

Saving Thomas Boston

By David W. Ponter

©

Introduction

I have chosen this title for this paper for deliberate reasons. Thomas Boston is a fairly enigmatic fellow in terms of his theology. It may be said, for all the wrong reasons, that he has become all things to all men. To many he is the fountain of Arminianism and Amyraldianism. To others he is now soon-becoming the champion of Neo-orthodox freedom. Even to moderate Calvinists, Boston has been misaligned and mistreated. The irony is that modern Calvinism of the orthodox variety stands on Boston's shoulders. We are where we are now exactly because of his contribution to Calvinism. Everyone, it seems, is either trying hard to own or disown Thomas Boston, and into this great mix, I now throw my own opinions.

What are the issues? The issues pertain to Calvinistic soteriology, generally, limited atonement and the doctrines of faith and assurance more specifically. My contention is straightforward and yet complex. It is my argument that it is now clear that what we have come to call *Calvinism* has undergone some profound revisions over the centuries. It is my argument that Calvin's Calvinism evolved in the subsequent generations of Calvinists. I argue that this evolution was partly due to what we call Federal Theology,¹ and partly due to a certain strain of rationalism that crept into second generation Calvinism. By using the word *rationalism*, I am not trying to be pejorative here. I do argue that a certain desire for harmony and consistency shaped the thinking of second generation Calvinists. I argue that this reshaping of Calvinism was initiated by Theodore Beza himself, and flowed through to other second generation Reformers, on to Dort, and then through the Federal theologians of Britain. Furthermore, I would argue that in Scotland, Federal Theology took on a sharper focus than it did in England, even in Holland.² Yet further, I want to stress that it was not Federal Theology alone that caused this rehonoring of Calvin's Calvinism, but partly due to an over-reaction to first the Arminians and then secondly to the Amyraldians. Federal Theology worked more as a tool, a category, that easily lent itself to this subtle revision of Calvinism.

My argument is that for the second generation Calvinists, three cardinal doctrines underwent profound revisions, *viz.*: (1) the Atonement of Christ, its extent; (2) the Will of God, the distinction and import of the traditional dualism between the decretive and revealed wills; and (3) the doctrine and definition of saving faith, that is, whether or not assurance is an essential component of saving faith. For the purposes of this paper, I will concentrate on points (1) and (3). My thought is that the import of (2) will become evident as the following investigations regarding (1) and (3) unfold.

It is now that I should add my qualifications. I want to state at the outset that I am not denying substitutionary atonement. I am not denying *per se* the so-called "five points of Calvinism" as popularly expressed. The problem I have with the popular and modern TULIP is not that I think it is incorrect, only that it is not expressive enough. What it says is true as far as it goes, the problem is that it does not go far enough. Further, I am not advocating the Barthian thesis of the discontinuity between Calvin and the Protestant (Federalist) Scholastics. My problem with Barth is that while I must agree that in some sense he correctly detected a drifting departure from Calvin in the Protestant Scholastics, his solution and, indeed, his identification of the cause, is wrong. I accept completely that Federalism was there in Calvin in seed-form. What the Neo-orthodox are trying to do is disconnect Calvin completely from later Federalist advocates on the grounds Federalism led to a legalism under the guise of a loveless contractualism.³ I am not endorsing these claims in any way, but would deny them completely. Nor am I advocating support for the classic Amyraut thesis. I would, however, argue, that like Barth centuries later, Amyraut did correctly identify a theological shift from Calvin's Calvinism to the

¹Federal Theology is also known as Covenant Theology, and is that cluster of doctrines regarding the covenantal arrangement between the Father and the Son for the redemption of the elect (called the Covenant of Grace or Covenant of Redemption), and the further arrangement between Adam, as Federal representative head of mankind, and God (called the Covenant of Works). In terms of Federal headship, Adam was the head of humanity, while Christ is the Federal head of the elect. Formal and systematic Federalism was not found in Calvin's writings. The leading exponents of this were first of all Ursinus and Olevianus, and was later developed by such as Rollock, Ball, Roberts, Rutherford, Ames, Witsius, Cocceius, and so forth. Federal Theology *became* the defining characteristic of Reformed theology.

²I will argue, though, that even in Holland, at the occasion of Dort, some Calvinists were echoing the theological attitudes of Scotland.

³This is essentially the claim that the persons of the Trinity entered legal contracts, as do believers between themselves and God for salvation.

Calvinism of his day, which was post-Dort. But again, I argue that his solution and his identification of the cause of this shift was incorrect. The defining aspect of Amyraut's own revision of Calvinism of his day was that championed the teaching that Christ died for all men, not just the elect. The problem here is that Amyraut, in defending this, originally said, and without apparent qualification, that this death was for all men *equally*. This is problematic language to say the least. It is here that many old and modern theologians stumble in a false zeal to identify Boston with the Amyraldianism as it was later popularly received and understood.

Another way to see this revision of Calvinism is to look at the issue from the perspective of the centrality of Christ. Here we must say that, to some extent, Barth was right in his analysis of the differences between Calvin and later Calvinists. For Calvin, the extent of the Atonement, the saving will of God for all mankind, and the nature of assuring faith were all wrapped up in Christ, and also in the love of the Father to mankind. This is no easy concept to explain, especially as we now stand centuries removed from Calvin himself. For Calvin, God is wrapped in mystery. God, says Calvin, loved all men, he desires that all men be saved. Therefore, says Calvin, God sent his Son into the world as a demonstration of his love to all men. Christ, in Calvin's thinking, came to save all men, he came to die for all men to make a way of salvation available to all. However, God, in mystery, decrees in ways beyond us, to save only some men. He decrees to make this atonement effectual to only some. Calvin's doctrine of the atonement of Christ is constrained by his Augustinianism and his acceptance of the Medieval Scholastic synthesis *sufficienter pro omnibus, efficienter pro electis*, Christ died sufficiently for all, but efficiently for the elect. For Calvin, God was well-disposed to all men, wanting all to be saved through the work of Christ. Thus, no one need ask the questions, "Does God want to save me?" or "Can I know that Christ died for me?" Even "Did Christ die for me?" or again "Is there a salvation available for me?" For Calvin, the answer to these and cognate questions is "yes."⁴

Let me try to crystallize these points. For Calvin, the will of God is perceived by our human minds as twofold. The unitary will appears to us in the twofold forms of the decreed will and the revealed will. The work of Christ for all men, though formally *sent* into the world by the decreed will, is an expression of the Father's revealed will. And this revealed will, for Calvin, is expressed in active and volitional terms. The work of Christ, similarly, takes on a twofold form. Christ came into the world for all men, not just the elect, he dies for all men, sufficiently, yet for the elect, efficiently, in order to actually secure the salvation of the elect. The love of God for all men, therefore, is now intimately connected and bound up with the (revealed) will of God and the universally sufficient work of Christ. Placed side by side this, is Calvin's doctrine of unconditional election and efficacious redemption. Neither side is to be denied, but asserted as explicit teachings of sacred text.

However, now we must introduce a new dynamic. This can be called "the hierarchy of explanation." A hierarchy of explanation is a simple and necessary tool in theology, and indeed, in every aspect of thinking. Simply stated, its intent is to bring harmony, rational or otherwise, between thesis and antithesis. At the very superficial level we can see it operating in this example: Thesis: God says "Do not kill." Antithesis: God says, "Go and kill." We apparently have here a contradiction. We resolve that appearance by invoking the synthesis: "the thesis actually pertains to unlawful killing, while the antithesis pertains to lawful killing." It is in this manner that Calvin, when pressed, will always invoke the concept of *anthropomorphism*⁵ when speaking of God's revealed desire that all men be saved. For Calvin, the decreed will is the more fundamental expression of God's will, the revealed will, though described in active and volitional terms, is really anthropomorphic. Thus, for Calvin, the revealed will is described as a divine volition (desire) that all men be saved, yet is really an anthropomorphism. To this we can add that the very *Medieval Synthesis* is in itself another attempt to invoke this hierarchy of explanation, a way of handling those texts which speak of a more universal aspect of Christ's work and those which indicate a more specific and narrow focus. In all this, there is for Calvin a resting in paradox. He senses the tension between thesis "God wills to save only some" and the antithesis "God wills that all men be saved" but his resolution is to stay with the express biblical terminology, while invoking the theological concept of

⁴Yet always he says "yes" with sound qualifications of course.

⁵A general term denoting God's descriptions of himself in human terms and forms. For example, the hand of God, the back of God, the wings of God, and so forth. These are anthropomorphisms, not that actually has hands, a back and wings. A theological cognate term here is *anthropopathism*, that is God expressing his *feelings* in human terms and forms.

anthropomorphism. The solution to the tension is on the other side of glory. However, Beza and others will not rest here. For them, they will change the terminology and the theology accordingly.

What happened is that Beza and others now moved to further flatten or smooth out the tension in Calvin's expressions. This impacted the three stated areas. Now the atonement of Christ was seen almost exclusively in limited categories. Christ only came to save the elect, and this an expression of the electing will of God. Any universal aspects of the atonement were now seen as incidental and part of the collateral benefits the atonement brings to humanity. Faith is defined more and more in abstract terms, breaking the connection between faith as a knowledge that God is well-disposed towards you. Because Christ only came and died for the elect, you no longer have a sure knowledge that Christ died for you, or that Christ and the Father wish you to be saved. You can only know these things be the reflex act of faith, after you have believed. While it is true that none of the Protestant Scholastics denied that God bears to all men a general love⁶ and that God by his revealed will, wills that all men be saved, these were now abstracted from the work and mission of the Son. The revealed will was now described more and more in passive constitutive terms as a delight. Thus, it is God's delight, that is agreeable to his will, that all men be saved.⁷ Into this mix, too, Federal Theology now served as the foundation for this new hierarchy of explanation.

It is right here that I need to add a qualification. The important thing to realise is that there is overlap in all this. For example, Ursinus, one of the principal initiating exponents of Federal Theology,⁸ also held to the traditional Medieval Synthesis regarding the Atonement. On the other hand, Beza, who, dominated by his supralapsarian particularism, denied the same Medieval Synthesis even before Federal Theology became the mode of thinking. What we have here are trends and movements, not absolute, air-tight, generational, and regional compartments.

Having made this necessary qualification, it is this revision of Calvinism that flows in and out of Dort. It is this revision of Calvinism that is adopted by the Scottish theologians, such as Rutherford and Durham. It is this revision of Calvinism that Boston collides with in the beginning of the 18th century. The whole matter can be likened to a pendulum. Against the swing of Romanism, Calvin swung it one way. Against the swing of Arminianism, the Protestant Scholastics now swing it another way. Against the swing of the Neo-nomians in Scotland, Boston now swings it another way. Against him, men like the Hodges, Dabney and Shedd swing it another way.⁹ Each swing adds and evolves the thinking, taking the theological categories into new directions. The Protestant Scholastics added Federal Theology to Calvinism. On the other hand, they also removed some of Calvin's key theological categories. Boston attempted a new synthesis. He sought to integrate Federal Theology with Calvin's and the early Reformers theologically broader Calvinism.

Having laid down my foundation, my aim in this part is to save or justify Thomas Boston from the charges of being a heretic. I want to lay down evidence that there was a subtle shift in focus in the thinking of later Calvinism. I want to

⁶E.g., Amandus Polanus, typical of the Protestant Scholastics, "the loue of God toward the creatures, is either generall or speciall." He then notes: "The generall loue of God, is that with which hee imbraceth altogether all things which he hath made, and doth good vnto them, and preserueth and sustaineth them. For though he hate sinne, hee loveth the nature which he hath created. Amandus Polanus, *The Substance of the Christian Religion*, 3rd edition, (Imprinted by Arn. Hatfield, for Felix Newton, dwelling in Paules Churchyard at the sign of the Parrot, 1600), p., 18.

⁷It now becomes rare to see the expression of "desire" or "want" in Protestant Scholastic theology. It is more often than not only used in passing. And when the Revealed will is described, it is explicated in terms of delight, rather than desire. For example, a' Brakel, will not Scripture will speak of God desiring something to come to pass which does not occur. He then cites the classic optative verses, Dt 5:29, Isa 48:18, and also Eze 18:23. Then he says this expression is anthropomorphic "speaking in the manner of men" and which indicates God's displeasure toward sin, and his delight in holiness; Wilhelmus a' Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (Ligonier, PA.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992), vol., 1, p., 117. The problem here is if Scripture, that is, God, himself uses the expression *desire* why is it improper to depart from this biblical expression? At what point, theologically and lexically, can we determine that this Scriptural divine *desire* can only mean *delight*, thereby moving, with profound theological import from active volition (in some manner) to mere passive constitutional complacency?

⁸And, importantly, the co-author of the famous Heidelberg Catechism.

⁹It's all rather Hegelian after a fashion.

demonstrate in passing that what we now call Hyper-Calvinism could only have arisen out of the categories of Protestant Scholasticism, and not out of Calvin's original categories.¹⁰ My plan for this paper will be to divide the work into sections. Part 1 will deal with Calvin's own thinking in relation to the later Protestant Scholastics. This will be a brief overview. The aim here is to lay down a foundation of comparison so that we may appraise Boston in a sounder light. This section will not be an exhaustive survey, but introductory and suggestive. Part 2 will be an examination of some of Boston's theology proper.

Part 1, Calvin and Early Orthodoxy

Thomas Boston is often characterised as an Amyraldian or Arminian because, for the most part, he is seen only in the light of the orthodox Protestant Scholastics. This fact is born out even in our generation. There are examples where Boston is contrasted to men like Turretin--and the assumption is that Turretin is in alignment with Calvin himself¹¹--and in this way he is seen as out of alignment with Calvinism. If, however, it can be shown that Calvin, himself, is actually somewhat out of alignment with the later Federalists, then my argument is that Boston can now be seen as clearly orthodox.

