

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Johannes Polyander and the inefficacious internal call: An Arminian compromise?

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Abstract

In the thirtieth disputation of the *Leiden Synopsis* (1622), Johannes Polyander elucidates what he considers to be the Reformed doctrine of *vocatio*. In his explanation of this doctrine, Polyander makes surprising statements concerning the internal call. He teaches that not only the external call, but also the internal call can come to the reprobate. It does not do so all the time, but it does so sometimes, especially in the sphere of the covenant. Yet, when it does, that internal call is ineffectual. This doctrine of an ineffectual internal call is not found in the Canons of Dordt (1618–19), nor in disputations held before the cycle of disputations that became the *Leiden Synopsis*. Was Polyander's view a compromise with Arminianism? Or was Polyander actually defending Dordt's doctrine? This article builds on Henk van Den Belt's cursory conclusion to this question by providing proof that Polyander was in fact defending Dordt.

Keywords: Arminius; calling; Dordt; internal call; *Leiden Synopsis*; reprobation

The *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (*Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, or, the *Leiden Synopsis*) is a collection of disputations held by the Leiden University faculty between 1620 and 1624. The disputations cover all the topics of the traditional *loci* of dogmatics, together representing a key Reformed system of theology published shortly after the Synod of Dordt.¹ The word 'purer' is in the title due to the fact that, before the Synod of Dordt, the Leiden faculty had included Arminian theologians. Arminius himself had succeeded Junius in Leiden in 1603, and later Episcopius was hired to teach theology. After the Synod of Dordt, however, Arminian sympathisers were removed from the school and the country. The Leiden curators and faculty, aware that the reputation of the school could be called into question, wanted to make known their orthodoxy by publishing a 'pure' theology in harmony with the decisions of the great Synod.

In the thirtieth disputation of the *Leiden Synopsis* (held in 1622), Johannes Polyander, professor of theology at the university, elucidated what he considers to be the Reformed doctrine of *vocatio*.² In his explanation of this important doctrine,

¹The Synod of Dordt is dated 1618–19. The *Synopsis* was published in 1625.

²Henk van den Belt, 'The *Vocatio* in the Leiden Disputations (1597–1631): The Influence of the Arminian Controversy on the Concept of the Divine Call to Salvation', *Church History and Religious Culture* 92/4 (2012), p. 546.

Polyander makes surprising statements concerning the internal call. He teaches that not only the external call, but also the internal call can come to the reprobate. It does not do so *all the time*, but it does so *sometimes*, especially in the sphere of the covenant. Yet, when it does, that internal call is ineffectual: 'Nor does God always link the two ways of calling [external and internal] equally or in the same way, but the concurrence of both of them is effective in some people and ineffective in others.'³ Polyander goes on to explain, 'The ineffective concurrence of the two ways is observed in three kinds of people.'⁴ These three kinds of people are the three kinds of hearers who ultimately reject the word in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. These 'three-soil' hearers 'hear' the word, and to some extent 'receive' it, though they are never regenerated. This is evidence, says Polyander, of an internal, ineffective calling.⁵

Polyander views this internal yet ineffective call as the work of the Holy Spirit: 'The way of calling when we examine it from opposing perspectives, is divided into external and internal. The former is achieved outwardly through the administration of Word and sacraments, the latter inwardly through the working of the Holy Spirit.'⁶ The Holy Spirit is not involved only in the efficacious call to the elect, but He is involved in *any* internal call, efficacious or inefficacious.

In making this claim, Polyander has Hebrews 6:4–6 in view: 'For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made *partakers of the Holy Ghost*, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame' (AV).⁷ As Polyander sees it, the three-soil hearers who are not regenerated receive something of an internal call of the Holy Spirit in them, though this calling is ineffective.

This doctrine of an ineffective internal call is not found in disputations on *vocatio* held by the Leiden faculty previous to the one held by Polyander in 1622 and recorded in the *Leiden Synopsis*. Beginning in the year 1596, and ending with the cycle that became the *Synopsis*, the Leiden faculty held eleven cycles of disputations. Prior to Polyander's disputation on *vocatio* in 1622, 'the internal call – or rather the combination of the external and internal calls – is synonymous with the efficacious call. This is the case in all the disputations prior to the Synod of Dort.'⁸ Two examples will suffice. Franciscus Junius held a disputation on the *vocatio* in Leiden in 1597. In this disputation he identified the internal call with the efficacious call: 'Junius says that the call is either merely by external revelation, which is inefficacious, or by both internal and external revelation, which is efficacious to salvation.'⁹ Franciscus Gomarus, in a disputation held in 1600, 'distinguishes the call to salvation in an external call (of all people) and an internal call (of the pious or elect)'.¹⁰

³Henk van den Belt et al., *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae/Synopsis of a Purer Theology: Latin Text and English Translation*, 3 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 2:223.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 221. See also thesis 37 (2:223): 'To other people the Holy Spirit offers a little taste of his grace so that their hearts are touched by a momentary feeling of happiness. These receive the gospel like seed on rocky soil.' This 'taste of His grace' does not imply saving intentions, as will be shown below.

