

## INTRODUCTION TO DAVENANT'S *DISSERTATION ON THE DEATH OF CHRIST*

Quinta Press is to be congratulated for making this new edition of Bishop Davenant's excellent treatise available to a new generation of readers. It is welcome for two reasons. *First*, in the context of past and ongoing debates between Calvinists and Arminians over the extent of the Atonement, the author's long-neglected treatise remains an invaluable and significant contribution to a proper understanding of this fundamental subject. Indeed, for reasons to be explained, what one may call the 'Davenant dimension' has been sadly lacking for too long. Michael G. Thomas is right to say that 'Not only does Davenant deserve to be better known, but he also should be better understood'.<sup>1</sup>

The *second* reason for welcoming this new edition of Davenant's *Dissertation on the Death of Christ* is that it compensates for the deletion of it from the recently-issued [2005] single volume Banner of Truth Trust facsimile of the author's original two-volume *Commentary on Colossians*<sup>2</sup> - where it appeared at the end of Volume 2. It is surely regrettable if not disingenuous that the publisher of the facsimile nowhere indicates that the dissertation has been deleted. Since the translator's 'Life of the Author' is retained, readers are informed that a 'translation' of the dissertation is 'annexed to this work'.<sup>3</sup> Disconcerted readers will thus look in vain for it in the facsimile!

As to why the Banner of Truth Trust excised Davenant's dissertation, we are left in no doubt. In an e-mail to Dr Hazlett Lynch, editor Jonathan Watson said that The Banner wanted to make his *Commentary on Colossians* available and to include it in the Geneva Series of Commentaries. 'The only edition we had to work with was an old two volume edition which had appended to it Davenant's *Dissertation on the Death of Christ* - hence the references to the latter work in the translator's Introduction, which we could not excise due to the nature of the photolitho process. We decided not to publish it, partly because of the sheer size of the book (the *Commentary* alone runs to 952 pp, and partly because, in our view, the work was less valuable than other works we have published on the Death of Christ, namely Owen's *The Death of Death* and Smeaton's two volumes on the *Atonement*, to name but two.'<sup>4</sup>

So there we have it. A theological agenda rather than commercial considerations really explains the deletion. Davenant's *Dissertation* is 'less valuable' than Owen's *Death of Death*. However, one may ask, "less valuable for whom?" In his 'Introductory Essay' to the 1959 Banner of Truth edition of John Owen's treatise, Dr J. I. Packer stated that 'Owen was not impressed'<sup>5</sup> with Davenant's 'Amyraldian' *Dissertatio de Morte Christi*. Indeed, Owen himself was utterly uncompromising in his verdict. Davenant's treatise was 'repugnant unto truth itself.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G. Michael Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus* (Carlisle, 1997), p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> *An Exposition of the Epistle of St Paul to the Colossians* by The Right Revd John Davenant, D. D., translated from the original Latin; with a life of the Author by Josiah Allport (two volumes, London, 1831).

<sup>3</sup> At p. xlviii.

<sup>4</sup> E-mail to Dr J. E. Hazlett Lynch, 30 January 2006.

<sup>5</sup> *Op cit.* p. 23, n. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Owen, *Works*, ed. W. H. Goold (Edinburgh, 1850), Vol. 10, p. 432.

If Owen and his disciples are correct, then our friends at the Quinta Press should be having sleepless nights. Being Christian publishers, is it right or safe to be printing and selling such a 'false' theological work on such a central subject as the death of our Lord Jesus Christ? Surely not, if Owen is correct. However, in the opinion of the present writer, despite unpersuasive and misleading attempts to vindicate John Owen's 'limited atonement' ultra-orthodoxy,<sup>7</sup> there are substantial grounds not only to congratulate the Quinta Press but to reassure them that they are rendering a necessary and valuable service to the Church of Christ in republishing Davenant's noble work. In short, despite the criticisms of Owen, Packer and others, his treatise is 'very helpful' to say the least. The purpose of this introduction is to explain why.

Despite the concern of the Banner of Truth Trust to shield its readers from Davenant's 'unhelpful' theology of redemption, the commentary itself teaches the author's 'Amyraldian' views unambiguously. Commenting on the text 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins' (*Colossians 1: 14*), Davenant declares:

It demonstrates also the infinite love of God towards the human race, who willingly sent his own Son to redeem miserable mortals. ... It must also be observed, that the Apostle does not say we have redemption by the Son of God, but *in* him. For *by* Christ the whole world is said to be redeemed, inasmuch as he offered and gave a sufficient ransom for all; but *in* him the elect and faithful alone have effectual redemption, because they alone are *in* him.<sup>8</sup>

To avoid further embarrassment, the Banner of Truth would have done better to delete translator Allport's 'Life of the Author' as well as the dissertation, since it includes a thoroughly sympathetic account of Davenant's 'proto-Amyraldian' contribution at the Synod of Dort (1618-19). An outline of his career<sup>9</sup> enables us to see the significance of the new edition of the dissertation in its proper context.

