

The Anatomy of Arminianism

Or,

The Opening of the Controversies of these times
(formerly handled in the Low-Countries) concerning the
Doctrine of Providence, of Predestination, of the Death of
Christ, of Nature and Grace, etc.

Chapter 5: Of the Antecedent and Consequent Will of God

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There are certain men crept in which were before ordained to this condemnation (Jude 4).



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Chapter 5: Of the Antecedent and Consequent Will of God

Pierre du Moulin

Damascen, in his second book of Orthodox Faith, chapter 29, sets down two wills of God; the one the Antecedent; the other the Consequent. Arminius has caught this distinction and places in it the chief strength of his doctrine; and as often as he is urged by our side, he creeps into this den, as the lizard into the thickets.

The Antecedent will of God, he saith is that, “whereby God wills anything to be the reasonable creature, before all the actions of it, or before any act of that creature, but the consequent is that, whereby he wills anything to the reasonable creature after any one act or after many acts of the creature. To the explication of which distinction he brings these examples. God, he says, by his Antecedent will, would establish and confirm forever the kingdom of Saul; by his Consequent will, he would put him from his kingdom, and substitute in his place a man better than he. Christ by his Antecedent will, would gather the Jews as a hen gathers her chickens; but by his Consequent will, he would scatter them through all the nations. By his Antecedent will, they are called to the marriage; which by his Consequent will, were declared unworthy (Matthew 22). By his Antecedent will, the man without the wedding garment was invited; by his Consequent will, he was cast out. By his Antecedent will, the talents are given; by his Consequent will, the talent is taken from the servant.

The one of these wills is called the Antecedent will, the other is called the Consequent; not because that will goes before this, for in this sense, this distinction may be admitted, because there is a certain order among the purposes of God. Thus his will of creating man was in order before his will of feeding or clothing him. But with Damascen and Arminius it is called the Antecedent will of God because it goes before the act of man's will; and they call that the consequent will of God, which is after the will of man, and depends on it. This Arminius clearly teaches in his definitions before laid down.

Between these two wills of God, he puts this difference, that the Antecedent will of God may be resisted while the consequent will cannot be. He would have it that God should be disappointed in his antecedent will and fails of his propounded end; But the consequent will of God cannot be frustrated, but it must necessarily be fulfilled: for he thinks that God does not always attain to that which he intends, and that sometimes he is disappointed of that particular end which he propounds to himself; and that God is prepared to do that which from eternity he knows he shall not do; whence it comes to pass that he has prepared himself in vain, and that by his consequent will, which is eternal, certain, and immutable, he has decreed to harden those reprobates, who by his antecedent will he is prepared to mollify and convert: And so he is prepared to do that which he has decreed not to do.

Between these two wills of God (if any credit may be given to Arminius) man's will comes in, which causes, that God revokes his antecedent will, which is for the best; and being driven from his propounded end, turns himself to another thing than that which at the first he had intended: so far, that Vortius says "that God afterward will not do some things, which before he had promised, yea sworn that he would do" (*Disputation de Deo.*, p. 65).

If any doctrine be contumelious against God, this is, accusing him of folly, putting upon him human affections and falsely attributing to him wishes of no

strength and a desire of no force: as if they should bring in God speaking thus: “I do earnestly desire to save you, but you hinder, that I cannot do, what I desire; I would if you would: therefore seeing by you I am frustrated of my intent, I will change my purpose of saving you, and my will being otherwise bent, I have determined to destroy you forever. It is certainly plain, that this Antecedent will of God is not a will; but a desire and wish which God obtains only by entreaty and as much as he may by man’s good pleasure. Therefore, Arminius often calls this will a desire and natural affection and it is common to these feckless (feckless) to take those places (Psalm 81:14. Isaiah 48:18) where God is brought in speaking as one wishing and desiring, and disappointed of his wish, as if they were properly spoken when these things are spoken by an Anthropopathy, and after the manner of men.

