

# JOHN WESLEY, A FAITHFUL REPRESENTATIVE OF JACOBUS ARMINIUS

by

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In an important essay written on the occasion of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the University of Leiden, Gerrit Jan Hoenderdaal<sup>1</sup> quotes the late Albert Outler regarding possible connections between Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) and John Wesley (1703-1791): “Arminius himself had never been one of Wesley’s really decisive sources.”,<sup>2</sup> and concludes, “Whether Wesley interpreted Arminius’ thought correctly may be doubted.”<sup>3</sup> This assertion has been commonplace for the last half century, but it is rather sweeping in its implications. The implicit assumption seems to be that textual dependence is required for an accurate representation. This issue needs to be revisited, but in order to do this adequately we must recognize some important distinctions with regard to the theology of Arminius, Arminianism and Remonstrantism. In his 1958 doctoral dissertation, Carl Bangs pointed out that these three do not denote the same thing, although the latter two may historically be said to have begun with Arminius. At times Arminianism is used to describe all three, but this is at best confusing. Bangs notes that Arminianism “can mean the theological position of Arminius himself. It can mean some kind of protest against Calvinism. It can mean a rallying point for dissent under the banner of toleration.” And he adds, “Confusion results when these possible meanings are not clearly distinguished.”<sup>4</sup> Even more broadly, Arminianism has become a catch-all synonymous with liberalism or universalism.<sup>5</sup> With regard to Arminius himself, it is not only among Wesley specialists like Albert Outler and Remonstrant specialists like Hoenderdaal that any essential similarity of theology between Arminius and Wesley has been denied. In an article comparing the two, James Meeuwse’s thesis was that

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<sup>1</sup>G. J. Hoenderdaal, “The Debate about Arminius outside the Netherlands.” *Leiden University in the Seventeenth Century, An Exchange of Learning* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), p. 157, note 33.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>G. J. Hoenderdaal, *Leiden University*, p. 144.

<sup>4</sup>Carl Bangs, “Arminius and Reformed Theology” (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1958), p. 249.

<sup>5</sup>See Lambertus Jacobus van Holk, “From Arminius to Arminianism in Dutch Theology,” in Gerald O. McCulloh, *Man’s Faith and Freedom. The Theological Influence of Jacobus Arminius*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 27-45.

Arminius stood with the Remonstrants rather than with Wesley.<sup>6</sup> The implication of this is that Arminius should be linked more with the later Remonstrants and hence could not be evangelical in the same soteriological sense as John Wesley.

Until recent years it has been broadly assumed that Wesley had no personal knowledge of Arminius' writings, and that his Arminianism was one which he breathed in an Arminianized Anglicanism, or perhaps more locally in Epworth, the Epworth/Axholme region of Lincolnshire having been drained and made habitable by Dutchmen led by Cornelius Vermuyden during the reign of Charles I.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that John Wesley's direct knowledge of the Arminian theology assessed at Dort was minimal as far as we know. A copy of Thomas Bennet's, *Directions for Studying*, was in Wesley's personal library,<sup>8</sup> which Wesley makes a note of reading in January, 1731.<sup>9</sup> Herein may be found important excerpts from Arminius' *Declaration of Sentiments* (delivered in The Hague to the States of Holland in 1608), as well as main points from Arminius' earlier public disputation "On Predestination," given at Leiden in February, 1604.<sup>10</sup> The excerpt from Arminius' *Sentiments* reproduced by Bennet is not lengthy, but it does reflect the heart of Arminius' differences with the strict Calvinists. Unlike the formal disputations at university, Arminius composed his *Declaration of Sentiments* in Dutch; the excerpt likely read by Wesley (in Latin) is as follows in the original:

Hebbende nu tot hier toe verclaert, de meeningen over t'stuck der Predestinatie in onse Kercken ende inde Universiteyt van Leyden geleert, ende van my niet goet ghekent; mitsgaders oock de

<sup>6</sup> James Meeuwse, "Original Arminianism and Methodistic Arminianism Compared," *Reformed Review* 14.1 (1960): 21-36.

<sup>7</sup> G. F. Nuttall, "The Influence of Arminianism in England," in McCulloh, *The Theological Influence of Jacobus Arminius*, p. 55. Nuttall cites a pamphlet in the Dr. Williams' Library, London, by A. de M. Chesterman, *Axholme Baptists* (Crowle, Lincolnshire: 1949), pp. 15, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Information on Wesley's ownership of this volume was supplied by Professor Richard Heitzenrater in an Email of March 15, 1999. My attention was initially drawn to Wesley's reading of Arminius' excerpts, one if not the only record that we have of his direct contact with Arminius' thought prior to his publications in *The Arminian Magazine* (1778 and following years), by the Rev. Dr. Herbert McGonigle's thesis, "John Wesley: Evangelical Arminian," Ph. D., Keele University (England), 1994, scheduled Spring, 2001 for publication in an essentially unrevised form by Pater Noster Press, London.