The information supplied by Allport reminds us that Davenant was probably the most eminent of the five English deputies<sup>10</sup> commissioned by King James I to attend the famous Synod. A graduate of Cambridge University, John Davenant (1576-1641) received his DD at the age of thirty-three and was elected Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity in 1609. Later, in 1621, the King appointed him Bishop of Salisbury, a position he was to occupy until his death in 1641. Among several publications, Davenant's Latin commentary on *Colossians*<sup>11</sup> was published at Cambridge in 1627, a third edition appearing in 1639. Before his death in 1641, he published a reply to a thoroughly 'Arminian' tract by Samuel Hoard, Rector of Morton in Essex.<sup>12</sup> Hoard's work is one of the earliest assaults upon what may be regarded as classical

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<sup>7</sup> See Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> *Exposition of Colossians*, Vol. 1, pp. 163-4.

<sup>9</sup> See also Morris Fuller, *The Life, Letters & Writings of John Davenant, DD* (London, 1897).

<sup>10</sup> The others were Dr George Carleton, Bishop of Llandaff, Dr Joseph Hall, Dean of Worcester (and later Bishop of Norwich), Dr Samuel Ward, Master of Sydney Sussex College, Cambridge, and Walter Balcanqual, a presbyter of the Church of Scotland (see Nicholas Tyacke, 'The British Delegation to the Synod of Dort' in *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987). While these men had little sympathy for the supralapsarian Calvinism of some in the Synod, 'None of the British delegates ... can meaningfully be described as Arminian' (Tyacke, p. 99).

<sup>11</sup> *Expositio Epistolae D. Pauli ad Colossenses* (Cambridge, 1627).

<sup>12</sup> *God's Love to Mankind, manifested by disproving his absolute Decree for their Damnation* (London, 1633).

‘Anglican Calvinism’. Davenant’s reply<sup>13</sup> was not merely a re-statement of the orthodoxy of the *Thirty-nine Articles*. It was also an expression of the views he maintained at the Synod of Dort more than twenty years earlier. It is highly relevant to note that, in France, Hoard’s tract also occasioned a reply from Moïse Amyraut, Professor of Theology at the Reformed Academy of Saumur - his *Defence of the Doctrine of Calvin*.<sup>14</sup> It is remarkable to note the concurrence of sentiment in these two replies. Davenant’s final and fullest statement on the subject of the Atonement, and one of two Latin treatises, was his *Dissertation on the Death of Christ*. Written in 1627, it was initially a victim of the new ‘anti-Calvinist’ licensing laws of King Charles I;<sup>15</sup> the work was published posthumously in 1650<sup>16</sup> (but only translated and published by Allport in English in 1832).

In view of Owen’s summary dismissal of Davenant’s dissertation, what are we to make of its ‘orthodoxy’? While John Calvin is not the only authority cited by Davenant in his dissertation, he was conscious of doing what he himself did in his *Animadversions*<sup>17</sup> and Amyraut does in several treatises<sup>18</sup> - defending ‘the doctrine of Calvin’. Accordingly he states:

The death of Christ is the universal cause of the salvation of mankind, and Christ himself is acknowledged to have died for all men sufficiently ... by reason of the Evangelical covenant confirmed with the whole human race through the merit of his death ... [This] evangelical covenant [is the basis on which] ‘Christ...sent his Apostles into all the world (*Mark 16: 15,16*). ... On which words of promise, the learned Calvin has rightly remarked, that ‘this promise was added that it might allure the whole human race to the faith.’<sup>19</sup>

Earlier, Davenant had quoted<sup>20</sup> (among others) a statement by Calvin which Amyraut also cited against his critics:

Paul makes grace common to all, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is offered to all. Although Christ suffered for the sins of the world, and is offered by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, yet not all receive him.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Animadversions written by the Right Rev. Father in God, John, Lord Bishop of Salisbury, upon a treatise intituled, God’s Love to Mankind* (Cambridge, 1641).

<sup>14</sup> *Defensio doctrinae J. Calvini de absoluto reprobationis decreto* (Saumur, 1641). This work appeared in French in 1644. See Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* (Madison, 1969), p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> See Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp. 181ff.

