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THE DOCTRINE OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

A BRIEF STUDY

THE Lord is the true God and an everlasting King. He is the Maker of all things and as such He is their Lord. They are His work which He has made for Himself. They belong to His Lordship or Kingdom. They owe their being to His will and word. In the wide range of derived or created being which all belongs to His realm and is embraced in His decree there is not only the region of the inanimate or the merely sentient there is that also of animate and intelligent or spiritual being which was made to hold fellowship with Him from Whom it has come. Angels that excel in strength belong to this realm. We also who are of an order that was made a little lower than they belong to it as well. And we have a closer and more personal concern with the truth that bears on our race and on ourselves than we have with what holds good of another, albeit a higher rank of being than our own.

I

We each of us as well as the whole race to which we belong are subject to the sceptre of the Blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Made in His likeness and for His glory we should have our blessedness in Him. In regard to this we are as much dependent on the Lord for our blessedness as we are for our very being; and this we are not only as creatures, as our first father was before he fell, but very specially do we depend on Him for the recovery of blessedness as creatures that have sinned. Sinners have earned the wrath and curse of God and if they are to be freed from His righteous wrath it can be only as the outcome of His holy will in gracious intervention. The evil thing from which we need to be set free takes the shape of war with God. The very mind or thinking of man as fallen is enmity against Him. It is not subject to His law neither indeed can be, and so long as the reign of this evil

principle remains unbroken those who are under its sway cannot please God. They have their wicked quarrel with Him; and cherishing the thought of rebels, they are not willing to own Him as King or to give Him the glory of His kingly supremacy. They will not submit to the revelation of His will in Law as the rule of their obedience. Their quarrel with His royal rights comes out directly in their self-will which casts off His yoke. They would still, like their first father, be a God to themselves. And they dare to set up what falls in with their own pleasure against what He is pleased to make known as His preceptive will. The intimation of His preceptive will is one of the ways in which the great King makes it known that He is King. Those that would dethrone or ignore Him by ruling His authority out of their lives set at nought His will. They say in effect that their tongues are their own. Who is Lord over them? Thus the virus that was injected into the race by the tempter at the first is still at work and men will not yield to the claims of God as He calls for a loyal response in obedience at the hand of a race that He made to be His subjects and His servants.

This is one side of God's sovereignty; and it is often overlooked and forgotten when we speak of the matter. And yet when our attention is drawn to it we see at once how it belongs to His Kingly glory that it should be His revealed will that ought to guide the outgoings of our soul in the varied obedience of life. As a rule among Christian people there is an acknowledgment of this Kingship even though the best of them have reason to mourn over how far they come short of the love and the loyalty that should be theirs as their answer to the righteous claims of God. We see however that even on this side in regard to the obedience due to his Maker by man as fallen there is a disposition shown by many to reduce the claim that God makes at the hand of the sinner as though the sinful disability that man has brought upon himself availed to exempt him from some share of the full tale of duty for which his Maker calls. This perversion of truth may take more forms than one.

II

The plea may be put forward that man is responsible for only what is within the reach and compass of his present power. When this ground is taken we see how those who

adopt it as their starting-point and yet acknowledge the right of God to call for repentance and faith stand out for a seriously weakened and watered-down doctrine of the disastrous results of the Fall on the race of mankind, and they reason that when men are called upon to repent and believe the Gospel they must have some reserve of power still inherent in their nature which lays a rational ground for asking such obedience at their hand. Along this line lies Pelagianism with its diluted varieties and modifications in Semi-Pelagian Synergism and Arminianism. Those who espouse this kind of teaching reason from "I must" to "I can". They infer that there is power when there is duty. The pride of unbroken and unhumbled human nature comes out in the Kantian ethic that deduces "I can" from "I ought". It forgets that the disability which comes in the train of sin does not take away from God the right to ask for the love and the service to yield which He made us in His likeness at the first. To take this away from Him would be as much as to say that sin has so far reached its goal as to spoil our Maker of His right to call for full and unabated obedience at the hand of men who have fallen away from Him. Now the teaching that finds a place for such a leaven joins issue with the truth that the Lord is King. It quarrels with the rightful authority that belongs to Him as Maker and Sovereign.

