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ELECTION

This is a subject which has been the centre of much controversy throughout history, and still is, although sad to say, in this age, many seem to know very little about this all-important doctrine of Scripture. Those who have a fixed opinion on the matter are divided into two camps which are known as Calvinist and Arminian; the former after John Calvin and the latter after James Arminius.

These theological tags can be very misleading if not fully understood, for they can savour of the teachings of men or the intrusion of personalities such as occurred at Corinth: "...I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ (1 Cor.1:12).

However, that which we are considering now goes back far beyond the days of Calvin or Arminius; they were but champions of the two lines of a controversy already in existence - one Biblical and the other not - and there is no alternative to them. All who have given any thought to this matter are to be found in one or other of these two schools.

The object of this article is not to extol Calvin or to denounce Arminius, but rather to positively set forth the truth of Holy Scripture. Nevertheless, in dealing with this subject it is inevitable that theological terms be used in order to make it relevant to our day.

Before we proceed further, it should be stated that if we are to have sound views of the deep teachings of the Word of God, then, it is essential to be thoroughly grounded in 'THE DOCTRINE OF GOD': all His glorious attributes and perfections must be known and fully appreciated: they must also be held IN BALANCE: never forgetting that every attribute of God is ACTIVE and POSITIVE. Before any dare to discuss the subject or endeavour to teach others, they must KNOW GOD.

To this we must add that our view on Election will be largely determined by whether or not we accept the teaching of 'Human Depravity' in its TOTALITY.

This was dealt with in the last issue of 'THE LINK'.

It is feared that many freely make use of terms such as 'Total Depravity' and 'Divine Sovereignty' and yet are quite unaware of the depth of spiritual meaning contained in them. This also applies to Election.

Election as set out in the Word of God is UNCONDITIONAL and ABSOLUTE. This must follow the doctrine of 'Total Depravity', for, if man is dead and held captive etc., then it is obvious that only a power outside of himself can remedy his situation: "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). The Bible speaks of God coming out to man, not man returning to God. The first link in the chain is ELECTION.

The Scriptures unmistakably reveal that God made choice of certain persons from all eternity. Before the world was framed, or time, or matter existed, a people was elected to salvation in Christ and predestined to partake of His glory.

The Westminster Confession of Faith states, concerning the decrees of Almighty God: "God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass ... God before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto: and all to the praise of His glorious grace."

Article 17 of the Thirty-nine articles of the Church of England states: "Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) He both constantly decreed by His counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in due season: they through grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by

adoption: they be made like the image of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity."

These articles of religion here stated are absolutely true to the Holy Scriptures and are basic tenets of The Faith. That men should have left Anglicanism and other unbiblical set-ups in past days one can understand, but that they threw out such fundamental articles of religion as is contained in the historic creeds and embraced Arminian theology was a calamity of the greatest magnitude.

The truth of sovereign election runs right through the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) and to ignore this golden thread in the eternal design is to mar and distort the whole pattern, for, the eternal purpose concerning man's salvation is said to be "according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4) "... God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess.2:13).

This initial act in man's salvation issued from the Trinity within the secret and solitary majesty of the Godhead and all three persons were involved - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They can never be divided or isolated, all work in absolute harmony and unity. Nevertheless, election, for the most part, is attributed to God the Father: He is said to bless men with all spiritual blessings and choose them in Christ - cf. Eph.1:3-4. Hence, it is called the "ELECTION OF GOD" (1 Thess.1:4). The persons chosen are called "GOD'S ELECT" (Rom.8:33 - Luke 18:7). They are said to be "Elect according to the foreknowledge of GOD THE FATHER" (1 Peter 1:2).

Therefore, Election being an act of God, is for ever. The God of heaven does not change His mind. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom.11:29). The Almighty does NOT change course. If He chooses and decrees to bless, it is irrevocable. Men choose their friends but, if after a while something comes between, then they drop them and choose others. This is not so with God. Man's fall

in Adam made no difference to His love for His own: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer.31:3). To the elect, the mercy of God is "from everlasting to everlasting" - Cf. Psalm 103: 17. "He is in one mind, and who can turn Him?" (Job 23:13).

