

# A Tale of Two Wills?

## Calvin and Amyraut on Ezekiel 18:23

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### Amyraut, Calvin, and Exegesis: The Issue of Ezekiel 18:23

Much of the modern scholarship on the hypothetical universalism of Moysse Amyraut has focused on his consistent and detailed citation of Calvin as evidence of his allegiance to aspects of Calvin's theology neglected or even rejected by the majority of those who had come to be identified as orthodox Calvinists in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> On the broader question of whether Calvin held to a doctrine of universal atonement or limited atonement the scholarship had been very mixed. A significant group of writers has argued for a doctrine of universal atonement in Calvin.<sup>2</sup> An equally significant group has argued the opposite, namely that Calvin

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<sup>1</sup> Thus, Lawrence Proctor, "The Theology of Moysse Amyraut Considered as a Reaction against Seventeenth-Century Calvinism" (Ph.D. diss., University of Leeds, 1952), 233, 240–41; François Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et prédication: L'oeuvre d'Amyraut et la querelle de la grâce universelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 273–89; Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 38–42, 173–74, et passim; Frans Pieter van Stam, *The Controversy over the Theology of Saumur, 1635–1650* (Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 1988), 53–56, 167–70, 432; Alan C. Clifford, *Calvinus: Authentic Calvinism, a Clarification*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Norwich: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 2004); idem, *Amyraut Affirmed, or Owenism a Caricature of Calvinism: A Reply to Ian Hamilton's 'Amyraldianism—Is it Modified Calvinism'* (Norwich: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Van Buren, *Christ in Our Place: The Substitutionary Character of Calvin's Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Edinburgh, 1957); Basil Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*, ed. Gervase Duffield (Appleford: Sutton Courtney Press, 1966), 19–37; Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*; James William Anderson, "The Grace of God and the Non-elect in Calvin's Commentaries and Sermons" (Th.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1976); R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); M. Charles Bell, "Was Calvin a Calvinist," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36, no. 4 (1983): 535–40; idem, "Calvin and the Extent of Atonement," *Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (April 1983): 115–23; James B. Torrance, "The Incarnation and Limited Atonement," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 2 (1984): 32–40; Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); idem, *Calvinus and Amyraut Affirmed*; Kevin Dixon Kennedy, *Union with Christ and the Extent of the Atonement* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

taught limited atonement.<sup>3</sup> There is also a smaller group of scholars who have found Calvin's teaching indeterminate.<sup>4</sup> (In what follows, I refrain from using the term *atonement* whether limited or unlimited on the ground that it is highly anachronistic and has only contributed to the confusion present in much of the modern scholarship.)

One of the many places in Calvin's works cited by Moysse Amyraut in support of his own version of hypothetical universalism is the comment on Ezekiel 18:23,<sup>5</sup> which Amyraut cited *in extenso* as a foundation for his interpretation in his own sermon on the text.<sup>6</sup> In the view of at least one line of modern scholarship, moreover, the exegesis of this passage is crucial to the understanding of Amyraut's relationship to Calvin and proves rather conclusively that Amyraut correctly understood Calvin's theology specifi-

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<sup>3</sup> Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 387–91; William Cunningham, "Calvin and Beza," in *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1872), 345–412; François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 231; Roger Nicole, "Moysse Amyraut (1596–1664) and the Controversy on Universal Grace, First Phase (1634–1637)" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1966); idem, "John Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 197–225; John Murray, "Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement," *The Banner of Truth* 234 (March 1983): 20–22; Paul Helm, "Calvin, English Calvinism and the Logic of Doctrinal Development," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43, no. 2 (1981): 179–85; idem, "The Logic of Limited Atonement," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 3 (1985): 47–54; and idem, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1982); Jonathan H. Rainbow, *The Will of God and the Cross: An Historical and Theological Study of John Calvin's Doctrine of Limited Redemption* (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1990); Frederick S. Leahy, "Calvin and the Extent of the Atonement," *Reformed Theological Journal* 8 (November 1992): 54–64.

<sup>4</sup> Robert A. Peterson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1983); R. W. A. Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to the Synod of Dort," 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 1979), I, 125; 2.67; A. N. S. Lane, "The Quest for the Historical Calvin," *Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): 95–113; Hans Boersma, "Calvin and the Extent of the Atonement," *Evangelical Quarterly* 64 (1992): 333–55; A. T. B. McGowan, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 48–53; Pieter L. Rouwendal, "Calvin's Forgotten Classical Position on the Extent of the Atonement: About Sufficiency, Efficiency, and Anachronism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (2008): 317–35.

