

# **James Durham (1622 – 1658)**

And the Gospel Offer in its Seventeenth-Century  
Context

V&R Academic

# Reformed Historical Theology

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Volume 31

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Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;  
detailed bibliographic data available online: <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN 978-3-525-55087-8

ISBN 978-3-647-55087-9 (E-book)

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Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht LLC, Bristol, CT, U.S.A.

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Printing and binding: CPI buchbuecher.de GmbH, Birkach

Printed in Germany

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## List of Abbreviations

<i>Battles</i>	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; 2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960).
<i>CO</i>	John Calvin, <i>Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia</i> . (W. Baum et al. (ed.); 59 vols.; Braunschweig, 1863 – 1900)
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>CTS</i>	John Calvin, <i>Calvin's Commentaries</i> . 22 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981.
<i>CNTC</i>	John Calvin, <i>Calvin's New Testament Commentaries</i> . Edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. Translated by various. 12 vols. Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995.
<i>DPWG</i>	Directory for the Public Worship of God in <i>Westminster Confession of Faith &amp;c.</i> (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994), 369 – 394
<i>DSCHT</i>	Nigel M. Cameron, et al. (eds.) <i>Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology</i> . Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>KJV</i>	<i>King James Version (KJV)</i>
<i>MAJT</i>	<i>Mid-America Journal of Theology</i>
<i>NKJV</i>	<i>New King James Version (NKJV)</i> , Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> (Oxford University Press, 2004) Cited 29 Oct 2007. Online <a href="http://www.oxforddnb.com">http://www.oxforddnb.com</a> .
<i>PTR</i>	<i>The Princeton Theological Review</i>
<i>SCJ</i>	<i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>WCoF</i>	Westminster Confession of Faith in <i>Westminster Confession of Faith &amp;c.</i> (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994), 5 – 126.
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>





## Preface

There are a number of individuals whose support and encouragement deserve acknowledgment. The advice and guidance of the supervisors of my doctoral dissertation on which this work is based, Dr. Gwyn Davies and Dr. William Campbell, enhanced this work immeasurably. It was a pleasure being supervised by them. Particular thanks are due to my primary supervisor Dr. Davies for his warm fellowship and hospitality as well as his academic insight. Special gratitude is also due to my father, George F. MacLean. His theological insight and knowledge of Scottish church history have been an invaluable help. My mother, Mary MacLean, has also supported the work in many ways and has been a great source of encouragement.

I also owe a particular debt to my wife Ruth, and my children, Hannah and Jonathan, who have made many sacrifices in support of this project, in particular giving up family time and holidays to see the dissertation, and now this revised study, through to completion. In this revision process the valuable feedback of the anonymous reviewers from V&R is gratefully acknowledged. The support of many other friends, too numerous to mention by name, is also heartily acknowledged.

The work is dedicated to the memory of Nana, whom I shall see no more until the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

*An sin tha iad ro-ait, air son  
Gu bheil iad sàmhach beò:  
'S gu d'thug e iad do'n chaladh sin,  
'S do'n phort bu mhiannach leo.  
Sailm 107:30*



## Introduction

The suspicion of God's decree is daily fostered and augmented, and the afflicted person, not only doubteth of God's good-will to him, but is tempted unto desperation: By this means the command of God to believe the promises and consolations of the Gospel, seem to him to be offered to him all in vain: the hope of success, or profiting in the use of the means appointed by God, is undermined, so long as this suspicion is entertained...<sup>1</sup>

David Dickson's statement above demonstrates that the issue of the offer of the gospel, and its relation to other elements of Reformed theology, were matters of significant pastoral concern in the seventeenth century. The goodwill of God to all and the offer of the gospel were being questioned on the basis that they were inconsistent with the sovereignty of God. Dickson, and other seventeenth-century Reformed theologians, had to consider at the pastoral level the question of "How can this offer of grace to all the hearers of the Gospel ... stand with the doctrine of election of some, and reprobation of others, or, with the doctrine of Christ's redeeming of the Elect only, and not of all and every man?"<sup>2</sup>

However, the issue of the offer of the gospel was not confined to the pastoral level; it was a profoundly theological concern as well. The Remonstrant challenge to the Reformed orthodoxy of the early seventeenth century, as den Boer has highlighted, included the assertion that "Unconditional predestination and irresistible grace ... leads infallibly to the supposition that God is hypocritical in his offer of grace..."<sup>3</sup> Similar arguments against a particularist soteriology, founded on the offer of the gospel, persisted with significant seventeenth-century English theologians advancing materially similar arguments. Richard

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1 David Dickson, *Therapeutica Sacra* (Edinburgh: Evan Tyler, 1664), 251.

