

THE FIGHT FOR THE REFORMED FAITH

DEBATE ON REDEMPTION AT THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY

Rev. David Blunt M.Sc., Dip. Theol.
(From *British Reformed Journal* No. 13 Jan -Mar. 1996)

Main Participants

Rev. Edmund Calamy,	of Aldermanbury, London.
Rev. Herbert Palmer,	of Ashwell, Herts., and Master of Queen 's College, Cambridge.
Rev. Edward Reynolds,	of Braunston, Northampton.
Rev . Lazarus Seaman,	of All Hallows, Bread Street, London.
Rev. Thomas Young,	of Stowmarket, Suffolk, and Master of Jesus College, Cambridge.
Rev. George Gillespie,	of Edinburgh, - (Scottish Commissioner).
Rev. Stephen Marshall,	of Finchingfield, Essex.
Rev. Samuel Rutherford	of St. Andrews, - (Scottish Commissioner).
Rev. Henry Wilkinson	of Waddesdon, Bucks. *
Dr. Cornelius Burges,	of Watford, Herts.
Dr. John Lightfoot,	of Ashley, Staffs.
Rev. William Price	of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, London.
Rev. Richard Vines	of Calcot, Warks., Master of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, and a minister in London.
Dr. Thomas Goodwin,	of London.
Dr. Robert Harris	of Hanwell, Oxford.

(* It is possible that the speaker in this debate may have been his son of the same name, minister of St. Dunstan's, London, and also a member of the Assembly).

All works cited herein are listed in the bibliography at the end of this article.

In the progress of the debate, the original proposition that Christ redeemed the elect only (the Minute records it: "Debate about Redemption of the elect only by Christ"), was exchanged for this; 'That Christ *did intend* to redeem the elect only.' (It is important to remember that the propositions stated in the Minutes were not indicative of the view of the assembly itself, but were propositions put forward for debate, (Cf. H.HANKO, "Answer"). This exchange seems likely to have been the response of the stricter Calvinists to the line taken in the opening speech by Calamy: "Christ did pay a price for all, - absolute intention

for the elect, conditional intention for the reprobate in case they do believe.” All the divines were agreed that the death of Christ was intrinsically sufficient for all: the question between them was, whether the divine intention respecting the atonement was determined in its extent by the sufficiency of the atonement or by its efficacy. The former view was the teaching of Moise Amyraut of the French Reformed theological school at Saumur: the atonement was universal in God’s intention, because its extent was determined by its sufficiency (HANKO, “A Comparison”). Calamy was the leading spokesman in this debate for the followers of Amyraut (or of Davenant, according to BEVERIDGE) at the Westminster Assembly. “Amyraldism,” or so-called “hypothetical universalism,” taught that God wills the salvation of all, but that man’s will is incapable of causing the will to believe apart from the operation of God in the elect. “Amyraut was acquitted of heresy by two French Protestant synods, but the Swiss Reformed condemned his doctrine in the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675), which denied universal atonement and the notion that God desires the salvation of all” (DAVIS). The same writer adds perceptively, “Amyraldism lives on, however, in much of modern Calvinism.” Dr. Arrowsmith, an important member of the Committee on the Confession, is surprisingly not recorded as having contributed to this debate, although his writings express sympathy with the Davenant position. Seaman, Marshall, Vines and Harris all agreed with Calamy, at least in part. The final decision of the Assembly on this point is not recorded in the Minutes; what we do have of course is the language of Section VI of Confession Chapter III, “*Of God’s Eternal Decree,*” this debate belonging to the work upon that Chapter:

“As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained 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.”

MITCHELL & STRUTHERS comment cautiously: “...though at first sight it may not seem easy to reconcile the opinions of these divines (Calamy, etc.) with the language of the sixth section of this chapter of the Confession, it would be rash for me to say it is impossible. They certainly did not succeed in getting any positive approbation of their opinions inserted; but it is just possible that the language of this section may have been so arranged, that they felt warranted in accepting it as not positively condemning them. 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” (pp.lvi,lvii).

