

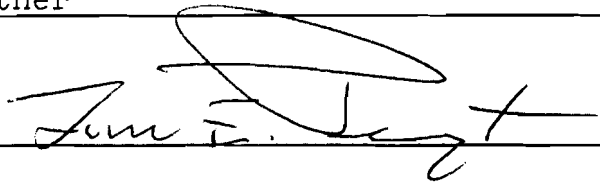
AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Arminianism in the Thought of John Cotton

and Increase Mather

Abstract approved: 

A number of historians of the early colonial era of this country have concluded that there was a tendency among Puritan theologians to move from Calvinist theology to Arminian theology. In an effort to decide if this truly is the case, two prominent Puritan theologians were examined in order to determine if they were Calvinistic or Arminian in their theologies. The two test cases were John Cotton (1584-1652) and Increase Mather (1639-1723).

In determining the theological stances of these two men the following approach was used. First, the thought of John Calvin in seven areas was ascertained, with heavy reliance on his commentaries and his Institutes of the Christian Religion. Second, by use of his collected

writings the thought of Arminius in these same seven areas was determined. Against this background the writings of Cotton and Mather were compared.

The results were that John Cotton was found to be an ardent Calvinist who assiduously avoided any Arminian leanings. Increase Mather was found to be still within the Calvinist camp, though with a much more Arminian tendency than Cotton. While Cotton seems more consistent in his theology, Mather seems less so. It is to be stressed however, that neither man was in fact Arminian.

ARMINIANISM IN THE THOUGHT
OF JOHN COTTON AND INCREASE MATHER

A Thesis
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the Department of Social Sciences
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PREFACE

With the publication of Perry Miller's work in the 1930's, it became popular for historians of the seventeenth century to conclude that the Puritans had slipped from a more or less pure Calvinism into a position much less Calvinistic and less pious. The idea was that when the Puritans adopted the "federal" or "covenant" theology of certain English theologians, they were in turn giving up something of Calvin's thought and embracing a quasi-Arminian position. In doing so, it was stressed that they were pressing more for man's rights and less for God's sovereignty; more for man's reason and less for the mystical concept of piety. Hence, it was argued that the Puritans in taking up "covenant" theology became in fact less pious. Edmund S. Morgan killed that argument in his book Visible Saints. Nevertheless, in keeping with Miller's analysis the opinion among historians remains that covenant theology was a sort of crypto-Arminianism. Oddly enough, in theological circles, Miller's position has gone largely unnoticed. There is hardly any question in such circles about the Calvinism of the Puritans and covenant theology. It is assumed that Puritans and covenant theology were Calvinistic, almost to an extreme.

To one trained in both disciplines, the natural tendency is to ascertain whether the historians or the theologians are right in their analyses of Puritan thought. It appears that the historians and the theologians both have insights into the problem, but because of a lack of understanding of each other's discipline each has failed to come to a completely adequate understanding of Puritan thought. If some historians have failed to grasp the subtleties of theology, some theologians have failed to be sufficiently critical of Puritan writers whose views coincide with their own.

This paper attempts to combine the best of both disciplines in order to ascertain if certain Puritans really were less Calvinistic than Calvin. John Cotton and Increase Mather have been chosen because of their status in the commonwealth of Massachusetts. In their own times, they were the most respected theologians of the colony, and because of this, highly influential. The question, therefore, is whether either John Cotton or Increase Mather give support to the idea that there was a slipping away from Calvinism into Arminianism among theologians in seventeenth century Massachusetts.

I wish to extend my thanks and appreciation to Dr. Loren Pennington, whose diligence and extremely helpful suggestions have helped me to write a better paper than

I otherwise would have done. To Reverend Mark Pettersen I owe thanks for his help and encouragement, and for reading earlier drafts of this work. My typist, Mrs. Dee Scott, deserves much thanks for her efforts and for a pleasant attitude in spite of a difficult job. I am especially thankful for an understanding wife, who has been more than patient about a project which has at times been less than easy to understand.

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CHAPTER I

CALVINISM

John Cotton and Increase Mather are ordinarily identified with the system of theology known as Calvinism. Calvinism takes its name from John Calvin (Jean Cauvin, 1509-1564). Since it is the purpose of this study to ascertain if certain Puritans, namely John Cotton and Increase Mather, departed from Calvinism to a form of Arminianism, it is necessary to first establish what Calvinism was and is.

For the purposes of our study, it would be a fruitless exercise to establish Calvin's position in all matters relating to theology. Calvin's interest was in the whole of Scripture; hence he discussed all that Scripture treats of in his various studies, and that is beyond the scope of this presentation of his ideas. There are, however, several areas of Calvin's thought which are pertinent to this study and which will be covered in order. We shall rely to a considerable extent upon a translation of the text of the 1559 edition of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, as well as excerpts from his commentaries on the Bible.¹

Before setting forth Calvin's positions, something of his background might be helpful. Born in 1509 in Noyon, France, Calvin was the son of an upper middle class family, his father being the lawyer for the bishopric of Noyon. Entering the University of Paris in 1523 and leaving in 1528 after studying Latin and dialectics, he proceeded to the University of Orleans to study law in 1528. He graduated in law sometime about 1530 from the University of Bourges. At Bourges he grew to love Greek and the Humanistic outlook.²

It was in 1534 that Calvin was converted. Because of his connections and a sympathy with the Protestant reforms. Calvin had to flee to Basel late the same year. It was in early 1536 that he published his Institutes in response to the French King's claims that French Protestantism was anarchistic. This work was revised several times, the final edition being that of 1559.³

Fortunes of war took him to Geneva in 1536, and in 1537 he was appointed a preacher there. His beliefs made his stay there stormy, and in 1538 both he and Guillaume Farel were banished. For the three years following, he pastored a church and was lecturer in theology at Strassburg. In 1540 the group favorable to Calvin in Geneva regained power and in 1541 Calvin returned to Geneva "practically on his own terms."⁴

Though he never held any position of power in Geneva,

apart from that of minister, Calvin had great influence there, though not without trials. / From 1548 to 1555, his position was shaky because of the fear on the part of the native Swiss that the "refugees" (which included Calvin) would overrun Geneva. Despite Swiss efforts this ultimately did happen, and Calvin's party was secure after 1555.⁵ In 1559 Calvin founded the University of Geneva, five years prior to his death in 1564. Calvin heavily influenced the church in France, the Netherlands, Scotland and in England, the Puritans especially. It was to Theodore Beza that Calvin's work in Geneva fell; it was this same Beza who was to be instructor to a Hollander by the name of Jakob Hermanzoon who later Latinized his name to James Arminius.⁶

We will cover Calvin's thoughts on seven pertinent areas. These are: (1) the nature of human reason; (2) the nature and use of moral law; (3) the nature of Adam's sin and its effects on his posterity; (4) free will; (5) predestination; (6) some aspects of the nature of faith; and (7) the concept of the covenant.

For the purposes of elucidation and clarification, reference will be made under each of the above headings, either to the Canons of the Synod of Dort or to particular seventeenth century Puritans.⁷ In some cases, both will be consulted.

First, in regard to the value of human reason, Calvin says:

We must now analyze what human reason can discern

with regard to God's kingdom and to spiritual insight. This spiritual insight consists chiefly in **three** things: (1) knowing God; (2) knowing his fatherly favor in our behalf, in which our salvation consists; (3) knowing how to frame our life according to the rule of his law. In the first two points--and especially in the second--the greatest geniuses are blinder than moles.⁸

"Human reason," Calvin continues, "neither approaches, nor strives toward, nor even takes a straight aim at this truth; to understand who the true God is or what sort of God he wishes to be towards us."⁹

In commenting on 1 Cor.2.14, he asks to whom Paul is referring when he speaks of "the natural man." He answers that it is "The man who depends upon the light of nature. He, I say, comprehends nothing of God's spiritual mysteries. Why is this? Is it because he neglects them out of laziness? No, even though he try, he can do nothing, for 'they are spiritually discerned.'"¹⁰ His point is that even though a man can understand the literal meaning of the words of Scripture or of those who expound Scripture (e.g. Calvin's writings themselves) and hence demonstrates natural abilities to reason, he will not agree with those meanings. To hold to such meanings as truth one must have "spiritual" understanding.

On this point, the Canons of Dort added little of nothing in elaboration of Calvin's thoughts. The Canons indicate that men are "neither able or willing to return to God . . . nor to dispose themselves to reformation."¹¹ There is implied the understanding that man's reason

(Canons--"will") is neither inclined nor able to discern man's proper or present relation to God.

Calvin sums up his beliefs on reason by saying that whereas reason is "proper to our nature," it is not the possession of all. Because of this fact, he urges that we ought to be more thankful to God, because of this graciousness in allowing us what we have left of our reason. "For if he had not spared us, our fall would have entailed the destruction of our whole nature."¹²

Secondly, Calvin, in dealing with moral law (as represented in the Decalogue, Exodus, and Deuteronomy), separates it into three functions. First, "while it shows God's righteousness, that is, the righteousness alone acceptable to God, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness."¹³ A second function of moral law is "to restrain certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats of the law."¹⁴ Finally, the moral law is seen by Calvin as "the best instrument for them [believers] to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it."¹⁵ This is achieved in "frequent meditation" on the law.¹⁶

As we shall see later, this moral law in both the Calvinist and Arminian systems must somehow be obeyed by someone. Calvin is simple and somewhat blunt; "I wish this

one thing at least to be conceded to me: it is pointless to require in us the capacity to fulfill the law, just because the Lord demands our obedience to it."¹⁷ Again, he says, "For this condition, that we should carry out the law . . . will never be fulfilled. Thus the Lord helps us, not by leaving us a part of righteousness in our works . . . but by appointing Christ alone as the fulfillment of righteousness."¹⁸ Thus, Christ is seen as obeying the moral law on behalf of man.

One other area of interest is the extent to which Calvin believed the moral law to be abrogated. To him, the law cannot be to believers what it was previous to their conversion. It does not have the "power to bind their consciences with a curse." Rather, it now "enjoins" and "exhorts" believers to live rightly. Hence, while the law is abrogated with respect to its judicial power, it has relinquished nothing in the moral realm.¹⁹

The Canons of Dort are in essential agreement with Calvin, regarding the moral law. Nevertheless, they say nothing which could be taken as analogous to Calvin's second point, which refers largely to the civil function of the law. The Canons see the moral law through strictly theological spectacles; they recognize the warning and convicting powers of the law, and its application to believers as a guide to God's character and will.²⁰

Thirdly, how does Calvin deal with Adam's first sin? How has it affected his posterity? In Calvin's system, the

inability to fulfill the precepts of the moral law came as a result of mankind's connection to Adam and his first transgression. "Since, therefore, the curse, which goes about through all the regions of the world, flowed hither and yon from Adam's guilt, it is not unreasonable if it is spread to all his offspring."²¹ Here Calvin teaches parental connection between Adam and us. Elsewhere, Calvin again calls Adam "the first parent of all."²² In the same place, Calvin says that "Adam was not only the progenitor but, as it were, the root of human nature."²³

In Book II, Chapter 1, section 7 of his Institutes, Calvin speaks of the gifts which God gave Adam with the intent that they would constitute the very nature of unfallen humanity. In the same section, Calvin states simply that when Adam sinned, he lost those same gifts; "lost them not only for himself but for us all." With Adam's sin "human nature was left naked and destitute."²⁴

The result then, of our connection with Adam and of his sin, is our less than perfect human nature. In place of the perfect nature, we now have a nature characterized by "impotence, impurity, vanity, and injustice."²⁵ "This is the inherited corruption, which the church fathers termed 'original sin,' meaning by the word 'sin' the deprivation of a nature previously good and pure."²⁶

This goes beyond the system of the Roman confession and the theological position of the Scholastics (and, as we will see, Arminius also). These all saw original sin as

principally the lack or loss of "original righteousness" or "justice." While admitting the need for God's help to do right things, they did not wish to hold too tightly to this concept, for it would then deny the existence of merit, an unthinkable idea in the Roman communion. In response to them, Calvin argues as follows:

Thus those who have defined original sin as 'the lack of original righteousness, which ought to reside in us,' although they comprehend in this definition the whole meaning of the term, have still not expressed effectively enough its power and energy. For our nature is not only destitute and empty of good, but so fertile and fruitful of every evil that it cannot be idle. Those who have said that original sin is 'concupiscence' have used an appropriate word, if only it be added . . . that whatever is in man . . . has been defiled and crammed with this concupiscence.²⁷

The process by which we individually come to this state is implied by Calvin's sarcastic reply to the Pelagian viewpoint:

What nonsense will the Pelagians chatter here? That Adam's sin was propagated by imitation? Then does Christ's righteousness benefit us only as an example before us to imitate? Who can bear such a sacrilege!²⁸

Calvin's answer to how we become sinners is that we are what we are somehow through propagation, and not by imitation.

G. C. Berkouwer elaborates on Calvin's position, saying:

We may ask in what way sin is 'transferred' from parents to children, but Calvin refused to go into that 'labyrinth.' . . . Thus, it was not the 'way in which' that occupied Calvin but the idea of the totality and universality of corruption.²⁹

How deeply Calvin thought mankind was infected can be seen in the following excerpts from his Institutes. "Here I only want to suggest briefly that the whole man is

overwhelmed--as by a deluge--from head to foot, so that no part is immune from sin and all that proceeds from him is to be imputed to sin."³⁰ We "are by nature inclined to evil with our whole [*italics mine*] heart."³¹ This nature in which nothing is perfect, in which even the best thing one does has some taint of sin to it, is the punishment and result not of someone else's fault, but our own.³²

There is practically no difference in the essential positions of Calvin himself and the Canons of Dort. All the Canons did was to state the doctrine of the result of Adam's sin more succinctly. In Article II, under Heads III and IV, the Canons state:

Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produces a corrupt offspring. Hence all posterity of Adam, Christ only excepted, have derived corruption from their original parent, not by imitation, as the Pelagians of old asserted, but by the propagation of a vicious nature in consequence of a just judgment of God.³³

Having dealt with these three aspects of Calvin's thoughts, it is now necessary to deal with the two areas which quickly proved to be most volatile--free will and predestination.

In regard to the state of man's will; i.e., whether or not it is free to do as it chooses, Calvin seems to be quite clear as to what its inevitable "choice" would be in any given situation:

In order that no one should make an excuse that good is initiated by the Lord to help the will which by itself is weak, the Spirit elsewhere declares what the will, left to itself, is capable of doing: 'A new heart shall I give you, and will put a new spirit

within you; I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh . . . ' [Ezek. 36:26-27]. Who shall say that the *infirmity* of the human will is strengthened by his help in order that it may aspire effectively to the choice of good, when it must rather be wholly transformed and renewed?³⁴

Elsewhere, Calvin makes it exceedingly clear what are the tendencies of the man's soul, including the will. The "whole heart" is "by nature inclined to evil," while the will itself is particularly singled out as "turned away from the good."³⁵ By way of reinforcement, Calvin says, "that whatever is in man, from the understanding to the will [*italics mine*], from the soul even to the flesh, has been defiled and crammed with this concupiscence."³⁶

What if the will is depraved; wholly prone to evil and concupiscent; cannot man still have a free will? Calvin will not concede that.

Yet so depraved is his [man's] nature that he can be moved or impelled only to evil. But if this is true then it is clearly expressed that man is surely subject to the necessity of sinning.³⁷

This necessity, says Calvin, does not mean that the will is irradicated, but that man is deprived of "soundness of will."³⁸

It was also held by Calvin that the will was "restrained by the stoutest bonds." This he took to mean that there was no willing of the good prior to the grace which was brought by God's spirit. This he felt was sufficient to dispel the idea of "preparation."³⁹

It will be most instructive if we follow up Calvin's

point here. In the very next section of his Institutes, Calvin makes a statement which, when coupled to the sentiments just cited, would have been his answer to Arminianism, had he lived to see it flourish. He says simply, "We have nothing of the Spirit, however, except through regeneration. Whatever we have from nature, therefore, is flesh."⁴⁰ Here, the term "flesh" signifies that which is the opposite of spirituality or Godliness. When these two sentiments are taken together, they show that Calvin believed that the will must be regenerated, or completely turned from its old ways, before one is able to choose God. There is no assisting grace helping a weak, infirm will which comes before regeneration and the choosing of God's way.⁴¹ In Calvin's system there is simply no room for the Arminian concept of "preparation," i.e. the act whereby a man is brought to the point where he is able to accept the gospel if he wishes, but is not compelled to accept it.

The later Puritans and the Synod of Dort are split, however, in their assessment of the state of man's will. Some Puritans seem to have slipped away from Calvin's position. Perry Miller cites the following quotation from Samuel Willard, a late seventeenth century Boston divine: "'Natural Necessity destroys the very nature of a Covenant,' said Willard, for it must be 'a voluntary obligation between persons about things wherein they enjoy a freedom of Will, and have a power to choose or refuse,' it must be

'a deliberate thing wherein there is a Counsel and a Consent between Rational and free Agents.'"42 Miller also indicates that Thomas Hooker "conceived that 'the main principall cause of faith is rather an assisting power [*italics mine*] working upon, than any inward principall put into the soule to work of its self.'"43 In short, these Puritans argue for a will which is not totally ruined or depraved.

The Canons of Dort, on the other hand, ally themselves with Calvin's position. The statement of Article X under the "Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine" is abundantly clear. "But that others who are called by the gospel obey the call and are converted, is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free-will, whereby one distinguishes himself above others equally furnished with grace sufficient for faith and conversion (as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains); but it must be wholly ascribed to God."44 The Canons of Dort seem to follow the thought of Calvin with very little deviation.

The fifth area, that of predestination, is undoubtedly the doctrine most often associated with Calvin. It is also possibly the most volatile area of his theology. Calvin is not altogether clear on the finer points of this doctrine in his Institutes, as will be seen upon examination. It has been, both prior to and after Calvin, quite common to make a distinction between God's active will in predestination and God's passive permission. In such a scheme God

passively permits a reprobate man (a person who continues in rebellion to God) to remain a reprobate, while he actively brings or wills the redeemed man into Christ's kingdom.

Calvin rejects this point of view.

But why shall we say 'permission' unless it is because God so will? Still it is not in itself likely that man brought destruction upon himself through himself, by God's mere permission and without any ordaining. As if God did not establish the condition in which he wills the chief of his creatures to be!⁴⁵

Calvin also rejects a second understanding of the nature of predestination:

No one who wishes to be thought religious dares simply deny predestination. . . . But our opponents, especially those who make foreknowledge its cause, envelop it in numerous petty objections. We, indeed, place both doctrines in God, but we say that subjecting one to the other is absurd.⁴⁶

In Calvin's understanding, God "foreknew nothing outside of himself which led him to will the adoption of sons."⁴⁷ Predestination, being based neither on a passive permission nor on the foreknowledge of the act to be predestined, is for Calvin unconditional with reference to election (i.e. having no conditions for receiving God's favor) but conditional with reference to reprobation (rejection received because of sin). This brings two new terms into our discussion: supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism.

Both terms are used in explaining the order in which certain predestinating decrees of God occurred. Supralapsarianism states that "the order of events is: God proposed (1) to elect some creatable men (that is, men who were to be created) to life and to condemn others to destruction; (2)

to create; (3) to permit the fall; (4) to send Christ to redeem the elect; and (5) to send the Holy Spirit to apply this redemption to the elect. According to this plan, election precedes the fall." The infralapsarian view differs only in the order of the "decrees." "The order of events then is" God proposed (1) to create; (2) to permit the fall; (3) to elect some out of this fallen mass to be saved, and to leave the others as they were; (4) to provide a redeemer for the elect; and (5) to send the Holy Spirit to apply this redemption to the elect. According to this plan, election follows the fall."⁴⁸ The difference to be seen between the two positions is that in supralapsarianism no creatures exist when God decides who will be elected to salvation. John Jones is elected to salvation before both John Jones and Adam are created. Hence, election or reprobation has absolutely nothing to do with anything either John Jones or Adam did. In infralapsarianism, the election to salvation occurs after Adam's sin (and John Jones' sin in Adam) and so the decision to leave John Jones or Adam as reprobates at least follows their sin. They did something to make themselves reprobate before God chose His children.

As can be seen the supralapsarian position is certainly the more absolute of the two choices, while the infralapsarian view allows for conditional reprobation. Calvin seems to prefer Supralapsarianism. "We did not exist when we were predestined."⁴⁹ Beyond this Calvin affirms that:

All are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.⁵⁰

Elsewhere, he seems to take the opposite opinion:

When Paul teaches that we were chosen in Christ 'before the creation of the world' [Eph. 1:4a], he takes away all consideration of real worth on our part, for it is just as if he said: since among all the offspring of Adam, the Heavenly Father found nothing worthy of his election, he turned his eyes upon his Anointed, to choose from that body as members those whom he was to take into the fellowship of life.⁵¹ (Italics mine.)

This seems to assure the existence of men before the process of election.

In something which seems to be a compromise statement,

Calvin comments on Romans 9.11:

In order, however, to prevent any doubt from remaining, as though Esau's condition had been worse because of some vice or fault, it was expedient for Paul to exclude sins no less than virtues. It is true that the immediate cause of reprobation is the curse which we all inherit from Adam. Nevertheless, Paul withdraws us from this view, so that we may learn to rest in the bare and simple good pleasure of God, until he has established the doctrine that God has a sufficiently just cause for election and reprobation in His own will.⁵²

Calvin therefore seems to take hold of infralapsarianism by way of practicality, while not being quite willing to desert his belief in the absolute predestinating power of God.⁵³ If so, even the brilliance of Calvin was unable to unravel the mystery of predestination. Nevertheless, he is implacable in his defence of unconditional election. It appears that the problem is the basis on which God determines who is reprobated.

In closing this section, it should be noted that Calvin's position on predestination is not contradicted by his zeal for proclaiming the word of God's salvation to the unbeliever. On the contrary, such proclamation is one of the means which God uses in carrying out his predestined decree to save certain individuals. This interpretation is borne out when one recalls how the moral law is also an instrument God uses in carrying out his decrees. (The proclamation is not, of itself, efficacious. It is not a sacrament which works ex opere operato.)

The sixth area, that of faith, has many facets which we cannot even begin to cover. Calvin, in his Institutes, devotes much space to it, as is altogether right, faith being God's chosen vehicle for conveying righteousness, and hence salvation to man. Nevertheless, we need only refer to two aspects of faith to provide a basis of comparison for our discussion.

First, we must ask what Calvin believed to be faith. He proposed the following as a definition: "Now we shall possess a tight definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."⁵⁴

In this definition, Calvin only hints at the second aspect which was a source of contention between Calvin and Arminius, not to mention Calvin and some later Puritans.

It is that which has to do with the origin or source of faith. Does faith originate in man? Is it a cooperative effort between God and man? Could it be a gift of God which he bestows on a man who can do nothing but suddenly realize that he believes? Calvin first gives a short reply, early in his Institutes and then a longer, more comprehensive answer later in the same book. First, Calvin teaches that "Similarly, where he says that the Thessalonians have been chosen by God 'in sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth' . . . he is briefly warning us that faith itself has no other source than the Spirit."⁵⁵ Calvin then elaborates on this warning:

But here we must beware of two errors: for some make man God's co-worker, to ratify election by his consent. Thus, according to them man's will is superior to God's plan. As if Scripture taught that we are merely given the ability to believe, and not, rather, faith itself! Others . . . make election depend upon faith, as if it were doubtful and also ineffectual until confirmed by faith.⁵⁶

Also, in his Institutes, Calvin interprets Paul as saying in 2 Thess. 1.11 that man is incapable of initiating faith.⁵⁷

Two statements of Calvin's cement his position.

One comes from his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, while the other comes from his commentary on the letters to the Thessalonian church. Commenting on 2 Thess. 3.2, Calvin exhorts his readers thus: "Let us, therefore, retain the words of Paul, by which he indicates that faith is a gift of God that is too uncommon to be found in all."⁵⁸

(Italics mine.) In the exegesis of Romans 10.17, he says

"But all these things do not prevent God from acting efficiently by the voice of man, so as to create faith in us by his [man's] ministry."⁵⁹

The Canons of Dort seem only to expand upon Calvin's understanding of the source of faith. Insofar as this is true, it betrays the emphasis of the Canons in the area of God's sovereign freedom and its effects on mankind. Such things as a definition of faith are taken as understood. One reference to the Canons will be sufficient for our purposes, since it is only the most explicit of several more or less clear statements concerning the nature of faith as a gift.

Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure, but because it is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him; not even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should, by the exercise of his own free will, consent to the terms of salvation, and actually believe in Christ; but because he who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.⁶⁰

A seventh issue concerns what Calvin had to say about the concept of "covenant." There are a number of uses of the word covenant in theology. The most obvious refers to the "Old" covenant and the "New" covenant, more commonly referred to as the Old and New Testaments. Calvin understands the usage thus:

the Old Testament of the Lord was that covenant wrapped up in the shadowy and ineffectual observance of ceremonies and delivered to the Jews; it was

temporary because it remained, as it were, in suspense until it might rest upon a firm and **substantial** confirmation. It became new and eternal only after it was consecrated and established by the blood of Christ.⁶¹

Hence, the two covenants were seen rather as one covenant which had been separated into a foreshadowing presence and a latter reality.

One can adduce at least four more characteristics which Calvin believed were common to the covenant. It was originally restricted to Israel, it was applicable in all periods of time, it could be made without reference to actual spiritual regeneration, and it was unconditional.

First,

In communicating his Word to them, he [God] joined them [Israel] to himself, that he might be called and esteemed their God. In the meantime, 'he allowed all other nations to walk' in vanity . . . as if they had nothing whatsoever to do with him.⁶²

Second,

it is most evident that the covenant which the Lord once made with Abraham . . . is no less in force today for Christians than it was of old for the Jewish people.⁶³

Third,

to those with whom God makes a covenant, he does not at once give the spirit of regeneration that would enable them to persevere in the covenant to the very end.⁶⁴

Fourth,

the covenant by which they were bound to the Lord was supported, not by their own merits, but solely by the mercy of the God who called them.⁶⁵

In further support of the unconditional character of the covenant as Calvin saw it, one should bring forth two more excerpts. "By this he indirectly indicates that although king and people wickedly rejected the promise offered them, as if they were purposely trying to discredit God's pledge, yet the covenant would not be invalidated."⁶⁶ On the other hand Calvin emphasizes that "when it is said that 'the Lord keeps covenant of mercy with those who love him' . . . this indicates what kind of servants they are who have undertaken his covenant in good faith rather than expresses the reason why the Lord benefits them."⁶⁷ That is to say, that such as who love God do so as a result of being true participants of the covenant rather than that they are allowed to participate on account of their good behaviour.⁶⁸

Interestingly enough, the Canons of Dort, though outlining what would come to be known as five-point Calvinism, fail to say anything substantial about the concept of the covenant. The only reference to any covenant is in a section entitled "Rejection of Errors" and there it is a quotation from the Arminian position which is being rejected. The idea of the covenant was not being rejected; it simply was just not considered an item of controversy.⁶⁹

It seems that the "Calvinist" group which brought most to the concept of the covenant, were those latter called "covenant theologians," of which the Puritans were the

foremost. Perry Miller identifies those who formulated the "covenant" theology that became standard fare for most Calvinists in the seventeenth century.