<sup>9</sup> Heitzenrater, "Oxford Methodists," p. 351. In Wesley's 'Oxford Diary II' we learn that he bought *Directions for Studying* after November 23, 1730, started reading it on December 1 and finished it on January 24, 1731. This information will be included in the forthcoming volume of the *Bicentennial Works of John Wesley, XXIV: Journal and Diaries*, VII, edited by Richard Heitzenrater.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Bennet, *Directions for Studying: I. A General System or Body of Divinity. II. The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion* (London: James and John Knapton, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 1727), pp. 95-98 for the excerpts from Arminius. Bennett notes that the Latin text is from *Declaratio Sententiarum*, p. 119, *inter illius opera*, Lugd. Bat., 1629. The original Dutch text is reproduced in J. Arminius, *Verklaring van Jacobus Arminius, afgelegd in de vergadering van de Staten van Holland op 30 oktober 1608*. Edited with an historical introduction by G. J. Hoenderdaal. (Lochem: De Tijdstroom, 1960), pp. 44-138, esp. pp. 104-06.

redenen waerom ick sulcx vande selfde oordeele, zoo sal ick mijne eygene meyninghe voorstellen, die ic meyne dat Godes woort allorghelijckformichste is.

## I

Het eerste precijs ende absoluut decreet Godes, om den sondighen mensche salich te maecken, is, dat hy besloten heeft zijnen sone Jesum Christum te stellen tot eenen Middelaer, Verlosser, Salichmaecker, Priester ende Coninc, die de sonde deur zijnen doot te niete doe, de verlorene salicheyt door zijne ghehoorsaemheydt verwerwe, ende deur zijne cracht mededeele.

## II

Het tweede precijs ende absoluut decreet Godes is, dat hy besloten heeft, de ghene die hen bekeeren ende ghelooven, in ghenade te ontfangen, ende deselve volherdende, salich te maken in Christo, om Christi wille, ende deur Christum, ende de onbekeerlicke, ende ongheloovige, inde sonde ende onder den toorne te laten, ende te verdoemen, als vreemt van Christo.

## III

Het derde decreet Godes is, deur welcke hy voorghenomen heeft de middelen ter bekeeringhe, ende gheloove noodich, ghenoechsaem, ende crachtich, te beleyden; welcke beleydinghe gheschiet naer de wijsheydt Godes, deur welcke hy weet, wat zijne barmherticheyt, ende strengicheyt betaemt, ende naer zijne rechtveerdicheyt, deur welcke hy bereyt is zijner wijsheydt voorschrijft te volghen, ende uyt te voeren.

## III

Hier uyt volcht het vierde besluit, om sekere bysondere personen salich te maken, ende te verdoemen; welcke besluit steunt op de voorwetenheydt Godes, deur welcke hy van eeuwicheyt geweten heeft, welcke personen volgens sodanige beleydinge der middelen, tot bekeeringhe ende gheloove dienstich, deur sijne voorcomende genade, souden gelooven, ende deur de navolgende genade souden volherden, ende ooc welcke niet souden ghelooven ende niet volherden.

These paragraphs are perhaps the most direct contact that Wesley would have had with Arminius' actual writings, but direct literary dependency is not the issue which needs to be argued. My design is to indicate that Wesley, with or without direct literary dependence, reflects in his soteriology several foundational assumptions that can also be found in Arminius. On the issue of election, all agree: Those who believe will be saved; those who do not believe will not be saved. Arminius takes the position that predestination to both of these classes is rooted in God's foreknowledge. Wesley gives little attention to the formal epistemological issue of foreknowledge, but he pays great attention to the *via gratiae* by which this is worked out. This is central also in Arminius' point four above: *welcke personen volgens sodanige beleydinge der middelen, tot bekeeringhe ende gheloove dienstich, deur sijne voorcomende genade, souden gelooven, ende deur de navolgende genade souden volherden, ende ooc welcke niet souden ghelooven ende niet volherden.*

