

# **Modern Moderate Calvinism**

**An Exposure of John Murray's and Ned. B.  
Stonehouse's Booklet,  
*The Free Offer of the Gospel*,  
as an Amyraldian Modification of the  
Doctrine of Decrees**



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# **Modern Moderate Calvinism**

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# (1)

## An Outline of the Principles Involved

Let it be first appreciated that sincere and good men do grievously err concerning the truth, even men of great talent, ability and learning, yet we do not malign them nor intend disrespect in opposing them, nor ought we to shrink from the exposure and shunning of their errors.

The Scripture has exhorted us that, “ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Such is the warrant and purpose of this exposure, which is to demonstrate the difference between orthodox Calvinism, and that which is accurately termed *modified* or *moderated* Calvinism. During the last one hundred and fifty years it has also been called *modern* Calvinism, even by some of its proponents.

*Modified* or *moderated* Calvinism, as the term implies, seeks to modify the terms of the Calvinism of the Reformers and Puritans, while at the same time attempting to maintain itself, until exposed, within the ranks of those who subscribe to the orthodox confessions of the church, such as the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Of this the article of Professors Murray and Stonehouse is a classic example. Its root principle is so plain that it is liable to be overlooked in all the controversy and debate which arises from it. It is simply the assertion that there are two desires and wills in God. The following is a clear statement made by the professors:

We have found that God Himself expresses an ardent desire for the fulfilment of certain things which He has not decreed in His inscrutable counsel to come to pass. This means that there is a will to the realisation of what He has not decretively willed, a pleasure towards that which He has not been pleased to decree.<sup>1</sup>

No one can deny, not even the professors, that this is a clear statement that there is a duplicity of desire and will in God. In the same paragraph the professors write, “We should not entertain, however, any prejudice against the notion that God desires or has pleasure in the accomplishment of what He does not decretively will.”<sup>2</sup> By the device of running to a mystery, they cling to the former and advance their doctrine of a duplicity of desire and will in God.

Now we admit that there are many instances in which the will of God, because of our weakness, appears to be manifold (i.e. several). To us there *seems* to be a contradiction or paradox. In regard to the offer it is that God preceptively<sup>3</sup> makes a free offer to all in the gospel, while according to His eternal purpose He has not desired or decreed to save all. The professors, however, assume that an offer to all is an offer *to save all*. This assumption is unwarranted, and creates a flat contradiction in which God desires and wills to save *all*, while He desires and wills to save only *some*. It is to be noted that God has never offered to save *all*—for in His providence the gospel has never even been *preached* to all. Systematic theology recognises and clears this seeming paradox—it does not build upon it. It is therefore a great folly to build a doctrine on a paradox which is stretched beyond its limits. The Calvinist must remain true in his preaching to the doctrine of decrees on which his system is built. When he preaches the doctrine of election, or

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<sup>1</sup> *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), vol. IV, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132

<sup>3</sup> By *preceptive will* is meant what God is pleased to reveal in Holy Scripture as our *duty*—what God wills that we *should* do, namely, repent and believe. By *decretive will* is meant what God *purposes certainly to do* Himself, or permit to be done. (Editor)

according to any of its allied doctrines, he does not preach that God desires and wills to save all. The ascribing of an actual desire and will to God in His precepts does nothing but make them internal to the mind of God, and create a duplicity in His desire, purpose, will and decree.

Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, clearly refutes the idea of a duplicity of wills in God as a basis for doctrine. So does John Owen, whom we quote as follows:

We must exactly distinguish between man's *duty* and God's *purpose*, there being *no connection between them*. The purpose and decree of God is not the rule of our duty; neither is the performance of our duty in doing what we are commanded any declaration of what is God's purpose to do, or His decree that it should be done. Especially is this to be seen and considered in the duty of the ministers of the gospel, in the dispensing of the word, in exhortations, invitations, precepts, and threatenings committed unto them; all which are perpetual declarative's of our *duty*, and do manifest the approbation of the thing exhorted and invited to, with the truth of the connection between one thing and another, but not of the counsel and purpose of God, in respect of individual persons, in the ministry of the word ... They command and invite all to repent and believe; but they do not know in particular on whom God will bestow repentance unto salvation, nor in whom He will effect the work of faith with power. And when they make proffers and tenders in the name of God to all, they do not say to all, "It is the purpose and intention of God that ye should believe" (who gave them any such power?) but, that it is His command, which makes it their duty to do what is required of them; and *they do not declare His mind*, what Himself in particular will do. The external offer is such as from which every man may

conclude his own *duty*; none, God's purpose, which yet may be known upon the performance of his duty. Their objection, then, is vain, who affirm that God hath given Christ for all to whom He offers Christ in the preaching of the gospel; for His offer in the preaching of the gospel is not declarative to any in particular, neither of what God hath done nor of what He will do in reference to him, but of *what he ought to do, if he would be approved of God* and obtain the good things promised.<sup>4</sup>

In chapter 2 of the same book of that treatise, Owen at length disproves absolutely that there is contained in the sending of Christ into the world any notion whatever of a natural affection and propensity in God for the good of the creature, lost under sin, in general. Such good he ascribes three ends: 1) the salvation of the elect, 2) the greater condemnation of the reprobate, and 3) the manifestation of His own glory by way of mercy tempered with justice. Whence then this desire and will in God to save all in the free offer of the gospel?