Furthermore, how grievous a thing it is to be defrauded of one’s desire and natural affection, and how disagreeable this is to God, who does not see, unless it be he that will willingly be deceived; For if God be most perfectly good, yea goodness itself, it must needs be, that his affections and natural desires (if he have any) are of highest sanctity, justice, and perfection: and therefore nothing is so much to be wished, as that that natural affection might be fulfilled, and that God might obtain his desired end: There is cause therefore that we should grieve for God’s cause, who is deceived of that end which is far the best, and who might be made partaker of his wish, if man would let him. See whether the wit of these innovators plunges itself and how honorably they think of God. To this belong those impious and wicked speeches of Vortius, who affirms that something happens unexpected to God, and which is bitter and very distasteful to him, and doth (although it be improperly spoken) bring very great grief to him, and which proceeds not from his Antecedent, but from his Consequent will, having tried all things in vain; Which speech, does doubtlessly abase God below the state of man: For if any such thing should happen, even among men, and any one’s endeavor, having tried all things in vain should be

deluded, it would be an argument, either of imprudency, or weakness, or infidelity. There is cause therefore that we should lament the state of God, who using an unprosperous success, has so ill performed the business.

It is also absurd, yea impious to affirm that God, to whom all things from eternity are not only foreseen, but also provided for, should intend any thing that from eternity he knew would not come to pass, and to have propounded an end to himself to which he knew he should not attain; as if one should level at a mark which is not, nor ever will be: For if God from eternity knows that this man shall be damned, in vain does he wish from eternity that he should be saved: and he doth from eternity know that he shall not be partaker of his natural desire, and his antecedent will.

What a thing is it that hereby there is brought in resistance between these two wills of God, that latter of which corrects the former? For by this Antecedent will, God desires to do that, which from eternity he is certain he shall not do. And God is imagined doing something hardly and unwillingly, and against that end which he had first intended, because man's will comes between, by which it comes to pass, that God ceases from that end propounded to himself, which was far better, as if upon a second advice, he should obtain some secondary good. Arminius does not dissemble this, whose words are these: "God seriously desires all men should be saved, but being compelled by the stubborn and incorrigible malice of some men, he will have them make loss of their salvation." But God does nothing unwillingly, neither can he be compelled by man, to the changing of his will.

And if these weak affections and ineffectual desires, of which he is disappointed, by the stepping between of man's will, be attributed to God, there is no doubt, but that God created man floating between his antecedent and consequent will; as not without grief foreseeing the fall of man, and knowing that he created a creature which would certainly perish, and yet he would not abstain from his

creation, because his decree of creating man could not be abolished: so that God bound himself in whole straights, out of which he could not quit himself.

It is not also to be endured, that the will of God should remain uncertain, until the condition, under which God antecedently wills anything, be either fulfilled or broken. For although the general affection of God towards all men, be not made to depend on man's will, yet (according to Arminius) the effect thereof is uncertain, until God by his consequent has decreed to save this or that man. But Arminius makes this Consequent will in God to depend on man's free-will, and makes it come after faith, and the right use of grace: Therefore Verstius, a man of sharp wit, but of an unfortunate audacity, is bold to write that the will of God is after some manner mutable, and that some change may be made in some part of God's decree.

But although all the counsels of God are eternal and immutable, neither can God be said to will anything new, which he has not willed from eternity; yet whosoever shall exactly consider this Consequent will of God shall find that it is made to come after his Antecedent will, not only in order, but in time: For it is impossible that God should at one time desire to save all men, and to damn some. And it must needs be, that the Antecedent will of God must cease, as blotted and raced out by his Consequent, before there can be place for his Consequent will.

And when the Apostle affirms in Romans 9 "that the will of God cannot be resisted"; by this distinction, there is made a will of God which may be resisted, and the execution whereof may be hindered by man.

And here, if anywhere, we may see how inconsistent the Arminians are. For they do contend that in the ninth chapter to the Romans, it is spoken of the Antecedent will of God, by which God will have mercy upon some, (for so they speak) that is, upon such as believe, and not of his Consequent will, by which he has determined precisely and absolutely to have mercy on this or that man: And yet they forgetting themselves, say, that this Antecedent will may be resisted; when

notwithstanding Saint Paul says in the same place, “Who can resist his will?” Either therefore let Arminius deny that the Antecedent will of God is a will, but rather call it a wish, desire, or affection; or if he contends that it is a will, let him confess that it cannot be resisted.

To which purpose, excellently Saint Augustine writes in *Enchiridion* chapter 95: “Our God in heaven does whatsoever things he will, both in heaven and earth; which is not true if he has willed some things and has not done them: And which is more unworthy of him, has not therefore done them because the will of man has hindered that the Almighty should not do what he willed.”