The suggestion is that the Confessional statement was purposely framed to allow for the viewpoint that Christ redeemed, or paid a price for, those who are not *also* effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved. This is most unlikely. CUNNINGHAM comments on this clause: “Here it has been made a question, whether the concluding restriction, to ‘the elect only,’ applies to each of the preceding predicates, ‘redeemed,’ ‘called,’ ‘justified,’ etc., *singly and separately*, or only to the whole of them taken collectively; that is, whether it be intended to be here asserted that not any one of these things, such as ‘redeemed,’ can be predicated of any but the elect only, or merely that the whole of them, taken in conjunction (emphasis mine), cannot be predicated of any others. The latter interpretation, - namely, that there are none but the elect of whom the whole collectively can be predicated, - would make the declaration a mere truism, serving no purpose, and really giving no deliverance upon anything, although the repetition of the general statement about the consequences of election, or the execution of God’s eternal decree, in a negative form, was manifestly intended to be peculiarly emphatic, and to contain a denial of an error reckoned important. The 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” (emphasis mine).

Moreover, we should remember that “the statements of the Confession, or of any similar document, must be taken in their entire context, and also in terms of the particular signification attaching to them at the time that they were used” (MACLEOD). Do then other sections of the Confession speak to the matter? In the crucial Chapter VIII, *Of Christ the Mediator*, we find three telling sections having respect to the question of the extent of the atonement:

“The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal 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.” (Section V).

“Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof, were communicated unto the elect in all ages successively from the beginning of the world.....” (Section VI).

“To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same....” (Section VIII).

MITCHELL & STRUTHERS acknowledge the strength of the argument which sees especially Section VIII as pointedly excluding the Amyraldian viewpoint. Notwithstanding this, they maintain, “Still, it is also just possible that they (the Amyraldians) may have accepted the words ‘purchased redemption,’ as Baxter was willing to do, not of every fruit of Christ’s death, but of ‘that special redemption proper to the elect,’ ‘which was accompanied with an intention of actual application of the saving benefits in time’” (p.lviii). This “contest” among the divines did not end however with the debate on redemption in connection with Chapter III of the Confession. Eighteen months later, when the Larger

Catechism was being prepared, another effort was made by the Amyraldians to get their opinions distinctly sanctioned and positively expressed in that document. A committee, “apparently of English members only” (MITCHELL & STRUTHERS , p.lix), prepared and brought up for discussion two questions and answers as recorded in the Minutes:

“.Session. 844.- May 17, 1647.- Monday morning.

The Assembly proceeded in debate of the Catechism, and upon debate it was:

Resolved upon the Q., These two questions and answers,

‘Q. Do all men equally partake of the benefits of Christ?

A. Although from Christ some common favours redound to all mankind, and some special privileges to the visible church, yet none partake of the principal benefits of his mediation but only such as are members of the church invisible.

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

A. Besides much forbearance 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,’ shall stand for debate in order to the Catechism.”

It is apparent from the next Minute that the Assembly was not happy with these formulations:

“.Session. 845.- May 18, 1647.- Tuesday morning

The Assembly proceeded in debate of the Catechism, and upon debate it was

Resolved upon the Q.,

The two former questions and answers shall be recommitted; and the Commissioners from the Church of Scotland are desired to be present.”

The committee was duly reorganised and several men were added to it. The final form of these recommitted portions was agreed at a later Session:

“.Session. 873.- July 2, 1647.- Friday morning.

The Assembly proceeded in debate of some things recommitted concerning Christ and the Holy Ghost; and upon debate it was: *Resolved* upon the Q.,

Q. What benefits hath Christ procured by his mediation?

A. Christ, by his mediation, hath procured redemption, with all the benefits of the covenant of grace. *Ordered* -

Q. How do we come to be made partakers of the benefits which Christ hath procured?

A. We are made partakers of the benefits which Christ procured, by the application of them to us, which is the work especially of God the Holy Ghost.”

These formulations entered the Larger Catechism as Q & A. 57,58. We note that the whole idea of common benefits for all was now specifically rejected.

In the record of the Debate about Redemption which now follows, the contributions of the Scottish Commissioners are highlighted. These are particularly interesting, because they show opinions regarding the love of God, the gospel offer, and the decree of reprobation that are challenged today. Note especially their interpretation of JOHN 3:16. The minutes are here reproduced exactly as they appear in MITCHELL & STRUTHERS. They are plainly not complete, and in a few places the authors were unsure of the wording, and give their suggested emendations in brackets. I have supplied English renderings of the Latin terms used by the participants in the debate.

“.Session. 522.- October 22, 1645.- Wednesday morning.

Debate about Redemption of the elect only by Christ.

Mr. Calamy- I am far from universal redemption in the Arminian sense; but that that I hold is in the sense of our divines in the Synod of Dort, that Christ did pay a price for all, - absolute intention for the elect, conditional intention for the reprobate in case they do believe, - that all men should be *salvabiles, non obstante lapsu Adam* ...[savable, notwithstanding Adam’s fall]....that Jesus Christ did intend, in giving of Christ, and Christ in giving Himself, did intend to put all men in a state of salvation in case they do believe.