It is to be noted that into the preceptive will, the professors place both *will* and *desire*. This *desire*, they assert, is “not at all the ‘seeming’ attitude of God but a real attitude, a real disposition of lovingkindness ...”<sup>5</sup> In this lovingkindness there is a true and high sense of benevolence in the heart of God. They, however, avoid ascribing the nature of an absolute decree to this so-called preceptive will, because, as they admit, it would imply an implicit contradiction.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it is a will with a heart which contains, desire, lovingkindness and benevolence to every fallen son of Adam. The attempt to avoid the nature of a decree cannot with such content be carried, for the moment that the love of God is inoperative, it becomes decretive. No one will claim that the love of God is inoperative, because it caused Him to send

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<sup>4</sup> *Death of Death*, Book 4, Chapt. 1, para 3; emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup> *Collected Writings*, p. 114.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

His Son into the world, and caused Him to make an offer of salvation to all in the gospel.

Where there is a will and desire, lovingkindness and benevolence which is translated into action, there is purpose and decree. Wherever there is operation and action, there must be purpose and decree. Operation and action without purpose and decree belong only to those who have lost their reason.

The linking of the passion of *desire* in God with the preceptive will is false, and complicates the issue. God does not desire, long for, or wish the accomplishment of anything, because He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. Calvin demonstrates that where God does speak to us in the Scripture of Himself in terms of human affections, He does so in order to accommodate Himself to our weakness. This in no way indicates a duplicity of will and desire in God, so Calvin invites his objectors, “But why do they not attend to the many passages in which God clothes Himself with human affections, and descends beneath His proper majesty?” The advocates of an earnest desire and will in God for the salvation of all do nothing to assist their case by placing it in an *external* aspect, namely, the preceptive or revealed will. Immediately, desire and will with lovingkindness and benevolence are ascribed to it, so it becomes *internal* to the mind of God, with the direct implication of purpose and decree.

Conversely, if the will of God proposed by the professors does not contain purpose and decree, it cannot be operative. If it is not operative, it cannot contain a real attitude and disposition of lovingkindness in which there is a true and high sense of *benevolence*. If this be so, then the desire to save all, said to be contained in this will, can have no reference whatever to the operation and action of God, in making a free offer to all in the gospel. The argument that there is no purpose or decree in a will which earnestly desires to save all, is not only ludicrous, but redundant to the argument.

Now if the advocates of this duplicity of desire and will in God, also hold to a doctrine of decrees, the only order of decrees suitable is that which places the decree of redemption before the decree of election, which is according

to the *Amyraldian* system. Remember that in their system, on the one hand, God desires and wills to save all, while on the other, He finally desires and wills to save only some. Arminians are more consistent in their attempt to rest one side of the paradox on man's free will. Thus we see that this notion of duplicity in God is the root and ground of Amyraldianism. The manner in which the doctrine of the professors' article necessarily follows the Amyraldian system is demonstrated in the exposure hereafter.

No statement of doctrine which is not according to principle can be held to be rational, (i.e., a thinking, logical statement). Now if we grant that all of the statements of the Marrow-men are rational, we must conclude that for some of them at least, the principle of duplicity underlay their system. This is clearly shown in the following statement which Louis Berkhof makes concerning them in his *Systematic Theology*, where he appears to admit the same thing, saying,

The Marrow-men of Scotland were perfectly orthodox in maintaining that Christ died for the purpose of saving only the elect, though some of them used expressions which also pointed to a more general reference of the atonement. They said that Christ did not die for all men, but that He is dead, that is, available for all. God's giving love, which is universal, lead Him to make a deed of gift and grant to all men; and this is the foundation for the universal offer of salvation. His electing love, however, which is special, results in the salvation of the elect only.<sup>7</sup>

In the light of a duplicity of desire and will in God, it would indeed be difficult to prevent the doctrine of these Marrow-men running to Amyraldianism. It appears that they did at least pave the way for the Amyraldians who later arose from their ranks.

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<sup>7</sup> *Systematic Theology* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), pp. 394, 462.

It is the belief of the writer of this exposure, that a notion of duplicity of desire and will in God must inevitably lead to atheism. How else could men arise as they did in the Free Church of Scotland, who embrace the rationalism and scepticism which all but destroyed the Scottish church in the latter part of the last century?

To hold to this notion of duplicity in God, under the conception that there is a will and desire in God for the salvation of all in the free offer of the gospel, is to make all doctrine and preaching to be double-minded in its revelation of God. Everything that is taught and held is ever on shifting sand—nothing can ever be clear-cut or definite. One day, God is depicted as having one desire and will, the next He is said to have another. Many errors cannot be exposed or dealt with because they are either akin to, or are but the other side of the same doctrine. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). The result of the notion of duplicity can only produce men like to its own principle, for a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Double-mindedness is one of the great sins of our age. It would indeed be a terrible thing if we allowed the notion herein exposed to overthrow the very doctrines and standards which we hold dear. Such will be the inevitable end if the warning intended here is not heeded.

John Owen sums up our argument against the doctrine of the professors on pages 209 and 210 of the Banner of Truth printing of his treatise, *The Death of Death*. He asserts that there is no natural affection, inclination, and propensity in God to the good of the creature lost under sin in general, but that all love on the part of God is an act of His will. It is therefore purposeful and decretive.

So that, without impairing of the infinite blessedness of the ever-blessed God, no natural affection unto anything never to be accomplished can be ascribed unto Him, such as this general love to all is supposed to be.

## (2)

### The Exposure of Modern Moderate Calvinism

Having already outlined the principles involved, there will necessarily be some recapitulation of argument in the demonstration of their consequent fruit, as the exposure proceeds. There is also the matter of the method of approach to the theological standards of Calvinism.