<sup>16</sup> *Dissertationes Duae; prima, de Morte Christi; altera, De Praedestinatione et Electione, &c* (Cambridge, 1650).

<sup>17</sup> *Op cit.* p. 142.

<sup>18</sup> See Armstrong, *op cit.* p. 142.

<sup>19</sup> Allport, pp. 401, 419; Quinta, pp. 71, 85.

<sup>20</sup> Allport, p. 37; Quinta, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> *Comment on Romans 5: 18*. Roger Nicole admits that ‘the passage ... comes perhaps closest to providing support for Amyraut’s thesis’. Without actually quoting the passage at this point, Dr Nicole flies in the face of the obvious when he adds: ‘it may well refer simply to the relevance of the sacrifice of Christ to a universal offer, without actually asserting a substitutionary suffering for all mankind’

Such citations as these ought surely to arouse suspicions regarding Owen's perspective on Davenant's dissertation. In which case, in view of Davenant's and Amyraut's use of Calvin, it might be useful to provide a summary of Calvin's actual teaching. Here, I repeat material published elsewhere.

As his writings make abundantly clear, the great reformer John Calvin taught a doctrine of the atonement significantly different from that of later Calvinists. Indeed, he would hardly recognise the theory of limited atonement as his offspring. The key to understanding Calvin's very different view of the extent and efficacy of Christ's death is his view of the divine will. While Calvin believed God's will to be one, he insists that it is set before us in Scripture as double - secret and revealed.<sup>22</sup> Conscious of its rational incomprehensibility (yet no more problematic than the doctrine of the Trinity), Calvin argued for this divine dichotomy from Deut. 29: 29 and elsewhere. As it relates to redemption, God's revealed will is universal and conditional but the secret will or counsel is restricted and absolute.<sup>23</sup> While predestination and election relate to the latter, Calvin usually relates the Gospel to the former.<sup>24</sup> Hence the death of Christ is presented by Calvin as universal according to God's revealed intention or decree, but limited in efficacy according to God's secret decree.<sup>25</sup> In his biblical comments, without speculating on any temporal or logical priority in the decrees, Calvin seems to stress one or the other according to strictly contextual considerations.

Accepting the delicate balance of this acute antinomy, it is truly remarkable that one who has been condemned for severe logicity should embrace a concept branded by its detractors as illogical. Yet Calvin insisted that humility of mind is demanded in the face of transcendent truth. After his death, his finely tuned biblical balance was effectively destroyed by the ultra-orthodoxy of Theodore Beza (1519-1605) and the reactionary sub-orthodoxy of Jakob Arminius (1560-1609). Their theological

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(*Moysse Amyraut (1596-1664) and the Controversy on Universal Grace*, Harvard University thesis, 1966, p. 83, n. 38). Even Richard Muller admits that 'Calvin's teaching was ... capable of being cited with significant effect by Moysse Amyraut against his Reformed opponents' (*The Unaccommodated Calvin*, (Oxford, 2000), p. 62).

<sup>22</sup> *Comments* on Ezekiel 18: 23; Matthew 23: 37; 2 Peter 3: 9.

<sup>23</sup> *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, tr. J. K. S. Reid (London, 1961), pp. 105-6; *Sermons on Timothy and Titus*, tr. L. T. (sic) (1579; fac. Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 1181-2.

<sup>24</sup> *Comments* on John 12: 47; 2 Peter 1: 16.

<sup>25</sup> *Comments* on Matthew 26: 24; Romans 5: 18; 1 Peter 1: 20; *Sermons on Christ's Passion*, tr. L. Nixon (Grand Rapids, 1950), p. 151; *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, pp. 102-3. Professor Paul Helm rejects what he dismisses as a 'proof-text' use of Calvin's teaching in relation to debates 'that only arose after his death' (Review of my *Amyraut Affirmed* in *Evangelicals Now* (November, 2004). While it is true that the reformer never *formally* addressed the issue of the extent of the atonement, yet he constantly and consistently presented his views *exegetically*. To say his views are not relevant and appropriate source material for later discussion is simply absurd. After all, would Professor Helm exclude Calvin's views on predestination from a discussion of seventeenth-century Calvinistic orthodoxy? The simple answer to Helm's charge of anachronism is that some things are eternal. Accordingly Nigel Westhead concludes that 'Calvin's language and thought forms *do* fit the contours of the later disputes very well and he speaks in a remarkably similar way to later disputants. His thought easily transplants to the 17th century debates. In any case all we can do is accept what Calvin did say in his own time on the controverted texts' (see Clifford, *Spotlight on Scholastics* (Norwich, 2005), p. 11).

antagonism notwithstanding, they agreed on the priority of strict rational consistency. Thus the two strands in Calvin's composite thought were separated with unhappy soteriological results. While Beza insisted on an atonement limited by decree, design and efficacy, Arminius - denying divine foreordination - taught an unlimited, hypothetical atonement.

