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# The Incarnation and 'Limited Atonement'

by James B. Torrance

*Professor Torrance takes up one particular area of thought where Calvin has been suspected of differing from his successors and suggests that the problem must be resolved in the light of the actual revelation of Jesus Christ in Scripture.*

Many years ago I was invited to take part in a conference at Tyndale House in Cambridge on the 'five points of Calvinism' — total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, the perseverance of the saints — the well known TULIP — in terms of which Calvinists, in the tradition of the Synod of Dort, rejected Arminianism. I read a paper on the subject of election, and sought to show, as Dr Kendall has argued recently,<sup>1</sup> that Calvin, although he taught, in a carefully formulated way, a doctrine of a 'double decree', did not allow this to lead him to teach a doctrine of 'limited atonement' in the manner of the later Calvinists. In the very lively discussions which followed, the question was put to me 'Did Christ die to make our salvation actual or possible?' — a good seventeenth-century scholastic Calvinist question! How does one answer this question? If I had replied that Christ died for all to make the salvation of all men 'possible', but it only becomes 'actual' if we repent and believe, I would have been accused of being an 'Arminian'! The weakness of this position is that it can run into a doctrine of conditional grace, and ground election on the divine foreknowledge of our human decision, a view rightly rejected by John Calvin and the Calvinist tradition. My questioner knew I would avoid that answer! If I said, 'No, Christ died to make our salvation actual, not just possible', that he actually bore our sins in his own body on the cross long ago, as I would say, the next question would have been, 'Did he make the salvation of all men actual or only of some!' In other words, this question implies, there are only three possible positions — Arminianism, universalism or limited atonement.

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How then should we answer such a question? I think I would say a number of things.

(1) The confession of faith of the believer is to say that our salvation is made actual by the work of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is from beginning to end entirely the work of God's grace, but within that one work there are three great 'moments' — the moment of eternity, the eternal love of the Father; the moment of history, when Christ died and rose again nineteen hundred years ago to fulfil for us in time God's eternal purpose, so that (in Calvin's phrase) 'all parts of our salvation are complete in Him'; the moment of experience when the Holy

<sup>1</sup> R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Puritanism to 1649* (Oxford University Press).

Spirit unites us to Christ and brings us to personal faith and repentance. This is the basic trinitarian structure of the first three books of Calvin's *Institutio*. As in the doctrine of the Trinity there are three persons, but one God, so there are three 'moments' in the one work of grace and forgiveness.

(2) Within this, certainly there is mystery, but if we are true to the New Testament we must assert that the Father loves all his creatures, Christ died for all, but none can come to the Father except the Spirit draw him. But to say it is a 'mystery' does not mean we abandon any attempt to probe this mystery, and see what light the Bible and the revelation of God in Jesus Christ throw on the mystery. Theology is faith seeking understanding. What kind of 'logic' controls any answers we seek to give? It is a mistake, I believe, to interpret the relation between the headship of Christ over all as Mediator, and the effectual calling of the Spirit in terms of an Aristotelian dichotomy between 'actuality' and 'possibility'.

84 (3) It is important to recognise in theology, as in any science or a court of law, that the nature of the questions we ask determines the kind of answers we give. In response to the above question, to echo an American right in law, I would appeal to 'the fifth amendment of the Constitution' the right to refuse to answer a question which can incriminate. ('Have you or have you not left off beating your wife, yes or no?')

(4) It is precisely this kind of Aristotelian logic which led the later Calvinists like John Owen to formulate the doctrine of a 'limited atonement'. The argument is that if Christ died for all men, and all are not saved, then Christ died in vain — and *a priori*, because God always infallibly achieves his purposes, this is unthinkable. Where does this same argument lead us when we apply it to the doctrine of God, as John Owen and Jonathan Edwards did? On these grounds they argued that justice is the essential attribute of God, but his love is arbitrary. In his classical defence of the doctrine of a limited atonement, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*,<sup>2</sup> in Book IV John Owen examines the many texts in which the word 'all' appears, saying that Christ died 'for all', and argues that 'all' means 'all the elect'. For example, when he turns to John 3:16, he says 'By the "world", we understand the elect of God only . . .' (p.209). What then about 'God so loved . . .' ? Owen argues that if God loves all, and all are not saved, then he loves them in vain. *Therefore he does not love all!* If he did, this would imply imperfection in God. 'Nothing that includes any imperfection is to be assigned to Almighty God'. In terms of this 'logic' he argues *love is not God's*

