

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

January, February 1990

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Calvinism and the Church

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Editor's note: This is an excerpt from chapter one of Calvinism in History.

What then, do we mean by Calvinism? I will let one answer who has gained the right to answer, and than whom no one is better qualified to answer – the Rev. Dr. Archibald Alexander Hodge.

He says: " 'Calvinism' is a term used to designate, not the opinions of an individual, but a mode of religious thought or a system of religious doctrines of which the person whose name it bears was an eminent expounder. There have been from the beginning only three generically distinct systems of doctrine, or modes of conceiving and adjusting the facts and principles understood to be revealed in the Scriptures: the Pelagian, which denies the guilt, corruption and moral impotence of man, and makes him independent of the supernatural assistance of God. At the opposite pole is the Calvinistic, which emphasizes the guilt and moral impotence of man, exalts the justice and sovereignty of God, and refers salvation absolutely to the undeserved favor and new creative energy of God. Between these comes the manifold and elastic system of compromise once known as Semi-Pelagianism, and in modern times as Arminianism, which admits man's original corruption, but denies his guilt; regards redemption as a compensation for innate, and consequently irresponsible, disabilities; and refers the moral restoration of the individual to the co-operation of the human with the divine energy, the determining factor being human will"

We have here, in succinct form, an accurate definition of the two systems of theology which are in active operation today, and which, Dr. Pusey says, "are now, and probably for the last time, in conflict" – Calvinism and Arminianism, the former taking its name from John Calvin, a Frenchman, born in 1519, and the latter taking its name from James Herman or (in Latin dress) Arminius, a Dutchman, born in 1560. These men did not originate the systems of doctrine which bear their names, but only expounded them more fully and developed them into a more perfect form. The same views were maintained at least as early as the fourth century, when Augustine and Pelagius stood in much the same attitude to each other as Calvin and Arminius in the sixteenth century. Hence Calvinism is frequently and correctly called Augustinianism; and Arminianism, Semi-Pelagianism. These are the two systems which are now most extensively held, and with the one or the other of them all other Christian theological systems have organic sympathies.

Out of Arianism grew Socinianism, and out of that modern Unitarianism, which makes Christ neither a man nor God, but a created being somewhere above angels and between humanity and Deity. And while Arminianism is neither Arian nor Socinian nor Unitarian, these all are Arminian. As the writer of the article "Arminianism" in the *American Cyclopaedia* says, "Every new phase of Arianism, to this day, is infallibly Arminian, though the organic connection of the two is not so manifest from the

distinctively Arminian side, at least in modern times."

Their organic connection might be easily traced, and their natural affinity easily shown, did it come within our present purpose. But there are other connections and affinities of these doctrines which demand our present consideration. Each of these two systems, Calvinism and Arminianism, has an organic connection and a natural affinity with a distinct form of church government – the Calvinistic with the presbyterial and independent form, and the Arminian with the prelatical or episcopal form. As a matter of fact, this has always been so. The Roman Episcopal Church has always been, as a Church, Arminian in doctrine, although her Thirty-nine Articles of Faith are Calvinistic. I once asked a learned Episcopal rector how it came that while his Confession of Faith is Calvinistic his Church is Arminian. Smiling, he replied, "The Calvinism in the Articles is so weak that you could drive a horse and cart through it at some points." That, I presume, accounts for it. It is not strong enough to hold the Church up to it or to resist the powerful tendency of Episcopacy to Arminian doctrines. The Methodist Episcopal Church also is, as a Church, Arminian. The fact, then, is that Arminianism and Episcopacy do naturally sympathize and affiliate. There is that in the Arminian doctrines of emotions and works which leads directly to the external forms and ceremonies of Prelacy or Episcopacy.

On the other hand, the Reformed churches which took the Presbyterian form of government have always been Calvinistic. As the Rev. Albert Barnes says, "There are no permanent Arminian, Pelagian, or Socinian presbyteries, synods, general assemblies on Earth. There are no permanent instances where these forms of belief or unbelief take on the presbyterian forms of ecclesiastical administration where they would be long retained."

