

# *Arminianisms*

**James I. Packer**

WITHIN the churches of the Reformation, the terms "Calvinism" and "Arminianism" are traditionally used as a pair, expressing an antithesis, like black and white, or Whig and Tory, or Roman and Protestant. The words are defined in terms of the antithesis, and the point is pressed that no Christian can avoid being on one side or the other. Among evangelicals, this issue, though now 350 years old (if not, indeed 1900 years old), remains alive and sometimes explosive. "Calvinism" and "Arminianism" are still spat out by some as anathematizing swear-words (like "fundamentalism" on the lips of a liberal), and there are still places where you forfeit both fellowship and respect by professing either. There remain Presbyterian churches which ordain only Calvinists, and Methodist and Nazarene bodies which ordain only Arminians, and the division between "general" or "free-will" (Arminian) and "particular" or "Reformed" (Calvinistic) still splits the Baptist community on both sides of the Atlantic. In evangelism, cooperation between evangelicals is sometimes hindered by disagreement and mistrust over this matter, just as in the eighteenth century the Calvinistic evangelicals and John Wesley's party found it hard on occasion to work together. Nor is it any wonder that tension should exist, when each position sees the other as misrepresenting the saving love of God. The wonder is, rather, that so many Christians who profess a serious concern for theology should treat this debate as one in which they have no stakes, and need not get involved.

This article seeks to understand and evaluate the Calvinist-Arminian antithesis. To that end, we shall address ourselves to three questions. First, what is Arminianism? Second, how far-reaching is the cleavage between it and Calvinism? Third (assuming that by this stage we shall have seen reason to regard Arminianism as a pathological growth), what causes Arminianism? and what is the cure for it? Before we tackle these questions, however, one caveat must be entered. Our concern is with things, not words. Our subject matter will oblige us to speak of Calvinism and Arminianism frequently, but it is no part of our aim to revive bad habits of slogan-shouting and name-calling.<sup>1</sup> What matters is that we should grasp truly what the Bible says about God and His grace, not that we should parade brand labels derived from historical theology. The present writer believes, and wishes others to believe, the doctrines commonly labelled Calvinistic, but he is not concerned to argue for the word. One who has received the biblical witness to God's sovereignty in grace is blessed indeed, but he is no better

1. John Wesley wrote: "It is the duty of every Arminian preacher . . . never in public or in private, to use the word Calvinist as a term of reproach . . . and it is the duty of every Calvinist preacher . . . never . . . to use the word Arminian as a term of reproach" (*Works*, "from the latest London edition" [New York: Lane and Scott, 1850], V:134). To

off for labelling himself a Calvinist, and might indeed be the worse for it; for party passion and love of the truth are different things, and indulgence in the one tends to wither the other.

dispute this proposition would be hard.

#### WHAT IS ARMINIANISM?<sup>2</sup>

Historically, Arminianism has appeared as a reaction against the Calvinism of Beza and the Synod of Dort, affirming, in the words of W. R. Bagnall, "conditional in opposition to absolute predestination, and general in opposition to particular redemption."<sup>3</sup> This verbal antithesis is not in fact as simple or clear as it looks, for changing the adjective involves redefining the noun. What Bagnall should have said is that Calvinism affirms a concept of predestination from which conditionality is excluded, and a concept of redemption to which particularity is essential; and Arminianism denies both. The difference is this. To Calvinism predestination is essentially God's unconditional decision about the destiny of individuals; to Arminianism it is essentially God's unconditional decision to provide means of grace, decisions about individuals' destiny being secondary, conditional, and consequent upon foresight of how they will use those means of grace. To Calvinism, predestination of individuals means the foreordaining of both their doings (including their response to the gospel) and their consequent destinies; to Arminianism it means a foreordaining of destinies based on doings foreseen but not foreordained. Arminianism affirms that God predestined Christ to be man's Savior, and repentance and faith to be the way of salvation, and the gift of universal sufficient inward grace to make saving response to God possible for all men everywhere, but it denies that any individual is predestined to believe. On the Calvinist view, election, which is a predestinating act on God's part, means the efficacious choice of particular sinners to be saved by Jesus Christ through faith, and redemption, the first step in working out God's electing purpose, is an achievement which actually secures certain salvation--calling, pardon, adoption, preservation, final glory for all the elect. On the Arminian view, however, what the death of Christ secured was a possibility of salvation for sinners generally, a possibility which, so far as God is concerned, might never have been actualized in any single case; and the electing of individuals to salvation is, as we said, simply God noting in advance who will believe and so qualify for glory, as a matter of contingent (not foreordained) fact. Whereas to Calvinism election is God's resolve to save, and the cross Christ's act of saving, for Arminianism salvation rests in the last analysis neither on God's election nor on Christ's cross, but on a man's own cooperation with grace, which is something that God does not himself guarantee.

2. Cf. my introduction to John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (London: Banner of Truth, 1959).

3. *The Writings of Arminius*, tr. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956), I:iii.

Biblically, the difference between these two conceptions of how God in love relates to

fallen human beings may be pinpointed thus. Arminianism treats our Lord's parable of the Supper to which further guests were invited in place of those who never came (Luke 14:16-24; cf. Matt. 22:1-10) as picturing the whole truth about the love of God in the gospel. On this view, when you have compared God's relation to fallen men with that of a dignitary who invites all needy folk around to come and enjoy his bounty, you have said it all. Calvinism, however, does not stop here, but links with the picture of the Supper that of the Shepherd (John 10:11-18, 24-29) who has his sheep given him to care for (vv. 14, 16, 27; cf. 6:37-40; 17:6, 11f.), who lays down his life for them (10:15), who guarantees that all of them will in due course hear his voice (vv. 16, 27) and follow him (v. 27), and be kept from perishing forever (v. 28). In other words, Calvinism holds that divine love does not stop short at graciously inviting, but that the triune God takes gracious action to ensure that the elect respond. On this view, both the Christ who saves and the faith which receives him as Savior are God's gifts, and the latter is as much a foreordained reality as is the former. Arminians praise God for providing a Savior to whom all may come for life; Calvinists do that too, and then go on to praise God for actually bringing them to the Savior's feet.

So the basic difference between the two positions is not, as is sometimes thought, that Arminianism follows Scripture while Calvinism follows logic, nor that Arminianism knows the love of God while Calvinism knows only his power, nor that Arminianism affirms a connection between believing and obeying as a means and eternal life as an end which Calvinism denies, nor that Arminianism discerns a *bona fide* "free offer" of Christ in the gospel which Calvinism does not discern, nor that Arminianism acknowledges human responsibility before God and requires holy endeavor in the Christian life while Calvinism does not. No; the difference is that Calvinism recognizes a dimension of the saving love of God which Arminianism misses, namely God's sovereignty in bringing to faith and keeping in faith all who are actually saved. Arminianism gives Christians much to thank God for, and Calvinism gives them more.

Arminianism was born in Holland at the turn of the seventeenth century, and synodically condemned by the whole Reformed world at Dort in 1619. In England, an Arminian tradition of teaching lasted into, and right through, the eighteenth century. Arminianism was part of the Wesley family heritage, and John and Charles fought the Calvinists by prose and poetry throughout their evangelical ministry. The Arminian evangelical tradition has been maintained by Methodists and others up to the present day.

It is important to realize that both in its general tenor and in its practical effect the Arminianism of the "Belgic semi-Pelagians,"<sup>4</sup> as John Owen called the Remonstrants and their supporters, was not by any means identical with the Arminianism of John Wesley, his *Arminian Magazine*

4. John Owen, *Works*, ed. W. Goold (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), X:6.

(1778-),<sup>5</sup> and his colleague John Fletcher. The following account of Wesley's doctrine, taken from Fletcher's *First Check to Antinomianism* (1771), will alert us to the difference:

5. Full title, *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption*; changed in 1805 to *The Methodist Magazine*.

. . . he [Wesley] holds also *General Redemption*, and its necessary consequences, which some account *dreadful heresies*. He asserts with St. Paul that *Christ by the GRACE of God, tasted death for every man*: and this *grace* he calls free, as extending itself *freely* to all. . . . He frequently observes with the same apostle, that *Christ is the Saviour of ALL men, but specially of them that believe*; and that *God will have ALL men to be saved*, consistently with their moral agency, and the tenor of his gospel. With St. John he maintains, that *God is love*, and that *Christ is the propitiation not only for our sins, but also for the sins of the WHOLE WORLD* . . . and with St. Peter, that *the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that ALL should come to repentance*; yea, that God, without hypocrisy, *commandeth ALL men, EVERYWHERE, to repent*. . . .

