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A Study of the Problem of Synergism in Relation to Salvation

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A STUDY OF THE PROBLEM OF SYNERGISM IN RELATION TO SALVATION

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"What must I do to be saved?" is a question which might well arise in the mind of an earnest seeker of salvation who has been under the influence of various types of preaching. This is due to the fact that there are two main and many mediating theories concerning the process by which salvation is attained. One of these major theories is that God is entirely responsible for man's salvation and the man himself can contribute nothing toward it. The other main theory is that man is responsible for accepting or rejecting the salvation that God offers. Between these two theories lie varying points of view concerning the relative responsibility of God and man to salvation.

The basis of these theories depends on the interpretation given to certain passages of scripture. The New Testament contains various phrases concerning the process by which man enters salvation. Some of these are: "Ye must be born anew" (John 3:7, A.S.V.); "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31, A.S.V.); and "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Romans 10:10, A.S.V.). During the period of the early fathers, different ideas concerning the matter of salvation began to develop and finally culminated in the Pelagian Controversy. At the time of the Reformation new controversies arose. Today, a man seeking personal salvation is faced with many exhortations such as, "God will save you," "you must make the decision," and "accept Jesus as your Saviour" and he is often left in a state of confusion.

The Problem

With such an array of ideas facing him, one may not know just what to do in order that a firm foundation might be laid for his faith. The problem was to discover that part of the salvation experience for which man is responsible and that which he can expect God to do for him.

Justification and Delimitation

In a matter as important as one's personal salvation it is imperative that this problem be answered as clearly as possible. The author sought to do this by studying some of the key solutions men have come to in the course of Christian history and then making his own Biblical study in order to determine to the best of his ability that which is in harmony with God's Word. The choice of the book of Romans was made because of the definite theological approach of the book, and the choice of chapters 9, 10 and 11 was assumed to be justified on the basis of their specific emphasis upon the problem which was before the author. The fact that Romans 9 was a key chapter in one of the controversies gives added support to the author's choice of this section. It was assumed that the conclusions drawn from this limited section would not be out of harmony with other Biblical teaching and hence would yield a reasonably justifiable theological judgment. The book of Ephesians which also emphasizes the problem would have made a more adequate study; but since a thorough study of any one of the questions under consideration would have been an extensive work in itself, the author limited himself to the three chapters in Romans.

Definition of Terms

Synergism. "Synergism places in man the decisive factor which is supposed to determine the conversion of one as well as the non-conversion of another, and assumes this factor to be the human will."¹

Method

Since much research had already been done in the historical field, and the author needed only a foundation for his own scriptural study, large reliance was placed upon such historical accounts. The consultation of only the direct works or compendiums of the works of Calvin and Arminius, apart from any subsequent developments of the basic doctrine of these men, limited these phases of the doctrinal study. Similar limitation of the Lutheran system of doctrine was obtained by consulting pertinent articles in the Lutheran Encyclopedia. These articles depended largely on the Formula of Concord. Because of its particular relevance to the problem, Romans 9, 10 and 11 became the basis for the Biblical study. The author was conscious of the limited field within which he worked and drew conclusions, and of the consequent validity of this field for a larger doctrinal context.

Procedure

This study is arranged in three main chapters. The first of these chapters is an historical survey of three great controversies which were concerned with the problem. The first of these controversies,

¹August L. Graebner, "Synergism," The Lutheran Encyclopedia (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 476.

namely the Pelagian Controversy, clearly defined the problem. The position of the Augustinians who won the controversy became the norm for subsequent doctrine. The Flacian and Arminian controversies were later attempts to solve the same problem in the Lutheran and Calvinistic groups. The second chapter is a comparison of the doctrines of three main theological systems which were connected with these controversies and concludes with points of agreement and disagreement. The last of these main chapters is a study of Romans 9-11 against which the three systems are compared and contrasted. The author's conclusions follow.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF THE SYNERGISTIC PROBLEM

Introduction

In attempting to find the solution to any problem it is proper to begin with a historical study to find what, if anything, has already been done with the problem. To discover what men have thought and done with respect to the problem of salvation, the history of the early fathers and that of three great controversies concerning this subject will be considered in this chapter. These controversies are the Pelagian, the Flacian and the Arminian.

As a guide for the study, the following questions will be considered. What developments of thought took place prior to the controversies? What were the positions of the main figures in the controversies? What course did each of the controversies take; and what were the results of the controversies?

The bulk of the material for this chapter was drawn from articles concerning Augustine, Pelagius and the Pelagian Controversy, Synergism and Arminianism in the following encyclopedias: Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature; A Religious Encyclopaedia: or a Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal and Practical Theology; and The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge.

Ideas Prior to the Pelagian Controversy

The early fathers of the church maintained the necessity of human co-operation in the matter of salvation. Since man has free

will, it is necessary for him to choose salvation, but this does not exclude God's grace. These early fathers, however, had no scientific views and their ideas were expressed rather vaguely.¹

Justin, Irenaeus and Hippolytus defended man's freedom to accept or reject salvation. Tertullian believed that man had free will which enabled him to appropriate the provisions of grace, yet needed divine grace to accomplish salvation. According to Apollinaris, salvation was a choice of the will to initiate and assimilate the salvation which Christ provided.² Origen and Clement believed that man was free to obey or disobey God, and that man could initiate his own salvation but needed the help of the Divine Spirit to complete it.³ Thus both man's free will and God's provision were recognized by the fathers.

The emphasis which the Gnostics placed upon the sinful nature of man and his inability to use free will caused the fathers to stress the free moral agency of man to the neglect of the effect of depravity and apostasy upon the actions of the will. There were developing, however, two main ideas concerning the origin of the soul which greatly influenced opinions concerning sin. The first of these was advanced

¹"Augustine," Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature (New York, Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1895), I, 513.

²Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History (rev. and enlarged ed.; Philadelphia, The American Baptist Publication Society, 1931), I, 359-363.

³W. G. Easton, "Pelagianism," Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature (New York, Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1894), VII, 868.

by Jerome and briefly is this: each soul is created from nothing, and so there is no room in this view for original sin. The other idea is connected with Tertullian who defended the idea that the soul is propagated the same as the body. From this it was argued that sin can also be propagated.¹

Clement and Origen developed the idea that original sin is lodged in the body and the sensuous nature and not in the soul. Corruption, therefore, descends from Adam; but the soul, a pre-existent spiritual nature from the angelic sphere, is not guilty unless it yields to temptation of its own free will. Although this doctrine was modified by the fathers of the Antiochian and the later Alexandrian schools and by Jerome's idea of the origin of the soul, it continued to be the dominant idea in the East and contained the germs of Pelagianism.²

Tertullian developed traces of traducianism which he found in the West; and according to his view, man's soul as well as his body is procreated. From this it was argued that sin is propagated; and thus since man's soul has innate sinfulness, it has no tendency or inclination toward holiness until acted upon by the Spirit of God. The origin and progression of the desire for holiness is solely by the Spirit of God. Tertullian, however, only opened the way for these doctrines which found their greatest development during the time of

¹Easton, loc. cit.

²loc. cit.

Augustine.¹

The Pelagian Controversy

Pelagius. Pelagius was a native of Britain, who, during a considerably lengthy stay in Rome, gained the high regard of all for his purity of manners, piety and scholarship.² Two of the things which may be regarded as influencing the development of his doctrinal views were the teachings of the Eastern Church concerning the freedom and moral responsibility of man and the perversion of truth in the West where the doctrines of human depravity and the necessity of divine grace were made a cloak for practical ungodliness.³

As for the ideas of Pelagius, the following quotation gives a good summary:

Marius Mercator, in his Commonitorium adversus haeresin Pelagii et Coelestii, published in 429, records the charges brought against Coelestius on this occasion [412 council of Carthage] by Paulinus. They are the following, as quoted by Worter: '1. That Adam was created mortal, and would have died whether he had sinned or not. 2. That Adam's sin injured himself alone, and not the human race. 3. That new-born infants are in the same condition in which Adam was before his transgression. 4. That since neither by the death nor transgression of Adam the whole human race dies, so neither will the whole human race rise again from the dead on account of Christ's resurrection. 5. That the law guides into the kingdom of heaven as well as the Gospel. 6. That there were men who lived without sin (impeccabiles, i. e. sine peccato) before the advent of our Lord.' Thus far quoting Mercator, Worter continues: 'If we add, 7. That the grace of God is not absolutely necessary to lead men to holiness; and, 8. That grace is

¹Easton, "Pelagianism" op. cit., pp. 868-869.