This connection between the *doctrine* and the *form of worship* is not superficial or accidental, but inherent. A system of doctrine, as Pelagianism, which teaches salvation by our own good works or, as Arminianism, which teaches salvation partly by works and partly by grace, of necessity sympathizes

and affiliates with rites and ceremonies, and lays, in the very spirit of it, the foundation for a ritualistic service. Romanism, which is rigid Arminianism, and Presbyterianism, which is strict Calvinism are the very antipodes of each other, and have always been in the most uncompromising hostility. Hence the historical fact that the higher the "Churchman" the more intensely Arminian he is. "It is a conspicuous fact of English history," says Dr. Hodge, "that high views as to the prerogatives of the ministry have always antagonized Calvinistic doctrines." Hence also the simple republican form of worship in the Calvinistic churches.

Buckle, who, himself a fatalist, cannot be charged with partiality toward any Church, says: "It is an interesting fact that the doctrines which in England are called Calvinistic have always been connected with a democratic spirit, while those of Arminianism have found most favor among the aristocratic, or protective, party. In the republics of Switzerland, of North America and of Holland, Calvinism was always the popular creed. On the other hand, in those evil days immediately after the death of Elizabeth, when our liberties were in imminent peril, when the Church of England, aided by the Crown, attempted to subjugate the consciences of men, and when the monstrous claim of the divine right of Episcopacy was first put forward, – then it was that Arminianism became the cherished doctrine of the ablest and most ambitious of the ecclesiastical party. And in that sharp retribution which followed, the Puritans and Independents, by whom the punishment was inflicted, were, with scarcely an exception, Calvinists; nor should we forget that the first open movement against Charles proceeded from Scotland, where the principles of Calvin had long been in the ascendant."

Thus we see how Arminianism, taking to an aristocratic form of church government, tends toward a monarchy in civil affairs, while Calvinism, taking to a republican form of church government, tends toward a democracy in civil affairs.

Allow me to quote again from this eminent English author. He says: "the first circumstance by which we must be struck is, that Calvinism is a doctrine

for the poor and Arminianism for the rich. A creed which insists upon the necessity of faith must be less costly than one which insists upon the necessity of works. In the former case the sinner seeks salvation by the strength of his belief; in the latter case he seeks it by the fullness of his contributions"... "This is the first great practical divergence of the two creeds."... "It is also observable that the Church of Rome, whose worship is addressed mainly to the senses, and which delights in splendid cathedrals and pompous ceremonies, has always displayed against the Calvinists an animosity far greater than she has done against any other Protestant sect." Continuing in this strain, he observes what he calls "the aristocratic tendency of Arminianism and the democratic tendency of Calvinism" and says: "The more any society tends to equality, the more likely it is that its theological opinions will be Calvinistic; while the more a society tends toward inequality, the greater the probability of those opinions being Arminian."

These views of this writer are abundantly confirmed by the history bearing upon the subject. The historical fact is that Arminianism tends to beget and to foster classes and castes in society, and to build up a gorgeous ritual wherever it gains a foothold. And so it comes to be true, on the other hand, what the historian Bancroft observes, that "a richly-endowed Church always leads to Arminianism and justification by works."

Now let us glance at the explanation of this historical fact.

The prelatical or episcopal form of church government, which has always been connected with Arminian doctrines, asserts that all church power is vested in the clergy; while the republican form, which has always accompanied Calvinistic doctrines, asserts that all church power is vested in the Church; that is, in the people. This is a radical difference, and "touches the very essence of things." If all the power be in the clergy, then the people are practically bound to passive obedience in all matters of faith and practice. Thus the one system subjects the people to the autocratic orders of a superior, the central principle of monarchy and despotism; while

the other system elevates the people to an equality in authority, the central principle of democracy.

On this point I will quote a few sentences from the late Dr. Charles Hodge. "The theory," he observes, "that all church power vests in a divinely constituted hierarchy begets the theory that all civil power vests, of divine right, in kings and nobles. And the theory that church power vests in the Church itself, and all church officers are servants of the Church, of necessity begets the theory that civil power vests in the people, and that civil magistrates are servants of the people. These theories God has joined together, and no man can put them asunder. It was therefore by an infallible instinct that the unfortunate Charles of England said, 'No bishop, no king,' by which he meant that if there is no despotic power in the Church, there can be no despotic power in the State, or if there be liberty in the Church, there will be liberty in the State."