<sup>5</sup> *Ioannis Calvinii in viginti prima Ezechielis prophetae capita praelectiones ... cum praefatione Theodori Bezae* (Geneva: Franciscus Perrinus, 1565), also in *Ioannis Calvinii opera quae supersunt omnia*, 59 vols., ed. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss (Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863–1900), vol. 40, hereinafter abbreviated as *CO*; in English, John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. Thomas Myers, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849–1850), hereinafter abbreviated as *CTS Ezekiel*. I have used the Myers translation, emending it as necessary from the text in *CO*.

<sup>6</sup> Moysse Amyraut, *Sermon sur les paroles du Prophete Ezechiel, Chap. 18. v. 23*, in idem, *Sermons sur divers textes de la sainte ecriture*, seconde edition (Saumur: Isaac Desbordes, 1653), 37–73, citing Calvin's commentary at length, 48–52.

cally as teaching a “dual divine intention.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it is the interpretation of such passages that marks the difference between a “true disciple” of Calvin, like Amyraut, and those later Reformed writers who are actually disciples of Beza.<sup>8</sup> Examination of Amyraut’s and Calvin’s reading of the passage in Ezekiel is certainly significant to the understanding of the relationship of the two thinkers inasmuch as this is one of the few passages cited by Amyraut from Calvin that is also accompanied by a significant exposition on Amyraut’s part.

Although an examination of the exegesis of a single text cannot resolve the larger issue of Calvin’s relationship to later understandings of the divine intention to save and the extent of salvation, the centrality of the exegesis of Ezekiel 18:23 to Amyraut’s own claims renders a close comparative reading of Calvin’s and Amyraut’s interpretations as potentially useful to the evaluation of the relationship of their theologies and to resolution of the question of Calvin’s relationship to the variant doctrines of redemption that appeared in Reformed circles in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Specifically, Calvin’s comments on Ezekiel 18:23 bear on the debate over the direction of his doctrine inasmuch as this text is one of the few places in his writings that not only represents the universal offer of salvation but also discusses it in relation to the eternal counsel or decree of God and moves to resolve the relationship of universal promise and particular election with reference to distinctions concerning the divine will. In support of his own teaching, Amyraut cited Calvin’s lecture on Ezekiel 18:23, arguing that Calvin’s interpretation of the text supported a view of two mercies and two wills in God.<sup>9</sup> In the view of Pierre Du Moulin, Amyraut’s indefatigable opponent, Calvin never hypothesized two “conseils de Dieu frustratoires.”<sup>10</sup> Du Moulin also objected to the practice of citing Calvin from the pulpit—a human author, referenced as an authority.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Clifford, *Amyraut*, 28–29; cf. idem, *Calvinus*, 16, 27–28; cf. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 188–89, 198–205.

<sup>8</sup> Clifford, *Amyraut*, 8; cf. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 38–42, 136–38, 158–60.

<sup>9</sup> Amyraut, *Sermon sur les paroles du Prophete Ezechiel*, 61–66; cf. Clifford, *Amyraut Affirmed*, 9–10; Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 188–90, assuming Amyraut’s agreement with Calvin.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Du Moulin, *Esclaircissement des controverses salmuriennes* (Leiden: Jean Maire, 1648), 233; cf. Rainbow, *Will of God and the Cross*, 150–51, assuming Amyraut to have misread Calvin.

<sup>11</sup> Du Moulin, *Esclaircissement*, 231–41.

## Reading Calvin's Exegesis: Amyraut on the Interpretation of Ezekiel 18:23

That “excellent servant of God,” Amyraut comments, has “provided us with two memorable points” to consider in the text of Ezekiel 18:23. First, Calvin evidences a “beautiful modesty” that ought to be observed in considering the “incomprehensible counsels of God.”<sup>12</sup> Specifically, when God reveals something concerning the economy of his willing concerning the human race, it is not our place to speculate as to what relates or does not relate to his ultimate nature, or whether differing revelations evidence two opposing wills in God, inasmuch as the divine nature is a depth that neither human beings nor angels can penetrate.<sup>13</sup> The second point offered by “this great personage,” Calvin, is “an excellent solution to the difficulty” of the seeming contradictions in the divine willing, namely, that “the word of God ... presents his mercy to be considered in two ways.”<sup>14</sup> According to the first of these modes of divine mercy, the human reception of eternal salvation, as evidenced in the remission of sins and the gift of new life, would require “a certain precedent quality” in human beings, “without which their pardon would be impossible.”<sup>15</sup> According, however, to the other mode of divine mercy, this precedent quality is not required or presupposed in human beings but rather created in them by God.<sup>16</sup> There are, therefore, two “degrees” or “kinds” of mercy indicated in Scripture, the latter of which alone is “simply and absolutely free.”<sup>17</sup>

Much as he had argued an absolute divine right over creation against Arminius,<sup>18</sup> Amyraut here indicates that there can be no necessity imposed on God but that God works according to *sa proper necessité*: When his creatures are good and holy, God cannot but love them, not because he owes anything to the creature but because he is infinitely good. Even so, when

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<sup>12</sup> Amyraut, *Sermon sur les paroles du Prophete Ezechiel*, 52.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 55: “La parole de Dieu ... nous presente sa misericorde à considerer en deux manieres.”