III

This, however, is not all. If there are left-hand defections there are right-hand extremes. For among those who own the truth of the spiritual bankruptcy of a fallen race there are some who reason that because man as a sinner is unable, until he is born again, to repent or to believe the Gospel he is not called upon to do either and it would not be reasonable that he should be called upon to yield such obedience. It is said to be a mockery of his misery or it is a suggestion that he is not so lost as not to be able to make his way back to God. Now it is neither the one thing nor the other. It is not a mockery of the wretchedness of the sinner which on the part of his fellow in sin would be a very heartless thing. It is the way that God Himself takes in His Word in dealing with the many that are called outwardly so many of whom hear and heed not. For many are called while few are chosen. He bids men make them

a new heart and this is fitted, when they try to comply with the Word and find how wretchedly they fail to let them see the wickedness and stubbornness of hearts that will neither tremble nor obey. And at the same time it is fitted to produce the conviction that such is the grip of spiritual death that nothing else can loosen it than the new birth from above which gives life to the dead. Such a method conveys no suggestion that the thing a man ought to do he can do. He ought to do it and he has to learn that what he ought to do he cannot do and that this is the pit of hopeless ruin into which his sin has plunged him. It is a bitter thing to learn this truth but it is a wholesome truth to learn. It is not we, who are only called upon to echo His Word, but God Himself that bids the impenitent repent, the unbelieving believe and the dead to do what only the living can do. In doing all this God is within His own right and He vindicates the wisdom of the way that He is pleased to take when He brings in sinners guilty in the court of conscience and makes them feel that they are quite consciously impotent by reason of the dominion of death over their nature. When He does this He teaches the truth of spiritual death in the hard school of a living experience. This is something more than acquaintance with doctrinal notions. God convinces those whom He thus teaches that they must depend on Him as God Who quickeneth the dead Who alone can give effect to His own Word of truth and Who alone can burst the bonds that lie on the person and his powers over which the apathy of death holds its sway. The subjects of this teaching can speak of things whose truth they have been made to feel.

That our race should be in such a sad plight is a mystery that we are bound to recognise to be one that we cannot fathom; and it is folly on our part to try to explain it away by our proud and empty reasonings. In his pride man the culprit would take as his own the seat of the Judge and arraign his Judge at his bar as though the roles of Judge and culprit were reversed. He forgets that He with Whom he has to do is One that giveth not account of His matters and is not amenable to the judgment of the creatures that owe their very being to His Kingly fiat. Well would it become each one of us in things of this kind to hearken to the Voice that spoke of old at the Bush—"Take off thy shoes from off thy feet for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground".

IV

The truth of scripture has a catholicity of its own, an all-round fulness and symmetry that man with his nibbling cavils would mar and mutilate. The whole truth as to man's awful ruin is to be held and taught subject to no abatement and the full tale of God's unabridged rights and claims is at the same time to be held and taught along with it. And so the two-fold truth that man ought to obey and yet he cannot is to be maintained in its integrity. There is a lofty superiority to the whittling schemes of man to be seen in the way in which the Word of God sets forth both sides of this truth doing full justice to each alike. And in this respect our Reformed Faith in its fullest confession and expression as it sets forth standard Reformed teaching in such symbolic documents as the Canons of Dort and the Westminster Confession of Faith is a true echo of the doctrine of the Word which these notable symbols undertook to declare and to defend. The sacred rights of Law as an utterance of the holy will of God are guarded and at the same time unmistakable witness is borne to the need that there is for the saving operation of God so that man may be restored to the likeness he has lost. He will only in this way be enabled to answer the end of his being when he answers the end of his calling in wearing the yoke of his Redeeming Lord. We are thus brought up to face the question of what effects this precious result. And this is the other aspect of Sovereignty which is to be seen not in the authoritative proclamation of the preceptive will of God the Lawgiver and King but in His decisive will as He appoints things to be in His eternal decree.

