

## Charles Drelincourt: Amyraldian sympathiser?

Born at Sedan of godly Huguenot parents in 1595, Charles Drelincourt became one of the great lights of the French Reformed Church. Having studied at the Reformed Academy in Sedan, his preparation for the ministry was completed at the famous Academy of Saumur. Following his ordination in June 1618, Drelincourt became the pastor of a Reformed congregation near Langres. Two years later, he was called to minister to the large congregation at Charenton near Paris, his first sermon being preached there on 15 March 1620. In 1625, Drelincourt married the only daughter of a wealthy Parisian merchant, by whom he had sixteen children - thirteen sons and three daughters. Four of the sons became pastors and two others were doctors. Sadly, the only surviving daughter lapsed into Romanism. Others died in infancy or at a young age. Escaping from France at the time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the sixth son Pierre became an Anglican clergyman in Ireland where he served as Dean of Armagh.

During a long and settled ministry at Charenton, Drelincourt became famous for pastoral visitation. He was specially noted for his ministry to the sick and dying. A prolific author as well as an able preacher, his most famous book was *Consolations de l'âme fidèle contre les frayeurs de la mort* (1651), i.e. *The Christian's Consolations against the Fears of Death*. The work saw forty French editions besides translations into Dutch (high and low), Italian and English. So compelling was its sacred eloquence that Queen Mary II (consort of William III) read the book a total of seven times! Besides volumes of sermons and other pastoral writings, Drelincourt produced important treatises in the ongoing controversy with the Church of Rome.<sup>1</sup> Outraged by a scurrilous attack on Calvin's memory, he wrote *La Defense de Calvin contre l'outrage fait a sa memoire* (1667). Such was his diligence that he said he wished to die with his pen in his hand. His whole life was conspicuous for devotion to the Lord and His people. His personal piety was extraordinary. In the last years of his life, he never heard the clock strike without falling on his knees in prayer. Despite worsening health, Drelincourt preached his final sermon only a week before his death. In the 50th year of his ministry at Charenton, he died on 3 November 1669 at the age of 74.<sup>2</sup>

One of the five pastors of Charenton, Charles Drelincourt shared the responsibility for leadership of the most influential Reformed Church in France. Thus it was impossible to avoid being involved in the national controversy over 'universal grace' as it was known. While his colleagues Jean Daillé, Jean Mestrezat, Michel Le Faucheur and Edmé Aubertin supported the Saumur Professor Moïse Amyraut,<sup>3</sup> Drelincourt was less convinced. He may fairly be described as a neutral in the debate. He neither sided with his Amyraldian brethren nor concurred with the likes of Pierre du Moulin, Friedrich Spanheim, the brothers André and Guillaume Rivet and other ultra-orthodox adversaries of Amyraut. Pained by the whole controversy, he was relieved and pleased when the National Synod of Alençon exonerated Amyraut from the charge of heresy in 1637.<sup>4</sup>

Drelincourt's views on the extent of the atonement therefore possess an interest all their own. How precisely did he express himself when the subject was touched on in his works? Did he lean in the direction of Du Moulin or Amyraut? A definitive answer to these questions would of course require a comprehensive survey of his

writings. Albeit practical and pastoral in intent, his *Catechism* (1642) and the *Consolations* (1651) - both of which appeared in the post-Alençon era - suggest a soteriology more consistent with Amyraut's emphasis than Du Moulin's.

When combating Rome's multiple mediators in his *Catechism*, Drelincourt declares fully and without the least qualification:

There is only one God, and one only mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself a ransom for all (1 *Tim.* 2: 5-6), wherefore St John tells us, in the second of his first Epistle, My little children...we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.<sup>5</sup>

In the *Consolations*, Drelincourt is happy to direct the fearful believer to 'the Saviour of the world'<sup>6</sup> rather than, say, 'the redeemer of God's elect'. Elsewhere, he is equally happy to quote verbatim such universalist texts as John 1: 29, John 3: 16 and 1 Timothy 2: 6<sup>7</sup> without any Du Moulinist - we might even say 'Owenite' - qualifications, i.e. 'all' = 'all kinds' = 'some'; 'world' = 'elect world' etc. The validity of these observations are confirmed in the concluding prayer to Chapter 15:

Thou didst pray with loud cries and tears, to be delivered from death, and that this cup might pass from thee, that thou mightest not taste of its bitterness. But, O Lord! thy death was quite of a different nature from mine, or that of thy blessed martyrs. Thy death was to make atonement for the sins of the whole world; whereas ours is not to satisfy the justice of God, but that we may reap the fruits of his eternal compassions.<sup>8</sup>

It is hard to resist at least a tentative conclusion that Drelincourt was an Amyraldian sympathiser in the end. After the early fires of controversy had subsided, perhaps calm reflection drew him eventually to share the convictions of his Charenton brethren. Convinced as his colleagues were that Amyraut was a faithful exponent of both the Bible and John Calvin,<sup>9</sup> Drelincourt's obvious admiration for the great Reformer probably helped him to 'get off the fence'.

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1. See Philip Benedict, *The Faith and Fortune of France's Huguenots* (Aldershot/Vermont, 2001)
2. See Bayle, P., *Dictionary Historical and Critical* (London, 1735), Vol. 2, pp. 693-6 (article under 'Drelincourt').
3. See Van Stam, F. P., *The Controversy over the Theology of Saumur, 1635-1650* (Amsterdam & Maarssen, 1988), 53.
4. See John Quick, *Synodicon in Gallia Reformata* (London, 1692), ii. 352-7; 455; 554-61.
5. C. Drelincourt, *A Catechism, or Familiar Instructions on the Principal Points of the Christian Religion* (London, 1698), 64.
6. C. Drelincourt, *The Christian's Consolations against the Fears of Death* (Edinburgh, 1771), 245, 282.
7. *Ibid.* 283-6.

8. Ibid. 289-90.

9. See A. C. Clifford, *Calvinus: Authentic Calvinism, a clarification* (Norwich, 1996).