The names of those who formulated the theory . . . were among the authors most widely studied in New England: [William] Perkins, [William] Ames, [John] Preston, [Richard] Sibbes, [John] Ball, [Richard] Baxter, and [Theophilus] Gale. It can hardly be said that Perkins invented it. . . for it had figured in the writings of the earlier reformers, but his works were the first in England to give it the stress which became overwhelming in the sermons of Preston.⁷⁰

What did the term "covenant" mean to the Calvinist Puritan element of the latter sixteenth and early seventeenth century? In most every case, a covenant seemed to be a synonym for a contract. Perry Miller believed that "with Preston and his friends the word [covenant] seemed to suggest one simple connotation: a bargain, a contract, a mutual agreement, a document binding upon both signatories, drawn up in the presence of witnesses and sealed by a notary public." In the same article, Miller cites William Perkins as defining "'the Covenant of Grace'" as God's "'contract with man, concerning the obtaining of life eternall, upon a certaine condition.'"⁷¹

John S. Coolidge, in a recent work, reinforces Miller's stand:

They [the Puritans] naturally suppose that the idea of a covenant has in all times been essentially what it is in their own. It is a 'mutual agreement between parties upon Articles or Propositions on both sides, so that each party is tied and bound to perform his own conditions', as Thomas Blake defines it. . . .⁷²

John Goodwin, also a Puritan, "points out particularly

that conditions are 'as formal and essential a part of a covenant, as any other thing belonging to it.'"73 Miller continues to give support to this contractual definition by quoting William Ames: "'Where two Parties do stand mutually obliged one to another in a voluntary Agreement, there is a Covenant.'"74

Finally, Richard Sibbes puts the definition to work for us in an explanation not of a simple covenant, but of the theological covenant:

It has pleased the great God to enter into a treaty and covenant of agreement with us his poor creatures, the articles of which agreement are here comprised. God, for his part, undertakes to convey all that concerns our happiness, upon our receiving of them, by believing on him. Every one in particular that recites these Articles from a spirit of faith makes good this condition.⁷⁵

It seems quite clear at this point how a certain segment of the population of Puritan theologians must have viewed the basic nature of the covenant. It was a contract between two rational and equal beings.

As was seen earlier in our treatment of free will, certain Puritans departed from the position held to by Calvin. They saw men as having free will. It is this free will which, though diseased, can be brought to some state of health by God's mercy, so as to then choose for itself to exert faith, which faith mankind is capable of producing of itself. (In this system, while man produces the faith itself, God provides the ability to produce the faith.) If covenants are conditional, then faith becomes the condition

which settles the agreement, and man decides whether a contract is to be made or not.

The difference between these Puritans' understanding of the covenant and that of Calvin should be evident. Not only so, but it must be realized that how a man views the covenant between God and man betrays the man's thoughts on how corrupt a fallen man is, and hence his kinship to either Calvin or Arminius.

It is generally assumed that the concept of a contractual covenant is a legitimate and accepted understanding of the word covenant. It is important to note that Calvin's understanding is equally valid. In fact, recent research on the use of the Hebrew and Greek words for covenant, tends to support Calvin's position quite well. For this reason a discussion of this research is contained in Appendix I. (It is felt that such a discussion is helpful in seeing the relationships between Calvin, Arminius, John Cotton and Increase Mather.)

From this examination, it is to be seen that Calvinism (that form characteristic of Calvin) held to the inability of man's reason to think rightly about God; that it regarded the moral law as useful for a standard of conduct and a tool to bring men to Christ, but that it had no justifying power; it regarded Adam's sin as ours and that the result of Adam's sin was not just the loss of righteousness but "corruption" as well. With regard to free will, it is here

where Calvin and some Puritans part company. For Calvin, man has no free will. The will is depraved and incapable of freely choosing God. Many Puritans would require that men have free will.

Calvin is a thorough predestinarian, not allowing that predestination (to election) is based on foreknowledge, but simply on God's sovereign will. Here many Puritans separated from Calvin, embracing foreknowledge as the basis of predestination--a position held by Arminius. God's sovereign will is the only basis of faith as well. Hence, it is a gift by Himself to men and not a function or construct of man's mind or soul or spirit.

Again, Calvin and the "Calvinists" who followed (including many Puritans) diverged on the question of the nature of the covenant. To Calvin, any covenant between God and man was an unconditional disposition on the part of God and not a "contract" between two equal (or unequal for that matter) partners. Among the Puritans, however, the term covenant can have varied meanings. Once one has determined how a Puritan understands the covenant, then one can see how he feels about the origin of faith and the freedom of the will. Once this is clear, a Puritan can be ascribed a Calvinist or an Arminian. But this examination is essential. Moreover, it is the determining examination, for it tests the points where divergence is most important. This will be an area of great importance, therefore, in our treatments of John Cotton and Increase Mather.

NOTES

¹Everett Emerson, in his article "Calvin and Covenant Theology" in Church History, vol. 25 (1956) pages 136-144, says on page 136 that "The purpose of the following study is to compare some aspects of covenant theology with the teachings of Calvin in their approaches to the conversion process. Such an investigation is especially important because previous students have made the unfortunate error of comparing Calvin's teachings in his textbook of theology The Institutes of the Christian Religion with the sermon teachings of such so-called covenant theologians as the New Englanders Thomas Hooker, John Cotton, and Thomas Shepard. A comparison of this sort is neither useful nor fair; it is more appropriate to use Calvin's sermon teachings as the basis of a comparison, although other writings may well be used in addition." Because of Emerson's position, it is necessary to defend the use of Calvin's Institutes in this study. First, it is by no means self-evident that the concepts found in the Institutes are foreign to the ideas to be gleaned from Calvin's sermons. Emerson seems to imply that one would find two separate theologies in them. I would think that as intelligent as Calvin was he would be more careful to cover his tracks. Second, it is the intention of this author to use whenever possible not only the sermons of Cotton and Mather, but also their more systematic writings as well. Third, one is most likely to obtain a more accurate discussion of such controversial doctrines as are involved in the Calvinist-Arminian debate by going to the more systematic writings. Finally, not even Emerson is consistent. He implies that his major points at least would be drawn from Calvin's sermonic material. On the question of "preparation," a point at which he tries to show Calvin's closest affinity to the covenant theologians, he falls short of his claims. One error, on page 140, is cited here: "But Calvin, at least, in passing, also refers to a kind of preparation for salvation. 'There are two operations of the Spirit in faith, corresponding to the two parts of which faith consists, as it enlightens, and as it establishes the mind. The commencement of faith is knowledge: The completion of it is a firm and steady conviction, which admits of no opposing doubt.'" Apart from misapplying Calvin's words (we shall show how Calvin really felt about "preparation" shortly), Emerson has drawn them, not from a sermon of Calvin's, but from, of all things, his Commentary

on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians! Few books of Calvin's tend to be more like his Institutes than his commentaries. Hence, this author feels Calvin's Institutes to be reliable for the comparison intended.

²Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, 3d ed., eds. Cyril C. Richardson, Wilhelm Pauk, and Robert T. Handy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), pp. 348-49.

³Ibid., pp. 349-50.

⁴Ibid., pp. 352-53.

⁵Ibid., pp. 354-56.

⁶Ibid., pp. 356-57.

⁷The Canons of the Synod of Dort represent the most thoroughgoing and explicit form of Calvinism current on the continent in the 1620's. The Synod was held from November 1618 to May 1619. "The assembly of the Dutch Reformed Church, convened at Dort (Dortrecht) by the States-General [of the Netherlands was] to deal with the Arminian Controversy." Delegates included representatives not only from Holland, but also from Switzerland, the Palatinate, and England. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), s. v. "Dort", p. 421. G. C. Berkouwer, Professor of Systematic Theology in the Free University of Amsterdam, introduces us to the "theme" of the Canons of Dort. "Therefore the Canons are not content to refer us to the consequences and pervasive powers of evil. As in the later theology of original sin, they stress the theme of the justice of God." Sin, trans. Philip C. Holtrop (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1971), p. 472.

⁸John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2. 2. 18. Hereafter designated by Institutes, Book, Chapter, and Section.

⁹Ibid. Cf. also 2. 2. 21.

¹⁰Ibid., 2. 2. 20.

¹¹Philip Schaff, ed., The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations, Vol. III of The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes, ed. David Schaff, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966), p. 588.

¹²Institutes, 2. 2. 17.

¹³Ibid., 2. 7. 6. Cf. also 2. 7. 9, where Calvin asserts that the result of this condemnation is to drive us to Christ. To this effect Calvin quotes Augustine extensively.

¹⁴Ibid., 2. 7. 10.

¹⁵Ibid., 2. 7. 12.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., 2. 5. 9.

¹⁸Ibid., 3. 17. 2.

¹⁹Institutes, 2. 7. 14. Calvin does seem inconsistent here. If the moral law is being enforced as civil law, as was the attempt at Geneva, then it is not really "abrogated with respect to its judicial power," at least in some sense.

²⁰On the first of these two points, the moral law "discovers the greatness of sin, and more and more convinces man thereof, yet as it neither points out a remedy nor imparts strength to extricate him from misery, and thus being weak through the flesh . . . man can not by this law obtain saving grace." In the second place, God "preserves, continues, and perfects it [His work of grace] by the hearing and reading of his Word, by Meditations thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings, and promises thereof." See Schaff, The Evangelical Creeds, pp. 588, 595.

²¹Calvin, Institutes, 2. 1. 5.

²²Ibid, 2. 1. 6.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 2. 1. 7.

²⁵Ibid., 2. 1. 5.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., 2. 1. 8. In the same section he states that we inherit not just a lack but a "punishment" and a "contagion." Every part of our nature is "perverted." Thus there is in Calvin a positive statement about the real existence of a state of nature worse than a "lack of original righteousness."

²⁸Calvin, Institutes, 2. 1. 6.

²⁹Berkouwer, Sin, p. 481.

³⁰Calvin, Institutes, 2. 1. 9.

³¹Ibid., 2. 3. 8.

³²Ibid., 2. 1. 8.

³³Schaff, The Evangelical Creeds, p. 588.

³⁴Calvin, Institutes, 2. 3. 6.

³⁵Ibid., 2. 3. 8, 7.

³⁶Ibid., 2. 1. 8. The term concupiscence is used a great deal in the theology which is sometimes called the "Augustinian-Calvinist" tradition. Geoffrey Bromley defines it as "the wrongful inclination of the sinner which characterizes his nature and leads to sinful acts." See Everett F. Harrison, Geoffrey Bromley, and Carl F. H. Henry, eds., Baker's Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), s. v. "Concupiscence," by Geoffrey Bromley.

³⁷Calvin, Institutes, 2. 3. 5.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹See Calvin, Institutes, 2. 2. 27, where he says that "if the whole man lies under the power of sin, surely it is necessary that the will, which is its chief seat, be restrained by the stoutest bonds. Paul's saying would not make sense, that 'it is God who is at work to will in us'. . . if any will preceded the grace of the Spirit. Away then with all that 'preparation' which many babble about!"

⁴⁰Ibid., 2. 3. 1.

⁴¹Cf. Institutes, 2. 3. 5, where Calvin says the following: "Because of the bondage of sin by which the will is held bound, it cannot move toward good, much less apply itself thereto; for a movement of this sort is the beginning of a conversion to God, which in Scripture is ascribed entirely to God's grace." See also Institutes, 2. 2. 6.

⁴²Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1939; reprinted ed., Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), p. 375.

⁴³Perry Miller, "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity" in The New England Puritans, ed. Sydney V. James (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 29.

⁴⁴Schaff, The Evangelical Creeds, p. 589.

⁴⁵Calvin, Institutes, 3. 23. 8.

⁴⁶Ibid., 3. 21. 5. Cf. Joseph Haroutunian and L. P. Smith, eds., Calvin's Commentaries (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 56. Also see the same work on p. 308, where Calvin is commenting on Rom. 8.28-30. "The foreknowledge of God, therefore, which Paul mentions here, is not a mere knowing beforehand, as some ignorant people imagine in their stupid way. It is rather the act of adoption, by which God has always distinguished his children from those who are reprobate." He does admit however, of another way to view foreknowledge. But one gets the impression that people either confuse the two ways of understanding foreknowledge, or they confound one for the other. This second view is essentially the general understanding of foreknowledge where all time is "present" to God, where He actually looks upon all things at once. This foreknowledge thus encompasses all creatures in all times. See Institutes, 3. 21. 5.

⁴⁷Haroutunian and Smith, Calvin's Commentaries, p. 308.

⁴⁸Harrison, et al., Baker's Dictionary of Theology, s. v. "Predestination," by Lorraine Boettner.

⁴⁹Haroutunian and Smith, Calvin's Commentaries, p. 306. Here he is commenting on Eph. 1. 4. 6.

⁵⁰Calvin, Institutes, 3. 21. 5. Cf. also 3. 23. 7.

⁵¹Ibid., 3. 22. 1.

⁵²John Calvin, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, ed. David W. and Thomas Torrance, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), pp. 200-01. Cf. also Haroutunian and Smith, Calvin's Commentaries, pp. 303-04, 306.

⁵³This should not be construed as a shift on the part of Calvin to a less vigorous Augustinian position. For it must be realized that both supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism are solidly predestinarian with regard to the doctrine of election. The only difference between the two being that in the one, men are predestined to damnation before creation, while in the other men are predestined to remain in sin once involved in it.

⁵⁴Calvin, Institutes, 3. 2. 7.

⁵⁵Ibid., 3. 1. 4. Also cf. 3. 2. 35, where Calvin indicates that the Spirit gives faith and that men are not naturally capable of producing it. Faith is spoken of as "a manifestation of God's power," and "the work of God."

⁵⁶Ibid. 3. 24. 3.

⁵⁷Calvin, Institutes, 3. 2. 35.

⁵⁸Calvin, The Epistles to the Romans and Thessalonians, p. 414.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 233.

⁶⁰Schaff, The Evangelical Creeds, p. 591.

⁶¹Calvin, Institutes, 2. 11. 4.

⁶²Ibid., 2. 11. 11.

⁶³Ibid., 4. 16. 6.

⁶⁴Ibid., 3. 21. 7.

⁶⁵Ibid., 2. 10. 2.

⁶⁶Ibid., 2. 6. 3. Cf. also Haroutunian and Smith, Calvin's Commentaries, p. 191. In exegeting Isa. 19.24-25, Calvin says that "Israel he honors with its own unique privilege. Because it is God's inheritance, it keeps the right and honor of the first-born. . . . Certainly God's covenant, which he first made with them, gave to them a priority which not even their own ingratitude could erase." See also pp. 61, 109 and Institutes, 2. 6. 4.

⁶⁷Calvin, Institutes, 3. 17. 6.

⁶⁸In speaking of apostate Israel, Calvin insists that: "Although they were unbelievers and had broken His covenant, yet their perfidy had not rendered the faithfulness of God void, not only because He preserved for Himself some seed as a remnant from the whole multitude, but also because the name of a church still continued among them by the right of inheritance." Calvin, The Epistles to the Romans and Thessalonians, p. 194. In the same place Calvin could be understood to be a holder of the conditional covenant, but only if we ignore his own explanation of his words. "A covenant is that which is conceived in express and solemn words, and contains a mutual obligation, for instance, the covenant which was made with Abraham. But the promises are found in various places in Scripture. For when God had once made a covenant with His ancient people, He did not

cease to offer them His grace from time to time by new promises. It follows that promises are related to the covenant as their only source." Ibid., p. 195. If the covenant had ceased due to the breaking of obligations, the promises would have lost their source and these too would have ceased. The promises did not cease, though, and neither had the covenant, regardless of the disobedience of the Isrealites.

⁶⁹Schaff, The Evangelical Creeds, p. 563.

⁷⁰Miller, The Seventeenth Century, p. 374.

⁷¹Miller, "Marrow," in New England Puritans, pp. 20, 18.

⁷²John S. Coolidge, The Pauline Renaissance in England: Puritanism and the Bible (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 107-08.

⁷³Ibid., p. 108.

⁷⁴Miller, The Seventeenth Century, p. 375.

⁷⁵As quoted in Miller, The Seventeenth Century, p. 377. Again, the echo is picked up in the nineteenth century in Charles Hodge: "The condition of the covenant of grace, so far as adults are concerned, is faith in Christ . . . by condition we merely mean a sine qua non. A blessing may be promised on condition that it is asked for; or that there is a willingness to receive it." Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1973), 2:354.

CHAPTER II

ARMINIANISM

We have come to a point in our discussion which is crucial to the thesis held by the scholars mentioned in the beginning of this study. It is here that Arminianism will be defined. Very few who have dealt with this question have an accurate understanding of what the Arminian view entails.

Perry Miller wishes to contrast things too sharply. With respect to the application of salvation to an individual, he says, "Thus it was easy to see where . . . Arminians went astray: Arminians attributed everything to our consent." In a word of explanation, Miller continues "The covenant theology held to both the grace and the consent, to the decree of God and the full responsibility of man, to assurance in spite of sin and morality in spite of assurance." Elsewhere, he indicates that Arminians made obedience to God strictly a matter of man's will and that it was the covenant theologians who introduced the idea that men needed God's grace in their lives to help them obey.¹ The point is that the thing which Miller claims the Arminians were saying is precisely what Arminius, at least, would not say. Miller more clearly describes the true Arminian

position under the name "covenant theology." It seems Miller accused the covenant theologians of slipping into Arminianism because he simply did not grasp the Arminian position as it really was and is. If he had understood Arminius' view of salvation, he would have declared not that the covenant theologians had Arminian traits, but that they were in fact Arminian through and through, despite their protestations to the contrary. The difficulty does not end here. Miller tends to see covenant theologians as in agreement on the question of salvation. In actuality they did not agree; indeed, their views ranged from rigid Calvinism to Arminianism.

Sydney V. James, editor of the book entitled The New England Puritans, also misses the point. He states his understanding as follows: "Editor's Note: The Arminians were followers of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch Protestant who in 1604, . . . denounced the doctrine of predestination and proceeded to argue that good works can earn salvation."² Here he describes not Arminianism, but Pelagianism.³

There are others whose conceptions of Arminianism stress one facet of the position to the exclusion of others and so tend to distort to a greater or lesser degree the real thrust of Arminian thought. The Baptist theologian A. H. Strong wishes to stress the concept of a justly given ability to accept Christ as savior.⁴ Yet, no substantial

evidence to support this contention was found by this author in the pertinent sections of Arminius' works. Edmund S. Morgan is at best ambiguous about his understanding of the movement when he describes Arminianism as "a belief that man by their own will power could achieve faith and thus win salvation."⁵ Though close to the truth, the definition says nothing of grace, which Arminius himself would demand.

Similarly, Sydney Ahlstrom implies a sub-Arminian view in saying that the covenant theologians "by no means defended Arminianism, for they did not believe that God's sovereign will could be coerced by human effort."⁶ Arminius and most of his followers would not hold with that either. William K. B. Stoever sees the Puritan or Reformed position in the following way: "God condescends to accomodate the effecting of regeneration to natural human capacities, and to treat with men for salvation in a manner requiring their persuasion and consent."⁷ This indeed could be an acceptable way of putting the problem of the tension of human responsibility and divine sovereignty. It is not, however, Calvin's position. In fact, in the same article he describes the Reformed position on regeneration in a form perfectly acceptable to Arminius.⁸

Williston Walker comes closest of all to a balanced view of the position of Arminius.

Over against the Calvinist doctrine of absolute predestination, it [Arminianism] taught a predestination based on divine foreknowledge of the use men would make of the means of grace. Against the

doctrine that Christ died for the elect only, it asserted that He died for all, though none receive the benefits of His death except believers. It was at one with Calvinism in denying the ability of men to do anything really good of themselves--all is of divine grace. Hence the Arminians were not Pelagians. In opposition to the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace, they taught that grace may be rejected, and they declared uncertainty regarding the Calvinist teaching of perseverance, holding it possible that men may lose grace once received.⁹

In the face of all the misunderstanding of Arminius' position, we must turn to Arminius himself and to his immediate followers (when necessary) in order to clarify what Arminianism really is. But first, some background to Arminius' life is necessary.

Jacobus Arminius was born in 1560. He began his education at Utrecht and continued at Marburg. His theological training was received at the University at Leyden from 1576 to 1582.¹⁰ The merchant's guild in Leyden provided him with the support he needed to continue his studies under Theodore Beza, Calvin's heir, in Geneva.¹¹ From Geneva he went for a brief time to Basel, Padua, and Rome for study.¹² He served as a pastor in Amsterdam from 1588 to 1603, "winning distinction as a preacher and pastor of irenic spirit."¹³

It was in 1589 that a decisive change came in Arminius' theology. "He was at first a strict Calvinist, but while engaged in investigating and defending the Calvinistic doctrines [notably, supralapsarianism] against the writing of Dirik Volckaerts Zoon Koornheert, at the request of the magistrate of Amsterdam, he found the arguments of

his opponent stronger than his own convictions, and became a convert to the doctrine of universal grace and of the freedom of will."¹⁴ In 1603, Arminius was called to succeed Franz Junius in the chair of theology at Leyden. Arminius taught there six years, dying in 1609.¹⁵

Arminius, as can be seen, was not the originator of the doctrines which received his name. He was simply the most prominent expositor of them. For example, we have Koornheert himself. "Koornheert was Secretarius at Haarlem, and a forerunner of the Remonstrants [Arminius' followers in Holland] (d. 1590). He attacked the doctrine of Calvin and Beza on predestination and the punishment of heretics (1578), wrote against the Heidelberg Catechism (1583), and advocated toleration and a reduction of the number of articles of faith. . . . Another forerunner of Arminianism was Caspar Koolhaas, preacher in Leyden, . . ."¹⁶

Gellius Sneecanus published a book in 1596 entitled Introduction to the Ninth Chapter of Romans. In it Arminius saw his own positions and attitudes reflected. As early as 1590, unknown to Arminius, Sneecanus had said that "'the doctrine of conditional predestination is not only conformable to the word of God, but cannot be charged with novelty."¹⁷ Carl Bangs, in his unparalleled work on Arminius, classifies four men mentioned by Arminius himself in his Declaration of Sentiments as his precursors. "These were all instances of the retention in the Dutch Church of an older, indigenous theology which came under fire when the largely refugee

Calvinists gained control of the [Netherlands] Church."¹⁸

Upon the death of Arminius, several men took up his cause. Among them were Johan Uytenbogaert (1557-1644) and Simon Episcopius (Simon Bischoop) (1583-1643).¹⁹

"Uytenbogaert took the lead in drawing up the Remonstrance of 1610, directed to the Estates of the province of Holland. . . ." ²⁰ Episcopius "systematized the typical tenets of Arminius."²¹ He had been a pupil of Arminius from 1600 to 1606.²² Like Arminius, Episcopius protested against the "Calvinist dogma of predestination and original sin, and stressed the responsibility of man, not God, for sin." Unlike Arminius, he "taught a reduced view of the divinity of Christ and a subordinationist doctrine of the Trinity."²³ Arminius himself had been accused of both Pelagianism and Socinianism but, differing from Episcopius, he sought to refute the charges, and did so successfully.²⁴

The vast majority of Arminius' writings were penned after 1589. Hence, our concern is with his works in the period in which he was developing the views of his Examination of Perkin's Pamphlet or buttressing its arguments.

The significance of this is seen in the belief expressed by Bangs when he states that "Arminius never departed from the foundations laid in his Examination of Perkin's Pamphlet, but he did rephrase his views, elaborate them, and branch out to deal with new issues."²⁵ In studying the writings of Arminius we will be working with the writings of a man who has already thrown over some of

the most basic tenets of Calvinism and is working towards a **systematization** of views which deny the intent of those dogmas, if not always the wording.

A second important work by Arminius was his Declaration of Sentiments, which was a theological résumé submitted by him after Gomarus had sought to bring charges of heretical teaching against Arminius in the High Court of Holland in May, 1608.²⁶ The Declaration, as the most mature writing of Arminius,²⁷ and his Examination, which Bangs calls the "basic document of Arminianism,"²⁸ are then the principal works of Arminius and contain his most finely honed theological arguments. As with our treatment of Calvinism, however, wherever it seems that Arminius' thoughts can be elucidated so as to provide an accurate description of "Arminianism," other writings must be drawn in, particularly those of his followers, the Remonstrants.²⁹

In this chapter we shall address ourselves to the same areas which we investigated in our discussion of Calvinism, namely: (1) the nature of human reason, (2) the nature and use of moral law, (3) the nature of Adam's sin and its effects, (4) free will, (5) predestination, (6) some aspects of faith, and (7) the concept of the covenant.

First, man's reason, says Arminius, needs to be seen from two angles. It must be looked at as it was created by God, and as it exists in fallen mankind. Arminius is quite direct in describing the nature of man's reason as created. "In the state of primitive innocence, man had a

mind endued with a clear understanding of heavenly light and truth concerning God."³⁰ In speaking of the **image** of God in man (*imago Dei*), Arminius further reveals what he believes was the created state of man:

VIII. The parts of this image may be thus distinguished: Some of them may be called natural to man, and others supernatural; some, essential to him, and others accidental. It is natural and essential to the soul to be a spirit, and to be endowed with the power of understanding and willing, both according to nature and the mode of liberty. But the knowledge of God, and of things pertaining to eternal salvation, is supernatural and accidental, as are likewise the rectitude and holiness of the will, according to that knowledge.³¹

The principal point in this paragraph is that actual understanding of God is "accidental," while the "power" or "ability" to understand is not. It is the essence of mankind, whether or not he actually does so, to be able to understand God and His directives and wishes.

A third quotation implies a certain belief about the nature of man's reason, though it does not state it explicitly.

Liberty, when attributed to the will is properly an affection of the will, though it has its root in the understanding and reason [italics mine]. Generally considered, it is various. (1.) It is a Freedom from . . . the control or jurisdiction of one who commands, . . . (2.) From the inspection, care, and government of a superior. (3.) It is also a freedom from necessity, whether this proceeds from an external cause compelling, or from a nature inwardly determining absolutely to one thing. (4.) It is a freedom from sin and its dominion. (5.) And a freedom from misery.

II. Of these five modes of liberty, the first two appertain to God alone; . . . But the remaining three modes may belong to man, nay in a certain respect they do pertain to him. And, indeed, the

former, namely, freedom from necessity always pertains to him because it exists naturally in the will, as its proper attribute, so that there cannot be any will if it be not free.³²

The most logical inference to be drawn seems to be the following: I am not compelled to reason in any fashion in which I choose not to reason. If I reason falsely, it is not because of some inward necessity, e.g., a totally depraved nature, that I reason falsely. Rather, I reason falsely because I choose to reason falsely. Arminius seems to indicate that this ability to choose how I will reason is part of the created and fallen imago Dei.

"The mind [in which reason and understanding reside] of man, in [the fallen] state, is dark, destitute of the saving knowledge of God, and, according to the Apostle, incapable of those things which belong to the Spirit of God."³³ This is in evident contradiction to what has just been presented. It is in contradiction because it indicates an inability to do spiritually good things in the fallen state, yet Arminius has also said that the will must be free or there is no will. He assumes man has a will, and such a will as he accepts, demands ability to do anything one chooses to do--including, I should think, spiritually good things. Nevertheless, at times one could almost say that he outdoes Calvin. (Interestingly enough, he sounds more and more like Calvin the closer he gets to the end of his career and the more accountable he is to the Calvinistic authorities.) Accordingly, Arminius says

that the soul

. . . is so encompassed about with the clouds of ignorance, as to be distinguished by the epithets of 'vain' and 'foolish;' and men themselves, thus darkened in their minds, are denominated . . . 'mad' or foolish, 'fools,' and even 'darkness' itself. . . . This is true, not only when, from the truth of the law which has in some measure been inscribed on the mind, it is preparing to form conclusions by the understanding; but likewise when, by simple apprehension, it would receive the truth of the gospel externally offered to it. For the human mind judges that to be 'foolishness' which is the most excellent 'wisdom' of God. (1 Cor. 1, 18,24.) On this account, what is here said must be understood not only of practical understanding and the judgment . . . of particular approbation, but also of theoretical understanding and the judgment of general estimation.³⁴

Arminius, as previously quoted, cited St. Paul as saying man is "incapable" of understanding the things of God. That, with the sentiments just adduced, put man in a helpless state. Yet, one of the inferences drawn from his words quoted earlier indicates that man is now "darkened" in his understanding because he chooses to be such. Does this mean he can then choose to understand God, if he wishes? If man is free from any internal necessity, including an evil nature, the answer necessarily must be yes.

Nevertheless, Arminius categorically states that "if our brethren really think that man can do some portion of good by the powers of nature, they are themselves not far from Pelagianism, which yet they are solicitous to fasten on others."³⁵

Perhaps the answer lies in this statement of

Arminius. To him,

A distinction is to be made between the blindness [of man] as the act of God to which man is judicially subjected, and the blindness of man himself by which he renders his own mind hard and obstinate against God, which is the act of man, produced by wickedness and obstinate pertinacity. These acts indeed concur, but do not coincide, nor are they one single action, made up of the efficiency of those concurrent actions, which together make up one total cause of that act, which is called blindness.³⁶

To Arminius, it is possible that once a man has chosen for so long to disregard God's way, then God adds to that "blind" estate. God causes an additional blindness to come on the man which has a cumulative effect. This "additional" blindness would come as the result of God passing some sort of present judgment on the man. Hence, the man would, in a sense, be incapable of understanding the things of God, unless God removed the judicially applied blindness. Yet, Arminius seems to believe that all men can choose to understand God any time since free choice is essential to humanity. Whatever else he says, Arminius will allow that man can choose his own wickedness or goodness before God "judicially" blinds that man.

