Amyraut and the Amyraldians

An evaluation of universal grace within Reformed theology as

popularised by Moïses Amyraut

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Author's Preface

For whom did Christ die? This question continues to divide Bible-believing Christians. Among the plethora of views, an Amyraldian conception of the atonement's extent has enjoyed minority support within Reformed circles. While few have consulted Moïses Amyraut's own writings directly, history shows that his teachings were advocated within the Reformed evangelical tradition as a legitimate view of the atonement's extent. Amyraldianism's main tenet — Christ's death is "sufficient for all, but efficient for the elect" — is supported by Christians across denominational and geographic boundaries. Strengths of the Amyraldian view include its ability to incorporate all the biblical data at face value, and its coherence as a carefully articulated system. Weaknesses of the Amyraldian view include a lack of correspondence with OT texts pertaining to atonement, and a difficulty in addressing several theological objections: an inconsistent portrayal of predestination, the double payment objection, and a disunity of intent within the Godhead.

1. Introduction

For whom did Christ die? Does He suffer for the sins of all humankind, or for the
sins of the elect? What appears a straightforward question continues to perplex
Bible-believing Christians. Disagreement over the extent of the atonement sparked
several post-Reformation denominational splits.[1] More recently, the resurgence of
Reformed soteriology within Baptist[2] and broader evangelical circles has rekindled
centuries-old debates concerning the "five points of Calvinism".[3] Of these, it is the
third point, "limited" or definite atonement,[4] which endures the most scrutiny.
Supporters contend that the doctrine lies "at the heart of the meaning of the
cross",[5] while detractors warn that it "may prove an Achilles' heel for the revival of
Reformed theology."[6] While wary of fomenting unnecessary division among
brothers and sisters,[7] few subjects are more worthy of reflection than the nature of
Christ's death.

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[1] Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 420.

[2] This is my denominational affiliation.

[3] John S. Hammett, "Multiple-Intentions View of the Atonement", in *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement*
(Nashville, TN: B&H Academic), 144. However, note J.I. Packer's warning that Reformed Christianity cannot be
reduced simply to five points. "Introductory Essay," in John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (London:
Banner of Truth, 1959), 5–6.

[4] I prefer the term "definite atonement", given that only Universalism teaches a genuinely unlimited atonement.
What is debated is not merely the cross's extent, but also God's intent for the atonement.

[5] David and Jonathan Gibson, "Introduction", *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013),
34.

[6] D. Broughton Knox. "Some Aspects of the Atonement". In *The Doctrine of God*, vol. 1 of *D. Broughton Knox, Selected
Works*, ed. Tony Payne (Kingsford, NSW: Matthias Media, 2000), 266.

[7] For whom Christ definitively died for! (Rom 14:15, 1 Cor 8:11)

Among the plethora of views,[8] an Amyraldian[9] conception of the extent of the atonement has enjoyed minority support within Reformed circles.[10] In this view — popularised by French theologian Moïses Amyraut (1596-1664) — God intends for Christ to atone for all of humanity, but seeing that none freely choose him in their state of total depravity, he gives the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit to the elect, providing them with faith that makes the atonement effective.[11]

This essay seeks to critically evaluate an Amyraldian conception of the atonement's extent by tracing its historical development, assessing its biblical correspondence and evaluating its theological coherence. I will suggest that: 1) Amyraldianism resides within the boundaries of the Reformed evangelical tradition; 2) Amyraldianism's main strength is its capacity to hold all the biblical data regarding the atonement as a coherent whole; and 3) Amyraldianism's main weaknesses are its inability to adequately address a number of theological objections and implications, and its lack of interaction with OT presentations of atonement.

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[8] Mark Snoeberger, "Introduction", in *Perspectives*, 4-6, acknowledges over 20 different specific views, but suggests three distinct Protestant substitutionary views: definite atonement, a universally sufficient atonement, and a multiple-intention view of the atonement.

[9] Oliver Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 185, proposes the term "Scottish hypothetical universalism" to clarify its provenance from Amyraut's theological mentor, John Cameron. However, I retain the term "Amyraldian" not to "lump" Amyraut's theological position with everyone else, but to respect how it is commonly used. Similarly, "Calvinism" is often used to express a doctrinal fidelity to Reformed soteriology rather than the exact teachings of Calvin himself.