Thus far, Wesley's position coincided completely with that of the Remonstrants; but Fletcher's next point is this:

Thus far, Mr. W. agrees with Arminius, because he thinks that illustrious Divine agreed thus far with the Scriptures, and all the early Fathers of the Church. But if Arminius (as the Author of *Pietas Oxoniensis* affirms in his letter to Dr. Adams) "denied that man's nature is totally corrupt, and asserted that he hath still a freedom of will to turn to God, but not without the assistance of grace," Mr. W. is no Arminian, for he strongly asserts the *total* fall of man, and constantly maintains that by nature man's will is only free to evil, and that divine grace must first prevent, and then continually further him, to make him willing and able to turn to God. . . .<sup>6</sup>

These sentences point us to the basic difference between the Remonstrant and the Wesleyan Arminianisms. In seeing man's acts as contingent so far as God is concerned, and in thinking that moral agency presupposes "free-will" in the special and particular sense of indeterminacy of action under God, the two were agreed. In claiming that all men actually have power to respond to such revelation from God as reaches them, and that revelation sufficient to save actually reaches every man, whether he hears the gospel or not, they were agreed also. (Historic Calvinism would query all these positions.) But the two Arminianisms divided over the question whether capacity for response to God

6. John Fletcher, *Works* (London, 1814), II:232-34. Proof of Fletcher's statement on Wesley's view of man's fallenness, and of the importance Wesley attached to it, is abundantly supplied in *The Doctrine of Original Sin according to Scripture, Reason and Experience* (1757), his 100,000-word reply to Dr. John Taylor (*Works*, V:492-669).

had been wholly lost at the fall. Wesley said it had, but held that it was now restored to every man as a gift of grace. The Remonstrants (not, it seems, Arminius himself) said it had never been wholly lost, and "total inability" had never been a true diagnosis of man's plight in Adam. Sin, said the Remonstrants in effect, has made man weak in the moral and spiritual realm, but not bad: he still has it in him to reach out, however sluggishly, after what is right, and God in fact helps him, powerfully if not decisively, in each particular right choice. Wesley agreed that God helps to actualize an existing capacity in every right choice, but maintained that this capacity only existed now because it had been supernaturally restored to all the race in consequence of the cross. While accepting Remonstrant synergism, in the sense of seeing man's cooperation in right action as something distinct from, and independent of, God's energizing, Wesley insisted that the capacity to cooperate was itself a love-gift from God to sinners, and that the Calvinistic doctrine that original sin involves loss of this capacity entirely had not been a whit too strong.

The effect of this difference was to give the two Arminianisms contrasting thrusts. The Remonstrant thrust was to upgrade fallen nature, minimize sin, and recast Christianity as a moralism of grace (that is, a system, like Roman Catholicism, in which grace makes possible saving moral endeavor: in New Testament terms, a Judaizing Christianity which is really "another gospel"). The end of this road, as the century following Dort showed, was Deism - salvation by merit of morality without internal grace at all. The Wesleyan thrust, however, was explicitly anti-deistic and in intention, if not entirely in effect, anti-moralistic too. Wesley maximized sin in order to magnify grace. He challenged the then standard Anglican moralism, of which he had himself once been a victim, by affirming present justification through faith in Christ alone, and by adding that true Christian morality was the fruit of justifying faith, and that self-abandoning trust was of this faith's very essence. Where Remonstrant Arminianism had been humanistic and rationalistic in motivation, delimiting God's sovereignty of set purpose in order to assert man's autonomy and self-determination, and so show that he, not God, was the author of his sins, and could properly be called to account for them, Wesleyan Arminianism was directly religious in motivation-more religious than theological, in fact-seeking only to exhibit the love of God in salvation and the power of faith in everyday life and practice. Remonstrant Arminianism, like later Baxterianism, took a voluntaristic view of faith as essentially commitment to new obedience, a view which assimilates faith to repentance and makes it both look and feel like a human work determining salvation. Wesleyan Arminianism, however, like earlier Reformation theology, both Lutheran and Calvinist, distinguished faith from repentance, defining it as assured trust in Christ, correlative to the witness of the Holy Spirit, and springing from the sense of hopelessness and helplessness which God's law induces. Having thus excluded all self-reliance from the psychology of faith, Wesley seems never to have seen the oddity of continuing to profess a theology which obliged him to view faith as

man's own work of response to God. There was, in truth, beneath the surface clearness and practicality of his mind a great deal of muddle at the theoretical level. Certainly, however, his view of the nature of faith made his professed Arminianism as fully evangelical, and as little legalistic, as it is possible for a synergistic system to be.<sup>7</sup> We shall mark the difference between it and the Remonstrant position by calling them evangelical and rationalistic Arminianisms respectively.

We shall now glance at their history, taking the latter first.

#### RATIONALISTIC ARMINIANISM

*Rationalistic* Arminianism was in effect, if not in intention, a revival of the semi-Pelagian reaction to Augustinianism which was developed in the fifth century by John Cassian and Faustus of Ries. It was a movement of recoil from the high doctrine of predestination taught by Luther, Calvin, and their reforming contemporaries<sup>8</sup> and systematized—perhaps too neatly—by Beza, Calvin's successor as head of the Geneva Academy. Arminianism emerged in Holland, but not as an isolated phenomenon; similar reactionary theologies appeared at about the same time in England, as we shall see, and in German Lutheranism. It was part of a Europe-wide encroachment on the theology of the Reformation by the rationalism of the Renaissance.

The story is this. In 1589 a brilliant young Amsterdam clergyman, who had studied for a year with Beza, Jakob

7. When the Nazarene theologian H. Orton Wiley calls synergism, defined as "the co-operation of divine grace and the human will," a "basic truth of the Arminian system," adding, however, that the ability to cooperate is a gift of grace, not an endowment of nature, he reproduces Wesley's view exactly (*Christian Theology* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press], II:355). Carl Bangs, in his admirable *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 342, notes that the English Wesleyan theologian W. B. Pope rejected the word synergism since the Lutheran use of it implied that man could cooperate with God by virtue of natural goodness not wholly corrupted by the fall (*Christian Theology* [New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1880], II:77f., 389f., III:24f., 74). In this Pope was identifying with Wesley's view and guarding it against misunderstanding.

8. For Luther, see his reply to Erasmus, *The Bondage of the Will*, tr. and introduced by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (London: James Clark, 1957). For Calvin, see *Institutes*, [III:xxi-xxiv, and his reply to Pighius, *The Eternal Predestination of God*, tr. J. K. S. Reid (London: James Clarke, 1961). For the Anglican Reformers, see Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Theology of the English Reformers* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), pp. 68-73, and Article XVII of the Thirty-nine. Note that the motives which prompted the Reformers' strong assertion of sovereign predestination were pastoral and doxological; they wanted to induce humble realism about our natural helplessness in sin, pure faith which totally forsakes self-reliance and self-confidence to trust Christ fully, strong hope that God will hold us fast and finish the good work he has begun in our lives, and heartfelt love to God for his great love to us. This is particularly clear in the two pastoral

Harmenszoon (Arminius<sup>9</sup>) by name, was asked to respond to an attack by a humanist layman named Koornhert, of Delft, on the supralapsarian view of predestination, and also to a pamphlet by two clergy who, under pressure from Koornhert's arguments, had moved to the position later called infralapsarianism or sublapsarianism. (Supralapsarianism, as spelled out by Beza and the many who went with him in the last third of the sixteenth century, was the view that God's pre-mundane election of some to salvation and his passing by of others had respect to men, not as fallen, but simply as rational creatures whom God planned to create, and so was logically prior in God's thinking to his decision to permit the fall. Infralapsarianism, as expressed by the Synod of Dort and most English-speaking Calvinists since, viewed the subjects of election as vessels of mercy chosen from a race envisaged as fallen and ruined.) It was assumed that Beza's pupil would hammer the defectors hard, but Arminius' detailed studies in preparation for writing led him to give up supralapsarianism for good.<sup>10</sup> The expected reply never appeared. Instead, for the next 20 years till his death of tuberculosis in 1609, at the age of 49, Arminius maintained, discreetly but decidedly, the "Arminian" view of election and the state of fallen man.<sup>11</sup>

In 1610 a group of his followers issued a Remonstrance, stating five theological positions for which they claimed toleration and protection. The first was that predestination is not the cause of the faith which saves or the unbelief which damns; the second was that Christ died to redeem all men, not just the elect; the fifth was that believers through negligence can fall out of the state of grace (through ceasing to believe); while the third and fourth disclaimed pure Pelagianism by affirming that neither faith nor good works exist apart from internal grace. Eventually, after much debate, the international Synod of Dort (1618-19) pronounced against these semi-Pelagian formulations, as we must call them, and affirmed in opposition five counter-theses of its own. These "five points of Calvinism," made memorable in English by the mnemonic T-U-L-I-P, are the Total depravity and inability of man in sin; the Unconditional and decisive character of God's election of sinners to salvation; the Limited scope (but definite and effective nature) of Christ's redemptive sin-bearing

paragraphs which follow the dogmatic definition of predestination in Article XVII: ". . . the godly consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal Salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God . . . we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture. . . ."