V

This second aspect of His Sovereignty of which we are now to speak is what is oftenest indicated by the word when in doctrinal debates it is used of God. Stress is laid in historical and dogmatic discussions on the disposal of all things according to the purpose of God as that is wrought out in the field of universal providence. At times the word predestination may be used in a narrower and at other times in a wider sense. The stress of thought may be laid on the decree that bears in electing grace on the destiny of the people of God and its twin decree

which bears on the appointed destiny of those that He is pleased to pass over and to ordain to wrath and to dishonour as the reward of their sin. In the wider sense of predestination it covers all events so that God is seen to have preordained whatsoever comes to pass and the regularity of natural law is due to His appointment as to the necessary action of second causes according to the nature that He has bestowed upon them and their consequent appropriate working. In the course of His government in providence He works out what He has decreed so that these second or subordinate cases have their field of a proper operation and activity according to the nature of each of them. Thus events that are contingent fall out contingently and what is necessary has its own necessity. In the range of this latter category, paradoxical as it may sound it is necessary that the functioning of the created will should be free so that if it is to be exercised at all there is a need that it should be free. Thus rational freedom and necessity are found to conspire sweetly in the production of the actions of free agents. Here there is a necessity that has in its nature nothing of the character of the compelling force that overbears rational freedom; and so the predestination of God does not clash with the responsible freedom with which He has endowed accountable creatures whom He has put under Law and laid under obligation to honour Him by obeying it.

When a free agent in the exercise of his personal natural spontaneity takes a course of action it was certain beforehand that he would take such a course and should be naturally free in doing so. For God Who appointed before that such a course should be taken, in doing so appointed that it should be taken by a free agent in the natural exercise of his proper freedom. Such an appointment does not mar the freedom of the agent or his responsibility for his act. So far is this from being the case that it made sure that without any compulsion the action should take place and that it should be free when it took place. And appointment of this kind lays no kind of blind or brute necessity upon a free agent which interferes with his native spontaneous freedom or binds the agent hand and foot to be or to do anything else than he sees fit to choose for himself. Thus the Sovereignty of God in His purpose of predestination or preordination is a guarantee beforehand that when the time and place come for rational accountable action such action

shall be taken in the full tale of its rationality and responsibility. That God has appointed that a thing should be free is what secures and makes certain that it shall be so. It makes it certain beforehand; and this certainty does not come in conflict with the truth of the freedom of the willing agent when he in due course wills to act and acts as he has willed. It is a mere bugbear that is conjured up when men say that the predestination of God with its attendant certainty prohibits the free eventuation of the acts of responsible agents. God has appointed that responsible action should be that of free agents in the exercise of their choice as it commends itself to them and as they shall answer for it.

To say that the purpose beforehand to make a being endowed with rational freedom is inconsistent with the true freedom of that being when made is as much as to say that no truly free and accountable creature can exist; for to be such a free creature is only the thought of the Creator Who designed to make such a being. The creature will is free as it chooses what the person sees to be good for choice. It was made to be free and the purpose to make it was a purpose to make it what it was meant to be. There is thus no quarrel between man's creation as a morally free being and his freedom, and there is no more of a quarrel between that freedom and God's purpose to make beings endowed with such a freedom. Man made in the likeness and for the service of his Maker was not meant to be a mere piece of automatic mechanism grinding out irresponsibly thought and desire and—shall we call it?—volition. In his own sphere he was meant to be an originating centre of spontaneous and voluntary acts and of an activity that is a reflection on the plane of created life and being of the supreme and controlling activity of the will of God our Maker. Thus the Sovereign counsel of God has effect given to it, and yet it not only does not impinge upon the entire freedom of the will of free agents, it has in its certainty of execution the pledge that each responsible creature of His hand shall have all the freedom that is needed for the responsibility for which He has given it being.