[10] Snoeberger, "Introduction", in *Perspectives,* 16.

[11] Because it rejects "Limited atonement" yet retains the other distinctives of the "TULIP" in Calvinism, Amyraldianism is sometimes called "Four-Point Calvinism", "Moderate Calvinism" or "Hypothetical Universalism". In practice, Amyraldianism is often used as shorthand for Reformed soteriology *sans* definite atonement, e.g., Bird's description in *Evangelical Theology*, 429–434.

2. Preliminary definitions

A few introductory comments will clarify our approach. Firstly, Christians in ages past and present have been convinced from Scriptures of both general and definite atonement, and through Christ's penal substitutionary atonement all in Christ will celebrate His victory over sin and death around His throne (Rev. 7:10). I hope the tone of discussion will reflect this reality and avoid enshrining any particular view as a litmus test of theological orthodoxy.[12]

Secondly, the scope of this discussion is limited to assessing the Amyraldian conception of the extent of the atonement.[13] In considering who Christ died for (i.e. extent), we are also asking what was Christ's saving purpose (i.e. intent). These are distinguishable yet inseparably joined, like two sides of a coin. Consequently, in the ensuing discussion I refer interchangeably to both God's intent and extent.[14]

Thirdly, the paucity of primary sources has been a longstanding barrier to evaluating Amyraut's teachings accurately. Consequently, some have disparaged or defended[15] Amyraldianism without ever engaging with Amyraut's writings for themselves.[16] To facilitate objective appraisal, I give significant attention to the

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[12] Given the broad acceptance of his teachings by those who hold to Reformed theology, I also include Amyraut and his theological relatives within the Reformed community.

[13] For an extensive historical survey of theologians and pastors on this issue, see David Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016).

[14] Contra Allen, *Extent,* xix–xx, who includes a third area of focus, the application of atonement (or, "When is the atonement applied to the sinner?") My opinion is that this issue falls more under the doctrine of justification and may be excluded from our discussion.

[15] For example, Bird cites no primary sources in *Systematic Theology*, 432–434.

[16] Allen, *Extent,* xvi, notes: "Heavy dependence on secondary sources increases the possibility of misinterpreting an author's position."

surrounding historical theology, and to Amyraut's own writings regarding the atonement.

Additionally, debates about the atonement's extent typically centre around how to reconcile biblical texts suggesting a universal atonement[17] with passages that support definite atonement.[18] These are well-worn paths, so I will limit discussion to strengths and weaknesses reflected in the writings of Amyraut (and other Amyraldians). This will highlight some of the inherent challenges in navigating the "rough terrain… between correspondence and coherence"[19] - that is, between exegetical and systematic theology.

Having established these parameters, we may proceed to locate Amyraldianism within its historical context, beginning in the charming riverside town of Saumur, France.

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[17] For example, John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4–6, 4:10; 2 Peter 2:1; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2.
[18] For example, John 6:37–40, 10:11, 15, 26, 17:6-10; Mark 10:45; Acts 20:28; Romans 8:29–32; Ephesians 5:25.
[19] As described by Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology,* vol. 2 of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977), 1–3.

3. A French affair: Amyraut's explosive *Traitté*

Moïse Amyraut served from 1633–64 as Professor of Theology at the Reformed Academy of Saumur, then the most influential seminary within Huguenot France.[20] While committed to Reformed theology as taught by John Calvin, Amyraut wished to defend against the view that predestination was "harsh, narrow, and unworthy of God."[21] He also self-consciously adopted the teachings of John Cameron, his former theology professor at Saumur who likewise emphasised the universal saving will of God.[22]

In 1634, he published *Brief Traitté de la Predestination et de ses principales dependances*,[23] a popular-level appeal to potential converts from Roman Catholicism who perceived the Reformed doctrine of predestination to be "harsh, narrow, and unworthy of God".[24] Amyraut presented 14 theses "to make this doctrine, which is commonly thought so difficult and thorny, capable of being understood by all…".[25]

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[20] Amar Djaballah, "Controversy on Universal Grace", in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 170.