At work in Wesley, and I propose also in Arminius, is the notion that however God chooses to save humanity, this must be along the lines of *responsible grace*.<sup>11</sup> The contours of concern with Wesley and Arminius are similar, especially on the doctrine of sin; and if forced to choose in a debate on working out our salvation, both would side with Luther against Erasmus on the freedom of the will issue. Luther and Wesley, however, differ on how the will is ‘set free’ to participate in God’s saving work. The key, of course, is how efficient and efficacious grace is applied and experienced. If axiomatic similarities can be demonstrated between Arminius and Wesley, then our premise can be sustained: Wesley was not an Arminian in the general Anglican sense of English Arminianism, much less was he an Arminian like the Remonstrants of Holland in the latter part of the eighteenth century, especially as reflected in the theology of Philip of Limborch;<sup>12</sup> he was, however, a faithful representative of Arminius’ evangelical soteriology.

Methodologically, then, we will not compare Arminius and Wesley on the basis of their soteriology in connection with election and predestination, but rather on the salvific implication of their respective doctrines of grace. A comprehensive analysis would entail at least four dimensions of grace: 1) its necessity; 2) its nature; 3) its ground; and 4) its appropriation.<sup>13</sup> The necessity of grace is rooted in human need as a result of the Fall and original sin. The nature of grace as God’s sovereign initiative involves a discussion of the role of ‘free will’ and the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. The ground of grace is rooted in issues related to atonement theories and forensic imputation. The appropriation issues revolve around the means of justification and the relations between faith and works. A detailed analysis of these is not possible within the scope of this article, but perhaps we will gain sufficient insight within the next few pages to give warrant to our thesis that Wesley faithfully represented Arminius in his fundamental assumptions.

In accord with orthodox assumptions prevalent at the time, Arminius develops his anthropology along the lines of humanity being created in the image and likeness of God. This image consists of two parts, one is described as natural and the other supra-natural. The natural

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<sup>11</sup> See the comprehensive analysis of Wesley’s theology by Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace. John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> See John Mark Hicks, “The Theology of Grace in the Thought of Jacobus Arminius and Philip van Limborch: A Study in the Development of Seventeenth-century Dutch Arminianism,” (Ph. D., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> This fourfold demarcation is used by Hicks, “The Theology of Grace in Arminius and Limborch,” p. 21-22.

image is essential and indispensable to the human **esse**. The supra-natural and accidental attributes are those which may be possessed or missed without destroying our human essence:

The image and likeness of God, after which man was created, belongs partly to the very nature of man, so that without it man cannot be man; but it partly consists in those things which concern supernatural, heavenly and spiritual things. The former class comprises the understanding, the affections, and the will, which is free; but the latter, the knowledge of God and of things divine, righteousness, true holiness, &c.<sup>14</sup>

For Arminius these dimensions of the **imago** can not be separated either logically or ontologically from the *soul* of a human being, for it is in the soul that these are exhibited.<sup>15</sup> The soul comprises both intellect and will, and functionally the intellect apprehends truth by “a natural and necessary” act, whereas the will is intrinsically free to apprehend or not to apprehend. However, Arminius’ asserts that the will prior to the Fall is consistent with being created in God’s image and is therefore “inclined to good.”<sup>16</sup> In the primitive righteous state, human intellect and understanding (properties of the soul) were endowed with “wisdom.” At the same time, the will was endowed with righteousness and true holiness, “by which the will was fitted and ready to follow what this wisdom commanded to be done, and what it shewed it to be desired.” This was a human “original righteousness” and had there been no disobedience, these endowments would have been “communicated to his posterity.”<sup>17</sup> This means also that the will was completely free to seek an inferior good, even one which entailed condemnation. Thus there is for Arminius a dialectic: the will was free and able to pursue either good or evil, even if it was sufficiently informed and moved by the understanding to seek the highest good.<sup>18</sup>

As one might expect Arminius applies this concept of freedom specifically to the biblical figure Adam, and he insists that the sin of Adam was a free act on his part, with no hint of necessity in the human choice.<sup>19</sup> Adam sinned because he freely chose between equally available alternatives: “. . . by his free will, his own proper motion being allowed by God, and himself persuaded by the devil.”<sup>20</sup> The public symbol that reflects the repercussions of this decision is

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<sup>14</sup> Arminius, “Certain Articles,” VI.v, in *The Writings of James Arminius*, 3 Vols., trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprinted 1977), 2:486. [Hereafter cited as *Writings*.] Arminius also defends this distinction against Franciscus Junius, “Discussion with F. Junius,” X, in *Writings*, 3:116-133.

<sup>15</sup> Arminius, “Private Disputations,” XXVI.vii, in *Writings*, 2:64.