<sup>2</sup> The Banner of Truth Trust, London 1959, with an introductory essay by Dr J. I. Packer.

*nature*. There is no 'natural affection and propensity in God to the good of his creatures'. 'By love is meant an act of his will (where we conceive his love to be seated . . .)'. God's love is thus assigned to his *will* to save the elect only. It seems to me that this is a flagrant case where a kind of logic leads us to run in the face of the plain teaching of the Bible that God is Agape (pure love) in his innermost being, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and what he is in his innermost being, he is in all his works and ways. It is Aristotle's argument that there are no unrealised potentialities in God, that he is pure actuality (*actus purus*), the Unmoved Mover. So quite consistently Aristotle also argued in precisely similar terms that we cannot predicate love of God (only of contingent creatures), as love (*eros*) is a desire for what we do not possess. Owen's argument illustrates the point, so often made by theologians (like Pascal, Barth, Moltmann, Rahner and many others), of the problems involved in fusing an Aristotelian doctrine of God with the teaching of the Bible about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the Incarnation is not that an impassible God came *in* Jesus Christ. It is that God came *as* man in Christ and 'suffered under Pontius Pilate'. As God and as man he experiences the rejection of those who hate him (not of those whom he hates!) but loves them to the end in spite of their hatred. He takes vicariously to himself for mankind both his own divine judgments and the rejection of men, when he dies for us that we might be forgiven, and receive his forgiveness by the gift of the Spirit. This is not 'universalism' but it is universal love. There is a sin of 'denying the Lord who bought us' and a 'sin against the Holy Ghost' — a sin against the incarnate love of God. If we apply the same kind of 'logic' to the doctrine of creation which Owen applies to the death of Christ, we cannot say that God in covenant love created all men in Adam for covenant love and communion, because if he did, he did so in vain. The Calvinist conclusion from this doctrine of God is that he creates all men under natural law for obedience but only the elect in love for love. The end result of this kind of argument is the desperate attempt to argue against the plain literal meaning of such great passages as John 3:16; 1 John 2:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; Heb. 2:9. A clear illustration of this is John Owen's determined attempt to explain away the words in 2 Peter 2:1 about those who are delivered to destruction 'for denying the Lord who bought them' (p.250ff).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Not all the federal theologians taught this doctrine of God nor indeed did all subscribe to a limited atonement. Robert Rollock in 1596, commenting on John 3:16, suggests that the gospel can be put in the form of a syllogism. Major premiss: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Minor premiss: I am a sinner. Conclusion: Therefore he came to save me. But he recognises that the syllogism is only valid if the major premiss

This raises for us in the acutest way the question of how we formulate our doctrine of God. Twice in recent months I have had students who have said to me, 'Doesn't the Bible say in Romans 9:13 "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated?" Is that not proof that God loves the elect and hates the reprobate?' — as some of the Puritans and Calvinists like William Perkins taught. My immediate reply was to ask, 'Do you hate your father and mother? You should if you interpret Scripture (Luke 14:26) in that way!' Surely such passages must be carefully interpreted in their context. But more important, it is a mistake to construct a doctrine of God out of isolated texts, even if they appear to fit a 'logical system', rather than in the light of the incarnation. The question I put to these two students was, 'How do you interpret the second table of the law, "thou shalt love thy neighbour"? Does this not include our enemies?' The good news of the gospel is that God sent his Son, born of a woman under the law, to redeem us who are under the law, fulfilling the law for us. *Who* then is Christ? The doctrine of the incarnation is that he is at once the God who gives us the two tables of the law, who commands us to love our enemies, *and* he is the one who as man for us fulfilled the law — loving his enemies, praying for those who despitefully used him and rejected him. Does God tell us to love all men, including our enemies, but he himself does not? The logic of the incarnation is not the logic of Aristotle. It seems to me a danger in 'Systematic Theology', the subject I teach, to have a neatly structured 'system' (no doubt based on biblical texts) into which we fit God and Christ and atonement 'logically', as into pigeon holes, and fail to see that every doctrine must be seen in the light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of a limited atonement emerges where we draw inferences from certain 'logical premisses' or isolated texts or an Aristotelian idea of God. Rather we must see atonement as the work of the One who loves all his creatures, the one by whom and for whom all things were created — the one who so loved Jerusalem that he wept over it, who is our 'suffering God'. The logic of the incarnation may at times conflict with the logic of Aristotle.