<sup>15</sup> Amyraut, *Sermon sur les paroles du Prophete Ezechiel*, 56: “vne certaine qualité prealable, sans laquelle il est impossible qu’elle leur pardonne.”

<sup>16</sup> Amyraut, *Sermon sur les paroles du Prophete Ezechiel*, 57: “L’autre maniere en laquelle elle nous presente cette misericorde à considerer, est autant qu’elle ne requiert point cette qualité, mais qu’elle de deploye à la former dans les hommes.”

<sup>17</sup> Amyraut, *Sermon sur les paroles du Prophete Ezechiel*, 57: “la derniere est purement, & simplement, et absolument libre.”

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Moysse Amyraut, *De iure Dei in creaturas dissertatio in Dissertationes theologicae quatuor* (Saumur: Isaac Desbordes, 1645), 102; on Arminius’ understanding of the limitation of divine right, see Richard A. Muller “God, Predestination, and the Integrity of the Created Order: A Note on Patterns in Arminius’ Theology,” in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham (Kirkville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 431–46.

the creature is corrupt, God cannot but hate him because of the sin, not because God is answerable to a standard outside of himself but because he is infinitely just. Finally, when the sinful creature has recourse to the mercy of God, God cannot but have compassion, not because he is in any way obligated to the creature but because he is infinitely merciful.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, God has revealed two covenantal relationships with his fallen creatures, a covenant of nature or legal covenant (*alliance de la nature, alliance légale*) and an evangelical covenant or covenant of grace (*alliance Evangelique, alliance de la grâce*), the former requiring for salvation a condition of perfect holiness, in effect, presupposing a condition in human beings as the basis for salvation; the latter requiring for salvation the condition of faith but rather than presupposing it as a condition for salvation creating it in human beings as the basis for their salvation.<sup>20</sup> The evangelical covenant, therefore, “is an absolute promise, and nonetheless a conditional formula of covenant” because it is founded on a mercy “that demands the condition, ‘if you believe, you will be saved.’”<sup>21</sup>

Amyraut continues, setting aside his own declaration that Calvin had shown the unsuitability of speculation over whether or not God might have two wills and declares, “we therefore now see, my brethren, how these observations serve to reconcile the two wills of God that had seemed repugnant to one another, and in the same way [serve] to explain the solution provided by that great man [i.e., Calvin].”<sup>22</sup> There is “no contradiction between these two kinds or two degrees of mercy,” namely, the two covenants,

so also is there none at all between these two wills on which they depend. He wills that all human beings might be saved. This is true: and he wills this fondly (*avec affection*): but this is according to that mercy which presupposes the condition, and not the other. If he does not find the condition in them, he does not so will. He wills that some of the human race might be saved. This is true: but it is according to this second kind of mercy which does not demand the condition, but creates it: which does not presuppose it, but creates it in human beings.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Amyraut, *Sermon sur les paroles du Prophete Ezechiel*, 59.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 59–60.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 61: “c’est vne promesse absoluë, & non pas vne formule conditionnelle d’alliance. L’Alliance Evangelique donc a son rapport à cette autre misericorde qui exige la condition, Si tu crois, tu seras sauué.

<sup>22</sup> Amyraut, *Sermon sur les paroles du Prophete Ezechiel*, 61.

<sup>23</sup> Amyraut, *Sermon sur les paroles du Prophete Ezechiel*, 61: “Certes comme il n’y a point de contradiction entre ces deux sortes ou ces deux degrez de misericorde, aussi n’y en a-t’il point entre les deux volentez qui en dependent. Il veut que tous les hommes soient sauuez. Il est vray: & il veut avec affection: mais c’est selon certe misericorde qui presuppose la condition, & non autrement. Si la condition ne se trouve pas en eux, il ne le veut pas. Il veut que peu d’entre les hommes sont sauuez. Il est vray: mais c’est selon sette seconde sorte de misericorde qui n’exige pas la condition, nais la crée: qui ne la presuppose pas, mais la fait en l’homme.”

Arguably, this distinction of two wills, one hypothetically universal given the conditionality of the promise, the other particular and resting on grace alone, represents a form of scholastic argumentation.<sup>24</sup> The question is how Amyraut will root it in or link it to Calvin's exegesis.

