

# Editorial . . .

## Arminianism

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The theological position of the post-Reformation development in the Church, commonly known as Arminianism, has important historical sources. As the Reformation itself was not a new theology, but rather a rediscovery of certain fundamental truths which were little known or had become lost, so it was with the major ideas of Arminianism. The system was a rediscovery of obscured truth. The extreme emphasis which Calvin, and the Reformed tradition of the Reformation, had placed upon certain theological ideas prepared the way for the militant, reactionary spirit of Arminius and his colleagues.

When certain departures from the generally accepted theological position of Calvin were threatening the creedal unity of the Church in Holland, it was James Arminius who was called as a servant of the Church to defend its doctrine. His intensive study of these doctrines ultimately caused Arminius to conclude that they could not be sustained upon the authority of the Scriptures. Others soon united with him in this movement, and the organization of the Remonstrance followed.

Among others Curtiss, in his study on the subject, indicates that the doctrine of Arminius is not new.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the first four centuries the Fathers of the Church held, perhaps without exception, that the eternal destiny of man was determined, not by the divine decrees alone, but also upon the faith and obedience of the individual, as these were foreseen by God. During the theological controversy between Augustine and Pelagius (the great bishop of Hippo), the latter, while seeking to exalt the glory of grace, became the first leader of the ancient Church to boldly affirm that the salvation of the elect was exclusively dependent upon the will of God.

The second major appearance of this doctrine of unconditional predestination was in the ninth century. Gottschalk, a

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<sup>1</sup>George L. Curtiss, *Arminianism in History*, New York, 1894, p. 13.

monk from the monastery of Fulda, during a period of frustrating attempts to renounce his monastic vows, was led to a study of Augustine. As a result of this he became the medieval champion of the doctrine of a double divine predestination. In the face of much opposition he taught that God has unconditionally determined some men to eternal life and others to eternal death. After a long theological struggle in which Gottschalk was successfully opposed by two important ninth century leaders of Christian thought--Hrabanus Maurus and Hincmar--the doctrine of double predestination and its defender were condemned at a synod at Mainz (848 A.D.).

Thus the doctrine stood condemned by the Church until the time of John Calvin. The Genevan Reformer carried to the extreme all that had been taught and thought by Augustine and Gottschalk. The absolute sovereignty of God and the unconditional predestination of all men became major presuppositions in the theology of the *Christian Institutes*. These ideas of Calvin, very often in greatly modified form and expression, have been more widely disseminated since his time than at any other period in the history of Christendom. However, they have been repeatedly and insistently challenged in the light of the revealed Word of God and at the bar of human reason.

Too often the thought of Arminius has been confused with semi-Pelagianism or some other heretical system. Curtiss affirms that there was never a time when semi-Pelagianism and Arminianism were synonymous terms.<sup>2</sup> It has remained from the beginning distinct from Arianism, Pelagianism, Socinianism, Universalism, and Calvinism.

This issue of the *Seminarian* features Arminius and his beliefs since 1960 marks the four hundredth anniversary of the Dutch theologian's birth.

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<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.