Professor Murray, in his booklet *The Covenant of Grace*, pages 4-5, speaks of a need in covenant theology for, “Correction, modification and expansion.” He says, “Theology must always be undergoing reformation,” and needs ‘recasting’ from one generation or group of generations to another. It is apparently on this basis that he introduces what is to him, a reconstruction, when he expounds the unilateral (one sided) nature of God’s covenants. Robert Shaw, in his *Exposition of the Confession of Faith*,<sup>8</sup> demonstrates that the Westminster divines held to this unilaterality, when they taught in connection with the covenant of grace, that faith was a condition of order or connection, an instrument of obtaining an interest in the salvation offered in the gospel, and was in no sense a procuring cause or condition of the covenant itself. While we admit that man must ever endeavour to improve his exposition of Scripture, we object to the notion that our theology needs reformation or recasting. If such were allowed it would mean the overthrow

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2008), pp. 127-138.

of the standards so thoroughly and ably stated by the Westminster divines. The same restlessness with the old expressions of theology appear to underlie the article which is the subject of this exposure. It may be said that their opponents and supporters have one point of agreement at least, and that is that the professors, by inability or design, have found that the free offer of the gospel cannot be comprehended within the doctrine of decrees.

As has already been clearly indicated, their doctrine constitutes a moderation or modification of the system of Calvinism, and appears to be an attempt to remove the offence which that system has always presented to the natural mind. Their modification is achieved by divorcing the revelation of God concerning the free offer, both as to its substance and open offer, together with an earnest desire and pleasure for the salvation of all, said to be contained in it, from His decretive will. The preceptive or revealed will is said to contain an earnest desire and pleasure for the salvation of all, while the decretive will contains a desire and purpose to save only some. This duplicity of desire and will in God, as has been demonstrated above, demands the *Amyraldian* order of decrees. It remains now to show the fruit of this order, to which the doctrine of the professors must be agreeable.

The following are the points of Amyraldianism as enumerated by Charles Hodge in his *Systematic Theology*:<sup>9</sup>

1. The motive impelling God to redeem men was benevolence, or love to men in general.
2. From this motive He sent His Son to make the salvation of all men possible.
3. God, in virtue of a *decretum universale hypotheticum* (universal hypothetical decree), offers salvation to all men *if* they believe in Christ.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans), vol. II, p. 322.

<sup>10</sup> *Hypothetical* means, founded on a supposition; conditional; assumed without proof for the purpose of reasoning and deducing proof; conjectural. (*Webster*)

4. All men have a natural ability to repent and believe.

5. But as this natural ability was counteracted by a moral inability, God determined to give His efficacious grace to a certain number of the human race, and thus secure their salvation.

The desire and will proposed by the professors is much more substantial as to its content of purpose than a *hypothetical* decree would require. Their doctrine is therefore well over the borders of Amyraldianism.

Three facts bind the doctrine of the professors irrevocably to the first three points enumerated above.

1. An ardent desire and will in God said to be connected with the free offer of the gospel—i.e., for the salvation of all.

2. The duplicity of desire, purpose, will and decree involved in such an assertion.

3. The Amyraldian order of decrees—the decree of redemption before the decree of election is the only order possible to apply to such a notion.

These factors are now self-evident and leave the doctrine of the professors inextricably involved in the Amyraldian system. The fourth and fifth points of that system are to be applied by direct inference and consequence by reason of their inconsistent Calvinism as shown hereafter.

To modify any principle of Calvinism is to condition the whole system. Now that we have discovered the principles of their modification, we must hereafter interpret all that the professors write in the light of their principles. Likewise, we must interpret the doctrine and preaching of all those who support the same principles.

## The Grounds of Objection Established

The professors begin their article with the assertion that, “the real point in dispute in connection with the free offer of the gospel is whether it can properly be said that God *desires* the salvation of all men.”<sup>11</sup> The purpose and substance of their article demonstrates an answer to this question in the affirmative. The professors seek to convince their readers that the basis on which God makes the free offer of the gospel, is that He has an earnest desire for the salvation of all men. This ‘desire,’ it is asserted, contains “a real disposition of lovingkindness” to all.<sup>12</sup>

Such an assertion is at least startling to those who are of Calvinistic persuasion, for it must immediately be asked, among other things, how are we to maintain a difference concerning the principles of our system with those of Arminian persuasion?

How, for example, can we assert that God, while He has a disposition of lovingkindness to all, and desires to save all, has not sent His Son into the world to *die* for all? And how can we assert that though this desire and lovingkindness to all remains, Christ in His great work of intercession does not *intercede* for all? How can we tell thinking people that we worship a sovereign God who has a longing and desire which is opposed to His will and purpose? These questions cannot be dismissed as a “mystery,” else we are left with the situation that the difference between Calvinism and Arminianism is also a mystery, and, after all, both Calvinism and Arminianism are merely aspects of the truth of God’s word. In other words, the difference between the two systems is but truth in *degree*, and any line of demarcation is obliterated. The doctrine of the professors, being a half way position, becomes the true Calvinism in the eyes of most, because it easily satisfies “moderate” Calvinists and Arminians alike.

For many of us, the idea that God has a lovingkindness toward all, and a desire to save all, was the greatest obstacle to our embracing the Reformed

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<sup>11</sup> *Collected Writings of John Murray*, p. 113.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

faith. Had the professors written that the real point in dispute between *Calvinists* and *Arminians* in connection with the free offer of the gospel is whether it can be said that God desires the salvation of all men, we should have agreed with them.