[21] Ibid., 172.

[22] Alan Clifford notes that he imitated Cameron to the point of adopting his gestures and Scottish accent in his preaching. "A Quick Look at Amyraut", in Matthew Harding, *Amyraut on Predestination* (Norwich, UK: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 2017), 16–17.

[23] Moïse Amyraut, *Brief Traitté de la Predestination et de ses principales dependances* (Saumur, France: Jean Lesnier & Isaac Debordes, 1634; 2nd ed., revised and corrected; Saumur, France: Isaac Debordes, 1658). 1st edition retrieved from: https://books.google.com.au/books?id=N7U8AAAAcAAJ.

[24] The circumstances are retold in the preface to a second publication, *Eschantillon de la Doctrine de Calvin Touchant la Predestination*. Djaballah, "Controversy", 172.

[25] Djaballah, "Controversy", 172 fn.30. Amyraut's decision to write in the common language of French, rather than the ecclesiastical Latin, also evinces this desire.

Upon publication, *Traitté* was opposed by several Reformed theologians.[26] Each sought to prove Amyraut had misunderstood or misrepresented Calvin, and did not faithfully reflect the Bible's teaching. However, Amyraut's fellow Saumur theologians supported him, and crucially, his views were subsequently cleared of heresy in three separate French synod trials. Amyraut continued to teach and defend his view[27] of hypothetical universalism until his retirement, appealing to Calvin's writings extensively for support.[28] He and his followers insisted their views aligned with the Canons of Dort, which was signed by representatives of both particular and hypothetical universalist views of the atonement.[29]

Amyraut's views continued to generate debate following his death. Puritan theologian John Owen's magisterial *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1648) was written as a direct response to Arminian and Amyraldian conceptions of general atonement.[30] Amyraut's views were posthumously rejected by the Swiss Reformed Churches, whose 1675 *Formula Consensus Ecclesiarum Helveticarum* was mostly directed against his views on the atonement.[31] The Westminster and 2nd

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[26] Including Pierre Du Moulin (1568-1658) from the competing Reformed Academy of Sedan; André Rivet (1572-1651), Amyraut's old professor then based in the Netherlands; and Friedrich Spanheim (1600-1649), a professor at Geneva. Ibid., 193.

[27] His subsequent publications included *Eschantillon de la Doctrine de Calvin Touchant la Predestination* (Saumur, 1636) and *Defense de la doctrine de Calvin* (Saumur: 1644); note the self-identification of his teachings with John Calvin.

[28] This practice was not well-received by his opponents: for instance, Pierre Du Moulin who criticised Amyraut's very copious quotations of Calvin from the pulpit and a concerningly adulatory attitude towards him. Djaballah, "Controversy", 171 fn.24.

[29] Crisp, *Saving Calvinism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 132. However, some statements seem to explicitly argue that the work of Christ is specifically ordained to save God's elect, e.g. Article 8 of the Second Head of the Canons of Dort.

[30] J.I. Packer, "Introductory Essay", in John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (London: Banner of Truth, 1959).

[31] Djaballah, 196.

London Baptist Confessions noted explicitly that "Christ purchased salvation for all those whom the Father hath given to him."[32]

Despite opposition, Amyraut's theses continued to gain influence in France and abroad.[33] While crafted prior to and independent of the publication of *Traitté,* The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England affirmed both divine predestination[34] and a general atonement[35]. Exponents of this view included Archbishop James Ussher,[36] John Davenant,[37] John Bunyan[38] and Richard Baxter, who offered his own attempt at a mediatory view of the atonement's extent.[39] As a result, Amyraldianism remains a default position among Reformed evangelicals within the Anglican church.[40] Amyraut's legacy extends even to Australian "Anglican Amyraldians"[41] who advocate a Reformed view "stretched to accept a universal dimension to the atonement."[42] Additionally, in the US, a combination of general atonement and Calvinistic soteriology has been defended by a range of