⁷Polyander refers specifically to Hebrews 6:6 in thesis 40 when speaking of the gifts that flow to hypocrites when the internal ineffective call comes to them along with the external call.

⁸Van den Belt, 'The *Vocatio*', p. 548.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 549.

These facts raise the question, why the change in the doctrine of *vocatio* found in Polyander and the *Leiden Synopsis*? More specifically, why does this change occur *only after* the watershed decisions of the Synod of Dordt? The fact that the change *does* occur *only after* the Synod of Dordt indicates that the answer to the question must take into account the rise and rejection of Arminianism (Remonstrantism). This leaves two most likely possibilities: (1) either Polyander is compromising with Arminianism by teaching an ineffectual internal call given to the reprobate, or (2) he is combating Arminianism by the same teaching.

Henk van den Belt is the only scholar I have discovered who is cognisant of this change in the doctrine of *vocatio* after the Synod of Dordt and who addresses the issue of the inefficacious internal call in Polyander. Van den Belt is one of the editors of the English publication of the *Leiden Synopsis*. In an article titled ‘The *Vocatio* in the Leiden Disputations (1597–1631): The Influence of the Arminian Controversy on the Concept of the Divine Call to Salvation’,¹¹ he argues that Polyander is combating Arminianism by this new development:

The background or stimulus of this more nuanced view most probably is the claim by Arminius that the concurrence of the outward and inward call is efficacious, be it that in his case the effect ultimately depended on the consent of the faith of the believer. After the Synod of Dort, Reformed theologians felt a need to specify when and how the internal call had effect and did not assume that the combination of outward and inward calls was always salvific.¹²

I do not disagree with Henk van den Belt’s conclusion, namely, that by his teaching of an ineffectual internal call, Polyander was not attempting to compromise with Arminianism but was attempting to defend the faith from Arminian doctrine. My intention with this article is rather to bolster this point. Van den Belt grounds his conclusion in the fact that Arminius believed the concurrence of the external and internal call was always efficacious (at least to start). Polyander, he concludes, wanted to distinguish the Reformed view from this position. But *all* of the Leiden faculty before the Synod of Dordt taught that the combination of the internal and external call was efficacious, including Gomarus.¹³ This was standard Reformed teaching. That Arminius taught the combination of the internal and external call was efficacious (in its beginning) is not sufficient explanation for the change after Dordt. Van den Belt’s own conclusion here is a small part of an article with more expansive intentions. His conclusion demands more research. In this article I will show that Polyander’s doctrine of an inefficacious internal call is an attempted defence of Dordt’s theology against Arminian doctrine. I will proceed by first investigating the Arminian doctrine of *vocatio*. Then I will consider the possibility that Polyander is compromising with Arminian doctrine, which possibility I will reject. My three grounds for rejecting this possibility will be drawn from the *Synopsis* itself, Polyander’s disputation on *vocatio* and a comparison of Polyander’s teaching on *vocatio* with that of Wollebius and Francis Turretin. We will then be able to see Polyander’s polemical purpose in teaching an internal inefficacious call.

¹¹See n. 2 above.

¹²van den Belt, ‘The *Vocatio*’, p. 552.

¹³As noted above.

Arminius' theology of *vocatio*

Jacobus Arminius held a disputation on *vocatio* in Leiden, 25 July 1609.¹⁴ This disputation was the last theological treatise Arminius wrote before he died three months later.¹⁵ In thesis XI, Arminius states what was standard Leiden theology regarding the call at the time: 'The efficacy consists in the concurrence of both the internal and external call.'¹⁶ Nonetheless, in thesis X, Arminius had already set forth his conditional theology: 'The remote end is the salvation of the elect and the glory of God, in regard to which the very vocation to grace is a means ordained by God ... But the answer by which obedience is yielded to this call, is the condition which, through the appointment of God, is also requisite and necessary for obtaining this end.'¹⁷ The foreseen answer to the call is the condition to the end of actual salvation by the call.

