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The Declaration of Sentiments: The Theological Testament of Arminius

Sadly this is the last article that we shall publish from our much respected Editorial Adviser. Dr Wood died on 28th January, 1993, and this article is thus as much his testament as that of Arminius. We shall pay tribute to him in the next issue of THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY.

Introduction

In the year before he died the Dutch Protestant theologian, Jacob Harmensz, better known by his latinized academic name of Jacobus Arminius, delivered an oration before a full assembly of the States of Holland.¹ Their Lordships were gathered together in the Binnenhof, or Session Hall, at the Hague on Thursday 30 October 1608. Speaking in the Dutch language, Arminius summarized and defended his views on such crucial and yet at times controversial themes as predestination, divine providence, the freedom of the human will, the grace of God, the believer's assurance, the divinity of the Son of God, and justification by faith. This clear and unequivocal *Declaration of Sentiments* represents the mature conclusions of the reformer in response to those who doubted whether his interpre-

¹ Harmensz is an abbreviation of Harmenszoon, or Herman's son. Arminius (c.1559-1609) studied at Leiden, Geneva and Basel before taking up a pastorate in Amsterdam. He was appointed a Professor of Theology at Leiden in 1603 and elected as Rector of the University in 1605. The traditional date of his birth on 10 October 1560 is now questioned and it seems more probable that he was born in 1559.

Accounts of Arminius available in English are few indeed. By 1814 John Guthrie's translation of Caspar Brandt's eighteenth century life of Arminius, written in Latin, was published in London by Ward and Company. The sole authoritative modern coverage is to be found in Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1971). In Dutch there is useful material in J. H. Maronier, *Jacobus Arminius: een Biographie* (Amsterdam: Y. Rogge, 1905).

tations were compatible with the doctrinal standards of the Dutch Church. As such it may rightly be recognized as his theological testament.

As Professor Carl Bangs has explained, the opportunity for Arminius to make his statement arose from a conference before the High Court on 30 May 1608, when Arminius and his senior faculty colleague at the University of Leiden, Francis Gomaer, were invited to discuss their differences.² The councillors were instructed to discover whether the matter could be settled in an amicable fashion and to report to the States accordingly. The four deputies representing the Dutch churches urged that the cause should be brought before a provincial Synod, since the civil court had no jurisdiction over spiritual issues.

Gomaer was reluctant to appear in the role of a prosecutor laying charges against Arminius, although he did raise the question of imputed righteousness in relation to justification. Eventually the conference was adjourned with the court reporting that the disagreements between the two professors were marginal. Each was asked to submit his arguments in written form, with additional comments after the one had examined what the other had advanced.

At a later date Arminius requested the States of Holland to allow him to present his case in person as well as on paper. In October 1608 the South Holland Synod meeting at Dordrecht passed a resolution demanding that all ministers should submit their comments on the church formularies within thirty days. Arminius, however, as a university professor, was not under the jurisdiction of the Synod and was therefore invited to make his statement before a specially convened assembly of the States on 30 October. He was given only ten days' notice, and it is remarkable that he was able to prepare such a lengthy and detailed presentation of his theological stance in such a relatively short period of time. He had, however, committed the entire oration to writing; the manuscript has survived and is housed in the city library at Rotterdam in the collection of the Remonstrant Reformed Church. According to James Nichols—admittedly a sympathetic commentator—his speech was delivered 'with such a happy admixture of freedom and modesty, as commanded admiration and applause from all his honourable auditors.'³

The original old Dutch text was published by the Englishman,

² Bangs, *Arminius*, 307, Francis Gomaer (1563–1641) studied theology under Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590) at Neustadt and was appointed a Professor of Theology at Leiden in 1594. He is often referred to by his latinized name of Franciscus Gomarus.

³ *The Works of James Arminius D.D.*, E. T. James Nichols, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, Vols. 1 and 2 (1825–28)), 1:516.

Thomas Basson, in 1610, after the death of Arminius. It was reissued in 1960 with an introduction and annotations by Professor Gerrit Jan Hoenderdahl.⁴ A Latin version was included in the *Opera theologica* of Arminius which first appeared in 1629. It was not from the author's hand but the work of an unidentified translator. Together with *Answers to Nine Questions*, the *Declaration of Sentiments* was the first of Arminius's writings made available in English. In his translator's preface, Tobias Conyers urged Oliver Cromwell, the Great Protector, to assume a more objective attitude towards Arminius.⁵ James Nichol's translation in the first volume of *The Works of James Arminius* (1825) is from the Latin.⁶ An American reprint appeared in 1956, published by Baker Book House of Grand Rapids.