Calvin states that "the prophet does not dispute subtly concerning the secret counsel of God?" "Certainly," Amyraut continues,

he does not wish to speak of the decree that depends on this second kind of mercy, the counsel of which is so free that one cannot plumb its reasons, and concerning which one cannot advance anything other than the divine good pleasure: the kind that, when one comes to examine why some believe, and others do not believe, why God has given faith to some and not to others, one must halt, as if at the edge of an abyss.<sup>25</sup>

Rather, the prophet speaks of the first kind of mercy and of the first kind of divine will, according to which God wills that all human beings be saved on grounds of belief, based on the preaching of the gospel.<sup>26</sup>

That, concludes Amyraut, is the solution to the great difficulty: These two kinds of mercy are taught throughout the Word of God and ministers of the gospel "announce one or the other as the occasion requires," recognizing that there is a significant difference between the two occasions, specifically whether it is a matter of drawing their hearers toward faith and repentance.<sup>27</sup> The minister will then not mention the two kinds of mercy and the will that arises from them, inasmuch as no minister will say "believe, because God has ordained that you believe," or "believe, because it is only God who can make you believe," or "believe because you are reprobated, and God will never give you faith."<sup>28</sup> Rather, the minister will say, "believe, because if you believe you will be saved; believe, because if you do not believe, the wrath of God will rest on you; believe, because it is the only way to enter into life."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. the argument in Stephen Strehle, "Universal Grace and Amyraldianism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1989): 345–57.

<sup>25</sup> Amyraut, *Sermon sur les paroles du Prophete Ezechiel*, 63–64: "Certes qu'il ne veut parler du decret qui depend de cette seconde sorte de misericorde dont le conseil est si libre qu'on n'en peut sonder les raisons, & n'en peut-on alleguer aucune que son bon plaisir: de sorte que quand on vient à examiner pourquoy les vns croient & les autres ne croient pas, pourquoy Dieu a donné de croire à ceux-cy, & non à ceux-là, il se faut arrester là comme sur le bord d'un abysme."

<sup>26</sup> Amyraut, *Sermon sur les paroles du Prophete Ezechiel*, 64.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

### Calvin on Ezekiel 18:23

Calvin commented on Ezekiel 18:23 at least three times: a significant meditation on the passage in Calvin's *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* (1552), the as yet unrecovered sermon on the passage (1552–1553), and the comment in Calvin's *In Ezechielis prophetae praelectiones*, delivered in 1563–1564 and published posthumously in 1565, the latter being the passage cited by Amyraut. Calvin also referenced Ezekiel 18:23 in the *Institutes* as an illustration of the mercy of God in the law and the prophets and the readiness of God to offer “mercy to a people covered with innumerable transgressions.”<sup>30</sup>

In the *Praelectiones*, at the conclusion of his reading of Ezekiel 18:21–22, Calvin notes the two essential elements of conversion, a turning away from sin and a new obedience to God: The prophet teaches that those who are penitent “pass at once from death to life, since God blots out all their transgressions.”<sup>31</sup> This comment leads Calvin, at verse 23, to offer one of his universalizing statements concerning the will of God in relation to the yearnings of the heathen to appease divine anger, the clearer declarations of the law and the prophets, and the full promise of pardon in the preaching of the gospel:

He confirms the same sentiment in other words, that God desires nothing more earnestly than that those who were perishing and rushing to destruction should return into the way of safety.... And this is the knowledge of salvation, to embrace his mercy which he offers us in Christ. It follows, then, that what the prophet now says is very true, that God wills not the death of a sinner, because he meets him of his own accord, and is not only prepared to receive all who fly to his pity, but he calls them toward him with a loud voice, when he sees how they are alienated from all hope of safety.<sup>32</sup>

The promise of salvation is universal but conditional: All people are equally called to repentance and all who seriously repent will be saved.<sup>33</sup>

The passage in Ezekiel does not refer to the decree or to predestination, but, given its clear identification of a universal offer of salvation on condition of repentance and new obedience, Calvin expresses the concern that the prophet's words not be used to undermine the doctrine of election:

If any one should object then there is no election of God, by which he has

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<sup>30</sup> John Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis*, IV.i.25: Latin text in *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, vol. 2; following the English of John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), emending as necessary.