Does this mean that therefore we abandon any doctrine of election? Surely not. One aspect of the biblical doctrine of election of which we too often lose sight is the thought of 'the one and the many', 'the one for the many', 'the many in the one'. God elects Israel as the one nation on

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means Christ died for all sinners. So he adds at once, quoting 1 Tim. 2:4, 'Out of which it followeth, that in the publishing of the Gospel, God hath respect not only of all men in common, but also distinctly of every several person' (*Select Works of Robert Rollock*, Wodrow Society, Vol.1 p.214ff.). But within a few years limited atonement became the widely accepted federal view in Scotland.

behalf of 'all nations' to be a 'royal priesthood', a 'holy nation', that Israel might be the custodian of grace, God's instrument of grace for the world that all nations might be blessed in Abraham. The language of election is the language of Israel, the Suffering Servant, the Messiah. Jesus is the fulfilment of God's purposes for Israel, the true servant of the Lord, the royal priest, the One for the many, the One for all, the One in whom and through whom God's purposes of grace are worked out in the world. So Christ appoints twelve apostles to reconstitute Israel about himself, and pours out his Spirit on the Church at Pentecost to call people out of all nations to be a royal priesthood, a holy people, to be the elect of God, to carry the gospel to all nations, to every creature, as good news for every creature. Election is thus in and through Christ, and is both corporate and personal, for none can come unless he or she is drawn into the household of faith by the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of election, interpreted in this christological way, enshrines the good news that our salvation is by grace alone, and is from beginning to end the one work of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He chose us, not we him. The doctrine of election is another way of saying that all is of grace. This, it seems to me, is why Calvin deals with it at the end of Book III of the *Institutio*, after having said all he has to say about the love of the Father ('the efficient cause' as he puts it); after all he has to say about incarnation and atonement ('the material cause'), that all is 'complete in Christ'; after all he has to say about the Spirit ('the instrumental cause'), union with Christ, repentance.

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As I see it, the mistake of his successors was twofold. The scholastic Calvinists made *election prior to grace*, beginning with the doctrine of a double decree as a major premiss, and then moving on to formulate the doctrines of grace, incarnation and atonement, as God's way of executing the eternal decrees — thereby 'logically' teaching that Christ died only for the elect, to secure infallibly the salvation of the elect. The Arminians on the other hand made *grace prior to election*, so that grace means that Christ died to make all men salvable, but God, foreknowing those who would decide, elects them. This, as we have said above, grounds our salvation on our human decision. This separation of election from grace, from a proper trinitarian understanding of the being and will of God, led to the polarisation of 'Calvinists' and 'Arminians' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To speak about election — the eternal will of God and the decrees — apart from Christ, or about election as prior to grace in the order of the decrees, is to go behind the back of Christ to some inscrutable impassible God. It is to fail to see the significance of the Trinity, that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in being (*homoousios*), and that this triune God has made known his