9. Arminius, to which Harmenszoon Latinized his name, was originally the name of a first-century Germanic chief who resisted the Romans.

10. Arminius' lifelong friend Petrus Bertius said in his funeral oration for the theologian that Arminius' studies led him first to move from supralapsarianism to infralapsarianism and then settle for a position like that of Melanchthon and Nicholas Hem(m)ingius, Lutheran professor of theology at Copenhagen and once Melanchthon's student namely, conditional predestination of individuals based on a synergistic view of how through grace men have faith. Bangs, who cites this (op. cit., pp. 138f.), doubts whether Beza's supralapsarianism was ever Arminius' view, but it would be strange if Bertius, who knew Arminius well and speaks positively on the point, was wrong.

11. Arminius' views were based on his understanding of Romans 7 and 9, on both of which he wrote formal treatises. He argues that the "wretched man" of Rom. 7:14ff., the man who feels himself "carnal, sold under sin" while he delights in God's law and loathes his involuntary failures to keep it, cannot be regenerate, and goes on to belabor

on the cross; the irresistible, efficacious quality of the grace which, by renewing sinners' hearts, leads them to faith and repentance through a calling that is truly effectual; and the certain Perseverance, through divine preservation, of all regenerate persons to final glory.<sup>12</sup> The overall thrust of the Dort deliverances is to make the double point that it is God who saves us by fulfilling his plan of election, which means that it is Christ who saves by his effective purchase of us on Calvary and the Holy Spirit who saves by instilling faith, and that in no sense do we save ourselves: salvation is wholly of the Lord, first to last a gift of free sovereign mercy. A. W. Harrison rightly calls the canons of Dort "rather one of the classic statements of Calvinism than an exposition of Arminian error";<sup>13</sup> their significance lies in their positive affirmations, which controlled the presentation of the Reformed faith in Europe for more than a century.

Dort having spoken, the plea for toleration went to the wall and the Arminians were temporarily exiled; but in 1626 they were able to return and open a theological seminary at Amsterdam, where Simon Episcopius, Stephanus Curcellaeus (Etienne de Courcelles), and Philip von Limborch, three outstanding men, taught in succession. Philip Schaff's description of Arminianism as standing for "an elastic, progressive, changing liberalism"<sup>14</sup> was, however, true of the seminary. The continental Arminian school drifted into undogmatic moralism and pietism, with Arian, Socinian, deist, and immanentist flavoring from time to time.

In England, where Bezan Calvinism was part of accepted orthodoxy for a generation from the 1570s, Peter Baro (Baron), a French refugee who had become Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, caused a stir in 1579 by arguing from the case of Nineveh in the book of Jonah the position which Melanchthon had taught and which in substance Arminius was to maintain ten years later—that "God predestined all men to

the alternative view as encouraging low moral standards among Christians by teaching them not to expect grace to free them from sin. He misses the point that any devoted Christian expressing his feelings about the shortcomings of his obedience will naturally find himself using Paul's language, nor does he weigh the theological implications of supposing that an unregenerate person can wholeheartedly ("in my inmost self," v. 22, RSV) delight in God's law. His view of Rom. 9 rests on the hypothesis that the question Paul answers from verse 6 on is not, "does the word of God fail if most Jews are rejected?" (answer: no, for God's election has regularly passed some Jews by), but "does the word of God fail if God rejects Jews who seek righteousness by works, not faith?" (answer: no, for God has always done this). It must be said at once that, if that is what Paul means, his language is extraordinarily elliptical and misleading. There is a fuller summary of Arminius' arguments in Bangs, *op. cit.*, pp. 186ff.

12. For the Remonstrance, see H. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), XI:iv; Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1877), 1:516ff. Its fifth point, no less than its first four, reproduced the thinking of Arminius: see Bangs, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-19, 348f.; the canons of Dort are in Schaff, *op. cit.*, III:550 ff; also, translated from the Dutch version by Dr. Gerrit J. Vander Lugt, in *Liturgy and Psalms* (New York: Board of Education, Reformed Church of America, 1968); and, in a most accurate rendering of the original Latin by Anthony A. Hoekema, in *Calvin Theological Journal*, November 1968. Dr. Hoekema's translation is separately available from Calvin Theological Seminary.

13. A. W. Harrison, *Arminianism* (London: Duckworth, 1937), p. 93.

14. Schaff, *op. cit.*, I:509. The Remonstrant Brotherhood (*Remonstrantse Broederschap*; the Remonstrant-Reformed Church) still

eternal life on condition of their faith and obedience."<sup>15</sup> William Barrett, Baro's student, preached the same doctrine in 1595, and the resulting furor led to the composing of the nine Lambeth Articles. These, the nearest English counterpart to the Dort canons, were a semi-official statement of what was then taken as Anglican and Christian orthodoxy on predestination and grace.<sup>16</sup> At the Hampton Court Conference of 1604, John Rainolds of Oxford went so far as to ask for the Lambeth Articles to be added to the Thirty-nine, but Bishop Bancroft and Dean Overall vigorously opposed the idea, and King James, who in any case resolved to give the Puritans nothing of substance, said no.

The seventeenth century saw, however, a widespread English recoil from Calvinism, both supra- and infralapsarian, along the lines that Baro and Barrett marked out. Though in Elizabeth's last years it looked as if the Bezan Calvinism of Cambridge's William Whitaker (died 1595) and William Perkins (died 1602), the only two British theologians of international reputation, was carrying all before it, men such as Lancelot Andrewes and John Overall, like Hooker before them, were already standing quietly apart, thinking it a provincial and uncatholic development, and their viewpoint made steady headway. James I, though himself a Calvinist in soteriology, with a robustly Calvinist archbishop of Canterbury, George Abbot, favored "High Churchmen" who accepted his doctrine of the divine right of kings, and these tended to be Arminian in sympathy. Laud, who became archbishop of Canterbury under Charles I, was one of them. Led by Laud, and greatly disliking Puritans, Charles promoted many Arminians,<sup>17</sup> and the net result was to set Anglican theology moving away from the world of Bezan scholasticism. Interest in the Greek fathers which blossomed at that time confirmed the trend. In the middle of the century the Cambridge Platonists, who interestingly had personal links with the Dutch Arminians,<sup>18</sup> began spreading their attractive combination of moralism and natural theology, and this became a fountainhead of later latitudinarianism. Absolute personal predestination had come to be thought of as a distinctly Puritan assertion, and when after 1660 the Restoration set the pendulum swinging against all that Puritanism had stood for, Calvinism had the status only of an oddity maintained by nonconformists. Anglican theologians with few exceptions were Arminian in type, as indeed they are still.

#### JUSTIFICATION AND GOD

It is now clear that rationalistic Arminianism, so far from being a creative advance upon the Bezan formulation of God's

exists. Lambertus Jacobus van Holk, one of its theologians, described it in 1960 as "the only basically nonconfessional denomination in the Netherlands" (*Man's Faith and Freedom*, ed. Gerald O. McCulloh [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1963], p. 42).

15. Schaff, *op. cit.*, I:659.

16. For the Lambeth Articles, see C. Hardwick, *History of the Articles* (London, 1859), chapter 7 and App. V; Schaff, I:658ff., III:523.

17. Hence the oft-repeated *bon mot*: "What do the Arminians hold?" "The best bishoprics and deaneries in all England."

18. See Rosalie L. Colic, *Light and Enlightenment: A Study of the Cambridge Platonists and the Dutch Arminians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1957). "Arminianism was in the beginning the result of the common-sense, humanistic attitude towards religion, metaphysics, physics, and human society, attractive to men of good will in England as in Holland: it gave authority to Mede, Whichcote, More, Cudworth and their fellows; it took much in turn from their philosophic idealism . . . the Arminian and Platonist traditions became

sovereignty, was rather a reaction against it, narrowing and impoverishing as reactions usually are, and that its concern was less to assert what Calvinists were denying than to deny what they were asserting. But we have not yet fully mapped the gulf that divides Arminian from mainstream Reformed theology. Two more areas of divergence call for notice. The first is the doctrine of justification.