<sup>16</sup> “Private Disputations,” XXVI.v, in *Writings*, 2:63.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, XXVI.vi, 2:63-64.

<sup>18</sup> “Public Disputations,” XI.vi, in *Writings*, 1:525-26.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.iv, 1:481.

<sup>20</sup> “Private Disputations,” XXX.vi, in *Writings*, 2:75-76.

ejection from paradise;<sup>21</sup> the personal loss is reflected in the loss of “original righteousness” through fellowship with the Holy Spirit. This **privatio** is the deprivation “of that primitive righteousness and holiness, which, because they are the effects of the Holy Spirit dwelling in man, ought not to have remained in him after he had fallen from the favor of God . . . .”<sup>22</sup> The implications of this fall are both personal and racial, for sin “is common to the entire race and to all their posterity.”<sup>23</sup> The essential nature of this fallen state is the reality that each person is born void of fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit: “All men, who were to be propagated from them [Adam and Eve] in a natural way, became obnoxious to death temporal and death eternal, and devoid (**vacui**) of this gift of the Holy Spirit or original righteousness.” The end result of this is the “privation of the image of God,” or “original sin.”<sup>24</sup> The practical result of this privation is evident in every person as an “original propensity of our nature towards that which is contrary to the divine law, which propensity we have contracted from our first parents, through carnal generation.”<sup>25</sup>

If this is the human predicament, then what is the divine solution? Both Arminius and Wesley find it in specific notions about grace. Unlike other Reformed theologians, Arminius speaks seldom about ‘common grace.’ Perhaps the reason for this is to be found not so much in his not believing the category helpful, but rather by the exigencies of the contexts in which he theologized. From the earliest days of his pastorate in Amsterdam through his years in Leiden, he was involved in polemics that entailed very specific questions about how the **ordo salutis** is worked out. The practical result of this is that Arminius writes almost exclusively about special or saving grace, and he chose to develop his theology of grace in the context of **vocatio**, divine calling:

[There is] a gracious act of God in Christ by which, through [God’s] word and Spirit, He calls forth sinful men, who are liable to condemnation and placed under the dominion of sin, from the

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXI.vii, 2:78

<sup>22</sup> “Public Disputations,” VII.xv, in *Writings*, 1:485.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.xvi, 1:486.

<sup>24</sup> “Private Disputations,” XXXI.ix, in *Writings*, 2:79. It is true that Arminius doubted whether the privation of original righteousness was sufficient to account for original sin or whether there was some contrary quality in man which moved him to sin, some factor in addition to the privation of original righteousness. He did not consider the issue substantive enough to make a difference, and it is clear that he preferred the alternative that there was no outside influence *causing* the disobedience. See “Private Disputations,” XXXI.x, 2:79 as well as “Certain Articles,” XII.ii, in *Writings*, 2:492. Carl Bangs, *Arminius. A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), p. 340, has argued that Arminius’ position is “not explicitly contrary to the received Lutheran and Reformed confessions of the time . . . [which] do not distinguish between the negative and positive aspects of this corruption.” Bangs refers to the Formula of Concord, Article 1, and the Belgic Confession, Article 15.

<sup>25</sup> “Public Disputations,” VIII.xiii, in *Writings*, 1:492.

condition of the animal life, and from the pollutions and corruptions of this world . . . unto ‘the fellowship of Jesus Christ,’ and of his kingdom and its benefits; that, being united unto Him as their Head, they may derive from him life, sensation, motion, and plentitude of every spiritual blessing, to the glory of God and their own salvation.<sup>26</sup>

In public disputation sixteen, “On the Vocation of Men to Salvation,” and other correlated disputations, Arminius works his salvation logic along formal epistemological lines using Trinitarian language. God the Father in the Son is the efficient cause.<sup>27</sup> Ordinarily the instrumental cause is the written Word of God made efficacious by the Holy Spirit, but the extraordinary cause is the immediate sensible work of the Spirit, if need be without the accompanying written Word.<sup>28</sup> The object of vocation on which this special saving grace operates is sinful humanity in its natural ‘ungraced’ state.<sup>29</sup> The **telos** of vocation is the salvation of sinful beings, without which special grace human participation in the saving work would be impossible.<sup>30</sup> The accidental result of vocation is the rejection of grace by man.<sup>31</sup> Among interpreters of Reformed theology, this is one of the most contested aspects of Arminius’ soteriology; and Arminius himself is aware that the crux of the issue is “the mode of [the Spirit’s] operation, *whether it be resistible or not.*” [ . . . maer alleen vande maniere der werckinghe, ofse onwederstandelijck zy oft niet.”] To which his own reply reads simply: “Waer van ick ghelooove naer de Schriftuere, dat vele den heylighen Gheest wederstaen, ende de aenghebodene ghenade Godes verstoten.”<sup>32</sup> [With respect to which, I believe, according to the scriptures, that many persons resist the Holy Spirit and reject the grace that is offered.]