There has been so much debate over whether or not Calvin held to limited atonement. This debate has been with us since Amyraut first charged that Calvin denied limited atonement. And there at the very point the debate has been set off on a wrong footing in my estimation. The problem is one of category. Those who have been trying to demonstrate that Calvin held to limited atonement have placed themselves on a bad footing. For they have been trying to see Calvin's doctrine of the atonement in the light of and in the same categories that the Protestant Scholastics laid down--that is, there are no intended universal saving elements within the atonement, only incidental and secondary elements.¹² But then the problem arises, how does one deal with the many comments by Calvin regarding a more universal dimension to the atonement? And so what happens is that one side emphasises Calvin's statements regarding the limitedness of the atonement, while the other emphasises his statements regarding the unlimitedness of the atonement.

The proffered solutions from the Reformed side have been varied. It is not my purpose here to answer this or to even survey these solutions.¹³ Peterson is surely right when he notes that various attempts to prove that Calvin held to limited atonement may backfire. For example, Peterson cites Jonathan Rainbow's argument that given that Bucer held to limited atonement, and given, also that Calvin spent a great deal of time ministering with Bucer in Strassburg, it is very likely that Calvin, too, held to limited atonement. Yet Peterson counters well:

if Bucer did teach limited atonement in his refutations of Anabaptist teaching, as Rainbow demonstrates, and if Calvin was influenced by this, then why does Calvin not give the doctrine a more prominent place in his

¹⁰The sobering irony here is that many Hyper-Calvinists claim to be expressing the true form of Calvin's Calvinism, but if they were to seriously examine his theology, he would be excommunicated and disowned by them. For example, we shall see the evidence for this in terms Calvin's interpretation of Jn 3:16.

¹¹By this I mean, while it is granted by many that Calvin did not expressly delineate Federalism as it came to be known later, he was in principle agreement with the very particularism of later Federalism. All agree, including myself, federalism is present in his thinking in seed form, as handed down from Augustine via the Medieval Scholastics. The, however, *assumption* is that Calvin held that Jn 3:16, as an example, was "God so loved the elect" or something like that. Put another way, the assumption is that even though the later Federal structures were not operating upon and in Calvin's, the content (soteriological particularism) in terms of his exegetical and theological conclusions was more or less exactly identical. It is this last assumption I would challenge.

¹²These secondary elements are non-salvific, and only regard such things as temporal good, temporal blessings, and restraint of sin, among other things.

¹³For my part, I assume the general correctness of G.M., Thomas arguments in his *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus* (UK: Paternoster: 1997). I believe this to be a defining work and all questions of this matter will now have to go through his analysis of Calvin.

teachings? Above all, why does Calvin not even mention the extent of the atonement when he summarizes his views on the person and work of Christ in his *Institutes*?¹⁴

Peterson is surely right here. If Calvin had held to limited atonement as Bucer did, then why did he not make it a point of emphasis in his writings? The only solution is to accept that Calvin adopted the language of the Medieval Synthesis, yet with qualifications. We will come to this below.

In order to avoid the quagmire of debate regarding Calvin on limited atonement, I would rather present a more inductive and suggestive case for my argument, based on a compact analysis of Calvin on a few key texts which in themselves throw much light on his understanding of the work of Christ. The first passage I wish to examine is John 3:16 and 17. I want to cite this as an extended quotation in order that Calvin's meaning is undeniably clear:

For God so loved the world. Christ opens up the first cause, and, as it were, the source of our salvation, and he does so, that no doubt may remain; for our minds cannot find calm repose, until we arrive at the unmerited love of God. As the whole matter of our salvation must not be sought any where else than in Christ, so we must see whence Christ came to us, and why he was offered to be our Savior. Both points are distinctly stated to us: namely, that faith in Christ brings life to all, and that Christ brought life, because the Heavenly Father loves the human race, and wishes that they should not perish. And this order ought to be carefully observed; for such is the wicked ambition which belongs to our nature, that when the question relates to the origin of our salvation, we quickly form diabolical imaginations about our own merits. Accordingly, we imagine that God is reconciled to us, because he has reckoned us worthy that he should look upon us...

And, indeed, it is very evident that Christ spoke in this manner, in order to draw away men from the contemplation of themselves to look at the mercy of God alone...

This, he says, is the proper look of faith, to be fixed on Christ, in whom it beholds the breast of God filled with love: this is a firm and enduring support, to rely on the death of Christ as the only pledge of that love. The word only-begotten is emphatic, to magnify the fervor of the love of God towards us. For as men are not easily convinced that God loves them, in order to remove all doubt, he has expressly stated that we are so very dear to God that,¹⁵ on our account, he did not even spare his only-begotten Son. Since, therefore, God has most abundantly testified his love towards us, whoever is not satisfied with this testimony, and still remains in doubt, offers a high insult to Christ, as if he had been an ordinary man given up at random to death...

That whosoever believeth on him may not perish And he has employed the universal term whosoever, both to invite all indiscriminately to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is also the import of the term World, which he formerly used; for though nothing will be found in the world that is worthy of the favor of God, yet he shows himself to be reconciled¹⁶ to the whole world, when he invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than an entrance into life. Let us remember, on the other hand, that while life is promised universally to all who believe in Christ, still faith is not common to all. For Christ is made known and held out to the view of all, but the elect alone are they whose eyes God opens, that they may seek him by faith...

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world. There is now no reason why any man should be in a state of hesitation, or of distressing anxiety, as to the manner in which he may escape death, when we

¹⁴Robert A. Peterson, *Calvin and the Atonement* (New Jersey: Mentor: 1999), p., 119.

¹⁵C.f., this remark to the one he makes in his lectures on Eze 18:1-4, where there, while speaking of God's general love to mankind, all men, he says "but inasmuch as we are men, we must be dear to God, and our salvation must be precious in his sight," (*Calvin Commentaries, in loco*).

¹⁶In this sense he means *favourable*.

believe that it was the purpose of God that Christ should deliver us from it. The word world is again repeated, that no man may think himself wholly excluded, if he only keep the road of faith.¹⁷

Elsewhere, in his *Sermons on Isaiah's Prophecy of the Death and Passion of Christ*, Calvin says:

That, then, is how our Lord Jesus bore the sins and iniquities of many. But in fact, this word “many” is often as good as equivalent to “all”. And indeed, our Lord Jesus was offered to all the world. For it is not speaking of three or four when it says: ‘For God so loved the world, that he spared not His only Son.’ But yet we must notice that the Evangelist adds in this passage: “That whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but obtain eternal life.” Our Lord Jesus suffered for all, and there is neither great nor small who is not inexcusable today, for we can obtain salvation through him.¹⁸

Note Calvin’s own explicit connection between this Isaiah 53:12 and Jn 3:16. For Calvin, ‘the world,’ ‘the many,’ and ‘all’ are co-extensive. This is also further evidence that with regard to the ‘world’ of Jn 3:16, he assumed a universal reading. Calvin also goes on to affirm that Christ’s death is sufficient for all men, for there is power and efficacy in Christ to meet the needs of all. At this point, a little detour is instructive. These comments come from Calvin’s sermon on Isa., 53:12. In his commentary on this same verse, Calvin says:

I have followed the ordinary interpretation, that “he bore the sin of many,” though we might without impropriety consider the Hebrew word *rabbim*, to denote “Great and Noble.” And thus the contrast would be more complete, that Christ, while “he was ranked among transgressors,” became surety for every one of the most excellent of the earth, and suffered in the room of those who hold the highest rank in the world. I leave this to the judgement of my readers. Yet I approve of the ordinary reading, that he alone bore the punishment of many, because on him was laid the guilt of the whole world. It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that “many” sometimes denotes “all.”¹⁹

Now also, regarding that reference to Romans 5:18, he makes this statement:

He makes this favor [*i.e.*, righteousness] common to all, because it is propounded to all, and not because it is in reality extended to all; for though Christ *suffered for* the sins of the whole world, and is offered through God’s benignity indiscriminately to all, yet all do not receive him.²⁰

In a similar vein:

And again, has not our Lord Jesus Christ redeemed mens's souls: true it is that the effect of his death comes not to the whole world: Nevertheless for as much as it is not in us too discern between the righteous and the sinners that go to destruction, but that Jesus Christ has suffered his death and passion *as well for them as for us*: therefore it behooves us to labour to bring every man to salvation that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ made be available to them.²¹

¹⁷C.f., Calvin’s comments on Jn 1:29, where he understands the *world* in the same manner.

¹⁸John Calvin, *Sermons on Isaiah's Prophecy of the Death and Passion of Christ*, trans., by T.H.L. Parker (London: James Clarke & Co, 1966), sermon 7 no Isa., 53:12, p., 141. See also an alternative translation and edition: John Calvin *The Gospel According to Isaiah*, trans., by Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1953), pp., 120-121.

¹⁹Calvin, *Commentaries, in loco*.

²⁰Calvin, *Commentaries, in loco* [emph., mine]. See also his comments on Heb 9:28, where he again refers back to this passage, reaffirming the same idea he expresses in his Sermon and Commentary on Isaiah 53 regarding the equivalency of *many* and *all*.

²¹John Calvin, *Sermons on Job*, (Edinburgh :Banner of Truth Trust,1993), p., 454. [Emph., mine.] I have removed the later interpolated comments.

What is important to note here is that for Calvin, it is true that Christ suffered for *all*, even though *all*, even for them who go to destruction, yet all do not receive benefit of Christ's suffering. And thus, as Christ suffered for the whole world--and many is equivalent to all--the reality of Christ's death is not extended to all. Calvin's language here expressly reflects the Medieval Synthesis, and his language cannot be made to fit into the narrower Protestant Scholastic categories.

In his *Sermons on the Deity of Christ*, Calvin makes this more general statement:

So let us learn (following what I have already mentioned) to know in everything and by everything the inestimable goodness of our God. For as He declared His love toward mankind when He spared not His Only Son but delivered Him to death for sinners, also He declares a love which He bears especially toward us when by His Holy Spirit He touches us by the knowledge of our sins and He makes us wail and draws us to Himself with repentance.²²

Here the focus must be on Calvin's shift from the apparent general love which sends the Son, to the especial love by which he makes the atonement effectual. Having searched the corpus of Calvin's commentaries, tracts and sermons I have not found a single instance where Calvin limits the world of Jn 3:16 to the elect, or to all kinds of men. Always he speaks either generally in the first person plural, *we* and *us*, or he expressly identifies the *world*, as all men, as he has above. The implication here is that for Calvin, in some sense, however we moderns may term it, God sent Christ into the world in order that the world be saved. Calvin does not conceive of the mission of the Son in absolutely exclusive terms as a mission to save the elect only. Thus plainly, in some sense, Calvin considered that Christ was a gift of love from God to the whole world.

Yet this is exactly what happened in later Calvinism. Almost to a man, the later Calvinists took Jn 3:16 to denote the elect only, or all kinds of elect men. This was the position of Owen, Witsius, Rutherford, Gillespie, Lightfoot, Turretin, *et al.* It is often set forth in the popular modern works by Pink, Boettner and Sproul. The dissenting opinion has always been the minority report, and these after Boston, namely, Dabney²³ and Warfield expressly deny the limited reading. Turretin is aware of the fact that Calvin understood the verse to speak of an indefinite love to the human race, but will argue strongly against this.²⁴ Owen will labour long and hard on Jn 3:16 seeking to prove that the term *world* does not denote all men.²⁵

Calvin on Mt 12:37 also expresses himself in clear terms:

²²John Calvin, *Sermons on the Deity of Christ* (New Jersey: Old Paths Publ., 1997), sermon 6, p., 108. His wording here alludes to Roms 8:32 (c.f., his comments on p., 284), and yet also to John 3:16 (c.f., his comments on p., 48). Calvin explicitly cites these two verses in his comment in his *Sermons on Psalm 119*: "And since it is said. *God so loved the world, that he spared not his only begotten son: but delivered him to death for us.*" The text cites these verses. The text then continues: "It is meet I look at that. For it is very needful that Jesus Christ should pluck me out from that condemnation, wherein I am. Since it is so, that the love and goodness of God is declared unto the world, in that his son Christ Jesus suffered death." John Calvin, *Sermons on Psalm 119*, (New Jersey: Old Paths Publ), pp., 133-4, sermon #7, 119:49-56. Thus, this is a further insight into Calvin's understanding of the intent of Christ's death, as he would not have used these verses in this way to assert a general love to mankind, as the grounds for the giving, sending and death of the Son for mankind, had he seen the work of Christ in the strict particularist categories of later Calvinists.

²³In my opinion, Dabney has been the truest to the biblical sense of this passage. Warfield wants to press the verse into some sort of postmillennial eschatology, it seems.

²⁴Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elencitic Theology* (New Jersey: P&R, 1992), vol., 1., p., 405.

²⁵John Owen, *The Death of Death* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), see pp 190-195 for example. I will assume that the fact that the Protestant Scholastics understood the world in Jn 3:16 as the elect or all kinds is well understood by the reader.

How often would I have gathered together thy children... If in Jerusalem the grace of God had been merely rejected, there would have been inexcusable ingratitude; but since God attempted to draw the Jews to himself by mild and gentle methods, and gained nothing by such kindness, the criminality of such haughty disdain was far more aggravated. There was likewise added unconquerable obstinacy; for not once and again did God wish to gather them together, but, by constant and uninterrupted advances, he sent to them the prophets, one after another, almost all of whom were rejected by the great body of the people. As a hen collecteth her brood under her wings. We now perceive the reason why Christ, speaking in the person of God, compares himself to a hen...