The Reformers' doctrine of justification can be summed up in the following seven points:<sup>19</sup> (1) Every man faces the judgment-seat of God, and must answer to God there for himself; nothing can shield him from this. (2) Every man is a sinner by nature and practice, a nonconformist so far as God's law is concerned, and therefore all he can expect is God's wrath and rejection. Thus far the bad news; now the good news. (3) Justification is God's judicial act of pardoning a guilty sinner, accepting him as righteous, and receiving him as a son and heir. (4) The sole source of justification is God's grace, not man's effort or initiative. (5) The sole ground of justification is Christ's vicarious righteousness and blood-shedding, not our own merit; nor do supposed works of supererogation, purchase of indulgences, or multiplication of masses make any contribution to it; nor do the purgatorial pains of medieval imagination have any significance, or indeed reality, in relation to it. Justification is not the prize to work for, but a gift to be received through Christ. (6) The means of justification, here and now, is faith in Christ, understood as a pacifying and energizing trust that Christ's sacrificial death atoned for all one's sins. (7) The fruit of faith, the evidence of its reality and therefore the proof that a man is a Christian as he claims to be, is a manifested repentance and life of good works.

The Council of Trent met the Reformers' doctrine by defining justification as inner renewal plus pardon and acceptance and affirming that the "sole formal cause" (*unica formalis causa*) of justification, in both its aspects, was God's righteousness (*iustitia*) imparted through baptism as its instrumental cause.<sup>20</sup> "Formal cause," in the language of the schools, denoted that which gave a thing its quality (thus, heat was the formal cause of a thing being hot, or having the quality of hotness). The Tridentine thesis thus was that the ground of our being pardoned was the quality of actual divine righteousness infused into us: God declares us righteous, not liable to punishment for our sins, because we have been made genuinely righteous in ourselves. In the more biblical terminology of Protestantism, this was to make regeneration, or the start of sanctification, the ground of justification. In reply, a host of Reformed divines, continental and British,<sup>21</sup> drew out at length the position already explicit

19. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, III, especially xi; Hughes, op. cit., chap. II, pp. 54-75.

20. Decrees of the Council of Trent, VI:vii, cf. V:v; both translated in C. F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (London, S.P.C.K., 1966), pp. 213f. Allison's book assembles much thought-provoking material about the declension from the Reformers' view of justification by faith in seventeenth-century England.

21. Englishmen who upheld the Reformation doctrine in print included Richard Hooker; Bishops George Downname, Lancelot Andrewes, John

in Calvin,<sup>22</sup> that the "sole formal cause" of justification is not God's righteousness imparted, but Christ's righteousness imputed; and to make their meaning more clear, they developed the habit of distinguishing between Christ's active obedience to God's law, in keeping its precepts, and his passive obedience to it, in undergoing its penalty, and insisted that our acceptance as righteous depends on the imputing to us of Christ's obedience in both its aspects.<sup>23</sup>

The same polemic was directed at the Arminians, who were regularly accused of being crypto-Romans because they held that our faith is itself actual, personal righteousness, being obedience to the gospel viewed as God's new law, and as such is not only the condition but also the ground of our justification. Faith is "counted for righteousness," on this view, because it is righteousness. The Reformed men argued against both Romans and Arminians that by finding the ground of justification in the believer himself they ministered to human pride on the one hand and on the other hand robbed the Son of God of the glory which is his due. It is not enough, they urged, to say (as both Romans and Arminians did say) that without Christ our justification would be impossible; one must go on to say that it is on the ground of his obedience, as our representative and substitutionary sin-bearer, and that alone, that righteousness is reckoned to us and sin cancelled. The analysis of justification in the Westminster Confession reflects the precision and balance of thought, as well as the polemical thrusts, that came to focus in these exchanges.

Those whom God effectually calleth he also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience, to them as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God (XI. i).

Why did the Arminians take the line they did concerning the ground of justification? The answer is that they were driven to it by the inescapable logic of their basic denial that the individual's salvation is wholly God's work, through the effectual calling and sovereign preservation

Davenant, James Ussher, Joseph Hall, Thomas Barlow, John Bramhall, Robert Sanderson, William Nicholson, William Beveridge; John Donne, Thomas Gataker, Anthony Burgess, John Owen, Isaac Barrow, Robert Traill.

22. "It is entirely by the intervention of Christ's righteousness that we obtain justification before God. This is equivalent to saying that man is not righteous in himself, but that the righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation, while he is strictly deserving of punishment. Thus vanishes the absurd dogma, that man is justified by faith inasmuch as faith brings him under the influence of the Spirit of God, by whom he is rendered righteous. . . . You see that our righteousness is not in us but in Christ, that we possess it only because we are partakers in Christ" (*Inst.*, III:xi.23). See also Calvin's discussion of session VI of the Council of Trent, *Tracts and Treatises* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844-51), III:108ff., esp. pp. 114-21.

23. When Johannes Piscator of Herborn urged that only the passive obedience of Christ is imputed to believers, Reformed theologians generally rejected his view. This was at the end of the sixteenth century.

whereby he executes his eternal unconditional decree. The same logic characteristically operates in Roman Catholic thinking too. That the particular denials out of which the Arminian doctrine of justification was built are corollaries of that basic denial becomes clear as soon as they are set out. There were five of them.

The first denial was that man's act of faith is wholly God's gift.

The second denial was that there is a direct correlation in God's plan between the obtaining of redemption by Christ's obedience to death and the saving application of redemption by the Holy Spirit-direct, that is, in the sense that the former secures and guarantees the latter. The Arminian view was that the atonement made salvation possible for all but not necessarily actual for any. This meant abandoning any precise concept of Christ's death as substitutionary, for substitution is, by its very nature, an effective relationship, securing actual immunity from obligation for the person in whose place the substitute has acted:

Payment God will not twice demand,  
First from my bleeding Surety's hand  
And then again from mine.

Grotius' famous, or infamous, theory of the atonement as an example of the punishment sinners would receive if they did not come to their senses and repent was one of several ways in which the Arminian conception was spelled out.

The third denial was that the covenant of grace is a relationship which God imposes unilaterally and unconditionally, by effectual calling, saying to his elect, "I will . . . and you shall. . . ." The Arminian idea was that the covenant of grace is a new law, offering present pardon on condition of present faith and final salvation on condition of sustained faith.

The fourth denial was that faith is essentially fiducial (a matter of trustful knowledge, assured and animating, of what another has done). The Arminian alternative was that faith is essentially volitional (a matter of committing oneself to do something, i.e., live by the new law which Christ procured). Pietists from the seventeenth to the twentieth century have so regularly fastened onto the Arminian conception as to make it appear an evangelical axiom, but the fact remains that it marks a shift from the original Reformation teaching,<sup>24</sup> and one which can quickly breed both anti-intellectualism and the idea of faith as a meritorious work.

24. The fullest and most exact demonstration of this is R. T. Kendall's monograph, *The Concept of Faith from William Perkins to the Westminster Assembly* (Oxford University Press, 1979).

The fifth denial was that the ground of justification is Christ's righteousness imputed. The Arminian notion, as we saw, was that faith itself is the ground of justification, being itself righteousness (obedience to the new law) and accepted by God as such. Arminius' formula was that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us not for righteousness,

but as a basis on which faith may be imputed to us for righteousness.<sup>25</sup> Appeal was made to the phraseology of faith being reckoned for righteousness in Romans 4:3, 5, 9 (cf. 11, 13; all echoing Gen. 15:6); but Paul's insistence that the Christian's righteousness is God's gift (5:15-17), and his emphatic declarations that sinners, though ungodly (4:5; 5:6-8), are justified by faith through Christ's blood irrespective of their own works, make this exegesis really impossible.

25. "To a man who believes, faith is imputed for righteousness through grace, because God has sent forth his Son, Jesus Christ, to be a propitiation, a throne of grace, through faith in his blood" (*The Writings of Arminius*, I:264).

The Arminian teaching on justification is in effect, if not in intention, legalistic, turning faith from a means of receiving from God into a work that merits before God. As such, it corresponds in principle with the doctrine of the Council of Trent; at this point its critics were right. But it, or perhaps we should say, the way of thinking which it represented, had a wide influence, not least in England. Anti-Puritan, anti-Calvinist Anglicans such as Henry Hammond, Herbert Thorndike, and Jeremy Taylor taught justification on the basis of a personal righteousness which God accepts, despite its shortcomings, for Jesus' sake. They spell out the nature of this righteousness in terms of repentance and effort for holiness, and their concept was canonized after the Restoration by the (unhappily) influential Bishop George Bull, who interpreted Paul by James and understood both as teaching justification by works. (The trick was done by defining faith moralistically, as "virtually the whole of evangelical obedience," "all the obedience required by the gospel."<sup>26</sup>) Teaching of this kind led inevitably to a new legalism of which the key thought was that the exerting of steady moral effort now is the way to salvation hereafter. By Wesley's day the true meaning of justification by faith had been forgotten almost everywhere in the Church of England.