nature and his will to us in Jesus Christ. We know of no nature of God nor will of God other than that of the Father, made known to us in Christ by the Spirit. When St Thomas Aquinas in his 'mediaeval synthesis' sought to wed the God of Aristotle to the God of the Bible, was his Aristotelian idea of God as necessary being, the unmoved mover, pure actuality, not also wedded to an Islamic notion of the will of God, as in the Arab Aristotelians like Averroes and Avicenna, who preserved Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in the earlier Middle Ages when they were unknown in Europe?<sup>4</sup> This concept of an omnipotent impassible God, who knows all and wills all was certainly injected deeply into Western theology and emerges in certain forms of scholastic Calvinism. In Zanchius, for example, we find 'a whole hearted acceptance of Aristotelian scholasticism. "For this Aristotle — or rather God through Aristotle", he wrote, "presents us with a most useful work, his book *Sophistical Refutations*".'<sup>5</sup>

88 What happens if we make the doctrine of a double decree our logical starting point or major premiss? The answer is very clear in the subsequent developments of the so-called 'federal Calvinism' or Covenant Theology which was to develop in England, Scotland and Holland. In this brief article I can only summarise.

(1) Calvinism commits itself thereby to the nature-grace model, with a radical dichotomy between the sphere of nature and the sphere of grace, of natural law and the gospel, with the result that the relationship between the church and the world, church and state, is no longer understood christologically as in the Greek Fathers, and basically in Calvin and Knox, but in terms of gospel and natural law. God creates Adam, the child of nature, who can discern 'natural law' by the light of reason, and then on the basis of natural law and 'symbolical law' (the tree of life, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the law of the sabbath) makes a covenant or contract (*foedus*) with him, that if he will be obedient, God will be gracious to him as the 'federal' contracting

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<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Bishop Lesslie Newbigin for this suggestion. See *Western Philosophy and Philosophers*, edited by J. O. Urmsion, Hutchinson, London, 1960, article on Avicenna. 'Avicenna's concept of God in whose Being existence and essence are identical gained wide acceptance in the West, especially with the Jew Maimonides and the Christian Thomas Aquinas.' In Avicenna's concept of God, which is based on Aristotle as seen through the eyes of Neoplatonic commentaries and the Stoics, God is seen as an absolute unity in whom knowledge, will and power are one. He fuses this concept of God as Uncaused Cause with that of Creator.

<sup>5</sup> G. Yule, *Puritans in Politics* (Sutton Courtenay Press, 1981, p.29). Zanchius like Beza deeply influenced William Perkins in his *A Golden Chaîne or a Description of Theologie, concerning the order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation according to God's Word*.

head of the race. So taught Robert Rollock, who first introduced the federal scheme of theology into Scotland, Rutherford, Dickson, Durham, Witsius, 'The Sum of Saving Knowledge', Thomas Boston, and others — in Scottish theology. Because of the failure of the covenant of nature, God provides a covenant of grace for those whom he elects out of the mass of fallen mankind. But their separation between nature and grace amounts to a reversion to the pre-Reformation view that *grace presupposes nature* and *grace perfects nature* — a departure from the emphasis that nothing is prior to grace. An illustration of this is the interpretation of the Sabbath in Scotland and Puritan England. The ten commandments are a transcript of the law of nature, and the law of nature (including the law of the Sabbath), is the foundation of society, and for the state consequently to violate the law of nature is to expose the state to divine judgment. Again such a doctrine of the separation of nature and grace, lies behind the American radical separation of church and state, and has been the ground of certain doctrines of 'the spirituality of the church' where the church is concerned with 'spiritual' matters like the preaching of the gospel, but civil matters like civil rights and race relations should be left to the state — as Charles Hodge said of slavery. But are we to interpret the state and the civil order simply in terms of the orders of creation and preservation, but not also in terms of the orders of redemption? Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, in the old Princeton school, was the massive elaboration of the nature-grace model in the North American scene.