It is an amazing and unparalleled instance of love, that he did not disdain to stoop to those blandishments, by which he might tame rebels into subjection...

By this he means that, whenever the word of God is exhibited to us, he opens his bosom to us with maternal kindness, and, not satisfied with this, condescends to the humble affection of a hen watching over her chickens. Hence it follows, that our obstinacy is truly monstrous, if we do not permit him to gather us together...²⁶

Here we see Calvin facing the text head-on without any denial of its import and meaning. For Calvin it is a genuine *love* on the part of the Father that sends the Son to these people, with the intent that these people should be gathered to Christ and so saved. Further, Christ here speaks as the God-man, not merely as a man with all too human emotions. This images the very intent of Calvin on Jn 3:16. Yet a little further, however, we see Calvin invoking a hierarchy of explanation:

Again, when the sophists seize on this passage, to prove free will, and to set aside the secret predestination of God, the answer is easy. "God wills to gather all men," say they; "and therefore all are at liberty to come, and their will does not depend on the election of God." I reply: The will of God, which is here mentioned, must be judged from the result. For since by his word he calls all men indiscriminately to salvation, and since the end of preaching is, that all should betake themselves to his guardianship and protection, it may justly be said that he wills to gather all to himself. It is not, therefore, the secret purpose of God, but his will, which is manifested by the nature of the word, that is here described; for, undoubtedly, whomsoever he efficaciously wills to gather, he inwardly draws by his Spirit, and does not merely invite by the outward voice of man...

If it be objected, that it is absurd to suppose the existence of two wills in God, I reply, we fully believe that his will is simple and one; but as our minds do not fathom the deep abyss of secret election, in accommodation to the capacity of our weakness, the will of God is exhibited to us in two ways. And I am astonished at the obstinacy of some people, who, when in many passages of Scripture they meet with that figure of speech which attributes to God human feelings, take no offense, but in this case alone refuse to admit it.²⁷

Here, Calvin resolves the tension by first positing a fundamental unity in the will of God, and then by invoking anthropomorphism. God speaks to us in the figures of men. God wills to gather the elect effectually by decree and yet wills to gather all men, ineffectually, by revealed will and precept. But here again, the Protestant Scholastics will take a different interpretative line. Beza will argue that Christ speaks only as a minister of the gospel: "Thus, therefore, Christ as minister of the gospel willed and applied himself to gather all his hearers promiscuously, leaving with God his hidden will, as all God's ministers have been accustomed to do."²⁸ Beza is distinguishing the human and divine work of Christ,

²⁶Calvin here may have been influenced by Luther, who in his *Bondage of the Will*, for example, said in regard to this verse: "It belongs to the same God Incarnate to weep, lament, and groan over the perdition of the ungodly..." Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1973), p., 176. For Luther, this entire passage is about the Incarnate God, the God-Revealed, who laments and desires that the masses of the city, indeed all men, be saved (c.f., p., 171). For Luther, the solution to the tension is the hidden versus revealed God. His entire discourse from pages 171-177 require reading with comparison and contrast with Calvin's own solution.

²⁷Calvin, *Commentaries*, *in loco*.

²⁸Beza, cited from Thomas, p., 54.

wherein Christ speaks as a man. Later, Amandus Polanus (1561-1610), the influential Dutch theologian would argue in the same manner. Regarding Mt 23:37, he says:

the assumption speaks of the will of God, but the saying that is brought out of Matthew is spoken of the humane will of Christ. For Christ speaks of himself as he is a man, namely as he is the minister of circumcision, or a prophet sent to the people of the Jewes, which Christ by his humane will desired and sought to gather together every one that was offered unto him, into the kingdom of God by the preaching of the word.²⁹

This position was again adopted by Owen, Turretin, Witsius³⁰ and others. Christ as a man loved all men. Then to this is added that it is only the children of Jerusalem that Christ sought to gather.³¹ Owen simply dismisses this verse, along with certain others, and fails to deal with it exegetically. Owen above all the Protestant Scholastics is gripped by an unshakable commitment to his *a priories*.

One more passage. Calvin on 2 Peter 3:9:

But the Lord is not slack, or, delays not He checks extreme and unreasonable haste by another reason, that is, that the Lord defers his coming that he might invite all mankind to repentance. For our minds are always prurient, and a doubt often creeps in, why he does not come sooner. But when we hear that the Lord, in delaying, shews a concern for our salvation, and that he defers the time because he has a care for us, there is no reason why we should any longer complain of tardiness. He is tardy who allows an occasion to pass by through slothfulness: there is nothing like this in God, who in the best manner regulates time to promote our salvation. And as to the duration of the whole world, we must think exactly the same as of the life of every individual; for God by prolonging time to each, sustains him that he may repent. In the like manner he does not hasten the end of the world, in order to give to all time to repent. This is a very necessary admonition, so that we may learn to employ time aright, as we shall otherwise suffer a just punishment for our idleness.

Not willing that any should perish. So wonderful is his love towards mankind, that he would have them all to be saved, and is of his own self prepared to bestow salvation on the lost. But the order is to be noticed, that God is ready to receive all to repentance, so that none may perish; for in these words the way and manner of obtaining salvation is pointed out. Every one of us, therefore, who is desirous of salvation, must learn to enter in by this way. But it may be asked, If God wishes none to perish, why is it that so many do perish? To this my answer is, that no mention is here made of the hidden purpose of God, according to which the reprobate are doomed to their own ruin, but only of his will as made known to us in the gospel. For God there stretches forth his hand without a difference to all, but lays hold only of those, to lead them to himself, whom he has chosen before the foundation of the world.

But as the verb *choresai* is often taken passively by the Greeks, no less suitable to this passage is the verb which I have put in the margin, that God would have all, who had been before wandering and scattered, to be gathered or come together to repentance.

²⁹Amandus Polanus, *A Treatise pf Amandus Polanus, Concerning God's Eternal Predestination*, (Cambridge: Printed by Iohn Legat, 1599), p., 179. From this, Polanus concedes that even if here Christ spoke as God, the will and desire is the will which invites men to salvation, not his eternal counsel and purpose (p., 180).

³⁰In regard to Luke 19:41, Witsius insists this refers only to Christ as a man, with human affections--Herman Witsius *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (California: Den Dulk Foundation, 1990), vol., 1., p., 256. a' Brakel also follows this model. When he speaks to this verse, he notes that here is no proof of two wills in God, or an impotent divine will, but the will mentioned here is Christ's will; a' Brakel, vol., 1, p., 117.

³¹Turretin, vol., 1, p 228, and vol., 2., p., 556.

Here again, Calvin, while taking this passage to denote that as God loves all and wills that all men be saved, he so wills preceptively, by that will which is made known to us in the Gospel, not by the secret and decreed will of God.³² Yet once again, the common Protestant Scholastic position is that the *all* here is restricted to all the elect. It is later that the use of words like *desire* and *want* appear more and more infrequently and *delight* is used more frequently. The revealed will now becomes an anthropopathic expression of what God delights in, or what is agreeable to him.³³ For sure, Turretin will speak of God's desire that all men be saved, the issue is that the propensity of his terms reflects a new way of thinking. Here again I am not alone, Dabney makes a similar criticism regarding Turretin and others.³⁴ What drives the Protestant Scholastics is the desire to expunge from all language about God any implication that there resides in God any ineffectual will or velleity, as Owen is wont to put it. Owen readily denies that Christ desired or intended to save all.³⁵ He asserts emphatically that there can be in God any ineffectual velleity, for this is "opposite to his eternal blessedness and all-sufficiency."³⁶ See also the Formula Consensus Helvetica, act., 6, which for example similarly denies that there can or does exist in God any ineffectual velleities.³⁷ The idea of God desiring or wishing for something which does not come to pass does not *fit* well with the idea of God's eternal blessedness and all-sufficiency. Therefore the term 'delight' and passive cognate words and phrases came to be used as normative in describing God's revealed will.

Regarding Calvin's doctrine of the atonement, I would argue that there is evidence from Calvin that he did accept the Medieval Synthesis. It was only after the rise of Arminianism and Amyraldianism along with Federal Theology that this synthesis fell out of favour. To demonstrate that I am not merely borrowing from Barth, let me cite A.A. Hodge. Speaking of the Medieval Synthesis (the formula), he says:

This language is adopted as representing his own view by Calvin in his Commentaries, as on 1 John 2:2. The same was done by Archbishop Ussher in Nos 22 and 23 of his letters, published by his chaplain Richard Parr. The early Reformed Confessions for the most part emphasized the general phase of the atonement... But as *Federal Theology* more and more gained currency in the Reformed Churches the special bearing of Christ's

³²To remind ourselves here, Calvin also held that God loved the elect with an especial love which actually secures their salvation.

³³For example, see article 8 of Dort: As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God has most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what is *acceptable* to Him, namely, that those who are called should come unto Him. He also seriously promises rest of soul and eternal life to all who come to Him and believe [emph., mine]. Thomas documents that, indeed, some of the very delegates of Dort had already begun to insist that Christ and grace only to offered to the penitent. Thomas notes rightly that here we already have the beginnings of Hyper-Calvinist thinking, see Thomas, p., 149. The above article probably reflects the shift away from Calvin's heartier Calvinism.

³⁴See, R.L. Dabney's, *God's Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy* in his *Discussions*, vol 1., (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1982), specifically pp., 283-284. Dabney chides Turretin and others for tending to reduce the revealed will of God to a mere constitutional delight, denying any active and volitional thrust behind this will. It will help if some of Dabney's comments were made explicit. The essence of this article by Dabney in many ways is an attempt to expose errors in the Reformed camp as much as in the Arminian camp. Dabney attacks the notion that the revealed will is reduced to a mere complacency, within which there are no active principles. For this is chastens the "Reformed divines of Turretin's school." What is powerful here is that in this regard, he says that "the candid mind feels that there should be a truth in somewhere in that direction in which the 'Hypothetic Universalist' was vainly groping." His sense is that the answer to the problem is in the direction away from Turretin's position, which would include the same for Owen, for example.

³⁵Owen, *Death*, pp., 84-85.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p., 116. This is the exact point that Dabney chides Turretin and others for. It is also the exact point of departure of Owen from Calvin and Scripture. For example, Calvin on Ps 81:13 is one of the few theologians of the Reformation who acknowledged the full force of the optative mood in the Hebrew. His qualification only comes by recouring to anthropomorphism in order to explain how this wishing on God's part *fits* with eternal election.

³⁷See A.A., Hodge's *Outlines of Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), Appendix 2., p., 567. This Confession, co-authored by Heidegger and written in 1675, is replete with statements like this and is clearly an over-reaction to Amyraldianism.

death upon the elect necessarily was thrown more conspicuously into the foreground. For if he died in pursuance of the terms of an eternal covenant with the Father, He must needs have died in some special sense for the elect, who were given to Him by the Father by the terms of that Covenant.³⁸

Hodge in his work on the Atonement restates this point. There he notes that the formula was accepted by Calvin and by the early Reformers, but after the rise of the Amyraldians, it was redefined.³⁹ Then there is the noted Cunningham. He acknowledges that the early Reformed adopted the formula of Christ's Atonement being sufficient for all, but efficient for the elect. However, Cunningham says,

after controversy had thrown its light upon the subject, orthodox divines generally refused to adopt this mode of stating the point, because it seemed to ascribe to Christ a *purpose* or *intention* of dying in the room of all, and of benefitting all by the proper effects of His death, as an atonement or propitiation; not that they doubted or denied the intrinsic sufficiency of His death for the redemption of all men, but because the statement--whether originally so intended or not--was so expressed as to suggest the idea, that Christ, in dying, desired and intended that all men should partake in the proper and peculiar effects of the shedding of his blood.⁴⁰

Cunningham notes that if the statement is taken *irrespective* of the *design* or *purpose* of Christ, it is acceptable, but that the original scholastic form "seems to indicate that, when He died, *He intended* that all should derive some saving and permanent benefit from His death."⁴¹ It needs to be recognised that Cunningham points out that there was a modification in the understanding of the meaning and intent of the phrase "he died sufficiently for all, and efficiently for the elect." Therefore, this is no novel and modern Barthian thesis being put forth here in this paper.

It is granted that the documentable support for believing that Calvin accepted the Medieval Synthesis is minimal. The most well-known passage comes from his commentary on 1 Jn 2:2. There he says:

Here a question may be raised, how have the sins of the whole world been expiated? I pass by the dotages of the fanatics, who under this pretense extend salvation to all the reprobate, and therefore to Satan himself. Such a monstrous thing deserves no refutation. They who seek to avoid this absurdity, have said that Christ suffered sufficiently for the whole world, but efficiently only for the elect. This solution has commonly prevailed in the schools. Though then I allow that what has been said is true, yet I deny that it is suitable to this passage; for the design of John was no other than to make this benefit common to the whole Church. Then under the word all or whole, he does not include the reprobate, but designates those who should believe as well as those who were then scattered through various parts of the world. For then is really made evident, as it is meet, the grace of Christ, when it is declared to be the only true salvation of the world.⁴²

Here Calvin grants the Synthesis to be true, but here he denies its application to this verse. Others, however, are more explicit. Ursinus (1534-1583), and Wolfgang Musculus (1497-1563), were key first and second generation Reformers who held to the theology of this formula. For example, the Heidelberg Catechism, speaking of Christ's work of redemption, Q37 asks: "What do you understand by the word 'suffered'?" Answer: "That all the time He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, He sustained, in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind, in order that by His suffering, as the only atoning sacrifice, He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the grace of God, righteousness and eternal life."⁴³ The answering comments by Ursinus here are of interest. Among the many points and counter-points he makes, he says that Christ suffered:

³⁸A.A. Hodge, "The Consensus of the Reformed Confessions" *The Presbyterian Review* 5 (1884) pp., 287-298.

