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AN ECUMENICAL CALVINIST CHURCHMAN·BISHOP JOSEPH HALL (1574-1656)

by M. W. DEWAR

DR. DEWAR, Rector of Magherally and Annaclone, Co. Down, is a graduate of the University of Cambridge, where he was History Exhibitioner at Emmanuel College. This study of the author of "Roma Irreconciliabilis" and "The Reconciler" provokes some thoughts in relation to our own ecumenical enterprise today.

OF seventeenth century Anglican divines few had a "worse press", and with less justification, than Joseph Hall, except perhaps Robert Leighton, Archbishop of Glasgow. Neither a Laudian nor a Puritan, he had the misfortune to live in the age of transition between the Elizabethans and the Carolines. While some of these Jacobeans survived to emerge as "Arminians", Hall lived on as an Anglican Calvinist, which had not before been a contradiction in terms. Most of the Elizabethans had been Calvinians, and only the growth of a new school of non-Anglican Puritans made those who were "doctrinal Calvinists" suspect as Calvinistic in discipline.¹

I. ARMINIANS

Such as Bishop Hall, too conservative to desert their old doctrines and too liberal to join with the new Puritans, were in an unhappy position. Few stood more courageously for Protestant principles *vis-à-vis* the Church of Rome, and none stood more determinedly for Anglican Orders against the rising tide of the new Puritanism. Such men were an enigma, as they always must be, to the *novi homines* of the dominant Laudian party, loosely and inaccurately called "Arminians", as they had little in common with the Dutch Remonstrants, except a distaste for strict Calvinism.²

II. "ROMA IRRECONCILIABILIS"

Keenly interested in what used to be called "the Romish Controversy" Hall had made a considerable name for himself with the polemical *Roma Irreconciliabilis*, or "*No Peace with Rome: wherein is proved, that as terms now stand, there can be no reconciliation, of the Reformed Religion with the Romish, and that the Romanists are in all the fault (written first in Latin by J.H. and now Englished)*".³ In style and in matter it set the

¹ P. Heylin, *Life of Laud*, 1668, p. 119.

² H. D. Foster, "Liberal Calvinism: The Remonstrants at the Synod of Dort in 1618" *Harvard Theol. Review*, January, 1923, p. 1. Cf. J. F. H. New, *Anglican and Puritan*, 1964, p. 14.

³ Works, VIII, Wynter, pp. 292-396.

standard for Protestant controversialists for three centuries to come, strongly grounded in Scripture, the Fathers, and Church History. It is dated 1611, the year of the Authorized Version.

III. THE SYNOD OF DORT

Rising in the favour of King James VI of Scotland and I of England and Ireland, who was then as strongly Calvinian in doctrine as he was anti-Presbyterian and anti-Puritan in discipline, Hall became Dean of Worcester in 1616.

Two years later saw him in the Low Countries as, perhaps, the most distinguished of that quintet⁴ whom His Britannic Majesty sent to represent *Ecclesia Anglicana* at the Pan-Calvinistic Synod of Dort. This, together with the Westminster Assembly of Divines (1643), was the nearest to an Ecumenical Council, or to Trent, that the Reformed Churches were to see. At it the "Remonstrant" disciples of Jacobus Arminius, led by Simon Episcopius and John Uitenbogaert, were arraigned before a closely packed but quasi-international Synod from the Dutch and Walloon Churches of the United Provinces, their Swiss and German neighbours, Geneva, and Great Britain, in defence of the orthodoxy of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, the authority of which had been questioned by the Great Remonstrance of 1610. But the Huguenots of France were unrepresented, owing to the ban placed upon them by Louis XIII.

Of the Westminster Assembly, of which he was "not accounted worthy to be a member," Richard Baxter was to write: "the Christian world . . . had never a Synod of more excellent divines . . . than this and the Synod of Dort".⁵ But the Reformed Pastor of Kidderminster, whose favourite description of himself was a "meer Catholick",⁶ was essentially eirenic in his sympathies. Not all reactions to the Synod were as favourable.

Undoubtedly the Netherlands conflict was almost as much political as theological, since the strictly Calvinistic Counter Remonstrants (Gomarists) rallied around Maurice of Orange-Nassau, son of William the Silent, leader of the Anti-Spanish War Party. Conversely the more liberal Remonstrants (Arminians) had the active support of his political opponent, his father's old colleague, the elder statesman, John Van Oldenbarnevelt, Advocate

⁴ George Carleton, Bishop of Llandaff; John Davenant, later Bishop of Salisbury; Samuel Ward, Archdeacon of Taunton; Walter Balcanqual, a Scot, Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge; Thomas Goad, Chaplain to Abp. Abbot (*Vice Hall*).

⁵ *Works*, ed. Orme, I, p. 140.