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[32] Westminster Confession of Faith and 2nd London Baptist Confession 1689, VIII.5. See also WCF VIII.8: "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."
[33] Djaballah, 196.
[34] Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, XVII.
[35] Ibid., XV and in particular XXXI: "The Offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual…"
[36] Gary Shultz, *A Multi-Intentioned View of the Extent of the Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013)*,* 29.
[37] His conception of the atonement, known as "English Hypothetical Universalism", was developed prior to, and independently to Amyraut. See Oliver Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 193-95.
[38] John Hammett, "Multiple-Intentions", in *Perspectives*, 160.
[39] Allen, 200–204.
[40] Anglicans who held to both universal atonement and Calvinistic soteriology include J. C. Ryle, Charles Simeon and John Newton. Bird, *Evangelical*, 430.
[41] E.g. David Broughton Knox, who was Principal of Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia from 1959-1985.
[42] Bird, *Evangelical*, 431–432. Bird even reiterates Amyraut's ordering of election subsequent to redemption.

theologians and pastors, including Robert Dabney,[43] Charles Ryrie,[44] Millard Erickson,[45] Bruce Ware[46] and Mark Driscoll.[47]

In summary, far from being a niche view, Amyraut's conception of "the universality of salvation on condition of faith"[48] within a Calvinist framework was accepted and taught well beyond the borders of Saumur. Even if they do not share his specific formulation or speculative ordering of decrees, those who hold to similar Amyraldian or "multi-intentioned" (MI) conceptions of the atonement[49] share in the belief that Christ's death "has both universal *and* particular purposes, and has elements that are alternately provisional *and* efficacious in character [emphasis in original]."[50] Therefore, we may acknowledge Amyraldianism not as "heresy", but as part of the diversity of thought within the Reformed evangelical tradition concerning the atonement's extent.

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[43] Allen, 367–370.

[44] See Chapter 55 in Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1999), 318–23.

[45] Who states in *Christian Theology*, 3rd Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 761: "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."

[46] For his helpful summary of the key positions and arguments, see "Extent of the Atonement: Outline of the Issue, Positions, Key Texts, and Key Theological Arguments." Unpublished outline, retrieved from: https://www.epm.org/static/uploads/downloads/Extent_of_the_Atonement_by_Bruce_Ware.pdf.

[47] Who calls it "unlimited/limited atonement". See Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breashears, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 267–270.

[48] Djaballah, "Controversy", 180.

[49] For example, John Davenant's English Hypothetical Universalism, as retold in Jonathan Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); or recent attempts to distinguish John Calvin's "classical" position from his theological successors, as argued by P. L. Rouwendal, "Calvin's Forgotten Classical Position on the Extent of the Atonement: About Sufficiency, Efficiency, and Anachronism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 317–35. Other descriptions include "Four-Point Calvinism", "Moderate Calvinism" and "Limited-Unlimited Atonement", Driscoll, *Doctrine,* 267–270.

[50] Snoeberger, "Introduction", in *Perspectives,* 7.

4. Amyraut on predestination: a closer look

Many supporters of "Amyraldian" positions regarding predestination and the atonement are unfamiliar with Amyraut's own writings. Given that an English translation of *Traitté* is now available,[51] a brief summary of its main tenets will help us evaluate Amyraldianism's biblical correspondence and theological coherence later.

The opening chapters of *Traitté* set the scene by defining the predestination in question (Chapter 1), the purpose of creation (Chapter 2–3), and the origin of sin and its consequences (Chapters 4–5). In Chapter 6, Amyraut tackles the question: "What was God's purpose for sending his Son to the world?" This is then followed with Chapter 7, "What is the nature of the decree by which God has ordained to accomplish this purpose, either for its extent or for the condition on which it depends." The remaining chapters explore humankind's total depravity (Chapter 8), God's election and predestination in relation to human will (Chapter 9–12) and some practical implications of the Reformed doctrine of predestination (Chapter 13–14).

