phrase from Alan Sell, Amyraldianism was "the great debate" of its age.⁸⁶ But it is more than a relic of historical controversy. It remains a living question at the intersection of divine sovereignty, human responsibility, and the universality of the gospel call. Amyraut's system, for all its logical tensions, reminds us that theology is never merely an exercise in deduction; it is an effort to proclaim good news to sinners. The free and well-meant offer of the gospel was his lodestar, and in that aim, at least, he continues to hold a challenge before us: to preach Christ crucified for the world, and Christ risen for His elect.

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⁸⁶ Sell, *The Great Debate*, 99.

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