If Arminius's view was that the concurrence of the internal and external call was efficacious, and yet salvation was not guaranteed unless man fulfilled the condition of obedience to the call (many of whom did not), what precisely was the efficacy of the concurrence of the internal and external call? For Arminius, the concurrence of the internal and external call did not irresistibly save him. Instead, it irresistibly brought a man into a state in which his will was liberated, and from there, saved him only if the now liberated will consented. The initial state to which the grace of calling brought a man was 'an intermediate stage between being unregenerate and regenerate'.¹⁸ A man still needed more grace from calling to help him believe in Christ for salvation. But the will, now freed, could choose to resist or not resist the further grace of calling.

Thus, the grace of calling began irresistibly when the external and internal call were concurrent, but continued resistibly: 'For all his affirmations of the necessity of grace from beginning to end in the process of salvation, he [Arminius] still affirmed that the person under the influence of grace can resist it and, in order to be saved, must freely accept it of his or her own volition by not resisting it.'¹⁹

Because saving grace came to all who heard the preaching of the Word, and that saving grace was not effectual but ultimately resistible, we would expect to hear from Arminius an explicit confirmation that the internal call goes to more than those who are saved. This is indeed the case. In his work, 'Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed', Arminius states concerning the doctrine of *vocatio*, 'Internal vocation is granted even to those who do not comply with the call.'²⁰ He then adds that the intention of God with this expansive internal call is to save all who are called internally: 'Whomever God calls, He calls ... with a will desirous of

¹⁴To situate the timing of this disputation, 1609 is nine years after Gomarus held the same disputation in Leiden, nine years before the Synod of Dordt, sixteen years before the *Leiden Synopsis* was published.

¹⁵Jacobus Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, 3 vols, ed. James Nichols (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1956), 1:15.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 573.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p. 164.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 163.

²⁰James Arminius and Carl Bangs, *The Works of James Arminius: The London Edition*, 3 vols, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986), 2:721. The 'Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed' were published posthumously. No one knows exactly when they were written. See Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), p. 332.

their repentance and salvation.²¹ And, Arminius continues, there is no other will of God, as in the will of God's decree, that is contrary to this intention.²²

This was directly opposed to the irresistible power of the concurrence of the external and internal call on the elect taught by the Reformed. Arminius himself recognised that the issue at dispute in his theology was ultimately whether or not the intention to save and the grace of God demonstrating that intention to save were irresistible all the way to salvation:

For the whole controversy reduces itself to the solution of this question, 'is the grace of God a certain irresistible force?' That is, the controversy does not relate to those actions or operations which may be ascribed to grace, (for I acknowledge and inculcate as many of these actions or operations as any man ever did,) but it relates solely to the mode of operation, *whether it be irresistible or not*.²³

Arminius taught (1) that the saving grace of calling came internally to all who hear the word with the intention to save, and (2) that saving grace began irresistibly, but in the end was resistible.

Episcopius and the Remonstrants

In 1621, Simon Episcopius, former student of Arminius, erstwhile professor at Leiden, and leading representative of the Remonstrant party after the death of Arminius, authored the *Confession or Declaration of the Remonstrant Pastors*.²⁴ Regarding the call to faith, Episcopius says in this work, 'Faith, conversion, and all good works, and all godly and saving actions which are able to be thought, are to be ascribed solidly [*sic*] to the grace of God in Christ as their principal and primary cause.'²⁵ This saving grace for faith, conversion and good works is not limited to the elect, but is given to all who come under the proclamation of the Word: 'According to the most free dispensation of the divine will, still the Holy Spirit confers such grace to all, both in general and in particular, to whom the Word of faith is ordinarily preached ...'²⁶ The effect of this saving grace is to free a man from his bondage and give him what he needs for salvation.

Freed from bondage, he must now make a choice. This grace will save him if only he will not resist its power: 'Still the Holy Spirit confers such grace to all ... as is sufficient for begetting faith in them, and for gradually carrying on their saving conversion. And therefore sufficient grace for faith and conversion not only comes to those who actually believe and are converted, but also to those who do not believe and are not really converted.'²⁷ This is an internally worked saving grace given to all with the intention of saving all. 'This calling, however, is effected and executed ... with a gracious and serious intention to save and so to bring to faith all those who are called, whether they really believe and are saved or not.'²⁸

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Arminius, *Writings of Arminius*, 1:253–4.

²⁴Simon Episcopius, *The Arminian Confession of 1621*, ed. and trans. Mark Ellis (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2005), pp. 105–10.

²⁵Episcopius, *Arminian Confession*, p. 108. N.b., not 'only cause' but 'primary cause'.

²⁶Ibid., p. 109.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., p. 106.