26. Bull, *Harmonia Apostolica* (Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology), I:58, 57. See Allison, chap. 6, "The Theology of George Bull," pp. 118-37.

Within Puritanism, too, the Arminian doctrine of justification made inroads. The only Arminian Puritan of ability was John Goodwin, author of *Imputatio Fidei* (on Romans 4), *The Banner of Justification Displayed, An Exposition of Romans 9* and *Redemption Redeemed*.<sup>27</sup> Goodwin was a stormy petrel, and though much noticed, he does not seem to have converted many to his opinions. But Richard Baxter, perhaps the greatest of all Puritan devotional writers, urged the Arminian doctrine of justification (for that is what it was) as part of his Amyraldean understanding of the gospel (we shall glance at Amyraldism shortly), and as a result of a generation's campaigning by him in its interest his position had become influential among the heirs of the Puritans in both England and Scotland by the end of the seventeenth century. In the 1690s it was referred to as "Baxterianism" and (because of the prominence it gave to the

27. *Redemption Redeemed* (1651) was Goodwin's *magnum opus*, a 600-page folio which he dedicated to Benjamin Whichcote, the Cambridge Platonist, as vice-chancellor of the University, and to all the college heads and divinity students there. Its title-page is a memorable memorial to the days before dust-jackets and publishers' blurbs. Απολυτρωσι Απολυτρωσεω or *Redemption Redeemed. Wherein the Most Glorious Work of the Redemption of the World by Jesus Christ, is by Expressstness of Scripture, clearness of Argument, countenance of the best Authority, as well Ancient as Modern, Vindicated and*

*Asserted in the Just Latitude and Extent of it, according to the Counsel and most Gracious Intentions of God, against the incroachments of later times made upon it, whereby the unsearchable Riches and Glory of the Grace of God therein, have been, and yet are, much obscured, and hid from the eyes of many. Together with a sober, plain and thorough Discussion of the great Questions relating hereunto, as viz. concerning Election and Reprobation, the Sufficiency, and Efficacy of the Means vouchsafed unto Men by God to repent and Believe; concerning the Perseverance of the Saints, and those who do believe; concerning the Nature of God, his manner of Acting, his Intentions, Purposes, Decrees, etc. the Dependency of all Creatures, or second Causes upon Him, as well in their Operations, as simple Existencies, or Beings, etc. The Decision of all these Questions founded upon the good Word of God, interpreted according to the generally-received Doctrine, concerning the Nature and Attributes of God, the manifest Exigency of the Words, Phrases, coherencies, in the respective passages hereof relating to the said Questions, as also (for the most part) according to the Judgment and Sence of the best Expositors, as well Modern, as Ancient. With three Tables annexed for the Readers accommodation.* John Owen, then vice-chancellor of Oxford University, replied in 1654 with a folio of similar length, dedicated to Oliver Cromwell, dealing with the theme of perseverance, which had a title-page of almost equal impressiveness. *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed, or, the certain Permanency of their (1) Acceptation with God and (2) Sanctification from God manifested and proved from the (1) Eternall Principles (2) Effectuall Causes (3) Externall Meanes Thereof. In (I) the Immutability of the Nature Decrees Covenants and Promises of God (2) the Oblation and Intercession of Jesus Christ (3) the Promises, Exhortations, Threats of the Gospell. Improved in its Genuine Tendency to Obedience and Consolation. And Vindicated in a Full Answer to the Discourse of Mr. John Goodwin against it, in his book Entituled Redemption Redeemed. With some Digressions Concerning (1) the Immediate effects of the Death of Christ (2) Personall Indwelling of the Spirit (3) Union with*

"new law" idea) "Neonomianism."<sup>28</sup>

Baxter's view was rooted in a rather quaint natural theology; with Grotius, he thought Bible teaching about God's rule and kingdom should be assimilated to current political theory, or, as he put it, theology should follow a "political method." God should be viewed as governor, and the gospel as part of his legal code. Our salvation involves a double justification, one here and a second hereafter, and both justifications require a twofold righteousness, Christ's, the meritorious cause of the enacting of God's new law, and our own, in obeying that new law by genuine faith and repentance. Jesus Christ, who procured the new law for mankind by satisfying the prescriptive and penal demands of the old one, should be thought of as head of God's government, exalted and enthroned to administer the law which his death secured and under it to pardon true believers. Faith is imputed for righteousness here and now because it is real obedience to the gospel, which is God's new law and the new covenant. Faith, however, involves a commitment to keep the moral law which was God's original preceptive code, and every believer, though righteous in terms of the new law, needs pardon every moment for his shortcomings in relation to the old one.

Baxter did battle constantly against those who held the mainstream Reformed view that the ground and formal cause of our justification is the imputing to us of Christ's own righteousness (i.e., his fulfilment of the precept and penalty of the moral law on our behalf). He was certain that this view logically entails antinomianism (i.e., the needlessness of our keeping God's law), on the "payment-God-will-not-twice-demand" principle: what Christ has done for us we cannot be required to do again for ourselves. At this point in his thinking Baxter assumed, as his Roman Catholic, Socinian, and High Anglican contemporaries also did, that law-keeping has no relevance for God or man save as work done to secure salvation. It is an odd mistake for him to have made, but he never got this streak of legalism out of his theological system.<sup>29</sup> His views had crystallized during his traumatic time as a chaplain in the 1640s countering real antinomianism in the army, and from then on antinomianism was his *bête noire*, right up to his last months on earth, when by assaulting as antinomian the reprinted sermons of Tobias Crisp he effectively wrecked the "Happy Union" between Presbyterians and Independents almost before it had been

*Christ (4) the nature of Gospell promises &c. ALSO A PREFACE Manifesting the Judgements of the Antients touching the Truth contended for: with a discourse touching the epistles of IGNATIUS; the EPISCOPACY in them Asserted: and some Animadversions on Dr. H: H: his Dissertations on that Subject.* ("H. H." was Henry Hammond.)

28. See Allison, op cit., chap. 8, pp. 154-77. Allison does not note the Arminian source of the idea, common to Baxter, Hammond, Thorndike, Jeremy Taylor, and John Goodwin, that faith is itself our righteousness by reason of the new principle of acceptance which God enacted for Jesus' sake. But he is right when he says: "If we are justified only by a righteousness of our own (made acceptable on account of Christ's sacrifice), and if our own righteousness is in fact directly given to us by God, as Baxter seems to say, then it is difficult to distinguish Baxter's position from that of the Council of Trent" (p. 163).

29. John Owen devotes the last part of his treatise on the Holy Spirit (Πνευματολογία) to correcting the assumption that the Reformed gospel makes holiness needless. "The Socinians contend that the doctrine of the satisfaction of Christ doth overthrow the necessity of a holy life; the Papists say the same concerning the imputation of the righteousness of Christ unto our

contracted.<sup>30</sup>

The Crispian controversy of the 1690s produced much heated writing, but the best contribution was the coolest—Robert Traill's *Vindication of the Protestant Doctrine concerning Justification, and of its Preachers and Professors, from the unjust charge of Antinomianism. In a Letter from the Author to a Minister in the Country*. Traill notes, first, that Baxter's scheme does not come to terms with the representative headship of Christ, the last Adam, as set forth in Romans 5:12ff.—the unique relationship on which the imputing of Christ's righteousness to his people is based—and, second, that the scheme is spiritually unreal, for a sinner pressed in conscience by the burden of uncleanness and guilt finds relief, not by reminding himself that his faith is evangelical righteousness according to the new law, but by looking to Christ and his cross. Talk of one's faith and one's righteousness at such a time would be at best a frivolity and at worst a snare. There seems to be no possible answer to that. Not even Baxter's "politicized" version of the Arminian doctrine of justification will do.

This brings us to the last divergence between Arminian and Calvinist thinking that we shall notice, namely, their different views of God's character. This is a distinct issue from whether he is sovereign in men's response or lack of response to him, and whether he unconditionally elects to salvation or not. The difference emerges as we reflect on the view of the atonement which lay behind Baxter's teaching on justification. Taking a leaf out of Grotius' book, Baxter held that when God purposed to restore fallen man, he carried out his plan not by satisfying the law, but by changing it. In consideration of Christ's death a new law was brought in, waiving the penal requirement of the old law. To be sure, Baxter sees Christ's death as satisfaction (compensation) to the Father for our sins, in a manner reminiscent of Anselm, rather than as a penal example for man's instruction in the fashion of Grotius; yet he is with Grotius in assuming that the demand for retribution in the original law was grounded not in the nature of God, but only in the exigencies of government. What is at issue here is the divine holiness. Mainstream Reformed theology sees both the precept and the penalty of the law of God as permanently expressing his unchangeable holiness and justice, and holds that God does not save sinners at the law's expense; instead, he saves them by satisfying his law on their behalf, propitiating his own wrath by diverting it upon the Son as man's substitute, so that he remains just in judging all sin as it

justification; the same charge is laid by others against the doctrine of the gratuitous election of God, the almighty efficacy of his grace in the conversion of sinners, and his faithfulness in the preservation of true believers in their state of grace unto the end" (*Works*, III:566f.). But, says Owen, holiness is necessary by reason of (1) God's nature, (2) God's electing purpose, (3) God's command, (4) the goal of Christ's mission, (5) our need to be cured of the inner disorder sin has brought.

