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# THE READER'S VIEW

## THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM HISTORICALLY CONSIDERED

The meeting of the two Presbyterian General Assemblies in Atlanta, Georgia, last month, and the retiring from the presidency of Princeton Theological Seminary of Francis L. Patton, D.D., LL.D., who has for so many years occupied with most marked ability the highest and most honorable positions within the gift of the Presbyterian Church, render this a most appropriate time to take a brief historical glance at the so-called Five Points of Calvinism.

It may not be very generally known that these articles of belief had no existence in the time of Calvin, and therefore did not originate with him. John Calvin died in the year 1564, aged fifty-five years, while these five points, called by his name, were formulated in 1619 by the Synod of Dort to controvert the Five Points of Arminius, which formed the basis of the discussions through the six months of the sessions of that Synod. These Five Points, as formulated by the Synod of Dort, according to two authorities, are as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Personal, Gratuitous Election to Everlasting Life. | 1. Divine Predestination. |
| 2. Particular Redemption. | 2. The Redemption of Men through the Death of Christ. |
| 3. Depravity, Native and Total. | 3. Total Depravity. |
| 4. Effectual Calling, or Regeneration, by the Holy Spirit. | 4. Redemption through Grace. |
| 5. Certain Perseverance of Saints unto Eternal Life. | 5. Perseverance of Saints. |

Some eight years ago I had the privilege of hearing a popular lecture, by Dr. McAfee, of Brooklyn, upon the Five Points of Calvinism, given before the Presbyterian Union of Newark, New Jersey, which was most interesting as well as instructive. To aid the mind in remembering the Five Points, Dr. McAfee made use of the word Tulip, which, possessing five letters, lends itself nicely to the subject in hand, especially as it ends with the letter P, as will be seen later.

Taking the five letters, Dr. McAfee used them as follows:

1st, T stands for Total Depravity.
2d, U " " Universal Sovereignty.
3d, L " " Limited Atonement.
4th, I " " Irresistible Grace.
5th, P " " Perseverance of the Saints.

Of course the adoption of this word restricts the order of the five points, and perhaps throws them out of their proper order and logical sequence. However this may be, I was led to consult several theological authorities to see how they agreed with Dr. McAfee, both as to the substance of doctrine as well as to the order of their relation to each other, and I give below some of the results of such consultations.

First, going to Abbott's "Dictionary of Religious Knowledge," I found the Five Points of Calvinism listed as in the list marked A below.

Jonathan Dickinson, first President of Princeton College, states these Five Points, with their proof texts, as:

1. Eternal Election. Ephesians i. 4, 5.
2. Original Sin. Romans v. 12.
3. Grace in Conversion. Ephesians ii. 4, 5.
4. Justification by Faith. Romans iii. 25.
5. Saints' Perseverance. Romans viii. 30.

And now, to come to the living authorities, I called upon Dr. Francis L. Patton, in Princeton, in the year 1905, and, requesting him to write the Five Points of Calvinism for me offhand, he sat down at his table and began. As he hesitated a little upon the second point, I said to him that if he desired a little time to think them over he might mail the list to me the next day, when he immediately replied: "Dr. Vail, if I cannot give you the Five Points of Calvinism offhand, without taking time to consider them, I had better get out of here" (meaning the presidency of Princeton Theological Seminary).

As he wrote the last point, "Perseverance of the Saints," I remarked, "That's right, Doctor, don't leave that point out." And he quickly replied, "No, Doctor, that would never do, for even the Cumberland Brethren believe in that."

Then I asked Dr. Patton if he had noticed that from the time of the disruption of the Presbyterian Church into the Old School and

| | A | B | C | D | E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Original Sin | Sovereign Election | Predestination | Universal Sovereignty and Partial Election | Absolute Sovereignty of God |
| 2. | Free Will | Total Depravity | Irresistible Grace | Total Depravity | Total Depravity of Man |
| 3. | Grace | Limited Atonement | Original Sin | Limited Atonement | Invincibility of Divine Grace |
| 4. | Predestination | Efficacious or Irresistible Grace | Particular Redemption | Efficacious Grace | Eternal Decrees of God |
| 5. | Perseverance | Perseverance of the Saints | Perseverance of the Saints | Perseverance of the Saints | Perseverance of the Saints |



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New School branches, in the year 1837, until the date of the reunion of the two schools in the year 1870, was just thirty-three years, which we were accustomed to call one generation, and that between the dates of the reunion, in 1870, and the year of the revision of the Confession of Faith, in 1903, was again just thirty-three years, another generation. . He replied that he had never noticed those facts, but, said he, "Dr. Vail, it will not be thirty-three years before the Cumberland Brethren are admitted into the great Presbyterian family." And it was not. It was only three years, as they were admitted in 1906, the very next year.