There is then a perfect harmony between the will of a Sovereign God, the blessed and only Potentate, as effectual and controlling and transcendent, and the will or freedom of His responsible creatures who take the way that commends itself

to their choice. At one and the same time the will of God is sovereign and supreme and the will of man is naturally and morally free. Neither has a real quarrel with the other, though the perverse and rebel will of fallen man has its steady quarrel from day to day with the preceptive will of the Holy Sovereign of heaven and earth. The exercise then of the will of the creature leaves him open to the account that he has to give in. His responsibility is unimpaired. And it is altogether an oblique view that is taken of the supreme control and certainty of God's decretive will when it is seen as if it were in conflict with the fundamental and undeniable truth that we as a race are amenable to the judgment in righteousness of the great King Eternal, Immortal and Invisible.

There is no conflict at this point. In a word we may say that as surely as God is sovereign man is free, and as surely as man is free God is sovereign. In the sovereignty that belongs to Him He so controls the thoughts and desires and volitions of His creatures as to carry out through their free and responsible activity what He has Himself designed. His supremacy sets bounds to the activity of His creatures so that at the very time and in the very thing in which they please themselves they are giving effect to His transcendent design. And this is so even should it be the thought of their heart that they are bent on frustrating His counsel by doing their own will and pleasure. When their self-will reaches its highest His controlling hand is above it.

VI

There is of course an important distinction in the meaning we put upon the word free when we apply it to the ordinary rational choice and activity of every man in every day life which marks it out from the sense that attaches to it when we deny the spiritual freedom of the natural man and ascribe freedom in things spiritual to those only whose spiritual freedom of will has been given back to them by the touch of renewing grace. On such subjects as fall to be discussed in this connection we cannot be too careful as to the precise sense in which we and others use the words that are the coinage of thought. It is the failure to define our terms and to adhere to the definition if made and accepted that brings in the confusion that is found so often in the handling of topics in which ambiguity lurks at

every corner, owing to the various shades of meaning that belong to the same words, as they are used in the dialect of the various schools of thought. It is one of the benefits that issue from dogmatic or theological conflict that the combatants are forced by the necessity of the case to clear their ground and to use their terms with a respectable amount of self-consistency. In the field of philosophy we may ascribe to man a freedom that in the contiguous field of theology we deny to him. And when we understand the terms that we use in these neighbouring realms of thought we see that it is quite consistent to ascribe to man as a moral agent an inalienable freedom, while in regard to spiritual service to God his Maker, we deny to him as fallen the true and holy freedom which was his glory in his unfallen state. Then to do God's will was man's true delight; and such delight he cannot again have in the will and Law of God until that Law is written on the fleshy tablets of a new heart as the promise of the New Covenant has been made good to him.

By the misuse of his natural freedom of will man lost both himself and his true liberty. He is thus without the power to yield the homage of a loyal heart to the will of God. This being so, he is often spoken of as being destitute of freedom of will in which usage power and freedom are almost convertible or interchangeable terms. He is in bondage as fallen to the depravity of his nature so as not to be able to choose or to will as he should. This inability is bondage which is the negation of freedom. Yet as he is in possession of spontaneity of action and makes his own choice, he has a natural freedom that is enough to leave him responsible for the choice that he makes and the course that he takes.