What makes the difference between the believing and the unbelieving then? It is not the grace of calling, for all who hear the preaching of the word receive sufficient grace, yet not all believe. Neither is it the intention of God to save that makes the difference, for God intends to save all who hear the preached word. The difference is what a man does with the continuing grace of calling, having had his will freed by grace under the preaching of that Word: 'Yet, a man may despise and reject the grace of God and resist its operation, so that when he is divinely called to faith and obedience, he is able to render himself unfit to believe ...'²⁹

Just as with Arminius, the later Remonstrants taught concerning *vocatio* (1) that the saving grace of calling went to all who hear the word, internally with the intention to save, and (2) that saving grace began irresistibly, but in the end was resistible.

Did Polyander intend to compromise?

The possibility exists that Polyander intended to compromise with the Remonstrants by his formulation of an inefficacious internal call. Four considerations can be raised in support of this claim.

First, both the Arminians and Polyander taught an ultimately ineffective internal call that went beyond the elect. Second, both appealed to the parable of the sower to support their doctrine. We observed above that Polyander appealed to the three-soil hearers in Matthew 13. When Episcopius confessed that the grace of calling is ultimately resistible, he also turned immediately to the parable of the sower for proof.³⁰ Episcopius published his *Arminian Confession* in 1621. Polyander held his disputation on *vocatio* in 1622.

Third, it is notable that there is no mention of an inefficacious internal call to the reprobate in the Canons of Dordt. This is true in spite of the fact that the Canons speak of the parable of the sower in relation to *vocatio*. Instead of explaining the sowing to some as an ineffective internal call of the Spirit, the Canons of Dordt say that the three-soil hearers are only rejecting the *external* call, the ministry of the Word:

It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ offered therein, nor of God who calls men by the gospel, and confers upon them various gifts, that those who are called by the *ministry of the word*, refuse to come, and be converted: the fault lies in themselves; some of whom when called, regardless of their danger, reject the word of life; others, though they receive it, suffer it not to make a lasting impression on their heart; therefore, their joy, arising only from a temporary faith, soon vanishes, and they fall away; while others choke the seed of the word by perplexing cares, and the pleasures of this world, and produce no fruit. – This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower. Matthew 13.³¹

Though the Canons speak of a temporary faith, they do not speak of an inefficacious internal call. In addition, they do not mention the work of the Holy Spirit in calling the three-soil hearers.

When the Canons of Dordt do bring up the work of the internal call of the Holy Spirit they speak of it as effectual:

²⁹Ibid., p. 108.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations* (New York: Harper, 1919), p. 589.

But when God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, he not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illumines their minds by his Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, pervades the inmost recesses of the man; he opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, he quickens; from being evil, disobedient and refractory, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.³²

Here the Spirit is said effectually to draw the elect by an internal irresistible working. Polyander clearly is adding something that differs from the teaching of the Canons of Dordt.

Fourth, it would not be impossible to think Polyander capable of compromising with Arminian theology. Polyander was a mollifying figure with respect to the Remonstrants.³³ He has been called ‘the orthodox but conciliatory Calvinist’.³⁴ In fact, as a condition to receiving the chair of theology at Leiden, Polyander ‘promised the Curators to tolerate Arminian colleagues’.³⁵ Although some would argue that his conciliation with Episcopius that allowed the two of them to teach together before the Synod of Dordt was more feigned than real, Polyander certainly was a man who sought peace.³⁶

Polyander did not intend a compromise of Dordt but a defence of Dordt

Despite these possibilities, I do not believe such compromise is Polyander’s purpose in teaching an internal inefficacious call to some reprobate. For all his conciliatory attitude toward the Remonstrants, Polyander was still an orthodox Reformed theologian. He was a delegate to the Synod of Dordt, functioning as secretary of the drafting committee of the Canons themselves, and therefore also editor of the Canons.³⁷ In addition, he was charged by the Synod with helping to ‘translate the Synod-ordered *Staten-Bijbel*’.³⁸ Add to this that, though he was a man who sought peace and was able to labour beside Episcopius at Leiden for a number of years, he did publish an anonymous attack on Episcopius’ theology even *before* the Synod of Dordt met to deal with the Remonstrant question.³⁹

Regarding the publication of Polyander’s disputation on *vocatio* in the *Leiden Synopsis*, it is important to remember that, though each disputation was the work of

³²Ibid., p. 590.

³³Johannes Polyander, *Prabook World Biographical Encyclopedia*; <https://prabook.com/web/johannes.polyander/2218573>, accessed 29 November 2021.

³⁴C. C. Barfoot and Richard Todd, *The Great Emporium: The Low Countries as a Cultural Crossroads in the Renaissance and the Eighteenth Century* (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1992), p. 90.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Jeremy Bangs, ‘Johannes Polyander: Een Dienaar van Kerk En Universiteit: EBSCOhost’, *Church History* 52/3 (Sept. 1983), p. 375.

³⁷Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg (eds), *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 299.

