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ELECTION IN CHRIST

The Role and Place of Christ's Work in the Works of Arminius and the
Theological Arguments of the Canons of Dort

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Summary

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The theological dispute between J. Arminius and Fr. Gomarus on predestination at the beginning of the 17th century has been so significant that it still has an effect on the theological thought and life of the Reformed churches. For the Hungarian readers the dispute is mostly known from the reflection of the Canons of Dort. By contrast, the ideas of Arminius are little-known, and it often happens that the later remonstrant views are unfoundedly attributed to him. This dissertation intends to supply a deficiency, revealing the background of the 17th century predestinarian debate with special regard to one of its important questions: what is the role and place of Christ's work in the theological arguments of Arminius and the Canons of Dort.

After the introduction and methodology (I.) the dissertation begins with an overview of history of the doctrine of predestination to elaborate the topic. The list, which is not complete by any means, begins with Augustine and ends with Perkins, predominantly introducing those theologians and their works, who were decisive authorities and references for Arminius and his contemporaries. The discussion of these theologians provides a good opportunity not only to show the parallels in their teachings, but also presents the important differences as well. Moreover, this chapter aims to reveal the diversity in content, methodology and structure, which characterize the early and later phases of Reformation. It is important to note the shift of focus as well, which is tangible from Beza even among the second generation of reformed theologians, i.e. how does the emphasis shift from the *sola gratia* character of salvation to *ordo salutis*. Later the *ordo decretis* was the central question of the theology, which had an effect on the way of discussion of predestination.

The third chapter deals with the important works of Arminius in connection with the topic, presenting those determining motives along which he develops the peculiar Christ-centred order of the decree of election and predestination. Such main motive is his perception of God, starting with the statement that God is good. For Arminius the good nature of God itself

excludes the thesis of absolute will and that God without the prescience of sin would condemn anybody to damnation. The good nature of God ensues the good and valuable nature of his work, including the created world. According to Arminius, the state of being created cannot merely be the instrument of double predestination due to its valuable nature, but has a goal in itself. The process of creation shows the attributes of God – kindness, wisdom, and love – the same ones becoming apparent in the work of re-creation. God’s love towards the created world in Arminius’ interpretation means that God primarily loves humanity in its created nature and secondly as the chosen one.

God’s nature defines the relationship to his creatures, which is from the beginning described by Arminius as a covenant relationship. The foundation of this relationship is the covenant of salvation between the Father and the Son. From this covenant derives the priestly and regal office, and this is the ground of election of the individual beings, the faithful. As Christ stands between God and humanity, the merit of his satisfaction is universal, though the election is particular. According to Arminius, Christ has to be named the foundation of election, because his suffering and death as a saviour reconciled God’s justice towards the sinners, who are called and sanctified efficiently through the Spirit. Therefore, he firmly argues that the definition of predestination cannot lack the election and predestination of the Mediator. The first decree of the predestination to salvation is the election and predestination of Christ as a Mediator. The predestination of the effective instruments needed for faith and salvation of the faithful are the results of this first decree.

Arminius aimed to emphasize God’s sovereignty in the election and predestination. Faith and grace are solely the gifts of God. However, unfaithfulness and refusing the calling must be a decision made by man, otherwise God will be the cause for being in sin and damnation. Arminius attempts to exempt the tension between God’s and man’s will by the Jesuit

notion, middle knowledge, which takes the possible human reactions into consideration and chooses the option which agrees with the will of God.

The fourth chapter discusses the theological debate after Arminius' death: the statement of the Remonstrants and the arguments at the Hague conference (IV.1). The following section briefly summarizes the events of the Synod of Dort. (IV.1). It is important to note that regardless of their (historical) impact, the Canons of Dort are answers to a concrete theological dispute, attempting to create a consensus among the statements which were far from being uniform. The IV.3 subchapter examines the question based on the statements written in the Synod's records and canonical texts: is Christ the fundament of election or salvation? This part draws an important conclusion that the Canons do not unambiguously state the thought of limited atonement. Instead they make a distinction between the universal sufficiency and particular effectiveness of Christ's satisfaction.