

Bishop Joseph Hall (1574-1656)

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Of seventeenth century Anglican divines few have had a “worse press”, and with less justification, than Joseph Hall. 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 Calvinists, and only the growth of a new school of non-church Puritans made those who were “doctrinal Calvinists” suspect as Calvinistic in discipline.¹

Such as Bishop Hall, too honest to desert their old doctrines and too liberal to join with the fanatics, 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 Catholic order against the rising tide of Puritanism. Such men were an enigma, as they always must be, to the *novi homines* of the dominant Laudian party, paradoxically called “Arminians”.

“Paradoxically,” because the original Dutch Arminians were essentially Calvinists, though moderate ones; and were essentially a liberal “brotherhood”, or “fellowship” rather than a Church.² It is significant that their present day descendants, the Netherlands Remonstrants, have affiliated with the *International Congregational Council* rather than with the *World Presbyterian Alliance of Reformed Churches*. It is only very recently that the two have been amalgamated. A Scholar of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, an Elizabethan foundation with a strong “Puritan” tradition, Joseph Hall was appointed as the first Headmaster of Blundell’s School, Tiverton, Devon, by his friend Lord Chief Justice Popham, who presided over the trial of the Gunpowder Plotters three years later (1606). He afterwards accepted the Suffolk rectory of Halstead instead, thinking that “God pulls me by the sleeve: and tells me it is His will I should rather go to the east than to the west”. He ingenuously admitted to the Master of Emmanuel: “I never meant other, than to pass through this western school to it: but I saw that God who found me ready to go the further way about, now called me the nearest and directest way to that sacred end.”

Keenly interested in what used to be called “the Romish Controversy” he 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 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.

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 quintet 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 Episcopus 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. But the Huguenots of France were unrepresented, owing to the ban placed upon them by Louis XIII; although four French delegates, including Pierre du Moulin, had been appointed.

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”.⁴ But the Reformed Pastor of Kidderminster, whose favourite description of himself was a “meer Catholick”,⁵ was essentially eirenic if not ecumenical. Not all English reactions to the Synod were as favourable. There was, for example, the Arminian doggerel popular at the time:

*“Dordrecht Synodus, nodus,
Chorus integer, aeger,
Conventus, ventus,
Sessio stramen, Amen.”*⁶

This might be lightly rendered as:

“Dort’s knotty Synod,
Choir in ill condition,
Windbag assembly,
Heap of straw in session.”

The Netherlands conflict was *almost as much political as theological, as the strictly Supralapsarian Counter-Remonstrants rallied around Maurice of Orange-Nassau*, son of William the Silent. The more liberal Remonstrants had the active support of his political opponent, his father’s old colleague, the Advocate of Holland, John Van Oldenbarnevelt, who was executed at the end of the Synod, and also Hugo Grotius, the famous jurist, who shared exile with the other Remonstrants. As Diodati, a Genevan delegate was later drily to remark, “the Canons of Dort have shot off the Advocate’s head!”⁷

George Carleton, Bishop of Llandaff, was the head of the delegation, which included John Davenant, later Bishop of Salisbury and friend of Archbishop James Ussher, besides Samuel Ward, Master of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, another Puritan foundation, and also Archdeacon of Taunton. They were later to be joined by Walter Balcanqual, another Episcopal divine, whom James had sent to represent his other Church of Scotland. But even the most rigidly “Presbyterian” of Dutch Counter-Remonstrants confessed the worthiness of the “most learned the Dean of Worcester”, who had preached “a polite and pathetic sermon”,⁸ as the most outstanding of the Anglican divines, who, unfortunately for posterity, did not see the Synod through to its conclusion.

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 the Anglicans might be, but they were not suppliants for their form of Church government, which all held to be “godly and allowable”.

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” to leave Holland before the Synod was over, he survived it and many of its members by a generation. But lest it should be implied, as indeed it was, 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, he adjusted both his Calvinism and his Anglicanism to the coming storm of the Puritan Revolution. His place was taken by Dr. Thomas Goad, the Calvinist Archbishop Abbot’s chaplain, after having been “very crazy and sickly of late”, as John Hales wrote to Dudley Carleton. The Dort Medal, preserved in his old college, 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. On the reverse is a picture of the Synod in session, the date, and the legend “*Religione asserta*”. In addition to the medal all the British delegates received an allowance of not less than ten pounds sterling every day, a larger sum than that allowed by the States General to the other *exteri*.

But as early as 1628 he was suspected by extreme 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 extremist pamphleteers, who accused him of Prelacy, Pelagianism, and Popery in the most vehement invective.

This, rather than Dort, was the time when he bid Puritanism, though not Calvinism, “goodnight”. Smarting from the double assault of the new “Arminian” School of Anglicanism, so different from the original Dutch Arminianism, and which regarded him as dangerously Calvinian, and of the new school of Puritanism which suspected all Bishops on principle, Hall turned to his old friends 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’.”¹³

Foremost among these Divines, both Anglicans and Huguenots, is his old “Dordracenist” colleague, 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. . . .”

“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.”¹⁴

From 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 true Anglican spirit of the XIXth Article of Religion, he is not prepared to “Un-church” 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”¹⁵ 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 never be so false in their expositions of God’s Word, or never so untrusty in mingling their own traditions with God’s ordinances.”¹⁶

The italics are those of the present writer, but the doctrine is both solidly Biblical (Philippians 1, 15-18) and undeniably Anglican (Article XIX).

