

Amyraldianism:- “A deadly compromise”

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 10 August 2016 16:18

In [A-007](#) we ask if Christians can be Theistic Evolutionists. The answer for any genuine believer is ‘no’, because God specifically tells us He made everything in six literal days (borne out by a study of the Hebrew text and construction of verses). Theistic Evolutionists are compromisers of the worst kind, because their refusal to accept what God says is rooted in unbelief.

There are other forms of compromise. Some can be discarded as mere nonsense. Others are deadly to faith and to others who are taught the same doctrinal errors. One of the deadly kind is Amyraldianism. It began after the Synod of Dort as a compromise between the Romanistic Arminianism that threatened to kill-off the new Reformation, and Calvinism. I am NOT a Calvinist, but I recognise that to move even a small step towards Arminianism in a compromise is a step too far. Just the smallest step taints the whole idea. This is because while Calvinistic basics teach biblical truth, Arminian basics do not.

And though Amyraldianism contains the taint of another heresy (Arminianism) it began its false life associated with Calvinism. (The name comes from French theologian, Moses Amyraut, 1569-1664). It accepted that there is God’s distinguishing grace in the election of individuals. Since then Amyraldianism has spread in its range of ideas. My own view is that once a man takes on the title of an ‘ism’, he has already slipped away from 100% biblical truth. It does not matter what that ‘ism’ is, including Calvinism. Such slippage is *always* detrimental to God’s word. Or, as I have asked before: How much error can be accepted before it affects truth? The obvious answer is “None!” because God Himself does not tolerate it.

Amyraldians believe that God pronounced a universal atonement before He pronounced particular election. This is why many versions of this expanding theological stance is called ‘four-point Calvinism’. It is also called Hypothetical Redemptionism. Many see the movement (which is what it is, outside of genuine godly interpretation of scripture) as a poor form of Calvinism. BB Warfield said of it:

“it is a logically inconsistent and therefore unstable form of Calvinism. For another more important reason, it turns away from a substitutionary atonement, which is as precious to the Calvinist as his particularism,” (Plan, p. 98).

Those who hold to this kind of ‘ism’ cannot understand that their beliefs are based NOT on an

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‘objective study of scripture’, but on a study that is based on, and initiated by, their chosen theoretical bias. Perhaps of interest to readers is the fact that I accepted the teachings known as ‘five point Calvinism’ completely exterior to being a Calvinist. That is, I came to the conclusion that the various biblical texts that are found in the Points were true, though I had no idea what Calvinism was. Only much later did I look at Calvinistic teachings.

In other words, a proper study of God’s word drives one towards the same position taken by ‘five-pointers’. So, to call me a Calvinist is an error, and to call me an Hyper-Calvinist (when, anyway, there is no fixed definition for this intended insult) is ridiculous. In the five points erroneously attributed to Calvin (who never issued them), there are absolute biblical truths. That is why I can concur with each one, though I am not, and never have been, a Calvinist. My only label is ‘believer’ in what God says.

Amyraldianism is an absurdity, because it lacks biblical logic and contains many disconnects. It says that Christ died literally for ‘all men’, thus rejecting the actual linguistics of scripture and giving sinful men the ability to choose salvation, even though God Himself says that no man searches for Him and so remains dead in their sins until they are ‘born again’! To say that all men are *potentially* saveable is nonsense; it makes no biblical sense whatever... but it certainly is a false salve to all who reject truth and prefer their own humanised version of scripture, because it places control for their future in their own sinful hands.

Amyraldians then go on to say that God could see that not all men would make a move towards their salvation, and so He then brought in election. Thus, He introduced election only after He introduced the atonement meant for EVERY human being ever born. This is saying that God did not see what would happen in Man!

This means God is not omniscient. It is just a game that went wrong, and so God brought in new rules! This is so absurd: it is anti-intellectual; it is anti-God; it is biblically illogical! Overall, God is eternal. This means that everything known has been known by God in eternity, ***all at once***

God was not caught by surprise by those who would refuse His atonement. He knew all things at the same time, so every thought and action are part of His divine will. It has to be, or He is not God. And this is why Amyraldianism is not just absurd – it is heretical and demonic.

Scripture is clear: God elected those who are His, and because God cannot make a mistake, and anything chosen in eternity is fixed, people elected are chosen NOT because of how they

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would turn out in their lifetime, but because GOD CHOSE THEM FOR SALVATION for His own reasons. Humans get to choose nothing, not even to reject the Gospel. If they are elect, then they WILL be saved, regardless of any human interference, or not.