The purposes of God concerning election are sure and unalterable. Every soul elect of the Father in a past eternity WILL BE SAVED: not one will be lost; for all are chosen IN CHRIST and chosen UNTO SALVATION - Cf. 2 Thess.2i 13. This is infallible. The Holy Spirit does not go into the "far country" searching for sinners, and as He finds one, so that sinner is elected and put in Christ. Such appears to be the thinking of many. Indeed, this is not the case. The WHOLE BODY of the elect were chosen TOGETHER IN CHRIST before any were created or had a being.

Christ was first elected AS MEDIATOR, (for all those chosen and predestinated were known to fall in Adam, therefore, must be redeemed from sin and bondage). As Mediator He was Head of all those given Him by the Father. Christ is styled by Jehovah as "my servant ... MINE ELECT" (lsa.42:1).

"BE THOU MY FIRST ELECT HE SAID,
THEN CHOSE THE CHURCH IN CHRIST ITS HEAD."

The names of the elect are said: "to be written in heaven" and to be: "in the book of life", "from the foundation of the world". Cf. Heb.12:23 - Phil.4:3 - Rev.17:8.

Men's names are not recorded in heaven because they believe, such as Arminians preach, rather do they believe because their names ARE recorded there. Such choruses as "Write my name in the book O Lord" are unscriptural, and the singing of such trash shows an appalling ignorance of Biblical truth.

All men do not believe because their names are not recorded. "I speak not of you all", says Christi "I know whom I have chosen" (John 13:18). "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15). "Sheep" and "Elect" signify one and the same. Verses 15-16 of John chapter 10 infer that they are Christ's sheep before they are called and regenerated. He does not lay down His life in order to MAKE them His sheep and so

enable God the Father to elect them, NO! It is "because they are already His - given to Him "by the sovereign election of the Father - that He lays down His life for them; for they, in common with all Adam's sons and daughters are dead in trespasses and sins. The elect are: "The children of wrath, even as others" (Eph.2:3).

Christ came explicitly to "Save HIS people from their sins" (Matt.1:21). He was the Lamb of God....Foreordained before the foundation of the world but was manifest in these last times for you (THE ELECT) - Cf. 1 Peter 1:20. The elect are delivered from going down to the pit because of the ransom - Cf. Job 33:24.

The blood of the Redeemer was not shed for all men. The work of Atonement was not a token payment for ALL; it was an ABSOLUTE satisfaction to God for MANY. Christ died not for goats but for His sheep. The Son of God did not come to this earth to make the salvation of all men POSSIBLE. He came to make the salvation of the elect ACTUAL. Further to this, Christ's obedience, sufferings and death are not the cause of our election; men are not elected because He shed His blood, rather, Christ shed His blood on behalf of those elected. The blood and righteousness of the Mediator are MERITORIOUS IN REDEMPTION, not the CAUSE OF ELECTION. The Bible speaks of men and women who are redeemed out of every kindred tongue and people; this is because God the Father elected out of every tribe and nation.

Election and Redemption pertain to the SAME persons; they are vessels of mercy and are distinct from vessels of wrath. They are a seed, a remnant, ACCORDING TO THE ELECTION OF GRACE.

Whilst the gospel is to be preached throughout the world, comparatively few are saved. "Many be CALLED but few CHOSEN." (Matt.20:16). It is this LITTLE FLOCK who are to be given the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world - Cf. Matt.25:3^. Although by comparison they are said to be a "little flock", yet, when considered absolutely, they are "a great multitude, which no man can number" (Rev.7:9). They are the elect of God the Father, redeemed by God the Son, and effectually called by God the Holy Spirit. These are the three links in the chain of

salvation. ALL the elect are redeemed, and ALL the redeemed are effectually called. SOVEREIGN ELECTION IS ABSOLUTE: NONE WILL BE LOST.

For further evidence of this let us make additional scriptural references to substantiate this point. "The children being not yet born ... that the purpose of God according to election might stand" (Rom.9:11). "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou earnest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee (or set thee apart), and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jer.1:5). "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation" (2 Thess.2.13).