³⁹A.A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1868), p., 333.

⁴⁰W., Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1979., vol., 2, p., 332.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²Calvin, *in loco*.

⁴³Heidelberg Catechism: Fifteenth Lord's Day, Question 37.

The keenest and most bitter anguish of soul, which is doubtless a sense of the wrath of God against the sins of *the whole human race*. It was this that caused him to exclaim, upon the cross, with a loud voice, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’... Thus we should see what, and how greatly Christ has suffered in our behalf.⁴⁴

From Here, Ursinus asserts that the suffering of Christ was vastly different than the suffering of the martyrs. Citing the example of St. Lawrence, he says: “St Lawrence lying on the gridiron, did not experience the dreadful wrath of God, either against his own, or against the sins of *the human race*. The entire punishment which was inflicted upon the Son of God, as Isaiah saith, he was stricken, and smitten of God for our sins.”⁴⁵

If it should be imagined that Ursinus, in his use of the phrases “the whole human race” and “the human race” he did not mean elect and non-elect inclusively, then his subsequent comments dispel this idea. A little later, Ursinus responds to the counter question and argument: “If Christ made a satisfaction for all, then all ought to be saved. But all are not saved. Therefore he did not make a perfect satisfaction.”⁴⁶ Ursinus’s answer to this is telling: “Ans. Christ satisfied for all, as it respects the sufficiency of the satisfaction which he hath made, but not as it respects the application thereof.”⁴⁷

If we stop here and pause to put the pieces of the puzzle together, it is clear that for Ursinus, Christ suffered the wrath of God for the sins of the whole human race, by which he means, all without exception. This suffering for all effected a sufficient satisfaction for all. However, the application of this satisfaction is only effected through faith.

Wolfgang Musculus was one of Calvin’s contemporaries and a Reformer in the city of Bern. His major dogmatic work was *Loci Communes Sacrae Theologiae*. Speaking of the Redemption of Mankind, he says the following:

Now we must in redemption consider by degrees, who it is that is redeemed, from whence, by whom, how, when, and to what purpose and end. Touching this matter we have in hand, the very title of this place, speaketh of the redemption of mankind. Mankind comprehendeth not once or two nations, but the universal world, that is, all the nations of the whole world, all men from the first to the last. Israel was redeemed sundry times out of the power of his enemies, out of Egypt, sometimes from the tyranny of the Cannanites out of Babylon. But here is not meant of some special redemption of any people, but of the same which is generally of all. We know that all be not partakers of this redemption, but the losse of them which be not saved, doth hinder nothing at all, why it should not be called an universal redemption, which is appointed not for one nation, for all the whole world.⁴⁸

Musculus then goes on to use the metaphors of summer and the budding of plants, and the sun. He notes that in the opening of summer, it may be said that universally that trees and plants are setting forth buds, even though not every tree and plant, which is able to bud, has indeed budded. And again, the light of the sun extends itself to the whole world, not all in the world receive that light. From this, he then notes that among the Jews, there was the year of Jubilee wherein there was a general delivery of all bondmen, “although, many which abide in their bondage, did refuse the grace of their deliverie.”⁴⁹ Only now does he come to the question of the reprobate. He says that it is similar with regard to this redemption of mankind:

⁴⁴Zacharius Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: 1994), p., 213. [Emph., mine.]

⁴⁵Ibid. [Emph., mine.]

⁴⁶Ibid., p., 215. This counter to Ursinus’ earlier remarks only makes sense upon the supposition that by the terms human race, and whole human race, he meant all men universally.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Wolfgang Musculus, *Common Places of Christian Religion*, trans., by John Merton (London: Henry Byneman, 1578), p., 305.

⁴⁹Ibid., p., 305.

for it is not for lacke of the grace of God, that the reprobate and desparatly wicked men do not receyve it: nor is it right that it should loose his title and glory of universal redemption because of the children of perdition, seying that it is ready for all men, and all be called unto it. So he redeemed the worlde, what soever do become of the reprobate, is most iustly called the Saviour of the worlde... And this redemption is also universal for this cause, it is so appointed unto all men, that without it no man is, nor can be redeemed⁵⁰

Here we see Musculus expressing the theology of the Medieval Synthesis. The Redemption of Christ is ready for all, by which he means, no doubt, that it is available for all, and this availability for all was appointed.

Having outlined the earlier Reformation doctrine at this point, it will serve us well to illustrate the theological revision regarding the extent of the atonement by detailing James Durham's understanding of the atonement. Here Durham is important exactly because he was a significant contributor to the very Scottish arm of the Protestant Scholastic tradition that Boston later tussled with. Durham on the sufficiency of the atonement:

In respect to itself, and as *abstractly* from the covenant of redemption, wherein it is contrived as to all the circumstances of it, in which sense, as his death and sufferings are of infinite value and worth, so they are (as divines commonly speak), of value to redeem the whole world, if God in his design and decree had so ordered, and thought meet to extend it.⁵¹

And again, from his Commentary on Revelation, we find the concurring words with explanation:

It is true, that Christ's death, being considered *abstractly* and materially in itself, in respect to the Person who died, and in respect of the manner of His performing this obedience with so much cheerfulness, reverence, etc. may be, and by Divines is said to be, of infinite value; So that if it had been so intended and transacted *in the Covenant of Redemption*, it might have been in the former respects accounted, and accepted as a price for many more; yea for all: because the suffering, performed by such a Person is equivalent unto, and, in respect of His excellency who suffers, beyond the eternal sufferings of all mere creatures.

But now, Durham is careful to explain how the Covenant of Redemption, *regulates* the intention and work of Christ:

But Christ's death, being considered formally, as a price and satisfaction, with respect to the transaction that is made in the Covenant of Redemption, it must be qualified and understood with respect to the Lord's proposing of the terms, the Mediator's condescending thereto, and His intention in undertaking and executing the same, as also with respect to the Lord's accepting of the same as such... Whereby it is evident, that the Lord hath particular ordered the work of Redemption according to His good pleasure in respects formerly mentioned; and the Mediator's death and suffering are to be looked upon as regulated and qualified in respect of their effects, according to what has been proposed to him.

In this context Durham asserts that it was Christ's intention to provide a satisfaction for sin for the elect only, thereby saving the elect, "out of all kindreds, tongues and nations."⁵² It must be recalled that this is the theology that shaped the Protestant Orthodox of Scotland. Walker pithily sums up Scottish thinking on this topic:

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹James Durham, *Christ Crucified: The Marrow of the Gospel in 72 Sermons on Isaiah 53* (Dallas, TX: Naphtali Press, 2001), p., 343. This whole section in this work is a refutation of attempts to import any shades of universalism into the work of Christ. Durham argues in the same spirit and categories as Owen. You will find the same expressions in John Brown of Wamphray's *The Life of Justification Opened* (No place: No publisher, 1695). I do not think it is an overstatement to suggest John's Owen's work of limited atonement defined Scottish theology at this point. Contrary to Durham, however, see Calvin's comments on John 4:42 and 12:47.

⁵²James Durham, *A Commentary on Revelation* (PA: Old Paths Publ., 2000), pp., 378-379.

It was discussed by Rutherford, and Brown, and Durham, and Dickson, and Gillespie; and I think there can be no doubt that they hold, that in whatsoever sense Christ died for any of our race, in that same sense he died for all for whom he died. They held, indeed, the intrinsic sufficiency of Christ's death to save the world or worlds but that was altogether irrespective of Christ's purpose, or of Christ's accomplishment. The phrase that Christ died sufficiently for all was not approved, because of the "For" seemed to imply some reality of actual substitution.⁵³

The import here is that Walker is saying that for the Scottish theologians there can be no sense where Christ died for any in a way that is different to his death for others. As much as Christ effectually died for one, so in this same manner he died for all for whom he died. Thus, he could never die, ineffectually, for any. I add to Walker's point that what caused this reevaluation was not so much the terms, themselves, but the terms as now understood by the Federalist categories. For the terms, themselves, were never a problem for men like Calvin and the early Reformed.

Shifting focus a little, regarding faith, it is important to note that for the early Reformers, saving faith consisted in a knowledge that God is well-disposed to those who come to him. A.A. Hodge explains the point well and briefly:

The Reformers generally maintained that justifying faith consisted in appropriating the promise of salvation through Christ made in the gospel, *i.e.*, in regarding God as propitious to us for Christ's sake. Thus the very act of faith involves assurance.⁵⁴

Calvin on Faith: "Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and *certain knowledge* of God's *benevolence* toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."⁵⁵ A little later, he will add:

For faith is so far above sense that man's mind has to go beyond and rise above itself in order to attain it. Even where the mind has attained, it does not comprehend what it feels. But while it is persuaded of what it does not grasp, by the very certainty of its persuasion it understands more than if it perceived anything human by its own capacity...

By these words he shows that those things which we know through faith are nonetheless absent from us and go unseen. From this we conclude that the knowledge of faith consists in assurance rather than in comprehension.⁵⁶

With regard to our initial saving and assuring faith in relation to the expiation of Christ and my knowledge of that, Calvin says directly:

For God must first have told us that he loveth us, or else we cannot rest upon his goodness, nor call upon him as our father. Now let us see what this promise is. God not only saith that he will have pity upon us, but also telleth us that although we be wretched sinners, yet he will not cease to accept us, because he burieth all our sins, namely by the means of our Lord Jesus Christ: *for that sacrifice must needs come forth everywhere*, where any mention is made of the forgiving of sins. Never can there be any pardon gotten at God's hand, except there be *bloodshedding with it for a satisfaction*. So then the foundation of this promise where God saith that he will be merciful to us, *is Christ's shedding of his blood to wash away our spots*, and his offering up of himself for a full amends, to pacify the wrath of God his father. Thus ye see how that if we be of faith, we have our eyes *fastened*

⁵³James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland: Chiefly of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1888), p., 80.

⁵⁴Hodge, *Outlines*, p., 477.

⁵⁵John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans., by F.L., Battles, ed., by J.N., McNeill, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), vol., 1, p., 551, or 3.2.7, [Emph., mine].

⁵⁶Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.14, vol., 1, p., 559-560. In the very next section, Calvin will again affirm that faith must be "sure and firm" immune to doubt and change, 3.2.15.

*upon Jesus Christ, and our rest and quietness is altogether in his death and passion, which is the only mean to reconcile us unto God.*⁵⁷

And again:

For it is very certain that the forefathers had the spirit of faith or belief, according as I have showed you already that Abraham was justified because he believed God, and that we also must be fashioned like to his example in that behalf, as whereby we be made his children to come to the kingdom of heaven. Then had faith his full strength at all times, and there was never any other means to set God and men at one: but yet was not the faith revealed in Abraham's time, because our Lord Jesus Christ who is the very pledge and substance thereof, was not yet come into the world. Thus ye see how we be justified freely at this day, and without any desert of our own. And why is that? *For he that believeth that Jesus Christ died for our sins, and is risen again for our justification: hath all the whole.* And it is said in another place, (Romans 10:10) our believing in our heart maketh us righteous, and our confessing with our mouth maketh us safe.⁵⁸

And:

But I have showed you heretofore, *that our believing in Jesus Christ* is not as the crediting of some story when we hear it or read it, but a *receiving and conceiving* of him inwardly with *full assuredness* as he is *offered us by God* his father. Therefore when we *embrace our Lord Jesus Christ, as the party that hath made amends [paid] for our sins to reconcile us to God*, so as we *repose the whole trust* of our welfare in him, not doubting but that he hath brought us all that is for the inheriting of heaven: I say if we be once assured of that: it is no marvel though God acknowledge us as his children for our beliefs sake.⁵⁹

And:

Nevertheless to the end that this shortness be not darksome: I will declare it more at large. So long as we be in doubt whither God do love us or hate us, there will always be trouble and unquietness in our consciences, and we shall be as it were locked up in prison. So then there will be no freedom in our minds, till we know and be thoroughly persuaded that God is at one with us, and that he receiveth us into his favor and grace, though we be not worthy of it. But it is impossible for us to have any certainty of it, except we *have our quittance always before our eyes, which was made us in the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Why so? For as I said afore, we be indebted unto God many ways, yea infinite ways. For we be bound to keep the law, and we break it a hundred times a day, yea even or ever we think of it. Again we offend even in gross faults. But howsoever we deal, we cannot assure ourselves of God's love, unless we be discharged against him of the obligation of everlasting death wherein we stand bound. Now we attain that benefit when we be *persuaded by the Gospel, that the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed to wash away all our spots, and that his death is a sufficient sacrifice to appease God's wrath*, and to wipe out the remembrance of all our offenses and iniquities. Ye see then that the way to set us free, is to know that God receiveth us to mercy for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and that our faults and sins shall not hinder us to find favor always in his sight, or to have familiar access unto him, as children have unto their fathers.⁶⁰

Lastly:

⁵⁷John Calvin, *Sermons on Galatians*. (New Jersey. Old Paths Publications, 1995), 3:7-9. [Emph., mine.]

⁵⁸Ibid., 3:21-25. [Emph., mine.] I would suggest that here Calvin is possibly alluding to 1 Cor 15:1-4.

⁵⁹Ibid., 3:26-29. [Emph., mine.]

⁶⁰Ibid., 5:1-3. [Emph., mine.] Of course, one may choose to deny the natural force of these statements, for viewed in isolation from Calvin's wider theology of the atonement, they could be interpreted otherwise. But in the context of that wider theology, his meaning is patently clear.