But the good Bishop fell between two stools, and in later editions of this correspondence between the two old Dordracenist delegates, these passages were suppressed by the instructions of Laud (1629).¹⁷ 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 them eligible, such as Ussher, Brownrigg, and Prideaux.¹⁸

In the meanwhile his *Humble Remonstrance* (1640-41) had brought upon him the full fury of a group of five “Presbyteridly inclined” Puritans, writing under the name of *Smectymnuus*. This curious combination of initials scarcely concealed the identity of Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy, Thomas Young, Martin Newcomen and William (i.e., “double u”!) Spurstow. Inveterate haters of “prelacy”, whether of Laud’s or Hall’s variety, they were the

leaders of the “divine right” wing of the Ultra-Presbyterian party in the Assembly. Committed to the Tower in 1641, he was not released for six years, dying in 1656, in the same year as Archbishop Ussher, for whom a state funeral, according to the Book of Common Prayer, was approved by Oliver Cromwell.

Although Hall’s *Collected Works* appeared three times in the last century (edited by J. Pratt, 1808, P. Hall, 1837, and P. Wynter, 1863), he has been largely neglected in a century when his truly ecumenical outlook should make him a popular subject for research.

Apart from a *Memoir* by J. Jones (1826) and a fairly definitive biography by G. Lewis in 1886, T. F. Kinloch produced *The Life and Works* in 1951.

But it is a somewhat slight volume and takes the form of a symposium of *Halliana* rather than a critique. His summary of this great Jacobean is highly apposite, however: “One has only to read through the list . . . of Roman beliefs and practices which Hall so unhesitatingly condemned . . . to realize that apart from his unblushing Erastianism, now so generally deplored, he cannot be regarded as an adequate exponent of Anglicanism as it exists today.”

Dordracenist deputy, Calvinist ecumenist, Erastian bishop, Joseph Hall remains a puzzle to our age as to his own. Like Ussher, Baxter, and Leighton he was bound to be misunderstood. He suffered latterly from the unreasonableness of party hacks who labelled all loyal churchmen with the opprobrious name, “Arminian”, which had little or no connection with its Dutch origins. In practice the term became linked with “Pelagianism” and, of course, “Popery”.¹⁹ Even R. L. Ollard’s *Dictionary of English Church History* (1912) perpetuates this antithesis in its definition: “Arminianism is a general term used to cover the whole high church and latitudinarian reaction against the intellectual tyranny of Calvinism”. But, as Dr. New has said, “the use of post Civil War labels (high church and latitudinarian) for pre Civil War attitudes is inept.” He is, however, equally correct in describing the contemporary use of the term as “a propaganda windfall that very soon crystallized into established conviction”.²⁰ Against none was it used more ruthlessly, remorselessly, and relentlessly than against the author of *Roma Irreconciliabilis* and *The Reconciler*. The words applied by Fuller to his Dordracenist colleague, Dr. Samuel Ward, might have as easily been applied to Hall himself:

“he turned with the times as a rock riseth with the tide; and for his uncomplying therewith was imprisoned in Saint John’s Colledge in Cambridge. In a word, he was counted a Puritan before those times, and Popish in those times, and yet being always the same, was a true Protestant at all times.”²¹

Nowhere was his essentially Catholic Protestantism more emphasized than in his sermon before the Synod of Dort, uttered in Latin on account of the “confusion of tongues”. Urging the delegates to do away with the “ill-omened” names of Remonstrant and Counter-Remonstrant, Calvinist and Arminian, he concludes:

“We are Christians. We are one body; let us be of one mind! By the awful name of God, by the gentle bosom of our common Mother, by your souls, and by the sacred bowels of Jesus Christ, our Saviour’s brethren, I entreat you, be at peace. So lay aside all prejudice and party feeling, that we may be happily united in the enjoyment of the common truth.”²²

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Endnotes:

- 1) P. Heylin: *Life of Laud*, 1668, p. 119.
- 2) H. D. Foster: "The Remonstrants at the Synod of Dort", *Harvard Theol. Journal*, 1923, 1.
- 3) *Works*, VIII, Wynter, pp. 292-396.
- 4) R. Baxter, *Life*, (Orme), p. 69.
- 5) *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, p.79.
- 6) D. Neal: *History of the Puritans*. II, ch. ii.
- 7) G. Brandt: *History of the Reformation in and about the Low Countries*. London, 1722, III., p. 371.
- 8) In J. Hales, *Letters from Dort*, 1673, p. 12 (Ecclesiastes, VII, 17).
- 9) *Worthies*, 1662, p. 130.
- 10) *Church History*. Bk. X, pp. 67ff.
- 11) *Golden Remains*, 1673, Introduction.
- 12) *Works*, VIII. Wynter, p. 725.
- 13) *Works*, VIII. Wynter, p. 720.
- 14) *Ibid.*, p. 740.
- 15) *Ibid.*, p. 743.
- 16) *Ibid.*, p. 742.
- 17) "That which my Chapline a Mr. Turner left out of the letters of the Bishop (sic) of Exeter and Sarum about Arminianisme."
- 18) 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.
- 19) J. Nichols, *Calvinism and Arminianism*, Vol. I, Pt. I, p. 372
J. Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, Vol. I, p. 660.
- 20) A. C. New, *Anglican and Puritan*, 1961, p. 14.
- 21) T. Fuller: *Worthies*, p. 299.
- 22) *Acta Synodi; Dordrecht*, Dordrecht, 1619, p. 47.