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(2) The procedure of making the double decree the major premiss of the scheme of salvation, and restricting grace to the redemption of the elect implies the *priority of law over grace*. But has this not inverted the biblical order? Calvin in the 1536 edition of the *Institutio* followed the pattern of Luther's Short Catechism of law-grace, but subsequently abandoned it as not true to the Bible. His study of the Old Testament and the clear teaching of Paul in Galatians, chapter three, led him to see the priority of grace over law — that law is the gift of grace, spells out the unconditional obligations of grace and leads to grace — its fulfilment in Christ. He contends for this very eloquently in Book Two of the *Institutio*, expounding law in the context of promise and fulfilment.<sup>6</sup> But the priority of grace over law is true not only in the life of Israel and the story of man's redemption. It is the *grammar of creation*. God in grace, in covenant love, creates Adam for covenant love and

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<sup>6</sup> *Institutio* 2.9.4.

then lays him under unconditional obligations, warning him of the consequences which would follow 'if' he transgresses these commandments.<sup>7</sup> But that was not the way the federal theologians interpreted it, because of their doctrine of election. It was after God created Adam under natural law and after he gave him symbolical law that then he made a contract with him, that 'if' he kept the terms of the contract, God would be gracious to him — making life conditional on obedience. This not only turns a 'descriptive *if*' into a 'prescriptive *if*' — the covenant into a contract. It implies the priority of law over grace, that grace presupposes natural law. So Thomas Boston (following Rollock, Rutherford, Witsius and others) in a chapter on 'The conditions of the covenant of works' in his *A View of the Covenant of Works*,<sup>8</sup> after expounding the doctrine of creation in terms of 'natural law', writes 'This law was afterwards incorporated into the covenant of works, and was the chief matter of it. I say, afterwards; for the covenant of works is not so ancient as the natural law. The natural law was in being when there was no covenant of works; for the former was given to man in his creation, without paradise; the latter was made with him, after he was brought into paradise.' Passages like this abound in the federal theologians, making it crystal clear that the scheme implies the priority of natural law over grace. It was for this reason that the covenant of works was regularly called the *foedus naturae* — the 'covenant of law' or the 'legal covenant'. Calvin never taught this doctrine of a covenant of works nor interpreted Genesis 1-3 in this way.

(3) As a consequence, in the federal scheme, not only is the doctrine of the double decree, but also the covenant of works (as so expounded) a major premiss. Because of the failure of the covenant of works, in the scheme of salvation, God provides a covenant of grace whereby Christ fulfils the conditions of the covenant (contract) of works on behalf of the elect, to secure their redemption. There were different forms of federal Calvinism. Some divines like Owen, Rutherford, Dickson, Durham, Witsius, distinguish three covenants (contracts) — the covenant of

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<sup>7</sup> This is what we might call a 'descriptive IF' (a description of the consequences which would follow disobedience) not a 'prescriptive IF' (a prescription of the conditions under which grace can be obtained).

<sup>8</sup> p.17ff. Second Edition. Edinburgh, 1776. David Dickson, in *Therapeutica Sacra*, ch. 4, writes 'the law of nature, within the heart of man, in order both of nature and time, went before the covenant made for keeping that law; because the covenant for keeping that law was not made till after man's creation and after his bringing into the garden to dress it and keep it'. He goes on to discuss 'How the Covenant of Works may be called the Covenant of Nature', and answers 'because the covenant of works is grounded upon the law of nature'. See *Select Practical Writings of David Dickson*, Vol. 1, pp.225ff, 282ff, 292.