2 Dickson, *Therapeutica Sacra*, 120. For instance, Paul Archibald notes that "One of the major criticisms brought against the doctrine of limited atonement by opponents from the sixteenth century down to the present, is that it is inconsistent with the 'free offer' of the Gospel." Paul Archibald, "A Comparative Study of John Calvin and Theodore Beza on the Doctrine of the Extent of the Atonement" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998), 210.

3 William den Boer, *God's Twofold Love: The Theology of Jacob Arminius* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 250.

Baxter argued that to have any propriety the command for all to believe on Christ presupposed that Christ died for all because “God doth not offer that which he cannot give ... But God cannot give Pardon ... to any sinful man for whom Christ never satisfied.”<sup>4</sup> John Goodwin held that the offer of the gospel was fundamentally inconsistent with strict predestinarian thought and any attempt to combine the two “made God a liar.”<sup>5</sup> This recurring issue is highlighted, from a critical perspective, by T.F. Torrance who, in expounding seventeenth-century Scottish theology, stated that “The rigidly contractual concept of God as lawgiver together with a necessitarian concept of immutable divine activity allied to a double predestination, with its inescapable implication of a doctrine of limited atonement, set the church with a serious problem as to its interpretation of biblical statements about the offer of the Gospel freely to all people.”<sup>6</sup> Fundamentally, the consistent charge against the offer of the gospel in all of these examples is one of duplicity: Reformed theology entailed a God who “offers in the Gospel that which he has no intention of providing to the reprobate.”<sup>7</sup>

Despite the significance and persistence of the debates surrounding the offer of the gospel and Reformed theology, the scholarly attention given to this subject has been limited. The most relevant literature consists of two significant essays by Raymond Blacketer and R. Scott Clark. In these essays Blacketer and Clark have examined the history of Reformed thought on the offer of the gospel and reached radically differing conclusions.<sup>8</sup> Blacketer’s position is that Reformed theology, while speaking of a universal proclamation and call of the gospel, never embraced a “universal, well-meant offer of salvation”.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, to speak of “offers” in connection with gospel proclamation at all is problematic.<sup>10</sup> Reviewing

4 Richard Baxter, *Universal Redemption of Mankind By the Lord Jesus Christ* (London: Printed for John Salusbury at the Rising-Sun in Cornhill, 1694), 104.

5 John Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed: Wherein the Most Glorious Word of the Redemption of the World by Jesus Christ is Vindicated against the Encroachments of Later Times* (1651; repr., London: Thomas Tegg, 1840), 186.

6 Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 137.

7 Archibald, “Calvin and Beza,” 162.

8 Raymond A. Blacketer, “The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Reexamination of the So-Called Well-Meant Offer of Salvation,” *CTJ*, 35:1 (April 2000): 37–65; R. Scott Clark, “Janus, the Well-Meant Offer, and Westminster Theology,” in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries* (ed. David VanDrunen; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 149–179.

9 Blacketer, “Three Points,” 39.

10 Blacketer, “Three Points,” 40. Certain Reformed theologians have undoubtedly denied the free offer of gospel. One example is John Gill, whom Robert Oliver identifies as teaching “That there are universal offers of grace and salvation made to all men I utterly deny; nay, I deny that they are made to any; no, not to God’s elect”. Robert W. Oliver, “John Gill (1697–1771): His Life and Ministry,” in Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation* (New York: Brill, 1997), 28. See also the exhaustive study of Gill’s thought on the free offer of the gospel in Curt Daniels, “Hyper-

largely the same primary literature, Scott Clark argues, in contrast to Blacketer, that classic Reformed theology clearly taught a “well-meant offer of the gospel”.<sup>11</sup>

Two substantial recent works which have supported the conclusions of Blacketer are Jonathan Moore’s study of John Preston and Patrick Baskwell’s study of Herman Hoeksema.<sup>12</sup> Moore argues that any conception of the gospel offer which speaks of a will or desire of God for the salvation of all hearers of the gospel is inconsistent with “mainstream” Reformed thought and is to be regarded as a consequence of a denial of particular redemption.<sup>13</sup> Baskwell has similarly supported the argument of Raymond Blacketer that to posit any well-meant gospel offer to the non-elect is to abandon “the proper interpretation of the Reformed confessions”.<sup>14</sup>

However, other examinations of this subject have reached similar conclusions to Scott Clark. For instance, J. Mark Beach’s recent essay on John Calvin’s treatment of the free offer of the gospel concludes that Calvin spoke of “fatherly favour, paternal love ... goodness and grace directed toward all people” in connection with the gospel offer.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, a number of older works, in so far as they broach this issue similarly lend support to the views of Clark. A.C. De Jong, for instance, posits that the proper interpretation of Calvin, and Dort, is that they both teach a “well-meaning offer of salvation”.<sup>16</sup> Curt Daniels’s study of hyper-Calvinism and John Gill touches on the offer of the gospel at several

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Calvinism and John Gill” (Ph.D. diss., Edinburgh University, 1983). However, the question is: was this also the response of earlier Reformed theology to the “free offer question”?