The *Declaration* was in fact the last of three apologia to be drawn up by Arminius shortly before his death. The first was his letter to the Palatine ambassador at the Hague, Lord Hippolytus à Collibus, who had received an adverse report about Arminius's teaching from David Wängler at Heidelberg, who in turn had been briefed by Sibbrand Lubbert, a professor at the University of Franeker in Friesland.⁷ As Dr A. W. Harrison put it, Hippolytus 'did the honourable thing and sent for Arminius, telling him exactly what was being said about him'.⁸ The ambassador was so satisfied with the reply that he asked for a written draft. This Arminius provided in a letter dated 5 April 1608, although not published until 1613. Five topics are covered—the divinity of Christ, the providence of God, predestination, grace and free will, and justification. It will be noted that these items are dealt with in the *Declaration*, although there more expansively than was possible in a brief letter.

The second apologetic piece from the pen of Arminius in his declining years was his *Answer to Nine Questions*, which was a response to allegations of heresy directed against himself and Adrian Van der Borren, a minister in the Reformed Church at Leiden.⁹ There are two references in the *Declaration* to defamatory articles

⁴ *Verlaring van Jacobus Arminius*, ed. Gerrit Jan Hoenderdahl (Lochem: De Tijdstroom, 1960).

⁵ *The Just Man's Defence, or, The Declaration of the Judgment of James Arminius*, E. T. Tobias Conyers (London: H. Eversden, 1657).

⁶ *Works*, 1:516–668.

⁷ For the Letter to Hippolytus à Collibus, see *Works*, 2:685–705. David Wängler, or Paraeus (1548–1622), a Silesian, studied theology at the Collegium Sapientiae at Heidelberg and was appointed Professor there in 1594. Born in Friesland, Sibbrand Lubbert (1556–1625), a pupil of Beza and Zacharias Beer, or Ursinus (1534–1583), was a Professor at the University of Franeker.

⁸ Archibald H. W. Harrison, *Arminianism* (London: Duckworth, 1937), 37.

⁹ For the *Answer to Nine Questions*, see *Works*, 2:64–68.

erroneously attributed to Arminius. The nine questions are related to justification by faith, the security of the believer, the divine decrees, and the sufficiency of grace. Arminius was advised by his friends not to publish this defence, so as to avoid further controversy, although it may have been circulated in manuscript form. It eventually found its way into the *Opera theologica* in 1629.

The third and weightiest apologia in the penultimate period of his life is Arminius's *Declaration of Sentiments*. It opens with an extended introduction in which Arminius rehearses details relative to the sequence of events leading up to his appearance before the States assembly. He traces these as far back as 30 June 1605 when he was approached by three deputies from the South Holland Synod, together with two ministers from North Holland, with a view to arranging a conference in which his views could be examined. Since the suspicions of the delegation were based on second-hand accounts of what Arminius taught, as relayed by some of his students at Leiden, he saw no reason to respond to such a summons, although he was prepared to discuss in private any specific instance of alleged unorthodoxy. He himself 'was quite unconscious of having propounded a single doctrine . . . that was contrary to the Word of God or to the Confession and Catechism of the Churches in the Low Countries!' (526).¹⁰

Later attempts to arraign Arminius were similarly resisted by him. In 1607 the Preparatory Convention pressed him yet again to acquiesce and again he refused. He sets out his reasons for doing so in this instance in a detailed section of his Introduction (536–43). He makes it clear that he is under the jurisdiction of the University curators and not of the Synods. Furthermore, he is apprehensive lest the proposed conference should be prejudiced against him because of its composition. The deputies, moreover, would hardly be at liberty to arrive at an independent judgment since they were restrained by the opinions of their superiors.

Although Arminius was unwilling to be placed in the dock to defend his views, since no specific charge had been brought against him, he was nevertheless agreeable to sharing in an open-ended colloquy in which all involved in the debate could present their arguments with the intention of reaching a resolution. And, of course, Arminius raised no objection to the invitation to testify before the States assembly. 'I entertain a confident persuasion', he tells his auditors, 'that no prejudice will be created against me or my sentiments from this act, however imperfectly I may perform it,

¹⁰ Parenthetical references in the text of the article indicate the page in *Works*, 1 where the direct quotation from the *Declaration* is to be found.

because it has its origin in that obedience which is due from me to this noble assembly,—next to God, and according to the divine pleasure' (549).

After the Introduction, the *Declaration* is divided into nine major sections, as follows:— 1. Predestination. 2. The Providence of God. 3. The Free Will of Man. 4. The Grace of God. 5. The Perseverance of the Saints. 6. The Assurance of Salvation. 7. The Perfection of Believers in this Life. 8. The Divinity of the Son of God. 9. The Justification of Man before God.

Since it was the primary item of contention, much of the *Declaration* is devoted to predestination and in particular to the lapsarian controversy then being pursued, with its bearing on election and reprobation. This concerned the precise relationship between predestination and the fall of man. Did God determine in advance to redeem certain specific individuals, quite apart from his foreknowledge of their response to the gospel as envisaged in their state before the fall (supralapsarianism) or after it (infralapsarianism, or sublapsarianism)? As T. H. L. Parker explains, 'there was no disagreement on the eternity of predestination, as if the one placed the decree in eternity and the other only after the creation and fall. The difference lay in whether God was contemplating man as he intended to create him or as if he were created and fallen'.¹¹ Arminius proposes a third option, which takes into consideration the divine foreknowledge and hinges on the election or reprobation of specific classes (i.e. believers and unbelievers) rather than on individuals as such.