Mr. Palmer- He would distinguish from the Arminians; they say all equally redeemed, but not so the other, and...

Mr. Reynolds - This opinion cannot be asserted by any that can say he is not of the Remonstrants’ opinion....upon a condition that they cannot perform, and God never intends to give them.

Mr. Calamy- the Arminians hold that Christ did pay a price for this intention only, that all men should be in an equal state of salvation. They say Christ did not purchase any impenetration....This universality of Redemption doth neither intrude upon either doctrine of special election or special grace.

Mr. Seaman - It is nothing whether the opinion of Remonstrants or not. We must debate the truth and falsehood of it....He doth not say a salvability *quoad homines*, [as regards men] but *quoad Deum*.. [as regards God]..so far reconciled Himself to the world, that He would have mercy on whom He would have mercy.

Mr. Palmer - I desire to know whether he will understand it *de omni homine*. [concerning all men].

Mr. Calamy- *De adultis*. [of adults].

Mr. Whitakers.....

Mr. Young- This controversy, when first started in the Church, they used a distinction: they said it was *pro natura humana*. [for human nature] ..In the application he expresseth it only

electis. [elect] Some speak of the former branch as that....

Mr. Gillespie - Nothing to the thing itself; but for the state of the question, let more be looked upon than that expressed in the proposition, because **there is a concatenation [linking together] of the death of Christ with the decrees; therefore we must see what they hold concerning that which in order goes before and what in order follows after...**Cameron saith for all upon condition of believing, but Amyraut he hath drawn it further....Whether he hold an absolute reprobation of all that shall not be saved...*A parte post* [in future eternity] what follows upon that conditional redemption.

Mr. Calamy - In the point of election, I am for special election; and for reprobation, I am for *massa corrupta* [sinful mass]Those to whom He....by virtue of Christ's death, there is *ea administratio* [that administration] of grace to the reprobate, that they do wilfully damn themselves. I neither hold sufficient grace nor special grace.

Mr. Marshall- For order, you shall not need to know what this or that man's opinion is; if you dispute the thesis, you will state it so as that it rejects all contrary opinions.

Mr. Reynolds- The Synod intended no more than to declare the sufficiency of the death of Christ; it is *pretium in se* [a ransom in itself], of sufficient to all, - nay, ten thousand worlds. There are two Adams, one a fountain of misery, and the other of mercy....To be salvable is a benefit, and therefore belongs only to them that have interest in Christ.

Mr. Seaman - All in the first Adam were made liable to damnation, so all liable to salvation in the second Adam.

This proposition to be debated: 'That Christ did intend to redeem the elect only.'

Mr. Calamy- I argue from the iii. of John 16, in which words a ground of God's intention of giving Christ, God's love to the world, a philanthropy the world of elect and reprobate, and not of elect only; it cannot be meant of the elect, because of that 'whosoever believeth'....xvi. Mark, 15. 'Go preach the gospel to every creature.' If the covenant of grace be to be preached to all, then Christ redeemed, in some sense, all - both elect and reprobate; but it is to be preached to all; there is a warrant for it....For the minor, if the universal redemption be the ground of the universal promulgation, then....the minor, else there is no verity in promulgation. All God's promulgations are serious and true....Faith doth not save me, but only as an instrument to apply Christ. There is no verity in the universal offer except founded in the

Mr. Rutherford- All the argument comes to this: there can be no truth in this proposition except this be first granted, that Christ died in some sense...I deny this connection....**because it holds as well in election, justification, as in redemption; if he believe, he is as well elected and justified as redeemed.**

Mr. Calamy- We do not speak of the application, for then it would bring it in, but we speak

of the offer. It cannot be offered to Judas except he be salvable.

Mr. Rutherford- There is no difference betwixt redemption and justification in this....The promise of justification is made no less to Judas than of redemption....The ground of his is to make all salvable, and so justifiable.

Mr. Seaman - He makes it absurd....But there is none. It comes only to this: look as every man was *damnabilis*..[damnable, capable of damnation]..so is every man *salvabilis*; [savable, capable of salvation] and God, if He please, may choose him, justify him, sanctify him.

Mr. Walker.....

Mr. Marshall- The strength of his argument is either not taken or is not answered....It is in this that there can no *falsum subesse* [false thing subsist] to the offer of the gospel.