Thus the two sides of a supra-logical, paradoxical coin were rent asunder. The opposing positions were alike rationalistic; theologians adjusted and modified textual evidence which conflicted with their particular perspective. Whereas the Arminians made election conditional and God's redemptive purpose contingent, the high Calvinists squeezed the universal language of Scripture into a rigidly particularist mould. Calvin would have rejected this double-distortion of his theology.<sup>26</sup>

Having outlined the 'authentic Calvinism' of John Calvin (the very soteriology defended and propagated by both Amyraut and Davenant), it is also essential to possess a correct grasp of the teaching of the Canons of Dort, not least because of Davenant's decisive influence and contribution. It is a fact that the Canons were a compromise statement reflecting 'broader' and 'narrower' views of the Lombardian formula 'sufficient for all, efficient for the elect'.<sup>27</sup> The likes of Bishop Davenant and the other English delegates at Dort, together with the divines from Bremen and Hesse, represented this 'broader view'. For them, notwithstanding doctrines of predestination and the atonement's particular application to the elect, the following articles relate to an *intended provision* ('for the sins of the whole world') in Christ's sacrifice and not merely to its intrinsically infinite value derived from His person (a view shared by all parties):

The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin; and is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world. ... That, however, many who have been called by the gospel neither repent nor believe in Christ but perish in unbelief does not happen because of any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice of Christ offered on the cross, but through their own fault. ... [This] was the most free counsel of God the Father, that the life-giving and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect.<sup>28</sup>

It should be remembered that King James I and Archbishop Abbot (besides insisting that no discussion of Anglican episcopacy should be allowed at Dort) had charged the English delegates to be 'peremptory on the point of introducing into the decisions of the Synod, the Universality of Christ's Redemption'.<sup>29</sup> Davenant's role in securing this was crucial. Francis Gomarus, the supralapsarian Dutch 'Beza-ist' stood for a rigidly exclusive definition of limited atonement, a position resisted by Davenant and his friends. Heated discussions created a rift even within the English delegation when Bishop Carleton nearly yielded to pressure from Gomarus. Allport narrates the dramatic developments:

The doctrine of redemption as a blessing to be universally proposed and offered to all

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<sup>26</sup> See *Calvinus: Authentic Calvinism, A Clarification* (Norwich, 1996), pp. 11-12; *Amyraut Affirmed, or Owenism, a caricature of Calvinism* (Norwich, 2004), pp. 7-8.

<sup>27</sup> See Armstrong, pp. 59-60.

<sup>28</sup> H. B. Smith and P. Schaff, *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (London, 1877), p. 586).

<sup>29</sup> 'Life of Bishop Davenant' in *An Exposition of the Epistle of St Paul to the Colossians* by The Right Revd John Davenant, D. D., translated from the original Latin; with a life of the Author by Josiah Allport (two volumes, London, 1831), Vol. 1, p. xv.

men, was so little relished by the Synod, that it is clear, nothing but a threatened loss of the English deputies induced its insertion. In fact, it led to so much unpleasant discussion, that it appears the Bishop [Carleton] would have given way: but Davenant declared he would sooner cut off his hand than rescind any word of it; in which he was supported by Ward; and it was ultimately agreed to.<sup>30</sup>

As if to confirm that the 'Three Forms of Unity' [*Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism*<sup>31</sup> and *Canons of Dort*] and the Anglican *Thirty-nine Articles* were entirely consistent (whatever advocates of the later *Westminster Confession of Faith* were to say), Dr Samuel Ward wrote thus to Archbishop Usher:

We were careful that nothing should be defined which might gainsay the Confession of the Church of England, which was effected, for that they were desirous to have all things in the canons defined *unanimes consensu*. We foreign divines, after the subscription to the canons, and a general approbation of the Belgic Confession, and Catechism, which is the Palatine's, as containing no dogmata repugnant to the Word of God, ... were dismissed. In our approbation of the Belgic Confession, our consent was only asked for doctrinals, not for matters touching discipline [episcopacy or presbytery]. We had a solemn parting in the Synod, and all was concluded with a solemn feast.<sup>32</sup>

In view of the seeming soundness of Davenant and his colleagues, enough has surely been said to raise questions about John Owen's theological stance. Is it correct to regard him as 'the Calvin of England' and, as the Banner of Truth affirmed, 'the greatest British theologian of all time'?<sup>33</sup> While the second question involves a value judgement, the first is more than doubtful from a purely factual perspective. In view of the significant differences between Calvin and Beza - and even Richard Muller, for all his pleas that doctrinal and scholastic

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. xvi.