I. Predestination

Arminius introduces predestination as 'the first and most important article in religion' on which he is about to offer his views (549). It has engaged his attention, he says, over many years. We may therefore assume that his treatment in the *Declaration* reflects his considered judgment. He defines 'the predestination of God' in simple terms as 'the election of men to salvation, and the reprobation of them to destruction' (550). He claims that in the Dutch Church of his time there is no uniform and uncomplicated opinion among the teachers of theology, but that there is 'some variation in certain parts of it in which they differ from each other' (550).

¹¹ T. H. L. Parker, 'Lapsarian Controversy', in *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson (London: S.C.M. Press, 1969), 189. There is no entry under this heading in the 1983 revised edition.

1. Supralapsarian Doctrine

Arminius proceeds to deal with three of these variations and to list his objections to them before declaring his own position. He begins with conventional supralapsarianism as derived from Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor at Geneva, and Arminius's own former mentor. It represents what he describes as 'the very highest ground' of predestinarianism (550). On the evidence of their own writings Arminius sets out the views of supralapsarian advocates and, as Professor Bangs concludes, does so with commendable accuracy.¹²

In summary, supralapsarians affirm that God irreversibly decreed that certain individuals viewed in their condition prior to the fall (and indeed to the creation also) should be saved to everlasting life, whilst others were condemned to eternal destruction and this 'without any regard whatever to righteousness or sin, to obedience or disobedience' (550). The means to these ends were also the subject of divine decrees. Some of those means are common to both classes (the elect and the reprobate) namely, the creation of man in original righteousness, the permission of the fall, 'the ordination of God that man should sin, and become corrupt or vitiated', and the loss of God's image in man and his conclusion under sin and condemnation' (550).

Other means are distinctively appropriate to the classes involved. The means preordained for the redemption of the elect are 'the giving of Jesus Christ as a Mediator and a Saviour', the call to faith conveyed outwardly by the Word and inwardly by the Spirit, and the gift of perseverance (551). Those related to the rejection of unbelievers are desertion in sin 'by denying to them that saving grace which is sufficient and necessary to the salvation of any one', and obduration, or the hardening of those who deliberately persist in sin (552).

After analysing the leading features of the supralapsarian position, Arminius then enumerates no fewer than twenty reasons why he regards such a version of predestination as unsatisfactory. He elaborates on each with close and as he believes compelling arguments, but we can do no more than indicate the trend of his criticism. He begins by contesting the claim that the supralapsarian interpretation provides the only sure foundation for Christianity. This foundation he insists is rather the decree of God by which Christ is appointed by God to be the Saviour, the Head, and the Cornerstone of those who will be made heirs of salvation (554).

Arminius appeals to the principles of logic in disputing the suggestion that the certainty of salvation rests on the supralapsarian

¹² Bangs, *Arminius*, 308.

premiss. On the contrary, Arminius contends, the Christian's assurance is dependent on the scriptural maxim that those who believe shall be saved (Jn. 3:16; Acts 16:31). Developing a syllogism, Arminius adds: 'I believe, therefore I shall be saved' (555). But supralapsarianism lacks both the first and second member of the syllogism. Arminius likewise resists the view that this account of predestination comprises within it the whole gospel or even any essential part of it, since it fails to take into proper consideration the injunction to repent and believe or the promise of forgiveness and eternal life extended to all who respond in faith.

Arminius moves on from Scripture and logic to appeal to history. The doctrine to which he objects 'was never admitted, decreed, or approved in any Council, either General or Particular, for the first 600 years after Christ' (556), nor did any of the Church fathers in the period advance such an interpretation—not even Augustine of Hippo, who dealt so extensively with the matter of predestination. Coming nearer to his own time, Arminius is unable to find support for the supralapsarian view in the *Harmony of the Confessions of the Faith of the Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, published in Latin at Geneva in 1581, nor is it required by the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism—the acknowledged standards of the Dutch Church.¹³

Article XIV of the Belgic Confession, which deals with the creation and fall of man, declares that man 'wilfully subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil'.¹⁴ By sin he 'separated himself from God' and 'made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death'.¹⁵ The emphasis on human responsibility is noteworthy, with no hint of predetermined necessity. Similarly in Article XVI, concerning eternal election, it is affirmed that after the fall 'God then did manifest himself such as he is; that is to say, merciful and just'—merciful in delivering all those who are chosen in Christ and 'leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves'.¹⁶

Turning to the Heidelberg Catechism, Arminius refers to Question 20 where it is made clear that only those are saved who 'by true faith are incorporated into Christ and accept all his benefits'.¹⁷ Arminius

¹³ *Harmonia confessionum fidei orthodoxarum et reformatarum ecclesiarum*, often attributed to Jean-Francois Salnar, or Salnart, was actually compiled by Francesco Salluado, a preacher in Frankfurt (*Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Arthur C. Cochrane (London: S.C.M. Press), 12, n. 2.)