With regard to Arminius' followers, the Remonstrants, we find that they treat of man's reason as being in a "state of apostasy," with the result being that man "can for himself and by himself, think nothing that is good--nothing, that is, truly good, such as saving faith is, above all else."³⁷

The Canons of the Synod of Dort also provide elucidation here, for they include within them the charges made against the Remonstrants. Though the Synod was biased, there was sufficient enough difference between the Calvinists and the Remonstrants that it was generally unnecessary to charge the Remonstrants with a position they did not actually hold. The Synod of Dort understood the Remonstrants to have taught the idea that mankind, though "incomplete," was "not ruined."³⁸ This assessment seems to me to be close to a proper understanding of Arminius and his followers.

It is to be regarded as unfortunate that Arminius was less than completely clear on the ability of man's reason to think rightly about God. It is apparent however, that Arminius maintained the ability of men to think about God correctly although most do not do so. Though subscribing to a "dark and demented mind," it would appear that this was a sop thrown to the Calvinists to placate them. While not indicating that unbelievers necessarily did think about God properly, he makes it clear that it is a necessity that they could (that is, a moral necessity on the part of God to create and maintain them so that they could), if they chose to do so.

Secondly, Arminius holds to the "moral law" in a thoroughly Reformed (as opposed to Lutheran) manner. In the following statement he describes for us what the moral law is.

III. 1. The Moral Law is distributed through the whole of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and is summarily contained in the Decalogue. It is an ordinance that commands those things which God . . . accounts grateful of themselves, and which it is his will to be performed by all men at all times and in all places; and that forbids the contrary things. . . . It is therefore the perpetual and immutable rule of living, the express image of the internal Divine conception; according to which, God, the great law giver, judges it right and equitable that a rational creature should always and in every place order and direct the whole of his life.³⁹

For Arminius;

The instrumental causes which God ordinarily uses for our conversion, and by which we are solicited and led to repentance, are the law and the gospel. Yet the office of each in this matter is quite distinct.
 . . .⁴⁰

Of what, then, does the office of the law consist?

Principally, the "office" of the law is divided into three uses, when applied to fallen mankind. "The first use in order of the moral law, under a state of sin, is against man as a sinner, not only that it may accuse him of transgression and guilt and may subject him to the wrath of God and condemnation; (Rom. iii, 19,20;) but that it may likewise convince him . . . of his utter inability to resist sin and to subject himself to the law. (Rom. vii.)"⁴¹

To Arminius, it seemed that "the next use of the law towards the sinner is, that it may compel him who is thus convicted and subjected to condemnation, to desire and seek the grace of God, and that it may force him to flee to Christ either as the promised or as the imparted deliverer. (Gal. ii,16,17.)"⁴² "The third use of the

moral law is towards a man, as now born again by the Spirit of God and of Christ, and is agreeable to the state of grace, that it may be a perpetual rule for directing his life . . . in a godly and spiritual manner: (Titus iii, 8; James ii, 8.)"⁴³

It may be well for us to look a bit more deeply into the subject, and ask what further connections or disconnections the law has with a redeemed sinner. An extended quote is reproduced here, because Arminius saw several areas which he felt needed to be commented upon.

VI. From these uses it is easy to collect how far the moral law obtains among believers and those who are placed under the grace of Christ, and how far it is abrogated. (1.) It is abrogated with regard to its power and use in justifying: . . . (2.) It is abrogated with regard to the curse and condemnation: For, 'Christ, being made a curse for us, hath redeemed us from the curse of the law;' (Gal. iii, 10-13;) . . . (3.) The law is abrogated and taken away from sin, so far as sin, having taken occasion by the law, works all manner of concupiscence' in the carnal man, over whom sin exercises dominion. (Rom. vii, 4-8.) (4.) It is abrogated, with regard to the guidance by which it urged man to do good and to refrain from evil, through a fear of punishment and a hope of temporal reward. (I Tim. i, 9, 10; Gal. iv, 18.) . . . it appears, that the law is not abrogated with respect to the obedience which must be rendered to God; for though obedience be required under the grace of Christ and of the Gospel, it is required according to clemency, and not according to strict [legal] rigor. (1 John ii, 1, 2.)⁴⁴

Hence, the moral law in Arminius' teaching is essentially the same as in Calvin's. It condemns a person who is sinful, it convicts a person of his hopeless state in trying to live up to the demands of the law. It

drives a person to Christ. Finally, it stands as a guide to life for a believer, since it continues to show the character of God. Yet, for both Arminius and Calvin, there is no condemnation of the believer by the law since Christ, not the law, justifies mankind.

Thirdly, Arminius is not easily understood in regard to his position on the nature of Adam's sin and its imputation to his posterity. One contributing factor is that he prefers to avoid the term "original sin."⁴⁵ A second factor is that, at times, he sounds most Calvinistic (we must not forget that he was essentially a Reformed churchman).

Part of Arminius' Calvinistic vein is found in his adherence to one of several explanations of how we are related to Adam. The question which each of the different explanations supposedly answers is "Why am I guilty for Adam's sin?" Generally, Arminius holds to a covenantal explanation. However, in other places he holds to a "realist" explanation. G. C. Berkouwer explains that realism is the concept in which men are said to have actually sinned in Adam. That is to say, when sin is imputed to us it is our own sin which is "put on our account."⁴⁶ The essence of the position is that any sin imputed to us is not Adam's sin alone but our very own sin, since we are conceived, by the realist, to have actually been present in Adam when he sinned. Hence, as Berkouwer points out "A

special appeal is frequently made [by the realists] to such expressions as we find, for example, in Hebrews 7: 5,10: 'out of the loins of Abraham' and 'in the loins of his father.'"⁴⁷ Therefore, to a realist, in Adam, the whole race actually sinned.⁴⁸

This being said we go to Arminius' words:

XVII. The whole of this sin, however, is not peculiar to our first parents, but is common to the entire race and to all their posterity, who, at the time when this sin was committed, were in their loins, and who have since descended from them by the natural mode of propagation, according to the primitive benediction. For in Adam 'all have sinned.' (Rom. v,12.)⁴⁹

Further, Adam and Eve are seen by Arminius as "the parents and social head of the human race, in whom, as in its origin and root, was then contained the whole human race." (Italics mine.)⁵⁰

The sin which Adam committed, apart from its ramifications, was for Arminius, done by Adam "in his own person and with his free will."⁵¹ Still in the Calvinist, though not necessarily realist vein, Arminius understands adults as having "perpetrated in Adam" sins in addition to "those which they have themselves personally committed."⁵²

In the following extended quotation, Arminius most clearly enunciates for us, however, the effects of Adam's sin on himself and on his posterity. In addition, one can see his departure from Calvinism in the last section quoted.

I. The first and immediate effect of the sin which Adam and Eve committed in eating of the forbidden

fruit, was the offending of the Deity, and guilt. . . .

II. From the offending of the Deity, rose his wrath on account of the violated commandment. . . .

III. Punishment was consequent on guilt and the divine wrath; the equity of this punishment is from guilt, the infliction of it is by wrath. . . .

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V. The Sprit of grace, whose abode was within man, could not consist with a consciousness of having offended God; and, therefore, on the perpetration of sin and the condemnation of their own hearts, the Holy Spirit departed. . . .

VI. Beside this punishment, which was instantly inflicted, they rendered themselves liable. . . to temporal death, . . . and to death eternal. . . .

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IX. But because the condition of the covenant into which God entered with our first parents was this, that, if they continued in the favor and grace of God by an observance of this command and of others, the gifts conferred on them should be transmitted to their posterity, by the same divine grace which they had, themselves, received; but that, if by disobedience they rendered themselves unworthy of those blessings, their posterity, likewise, . . . should not possess them and should be . . . liable to the contrary evils. . . . This was the reason why all men, who were to be propagated from them in a natural way, became obnoxious to death temporal and death eternal, and . . . devoid of this gift of the Holy Spirit or original righteousness. This punishment usually receives the appellation of 'a privation of the image of God,' and 'original sin.'

X. But we permit this question to be made a subject of discussion: Must some contrary quality, beside . . . the absence of original righteousness, be constituted as another part of original sin? Though we think it much more probable, that this absence of original righteousness, only, is original sin itself, as being that which alone is sufficient to commit and produce any actual sins whatsoever.⁵³

Arminius has sought to save his readers from an error. "1. Original sin is not that actual sin by which Adam transgressed the law concerning the tree of knowledge

of good and evil, and on account of which we have all been constituted sinners, and rendered . . . obnoxious or liable to death and condemnation."⁵⁴ Rather, "original sin," in the extended quotation above, is only the result of the actual sin of Adam. Yet, it is not even a "positive" result, but a negative result. We no longer have original righteousness, it is true. But that is far from the positive statement that man becomes totally depraved because of Adam's sin.

Indicative of Arminius' thoughts is his position on the state of infants. For a Calvinist, infants would be as totally depraved or vitiated in their nature as adults. Yet, God saves them though not revealing to us exactly how. To Arminius, infants are not in the same state as adults.

2. When Adam sinned in his own person and with his free will, God pardoned that transgression. There is no reason then why it was the will of God to impute this sin to infants, who are said to have sinned in Adam, before they had any personal existence, and therefore, before they could possibly sin at their own will and pleasure.⁵⁵

Here he is certainly not a realist.

Speaking of the sins of angels and Adam, Arminius says the following: "On this account, the angels were in fault, because they committed an offence which it was possible for them to avoid; while infants were not in fault, only so far as they existed in Adam, and were by his will involved in sin and guilt."⁵⁶

In both of these quotations the thing to note is the attitude of Arminius which seems to say that **the infants** were guilty, in Adam, but not really. We cannot blame them as we do fallen angels and adults. This lack of blame explains how God can go more lightly on infants than adults, but in so doing it muddies the waters and hinders understanding of the adult dilemma.

One seems to be able to put his system together in the following manner: 1) Adam first commits an actual sin, 2) Adam is guilty, 3) God's wrath is provoked, 4) Adam is punished by depriving him of "original righteousness," 5) This deprivation of "original righteousness" is original sin and is the punishment which is meted out also to Adam's offspring, 6) This original sin is the cause of any and all actual sins committed by Adam's seed. Original sin is not sin at all, it is simply the punishment of Adam's actual sin.

In this assertion, Arminius follows a great many others in the history of the Church. St. Athanasius taught that original sin was "the loss of the grace of conformity to the image of God, . . ."57 This cannot be far from the formula "loss of original righteousness." St. Anselm "defines Original Sin as the 'privation of the righteousness which every man ought to possess,' thus separating it from concupiscence, with which the disciples of St. Augustine had often defined it."58 Abelard, like

Arminius, refused to classify original sin as itself being **guiltworthy**.⁵⁹ Aquinas believed original sin to be the loss of original righteousness as well. In addition, the whole nature of man was disordered and weakened, but not as bad off as Augustine would make it.⁶⁰ Finally, "Dominic Soto [the Imperial Theologian for the Council of Trent] eliminated the element of concupiscence altogether from the definition and identified Original Sin with the loss of sanctifying grace."⁶¹ The curious thing about all these men is that they tend to be the greatest minds of the Roman Church. Far from identifying himself with Reformed thinking, as Bangs would like to believe, Arminius here sides with Roman Catholicism. And what is the difference between the Roman view of original sin and the Reformed view? The Reformed view goes far beyond simply "the loss of original righteousness." Sin "proceeds from something that is more deep-seated than the volition itself, . . ."⁶² As Charles Hodge indicates, the Augustinian view (which Calvin held to) requires sin to consist of not only the "loss of original righteousness," but also the guilt of Adam's first sin and the "corruption of our whole nature."⁶³ This state of the corruption of our nature is itself sinful, and manifests "an aversion from all spiritual good, or from God, and an inclination to all evil."⁶⁴

Hence, the position of Arminius can be seen more clearly. To him, original sin is simply the loss of original

righteousness, which loss is punishment but not sin itself. The Augustinian/Calvinist model requires original sin to consist of not only this loss, but also a corruption of the nature of man which is a state of being and which state is itself sinful. Though Arminius does seem to be in the Augustinian tradition with regard to "how" Adam's sin is transferred to us, this same affinity to Augustine is not repeated with regard to the depth of the effects of original sin in us. In his position, Arminius is clearly in line with the Roman dogmaticians and the Schoolmen as opposed to the theologians of the Reformed tradition (including Calvin) in the matter of original sin.⁶⁵

Free will is a doctrine more clearly stated by Arminius, though not absolutely so. We take as a starting point the following statement: "Therefore, if 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;' (2 Cor. iii, 17;) and if those alone be 'free indeed whom the Son hath made free; (John viii, 36;) it follows, that our will is not free from the first fall; that is, it is not free to do good, unless it be made free by the Son through his Spirit.'"⁶⁶

A second statement emphasises the same attitude:

X. 3. Exactly correspondent to this darkness of the mind, and perverseness of the heart, is . . . the utter weakness of all the powers to perform that which is truly good, and to omit the perpetration of that which is evil. . . . The subjoined sayings of Christ serve to describe this impotence. . . . As do likewise the following words of the Apostle: 'The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be;' (Rom. viii, 7;) therefore, that man over whom it has dominion cannot perform what the law commands.⁶⁷

Finally, Arminius says that "beside this, I place in subjection to Divine Providence both the free-will and even the actions of a rational creature, so that nothing can be done without the will of God, not even any of those things which are done in opposition to it; only we must observe a distinction between good actions and evil ones, by saying, that 'God both wills and performs good acts,' but that 'He only freely permits those which are evil.'⁶⁸ Although Calvin, as was seen in the previous chapter, was much more strict and would not allow this distinction, many "Calvinists" have held to just such a distinction.

Having presented this aspect of his teachings, we go on to a different, seemingly contradictory, side of Arminius' theological thought. We begin by reproducing a quotation of Bernard of Clairvaux which Arminius himself quoted:

'Take away Free Will, and nothing will be left to be saved. Take away Grace, and nothing will be left . . . as the source of salvation. . . . God is the author of salvation. Free will is only capable of being saved. . . .'⁶⁹

From this point, however, Arminius speaks more cautiously.

But sin is the transgression of a law, that is, of one which is just, for, if a law be not just, it is not a law and therefore, its transgression is not a sin. That a law may be just, it necessarily requires these two conditions, that it be enacted by him who has authority to command, and that it be enacted for him who has the power or rather the ability to obey, not only ~~divine~~ but ~~every~~ law that is, the ability of such a character as is hindered by no intervening decree, from doing that which he can do. Whence it

is apparent that 'sin is a voluntary transgression of the law,' which the sinner, since he could avoid it (I speak now of the act), commits, of his own fault.⁷⁰

In addition, Arminius says that "An act which is inevitable on account of the determination of any decrees does not deserve the name of sin."⁷¹ "Briefly, God makes man a vessel; Man makes himself an evil vessel, or a sinner."⁷²

The following, referred to earlier, is very much to the point:

VIII. The parts of this image . . . may be thus distinguished: Some of them may be called natural to man, and others supernatural; some, essential to him, and others accidental. It is natural and essential to the soul to be a spirit, and to be endowed with the power of understanding and willing, both according to nature and the mode of liberty. But the knowledge of God, and of things pertaining to eternal salvation, is supernatural and accidental, as are likewise the rectitude and holiness of the will, according to that knowledge.⁷³

Notice here that the ability of all mankind to will one way or the other is implied, and this ability to will is essential. It is possible for a man not to will to be holy. But he is equally able to choose such a state. Equally to the point is the following: "And, indeed, . . . freedom from necessity always pertains to him [man] because it exists naturally in the will, as its proper attribute, so that there cannot be any will if it be not free [italics mine]."⁷⁴

A further position taken by Arminius is that God cannot save anyone unless their free will is engaged:

But, good sir, does that doctrine say that 'God wills that all men should be saved through Christ, whether they will or not?' It does, indeed, assert that 'God

wills that they should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth' which last can not be done, apart from their free-will.⁷⁵

Arminius is crystal clear now. Can man resist God's will? "I believe, according to the scriptures, that many persons resist the Holy Spirit and reject the grace that is offered."⁷⁶

In defending himself elsewhere, Arminius, as is often the case, brings in the witness of the church Fathers (nearly always post-Nicene). In this case he quotes Prosper.

"The Grace of God has indeed . . . the decided preeminence in our justifications, persuading us by exhortations, admonishing us by examples, . . ., and by illuminating the heart itself and imbuing it with the affections of faith. But the will of man is likewise subjoined to it and is united with it, which has been excited to this by the before-mentioned succors, that it may co-operate in the Divine work within itself, and may begin . . . to follow after the reward which, . . . it has conceived for the object of its desire, ascribing the failure to its own mutability, and the success (if the issue be prosperous) to the aid of grace. This aid is afforded to all men, by innumerable methods. . . and the rejection of this assistance by many persons is to be ascribed to their negligence; but its reception by many persons, is both of Divine grace and of the human will."⁷⁷

There are three things to note in the passage. Arminius looks to the concept that man's will "co-operates" with God's working in bringing about a commitment to Christ in an individual. Secondly, the assistance required to help man's will "is afforded to all men." Thirdly, the successful entry of a person into the kingdom of God is to be attributed both to God's grace and the human will. A true Calvinist would have a difficult time bearing so many synergistic expressions in one argument.

Elsewhere, Arminius blatantly contradicts himself while trying to weave his way between God's grace and man's free will.

Free will is unable to begin or to perfect any true and spiritual good, without grace. . . . I mean by it [grace] that which is the grace of Christ and which belongs to regeneration. I affirm, therefore, that this grace is simply and absolutely necessary for the illumination of the mind, the due ordering of the affections, and the inclination of the will to that which is good. . . . This grace . . . goes before, accompanies, and follows: it excites, assists, operates lest we will in vain.⁷⁰

The logic of this statement seems to be the following: The will is free to do spiritual good only as it is acted upon by the grace of Christ. This grace also effects regeneration. Hence, the will is not truly free until it is first regenerated. This however contradicts what Arminius has been saying about it being "essential" to the will to be free. He cannot seem to make up his mind about just when man's will is really free.

If, however, Bangs is correct in assuming that the Declaration of Sentiments was reflective of the mature doctrine of Arminius, then perhaps the following is a reconciliation of Arminius' seemingly divergent opinions.

But in his lapsed and sinful state, man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good; but it is necessary for him to be regenerated and renewed in his intellect, affections or will, and in all his powers, by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, that he may be qualified rightly to understand, esteem, consider, will, and perform whatever is truly good. When he is made a partaker of this regeneration or renovation, I consider

that, since he is delivered from sin, he is capable of thinking, willing and doing that which is good, but yet not without the continued aids of Divine Grace.⁷⁹

It would seem to be, then, that true free will comes only after regeneration. That is, free will which is really free to choose the good comes only after regeneration. Prior to that it can reject the good freely, but cannot accept or choose the good. That comes only after the infusion of God's grace. Yet, if God cannot force a man into becoming regenerate, then if a man becomes regenerate, it is partially because he himself allows it. Hence, we return to where we started. Arminius' "men dead in sin" are like the proverbial sacrifice that keeps crawling off the altar.

The "Remonstrance" is guarded on the subject of the freedom of the will. It affirms that "man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the working of his own free-will. . . ." It states that "even the regenerate man can neither think, will nor effect any good, nor withstand any temptation to evil, without grace precedent (or prevenient), awakening, following and co-operating." The Remonstrance is guarded because it affirms a lack of truly free will in "natural" men, yet "precedent" or "prevenient" grace need not occur just prior to regeneration. In fact, the "awakening" grace just mentioned would fit into the place of the grace which could be said to cause regeneration. "Precedent" or "prevenient" grace could be given at birth

it as well as at any other time. The term "precedent" is the catch in this otherwise Calvinist affirmation.⁸⁰

Generally, when one is presented with the subject of free will, he is most apt to summon up thoughts of our fifth area of concern, predestination. It is this doctrine which most believe that Arminius rejected out of hand. He did not. He tried to deal with it; he tried to reconcile it with foreknowledge. Though he finally rejected absolute predestination, we must not over-simplify the process by which he did so. "'For it is our presupposition that no one is saved except through an act of predestination.'" Further, "'the predestination of which the Scriptures treat is of men as they are sinners.'" "'From this it is clear enough how circumspectly one must speak before the common people about this matter [i.e., the problems of predestination], for they do not know how to distinguish between these aspects. . . .'" These thoughts are the starting point for Arminius' ideas on predestination. Many a Calvinist could agree with them.⁸¹

From these first thoughts one can draw some important conclusions. First, Arminius recognized the difficulty in dealing with the doctrine, yet he was unwilling to deny it simply because it was hard to understand. Further, he would seem to have affinities to the infralapsarian position. That is, men are not predestined before the creation of mankind. Rather, once man has been vitiated, it is only then

that God predestines man to salvation. Close though he seems, Arminius is still no infralapsarian.

It is perhaps best for a framework to be laid so as to guide us in understanding Arminius' position on predestination. The framework we shall use is a list of four points set out in Arminius' Declaration of Sentiments. These are found in the following form under the fifth section of that work.

I. The First absolute decree of God concerning the salvation of sinful man, is that by which he decreed to appoint his Son, Jesus Christ, for a Mediator, Redeemer, Savior, Priest and King, who might destroy sin by his own death, might by his obedience obtain the salvation which had been lost, and might communicate it by his own virtue.

II. The Second precise and absolute decree of God, is that in which he decreed to receive into favor those who repent and believe, and, in Christ, for HIS sake and through HIM, to effect the salvation of such penitents and believers as persevered to the end; but to leave in sin, and under wrath, all impenitent persons and unbelievers, and to damn them as aliens from Christ.

III. The THIRD divine decree is that by which God decreed to administer in a sufficient and efficacious manner the MEANS which were necessary for repentance and faith; and to have such administration instituted (1.) according to the Divine Wisdom, by which God knows what is proper and becoming both to his mercy and his severity, and (2.) according to Divine Justice, by which He is prepared to adopt whatever his wisdom may prescribe and put it in execution.

IV. To these succeeds the FOURTH decree, by which God decreed to save and damn certain particular persons. This decree has its foundation in the foreknowledge of God, by which he knew from all eternity those individuals who would, through his preventing grace, believe, and, through his subsequent grace would persevere, according to the before described administration of those means which are suitable and proper for conversion and faith; and, by which foreknowledge, he likewise knew those who would not believe and persevere.⁸²

Arminius' words in decree II are capable of bearing two distinct meanings. He could mean by "those who repent and believe" either individuals who repent and believe or a designated class with no particular individuals being predestined to be a member of that class. An interesting question, to which there can be no answer, is whether or not Arminius meant that phrase to mean different things to different men of different theological persuasions. That is to say that Arminius may have formed his statements so as to sound the way his Calvinist examiners would want them to sound, while at the same time expressing, to himself at any rate, his differences. Yet, it is still possible for us to pin Arminius to a more exact meaning.

But such a decree as I have there described is not that by which God resolves to save some particular persons, and, that he may do this, resolves to endow them with faith, but to condemn others, and not to endow them with faith. Yet many people declare, that this is the kind of predestination on which the apostle treats in the passages just cited. But I deny what they assert.⁸³

In the same place he says, positively, "With respect to the article of predestination, my sentiments upon it are the following: It is an eternal and gracious decree of God in Christ, by which he determines to justify and adopt believers, and to endow them with life eternal, but to condemn unbelievers, and impenitent persons."⁸⁴

It becomes evident that Arminius is speaking not of predestination of individuals but of the predestination of classes. God predestines believers to heaven and

unbelievers (as classes) to eternal damnation.⁸⁵

Unlike the Calvinistic formulas, the third decree says nothing about God either giving faith, or directly working in man with resultant salvation. Rather, in a guarded statement, he says that God will "administer" the "means of repentance and faith." It is the question of "how" and "when" that separates Calvinists from Arminius.

Regarding the fourth decree, it is here that Arminius makes his furthest departure from Calvinism. A rather lengthy quote from Arminius will help to expand and deepen our understanding of his position on the question.

For God by his own prescience, knows who, of His grace, will believe, and who, of their own fault, will remain in unbelief. I wish that you would consider, that certainty of an event results properly from the prescience of God, but its necessity results from the omnipotent and irresistible action of God; which may, indeed, be the foundation of the prescience of some events, but not of this event, because He has determined to save believers by grace; that is, by a mild and gentle suasion, convenient or adapted to their free-will, not by an omnipotent action or motion, which would be subject neither to their will, nor to their ability either of resistance or of will. Much less does the damnation of some proceed from an irresistible necessity, imposed by the Deity.⁸⁶

As seen in our chapter on Calvin, the Genevan would utterly reject such a construction.

Trying to reconcile himself to the common viewpoint, Arminius elsewhere states that

This predestination is evangelical, and, therefore peremptory and irrevocable, and as the gospel is

purely gracious, this predestination is also gracious, according to the benevolent . . . inclination of God in Christ. But that grace excludes every **cause** which can possibly be imagined to be capable of having proceeded from man, and by which God may be moved to make this decree.⁸⁷

Yet, we must remember that this predestination is that of a class of believers. Of course, there is to be no human cause in the predestination of the class. But that says nothing about whether there are human causes which decide ultimately who enters that class of believers.

With this in mind, when Arminius speaks of the predestinating decree "to justify, adopt and endow with everlasting life, . . . believers on whom he had decreed to bestow faith," his words have something of a hollow ring to him who would like his Calvinism pure.⁸⁸

To those who would cite St. Paul's argument in Romans Nine as proof of a Calvinist position, Arminius would say that there is no reference in that chapter to the predestinating of particular individuals. Rather, he says, Romans Nine is aimed at Jews who are asking if God's word is not made void if Jews seeking righteousness by means of the law, rather than by faith, are to be rejected.⁸⁹ Hence, predestination in Romans Nine is taken care of.

The "Remonstrance," not so surprisingly, says little about predestination. Since this was the point of greatest conflict between the Remonstrants and the Calvinists, and since even by the date of Arminius' death, pressure seems to have been applied, it is not so very strange that no

direct mention of the doctrine is made.

However, two phrases indicate something of the Remonstrants' position. In Article II of the Remonstrance we find the following: "That, accordingly, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for all, by his death on the cross, reconciliation and remission of sins; yet so that no one is partaker of this remission except the believers." (Italics mine.) Secondly, in Article IV it is said that "with respect to the mode of operation, grace is not irresistable; for it is written of many that they resisted the Holy Spirit."⁹⁰ Here we have an indirect denial of God's absolute sovereignty in the election to salvation of individuals, and a statement which could easily be taken as affirming the election of a class of believers, rather than individuals as the Calvinist formulas would contend.

Finally, it seems that somewhere between the writing of the "Remonstrance" in 1610 and the Synod of Dort in 1618, the Remonstrants declared their position on foreknowledge and its relation to predestination more fully. As Berkouwer points out, the Canons of the Synod of Dort assert the following: "That election occurs on the basis of foreseen faith or of the obedience of faith is repudiated (I, 9): to say that faith is a condition of salvation is an 'injurious error' (I, Rejection of errors 3)."⁹¹

Indeed, the Synod produced as its understanding

of the Arminian position on predestination the view that people are elected to salvation on the basis of "foreseen faith, consciousness, sanctitude and piety unfinished."⁹² The following statement embodies in it what the Synod believed the Remonstrants were saying: ". . . the doctrine of the elect, does not consist in that, because God might choose a certain sort of men before others, but in this, because God out of all possible conditions (among which also are the works of the law) or out of the order of all things might choose a deed of faith, in itself ignoble, and the imperfect obedience to the faith, for the condition of salvation; and it obligingly through perfect obedience, considered and God might assess the worth [of the faith] for the reward of eternal life."⁹³

On this position G. C. Berkouwer comments:

[The Synod of Dort was] unable to be conciliated by the Arminian concession that the foreseen faith on the basis of which we are justified was a gift of grace, nor by the statement that God chose out of all possible conditions (among which are also the works of the law), or out of the whole order of things, the act of faith which from its very nature is undeserving and which offers condition of salvation' (I, Rejection of Errors 3). This was unacceptable precisely because it made faith a condition, chosen from all possible conditions, actually putting faith and the law on the same level, though one is accepted by God and the other not.⁹⁴

It must be noticed, that the position which the Synod of Dort understood to be the Remonstrant's position on predestination is almost identical to that held by Arminius himself. Therefore, it seems that there was a uniformity

of thought between Arminius and his followers concerning the essential of predestination.