Arminius indeed does confess that God does not lack power to fulfill that Antecedent will, whereby he earnestly desires all men to be saved: “But it is not true that the thing which he does wish and seriously desire, that he will effect the same by what means soever he is able, but by these means by which it is decent and convenient, that he should effect it. The Father wills, and does earnestly desire, that his son would obey him, but he does not violently draw his son to obedience.” A little after Arminius writes: “The similitude of a merchant who desires that his wares should be safe, and yet casts them into the sea, does very well square and agree to the purpose God earnestly desires that all men should be saved, but compelled by the stubborn and incorrigible malice of some men, will have them make loss of their salvation.” For although God earnestly wills and intends the salvation of all and singular men, yet he will not then put forth his omnipotency, lest he should force man’s free-will. I answer: Nothing is effected by these similitudes; for they are plain dissimilitudes.

Arminius uses examples of men who cannot be made partakers of their vows, but by means that are not convenient; and of them who are oftentimes disappointed of their intention. But to God there are never wanting just and convenient means by which he should obtain that which he intends; neither can he be disappointed of his

intent. But you say, if God should exercise his omnipotency, in converting man, he should force man's free-will, and compel man's voluntary liberty. But that I deny: For he can without constraint so bend the will that it should follow of its own accord. Without constraint he suddenly changed the mind of Esau (Genesis 33), and the mind of Saul (I Samuel 19:23), and the mind of the Egyptians (Psalm 105:25), and of kings (Proverbs 21:1). If God makes this change of the will in wicked men, the liberty of man's free-will untouched; how much more may he do it in good and faithful men? God without constraint did change the heart of the thief on the cross, and so does he of all, from whom he takes their stony heart, and gives them an heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:16), and of those, who when they were dead in sin, he raised up with a spiritual resurrection (Ephesians 2:5). We shall see Arminius is of the opinion that the understanding is irresistably indued with light by God, and that God doth irresistably give power of believing the gospel to all men to whom the gospel shall be preached, and that he draws their affections: But when the mind has fully received in this persuasion, and the affections stir up the will, it is impossible but that their will should move itself, whether the mind, instructed by God appoints it; and whether the appetite forces it; for these are the only incitements of the will, neither is it moved by any other impulsion. The School and followers of Arminius are also of the opinion that the elect are drawn of God by effectual and powerful grace, the effect whereof is most sure, because God draws them in a congruent and fit time and manner, in which he knows they will infallibly follow him, calling them: And yet the Arminians mean not hereby that any force is offered o the will of man, but that it is vehemently affected with a moral and sweet persuasion, that it follows of its own accord. The example of the thief, seems to me to be notable above all the others; whose heart so suddenly changed in a time of adversity, when the faith of the apostles themselves did shake, is an evident lesson how great the efficacy of the

Holy Spirit is on them who are called by the purpose of God (Romans 8:28). But of this efficacy of calling it shall be spoken more at large in its proper place.

Hence appears how preposterous diligence Arminius has turned his wit to the defense of free-will. For there lay open to him a most sure and plain way, whereby God might show forth his power in the conversion of man, without the diminishing of our liberty. Nor, while he patronizes and defends free will, ought he to strike against the wisdom and perfection of God, whom he would frustrate and disappoint of his own end and natural desire and with those things which he knows he shall not obtain, and propound an end to himself which shall never be.

In the meanwhile, the prudent reader shall easily discern whereto that similitude of the merchant making loss, and casting his wares into the sea, with his own hands, may belong. For Arminius does not only expressly say that God is compelled to do something which he had not intended, for the merchant did not intend to do this, but does it between willing and nilling, but also by these he insinuates that God being driven from that better end which he had propounded to himself, turned himself to another end less to be wished; which things, whether they are spoken by well advised men to the reproach of God, or by unadvised men through ignorance, it strikes horror into pious minds.

But in this distinction of the will of God into Antecedent and Consequent the first whereof does go before, the other follows man's will; this is far the worst thing, that by it, the will of man is made to go before the election of God. For according to Arminius, God by his antecedent will would save all men and give them power of believing in Christ; but by his consequent will elects or reprobates several men, according as he foreknows their faith or infidelity. A deadly doctrine by the election of man depends upon man's will and our faith is made the cause and not the fruit of our election, and man chooses God and applies himself to God before he is chosen of God. When it comes to past, that on the one side man's pride is blown up, as it

were, with bellows, and on the other side, faith is undermined as it were with trenches, and confidence decays: For what certainty can there be of our salvation if our election depends upon so unstable a thing. But of these things more at large in their proper place. Now those examples with which Arminius supports that double will of God are to be examined.