We therefore object to the article on the following grounds:

1. That the said point in dispute is one within the framework of the system of Calvinism.
2. That the answer given is destructive of the whole system of Calvinism.

If such objections can be sustained in the light of the word of God, the principles of which are expressed in the Calvinistic and Reformed system of faith, then we cannot allow that the opinion in question is a matter of private interpretation, without recognising it to be opposed to the doctrinal standards of all the Reformed churches.

### **The False Confinement of Desire, Open Offer and its Substance to the *Revealed and Preceptive Will of God***

Let us proceed to the proof of our first objection. The Westminster divines have stated in *The Practical Use of Saving Knowledge* (“Warrants to Believe”), that,

the Lord ... [maketh] open offer of Christ and his grace, by proclamation of a free and gracious market of righteousness and salvation, to be had through Christ to every soul, without exception, that truly desires to be saved from sin and wrath ...<sup>13</sup>

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[https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/dickinson/dickson\\_sumsaving.html](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/dickinson/dickson_sumsaving.html)

Because there is a market, there are goods to be offered and there is a manner of their disposal. Thus there is a distinction to be observed between the ‘open offer’ and the ‘substance’ of the offer, which had the professors taken into account, they would never have advanced the proofs of their assertion and still called themselves Calvinists. It would appear that they have concerned themselves only with the offer itself.

Now it is obvious that the desire of God in offering the gospel cannot be divorced from its substance, namely, Christ and His grace.

If we say that a desire in God relates only to the ‘open offer’ of the gospel, and not to its substance, we divorce the desire of God from that which makes it possible, namely, the merits and work of the Redeemer. In such a case, the desire of God and the satisfaction of Christ can have no reference in the offer to that which the work of redemption accomplished. It empties of its meaning the cry of the Saviour, “It is finished.” Desire and purpose can have nothing in common, nor could He have seen the travail of His soul and been satisfied. Thus we can see that it is an utter folly to refer the desire of God to the offer to all, and not its substance—it would be an offer without a substance.

However, if *a desire to save all* is related to the substance of the gospel, namely, Christ and His grace, we are not Calvinists. In such instance we have the desire of God identified with the work of a Redeemer designed in its purpose to save all. If it does not, God has failed to provide a sufficient Saviour, and His desires and purposes are frustrated. In other words, such a notion is Arminian.

The professors, in the first paragraph of their article, have written, “... the free offer of the gospel to all without distinction ... surely respects, not the decretive or secret will of God, but the revealed will.”<sup>14</sup> They also assert in the same paragraph that there is no ground for the supposition that the desire of God to save all refers to the decretive will. They admit that such a desire,

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<sup>14</sup> *Collected Writings of John Murray*, p. 113.

if related to the decretive will, would mean a contradiction—God desiring to save the reprobate, while at the same time damning them.

At this point we may apply the *coup de grace* to the argument of the professors.

On their own argument, a) The offer to all, together with the desire of God, relates only to His revealed will. But we have shown, b) That the desire of God, related only to the offer to all, without respect to the *substance* of the offer, to be an utter folly. c) We have also shown that a desire to save all related to the *substance* of the offer, belongs to the theology of *Arminianism*.

The device of relating both a desire in God to save all, and the open offer to all, to the revealed will only, does nothing but isolate the substance of the offer from the secret and decretive will of God, and is a theological absurdity.

The professors are thus left in the following dilemma:

- 1) They must separate the open offer from its substance (which is a complete and utter folly), or,
- 2) They must relate both the open offer and its substance (Christ and His grace) to the desire of God to save all (in which case the professors have gone over to the camp of the Arminians).

The obvious contradiction arising out of the confinement of desire, substance, and open offer to the revealed will, and purpose to the secret will, is not resolved by stating,

This is indeed mysterious, and why he has not brought to pass, in the exercise of his omnipotent power and grace, what his ardent pleasure lies hid in the sovereign counsel of his will.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Collected Writings of John Murray*, p. 131.

This is not a mystery, but a theological fog created by the professors which clouds the real issue for their readers. In the very next paragraph they state a contradiction of their own proposal:

We should not entertain however any prejudice against the notion that God desires or has pleasure in the accomplishment of what He does not decretively will.<sup>16</sup>

It is indeed a strange device brought into the framework of Calvinism that a proposition is asserted, and then its contradiction admitted. The assertion of our *Confession* concerning the infallible rule of interpretation is cast aside.

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.<sup>17</sup>

We have now sustained our first objection, and can assert that the proposition of the article in question, that “in connection with the free offer of the gospel ... God *desires* the salvation of all men,” cannot be brought within the framework of the Calvinistic system. While we must allow men liberty of opinion and conscience, we cannot allow that such an opinion may be held as a matter of private interpretation, without recognising it to be opposed to the *Westminster Standards*.

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<sup>16</sup> *Collected Writings of John Murray*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>17</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1:9.

### (3)

## The Destruction of the System of Calvinism

### The Doctrine of Decrees

In their second conclusion, the professors write:

We have found that God himself expresses an ardent desire for the fulfilment of certain things which he has not decreed in his inscrutable counsel to come to pass. This means that there is a will to the realisation of what he has not decretively willed, a pleasure towards that which he has not been pleased to decree.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps a more thorough denial of the doctrine of the *Westminster Confession* (chapter 3—“Of God’s Eternal Decree,” and chapter 5—“Of Providence”) could not be written. It is, however, the logical end of a doctrine which divorces the substance and open offer of the gospel from God’s decretive will (whether in whole or in part) and confines them in His revealed will, together with an ardent desire and pleasure toward the salvation of all.