When the gospel was preached at Thessalonica we read that it was, "with much power and in the Holy Ghost", but not all believed, indeed we learn, from the account given in Acts chapter 17 that there was an uproar in that city, so much so, that Paul and Silas had to move out. Why was this? Was the Holy Ghost defeated? Was the purpose of God in election thwarted? Of course not.' neither was the great apostle disappointed; he knew that his God was infallible. He had a similar experience as recorded in Acts Chapter 13, but he states. "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed". Then, when they raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, the apostles shook the dust off their feet and left - FILLED WITH JOY - Cf. Acts 13.48-52. What an attitude to adopt! many would say; but the servant of Christ who has a clear understanding of DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY and UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION will not be downcast, for he knows that the purposes of God according to election, STAND, and all such will savingly believe; but, NO OTHERS. Goats do not believe. "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you" (John 10.26).

The faithful preacher will never be dismayed, for the Word of God will NEVER return unto Him void, and it SHALL accomplish that which God pleases, and it SHALL prosper in the thing whereto He sends it - Cf. Isa. 55: H. Every preacher should preach in the light of 2 Cor.2.15-16. "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life". The one exalts the attributes of Holiness and

Justice, whilst the other magnifies Divine grace and mercy, but one is not more important than the other.

The apostle Paul had one great aim, and that was to declare "all the counsel of God". How his preaching was received, was not his concern; he served a God whom he knew to be sovereign and invincible; in this he rejoiced: "Now thanks be unto God, which ALWAYS causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place" (2 Cor.2:14).

Through faithful exposition of Holy Scripture, God is ALWAYS glorified whatever the outcome as seen, or not seen by us. Therefore states the inspired Book "PREACH THE WORD" (2 Tim.4:2)

By faith, we can rest fully assured that eventually all elect souls will be effectually called: "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called" (Rom.8:30). However rebellious a sinner may be, every elect soul will, in God's time, be "made willing", for such are chosen "unto obedience" (1 Pet.1:2). All the sheep for whom Christ died WILL HEAR HIS VOICE: none will ever perish. However far a sinner may wander in the 'far country' if he or she be elect of God they will not perish in their sins. The providence of God will so order their lives that ultimately by some means they will hear the gospel and salvation will be wrought in their hearts. They will be preserved until their calling of the Holy Ghost - Cf. Jude 1.

Some accuse the Almighty of being unequal because of the doctrine of Election. Indeed, this is a doctrine which is hated, to a large degree, by Christian and worldling alike. C. H. Spurgeon of the last century said: "God can be in His workshop creating worlds and planets, He can sit in His treasury and bestow His bounties, He can light the lamps of heaven, control the waves of the oceans, BUT when He ascends the throne and proclaims HIS SUPREME RIGHT to do His sovereign will without consulting men, then they hiss".

The fact that God favours some and passes by others, in no way warrants the charge often made, when the truth of election is spoken of, that it is unjust. Injustice only enters into a case when one party has a claim upon another.

If God owed forgiveness of sin and eternal life to all men, then it would be an injustice to only save a given number; but the sinner has absolutely NO claim whatsoever on the blessings which come to him because of Divine election. In fact he FORFEITED all rights to spiritual blessing in Eden. Man has no occasion to call the Almighty to account for electing some and passing others by, for God would have been perfectly just and equitable if He had not saved any - Cf. Matt.20:15-16.

"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For He saith unto Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom.9:14-15).

This is the mystery of the Divine will; it is according to God's good pleasure which He purposed in himself - Cf. Eph.1:9. By election, the free and sovereign grace of God is displayed, for He was not obliged to choose any, and as it is, He chooses whom He will and for no other reason than His own glory. "WHAT IF GOD WILLING..." (Rom.9:18-23).

Election is unconditional and absolute, and all elected are predestined unto the adoption of children and unblameable holiness, the end being the praise of the glory of His grace - Cf. Eph.1.3-6. Saved sinners are: "A CHOSEN generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should SHOW FORTH THE PRAISES of Him that hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2.9).

In a true work of grace, holiness of life and unblameable conduct will be seen, for this is the object of sovereign election. "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise" (Isa.4-3. 21). "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath BEFORE ORDAINED that we should walk in them" (Eph.2.10). Good works in the life of the believer give the evidence to the work of The Trinity - Election of the Father, Sanctification of the Spirit and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ - Cf. 1 Peter 1.2.

Where there is no desire to walk in the paths of righteousness we have NO WARRANT to believe that a work of grace has been wrought. "For every tree is known by his own

fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes" (Luke 6.44). In election, God foreordained good works to the praise of the GLORY of His grace which has been given to us, and is in ALL His own.