<sup>31</sup> Reflecting the *Heidelberg Catechism's* answer to Q. 37 (which states that 'Christ bore in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race'), David Pareus (1548-1622) expressed the 'Heidelberg' position at Dort. Too old to attend the Synod personally, his views on the atonement were heard *in absentia*. Significantly, the words of the *Heidelberg Catechism* are woven into his statement as cited by Davenant: 'The cause and matter of the passion of Christ was the sense and sustaining of the anger of God excited against the sin, not of some men, but of the whole human race; whence it arises, that the whole of sin and of the wrath of God against it was endured by Christ, but the whole of reconciliation was not obtained or restored to all' (see Allport, Vol. 2, p. 356; Quinta, pp. 34-5). Not surprisingly, many catechism commentators have been quick to distance the *Heidelberg Catechism* from a 'broader' understanding. However, in so doing, they have reflected not the views of the catechism's authors, Ursinus and Olevianus (surely the best guides as to its meaning) but a later and 'higher' orthodoxy of the Westminster type. Notwithstanding the Heidelberg divines' commitment to election and predestination, they nonetheless - like Calvin and Davenant - maintained a universal dimension to the atonement. Ursinus affirmed that as Christ 'died for all, in respect to the sufficiency of his ransom; and for the faithful alone in respect of the efficacy of the same, so also he willed to die for all in general, as touching the sufficiency of his merit ... But he willed to die for the elect alone as touching the efficacy of his death' (*The Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, ed. G. W. Williard (Phillipsburg, 1985) p. 223). Consistent with his colleague, Olevianus declared that Christ 'was being tried before God, laden with your sin and my sin and that of the whole world' (*A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism* (tr. & ed. L. D. Bierma (Grand Rapids, 1995) p. 65).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. xvii.

<sup>33</sup> See Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790 - An Evaluation* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990, rep. 2002), pp. 3-4.

continuity existed, acknowledges that the latter was ‘more rationalistic’ than the former<sup>34</sup> - it may be argued that Owen was ‘the *Beza* of England’. Following Beza rather than Calvin, Owen’s soteriology is flawed in a number of respects (as I have argued elsewhere). *First*, it is *exegetically* defective. The ‘limited love’ exegesis of John 3: 16<sup>35</sup> in the *Death of Death* has no prototype in Calvin’s theology. *Second*, it is *theologically* defective. Since his approach is driven more by ultra-orthodox dogma than scriptural data, universalist texts are ‘explained away’ in the interests of deductive theological consistency.<sup>36</sup> *Third*, it is *philosophically* defective. In his discussion of the purpose and nature of the Atonement, Owen’s entire approach was conditioned by the scholastic categories of medieval Aristotelianism.<sup>37</sup> This is not to deny that Owen’s opponent Richard Baxter - who championed Davenant’s teaching - also employed a scholastic methodology.<sup>38</sup> However, unlike Baxter’s significantly different scholastic mode, Owen’s had a more detrimental influence on his understanding of biblical teaching.

It is undeniable that for Owen, his ‘method’ influenced the ‘content’ of his theology. So much so, that we may say Owen’s Gospel is not Calvin’s Gospel. For this reason, his rejection of Davenant’s treatise as ‘repugnant unto truth’ has no credibility. Where the doctrine of the Atonement is concerned, it may be safely argued that ‘over-orthodox’ Owen (as Richard Baxter called him<sup>39</sup>) was no friend of the Canons of Dort, Calvin, or the early Reformed confessions, including the formularies of the Anglican Church in which he was ordained.<sup>40</sup> From a ‘Davenantian perspective’, Baxter’s commendations of Calvin and Dort make perfect sense. While Owen’s editor, W. H. Goold, found it difficult to reconcile Baxter’s rejection of Owen’s view of the atonement with his admiration for the divines of Dort<sup>41</sup> Baxter could happily declare: ‘In the article of the extent of redemption, wherein I am most suspected and accused, I do subscribe to the Synod of Dort, without any exception, limitation, or exposition, of any word, as doubtful and obscure’.<sup>42</sup>

The solution to Goold’s perplexity is not difficult to find for, unlike the Westminster Confession, and contrary to their popular image, the Canons of Dort contain a clear statement

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<sup>34</sup> R. A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree* (1988), p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> A. C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*, pp. 152-3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 96, 161

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 95ff; 129.

