

## Arminianism in England

The following notice appeared in a recent issue of the periodical, *Reformation Today*, whose editor is the gentleman mentioned in the article, Mr. Erroll Hulse:

### Hyper-Calvinism in Northern Ireland

The very essence of hyper-calvinism is the denial of common grace and the free offer of the gospel. A magazine with the title *The Standard Bearer* (from Grandville, MI, USA) is a vigorous opponent of common grace. A church has been started in Larne, Co Antrim which is sending out a news sheet which propagates erroneous Calvinism. Hyper-calvinism denies the Reformed faith.

Among the works of excellence from the ministry of Prof John Murray were his writings on the Free Offer (Works, vol 4 pp 113-114) and Common Grace (Works, vol 2 pp 94-119). See also *The Great Invitation* by Erroll Hulse, EP and *The Love of God for all Mankind* RT 76.

Mr. Hulse is wrong on all counts. The Covenant Reformed Fellowship, which publishes the news sheet mentioned above, is not a church, nor has it been meeting in Larne for almost two years. But Mr. Hulse does not only have these facts wrong. The charges made in the notice that both the *Covenant Reformed Fellowship Newsletter* and *The Standard Bearer* are guilty of propagating Hyper-calvinism are also utterly false. A denial of common grace and the free offer of the Gospel is not and never has been "the very essence of Hyper-calvinism." It is somewhat wearying that these things need to be repeated so often. Mr. Hulse has knowledge of *The Standard Bearer* and the *Newsletter*. If only he would read them! He would not then get *all* his facts wrong. In the interest of truth, however, let us go over these matters again.

First, regarding Hyper-calvinism, let it be stated again that Hyper-calvinism is the denial of so-called "duty repentance" and "duty faith," i.e., that the Gospel includes a serious call, addressed to all who hear it, to repent of sin and believe in Jesus Christ. In other words, Hyper-calvinism denies that all who hear the Gospel must be admonished that it is their *duty* before God to repent and believe. This in turn leads to the idea that the Gospel can be preached only to the elect, and makes it all but impossible to do mission work. Neither the *Covenant Reformed Fellowship Newsletter* nor *The Standard Bearer* (nor any other publication of the Protestant Reformed Churches or of the Covenant Reformed Fellowship) have ever propagated these errors. We *do* believe that all who hear the Gospel preached must be exhorted and admonished to repent. We *do* believe that this *duty* must be urged upon them most seriously. They must understand that if they do not repent and believe they will perish! We *do* urge all who hear the preaching to repent and believe! We *are doing* mission work, Northern Ireland being one field in which we are working.

Second, if a denial of common grace and the free offer is Hyper-calvinism, then both Calvin and the Five Points of Calvinism (as originally formulated in the Canons of Dort) are Hyper-calvinistic! The Canons of Dort mention

common grace only once (III, IV, B5), only to reject it as part of the erroneous teaching of the Arminians (against whom the Canons were written). Calvin says the following in his treatise, *The Eternal Predestination of God*:

Calvin's Calvinism, p. 49, The fiction of Pighius is puerile and absurd, when he interprets grace to be God's goodness in inviting all men to salvation, though all were lost in Adam. For Paul most clearly separates the foreknown from those on whom God deigned not to look in mercy.

Calvin's Calvinism, p. 51, Pighius will himself confess that there is need of illumination to bring unto Christ those who were adversaries to God; but he, at the same time, holds fast the fiction that grace is offered equally to all, but that it is ultimately rendered effectual by the will of man, just as each one is willing to receive it.

Calvin's Calvinism, p. 104, Now let Pighius boast, if he can, that God willeth *all men* to be saved! The above arguments, founded on the Scriptures, prove that even the external preaching of the doctrine of salvation, which is very far inferior to the illumination of the Spirit, was not made of God common to *all men*.

Calvin's Calvinism, p. 152, After this, Pighius, like a wild beast escaped from his cage, rushes forth, bounding over all fences in his way, uttering such sentiments as these: "The mercy of God is extended to every one, for God wishes all men to be saved; and for that end He stands and knocks at the door of our heart, desiring to enter."