Many who read this article, sad to say, will have been brought up in Arminian circles, and to such, the doctrine of Election has never been taught. Indeed, some even go so far as to dismiss it altogether. Others, admitting it to be true, are of the opinion that it should never be preached from the pulpit. The only explanation which the writer ever had on the subject of Election, in the circles in which he was brought up and in which he fellowshiped for many long years was: 'That God foresaw who would repent and turn to Christ, and those He elected' - WHAT A TRAVESTY OF TRUTH! The Word of God is impregnated with SOVEREIGN UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION.

Why do so many bypass this doctrine? The main reason is, as previously stated, they do not KNOW GOD in the full splendour of ALL His attributes. They major on certain of the Divine qualities, rather than hold all in their entirety! Their thinking revolves around those attributes which they can best understand! In other words they have reduced the SUPREME BEING to a dimension compatible with finite reasoning. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" (Psalm 50:21). As a consequence their theology is completely out of balance, and their preaching sadly deficient and oftentimes erroneous.

A preacher must not fight shy of declaring "all the counsel of God". The doctrine of election is no secret; it was at one time; it was a 'mystery' concealed in the counsels of Deity, but now that mystery has been made known - Cf. Rom!16i25-26 - Eph.li9. It is perfectly true that it cannot be said by us that such and such a person (in their unregenerate state) is elect, or that another, we believe to be non-elect. The preacher in his preaching is to treat all alike in presenting the gospel, and command ALL men to repent, and to urge ALL to seek the Lord. This is the general call of the gospel. He is to sow beside ALL waters and to preach to every creature. With all his heart he can say: "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21).

Who ultimately responds is not our concern, the lord knoweth them that are His. He knows every one given to Him by the Father in a past eternity. He knows every sheep for whom He died, and the Holy Spirit, working in absolute harmony knows every one whom He must effectually call, in every generation. The preacher is to call the MANY, whereas the Holy Spirit will select the FEW (the chosen).

There are still others who will argue that, if election is ever mentioned, then many will despair, or become distressed and question: "Am I elect?" "How do I know?" "Until I know, what can I do?" These are not the questions. The questions are: "Am I born again?" "Am I a new creature in Christ Jesus?" "Have I repented of my sins?" "Am I truly converted?"

The doctrine of regeneration which asserts that a man must be born again or he will not see the kingdom of heaven, may as well be objected to as election. The doctrine of election and predestination in no way inhibits our preaching; indeed it is a fundamental part of the message. Neither does it put us in bondage in our intercession for the salvation of the lost, as some seem to imagine. We are to pray for "all men everywhere". Abraham, that great hero of the faith in the Old Testament, prayed fervently over Sodom although God had told him that it was about to be overthrown. Probably, no mortal ever preached or prayed like the apostle Paul, yet, his words are permeated with the truth of Election, but this placed no restriction upon him whatsoever: "I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made FOR ALL MEN" (1 Tim.2.1): "For necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Cor.9:16), were his words.

At the commencement of His ministry our Lord, on the Sabbath day went into the synagogue at Nazareth, and after reading a passage from Isaiah, He preached, and part of the content of the sermon was: "I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias ... but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta ... and many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4: 25-27). What is this if it is not the truth of UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION? If the Divine Preacher withheld not the teaching THEN DARE WE?

The result of that preaching was: "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city ... But He passing through the midst of them went His way" (Luke 4: 28-30). The declaration of all the counsel of God has never been popular, but it is always God glorifying, and through it the 'eternal purposes' will be accomplished.

It was a sad day for the church when in such large measure she cast aside, and commenced to ignore such fundamental teachings of Holy Scripture and to embrace the deficient and erroneous views revived and championed by Arminius. One does not deny but that vast numbers have been saved through Arminian preaching (for the Holy Spirit will effectually call all the elect in every age).

Nevertheless, God will call into account, in a coming day His people who have so grievously departed from the mandate given to them. Also, it is correct to say that Arminian preaching with its 'decisionism' has produced, down through the years, many who are but false professors. They have a faith but it is of man, it is not the "work of faith with power" (2 Thess. 1:11) and no fruit is ever seen in their lives. It is a faith without works - DEAD - cf. James 2:20. It is vain; it is the exercise of the will of a man who is still dead in trespasses and in sins, whereas the faith of God's elect is imparted by the Holy Spirit - it is "THE GIFT OF GOD" (Eph.2.8).