Furthermore it is not enough to know *generally* that Christ is our Redeemer: but faith importeth that every of us must acknowledge him to be *his* Redeemer. And is that possible to be unless our Lord Jesus do dwell in us and reign in us, and that we be inflamed with the love of him to give ourselves wholly unto him.⁶¹

What we must do here is place these two affirmations back to back. Faith, for Calvin is that *assurance, certainty* and full *persuasion* that God is benevolent towards us.⁶² Furthermore, what lies at the back of Calvin's definition of faith entailing assurance is quite apparently his understanding of the work of Christ generally speaking; namely, in that as Christ died for all, this is the sure ground for my own initial saving faith and assurance. Calvin did not primarily ground assurance in a relex act of faith, the so-called *practical syllogism*.

Moving on, the influential Heidelberg Catechism defines faith as:

True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us I his word, but also an *assured confidence*, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.⁶³

Ursinus in his commentary on this further notes that :

justifying or saving faith differs, therefore, from other kinds of faith, because it alone is that assured confidence by which we apply unto ourselves the merit of Christ, which is done when we firmly believe that the righteousness of Christ is granted and imputed unto us, so that we are accounted just in the sight of God.⁶⁴

To conclude Part 1, my intent here has not been to exhaustively cite Calvin against the Protestant Scholastics. My aim here has been to be suggestive. For in terms of Scotland's infamous Marrow debate in the 1720s, what is we should note is that for the most part, it was the works of men like Rutherford, Gillespie, Dickson, Durham, Owen, Witsius and Turretin that sat prominently upon the shelves of most Presbyterian ministers. It was the categories and concepts of the Protestant Scholastics that shaped and defined the theologians of Scotland from the time of the Westminster Assembly and onward. And these categories were Federal or covenantal categories which served to supply a new hierarchy of explanation.

It should become clear how Federalism was seen as the concept that determined what the work of Christ on earth would look like. The work of Christ was seen as a straightforward outworking of the Federalist categories, and because of this the universal motifs in Calvin and Musculus, Ursinus, *etc.*, were phased out. This is why the Protestant Scholastics embraced the idea that Christ only as man, as any human, loved all men and desired that all be saved, not as God-Man the Redeemer-Messiah enacting the mission of Federalism's mandate--specifically the Covenant of Redemption. Only in this way could they make their theological schema non-contradictory. That is, Christ as God and Messiah who enacts the terms of the Covenant of redemption could not, they thought, also desire anything other than the accomplishment of the terms of the Covenant of Redemption. As God-Man, Messiah-Redeemer, in this same sense, he could not desire the one and yet also, they thought, desire its apparent negation. The Medieval Scholastic maxim was: When faced with a contradiction, make a distinction. Therefore, they reasoned, Christ only as a man loves all men, and desires that all be saved. It never occurred to them that perhaps one of their founding premises may have been defective.⁶⁵ It should be more clear now that men like Dabney, and others had moved away from some of the exegetical conclusions of men like Turretin and the Supralapsarians. Yet how many of us today are cognizant of this fact? It did not mean that he rejected

⁶¹Ibid., Sermon 5:4-6 [Emph., mine.]

⁶²Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.24.5, vol., 2, p., 970.

⁶³Heidelberg Catechism, Seventh Lord's Day, question 21, [emph., mine].

⁶⁴Ursinus, p., 110.

⁶⁵Witsius, for example, notes that Christ as a man loved all and wished all well, he even seriously lamented the ruin of those that perish. Yet as God he knew they were reprobates, as Mediator he had not engaged. Further, he submitted his human affection to the divine will and purpose of God, (Ibid., vol., 1, p., 256).

the Protestant Scholastics completely. No, but on these points he saw something wrong. He saw something that was not exegetically and theologically sound.

Ideas are powerful. And the Federalist ideas were very powerful in their explanatory ability to make sense of so much. It's naive to imagine that such a *new* and powerful idea did not have a ripple effect elsewhere and cause changes in emphases and directions from the previous lines of thought. Federalism to the Calvinists was like the earth going around the sun for Copernicus. It was a whole new mode of looking at God's redemptive purposes.

I have tried to imagine what it would have been like for Augustine, for example, before Federalism was an organising complex of ideas, to conceive of his theological world? He would have organised his theological world around the broader concepts of predestination and then sovereignty. Now add to this the Medieval Scholastics with the old formula, *Christ died for all sufficiently, the elect efficiently*, that is, with some sort of dual intentionality for all, on the one hand, and for the elect only, on the other. How did they organise their theological world? Predestination again, as broadly considered. Calvin is part of *that* world, before Federalism was fully set out. Calvin has no technical concepts of a distinct Covenant of Redemption, and Covenant of Grace as opposed to the Covenant of Works. His Federalism was as much as Augustine's was--original sin, Adamic headship, and so forth, rather minimal compared to what was to come.

For Calvin, then, his Christ is shaped by a different central matrix of ideas: Predestination, sovereignty, and the formula: Christ died *for* all men sufficiently, and *for* all men efficiently. He can see Christ's work in broader categories than could Beza, Durham and the Protestant Scholastics, who now only saw Christ's work in wholly particularist categories, either as the outworking of supralapsarianism or of Federalism's Covenant of Redemption. These changes in emphases did influence and impact their thinking. This then explains perfectly that Cunningham quotation as cited above--Cunningham here reflects a different matrix of controlling presuppositions. Federalism did bring with it a new organising principle into Reformed theology. I would argue that it is naive to imagine that this new complex of ideas which delineated, exactly, the work of Christ did not have a profound impact upon Reformed theology. Imagine Federalism's potency: In one system it brings together the Covenants of Works, of Redemption, of Grace, it weaves in predestination, atonement, and the unfolding covenant redemptive history. It gives meaning to baptism, communion, and to the church. The whole of redemptive history, pre-temporally and temporally takes on a richer hue of coherence and unity. However, some of the early exegetical and theological conclusions of early Federalism, though, were not sound, but needed correction and adjustment from men like Boston, Dabney, the Hodges, and Murray, for example.

On the nature of saving faith, the Westminster Confession of Faith speaks emphatically in its denial of assurance as the essence of saving faith: "this infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it."⁶⁶ Needless to stress that it was the theology of the confession that also defined what it meant to be orthodox in Scotland in the 1720s.

Part 2, Thomas Boston and Protestant Scholastic Orthodoxy

There is little doubt that some strife that arose was due to unorthodoxy, not to the church of Scotland, but to the Marrowmen themselves... The theology of Boston and the Erskine brothers was based upon Fisher's *Marrow of Modern Divinity* published in 1645. There is no question that the language of the book is Amyraldian.

These are the words of my friend, Ken Stebbins in his book *Christ Freely Offered*.⁶⁷ Stebbins does go on to acknowledge that 'Boston and the Erskines were less than orthodox, even while holding to particular redemption, but

⁶⁶WCF 18:3.

⁶⁷Ken Stebbins, *Christ Freely Offered* (Australia: Covenanter Press, 1978), p., 86. Stebbins here argues that we can only speak of God's *delight* that all men be saved, not of God's *desire* that all be saved. Stebbins' entire argument in this book is determined by his reading Turretin and in this by his assumption that the expressions and categories of Turretin reflect Calvin's thinking and Calvinism as a whole.

they wrongly fused the Amyraldian language of Fisher with their own.⁶⁸ The problem here is that Stebbins is relying on the opinions of the Hyper-Calvinist, Charles Rodman, in the booklet *"The Desire of God for the Salvation of the Reprobate:" An Ambiguous Doctrine Refuted and the Reformed Evangelical Church Vindicated*.⁶⁹

On the other hand, A.A. Hodge says:

The "Marrow of Modern Divinity" was published in England in 1646, and republished in Scotland by James Hog of Carnock in 1726. The "Marrow Men" were Hog, Thomas Boston, and Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine, and their followers in the Secession Church. They were perfectly orthodox with respect to the reference of the Atonement to the elect. Their peculiarity was that they emphasised the general reference of the atonement to all men. They said Christ did not die for all, but that he is dead for all, *i.e.*, available. "God made a deed of gift and grant of Christ unto all men." They distinguished between his "giving love," which was universal, and his "electing love" which was special.⁷⁰

I will not spend too much time discussing the historical context of the Marrow debate.⁷¹ The theological context is more important. David Lachman's thesis *The Marrow Controversy, 1718-1723: An Historical and Theological Analysis* is one of the first to document in careful detail the theological context of the Marrow debate. There are two key ideas that Lachman is right to bring up. The first thing to realise is that there was a rise in Scotland of Neo-nomianism. Neo-nomianism was a teaching derived from Richard Baxter. Baxter taught the doctrine that faith is a proper condition which the believer performs in order to obtain the covenant blessings. This led to the further idea that the Christian must keep the new law of Christ--faith and repentance--in order to secure the new covenant blessing of justification. In this manner, a strain of legalism was now imported into Reformed theology. This is Lachman's main thesis. However, we must add to this other themes that were also edging their way into the thinking of the Protestant orthodox in Scotland. Bound with the Neo-nomian error was the further error of the redefinition of the Biblical warrant or grounds for believing in the gospel. I would argue, that given the redefining of the work of Christ by the Protestant Scholastics, the ground or warrant for faith was accordingly redefined. Recall that for Calvin and others, the knowledge that God was well-disposed to the penitent is the definition of saving faith. If, however, that knowledge of God's benevolent disposition is abstracted from faith, then what becomes the grounds or warrant for the believer to trust in Christ for *his* or *her* salvation?

What this meant was that the warrant was to be sought elsewhere. Unfortunately the grounds began to be seen as lying within the person, within the sinner. What this meant was that the sinner must now qualify himself. Here we see the rise of the term "sensible sinner."⁷² In New England, this idea took the form of preparationism. This is the error of Thomas Hooker. One had to prepare himself before they could "close with Christ." In England, and in Scotland, this manifested itself in that strain of legalism we now call Neo-nomianism.⁷³ The warrant for faith is no longer the gracious invitation of Christ, but some internal work of preparation or qualification within the penitent. In this way, the penitent would have

⁶⁸Ibid., p., 87.

⁶⁹[Charles Rodman], *"The Desire of God for the Salvation of the Reprobate:" An Ambiguous Doctrine Refuted and the Reformed Evangelical Church Vindicated* (Tasmania, Australia: The Reformed Evangelical Church, 1965). This work has no stated authorship, but it is known that Rodman was the author. Stebbins at this point did not have direct access to either Fisher's *Marrow of Modern Divinity* or to the works of Thomas Boston.

⁷⁰Hodge, *Outlines*, p., 417.

⁷¹See on this John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: The Knox Press, 1974), pp., 139-166, as representative of any standard treatment.

⁷²David C. Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy, 1718-1723: An Historical and Theological Analysis* (Edinburgh, Rutherford House Books, 1988). In the introductory chapters, Lachman argues for the same thesis as I do here regarding the limiting of the atonement categories and the affect of that on the doctrines of the free offer and the nature of saving faith.

⁷³In its original intended meaning it meant those who were now sensible of their sins, and were near to closing with Christ. However, later Calvinists began using this concept to limit the gospel offer. C.f., Lachman, pp., 59, 100-105, on the limitation of the gospel offer to the sensible sinner.

⁷⁴See Lachman, p., 55, and 66.

to supply the necessary precondition of salvation, namely faith. The idea of conditionality was often muddled by the leading protagonists of this period. While it was granted by the anti-Marrowmen that the faith that saves was an instrumental condition, the *sine qua non* of salvation, it was, nonetheless, still something that the penitent had to produce in order to qualify closing with Christ. Here the line between true legalism, true Neo-nomianism, and grace with faith only as the *sine qua non* of salvation, greyed and became blurred. In the eyes of the Marrowmen, the position of the opposing party was nothing short of a new legalism. In the eyes of the orthodox, the position of the Marrowmen was nothing short of pure antinomianism. The spill-over effect of the anti-Marrowmen's position was that they now tended to deny the offer of grace to all men. Rather, they tended to only publicly offer Christ and his grace to the penitent, or to the so-called "sensible sinner."

Thus it was inevitable that given the Scottish drift into Neo-nomianism that the so-called Auchterarder Creed should come about. In 1717 the Presbytery of Auchterarder moved to counter the growing threat of legalism. It created the famous creed to which all candidates for ministry in their presbytery had to subscribe. The *creed* ran thusly: "It is unsound to teach that men must forsake sin in order to come to Christ." The creed, most admit, is not worded the best it could have been. But the intent was to stop the spread of a sort of preparationist legalism. This new legalism had been infecting Reformed theology from New England to Holland.⁷⁵ This question was then put to one William Craig, a candidate for the ministry. Non-plussed, Craig took the issue to the General Assembly. That General Assembly declared that the *creed* was 'unsound, detestable and abhorrent' This then was the little spark that fired the revival of evangelical Calvinism in Scotland.⁷⁶ During the subsequent disputes over the Auchterarder Creed, Thomas Boston discovered the *Marrow of Modern Divinity* by Edward Fisher on the shelf of one of his parishioners. That book changed Boston's thinking for the rest of his life.

*The Marrow of Modern Divinity*⁷⁷

The *Marrow* is divided into two sections. Section 1 is a treatment of the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. Section 2 is an exposition of the 10 commandments. The entire work is written in the form of a fictional dialogue between *Nomista* (who stands for the legalist), *Evangelista* (who stands for an evangelical Christian), *Antinomista* (who stands for an Anti-nomian Christian), *Neophytus* (who represents a young naive Christian), and in the second section, there is added *Nomologista* (a "Prattler of the Law"). It is the first section that concern this paper. Within the *Marrow* are two sets of ideas which caused much offence to orthodox sensibilities. The first set regards certain statements--3 in fact--the apparent extent of the atonement of Christ. The second set of ideas pertains to the nature of faith as assurance.