11 Clark, “Janus,” in VanDrunen, *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine*, 165.

12 Jonathan Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Patrick Baskwell, *Herman Hoeksema: A Theological Biography* (Manassas, VA: Full Bible Publications: 2009). Baskwell’s work originated in his doctoral dissertation at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. The free offer of the gospel, while a significant element in both monographs, is not the main focus of either work.

13 For one pertinent criticism of the historical readings of Moore’s work, see Hunter Bailey, “Via Media Alia: Reconsidering the Controversial Doctrine of Universal Redemption in the Theology of James Fraser of Brea (1639 – 1699)” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 2008), 71 – 72.

14 Baskwell, *Herman Hoeksema*, 250.

15 J. Mark Beach, “Calvin’s Treatment of the Offer of the Gospel and Divine Grace,” *MAJT*, 22 (2011): 75. Beach extends his analysis to other theologians, although focusing on the extent of grace rather than the gospel offer *per se*, in J. Mark Beach, “The Idea of a ‘General Grace of God’ in Some Sixteenth-Century Reformed Theologians other than Calvin,” in Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma and Jason Zuidema. Eds. *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition* (Leiden, Brill, 2013), 97 – 110.

16 A.C. De Jong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer: The Views of H. Hoeksema and K. Schilder* (Franker: T. Wever, 1954), 130. See also Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 78.

points, arguing throughout that Reformed theology taught a well-meant gospel offer.<sup>17</sup>

Given, then, this current state of disagreement, the time is ripe for a fresh examination of the free offer of the gospel in Reformed thought. This is particularly so given the lack of an academic work which focuses exclusively, or even mainly, on this issue.<sup>18</sup> This volume, then, will seek to fill this lacuna by focusing on the historical question of whether Reformed theologians have taught a free offer of the gospel, and, if so, what they meant by that term and how they related it to the rest of their theological commitments. In particular, the focus will be on ascertaining the meaning of one of the most significant of the Reformed creeds, the Westminster Confession of Faith, when it spoke of this matter.

The phrase “free offer” itself is drawn from the Westminster Confession 7:3 which states that: “the Lord ... freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ (*in quo peccatoribus offert gratuito vitam ac salutem per Jesum Christum*)”.<sup>19</sup> Both the terms “free” and “offer” raise a number of questions which will be investigated in this work.

Regarding the term “free” it needs to be ascertained whether this entails an offer that is simply freely presented or is also free to accept. If it is free to accept, is this with a condition which the hearer is capable or incapable of fulfilling? Again, if freely presented is this presentation absolutely universal in its actual human reference, or simply to be indiscriminately preached? In view of these questions explicit consideration will be given to *who* James Durham, and others included in this study, define as the recipients of the gospel offer to determine if it is “free” in its extent.<sup>20</sup> This consideration will be set in the context of their broader covenant theology, and soteriology, with specific attention to the conditional or unconditional nature of the covenant of grace and the inability of any to believe without an effectual call to determine the *conditional* or *unconditional* nature of the “offer”.<sup>21</sup>

17 Daniels, “John Gill,” 52–53, 364, 382–3, 398, 407–8, 438. Daniel’s dissertation differs from the other works cited in this section in arguing extensively that Calvin denied particular redemption.

18 The only work to cover the gospel offer in detail looked simply at the nineteenth-century American theologian James H. Thornwell, namely Craig A. Sheppard, “The Compatibility of the Doctrine of Election with the Free Offer of the Gospel in James Henley Thornwell” (M.Th. diss., Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, 1998).

19 *Westminster Confession of Faith &c.* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994), 42; G.D. *Confessio Fidei in Conventu Theologorum Autoritate Parliamenti Anglicani indicto* (Cambridge: Johannes Field, 1656), 21.

20 Specifically this is addressed in the sections of Chapters 3 & 4 below entitled “The Recipients of the Offer,” “The Warrant to Believe” and “Duty Faith”.

21 Specifically this is addressed in the sections of Chapters 3 & 4 below entitled “The Rejection of the Offer” and “Objections to the Gospel Offer” as well as in the sections discussing covenant theology.

Again, as the brief survey of secondary literature above indicates, “offer” needs defined. Is the “offer” of the gospel a presentation of the truths of the gospel, or is it more akin to an offer as it would be understood today, that is, a proffering of the gospel. If it is an “offer” how does this relate to the divine intention? For instance, is the “offer” hypothetically effectual for all who hear, and made in the genuine expectation that all who hear might actually respond positively? With these questions in mind careful attention will be given to how Durham and his contemporaries defined offer, in order to illustrate in what manner they employed this term.<sup>22</sup> The way in which Durham, and others, related the gospel offer to the will of God, and the explicit reasons they gave for a “free gospel offer,” will be considered to determine how they understood the gospel offer in relation to the divine purpose.<sup>23</sup>

As indicated in the preceding two paragraphs, the teaching of the Confession on these matters will be ascertained largely by means of a case study, examining the teaching and preaching of one of the most respected and representative theologians of the seventeenth century, James Durham. However, before presenting Durham’s life and theology, select aspects of Reformed thought up to and including the time of the Westminster Assembly will be surveyed. Following an examination of Durham’s views, other leading Reformed theologians from around the time of the Assembly will be considered to determine whether there was indeed a consensus Reformed view which could be expressed in the Westminster Confession.<sup>24</sup> The study will then conclude by considering the on-going significance of seventeenth-century debates over the free offer of the gospel.