Several points become clear from Amyraut's own writings. First, he holds strongly to penal and substitutionary atonement. In Chapter 6 of *Traitté*, he taught

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[51] Matthew Harding, *Amyraut on Predestination: The First Published Translation from the French* (Norwich, UK: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 2017). In referencing, I will distinguish between the words of *Amyraut* and Harding's commentary on the translation.

humanity's sin against an infinite God required a payment of infinite duration.[52]

The Son fulfilled this demand by taking on our human nature, and satisfying God's

infinite justice by the "infinite worth" of his sufferings.[53]

Secondly - and crucially - Amyraut's theses reveal a two-fold nature to the Father's

will: a universal desire to deliver humanity from sin's slavery; and a secret will

where He predestines a group of sinners to be moved by the Spirit to believe in

Christ's atoning work.[54] Amyraut distinguishes between a "predestination to

salvation and predestination to faith."[55] In Amyraut's theology, the decree of

election follows the decree of redemption, and as Djaballah notes, "comes in only

to rescue the first one from failure."[56]

Thirdly, Amyraut clearly argues for a universal intent for the atonement, provided

that sinners receive it by faith. Amyraut's key passage in Chapter 7 reads as follows:

> "The Redeemer has been taken from their race and made a participant in
>
> the same flesh and blood with them all, that is, from a same human nature
>
> conjoined in Him with the divine nature in a unity of person. The sacrifice
>
> that He offered for the propitiation of their offenses was [equally] for all;
>
> and the salvation that He received from His Father to communicate to men

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[52] *Amyraut*, 95 (70, 1st ed.): "the justice
of God, therefore, required that man should be punished eternally and only
in a way which could be compatible with the restoration of our nature."
[53] Ibid. 95–96 (72, 1st ed.).
[54] Djaballah, "Controversy", 191. See also 184 for his summary of Chapter 9 of *Traitté*, where Amyraut explains this
second decree.
[55] *Amyraut,* 143 (163, 1st ed.).
[56] Djaballah, "Controversy", 191. Amyraut explains this in full in Chapter 9 of *Traitté* (103–104, 1st ed.).

in the sanctification of the Spirit and in the glorification of the body is

ordained [equally] for all, provided — I say — that the necessary disposition

to receive it (in men) is equal in the same way."[57]

In other words: according to God's universal will, Jesus Christ made atonement for

everyone. However, this atonement is efficacious only if and when an individual

exhibits faith.[58] Quoting 1 Timothy 2:4, Amyraut explains: "this truth receives this

necessary limitation, "providing that they believe." If they do not believe, He does

not desire it."[59] Saving faith is only exhibited by those whom the Father

predestines according to his secret will, and are therefore led by the Spirit to

believe in Christ.[60] Therefore, for Amyraldians, Christ's death was "sufficient for

all, but efficient for the elect."[61]

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[57] *Amyraut*, 99-100. The two instances of "equally" appear in the first edition of *Traitté* only (77–78).
[58] Djaballah, "Controversy", 191. John Cameron offered the following illustration: though the sun shines on all, not everyone benefits from its light as some are asleep while others keep their eyes closed. "Now, this is not because of any deficiency in the sun; rather it is the fault of the one who makes no use of this benefit. Accordingly, Christ died for all; but his death makes blessed only those who lay hold of him by faith." Letter written in December 1611, as translated in Brian Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* (University of Wisconsin Press: 1969), 59.
[59] *Amyraut,* 106 (87, 1st ed.).
[60] Crisp, *Saving*, 135-136.
[61] This statement is actually derived from medieval scholar Peter Lombard. However, David Hogg argues that, read in context, Lombard's theology "is consistent with later articulations of definite atonement." "Sufficient for All, Efficient for Some", in *From Heaven He Came*, 81–85.

5. Does an Amyraldian view correspond biblically?

Having surveyed Amyraut's teachings directly, we may now identify some of its strengths and weaknesses. Central to debates around the extent of the atonement is whether one's view corresponds to the biblical witness. On the one hand, the scriptures affirm a particular extent to the atonement (e.g. John 6:37–40, 10:11, 15, 26, 17:6-10; Mark 10:45; Acts 20:28; Romans 8:29–32; Ephesians 5:25). Conversely, a large number of texts seem to support a universal scope to Jesus's death (e.g. John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4–6, 4:10; 2 Peter 2:1; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2).