²"Augustine," op. cit., p. 543.

³Easton, op. cit., p. 869.

given to men in proportion to their merit, we will then have a pretty complete summary of the doctrines taught by Pelagius and his followers.¹

Neander considered the second and third of the propositions listed by Mercator to be basic, and that other propositions were deduced from these. Neander thought it probable that none of these deduced propositions were asserted by Coelestus in the same form as alleged, and that some of them were attributed to him only by inference.² The error of Pelagius and his follower Coelestus lay in their denial of the corruption of human nature, and their consequent belief in the natural ability of man to obey the divine commands.³

Augustine. Augustine was born November 13, 354, at Tagaste in Numidia. His mother was a Godly woman who sought her son's spiritual welfare, but his father was more concerned with earthly knowledge. In his early life Augustine became entangled with Manichaeism and immoral habits. Under the influence of Ambrose, he fell into a state of deep conviction and finally was converted upon reading a verse from the Pauline epistles. He was consecrated Bishop of Hippo in 395. His later years were spent in writing. Many of these writings were treatises against the Pelagians.⁴

¹Der Pelagianismus nach seinem Ursprunge und seiner Lehre, (ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Dogmas von der Gnade und Freiheit) quoted in Easton, op. cit., pp. 869-870.

²Augustus Neander, General History of the Christian Religion and Church; trans. by Joseph Torrey (third Am. ed., Boston, Crocker & Brewster, 1852), II, 580-581.

³Ibid., p. 578.

⁴"Augustine," op. cit., pp. 540-541.

Augustine believed that the fall caused human nature to be totally corrupted and deprived it of all ability and inclination to do good. His views of grace may be briefly stated as follows: 1. Divine grace is necessary for man's obedience to the divine will. 2. Man is unable to co-operate in the renovation of his moral nature. 3. Grace is irresistible. 4. Grace is given to only part of the human race, that is to those who manifest the fruits of grace in their sanctification. 5. Perseverance is secured to all on whom grace is bestowed.¹

Thus in Pelagius' view the fall had no effect upon Adam's posterity, and therefore grace was not absolutely necessary in order for man to live a holy life. Augustine's view was the direct opposite. Adam's posterity was totally corrupt as a result of the fall, and therefore the only means of man living a holy life was by the grace of God.

The Course of Controversy. In 411 Pelagius and his follower Coelestus went to North Africa. After sending a letter of greeting to Augustine, Pelagius left Coelestus at Carthage and proceeded to Palestine. Coelestus sought the office of presbyter, and upon examination was suspected of heresy. A council of the Church of Carthage was called in 412, and Coelestus was condemned.

Orosius, a young Spanish ecclesiastic, carried the news to Bethlehem, where he went to study.² Orosius' report stirred Jerome

¹"Augustine," Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, op. cit., p. 543.

²Easton, "Pelagianism," op. cit., pp. 869-870.

into action, and he lost no time in writing Dialogi contra Pelagianos. In this work he dealt with the question of whether man could be without sin. To settle the controversy between Jerome and Pelagius, Bishop Johannes convened the synod of Jerusalem.¹ This synod, which was assembled in 415, considered Pelagius to be orthodox. Another council was assembled at Diospolis (Lydda) in the same year, and again Pelagius was declared orthodox. Two reasons for his escape were that the Eastern Church had not clearly defined sin and grace, and their anthropology was still that of the second and third centuries.²

In the West Augustine stirred the church to investigate the matter and published De gestis Pelagii. Other works concerning the controversy were also published by him during the next twenty years. In 416 two provincial synods held at Mileum and Carthage both condemned the Pelagians. The Bishop of Rome, Innocent, concurred in their findings.³

After being thus condemned, Pelagius prepared a statement of his faith to send to Pope Innocent I; but before it reached him, Innocent died. This statement together with an appeal from Coelestus caused Innocent's successor, Zosimus, to reverse Innocent's decision. Not satisfied with this action, a general council in Carthage was held in 418, and this council reaffirmed their earlier position and

¹W. Möller, "Pelagius and the Pelagian Controversies," A Religious Encyclopaedia: or a Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal and Practical Theology (New York, Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1883), III, 1784.

²Easton, op. cit., p. 870.

³Ibid., pp. 870-871.

published nine propositions in opposition to the errors which they condemned. Zosimus was persuaded to reconsider the matter and summoned Coelestus for examination. Coelestus fled, and Zosimus then confirmed the decision of Innocent. Also in 418 the civil authorities pronounced against Pelagianism, and Pelagius passed from the scene. Pelagianism was condemned in the East at the Council of Ephesus in 431.¹

Although Pelagianism was thus condemned in both East and West, a group called Semi-Pelagians sprang up. This group opposed Augustine's extreme view of salvation by grace alone because they concluded that such a view would make the nonelect not responsible for their perdition. Their synergistic view of regeneration was accepted by the Church of Rome and was later vigorously maintained by the Tridentine Theologians. Augustinianism waned until it was given new life by Luther and Calvin.²

The Flacian Controversy

Background. It was brought out in the previous section that Augustinianism waned until given new life by Luther and Calvin. Luther's position was that sin had completely ruined man, so that he is entirely unable to contribute anything to his salvation. In his controversy with Luther, Erasmus advanced the doctrine that there is the possibility of co-operation between the human will and divine grace in the work of conversion. At first Melancthon agreed with Luther, but later he took the position that human liberty as well as

¹Ibid., pp. 871-872.

²Ibid., p. 872.

divine necessity is a factor of conversion, thus agreeing with Erasmus' idea. The third edition of Melancthon's Loci maintains that man after the fall retains a measure of freedom to obey the divine law, but needs the aid of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the law. Three causes work together in every good action; these are the Word of God, the Holy Spirit and the human will. This synergistic idea was included in the Leipsic Interim as follows: "God does not operate on man as on a block, but draws him in such a way that his will co-operates."¹

The Course of the Controversy. In 1555, Johann Pfeffinger, professor and pastor at Leipsic, advocated in a polemical address the same idea as was expressed in the Interim. In 1558, Amsdorf contended against Pfeffinger, saying that no man could, by his own power, prepare himself to receive grace. This was not Pfeffinger's idea, for he had said that the Holy Spirit must arouse the will, and then it must do its part in bringing about conversion.²

Flacius brought the controversy out of the personal realm and carried it into the schools.³ In 1558, he wrote his Refutation of Pfeffinger's Propositions which declared that man has no more part in his conversion than a block of wood or stone has in becoming a

¹"Synergism," Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature (New York, Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1894), I, 88.

²Loc. cit.

³Loc. cit.

statue.¹ Man is even worse than a black, for he is not merely passive but resists and is hostile to the work of God.² Flacius spent two days defending his postulates at a disputation held at Jena.³ This took place November 10-11, 1559.⁴ The recently founded University of Jena now became the center for the attack upon the synergists, who had their headquarters at Wittenberg and Leipsic.⁵

The next step in the controversy was the publishing of the Weimar Book of Confutations by Flacius. This document served to refute the errors of the time and placed the support of the duke of Saxony on the side of orthodoxy. It also caused the temporary downfall of Strigel. He had been compelled to help with the first draft of the book, but he opposed the improvements suggested by Flacius and wrote against the work as it appeared. For this he was thrown into prison, but he was soon released in deference to public opinion.⁶

A disputation between Flacius and Strigel was called for by Duke Johann Friedrich, and this was held at Weimar August 2-8, 1560. At this disputation Flacius held that conversion takes place during

¹G. Frank, "Synergism," A Religious Encyclopaedia: or a Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology (New York, Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1883), III, 2260.

²G. Kawerau, "Synergism and Synergistic Controversy," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (New York, Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1911), XI, 224.

³"Synergism," op. cit., p. 88.

⁴Kawerau, loc. cit.

⁵Frank, loc. cit.; "Synergism," loc. cit.