The issue, of course, is synergism. On this specific point we will see that Arminius and Wesley begin in agreement, with Arminius taking a turn which Wesley was unwilling to make. Arminius argues that those who resist the operation of the Spirit do so at their own peril and as a result of “malice and hardness of heart,” which is itself formally speaking the “cause” of their rejection of the divine call to salvation. To this point Wesley and Arminius would be together.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, XVI.ii, 1:570.

<sup>27</sup> “Private Disputations,” XLII.ii, in *Writings*, 2:104; and “Public Disputations,” XVI.iii, 1:571.

<sup>28</sup> “Public Disputations,” XVI.v, in *Writings*, 1:571.

<sup>29</sup> “Private Disputations,” XLII.v, in *Writings*, 1:105; and “Dissertation on Romans 7,” III, in *Writings*, 2:390: “But it also teaches that the grace of Christ, that is, the gift of the Holy Spirit and of love, is absolutely necessary for this purpose.”

<sup>30</sup> “Letter to Hippolytus,” IV, in *Writings*, 2:472: “I affirm, therefore, that this grace is simply and absolutely necessary for the illumination of the mind, the due ordering of the affections, and the inclination of the will to that which is good.”

<sup>31</sup> “Private Disputations,” XLII.xii, in *Writings*, 2:106.

<sup>32</sup> Hoenderdaal, ed., *Verklaring*, p. 114; *Writings*, “Declaration”, 1:254; *Opera*, “*Declaratio Sententia*,” IV, p. 122.

Arminius, however, also argues that as a result of the hardness of heart and consequent rejection of salvation, God *avenges* the “contempt shown to his word and call, and the injury done to his Holy Spirit,” by removing the grace which had initially enabled them to accept they call. The withdrawal of God’s gracious spirit results in the resistant sinner being “given over to a reprobate mind” and they are finally delivered into “the power of Satan.”<sup>33</sup> Wesley would agree that those who persevere in resisting are finally given over to Satan, but he does not make the formal move of declaring that this is because God withdraws the gracious assisting Holy Spirit, but rather because the sinner persists in rejecting the Spirit’s overtures. The practical results, of course, are the same.

Before proceeding more specifically to Wesley’s thought, it is important for us to look at the manner in which Arminius theologizes with regard to the internal work of the Holy Spirit when salvation is efficaciously worked out in the believer. Arminius insists that this spiritual work is direct and personal, often referring to it as a divine infusion. In his letter to Hippolytus he argues that regenerating grace “infuses good thoughts into the mind, inspires good desires into the affections, and bends the will to carry into execution good thought and good desires.”<sup>34</sup> This grace is further explicated as: 1. a gratuitous affection; 2. a divine enabling infusion; and 3. a perpetual assistance and continued aid of the Holy Spirit. Because this structure is maintained in Arminius’ most mature statement near the end of his life, seeing his wording is important:

*Van de ghenade Godes* gheloove ick, dat deselfde ten eersten zy een onverdiende goetgunsticheyt, die God toedraeght den armen elendigen sondighen mensche, waer deur hy voor eerst zynen Sone geeft, op dat een yder die in hem gelooft, het eeuwighe leven hebbe. Daer nae in Jesu Christo, ende om Christi willen rechtveerdicht, ende tot de kindtschap aenneemt der salicheyt. Ten tweeden, datse zy een instortinghe aller gaven des heyligen Gheestes, so in het verstant, als in de will ende affectien des menschen, die tot de wedergheboorte ende vernieuwinge des menschen ghehooren: gheloof, hope, liefde, etc. Sonder welcke gaven der genade, de mensche niet bequaem is eenich goet te dencken, te willen ofte doen. Ten derden, dat sy zy eene gheduerige assistentie, ende bystant des heylighen Gheestes, deur welcke de heeylighe Gheest den menschen nu alreede herboren zijnde, aenclopt ende opweck ten goede, hem in stortende heylighe ghedachten, ende inblasende goede begheerten, op dat hy also het goede dadelijk wille, ende deur welcke hy daer na, met den mensche mede wilt ende medewerckt, op dat de mensche tghene hy wilt, oock volbrenge; ende schrijve oversulcx de ghenade Godes toe, het beghinsel, den

<sup>33</sup> “Public Disputations,” XVI.xiv, in *Writings*, 1:574.