As a result, advocates of either definite or general atonement must offer an alternative interpretation for texts that seem to contradict their view. For example, Owen sought to explain that in John 3:16, "God so loved the world" refers not to all people, but rather "to the elect of God only."[62] Definite atonement advocates must also qualify passages that refer to Jesus's death for "all"[63] as "all kinds of people".[64] Conversely, Arminians must seek to downplay particularist-sounding passages and phrases in a variety of ways,[65] and ultimately to state that any notion of "the elect" refers to those who freely choose Christ.[66]

Amyraldians, on the other hand, believe that their view makes the best sense of all the biblical texts. For example, Bird proffers that "the biblical evidence shows a

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[62] Owen, *Death of Death*, 209. He also argues that κοσμος in John 1:29 refers to sins common to humanity, and that John 4:42 and 6:51 refers only to those who are saved (209–31).
[63] e.g. 1 Tim 2:6, 4:10.
[64] See Grudem, *Systematic Theology,* 598–600.
[65] See Grant Osborne, "General Atonement View", in *Perspectives*, 100–104.
[66] Crisp, *Saving,* 148.

mixture of inclusivity and particularity when it comes to the saving scope of Jesus's death."[67] Rather than attempt exegetical gymnastics where a text seems to disagree,[68] Amyraldians simply accept both particular and universalist dimensions at face value.[69] The ability to coherently hold together all the biblical data is "no mean achievement",[70] and seems a potential strength of Amyraldianism.

Amyraut himself appeals to both particularist and general texts in his *Traitté*, presented as a mixture of Scriptural proofs and his own paraphrasing.[71] He freely cites general verses like 1 John 2:2 and 1 Timothy 2:4-5 when maintaining the universality of God's saving intention,[72] while employing definite texts like Romans 8:29–30 when discussing predestination and other Reformed tenets. Notably, Amyraut makes few direct OT references other than noting the purpose of creation (Chapters 2-3),[73] mentioning the *protoevangelion* (Gen. 3:15)[74] and sketching a brief salvation history mentioning how God's promises are fulfilled through Abraham and Israel (Chapter 7).[75] Yet it seems that Amyraut never explores how OT accounts of atonement (e.g. Leviticus 16-17, Isaiah 53) might inform our

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[67] Bird, 434.
[68] It is on this perceived issue that Broughton Knox accused definite atonement to be "a textless doctrine". *The Doctrine of God* vol. 1, 263.
[69] Crisp, *Saving*, 147–148.
[70] Ibid., 148.
[71] Harding, 60 fn.1.
[72] *Amyraut,* 103 (82, 1st ed.).
[73] Ibid., 70 (24, 1st ed.).
[74] Ibid., 100 (77, 1st ed.)
[75] Ibid., 100–101 (77–79, 1st ed.).

understanding of the extent of Christ's atonement.[76] This lacuna is also evident among other Amyraldian writers[77] and those who hold to general atonement.[78]

To restate, Amyraldianism and other multiple-intentioned views of the atonement offer a biblically comprehensive position that incorporates all the biblical data at face value. However, the lack of correspondence with key OT texts seems a significant weakness in Amyraldian approaches to the extent of the atonement.

6. Is an Amyraldian view theologically coherent?

Given the availability of biblical data on both sides, we must move beyond textual tallies to ascertain a coherent theological position regarding the atonement's extent. Evaluating Amyraldianism's overall theological framework is important, given the atonement's connection to a web of related doctrines and their practical corollaries, including the authority of Scripture (is it true that "God so loved the world" if He only elects some to eternal life?), mission and evangelism (may we tell unbelievers that "Christ died for you?"), and unity of purpose within the Godhead (does a general atonement "threaten to tear apart the Holy Trinity"?[79]).

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[76] This is perhaps due to his three covenants framework, which sees Christ's work within a covenant of grace that supersedes the previous ones (nature/Adam and law/Israel).

[77] For example, Bird does not mention OT passages in his extent of the atonement in *Systematic Theology*.

[78] Osborne, an Arminian, offers one paragraph in *Perspectives,* 81. Conversely, Paul Williamson and Alec Motyer (both advocates of definite atonement) have offered cogent reflections on the extent of atonement in the OT (see *From Heaven He Came*, 227–246 and 247–266).

