

# *The Westminster Assembly 1643 -1649*

## *The Men, Their Times & Their Work*

### *Doctrine*

Almost to a man the Puritans were Calvinists. This might seem strange in this age of rampant dispensationalism and Arminianism, but the works of Puritans of all denominations will show their theology was solidly Calvinistic. This meant that in the Westminster Assembly there was great unity of mind on Theology. Their manner of Bible interpretation was one and this was surely the glue which kept the work together in the face of difficulties in areas of church government. It enabled them to produce a document with doctrinal statements which were truly reformed, precise, and a sufficient defense against false doctrine.

**The Theology of the Westminster Assembly was one with the teachings of John Calvin.** That is they believed in attributing to God the sole glory for man's salvation and government of the world for the good of the church. It makes God the author and finisher of salvation and humbles the pride of man to a recipient of undeserving mercy through grace alone. This is often referred to in theology as:

#### **THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE**

- Predestination
- Election
- Justification by a gifted faith
- Adoption

#### **TULIP Theology - 5 Points of Calvinism**

1. Total Depravity of Man
2. Unconditional Election
3. Limited/Definite Atonement
4. Irresistible Grace
5. Perseverance of the Saints

#### **They held to a strong yet balanced view of Federal Theology.**

This is also called the covenant view of the Gospel.

In the history of the world God dealt with men by only two covenants.

1. With Adam pre-fall by a Covenant of works.
2. With Adam and elect sinners after the fall by a covenant of grace.

This view was held by the majority of all four parties: Anglican, Presbyterian, Independent and Erastian.

Arminianism was not popularized in England until the time of the Wesleys in the 1800s.

#### **Arminianism:**

Belief that God offers salvation in a general fashion to all men on the condition that men desire to repent and turn to God of their own free will. It also means that a man can choose to be saved and also choose to be lost at a later time. (Saved and Lost)

The five points of Calvinism were adopted to counter the errors of Arminianism. Thus Arminians deny all five points of Calvinism.

Dispensationalism was not popularized until 1870 in U.K. when it was propounded by John Darby and the Plymouth Brethren and the early 1900's in North America by the Scofield Study Bible.

**Dispensationalism:**

A method of Bible interpretation that divides Bible History into seven distinct time periods or economies, when God dealt with men on different terms. Each of these are a new test upon man and each ends in judgment. E.g

**Innocence** - Adam

**Human Government** - Pre flood

**Promise** - Post flood

**Law** - Under Moses

**Kingdom** - Christ's earthly ministry

**Grace** - Pentecost to Second Coming

**Kingdom** - Millennial reign

**Augustine** - Bishop of Hippo 354 - 430 A.D. Taught salvation by salvation by grace alone. What is usually called Calvinism is in the main Augustinianism.

**Calvin**, therefore, was not the first to teach the doctrines of grace. Calvinism was the gospel of the N.T. laid out in a consistent systematic scheme. His Institutes of The Christian Religion are a Classic Work.

**Reasons why the W.C.F. was Calvinistic**

“It is scarcely possible to understand the theological standpoint of the Confession of Faith without some knowledge of the trend of theological thought in the century which preceded its formation. It will not, however, be necessary to say much on this point, for it has been shown repeatedly that the whole drift of English theology from the Reformation to the times of Laud was distinctly Augustinian or Calvinistic. **Indeed, before the Reformation English theology had been enriched by the Augustinian contributions to it of men like Bradwardine, Anselm of Canterbury, Wycliffe, and Tyndale.** At the Reformation, English theology was deeply concerned, not only by intercourse between English and Continental reformers, but by the writings which came across and found a ready market in Britain. **The minds of English theologians were profoundly influenced by Calvin.** In the controversy over the Lord's Supper they sided with Calvin; and in the matter of predestination they clung to his views. The thirteen Articles drawn up in the reign of Henry VIII (1538) were influenced by the Augsburg Confession (1530), and are plainly Augustinian. In the following reign a greater formula was made. The Forty-two Articles of 1553 are unquestionably Augustinian. These Articles, revised in the reign of Elizabeth, and known as the Thirty-nine Articles, still remain the Creed of the English Church. One Article (Article 17) has sometimes been wrested into an Arminian interpretation, but the attempt cannot be looked upon as other than a failure. Other clear proof that the theology of England down to the time of Laud was thoroughly Calvinistic may be found in the Lambeth Articles (1595), the Irish Articles (1615), and the decisions of the Synod of Dort (1618-19), at which there were representatives of English theology. It may be said, then, that English theology from the Reformation on to 1643 was profoundly Calvinistic; and the Calvinism generally was of a moderate or infralapsarian [*balanced as opposed to hyperCalvinists*] type. The aim of the Westminster Assembly was simply to reassert this Calvinism, which had been so obscured by the Arminianism and the sacerdotalism [*Medieval, mystical views of sacraments and rites*] of the school of Laud. \_ W. Beveridge A Short History of the Westminster Assembly Pg. 87 - 88.

**WCF CHAPTER X Of Effectual Calling**

*I. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by His almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.*

Rom. viii. 30; Rom. xi. 7; Eph. i. 10, 11; 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14; 2 Cor. iii. 3, 6; Rom. viii. 2; Eph. ii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; 2 Tim. i. 9, 10; Acts xxvi. 18; 1 Cor. ii. 10, 12; Eph. i. 17, 18; Ezek. xxxvi. 26; Ezek. xi. 19; Phil. ii. 13; Deut. xxx. 6; Ezek. xxxvi. 27; Eph. i. 19; John vi. 44, 45; Cant. i. 4; Ps. cx. 3; John vi. 37; Rom. vi. 16, 17, 18.

*II. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.*

2 Tim. i. 9; Tit. iii. 4, 5; Eph. ii. 4, 5, 8, 9; Rom. ix. 11, 1 Cor. ii. 14; Rom. viii. 7; Eph. ii. 5, John vi. 37; Ezek. xxxvi. 27; John v. 25.