30. For the full story, see Peter Toon, *Hyper-Calvinism* (London: The Olive Tree, 1969), chap. 3. On Crisp, cf. Allison, *op. cit.*, pp. 171f. Crisp affirmed justification before faith through Christ's substitutionary death for us, and spoke Lutherishly of Christ becoming by imputation a great sinner. His idea of faith as knowledge of Christ's death for me, the sinner, was Lutherish too. Published with the title *Christ Alone Exalted*, Crisp's sermons celebrate the great grace of Christ to great sinners in his atoning death and present acceptance of the worst of us. Crisp disclaims antinomianism, urging holiness as our grateful response. The worst that can be said of him is that some of his language was tasteless and overstrained. John Gill, a hyper-Calvinist but no antinomian, reprinted the sermons later with notes vindicating Crisp's essential soundness; this edition reached its seventh reprint in 1832.

deserves even when he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. The schemes of Grotius and Baxter make the wrath of God against sin a public gesture which is something less than a revelation of God's abiding character; thus it opens the door to the idea that a wise benevolence is the real essence of God's moral nature. In due course Unitarians and Liberals latched onto this idea, some of them with grateful backward glances to the Arminians and to Baxter for having pointed the way to their position.<sup>31</sup>

One last fruit of rationalistic Arminianism calls for notice: the modified Calvinism (a "half-way house between Calvinism and Arminianism," A. W. Harrison calls it<sup>32</sup>) which the Scot John Cameron developed at the Saumur Seminary, and which history knows as Amyraldism, from Moise Amyraut (Amyraldus), its most copious exponent. Amyraldism affirmed that as Arminianism erred in thinking that unconditional predestination has no place in God's decree to save believers, so supra- and infralapsarians erred in thinking that the Father sent the Son to redeem only the elect. Instead, God first appointed the Son to redeem our fallen race without distinction and then chose whom he would effectually call and preserve to glory. Amyraldism thus fused the Arminian view of indefinite (universal) redemption and of the covenant of grace as identical with the whosoever-will promise of the gospel with the Calvinistic belief in particular election, effectual calling, and final preservation. Baxter found Amyraldism congenial to his "political method" and lifelong quest for a unitive theology, but Reformed theologians generally have judged it incoherent and lame, and positively anti-biblical in its way of relating the mission of Christ to men's salvation. Certainly, such a view could hardly ever have emerged had there been no felt need for a pacifying synthesis of Calvinism and Arminianism which would give a sense that all had won, and all must have prizes.

31. The Unitarian historian Alexander Gordon was a case in point. The Richard Baxter Church in Kidderminster today is a Unitarian meeting-house.

32. *Arminianism*, p. III. Amyraldism is evaluated, under the name "Post-redemptionism," in B. B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 90-96.

Now we move to *evangelical* Arminianism, which had as part of its purpose the reinstating of the Reformation truth of justification which rationalistic Arminianism had so effectively turned out of doors.

#### EVANGELICAL ARMINIANISM

John Wesley learned moralistic Arminianism from his parents as part of the family doctrine. Both Samuel and Susanna had moved out from Calvinistic nonconformity into Arminian Anglicanism, and were sharply hostile to the teaching they had left behind. (The psychology of such attitudes is well known.) A letter from Susanna to John in 1725, when he was 22, states exactly the view of predestination, and of the meaning of Article XVII of the Thirty-nine, which he always upheld in later life:

The doctrine of predestination as maintained by rigid Calvinists, is very shocking . . . because it charges the most holy God with being the author of sin. . . . I do firmly believe

that God from all eternity hath elected some to everlasting life, but then I humbly conceive that his election is founded in His foreknowledge, according to Romans viii, 29, 30 . . . Whom in his eternal prescience God saw would make a right use of their purses, and accept of offered mercy, He did predestinate . . . nor can it with more reason be supposed that the prescience of God is the cause that many finally perish than that our knowing the sun will rise tomorrow is the cause of its rising.<sup>33</sup>

However, John's association with the Moravians, which led to his Aldersgate Street experience of 1738, knocked all the moralism and self-effort out of his Arminianism, and brought in its place a clear emphasis on instantaneous justification through faith<sup>34</sup> as part of an instantaneous new birth, without which there was no true religion. As we hinted earlier, Wesley's stress when presenting conversion as the entrance to authentic Christian life (unlike that of some today who would see themselves as Wesley's successors) was on man's utter and helpless dependence on God to give faith and bring about new birth. This was because Wesley thought of faith, not as decision (to use the modern catchword), but as a compound of trust and assurance, the subjective consequence of the Spirit's inner witness. What the Spirit witnessed to in giving faith was the promise of pardon and adoption as applying to oneself. Calvin, speaking here for all the Reformers, had defined faith as "a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favour toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit."<sup>35</sup> Wesley's teaching on faith represents a return to this, a return from the world of synergism and self-determination to that of monergism and sovereign grace.

It was Wesley's Aldersgate Street experience that determined his view of faith. There, as his heart was "strangely warmed" through the reading of Luther on Romans, he entered into what his Moravian friends had told him that real faith was: namely, assurance of pardon and acceptance through the cross. "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*. . . Habitually (though not in perfect verbal consistency) Wesley taught that this assurance is an integral element in the faith that God gives-the faith, that is, that saves.<sup>36</sup> Repentance was to him faith's precondition, sorrow for sin and reform of manners. Sometimes, indeed, as in his 1744 Conference Minutes, he would describe repentance as "a low state of faith," or as the faith of a *servant* in contrast with that of a *son* (compare Gal. 4:1-7; Rom. 8:15f.); his basic thought, however,

33. The letter is given in Luke Tyerman, *Life and Times of John Wesley* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872), I:39f.; Harrison, *op. cit.*, pp. 189f.; Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography* (London: Epworth Press, 1962-), I:87f.

34. Wesley "rejects the commonly held view that justification is a double act in which the first part takes place in the present and presupposes faith, whilst the second is at the last day and requires works. But for John Wesley there was only one justification . . . received by faith alone, and faith was begotten only through grace" (Schmidt, *op. cit.*, II.i, p. 43).

35. *Institutes*, III:ii.7; cf. note 24 above.

36. Compare this definition of faith, from the 1744 Conference Minutes: "First, a sinner is convinced by the Holy Ghost, 'Christ loved me and gave himself for me.' This is that faith by which he is justified or pardoned the

was that, whereas repentance is a state of *seeking* God, faith is the state of *finding* him, or rather of *being found* by him. A person seeking God can do no more than wait on God, showing the sincerity of his quest by the earnestness of his prayers and the tenderness of his conscience, till the light of assurance dawns in his heart. Such teaching is similar to the Puritan doctrine of "preparatory works," and led to similar practice in counseling troubled souls: it is a far cry from Dutch Arminianism.

As for Wesley's view of justification itself, it was as far as Wesley knew a return to the Reformers. He spoke of Christ's atoning death in penal and substitutionary terms, and insisted that it was on the grounds of that death, and that alone, that we are forgiven and accepted by God. With perfect sincerity he declared himself in 1765 to have believed about justification for 27 years "just as Mr. Calvin does."<sup>37</sup>

Yet Wesley would never let the world forget that he wanted his teaching taken in an Arminian sense, because Calvinism in all its forms was anathema to him; and this caused him much trouble, mostly unnecessary and of his own making. He always caricatured Calvinism in the same three ways—as antinomian, making holiness needless; as restricting the preaching of God's love to the world (for some reason he was always sure that according to Calvinism only "one in twenty" is elect); and as fatalistic, destroying moral responsibility and denying the connection between means and ends in the spiritual realm. At the end of his life he wrote:

Q. 74. What is the direct antidote to Methodism, the doctrine of heart-holiness?

A. Calvinism: All the devices of Satan, for these fifty years, have done far less toward stopping this work of God, than that single doctrine. It strikes at the root of salvation from sin, previous to glory, putting the matter on quite another issue. [That is, Wesley takes Calvinism to say that men may be saved without holiness by virtue of their election.]