Such who through God's sovereign grace receive this gift become new creatures: Created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath BEFORE ORDAINED that we should walk in them.

CALVINISM? NAY! THE INFALLIBLE TEACHING OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

W.H.Molland.

"God's eternal Election is the first link in the chain of a sinner's salvation of which heavenly glory is the end. None ever repent, believe, and are born again, except the Elect".

J.C.Ryle.

The following is an extract from a series written by the late Mr. Donald Beaton and which appeared in the magazine 'Peace and Truth' and we reprint this article by kind permission of the Editor, Mr. M. R. Kimmitt.

Mr. Beaton was born at Craigengelt, near Kilsyth in 1872. He was educated at Kilsyth and Glasgow, and studied Divinity in Belfast before being licensed by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1896.

In 1901 he was inducted to the congregation at Wick and in 1930 accepted a call to Oban, resigning in 1948 because of ill health. He went to be with the Lord 12th November 1953

He exercised a widespread ministry in his church both at home and abroad and edited the 'Free Presbyterian Magazine' from 1921-1949.

SOME FOUNDATION TRUTHS OF THE REFORMED FAITH.

It may be useful to say something concerning three systems of error, essentially one, which under the names of 'Pelagianism', 'Semi-Pelagianism', and 'Arminianism', have plagued the Christian Church through the centuries.

(I) Pelagianism. The issues involved in the Pelagian controversy are not to be set aside as merely of interest to theologians or ecclesiastical historians. They are of perennial interest and assert themselves periodically in religious history. At bottom the controversy was concerned with the age-long controversy of free-will. Like most of the serious heresies which have disturbed the peace of the Church, Pelagianism cast its roots into the early centuries of the Christian era. Historically, however, the Pelagian controversy proper was fought out between 411 and 418. At the Council of Ephesus (A.D.431) the positions maintained by Pelagius were condemned. At some time between 398 and 402, if not earlier, there arrived at Rome a British monk, known to history by his Latin name, Pelagius. He prepared a book of 'Eulogiae', or extracts from Scripture selected, as he thought, to emphasise the liberty of the will, and especially to counteract what he considered to be the enervating effects of Augustine's 'Confessions'. Associated with him was Cælestius. Another of the ablest of the

Pelagians was Julian of Eclanum, in Italy, who was the real theologian of Pelagianism. The great defender of the orthodox doctrine against this heresy was Augustine of Hippo

The leading tenets of Pelagianism may be summarised as follows:

(1.) Everything that God creates is essentially good and cannot in its nature be convertible; consequently human nature remains indestructibly good; so there can be no such thing as a sinful nature or original sin.

(2.) Man's free will is an absolute and indefectible freedom of choice unaffected by previous choices. Sin is choosing that which is contrary to what reason tells us is righteous. By virtue of this free will man is rendered independent of God.

(3.) The desires of the flesh are not as such evil; sin consists not in desire itself as such, but in its excess which is due solely to the free choice of each individual will.

(4.) Every man by birth is in precisely the same condition morally as Adam was before he sinned, i.e., endowed with 'natural holiness' (reason and free will). Hence there can be sinless men.

(5.) Adam sinned through free will; his descendants also sin through free will; neither, in his case nor theirs is physical death a consequence of sin, but spiritual death is; this is in no sense inherited from Adam, but is acquired by each man through his own sins.

(6.) The idea of inherited sin and of inherited guilt is unthinkable. The only difference between children born now and that of Adam before the Fall is one not of nature but of environment: the former are born into a society in which evil customs and habits prevail.

(7.) By grace is meant either man's natural constitution ('the grace of creation'), by virtue of which some heathen have been perfect men, as good in every respect as perfect Jews or Christians. Grace, of whatever kind, is emphatically not an inward power enabling the will; it is rather something external, which the will may grasp if it chooses to. Law and Gospel are alike in operation, and man can enter the kingdom of heaven as well through the one as the other.

(8.) Grace is given according to men's merits; it would not be consistent with God's justice to give it to sinners.

In reading this summary the reader will readily agree that the Church acted wisely in rejecting a system so antagonistic to the very essence of the Gospel of the grace of God. Yet, unfortunately, various phases of this ancient heresy are very much alive in much of the religion and theological thinking of the present day. "In temper and spirit," it has been truly said, "it was undoubtedly in marked contrast with the instinctive religious attitude reflected in every writing of the New Testament and in the traditional piety of the Church." Its whole conception was more in keeping with certain aspects of the Greek philosophy than in accordance with the Gospel.