<sup>38</sup> Contrary to Carl Trueman’s criticism of me, I never denied Baxter’s scholastic activity. See my *Spotlight on Scholastics* (Norwich, 2005), p. 4 and *Atonement and Justification*, pp. 23, 106-7, 143.

<sup>39</sup> *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or Mr Richard Baxter’s Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times*, ed. M. Sylvester (London, 1696), Part 2, p. 199.

<sup>40</sup> Article XXXI explicitly affirms that ‘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;...’ Consistent with this, the prayer of consecration from the service of Holy Communion states that Christ made ‘a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world’. The Catechism teaches the catechumen to believe that God the Son ‘hath redeemed me, and all mankind’ while it hastens to add, in Calvinist rather than Arminian fashion, that God the Holy Ghost ‘sanctifieth me, and all the elect people of God’.

<sup>41</sup> W. H. Goold (ed), *The Works of John Owen* (London, 1850-5), Vol. 10, p. 430.

<sup>42</sup> Cited by W. Orme (ed), *The Practical Works of the Revd Richard Baxter* (London, 1830), Vol. 1, p. 456.

about the universal sufficiency of the atonement. It is from the very same perspective that Amyraut himself was able to rebut the charge of heterodoxy at the National Synod of Alençon (1637).<sup>43</sup> In short, whilst neither Baxter nor Amyraut questioned the 'effectual application' of the atonement in the salvation of the elect, they were able to affirm - on the authority of the Synod of Dort - that there was a universal dimension to the atonement. As Amyraut himself eulogised Calvin, enlisting his support against his ultra-orthodox critics,<sup>44</sup> so Baxter expressed his admiration for the Genevan reformer in a way Owen never did: 'I know no man, since the Apostles' days, whom I value and honour more than Calvin, and whose judgement in all things, one with another, I more esteem and come nearer to'.<sup>45</sup>

Bringing Baxter into the picture is directly relevant to our appreciation of Davenant. Indeed, the former is perhaps the most famous proponent of 'the Davenant dimension'. For puritan Baxter, Davenant was one of 'The old Orthodox Protestant Bishops'<sup>46</sup> of the pre-Laudian type. No other English divine stamped his outlook more decisively on Baxter than did John Davenant. Writing to his 'dearly beloved friends' at Kidderminster in 1650, Baxter urged them 'to beware of extremes in the controverted points of religion. When you avoid one error, take heed you run not into another ... The middle way which Camero,<sup>47</sup> Ludov. Crocius,<sup>48</sup> Amyraldus,<sup>49</sup> (John) Davenant, &c. go, I think, is nearest the Truth'.<sup>50</sup>

Not surprisingly, Baxter owned a number of Davenant's works.<sup>51</sup> Even then, he insists that his theological understanding was formed prior to his acquaintance with them.<sup>52</sup> He confesses to admiring Amyraut, Davenant and others because they confirmed his own grasp of things. Thus, while he shunned the *Bezan* Calvinism of 'over-orthodox' Owen, Davenant's influence helped him to avoid the 'opposite error'. Writing in 1653 to Peter Ince, Baxter declared 'I am more firmly established against Arminianism than ever I was in my life; & much more since I ... went the way of the Synod of Dort, ...'<sup>53</sup> In 1655, Augustine and Davenant were cited authorities in Baxter's response to enquiries about predestination and reprobation.<sup>54</sup> The

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<sup>43</sup> See J. Quick, *Synodicon in Gallia Reformata* (London, 1692), Vol. 2, p. 354.

<sup>44</sup> See Armstrong, op cit, pp. 186f.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh, 1883), Vol. 8, p. 136. Neil Keeble's assessment is therefore wholly inaccurate: 'Though we may wonder that Baxter could say 'I am no Arminian', it is no surprise to find him denying whole-hearted allegiance to Calvin' (*Richard Baxter: Puritan Man of Letters* (Oxford, 1982), p. 72).

<sup>46</sup> N. H. Keeble and Geoffrey F. Nuttall (eds), *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991), Vol. 1, p. 358 (*Letter* 516). Hereafter Baxter, *Letter* 'n'.

<sup>47</sup> John Cameron (c. 1580-1625) was Amyraut's mentor and predecessor at Saumur.

<sup>48</sup> Lewis Crocius (1586-1655) was one of the 'moderate' Bremen delegates at the Synod of Dort.