Honesty demands of Mr. Hulse that he admit that a denial of common grace and the free offer are not outside but within the Calvinist tradition.

Third, Mr. Hulse is the one outside the Calvinist tradition. The titles of the two articles of Mr. Hulse, mentioned in this notice clearly show that his irresponsible and erroneous charges are the result of his Arminianism. Mr. Hulse is not a Calvinist, nor does he understand Calvinism, though he wishes to present himself under false colors as a Calvinist. It is not and never has been Calvinistic to believe in a love of God for all mankind. That is Arminian. Nor is it Calvinism to present the Gospel as an invitation, even if one believes in the free offer of the Gospel! That too, is Arminianism of the worst sort.

To teach a love of God for all mankind, as Mr. Hulse does, is to teach the opposite of Calvinism. The Reformed Creeds know nothing of such a love of God for all mankind. No matter how hard he searches, Mr. Hulse will not find one reference in any of the Reformed Creeds that speaks of a love of God for all. The Westminster Standards, for example, speak only of a love of God for the elect (Westminster Confession of Faith, II, i and proof texts, III, v, XVII, ii, Westminster Larger Catechism, 30, 79, 83). The same is true of the Heidelberg Catechism (The only passage in the Heidelberg Catechism that speaks of "all mankind" speaks of "the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind," XV, 37), the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort (I, 10, 13, II, 9). The closest he could come would be the quotation of John 3:16 in Canons I, 2. But Mr. Hulse knows, as well as anyone else, that the interpretation of John 3:16, which

makes it teach a love of God for everyone, is *not* the Calvinist interpretation of the passage. In fact, to speak of a love of God for all mankind is a blatant denial of unconditional election and of particular atonement. For Mr. Hulse, therefore, to infer that he represents true Calvinism because he teaches something that the Calvinist creeds (including the original Five Points of Calvinism) do not teach of is nothing short of ridiculous. For him to suggest that his Arminianism is true Calvinism is a lie.

The same is true of invitations. Whether the title of Mr. Hulse's article, *The Great Invitation*, refers to the Gospel itself as an invitation or to the practice of ending sermons with an "invitation" makes no difference. The fact is that the whole "invitation system" developed out of the Wesleyan, evangelical Arminian, and Fundamentalist tradition, and not out of Calvinism. Nor will Mr. Hulse find any favorable reference to invitations in the Reformed Creeds.<sup>1</sup>

It is one thing, however, to deviate from the Reformed Creeds. It is quite another to deviate from Scripture. It is one thing to be called an Arminian. It is something much more to be called unBiblical. Mr. Hulse is not only an Arminian. He is also unBiblical. Let him try to find one passage in Scripture that uses the word "grace" to refer in any sense to the reprobate wicked! There are none. Let him try to find a single passage that clearly speaks of a love of God for those who are not and never will be saved - just one to set against the hundreds of passages that speak of the eternal, unchangeable, and abiding hatred of God for those who continue unbelieving and unrepentant and who are never saved. Where in Scripture is God's love for Esau or for Judas? Where is God's love for the wicked of Psalm 1 and Psalm 11?

In a letter to Mr. Hulse some of these points were raised. Mr. Hulse sent the following reply:

John Calvin is rightly esteemed as a progenitor of the doctrine of common grace (see *Collected Writings of Prof John Murray*). You are selective in your choice of reformed materials (i.e., the quotes from Calvin and the references to the Canons). The Puritans do not support your case.

The problem with both Arminians and hyper-Calvinists is rationalism. Both parties refuse the concept of what J I Packer terms "antimony" (sic). Don Carson prefers the term "tension."

For hypers God only hates the non-elect and only loves the elect. There are various ways out of this quandry. A careful study of the use in Scripture of רַחֲמִים (the Hebrew word for mercy) might be one. Arminians who rationalize see all Calvinists as hypers, and hypers see all those who do not rationalize as they do as Arminians.

