

Lynch, Michael J. *John Davenant's Hypothetical Universalism: A Defense of Catholic and Reformed Orthodoxy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

The heart of the argument is this—*Christ died sufficiently for all, effectually for the elect*. John Davenant found himself caught between the Remonstrants and Contra-Remonstrants. Michael J. Lynch asserts,

From Davenant the supralapsarian to Davenant the Arminian-leaning delegate to Dordt, readings of his hypothetical universalism have been relatively diverse. Because of the dogmatic intrigue the question of the extent of Christ's work often garners among theologians, it is not altogether surprising to find many theological judgments pronounced on Davenant's theology—either positively or negatively. (12)

Lynch masterfully analyzes the terms, concepts, events, and individuals related to John Davenant's hypothetical universalism. Lynch is a leading scholar on hypothetical universalism and the thought of John Davenant.

Chapter 1 offers an introduction, highlighting several of the reasons scholars place Davenant outside Reformed orthodoxy: (1) They define Reformed theology too narrowly, (2) They fail to understand the doctrine of the extent of Christ's death historically and developmentally, (3) They are sloppy, inconsistent, and unnuanced in their terminology, and (4) They incorrectly merge pre-Moïse Amyraut varieties of hypothetical universalism with French Amyraldianism, arguing that Davenant's "moderate" Calvinism was a step toward Arminianism. Lynch supplies a *Survey of Literature* and a helpful *Definition of Terms*. He affirms that his thesis will

examine Davenant's hypothetical universalism in the context of early modern Reformed orthodoxy. In light of the various misunderstandings of early modern hypothetical universalism (including English hypothetical universalism), as well as the paucity of studies touching on Davenant's theology in particular, this study will (1) give a detailed exposition of Davenant's doctrine of universal redemption in dialogue with his understanding of closely related doctrines, such as God's will, predestination, providence, and covenant theology, and (2) defend the thesis that Davenant's version of hypothetical universalism represents a significant strand of the Augustinian tradition, including the early modern Reformed tradition, over and against the popular—albeit inaccurate—thesis that his hypothetical universalism was a *via media* between Reformed orthodoxy and Arminianism. (18–19, 161–162)

Chapters 2–4 trace the historical debate from the patristics (esp. Augustine) through the early medieval period to scholasticism (esp. Lombardian Formula). Lynch follows Davenant’s own history as recorded in *De Morte Christi* (1). Davenant reveals how English hypothetical universalists understood various patristic and medieval theologians, serving to prove the catholicity of his theology (2). He illumines the fundamental categories of his Augustinianism, supplying the patristic origins for his view (3). He supplies a thorough doctrinal history of his own (4). He furnishes his own explanation of this history, thereby setting the stage for the first early modern controversies relating to Christ’s death (20).

The focus of chapter 3 is the impact the Lombardian formula had on the debates on the extent of Christ’s atonement during the first early modern era. It offers the important context for the Remonstrant controversy and the Synod of Dordt, while providing the background for Davenant’s views. Davenant believed his view was not “substantially different from those earlier Reformed, medieval, and patristic theologians who confessed that Christ died sufficiently for all, but efficaciously for the elect” (68).

The ascent of English hypothetical universalism is the subject of chapter 4. It focuses on Davenant’s role at Dordt and his resultant treatise, *De Morte Christi* (21). Davenant’s view is not some insipient form of Arminianism: “To the degree that the Canons of Dordt teach definite atonement, to that same degree Davenant... also taught the doctrine of definite atonement” (99).

Chapter 5 delivers a meticulous exposition of hypothetical universalism as expressed in Davenant’s *De Morte Christi*. Lynch shows the continuity and discontinuity with earlier theological understandings of the death of Christ, revealing a significant trajectory of Augustinian and Reformed orthodoxy (21, 130–131). Davenant never saw his view as Reformed orthodoxy-lite, but as an apologetic (and reclamation) of an earlier form of the Reformed tradition (Augustinianism) reflecting the truth of an *ordained sufficiency* (21, 113–122, 124).

Lynch examines Davenant’s covenant theology in chapter 6, particularly as it supplies the framework for God’s saving mercy toward humanity, proving his theology does not (or necessarily) lead to certain conclusions such as limited atonement (21, 145). Lynch argues, “Davenant’s federal theology is not nearly as unique as certain scholars have argued when viewed within the wider theological world in which Davenant was a part... It simply will not do to read Reformed theology in light of one figure, such as Calvin, Beza, or Perkins” (146).

Chapter 7 stresses Davenant's doctrine of the divine will and how it bolsters his view of the extent of Christ's death, as well as his differentiation between three aspects of God's will (*Complacitiae, Providentialis, and Beneplaciti*). Lynch explains how Davenant avoids theological contradiction in suggesting both a universal and particular outcome of Christ's death (21–22, 154–159).

Chapter 8 recaps Lynch's thesis, asserting Davenant's hypothetical universalism as Reformed and catholic (22, 162). Lynch insists, "Instead of depicting Davenant's hypothetical universalism as a softening of the Reformed tradition, it is perhaps better explained as a defense of the older, even ancient language of Christ dying for all sufficiently, in the elect efficaciously" (161).

Lynch provides a great example on how to do historical theology. His precision with the historical and theological data is impressive. One does not have to agree with Lynch's conclusions to appreciate his fair and rigorous methodology. His views are clear, and he argues his thesis in a compelling way. He does all the heavy lifting, consulting an abundance of resources. Of the 450 resources cited, 229 are primary. Lynch synthesizes all these down to a cogent and condensed work, which ultimately stimulates the reader's interest in *De Morte Christi*.

To be sure, Lynch's work is challenging and requires time and focus. Nevertheless, the reward is worth the effort. There are many encouraging insights along the way:

The gospel offer, which ministers are called to proclaim indiscriminately, must include the proposition that *God is, according to his divine justice and on account of the personal work of Jesus Christ, able to forgive any person of his or her sins*. For this proposition to be true, it must antecedently be the case that God in Christ made a remedy for every person. (109)

Immediately, thoughts go to the Reformed Baptist pastor Charles Spurgeon, who many viewed as a Reformed anomaly given his indiscriminate offer of the gospel. Could it be that Davenant's view of an ordained sufficiency in some way found a resting place in his fellow-Englishman's hermeneutic of *crucicentrism and conversionism*?

—Tony A. Rogers
Southside Baptist Church (Bowie, Texas)