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<sup>18</sup> *Collected Writings of John Murray*, p. 131.

If God ardently desires the salvation of all, and has a pleasure towards that which He has not decretively willed, and neither desire nor pleasure are realised concerning all, another dilemma faces the professors, if they do not admit to the Amyraldian order of decrees:

1. Did God decree the salvation of some, and leave the rest to their own free wills—thus turning decree, desire and pleasure into injustice? Some needed to have a decree to save them, the rest are damned for not exercising free will. Some are saved because there was no foreseen good in them, and the rest are damned because God foresaw that they possessed some good, namely, free will, or ...

2. Consistently, therefore, such assertions with regard to the relationship of God's decree to His desire and pleasure cannot have any reference to the salvation of any. The offer of the gospel then must be to those who possess free will.

The article in question clearly affirms that in connection with the free offer of the gospel God desires the salvation of all men. God, therefore, must have designed a means suitable to His desire and pleasure, i.e. the salvation of all.

Thus, the second affirmation of Amyraldianism and the governmental theory belongs properly by direct implication to the doctrine of the professors—i.e. God, out of His lovingkindness to all, desiring the salvation of all, sent His Son into the world to make the salvation of all men possible. If this is not so, a desire for the salvation of all is an outright contradiction.

The third affirmation of a universal hypothetical decree offering salvation to all men if they believe in Christ, is necessary to the professors' doctrine if it is to retain any semblance of Calvinism at all.

The fourth and fifth affirmations must follow by direct inference and consequence.

With reference to the desire and pleasure of God in the free offer of the gospel, the Scripture asserts, “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy” (Rom. 9:18), “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa. 46:10).

We know that God brings to pass those things which appear contrary to that which He would have men do in righteousness, e.g.,

Herod and Pontius Pilot conspired “to do whatever thy hand and counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:28). And in truth if Christ were not crucified by the will of God, where is our redemption? Still, however, the will of God is not at variance with itself. It undergoes no change. He makes no pretence of not willing what He wills, but while in Himself the will is one and undivided, to us it appears manifold, because from the feebleness of our intellect, we cannot comprehend how, though after a different manner, He wills and wills not the very same thing.<sup>19</sup>

God in commanding all men everywhere to repent, and maintaining demands upon them is thus consistent with His own nature, whilst He is also able to make the wrath of man, by His own ordination, to praise Him. This however gives no ground for the notion that there is a will or pleasure in God toward that which He has not been pleased to decree. The providence of God is the governing of all His creatures and all the actions of men though God cannot be charged with the sinfulness of those actions.

The notion, therefore, “that God desires or has pleasure in the accomplishment of what He does not decretively will” is a strange inversion of God’s nature, and nothing short of blasphemy.

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<sup>19</sup> (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book 1, chapt. 18, para 3).

This system has God grieved to fulfil that which He has decreed, since He has decreed the death of the reprobate, and at the same time it is said He loves them. It is psychologically impossible and indeed would charge God with being an irrational being, having His will and purpose opposed to longing and desire. Tell this strange notion to a rational being and he will conclude that God hates Himself. Thus we have this article thoroughly destroying the doctrine of decrees.

### **The Love of God Profaned**

The article identifies the grace whereby God does good to all His creatures with His special and saving grace. This does nothing but assert that there are *natural affections* in God.

In their proof, the professors use Matthew 5:44-48, where we are enjoined to love our enemies in view of the fact that God makes the sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust alike. This is adduced by the professors to mean that this goodness of God to all in temporal things is indicative of a special and saving grace in God in which He earnestly desires the salvation of all men. This is clearly shown in the first conclusion of page 14 of the article, where we read:

We have found that the grace of God bestowed in his ordinary providence expresses the love of God, and that this love of God is the source of the gifts bestowed upon and enjoyed by the ungodly as well as the godly. We should expect that herein is disclosed to us a principle that applies to all manifestations of divine grace, namely, that the grace bestowed expresses the lovingkindness in the heart of God and that the gifts bestowed are in their respective variety tokens of a correspondent richness or manifoldness in the divine lovingkindness of which they are the expression.

Of this confusion of common grace and special grace as being a natural affection in God, John Owen wrote the following:

That since the entrance of sin, there is no apprehension—I mean for sinners—of a goodness, love, and kindness in God, as flowing from his natural properties, but upon an account of the interposition of his sovereign will and pleasure. It is most false, which by some is said, that special grace flows from that which they call general grace and special mercy from general mercy. There is a whole nest of mistakes in that conception.<sup>20</sup>

And again:

By ‘love,’ all our adversaries agree that a natural affection and propensity in God to the good of the creature, lost under sin, in general, which moved him to take some way whereby it might possibly be remedied, is intended. We, on the contrary, say that by love here is not meant an inclination or propensity of his nature, but an act of his will (where we conceive his love to be seated), an eternal purpose to do good to man, being the most transcendent and eminent act of God’s love to the creature.<sup>21</sup>

If the reader will take the trouble to read John Owen on this subject he will find the conception of the article soundly refuted, for it would leave us in the position that there is no grace of God which is not a saving grace in its desire, object and intent.

With the confusion of common and saving grace, the professors easily confuse the human and divine natures in Christ.

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<sup>20</sup> *Works*, (Banner of Truth), vol. IX, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> *The Death of Death* (Banner of Truth), p. 209.

Concerning the lament of the Lord Jesus over Jerusalem they write,

Jesus says he often wished the occurrence of something which did not come to pass and therefore willed (or wished) the occurrence of that which God had not secretly or decretively willed (Matt. 23:37).