This, obviously, is no reply at all. We did not attempt to prove that John Calvin did not teach common grace. That is another matter entirely and much more difficult. All we attempted to show was that a denial of common grace and the free offer of the Gospel is not outside the Calvinist tradition either as it is defined by Calvin himself or by the

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<sup>1</sup>The word "invitation" in some English translations of Canons III, IV, 8, is a blatant mis-translation, as a careful study of the original Latin text will clearly show.

original Five Points of Calvinism, the Canons of Dort. One clear quote either from Calvin or the Canons would have sufficed to prove that point, and there are many besides those we have given. But perhaps Mr. Hulse prefers irrationality. His answer at least would seem to indicate that he does. Perhaps he prefers irrationally to believe that even though both Calvin and the Canons do speak against common grace and the free offer, it is nevertheless anti- or hyper-Calvinistic to do the same.

Regarding the Puritans, Mr. Hulse has apparently not read them either, for neither is opposition to the offer outside the Puritan tradition, though there were many who did hold to it. John Owen, though he uses the words "offer" and "invitation" nevertheless shows himself strongly opposed to the offer-theology of someone like Mr. Hulse and rejects the idea that the Gospel as an offer reflects a desire on God's part to save all and a love of God for all who hear. Owen says, for example:

Also, the fact that believers and unbelievers live mixed together, and the preacher cannot certainly tell who are, and who are not, the elect of God, means that he must preach in general terms to all. This does not mean that the gospel promise is made generally to all, but merely that it is declared generally to all. Since Christ is only received by faith, and since faith is God's gift to whom he pleases, it is clear he cannot intend the salvation of any to whom he does not give faith.<sup>2</sup>

The charge of rationalism we have heard before. We reject this charge also as an attempt to avoid the issues. Rationalism is reason without Scripture. We are willing to go to the Scriptures. Let Mr. Hulse show us from Scripture the word "grace" used in reference to the non-elect. Let him show us from Scripture that God both hates and loves the wicked and loves and hates the righteous. We are thankful to say he will not be able to do it. And God forbid that any of God's people should hear from the mouth of Mr. Hulse or anyone else that God hates them and loves the wicked! That is not only irrationality of the worst kind, but blasphemy against God and slander against His people.

The problem is not that we are guilty of rationalism, but that Mr. Hulse is irrational and deceptive. He wants to be an Arminian with the name "Calvinist." He calls his theology a tension. We call it nonsense. He calls it an "antimony" (the word he wants is antinomy, meaning a self-contradiction). We too call it antimony - poison. For though

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<sup>2</sup> *Life by His Death*, p. 54. This book is an abridged version of *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. In an introductory essay to this book J. I. Packer says (Packer does believe in the free offer): "And when we come to preach the gospel, our false preconceptions make us say just the opposite of what we intend. We want (rightly) to proclaim Christ as Saviour; yet we end up saying that Christ having made salvation possible, has left us to become our own saviours. It comes about in this way. We want to magnify the saving grace of God and the saving power of Christ. So we declare that God's redeeming love extends to every man, and that Christ has died to save every man, and we proclaim that the glory of divine mercy is to be measured by these facts. And then, in order to avoid universalism, we have to depreciate all that we were previously extolling, and to explain that, after all, nothing that God and Christ have done can save us unless we add something to it; the decisive factor which actually saves us is our own believing. What we say comes to this - that Christ saves us with our help; and what that means, when one thinks it out is this - that we save ourselves with Christ's help. This is a hollow anticlimax. But if we start by affirming that God has a saving love for all, and Christ died a saving death for all, and yet balk at becoming universalists, there is nothing else that we can say. And let us be clear on what we have done when we have put matters in this fashion. We have not exalted grace and the Cross; we have cheapened them."

it may indeed be self-contradicting, such contradiction in theology is the death of all theology.

Whether or not Mr. Hulse pays any attention to what we have said, we trust that others will read what is written in *The Standard Bearer* and the *Covenant Reformed Fellowship Newsletter* and test what they read against the perfect standard of the Word of God. They will see for themselves the truth of what we have said and will not listen to rumors and lies that reflect a total lack of concern for the truth.