There is further absurdity in Amyraldianism, because it avoids, by contortions of theology, the simple fact that Jesus came NOT to save everyone, but to save those who were elect. The number saved equals the number who are elect. He became human as the embodiment of an Heavenly choice. He did NOT come to persuade people, but to DECLARE what the Father gave to Him. The fact of election coming at the same time as salvation is even declared by Jesus to His disciples just before He was arrested: “*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,*” (John 15:16. Also see John 10:15, 17:2,9). Logically, this means that no-one can choose their own salvation, because it has already been elected in eternity, and cannot be changed!

Yes, we must *preach* universally, simply because we do not know God’s choice in election for individuals. But, even this general call can be limited by the Holy Spirit, Who can stop us witnessing or preaching to certain individuals or groups. One example is when He told the disciples to shake the dust off their feet when a village refused to listen. (Matthew 10:14 etc). This command prevents us from revisiting certain individuals and groups, and works against the Arminian idea of constantly badgering them with renewed efforts and a variety of novelties.

Some suggest that if this is the case then election HAD to precede atonement. Not so, because of the reason already given – God’s will included EVERYTHING necessary **at the same time** in eternity, even when one thing appears TO US to flow seamlessly to another. Amyraldians rely more on their idea of counter-intuition than on what scripture truly says. This is because their starting point is not scripture, but a humanly-devised theory that leads them in the opposite direction to what scripture actually says.

(See my brief review, A-557, of an Amyraldian-style booklet. When the author was challenged about this he stubbornly and resorted back to quotes from Baxter and could not offer any biblical support for his arguments. Instead, he merely threw out childish name-calling. It is a typical method used by all who teach error – they try to make the critic wrong, without once answering any criticisms. This is their attempt at making a smoke-screen to hide their inadequacies).

These folks can certainly be very pious in their statements, who can sit on a very high hobby-horse – but it does not make them right in any degree! It also leads them to write whole

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books on the subject from the point of view of their chosen theory, even dealing one-by-one with various texts ‘proving’ their heresy to be true... but it is only true if they *begin* with their theory and not God’s word! (See my article on Contextual and Universal Validity, A-381).

By believing as they do, Amyraldians place no real emphasis on Christ’s redemptive work on the cross. How can they, when they have already claimed God gave us election only after He gave us atonement? God’s grace is NOT a ‘free offer’ of salvation, but is a free gift of God that is not reliant on human responses. It is a gift based on His elective will of some but not others. There is the absurdity of Christ dying for all and yet being effective with just a few. It is as absurd as a chef buying two tons of food when he knows in advance that he is only going to cook for a table of ten! Amyraldianism removes Christ from the equation of redemption by making God’s grace outside of His sacrifice.

Yet, as scripture teaches, our salvation is found *within* His redemptive act on the cross... a redemption only available to those who were elect. Amyraldians can very cleverly fog the issue with plenty of noxiously tangled, detailed textual analysis, but the end result is obvious. Far better to skip the analysis on the basis that they reject God’s true plan of redemption! To read their books is like reading the thoughts of Chairman Mao for our godly lives! It does not work and has no place in our thoughts.

For myself, I never bother to read material by heretics unless I wish to define their errors. This is because they have nothing of value to teach me and it would be a waste of my time to read what is against my scriptural beliefs. Christ is central to salvation and faith.

Jonathan Edwards, in a public lecture in Boston July 8, 1731, said *"We are dependent on God, not only for redemption itself but for our faith in the Redeemer; not only for the gift of His Son but for the Holy Ghost for our conversion."*

Amyraldians tend to be smug, self-interested people. They pat themselves on their backs because they are steeped in their own smugness. Many probably have reasonable numbers of followers and church attenders, who, like them, prefer human cooperation with salvation than having a free gift they cannot control. (Though it is far more likely they are unaware that their pastor is preaching heresy). Yet, you can read the disconnects and illogic in their work. They are blinded to their own errors, and try to convince others that their bad exegesis and poor interpretations are genuine!

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Sounds Too Hard! So, Change it!

The aim of Amyraut was to soften the edges of Calvin's words, by moderating them. That is, where Calvin touched on election. This I find to be useless, for Calvin only taught about salvation what scripture teaches. Thus, the aim of Amyraut was no more true than the aim of Arminius, whose work was aligned to a subversive Romanism in its desire to crush Calvin's work and its part in the Reformation so hated by Rome. Strangely, Amyraut sought to make Calvin's work stronger against Roman attack. But, to tamper with what is already correct is an error in itself, no matter what the underlying aim might be.

Caution should be shown towards the man, who was befriended by the Roman luminary, Cardinal Richelieu, who liked his work. When we see a Protestant work taken on board by Romanists, we should be extremely careful and cautious, for Rome only accepts what is useful to its cause (such as the infamous Alpha Course today). Amyraut rejected Arminianism, but today's Amyraldians are dangerously close to it. We could say they are half-way there, by preaching universal atonement. Indeed, being much closer to Lutheranism, they are just as bad, for Lutherans quickly started to separate from mainstream reformation teaching. Now, it is virtually Roman Catholic, which shows that a small deviation can lead to total devastation. It is therefore interesting to know that 'rigid adherents' to the Synod of Dort accused Amyraldians of Pelagianism and Manichaeism.