³⁸Bangs, ‘Johannes Polyander’, p. 375.

³⁹Ibid. The attack was published in 1616.

its own author, the publication of the *Synopsis* was the combined effort of the whole faculty. The son of Antonius Walaeus (one of the other faculty members involved in forming the *Synopsis*) later reported that ‘the professors were concerned to avoid division within the Leiden faculty. They even decided not to pass their judgment separately, but only together as colleagues; no theses were to be disputed publicly unless all colleagues had seen and approved them.’⁴⁰ It is highly unlikely that the faculty together would brook any compromise with the Arminian position. The *Leiden Synopsis* was written in order to exhibit the orthodoxy of the Leiden faculty regarding Dordt’s rejection of Arminian theology.⁴¹

But the question centres on the theology of the call itself. Did Polyander teach (1) that the internal inefficacious call was a saving grace of God intending to save those who ultimately did not believe? And did he teach (2) that this internal inefficacious call was an irresistible saving grace of God? If so, then all other evidence falls away; he has compromised with Arminianism. In the disputation itself, however, one finds proof that Polyander did not intend either of these things with his doctrine of an internal inefficacious call.

In the disputation Polyander states that one goal with any inefficacious calling (internal or external) is to harden and leave without excuse: ‘The accidental goal (*finis*) of the ineffective calling is the conviction of stubborn disobedience and complete inexcusableness in the hearts of the those who impudently withstand and interrupt the Holy Spirit as He speaks through the mouths of the preachers.’⁴² Both Arminius and Episcopius were unwilling to make this a goal (*finis*) of the call with regard to those who do not believe, because it implies that God has no saving intention with regard to the non-elect. In Arminius’ ‘Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed’, Arminius says of the *vocatio*: “That man should be rendered inexcusable” is neither the proximate end, nor that which was intended by God, to the Divine Vocation when it is first made and has not been repulsed.⁴³ Arminius here rejects the notion that God has any intention to harden before man rejects the call. For Arminius the only intention of God in *vocatio* is to save, and therefore, only when the gospel is rejected finally and fully does hardening occur as an *effect*. But God did not intend this effect in any way. Importantly, in his 1609 disputation, Arminius says, ‘The accidental *result* of vocation, and that which is *not of itself intended by God*, is the rejection of the word of grace.’⁴⁴ Polyander uses similar language in his disputation in 1622, with key differences.⁴⁵ First, whereas for Polyander, the accidental goal (*finis*) is the conviction of stubborn hearts, for Arminius this is the accidental *result*. And whereas Arminius emphasises that God has no intention with regard to this hardness, Polyander gives no such qualification. It appears that for Polyander God does have an intent to harden, which intention is opposed to an intention in God to save.

Episcopius also repudiates any notion of an intention in God to harden, understanding this would limit God’s intention to save to only some: ‘For whoever God calls to

⁴⁰Van den Belt et al., *Synopsis*, 1:2.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, n. 3.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 227. ‘Conviction of stubborn disobedience’ is hardening. Though this is termed an ‘accidental goal’ by Polyander, that is, a goal not essential as the main goal of the calling, it is nonetheless a *goal*. The importance of that word is seen below.

⁴³Arminius, *Works of Arminius: London Edition*, 2:721.

⁴⁴Arminius, *Writings of Arminius*, p. 574 (emphasis added).

⁴⁵As quoted above.

faith and salvation he calls ... also with a sincere and unfeigned intention of saving them. Thus, he never willed any prior decree of absolute reprobation of undeserved blinding or hardening concerning them.⁴⁶ Polyander, however, has hardening and leaving without excuse the accidental goal. This is directly opposed to Arminianism's intention of God to save all by calling, internal and external.

Enough evidence exists also to say that Polyander teaches that when God graciously intends to save, His saving grace is directed to the elect and is irresistible. In his 1609 disputation Arminius said the love of God (philanthropy) is the inward moving cause in God of every call of the gospel (both external and internal): 'The inly-moving cause [i.e. the cause within God himself that leads him to save creatures] is the grace, mercy and (philanthropy) "love of God our Savior toward man;" (Titus iii, 4,5;) by which He is inclined to relieve the misery of sinful man, and to impart unto him eternal felicity.'⁴⁷ Van den Belt points out that 'after the Synod of Dordt the philanthropy of God is no longer mentioned as cause of the external call'.⁴⁸ In fact, Polyander explicitly denies it is a cause:

Therefore they are idle dreamers who extend God's gracious calling to each and every human being. For they mix up God's love towards humanity (whereby God embraces all people as his own creatures) with the love whereby He has ordained to take into his grace a select number of people from the common crowd of sinners who are perishing for their own wickedness, and to guide them in Jesus Christ, the Son in whom He delights.⁴⁹

Here Polyander is unwilling to say that the call that goes to the reprobate is evidence of God's gracious saving work toward them. To say so would be for Polyander to confuse what he terms the general love of God for his creatures with his love that 'takes into his grace', which is limited to the elect.

