

Foreword

THE MIDDLE L OF the infamous TULIP refers to Limited Atonement, a topic of controversy amongst Calvinists especially. While many fondly imagine that the acronym goes back to Calvin, or at least to the Synod of Dort (1618–19), Paul Hartog is well aware of its twentieth-century origin. It is not only the origin of the acronym that is problematic. There are objections to the word “atonement” and even more to the word “limited.” Some prefer to talk of “definite atonement” or “particular redemption.” Again, there is no one version of limited atonement (or whatever one chooses to call it) but many different ones. Hartog cites examples of theologians teaching “unlimited atonement” alongside “limited redemption,” or “unlimited expiation” alongside “particular redemption.” This book helpfully demonstrates the range of different views that can be gathered under the umbrella of “limited atonement.”

Those arguing for one side or the other on this topic have often sought to conscript Calvin into their ranks. There has been a vigorous debate among Reformed (and other) theologians as to whether or not Calvin held to “limited atonement” (however that is understood). This is the question that lies at the heart of this book, though it is very helpfully set in the context of the wider debate in the history of Reformed theology.

Hartog argues that, for Calvin, “Christ died intentionally as a sufficient expiation and redemption for the sins of all humanity, and he died intentionally for the efficacious salvation of the elect in particular.” I remember James B. Torrance telling me about a debate that he and his brother had with John Murray among others. Murray asked whether Christ’s death makes our salvation certain or merely possible. The Torrances replied that our salvation is made certain, not just possible, by the combined work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The structure of Calvin’s *Institutes* supports their response. At the end of Book 2 he expounds the

work of Christ. At the beginning of Book 3 he states that “all that [Christ] has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race” (not “for the salvation of the elect”) is “useless and has no value for us” until the Holy Spirit by faith unites us to Christ (3:1:1). This is not just a random quotation from the *Institutes* but involves the very structure of the work. Book 2 is about what Christ has done for the whole human race; Book 3 is about how the Holy Spirit makes this effective for the elect.

Many books and learned articles have been written on this topic—as can be seen by perusing the twenty-six pages of bibliography. I have read a number of these and am very happy to commend the present work. Paul Hartog offers a fairly argued study that reviews the full range of evidence and that avoids the trap of expounding Calvin in isolation from the tradition to which he belongs. Also, as has already been indicated, he recognizes the complexity of the issue and avoids simplistic solutions. This book is definitely a must for anyone with an interest in the topic.

Tony Lane
Professor of Historical Theology
London School of Theology