



Who do you think you are? Thinking Like a Christian April-June 2020

## 5. Fighting for the old gospel, discovering a new one AD1600-1700

In 1600, everyone believes Christianity is true, and the task of kings and queens is to defend the true faith. In 1700, most educated people believe Christianity is largely irrelevant. What happened in between?

### 1. Arminianism: Pelagius raises his head

Jacobus Arminius, born 1560 in Holland

His followers in 1610 issued a document called the 'Remonstrance', arguing

1. God chose who to save before the foundation of the world... on the basis of his foreknowledge that they would choose to believe.
2. Jesus died to save from sins... but this only takes effect for those who choose to believe. In other words, Jesus' death doesn't actually save, it just makes everyone 'saveable'.
3. We don't have the ability to do good... on our own. But with a bit of help...
4. God saves by grace... he sends prevenient ('coming-first') grace to help us (see point 3). But we can resist this if we like; it just makes it possible for us to believe, if we choose.
5. Jesus saves till the end... provided that we don't decide to turn away from him.

This nearly led to civil war in Holland.

### The Synod of Dordt

Nov 13<sup>th</sup> 1618 – May 29<sup>th</sup> 1619

Exercise: How would you answer the Remonstrant's five points? Look up these verses to help:

Ephesians 1:4; Ephesians 2:1; John 5:21; John 8:34-36; John 17:12

In response to the Arminians: five articles

1. Unconditional Election: God did not choose us because he saw something 'better' in us
2. Effectual Atonement (often, unhelpfully, called 'Limited' atonement): Jesus' death actually saves those for whom he died; it atones for all of a believers' sins, including the sin of unbelief.
3. Total depravity: we are dead in our sins, needing a new nature, not just a little help

- 4. Irresistible Grace: God's grace actually saves, bringing from death to life; not a prod-and-then-see-what-happens
- 5. Perseverance of the saints: Since Jesus is the one who saves, and it does not depend on us; those he has chosen in eternity he always saves

Salvation is a unified work of grace of the Holy Trinity: The Father elects, the Son atones, the Spirit regenerates.

This became the definitive statement of what grace really means, shared by all Reformed churches.

*Blessed be God, there is no difference, in any essential point, between the Church of England and her sister Reformed Churches. We unite in every article of Christian doctrine, without the least variation... (Bishop Joseph Hall, British commissioner to the Synod of Dordt)*

## 2. The Westminster Assembly

But this happy peace was not to last.

1618-1648 Thirty years war

Meanwhile in England:

1625 Accession of Charles I.

Henrietta Maria

Archbishop Laud

vs.

The Puritans

1639 First Bishops' War starts in Scotland

1642 Charles raises his standard in Nottingham

Civil war lasts until 1651

The King  
(Cavaliers)

vs.

Parliament  
(Roundheads)

The King lost London very quickly. Parliament called for an 'Assembly of Divines' to review and complete the reformation of the Church in the Three Kingdoms. 1643-1653.

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*I. THAT we shall sincerely, really, and constantly, through the grace of GOD, endeavour, in our several places and callings, the preservation of the reformed religion in the Church of Scotland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, against our common enemies; the reformation of religion in the kingdoms of England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to the word of GOD, and the example of the best reformed Churches; and shall endeavour to bring the Churches of GOD in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church-government, directory for worship and catechising; that we, and our posterity after us, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us. (The Solemn League and Covenant)*

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‘Westminster Standards’ 1647. A blueprint for a Reformed English Church.

Westminster Confession of faith

Westminster Shorter & Larger Catechisms

The form of Presbyterial Church Government

The Order for the Public Worship of God

The Confession & Catechisms became the standard statement of faith for Reformed churches in the English-speaking world.

Exercise: Westminster Confession 1.1

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

- 1. Can we know enough about God to be saved from nature?*
- 2. So how do we know the truth?*
- 3. Why did God cause his word to be written down?*
- 4. So why is Scripture ‘most necessary’?*

Presbyterians and Independents

Independents are concerned most of all about the Freedom to worship as they see fit.

Parliament vs. The Army

Oliver Cromwell

29<sup>th</sup> May 1660: the Restoration

24<sup>th</sup> August 1662: the Great Ejection.

24<sup>th</sup> May 1689: The Act of toleration.

But by now the world has profoundly changed.

### 3. The world is changing...

November 10<sup>th</sup> 1619: Rene Descartes shut himself in an oven.

Educated as a Jesuit from age 11. (The Jesuits: 'the stormtroopers of the counter-reformation').

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*I entirely abandoned the study of letters. Resolving to seek no knowledge other than that of which could be found in myself or else in the great book of the world, I spent the rest of my youth traveling, visiting courts and armies, mixing with people of diverse temperaments and ranks, gathering various experiences, testing myself in the situations which fortune offered me, and at all times reflecting upon whatever came my way to derive some profit from it.*

*(Descartes, 'Discourse on method')*

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I have to doubt everything! How can I find something that I cannot doubt?

Descartes' famous solution: I can't doubt the fact that I'm doubting. 'I think, therefore I am'

All knowledge starts with us. With ourselves. We can work this out. We don't need revelation from God; that doesn't help us anyway. Look how everyone keeps fighting over what they think God has said!

Let's make man the measure of all things. Man first solves our problems. Man's reason is the route to truth. Man's freedom is the ultimate good.

So by the time the century closed, this idea was everywhere. Real progress starts with us. Religion has its uses, but the one thing it doesn't bring us is truth. For that, we need reason.