[79] As charged by Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Nottingham, UK: IVP Academic, 1993), 237.

To begin with, Amyraldianism, as taught by Amyraut, should be respected as a carefully articulated theological system.[80] We have seen how he builds his tenets upon a unique three-fold view of covenant theology.[81] He rejected the harshness of his Reformed contemporaries who taught that God decreed in eternity past to elect certain individuals for salvation and to consign others to reprobation.[82] Instead, he proposed viewing predestination and the atonement through the lens of a God who is rich in mercy towards all the lost, who provides salvation to all universally if they choose to accept Christ.[83] Consequently, it is inaccurate to portray Amyraut's views as a corruption or deviation from Calvin's teachings, particularly in light of evidence that Calvin himself did not fit neatly within either a definite or general view of the atonement's extent.[84]

However, several points may be made against Amyraut's theological system. The first is Amyraut's inconsistent portrayal of predestination. Wishing to present a warmer view of predestination,[85] he seeks to reframe the term in a number of ways. In Chapter 1 of *Traitté*, he speaks of general predestination ("of which the world had been ordained in general").[86] In Chapter 9 he uses the term

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[80] Trueman observes that, in comparison, most contemporary "Amyraldians" believe simply (and perhaps pragmatically) that while God's elects certain people, Christ died for all. He points out their "anti-systematic approach" is ironic given the carefully constructed nature of Amyraut's theology. "Limited Atonement View", in *Perspectives,* 21 fn.4.
[81] As taught by his theological mentor John Cameron. Djaballah, "Controversy", 169.
[82] I.e. a supralapsarian position of double-predestination.
[83] Harding, *Amyraut*, 100 fn.3.
[84] See P. L. Rouwendal, "Calvin's Forgotten Classical Position on the Extent of the Atonement: About Sufficiency, Efficiency, and Anachronism," *WTJ* 70, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 317–38.
[85] Harding*,* 100 fn.3.
[86] *Amyraut*, 61, (9, 1st ed.).

appositionally with election to describe God's foreknowledge.[87] Finally, in Chapter 13 he distinguishes between a conditional "predestination to salvation" and an absolute "predestination to faith",[88] but struggles to prove this distinction from Scripture. As Djaballah notes: "Amyraut is really saying that Holy Scripture ignores the distinction he seeks to promulgate. Election is an absolute decree, and it applies both to the giving of faith and to salvation, without distinction."[89] Unfortunately, Amyraut's elastic use of terminology makes it difficult to avoid the perception of an *a priori* commitment to a two-fold predestination, even when one seems merely illusory.

A second objection to Amyraldianism involves the double payment of sins. Owen poses the challenge as follows: "Is it probable that God calls any to a second payment, and requires satisfaction of them for whom, by his own acknowledgement, Christ hath made that which is full and sufficient?"[90] If Christ has made a ransom payment and covered the sins of all humanity, how then can he proceed to punish sinners in hell? Eighteenth-century hymn writer Augustus Toplady likewise encapsulates this inconsistency in poetic form:

> *"If Thou hast my discharge procured*
> *And free in my place endured*
> *The whole of wrath divine,*

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[87] See *Amyraut*, 113–115 (102–107, 1st ed.), where he cites Galatians 4:8-9 and 1 Peter 2:10 as examples of predestination as election.
[88] Harding, 143–145 (163–166, 1st ed.). Amyraut attempts clarification in his 2nd edition by defining "predestination to salvation" as "God's will (desire) to save men". It remains a confusing use of the term.
[89] Djaballah, "Controversy", 188–189.
[90] Owen, 161.