works, the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace. In the covenant of redemption, the Father makes a covenant or contract with the Son that if the Son will become man and fulfil the conditions of the covenant of works for the elect then God will be gracious to the elect. The covenant of grace then becomes the covenant between God and the elect, that on the 'condition' of faith and repentance, the elect will receive the benefits of the covenant of redemption (the covenant of suretyship). This threefold scheme was vigorously rejected by Thomas Boston, who rewrites the federal scheme, to teach two covenants only, of works and of grace, in the manner of the Westminster Confession. Christ fulfils the conditions of the covenant of works *for the elect*, that grace may be *unconditionally free* for the elect. This was the theology which led to the 'Marrow controversy' in Scotland in the early eighteenth century. But all these divines, whether they taught three covenants or two covenants, interpreted the scheme of salvation as God's way of fulfilling in grace the conditions of the covenant of works — the covenant of nature. Deep in this whole way of thinking lies not only a doctrine of the priority of law over grace, of nature over grace, but a deep-seated confusion between a 'covenant' and a 'contract'. The standard definition was that 'a covenant is a contract between two parties based on mutual conditions'. In terms of this they spoke of different species 'of this sort of contract' (*huius generis foederis*), and went on to ask who are the 'contracting parties' (God and Adam, the Father and the Son, God and the elect) and what were the 'conditions' of the different covenants.<sup>9</sup> One can see why Boston wrote in his diary, federalist although he himself was, 'I perceived I had no fondness for the doctrine of the conditionality of the covenant of grace', and why the Marrowmen were to make their protest against the 'legal preaching' this brought into Scotland. Genesis 1-3 was being expounded in terms of a Stoic anthropology of 'nature', 'natural law', 'reason', 'light of nature', 'law of contract'. Federal Calvinism has moved a long way from Calvin.

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(4) In this kind of predestinarian scheme, the doctrine of God is going

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<sup>9</sup> This kind of language and this way of thinking is found in endless writings of the federal divines. Eloquent illustrations of this occur in Witsius, *The Oeconomy of the Covenants between God and Man*, with chapters on 'the contracting parties' and 'the conditions'; in David Dickson's *Therapeutica Sacra*, ch.4; 'The Sum of Saving Knowledge', etc.

The concept of the Covenant of Redemption in these writers as a contract between the Father and the Son — between the 'Will' of the Father and the 'Will' of the son — is virtually a tritheistic way of thinking about God which has lost sight of the fact that they are 'one in being' (*homoousios*) in love. It also comes perilously near saying that the Father has to be conditioned into being gracious to the elect by the Son fulfilling the conditions of the covenant of works!

wrong. The God of the Bible, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a covenant-God not a contract-God. The Latin word *foedus* obscured the distinction because it means both a covenant and a contract. The words were used quite interchangeably, and the whole federal scheme is built upon this deep-seated confusion. The failure to draw this distinction arises in part from the failure to allow the doctrine of God as creator and redeemer to be controlled by the incarnation, to recognise that *Christ* is not only the redeemer. He is the One by whom and for whom all things were created who fulfils in the New Covenant his purposes in creating man.

When Robert Rollock first expounded the federal scheme in Scotland in 1596<sup>10</sup> he could say, 'The Covenant of Works, which may also be called a legal or natural covenant, is founded on nature . . . Therefore the ground of the covenant of works was not Christ, nor the grace of God in Christ, but the nature of man . . .' This doctrine of the priority of nature over grace arises as this quotation shows because creation is not being interpreted christologically, as in the New Testament. The federal scheme, in its doctrine of creation, is not only moving away from Calvin, it is also moving away from the New Testament, and reading into the Old Testament a Western Latin juridical concept of a contract God. This is why John Owen in England and Jonathan Edwards in New England take this to its logical conclusion in teaching that justice is the essential attribute of God, but the love of God is arbitrary. God is related to all men as the contracting sovereign, the giver of natural law, the judge, but only to some men in grace. This may be the logical corollary of federal Calvinism, but it is not true to the New Testament, and it is not Calvin. God is love in his innermost being, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father after whom every family in heaven and earth is named. Love and justice are one in God, and they are one in *all* his dealings with his creatures, in creation, providence and redemption. God's sovereignty is his grace, his freedom in love. We must interpret Genesis 1-3 in the light of the New Testament, not in terms of Stoic anthropology or Western jurisprudence.<sup>11</sup> Who is the God who created

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<sup>10</sup> 'A Treatise of God's effectual calling', Ch. II, p. 32ff. *Select Works of Robert Rollock*, Wodrow Society, 1849.