<sup>31</sup> Calvin, *In Ezechielis prophetae praelectiones*, 18:21–22, in loc. (*CO* 40, col. 445; *CTS Ezekiel*, 2.246).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 18:23, in loc. (*CO* 40, col. 445; *CTS Ezekiel*, 2.246–47).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 18:23, in loc. (*CO* 40, col. 445; *CTS Ezekiel*, 2.247); similarly, Calvin, *Institutio*, IV.i.25.

predestinated a fixed number to salvation, the answer is at hand: the prophet does not here speak of God's secret counsel (*hic prophetam verba non facere de arcano Dei consilio*), but only recalls miserable men from despair, that they may apprehend the hope of pardon, and repent and embrace the offered salvation.<sup>34</sup>

Calvin has here begun to broach the issue of the simplicity and unity of the divine will: It is not as if the promise of salvation upon repentance and election point in different directions and indicate a *duplex* or equivocal willing in God. The prophet's words of universal promise do not refer to the eternal counsel of God, nor do they set the universal promise of the gospel against the eternal counsel as a different will. Rather, God always wills the same thing, presumably, the salvation of the elect, albeit in different ways, namely, in his eternal counsel and through the preaching of the gospel: "If any one again objects that in this way God acts in two ways (*Deum hoc modo fieri duplicem*), the answer is ready, that God always wishes the same thing (*Deum semper idem velle*), though by different ways (*sed diversis modis*), and in a manner inscrutable to us."<sup>35</sup> There is a clear parallel in Amyraut's reading: God appears to act in two rather different ways but, unlike Amyraut, Calvin is not referring to two revealed mercies.

Where Amyraut has begun to move toward an argument concerning two divine mercies and two divine wills, Calvin insists on a single divine volition. Further, also in contrast to Amyraut's reading, Calvin nowhere raises the issue of different covenant relationships or of two different mercies of God, deployed, as Amyraut indicates, in relation to differing covenants. Amyraut's argument evidences a later stratum of Reformed thought in which the language of two covenants, one of nature or law and one of grace or the gospel had become a prominent feature of theological argument, with the covenant of nature or law standing after the Fall as a subsidiary covenant alongside the covenant of grace.<sup>36</sup> Calvin did, of course, elsewhere refer to the Mosaic law as a "legal covenant" (*pactio legalis*) in contrast to the "evangelical covenant" (*pactio evangelica*), but he does not identify the legal covenant as reflecting an alternate will in God or an alternate mercy.<sup>37</sup>

What is not at all clear, however, is how Calvin understood this one will of God in relation to its different or diverse modes: Amyraut saw the diverse modes through the pattern of two distinct covenants, whereas Calvin did

<sup>34</sup> Calvin, *In Ezechielis prophetae praelectionis*, 18:23, in loc. (CO 40, col. 445; CTS Ezechiel, 2.247).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> See the discussion of this development in Richard A. Muller, "Divine Covenants, Absolute and Conditional: John Cameron and the Early Orthodox Development of Reformed Covenant Theology," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006), 11–56.

<sup>37</sup> John Calvin, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Galatas*, CO 50, col. 238.



not specify. There is, for Calvin, one will indicated in the prophet's preaching, which is to save all those who repent. Calvin does not posit a *duplex* willing in the offer of salvation but rather and only a *duplex* willing or diverse modes of willing when one compares the universal preaching of salvation that the prophet does mention to the secret counsel or decree that the prophet does not mention.

There is an almost identical explanation of this issue offered in Calvin's *Harmony of the Gospels*:

It may justly be said that he wills to gather all to himself. It is not, therefore, the secret purpose of God (*Non ergo hic nobis arcanum Dei consilium*), but his will (*sed voluntas*), which is manifested by the nature of the word, that is here described. For certainly, whoever he efficaciously wills to gather, he inwardly draws by his Spirit, and does not only invite by the outward voice of human beings. If it be objected, that it is absurd to suppose a double will in God (*absurde duplicem in Deo voluntatem fingi*), I reply, we believe nothing other than that his will is one and simple (*quam unicam et simplicem esse eius voluntatem*); but since our minds do not penetrate the abyss of secret election, because of our weakness, the will of God is set forth to us in a double manner (*pro infirmitas nostrae modulo bifariam nobis Dei voluntatem proponi*).<sup>38</sup>

In both places, Calvin denies that God has two wills and, significantly, even when he comments on the double (*duplex*) manifestation of God's willing, he refers to the will in the singular. Amyraut's language, by contrast, consistently identifies two wills corresponding to two divine mercies.

Calvin further defines his understanding of Ezekiel 18:23 by indicating that, although God's will is simple, yet there are distinctions to be made concerning it: "Although, therefore, God's will is simple, yet variety is implied in it (*Quaquam itaque simplex est Dei voluntas, varietas quidem est illic implicita*), as far as our senses are concerned ... we cannot certainly judge how God wishes all to be saved, and yet has devoted all the reprobate to eternal destruction, and wishes them to perish."<sup>39</sup> These distinctions, however, given Calvin's previous comment, *Deum semper idem velle, sed diversis modis*, do not indicate either two actual wills or two different goals of God's single will. Rather, they indicate diverse ways of executing a single will, again in fairly clear contrast to Amyraut's conclusion of two wills in God.

