

ARMINIANISM: THE ROAD TO ROME

Augustus Toplady (1740-1778)

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Whose Voice Do You Hear?

"My sheep,' saith Christ, 'hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.' O most worthy Scriptures! which ought to compel us to have a faithful remembrance, and to note the tenor thereof: which is, the sheep of Christ shall never perish.

"Doth Christ mean part of his elect or all, think you? I do hold, and affirm, and also faithfully believe, that he meant all his elect, and not part, as some do full ungodly affirm. I confess and believe assuredly, that there shall never any of them perish: for I have good authority so to say: because Christ is my author, and saith, if it were possible, the very elect should be deceived. *Ergo*, it is not possible that they can be so deceived, that they shall ever finally perish, or be damned: wherefore, *whosoever doth affirm that there may be any* (ie, any of the elect) *lost, doth affirm that Christ hath a torn body.*"¹

The above valuable letter of recantation is thus inscribed: "A Letter to the Congregation of Free-willers, by One that had been of that Persuasion, but come off, and now a Prisoner for Religion:" which superscription will hereafter, in its due place, supply us with a remark of more than slight importance.

John Wesley, a Friend of Rome?

To occupy the place of argument, it has been alleged that "Mr Wesley is an old man;" and the Church of Rome is still older than he. Is that any reason why the enormities, either of the mother or the son, should pass unchastised?

It has also been suggested, that "Mr Wesley is a very laborious man:" not more laborious, I presume, than a certain active being, who is said to go to and fro in the earth, and walk up and down

in it:² nor yet more laborious, I should imagine, than certain ancient Sectarians, concerning whom it was long ago said, "Woe unto you Scribes, hypocrites; for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte:"³ nor, by any means, so usefully laborious, as a certain diligent member of the community, respecting whose variety of occupations the public have lately received the following intelligence: "The truth of the following instance of industry may be depended on: a poor man with a large family, now cries milk, every morning in Lothbury, and the neighbourhood of the Royal Exchange; at eleven, he wheels about a barrow of potatoes; at one, he cleans shoes at the Change; after dinner, cries milk again; in the evening, sells spratts; and at night, finishes the measure of his labour as a watchman."⁴

The Quarrel is With the Wolf

Mr Sellon, moreover, reminds me that, "While the shepherds are quarrelling, the wolf gets into the sheepfold;" not impossible: but it so happens that the present quarrel is not among "the shepherds," but with the 'wolf' himself; which "quarrel" is warranted by every maxim of pastoral meekness and fidelity.

I am further told, that, while I am "berating the Arminians, Rome and the devil laugh in their sleeves." Admitting that Mr Sellon might derive this anecdote from the fountain head, the parties themselves, yet, as neither they nor he are very conspicuous for veracity, I construe the intelligence by the rule of reverse, though authenticated by the deposition of their right trusty and well-beloved cousin and counsellor.

Once more: I am charged with "excessive superciliousness, and majesty of pride:" and why not charged with having seven heads and ten horns, and a tail as long as a bellrope? After all, what has my pride, or my humility, to do with the argument in hand? Whether I am haughty, or meek, is of no more consequence either to that, or to the public, than whether I am tall or short: however, I am, at this very time, giving one proof, that my "majesty of pride" can stoop; that even to ventilate the impertinence of Mr Sellon.

Arminianism at Home in Rome

But, however frivolous his cavils, the principles for which he contends are of the most pernicious nature and tendency. I must repeat, what already seems to have given him so much offence, *that Arminianism "came from Rome, and leads thither again."* Julian, bishop of Eclana, a contemporary and disciple of Pelagius,

was one of those who endeavoured, with much art, to gild the doctrines of that heresiarch, in order to render them more slightly and palatable. The Pelagian system, thus varnished and palliated, soon began to acquire the softer name of Semipelagianism. Let us take a view of it, as drawn to our hands by the celebrated Mr Bower, who himself, in the main, a professed Pelagian, and therefore less likely to present us with an unfavourable portrait of the system he generally approved.

Among the principles of that sect, this learned writer enumerates the following:

"The notion of election and reprobation, independent on our merits or demerits, is maintaining a fatal necessity, is the bane of all virtue, and serves only to render good men remiss in working out their salvation, and to drive sinners to despair.

"The decrees of election and reprobation are posterior to, and in consequence of, our good or evil works, as foreseen by God from all eternity."⁵

Is not this too the very language of modern Arminianism? Do not the partizans of that scheme argue on the same identical terms? Should it be said, "True, this proves that Arminianism is Pelagianism revived; but it does not prove, that the doctrines of Arminianism are originally Popish;" a moment's cool attention will make it plain that they are. Let us again hear Mr Bower, who, after the passage just quoted, immediately adds, "on these two last propositions, the Jesuits found their whole system of grace and free-will; agreeing therein with the Semipelagians, against the Jansenists and St Augustine."⁶ The Jesuits were moulded into a regular body, towards the middle of the sixteenth century: toward the close of the same century, Arminius began to infest the Protestant churches. It needs therefore no great penetration, to discern from what source he drew his poison. His journey to Rome (though Monsieur Bayle affects to make light of the inferences which were at that very time deduced from it) was not for nothing. If, however, any are disposed to believe, that Arminius imbibed his doctrines from the Socinians in Poland, with whom, it is certain, he was on terms of intimate friendship, I have no objection to splitting the difference: he might import some of his tenets from the Racovian brethren, and yet be indebted, for others, to the disciples of Loyola.