⁶ *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, p. 79.

of Holland. As Giovanni Diodati, a Genevan delegate, was later drily to remark, "the Canons of Dort have shot off the Advocate's head!"⁷

Calvinists all, these British deputies were not slow to stand for the rights of Episcopacy over against the "conceit" of a "parity of ministers" for which the Dutch were inclined to press. Allies of the Counter-Remonstrants the Anglicans might be, and were, but they were not suppliants for their form of Church government, which all held to be "godly and allowable!" Balcanqual, though a Scot, was no "true blue" Presbyterian, rising rapidly in the royal favour to the Deanery of Rochester.⁸

The penetrating comments in the letters which the "ever memorable John Hales" sent to Sir Dudley Carleton, British Ambassador at The Hague, from Dort, give more than a hint that in this Predestinarian and quasi-Ecumenical Synod the Remonstrant Arminians were "predestined" to failure from the start. Although sickness and the damp Dutch climate required "Mr. Dean of Worcester", who had preached "a polite and pathetic sermon" before the Synod, to leave Holland before it was over, he survived it and many of its members by a generation. But lest it should be implied, as indeed it was by the Arminians, that his sickness was of the diplomatic variety, Tom Fuller writes: "Only indisposition of body forced him to return before the rest of his colleagues . . . Bishop of Exeter, then Bishop of Norwich, then Bishop of no place, surviving to see his sacred function buried before his eyes".⁹

In one of his most delightful phrases, writing elsewhere, the same author tells us that, "he had gone over the graves of all his English colleagues there (and what cannot God and good air do?) surviving in health at this day".¹⁰ Clearly Dort was a parting of the ways for Hall, soon to be promoted Bishop of Exeter (1627) and translated to Norwich in 1641. While, unlike John Hales of Eton, he did not "bid John Calvin goodnight"¹¹ at the Synod, if indeed Hales had ever bid him good morning, he adjusted both his Calvinism and his Anglicanism, but never his essentially Reformed faith, to the coming storm of the Puritan Revolution. His place at Dort was taken by Dr. Thomas Goad, Archbishop Abbot's chaplain, after having been "very crazy and sickly of late", as

⁷ G. Brandt, *History of the Reformation in the Low Countries* (London, 1725), II (Abridgment), p. 541.

⁸ G. D. Henderson, *Religious Life in Seventeenth Century Scotland* (1937), ch. iv.

⁹ *Worthies*, 1662, p. 130.

¹⁰ *Church History*, Bk. X, 67-68.

¹¹ *Golden Remains* (1673), Introduction.

John Hales wrote to Dudley Carleton. His Dort Medal, preserved at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, is sufficiently indicative of his enthusiasm for the Calvinistic cause. It displays a rock-built temple, the Tetragrammaton, and the four winds blowing at full blast. The legend on the edge is *erunt ut Mons Sion*, and the date in Roman numerals. On the reverse is a picture of the Synod in session, the date in Arabic and the legend "*Religione Asserta*". In addition the British Delegation had received a daily subsistence allowance of £10 sterling, and in addition £200 travelling expenses. . . .

IV. "THE RECONCILER"

But as early as 1628 Hall was suspected by ultra-Puritans of over-sympathetic leanings towards "the Old Religion" (i.e. Romanism). In a pamphlet published by one Nathaniel Butter in that year, and under that name, he had stated that the Church of Rome was "a true church" although "it holds some errors whereby the doctrine is corrupted, makes it false in belief, while it has a true being".¹² In spite of this safeguard he antagonized some of the Puritan pamphleteers, who accused him of Prelacy, Pelagianism, and Popery in the most vehement invective.¹³

This, rather than at Dort, was the time when Hall bid Puritanism, though not Calvinism, "goodnight". Smarting from the double assault of the new "Arminian" school of Anglicanism which regarded him as dangerously Calvinian, and the new school of Puritanism which suspected all Bishops on principle, Hall turned to his old friends, Anglican and Huguenot, for sympathy and support.

A year later (1628) his reply appeared from the same press, entitled *The Reconciler*. Pathetically he writes, "'Lo', say they, 'the man that once wrote "No peace with Rome" now cries nothing but "peace with Rome", while he proclaims it a true visible church, and allows some communion with it.'"¹⁴ Foremost among these Divines, both British and foreign, was John Davenant, now Bishop of Salisbury. The *locus classicus* in which the Bishop of Exeter addresses him reads as follows: "My Lord, you know I had a place with you though unworthy, in the famous Synod of Dort: . . . I am still the same man, and shall live in the suffrage of that reverend Synod; and do confidently avow that those other opposed opinions cannot stand with the doctrine of the Church of England. . . ."

¹² *Works*, VIII, Wynter (1863), p. 725.

¹³ Cf. G. Davies, "Arminian versus Puritan in England (c. 1620-1640)", *Huntingdon Library Bulletin* (1934), p. 179.