⁶"Synergism," loc. cit.

a brief period of repentance and endowment with faith, the natural will is passive, but a new will is originated by the "gift of faith." Strigel considered conversion to be a process which continues throughout life and is accomplished by action of the human will in every phase.¹ Flacius asserted that original sin is part of the substance of man and not an accident. He refused to retract this statement, and the favor of the court waned. The Flacians raged against all who did not support them, and this resulted in the dismissal of Flacius and his followers on December 10, 1561.²

On March 3, 1562, Strigel brought forth his Declaratio in which he distinguished between the "power" to please God, which was lost in the fall, and the "capacity" for divine calling, by which he is able to assent to the Word with the help of the Holy Spirit and to retain the blessing of grace once it is acquired. This was accepted and Strigel was restored to his professorship. To please a refractory portion of the clergy, the superintendent, Johann Stossel, brought out a Superdeclaratio, which required only a conditional signature. This only made the controversy worse, and the refractory clergymen were removed. Strigel, who was not satisfied with the Superdeclaratio withdrew to Leipsic.³ Some of the Melancthonian party were then called to Jena; but when a new duke came to the throne in 1567, they

¹Kawerau, op. cit., p. 225.

²"Synergism," Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, op. cit., p. 88.

³Kawerau, loc. cit.

retired, and members of the Flacian party took their places.¹

A colloquy was held at Altenburg, October 21, 1568, to restore peace to the church, but this was a futile attempt.² The men from Wittenberg broke off the discussion, and the Jena theologians had to be content with a written protest made up of the old objections.³

The duke then had the corpus doctrinae Thuringicum drawn up, which held that man had no spiritual power left after the fall. The will can do no good and is passive in conversion. Conversion is a resuscitation from spiritual death.⁴

The controversy was brought to a close by the Formula of Concord which favored the Flacian view substantially,⁵ but rejected, as a Manichean error, the identification of original sin with substance.⁶

Thus in favoring the Flacians, the old Augustinian position concerning man's natural condition and the impossibility of co-operating in his salvation was upheld.

The Arminian Controversy

Background. During the Reformation, Calvin and others not

¹Frank, "Synergism," op. cit., p. 2260.

²"Synergism," op. cit., p. 88.

³Kawerau, loc. cit.

⁴Frank, loc. cit.; "Synergism," loc. cit.

⁵"Synergism," loc. cit.

⁶Kawerau, op. cit., p. 225.

only revived, but also extended Augustine's doctrine of unconditional predestination.¹ James Arminius, with his doctrine of conditional election led the natural and necessary reaction to his extreme view which threatened the universality of divine grace.²

Arminius. Arminius was born at Oudewater in Holland, October 10, 1560. His father died during his infancy, and his mother was killed by the Spaniards when he was about fifteen. Among the protectors who cared for him were Theodorus Amelius and Peter Bertius. Amelius sent him to school in Utrecht, and Bertius sent him to the University of Leyden where he studied for six years. The directors of the merchants of Amsterdam sent him to Geneva to study in 1582. He spent some time studying at Basle and made a trip to Rome before being recalled to Amsterdam, where he was ordained in 1588.³

Course of the Controversy. In 1589, Theodore Koornhert published a number of works in which he attacked the doctrine of predestination as taught by Calvin and Beza. In an attempt to obviate Koornhert's objections, some ministers of Delft proposed a change in Beza's doctrine which would make it sublapsarian rather than supralapsarian. Lydius, a professor at Franeker, to whom the book con-

¹"Arminianism," Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature (New York, Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1895), I, 412.

²(A. F. L. A.) Pelt, "Arminianism, Historical," A Religious Encyclopaedia: or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology (New York, Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1882), I, 113.

³"Arminianism," op. cit., pp. 412-413.

taining this proposal was sent, asked Arminius to answer the work.¹

As Arminius pondered the question, his own views were changed.

A sermon on Romans 7:14 brought a charge of Pelagianism, but this was stilled by his pledge not to teach contrary to the catechism of Heidelberg and the confession of the Church of the Netherlands.

Another sermon on Romans nine brought fresh investigations and disputations, but these served only to make Arminius more firmly convinced that the Calvinistic views of predestination and grace were mistaken.²

When two of the professors of Leyden died in 1602, the curators called Arminius. After being reconciled with Gomarus, who had protested his appointment, he took up his duties in 1603.³ In February, 1604, Arminius set forth certain theses concerning predestination.

The sum of these views is as follows:

Divine predestination is the decree of God in Christ by which he has decreed with himself from eternity to justify, adopt, and gift with eternal life, to the praise of his glorious grace, the faithful whom he has decreed to gift with faith. On the other hand, reprobation is the decree of the anger or severe will of God, by which he has determined from eternity, for the purpose of showing his anger and power, to condemn to eternal death, as placed out of union with Christ, the unbelieving who, by their own fault and the just judgment of God, are not to believe.⁴

Gomarus openly attacked these theses the following October, and from

¹Ibid., p. 413.

²Pelt, op. cit., p. 143.

³H. C. Rogge, "Arminius, Jacobus (Jakob Hermanns), and Arminianism," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (New York, Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1908), I, 297.

⁴"Arminianism," op. cit., p. 414.

then on the controversy raged throughout the remainder of Arminius' life and beyond. Deputies from churches all over Holland and from the Synod of Leyden demanded a conference concerning his opinions, preachers attacked him as a Pelagian and a synod was planned to settle the dispute. In 1608, a conference between Arminius and Gomarus was held before the Supreme Court of the Hague.¹ This court ruled that since their differences were not concerned with the main points of salvation, each should bear with the other, but Gomarus would not accept this decision.² Later that year, Arminius gave an account of his opinions to the States at the Hague,³ and in August, 1609, Arminius and Gomarus, with four ministers for each, were invited by the States of Holland to negotiate for a settlement. The deliberations, which were oral at first and later in writing, were brought to a close by the death of Arminius⁴ in October, 1609.⁵

Arminius' death was by no means the close of the controversy, for both the clergy and the laity were divided into two hostile armies. The Gomarists had the advantage in numbers, but the Arminians had the advantage in scholarship and the support of the leading statesmen.

¹loc. cit.

²Rogge, op. cit., p. 297.

³"Arminianism," Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, op. cit., p. III.

⁴Rogge, loc. cit.

⁵"Arminianism," loc. cit.

A petition, called the "Remonstrance," which was presented to the States of Holland and West Friesland in 1610, gave the name of Remonstrants to the Arminians. The Gomarists were called Contra-Remonstrants because they answered with a "Counter-Remonstrance."¹ Pelt gives the following summary of the articles contained in the "Remonstrance":

The first of these articles reads: 'By an eternal and inscrutable decree, before the foundation of the world, God ordained to save in Christ, and through Christ, from out of the human race, which is fallen and subject to sin, those who by the grace of the Holy Spirit believe in His Son, and who, by the same grace, persevere unto the end in that faith and the obedience of that faith,' etc. The second article says that Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all and each one, etc.; the third, that man of himself and by the power of good, etc.; the fourth, that the grace of God, though not irresistible, is the beginning, the progress, and the perfection, of every thing a good man does or thinks, etc.; and the fifth, that those who are grafted into Christ, and partake of his vivifying spirit, have the means by which to fight against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and to obtain victory by the aid of the grace of the Holy Spirit, etc.²

The "Counter-Remonstrance" was not so moderate in expression, and the attempts at negotiation only made the controversy more bitter.³ The attempts at reconciliation by the authorities included a conference at the Hague in 1611, a discussion at Delft in 1613, and an edict enjoining peace in 1614.⁴ The Gomarists would not abide by the civil

¹Ibid., p. 416.

²Pelt, "Arminianism, Historical," op. cit., pp. 143-144.

³Ibid., p. 144.

⁴"Arminianism," Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, op. cit., p. 414.

injunction, and the political parties became involved. Maurice of Orange, a monarchist, favored the Gomarists, and Oldenbarneveldt was on the side of the Remonstrants.