Before proceeding, however, some explanation of the choice of James Durham as a representative case study is necessary. He has been chosen for several reasons:

First, there is an abundance of material in his works which directly relates to the free offer of the gospel. His sixteen sermons on Isaiah 53:1 largely comprise a detailed consideration of this subject.<sup>25</sup> A number of his sermons in *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ* also explicitly cover the same theme.<sup>26</sup> As well as theological reflection and practical illustration of the free offer of the gospel in his sermons, Durham’s commentary on Revelation contains extended theo-

22 Specifically this is addressed in the sections of Chapters 3 & 4 below entitled “Defining ‘Offer’”.

23 Specifically this is addressed in the sections of Chapters 3 & 4 below entitled “The Offer and God’s Will and Desire,” “Common Grace” and “The Reasons for the Gospel Offer”.

24 Without necessarily entailing that other views are “unconfessional”.

25 James Durham, *Christ Crucified: Or, the Marrow of the Gospel Evidently Holden Forth in LXXII Sermons, on the whole 53. Chapter of Isaiah* (Edinburgh: Printed by the Heir of Andrew Anderson, 1683), 1 – 112.

26 E.g. James Durham, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ, And of Grace and Glory In and thorow Him* (Glasgow: Robert Sanders, 1685), 41 – 76 and Durham, *Unsearchable Riches*, 130 – 154.



logical essays on themes related to this subject, for instance, the extent of the atonement.<sup>27</sup>

Second, Durham expressed his respect for the teaching of the Westminster Standards in connection with the free offer of the gospel. For instance, he commented that “Faith is . . . well express’d in the *Catechism*, to be a receiving of Christ as He is offered in the Gospel; this supposes that Christ is offered to us”.<sup>28</sup> He evidently expected his congregation to have memorized the Shorter Catechism and spoke of it as “our excellent catechism”.<sup>29</sup>

Third, Durham was ordained in the year that the Scottish Church adopted the Westminster Confession. He is therefore a good example of how the Westminster Standards were received among the younger generation of theologians who entered a church which was in the process of adopting them.

Fourth, Durham co-authored with David Dickson an early summary of the doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith, entitled *The Sum of Saving Knowledge or a Brief Sum of Christian Doctrine, Contained in the Holy Scriptures, and Holden Forth in the Foresaid Confession of Faith and Catechisms; Together with the Practical Use Thereof*.<sup>30</sup> This document provides significant insight into the understanding of the Scottish Church of the Westminster Standards’ teaching on the free offer of the gospel. Indeed, Hodges has correctly noted that *The Sum* “served as a more or less official interpretation of the Westminster Standards.”<sup>31</sup> As such it moulded the views of generations of Scottish ministers.

Fifth, Durham explicitly set the free offer of the gospel within the framework of covenant theology. This provides a similar context for this subject to Westminster Confession 7:3, making Durham an ideal choice for examining how covenant theology interrelates with the free offer of the gospel in the Westminster Standards.

Sixth, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Two, Durham was highly respected

27 James Durham, *A Commentarie Upon the Book of the Revelation* (Edinburgh: Christopher Higgins, 1658), 299–325. This provides a basis for a consideration of whether a strict particular redemptionist viewed the free offer of the gospel as a concession to universal redemption.

28 Durham, *Christ Crucified*, 23. See also 31, 82, 419, 446, 467, 474 and *Unsearchable Riches*, 282.

29 Durham, *Christ Crucified*, 73, 246, 452, 455, 482.

30 “The Sum of Saving Knowledge,” in *Westminster Confession*, 321–43.

31 L.I. Hodges, “The Doctrine of the Mediator in Classical Scottish Theology, from John Knox to James Durham” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1975), 499–500. Additionally, Torrance argues that it “was long printed together with the Westminster Standards and associated with their authority.” Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 112. See also Andrew McGowan, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston*, (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1997), 5; J. S. Morrill, ed., *The Scottish National Covenant in its British Context* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 48.

by his contemporaries, including John Flavel and John Carstairs, especially with regard to his preaching of the free offer of the gospel.