The main difference between the orthodox doctrine and Pelagianism is found in the Pelagian view of human nature. Augustine asserted in opposition at the Pelagian doctrine that human nature was utterly corrupt; that the will was perverted and depraved at its very root, and incapable in its own strength of choosing and doing good. The Augustinian doctrine has behind it the teaching of Scripture and the experience of those taught by God's Spirit. Augustine traced all human goodness not to the creature but to the Creator, and whatever goodness possessed by any sinner came from the fountain of all grace, and the sinner had no merit in its possession.

(II) SEMI-PELAGIANISM. Another phase of this heresy is that, advanced by John Cassian, formerly a deacon of Chrysostom, which is generally known under the designation of Semi-Pelagianism. Cassian held Augustine in great respect. He believed in the doctrine of original sin and in the universal need of grace, but he held (1) that the first movement of faith by which man grasps grace and profits by it is the effort of man's native capacity unaided; (2) that grace is not irresistible; man can of his own free choice reject, just as he can accept it, though, unless he accepts it, he remains powerless to be or do good; (3) that God offers His grace freely to all men, and genuinely and literally wills all men to be saved; that all men do not profit by grace is due solely to their own rejection of it; (4) that, consequently, God's predestination, of which Scripture certainly speaks, is grounded on His foreknowledge of those who would accept or reject His grace, not on any absolute selection of His sovereign choice. It will be seen from this summary that Cassian's position was practically that of modern Arminianism, or, in other words, that Arminianism is developed Semi-Pelagianism.

The main principles of Semi-Pelagianism have been thus set forth by Dr. A.A.Hodge: "(1) Man's nature has been so far weakened by the fall that it cannot act aright in spiritual matters without divine assistance. (2) This weakened moral state which infants inherit from their parents is the cause of sin, but not in itself sin in the sense of deserving the wrath of God. (3) Man must strive to do his whole duty, when God meets him with co-operative grace, and renders his efforts successful. (4) Man is not responsible for the sins he commits until after he has enjoyed and abused the influences of grace" (Outlines of Theology, p.338).

Socinianism accepted the Pelagian doctrines; while, in opposition to the Jansenists in the Church of Rome, the Jesuits adopted Semi-Pelagian doctrines. All the branches of the Protestant Churches which accept Arminianism are Semi-Pelagian in their doctrines of human nature, the will and grace. Man's state as represented under Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Augustinianism (or Calvinism), has been happily represented as follows: under Pelagianism man is sound; under Semi-Pelagianism he is sick; under Augustinianism he is dead.

(III) ARMINIANISM. Careful students of contemporary theological literature must be impressed by the extent to which it is permeated by the leaven of Arminianism. What that system failed to achieve in the arena of debate it has accomplished by peaceful penetration. It has saturated theological thinking to an extraordinary degree. The 'revival' literature of to-day is full of it, as is also the religious press generally. Warnings from the pulpit and denunciation of the errors of Arminianism are not now heard as once they were. Even in pulpits where the truth is preached, it is to be feared that, in some cases, a faithful witness is not raised against Arminianism. The cause of this may be due in a measure to the fact that in defending the cause of truth new forms of error have to be exposed and assailed, with the result that the old enemy is left so far unmolested as if it were dead. Unfortunately this is not so; Arminianism is very much alive in the pulpit, in the theological and religious press, and in the modern evangelistic meeting. It is true, no doubt, that there has been a notable revival of Calvinistic teaching on the Continent, and an effort is being made to revive interest in it in this country, but there can be little doubt notwithstanding that Arminianism still enjoys great favour with the religious public. When we bear in mind the horror with which our fore-fathers regarded Arminianism, the modern attitude to it indicates how far the professing Church has drifted from the position of the theologians of those days. The symbolic books of the Church of England - the XXXIX Articles - and the symbolic books of the Church of Scotland - the Confession of Faith - are undoubtedly Calvinistic, but can it be said that all who sign these symbols are Calvinists at heart?

The theological system called Arminianism received its name from the Dutch theologian, Jakob Hermanss, the Latinised form of whose name was Arminius. He was born at Oudewater, about 18 miles from Rotterdam, in 1560, and died at Leyden in 1609.