To stop the increasing violence, a synod was convened at Dort, November 13, 1618--May 9, 1619. The chairman of the assembly, Bogermann, was opposed to the Remonstrants, and the assembly took upon themselves the position of accuser and judge. The five articles were condemned, the ministers deposed and those who would not be silent were banished. Oldenbarneveldt was executed, though mainly for political reasons. The defense which the deposed ministers who gathered in Amsterdam prepared, together with the acts of the synod, which were published in 1620, made a favorable impression on the government. In 1625, Prince Henry succeeded Maurice, and the Arminians were given tolerance. In 1630, they were given permission to live where they pleased and to build churches and schools.¹

In 1621-1622, Simon Episcopius published a twenty-five chapter Confessio which set forth the Arminian faith clearly and succinctly.² Polyander and four other Leyden professors answered by publishing a Censura of the confession, and in turn, Episcopius replied, in 1630, with his Apologia pro Confessione. The Confessio had disappointed the Gomarists, for it had ably answered the charge of Socinianism which had been brought against the Arminians.³

¹Pelt, op. cit., p. 144.

²Loc. cit.

³"Arminianism," op. cit., p. 444.

The Lutherans were sympathetic to the Arminian movement, and even the victory of the Gomarists did not last. Ebrard says:

. . . this outward show of victory was really a defeat; for the true elements of Arminianism were not killed at Dort, but grew up, silently but surely, within the bosom of the orthodox Reformed Church.¹

Thus Arminianism, which started out as a reaction against extreme Calvinism and was soundly defeated by the Calvinistic group at the Synod of Dort, gradually gained favor and even acted as a purge to extreme Calvinism.

Other Forms and Developments of Arminianism

In England Arminian doctrines were held prior to the time of Arminius. The Articles of Religion were so set up as to leave liberty of conscience to believe either the Arminian or the Calvinistic way of thinking. The Necessary Erudition of a Christian Man (1543), which Cramer helped to draw up just prior to the compilation of the articles, is certainly not Calvinistic. Under leaders such as Laud and Juxon, Arminianism became entangled with politics; and as it was connected with the king's party during the civil war, seemed to perish with the king and the Church of England. The Arminianism of Laud and that of the divines of Charles II was not in harmony with that of the Dutch leaders. Arminius would have considered Laud's combination of Arminian type doctrines and sacramental efficacy as superstitious, and the Arminianism of the later group of divines minimized grace and exalted the example of Christ. Pure Arminianism was revived in England by

¹Ebrard, Christliche Dogmatik, I, 38, quoted in "Arminianism," op. cit., p. 444.

the Wesleyan Reformation.¹

The Wesleyans of the British Empire and the Methodists of America are Arminians and heartily oppose the Calvinistic doctrine of absolute predestination. The main points at which they oppose Calvinism are as follows: 1. While they uphold God's supremacy, they consider God's foreknowledge as preceding his volitions rather than a result of them. 2. God controls natural phenomena, but moral occurrences are contingent upon the actions of his creatures. 3. Man cannot accomplish his own salvation, but he can choose to be saved.

Especially they believe, that man is born with corrupt moral affections, and therefore is of himself unable either to love or to serve God acceptably, yet by virtue of the universal atonement of Christ, and the general distribution of the Holy Spirit, such gracious aid is supernaturally afforded to every man as is sufficient to enable him to overcome the bias of his depraved affections, and the weakness or perverseness of his will; so that, if he chooses, he may, through the appointed means, lay hold upon the salvation of the gospel.²

3. Innate depravity of the heart but not the imperfection of the present state of probation can be completely removed in this life. 4. Man can lapse from grace and be lost, but the same assistance which made him a child of God can keep him if he co-operates.³

Before closing this section on Arminianism, it should be explained that the title has been applied to all sorts of movements ranging from those advocating unwarranted freedom and toleration to

¹"Arminianism," Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, op. cit., pp. 416-417.

²James Strong, "Arminianism (Wesleyan)," A Religious Encyclopaedia: or a Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology (New York, Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers), I, 145.

³Ibid., pp. 145-146.

those merely repudiating Calvinism.

The name itself was made to cover many things for which Arminianism proper was not responsible--rationalistic tendencies of thought, depreciation of the serious nature of sin, indifference to vital piety, and laxity of morals.¹

Thus the term Arminianism has been greatly misused.

On the other hand, Arminian doctrine concerning predestination has been diffused in a proper manner throughout the world. It coincides with that of the German Lutherans and is held by Wesleyan Methodist churches throughout the world, by a large portion of the Church of England, and is also believed by several of the smaller groups.² Beckwith says that "it has thoroughly leavened the Christian thought of America."³

Arminian type doctrines were held in England prior to the time of Arminius. During the time of Laud and Charles II, Arminianism was held in corrupt forms and was not restored to its true form until the Wesleyan Reformation. The title Arminianism has been applied to various movements which were not in harmony with Arminianism proper, but on the other hand it has been diffused in proper form throughout the world.

¹Clarence Augustine Beckwith, "Arminius, Jacobus (Jakob Hermanss), and Arminianism," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (New York, Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1908), I, 297.

²"Arminianism," op. cit., p. 418.

³Loc. cit.

Summary and Conclusions

Most of the early fathers believed that man could cooperate in obtaining his salvation, but needed the grace of God to help him accomplish salvation. Clement and Origin's idea that sin is lodged in the body together with Jerome's idea that each soul is created from nothing laid the basis for Pelagianism, and Tertullian's idea that each soul is propagated the same as the body opened the way for the development of Augustinianism.

Pelagius held that God's grace is not absolutely necessary for man's salvation. This idea grew out of his belief that Adam's fall had no direct effect upon his posterity. Augustine believed that man was totally corrupted by the fall, and so God's grace is the only means of man coming into salvation. The final outcome of the controversy was that Pelagius was condemned and passed from the scene of history. His ideas were modified, however, and the resultant Semi-Pelagianism became the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Reformation brought a revival of Augustinianism, but Melancthon soon began to moderate his views, and came to believe that man retained a measure of freedom toward the good and could thereby co-operate with the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in accomplishing salvation. After a bitter controversy, the matter was settled by the Formula of Concord which favored the Flacian view. Thus the Lutherans followed Augustine in their beliefs concerning man's natural condition and ability to co-operate in salvation.

Arminius, though himself a Calvinist, turned from the extreme Calvinistic position concerning predestination. He had been called on

to refute attacks which had been made against this position, and during the course of his study came to believe that election is conditional, and that grace is universal. As he began to propound his new views, he was attacked by Gomarus and soon the controversy was widespread. Arminius died during the heat of the controversy, but his followers carried on. They were condemned by the Synod of Dort. Although thus condemned, they gradually won back tolerance and finally permission to live where they pleased and to build churches and schools.

Arminian type doctrines were found in England even before the time of Arminius. During the time of Laud and the divines of Charles II corrupt forms of Arminianism were held, and the true form was not restored until the time of the Wesleyan Reformation. Although the name has been misused by applying it to a wide range of movements which were not in harmony with true Arminianism, the true doctrines of Arminianism have been spread over the world.

Thus man has struggled with the problem of his own place in salvation in three great controversies. Although in each case the council action has always favored the Augustinian view, the results of these councils have not always stood in practice. The Pelagian controversy served to purge Pelagianism of its extreme errors, and it reappeared in the form of Semi-pelagianism. Arminianism was condemned by the Synod of Dort, but gradually won back favor and has become spread over the whole world. Only the results of the Flacian controversy have remained essentially unchanged.

CHAPTER III

A COMPARISON OF CALVINISTIC, LUTHERAN AND ARMINIAN DOCTRINES

Introduction

How can man's free will and God's sovereign grace be harmonized in the salvation process? This is a problem that has perplexed the minds of theologians down through the centuries. Basically this was the problem which brought about the controversies between Pelagius and Augustine, between Melancthon's followers and the Flacian school, and between Calvinists and Arminians. It was the purpose of this chapter to compare three systems of doctrine, namely, Calvinism, Lutheranism and Arminianism which in some way were connected with these controversies; and from the results obtained to determine what portion of the salvation process can be attributed to God's grace and also that portion for which man is responsible.

In handling this problem the following questions will be considered. In what position was the grace of God placed in each of these systems? In what way is man responsible for his own salvation? To answer these main questions, the problems of man's condition before salvation, the conversion process, election, universal grace, irresistible grace, and perseverance and works will be considered.

The material for the Calvinistic position was drawn from Calvin's Institutes and A Compend of Calvin's Institutes by Hugh Thomson Kerr. The material for Lutheranism was drawn from the articles on "Conversion" and "Synergism" in the Lutheran Encyclopedia which was edited by Jacobs

& Haas. The Lutheran articles contain numerous quotations from the Formula of Concord, which was supposed to have settled the Flacian controversy, and the Book of Concord which sets forth the Lutheran doctrine. The material for the Arminian position was drawn from A Theological Compend of the Works of James Arminius which was compiled by Bern M. Warren.