They then assert that this is Christ exercising the office and prerogative which belong to Him as the “God-man, Messiah and Saviour” and state, “It is surely, therefore, a revelation to us of the divine will as well as the human.” Is this not a confusion of the acts of the natures of Christ? In the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ it is essential that the acts of each nature belong to that nature, and are not to be confused as an act of the other, yet are always to be understood as acts of the one Person in whom the two natures do dwell.<sup>22</sup>

If we accept the doctrine of the professors, it simply means that Christ is not eternally blessed in His divine nature. If we assert that this is only a temporary state in the divine nature of Christ, we make that nature changeable, and conclude that God is not infinite in all His attributes. If Christ wept and lamented in His divine nature it would mean that He was not sufficient and happy in Himself, and that His happiness is dependent upon the state of the creature.

### **False Appeal to the Difference between Supra and Infra-lapsarianism**

The difference between these two positions revolves around the order of decrees, namely:

*Supra-lapsarianism*—God decreed to save before He decreed to permit the fall.

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<sup>22</sup> Refer, John Owen in his *The Glory of Christ in the Constitution of His Person*.

*Infra-lapsarianism*—God decreed to permit the fall before He decreed to save.

We are not concerned here with the relative merits of these two views. Rather, we shall demonstrate that a desire to save all in a free offer of the gospel is quite foreign to both positions. Augustine wrote,

Incomprehensible and immutable is the love of God. For it was not after we were reconciled to Him by the blood of His Son that He began to love us, but He loved us before the foundation of the world ... Our being reconciled by the death of Christ must not be understood as if the Son reconciled us, in order that the Father then hating, might begin to love us, but that we were reconciled to Him already, loving, though at enmity with us because of sin.

In other words, Christ did not die to make the Father love us; rather, Christ died *because* the Father loved us.

This, however, bears no proof to our opponents that God loves all men in or out of Christ in time. Against such a notion we reply:

1. We know not why God loved any at all.
2. There is nothing to indicate that God loved any He did not choose, nor did He ever contemplate the salvation of any outside of Christ, for He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.
3. There is no indication in the Scriptures that any whom God loved before the foundation of the world will perish.
4. The objection of our opponents is an innovation which serves to divide a decree to no purpose.

5. The argument is in itself inconsistent with the assertions of the professors. If it relates to infra or supra-lapsarianism then the free offer of the gospel and the desire contained in it, respects the *decretive* will. This is denied in the first paragraph of the article.

Concerning the infra and supra-lapsarian views, there is the following agreement:

1. Both assert that the love and mercy of God toward fallen creatures is wholly a matter of His *decretive* will, (the professors deny this).
2. Both agree with Augustine that God did not love His elect *because* Christ died for them, but rather loved them and chose them in Christ. The death of Christ was not a satisfaction of God's love, but a satisfaction of divine *justice*.

There is not a vestige of evidence to suggest that a desire in God to save all arises out of the difference between these two positions, but rather the evidence proves that such a notion is foreign to both.

### **The False Notion that a Desire to Save All in God Arises out of the Relationship of All Men to God as Creator and Moral Governor**

Charles Hodge asserts that the universal and indiscriminate call of the gospel necessarily follows from its nature:

Being a proclamation of the terms on which God is willing to save sinners, and an exhibition of the duty of fallen men in relation to that plan, it of necessity binds all those who are in the condition which the plan contemplates. It is in this respect analogous to the moral law. That law is a revelation of the duties binding all men in virtue of their relation to God as their Creator and moral Governor. It promises the divine favour to the obedient, and threatens wrath to

the disobedient. It therefore of necessity applies to all who sustain the relation of rational and moral creatures to God. So also the gospel being a revelation of the relation of fallen men to God as reconciling the world unto Himself, comes to all belonging to the class of fallen men.<sup>23</sup>

To assert that this is a basis for the notion that there is in God a desire to save all, only leads into further error. Athanasius, in his treatise on the incarnation, along with other early church fathers, established a benevolence in God toward a fallen mankind on the ground that God saw everything that He had made and beheld it as very good. They concluded that God was obliged to look down in pity, and seek a recovery, or otherwise admit defeat to Satan. This view loses sight of the justice of God, and the penalty forewarned and incurred as a result of sin.

The objection of our opponents is similarly false when they assert that it was because man was created in the likeness and image of God, and though he fell into sin, God therefore has a desire to save all. Against this notion we reply:

1. Martin Luther wrote, “the sole preparation for grace is God’s eternal election and predestination.” The sole preparation for grace according to the doctrine of the professors is a desire in God to save all.
2. The notion like that of Athanasius, forgets the justice of God and the suitableness of the penalty, the reward of sin. God said in the beginning “the soul that sinneth it shall die,” and it is the nature of God that He is ever true to this pronouncement.
3. Our opponents must assert, that since the moral image was lost at the fall, one of two falsities: a) that God must love only the natural image, which is an absurdity, for the state of morality cannot be divorced from personality, or b) that God, loving men out of Christ in time, must have natural affections

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<sup>23</sup> *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 1981), vol. II, p. 642.

toward evil creatures. Such a notion is blasphemous because it accuses God of possessing evil passions and desires.

4. The proposition does nothing but support the false notion that there is something desirable to God in the reprobate, and that men are saved by their own free wills, and ultimately only lose the favour of God for not making a right decision. Like modern evangelicalism it makes the issue, “not the sin question, but the Jesus question.”