Resolution of the issue of how the diverse ways of executing a single will are accomplished, lies in the nature of conversion itself as an act required of all who are to be saved but as not within human ability to accomplish:

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<sup>38</sup> John Calvin, *Commentarius in harmoniam evangelicam*, Matt. 23:37, in *CO* 46, col. 643–44; cf. Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, trans. William Pringle, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845–1846), 3.109.

<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *In Ezechielis prophetae praelectiones*, 18:23, in loc. (*CO* 40, col. 445–46; *CTS Ezekiel*, 2.247).

God is said *not to wish the death of a sinner*. How so? Since he wishes all to be converted. Now we must see how God wishes all to be converted; for repentance is surely his peculiar gift: as it is his office to create men, so it is his province to renew them, and restore his image within them. For this reason we are said to be his workmanship, that is, his fashioning (Eph. 2:10). Since, therefore, repentance is a kind of second creation, it follows that it is not in man's power; and if it is equally in God's power to convert men as well as to create them, it follows that the reprobate are not converted, because God does not wish their conversion; for if he wished it he could do it: and hence it appears that he does not wish it.<sup>40</sup>

We have here a positive parallel with Amyraut's reading: Amyraut very clearly points out that God supplies the power lacking in human beings to come to faith. Where he differs with Calvin is in his positing of two divine mercies, one that is set to respond to those who come to faith of themselves, the other that supplies the condition of faith in some human beings.

Calvin acknowledges the double implication of the promise to all and the salvation of some only but denies the possible contradiction, given only the consistent relationship between the gift of salvation and the fulfillment of the condition.

But again they argue foolishly, since God does not wish all to be converted, he is himself deceptive, and nothing can be certainly stated concerning his paternal benevolence. But this knot is easily untied; for he does not leave us in suspense when he says, that he wishes all to be saved. Why so? for if no one repents without finding God propitious, then this sentence is filled up. But we must remark that God puts on a twofold character (*Deum duplicem personam induere*).<sup>41</sup>

Where Armstrong, accepting Amyraut's argument, sees Calvin as teaching not only a twofold character in God's revelation but also a "twofold character of God's will; indeed ... of God himself,"<sup>42</sup> Calvin resolves the problem not by moving from the twofold character of the revelation to a twofold will but by making a strict distinction between the eternal counsel of God to save some and the universal call of the gospel:

The prophet does not here dispute subtly about his incomprehensible counsel (*propheta hic non disputat subtiliter de consilio eius incomprehensibili*)... all are called to repentance, and the hope of salvation is promised them when they repent. This is true, since God rejects no returning sinner: he pardons all without exception: meanwhile, this will of God which he sets forth in his word (*haec Dei voluntas, quam in verbo suo proponit*) does not prevent him from decreeing before the world was created what he would do with every individual (*quin decreverit ante creatum mundum quid facturus esse de singulis*

<sup>40</sup> Calvin, *In Ezechielis prophetae praelectionis*, 18:23, in loc. (CO 40, col. 446; CTS Ezechiel, 2:247).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 188.

*hominibus*): and as I have now said, the prophet only shows here, that when we have been converted we need not doubt that God immediately meets us and shows himself propitious.<sup>43</sup>

Calvin also commented, much to the same effect on the implications of Ezekiel 18:23 in his treatise on the *Eternal Predestination of God*. Calvin meditates on the issue of universal exhortation and, given the nature of exhortation, comments,

since the prophet's word here exhorts to repentance, it is no wonder for him to declare that God wills all human beings to be saved. For the mutual relation between threats and promises shows that such forms of speaking are conditional (*loquendi formas conditionales esse*). In this same manner God declared to the Ninevites, and to the kings of Gerar and Egypt, that he would do what he did not intend to do. Since their repentance averted the punishment he had threatened to inflict upon them, it is evident that the punishment was decreed only if they remained obstinate. Yet, the declaration was positive, as if the decree had not been revocable (*ac si revocabile non esset decretum*).<sup>44</sup>

Calvin here parallels one of the points we have seen in Amyraut, namely, that the language of the prophet, as a language of promise, does not refer to the decree, but merely indicates the promise of salvation on fulfillment of the condition, without also indicating how the condition is to be fulfilled. He also, very unlike Amyraut, comments in his example of the Ninevites and the kings of Gerar and Egypt that the conditional decree referred to something that God did not intend to do; thereby pressing away from a sense of universalistic intention on God's part, albeit not offering an argument for limiting the scope of the promise. Arguably, Calvin's language maintains the broad sense of the traditional sufficiency-efficiency distinction concerning Christ's work, a distinction held both by Amyraut and by his opponents.<sup>45</sup>