The sixth area to which we must address ourselves is that of Arminius' thoughts on the concept of faith. The aspects we will cover are primarily the nature of faith as a mere gift of God, the objects of faith, and how faith is related to grace.

To Arminius, faith had two objects in one. Both God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are objects of faith.⁹⁵ This faith is, by way of description, as follows (Arminius describing it in two ways):

V. The form [of faith] is the assent that is given to an object of this description; which assent is not acquired by . . . a course of reasoning from principles known by nature; but it is an assent infused above the order of nature, which yet, is confirmed and increased by the daily exercises of prayers and mortification of the flesh, and by the practice of good works. Knowledge is antecedent to faith; the Son of God is beheld before a sinner believes on him. But . . . trust or confidence is consequent to it; for, through faith, confidence is placed in Christ, and through him in God.⁹⁶

Second,

VII. The subject . . . in which it [faith] resides, is the mind, not only as it acknowledges the object to be true, but likewise to be good, which the word of the gospel declares. Wherefore, it belongs not only to the theoretical understanding, but likewise to . . . that of the affections, which is practical.⁹⁷

Faith, then, "resides" in the mind, and has both theoretical and practical aspects. The theoretical has to do with the abstract understanding that the object of

faith is both true and good. The practical aspect refers to the effect that truth has on the feelings, and presumably, the feelings on the will. This same faith, to Arminius, is an "assent," and is not based on understanding arrived at by subjecting the principles of this present world order (both natural and human) to reason. That does not mean that reason is abandoned. Rather, reason is applied to a different, spiritual, set of principles. Otherwise, Arminius could not speak of knowledge as requisite to faith. Knowledge of the existence and claims of Jesus Christ comes first. Faith is then exerted towards Christ, on the basis of the reasonableness of Christ's claims within the specified set of principles. The results of faith are increasing trust and confidence towards God by means of Christ, as God and Christ support one's faith by continuing to act in the way which is consistent with the set of principles upon which one originally reasoned. This continued support is made most apparent to the individual as he engages, among other things, in the good works which God re-created him to do (Eph.2.10).

The relationship between faith and grace can be somewhat confusing at times. In fact, in some places in Arminius' writings, one could almost replace "grace" with "faith" in some instances of the discussion. The italicized proposition is a thesis of Franz Junious, professor of theology at the University of Leyden at the time when

Arminius was pastoring in Amsterdam. The remainder of the quote is Arminius' answer.

This preterition is without blame: for God bestowed on man the perfection of human nature, He was not under obligation to bestow grace upon any one. It is grace; therefore, there is no obligation.

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Q. God, in the abstract and absolutely, was not under obligation to bestow grace on any one, but He could place Himself under that obligation in two ways, by promise, and by making certain requisitions. By promise, if He should promise to bestow grace, either with or without condition. By requisition, if He should require, from a man, an act, such that it could not be performed without his grace, for then He would be under obligation to bestow it, otherwise He would reap where He had not sowed.⁹⁸

Here it is apparent that between these two "reformed" theologians the real issue is grace only insofar as it relates to faith. The essence of Arminius' position is that if God requires faith from a man for salvation, then God is required to bestow the "grace" which is the ability to have faith. He uses conditional language here, but the situation he poses in the subjunctive mood, we have found to be the position he actually holds, i.e. God does require faith from man. Hence, God is obligated. It is at this point that A. H. Strong's criticism (that Arminius saw the ability to believe as growing out of justice rather than grace) almost becomes valid. Arminius very nearly lost his footing here.

This takes us to the main question of this section. Is faith a mere gift of God, or is it something that man

decides on once given the ability to do so? Let us turn to Arminius' answers.

In speaking of an "eternal decree" of God concerning the administration of the means of salvation, Arminius says that "about this decree, I think nothing more is necessary to be known, than that faith is the mere gift of the gracious mercy of God; and that unbelief is of men, and partly to the just vengeance of God, which deserts, blinds and hardens sinners."⁹⁹ This is a thoroughly Reformed answer. Further, he says that it is God who, in a "gracious and efficacious act," himself, "bestows repentance, and converts us to himself."¹⁰⁰

The work of the Holy Spirit is also of interest to Arminius with regard to this area. He says that the Spirit "is necessarily the author of repentance."¹⁰¹ Elsewhere, the "instrument is the gospel," while the "author of faith is the Holy Spirit."¹⁰² Arminius acknowledges for us both the author within the realm of faith and the means of its existence. He also indicates the proper share of influence of faith. "III. Evangelical faith is an assent of the mind, produced by the Holy Spirit, through the gospel."¹⁰³ (Italics mine.) In conclusion, it may be said that "whatever it may be of knowledge, holiness and power, is all begotten within him [man] by the Holy Spirit."¹⁰⁴

I say, "In conclusion," but there is another side of Arminius' thought which at once contradicts these words

we have just received.

9. Faith is a gracious and gratuitous gift of God, bestowed according to the administration of the means necessary to conduce to the end, that is, according to such an administration as the justice of God requires, either towards the side of mercy or towards that of severity. It is a gift which is not bestowed according to an absolute will of saving some particular men; for it is a condition required in the object to be saved, and it is in fact a condition before it is the means for obtaining salvation.¹⁰⁵

Arminius has hedged. In one breath he affirms that faith is a "gratuitous gift" and, while a means of obtaining salvation, it is a condition which man has to fulfill by having it, before it can be a means which is bestowed. This is theological double-talk.

He displays the same characteristic elsewhere. He has posed the following questions: "Is justifying faith the effect and the . . . mere gift of God alone, who calls, illuminates, and reforms the will: and is it . . . peculiar to the elect alone from all eternity."¹⁰⁶ Arminius' answers follow:

(1.) To the first [question] I reply, Faith is the effect of God illuminating the mind and sealing the heart, and it is a mere gift. (2.) To the second I answer, by making a distinction in the word Election. If it be understood as signifying Election to salvation; since this, according to the scriptures, is the election of believers, it cannot be said, 'Faith is bestowed on the elect, or on those who are to be saved,' but that 'believers are elected and saved.' But if it be received for the decree by which God determines variously to administer the means necessary to salvation; in this sense I say that Faith is the gift of God, which is conferred on those only whom he hath chosen to this, that they may hear the word of God, and be made partakers of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁷

Essentially, Arminius is saying that faith is bestowed on the class known as believers, since it is believers who are saved. Yet they do not come into the class called "believers" until after they exercise faith. The logic of this would drive us to say that one must exercise saving faith in order to be given saving faith. This is most illogical.¹⁰⁸

Arminius, then, is drawing away from his basic Reformed position. Faith has become less a gift of God and more like something a man produces himself once given the necessary raw materials. Three statements lead us to this conclusion quite directly. "I say, that faith is the requirement of God, and the act of the believer when he answers the requirement." "I reply, faith as a quality has in that passage relation to the mode of an instrument; but the acceptance or apprehension itself is an act, and indeed one of obedience yielded to the gospel." "The proximate, yet less principal cause [of repentance], is man himself, converted and converting himself [italics mine] by the power and efficacy of the grace of God and the Spirit of Christ."¹⁰⁹

Whenever it can be said that faith is a "requirement" with the idea that it is also an "act of obedience" on the part of men, then it is very hard to speak of faith as "mere gift" which becomes operative without man's co-operation, at the moment of infusion. When it is said that man is

"converting himself," it is impossible to speak of "mere gift." The only way to avoid Pelagianism, or **synergism**, is to postulate an ability graciously given to man by God. This is a "preparation" which allows man to retain free-will. "No man believes in Christ except he has been previously disposed and prepared, by preventing or preceding grace, to receive life eternal on that condition on which God wills to bestow it. . . ." ¹¹⁰ Here, Arminius makes no reference to the extent or time of the preparation. Yet, by our previous investigation, it most certainly means an ability to believe, though not necessarily given just prior to conversion, but, quite feasibly, given at birth.

A further proof of the likelihood just stated, is in the following question put to Arminius and his reply:

[Ques.] Can God now, in his own right, require faith from fallen man in Christ, which he cannot have of himself? But does God bestow on all and every one, to whom the Gospel is preached, sufficient grace by which they may believe, if they will?

[Ans.] The parts of this question are not opposed to each other; . . . they are at the most perfect agreement. So that the latter clause may be considered and rendering of a reason, why God may require from fallen man faith in Christ, which he cannot have of himself. For God may require this, since he has determined to bestow on man sufficient grace by which He may believe. Perhaps, therefore, the question may be thus corrected: 'Can God, now in his own right, demand from fallen man faith in Christ, which he cannot have of himself, though God neither bestows on him, nor is ready to bestow sufficient grace by which he may believe?' This question will be answered by a direct negative. God cannot by any right demand from fallen man faith in Christ, which he cannot have of himself, except God has either bestowed or is ready to bestow, sufficient grace by which he may believe if he will. ¹¹¹

Arminius goes on to claim that this explanation is not Pelagian and neither does it have any affinities to Pelagianism.

This position tells us plainly that what God bestows is "sufficient grace" to have faith. He could have used "faith" itself instead of "sufficient grace." In view of the fact that he was constantly addressing himself to Calvinists, the lack of the word "faith" in place of "sufficient grace," is conspicuous by its absence. Further, despite his statements to the contrary,¹¹² it does appear that, for him, once a man is "prepared" he then can believe or not believe as he wishes.

When accused of this very thing, he denies it with a "simile." He posits a poor man who receives alms from a rich man. He asks if the gift is any less gratuitous because the pauper receives it with an open hand. He claims the pauper could not receive it without exercising his will. He finishes by asking "Can it be correctly said, because the beggar is always prepared to receive, that 'he can have the alms, or not have it, just as he please?'"¹¹³ He assumes a "no" answer.

We thus end our discussion of Arminius' view of faith. For him it is the result of God's gracious gift of an ability to believe, which ability need not come just prior to regeneration and which need not finally end, in all cases, with regeneration (he thus differs with some Puritans who admit of preparation, but that it always brings

about regeneration). This ability can be exercised or not as a man wills. Further, God cannot expect a man who is "unprepared" to believe. Since he commands all to believe, He thus prepares all. Each can believe if he wants to. Thus, despite Arminius' protestations, he seems definitely out of line with the Reformed theologians by whom he wished to be accepted.

The "Remonstrance" has something to say about faith, but whether it could be said to be the logical outcome of Arminius' own position is doubtful. The pertinent article follows:

III. That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the working of his own free-will, in as much as in his state of apostasy and sin he can for himself and by himself think nothing that is good--nothing, that is, truly good, such as saving faith is, above all else. But that it is necessary that by God, in Christ and through his Holy Spirit he be born again and renewed in understanding, affections and will and in all his faculties, that he may be able to understand, think will and perform what is truly good, according to the Word of God [John XV. 5].¹¹⁴

This is a thoroughly Calvinistic statement. Either the Remonstrants drastically altered Arminius' position, or there is an attempt to hide the Arminianism in Calvinistic language.

The Synod of Dort took the second option. It believed that the Remonstrants taught "that the purpose of the death of Christ [was] . . . only that He should acquire for the Father the mere right to establish with man such a covenant as he might please' (II, Rejection of errors, 2).¹¹⁵ (Italics mine.)

Charles Hodge points out another section of the "Remonstrance" which substantiates the Synod of Dort's view:

Although there is the greatest diversity in the degrees in which grace is bestowed in accordance with the divine will, yet the Holy Ghost confers, or at least is ready to confer, upon all and each to whom the word of faith is ordinarily preached, as much grace as is sufficient for generating faith and carrying forward their conversion in its successive stages. Thus sufficient grace for faith and conversion is allotted not only to those who actually believe and are converted, but also to those who do not actually believe and are not in fact converted.¹¹⁶

In this statement faith itself is seen only as a derivative of the "mere gift" of ability to believe. This ability is given universally, but the derivative, faith, is not every man's possession. Only those who "generate" faith by means of the ability, are saved from God's wrath. It is, therefore, to be concluded that once again that the "Remonstrance" is in nearly a direct line with Arminius.

The last area of Arminius' thought to be covered is that of the "covenant." There is a tendency to think that the covenant concept was held exclusively by the Puritans or the earlier Calvinists. What did Arminius have to say about it? (Why should he say anything about it at all?) We should expect something from him on the subject because he originated it within the Reformed tradition.

Arminius indicates his belief in the covenant concept when stating that when man is regenerated "the hardness of his stony heart . . . is changed into the softness of flesh, and the law of God according to the covenant of grace . . . [is]

inscribed on it, (Jer. XXXI. 32-35). . . ."117 For Arminius, the entire significance of the sacraments lies in the fact that they are signs of participation in the covenant with God: "those in covenant are bound to Christ by their reception of these signs [sacraments], as by a public oath."118

To Arminius, the nature of the covenant is that it embraces all mankind. Whatever Adam did with the covenant was considered to be what all did (or would do, given the chance) with the covenant.

IX. But because the condition of the covenant into which God entered with our first parents was this, that, if they continued in the favor and grace of God by an observance of this command and of others, the gifts conferred on them should be transmitted to their posterity, by the same divine grace which they had, themselves, received; but that, if by disobedience they rendered themselves unworthy of those blessings, their posterity, likewise, . . . should not possess them, and should be . . . liable to the contrary evils. . . . This was the reason why all men, who were to be propagated from them in a natural way, became obnoxious to death temporal and death eternal, and . . . devoid of this gift of the Holy Spirit or original righteousness. . . . "119

There was, therefore, a substantive result which came out of the original covenant made with Adam.

Yet, typical of the Reformed tradition, God made a second covenant with Adam. This was a covenant of grace:

1. Because God has taken the whole human race into the grace of reconciliation, and has entered into a covenant of grace with Adam, and with the whole of his posterity in him. In which he promises the remission of all sins to as many as stand steadfastly, and deal not treacherously, in that covenant. But God not only entered into it with Adam, but also afterwards renewed it with Noah, and at length confirmed and perfected it through Christ Jesus. [Italics mine.] "120

Part of the result of this new covenant is that infants are **not** considered guilty of sin at birth. They **are** automatically included in the new covenant, presumably until they reject this same covenant.

Yet, even this new covenant is like the original covenant. It will be noted that the original covenant was broken due to disobedience. Similarly, there is an aura of conditionality which surrounds Arminius' words about the new covenant or covenant of grace:

X. The fruits of repentance, which may also have the relation of ends, are, (1.) On the part of God, the remission of sin according to the condition [italics mine] of the covenant of grace in Christ, and on account of his obedience, and through faith in him.¹²¹

Elsewhere, he is more specific:

I. As in the matter of salvation, it has pleased God to treat with man by . . . the method of a covenant, that is, by a stipulation, or a demand and a promise, . . .; it is instituted on both sides and separately, that man may perform the requisition or command of God, by which he may obtain [the fulfillment of] his promise. But this is the mutual relation between these two--the promise is tantamount to an argument, which God employs, that he may obtain from man that which he demands; and the compliance with the demand, on the other hand, is the condition, without which man cannot obtain what has been promised by God, and through [the performance of] which he most assuredly obtains the promise.¹²²

Earlier, Arminius seems to equate covenant with a contract.¹²³

The purpose of such a "contractual" covenant is "that [God] might elicit from man voluntary and free obedience, which alone, is grateful to him, . . ." ¹²⁴ From what we have seen earlier, faith is the condition which must be fulfilled.

That same faith we now understand to be necessarily freely

exercised. The end product of this is that man freely meets or does not meet the conditions of the covenant as he chooses. Hence, the concept of the covenant is, to Arminius, truly conditional.

The purpose of this chapter has been to correct misunderstandings as to the nature of Arminius' theology. This has been necessary in order to properly classify the two primary subjects of this study, i.e. John Cotton and Increase Mather. One cannot classify a theologian as Arminian if one does not have a sound knowledge of Arminianism. This has been the fundamental problem with the analyses of authors such as Miller, Stoeber, Morgan, and others.

We have seen that Arminius came out of the Reformed tradition and hence brought much of it with him into his new position. This is especially true with regard to his view of the covenant, which is essentially in the Reformed vein. He gives more credit to man's reason, when applied to spiritual things, than Calvin and his successors. He does not see the connection between Adam and his posterity in the same way as Calvin. Calvinism's concept of the extent of the effects of Adam's sin is much deeper and more far-reaching. While Calvinism regularly attributes to God alone a sovereign will, there is in Arminius' thought, at the very least, a certain sphere in which man's will can be said to be sovereign. Calvin simply posits man's

responsibility; Arminius feels impelled to give a reason why man is responsible.

The greatest gulf between the two systems lies between faith as a mere gift, on the one hand, and, on the other, faith as essentially a construct and function of the human will and mind. The answer to the question of the origin of faith regularly identifies an Arminian from a Calvinist. This also relates to the difference between the systems on the subject of predestination. To Calvin and his followers, faith is given by God to those whom he predestines to eternal sonship. To Arminius, God first predestines an as yet non-existent class of people called believers. People enter this class, and so eternal fellowship with God, by exercising faith (as a function of their wills) and hence believing, thus entering the class.

With these distinctions in mind, let us go on to our sample cases, two of the most eminent Puritans. Once having done this, we will be in a better position to evaluate the probability John Cotton and Increase Mather gradually shifted from a Calvinist stance to one of Arminian persuasion.

NOTES

¹Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939; reprint ed., Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), pp. 389, 392.

²Sydney V. James, ed., The New England Puritans (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 18, n. 1.

³"According to this theory, every human soul is immediately created by God, and created as innocent, as free from depraved tendencies, and as perfectly able to obey God, as Adam was at his creation. The only effect of Adam's sin upon his posterity is the effect of evil example; it has in no way corrupted human nature; . . .

"Adam's sin therefore injured only himself; the sin of Adam is imputed only to Adam,--it is imputed in no sense to his descendants; God imputes to each of Adam's descendants only those acts of sin which he has personally and consciously committed. Men can be saved by the law as well as by the gospel; and some have actually obeyed God perfectly, and have thus been saved." (*Italics mine.*) Augustus H. Strong, Systematic Theology (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1907), p. 597.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 601-03.

⁵Edmund S. Morgan, The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), p. 28.

⁶Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 153.

⁷William K. B. Stoever, "Nature, Grace and John Cotton: The Theological Dimension in the New England Antinomian Controversy," *Church History* 44 (March 1975): 26.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, 3d ed., ed. Cyril C. Richardson, Wilhelm Pauck, Robert T. Handy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 400.

¹⁰F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 90.

¹¹Walker, History of the Christian Church, p. 399; Cross and Livingstone, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 90.

¹²Cross and Livingstone, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 90.

¹³Walker, History of the Christian Church, p. 399.

¹⁴Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom; History of the Creeds, Vol. I: 510. Cf. also Cross and Livingstone, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 90, and Walker, History of the Christian Church, p. 399.

¹⁵Walker, History of the Christian Church, p. 399.

¹⁶Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom: History of the Creeds, Vol. I: 510, n. 2.

¹⁷Carl O. Bangs, Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), pp. 194, 193.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 312.

¹⁹Walker, History of the Christian Church, p. 399.

²⁰J. D. Douglas, et al., The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 835.

²¹Cross and Livingstone, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 465.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., p. 466.

²⁴Ibid., p. 90.

²⁵Bangs, Arminius, pp. 337-38.

²⁶Ibid., p. 209.

²⁷Ibid., p. 307.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 307-08.

²⁹The Remonstrants were so called because of the document which represents their beliefs, i.e., "The Remonstrance." Though written in 1610, this document was not condemned until 1619, by decision of the Synod of Dort. (The five positive articles of "The Remonstrance" will be found in Appendix II) "Among the Calvinistic doctrines repudiated [in the "Remonstrance"] were both the Supralapsarian and [Sub]Infralapsarian form of Predestination, the doctrine that Christ died only for the elect, and the belief that the saints could not fall from grace." Cross and Livingstone, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, s.v. "Remonstrance," p. 1173. The primary emphasis of Arminius' followers was the insistence". . . that the Divine sovereignty was compatible with a real free-will in man." Ibid., s.v. "Arminian," p. 90.

³⁰James Arminius, The Writings of James Arminius, 3 vols., trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Auburn and Buffalo: Derby, Miller and Orton, 1853; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1956), 1:525.

³¹Ibid., 2:64.

³²Ibid., 1:524.

³³Ibid., 1:526.

³⁴Ibid., 1:526-27.

³⁵Ibid., 1:323.

³⁶Ibid., 3:443.

³⁷Henry Bettenson, ed., Documents of the Christian Church, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 268.

³⁸Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical Creeds, p. 557.

³⁹Arminius, Writings, 1:532.

⁴⁰Ibid., 1:579.

⁴¹Ibid., 1:533.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 1:534.

⁴⁴Ibid., 1:534-35.

⁴⁵Bangs, Arminius, p. 339.

⁴⁶G. C. Berkouwer, Sin, trans. Philip C. Holtrop (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 438.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 441.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 446.

⁴⁹Arminius, Writings, 1:486.

⁵⁰Ibid., 3:177.

⁵¹Ibid., 1:319.

⁵²Ibid., 1:318.

⁵³Ibid., 2:77-79; cf. 1:485-86.

⁵⁴Ibid., 2:492.

⁵⁵Ibid., 1:319.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Cross and Livingstone, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, s. v. "Original Sin," p. 1010.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 1011.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 2:171-73.

⁶¹Ibid., cf. p. 1292, s.v. "Dominic Soto."

⁶²J. D. Douglas, et. al., The New Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), s.v. "Sin," by John Murray.

⁶³Hodge, Systematic Theology, 2:227; cf. 2:231.

⁶⁴Ibid., 2:231, 230.

⁶⁵Douglas, New International Dictionary of Christian Church, s.v. "Original Sin," p. 735.

⁶⁶Arminius, Writings, 1:528.

⁶⁷Ibid., 1:527-28.

⁶⁸Ibid., 1:251.

⁶⁹Ibid., 1:531.

⁷⁰Ibid., 3:547-48.

⁷¹Ibid., 3:548.

⁷²Ibid., 3:558.

⁷³Ibid., 2:64.

⁷⁴Ibid., 1:524.

⁷⁵Ibid., 3:480.

⁷⁶Ibid., 1:254; cf. 2:473.

⁷⁷Ibid., 1:368-69.

⁷⁸Ibid., 2:472.

⁷⁹Ibid., 1:252.

⁸⁰Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church, p. 268.

⁸¹Bangs, Arminius, p. 204; Arminius, Works of James Arminius, 3 vols. (London: 1825-75), 3:274-75, cited in Bangs, Arminius, p. 209; Bangs, Arminius, p. 204.

⁸²Arminius, Writings, 1:247-48. Cf. Writings, 2:494 for an instance where Arminius declares the same sentiments as those found in decree I here.

⁸³Arminius, Writings, 2:470.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵I am indebted to Carl Bangs in his book Arminius for explaining this aspect of Arminius' thought to me. He says of the second decree, "This is the predestination of the class of believers." p. 351. This aspect was peculiar to Arminius, since Calvinists traditionally believed in the election of individuals, not classes, to salvation. Cf. Calvin, Institutes, 3.21.5.

⁸⁶Arminius, Writings, 3:478-79.

⁸⁷Ibid., 2:99-100.

⁸⁸Ibid., 1:565.

⁸⁹Ibid., 3:528-31.

⁹⁰Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church, pp. 268, 269.

⁹¹G. C. Berkouwer, Faith and Justification, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. 46.

⁹²From a translation prepared for this author from the Latin original in Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical Creeds, p. 557, I Rejectio Errorum, 5.

⁹³From a translation of the text found in Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical Creeds, p. 557, I Rejectio Errorum, 3. The original text follows: ". . . doctrina electionis, non consistere in eo, quod Deus certos quosdam homines prae aliis elegerit, sed in eo, quod Deus ex omnibus possibilibus conditionibus (inter quas etiam sunt opera a legis) sine ex omnium rerum ordine actum fidei, in sese ignobilium, et obedientiam fidei imperfectam, in salutis conditionem elegerit; eamque gratiose pro perfecta obedientia reputare, et vitae aeternae praemio dignam censere volerit."

⁹⁴Berkouwer, Faith and Justification, p. 47.

⁹⁵Arminius, Writings, 2:110.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid., 3:275.

⁹⁹Ibid., 2:470-71.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 1:581.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 1:582.

¹⁰²Ibid., 2:110.

¹⁰³Ibid., 2:100-10.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 1:529.

105Ibid., 2:500.

106Ibid., 1:384.

107Ibid.

108This is not the import of Paul's statement made in Romans 1.17, though the wording is similar.

109Arminius, Writings, 1:363, 363-64, 579.

110Ibid., 2:500-01.

111Ibid., 1:383.

112Ibid., 1:365.

113Ibid., 1:365-66.

114Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church, p. 268.

115Berkouwer, Faith and Justification, p. 199, n. 44.

116Hodge, Systematic Theology, 2:676, quoted from Confessio Remonstrantium, xvii. 8; p. 89, a, of second set.

117Arminius, Writings, 1:529.

118Ibid., 2:152.

119Ibid., 2:78-79.

120Ibid., 1:318.

121Ibid., 1:581.

122Ibid., 2:106.

123Ibid., 2:71.

124Ibid.

CHAPTER III

JOHN COTTON

Before investigating the depth of John Cotton's Calvinism, (or lack of it) we would do well to look at how Cotton came to the place where he was one of the most important divines of the new English colonies.

Cotton was born in Derby, Derbyshire, England on December 4, 1584 to believing parents.¹ The next we hear of him is that he matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1597 at age 13.² He received the A.B. in 1603 and took the M.A. in 1606 at Emmanuel College.³ Of these two schools Larzer Ziff notes that "Trinity had been in a somewhat moderate position with regard to ecclesiastical reforms, but Emmanuel was a Puritan foundation--even Queen Elizabeth had referred to it by that term."⁴

Cotton, though "he had given assent to a theology he had mastered" was still not a believer until moved by the sermons of Richard Sibbes at Emmanuel. He was converted in 1609.⁵ After this, he was ordained a deacon and priest at Lincoln on July 13, 1610.⁶ In 1613, he received the B.D. degree. Meanwhile, he had received his first charge on June 24, 1612; this was the church of St. Botolph's in Boston, Lincolnshire.⁷

Previous to all of this, especially his conversion, Cotton had been known as an eloquent pulpiteer, and one of the finest Hebrew scholars to have come out of Emmanuel.⁸ Having become a believer simplified his style though not his scholarly acumen.

He preached at St. Botolph's for twenty years, though very shortly after arriving there, he took up non-conformity.⁹ He resigned St. Botolph's in May 1633 and embarked in July of the same year for New England.¹⁰ He arrived at Boston, New England on September 4, and the next month was chosen teacher of First Church, where he preached until his death.¹¹ He died December 23, 1652, at the age of 68.¹²

Cotton is best known as the chief spiritual mentor of New England's first generation. His influence in the Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson affairs bears this out. It is because of this that he has been chosen as a test case. Cotton's influence was great not only in his own day but long after. If Arminianism was as rampant in New England as some suggest, why not look to the most influential teacher of the area to see if he was the source? The question then becomes the following: Was John Cotton truly a Calvinist or did he really espouse ideas which would more properly be identified as Arminian?

The first area of his thought where we shall look for traces of Arminian or Calvinist tendency is in Cotton's

view of the nature of human reason. In his work Christ the Fountain, Cotton concedes that mankind is able to "move to acts of Reason."¹³ Yet in the same work he indicated that mankind "cannot move themselves to any spiritual duty and work of grace."¹⁴ This would seem to indicate that men are able to reason but that reason cannot move men to true acts of grace. In the work Way of Life, Cotton says this: "True grace doth not destroy a man's wisdom, but rather enlargeth and enlighteneth it wonderfully."¹⁵ One understands by this that men have some sort of usable wisdom, reason if you will, which is simply enlarged, broadened, made more useful. It could be drawn from this that man can think accurate thoughts about God by means of his intellect, but only after grace infuses it with the ability to reason accurately about God. Until then it can only reason correctly about natural things.

