

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

MANY find much fault with the calling professing Christians, that differ one from another in some matters of opinion, by distinct *names*. Especially calling them by the names of particular men, who have distinguished themselves as maintainers and promoters of those opinions. The calling some professing Christians *Arminians*, from ARMINIUS; others *Arians*, from ARIUS; others *Socinians*, from SOCINUS, and the like. They think it unjust in itself, as it seems to suppose and suggest, that the persons marked out by these names, received those doctrines which they entertain, out of regard *to*, and reliance *on*, those men after whom they are named. [They do this] as though they made them their rule; in the same manner, as the followers of CHRIST are called *Christians*; after his name, whom they regard and depend upon, as their great Head and Rule. Whereas this is an unjust and groundless imputation on those that go under the aforementioned denominations. Thus, say they, there is not the least ground to suppose, that the chief divines, who embrace the scheme of doctrine which is, by many, called *Arminianism*, believe it the more because ARMINIUS believed it. And that there is no reason to think any other, than that they sincerely and impartially study the Holy Scriptures, and inquire after the mind of Christ, with as much judgment and sincerity, as any of those that call them by these names. That they seek after truth, and are not careful whether they think exactly as Arminius did. Yea, that, in some things, they actually differ from him. This practice is also esteemed actually injurious on this account, that it is supposed naturally to lead the multitude to imagine the difference between persons thus named, and others, to be greater than it is; so great, as if they were another species of beings. And they object against it as arising from an uncharitable, narrow, contracted spirit, which they say, commonly inclines persons to confine all that is good to themselves, and their own party. And to make a wide distinction between themselves and others, and stigmatize those that differ from them with odious names. They say, moreover, that the keeping up such a distinction of names, has a direct tendency to uphold distance and disaffection, and keep alive mutual hatred among Christians, who ought all to be united in friendship and charity, though they cannot, in all things, think alike.

I confess these things are very plausible, and I will not deny, that there are some unhappy consequences of this distinction of names. That men's infirmities and evil dispositions often make an ill improvement of it. But yet, I humbly conceive, these objections are carried far beyond reason. The generality of mankind are disposed enough, and a great deal too much, to uncharitableness, and to be censorious and bitter towards those that differ from them in religious opinions: which evil temper of mind will take occasion to exert itself from many things in themselves innocent, useful, and necessary. But yet there is no necessity to suppose, that the thus distinguishing persons of different opinions by different names, arises mainly from an uncharitable spirit. It may arise from the disposition there is in mankind (whom God has distinguished with an ability and inclination for speech), to improve the benefit of language, in the proper use and design of names, given to things of which they have often occasion to speak, which is to enable them to express their ideas with ease and expedition, without being encumbered with an obscure and difficult circumlocution. And our thus distinguishing persons of different opinions in religious matters may not imply any more, than that there is a *difference*. A difference of which we find we have often occasion to take notice: and it is always a defect in language, in such cases, to be obliged to make use of a description, instead of a name. Thus we have often occasion to speak of those who are the descendants of the ancient inhabitants of France, in distinction from the descendants of the inhabitants of Spain; and find the great convenience of those distinguishing words, *French* and *Spaniards*; by which the signification of our minds is quick and easy, and our speech is delivered from the burden of a continual reiteration of diffuse descriptions, with which it must otherwise be embarrassed.

That there is occasion to speak often concerning the difference of those, who in their general scheme of divinity agree with these two noted men, CALVIN, and ARMINIUS, is what the practice of the latter confesses. Who are often, in their discourses and writings, taking notice of the supposed absurd and pernicious opinions of the former sort: Therefore the making use of different names in this case cannot reasonably be objected against, as a thing which must come from so bad a cause as they assign. It is easy to be accounted for, without supposing it to arise from any other source, than the exigence of the case, whereby mankind express those things, which they have frequent occasion to mention, by certain distinguishing names. It is an effect, similar to what we see in innumerable cases, where the cause is not at all blameworthy.