Q. But wherein lie the charms of this doctrine? What makes men swallow it so greedily?

A. It seems to magnify Christ, although in reality it supposes Him to have died in vain. For the absolutely elect must have been saved without Him; and the non-elect cannot be

moment he receives it. Immediately the same Spirit bears witness, 'Thou art pardoned; thou hast redemption in his blood.' And this is saving faith, whereby the love of God is shed abroad in his heart." Cited from Maximin Pierre, *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1938), p. 423.

<sup>37</sup>. Cited from Harrison, op. cit., p. 191. Wesley also wrote: "No man ever lived, not John Calvin himself, who asserted either original sin or justification by faith in more strong, more clear and express terms, than Arminius has done. In this respect there is not a hair's breadth difference between Mr. Wesley and Mr. Whitefield" (*Works*, V:133). On original sin, Wesley's statement about Arminius is substantially true (cf. Bangs, op. cit., pp. 337ff.), but on justification Wesley, if not disingenuous, was not well informed. In *Thoughts on Christ's Imputed Righteousness* (1762: *Works*, V:100ff.) he declines to speak of the imputed righteousness of Christ as the ground of justification simply because it is not a biblical phrase, taking no notice of the difference between Reformed and Arminian conceptions of how Christ's obedience and man's faith relate in justification; yet he republished at different times Richard Baxter's *Aphorisms of Justification* and John Goodwin's *Treatise on Justification*, in both of which the Arminian conception is opposed to the Reformed in quite a sharp way.

saved by Him.

<sup>38</sup>Misrepresentations like this, from a godly man who over fifty years had had many Calvinistic friends and abundant opportunity to read Calvinistic books, argue a degree of prejudice and closed-mindedness which is almost pathological. Perhaps John's invincible ignorance (shared by Charles) as to what Calvinism really was should be seen as a lifelong haunting by the ghost of Susanna. At all events, it became a rod for his back, and for the backs of many others too.

<sup>38</sup>. *Works*, ed. T. Jackson (London, 1829), VIII:336.

Wesley's first anti-Calvinist eruptions were occasioned by troubles in the Fetter Lane and Kingswood Societies in 1740-41. There were some sharp exchanges, and John, with Charles' help, produced a volume entitled *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love*, in which, along with some vintage Wesley paeans, ditties of this sort were reeled off:

*God, ever merciful and just  
With new-born babes did Tophet fill;  
Down into endless torments thrust,  
Merely to show his sovereign will.  
This is that Horrible Decree!  
This is that wisdom from beneath! God (O detest the blasphemy!)  
Hath pleasure in the sinner's death.*<sup>39</sup>

Comment on the tone and content of such lines, and on the degree of pastoral wisdom which they show as a contribution to domestic debate within a young evangelical movement, is surely superfluous.

<sup>39</sup>. The phrase "horrible decree" is Wesley's tendentious rendering of Calvin's description (*Institutes*, III:xxiii.7) of God's decree of election and reprobation as "*horrible*"—meaning something awesome, making one tremble, but not necessarily something repellent.

For all the inflammatory gestures made on both sides, the 1741 debate died down; but in 1770 came bigger trouble. Wesley's Conference Minutes, wishing to make the point, against real or supposed Calvinistic antinomians, that salvation through faith is also, and necessarily, salvation in holiness, were so drafted as to appear to teach, Roman-style, that a man's own works are the ground of his acceptance with God. Having reaffirmed that "we have leaned too much toward Calvinism" in playing down the fact that a man must be faithful and labor for life and bring forth works of repentance if he is to be saved, the Minutes proceed thus:

Once more review the whole affair: (1) Who of us is now accepted with God? He that now believes in Christ with a loving, obedient heart.

(2) But who among those that never heard of Christ? He that, according to the light he has, "feareth God and worketh righteousness."

(3) Is this the same with "he that is sincere?" Nearly, if not quite. [The Arminian doctrine of "universal sufficient grace" here comes to the surface.]

(4) Is not this salvation by works? Not by merit of works, but by works as a condition.

(5) What have we been disputing about for these thirty years? I am afraid about words. . . .

(6) As to merit itself, of which we have been so dreadfully afraid. We are rewarded according to our works, yea because of our works. How does this differ from, "for the sake of our works?" And how does this differ from *secundum merita operum*? which is no more than, "as our works deserve. " Can you split this hair? I doubt [i.e., I rather think] I cannot. . . .

(8) Does not talking . . . of a justified or sanctified state, tend to mislead men; almost naturally leading them to trust what was done in one moment? Whereas we are every moment pleasing or displeasing to God, according to our works. . . .<sup>40</sup>

These Minutes sparked off the heated and tragic controversy of the next five years, in which Wesley's lieutenants John Fletcher and Thomas Olivers exchanged fierce literary punches with Toplady, the Hill brothers, and Betridge, while the Calvinist and Arminian segments of the revival movement drifted further and further apart. One comment only, however, is relevant for us: and that is, that it is no more right to dismiss these Minutes as theologically inept (even though the 1771 Conference admitted that they had been unguarded), than it is right, with A. W. Harrison, to call them "apparently innocuous."<sup>41</sup> They are in truth an object lesson on the tensions and incoherences that necessarily arise as soon as an Arminian, committed as he is to treating man's response to the gospel as man's own contribution, and continuance in grace as contingent on his continued response, tries to state the Reformation doctrine of justification by grace through faith without works. The doctrine he states, whatever he calls it, will appear as justification by works in fact. No man, however confident in manner, can really square this circle. Wesley's various attempts to do so (and he made quite a number) put one in mind of the parody of the Scout song:

They said it couldn't be done:  
He said, "There's nothing to it!"  
He tackled the job with a smile

40. Cited from Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (London: Epworth Press, 1960), pp. 61 f. Harrison, *op. cit.*, pp. 204f., traces the course of the debates which the Minutes provoked.

41. *Op. cit.*, p. 206. The 1771 Conference declared: "as the said [1770] Minutes are not sufficiently guarded in the way they are expressed, we hereby solemnly declare, in the sight of God, that we have no trust or confidence but in the alone merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for Justification or Salvation either in life, death or the day of judgment and though no one is a real Christian believer, (and consequently can not be saved) who doeth not good works . . . yet our works have no part in meriting or purchasing our salvation from first to last, either in whole or in part.

And couldn't do it.

Which brings us to our next section.

#### HOW FAR-REACHING IS THE CLEAVAGE BETWEEN CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM?

Views differ here. Some maximize the cleavage in terms of theological black and white. In the seventeenth century, for example, Prynne spoke of "Arminian thieves and robbers," and Francis Rous told Parliament that "an Arminian is the spawn of a Papist"; and in the eighteenth century the Wesleys, as we saw, told the world that Calvinism was blasphemous, devilish, and spiritually ruinous. Many since have echoed both estimates, and left the matter there. A more discerning approach, however, is that exemplified by William Ames, one of the *periti* of Dort, who wrote: "The view of the Remonstrants, as it is taken by the mass of their supporters, is not strictly a heresy [that is, a major lapse from the gospel], but a dangerous error tending toward heresy. As maintained by some of them, however, it is the Pelagian heresy: because they deny that the effective operation of inward grace is necessary for conversion."<sup>42</sup> Ames' words alert us to the fact that Arminianisms vary, so that blanket judgments are not in order: each version of post-Reformation semi-Pelagianism must be judged on its own merits. Ames is right. The facts surveyed in this article show clearly the need for discrimination. Thus, it is surely proper to be less hard on Wesleyanism than on any form of Dutch Arminianism, just because (to the loss of clarity and consistency, yet to the furtherance of the gospel) Wesley's teaching included so much Reformation truth about the nature of faith, the witness of the Spirit, and effectual calling. Wesley's Arminianism, we might say, contained a good deal of its own antidote! Its evangelical and religious motivation, also, puts it in a different class from the Remonstrant position.

42. Ames, *De Conscientia*, IV:iv, q. 4; cited in Latin by William Cunningham, *Historical Theology* (London: Banner of Truth, 1960), II:378.

But why should Arminianisms vary in this way? The final answer is: not because Arminians are personally erratic, but because all Arminian positions are intrinsically and in principle unstable. Arminianism is a slippery slope, and it is always arbitrary where one stops on the slide down. All Arminianisms start from a rationalistic hermeneutic which reads into the Bible at every point the philosophic axiom that to be responsible before God man's acts must be contingent in relation to him. All Arminianisms involve a rationalistic restriction of the sovereignty of God and the efficacy of the cross, a restriction which Scripture seems directly to contradict. All Arminianisms involve a measure of synergism, if not strong (God helps me to save myself) then weak (I help God to save me). All Arminianisms imply the non-necessity of hearing the gospel, inasmuch as they affirm that every man can be saved by responding to what he knows of God here and now. The right way to analyze the difference between Arminianisms is to ask how far they go in working out these principles, and how far they allow evangelical checks and balances to restrain them.