<sup>49</sup> Moise Amyraut (1596-1664), Cameron's successor at Saumur.

<sup>50</sup> Baxter, *Letter* 32.

<sup>51</sup> Baxter, *Letter* 94, n.5.

<sup>52</sup> See Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in its Seventeenth-Century Context* (Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1993), p. 26.

<sup>53</sup> Baxter, *Letter* 148.

<sup>54</sup> Baxter, *Letter* 225.

publication of Baxter's 1649 manuscript on *Universal Redemption* was held back<sup>55</sup> because he considered works by Amyraut, Jean Dailié<sup>56</sup> and Davenant rendered it superfluous. He asked, 'What need more than Davenant's *Dissertation* & Dailié's *Apology*?'<sup>57</sup> While Baxter's Amyraldian friend John Howe (1630-1705)<sup>58</sup> shared Baxter's enthusiasm for Davenant, he insisted that 'however about Redemption Davenant and Amyraldus may have spoken many of your thoughts, yet their books do not commonly fall into hands of young scholars (whose minds while such are least prepossessed & almost *rasa tabula*) as yours are like to do'.<sup>59</sup>

Baxter and Howe were not the only seventeenth-century English admirers of Davenant. While they were young men, Davenant's influence was felt in the Westminster Assembly (1643-9). During the debates on redemption, Edmund Calamy (1600-60) declared:

I am far from universal redemption in the Arminian sense; but that that I hold is in the sense of our divines (e.g. Bishop Davenant) in the Synod of Dort, that Christ did pay a price for all ... that Jesus Christ did not only die sufficiently for all, but God did intend, in giving Christ, and Christ in giving himself, did intend to put all men in a state of salvation in case they do believe...<sup>60</sup>

Like Baxter and his grandfather, the Dissenting leader Dr Edmund Calamy III (1671-1732) argued in the next century that 'the doctrine of particular election' is consistent with 'a general love of God to the world'.<sup>61</sup> Allport is careful to cite Calamy's exhortation to those who think more narrowly to 'consult the learned and peaceable Bishop Davenant's *Animadversions upon Hoard's Treatise*; a book not valued according to its worth'.<sup>62</sup> When Gilbert Burnet, the Latitudinarian Bishop of Salisbury failed to make sense of 'middle way' orthodoxy, Calamy was quick to point out 'that the learned Davenant, one of his Lordship's predecessors in the See of Sarum, had not only vigorously asserted and defended that middle way in the Synod of Dort, in opposition to Remonstrants and Supralapsarians, but had also been at no small pains to support it in several of his writings; of which his Lordship took not the least notice'.<sup>63</sup>

In the nineteenth century, J. C. Ryle, the first Bishop of Liverpool expressed the 'Davenant dimension' in no uncertain terms. Commenting on John 1:29, he wrote that 'Christ's death is profitable to none but to the elect who believe on His name. ... But ... I dare not say that no

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<sup>55</sup> According to Baxter's late instructions, the work was eventually published posthumously by Matthew Meade in 1694.

<sup>56</sup> Dailié (1594-1670) - as a preacher, the 'French Baxter' - was a friend and former fellow student of Amyraut at Saumur, later pastor at Charenton, Paris.

<sup>57</sup> Baxter, *Letter* 314. Also 115, n. 1; 263n; 140, n. 4; 77, n. 3.

<sup>58</sup> See David P. Field, *Rigide Calvinisme in a Softer Dresse: The Moderate Presbyterianism of John Howe (1630-1705)* (Edinburgh, 2004).

<sup>59</sup> Baxter, *Letter* 436.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in A. F. Mitchell and J. Struthers (eds), *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (London, 1874), p. 152.

<sup>61</sup> *Divine Mercy Exalted: or Free Grace in Its Glory* (London, 1703), p. iv.

<sup>62</sup> Allport, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 1. See also C. G. Bolam, J. Goring, H. L. Short, R. Thomas, *The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism* (London, 1968), pp. 134-5.

atonement has been made, in any sense, except for the elect. ... When I read that the wicked who are lost, “deny the Lord that bought them,” (2 Pet. 2:1) and that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,” (2 Cor. 5:19), I dare not confine the intention of redemption to the saints alone. Christ is for every man’. Commenting on John 3:16 and appealing to Bishop John Davenant, Calvin and others, he concludes: ‘Those who confine God’s love exclusively to the elect appear to me to take a narrow and contracted view of God’s character and attributes. ... I have long come to the conclusion that men may be more systematic in their statements than the Bible, and may be led into grave error by idolatrous veneration of a system’.<sup>64</sup>

Such a dismissal of Bezan orthodoxy is remarkable in a work published in facsimile by the Banner of Truth Trust. It directly challenges the Bezan orthodoxy of Owen’s *Death of Death*. Ryle, who quotes copiously from Davenant’s reply to Hoard and another pro-Amyraldian work on the *Gallican Controversy*<sup>65</sup> would doubtless have something to say about the deletion of Davenant’s *Dissertation* from the new *Exposition of Colossians*.