¹⁴ *Reformed Confessions*, 198.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 199–200.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 308.

draws a significant conclusion, already anticipated in his earlier writings, as Bangs points out, namely 'that God has not absolutely predestined any men to salvation; but that he has in his decree considered (or looked upon) them as believers' (559).¹⁸ Further, in the answer to Question 54, election to eternal life and agreement in the faith stand in mutual juxtaposition in such a way that the latter is not treated as subordinate to the former.¹⁹ The question then has to do with the Church and, as Arminius explains, the answer asserts that the Son of God, by his Spirit and his Word, gathers a company who believe to be chosen for eternal life, and not a company chosen for eternal life in order that they may believe.

Arminius goes on to insist that the doctrine which he rejects is inconsistent with the nature and attributes of God—his wisdom, justice, and goodness—and the nature of man made in God's image, endowed with free will, and intended for eternal communion with his Creator. It is diametrically opposed to the divine act of creation, and incompatible with the nature of eternal life and eternal death as well as sin and grace. Arminius furthermore maintains that the supralapsarian form of predestinarianism is injurious to the glory of God which, in line with Calvin himself, is to be regarded as a factor of primary importance. Moreover, the doctrine to which Arminius takes exception is dishonouring to Jesus Christ our Saviour, since in the supralapsarian scheme he is not the foundation of election and is merely a subordinate cause of salvation.

Salvation itself is placed in jeopardy, according to Arminius, and the order of the gospel reversed. In the gospel, God says: 'Fulfil the command, and thou shalt obtain the promise, believe, and thou shalt live.' In supralapsarianism that becomes 'Since it is my will to give thee life, it is therefore my will to give thee faith', which Arminius argues is 'a real and manifest inversion of the gospel' (569). As such, it is detrimental to an authentic ministry of the gospel. In a later marginal note Arminius succinctly reduces the problem to a double-barrelled question: 'Do we believe because we have been elected or are we elected because we believe?' (579).

Finally Arminius goes so far as to assert that this version of predestination 'completely subverts the foundation of religion in general, and of the Christian religion in particular' (570). The twofold foundation of the latter is God's love of righteousness and his love for sinners. But how are these safeguarded if God has condemned in advance those who are predestined to rejection simply as a matter of arbitrary decision, irrespective of his foreknowledge or

¹⁸ Bangs, *Arminius*, 310.

¹⁹ *Reformed Confessions*, 314.

their reaction? Arminius closes this section of the *Declaration* by referring to the unhappy divisiveness of the debate on this controverted issue in his day.

It is evident that however restrained Arminius may have been in his earlier writings, his critical appraisal of what he regarded as an unduly rigorous species of Calvinism contained in the *Declaration* was sufficiently trenchant. Some of his opponents indeed complained that he had employed not only the shield but also the sword, and the latter beyond the limits of moderation. But, as he explained in a letter written in December 1608 to Sebastian Egbertsz, one of the chief magistrates of Amsterdam, the occasion demanded a firm response, although he denied that his use of the sword had been immoderate. 'I had to give my opinion about certain dogmas', he said, 'which I thought to be chargeable with error. I did give that opinion, and expressed my serious disapprobation of the dogma of predestination as it is at present taught among us; because while my conscience commands me not to keep silence when that doctrine is made a topic of discussion, it likewise dictates to me, that it is worthy of reprehension' (516).

2. *Modified Supralapsarianism*

Arminius deals at such length with the full-blooded supralapsarian account of predestination because this form of the doctrine was the most prevalent at the time and demanded a comprehensive reply. He now considers more briefly two other varieties of lapsarian attitudes, the first of which may be described as a modified supralapsarianism in which only the positive aspect of election is stressed—namely, that God has determined in advance who should be saved and has provided them with the necessary means to that end in the sending of his Son to be their Redeemer. Predestination here is strictly speaking applied only to the elect. Reprobation, although inevitable in the case of the non-elect, is not specifically predetermined. Unbelievers are simply left in their helplessness, as Bangs brings out.²⁰

On this view the scheme of reprobation consists of two acts—preterition and predamnation. The first involves dereliction, or abandonment in a state of nature, and non-communication, or negation of supernatural grace. Predamnation is antecedent to everything else, yet it is not unrelated to God's foreknowledge. 'It views man as a sinner, obnoxious to damnation in Adam, and as on

²⁰ Bangs, *Arminius*, 312.

this account perishing through the necessity of divine justice' (582). The means ordained in the execution of this predamnation are just desertion and induration, or hardening.

3. *Infralapsarianism*

The third position which Arminius examines is identifiable as infralapsarianism or sublapsarianism. It was this alternative which Arminius had encountered earlier in his career when he was a pastor in Amsterdam. Two ministers in Delft—Arent Corenlisz and Reynier Donteklok—when debating the issue of predestination with the humanist Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert had been led to qualify aspects of Beza's ultra-Calvinistic theology.