Armstrong's reading of the text also falls short at this point. Calvin certainly speaks of a conditional will to save on grounds of repentance and belief, but Armstrong reads this language in an Amyraldian fashion as indicating a will or willing in God rather than as a revealed promise; in other words, as if it referred to an eternal divine willing, such as could be identified as a decree, counsel, or divine good pleasure.<sup>46</sup> Calvin, however, refers to a revealed willing, such as could be identified as the revelation

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<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *In Ezechielis prophetæ prælectiones*, 18:23, in loc. (CO 40, col. 446; CTS Ezekiel, 2.247–48).

<sup>44</sup> John Calvin, *De aeterna Dei prædestinatione*, in CO 8, col. 300; cf. the translation in *Calvin's Calvinism: Treatises on the Eternal Predestination of God and the Secret Providence of God*, trans. Henry Cole (London, 1856), 99.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. the analysis in Rouwendal, "Calvin's Forgotten Classical Position," 323–26, 333–35.

<sup>46</sup> Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 189–90.

itself or as a preceptive will or *voluntas signi*, i.e., not an eternal determination parallel to the determination to save the elect.

There is a clear distinction to be made, therefore, between God's invitation to salvation and his counsel or decree:

So it is with respect to the promises of God, which invite all men to salvation: they do not simply or precisely indicate what God has decreed in His secret counsel (*non simpliciter nec praecise quid in arcano suo consilio statuerit*), but only what God is ready to do to all those who are brought to faith and repentance.<sup>47</sup>

The declaration that God wills all human beings to be saved is conditional, akin to the threats and promises of the Old Testament. Although such declarations take the form of irrevocable decrees, they are not a direct indication of the divine intention as lodged in the eternal counsel.

It is alleged that we hereby attribute to God a double will (*hoc modo duplex affingitur Deo voluntas*), who is not at all variable (*varius non est*), that no shadow of turning pertains to Him, even in the most remote degree.... God is said to will life, even as he wills repentance. This indeed he wills, because he invites all to it by his Word. This is not contrary to his secret and eternal counsel (*cum arcano ipsius consilio non pugnat*), by which He decreed to convert only his elect (*quo non nisi suos electos convertere decrevit*). Nor can he, on this account, to be considered variable, because, as a lawgiver, he enlightens all men with the external doctrine of life [and] in this prior manner he calls all to eternal life: in the latter manner, he brings to life those whom he will, as an eternal Father, regenerating by his Spirit, his own children only.<sup>48</sup>

What is significant about the distinction concerning the divine willing made here by Calvin is that it parallels other distinctions made by him concerning the divine will, specifically between the hidden will of God and the revealed will or between the ultimate will of the divine good pleasure and the revealed will in the divine commandments. These are the traditional distinctions between the *voluntas arcana* and *voluntas revelata*, the *voluntas beneplaciti* and *voluntas signi* with the decree corresponding to the *voluntas arcana* or *beneplaciti* and the will of God set forth in the Word to the *voluntas revelata* or *signi*. To make the point in another way, the "will of God which he sets forth in his word" is neither a causal willing that brings about a particular effect nor an antecedent will, set prior to the decree to elect some and not others.

Amyrault's use of the text, however, does not draw on the *voluntas arcana/revelata* or the *voluntas beneplaciti/signi* distinctions but rather on a distinction between a *voluntas antecedens et hypothetica* and a *voluntas consequens et absoluta*. In other words, Amyrault takes Calvin's reference to a "will of God

<sup>47</sup> Calvin, *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione*, in CO 8, col. 301.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

which he sets forth in his word” as a reference to a hypothetical or conditional will in God antecedent to the decree, just as he reads Calvin’s reference to the decree as a will in God consequent upon the “will of God which he sets forth in his word,” now willed absolutely for the sake of the elect.

### Some Conclusions

The question raised with regard to Calvin’s exegesis of Ezekiel 18:23 (and, by extension, of Matthew 23:37) is whether his argumentation looks toward the Amyraldian form of hypothetical universalism or belongs to another strand of argumentation within the Reformed tradition, specifically whether, as Amyraut claimed and in the recent scholarship Clifford has maintained, whether Calvin’s reading of the biblical passage anticipates Amyraut’s understanding of two wills in God, one conditional and the other absolute.