The Five Points of Calvinism, as given by Dr. Patton, are in list B.

Soon after obtaining Dr. Patton's list, having occasion to write Dr. Henry van Dyke upon another matter, I requested him to give me, offhand, the Five Points, stating that I had received them from Dr. Patton, but that I would like to have them in the order that he preferred.

He replied as follows: "The so-called Five Points of Calvinism are matters of historic theology, and you can rely upon Dr. Patton's statement of them as being correct. There is room for dispute as to what these points have been in the history of the Church, but I feel that there ought to be considerable room for difference of opinion as to whether they are true or not."

In reply to my request for a similar statement of the Five Points from Dr. Hugh Black, of Union Theological Seminary, he, after giving the list marked C, said: "I don't think Calvin himself would have summed up his system in these points. The system is one built up by rigorous logic from the one central idea of the sovereignty of God."

The Rev. George B. Stewart, D.D., President of Auburn Theological Seminary, gives the Five Points according to list D.

The Rev. Isaac N. Rendall, D.D., late President of Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, gives the Five Points as they are in list E.

It is interesting, in closing this short survey of these Five Points of Calvinism, to notice that the authorities consulted, however they may vary in the order of the points, all place "Perseverance of the Saints" as the fifth point, and while the order or wording of the other four points differs in almost every instance, no one omits this fifth point. This is significant, as it brings thus into prominence the fact that the main point of difference between the Calvinists and the Arminians at the Synod of Dort was just this fifth point, the Arminians believing that saints could fall from grace, and the Calvinists holding to the perseverance of the saints.

Whatever may be our individual position as to the merits of the Five Points of Calvinism, we must admit that they have stood the test of generations of controversy better than other statements of belief, and that Dr. Patton was about right when he said, in substance, not long since, that should Calvinism as a system of belief pass away, and man come to hold that he had found something better and more satisfactory, and in the coming ages should the antiquarian in his researches through the cemeteries dig up a skeleton of Calvinism, he would find it a vertebrate. WILLIAM H. VAIL.

Newark, New Jersey.

### THE VISITING TEACHER

[In a recent issue of The Outlook (the issue of May 31) we gave editorially some account of the work of the "Visiting Teachers Committee" in the New York public schools. It is hoped that the visiting teachers will before long become an official part of the public school system. At present their expenses are met by private subscription. A correspondent has sent us the following interesting record of specific cases which are typical of the results attained by the visiting teachers. They confirm our opinion, previously expressed, that the idea of the visiting teacher, who brings the home into closer touch with the school, may well be adopted by the public schools of cities and towns all over the country.—THE EDITORS.]

#### CASE NO. 1

The service which the visiting teacher renders in finding out the causes that make a child "difficult" is convincingly shown in the case of S——, thirteen years old. She had been sent to the principal's office nearly every day for two weeks because her behavior was "driving the teacher to distraction." Her stepmother had even taken her to the Children's Court because she could not manage the child, who screamed on the streets till the neighbors complained, stayed out till after ten o'clock playing with rough boys, and refused to do any work at home. The visitor in talking with her felt a certain helplessness in her manner, indications of nervousness but not of maliciousness. She took S—— to a nerve specialist, who said she was in the early stages of St. Vitus' dance. Long-continued medical treatment, under the supervision of a visiting nurse, was followed by a two months' outing in the country and then two months' vacation with a relative who lived near Bronx Park. In the fall the child returned to school in splendid mental and physical condition.

#### CASE NO. 2

R—— was coming to school irregularly; he was backward in his lessons and seemed to have lost interest in them. Sometimes he would fall asleep in the class-room. When the visiting teacher talked to him, he just said that he couldn't help it. The mother said, however, that the boy was being ill-treated by his stepfather, who made him go out at five o'clock every morning to sell newspapers and punished him severely if he did not bring in a certain amount

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