Mr. Wilkinson - You know they cannot be partakers of redemption against whom Christ takes special exception; Christ prayed not for the world.

Mr. Gillespie - In answer to the two arguments, - one from the iii. John 16. A.1. The brother takes for granted that by the world is meant the whole world. It is a point much controverted. Our divines do deny that the word world must in some places be taken in another sense....For that of the philanthropy it makes much against it....**I cannot understand how there can be such a universal love of God to mankind as is maintained. Those that will say it must needs deny the absolute reprobation; then alone [perhaps ‘a love’] to those whom God hath absolutely reprobated both from salvation and the means of salvation....**For the next argument from XVI Mark..... he conceives the ground of this universal offer is the institution perhaps ‘intention’] of Christ in dying....For that of the truth....There is a truth in it: the connection of those two extremes must ever hold true faith and salvation. But what is that to a reprobate? **Here is the mistake. The *voluntas decreti* [will of decree] and *mandati* [of command] are not distinguished....A man is bound to believe that he ought to believe, and that by faith he shall be saved. It is his duty.** The command doth not hold out God’s intentions; otherwise God’s command to Abraham concerning sacrificing of his son....Said I cannot say so to a devil...True; but reason is, that it is the revealed will of God that devils are absolutely excluded, but not so any man known to me.

Mr. Marshall- This distinction, there is use of it if rightly understood. We say more: there is not only a *mandatum*, [command], but a promise.

Dr. Burges - You say the *novum foedus* [new covenant] doth intend; then there be either two covenants; one general to the elect, and another special to the elect.

Mr. Calamy- The difference is not in the offer, but in the application....That *voluntas decreti* [will of decree] comes only in the application....For the word world....I grant it signifies the elect sometimes, but sometimes it signifies the whole world, and so it must do here....For this love he saith he under -There is a double love: general and special. A general love

to the reprobate, and the fruit of this, a general offer, and general grace, and general reformation.

Mr. Gillespie- It is acknowledged the word world may suffer another sense - the elect, but said it must be a larger thing than believers....**A. This is still taken for granted, which is to be proved, for I say it is very good sense. God so loved the elect, that whosoever believes in Him....The reconciling of a general love with absolute reprobation is not answered....The general offers of the gospel are not grounded upon the secret decree.**

Mr. Lightfoot- I understand the word world in a middle sense. It is only in opposition to the nation of the Jews....For the universal offer God intends as the salvation of the elect, so the inexcusableness of the wicked.

Mr. Price - For the first text suppose mankind be meant, yet it doth not follow that Christ intended all...For the latter text, it doth not follow that Christ did die intentionally for the redemption of all....Prove that there is such a covenant with mankind. If so, why mention the children of the covenant?...Then the signs of the covenant might be generally administered (?)...Said this may be a truth, though to a congregation of reprobates the reason of the prescious (perhaps 'promiscuous') offer is because we do not know who is elect and reprobate.

Mr. Vines- That said of the covenant relates to the application. Is not the gospel a covenant, and is not that propounded to every creature?....What is the gospel preached to every creature founded upon but the blood of Christ....By 'the world' I do not understand the Gentiles, but if I did, it were all one....As is whether the world here do not signify more than the elect. It seems it doth, because the words do not else run well. This word denotes an intention in the gift and in the love. We could not live if there were not a general love of man (Sic. = God) to mankind....For that xvi. Mark, 15....What is the gospel but a conditional proposition of a covenant?....What is this founded upon but the blood of Christ? We must either deny that there are effecting, etc.

Mr. Good.....

Ordered- To proceed in the debate to-morrow morning.

.Session. 523.- October 23, 1645.- Thursday morning.

Mr. Goodwin - Two arguments brought....Said universal redemption must be the foundation of the preaching of the gospel to every creature. True, it must be preached to every creature; but then the question is, What is the gospel there? The message is reconciliation, 'God was in Christ,' and this contains a reconciling only of such a world to whom God doth not impute their trespasses. The decrees of God concerning the world of His elect kept up in indefinite expressions, that is the world; and hence there is a universal obligation of ministers to preach it to every creature, and upon every creature to come unto Christ....I exemplify it by that in the iv. 11 to the Hebrews: Some must enter into this rest, therefore let us

labour to enter into this rest. And so God doth but speak as He means....Said that whoever believes shall have eternal life. To me there is this distinction....Said the Scriptures mean the rather, that if all mankind believe they shall be saved, for Christ did not die for propositions, but for persons....But the sense is rather.....