Corroborating this interpretation is what Cotton says just after his statement about "true grace." He continues, "so as that men by nature are blinde, but spirituall wisdom enlightens the eyes of the blinde."¹⁶ Blind men certainly don't see light, and "natural" men don't see spiritual things any better, in Cotton's view.

Elsewhere, Cotton reiterates his position more clearly. In Some Treasure Picked Out of Rubbish Cotton asks a rhetorical question which, in context, assumes a negative answer. "Shall we think the light of reason

sufficient to direct, without the guidance of Scripture in matters of Rites and Ceremonies, appropriated to the solemn Worship of God for the Instruction of his People?"¹⁷

He continues,

And, what Understanding or Judgement can man have of himself to discern how, or by what means God will be Worshipped? None at all. For the Scripture testifieth that every man is brutish by his own knowledge, nor more able to discern what in this case is fit and acceptable than a blind man is to judge of Colours; that there is no light in them that speak not according to the Scriptures, no wisdom in them that reject the Word of the Lord:
 . . .¹⁸

With reference to men's natures and even their words, Cotton invokes Genesis 6.1: "All the thoughts and imaginations of such men's hearts are evill, and only evill, and that continually."¹⁹

It is apparent that Cotton has a low view of man's natural ability to reason about spiritual things. In this, from our previous discussion, we see that he more nearly follows Calvin's line of thinking than that of Arminius.

A second area, "the Law," could refer either to the ceremonial laws of the Jews or to the "Moral Law."²⁰ Yet, it is evident that Cotton's preoccupation with the law centers primarily on the moral statutes mediated through Moses, since the Puritans did not attempt to uphold Jewish ceremonies.²¹

As to the purpose of the moral law, we ought first to discern what Cotton believed it could not accomplish. For Cotton, it was impossible for the law to "give life."

"Had there been a Law that could have given life, then righteousness had been by the Law, but it was impossible for the Law to give life, by reason of the weakness of it, Rom. 8.3."²² At this point he certainly differs with the Remonstrants who saw no inherent weakness in the law with regard to its ability to impart righteousness, provided of course, that God had chosen it as the appropriate vehicle for that purpose.

In explaining Paul's argument as presented to the church of Galatia Cotton expounds:

For the ground of the Point is this, we cannot have a spirit of life wrought in us by the workes of the Law, Gal. 3.5. He that ministereth to you in the spirit, and worketh miracles, doth hee it by the workes of the Law? As if he should say, did ye ever receive the grace of Christ, by the workes of the Law? or by the counsell of the Law, or by the commandments of the Law? or by the reproofs reached forth from the Law; he excludes it as impossible, and as no wayes able to do it, vers. 21.²³

In the same work, Cotton indicates that the Law is not able to make a "new man in God's sight."²⁴ In his most succinct passage, Cotton concludes that "The inheritance is not by the Law, but by promise, and therefore we challenge nothing by our most perfect obedience to the Law."²⁵

If the Law is not good for making a man righteous and acceptable before God, if obedience to it does not make one an heir to the promises of eternal life, what is its purpose? According to Cotton, it has several purposes.

First, the law "kills" us to the covenant of the law.²⁶ That is, the law shows to us where we fail. Part of the covenant of the law is that if one fails he is worthy of death. Hence, the law shows us that we are worthy of death and so we find no comfort in the covenant of the law and so are "dead" to it. Second, the law can harden an unregenerate person's heart. The unregenerate believe they will be made acceptable by obedience to the law. This, in turn, causes them to rely on "earned" grace as opposed to "free" grace.²⁷ Third, the law removes any excuse for sin. Speaking of unregenerate man, Cotton contends that "when men have the knowledge of the Law, and yet commit sin willingly, now they have no Cloak for their sin, Rom. 1. vers. 21."²⁸

Related to the first "use" of the law are the fourth and fifth uses. "The Law doth kill sin in us, and thereby kills us, it kills all our former jollities and comforts in this world, . . ."²⁹ Beyond that however, by means of total lack of comfort which the unregenerate man experiences when he realizes these previous uses of the law, that man is driven to Christ by the law.

Again, there is a further power in the Law, though of it self it work nothing. Yet it is a Schoolmaster to drive us to Christ. Gal. 3.24. Not onely the Jewish Ceremonies, but the Morall Law, when it discovers to us our sins, occassionally, and God blessing it to that end, the spirit of Adoption striking in with it, makes us cry out, What shall we do to be saved?"³⁰

For believers, the law also has its uses. For them,

it is useful "to aggravate the apprehension of the hainous-
ness of sin upon their consciences, and to **set home** the
 burden of their sins unto their souls, thereby to drive
 them to feel their great need of the Lord Jesus Christ,
 whom otherwise they should for ever have despised."³¹

Perhaps the most important aspect however, is that
 in so far as the moral law reflects the character of God
 and Christ, we should attempt to follow it. We are to be
 holy--our goal is to be holy--the law reflects a holy
 character, hence we should follow it, being aware that it
 takes more than just outward superficial adherence to
 satisfy Christ.³²

A third use of the law for the believer is that
"Sincere obedience, or keeping the Commandments of Christ,
 is a scientific argument, and sign of our undoubted and
 known fellowship with Christ."³³ Though certainly not a
 sentiment which would have set with his one-time friend
 Anne Hutchinson, Cotton defends this position by adducing
 "the wonderful insufficiency of our natures to keep any
 Commandment of God without this, . . . we of our selves
 are altogether fruitless in the works of righteousness,
 till Christs love dwell in us."³⁴

It was Cotton's opinion that though "none can be
 justified by the works of the Law . . . wee do not dis-
 courage them from good works."³⁵

Since Cotton's goal was to see a community in
 Massachusetts which was made up completely of believers,

it was natural for him to expect the society to operate according to the "command" of the law, if not the "covenant" of it.³⁶ When unbelievers came into the society he saw no need to change the basic rules, or require two standards. This is clear from his An Abstract of the Laws of New England published in London in 1641. This is a civil code based solidly on the precepts of the moral law.

From our discussion of Cotton's position, it is evident that he is completely compatible with Calvin in his treatment of the moral law.

We shall begin our discussion of Cotton's view of the nature and results of Adam's sin by quoting an excerpt from his short catechism written for children.

- Q. Are you then born holy and righteous?
 A. No, my first father (3) sinned, and I in him.
- Q. Are you then born a sinner?
 A. I was conceived in sinne, and (f) born in iniquity.
- Q. What is your birth-sinne?
 A. Adam's sinne imputed to me (g) and a corrupt nature dwelling in me.
- Q. What is your corrupt Nature?
 A. My corrupt nature is empty of (h) Grace, bent unto sinne, and only unto sinne, and that continually.
- Q. What is sinne?
 A. Sinne is the (i) transgression of the Law.³⁷

In this excerpt can be seen elements common both to Calvin and Arminius. Calvin and Arminius would agree with Cotton on answers 1, 2, 3, 5, Arminius having given exactly the same answer to question five as Cotton. However, the

answer to question 4 would, if taken literally, fit only Calvin. For Cotton, it is not simply enough to acknowledge that all men sinned in Adam and hence are born in sin. He specifically states in the answer to the third question that one's "birth-sinne" is, in part, a corrupt nature which dwells in each man. In the answer to the fourth question, however, Cotton marks himself as irretrievably Calvinistic. He claims that a man's nature is "empty of grace" and that the attitude of that nature is "only" to sin "continually." Apart from Christ, man has no grace operative in his nature, much less a preparatory grace. As seen earlier, Arminius acknowledges that "original sin" is the loss of original righteousness. But here we see Cotton going beyond that with the phrase "bent unto sinne, and only unto sinne."

Do Cotton's writings elsewhere agree with his catechism? In Gospel Conversion he indicates men are the "heires of [Adam's] transgression," and that God immediately imputed the guilt of Adam's sin to us and so we stand condemned.³⁸ Each of us is "Born in Sin from our Mother's Womb."³⁹ Elsewhere, he differentiates between "the sins of our Birth" and those "of our life." That is, between original sin and actual sin.⁴⁰ This in turn strengthens the interpretation that Cotton believed in the concreteness of original sin. Just so, in A Treatise on Faith, Cotton indicates that our fall from grace was a

result of our "first Parents," and not a result of our later "actual" sins.⁴¹

From these passages, one concludes that, although actual sins are important, those which we consciously commit are not the basis of the enmity between men and God. Rather, the basis to which is added actual sin, is mankind's sin in Adam and the imputation of Adam's guilt to us. It is original sin which is the cause of our separation from God. Actual sin simply compounds the problem.

This conclusion is not that of Arminius, who would make actual sin not only the thing which continues our separation from God, but also the "first" separator. Original sin for Arminius is simply the guilt imputed to us, and not a nature so corrupted so as to be incapable of choosing the good. That nature which is "maimed" is so not because of original sin, but only because of additional actual sins. This sort of reasoning, Cotton would reject.

Let it be understood though, that this original sin is our own sin. Recall Cotton's first question and answer:

Q. Are you then born holy and righteous?

A. No, my first father (e) sinned, and I in him.⁴²

No, original sin is not being blamed on someone else's fault, but on our own. In this, Cotton is completely in line with Calvin, and the Synod of Dort.

Whenever a person broaches the topic of man's free will, most (in theological circles) would agree that it does exist. Some, however, would deny that man has a "free will." A third group, smaller still, would try to indicate that there is truth in both positions, usually by suggesting that Scripture can be quoted to support both positions and that there is something of a "Biblical tension" involved in this matter of free will.

This third group could be found speaking both in terms of the will of man being unable to choose any good thing and in terms of an individual choosing Christ--which is most certainly a good thing--at least to men such as John Cotton. Though this position smacks of inconsistency to some, it must be remembered that remarks which sound inconsistent are not always actually so. On the one hand it may be the burden of the individual to be completely honest with Scripture and not come to it with any preconceived notions or penchants for systematizing. On the other hand, the author may be trying to emphasize certain aspects of Biblical truth to different groups of people. A truth may be uttered in the presence of the theologically learned or in the presence of the common layman. Hence, the inconsistency may be the result of an antinomy as opposed to mere sloppiness of scholarship or predisposed concepts.

John Cotton appears to fit into this third group.

As we examine his thoughts on the subject we ought to keep three questions in mind. First, is Cotton's inconsistency the result of ignorance or maliciousness? Second, is Cotton's inconsistency merely superficial, and, hence only apparent, while showing forth a well thought out theology? Third, does Cotton propound a synthesis between Calvinism and Arminianism and if so, is the synthesis more Calvinistic or Arminian in tone?

The point at which "free will" becomes a vital issue is in the question of its relation to the act of conversion, for it is in conversion that the ultimate good is either given or chosen. Either a man is unable to choose Christ and so is simply changed and given Christ, apart from the man's desires, or the individual man chooses Christ of his own motivation. It is at this point that our study of Cotton's position will turn.

In the Roman tradition, it is taught that man exerts free will in becoming a believer. Men choose Christ. Cotton takes the Roman Church to task for this doctrine.⁴³

For Cotton,

we are not able to give ourselves unto him [God] until he first take us. For if Abraham did give himself, it was because God did take him first.⁴⁴

Here, in the first sentence, Cotton is quite clear. God takes us--we do not give ourselves to Him. At least not initially. In the second sentence we have what seems to be a fore-taste of Cotton's solution to the problem. As

God takes a man for His own, He does something to the man, such that the man then begins to want to take God as his God whereas he never wished to before.

In his commentary on St. John's epistles, Cotton shows again his belief in our lack of desire to turn to God. God forgives sin

For his own sake, that is without any desert of ours, yea sometimes without any desire of ours, Isa. 43.22, 23, 24, 25. Thou hast not called upon me, nor offered sacrifices unto me, yet I, even I am he, that for mine own names sake putteth away thine iniquities, and will remember thy sins no more.⁴⁵

This passage indicates that as far as Cotton can understand, "a man is as passive in his Regeneration, as in his first generation."⁴⁶

From his records, we know that Cotton exerted considerable energy in trying to defeat an Arminian faction in Boston, Lincolnshire. Of that endeavor, he says that

I then began publicly to preach, and in private meetings to defend the doctrine of God's eternal election before all foresight of good or evil in the creature: and the redemption (ex gratia) only of the elect: the effectual vocation of a sinner per irresistibilem gratia vim, ["By grace . . . through the irresistible power of grace"] without all respect of the preparations of the will [*italics mine*]: . . .⁴⁷

Cotton is here refuting the Arminian notion that the will of a man must be party to the transaction in which he becomes one of the regenerate. So far gone is man's desire to come to Christ "if God should make us able to doe it, yet we would not be willing to doe it."⁴⁸

Positively, Cotton taught that "therefore well doth

the Apostle say, It is God that workes in you both the will and the deed, Phil. 2.12, 13."⁴⁹ To secure his point, that man in no way freely chooses of himself to believe in Christ, Cotton calls upon the experience of the believer.

But now take another man, that is indeed borne to a new life, and hath this life in him that springs from Christ, he will tell you as Paul was wont to say, Gal. 1. 15, 16, When it pleased God to separate me from my mother's wombe, and called me by his grace. There you shall as in a pattern discern that the maner of the expression of a living soul is, he doth not say it was wrought when he had a good mind to hear such a man, or to take such a course, so it may be will flesh and blood say, but when you come to an heart that indeed lives in Gods sight, he expresseth himself thus: But when it pleased God it was done. I for my part ran cleane another way, I never had a desire after God, . . .⁵⁰

Cotton is certainly cautious in the remainder of his explanation. He even goes as far as to say that Christ was not revealed to him (so that his first knowledge of Christ might allow him to choose something external to himself) but in him (Cotton's first knowledge of Christ as his savior was simply that he found Christ in his heart). One second he disbelieved, the next second he believed and had no cognizance of having decided to do so.⁵¹ It would seem that Cotton's concept of a free will in man with regard to choosing the spiritual good was simply non-existent.

What of the position which Cotton seemed to display in our first quotation from him on free will? Everything else thus far has said nothing about man choosing either God or Christ or both. Yet Cotton indicated that Abraham gave himself to God at some point in time.

Indeed, Cotton speaks rather extensively in other places about receiving and choosing Christ. In one place he simply admonishes men to "Seeke the Lord while he may be found. . . ."⁵² In another work he seems to indicate that we could change and follow Christ if we chose to do so. "It doth shew you how farre shott wee are from giving God any possession within us, any hold of us, as long as wee content ourselves with any measures of knowledge and grace, and doe not change and open the heart."⁵³

Cotton uses much stronger language just a few pages further on in the same work. He speaks of men as having "once given God the heart."⁵⁴ He assumes that men can give themselves to God by urging that they "give God the heart, and then you give him the whole soule and body too."⁵⁵ In another work, Cotton speaks of the results "When a man hath given up his heart to God."⁵⁶

In Christ the Fountaine, Cotton uses the giving of oneself to God, and the forsaking of pagan life as the condition for eternal life. "God is then abundantly ready to pardon, when men forsake their owne wayes and thoughts, and throw away the sins that hang about them, God will say of such a people, I will heal them, and love them freely, mine anger is turned away from them."⁵⁷ In the same work we are told that the last of four ways in which we are said to have Christ "is a way of free acceptance."⁵⁸

In God's Mercie Cotton dwells on the imagery of

Rev. 3.20, where Christ knocks on a man's door, and if the door is opened by the man, Christ will enter and fellowship with him.⁵⁹ Here, he is eager to show God's mercy (by His continuing to knock and wait) towards those who do not belong to Him. However, he just as surely shows that God waits at the door and doesn't cave it in with a battering ram. All seems dependent on man's actually choosing to open the door.

In addition to these two seemingly contradictory groups of thoughts, one making Cotton sound like a Calvinist, the other placing him in the Arminian camp, we must also turn our attention to a third line of thought which has promise of resolving Cotton's apparent inconsistency.

The concept of "preparation" in theology is one which does not mean the same thing to all people. (Cotton is an example of a person for which it has at least two meanings. He seems to allow an "Arminian" preparation and a "Calvinist" preparation.) In Gospel Conversion he says "To works of creation [like the new-creation] there needeth no preparation."⁶⁰ A similar sentiment is found in the following statement: "But what preparation is there in a blind man to see, or in an ignorant man to understand: here are men as much unprepared for mercy, as ever you knew any."⁶¹

In the above, he is speaking as a Calvinist against an "Arminian" type of preparation which would posit in all men alike a sort of preparation in which God graciously

gives all men an ability to accept Christ but which does not force them to do so or even necessarily expect that they shall.

Yet, Cotton seems to accept some sort of preparation.⁶² This might be labeled "special" or "effectual" or both. The idea is that God, having chosen the elect, often brings them to himself gradually, rather than suddenly. Cotton suggests that by various means God draws men to Himself in such a way that a man might feel that the end result was his own decision, when from God's point of view, the man's acceptance of God came only as an almost unnecessary ratification of the fact that he was already in God's Kingdom.

One of the instruments God uses to draw men to Himself is the preaching of God's Word, says Cotton, quoting from Rom. 10.14-17.⁶³ "Yet while we are thus speaking to you, God many times conveys such a spirit of grace into us, as gives us power to receive Christ."⁶⁴

The result of this instrument's work is a "pricking" of the heart or conscience of the listener. "Now then, what is the first grace that is wrought in them? After by hearing they understood, They were pricked in their hearts."⁶⁵ This itself results in the will being laid "in the dust," in abject humility.⁶⁶ This process is the result of "saving grace."⁶⁷ The power of God then works faith in the humbled individual.⁶⁸ That faith seeks an object--Christ. It is then, when an individual's faith begins to work, that he

recognizes the object of his faith. It is natural for the person to conclude that he decided to "put his faith" in Christ. But where else could the faith which God gives find its object?

As for the waiting of God outside the door of a person's heart, Cotton evidently does not believe that the purpose behind it is necessarily to wait until the sinner opens up. Rather, "This is the first Reason, why God will thus waite and stand and knocke, and tarry our leisure, that hee might exalt the glory of his rich grace towards us."⁶⁹ It shows that God is patient and long-suffering. For Cotton, it is God, not man, who takes from the sinner Jeremiah's "heart of deceit" (Jer. 17.9).⁷⁰ Further, it is God who gives a heart which desires to avoid sin.⁷¹

Before concluding this discussion, we feel some purpose is served by at least indicating Cotton's view on the question of apostasy, i.e., whether a true believer can ever reject Christ. He has two pertinent things to say in commenting on I Jn. 3.9.

2. You can never lose the favour of God, because if you be once begotten, you can never be unbegotten. You are begotten of an immortal seed, and therefore cannot dye.

3. See what to judge of those that have made a profession, and yet fall away. They were never born of God, for then they could not have sinned.⁷²

The force of his argument is that true believers never fall away from believing in Christ. When he says that "they could not have sinned," he is using the phrase

in the Johannine sense of either habitually sinning or **making** a decision to abandon Christianity permanently. This opinion of his indicates that he believes all true believers persevere. God will keep them in the fold. If they "decide" by means of their own free will to give up believing then they never really believed at all. With regard to perseverance, this is a simple denial of free-will.

Briefly then, it can be seen that Cotton's concept of free will is one in which God initiates man's movement towards Christ. He then motivates the individual to continue moving in that direction through external means, but also by working directly on the person's heart and conscience. Hence it can be said by Cotton that God directly causes our salvation and that man chooses Christ. Man does choose Christ, but only because God causes him to do so. In speaking of these two views, Cotton is simply stating that man's will is involved while assuming that the motivating activity behind it is God's. It is for this reason that we can say that Cotton does not hold to the concept of free will in the same fashion as Arminius. For Cotton, free will in the Arminian sense simply does not exist.

With respect to the questions posited earlier about Cotton's understanding of free will, it must be said that he does affirm both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility to do what is right. However, this is not

inconsistency, much less ignorant or malicious inconsistency. **Rather**, his position is well-considered theology, in the sense that he takes all of the teaching of the Scripture and tries to come to an overall understanding of the data. He does not throw out some data in favor of other data simply because the problem is tougher when all the data are considered. In answer to our third question (does Cotton propound a synthesis between Calvinism and Arminianism and if so, is the synthesis more Calvinistic or Arminian in tone?) it must be admitted that he has far more affinity to Calvin, and really none at all with Arminius, for Arminius rejects the basis upon which Cotton erects his structure.

Related to the question of free will is the doctrine of predestination. This doctrine is itself connected with the doctrine of Divine providence (providence being a more general term and predestination a more specific one). Predestination has more to do with the doctrine of election than with the general direction in which God rules his creation. Yet, predestination has its basis in providence; the extent to which one holds to the concept of a general providence of God will often determine the strength of one's doctrine of predestination. By looking at one example of Cotton's view of the extent of providence we can get a foretaste of how he will handle predestination. "So that God is the more provoked against the sonnes of men, when they rise up against him though

they do no more then he before had determined to be done; . . ."73 Cotton's idea of providence includes seeing God as responsible even for the action of evil men.⁷⁴ This braces us for a rather strong view of predestination on Cotton's part. First, however, he says, "Know, that God and Christ is a mysterie, and so those great works of Election, Vocation, and Redemption are mysteries."⁷⁵ Cotton is warning us of the limitations of the human mind when trying to understand the ways of the infinite God.

In summary statement, he gives us an understanding of predestination: "we may be sure we could never have thus prized him, but that he first prized us."⁷⁶ Those who have been "prized" are incorporated into a covenant which it was "God's eternall purpose [that] it was first framed, Ephes. 1. 4,5. it was everlastingly purposed with God."⁷⁷ Not only is it a fact that people who are in the covenant are an example of God's "eternall purpose," but it is also a fact that not everyone who has the advantages of a Christian upbringing is included in that covenant.

From a secret purpose and counsel God hath to have some unbelievers in every family; . . . there shall be some upon whom it shall be his pleasure to show his displeasure; Christ made as good choyce as choyce could be made, and yet he would have us see, what wee may not unjustly expect in the like case, Joh. 6.70 Have not I chosen you twelve, and behold one of you is a Devill?⁷⁸

We are now surely dealing with the matter of election to salvation. This election is from God's "secret purpose and counsel." And on what does God base that counsel?

No one yet has been granted that answer in detail. However, as we have seen, generally speaking election can be said to be based on 1) good works done by the one about to be elected, or 2) foreseen faith, or 3) grace, or 4) a combination of one or more of the above. Cotton identifies Calvin's position as the third and heartily commends it as accurate.⁷⁹ This certainly would not be the attitude one would expect if Cotton were holding to any Arminian beliefs. If he were Arminian he would have chosen the second formula.

Perhaps it was Cotton's response to Robert Baylie (who accused Cotton of Arminianism)⁸⁰ which has been the basis of the belief that Cotton drifted into the Arminian error. In it Cotton says that "Dr. Twisse doth indeed truly express that which (through grace) was my true intent, to clear the orthodox doctrine of predestination from such harsh consequences, as are wonted to be derived from absolute reprobation."⁸¹ Hence, it is not the concept of predestination to salvation which bothers Cotton. Rather, the idea of an arbitrary assigning of persons to hell was unbearable to Cotton. His answer was that people "earned" hell by their wickedness. They were not arbitrarily sent there regardless of what good they might have done; the fact was that they hadn't done anything really good.

In The New Covenant, Cotton reveals his difficulty with the Arminian position. An extended quote from this work makes Cotton's position clear:

I might also here (in the 2d place) from hence gather an Argument against the whole body of

Arminianism; for they look at no gift of God, but merely upon the faith or works of the Creature foreseen: If God speake of Election or **any other** gift of his grace, they tell you it is of Faith foreseen: But we see how contrary it is unto this truth of God, for he giveth himselfe first in order of nature, before he giveth anything also accompanying Salvation. He gave us Christ in his Eternall Counsel before Election, and so doth he also in our Effectuall Calling not any Grace before Christ, or power to choose whether we will have him or not have him; but he is God, and first giveth himself, and with him faith, and so worketh our wills unto himselfe; not otherwise, leaving it unto us to choose whether we will have him to be our God or no. Many things in Popery and Arminianisme come to be confuted from hence, and both are rooted out; for in truth they hold forth no more but a Covenant of works: . . . ⁸²

The result of Cotton's position on predestination is his belief in effectual perseverance.⁸³ Essentially, this is the belief that if one is truly called by God to be one of the elect, then he will always be one of the elect. He cannot cease to be of the elect. "Such as are true Members of the Church, do keep continuall fellowship with the Church, and do never depart from the Church."⁸⁴

In Cotton's system then, God's predestination is based on nothing except His own will which is uninfluenced by his foreknowledge of things to come. In this sense it is absolute. Further, it refers primarily to salvation and not to damnation which is the result of man's own unrepentant wickedness, which occurs after predestination takes place. This predestinating decree which brings salvation to a person comes solely from God, apart from man's will. Since God is immutable, man's salvation is

sure, permanent and unassailable. Those whom God truly **calls** remain in His kingdom forever.

Thus far we have dealt with Cotton's views of the nature of man's reason, the nature and uses of the moral law, Adam's sin and its effect on his posterity, the reality of free will and the causes and ends of the predestination of believers. Though each of these, in some way or another, provides a promontory of sorts from which one can see the differences between a Calvinist and an Arminian, the way in which each of the sides views faith in Christ is perhaps the thing which provides as much contrast between the two systems as can be had. This contrast is seen most clearly when one asks the question "Where does faith in Christ come from?" Is it a construct of one's own mental powers? Or, is faith in Christ something beyond man's ability to manufacture? Is its reality naturally latent in man, so as to need only vivication to be active? Or, is it something alien to man, something external to him which has to be infused from another source if man is to have it at all?

Actually, Arminius, as we have seen, would not say that the ability to believe is naturally latent, but that it is given to all men so that they may believe or exercise faith if they will. This is the very position Perry Miller insists on calling Calvinist Covenant theology.⁸⁵ It is a position which neither Calvin nor Cotton would hold to.

First, we need to ask what Cotton believes faith is. Faith "is a work of God's Almighty Quickening Power, wrought by the Ministry of the Word and Spirit of God, whereby the Heart is weaned from all confidence in the Flesh, and believeth in God and the Lord Jesus Christ to Righteousness."⁸⁶ A more simplified answer is found in his Milk for Babes. "Faith is a grace of the (z) spirit; whereby I deny my selfe: and believe on Christ for righteousness and salvation."⁸⁷

Three doctrines are immediately discerned from these definitions. First, faith has its ultimate source in God and is mediated to us through the person of the Spirit. Second, a self-centeredness and confidence in one's own abilities to do right is given up. Third, confidence is placed in Christ, and hence in God, to do whatever is necessary to produce righteousness in a person and ultimately bring that person to eternal life in the very presence of the Godhead. The first doctrine deals with the origin of faith, while the other two deal with its results. We turn now to Cotton's other works to see if he maintains and explains what he seems to believe in these two definitions of faith.

Overwhelmingly, Cotton sees faith to be a gift of God, totally unmerited. Our part in receiving faith is simply nothing. "Now in this we all consent; that in receiving the gift of Faith we are merely passive."⁸⁸ By

receiving faith "we yeeld unto the first work of God."⁸⁹

Our passivity in receiving faith is used by Cotton as an assumed basis for his argument that we also receive Christ just as passively.⁹⁰

Cotton sees all three persons of the Godhead as the source of this gift of faith. God the Father gives faith. He says that "the Lord in giving you his Son, gives you Faith to believe in his Son, Eph. 3.17. and both at the same instant, that if you have not Christ you have not Faith, and if you have not Faith, you have not Christ."⁹¹ Of Abraham, Cotton concludes that "yet God himself doth undertake in this Covenant [of grace] to be the Author and Finisher both of his [Abraham's] Faith and Obedience."⁹²

Christ Himself is also said to give us faith.