<sup>34</sup> “Letter to Hippolytus,” IV, in *Writings*, 2:472.

voorgangh, ende de volbrenginghe alles goets,<sup>35</sup> oock so verre dat die wedergeborene mensche selfs, sonder dese voorgaende ende opweckende, volghende, ende medewerkende ghenade, noch het goede dencken, willen of doen can, noch oock eenighe tentatie ten quade wederstaen. Waeruyt dan blijktt, dat ick de ghenade Godes niet te cort en doe, den menschen zijnen vryen wille te veel toeschrijvende, ghelijck mij nae ghegeven wert . . . .<sup>36</sup>

It remains for us now to see to what extent Arminius' understanding of creation, fall, freedom and redemption can be found in Wesley's writings, pointing out again, there is no record of direct dependence on sources. The question before us is whether there is a discernible agreement in theological intent and defined means. Did Wesley agree with Arminius in his understanding of what is entailed in created human nature, the effects of the fall and how original sin is defined; how redemption is carried out and what the respective roles are that divine grace and human freedom play in the redemptive process? Put succinctly, is Wesley's soteriology a fair representation of original Arminianism?

Even though Wesley and Arminius are separated by two hundred years, this is not an unfair question to pose with regard to John Wesley's theology, for in 1778 he chose *The Arminian Magazine* as title for his Methodist magazine; and his intention in doing so was to distinguish his arm of the English revival movement from that of the 'Calvinian Methodists.'<sup>37</sup> Wesley had not previously claimed this Arminian identity in a public way, and as late as 1770 he had written: "To say, 'This man is an Arminian,' has the same effect on many hearers, as to say, 'This is a mad dog.'"<sup>38</sup> Wesley's reticence to appropriate the label may be understood when we remember that in the eighteenth century English Arminianism was comprehensively rationalistic and had become a vague enough designation to refer to any anti-Calvinistic theological position from a mild Latitudinarianism to full-blown Socinianism.<sup>39</sup> It is interesting then that when the Methodist-Calvinist controversy broke out in the early 1770s over some loosely worded Minutes from the Methodist Annual Conference, and the Methodists were accused by the Calvinist Evangelicals of being essentially Pelagian in their notions of 'free will' and that they were

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<sup>35</sup> Hier heeft Arminius de bekende woorden over de genade gesproken die letterlijk in de Remonstratie, artikel 4, zijn overgenomen.

<sup>36</sup> Hoenderdaal, (ed.), *Verklaring*, pp. 113-14. [*Declaration*, IV, "The Grace of God," 1:253 in *Writings*.]

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed discussion of these events, see my monograph *The Limits of Love Divine* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), pp. 252-66.

<sup>38</sup> "The Question, 'What is an Arminian?'" in *The Works of John Wesley* (1872), edited by Thomas Jackson, 10:358. [Various reprints, Kansas City and Grand Rapids, hereafter cited as *Works* (1872).]

teaching a works righteousness which denigrates the free grace of God for salvation, that Wesley takes recourse to an Arminian identity. It is clear that he did not take this step lightly, and it is also evident that he understood well the difference between English Arminianism and Arminius' theology. Like Arminius himself, Wesley believed that his soteriology was only a 'hair's breadth' separated from Calvin; but it is a critically important breadth. When he preaches the doctrines of original sin, vicarious atonement and salvation by faith, he is preaching like a Calvinist – albeit one who does not accept the doctrines of the decrees. At the second Annual Conference of his preachers in London in 1745, it was declared that the “truth of the gospel lies very near Calvinism,” indeed, “within a hair's breadth.”<sup>40</sup> In the context of the debate in 1770 he would declare: “We have leaned too much toward Calvinism.”<sup>41</sup> When we compare Wesley to Arminius on key points of soteriology, we can understand better how these seeming contradictory claims might be reconciled. We keep in mind that the two hundred years that separates them results in Wesley being less medieval and scholastic in his approach and categories, and clearly Wesley is also a child of the emerging Enlightenment, most clearly discerned in his emphasis on religious experience.