Mr. Rutherford - For the two scriptures alleged yesterday desire when I give a reason of the denial of a proposition....For that of iii. John 16, three grounds of an argument taken from this place: 1. From the word loved; a general love to elect and reprobate. 2. From the word world, generally taken, because distributive afterwards. 3. Grounded upon God's intention upon condition of faith....For the first Christ speaks of a particular special love....This all one with those places....This love is parallel with that expressed in those three places....The love of one giving his life for his friends....the love that moved Him to send His only-begotten Son..**If the love in the iii. of John be the same with those, as in those places is meant the special particular love of God commensurable with election....not one scripture in all the New Testament where it can be expounded for the general....2. The love in the iii. of John 16 is restricted to the Church;** v. Eph. 21, restricted to a Church....so ii. Gal. 20: loved me; the apostle who lives the life of God by faith,....v. Rom. 8, the sinners and ungodly are set down to be the justified by faith....Such a love as moved the husband Christ to give His life for His spouse, such as moved....such as God commends, for the highest love is a restricted special love....3. **It is an actual saving love, and therefore not a general love.**

.Session. 524.- October 24, 1645.- Friday morning.

The Assembly proceeded in the debate.

Mr. Vines - A connexive proposition if it be impossible in the assumption (?)....He that believes not shall be damned. This is so positively set down as that it implies not only to be a sin against a law, but a sin against a remedy....They have some fruits of the death of Christ and the benefits thereof....Whether this tends to make a man salvable we cannot so well say.

Mr. Harris - That which the brother last spake, his conclusion I wholly agree with....Distinguish betwixt *meritum mortis* [deserving of death] and *propositum morientis*. [proposition of the dying]. 1. About the stating of this question - a noble question. Objections strong on both sides; I see more than I can answer. The best way to answer an erroneous opinion is well to state the question....I doubt whether there be any such thing at all as conditional decree....or, if there be any such thing, whether the condition is founded upon a possibility....Those two arguments mentioned, they are in part answered; by world there is meant the world of the Gentiles, as appears in the whole Chapter. His discourse is with Nicodemus, a Jew....That of love is the highest love and highest expression of love that ever that can be....That that holds out the highest love that ever God sealed up to mankind, that cannot be meant of common love..For that of work (probably 'Mark' [xvi. 15]) sufficiently answered....Only move that the reverend brother may produce the rest of the arguments.

Ordered- Proceed in debate.

Nothing further of consequence is recorded in the Minutes: mention is made of a "Report made by Mr. Reynolds about Reprobation," (Session. 530. November 7, 1645) which was debated at Session. 532.- November 11, 1645.

It is striking to what degree the sentiments of Calamy, a confessed Amyraldian, are shared by much of modern Calvinism! A will or desire in God for the salvation of all men; a general love of God as a ground for His giving Christ; a common grace in the offer of the gospel; and salvation for the reprobate if only they supply the condition of faith.

The logic of these opinions led Calamy in one direction only - **a universal redemption**. Quite correctly, he could not comprehend how a promiscuous offer and a promiscuous promise of salvation (the so-called "well-meant offer") could be sincerely founded upon any other basis. Are some of today's Calvinists in danger of following down the same road? Calamy's views were ably refuted by other participants and, I believe, in the final formulations of the Assembly. Gillespie and Rutherford were obviously satisfied that their own viewpoints, as expressed above, were fully reflected in the agreed form of words, for the Westminster documents were swiftly approved and adopted by the Church of Scotland without amendment. Let us stand upon the same sure ground.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

MITCHELL, ALEX F. & STRUTHERS, JOHN. "Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines". Still Waters Revival Books, Edmonton, (Canada,1991), various citations.

HANKO, HERMAN. "Answer to David Silversides," p.7. Also Idem, "A Comparison of the Westminster and the Reformed Confessions." Protestant Reformed Seminary, 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville MI 49418, U.S.A., p.22.

BEVERIDGE, W. "A Short History of the Westminster Assembly." T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh,1904, pp. 128, 129.

DAVIS, DONALD G. "Amyraldism." Article in Harrison, Everett F., Bromiley, Geoffrey W., & Henry, Carl F.H. (Eds.), "Baker's Dictionary of Theology," Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A., 1960, pp.39,40.

CUNNINGHAM, WILLIAM. "Historical Theology." The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1969, vol.II, pp.327, 328.

MACLEOD, NEIL "Church and State." Article in Macleod, Donald (Ed.), "Hold Fast Your Confession," Knox Press, Edinburgh, 1978, p.59.