

# The Origin Of The Acronym TULIP

## The Five Points Of Calvinism

By Ed. Sanders<sup>1</sup>

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In 1905 Dr. William H. Wail did a survey of five leading Calvinist theologians, including Dr. Francis L. Patton president of Princeton Seminary, and came up with 5 different names for the 5 points of Calvinism (which are derived from the Canons Of Dort<sup>2</sup>). During the same year he heard a Dr. Cleland Boyd McAfee lecture on the 5 points of Calvinism at the Presbyterian Union Of Newark New Jersey. It was here, according to Dr. Wail, the five points were first referred as the acronym TULIP.

### The Five Points Of Calvinism, Historically Considered<sup>3</sup>

“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	Divine Predestination
2	Particular Redemption	The Redemption of Men Through The Death Of Christ
3	Depravity, Native and Total	Total Depravity
4	Effectual Calling or Regeneration by the Holy Spirit	Regeneration Through Grace
5	Certain Perseverance of Saints unto Eternal Life	Perseverance Of Saints

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the result of my research into the origins of the Five Points. My opinion is that Dr. McAfee was the first to use the acronym TULIP in 1905 (others have also come to this conclusion). If you know of an earlier use of this acronym please let me know. You can leave a comment at my blog [theologue.wordpress.com](http://theologue.wordpress.com).

<sup>2</sup> The copy of the Canons Of Dort that I have the headings as listed as: 1. Divine Election and Reprobation, 2. The Death of Christ and the Redemption of Men, 3 & 4. The Corruption of Man and His Conversion to God, 5. The Perseverance of the Saints.

<sup>3</sup> Extracts from the article I obtained: William H. Wail., (1913), “The Five Points of Calvinism Historically Considered”, *The New Outlook* magazine, #104, 1913, Theodore Roosevelt, Contributing Editor. In the text I made some minor edits for the sake of space.

Some eight years ago (1905) I had the privilege of hearing a popular lecture, by Dr. McAfee<sup>4</sup>, 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:

1-T for Total Depravity

2-U for Universal Sovereignty

3-L for Limited Atonement

4-I for Irresistible Grace

5-P for 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.

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

1. Eternal Election. Ephesians 1:4-5
2. Original Sin. Romans 5:12
3. Grace in Conversion. Ephesians 2:4-5
4. Justification by Faith. Romans 3:25
5. Saints' Perseverance. Romans 8:3.....

.....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".

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