With regard to Arminius' mention of two dimensions (the natural and the supra-natural) in connection with the image of God in humanity, Wesley occasionally speaks of three dimensions: the natural, the political and the moral image of God in humanity,<sup>42</sup> but most consistently and expansively he dwells on the natural and the moral image. The natural image (similar to Arminius) refers to the essential native characteristics of being human, which, if removed, would render us less than creatures in God's image and likeness. The moral image is comprised of those 'characteristics' of holiness, obedience and love which God intended for humanity to enjoy.<sup>43</sup> While it is true that they are not the only two theologians to use these categories, it is of importance for us that they are so similar in their assumptions. Randy Maddox has pointed out that Wesley was affirming the same basic concept expressed by typical Eastern theologians, distinctions between the Image and Likeness of God: “Humans were originally

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<sup>39</sup> See R. N. Stromberg, *Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 111.

<sup>40</sup> *Works* (1872), 8:284, Q.22.

<sup>41</sup> *Letters* (Telford), 5:262.

<sup>42</sup> See *Sermons* (Outler), “The New Birth,” ¶I.1, *The Bi-centennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984 --), 2:188. [Hereafter cited as *Works*.]

<sup>43</sup> For an explication of natural and moral image, see the sermon ‘The General Deliverance’ (1781), ¶I.1, *Works*, 2:439 and “The End of Christ's Coming,” ¶I.3-7, *Works*, 2:474-75

created capable of participating in God, and when they do so participate, they embody God's moral character and find fulfillment."<sup>44</sup> In Wesley's words, "[Adam] was a creature capable of God, capable of knowing, loving and obeying his Creator. And in fact he did know God, did unfeignedly love and uniformly obey Him . . . . From this right state, and the right use of all his faculties, his happiness naturally flowed."<sup>45</sup> For Wesley, entrance into salvation through Christ is the renewal of this participation in God.<sup>46</sup>

If Arminius and Wesley sound similar notes in their anthropological notions about humanity in the initially created order, are they also in agreement about the state of human affairs as a result of disobedience and banishment from paradise? Wesley rarely passed up the opportunity to affirm the universal problem of sinfulness. He considered any denial of this reality to be both contrary to general experience and a rejection of essential Christian teachings.<sup>47</sup> Like Arminius, Wesley often delineated the character of depravity, which he often called Inbeing Sin, to be the result of **privatio**, our being separated through disobedience from God and deprived of intimate fellowship with the Creator.<sup>48</sup> Wesley's concern in dealing with the concept of depravity or Inbeing Sin was to search out and define the source of our actual sins, which he referred to as voluntary and involuntary sins. Following I John 2:16, Wesley views these as flowing from the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eye, and the pride of life.<sup>49</sup> The relation between Inbeing Sin and actual sins is expressed also by a threefold division: sinful tempers, sinful words, and sinful acts.<sup>50</sup> As Maddox notes, "The point of this division was to emphasize that our sinful actions and words *flow from* enduring corruptions of our affections (one of our

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<sup>44</sup> R. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, p. 68.

<sup>45</sup> Sermon, "The General Deliverance," ¶I.2, *Works*, 2:439.

<sup>46</sup> See his *Notes on the New Testament*, II Peter 1:4.

<sup>47</sup> For his fullest treatment, *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, in *Works* (1872), 9:191-464; see also his sermons, "Original Sin," *Works*, 2:172-85; "The Deceitfulness of the Human Heart," 4:150-60; and his exclusion of preachers who deny Original Sin from the conference in the 1784 *Minutes*, Q.20, *Minutes of the Methodist Conference* (London: Mason, 1862), p. 170.

<sup>48</sup> The best discussion of Wesley's doctrine of sin is in Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, esp. pp. 73-82.

<sup>49</sup> The distinction between voluntary and involuntary sin is central to Wesley's discussion of Christian perfection and sin in believers. Though believers may never be free from involuntary transgressions, the life completely dedicated to God and filled with the Holy Spirit through the indwelling Christ could be so cleansed from sin as to be consistently inclined to obedience rather than committing voluntary transgressions of known laws of God.

<sup>50</sup> See Wesley's *Notes on the N.T.*, Romans 3:23 & 6:6; *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Pt. II, ¶III, *Works* (1872), 9:306.

human faculties).”<sup>51</sup> Inbeing Sin is the very corruption of human faculties resulting from our separation from God’s empowering Presence.”<sup>52</sup>

In Arminius we do not find the implications of Sin spelled out in these rather practical ways, but we did note that he emphasized how the human affections are distorted, implying a relational view of sin rather than an abstract, substantial, or metaphysical one. This emphasis opened the way for Arminius to describe God’s saving grace as also being relational in its essence and application: “...oock so verre dat die wedergeborene mensche selfs, sonder dese voorgaende ende opweckende, volghende, ende medewerckende ghenade, noch het goede dencken, willen of doen can, noch oock eenighe tentatie ten quade wederstaen.” This is precisely the emphasis that we encounter in Wesley. Whereas Arminius’ untimely death did not give him time to work out in any detail his mention of prevenient grace (voorgaende ghenade), Wesley is careful to make this foundational to his notion that sinful humanity can and must be held personally responsible for the sinful disobedience that leads to spiritual death.