Even more remarkable is a recent Banner of Truth publication about debates over the Atonement in nineteenth-century Wales.<sup>66</sup> An otherwise informative and valuable study, the book is published with a highly critical translator’s introduction against the author’s theological stance. Clearly out of sympathy with the tight ‘limited atonement’ orthodoxy of both translator and publisher, Owen Thomas cites at length a letter from the English delegates at the Synod of Dort to Archbishop Abbot, prefacing it with the remark that Drs Davenant and Ward in particular, were very decided in wishing for ‘a wider interpretation’ than the ‘more limited view’.<sup>67</sup>

The author and many of his brethren were convinced that the scholastic ‘Owenite’ doctrine of limited atonement involved an ‘unscriptural limitation’.<sup>68</sup> Thomas and his friends were persuaded that Article 18 of the Calvinistic Methodist *Confession of Faith* (1823) was ‘wise above what is written’.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, this article *Of Redemption* is more ‘particular’ than the *Westminster Confession of Faith* equivalent. These arguments had significant effect. In 1874, the year Thomas’s book was published, the General Assembly of the denomination (Carmarthen, 1874; Portmadoc, 1875) modified the interpretation of the article with an appendix stressing the universal sufficiency of the atonement.<sup>70</sup>

In short, the whole controversy concerned the true character of Calvinism. Despite the translator’s criticisms, Owen Thomas had done his homework well. He was thoroughly aware that John Calvin and many other reformers both Continental and British did not teach the doctrine of limited atonement and that the Canons of Dort maintain a universal dimension in the atonement.<sup>71</sup> The first of these accurate and well-established observations is dismissed

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<sup>64</sup> *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St John* (London, 1865), Vol. 1, pp. 61-2, 159.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 159-60.

<sup>66</sup> Owen Thomas, tr John Aaron, *The Atonement Controversy in Welsh Theological Literature and Debate, 1701-1841* (Edinburgh, 2002).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 124-5.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 323.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* p. 323.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p. 324.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 123-4. See my *Window on Welsh Calvinism: Owen Thomas and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on*

with a doubtful two-fold appeal to highly debateable studies by Robert A. Peterson and Paul Helm.<sup>72</sup> In all this highly biased discussion, the translator fails to perceive the integrity and accuracy of the author's case. The former's reference to 'classical Reformed teaching'<sup>73</sup> is question begging. By blaming 'moderate Calvinism' as 'Calvinism in decay',<sup>74</sup> John Aaron is effectively saying that 'Calvin's Calvinism' is dangerous!

The simple fact is that Owen Thomas and his friends saw the need to 'moderate' the 'ultra-Calvinism' of the day in order to return to a Bible-based 'Authentic Calvinism'. One may say that they sought to rescue the denomination from 'Owenistic Methodism' and to be true to correctly-defined 'Calvinistic Methodism'. In this respect, contrary to the standpoint of both translator and publisher, the author produced one of the most praise-worthy and illuminating studies in historical theology ever written. For us, it is important to note the 'Davenant dimension' in the theology of Owen Thomas. The author would doubtless welcome the Quinta Press edition of Davenant's *Dissertation*, an event which will simply reinforce and confirm his well-argued case. For us, we welcome the work with joy. Let us pray that, by the blessing of God, it will help restore 'compassionate Calvinism' to the Church of the twenty-first century and bring blessing to a desperately-needy world.

Dr Alan C. Clifford

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*the Atonement* (Norwich, 2006) for selected 'Davenant dimension' citations from Augustine, John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Anglican Reformers, the Canons of Dort, John Davenant, Moïse Amyraut, William Twisse, Edmund Calamy, Richard Baxter, Philip Doddridge, Jonathan Edwards, Joseph Bellamy, Thomas Boston, Thomas Chalmers, Charles Hodge, Robert Dabney, J. C. Ryle, John Murray and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. These statements suggest that John Owen and his friends are 'out of step' with some of the wisest heads of the Church of Christ.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. pp. 123, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. xxxiii.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. xxxii.