Comparison of the Doctrines

Man's Condition Before Conversion. In answering the question about man's condition before conversion, Calvin turned to the words of Christ and quoted John 3:6. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." It was upon this fact that the Lord based his argument for the new birth. Man is entirely carnal, and it is only through regeneration that man can have anything of the Spirit.¹ In another place Calvin stated

We are not afraid to allow what Paul very strenuously asserts, that all, without exception, are depraved and addicted to wickedness . . .²

This evil state was brought about by Adam's transgression which almost obliterated the divine image in man.³ Man still has will, but it is turned entirely toward evil.⁴

In considering man as totally depraved, Calvin found himself faced with the question of how some men pursue virtue and live com-

¹Hugh Thomson Kerr, ed., A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin (Philadelphia, Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1939), p. 48.

²Ibid., p. 53.

³Ibid., p. 96.

⁴Ibid., p. 49.

paratively good lives on the mere dictates of nature. He answered this by saying that divine grace restrains these men without purifying them. It is necessary that this be so; for if every man were to follow freely his natural inclinations toward evil, it would not be hard to imagine the results.¹

As will be explained later, another aspect of man's life before conversion is that those who are destined to be converted are preserved from falling too deeply into sin--that is to become unpardonable.²

The Lutheran view of natural man as presented by professor Graebner is not as severe as Calvin's though it leans in that direction. He quoted from the Formula of Concord, to show that it rejected the idea that man has something good in him and can begin to work in spiritual things "or to co-work for something good."³ However, in another place he stated that natural man is in a measure capable of attending upon the means of grace. This is not a part of conversion but merely preparatory acts which convict the man of his sinful state and give him an historical understanding of the truths of Gospel conversion.⁴ Although Professor Stellhorn, another Lutheran, believes that man's mind and will are completely corrupt, he still has a measure of free

¹ Kerr, A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

²Ibid., p. 137.

³August L. Graebner, "Synergism," The Lutheran Encyclopedia, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 477.

⁴August L. Graebner, "Conversion," The Lutheran Encyclopedia, ibid., p. 136.

will, and his personality is not annihilated.¹

The Book of Concord, as quoted by Stellhorn, gives the following view of natural man:

Although man's reason of natural understanding has still indeed a dim spark of the knowledge that there is a God, as also (Rom. 1:19 sqq.) of the doctrine of the Law: yet it is so ignorant, blind and perverted that, when even most able and learned men read or hear the gospel of the Son of God and promise of eternal salvation, they cannot, from their own powers, perceive, apprehend, understand, or believe and regard it true, but the more diligence and earnestness they employ in order to comprehend, with their reason, the spiritual things, the less they understand or believe, and, before they become enlightened or taught of the Holy Ghost, they regard all this as foolishness or fiction.²

Thus Professor Graebner and the Book of Concord were in agreement in that though man can know about the things of God, he can do nothing toward the accomplishment of his salvation.

Arminius paints a picture of natural man which is fully as dark as that of Calvin and somewhat darker than that of the Lutherans. In his view man's free will has been lost, his mind has been darkened and his heart has been turned toward evil. The following series of quotations set forth these ideas very clearly.

In this state, the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost. And its powers are not only debilitated useless unless they are assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace.³

¹F(rederick) W. S(tellhorn), "Conversion," The Lutheran Encyclopedia, ibid., p. 138.

²Ibid., p. 139.

³Bern M. Warren, A Theological Compend of the Works of James Arminius, a dissertation submitted to the faculty of Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois, May, 1954, p. 191.

The mind of man, in this 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.¹

To the darkness of the mind succeeds the perverseness of the affections and of the heart, according to which it hates and has an aversion to that which is truly good and pleasing to God; but it loves and pursues what is evil.²

From these quotations it is evident that man is not only totally unable to do that which is good, but also has a bent to that which is evil.

Thus all three positions are essentially in agreement, for all assert that man is evil and cannot accomplish salvation by his own power. In its attempt to maintain a measure of free will, Lutheranism shows itself to be slightly more moderate than the other two views at this point. With man in such a helpless state, the question of how conversion can be accomplished naturally arises.

Conversion. In Calvin's theology conversion is the process by which man's evil will is changed into a will for good. This is entirely the work of grace. Human will attends the conversion process; but since it is only as the Lord reforms the will that it is able to attend, man cannot be given any credit for applying the will.³ Man's part in conversion is repentance⁴ or the change of mind and intention;⁵

¹Ibid., p. 192.

²Loc. cit.

³Kerr, A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin, op. cit., p. 50.

⁴Ibid., p. 94.

⁵Ibid., p. 96.

but since this is the product of faith,¹ and faith is the gift of God,² this also depends entirely upon God.

The Formula of Concord attributes the work of conversion solely to the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.³ After the Holy Spirit has begun His work through the word and sacraments, man can co-operate in a weak manner. This is not by his natural powers but through the power given to him.⁴ Professor Stellhorn quoted references such as Matt. 13:15; Luke 22:32; Acts 3:19; 9:35; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 26:20; II Cor. 3:16; I Thess. 1:9 and others to show that conversion is an act of man. He also quotes such references as Acts 3:19; 26:20; Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 11:20; Acts 2:38; 17:30; Rev. 2:5; 16; 3:3; 19 to show that repentance is an act of man. On the other hand Acts 5:31; 11:18; II Tim. 2:25 show that God gives repentance. He concludes that though conversion is an act of man, it is also a creative work of God; and that man can not accomplish it in his own power.⁵

In Arminius' system conversion is the turning from evil, sin and Satan to God. It is closely connected with repentance, which is a "change of mind after reflection," and penitence which is "regret on account of misdeeds." All three of these closely related parts

¹Ibid., p. 94.

²Ibid., p. 93.

³Graebner, "Synergism," op. cit., p. 478.

⁴Loc. cit.

⁵Stellhorn, "Conversion," op. cit., p. 138.

were grouped under the heading of repentance.¹ The manner in which it takes place is as follows:

It results not only from the gracious and efficacious act of God, who bestows repentance, and converts us to himself; but likewise from the act of the penitents themselves, by which turning themselves away from sins, and returning to God, they "walk in newness of living" all the days of their life.²

As in the other systems, grace is a necessity:

It is an infusion (both into the human understanding and into the will and affections,) of all those gifts of the Holy Spirit which appertain to the regeneration and renewing of man--such as faith, hope, charity, &c.; for, without these gracious gifts, man is not sufficient to think, will, or do anything that is good.³

Grace is a free affection of God by which he loves the sinner and for whom he gave his Son, "that whosoever believeth in him might have eternal life." As the gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit illumines and affects the heart so that it might believe; the heart does not necessarily accept, for it can reject the grace which is offered.⁴

From this it appears that conversion is accomplished in much the same way in all three systems. Man in one sense co-operates, but he is enabled to do this only as grace has preceded his co-operation.

Election. Who can be saved? Calvinism places this question entirely in the hands of God. He has determined, according to his his own will, whom he would have to be saved, and this is entirely

¹Warren, A Theological Compend of the Works of James Arminius, op. cit., p. 230.

²Ibid., p. 236.

³Ibid., pp. 227-228.

⁴Ibid., p. 227.

apart from human merit.¹ Calvin rejected the idea that election is based upon God's foreknowledge of character and said that those who do so obscure God's election and place the source in a different cause.²

Lutheranism opposed the Calvinistic doctrine at this point and placed the responsibility for the choice in the hands of man. In the words of the Formula of Concord:

We should be certain, from and according to the promise, that the preaching and hearing of the Word of God is an office and work of the Holy Ghost, where by he is certainly efficacious and works in our hearts (2Cor. 2:11ff.) But where such a man despises the instrument of the Holy Ghost, and will not hear, no injustice befalls him, if the Holy Ghost do not enlighten him. . . .³

God draws the man whom he wishes to convert in such a way as to convert him; but if the man resists, conversion will not take place.⁴ Thus man can choose in a negative sense by rejection, but he cannot choose positively to be converted.