Payment God will not twice demand,

First at my bleeding Surety's hand,

And then again at mine."[91]

The double payment object is addressed in various ways. The hypothetical universalist typically acknowledges that Christ's atonement meets all the conditions of salvation, but not as a final, effectual action.[92] To concede this, however, is to admit that the atonement has only made salvation possible, rather than actually securing redemption.[93] Furthermore, since Christ has no longer substituted for anyone in a definite way, the evangelistic maxim "Christ died for you" risks becoming a mere platitude.[94]

Others object to the double jeopardy argument by criticising Owen's commercialistic conception of the atonement. For example, Allen asserts the view that Christ's death as a literal payment is problematic.[95] However, the literal/metaphorical debate is largely semantic, and does not remove the underlying double payment objection. Furthermore, the language of atonement, traced properly from its Old Testament foundations, arises from the concept of "covering" or "wiping out" of what made one unacceptable to God precisely by a "ransom" involving either money (Exodus 30:1–16) or blood sacrifice (Leviticus

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[91] Augustus M. Toplady, 'From whence this fear and unbelief?' (1772). Retrieved from: https://hymnary.org/text/from_whence_this_fear_and_unbelief.

[92] Crisp, *Saving*, 138, offers the analogy of a medical team with enough vaccine to immunise an entire village, provided they accept it. This hypothetical availability does not square, however, with the Biblical witness that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

[93] As argued by Trueman in *Perspectives,* 203–204.

[94] An analogy follows: if a friend is in jail and wishes for me to post bail, and I merely make it possible that I provide the money, or if I post bail but they remain in prison, I have not really paid for his transgressions.

[95] Allen, *Extent*, 199.

17:11).[96] When one allows the Bible's language to shape our conception of atonement, the commercial metaphor seems less misplaced.

A third theological vulnerability posed by an Amyraldian view of the atonement is the introduction of disunity within the Trinity. The Gibson brothers summarise the objection: "The Trinity orchestrates the symphony of salvation in all its movements: the Father elects and sends, the Son becomes incarnate and dies, the Spirit draws and vivifies… if however, as some might argue, Christ's atoning work on the cross is intended for everyone… a fatal disjunction is introduced."[97] Amyraldians respond to this objection with the idea of a two-fold division within the will of each person of the Trinity,[98] but this serves to further complicate the issue. Once we consider Jesus's intercessory prayer to the Father in John 17, the two-fold will becomes difficult to maintain.[99] Trueman exposes the internal conflict: "Is Christ praying for all to be saved? In that case his Father denies his request. Is Christ praying for some to be saved? Then the intention behind Christ's death and that behind his intercession are different."[100] Christ becomes a baffled Saviour, out of sync with His Father's will.[101] Ultimately, Owen may be right to suggest that advocating a general atonement which saves no one in particular

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[96] See Richard Averbeck, "כפר", in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol 2 (1997), 689–710.

[97] Jonathan and David Gibson, *From Heaven He Came,* 49.

[98] E.g. Amyraut's description of God the Father's "conditional" and "absolute counsel" in Chapter 11 of *Traitté. Amyraut*, 127–128 (131–134, 1st ed.).

[99] In *Traitté*, Amyraut uses John 17 once: within a confusing description of a three-fold conversion, where the passage refers to God's unconditional election to salvation. *Amyraut*, 157 (189–192, 1st ed.).

[100] Trueman, *Perspectives,* 209.

[101] The doctrine of God's impassability could be another possible argument against a multiple-intentioned view of the atonement. If God requires an absolute will in order to avoid being frustrated at humanity's depravity, we come close to depicting him as One who reacts emotionally to humanity's actions.

diminishes the "virtue, value, fruits and effects of the satisfaction and death of Christ."[102]

7. Concluding thoughts

There is much to commend about an Amyraldian conception of the extent of the atonement. It attempts to be a pastorally motivated proclamation of Reformed theology without harsh and narrow schemas of predestination and atonement. Amyraldianism's main tenet — Christ's death was "sufficient for all, but efficient for the elect" — is supported by a broad range of Christians across denominational and geographic boundaries. Examining Amyraut's *Traitté* in particular highlights some strengths of the Amyraldian view, including its ability to incorporate all the biblical data at face value, and its coherence as a carefully articulated system. Nevertheless, weaknesses of the Amyraldian view include a lack of correspondence with OT texts pertaining to atonement, and a difficulty in addressing several theological objections: an inconsistent portrayal of predestination, the double payment objection, and a disunity of intent within the Godhead. Despite these challenges, Amyraldianism remains a biblically faithful (if at times inconsistent) conception of predestination and the atonement that invites careful and humble inquiry.

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[102] Owen, 48.

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