(4)

## **The Destruction of the Five Points of Calvinism**

Just as clearly as the professors destroy the doctrine of decrees, confuse the human and divine natures in Christ, and as clearly as our opponents attempt to attach their false opinion to a distinction which does not exist in the order of decrees, and to the relation of men to God as He is their Creator and moral Governor, they also destroy the five points of Calvinism.

### **Total Depravity**

Since it is said that God has a lovingkindness toward all men, there must be something desirable to God in the fallen creature. This places the proponents of the article in the dilemma of Arminianism at this point. They must assert that God loves the sinner and not his sins because he is not altogether fallen, or they must assert that if man is altogether fallen, there is unrighteousness with God in loving that which is evil, without a satisfaction of His justice and holiness. Thus is the doctrine of total depravity overthrown.

### **Unconditional Election**

The very assertion that God has a lovingkindness to all in the free offer of the gospel denies the one and only basis of God's love for fallen sinners, i.e.

that He chose them and loved them in Christ from before the foundation of the world. It also asserts that there are other creatures whom God loves, but whom He has ordained to hell. This suggests either of two things, a) that there is a dualism to God's nature, a dark and an evil side, the doctrine of the Manichees, or, b) that there is a limit to God's foreknowledge and foreordination in that there may be, since God earnestly desires the salvation of all, certain who out of an ability of their own hearts, would repent and believe under a free offer of the gospel, but who were not chosen in Christ. Thus is the doctrine of election completely overthrown.

### **Limited Atonement**

A free offer which contains a genuine desire to save all, must contain that motive, and by its very nature requires a universal atonement. That would be an atonement which even its proponents must admit does not achieve its end. The point is not covered by an appeal to a "sufficient for all" aspect, which is immediately turned into a universal atonement, if there is asserted a desire and motive to save all. The decree to save cannot be divorced from the desire which moved God in instituting the means.

Furthermore, if God has a lovingkindness toward all men, as the article asserts, we are faced with the positions that God must love men out of Christ, in time, or He must love them in Christ. If God loves men in the dispensation of His grace, out of Christ, then He does not love them in virtue of the Person and work of a Redeemer.

That is a blasphemy not to be entertained. We acknowledge the aspect that God in virtue of the death of Christ, has stayed the day of His wrath, yet if we assert that God loves all men in Christ, He must love them in virtue of Christ's death. God by that revelation would be consistently bound to save all men. Inconsistently, their salvation must depend on an act of their own free wills. Thus the article succeeds in the overthrow of the doctrine of limited atonement.

## **Irresistible Grace**

If God has an ardent desire and a will toward that which He has not decretively willed, it follows that His grace is not irresistible. Should just one sinner perish in unbelief while God desires his salvation, grace is resistible; then man's will is sovereign, God is frustrated, and Christ died in vain.

## **Perseverance of the Saints**

Where God's grace is not irresistible, it follows that there can be no certain perseverance of the saints. Further if one may perish whom the Scripture supposedly says God loves and ardently desires his salvation, what assurance can any man have who rests his soul on the grace, mercy and love of God? If God's love for one may fail, who can be assured that it will not fail for all?

(5)

## To Build and to Plant

And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build and to plant, saith the Lord (Jer. 31:28).

While we must not attempt to sow among thorns, and it is our duty in doctrine to pluck up, to break down and destroy that which is false, it is also our duty to build and to plant with the truth of the word of God. Let us therefore consider in contrast, the truths of the everlasting gospel.

The motive, if false, has a means designed to its own end. If the ground is false, so is the gospel which contains it. Hence the false gospel herein exposed presents sentimental ideas about God, in which He is viewed as the lover of the whole fallen race of mankind, which He earnestly desires to save in a free offer, which He knows cannot achieve its end. This is in spite of the fact that in the providence of God the gospel has never been preached to every creature. We have demonstrated that the love of God toward fallen creatures is wholly an act of His will. Hence, His love when extended toward fallen creatures is an execution of His purpose, and therefore cannot be divorced from, but is comprehended within His decretive will. It is this basic

truth which the professors deny, and which stands against all the modernist unbelief which has infected many of the churches of our day.

Let us therefore cleave to the 'old paths' in which it is not supposed that the unregenerate must be told that God loves them, any more than they must be told that Christ died for them. Such simply means that though many be called and few chosen, many will perish who in life were told that God loved them, and Christ died for them. Rather let us affirm that God is delighted in repentance, and pleased only with them who out of a sight and sense of their sins do unfeignedly believe the gospel.

The word *gospel* simply means, the good news. The free offer of Christ in the gospel simply means that He is the One in whom those weary and sick of their sins may find rest unto their souls. Christ Himself is not the gospel, but is the substance offered in it. Modern evangelicals are in an impossible position when they say, "let us not have doctrine, but let us have Jesus." The doctrine of the gospel is the counsel of God concerning it. It is because the natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God, that this good news consists of two parts: 1) A demonstration to the sinner of the state and wickedness of his heart, and 2) the remedy for that condition.

The need as well as the remedy must be proclaimed at all times; due emphasis being laid as the particular situation demands. The one can never be absent from the other in the heart and mind of man, if the preaching of the gospel is to be to him, a means of grace in his salvation. No man can be saved by the preaching of the gospel, who does not obtain from it, an apprehension of his guiltiness and desert before God on the one hand, and the all sufficiency of Christ to save on the other. In this day when sentimental ideas of God have prevailed in most pulpits, Calvinistic as well as Arminian, there is little conception of the great God with whom we have to do. We need to remember that there is a God who "is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat." John the Baptist left his hearers in no doubt as to the mission of the Saviour, when he spoke of Him as the One, "whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather the wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt.