The *Marrow*: its background. Lachman makes a valuable point when he argues that the first edition of the *Marrow* was published in 1645. The book was later republished with corrections and additions. What is important here is that Lachman is right to argue that in terms of theology, Fisher clearly reaches back to the theology of the early Reformers. There is a sense where the *Marrow* is stuck in a sort of time-warped. Fisher essentially skips over the Protestant Scholastics and reaches back to the time of Musculus,⁷⁸ Ursinus, Preston and the early British and Continental divines. It is these sources that shape much of his theology. It must be noted, too, that Fisher is writing also within the matrix of Federal Theology. That is the marvelous aspect of this work, for Fisher combines the emergent Federalism of his day with the

⁷⁵Its this very form of legalism that infected much of the Dutch Reformed church, and to which Abraham Kuyper reacted so strongly against. Joel Beeke has fought this legalism while in the Netherlands Reformed Church. The legalism make take on subtle variations, but at the heart of all its forms is a subtle shift in the warrant to believe, shifting the grounds from Christ to self. I believe there is probably good grounds for tracing the development of Reformed legalism to the growth and popularity of Puritanism. This no doubt would make a great Ph.D. topic.

⁷⁶As an aside, Boston was the principal writer that influenced Andrew Fuller. Andrew Fuller was the man that pulled the Particular Baptists out of the slough of Hyper-Calvinist (with the exception of the hardshell Gillites, *et al*). It was then the direct result of this that men like William Carey initiated the great 19th drive for missions.

⁷⁷Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity: in Two Parts... With Notes by Thomas Boston* (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Water Revival Books, 1991).

⁷⁸Interestingly, Musculus is quoted frequently by Fisher.

older more generous and broader Calvinism of the first Reformers. Boston, in one sense, is merely following and defending the lead of Fisher by synthesising Federalism with the Calvinism of Calvin, *et al.*

In contrast to this, the main sources for the anti-Marrowmen, such as James Hadow, are the Protestant Scholastics like Francis Turretin,⁷⁹ Herman Witsius, John Owen, Rutherford, Durham, *et al.*⁸⁰ Thus, in a sense, there are now two Calvinistic paradigms at loggerheads. Regarding the atonement, the *Marrow* makes the following statements. Firstly, speaking of Christ:

I find him a sinner, yea, such an one as hath taken upon him the sins of all men, therefore let him die on the cross.⁸¹

Secondly:

I beseech you consider, that God the Father, as he is in his Son Jesus Christ, moved with nothing but with his free love to mankind lost, hath made a deed of gift and grant unto them all, that whosoever of them shall believe in this his son, shall not perish, but have eternal life.⁸²

And thirdly:

And hence it was, that Jesus Christ himself said unto his disciples, Mark 16:15, “Go and preach the gospel to every creature under heaven:” that is Go and tell every man without exception, that here is good news for him; Christ is dead for him; and if he will take him, and accept his righteousness, he shall have him.⁸³

The first statement comes from Martin Luther, in his commentary on Galatians.⁸⁴ The second statement is from Ezekiel Culverwell’s *A Treatise of Faith*,⁸⁵ and the third comes from John Preston’s *The Breastplate of Faith*.⁸⁶ These three men were all completely orthodox in their opinions regarding the atonement. They reflect, however, the Medieval Synthesis which posits a designed universal sufficiency of the atonement. My interest here is not so much documenting the theology of Luther, Culverwell and Preston--Lachman has already performed this task. My interest here is to document in more detail Boston’s responses to these comments with the view of saving him from the charges of heresy.

Regarding the first statement, Boston says emphatically⁸⁷ that: “Christ died not for, nor took upon himself the sins of all and every individual man, but he died for, and took upon himself the sins of all the elect, Jn 10:15., and 15:13; Acts 20:28; Eph 5:25; Tit 2:14, and no other doctrine is here taught by our author [Fisher] touching the extent of the death of Christ.”⁸⁸ Boston then invokes the now standard concepts of Christ as surety for the elect only: Christ as surety “puts himself in the place of those for whom he becomes surety, to pay their debt... not for all men of all the faithful, or elect

⁷⁹And certain other later Protestant Scholastics.

⁸⁰These writers were publishing after the first edition of the *Marrow*, but they became the movers and shakers of Scottish Reformed theology.

⁸¹*Marrow*, p., 102

⁸²*Ibid.*, p., 126.

⁸³*Ibid.*, pp., 126-127.

⁸⁴Martin Luther *A Commentary Upon the Letter to the Galatians* (London: George Miller, 1635), fol., 137b.

⁸⁵Ezekiel Culverwell’s *A Treatise of Faith* (London: I.D., for Hen: Overton, 1633), p., 15.

⁸⁶John Preston’s *The Breastplate of Faith and Love* (London: W.I. for Nicolas Bourne, 1632), p., 8.

⁸⁷The reader should note that it is reasonable here that Boston is sensitive to the charges made against him and so is specifically and self-consciously seeking to explain and document his position so as to be beyond all question and doubt.

⁸⁸*Marrow*, p., 102. To be noted: all of Boston’s comments are located in the footnotes edition of the *Marrow* he had republished.

of God.”⁸⁹ What is driving Boston in his defense of the *Marrow* at this point is a very serious pastoral concern. The question is, ‘what if Christ did not die for me?’ Boston’s answer is clear:

The author hitherto hath been dealing with the parties, to bring them to Christ; and particularly here, he is speaking for the instruction and direction of a convinced trembling sinner, namely, Neophytus; and, therefore, like a wise and tender man in such a case, he useth a manner of speaking, which being warranted by the word, was fitted to excite the awakening of the ordinary scruples in that case, namely, “It may be that I am not elected, - it may be Christ died not for me” and which pointed at the duty of all, and the encouragement that all have to come to Christ.⁹⁰

Boston’s point here touches on the very real question that came to be a problem in Protestant Scholastic theology. His answer is Fisher’s answer, which is a reworking of Luther and the Medieval Synthesis. There is a sense where the atonement of Christ was made for all men, that it was made and designed to be available for all, so that none may consider himself necessarily excluded. And regarding the open-endedness of Luther’s expression, Boston reaffirms that this here is no more than the generalist language of Scripture itself (*e.g.*, 1 Tim 2:6, and Heb 2:9).

On page 126, Boston makes the point that Christ is the deed of gift and grant to all mankind lost, which means, in other words, says Boston:

By the authentic gospel offer, in the Lord’s own word; which offer is the foundation of faith, and the ground and warrant for the ministerial offer, without which it could avail nothing... By this offer or deed of gift and grant Christ is ours before we believe; not that we have a saving interest in him, or are in a state of grace, but that we have a common interest in him, and the common salvation, which fallen angels have not... so that it is lawful and warrantable for us, not for them, to take possession of Christ.

Then citing 1 Jn 5:11, he says:

The giving here is not the giving in possession in greater or lesser measure, but giving by way of grant, whereupon one may take possession. And the party to whom, is not the election only, but mankind lost. For this record is the gospel, the foundation of faith, and warrant to all, to believe in the Son of God, and lay hold of eternal life in him; but that God hath given eternal life to the elect, can be no such foundation nor warrant; for that as a gift made to certain select men, can never be a foundation nor warrant for all men to accept and take it.⁹¹

Here Boston alludes to the concept that in some sense mankind as a whole is a party, in terms of the *offer*, of the Covenant. The offer of the Covenant of Life is made to all, and all men, as men, have a common right to this Covenant. At no point does Boston say that all men are actually made partakers of the Covenant of Life. Boston will only ever affirm that in terms of actual salvation, Christ only went surety for the elect, and for them alone did he die as to purchase redemption. Next we come to the statement by Culverwell. Boston cites Culverwell in context:

The matter to be believed unto salvation is this, that God the Father, moved by nothing but his free love to mankind lost, hath made a deed of gift and grant of his son Christ Jesus unto mankind, that whosoever of all mankind shall receive this by a true and lively faith, he shall not perish, but having everlasting life.⁹²

⁸⁹Ibid. This language is *the* language of Federalism and to one sensitive to these nuances, the import of Boston’s words strike immediately.

⁹⁰Ibid., p., 103.

⁹¹Ibid., p., 119.

⁹²Ibid., p., 126, echoes of Calvin resound in this quotation. Here Boston cites the words of Dr. Gouge, the Westminster divine: “Never any took such pains to so good purpose, in and about the foundation of faith, as he hath done.” Boston’s intent is to establish Gouge as a Westminsterian imprimatur.

It is here again that Boston will define his meaning of the terms *deed of gift* to all mankind, for he adds: “This deed of gift, or grant, or *authentic gospel-offer*...”⁹³ Boston clearly means to use the latter clause to explain the former. He adds: “This is the good old way of discovering to sinners their warrant to believe in Christ; and that Christ doth indeed bear the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ for all, and that Christ crucified is the obedience of God for the salvation unto all mankind, in the use-making of which only they can be saved; but not a universal atonement or redemption.”

He then notes that “this general offer, in substance, is equivalent to a special offer made to every one in particular.” I take his meaning here to be simply that what is offered to one, is in substance, offered to all. Regarding the third comment, Boston first cites at length the original context of the Preston statement, which generally comes to the assertion that the righteousness of Christ is available to everyone. Hence this is the very context of the words, “Go and tell every man without exception, that there is good news for him; Christ is dead for him.”⁹⁴ Boston endeavours to, himself Preston’s meaning:

Therefore he says not ‘Tell every man Christ died for him;’ but ‘Tell every man that Christ is dead for him;’ that is, for him to come to, and believe on a Saviour who is provided for him; there is a crucified Christ for him, the ordinance of heaven for salvation for lost man, in the use-making of which he may be saved; even as one had said of old, Tell every man that has slain any person unawares that the city of refuge is prepared for him, namely to flee to.⁹⁵

Boston adds further:

Thus what (according to Dr. Preston and our author) is to be told every man, is no more than what ministers of the gospel have in commission from their great Master, Matt 22:4 “Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen, and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready, come unto the marriage.” There is a crucified Saviour with all saving benefits, for even them to come, feed upon, and partake freely.⁹⁶

From this Boston now argues that Fisher never implied that Christ died for all men. And to this end, Boston offers arguments. He notes that for Fisher, knowledge that Christ died for a given person comes at the end of saving faith, not

⁹³Boston repeats this exact formula on p., 130, twice. Because some men make much of this language, it is reasonable to expound the meaning of this phrase as understood by the Marrowmen. In 1720, the General Assembly put to the Marrowmen a number of queries. In response to query 10, pertaining to the terminology of deed, gift and grant of Christ to all men, the Marrowmen said forcefully:

we answer... that by the “deed of gift or grant unto all mankind.” we understand *no more* than the revelation of the divine will in the word, affording warrant to offer Christ to all, and a warrant to all to receive him; for although we believe the purchase and application of redemption to be peculiar to the elect, who were given by the Father to Christ in the counsel of peace, yet warrant to receive him is common to all.

These queries are bound with the *Marrow*, p., 336 [emph., mine]. Further, the Marrowmen cite Jn 3:16 in support of this point, along with 1 Jn 5:11. Here again they assert the purchase (impetration) and application of redemption to be coterminous.

⁹⁴*Marrow*, p., 127.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, pp., 127-28. Here now we can begin to see the context of these statements and their intended meaning. Preston, importantly, now cites Jn 3:14-16.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

at the beginning.⁹⁷ Arminians make this knowledge the beginning of faith, says Boston. After this Boston reaffirms Fisher's statements regarding the point that Christ died as surety in the place of the elect and for them alone.

Moving on, next we consider some of Boston's statements which are spread throughout section 1 of the *Marrow*. On page 15, in a note to Fisher's letter to the reader, Boston flatly affirms the following: "Thus impetration or purchase of redemption, and the application of it, are taught to be of the one same extent." In terms of Amyraldianism, this comment is extremely germane to the defense of Boston. Amyraut taught that Christ purchased--the old technical term for this was impetration--redemption for all mankind, but that the actual benefits of this purchase were only applied to the elect. Boston is patently aware of Amyraldianism, and here for this very reason affirms the very theology Amyraut denied. On page 26 he affirms, "all mankind being ruined by the breach of law, Jesus Christ obeys and dies in the room of the elect, that they might be saved."