In 1588 he was appointed preacher of the Reformed congregation at Amsterdam. While here his views underwent a change, and his expositions of Romans vii. and ix. and his utterances on election and reprobation gave offence. His colleague, Plancius, opposed his views, and disputes arose

in the consistory which for a time were put a stop to by the burgomasters. Arminius was called to fill the professor's chair at Leyden, and in his lectures on predestination he stirred up considerable opposition, his chief opponent being Gomarus. The dispute spread among the students and the ministers. The followers of Arminius refused to be called Arminians, preferring the name Remonstrants, from 'Remonstrantiae', drawn up in 1610 after Arminius's death (1609): which formed an exposition and justification of their views. They held that they should not be hampered by subscription to the symbolical books, but that free investigation of the Bible should be allowed. Their Remonstrance was met by a Counter-Remonstrance. The controversy went on for years, causing considerable disturbance. When Prince Maurice countenanced the cause of the Counter-Remonstrants a change took place as to the State attitude to the controversy, and a national synod was called by the States-general at Dort (May 30, 1618).

The presentation of the case of the Arminians in Five Articles determined to a large extent the form in which the whole subject was afterwards discussed at the Synod of Dort under the Five Heads: (1) Predestination or election.

(2) On the death of Christ, the nature and extent of His redemption. (3) On the cause of faith, that is, the power of agency by which it is produced. (4) The mode of conversion, or the agency by which it is effected, and the mode of its operation. (5) On perseverance. On these great doctrines the Synod of Dort gave decisions condemning the Arminian positions. It is mainly the doctrines of conditional predestination, man's ability to spiritual good and a universal atonement, which have made their way into the theological thinking of our time. No doubt some of these doctrines make a pleasing appeal to the natural man, but they are contrary to the clear statements of Scripture and the plain facts of experience.

Dr. W. Cunningham seems to us to have happily hit off the real inwardness of the Arminian error when he says: "It is not very difficult to point out what may fairly enough be described as the fundamental characteristic principle of Arminianism - that which Arminianism either is, or has a strong and constant tendency to become; and this is, that it is a scheme for dividing or partitioning the salvation

of sinners between God and sinners themselves, instead of ascribing it wholly, as the Bible does, to the sovereign grace of God, the perfect and all-sufficient work of Christ, and the efficacious and omnipotent operation of the Spirit...The encroachment they make upon the grace of God in the salvation of sinners varies, of course, according to the extent to which they carry out their views, especially in regard to men's natural depravity, and the nature and necessity of the work of the Spirit in regeneration and conversion; but Arminianism in any form can be shown to involve the ascription to men themselves, more directly or more remotely, of a place and influence in effecting their own salvation, which the Bible denies to them and ascribes to God" (historical Theology, ii. 377: 378). This is a serious indictment against Arminianism, for it virtually means that it robs God of His glory in the salvation of the sinner and denies that this salvation is all of grace from beginning to end.

Prof. R.Watts, of Belfast, used to tell his students that Arminianism fought none of the battles of the Reformation, and that when it appeared on the stage it was as the sower of discord and disunion that it made its presence felt. Arminianism, in a word, is a direct challenge to the sovereignty of God. This is the rock against which it is spending its strength, and on which it will ultimately be broken to pieces. In this attack it has as its supports all these elements in our fallen nature which are at war with the divine sovereignty. Arminianism has never had a glimpse of the majesty of the divine truth that God, as sovereign Lord, has a right to do with His creatures what seems to Him good, and it has failed to grasp the utter ruin of man and the awful depths to which he has fallen. It denies to God the high place that is due to Him, and exalts man to a position which is not his due. If it has ever candidly faced the Saviour's words: "Even so, Father for so it seemed good in Thy sight," it has never been awed or subdued by them.

EDITORIAL

Information has been received by us of the film 'JESUS' which is to be shown widely in North Devon at the end of March 1985, and a covering letter suggests that we might like to make reference to this film in our magazine, and the information sheet is sent to us for this purpose. Whilst the showing will be over by the time this edition goes into circulation, we would nevertheless like to make comment.