<sup>11</sup> In the federal scheme we see the adaptation of Calvin's thought to the Western *ordo salutis* (the order of salvation): Man — law — sin — satisfaction — grace, with its roots in Tertullian, Roman jurisprudence and notions of law of contract. In the federal scheme it becomes: Man (Adam, reason) — law (natural law, contract, covenant of works) — fall — satisfaction (by God for the elect) — grace (covenant of redemption and/or covenant of grace, limited atonement). This is clearly the Nature — Grace (law — grace) model which Calvin was seeking to reverse. A more biblical model would be: God (triune-holy love) — Man (sonship, covenant love) —

Adam? He is the triune God whose nature is love, and who is in creation (the *opera trinitatis ad extra*) what he is in his innermost being, the God who reveals himself in covenant love in Christ, and who brings fulfilment in redemption his purposes in creation. The doctrine of the incarnation and the trinity are our Christian logical starting points. Where conversely we begin with the doctrine of the 'double decree' and an abstract concept of an impassible God as the law-giver who knows all and wills all, and where we also begin with the 'Stoic' interpretation of Genesis 1-3, and try to fit Christ and grace into this forensic 'scheme of salvation', we are led to the doctrine of a 'limited atonement'. It may be the logic of Aristotle, but it is not the logic of the incarnation.

Long ago, James Orr, in his *Progress of Dogma* chapter 9,<sup>12</sup> maintained the same thesis as that of this article, in a powerful discussion of Calvin and Calvinism. 'It ought to be noted, further, that, however fundamental this doctrine (of predestination) may be in Calvin, it is brought in, not at the head of his system — not, therefore in the all-dominating place it holds, e.g. in the Westminster Confession — but towards the close of the third book as a corollary from his exposition of the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification' (p.292). 'In the hands of Calvin's disciples, on the other hand, it tended to become more severe, exclusive and unyielding than Calvin himself had made it. With Calvin, as I have stated, predestination is a corollary from the experience of salvation, and so is treated in the *Institutes*. With his successor Beza, and, after him, with Gomar of Leyden, predestination is placed at the head of the theological system, and is so treated that everything else — creation, providence, and grace — is viewed as a means to the fulfilment of this initial purpose' (p.296). Orr goes on to question the concept of abstract sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist doctrine of God. 'There is undoubtedly a side here of Calvin's system which urgently calls for rectification and supplement . . . That defect does not lie simply in the doctrine of predestination. It lies rather in the idea of God behind that doctrine . . . Calvin exalts the sovereignty of God, and this is right. But he errs in placing his root-idea of God in sovereign will rather than in love. Love is subordinated to sovereignty, instead of sovereignty to love . . . The conception is that God wills, as

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obligations (unconditional obedience) — fall — Israel (election of grace) — torah (gift of grace) — Jesus Christ (fulfilment of promise and law in new covenant) — union with Christ by Spirit (faith, evangelical not legal repentance). In this, grace is prior to nature, grace prior to law, the filial prior to the judicial. Is this not the pattern of Calvin's *Institutio*?

<sup>12</sup> London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1901. Orr comments 'The limitation of atonement is not taught by Calvin' (p.297).

the highest of all ends, His own glory . . . ' The reprobate 'are not the objects of God's love in the more special sense. Now this, I think I may safely say, is not a conception in which the Christian mind can permanently rest. Our deeper penetration with Christ's doctrine of God as love, as well as the express testimony of Scripture respecting God's character and love to the world, forbid it.' (p.293). Orr then goes on to speak about the difference between the *infralapsarian* and the *supralapsarian* Calvinists, and says of the latter 'A doctrine of this kind . . . is one which no plea of logical consistency will ever get the human mind to accept, and which is bound to provoke revolt against the whole system with which it is associated.'

The person who expounded the *supralapsarian* position most powerfully in Scotland, paradoxically, was Samuel Rutherford 'the saint of the covenant'. Does that symbolise something deep in Scottish religion, a passionate concern for the Evangel, combined with an abstract severe concept of the sovereignty of God, which can too easily lead to intolerance and lack of love for those from whom we differ?