"Faith may be said to bee passive in our justification, because it doth not lay hold on Christ to fetch Justification from him till Christ have first laid hold on us, and imputed his righteousnesse to us."⁹³

Cotton tells us also that a person cannot become a believer until the Holy Spirit puts faith in an individual.⁹⁴ In his own words he explains that "For I conceived, faith itself, which is an evidence of things not seen, and the first saving qualification that doth evidence justification, is itself founded upon a former evidence, even the free grace of God in Christ, revealed in the promise of grace, and applied to the soul effectually by the Spirit of grace,

both in our effectual calling (even to the begetting of faith) and in our justification."⁹⁵

In The New Covenant, Cotton securely links the activity of the Spirit with effectual calling; "and this is indeed our Effectual Calling; the Spirit of God taking possession in our hearts, and working this faith in us, whereby we submit unto the Lord."⁹⁶ In the same work, he speaks of the Spirit "infusing" faith so that we might believe on Christ.⁹⁷

It is extremely important to note Cotton's logical defense of why it must of necessity be that the Godhead give the quality (or commodity?) of faith before one believes in Christ as Savior and Lord. "If we bee active in laying hold on Christ, before he hath given us his Spirit: then we apprehend him, before he apprehend us: then wee should doe a good act, and so bring forth good fruites, before wee become good trees; yea, and be good trees before we be in Christ."⁹⁸ Cotton's dilemma here comes, of course, from his belief in the natural inability of mankind to do anything good unless a person is a believer in Christ. As long as he holds to that, Cotton must hold to the sort of argument presented above. In the same work, Cotton draws the argument out to a more startling conclusion. "If there be any gracious conditions, or qualifications wrought in us before union with Christ [which our exercising faith by ourselves would be], then we may be in a state

of grace and salvation, before we be in Christ."⁹⁹ But such a consequence would be totally unthinkable to any true believer. Cotton's conclusion is that "there bee no gracious conditions, or qualifications wrought in us, before we received union with Jesus Christ."¹⁰⁰

Hence it is, that one result of faith is our entrance into grace.¹⁰¹ That is, God graciously allows us to enter into a relationship with Himself, His Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹⁰² When God allows this, on the basis of faith, the immediate result of it is that "we are justified in the sight of God from all our sins."¹⁰³ That is, God sees us as justified because Christ identified Himself with believers and paid the price of their justification. Those in union with Him receive the benefits of his having the punishment for all believers' sins.

Faith has yet another result. The exercising of it "doth not onely procure us pardon of sin, but it tells us and assures us of it."¹⁰⁴ That is, "Faith brings on a soule to assurance of justification."¹⁰⁵ Other results of faith include an enlivening our "strongest abilities" which otherwise have "no life in them."¹⁰⁶ Also there is an obedience to God's commandments which Cotton describes as "blindfold obedience." This obedience, he feels, applies to all of God commands.¹⁰⁷ Faith also results in a believer's children being included in the "covenant" until such time as the children are able to enter into the covenant under their own consent.¹⁰⁸

A final result of faith is sanctification. The process whereby, as the believer continues his Christian "walk," his character becomes more like that of Christ's. "Faith makes us depend and wait upon Christ, for assistance and strength to do every Christian duty."¹⁰⁹

In commenting on I Jn. 1.7, Cotton asserts that "if any good fruit [ie. good works] be growing in a Christian it is from the Spirit of God, otherwise the fruit of a carnal heart is carnal."¹¹⁰ And as seen above, the Spirit comes only by faith. It is, for Cotton, not enough to simply seek "justification by faith," we are to seek "sanctification by faith."¹¹¹ Just as one cannot be justified before God apart from faith, one must exercise faith into order to do works which are truly pleasing to God.

In concluding this section on Cotton's beliefs on faith, two final things must be mentioned which do not neatly fit into any scheme of presentation. First is Cotton's understanding that it is not enough to simply "have" faith. We must be like Abraham who "stands not justified by the first act of his faith, his calling, but by his acting this faith."¹¹² We must continually act on the basis of faith, urges Cotton. Each action we take must be characterized by the fact that we would not do it if we did not believe that it was God's wish for us to do so and that we need to trust Him to help us to do it in a fashion pleasing to Him.¹¹³

Finally, faith must be continually used in the above manner if it is to remain alive. Cotton's words are striking for their incisiveness and practicality. "Faith is not kept alive unless it be exercised, for though it ever live, it will be smothered, unless exercised; faith in Christ will be decaying, unless it be daily set a worke to believe in Jesus Christ for daily pardon of your daily transgressions."¹¹⁴

Hence, we see that faith for John Cotton is a gift of God; something that is not given to all men in incipient form, but which always brings sanctification and glorification as well as repentance and justification. In this area also there is no taint of Arminianism.

"God becomes a God to me, and to my seed by way of covenant. If you have him [God] not by covenant, you have him not at all."¹¹⁵ Thus John Cotton introduces us to his thoughts on the relation between God and covenant. Without a covenant between man and God there is no relation between them at all. Yet, one does not have a covenant and then use it as a tool to "have" God. One takes both God and Covenant at one and the same time by faith.

Q. How do they [believers] give up themselves and their seed to the Lord?

A. By receiving through (h) faith, the Lord and his Covenant, to themselves, and to their seed, and accordingly walking themselves, and trayning up their children in the wayes of his Covenant.¹¹⁶

But the covenant has more influence than simply as a requisite for fellowship with God. It only follows that

since it is a requirement for a relationship with God, it would also be a requirement for fellowship with His church.¹¹⁷ Beyond this, when one enters into covenant with God, he enters not by himself, but he brings his entire family with him.

And when we undertake to be obedient to him [God]; not that we promise it in our owne names, and for our owne parts, but in behalfe of every soule that belongs to us, as wee desire a blessing upon all that belongs to us, so we offer up ourselves to God, and our wives, and children . . . and all that are under our reach, . . . , that we and our households will serve the Lord. . . thus you see how God comes to be ours by way of Covenant.¹¹⁸

But what is this covenant that Cotton urges upon those who would have a relation with God? Is it an unconditional covenant as we have previously seen as being possible, or is it the conditional covenant which seemed to be popular with other theologians of both his time and our own? In answer to this question, we shall try to describe the various aspects of the personal covenant between God and man as Cotton saw it and by means of that description, come to a clearer understanding of what this covenant really is.

To begin, let us take Cotton's own analogies as a starting point. First, the covenant between God and man is analogous to that "Between Prince and People."¹¹⁹ This simply means that God is of Princely station and the people are in submission to Him. Secondly, the covenant is characterized by the bond of friendship; God and a man being friends of one another as were David and Jonathan (I Sam. 20.16).¹²⁰

One way of clarifying a concept is by contrasting it against another. To Cotton, the true covenant between God and a man, which issues directly in eternal life is styled a covenant of grace. In contrast to the covenant of grace, he identifies a covenant of works. It will be good for us to see how he distinguishes the two, and in so doing, clarifies what the true covenant is like.

In one respect, the covenant of works is a legitimate covenant, for it is antecedent to the covenant of grace, both historically and existentially. Cotton speaks of the Mosaic covenant as "the old covenant that God made with his people, and is called a covenant of works."¹²¹ Elsewhere, he says that "God doth not call any into fellowship with himselfe in a Covenant of Grace, but ordinarily he first bringeth them into a Covenant of works."¹²² He thus acknowledges the legitimate existence of the covenant of works and identifies it as coming before the covenant of grace both in history and in each person's individual experience.

Nevertheless, the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works only for those who failed to see Messiah and salvation by grace through faith foreshadowed in it. To the "faithful seed of Abraham it was a covenant of grace, (wherein they saw Christ and these benefits graciously dispensed to them, Psal. 11, 7.)."¹²³ For all the rest, "the carnal seed," "it seemed to me to be a covenant of

works, to prepare them for the saving benefits of that covenant of grace which was formerly given to Abraham and his seed, (but neglected by them in Egypt) and afterwards renewed in the plains of Moab, . . . And so Paul maketh that covenant on Mount Sinai, to be expressly a different covenant from that of grace."¹²⁴

Here we see not only the distinction between the two covenants sharply pointed out (with faith designated as the distinguishing characteristic) but we also see the purpose of the covenant of works. It has the same purpose as the moral law with which we concerned ourselves earlier. It is to prepare men for the succeeding covenant of grace. If the purpose is identical, it is only because one of the principal parts of the covenant of works is the moral law.

Besides being antecedent to the covenant of grace and being preparatory for it, the covenant of works has, as its condition of fulfillment, obedience.¹²⁵ That is to say that obedience to the laws set forth in the covenant of works is absolutely necessary in order to gain the rewards. If there is no obedience, there is no reward. A correlate of the attribute just mentioned, is that, for Cotton, justice is the outstanding characteristic, not mercy; "in the Covenant of Works, the reward is given of justice according to works."¹²⁶ If a person is under the covenant of works he is bound to keep every stipulation.¹²⁷ If he does not, then justice requires his punishment, not his

forgiveness. "If any man breaks this Covenant, he brings a **curse** upon his own head thereby, no person is **excepted**."¹²⁸

As was just intimated, in Cotton's understanding of the Covenant of works, once one has broken the covenant, he is justly punished and there is "no remission of sin." "Now, where there is cursedness for sin [as indicated above], there is no pardon for sin."¹²⁹

There is one last attribute of the covenant of works which, as we consider it, will lead us into the attributes of the covenant of grace and hence the contrast between the two. A person becomes as a dead man to the covenant of works when he enters into the covenant of grace.¹³⁰ That is, it simply no longer affects him. He is outside of its jurisdiction. That realm no longer has any control over him. Since the covenant of works is roughly coterminous with the "Law," it is the judicial condemnation of the law to which we are dead.¹³¹ So long as one remains under the judicial authority of the law and the covenant of works, salvation is denied him. By becoming dead to the covenant of works, one obtains salvation.

With regard to the covenant of grace, we are now in a better position to see what it is. If the covenant of works is preparatory to that of grace, then the covenant of grace is meant to be the desired end result. Since there are only two covenants, according to Cotton,¹³² we are led to see that the covenant of grace is the purposed end.

While the covenant of works requires "perfect obedience in every man's person," the covenant of grace accepts the perfect obedience from our "surety," Christ. The covenant of grace assumes that we are unable to "perform perfect satisfaction," and so must rely on Christ to do the required perfect obedience.¹³³ Because of this substitution, whereby we are assumed to be unable to perform obediently and Christ's obedience is counted as our own, the covenant is said to be characterized by mercy and grace. That is, God is gracious to us by allowing Christ to fulfill any necessary requirements. As a result, there is pardon or forgiveness of sin, quite unlike the lack of forgiveness which characterizes a covenant of works.¹³⁴

If there is the condition of obedience to God on our part in the covenant of works before there can be any positive relationship between a man and God, in the covenant of grace (we are here slightly anticipating our argument) the only conditions of acceptance with God are conditions of weariness, sin, and inability to relate rightly to God.¹³⁵

Essentially then, in a covenant of works, a positive relationship to God is based upon a man's ability to perfectly keep all the laws God has set down. The covenant of grace, to Cotton, offered a positive relationship with God as a gift to mankind on the basis of Christ's perfect obedience.

The principle division, as discussed earlier, **between** Arminius and Calvin concerning the **covenant of** grace centered in the area of whether or not there were conditions which had to be met in order to partake of the covenant. The Arminians (following their leader) believed that there was at least one condition for entering the covenant. One had to first believe. That was how he entered the class of people known as believers, which class (of an undetermined number) was elected to salvation. The Calvinists, on the other hand indicated that there were no conditions and that the covenant was to be viewed as a sovereign disposition of God's will, unaffected by what any man did. Belief was given by God; He was not first the recipient of it. What did John Cotton believe?

Are there conditions and qualifications to be met before God elects a person? "If the Lord doe give any saving Qualification before Christ," says Cotton, "then the soule may be in a state of Salvation before Christ, and that would be prejudicial unto the grace and truth of Christ."¹³⁶ The whole concept is illogical to Cotton. But Cotton does admit of conditions, yet not pleasing to the Arminians.

The Lord therefore by his Spirit must work all our works for us. Here is the freeness of God's Covenant, in that the Lord giveth himself first, Jer. 32.40. You may speak of Conditions in this kind, but the Lord doth undertake for his own part and for our parts also; for as the Covenant is free so the Lord will freely maintaine and preserve all his Elect.¹³⁷

If there are conditions, God fulfills them for us. God **works** in us and causes us to work any conditions necessary.¹³⁸ If faith is a condition, then God causes us to have faith and does not expect us to produce it of ourselves. If there is a promise with a condition, Cotton points out that it is not even necessary that a person live up to the condition of the promise in order to receive the blessing of it.¹³⁹ (The point of this is not to support Antinomianism, but rather to show the dependence on God's grace and not man's works for a covenantal relationship to God.) What Cotton is expressing is that to enter the blessing of the relationship to God, one need not fulfill the condition upon which the promise is based prior to entering the new relationship to God. If the condition is really there, it is a "condition subsequent to Faith."¹⁴⁰ That is, the condition will be fulfilled after the new relationship is established, not before. But even then, as we have seen, it is God who then Himself fulfills any such requirements through us. To Cotton, justification is not based on whether or not we fulfill this or that condition. It is based on God's free gift of grace.¹⁴¹

John Cotton not only believed in what we would call an unconditional covenant, but he also saw it to be very much like a sovereign disposition. It is God who makes the covenant. "As God thus prepareth us for himselfe, so he doth give himself unto us, and taketh possession of us by

his blessed Spirit."¹⁴² Cotton saw two acts on God's part which established His covenant with Abraham and his seed.

1. Of Preparation, not on Abrahams part, or on his seeds part, but on his [God's] own part, the Lord prepared them.

2. The Lord did invest him with the blessings of this Covenant.¹⁴³

In both actions, both Abraham and his seed were passive in Cotton's judgment. In A Treatise of the Covenant, Cotton puts it simply that God gives Himself to us and then "taketh possession of us by his blessed Spirit."¹⁴⁴

It may be objected that it takes two parties to ratify a covenant. Indeed, in one sense it does. If there is any necessary ratification of the covenant on man's part, he is able to do it only because God causes him to do so. As Cotton states it, "If we give up ourselves unto the Lord, it is because the Lord hath taken hold upon our hearts first."¹⁴⁵ Elsewhere, he says that "The Lord hath drawn thee to make this everlasting covenant, thou did'st not take up upon thy own accord."¹⁴⁶ Hence, it is God's sovereign will which has the last say and provides us with the characterization of the covenant as a disposition. The establishment of the covenant then, is entirely in God's hands.

Because of the fact that the establishment of the covenant of grace is in God's hands it is certain, sure and unshakable for all those who are truly "in covenant." The new covenant of grace is not like the old one of works.

It will not be superceded.¹⁴⁷ "This covenant doth not stand on keeping commandments, but this is all our delight, that the Lord will not break covenant with us, not alter the thing that is gone out of his lips."¹⁴⁸ Again, Cotton says that it is a sure covenant because God will not alter that which he has spoken.¹⁴⁹ This is because it is His nature not to change.¹⁵⁰

Cotton speaks of the fact that "wee cannot lay sure hold on this Covenant of God; yet notwithstanding it lays hold on us, it comprehends us, when wee cannot comprehend it, and supports us through all."¹⁵¹ If this new covenant could be broken it would "bring confusion" on those in it and it would then be no different from the old covenant of works.¹⁵² "It being a Covenant of Grace, is not abrogated by our failing, though wee remain unsettled, yet God continues constant."¹⁵³

Nevertheless, Cotton speaks of the possibility of breaking covenant on man's part. Yet, when he speaks of man being able to break the covenant, one must understand him correctly. "This Covenant of Grace God will not break, and though on our parts it may be broken, yet because Christ hath it in keeping, it shall never be so broken, as to the destruction of the transgressor, Jer. 32.40."¹⁵⁴ In fact, says Cotton, "Many a Child of God walks in much dishonour and basenesse, and yet have fellowship with God, I Cor. 4.13."¹⁵⁵ Even though an "ancient Christian" might take great liberties in sinning, "justification is there, but the life of it is much decayed."¹⁵⁶ The "Covenant of Grace is not abrogated by our failing."¹⁵⁷

One enigmatic statement of Cotton's does help to clarify what seems, on first glance, to be a **frightfully** close flirting with Antinomianism. In a sermon preached at Salem, Massachusetts in 1636, Cotton spoke the following words:

so long therefore as this church keepeth her to Christ, and holdeth Christ for her head and husband, the Lord doth keep covenant; and He hath promised to the elect seed, that they shall keep covenant, for He hath said, they shall not depart from Christ, and then they can never depart from the covenant, and though they break covenant, yet if they keep close unto Christ, they have the covenant, although they break it.¹⁵⁸

What Cotton seems to be describing is a situation quite like that to which St. John was speaking, "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (I John, 2.1, R.S.V.). Both address themselves to true believers who stumble and fall into sin. For these, the covenant remains the same, with unbroken fellowship with God on the basis of the continuing efficacy of Christ's propitiatory sacrifice. Though they "break" the rules of the covenant in one sense by sinning, the covenant remains in force.¹⁵⁹

Yet, there remains another breaking of covenant which has more dire consequences. He says that "when they do sin against knowledge, and after they have been taught and convinced, do yet rebel, then is this everlasting covenant broken, else it is not broken till they come to

this desparate extremity."¹⁶⁰ These are people who hold to the covenant externally but who are not true believers. Unbelieving hangers-on are allowed into the blessings of the covenant of grace according to Cotton. However, these are simply the superficial blessings which come of associating with a fellowship of believers. These are not the blessings of salvation, which are reserved only for the faithful elect.¹⁶¹

Hence, there are two ways in which the covenant can be said to be broken, according to Cotton. Yet, it is apparent that neither way involves the complete and final breaking of the eternal covenant by a true believer.

The covenant of grace is to John Cotton the perfect covenant; it is final, complete, characterized by mercy and forgiveness of sin. The covenant is initiated and established by God alone, and as such is truly a covenant of the disposition type rather than of the contractual model. Once made it is never broken, neither by God, because He will not, nor by man, because he cannot. It is this author's judgment that John Cotton was certainly Calvinistic, and not Arminian in his view of the covenants of works and grace.

NOTES

¹Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. "Cotton, John," by James Truslow Adams, 4:460.

²Larzar Ziff, ed., John Cotton on the Churches of New England (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 6; D.A.B., s.v. "Cotton, John," by Adams, 4:460.

³Ziff, Cotton on Churches of New England, pp. 6, 7.

⁴Ibid., p. 6.

⁵Ibid., p. 8. Cf. Larzar Ziff, The Career of John Cotton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 31. One aspect of Sibbes' preaching appears to have left an indelible mark on Cotton's theology. According to Ziff, Sibbes "tended to disregard or skirt about the doctrine of reprobation. . . ." Ibid. The result of this seems to be that Cotton stressed reprobation hardly at all. See Chapter V, "Conclusions" in this work.

⁶D.A.B., s.v. "Cotton, John," by Adams, 4:461.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ziff, Cotton on Churches of New England, p. 7.

⁹D.A.B., s.v. "Cotton, John," by Adams, 4:461.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., 4:460.

¹³John Cotton, Christ the fountaine of life (London: By Robert Ibbitson for George Calvert, 1651; reprint ed., American Culture Series, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 580-14, 1975), p. 128.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵John Cotton, The Way of Life (London: By M.F. for L. Fawne and S. Gellibrand, 1641; reprint ed., American Culture Series, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 5-32, 1941), p. 274.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷John Cotton, Some Treasure Fetched out of Rubbish (London, 1660), p. 27.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 27-28.

¹⁹Cotton, Christ the fountaine, p. 162.

²⁰Cotton, Way of Life, p. 233.

²¹Cf. Cotton, Way of Life, p. 237.

²²Ibid., p. 235.

²³Cotton, Christ the fountaine, p. 96.

²⁴Ibid., p. 97.

²⁵Cotton, Way of Life, p. 230.

²⁶Ibid., p. 246.

²⁷John Cotton, A Treatise of the Covenant, 2d ed., (London: for William Miller, 1659), p. 79.

²⁸Ibid., p. 78.

²⁹Cotton, Way of Life, p. 232.

³⁰Ibid., p. 233.

³¹Cotton, Treatise of Covenant, p. 77.

³²Ibid., pp. 81-82.

³³John Cotton, A Practical Commentary on the 1st Epistle of John (London: By R. I. and E. C. for Thomas Parkhurst, 1656; reprint ed., American Culture Series, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 495-5, 1972), p. 60.

³⁴Ibid., p. 71.

³⁵Ibid., p. 62

³⁶Cotton, Way of Life, p. 236.

³⁷John Cotton, Milk for Babes (London: By J. Coe for Henry Overton, 1646; reprint ed., American Culture Series, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 612-4, 1976), pp. 1-2.

- ³⁸John Cotton, Gospel Conversion (London: By J. Dawson, 1646; reprint ed., Early American Imprints, Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1134, 1963), p. 38.
- ³⁹John Cotton, A Treatise on Faith (Boston: By B. Green, 1713; reprint ed., Early American Imprints, Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1604, 1963), p. 6.
- ⁴⁰Cotton, Commentary on 1 John, p. 34.
- ⁴¹Cotton, A Treatise on Faith, pp. 6-7.
- ⁴²Cotton, Milk for Babes, p. 1.
- ⁴³Cotton, Christ the fountaine, p. 169.
- ⁴⁴Cotton, Treatise of the Covenant, p. 13.
- ⁴⁵Cotton, Commentary on 1 John, p. 88.
- ⁴⁶John Cotton, The New Covenant (London, 1654), p. 55.
- ⁴⁷John Cotton, The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared (London: By Matthew Simmons for John Bellamie, 1648; reprinted in Larzar Ziff, ed., John Cotton on the Churches of New England, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 216.
- ⁴⁸Cotton, Christ the fountaine, p. 163.
- ⁴⁹Ibid., p. 169.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 93-94.
- ⁵¹Ibid., p. 94.
- ⁵²Ibid., p. 175.
- ⁵³John Cotton, God's Mercie Mixed with His Justice (London: By G. M. for Edward Brewster and Henry Hood, 1641; reprint ed., Gainesville, Fla.; Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, 1958), p. 4.
- ⁵⁴Ibid., p. 6.
- ⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 3-4.
- ⁵⁶Cotton, Way of Life, p. 203.
- ⁵⁷Pp. 20-21.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 39.

⁵⁹Cf., pp. 1-3, 7, 10, 18.

⁶⁰Cotton, Gospel Conversion, p. 5.

⁶¹Cotton, Way of Life, p. 182.

⁶²Cotton, Treatise of the Covenant, pp. 16-19.

⁶³Cotton, Christ the fountaine, p. 181.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 173.

⁶⁵Cotton, Way of Life, p. 126.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 133.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 131-32.

⁶⁸Cotton, Christ the fountaine, p. 193.

⁶⁹Cotton, God's Mercie, p. 13.

⁷⁰Cotton, Way of Life, p. 353.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 134.

⁷²Cotton, Commentary on 1 John, p. 248.

⁷³Cotton, Way of Life, p. 188.

⁷⁴It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the problem of theodicy in general or Cotton's approach to it in specific. There is no indication from this author's research that Cotton believed that God was the author or cause of evil. Such thinking would be labeled blasphemous in Cotton's day by any orthodox believer. G. C. Berkouwer deals with the problem in The Providence of God, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 232-75. Also cf. C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 37-54, 118-128; and J. W. Wenham, The Goodness of God (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), passim.

⁷⁵Cotton, Way of Life, p. 343.

⁷⁶Cotton, Christ the fountaine, p. 8.

⁷⁷John Cotton, The Covenant of God's Free Grace (London: for Matthew Simmons, 1645; reprint ed., American Culture Series, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 195-4, 1972), p. 15.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 6.

⁷⁹Cotton, Gospel Conversion, p. 30.

⁸⁰Cotton, The Way Cleared in Ziff, Cotton on Churches, p. 214.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 215.

⁸²Cotton, New Covenant, pp. 48-49.

⁸³Cotton, Way of Life, pp. 218-19.

⁸⁴Cotton, Commentary on 1 John, p. 152.

⁸⁵Miller, The New England Mind, pp. 377, 383, 387, 392.

⁸⁶Cotton, Treatise on Faith, p. 2.

⁸⁷p. 11 (9).

⁸⁸Cotton, Gospel Conversion, p. 38.

⁸⁹Cotton, New Covenant, p. 28.

⁹⁰Cotton, Gospel Conversion, p. 39.

⁹¹Cotton, Treatise on Faith, p. 7.

⁹²Ibid., p. 12. Cf. Cotton, Treatise of Covenant, p. 41, where Cotton explains that "[the Lord] doth give himself to work Faith, before Faith can be there; . . . but to be able actually to apply Christ, before we be in Christ, our first birth will not bear it; for a man is as passive in his Regeneration, as in his first Generation; . . ." In God's Mercie, p. 12, Cotton refers to God's work in the following fashion; "Hee doth many times breake open the doore of the heart, though wee bee unready and unlisty to open, . . ." On the aspect of God the Father giving faith cf. also Cotton, Way Cleared in Ziff, Cotton on Churches, p. 230; John Cotton A Sermon Delivered at Salem, 1636 (Boston: by B. Green, 1713; reprint ed. in Larzar Ziff, ed., John Cotton on the Churches of New England Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 63; Cotton, Christ the fountaine, p. 72, for other ways of expressing the same idea.

⁹³Cotton, Gospel Conversion, p. 45. Cotton sees support for this position in Calvin's Institutes, 3.3.5.

⁹⁴Cotton, Gospel Conversion, p. 26.

⁹⁵Cotton, Way Cleared in Ziff Cotton on Churches, p. 232. In support of this position, Cotton cites Calvin's comments on 2 Peter 1.10, and on John 3.14,19.

⁹⁶Cotton, New Covenant, p. 28.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 26. A quite similar expression is used by Cotton in Treatise of the Covenant, p. 20.

⁹⁸Cotton, Gospel Conversion, p. 39.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 3-4.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰¹John Cotton, The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (London: By M. Simmons for Henry Overton, 1644; reprinted in Larzar Ziff, ed., John Cotton on the Churches of New England Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 95.

¹⁰²Cotton, Way of Life, p. 424.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 312; cf. Treatise of Faith, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 319.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 325.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 358.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 396. This all-inclusiveness does make one wonder about those who don't quite actually obey all the commandments.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 388.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 355; cf. also p. 347.

¹¹⁰Cotton, Commentary on 1 John, p. 30.

¹¹¹Cotton, Christ the fountaine, p. 29.

¹¹²Cotton, Way of Life, p. 337.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 335.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 342.

¹¹⁵Cotton, Christ the fountaine, pp. 31, 37.

116 Cotton, Milk for Babes, p. 11.

117 Cotton, Treatise of Faith, p. 23.

118 Cotton, Christ the fountaine, pp. 33-34.

119 Ibid., p. 34.

120 Ibid.

121 Cotton, Salem Sermon, 1636 in Ziff, Cotton on Churches, p. 48.

122 Cotton, New Covenant, pp. 49-50.

123 Cotton, Way Cleared, in Ziff, Cotton on Churches, p. 233.

124 Ibid.

125 Cotton, Treatise of the Covenant, p. 30.

126 Cotton, Covenant of God's Free Grace, p. 12.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid., p. 13.

130 Cotton, Way of Life, p. 228.

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 Cotton, Covenant of God's Free Grace, p. 12.

Cf. also Cotton, Salem Sermon, 1636 in Ziff, Cotton on Churches, p. 52.

134 Cotton, Covenant of God's Free Grace, p. 15.

135 Cotton, Way of Life, p. 323.

136 Cotton, New Covenant, p. 53.

137 Ibid., p. 18. In his fondness for logical argument, Cotton presents the following to show that God fulfills all necessary conditions for man's salvation, and that men cannot logically be said to fulfill any conditions himself. "I pray you consider it: If it be a Condition, it is to some good Qualification or other,

some good work or other of the Spirit of God in the heart of a Christian. Was this work wrought before Conversion, or after? Every Christian knoweth, that all works before conversion are but dross and dung; to apply promises to such works, were indeed to build upon a sandy foundation. What say you then to works after conversion? All works after conversion are fruits of Faith; and if they proceed from Faith; then faith went before, then a man's faith was not built on a conditional promise; how is it possible that it should? when as all works after conversion, are either fruits of Faith, or else they are no true sanctification; then Faith went before in order of Nature, and so was not built upon works, but works upon it." Treatise of the Covenant, pp. 22-23.

¹³⁸ Cotton, Treatise of the Covenant, p. 14.

¹³⁹ Cotton, New Covenant, p. 132.

¹⁴⁰ Cotton, Treatise of the Covenant, p. 22.

¹⁴¹ Cotton, Way Cleared, in Ziff, Cotton on Churches, p. 229.

¹⁴² Cotton, New Covenant, p. 24.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

¹⁴⁶ Cotton, Salem Sermon, 1636 in Ziff, Cotton on Churches, p. 60.