Infralapsarianism holds that in his elective decree God 'considered the human race not only as created but likewise as fallen or corrupt, and on that account obnoxious to cursing and malediction. Out of this lapsed and accursed state God determined to liberate certain individuals and freely to save them by his grace—for a declaration of his mercy; but he resolved in his own just judgment to leave the rest under the curse (or malediction) for a declaration of his justice' (582-3). Arminius explains that this option regards the fall of man as furnishing a fixed purpose or occasion for God's decree of predestination rather than as a foreordained means of executing such a decree.

These two schemes differ from thorough-going supralapsarianism in that neither of them treats the creation or the fall as the foreordained cause behind the execution of God's predestination decree. They differ from each other since modified supralapsarianism places election, in terms of planned intention, before the fall, as well as preterition which is the first part of reprobation, as we have seen. Infralapsarianism, on the other hand, does not allow any part of election or reprobation to be regarded as designed for unfallen man.

Despite such readjustments, Arminius is dissatisfied with both of these alternative schemes. In each of them 'the fall of Adam cannot possibly, according to their views, be considered in any other manner than as a necessary means for the execution of the preceding decree of predestination' (584). Furthermore, modified supralapsarianism, so Arminius is convinced, falls into the same inconvenience as its full-blooded counterpart in failing to avoid the possibility of concluding from it that God is the author of sin. As for the infralapsarian option, Arminius finds that the element of determinism is still present, even though the divine decree is now applied, in terms of intention, to fallen man.

4. *Arminius's Position*

After this exhaustive critique, Arminius is now prepared to declare his own position in an affirmative fashion. What follows, he believes, is an account of predestination which appears 'most conformable to the Word of God' which is his definitive criterion (589). It is presented in the form of four condensed yet pertinent propositions. They all have to do with the divine decrees which lie at the heart of predestination.

Arminius has no hesitation in accepting the notion of such decrees, which are integral to reformed doctrine, although deduced from rather than actually designated as such in Scripture. He recognizes, furthermore, the absolute and immutable authority of what God has decreed. But he adjusts the order and amends the content of the decrees so as to avoid the misconception engendered by what he takes to be an overly rigorous determinism in the views he has opposed. The sequence is theological rather than historical. It is, moreover, markedly and deliberately Christ-centred and Christ-controlled.

Instead of starting off with God's predestination of individuals, Arminius puts first the decree by which God appointed his Son Jesus Christ 'for a Mediator, Redeemer, Saviour, Priest and King' (589). That, Arminius is convinced, is where any consideration of predestination should begin, and that indeed is also the foundation on which the entire structure rests. The purpose behind God's election of his Son is that the Son 'might destroy sin by his own death, might by his obedience obtain the salvation which had been lost, and might communicate it by his own virtue' (589). The positive, salvific intention and design of divine predestination is thus set in the foreground.

The second decree has to do with the predestination to salvation of all who are in Christ and the corresponding reprobation of all who are not in Christ. The key and clue to the mystery of election lies in the compact Pauline formula 'in Christ'. It was 'in Christ' that believers were chosen 'before the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1:4). But those potentially 'in Christ' from all eternity are actually positioned 'in Christ' through repentance and faith. It is these that God has decreed to receive into favour, and 'in Christ, for his sake and through him, to effect the salvation of such penitents and believers as persevered to the end' (589). Negatively, God leaves in sin and under wrath all who are unrepentant and refuse to believe, and condemns them 'as aliens from Christ' (589).

The third decree is that by which God determined to provide and apply the means essential to repentance and faith and that 'in a

sufficient and efficacious manner' (589). This he does according to divine wisdom 'by which God knows what is proper and becoming both to his mercy and his severity', and according to divine justice 'by which he is prepared to adopt whatever his wisdom may prescribe' and to put it into effect (589).

Consequent and dependent upon these three is the fourth decree by which God decides who shall be saved and who shall not. It is important to Arminius that this crucial decree should be seen in the context of what has preceded and understood in that light. He proceeds to relate election and reprobation to God's prescience of foreknowledge, as in Romans 8:29—'For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son'. Before time was, God knew 'those individuals who would, through his preventing grace, believe, and, through his subsequent grace would persevere,—according to the before-described administration of those means which are suitable and proper for conversion and faith' (589–90). Similarly God was aware in advance of those who would fail to believe and persevere. The stress on prevention, redeeming, and preserving grace makes it abundantly clear that it is on the basis of God's work in them and not their own that believers are elected.

Arminius supports his four foundational theses with a series of twenty brief arguments corresponding to the twenty objections to supralapsarian doctrine previously listed. He then explains that there are other articles of faith which possess a close affinity to the doctrine of predestination and are largely dependent on it. These he examines more compendiously in the remainder of the *Declaration*.

II. The Providence of God

Divine providence is defined as 'that solicitous, continued, and universally present inspection and oversight of God, according to which he exercises a general care over the whole world, but evinces a particular concern for all his (intelligent) creatures without any exception, with the design of preserving and governing them in their own essence, qualities, actions, and passions, in a manner which is at once worthy of himself and suitable to them, to the praise of his name and the salvation of believers (593). Nothing in life occurs fortuitously or by chance. Both the will and the actions of rational beings are subject to divine providence, so that nothing can be done outside God's control. There is, however, a distinction between the good which God both wills and performs and the evil which he only permits.