That Polyander's view restricts God's gracious saving intention to the elect, regardless of whether or not the Holy Spirit internally calls the reprobate, is further confirmed at the end of the disputation. There he makes a distinction between the *mercy* of God manifest in the call when it goes beyond the elect, and the 'saving *imparting* of God's *grace*' found in the 'effective calling' of God's own. 'The highest goal of both callings [ineffective and the effective] is the manifestation of God's mercy towards those whom He calls. The subordinate goal of the effective calling, and the goal proper to it, is the saving imparting of God's grace.'⁵⁰ All men see that God is a God of mercy by the general call. But the effective call imparts God's grace. For this reason, Polyander says, 'although some gifts flow forth from the concurrence of the callings and are shared by hypocrites along with the elect (i.e. the gift of knowing and tasting God's good Word, and the virtues of the coming age), they are not sufficient for the salvation of the hypocrites.' It appears therefore that the reason why Polyander considers the internal call to be ineffectual with the three-soil hearers is because there is no gracious intention to save in it.

⁴⁶Episcopus, *Arminian Confession*, p. 110.

⁴⁷Arminius, *Writings of Arminius*, 1:571.

⁴⁸Van den Belt, 'The *Vocatio*', p. 555.

⁴⁹Van den Belt et al., *Synopsis*, 2:219.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 225.

It was thus not merely the *mode* of the call (external or internal) that was at issue in the debate between the Reformed and the Arminians/Remonstrants, it was also God's intentionality or lack thereof, and the resistibility or irresistibility of that intention in his saving grace. The *Opinions* of the Remonstrants that were presented to the Synod of Dortd make this very clear: 'Whomever God calls to salvation, he calls seriously, that is, with a sincere and completely unhypocritical *intention and will* to save.'⁵¹ For the Remonstrants, God's intention and will to save was coordinate with the internal call which comes to all. In contrast, Polyander does not coordinate the internal call and the intention to save in every case.

Our understanding of Polyander is consistent with the theology of others of his day who were seeking to present the orthodox faith of Dortd. Johannes Wollebius provides a key point of comparison. Wollebius was a preacher and professor in Basel. He published his *Compendium of Theologiae Christianae* in 1626. Beardslee says of this work:

It cannot be denied that its extensive use during the seventeenth century, its brevity, clarity, and faithful, positive expression of what Reformed theologians were saying in the decade of the Synod of Dortd and would keep on saying, entitle it to consideration as an avenue to an over-all picture of the accepted 'orthodox' understanding of the Reformed faith – the 'teaching commonly accepted in our churches' on which Voetius, Turretin, and others set such store.⁵²

Wollebius' intention aligns with that of the *Leiden Synopsis*.

Though he does not make as much of a point of it as Polyander, Wollebius does speak of some possible internal aspects of calling with respect to some of the reprobate: 'It is called internal because the calling of the reprobate is only external, by the word; or if they are to some extent enlightened and internally moved, the change is only temporary.'⁵³ Again, 'From the above, the differences between common and special calling are evident. The first is often merely external. The second is internal.'⁵⁴ If the common calling is *often* merely external, then there are times when it is also internal. And since this is the *common* calling being described, this internal calling too is ineffectual. Interestingly, Wollebius immediately turns to the parable of the sower in this connection, explaining that the three-soil hearers who ultimately are not converted are those who receive some kind of internal ineffective call.⁵⁵ The difference between Polyander and Wollebius is that Wollebius never mentions this possible internal call as the work of the Holy Spirit or references Hebrews 6:4–6, even if it may be implied.

⁵¹P. Y. De Jong (ed.), *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dortd, 1618–1619* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), pp. 226–7; emphasis added. The Remonstrants defined the serious call as 'intention and will to save'. Contrast this with the Canons, which define the seriousness and genuineness of the call as instead, 'For God hath most earnestly and truly shown in His Word what is pleasing to Him, namely, that those who are called should come to Him' (i.e. the will of His command). See also Raymond Blacketer, 'The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Reexamination of the So-Called Well-Meant Offer of Salvation', *Calvin Theological Journal* 35/1 (Apr. 2000), pp. 41–2. The *Opinions* of the Remonstrants were likely written at least in their final form by Jan Uytenbogaert.

⁵²John W. Beardslee et al., *Reformed Dogmatics: J. Wollebius, G. Voetius, F. Turretin* (Oxford: OUP, 1965), p. 11.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 161.