Seventh, Durham has been used by contemporary writers to expound the Standards in other areas. For instance, Jonathan Moore cites Durham as an example to illustrate the meaning of Westminster Confession 28:5, and Garnet Milne studies Durham's theology as a help to ascertaining the position of the Westminster Assembly on prophecy.<sup>32</sup> John T. McNeill also states more generally that "James Durham (d. 1658) may represent for us the theology of the seventeenth-century Scottish church."<sup>33</sup>

Finally, it has been noted that the "secondary material on the theology of James Durham is not plentiful."<sup>34</sup> This statement of Holsteen's is as true today as it was when he wrote it in 1996. In view of the significance of Durham in the development of Scottish theology, and in Reformed theology in general, this study will contribute to filling that void.

James Durham is therefore a suitable case study to determine the meaning of the "free offer of the gospel" in Westminster Confession 7:3. Consideration will now be given to the development of the Reformed doctrine of the free offer of the gospel up to his day.

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32 Jonathan D. Moore, "The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Sin of Neglecting Baptism," *WTJ* 69:1, (Spring 2007): 76–77; G.H. Milne, *The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Cessation of Special Revelation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 247–50.

33 John T. McNeill, "The Doctrine of the Ministry in Reformed Theology," *CH*, 12:2 (June 1943): 93.

34 Nathan D. Holsteen, "The Popularization of Federal Theology: conscience and covenant in the theology of David Dickson (1583–1663) and James Durham (1622–1658)." (Ph.D. diss., Aberdeen University, 1996), 220, fn. 1.



## Chapter One: The Free Offer of the Gospel in Reformed Theology and Creeds

Curt Daniels has stated that: “Reformed history shows that from earliest times the Free Offer was taught”.<sup>1</sup> However, in view of the debates surrounding this topic, neither the statement that the free offer has been taught in historic Reformed theology, nor the understanding of what such a free offer entails are self-evident. This chapter, then, seeks to outline the historical development of the free offer of the gospel in seventeenth-century Reformed thought up to the Westminster Assembly.

Before examining the history of the free offer in Reformed thought, it is important to highlight some theological distinctions which were common in Reformed theology, and which have a significant impact on the free offer. There are two related points to bear in mind. The first is the definition of two “kinds” of theology, namely *theologia archetypa* and *theologia ectypa*, that is, the distinction between theology as God knows it and theology as man know it.<sup>2</sup> R. Scott Clark notes that “this distinction became the basis for Protestant theological method.”<sup>3</sup> The effect of distinguishing between these two “kinds” of theology was to enable Reformed theologians to develop the “accommodated nature of God’s revelation: God reveals himself not as he is in his infinite majesty but in a form accessible to human beings.”<sup>4</sup> This principle of accommodation is important in understanding the tensions inherent in the doctrine of the free offer articulated by Reformed theologians.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Daniels, “Gill,” 515.

2 See Willem Van Asselt, “The Fundamental Meaning of Theology: Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in seventeenth-century Reformed Thought,” *WTJ* 64:2 (2002), 319–35; Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:225–238; Willem J. Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (trans. Albert Gootjes; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 123–6.

3 Clark, “Janus,” 156.

4 Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:229.

5 Thus Van Asselt asserts that “the *archetypa-ectypa* distinction ... was used to express an insight present in Reformed theology from the very beginning, namely, that finite and sinful

The second relates to the will of God, and the Reformed understanding of the twofold manner of apprehending the one will of God, that is, the division between the hidden will (*voluntas arcana*) and the revealed will (*voluntas revelata*), or, phrased differently, between the will of good pleasure (*voluntas eudokias*) and the will of approbation (*voluntas euarestias*).<sup>6</sup> Richard Muller highlights the quandary for Reformed theology that led to the recognition of this distinction: “it is clear that God, according to his perceptive will, wills that all people be holy ... [however] it can be inferred that the eternal, hidden will or decree of God is not that God will sanctify all people!”<sup>7</sup> This distinction was used by Reformed theologians to argue that the contradiction highlighted by Muller is “apparent, not real”, because “it arises only when the revealed will is incorrectly paired with one aspect of the ultimate will of God”.<sup>8</sup> G. Michael Thomas comments that “the two wills distinction, adapted from medieval scholastics, was taken for granted in Reformed theology.”<sup>9</sup> The importance of this understanding of the will of God for the free offer of the gospel will emerge as specific theologians are considered.

In outlining the development of the doctrine of the free offer, consideration will be given to the views of significant individual theologians in this period and also to the creeds of the Reformed churches.<sup>10</sup> Constraints of space necessitate that this survey is limited to the seventeenth century. The survey begins by examining two early seventeenth-century creeds, the Irish Articles and the Canons of Dort. Following this, William Ames’ teaching on the gospel offer will be surveyed. Given his intimate connection with the Synod of Dort he serves as a link between Continental and British Reformed theology. Then, after summarising the position of John Ball, an influential figure in the mid-seventeenth-century English Reformed theology, the Westminster Assembly’s doctrine of the

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man is not capable of fully comprehending divine truth.” Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 125.