¹⁴⁷ Cotton, Covenant of God's Free Grace, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Cotton, Salem Sermon, 1636 in Ziff, Cotton on Churches, p. 66.

¹⁴⁹ Cotton, Covenant of God's Free Grace, pp. 15-16.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

155 Cotton, Commentary on 1 John, p. 28.

156 Cotton, Way of Life, p. 315.

157 Cotton, Covenant of God's Free Grace, p. 16.

158 Cotton, Salem Sermon, 1636 in Ziff, Cotton on Churches, pp. 53-54.

159 Cf. Cotton, Christ the fountaine, p. 38.

160 Cotton, Salem Sermon, 1636 in Ziff, Cotton on Churches, p. 55.

161 Cotton, Treatise of the Covenant, p. 225.

CHAPTER IV

INCREASE MATHER

Increase Mather, the youngest son of Richard Mather, was born in Dorchester, Massachusetts on June 21, 1639. In 1651 he matriculated at Harvard and studied under Michael Wigglesworth and the Reverend John Norton. He received the A. B. degree in 1656, preached his first sermon on his eighteenth birthday and then went off to Dublin and Trinity College where he became M. A. in 1658.¹

From 1658 to September of 1661 Mather stayed in England, hoping to put down roots there in a pastorate. With the Restoration, he found himself out of grace with the ruling party, and with little hope of ministering in the Church of England. He therefore returned to Massachusetts. In 1662 he married his step-sister, Maria, who was the daughter of John Cotton (Richard Mather having married Cotton's widow).²

That same year he gained some notoriety by opposing his father's support of the "Half-way Covenant."³ Two years later (1664) he became teacher at Second Church in Boston. In 1674, at age 35, he became a fellow of Harvard. Seven years later he was elected President of that college,

but chose Second Church of Boston over the new position.⁴

From 1688 to 1692 he was very active in politics as a colonial agent for Massachusetts to the courts of James II and William and Mary, at first unofficially and later sanctioned.⁵ Returning in 1692 in the midst of the Salem witch trials, he did not support their excesses, and in fact wrote against those excesses in the fall of 1692.⁶

Mather was an intelligent man, as evidenced by his efforts to organize a scientific society in Boston, and in his support in 1721 of the greatly feared practice of inoculation.⁷ He strove to maintain orthodoxy at Harvard, and in the face of the probabilities against that, he began to show great interest in Yale, hoping to help secure its Congregationalist orthodoxy.⁸ He died in 1723, a greatly honored politician, lay scientist and theologian.⁹

The first aspect of Mather's theology which is pertinent to our study is the way in which he viewed the capabilities of man's reasoning powers. "And he [Christ] has a rational Soul, which is the other essential part of humane Nature. . . . The proper Facultyes of a reasonable soul are ascribed unto Christ. e.g. That of Understanding."¹⁰ With this we see Mather's basis for the doctrine of the reason in man to be Christological. Christ was fully man, and He had a rational soul capable of understanding. It follows that mankind, of which He is the archetype, should share this with Him.

What can rational souls think about? For one thing

(and this is the thing which most interests us) "that Cognitive faculty, that power of thinking that God has given to men makes them capable to think of Christ, of Eternity, and of another World, as well as of the vain things of this world." According to Mather, this is true to the degree that one cannot only think of them but can also think rightly about them. To be noted is that this is predicated of all men.¹¹

One wonders how Mather could have said the above since he also recorded the opinion that "An unconverted sinner never thought one good thought, nor spake one good word, nor did one good action before God in all his life." It seems to this author (if he is not reading something into Mather's thought) that the man Mather is speaking of would be somewhat akin to many religious liberals of the late nineteenth century. This sort of person could understand what Paul or Jesus or Peter was saying perfectly well. There was no misunderstanding. To hear them explain what Paul said, they would have sounded like strict fundamentalists. Nevertheless, they simply didn't believe Paul or Jesus or Peter. They understood the words, but not believing, could be said by the Religious conservative to have failed to understand their significance. And so Mather seems to agree by saying that "A natural man may do and speak, and think many things, which for the matter of them are good; but--done by such a person as is out of Christ

they are not good, but evil in the sight of God."¹²

Hence, Mather insists that the result of conversion is a "renewed mind." In fact "Whenever God converts a Soul," it is necessary to let in, "a new, and blessed light into the Understanding, that the sinner hath other apprehensions about God, and Christ, and Heaven, and Sin, and Hell, and spiritual objects, then once he had."¹³ Despite this new ability to discern spiritual things, Mather does not subscribe to the idea that reason can then encompass and understand all spiritual things. It has its limits.

1. We must set this down for a Principle, that we are to believe beyond Reason, albeit the great Truths of the Christian Religion are not contrary unto, yet they are above Reason. Therefore must we believe what we are not able to comprehend.¹⁴

Mather gives us an example of the limits of man's reason, the inability of man to comprehend the doctrine of the person of Christ.¹⁵ We are not to draw from this however, that Mather espouses dumb ignorance and blind leaps of faith, but only restraint in assessing our capabilities. To him "ignorance is the mother (not of devotion but) of Heresy."¹⁶ In this regard he urged upon the people a renewed interest in Harvard College and in a learned ministry.¹⁷

Mather's position on the capabilities of man's reason can be summarized as denying the natural ability of men to understand the true significance of the Christian faith, while allowing that they were able to understand things secular and the literal meaning of Scripture and the words of preachers. Yet, it was necessary for men's minds

to be renewed in order to "truly understand" Christianity.

As with those men we have previously studied, Mather sees no efficacy in the law to make a man right or acceptable before God. External observance of the moral law, however desirable it may be, is not the same as regeneration or conversion, and hence is insufficient to make a man righteous in God's sight.¹⁸ This, however, is not to say that obedience to the moral law is without point. On the contrary, the moral law is so important that all men ought to choose to follow it as opposed to sinning even if we have to suffer for doing so.

The reason for this is that to obey the moral law is to obey Christ Himself.¹⁹ In fact, Mather regards the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt. 5-7), considered to be the essence of Christ's moral expectations of man, to be Jesus' exposition of the moral law. In this passage, the law is vindicated "from those Corrupt Glosses which the Pharisees made in Addition to it."²⁰

The connection between the law and the gospel, however, entails an even more involved relationship. The applicability of the law to the gospel, and vice versa, is not new with the preaching of Jesus. It antedates Him by some 1200 years, according to Mather. To him, "Moses Preached not the Law only but the Gospel also, he Preached the Covenant of Grace among that People, Deut. 29.10."²¹ Hence, there is surely a connection of deepest significance

between the Old and New Testaments; such that one feels Mather was comfortable with Calvin's understanding of the problem in saying that the Old and New Testaments were but two dispensations of a single covenant.²²

However, the Law's affinity to the Gospel is seen on yet another plane.

The word of the Law, strictly taken, is partly Instrument and influential to the Souls Conversion. For thereby is Conviction of sin and misery, Rom. 3.20. By the Law is the knowledge of sin. If a men cometh to see and acknowledge himself to be a sinful and miserable Transgressor, this conviction is by means of the Law.²³

Accordingly, we see that the moral law brings us to a point where we acknowledge our need of Christ's redemption.

It is apparent from our discussion of Mather's view of the moral law that its use is singular. It is to show a man where he ought to be with regard to his conduct. However, the effects of this use are at least two-fold. To the unconverted, the effect is to convince one of his need for God's redemptive forgiveness and his need to seek such. To the regenerate man, it shows him the path of obedience to Christ, in which he will be helped to walk through God's grace. In this, Mather is perfectly consonant with the ideas expressed by Calvin.

In discussing our third area of inquiry, it must be understood that the importance of the relationship between Adam, his sin, and his posterity cannot be over-emphasized for Mather. The doctrine of original sin is one of a number

of beliefs which Mather felt were necessary to hold in **order** to obtain salvation.²⁴ Every one of us is guilty of original sin, and as Adam's offspring, the result of this is a natural tendency to "seek for life by works and doings of their own, without a Christ."²⁵

How exactly, is it that Adam's offspring came to this state? According to Mather, Adam lacked nothing which would have made him able to remain obedient to God. Whatever God asked of Adam, he was capable of doing. But, in sinning, Adam lost that ability or "power." From that point on he was "unable to do what once . . . [he] could have done."²⁶ Notice that he says Adam lost the power to obey of his own desire. It is no longer natural for him to be able to obey. Not only so, but he speaks of "they" having lost the power also. "They" turns out to be "us." Adam was simply "man in his first-state." Mather sees us all in Adam, and hence sees us all as lacking power now to obey.²⁷

Though Adam "was innocent at his first creation," having disobeyed, both he and his posterity are endowed with a "Corruption of Nature which makes us averse to everything that is holy, and inclines us to the worst of Evils." In saying this, he indicates that mankind has not simply lost something good, but gained or taken on something positively bad. This goes beyond a loss of original righteousness. Therefore, renovation of man's nature is simply insufficient. Rather, it is easier to

create a new Soul, than by Conversion, as it were, to make anew the broken ruined souls of men.²⁸

From this last conclusion of Mather's, it is altogether appropriate that Mather should see man's corruption as total; "corruption of nature is universal, as to all parts and faculties. The results of this are that any unregenerate man is no better than a dead man to God. He cannot do anything of a truly spiritual nature; even his good works are unpure and "reprobate."²⁹

The logical concomittant to this is Mather's conclusion that since man's corruption is not simply a lack of good but an addition of evil to the entire fabric of his nature and that he therefore has the sensibilities of a dead man toward the living God, there must be a genuinely "creative power" engaged in regenerating any man; and this "showeth both that the Soul is passive in this work; and also, that it is above the power of Men or Creatures to accomplish."³⁰ This position itself leads us now on to other aspects of God's relationship to man, beginning with Mather's concept of free will.

As we have seen previously, what a theologian thinks about the nature of man's reasoning powers, what mankind's relation to Adam is, and how well he feels man can live up to the demands of the moral law, all help to point to whether his thought more closely approximates Calvin or Arminius. Yet it should be apparent by now that an even clearer indicator of a man's tendencies is to be found in

whether or not he acknowledges that each man is equipped with free will. Bearing this in mind, let us examine Increase Mather's thinking about the relation between mankind and free will.

In Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, Mather identifies the reason why men do not have faith and why they have no salvation. It is because they simply will not do what is necessary. In this regard, he credits men with a "power to do" things which result in "obtaining" faith, and these things "they can do if they would, but they will not, and therefore do they perish."³¹ As far as the negative aspect is concerned, it seems as though it is our free will which keeps us out of fellowship with God.

Consistent with this is his opinion that men are responsible themselves for their Godless state. God is not to be blamed.³² Nevertheless, once the sinner has chosen his path, Mather acknowledges that there is something more which affects any future decisions. They simply cannot come to Christ, though in the same breath he also reiterates that "Their Cannot is a most willful Cannot."³³ Men "have made themselves unable to believe."³⁴

However, the responsibility of man is not just in regard to his entering that state of condemnation. Mather suggests that men can do something positive about leaving their state of sinfulness. "They have power to avoid those things which are an hindrance of Conversion."

"Sinners can do more towards their own Conversion than they do or will do." They are to "strive" and "make sure of their being effectually called." More to the point, in Returning to God, he speaks of God's waiting "to see if we will Return unto him."³⁵

The result we have thus far, is not the same sort as what we have found previously. Mather seems to want to make man shoulder the responsibility both for entering the state of rebellion against God and for remaining there. Moreover, he stresses the universality of the call to conversion. By so doing, he seems to reinforce the implicit understanding that a man has completely free choice in whether he remains as he is or is converted. Thus he proclaims that "The Gospel would not be thus Preached to Sinners, and the worst of Sinners, if there were not a possibility of their Conversion and Salvation."³⁶ He speaks as if it were merely a matter of preference whether a man accepts or rejects the offer of the gospel.³⁷ The offer would seem to be genuine in all cases.

There is not one that hears me this day but Christ has invited him to the great Supper. All and every one in particular as truly as if the Lord from Heaven called him by Name.³⁸

Nearly everything we have said so far about Mather would indicate thoroughly Arminian leanings in this area, if taken in and of themselves. However, one cannot be sure they should be so taken. Recall the earlier discussion of responsibility. Mather believed men to be responsible

for the state they are in. Yet he indicated something else. The state they were in was one in which they are now "unable to believe."³⁹ While supporting the connection between sin and the will, it is as if the will had made an irrevocable decision which stands, while the will continues to act according to that same initial decision.⁴⁰

As far as the universal offer of the Gospel is concerned, Mather points out that the plea is rather more a command. "Where-ever the Gospel comes, God commands every Man that hears it to repent. Act. 17.30."⁴¹ Hence, it can also be said that some who listen are not really chosen by God to receive grace; nevertheless, the gospel is presented to them as a witness against them. They did hear the truth.⁴² Thus we are led to think that there is more here than appears.

One aspect of Mather's thinking is not simply theoretical theology, but extreme practicality. He continually urges upon all men to work at being sure that they are open to God's grace at their end of the continuum of responsibility. He urges them to separate from evil fellows and to embrace those prone to good. Attention to the Bible is likewise encouraged. Meditation on "Spiritual and Eternal things" is beneficial as well.⁴³ Mather's own words about the efficacy of following these instructions seem as though they hedge the issue. "Most certainly, altho' we cannot say, That if men improve their Natural abilities as they ought to do, that Grace will infallibly

follow, yet there will not one Sinner in all the Reprobate World, stand forth at the day of Judgment and say, Lord, Thou knowest I did all that possibly I could do, for the obtaining Grace, and for all that, Thou didst withhold it from me."⁴⁴ It seems abundantly clear that Mather at once wants to affirm man's responsibility, God's sovereignty and God's justice. It is extremely difficult to do without sounding contradictory. Mather cannot quite bring it off. Nevertheless, Mather insists:

Must they sit stil then, & doe nothing, under pretence that God must do all? Nay, but they must stir up themselves, and call upon God.⁴⁵

Men are to do whatever seems to lead in the direction of conversion.⁴⁶

With the evidence thus presented concerning Mather's position on free will, it would appear that he is either a very weak Calvinist, or simply an Arminian. To reach such a judgment would be to overlook the evidence to the contrary, the sheer bulk of which is staggering. The easiest and clearest way to present a sample of his position is to examine what he has to say about our helplessness in our present state.

Men, says Mather, do not have the power or ability to convert themselves.⁴⁷ They are incapable of getting grace for themselves.⁴⁸ In the act of being "begotten of God" men are "wholly passive," they "are altogether passive in their Conversion, and the Eternal Spirit is the only

[italics mine] principal Agent therein."⁴⁹ To point up man's helplessness in all areas, Mather appeals to the doctrine of Providence. In so doing he points out that God "ruls the spirits of men, and turns them which way soever he pleaseth."⁵⁰ The point being that if in insignificant areas men are not the final arbiters neither are they such in cases of importance.

A second area where Mather's Calvinism is equally apparent is that of direct statements about God's converting actions. He gives repentance to sinners. If it is true that God requires men to pray for conversion, it is He who causes the man to pray. Only God can convert sinners; the implication is that sinners cannot convert themselves.⁵¹

It is God who changes men's hearts, not they themselves, and it is He who supplies all the grace necessary for conversion. Specifically, "not man, but God alone is the Author of Regeneration, Joh. 1.13." Mather actually mentions man's will as being outlaw to the conversion process.⁵² In summary, Mather has said that "To make things depend chiefly upon the decrees and wills of man, is to place Man in the Throne and to dethrone him that sitteth in Heaven."⁵³

What tentative conclusions can one draw from this information? It does not appear that Mather can yet be called an Arminian, or even a weak Calvinist. Thus far, it

seems he is a Calvinist who has become confused and imprecise in attempting to deal with God's sovereignty and man's will and responsibility. Let us now look further to see if this tentative analysis will bear further examination.

In his approach to the doctrine of Predestination, Mather stresses the idea that the way in which it works and some of its results even, are secretive by nature.⁵⁴ As he puts it, "Predestination is a Divine secret, known to no Man or Angel, to none but God alone."⁵⁵ Having said this, however, he does make some observations about the doctrine, with an eye to understanding it better. Certainly, the principal essence of the doctrine is not beyond understanding.

There is an holy Decree and Praedetermination in Heaven concerning all things which come to pass in the world. He worketh all things after the counsel of his will. Ephes. 1,11.⁵⁶

Not only does Mather affirm God's working everything He does according to His own will, he also believes that "The Lord in Heaven knows all that is done upon the Earth."⁵⁷ But this knowledge ceases not with those things presently happening but includes all things which are yet to happen. Mather brings God's omnipotence into juxtaposition with his prescience, and hence has identified the two primary components of the doctrine of predestination. The process is aimed not simply at actions but also the thoughts of men.⁵⁸

Having identified God's will, His omnipotence, and His prescience as major component parts of predestination, one is curious to know what effect Mather believes each part to have upon the others. It is apparent that Mather believed that the divine foreknowledge is not the direct cause of any predestinating decree. This is evidenced by the following.

And indeed the Foreknowledge of God proveth his decree, For if he knows what shall be, he must needs either will or will the Being of it. To say that God foreseeth that such and such things will be, but that they come to pass contrary to his decree or whether he will or no, is to make Omnipotency impotent. Hence, whatever things happen in the world, could not but be so, that is in respect of the divine decree, . . . as to the first cause things are infallibly accomplished, as he that is in Heaven has determined.⁵⁹

Here Mather is pressing for the understanding that there is a freedom of God's will and decree which is undisturbed by anything God foresees in the future. What God foresees is not determinative of God's will and decree. Rather, the opposite is true.

Mather expresses this again elsewhere when speaking of God's decision to save fallen men.

This Transaction was from Eternity. For God from Eternity knew that Man would fall, and though it be true, that neither the Divine Prescience, nor anything else is or can be a Cause nevertheless, we may from that Consideration argue and conclude, that He did from Eternity contrive a way for man's Recovery.⁶⁰

God knew Adam would disobey, but that knowledge did not cause Him to will either that Adam should fall or

(by implication) that God should find a way to save Adam **after** his fall. While it is true that there would have been no need for Christ to die had Adam remained obedient, and hence Adam's sin is the "procuring cause" of the Christ's sufferings, it is also true that Mather insists that the Father and Son agreed from all eternity to redeem the elect, not having waited until after Adam sinned to devise a plan.⁶¹ It appears that what he is saying contradicts itself. Nevertheless, before Adam fell, says Mather, God had already devised a plan to redeem him.

What are we to understand regarding Mather's position on this matter? First, he is a predestinarian. Second, God's will is not determined by his prescience. Third, God's predestinating decrees are eternal, i.e., they have always been. Fourth, all things which happen in the world happen in accordance with and because of God's predetermining decrees. Fifth, the "how" and "why," in exact terms, of God's predestination is essentially a mystery. In each of these areas Mather has the greatest affinity to Calvin.

However, there is one area which could mark him off from Calvin, or Arminius for that matter. That area is dealt with by asking whether God predestines individuals or classes. "Sometimes God has spoken of Particular persons long before they came into the world, mentioning what their names should be, and what things they should doe;

that so men might see that the Lord knows not only the general concerns which shall happen in the world, but also particular persons, and particular events of this or that kind."⁶² Hence, we see that Mather advocates predestination of particular people in the things they do as opposed to the predestination of classes. In this too, Mather is in the company of Calvin, rather than of Arminius.

Some minor observations by Mather on this topic remain. Though one cannot identify himself or another as being predestined to be reprobate, any man may know if he is elect.⁶³ One way to know if one is elect is to see if one's life is characterized by sin. If it is, then one could properly conclude that he was not yet a believer, though perhaps not a reprobate either.⁶⁴ Likewise, "the true Disciple of Christ is constant in his obedience."⁶⁵ The true believer can be identified as such by his obedience to Christ's commands.⁶⁶

One final thing to be noted about Mather's understanding of the election of believers. It is evident that he believed in the perseverance of all true saints; "they that are brought out of a state of sin will return to it no more."⁶⁷ In concluding this section we might apply Mather's words to the problems presented by this doctrine: "We must not be wise above what is written. It is good to enquire into these divine and holy Mysteries, so far as God hath revealed, but no further."⁶⁸

In passing from Mather's treatment of the doctrine

of predestination to his thoughts on faith, one notices a lack of the same awe which he showed toward the mysteries of predestination. He seems to have the question of faith well in hand. But is his understanding of the concept of faith consistent within itself? At first glance it seems self-contradictory. At one and the same time (within five consecutive pages of the same book) he tells us that faith is a "gift of God," that men ought to pray to receive it, that they should ask outright for it, and that they should "labour for faith."⁶⁹ What are we to make of this? Our first response is to call it confused thinking. St. Paul indicates that what is earned by labor is not a gift and that a gift cannot be earned, else it cease to be a gift and become wages.⁷⁰ It would seem that Mather has either departed from Paul's usage (which is at least logical) or he is using "gift" and "labor" in a qualified fashion.

Common to all the Puritans was an emphasis on the importance of the authority of the Scriptures and their proper interpretation. Hence it is that exhortations are found in the sermons of all the major Puritan figures which are aimed at getting people to give their attention to the Scriptures as written, and as expounded from the pulpit.⁷¹ Perhaps Mather gives us one reason why such exhortations were made. "Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the Word of God; Harken to the Word of God."⁷² Mather is calling men to "labor," if you will, at attending to

the Scriptures, because that "labor" will result in obtaining faith. This understanding, I suggest, is completely in line with the current understanding and pastoral exhortations of Mather's predecessors and contemporaries.

Whether this understanding is Calvinist or Arminian in flavor is a mute point. The whole argument turns on what is meant by the word "labor." If this were the sum total of Mather's thoughts, I would tend to think him Arminian. However, he seems to indicate elsewhere that we are helpless even to "labor" in its fullest sense in order to come to Christ.

Whereas we must come to Christ like poor Beggars that have nothing in the world to recommend us to him, but only Sin and Guilt and Misery, that so Christ may deliver us from it.⁷³

This seems to assume our inability to do anything fruitful towards conversion.

In The Divine Right of Infant-Baptism Asserted and Proved, Mather states his belief that infants have faith. Now, it seems safe to assume that no theologian ever believed infants capable of "laboring" for faith; at least Mather does not indicate such. Rather, he attempts to argue their possession of it on the basis of Christ's communicating his "holy image" to them without their direct consent or knowledge. Whether this is active faith or "seminal habitual faith" is left undecided.⁷⁴

One thing is to be noted however. Mather does not here refer to an ability to believe given to all infants

which they could exercise later. He is speaking of faith itself, and we must assume from his fashion of speaking of it, that it is a free gift of God. There is no way infants can "labor to enter into faith."

As far as whether Mather was Arminian in his assessment of faith or not, it is this author's tendency to think that Mather hedged on both sides of the argument. Though he ultimately comes out more Calvinistic, one wonders if it is more because of well-thought-out convictions or simply sloppy theology. There is a hint that Mather never tried to bring a cohesiveness to his view of faith. It is not as though he were trying to attempt an ultimate reconciliation between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. He leaves one perplexed.

Though Mather's views on other aspects of faith do not concern us here directly, it is interesting to note two other beliefs of his about faith. Consonant with his view of the moral law, it should be noted that Mather took the extent of obedience to God's and Christ's commands as indicative of the extent of that person's real faith and salvation. If one lacks obedience, one never had real faith.⁷⁵

The other belief was that "we are to believe beyond Reason." In this statement, Mather is not saying that faith and reason are contrary to one another, or even that they relate to different spheres of ideas altogether (as many

twentieth century thinkers would have us believe). Rather, he is calling for a realization on our parts of the limits of reason. He is arguing for antinomy, if you will. Where reason would lead us in one direction, and God's word would apparently lead us in another, we are to believe God's word and trust that His word and reason meet at a point farther down the road than we can see. In both this and the area of the relationship between good deeds and faith, Mather, Calvin and Arminius would agree in the generalities, if not in all the particular applications.⁷⁶

When Increase Mather speaks of a covenant, one soon becomes aware that a differentiation existed in Mather's thinking between that personal covenant that exists between God and a particular believer, that covenant which is between God and a particular church and between the members of that particular church, and that covenant between Christ and God with the purpose of redeeming mankind.⁷⁷ Our concern here will be with the first type of covenant mentioned, almost to the exclusion of the other two (except in so far as they shed direct light on the first).

The question which we have posed to Calvin, Arminius, and Cotton has been that of whether the covenant between God and an individual, was conditional or without conditions. Was it an agreement like any business or civil contract or was it more in terms of a sovereign disposition? To Arminius and his followers the covenant would more closely

resemble a contract. To Calvin and Cotton, the covenant was unconditional. What was Mather's approach to this?

There is a way in which it could be said of Mather, that he felt any covenant between God and man required man's consent. He states that in partaking of the Lord's Supper men "implicitly Renew their consent to the Covenant of Grace."⁷⁸ In fact, he says plainly that covenants are to be understood as "voluntary Transactions."⁷⁹ When speaking of the Apostle Paul's words to the Galatians, he believes that the Galatians were apostacizing. He seems not to question the original validity of their faith.⁸⁰ If this is true, then men can break the covenant, and it becomes conditional; the condition of its existence being their willingness to hold on to it. It certainly seems that Mather advocated a conditional covenant.

But there is yet another side to it. For elsewhere, Mather seems to hold to an unconditional covenant with God as the disposing sovereign. Of the covenant of grace, Mather says "In that, the Condition was free and absolute."⁸¹ This is as much to say that there was no condition. In further explanation we see his thoughts in Danger of Apostacy:

It is indeed most true, that the special favour of God is unchangeable, Rom. 5.2 This Grace wherein we stand. He that hath once access into the special grace and favour of God stands and abideth therein forever, in respect of that there is no casting off forever.⁸²

Likewise, "They that are internally and sincerely in

Covenant with God shall never lose their interest in the Covenant, for they are betrothed unto the Lord forever, Hos. 2.19."⁸³

There is however, a group, in covenant, who are said to be liable to being "cast off forever." "They that are the Lord's People in respect of a visible Covenant Interest only, may fall totally and finally."⁸⁴ This "visible Covenant Interest" Mather also calls "common Grace."⁸⁵ (Though this is not to be understood as meaning the same thing as what classical theologians mean by that designation. They would include all of mankind as recipients of such grace, whereas Mather would not.) These same are said to have only a "Form of Godliness."⁸⁶ They are also called the apostate generation by him.⁸⁷ If this is all true, one may reasonably ask if these are Christians he speaks of. The answer is that they are not.⁸⁸

To Mather, it was these "external" members of the covenant which were the ones who were subject to being cut off from God. These are those who partake of the church covenant but not the individual covenant with God.⁸⁹ These people are not really partakers of God's sovereign disposition. Rather, they partake only in the blessings of the covenant secondarily, as hangers-on. Hence, it is not surprising they should be said to be liable to be rejected. The requirement for not being "cast off" is their grasping onto the "internal covenant." As they are, they do not inherit God's kingdom, yet they enjoy the

benefits, in this life, of not being pagan.⁹⁰

If one could take just the last two sets of data into account, it would appear that true believers are in an unconditional covenant with God and remain in it forever, while those in just the "external" covenant are not true believers and partake of a sort of "conditional covenant." When they refuse to engage in the "internal covenant," Mather calls them apostates (a rather inaccurate use of the word). Unfortunately, the first group of data do not allow us to conclude this. It does seem that in this area he was making some concessions and departing from the original Calvinism. It must be said however, that the argument for this interpretation is not heavily weighted. Any concessions here to Arminianism are not major, in and of themselves. They must be taken with other concessions in other areas to cause one to call Mather an Arminian. If placed on a continuum, it would be accurate to say that Increase was essentially in the same area as his father-in-law John Cotton.

NOTES

¹Kenneth B. Murdock, Increase Mather (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926), pp. 33, 45, 48, 50, 53, 56, 59, 61.

²Ibid., pp. 63-68; 72.

³Ibid., p. 83. He was to later hold to the half-way covenant, defending it in two books published in 1675. Cf. p. 84.

⁴Ibid., pp. 84, 107. He was to become rector of Harvard in 1685 which was tantamount to being President, though he did not have to give up his pastorate. He retained the office until 1701. Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. "Mather, Increase," by Kenneth B. Murdock, 6.2:391.

⁵D.A.B. s.v. "Mather, Increase," by Murdock, 6.2: 391-92.

⁶Murdock, Mather, pp. 296, 299-300.