Before I leave the *Marrow*, there is one more point I wish to bring out. Ever since the earliest days of the Reformation, there has been a tradition that the Gospel is in some sense to be offered to the so-called *sensible sinners*. The basis of this idea comes from Matthew 11:28. Calvin is representative of this tradition (if not the founder of it in terms of Reformed theology):

He speaks of them as laboring, or groaning under a burden, and does not mean generally those who are oppressed with grief and vexations, but those who are overwhelmed by their sins, who are filled with alarm at the wrath of God, and are ready to sink under so weighty a burden. There are various methods, indeed, by which God humbles his elect; but as the greater part of those who are loaded with afflictions still remain obstinate and rebellious, Christ means by persons laboring and burdened, those whose consciences are distressed by their exposure to eternal death, and who are inwardly so pressed down by their miseries that they faint; for this very fainting prepares them for receiving his grace. He tells us that the reason why most men despise his grace is, that they are not sensible of their poverty; but that there is no reason why their pride or folly should keep back afflicted souls that long for relief.⁹⁸

In direct opposition to this, Boston counters well. Speaking of Isa 55:1, Mt 11:28 and Rev 22:17, he says:

That gospel offer... is the most solemn one to be found in all the Old Testament; and that recorded, Rev 22:17, is the parting offer made to sinners by Jesus Christ, at the closing of the canon of the Scripture... I can see no ground to think that the thirsting therein mentioned does any way restrict the offer; or that the thirsty there invited, are convinced, sensible sinners, who are thirsting after Christ and his righteousness; that which would leave without the compass of this solemn invitation, not only the far greater part of mankind, but even of the visible church. The content seems decisive in this point; for the thirsting ones invited, are such as are "spending money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfies not," verses 1, 2; but convinced

⁹⁷The later Protestant Scholastics revised Calvin at this point and made assurance of salvation a reflex act, grounded on the perception of the *sylogismus practicus* the practical syllogism, which denotes the reflection upon one's life in Christ thereby discerning the marks of regenerate and if one is regenerate, one is elect, and therefore someone included within the scope of Christ's redeeming work. See on this Durham *Commentary*, pp., 384-385. Durham here makes this exact point for his reader. Durham inverts the traditional perception by arguing that this method actually brings comfort to the believer. His argument is against the Amyraldian claim that for some whom Christ purchased redemption (impetration) are not actually saved. He argues rhetorically that this can bring no comfort. For he says, for it may be I am one of those not actually saved, even though Christ purchased redemption (impretrated) for me by his death. Durham, however, by linking impetration with efficacious application of salvation, asserts that I, by way of the practical syllogism, can reason backwards, that is, from the evidences of my regeneration--this being sure proof of my salvation--to the proof that I am indeed one for whom Christ impretrated. Naturally, the problem of assurance and doubt arose from this theological approach, for how can I know with certainty--via the practical syllogism--that I am regenerated? It was problems exactly such as this that led to such ideas as preparationism and the development of an intensive form of Calvinistic casuistry.

⁹⁸Calvin's *Commentaries*, *in loco*.

sensible sinners who are thirsting after Christ and his righteousness are not spending their labour and money at that rate; but, on the contrary, for that which is bread and satisfies, namely for Christ. Wherefore, the thirsting there mentioned, must be more extensive, comprehending, yea, and principally aiming at that thirst after happiness and satisfaction, which, being natural, is common to all mankind. Men pained with this thirst or hunger are naturally running, for quenching thereof, to the empty creation, and their fulsome lusts; so “spending money for that which is not bread and their labour for that which satisfies not,” their hungry souls find no food, but what is meager and lean, bad and unwholesome, and cannot satisfy their appetite.⁹⁹

Later he expands on this: “The words ‘labour and heavy laden,’ do not restrict the invitation and offer to such as are sensible of their sins, and longing to be rid of them, though indeed none but such will really accept [him]; but they denote the restlessness of the sinful soul of man; a qualification (if it is so called) to be found in all that are out of Christ.”¹⁰⁰

Boston’s Commentary on the Shorter Catechism

This work by Boston is exceptionally clear regarding his orthodoxy. For our purposes, I shall detail his discussion on the Federal Theology. Significantly, herein Boston demonstrates his complete commitment to Federal Theology, as set out by the Protestant Scholastics.¹⁰¹ Boston identifies the parties of the Covenant of Grace¹⁰² as the Father, who represents the offended Trinity, and as the Son, who stands as the representative of the elect, and for them alone.¹⁰³ Christ, says Boston, is our *kinsman redeemer*.¹⁰⁴ For Jesus, as our *kinsman redeemer* “contracted with God, as our elder brother, flesh of their flesh, and bone of their bone.”¹⁰⁵ For Boston, Christ contracts in our behalf and in him the elect are thereby contracted to the Father.¹⁰⁶ Boston even says that Christ bargained for us: “In their person it was that he stood in making this bargain with his Father, in their name it was that he acted when he struck hands with the Father, as a surety to obey the law and satisfy justice.”¹⁰⁷ Christ, in this manner, contracts to meet or fulfill all the conditions of the covenant for himself and *for the elect*.¹⁰⁸ These conditions are meritorious conditions, for now Christ has made a covenant of works with the Father. But for us, these conditions are by no means meritorious, but now instrumental.¹⁰⁹ Boston held that for our part, we are only to believe and embrace the covenant: “pretend not to make a covenant of your own, setting down such and such terms for life and salvation, which you will do... All that remains for us in that matter is to take hold of God’s covenant... to believe the promise, [and] approve cordially of the covenant.”¹¹⁰

The covenant is designed for the elect only: “The persons for whom this life was designed, the elect.” In this covenant between the Father and the Son, Boston affirms that Christ is the head of the elect only--“Christ as the head of the elect or head of the company chosen to life,”¹¹¹ takes the place of surety for the elect only:

⁹⁹Marrow, p., 143.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p., 254.

¹⁰¹Boston did follow the method of reasoning which collapsed the Covenant of Grace into the Covenant of Redemption. Thus for Boston, there are only 2 covenants, not 3, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. It is not necessary for me to labour Boston’s denial of the distinction between the Covenants of Grace and Redemption.

¹⁰²His treatment of the Covenant of Works need not concern us here. He adopts the traditional formulation. And regarding the parties of the Covenant Grace, Boston himself echoes the ambiguity found in the WCF documents, see LC 32.

¹⁰³Thomas Boston, *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993), vol., 1, p., 315, see also 22, 327, and 336.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p., 324 and 333.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp., 332-333, [emph., mine].

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 336.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p., 336.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p., 320, see also 327.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p., 338.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 316.

¹¹¹Ibid., p., 320.

This Federal headship of Christ, and of his representing of the elect in the covenant of grace, is evident from his suretyship in that covenant whereby he became surety for them... Now he was surety for them in the way of satisfaction for their debt, and the punishment due to them, and that as for persons utterly unable to answer for themselves.¹¹²

The satisfaction of Christ for the elect restores the breach between them and the Father by the breaking of the covenant of works.¹¹³ Boston further elaborates that while the covenant of works was made with all mankind, the covenant of grace was made with those secretly 'marked' in Christ:

He saw them among the rest, gone from their pasture, wandering like poor waifs and strays, a prey to every devourer. And he proposes a new covenant, whereby they might be put under the hand of Christ as their shepherd, to be by him sought out and brought back. And to all this our Lord Jesus accepted, though he well knew what it would cost him to save the lost sheep."¹¹⁴

For the elect, Christ suffers to satisfied fully and completely the demands of the law against the elect.¹¹⁵ The elect of this covenant are loved by God: "God's eternal love to his elect vented itself in the covenant of grace," and this love is eternal, reflecting an eternal covenant.¹¹⁶ Later he will describe this love as "the matchless love of the Son of God to poor sinners." And he also says: "It was this love that induced him to substitute in their room, and to undertake to pay their ransom."¹¹⁷

Furthermore, "the revelation and offer of this covenant unto the sons of men is called the gospel, announcing glad tidings of life and salvation to ruined sinners."¹¹⁸ He goes on to note that this offer is also an expression of divine love:

The offer of Christ made to you in the gospel, is the offer of the covenant of grace to you, and of all the benefits thereof; and the embracing of Christ is the embracing of the covenant, and the personal entering into it. The covenant of grace held forth in the gospel is a cord of love let down from heaven to perishing sinners shipwrecked in Adam, to save them from sinking into the bottom of the gulf, and to hale them to land.¹¹⁹

Having delineated all the basic points of Federal Theology, Boston is now able to bring to the table a new concept. Here he is able to effectively bring together the more generalist thinking of Calvin and the early Reformers with the Federal Theology of the Protestant Scholastics. Boston speaks of the administration of the covenant:

Wherefore the administration of it [the covenant] was devolved on Christ, the second Adam: and he hath it as one of his prerogatives, the covenant itself, made over to him in the promissory part of the covenant... He is constituted and settled, by the authority of his Father, Administrator of the covenant. As he had the burden of purchasing the promised benefits, so he has the honour of distributing them, according to the measures laid down in the eternal purpose of God, with respect to the conferring of these benefits.¹²⁰

Boston considers the covenant administration as something echoing the very Medieval Synthesis, in that he seems to see the covenant as effectual for the elect, but administered, non-effectively to mankind-sinners, generally:

¹¹²Ibid., p., 330. Later he will reaffirm that Christ redeemed the elect according to the mutually agreed terms of the covenant, and to them only will he actually save by his sovereign power, *ibid.*, p., 379.

¹¹³Ibid., p., 342.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p., 337. C.f., back to Calvin's closing remarks on 2 Pet 3:9 (cited above).

¹¹⁵Ibid., p., 342.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p., 330.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p., 387.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p., 315.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p., 335.

¹²⁰Ibid., p., 351.

The elect only are the parties represented by the second Adam; and to them only is the administration of the covenant effectual to their salvation. But mankind-sinners indefinitely are the objects of the administration. The extent of it is not founded on election, but on the sufficiency of Christ's obedience and death for the salvation of all; nor is it regulated by election, but by the fulness of power in heaven and earth given to Christ as the reward of his work, his obedience unto death.¹²¹

Again Boston refers to Christ as a gift and grant of the Father to mankind:

So all mankind being bitten by the old serpent the devil, and sin, has his deadly poison left in them; God has appointed Jesus Christ the ordinance of Heaven for their salvation, and has made a grant of him as such, to all of Adam's lost posterity who will make use of him for that purpose, by looking to him in the way of believing... Consider to whom Christ stands related as a Saviour by office. He is the Saviour of the body only, Eph. 5:23, being considered as actually saving from sin and wrath. But considered as an official Saviour, he is the Saviour of the world, as he is expressly called in 1 John 4:14, John 4:42. And his salvation is called the 'common salvation' in Jude 3... If it were not so, then there would be some of mankind-sinners excepted, for whom here would be no manner of warrant to believe in Christ, or take hold of the covenant more than there is for devils: which is contrary to the scriptures, John 3:16. Mark 16:15.¹²²

Clearly, once again Boston is not saying that Christ died for all men, or that in some manner, Christ purchased salvation for all men, but which benefits are only applied to some. Rather he is attempting to ground the universal offer of the gospel and warrant to believe in the universally sufficient work of Christ. He has taken his cue from the old atonement formula and applied it to the covenant itself.

The Covenant of Grace

Boston also authored a work specifically dealing with the covenant of grace, entitled: *A View of the Covenant of Grace from the Sacred Records*.¹²³ Given that the marrow of Boston's covenant theology has already been reproduced here, I will only lay out a few highlights from this work. On Page 379, he notes:

So the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace, are but two names of one and the same second covenant, under different considerations. By a covenant of redemption is meant a bargain of buying and selling: and such a covenant it was to Christ only, for as much as he alone engaged to pay the price of our redemption... By covenant of grace, is meant a bargain whereby all is to be had freely: and such a covenant it is to us only.

On pages 400-401 he is undeniably clear in his rejection of Amyraldianism:

As Adam's deadly efficacy goes as wide as his representation did in the first covenant, reaching all mankind his natural seed, and them only, so Christ's quickening efficacy goes as wide as his representation did in the second covenant, reaching all the elect, his spiritual seed, and them only: and if it did not, some would be deprived of the benefit which was purchased and paid for, by the surety, in the name: which is not consistent with the justice of God.¹²⁴

A little later, Boston categorically denies Amyraldianism and Arminianism.¹²⁵ And in this he makes the intriguing statement that given his collapse of the two covenants of grace and redemption into one, he is actually prevented from separating the impetration and application of Christ's work:

¹²¹Ibid., p., 353.

¹²²Ibid., pp., 352-353.

¹²³Thomas Boston, "A View of the Covenant of Grace from the Sacred Records" in *The Complete Works of The Late Rev. Thomas Boston* (Wheaton, Ill: Richard Owen Roberts Publ., 1980), vol 7, pp., 347-597.

¹²⁴On page 403, Boston notes that the love God expresses to the elect is that sovereign free love.

¹²⁵Though he does not here name these two theologies, he clearly means to target them in his denials.

There is no universal redemption, nor universal atonement. Jesus Christ died not for all and every individual person of mankind, but for the elect only. The contrary doctrine may consist with the opinion which holds the covenant of redemption, and the covenant of grace, to be two distinct covenants, the former made with Christ, and the latter with believers; the condition of the one undertaken and performed by him, the conditions of the other undertaken and performed by us.¹²⁶ Accordingly that opinion concerning the covenant, is readily embraced by Universalists of different denominations. But that doctrine is utterly inconsistent with this account of the covenant, which doth at once overthrow universal redemption or atonement, together with the Federal conditionality of our holiness and good works, in the covenant of grace.¹²⁷

The irony here is that for Boston he felt that his understanding of covenant theology necessarily precluded him from being able to separate the impetration and application of Christ, and yet this is the very thing men in ignorance accuse him. It was the very thing his contemporaries accused him of, and which men today still do. Regarding the warrant to believe, Boston follows the standard position of the Protestant Scholastics by asserting that even the reprobate have warrant to believe, and again he cites Jn 3:16 to this end.¹²⁸ On pages 523-529, Boston reaffirms his concept of the universal *administration* of the covenant. On pages 525-526, Boston once again states that Christ is the official saviour of all mankind, but here he now adds 1 Tim 4:10 as a proof-text.