6 This reflects the Reformed distinction between God revealed (*Deus revelatus*) and God hidden (*Deus absconditus*).

7 Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:460.

8 Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:461. Thus, for example, to state that God willed and did not will the salvation of all men did not entail a contradiction (although it might create a tension) in so far as *will* might be used in more than one sense. For the importance of the principle of contradiction (*principium contradictionis*) to Reformed theology see, Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 30.

9 G.M. Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 166.

10 The writings of individual theologians provide the context for the creeds, but not all the views of influential theologians find expression in the creeds. For example, W.G.T. Shedd argued, within the context of interpreting the Westminster Confession, that “the Westminster Confession must be held responsible for only what is declared on its pages. The question is not whether few or many of the members of the Assembly [held a particular view] ... but whether the Confession so asserts”. W.G.T. Shedd, *Calvinism Pure and Mixed* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893), 69.

free offer will be outlined. Finally, the development of the free offer of the gospel in Scottish theology, particularly as seen in Robert Rollock,<sup>11</sup> will be considered as it presents the most immediate context for the case study of James Durham.<sup>12</sup>

## The Free Offer in Early Seventeenth-Century Reformed Creeds

Two significant Reformed creeds written in the early seventeenth century will now be considered, namely the Irish Articles and the Synod of Dort.

### Irish Articles (1615)

The Irish Articles were an important early Anglican Confession, and are closely related to the documents produced by the Westminster Assembly. The significance of the relationship between the Irish Articles and the Westminster Confession of Faith has often been noted. Philip Schaff commented that they “were the chief basis of the Westminster Confession”.<sup>13</sup> B.B. Warfield similarly argued that the “most important proximate source ... of the whole Confession was those Irish Articles of Religion which are believed to have been drawn up by Ussher’s hand, and which were adopted by the Irish Convocation in 1615.”<sup>14</sup> More recently, Douglas Kelly has again made the same point.<sup>15</sup> It is therefore

11 A more comprehensive discussion of the views of Durham’s contemporaries will be undertaken in Chapter Four.

12 Thus this Chapter considers what Richard Muller regards as the period of Early Orthodoxy (1565–1640), and into the beginning of High Orthodoxy (1640–1725). Chapters Two through Four focus solely on the period of High Orthodoxy. Chapter Five focuses on one controversy which overlaps the end of High Orthodoxy and the beginning of Late Orthodoxy (after 1725), namely the Marrow controversy, and two other controversies after the effective end of the dominance of Reformed Orthodox theology.

13 Schaff, *Creeds*, 1:665.

14 B.B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (vol. 6 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*; 10 vols.; 1932; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 169. The role of Ussher in the drafting of the Irish Articles has been challenged. See, for example Jonathan Moore, “James Ussher’s Influence on the Synod of Dort,” in *Revisiting the Synod of Dort (1618–1619)* (Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg, eds.; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 164–5.

15 Douglas Kelly, “The Westminster Shorter Catechism,” in *To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the Westminster Assembly* (ed. John L. Carson and David W. Hall; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 107. Muller also comments that “Although written with a retrospective glance at the Thirty-nine Articles, the Westminster Confession most clearly echoes the order and contents of the Irish Articles.” Richard Muller, “Scripture and the Westminster Confession,” in *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Public Worship* (ed. Carl R. Trueman; Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward; New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2007), 40–1.

relevant to consider the teaching of the Irish Articles on the free offer of the gospel.

The first pertinent section of the Articles is Article 17: “We must receive God’s promises in such wise as they be generally set forth unto us in holy Scripture; and in our doings, that will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of God.”<sup>16</sup> This section employed the distinction between the hidden will (*voluntas arcane*) and the revealed will (*voluntas revelata*) outlined earlier in this chapter. The promises of the gospel, then, belonged to the revealed will. Thus the important distinction between *theologia archetypa* and *theologia ectypa* found expression in the creedal articulations of Reformed theology, insofar as any distinction in discussing the “one and simple” will of God necessarily implies an accommodated mode of speech.

There were further incidental references to the free offer of the gospel. Article 36 exhorted its readers to “embrace the promise of God’s mercy”.<sup>17</sup> Article 37 spoke of a “particular application of the gracious promises of the gospel” being the essence of justifying faith.<sup>18</sup> Article 83 referred to the gospel “bringing joyful tidings unto mankind”.<sup>19</sup>

However, the clearest statement on the free offer of the gospel is found in Article 81, and is a direct quotation from the Thirty-nine Articles declaring that “everlasting life” is “offered to Mankind by Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

### The Canons of the Synod of Dort (1619)

The Synod of Dort was one of the most significant of the Reformed assemblies, drawing its delegates from across Europe.<sup>21</sup> It formulated a response to the teaching of James Arminius, as represented by his followers in their *Remonstrance*.<sup>22</sup> The outcome of the Synod of Dort was a reaffirmation of earlier

16 Article 17, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:529.

17 Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:533.