¹⁴ *Works*, VIII, Wynter, p. 720.

"To that good God do I appeal", he continues, "as the witness of my sincere heart to his whole truth, and no less-than-ever-zealous detestation of all Popery and Pelegianism".¹⁵ In Hall the Bishop there is no change from Hall the Dordracenist deputy in the matter of doctrine. He is still as loyally "Episcopalian" as ever, and for that the new Puritans would never forgive him. He is still as "Protestant" as ever, but, in the eirenic spirit of the XIXth Article of Religion, he is not prepared to unchurch even the Roman Catholics.

Bishop Davenant replies: "As for the aspersion of Arminianism, I can testify that in our joint employment at the Synod of Dort you were as far from it as myself, and I know that no man can embrace it in the doctrine of predestination and grace, but he must first desert the Articles agreed upon by the Church of England". Logically and step by step "John Sarum"¹⁶ proceeds to justify "Joseph Exon's" *Old Religion*: "the being of a Church does principally stand upon the gracious action of God, calling men out of darkness and death into the participation of light and life in Christ Jesus. So long as God continues this calling unto any people, though they, as much as in them lies, darken their light, and corrupt the means which should bring them to life and salvation in Christ; yet when God calls men into the participation of life in Christ by the Word and by the sacraments, there is the true being of a Christian Church let men be never so false in their expositions of God's Word, or never so untrusty in mingling their own traditions with God's ordinances."¹⁷

V. "SMECTYMNUUS"

Inevitably Bishop Hall fell between two stools, and in later editions of this correspondence between the two old Dordracenist delegates, these passages were suppressed by the intructions of Laud (1629), which accounts for the difficulty in tracing them to an original source.¹⁸ Hall's defence of the Episcopate in 1640, when the Bishops were attacked by the Long Parliament, appeared as *Episcopacy by Divine Right*, although urging a non-prelatic form of Episcopacy after the manner of Ussher. Three years later the Long Parliament had convened the Westminster Assembly, a Theocratic Assembly called by Erastian means, and Joseph Hall was not among the Bishops whose "doctrinal soundness" made

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 740.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 743.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 742.

¹⁸ "That which my Chaplin a Mr. Turner left out of the letters of the Bishop (*sic*) of Exeter and Sarum about Arminianisme" (W. Laud, *A history of his Troubles and Tryal*, p. 353).

them eligible, such as Ussher, Brownrigg, and Prideaux.¹⁹

In the meanwhile his *Humble Remonstrance* (1640-41) had brought upon him the full fury of a group of five "Presbyterially inclined" Puritans, writing under the name of "Smectymnuus". This curious combination of initials scarcely concealed the identity of Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy,²⁰ Thomas Young, Martin Newcomen and William (i.e. "double u"!) Spurstow. Inveterate haters of Episcopacy—Laud's or Hall's variety being like "Pre-lacy" to them—they were the leaders of the "divine right" wing of the Ultra-Presbyterian party in the Assembly. Committed to the Tower in 1641, Hall was not released for six years, dying in 1656, in the same year as Archbishop Ussher (for whom a State Funeral was ordered by Oliver Cromwell, at which the Prayer Book Service was used).

VI. AN ECUMENICAL CHURCHMAN

It may be asked what message Bishop Hall has for this generation. It would seem that he has a word of encouragement at least for those innumerable Anglican Evangelicals who, while not enthusiastic for *rapprochement*, still less reunion, with an unreformed Rome, are not prepared to quarrel with the Ecumenical Movement, as expressed in the World Council of Churches. There, as with Joseph Hall and his four colleagues at Dort, they may meet in Christian fellowship and without any surrender of Anglican or Evangelical principles with their separated brethren of the Continental Reformation, and without "unchurching" other more recently declared "Friends of Reunion". Let "Worthy Mr. Fuller", the wise and witty, have the last word: "*In Carletonio praelecebat Episcopalis gravitas, in Davenantio subactum Judicium; in Wardo multa lectio; in Hallo expedita concinatio.*"²¹ What he wrote, in English, of Ward is equally true of Hall: "He turned with the times as a Rock riseth with the tide; and for his uncomplying therewith was imprisoned in Saint John's College in Cambridge. In a word he was counted a Puritan before these times, and yet being always the same, was a true Protestant at all times".²² For such transgressors of the contemporary ecclesiastical fashions the way must always be hard.

Banbridge, Co. Down.

¹⁹ See M. W. Dewar, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, "How far is the Westminster Assembly of Divines an expression of 17th century Anglican Theology?" Queen's University, Belfast, 1960, p. 135.

²⁰ Grandfather of the famous eighteenth-century Nonconformist historian.

²¹ T. Fuller, *Worthies*, p. 304.

²² *Ibid.* (Durham), p. 299.