Arminius says that God, by his antecedent will, would establish the throne of Saul forever; but by his consequent will, he would overthrow it, as it is in I Samuel 13:13. But there is no such thing to be found; for Samuel does not say that God would establish the kingdom of Saul; but he says: “God has established your kingdom forever” between which there is a great deal of difference: if God had established it, it had been his will to establish it: But because he did not establish it; it is certain it was not his will to establish it.

There is no more force at all in the other example. Arminius says that Christ by his antecedent will, would gather the Jews, as an hen gathers her chickens; but by his consequent will he would scatter them through all nations (Matthew 22:37). But this place signifies quite another thing. Christ speaks to Jerusalem and says that he would have gathered his children together; but Jerusalem herself resisted with all her power. Jerusalem is one thing and her children another, who here are expressly distinguished from the city. By Jerusalem understand the priests, the Levites, the scribes, and the prince of the people, for these did most of all withstand Christ. By children of Jerusalem understand the people. Christ says that he would have gathered together these children; neither is it to be doubted but that he gathered together many of them, although the rulers were unwilling. This place, therefore, makes nothing for that Antecedent will, which these men would have not to be fulfilled, when indeed it was fulfilled as much as seemed good to God. Then also these words, “How often would I,” they misunderstand as referring to the Antecedent will, which is the decree of God; when to “to will” is here nothing else than to invite and command: So Saint

Augustine thinks in Encheridion Chapter 97: “Or rather she would not have had her children to be gathered together by him: but even the unwilling, he gathered those of her children whom he himself would.

The other examples are unworthy that we should stay long upon them. Arminius claims that by God’s Antecedent will those were called to the wedding, which by his Consequent will were declared unworthy: By this Antecedent will, he without the wedding garment is invited; by his consequent will, he is cast out. By his Antecedent will, the gospel is offered to the Jews; by his consequent will, it is taken away. In all these things, that will of God whereby men are called is no other thing than to command and invite, not to decree that by his Antecedent will, which afterward he broke off by his Consequent will.

Neither are we scrupulously to enquire why God has called them whom he knows will not follow. The end why God does this is evident, to wit, to require of men that which they owe. To search any farther into the intent of God is to make God obnoxious to accounts and to break into his secrets.

It is not to be overpassed that Arminius will have God equally desire to save all men by his Antecedent will, but when he is prepared to the effect and execution of that will, he does those things which are contrary to that will. For he preaches the gospel to those who are very wicked, as to the men of Capernaum; he denies that favor to those who are less wicked, as to the men of Tyre and Sidon; and he suffers many wild and stupid people, with their barbarous cruelty to be overwhelmed in darkness. But why so? Arminius says that God does this because “their ancestors refused the gospel.” O ridiculous reason! Should he that equally desires the salvation of all be hindered with so light an impediment and which is contrary to his justice, as shall afterward be taught? Thus though Arminius teaches that God would by his Antecedent will save all several men; it is yet manifest by experience that God through many ages has denied and does yet deny to most nations those means

without which they cannot be saved, and only supplies those means, which means alone, none ever used well.

But God, says Arminius, seeing he is very good by nature, cannot but wish well to all men by his Antecedent and primary will; as being created after his own image. These things were spoken by them rightly and agreeably to the nature of God, if we were born without original sin: But seeing the image of God is almost blotted out, and in place of it, the image of the devil has succeeded, no reason compels us to believe that God is willing to save all and singular men; but the holy Scripture teaches that some are saved by the mere grace of God, and by election, according to his purpose, and appointed to damnation for those sins which they were to commit of their own accord.

All these things are not therefore spoken that we should reject this distinction of the will of God into his Antecedent and Consequent will: For we know, that among the decrees of God, some are before, and some are after in order. We do not deny¹ that there are two decrees of God, between which man's will steps in, as man's will came between the decree of creating man, and the decree of condemning certain men. But we deny that the will of man does so come between the two decrees of God that the first, or Antecedent decree is broken off by the will of man, and that God is compelled to absist from that end which he had propounded to himself, and which he did seriously intend. We deny also in the work of our election that the precise will of God depended on the foreseeing of any power or action of man's free-will; or the Consequent will of God to be suspended on man's will: Concerning which thing, it shall be diligently spoken in the proper place.

¹ Original: "Not wee deny that there are two degrees of God."