Arminius believed that election was conditioned on whether man would believe or not. This can be seen in the series of decrees, which according to Arminius, were made by God. The first decree was that by which God appointed Jesus Christ as saviour to expiate sin, recover lost salvation and dispense salvation. The second decree was to receive and save those who repent, believe and persevere and to condemn the

¹John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion trans. by John Allen (sixth Am. ed., rev. & cor., Philadelphia, Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.), II, 149.

²Ibid., p. 150.

³Graebner, "Conversion," op. cit., p. 138.

⁴Stellhorn, "Conversion," op. cit., p. 140.

impenitent and unbelievers. The third decree was to provide the necessary, sufficient and efficacious means for repentance and faith. The fourth decree was concerned with the salvation or damnation of particular persons. This decree rested on God's foresight of which ones, by the aid of preventing and subsequent grace, would believe and persevere.¹ Election, then, depends entirely upon man's choice, for God has decreed that it should be so.

Although all three systems differ at this point, a serious difference separates Calvinism on the one hand and Lutheranism and Arminianism on the other. In Lutheranism grace is offered and is efficacious unless man rejects, in Arminianism grace is offered and man can choose either to believe or remain in unbelief, but in Calvinism the choice is entirely in the hands of God. This leads to the question as to whether or not grace is directed toward all men.

Universal Grace. In Calvin's system grace is not directed toward all men. This was brought out in his reply to the objection against Calvinism that God would be inconsistent if he invited all men to receive him and then only chose the elect.² To Calvin the objection was false in two respects. In the first place, God can withhold doctrine from certain places just as he withholds rain (Amos 4:7; 8:11). Calvin also gives as proof the fact that Paul was forbidden to preach in Asia and turned from Bithynia, but was called

¹Warren, A Theological Compend of the Works of James Arminius, op. cit., pp. 124-125.

²Kerr, A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin, op. cit., p. 131.

into Europe (Acts 16:6-10). He referred to Isaiah 8:16 ff., as more fully indicating that the promises of salvation are for the elect only.¹ The passage reads as follows:

Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.
And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face
from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.²

Thus he says the promises are not for all men indiscriminately, but only for the elect of which "he declares that they shall be his disciples."³ Hence he calls the doctrine that salvation is offered in an effectual way to all, a "corrupt prostitution of that which is declared to be reserved particularly for the children of the church."⁴ In the second place, though the gospel is addressed to all men, faith is not given to all. All have not been given eyes and ears with which to appropriate, so why should God even call those whom he knows will not come? Thus God not only withholds the gospel from some, but he also does not call those whom he knows will not come.⁵

In the Lutheran portion of the section on election it was brought out that the Holy Spirit works in men's hearts in an efficacious way, and the only reason why some are not saved is that they continue in resistance. A quotation from Graebner brings out the same idea:

¹Loc. cit.

²Isaiah 8:16-17, A.V.

³Kerr, loc. cit.

⁴Loc. cit.

⁵Loc. cit.

That some are not converted is due only to their own hardness of heart, their obstinate resistance to the means of grace; and that others are converted is owing to the grace of God alone (Hos. 13:9)¹

This indicates that the atonement is offered to all; for those who resist must have something to resist, and that grace is provided for those who are saved is obvious.

Arminius' position concerning universal grace can be seen from his argument against the Calvinistic denial of grace to a portion of mankind. He says

For when they are taught that the grace of God (which is really necessary to the performance of the least portion of good) is denied to the majority of mankind, according to an absolute and peremptory decree of God . . . it is scarcely possible for any other result to ensue, than that the individual who cannot even with great difficulty work a persuasion within himself of his being elected, should soon consider himself included in the number of the reprobate. From such an apprehension as this, must arise a certain despair of performing righteousness and obtaining salvation.²

An argument such as this shows that he must have believed in universal grace.

Irresistible Grace. It has already been shown that in Calvin's system grace is offered only to those whom God has elected. It should also be explained that those who have been elected have no choice in the matter--that is, they are not free to refuse that grace. Two statements from Calvin's Institutes are sufficient to illustrate this fact.

But Christ only insists on this point--that notwithstanding

¹"Conversion," op. cit., p. 136.

²Warren, A Theological Compend of the Works of James Arminius, op. cit., pp. 289-290.

the defections of vast multitudes, shaking the whole world, yet the counsel of God will be stable and firmer than the heavens, so that election can never fail.¹

The conclusion is, that God creates whom he chooses to be his children by gratuitous adoption; that the cause of this is wholly in himself; because he exclusively regards his own secret determination.²

Thus God chooses and makes whom he would to be Christians, and they have no choice in the matter.

The Lutheran view has already been indicated, for it has been shown that the only reason why some men are not converted is because they resist grace. Thus grace is definitely not irresistible.

Although Arminius ascribed to grace "THE COMMENCEMENT, THE CONTINUANCE AND THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL GOOD," he did not consider it to be irresistible. He says

. . . I believe, according to the scriptures, that many persons resist the Holy Spirit and reject the grace that is offered.³

Thus Arminius and the Lutherans believe in resistible grace as opposed to Calvin's belief in irresistible grace.

Perseverance and Works. Calvin considered perseverance to be the free gift of God.⁴ In a sense this applies even to those who have not been saved, for those whom God has determined to save are preserved

¹Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, op. cit., p. 157.

²Ibid., p. 158.

³Warren, op. cit., pp. 228-229.

⁴Kerr, A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin, op. cit., p. 51.

"from falling into unpardonable blasphemy."¹ After a Christian is adopted by the remission of sins, he is kept by the same mercy that pardoned him. Because the person realizes many infirmities, the mercy must be continuous; for divine mercy would be in vain if provided only once.²

Repentance, which Calvin apprehended to be regeneration, has for its end the restoration of the divine image; but this is not something that is completed in a short time, but it is something that is gradually accomplished and terminated only by death.³

In another place Calvin wrote:

God begins the good work in us by exciting in our hearts a love, desire, and ardent pursuit of righteousness; or to speak more properly, by bending, forming, and directing our hearts towards righteousness, but he completes it by confirming us to perseverance.⁴

After man is converted, his will is still not free. Though he may seem to have choice in matters which do not pertain to spiritual things, even in these God's providence may overrule; so that the Christian's liberty is really controlled by the influence of God.⁵

Any good in the work that he may perform must come directly from the grace of God; for anything that man may do, no matter how good, is affected by some taint from the flesh. If some perfect work

¹Ibid., p. 137.

²Ibid., p. 159.

³Ibid., pp. 96-97.

⁴Ibid., p. 50.

⁵Ibid., p. 52.

could be accomplished, it would be nullified by the committal of sin.¹

In the Lutheran system, man, after his conversion, exercises repentance daily.² In so far as his will is renewed, he wills the good, delights in the law of God (Rom. 7:22) and does the good as he is moved by the Spirit.³

Stellhorn includes in his article "Conversion," a quotation from Huelsemann which indicates the Lutheran view of perseverance.⁴ According to this quotation, the higher works of grace which follow conversion are not irresistible.⁵ The Formula of Concord says man does good "so long as God by his Holy Spirit, rules, guides, and leads him."⁶ From these statements it follows that man does not necessarily persevere.

On the matter of perseverance, Arminius made it plain that he never taught that man could either totally or finally fall away from faith and perish. He believed that those who were truly grafted into Christ had sufficient powers to overcome all enemies through the grace given by the Holy Spirit. He thought that some scriptures seemed to indicate that a believer could fall away from faith, and that a synod

¹Kerr, A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin, op. cit., p. 114.

²Graebner, "Conversion," op. cit., p. 137.

³Loc. cit.

⁴Op. cit., p. 140. Stellhorn says of Huelsemann that he was from the older school of Lutherans; however, the portion of his statement which is used here does not conflict with post Concord Lutheranism.

⁵Loc. cit.