18 Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:533.

19 Article 83, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:541.

20 Article 81, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:540.

21 Schaff noted that the Synod of Dort was “the only Synod of quasi-œcumenical character in the history of the Reformed Churches.” Schaff, *Creeds*, 1:514. The teaching of the Synod was highly regarded in Scotland, as Guy Richard notes: “Even to the end of the seventeenth century in Scotland these canons [of Dort] were acknowledged to be the quintessence of ‘Scripture Divinity, the Divinity of the Ancients, and the Divinity that right reason doth countenance.’” Guy Richard, *The Supremacy of God in the Theology of Samuel Rutherford* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 15.

22 For a translation of the text of the *Remonstrance*, see Peter Y. De Jong, ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618–1619* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 207–209.

Reformed theology and a rejection of the views contained in the *Remonstrance*.<sup>23</sup> Despite the polemic context of affirming a strict predestinarian system of theology, the Canons of Dort contain the fullest statements regarding the free offer of the gospel of any Confession prior to that of the Westminster Assembly.

This is not surprising, since one of the key accusations of the Remonstrants was that predestinarian theology was inconsistent with the free offer of the gospel. For example, Arminius stated that, if redemption was not purchased for all, “faith in Christ is, by no right, required of all, and if it was not obtained for all, no one can be rightly blamed, on account of rejecting the offer of redemption, for he rejects that which does not belong to him, and he does it with propriety.”<sup>24</sup> The delegates at the Synod were aware of this charge with the British delegation complaining of the Remonstrants’ “odious imputation of illusion in the general propounding of the Evangelical Promises”.<sup>25</sup> In the face of these Remonstrant objections David Lachman asserts that the Synod of Dort “taught a full and free

23 Of course the final Canons represented “a laborious theological compromise worked out between the various Calvinist traditions represented at Dort, and not simply the triumph of the most rigid forms of Dutch Contra-Remonstrant thought”. Nicolas Fornerod, “‘The Canons of the Synod Had Shot Off the Advocate’s Head’ A Reappraisal of the Genevan Delegation at the Synod of Dort” in *Revisiting the Synod of Dort* (Goudriaan and van Lieburg, eds.), 183.

24 James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius* (ed. and trans. James Nichols and W.R. Bagnall; 3 vols.; Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853), 3:458. Compare also den Boer, *God’s Twofold Love*, 234, 250; William Den Boer, “Defence or Deviation? A Re-examination of Arminius’s Motives to Deviate from the ‘Mainstream’ Reformed Theology,” in *Revisiting the Synod of Dort* (Goudriaan and van Lieburg, eds.), 30 fn. 28; Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: A Theologian of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 78, 115. For other recent surveys of the theology of Arminius, see Richard Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); Keith D. Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation: The Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603–1609* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); W. Stephen Gunter, *Arminius and His Declaration of Sentiments: An Annotated Translation With Introduction and Theological Commentary* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012); Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 22–38.

25 Milton, *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort*, 217. Sinnema highlights a number of these challenges. To give one example, at the Gelderland Synod in 1618 the Contra-Remonstrants were accused of teaching that God “invites” the reprobate to “be converted and believe in Christ” but that this was only to “harden and punish them” and yet “the reprobates” were called to “acknowledge this call and invitation of the Lord ... as an act of grace and mercy for which they are obliged to thank him.” Donald Sinnema, “The Issue of Reprobation at the Synod of Dort (1618–19) in Light of the History of this Doctrine” (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Michael’s College, 1985), 189. What is interesting is that the Remonstrants clearly saw the Contra-Remonstrants as viewing the gospel call as an “invitation”.



gospel offer to all men.”<sup>26</sup> The following examination of the canons supports Lachman’s contention.<sup>27</sup>

### The Synod of Dort on the Free Offer of the Gospel

The Synod’s teaching on the free offer may be considered in three distinct points: the existence of a free offer, its sincerity, and its extent. It should also be considered against the background of Remonstrant claims that the sovereignty of God “makes God responsible for man’s sin, leaves no room for moral responsibility, and makes a mockery of gospel preaching.”<sup>28</sup>

The Canons of Dort use language which indicates the existence of an offer of the gospel, speaking of “Christ offered (*oblato*) by the gospel”.<sup>29</sup> They held that the offer of the gospel was a mercy, noting that “God mercifully (*clementer*) sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings to whom he will, and at what time he pleaseth.”<sup>30</sup> The Synod further held that this “offer” was a divine and not merely a human activity, and spoke of “God, who calls men by the gospel (*Deo per Evangelium vocante*)”.<sup>31</sup>

In view of Dort’s commitment to an absolute divine decree concerning the

26 David Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy 1718 – 1723* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1988), 11. Lachman, contrasting Dort with the Westminster Assembly, notes that while both taught a “gospel offer to the reprobate” it was Dort that “placed the greater emphasis on the gospel offer, both in asserting it with vigour and in proclaiming its universal extent.” Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy*, 36. An examination of the two creeds will show that, if anything, the opposite is the case.