Papists and Predestination

Certain it is, that Arminius himself was sensible, how greatly the doctrine of predestination widens the distance between

Protestantism and Popery. "There is no point of doctrines (says he) which the Papists, the Anabaptists, and the (new) Lutherans more fiercely oppose, nor by means of which they heap more discredit on the reformed churches, and bring the reformed system itself into more odium; *for they (ie the Papists & etc) assert, that no fouler blasphemy against God can be thought or expressed, than is contained in the doctrine of predestination.*"⁷ For which reason, he advises the reformed world to discard predestination from their creed, in order that they may live on more brotherly terms with the Papists, the Anabaptists, and such like.

The Arminian writers make no scruple to seize and retail each other's arguments, as common property. Hence, Samuel Hoord copies from Van Harmin the self same observation which I have now cited. "Predestination (says Samuel) is an opinion odious to the Papists, opening their foul mouths, against our Church and religion:"⁸ consequently, our adopting the opposite doctrines of universal grace and freewill, would, by bringing us so many degrees nearer to the Papists, conduce to shut their mouths, and make them regard us, as their own orthodox and dearly beloved brethren: it follows, that, as *Arminianism came from Rome, so "it leads thither again."*

The Jesuits and Predestination

If the joint verdict of Arminius himself, and of his English proselyte Hoord, will not turn the scale, let us add the testimony of a professed Jesuit, by way of making up full weight. When Archbishop Laud's papers were examined, a letter was found among them, thus endorsed with that prelate's own hand: "March, 1628. A Jesuit's Letter, sent to the Rector at Bruxels, about the ensuing Parliament." The design of this letter was to give the Superior of the Jesuits, then resident at Brussels, an account of the posture of civil and ecclesiastical affairs in England; an extract from it I shall here subjoin: "Father Rector, let not the damp of astonishment seize upon your ardent and zealous soul, in apprehending the sodaine and unexpected calling of a Parliament. We have now many strings to our bow. *We have planted that souveraigne drugge Arminianisme, which we hope will purge the Protestants from their heresie; and it flourisheth and beares fruit in due season.* For the better prevention of the Puritanes, the Arminians have already locked up the Duke's (of Buckingham) eares; and we have those of our own religion, which stand continually at the Duke's chamber, to see who goes in and out: we cannot be too circumspect and careful in this regard. I am, at this

time, transported with joy, to see how happily all instruments and means, as well great as lesser, co-operate unto our purposes. But, to return unto the maine fabricke:— *OUR FOUNDATION IS ARMINIANISME*. The Arminians and projectors, as it appears in the premises, affect mutation. This we second and enforce by probable arguments."⁹

The Sovereign Drug Arminianism

The "sovereign drug, Arminianism," which said the Jesuit, "we (ie we Papists) have planted" in England, did indeed bid fair "to purge our Protestant Church effectually. *How merrily Popery and Arminianism, at that time, danced hand in hand*, may be learned from Tindal: "The churches were adorned with paintings, images, altar-pieces, & etc and, instead of communion tables, alters were set up, and bowings to them and the sacramental elements enjoined. The predestinarian doctrines were forbid, not only to be preached, but to be printed; and the Arminian sense of the Articles was encouraged and propagated."¹⁰ The Jesuit, therefore, did not exult without cause. The "sovereign drug," so lately "planted," did indeed take deep root downward, and bring forth fruit upward, under the cherishing auspices of Charles and Laud.

Heylyn, too, acknowledges, that the state of things was truly described by another Jesuit of that age, who wrote: "Protestantism waxeth weary of itself. The doctrine (by the Arminians, who then sat at the helm) is altered in many things, for which their progenitors forsook the Church of Rome: as *limbus patrum*; prayer for the dead, and possibility of keeping God's commandments: and *the accounting of Calvinism to be heresy at least if not treason*."¹¹

Arminianism from the Pit

The maintaining of these positions, by the Court divines, was an "alteration" indeed; which the abandoned Heylyn ascribes to "the ingenuity and moderation found in some professors of our religion." *If we sum up the evidence that has been given, we shall find its amount to be, that Arminianism came from the Church of Rome, and leads back again to the pit whence it was digged.*

Notes

1. Strype, u.s.
2. Job 1:7 with 1 Peter 5:8.
3. Matthew 23:15.
4. *Bath Chronicle* for Feb 6, 1772.
5. Bower's *History of the Popes*, vol 1, p 350.
6. Bower *ibid*.
7. Arminius in Oper P115. Ludg. 1629 (See book for Latin).
8. Hoord, in *Bishop Davenant's Anidmadversions*, Camb. 1641.
9. *Hidden Works of Darkness*, pp 89-90, Edit. 164
10. Tindal's *Contin. of Rapin*, vol 3, octavo, 1758.
11. *Life of Laud*, p 238