⁶Graebner, "Synergism", op. cit., p. 478.

should investigate the matter carefully. On the other hand, certain passages which favor unconditional perseverance he considered to be worthy of careful consideration.¹

As to the possibility of regenerated man doing good works, Arminius felt that since man was delivered from sin in regeneration, he is capable of thinking, willing and doing good, but only as he is aided by divine grace.²

Arminius believed in sanctification of the believer and that to deliver him from the dominion of indwelling sin and fit him to serve God in newness of life. He described it as "a gracious act of God," yet it is not an instantaneous act.³ He described the process in the following manner:

This sanctification is not completed in a single moment; but sin, from whose dominion we have been delivered through the cross and the death of Christ, is weakened more and more by daily losses, and the inner man is day by day renewed more and more, while we carry about with us in our bodies, the death of Christ, and the outward man is perishing.⁴

Arminius left the question as to perfection in this life undecided, saying that though he did not deny the possibility, he would rather spend his time praying concerning that which was lacking and admonishing to seek perfection than to enter into contest concerning the matter.⁵

¹Warren, A Theological Compend of the Works of James Arminius, op. cit., pp. 250-251.

²Ibid., p. 195.

³Ibid., pp. 265-267.

⁴Ibid., p. 267.

⁵Ibid., pp. 267-269.

All of these systems agree that man needs assistance in performing good works, but Arminius and the Lutherans held a more optimistic view as to the ability of man in his renewed condition than Calvin did. In their view man was restored so that he could will and do good as he had the help of grace or the Holy Spirit, but Calvin attributed all that was good to grace alone apart from any responsibility on the part of man. The same alignment was found in the matter of perseverance. Calvin believed that perseverance is a gift of God, but the Lutherans and Arminius believed that man could fall away or resist grace.

Summary and Conclusions

All three systems are essentially in agreement on the questions of man's natural condition, the conversion process and to some extent on the matter of works. All hold that natural man is evil and can do nothing toward his salvation by his natural powers. He is able to play a part in the conversion process, but that only as he is aided by the grace of God. After he is converted, he can do good works as he is aided by grace or the Spirit; but the Lutheran and Arminian views are much more optimistic, for they consider man capable of willing to do good, whereas Calvin holds a degraded view of man and says that any good that he might do would be tainted by the flesh or nullified by the committal of some sin.

On the question of election, universal grace, irresistible grace and perseverance, the Lutherans and Arminius hold much the same view, but Calvin's view was in direct opposition to theirs. Although

the Lutherans thought that man had power to resist grace but not to accept it positively, and Arminius held to the choice of believing or remaining in unbelief, they both placed the responsibility for the choice entirely upon man; Calvin on the other hand placed the choice in God's sovereignty. In line with this view of election, Calvin believed in limited grace, irresistible grace and perseverance, but the Lutherans and Arminius believed in universal grace, resistible grace and the possibility of not persevering in grace.

Calvin, then, makes God's grace entirely sovereign and allows no place for man's will in choosing whether he will be saved or not. In such a system man bears no responsibility for his own salvation which is entirely in the hands of God.

The Lutherans and Arminius make God's grace sovereign in that it is the only means by which man may be saved, but they harmonize this grace with man's free will by giving man the power to resist (in the case of the Lutherans) and power to believe or remain in unbelief (in Arminius' system). God's grace is sovereign, but within that sovereignty the power of choice is delegated to individuals thus making them responsible for their salvation.

CHAPTER IV

A BIBLICAL STUDY OF SYNERGISM

Introduction

The problem of how man is saved has been traced through the course of history, particularly that of the three great controversies; and three major systems of doctrine which grew out of these controversies have been compared. The main source of information concerning the problem remains to be considered. If the author were to look into what men have said about that source, he would be able to find information in harmony with all of the three views which have already been discussed; therefore, it was the purpose of this chapter to discover for himself what the Bible has to say concerning this matter.

The problem will be handled by using the same questions as were considered in chapter three; that is the questions of man's natural condition, conversion, election, universal grace, irresistible grace and perseverance and works will be used as tools to answer the main questions of what is God's part in salvation, and for what is man responsible.

A consideration of the whole Bible would be a work of major proportions, therefore, the author has limited himself to Romans 9, 10 and 11 which deal most directly with this problem.

The Biblical Study

Man's Natural Condition. Various verses in the chapters which were chosen for study indicate man's condition before conversion. In

Romans 10:3 Israel was spoken of as being ignorant of God's righteousness. If Israel, to whom belonged the adoption, glory, covenants, law, service of God, promises, fathers and coming of Christ,¹ was ignorant of the righteousness of God, how much more so the Gentiles who had no such advantage. This lack of knowledge made all their zeal for God to no avail.²

Man cannot attain righteousness through his own works, for Israel tried to follow the law of righteousness, but did not attain to righteousness.³

Thus man is both ignorant of God's righteousness and helpless to attain righteousness by his own works even when he has the law to guide him.

Conversion. The way into righteousness or salvation is indicated in Romans 9:32-33, and that is by faith and believing on "Him," which refers to Christ. The third and fourth verses of the tenth chapter bring out the idea of subjecting themselves to the righteousness of God, and that again is by believing in Christ. Man does not need to seek in heaven or among the dead for Christ, but he simply has to believe the word that is preached to him concerning Christ. If he believes in his heart that God has raised Christ from the dead, he has attained unto righteousness through that belief; and if he confesses

¹Romans 9:4-5, A.S.V., All references in this study will be to the American Standard Version of 1901.

²Romans 10:2.

³Romans 9:30-32.

with his mouth that Jesus is his Lord, he has attained salvation through that confession.¹ The message or word of faith is really the gift of God, for it is he who provides the messenger to the ones in need.²

Man in order to be saved needs the provision of grace which is supplied through the preaching of Christ. He must be made righteous through believing the word or message in his heart; and finally, he must acknowledge with his mouth that Jesus is his Lord. Man then plays a definite part in obtaining his salvation, but it is only by accepting that which has been provided for him.

Election. It is evident from these chapters that there certainly is an election by God, however, a careful study is necessary to determine the nature of this election. The first fact that should be noticed is that election applies to a nation.³ This nation of Israel came through especially chosen individuals, namely, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.⁴ Thus God chose or elected a nation and the channels through which the nation came and was developed.

As already indicated, election also applies to individuals. These individuals were not chosen according to their works, but according to the purpose of God and the service which they were to render.⁵

¹Romans 10:6-10.

²Romans 10:14-15.

³Romans 11:28.

⁴Romans 9:6-11.

⁵Romans 9:11-12.

God had mercy on individuals and hardened individuals not according to the individual's willing or working but according to his own choice. This election was concerned with the showing of his power and the publishing of his name throughout the earth and God chooses the ones through whom he is going to do this.¹

Thus God's election of his nation and also that of individuals does not depend upon man's choice or works, but upon the service that God desires them to render.

There is also an election that pertains to salvation. God desired that all Israel would come to him;² but because of their unbelief, God broke off or hardened some of them.³ Before he hardened them, however, he elected that a remnant should be saved according to God's grace,⁴ and Paul testified that there was a remnant in his time.⁵ The election of the remnant and the hardening of the rest had for its purpose the bringing in of the Gentiles and in turn the provoking of Israel to jealousy⁶ that he might show mercy to all.⁷ Thus in one sense God elected that all should be saved, for he was seeking both Jews and Gentiles.

¹Romans 9:14-18.

²Romans 10:21.

³Romans 11:20.

⁴Romans 11:6-8.

⁵Romans 11:5.

⁶Romans 11:11.

⁷Romans 11:30-32.

Romans 9:19-24 presents somewhat of a difficulty. In 9:19-21 Paul was speaking of a vessel made unto honor and another unto dishonor and this in connection with verses 14-18 where God has mercy on whom he will and hardens whom he will according to the service he wants performed. In Romans 9:22-23, he spoke of vessels of wrath fitted for destruction and vessels of mercy prepared for glory, the latter of which refers to those who were saved.¹ Since Paul went from one figure right into the other and spoke of those prepared for glory as vessels of mercy, it would seem that God chose them in the same way as he chose the vessel made for honor, that is he had mercy according to his own choice. There is, however, a definite break between verses 21 and 22. In 21 the vessels are singular in number and are made for honor or dishonor. In verse 22 the vessels are plural in number and are described as those of wrath fitted for destruction and those of mercy fitted for glory. Since there is this definite break; and, as will be explained later, the choice of the one who is to be saved, depends on the individual, then the fitting for wrath and the preparing for glory must refer to classes of people and not to individuals; that is, God ordains one class for destruction and another for glory, but the individuals who make up each of these classes are there because of their own choice. Thus in another sense, God elects to salvation and destruction.