Once again Arminius is careful not to fall into the trap of appearing to make God responsible for sin. He refers to his own

public disputation in 1605 *On the Righteousness and Efficacy of the Providence of God concerning Evil*.²¹ In it he ascribes to providence the prohibition and restraint of sin as well as its permission. God also deflects the consequences of sin so that it does not invariably achieve all that the transgressor intends, but is overruled and even turned into a benefit, as in the case of Joseph's brother's who plotted evil against him 'but God meant it for good' (Gen. 50:20). Again, both the punishment and pardon of sin are acts of divine providence. Arminius also directs the attention of his hearers to his treatment of the same subject in his *Apology or Defence against Thirty One Theological Articles*.²²

III. The Free Will of Man

Arminius holds that in his pristine condition prior to the fall, as originally created by God, 'man was endowed with such a portion of knowledge, holiness, and power, as enabled him to understand, esteem, consider, will, and to perform the true good, according to the commandment given to him' (595). Otherwise, the requirement of obedience would have been an empty mockery of his condition. Yet Arminius is quick to add that even before the fall, man could do nothing good except through the assistance of divine grace.

Now, however, in his lapsed and sinful state, man is altogether incapable of and by himself either to think, will, or do what is right. It is imperative that he should be regenerated and renewed in his mind, his affections, his will, and indeed in all his faculties, by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Only thus is he delivered from sin and enabled to fulfil God's demand for obedience. Again, as if to underline his insistence, Arminius adds: 'yet not without the continued aid of divine grace' (596). It is obvious that his outlook is to be distinguished from any Pelagian optimism regarding man's inherent capacity to achieve the ideal of goodness.

IV. The Grace of God

Divine grace is considered in three aspects. In the first place it is 'a gratuitous affection' by which God is kindly disposed towards undeserving sinners (597). Because of this he freely gave his Son so 'that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life' (Jn. 3:16). Afterwards, God 'justifies him in Christ Jesus and for his sake, and adopts him into the right of sons, unto salvation' (599).

²¹ *Works*, 2:162-77. *Disputation IX*.

²² *Works*, 2:35-42. *Article XXIII*.

Secondly, grace is an infusion into human personality of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are related to regeneration and renewal, without which man is incapable of recognizing what is good let alone of willing or achieving it. Thirdly, grace is the continued assistance of the Holy Spirit by which man is filled with godly desires and maintained in righteousness. In this ongoing process God works and wills together with man so that man may perform whatever God wills. What we have, however, is not a form of synergism in which God's work and man's work cooperate, but rather a relationship in which God's will and work within man is welcomed in an attitude of trust and submission.

Arminius then insists that he ascribes to grace 'the commencement, the continuance and the consummation of all good' (to) such an extent that it is impossible for man, although regenerate, to will or do any good or to resist any evil temptation 'without this preventing, and exciting, this following and cooperating grace' (600). He believes, in short, that injustice is done to grace if too much is attributed to free will. As to the question of whether grace is irresistible, Arminius considers that the controversy is not about the extent or sufficiency of grace but rather about its operation. He contents himself with observing that according to the Scriptures there are many who do in fact resist the Holy Spirit and reject the grace that is offered to them.

V. The Perseverance of the Saints

Arminius takes the view that those who are 'in Christ' and partakers of his life-giving Spirit are endowed with sufficient strength to fight against Satan and sin and to gain the victory. Provided that they stand prepared for the battle, relying on God's help, Christ preserves them from falling so that it is not possible for them to be either seduced or dragged out of Christ's hands by the powers of evil.

That represents a sufficiently definite affirmation concerning security, coupled with what Arminius regards as an essential and biblically justified proviso. But then he goes on to suggest that it might be appropriate in a future conference to reconsider the issue. He had first faced it when responding to a pamphlet by William Perkins in 1602, and although he there confesses that he 'should not readily dare to say that true and saving faith may finally and totally fall away', he does not exclude the possibility and notes that several of the Church fathers often seem to affirm it.²³

²³ *The Works of James Arminius, D. D.*, Vol. 3 E. T. William Nichols (London: Baker, 1875), 454. The full title is *Dr. James Arminius's Modest Examination of a Pamphlet, which that very learned divine, Dr. William Perkins, published some*

Here in the *Declaration* Arminius protests that he never actually taught that any genuine believer could ultimately apostasize and perish, yet nevertheless concedes that there are passages of Scripture which appear to support such a conclusion, although other texts may be produced in favour of unconditional perseverance and demand serious consideration. There the matter rests, awaiting further clarification.