VII

It is in regard to the bondage of the will to sin that on the field of history, discussion took place in the Pelagian controversy. For the Pelagians denied the truth of the teaching of the orthodox which laid stress on the spiritual bondage of man as a fallen being. In connection with this denial they had their quarrel with the sovereign will of God in regard to the dispensation of His grace; and this quarrel has passed on along the line of their avowed successors such for instance as the Socinians. In a modified form we find the Semi-Pelagian

strain taking up this teaching and so quarrelling with the free and absolute sovereignty of God's will in the distribution of His saving favour and salvation. This holds of the earlier and later Semi-Pelagians so that the Arminians both of the early seventeenth century and of the Methodist movement, join hands with the first representatives of their tendency in raising opposition to the freedom and sovereignty of the love and will of God in the choice of a people who shall reap the good of His thoughts of saving grace. The criticism that Pelagianism in its several varieties makes on the truth of the sovereignty of grace, is rooted in the unhumbled and self-righteous thoughts of men who fail to see that they are indeed sinners or who have no just or serious sense of the evil of sin and the righteousness of the doom that is out against it and that lies upon the sinner because of it. An uncircumcised heart is its source.

VIII

The objections that an Apostle had to face recur down the ages. Men will still say "Who hath resisted His will?" so that they have to be told that it does not belong to the thing that is made to say to its Maker, "Why hast Thou made me thus?" They need to be told that God our Maker is our Lord and King, being all that He is and all that the ideal Lord and King must be. If to be an ideal king among men one must be wise and just and true and good, these things raised to the height of full perfection and bearing the stamp of unending immutability belong to the Sovereign of heaven and earth. If a king to be a king indeed must be good, He is good. There is none good but one; that is God. If he must be true, He is true. If he must be just, He is just. If he must be wise He is wise. If he must be mighty He is mighty. And in all these things He is infinite, eternal and unchangeable while over and above His wisdom, power, justice, goodness and truth He is as perfect in the beauty of His holiness as He is in all His other attributes. Of such a One it is not to be thought that he should not be trusted even in the dark. Nor should we dare to think of Him and of His ways as though He were subject to our judgment while as a matter of fact we are subject to His judgment and not He to ours. Thus in the infinitude of His Being there are depths that no plumb line of ours can fathom so that

it is sheer presumption on the side of man to take the measuring rod of his own creature mind to measure the thoughts and ways of One Whose judgments are unsearchable and Whose ways are past finding out. In these things it is our best wisdom to be clad with true lowliness of mind for we are dealing with things that are so high above us that we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. When such wisdom is shown as keeps man within his proper bounds he will sit as a little child at the footstool of God as He speaks in His Word and will say, "I will hear what the Lord will speak." It is to souls of such gracious docility that those things of the Kingdom are made known which are hid from the wise and prudent. They are of such a temper because they have been born from above and this new birth is the outflow and the token of the high sovereign and distinguishing love of Him Who in His counsel of peace and purpose of love set them apart from everlasting to be His own.

IX

It is a fruit of God's kingly choice that comes out in the efficacious gracious work of the Holy Ghost. For there is a bond that binds into one scheme or system the truths of the doctrines of grace. These doctrines are part of one whole. With God's sovereign choice goes hand in hand His kingly provision and destination of the redeeming work of His Son in the effectual working of His gracious call as He quickens His called ones to newness of life. It is this working that begets faith; and the conversion or the turning of the sinner to God is the result of the renewing of his will which has been wrought by the effectual call. The newness of life thus given is seen in an abiding inclination of the called ones to new obedience so that the renewal of their will prompts them willingly to abide in Him to Whom they have betaken themselves and thus they persevere in the faith and in new obedience. This willing abiding in the Vine or in the City of Refuge tells of the operation in real grace of the love that in the purpose of grace sets apart its objects to be vessels prepared unto glory. That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit, so that the new born have that in them that cleaves to the Lord and His good ways. The outflow of sovereign choice in electing love is found in the reality of the new life of the regenerate which beginning at their call

shall reach its crown of completion in the achieved perfection of the subjects of grace here in the kingdom of glory hereafter.