On all this, we have just three comments to make.

First: the Bible forbids us to take a single step along the Arminian road. It clearly affirms the positions which Dort highlighted: God's absolute sovereignty; human responsibility without any measure of contingency or indeterminacy (look at Acts 2:23!); and a direct connection between the work of Christ in obtaining and applying redemption. The very name of Jesus is itself an announcement that "he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). It does not tell us that He will make all men savable, but that He will actually save those who are His. And it is in these terms that the Bible speaks throughout.<sup>43</sup>

Second: if we travel the Arminian road, there are three precious things that we necessarily lose. These are: the clear knowledge of God's sovereignty in our salvation, the clear sight of Christ's glory as the Savior of His people, and the clear sense of the Christian's eternal security in the covenant of grace. Also, our piety, unless inconsistent with and superior to our principles (as John Wesley's, for instance, seems to have been), must center on the thought that at each present moment everything-future salvation, present blessing, current usefulness to God—depends on the use I make of opportunities and resources already given, for God, having made me able to do what I should do, is standing back, so to speak, waiting to see if here and now I shall do it. Self-reliance rather than dependence, strain rather than spontaneity, and an anthropocentric fixity on dedication which inhibits the theocentric instinct for doxology will thus become characteristic of our Christian lives, and the inner relaxation and gaiety witnessed to by such far-out workers for God as Paul, George Whitefield, and C. H. Spurgeon, who knew themselves to be carried along and kept every moment by the power of God, is something to which we are likely to be comparative strangers. These are sad, and saddening, losses, which impoverish the children of God in the same way that Roman Catholicism impoverishes them. There is more comfort and joy for God's children set forth in the Scriptures than the Roman and Arminian theologies allow them to possess. At this point, at least, Rous' verdict stands: Romanism and Arminianism show themselves to be all too much akin.

Third: we must acknowledge that professed Calvinists bear some blame for the pilgrimage of others along the Arminian road, both in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and since. Arminianism, we have seen, is a reaction, and it seems undeniable that one factor producing it has been Calvinistic theological provincialism, in the sense defined by Mildred Bangs Wynkoop—"any partial truth raised to the status of a whole truth, or any over-emphasis of one segment of theology to the neglect of other emphases."<sup>44</sup>

43. The most impressive major demonstration that the Bible speaks in "Calvinistic" terms remains that of John Owen in various large-scale works; see in particular *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Latin title, *Sanguis Jesu Salus Electorum*, "the blood of Jesus the salvation of the elect"); *Justification by Faith*; *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*; Πνευματολογία (on regeneration); *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (*Works*, X, V, XI, III, XII). The classic analyses in English of the differences between the rival conceptions remain Owen's *Display of Arminianism* (*Works*, X) and William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, chap. XXV, II:371-513.

What is a Calvinist? Basil Hall speaks of "that careful balance

44. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian*

of [Calvin's] theological doctrines and his organisation of the Geneva Church in relation to the civil power, which constitutes what should properly be called 'Calvinism,'"<sup>45</sup> and notes how both Beza and Perkins, the architect of Puritan theology, "distorted" (there is a value-judgment in that word, so it would be better simply to say "changed") "that balance of doctrines which he had tried to maintain."<sup>46</sup> Beza saw Calvinism as a heritage of church doctrine to be preserved, an orthodoxy best thought through in Aristotelian categories and analyzed with Aristotelian detachment; thus he became the pioneer Reformed scholastic. He articulated with exact precision the formulae of supralapsarianism, original guilt, and particular redemption, which Calvin had not done, however true it may be that his thought points in these directions. In his arranging and interrelating of theological doctrines Beza removed predestination back from where Calvin put it in his final (1559) revision of the Institutes-in book III, after the gospel and the Christian life, so that it appears as undergirding a known salvation, as in Romans 8:29-38-and subsumed it once more under the doctrine of God and providence, as the medievals had done: which was an invitation to study the gospel promises in the light of predestination, rather than vice versa (an invitation also given-regrettably, it may be thought-by the Westminster Confession). Perkins based Christian assurance not on Scripture, Christ, being in the church and receiving the sacraments, as Calvin had done, but on discerning in oneself signs of election. Thus Perkins and Beza moved on from Calvin, whether or not they are judged to have moved contrary to him. Again, many who style themselves Calvinists today mean hereby to advertise that they accept Beza's scholastic development of Calvin's view of sin and grace, as confessionally restated by the Synod of Dort and the Westminster divines, and that they value the pastoral, devotional, and evangelistic use of this development found in the Heidelberg Catechism, English Puritanism, and the revival tradition from Whitefield and Edwards to Spurgeon: which too is a moving on from Calvin, however direct or deviant. It would take a bold man to deny that any theological provincialism might have entered into this vigorously developed tradition.

*Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1967), p. 81.

45. Basil Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*, ed. Gervase E. Duffield (Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1966), p. 19.

46. Op. cit., p. 25.

Specifically: can it be denied that any stress on God's sovereign predestination which overshadows or makes doubtful the *bona fide* universality and truthfulness of Christ's invitation in the gospel, and man's genuine responsibility before God for his reaction to it, is an example of theological provincialism? Can it be doubted that any stress on the believer's continuing sinfulness which undermines or excludes expectations of present power against temptation and progress in holiness is another example of it? But it is certain that the sense of being confronted by just these irreligious-seeming provincialisms gave strength and won adherents to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Arminianisms, which both saw themselves as called to supply the rational, reverent corrective that was then needed. We must acknowledge that it was in part bad Calvinism that encouraged this unhappy mistake.

We still conclude, therefore, that Arminianism should be diagnosed, not as a creative alternative to Reformation teaching, but as an impoverishing reaction from it, involving a partial denial of the biblical faith in the God of all grace.

The lapse is less serious in some cases, more so in others, but in every case it calls for responsible notice and compassionate correction. The logical conclusion of Arminian principles would be pure Pelagianism, but no Arminian takes his principles so far (otherwise one would call him a Pelagian, and be done with it). Calvinists should therefore approach professed Arminians as brother evangelicals trapped in weakening theological mistakes, and seek to help them to a better mind. So we move to our final brief section.

#### WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF ARMINIANISMS, AND WHAT IS THE CURE FOR THEM?

Satanic malice and the natural darkness of the human mind are, no doubt, contributory causes of Arminianism in its various forms; but what has directly produced it in history, as we have already begun to indicate, is reaction against an image (not necessarily correct) of Calvinism. Arminians appear as men concerned to do justice to four biblical realities: the love of God, the glory of Christ, the moral responsibility of man, and the call to Christian holiness. The reason why they affirm universal redemption, universal sufficient grace, man's ability to respond to God, man's independence in responding, and the conditional character of election, is that they think these assertions necessary as means to their avowed end. Calvinists believe that the Arminian method of safeguarding these four realities actually imperils them, and can argue strongly to this effect; but they can only expect to be listened to if they are showing equal concern for these realities themselves. And if their Calvinism appears hard, cold, and academic, lacking love for God and man, lacking passion for evangelism, lacking both the tender conscience and the burning heart, they must not wonder if their arguments fail to carry conviction. It is to be feared that much of the Arminianism in this world has been due in part, at any rate, to recoil from an unspiritual Calvinism. We are deliberately, in this article, avoiding any attempt to generalize about our situation today; but those who find themselves up against Arminianism (or perhaps it calls itself anti-Calvinism) at the present time would do well to ask whether Calvinists themselves have not had something to do with bringing it into being, by not advancing their doctrine with holy and loving attitudes and actions.

How can Arminianisms be cured? Only God can finally set men's heads right, just as only He can ever set our hearts right. But if we, who stand on the Calvinist side, can learn afresh to explain that true theology must be confessional, a faithful echo of the Bible, neither adding nor subtracting; and that the reality of human moral agency and responsibility in a world where God is Lord is one of the mysteries of creation, which we reverently acknowledge, but do not pretend fully to understand; and that total inability to respond to God is indeed part of the human tragedy; and that the redeeming love of God is not an impotent good-will that can be thwarted, but a sovereign

resolve that not even Satan can stop; and that there is in every regenerate heart a testimony confirming the biblical insistence that it is the triune God, and He alone, who saves us; and that God in the gospel offers pardon and life to every man who hears it, and that none who hears it misses this blessing save by his own unbelief; and that expectant evangelism is every Christian's duty; and that it is the very knowledge that it is God who saves, and that He does not send His word forth for nothing, that upholds our expectancy; and that the reprobates are faceless men so far as we are concerned, so that we can never be sure we have met even one of them-then we may hope to see the children of God returning in increasing numbers from the dry places of Arminianism to the "old paths, wherein is the good way," where they will find rest for their souls and power for their lives.



**ReformedLiterature.com**