As an aside, James Torrance, the Neo-orthodox theologian tries hard to disconnect Boston from the Reformed Federalists. For Torrance, the idea of the covenant of grace being described as a contract or bargain is repulsive. Rather, the covenant is an expression of love, and unconditional, wherein God need not be “conditioned” to love us. Torrance is keen to link Boston with James Fraser of Brea. Yet as seen, Boston stands for all the very things Torrance finds insufferable.¹²⁹

Assuring Faith

Now I come to the next point of contention in the Marrow debate. As noted, the earlier Reformers defined saving faith as that assurance of God’s benevolence toward the sinner. This faith, Calvin called knowledge. However, as the doctrine of limited atonement was retooled, so too was the definition of saving faith. For one could now not assume that in some sense Christ died for you.¹³⁰ To James Hadow, the idea that saving faith entailed assurance implied unlimited atonement. To deal with this point, I shall restrict myself to Boston’s comments in the *Marrow*. The spark of this aspect of the debate was caused by Fisher’s citing of Jim Roger’s comment:

Wherefore, as Paul and Silas said to the jailor so say I to you, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved; “That is, be verily persuaded in your heart that Jesus Christ is yours, and that you shall have life and salvation by him; that whatsoever Christ did for the redemption of mankind, he did it for you.”¹³¹

In support of this statement, Boston presents a dense battery of citations and argument from the early Reformers, British and Continental. First, Boston defines the import for his readers:

It doth also evidently bear the soul’s resting on Christ for salvation, for it is not possible to conceive a soul resting on Christ for salvation, without a persuasion that shall have life and salvation by him; namely a

¹²⁶This is the nerve centre of the reason why Boston collapses the two covenants, for he thinks that a two covenant perspective will necessarily result in the conditional legalism of Baxter, the Neo-nomians and the Scottish Reformed legalists, such as James Hadow and the moderates.

¹²⁷*Covenant*, Ibid., p., 404.

¹²⁸Ibid., p., 406.

¹²⁹James B. Torrance, “Covenant of Contract? A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970), pp., 51-76.

¹³⁰Apart from those accidental benefits that come to society, such as restraint of sin, civic good and so forth.

¹³¹*Marrow*, p., 118. C.f., Lachman, p., 374.

persuasion which is of the same measure and degree as the resting is. And thus it appears, that there can be no saving faith without this persuasion in greater or lesser measure.¹³²

Boston's point seems intuitively correct. How one can really have faith if one is unsure that the object of one's faith may or may not save him? I liken this issue to a man standing before an open door. For Calvin and the early Reformers, and for Boston, Christ is standing on the other side of the doorway. He stands there beckoning the sinner to come through. He stands there exactly because in some sense Christ did come into this world to save that sinner, all sinners, and his beckoning is an expression of love.¹³³ However, as the atonement was more and more narrowed, this visual metaphor could not stand with the newer theological categories. Given that Christ came only to save the elect, in accordance with the covenant of redemption, and given that no one can know their election before they have faith, its as if now the door in our metaphor is closed. It's as if now that Christ cannot be seen graciously beckoning the sinner to come through. Now, though, faith has to be abstracted. It now takes on the quality that I believe and trust and perchance God will save me.¹³⁴ It is not that the Federalists held that God would actually reject any who trusted sincerely, or that there are some kicking down heaven's door only to be rejected. But in terms of the actual object of faith, and one's assurance of election, the focus is now shifted to faith's reflexive act and assurance is now, therefore, somewhat more contingent.

In support of his position, Boston cites a number of men. I will mention but a few: Patrick Hamilton (Burnt in 1527), "faith is a sure confidence of things which are hoped for"; James Melville, defines faith as his "sure belief that God both may and will save me" (from his *Catechism*, published in 1598); John Davidson, "faith is a sure persuasion of the heart" (from his *Catechism*, no date given).¹³⁵

The problem is that for the Marrow, this now apparently puts them at odds with the Westminster Confession's stated rejection of assurance as the essence of saving faith. Boston and the Marrowmen sought a way around this by distinguishing between the assurance of sense and the assurance of faith.¹³⁶ Donald Beaton, explains the issue very well by way of citing Dr. Colquhoun:

It may be remarked that there is a very great difference between the assurance of faith, and that assurance of sense which is one of the fruits of faith. The assurance of sense is a believer's assurance that he is already united to Christ, and is in a state of grace. The assurance of faith is as inseparable from faith as light is from the sun; but it is quite otherwise with the assurance of sense. A man cannot have faith without having an assurance in it, but he may have faith and not have assurance of it. For, though the mind cannot but be conscious of its own act, yet whether that act has the peculiar properties and nature of saving faith cannot be satisfactorily known but by reflection. This assurance of sense or reflection, then, is not a believing in Christ; but it is a believing that we have believed him. It is not a direct act terminating on him, but a reflex by which we are assured of the saving nature of that direct act. But although the direct act may be without the reflect, yet the latter cannot be without the former. A man must begin to believe before he can begin to know that he has believed... The assurance of faith is commonly not so strong nor sweet as the assurance of sense which is supported by evidences. By the former, a man trusts upon the warrant of the free offer and promise that Christ will do the part of a Saviour to him; by the later, he believes upon the inward evidences of grace, that his faith is unfeigned and operative. By the one, he is assured of the truth of what God hath said to him; by the other, of the reality of what God hath wrought in him. By that he trusts he shall be pardoned and saved; by this he is persuaded that he is pardoned and saved in part already. The object of the assurance of faith is Christ revealed, and offered in the

¹³²Ibid., p., 120.

¹³³For example, Fisher explicitly connects the all-sufficiency of Christ's death with his concordant willingness that all be saved, *Marrow*, p., 236.

¹³⁴I am sure avid Federalists will disagree with me on the use and value of this metaphor.

¹³⁵Boston also labours through the early Scottish and Reformed creeds. I leave off citing more for the sake of brevity.

¹³⁶C.f., *Marrow*, pp., 358-366.

Word the object of the assurance of sense is Christ formed and perceived in the heart. The former is the root and the latter is the fruit.¹³⁷

Conclusion

It is clear that Thomas Boston was no closet Arminian. If what has been presented in the body of this paper fails to convince, then nothing from the man's pen will convince. It now should not be doubted that phrase "Christ is dead for you" and its cognates as found in the *Marrow*, were meant by Boston to refer to the universal and infinite sufficiency of Christ's atonement, not as to its intended design and efficacious application. To argue that the phraseology "Christ is a deed of gift and grant to all men" meant for Boston, indeed, for the Marrowmen as a whole, more than that there is a sincere offer of Christ to all men is to misread his clearly stated intent. More positively though, it is clear that Boston wants to create a new synthesis between Federal Theology and the theology of the early Reformers. Boston quite effectively creates a new union between the Calvinism of Calvin and the early Reformers and the Federalism of the later Protestant Scholastics.

In terms of the judgement of history, there is no doubt that men like Charles Hodge,¹³⁸ A.A. Hodge, Dabney, Shedd, and Warfield, stood on Boston's shoulders. For in their theologies we can see a clear return to the Medieval Synthesis. How they understood the "sufficiency for all, efficiency for the elect" paradigm returns to the expressions of Ursinus, Calvin, Lombard and Aquinas. These men, among others, returned to the heartier doctrine of Christ being freely offered to all men. These men also turned again to expressing the revealed will in volitional and active terms again. The 19th century Presbyterians, for example, never simply rested the universal aspects of Christ's work in the incidental and collateral benefits that come to society at large as some sort of accidental result of the atonement.¹³⁹

However, it is also clear that the Hodges, and others, rejected Boston's distinction between the assurance of faith and the assurance of sense, deciding to stay with the Westminster formulation on this point. Further, it does seem clear that the post-Boston orthodox did not choose to follow Boston in terms of his concept of the covenant of grace being *universally administered*. This language is absent from their works, though the freeness of the Gospel offer and God's love for all men is reaffirmed. In terms of exegesis, only Dabney who explicitly takes such verses as John 3:16 to denote the world of apostate men, all men. It is also apparent that in much of mainstream post-Boston Reformed thinking there was a return to the unity of the person of Christ as mediator. We do not see in post-Boston Reformed writings the same emphasized distinctions that Christ loved all men only as a man, or that he willed to gather men to himself only as a man.¹⁴⁰ Boston reminded us again that we cannot compartmentalise the person and nature of Christ as the Protestant Scholastics were willing to do.

The more Calvinism, so emphasised the particular aspects of Christ's work, the less evangelical and the less biblically balanced it became. This lesson holds true for Calvinism today. The significant point here is that the higher Calvinism becomes, the harder it becomes. We today may not agree with Boston's actual synthesis in all its parts--his new hierarchy of explanation--but in terms of his shaking Scottish Calvinism out of the malaise it had fallen into, his work must not be

¹³⁷Cited by Donald Beaton "The Marrow of Modern Divinity" *The Princeton Theological Review*. 4 (1906), p., 330. Interestingly, Beaton notes that Cunningham was forced to concede "the great majority of Reformers held that personal assurance was essential to the idea of saving faith," p., 328.

¹³⁸See for example, Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1981), vol., 2, pp., 544-5.

¹³⁹See A.A. Hodge, *Atonement*, pp., 329 and 345. Hodge is even prepared to freely use the phrase that Christ removed the legal obstacles for all men, thus freeing the way for God to save all if he so chooses (pp., 227 and 330). This was the phrase that Amyraut originally used and which brought down upon him condemnation as a result. Yet here Hodge is able to redeem it and re-use correctly, in terms of the sufficiency of the atonement for all. Back in Amyraut's time, this language was necessarily precluded on account of the limitation of categories the Protestant Scholastics had adopted.

¹⁴⁰Here I refer specifically of Charles and A.A. Hodge, Dabney, Shedd and John Murray, for example.

under appreciated. Nor in terms of shaping and defining American Calvinism--that of men like the Hodges and Dabney--should Boston's input be undervalued.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books:

Bell, Charles, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance*, Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985.

Boston, Thomas, *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993.

----- *The Complete Works of The Late Rev. Thomas Boston*, Wheaton, Ill: Richard Owen Roberts Publ., 1980.

----- *Memiors of Thomas Boston* Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988.

a' Brakel, Wilhelmus, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* Ligonier, PA.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992.

Brown, John, *The Life of Justification Opened*, No place: No publisher, 1695.

Calvin, John, *Sermons on Isaiah's Prophecy of the Death and Passion of Christ*, trans., by T.H.L. Parker, London: James Clarke & Co, 1966.

----- *The Gospel According to Isaiah*, trans., by Leroy Nixon, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1953.

----- John Calvin, *Sermons on Job*. Edinburgh :Banner of Truth Trust,1993.

----- *Sermons on the Saving Work of Christ*, ed., and trans., by Leroy Nixon, England: Evangelical Press, 1980.

----- *Sermons on Galatians*. New Jersey. Old Paths Publications, 1995.

----- *Sermons on the Deity of Christ*, New Jersey: Old Paths Publ., 1997.

----- *Sermons on Psalm 119*, New Jersey: Old Paths Publ., 1996.

----- *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans., by F.L., Battles, ed., by J.N., McNeill, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.

Cunningham, William, *Historical Theology*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1979.

Dabney R.L., *Discussions*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1982.

Durham, James *Christ Crucified: The Marrow of the Gospel in 72 Sermons on Isaiah 53*, Dallas, TX: Naphtali Press, 2001.

----- *A Commentary on Revelation*, PA: Old Paths Publ., 2000.

Fisher, Edward, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity: in Two Parts... With Notes by Thomas Boston*, Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Water Revival Books, 1991.

Hodge, A.A., *Outlines of Theology*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983.

----- *The Atonement*, London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1868.

Hodge, Charles, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1981.

David C. Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy, 1718-1723: An Historical and Theological Analysis*. Edinburgh, Rutherford House Books, 1988.

Luther, Martin, *Bondage of the Will*, Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1973.

Macleod, John, *Scottish Theology*, Edinburgh: The Knox Press, 1974.

M'Crie, Thomas, *The Story of the Scottish Church* London: Blackie & Son, 1875.

McGowan, Andrew, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston (1676-1732)*, University of Aberdeen: unpublished thesis, 1989.

Muller, R.A. *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, New York: OUP, 2000.

Musculus, Wolfgangus *Common Places of Christian Religion*, trans., by Iohn Merton, London: Henry Bynneman, 1578.

Peterson, R. A., *Calvin and the Atonement*, New Jersey: Mentor, 1999.

Polanus, Amandus , *A Treatise pf Amandus Polanus, Concerning God's Eternal Predestination*, Cambridge: Printed by Iohn Legat, 1599.

----- *The Substance of the Christian Religion*, 3rd edition, Imprinted by Arn. Hatfield, for Felix Newton, dwelling in Paules Churchyard at the sign of the Parrot, 1600.

Rainbow, Jonathan, *The Will of God and the Cross: An Historical and Theological Study of John Calvin's Doctrine of Limited Redemption*, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publ., 1990.

Thomas, G.M., *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus*, UK: Paternoster: 1997.

Turretin, Francis, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, New Jersey: P&R, 1992.

Ursinus, Zacharias, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, Phillipsburg, New Jersey: 1994.

Walker, James, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland: Chiefly of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1888.

Witsius, Herman, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, California: Den Dulk Foundation, 1990.

Articles:

Beaton, Donald , "The Marrow of Modern Divinity," *The Princeton Theological Review*. 4 (1906) 317-338.

Beeke J.R. "Faith and Assurance in the Heidelberg Catechism and its Primary Composers: A Fresh Look at the Kendall Thesis," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992) 39-67.

Hodge, A.A., "The Consensus of the Reformed Confessions," *The Presbyterian Review* 5 (1884) 265-304.

Macleod, Donald, "Dr T.F. Torrance and Scottish Theology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 72 (2000) 57-72.

M'Crie, Charles, "Studies in Scottish Ecclesiastical Biography," *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 33 (1884) 669-719,

M'Crie, Thomas, "The Marrow Controversy," *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 2 (1865) 411-440.

Nicole, Roger, "The Doctrine of Definite Atonement in the Heidelberg Catechism," *The Gordon Review* 7 (1964) 138-145.

Philip, W.J.U., "The Marrow and the Dry Bones: Ossified Orthodoxy and the Battle for the Gospel in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Calvinism," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 15 (1997) 27-37.