27 For studies on Dort, and aspects of its theology, see William Tisbe, *The Doctrine of the Synod of Dort and Arles, Reduced to the Practice* (Amsterdam: Successors to G. Thorp, 1631); Thomas Scott, *The Articles of the Synod of Dort*, (New York: William Williams, 1831); De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*; Sinnema, “Reprobation at Dort”; White, *Predetermination, Policy and Polemic*, 175–202; Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 128–159; Milton, *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort*; Goudriaan and Lieburg, *Revisiting the Synod of Dort*; H.D. Foster, “Liberal Calvinism: The remonstrants at the Synod of Dort in 1618,” *HTR*, 16:1 (1923): 1–37; Peter Lake, “Calvinism and the English Church 1570–1623,” *Past and Present* 114 (Feb. 1987): 51–64; S. Strehle, “The Extent of the Atonement at the Synod of Dort,” *WTJ*, 51:1, (Spring 1989): 1–23; W.R. Godfrey, “Tensions within International Calvinism: the debate on the atonement at the Synod of Dort” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1974); Anthony Hoekema, “Missionary Focus of the Canons of Dort,” *CTJ* 7:2, (November 1972): 209–220.

28 Peter de Yong, “Preaching and the Synod of Dort” in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 130.

29 Article 3/4:9 in Schaff in *Creeds*, 3:566 (English 3:589). “Offer” is also used by Scott, *Articles*, 107 and Anthony Hoekema in “A New English Translation of the Canons of Dort,” *CTJ*, 3:2 (November 1968): 150. Some translations use the term “invitation” in Article 3/4:8 and Article 3/4:9 E.g. Scott, *Articles*, 107; Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:589. The translation by Hoekema does not use “invitation” at all but rather “call”. Hoekema, “New English Translation,” 150–1. Hoekema’s translation is to be preferred in this instance.

30 Article 1:3, in Schaff in *Creeds*, 3:552 (English 3:581).

31 Article 3/4:9, in Schaff in *Creeds*, 3:566 (English 3:589).

salvation of individuals, this naturally raised the question of God's sincerity in the gospel offer. As well as confessing that there was a gospel "offer", the Synod taught that God was sincere in offering the gospel, even to those who persisted in rejecting it. The first point Dort made in propounding a sincere offer was that, even though "many who are called (*vocati*) by the gospel do not repent, nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief; this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency of the sacrifice offered (*oblatae*) by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves."<sup>32</sup> This was reiterated later in the Canons, where again it was stated that, though all who hear the gospel were not converted, "It is not the fault of the gospel, nor in Christ offered (*oblato*) therein, nor of God, who calls (*vocante*) men by the gospel, and confers upon them various gifts; that those who are called (*vocatis*) by the ministry of the Word refuse to come and be converted."<sup>33</sup> Thus, the overarching commitment to sovereign predestination did not prevent the Synod from locating the responsibility for unbelief in the unbeliever rather than in the divine decree. The sincere nature of the gospel offer was also explicitly stated: "As many as are called (*vocantur*) by the gospel, are unfeignedly called (*serio vocantur*); for God hath most earnestly and truly (*Serio enim et verissime*) declared in his Word what will be acceptable to him, namely, that all who are called should comply with the invitation (*vocati*, or call). He, moreover, seriously (*serio*) promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him."<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the Synod did not place a restriction on the extent of the gospel offer, noting that "the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life", and that this "promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and all persons, promiscuously and without distinction (*promiscue et indiscriminatim*), to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel."<sup>35</sup>

Thus the Canons of Dort taught an offer of the gospel that was universal in extent ("free") and sincere and well-meant in nature. This is not to say that Dort embraced the free offer without any controversy. Michael Thomas notes that two of the deputations to Dort denied that "the benefits accrued by Christ's death are offered to each and all to whom they are preached."<sup>36</sup> It is apparent from the clear

32 Article 2:6, in Schaff in *Creeds*, 3:562 (English 3:586).

33 Article 3/4:9, in Schaff in *Creeds*, 3:566 (English 3:589).

34 Article 3/4:8, in Schaff in *Creeds*, 3:565–6 (English 3:589). Hoekema constantly translates *serio* as "earnestly." Hoekema, "New English Translation," 150–1. Schaff, as above, translates it variously as "unfeignedly", "seriously" and "earnestly." Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:589.

35 Article 2:5, in Schaff in *Creeds*, 3:561 (English 3:586).

36 Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 149. This undoubtedly gave some credence to Arminian claims that the free offer and predestinarian theology are inconsistent.