VI. The Assurance of Salvation

We have seen that Arminius felt that strict supralapsarianism was liable to lead either to an unwarranted sense of security or on the other hand to unnecessary despair. As Bangs points out, Arminius attempts to construct a doctrine of assurance that avoids these two extremes.²⁴ He establishes that believers may enjoy a present assurance of a present salvation. 'It is possible for him who believes in Jesus Christ to be certain and persuaded, and, if his heart condemn him not, he is now in reality assured, that he is a son of God, and stands in the grace of Jesus Christ' (603). Such assurance results from the work of the Holy Spirit whose inner testimony confirms the witness of the conscience.

Arminius is convinced that believers may leave this earthly life to appear before the throne of God without any anxious fear or terrifying apprehension. They can experience an assured confidence in God's grace and mercy in Christ, although they should constantly pray with the Psalmist, 'O Lord, do not enter into judgment with your servant' (Ps. 143:2). Since 'God is greater than our heart, and knows all things' (1 Jn. 3:20) and since we cannot judge ourselves, knowing nothing by ourselves, but must allow the Lord alone to judge (1 Cor. 4:3, 4), Arminius confesses that he dare not place this assurance on an equality with that by which we know that there is a God or that Christ is the Saviour of the world. He hopes that a forthcoming conference might further explore the parameters of such assurance.

VII. The Perfection of Believers in this Life

In the course of an ongoing debate in the Dutch Church about the sanctification of the regenerate, Arminius had been accused of

years ago, on the Mode and Order of Predestination, and on the Amplitude of Divine Grace. Perkins's Latin work was published in Cambridge in 1598 and again in Basel in 1599. William Perkins (1558–1602), the English Puritan theologian, was a fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, and then lecturer at Great St. Andrew's, Cambridge.

²⁴ Bangs, *Arminius*, 347.

inclining to the Pelagian view that it is possible in this life perfectly to observe the divine precepts. Arminius defends himself by arguing that even if he had made such a claim, he could not fairly be charged with Pelagianism since he would wish to make it clear that perfection could only be attained 'by the grace of Christ, and by no means without it' (612—13). According to Augustine, Pelagius had insisted that man possessed the capacity in himself to obey the law of God, but that 'grace was bestowed in order that what God commands may the more easily be fulfilled'.²⁵ This distorted speculation Arminius categorically dismisses as heretical and destructive, inflicting as it does 'a most grievous wound on the glory of Christ' (625).

Arminius does, however, appeal to Augustine himself in order to substantiate the view that in the strength of God's grace alone it is possible to live in this world without sin (614).²⁶ Even so Arminius refuses to dogmatize. 'While I never asserted, that a believer could perfectly keep the precepts of Christ in this life, I never denied it, but always left it as a matter which has still to be decided (613—14).

VIII. The Divinity of the Son of God

In a section similar to a passage in his *Apology against Thirty-One Articles* Arminius explains his refusal to recognize the term *autotheos* ('God in his own right') to Christ in the sense that some

²⁵ Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali*, 1:26.

²⁶ Arminius refers to the four questions raised by Augustine in his *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum*, 2:6, 7, 17, 20. Is it possible for anyone in this life to exist without sin? Has there ever been anyone, apart from the man Christ Jesus, who was without sin? Is there anyone now who is so? And, fourthly, if it is indeed possible for anyone who has been born again to be from then on without sin, why has such an individual never been found?

In answering the first and most crucial question, Augustine allows that it is possible for the regenerate to be without sin 'through the grace of God and the man's own free will; not doubting that the free will itself is ascribable to God's grace' (2:6). After citing a catena of Scripture passages, Augustine concludes: 'From these and many other like testimonies, I cannot doubt that God has laid no impossible command on man; and that, by God's aid and help, nothing is impossible, by which is wrought what he commands' (2:6).

The second and third questions Augustine answers in the negative. As to the fourth, he explains that when the regenerate are unwilling to perform what is made possible for them by the grace of Christ it is 'either because what is right is unknown to them, or because it is unpleasant to them' (2:17). Augustine adds, however, 'that what was hidden may come to light, and what was unpleasant may be made agreeable, is of the grace of God which helps the will of man; and that they are not helped by it has its cause likewise in themselves, not in God' (2:17). See also Augustine, *De Spiritu et littera*, 25:62 and *De natura et gratia*, 10, 42.

had placed upon it.²⁷ It is capable of two interpretations. It may signify 'one who is truly God' and this Arminius has no difficulty in accepting. But it could mean 'one who is God of himself, implying that the divinity of the Son is self-derived, and Arminius is not prepared to countenance such a statement. He defends at some length the scriptural and classic insistence that 'the Son had his deity from the Father by eternal generation' (638).

To regard Christ as *autotheos*, in the sense that his divinity is as it were inherent, leads to the mutually conflicting errors of Tritheism and Sabellianism. It would follow as a logical consequence that there are three gods who share the divine essence altogether independently. Only the procession of the Son from the Father safeguards the divine unity in the trinity of persons. It would also follow that the Son would be indistinguishable from the Father, differing from him only in name, which was the opinion of Sabellius.