X

Before the Pelagian controversy arose what was in substance the system that called forth the witness of Augustine to the doctrines of grace had been taught by men like Clement of Alexandria and other Church teachers in whose case their philosophy gave law to their theology. That philosophy had at its heart a pagan strain. Along with the earlier philosophic theologians we may take the general strain of the teachers of the Greek Church who were not given to an Augustinian type of teaching. The influence of Augustine as one of the recognised and accepted doctors of the Church told on the Western Churches in such a succession as we find in the names of outstanding teachers like Anselm and Bernard and so far as Aquinas, so that there was a definite Augustinian tradition which gave the Evangelical element to the mixed teaching of the Middle Ages. A Gottschalk might be condemned and a Semi-Pelagian strain might prevail among the Scotists and the Franciscans of pre-Reformation days. Yet so great was the authority that was recognised as belonging to Augustine that when the threads of Mediaeval Scholasticism were woven into one fabric at Trent, the Council aimed at avoiding any finding that would come in conflict with the teaching of the great bishop of Hippo while with equal care it sought to shun any form of words that would condemn the Semi-Pelagianism which was rampant in the current teaching of the Church and the Schools. So intellectual acrobats went through their gymnastic exercises of balancing themselves on the tight rope by coming to non-committal findings which kept their doctrine from being too definite on the one side or the other of debated questions which were open in the Schools.

The Augustinian strain that came out in Jansenius and Baius was a much more emphatic utterance of the doctrine of grace than the teaching that found acceptance in Lutheran circles from the later days of Melancthon's life onward or in the beginnings of the Arminian movement in the Reformed Churches. The earlier stage of the Reformation showed the leading teachers of the Protestant world to be very much at one as to

the gratuitous character of the Gospel salvation. Their movement was indeed a resurgence of the teaching of the Doctor of Grace. This marked them out to begin with from the half-way men of the Humanistic Reform. In the main features of their teaching the first Reformers were at one as to the gracious character of salvation. They were also at one with the teaching of the line of the Augustinian witnesses of earlier days except that in the sphere of relative grace they made a great advance in setting forth the truth as taught by the Apostles in regard to the free Justification by faith of the believing sinner. This advance made clear the distinction between grace as it renews the nature and grace as it rectifies the standing of those to whom it is shown. As things came about the defence of the truly gratuitous character of the provision of the Gospel fell to be made by the Reformed as distinct from the Lutheran Churches. They were in the Augustinian tradition on the subject.

XI

In the Church of England in Post-Reformation days, the first uprising of a type of teaching that came in conflict with the true teaching of its Confession was firmly repressed and the Lambeth Articles made plain to the world the strict Reformed orthodoxy of the leaders of the Anglican Communion in the latter days of Queen Elizabeth. It was not then to be wondered at that the representatives of England at the Synod of Dort should join in the condemnation of Arminianism and in the profession of the Reformed Faith in regard to the decree of God which recognises His holy sovereignty in the dispensing of His saving favour.

The findings of the renowned ecumenical Synod of the Reformed Churches set forth their faith as it was held in the great theological age which followed the Reformation itself when the divines of Western Protestant Europe were thoroughly at home in the kind of questions that were at issue between their Churches and Rome and in particular were alive to the meaning of the marked Semi-Pelagian teaching of their Jesuit opponents who were the foremost champions of the Papacy as they were the keenest critics of the doctrine of the Reformers. It was no convention of novices or of weaklings that met at Dort in 1618. They had among their leaders and counsellors some of the

foremost divines of their day. And the conclusions at which they arrived in the avowal of their faith and in the condemnation of error were not hastily come to. They were the ripe decisions of a generation of Theologians who were at home in their subject, expert in wielding their weapons and temperate and restrained in the terms in which they set forth their judgment. Coming as they did in point of time after the National Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformed Churches, even after the Irish Articles of 1615, except the documents of the Westminster Assembly they with these documents of British origin are the culminating exhibition of our common Reformed Faith when it was called upon to unfold its inmost genius and essence in self-defence against the revived Semi-Pelagianism of the early Arminians.