We find, then, these three propositions proved by historical fact and logical sequence: First, Arminianism associates itself with an episcopal form of church government, and Calvinism with a republican form of church government; second, Episcopacy fosters ideas of inequality in society and of monarchy and one-man power in civil affairs; and, third, Arminianism is unfavorable to civil liberty, and Calvinism is unfavorable to despotism. The despotic rulers of former days were not slow to observe the correctness of these propositions, and, claiming the divine right of kings, feared Calvinism as republicanism itself.

Now, consider, for a moment, some of the reasons which lie in the system of Calvinism for its strong hostility to all despotism and its powerful influence in favor of civil liberty.

One reason for this may be found in the boundary line which it draws between Church and State. It gives to each its distinct sphere, and demands that the one shall not assume the prerogatives of the other. In this it differs from Lutheranism, "which soon settled down at peace with princes, while Calvinism was ever advancing and ever contending with rulers of the world;" and from the Anglican system, which began with Henry VIII, as its head in

place of the pope. This distinction between Church and State is, as the eminent Yale professor, Dr. Fisher, remarks, "the first step, the necessary condition, in the development of religious liberty, without which civil liberty is an impossibility."

Another reason is found in the republican character of its polity. Its clergy are on a perfect equality. No one of them stands higher in authority than another. They are all alike bishops. Its laymen share equally with its clergymen in all official acts – in the discussion and decision of all matters of doctrine and practice. They have a most important part given them in the right of choosing and calling their own pastor. By being thus rulers in the Church they are taught to claim and exercise the same liberty in the State. It is this feature of the Calvinistic system which has, from the first, exalted the layman. It constitutes, not the clergy, but the Christian people, the interpreter of the divine will. To it the voice of the majority is the voice of God, and the issue, therefore, is, as Bancroft observes, "popular sovereignty."

Another reason why Calvinism is favorable to liberty lies in its theology. "The sense of the exaltation of the Almighty Ruler," says Dr. Fisher, "and of his intimate connection with the minutest incidents and obligations of human life, which is fostered by this theology, dwarfs all Earthly potentates. An intense spirituality, a consciousness that this life is but an infinitesimal fraction of human existence, dissipates the feeling of personal homage for men, however high their station, and dulls the lustre of all Earthly grandeur"... "The Calvinist, unlike the Romanist, dispenses with a human priesthood, which has not only often proved a powerful direct auxiliary to temporal rulers, but has *educated the sentiments to a habit of subjection*, which renders submission to such rulers more facile and less easy to shake off."

Its doctrine of predestination also is calculated to have a tremendous influence on the political character of its adherents. This has not escaped the notice of historians. Bancroft, who, while adopting another religious creed, has awarded to Calvinism the palm for its influence in favor of religious and civil liberty, remarks that "the political character of

Calvinism, which, with one consent and with instinctive judgment, the monarchs of that day feared as republicanism, is expressed in a single word – *predestination*. Did a proud aristocracy trace its lineage through generations of a highborn ancestry, the republican Reformers, with a loftier pride, invaded the invisible world, and from the book of life brought down the record of the noblest enfranchisement, decreed from eternity by the King of kings... They went forth in confidence,... and, standing surely amidst the crumbling fabric of centuries of superstition, they had faith in one another; and the martyrdoms of Cambray, the fires of Smithfield, the surrender of benefices by two thousand nonconforming Presbyterians, attests their perseverance."

This doctrine "inspires a resolute, almost defiant, freedom in those who deem themselves the subjects of God's electing grace; in all things they are more than conquerors through the confidence that nothing shall be able to separate them from the love of God. No doctrine of the dignity of human nature, of the rights of man, of national liberty, of social equality, can create such a resolve for the freedom of the soul as this personal conviction of God's favoring and protecting sovereignty. He who has this faith feels that he is compassed about with everlasting love, guided with everlasting strength; his will is the tempered steel that no fire can melt, no force can break. Such faith is freedom and this spiritual freedom is the source and strength of all other freedom."