That the choice of the ones who are to be saved depends on the individuals themselves is evident from a number of things. One of

¹Romans 9:24.

these is that the message of good tidings is universal,¹ but because of unbelief part of Israel was broken off.² The condition upon which the Gentiles stood was their faith,³ and even Israel could be restored if they remained not in unbelief.⁴ Thus faith or belief is the condition of salvation. That it is individual faith is clearly seen in Romans 10:12-13. The Lord is rich both to Jews and Greeks (all), and whosoever (individual) calls upon him, that is exercises his privilege of belief,⁵ shall be saved.

That election and salvation should not be taken synonymously is most clearly seen in Romans 11:28, for here Paul spoke of Israel as being, as far as the gospel is concerned, enemies for the Gentiles sake; but beloved for the father's sake. Thus some of the elect were not saved.

Summarizing these various items, God elects individuals and classes of people, such as the nation of Israel, to fulfill his purposes. In the matter of salvation God, in one sense, elects all people to be saved for he seeks both Jews and Gentiles. In another sense the election to salvation is by class only, and the ones who make up that class is conditioned by individual choice.

Although Willey divides his material in a different manner, he

¹Romans 10:18.

²Romans 11:20.

³Romans 11:20.

⁴Romans 11:23.

⁵Romans 10:8-10.

takes the same position with regard to election as worked out by this author.¹

Universal Grace. By bringing together various portions of these chapters and weighing them against one another, Paul's belief in universal grace can be shown. The message was sent out to the ends of the world² which shows that God did not withhold his message. All that the people had to do was to hear and believe.³ God did not withhold his message even from the disobedient, but stretched out his hands to them all day long.⁴ Thus the message was universal in scope.

According to the election of grace, part of Israel was preserved as a remnant, and the rest was hardened.⁵ Although Paul recognized the fact that God had given this hardened group a dullness of spirit and the inability to see and hear,⁶ yet he sought to minister to the Gentiles in such a way as to provoke Israel to jealousy to save some of them.⁷ In doing this he must have considered that grace was provided for the hardened group. Grace was provided for the Gentiles, for

¹H. Orton Wiley, Christian Theology, (Kansas City, Missouri, Beacon Hill Press, 1941), II, 337-340.

²Romans 10:18.

³Romans 10:17.

⁴Romans 10:21.

⁵Romans 11:5-7.

⁶Romans 11:8.

⁷Romans 11:13-14.

mercy was granted to the Gentiles because of the disobedience of Israel.¹ In Romans 10:12-13 it was shown that God is rich to both Jews and Gentiles, and that the Lord would save any that would call upon him. Thus grace was provided for the elected remnant, the hardened group and the Gentiles, and that it was provided for all is shown by the fact that whosoever would call would be saved.

Irresistible Grace. After Paul had explained that salvation is by believing the word of faith which is preached,² he said that all did not hearken to the glad tidings.³ In Romans 10:21, he related how God had spread his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people. Both of these instances show that grace is resistible.

Perseverance and Works. Even after grace has been attained, it is still possible to resist it, for Paul indicated that God's goodness would be manifested to the believing Gentiles as long as they continue in his goodness. If they did not continue, they would be cut off.⁴ Thus it is possible not to persevere in grace.

What man does with his life, that is his works, depends on God. This was shown in the fact that those who preach the gospel are sent.⁵ On the other hand man plays a part, for Paul glorified

¹Romans 11:30.

²Romans 10:8-15.

³Romans 10:16.

⁴Romans 11:22.

⁵Romans 10:15.

his Gentile ministry in an attempt to provoke his own countrymen to jealousy.¹

Summary and Conclusions

Man in his natural condition is ignorant of the righteousness of God and cannot attain righteousness through his own works. He obtains salvation by believing the gospel message which is preached concerning Christ and confessing that Jesus is his Lord. God certainly elects individuals and classes of people to accomplish his purposes, to show his power and to publish his name abroad, but his election to salvation applies to class only. The question of who is to be saved rests upon the individual choice to believe. That all are given a chance to believe can be seen from the facts that the message is universal, and that God is Lord of both Jew and Greek and will accept the ones who call upon him. It can also be seen from the fact that God elected a remnant of Israel to grace and hardened the rest for their disobedience that he might show mercy to the Gentiles; yet would still receive believers from the hardened group, thus including all classes. God's grace is not irresistible, and even those who do not resist can fall from grace once they have obtained salvation. Man's works are dependent upon God, yet he also plays a part.

God supplies the means of salvation by sending preachers to preach the message of his Son. He also elects that all should be saved in one sense, and that some should be saved and others destroyed

¹Romans 11:13-14.

in another sense. Man is responsible for his own salvation in the sense that the choice to believe rests upon him.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The early fathers believed that man could co-operate in obtaining his salvation, but needed the grace of God to help him accomplish salvation. The ideas of Jerome and Tertullian concerning the origin of the soul laid the basis for the Pelagian controversy. Although the Augustinians with their extreme emphasis on the sovereignty of God were victorious in the councils, a Semi-Pelagianism arose and became the doctrine of the Roman Church.

The Lutheran Reformation revived Augustinianism, but soon a controversy arose which centered around man's natural condition and his ability to co-operate in obtaining salvation. The Flacianists who favored the Augustinian position were favored by the Formula of Concord. Its position that natural man is evil and cannot co-operate in salvation has remained.

The Arminian controversy dealt mainly with the problem of predestination. The Synod of Dort which settled the controversy between the Arminians and the Gomarists upheld the Gomarists who were extreme Calvinists and therefore followed the Augustinian pattern of thinking. The Arminians with their belief in conditional election gradually won back favor, and their doctrines have become spread over the whole world and even leavened the Calvinistic doctrines in varying degrees.

The comparison of the Calvinistic, Lutheran and Arminian systems showed that all three systems were essentially in agreement

on the following points: that man's natural condition is evil, that he cannot accomplish salvation by his own power, and that his works depend upon God. On the questions of election, universal grace, irresistible grace and perseverance, the Calvinistic view is opposed to the Lutheran and Arminian views. The Calvinists believe in unconditional election, limited grace, irresistible grace and perseverance. The Lutherans and Arminians believe in conditional election, universal grace, resistible grace and perseverance. Thus in Calvin's system, God's grace is entirely sovereign and man has no responsibility for his salvation. Although the Lutherans and Arminians believe that man cannot accomplish salvation apart from God, they believe that man has the power of choice as to whether or not he shall be saved and therefore is responsible for his salvation.

In the Biblical study of Romans 9, 10 and 11 it was found that man cannot attain righteousness through his own works. He obtains salvation by believing the message concerning Christ and confessing Christ as Lord. God certainly elects individuals and classes to fulfill his purposes, but the election to salvation is by class only. In one sense this class includes all people and in another sense it includes only those who by their own choice are believers. God's grace is universal, but can be resisted, and even those who obtain grace do not necessarily persevere. Thus God provides the means of salvation through the message of Christ and the sending of preachers to preach it, but man is responsible for making his own choice.

Conclusions

From this study the author concludes that:

1. Man in his natural condition is evil and cannot save himself.

2. Conversion is an act of God, but man co-operates to the extent that he accepts that which has been provided.

3. There certainly is an election on the part of God, but election and individual salvation should not be considered synonymously. Election refers to individuals and classes of people with regard to the work they are to perform, but election to salvation is by class only. In one sense this class includes all people, and in another sense it includes only believers.

4. Grace is universal.

5. Grace is resistible.

6. Man does not necessarily persevere in salvation.

7. Man's works depend upon God, yet he co-operates in those works.

From these specific conclusions the general conclusions were drawn that:

1. God provides everything necessary for salvation.

2. Man is responsible for making his own choice of acceptance or rejection.

Suggestions for Further Study

One subject which, although more historical than theological in nature, would make an interesting study would be the tracing of the developments of Arminianism which have influenced Calvinism. Another study would be the tracing of developments within each system--

Arminianism, Calvinism, Lutheranism.

Another type of work which this study has suggested is that of a Biblical study of such matters as election and God's provision of grace. The area which was covered in this study was limited in scope, and it would be of value to confirm the work that has been done by making a more extensive study of these topics.

It would also be interesting to make a study of what believing in Christ and confessing Christ as Lord means. Certainly the intellectual knowledge that Jesus Christ lived is not the type of belief that is meant, so it would be of value to make a study of that in which believing in and confessing Christ consists.

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