It is particularly this notion about ‘responsible grace’ that made Wesley vulnerable in his soteriology to charges of transgressing Reformation orthodoxy. The Protestant theologians with whom he shared an emphasis on total depravity drew from it an emphasis on limited atonement and unconditional election with which Wesley deeply disagreed. However, Wesley also could not accept the typical way that Roman Catholicism avoided these implications by inferring that depravity was not total. To teach that some aspect of the freedom, graciously given to humans in creation, remained in fallen humanity opened the door to a brand of synergism that Wesley could not abide. Such an emphasis, Wesley believed, both underestimated the impact of Inbeing Sin and also endangered the unmerited nature of God’s saving and restoring *grace*. His path to emphasizing unmerited salvation was through an ‘ongoing’ concept of grace – a grace that always precedes us and continually accompanies us on the *via salutis*.

It is important to note that Wesley used the characterization of grace as ‘prevenient’ in both a broad and narrow sense. In its broadest sense, Wesley meant by prevenience that each and every salutary human action or virtue, from the earliest expression of faith to the highest degree of sanctification, is grounded in the prior empowering of God’s grace. The narrow use of prevenient grace, very Arminian in its emphasis, refers to the saving (awakening) work of God in

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<sup>51</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, p. 81.

the pilgrim prior to and leading to justification. It is this Arminian appropriation that Wesley makes to counteract the logical necessity with which the affirmation of total depravity seemed to lead to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.<sup>53</sup> Although the broader concept of prevenience is also present in Arminius, it is the specific relation to justification that Arminius and Wesley share. And all of this is, of course, rooted solely in the salvific work of God through Christ. In this respect both Arminius and Wesley are very much Christologically centered rather than decree centered.

Given their respective concepts of prevenient and ongoing/continued grace, it would not then be accurate to say that either Arminius or Wesley taught a human-centered voluntarism that initiates even the slightest move apart from grace in the direction of salvation. That the human will is free to respond to God's overtures and offer of salvation is the result of being *set free* by the Holy Spirit. It is a 'freed will.' Wesley states specifically, "Natural free will I do not understand . . . ."<sup>54</sup> The position taken in the early days of the Revival (the 1745 London Annual Conference) is foundational to why Wesley chose *The Arminian Magazine* as his identifying periodical in 1778: "(1)Ascribing all good to the free grace of God. (2) Denying all natural free-will, and all power [for salvation] antecedent to grace, And (3) Excluding all merit from man; even what he has and does by the grace of God."<sup>55</sup> On the issue of gracious efficiency and effectiveness, Arminius and Wesley agree: "Why, the very power to 'work together with Him' [is] from God. Therefore to Him is all the glory."<sup>56</sup> Arminius' declaration is equally clear and succinct: "Free Will is unable to begin or to perfect any true and spiritual good without grace . . . . I affirm, therefore, that this grace is simply and absolutely necessary for the illumination of the mind, the due ordering of the affections, and the inclination of the will to that which is good."<sup>57</sup>

There are many dimensions of this issue that space limitations prohibit our exploring, and a dissertation would be required to sort it all out; however, perhaps the preceding has demonstrated that John Wesley chose his identity carefully and well in *The Arminian Magazine*.

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<sup>52</sup> See sermons, "Original Sin," *Works*, 2:172-85; "Justification by Faith," ¶I.5, *Works*, 2:177; "Sermon on the Mount I," ¶4, *Works*, 1:477; and *Notes on the N.T.*, Rom. 6:6.

<sup>53</sup> See Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, Press, 1960), p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> *Works* (1872), 10:229-30.

<sup>55</sup> *Works* (1872), 8:285, Q.23.

<sup>56</sup> "Predestination Calmly Considered," *Works* (1872), 8:230. Compare Arminius, *Verklaring*, pp. 113-14; *Writings*, 1:253.

<sup>57</sup> 'Grace and Free Will' in "Letter to Hippolytus," in *Writings*, 2:472.

Perhaps he was not only a faithful representative of Jacobus Arminius, he may have even been one with whom the Leiden professor would have felt a great affinity.

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