Arminius recognizes Christ both as God and as the Son of God. The word 'God' signifies that he has the true divine essence. The word 'Son' signifies that he has the divine essence from the Father. To deny the communication of divinity from the Father to the Son is to jeopardize at once the Sonship of Christ and the unity of the Godhead.

IX. The Justification of Man before God

The background to the comments of Arminius on the pivotal doctrine of justification is a controversy on the subject between Jorannes Fischer, Professor of Divinity at Herborn in Nassau and the French churches.²⁸ It focussed on two questions. Is the obedience or righteousness of Christ which is imputed to believers and in which their righteousness before God consists passive, in terms of what our Lord suffered, as Fischer held, or is it not also that active righteousness which he displayed in his observance of the divine law throughout his whole life, and the holiness in which he was conceived, which was the way the French churches saw it? Arminius was reluctant to enter into the dispute, preferring to allow liberty of interpretation in such recondite matters.

The question had been raised again, however, in relation to Paul's

²⁷ *Works*, 2:29–35. Article XXI.

²⁸ Johannes Fischer, or Piscator (1546–1625) studied at Tübingen and taught successively at Strasburg and Heidelberg, being dismissed from both appointments because of his strong Calvinistic leanings. He finally settled at the academy in Herborn, Prussia, founded by Count Johann of Nassau. Fischer's views about the righteousness of Christ were repudiated by the Synod of Gap in 1603 and he was denounced at Rochelle in 1607.

assertion in Romans 4:22 that Abraham's faith was imputed to him for righteousness. Should that be properly understood as meaning that faith itself, as exercised according to the command of the gospel, is reckoned before God 'for or towards righteousness', although all of grace since it is not the righteousness of the law (635-6)? Or should it be figuratively and improperly understood that the righteousness of Christ is reckoned to us instead of any actual righteousness of our own? Or again it should be understood that the righteousness for which or towards which faith is reckoned is in fact the instrumental operation of faith?

In his disputations on justification when he was moderator at Leiden, and elsewhere in his writings, Arminius had opted for the first of these possibilities, although not in any inflexible fashion.²⁹ On this account he had been accused of deviating from Protestant orthodoxy. This allegation he strenuously rebuts, insisting that he is not aware of having in any way departed from the reformed doctrine relating to justification. To clarify his position he adds this declaration: 'I believe that sinners are accounted righteous solely by the obedience of Christ: and that the righteousness of Christ is the only meritorious cause on account of which God pardons the sins of believers and reckons them as righteous as if they had perfectly fulfilled the law. But since God imputes the righteousness of Christ to none except believers, I conclude, that in this sense it may be well and properly said, To a man who believes faith is imputed for righteousness through grace,—because God hath set forth his Son Jesus Christ to be a propitiation, a throne of grace, (or mercy-seat) through faith in his blood' (636). Arminius adds that he is prepared to subscribe to what Calvin had written on this issue in the Third Book of his *Institutes*.³⁰

Arminius has now reached the end of his theological testament as such. In the remainder of the *Declaration* he expresses his approval of the consent given by the States General to convene a national Synod in order to examine the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism and if necessary to revise and clarify them. The reasons why he considers that this task should be undertaken are elaborated at some length.

In a moving peroration Arminius pleads for charity and a degree of fraternal unity within the Dutch Church as theological discussion continue. For his own part, he is ready to show moderation and a willingness to learn from others as well as to communicate his own

²⁹ *Works*, 2:405-8, *Disputation XLVIII*; cf. *Disputation XIX*, 253-8.

³⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, E. T. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke, 1949), 2:36-59. Book III Chapter XI 'Of Justification by Faith'.

convictions. His overriding concern is fidelity to the Word of God and the safeguarding of what is essential for salvation. Should his views eventually prove unacceptable, he would resign his post but 'continue to live for the benefit of our common Christianity as long as it may please God lengthen out my days and prolong my existence' (668). He was a sick man and no doubt realized that he had only a short time left to survive. Within a year he was dead.

The *Declaration of Sentiments* is rounded off with an exclamation in Latin: *Satis ecclesiae, sat patriae datum* ('Enough given to satisfy Church and country!'). As A. W. Harrison observed, the oration of Arminius before the States assembly 'seems to have been worthy of a great national occasion'.³¹ It also enshrines the quintessence of Arminius's teaching on a series of vital and yet often debatable topics. At a time when these issues are still the subject of theological discussion, if not of dispute, it is salutary to be reminded of what the Dutch reformer actually believed and wrote.

Abstract

The essence of Arminius's teaching is contained in his last apologia, *The Declaration of Sentiments*. The circumstances leading up to its presentation are outlined before the contents are closely examined. A lengthy introduction is followed by nine major sections covering aspects of Christian doctrine under discussion in seventeenth-century Holland and elsewhere. Since it was the principal item under review at the time in the Reformed Church, much of the *Declaration* is taken up with the matter of predestination and the lapsarian controversy concerning the relationship between election/reprobation and the fall of man. As the issues raised are the subject of continuing debate, an account of how Arminius himself expressed his convictions may serve the interests of clarification.

³¹ Harrison, *Arminianism*, 39.