3:12). An unfaithful ministry will ever tone down or hide these truths from its people.

Where there is no need, there is no necessity for a remedy. This is that which the Saviour affirmed when He said, “I am come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:13). If our ground for preaching the gospel is to tell men that God loves them, and desires their salvation, they will fail to learn that the offer of Christ in the gospel is an act of the mercy and grace of God. The sinner in such instance will not be presented with a God whose wrath is against sin and the sinner. The love of God and not His fear is made the beginning of wisdom.

In the *Practical Use of Saving Knowledge* annexed to the *Westminster Confession* we are instructed:

The chief general use of Christian doctrine is to convince a man of sin and of righteousness and of judgement, by two means, 1. partly by the law or covenant of works that he may be humbled and become penitent, and 2. partly by the gospel or covenant of grace, that he may become an unfeigned believer in Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, there is not grace or love of God displayed in the gospel apart from the mercy of God. For the reprobate the day of grace, while a benefit purchased by the death of Christ, chiefly for the elects’ sake, is but a stay of God’s hand, till the day of His wrath. All this the professors deny by their assertion that the desire of God in the free offer respects not the decretive will, but the revealed will.

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<sup>24</sup> The function of the gospel as contained in the heading of paragraph 4 in *The Sum of Saving Knowledge* is “For the convincing a man of sin, righteousness and judgement, *by the gospel.*” There are those who do not understand or admit this as a function of the gospel.

Calvin in his *Institutes*,<sup>25</sup> in reference to Ezekiel 18:23 (“Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God, and not that he should return from his ways and live”) disposes of any idea that there is a desire and pleasure in God apart from His decretive will, when he writes:

the passage is violently wrested, if the will of God which the prophet mentions is opposed to His eternal counsel, by which He separated the elect from the reprobate.

It is relevant to discourse here on the extent of the compassion of God manifested in the free offer of the gospel.

At the outset we assert that the extent of the actual compassion of God in the free offer of the gospel is no more revealed in the Scripture than is His eternal election and predestination. The wrath of God against the elect when not in a state of grace is real, otherwise it could not be said that He hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all, or that He saw the travail of His soul and was satisfied. On the other hand, the wrath of God against the reprobate is real and without remission. In the day of grace when God has stayed the day of His wrath chiefly for the elects’ sake, He makes a gracious offer to all, which is ever qualified in Scripture as manifestly calling all men to repentance or toward them that repent. Since God has not given Christ to all, it cannot be said that God has an actual compassion toward the reprobate who are known to Him. The objection that we make a bare preceptive will cannot be carried, for God ever annexes a blessing to faith and repentance, and exhorts men to it. It is His preceptive will which He has committed to His ministers as the word of reconciliation. As they are God’s ambassadors so they beseech all to whom they preach, yet it is God alone who inwardly speaks and calls to those to whom it is His intention to give Christ. Though there is an offer of mercy to all in the gospel, it remains part of the revealed will of God, that He will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy. Calvinists therefore do not preach that God desires to save all, any more than they hold it as part of their doctrine.

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<sup>25</sup> Book 3, chapt. 24, para. 15.

If there is to be a free offer of the gospel, let it be made by the right use of means, as set forth by the Westminster divines and briefly enumerated in numbers 1 and 2 above. Let there be a free offer of Christ in the gospel, yes, but let it be clearly made known that the offer is to *them that labour and are heavy laden*, as did the Saviour when He said, “Come unto me all ye that *labour and are heavy laden*, and I will give *you* rest” (Matt. 11:28). Let our ministers make a free offer of the gospel as did the prophet Isaiah (see chapter 55) to them that *hunger and thirst*, when he cried, “Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Let not our opponents object that this is not a free and open offer without discrimination, and that it would require us to make open offer only to those who *manifestly* labour and are heavy laden, or to those who hunger and thirst. Such was the error of the Particular Baptists, who desiring a gospel suitable to their ordinance and their idea of a pure church, that they did not make the gospel offer to the manifestly unregenerate. Robert Shaw also points out that it was the error of the Neonomians:

This offer is not restricted, as Baxterians allege, to sensible sinners, or those who are convinced of their sin, and their need of a Saviour; for it is addressed to persons sunk in total insensibility as to their own miseries and wants (Revelation 3:17, 18). This offer is made as really to those who eventually reject it, as to those who eventually receive it; for if this were not the case, the former class of gospel-hearers could not be condemned for their unbelief (John 3:18, 19).<sup>26</sup>

Common sense demands that there must be an outward call to the unregenerate and undiscerning men, in order for there to be an *inward* call. It is God’s ministers who must make a free and open outward call to sinners without distinction—yet even in that they must make their invitations to

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2008), p. 135.

them that labour and are heavy laden, and to them that hunger and thirst. It is the Spirit's work to make the inward call, whereby He convinces us of our sin and misery, enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel. Thus the outward call, and the free offer of Christ in the gospel is made to all indiscriminately, and though this call consists in an invitation to them that hunger and thirst, it is in the inward calling of the Spirit, that the invitations and offer are applied and made effective. In order to effectually call some, God is wise and just in outwardly calling all to whom the gospel is preached.

Thus we see that the notion that God desires the salvation of all is quite unnecessary to a free offer of the gospel, and is even destructive of and foreign to it. Let us therefore have done with the notion of the professors and return to the old ways, for, "thus saith the Lord: stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jer. 6:16). Let us not be dismayed when men eminent in scholarship and ability reply to us, "We will not walk therein."