I can see why. Amyraldians think that our will can make a choice of salvation without divine aid. This is scriptural heresy and is found in Pelagianism. God says that we are spiritually dead and CANNOT will our responses to good or to God. We can only do what is evil/sin. Thus, our will can ONLY do what is good if God causes it to be attuned to the newly 'born again' spirit. Often, what unsaved men calls 'good' is counted to be as filthy rags by God, because it is outside God's will.

It is possible that Amyraut was genuine in his attempt to modify what Calvin taught. But, sadly, his work had the effect of distorting scripture. Amyraut, after all, kept to Calvin's predestination and foreknowledge, but believed in a universal salvation through a universal sacrifice by Christ, making faith the deciding factor in one's salvation. This contradicts scripture and, taken to its logical conclusion, makes a mockery of Christ's sacrifice. It also brings in the Arminian idea of God 'offering' salvation, so that human beings can make their own choice of salvation, or not. This is why I cannot properly separate Arminianism from Amyraldianism. They are like neighbours living next door to each other, but denying they know each other!

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Amyraut thought that Calvinists tended to work backwards, by making the facts interpret the decrees of God. So, he argued that there is objective grace (offered to all and sundry in the matter of the Gospel) and subjective grace (only for those who accepted the offer of salvation, the elect). I do not see this division in scripture. Not because of blindness caused by wrong interpretation, but because scripture does not contain such division, nor does it make the Gospel an ‘offer’.

He said that man has the power to believe (natural ability), and can also will to believe (moral ability). Man, he claimed, has the power to believe, but not the moral ability because of inward sin. So, an act of God is needed to lighten the mind, which in turn causes the will to act on the offer of salvation.

As I have suggested, when we take his views to their logical conclusion, we start to see the cracks widen and explode. Like Zwingli, Amyraut thought that even heathen have ‘faith without knowledge’ or an ‘unconscious Christianity’, but God makes faith clearer to those who are saved. Paul tells us that the unsaved world is without excuse because God is evident in creation. But, this is far from being an ‘unconscious Christianity’ or ‘faith without knowledge’. Rather, it is just an inbuilt acknowledgement that God exists. This can be a reluctant thought, and not ‘faith’, or even an outright hatred for God.

Scripture does not teach such a condition, which would really be a kind of ‘halfway to Heaven’ idea. Significantly, though some theologians agreed with Amyraut, others did not. So, for Amyraldians to claim superiority is deceptive. They prefer to enjoin the work of Baxter, probably as a form of ‘protection by unity’... but, even if ALL theologians accepted Amyraut’s ideas, it would not necessarily make them right! In interpreting God’s word there is no such qualifying condition as consensus! What qualifies God’s word is – God’s word, NOT the word of human beings, even if they have an almost 100% understanding of it.

At the time of Amyraut’s initial work, it was not thought of as heretical, but within Puritan bounds. (For example: Muller, Richard A [2003], *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* 1, Grand Rapids: Baker, pp. 79–80, cited in Ponter, David W. [4 October 2007]. "Richard Muller on Amyraut". *Calvin and Calvinism*). But, this is again to rely not on scripture itself but on the work of human beings. This is something I have difficulty with, for either God says it, or He does not, and I cannot detect Amyraldianism in scripture. For Amyraldians to feel superior when the matter is not proved (though they think it is) is tantamount to pride and arrogance.

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They have what seems to be a naïve (or is it deliberate misinterpretation?) understanding of statements such as God loving the “whole world” and so wants “all men to be saved”. I am flabbergasted that serious theologians cannot see the truth in this – that their interpretations are wrong. A close study of texts containing those two thoughts show that ‘whole world’ refers ONLY to the elect (see my study on this text), and that the men God wishes to be saved are precisely those who are elect! To put it nicely, I could accept but reject naïve misinterpretations as just someone’ else’s view. But, not when those views lead others to think they may choose their own salvation.

As I have said elsewhere, there is a disconnect in their idea that Christ died for every man and woman who ever lived, even though only a small number are actually saved. It is biblically illogical (and has been called an “unfruitful abstraction”).

For me, Amyraldianism is just an excuse for the mind to play semantics with God’s word, a subtle attempt to destroy God’s salvation by very small degrees! I do not necessarily think that all Amyraldians do so as a stark reaction against God, but it is, nevertheless, the end result of making such ‘slight’ changes, so they are guilty anyway. It is not for nothing that Amyraldianism is also known as “hypothetical universalism”. An hypothesis is not a full-fledged theory (sometimes referred to as ‘fact’ as opposed to guesswork), no matter how intellectually advanced a theologian is (or claims to be).

