

APPENDIX 2**THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN MY PROPOSAL OF UNIVERSAL SUFFICIENT GRACE AND
AMYRALDIAN “HYPOTHETICAL UNIVERSALISM”**

In 1996, I offered a version of my proposal concerning universal sufficient grace, in a paper read at an Evangelical Theological Society meeting.¹ A Calvinist theologian who later read the paper suggested to me that I was reiterating Amyraldianism. I had made a number of references to Amyraut, who addressed some of the concerns to which I am trying to speak, but our proposals are distinct in a very fundamental way.

Moise Aymraut (1596-1664) agreed with the Synod of Dort’s position concerning God’s unconditional election but he contended that it was the secret counsel of God and should not be made the basis for the Church's doctrine. He argued that God’s stated purpose was to save all humankind. This was made possible by the universal sufficiency of Christ’s death and by the external call which moved the elect to respond in faith. God’s purpose was declared in a series of covenants. God the Father made the first covenant with humans in their innocence and perfect obedience, and this was also in effect in the period of law, when salvation was offered on the basis of obedience to the law given to Moses. God the Son, however, established a covenant of Grace. This was a *hypothetical* covenant, based on universal atonement, which is why Amyraut’s view is sometimes called “hypothetical universalism.”² Forgiveness was offered to sinners without personal merit and salvation was available to those who responded in faith.

But, faith was a gift through the persuasion of the Holy Spirit, in keeping with the mysterious and secret absolute will of God.

In Amyraut's construct, there is thus a twofold will of God, "whereby he wills the salvation of all humankind on condition of faith but wills the salvation of the elect specifically and unconditionally."³

Therefore, Christ dies in a hypothetical sense for all humanity but in a particularist sense for the elect alone.

My proposal in chapter 5 should have made it clear that I do not affirm a hypothetical universalism. I believe that Christ died to accomplish the Father's intent to save the elect and that the Spirit applies Christ's work in efficacious enabling of those elect, so that they believe the revelation God gives them. The *universal sufficient enabling grace* of which I speak is one of the universal benefits of Christ's death but this does not necessitate an affirmation of a hypothetical intent, on Christ's part, to save everyone.

Fairly recently, Alan Clifford has argued that John Owen's concept of a single intent for the atonement (namely, the salvation of the elect) is problematic because it "cannot make sense of the sin of unbelief. If unbelievers are guilty of rejecting Christ, whence their guilt, if Christ was not given for them?"⁴

Clifford's own answer to the problem is to affirm the hypothetical or conditional universalism of Amyraut and of the Puritan theologian, Richard Baxter. For reasons I gave in chapter 11, I sympathize with Clifford, but I suggest that the problem which Clifford locates in a limited intent of the atonement (for the elect alone) is much more clearly a problem at the *subjective* level of human ability, as Jonathan Edwards rightly discerned.

Against John Owen, Richard Baxter asserted that Christ's sacrifice for sin was "satisfactory and meritorious for all" people and that no one "shall be damned for want of a Saviour to die for him, and

fulfil all righteousness, but only for abusing or refusing his mercy.”⁵ Two things are necessary, if Baxter’s concern is to be properly addressed, namely, (1) the death of Christ must be sufficient for all sin, as the Synod of Dort (and I) affirmed, and (2) sinners must be in a position to accept or reject that salvation. To accept the first condition, we need not assert a hypothetical universalism, but I am arguing that the second truth does require a universal enabling grace.

1. “The Universal Salvific Work of the Holy Spirit: Reducing the Scandal of Calvinism..” A paper read at the Evangelical Theological Society, Jackson, Mississippi, Nov. 22, 1996.

2. Andrew T. B. McGowan, “Amyraldianism,” in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Gand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 12a.

3. Ibid.

4. Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 100.

5. *Richard Baxter's Catholick Theologie* (1675), I, ii.51, cited by Clifford, *Atonement*, p. 101.