Nevertheless, at first, I had thoughts of carefully avoiding the use of the appellation *Arminian* in this Treatise. But I soon found I should be put to great difficulty by it; and that my discourse would be too much encumbered with circumlocution, instead of a name, which would express the thing intended. And therefore I must ask the excuse of such as are apt to be offended with things of this nature, that I have so freely used the term *Arminian* in the following

Discourse. I profess it to be without any design to stigmatize persons of any sort with a name of reproach, or at all to make them appear more odious. If, when I had occasion to speak of those divines who are commonly called by this name, I had, instead of styling them *Arminians*, called them "*these men*," as Dr. WHITBY does Calvinistic divines; it probably would not have been taken any better, or thought to show a better temper, or more good manners. I have done as I would be done by, in this matter. However the term *Calvinist* is, in these days, among most, a term of greater reproach than the term *Arminian*. Yet I should not take it at all amiss, to be called a *Calvinist*, for distinction's sake, though I utterly disclaim a dependence on CALVIN, or believing the doctrines which I hold, because he believed and taught them and cannot justly be charged with believing in everything just as he taught.

But lest I should really be an occasion of injury to some persons, I would here give notice, that though I generally speak of that doctrine, concerning free will and moral agency, which I oppose, as an Arminian doctrine. Yet I would not be understood as asserting, that every divine or author, whom I have occasion to mention as maintaining that doctrine, was properly an Arminian, or one of that sort which is commonly called by that name. Some of them went far beyond the Arminians; and I would by no means charge Arminians in general with all the corrupt doctrine which these maintained. Thus for instance, it would be very injurious, if I should rank Arminian divines, in general, with such authors as Mr. CHUBB. I doubt not, many of them have some of his doctrines in abhorrence; though he agrees, for the most part, with Arminians, in his notion of the freedom of the will. And, on the other hand, though I suppose this notion to be a leading article in the Arminian scheme, that which, if pursued in its consequences, will truly infer, or naturally lead to all the rest; yet I do not charge all that have held this doctrine, with being Arminians. For whatever may be the consequences of the doctrine really, yet some that hold this doctrine, may not own nor see these consequences; and it would be unjust, in many instances, to charge every author with believing and maintaining all the real consequences of his avowed doctrines. And I desire it may be particularly noted, that though I have occasion in the following Discourse, often to mention the author of the book entitled, *An Essay on the Freedom of the Will, in God and the Creature*,^{*1*} as holding that notion of freedom of will, which I oppose; yet I do not mean to call him an Arminian: however, in that doctrine he agrees with Arminians, and departs from the current and general opinion of Calvinists. If the author of that essay be the same as it is commonly ascribed to, he doubtless was not one that ought to bear that name. But, however good a divine he was in many respects, yet that particular Arminian doctrine which he maintained, is never the better for being held by such an one. Nor is there less need of opposing it on that account. But rather more, as it will be likely to have the more pernicious influence for being taught by a divine of his name and character, supposing the doctrine to be wrong and in itself to be of an ill tendency.

I have nothing further to say by way of preface; but only to bespeak the reader's candor, and calm attention to what I have written. The subject is of such importance, as to *demand* attention, and the most thorough consideration. Of all kinds of knowledge that we can ever obtain, the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of ourselves, are the most important. As religion is the great business for which we are created, and on which our happiness depends; and as religion consists in an intercourse between ourselves and our Maker; and so has its foundation in God's nature and ours, and in the relation that God and we stand in to each other; therefore a true knowledge of both must be needful, in order to true religion. But the knowledge of ourselves consists chiefly in right apprehensions concerning those two chief faculties of our nature, the *understanding* and *will*. Both are very important: yet the science of the latter must be confessed to be of greatest moment; inasmuch as all virtue and religion have their seat more immediately in the will, consisting more especially in right acts and habits of this faculty. And the grand question about the freedom of the will, is the main point that belongs to the science of the will. Therefore I say, the importance of this subject greatly *demands* the attention of Christians, and especially of divines. But as to my *manner* of handling the subject, I would be far from presuming to say, that it is such as *demands* the attention of the reader to what I have written. I am ready to own, that in this matter I depend on the reader's courtesy. But only thus far I may have some color for putting in a claim, that if the reader be disposed to pass his censure on what I have written, I may be fully and patiently heard, and well attended to, before I am condemned. However, this is what I would humbly ask of my readers, together with the prayers of all sincere lovers of truth, that I may have much of that Spirit which Christ promised his disciples, which guides into all truth; and that the blessed and powerful influences of this Spirit would make truth victorious in the world.

¹ This essay has been generally ascribed to Dr. Watts, and is included in his works. W.