Calvin does indicate *varietas* in manner of execution of the *simplex voluntas* of God, but he also denies that this means that *Deum hoc modo fieri duplicem*: there are not two wills or an equivocal willing in God, rather *Deum semper idem velle, sed diversis modis* so that the universal conditional proclamation of the gospel serves the same will as the election of some to salvation.<sup>49</sup> Then, after having said that the prophet’s words concerning the call of all to salvation “do not dispute subtly concerning [God’s] incomprehensible counsel,” Calvin distinguishes between the decree and before the creation to determine the ends *de singulis hominibus* and the will of God revealed in the Word. The distinction that Calvin makes, therefore, parallels the traditional *voluntas beneplaciti/signi* distinction, not a *voluntas antecedens/consequens* distinction: The will to save all is a revealed will, not referencing the secret counsel. Nor is the conditional promise lodged in the revealed will of God ever associated with an eternal will, counsel, or decree.

Calvin might mean that, hypothetically, by divine intention, if all would believe all would be saved, assuming what John Davenant would call an ordained sufficiency,<sup>50</sup> but the case for such an implication is unclear, particularly inasmuch as Calvin does not here deal with the sufficiency or impetration of Christ’s death and given that he understands both eternal election and temporal promise as serving the same divine will. Calvin’s use of the same passage in his treatise *On the Eternal Predestination of God*, moreover, tends in the opposite direction by offering an example of an expressed threat that God never intended to carry out in parallel with the language of universal conditional promise.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Rainbow, *Will of God and the Cross*, 150.

<sup>50</sup> John Davenant, *Dissertatio de morte Christi ... quibus subnectitur eiusdem D. Davenantii Sententia de Gallicana controversia: sc. De Gratiosa & Salutari Dei erga Homines peccatores voluntate* (Cambridge: Roger Daniels, 1683), iv. 98–106.

As to Amyraut's reading of Calvin's exegesis, it stands, quite clearly as a use of Calvin's text that observes its basic pattern of a promise of salvation or reconciliation on condition, the qualification that hovers in the background of the promise that the condition can only be met by a divine act of creating it in the individual, and the eternal decree or counsel to bring about this condition and, consequently, salvation in the elect alone. It matters little to the argument that the condition in Calvin's interpretation of Ezekiel is repentance and obedience and Amyraut's condition is faith, although this is an easily identifiable difference of interpretation. Amyraut, however, builds on Calvin's argument and, indeed, claims to be interpreting and clarifying it by arguing two mercies and two wills in God where Calvin did not; in fact where Calvin had specifically stated that the will of God is one and simple, albeit with distinctions that can be observed in its revelation. Where Calvin resolved the issue of the universal call and particular election by simply declaring a resolution in the fact that, as promised, the repentant are saved, Amyraut indicated a double divine intentionality. Still, the way in which Amyraut develops the covenantal argument in his exegesis does stand in positive relation to Calvin's language of a legal and an evangelical covenant, of which it is not a duplication but a development. Even if Amyraut had added, as he would do at the Synod of Alençon, that his language of two decrees was by rational distinction and intended "without any succession of Thought, or Order of Priority and Posteriority" in God,<sup>51</sup> his exegesis still would differ from Calvin's in its postulation of two divine mercies and two intentions.

The exegesis of the particular text, therefore, does not fully support those who appeal to it in order to interpret Amyraut as a precise follower of Calvin. At the same time, Calvin's exegesis offers little useful ammunition to the other side of the debate. Calvin's reading of Ezekiel 18:23, like the similar comment on Matthew 23:37, offers neither a foundation for Amyraldian hypothetical universalism nor a definitively particularistic reading of the divine intention underlying the work. Where Calvin did not raise this issue, Amyraut offered his own conclusion, modifying and supplementing Calvin's argument with a concept of two wills in God—a scholastic distinction not found in Calvin's reading of the text and related, probably, to Amyraut's own training under John Cameron.<sup>52</sup> As in the case of other developments of Reformed thought in the era of scholastic argumentation and confessional orthodoxy, Amyraut's reception of this aspect of Calvin's thought drew it into the context of debates to which Calvin did

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<sup>51</sup> Synod of Alençon, xv. 21, in John Quick, *Synodicon in Gallia Reformata: Or, the Acts, Decisions, Decrees, and Canons of those famous National Councils of the Reformed Churches in France*, 2 vols. (London: T. Parkhurst and J. Robinson, 1692), 2.355.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Strehle, "Universal Grace and Amyraldianism," 346–49; with Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 158, 192.

not provide a clear solution and projected his arguments toward a more specified conclusion than he himself had proposed. Such development, of course, did not so much distinguish Amyraut's thought from that of other Reformed orthodox in his era as identify the shared character of the scholastic orthodoxy within which they debated, often bitterly.