Nonetheless, the teaching of an ineffectual internal call to some reprobate is not Polyander's alone.

According to Wollebius, the goal of God with calling is not that all are saved: 'Its purpose is the glory of God and the salvation of the elect. This is served both by the glory of his mercy toward the elect who are responsive to the calling, and by the glory of his justice toward the reprobate who are disobedient.'⁵⁶ God's *mercy* in the *vocatio* is for the elect, His *justice* is for the reprobate. And again: 'We grant that common calling is enough to take away any excuse from the reprobate, although it is not enough for salvation.'⁵⁷ And most explicitly: 'As to the reprobate, although they are not called "according to his purpose," or to *salvation*, nevertheless they are called in earnest ...'⁵⁸ Wollebius states that the reprobate, even if called internally, are not 'called to salvation'.⁵⁹

Conversely, Wollebius speaks of the saving grace of calling as irresistible and limits that saving grace to the elect:

The 'matter' or object of [special] calling is elect man. ... It is absurd to suppose that this grace of calling is extended to all, since not even that calling which we have considered above reaches all men. ... The grace of calling is absolutely irresistible, not with respect to our corrupt nature, which is harder than stone, but with respect to the Holy Spirit, by whom his elect are so drawn that they inevitably follow.⁶⁰

If the grace of calling is irresistible, and if an internal call can be resisted, then God has no gracious intention to save in the internal ineffectual call.

Francis Turretin's doctrine of *vocatio* with respect to an inefficacious internal call upon some of the reprobate is also worth examining. Turretin was also intent on explaining the orthodox faith of Dordt. Turretin was 'a great synthesizer and defender of Reformed orthodoxy. He frequently defends and expounds the declarations of the Synod of Dort in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*'.⁶¹ Turretin treats the doctrine of *vocatio* in particular with explicit reference to the canons of Dordt.⁶² He begins by explaining the external and internal call: 'The former takes place only by the ministry of the Word and sacraments (which are the external means of application). The latter however, takes place with the additional internal and omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit.'⁶³ Turretin maintains this strict distinction between the two aspects of calling for nine pages. But when he takes up polemic against the Arminian doctrine of

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 116.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 160.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 116; emphasis added.

⁵⁹Making reference to the reprobate not being called 'according to His purpose' is significant in this regard as well. This speaks to God's lack of intention to save. Turretin explains, 'They who are called with the intention of salvation are "called according to purpose" because that intention is the act of election and the effecting of the purpose. Now it is certain that no reprobates are called according to purpose because thus they would both love God and be necessarily justified, etc (v. 30), which cannot be said of them.' Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1994), 2:506.

⁶⁰Beardslee, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 159.

⁶¹Blacketer, 'The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed', p. 59.

⁶²Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:507.

⁶³Ibid., p. 502.

vocatio,⁶⁴ he admits that at times there is an internal aspect to the general call: 'Still we do not deny that in a certain sense the division can be admitted if a sufficiency...is meant...both with regard to external means and internal illumination for a knowledge of the truth and temporary faith (Heb 10:26; Lk 8:13) and for conviction and inexcusability (*anapologian*, Jn 15:22).⁶⁵ Turretin adds that 'the reprobate mingled with the elect are favored with the external preaching of the word and sometimes an internal illumination of mind by which they mourn over their sins and congratulate themselves at least for a time concerning the word admitted'.⁶⁶ Again, the scripture to which Turretin appeals in speaking of this internal inefficacious call is the parable of the sower (this time from the version in Luke 8:13).⁶⁷

Turretin did not believe that God's intent with the internal ineffective call is to impart saving grace to the reprobate, but rather to draw out their hardness and hold them without excuse. This is consistent throughout Turretin's doctrine of *vocatio*. The 'Second Question' Turretin treats is, 'Are the reprobate, who partake of external calling, called with the design and intention on God's part that they should become partakers of salvation? And, this being denied, does it follow that God does not deal seriously with them, but hypocritically and falsely; or that he can be accused of any injustice? We deny.'⁶⁸ He explains:

we do deny that they are called with the intention that they should be made actual partakers of salvation (which God knew would never be the case because in his decree he had ordained otherwise concerning them). ... God cannot in calling intend the salvation of those whom he reprobated from eternity and from whom he decreed to withhold faith and other means leading to salvation. Otherwise he would intend what he knows is contrary to his own will and what he knew in eternity would never take place (and that it would not take place because he, who alone can, does not wish it to do it).⁶⁹

Turretin sees a kind of grace going to all in the *benefits* the reprobate have being under the word (restraint from many wickednesses and enormous crimes),⁷⁰ but grace with saving intention is limited to the elect alone and is irresistible:

However, the orthodox deny that God is bound to bestow such grace upon all and that he wills in fact to confer it and actually to impart it to each one. Rather he bestows it only on those who are the called according to his purpose (*viz.*, to the elect). XII. The reasons are: (1) saving grace is not extended beyond the decree, since it is its effect.⁷¹

Apparently after Dordt it had quickly become common to nuance the doctrine of *vocatio* by not so strictly coordinating the external call with the common ineffectual call, and

⁶⁴Third Question: Sufficient Grace. Is sufficient, subjective, and internal grace give to each and every one? We deny against the Romanists, Socinians, and Arminians.' *Ibid.*, p. 510.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 511.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 504.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 504–5.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 511.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 512–3.

the internal call with the effective saving call. At times the common call could have an internal ineffective component as well. Yet, this was not a compromise with Arminian theology, for those who taught it maintained that God's saving grace in this internal calling was not resistible, and that God had no frustrated intent to save by it.

Why did this teaching develop after the Synod of Dordt?

After the Synod of Dordt Polyander and others taught a possible internal call to the reprobate that was inefficacious. If they did so *not* to compromise with Arminianism, then the conclusion must be that they did so in order to defend the teaching of Dordt. From what has been said, the truth of this latter position should now be clear. The promoters of Arminianism were using the parable of the sower to teach that God issued an irresistible and efficacious call that freed the will of all to whom it came. This call was the combination of an external and internal call. In light of the parable of the sower and Hebrews 6:4–6, orthodox Reformed theologians did not believe they could respond to this by claiming there is no possible internal aspect to the call to the reprobate. Instead, they responded by nuancing the Reformed doctrine of *vocatio* by saying that the general call has an internal aspect at times, but that no saving intention in God is frustrated by that call, nor is resistible saving grace turned away. Rather, the intention for the reprobate is the same in the end as that of the ineffectual *external* call: to convict (harden) and to leave without excuse. For Polyander and others it was important to point out that God had more than one purpose with the internal call. He was not freeing the will by this internal call as the Arminians taught, leaving salvation to the autonomous will of man.

For Polyander in particular, this teaching regarding the internal ineffective call was no different from what he saw as the internal ineffective call that comes through nature. Polyander first addresses this general call through nature in his disputation in the *Synopsis*. This call through nature is not a call to salvation, because Christ is not found in general revelation. Rather it is a call to 'know and worship God the Creator (Acts 17:27; Rom 1:20). For this reason it may be called "the natural calling."⁷² This 'natural calling', Polyander explains, has both an internal and an external aspect, though it saves no one:

As for the generally occurring patterns of nature, they are partly internal – recorded on the hearts of all people – and partly external, engraved by God in the created things. The former kind is known by the name 'Law' (Romans 2:14), the latter by 'words that declare the glory of God' (Psalm 19:4).⁷³

Since this ineffectual call of God through nature is partly internal and does not indicate an intention of God to save, for Polyander there is no theological problem in saying that the special call is partly internal as well, though it too is ineffectual. It too is not a frustrated grace of God intending to save.

Conclusion

A change occurred in the presentation of the doctrine of *vocatio* among the Reformed after the Synod of Dordt. Previous to the Synod, the external call was presented as synonymous with the general ineffectual call, and the internal call was synonymous with the effectual saving call. The Canons of Dordt reflect this teaching. After the Synod

⁷²Van den Belt et al., *Synopsis*, 2:209.

⁷³Ibid.

some of the central defenders of Dordt began to nuance the doctrine by teaching an ineffectual internal call. Some might believe this was a compromise with Arminian theology, which also taught an internal call ultimately ineffectual to the non-elect. However, the evidence is decidedly in favour of the conclusion that this nuancing of the doctrine served the opposite purpose.

Arminius and his followers taught that the internal call *always* accompanied the external call and *always* carried sufficient grace to save, evidence of God's intention to save all who hear. Ultimately, God's intention was ineffective and in many instances was resisted. The Reformed responded by arguing that at times (following Heb 6:4–6 and Matt 13:18–23) the Spirit worked internally while the external call came upon a person. He gave the reprobate to 'taste of the heavenly gift' and yet ultimately in order to draw forth their innate rebellion and leave without excuse. The unbeliever did not resist and frustrate a saving grace intended to save the reprobate.

More work could be done to trace the doctrine of *vocatio* after this early period of orthodoxy to see if the doctrine of an inefficacious internal call continues through the period, and if so, how it is explained. For now, it is clear that Henk van den Belt's initial conclusion is correct. Polyander's doctrine of an inefficacious internal call is an attempted defence of Dordt's doctrine against Arminian theology.