

seeking a short introduction in English to the core of Kuyper's intellectual legacy. It also supplies inspiration to those within the evangelical and Reformed tradition who seek to relate biblical principles to cultural and social engagement. In the words of the British politician Viscount Tony Pandy, who writes the forward, 'It provides Christians in public life with an added incentive to proclaim the relevance of our faith to all aspects of human activity.'

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***The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus***

G. M. Thomas

Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997, 277 pp., ISBN 85364 828 X

**RÉSUMÉ**

*Le livre de Thomas tente de montrer que, dans la théologie réformée de 1536 à 1675, alors qu'il y avait un consensus sur la doctrine de l'élection inconditionnelle au salut, un consensus semblable n'a pas été atteint sur la question de l'étendue de l'expiation, et que la théologie réformée maintenait une tension entre une portée universelle et une portée particulière de l'œuvre de Christ, sans parvenir à résoudre la difficulté. La plus grande force de ce livre ne se situe pas dans sa présentation de l'histoire de la théologie, mais dans sa manière de nous introduire à la théologie systématique réformée, car Thomas lie la question de l'étendue de l'expiation à d'autres points de doctrine, en particulier à la doctrine de la prédestination. Comme tel, le livre est stimulant et utile.*

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Thomas weist in seinem Buch darauf hin, daß in der reformierten Theologie von 1536-1675, ungeachtet des Konsens bezüglich der nichtkonditionalen Erwählung zum Heil, kein Konsens bestand in der Frage des Ausmaßes der Sühne. Zudem war die reformierte Theologie laut Thomas von einer nicht zu vereinbarenden Spannung zwischen der universellen und der spezifischen Dimension des Werks Christi gekennzeichnet. Aus der Sicht des Rezensenten besteht die Stärke dieses Buches nicht so sehr*

*in seinem Beitrag zur Kirchengeschichte als vielmehr darin, das Ausmaß der Sühne zu anderen Bereichen der Dogmatik, insbesondere der Prädestinationslehre, in Beziehung zu setzen. Dies macht das Buch stimulierend und relevant.*

The question of the extent of the atonement has long been a theological shibboleth in the Reformed tradition and it seems commonplace to define Reformed theology in terms of its belief in limited atonement (note its place in T.U.L.I.P.). This book, which is closely based on Thomas' doctoral thesis, seeks to refute two opposing camps in Reformed historical studies: the first and most prominent camp stating that from Calvin to the Swiss Consensus of 1675, there was, apart from the Amyraldian controversy, an unbroken Reformed consensus on the extent of the atonement (its extent being limited to the elect); the second camp in a variety of ways stating that there was a division between Calvin's teaching and that of his successors, and even that Amyraut's theology was a faithful re-interpretation of Calvin. Surveying a number of Reformed theologians and schools over a hundred and fifty year period, Thomas' conclusion is that from the beginning of the Reformed movement there were inherent and unresolvable theological tensions over the universality and particularity of the atonement which can be clearly seen in the controversies and debates of the time. As such, the aim of Thomas' thesis appears to be one of problematization: to make the reader aware of the theological complexities and nuances surrounding the question of the extent of the atonement. The great strength of Thomas' work is his insistence not to treat the extent of the atonement as an isolated doctrine, but to relate it to other fundamental areas of Reformed doctrine (for example, the 'two wills' of God, covenant and the nature of God), most importantly the doctrine of predestination. Thomas argues that there *was* (contra Arminianism) a Reformed consensus on defining election as the eternal and unconditional selection of certain persons to be granted faith and salvation. He also believes that for some theologians, most noticeably Beza, the logic of such a belief inexorably led to a belief in limited atonement. However Thomas' contention is that there was a great deal of diversity in relating predestination to the work of Christ (is Christ subordinate to predestination or vice versa?), and that many prominent theologians including Bullinger and Ursinus upheld *both* a



particular doctrine of predestination and an unlimited view of atonement, and as such represented 'another Reformed tradition' (p. 81).

Thomas finds this tension in Calvin, arguing that his theology presents an unstable *complexio oppositorum* in that he held to a universal promise of the gospel-offer revealed in God's *voluntas signi* (revealed will), and a belief in God's individual election in his *voluntas secreta* (hidden will). While it is possible to detect a resolution of this tension towards the hidden side, Thomas argues that it was only with Beza's strongly supralapsarian theology that this tension was resolved adequately by Beza's denial of the universal promise of the gospel offer. Thomas argues that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the tension is more explicit in the various deputations of the Synod of Dort, and is most clearly seen in the Amyraldian controversy which Thomas credits as bringing all the latent inconsistencies of the Reformed system to the fore. Thomas concludes, I thought somewhat disappointingly, with a single page on Barth and how his reformulation of election is a positive attempt to resolve these inherent tensions, and how Reformed theologians should give him careful consideration. Indeed it is apparent by the end of the book that because he believes these difficulties to be irreconcilable, Thomas wishes to leave this theological arena he has been surveying in search of a new departure in Reformed theology, Barth being the starting point for such a venture.

Thomas' book is lucid and highly stimulating and in a field which can sometimes seem rather removed and dry, this is a positive feature. Its wide scope is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Because he covers such a wide area, I am not sure whether he can substantiate his claims with the force he does, on this evidence alone, and for those already acquainted with this area of historical theology and with specific individuals in particular, one wonders whether they will be persuaded by a study of this length (for example, Thomas' exposition of Calvin only runs to 24 pages). However it is refreshing to see this whole historical period dealt with as whole, and one can gain a good overview of the characters involved and issues debated in this formative period. With this in mind and noting their close relationship, I found Thomas' book helpful not so much as a piece of historical theology, but as an excellent entry into Reformed systematics. Because he relates the question of the extent of the atonement to other areas

of doctrine, one can discern all the areas of contention in Reformed theology, areas which are just as vigorously debated today as they were three hundred years ago. So often questions like the extent of the atonement are discussed in isolation from other areas. In his thesis Thomas presents a clear theological map of the connections and relationships which need to be made in discussing the extent of the atonement. For me, rather than demonstrating the lack of consensus regarding the extent of the atonement, Thomas' thesis highlights the constant struggle within Reformed theology over firstly, the relationship between limited atonement and the universal free-offer of the Gospel; secondly, the nature of and relationship between the 'two wills of God'; thirdly, the infralapsarian/supralapsarian debate; and fourthly, the relationship between logic/deduction and paradox/mystery in theology. One area which Thomas strangely does not mention and which would aid discussion in the above areas is the distinction between common grace and special grace and their relationship to the work of Christ and the nature of God. Ironically therefore, although Thomas' thesis is primarily centred on a specific question within a specific period of history (1536–1675), I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the complexities and nuances of Reformed theology not only around the time of the Reformation, but in Reformed theology today.

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### ***Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia***

**P. Gifford**

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### **RÉSUMÉ**

*Cet ouvrage fait partie des « Études de Cambridge sur l'idéologie et la religion ». Elle examine comment la foi chrétienne a été reçue au Libéria, dans la période de 1980 à 1990, sous la dictature de Samuel Doe. L'auteur montre un fondamentalisme qui n'a rien fait pour s'opposer aux ravages d'un régime corrompu : cette sorte de christianisme n'a pas apporté grand-chose pour ce qui concerne le*