⁷Ibid., p. 386.

⁸D.A.B. s.v. "Mather, Increase," by Murdock, 6.2:353; Murdock, Mather, p. 382.

⁹Murdock, Mather, p. 375.

¹⁰Increase Mather, The Mystery of Christ Opened (Boston: 1686), p. 80.

¹¹Increase Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths (Boston: By B. Green and J. Allen, 1703; reprint ed., Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1963), pp. 37, 36.

¹²Increase Mather, Some Important Truths Concerning Conversion, 2d ed. (Boston: By Samuel Green for John Griffin, 1684), p. 52.

¹³Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁴Mather, Mystery of Christ, p. 47.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Increase Mather, A call to the Rising Generation-The Danger of Apostacy (Boston: By John Foster, 1679), p. 92.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁸Increase Mather, The Doctrine of Divine Providence (Boston: By Richard Pierce for Joseph Brunning, 1684), p. 104; Increase Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion (Boston: For Timothy Green, 1710), p. 44. Also cf. Concerning Conversion, p. 8.

¹⁹Increase Mather, The Doctrine of Singular Obedience (Boston: For Timothy Green, 1707), p. 16.

²⁰Ibid., p. 8.

²¹Increase Mather, Awakening Soul-Saving Truths (Boston: By S. Kneeland for B. Gray and J. Edwards, 1720), p. 71. This verse begins a section where Moses exhorts the people of Israel to hold to God's covenant with them. On verses 10-13, C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch comment that this is a "Summons to enter into the covenant of the Lord, namely, to enter inwardly, to make the covenant an affair of the heart and life." Further, they say of this covenant that "notwithstanding the frequent transgressions on the part of the nation [Israel], it had not been abrogated on the part of God, but still remained in full validity and force. Cf. Commentary on The Old Testament, 10 vols., trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.) 3:447-48, 446-47. See also Appendix I in this work.

²²Supra., Chap. 1, p. 16.

²³Mather, Concerning Conversion, pp. 6-7. Cf. also pp. 7-8.

²⁴Mather, Danger of Apostacy, p. 49.

²⁵Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion, p. 22; Mather, Doctrine of Obedience, p. A2.

²⁶Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, p. 27.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Mather, Mystery of Christ, pp. 108-09; Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion, p. 22; and Mather, Concerning Conversion, p. 6.

²⁹Mather, Concerning Conversion, pp. 25, 53;
Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion, p. 82.

³⁰Mather, Concerning Conversion, p. 5.

³¹Mather, pp. 29-30.

³²Mather, Awakening Truths to Conversion, pp. 65-66.

³³Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, p. 28.

³⁴Ibid., p. 26.

³⁵Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion,
pp. 72, 71; Mather, p. 12.

³⁶Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion,
p. 8.

³⁷Ibid., p. 5.

³⁸Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, p. 75.

³⁹Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁰Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion,
pp. 24-25.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 4.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 13-14. This point is one over which theologians have wrangled constantly since the days of Augustine at least. While some see no need for people actually to be able to respond to the Gospel in order for its preaching to leave them without excuse before God, others demand that ability in order to defend God of any insincerity in the offer. The answer to that is that it is not so much an offer as a command which they cannot obey because they chose to enter a state which locked them into one option only. The problem therefore, is how to take Scripture seriously, while taking man's responsibility (as affirmed in Scripture) seriously, while taking God's sovereignty seriously. One is almost driven to throw up his hands in dismay when attempting to construct a consistent system. It is at this point that the theologian thanks God for the gracious gift of antinomy.

⁴³Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion,
pp. 73-74, 75.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 78.

⁴⁵Increase Mather, Returning Unto God (Boston: By John Foster, 1680), p. 14.

⁴⁶Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, p. 34. Cf. also pp. 30-32 of the same work where three requirements for conversion are listed. Also see Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion, p. 93, and Increase Mather, The Necessity of Reformation (Boston: By John Foster, 1679), p. 15.

⁴⁷Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion, pp. 55, 70; Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, p. 28.

⁴⁸Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion, pp. 53, 55.

⁴⁹Mather, Concerning Conversion, pp. 4-5. Not only does Mather point up man's helplessness in the conversion process, but he also throws doubt on the idea that a truly converted man can really pull away from God. Following is a question Mather asked to which he expected a negative answer: "Are there not many in our Days, who having been once enlightened, have not only sinned against the Light of their Education, but are become malignant Haters of those holy Truths and Ways of God, . . . ? Do not such Sin wilfully after they have received the knowledge of the truth?" Mather posited the worst state of apostasy and then indicated that he doubted a true believer would be guilty of it. Increase Mather, Dedicatory Epistle to A Guide to Christ, by Solomon Stoddard (Boston: By B. Green for D. Henchman, 1742).

⁵⁰Mather, Doctrine of Divine Providence, p. 25. Cf. also p. 8.

⁵¹Mather, Awakening Soul-Saving Truths, p. 78; Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion, pp. 47, 63-75, 62-63.

⁵²Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion, pp. 46, 60; Mather, Concerning Conversion, p. 4; Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion, p. 46.

⁵³Mather, Doctrine of Divine Providence, p. 8.

⁵⁴Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, pp. 24, 25; Mather, Mystery of Christ, pp. 40, 66.

⁵⁵Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, p. 96.

⁵⁶Mather, Doctrine of Divine Providence, p. 6.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 7.

⁶⁰Mather, Mystery of Christ, p. 6.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 3, 5.

⁶²Mather, Doctrine of Divine Providence, pp. 4-5.

⁶³Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, pp. 24, 96, 97;
Mather, Awakening Soul-Saving Truths, p. 19.

⁶⁴Mather, Awakening Soul-Saving Truths, p. 20.

⁶⁵Mather, Doctrine of Obedience, p. 14.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 10, 11, 28.

⁶⁷Mather, Awakening Truths Tending to Conversion,
p. 37.

⁶⁸Mather, Mystery of Christ, p. 44.

⁶⁹Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, pp. 38, 39, 34.

⁷⁰Romans 4.4-5.

⁷¹Cf. Coolidge, Pauline Renaissance, p. 11.

⁷²Mather, Awakening Soul-Saving Truths, p. 28.

⁷³Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, p. 41.

⁷⁴Boston: 1680, p. 7.

⁷⁵Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, p. 139; Mather, Doctrine of Obedience, p. A2, 2d pg. of "To the Reader."

⁷⁶Mather, Mystery of Christ, p. 47.

⁷⁷Cf. Mather, Returning to God, p. 18; Increase Mather, Order of the Gospel (Boston: By B. Green and J. Allen for B. Eliot, 1700) pp. 18, 19; Mather, Mystery of Christ, pp. 2, 136.

⁷⁸Returning to God, p. 18. This covenant consent Mather distinguishes from the sort of covenant between

God and Adam, which was said to have been a covenant of works. Cf. Mystery of Christ, p. 119.

⁷⁹Mystery of Christ, p. 7. This definition however, is found in a context where Mather is speaking of the "Covenant of Redemption" between God and Christ with the purpose of saving mankind. It is his burden to show the grace of God in salvation by stressing that God and Jesus both entered into the covenant voluntarily. Neither was forced to save mankind. One wonders if Mather would apply the same definition to the covenant between God and individuals. His statements are certainly categorical enough to think that he would.

⁸⁰Mather, Danger of Apostasy, p. 39.

⁸¹Mystery of Christ, p. 4.

⁸²Mather, p. 44.

⁸³Ibid., p. 45. Cf. also Returning to God, p. 2; Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, pp. 87-88.

⁸⁴Mather, Returning to God, p. 3.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Mather, Soul-Saving Gospel Truths, p. 73.

⁸⁷Mather, Danger of Apostasy, pp. 56-59, 62.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 62; Mather, Awakening Soul-Saving Truths, pp. 31-33.

⁸⁹Awakening Soul-Saving Truths, p. 31.

⁹⁰Danger of Apostasy, pp. 44, 47, 39.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions which will be set forth here are an attempt to take into consideration not only the direct evidence adduced in this study, but also certain other factors pertaining to the particular life experiences of both John Cotton and Increase Mather. They are tentative conclusions in that the author reserves the right to change his assessment upon further reflection or upon introduction of new evidence.

With regard to how John Cotton and Increase Mather each viewed man's ability to reason and the place of the moral law, the evidence indicates that they stand fairly close together in their assessments of men's abilities to reason. Men can reason about all things: however their ability to reason about spiritual matters is so limited as to be, in fact, nonexistent. In this they both follow Calvin as opposed to Arminius. In effect, their positions are nearly identical when speaking of the moral law. Here neither Cotton nor Mather nor Arminius differ significantly from Calvin.

In dealing with Adam's sin and its relation to the human race, both Cotton and Mather indicate an infection

of the race as a result of Adam's sin. This goes beyond what Arminius is willing to admit. This infection is a corruption of nature which produces only evil thoughts, actions or desires when seen from God's viewpoint. On this point both men are in agreement with Calvin. They have no trouble with the concept of total depravity, as properly understood.

The area of the freedom of the will is one in which it is difficult for both Cotton and Mather to come to a position. Nevertheless, Cotton does better than Mather in reconciling God's sovereignty and the free will of man. Cotton does not get quite so caught up in the dilemma as Mather, principally because the concept of man's free will does not seem to have been a burning issue with Cotton. Human responsibility he takes seriously, but he does not place himself in such a position that he has to come up with an explanation of man's free will. Supporting this, one sees Cotton adhering more closely than Mather to the Biblical text whenever he deals with the freedom of the will. He never strays far from Philippians 2. 13. Mather, on the other hand, seems somewhat more speculative in attempting to produce an appropriate answer to the problem. This factor, I believe, keeps Cotton closer to Calvin.

A surprising thing is that Mather, in his view of predestination, seems to have been a supralapsarian. In this he is quite close to Calvin, who has that tendency also.

However, this is not complimentary to any defence of free will. It is in fact the antithesis of it. If complete freedom of choice lies at one end of a continuum, then supralapsarianism lies at the other end. Here is an attempt by Mather to remain true to Calvin. It is, however, highly inconsistent with his other views. This betrays a lack of integration in Mather's theology. Cotton, in contradistinction to Mather, seems to be infralapsarian in his support of predestination. This we derive from his rejection of absolute reprobation. While this conclusion is a conjecture, one usually finds the two concepts together in any particular system of thought. In both cases, these men are predestinarians, and hence more closely related to Calvin. However, the type of predestination Mather adheres to shows a lack of cohesiveness with his other thought.

Cotton betrays a purely Calvinist view of faith. Mather, however, suggests we ought to "labor" for faith. In fairness to Mather, he uses the term in an apparently qualified sense. Nevertheless, he appears to have a less well-conceived notion of the origin of faith than does Cotton. It is interesting to note Mather's rather well thought out beliefs regarding infants and faith. This could be a reflection of his involvement with a major concern of his day; the Half-Way Covenant. Generally, Cotton is much stronger in his emphasis on faith as a "gift."

It is in their understandings of the covenant that one can best see the separation between Calvin and John Cotton on the one side and Increase Mather on the other. Cotton is extremely Calvinistic in the basis for his covenant concept. There is simply no doubt as to his view of the covenant between God and a true believer as an unconditional and sovereign disposition. Mather, however, sees the covenant as the result of consent on the part of a believer. He must consent or there is no covenant. This is not a covenant which could be called a sovereign disposition. It is not unconditional, and therefore must be conditional. By so being, it allows man to have a part (no matter how small) in his own salvation. Whether or not this is Biblical cannot be said here. It is not, however, a Calvinistic understanding of the covenant.

Having summarized briefly the positions of these men, it appears to this author that it is incorrect to label either man an Arminian, deliberate or inadvertant. Neither man is willing to give up the concept of God's sovereign will, which is a hallmark of Calvinism. However, it is not incorrect to say that one could be closer to Arminius than the other. In this respect, Mather seems to be closer to Arminius than Cotton. This I see to be a result of imprecision on the part of Mather in spite of his striving for fidelity to the Biblical text.

This imprecision can be seen as a result not so

much of improper theological training as of an attempt on Mather's part to spread his time and energies too thin. As has been noted, much of Mather's mature adulthood was taken up with political, diplomatic, administrative and scientific interest, as well as his pastoral and theological pursuits. This of itself reduced the time he could spend in theological and exegetical activities. This, in part, could explain his imprecise formulations which did full justice to neither Calvin nor Arminius.

Unlike Mather, John Cotton was given over almost wholly to theological and pastoral concerns. Although the nature of civil government in Massachusetts in the years between 1630 and 1650 required every clergyman to be more than minimally involved in governmental matters, by the 1680's and 1690's the two spheres had become relatively separate fields in which no man could expect to become equally masterful. Hence, Cotton, by reserving his energies for principally one sphere, more or less, would have more time to hone his position to greater sharpness than Increase Mather. In the estimation of this author, this is what in fact happened.

Beyond this, another point must be made. Cotton began his ministry seven years before the Synod of Dort condemned Arminianism. This gave him a perspective on the Arminian problem which Increase Mather did not have. The significance of this is most easily understood when one

remembers that early in his career in England, Cotton had a head-on confrontation with Arminianism. Cotton was forced by circumstances to pay more attention to Arminianism proper, and to grapple with it. He was therefore more aware of its arguments and more studious to avoid it. Given the fact that Cotton was an exegetical scholar of some note at Cambridge University, the greater precision of Cotton in regard to Arminianism is not surprising.

In view of the fact that Mather lived at a time when the political existence of the colonies was taking on a greater emphasis than their theological existence, it could well be that there was a connection between Mather's belief that consent was required of a covenant, and his increased realization of the state of politics in the period of the rise of the constitutional monarchy in England. Though it cannot be said that the Puritans were ever a-political, it is safe to say that pure politics played a larger part in Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century than it had in the 1620's, 1630's or 1640's. Is it possible that Mather realized that to say that God could have a covenant which was a sovereign disposition was, in effect, an undermining of the idea of a covenant between the ruled and the ruler, in which the ruled had certain rights? Did a sovereign disposition in theology support the Stuart belief in a divine-right monarchy? Perhaps Mather thought that since it seemed most right for men to be free to

contract a covenant between ruler and ruled on earth, it must surely be the same between God and man. I would not dare to say that Mather held to a conditional theological covenant merely for the sake of expediency in the political realm. However, the influences may have been so subtle that even Mather, as great a mind as he was, was unable to gauge their effect on his theological positions.

These data seem to best account for the more Arminian tone of Mather's writings as compared with Cotton's. Hence, it is the judgment of this author that whereas neither man was actually an Arminian, Mather had a bent in that direction which Cotton did not have.

Though both John Cotton and Increase Mather were deeply learned theologians, they were men of different times. Mather's life witnessed the closing of the age of piety and the opening of the secular age. He was not unaffected by the transition.

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APPENDIX I

THE MEANINGS OF THE
HEBREW "BERITH" AND THE
GREEK "DIATHEKE"

The concept of the covenant has played an important part in this study. The distinction has been made between a conditional and an unconditional covenant. Today and in the time of the later Puritans, the general understanding of the term covenant has been that of a mutually agreed-upon contract between equals. Because of this, some may question the basis upon which Calvin reached the conclusion that the "unconditional" covenant was a suitable way to speak of God's covenant with man. It may seem that Calvin was creating a concept simply to justify what he was bound to believe anyway. For this reason, it may be appropriate to present here some theological, cultural, and philological evidence to support the thesis that the way of looking at a Biblical covenant from the unconditional viewpoint is at least as valid as looking at it from the conditional viewpoint.

Prior to Calvin's time Hebrew and Greek studies in the Christian Church were in a deplorable state.¹ The Northern Humanist movement and the Reformation did much

to change this. The importance of Greek and Hebrew studies is seen when one realizes that a proper understanding of the nature of the Biblical covenant in large part turns on the meanings of two words, the Hebrew "berith," and the Greek "diatheke." On what evidence Calvin based his determination of the meanings of berith and diatheke we cannot be sure. But we do know that from recent discoveries and the use scholars have made of them that Calvin's position was at least tenable.

John S. Coolidge points out that in the narrative found in Genesis 15, which deals with the establishment of God's covenant with Abraham, "God does not so much as mention any obligations on Abraham's part."² George E. Mendenhall in his study on near-eastern suzerainty treaties (which has been used by Coolidge and others³) establishes the sort of treaties and covenants which were in use in the times of the patriarchs and Moses. Says Mendenhall, "'The suzerainty treaty established a relationship between the two [king and defeated vassal], but in its form it is unilateral.'"⁴ This is significant because, as K. A. Kitchen points out, these same suzerainty treaties parallel almost exactly the form of the covenant God is said to have given to Israel at Sinai.⁵ Here the emphasis we wish to make is on the form of these covenants and not necessarily on their essence. These covenants appear to be unilateral dispositions set forth by one member of the

covenant who is also unequal to the other signatory of the covenant. That is, the one who disposes is able to do so because the one who receives is in no position to reject the terms.

We now move on to the philological evidence for the understanding of covenant as being unconditional. Geerhardus Vos, professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Seminary in the early years of this century, opens up a way of understanding the term "covenant" when applied to its Old Testament context. The following extended quotation on the Hebrew word berith is here reproduced because of the light it sheds on the problem.

The Hebrew word rendered by the above nouns [testament, covenant] is "Berith." . . . As to berith, this in the Bible never means "testament." In fact the idea of "testament" was entirely unknown to the ancient Hebrews. They knew nothing of a "last will." From this, however it does not follow that the rendering "covenant" would be indicated in all places where berith occurs. Berith may be employed where as a matter of fact a covenant in the sense of agreement is referred to. . . . Only the reason for its occurrence in such places is never that it relates to a agreement. That is purely incidental. The real reason lies in the fact that the agreement spoken of is concluded by some special religious sanction. This, and not its being an agreement, makes it a berith. And similarly in other connections. A purely one-sided promise or ordinance or law becomes a berith, not by reason of its inherent conceptual or etymological meaning, but by reason of the religious sanction added. From this it will be understood that the outstanding characteristic of a berith is its unalterableness, its certainty, its eternal validity, and not (what would in certain cases be the very opposite) its voluntary, changeable nature. The berith as such is a "faithful" berith, something not subject to abrogation. It

can be broken by man, and the breach is a most serious sin, but this again is not because it is the breaking of an agreement in general; the seriousness results from the violation of the sacred ceremony by which its sanction was affected.⁶

Seemingly, man can break the covenant, yet the unique characteristic of the berith is that God is evidently faithful in His part of the arrangement. Again, Vos sheds much light on the nature of the word in the New Testament, which is translated "testament" or "covenant." In this case the word is the Greek diatheke.

Diatheke at the time when the Septuagint [the third century B. C. Greek translation of the Old Testament] and the New Testament came into existence not only could mean "testament," but such was the current meaning of the word. It was, to be sure, not its original meaning. The original sense was quite generic, viz. "a disposition that some one made for himself" (from the middle form of the verb diatithemi). The legal usage, however, referring it to a testamentary disposition had monopolized the word. Hence the difficulty with which the Greek translators found themselves confronted. . . . When notwithstanding all these difficulties, they chose "diatheke," weighty reasons must have determined them. The principal reason seems to have been that there was a far more fundamental objection to the one other word that might have been adopted, the word "syntheke." This word suggests strongly by its very form the idea of coequality and partnership between the persons entering into the arrangement, a stress quite in harmony to the genius of Hellenic religiosity. . . . So, in order to avoid the misunderstanding, they preferred to put up with the inconveniences attaching to the word "diatheke." On closer reflection these were not insurmountable. Though diatheke meant currently "last will," the original generic sense of "disposition for one's self" cannot have been entirely forgotten even in their day. The etymology of the word was too perspicuous for that. They felt that diatheke suggested a sovereign disposition, not always of the nature of a last will, and repristinated this ancient signification.⁷

Vos goes on to indicate that in the New Testament there are places where "testament" with the meaning "last will" is to be preferred, yet, in those places where "covenant" is the proper signification, the sense would be that as described above. The point which is most important at this juncture is that had the Old Testament Greek translators (or the New Testament writers for that matter) wanted to indicate some sort of mutuality, a conditionality in the concept of the covenant, they had a much better word to use in syntheke than in diatheke.

Leon Morris has also added something to the discussion of the appropriateness of the Biblical terms to indicate a "sovereign disposition". With regard to the term berith he says the following:

The place of the duties which devolved upon the people in the covenant should not be misunderstood. They do not represent concessions freely made, and which might have been withheld. It is clear that this whole process of covenant-making is regarded as taking place under divine direction. It is not a compact freely negotiated by independent parties with the people determining just how far they intend to go. Their part is unconditional surrender to whatever might be the will of God, their absolute Ruler. As G. Vos puts it: 'Notwithstanding all the emphasis placed upon the two-sidedness of the Berith, Scripture always so represents it that the Berith in its origin and in the determination of its content is not two-sided but based on the sovereignty of God.'⁸

In choosing the word diatheke, Morris feels that the translators of the Septuagint made a decision which most reflected the sense of the Old Testament. "The word they chose instead is one which indicates a unilateral arrangement,

and thus is well adapted to indicating an arrangement where one partner is dominant and dictates the terms, as in all the cases where God is one of the partners."⁹ Regarding the use of diatheke in the New Testament (and its translation by the English "covenant") Morris has this to say: "Under the circumstances it is, perhaps, unfortunate that διαθήκη is rendered in English by 'covenant,' for this word carries with it associations of compact, of agreement, of conditions mutually determined, which are not to be found in the arrangements under consideration."¹⁰

Walter Bauer substantially agrees with the conclusions of Vos and Morris concerning the propriety of the use of diatheke to translate berith (with emphasis on the concept of diatheke as a "disposition"). Moreover, Bauer also concludes that, with only two or three exceptions, the proper meaning of diatheke in even the New Testament, is that of "declaration of purpose" (or "will"), "decree" or "ordinance." As far as the classical Greek concept of diatheke, meaning a compact or contract, Bauer thinks it unlikely that such connotations apply to the New Testament literature.¹¹

Liddell and Scott in their Greek-English Lexicon, which deals primarily with classical usage, substantiate the existence of the variations of meaning between syntheke and diatheke as pointed out by the arguments just presented. Syntheke is defined as a "covenant treaty

between individuals or states," while its root word syntithemi in one case can be a "synthesis," though with regard to its more direct connection with syntheke, its sense as making a covenant was seemingly taken as an agreement, which definition of necessity implies at least two parties. Diatheke can be seen as either disposition or as a covenant, both usages being applicable to Scriptural usage. Its root, diatithemi on the other hand, strongly infers the notion of "disposition." Its use for the concept of making a "covenant" can be attested as early as Aristophanes, in the fifth and fourth centuries B. C. It is occasionally defined as making a mutual agreement or settlement, but its overall complexion is strongly in favor of the concept of making a disposition or of disposing of something as one wishes.¹²

Johannes Behm, in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, says of diatheke (in the section dealing with the work of the Septuagint translators contained in the article "Diatheke") that "'Disposition,' 'declaration of the divine will,' 'the divine will self-revealed in history and establishing religion'--this is the religious concept of the diatheke in the LXX, . . ." ¹³ He concludes his article with these words:

Neither "covenant" nor "testament" reproduces the true religious sense of the religious term [diatheke] in the Greek Bible. [Diatheke] is from first to last the "disposition" of God, the mighty declaration of the sovereign will of God in history,

by which He orders the relation between Himself and men according to His own saving purpose, and which carries with it the authoritative divine ordering, the one order of things which is in accordance with it.¹⁴

The conclusion which has been arrived at by these seven scholars has been that the appropriate way in which to understand the terms berith and diatheke is that they represent the idea of a disposition, i.e., a covenant which involves two parties, but which is of such a nature as to make one party dominant while the other remains passive. The one party is obliged to live under the dictates of the other. Not all Puritans accepted this idea, since it rules out free will when speaking of the concept of election. In fact many Puritans rejected it. Some, however, retained it. This short summary of the evidence has been presented to show that the position of this latter group was at least tenable, and perhaps justified.

NOTES

¹Cf. Walker, History of the Christian Church, p. 293. Instruction in Greek, notes Walker, was only begun at the University of Paris in 1470. Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522) was the "first of non-Jewish scholars in Germany, to make a profound study of Hebrew." Ibid. Cf. also G. Freidrich, "Pre-History of the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament" in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. G. Kittel and G. Freidrich; trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 10:613-17; Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. xxi.

²John S. Coolidge, The Pauline Renaissance in England: Puritanism and the Bible (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 100.

³Notably K. A. Kitchen, Ancient Orient and Old Testament (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1966), pp. 91-96, et passim.

⁴Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East (Pittsburgh, 1955), quoted in Coolidge, The Pauline Renaissance in England, p. 104.

⁵Kitchen, Ancient Orient and Old Testament, pp. 98-99.

⁶Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1948), pp. 32-33.

⁷Ibid., pp. 33-34.

⁸The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), p. 78.

⁹Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 96.

¹¹Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 4th ed. edited and translated by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), s.v. p. 182. Another very interesting article on diatheke

is found in E. D. Burton, Galatians (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1921), pp. 496-505. He agrees with Vos on the reasons for the LXX translators choosing diatheke (p. 498). He is however, more involved with the "pros" and "cons" of the use of "covenant" or "testament" in the New Testament, rather than in the essential meaning of diatheke itself.

¹²Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, ed. H. S. Jones, et al., rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), pp. 1717, 1727, 395, 415.

¹³Johannes Behm, "διαθήκη." in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel; trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 2:127.

¹⁴Ibid., 2:134.

APPENDIX II

THE FIVE POSITIVE ARTICLES OF THE "REMONSTRANCE"

The articles which follow are those drawn up by the party of the Remonstrants, the followers of J. Arminius. As such they were condemned by the Synod of Dort in 1619. They were first conceived as a thought-out response to the Calvinists as early as 1610. They are not to be taken as the whole of the articles known as the "Remonstrance." They are simply the five "positive" articles of the document. They are:

I. That God, by an eternal and unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ his Son, before the foundations of the world were laid, determined to save, out of the human race which had fallen into sin, in Christ, for Christ's sake and through Christ, those who through the grace of the Holy Spirit shall believe on the same his Son and shall through the same grace persevere in this same faith and obedience of faith even to the end; and on the other hand to leave under sin and wrath the contumacious and unbelieving and to condemn them as aliens from Christ, according to the word of the Gospel in John iii. 36, and other passages of Scripture.

II. That, accordingly, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for all, by his death on the cross, reconciliation and remission of sins; yet so that no one is partaker of this remission except the believers [John iii. 16; I John ii. 2].

III. That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the working of his own free-will, inasmuch as in his state of apostasy and sin he can for himself and by himself think nothing that is good--nothing,

that is, truly good, such as saving faith is, above all else. But that it is necessary that by God, in Christ and through his Holy Spirit he be born again and renewed in understanding, affections and will and in all his faculties, that he may be able to understand, think, will and perform what is truly good, according to the Word of God [John xv. 5].

IV. That this grace of God is the beginning, the progress and the end of all good; so that even the regenerate man can neither think, will nor effect any good, nor withstand any temptation to evil, without grace precedent (or prevenient), awakening, following and co-operating. So that all good deeds and all movements towards good that can be conceived in thought must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ.

But with respect to the mode of operation, grace is not irresistible; for it is written of many that they resisted the Holy Spirit [Acts vii and elsewhere, passim].

V. That those who are grafted into Christ by a true faith, and have thereby been made partakers of his life-giving Spirit, are abundantly endowed with power to strive against Satan, sin, the world and their own flesh, and to win the victory; always, be it understood, with the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit, with Jesus Christ assisting them in all temptations, through his Spirit; stretching out his hand to them and (provided only that they are themselves prepared for the fight, that they entreat his aid and do not fail to help themselves) propping and upholding them so that by no guile or violence of Satan can they be led astray or plucked from Christ's hands [John x.28]. But for the question whether they are not able through sloth or negligence to forsake the beginning of their life in Christ, to embrace again this present world, to depart from the holy doctrine once delivered to them, to lose their good conscience and to neglect grace--this must be the subject of more exact inquiry in the Holy Scriptures, before we can teach it with full confidence of our mind.

These Articles thus set out and delivered the Remonstrants deem agreeable to the word of God, suitable for edification and, on this subject, sufficient for salvation. So that it is not needful, and tends not to edification, to rise higher or to descend lower.

The above is taken from Henry Bettenson, ed., Documents of the Christian Church, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 268-69.