We are told that £3,000,000 has been invested in this production which was shot in Israel. The wardrobe consists of 4,000 different costumes, and 2,000 hats and headdresses. The cast includes 45 actors and 5000 Israeli and Arab extras for the large crowd scenes. A member of the Royal Shakespeare Company has been given the role of Christ. It is stated that scenes which have never before been attempted, are depicted, such as the Transfiguration and the Ascension. It is further said: "that this is the most accurate, realistic, and BIBLICAL version of Christ's life yet produced ... for the first time Jesus speaks only the words as the Bible records them."

How are we to react to this seemingly wonderful revelation? "TO THE LAW AND TO THE TESTIMONY: IF THEY SPEAK NOT ACCORDING TO THIS WORD, IT IS BECAUSE THERE IS NO LIGHT IN THEM" (Isaiah 8:20). Take heed lest ye corrupt yourselves and make the similitude of any figure - Cf. Deut. 4:15-16.

The Law of God forbids the portraying of shapes, images, effigies, pictures, portraits, or the dramatising of Deity. Neither can it be argued that it is lawful for Christ to be depicted, for He is Emmanuel (GOD WITH US). It is the Godhead of Christ, united to His manhood that makes Him to be the Mediator. Christ is none other than GOD MANIFEST IN FLESH. To seek to portray the manhood of Christ, when we cannot portray His Godhead, is to set forth but a mere mortal: the very thing which makes Him to be the Christ, is missing. It is the separating of that which God for ever joined in ONE PERSONALITY at the Incarnation - DEITY and HUMANITY. The impersonation of the Incarnate Son of God is a sin of the greatest magnitude.

"THIS DAY IS A DAY OF ... BLASPHEMY" (Isaiah 37:3).

In view of the revival of interest and concern for 'THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE' the following comments by Mr. C. H. Spurgeon must surely be pertinent:

"Holy and reverend is His name." Ps. 111:9

"Well may he say this. The whole name or character of God is worthy of profoundest awe, for it is perfect and complete, whole or holy. It ought not to be spoken without solemn thought, and never heard without profound homage. His name is to be trembled at, it is something terrible; even those who know him best rejoice with trembling before him. How good men can endure to be called 'reverend' we know not. Being unable to discover any reason why our fellow men should reverence US, we half suspect that in other men there is not very much which can entitle them to be called reverend, very reverend, right reverend, and so on. It may seem a trifling matter, but for that very reason we would urge that the foolish custom should be allowed to fall into disuse."

ANNOUNCEMENTS and INFORMATION

VISITING PREACHERS:

Sunday 14th April.	Mr. J.Thackway (Devizes)
Sunday 21st April	Mr. M.Watts (Salisbury)
Thursdays 2nd May	
6th June	
4th July	Mr. F.Stanbury (Bow)

PRELIMINARY NOTICE:

20th July 1985 - ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION -
Speaker - Mr. John Roberts (London)
(General Secretary - The Lord's Day Observance Society).

In the last issue we made reference to Mr. and Mrs. Jackson and their two children having moved into Bideford. It was a very great joy to us, on the 13th January 1985, to receive our brother and sister into the membership of the Church. We trust that they will find among us the warmth, security, love, and food, of a true spiritual home, and pray that the Lord will richly bless them and their children, and that they may be greatly used of God to the strengthening of the work and testimony at North Road Chapel.

Mr. Bennett and Mr. and Mrs. Potter continue with great zeal in the work amongst the sick and elderly. The report brought to the church prayer meeting each week is both heart warming and challenging.

We are greatly encouraged by the number of letters which we receive expressing appreciation and telling of blessing received through the tape ministry. We assure our unseen (and often unknown) friends of our constant remembrance of you in prayer. We are mindful also, of your prayers and support for us in the work of spreading the Word. For the benefit of our more recent readers we list again the expository series available:

The Attributes of God	18	sermons
Spiritual Union	31	"
The Holy Spirit	36	"
The Atonement	72	"
The Life of David	182	"
The Church	50	"
The Covenants	65	"

The following are currently engaging our attention:

The Book of Genesis	130	sermons available
The Prayers of the Apostle Paul	52	" "
The Sermon on the Mount	18	" "

All cassettes are available on free loan, subject to the borrower paying postage: or they may be purchased at £1.25 per cassette plus postage. Each cassette contains two sermons.

The circulation of 'The Link' continues to expand. If any of our readers who have friends who would like to be put on the mailing list, then please contact the Secretary, Mr. L. Gee.