Their statements on these subjects put in short compass the dogmatic teaching of our Churches. Thus the Canons of Dort say :

Art. 1. "As all men have sinned in Adam, and have become exposed to the curse and eternal death, God would have done no injustice to anyone, if He had determined to leave the whole human race under sin and the curse, and to condemn them on account of sin. . . ."

Art. 2. But "in this is the love of God manifested, that He sent His only begotten Son into the world that everyone who believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. . . ."

Art. 3. But that men may be brought to faith, God mercifully sends heralds of this most joyful message to whom He willeth, and when He willeth, by whose ministry men are called to repentance, and faith in Christ crucified. . . .

Art. 4. They who believe not the Gospel on them the wrath of God remaineth, but those who receive it, and embrace the Saviour Jesus with a true and living faith are, through Him, delivered from the wrath of God and endowed with the gift of everlasting life.

Art. 5. The cause or fault of this unbelief as also of all other sins, is by no means in God, but in man. But faith in Jesus Christ and salvation by Him, is the free gift of God. . . .

Art. 6. That some, *in time*, have faith given them by God and others have it not given, proceeds from His eternal decree

. . . according to which decree, He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however hard, and He bends them to believe; but the non-elect He leaves, in just judgment, to their own perversity and hardness. And here, especially, a deep discrimination, at the same time both merciful and just, a discrimination of men equally lost opens itself to us; or that decree of Election and Reprobation which is revealed in the Word of God. . . .

Art 7. But Election is the immutable purpose of God, by which before the foundations of the world were laid, He chose out of the whole human race, fallen by their own fault from their primeval integrity into sin and destruction, according to the most free good pleasure of His own will, and of mere grace, a certain number of men neither better nor worthier than others, but lying in the same misery with the rest, to salvation in Christ; Whom He had, even from eternity, constituted Mediator and Head of all the elect, and the foundation of salvation; and therefore He decreed to give them unto Him to be saved; and effectually to call and draw them into communion with Him, by His own Word and Spirit; or He decreed Himself to give unto them true faith, to justify, to sanctify, and at length powerfully to glorify them, having kept them in the communion of His Son; to the demonstration of His mercy and the praise of the riches of His glorious grace. . . .

Art. 9. This same Election is not made from any foreseen faith, obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality and disposition, as a pre-requisite cause or condition in the men who should be elected but unto faith, and unto the obedience of faith, holiness, &c. And therefore Election is the fountain of every saving benefit; whence faith, holiness, and the other salutary gifts and finally eternal life itself, flow as its fruit and effect. . . .

Art. 10. Now the cause of this gratuitous Election, is the sole good pleasure of God, not consisting in this, that He elected into the condition of salvation certain qualities or human actions, from all that were possible; but in that out of the common multitude of sinners, He took to Himself certain persons as His peculiar property. . . .

Art. 11. And as God Himself is most wise, immutable, omniscient and omnipotent; so, Election made by Him can neither be interrupted, changed, recalled, nor broken off; nor

can the Elect be cast away, nor the number of them be diminished.”

This teaching is but an exposition or expansion of the teaching of the Belgic Confession in what it has to say on the subject. So in brief compass the Second Helvetic Confession which found so wide an acceptance in the Reformed Churches says: “God hath from the beginning freely and of His mere grace without any respect of men predestinated or elected the saints whom He will save in Christ.” So also we find in the Irish Articles which passed through the hands of James Ussher such words as these: “By the same eternal counsel, God hath predestinated some unto life, and reprobated some unto death, of both which there is a certain number known only to God which can neither be increased nor diminished.” This choice these Articles go on to attribute only to the good pleasure of God Himself. There is no question as to the agreement of the Westminster documents with the common consensus of the Reformed Churches as they deal with this matter of Divine Sovereignty and Predestination.

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