For reasons above (and others) the Synods at Alençon, Charenton and Loudon, did not excommunicate Amyraut, but they did delimit his ideas so that they did not go further in their variance with the historic form of the Reformation, and to retain ‘unity’. (I cannot agree with maintaining ‘unity’ when some are at variance with basic doctrinal facts. It is not ‘unity’ but human compromise).

Thus, the very objections and suspicions I have mentioned were also in their minds, too. God does not set out a scenario without having a remedy. He would not cause Christ to die for literally ‘all’, if only a small number would benefit. It simply makes no sense to claim He died for the vast numbers who rejected Him. It reduces God to a guesser, or one with a very loose economy! I cannot agree with the latitude given by the various Synods, just to avoid a schism. Something is either right or it is wrong.

That Baxter devised a middle route between Calvinism, Arminianism and Romanism, does not impress me. (We should not be in the business of guiding minds to avoid dissent with

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heretics). Baxter:

"devised an eclectic middle route between Reformed, Arminian, and Roman doctrines of grace: interpreting the kingdom of God in terms of contemporary political ideas, he explained Christ's death as an act of universal redemption (penal and vicarious, but not substitutionary), in virtue of which God has made a new law offering pardon and amnesty to the penitent. Repentance and faith, being obedience to this law, are the believer's personal saving righteousness... the fruit of the seeds which Baxter sowed was neonomian Moderatism in Scotland and moralistic Unitarianism in England." (Packer, J. I., "Introduction," in Baxter, Richard (1979) [1656], The Reformed Pastor, The Banner of Truth Trust, pp. 9–10).

(Note: Neonomianism teaches that God reduced the import of His original moral law, to give us a milder form of law, the Gospel. Yet, Christ said that He did not come to remove that law but to perfect and expand upon it! Christ also perfectly complied with the utter and absolute nature of the law, neither reducing its content or aim. [The Amyraldian position is described by William Styles, 'A Manual of Faith and Practice']. The sin of Neonomianism was dealt a severe blow by Isaac Chauncy, 1632-1712, in his book 'Neonomianism Unmask'd').

We can see, then, that the ordinariness presented by modern Amyraldians is far from ordinary, and contains many seeds of unbiblical belief that alter the facts concerning salvation. It is also why the 'Marrow Controversy' arose: it tried to guide unwary students of the bible between Antinomianism and Neonomianism. The very fact that the two 'nomianisms' are mentioned in the same breath should cause readers to be cautious about Amyraldianism and its consequences.

Final Note

In my dealings with Amyraldians and Arminians, I continuously find an attitude of selfism and pride in their thoughts. They think their positions to be unassailable even when major theologians have opposed their views in the past. They give detailed studies of a large variety of texts, with their own 'spin' on meanings, disregarding more pertinent interpretations. This is called 'creating a fog to hide error'.

I have briefly dealt with such thinking in my paper on Contextual and Universal arguments. To summarise, Amyraldians are like those who live in their own little bubble. They devise their own rules and meanings and live by them, and because all within the bubble think the same way, the rules and theories hold up.

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But, when compared to the wider (universal) view, their bubble is burst and their rules and interpretations fly away like so much chaff, because they do not hold up to genuine scrutiny. This is what Amyraldians are like. They feel safe within their own circles, but are threatened by the wider context of biblical truth, and cannot possibly sustain their views without retreating into another bubble of their own making, or by denigrating those who hold to a biblical view. Sadly, projecting their own errors onto critics is a typical ploy to remove attention from themselves.

The very fact that Amyraldianism IS an ‘ism’ proves beyond doubt that it has deviated from plain truth. There is no need to call it anything at all if it is consistent with scripture... though this fact is not understood by Amyraldians, so intent are they to uphold their own ideas within their own bubble!

It does not matter how many texts they allude to in their ‘explanations’, because their ‘interpretations’ are ALL a product not of scripture but of human devices, hypotheses that do not make sense, full of logical disconnects. They begin with the wrong premise, so everything said after that makes no sense... except to them! They must be left inside their self-made bubble to reassure each other, but we should know that the bubble will one day be burst by God.

Parallel Example of this kind of thinking:

In the law concerning the purchase of motor cars, if a car is stolen and resold, the new owner does not have legitimate ownership of the car. Even if the car was stolen ten years previously and has had numerous owners, the present owner does not legally own the car, which will be removed by the police.

In the same way a theologian does not own God’s word. If he rewrites it to his own fancy, and even passes off countless ‘interpretations’ that counter the original, he does not own God’s word but has ‘stolen’ it for his own advantage. If he passes on this corrupted word, those who come across it do not own it either. Rather, they have a fake. One day God will remove it and replace it with His true doctrine. The ones who corrupted it have no godly ownership, so they lose by being corrupt.

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